

## “COMPREHENSIVE, COMBINING, AND SUBTLE”: ISHMAEL’S PHILOSOPHY OF CONNECTION IN MELVILLE’S *MOBY-DICK*

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The namesake of Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick*, the white whale being hunted by the vengeful Captain Ahab and his crew aboard the Pequod, is fundamentally difficult to define. Moby Dick himself is an elusive symbol: both the characters in the novel and contemporary critics struggle to concretize his significance. However, this paper does not attempt to find an allegory for what the great white leviathan symbolizes, a famously dangerous thing to do,<sup>1</sup> but it instead aims to explore how the form of the novel presents a specific philosophy. The philosophy of the novel aims to accept all that Moby Dick might represent—the unknown and the undefinable. Ishmael, one of the crewmembers of the Pequod and the novel’s narrator, is not a whaler by trade, but a man who ventures out to sea when depressed and discontent with his life on the shore. As the sole survivor of the Pequod’s eventual wreckage, Ishmael’s recounting of his journey provides the novel’s framework. As the narrator, it is Ishmael’s philosophy that becomes the guiding philosophy of the novel. Furthermore, Ishmael survives the wreck because his life philosophy centers life, while Ahab’s moves towards death.

*Moby-Dick* explores man’s myriad attempts to survive the overwhelming nature of the existential unknown, represented often by the vast sea or the great white whale. Melville populates the crewmembers with vastly different perspectives, and Ishmael and Ahab hold the most diametrically opposed ways of interpreting and viewing life. Ahab, a determined hunter and captain, has a limited narcissistic vision, which sees all the world as a mirror of himself, as he projects himself into everything he sees. On the other hand, Ishmael, the apparent wanderer and crewmember has an extensive peripheral vision, as he seeks understanding of perspectives other than his own. Melville intentionally gives these two characters the most power in the novel; Ahab, the captain, commands the ship’s direction, and Ishmael, the narrator, commands the novel’s direction. Ahab leads himself and his crew to destruction—only Ishmael survives. This paper argues that, as the sole survivor, Ishmael’s way of life is presented as a successful remedy to Ahab’s self-destructive affliction. Through this reading, the novel posits that man must give up Ahab’s philosophy, which involves a pointed search for specific meaning. Instead, man should allow himself to wander through life like Ishmael. Ishmael connects with ideas and people and allows himself to experience the journey of life without a predetermined end-goal. Additionally, Ishmael’s openness to new people, experiences, and ideas allows him to find meaning and spirituality in a plethora of places. This is not to say that Ishmael is a person without judgement or assumption; in fact, Ishmael begins the novel steeped in biases. This paper

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<sup>1</sup> One chapter of the novel—“The Affidavit”—warns against interpreting “Moby Dick as a monstrous fable, or still worse and more detestable, a hideous and intolerable allegory” (223).

claims that Ishmael's rejection of these biases, although perhaps incomplete, proves that Ishmael is capable of change and is willing to admit his own wrongdoing to foster meaningful connections with other people. Not only does Ishmael's ability to connect with others contrast with Ahab's intense narcissism, Ishmael values new information and actively seeks to embrace any and all sources of knowledge. In the end, it is Ishmael's openness and desire for human connection that eventually saves him.

### I. Ahab: Looking Inward and in Conversation with Himself

This paper will first detail Ahab's narcissism to better contextualize Ishmael's radical rejection of Ahab's worldview. Ahab is the captain of the Pequod, and it seems that his duty would be to focus his energy on the ship and its crew. However, Ahab is inordinately narcissistic, placing himself above everything, even his ship and crew. He relates all symbols to his own selfhood, assigning meaning to others based on his own relation to them. Daniel G. Hoffman, exploring the relationship between the myth of Narcissus, the origin of narcissism, and *Moby-Dick*, claims that "in the Narcissus myth, which Melville invokes in the very first chapter (and often again), the hunter becomes both a seeker and a solipsist" (Hoffman 207). Ahab's solipsistic attitude, the idea that the self is the only thing that truly exists, becomes explicit in "The Doubloon," the chapter in which Ishmael describes an Ecuadorian doubloon that has been hammered into the mast of the Pequod as a prize for the first crew member that sights the white whale. Each member of the crew relates to the gold coin in a different way, and Ishmael describes each unique reaction. When Ahab turns to the doubloon one morning "for the first time beginning to interpret for himself in some monomaniac way whatever significance may lurk" in the coin's face, his thought process reveals a distinctly self-absorbed mode of meaning-making (470).<sup>2</sup> Melville's repetitive use of "monomaniac" and "monomania" as descriptors for Ahab—fifteen times throughout the novel—highlights Ahab's single-minded perspective.

While it may seem that Ahab's single focus should be on the great Moby Dick, Ahab's monomaniacal obsession is with himself. This is clear when he describes what he sees in the Doubloon: "There's something ever egotistical in mountain-tops and towers, and all other grand and lofty things," Ahab begins, associating his ego with the mountains on the coin (471). He continues to find representations of himself in each figure impressed on the coin: "The firm tower, that is Ahab; the volcano, that is Ahab; the courageous, the undaunted, and victorious fowl, that, too, is Ahab; all are Ahab" (471). He does not, as the third mate does, see merely "a round thing made of gold," but instead sees this doubloon as "a magician's glass [that] to each and every man in turn but mirrors back his own mysterious self" (474, 471). Likewise, when Starbuck, the first mate, interprets the coin as representing the Holy Trinity, and when Stubb, the second mate,

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<sup>2</sup> If no author is given for an internal citation, the citation is from Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*, edition stated in this paper's "Works Cited."

manages to find the superstitious zodiac reflected in the coin's face, they are connecting the object to concepts and knowledge outside themselves. With his solipsistic attitude, Ahab believes that all meaning is merely projected from the self onto objects. He projects his own selfhood into the doubloon, unable to see anything besides himself in the trees and birds presented there. It may be suggested that Ahab holds this same attitude towards Moby Dick; Ahab's obsession with the white whale is perhaps a manifestation of his obsession with himself.

Ahab's self-obsession results in the delusion that meaning is only found in relation to the self, and this belief produces a confidence in his own superiority. He dismisses criticism and scrutiny from others, even, potentially, from God. Facing criticism from Starbuck regarding his monomaniacal hunt of Moby Dick, Ahab compares himself to the Christian god: "there is one God that is Lord over the earth, and one Captain that is lord over the Pequod" (517). He even calls Starbuck a "devil" for doing so "much as to dare to critically think of" Ahab (517). From Ahab's self-appointed pinnacle, he is akin to God, and those that contradict him are akin to Lucifer. "I'd strike the sun if it insulted me," Ahab claims, further testifying to his own aggrandizement (178). Throughout the voyage, Ahab makes it clear to his crew that he sees himself as far superior, and he expects his crew to respect this hierarchy.

