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Point of View as Key to the Narrative Structure, Symbolism, and Theme of Moby Dick

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POINT OF VIEW AS KEY TO THE NARRATIVE STRUCTURE, SYMBOLISM, AND THEME OF MOBY DICK

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I. PURPOSE

Mark Schorer in an essay entitled "Technique as Discovery" contends that the use of point of view in fiction has been neglected as a critical method. He asserts point of view has been considered as "some nearly arbitrary device for heightening of dramatic interest through the narrowing or broadening perspective upon the material, rather than as a means toward the positive definition of theme" (7:70). In support of his argument, Schorer contends that inasmuch as technique alone objectifies the materials of art, technique alone evaluates these materials. An artist's intention can be determined by examining his performance. This paper will assume Schorer's thesis that point of view is not only a mode of dramatic delimitation but also can be utilized to determine an author's thematic intention. An examination of Melville's use of point of view in Moby-Dick not only might shed light upon thematic intention, but be a key to the narrative structure and symbolism as well.

II. METHOD

The first problem in this study was to isolate the multiple points of view in Moby-Dick. For this purpose, two copies of Moby-Dick, Rinehart Edition, paperback, August, 1959, were dismantled. Each page, measuring approximately 5" x 7½", was glued to a sheet of standard-size typing paper, thus providing ample room for marginal comments.

With colored pencils, the reader developed a code. For the first reading, since the reader had no idea how many changes in viewpoint would occur, a temporary system of color symbols was devised: black for Ishmael's narrative comments, blue for what appeared to be Melville's philosophical intrusions, green for dialogue, yellow for "omniscient" information, and so on. Other colors were added from time to time as various new methods of "telling" or "viewing" appeared. A continuous line, coded according to color, was drawn along the left margin of the text on the typing paper. Comments regarding Melville's changes in distance from his material with particular emphasis on whether his views of characters were external or internal were also noted along the left margin. Other notes concerning problems in point of view were written in the right margin.

Following this first reading, all chapter titles were

listed separately with space allowed for notes concerning the predominating point of view in each chapter and other comments to be made during a second reading. The novel then was re-read slowly and carefully with particular attention to tense, voice, and diction, inasmuch as the reader was convinced by this time that there was a strong correlation between Melville's use of point of view and his overall artistic intention. During the second reading, numerous notes were taken regarding style in general and philosophical and symbolical passages. Significant passages were underlined.

After the second reading, the researcher turned to critical material. Melville's letters and journal and most most of the book-length biographies and critical works in the Central Washington State College Library and in the Yakima Valley Regional Library were read, as well as of the various collections of essays. Bibliography lists were also consulted for particular essays bearing on the problem of point of view in Moby-Dick. Those available were read.

Inasmuch as a great deal of the critical material confirmed the researcher's conviction that Melville had a change of attitude during the writing of the novel, Moby-Dick was read once more and notes taken with critical views in mind. At the completion of the third reading, a chart of

multiple points of view in the novel was made to determine patterns and to organize the voluminous, varied material into some form for the discussion which follows.

III. DEFINITIONS

An organization of Moby-Dick according to point of view falls roughly into four very general and sometimes overlapping categories. For the purpose of this discussion, the book has been divided into the following categories: (1) those sections narrated by Ishmael as a central character, (2) expository sections in which Melville steps in to "explain," (3) sections narrated by Ishmael as a witness, and (4) sections narrated by Melville as omniscient author. Most of the definitions and terminology used in discussions of point of view within this paper come from an article by Norman Friedman, "Point of View in Fiction: The Development of a Critical Concept," Publication of the Modern Language Association, 70:5, December, 1955.

For the most part, chapter designations are used in the following discussion of point of view. Chapter divisions are used for the convenience of locating oneself and the reader and also because Melville was obviously quite conscious of chapter organization, as indicated by his carefully chosen titles and frequent shifts in mood and tempo from one chapter to another.

However, dividing a novel by chapters instead of by incidents is not entirely satisfactory, especially in appraising point of view. Melville usually maintains one general viewpoint throughout a chapter, but it should be made clear that this type of division is arbitrary. No clear-cut demarkations can be made in this manner; only general trends can be noted. Inasmuch as inconsistencies noted are usually inconsistencies within the confines of the chapter under discussion, distortion may result that is unfair to Melville in an evaluation of his technique. In other words, a more comprehensive, more thorough study than this one might show that what appears to be an inconsistency from within the confines of one chapter might prove to fit in very satisfactorily with a larger scheme not confined to artificial chapter barriers. However, for the purpose of this limited, rather superficial study, the chapter division seems to allow for the most manageable organization.[1]

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[1]See Appendix A for a list of chapters and chapter titles.

CHAPTER II

POINT OF VIEW

I. ISHMAEL AS PROTAGONIST

In Chapters 1-8, 10-17, 22, 23, 47, 49, 72, 96, and the Epilogue, Ishmael relates his story from the center of the stage in the role of "I" narrator. Chapters 9, 41, 46, and 50-52, classified as "problem" chapters will be discussed later in connection with other sections. However, the reader will note that these chapters intervene between those in the list above and if they were inserted, two clusters of chapters in "the first person as protagonist" would appear. The first of these clusters includes Chapters One through Twenty-three with a gap of twenty-two intervening chapters, followed by another cluster of six chapters in which Ishmael is the central character. From this evidence one may roughly approximate that category one compromises in length one-fifth to one-fourth of the novel.

First, it seems pertinent to establish the fact that the "I" narrator is more than a story-telling device inasmuch as a close identity exists between Ishmael and Melville. Up to the time of the publication of Moby-Dick in 1851, Melville had written and published five novels, Typee (1846), Omoo (1847), Mardi (1849), Redburn (1849), and White Jacket (1850),

all largely autobiographical, relying heavily on personal adventures and philosophical speculations, and all written from the point of view of first person narrator.

Clues in the text itself support the close relationship between Melville and Ishmael:

> No, when I go to sea, I go as a simple sailor, right before the mast, plumb down into the forecastle, aloft there to the royal mast-head. True, they rather order me about some, and make me jump from spar to spar, like a grasshopper in a May meadow. And at first, this sort of thing is unpleasant enough. It touches one's sense of honor, particularly if you come of an old established family in the land, the Van Rensselaers, or Randolphs, or Hardicanutes. And more than all, if just previous to putting your hand into the tar-pot, you have been lording it as a country schoolmaster, making the tallest boys stand in awe of you. The transition is a keen one, I assure you, from a schoolmaster to a sailor, and requires a strong decoction of Seneca and the Stoics to enable you to grin and bear it. But even this wears off in time (8:4).

Although the above is light in tone, biographical information indicates that Melville's own ancestory was distinguished on both the Melville and Gansevoort sides of the family and that family financial problems and a subsequent decline in social standing did injure both the dignity and "sense of honor" of the proud Herman Melville. Furthermore, we know from his letters that Melville also taught school in 1837, three years before he embarked on the whaling ship Acushnet, and that some of his students had "attained the ages of eighteen" (5:5).

At one point in Moby-Dick, Melville in the guise of

Ishmael comments:

> Now, the Captain D'Wolf here alluded to as commanding the ship in question, is a New Englander, who, after a long life of unusual adventures as a sea-captain, this day resides in the village of Dorchester near Boston. I have the honor of being a nephew of his (8:205).

Melville's Aunt Mary was married to a Captain D'Wolf.

Melville's choice of the name Ishmael to symbolize his feelings was suggested earlier in Redburn when Redburn comments:

> I found myself a sort of Ishmael in the ship, without a single friend or companion; and I began to feel a hatred growing up in me against the whole crew. . . (9:86).

A further clue to the close relationship between a younger Melville and Ishmael is revealed if one contrasts the methods used in describing New Bedford and Nantucket. Melville knew New Bedford, but according to his letters did not visit Nantucket until the summer of 1852, after Moby-Dick was completed (5:153). Vincent, in his The Trying Out of Moby-Dick, summarizes the differences in Melville's treatment of the two locations:

> New Bedford was part of his past, so that the chapters placed there contain such precise, physical detail that the scenes are powerfully etched on the reader's mind. Nantucket, which he knew from reading and heresay, is described in general terms devoid of concrete, distinguishing detail. To cover his lack of sharp particularity Melville here resorted to rhetoric and to lyrical celebration (14:64).

Now that minor proof of the close identification between the character and the author has been established,

the reader is cautioned against assuming that the early Ishmael and the younger Melville are identical. For instance, at one point in the story, Ishmael recounts a childhood experience in which his "stepmother" sent him to his room (8:26). Although we know Melville did not have a stepmother, we might assume he meant the relationship of "stepmother" to symbolize a feeling he associated with an actual childhood experience. In any event, we are warned that Melville intended (at least at times) to maintain an imaginative distance from Ishmael.

In another instance, Ishmael informs us he was "a good Christian: born and bred in the infallible Presbyterian Church"(8:51), whereas biographical evidence reveals Melville's mother belonged to the Dutch Reformed Church and had her children baptized into it. Herman attended this church until he was at least in his teens. True, both churches were rooted in Calvinist orthodoxy, but Ishmael's claim to a Presbyterian religious background does suggest Melville's intention not to establish a complete identity with young Ishmael.

