

Paradox and Philosophical Anticipation in Melville's *Moby-Dick*

A Thesis by

Sara Ott

Bachelor of Arts, Friends University, 1999

Submitted to the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

and the faculty of the Graduate School of

Wichita State University

in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

May 2006

Copyright 2006 by Sara Ott

All Rights Reserved

Paradox and Philosophical Anticipation in Melville's *Moby-Dick*

I have examined the final copy of this Thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts with a major in English.

Dr. Diane Quantic, Committee Chair

We have read this thesis
and recommend its acceptance:

Dr. Christopher Brooks, Committee Member

Dr. Wilson Baldrige, Committee Member

DEDICATION

To Memom and Granddad

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many thanks are due to the director of this essay, Dr. Diane Quantic. Without her editorial assistance and mind-reading skills, this paper would not have the clarity and precision it now contains. I am grateful to Dr. Christopher Brooks of the English Department for his assistance on this project in spite of his crushingly busy workload. Thank you to Dr. Wilson Baldrige for his patient encouragement and insightful thoughts on Melville's ocean and novelistic inventions. Finally, to Doug, Cort, and Lyla, if not for your gift of time, support, and being willing to sit on my lap while I researched and wrote, I could not have finished this.

ABSTRACT

Much of the current critical literature on *Moby-Dick* lacks a unifying focus. This essay attempts to provide a thread of continuity for *Moby-Dick* by proving that paradox and Herman Melville's anticipation of the early existential movement hold the key to a full reading of this text. By viewing the text itself, Melville's personal correspondence, and the writings of Emerson, Hegel, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche, the paradoxical tension by which this text must be read comes into clearer focus.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| Chapter | Page |
|---|------|
| I. INTRODUCTION..... | 1 |
| II. PARADOXES IN <i>MOBY-DICK</i> 'S CHARACTERS..... | 4 |
| Ahab..... | 4 |
| Ishmael..... | 9 |
| Queequeg..... | 14 |
| Pip..... | 17 |
| III. PARADOXES IN SHIPBOARD TASKS..... | 19 |
| Work and Leisure..... | 19 |
| Masculine and Feminine Spaces..... | 22 |
| IV. PARADOXES AS AVATAR OF EARLY EXISTENTIALISM..... | 27 |
| Melville's Response to Emerson..... | 27 |
| Melville's Anticipation of Kierkegaardian Existentialism..... | 30 |
| V. LIST OF REFERENCES..... | 34 |

INTRODUCTION

Billy Budd's narrator asks, "Who in the rainbow can draw the line where the violet tint ends and the orange tint begins? Distinctly we see the difference of the colors, but where exactly does the one first blindingly enter the other?" (*Billy Budd* 334).

Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* displays a "blending" of paradoxes in the major characters, their shipboard tasks, and Melville's own life. These paradoxes function at surface level as contradictions and have even been called "oscillations" by his friend Evert Duyckinck and the critic Robert Milder ("Dream" 250). The contradictions, as embodied in the major characters and their tasks, create a tension by their concurrent presence in one person or task. Melville chose not to resolve the tension inherent in these paradoxes. As a result, he demonstrates the "blending" of categories such as sane and insane, god and man, cannibal and Puritan.

The balancing of certain contradictions within an individual character or a task a character must perform reveals Melville's view that paradox is a crucial element of human existence. Melville grounded his paradoxes in the characters and the tasks those particular characters perform. By having his paradoxes rooted in characters who function as symbols of humanity in general, he clearly demonstrates that his primary concern rests with people and their tension-fraught relations to themselves and each other. He may discourse at long length about the whales and the water they inhabit, but never does he describe the whales in paradoxical terms. The whales in *Moby-Dick* only feel the tension from the chase or the harpoon a sailor has imbedded in one of them. Melville implies

that to be human is to live a tension-filled life, to feel the paradox of spirit encased in flesh. Further, Melville's characters not only represent a broader humanity, but they reflect his own struggle with the relationships between God¹, humanity, and nature. Melville could be considered "pre"-existentialist because this work points, as the later philosophers do, to the paradoxes inherent in humanity's relationship to God, itself, and nature. As Soren Kierkegaard in the late 1850s celebrates paradox in his philosophical writings, so Melville allows paradoxes to remain in the text of *Moby-Dick* without a formal resolution.

A careful view of these tensions and the connections between them shows that Melville was not "oscillating" in his views. He was straying from the Hegelian tripartite view of history prevalent in Europe during the early 1800's that claims a system-thesis, antithesis, and synthesis-can properly resolve apparent paradoxes in a person's apprehension of truth. The repetition of paradox and the tension this creates in Melville's work anticipates the existential movement that began in Denmark in 1843 with Kierkegaard's publication of *Either/Or*, which argued that truth may sometimes be found in paradoxes, the most notable paradox being human beings with their tensions between physicality and spirituality/intellectuality.

For Melville, truth itself is paradoxical and individual: "Truth hath no confines," the raving Ahab exclaims to Starbuck's questioning of the hunt for Moby-Dick (*Moby-Dick* 164). Truth was not bound to behave in certain logical and rational ways (as Hegel would have it), and though the text of *Moby-Dick* does not explicitly indicate the nature

¹In a letter to Nathaniel Hawthorne, Melville admitted, "You perceive I employ a capital initial in the pronoun referring to the Deity; don't you think there is a slight dash of flunkeyism in that usage?" Nevertheless, he maintained the capital, which I have preserved in this essay.

of truth, the prevalence of paradoxes in the text indicates truth may be found *in* the paradox. Melville dated the “beginning” of his life from age twenty-five, when he went to sea and began to experience the paradoxes that “contact with the world” impressed upon his apprehension of truth (*Correspondence* 193). In his biography of Melville, Andrew Delbanco speaks of the impetus Melville’s experiences at sea gave his writing: “What Melville found at sea was what other writers have found in war: a feeling of *contact* with the world that shocked him equally with moments of desire and dread. He gave up on notions and theories learned from books and became...an engaged participant in life...” (*World* 58). His contact with the world and with “life”—meaning different people he met and the different person he became—helped create his understanding that life is paradoxically full of objects of desire and dread. As a result, his works reflect the recognition that man is a paradoxical animal. In Ishmael’s words, Melville speaks to the reader of these paradoxes:

If, then, to meanest mariners, and renegades and castaways, I shall hereafter ascribe high qualities, though dark; weave round them tragic graces; if even the most mournful, perchance the most abased, among them all, shall at times lift himself to the exalted mounts; if I shall touch that workman’s arm with some ethereal light; if I shall spread a rainbow over his disastrous set of sun; then. . . bear me out in it, thou just Spirit of Equality, which hast spread one royal mantle of humanity over all my kind! Bear me out in it, thou great democratic God! (117)

PARADOXES IN *MOBY-DICK'S* CHARACTERS

In the experience of Melville's characters, the demarcating line between sanity and insanity, expression and oppression, and civilization and barbarism proves indistinct. None of the tensions in these desires and dreads fall neatly into discrete categories, with the result that Melville created a rainbow of human response to life.

