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One Nation Under Melville

An Analysis of Nationalism, Imperialism, and Race in Herman Melville's Moby-Dick or, The Whale

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Abstract

Moby-Dick, or The Whale is a novel famed for its multifaceted nature, due to the myriad of both literary themes and political views that critics can explicate from it. In this thesis I will show how the novel *Moby Dick, or the Whale* can be interpreted in a manner that engender nation and myth building for the United States, in which the contemporary greatness of the nation makes up for the lack of an aggrandized past. Furthermore, I will attempt to show how the text uses critique of ideologies such as slavery, colonization, and imperialism (through the *Pequod and its crew*) to both criticize American ideologies and political agendas, whilst simultaneously (and perhaps a bit hypocritically) making use of the very same patriotic and nationalistic ideology and language it itself criticizes. In the thesis, concepts and theories such as nationalism, community, nationhood, nation as narration, and imperialism are defined through the theories established by critics such as Anderson, Bhabha, and Said, as a means to engender a better understanding of what is meant by them when used in the analysis of the novel, as well as why these concepts are relevant for the thesis. As such, this thesis is another piece of evidence for the limitlessness of *Moby-Dick*, as it recognizes the vast openness of the text, that enables the myriad of interpretations, explications, and understandings of the novel. All which adds further evidence in favor of the continued canonization and importance of Melville's Work.

Call me Lars.

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1 Introduction

“Let’s not call *Moby-Dick* “this masterpiece.” Let’s call it instead – as we call *Ulysses* – “this imposing monument.” – Jean-Paul Sartre

Canon building is Empire Building. Canon defense is national defense, Canon debate, whatever the terrain, nature and range (of criticism, of history, of the history of knowledge, of the definition of language, the universality of aesthetic principles, the sociology of art, the humanistic imagination), is the clash of cultures. And all of the interests are vested (Morrison 1679). While it refers to a particular context, Toni Morrison’s claim has a certain universality to it.

For it describes something that is an integral part of the foundations of the modern world, of nations. Morrison makes it clear that literary canon is as important a part of the makeup of a nation’s wholeness as any other part. Literature is, in other words, one of the ways in which one can project and justify one’s own nation’s validity and sovereignty (or superiority, if that is your agenda), particularly in the way it merges the past with the present. The great old nations of Europe, the inheritors of the old empires, Britain, Germany, France, all have centuries of literature that testifies to their cultural standing and power. Their past is used as a means to justify their current greatness. However, when a nation possesses little to no storied past, yet lays claims to contemporary greatness, there emerges a discrepancy. For there is no way for such nations to support their argument with such a lack of legendary ancient times. For such a nation to stand as equal to the old giants of Europe, it has invented its own greatness, by claiming superiority in the now. Because literature coalesces the now and the then, it becomes possible to reverse the order of things, where the current greatness manifests a great past. This thesis will explore how the novel *Moby Dick, or the Whale* by Herman Melville can be read in a manner that shows how it participates in nation and myth building for the United States, in which the contemporary greatness of the nation makes up for the lack of an aggrandized past. Furthermore, I will show how the text critiques of ideologies such as slavery, colonization, and imperialism (through the *Pequod* and its crew) to both criticize American ideologies and political agendas, whilst simultaneously (and perhaps a bit hypocritically) making use of the very same patriotic and nationalistic ideology and language it itself criticizes.

As suggested by critics such as Edward W. Said and Homi K. Bhabha, all nations seek to project the strongest, most prolific image of themselves outwards in a sign of strength, so it therefore goes without question that the US would also seek to cement its own foundations and ascend to the same heights as these older nations. Such a massive undertaking would demand heroic efforts on the physical plane. The nation needed savvy politicians, businessmen, and a strong workforce to build its economy, infrastructure, and international relations. However, it would also need to grow on a metaphysical plane, meaning that it would need philosophers, scholars, and poets to craft its origin and continued narrative. Therefore, perhaps, it would be more fitting to say that the nation's soul needed to be born and then nurtured. Amongst these poets and writers that would later be canonized as American literature's most influential writers (at least in more modern times) is Herman Melville. A writer of adventure novels, Melville seemed to change his pace and purpose when he penned and published his three greatest works *Typee* (1846), *Mardi* (1849), *Moby Dick Or, The Whale* (1851), and *Pierre* (1852). These massive, complicated, and enigmatic novels found themselves on a completely different level than his previous novels which would lead to their inclusion into the cannon. However, during Melville's lifetime these works were far from as lauded as they are in the present day and saw little popularity.

Moby Dick in particular stands as a magnificent example of a canonized novel. It is a text that still thrives, alive and well, in the way in which it strikes its readers (and the body of critics) with its relevance and its vastness. It is a novel that delivers high-minded, thought-provoking ideas and themes, political commentaries and criticism that still hold viability to this day, as well as beautiful and poetic language, all encapsulated within a modern "Greek" myth. In the novel, the reader will find both adventure and criticism of the political landscape of Melville's contemporary time, where imperialism, racism and slavery, and populism all fall under the scrutiny of the text. Moreover, due to its details regarding life at sea, port towns, and Ishmael's world, the novel also functions as a passage into the past, a mirror into the whaling and venture capitalist expeditions of the nineteenth century and their importance on both a national and a global scale. Submerged between chapters regarding whale genealogy and anatomy, and technical chapters on ocean faring vessels and the sailor's daily life, the text also contains paragraphs and chapters in which it directly opposes the then-contemporary imperialistic expansion of the borders of the United States, as well as criticism leveled towards the continued perpetuation of slave-based economic systems (primarily enacted in the southern states). With any text with such discernable political statements, one must wonder whether such

passages offer insight into the author's personal opinions, and were therefore penned to paper with clear intent, and therefore must be taken into account. Or whether the text itself should be separated from the author and judged without insight into his or her opinions or intent. Regardless, these themes and political stances are present in the novel and therefore are subject to both explication and debate.

Due to its malleable nature, *Moby Dick* has since its publishing been analyzed in a hundred different ways, by a hundred different critics, with each forming his or her own views or ideas as to what the text means. One such critic, Donald Pease, claims a "Cold War" reading of the novel, in which the themes of the text are juxtaposed against the Cold War era of American Politics. Toni Morrison, on the other hand, sees the novel (and what it presents) more as a criticism of "whiteness" and slavery, and therefore her interpretation centers more around questions of race and identity. Similarly, Michael Rogin has studied the way in which the novel not only connects its author to thoughts about slavery and freedom, but how the text is interwoven with many of Melville's social ideas and ideals.

Attempting to analyze *Moby Dick* is a grand venture in itself, an Odyssey, one could say. The choice I made in analyzing Melville's text was not an attempt to discredit or cast other interpretations as wrong. On the contrary, it is an argument for the malleability of the text's themes and messages. It is an attempt at showing the messy and multifaceted nature that envelops and suffuses Melville's novel, especially on a political stratum. My analysis attempts to show a particular political reading of the novel, where the text presents an image that is two-fold as it projects a criticism towards the aggressive political ideologies of imperialistic expansion and slavery in the United States at the middle of the nineteenth century, whilst also promoting a certain level of racial and political equality through nationalistic language and themes

Moby Dick is a rather dense, comprehensive, and gargantuan work of literature, meaning that before one ventures onto explicating the text, one has to decide upon and lock down what particular themes one wishes to analyze and in which manner (perhaps more than most other novels). Once decided upon, it becomes necessary to establish the number of relevant themes, concepts, and ideas that will help the reader understand one's particular analysis of the text. Since this thesis focuses upon the part the text might have had in creating a mythos and a contemporary point of national pride, as well as its position as a piece of political critique, it becomes vital for me to explore these ideas before I move on to the analysis of parts of the text

itself. In the first chapter of the thesis, I will explore and explain themes such as nation, culture, nationalism, imperialism, and colonialism, and discuss the definitions of these concepts provided by critics such as Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, and Benedict Anderson. This, in turn, will help explain how these ideas go together and furthermore, how they relate to the novel itself. I will also explore certain idiosyncratic cultural traits possessed by the United States, and discuss how they have affected the nation up to our point in time, and furthermore, how they can be used as both objects of criticism within a text, as well as how they can be seen as literary or oratorical tools with which the text attempts to promote its message.

The first chapter of the thesis focuses on, presents, and attempts to explicate terminology, concepts, and ideologies that one will need in order to read the text as ideological and political criticism. The first thing to do is to find a definition of the concept of nation, because for us to understand how any work of literature can help birth a nation-state, one has to understand what is meant by the idea of nationhood. In his book *Imagined communities*, Benedict Anderson delves into the very idea of community from its beginning, in tribal units to the emergence of massive modern nations, shaped by ideas of nationhood and nationalism. Anderson sees greater communities as created things, imagined by humanity's collective consciousness. To Anderson any community greater than the most basic tribal village, a local social stratum where everyone is known to everyone, is as fictional (in a sense) as any novel. Or, as he writes, "[all] communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact are imagined" (Anderson 6). And communities are imagined in the sense that we as humans, as inhabitants of a city or a nation, imagine ourselves as the same as or similar to our fellow New Yorkers for example, or our fellow Germans.

We assume that we think in similar manners and have roughly the same mannerisms, when we have no evidence to support this hypothesis. "[A nation] is *imagined* because the members of the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their community" (Anderson 6). This imagined togetherness is, as Anderson writes, that which creates the foundation for social communities, creating the ties that binds us to each other. And imagined as they might be, they serve as the basis for what we could call culture, the idiosyncratic social traits and features that all members of a community subconsciously agree upon to be representative for a particular community. Moreover, as culture is part of what we as members of a community use to define ourselves, it is also something we use to differentiate us from others, from hostile or foreign communities. Edward Said writes such in the introduction to *Culture and Imperialism*, where

he states that “culture comes to be associated, often aggressively, with the nation or the state, this differentiates ‘us’ from ‘them’, almost always with some degree of xenophobia” (xii).

Since its inception the United States has seen itself as more or less unique amongst the nations of the modern world. It is a nation that chose to stand up to its colonial overlords in a war for independence, which it eventually won, a nation that has been a moving frontier and now stands as one of the most powerful empires left in the world. However, the US is but a foundling when compared to other, more ancient nations, at least on a cultural level. In its youth, the nation lacked the same storied past that elevated the old nations of Europe above it. What it did possess, and in overabundance was the spirit of adventure, the will to conquer anything set in its path. And from that emerged two ideologies that would prove vital for the future success of the nation, American Exceptionalism and Manifest Destiny (the latter an imperial branch of the former). These terms were in time coopted by the scholars within American studies, shaping how they and American society brought national belonging into their core, as well as to show the rest of the world how society would evolve if based on freedom and liberty. In modern times this has again shifted, and this time towards a line of thinking that is critical to the former self-glorification of field of study. The ideologies of American Exceptionalism and Manifest Destiny, were both double edged swords, double edged in the sense that they helped inspire the outward expansion of the US as well as its economic growth, but also helped foster an unhealthy hubris and colonial hunger within the nation. The transformation changed the ideal from a self-image that promoted the uniqueness of the community (the US) to its divinely ordained or mandated destiny to rule the Americas, as such dreams of merely taming the land to create a home morphed into dreams of empire.

In the second and third chapters, I will explore and analyze *Moby Dick*, looking at political and ideological views of the text, as well as some of the supposed reasons behind the creation of the text and what might have been a motivating factor. Beginning with the second chapter, I explore what I have chosen to call the political backdrop of the creation of the text. In this part of the chapter the focus rests on the politics and ideological thoughts that flourished during Melville’s contemporary times. The United States, still a young nation, had at this point just fought a war with Mexico, in which the US had emerged the victor. Following the proper protocols and standards of the aftermaths of wars/conflicts during this age (and all ages previously, to be fair) the US forced the defeated Mexico to cede parts of its nation to the US, as well as keeping Texas, although I did pay Mexico for Texas as well as guarantee US citizenship to those Mexican nationals still living in the now annexed areas.

This event would spark heated debates amongst the leaders and in the political space of the US. Where many wanted to continue the expansion and colonization, thus courting empire, there was a sizable opposition that felt that imperialism, and colonialism was counter to the founding ideals of the nation. There was also the question of slavery, and the legality and ethical dilemma it posed, especially when the southern US relied heavily on a slavery-based economy. Therefore, it became a conservative, pro-Empire, pro-slavery versus a more liberal, anti-empire, and abolishment divide, and amongst the stood Melville. Critic Andrew Delbanco writes that “Melville in private had admitted that he found himself agreeing with the more northern sentiments of anti-imperialism and abolishment” (Delbanco 149). The text comments directly on these matters, as it levels direct critique towards the expansionistic factions within US politics.

Moving on from the novel’s criticism of imperialism, the thesis considers the subject of race, a subject that never seems to escape anything the relates to the United States (and for good reason). According to Delbanco Melville, was aware of and did not condone the treatment of African Americans. However, he failed to either do anything about it, or to grasp the true scope of the problem. Yet when looking at *Moby Dick*, one would be hard-pressed to deny the existence of egalitarian viewpoints within the novel (at least within the boundaries of the era’s concept of race). Over the course of a few chapters, we see Ishmael and Queequeg go from wary strangers to extremely close and intimate friends, both accepting of the other’s cultural idiosyncrasies (despite not understanding them). Despite being non-white, Queequeg is in Ishmael’s eyes just as much a fellow man as any other American, despite his “queer ways.” Likewise, the crew of the *Pequod* (the ill-fated ship on which most of the plot takes place) seems to enjoy a freer, more egalitarian space than that of more land-based communities in the US. As such, the argument of this part of the chapter becomes that the crew of the vessel serves as a facsimile of cultural and racial synthesis. It is by no means perfect, as I will show, although the text makes great strides in the correct direction regarding this topic. There is little observable racism or prejudice amongst the crew themselves, where skill and work mentality decide your position amongst them. The notable exceptions seem to be the lack of non-white expeditionary leaders and the supremely foreign Fedallah and his cronies, whom the rest of the crew view with scorn and suspicion, revealing a veiled racism that shadows the otherwise progressive image. The third chapter builds upon that which I discussed in both the first chapter and the second chapter, namely the themes of nation and nationalism and their uses. The chapters do this by setting up the *Pequod* as a manifestation or avatar of these aspects of the story (aside

from a short sub-section exploring a possible meaning behind Ahab's purpose in the text, and how it pertains to nation or nationhood).

This idea of togetherness is the subject of the next sub-section of the chapter, where the ideals regarding society emerge from the text. Here I present to the reader the idea that Ishmael's floating micro-nation represents, or rather projects, a view on race that is more in line with our contemporary views. This is also one of the parts, of the novel, where it becomes difficult to see a separation or division between the text and the author.

We know, from letters and other sources, that Melville did not condone slavery or the slave-based economy, and to a degree (taking into account the times in which he lived) objected to the idea of one "race" being better than others, and these views are present, quite obviously, in the text. The vessel is a space sprawling with people of all ethnicities and cultures who have come together to work towards a common goal, profit. A goal that later becomes corrupted by captain Ahab. To a certain extent, the hierarchy of the ship is also represented as very meritocratic, where all but the highest positions are available to the men that work the hardest, and possess the greatest skill. However, these ideals are mostly just that, ideals. And that is why I chose to call that sub-section "*The ideal world of Moby-Dick*", because it explores the idealized or idyllic views of a possible future presented in the novel, of a future American Melting-pot, and not the reality of Melville's America (as I presented in the former chapters). Racism had a stronger foothold within the nation, and the will to expand (and subjugate) was more than present, making the nation vulnerable to stronger, authoritarian minds.

The next sub-section builds upon the idea of the strong leader, or rather the "bad" version of the strong leader, the tyrant. Working from where the ideal future of the US is presented, it reverses this and shows the text's inherent fear of the oratorical demagogue. In this section I argue for how the text's projection on Captain Ahab, can be seen as a warning against well-spoken, populist leaders. It is an argument entertained by many critics (so not really an original idea at all, but still important to analyze) such as Andrew Delbanco, who I use to show the aversion the text (or Melville himself according to Delbanco) has towards such leaders. Again, there arises a problem with regards to who's speaking, is it the text or Melville? For as Delbanco suggests, many a critic has read Ahab as an allegory for political agitators such as John C. Calhoun or William Lloyd Garrison (both whom Melville strongly disagreed with). Therefore, it becomes difficult (if not impossible) to see whom or what is presenting these warnings against these eternally recurring demagogues.

The last sub-section of the chapter explores how the text uses the *Pequod* as an metaphor for the United States, and how the text uses the ship as a literary device to elicit a positive response towards its criticism of the establishment. This also shows how the text can be seen as a literary device of political rhetoric, nationalistic in its purpose. Based on my earlier discussion of the nation building qualities of literature, this chapter discusses the gam chapters (describing meetings between two ships at sea) as a way to inspire nationalistic feelings and pride. Over the course of its voyage, the *Pequod* comes into contact with other ships, which are dealt with in their own separate chapters. What I found interesting about these chapters was the way in which the text treats and presents the ships of foreign nationalities (meaning that the ships originate from other nations than the US). Without exception, each one is described and shown in far inferior states than even the most ramshackle of US vessels, both in its physical and moral state.