Melville's psychological reasons for occasionally putting the character, Ishmael, between himself and the reader are intriguing, but he probably also had "mechanical" reasons. For instance, Melville sometimes either addresses Ishmael directly or has him talk to himself, a device that

gives information to the reader at the same time that one is reminded Ishmael as a character has limitations:

> It needs scarcely to be told, with what feelings, on the eve of a Nantucket voyage, I regarded those marble tablets, and by the murky light of that doleful day read the fate of the whalemen who had gone before me. Yes, Ishmael, the same fate may be thine (8:36).

In this manner, Melville is able to gracefully withhold information and to build suspense. After all, Ishmael's story has not yet been told.

At times Melville expediently hides behind Ishmael, as in the following instance:

> If the Sir William Jones, who read in thirty languages, could not read the simplest peasant's face in its profounder and more subtle meanings, how may unlettered Ishmael hope to read the awful Chaldee of the Sperm Whale's brow? I but put that brow before you. Read it if you can (8:344).

Although the remark is highly ironical, Melville does "use" Ishmael's limitations, in this instance to leave his meaning ambiguous. Later in the novel, Melville ironically "apologizes" for what appears to be his own limitations by blaming them on Ishmael:

> But how now, Ishmael? How is it, that you, a mere oarsman in the fishery, pretends to know aught about the subterranean parts of the whale? Did erudite Stubb, mounted upon your capstan, deliver lectures on the anatomy of the Cetacea; and by help of the windlass, hold up a specimen rib for exhibition? Explain thyself, Ishmael (8:443).

Melville then commences to explain how a "mere oarsman" might

have access to such information. He again uses Ishmael to plead ignorance of any precise knowledge about what the whale means to Ahab when he concludes, "--All this to explain, would be to dive deeper than Ishmael can go" (8:183). Ishmael serves as a buffer when Melville has explored something as much as he wishes to.

Furthermore, and this seems the strongest reason for the creation of Ishmael as a character, he shows signs of emotional and spiritual growth between the beginning chapters and later ones. Melville obviously wished to portray the early Ishmael as inexperienced, alienated and in search of meaning and self-identity. As if his name were not indication enough, Ishmael steps on stage telling us he has "nothing particular to interest him on shore," he is "grim about the mouth," he has "a damp, drizzly November in his soul," he has an impulse to step into the street to knock "people's hats off," and is drawn to "coffin warehouses" and funerals. We also have evidence of his espousal of a pessimistic, harshly deterministic Calvinism from his remarks:

> "In judging of that tempestuous wind called Euroclydon," says an old writer--of whose works I possess the only copy extant--"it maketh a marvellous difference, whether thou lookest out at it from a glass window where the frost is all on the outside, or whether thou observest it from that sashless window, where the frost is on both sides, and of which the wight Death is the only glazier." True enough, thought I, as this passage occurred to my mind--old black-letter,

> thou reasonest well. Yes, these eyes are windows, and this body of mine is the house. What a pity they didn't stop up the chinks and the crannies though, and thrust in a little lint here and there. But it's too late to make any improvements now. The universe is finished; the copestone is on, and the chips were carted off a million years ago (8:9).

Indirectly, through what Ishmael tells us about himself, what is said to him by others, by his actions, and by contrast with other characters (the means available to Melville from this point of view), Melville reveals Ishmael's inexperience. As Edward H. Rosenberry says, "Ishmael introduces himself with typical Yankee self-ridicule as a full-fledged Yankee sucker" (11:94).

Ishmael's inexperience is first revealed in the incidents at the Spouter-Inn in which he becomes the butt of Peter Coffin's joke. When Ishmael's apprehensions regarding his unseen bedfellow overcome his reluctance to appear gauche to Peter Coffin, and Coffin attempts to plane down a bench to make a bed for him, all the while "grinning like an ape," we see Ishmael's naivety in action. Later he suggests his inexperience himself when he protests to Coffin, "You'd better stop spinning that yarn to me--I'm not green" (8:17).

Early Ishmael's prissiness, inflexibility, and "pedantic school teacher" manner are evident in his long exhortation of Peter Coffin which follows (called by that

gentleman "a purty long sarmon"):

> "Landlord," said I, going up to him as cool as Mt. Hecla in a snow storm,--"landlord, stop whittling. You and I must understand one another, and that too without delay. I come to your house and want a bed; you tell me you can only give me half a one; that the other half belongs to a certain harpooneer. And about this harpooneer, whom I have not yet seen, you persist in telling me the most mystifying and exasperating stories, tending to beget in me an uncomfortable feeling towards the man whom you design for my bedfellow--a sort of connexion, landlord, which is an intimate and confidential one in the highest degree. I now demand of you to speak out and tell me who and what this harpooneer is, and whether I shall be in all respects safe to spend the night with him. And in the first place, you will be so good as to unsay that story about selling his head, which if true I take to be good evidence that this harpooneer is stark mad, and I've no idea of sleeping with a madman; and you, sir, you I mean, landlord, you, sir, by trying to induce me to do so knowingly, would thereby render yourself liable to a criminal prosecution" (8:18).

We share with Melville in the high humor of the scene when Ishmael finally meets Queequeg, in the amusing incidents at Mrs. Hussey's, and finally in Ishmael's meeting with the Captains Bildad and Peleg; we are not a partner to Ishmael's discomfort. We have fun at his expense, but he remains a sympathetic character. Melville accomplishes this through point of view, or his own attitude towards Ishmael at this point. Melville probably sums up his attitude towards Ishmael at the same time he makes an apology to him for the fun we have had at his expense when he has Ishmael observe:

> I cherished no malice towards him (Peter Coffin), though he had been skylarking with me not a little in the matter of my bedfellow. However, a good laugh is

> a mighty good thing, and rather too scarce a thing; the more's the pity. So, if any one man, in his own proper person, afford stuff for a good joke to anybody, let him not be backward, but let him cheerfully allow himself to spend and be spent in that way. And the man that has anything bountifully laughable about him, be sure there is more in that man than you perhaps think for (8:29).

The passage also marks a change in Ishmael since he made the previously quoted stuffy speech to Peter Coffin. Ishmael's experience with Queequeg has given him the insight to remark, "Ignorance is the parent of fear" (8:21). As Ishmael's fears concerning Queequeg are dispersed, he continues to gain in understanding until he can call Queequeg "my fast bosom friend" (8:71). By contrasting his own orthodox religious views with unorthodox Queequeg's, Ishmael also grows more tolerant of intellectual and spiritual differences. He has almost full acceptance of Queequeg when he remarks:

> Wild he was; a very sight of sights to see; yet I began to feel myself mysteriously drawn towards him. And those same things that would have repelled most others, they were the very magnets that thus drew me. I'll try a pagan friend, thought I, since Christian kindness has proved but hollow courtesy (8:50).

With new insight he remarks, ". . . see how elastic our stiff prejudices grow when love once comes to bend them" (8:53).

Early in the novel Ishmael equates Christianity with custom, as in the following quotations:

> . . . What could I think of a harpooner who stayed out of a Saturday night clean into the holy Sabbath, engaged in such a cannibal business as selling the heads of dead idolaters? (8:18)

Again, in the same tone, he comments regarding Queequeg's toilet, "At that time in the morning any Christian would have washed his face . . . " (8:28).

Later Ishmael sees a paradox between his Christian beliefs and his practices:

> 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 (8:51).

In the latter portion of the book, Ishmael puts new emphasis upon the Christian doctrine of brotherhood, as in the passage from "The Monkey Rope" when he holds one end while Queequeg works on the whale's back. Ishmael comments:

> So strongly and metaphysically did I conceive of my situation then, that while earnestly watching his motions, I seemed distinctly to perceive that my own individuality was now merged in a joint stock company of two: that my free will had received a mortal wound; and that another's mistake or misfortune might plunge innocent me into unmerited disaster and death . . . I saw that this situation of mine was the precise situation of every mortal that breathes; only, in most cases, he one way or other, has this Siamese connexion with a plurality of other mortals (8:317).

Ishmael's acceptance of humanity is expressed in the often quoted passage from "A Squeeze of the Hand." As he searches in the spermaceti with his hands for lumps to be squeezed into liquid, he observes:

> Squeeze! squeeze! squeeze! all the morning long;
> I squeezed that sperm till I myself almost melted into it;

> I squeezed that sperm till a strange sort of insanity came over me; and I found myself unwittingly squeezing my co-laborers' hands in it, mistaking their hands for the gentle globules. Such an abounding, affectionate, friendly, loving feeling did this avocation beget; that at last I was continually squeezing their hands, and looking up into their eyes sentimentally; as much as to say,--Oh! my dear fellow beings, why should we longer cherish any social acerbities, or know the slightest ill-humor or envy! Come; let us squeeze hands all round; nay, let us all squeeze ourselves into each other; let us squeeze ourselves universally into the very milk and sperm of kindness.
>
> Would that I could keep squeezing that sperm for ever! For now, 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 fire-side, the country; now that I have perceived all this, I am ready to squeeze case eternally. In thoughts of the visions of the night, I saw long rows of angels in paradise, each with his hands in a jar of spermaceti (8:413).

