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MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

POLITICS AND PROPHECY: MELVILLE'S AMERICA IN *MOBY-DICK* AND
BENITO CERENO.

by

Michelle T. Fernandes

A Master's Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Montclair State University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

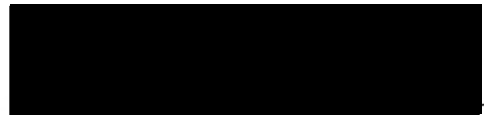
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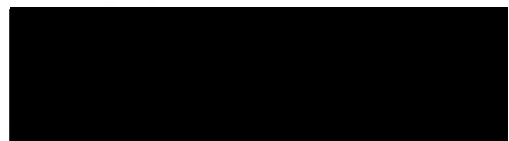
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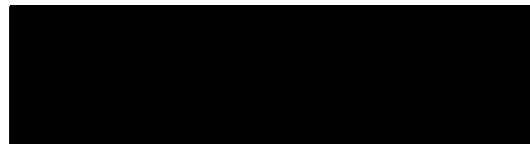
Thesis Committee:



Dr. Monika Elbert



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Abstract

The goal of this thesis is to explore and identify Herman Melville's position on a government that participated in slavery in the 1850's. By examining the stories of *Moby-Dick* and *Benito Cereno* Melville's distrust in government is exposed. The period in which he wrote was filled with political and social reforms during which he took influence from other vocal authors and slaves involved in revolt. I use two research strategies: (1) a look at literary and social events during Melville's writing and (2) his personal correspondences. In the first part of the exploration is Melville's attack on a government that allowed the continuation of slavery. The research then goes on to explore the signs and warnings in his texts that lead readers to question their governing system of power. This thesis seeks to show that Melville was not solely interested in slavery and his writings were not just an attack on the slave trade. He was an advocate for brotherhood and unity in the face of an immoral government. Some critics strive to show that he wrote about larger issues and not the simple issue of color. By exposing his personal writings, Melville was not passive and was quite disappointed in his government.

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Montclair State University

Montclair, NJ

2015

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Introduction

America during the 1850s was a time of inspiring change. Citizens witnessed the first locomotive run from the Atlantic to Pacific coasts, they enjoyed a book of poetry entitled *Leaves of Grass*, and the issue of slavery was being debated. Some debates resulted in states repealing the Fugitive Slave Law Act (herein FSL) and its unconstitutional acts. Yet, from Texas to North Carolina and Arkansas to Florida slavery was being kept alive by many through active slave trade agreements. Notably absent from the vocal abolitionists scene was Herman Melville. Unlike some authors active in the abolitionist movement, specifically Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson, Melville was not particularly vocal on the issue of slavery. Although he may not have been a visible figure at the forefront of the abolitionist movement, Melville used his writings to convey his position as an anti-slavery advocate and to display his upset over a government that allows slavery to continue. Just as Father Mapple claims his motivation from his pulpit in *Moby-Dick* is "To preach the Truth to the face of Falsehood!" (53), so too was Melville's motivation to expose the errors in a system that allows slavery and to vocalize frustration with those whose failed to see the flaw in such an organization.

Many writers were vocal in the abolitionist movement of the time. Ralph Waldo Emerson published essays that explored self-reliance, ethics, and man's position within nature, Henry David Thoreau acted upon the suggestions of Emerson's call for reform, and Frederick Douglass was paramount in giving the free slave a voice. Melville was surrounded by many political influences, however these were not just relegated to the literary world; he was also surrounded by familial and political connections that went against his anti-establishment feelings. Allan Melvill, Herman's father, was vocal with

his approval of Chief Justice Lemuel Shaw's anti-slavery writings. However, Shaw also believed in the Fugitive Slave Law and supported its legal and judicial aspects. The act of upholding a law that perpetuates slavery is something Melville would have been against and took to writing to express his disgust. Incidentally, when Shaw was Chief Justice, he returned a slave to his master as per the law. According to Wyn Kelley, since Melville had been captive as a sailor and whaler, to side with Shaw would be to side with his own captors (8). Also connected to Melville was President Franklin Pierce who won on a platform upholding the Compromise of 1850; thereby extending slavery into territories gained by the Mexican War and further strengthened the FSL. The connection with Pierce was through Nathaniel Hawthorne, the two were college friends; to betray Pierce would be to betray his dear friend. Therefore Melville was placed in a unique position – should he publicly agree with the friends of his father or should he employ another means to show discontent? It is not mere coincidence that he wrote *Moby-Dick* and *Benito Cereno* during such a politically charged time, he employed more deceptive means than his peers. Writing during this time and taking on such topics was a necessity.

Although Melville was busily employed on whale ships during the late 1840s he was not ignorant to political happenings in America. Slave ships and mutinies were becoming an unfortunate topic in the news. Melville was surrounded by reports and descriptions of massive and devastating slave driven mutinies; how could he not be influenced by these events? As a fellow sailor he could give an empathetic perspective when dealing with politics on a fishing vessel. He soon became passionate for sailor rights and privileges after witnessing how politics can disrupt the environment on a whaler. However, after being exposed to the horrors that his fellow Americans were

committing against other humans, Melville could not be silenced. Starting with Captain Amasa Delano's *A Narrative of Voyages and Travels* an account of the journeys of a Massachusetts whaler, there are other accounts that influenced his disgust in a government that allowed slavery.

In 1831 Nat Turner organized a slave revolt in Virginia. Although eventually suppressed, the slaves involved did not discriminate while killing those who enslaved them. Further on in the century were successful mutinies on slave vessels which sparked support and interest in America. The famous mutiny of the *Amistad* is a recognized point of inspiration for Melville for the stories of *Benito Cereno* and "The Town Ho Story" found in *Moby-Dick*. As discovered by Jeffery Bolster, Melville would have also known of the underground abolition movement within the whaling industry; black seamen would often smuggle anti-slavery literature and distribute at each port of call (1192). Aside from taking inspiration from these news events, Melville was exposed to the literary environment inspired by Transcendentalism.

Writers recognized the great power within nature and humans and strove for synchronicity. Transcendentalists like Emerson and Thoreau wrote about the human position within nature and the resulting connections made when harmony is realized. Wary of the political machine and evil potentials in humans and nature, Melville developed a respect by recognizing the evil that can occur with power. Unlike his transcendental peers who had a fondness for the unity that is created between man and nature, Melville had cautious respect. Having experienced unseen dangers and furious winds, he gained a first-hand account of the natural powers at sea. This reverence for the ocean is seen in Ishmael's unknown drive to go whaling, "There is a magic in it... Why is

almost every robust healthy boy with a robust healthy soul in him, at some time or other crazy to go to sea?" (19). Transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau went to the woods to live "deliberately"; by surrounding himself in nature he would become one with it and revel in that harmony. With the same sentiment Emerson became the "transparent eyeball" while absorbing all nature has to offer. He did not just reflect upon it but became one with his surroundings. Melville recognized this power nature held and how we should embrace it, but not without the acknowledgment that it can take away as quickly as it gives. The violent potential hidden in the oceans calm is seen in *Moby-Dick* during Pip's tranquil yet horrific death of his soul. A favorite of the crew with his tambourine and songs, Pip is a victim to the horrors found under the calm sea. Whereas Thoreau found beauty and pondered the poetic depths of Walden Pond, Pip's soul is slowly ripped away from him in the current. The transformative power of the ocean is also seen with the character of Babo in *Benito Cereno*. On land he was an anonymous slave, but on the ocean he is the brave leader of a mutiny. For Melville, water allows men to redefine their position from who they are on land to a different person on the ocean. Taking from events Melville witnessed, Elizabeth Schultz notes that many pre-Civil War escaped slaves often took to the sea for various means of employment (237). Out at sea Africans and West Indian men were revered for their harpooning skills rather than be subjected to cruel prejudices on land.

Notable author of the time Emerson wrote positively about the human potential. However, Melville often focused on the negativity and saw Emerson as an inspiration to go against. According to Lea Newman, "Emerson may have provided the optimistic model for the fictional Delano" (107). Melville did not share the trust in humanity that

Emerson often spoke about. His mistrust is evident as seen in the margins of his copy of Emerson's essay "Prudence." There is a distinct 'X' next to the paragraph in which Emerson declares, "Trust men, and they will be true to you" and Melville's penciled reaction of "God help the poor fellow who squares his life according to this" (Marginalia). Melville respected Emerson as a writer and thinker, but did not agree that people should follow his thinking, "I do not oscillate in Emerson's rainbow, but prefer rather to hang myself in mine own halter than swing in any other man's swing" (Letter to Evert Duyckinck 121). By questioning surroundings, people should be free to dissect what is around them, not give in fully to assigned positions of power. As Melville writes in *Benito Cereno*, we must understand that "the best regulated mind is not always free" (72).

