

Vengeance, Indifference, and Concern The Ethical Interpretation of Man-Nature Relations in *Moby-Dick*

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Abstract: Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* offers a diversity of human conducts towards nature. This essay probes into the ethical motives behind the respective conducts of the main characters, namely, captain Ahab, the chief mate Starbuck, the sailor Ishmael. Full of vengeance, Ahab abandons human reason and deals with the conflict between *Moby-Dick* and him according to the law of the jungle. Reasonable and indifferent, Starbuck emphasizes the economic value of the whales and his conduct is driven by the anthropocentric economic ethic. Diametrically opposite to Ahab and Starbuck, Ishmael extends his love to the whales and develops an ecological ethic during the voyage of the *Pequod*. The death of Ahab, the tragedy of Starbuck, together with the survival of Ishmael best illustrate Melville's ethical leanings and further reveal his ethical thought delivered in the novel.

Key Words: Herman Melville *Moby-Dick* Ahab Ishmael Starbuck

In his masterpiece *Moby-dick*, Herman presents a world of sea animals with the white whale as the subject of the story and a human society symbolized by the *Pequod*. By describing the clash between whales and the *Pequod*, Herman Melville makes a thorough, intensive and unique probe into the relation between man and nature. The current research on *Moby-Dick* from eco-criticism mainly focuses on the idea of mastering nature through industrial technology, and Ahab's embodies contemporary "American hope that technology would empower free man," and his quest becomes an allegory of that attempt to master nature which characterized industrial capitalism in its new found confidence.¹ Such idea sheds light on the understanding of the novel so far as the relation between man and nature is concerned. However, the diversity of the main characters' conducts on the *Pequod* and the variety of ethical notions held by these characters remain to be folded. With a combination of ethical literary criticism and eco-criticism, this paper pays attention to the three main characters, namely, Captain Ahab, the first mate Starbuck and the sailor Ishmael, to study the different fates incurred by their respective ethical notion they each stick to, so as to unfold Herman Melville's ethical leanings delivered in the novel and offers a new perspective to the eco-study of *Moby-dick*.

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¹ Michael Paul Rogin, *Subversive genealogy: The Politics and Art of Herman Melville* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1985), 138. quoted in Philip Armstrong, 'Leviathan Is a Skein of Networks': Translation of Nature and Culture in *Moby-Dick*, ELH 71.4 (Winter 2004): 1039-1063.

(一)

Ahab is generally regarded as a tragic hero people always see in those Greek heroes and the tragedies during the Renaissance. Up to now, the sharp conflict between Moby-Dick and Ahab sets off strains of thought among readers: What innermost motive on earth makes the contradiction between Ahab and Moby-Dick so irreconcilable? What notion on earth gets hold over Ahab so tightening so that he cannot veer from his quest to rid Moby-dick, regardless the lives of the crew members and the interest of the shareholders of the *Pequod*? Readers' perplexity and concerns echo Ahab's confession he admits to Starbuck before the final chase:

What is it, what nameless, inscrutable, unearthly thing is it; what cozening, hidden lord and master, and cruel, remorseless emperor commands me; that against all natural lovings and longings, I so keeps pushing, and crowding, and jamming myself on all the time; recklessly making me ready to do what in my own proper, natural heart, I durst not so much as dare? Is Ahab, Ahab? Is it I, God, or who, that lifts this arms?² (MD 444)

What on earth works on Ahab? Divinity? Humanity? Or bestiality?

Lan Ousby believes that Ahab's chase is a daring probe into the heart of the nature, a challenge to God's almighty power, which is grand display of courageous heroism.³ Harold Bloom sees in Ahab an idealist, a "worldly, godly figure" (Harold Bloom 103). Bloom's argument is resonant with that of Captain Peleg, one of the largest owner of the *Pequod*: "He (Ahab) is a grand, ungodly, god-like man" (MD 68). What Both Bloom and Peleg impresses the readers is that there is divinity in Ahab; however, Ahab is not divine, he is temporal, and his life is inseparable from the other members of the society. In this sense, Ahab does live up to Peleg's moral judgment that "Ahab has his humanities" (MD 69). The humanity mentioned by Peleg refers to love, for his judgment is based on the fact that Ahab has a young wife and a young son. But there is no love which does not become help.⁴ Being a "worldly" man, a member of human society, Ahab does offer help and shows "his humanities" several times, especially at the end of the novel: Pip has gone mad after falling overboard and drifting alone in the sea. Ahab shows sympathy for Pip, and takes him under his protection; Ahab opens his heart to Starbuck with whom he reflects upon his past life; Before the final chase, he orders Starbuck to stay aboard rather than risk his life confronting Moby-Dick. In the above mentioned examples, the humanities Ahab shows attest to the positive moral judgment made by Captain Peleg.

