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HISTORY IS FICTION, FICTION HISTORY: QUESTIONS OF HISTORY FORMATION IN MELVILLE'S MOBY-DICK

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ABSTRACT

Golo Mann, who is recognized in a recent article as one of the first historians to realize that their work "does not reproduce 'what actually happened' so much as represent it from a particular point of view (Burke, "History of Events" 290), describes the ideal historian as someone who must "swim with the stream of events" and tell the story as if he was there when the events occurred while analyzing them as an outside "better informed observer." In combining these two methods, the historian must be sure to "yield a sense of homogeneity […] without the narrative falling apart" (Mann 7).

While most contemporary criticism surrounding Herman Melville's Moby-Dick focuses on various metaphorical readings, if we return to a more literal reading we see that Ishmael is Mann's ideal historian. Not only is Ishmael carried along with the events "as though he was present" (7), he actually was present, and he does return to the events a later, better informed observer. With this in mind, an often decried literal reading of Moby-Dick adds to the current metaphorical scholarship because it sees Ishmael as a common man in a rapidly chancing society and explores how that man comes to terms with his own existence in such an impersonal world.

However, because Ishmael is unsure of how to deal with the events of his past and how to capture the meaning of those events on paper, he has problems with what Mann calls the "homogeneity" of his history and cannot keep his narrative from falling apart. Through an analysis of the similarities and differences of the assumptions underlying both the creation of history and the creation of fiction, and a subsequent look at how those conventions are both obeyed and subverted in Moby-Dick, we can enhance an understanding of Melville's novel as the narrator's attempt to come to terms with his own traumatic past.

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Special thanks I reserve for my parents, who were understanding and supportive when I called home one day and told them I had decided to pursue a graduate degree in English instead of medical school. God bless you all.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to the only grandfather I ever knew – Kirby "Paw-Paw" Thomas. He loved me as his own blood, even though I was not, and I will always remember him reading, smoking, drinking, and loving the ocean.

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INTRODUCTION

"Loomings"

Much of the Moby-Dick scholarship of the past twenty years has focused on metaphorical interpretations of Melville's novel concerning many different subjects. In his 1986 book, *Moby-Dick*: Ishmael's Mighty Book, Kerry McSweeney mentions that scholarship has already begun to emphasize readings dealing with the novel's commentary on "nineteenth-century America's commercial expansion" as well as its "prophetic criticism of unbridled industrialization and predatory capitalism" (3). To be sure, the trend in examining Moby-Dick as an allegorical study of nineteenth-century America as opposed to a literal whaling sea-adventure has continued. In Fred Bernard's 2002 article "The Question of Race in Moby-Dick", Bernard poses the possibility that both Ishmael and Ahab are mulatto and the *Pequod*'s northbound pursuit of whales in the Pacific is an oceangoing metaphor for slave hunters chasing and tormenting fugitive slaves fleeing north in the wake of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act (392). Ian McGuire also interprets the novel in terms of the nineteenth-century American issues surrounding race, slavery, and labor in his 2003 article, "'Who ain't a slave?': Moby-Dick and the Ideology of Free Labor." There have even been studies done about the possible homosexual relationship between Herman Melville and Nathaniel Hawthorne and the influences of that relationship on the composition of Moby-Dick.[1]

While these are all examples of viable, and often persuasive, interpretations about Herman Melville's nineteenth-century masterpiece, they ignore the fact that Moby-Dick is but one of many products of the "great age of the realistic novel" (McSweeney 10). And while much of the

[1] See Michael Bronski's "When Nathaniel Met Herman" for an example.

current scholarship has moved past reading Moby-Dick literally as a story about Ishmael's ill-fated whaling voyage, this interpretation does not necessitate the denial of Moby-Dick as a metaphorical work. What it does demand is that we see in the literal whaling voyage Melville's attempt to show one man's coming to terms with his own existence in a turbulent world which seems to remove the his own free will and place him in the whimsical hands of fate and tyrannical rulers.

In what he calls an "attempt to see what is being done in this book and perhaps why it is being done" (5), in 2001 E.L. Doctorow said that due to the habitual fluctuations of narrative, one can "make a case for Moby-Dick as a road novel" (9). In support of this claim, Mark Dunphy has argued in a 2002 article that "Moby-Dick can be viewed as the *ur*-Beat novel for On the Road" (1). Dunphy claims that Ishmael is one of the literary forefathers of Sal Paradise, in that they are both "men alienated from their culture; and they take their 'life on the road' in search of self-transformation and self-transcendence" (1). To read Moby-Dick in this light, the novel becomes a coming-of-age tale for Ishmael, and can be seen as Ishmael's cathartic act of trying to provide a sufficient explain for the events that happened on the *Pequod* "some years ago."

While relying a reading of the novel that focuses on the literal whaling adventure may seem like a simpler method of interpreting Moby-Dick than the metaphorical readings of many contemporary scholars, it presents interesting questions of its own. Though McSweeney argues that the novel is a product of nineteenth-century literary realism, he also admits that

> Moby-Dick is a boldly experimental work that anticipates some of the central techniques and devices of modernist and postmodernist prose fiction. […]. The novel ignores and/or subverts dominant nineteenth-century novelistic conventions and the assumptions that underlie them […]. (11)

One of the more problematic experiments of conventions for nineteenth-century audiences Melville makes in Moby-Dick is that of the narrator. If we read Moby-Dick as the narrator's road novel, and consequently as an attempt for him to create historical significance for the events he remembers, we also encounter specific problems of history formation because of Ishmael's integration of what can only be called "factual information" into his fictional experience.

By "factual information" I mean extraliterary sources - information that exists in the world outside of the confines of fiction. This includes information that readers perceive to be reality, which implies that it is something that Ishmael, as a fictional character, should not have access to. For example, both readers contemporary to Melville and readers contemporary to this discussion are capable of differentiating between what exists in their conception of reality and what exists as fiction. Because Ishmael is easily recognized to exist only on the level of fiction, but has knowledge of information that exists on the readers' level of reality, the line between fiction and reality is blurred, which eventually harms the believability that Ishmael is trying to develop in order for him to come to terms with what he is telling.

Doctorow likens Ishmael's use of extraliterary sources to another nineteenth-century American author, and in so doing grants Ishmael the type of existence that allows him a sort of "charactorial volition":

> Like E.A. Poe, [Ishmael] has a habit of citing extraliterary sources. […]. [A]mong Poe's bad writing habits is his attempt to provide authority for the tale he is about to tell by citing factual precedents for it. He begins "The Premature Burial," for example, by citing three or four newspaper stories about people buried prematurely – just to establish that this sort of thing can happen. […]. It's the fiction writer's admission after all that he is

> not a factualist, that he stands outside the culture of empirical truth. And as such, it's a fatally defensive
> move. (11)

Doctorow argues that there is a fundamental difference between what Poe does and what Ishmael does, however. Because Ishmael "carr[ies] on to excess outside the novel," his incorporation of extraliterary information is does not damage the believability of his narrative as it does Poe's, who uses limited extraliterary sources (11). In Doctorow's mind, because Ishmael drowns his reader with this overwhelming tide of information, it makes his narrative more persuasive than Poe's relatively timid offering of "factual evidence."

This is where I disagree with Doctorow; I do not see the use of extraliterary sources as one of Poe's "bad writing habits." Rather, Poe's tentative justification of the plausibility of his fiction makes it more believable, while Ishmael's flood of extraliterary information detracts from its believability because it excessively blurs the line between fiction and reality and never offers a clear representation of the experience the narrator seems to so desperately need to justify.

However, before I can discuss the narratorial conventions that Melville uses in Moby-Dick and how those conventions contribute to the problematic blurring of fiction and reality, I must first explain how what Ishmael is attempting to do as a character-narrator fits into the paradigm of the formation of history as well as the formation of fiction. A discussion of this must invariably turn to an analysis of the assumptions underlying what is perceived as historical reality, and what goes into the construction of that reality as opposed to what goes into the construction of fiction. Once this distinction is made, Ishmael's identity and role as a character-narrator can come into focus and fuel an understanding of what he may be attempting to do in the

divergent immensities of Moby-Dick as he works towards his own ideal self-realization through an understanding of his experience on the *Pequod*.

In Search of Something True: History Versus Fiction

While a superficial understanding of fiction and history may suggest that the two exist on opposite sides of a fundamental spectrum of reality, there are numerous crucial intersections between fiction and the "reality" of historical narratives. Perhaps because of the relatively modern perception of reality as a subjective experience and the understanding that history is a construct imposed by a dominant culture open mainly to the interpretation of those in power, the aesthetic and structural worlds of history and fiction have begun to collide with more and more frequency. One trend in historical scholarship over the past quarter-century that began with Hayden White is to recognize the similar goal of the writer of a novel and the composer of history; namely that they both want to project a "verbal image of 'reality'" (White, Tropics 122). However, according to Lloyd Kramer, many historians contemporary to White resist his redefinition of the roles of the historian and fiction author "because they seem to lead straight into relativism and straight out of reality" (101).

Indeed, according to Lionel Gossman, the traditional image of "history and fictional story-telling [is that they] confront and challenge each other at opposite poles of narrative practice" (10). As such, fiction and history may be interpreted as two halves of a theoretical coin; if fiction is expressed "face up," history must be kept "face down," and vice versa. Philosophically, this "two-sided" distinction between history and fiction presupposes a fundamental duality of nature, a binary understanding of existence that relies on the assumption

that nothing exists as a singular absolute. In Moby-Dick, Ishmael explains the concept in the simple terms of physicality: "[T]ruly to enjoy bodily warmth, some small part of you must be cold, for there is no quality in this world that is not what it is merely by contrast. Nothing exists in itself" (61). This distinction can be extended to the traditional understanding of the history/fiction binary. According to Hayden White,

> [In the early 1800s the thought was] to identify truth with fact and to regard fiction as the opposite of truth, hence as a hindrance to the understanding of reality rather than a way of apprehending it. History came to be over against fiction, and especially the novel, as the representation of the "actual" to the representation of the "possible" or only "imaginable." (Tropics 123)

However, the current ideological shift that attempts to encapsulate history and fiction together rejects the fundamental binary distinction of determinate existence. If history is understood merely as a timeline that can approach objectivity because no opinion regarding the importance or meaning of those events is presented (though this relies on the questionable assumption that nothing is left out by conscious deletion or unconscious cultural repression), the picture that history paints is incomplete. An event in itself, listed without any understanding of cause, outcome, or effect on the future, is relatively useless in the formulation of the current idea of "reality." Having a history that consists solely of a list of facts would not be acceptable as historical reality to one desiring a qualitative understanding of the history that the events outline.