Ishmael goes to the ocean for a solution to calm his "drizzly November" soul, but not without a respectful reticence. Melville forces the reader to realize that there is darkness and violence under the calm surface of the ocean. Just like in man, there lies hypocrisy and a propensity towards violence. This is where we start to see Melville fracturing off from the early transcendental work of Thoreau and Emerson. Melville recognized and explored the idea that there is an inherent evil in all humankind. We are either born evil or it is forced upon us like Ahab's prosthetic leg.

For Melville, the ocean and the whale within it are to be recognized, respected, and remain a mystery. Emerson and Thoreau set out to find answers to the question of how we fit in the world and how do we become one with nature? Although he realized the human's place in nature, Ishmael recognizes the mysteries that are within nature, specifically the ocean. According to Ishmael, to die while at sea is an honorable death, "a

stove boat will make me an immortal by brevet" (45). He delights in the idea that his fate may be the same as countless men before him. During this self-reflective moment in church, he aligns himself Emerson and Thoreau when recognizing that it is his soul that makes him a man, not his body, "take my body who will, take it I say, it is not me" (45).

Knowing that Melville often wrote allegories, why choose to have the ocean as such a prominent feature in his writings? Firstly, it was something he knew very well – what better vehicle than the ocean to illustrate the ebbs and flows of reform and hidden depths of man? While many transcendentalists focused on unity and harmony, Melville set to expose the negative aspects of nature and man. The abolitionists he was criticizing may have written and protested with all their might – but did they *all* make a difference? Were many too afraid of repercussions and hard work? Were prison reformers eager to call out inhumane treatment to the mentally ill but at a loss when asked for solutions? Melville experienced directly the hard work and brotherhood it took to produce a product and a harmonious outcome. He expected no less than the same dedication from others.

Already known as slavery texts, both *Moby-Dick* and *Benito Cereno*, are also the texts Melville used for his position on warnings and the danger that lives in ignorance. Larger than the specific topic of slavery, Melville's writing is the device in which he delivered his growing frustrations with the American condition in 1850. How are these texts American? Which American political platforms was Melville looking to criticize?

Many research paths in Melville studies travel down a road of unlocking the heavily veiled allegories. Critics vary their approach to *Moby-Dick* and *Benito Cereno*, from the homosensual (i.e. the nonsexual love for another man) interpretations of Robert K. Martin, and to Geoffrey Sanborn's Postcolonial reading. Heralded biographer

Herschel Parker claims that Melville “went the other way” during slavery. Carolyn Karcher notes that on the issue of slavery and its propensity for violence as a means for freedom, “Melville was extremely ambivalent” (2). It is already critically established that Melville drew inspiration from the 1839 *Amistad* revolt led by Joseph Cinque. However, some other possible anti-slavery inspirations are Nat Turner’s slave revolt in Virginia in 1831, and the 1841 revolt on the *Creole* led by Madison Washington. Coincidentally, as noted by John Stauffer, Washington’s plight was the inspiration for Frederick Douglass’ fictional story of “The Heroic Slave” (138). Building on historical and critical findings, it is found that Melville was not a political wallflower.

I propose that Melville was quite vocal with his political opinions during the mid-1800s; however, he employed different means of delivery than the tactics of Emerson and Thoreau. If we look at *Typee*, Melville’s disgust at an oppressive power structure is initially seen when he decides to disembark because “The usage on board was tyrannical” (21). Critics often cite the issues of race, revolt, and violence as hints to Melville’s stance on slavery. They conclude that he was anti-slavery, pro-abolitionist, and sympathetic to minorities. However, Melville dealt with issues larger than slavery specifically. Melville did not only focus on slavery, but mainly the government that allows, participates in, and does nothing about it. Karcher is in agreement that Melville looked to expose the problem of the system and his ambivalence on finding an answer (2). Slavery was but one of the issues that grew from a broken system of government and citizens.

When Melville wrote about Nathaniel Hawthorne in the essay “Hawthorne and His Mosses he claimed, “Whereas, great geniuses are parts of the times; they themselves are the times; and possess a correspondent coloring” (524). Melville claimed that

Hawthorne became his work and the environment reflected upon him. His “coloring” was that of a broadcaster reporting on a moment in time. I seek to prove that the same can be said of Melville. His writings are “parts of the time” in which he wrote. Melville was living in a United States that was bifurcated on the issue of slavery. Seeing such contrasting views he set out to write not only about slavery, but about dissatisfaction in a government that allows and perpetuates such an abomination. However, those in power who aided in the continuance of slavery were not the only people with whom he was frustrated. Abolitionist groups that spent the majority of their time talking about slavery rather than trying to correct it were also scrutinized. Evidence of his stance is not only found by looking at historical occurrences, but also at his correspondence with friends.

Chapter 1: Anti-Slavery System

In 1839 Melville set out on his whaling career and although the America he left was still in support of slavery, the America he returned to was beginning to change due to public involvement. The 1839 mutiny led by Joseph Cinque on the *Amistad* had the support of New York abolitionists when the conspirators were eventually brought to trial. The *Creole* in 1841 was subject to a mutiny led by Madison Washington who also served as inspiration for two great authors. Unbeknownst to Melville, Frederick Douglass was also encouraged by the political environment. Published the same year as *Benito Cereno*, "The Heroic Slave" puts Washington in a positive narrative light. For Melville, he took these reports to write pieces that exposed a system of government that allowed the immoral slave trade. Slavery and a corrupt government were the topics many authors chose to focus on. Melville also decided to write about a government that allowed slavery and focused his work to attack the source of the problem. Parker claims that Melville was not focused solely on slavery but the environment and American sentiment of the time (221). He departed from his previous travel-log type writings and wrote *Moby-Dick*, knowing that what he was writing may not be thoroughly enjoyed by the public. Motivated by his antiestablishment feelings, Melville took to writing about how America turned from a proud country to one that should be embarrassed of its inability to see the harm of a system that promotes slavery.

In *Typee* there is a conflict of loyalties. Melville leaves the ship, joins the cannibals and praises their society. However, when they want to convert him he leaves with regret and boards the next ship. *Omoo* has him exploring mutiny and the removal of the captain, the power source. The figurehead in power, not the crew, is the problem. As

seen in *Moby-Dick* and *Benito Cereno*, slavery and oppression of any race was the issue focused on by Melville.

On board the individual whaling boats on the *Pequod*, stereotypes are dismantled. The headhunting, rare steak eating harpooner is initially an imposing man, but Melville is careful to give Queequeg moments that challenge his “savage” exterior. The reader is left knowing that there is more to Queequeg than his tattooed facade. Noted by Carolyn Karcher, Queequeg is an interesting character because he represents so many cultures that he becomes culturally ambiguous (64). Functioning on Polynesian, American Indian, African, Islamic, and some Christian customs, he blurs racial lines thereby forcing the reader to never allow their prejudices to sully their reading of him. This ethnic and racial composite that is Queequeg, according to Karcher, shows Melville creating a lesson in racial tolerance and undermining racial categories that he himself learned in his own travels (65). Melville uses the idea of a composite because a person’s race is secondary to their actions.

Melville challenged the public definition of good and evil by using black and white unexpectedly; the black “savage” Queequeg is a gentle and moral man and the white whale is legendary horror. We know, through Ishmael’s observations, that Ahab as their “supreme lord and dictator” (107), bears “a crucifixion in his face” (109), and is “shaped in an unalterable mould” (108). With these intense characteristics his white prosthetic leg is that much more pronounced. For Ahab to be metaphorically straddling two worlds, one that fights against whiteness and one that depends on it, makes him a composite of good and evil.

The idea of characters and ideas being a composite is furthered in Chapter 42 “The Whiteness of the Whale.” This chapter finds Melville exploring, through Ishmael, the origin and meaning of the word “white”. Yet why does Ishmael go on this origin exploration and not Ahab? Captain Ahab is the one on the monomaniacal journey to kill the white whale, he could possibly benefit more from introspection. Unfortunately whiteness has already destroyed Ahab; any hope of resolution lies in Ishmael. For Ahab, whiteness is dealt with negatively as seen in his facial scar, with his white prosthetic as the violent result of conflict, and of course the Leviathan. However, this chapter serves Ishmael to ponder why there is a hunt and how is he to legitimize what he does? For the reader, they are to explore how the word white can be so positive and negative at the same time. Melville seeks to expose the idea of whiteness and how definitions can be so polarized.

From the majestic White Steed of the Prairies to the repulsive and shocking reactions given to an Albino man, whiteness can be seen on both sides of the spectrum. Melville’s purpose of this chapter is not to decide on if whiteness is a visible darkness bereft of any color or if it is a positive reflection of all colors. This chapter serves to show readers that there are multiple definitions and various viewpoints in which to see something. Perhaps the reader is to take this chapter and look for the negative in something they normally heralded as good and clean? Who in *Moby-Dick* takes the time to explore both sides? Certainly not Ahab. Starbuck is aware of the duality but fails to fully explore all avenues. It is Ishmael that realizes that color has no true definition but not before recognizing that there is revelation and release, not depression, in this realization.