Ishmael's philosophical resolution is expressed again in the chapter entitled "The Try-Works." After he has become aware that gazing into the fire has hypnotized him and caused him to reverse the direction of the ship's tiller, he exhorts the reader in the manner of the preacher in Ecclesiastes:

> Look not too long in the face of the fire, O man! Never dream with thy hand on the helm! Turn not thy back to the compass; accept the first hint of the hitching tiller; believe not the artificial fire, when its redness makes all things look ghastly. To-morrow, in the natural sun, the skies will be bright; those who glared like devils in the forking flames, the morn will show in far other, at least gentler, relief; the glorious, golden, glad sun, the only true lamp--all others but liars!
>
> Nevertheless the sun hides not Virginia's Dismal

> Swamp, nor Rome's accursed Campagna, nor wide Sahara, nor all the millions of miles of deserts and of griefs beneath the moon. The sun hides not the ocean, which is the dark side of this earth, and which is two thirds of this earth. So, therefore, that mortal man who hath more of joy than sorrow in him, that mortal man cannot be true--not true, or undeveloped. Give not thyself up, then, to fire, lest it invert thee, deaden thee; as for the time it did me. There is a wisdom that is woe; but there is a woe that is madness. And there is a Catskill eagle in some souls that can alike dive down into the blackest gorges, and soar out of them again and become invisible in the sunny spaces. And even if he for ever flies within the gorge, that gorge is in the mountains; so that even in his lowest swoop the mountain eagle is still higher than other birds upon the plain, even though they soar (5:421).

Significantly, in the short chapter following "The Try-Works" from which the above quotation was taken, the light from the lamp is symbolically equated with brotherhood. Through his realization of the bond of brotherhood between men, Ishmael has learned to accept the world in spite of his knowledge that it is two-thirds woe.

Although the foregoing may appear to have lapsed into a discussion of meaning, it relates directly to Melville's point of view since it indicates an attitude towards Ishmael and attempts to prove that Ishmael did experience a gradual mental growth between Chapters One and Ninety-six.

The internal story of Ishmael's development may or may not be Melville's own story, but by "objectifying" through a character somewhat separate from himself, Melville was able to mark for the reader the steps in Ishmael's return from alienation to the world of men--his change from belligerent,

negative misanthropism to a loving, passive acceptance. Melville knew one's "true confessions" soon weary his listener and that one cannot expect his listener's full confidence in his ability to objectify subjective experience. The listener is much more likely to accept as accurate an evaluation of a person other than one's self. When Melville needs him, Ishmael serves the function of externalizing the internal world of thought.

As has been indicated, when it served his purpose, Melville took advantage of the limitations of the role of the "I" narrator. On the other hand, we have noted that he also utilized the advantages of telling his story in the first person. Although the action taking place in the story then is limited to Ishmael's thoughts and perceptions, Melville can step in at any time from his vantage point of now to comment on Ishmael's observations. In other words, by creating the character Ishmael, Melville "has it both ways." He can limit himself to Ishmael's early viewpoint if he wishes, or he can comment from his position as an older and wiser Ishmael. When he comments from his present standpoint as author, he tends to merge his identity with Ishmael's. He drops all artifice, making no attempt to create distance between himself and his character. He is Melville speaking directly to the reader, as in the two previously cited quotations from "A Squeeze of the Hand" and "The Try-Works."

As early in the book as the first page, Melville interrupts Ishmael's commentary to explore man's fascination with water, concluding that "meditation and water are wedded for ever" (8:2). On page ten, after digressing for some time, he brings the reader back to the story by saying:

> But no more of this blubbering now, we are going a-whaling, and there is plenty of that yet to come. Let us scrape the ice from our frosted feet, and see what sort of a place this "Spouter" may be (8:10).

Again, after making some general remarks about human nature that were probably beyond Ishmael's understanding at that particular place in the story, Melville explains his digression by saying, "These reflections just here are occasioned by the circumstance that after we were all seated at the table . . . ." (8:30) and so, back to the narrative.

After speaking directly to the reader for one chapter about New Bedford, Melville turns the story back to Ishmael by the simple device, "In this same New Bedford there stands a Whaleman's Chapel, and few are the moody fishermen, shortly bound for the Indian Ocean or Pacific, who fail to make a Sunday visit to the spot. I am sure that I did not" (8:33).

As Ishmael views the tablets in Whaleman's Chapel in commeration of the dead, Melville takes the opportunity to make some rather sharp criticisms of the popular view of immortality, concluding:

> . . . how it is that we still refuse to be comforted for those who we nevertheless maintain are dwelling in unspeakable bliss; why all the living so strive to hush all the dead; wherefore but the rumor of a knocking in a tomb will terrify a whole city. All these things are not without their meanings. But Faith, like a jackal, feeds among the tombs, and even from these dead doubts she gathers her most vital hope (8:36).

Melville may be "pretending" that these are Ishmael's thoughts, but at this point in the story they seem beyond rigid, Calvinist Ishmael who is just beginning to question his religious faith by contrasting it with Queequeg's.

Numerous examples of Melville's seeming intrusions could be cited; however, whether the comments are made by Ishmael or Melville remains problematical inasmuch as in reality there is no definite line between the time one is a "green" boy and the time he finally becomes a man. As first person narrator, Melville has the benefit of the knowledge that has come to him during the years intervening between the actual experience and his recollection of it. He probably could not himself tell the reader each time he steps out of Ishmael's shoes inasmuch as he is so closely identified with him. But the point is that when Melville speaks as Ishmael he <u>may</u> be playing a role. When he speaks in the present, addressing the reader as "you," he speaks from the standpoint of Ishmael who has experienced the false fire of the try-works and who has worked out one possible compromise with the universe--an acceptance of its dark side with its bright and a belief that the sun of knowledge gives the only true

light. One must "dive deep" for the truths of this world.

Melville takes other advantages of his position as first person narrator. We have illustrated in noting Melville's intrusions in the story that he digresses whenever he wishes. Since this is a personal experience he is narrating, the demands for dramatic unity are relaxed; Melville may recount episodically, or he may take time out to recite other incidents he is reminded of. He may also use the device of summary narrative whenever it fits his purpose. From his later vantage point, he can give information to the reader that would have to be presented dramatically if he had limited himself to an "on the scene" presentation. For example, through Ishmael the reader is given Queequeg's biographical information. Ishmael explains:

> Though at the time I but ill comprehended not a few of his words, yet subsequent disclosures, when I had become more familiar with his broken phraseology, now enable me to present the whole story such as it may prove in the mere skeleton I give (8:54).

Ishmael then proceeds to summarize pertinent biographical information. Using the same device, Melville recounts some of Queequeg's early experiences with "civilization," amusing the reader at the same time he is developing theme.

Melville overcomes the disadvantage of being unable to look into other people's thoughts by "hinting" at what another character may be thinking, as in the following instance:

> Queequeg put on dry clothes, lighted his pipe, and leaning against the bulwarks, and mildly eyeing those around him, seemed to be saying to himself--

> "It's a mutual, joint-stock world, in all meridians. We cannibals must help these Christians" (8:61).

Melville's increasing seriousness throughout "Ishmael's story" is indicated in the changes in language and tone--in the changes in diction and intensity of feeling. A study of language and tone goes beyond the scope of this paper, but a cursory examination of quoted material will reveal that in later passages Melville gradually drops much of the colloquialism, humor, and relaxed diversions evident in earlier chapters. Neither does Melville pun as frequently nor play with words as he does with the word "lay" in the exchange between Ishmael and Captain Bildad. With the possible exception of "The Monkey Rope," Melville drops his earlier practice of using every opportunity to either tell a joke or to express a humorous metaphor, maxim, or analogy, as in the few examples below taken from the beginning pages of the novel:

> Had not the stranger stood between me and the door, I would have bolted out of it quicker than ever I bolted a dinner (8:21).

> . . . he seemed to have been in a Thirty Years' War, and just escaped from it with a sticking-plaster shirt. Still more, his very legs were marked, as if a parcel of dark green frogs were running up the trunks of young palms (8:22).

> Better sleep with a sober cannibal than a drunken Christian (8:24).

> There was a fishy flavor to the milk, too, which I could not at all account for, till one morning happening to take a stroll along the beach among some fishermen's boats, I saw Hosea's brindled cow feeding on fish

> remnants, and marching along the sand with each foot in a cod's decapitated head, looking very slip-shod, I assure ye (8:66).

The above is merely a sampling, but should indicate the change from a robust, jocular, often ironic tone to the quiet, lyrical mood illustrated by Ishmael in the following passage as he sails over a pod of whales:

> And thus, though surrounded by circle upon circle of consternations and affrights, did these inscrutable creatures at the centre freely and fearlessly indulge in all peaceful concernments; yea, serenely revelled in dalliance and delight. But even so, amid the tornadoed Atlantic of my being, do I myself still for ever centrally disport in mute calm; and while ponderous planets of unwaning woe revolve round me, deep down and deep inland there I still bathe me in eternal mildness of joy (8:385).

