

“As in the hurricane...some lone, gigantic elm”; Melville's Use of Similes in *Moby-Dick*

Abstract

A simile compares two unlike things (often using “like” or “as”), one of which is the thing to be described (in this paper the Focus) and the other the thing it is compared to (the Aspect). For example, in the simile “He lived in the world, as the last of the Grisly Bears lived in settled Missouri,” “He” is the Focus of the simile and “lived as the last of the Grisly Bears (did) in settled Missouri” is the Aspect, which illustrates or explains the Focus.

Homer in *The Illiad* was the first to use extended similes involving complex objects, actions or relations. In *Moby-Dick*, to figuratively make Ahab more closely the equal of the Whale, Melville employed the epic, or Homeric simile. This paper explores his use of this device and other, less elaborate, similes employed in the novel. Similes for the ship itself, its crew and the Whale are also analyzed because they are central to the novel's meaning and are the locus of Melville's imagery and metaphorical imagination. It will be seen that Melville uses trees in a number of similes for Ahab and that wood is the main Aspect associated with him---though Melville uses other symbols in his similes for Ahab. The 1979 University of California, Arion Press edition has been used in this paper.

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1. Introduction

Stories of sperm whales attacking whale boats and larger ships were not uncommon in 19th century newspapers and magazines and as topics of daily conversation. Ralph Waldo Emerson recorded in his journal of 1834 a story he had heard from a fellow stagecoach passenger of:

an old sperm whale which he called a white whale which was known for many years by the whalemens as Old Tom & who rushed upon the boats which attacked him & crushed the boats to small chips in his jaws, the men generally escaping by jumping overboard and being picked up.

Hayford et. al 1997: 638

Emerson's journal entry is typical. Melville knew of such accounts from his research and reading. However, the event that directly inspired him was the 1820 sinking of the whaling ship *Essex* by a sperm whale. In *Moby-Dick* he turned this, his experiences on whaling ships and what he knew of the industry into art. In one example in the novel, which parallels Emerson's anecdote, his use of a simile to describe the actions of the Whale adds greatly to the interest and action of the scene. The White Whale took Ahab's boat between his jaws, and "shook the slight cedar craft as a mildly cruel cat her mouse" (551). This simile portrays the Whale as being playfully brutal, an attribute that is startling in a creature of such supposedly limited intelligence and huge size. It is an imaginative feat to compare a 50-ton sea mammal to a 5-pound feline, but the association works because of the relationship of the cat to the mouse and the whale to the whale boat. Other passages in the novel add to the idea that *Moby-Dick* is a malevolent, cunning entity and not just a dumb brute: The Whale seems able to anticipate what the crew of the *Pequod* is about to do; he appears to lead them on, as if he were the hunter and they the hunted; and unlike other whales, he shows no fear of his pursuers. Ahab sees the Whale as a symbol or representative of "a cosmically sanctioned evil in the natural world" (Bloom 1996: 7).

What Melville has done in his greatest novel is to use simile in a way that is internally essential to the narrative, not merely as an external ornamental device. The use of simile as a trope has often been denigrated by critics who feel metaphor is the artistically superior form. The prejudice against simile in favor of metaphor began with Aristotle, who judged simile inferior for two reasons--- "since it is longer than metaphor, it is 'less pleasing'; and since simile 'does not affirm that this *is* that, the mind does not inquire into the matter'" (Preminger 1993; 1149). Since Aristotle, other critics have seen simile as simply a literary embellishment and felt it supposedly required a lower order of imagination---being a product of "fancy" while metaphor is a product of the "imagination" (ibid.).

Melville, however, uses simile in *Moby-Dick* to enliven and deepen characterization, create striking analogies and suggestive imagery and to establish dramatic tension. His use of simile also helps to propel the action of the story. Melville's vast vocabulary, his control of language and his Shakespearean imagination unite in this novel to create similes which refute the traditional prejudiced view against this trope as being merely ornamental and superficial. Few writers in English have equaled his imaginative use of this rhetorical device.

2. The Figure of Ahab

The main character, Ahab, captain of the whaler *Pequod*, does not make his appearance until Chapter 28. The crew has never seen him. As the ship leaves Nantucket harbor, the crew speculates on his self-imposed seclusion in his cabin, and suspense about him gradually builds. When he finally appears on deck for the first time, his entrance is all the more dramatic. Ishmael, the narrator, reacts to the sight of him with "foreboding shivers" and says that "Reality outran apprehension; Captain Ahab stood upon his quarter-deck" (125).

The first description of Ahab contains a series of three striking similes. The first suggests that Ahab has undergone a horrible ordeal, he "looked like a man cut away from a stake, when the fire has overrunningly wasted all the limbs without consuming them, or taking away one particle of their compacted aged robustness" (125). The next simile compares him to a famous Renaissance statue of a Greek hero, his "whole high, broad form, seemed made of solid bronze, and shaped in an unalterable mould, like Cellini's cast Perseus" (125). The Homeric simile which follows likens him to a great, lightning-blasted tree:

Threading its way out from among his grey hairs, and continuing right down one side of his tawny scorched face and neck, till it disappeared in his clothing, you saw a slender rod-like mark, lividly whitish. It resembled that perpendicular seam sometimes made in the straight, lofty trunk of a great tree, when the upper lightning tearingly darts down it, and without wrenching a single twig, peels and grooves out the bark from top to bottom, ere running off into the soil, leaving the tree still greenly alive, but branded.

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It is interesting that in his 1854 short story, "The Lightning-Rod Man," written three years after *Moby-Dick*, Melville reprises this idea. In the short story, the salesman of the title visits a prospective customer's house during a violent storm; he admonishes the home-owner to avoid certain parts of the house that favor lightning strikes, such as the chimney, doors and windows. This authority on lightning says, "The oak draws lightning more than any other timber, having iron in solution in its sap" (121). In a later section of this paper, a number of similes characterizing Ahab as having an iron soul, an iron voice, as being like an iron anvil and standing like an iron statue enter this discussion. It is suggested that tree, lightning and iron associations were central to Melville's artistic conception of Ahab.

One source for these associations may have been his surroundings at the time he wrote parts of the novel and the short story---he was resident in the Berkshire Mountains near Pittsfield, Massachusetts for a period of fifteen years. Anyone who has ever visited Arrowhead, his home there, will note the great number of majestic trees on the property and in the surrounding countryside. One can imagine Melville sitting in his study during a summer lightning storm, pondering the character of Ahab, picturing the captain's livid, white, facial scar, his towering figure, his iron determination. In the novel, some of the crew speculate that his scar was caused by "some elemental strife at sea" while others say it is not a result of an accident or a natural calamity but "a birth-mark" running from "crown to sole" (126).

Ishmael is also "struck" by Ahab's posture. Ahab "stood erect, looking straight out beyond the ship's ever-pitching prow. There was an infinity of firmest fortitude, a determinate, unsunderable

willfulness, in the fixed and fearless, forward dedication of that glance" (126). The captain remains unspeaking, giving no orders to his officers, his demeanor is proud, regal and mysterious as "moody stricken Ahab stood before them with a crucifixion in his face" (126). This is the first of a series of references linking Ahab and Christ. Toward the end of this same chapter (in an extended simile) as the *Pequod* sails into warmer waters after leaving winter-bound Nantucket, Ishmael notes the effect of the pleasant weather on his captain:

For, as when the red-cheeked, dancing girls, April and May, trip home to the wintry, misanthropic woods; even the barest, ruggedest, *most thunder-cloven old oak* will at least send forth some few green sprouts, to welcome such glad-hearted visitants; so Ahab did, in the end, a little respond to the playful allurings of that girlish air. More than once did he put forth the faint blossom of a look, which, in any other man, would have soon flowered out in a smile.