Ahab rejects the authority of knowledge that originates outside of his own experiences and assumptions. For example, he dismisses science as a tool for meaning making when he destroys the quadrant, a tool used to help sailors orient themselves on the sea by charting their position in relation to the stars. Ahab adamantly rejects any external influence as he yells, "Science! Curse thee...and cursed be all the things that cast man's eyes aloft to that heaven...no longer will I guide my earthly way by thee" (544). While Ahab dismisses the validity of the quadrant because it is powerless to determine the location of the white whale, he cannot admit its necessity to the crew and ship to steer its course. In rejecting the quadrant, Ahab symbolically rejects systems of knowledge outside of himself, and, thus, he "trampled," "split and destroy[ed]" the quadrant, showcasing his power over the stars and the symbols found within them.

Ahab's belief in his own limitless power over the Pequod perhaps reaches its zenith during the fire ceremony in "The Candles." As corpusants, blue flames that sometimes form around mastheads during strong lightning storms, blaze atop the Pequod's mast, the crew becomes "panic-stricken," fearful of the potentially divine consequences of their mission. Starbuck interprets the "lofty tri-pointed trinity of flames" to be God's warning against the hunt for Moby Dick: "God, God is against thee, old man," he says aloud (552). Even Stubb, typically characterized by his "invulnerable jollity of indifference and recklessness," cries out, almost in prayer: "The corpusants have mercy on us all" (550). Ahab, however, is not fearful of this potentially divine remonstrance. Instead, he turns to his harpoon, the one he had bathed in "heathen blood" as he "deliriously howled" the phrase "Ego non baptizo te in nomine patris, sed in nomine diaboli!"<sup>3</sup> and directs it towards the

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<sup>3</sup> In English, this translates to "I do not baptize thee in the name of the Father, but in the name of the Devil."

corpusants, attacking both the flames and the implication that he might be in the wrong (532). Triumphant, he tells his crew, “I blow out the last fear,” and “with one blast of his breath he extinguished the flame” (552). With this action, Ahab defiantly dismisses any criticism, even criticisms with potentially divine sources.

Ahab’s self-preoccupation informs his interpretation of the white whale’s violence: a manifestation of evil intent on personally attacking his ego. While Starbuck sees Moby Dick as merely a “dumb brute” who only attacked Ahab out of “blind instinct” against predators, Ahab sees “outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing it” (178). To Ahab, the white whale’s incomprehensible motive for taking his leg becomes a personal affront that must be avenged because Ahab has chosen to imbue Moby Dick with hatred or evil. As Ishmael describes, “The White Whale swam before [Ahab] as the monomaniac incarnation of all those malicious agencies which some deep men feel eating in them,” and “[h]e piled upon the whale’s white hump the sum of all the general rage and hate felt by his whole race from Adam down” (200). Ahab, aware of his suffering and anger, does not learn to cope with these emotions and instead projects them onto the figure of Moby Dick. Moby Dick becomes a symbol for Ahab’s own misplaced emotions of hatred and rage: the “intangible malignity” that Ahab feels but cannot define is “deliriously transfer[ed]... to the abhorred white whale” and Ahab “pitted himself, all mutilated, against it” (200). Ahab conflates his own hate for Moby Dick with Moby Dick’s hate for him, imbuing the whale with conscious feelings of animosity. He projects his own selfish meaning onto Moby Dick, and, as with the doubloon, he can only find aspects of himself reflected in the symbol he has created.

Ahab’s egomania impedes his understanding of the intangible or unknowable because he has a myopic viewpoint filtered through a singular, self-informed lens. In Chapter 74, “The Sperm Whale’s Head-Contrasted View,”<sup>4</sup> Melville provides a counterexample to Ahab’s defective vision, showing the extent of its inadequacy. This chapter follows “Stubb and Flask Kill a Right Whale,” in which the Pequod attempts to balance multiple dead whales on either side of the boat. Ishmael relates the balancing of two whales on either side of a whaling vessel to balancing two disparate philosophies in one mind: “So, when on one side you hoist in Locke’s head, you go over that way; but now, on the other side, hoist in Kant’s and you come back again; but in very poor plight. Thus, some minds for ever keep trimming boat” (357). Ishmael recognizes the necessity of synthesizing the two arguments, seeing the truth in both, or else “throw all these thunder-heads overboard” (357). Humans struggle to hold two dissonant truths. However, Ishmael interprets that, because of the position of the whale’s eyes, one on either side of its head, the whale “can at the same moment of time attentively examine two distinct prospects, one on one side of him, and the other in an exactly opposite direction” (361). Perhaps the whale can simultaneously balance two opposing images because “his brain [is] so much more comprehensive, combining, and subtle than man’s” (361). In contrast, even “though [man] can take in an

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<sup>4</sup> This chapter is one of the many chapters detailing the mathematical or historical context of the sperm whale as opposed to discussing the narrative of the Pequod; this paper will refer to such chapters as whale-fact chapters.

undiscriminating sweep of things at one glance, it is quite impossible for him, attentively, and completely, to examine any two things—however large or however small—at one and the same instant” (360-361). Melville does not use this whale-fact chapter as an extraneous interlude; rather, he highlights the heart of Ahab’s problem: Ahab’s reasoning is imbalanced because he excludes any other opinion but his own. While all men are limited in their perspective physically by the placement of their eyes in the front of their head, Ahab limits his philosophical and internal dialogue by only listening to himself. His self-centered grandeur has reached such a height that he truly cannot see anything but himself and his beliefs.