For instance, the *Rose Bud's* crew are presented by the text as completely inept at the business of whaling, whilst the German/Dutch *Virgin* also seems lacking when it comes to skills in the trade. With this analysis I show how the establishment of these other ships' inferiority to the *Pequod* speaks to a nationalistic layer which underlies the novel. If we take into account, as established previously in this and the former chapter, that the *Pequod* is a simile for the United States itself, then the same is true for these other ships. Their mono-ethnic composition leaves them lacking, where the multi-cultural American vessel is strengthened by its amalgamation of cultures, an obvious jab at the politics of pro-imperialistic, pro-slavery Americans. What it also leads to is the argument that the text attempts to present the US as a better nation on every level than other, more storied nations. And this leads to the argument that the text can be read as an attempt to create greatness for itself, suggesting that now it can supersede the need for a storied past to lay claim on its current greatness.

2 Chapter 1: Concepts, Terminology, and Ideology.

We cannot live only for ourselves. A thousand fibers connect us with our fellow men.

– Herman Melville

In *Moby-Dick*, the US is in ascendance, in a position of superiority. And yes, much of that is due to the author's need to play to current political and ideological mindsets, but there also be due to a longing for legacy. As I will discuss later in this thesis, the other vessels, representing other nations presented in this novel are all old nations, some amongst the first ones to rise in Europe. They have rich tapestries of myths, stories, legends, and history to draw upon and show their peers. Centuries of legends, stories, and legacies, all based on conflicts, inventions, heroes, and movements that made up the narrative of their nation. The US, on the other hand, did not. Being a young nation at the time of *Moby-Dick's* writing, one could sense a struggle to justify the existence of the nation and its place on the geopolitical scene. The fact that the nation was still an adolescent (a mere seventy years old when the novel was written) meant that it did not have the vast stores of legacy to put on the proverbial world table. It little to no storied past to draw from. Amongst nations there is also a matter of pride and power, of which the US wielded little during those early days. If this is the case, what does one do then to put oneself on equal footing with these historic nations? Van Wyck Brooks writes in his short essay "*On Creating a Usable Past*" that "[i]f we (Americans) need another past so badly, is it inconceivable that we might discover one, that we might invent one?" (Brooks 1). In other words, if a storied past does not exist, then all one has to do is simply create or invent one. It is to be noted here, that Brooks wrote this in 1917, therefore we can assume that the ideas he professed in this essay were a part of the US's cultural legacy at this point in time.

But how does one create a past where there is none? One cannot just simply say that your nation now has a storied past, especially with no evidence to base such assumptions on. But for those lacking in such a past, they have to appropriate (or choose) whatever small

partitions of the past that they want to keep or use as representative for the nation as it is now or imagine a past, create one from nothingness. One way, a way which I argue that the novel uses in these chapters, is to create or define a *contemporary* greatness. If a nation stands as greater than others (or even stands as the greatest), an author can use this to lay claim to a storied past. For such greatness or superiority does not rise from nothing. It has to emerge naturally, stem from a greater legacy. As such, the current state of the nation becomes a substitute for the past which it lacks. Brooks writes that “[t]he past is an inexhaustible storehouse of apt attitudes and adaptable ideals; it opens of itself at the touch of desire; it yields up, now this treasure, now that, to anyone who comes to it armed with a capacity for personal choices” (Brooks 1).

But before I analyze and discuss how the greatness of the now becomes a substitute for a missing past, there is some themes and concepts that needs to be defined and clarified. For in *Moby-Dick* there is an idea that is of great importance, an idea which we today see as a given, the concept of nation and nationhood, an idea that evolved in Europe during the Enlightenment and reached the Americas during the colonization period. The nation is a concept and a theme that is as important to Melville’s novel as that of the journey or the damning quest for revenge. There are numerous occasions within the text in which Melville’s writing alludes or refers to matters of nationhood or community, especially ones related to American superiority or exceptionalism (which I will explicate further later in this thesis). However, before I explore the novel’s use of these themes, it is necessary to form an understanding of what is meant by nation and nationalism, and more importantly how such ideas can be used to forge a narrative for an adolescent community.

2.1 Nation, Nationhood, and Community

The concept of nationhood has fascinated and intrigued scholars within the humanities for decades, not only within social studies, but also in fields such as philosophy and literature (especially in sub-fields such as post-colonial literature). The Oxford Dictionary defines the concept of nation as “[a] large body of people united by common descent, history, culture, or language, inhabiting a particular state or territory.” (oxforddictionaries). And when most people think of a nation nowadays, they would probably imagine the country from which they hail, the well-defined area in which people of like mind and physical appearance share a community and

have done so for eons. Ironically, this could not be further from the truth. Counter to what many today would believe, if one were to gaze back upon the shared history of our species, one would discover that the idea of a nation, as a vast community of people, bound together by geographic location, ethnicity, shared culture, and history, is in fact a recent invention. As such, the commonly held belief is only partially correct, possessing fractions of the truth. One of the major proponents of this idea is the historian and political scientist Benedict Anderson, whose book *Imagined Communities* stands as one of the most important and nuanced texts to explore and discuss the topics of nationalism, nation, and narratives. In the book, Anderson constructs his own definition of the idea of nation, as he writes, “[i]n the anthropological spirit, then, I purpose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (5-6). In Anderson’s view, the idea of a greater community, a shared nation, according to Anderson is itself an incorporeal thing, supernatural in its nature as an imagined object, or rather, as he writes himself, “[all] communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined” (6). In the process of evolving into complex societies, we needed to imagine this form of togetherness and shared relationship in order to avoid harming each other and to co-exist. Now the nation has become an integral part of our world. To perpetuate this chimeric consciousness, something is needed to bind us together, to communicate our values and common sensibilities. For this, we need culture (or cultural traits), a vague term that the scholar Edward Said defines as “all those practices, like the arts of description, communication, and representation, that have relative autonomy from economical, social, and political realms and that often exist in aesthetic forms, one of whose principal aims is pleasure” (xii). Culture is something that one finds on every strata of society, and it can shift (sometimes marginally and other times radically) from a higher instance to a lower one, or highbrow to lowbrow culture. Culture is a vital part of the idea of nation because of its ability to act as a focal point for its people and enhance the narrative of a nation, the narrative of shared community: “regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (7), which is why people have been willing to both die and kill for such “limited imaginations”(Anderson7).

However, there is an argument to be made that culture also can be imagined in the same manner that a community is imagined: in the same way as one can forge a narrative for a nation or a community, one can create a narrative for a culture or cultural traits. Anderson describes something that can be interpreted in such a manner in his theory as to why a community (as a

concept of shared human existence, or an extended family unit) is imagined. Members of a community, or in this case a nation, cannot truly prove that their peers (outside their personal community) subscribe to the same cultural ideal as they do: “[a nation] is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their community” (Anderson 6). Ironically, this sense of community and togetherness associated with the nation is so natural to our way of being, and perhaps so well indoctrinated in us, that we can experience it without ever having met most of our countrymen. In modern times, in Anderson’s view, an American citizen will have a weird, idiosyncratic bond with his fellow Americans (quite unlike people of the past), where he imagines that they are similar to him, act similarly to him, and think in roughly the same way as he does, presumptions he bases on the fact that they belong to the same nation as he does and share the same culture.

A nation is not truly eternal, either in size or scope, but can often be imagined as such. “The nation is imagined as *limited* because even the largest of them ... has finite ... boundaries, beyond which lie other nations. No nation imagines itself coterminous with humanity. The most messianic nationalists do not dream of a day when all [of humanity] will join their nation” (Anderson 7). A nation’s or community’s sovereignty is imagined because “the concept was born in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained” when “the most devout adherents to any universal religion were inescapably confronted with the living pluralism of such religions, and the allomorphism between each faith’s ontological claims and territorial stretch, nations dream of being free. The gage and emblem of this freedom is the sovereign state” (7). Community, and nationhood are, in their created nature, not necessarily products of a conscious effort, but natural effects of certain processes. As Anderson sees it, these processes stemmed from the fall of the previous cultural, societal structures, namely the “religious community” and the “dynastic realm,” both of which were “taken-for-granted frames of reference [in their time], very much as nationality is today” (12).

2.2 Nationalism

Another vital part of what one could consider the makeup of a nation, is the concept of nationalism. The very idea of nation and a shared national consciousness beget nationalism. There cannot be a nation in the world today (either now or in its nascency) that does not have a certain nationalism as part of its culture. Whereas nationhood can be understood as representing the actual conglomeration of different groups into one unified whole, a synecdoche of a people, nationalism stands almost as a celebration, or rather a sanctification of the imagined community's shared culture. Edward Said puts it well when he writes that "the trouble with this idea of culture (for nationalism is a part of culture, and vice versa) is that it entails not only venerating one's own culture, but also thinking of it as somehow divorced from, because transcending, the everyday world" (xiii). Because shared culture is a strong part of nationalism, alongside language, ethnicity, and the idea of a storied past, it can be used as a tool to raise the spirit of the downtrodden, oppressed, and occupied, as well as a means for a community to justify acts of oppression, subjugation, and segregation enacted upon others.

As Said suggests, the longer this process has been in play, the more prominent and powerful it becomes, eventually making it less and less problematic to define another group as an "other", and claim moral and ethical superiority to those not of one's own group/community. Moreover, the danger of such a turn of self-image is that it can spiral out of control, leading the nation to descend into ideologies such as fascism and imperialism. According to Said, "culture comes to be associated, often aggressively, with the nation or the state, this differentiates 'us' from 'them', almost always with some degree of xenophobia" (xii).

2.3 Nation and Narration

Part of such processes of self-realization is the construction of a story, what one can call forging a narrative. As people, it becomes far easier for us to relate to someone or something if we know its past, its story, especially if it is similar to our own experiences, we have experienced. Therefore, the story or the narrative is just as important for a nation or community as it is for a person, perhaps even more so. Said writes that "nations themselves are narration," and that "[t]he power to narrate or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism" (qtd. in Said xiii). Imperialism, the conquest or annexation of land through colonization or warfare, is often perpetuated by a technologically

more advanced and more powerful nation or entity. Dictating the way others view one's nation and how one's nation presents itself is the primary concern of the narrative, especially for nations whose primary enterprise is empire building. If one's control of the narrative is in the hands of others, through "surrender" of sovereignty, chance or lack of strength, then a nation risks being disenfranchised or at worst dissolved. Therefore, it is of paramount importance for a nation to remain in control of the wider narrative being projected. This can be done in a number of ways, none necessarily taking precedence over others, but how the nation narrates its past stands as one of the most important ways in which a nation creates the story of itself.

As I have already mentioned, all nations rely on their histories and pasts to not only justify their existence and legitimacy. The storied past of a nation becomes a point of great pride and exaltation for its people, for its feeling of nationalistic self-worth. The British take pride in their former empire, the Scandinavians in their Viking ancestors, the Japanese in their ancient samurai forefathers. Ernest Renan writes that a nation "is partitioned 'souls' of sorts, an amalgamation of the past and the present, a shared heritage and willingness to coexist" (19). He continues by saying that "[a] heroic past, great men, glory, this is the social capital upon which one bases a national idea. To have common glories in the past and to have a common will in the present; to have performed great deeds together, to wish to perform still more – these are the essential conditions for being a people" (Renan 19). Thus, the past becomes an important tool in the process of creating and perpetuating a nation. The shared past becomes central to the narrative that is a nation, because without a storied past, a nation will struggle to legitimize itself as a participant on field of global politics (and to legitimize its rightful claim to ascendancy, as well as challenging opposing images), in the sense that its projected sovereignty and greatness are perceived as baseless and self-righteous. Communities are, as Anderson describes them, imagined, unreal, supernatural, artificial. And like most things created, they have expiration dates, meaning they are of a transient nature. No nation came into being on its own, nor did most communities, and no society will last forever. "Nations ... have no clearly identifiable births, and their deaths, if they ever happen, are never natural" (Anderson 205). No nation or community in history has ever been perpetual, so temporality is therefore of great importance to the nation; in the way it forges its narrative. And there certainly is no better way to remember the past than through literature.

When looking at the past, the most logical thing to do would be to refer to historical text and accounts written about the time in question. However, the further back one goes, the more one will experience that historical texts merge with myths, legends, and literature of the time.

Likewise, an historical, factual text might not always convey the zeitgeist or feelings of the people living in that era, in the same manner or with the efficiency that literature does. Yet they can both instill the same manner of feelings, the same level of pride, shame, hate or love. As such literature should in all fairness be equal to history, with regards to the rise of nations. Simon During postulates that “[i]t is becoming a commonplace that the institution of literature works to nationalistic ends” (138), and that one cannot “deny literature’s ability to function as a signifier of national identity or heritage” (During 138).

Literature is amongst the most important parts of what forms a nation’s ideas concerning itself, its spirit, and perhaps more importantly, its past. Literature contains not only much of the knowledge previously passed down from word of mouth, but also the history and legacy of a nation, its past and its origins. Homi K. Bhabha, based on Anderson’s notion of nations as “[i]maged communities,” suggests that both nations and narratives are imagined things, their births lost to antiquity. He writes that “[s]uch an image of the nation ... might seem impossibly romantic and metaphorical, but it is from those traditions of political thought and literary language that the nation emerges as a powerful historical idea in the west” (qtd. In Bhabha 1). It is through a nation’s stories of the past that it lays claim to and legitimizes its own standing in the world at large. However, because time is linear, we cannot directly experience the past, and must therefore turn to the world of literature to do so. We turn to novels and poems written in or about the past to learn and understand it.

If one then takes into account both the ideas of Bhabha and Renan, one sees that both the past and the present are parts of the ongoing narrative that is the nation. The language of a nation and its national culture are the tools with which the narrative of the nation, the idea of a nation itself, is continuously being written. Bhabha refers to Fredric Jameson, writing that, “[t]he emergence of the political ‘rationality’ of the nation as a form of narrative – textual strategies, metaphoric displacements, sub-texts and figurative strategems – has its own history” (qtd. In Bhabha 2). Suggesting that the nation is, indeed, itself a narrative formed from a myriad of strategies. Bhabha also turns to Anderson to solidify his argument, stating that Anderson comes to the same conclusion in his views of “the space and time of the modern nation as embodied in the narrative of the realist novel” (qtd. In Bhabha 2). It is as if the nation itself is a work of fiction, imagined and perpetuated by the collective community of its members, placing them in the role of authors of the text that is the nation. Bhabha speaks of “reading the nation” (3) as one reads a novel or other text, and similarly refers to both the “prose of power

that each nation can wield within its own sphere of influence” (1) and the idea of the nation as having “authors that write it using their language” (1).

However, this also makes the past vulnerable to manipulation, to changes in the truth of information, to the recreation or reimagining of the narrative for political purposes. If we acquire knowledge of the past through literature, then the writer becomes the arbitrator of what is remembered, what the reader sees and learns. If the works of an author become canonized as part of a national canon, the writer can in essence be a part of the exclusive club that decides upon the narrative of the nation. If he or she wants to, the author can help shape the national self-image as he or she sees fit, recreate it in his own image. As Said writes, “authors are ... very much in the history of their societies, shaping and shaped by that history and their social experience in different measure. Culture and the aesthetic forms it contains derive from historical experience” (xxii). Therefore, one cannot truly or completely ignore the intent of the author, especially the well-articulated, intelligent, and charismatic ones. Like the crew of the *Pequod*, the lay person is often quite easily manipulated, and if an author, a person of power, controlling the narrative (like Ahab does in the novel) deliberately forges a certain narrative for his tale, many readers will fall prey to his intent. But this cannot be reduced to a pure guessing game: the author’s text has to be contextualized, meaning that we have to look at their works as products of the times and places in which they lived. As such, we as readers cannot be too hasty to judge or condemn authors of the past for what they wrote or thought, nor chastise the public for becoming enamored with their words. For such powers of persuasion become vital when one intends to spread one’s own political ideologies, as will be seen below in my discussion of the idiosyncratic version of nationalism unique to the United States, based on the idea of American exceptionalism, which in turn yielded the concept of Manifest Destiny.

2.4 American exceptionalism, Manifest destiny, and American imperialism

As with all nations and cultures, there are some cultural traits that surface in the United States that help define the very essence of how Americans tend to view themselves. These include a dogged persistence to defy adversity against the odds, a belief in self-reliance, and an idea of self-imagined superiority or exceptionalism. It is therefore no wonder that the ideology known as American exceptionalism would permeate almost all strata of American society.

Granted, this self-righteous image is far from unique, as was often seen in the adolescence of the nation-states, and very much in this day and age as well, although some nations or states seem to exemplify this to a greater extent than others (especially autocratic dictatorships).