(emphasis mine; 127)

In a much later chapter, 119, "The Candles," the *Pequod* is caught in a typhoon in the Pacific. As lightning strikes near the ship and the electric glow lights up the masts, the crew cowers in fear. Ahab however, picks up a harpoon that is alive with the electrical current and with a curse, snuffs it out with his breath:

As in the hurricane that sweeps the plain, men fly the neighborhood of some lone, gigantic elm, whose very height and strength but render it so much the more unsafe, because so much the more a mark for thunderbolts; so at those last words of Ahab's many of the mariners did run from him in terror of dismay.

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Melville found it necessary to employ Homeric similes like these in the portrayal of Captain Ahab because his protagonist had to appear on an epic scale. What better choice as a symbol for Ahab than a giant tree, since other than mountains (which are also used for Ahab), trees are the most imposing natural features of any landscape; also, since *Moby-Dick* is a sea creature, to elevate Ahab to his level as a landsman, a simile using a giant tree is an apt choice. Further, there is symmetry here too because the *Pequod* itself is made of trees and the masts of the ship are the most immediate reminders of their form.

It is also noteworthy that while Ahab's famous white leg is made of whale bone, the fact that he has had augur-holes drilled into the wooden deck so that he can fit his peg-leg into them for better balance, makes him, in a sense, an extension of the ship, a fourth, wooden, mast. In fact, in the chapter introducing Ahab, Ishmael notes that "yet, for all that he said, or perceptibly did, on the at last sunny deck, he seemed as unnecessary there as another mast" (126-7). Moreover, during the second day of the final three day battle with the Whale, Ahab's leg is splintered and the carpenter makes him a new, wooden one, from the keel of his shattered whale boat. He even walks the deck "with heavy, lumber-like pace" (128).

Melville also uses a tree-simile to characterize Ahab's beard. Ahab spends all his time on deck as the ship nears the cruising ground where he expects to find the White Whale. He eats twice a day on deck, "supper he never touched; nor reaped his beard; which darkly grew all gnarled, as unearthed roots of trees blown over, which still grow idly on at naked base, though perished in the upper verdure" (538). The comparison here also implies that Ahab's mind has suffered a kind of death through the reference to the tree being "perished in the upper verdure."

Another simile marrying Ahab and notions associated with trees and wood comes in the pivotal Chapter 132, "The Symphony," where Ahab's harshness and stubborn gloom are contrasted with the fine weather. Melville characterizes the warm air as feminine and the rolling sea as masculine with the "royal czar and king" the sun smiling down on both. All nature seems in harmony but then we see Ahab on deck:

Tied up and twisted; gnarled and knotted with wrinkles; haggardly firm and unyielding; his eyes glowing like coals, that still glow in the ashes of ruin; untottering Ahab stood forth in the clearness of the morn; lifting his splintered helmet of a brow to the fair girl's forehead of heaven.

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The three adjectives "twisted, gnarled and knotted" are all customarily used when describing trees; his stance is "untottering" suggesting a strong, upright tree, and he lifts his "splintered" brow to the sky, an image of ruptured wood. The stark contrast of this burned, twisted man with the fair morning adds a dimension of horror not glimpsed before.

When we first see Ahab on deck in Chapter 28, however, the pleasant weather seems to work a change in his grim and forbidding figure; as "the lovely aromas in that enchanted air did at last seem to dispel, for a moment, the cankerous thing in his soul" (544). Ahab softens as "from beneath his slouched hat Ahab dropped a tear into the sea; nor did all the Pacific contain such wealth as that one wee drop" (544). Ahab's tear of compassion for the world and its sufferings prompts Starbuck, his First Mate (and the voice of reason in Ahab's mad quest for the Whale) to plead with him to give up his suicidal vengeance and turn the ship for home. There is no response as "Ahab's glance was averted; like a blighted fruit tree he shook, and cast his last, cindered apple to the soil" (546).

This tree simile is fitting in that Melville, by using the figure of a fruit tree here, now shows Ahab as a vulnerable, sad yet once-hopeful figure. This is in contrast to earlier similes comparing him to a mighty oak or elm. This simile comes just before his death.

The fight with the Whale is one of the most exciting narratives in this or any other novel. Whereas before the tree similes relating to Ahab emphasized his power, resolve, strength and adamant nature, appropriately, the action in the last chapters requires similes that express more active, less static states; an exception to this comes after the second battle with the Whale, and Ahab is yet again left without his ivory leg. He turns to the men and commands, "Stand round me, men. Ye see an old man cut down to the stump..." (563). While not strictly a simile, this describes his state and again compares him to a

felled tree. Earlier Ahab says of the initial loss of his leg in Chapter 36, "Aye, Starbuck; aye, my hearties all round; it was Moby Dick that dismasted me; Moby Dick that brought me to this dead stump I now stand on" (167).

One of the most interesting and suggestive passages associating Ahab and wood/tree imagery has Ahab meditating on his immanent death in the last chapter, "The Chase---Third Day." Ahab notices green moss growing in the cracked mast of the ship:

But good-bye, good-bye, old mast-head! What's this?---green? Aye, tiny mosses in these warped cracks. No such green weather stains on Ahab's head. There's the difference now between man's old age and matter's. But aye, old mast, we both grow old together; sound in our hulls, though, are we not, my ship? Aye, minus a leg, that's all. By heaven this dead wood has the better of my live flesh every way. I can't compare with it; and I've known some ships made of dead trees outlast the lives of men made of the most vital stuff of vital fathers.

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This Shakespearean soliloquy could not be more effectively placed in the novel. As a farewell it is a culmination of all the foregoing sylvan similes and imagery for Ahab. While the green moss growing in the cracks of the mast suggests life and even rebirth, and Ahab declares that the "dead wood has the better of my live flesh in every way," in the end, both ship and man will be joined together in the equality of death.

2.1 Other Similes Describing Ahab

As noted, Melville employed three initial similes to describe Ahab: the first two were rather simple and exact and the third was of the Homeric type---longer and more complex. This section will look at other Ahab similes, most of which, though not all, are fairly simple and direct.

2.1.1 Mountains

Several instances of similes using mountains or the features of mountains add solidity and majesty to the figure of Ahab. The initial one comes in Chapter 28, where Ahab first appears. Ishmael observes that there is little to "employ or excite" Ahab on deck, little to chase away "the clouds that layer upon layer were piled upon his brow, as ever all clouds choose the loftiest peaks to pile themselves upon" (127).

The next example, while not strictly a simile, more of a metaphor, pertains here because it depicts Ahab as a pyramid (a man-made mountain) in a dream the second mate, Stubb, has had after an argument with the captain. Stubb tells Flask, the third mate, "You know the old man's ivory leg, well I dreamed he kicked me with it; and when I tried to kick him back, ...I kicked my leg right off! And then, presto! Ahab seemed a pyramid, and I, like a blazing fool, kept kicking at it" (131). Stubb continues "battering away at the pyramid" and a merman appears offering his backside for Stubb to kick; it is stuck full of marlin-spikes, and so he wisely declines. The merman tells Stubb that it was an honor for him to be kicked by such a man as Ahab, someone of almost kingly rank. The pyramid obviously

represents Ahab's kingly status because it is the burial place for an Egyptian Pharaoh.