## II. Ishmael: Looking Outward and In Conversation with Others

In contrast to Ahab, Ishmael’s character is defined by his relationship to others, be it a direct relationship with a single person or a wider relationship to humanity. The opening paragraph of the novel introduces Ishmael not through a description of what is inherent to him, but through a display of how he relates his selfhood to others. In fact, in the iconic opening line of the novel, “Call me Ishmael,” Melville uses the imperative form of the verb, which implies a second person that he is addressing (3). In this case, that second person is the reader, indicating that Ishmael aims to communicate with another person and share his knowledge with the reader. Because Melville does not begin with the pronoun “I” (for example, I am called Ishmael), the author ascribes to Ishmael an ability to sublimate his own self and ego to invite the reader into conversation. Thus, his identity as Ishmael is dependent on the reader’s relationship to him and their willingness to call him Ishmael. However, this is not to say that Ishmael has no ego; in fact, he acutely perceives his own selfhood and recognizes his own self-destructive impulses. He introduces himself as depressed, experiencing “a damp, drizzly November in [his] soul,” and decides to “sail about a little and see the watery part of the world,” hoping to prevent his own self-destructive inclinations (3). He then links his own thoughts and fears to all of humanity, saying, “almost all men in their degree, some time or other, cherish very nearly the same feelings towards the ocean with me” (3). Ishmael believes he shares attributes and experiences not unique to his life alone. Even when he is talking about himself and his own experiences, he is able to relate those experiences to others; he can use his subjective and personal perspective as its own means of connection.

The reader gains notable insight into Ishmael’s inner struggle in the chapter titled “The Whiteness of the Whale,” where Ishmael shares his frustration regarding his limited ability to comprehend and communicate spiritual experiences. Ishmael begins the chapter by enticing the reader: “What the white whale was to Ahab, has been hinted; what, at times, he was to me, as yet remains unsaid” (204). Ishmael, unlike Ahab, can hold two seemingly contrary perspectives, Ahab’s and his own, in balance (205). Moby Dick’s whiteness was, to Ishmael, “a nameless horror” and “yet so mystical and well nigh ineffable was it, that I almost despair of putting it in a comprehensible form” (204). Therefore, within even one being, Ishmael witnesses a complicated symbolic meaning within the color white. “It was

the whiteness of the whale that above all things appalled me,” he admits (204). Ishmael reflects on why the color white holds a complicated symbolic power: “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...a dumb blankness, full of meaning” (212). A white object reflects all visible light off of its surface, thus not absorbing anything itself. In this way, the white object is devoid of color. However, white light combines all visible colors of light; therefore, seeing something white is seeing an infinity of color at once. Thus, when ascribing meaning to something white, like the white whale, it seems to be both infinitely full of that meaning and void of it completely. To Ishmael, this seeming contradiction makes the concept of whiteness overwhelmingly difficult to communicate.

The nuanced, complicated nature of the symbolic meaning of whiteness distresses Ishmael because it represents the nuanced and complicated nature of meaning-making. On one hand, there is “spiritual whiteness...divineness [that]...though commanding worship, at the same time enforced a certain nameless terror” however, “there are other instances where this whiteness loses all that accessory and strange glory” (207). Ishmael claims that the white coloring of an albatross seems divine, but the whiteness of some other animals seems to hold no particular meaning. Ishmael recognizes that a person’s sensory experience and the context in which they view an object will change the meaning they ascribe to it. This directly opposes Ahab’s strict adherence to his own self-determined truth; in fact, Ishmael seems to be overwhelmed by his belief in the infinity of truths. He sees so many options and contradictions that he struggles to communicate what, if anything, whiteness inherently symbolizes.

However, Ishmael does not think that this infinity of possible meanings makes the search for meaning futile. His confusion about Moby Dick’s symbolic power is not a reason for him to turn to despair; though Ishmael knows he may not be capable of adequately expressing every aspect of his experience, he is dedicated to the attempt: “But how can I hope to explain myself here; and yet, in some dim, random way, explain myself I must, else all these chapters might be naught” (204). Even if his language is “dim” and “random,” he deems the effort to communicate essential. Ishmael reflects upon the necessity of the seemingly impossible task of exploring the infinity of meaning-making:

...how is mortal man to account for it? To analyse it, would seem impossible. Can we, then, by the citation of some of those instances wherein this thing of whiteness—though for the time either wholly or in great part stripped of all direct associations calculated to impart to it aught fearful, but nevertheless, is found to exert over us the same sorcery, however modified;—can we thus hope to light upon some chance clue to conduct us to the hidden cause we seek? / Let us try. But in a matter like this, subtlety appeals to subtlety, and without imagination no man can follow another into these halls. And though, doubtless, some at least of the imaginative impressions about to be presented may have been shared by most men, yet few perhaps were entirely conscious of them at the time, and therefore may not be able to recall them now. (208-209)

As he writes this novel, Ishmael has accepted that meaning is not fixed and is perhaps incommunicable in its entirety. It “seem[s] impossible” to parse through the contradictory and incomplete recorded interpretations of whiteness and find some “chance clue” to unlock the “hidden cause” behind all its meaning. Although the task of finding this concealed, secret, concrete source of meaning is likely impossible, he petitions his reader: “Let us try.” Ishmael recognizes both the futility of seeking meaning and the value of the search. The process of communicating spiritual and meaningful experiences to other people is worth time and effort, even if the final destination, “the hidden cause” of ultimate truth, is never accessed.

Furthermore, by claiming that a man needs an attitude of “subtlety” to perceive meaning, Ishmael implies the necessity of maintaining an open mind and a willingness to synthesize new information with one's own personal experiences in order to access greater truth. Much like the “subtle” brain of the sperm whale, to make peace with the vastness of the spiritual, one must see and validate all things. The passage's final line indicates that “most men” have witnessed spiritual, meaningful, and “imaginative experiences,” but “few perhaps were entirely conscious of them at the time, and therefore may not be able to recall them now.” Ishmael claims it is insufficient to simply find truth if one cannot recall and reflect on the experience of it. To share one's own meaningful experience with others, as Ishmael is trying to do with his novel, necessitates a conscious, purposeful openness to the complexity of truth. In the final line of the chapter, Ishmael claims that man “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?” (212). Ishmael concludes the chapter confirming that, while he has come to terms with the complexity of meaning-making sometime between joining the Pequod's crew and writing his novel, he was once guilty of projecting his inner struggles onto Moby Dick.

Ishmael, as a character and a narrator, is concerned with exploring effective means of communicating that which is meaningful or spiritual. As a character, he listens to everyone, accepting everyone's opinions and beliefs without judgement, presenting their opinions to the reader as equally potentially valid. The crew of the Pequod is “chiefly made up of mongrel renegades, and castaways, and cannibals,” each functioning under different belief systems (203). Ishmael, aware of this, presents the reader with varying belief systems without devaluing them. For example, the three mates—Starbuck, the Quaker first mate, Stubb, the superstitious second mate, and Flask, the disillusioned, money-conscious third mate—are nothing alike. While Ishmael describes Starbuck as a man of “virtue or right-mindedness,” and thus gives some level of validity to Starbuck's moral belief system, he includes the potential for truth to be found through other access points, such as the “superstitions of seafaring folk” (Babcock 128). As mentioned in reference to the Doubloon chapter, Ishmael describes how each crew member finds their own disparate meanings within the images of the doubloon. Ishmael does not critique, analyze, or editorialize each mate's interpretation of the “white whale's talisman,” but prefaces the chapter with the statement that “some certain

significance lurks in all things, else all things are little worth” (470-471). Thus, Ishmael merely presents the reader with possible symbolic meanings from the point of view of various characters.