However, for a free, democratic republic, it would seem perhaps counter-intuitive. In attempting to understand why the idea of American exceptionalism has been so influential, one has to look at both what American exceptionalism is, where it originated, and how it enabled other ideologies such as Manifest destiny and Imperialism. Donald E. Pease, defines the ideology of American exceptionalism in the following way in an essay:

The exceptionalist paradigm represented US uniqueness in the terms of absence and present elements – the absence of feudal hierarchies, class conflict, a socialist labor party, trade unionism, and divisive ideological passions; the presence of a predominant middle class, tolerance for diversity, upward mobility, hospitality towards immigrants, a shared constitutional faith, and liberal individualism. Exceptionalist historians cited these traits to portray the US nation-state not merely as different from but also qualitatively better than the European nation-states whose social orders were described as having been devastated by Marxism. (Exceptionalism. keywords.nyupress)

American exceptionalism is one amongst many nationalistic, self-aggrandizing ideologies that have surfaced during modern human history. Similar to other such extreme, nationalistic ideologies, America's ideology is one of imagined superiority of self as against other nations (whether this view is justified or not is irrelevant). And its imagined nature here becomes very important, not only because it ignores any objective truth, but also because it conjoins Anderson's concepts of community and culture. American exceptionalism is an extreme evolution of tribalism and nationalism that engenders an absolute and unquestionable truth, a truth of the nation's clear superiority over all others, contemporary, future or past, a credo that supplements the idea of limitless potential and possibility. Which, during the nineteenth century caused nationalism to evolve into an imperialistic discourse "cultivated both on the European continent and in 'third-world' nations" (Exceptionalism. keywords.nyupress). A passage from Melville's earlier novel *White Jacket*, which directly preceded *Moby-Dick*, perfectly encapsulates this very belief.

And whilst this novel is not the subject of this thesis, the themes and ideas presented in this passage and the novel itself is something I view as great source for exploring Melville's relationship with the ideas presented. Melville writes:

[I]n many things we Americans are driven to rejection of the maxims of the Past, seeing that, ere long, the van of the nations must, of right, belong to ourselves. There are occasions when it is for America to make precedents, and not to obey them. We should, if possible, prove a teacher to posterity, instead of being the pupil of by-gone generations. More shall come after us than have gone before; the world is not yet middle-aged. (Melville. *White Jacket*)

The origin of the ideology of American Exceptionalism is twofold and can be traced to puritan settlers of the American continent, and their survival and taming of the land, as well as to another ideology, Americanism. The puritan, Christian settlers saw the American continent within a biblical typology as a new Canaan, bequeathed to them by God himself for their faith and devotion. Consequently, the puritans, like other groups in history, saw themselves as God's new chosen people, an idea that still resonates with the American populace today (although not as clearly anymore). Again, Melville's *White Jacket* sums up this concept:

And we Americans are the peculiar, chosen people – the Israel of our time; we bear the ark of the liberties of the world. Seventy years ago we escaped from thrall; and, besides our first birthright – embracing one continent of earth – God has given to us, for a future inheritance, the broad domains of the political pagans, that shall yet come and lie down under the shade of our ark, without bloody hands being lifted (Melville *White Jacket*)

According to writer and poet D.H Lawrence, the puritans fled to the American continent to get away from “themselves. Away from everything. . . . To get away from everything. . . . To get away from everything they [were] and [had] been. ‘Henceforth be masterless’” (3). These feelings of uniqueness and superiority would later be lifted to even greater heights after the War of Independence, where the rebelling colonists fought off and secured their emancipation from the British empire. Therefore, it is easier to understand the almost religious fervor with which many Americans believed (and still believe) in this ideology, and how it changed over time.

The idea of American exceptionalism was however, never clearly defined, in the manner as it is described above by Pease, until the early to mid-twentieth century with the founding of American studies as a scholarly field. The term itself was first coined by Joseph Stalin, but was coopted by American studies, much with the purpose of “portraying the United States as destined to perform a special role in the world of nations” (Exceptionalism. keywords.nyupress). The idea behind this move was to show the rest of the world, Europe in particular, an image of how the future would be if removed from ideologies such as Marxism or Socialism, how the US could protect them from such dangers. Although, it was only ever benign in the eyes of, or rather in the narrative of those in favor of and supporting the ideology. And this war of ideas would, as it often does when one deal with national ideologies, bleed into the cultural sphere of literature.

In the same way that South and Central American republics became spaces for both violent and non-violent proxy wars between the US and the USSR, so did the domain of literature. *Moby-Dick* became subject to this treatment because of the many conflicts between the liberal and democratic crewmembers of the *Pequod* (e.g. Starbuck and Ishmael) and the totalitarian and dictatorial Ahab could be seen as analogous to the conflict between the East and the West (Communism versus Capitalism and democracy). Pease elegantly puts it, as he declares that “the canonical reading appropriated *Moby-Dick* to a modern scene of cultural persuasion analogous to the one at work in Melville’s age”(243), and states that the “Cold War” reading, like Ahab, has no need to prove its veracity through discussion, “[i]nstead of arguing its persuasion, the Cold War simply exemplifies it” (Pease. *Cultural persuasion* 243). American exceptionalism was in other words an ideological weapon in the arsenal of the west against the USSR during the Cold War, a central text in a covert war of ideology, in which the US was the good guy, allowed to use any means necessary to win.

Despite the explicit idea behind the original purpose of the field, Pease notes (in another essay) that American exceptionalism, despite having evolved into an overarching concept, was plagued with divisions amongst Americanist scholars as to the true meaning of the term. Some claimed it signified America’s difference from other nations, some its uniqueness, or its place as a shining example for all to follow, whereas some saw it as a justification for the US to be “‘exempt’ from the laws of historical progress (meaning that it is an ‘exception’ to the laws and rules governing the development of other nations)” (Exceptionalism. keywords.nyupress). It was, in short, “a fantasy through which US citizens [could] bring these contradictory political and cultural descriptions into correlation with one another” (Exceptionalism.

keywords.nyupress). This rootless nature is what makes this ideology such an ingenious concept, as it becomes highly mutable, able to adapt to many changes, thus securing its own survivability. Moreover, it is why it has survived from its origin as a frontier mentality to the Cold War and finally into modern times, when the President of the US is often seen as the leader of the “free world”. There is therefore a flexibility to the concept of American Exceptionalism, which makes it easier to how it could spawn a new idea. Therefore, it becomes easier to see why it shaped the way American academics went about in their studies of American culture (the so-called Americanists), but also how it would plant itself within the foundations of government and society. This exceptionalism “supplied the attitudes of belief through which ‘Americanists’ (in and out of the academy) practiced their mode of national belonging” (Exceptionalism. keywords.nyupress). However, the generation of “New-Americanist” critics and scholars such as Pease, Amy Kaplan, Sacvan Berkovitch, and John Carlos Rowe have made it their project to discuss and criticize American Exceptionalism, as opposed to lauding its existence.

In a sense then the ideology of American exceptionalism was and still is “an academic discourse, political doctrine, and a regulatory ideal assigned responsibility for defining, supporting, and developing US national identity” (Exceptionalism. keywords.nyupress), but it was also, as Pease notes, “dependent on the recognition of European nations for validation, despite claiming to be unburdened by their historical traditions” (Exceptionalism. keywords.nyupress). For this reason, we see more clearly how such a concept could evolve, or rather spawn another quintessential American idea, the idea of Manifest Destiny (which I will discuss later)

2.5 From Manifest Destiny to Imperialism and colonization

As we now have a more tangible idea of what American Exceptionalism is, we will look closer at Manifest Destiny. As stated earlier, Manifest Destiny is an ideological evolution of American exceptionalism and can almost be seen as the natural next step, for such an idea, especially with an added religious factor. It was “a complex set of beliefs that incorporated a variety of ideas about race, religion, culture, and economic necessity” (Manifest destiny. encyclopedia). The term is defined in the simplest way as the “growing conviction that the United States was preordained by god to expand throughout North America and exercise

hegemony over its neighbors” (Manifest destiny. encyclopedia). The term was first coined by the journalist John O’Sullivan in 1845 in the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, where he similarly to the finest demagogue, argued that “the fulfillment of our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions” (O’Sullivan 5). He would also aggressively support this statement with others, such as the following, ” [y]es, more, more, more! ... till our national destiny is fulfilled and ...the whole boundless continent is ours” (John L. O’Sullivan, 1845, Morning news lead editorial). O’Sullivan was referring to the unprecedented growth in both population and territory which took place in the United States in the mid nineteenth century. With the land annexed from Mexico and the native American tribes, the United States of America had grown and expanded its borders by a staggering “60 percent or 1.2 million square miles” (Manifest destiny. encyclopedia). The amazing pace with which this expansion took place left many citizens within the US (like O’Sullivan) with the notion that its growth could not be stopped, and that the further expansion of the nation was “inevitable, necessary, and desirable” (Manifest destiny. encyclopedia).

With the definition we have set for the ideology of American exceptionalism, we begin to see a clear pattern as to how over time it could engender this “evolved” version of itself. Moreover, what makes the ideology so interesting is its unification of the separate interpretations of its meaning, the interpretations of different Americanists. This encapsulation of these different ideas, regarding America’s uniqueness, exemplary nature, and its station as “above” international law, makes it easier to understand why it was allowed to fester and grow, why the population of the US could become so infatuated and enraptured by its prospects. It makes it clearer how the belief that the continued expansion of the United States territories across the rest of the Americas was not only righteous, but completely justifiable. Not only that, it was also inevitable. It was the destiny of the United States, as ordained by God, to become the major player on the western hemisphere, to become the next great empire. However, as I have mentioned before entertaining or harboring such ideologies over a period of time has a tendency to corrupt the ideal, or in some cases unveil its true purpose.

The growth of the idea of Manifest Destiny would eventually reveal the darker side of the ideology, turning the nation onto of the conqueror of others. With the driving force of Manifest Destiny ennobling its actions the US would in time be aligned with the infamous doctrine that governed the mindset of the European nation-states during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Colonialism. This would later evolve into Imperialism (which in simple

terms can be said to be the perpetuation and legitimization of colonialism), and as such “Manifest Destiny was obviously a defense of what is now called imperialism” (Manifest destiny. encyclopedia). It was an ideology that saw the western European great kingdoms expand their influences through conquest and the establishment of colonies in the conquered areas, as nations grew from kingdoms to empires. The subjugation of these areas occurred not only because of material needs, the hunt for natural resources to further fuel exponentially growing industrial societies, but also due to ideological reasons. Having cast off the shackles of the British empire themselves some seventy years prior, the US saw itself as a nation now free from the powers of another. Now it was their turn to affect the world, a sentiment that Melville presented (again) in *White jacket*:

The rest of the nations must soon be in our rear. We are the pioneers of the world; the advance-guard, sent on through the wilderness of untried things, to break a new path in the New World that is ours. In our youth is strength; in our inexperience, our wisdom. At period when other nations have but lisped, our deep voice is heard afar. Long enough, have we been skeptics with regards to ourselves, and doubted whether, indeed, the political Messiah had come. But he has come in us, if we would but give utterance to his promptings. And let us always remember that with ourselves, almost for the first time in history of earth, national selfishness is unbound philanthropy; for we can not do a good to America but we give alms to the world. (Melville *White Jacket*)

According to President James Monroe, America was “not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers” (Manifest destiny. encyclopedia). This policy, also known as the Monroe Doctrine, was a way of countering European colonization of the Americas, as it based itself on the idea that any aggressive political moves towards any state in the Americas would be regarded as an aggressive political move towards the US itself (although the doctrine did also promise that the US would not involve itself in Africa or Asia Major). The Monroe Doctrine, in conjunction with Manifest Destiny, led to “a state of Increased US control and hegemony in the Americas, as they attempted to hinder European influence on the continent” (Manifest destiny. encyclopedia). Some twenty-odd years later the Civil War would ravage the nation, yet even this could not stop the tide of Manifest Destiny as it continued to evolve, with the US spreading its influence over the Caribbean and the Pacific. Whilst not necessarily a direct effect from of spread of influence, Manifest Destiny would welcome elements of Darwinism into its fold in the post-Civil War era.

The most well-known of these elements was something that had been seen in the colonial politics of several European nations, namely the idea of the burden of leadership and superiority. This idea was the one known as “the white man’s burden,” after Kipling’s poem of the same name, and it was the idea that the colonial powers’ (most often white Europeans’) imprisonment, colonization, and subjugation of locals was a kindness, a mercy.

It was, as the well-known idiom says, the burden of the white man to bring civilization, society, and democracy to these primitives. By making these concepts part of Manifest Destiny, the United States government could justify its own expansionistic policies, “it was convenient for all to think that they had the divine right to acquire and dominate because they had the proper economic system and the most developed culture and belonged to the most advanced race” (Manifest destiny. encyclopedia). And the United States was not immune to such thoughts, where US citizens felt that they held the “the white’s man burden” in the Americas and it was their responsibility to lead the inferior races, such as the African Americans and the Native Americans to better lives, proving the actual uniformity of the nation. Furthermore, in a strange twist of irony, there was amongst some of these “inferior” races an acceptance of this version of Manifest Destiny as “[even] black leaders like Fredrick Douglass accepted the principles of Manifest Destiny when he supported the annexation of Santo Domingo” (Manifest destiny. encyclopedia)

The United States was, as the ideology of American exceptionalism suggests, founded on the belief in liberty, egalitarianism, and democracy. It was itself a former colony that actually managed to wrest its own freedom from the colonial power, and thus from an early stage showed clear, unbridled disdain for colonialism, or as Pease writes, “[i]n its (the US’s) representation of the transition from a proto-national to a national community, the national narrative proposed a scene of emancipation, wherein a captive people liberated themselves from a tyrannical power” (4). Therefore, it was ironic that, due to the zealous nature of American exceptionalism and Manifest Destiny, the US would eventually become a colonial power itself. Whilst there was some minor opposition to the ideology of Manifest Destiny and the further expansion of the US, most citizens “gladly embraced the concept that they belonged to a superior culture and race, and that Providence or genetics had preordained the people of the United States for greatness” (Manifest destiny. encyclopedia).

The ideals championed by Manifest Destiny and American Exceptionalism, which were so readily embraced by the populace of the US, are in their most basic form the very essence of

imperialism and the sediment of colonialism. It was no longer a nation whose project was the conquest of the wilderness, to battle nature, but a nation who fought wars for flags, resources, and pride. Or as Daniel Immerwahr writes, “[t]his was, in other words, a different kind of expansion, reminiscent of the failed vision for Indian Country. Not taking land and flooding it with settlers, but conquering subject populations and Ruling them” (Immerwahr 79). Knowing this, it has become impossible to put blind faith in the idea that America was the champion of freedom for all, as this ideology only goes to show the United States’ veiled dream of empire.

2.6 Imperialism & nationalism

At this point, we have to delve into two concepts that become extremely important when reading Melville, or rather, when reading *Moby-Dick*: imperialism and empire. As we analyze Melville’s grand narrative, these concepts surface again and again, like the mighty cetaceans hunted in the story itself. To understand the text’s relationship to empire, we have to accept that it itself is both a critique of these concepts, but (in a sense) makes use of them as well. Melville’s political leanings and ideologies seem somewhat clear in the biographical information we possess: he had no great love for the idea of empire. Likewise, the text itself will seem vehemently opposed to these concepts as well. Seeded throughout the novel we find paragraphs or whole chapters, such as the “*Fast Fish and Loose Fish*” chapter, in which critique is leveled against imperialism and empire. The text seems set upon imparting its abhorrence of Europe’s grand old project of empire whilst warning the fledgling United States against following the same path. Perhaps out of fear that said path is already set, or because it sees these concepts as diametrically opposed to its idea of the US. Although it has to be mentioned that the text seems to believe that the destination is not inevitable, and the course can be altered in time.

However, in an ironic turn the novel uses nationalistic imagery, we would associate with imperialism or empire. Comparing and contrasting “foreign” ships to the *Pequod*, presenting the others as lesser than their US colleague, one could read it as if the text attempts to envelop us into its own ideology of US supremacy, in a manner that could cheapen the message somewhat. For the text makes use of (amongst other things) nationalistic writing in certain chapters. With this we mean words, phrases or narratives that aim to bolster the feeling of national self-worth or idealism within the reader, assuming that the reader is part of the community/nation state that the text champions, whilst simultaneously berating or referring to

other rivaling nations and communities in a condescending manner, which aims to infer inferiority. At these points, the text utilizes an almost extreme nationalistic rhetoric used by demagogues and despots, where one praises one's chosen group whilst demonizing another. Likewise, the dreaded captain Ahab uses his oratorical power in such manners several times during the journey of the *Pequod*, which more than once brings the crew back from the brink of mutiny, reinstating the crew once more into his project.

Therefore, we need to understand the importance of concepts such as Empire and Imperialism in connection to this text, that its use is not only married to some of the overarching themes, but also suffuses the beings of the *Pequod*, its captain, and crew. Moreover, it will give us insight into how the US, as a political entity, denies its own attempts at empire, and cannot see its own imperialism due to its zealous need to expand, all according to the text at least.

3 Chapter 2: Melville and the text

I believe in God, who made of one blood all nations that on earth do dwell. I believe that all men, black and brown and white, are brothers, varying through time and opportunity, in form and gift and feature, but differing in no essential particular, and alike in soul and the possibility of infinite development.