Ahab

The sanity and insanity of Captain Ahab in *Moby-Dick* provides an important starting point for understanding Melville's depiction of human paradoxes. When Ishmael asks Peleg about the captain of the *Pequod* because, as he says, "[I]t is always well to have a look at him before irrevocably committing yourself into his hands," Peleg haltingly replies, "[H]e ain't sick; but no, he isn't well either.... He's a grand, ungodly, god-like man.... Ahab's been in colleges, as well as 'mong the cannibals; been used to deeper wonders than the waves; fixed his fiery lance in mightier, stranger foes than whales" (*Moby-Dick* 78-79). Peleg's paradoxical descriptors of Ahab leave Ishmael curious about the reality of a man who exists on both ends of the spectrums Peleg lists: god/man, cannibal/educated man, and sick(insane)/well(sane). Ishmael finds himself intoxicated by the rage and power of expression in Ahab, and several chapters later, he uncovers the history of Ahab's amputation, pointing to the connection between a person's mind and body and indicating how close sanity and insanity are related within Captain Ahab:

[T]hen it was, that his torn body and gashed soul bled into one another; and so interfusing, made him mad. That it was only then, on the homeward voyage, after the encounter, that the final monomania seized him, seems all but certain from the fact that, at intervals during the passage, he was a raving lunatic.... Human madness is oftentimes a

cunning and most feline thing. When you think it fled, it may have but become transfigured into some still subtler form.... [S]o 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 any one reasonable object. Now, in his heart, Ahab had some glimpse of this, namely: all my means are sane, my motive and my object mad. (185-186)

Ishmael explicitly denominates Ahab as a lunatic, “seized” by “monomania”—a fierce madness that Ahab concentrates upon the white whale. The difficulty with Ahab’s lunacy soon becomes clear, as Ishmael speaks broadly about human madness and calls it a “cunning” thing (185). By identifying Ahab’s madness with human madness, Melville clearly intends for Ahab to stand as a symbol of humanity (in general) and to point to the paradox of insanity: it is cunning, calculating, and sane in its devices. This immediately seems to contradict the very definition of insanity. How can Ahab be sane if he is insane? Ishmael provides an explanation by giving an inner view of Ahab’s heart in Ahab’s words: “[M]y means are sane, my motive and my object mad” (186). As later action demonstrates, this combination of sane/insane has increased Ahab’s “potency” and created a sort of “superman.”

Toward the end of *Moby-Dick*, in Chapter 113, Ahab’s madness is once again explicitly spoken of as Ahab asks Perth the blacksmith how he can work with fire without being burned. Perth indicates that his scars keep him from being burned, but this rational and sane answer frustrates Ahab, and he retorts: ““Well, well; no more. Thy shrunk voice sounds too calmly, sanely woeful to me. In no Paradise myself, I am impatient of all misery in others that is not mad. Thou should’st go mad, blacksmith; say, why dost thou not go mad? How can’st thou endure without being mad? Do the heavens yet hate thee, that thou can’st not go mad?” (487). Ahab sees his madness as a

defensive mechanism, enabled by the heavens, which is “no Paradise,” nor is it hell, since madness is a sign of favor from “the heavens.” His recognition of Perth’s sanity and his own lack of sanity, once again, points to the paradoxical nature of his insanity. He is sane enough to recognize his own insanity, and insane enough to cope with the misery resulting from the theft of his leg by Moby-Dick.

In Chapter 99, Pip, a servant boy who has lost his sanity as a result of the terror of being left behind in the sea after accidentally falling overboard during a whale chase, comments on Ahab: “Ain’t I a crow? And where’s the scare-crow? There he stands; two bones stuck into a pair of old trowsers, and two more poked into the sleeves of an old jacket” (435). Ahab, in response, says, “Wonder if he means me?—complimentary!—poor lad!—I could go hang myself. Any way, for the present, I’ll quit Pip’s vicinity. I can stand the rest, for they have plain wits; but he’s too crazy-witty for my sanity” (435). Ahab recognizes that his insanity controls his own sanity, and Pip’s “crazy-witty” sanity/insanity may influence Ahab’s sanity, as well. In turn, as Pip indicates, Ahab is the scare-crow that frightens even the mad young Pip. That Ahab’s madness co-exists with his sanity is clear from his recognition of Pip as “crazy-witty” and the other sailors as plain-witted.

In a letter to his friend Evert Duyckinck in April 1849, Melville speaks briefly and cautiously on the subject of madness in a fellow writer:

I remember the shock I had when I first saw the mention of his madness. —But he was just the man to go mad — imaginative, voluptuously inclined, poor, unemployed, in the race of life distanced by his inferiors, unmarried, —without a port or haven in the universe to make. His present misfortune—rather blessing— is but the sequel to a long experience of morbid habits of thought. — This going mad of a friend or acquaintance comes straight home to every man who feels his soul in him,—which but

few men do. For in all of us lodges the same fuel to light the same fire. And he who has never felt, momentarily, what madness is has but a mouthful of brains. What sort of sensation madness is may be very well imagined—just as we imagine how we felt as infants, tho' we can not recall it. In both conditions we are irresponsible & riot like gods without fear of fate. . . . —But if we prate much of this thing we shall be illustrating our own propositions. (*Correspondence* 128)

As he describes madness and its prerequisites in this passage (poor, unemployed, unmarried, without a “port” in the “universe,” etc.) Melville could be describing himself, but certain discrepancies are readily apparent with this description of madness and the description of Ahab’s madness. Ahab lives with a sense of fate—that is to say, he acknowledges that he *does* have a port in the universe². He has a new family and knows that his wife and child are at his home port awaiting his return, as Captain Peleg points out to an inquisitive Ishmael: “Besides, my boy, he has a wife—not three voyages wedded—a sweet, resigned girl. Think of that; by that sweet girl that old man has a child: hold ye then there can be any utter, hopeless harm in Ahab?” (79).

As captain, he is employed and could be relatively rich if he would choose to chase more whales than the white whale. Ahab’s declared lunacy and evident sanity are the poles of the paradoxical tension with which a “man of feeling” must reconcile himself.

Ahab’s amputated leg provides the primary cause for Ahab’s lunacy and his later confrontation with God. This lost leg, the catalyst that moves Ahab to face the other paradoxes in his relation to the world and himself, poses its own paradox. Ahab describes the paradox to the carpenter as the carpenter fashions a new leg for him: “Look, put thy live leg here in the place where mine once was; so, now, here is only one distinct

²He prays to his “father”—“thou clear spirit” in “The Candles” chapter, indicating that he knows how to properly worship this spirit (507). He has a relationship—a “port” in the universe—with a higher power than himself: “I leap with thee; I burn with thee; would fain be welded with thee; defyingly I worship thee!” (508).

leg to the eye, yet two to the soul. Where thou feelest tingling life, there, exactly there, there to a hair, do I. Is't a riddle?" (471).