Consider for effect a brief version of the history of the United States: Boats arrive from Europe; Conflicts with native groups; Conflicts with ruling European countries; Revolutionary War; Conflicts over State's Rights and Slavery; Civil War; Industrialization; World War I; Stock Market Crash; World War II; Conflicts over Civil Rights; Vietnam War; Present Day. One could

argue that this is an acceptable list of the major events in U.S. history, but by this list alone it appears that American history is characterized entirely by periods of civil unrest and war. In this "objective" list, I have created a history of events that many people would have a problem with because there is no "explanation of their causes" – the second part of the definition of history. These same events may be, and are, included in an "acceptable" version of American historical reality that does not necessarily offend as many people as the preceding list if an explanation of their causes is provided. The inclusion of an explanation is central to both history and fiction because, in creating the historical narrative that explains the events, historians are often involved in the formation of verbal fictions which are invented as readily as they are found and so share more similarities with literature than with the sciences (White, "Historical Text" 42). While historical invention is tempered by the degree to which explanations are linked to the historical events, the historian invariably engages in invention when creating scenarios that link the events without being able to justify those links with verifiable events. Were this not the case, and all historical narratives were passed through time in a complete form, history would become as objective and scientifically quantitative as the physical sciences. However, because history is only passed through time in verifiable segments, the historian is forced to invent unifying causality in order to create a coherent linear history, and therefore shares conventions of invention with the author of fiction. The fact that the invention of the historian is accepted as a version of reality while the invention of the author is not is at the heart of the distinction between history and literature. The question must invariably turn to: what, then, shall we assume is *real*?

In The Social Construction of Reality, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann define reality as "a quality pertaining to phenomena that we recognize as having a being independent of our own volition" (1). In terms of historical reality, the "phenomena" must refer to the historical events,

those points on the quasi-objective timeline that historians impose meaning upon. Those events become "real" when we accept that they occurred as the historian tells us they occurred. Without our own direct knowledge, the historian acts as an intermediary on our behalf, and we accept his or her version of the events as having occurred though they are outside our realm of knowledge, or in Berger and Luckmann's terminology, "our volition." Our personal belief systems and cultural upbringing also mediate our reception to created history, and any cultural or religious background we share with the historian increases the believability of a certain invented historical reality.

And while the general reader may not accept fiction as fact because of the fundamental difference between fiction and history, the line between the two is blurred when the author of fiction incorporates the same factual events and people as the historian into his or her fiction. Using these extraliterary sources brings the common binary distinction between history and fiction into question by mixing within the same narrative that which is understood to be real and that which is understood to be fictitious. When the author of fiction introduces a character who becomes a narrator and creates his own version of reality, it becomes easier to make a clear distinction between the acceptable reality offered by the historian and the unacceptably fictitious reality of the character-narrator.

Levels of Reality and the Formation of Historical Truth

While history contains some elements of fiction in the perpetuation of its particular image of reality, the fact that fiction may contain some elements of history does not necessitate that all works of fiction are, by default, works of history. This even extends to works of fiction that deal

with historically verifiable facts. In his essay, "Narrative Form as a Cognitive Instrument," Louis Mink holds that

> fiction may indeed be accurate in reporting some events, actions, and the details of life in a certain period, but we know this (and know that we know it), only because we can compare fiction with history, without doubting in principle which is which. (130)

What Mink argues here is that while history and fiction may be using the same verifiable events and some of the same conventions in dealing with those events, there is some inherent distinction that differentiates history and fiction.

White provides one possibility for understanding the distinction between history and fiction by placing the responsibility for historical understanding on the shoulders of the historian as well as the reader. Reality formation is then a joint venture by both the reader and the historian: "[F]or history both the structure of the narrative and its details are representative of past actuality; and the claim to be a true representation is understood by both the writer and reader" (Tropics 130). The narrative structure and the details of history are set up from its inception to be understood as history by both the historian who must believe in the history he or she is setting forth, and the reader who is persuaded to accept the reality of the historian through the narrative but must be receptive to that version of reality in the first place.

The historian's assumed belief in his story and the reader's initial receptivity to that history is central when coupled with the notion that there is no inherent historical reality to any historically factual events. Just because an event occurred does not automatically grant it status as a "historical event." Accepted versions of history are only created in retrospect; there is no fixed or predetermined meaning to facts or events. When a significant event occurs, it is often referred to as "history in the making," which implies that at a future time the event will be given

historical significance. We can apply criteria from previous events that have been deemed "historical" to predict which current events will one day be granted this historicity based on shared attributes, but there is no immediate quality of history that can be ascribed to any singular event. Thus, history is only given retrospective linguistic existence because after the passing of the physical occurrence the event only exists in language.

One of the most common examples of "history in the making" is trauma. Traumatic events, especially those that occur on a national or world-wide scale, are often understood to be events that will be historicized even while they are occurring because many of the events we accept as historical share qualities of trauma. Trauma also plays an important role in the progression of literature, because these events beg to be fictionalized as rapidly as they are converted into an historical reality. According to White,

> The greatest historians have always dealt with those events in the histories of their cultures that are "traumatic" […] events such as revolutions, civil wars, large-scale processes such as industrialization or urbanization, or institutions that have lost their original function in a society but continue to play an important role in the current social scene. ("Historical Texts" 51)

However, the designation of what is "traumatic" can be as subjective as history itself. There is an assumption that trauma is an intrinsic quality that is immediately identifiable in certain events, generally revolving around the loss of life, property, or money. But as White again makes clear, there is no historical event that can be "traumatic" of its own accord; there can only be a sense of trauma perceived in the context of the event by the historian's narrative technique (47). White's view does not negate qualities of emotional trauma in favor of purely physically traumatic experiences, and it would be remiss not to recognize that people do experience

"traumas" that have profound and immediate effects on their lives. But according to White's interpretation of the positing of meaning on history, the creation of the sense of widespread trauma is contingent upon the repression of certain viewpoints while highlighting others. In almost any instance, a tragic event can be turned into a joyous one by switching the viewpoints. For example, consider the Haitian coup d'etat and removal of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. For Aristide's supporters the coup was a national trauma, but for his opponents it was an event to be celebrated. In any "traumatic" event, the group not adversely affected by the event may be able to empathize with those who are, but they do not see the event as inherently traumatic.

As Mink in "Narrative Form" and White in Tropics of Discourse have previously intimated, we see Lionel Gossman in "History and Literature: Reproduction or Signification" contend that the larger realm of history is given existence through linguistics:

> One of the most effective and radical criticisms of historical realism has been made by highlighting the linguistic experience of historical narratives, by emphasizing that history constructs its objects, and that its objects are objects of language, rather than entities of which words are in some way copies. From this point of view, the *battle of Gettysburg*, for instance, does not designate unproblematically something solid in reality that is prior to any naming of it. The semiology of history, moreover, is more complex than language itself. (29)

Essentially, Gossman is arguing that one of the most significant problems of history formation is that history does not exist as a physical entity, and the factual events of history cannot be proven because their physicality ends the moment the event is over. In Gossman's example of the battle of Gettysburg, he claims that the designation "the battle of Gettysburg" no longer refers to men physically fighting on a field in Pennsylvania – that reference was only good for the period in

time that the battle was taking place – but due to the nature of history, at that point the event was not historical. So "the battle of Gettysburg" is now a *signifier* of an event that once occurred in reality but now only occurs through language. The present language event, or *signife*, is now the historical reality and was created by the historian to correspond to the *signifier*.

This is complicated because, as opposed to the physical reality, the historical reality was never actual since it only ever exists in its linguistic form. Gossman continues:

> In historical writing, the signs of language become signifiers in a secondary system elaborated by the historian. What already has meaning at the level of language becomes an empty form again until, being brought into relation with an historically definable *signife*, or concept, it constitutes a new sign at a different level of meaning. Historical discourse thus has the character of a language constructed out of material that is itself already a language. (29)

The secondary level that Gossman refers to here can be linked to the secondary level of reality that exists in a fiction. Imagine reality as a series of steps; the physical "actual" world exists on the bottom level. Information about this primary level is gathered through language by those existing on the same level, but the physical reality of the level is verifiable. The author or historian who exists on this level synthesizes the information gathered though language, and then turns around and uses the same language to create another reality on the second level.[2] Language is used in history as it is in fiction to create a world existing entirely of language – there is no physicality in the secondary level in either fiction or history. One may be able to prove the existence of concepts, people, or events that are represented in the secondary level, but, in order to do so, one must return to the primary level and even then must rely heavily on language-based documents. In some cases, one may prove historical physicality through

[2] See Diagram 1: Secondary Level of Reality

photographs, ruins, or artifacts, but the narrative that creates the history from those articles invariably exists only in the realm of language because interpretive strategies for developing linear explanations for those artifacts must rely on a system of representations that is only perpetuated through language. Therefore, the author or the historian must take information gathered though language and re-posit meaning into the information by packaging it in the language of the second level.

In "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact," White tells us that while the historian is recycling information and repositioning it on the secondary level, he or she is invariably suppressing some events and highlighting others, evolving characterization, shifting tone and/or point of view, and shifting descriptive strategies – essentially all of the techniques that are generally used in the production of literature (47). The historian is using all of these tools to "refamiliarize us with events that have been forgotten either through accident, neglect, or repression" (51). However, because the historian must, consciously or unconsciously, repress some events in order to refamiliarize us with others, he or she is continually involved in subjective second-level history creation.

Because information-gathering on the primary level is never absolute or complete, the historian must turn to the major tool of the author of fiction – imagination. According to Gossman, an emphasis is placed on the ever-increasing role of the historian's individual aesthetic and moral sensibilities, social status, and, most importantly, his or her imagination in the "determination of the problem studied, and in the shaping of the historical narrative" (28). But the use of the imagination must be tempered with the historian's constant desire to know the past in the same way that the scientist wants to know the natural world; that is, objectively (29). But because the imagination is a crucial element of the historian's research, this objectivity can never

be completely achieved. Fundamentally, then, even when dealing with the same issues and historical events, the historian is going through many of the same processes as the author of fiction, but the audience's sense that the historian's work is attempting to pursuade them to believe the reality it creates ultimately gives it more validity in a cultural understanding than the work of the author of fiction.

The reason that history and fiction can be discussed in this manner, and the reason for discussing the problems surrounding history creation in conjunction with understanding fiction, is touched on in Nielsen's discussion of Dorrit Cohn's The Distinction of Fiction:

> A work of fiction creates the world to which it refers by referring to it. […]. [Cohn] speaks of how fiction can still refer to the real world (14), but that this reference does not need to be precise or exclusive (15), and as a result the most important fact is left unmentioned: "the real world" outside the text and "the real world" as it is created in the text are by necessity not the same, and the world to which the text refers is nonetheless created in and by the reference of the text, even when the text contains characters, places, and occurrences that we know from "the real world." (145)

When we read a work of fiction we are invited transport ourselves to a world parallel to our own, a world that we understand does not exist in the same terms that ours does. However, for the characters within the novel, the reality the author creates for them is their fundamental physical reality or "actuality." Recall that the author of fiction, like the historian, creates a reality based on language – to the characters formed within the confines of that language-based reality, the reality is not language based; it is their verifiable actuality. We, as exterior readers, can never validate this reality because we do not exist on the same plane of verifiability that the characters do.