However, love by no means predominates Ahab (Laurence Macphie, 140). In him we also see his nonhuman side, and many of his actions and words are totally against the human ethic. When Pip pleads with Ahab to abandon his quest for vengeance, rather than be swayed, Ahab tells Pip that he will murder him; For several times, he rejects Starbuck's persuasion and once he even threatens to kill him; Ahab's cruelty reaches its height when he refuses to offer help to the *Rachel*. The Captain of the *Rachel* has lost two sons in an encounter with Moby-Dick. He begs Ahab to join the search. Instead of being moved, Ahab rejects, and tells him to leave his ship simply because the help to the *Rachel* will delay his quest for Moby-Dick. If we say what the *Rachel* has lost are the two sons of

² Herman Melville. *Moby-Dick*, Wordsworth Editions Limited. 2002. Hereafter, MD.

³ Ousby, Lan. *An Introduction to Fifty American Novels*. Trans. Xiao Anbo and Li jiao. Chengdou: Sichuan People's Publishing House. 1985. P 89.

⁴ See http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/p/paul_tillich_2.html.

the captain, while what Ahab has lost is humanities, for it is natural for a man to help others in need, to express his love or his concern for those who are suffering, but for vengeful Ahab, his nonchalance outweighs his humanity. Never will Ahab relinquish his quest for Moby-Dick.

Where the humanities are absent, the bestiality emerges. In the novel, the author for several times puts Ahab and animals together to indicate the similarities between them. In the novel, we read:

He(Ahab) lived in the world, as the last of the Grisly Bears lived in settled Missouri. And as when Spring and Summer has departed, that wild Logan of the woods, burying himself in the hollow of a tree, lived out the winter there, sucking his own paws; so, in his inclements, howling old age, Ahab's soul, shut up in the caved trunk of his body, there fed upon the sullen paws of its gloom!(MD 126-127)

What readers are impressed here is that Ahab lives in the cabin lonely just as the "Grisly Bears" and the "wild Logan" that have already lost their contact with the human society and live in isolation. Furthermore, there are a lot of descriptions about the likeness between Ahab and the Whales. In Chapter 30, "The Pipe", Ahab smokes to windward all the while, with such nervous sniffs, as if "like a dying whale". In many places of the novel, the depiction of the sameness between Ahab and Moby-Dick is so close that "the two almost becomes one"(Kevin J. Hayes 58). In the late chapters, it is noticeable that the physical features Ahab and Moby-Dick share: Both have deep furrowed brows. The portraits of the furrowed brow of Moby-Dick occur on many occasions, especially in the final chapter, Moby-Dick's knitted forehead appears menacing. The emphasis of the furrowed brow on Ahab's forehead also catches the readers' eyes. In Chapter 113, "The Forge", Ahab asks Perth the blacksmiths to smooth out his forehead, but Perth tells him that a wrinkled brow is the one thing he cannot smooth out. Ahab realizes the reason why his forehead is unsmoothable is that his wrinkled brow though seen in the flesh, actually "has worked down into the bone of my skull- --that is all wrinkles!" (MD 401) when Ahab confronts Moby-Dick, The two wrinkled brow face one and another. The frequency of the resemblance between Ahab and Moby-Dick suggests that Ahab, is liken to a whale. Bestiality, the very common thing Ahab shares with Moby-Dick now comes to the fore. So it can be concluded that what works on Ahab is not the ethical rules and regulations of the human society, but where bestiality comes from: the principle of the survival of the fittest, the law of the jungle.