– W. E. B. Du Bois

3.1 The political backdrop of Herman Melville's writing of *Moby Dick*

During the era in which Melville began his writing of the novel, the United States was still a nascent idea, an adolescent amongst the nation states of the world, which a mere seventy years before had won its own sovereignty in a war of independence. So, it stands to reason that the nation as a whole was still struggling to cement its cultural norms. What was certain, however, was that the key elements of what would eventually become known as “the American spirit” thrived. Two ideologies, in particular, would rise above the rest, feeding of and reinforcing each other. Namely American Exceptionalism and Manifest Destiny. However, these two ideologies were points of contention between the opposing political factions in the fledgling nation, going as far as tearing a rift between them, which would in turn be a factor that led to the American Civil War, which broke out ten years after the publishing of Melville's novel, in 1861.

A few years prior to the release of *Moby Dick*, the US fought a war against Mexico (from 1846 to 1848), in which it would emerge victorious. In the aftermath of the war, Mexico was forced to surrender the provinces of Alta California and Santa Fe de Nuevo México. However, the main point of political conflict between the parties stemmed not from this result, nor the war bounty. On the contrary it had its origin in the catalyst of the war, the annexation of Texas. Winning these massive, new areas of land, as well as managing to keep Texas in American hands, seemed to feed into the growing idea of Manifest Destiny.

America was, in the minds of many now truly ascendant, and on its way to becoming one of the truly great (if not the greatest) nation in the world. Or as Andrew Delbanco writes, “the defeat of Mexico at first seemed another step towards the glorious fulfilment of America’s Manifest Destiny” (Delbanco 149). And one could indeed argue that America was moving towards greatness, as the nation was ripe for transformation into the fabled Jeffersonian democracy, an agrarian paradise where a man could earn his own keep through hard, honest, righteous work and the sweat of his brow, or through the hard work of others (not always of their own volition). As D.H. Lawrence wrote, America was never as free as people believed, not even for white men with opinions dissimilar to the majority, “[f]reedom anyhow? The land of the free! This land of the free! Why, if I say anything that displeases them, the free mob will lynch me, and that’s my freedom. Free?” (Lawrence 3).

As with so many other important political topics, America’s imperialistic or colonial tendencies would spark heated debates within the political milieu, polarizing the different sides. Where conservative forces applauded the ideas of expansion, conquest, and continued slavery, whilst liberal voices condemned it. In other words, not everyone was comfortable with the more aggressive, negative ideals within these ideologies. As with most political debates, the “pro-imperialism” political opinions that surfaced had their adversaries and some created more fraction than others, especially the war with Mexico and the initial annexation of Texas, which remained controversial and divisive. As Donald E. Pease writes in *Melville and Cultural Persuasion*, “the Mexican War embroiled the American people in an anxious political conjuncture involving debates over slavery and national identity” (249). The annexation of Texas was critiqued by Ralph Waldo Emerson as an “ironic triumph for ‘Manifest destiny’, an ominous fulfilment for the impulses of American nationalism . . . [which] within thirteen years, would bring the nation to a supreme crisis” (Rogin, quoting David Potter 102). The discussion was not only related to the “stealing” of land belonging to others, or the question of whether new states being admitted to the union should allow or make use of slavery as a part of their labor force and economy, but just as much about the national image of the US, and how this image was projected externally and viewed internally. How could a nation that so ardently advocated liberty, justice and freedom for all also condone slavery?

How could a nation that itself had been subject to a colonial master, which it had unshackled itself from, step up to fill the same shoes as colonizer and empire builder? Rogin brings up this dilemma as one of the major issues that divided the political spectrum of the US, going as far as to set it up as of the catalyst for the Civil War as he writes,

Slavery always stood in contradiction to the ideals of 1776. The Mexican war made that contradiction a threat not simply to the Declaration of Independence but to the American institutions as well...The commitment of both parties to the Manifest Destiny only raised the question of slavery, the question that American nationalism was supposed to bury. The conflict over California's admission to statehood, the expansion of slavery to the other territories won from Mexico, and the return of fugitive slaves posed, by 1850, the gravest threat to the Union since its founding (103).

Under such circumstances, it is understandable that slavery and the slave economy could, even at that time, tear massive rifts between the different political agendas. For whereas the southern states of the nation, relied heavily on the slave industry for their economic growth and wellbeing, the northern states wanted little to do with slavery. Moreover, there were also those within pro-slavery circles that claimed that African Americans were a naturally servile race, and therefore would be happier under the yoke of a master. Emerson, who prophesied American victory, said prior to the war that the annexation of Mexico would cause great harm to the nation and perhaps even ruin it, as "it [would] be as the man who swallows the arsenic which brings him down in turn. Mexico will poison us" (Delbanco 149). Therefore, it comes as no surprise that conflicting views would sour the relationship between the factions, and only if one disregards the link slavery had to the very survival of the southern states as economic entities, does the inevitable outcome come as a surprise. Or rather, that is what southern politicians such as John Calhoun claimed. Likewise, they regarded the ideology of Manifest Destiny as applicable only to White Americans.

As an example, the northern states saw no outright problem in accepting thousands of (formerly) Mexican citizens into the fold, although these Mexicans had to be defined as "white" to give them political rights, whereas many of the southern states clung to their xenophobic view of Manifest Destiny, what one would in modern times define as an ideal of white supremacy. The former vice president, Calhoun articulated such a sentiment when he in 1848 as the elected senator for South Carolina (1845-50) addressed congress, regarding the conquest of Mexico:

I know further, sir, that we have never dreamt of incorporating into our union any but the Caucasian race – the free white race. To incorporate Mexico, would be the very first instance of the kind of incorporating an Indian race; for more than half of the Mexicans are Indians, and the other is composed chiefly of mixed tribes. I protest against such a union as that! Ours, sir, is the government of a white race. The greatest misfortunes of the Spanish America are to be traced to the fatal error of placing these colored races on an equality with the white race. (teachingamericanhistory)

Melville, however, seemed to agree with the northern sentiment of abolitionism, as he was said to recognize Emerson's view. According to Delbanco, Melville "privately . . . was thinking along similar lines" (149), for "in his copy of the works of William D'Avenant . . . he checked the following passages 'For God ordain'd not huge Empire as proportionable to the Bodies, but to the Mindes of Men; and the Mindes of Men are more monstrous and require more space for agitation and the hunting of others, than the Bodies of Whales'" (Delbanco 149). With this one could argue that there is evidence for Melville's political leanings, and that it is possible to spot a subtle influence, from Melville's side, in *Moby-Dick*. Considering the work as a whole the text does present its readers with strong contemporary opinions on the state of the nation, or as Michael Rogin writes, "*Moby-Dick* does not simply respond, in general, to slavery and racial prejudice in America, it is deeply enmeshed in the crisis of 1850" (107). However, even if evidence for thoughts and ideas aligned with the author's personal ideal are present in the novel, we cannot with absolute certainty claim that he uses the novel to further an agenda, only that it can be read or interpreted in such a manner. However, Rogin also contradicts himself earlier in his text, as he sees both political agency in Melville's novel as well as anti-political sentiment:

Melville's clan was prominent in American politics for three generations from the Revolution to the Civil War. Family connections located the writer at the center of the dominant public issues of his time: Manifest Destiny, slavery, and capitalist expansion. But the radical terms on which his family enmeshed him in politics isolated Melville. It encouraged his absorption into texts that were increasingly self-referential. (Rogin Preface).

If one was to claim any infusion of personal, political thoughts in *Moby-Dick*, chapter eighty-nine, also known as the "Fast-Fish and Loose-Fish", seems the best source to strengthen such an argument. In the chapter, Ishmael, as a mouthpiece of the author himself, delves into a

maritime law (legislated by the American whaling community and not internationally recognized) regarding the rights to felled whales. As Ishmael suggests, sometimes a whale might slip away during a hunt or be loosened and set adrift during a storm, and the rights to said whales needed to be defined. He attempts to explain to the reader that a marked whale (“waifed” being used by Ishmael as a word for a mark) differs from an unmarked one with the regard to ownership. According to Ishmael, there exist two terms which are applied to whales when one is in the process of hunting them, loose-fish and fast-fish. A waifed whale is for all intents and purposes a fast-fish as it has been, as the definition suggests, marked by the harpoons and/or colors of the ship that wounded it. In juxtaposition to this, a loose fish is (quite self-explanatorily) a whale that has not been “flagged,” and therefore belongs to no one, or as Melville writes, “a Loose-Fish is fair game for anybody who can soonest catch it” (433).

Although the chapter is a short one, it is a key source of insight into the politics of the novel. It is in the last paragraph of this chapter in which the text shows its colors, where it reveals political thoughts in an explicit way. Ishmael seems uncharacteristically grounded in this chapter, as the usually loftier way of writing gives way to a more clear and concise voice. The way in which Ishmael verbalizes himself in this paragraph could present not his voice, but that of the text. It is here that the text shows a very clear disdain for the war with Mexico and imperialism and colonialism. He starts his critique of imperialism with a comparison, equating the laws of fast-fish and loose-fish with the system of law that governs human enterprises. Ishmael states that “possession is half of the law, regardless of how the thing came into possession,” and then, playing in the idiom (possession is nine-tenths of the law), he continues with the following: “but often possession is the whole of the law. . . . What to the rapacious landlord is the window’s last mite but a Fast-Fish?” (Melville 434-5). Likewise, he ends the chapter with a paragraph where he contemplates the true meaning of human freedom:

What are the rights of Man and the Liberties of the world but loose-Fish? What all men’s mind and opinions but loose-Fish? What is the principle of religious belief in them but a loose-Fish? What to the ostentatious smuggling verbalists are the thoughts of thinkers but loose-Fish? What is the great globe itself but a loose-Fish? And what are you, reader, but a Loose-Fish and a Fast-Fish, too?”. (Melville 435)

Here the text postulates, or rather implies, that the rights of all, thought to be immutable, are truly not. Nor is the world itself, nor even an individual’s own thoughts mind, or very being.

Whether or not these entities are all “waifed” is up for debate, and as such, they are open for conquest, annexation and manipulation. Whilst this is not explicitly stated, it seems in this passage that the text fears the effect political ideologies can have on people, as it is remarked how little it takes to rouse emotions within the population and push them in a certain direction. As such political conflict was seen and experienced in the US during the build-up to and aftermath of the war with Mexico and the lead up to the Civil War.

To further cement this postulation regarding the novel’s explicit political commentary, one only has to look at the preceding paragraph, where the text puts focus on a certain particular political topic, that of colonization. “[w]hat to that redoubted harpooner, John Bull, is poor Ireland, but a Fast-Fish? What to that apostolic lancer, Brother Jonathan, is Texas but a Fast-Fish? And concerning all these, is not Possession the whole of the law? . . . What at last will Mexico be to the United States? All Loose-fish” (Melville 435). In this critique of colonialism, the text uses the personifications of England and the US, John Bull and Brother Jonathan respectively, as synecdoches for the colonizing nations. Evoking the image of a harpooner, one of the most elevated positions on a whaling ship and the person responsible for “waifing” a whale, the text attempts to cast these nations as the hunters of others, or rather as the entities that mark other nations or people as their possessions. Great Britain, or more precisely England, was at the time of Melville one of (if not the most) prominent and powerful empires on the planet, possessing colonies all around the globe.

The text chooses to focus on one of England’s closest colonies, Ireland. By doing this, it draws parallels to the United States’ annexation of Texas, as well as its conflict with and attempted conquest of Mexico. The way in which the text presents itself, how it continues to repeat the same sentiment for over a page and a half, in this chapter suggests a disapproval of the Calhounian idea of forceful acquisition of land, of things possessed by others, or things that can never truly be possessed. Furthermore, it shows the novel’s rejection of the mentality that “possession as the whole of the law,” as the suggestion is made that land, people, ideas cannot truly be owned, like the open ocean on which Ahab and the *Pequod*’s perilous odyssey takes place, or the Pale whale that they seek.

3.2 Moby-Dick and race

Melville was not only an opponent of imperialism/colonialism and aggressive expansion. He was also a proponent of abolition, as stated earlier, and of racial equality, although it has to be said that he still carried some level of bias towards non-whites. This is to be expected as certain cultural and ideological mindsets are not cast away that easily. Even the most ardent champion of equality during Melville's time would find themselves believing in some sort of racial hierarchy. Delbanco writes of Melville that he "knew that in America the dignity of whites depended on the degradation of blacks, and he was, at least sporadically, ashamed to be a beneficiary of the system. But like virtually everyone in his time, . . . he took for granted that some sort of racial hierarchy had always existed and always would" (Delbanco 156). There are no sources that lay claim to one certain, unquestionable source for Melville's more egalitarian views, but one possibility is his life at sea.

As a young man, Melville spent five years at sea, mostly on whaling vessels (and one year on a US navy frigate) in the Atlantic Ocean. During his stint as a sailor, he certainly must have experienced the multi-racial and multi-cultural facets of nautical life and come into contact with people from all over the world. When a person has to brave such hazardous work environments, on a daily basis, as was the fact for the sailors during the age of sails, one has to rely entirely on one's crewmates, and as such prejudice and racism have a tendency to evaporate. Although there is no concrete basis for such a conclusion, it would fit with Melville's belief in the insignificance of a man's skin color and how he "regarded slavery . . . as a crime not only against one subjugated race but against humanity" (Delbanco 157). In other words, Melville seemed to entertain opinions diametrically opposite to those of politicians such as Calhoun such as the belief that the Manifest Destiny of America was a destiny for all citizens not just white, upper-class Americans, as one can explicate from his novels, as well as private letters. Critics such as Rogin and Morrison suggest the same. Morrison, for instance, writes that Melville did not vilify white people, but that "he was overwhelmed by philosophical and metaphysical inconsistencies of an extraordinary and unprecedented idea that had its fullest manifestation in his own time in his country, and that idea was the successful assertion of whiteness ideology" (Morrison 1682).

In this regard, the argument for Melville's egalitarianism is not completely baseless. Looking at the political themes in his fictional as well as non-fictional texts, we see evidence for equality-based ideologies. Moreover, when we begin to explicate the novel, a pattern begins to emerge, that helps support this claim. Despite this, it has to be stated that there is no way of

confirming the truth of such statements, as Melville never explicitly stated any political intentions with *Moby-Dick*, nor does it prove he wrote the novel with specific intentions in mind, but it does remain as a curious observation that such themes and thoughts seems to surface in so many of his novels. Throughout the novel, again and again, the text presents us with this attitude that echoes the ideas of the United States as a multicultural society, foreshadowing the idea of the nation as a melting pot for different cultures and races, a point of coalescence of humanity. This is interesting, as this idea of the melting pot would not cement itself for some time, which means that Melville could be thought of as one of many precursors to the very idea.

The first of many such instances is the scene in which Ishmael and Queequeg share a room at an inn at the end of chapter three, a scene that will foreshadow the cultural blend that the novel will portray to the reader later during the voyage. In the scene the characters, who at first find each other strange, Ishmael thought Queequeg's customs "queer and scary," (Melville 25) end up sharing a bed. This, in conjunction with the cultural exchange Ishmael and Queequeg experience, leads to their forming a close bond even before they embark on the perilous journey to hunt a whale. It is not uncommon for critics (as well as readers) to interpret this scene in a "gay" context, but since sexuality is not the focus of this thesis I will only mention this in passing. Scenes such as the one described in chapter thirteen (wheelbarrow) show how this relationship quickly shapes Ishmael's thoughts as he and Queequeg do not "notice the jeering glances of the passengers, a lubber-like assembly, who marveled that two fellow beings should be so companionable; as though a white man were anything more dignified than a white-washed negro" (Melville 66). Such is the newfound platonic love that it leaves Ishmael completely blind to the nonverbal race and class-based criticism or chastisement that he receives from his peers.

Some scholars have likened the relationship shared by them as a pseudo-marital union of sorts. Shortly after their meeting, Ishmael notes regarding Queequeg that "upon waking next morning about daylight, I found Queequeg's arm thrown over me in the most loving and affectionate manner You had almost thought I had been his wife" (Melville 28). Later Ishmael even confirms their unofficial union, stating that "he seemed to take to me quite as naturally and unbiddenly as I to him. . . . he pressed his forehead against mine, clasped me around the waist, and said that henceforth we were married; meaning, in his country's phrase, that we were bosom friends; he would gladly die for me" (Melville 57), and describes their lying in bed together, with their legs intertwined.