However, while both the historian and the author of fiction create a reality based on language and use some of the same narrative conventions, some conventions are available to the author of fiction that are "off-limits" to the historian. In "History of Events and the Revival of Narrative," Peter Burke asserts,

> Some innovations are probably best avoided by historians. In this group I would include the invention of someone's stream of consciousness, useful as it might be, for the same reasons that have led historians to reject the famous classical device of the invented speech. (289)

While the historian may be forced to subjectify history by engaging his or her imaginative creativity in order to explain the chronicle of events, he or she generally stops short of attempting to show interpersonal interaction, conversation, or thoughts, with the possible exception of when direct sources of such information exists. Doing so would blur the distinction between history and fiction, a distinction that Louis Mink claims is integral for the integrity of historiography. This leads to one of the most prominent distinctions between the historian and the author of fiction; the author can create the conversations between the characters involved in a historical event in order to explain, fictitiously but often logically, the reasons behind the events, and the personal motivations of those perpetuating and affected by those events. The historian often relies on a putatively impersonal representation of the events, which hides the subjectivity of history through a scientific tone which begs to be interpreted as objective and therefore believable. Some historians "go so far as to dismiss what they call 'intentionalism' altogether" and view the motivations and drives of historical figures as virtually insignificant (Burke, "New History" 16). The author of fiction, conversely, has the ability to set up personal relationships between the characters within the events which make them more "human" because we can

identify with their motivations and desires in situations similar to our own personal experiences. This provides a means for some readers to connect with the characters in such a way that they are invited to insert themselves into the second-level reality of fiction, which consequently indicates strong subjectivity and thereby differentiates between the fiction and the history. This fiction may function as reality in the sense that the reader who connects with the character emotionally commits to the story and may even recognize some facts as having a historical existence, but the subjectivity of the created interpersonal atmosphere destroys any semblance of historical actuality.

This scenario is further complicated when the story is not told through the author or an impersonal narrator, but rather through a character within the frame of the fiction itself. When dealing with an author from the primary level of reality telling a story on the second, it is possible to forge a connection with the characters that allows some degree of acceptance of the story because there is a connection not only with the characters but also with the author. We know that we, as readers, and the author both exist on the same primary plane of reality. When the primary-level author creates a fiction that draws on extratextual reality of the first level, we can accept some things because we know that we have access to the same knowledge of actuality as the author. Recall Doctorow's example concerning Poe cited above; a contemporary reader with access to a database of nineteenth-century newspapers can verify the articles Poe includes about stories of people being buried alive. This theoretical verifiability promotes a sense of security in reading that allows a degree of suspension of disbelief in the second-level story. However, when a character becomes the author and creates a history, there is no recourse to check the information that the character-author has because we do not both exist on the same plane of reality. Because we can only accept information at our discretion that comes from the

primary author, when a character creates a history we can believe that there is a character telling a story, but we cannot commit to the reality that the character is trying to portray. The character becomes an author, but is not reliable in the sense that we can rely unquestioningly on the story's truth.

Returning to the image of the step-level understanding of narrative history, the character who exists as a construct of the language-based reality of the second level and tells a separate historical narrative winds up creating a third level of reality that is two steps removed from the actuality of the physical author and the physical reader.[3] Examples of character-authors of this order include many first-person narrators, such as the many narrators in many of Faulkner's Yoknatapawpha writings, Robert Walton from Shelly's Frankenstein, and Ishmael from Melville's Moby-Dick, discussed below. In order to easily differentiate between the physical author and the character-author of the second level, I will henceforth refer to the physical author as the "Author" and the character-author as the "author." While the author may integrate some of the same events from verifiable first level actuality as the Author in an attempt to make his story or history seemingly verifiable, this attempt invariably fails. While the author may be using extraliterary information, it is information that has been assimilated by the Author and recreated in the realm of language, which is not verifiable at all by the reader. The fact that there is no reason to trust the author as reliable presents a problem for the acceptance of the author's story and denigrates the suspension of disbelief that generally allows readers to become engulfed in the reality of the second level created by Authors. In many second-level stories, a suspension of disbelief instills some connection between a reader and the secondary characters and events, even while the reader exists on the first level. But when the author creates a story on the third

[3] See Diagram 2: Third Level of Reality

level, the degree of separation between the reader and the author disallows a connection with the story which may be present in a second level story.

If we return to the Berger-Luckmann definition of reality, we see that in the second-level stories, because the audience is invited to suspend disbelief, it is understood that what is being told to them by the Author is independent of their own experience. It becomes unclear that the story being told is actually being created by someone, and so it becomes burred with reality in the sense that appears to exist outside of the audience's control. But in the third-level stories the existence of the author as a character is obvious, and while the reality of that character is believable, it is always apparent that the story character is telling is the creation of a creation, and thus is too far removed from a verifiably acceptable reality to be believed.

To fully understand this, we must now answer the question of what can be verifiably, or objectively, known within the realm of fiction. Since the second-level story is actually not something that can be verified but is acceptable nonetheless, what is it about this level that makes it fundamentally different from the third-level? Why can information given about the second level be accepted as having an independent existence?

To answer this, consider religious texts, which are a singularly interesting case in terms of history and literature. In many passages from the Judeo-Christian religious texts (I use this as an example merely due to personal knowledge, though almost any religious text could be used in its place), the form of the narrative reads more like fiction than history, though for centuries religious texts have been, and still are in some quarters, accepted as historical fact. If the presence of dialogue or personal thoughts within the narrative is a qualification for fiction, how does one come to terms with the fact that the Bible has many stories that rely heavily on interpersonal interactions between the characters that the authors could have no knowledge of

but is still considered to be an objective compilation of historical actuality? For some Christians, the answer to this question is God. In many Christian churches, the Bible is referred to as "the word of God," immediately giving validity to any passage from the book. There need be no other proof for some Fundamentalist or Creationist Christians that the world was created in seven days other than the fact that the Bible says it was, and the Bible came from God, the ultimate authority over reality.

But in creating worlds, the God of creation has no more authority over objectivity than does the Author of a novel. According to Martin Buber, "'the establishment of a universe […] is the fundamental reality of existence'" (qtd. in Molinar 63). Therefore, God has the ability to dictate objectivity in this world because He created this world. In a strong sense, God is the Author of the first level of the three-level diagram of reality and the Author is the God of the second level.[4] This theory does not advocate "Author-worship," but it does rely on the premise that a reader has a degree, and any degree will do, of faith in the Author's ability to create a fictional reality. The reader need not believe *in* this reality as long as he or she believes that the Author can, and does, create it. When a reader has this faith, whatever information that comes through the Author, usually personified through an impersonal narrator, can be understood as second-level objective reality.

What is understood as objective in the above description of second-level reality is relatively limited, however. Because "objectivity" is a debatable concept, in the context of what can be "known" in fiction, objectivity must be ultimately based on physical experience. In the "actual" world, objectivity is most easily described as information that one perceives through his or her own senses – we objectively know the world immediately around us. Because we cannot physically enter the world of fiction, we are unable to get this same physical experience of that

[4] See Diagram 3: God as First-Level Author

world, so the Author provides a surrogate sensory experience through the description of the setting. The faith that accepts the Author as God of fiction allows the Author to neutrally describe the physical surrounding in such a way that it becomes objective through the reading, a concept I define as "neutreality."

This neutreality is almost exclusively limited to third person narratives. In first person accounts, the Author is removed from his or her creation, and the drive of the narrative rests on the shoulders of the "I" – a character that the Author has created. Therefore, everything that we see, including description of setting, is colored through this character that is not in control of the environment in the same way that the Author is. In fact, Wayne Booth has alleged that "the choice of the first person is sometimes unduly limiting; if the 'I' has inadequate access to necessary information, the author may be led into improbabilities" (150). By "author" Booth is referring to the Author who exists on the first level, who may be "led into improbabilities" because of the inability to create a verifiable second-level reality.

Consider the difficulties of knowledge presented through the limitations of the first person narrator in Mary Shelly's Frankenstein. In Frankenstein, the information given comes through letters written by Robert Walton to a person he names Mrs. Saville. Because the entire story is presented within the framework of a series of letters, one can never be completely sure of anything that is occurring. The letters indicate that Robert Walton is stuck aboard a ship amidst an ice field and one day happens upon a man trapped on a floating ice block. He and the crew take the man aboard and he eventually tells Walton his fantastic tale about creating a monster that he is now chasing across the Arctic; a story that Walton in turn writes down in letters, which is how we access it. The main story of Frankenstein, the story of the creature, is then placed on a fourth level of reality because it is not only being told by a character on the second level, it could

be told by a character on the third level, since Frankenstein never directly appears in the text. There is nothing at all indicating that Frankenstein is not a figment of Walton's imagination, which, if true, means that the creature is the figment (Frankenstein's) of a figment (Walton's) of a figment (Shelly's) of imagination. The only thing in Frankenstein that comes from the Author and therefore exists as neutreality is that there is someone who calls himself Robert Walton writing letters to someone he calls his sister. There is no proof that Walton ever meets Frankenstein, or that he is even on a ship. With the degree of insight and the apparently uncanny ability of Walton to remember Frankenstein's story, it would not be unreasonable to assume that perhaps Walton is making the entire thing up, and nothing to indicate that he is not doing it from dry land – perhaps from an asylum. While there is no proof that Walton is a lunatic and has created the fanciful story of the tormented scientist and his renegade monster, there is no proof that he is not. Because Shelly never enters into her created reality and asserts herself as the God of that world, one is forced to be completely immersed in, at least, the third level of reality. Thus, this form of narrative history creation, since that is what the characters in the novel are essentially doing – creating a history – I shall call "total immersion history formation."

While total immersion history formation may make for good fiction, it does not make for good history because the lack of seemingly acceptable objective information continually calls attention to the fictitiousness of the work. Then question may then arise, what does the author of fiction care about the validity of history, and why is this discussion important for an understanding of Moby-Dick? The answer to this question is found in the foreword to the English-language edition of Golo Mann's history, Wallenstein, which was criticized by his German contemporaries as being literature:

> The historian has always to try to do two different things simultaneously. He must swim through the stream of events, allowing himself to be carried along as though he had been present. He must from outside converge on his subject from various directions, a later, better informed observer, and catechize it, yet never quite have it in the hollow of his hand. How to combine these two methods so as to yield a semblance of homogeneity and without the narrative falling apart, that would be a man of letters' concern. (7)

Mann here combines the roles of the historian and the "man of letters" into one discrete act, and this is precisely what the narrator attempts to do in Moby-Dick. The narrator, calling himself Ishmael, attempts to return to the events of his past, "a later, better informed observer," and contemplates it "from various directions" using various conventions of narrative. In Mann's eyes, Ishmael would be the ideal historian, and Moby-Dick should be the perfect history, but I will show that through the fluctuating narrative voice and the inconsistent observance of the levels of reality, Moby-Dick can be re-interpreted as the failed attempt to effectively come to terms with one's troubling history.

THE PROBLEMATIC HISTORY OF THE *PEQUOD*

What's in a Name?: Clues to the Real Identity of "Ishmael"

With one of the most recognizable opening lines in American literature, "Call me Ishmael," Herman Melville introduces his audience to a world wherein extraliterary truth and Ishmael's "historical reality" are intertwined. Because the narrator introduces himself as Ishmael from the outset and Melville does not provide any objective second-level information, Melville effectively bestows the power to create and control the literary universe on his fictitious narrator. Unlike most first-person, present tense total immersion narratives wherein one is immersed in the secondary level of reality, when Melville immediately introduces a narrator who calls himself Ishmael, the narrative jumps to the third level of reality because the story is told by a character-narrator. There is no evidence that Ishmael is this narrator's name; in fact, it appears as though Ishmael is only a name assumed by the narrator for the purposes of telling his story. Therefore, when Melville's narrator, who exists on the second level of reality, begins to tell his history as Ishmael, he is creating a third level of reality for Ishmael. In essence, though the narrator may have experienced the events he relates concerning the *Pequod*, he is not Ishmael. Ishmael is a fictional representation of the self who embarked on the voyage of which he is the lone survivor. This understanding of Melville's narrator presents tremendous problems for the acceptance of history formation in Moby-Dick because Ishmael repeatedly attempts to transcend the levels of reality in which he is confined. While we may not know any information about the second level narrator thanks to Melville's self-removal from Moby-Dick, we can come to some understandings of the second-level truth through Ishmael's repeated historical transgressions.