It is unclear if Melville is speaking to Ishmael or Ishmael speaking to himself in the line, "But thou sayest, methinks this white-lead chapter about whiteness is but a white flag hung out from a craven soul; thou surrenderest to a hypo, Ishmael" (164). For either possible reading, Ishmael has come to the depressing realization that an exploration into the meaning of whiteness is but a feeble attempt from a cowardly soul. Is there any function or meaning to define what it means for something to be white? As seen in this chapter there is multiple meanings, a variety of applications, and mythical allegories just for one simple word. Or perhaps this is a person going hunting and is searching for validation? The abolitionist or slave owner looking for a possible rationale for what they do can and cannot be answered in this chapter. Exploratory questions provoked in "The Whiteness of the Whale" chapter are its function. There are no answers in *Moby-Dick* just a series of presentations laid out before the reader in order for them to make the correct ethical and moral choice. Ahab and Starbuck choose wrong and perish, whereas Ishmael chooses to see past color and survives.

Ishmael's preconceived notions and prejudices about other races are first evident during his night at The Spouter Inn. Moments at the inn also shows Ishmael's ability to recognize and solve his prejudices. When first learning that he will be sharing a bed with a harpooner, Ishmael seems inconvenienced, "No man prefers to sleep two in a bed" (29). His thoughts then go deeper as he explores his reluctance, "I began to think that after all I might be cherishing unwarrantable prejudices against this unknown harpooner" (31). He also is able to look at a situation and recognize the larger lesson to be learned. When he finally sees Queequeg and notices the multiple tattoos, he realizes that it is just skin and "It's only his outside; a man can be honest in any sort of skin" (34). This is the larger

message Melville is giving – no matter the color of skin or wardrobe, man is capable of being honest and good. Ishmael continues to quickly self-actualize and see that he and Queequeg have the potential of becoming friends by socializing with each other.

According to Ishmael, “Ignorance is the parent of fear” (34) and the only way to end his fear of this harpooner is to learn more about him. This chapter is Ishmael’s first step towards survival. He recognized that he was judging others and denying himself friendship as a result. With this knowledge is able to recognize the need for brotherhood further into his journey. He does not fall victim to prejudices or fear. The character of Ishmael needs to survive in order to show that knowledge is the key to progress.

Along with race come cultural beliefs and Melville recognized that all should be respected. The ideology that crew members bring on board cannot simply be left on the docks. Race relations are illustrated in the chapter “Midnight, Forecastle,” presented in the format of a play. As previously seen on the personal whaling boats, Daggoo is only concerned with completing the task at hand. However when faced with a moment of racial intolerance by a Spanish sailor, Daggoo becomes hypersensitive.

Daggoo: What of that? Who's afraid of black's afraid of me! I'm quarried out of it!

Spanish Sailor (Aside.): He wants to bully, ah!-the old grudge makes me touchy. (Advancing.) Aye, harpooneer, thy race is the undeniable dark side of mankind-devilish dark at that. No offence. (150)

Interestingly enough, this chapter does not entail any violence, as one would expect from such highly charged racial slurs; Melville used this to convey that power struggles are not solved with violence but with brotherhood. This is the crux of Melville’s goal – the

system functions when all participate equally. This equality is best seen when the men are hunting a spotted whale. Each man knows his role and the role of the man next to him. When on the individual whaling boats racial lines are not seen or put on display. If there was any form of violence or dissent on these individual boats the whale would not be caught and no one would make a profit. The ship functions when the men work together and tragically collapses when the violence of Moby Dick is encountered. As noticed by Karcher, this chapter ends with a chorus-like warning from Pip, articulating Melville's premonition about the storm brewing over slavery in America, "Oh! thou big white God aloft there somewhere in yon darkness, have mercy on this small black boy down here; preserve him from all men that have no bowels to feel fear!" (83). In the same vein, by ignoring the issue of slavery man would be forsaken by the white God.

Although there are moments of racial bullying, as seen in "Midnight, Forecastle" and Stubb's treatment of Pip, there are moments that give hope for progress. Brotherhood as a form of progress is seen through the strained relationship of Ahab and Starbuck. In the end Starbuck sees Ahab as a brother, "Their hands met; their eyes fastened; Starbuck's tears the glue" (421). The tragedy of this relationship is Ahab's failure to see the offering of brotherly love from Starbuck. Starbuck acknowledges the agony and torment Ahab puts himself through and Starbuck tries to reason to the humanity of Ahab. Often he will remind Ahab of Nantucket and his family there, "Sir, are the wife and child of thy loving, longing, paternal old age! Away! let us away!-this instant let me alter the course!" (406). Sadly, Ahab has a moment of regretful questioning and realizes that he has focused entirely on this mission instead of his family, "what a forty years' fool-fool-old fool, has old Ahab been! Why this strife of the chase? why weary, and palsy the arm

at the oar, and the iron, and the lance? how the richer or better is Ahab now?" (405). Too concerned with the task at hand Ahab fails to realize that there are other lives at stake.

We can read this as a possible warning to abolitionists who focus on fighting lawmakers or distributing pamphlets rather than helping the person next to them. Just as brotherhood and unity strengthens a country, selfish means to an end will divide a country. Those who focused solely on the emancipation of slaves have the potential to forget that human lives should be the focus, not only politics.

On board, a gentle and caring relationship does occur with Ahab, and that is with the black cabin boy Pip. Pip is an obvious character of the slave trade and Ahab is his savior – for a moment. Possibly reveling in the freedom of maritime laws versus slave laws Pip initially enjoys his time on the *Pequod*. When Pip falls overboard, Stubb in a rash moment of blatant racism sees no issue in leaving him out at sea and admonishes him when rescued, "We can't afford to lose whales by the likes of you; a whale would sell for thirty times what you would, Pip, in Alabama" (321). Stubb's obvious master/slave language furthers Pip's character as southern slave. With the fervor of an abolitionist, Ahab sees Pip as something to hide away and protect. Pip forces Ahab to acknowledge black slavery and Pip sees the freedom giving whiteness within Ahab. However, Pip cannot drop the slave vocabulary of calling Ahab "master" throughout the novel. Little does Ahab realize but he commits, what Karcher labels "a great Northern hypocrisy and indifference," when he vows, "Ahab's cabin shall be Pips home henceforth, while Ahab lives" (87). The cabin becomes Pip's new prison with no solution neither presented nor sought after by Ahab.

Ishmael's controversial line, "Who ain't a slave?" (21), is not offensive if read with historic maritime wages in mind. Regardless of color, all novice seamen were paid to what equated to "slave wages" as researched by Bolster, and Ishmael was paid as such (1183). Queequeg a skilled harpooner was paid more than Ishmael, therefore skill and experience trumps race. Ishmael equates working for an employer for a wage akin to slavery by asking, in other words "Who doesn't work under the rule of a master?" Ishmael is also asking, are we not always a slave to something, a boss, a job, or God? Every employment position answers to a higher ranking official. Also, it must be noted that Ishmael uses vocabulary indicative of slavery and cannibalism which echoes sentiments of the slave states. It is not until he realizes his prejudices and seeks to correct his behavior by examining his way of thinking does his vocabulary change.

While on board various whaling vessels, Melville was exposed to the diverse crew that constitutes a ship's maritime society. Social graces, laws, and ethics on board a boat are quite different than on land. The unspoken primary goals on a vessel are survival and profit; both are accomplished via teamwork no matter what race the crew may be. Melville illustrates this goal of survival and blurs racial lines by having Queequeg save the life of a greenhorn "bumpkin" who accuses Queequeg of being "the devil" (63). After this incident Ishmael sees him for the man he truly is. Melville's writings are not solely anti-slavery, but positively pro-brotherhood. All races need to recognize the humanity in each other.

Taking account of the *Pequod* crew, nearly every race and a variety of cultures are represented – the *Pequod* illustrates the diversity of America. Melville has distinct moments on board that not only reflect race relations that were occurring in America

during his time, but also timeless lessons about humanity. If the *Pequod* function as America, then each individual onboard whaling boat is a state. Of the four boats on board, each is overseen by a strong governor and we can relegate each boat north or south of the Mason-Dixon line; focused Ahab with Fedallah along with the methodically quiet Starbuck with Queequeg are of the North, “plantation” threatening Stubb and Tashtego are of the racially divided South, and the boat that can be seen as southern with anti-slavery tendencies is with Flask and Daggoo. The harpooners are not white, and are recognized as valuable members of the crew. As historically established, the race lines onboard a whaler were blurry due to the goal of profit and respect for skill.

The combination of Flask and Daggoo is the most primal of all three; Daggoo has “voluntarily shipped on board of a whaler” and still “retained all his barbaric virtues,” (106) implying that he knows nothing of American slavery. Flask is a simple whaler, keen on hunting and leaving his fate to the ocean. Both of these men see whaling for what it is – a business. Within this business neither gets distracted when working and display the ultimate teamwork while hunting. Flask, being of short stature, takes no issue in climbing on the back of his black harpooner’s “lofty shoulders” to get a more advantageous view.