Actually, the law of the jungle lies dormant in Ahab and he has been driven by it for the whole career of his whaling life. Ahab struck his first whale when he was eighteen, and has been in the whale fishery for forty years. Out of the forty year, he has not spent three ashore. He even left his newly-wedded wife the next day of his marriage to make war on the deep. As Ahab says: "the madness, the frenzy, the boiling blood and the smoking brow, with which, for thousand lowerings old Ahab furiously, foamingly chased his prey.....(MD 443)". Unlike millions of people who are engaged in the whale fishery driven by its profit, Ahab' hunting of whales is not out of economic concern, but for the pleasure of mastering nature. For such a pleasure, Ahab abandons the duty of a father and a husband. Ahab has been on war with whales for forty year and he is the constant winner of the existential competition with whales until one encounter with Moby-Dick:

One captain, seizing the line-knife from his broken prow, had dashed at the whale, as an Arkansas duellist at his foe, blindly seeking with a six-inch blade to reach the fathom-deep life of the whale. That captain was Ahab. And 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.(MD 152.153)

Ahab wants to annihilate Moby-Dick, so does Moby-Dick. The war between Ahab and Moby-Dick is not a war between man and animal, but a fierce fight between animals for survival, which symbolizes the live-or-die principle in the animal world. In this war fought according to the law of the jungle, Ahab has lost one of his legs, and becomes the loser of the existential competition.

Ahab sinks into the revengeful desire after being defeated by Moby-Dick and this desire strengthens his consciousness of the law of the jungle so that whatever he does and says is totally out of animal's intuition and instinct. Ahab has lost the ability to reason and make sound judgment. It is well known that the difference between man and animal lies in the fact that man has reason, and man is capable of reflecting upon his conducts and learning lessons from his or others' experience. But such a difference cannot be seen in Ahab. On the voyage of hunting Moby-Dick, Ahab has enough time to change the course of the *Pequod* and his destiny, but he fails to make the slightest effort. During the hunting journey, the *Pequod* has encountered all together nine whaling ships. Each of them has profound meanings and serves as a warning to Ahab's pursuit. The Captain of the *Samuel Enderby* has lost an arm to Moby-Dick, but he reflects and jests about it to make the best of the bad situation so that he becomes reconciled with nature. *The Delight* has lost five stout men. *The Delight* is the last whaling ship the *Pequod* has encountered, which is also the last, and sternest warning to Ahab. But all the warnings go unheeded by Ahab, for "Ahab never thinks; he only feels, feels, feels(MD 460)". Ahab feels his way just as an animal does. Eventually, Ahab and Moby-Dick, the two with deep furrowed forehead confront one another. A new existential competition begins. Ahab darts the harpoons and strikes the whale. But when Ahab stoops to clear a snarl in the line, it loops round his neck, and snaps him out of the boat in an instant. Ahab is gone and never returns.

Ahab is dead. The tragedy of Ahab lies in the wrong ethical notion he holds. Ahab has a family, but he abandons the family pleasure and betrays the human ethic. What's more, he degenerates himself into an animal. Instead of thinking with reason, Ahab is reasonless and deals with the clash between Moby-Dick and him in way of the law of the jungle as an animal does. But man is different from animals. Man has reason, while animals have not. The law of the jungle cannot be applied to solve the conflict between man and animal. The mingling of the two sets of totally different principles throws Ahab into ethical confusion with which Ahab cannot soothe his animosity against Moby-Dick, which finally leads to his tragedy. So it can be concluded that the real cause of Ahab's tragedy is the law of the jungle that runs through his blood and the fact that he abandons the ethic of the human society and accepts the ethic of the animal world.⁵

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Different from Captain Ahab's monomania, the first mate Starbuck is rather sane and sensible. Psychoanalytic critic Henry Murray argues that Starbuck symbolizes a balanced and sensible reason, and he tries to mediate between Ahab and Starbuck.⁶ Murray's interpretation is very revealing and instructive to the understanding of the novel, but a puzzle remains there : if Ahab's destiny is

⁵ About the ethical of the animal world, see Professor Nie Zhenzhao, "The Old Man and the Sea and the Law of the Jungle", *Foreign Literature Review*. 2009(3),pp

⁶ See Henry A.Murray, 'In Nomine Diaboli', *The New England Quarterly*.24.4. (Dec. 1951): 435-452

inevitable, why cannot the sane and sensible Starbuck escape his misfortune? What message does Melville want to deliver by the characterization of Starbuck?