Perhaps a key to why Melville used mountains and tall trees in similes for Ahab comes in a speech in Chapter 99, "The Doubloon." Ahab is contemplating the meaning of the figures stamped on a gold coin that he has nailed to the main mast:

There's something ever egotistical in mountain-tops and towers, and all other grand and lofty things; look here,---three peaks as proud as Lucifer. The firm tower, that is Ahab; the volcano, that is Ahab; the courageous, the undaunted, the victorious fowl, that too, is Ahab; all are Ahab; and this round gold is but the image of the rounder globe, which, like a magician's glass, to each and every man in turn but mirrors back his own mysterious self.

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2.1.2 Statues, Iron, Animals and Others

In the initial description of Ahab in Chapter 28, he is compared to a bronze statue of Perseus by Cellini---but there are other references to his iconic nature: in Chapter 130 Ishmael comments on the Captain's long, motionless watches on deck, where he seems oblivious to the weather, where the "unheeded night-damp gathered in beads of dew upon that stone-carved coat and hat" (538). In Chapter 41, "Moby Dick," Ishmael compares him to a Greek sculpture, "so like a Caryatid, he patient sits, upholding on his frozen brow the piled entablatures of ages" (187). These allusions to Ahab convey a sense of his motionless, massive and solid demeanor and his silence. At the captain's table "only he himself was dumb" (153).

References to his "iron" nature also add to the portrayal of his character. In Chapter 111, "The Pacific," Ishmael observes Ahab "standing like an iron statue at his accustomed place..." his "firm lips met like the lips of a vice..." (491). The firmness of his purpose and his hard-heartedness are illustrated through his lack of response to a plea from another captain for aid in searching for some lost men. Ahab refuses to help, he "stood still like an anvil, receiving every shock, but without the least quivering of his own" (534). There is a reference to the "clamped mortar of Ahab's iron soul" (537) in Chapter 130. There is mention of "his iron voice" (539) in more than one instance and to his heart of "wrought steel" (568).

Ahab's head and face are also a locus for Melville's employment of similes. In Chapter 87, "The Grand Armada," Melville shows Ahab's resolve by saying his "brow was left gaunt and ribbed, like the black sand beach after some stormy tide has been gnawing it, without being able to drag the firm thing from its place" (393). As Ahab leaves another ship at sea for his own, he is seen in his whale boat, "With back to the stranger ship, and a face set like a flint to his own, Ahab stood upright till alongside the Pequod" (453). A blending of references to Ahab's head and to iron comes in a passage where he soliloquizes on his fate, and the "crown" (of thorns?) he must wear as commander of the ship, "my brain seems to beat against the solid metal; aye, steel skull, mine; the sort that needs no helmet in the most brain-battering fight" (171). In the final chapter occurs an extended simile where Ahab compares his own brain and skull to a glass filled with water freezing into ice. He also likens his hair to hearty grass

which grows anywhere, in heat or in cold. His hair is like "torn shreds of split sails" which beat against the "tossed ship" of his being:

...I've sometimes thought my brain was very calm---frozen calm, this old skull cracks so, like a glass in which the contents turn to ice and shiver it. And still this hair is growing now; this moment growing, the heat must breed it; but no, it's like that sort of common grass that will grow anywhere, between the earthy clefts of Greenland ice or in Vesuvius lava. How the wild winds blow it; they whip it about me as the torn shreds of split sails lash the tossed ship they cling to.

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At the beginning of the voyage, it will be remembered, Ahab was a complete recluse, keeping to his cabin. Melville uses this temporary symbolic physical isolation to represent the permanent sequestered nature of his soul. This is further figured in a simile using the American Grizzly Bear, (cited in the Abstract to this paper) where Ahab "lived in the world, as the last of the Grisly Bears lived in settled Missouri.... burying himself in the hollow of a tree" where he "lived out the winter there, sucking on his own paws; so, in his inclement, howling old age, Ahab's soul, shut up in the carved trunk of his body, there fed upon the sullen paws of its gloom!" (156).

One of the most striking Homeric similes in the novel also concerns Ahab's soul. It is to be found in Chapter 96, "The Try Works," where the *Pequod* is seen as the physical twin of her captain's soul. The *Pequod* glides through the watery blackness while over the fires of the try works the crew are reducing a whale's blubber to oil---the remains of the whale's carcass still lashed to the side. Melville gives us, "the rushing *Pequod*, freighted with savages, and laden with fire, and burning a corpse, and plunging into that blackness of darkness, seemed the material counterpart of her monomaniac commander's soul" (434).

Ahab's madness is like a river. At times his insanity appears to change like the course of a river, in speed, direction and depth, but "Ahab's full lunacy subsided not, but deepeningly contracted; like the unabated Hudson, when the noble Northman flows narrowly, but unfathomably through the Highland Gorge. But, as in his narrow-flowing monomania, not one jot of Ahab's broad madness had been left behind, so in that broad madness, not one jot of his great natural intellect had perished" (187).

In the final chapters, which relate the pursuit of *Moby-Dick* and the death of the *Pequod* and its crew, the number and variety of similes increases markedly as there is a hastening in the pace of the action and a marked intensity of description. Section 3 of this paper, covering a single chapter (134) examines Melville's most concentrated use of simile in the novel. Chapter 134 is one of the most carefully constructed parts in a carefully structured novel and as such is an example of Melville's artistry and controlled imagination.

3. A Symphony of Similes

The most stunning series of similes in the novel comes in Chapter 134, "The Chase---Second Day," the penultimate chapter of the novel. A succession of short similes helps to increase the pace of the

action and the feeling of excitement as the crew sights the Whale in the opening movement of the chapter. This is followed by a lengthy description of the unity of the crew as they work together to prepare the ship and lower the whale boats. Next comes what can be thought of as a diminishing series describing the action in the fight with the Whale.

The hastening ship is described thus: "The ship tore on; leaving such a furrow in the sea as when a cannon-ball, misspent, becomes a plough-share and turns up the level field" (557). The excited second mate, Stubb, on seeing the Whale declares, "ye can't escape....Ahab will dam off your blood, as a miller shuts his water-gate upon the stream!" (557). Immediately after comes, "Stubb did but speak out for well nigh all that crew. The frenzies of the chase had by this time worked them bubbling up, like old wine worked anew" (558). The wind, the ship, the crew and the passion of their commander unite; they have become

one man, not thirty. For as the one ship that held them all; though it was put together of all contrasting things---oak, and maple, and pine wood; iron, and pitch, and hemp --- yet all these ran into each other in the one concrete hull, which shot on its way, both balanced and directed by the long central keel; even so, all the individualities of the crew, this man's valor, that man's fear; guilt and guiltlessness, all varieties were welded into oneness, and were all directed to that fatal goal which Ahab their one lord and keel did point to.

The rigging lived. The mast-heads, like the tops of tall palms, were outspreadingly tufted with arms and legs. Clinging to a spar with one hand, some reached forth the other with impatient wavings; others, shading their eyes from the vivid sunlight, sat far out on the rocking yards; all the spars in full bearing of mortals, ready and ripe for their fate. Ah! How they still strove through that infinite blueness to seek out the thing that might destroy them!