Perhaps the most notable example of Ishmael’s willingness to respect different opinions is exemplified in his relationship with Queequeg, a harpooner who hails from a fictional island “far to the West and South” (61). From the beginning, Melville intentionally makes the relationship a difficult one, which reflects the suspicious attitude of a typical nineteenth-century white American towards someone of a different culture. As Queequeg approaches Ishmael for the first time, Ishmael prays, “Lord save me, thinks I, that must be the harpooner, the infernal head-peddler” (22). Because he sees Queequeg’s face in the shadows and assumes he is covered in bruises and bandages, Ishmael prejudices his new bedfellow: “Yes, it’s just as I thought, he’s a terrible bedfellow; he’s been in a fight, got dreadfully cut, and here he is, just from the surgeon” (23). However, Ishmael learns almost immediately that his assumptions were wrong: “he chanced to turn his face so towards the light, that I plainly saw they could not be sticking-plasters at all” (23). With his limited experience, he has never seen tattoos on someone’s face before, and, thus, “knew not what to make of this” at first (23). Seeking to understand, Ishmael recalls “a story of a white man” who was given tattoos by some “cannibals,” recalling this tale to help him expand his own limited perspective (23). Yet, this knowledge is still inadequate because referring to an island’s native peoples as merely “cannibals” showcases the limitations of story as a replacement for experience. Without realizing that his comprehension may be lacking, Ishmael decides that he will not place moral judgement on the fact that Queequeg is tattooed: “It’s only his outside; a man can be honest in any sort of skin” (23). Thus, the reader is privy to Ishmael’s struggle with his own assumptions and biases against non-white people. These assumptions initially prevent him from approaching Queequeg as an equal from the beginning of their interaction.

However, Ishmael’s resolution to withhold judgment does not endure, as the story cannot dispel Ishmael’s biases completely. As Ishmael reflects on his negative reaction to Queequeg, he identifies fear caused by ignorance as his shortcoming:

I am no coward, but what to make of this head-peddling purple rascal altogether passed my comprehension. Ignorance is the parent of fear, and being completely nonplussed and confounded about the stranger, I confess I was now as much afraid of him as if it was the devil himself who had thus broken into my room at the dead of night. In fact, I was so afraid of him that I was not game enough just then to address him, and demand a satisfactory answer concerning what seemed inexplicable in him. (24)

Much like Ishmael describes the “the invisible,” unknowable, or incomprehensible aspects of the world as “formed in fright,” Queequeg, unknown and therefore incomprehensible to Ishmael, becomes a source of fear (211). Queequeg is also afraid of the unknown in Ishmael because the two of them are, at first, unable to communicate directly (26). However, once the landlord of the



inn helps them understand each other, Ishmael is able to see Queequeg as “not only a civil but a really kind and charitable...For all his tattooings he was on the whole a clean, comely looking cannibal” (26). Finally, Ishmael recognizes his assumptions regarding Queequeg’s character. Presented with the truth, Ishmael scolds himself: “What’s all this fuss I have been making about, thought I to myself—the man’s a human being just as I am: he has just as much reason to fear me, as I have to be afraid of him” (26). Communication is presented as the antidote to this fear; to make the seemingly inexplicable somehow explicable is accomplished through dialogue and relationship.

Eventually, after many missteps and faulty assumptions, Ishmael overcomes his racist preconceptions and recognizes Queequeg as an equal. While this is the bare minimum inner work required of anyone with racist ideology, this chapter does not praise Ishmael for doing this inner work. Instead, it demonstrates the foolishness of Ishmael’s racism, which is rooted in ignorance. As John Bryant discusses in his recent article “Rewriting *Moby-Dick*: Politics, Textual Identity, and the Revision Narrative,” Ishmael’s preconceptions, especially at the beginning of the novel, are imbued with orientalist and imperialist attitudes. Bryant claims that “Ishmael transforms himself from jingoist to critic of Pacific imperialism,” which is part of Melville’s larger “strategy” to imbed “discourse on alternatives to imperialism” within *Moby-Dick* (Bryant 1050). Using Edward Said’s seminal book *Orientalism* as a guide, Bryant claims that “Melville’s orientalist critique” of imperialism, which includes using Queequeg as “a projection of Ishmael’s imperialist guilt, a self-sacrificing savage whose physical friendship conveniently transcends imperial politics,” is both dependent on and critical of orientalism (Bryant 1051).<sup>5</sup> Ishmael’s relationship with Queequeg does not exempt him from critique, but it is a definitive example of Ishmael’s proclivity for self-reflection and change. This trait of Ishmael’s opposes Ahab’s refusal to listen to others. As discussed in the previous section, Ahab clings to his personal experience as inherent truth whereas Ishmael learns new information that opposes his narrow-minded preconceptions and eventually abandons his ignorant assumptions.

Beyond developing basic respect for Queequeg, Ishmael engages with Queequeg’s religion, indicating that Ishmael’s acceptance of his new friend extends beyond a mere tolerance of the unknown. His own beliefs in the Christian god are not threatened by critical analysis or by understanding other faiths. Rather, his own faith can be enhanced by new experiences of the divine. For example, Ishmael says, “Better sleep with a sober cannibal than a drunken Christian,” implying that the strength of a man’s morality is not necessarily linked to a man’s religious beliefs (26). In the chapter titled “A Bosom Friend,” after reflecting more on his impressions of Queequeg and deeming him a man with a good soul, Ishmael

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<sup>5</sup> I agree with Bryant’s arguments and acknowledge that Melville’s orientalism affects how Ishmael views Queequeg. As this paper focuses on Ishmael’s capacity for and dedication to changing his own beliefs, which Bryant himself notes, I will not be discussing in detail the context of Melville’s historical moment nor the complicated roots of Ishmael’s racism. However, I encourage readers who are interested to turn to Bryant for a valuable and in-depth consideration of how orientalism affects *Moby-Dick* and its characters.

decides, “I’ll try a pagan friend...since Christian kindness has proved but hollow courtesy,” noting the ineffectiveness of Christian tradition to foster brotherhood indiscriminately (57). They speak, ask each other questions, and smoke, their interchange of dialogue and possessions making them “married; meaning, in [Queequeg’s] country’s phrase, that we were bosom friends” (57).