What Starbuck impresses the readers when he makes his debut is that he is a man of reason. His reason lies in the fact that he knows how to balance interests and risks. As a native of Nantucket, Starbuck is extremely brave, but he is well aware of the dangers in the whale fishery, so he is not in the least foolhardy. When in a whale boat, Starbuck knows clearly that "I am here in this critical ocean to kill whales for my living, and not to be killed by them for theirs." This sentence best explains Starbuck's ethic: economic concern prevails anything else. This kind of ethical thought is the core of economic ethic. Starbuck's being out on sea is simply for economic concern. But in Ahab's eyes, there is no interest worth his considering, no risk deserving avoidance, but his vengeance over Moby-Dick comes before everything else. Starbuck's ethical notion goes against that of Ahab. The discrepancy of the two ethical notions shows itself again in chapter 109 where Ahab's obsession with Moby-Dick is set in sharp contrast with Starbuck's devotion to duty, to economic concern. When the *Pequod* is drawing near the Japanese seas where Moby-Dick frequently haunts, Starbuck finds that a serious leak has occurred somewhere, so he reports to Ahab and asks a stop to inspect the leak: "or waste in one day more oil than we may make good in a year. What we come twenty thousand miles to get is worth saving, sir"(MD390). Ahab is excited with the thought of Moby-Dick and rejects Starbuck's request. Starbuck pleads with Ahab to consider the owners' interest which is always Starbuck's prior concern, but what Ahab takes into consideration is the pursuit of Moby-Dick without any delay.

As a man of reason, Starbuck can interpret the man-nature relation from the economic perspective. In Starbuck's eyes, the sperm whale is nothing but a commodity while Ahab sees Moby-Dick as his sworn enemy. When Ahab tries to charge the crew with the fierce energy to search a white whale, Starbuck disputes Ahab's desire for revenge: "Vengeance on a dumb brute! that simply smote thee from blindest instinct! Madness! To be enraged with a dumb thing, Captain Ahab, seems blasphemous.(136)" Starbuck also protests against Ahab's selfishness: "But I came here to hunt whales, not my commander's vengeance. how many barrels will thy vengeance yield thee even if thou gettest it, captain Ahab? It will not fetch thee much in our Nantucket market.(135)"

The whale Ahab wants fanatically to chase is tremendously impressive. He is much larger than most sperm whales and with snow-white forehead, a high white hump on his back, and a deformed, scythe-like lower jaw. Moby-Dick is furiously destructive. He has killed many of his assailants, so that actually few whalers have chased him, and those who have met him want to avoid him. Starbuck, of course knows what the pursuit of Moby-Dick means. Meanwhile, the pursuit of Moby-Dick goes against Starbuck's economic ethical principle. Whatever Starbuck does is for economic purpose. Compared with other sperm whales, Moby-Dick cannot "yield" more barrels of oil or "fetch" more, that is to say, Moby-Dick cannot bring in more money, so it is unworthy of risking the interest of the owners and the crew of the *Pequod* for such a whale. From this point it can be said that Starbuck takes a more rational and sensible attitude towards Moby-Dick than Ahab. But Starbuck's reason and sensibility is based on anthropocentrism, for in his eyes, Moby-Dick is not any more than a brute beast. What Starbuck emphasizes in his dispute with Ahab is the white whale's economic value. Just as Leopard states that land, like Odysseus slave-girl, is still property. The land-man relation is still strictly economic, entailing privileges but not obligation(Aldo Leopold 253). Although Leopard stresses the value of the land in man's eyes, what he says can also be applied to the sea. In Starbuck's eyes, the sea is also property, for it offers the free resources which

bring man wealth. The existence of nature only lies in its economic value, lies in the wealth it brings to man. Starbuck deals with the relation between man and nature from the anthropocentric stance, so what works on him in his whaling life is the nature-for-man economic ethic.