Ahab confronts this “riddle” or paradox in “The Candles” as he indicts God for his suffering. In this chapter, Ahab prays over his new harpoon, fashioned especially for Moby-Dick and tempered with the blood of the “savages” aboard. During this chapter, it becomes clear Ahab feels the pull of his paradoxical nature most in his relation to a silent, mechanical God. In his roaring invocations to this absent God, one hears the paradox of an embodied spirit celebrated with passion. Ahab recognizes his power, albeit limited, in the face of some being more powerful than he, and he clings to that physical part of himself that can resist God, which thus ensures his continual existence in some form: “Thou canst blind; but I can then grope. Thou canst consume; but I can then be ashes. . . .Yet blindfold, yet will I talk to thee. Light though thou be, thou leapest out of darkness; but I am darkness leaping out of light, leaping out of thee!” (507). Ahab believes that his very existence defies this God with mechanical creative power and silent destructive power. During this defiant prayer to the fire God, Ahab’s harpoon is struck by lightning and begins flaming. He takes this flame as an affirmation of son-ship from the “spirit of fire” God, an allusion to the affirmation of son-ship displayed in the dove that rests over Jesus’ head when, in Matthew 3:16-17, the narrator describes the heavens parting and saying, “This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.” This is not the peaceful, olive-branch-bearing dove-like God who owns Jesus as his son. Ahab recognizes a fierce God of fire. Referring to this God, Melville hinted at the “secret motto” of *Moby-Dick* in a letter to Hawthorne: “This is the book’s motto (the secret one), – Ego non baptiso te in nomine—but make out the rest yourself” (*Correspondence* 196).

The rest of the motto is supplied by Ahab in Chapter 113 as he tempers his new harpoon in the blood of the harpooneers: “Ego non baptizo te in nomine patris, sed in nomine diaboli!” (489). Baptism in the name of the devil, the flame-bearing father/God to whom Ahab prays, functions as the secret motto of the book, according to Melville. By creating this scene reminiscent of Jesus’ baptism but inserting fire above Ahab instead of a dove, Melville drives home his point: a person is so much divinity and diabolism at the same time. Ahab recognizes his spiritual (yet diabolical) genealogy in this fire above his harpoon. He recognizes in his lineage that he is both flesh and spirit, spirit from God his father and flesh from his unknown mother. In that recognition, he sees that the paradox of his humanity coupled with intellectuality is greater than the pure spirit that God is:

Oh! thou magnanimous! now do I glory in my genealogy. But thou art but my fiery father; my sweet mother, I know not. Oh, cruel! what hast thou done with her? There lies my puzzle; but thine is greater. Thou knowest not how came ye, hence callest thyself unbegotten; certainly knowest not thy beginning, hence callest thyself unbegun. I know that of me, which thou knowest not of thyself, oh, thou omnipotent. There is some unsuffusing thing beyond thee, thou clear spirit, to whom all thy eternity is but time, all thy creativeness mechanical. (507)

His presumption sounds blasphemous, and may well be, but it celebrates the paradox of humanity. Ahab admits the existence of a mechanical God capable of destructive power, but he believes that the existence of God is *less* than his own paradox-fraught physical/spiritual existence. Because he is born, because he exists physically, and because ashes will remain even if he is consumed by fire, Ahab believes his existence is greater than God’s, which he defines and defies as pure spirit: “Oh! thou clear spirit of clear fire...I now know thee, thou clear spirit, and I now know that thy right worship is defiance” (507). Melville’s Ahab realizes that physical/intellectual existence may be

painful, but it also may be superior to any other form of existence. He is a god/man (spiritual/physical), and, thus, he is better than a god. The paradox, his existence, has created something better than its creator.

Ishmael

The first paradox a reader encounters with Ishmael, the narrator of this story, is the suicidal quality of his life. As we meet him, he is winding his way to the sea to heal himself of a recurrent suicidal tendency:

Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet; and especially whenever my hypos get such an upper hand of me, that it requires strong moral principle to prevent me from deliberately stepping into the street, and methodically knocking people's hats off-then, I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can. This is my substitute for pistol and ball. With a philosophical flourish Cato throws himself upon his sword; I quietly take to the ship. (23)

Ishmael uses the word "whenever" multiple times, which indicates this depression, or despair, is a recurring facet of his emotional life, so much so that he knows what he needs to cure himself. Several clues further on in the story indicate that Ishmael is never fully cured of his need to wander. Ironically, his lust for death drives him into the arms of life, literally, when he meets Queequeg. Robert Milder, in his essay "Melville and the Avenging Dream," speaks of the circularity of Ishmael's life: "[T]he older Ishmael returns to the sea, presumably to learn the same lessons over again.... [Ishmael] himself is only partially and temporarily satisfied..." (259). Milder refers to Ishmael's "Town-Ho Story," a story within a story: he narrates the story via his telling of the story while he is in Lima, Peru, some time later after his rescue from the wreckage of the *Pequod*. Ishmael's obvious pleasure in telling the story (of a sea-ship) in Lima (on foreign land)

indicates that he is happiest when he can hold the paradox of his zest for life and his despair in tension.

The next, and perhaps most intriguing, paradox a reader encounters with Ishmael is his voice and his silence. A reader immediately meets the narrator: “Call me Ishmael” (3), he says, as he introduces himself to the reader. However, his narrative voice disappears at times, and the text takes on an omniscient third-person narrator, as when Perth and Ahab are discussing a new harpoon, or when the thoughts and private soliloquies of Ahab are revealed. Ishmael as a character lapses into silence for long stretches of time within the text. D. H. Lawrence noted this—but only partially—in his essay “Herman Melville’s ‘Moby-Dick’”:

You would think this relation with Queequeg meant something to Ishmael. But no. Queequeg is forgotten like yesterday’s newspaper. Human things are only momentary excitements or amusements to the American Ishmael... What’s a Queequeg? ... The white whale must be hunted down. Queequeg must be just “KNOWN,” then dropped into oblivion. (200)

Lawrence picks up on the disappearance of Queequeg, but he doesn’t notice that Ishmael has disappeared, as well. In Chapter 72, Queequeg makes his last major appearance until Chapter 110, “Queequeg in His Coffin.” Ishmael or the narrative refers with a short mention only to Queequeg twice in the thirty-eight chapters between his last appearance and his near death. After Queequeg’s last appearance, Ishmael’s narrative “I” speaks in approximately every other chapter until Chapter 94, “A Squeeze of the Hand.” In the intervening chapters, Ishmael’s narrative “I” may only be heard once in a chapter with vague reference to his thoughts on whales. Most of the chapters in this section are devoted to scientific observation and discussion of the whales, so the character of

Ishmael, though he is presumably speaking—as the occasional “I” indicates—neither develops nor unfolds during this time in which Queequeg is absent. After “The Squeeze of the Hand” in which Ishmael narrates his pleasure in a particular task, the narrative “I” disappears as the whale chase approaches its climax. The explanation for the disappearance of the characters lies in the disappearance of Ishmael’s narrative voice.