This is experienced Ishmael who has found a new calm midst the "consternations" and "affrights" of an essentially evil universe. The change in mood with an accompanying change in language is significant since it supports the thesis that Ishmael does change within the chapters in which he serves in the role of "I" narrator and also indicates a change in Melville's attitude toward his novel.

Implicit in the foregoing discussion is a belief that Melville originally chose the point of view of the "I" narrator as protagonist because it was best suited to his first concept of his novel. He wished to give an authoritative, semi-fictionalized account of an actual whaling experience, but to keep his story from being merely a personal chronicle, he decided to interweave Ishmael's metaphysical journey.

Inasmuch as Ishmael tells the story, the reader, as an active participant in the fishery, shares in all of Ishmael's first impressions.

The method allows Melville considerable flexibility. As indicated in the above discussion, during the action, he may disappear completely, giving the reader a sense of immediacy and reality. Whenever he wishes to give insight or information the reader may not get from the immediate scene, he is able to summarize and comment from the vantage point of events "recollected in tranquility." In other words, the "I" narrator is able to involve himself in the action as well as to stop it at any time to fill in subsequent events, or to comment on significances. He is able to express his thoughts when they are pertinent and he is able to reveal how he appears to others by repeating dialogue.

By telling his story in first person, primary to his original intention and extremely important to the expository chapters to be discussed in the next chapter, Melville lends realism and credibility to the whaling account. He may have experienced some difficulty revealing Ishmael's spiritual and intellectual development from his internal perspective, but if so, it is not apparent to the reader for he has effected a convincing "mental journey." Furthermore, Melville gives further credence to his authority in his

present capacity as author since he speaks with the knowledge of a man who has experienced the fire and grown wiser from his experience.

By creating Ishmael to tell the story and by using Queequeg as his foil, Melville is able to imply more in his contrasts between "primitive" man and "civilized" man than he might have been willing to express in a more straightforward manner, even though his distinction between himself and Ishmael is often only "playful."

Thus far, the advantages to Melville in using the "I" narrator as protagonist have been emphasized. The disadvantages will be discussed incidentally in later chapters.

II. EXPOSITION

To introduce the "Extracts" with which he prefaces his novel, Melville says:

> It will be seen that this mere painstaking burrower and grubworm of a poor devil of a Sub-Sub appears to have gone through the long Vaticans and street-stalls of the earth, picking up whatever random allusions to whales he could anyways find in any book whatsoever, sacred or profane. Therefore you must not, in every case at least, take the higgledy-piggledy whale statements, however authentic, in these extracts, for veritable gospel cetology. Far from it. As touching the ancient authors generally, as well as the poets here appearing, these extracts are solely valuable or entertaining, as affording a glancing bird's eye view of what has been promiscuously said, thought, fancied, and sung of Leviathan, by many nations and generations, including our own (8:xxi).

The number of "extracts" in his collection and the variety of sources attests to Melville's interest in all aspects of whaling long before Ishmael was born. Perhaps his whaling novel was mentally in the making since he first sailed on a whaling vessel on January 3, 1841. Although he warns us that all of the extracts are not to be taken for "gospel cetology," we are given our first indication that the whaling voyage on which we are about to embark is going to be an authentic one. In the important chapter "Cetology," he says:

> . . . to have one's hands among the unspeakable foundations, ribs, and very pelvis of the world; this is a fearful thing. What am I that I should essay to hook the nose of this Leviathan! The awful tauntings in Job might well appal me. "Will he (the Leviathan) make a covenant with thee? Behold the hope of him is vain!" But I have swam through libraries and sailed through oceans; I have had to do with whales with these visible hands; I am in earnest; and I will try (8:131).

As Howard P. Vincent[1] explains, in Melville's age whaling and whales were a mystery to most Englishmen and Americans. Since the novel would be neither comprehensible nor believable until the reader had some understanding of the whaling industry, it was imperative that Melville create some feeling for the fishery's reality and importance to

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[1]Anyone interested in the expository sections of Moby-Dick is referred to Vincent's thorough study of source material used by Melville in these chapters.

the Nineteenth Century reader. The expository sections explaining the business of whaling are the core of the book out of which the narrative sections grow. The expository chapters, roughly comprising one-fourth of the book, start with Chapter Twenty-four and end with Chapter One Hundred Five, with nearly forty expository chapters between the two. Some of the chapters are in groups, others are dispersed among narrative chapters, and occasionally, a chapter contains both narrative and expository material. Vincent calls the expository section, "The Cetological Center, the keel to Melville's artistic craft."

Melville had learned from the public reaction to Mardi that before a story can "mean" anything symbolical, it must be acceptable as naturalistic or objective fact. Hence in Moby-Dick, every time he approaches or mentions a fact apt to be disbelieved, he takes time out to show (from whaling texts and voyages) that it is "plain fact," as noted in his introduction to "Cetology":

> Already we are boldly launched upon the deep; but soon we shall be lost in its unshored, harborless immensities. Ere that come to pass; ere the Pequod's weedy hull rolls side by side with the barnacled hulls of the Leviathan; at the outset it is but well to attend to a matter almost indespensable to a thorough appreciative understanding of the more special leviathanic revelations and allusions of all sorts which are to follow (8:128-29).

In other words, Melville had learned what Hemingway much

later expressed metaphorically, as follows:

> No good book has ever been written that has in it symbols arrived at beforehand and stuck in. That kind of symbol sticks out like raisins in raisin bread. Raisin bread is all right, but plain bread is better (1:72.)

If Melville had planned to recount a whaling adventure only, he would have chosen a more dramatic mode than that of first person narrator. He chose the first person viewpoint because it gave him the greatest opportunity to trace the growth of a personality reacting to experience and it furnished him with the authority that comes from personal testimony. Melville's enthusiasm and sincerity are felt more strongly in the first person than they would have been with any other method.

Some of the chapters giving factual information are 45, 53, 58-60, 62, 63, 67, 74-77, 79, 80, 84-86, 88-90, 92, 98, 101. This is not a complete list of expository chapters. Some are primarily entertaining, philosophical, or whimsical.

Melville forms a conspiracy with the reader in these expository sections. In a sense, while the story unfolds in the background, Melville moves up to whisper the mysteries of the fishery directly into the reader's ear. An example of this method of addressing himself directly to the reader is shown in his approach to the first expository chapter in the book:

> As Queequeg and I are now fairly embarked in this business of whaling; and as this business of whaling has somehow come to be regarded among landsmen as a rather unpoetical and disreputable pursuit; therefore, I am all anxiety to convince ye, ye landsmen, of the injustice hereby done to us hunters of whales (8:105).

He introduces the chapter "Of the Monstrous Pictures of Whales" by saying:

> I shall ere long paint to you as well as one can without canvas, something like the true form of the whale as he actually appears to the eye of the whaleman when in his own absolute body the whale is moored alongside so that he can be fairly stepped down there. It may be worthwhile, therefore, previously to advert to those curious imaginary portraits of him which even down to the present day confidently challenge the faith of the landsman. It is time to set the world right in matter, by proving such pictures of the whale all wrong (8:260).

And again:

> With reference to the whaling scene shortly to be described, as well as for the better understanding of all similar scenes elsewhere presented, I have here to speak of the magical, sometimes horrible whale-line (8:276).

In a similar manner he begins his description of the sperm whale's head:

> Here, now, are two great whales, laying their heads together; let us join them, and lay together our own (8:326).

On occasion, to enlighten the reader, he inserts a short expository section in the narrative by prefacing it with, "But before going further, it is important to mention here . . . (8:364), or "Had you stepped on board the Pequod at a certain juncture of this post-mortemizing of the whale . . .

(8:415), and so on.

Sometimes an incident requires some explanation. For example, when the Pequod crosses meadows of brit, Melville feels obligated to explain the dietary habits of the Right Whale. The incident with the giant squid calls for a similar discussion of the food of the Sperm Whale. Stubb's whale dinner calls for some remarks about "The Whale as a Dish," and the first meeting with a ship at sea requires an explanation of "The Gam." Many other narrative incidents give rise to one or more chapters of explanation of some facet of the whale or the fishery, or, rather, Melville dramatizes an aspect of whaling to illustrate an expository section.

The expository chapters are not merely explanatory, however, More often than not, Melville turns a general discussion into a particular philosophical truth, such as his description of the skin of the whale, culminating in the following sermon:

> It does seem to me, that herein we see the rare virtue of a strong individual vitality, and the rare virtue of thick walls, and the rare virtue of interior spaciousness. Oh, man! admire and model thyself after the whale! Do thou, too, remain warm among ice. Do thou, too, live in this world without being of it. Be cool at the equator; keep thy blood fluid at the Pole. Like the great dome of St. Peter's, and like the great whale, retain, O man! in all seasons a temperature of thine own (8:305).

Again, in describing the discarding of the whale's carcass,

Melville turns exposition into philosophical analogy when he comments:

> Desecrated as the body is, a vengeful ghost survives and hovers over it to scare . . . . And for years afterwards, perhaps, ships shun the place; leaping over it as silly sheep leap over a vacuum, because their leader originally leaped there when a stick was held. There's your law of precedents; there's your utility of traditions; there's the story of your obstinate survival of old beliefs never bottomed on the earth, and now not even hovering in the air! There's orthodoxy (8:307)!