If Starbuck is the individual, the representative of anthropocentric economic ethic, the *Pequod* is the collectivization of such an ethic, or the materialization of such a group. What she represents is a society. In this sense, it can be said that the *Pequod* is the materialized Starbuck. As the key industry of the richest city---New Bedford, the whale fishery has the greatest attraction to people all over the world, even the green Vermonters and New Hampshire men are athirst for gain and glory in the fishery. People in the coastal areas all invest their money in the whaling vessels. Take the *Pequod* for example, Peleg and Dildad are the largest owners of the vessel; the other shares, being held by a crowd of old annuitants, widows, fatherless children, and chancery wards, each owns about the value of a timber head, or a foot of plank, or a nail or two in the ship. In addition, it is customary that in whaling business, there is no wage. All hands including the captain, receive certain shares of the profits called *lays*, and these *lays* are proportioned to the degree of importance to the respective duties of the ship's company. For ample *lays*, harpooners must work diligently to increase their profits. Their diligent work is to wage more wars on whales. Of course, their diligence involves human's cruelty towards the sperm whales, to be specific. On the *Pequod*, the first mate Starbuck is the most careful and prudent, but he can go plump on a flying whale with the sail set in a foggy squall; for the second mate Stubb, battling whales is an enjoyment: "when close to the whale, in the very death-lock of the fight, he handles his unpyting lance coolly and off-handedly, as a whistling tinker his hammer.(98)" To the third mate Flask, the wondrous whale is but a species of magnified mouse, or at least water-rat, requiring only a little circumvention and some small application of time and trouble in order to kill and boil. Not to mention how many whales Captain Ahab has killed, whose lance is the surest and keenest in Nantucket. Besides describing the cruelty of the crew members on the *Pequod*, the author also records many brutal hunting scenes in the novel: "Darted dart after dart into the flying fish; the red tide now poured from all sides of the monster like brooks down a hill. His tormented body rolled not in brine but in blood, which bubbled and seethed for furlongs behind in their wake." (MD 239) For the wealth brought by whale oil, not less than 13,000 whales have been annually slain on the north-west coast by the Americans.

It can be said from the above-cited examples that the whalemens have totally lost their reason when battling whales. But their reasonless behavior is different from that of Ahab. Ahab is reasonless because he seldom considers others' interest and what he represents is the degradation of man into animal, which is unacceptable by the human society. Starbuck's protest demonstrates it to the point. However, the motive of the whalemens' hunting is for economic concern, what they embody is the nature-for-man ethical thought. From sociological perspective, their behavior is proper and worthy of praise, for it is driven to make fortune for the society. The fact that the whale fishery brings in a well reaped harvest of \$7,000,000 annually to American society and becomes the leading industry in America justifies the harpooners' brutal activities imposed on whales.

"Certain behavior is proper in certain situation, improper in another".⁷ While the anthropocentric activities of the harpooners bring in huge profit to human society, they have done a lot of damage to the existential environment of the sea animals, and also deprives the living right of the sea lives, especially the sperm whale. What the bloody conducts convey is the exploitation and contempt of

⁷ See Joseph Fletcher, *Situation Ethics: The New Morality* Trans. Cheng Lixian. Beijing, China Social Science Press.1994. 108.

humans upon the animal world. As ecological historian Tim Flannery puts it, “humans made the savage beast”, he argues that human hunting of animals created a wariness and antagonism on the part of certain species towards humans that they would not always have shown.⁸ The whale is one of the species. But what Tim Flannery fails to note is that the savagery of the animal is the revenge from animals upon human beings. In the novel, there are enough proofs to testify that the whale is made savage due to human activities. Simultaneously, they become savage out of revenge for what human has done to them. The knowing, and judiciously malicious sperm whale can utterly destroy, and sink a large ship; the once struck sperm whale, if allowed time to rally, he then acts, not so often with blind rage, as with willful, deliberate designs of destruction to his pursuers.

Moby-Dick is one of the sperm whales. He has done even farther. Any pursuit of Moby-Dick incurs such calamities – not restricted to sprained wrists and ankles, broken limbs, or devouring amputations. Ahab has lost one of his legs to Moby-Dick; the chief mate of the *Town-Ho*, Radney, when chasing Moby-Dick, is seized and mangled by the furious whale; the first mate of the *Jeroboam* is smashed out of the bow of a whaleboat by Moby-Dick’s tail and dead; the captain of The *Samuel Enderby* has lost one arm to Moby-Dick; the captain of the *Rachel* has lost two sons; the *Delight* has lost five whalemens, etc.