Ishmael then participates in Queequeg’s religious practices while explaining to the reader how his participation in this pagan ritual is another access point to his own god:

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? thought I. Do you suppose now, Ishmael, that the magnanimous God of heaven and earth—pagans and all included—can possibly be jealous of an insignificant bit of black wood? Impossible! 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. So I kindled the shavings; helped prop up the innocent little idol; offered him burnt biscuit with Queequeg; salamed before him twice or thrice; kissed his nose; and that done, we undressed and went to bed, at peace with our own consciences and all the world. (58)

He claims that this practice does not oppose his own Christian god; in fact, he believes that participating in this pagan ritual is “the will of God” because he is doing “to [his] fellow man what [he] would have [his] fellow man do to” him. Ishmael “worships” by demonstrating reciprocity and mutual respect, so to communicate and cooperate with others is a form of spiritual worship. Ishmael continues his search to find effective means of communication, and reasons that disdain for other forms of spirituality outside the Christian world is anti-Christian, because it involves prejudicial judgement. The most Christian thing to do, then, is to respect and even participate in other significant modes of spiritual experiences. In this way, Ishmael follows the will of God by being respectful and open to new encounters through thoughtful consideration of each person’s dignity and faith. He does not compromise his own individual beliefs, remaining steadfast in his adherence to the “infallible Presbyterian Church,” but he is able to see other beliefs as an access point to the divine. Thus, while Ahab refuses to see any viewpoint but his own, dismissing all criticism as devilish, Ishmael deepens his knowledge of himself and others, even those he previously considered devilish, through respect and communication.

Made clear through Ishmael’s relationship with Queequeg, which only becomes stronger throughout the novel, Ishmael values human relationships as a means to broaden one’s understanding of the world and as a way to bring spiritual meaning to one’s own life. While this can happen one-on-one, human connection can also happen on a larger scale; Ishmael unites his story with the larger

community of humanity by referencing ancient tales and variant religious beliefs. Within the first paragraph, Ishmael mentions Cato, a Roman senator, contrasting Cato's suicide to his own desire to go to sea (3). Ishmael relates his own experience of the sea with the religious experiences of the Persians and the ancient Greeks (4). With allusions such as these, he connects his life to a more ancient and expansive human community. He is one man with one experience, but, for centuries, others have had similar emotions. These shared experiences have been infused into myth and story, just as his experiences and feelings are infused into his novel. Furthermore, Ishmael not only references people from the past, but also other religions such as the Hindu god, Vishnu, and Roman gods, such as Jupiter (286, 596). He presents them as authentic religions, not just tales and stories that Christianity often dismisses as more folklore than religion. Although Ishmael identifies himself as Christian, he connects his own experience to any incident that will serve as a helpful addition to his tale, regardless of its origin.

Ishmael engages various unique references to explore his own experience, and, similarly, Melville references a plethora of seemingly dissonant religious and spiritual modes of thought. In a novel partly interrogating how people communicate their stories, fictional fact as decreed by Melville is nearly indistinguishable from Ishmael's subjective experience of the story. Nevertheless, scholars such as Helen P. Trimpi and R.H. Winnick have explored how Melville engages various sources of knowledge, including those that seem contradictory, such as witchcraft, Catholicism, and folklore. In her essay "Melville's Use of Demonology and Witchcraft in *Moby-Dick*," Trimpi explores the extent to which Melville references witchcraft and the supernatural, employing the occult at various points throughout the novel. For example, she writes, Melville accessed "the pervasive and powerful superstition of the Devil, as it was found in the history of European and world superstition. By means of the literary form of the romance, he could make his statement about evil, both nature itself and in the human mind contemplating it" (Trimpi 562). Although magic was often seen as a pagan opposite to Protestant Christianity, Melville did not reject it merely because his protagonist was Protestant. As Trimpi notes, Melville was likely not a believer in witchcraft or demonology, but he was able to reference it for his own purposes (Trimpi 562). In a similar way, although Melville was not a Catholic himself, Winnick proposes in "Melville's "The Candles and the Easter Village" that "The Candles" chapter of *Moby-Dick* was constructed to parallel the Catholic Easter vigil to emphasize Ahab's unholiness: "infernal darkness daring to quench divine light" (Winnick 186). C. Merton Babcock provides context for the nautical superstitions of the Pequod's crew, claiming that "Melville was aware of the importance of folk materials as a foundation upon which to create a work of art" (Babcock 133). By giving his characters a rich background in folk traditions like superstition, Melville not only makes his characters seem realistic, but adds another meaning-making mode to the world of his novel. Thus, Ishmael and Melville employ a mixture of multicultural allusions to support the protagonist's claim that dialogue with other human beings and their beliefs allows for growth and insights that are otherwise inaccessible.

Another device that Melville employs is his extensive chapters on whale facts, which he uses to ground the spiritual ineffable in the worldly. While these chapters provide insight into the conditions of a whaling ship or material facts such as the length of the sperm whale's body, these facts are not merely for the sake of the reader's education. The whale-fact chapters are also part of Ishmael's attempts to interlace as many systems of thought as he can to contextualize the Pequod's journey. One example was discussed earlier in this paper, as Ishmael relates keeping different mental ideas in balance to the difficulty of balancing the ship with two whales on either side. Another significant example is the chapter entitled "Fast-Fish and Loose-Fish." Ishmael begins the chapter by explaining his reason for presenting the following information: "the allusions to the waifs and waif-poles in the last chapter...necessitates some account of the laws and regulations of the whale fishery" (432). His explanation indicates the necessity of context for understanding, and he willingly makes the effort for the readers' greater enlightenment.

However, Ishmael uses these facts as a vehicle to impart something greater than the context of whaling as he compares these two different types of fish. While a "Fast-Fish" is a fish that has been assigned to a hunting party, a "Loose-Fish" "is fair game for anybody who can soonest catch it" (433). These two types of fish develop into a sort of allegory for the larger world as he asks the question: "What all men's minds and opinions but Loose-Fish?" and "What is the great globe itself but a Loose-Fish?" (435). Through these terms, he engages philosophical questions, such as whether or not some institutions and philosophies are racing to ensnare men's minds. Even within the factual details of whaling life, Ishmael finds new vocabulary, a new means of engaging with his perception of the world. He also invites these modes of meaning-making to be turned inwards as well, implying that while it is important to understand the world, one must be willing to interrogate the self: "And what are you, reader, but a Loose-Fish and a Fast-Fish, too?" (435).