Edgar Dryden refers to Ishmael's problematic name assumption in Melville's Thematics of Form:

> In assuming a new name, especially one as heavily allusive as Ishmael, [the narrator] leaves behind his 'own proper character' along with the discarded patronym and takes on a whole new set of possibilities – in effect, occupies a whole new world. (85)

The "whole new world" that Dryden refers to here is the third level of reality in the step-level theory of narrative history formation. While Melville creates the narrator that is speaking to us through the pages, the narrator re-creates himself through the character of Ishmael, a character that we as readers must take at face value because we are given no objective information about him. Melville gives all powers of creation to this narrator, but we cannot believe his version of reality because Ishmael, like Frankenstein, is a figment (narrator's) of a figment (Melville's) of imagination. Again, Dryden refers to this idea without clearly delineating the concept of the third level:

> At the time of writing, the narrator is *called* Ishmael precisely because he no longer plays the role identified by the name. No longer actor but teller, he names himself in order to reveal that all names are pseudonyms.
>
> By *calling* himself Ishmael, the narrator establishes his identity as a purely verbal one. (87)

While "all names may be pseudonyms" in the sense that each of us is responsible for creating our own persona which eventually comes to be signified by our name, "Ishmael" differs because the narrator assumes a name which carries with it a preconceived Biblical persona outside of the narrator's own personal experience. Dryden connects Ishmael's history with Gossman's theory of the "present language event," or *signife*, and the historical event, the *signifier*. Because the

narrator exists on the secondary level of reality, but only exists to the reader as Ishmael on the third level, and no objective information about the secondary level is provided by the Author-god (Melville), Ishmael creates a reality based on a linguistic system of *signifies* that the reader has no knowledge of. But, as Dryden tells us, because Ishmael does not believe in the existence of knowledge as dependent on the uncovering of factual evidence, the history based on linguistic *signifies* is not problematic. For Ishmael, knowledge and reality depend on "a turning away from the factual world, a retreat into an imaginary reality where the only visible objects are literary ones, products of the imaginative realm they inhabit" (84). In general, Ishmael's history formation revolves in a cycle of literary and linguistic reality as opposed to physical reality. But this is acceptable because as McSweeney tells us, Ishmael "knows that the keys to sympathetic identification lie in the reader's imagination and memory" (44). Ishmael says himself about his narrative that "without imagination no man can follow another into these halls" (160). Because there is no first-level factuality or solid objective second-level information given by the Author, it is difficult for the reader to find a solid informational reference point on which to orient himself in the framework of Ishmael's story, so faith and imagination become central to a "sympathetic identification."

Like Mann's ideal historian, Ishmael must fill in what he accepts as the factual chronology of events with a number of traditional literary conventions in order to provide the cohesive narrative chain that is necessary for giving meaning to the historical facts. But because in this case the historical facts exist on the second level instead of the first, and according to Dryden, the world of the *Pequod* "is obviously a fictional one […]. [This] world, in other words, is a literary one, and [Ishmael's history] can be understood only in this context" (90-1). It is also only in this context that we can understand Ishmael's literary persona.

As briefly noted above, the name "Ishmael" appears to be an unusual *signifier* to represent the principle *signife* – the person who shipped on the *Pequod* and survived to tell the tale. According to Dryden, in Moby-Dick, "the reader is invited to share an experience with someone who apparently, for reasons of his own, has chosen to conceal his name behind an unlikely Biblical allusion" (85). While Ishmael may be an obscure reference, the choice of pseudonym is not arbitrary. There are numerous Biblical parallels throughout Ishmael's narrative, none more obvious than the story of Jonah and the whale, and the Christian religion is a prominent component of the narrator's personality. Ishmael spends three chapters describing the chapel and the sermon that he hears in Nantucket before he ships out, and even claims that "the pulpit is ever the earth's foremost part; all the rest comes in the rear; the pulpit leads the way […]. Yes, the world's a ship on its passage out, and not a voyage complete, and the pulpit is its prow" (Melville 50). Ishmael's Christianity provides one of his most readily accessible extraliterary sources and presents itself as a possible link between himself and the reader because the Christian religion exists on the same primary level as the reader. The narrator is pulling from a base of information that the reader has access to even if he or she does not share Ishmael's knowledge of Christianity.

The significance of the assumption of Ishmael as a name relies on this connection because an understanding of the Biblical Ishmael can provide clues to the persona that the narrator wishes to adopt for the purposes of telling the story, which gives some idea of the narrator's self-image. We can assume a reliable projection of the Biblical Ishmael onto the personality of the narrator because he uses other Biblical names for characters throughout the story and we can recognize a pattern of characterization between the Biblical and Moby-Dick-ian namesakes. We can assume that the narrator understands the religious significance of the name Ishmael and has not renamed

himself arbitrarily because he recognizes the religious significance of the other Biblical names he uses. Aside from Ishmael, the most prominent religious name in the narrator's history is that of the monomaniacal Captain Ahab. We know that the narrator recognizes the significance of Ahab's name because when Peleg reminds him that Ahab of old was a king, Ishmael replies, "'And a very vile one. When that wicked king was slain, the dogs, did they not lick his blood?'" (80). Because the name Ahab refers to a story which exists on the first level, we can validate the claims laid out on the third level by Ishmael, and we do see that in the Christian Bible, when Ahab dies "the dogs licked up his blood" (I Kings 22:38).

While it must be admitted that there is not a literal connection between every aspect of the Biblical Ahab and the captain of the *Pequod*, for Captain Ahab never has his blood licked by dogs, there are parallels between the two characters. The Biblical Ahab was a "vile" and "wicked king" of Israel, but he also had moments of meekness and humanity. In I Kings, after a prophet tells Ahab the Lord has decreed, "'I will bring disaster on you. I will consume your descendants and cut off from Ahab every last male in Israel" (21:21), Ahab humbles himself and fasts, which prompts the Lord to postpone his disaster. Though Ahab's wickedness eventually leads to his death, there are glimpses of humanity in him. This is where we can see a parallel between the Biblical Ahab and Captain Ahab. The captain of a ship is the equivalent to a king on land and in "The Cabin Table" chapter Ishmael refers to Captain Ahab as "King Ahab" (128). And while the degree to which Captain Ahab is inherently wicked is debatable, his unrelenting desire for revenge ultimately leads him and his entire crew to their destruction.[5] However, like the Biblical Ahab, Peleg tells Ishmael:

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[6] For discussions of Captain Ahab's malignity, see Henry Pommer's Milton and Melville and Leslie Sheldon's "Messianic Power and Satanic Decay: Milton in Moby-Dick."

> "[…] [W]rong not Captain Ahab, because he has a wicked name. 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? No, no, my lad; stricken, blasted, if he be, Ahab has his humanities!" (81)

Here again we get a divergence between the Biblical Ahab and Captain Ahab in that King Ahab's wife, Jezebel, is one of the most recognizably malicious women in literature *or* history and is one of the motivating influences on King Ahab's wickedness, while Captain Ahab's wife is supposedly a sweet woman who serves to ground Captain Ahab's compassion.

The other readily identifiable Biblical name is that of a secondary character introduced in "The Prophet" chapter. While this character does not play an essential role in the development of Ishmael's history, he does support the assumption that the Biblical names give a first-level insight into the third-level characters. In this chapter, a grizzled old seaman accosts Ishmael and Queequeg after they have signed to ship on the *Pequod*. He concerns Ishmael with the story of Ahab's first battle with the white whale and mentions the fact that the loss of Ahab's leg occurred "'according to the prophecy'" (89). He makes an ominous statement about Ahab's quest being "'all fixed and arranged a'ready'" (90), and directly before Ishmael and Queequeg are to board for the voyage says, "'I was going to warn ye against—but never mind, never mind—it's all one, all in the family too'" (93). Not only may this be a reference to the destruction of the *Pequod*'s crew-family, it also may be an allusion to the Biblical Elijah's prophecy that God will consume Ahab's descendants and destroy his house (I Kings 21:21-22). Ishmael, not wanting to encourage the man from speaking more but overcome with curiosity, learns that the man is named Elijah. Ishmael's recorded reaction to this is crucial: "Elijah! thought I, and we walked away" (90). While he does not directly comment on the religious

significance of the name Elijah, the fact that he recorded an exclamation mark as indicative of his mental reaction tells us that he is aware of the meaning behind the name. Indeed, when we return to the Biblical *signife*, we see that Elijah is not only a prophet, he is the same prophet that gave King Ahab the pronouncement from the Lord that his family would be destroyed. Therefore, not only are the lives of the Biblical Ahab and Elijah intertwined, the lives of the Ishmael-ian Ahab and Elijah are intertwined as well. Accepting this, we can now look at the Biblical Ishmael in order to learn about the second-level narrator who is projecting his self-image through the Ishmael *signifier*.

Ishmael enters Judeo-Christian history in Genesis 16. Because Abraham and his wife Sarah could not conceive a child, Abraham fathered a child with Sarah's servant Hagar. However, tensions arose between Sarah and Hagar while Hagar was pregnant and she fled. According to Genesis 16:9, an angel of the Lord came to Hagar and told her to return to her mistress. The angel goes on to tell her,

> "You are now with child
> and you will have a son.
> You shall name him Ishmael,
> for the Lord has heard of your misery.
> He will be a wild donkey of a man;
> his hand will be against everyone
> and everyone's hand against him,
> and he will live in hostility
> toward all his brothers." (16:11-12)

Abraham later prays on Ishmael's behalf and gets God to reconsider: "'And as for Ishmael, I have heard you: I will surely bless him, I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers'" (Genesis 17:20).

While we do not see much of the "wild donkey of a man" who does not get along with anyone in the Ishmael of Moby-Dick, we do get a sense that he is a societal cast-away. He does admit that before he decides to ship off to sea, it often "requires a strong moral principle to prevent [him] from deliberately stepping into the street, and methodically knocking people's hats off" (Melville 23). It appears that Ishmael has at least the soul of a social outcast, and he insinuates that it is a common practice for him to go to sea. It is his "pistol and ball" – his way of personally eliminating the frustrations of the world (Melville 23).

In keeping with the possible parallels between the Biblical and Melvillean Ishmaels, it is also significant that God specifically tells Abraham that he will bless Ishmael. This could be part of the narrator's reasoning behind the fact that he was the only member of the *Pequod* to survive Moby-Dick's assault. There are many religious figures whose names the narrator could have used to serve his purpose: Job, whom Ishmael quotes in the Epilogue as saying, "'And I only am escaped alone to tell thee,'" would have been an appropriate allusion (Melville 432). And if the narrator did float for a day among the sharks that swam by "as with padlocks on their mouths" and the "savage sea-hawks [that] sailed with sheathed beaks," surely the Biblical Daniel, who spent a night among lions with closed mouths, would have been a meaningful namesake (432). But the Lord's blessing of Ishmael carries the same salvational significance; if the narrator was having a problem justifying his survival, it would not have been appropriate to use either Job or Daniel, two men who were both saved by their unfaltering devotion to their God. Because Ishmael tells us that he takes to sea only as a way to prevent himself from lashing out at society,

it makes more sense to draw upon the connotations of Ishmael, the outcast re-welcomed into the fold, in the creation of his literary persona. Because these connotations draw upon first-level information accessible to readers, we are given a means to connect with the narrator Ishmael despite the tremendous gap between the first and the third levels of reality.