After a lengthy comment on the whale's spout and why its misty vapor appears mysterious, Melville philosophizes:

> And so, through all the thick mists of the dim doubts in my mind, divine intuitions now and then shoot, enkindling my fog with a heavenly ray. And for this I thank God; for all have doubts; many deny; but doubts or denials, few along with them, have intuitions. Doubts of all things earthly, and intuitions of some things heavenly; this combination makes neither believer nor infidel, but makes a man who regards them both with equal eye (8:371).

One final quotation follows to illustrate Melville's method of using the fishery as an occasion for exposition, exposition as an excuse for philosophy, and philosophy as an opportunity to directly address the reader:

> What are the Rights of Man and the Liberties of the World but Loose-Fish? What all men's minds and opinions but Loose-Fish? What is the principle of religious belief in them but a Loose-Fish? What to the ostentatious smuggling verbalists are the thought of thinkers but Loose-Fish? What is the great globe itself but a Loose-Fish? And what are you, reader, but a Loose-Fish and a Fast-Fish, too?(8:395)

Melville also develops symbols in expository sections. The two chapters, "Moby Dick" (what the whale means to Ahab)

and "The Whiteness of the Whale" (what the whale means to Ishmael), are essential to an understanding of the symbolic content of the novel. Melville indicates early in the novel that going to sea is analogous to the search for truth when he states: " . . . all deep, earnest thinking is but the intrepid effort of the soul to keep the open independence of her sea . . . in landlessness alone resides the highest truth, shoreless, indefinite as God . . ." (8:105). Inasmuch as he leads us to expect analogy in his equation of the whale with truth, we cannot ignore the implication that when Melville classifies whales in the chapter "Cetology," he might also be suggesting his novel to be a classification of truths. "Gospel cetology" is extended into analogy at the end of the "Cetology" chapter:

> Finally: It was stated at the outset, that this system would not be here, and at once, perfected. You cannot but plainly see that I have kept my word. But I now leave my Cetological System standing thus unfinished, even as the great Cathedral of Cologne was left, with the crane still standing upon the top of the uncompleted tower. For small erections may be finished by their first architects; grand ones, true ones, ever leave the copestone to posterity. God keep me from ever completing anything. This whole book is but a draught--nay, but the draught of a draught. Oh, Time, Strength, Cash, and Patience (8:141-42).

Not all of the expository chapters are philosophical or analogous. Some of them, such as chapters 25, 65, 82, and 83 are humorous and mocking. They not only provide information but also give relief from the serious business of whaling.

Some chapters, such as 67 merely explain a process; others, such as 69 and 70 are quite poetic; whereas still others contain a variety of changes in mood.

The success of Melville's chapters on cetology has been attested to time and time again. Ashley, who according to Howard Vincent is "the greatest modern authority on whaling," has said: "There could be no truer picture of whaling or finer story of the sea than Herman Melville's Moby-Dick" (14:125).

We have seen that although Melville's chief purpose in the expository chapters is to convince the reader of the fitness and appropriatness of his vehicle, he is able to utilize a variety of expository methods. Furthermore, Melville uses one of the advantages of "I" narrator to insert expository chapters into the narrative flow at will. He takes advantage of its freedom to develop variety in organization and to move freely in space and time, as has been indicated in the foregoing discussion. His expository chapters create no conflict with the chapters in which Ishmael narrates, since the exposition is obviously the view of the experienced author, whether Ishmael or Melville. The reader will surely also note that there are no conflicts in the philosophical views of the "later" Ishmael and the author.

III. ISHMAEL AS WITNESS

After the two sections previously discussed are cut away from Moby-Dick, what remains has been called by many critics, "Ahab's story." From the moment of Ahab's entry into the novel in Chapter Twenty-eight, a change in mood takes place and is resumed whenever he is on the scene. Whenever Ahab steps to the center of the stage, the mood becomes serious, usually becomes more intense, and is often accompanied by a complete shift in point of view. In speaking to him, the language of most characters tends to become less colloquial and more formal. In speaking of him, even to describing his appearance, Ishmael sheds his relaxed, ironical tone and his speech becomes rich with metaphor and suggestion of symbolic meaning, as in the following:

> He looked like a man cut away from the stake, when the fire has overrunningly wasted all the limbs without consuming them, or taking away one particle from their compacted aged robustness. His whole high, broad form, seemed made of solid bronze, and shaped in an unalterable mould, like Cellini's cast Perseus. Threading its way out from among his grey hairs, and continuing right down one side of his tawny scorched face and neck, till it disappeared in his clothing, you saw a slender rod-like mark, lividly whitish. It resembled that perpendicular seam sometimes made in the straight, lofty trunk of a great tree, when the upper lightning tearingly darts down it, and without wrenching a single twig, peels and grooves out the bark from top to bottom, ere running off into the soil, leaving the tree still greenly alive, but branded . . . a crucifixion in his face; in all the nameless regal over-bearing dignity of some mighty woe (8:120-21).

From this point on, whenever Ahab comes on deck, Ishmael, as we have come to know him, steps aside. He becomes either "I" as witness or disappears altogether. As witness he is not a conscious "creation of the author," as Friedman describes his role, but, rather, seems to be an extra voice that Melville can use to advantage at times, but often "does not know what to do with." In other words, Ishmael is a carry-over from Melville's first concept of his novel (a whaling adventure interwoven with Ishmael's psychological and philosophical search) to the final inclusion of Ahab and Moby Dick as central characters.

It is almost impossible to differentiate between Ishmael as witness and Melville as neutrally omniscient author unless Ishmael tells the reader he is on the scene. This problem is illustrated in the following example. At the end of his description of Ahab in Chapter Twenty-eight, Ishmael comments: "Nevertheless, ere long, the warm, warbling persuasiveness of the pleasant, holiday weather we came to, seemed gradually to charm him from his mood" (8:122). The key words are "we" and "seemed." We assume from these that Ishmael makes this observation. However, in Chapter Twenty-nine, an equally poetic chapter, continuing in the same mood, we find the following paragraph:

> Old age is always wakeful; as if, the longer linked with life, the less man has to do with aught that looks like death. Among sea-commanders, the old greybeards will oftenest leave their berths to visit the night-cloaked deck. It was so with Ahab; only that now, of late, he seemed so much to live in the open air, that truly speaking, his visits were more to the cabin, than from the cabin to the planks. "It feels like going down into one's tomb," --he would mutter to himself,--"for an old captain like me to be descending this narrow scuttle, to go to my grave-dug berth" (8:123).

The first comment sounds suspiciously as if it comes from Melville or mature Ishmael. If Melville is speaking omnisciently, he would not qualify the statement with "seemed"; whereas, if Ishmael is reporting as witness, we question his ability to hear the remarks Ahab "muttered to himself."

We have the same problem in "The Pipe." The "I" narrator is not established as the reader externally views Ahab sitting on the deck smoking his pipe. However, Ahab's thoughts are given in the form of a soliloquy within quotation marks so the possibility exists that Ishmael, witnessing the scene, might have overheard him. This same situation arises in the chapter "The Cabin-Table," involving Stubb, Starbuck, Flask and Ahab. The episode is narrated in the present tense. The "I" narrator does not appear, not in print at least, nor would Ishmael be on the scene except in unusual circumstances. At one point in the chapter, Melville comments:

> Therefore it was that Flask once admitted in private, that ever since he had arisen to the dignity of an officer, from that moment he had never known what it was to be

otherwise than hungry, more or less (8:147).

If he told this to Ishmael at a later time, a possibility remains that he might have recounted the cabin episode at the same time.

A further aspect of this problem of "locating" Ishmael is illustrated during "The First Lowering." We know Ishmael is in Starbuck's boat, but the invisible author seems to shift from boat to boat as they converge.

At the close of several dramatic chapters in which Ahab has the stage and during which the "I" narrator does not once intrude, Melville puts Ishmael back on stage by having him remark:

> I, Ishmael, was one of that crew: my shouts had gone up with the rest; my oath had been welded with theirs; and stronger I shouted, and more did I hammer and clinch my oath, because of the dread in my soul. A wild, mystical, sympathetical feeling was in me; Ahab's quenchless feud seemed mine. With greedy ears I learned the history of that murderous monster against whom I and all the others had taken our oaths of violence and revenge (8:174).

Thus, Ishmael is now in position to report on the history of the white whale and what that whale "seems" to mean to Ahab. As has been noted in an earlier discussion, when propitious, Ishmael claims a limit to the surmises he is able to make about the white whale and Ahab, for after all, he is only Ishmael.

There seems no point in giving further examples of similar instances in which it is impossible to definitely

determine whether Ishmael is on the scene or not. The reader will note, however, that Ishmael appears most frequently as an avowed witness in the sections immediately following his role as protagonist--roughly the first half of the book. He tends to disappear into neutrally omniscient author as the pursuit of the white whale gains in intensity.