Shortly after the stream of Ishmael’s narrative resumes in “A Squeeze of the Hand,” he returns to Queequeg with the story of Queequeg’s illness. The tender and maternal feelings Ishmael has for Queequeg bring Ishmael back to his voice. That voice soon disappears again, as Ahab pursues his deathly quest for the white whale. When Ishmael’s narrative resumes, the somber, near silent narrator says, in a whispering italic script, *“I was he whom the Fates ordained to take the place of Ahab’s bowsman. . .the same, who. . .was dropped astern. . .Buoyed up by [Queequeg’s] 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”* (573). Why is it that Ishmael is able to say, “I only am escaped to tell thee” (573)? How does he effect his escape? At a time when Pip is babbling insanely, Starbuck is confronting Ahab about his blasphemy, Stubb is pronouncing Ahab “right,” and all the rest of the crew is raising a “half-mutinous cry” (508), Ishmael alone is silent. But he is not completely marked by silence in this text. While he is, at times, completely silent, at other times, his is the full narrative voice. Ishmael’s balance between silence and voice saves him—he embraces the paradox of a sometimes-silent narrator. As Ahab puts it earlier in the text, when a quailing Starbuck falls silent before him, “Aye, aye! thy silence, then, *that* voices thee” (164). Ishmael’s salvation lies in his acceptance of the paradox of a silence that provides a voice. Because

he alone recognizes the balance, the fates, or the gods (to use Ahab's terminology) spare him to tell the story with all of the paradoxes intact. Since he can embrace his own paradox, he can be trusted to convey the other paradoxes in the story. Ishmael's silence/voice saves him so that he is able to tell his story, presumably with all of the silences and moments of speaking intact.

Many of Melville's contemporary critics found a serious literary transgression: in *Moby-Dick*, one voice is sometimes multiple voices, and one point of view is sometimes an omniscient or additional point of view:

It is a canon with some critics that nothing should be introduced into a novel which it is physically impossible for the writer to have known: thus, he must not describe the conversation of miners in a pit if they *all* perish. Mr. Melville hardly steers clear of this rule, and he continually violates another, by beginning in the autobiographical form and changing *ad libitum* into the narrative. (*Spectator* 12)

This tension between the speaking and silent narratorial voice frustrated readers of Melville's day. Looking back now, with the benefit of Kierkegaard, Camus, and Nietzsche, readers can see that through tension among these voices Melville was exploring what it means to be human. Andrew Delbanco, in his essay "Melville's Sacramental Style," calls this tension in Melville's work a mark of a "fluid consciousness":

[S]tylistic prowling is one of the features of his prose that gives it both its protomodernist and its cluttered, seventeenth-century quality. We are approaching here the symphonic texture of *Moby-Dick*, in which the narrative voice darts back and forth (sometimes within contiguous sequences) between the elevated and the vernacular, or disappears entirely into a choral burst. The sudden shifts of focus and intonation; the illogical ubiquity of Melville's narrators (Ishmael is somehow present in Ahab's cabin when the Captain is alone); and above all the refusal of the prose to settle into any steady pattern, mark its fidelity to the fluidity of consciousness. (75)

In *Moby-Dick*, Melville not only exposes the psyches of Ahab, Pip, and Ishmael, but he reveals his own consciousness by allowing the text to unfold in a manner that could only reflect what Delbanco calls his “fluidity of consciousness.” By allowing this fluidity in his work, Melville’s art reveals himself as an artist and indicates, in all its variety and inconsistencies, an embrace of the paradoxes within him and within the human race.

Queequeg

In *Moby-Dick*, Melville does not confine men to mainstream or “undomestic” and heterosexual masculinity, but opens up the boundaries for men’s expressions of their souls—a primary reason many critics point to homoeroticism within his texts. By “homoeroticizing” his characters, he removes an element of gender classification and allows the particular “men” he selects as characters to function across a broader spectrum of masculine and feminine qualities. Queequeg is absent from the mainstream of the narrative for a significant stretch of time (from Chapter 72 to 110), but his humanizing effect upon Ishmael remains, and Queequeg returns abruptly to the narrative when he becomes ill and almost dies. The tenderness and maternal affection with which Ishmael speaks of his dear friend reveals a different Ishmael than the lonely wanderer who stumbles upon the Spouter Inn and, as a result, meets Queequeg. Ishmael cannot be Ishmael without Queequeg. He meets Queequeg through an odd and humorous enough encounter: two strangers must share the same bed due to a lack of vacancies at The Spouter Inn (23). Soon the two are warmed by each other as they sleep together in bed, as they are warmed by their mutual respect and friendship later on. Queequeg is a heathen cannibal and Ishmael is a conservative New Englander with Puritan/Presbyterian

leanings. Their friendship transcends the paradoxes/tensions inherent in their differences. In a wry comment on Queequeg's cannibalism, Caleb Crain notes in his article "Lovers of Human Flesh: Homosexuality and Cannibalism in Melville's Novels," "Once Ishmael sees Queequeg is a cannibal—and not a belligerent drunk, a renegade, or a Satanist—he is willing to sleep with him" (45-46). Crain astutely points out that this is not necessarily a sexual sleeping:

Queequeg is his own man. He is not a man who fails to reach the standard of independent nineteenth-century American manhood but a man by another standard, to wit, a cannibal standard. Ishmael thinks he has found a loophole; he is able to love Queequeg the way one cannibal loves another. The homophobic strictures of America do not apply, he imagines: "In a countryman, this sudden flame of friendship would have seemed far too premature, a thing to be much distrusted; but in this simple savage those old rules would not apply." (46)

Queequeg's foreignness gives him license (at least in Ishmael's eyes) to hold masculine and feminine qualities at once, while inspiring the same tension in the New Englander Ishmael (see for example, Ishmael's maternal care for Queequeg while he is sick).