But the sight of little Flask mounted upon gigantic Daggoo was yet more curious; for sustaining himself with a cool, indifferent, easy, unthought of, barbaric majesty, the noble negro to every roll of the sea harmoniously rolled his fine form. On his broad back, flaxen-haired Flask seemed a snow-flake. (184)

Although racial lines are hinted at, they physically display the harmony that can be achieved between blacks and whites. It can also be said that the productivity of America owes much to the strong backs of black men.

While Melville wrote of a captain hell bent on killing a cause, there is a character on board who goes through a social transformation before the reader's eyes. Ishmael is a simple school teacher looking to work on a whaling boat, yet he emerges as the most evolved character of all. Given no choice of roommates by Mr. Coffin, Ishmael and Queequeg become fast friends. Queequeg becomes the character in which Ishmael, and we, sees racial boundaries disappear. With the influx of newly freed slave this was an issue being faced in America, sanctioned boundaries were being blurred.

While Ahab is concerned with the cause of fighting for that which he cannot catch, Ishmael is concerned with the quality of a man. The first third of the novel has an Ishmael that is frightened of a black church service and petrified about sharing a bed with a savage. Slowly he begins to realize that "thought I to myself-the man's a human being just as I am: he has just as much reason to fear me, as I have to be afraid of him. Better sleep with a sober cannibal than a drunken Christian" (36) here we see that Ishmael is here for brotherhood. Knowing Queequeg allows Ishmael to realize that it is the soul that makes you a man, not your outward appearance, "Methinks my body is but the lees of by better being" (45), this enables an awakening within Ishmael and he boards the *Pequod* with this new knowledge. Overnight Ishmael undergoes a transformation of racial tolerance; he even questions the use of the words "savage" and "civilized" concluding that some "savages" are more civilized than the so called "civilized" person (56). Ishmael

is the enlightened racially tolerant member of society boarding a whaler that exemplifies the diversity in America.

According to Karcher, if Melville teaches us anything about Ishmael and Queequeg, or any other prejudices present it is: to avoid sinking the ship of American brotherhood, the citizens must embrace the freed slave as an equal member of society (63). When Ishmael leaves the narrative we are left knowing how dramatically a character can change but are faced with an ever battling Ahab versus his mates and his self. Readers hope for Ahab to realize his flaw and suffer along with Starbuck's fight between obeying and doing what is right. Self-discovery is the key to Melville's message to abolitionists. Infighting and turmoil amount to nothing and change begins with a calm leader and sadly that leader is not Ahab. Citizens and crewmembers should also self discover because blindly following a leaders amounts to furthering a damaged system.

The fateful *Pequod* sinks under the monomania of Ahab. *Moby Dick* swims on, as do countless other whales of every shape and color. Was there any lesson Melville wanted to leave with a blasted captain and a ship torn asunder by the leviathan? The lesson is left grasping on to the coffin of his dead brother. Ishmael is saved from the white whale by the American made coffin for a black man. To have Ishmael saved by Queequeg's coffin shows the surviving powers of sacred traditions. When building the coffin Queequeg inscribed it with sacred text, Melville has this "text" survive and rescue Ishmael, furthering Michael C. Berthold's idea that this Western device burst forth from a "black bubble" and saved him from the "creamy pool" (10). Ishmael is saved by using and realizing the true value of black traditions and contributions. Karcher claims that Melville looked forward to a unifying brotherhood and those in the abolitionist

movement were more concerned with vain aspirations (17). There was selfishness with those who claimed to be the voice of the oppressed. Many were concerned with the end result and how it reflected on their image rather than the results for those in slavery.

Ahab cared neither for his crew, other boats, nor to honor his obligations to Bildad and Peleg. Ahab's failure to embrace brotherhood highlights those who fail to recognize that the abolitionist movement is not just a cause on a pamphlet but also involves lives. The tortured captain dies but Ishmael must live because he must warn the ship of America not to be seduced by the promises of the overly ambitious.

A clue of what was to come from Melville after the 1851 publication of *Moby-Dick* is found in a letter written to his literary confidant, Nathaniel Hawthorne. Upon receiving a glowing review of *Moby-Dick* from Hawthorne, Melville responded in a letter in which he declares, "... let us add Moby Dick to our blessing, and step from that. Leviathan is not the biggest fish; -- I have heard of Krakens" (Letter to Nathaniel Hawthorne [17?] Nov 1851). The Leviathan is the largest whale, but the Kraken is the largest sea monster. What could hold greater weight than the Leviathan? Why allude to a greater beast lying in wait? Perhaps Melville was working on a piece that was not only great in literary weight, but was of a subject of great importance to society. Melville looked to further his investigation of America's moral decay just as Ishmael looked to the sea, "to have one's hands among the unspeakable foundations, ribs, and very pelvis of the world; this is a fearful thing" (116). The continuation of slavery and the denial of its damage is the "unspeakable foundation" that Melville sought to expose in *Benito Cereno*.

The many black characters in *Moby-Dick* know nothing of slavery; with origins in the Caribbean, Middle East, and South Seas, this crew works together for a goal. Even

though they are undermined and abused by Captain Ahab, they never revolt. Why? There is never a threat of violence because of the brotherhood on board. This crew respects each other and recognizes each role as integral to the success of their voyage. However, juxtaposed against the crew of the *Pequod* is the crew of the *San Dominick*. The violent blacks focused on mutiny on the *San Dominick* serve as a contrast for the civil profit based blacks on the *Pequod*. Melville, always the champion of brotherhood, uses this contrast to show what happens when there is no brotherhood. If the country continued on its path of captain and submissive crew - the country could expect revolution. On the other hand, if citizens recognized that they are all equal members of a crew on board the ship of America, the resulting progress will benefit all.

On board the ship of the *San Dominick* there are hatchet polishers, padlocks, knots that cannot be untied, and a factitious disorder involving fainting. There is the nervous captain "by proxy" Benito Cereno, his overly compensating deck hand Babo, and the blissfully unaware Captain Delano. Each of these characters is a way by which Melville conveyed his warnings to America; whether citizens supported slavery or not. Captain Delano interacts with Benito not knowing that he should help, just as the North unknowingly contributed to slavery by following the Fugitive Slave Law Act. Captain Delano referred to as "the American," functions on 'white blindness,' a method of distracting himself to the real problem on board. The black race on board is presented as both highly civilized and savagely uncivilized, mirroring the contrasting opinions of American citizens in 1850 that fought over the issue of repealing slavery.

During the first third of the account, readers are introduced to the *San Dominick* through the optimistic perspective of Captain Delano. He is aloof and naïve to the hidden

tragedy and distress on board. He is Melville's character that embodies Americans who support slavery and those who suffer from white blindness. His initial hesitancy to board the ship has him wondering what the ship could possibly contain "considering the lawlessness and loneliness of the spot, and the sort of stories, at that day, associated with those seas" (35). Melville uses Delano's reluctance to illustrate an attack on the innocence claimed by those in the North. By not learning more about slavery or recognizing its horrors, Northerners were also guilty of participating in slavery. Through his interactions with those on board, he proceeds to feed and humor the reverse slavery on board, that which he was blind to for many hours. Did he know to ask if there was a mutiny? He assumed that "Captain" Cereno was in charge. Therefore, did the North unknowingly contribute to the FSL by not recognizing the horrors that were occurring on their land? By not questioning the ship's odd location and form, Delano steps onto a ship of festering violence.

A group of characters that hold profound meaning to critics are the men tying meticulously intricate knots on the ship. Noticing Delano's interest in the knots being made, one elderly man challenges him to "Undo it, cut it, quick" (63). Sterling Stuckey finds that the knots are emblematic of the problems facing the whites on board and Delano's failure to work through the problem (135). According to William Dillingham "when the sailor throws him the knotted rope and tells him to 'undo it, cut it, quick,' he does not understand that the knot is a metaphor for the mystery of the *San Dominick*" (246). Not only is the knot itself of critical importance, but the exchange before the knot is handed to Delano is of equal weight, especially if the knot is the tangled issue of slavery.

“What are you knotting there, my man?”

“The knot,” was the brief reply, without looking up.

“So it seems; but what is it for?”

“For some one else to undo,” muttered back the old man, plying his fingers harder than ever. (63)

The old black man complicates the knot into a series of twists and turns. He is the one producing the knot under the forced conditions. And who will undo this knot? Certainly the old man cannot. Only the white abolitionists can help unravel the tangle of slavery created by an unjust white government. Delano is begged by the crew to untangle it quickly but he only inspects it in his hand. Frustrated by his failure to solve the knot it is taken from his hands and tossed overboard “with some African word, equivalent to pshaw” (64). Is Delano’s solution to throw it away Melville’s commentary of Northern Abolitionist hypocrisy? Citizens wanted slavery to end. The knot of slavery was an abomination to the Constitution, but were they willing to work hard at untying that knot? They wrote letters, protested, and spoke in public, but were they willing to do the actual work? If we are to read Delano as a Northern Abolitionist or any citizen not willing to put in the work to end an injustice, according to Melville they were not willing.