Furthermore, the text divulges Ishmael's egalitarian mindset in the way he describes his partner: "savage though he was . . . his countenance yet had a something in it which was by no means disagreeable. You cannot hide the soul" (Melville 55). In this way the text portrays how quickly these two men grew incredibly close, despite the fact that contemporary conventions said they shouldn't. To Ishmael, Queequeg is not simply a noble savage, but a noble soul in general, a "cannibal version of Washington" (Melville 56), or rather just a different version of a great leader, and the focus of Ishmael's words is on the Washington simile, not the cannibal adjective. Others may have seen more in the vein of characters that share a relationship of platonic or brotherly love, such as Huckleberry Finn and Jim (first published some thirty years after M.D) or Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson. Nevertheless, it is this close relationship between characters of different social classes or ethnicities that helps reinforce the novel's, and perhaps Melville's, egalitarian ideals, most so because the era in which the novel was written was one of strong nationalistic tendencies, and an era in which the idea of race was strong. Faux disciplines such as phrenology and craniometrics ensured that the systematic oppression of nonwhite ethnicities (but also "lesser" whites, such as the Irish) had scientific and moral justification, and because of their inferior nature, it would be better for them to be led and controlled by the "pure" white upper-class.

Therefore, when the text lets these two characters come together, it allows these two normally juxtaposed worlds to merge, and thus creates a new, interracial (or perhaps a nonracial/race neutral) space. Ishmael is completely willing to explore Queequeg's religious and cultural beliefs, because Queequeg will likewise explore Ishmael's, thus reaffirming, but not embracing one another's beliefs. Ishmael goes as far as to laud Queequeg's openness, while chastising his own, and by proxy America's, prejudicial mindset, saying that "I pay this particular compliment to Queequeg, because he treated me with so much civility and consideration, while I was guilty of great rudeness" (Melville 30). However, Ishmael (or rather, the novel) cancels out this slight transgression when he later makes the most profound of statements as he reaffirms Queequeg's equal standing to himself, simply saying "now, Queequeg is my fellow man" (Melville 58). In this statement, the novel dispels any and all notions of racism in its depiction of Ishmael's outlook. One can say what one wants regarding his language in parts of the novel, that it is oppressive, racist, or offensive, however, the three words "my fellow man" complicate such notions.

Queequeg becomes a synecdoche for the other, the barbarians and the "uncivilized." He shows how such others are not subhuman or inferior to white Americans. Their societies and

cultural facets are evolving towards a more modern, western looking one, and thus changes the way in which Americans and Western people view them (Whether or not this “morally” correct is irrelevant in this case, as we are not here to pass judgement on that particular topic). “But Queequeg.... was a creature in the transition state – neither caterpillar nor butterfly. He was just enough civilized to show off his outlandishness in the strangest possible manner” (Melville 31). Ishmael describes Queequeg as almost a manifestation of the process of evolution, a living chrysalis that exemplifies the birth of civilization and/or a nation, and in doing this he (sadly) perpetuates the racist, contemporary idea that regarded indigenous communities as primitive, that can lead us to doubt the way in which their relationship is presented. As such it shows a separation or duality within the text, where despite the progressive views of the text, there exists a surface level of racial harmony, that simultaneously perpetuates some of the same racial biases that were in place during Melville’s time. Having presented both the racial harmony seen in the Ishmael/Queequeg union and the unconscious hypocrisy, I now want to another positive reading of the ship’s crew, similar to the before mentioned union.

3.3 The crew of the Pequod as a representation of cultural and racial synthesis

The synecdochal role that Queequeg plays in the novel is one of several instances of societal critique that the novel aims at western nations of the time: as described above, he is a metaphor of societal growth, of the evolution of Anderson’s imagined community. Likewise, his “marriage” to Ishmael, and their continued relationship, stands as a great example of racial/social equality. However, their relationship is not the only way in which the novel professes such ideals to the reader. It also does so through the crew of the Pequod itself. For throughout the novel no other congregation of men is shown to possess such diversity as the crew of the Pequod, a stand-in for the Nantucket whaling vessel.

Foreshadowed in the union of Ishmael and Queequeg, the Pequod stands as beacon of the multicultural community, the novel idealizes a vision of America, somewhat different from what might have been imagined by its founding fathers. Not only is the *Pequod* a nexus of ethnicities, cultures, and ideologies that all come together to function in unison, but the physical entity of the ship itself is also a patchwork of cultural influences and materials. Described in the same manner as a person would be, the *Pequod* is personified as a trophy hunter and a

scavenger. Ishmael uses several different ethnic or cultural connotations as he analyses the ship, saying that, “her old hull’s complexion was darkened like a French grenadier’s,”(Melville 77) whilst “[h]er masts [had been] – cut somewhere of the coast of Japan,”(Melville 77), and that “[s]he was appareled like any Ethiopian emperor, his neck heavy with pendants of polished ivory”(Melville 78). Even the name itself originated from a “celebrated tribe of Massachusetts Indians” (Melville 77). With this, the text can be seen to show us the ethnic and cultural variety of the ship, even before we are introduced to the crew itself.

The crew of the *Pequod* is a menagerie of odd and peculiar people and personalities, housing ethnic types ranging from the New England Quaker captains, to the native American Tashtego, to the “gigantic, coal black negro-savage Daggoo” (Melville 131). Note here the racist and stereotypical portrayal of Daggoo in this quote, suggesting an even more primitive nature because he comes directly from Africa. The novel shows us a “community” that bases its hierarchy on the character and merit of the person, and not on heritage or nepotism. Amongst the most important members of the crew were the harpooners, strong and steady men that would tag (waif) the whales, whose killing was the very purpose of the *Pequod*. These men would lead their own boats, with their own small crews. And on Melville’s famed ship, every single harpooner is a non-Christian, nonwhite member of the crew, and all originate from different parts of the world (and different cultures). Toni Morrison also comments upon the myriad of non-American ethnicities on the ship, writing that “[o]n the *Pequod* the multicultural, mainly foreign, proletariat is at work to produce a commodity” (Morrison 1682). With this, the text further cements the idea of the *Pequod* as an ethnically diverse space, where only the sweat of one’s own brow can help one rise through the ranks. With the creation, and perpetuation of such an egalitarian space, the novel engenders a broader understanding and empathic link amongst the crew of the *Pequod*, a link that enables the crew to rise to the occasion time and time again, as no whale seems to elude their cold iron lances (all except the great leviathan itself).

However, it is not only because of the space created by the text that the *Pequod* becomes a symbol for a land of the free, but just as much due to the purpose of the ship, which is of a commercial nature. One could argue that Melville only chooses this setting as he himself had been affected greatly by his time at sea, and thus was more familiar and comfortable writing in such a setting. And whilst this may ring true, it ignores the idea which exists as a major part of the ideology favored by most Americans, capitalism. Synergizing well with older (but still relevant) ideas such as self-reliance and that hard, diligent work led to assured success, capitalism would enthrall the US with its possibilities. The privatization of business and the

means of production that defines capitalism, would eventually pave the way for great American inventions (or at least concepts first perfected by Americans) such as the assembly line and mass production, which in turn lead to the US becoming the leading industrial nation by the start of the second world war. But even back in Melville's time the Americans were beginning to pull ahead in the industrial and economic race, where "[b]y the early 1870s . . . American industry and productivity would reveal themselves to be incontrovertibly ahead of their British counterparts" (Pettitt 233). With this the need for resources and raw materials increased exponentially, and for God's chosen people there was no wrong way to acquire them. As such, it is not difficult to see how American capitalism, American exceptionalism, and Manifest Destiny worked so well together (when one views America as corporation).

As said, a part of this ideology, private ownership and one's is willingness to do anything one can to achieve the unimaginable, one will rise from nothing to become a king (in all but name). As such, every crew member of the *Pequod* has a vested interest in the success of the hunting expeditions, and therefore will be more willing to cooperate with others than they perhaps normally would have been, due to cultural or ethnic views. As time passes, slowly such grudging acceptance evolves into respect, empathy and brotherly love, as the crewmembers become dependent on each other, not just for their livelihood but also for their survival. As such, when the ship catches and processes a whale, the exaltation of the crew soars to great heights, further cementing the unity and community amongst them. It is in one such processing scene that Melville shows us how this exaltation helps foster the space mentioned above, as Ishmael works the sperm to keep it fluid:

I squeezed that sperm till I myself melted into it I found myself unwittingly squeezing my co-laborers' hands in it [s]uch an abounding, affectionate, friendly, loving feeling did this avocation beget; that at last I was continually squeezing their hands, and looking in their eyes sentimentally; as much as to say, - Oh! My dear fellow beings, why should we longer cherish any social acerbities, or know the slightest ill humor or Envy! Come; let us squeeze hands all round; nay, let us all squeeze ourselves into each other; let us squeeze ourselves universally into the very milk and sperm of kindness. (Melville 456)

In Ishmael's pontification, there emerges an amalgamation of the meritocratic and the egalitarian, of the capitalistic and the empathic (also not ignoring the extremely homoerotic imagery and elements of this particular scene). The sperm, as the primary goal of the expedition, is the most "object" in the job or milieu of the whaler. It is the source of their income, but also the very thing that binds them together. As Ishmael tells it, through the interaction with the sperm that he truly comes into contact with his fellow man. The liquid gold, the sperm of the whale, is the catalyst that helps elevate human connectivity to a transcendental level, a space in which humanity exists as one singular, leviathan entity. The novel makes no mention of race or ethnicity in this paragraph. Granted, this might be due to the fact that Ishmael is, as ever, the narrator and focalizer of the novel. However, it is never so simple when it comes to *Moby Dick*. Such use of flowery and emotionally charged language often occurs when an author (or any orator) attempts to sway or influence his listeners. One could argue that through Ishmael, the novel attempts to sway the American reader, the American populace, towards a mindset that supports a space free of slavery and racism. This, coupled with the overarching themes presented in the novel, and the other scenes mentioned in this thesis, strongly suggests that the novel attempts to show the reader the folly of racist or exclusionary thoughts or worldviews, or at the least criticize the established racial views and dogmas through an opposing view (that condones racial equality). In other words, the novel critiques the established racial prejudice and slavery-based economy of the US, whilst simultaneously adding its voice (although in a subtle way) to the important domestic debates during the writing and publishing of the novel.

As Ishmael's words are neither prophetic nor dogmatic, he could only appeal to the sentiment and empathy of his fellow Americans through his words and characters. Therefore, he sets up the crew as the overarching (macro)-protagonist (as Ishmael is the micro-protagonist) of the novel. Donald Pease, in his defense of C. L. R. James's *Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways*, explains how "Melville intends to make the crew the real heroes of his book" (James. Qtd. in Pease 98). Although James's statement is in regards to the conflict between the crew and their desire for normal whaling hunts versus Captain Ahab and his quest for vengeance, it is still fully applicable in the case of the ascendance of the crew as a heroic entity (for fighting against the tyranny of Ahab). The hero of a story is the character that the text wants the readers to empathize with and aspire to be, and as such it stands to reason that the novel would present the crew of the Pequod as the protagonist. Therefore, if the readers were to see the crew as such and attempt to emulate them, it would be in Melville's best interest (supposing

that he wants his ideas and ideologies to be spread and perpetuated) to engender the crew with his personal ideologies.

However, there is a counterargument to be made against the idealistic space presented by the text. By containing the narrative to a whaling ship, the novel frees its meritocratic community from the corrupting influences of the outside world, thus securing the a more egalitarian space. This in turn negates the status of the ship/crew as a synecdoche, as it no longer can be considered to be representative of the world, or America, as a whole, but more like an isolated nation (an ironic statement, when one takes into account the monomaniacal tyranny of Ahab). James Dean Young writes that “[t]he suggestions of Melville’s conception of the ship as society, as world-in-itself, or as microcosm are rather numerous and explicit” (Young 151), and that “[t]he ship, like Ahab, is self-sufficient; it is governed by attitudes and actions which are independent of other societies and other worlds, yet the *Pequod* has some relationships with these other worlds” (Young 151).

One cannot claim validity for a statement based on singular, idiosyncratic cases. In other words, the lack of other (American) whaling vessels with the same social and cultural foundation as the *Pequod* could seed doubts as to its symbolic nature. However, it is its unique idiosyncrasy that does legitimize the text’s “claim,” for it represents the views shared by so many an American citizens as to the uniqueness of the United States. What the novel attempts to show is the idea that its national belonging, the nation of its author, their nation, is the only one of its kind. There exists no nation like it.

With the *Pequod*, the novel creates a space that, like the fledgling nation of America, began as a nexus for different cultural and ethnic beliefs, and a space that would eventually, over time, evolve its own cultural traits as a myriad of traits coalesced into this new state. As such, the novel means for the *Pequod*, or rather the crew of the ship, to stand as a symbol of America, and of the spirit of an egalitarian nation, representing the development of a nonracial space where merit is the most important factor. The creation of these spaces of egalitarian and meritocratic union, forms the foundation of the text’s ideological beliefs about the human race and the US. Through the narrator Ishmael and the rest of the crew of the *Pequod*, the novel solidifies these. For this to happen he would have to be a part of the (then) ongoing process of creation and shaping of the nascent nation-state, to be a part of its literary foundation. The text would have to a literary work that stood as equal to the other great works of literature considered national epics or genesis of older nations. It would have to be a text that was part of the storied

past of the United States, of which (relative to the older states of Europe) the young nation had little to none. As such, the story of Ishmael and the *Pequod* would have to be a venture similar to the odyssey similar. It had to manifest a storied past where there was none. In the following chapter I will take a look at and explicate the ship chapters of *Moby-Dick*. Using the concepts and ideologies discussed in the first chapter, such as nation, nationalism, and American exceptionalism (to name a few), I will explore and explain how the text makes use of them to attempt to build a national consciousness. Likewise, I will show how the novel uses them as politically, literary devices in a critique of the then contemporary political climate, whilst simultaneously attempting to stoke feelings of nationalism or nationalistic pride. Moreover, I will show how, in the act of creating a contemporary space in which America is seen as superior to the older nations, the text succeeds in creating a storied past for the US.

4 Chapter 3 The Pequod as a nation.

They are ill discoverers that think there is no land, when they can see nothing but sea.

-Francis Bacon

The sea has always been amongst the world's greatest hurdles. In the minds of men from the primal ages of the earth to our modern time, it stands as the great barrier that separates the continents from each other, a seemingly vast and endless wasteland, a desert promising naught but death by water. However, over time, humans, in their ingenuity, learnt that stringing together trees and wood made for great floats, and soon great wooden structures assailed the seas, seeking new lands to settle and hunt. As mankind entered the age of sails, the great oceans became populated by thousands of these wooden creations, each populated by sailors. Some had just a few crewmen whilst some swarmed with hundreds of men. Voyages of these great expanses were a slow and arduous process in those days, and as such, each individual ship would naturally evolve its own idiosyncrasies. These socio-cultural traits, coupled with laws that differed from ship to ship, made each individual ship, in a strange way, a small nation state unto itself.

As described in the previous chapter, the text goes to great lengths to implant the idea of the *Pequod* as a nation of its own. It is filled with different people from different parts of the world, different walks of life, and with different cultural heritages, and all these coalesce at this central point into this wooden city-state, the *Pequod*. Despite hailing from a Quaker port, the *Pequod* is a very multi-ethnic, multi-cultural society, closer to modern societies than most cities of its time, although it should be mentioned that most coastal cities or ports of the time were fairly multi-ethnic. Following Benedict Anderson, one could say that the *Pequod* represents both the pure, primal community (or a small rustic village), where close, intimate contact and interactions are part of the daily life of the crew (everybody knows everybody), as well as the intricate, law-bound society of a modern state. The crew is bound together by a shared need for survival and protection from the outside, but also by the joy and contentment it brings them to be part of a community. Ironically, the community fostered on the *Pequod* is a barren or sterile one, barren in the sense that it has no mode of proliferation.

Being an exclusively male society, the *Pequod* has no way to naturally increase the size or mass of its population and is therefore by definition a non-reproductive Utopia. Moreover, the *Pequod* is, despite being a ship, a defined location. It might move around or be docked at some port city, but it will still remain its own isolated space. And this space moves with the crew, so one could claim that the *Pequod* is as much a people as it is a place. As such, the ship's community, its nationhood, is more tangible than more "normal" societies. In this chapter I will explore how the ocean-going vessels in the age of sails, such as the *Pequod*, could become such microcosms unto themselves. I will explain and justify this argument by showing exactly how a ship is a nation, and how the *Pequod* is displayed as a metaphor for the US. I will show how in this text, the ship can be read as a representation of an idealized version of American (e.g. the idea of "melting pot" society), in the way it criticizes and warns against those political ideals that could destroy the nation, both physically and morally. I will also show how the novel uses some of the same political/ideological devices that it criticizes conservative, pro-imperialism voices in the US for using, to engender sympathy or convergence towards its projected image of the nation, which will be done by comparing the "foreign" ships to the American *Pequod*.

4.1 The ideal world of Moby-Dick

Alongside language, there are other clear traits that further define and shape the American whaling-vessels. Further traits that set them apart from the other, non-American whaling vessels include their religious and ethnic makeup. A common trope in the Americas is the idea that the United States is and has always been a great nexus of culture, beliefs, and ethnicity, and more so freedom of religion and worship. It is a belief that has stood as an ideal for the nation as early as the eighteenth and nineteenth century, since the birth of the nation in fact, and as such is one of its founding principles. John L. O'Sullivan wrote in 1839 that "the American people [had] derived their origin from many other nations, and the Declaration of National Independence [was] entirely based on the great principle of human equality" (The Great Nation of Futurity), suggesting that equality was indeed part of the very foundation that held aloft the spirit of the nation, a place where "Truth, Justice, and Liberty for all" was the right of all men and women, regardless of their ethnicity. It is with this in mind that I now venture to look at the *Pequod* as the text's prime example of these ideals.