In Chapter 13 of *Moby-Dick*, "Wheelbarrow," Melville presents the civilized side of Queequeg the savage cannibal as Queequeg tells two stories, one of his interaction with a foreign culture and one of a foreigner interacting with his culture. In Queequeg's case, he had been lent a wheelbarrow which he did not know how to operate. He lifted it to his shoulder and carried it thus, to the shouts of laughter of the people on the street who recognized his ignorance. He then contrasts this story with another story. A foreigner, dining with Queequeg's father at the wedding feast of his daughter, washed his hands in the punch bowl, thinking it a large finger bowl. Queequeg and his savage family are more civil than the laughing Americans, choosing not to laugh at their

respected guest. When Ishmael and Queequeg are sharing a room in the Spouter Inn before the whaling voyage, Queequeg allows Ishmael to have the room to himself in order to dress privately. Ishmael responds, “Thinks I, Queequeg, under the circumstances, this is a very civilized overture; but the truth is, these savages have an innate sense of delicacy, say what you will; it is marvellous how essentially polite they are. I pay this particular compliment to Queequeg, because he treated me with so much civility and consideration, while I was guilty of a great rudeness. . .” (27).

The paradox visible in Queequeg’s “civility” is displayed most notably in his filed and pointed teeth (*Moby-Dick* 60). They have been filed to points for the express purpose of dining on other humans. From the moment Ishmael meets Queequeg, he assumes Queequeg is a cannibal. Queequeg confirms this assumption when Ishmael asks if he has ever suffered from dyspepsia: “[Queequeg] said no; only upon one remarkable occasion. It was after a great feast given by his father the king, on the gaining of a great battle wherein fifty of the enemy had been killed by about two o’clock in the afternoon, and all cooked and eaten that very evening” (85).

Queequeg’s paradoxes are visible in his body; just as his sharp teeth provide a counterpoint to his civility, so do his tattoos:

And this tattooing, had been the work of a departed prophet and seer of his island, who, by those hieroglyphic marks, had written out on his body a complete theory of attaining truth; so that Queequeg in his own proper person was a riddle to unfold; a wondrous work in one volume; but whose mysteries not even himself could read, though his own live heart beat against them; and these mysteries were therefore destined in the end to moulder away with the living parchment whereon they were inscribed, and so be unsolved to the last. (Melville 368)

Queequeg's tattoos represent an undecipherable text. He holds the secret to attaining truth, but he can never decipher it. Nevertheless, he still holds the text on his body, in a perfect tension, though it can never be read and will become dust as his body "moulders" away. Once he becomes ill, he recognizes that his death is imminent, so he transcribes his tattoos onto his coffin. Though his body will eventually decay, his tattoos will be preserved. These tattoos are parallel to the ashes the proud Ahab believes will still exist even if he is consumed by fire. Queequeg's tattoos, then, function as a symbol of his humanity, with its paradoxical and enduring nature. Ishmael calls attention to his physical deformities and spiritual perfections in "A Bosom Friend": "Savage though he was, and hideously marred about the face—at least to my taste—his countenance yet had a something in it which was by no means disagreeable. You cannot hide the soul. Through all his unearthly tattooings, I thought I saw the traces of a simple, honest heart . . ." (50).

Pip

Pip, the young boy who loses his wits as a result of falling in the ocean and being left for several hours, exhibits an insanity parallel to Ahab's. Ishmael indicates that insanity may not be anything more than heaven's sanity:

[During his near drowning, Pip was] carried down alive to wondrous depths, where strange shapes of the unwarped primal world glided to and fro before his passive eyes; and the miser-merman, Wisdom, revealed his hoarded heaps; and among the joyous, heartless, ever-juvenile eternities, Pip saw the multitudinous, God-omnipresent, coral insects, that out of the firmament of waters heaved the colossal orbs. He saw God's foot upon the treadle of the loom, and spoke it; and therefore his shipmates called him mad. So man's insanity is heaven's sense; and wandering from all mortal reason, man comes at last to that celestial thought, which to reason, is absurd and frantic; and weal or woe, feels then uncompromised, indifferent as his God. (414)

Pip, like Ahab, seems mad. Pip is reduced to conjugating nonsensical verbs and pronouns: “I look, you look, he looks, we look, you look, they look” (434). Andrew Delbanco points out that this is “a surrender of [Melville’s] cherished ideal of a language with no prescribed grammar, where invention and whim range free, but which [paradoxically] might still somehow be able to link one mind intimately with another. This was never an easy thing to imagine, and after *Moby-Dick* Melville all but gives it up” (86). Pip’s reduction to a conjugating, nonsensical fool functions as an elevation for him, and here the paradox becomes evident. Pip sees the “foot” of God; he sees the “coral insects”—the tiny elements from which the universe is born; he sees the “depths.” Ishmael’s descriptive language points down. Pip finds God (or at least God’s foot) below the heavens and the earth’s surface, and, as a result, Pip is elevated, not only by his playful language, as Delbanco indicates, but also by the freedom he now has. Before, as a sane “negro” boy, he was little other than a servant. In his lowering to madness, Pip is raised to a freedom akin to God’s: “[He] feels then uncompromised, indifferent as his God” (414). The “lowering” Pip undergoes paradoxically and simultaneously elevates him to God-like freedom and indifference

PARADOXES IN SHIPBOARD TASKS

Work and Leisure

The paradoxical nature of work, especially work that allows for moments of satisfaction better than leisure, continued to torment Melville throughout his life. A letter Melville wrote to his cousin Kate Gansevoort Lansing when he was in his late fifties gives a surprisingly blunt view of Melville's attitude toward work: "Whoever is not in the possession of leisure can hardly be said to possess independence. They talk of the *dignity of work*. Bosh. True work is poor humanity's earthly condition. The dignity is in leisure. Besides, 99 hundredths of all the *work* done in the world is either foolish and unnecessary or harmful and wicked" (*Correspondence* 464). When this statement is considered in the context of *Moby-Dick*, a glaring paradox becomes obvious: what is the world of the *Pequod* but a world of work? Ishmael tries to answer the question by comparing his labor to universal ideals, Paul Royster suggests in his article "Melville's Economy of Language":

For example, he dexterously explains away the kick administered by Captain Peleg as a sample of "the universal thump," passed the whole world round and imaginatively linking the entire race of men in the vast circuit of taking one's lumps.... In the chapter "The Mat-Maker," the job of weaving mats figures as an explanation of metaphysics: 'It seemed as if this were the Loom of Time, and I myself were a shuttle mechanically weaving and weaving away at the Fates. (314)

Ahab has a different view of labor, evident in a speech he makes while waiting as the carpenter helps make a new leg out of bone for him. Ahab will stand on the work Carpenter has done, but rather than gratifying Ahab, it peeves him to be indebted to such a "pudding-head" and "blockhead": "Cursed be that mortal inter-indebtedness which will

not do away with ledgers. I would be free as air; and I'm down in the whole world's books" (472). A solitary isolation and loneliness rings in his words. Ishmael, in contrast, unites himself with grand and universal concepts to make sense of his work.