The knot makers on the *San Dominick* are a microcosm of America; they represent various ethnicities within one moment. First speaking in English, they also speak Spanish, and finally speaking in their native African tongue. This trio of cultures comes together and produces a knot. Delano, the American, fails to undo the disruption of rope. With exasperation the knot maker throws the knot overboard with a “pshaw” (64). Author Robert Levine claims a “word, equivalent to pshaw” would have “caught the

attention of abolitionist lawyers in Massachusetts... especially since “pshaw” is pronounced like Shaw (63). As further noted, Levine believes that the quote bears an “attorney air” that would have caught the interest of Massachusetts lawyers; opponents would have “savored” its toss overboard. The combination of the word “pshaw” and “attorney air” equates to Chief Justice Shaw and his pro-slavery ideals being thrown overboard. A known supporter of the FSL, Shaw and his ideals were no longer productive for equality and should be overthrown.

Delano, referred to as “the American” twenty-eight times in the novel aligns him to the role of America and her states. Parker claims Delano is “an American type” as a result of his “preoccupation with the American national character” (237). Through his eyes, the black slaves are feared and sympathized. Melville was a master at forcing readers to read characters and conditions that were foreign to them. He took readers to cannibal societies and dire conditions on whaling vessels. However, the blacks on board the *San Dominick* are a stronger, more organized group than previously seen in Melville’s fiction. Therefore, as Delano is encountering this organized group for the first time so too are readers.

At first Delano sees Cereno as entranced and his interactions with the crew are moments of “sorry and affection... equally balanced” (39); with the exception of his eager personal servant Babo. Delano’s refusal to see the role reversal in front of him is due to his white blindness. Observing every race in their “proper” role, Delano is free to observe Cereno as a captain with the most loyal servant. The black race on board is presented as civilized as with the rope makers, and uncivilized as with the chained African ex-king Atufal. Delano is pleased albeit hesitant at the slave behavior – are they too loyal or not

loyal enough? The idea of balance with races is unseen to Delano; it is impossible for him to imagine a homogenous crew of black and white.

As seen in the explosive plot twist, Melville enslaved both races in order to illustrate how every person and all of America suffer from slavery. Even though many may profit from the slave trade and the goods it creates, the country suffers due to its lack of unity. By silencing the slave voice the white race displays a lack of unity and brotherhood. When the slave submits to their captor, they are also not being true to their race and self. Both Cereno and Babo appear realistic, however, these appearances are false. William Dillingham notes the fact that “the underlying conclusion reached in the story is that both appearance and what passes for reality are false and thus in a sense not opposites but similitudes” (230). First as a display to Delano, Cereno wears the key that can unlock Atufal’s chains. It is this key that turns into his albatross, “the slave there carries the padlock, but master... carries the key” (51). If only the white man took the key worn around their neck and unlocked slavery, then both parties would be truly free. The key, as read by Kevin Goddard, “is made futile by the stasis of the event,” thereby “turning it into an intolerable weight” (227). Not only is Atufal physically bound by chains, Cereno is also shadowed by bondage. Cereno’s chains are not made of metal but made of a man called Babo. Constantly underfoot, Babo serves as a constant reminder of why Cereno is in his current position of slave.

Cereno’s bouts of sporadic fainting are a physical mask to hide from the issue at hand. Whenever Delano questions or searches for more information, Cereno conveniently faints and is taken to his cabin or the subject is changed, as per the insistence of Babo. Cereno’s fainting, when situations become stressful, is Melville’s way to show Northern

denial through the actions of others. Cereno, a Spaniard, is the one who faints. Delano, a New Englander, must look upon these spells and unlock their hidden meaning. There is no progress when Cereno faints and Delano fails to recognize the lack of improvement. Delano only pities the captain. By having Delano witness Cereno's fainting Melville forces Delano to be the one to take action and question everything around him. Many Americans in the North believed that slavery was a problem that would either solve itself, go away on its own, or get untangled by someone other than themselves. Delano shares this thinking with Cereno, "For when, after a long, sad voyage, you know, the anchor drops into the haven, all its vast weight seems lifted from the captain's heart" (81). Eventually the anchor will drop and the captain will no longer have to carry the weight. Melville leaves the possible solution open. What may cause the anchor of slavery to drop is neither explored nor questioned.

Melville's use of slave masks on two characters calls into question if any other characters wear such an indicator. All crew members are members of the hidden revolution that occurred. Dillingham concludes that since no figure has a true and final identity as either free victor or defeated slave (or vice versa) there are no fundamental differences between the two (233). Babo was a slave on land but now he is a master – playing a slave. Cereno was crewmember, captain, and now slave playing a captain. Joyce Sparer Adler believes that Melville does not indicate which race is liable because, "he is opposed to slavery whether white or black is enslaved" (qtd. in Halpern 562). Delano confuses the master/slave mask when he confuses Cereno's withdrawn nature and Babo's effect on his behavior, "Ah, this slavery breeds ugly passions in man – Poor fellow!" (75). The passions of the slave and slave master breeds ugliness in both parties.

The Kraken Melville unearthed is the reality that all Americans, free or not, wear the slavery mask. In the same vein, Shaw wore the mask of justice while participating in the injustice that was the FSL.

For the infamous shaving scene the direct historical inspiration is found in the dossier of the real Captain Delano. In "Voyages" he describes,

[T]he chief pulled a knife out of this basket, drew the edge of it across his own throat, counted his fingers, and pointed to his neck, to show how many heads he had cut off with his knife, and then would rub it across White's throat to prove how convenient the instrument was for the purpose of beheading a man... (97)

Melville's intricate story revealed when readers reflect back upon the shaving scene after the mutiny is realized. Initially Delano finds it curious, but plausible, that Cereno is shaved while receiving a guest. He is then impressed that Babo is so caring with his handling of such a sharp instrument. However, upon realizing that roles are reversed, readers can see the glaring hints that Delano was blind to notice. When Babo "accidentally" cuts Cereno, Babo "held up the trickling razor, saying, with a sort of half humorous sorrow, 'See, master, - you shook so - here's Babo's first blood'" (73); Cereno understands that the second and final cut would be soon lest he keep up the suspicious behavior. Delano is blind and ignorant that slaves could mutiny, and readers should take heed from Delano's racism. The lesson Melville is imparting to his audience is that anything is possible. White readers are warned that one day the knife will be upon their neck if they do not read the warning signs.

Melville's antiestablishment drive and want to break free from previous literary genres was his vow not to follow established roles and laws. This motivation can be

directly seen in the motto of the ship in *Benito Cereno*. Melville's warning not to continue on the path of slavery is reflected in the motto of the *San Dominick*. "Seguid Vuestro Jefe" or "Follow Your Leader" as motto of the ship plays a dual role on board. During the narrative, before the revelation, each character follows their assigned leader: Babo follows Cereno and Delano follows America as a slave country. Yet upon revelation, it is seen that each followed the wrong leader: Cereno was the one following Babo and Delano should have been following abolitionist ideology. Delano fails to even entertain the idea that blacks hold a voice and power, thereby causing more harm than good. This message is also for the reader, do not follow those who lived before unless the wanted result is to fall victim to stasis. Freed slaves are not to follow but change the role they once had. In the deposition section, readers learn of Babo's threat, "Keep faith with the blacks from here to Senegal, or you shall in spirit, as now in body, follow your leader" (93). Death results from following the established norm. The flag does not say 'captain', only 'leader'; society should define what or who their leaders are.

When Delano first arrives on the *San Dominick* he noticed the figurehead of Christopher Columbus covered in canvas. Delano's innocence excuses it as "either to protect it while undergoing a re-furbishing, or else decently to hide its decay" (37). Columbus is now obscured by the skeleton of Aranda and imposing motto. The skeleton against the motto displays the fate of those who follow. By changing the figurehead Levine argues that Melville is implying that the new world has changed its course from discovery to corruption (190). Columbus found a new land that was virginal and uncorrupted; Melville wants readers to see only the skeleton of what was.

By the last page, the slave and enslaver share the same fate; both are dead. By contributing to the slave system it will only result in the same end for both parties, no one will survive. *Benito Cereno* answers the question first posed by Ishmael, "Who ain't a slave?" (21). Americans were not only slaves on land but slaves to a system that allowed it to continue. When Babo is killed and his head is placed upon a pole he gazes over the landscape to the corpses of Aranda and Cereno gazing back. As interpreted by Goddard, this final lasting gaze indicates that "the future is stasis, not progress, and the allegory lies stuck in the phase of battle" (233). All three parties are left staring at each other, all looking to the other for answers. Melville may have found the Kraken in *Benito Cereno*, but never solved its mystery.