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Following this, another sequence of similes serves to maintain the intense action and the fever of the chase. Some involve the ship, some the men and some the Whale. The men cry out like "the combined discharges of rifles" when they sight the Whale (559). They slide to the deck "like shooting stars" (ibid.). As the White Whale breaches the surface, he "booms his entire bulk into the pure element of the air" (ibid.). He carries great quantities of water into the air above, so that "the torn, enraged waves he shakes off, seem his mane; in some cases, this breaching is an act of his defiance" (ibid.). The men scream "There she breaches!" watching the Whale as he "tossed himself salmon-like to Heaven" (ibid.). Against the blue sky "the spray that he raised, for the moment, intolerably glittered and glared like a glacier; and stood there gradually fading and fading away from its first sparkling intensity, to the dim mistiness of an advancing shower in a vale" (ibid.). Once in their boats on the water, they quickly surround the whale, who charges them, seeking to smash them with his tail or crush them in his jaws, but the boats elude him because they are "skillfully manoeuvred incessantly wheeling like trained chargers in the field" (560). However, once the Whale is harpooned the ropes become entangled and the leviathan "irresistibly dragged the more involved boats of Stubb and Flask towards his flukes; dashed them together like two rolling husks on a surf-beaten beach" after which the Whale dives down

into the sea and "disappears into a boiling maelstrom in which, for a space, the odorous cedar chips of the wrecks danced round and round, like the grated nutmeg in a swiftly stirred bowl of punch" (560-561). This series of action similes is followed by a short simile using word play on the name of the third mate, Flask. He is seen in the water after the wreck bobbing "up and down like an empty vial" (ibid.). Another casualty is Ahab's boat, which capsizes. From under it the men come struggling out "like seals from a sea-side cave" (ibid.).

The crew get back to the ship and the chapter closes with Ahab asking them, once they are assembled on deck, "D'ye feel brave, men, brave?" "As fearless as fire," cried Stubb. To which Ahab mutters, "And as mechanical..." (564). Ahab sees his men as parts of a machine whose purpose is to hunt down the Whale. Before the final battle with the Whale in Chapter 135, Ahab declares metaphorically, "Ye are not other men, but my arms and my legs; and so obey me" (570).

4. The Sea

Melville's conception of the sea was not as transcendently welcoming as Walt Whitman's; to the poet, the sea was the source of all life, to which all life returns, a poetic inspiration and a balm. To the novelist, the sea was forbidding and alien; only the land was a fit home for man; the ocean was a source of terrors to mankind and a home for monsters, among whom *Moby-Dick* reigned as king.

One passage describes sea birds roosting on the *Pequod's* ropes, ignoring the hoots of the crew as "though they deemed our ship some drifting, uninhabited craft; a thing appointed to desolation, and therefore fit roosting place for their homeless selves." While beneath the *Pequod* the waters "heaved and heaved, still unrestingly heaved the black sea, as if its vast tides were a conscience; and the great mundane soul were in anguish and remorse for the long sin and suffering it had bred" (239).

Melville considered the sea to be "an everlasting terra incognita, so that Columbus sailed over numberless unknown worlds to discover his superficial western one" (280). Man with all his scientific pride is still at the sea's mercy because "for ever and for ever, to the crack of doom, the sea will insult and murder him, and pulverize the stateliest, stiffest frigate he can make...nevertheless, ...man has lost that sense of the full awfulness of the sea which aboriginally belongs to it" (ibid.). The sea also means death to its own offspring, just as "a savage tigress that tossing in the jungle overlays her own cubs, so the sea dashes even the mightiest whales against the rocks, and leaves them side by side with the split wrecks of ships. No mercy, no power but its own controls it. Panting and snorting like a mad battle steed that has lost its rider, the masterless ocean overruns the globe" (281). Melville further asks us to consider "the universal cannibalism of the sea; all whose creatures prey upon each other, carrying on eternal war since the world began" (ibid.). He invites us to compare the land and the sea, and to ponder the parallels that arise therefrom: "turn to this green, gentle, and most docile earth; consider them both, the sea and the land; and do you not find a strange analogy in yourself? For as this appalling ocean surrounds the verdant land, so in the soul of man there lies one insular Tahiti, full of peace and joy, but encompassed by all the horrors of the half-known life" (ibid.).

This harsh view is softened somewhat when Melville turns to consider the Pacific Ocean in Chapter 111; this very short chapter contains some of the most beautiful language in the book. The simile he uses for this particular ocean is biblical and transcendental: "There is, one knows not what sweet mystery about this sea, whose gently awful stirrings seem to speak of some hidden soul beneath; like those fabled undulations of the Ephesian sod over the buried Evangelist St. John" (490).

One of the most beautiful images in the entire book describes the waters of the seven seas as the "sea-pasture, wide-rolling watery prairies and Potters' fields of all four continents" under which "millions of mixed shades and shadows, drowned dreams, somnambulisms, reveries; all that we call lives and souls, lie dreaming, dreaming, still; tossing like slumberers in their beds; the ever-rolling waves but made so by their restlessness" (490-491). This image of the sea as the unconscious of the world is not new, but the simile "lives and souls...tossing like slumberers in their beds" as the cause of the "ever-rolling waves" is. Its startling truth and psychological appeal are readily apparent.

Cruising in the Pacific, the crew experiences long days of mild, calm weather. They spend much of their time off the ship in the whale boats waiting for a whale to surface. During these lulls, "under an abated sun; afloat all day upon smooth, slow heaving swells; seated in his boat, light as a birch canoe; and so sociably mixing with the soft waves themselves, that like hearth-stone cats they purr against the gunwale; these are the times of dreamy quietude, when beholding the tranquil beauty and brilliancy of the ocean's skin, one forgets the tiger heart that pants beneath it; and would not willingly remember, that this velvet paw but conceals a remorseless fang" (498).

Melville saw an understandable likeness between the sea and the vast American prairie. He compares the scattering of the fears of the *Pequod's* crew to prairie animals scattering before bison, and the undulating surface of the sea to the rolling hills of the prairie. But especially fine is the parallel imagery of the ship's masts as seen over ocean swells and the tips of horses' ears glimpsed over the high grass of the rolling plains. There are

times, when in his whale-boat the rover softly feels a certain filial, confident, land-like feeling towards the sea; that he regards it as so much flowery earth; and the distant ship revealing only the tops of her masts, seems struggling forward, not through high rolling waves, but through the tall grass of a rolling prairie; as when the western emigrants' horses only show their erected ears, while their hidden bodies widely wade through the amazing verdure.

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These "soothing scenes" lead into a speech by Ahab praising the "ever vernal endless landscapes of the soul" where "men may yet roll, like young horses in new morning clover" and "feel the cool dew of the life immortal on them" (ibid.). But these interludes do not last. Melville may be referring to reincarnation when he says we "trace the round again; and are infants, and men and I's eternally" (ibid.). Ahab asks himself, "Where lies the final harbor, whence we unmoor no more?" (499). Our souls are like "foundlings"; our souls are "like those orphans whose unwedded mothers die in bearing them; the secret of our paternity lies in their grave, and we must there to learn it" (ibid.).

5. The Pequod and Its Crew

The first description of the *Pequod*, moored at the dock in Nantucket, has a number of similes alluding to the age of the vessel, her color and fittings:

her old hull's complexion was darkened like a French grenadier's, who has alike fought in Egypt and Siberia. Her venerable bows looked bearded. Her masts---cut somewhere on the coast of Japan, where her original ones were lost overboard in a gale---her masts stood stiffly up like the spines of the three old kings of Cologne. Her ancient decks were worn and wrinkled, like the pilgrim-worshipped flagstone in Canterbury Cathedral where Becket bled. But to all these her old antiquities, were added new and marvellous features, pertaining to the wild business that for more than half a century she had followed.---She was apparelled like any barbaric Ethiopian emperor, his neck heavy with pendants of polished ivory.