The difference, paradoxically, is this: Ahab works because he acknowledges the silent creator who has made him "for the flesh in the tongue I brag with" (472), so he must forever owe his creator for the very body and tongue that allow him to defy that same creator. He has enough leisure to recognize not only his madness but also his indebtedness. Ishmael, in contrast, works to prevent his dark mood from overtaking him. Ishmael recognizes a form of madness in himself with his dark moods, and works to suppress that madness. He senses a danger in allowing himself the leisure to think. Melville leaves these two paradoxical views of labor in tension. Together, they indicate his own frustrations with labor.

In the chapter "A Squeeze of the Hand," Melville writes briefly with undisguised humor and affection of one of Ishmael's tasks on board the *Pequod*: "As I sat there at my ease, cross-legged on the deck ... I bathed my hands among those soft, gentle globules of infiltrated tissues...; as they richly broke to my fingers, and discharged all their opulence..., I felt divinely free from all ill-will, or petulance, or malice, of any sort whatsoever" (416). This divine good feeling quickly evaporates. In the next chapter, Melville discusses the try-works with all of its sooty, industrial blackness and the heavy labor it represents. By juxtaposing these two scenes, Melville underscores the literal tension between leisure and labor. The squeezing of the sperm is a form of labor which Melville seeks to make emphatic by following it with the "Try-Works" chapter. One

represents leisurely labor that provides release, satisfaction, and even a feeling of community for Ishmael, while the other represents soul-killing, backbreaking labor.

Another layer of the work in *Moby-Dick* involves the tedious labor Melville and his family invested in the writing and copying of the long text of *Moby-Dick*. Ahab's attitude about ledgers ("Cursed be that mortal inter-indebtedness which will not do away with ledgers. I would be free as air; and I'm down in the whole world's books" [472]) closely resembles Melville's own. Cindy Weinstein, author of "Melville, Labor, and the Discourses of Reception," believes *Moby-Dick* walks a thin line between appeasing Melville's readers (and thus providing enough money for some leisure) and appeasing his own "feeling" nature:

Moby-Dick is preoccupied with articulating and accounting for the pain and mournfulness that are involved in such transformations of labor, as Melville is committed to reconfiguring his own status as a literary laborer so as to avoid such pain [as was inflicted by negative reviews of earlier books]. . . . By unraveling the dichotomy which aligns literature with idleness, Melville's text works toward a redefinition of literature as work and, more specifically, literature as meaningful and rewarding work. (207-208)

In a letter to Hawthorne thanking him for his understanding of *Moby-Dick*, Melville says, "Appreciation! Recognition! Is Jove appreciated? Why, ever since Adam, who has got to the meaning of his great allegory—the world? Then we pigmies must be content to have our paper allegories but ill comprehended" (*Correspondence* 212). In another letter to Hawthorne, Melville anguishes over his frustration with his inability to tell the "Truth" and make a living: "But Truth is the silliest thing under the sun. Try to get a living by the Truth—and go to the Soup Societies. . . . Truth is ridiculous to men" (191). A letter to Duyckink reflects the same frustration that decorated his other letters to Hawthorne:

“And when he [Melville is speaking here of himself] attempts anything higher [than *Redburn*]-God help & save him! for it is not with a hollow purse as with a hollow balloon—for a hollow purse makes the poet *sink*. . . .What a madness & anguish it is, that an author can never—under no conceivable circumstances—be at all frank with his readers” (149). Melville was not to find leisure until he was much older and had worked long and hard many years. At the end of his working career, and only then, was he able to say, “The dignity is leisure” (*Correspondence* 464).

Masculine and Feminine Spaces

That *Moby-Dick* contains practically no female presence does not mean that it contains no domestic presence. Multiple chapters are devoted to the cleaning and cooking on board the ship, duties which on shore would typically be prescribed as women’s responsibilities at that time in American history. Sarah Wilson, in her article “Melville and the Architecture of Antebellum Masculinity,” claims that Melville’s writing “reveals a consistent fascination with the gender identifications enabled and thwarted by physical spaces. . . . Melville’s male characters need access to domestic space to form viable identities” (59). Many of Melville’s texts, and *Moby-Dick* in particular, address space and interaction within that space, and thus a modern reader finds another paradox: business and domesticity combined in one space. In *Moby-Dick*, the space is the *Pequod* and all thirty (the number Melville gives) or forty-four (the number of characters actually identified by the narrator[s]) inhabitants are male. A partial explanation for this is that Melville was asserting his position as a male writer in a female-dominated profession:

The ostensibly feminized character of the literary marketplace in Melville's time may have suggested that literary production, taking place as it often has within domestic space, had been ceded to women in the separation of the spheres [of business and domesticity]. Melville's frustration with the inconsistency of his literary work at Arrowhead seems analogous to his frustration with his inability to perform in the literary marketplace. Success for Melville thus relied on a figurative male reclaiming of a domesticated space—a proof of the ability of successful male work to share space, even perhaps identifications, with the female custodians of the domestic sphere. (Wilson 78)

A more thorough understanding of Melville's use of space in *Moby-Dick* should be based on Melville's tension-fraught views. He saw the tension between masculine/business space and feminine/domestic space at a time when businesses were congregating in the center of a town, away from residential areas and storefronts. As Sarah Wilson points out,

In his examination of gendered spaces, Melville is not subverting domesticity as the status quo; rather, he is subverting the domestic status quo insofar as it limits masculine identification with the spaces and labors of domesticity. Melville experiences male exclusion from female space as a particular and vivid instance of American conceptual inflexibility on the topic of identity. . . . In the conventional American middle-class home of the mid-nineteenth century, the separation of male work space and domestic space was becoming increasingly entrenched. Melville's fiction, from *Moby-Dick* on, deliberately fails to respect this separation. (60-61)

This unity Melville seeks to achieve is most notable, as Wilson asserts, in the chapter "Stowing Down and Clearing Up" in which the sailors scrub the decks and clean the hunting and cutting instruments. Once the men are finished, they "pace the planks in twos and threes, and humorously discourse of parlors, sofas, carpets, and fine cambrics; propose to mat the deck; think of having hangings to the top; object not to taking tea by moonlight on the piazza of the fore-castle" (*Moby-Dick* 468). The men have fancifully taken the domestic-female realm as their own, only to be called to work minutes later by

the cry, "There she blows!" (468). The juxtaposition of the cleaning scene with the call to the hunt shows Melville playing the domestic female (the "home" or ship) against the business male (the "office" of whale hunting). As Wilson comments, "The conclusion of *Moby-Dick*, with its image of the whirling cedar chips of the wrecks dancing 'like the grated nutmeg in a swiftly stirred bowl of punch,' mixes the extremes of male [whale] violence and serene conventional domesticity [the ship's remnants] with its own adept stirring" (Wilson 80).