First of all, it is important to reveal the *Pequod* for what it is, which has been mentioned several times before in this thesis, a synecdoche for the American whaling business and every American whaling ship during the time. Moreover, it stands as a metaphor for America itself, a symbolic representation of its spirit of self-reliance, meritocratic hierarchy, and its status as a cultural melting-pot. The *Pequod*, like most whaling vessels of the time, was a space separate from the civilized world of men patrolling the seemingly endless watery wasteland of the world oceans, in search for the leviathans of the deep (and their liquid gold). Where most ships spend quite some time out on these hunts, the American vessels took this to an extreme, spending years out hunting, due to their “outwardly distinguishable try-works”(Melville 461). According to the New Bedford Whaling Museum’s article, Overview of American Whaling, “[t]he adaptation of try-works to use on shipboard enabled these vessels to stay at sea for longer periods while boiling out their oil. This try-works installation of two iron pots in a brick furnace onboard ship was the major technological innovation that enabled the success of the Yankee whaling industry”(overview of American whaling. whalingmuseum).

With this, their very existence became an exercise in the Emersonian ideal of self-reliance, as they had to sustain themselves on the stores of supplies they brought along or gather what they needed at sea. Another part of this symbolic representation is the meritocratic hierarchy of the whaling vessel. Rooted in this belief in self-reliance, the idea that success and merit can be achieved as long as one works hard and has a willingness to make sacrifices, is a staple of the American ideology. Through self-reliance it is possible for a person to “pull themselves up by their bootstraps” and amass great personal wealth. Whilst nothing so extreme takes place in Melville’s novel, there is a case to be made for a merit-based power structure on the ship, to a certain extent. Scholar Henry Nash Smith saw the *Pequod*’s “system of government as akin to a relationship between mortal a divine concept, he writes:

The democracy which Melville has in mind is not a political system or even a social system. It is independent of institutions. Like Emerson’s Self-Reliance, it is sustained by transaction between the individual and great democratic God, the ‘just spirit of Equality, which [has] spread one royal mantle of humanity over all my kind! (Smith 39).

Smith himself is seen as one of the founding fathers of American studies and did, alongside Leo Marx (with his text *The Machine in the Garden*), help birth and evolve the original methodology of American studies. This involved developing a semiotic school of interpretation referred to as the “myth and symbol” school, that looked at American texts with the purpose of seeking out and focusing on recurring themes that proved the exceptional nature of American culture.

Paradoxically the *Pequod* is both as Rogin writes, “[w]ork relations on the *Pequod* point away from isolated independence and towards fraternity” (138). Whilst one could argue that this is due to the perilous nature of the profession, which is true and should not be disregarded, it is also a sign of the more (surface level) liberal, democratic structure of the community of the ship itself, and the ideals of this newborn nation it represents. Ishmael does tell of unity and togetherness that to some point transcended race based views, saying that, “[t]hey were nearly all Islanders in the *Pequod*, *Isolato*es too, I call such, not acknowledging the common continent of men, but each *Isolato* living on separate a continent of his own. Yet now, federated along one keel, what a set of these *Isolato*es were!” (Melville 131-2).

With this, the *Pequod* can be seen as a signifier of the American Melting-pot. In both subtle and obvious ways, the novel presents the reader with images and scenes of cultural and ethnic amalgamation, of one shared culture, the culture of the ship. The novel first shows us this egalitarian idea of acceptance and understanding on a more personal level with the relationship between Ishmael and Queequeg. It’s a complicated and extremely interesting relationship that synthesizes both camaraderie and homoerotic love into a strange concoction that works wonderfully. Over the course of a couple of days the two men manage to forge an extremely tightly knit bond in which they become as intimate as two men seems to stop just shy of engaging in sexual intercourse. Sharing a bed, they sleep together and cuddle, their legs interwoven together, or as Ishmael tells it, “[w]e had lain in bed, chatting an napping at short interval, and Queequeg now and then affectionally throwing his brown tattooed legs over mine, and then drawing them back; so entirely sociable and free and easy were we” (Melville 59). Their relationship stands as the human representation of the melting pot, as two men of completely different ethnicities, and of different social classes, come together to form a lifelong bond (which sadly is not a long one), sharing in each other’s cultural experiences and lives.

Less intimate than the relationship between Ishmael and Queequeg, we have the relationship with the crew and the ship leadership (and each other), especially when it comes

to questions of ethnicity and race. For the text shows, at times, a level of progressive thinking uncommon for its time, where the more “exotic” members of the crew, chief amongst them the harpooners, are treated and represented shows how the novel imagines the *Pequod* as less of a racial space, a space in which the man himself is judged on the basis of his skill, not his ethnicity or the color of his skin (to a certain extent). James Farr cites a black whaler named John Allan, who mid eighteenth century commented on how his experiences, showing that the text’s image of race fits with the reality of the time:

[Allan] identified an important but less obvious motivation for black seafarers when he observed that aboard his ship, the *Rambler*, there was no ‘distinction as to color’. At sea men measured their shipmates by their abilities; how well a man could pull an oar and furl a sail in a high wind counted for more than skin color. Men at sea knew their bunkmates as individuals as well as a member of a racial or ethnic group .(Allan. Qtd in Farr 165).

The harpooners (all foreigners and non-white) therefore hold their positions based on their skills with the whaling javelin of their namesake. When Queequeg is hired by captain Peleg and captain Bilbad, they both comment on his harpoon, saying that it “looks like good stuff that; and he handles it about right” (Melville 97). And some moments later, after he shows off his skills as a harpooner they are both so impressed that they scramble over each other to sign him up as a crewmember, “[q]uick, I say, you Bilbad, and get the ship’s papers. We must have Hedgehog there, I mean Quohog, in one of our boats” (Melville 98). Clearly the prospect imagined by hiring a harpooner of Queequeg’s skills outweighs any from for prejudice there ever was in the captains, although they do mock him by purposely mispronouncing his name.

A chapter that is astonishing in its representation of folk of different ethnicities and nationalities in synchronous harmony. The chapter is named *Forecastle–Midnight* and is the fortieth chapter of the novel. The first interesting detail of this chapter is that it is written as a script for a play, with different lines for the different actors as well as scene directions, starting with a song in chorus, before moving on to verses sung by individual sailors:

Harpooners *and* sailors.

(Foresail rises and discovers the watch standing, lounging, leaning, and lying in various attitudes, all singing in chorus.):

Crew. *Farewell and adieu to you, Spanish ladies! Farewell and adieu to you, ladies of Spain! Our captain's commanded* – (Melville 187).

And on the same page:

After the verse of a Nantucket sailor:

(Sings, and all follow.)

Crew. *Our captain stood upon the deck* (Melville 187).

The effect this has on the narrative of this chapter is to make it seem more alive and true to real life, as well as presenting a more realistic rendering of a moment in life at sea, freed from the poetic language of Ishmael as narrator. However, the essential idea that the novel might want to convey with this chapter is one of diversity. It is perhaps the clearest cut and most obvious example of this in the novel, as it attempts to imprint the reader with some of its ideological messages. For each line of dialogue (with some exceptions) swerves from one participant to another, and more importantly most of the players of this act are of different ethnicities.

There are sailors from America, France, China, Africa, Portugal, England, Denmark, and other nations, who all (at one point) dance and sing in unison:

(The half of them dancing to the tambourine; some go below; some sleep or lie among the coils of rigging. Oaths a-plenty) (Melville 189).

If we see the *Pequod* as a symbolic representation of America, then this chapter comes to symbolize its plethora of various cultures and ethnicities, all working towards a shared goal and ideal, the everyday struggle of the working man to achieve his goal, or in more lofty, metaphoric ways the perpetuation of the American ideals of equality, liberty, and freedom. “I, Ishmael, was one of that crew; my shouts had gone up with the rest; my oath had been welded with theirs” (Melville 194).

The problem with seeing the *Pequod* as a representation of America as a whole is that it in truth would not stand as a realistic representation of the nation, or at least it would stand as a flawed image. For the nation of America was, at the time of Melville, not such an idealized place as one encounters it in the novel, and the veiled racism is notable, making the progressiveness of the text is far off from melding seamlessly with the twenty first century views on race.

Sure, the nation was a melting pot of different cultures and ethnicities, and likewise it was (on paper at least) somewhat meritocratic, but it was not nearly as idyllic. Merit usually could not push you to the very top of society, and only a select few actually made it there. Moreover, the level of discrimination far eclipsed the rosy image presented by the text, as did the racism of the time. Slavery was still a discussion that was on the political table, as several southern politicians wanted to make slavery legal in the new states (as well as keeping it legal in the established southern states), and begin building up a slavery-based economy in the newly “acquired” states of Texas and California, whereas the northern politicians were petitioning to abolish slavery. Many minorities were subject to oppression and discrimination and were ostracized from society. These minorities included enslaved Africans, Native Americans, Mexicans (Latinos), and the Irish, all groups disparaged by the white upper-class.

The idealized relationship presented to the reader through Queequeg and Ishmael could not necessarily work in the “real world”, or at least was a rare occurrence outside life at sea. Despite the promises given by the American dream and idea of self-reliance, most Americans would never rise above their stations, and would have remained within their classes (which is ironic because there was never supposed to be such a “European” class system in the new nation). Some ethnicities, like the Irish, were subject to more class-based discrimination, where they were white on paper, but were regarded similar to black people. This does not equate the suffering the Irish to that of the black population of the US, but it does put into perspective the fact that not all white people were the right people. Even more egregious was the treatment of

the African-American population in the south, who still suffered under the yoke of systemic, industrialized slavery, a fate far worse than just discrimination (not to devalue the suffering that brings).

We see this in the way the text presents us with the different “classes” of crew aboard the ship, likening it to the medieval feudal system. At the head of the nation we have king Ahab (despite his obvious madness and hunger for revenge), who displays great skills as both captain of a ship and leader/manipulator (although these two go hand in hand in a way), severing any doubts as to the legitimacy of his captaincy. Furthermore, Melville writes that, “each mate or headsman, like a Gothic Knight of old, is always accompanied by his boat-steerer or harpooner,”(130) clearly establishing clear-cut lines between the stations as that between a lord and his valued servant.

Showing there is a case of veiled (or unintentional) racism on the *Pequod*, that keeps the white leadership in roles of power, where then “knighted” choose their underlings, as Melville writes, “[f]irst of all was Queequeg, whom Starbuck, the chief mate, had selected as his squire,” (130) and that “pretty nearly all the officers are [American]” (131).

Next we have the chief mate and second mate, Starbuck and Stubb, who because they are American (and Starbuck also being a Quaker) seem to have been hired in leadership roles, showing the racial preference of the owners of the ship. Although internally (within the upper strata of the ships hierarchy) they seem to be chosen based on skill, this fact proves to be the sad exception to the otherwise progressive hierarchy of the *Pequod* and shows how there exist some racism below the surface. As Melville writes about this saying that “the native American liberally provides the brains, the rest of the world as generously supplying the muscles” (131).

Again, it has to be mentioned that the novel was progressive for its time, as there were white Americans amongst the common sailors, they were few, “not one in two amongst the thousands were born American,” (Melville 131) but individuals such as Ishmael confirm their existence. And as it does specify American natives as the smart ones, there is a manner in which one could interpret it to suggest that white Europeans and European immigrants (ironically) did not suit the role of officer.

As such the image presented by the novel is only somewhat (or not at all) representational of America as a whole, but rather is the Melvillian idea of America. But what does that entail? What is the idea of America that the text attempts to show the reader? In the

novel the *Pequod* is presented in a way that is very much separated from the truth, and better represents an idealized version of the nation as visualized by the text, or as Rogin writes, “[t]here is no realistic society on the *Pequod* made coherent by relations amongst its characters”(Rogin 107) Regardless of this, the need for skilled labor regardless of ethnicity seems to be translated to each and every hire on the ship. Ishmael himself for instance, who has spent some time on merchant vessels prior to mustering with the *Pequod* (showing that he is no greenhorn), only qualifies as one amongst many “normal” sailors/whalers (despite being a white American). Such a mindset will, as the novel attempts to show the reader, engender a culture of equal principles and thought, as well a more diverse crew by nature.

And as Farr writes:

Discrimination did exist, of course, as these men grew up in societies steeped in racial prejudice. But as Allan (John Allan) comments suggests, a degree of equality in whale ships not found on land. This relative equality did allow black men to advance in the industry, earning the shares of endsmen (harpooners) and mates, and some went on to command their own vessels. (Farr 165)

Based on political opinions we can explicate from the text, it is clear that the novel envisages an America far more progressive than the state in which it was during Melville’s time. And this seems to be what the novel projects. By presenting the reader with ideal versions of America and its culture, the text tries to show its reader the fallacy of the pro-Manifest Destiny line of thought.

If a multicultural, fully equal community is presented as desirable, it is easier to “convert” people to adopting such a mindset. The text wants the reader to yearn for the intimacy of the relationship of Ishmael and Queequeg, or the camaraderie and community amongst the crew of the *Pequod*. And likewise, to dispel the dangers and prejudices associated with looking at people of other, different ethnicities as equal or similar to oneself. With this, there must have been a hope that the views in favor of slavery and segregation could be overturned and shifted into a more progressive direction.

4.2 The American Dreamer gone mad

There is another interesting way to read *Moby-Dick*, one where it is not just a slow, ponderous tale of the high seas, of abyssal horrors, nor a piece of rhetoric making an attempt to sway political leanings, but as a warning of the dangers of populists. One can read the novel (or at least parts of it) as a warning, a cautionary tale told by the novel, through Ishmael and the other crew members of the *Pequod*, against tyranny. As such, one could say that such a warning is in line with text's criticism of the growing imperialistic spirit amongst the population of the US, but also a stab at the past of the European nations. We speak, of course, of the dreaded captain of the *Pequod* himself, the monomaniacal captain Ahab. The captain of the *Pequod* is portrayed as a charismatic and commanding figure, who demands respect and fealty. However, the text also projects the image of an overbearing tyrant, a demagogue who has enthralled and enslaved the minds and bodies of his crew, forcing them to acquiesce to his quest for vengeance, no matter the cost. Despite referring to him as the ship's "supreme lord and dictator," (Melville 133) Ishmael falls under the spell of the dread captain as he narrates, "[a] wild, mystical, sympathetic feeling was in me; Ahab's quenchless feud seemed mine. With greedy ears I learned the history of that murderous monster against whom I and all the others had taken our oaths of violence and revenge" (Melville 194). Ahab has annexed the minds of his crew, made them into Fast-Fish "waifed" by the *Pequod* and its tyrannical overlord. As such there is perhaps not a better way to describe the hellbent Captain of the *Pequod* than to cite Ayn Rand's famous quote, "the question is not who's going to let me, it is who is going to stop me".

After a previous confrontation with the white whale Moby-Dick, Ahab was maimed, his leg gone and replaced by a whalebone pegleg, Ishmael narrating the tragic accident says, "then it was, that suddenly sweeping his sickle-shaped lower jaw beneath him, Moby Dick had reaped away Ahab's leg, as a mower a blade of grass in the field"(Melville 199). The event leaves Ahab emotionally and mentally emasculated or castrated by the whale, and ironically he would later (just prior to them leaving port) almost physically emasculate himself, he was found "lying prone upon the ground ... his ivory limb having been so violently displaced, that it had stake-wise smitten, and all but pierced his groin" (Melville 505). But unlike the Victorian characters who would surely lament their condition and sink into resignation, Ahab has become obsessed with avenging himself on the whale at any cost and by any means necessary, which would not only lead the *Pequod* to its doom.

Furthermore, his anger and need for vengeance goes beyond understandable and relatable, for this anger is more akin to that of an enraged god and not normal, rational, human feelings. Most modern people would find it hard to hold an animal accountable for such actions, especially to the extent that Ahab assumes the whale's malevolence and violent intent. Ishmael narrates to the reader how deep Ahab's hatred for the whale goes, seeing it as his natural enemy, "all evil, to crazy Ahab, were visibly personified, made practically assailable in *Moby Dick*. He piled upon the whale's white hump the sum of all the general rage and hate felt by his whole race from Adam down; and then, as if his chest had been a mortar, he burst his hot heart's shell upon it" (Melville 200). This obsession, as one could presume, also leads to the weakening of the captain's faculties, drowning him in the depths of madness. It is, however, quite interesting how this does not seem to diminish the persona of the man, but on the contrary elevates him. The madness has seen Ahab become a force of nature, unyielding, terrible yet sublime. One could almost cast him as a player on the same level as the great Greek heroes of antiquity, in his larger than-life nature.