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Notice that Melville has managed to mention or refer to countries all over the world---Egypt, Siberia, Japan, Germany, England and Ethiopia---emphasizing her international travels. The ship is covered with the teeth and bones of slain whales. She is a "thing of trophies" (*ibid.*). As the ship leaves port "on the wintry ocean" Ishmael says the "freezing spray cased us in ice, as in polished armor. The long rows of teeth on the bulwarks glistened in the moonlight; and like the white ivory tusks of some huge elephant, vast curving icicles depended from the bows" (108). Both of these similes create a feeling that the ship is fitted for war---combined they make her seem like an Indian Raja's battle elephant.

The *Pequod's* "Raja," Ahab, has a special crew for his whaleboat, and their strength at the oars is the subject of another simile. They are all Parsees from India. "Those tiger yellow creatures of his seemed all steel and whalebone; like five trip-hammers they rose and fell with regular strokes of strength, which periodically started the boat along the water like a horizontal burst boiler out of a Mississippi steamer" (224). This simile well conveys the action of the rowers---the startling comparison of the boat's movement to a burst boiler lends additional power to the image. Notice that both images are of machines. Ahab refers in other passages to the machine-like nature of the crew.

The third mate, Flask, in command of another boat during the pursuit of a whale, and being of an excitable nature, is seen to express this nature by "rearing and plunging in the boat's stern like a crazed colt from the prairie" (227). Later, Melville refers to the crew's fears of the White Whale being "broken up" and "routed" like "timid prairie hares" which "scatter before the bounding bison" (558). There is also a comparison between a white squall at sea and a prairie fire where "the whole squall roared, forked, and crackled around us like a white fire upon the prairie, in which, consumed, we were burning; immortal in these jaws of death!" (230).

During a typhoon, fire becomes an important symbol as the scene on deck is lit by lighting which has made the masts phosphorescent; the crew have gathered together on the forecandle where their eyes gleam "like a far away constellation of stars" (511). One of them, the "gigantic, jet negro, Dragoo,

loomed up to thrice his real stature, and seemed the black cloud from which the thunder had come. The parted mouth of Tashtego revealed his shark-white teeth, which strangely gleamed as if they too had been tipped by corpusants; while lit up by the preternatural light, Queequeg's tattooing burned like Satanic blue flames on his body" (ibid.). This grouping of three similes describing the three harpooners creates the feeling that they are unreal, magical and powerful.

With all the dangers of whaling, fatalism runs throughout the book and is expressed by Ishmael in a rather unusual passage. He philosophizes that at times of "extreme tribulation," life seems to be a vast practical joke, and that the joke is usually at one's own expense. A man's perspective is altered so that "what just before might have seemed to him a thing most momentous, now seems but a part of the general joke" (232). In the life of a man however "nothing dispirits, and nothing seems worth while disputing. He bolts down all events, all creeds, and beliefs, and persuasions, all hard things visible and invisible, never mind how knobby; as an ostrich of potent digestion gobbles down bullets and gun flints" (231). This "odd sort of wayward mood" is bred especially by the perils of whaling and leads to a "genial, desperado philosophy" (ibid.). Ishmael applies this "free and easy" philosophy to the voyage of the *Pequod*. Ironically, he notes that there "are no people more fond" of the "diversion" of "tinkering with their last wills and testaments" than sailors (233). Having made his will on this voyage, Ishmael now feels "all the easier; a stone was rolled away from my heart....I survived myself; my death and burial were locked up in my chest...." (ibid.). He felt like "a quiet ghost with a clean conscience sitting inside the bars of a snug family vault" ready for a "cool, collected dive at death and destruction, and the devil fetch the hindmost" (ibid.).

One of the most finely drawn seascapes in the entire book portrays the ship's four whale boats riding up and down sea swells while the *Pequod* follows; to Melville this is thrilling, "it was a sight full of quick wonder and awe" to see the "vast swells of the omnipotent sea; the surging, hollow roar they made, as they rolled along the eight gunwales, like gigantic bowls in a boundless bowling-green...the sudden profound dip into the watery glens and hollows; the keen spurring and goadings to gain the top of the opposite hill; the headlong, sled-like slide down its other side" and the "wondrous sight of the ivory *Pequod* bearing down upon her boats with outstretched sails, like a wild hen after her screaming brood" (228). The *Pequod* has a number of other epithets applied to it, though "ivory" is the most often repeated---others like "the fated *Pequod*" (523), "the intense *Pequod*" (541) are also used. In one passage, the ship is likened to a maddened elephant or bull: "the ivory-tusked *Pequod* sharply bowed to the blast, and gored the dark waves in her madness, till, like showers of silver chips, the foam-flakes flew over her bulwarks;" (238).

The masts of the ship as she turns into the wind, in another passage, are compared to three famous Greek warriors. As the *Pequod* wheels about "her three firm-seated graceful masts erectly poised upon her long, ribbed hull, seemed as the three Horatii pirouetting on one sufficient steed" (507). The masts in a succeeding chapter, when the ship is caught in a typhoon are lit by lightning and appear "like three gigantic wax tapers before an altar" (510).

The last scene of the novel portrays the sinking *Pequod*. The simile here compares the sinking ship to Satan falling into hell. A most unusual feature of this action is the figure of the Native-American

harpooner, Tashtego, nailing Ahab's flag to the top of the mast as the ship goes under; a skyhawk

chanced to intercept its broad fluttering wing between the hammer and wood; and simultaneously feeling that etherial thrill, the submerged savage beneath, in his death-grasp, kept his hammer frozen there; and so the bird of heaven, with archangelic shrieks, and his imperial beak thrust upwards, and his whole captive form folded in the flag of Ahab, went down with his ship, which like Satan, would not sink to hell till she had dragged a living part of heaven along with her, and helmeted herself with it.

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In the Epilogue, the only survivor, Ishmael, tells how he was drawn toward the vortex of the sinking ship, where he did revolve "like another Ixion" (ibid.) before grabbing the coffin life-buoy of the drowned Queequeg. Ixion, in Greek myth, was condemned by Zeus to revolve endlessly on a wheel of fire in the Underworld.

6. *Moby-Dick*, Whales and Sharks

The form and aspect of the White Whale Melville describes in rather predictable similes---as a snowy white mountain or as white marble. When the crew first neared the whale, he "slowly rose from the water; for an instant his whole marbleized body formed a high arch, like Virginia's Natural Bridge" (550).

His main characteristic, however, other than his color and size, is his spout. Ahab says, "his spout is a big one, like a whole shock of wheat, and white as a pile of Nantucket wool after the great annual sheep-shearing..." (166). In Chapter 51, "The Spirit Spout," the crew sees a spout in the moonlight, "it looked celestial; seemed some plumed and glittering god uprising from the sea" (236). They are not sure if it is really a whale or some kind of dream, and though they sight it night after night they can never close with it. Some of the crew think it is *Moby-Dick* treacherously beckoning them on to destruction.

When they finally close with the Whale, however, he is the one to attack first, before they even have a chance to throw a harpoon. He dives and as they search the depths for him, they see his white form beneath them rapidly rising with jaws open; his "glittering mouth yawned beneath the boat like an open-doored marble tomb" (550). This simile is simple but striking in its prefiguring of the crew's future doom. They maneuver to avoid his jaws but he manages to "slowly and feelingly" take one boat's "bows full within his mouth" and shake "the slight cedar as a mildly cruel cat her mouse" (551).