According to Friedman, the "I" narrator as witness denies the author "any direct voice in the proceedings" since the witness-narrator is a character "on his own right within the story itself" and as such the author must surrender to him his omniscience altogether. As has been noted, however, Melville is not willing or able to surrender all vestiges of omniscience since on occasion he either transcends his limitations as witness or stretches the reader's credulity to its outermost limits by overhearing conversations one would expect to be out of his hearing range. Ishmael as witness is extremely handicapped in all matters pertaining to Ahab because of his limited access to him in his unimportant position on the crew. For these reasons, it does not seem reasonable to believe Melville originally planned the "I" narrator as witness as a method for developing his story, but rather was stuck with it when he concluded Ishmael's search to make way for Ahab's. Inasmuch as Ishmael gradually approached Melville's viewpoint as he gained in experience,

he was easily absorbed into the voice of the omniscient author.

The casual reader probably would not be troubled with Melville's handling of the "I" narrator in the "Ahab" chapters since Melville maintains a great distance from all of his characters, even Ishmael. Though Melville speaks most often through Ishmael, he gives us very little actual information about him. We know infinitely more about his metaphysics than we do about his past history or physical appearance. For the most part, Melville approaches Ahab from an external position. We learn more about him from soliloquies and from others than we do from entering into his innermost thoughts. In other words, Ahab tells us far more about himself than does Ishmael as witness or Melville as author.

IV. OMNISCIENT AUTHOR

As has been indicated in the preceding chapter, Melville's use of omniscience is complex. The problem of isolating the omniscient author is complicated by the "I" narrator. Most critics seem to assume without question Ishmael's presence throughout the book as reporter. Others who have studied technique in Moby-Dick have noticed a change in point of view, but no one seems to have studied

Melville's use of point of view except in a very general way.

Some critics simply assume Ishmael is Melville and discuss the novel as Melville's autobiography. Others share Alfred Kazin's viewpoint that Ishmael is a character independent of Melville. Kazin says:

> Ishmael is not only a character, but the single voice, the single mind, whose endlessly spinning and turning spool of thought the whole story is unwound (3:81).

Among those who notice the change in point of view is Richard Chase, who declares, "Ishmael is always ostensibly the narrator, but in much of the latter part of the novel he is not felt as such" (3:59). Glauco Cambon ambiguously states, "Ishmael as persona of Melville is invisibly present through narration when he ceases to be directly present in it" (2:523). George R. Stewart explains the change in point of view by declaring that from Chapter Twenty-six on Ishmael ceases to be a "mere character" and becomes "the spokesman of the all-knowing author" (12:439).

The research for this study does not bring any definite nor final solutions to this controversy, but does tend to support Mr. Stewart's belief that as the novel becomes more philosophical and dramatic, Melville and Ishmael merge identities as omniscient author.

As indicated in the preceding chapter, Melville does occasionally use Ishmael as witness to relate Ahab's story, although Ishmael tends to merge with the omniscient author.

For example, in an early chapter, "Surmises," Ishmael and the omniscient author seem to share in the summary of Ahab's intention to this point. Ishmael's limitations are indicated with such expressions as "though he seemed," "it may have been," "might have possibly extended himself," and so on. But the omniscient author reports from a superior viewpoint when he says "he knew," "in foreseeing that," "thought Ahab," and so on. However, at this point we have heard Ahab speak, but someone has stepped in to tell us what he has been thinking. As the story progresses, Ahab himself reveals what he is thinking, tending more to the dramatic mode than to true omniscience. An example of the omniscient author's voice is shown in the following summary narrative:

> . . . ever since that fatal encounter, Ahab had cherished a wild vindictiveness against the whale, all the more fell for that in his frantic morbidness he at last came to identify with him, not only all his bodily woes, but all his intellectual and spiritual exasperations. The White Whale swam before him as the monomaniac incarnation of all those malicious agencies which some deep men feel eating in them, till they are left living on with half a heart and half a lung . . . all evil, to crazy Ahab, were visibly personified, and made practically assailable in Moby Dick. He piled upon the whale's white hump the sum of all the general rage and hate felt by his whole race from Adam down; and then, as if his chest had been a mortar, he burst his hot heart's shell upon it (8:180).

Note the contrast of the above with the following quotation that <u>shows</u> rather than <u>tells</u> what is going on in Ahab's mind:

> It was a black and hooded head; and hanging there in the midst of so intense a calm, it seemed the Sphynx's

> in the desert. "Speak, thou vast and venerable head," muttered Ahab, "which, with a beard, yet here and there lookest hoary with mosses; speak, mighty head, and tell us the secret thing that is in thee. Of all divers, thou hast dived the deepest. That head upon which the upper sun now gleams, has moved amid this world's foundations . . . Better and better, man. Would now St. Paul would come along that way, and to my breezelessness bring his breeze! O Nature, and O soul of man! how far beyond all utterance are your linked analogies! not the smallest atom stirs or lives on matter, but has its cunning duplicate in mind" (8:309).

Obviously, the latter method of examining thoughts is more objective than the previous quotation. The author is one more step removed from the material in the latter instance than he is in the former. The latter method not only objectifies, but also brings the reader closer to the action. The tendency in the latter is away from summary narrative to immediate scene. Friedman defines this type of omniscience, as follows:

> The next step toward the objectification of the story material is the elimination of not only the author, who disappeared with the "I" as Witness frame, but also of any narrator whatsoever. Here the reader ostensibly listens to no one; the story comes directly through the minds of the characters as it leaves its mark there. As a result, the tendency is almost wholly in the direction of scene both inside the mind and externally with speech and action; and narrative summary, if it appears at all, is either supplied unobtrusively by the author by way of "stage direction" or emerges through the thoughts and words of the characters themselves (6:1176).

It is apparent that this method is adaptable to looking into several different minds without committing the author himself to any particular viewpoint. The characters themselves tell the reader what they are thinking; the reader draws his

own inferences therefrom.

The chapter "The Doubloon" is a good example of the use of multiple selective omniscience, as Friedman defines this method. One might argue that Ishmael observed this scene and reports as witness, but this seems unlikely for several reasons. In the first place, no mention of first person is made. In describing the coin, Melville says, "You saw the likeness of three Andes' summits," putting the reader directly on the scene. Starbuck's first remarks are prefaced "murmered Starbuck to himself." Furthermore, Ishmael does not come to the doubloon with the others inasmuch as he has made his reconciliation. There is nothing further to be gained in this scene by revealing his thoughts and perceptions. Symbolically he has already "come to the doubloon." When Melville feels the need for stage directions, he has Stubb interpret, as follows:

> What says the Cannibal? As I live he's comparing notes; looking at his thigh bone; thinks the sun is in the thigh, or in the calf, or in the bowels, I suppose . . . . But, aside again! here comes that ghost-devil, Fedallah; tail coiled out of sight as usual, oakum in the toes of his pumps as usual. What does he say, with that look of his? Ah, only makes a sign to the sign and bows himself; there is a sun on the coin--fire worshipper, depend upon it (8:430).

Ostensibly the foregoing thoughts are Stubb's. They are characteristic of his language and manner. However, note the information revealed by the "invisible" author in even so

short an excerpt. We see Queequeg searching for symbolic self-identity and relationships by comparing the markings on his body with those on the coin, suggesting Melville's intention in having each man come individually to the coin, and also intimating underlying thematic intention of the novel as a whole. Fedallah's satanic identification is also implied with a further clarification of Melville's use of fire as symbol.

One further, long quotation is given to illustrate Melville's use of omniscience. The scene takes place at the end of Chapter Thirty-six, "The Quarter-Deck," when Ahab first makes known his intentions for the voyage:

> "Vengeance on a dumb brute!" cried Starbuck, "that simply smote thee from blindest instinct! Madness! To be enraged with a dumb thing, Captain Ahab, seems blasphemous."
>
> "Hark ye yet again,--the little lower layer. All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks. But in each event--in the living act, the undoubted deed--there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask. If man will strike, strike through the mask! How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall? To me, the white whale is that wall, shoved near to me. Sometimes I think there's naught beyond. But 'tis enough. He tasks me; he heaps me; I see in him outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing it. That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate; and be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal, I will wreak that hate upon him. Talk not to me of blasphemy, man; I'd strike the sun if it insulted me. For could the sun do that, then could I do the other; since there is ever a sort of fair play herein, jealousy presiding over all creations. But not my master, man, is even that fair

play. Who's over me? Truth hath no confines. Take off thine eye! more intolerable than fiends' glarings is a doltish stare! So, so; thou reddenest and palest; my heat has melted thee to anger-glow. But look ye, Starbuck, what is said in heat, that thing unsays itself. There are men from whom warm words are small indignity. I meant not to incense thee. Let it go. Look! see yonder Turkish cheeks of spotted tawn--living, breathing pictures painted by the sun. The Pagan leopards--the unrecking and unworshipping things, that live: and seek, and give no reasons for the torrid life they feel! The crew, man, the crew! Are they not one and all with Ahab, in this matter of the whale? See Stubb! he laughs! See yonder Chilian! he snorts to think of it. Stand up amid the general hurricane, thy one tost sapling cannot, Starbuck! And what is it: Reckon it. 'Tis but to help strike a fin; no wondrous feat for Starbuck. What is it more? From this one poor hunt, then, the best lance out of all Nantucket, surely he will not hang back, when every foremast-hand has clutched a whetstone? Ah! constrainings seize thee; I see! the billow lifts thee! Speak, but speak!--Aye, aye! thy silence, thee, that voices thee. (Aside) Something shot from my dilated nostrils, he has inhaled it in his lungs. Starbuck now is mine; cannot oppose me now, without rebellion."