Thus, these whale-fact chapters are not merely a critical and interesting lens through which the reader experiences the Pequod and its journey, but they are essential to understanding the concept of the journey itself. The narrative style of the novel is wandering, like Ishmael's namesake,<sup>6</sup> as he weaves the narrative of the Pequod with whale facts, history, his own philosophical musings, and psychological insights into the other characters. Grant McMillan explores how Ishmael's subjective narration serves as "a medium through which the narrative filters, seeking to explain, to reach some understanding of himself" (McMillan 206). Thus, the extent to which Ishmael as a narrator influences the story cannot be underestimated. McMillan describes how Ishmael's narrative style is indicative of his attempt to engage both the material and spiritual:

...the evasiveness, the circumlocutory structure of his narrative, results from his fluctuation between a description of the material actions and a probing into the spiritual significance of these actions. The narrative itself

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<sup>6</sup> In Genesis (15 - 16:11), Ishmael is identified as the son of Abraham, who, in turn, is identified as a "wandering Aramean" in (New American Bible, Deuteronomy 26:5).

follows this pattern of fluctuation. Whenever Ishmael becomes most absorbed with this spiritual significance, the reader can not long after expect him to seek refuge in the material description of the whale. (McMillan 209)

After trying so often to communicate spiritual significance, Ishmael finds refuge in the physical. However, even within these factual sections, these seemingly totally secular and perhaps even boring measurements of bone and descriptions of eyes, Ishmael finds larger significance. McMillan identifies that “Ishmael as narrator is tentatively attempting to discover a sort of universal code, a conversion factor for translating material objects and experience into spiritual significance” (208). McMillan concludes that “Ishmael does not effect a reconciliation” between the spiritual and the material, citing Ishmael’s “affrighted and affronted” narrative style that “retreats from the painful examination of his experiences” (McMillan 217). There is significance to Ishmael’s wavering between the spiritual and the material; however, this paper proposes that the wandering aspect of *Moby-Dick*’s narrative style is an inherent aspect of the reconciliation between spiritual and material.

### III. Subtilization and Connection

While it may seem that Ishmael constantly widens his perspective by taking in new information, he views it not as an expansion but a subtilization. In the “The Sperm Whale’s head—Contrasted View,” Ishmael, once again creating a metaphor using the whale, explains what he means by subtilization: “Is it not curious, that so vast a being as the whale should see the world through so small an eye...But if his eyes were broad as the lens of Herschel's great telescope...would that make him any longer of sight...Not at all.—Why then do you try to ‘enlarge’ your mind? Subtilize it” (361-362). Subtlety implies the art of taking concepts that might be obscure and learning to refine them with new information. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, subtle can be defined as “involving distinctions that are fine or delicate, esp. to such an extent as to be difficult to analyse or describe.” When specifically relating to “intellectual activity,” it implies “wisdom or perceptiveness.” Thus, a subtle mind is one that has keen insight, one that can thoroughly penetrate the complicated nuances of a subject, which Ishmael claims is necessary for accessing truth. To “subtilize” one’s mind, then, is to synthesize one thing with something else, finding nuance and complication. Ishmael concerns himself not only with exploring new ideas and accumulating facts, but also how these ideas and facts relate to each other. Thus, the whale-fact chapters are Ishmael’s attempt to subtilize his mind; he is working to find secular contexts through which to better understand the leviathan, constantly asking how one piece of information is in conversation with another. Therefore, the wandering aspect that the whale-fact chapters bring to the novel is not merely Ishmael, as McMillan claims, recoiling from the great spiritual as a “psychological defense mechanism” (217). Ishmael is using the secular to engage the spiritual, using the material,

historical, and mathematical forms of knowledge—among others—to share with his reader a subtler, and, therefore, more complex, manner of thinking.

Ishmael's "subtilization" requires respecting information that comes from outside of oneself, and, returning to Ahab, the captain finds subtilization impossible. It has been established that Ahab's narcissism contrasts with Ishmael's collectivism, and this section furthers this contrast by elaborating on Ahab's inability to foster meaningful human connection and the consequences this has for himself and his crew. Ahab projects himself onto symbols while Ishmael validates everyone's perspective; Ahab acts as if he is above God, science, and his fellow man while Ishmael consciously engages all three. Ahab is actively determined to be immovable in his position, and Ishmael is willing to change.

However, one potential exception to Ahab's abhorrence to all outside influences (both scientific and personal) is the relationship that he develops with the young stowaway, Pip. At first, Ahab tolerates Pip, but then he invites Pip to stay in his cabin to chat. As their relationship progresses, Ahab views Pip with concern and even tenderness. Once his gaze is distracted from himself, Ahab has the potential to be cured of his self-absorption and malignant course of action. Yet, slowly Ahab senses his desire to hunt the white whale softening, causing him to reject Pip: "The hour is coming when Ahab would not scare thee from him, yet would not have thee by him. There is that in thee, poor lad, which I feel too curing to my malady. Like cures like; and for this hunt, my malady becomes my most desired health" (580). Ahab, after accidentally becoming fond of Pip, cannot bring himself to explicitly force Pip to leave him. Nevertheless, he knows that having Pip around would somehow "cure" him of his "malady": his dedication to the hunt for Moby Dick. Even though Ahab might know his monomania is like a disease with which he has been infected, he wants to stay afflicted to reach his goal. In order to rid himself of all potential distractions, Ahab aggressively bans himself from any true bond or human connection that could relieve him of his narrow-minded focus.