Ishmael is aware of the connection that he provides by creating his persona with the help of first-level accessible information and realizes the value of objective information in regards to the degree in which it makes his story more believable. Because of this, he interjects verifiable first-level information throughout his entire narrative. At face value, the events that occurred on the *Pequod* which inspired Ishmael to tell this tale are meaningless because they only exist, even as an objective chronology of events, on the second level of reality, and thanks to the total immersion narrative structure of Moby-Dick, the reader has no access to this information. The only second-level information that can be taken as "objective truth" from the Author is the fact that the narrator was on the *Pequod* and was the only sailor rescued by the *Rachel*. This information is acceptable by the reader only because there is the theoretical possibility that if we were granted the ability to exist on the second level with the narrator, we could then go and investigate Ishmael's story; we could ask the crew of the *Rachel* if they did in fact meet the *Pequod* on its pursuit of the white whale and then later rescue a single man floating in the middle of the ocean on a coffin. Because there is that theoretical avenue of verifiability, we trust that Ishmael is not lying to us. However, everything else that occurred on the *Pequod* is eternally un-verifiable because there are no other surviving members of the crew to validate Ishmael's story.

Objectivity and Narrative Shifts in Ishmael's History

While I will later argue that Chapter 25 concludes the first section of Ishmael's actual narrative, there is an important structural shift that occurs Chapter 32, "Cetology." Here, for the first time, Ishmael begins to incorporate first level verifiable information into his increasingly subjective narrative in an attempt to validate himself as both a storyteller and an historian. This is where we get the first real glimpse of the failure of Ishmael's narrative to portray "what happened" as historical reality and his attempt to link his history to the actuality of the first level of reality. Paul Lukacs, in "The Abandonment of Time and Place: History and Narrative, Metaphysics and Exposition in Melville's Moby-Dick," explains the shifts in narrative form throughout Moby-Dick by arguing that

> Ishmael's struggle as the narrator to make sense of what he experienced as a character is what leads to the radical changes in the book's form. Those changes do not signal a quarrel with fiction. Instead, they signal a quarrel with narrative history—the chronological form supporting factual as well as fictional story-telling. The expository middle third of the book, in which chapter after chapter Ishmael dissects both a whale and the business of whaling, exists in the present of his composition, not in the past of the *Pequod*'s sailing. It not only divides his narratives, but also calls into question the assumption underlying them—namely, that a history that tells "what happened" can truly represent reality. (140)

At the beginning of this Chapter 25, Ishmael grants, "Already we are boldly launched upon the deep; but soon we shall be lost in its unshored, harborless immensities" (116). He turns to a familiar metaphor, going to sea, to explain the task he has undertaken. By attempting to

reproduce a historical reality out of what is now a linguistic experience, Ishmael is embarking boldly upon the treacherous depths of reality. In doing this, he knows that he must move away from objective physical reality out into the "unshored, harborless immensities." Without the theoretical objectivity to fall back on, he will be adrift with only his ship, literally and metaphorically the *Pequod*, to keep his historical reality above water. Thus, in "Cetology," Ishmael makes his first attempt to stay connected to objective reality by cataloguing the scientific truths behind his story. By doing this Ishmael claims that he is providing information necessary to a "thorough appreciative understanding of the more special leviathanic revelations and allusions of all sorts which are to follow" (116), though he seems to be attempting to persuade his readers that the "harborless" history he is creating is believable because it incorporates verifiable information. While the use of extraliterary facts are important to him, McSweeney contends that "'natural verity' is not an end for Ishmael; it is a means. The facts are used to provide a basis and an authenticating context for the larger speculative issues in which he is passionately interested and in which he wants his audience to become interested in as well" (46). In order to further validate himself as a "truthful" narrator, Ishmael attempts to prove to the reader that he knows the subject of his story intimately. And again, in proving that he is someone that can be trusted, Ishmael turns his third-level literary world over to the primary-level sources:

> It is some systematized exhibition of the whale in his broad genera, that I would now fain to put before you. Yet it is no easy task. The classification of the constituents of a chaos, nothing less is here essayed. Listen to what the best and latest authorities have laid down. (116)

While Ishmael exists as a third level creation of the second-level narrator, the second-level narrator exists as a creation of the first-level Author. Through the interconnected chain of knowledge that all three storytellers have, Ishmael does have access to this type of primary-level information, and this information is what can give the reader some insight into the reality that the narrator draws on for the creation of Ishmael and his history.

Ishmael admits that cataloguing whales is a monumental task that he is not above stepping away from and allowing people more qualified than he to step in and further his narrative when he cannot. This again is an attempt to make himself seem trustworthy because if he is willing to cite other people when his own personal knowledge is insufficient, it stands to reason that when Ishmael does speak is it because he feels confident enough in his own narrative abilities. However, Ishmael never gains enough confidence in his narrative abilities to completely allow the history to revolve around his own voice; he repeatedly returns to the relative security of the expository form by explaining verifiable information about the business of whaling intermittedly through Chapter 125, "The Log and Line." After this Ishmael essentially removes himself completely from the history in order to capture the reality of the last few days of the *Pequod*.

One of the most significant uses of extraliterary sources defends Ishmael's physical description of whaling scenes. When describing what the whales look like for any readers who may not have ever seen one, Ishmael gives a brief summary of artistic whale images. He begins by describing erroneous or "Monstrous Pictures of Whales" from ancient India and Egypt on up to 1836 (212). He then provides a chapter on "The Less Erroneous Pictures of Whales, and the True Pictures of Whaling Scenes" (216). In these chapters, Ishmael provides descriptions of actual paintings, and assesses each as a realistic portrayal of the majesty of the whale. According to Ishmael, "the finest, though in some details not the most correct, presentations of whales and

whaling scenes to be anywhere found, are two large French engravings, well executed, and taken from paintings by one Garneray" (216). Ishmael goes on to describe in great detail, and accurately, the two paintings by A.L. Garneray, both painted around 1835. That these paintings exist as factual objects and Ishmael appears to have an intimate knowledge of them blurs the line between his literary reality and the reader's physical reality, and enhances the appearance of his reliability.

Once Ishmael has provided a link between the third and first levels of reality and has convinced the reader to accept his narrative abilities, he must deal with the problem of believability in the story of a whale attacking a boat. Ishmael is aware that many readers may express the same sentiments as Starbuck in "The Quarter-Deck" chapter: "'Vengeance on a dumb brute!... that simply smote thee from blindest instinct! Madness!'" (139). Ishmael is presented with the problem that readers may not believe that a whale would decide to maliciously attack a ship. He understands this problem, and speaks to it directly:

> But fortunately the special point I here seek can be established upon testimony entirely independent of my own. That point is this: The Sperm Whale is in some cases sufficiently powerful, knowing, and judiciously malicious, as with direct aforethought to stave in, utterly destroy, and sink a large ship; and what it more, the Sperm Whale *has* done it. (171)

It is significant that Ishmael is relieved that he can rely on independent testimony in order to validate the action he will describe in the forthcoming chapters. He is concerned that his ability as both a rememberer and a historical re-creator is insufficient to carry the weight of the narrative on its own. To justify his history and assert that the events he narrates *could have occurred*, Ishmael references many first-level actual historical occurrences of whales sinking or attacking

ships at sea. But this reliance on primary-level information comes with a consequence. Because Ishmael never comes to terms with his own narrative abilities and repeatedly returns to information about a world from which Ishmael is twice removed, his dependence on this material begins to hurt his believability. It is stylistic overkill; it begins to seem as though Ishmael is attempting to compensate for some grievous lack by constantly referring to information that exists on a different level of reality as he. In effect, Ishmael tries so hard to give his readers some verifiable information that he begins to highlight his own shortcomings as an objective narrator. Dryden contends that "although anchored by the weight of its how-to-do-it material, [Moby-Dick] is always moving away from the objective or factual world and persistently calling attention to itself as fiction" (83). By "how-to-do-it material," Dryden is referring to all instances of Ishmael attempting to prove himself as a better informed observer by incorporating factual information about the whaling industry, from the "Etymology" and "Extracts" sections that precede the first narrative to "Cetology" to "Of the Monstrous Pictures of Whales" to the contrasting views of the Sperm and Right whale heads.

The first reference to actual attacks on whaleships by whales, concerning the *Essex*, is the most famous and is often assumed to be the "real" event behind the story of Moby-Dick. But instead of Melville admitting that the story of the *Essex* inspired his composition, he allows Ishmael to cite the existence of the *Essex* story as a parallel event to the *Pequod* which, in theory, puts the two ships on the same level of reality and therefore should make both stories equally believable. The sinking of the *Essex*, which occurred in 1820, would have been recognizable to Melville's contemporaries, and by paralleling its story to the *Pequod*'s, Ishmael is attempting to insert his narrative into the canon of contemporary history. The inclusion of first-level history gives a sense of reality to his story. Ishmael provides a footnote to the *Essex* story where he

quotes sections from Owen Chace's narrative, who was on the *Essex* when it was sunk by an angered sperm whale. Interestingly, Ishmael claims that that he has not only read Chase's account, but he claims to have "conversed with his son" (171). Here Ishmael crosses the boundaries of his literary reality in a more direct way than by merely mentioning events that happen on the first level of reality; he is claiming to have personally interacted with people involved in this incident.

Ishmael does the same thing in reference to a story recorded in what he calls "Langsdorff's Voyages," but which is actually titled Voyages and Travels in Various Parts of the World by George H. von Langsdorff. Ishmael cites chapter seven of this work, wherein Langsdorff tells of a ship, commanded by a Captain D'Wolf, being struck by an "'uncommon large whale'" but sustaining no real damage. While this tale may seem to be a rather inauspicious event to have included in his story, Ishmael oddly claims that he is a nephew of the aforementioned Captain D'Wolf. Ishmael assures the reader that "I have particularly questioned [D'Wolf] concerning the passage in Langsdorff. He substantiates every word" (173). Not only is Ishmael claiming knowledge of information from the first level of reality that the reader also has access to in order to build a connection and sense of trust between himself and the reader, he is asserting himself as a part of that reality by claiming kinship to a "real" first-level person. Even though Ishmael has consciously created his own literary persona through the Biblical allusions and, as we have seen Dryden claim, "establishe[d] his identity as a purely verbal one" (87), he takes steps to connect himself with the physical world of the reader.