"God keep me!--keep us all! murmured Starbuck, lowly.

But in his joy at the enchanted, tacit acquiescence of the mate, Ahab did not hear his foreboding invocation; nor yet the low laugh from the hold; nor yet the presaging vibrations of the winds in the cordage; nor yet the hollow flap of the sails against the masts, as for a moment their hearts sank in. For again Starbuck's downcast eyes lighted up with the stubbornness of life; the subterranean laugh died away; the winds blew on; the sails filled out; the ship heaved and rolled as before. Ah, ye admonitions and warnings! why stay ye not when ye come? But rather are ye predictions than warnings, ye shadows! Yet not so much predictions from without, as verifications of the foregoing things within. For with little external to contrain us, the innermost necessities in our being, these still drive us on (8:161-62).

Not only are we given Ahab's thoughts, but through his declaration we are given the reactions of others to his

words. In this instance, however, Melville feels the passage extremely important; since he does not trust the reader to draw the full implications of Ahab's soliloquy, he adds his own editorializing comments to give added emphasis to Starbuck's forebodings and Ahab's alliance with Satan. As we have seen, although point of view is in the direction of multiple selective omniscience, when the method does not suit his purpose or when relief is needed, Melville resorts to summary narrative, such as in "The Carpenter" and "The Blacksmith," or he adds his own comments as noted in the foregoing excerpt.

It should be noted that although Melville takes the omniscient prerogative of looking briefly into minds, he often rigidly restricts himself to one mind and only surmises about others with comments such as "whatever were his own secret thoughts, Starbuck said nothing," and often qualifies with such remarks as "he seemed to be thinking."

Many examples of Melville's use of omniscience might be cited, but to no further purpose. Some of the chapters border on the purely dramatic, but the fine distinction made here between selective omniscience and pure drama lies in the narrative and descriptive passages interspersed throughout the dialogue. Most of the chapters after the last chapter on cetology and continuing to the end of the novel are either selectively omniscient or dramatic. Melville only occasionally

steps into the realm of less restricted omniscience to supply background information or to give a view from a broader perspective than would come from any one mind, such as in "The Hat." An isolated "I" slips into the narrative on occasion in the last one-quarter of the book, but generally speaking, Melville speaks of the crew and boat in the impersonal third person in this section.

Probably Melville's most important reason for shifting to the omniscient point of view in the latter portion of Moby-Dick is simply that it is the only feasible method of looking into various minds to develop the moral and philosophical implications of Ahab's search. Ishmael is obviously too limited intellectually as well as in time and space to tell Ahab's story. Ishmael has accepted what he considers to be a predominantly evil world so cannot interpret the defiance of Ahab who cannot, but who must "strike through the mask." Another reason for omniscience is dramatic effect. In dispensing with a "mouthpiece," Melville is able to create a more immediate scene. The multiple selective mode allows him not only to reveal thoughts, but also to continue action. Also, Ahab is dramatized as a tragic character through a contrast of his internal state with that of others, especially Starbuck's, and through a contrast of his madness with Pip's.

Another very important reason for the omniscient point of view is related to the theme of isolation. Ishmael, the homeless wanderer, finds his way back through Queequeg, but Ahab sheds his "humanities" in his monomaniacal quest, intensifying his alienation. As Ahab spends more and more time by himself, it becomes mechanically impossible for Ishmael to overhear his thoughts and artistically undesirable for Starbuck to share them. The scene in "The Symphony" between Starbuck and Ahab (called by D. H. Lawrence "Ahab's Gethsemane"), reveals Ahab's submerged "humanities," but for dramatic effectiveness only to himself does he reveal: "So far gone am I in the dark side of earth, that its other side, the theoretic bright one, seems but uncertain twilight to me" (8:520).

CHAPTER III.

CONCLUSIONS

On February 24, 1849, Melville wrote to Evert A. Duyckinck:

> I have been passing my time very pleasurably . . . reading Shakspeare . . . Dolt & ass that I am I have lived more than 29 years, & until a few days ago, never made close acquaintance with the divine William. Ah, he's full of sermons-on-the-mount, and gentle, aye, almost as Jesus. I take such men to be inspired. I fancy that this moment Shakspeare in heaven ranks with Gabriel, Raphael and Michael. And if another Messiah ever comes twill be in Shakesper's person.--I am mad to think how minute a cause has prevented me hitherto from reading Shakspeare (5:77).

Much later, Melville's original set of Shakespeare with marginal notes was given by his relatives to Charles Olson. In a book published in 1947, Olson says:

> The significant thing is the rough notes for the composition of Moby-Dick on the fly-leaf of the last volume. These notes involve Ahab, Pip, Bulkington, Ishmael, and are the key to Melville's intention with these characters . . . the notes in the Shakespeare set verify what Moby-Dick proves: Melville and Shakespeare had made a Corinth and out of the burning came Moby-Dick, bronze (10:39-40).

Not only is Melville's annotated set of Shakespeare a key to his intention with characters, it is a further key to the dramatic structure of the "Ahab story" in Moby-Dick.

As has been noted earlier, Melville's use of omniscience is such that the tendency is to move away from a subjective commentator to an objectification of immediate scene. This tendency is strikingly noted in at least two sections in which Melville actually copies the dramatic mode

to the extent of giving stage directions within parentheses. The first of these sections commences with Chapter Thirty-six, "The Quarter-Deck," and ends with Chapter Forty, "Midnight, Forecastle." The second starts in the latter section of Chapter 119, "The Candles," and ends with Chapter 122, "Midnight Aloft." The author describes the situation of the "play within the novel" as neutrally omniscient author or from the perspective of multiple selective omniscience. After the ship's company arrives on the scene in the first section, mentioned above, the author comments infrequently. The white whale becomes symbolic of Ahab's metaphysical quest with very little editorializing on Melville's part.

Ahab's soliloquies sound very much as if they could have come directly out of a Shakespearean play. Note the diction in the quotation from "The Quarterdeck," quoted at length in the preceding chapter. The lofty, exciting language would probably seem out of place in any context except that of the dramatic form. The first time one reads Moby-Dick, the transition from Ishmael's quietly contemplative and philosophical musings in "The Mast-Head" to the noisy, exciting drama on deck is startling since the point of view changes so drastically, but this is Ahab's revelation of his intention--of Melville's intention for Ahab--and the reader begins to expect the dramatic point of view to predominate

when Ahab's quest is being featured.

With the evidence he found in Melville's copy of Shakespeare, and from letters of Melville's indicating he spent more than a year writing Moby-Dick after he had said it was practically completed, Olson surmised, as follows:

> Moby-Dick was two books written between February, 1850 and August, 1851. The first book did not contain Ahab. It may not, except incidentally, have contained Moby Dick (10:35).

This study of Melville's use of point of view tends to support Olson's assumption, at least to the extent that two distinct methods of narration are used. In telling Ishmael's story, Melville's viewpoint is internal and subjective and in relating Ahab's story, his viewpoint is dramatic and objective. The possibility that while writing Moby-Dick as first conceived, Melville was inspired from his reading of Shakespeare to include a cosmic, tragic drama, becomes probable. Ishmael, as characterized early in the novel, could hardly be cast in the role of tragic hero. Neither could his subjective, personal search be expanded to epic proportions, involving the entire company of the ship.

However, this conclusion does not imply that Ishmael's and Ahab's stories are not related. Ishmael's reconciliation is the focal point of the novel. Both Ishmael and Ahab as thinking men wrestle with the problem of evil in a supposedly

divinely created universe--Ishmael as a Calvinist and Ahab as a Quaker. Ishmael finds his compromise in a kind of philosophical humanism, putting man in the center of the universe. He accepts man's inability to "remove the mask," and focuses his attention upon human self-realization in an unending search for truth. Ahab, in turning his back on humanity in his demand that the truth behind existence be revealed, was destroyed, symbolically taking his universe with him.

Father Mapple's sermon in Chapter Nine becomes significant when considered from the standpoint of point of view. Several critics have commented that the sermon must be important inasmuch as it is quoted in its entirety, hence try to find in this chapter Melville's thematic intention for the novel as a whole. No one seems to notice the shift in point of view. At no place in this chapter does the "I" narrator make an appearance, suggesting perhaps that the chapter was added later with the "Ahab" story. At the end of the preceding chapter, Ishmael "places" himself in the chapel, but the entire chapter is from the selective omniscient point of view as Father Mapple delivers his sermon in his own words. The chapter ends:

> He said no more, but slowly waving a benediction, covered his face with his hands, and so remained kneeling, till all the people had departed, and he was left alone in the place (8:48).

The point of view in this chapter tends to put the reader in the pulpit with Father Mapple, not with Ishmael in the congregation. In overlooking the subtlety of the point of view, many critics assume Father Mapple voices the theme of the novel when he says that to obey God one must disobey himself--to disobey God means to run the risk of annihilation.