At the close of the novel, Melville describes the charge of Moby-Dick made upon the *Pequod* metaphorically:

Hearing the tremendous rush of the sea-crashing boat, the whale wheeled round to present his blank forehead at bay; but in that evolution, catching sight of all his persecutions; bethinking it – it may be – a larger and nobler foe; of a sudden, he bore down upon its advancing prow, smiting his jaws amid fiery showers of foam. (MD 466)

Moby-Dick’s attack upon the *Pequod* carries serious implications. He seems to know that Ahab is the only one with an unburdened hatred against him, while Starbuck is one of the millions who see him or his species as a commodity. Moby-Dick’s charge of the ship is the vengeance he takes upon humans and also a challenge of the economic ethical thought with which human destroys nature ruthlessly. Melville is clearly aware that with such an ethical thought, human’s destruction and exploitation of nature will be ceaseless. With his keen eyes, Melville perceives the hidden flaws of the anthropocentric economic ethical thought. The tragedy of the sensible Starbuck and the sinking of the *Pequod* proclaim unmistakably Melville’s “spiritual desolation”(Ronald Mason 157).. Meanwhile, Starbuck’s tragedy reveals what Melville conveys by the characterization of him: if human cannot fully realize the fact that man is not the scale of everything; if he cannot change his value judgment from the mastery and exploitation of nature to the peaceful coexistence with nature, what awaits man is the mutual ruin like the destiny of both the *Pequod* and Moby-Dick.

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Different from Starbuck’s economic concern and Ahab’s vengeful monomania, Ishmael goes to sea out of the following two considerations: for one thing, going out to sea is Ishmael’s way to forget the difficulties of life ashore; for another, the attraction of the white whale is so great that he is eager to see “such a portentous and mysterious monster. Then the wild and distant seas where he rolled his

⁸ Tim Flannery, *The Future Eaters: An Ecological History of the Australasian Lands and People* Chatswood, New South Wales: Reed. 1994. 188.

island bulk; the undeliverable, nameless perils of the whale” (MD 7). If vengeance is Ahab’s concern, profit is Starbuck’s pursuit, what Ishmael has towards Moby-Dick is nothing but curiosity. Since Ishmael has no judgment of his own about Moby-Dick at the very beginning of the voyage, readers may be worried about Ishmael’s leanings towards the white whale: Can he be influenced by Ahab? Or by Starbuck? Or both? The ensuing happenings confirms readers’ puzzle. With the gifts of superb leader and propagandist, Ahab delivers a splendid speech which prompts the crew to join his search for Moby-Dick. Ishmael is swayed somehow. He, together with other crew members, regards Ahab’s quenchless feud as his, has taken the oaths of violence and revenge against Moby-Dick. Meanwhile, Ishmael also absorbs Starbuck’s economic idea about the whale when he joins the hunting of a sick whale, “for all his old age, and his one arm, and his blind eyes, He must die the death and be murdered, in order to light the gay bridals and other merry-makings of men, and also to illuminate the solemn churches that preach unconditional inoffensiveness by all to all” (MD 297) .

However, the influence from Ahab and Starbuck does not last long. Ishmael is both a common sailor and a reflective loner. Ahab’s hatred and Starbuck’s contempt towards Moby-Dick are not enough to satisfy his curiosity about this white whale. With the ongoing of the *Pequod*, when Ahab is obsessed with his vengeance, when Starbuck is overwhelmed with the gain and glory of whaling, Ishmael plunges himself into a quest of his own. He devotes himself to the study of the whales, especially, to the study of Moby-Dick. Different from the one-sided opinion developed by both Ahab and Starbuck, Ishmael is clear-minded and open-minded. His reflections accumulate and eventually generate a totally new understanding about the whales. This new idea not only disabuses Ishmael of the hatred he bears against the white whale because of Ahab, but also removes completely the influence from Starbuck. It is neither exploitation nor vengeance. Ishmael anthropomorphizes the whale towards whom he cherishes a feeling of sympathy and reverence.

Ishmael observes that there are a lot of similarities between whales, the sea-dwellers and human, the land-dwellers, so what the readers see the whales in the ocean are not the wonders of the sea animals, but the familiar scenes in the human society. The whale that lazily undulates in the trough of the sea and now and then tranquilly spouts his vapory jet “looked like a portly burgher smoking his pipe of a warm afternoon” (MD 236) . The old whale, just like the aging people in human society is “venerable” (MD 292) . In addition, the whales share with human beings the same weakness: both are subject to panic. The scared whales when being chased by the harpooners, completely paralyzed, helplessly floated like waterlogged dismantled ships on the sea, just as all human beings, “when herded together in the sheepfold of a theatre’s pit, they will, at the slightest alarm of fire, rush helter-skelter for the outlets, crowding, trampling, jamming, and remorselessly dashing each other to death” (MD318) . In the chapter *Schools and Schoolmasters*, the descriptions of the whales’ life are so similar to those of human beings, which remind readers that the whales are not sea animals but human beings. There are two schools of herd of sperm whales: those composed almost entirely of females, and those mustering none but young and vigorous males. The male in cavalier attendance upon the school of females is regarded as a “gentleman” who is “a luxurious Ottoman” while the females in this school are his “concubines” (MD324) .the young males in the schools of forty-barrel-bulls are “like a mob of young collegians, they are full of fight, fun and wickedness, tumbling round the world at such a reckless, rollicking rate, that no prudent underwriter would insure them any more than he would a riotous lad at Yale or Harvard” (MD326) .