The "Narrative Present" and Problems of Knowability

One of the biggest problems for the objectivity of Ishmael's history is that the actual sinking of the *Pequod* happened long before Ishmael decides to tell his story. He begins his tale by saying, "Some years ago—never mind how long exactly…" (23). But we must be concerned with how long ago because there is an aspect of objectivity that is lost through the passage of time. The farther a person becomes temporally removed from the incident in question, the further that person moves from his or her physical experience of the event. Recall that as soon as an event occurs it ceases to exist as a physical actuality and thereafter only exists in a linguistic form. As time continues to pass, the connection to the physical world continually decreases until the only remnant of that event exists solely in a linguistic form and thus has no verifiable basis. Because years have passed since the sinking of the *Pequod*, we know that the history Ishmael creates only has a basis in the linguistic memory he has of the event. And because the physical event as the narrator would have experienced it only has its physicality in the second level of reality, which for us is also inherently linguistic, the events are even harder for us to accept as reality. Even with all of the objective proof that Ishmael provides in an attempt to persuade us that he is a reliable narrator, we remain aware of the increasingly subjective view of the events that arise with the passage of time.

When Ishmael begins to tell his story of the past, the act of telling it creates what Barry Marks calls the "'narrative present' or the 'writing time story'" (367). Marks' terms fit well into the step-level structure of literary reality because "the concept of the writing time story first implies that we recognize the narrator speaking to us as a fictional creation who in turn creates himself in the narrative past" (367). Even though Ishmael attempts to obscure the fact that he is a fictional

creation by merging his identity with the first level of reality, the fact that we are reading about the narrator means that we are aware of the narrator as a constituent of the secondary level of reality, and thus know that he does not exist. Therefore, we recognize that the history he tells us is the creation of a creation.

Ishmael desperately wants to portray his history as a reality, which is why he goes to the lengths that he does to connect himself with the verifiable first level of reality. He faces the same problem that faces the first-level historian – the presentation of a chronology of events does not provide a sufficient understanding of history. For Ishmael's history, a verifiable chronology of events would read as follows: arrive at New Bedford, meet Queequeg, arrive at Nantucket, sign on for the voyage of the *Pequod*, ship out from Nantucket, get rescued by the *Rachel* three years later. Each of these events are verifiable only if the reader can enter the second level of reality and retrace the narrator's steps and ask the people involved if the history happened as Ishmael laid out. Nothing on the *Pequod* is verifiable, so the sequence of events on board must be left out. As is, this is a very sterile, and confusing, history. Ishmael is forced to connect the gaps in the sequence of events with a narrative thread in order to provide some understanding of how and why his history happened as it did.

There is a necessity for Ishmael to create a narrative to string the events of his experience on the *Pequod* together. Barry Marks identifies and describes a shifting reliance on "historically accurate" conventions throughout Ishmael's history and asserts that in the first part of Moby-Dick, Ishmael "speaks clearly and simply and keeps a firm grasp on chronology" (372). In other words, at the beginning of the novel Ishmael attempts to lay out a cohesive narrative to link together the verifiable events of his time at New Bedford and Nantucket. And for the most part, he succeeds. Paul Lukacs agrees with Marks' idea that in the beginning, which Lukacs defines

as the first forty chapters, Ishmael seems to be telling a historically cohesive and plausible narrative because the narrative is *his*: "Yet while he moralizes, digresses, and speculates incessantly, his writing in the first forty chapters of Moby-Dick remains essentially narrative. That is, within those chapters he never stops telling *his* story" (142, my emphasis). While Ishmael does provide dialogue between characters, which is one of the significant liberties the author of fiction will take that the historian will not, in the beginning the dialogue is only provided between characters with whom Ishmael is personally involved. In doing this, Ishmael moves farther away from the work of the historian but tries to limit that distance by only dealing with events that he has directly witnessed. At first, we only see verbal communication when Ishmael has direct access to the original communicative event. For example, Ishmael does record the banter between Captains Peleg and Bildad on the deck of the *Pequod*, but he can do this because he was there to sign up for the voyage and so possibly overheard their discussion. Ishmael does not cross the boundary of the casual observer of the conversation, and while we may question his ability to retain the details of every conversation he relates, it is acceptable because he did have the personal experience of the event. And like before, we can theoretically verify the conversation if we were granted the ability to exist on the secondary level.

While I agree with this understanding of what Ishmael is trying to do in the beginning of his history, I disagree with Lukacs' delineation that the first section extends through Chapter 40. We must overlook certain structural problems if we understand the first 40 chapters as a continuous personal narrative. Ishmael first breaks this continuity in Chapter 26, the first "Knights and Squires" chapter. Here Ishmael begins to catalogue who is on the *Pequod* with him, and so sets the *dramatis personae* for his voyage. He begins with Starbuck, the first mate, and while Ishmael describes Starbuck intimately, we can accept it because we understand that

Ishmael is writing about Starbuck after the fact, that is, after he has spent enough time to get to know him personally and possibly had time to research his origins. However, about halfway through the chapter, Ishmael does something that he heretofore never attempted – he enters the mind of another character:

> Starbuck was no crusader after perils; in him courage was not a sentiment; but a thing simply useful to him, and always at hand upon all mortally practical occasions. Besides, *he thought*, perhaps, that in this business of whaling, courage was one of the great staple outfits of the ship, like her beef and bread; and not to be foolishly wasted. Wherefore he had no fancy for lowering for whales after sundown; nor for persisting in fighting a fish that too much persisted in fighting him. For, *thought Starbuck*, I am here in this critical ocean to kill the whales for my living, and not to be killed by them for theirs; and that hundreds of men had been so killed Starbuck well knew. (104, my emphasis)

Ishmael is easing himself into the narrative conventions that will allow him to enter into the minds and conversations of the other members of the *Pequod* without abandoning the first-person point of view that he established with the opening "Call me Ishmael."

While this may not be a significant shift into an omniscient point of view, there is structural evidence that signifies a fundamental shift in Ishmael's narration beginning with the twenty-sixth chapter. In telling about his time in New Bedford and Nantucket, Ishmael attempts to portray his history in a historiographically acceptable form, but according to Lukacs, the fundamental issue of Ishmael's narrative is the creation of history, and Ishmael is faced with the "necessity of choosing a discourse that grounds the representation of truth or life in the changing verities of time and place" (141). But once the *Pequod* leaves Nantucket in the "writing-time story," the verity of time and place is no longer groundable because everyone who could verify Ishmael's

history is lost. Therefore, Ishmael realizes that he must alter the narrative mode in which he presents his history – i.e. he must be able to enter the minds of his fellow crew and even of his captain in order to provide an understanding, or a history, of the events leading up to his rescue by the *Rachel*. He signifies this shift in narrative mode in chapter twenty-five, aptly titled "Postscript." This signifies the end of Ishmael telling personal knowledge and his entrance into a literary world of conjecture and assumption – the world of the *Pequod*. Ishmael specifically says this in the "Postscript" chapter:

> In behalf of the dignity of whaling, I would fain advance naught but substantiated facts. But after embattling his facts, an advocate who should wholly suppress a not unreasonable surmise, which might tell eloquently upon his cause—such an advocate, would he not be blameworthy? (102)

Ishmael effectively spreads out and sums up what he is about to undertake. In another attempt to connect with the reader, he avows that he would not consider presenting anything but "substantiated facts" – the closest he can offer to objectivity – but after he presents the facts, it is his responsibility to offer some "not unreasonable surmise," or a plausible explanation, for those facts. In this short paragraph, Ishmael summarizes his idea of the work of the historian and justifies the narratorial leaps he is about to take. Directly after this chapter comes the first "Knights and Squires" section, and the beginning of Ishmael's omniscience.

This omniscience does not come as a complete surprise, however. There are instances where the narrator intimates that he is not indelibly linked to his Ishmael persona. When he enters the chapel in Chapter Seven, Ishmael sees the stone memorials of the unreturned whalers and remarks, "I regarded those marble tablets, and be the murky light of the darkened, doleful day read the fate of the whalemen who had gone before me. Yes, Ishmael, the same fate may be

thine" (48). Here the narrator briefly stops being Ishmael to become a secondary narrator who comments on the possible future. This is problematic because this narrator is not omniscient if by "the same fate may be thine" indicates that this speaker does not know what happens on the *Pequod*. This narrator has the knowledge of neither Melville's original character nor Ishmael and indicates an early awareness on behalf of the narrator that he can step outside his Ishmael persona and exist as a narrator who is not limited by what Ishmael personally knows. While some may see this narrative fluctuation as problematic, Henrik Nielsen does not. In a 2004 essay "The Impersonal Voice in First-Person Narrative Fiction," Nielsen claims that Moby-Dick as a whole "illustrates the fact that readers very willingly accept the continuous identity of the experiencing-I and narrating-I even when the narration cannot plausibly be understood as coming from the narrating-I" (138). Though Nielsen's twenty-first century readers may not have a problem accepting this, Melville's contemporary readers surely did, which seems counterintuitive if one begins to read Ishmael as a nineteenth-century Transcendentalist.

Ishmael's "Transparent Eyeball"

In "Ishmael's Equal Eye: The Source of Balance in Moby-Dick," Beongcheon Yu recognizes the fluidity of the narrator's persona and links it to the Emersonian philosophy of nineteenth-century America. Yu claims that by telling the reader to "Call me Ishmael" the narrator "echoes Emerson's 'the first person singular' who finds that in nature 'all mean egotism vanishes' [and indicates] self-objectification or self-detachment" from the linguistically created Ishmael (113). While Yu is astute in linking Ishmael to Emerson, she stops short in her comparison of Moby-Dick and "Nature." The passage that Yu parallels to Ishmael's genesis presents us with a

tremendous insight into Ishmael's narrative strategy: "Standing on the bare ground—my head bathed in the blithe air and uplifted into infinite space—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God" (Emerson 6). Not only does Ishmael echo the Emersonian "first person singular" as Yu makes us aware, he becomes a manifestation of the "transparent eyeball" that sees all. Remember that Ishmael takes to sea to "drive off the spleen" and soothe a troubled soul. The sea is for the narrator what the woods are to Emerson, and Ishmael knows it. He even provides a maritime rendition of the "Nature" passage cited above when he describes "absent-minded young philosophers" who lose themselves while on watch on the mast-head:

> […] [L]ulled into such an opium-like listlessness of vacant, unconscious reverie is this absent-minded youth by the blending cadence of waves with thoughts, that at last he loses his identity; takes the mystic ocean at his feet for the visible image of that deep, blue, bottomless soul, pervading mankind and nature; […] In this enchanted mood, thy spirit ebbs away to whence it came; becomes diffused through time and space; […]. (136)

Ishmael here does not admit to becoming "part or parcel of God," but he stops only just short of it. His awareness of the concept of the transcendental consciousness is central to the understanding of Ishmael's ability to enter into the minds of the crew after Chapter 25.

Edgar Dryden tells us that Ishmael not only recognizes the existence of the universal being, he becomes the creator of the *Pequod*'s universe. In Chapter 26, Ishmael writes:

> 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 against all mortal critics bear me out in it, […]. (105)

Here again Ishmael admits that he must abandon the narrative structure that he has relied upon until this point. In providing a narrative that connects the facts of the *Pequod*'s disaster, Ishmael recognizes that he must invariably change the factual events to fit his historical narrative – he may be forced to "ascribe high qualities" to renegades, castaways, and trouble makers. Apparently he does this, because there do not appear to be any such men on the *Pequod*. In this, Dryden tells us that it is Ishmael, not God, who "is the source of the divine 'ethereal' light and the creator of the rainbow" (89).