Neither can one ignore the satire implicit in Father Mapple's use of the word "delight." Father Mapple says:

> "Delight is to him--a far, far upward, and inward delight--who against the proud gods and commodores of this earth, ever stands forth his own inexorable self. Delight is to him whose strong arms yet support him, when the ship of this base treacherous world has gone down beneath him. Delight is to him, who gives no quarter in truth, and kills, burns, and destroys all sin though he pluck it out from under the robes of Senators and Judges. Delight,--top-gallant delight is to him, who acknowledges no law or lord, but the Lord his God, and is only a patriot to heaven. Delight is to him, whom all the waves of the billows of the seas of the boisterous mob can never shake from this sure Keel of the Ages. And eternal delight and deliciousness will be his, who coming to lay him down, can say with his final breath--O Father!--chiefly known to me by Thy rod--mortal or immortal, here I die. I have striven to be Thine, more than to be this world's, or mine own. Yet this is nothing; I leave eternity to Thee; for what is man that he should live out the lifetime of his God?" (8:47-8)

In Chapter 131, the Pequod meets a ship "most miserably misnamed the Delight." All that remained of her were the "shattered, white ribs, and some few splintered planks, of what had once been a whale-boat" (8:530). The crew of the Pequod witnessed the sea burial of one of five men who had been alive the day before. Significantly, the chapter following this is "The

Symphony" in which Melville contrasts the "delightful" surface world with the "step-mother" world of reality, as follows:

> It was a clear steel-blue day. The firmaments of air and sea were hardly separable in that all-prevading azure; only, the pensive air was transparently pure and soft, with a woman's look, and the robust and man-like sea heaved with long, strong, lingering swells, as Samson's chest in his sleep.
>
> Hither, and thither, on high, glided the snow-white wings of small, unspeckled birds; these were the gentle thoughts of the feminine air; but to and fro in the deeps, far down in the bottomless blue, rushed mighty Leviathans, sword-fish, and sharks; and these were the strong, troubled murderous thinkings of the masculine sea (8:532).

As Lawrence Thompson points out, Mapple merely expresses the orthodox Christian point of view. Given the explicit land-sea symbolism, one must equate Father Mapple with the non-thinking land dweller who has ceased to search. True, he had once been to sea, but he has accepted as final some small truths and now remains ashore. One is also reminded of the two old sea captains who never go to sea anymore--Bildad who has concluded "man's religion is one thing and the practical world quite another" and Peleg who is "full of insular prejudices"--contrasted with Bulkington who cannot remain long on land--who knows "that all deep, earnest thinking is but the intrepid effort of the soul to keep the open independence of her sea . . . in landlessness alone resides the highest truth, shoreless, indefinite as God . . ." (8:105). Melville warns in "Cetology:

> I promise nothing complete; because any human thing supposed to be complete, must for that very reason infallibly be faulty (8:130).

Immediately following Father Mapple's sermon, unorthodoxy is contrasted in Queequeg's Ramadan. Certainly the point of view in "The Sermon" reveals no commitment whatsoever on Melville's part in either his own words or through the reactions or comments of Ishmael. One is reminded that in spite of his final unorthodox compromise, Ishmael is saved. Starbuck's unquestioning orthodoxy, labeled by Melville "mere unaided virtue or right-mindedness" (8:183), is not capable of turning Ahab back. Only Ishmael is saved and speaks to the reader in the "Epilogue" as the author's voice. Ishmael and Melville are one.

Thompson comments further:

> In Moby-Dick, it might be said that Melville projected one aspect of himself into his narrator Ishmael, and then projected another contrasting aspect of self into his hero, Captain Ahab (13:151).

If he believes it relevant, the reader must decide for himself whether this is true or not. Biographical information lends support to the idea that Melville's attempt to find peace in "hearth and home" did not take. The problem of evil overshadowed the good things on earth. While he was working on Moby-Dick, Melville write to Hawthorne:

> Truth is the silliest thing under the sun. Try to get a living by the Truth--and go to the Soup Societies. Heavens! Let any clergyman try to preach the Truth from its very stronghold, the pulpit, and they

> would ride him out of his church on his own pulpit bannister. It can hardly be doubted that all Reformers are bottomed upon the truth, more or less; and to the world at large are not reformers almost universally laughingstocks? Why so? Truth is ridiculous to men . . . .
>
> I shall at last be worn out and perish, like an old nutmeg-grater, grated to pieces by the constant attrition of the wood, that is, the nutmeg. What I feel most moved to write, that is banned,--it will not pay. Yet, altogether, write the other way I cannot . . . . I stand for the heart. To the dogs with the head! I had rather be a fool with a heart, than Jupiter Olympus with his head. The reason the mass of men fear God, and at bottom dislike Him, is because they rather distrust His heart, and fancy Him all brain like a watch. (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?) (5:127-29)

These are hardly the comments of a man who has found a reconciliation with traditionally accepted belief. After he had finished writing Moby-Dick, he again wrote to Hawthorne as follows:

> I have written a wicked book, and feel spotless as the lamb . . . . My dear Hawthorne, the atmospheric skepticisms steal into me now, and make me doubtful of my sanity in writing you thus. But, believe me, I am not mad, most noble Festus! But truth is ever incoherent, and when the big hearts strike together, the concussion is a little stunning. Farewell. Don't write a word about the book. That would be robbing me of my miserly delight. . . . Lord, when shall we be done growing? As long as we have anything more to do, we have done nothing. So, now, let us add Moby Dick to our blessing, and step from that. Leviathan is not the biggest fish;--I have heard of Krakens (5:142-43).

If whales symbolize truth, and Moby-Dick the greatest truth of all, one cannot ignore the implication of the destructiveness of hand-to-hand combat. If Melville could have remained content with passive acceptance, he would not have been "grated

to pieces by constant attrition." Neither his letters nor his biographers indicate he was ever content, however much he accepted unhappiness as man's natural state. After one has caught a whale, there remains the possibility of the existence of Krakens. In his English notebooks, Hawthorne commented:

> Melville, as he always does, began to reason of Providence and futurity, and of everything that lies beyond human ken, and informed me that he had "pretty much made up his mind to be annihilated"; but still he does not seem to rest in that anticipation; and, I think, will never rest until he gets hold of a definite belief. It is strange how he persists--and has persisted ever since I knew him, and probably long before--in wandering to-and-fro over these deserts, as dismal and monotonous as the sand hills amid which we were sitting. He can neither believe, nor be comfortable in his unbelief; and he is too honest and courageous not to try to do one or the other. If he were a religious man, he would be one of the most truly religious and reverential; he has a very high and noble nature, and better worth immortality than most of us (4:588-89).

Perhaps Melville did vicariously resolve his skepticism in Ahab's agnostic attempt to push back the wall. The point of view used in connection with Ahab's story makes it possible for Melville to disguise his own feelings. As pointed out earlier, Ahab acts out his own drama. One can find rather obvious reasons for identifying Melville and Ishmael. An identity with Ahab can be conjectured, but, given the satire and irony directed at transcendentalism, both American and "German-style," one has difficulty in carrying a similarity

between Melville and Quaker Ahab too far.[1] In essence, Melville presents a possible, peaceful solution to the problem of existence in a world that is two-thirds darkness, contrasted with the self-destructive alternative of hopeless defiance.

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[1]For examples of Melville's satire of transcendentalism see "The Mast-Head," "Cistern and Buckets," and "The Pequod Meets the Virgin."

CHAPTER IV.

SUMMARY

This paper has attempted to prove that a close study of point of view in Moby-Dick is useful as a key to narrative structure, symbolism, and thematic intention.

To this purpose the multiple points of view used by Melville in telling the story were isolated into four general categories: (1) Ishmael as protagonist, (2) exposition, (3) Ishmael as witness, and (4) omniscient author. Each point of view was discussed individually with particular emphasis upon advantages and disadvantages of each approach. From these considerations, inferences were drawn regarding Melville's reasons for using particular viewpoints.

Accumulated evidence proves the existence of a close identity between Melville and Ishmael, although the relationship with "early" Ishmael is not exact. Evidence also indicates that Melville's primary intention in Moby-Dick was to relate an authentic, believable story about whaling. The belief that out of this external, physical adventure grew Ishmael's internal search was verified by evidence showing his gradual emotional and spiritual growth until he finally merges into the "author's voice," approximately midway in the novel. From the time of Ishmael's philosophical resolution on, as Melville shifts the emphasis to Ahab's

quest of the white whale, the point of view tends to the external, dramatic mode. The latter shift in point of view not only indicates that Ishmael and Melville merge into omniscient author, but also supports those critics who contend Melville started out to write Ishmael's story and was later inspired to superimpose Ahab's story upon it.

The final conclusion regarding thematic intention was that through Ishmael and Ahab, Melville expressed his own dilemma in his attempt to relate to what he considered to be an essentially evil world. Through Ishmael, Melville expressed his own humanistic solution; through Ahab he illustrated the alternative course of non-compromise. Ishmael is man who accepts ambiguity as the natural condition and makes the best of it; Ahab is man who settles for nothing less than absolutes in an incomprehensible universe.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

LIST OF CHAPTERS

APPENDIX B

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