PARADOXES AS AVATAR OF EARLY EXISTENTIALISM

When Soren Kierkegaard published the first volume of *Either/Or* and the short *Fear and Trembling* in 1843⁴, he was responding to G.W.F. Hegel's philosophy and, in doing so, created what later has come to be known as the first expressions of existentialism, a human-based philosophy. At the outset, it must be made clear that Melville never read any of Kierkegaard's works. The two men were separated by language, religion, geography and many other factors. However, Melville anticipates, especially in *Moby-Dick*, much of Kierkegaard's work and existentialist philosophy. The depth of these two men's thoughts and the methods they employ to convey their thoughts bear striking similarities. In particular, both men especially embrace the concept of human existence as a paradox. Melville's response to Emerson's work, especially as seen in *Moby-Dick*, forms a kind of bridge between Kierkegaard and Melville. Though neither Kierkegaard nor Melville influenced each other, these two progressive thinkers anticipated and articulated similar movements in philosophical thought and in what later came to be known as the existential movement.

Melville's Response to Emerson

Melville's articulation of paradox in *Moby-Dick* can, in some respects, be attributed to his response to Ralph Waldo Emerson. In a letter to Evert Duyckinck before Melville began writing *Moby-Dick*, he explains his (paradoxical) respect and disregard for Emerson:

⁴ *Either/Or* and *Fear and Trembling* would not be translated into English until 1944 and 1939, respectively.

Nay, I do not oscillate in Emerson's rainbow, but prefer rather to hang myself in mine own halter than swing in any other man's swing. Yet I think Emerson is more than a brilliant fellow. Be his stuff begged, borrowed, or stolen, or of his own domestic manufacture, he is an uncommon man. . . I was very agreeably disappointed in Mr. Emerson. . . I love all men who *dive*. . . I could readily see in Emerson, notwithstanding his merit, a gaping flaw. It was, the insinuation, that had he lived in those days when the world was made, he might have offered some valuable suggestions. (*Correspondence* 121)

Though Melville does not specify to which works of Emerson's he is referring, a reading of Emerson's essay "Self-Reliance" provides a fair template of the philosophies to which Melville responds as he forms a *new* method of viewing human. As "Self-Reliance" reaches its climax, Emerson collapses into language that appears blasphemous (against God) and condescending (against humanity in general) at the same time:

This is the ultimate fact which we so quickly reach on this as on every topic, the resolution of all into the ever-blessed ONE. Virtue is the governor, the creator, the reality. All things real are so by so much virtue as they contain . . . Power is in nature the essential measure of right. Nature suffers nothing to remain in her kingdoms which cannot help itself. The genesis and maturation of a planet, its poise and orbit, the bended tree recovering itself from the strong wind, the vital resources of every animal and vegetable, are demonstrations of the self-sufficing, and therefore self-relying soul. (1136)

To Emerson, virtue is self-reliance. By self-reliance, he means a pure relation to nature and to the divine: "The relations of the soul to the divine spirit are so pure that it is profane to seek to interpose helps" (Emerson 1134). Emerson believes that recognizing the creative power of the self and seeking individual expression are the closest connection a soul can have to the divine. In that connection, "all" resolves "into the ever-blessed ONE." In self-reliance, a person achieves a resolution to the tensions of public and private: "Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every

one of its members . . . Self-reliance is its aversion” (Emerson 1128). Kierkegaard would call this the “despair to will to be oneself” and an act of defiance against God and the separation inherent between humanity and God. According to Emerson, the self-reliant person does not feel a pressure to conform to society or nature or the divine, but becomes a superior element in the universe, as Emerson explains in *Nature*: “I become a transparent eye-ball. I am nothing. I see all. The currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God” (1075). Emerson’s language works toward the universal as he describes the unity the self-reliant person can experience in harmony with the soul, the divine, and nature.

Ishmael and Queequeg’s friendship illustrates Melville’s dissent from Emerson’s self-reliance. Ishmael and Queequeg rely on each other in a symbiotic relationship. Queequeg’s friendship literally saves Ishmael from his dark, suicidal moods. Ishmael, in turn, provides a sense of family for Queequeg, who can no longer return home. When Ishmael asks why Queequeg cannot return, he replies to Ishmael: “[H]e was fearful Christianity, or rather Christians, had unfitted him for ascending the pure and undefiled throne of thirty pagan Kings before him” (*Moby-Dick* 56).

Melville veers away most decidedly from his contemporary’s idea that “all” resolves “into the ever-blessed ONE.” Melville admits a person may experience a feeling of union with the “all” at times, but a person cannot experience the “all” at *all* times. This is his primary reason for creating characters with marked paradoxes in their personalities and in their tasks. In a letter to Hawthorne, Melville says,

This “all” feeling, though, there is some truth in. You must often have felt it, lying on the grass on a warm summer’s day. Your legs seem to send out shoots into the earth. Your hair feels like leaves upon your head. This

is the *all* feeling. But what plays the mischief with the truth is that men will insist upon the universal application of a temporary feeling or opinion. (*Correspondence* 194)

Melville's important contribution to both the novel's theme and structure is this counterbalancing of opposing tensions—what I have called paradoxes. Ishmael can at once, sitting on the mast, experience this feeling of “all” and then, just a second later, experience true terror at nearly falling into the “all”—or the waiting ocean below. In *Nature*, Emerson claims even variety is unity: “Herein is especially apprehended the Unity of Nature,—the Unity in Variety,—which meets us everywhere. All the endless variety of things makes a unique, an identical impression” (1087). Melville's embrace of paradoxes and distinguishable variety—even in the natural world—anticipates a new movement in thought, one that simultaneously embraces Emerson's individualism and humanity's dependence.

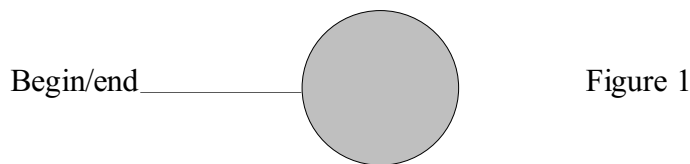
Melville's Anticipation of Kierkegaardian Existentialism

In his first major work, *Either/Or*, Soren Kierkegaard wrote two volumes, totaling over 800 pages. He used multiple pseudonymous authors as he began his philosophical move away from Hegel's dialectic. Hegel's dialectic, greatly simplified, is a system of logic in which two opposing truths find resolution in a universal truth. For example, according to Hegel, “Being” comes from “Nothing”—an apparent contradiction. However, “Being” and “Nothing” in Hegel's dialectic resolve into “Becoming.” Being and Nothing are different moments in Becoming. Kierkegaard disputed Hegel's theory that two opposing ideas could interact to resolve the tension in their contradictions and come to a universal truth. Hegel's theory of a universal truth resembles Emerson's “Self-Reliance” as Emerson predicts the resolution of *all* into *one*. Kierkegaard believed God

and man are separated by sin and the knowledge of sin—what he calls “despair”—and he believed that separation cannot be bridged without a leap of faith. This leap of faith is paradoxical in that it implies a human can be united with God and that a human can be separated from himself. Kierkegaard’s levels of despair indicate the expression of this paradox. For him, the paradox of humanity is separation from God and from self. He maintained that paradoxes do not resolve into a higher truth (synthesis) but remain in tension and thus truth (the leap of faith) circumscribes the movement of an individual and of the human race. In his *Journals*, Kierkegaard underscores this circular movement:

I began with *Either/Or* and two upbuilding discourses; now it ends, after the whole upbuilding series—with a little esthetic essay [*The Crisis*]. It expresses: that it was the upbuilding, the religious, that should advance, and that now the esthetic has been traversed; they are inversely related, or it is something of an inverse confrontation, to show that the writer was not an esthetic author who in the course of time grew older and for that reason became religious. (*Journals IX A 227*)

Kierkegaard’s view of the progression of life (and history, since he was often responding directly to Hegel’s view of history), if diagrammed, would look like this:



Kierkegaard distinguishes between the aesthetic (esthetic), ethical, and religious stages of development in a person’s life, but as the note from his *Journals* indicates, the progression from aesthetic is not one of upward movement, as in Hegel’s dialectic, but one of circular traversal. This circularity he traces back to each individual’s struggle with original sin. No upward movement occurs because each individual must start anew

with the truth of his separation from self and God. In Chapter 114 of *Moby-Dick*, Ahab speaks, using much the same words as he experiences a solitary moment of tranquility:

Would to God these blessed calms would last. But the mingled, mingling threads of life are woven by warp and woof; calms crossed by storms, a storm for every calm. There is no steady unretracing progress in this life; we do not advance through fixed gradations, and at the last one pause. . . . Our souls are like those orphans whose unwedded mothers die in bearing them: the secret of our paternity lies in the grave, and we must there to learn it. (492)

This separation from “the secret of our paternity” results directly in what Kierkegaard calls despair and displays what he considered the primary paradox of humanity. Using the Old Testament Abraham as a model of faith—the paradoxical unity with God that allows the individual to maintain a spiritual and physical identity—Kierkegaard says:

[F]or what is offered is a paradox I cannot make the movement of faith, I cannot shut my eyes and plunge confidently into the absurd [a correlative to his term “paradox”] But to be able to lose one’s understanding and along with it everything finite, for which it is the stockbroker, and then to win the very same finitude again by virtue of the absurd . . . —it is the one and only marvel. (*Fear and Trembling* 36)

Kierkegaard uses the moment of Abraham’s obedience to God’s command that he sacrifice his son Isaac as the highest example of faith. Abraham makes the “movement of infinity” (faith in God though God asked for all he had—his son Isaac) to return to the finite—his son, his life, his land. This pattern of movement from the infinite to the finite, Kierkegaard says, is a continual traversal. While Kierkegaard’s work focuses heavily on Christianity and the individual’s response to it, Melville steers away from associating himself with a particular religion or religious thought. Melville anticipates the later existential movement of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, with his sense of paradox: a finite

human in the face of an infinite spirit undergoes a circular repetition in the relation of the self to the divine and to other humans. Ishmael embodies this as he continues to retell his story in the pages of *Moby-Dick*.

The result of Melville's anticipation of existentialism and the "absurdity"/paradox of a physical/intellectual being having some relation to other humans and to a purely intellectual (spiritual) being is a less simplistic view of human history (as Hegel offered) and a more communal view of humans relating to themselves and to others (as opposed to Emerson's self-reliance. "Truth hath no confines," Ahab says, but he later recognizes that truth, or higher power, in its pure form ("thou clear spirit") lacks physicality. Only then does Ahab recognize the magnificence of his humanity: "Thou canst consume, but I can then be ashes" (*Moby-Dick* 507). This paradox Melville astutely recognizes and holds in tension throughout *Moby-Dick*. When he finished writing *Moby-Dick*, Melville celebrated these paradoxes in a letter to Hawthorne: "I have written a wicked book, and feel spotless as the lamb" (212).

REFERENCES

REFERENCES

- Crain, Caleb. "Lovers of Human Flesh: Homosexuality and Cannibalism in Melville's Novels." *American Literature* 76.1 (March 1994): 25-53.
- Delbanco, Andrew. *Melville: His World and Work*. New York: Knopf, 2005.
- . "Melville's Sacramental Style." *Raritan* 12 (1993): 69-91.
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *Nature*. *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. Nina Baym, ed. 6th ed. New York: Norton, 2003. 1073-1101.
- . "Self-Reliance." *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. Nina Baym, ed. 6th ed. New York: Norton, 2003. 1126-43.
- Kierkegaard, Soren. *Either/Or*. 2 vols. Howard Hong and Edna Hong, eds. and trans. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1987.
- . *Fear and Trembling; Repetition*. Howard Hong and Edna Hong, Eds. and trans. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1983.
- . *Journals*. Alexander Dru, Ed. and trans. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1938.
- . *The Sickness Unto Death*. Howard Hong and Edna Hong, Eds. and trans. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980.
- Lawrence, D.H. "Herman Melville's 'Moby Dick.'" *Critical Essays on Herman Melville's Moby Dick*. Brian Higgins and Hershel Parker, eds. New York: G. K. Hall, 1992. 198-210.

- Levine, Robert S, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Herman Melville*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998.
- Martin, Robert K. "Melville and Sexuality." Levine, 186-201.
- Melville, Herman. *Billy Budd, Sailor (An Inside Narrative)*. *Billy Budd, Sailor and Selected Tales*. Robert Milder, ed. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997.
- . *Correspondence: Writings of Herman Melville*. Lynne Horth, ed. Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern UP and The Newberry Library, 1993.
- . *Moby-Dick, or The Whale*. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle, eds.. Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern UP and The Newberry Library, 1988.
- Milder, Robert. "Melville and the Avenging Dream." Levine, 250-78.
- The Open Bible*. Kenneth Boa, gen. ed. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985.
- Parker, Hershel. *Herman Melville: A Biography*. Vol. 1. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1996.
- . *Herman Melville: A Biography*. Vol. 2. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2002.
- Royster, Paul. "Melville's Economy of Language." *Ideology and Classic American Literature*. Sacvan Bercovitch and Myra Jehlen, eds. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986.
- Spectator*. *Moby-Dick as Doubloon*. Hershel Parker and Harrison Hayford, eds. New York: Norton, 1970.

Weinstein, Cindy. "Melville, Labor, and the Discourses of Reception." Levine, 202-

223.

Wilson, Sarah. "Melville and the Architecture of Antebellum Masculinity." *American Literature* 76.1 (2004): 59-87.