The desperate need, or refusal, of brotherhood on the *San Dominick* is an act of desperation; therefore how can the slave crew be seen as savages? These men are driven to violence at the future of slavery, "the negroes giving too hot a reception, the whites kept a more respectful distance" (87). Is their violence justified if the end was freedom? Was the mutiny on the *Amistad* not valid because they were fighting for freedom? It is not the issue of slavery onboard, but the desperate and violent quest for freedom. Melville chose to use the violence in *Benito Cereno* as a warning and possibility. Melville took the advice of Father Mapple in *Moby-Dick*, he "preach[ed] the Truth to the face of Falsehood" (53). It is interesting to note that in 1852 Melville recognized that *Moby-Dick* failed to ignite a fire under the Reformers. In a letter to Hawthorne he states that "It can hardly be doubted that all Reformers are bottomed upon the truth, more or less; and to the world at large are not reformers almost universally laughing-stocks?...Truth is ridiculous to men." (Letter to Nathaniel Hawthorne, 1 July

1852). The idea of a ridiculous truth is seen in *Benito Cereno*. Mutiny is an outlandish idea to those focused on a peaceful solution. Truth lays in the violent mutiny and the falsehood is in Delano's inability to see that truth. Delano's character as "the American", not necessarily the "white American", focuses Melville's concern on the cause and reason rather than the effect. If racial prejudices are the unfortunate result, then the cause of that should be dealt with. The government, or "the American", is more responsible than just the "white American". For critic Robert Levine the eventual surprise is dramatic because it "depends on the failure to understand the nature of the relationship among white northerners, Spanish captains, and black passengers" (288). Society must strive for unity between all races in order to avoid a violent act that will expose the truth.

Chapter 2: Ignored Prophecy

If acts of slavery and anti-establishment feelings are the issues Melville had readers focus on – were there warnings of these negative results? If blame is to be placed on all humankind - what did they possibly ignore? Melville's uses of prophetic warnings are akin to sections of the Bible. In the Bible there are lessons and tests on values that warn of negative results if the correct path is not chosen. Selections of Melville's characters also describe the potential for negative results if warnings are ignored. For Melville's characters, many outcomes are not positive or pleasant. Not only are some outcomes negative, but the warnings that are the foundations of the destructive ends are blatantly ignored. A character who is explicitly prophetic is Elijah in *Moby-Dick* and although his warnings are dire, characters disregard his cautionary advice. One character, Delano in *Benito Cereno*, is blind to the warnings and only at the end does he recognize what should have been followed. Did Melville add these characters to challenge the idea of free will and fate? Or did he include them to show how characters/citizens ignore warnings no matter how explicit? By exploring characters that bear an omen and warnings that are ignored, we are able to delve deeper into Melville's larger warning to citizens. Melville wanted people to be mindful of others who refuse to grow and change because they are directing society toward a negative path.

There are a variety of episodes and characters that deliver warnings in *Moby-Dick*. Each one embodies an aspect of America whether it is of slavery or morality; each one is ignored and thereby suffered from. Ishmael's disregard of prophetic warnings is most obvious after a conversation with a man who calls himself Elijah. As Elijah follows Ishmael and Queequeg, Ishmael's memory recalls previous foreboding signs, "what

Captain Peleg had said of [Ahab], when I left the ship the day previous; and the prediction of the squaw Tistig, and the voyage we had bound ourselves to say; and a hundred other shadowy things” (88). Although the “shadowy things” may be found in the revival church he passed or the “dreary November” in his soul, Ishmael is never given such dire warning as with Elijah.

In front of the looming *Pequod*, Elijah is there to warn the two men of a darkness on the ship. That darkness is Captain Ahab and when men board the ship they write off their soul. Yet Ishmael and Queequeg ignore Nantucket’s prophet and disregard his warnings as the ramblings of a madman. Little did they know of the truth told and battles soon to be faced on board. Did American citizens disregard warnings and blindly board a ship that would take them in circles rather than towards new knowledge? They too may have ignored warnings from others who were giving a voice to problems they saw within the United States. There were a minority of people who recognized the problems that would result if they were not dealt with. The Elijah figures in America during 1850 were diverse vocal abolitionists such as William Lloyd Garrison and educated freed slaves like Frederick Douglass who were looking to raise awareness and rid the country of slavery. There were feminists gaining a voice against the sexism they faced prominently led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, and healthcare workers like Dorothea Dix who saw to address the flaws in the medical system. As with the ignored warnings in the novels, there were citizens who continued to support slavery and its laws. The laws outlined in the Compromise of 1850 bolstered the already existing Fugitive Slave Law, and thereby reinforced established slave laws. One state, Virginia, forced all those who were emancipated to leave and fought to forbid the legislature to free any more slaves.

Even though there were warnings, American took a chance with leaders who took things to extremes and citizens who gave in. Just as crewmembers took a chance on Ahab and often submitted to his wants they too would be subjected to extremes.

Melville's Elijah is very concerned with the souls of Ishmael and Queequeg. He asks if on their contract there was "anything down there about your souls?" (89). With no answer from either he quickly disregards the soul, calling it "a fifth wheel to a wagon" (89) insinuating that souls get in the way of industry. Perhaps the soulless man was the one who created a country of slavery? How else could a person take ownership of another human being? The essence of a person, their soul and guiding ethical force, would be against such slavery. Or maybe they are the ones who carelessly shed that fifth wheel to be part of the American machine? Had those who were part of the machine realized the focus on production and money, perhaps they could have been more sensitive to the machine's disregard of humanity. Ishmael's actions to board the *Pequod* are indicative of those focused on profit at any human expense. Melville uses Ishmael to show that there is more to learn and repair before profit should be considered. Melville asks, why not be soulless when dealing with something that may turn a financial profit no matter how abusive the leader may be? Although this conveys a selfish and negative result, Melville presents this ethical conundrum for the reader to resolve. If there is only one soul guiding a ship or economical machine and that soul is corrupt, then the result is failure. However, if that soul is in support of humanity and brotherhood then the result is profit and most importantly, progress. Melville hints at such a moral leader in the chapter "The Try-Works". A strong leader should resist madness and stay calm amidst the stormy darkness and "can alike dive down into the blackest gorges, and soar out of them again and

become invisible in the sunny spaces” (328). America needs all citizens to work through any injustice, particularly slavery. Therefore they should recognize a government, or captain, that has different intentions of what they initially set out for. As for Ishmael, he is being true to his role as a naïve American and board the ship for the want of money. However, as it is seen further into the novel Ishmael learns that there is more to gain in life than just money.

Elijah hints at a greater function when he asks Ishmael to relay a message, “when ye get there, tell ‘em I’ve concluded not to make one of ‘em” (88). This message is illusive yet full of prophetic potential. Since it was the Biblical Elijah to instill judgment, Melville’s Elijah hints at possible resolution. From this quote we can assume one of two things: either Elijah was to be a potential crew member and refused or he previously prophesized to Ahab. He has “concluded,” or decided, not to “make” one of them. Who is the one and what were they to be made into? One prophecy has yet to come to fruition or has been ignored previously according to Elijah. While asking the duo if they know of Ahab, Elijah wonders if they know “nothing about his losing his leg last voyage, according to prophesy” (87). This suggests that Ahab already ignored warnings and paid for it with his leg. Ahab knows of this prophesy when he admits to himself, “The prophesy was that I should be dismembered” (143) allowing the reader to wonder if it was the same Elijah Ishmael and Queequeg met. Elijah is prophet and judge, just as Ahab sees himself as “prophet and fulfiller one” (143). If we apply the issues of slavery to his previous warning then were there previous warnings ignored by citizens?

Elijah is ignored twice in Nantucket. The final warning is hinted at while the pair is boarding the *Pequod*. Elijah alludes to a darkness on board by asking if they saw

“anything looking like men going towards that ship” (91). Not men, but “looking” like men, a darkness entered the boat. This is eventually revealed as Fedallah, the on board prophet. Fedallah is a darkness that walks in Ahab’s shadow. This dark figure warns Ahab of his death, just like the slave whispering in the ear of America and what her future holds. Had both listened, Ahab would be a changed man and America would have broken the chains of slavery.

Eventually Elijah sees them off with a final statement, “I was going to warn ye against – but never mind, never mind – it’s all one, all in the family too... shan’t see you again very soon, I guess; unless it’s before the Grand Jury” (91). Mentioning The Last Judgment suggests that they will have to answer for all that is participated in on board. Americans were also bound to answer for all actions they allow. Not particular to slavery, Elijah focuses on a lasting legacy. It is the opinion of Jonathan Cook that Elijah serves as “an implicit reminder” of the biblical King Ahab (66). Yes, Elijah does serve Ahab but his warnings to Ishmael are for a greater issue. Elijah is there to remind people of their souls and how actions affect their final days of self-reflection. What will they have to atone for on their last day? Elijah, without directly saying slavery, hints at the need for self-reflection. Had Ishmael and Queequeg listened to Elijah perhaps the tragedy of *Pequod* would have been avoided. Any reader familiar with the Bible would have seen and understood Elijah’s warnings. Yet Ishmael forges on with no regard to the warnings given. Is Melville hinting that Americans failed to see the obvious warnings of future troubles? Perhaps the early slave revolts in America should have been given greater attention. As abolitionists warned people and slaves took to violent plantation revolts, many stood supporting slavery without any regard to the great warnings given.