This view evidences the final ideological split between the narrator and Melville. I argued above that in literature the Author acts as God in the creation of the second level of reality and as such has ultimate control over the reality of that world. While Ishmael tells his narrative in the first part of the novel, even though it is he telling the story instead of Melville, Ishmael stays confined by the limits of physicality that can be imposed on him in the secondary level by the Author – that is, he exists by the same rules of knowledge and knowability as we do in our realm. However, after Ishmael shifts into a floating narrative in the first "Knights and Squires" chapter, he no longer plays by the earlier rules of physical existence.

Early in the narrative shift, Ishmael is not completely comfortable in transcending his identity to explain the thoughts and actions of the *Pequod*'s captain and crew. While Ishmael enters briefly into Starbuck's mind in chapter twenty-six, he refrains from going into Stubbs' in Chapter 27, "What he thought of death itself, there is no telling" (106), though he does provide information that he could not possibly know: "when Stubb dressed, instead of first putting his legs into his trousers, he put his pipe into his mouth" (106). Ishmael continues this uncertain

dance with his omniscience until the next chapter, "Ahab," when Ishmael gives us our first glimpse of the monomaniacal captain. As if he is overwhelmed by the power and regality Ahab projects, Ishmael completely abandons his developing transcendent awareness and only gives us information about Ahab that he gathers either through personal experience or hearsay. Ishmael gives a physical description of Ahab but offers no explanation about the facts of his appearance. About the scar running down Ahab's face, Ishmael says, "whether that mark was born with him, or whether it was the scar left by some desperate wound, no one could certainly say" (110). The only elucidation Ishmael provides about Ahab in this chapter comes from the old "Gay-Head Indian" who "had never before sailed out of Nantucket, [and] had never ere this laid eye upon wild Ahab" (110). While Ishmael admits that this crewman had never seen Ahab before, he was recognized to have "preternatural powers of discernment" by the *Pequod*'s crew. Ishmael seems to trust him and cites his claim about Ahab's whale bone leg: "'Aye, he was dismasted off Japan," said the old Gay-Head Indian once; "but like his dismasted craft, he shipped another mast without coming home for it. He has a quiver of 'em'" (110). It is telling that there is no qualification about the old Indian's statement since Ishmael is relating this information after the fact, but the Indian appears to be wrong in this final pronouncement. Ahab does not have a quiver of replacement legs – when one is broken he relies on the carpenter to make him a new one instead of retrieving one from his "quiver" (356). It becomes obvious after the fact that this person is not reliable, but Ishmael does not negate his explanation in any way. This is significant, and problematic, because here Ishmael knowingly accepts and incorporates obviously erroneous information into his "real" history.

Not long after this Ishmael returns briefly to his fleeting omniscience, but never makes an overt assertion that he is providing information that he could not have first hand knowledge of.

In the "Enter Ahab; To Him, Stubb" chapter, Ishmael gives the first account of a conversation that he was not directly a part of, but since the exchange between Ahab and Stubb occurred on deck, it is possible that Ishmael overheard the two and remembered it. In the following chapters, "The Pipe" and "Queen Mab," neither of which contain Ishmael as a character, the fact that the people involved are verbally speaking to each other gives Ishmael a small window of believability because he is still not entering into the minds of other characters. While he is transgressing the rules of history formation by creating dialogue, there is the possibility that he could have overheard the people speaking. Even Ahab's philosophical musing in "The Pipe" is explained as soliloquizing, indicating that Ishmael could have overheard it.

However, once Ishmael gets to Chapter 36, he commits himself completely to the omniscient narrative role. Like the "Postscript" chapter, "The Quarter-Deck" provides a structural indication that a fundamental narrative shift is about to occur. This is the first chapter that includes stage directions, which has the odd effect of drawing the reader into the story by providing a feeling of the objective information that the Author can provide. Recall that any information given directly to the audience from the Author, especially concerning the setting, can be assumed to be objective information because the Author acts as God in the literary realm he creates. Because Ishmael has told us he has created a literary world, and as Dryden tells us it is Ishmael who is the source of divine light, on board the *Pequod*, he therefore assumes the role of God for this world and can provide us with seemingly objective information. We believe Ishmael that this scene begins with Ahab mounting the quarter-deck followed by his crew: "*Enter Ahab: Then all*" (136). Once we accept this image, we are more susceptible to believing the story that Ishmael gives us. Furthermore, the stage directions break the past tense of Ishmael's story to set up what Glauco Cambon calls the "historical present, whereby the author

who is telling his story of past events suddenly adopts a present tense to bring home to his audience the poignancy of some particular event relived now" (522). This is different from the "writing time story" explained by Lukacs because the "historical present" recreates the acts as physical events in the now-present while the writing time story is defined by the present act of *telling* about the events. For example, the stage directions cited above create the action in the present tense; the reader is transported temporally to the action described by the stage directions and witnesses them unfolding in real-time. The scenes carrying these stage directions are the most poignant and important scenes thus far for Ishmael's explanation of the events on the *Pequod* – they are the first real glimpses that we get into the minds of the principle characters: Ahab, Starbuck, and Stubb. Once Ishmael brings the reader into his world and makes him connect with the poignancy of the scene, the omniscient point of view becomes easier to accept.

However, the extent of Ishmael's omniscience is not realized until the next chapter, "Sunset." Here again Ishmael provides us with preliminary italicized stage directions to draw us into the scene: "*The cabin; by the stern windows; Ahab sitting alone, and gazing out*" (142). We are not only drawn into Ahab's inner sanctum, a place Ishmael is never permitted, we enter directly into Ahab's mind. Ishmael disappears into the Universal Being completely, and Ahab's is the only voice the audience is given:

> I leave a white and turbid wake; pale water, paler cheeks, where'er I sail. […]. The diver sun—slow dived from noon—goes down; my soul mounts up! she wearies with her endless hill. Is, then, the crown too heavy that I wear? this Iron Crown of Lombardy. Yet it is bright with many a gem; I, the wearer, see not its far flashings; but darkly feel that I wear that, that dazzlingly confounds. 'Tis iron—that I know—not gold. […]. The path to my fixed purpose is laid with iron rails, whereon my soul is grooved to run. (142)

By going directly into Ahab's mind, Ishmael gives us the first "not unreasonable surmise" about Ahab's soul and the mental struggle between his desire for revenge and the responsibility he has to his crew. But ultimately Ishmael succeeds in showing us that no matter what may occur in the future, Elijah was correct in his prophecy that "'it's all fixed and arranged a'ready'" (90).

In the next chapter, "Dusk," Ishmael remains invisible and enters the thoughts of Starbuck. Again we are given the stage directions to orient us in the historical present: "*By the Mainmast; Starbuck leaning against it*" (143). Ishmael is still invisible, and we are only given Starbuck's voice in the first person: "My soul is more than matched; she's overmanned; and by a madman! […]. I think I see his imperious end; but feel I must help him to it" (143). Just as with Ahab, Starbuck is given his own voice in order to establish a plausible explanation for his actions later in the story. He is the principle force against Ahab, the one who attempts to disconnect Ahab with his blind vengeance and reaffirm in him the responsibility to bring the crew home safely. Ishmael, as a member of the crew, is aware of Starbuck's unease about Ahab's quest, which was made clear in "The Quarter-Deck": "'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'" (139). Ishmael is faced with the necessity of explaining the events, and so must fall back upon his authorial right of omniscience in order to provide a plausible reason. According to Cambon, Ishmael's omniscience does not create a problem in the literary world of the *Pequod* because "in this perspective, Ahab's, Starbuck's, and the other crew members' asides do not lose plausibility; they are the conjuring narrator's imaginative reconstruction of the characters he knew" (522-3).

Ishmael remains invisible for the next short chapter, where we again get a first-person musing by Stubb that reads, as do the previous two chapters, like a Shakespearian monologue. Then the

"transparent eyeball" turns its gaze below decks to where the majority of the crew is gathered. Again, we are greeted with the stage directions to ground us in the historical present, but instead of focusing on the identity of one character, it presents us with a narrative in the form of a written drama. Each character is given voice only after they are identified: "1st Nantucket Sailor", "Dutch Sailor", "French Sailor", "2nd Nantucket Sailor", etc. While it is this chapter that first introduces us to Pip, who plays an important role in Ishmael's history later on, there is not a pressing reason to include this "drama" chapter. While we do get a glimpse into the interaction of the common crew, there is no deep insight into any one personality as in the three monologue chapters preceding it. Marks argues that the "primary function of such [drama] passages is to show Ishmael the narrator, as a part of the action of the writing-time story, passing through moments of furious repression as he tries with desperate self-consciousness to get rid of self-consciousness" (370).

During these passages we get the first glimpse into one of the most enigmatic and important characters in terms of understanding Ishmael's destruction of self-consciousness, Pip. Ishmael briefly introduces Pip in the second "Knights and Squires" chapter, but we learn more about him in last of the first series of drama passages. At the end of the scene, when the sailors rush to man the sails in the face of the oncoming squall, Pip is left behind to hide and comment on what happens. Like Ishmael, Pip becomes lost as a member of the *Pequod*'s crew and disappears into the rigging only to observe what is going on around him.

After this brief introduction, Pip disappears completely in the narrative for almost a third of the book, only to reappear in Chapter 93, "The Castaway." Pip leaps from the chase-boat he is on and is left alone in the sea until the *Pequod* chances by and rescues him. After this incident, Pip is markedly changed. He becomes a prophet of sorts for the *Pequod* and is the only member

of the crew who can both exclaim to Ahab's face the problems of his quest and cause Ahab to connect with his lingering humanity. In his new role, Pip is the "idle but unresting eye" who speaks the truth upon the *Pequod*. He was granted this sight when, alone on the ocean,

> the sea had jeeringly kept his finite body up, but drowned the infinite of his soul. Not drowned entirely, though. Rather 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. (321-22)

If anyone had recourse to understand Pip's revelation on the sea it is Ishmael, who actually spends longer adrift alone on the "firmament of waters." Edgar Dryden claims that aside from Pip, Ishmael is the only character in the whole of Moby-Dick who is "concerned with the speaking of truth" (105). Pip's awareness of truth comes though the glimpse he has of the inner workings of God, the "foot upon the treadle of the loom," which is seen as madness by the rest of his crew. Some argue that truth and madness cannot be distinguished when one becomes entangled in what Kierkegaard calls the "God-relationship, [wherein] it is quite impossible to distinguish madness from truth. This is so because, according to Kierkegaard, 'truth is subjectivity,' and therefore can only be defined *objectively* in terms that are uncertain and paradoxical" (Hartstein 35). Ishmael attempts to define truth by abandoning the self-consciousness in the manner described by Pip's descent into "madness." But rather than accept his own madness as an expression of truth, Ishmael attempts to objectify his truth through integrating factual information while abandoning his own personal conscious experience.