And in an act more at home in a mythological legend or a fantasy novel, Ahab helps forge a harpoon just for the whale, filled with all his rage and hatred, tempered in human blood and blessed in the name of Satan:

"No, no – no water for that, I want it of the true death-temper. Ahoy there! Tashtego, Queequeg, Daggoo! What say ye, pagans! Will ye give me as much blood as will cover this barb?' Holding it high up. A cluster of dark nods replied, Yes. Three punctures were made in the heathen flesh, and the White Whale's barbs were then tempered. 'Ego non baptize te in nomine patris, sed in nomine diabolic!' (I do not baptize thee in the name of the father, but in the name of the devil) deliriously howled Ahab, as the malignant iron scorchingly devoured the baptismal blood. (Melville 532)

Despite his deformities and altered mind, Ahab manages, through his charisma and conviction, to convince the crew, to cast away their own prospects of riches and success and their own personal safety, to follow him in his quest for vengeance against a whale. Ishmael tells of the captain's silver tongue in the chapter so aptly named *Moby Dick*:

Such a crew, so offered, seemed specially picked and packed by some infernal fatality to help him to his monomaniac revenge. How it was that they so

aboundingly responded to the old man's ire – by what evil magic their souls were possessed, that at times his hatred seemed almost theirs; the White Whale as much their insufferable foe as his (Melville 203)

For Ahab is (like his namesake, the Jewish king) an extremely charismatic man, with some wisdom to boot. His intelligent and articulate manner, alongside his poetic ability, makes the captain a great orator, comparable to the mightiest of clergymen or politicians. For he can, through the power of his word and conviction, as well as more nefarious means such as manipulation, bend most men to his will.

He is, in other words, the text's symbolic representation for the dreaded demagogue found amongst human communities since the dawn of time (and who will forever exist). Able to stoke the fires of dissent, political agitation and nationalistic fervor, Ahab is, as Andrew Delbanco writes, "a prophetic mirror in which every generation of new readers has seen reflected the political demagogues of its own times" (Delbanco 165). He is the Melvillian version of Adolf Hitler, Vladimir Putin, Kim Jong Un, and Donald Trump, the despotic tyrant king. One could also see him as an allegory for the political agitators of Melville's own time, the prophets of Manifest Destiny and American exceptionalism who lobbied for US conquest of the Americas, the Priests and politicians who maddingly followed their own convictions and at the same time ensorcelled the populace to blindly follow suite.

Delbanco suggests along the lines that "some reader who prefer to study Melville in relation to his own times have seen in Ahab a portrait of Calhoun, while others see his opposite, William Lloyd Garrison, who led a raucous anti-slavery convention in New York just before Melville left" (165). And this comparison becomes even more apt when one regards the state of upheaval the American political system saw around the writing of the novel. Not only was there a great contest between the north and the south, but there was conflict internally within the political parties, with the democratic party itself torn in two. And with this, Americans feared for the possible future of the nation. Melville himself might have, according to Delbanco, used pro-expansion leader Calhoun as inspiration for the tyrant-captain. He claims that "as the American political system went to pieces before his eyes, Melville saw in Calhoun one model for his haunted captain; but more than that, he turned the *Pequod* into a sort of Democratic Party death convention – a ship of political fools sailing headlong for disaster" (Delbanco 164). If this is the case, it could mean that the *Pequod* is not, in fact, a utopia at sea, but an illusion

of one. Or that is still can be read as one, but one that falls from grace, and where everything goes catastrophically wrong due to its manipulative leader.

However, it is still difficult to verify such claims, since there exists no concrete proof of the specific connections between fictional characters and historical, real-life people, especially since Melville left no manuscripts or research in which he explicitly states his sources of inspiration, leaving our hypotheses naught but conjecture. Although some critics, such as Rogin, state that, “*Moby-Dick* projects into imaginative space a world constructed from elements of the political discourse and social tension in which Melville was entangled” (Rogin 107). What is clear however, is that there is a connection between the novel and the political conflicts that plagued the nation, and that the text comments upon this (as certain chapters and themes suggest). Captain Ahab can therefore be seen as both a critique and a comment upon the expansionist ideologies championed by Calhoun and the Democratic Party, and a “brilliant personification of the of the very essence of fanaticism” (Delbanco 166).

One could also argue that the text warns against the dangers of fanaticism and religious fervor in a more singular case, in the way it presents the reader with the *Jeroboam*. The *Jeroboam* is at the point of meeting with the *Pequod*, when it becomes clear that the ship is under the control of a religious demagogue, “a deep, settled, fanatic delirium was in his eyes” (Melville 342). Influenced by a fringe sect of Christianity, the young man had seemed normal when he first mustered, but quickly turned out to be a religious madman who managed to enthrall the crew of the *Jeroboam* to his will, claiming that he had control over the plague that had ravaged the ship. When they later come into contact with *Moby-Dick*, Gabriel (after the Archangel he claims that he is) prophecies the death of those that pursue the whale, which ironically is exactly what happens to the *Jeroboam*’s Chief mate (Macey).

If the chapter itself is not an excellent critique of agitators in general, then the ending of its first paragraph surely is, in which Melville writes, “such things may seem incredible; but, however wonderous, they are true. Nor is the history of fanatics half so striking in respect to measureless self-deception of the fanatic himself, as his measureless power of deceiving and bedeviling so many others” (Melville 343). According to the text, the reader might ponder the veracity of such claims about the power of words, but they are indeed true. As farfetched as characters as this Gabriel and Ahab himself might seem, the “power” wielded by such men is evident. They possess the ability to deceiving both themselves and others, and as such should be avoided at the greatest cost, lest we suffer from their mad will.

Likewise, the way in which the text displays these characters, makes it possible to look at both Ahab and “Gabriel” as the inevitable culmination of Manifest Destiny. Where white, fanatical Christians, men of singular and strong will controls the fate of nations.

4.3 The “Gam” chapters and nationalism

So far, I’ve tried show how the novel entertains several political ideas that would be opposed to the leading ideals of its time, and how it chooses to criticize these ideologies and policies. However, what we haven’t looked at is how the text uses some of the same rhetorical and oratorical tricks used by those it criticizes. In this part I will show how the novel, regardless of authorial intent, uses nationalism and American exceptionalism to gain veracity and emotional appeal, and thus to invoke particular feelings within its readers. This appeal is not exclusive to a single chapter, but is spread out amongst several, and manifests itself particularly in the ship chapters. In these chapters, eight in number and all named *The Pequod meets... (the name of the ship)*, the novel shares with the reader the short scene in which the *Pequod* comes into contact with and communicates with other whaling vessels out on the high seas. And in what may at first seem normal or logical, the text presents the ships as hailing from different ports located in different nations. This, however, could be a clever ruse, and a fully intentional act from the side of the text, and the nations of the other ships are carefully thought out so to affect the mind of the reader.

In the novel the other ships are presented either in a good or a bad light, all according to their nation of origin: American, British, Dutch, and French. Most of the other ships encountered are American (or from Nantucket specifically), and whilst important, are not necessarily as interesting as the non-American ones. What is to be said about them is that all of them are portrayed in a more or less a positive way. Even the *Jeroboam*, a ship struck by plague, is seen as efficient and its crew is described as skilled and seems to be lauded for its efforts to contain the sickness. Likewise, during the meeting with the American ship the *Bachelor*, its crew seems to be very skilled and efficient in their craft, as the ship sails home with its stores filled to the brim with whale oil, its crew singing and dancing (celebrating). The critical differences appear when the *Pequod* meets three ships of other nationalities. And this is where the novel’s clever appeal to the American spirit manifests itself. For in each instance in which

the *Pequod* met with these ships, their clear inferiority (as opposed to the *Pequod* and its crew) is shown by the author, as to further reinforce the superiority of the American ships, or as Edward Stone writes, “the fact that the *Bachelor* is the only ship of this group whose home country is not in any way mocked is in keeping with the strident nationalism of *Moby-Dick*.” (176).

The first “foreign” ship encountered by the *Pequod* is a German ship, hailing from Bremen, the *Virgin* or the *Jungfrau*, a name that will show itself to be foreshadowing in regards to the competence of the ship’s sailors. In the eighty-first chapter, Ismael wastes no time in disparaging the German ship, commenting on the current complete ineptitude of the German whalers. Melville writes, “[a]t one time the greatest of whaling people in the world, the Dutch and Germans are now amongst the least” (Melville 384). Moreover, during the gam (a meeting of two whaling vessels) with the *Virgin*, Captain Derek De Deer brings along an oil can, wanting to borrow some oil, because they have run out. This event sparks the uttering of quite a degrading comment from the third-mate Flask, in which he says that “however curious it may seem for an oil-ship to be borrowing oil on the whale-ground” (Melville 384). This comment from the sailor again shows the lacking skills of these supposed whalers, running out of the very thing they are in pursuit of. If one is out of oil, then one cannot have had any luck regarding the hunting of whales. As if fate wanted to truly show the difference in skill between the American ship and the Dutch ship a pod of whales is discovered. Both ships set off in pursuit of the whales, the *Virgin* having a head start. Melville writes, “the *Pequod*’s keels had shot by the three German boats last lowered, but from the great start he had had, Derick’s boat still led the chase, though every moment neared by his foreign rivals” (Melville 386).

Despite this, the whalers of the *Virgin* seem so inept that they do not manage to pierce the whales they are hunting with their harpoons, squandering their head start. In the pivotal moment, the three “barbarian” harpooners from the *Pequod*, Queequeg, Tashtego, and Daggoo manage to raise above the Germans piercing one whale and waiving it, making it a Fast-fish. But the ridicule of the foreign ship is not done, as if wanting to add that last little layer of insult to the meeting with the *Virgin*, the text manages to put a final nail in the coffin that is this ship’s ineptitude. Already having shown a lack of skill, this scene also supposes that the Germans have little to no knowledge as well, or at least great gaps missing. Melville writes,

It was not long after the sinking of the body that a cry was heard from the *Pequod*’s mast-heads, announcing that the *Jungfrau* was again lowering her

boats; though the only spout in sight was that of a Fin-Back, belonging to the species of uncapturable whales, because of its incredible power of swimming. Nevertheless, the Fin-Back's spout is so similar to the Sperm Whale's, that by unskilful fishermen it is often mistaken for it (Melville 394)

The second foreign Whaling vessel encountered by the *Pequod* is the French ship known as the Rosebud, or the Bouton De Rose. Again, the novel's description of the crew of the foreign ship pertains to its inferiority versus the Nantucket vessel, as it presents the former as almost completely inept and out of tune with the milieu and nature of the whaling trade.

As the *Pequod* nears the French ship, vultures are seen circling it, and a rotting, blasted whale is seen hanging from its side (meaning a whale that has died of natural causes, and is now floating on the surface due to the gases produced during the process of decomposing), as well as a second whale that has died from illness. The text declares that such whales usually are "almost entirely bankrupt of anything like oil" (Melville 441). But being a wise fisherman, Stubb knows that such whales may contain a resource even more valuable than oil, ambergris. Presuming that the French sailors do not know the treasure they possess, Stubb condescendingly decides to attempt to rob them of it.

He justifies and rationalizes his plan by lambasting the French sailors, claiming that "these Crappoes [a bastardization of the French word *crapaud*, which translates to toad] of Frenchmen are but poor devils in the fishery, sometimes lowering their boats for breakers, mistaking them for Sperm Whale spouts" (Melville 441). Stubb goes even further in his tirade of insults, suggesting to the Captain that the *Pequod* could share some of its oil with the French ship, doing so straight the captain's face (luckily there is a translator there that chooses not to include these insults). Again, we see how the text resorts to insults to elevate the American ships, as it describes the crew of the ship, writing that "there a queer scene presented itself. The sailors in tasseled caps of red worsted, were getting heavy tackles in readiness for the whales. But they worked rather slow and talked very fast and seemed in anything but a good humor" (Melville 443). With this, the reader is implored to view the French sailors as posh, upper-class pretending at being whalers. Stubb goes so far as to insult the French crew as much as he can, saying to the captain of the Rosebud (to his very face), "I'm quite certain that he's no more fit to command a whale-ship than a St. Jago monkey. In fact, tell him from me he's a baboon"

(Melville 444). Stubb might not have been so brave had the captain of the *Rosebud* spoken English rather than relying on a translator, who pretties up and modifies Nevertheless, Stubb's insults and lies manages to fool the French captain to drop their captured whales, so that the *Pequod* can pick it up and harvest the ambergris.

The third and final foreign ship encountered by the *Pequod*, the *Samuel Enderby of London*, is the exception when it comes to non-American ships in this novel. Amongst the three foreign ships the *Pequod* meets, the *Samuel Enderby* is the vessel that receives the least amount of criticism from the characters and the narrator. And what we are given is a matter of heart and spirit, not ability. For the *Samuel Enderby* had its own confrontation with Moby-Dick some time ago, and in a curious twist of fate they too failed to slay the pale whale. This might cement to Ahab as proof that he is the man fated to best the whale, for none is willing to go to the same lengths as he, pursuing it across the world, or blessing a harpoon in the name of the devil. A confrontation left the captain of the ship, a Captain Boomer, maimed, similar to Ahab yet reversed (Captain Boomer lost an arm to the beast, as opposed to a leg).

After this failed battle the *Samuel Enderby* came into contact with Moby-Dick two additional times but chose not to engage the beast out of fear of further damage. Captain Boomer states that there will be "no more White Whales for me; I've lowered for him once, and that has satisfied me" (Melville 482). The only disparaging quality one could gleam from the text's presentation of the *Samuel Enderby* is one of cowardice and fear, for not continuing to pursuing the whale, but such a sentiment is never uttered or professed by the text. Only if the virtues and ideals of Ahab stood as a guiding light for us, then the *Samuel Enderby* should have chased and attempted to kill the whale until no man was left alive. But since the text sets up Ahab as the true antagonist, the one to be feared, the choice of Captain Boomer seems like the saner of the two actions. He has seen and physically felt the capabilities and monstrous rage of the great whale and made the wise decision not to pursue the leviathan any further. He knows he could gain much by killing the creature, saying that there is "great glory in killing him [Moby-Dick], I know that; and there is a ship-load of precious sperm in him, but hark ye, he's best let alone" (Melville 482). As such, it is ultimately up to the reader whether or not the *Samuel Enderby* should be considered to be inferior to the *Pequod*.

In the same manner, where the *Pequod* becomes a metaphor for the United States itself, the other ships in this novel become symbols for other nations. As it hunts the great white whale, the *Pequod* crosses "paths" with eight different ships, half of them American and the other half

representing other nationalities. The other American ships represents both the differences and similarities of the US in their representation of the nation: they are similar yet with small, peculiar idiosyncrasies. As such, they seem equal to the *Pequod*, yet seem to be affected by fears and beliefs possessed by Melville. One is ridden by plague, both spiritually and physically (for its crew is enthralled by a demagogue), whilst others seems to be caught in stints of bad luck. The “foreign” ships, on the other hand, function as synecdoches of their respective nations (or home ports, which are affiliated with a nation), and might present the views amongst the American populace or at the very least the views of the text itself regarding these nations. In the novel, they are all whaling nations which compete with the US in the business of fishing, but they were also amongst the greatest of European nations with regards to political, economic, military, and colonial power in reality.

In these chapters in particular, the text uses the rhetoric championed by those whose political opinions and ideals oppose its own, invoking the powers of nationalism and patriotism, American Exceptionalism, and Manifest Destiny as a way to appeal to the reader. The *Pequod*, as one could say of each and every ship in this novel, stands as a synecdoche for its nation of origin, a manifestation, representation or avatar of their home port. This includes Great Britain, Germany, and Holland, which were all great whaling and seafaring nations. But perhaps most important, all were old European nations with great storied pasts, and were great colonial overlords at the time. They, as well as the *Pequod*, possess their own cultural traits and ideologies, although we as readers are barely granted a surface level of understanding or insight into this. They not only serve this one purpose, but will also be used by the text as symbols to elevate American values and ideologies, as well as the nation’s people and place in the world, especially when juxtaposed.

Now it becomes quite clear why the text chose to degrade the ships from these nations. By presenting the ships as inferior to the *Pequod*, the text is implying that US is in fact greater than these nations of old. They might have had a legacy whose greatness cements them in the annals of history, but that was irrelevant as the US was here and now far superior to them. These other nations had given way to American ingenuity, work ethic, and culture. This idea is repeated, almost ad nauseum, to really reinforce this idea in minds of the readers, not just in the ship chapters but also in general throughout the novel (see for instance the *Tryworks* chapter, in which the economic superiority of the Nantucket whaling vessel is praised by the narrator). Therefore, the novel can also be viewed as being just as enamored with the rhetoric and ideals of nationalism as those it criticizes.

For the novel, showcasing American exceptionalism and nationalism in a positive manner would be crucial to its critique of these same concept, as some of the ideas presented in *Moby-Dick* would be counter to the societal beliefs of conservative circles, especially in the southern United States. Take, for instance the more egalitarian nature of the *Pequod* (when compared to the US at the time), where some modicum of racial equality exists. It would go against the already established idea (that existed amongst pro-slavery proponents) of the God-given right to rule that only white Americans possessed. The novel presenting the idea of a space of racial equality as not only a good, productive, and business savvy thing, but also as morally superior to slavery or subjugation, would make it a hard pill to swallow in large parts of the US. Therefore, the text has to show its readers that such a community is a natural part of American society, and that the US was always intended to be a multicultural, multiethnic community. As it is the only way to fully succeed in claiming one's Manifest Destiny and perpetuating American Exceptionalism.