The Whale in the final deadly encounter surfaces with great force, and as he crashes back into the sea, "Crushed thirty feet upwards, the waters flashed for an instant like heaps of fountains, then brokenly sank in a shower of flakes, leaving the circling surface creamed like new milk round the marble trunk of the whale" (569). As his boat nears *Moby-Dick* "Ahab was fairly within the smoky mountain mist, which, thrown off from the whale's spout, curled round his great, Monadnock hump" (572). This last named is a mountain in New Hampshire famous for its round top.

Before all this closing action, even before the White Whale has been sighted, the crew of the *Pequod*

catch other whales, and the descriptions of these experiences contain some elegant and thought-provoking similes. One of the best, is set on one hot, drowsy day, when all on board seem in a dream, Ishmael "with a shock" wakes up and sees "a gigantic Sperm Whale which lay rolling in the water like the capsized hull of a frigate, his broad, glossy back, of an Ethiopian hue, glistening in the sun's rays like a mirror. But lazily undulating in the trough of the sea, and ever and anon tranquilly spouting his vapory jet, the whale looked like a portly burgher smoking his pipe of a warm afternoon. But that pipe, poor whale, was thy last" (289). The "last pipe" of the whale is like the last breath of a dying man. This simile is pleasing, however, because his spout is compared to the peaceful smoke arising from a pipe, a symbol of relaxation and contentment; in addition, the pity we feel for the doomed whale is thus heightened through personalization by comparing him to a burgher. The death of this whale is horrible, as in his death throes "gush after gush of clotted red gore, as if it had been the purple lees of red wine, shot into the frightened air; and falling back again, ran dripping down his motionless flanks into the sea. His heart had burst!" (293-294). Melville gives the death of the whale greater scale by an additional simile describing its blood as being like a "red tide (which) now poured from all sides of the monster like brooks down a hill" (292).

This whale is secured to the side of the ship for the night, where the carcass provides a meal for "thousands on thousands of sharks." Melville at this point digresses to a description of a sea fight to illustrate, by way of extended simile, the comparable actions of sharks and men. He likens the men fighting on the decks of the opposing ships to the sharks waiting in the waters below to make a meal of any combatant unfortunate enough to fall overboard. This is a fine example of a Homeric simile: the sharks are like dogs waiting for table scraps; the men slashing at each other on the decks of the ships have their counterparts in the waters below who slash at the dead bodies. The "jewel-hilted" mouths of the sharks are likened to the swords of the humans. The simile is extended further by suggesting that sharks also follow slave ships to "decently" bury the dead slaves who are cast overboard. But in this fight, the sharks "longingly" gaze up at the ship for food; they "hilariously" feast on the dead; like dogs, they are ready to "bolt down" every killed man:

Though amid all the smoking horror and diabolism of a sea-fight, sharks will be seen longingly gazing up to the ship's decks, like hungry dogs round a table where red meat is being carved, ready to bolt down every killed man that is tossed to them; and though, while the valiant butchers over the deck-table are thus cannibally carving each other's live meat with carving-knives all gilded and tasselled, the sharks, also, with their jewel-hilted mouths, are quarrelsome carving away under the table at the dead meat; and though, were you to turn the whole affair upside down, it would still be pretty much the same thing, that is to say, a shocking sharkish business enough for all parties; and though sharks are also the invariable outriders of all slave ships crossing the Atlantic, systematically trotting alongside, to be handy in case a parcel is to be carried anywhere, or a dead slave to be decently buried; and though one or two other like instances might be set down...when sharks do most socially congregate, and most hilariously feast; yet is there no conceivable time or occasion when you will find them in such countless numbers, and in gayer or more jovial spirits, than around a dead sperm whale, moored by night to a whale-ship at sea. If you have never seen that sight, then suspend your decision about

Sharks again appear in the final chapter. As Ahab's boat is pulling away from the *Pequod* toward its doom, sarks begin to bite at the oars of the whale boat. They accompany it "in the same prescient way that vultures hover over the banners of marching regiments in the east" (568). The comparison of sharks and vultures---scavengers of the air and of the sea---lends a sinister purpose to the behavior of the sharks. It is interesting though that in the Epilogue of the book, where sharks are mentioned yet again, they are presented as being rendered harmless, perhaps by Fate. As Ishmael clings to the coffin of Queequeg, adrift and semi-conscious, as he "floats on a soft and dirge-like main" for "almost one whole day and night...the unharmed sharks...glided by as if with padlocks on their mouths" (577).

In an earlier chapter, 117, entitled "The Whale Watch," Ahab and his crew spend the night beside the whale they have killed. The crew all seem asleep, except for one man who watches the sharks. A lone lantern casts a "troubled, flickering glare" on "midnight waves, which gently chafed the whale's broad flank, like soft surf upon a beach" (503). The ever-present sharks "spectrally played" around the dead whale and "tapped the light cedar planks with their tails. A sound like the moaning in squadrons over Asphaltites of unforgiven ghosts of Gomorrah, ran shuddering through the air" (ibid.). (Asphaltites is a Greek word for the Salt Sea valley in the Holy Land where a type of natural pitch [asphalt] is found.)

A more pleasing simile describes the sighting of a great number of whales whose "host of vapory spouts, individually curling up into the air, and beheld through a blending atmosphere of bluish haze, showed like the thousand cheerful chimneys of some dense metropolis, descried on a balmy autumnal morning, by some horseman on a height" (392). As these whales approach the Straits of Sunda, Melville compares this group to "a marching army"; behaving as if it were nearing "an unfriendly defile in the mountains." They "accelerate their march, all eagerness to place that perilous passage in their rear, and once more expand in comparative security on the plain; even so this vast fleet of whales now seem hurrying forward through the straits..." (392). The whales seem to become aware that they are being hunted and, in another military simile, "forming in close ranks and battalions, so that their spouts all looked like flashing lines of stacked bayonets, moved on with redoubled velocity" (394). But the whales suddenly become confused and begin swimming aimlessly in all directions. As the whale boats approach and begin to move among them, the whales like "household dogs...came snuffling round us, right up to our gunwales, and touching them; till it almost seemed that some spell had suddenly domesticated them. Queequeg patted their foreheads; Starbuck scratched their backs with his lance..." (398). Melville has now dealt with the crew's capture of a single whale, multiple whales and their efforts against a whole herd before the final battle with the great solitary White Whale.

Later in the novel, a rather humorous simile likens the travels of a group of females dominated by a single male to the travels of the leisured classes:

It is very curious to watch this harem and its lord in their indolent ramblings. Like fashionables, they are forever on the move in leisurely search of variety. You meet them

on the line in time for the full flower of the Equatorial feeding season, having just returned, perhaps, from spending the summer in the northern seas, and so cheating summer of all unpleasant weariness and warmth. By the time they have lounged up and down the promenade of the Equator awhile, they start for the Oriental waters in anticipation of the cool season there, and so evade the other excessive temperature of the year.

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Comparing whales to the leisured classes is a nice conceit, because both groups migrate with the seasons, both appear indolent, and both seem to enjoy "parading" for other members of their respective groups. Melville has here fashioned an extended simile that is both humorous, intellectually provocative and telling.

7. Conclusion

Any student of Melville soon comes to understand that America's greatest writer was misunderstood and under-appreciated in his own time. He was never able to support himself with the profits from his writing. This caused him great bitterness but at the same time impelled him to seek for a literary formula which would become commercially successful. In doing so, he experimented with new stylistic and structural approaches to writing. This experimentation in turn is the primary reason for both his lack of success in his own time and for his recognition in our own.