Prior to boarding the *Pequod* Ishmael decides to participate in a church service. Upon entry into the Whaleman's Chapel, Ishmael quickly notes the nautical direction of this church. With walls lined with tributes to those lost at sea, widows in the pews, and a ship's bow for a pulpit – this is the church Ishmael needs to be in. Although the church's spiritual leader, Father Mapple, is giving his daily mass, readers cannot help but notice veiled warnings and premonitions about Ahab and his abuse of power.

The pulpit on which Father Mapple delivers his homilies is a “very lofty one” (46) outfitted with a rope ladder. Upon mounting the prow of his pulpit he would “deliberately drag up the ladder step by step” (46) as if to bar his congregation on his personal ship. While thinking about the pulpit Ishmael recognizes that it is the captain, the head of the ship, that often will “bear the earliest brunt” (47) of any wrath God may lay upon man. The priest is the filter and defender for the word of God just as the captain is the filter and defender for the truth. Trust from the congregation and crew must be had for a respectful balance. Melville's ultimate leader is defined through Mapple's homily. Leaders are to be trusted, be a voice in the face of controversy, and preach from on high. However, all should be hesitant of a leader who bars others from entering their space and pulpit.

Before the reading from the Bible, Mapple reveals that he will be reading from the first chapter of Jonah. Ishmael and the reader immediately know that this is the story of a wayward sinning soul eventually consumed by a whale. Is it coincidence that Mapple is reading from this particular book with Ishmael and Queequeg in the pews? How fitting is it that this is the chosen sermon of the day. Surely Father Mapple does not read this for every service; there is a reason for Ishmael to hear about Jonah. What is the purpose of the Jonah story and what is Ishmael to learn from it? Jonah ignores a request from God,

has a moment of repentance, lives a life resisting God, and eventually accepting his originally intended role as prophet. Jonah resisted when God pushed; he fled and God continued to pursue. Ishmael should not resist that which comes natural – and that is his potential of embracing brotherhood. The prophetic warning that lives in his sermon is poignant and unfortunately ignored by Ishmael.

During the introduction to Jonah, Mapple stresses that Jonah was a sinner and thought “that a ship made by men, will carry him into countries where God does not reign” (49). The *Pequod*, constructed by men, piloted by Ahab soon becomes a Godless ship with his famous anti-baptismal scene, “Ego non baptisto se in nomine” (372). Ahab is one who does not kneel to religion and recognizes the Godlessness within his soul. *The Pequod*'s initial intentions are to profit from whaling. However this focus shifts as Ahab's monomania increases. Although many hail and trust Ahab, his true Godless intentions are revealed as soon as they hit deep waters.

Melville's choice to include Jonah's story aligns Jonah's tale and Ishmael's journey on equal trajectories of sin and demise. Jonah's desperation to sail equate to Ishmael's decision to board a whaler. Jonah asks, “how soon sail ye, sir?” and questions if they can sail sooner. Ishmael is also quick to choose *The Pequod*, reveling in the ship's antiquated and classic construction. Perhaps Ishmael should have taken time to consider the crew on the ship he was about to board rather than its appearance. The crew driving a machine is just as important as the machine.

Mapple furthers his warning to Ishmael while discussing how Jonah feels suffocated by the ship. Yet for Jonah it is not physical claustrophobia but conscience laden. Feeling trapped, Jonah realizes it is he that is confined, “Oh! So my conscience

hangs in me... the chambers of my soul are all in crookedness” (51). Ishmael sails because there is a “damp November” in his soul. Both men cannot escape themselves – they bring all sin, anger, and conscience onto the ship. Mapple’s stress on restriction illustrates the fact that problems and sin travel with you. It matters not where you are physically, but how you deal with yourself emotionally. Ishmael’s anger and frustration with humanity cannot be solved by whaling. Ahab’s anger and emotional trauma cannot be cured by killing a whale; neither can one man rid the world of their own white whale. Both men fail to recognize that absolution starts from within and solutions are brought about with brotherhood. Melville was not asking for citizens to be specifically obedient to God. The greater issue for him was to be obedient to their fellow neighbor and brother. If we are all to be on one ship, then we should all recognize each other as equals. Slave owners, abolitionists, and those in power would continue on a negative path unless they recognize their humanity and brotherhood.

Wracked with guilt and sin “Jonah sleeps his hideous sleep” (51) and not until his full confession does he recognize and appreciate his punishment. Are Ishmael’s frustrations cured only by whaling? Peace comes onto Ishmael when he recognizes the sins within him. Ishmael has a tendency to become annoyed by others and starts the novel with racist language and thinking. Is Ishmael on the same trajectory as Jonah? Ishmael must realize that his sin is cured from within. Mapple did “not place Jonah before [Ishmael] to be copied for his sin but [he] did place him before [Ishmael] as a model for repentance” (52). The focus and purpose of the reading comes to fruition with Mapple’s reasoning for reading the Jonah story.

Recognizing that he is captain and conduit for "The Word," Mapple bears the weight of warning. He recognizes that all have the whale of sin and if not recognized we are bound to be swallowed. Ahab's failure to reconcile with himself eventually kills him. The crew's failure to recognize Ahab's ill-intent causes their demise also. And Americans who fail to realize the sins they allowed and participated in are bound "to be swallowed" if they are not atoned for. Realization does take time, however, and it takes one mutiny, one educated slave, or one abolitionist to open their home as refuge to start moving in a direction of unity. All was not beyond solution according to Melville. Ishmael eventually realizes and rectifies his sins and survives.

Elijah and Father Mapple are two prophets ignored by Ishmael, and Fedallah is the ignored prophet for Ahab. Having ignored the warnings of a tragic demise, Ishmael soon finds himself on board with the mythical Parsee. Wary of who and what purpose Fedallah serves, he is surely ignorant to the prediction Fedallah bestows upon Ahab.

Elijah hints at the addition of unnatural men on board. It is this group of five men that are Fedallah and others in Ahab's secret crew. Fedallah and the other "phantoms" are met with awe and trepidation during the first sighting of a whale. As Ahab's shouts direction, the crew and mates have "their eyes again riveted upon the smart Fedallah and his crew, the inmates of the other boats obeyed not the command" (181). Among the crew rendered confused is Starbuck who is quickly ignored by Ahab, Flask is unmoved, and most suspicious is Stubb who recognizes that Ahab's special crew is only for Moby Dick, "The White Whale's at the bottom of it" (183). However, Melville's addition of Fedallah is not only for whaling but a spiritual guide for Ahab.

Some hints that Fedallah is more than a simple crew member come during a conversation between Flask and Stubb who label him a “gamboge ghost” capable of “charm[ing] the ship to no good” (259). The ever suspicious Stubb labels him “the devil in disguise” (259). All crew members either ignore or never confront Fedallah and they certainly never confront Ahab about the inclusion.

It is not until Chapter 117 do readers learn of Fedallah’s true function. Those who bestowed warning on land offer hope for resolution – an alternate path other than demise. It is on the *Pequod*, away from land, do the warnings change to only death as a result. Fedallah is there to tell Ahab about his death and he offers no moral lesson or option for redemption. In a conversation between him and Ahab, Fedallah discusses three prophetic dreams he has been experiencing. First before Ahab dies he will see two hearses, one “not made by mortal hands” and the other made of wood “grown in America”. Second, Fedallah will die before Ahab, and lastly Ahab can only be killed by hemp. Ever defiant, Ahab ignores all three prophecies by responding to each with interpretations that satisfy his needs. Ahab not only ignores prophesy but reinterprets, or corrects, Fedallah’s visions. He thinks it is impossible for a hearse and its pallbearers be seen at sea, “such a sight we shall not soon see” (377), that he had “two pledges” that he will not only killed Moby Dick but survive, lastly he interprets hemp as the gallows, not as rope – which completely surrounded him on *The Pequod*. Ahab alternative interpretation may have worked on land, but not when the ship has already sailed. A leader focused on their profit with no recognition of possible ill effects will only harm himself and the crew.

Prophecy foretold by Fedallah is for Ahab only. The relationship between these two men is one of obligation. Chapter 130 describes the symbiotic relationship between

the two. Ahab is always on deck and Fedallah is not far from him. Neither speaks, they just watch the waters, “though the Parsee’s mystic watch was without intermission as his own; yet these two never seemed to speak... a potent spell seemed secretly to join the twain” (401). In this silence there is a merging of the two; Fedallah is the captain of Ahab’s fate and Ahab as captain of the ship. Perhaps it is a dark shadow that influences those in power. As barbaric as slavery is, there is a level of co-dependency that exists. Owner gives work, slave produces, owner profits, and slave may benefit with special house privileges. The changes that were made in America, e.g. the Thirteenth Amendment and the repeal of the FSL, were perhaps a result of the black influence. It is likely that the actions of Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, and Joseph Cinque influenced change with the whites in power.