Melville offers Ahab a final opportunity to abandon his obsessive and self-destructive behavior through his interaction with Starbuck, his first mate. This chapter gives Ahab a rich emotional depth, showcasing that under the armor of his egoism is a wounded and lonely old man. In the chapter "The Symphony," Ahab and Starbuck have a revelatory talk the night before the final hunt. While on the deck, Starbuck listens to Ahab's woes, hoping to eventually convince Ahab to abandon the hunt and return home. Ahab, moved by mediating on the sea, shares his internal thoughts with Starbuck, and, for the first time in the novel, Ahab seems to regret his monomaniacal search. He tells Starbuck that he abandoned his wife and child: with "the madness, the frenzy, the boiling blood...Ahab has furiously, foamingly chased his prey—more a demon than a man! —aye, aye! what a forty years' fool—fool—old fool, has old Ahab been! Why this strife of the chase?" (591). To give up on the chase would be to give up on forty years of energy and devotion. In the midst of telling this story and revealing his inner life to another man, he turns to Starbuck and entreats him, "Close! stand close to me, Starbuck; let me look into a human eye; it is better than to gaze into sea or sky; better than to gaze upon God. By the green land; by the bright hearth-stone! this is the magic

glass, man; I see my wife and my child in thine eye” (591). Ahab uses the same language to describe this experience as he did the doubloon: the magician’s magic glass. However, Ahab seems to be expressing that the doubloon, that image that reflects back only himself, is a false magic glass, and that the human eye of another holds true magic. Instead of seeing himself, he sees someone else, someone he has once claimed to love. Thus, to look in the eyes of another, to connect with them on equal terms, eye to eye, is not merely the work of a magician, but akin to gazing upon God. As Ishmael believes that to connect with others is to do the will of God, Ahab’s experience in this chapter confirms the relationship between spiritual connection and human connection. Ahab, for just one blissful moment, glimpses the magical, spiritual power of human connection.

However, Ahab remains unconvinced to return home to the family he sees reflected in Starbuck’s eyes. Starbuck leaves Ahab, unable to fully join in a union with him, leaving Ahab to regress to his narcissistic state of mind. Starbuck tries to convince Ahab to find his family, and Ahab tries to articulate why he cannot. Ahab feels that he is forced by some “hidden lord and master...against all natural lovings and longings” to seek the whale (592). “Is Ahab, Ahab? Is it I, God, or who, that lifts this arm” he muses to himself; alongside the narcissism and delusions of grandeur, Ahab feels he is not in control of his own life (592). Ahab clings to his vengeance, even if it goes against a deeper want or longing, “ready to do what in [his] own proper, natural heart, [he] durst not so much as dare” (592). The push and pull between his commitment to his hunt and the feeling that he has no control over this all-encompassing and overwhelming drive confuses Ahab. Throughout most of the novel, Ahab does not want to face that he has potentially wasted forty years of his life, choosing to cling to his “malady,” convincing himself that the search for Moby Dick is justified at all costs. In this chapter, however, Ahab spirals into a monologue of despair, expressing the above thoughts and more, such as his distrust in God’s power to enact justice and his fear that men have no free will.

As he turns once again to Starbuck, hoping to continue a dialogue with him, perhaps even to ask him how the Quakers cope with God’s power and the knowledge of their own death, he finds that “blanched to a corpse’s hue with despair, the Mate had stolen away (593). Starbuck, unable to bear witness to Ahab’s deep pain, abandons him, sealing their fates, and leaving Ahab to regress to his narcissistic state of mind. Realizing no one is there to listen to him, Ahab “crossed the deck to gaze over on the other side; but started at two reflected, fixed eyes in the water there” (593). While these eyes could be Fedallah’s, the fire-worshipper Ahab brings on board the Pequod, the effect remains the same: the tableau of the Narcissus myth. Ahab is left alone to look into either his own eyes or the eyes of Fedallah reflected in the water. On the verge of letting someone into his inner life, about to release himself from the anger and fear he has projected into this white whale, Ahab is left looking into the water, where the only eyes he can see are probably his own reflected in the vast ocean. Immediately following this chapter, Ahab hunts the whale; the antidote to Ahab’s narcissism, human connection, could not be administered in time. Starbuck’s untimely exit seals their fates.

While Ahab's lonely narcissism leads to his death, Ishmael's human relationships with others leads to life. Perhaps most dramatically, at the end of the novel, when Ishmael is "cast up by the sea, he is saved by the coffin prepared for his bosom companion Queequeg...to whom the bonds of human love had bound him the closest" (Hoffman 207). As it is due to Ishmael's insistence that Queequeg is onboard the Pequod—and that a coffin was made for Queequeg— Ishmael's dedication to his relationship with Queequeg is responsible for the life-buoy that saves him. However, as scholar Daniel G. Hoffman notes, Queequeg's influence on Ishmael's ultimate survival is "not merely to provide the coffin-lifebuoy, important as that is" (Hoffman 214). In fact, the suicidal thoughts plaguing Ishmael at the beginning of the novel, the disinterest in everything on shore, is dissipated by Ishmael's friendship with Queequeg. Hoffman claims that "Queequeg's love redeems Ishmael from the fatal isolation which had led him to choose Ahab's ship" and that "His love for Queequeg...qualifies Ishmael, alone of Ahab's oath-bound crew, to dis sever the bonds of hatred and vengeance and so qualify for survival from the annihilation that Ahab willed for all the rest" (Hoffman 214). The bond between Ishmael and Queequeg holds its own saving power, as proven by both the life-buoy and Ishmael's improved emotional well-being, and this paper takes these findings further, claiming that the bond between Queequeg and Ishmael is indicative of the necessity for humans to recognize their dependence on each other.

Ishmael, explicitly aware of his dependence on Queequeg, is receptive to other people influencing his selfhood and perception of the world. In the chapter titled "The Monkey-Rope," Queequeg and Ishmael "for better or for worse...were wedded" for a time, thus continuing God's will by uniting further with one another (349). Ishmael tells his readers, "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; and that another's mistake or misfortune might plunge innocent me into unmerited disaster and death" (349). Although Ishmael recognizes the risks involved in human connection, he is willing to engage nonetheless. This experience makes Ishmael reflect upon the dependency all men have upon one another for mere survival, which he calls "a connexion with a plurality of other mortals" (349). Ishmael would have died had there been no life-buoy, but it is a strange series of events, spurred to motion by Ishmael and Queequeg's dedication to their relationship to each other, that leads to Ishmael's ultimate survival. Thus, Queequeg's coffin is a reminder that, even though it is risky to partly surrender control of one's life to another person, all humans are bound in an ineffably complex dependency, and thus, willingly fostering human connection is necessary for survival.