Melville's powerful imagination and his mastery of language were married to a desire for success and an adventurous spirit. This mixture resulted in his greatest works, of which *Moby-Dick* (though it has its flaws) is perhaps the pinnacle of his artistic achievement. Melville's employment of simile, especially the extended, Homeric simile, resulted in passages of singular beauty and power. By juxtaposing two elements in a simile, Melville was able to expand the image and meaning of the thing to be described (the Focus) through the aspects or character brought to it by the image or simile itself (the Aspect). For example, it will be remembered that he compares one whale "lazily undulating in a trough of the sea" to a "portly burger smoking his pipe of a warm afternoon" (289). By giving the whale this human association (personification), the reader feels when the whale is finally killed that a guiltless, even virtuous, creature has been slain. Thus, Melville is able to add emotional depth to what would otherwise be the everyday business of a commercial whaling ship. This simile interestingly foreshadows the sensibilities toward whales common at the end of our own century.

In describing the *Pequod*, Melville used a variety of similes to give character and life to the ship, much like a painter does his subject. The ship's hull is like the darkened skin of a French soldier from the Napoleonic wars, who has fought in all climates, from Egypt to Siberia. Her "venerable bows looked bearded" (71) reinforces the notion of her age. Her masts are "like the spines of the three old kings of Cologne" (ibid.). This refers to the legend (from the Middle Ages) that the three wise men who followed the Star of Bethlehem were buried together upon their deaths and were later brought to Constantinople by Constantine's mother, Queen Helen. From there they were carried by the Roman Emperor Mauricius to Milan. When Milan rebelled against the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick the First, the Archbishop of Cologne aided the Emperor, and to show his appreciation, Frederick rewarded

the Archbishop by allowing him to carry the remains of the Three Kings to Cologne where they were placed in the church of Saint Peter. That the masts of the *Pequod* "stood stiffly up" (ibid.) like the spines of the three kings is, however, a somewhat puzzling simile. First, the number three occurs numerous times throughout *Moby-Dick*. There are of course three masts. But also:

1. Ishmael decides to stay at the third inn he comes to.
2. Queequeg saves three men from drowning.
3. There are three mates and three harpooners on the *Pequod*.
4. In chapters 73 to 105 the *Pequod* meets three ships; in chapters 106 to 135 she meets three final ships.
5. The three tri-pointed masts are lit by phosphorescent lightning; in the glow Drago, the negro harpooner, seems three times his height; the glowing masts are seen as three candles before an altar; the lightning strikes again and the glowing flames leap to three times their previous height.
6. The *Pequod* fights *Moby-Dick* for three days.
7. Ahab damages and has his peg leg repaired three times.

It therefore may seem natural that Melville would think of the three kings and associate them with the masts just as he compared them to the Horatii in another simile. But there remains the question of why he describes the masts as being as stiff as the "spines" of the kings. One possible explanation may be the architecture of Cologne Cathedral itself, where their bones are supposedly interred. He may have seen the cathedral spires and imagined them as the "spines" of the Kings and then transferred the meaning to the masts of the *Pequod*.

Further, the *Pequod's* decks are described as "worn and wrinkled" like "the pilgrim-worshipped flagstone in Canterbury Cathedral where Becket bled" (ibid.). Why did Melville use Cologne and Canterbury Cathedrals here, other than the fact that he wanted the reader to see the *Pequod* as "ancient"? Why did he choose to refer to the masts and deck, if not because they are the most identifiable features of a ship (other than the hull and keel), just as the spires and floor of a cathedral are basic to its identity as a structure? If the relationship of masts/cathedral spires and deck/cathedral floor is unintended, it is still then an interesting parallel.

The Whale, the *Pequod* and the crew are all central to the story and similes seem to cluster around them. But no other character is treated with the attention given to Ahab. The title of this paper was suggested by an important simile that is central to an understanding of Ahab's character. His pride makes him like "a lone, gigantic elm," challenging divine order and calling down the wrath of heaven:

As in the hurricane that sweeps the plain, men fly the neighborhood of some lone, gigantic elm, whose very height and strength but render it so much the more unsafe, because so much the more a mark for thunderbolts...so... many of the mariners did run from (Ahab)....

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On another level, just as the simile of the lone elm stands for Ahab, Ahab stands for America itself as a nation---often the object of attack because of its size, prominence and pride.

Moby-Dick is a book of images, and the images that are most striking gain power and vividness from the use of simile. There is branded Ahab standing on his quarterdeck; the Whale rising up to smash the whale boats; the chaos of the typhoon and the lightning; the *Pequod* under sail and in pursuit of the Whale; the swells and high waves at sea; the swirling vortex into which the *Pequod* sinks; the lone floating coffin to which Ishmael clings. Anyone who has seen John Huston's film of the novel already has a stock of images to bring to a reading of the text, and these images tend to make the reading more enjoyable rather than less. With this in mind, the contemporary reader may still find this book daunting for several reasons.

First, at over five hundred pages, there is the sheer length of the work; also, the text itself is dense in allusions and imagery and requires a careful reading; additionally, the long passages on the art and science of whales and whaling may seem to some an unwanted interruption in the narrative of the *Pequod*; finally, even the length, complexity and punctuation of Melville's sentences may be seen as a hinderance to easy and pleasurable reading.

For those who cope with the difficulties of the text, the rewards and discoveries are worth the effort. It is a book of great themes and ideas. For example, in one passage Ishmael sees the weaving of a mat as a metaphor for his life---the fixed threads of the warp are necessity or fate, the shuttle is free will, and the sword used to push the woof is chance. Ishmael and Queequeg were "mildly employed weaving what is called a sword-mat" (217). On a "cloudy, sultry afternoon" a "strange dreaminess" reigns over the sea and the ship, "broken only by the intermitting dull thud of the sword" as Queequeg slides it between the threads (218). To Ishmael it appears as if "this were the loom of time" and he himself a "shuttle mechanically weaving and weaving away at the Fates" (ibid.). The warp "seemed necessity; and here, thought I, with my own hand I ply my own shuttle and weave my own destiny into these unalterable threads" while Queequeg's "indifferent" sword, which finally "fashions both warp and woof" must be "chance---aye, chance, free will and necessity---no wise incompatible---all interweavingly working together" (ibid.). So that

The straight warp of necessity, not to be swerved from its ultimate course---its every alternating vibration, indeed, only tending to that; free will still free to ply her shuttle between given threads; and chance, though restrained in its play within the right lines of necessity, and sideways in its motions modified by free will, though thus prescribed to by both, chance by turns rules either, and has the last featuring blow at events.

(ibid.)

Ishmael is suddenly awakened from this musing by the wild cries of the lookout high aloft on the masthead, "There she blows!" and at this the "ball of free will" dropped from his hand. He stood "gazing up at the clouds whence the voice dropped like a wing." To Ishmael the lookout is "some prophet or seer beholding the shadows of Fate, and by those wild cries announcing their coming" (219). This sort of philosophizing may be tedious because it is obvious but it is nonetheless an effective way for Melville to deal with the issues he has addressed in this novel---nothing less than man's place in the physical and metaphysical world.

Melville presents most philosophical questions by juxtaposing them: Christian vs. pagan beliefs, civilization and barbarism, free will and necessity or fate, good and evil, the physical and metaphysical worlds, selfishness and self-sacrifice and man's morality in an immoral world.