The foreign ships, with their primarily mono-ethnic or mono-cultural crews, suffer because of it, if only in the way that they are not as skilled or educated in the craft of whaling as their American counterparts. It is the fact that their nation (The United States) is a cultural melting pot that gives them the strength a power to rise above and beyond their humble beginnings. The message put forth by the text becomes a nationalistic/patriotic beckoning call. In this process of "feeding" the nationalistic tendencies of the US, the novel becomes one of these cultural influences suggested by Homi K. Bhabha. It acts, not only as part of the (cultural) narrative of a nation, in the way it represents the very idea of its nation, its culture, ambitions, and capabilities, but also as its narrative on selected others. As such, in *Moby-Dick*, each vessel, as a physical representation of a nation, becomes the American narrative for the nation it represents. Something the novels does regardless of the original intent of the author.

That is why *Moby-Dick* has such a focus on the superiority of the United States. As part of a community, humans want the affirmation of said community, a justification and verification of the legitimacy of the community, simply its right to survive and exist. Thus, by implying that this community now has superseded its former colonial masters and competitors, the novel not only makes it visible that the US has survived and are thriving, but also confirms the heavenly mandated greatness of the nation. By appealing to the longing for greatness latent in all people, especially in the American populace in the mid nineteenth century, and by showing that it has its foundation in the same (to what degree can be debated) ideologies of exceptionalism and Manifest Destiny, the novel attempts to make itself more palatable, easier

to be experienced as part of the national narrative by the reader. Moreover, by basing itself in these concepts, ideologies, and themes the novel inadvertently (and “posthumously”) imbedded itself amongst the chosen few texts that refurbished, recreated, or simply invented a new storied past for the United States.

5 Conclusion:

In his best moments, Melville has the inspiration of a Lautreamont. And then, finally, he becomes conscious of writing an epic. He amuses himself writing it, he multiplies invocations to the democratic god and prosopopoeias, he entertains himself by presenting the harpooners as Homeric heroes. But when the reader has finally forgotten the idea, when he finds himself at last face to face with the unaccommodated fate of man, when he sees man as Melville sees him – this fallen transcendence in his horrible abandonment – it's no longer an epic he thinks he has read but an enormous *summa*, a gigantic, monstrous, gently antediluvian book which could only be compared, in its unmeasured hugeness, to Rabelais's *Pantagruel* or James Joyce's *Ulysses*.

– Sartre, Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*

The idea behind this thesis, and the very thing that I set out to show by writing this thesis, is one regarding political interpretation. The mission was to prove that Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* could be read/interpreted in a manner that suggests that the text has a certain nationalistic agenda, that the text seeks to affect America of the time (the nineteenth century) through criticism of the then political landscape, but also that the text, through nationalistic imagery, wants to affirm the (then) current greatness of the US. With this in mind the thesis took shape and solidified into its current shape.

Reading the novel for the first time a couple of years ago, I came to realize that it contained some very strong political statements, something I probably would not have seen had I read it at a younger age. The text presented both explicit messages and more subversive ideas that were simple in their message yet so vast in their scope. As I began my research, I came to the conclusion that I did not possess the knowledge of, or rather lacked the insight into what made up the foundation of the text's political ideas. To understand the almost explicit metaphor that the *Pequod*, in my mind represents, I needed to understand the ideas of community, nationhood, and nationalism. In search for this knowledge, I had to explore some of the most important works of critics, in this case Homi.K. Bhabha, Benedict. Anderson, and Edward Said.

With this came the understanding of how we can define communities and nations themselves, and how these definitions are integral to how they function and evolve. According to Anderson, communities beyond a certain scale (which is the small village) are, as the title of his book suggests, imagined. The idea proposed by Anderson, is that since humans have no innate ability, nor connection to others, the feelings of community we experience are imagined, yet still despite this. Since we cannot know how others within our nation or community think or feel, we simply imagine that they fall in line with the way we ourselves act, think, and feel. At first, I thought that this, whilst important and fascinating, would not be important to the thesis itself. Then I came to an understanding of how this could be linked to the novel. Because of the imagined/ethereal nature of community, there are no true/real conditions that decide what binds individuals within a community together, or at least what confers a spectrum to it. There is no need for the crew (or inhabitants) of the *Pequod* to conform to the societal requirements of terra firma. Therefore, the *Pequod* can be seen as, or rather, is a community, bound together by the common goal of profit and survival. Moreover, the isolated and frontier-like nature of the community changes the ideals and traits that are praised or elevated, and those which are lambasted.

To understand the political and societal ideologies that the text sets itself against, I had look at two particular movements that not only affected the United States in the past, but which can be found very much alive and well today. Two ideologies, one a (the) progenitor of the other, that helped shape the US into the nation that it is today, American exceptionalism and Manifest Destiny. What these nationalistic ideologies represent is the belief in the singular nature of the US, that the nation is better than all the other, older nations of the earth, or in particular Europe, which the US perpetually compared itself to, a belief that I have argued lies in the US's lack of a storied past. Like a person, the nation elevates its own perceived self-image at the same time as it attempts to construct the image others have of it, or rather how it wants others to perceive it. More than that, it became, as critic Donald Pease argues, a weapon against the Soviets, and their influence, during the Cold War, a shield against communism, Marxism, and socialism, that had corrupted and defiled Europe. As such it brought a yet another proof as to why America was of a greater quality than its parent nations. This mindset, this ideology, becomes quite clear and evident inside the confines of the text.

As one might have understood by now, these two ideologies were both important as parts of the political landscape in the US during Melville's time, and directly influenced the writing of the novel. Manifest Destiny, especially, garners the wrath of the text, which strongly

criticizes any notion of wanton US expansion. Furthermore, one would not be hard pressed to claim that the text seems to actively oppose most of the ideal championed by more conservative voices within the political climate of the nation during the mid-nineteenth century. The most tangible piece of criticism rendered by the text is on expansionism, or the willingness to annex the lands of others. In chapter eighty-nine, the text blatantly chastises the US, through Ishmael, for its annexation of Texas (and parts of California), and annexation of anything through force, leaving the reader with no room to misinterpret the text's intent.

In Ishmael's pontifications on the maritime law of possession regarding a hunted whale, he questions the validity of said laws, how anyone has any right to own anything at all. This in itself is not that closely linked to the notion of empire building, but it is in the latter part of the chapter that Ishmael truly breaks the so-called fourth wall and addresses the readers directly, lambasting and heavily criticizes the idea that land settled by someone else is up for the taking, as long as one claims to mark it. In his chastising of the expansionistic political side the text, referring to the then real-world political conflict, the text invokes the annexation of Mexico as evidence for the US's dreams of empire. In a deft feint he compares it to the English subjugation of the Irish, and their growing Empire, playing on the need for America to show itself as separate from the "tyranny" that they themselves cast of less than a century earlier.

Through my analysis of other chapters, I uncover a strong belief in the freedom of every human, notably the freedom of every human in the novel, dark skinned or light skinned, each his own man, willingly a participant in the trade of whaling. And as such, I argue that the text also possesses a strong anti-slavery message, as well as a rather progressive (for its time) viewpoint regarding the question of race and racism, both which can be seen in the communal and brotherly milieu amongst the sailors, and especially between Ishmael and Queequeg. *Moby Dick* therefore becomes a novel of personal space, the more intimate space between men, between "brothers (coworkers) in arms." And having been a sailor at sea himself, Melville presumably had intimate knowledge regarding a life on an ocean-going vessel.

However, what started as a national narrative evolved into a much more dangerous ideology. In and by itself, there is nothing necessarily nor inherently evil in nationalistic ideologies, but there is always a potential for a dangerous shift in them. For said ideologies become justifications for annexation, pogroms, and suppression, especially when based on religious foundations, as they then are heavenly/divinely mandated, a god(s) given right. And, whilst it was not as severe at this might suggest (though US dreams of empire will forever be

stained by slavery and denial), there is still no way to claim Manifest Destiny as a purely positive ideology. For it was an ideology of empire building, one that professed that the US was destined to rule all the Americas, and further spread the ideals of American republicanism to the rest of the world. In the end, the US managed to build itself a small empire, not as grand as perhaps imagined by those championing the cause, but a hidden one, hidden in the sense that their foreign territories were never defined as colonies, just places associated with the US.

As important that it is for us to note the shadow empire of the US, this ability to change or alter the story that is being told is just as important. The ability for a nation or a single person to change the narrative that it presents of itself is monumental. Objective truth lessens in its power as long as others put their belief in the national narrative the nation is projecting (outwards and inwards). And this “truth” is something we as readers can see in the text, on both a meta and a sub level. The meta level is one that is the hardest to justify, mostly due to nature of interpretation and agency. Whilst I can claim that the purpose of the novel, as intended by me, is to elicit a sympathetic response in the reader that hopefully will lead to a submission to the overall message and ideals of the text, it is difficult to prove such a thing. It requires extremely deep comparison between the text and the authors life, and even then, it might not represent his or her true intent. It is, however, easier to make the same argument on the sub level, where one can look at specific chapters or passages.

In *Moby Dick* the “Gam” chapters are excellent examples of how national narratives and patriotic or nationalistic ideals can be used in an attempt to elicit a response in the reader. To make any other claim about these chapters is a fool’s errand, especially with regards to how explicit the chapters themselves are. For they are all about US superiority and domination, all about the fall from grace that these vessels of other nations have suffered. The symbolism of the ships themselves makes this even more obvious, for who can deny that the *Virgin* is a simile or representation of Germany, or that the *Rosebud* represents France, or that the *Samuel Enderby* (of London) represents the British Empire.

The text wants its readers, its American readers, to take pride in and feel empowered by the fact that they fare and “objectively” are just so much better than their former masters (their parents) in the most important market in the world at that time. The significance of when does in this case become unimportant, what matters is that the US rises above its former status as a colony, a republic of secessionists, and is elevated to the same status/strata as these older, more storied nations, and goes beyond them. This project falls is supported by Said’s ideas on nation

and narration. Where the idea of a nation, and its ability to both project the narrative idea of itself, whilst hindering others in defining its narrative, is vital for the perpetuation of the nation, and its culture, especially for imperialistic or authoritarian nations. As much as these chapters represent the text's belief in the idea of American Exceptionalism in the superior skills and craftsmanship of American sailors, there is a more subversive way in which it champions the cause, a way that appeals to or draws its inspiration from the ideals that Melville himself seemed to have entertained, those progressive thoughts that he showed, mostly in private, but also throughout his works. One can say that these beliefs are the foundations of the strong, patriotic views of the text.

For it is through the multicultural, egalitarian, and race neutral space (all with the deepest understanding that whilst there was/is still racist elements throughout the text, it was very progressive for its day) that the *Pequod*, or rather the US draws its strength from, it is one of the sources of its superiority. And it is this source, this feeling of togetherness, of community that the text seeks to perpetuate amongst the populace of the US (or at least that is a manner in which one can read and interpret the project of the novel). A communal spirit that can elevate the nation above and beyond, so that it becomes a guiding light that the leaders of other nations want to follow. However, it is a fragile thing this space, that easily can become corrupted (as the then US political milieu), or susceptible to a stronger will, to an authoritarian and charismatic person. As such, the text warns us, the readers, against the dangers of demagogues and zealots, shows us how easily an Ahab can enforce his will and agenda upon us, which will inevitably lead to our ruin.

What I found interesting whilst researching and writing about these topics was the dichotomy in some of the themes and ideals presented by the text, themes and views presented in a manner that could almost be criticized as being hypocritical. For the text does at times walk a fine line as to what is morally acceptable or not. It vehemently criticizes and chastises the Greater US (or its politicians) for its imperialistic, expansionistic ideals, tools for building nations and their power, whilst simultaneously using colorful, nationalistic or patriotic themes itself. And likewise, when it attempts to elevate itself and the US, it does so by demeaning these old nations of Europe. As such, it seems that even though the text wants to distance itself and its nation from Europe it still has a strong link to the continent. It is still strongly affected by the old empires, and thus struggles to abandon them completely, as well as diverge from the beaten path trod by them. But perhaps this is precisely what it wants to impart upon us, that there is a right way to do things and a wrong way, that it is through literature and "harmless"

degradation of others that a nation can elevate itself to the same heights as the old giants, that one should refrain from dreams of empire, refrain from national wealth built upon the suffering of others (build upon blood and conquest).

Reading some of the plethora of criticism on the text, I've come to the conclusion that Melville's novel is truly as vast as the ocean on which his characters ply their trade. Not only is there an incomprehensible magnitude to the text, there is also a great malleability to it. What I mean to infer by that is that the novel in its very nature and essence is a multi-faceted, political mess. For every critic that delves into its pages there exists not one, but two or three different political interpretations of the text. Because of many ideas and themes presented in the novel, as well as the rich, elevated, and poetic language, it always engenders a new and perhaps different interpretation, and opens the text up to a myriad of different political interpretations. In its time, it could be seen as both just another adventure novel, and as a great work of American literature, commenting on the heated political climate of the time.

However, other, more modern critics have interpreted the novel in the light of the political issues of their day as well. Donald Pease commented on how it could be seen, or rather read as a comment on the Cold War period, and its politics (both US and Soviet). Toni Morrison on the other hand, saw the novel (during the penultimate years of the nineteen eighties) as a comment on the treatment of Afro-Americans, slavery, blackness, and whiteness (identity). In her interpretation, a fair amount of the topics find themselves in a racial/raced space, and the text seeks to banish ideas of racial (in this case white) superiority and comment upon multiculturalism. Rogin on the other hand, saw a Melville that sought to remove himself from anything political. I myself found my reading gravitating towards a historical, nation-building interpretation, as this thesis has conveyed, and how literature can be used to inspire nationalism and project/create narratives of and for nations. I am, as such, doing the same thing as Morrison, Rogin, and Pease, delving deeply into the text and finding a different view on things than those previously established.

My reading and analysis of the novel is not in itself unique or perhaps paradigm shifting, as many critics have brushed upon several of the topics I have covered, so I acknowledge its "shortcomings" there. However, I do believe that my reading bridges or falls in between interpretations such as Morrisons, who deals with the subject of race, and Pease, who deal with American foreign and domestic politics. It attempts to explore the reasons behind the creation of the text and suggest a reading that focuses on national narratives and political criticism.

I do believe that my contributions can help others gain further insight into the rich tapestry of themes that unfolds itself within the confines of the text, and likewise can help some understand or postulate the reason behind the writing of the text, both explicitly and on a more metaphysical plane. Furthermore, it would be interesting to see more research done in the same direction that I have chosen to focus my thesis, studies on the political and cultural effects of literature and how such national narratives can be forged, but perhaps with other novels (that are deemed just as important to the American canon, or perhaps novels relevant for other nations).

The time spent reading Melville's novel was an illuminating one. As a non-American I had had little direct contact with *Moby Dick* in my years as a reader of books, and even as a literature major/student of literature. The little information I possessed was learnt from film and tv, in which it was always described as a glacial, enormous grimoire, too vast to properly understand or digest. However, this seemed to be the thoughts of those too young or uninterested to properly understand and appreciate its complexity. After reading the text as an adult, and with three years of literary education at my back, its magnificence became apparent. Moreover, after reading different interpretations and explications from famed (and lesser known) critics, I came to understand the beautiful complexity and ambidextrous nature of the text.

The way I see it, as I have attempted to demonstrate in my thesis, Melville's *Moby Dick* stands amongst the greatest of novels in the American canon (if not amongst the world's greatest novels). It is a text steeped in poetic and literary beauty: from Ishmael's monologues and dialogues with Queequeg to Ahab's charismatic and zealous sermons, the language is both complicated and vivid. However, it is primarily not due to the aesthetic elegance of the language that this text manages to rise above so many other novels. For there is a complexity to the text that cannot be denied, a vastness to it. As I've commented on previously, that is almost sublime. The text has this marvelous ability to confer/elicit such a wide range of different feelings, meanings, and interpretations in its readers, especially if read or explicated in a political manner/way.

Whether or not all this was intentional from Melville's side becomes speculative, although one can probably find great arguments both for and against within his letters and diaries. Nevertheless, what is true is that the text is as boundless as the vast oceans seemed to men in the era of Ishmael, and will engender a different response in each and every one of its readers.

Moby Dick is therefore the novel with a thousand faces, one for each readthrough of the text. It is a novel whose granularity makes it so that any critic, regardless of time or space, can find his or her own interpretation of its themes and ideologies. It is also a quintessential American novel, in the manner in which it discusses and criticizes US politics and ideologies, as well as attempts to inspire the nation to see its own greatness and to lift itself even greater heights. Whilst this thesis concerns itself with one particular, singular text, I hope that it can stand as or function as an example as to how any work of canonized fiction can be used as a tool (political/ideological/etc.) to influence both the past, present, and future.

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