#### IV. Ahab as Seeker, Ishmael as Wanderer

The Pequod itself embodies this "connection with a plurality of other mortals" when it is working in total harmony, when each member of the crew recognizes their dependence on the rest. The Pequod reaches this total harmony during the chase for Moby Dick:



They were one man, not thirty. For as the one ship that held them all; though it was put together of all contrasting things—oak, and maple, and pine wood; iron, and pitch, and hemp—yet all these ran into each other in the one concrete hull, which shot on its way, both balanced and directed by the long central keel; even so, all the individualities of the crew, this man's valor, that man's fear; guilt and guiltiness, all varieties were welded into oneness, and were all directed to that fatal goal which Ahab had their one lord and keel did point to. (606)

Ishmael details how the ship, made “of all contrasting things,” becomes something greater than the sum of its parts when these contrasting materials are joined together. He compares this to the crew itself; the energy of the whole crew working together, combining all of their “individualities” to become “one man, not thirty” makes them collectively more powerful. Nevertheless, the mission still fails. While this image of individual talents and emotions joining together in total harmony may seem idyllic, the problem is that their harmony is driven by “Ahab their one lord and keel.” Initially, the Pequod is advertised as a “three-years’ voyage” during which the crew would find and hunt as much as they could before returning home (74). However, Ahab disregards this pledge, opting to use this crew and their time to prioritize the hunt for the white whale. Thus, the harmony of the ship in this scene shows its great potential as a group, but their end goal is a distortion of the whaling voyage.

Ahab's focus on one goal makes him a seeker or a hunter; he wants to conquer the whale above all else, and he cannot see past this end goal. However, he has focused so much on this goal that nothing exists beyond it. By seeking the completion of his only goal, he seeks death. This paper began by interrogating Ahab as a narcissist as well as a hunter, a seeker, and a solipsist as described by Hoffman. Hoffman notes that a hunter can become a “Seeker, a seeker after truth,” but Ahab does not seek Moby Dick because he seeks the truth (Hoffman 207). Ahab seeks the whale because he has already assigned a specific meaning to it, his “visibly personified... rage and hate” (200). Ahab seeks to destroy the whale, and, in turn, this rage that he has projected onto the image of the whale. Ahab narrows his focus, always prioritizing the achievement of his goal, which is, in effect, his own mortal end: he dies tangled in the rope of the very harpoon he launches against Moby Dick (623). Even when the ship works in harmony, even when the entire crew has overcome the narcissism of their leader to work as a collective, they are working towards the goal of Ahab, and, thus, their own deaths. Ahab's monomania makes him so focused on his hunt for Moby Dick that he cannot imagine anything beyond his revenge. The danger of the Pequod's voyage is in its premise: to seek something monomaniacally is to move single-mindedly to a fixed point. Once that fixed point is reached, however, the journey is over. To seek an ultimate goal at the cost of dismissing all other possibilities or responsibilities is to seek a kind of death. Thus, the intensity with which Ahab has focused on his hunt is self-destructive, and that destruction extends to the entire crew.

While Ahab's mode of seeking is to move towards a final destination, Ishmael, once again, presents a sustainable alternative: a focus on the journey, and, thus, on the experience of life. Ahab ascribes unwarranted meaning to the whale and refuses to renounce his pointed search. As McMillan proposes, Ahab is a cautionary tale for Ishmael: "The lesson for Ishmael is clear: it is best not to be overly meticulous in your attempt to understand and give meaning to the shards of experience which make up life" (McMillan 206). While McMillan proposes that Ishmael ends the novel in "ambivalences and ambiguities," this paper looks to the chapter "A Squeeze of the Hand" for proof that Ishmael has found the antidote to being "overly meticulous" in one's search for meaning making (McMillan 216). While having a meditative experience squeezing the whale's spermaceti, Ishmael tells the reader, "since by many prolonged, repeated experiences, I have perceived that in all cases man must eventually lower, or at least shift, his conceit of attainable felicity; not placing it anywhere in the intellect or the fancy; but in the wife, the heart, the bed, the table, the saddle, the fireside, the country" (456). After this experience, when he thinks of heaven, Ishmael imagines "long rows of angels in paradise, each with his hands in a jar of spermaceti" (456). What Ishmael has learned is that even the quotidian and the seemingly miniscule hold spiritual meaning. The realistic or attainable way to access joy, calm, and perhaps even the spiritual, is to experience the day-to-day aspects of life.

Ahab assigns meaning to the largest animal, tries to grapple with the largest questions of God's existence, but Ishmael recognizes that the whiteness of the whale is so overwhelming in its infinity that the only way to find peace is to release the need to define it all. Ishmael proposes grounding oneself in the real world, returning to the quotidian and the sensory, and letting the body experience whatever it may need to. In this way, Ishmael is focused on the experiences that life can bring while Ahab is focused on his goal with no regard for the process. Ishmael, from the beginning, has no goal but to continue living, embarking on this voyage to avoid his own suicide. Thus, he wanders through life, focused on absorbing all the information and sensory input that he can, including the viewpoints of others, as a means towards realistic, attainable felicity and spiritual experience. While Ahab seeks to know and conquer, Ishmael seeks to experience and communicate; while the former seeks the end and death, the latter seeks continuance and life.

While Queequeg's coffin, representative of Ishmael's dedication to human connection, saves him from the vortex that sinks the Pequod, Ishmael is also saved by his willingness to wander and his acceptance of the basic and ordinary. Ishmael is saved not only because of Queequeg, but because he is willing to float aimlessly for days, surrendering himself to the whims of the sea: "for almost one whole day and night, I floated on a soft and dirgelike main. The unharmed sharks, they glided by as if with padlocks on their mouths; the savage sea-hawks sailed with sheathed beaks" (625). His willingness to float without a destination keeps him alive until another ship, the Rachel, rescues him. In the final line of the novel, Ishmael brings attention to the irony that "in [the Rachel's] retracing search after her missing children, [she] only found another orphan" (625). The Rachel, a boat the Pequod

encountered before their final hunt, was searching for some lost men, one of whom was the captain's son. Although the Rachel did indeed have a distinct goal, she was still willing to adapt and rescue Ishmael. The Rachel's willingness to wander across the sea and embrace whatever she encountered mirrors Ishmael's philosophy. Therefore, Ishmael is not only saved by his own interpersonal connections or the embodiment of his personal philosophy. He must depend on the goodwill of the Rachel's crew, emphasizing that all humans are dependent on one another. Ishmael is also dependent on the willingness of others to allow the unexpected and the unknown, as The Rachel accepts him, a man they were not necessarily pursuing. As a result, even Ishmael's ultimate salvation is reliant on the presence of others and their readiness to accept him. Ishmael, from his suicidal beginning to his lucky end, relies on both human connection and a willingness to adapt in order to live. Thus, Melville presents Ishmael's holistic, sustainable attitude as a counterpoint to Ahab's monomaniacal and self-destructive way of thinking that rebuffs all human contact. While Ahab dies delusional, thinking himself a singular hero, Ishmael lives authentically, knowing himself as just one in a large, interdependent crew of humanity.

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