Consistent with this broad approach to ideas is his use of simile. He presents his characters and their world through juxtaposition of elements. What he seeks to describe (the Focus) is linked with an image or figure which brings meaning to it (the Aspect). (See the Appendix of this paper for a complete list of Focus and Aspect elements.) However, while he presents his philosophical ideas in a dynamic of opposition, the Focus and Aspect composing his similes can be thought of as existing in another kind of relationship. The tension in his similes is not created by opposition of ideas but by the comparison of aspects or elements of the physical and spiritual world: the figure of Ahab with trees; the *Pequod* with the crew and the *Pequod's* keel with Ahab; the sea's tides with a conscience or soul; the ever rolling waves with sleepers tossing in their beds; the vapory spouts of many whales with the smoke from chimneys on an autumnal morning. Through the juxtaposition and artful combination of images Melville elevates his tale to the level of myth. The flow of the narrative is there, but the use of simile gives the reader experiences that would be absent in a simple narrative.

Moby-Dick is like a diamond mine. There are various passages to follow, and each one leads in a different direction. At first, the going may be slow and laborious but gradually progress becomes easier, and as discoveries are made, delight grows. Along the way, the reader discovers treasures of imagery and thought which capture the mind and send it on further journeys, just as a diamond hypnotizes by casting reflected light. The seeker can linger or continue on to deeper and deeper levels; the pace can be fast or slow. The reader, the text and the world interact to create new meanings which have no seeming end.

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Appendix

Focus (subject) and Aspect (simile) in *Moby-Dick*

Below is a list of the similes Melville used in *Moby-Dick*. The **Focus** (the thing, or subject to be clarified, described or explained) and the **Aspect** (the simile itself or the image; the thing the Focus is compared to) are listed here for easy reference. It is important to understand that the **Aspect** colors or adds positive or negative imagery to the **Focus**. Also, while most similes have two parts, the comparison results in a third meaning which goes beyond the sum of the two constituents.

<u>Focus</u>	<u>Aspect</u>
The glittering spray from the Whale's spout	A glacier; an advancing shower in a vale
Ahab	A burned martyr A bronze statue A lightning-blasted tree A thunder-cloven old oak A lone, gigantic elm A blighted fruit tree A ship's mast (Metaphors-a tower, a volcano, an Egyptian pyramid, a powerful bird). A Greek sculpture An iron statue An anvil An American Grizzly Bear
Ahab's brow	A lofty peak A black sand beach
Ahab's skull	A glass cracking from expanding ice
Ahab's hair	Common grass torn shreds of split sails
Ahab's beard	The roots of a fallen tree
Ahab's soul	The <i>Pequod</i>
Ahab's madness	A river
The <i>Pequod's</i> wake	A mis-spent cannonball plowing a field
Ahab damming off the White Whale's blood	A miller shutting his water-gate on a stream
The passions of the crew during the chase	Old wine bubbling up anew
The dispersion of the the crew's fear of the Whale	Scattered hares before the bounding bison
The <i>Pequod</i>	The crew
The <i>Pequod's</i> keel	Ahab
The men's cries on sighting the Whale	The combined discharges of rifles
The men descending to the deck from the masts	Shooting stars
The whale boats maneuvering	Trained chargers in the field
The whale boats destroyed	Two rolling husks on a surf-beaten beach
The wood of the wrecked boats	Nutmeg in a swiftly stirred bowl of punch

Focus

The third mate "Flask"
Ahab's capsized whale boat and crew
The crew
The sea's tides
The raging sea

Tahiti and the surrounding ocean
The waves of the Pacific ---the movement of this sea
The ever-rolling waves
The soft waves against the gunwales of the boats
The masts of the ship seen through the high rolling waves

Men's souls

The (color of the) hull of the *Pequod*

The *Pequod*'s masts
The *Pequod*'s decks

The *Pequod*'s ivory fittings

The *Pequod* encased in ice---icicles hanging from the bows
Ahab's whale boat crew as they row---the movement of the boat
Movements of the third mate, Flask, in the rear of his whale boat
A white squall at sea
The gleaming eyes of the crew on deck in a typhoon
A "gigantic, jet negro" Dragoo

A man's acceptance of all beliefs "no matter how knobby"
The vast swells at sea
The boats in the swells
The *Pequod* following after her boats
White sea-foam over the bulwarks

Aspect

An empty vial
Seals struggling from a sea-side cave
As fearless as fire; as mechanical
A conscience or soul
A savage tigress; a mad battle steed that has lost its rider
Man's soul and the half-known life
The undulations of the Ephesian sod over the grave of St. John
Slumberers tossing in their beds
The purring of hearth-stone cats

The erect ears of immigrant's horses seen through the tall grass of the prairie

Orphans of unwedded mothers who die in bearing them
The darkened complexion of a French grenadier who has fought in Egypt and Siberia
The spines of the three old kings of Cologne
Flagstone (s?) in Canterbury Cathedral where Becket bled
The polished ivory pendants of an Ethiopian emperor
As in armor---the icicles like the tusks of a huge elephant
Five trip-hammers---the movement of a horizontal burst boiler out of a Mississippi steamer
The rearing and plunging of a crazed colt from the prairie
A white fire upon the prairie
A far away constellation of stars

A black cloud from which the the thunder had come
An ostrich of potent digestion gobbling down bullets and gun flints
A boundless bowling green
Gigantic bowls
A wild hen after her screaming brood
Showers of silver chips

Focus

The masts of the ship on her "long, ribbed hull"

The masts of the ship
The sinking *Pequod*
The body of the White Whale as he submerges
The Whale's spout
A spout by moonlight
The yawning mouth of the Whale
The Whale with a whale boat in its mouth
The Whale's hump
A whale rolling in the water
The glossy, glittering back of a whale
A whale "undulating" in a trough of the sea and spouting his "vapory jet"
The gush of red gore from a dying whale
Blood pouring down the sides of a dying whale
Sharks gazing up at the decks of a ship during a sea-fight
The swords (i.e. carving knives, "gilded and tasseled") of the men fighting on deck
The action of the fighting men "carving each other's live meat"
Sharks following Ahab's whale boat on its final attack on the Whale
Waves "gently chafing" a whale's flank
The tapping of shark's tails on the cedar planks of a whale boat
The vapory spouts of many whales

A group of whales approaching a strait

The spouts of whales as they form in lines to pass through the strait
A male whale and his "harem" of females as they leisurely migrate with the seasons

Aspect

The three Horatii pirouetting on one "sufficient steed"

Three gigantic wax candles before an altar
Satan falling into Hell
Virginia's Natural Bridge
A shock of wheat
A plumed and glittering god rising from the sea
An open-doored marble tomb
A mildly cruel cat shaking a mouse
Mt. Monadnock
The capsized hull of a frigate
A mirror
A portly burger smoking a pipe on a warm afternoon
The purple lees of red wine
Brooks flowing down a hill
Dogs around a table where red meat is being carved
The jewel-hilted mouths of sharks

The sharks "quarrelsome carving away at the dead meat under the table"
Vultures presciently hovering over the banners of regiments marching in the east
Soft surf on a beach
The moaning of squadrons of unforgiven ghosts of Gomorrah over the valley of Asphaltites
A thousand cheerful chimneys of a dense metropolis on a balmy autumnal morning
A marching army approaching an unfriendly defile in the mountains
Gleaming lines of stacked bayonets

"Fashionables" i.e. the rich, leisured classes moving north or south with the changing seasons