Ishmael at the End

We see Ishmael returning to his struggle against self-consciousness again, as the above examples are not the only instances where Ishmael casts aside his crew-identity in order to provide information that only the transcendent Universal Being could have access to. The objective stage directions return in Chapter 108, which is also organized like the script of a drama between Ahab and the Carpenter. They only speak after they are recognized by the narratorial playwright, and the only action of the scene is explained through the italicized stage directions. The stage directions again return in chapters 120-122, 127, and 129. It is significant that the stage directions return with such frequency after chapter 119 – "The Candles." Glauco Cambon tells us that

> after "The Candles" […] Ishmael will no longer assert his presence as an actor as in Chapter One, or as remembering actor-spectator as in Chapter 41, but will stay in the background, practically disappearing in his narration until the epilogue of the shipwreck sees him come to the surface again in objective shape, a survivor in Queequeg's coffin. (521)

Cambon is correct; after the first round of drama chapters, the narrator begins Chapter 41 by reasserting himself as Ishmael: "I, Ishmael, was one of that crew; my shouts had gone up with the rest" (149). He connects himself with the literary reality of the *Pequod* after having removed himself from it for the previous chapters and reclaims the role of both character and narrator. However, after Chapter 119, Ishmael disappears until after the *Pequod* has gone down and Ishmael has spent almost a full day drifting asea. Not only does Ishmael disappear after "The Candles," he completely denies his existence as a viable character in the story, refusing to even

mention his own name. In "The Chase—Third Day," the narrator describes three members of Ahab's chase-boat crew being tossed overboard by Moby-Dick:

> As it was, three of the oarsmen—who foreknew not the precise instant of the dart, and were therefore unprepared for its effects—these were flung out; but so fell, that, in an instant two of them clutched the gunwale again, and rising to its level on a combing wave, hurled themselves bodily inboard again; the third man helplessly dropping astern, but still afloat and swimming. (429)

While the major characters (Ahab, Starbuck, the Parsee) are named in the final chapters, the three oarsmen remain faceless members of the *Pequod*'s ill-fated crew. However, in the Epilogue, we learn that the one oarsman fated to fall astern and so not return to the boat was none other than Ishmael himself:

> It so chanced, that after the Parsee's disappearance, I was he whom the Fates ordained to take the place of Ahab's bowsman, when that bowsman assumed the vacant post; the same, who, when on the last day the three men were tossed from out the rocking boat, was dropped astern. (432)

By removing himself from the action of the final chase, Ishmael finally overcomes the problem of self-consciousness that Barry Marks claims he struggles with throughout his narrative. Being only the story-teller instead of a character story-teller grants Ishmael the objectivity in the narrative that he previously only achieved through the drama sections. The final chapters witness the culmination of Ishmael's attempts to make the readers believe in his history – they are the final result of the catalogues, the "how to do it" material, and the troublesome intermingling of the first and third levels of reality that Ishmael embarks on. Lukacs argues that the reality Ishmael creates by the end of the book "is not at all a product of his imagination.

Instead, it is a part of history, and in presenting it he writes from a point of view that is confined by the changing verities of time and place" (154). The final embracing of an omniscient narrative mode exemplifies Ishmael's final movement away from the limitations of his second-level self. That the final omniscient point of view is "confined by the changing verities of time and place" is not problematic because the time and place are constantly changing their positions on the continuum of reality. The only point of view that can readily accommodate the shift in "true" time and place is the final omniscience.

Glauco Cambon, however, finds problems with this argument and asserts that the "repeated modal shifts make for an instability of point of view which prompts some critics to discount Ishmael as a realized and consistent actor-spectator, and to consider him as a mere narrative device Melville feels free to disregard as he sees fit" (517). However, we cannot look upon Ishmael only as a narrative device because by doing so we limit the interpretive possibilities of Moby-Dick. While my reading in no way claims to invalidate metaphorical readings of the novel, I do see it as unfortunate if modern readers refuse to accept Ishmael's narrative as his attempt to come to terms with his past. But even so, it should not be forgotten that Ishmael is the narrator's constructed identity and Ishmael's experience on the *Pequod* is not the narrator's experience on the *Pequod*. It is the experience that the narrator relives in an attempt to come to terms with that history.

Ultimately, while the narrator does embody Golo Mann's ideal historian who tells a history as a "later, better informed observer" (7), what he creates through his Ishmael persona is not an acceptable version of historical reality. It is a story about his past that attempts to explain the events of that past. This is not to say that his story is not useful as a historical supplement, however. As the narrator becomes self-aware throughout the creation of his narrative, history

alone cannot always succeed in providing enough information to make a problematic history acceptable in terms of the narrator's coming-of-age. In this light, the *Pequod* can still be seen as a metaphor, but that metaphor must include Melville's attempt to show how one person adrift in the incessant current of social change deals retrospectively with the traumatic experience of surviving the social turmoil that easily and impersonally destroys many of the people swept along with it.

Diagram 1: Second Level of Reality

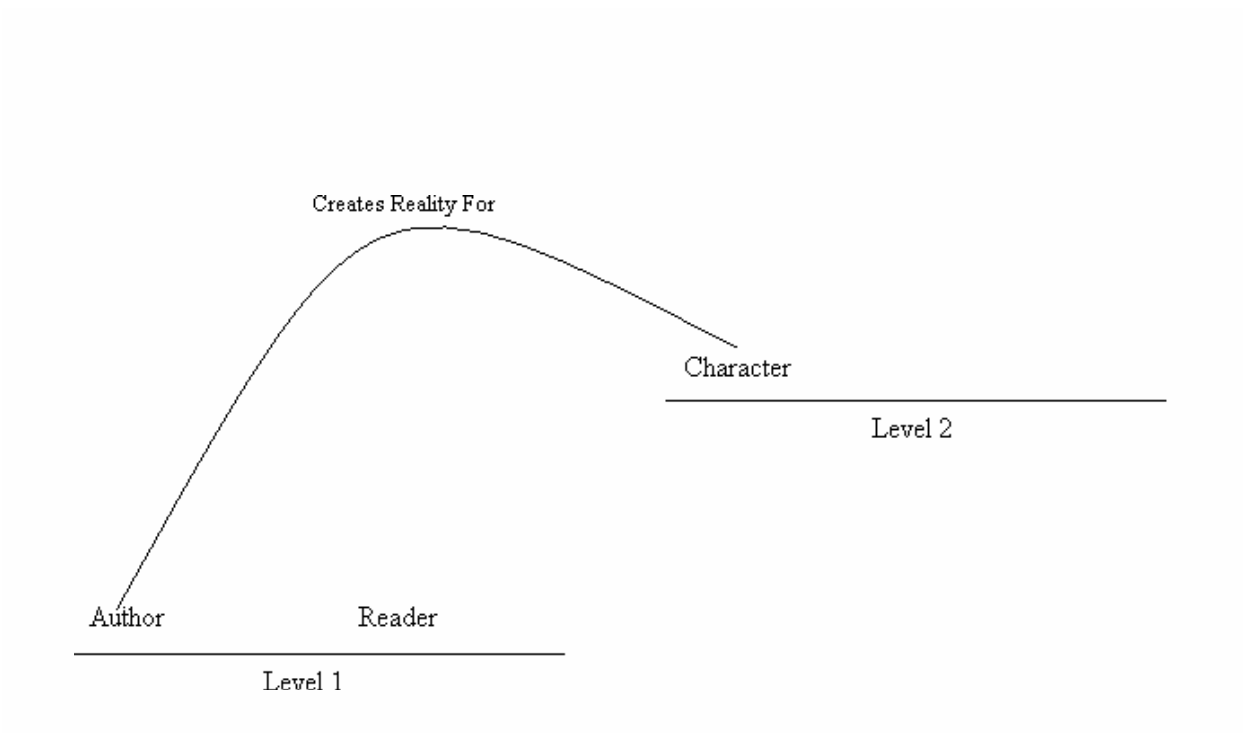


Diagram 2: Third Level of Reality

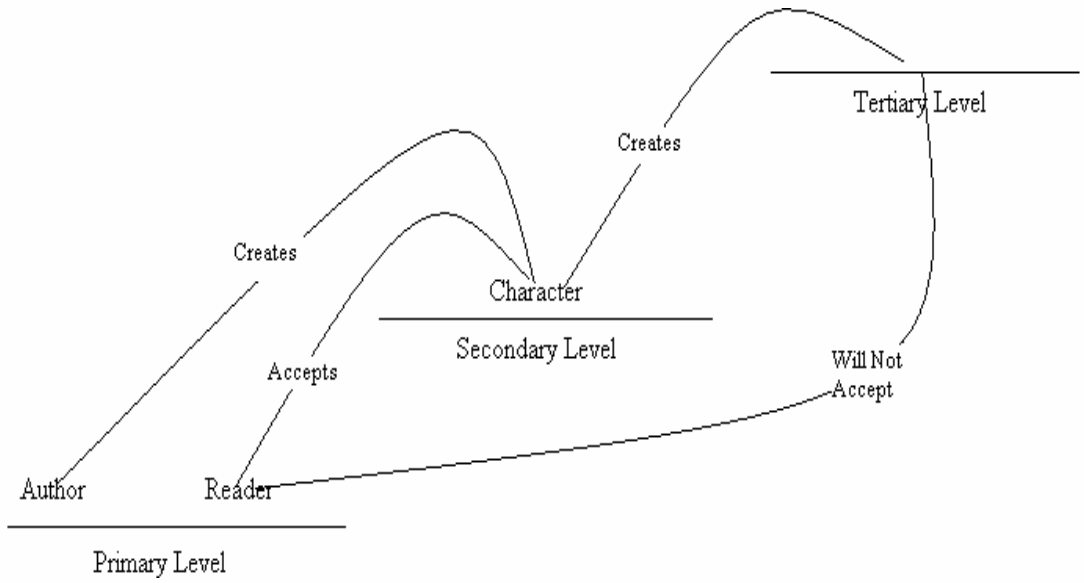
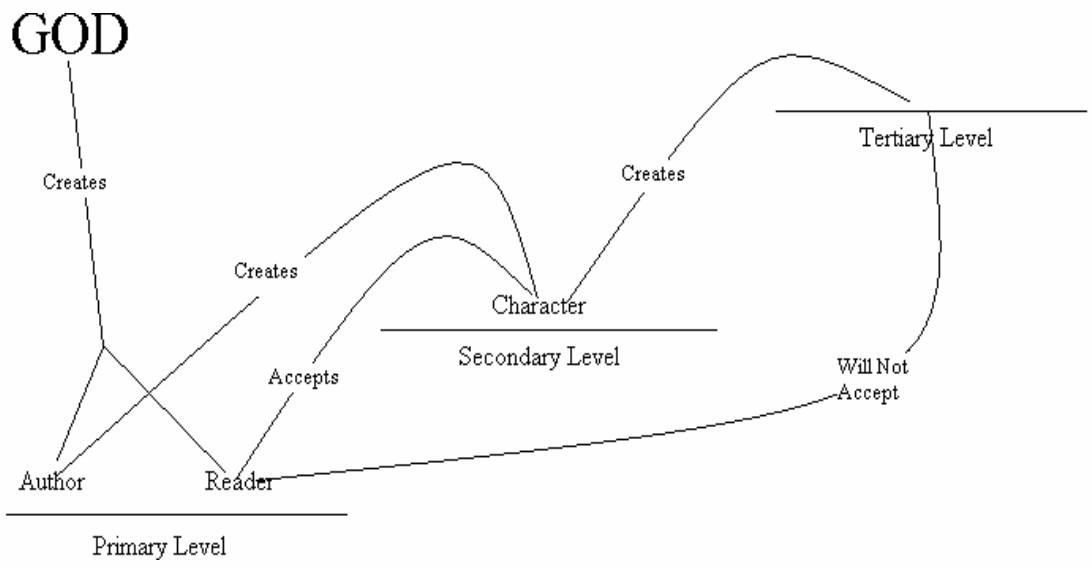


Diagram 3: God and the Levels of Reality



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