After Chase Day One, a frustrated and defeated Ahab questions what fate is, who he is, and where he is going. Upon asking “Is Ahab, Ahab?” (406) he recognizes an unknown force driving him, “Fate is the handspike” (407). With despair he looks to his reflection over the railing – only to see the eyes of Fedallah reflecting back to him. Fate and destiny are on this ship in the shape of the Parsee. With his prediction given, denied, and ignored is Ahab bound to death by hemp? Yes, because there is no escaping his end.

Ahab’s prophet does not allow him an escape. There are no choices given to Ahab; only a grim ending. Ishmael is given two chances of escape, Elijah is first with explicit warnings and Father Mapple furthers those warning. Ishmael could assess the warnings on land and consider all paths; Ahab cannot because he is already piloting a boat with a crew beneath him. Why have two characters knowingly ignored prophecy? And why have them experience two extremely different outcomes? Ahab’s death fulfills

the prophecy of Fedallah and Ishmael's survival fulfills the story of Jonah. Ishmael learns, grows, and recognizes brotherhood – he evolves. He appreciated the education given to him by Queequeg by simply taking the time to know him. The symbiotic relationship developed by the two is what eventually saves Ishmael. In a moment of grand symbolism Melville has Ishmael survive the shipwreck by holding onto Queequeg's coffin which is covered in ancient African symbols. Ahab, stubborn and blind to brotherhood, succumbs to his violent end. His apathy towards brotherhood hinders him and his godlessness gives him little chance to seek a spiritual epiphany.

There is one character that recognizes past sin, heals from it, and moves forward with his lesson learned. Captain Boomer of the *Samuel Enderby* is a fellow victim of *Moby Dick*. In a moment of understanding brotherhood Boomer and Ahab “shake” ivory appendages. Ahab is confused as to why Boomer does not seek justice or vengeance. Captain Boomer is simply satisfied and grateful to be alive. He recognizes that it is a fruitless mad journey to seek revenge on a whale; he recognizes that he will not make the same mistake twice and take on something so grand. Bordering on offended, Ahab brushes the fellow captain off with disregard. It is the recognition of sin, time to heal, and progress that separates Boomer from Ahab. Boomer represents what Ahab *can* be; yet Ahab ignores all possibilities. Melville shows us in Boomer that absolution from past sin is possible and should be embraced. Past mistakes can be corrected and not turned into personal vendettas.

Although not as explicit as the prophets in *Moby-Dick*, the participants on the *San Dominick* are able to see the warnings presented but choose to ignore them. After a bloody mutiny and desperate battle when the mutiny is discovered, the ending is one of

death and solitude. Delano simply dismisses what happened on the *San Dominick* with “the past is passed” casual response. Delano sees resolution in forgetting, “See, you bright sun has forgotten it all, and the blue sea, and the blue sky” (101). In this calm response Melville mimics the words of Daniel Webster’s praise of the Compromise of 1850. Upon the passing of these five separate bills Webster stated, “a long and violent convulsion of the elements has just passed away, and the heavens, the skies, smile again upon us” (101, note 8). Yet in a moment of clarity, Delano recognizes that the mutiny exposed him to his own prejudices, “you saved my life... saved it, too, against my knowledge and will” (100). His previous knowledge would have killed him because he was functioning on prejudices. The guiding motivation and his determination also function on white prejudice; therefore unless something or someone showed him that mutiny was a possibility he would have continued on his previous path of ignorance and bigotry. Unfortunately, he quickly forgets what transpired on board.

However, according to Cereno you have to be inhuman to forget and memory is what makes you melancholic. This memory, according to Goddard, “casts such a pall over Cereno’s face because it evokes a knowledge of what might be in the future – an end of an empire” (226). Cereno holds onto the memory and guilt of slavery, allowing a possible hope for progress during his recognition of that memory. Delano cannot understand Cereno’s pain, “you are saved; what has cast such a shadow upon you?” to which Cereno flatly replies, “the negro” (101). As Geoffrey Sanborn states, “the shadow of the ‘negro’ is unquestionably the kraken of *Benito Cereno* - a spectral, voiceless image” (172). Knowing that Babo will be put to death is a satisfying outcome for Delano; he has no interest in working on a solution. For Babo, he dies voiceless “since I cannot do

deeds, I will not speak words" (102), yet his image lingers. Readers never hear the voice of revolutionary Babo but only the masked slave. Babo emerges as a man remembered by the mask he wore. Had Delano seen past his racist thoughts and focused on hints given by Cereno, there would have been a chance for salvation.

Cereno and Babo both suffer because both are rendered silent. Cereno is silenced by fear and Babo's true voice is replaced by the role of slave. Had he noticed Cereno's fainting and Babo's double speak, Delano would have seen a master/slave relationship that fluctuates between the two. The characters and the roles they play depend on each other. Neither wants to reveal the truth to Delano because both could face immediate death. If Cereno revealed his position of captive he would risk death by Babo. On the same hand, if Babo revealed the mutiny he would risk possible death by Delano.

The section of the story that takes the form of a deposition serves as a means for Melville to present his narrative as a probable account. It also forces readers to reexamine the text, just as Delano does upon his realization of the truth. And in their own lives, readers are to reexamine the topic of slavery and their role within the problem. Slavery would soon catch up with the American people if not solved. If not, society would risk a future that is a reflection of the present. The narrative gaps in the deposition match the gaps in Cereno's consciousness; it is the reader's responsibility to fill in those gaps with morality and brotherhood.

After a bloody mutiny and desperate battle when the truth is discovered, the ending Melville gives readers is one of death and solitude. For Delano, he simply dismisses what happened on the *San Dominick* with a "the past is passed" casual response. Yet in a moment of clarity, Delano recognizes that the mutiny exposed him to

his own prejudices, “you saved my life... saved it, too, against my knowledge and will” (100). He quickly forgets what transpired on board. However, according to Cereno you have to be inhuman to forget and memory is what makes him melancholy. This memory, according to Goddard, “casts such a pall over Cereno’s face because it evokes a knowledge of what might be in the future – an end of an empire” (226). Cereno holds onto the memory and guilt of slavery, there may be hope for progress in his recovery. Delano cannot understand Cereno’s pain, “you are saved; what has cast such a shadow upon you?” Cereno flatly replies, “the negro” (101). As Sanborn states “the shadow of the “negro” is unquestionably the kraken of *Benito Cereno* - a spectral, voiceless image” (172). Knowing that Babo will be put to death is a satisfying outcome for Delano; he has no interest in working on a solution. For Babo, he dies voiceless “since I cannot do deeds, I will not speak words” (102), yet his image lingers. Readers never hear the voice of revolutionary Babo but only the masked slave. Babo emerges as a Guy Fawkes; the man is remembered by the mask he wore.

By the last page, the slave and enslaver share the same fate, both are dead. By contributing to the slave system, no one survives; it will only result in the same end for both parties. *Benito Cereno* answers the question first posed by Ishmael, “Who ain’t a slave?” (21). Americans were not only slaves on the land but slaves to a system that allowed it to continue. When Babo is killed and his head is placed upon a pole he gazes over the landscape to the corpses of Aranda and Cereno gazing back. Delano’s survival allows him, and the reader, to live with the guilt of denial. Both parties are to take what transpired to reflect and improve.

In a final ghastly image Babo's head is placed on a stake to overlook not only the land, but to meet the gaze of the corpses of Aranda and Cereno. The action of burning his body but leaving his head is a profound statement on how it is knowledge that makes a man. It does not matter what color a man is; thoughts and actions make him a person. All three parties are left staring at each other, one looking to the other for answers. Melville may have found the Kraken in *Benito Cereno*, but never solved its mystery.

Melville's opinions about a government and citizens that allow slavery seep through the lines of *Moby-Dick* and *Benito Cereno*. He was not necessarily concerned with a solution nor was his commentary specifically based on the issue of race. Melville focused on unity and brotherhood working towards a common goal. In *Moby-Dick*, men are bound together with this essential brotherhood. This bond is explicitly seen on the *Pequod* with all races working together. There is no glaring race preference on board, as evident with the performance based pay of Ishmael's meager earnings versus Queequeg's higher salary. But the black race on board the *San Dominick* is more desperate because unlike the *Pequod*, they are not crewmembers but cargo and therefore the brotherhood is searched for in with violent desperation. Melville forces the reader not to choose sides because either side is equally flawed. Readers are encouraged to examine their feelings about what motivates each character. Melville presented us with questions and scenarios in which we are to examine our reactions. Are the resulting reactions something that would benefit all citizens or something that would hinder our progress? In the novels of *Moby-Dick* and *Benito Cereno*, Melville lets the reader be the powerful captain capable of steering a great vessel.

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