Ishmael not only equates the whales with human beings, but also holds them high. In his eyes, the sperm whale is “both ponderous and profound” (MD 309) . from the heads of all ponderous

profound beings, such as Plato, Pyrrho, Dante can be compared with them. Meanwhile, Ishmael finds that the whales possess certain properties which man has not. Like man, the whale has lung and warm blood. Freeze his blood, and he dies. With the cozy blanketing of his body, "the whale is enabled to keep himself comfortable in all weathers, in all seas, times, and tides"(MD256) . Even in those Arctic waters, they are found at home, immersed to his lips for life, whereas man will be frozen. Ishmael is in such an admiration for whale that he cannot help acclaiming that he sees "the rare virtue of a strong individual vitality, and the rare virtue of thick walls, and the rare virtue of interior spaciousness. Oh, man! Admire and model thyself after the whale! "(MD 256) Ishmael's veneration reaches a new height when he sees the first close-up of Moby-Dick:

A gentle joyousness – a mighty mildness of repose in swiftness, invested the gliding whale. Not the white bull Jupiter swimming away with ravished Europa clinging to his graceful horns; his lovely, leering eyes sideways intent upon the maid; with smooth bewitching fleetness, rippling straight for the nuptial bower in Crete; not Jove, not that great majesty Supreme! Did surpass the glorified white whale as he so divinely swam. (MD 447)

Moby-Dick is unveiled now. He is neither the "malice of the universe" as Ahab sees it nor "the dumb brute" as Starbuck addresses. He is divine in Ishmael's eyes. Ishmael's reverence for Moby-Dick comes to full play with the detailed description of the way the white whale swam. On one hand, the description is full of anthropomorphic vocabularies; on the other hand, the comparison between Moby-Dick and the gods such as Jupiter, Europa further reinforces Ishmael's deification of Moby-Dick. Both are suggestive of the dignity and sublimity inherent in Moby-Dick.

In this way, Ishmael extends the human ethic to the whales. Besides their economic value, the whales, like human being, should enjoy their right of existence. Just as Schweitzer put, "animals, as we human being, want happiness, endure suffering and fear death"(Albert Schweitzer 89). The acknowledgement of the existential right of the whale makes Ishmael aware that the hunting of the whales equals the murdering of human beings. The bloodthirsty scenes Ishmael observes on the *Pequod* show his deep compassion for the whale. When the whale is struck by darts, "his tormented body rolled not in brine but in blood, which bubbled and seethed for furlongs behind in their wake .(239)" "the utmost monster of the seas was writing and wrenching in agony!(296)"

"from the points which the whale's eyes had once occupied, now protruded blind bulbs, horribly pitiable to see" (297). when Flask pricks the sick whales' wound, the whale rolls in his blood with "more than sufferable anguish"(297). The cutting-spade struck a whale , "he is tormented to madness"(323). "tormented" , "horribly pitiable" , " more than sufferable anguish" , "tormented to madness, " etc, the use of such words with strong human feelings indicates Ishmael's deep sympathy for the whale and his extension of ethical concern over them.

Being a lowly common sailor on the *Pequod*, Ishmael cannot change its course and destiny, but as a reflective loner, he remains clear-minded, positively reflects on what he sees and knows, and maintains his distances from the crew and Ahab. As James McIntosh put, "He (Ishmael) even grows wiser in the course" (James McIntosh 49) . Being wiser helps Ishmael get rid of the prejudice against the whale influenced by Ahab and Starbuck. Ishmael extends his ethical concern from man to the whale. Thus he develops a new ethic towards the whale during the course of the *Pequod*. He uplifts the value of the whale from the depth of contempt to the peak of sympathy, which contributes to the understanding of the only survival of Ishmael after the sinking of the *Pequod*. The final scene

is a harmonious picture between man and nature and also a case in point to demonstrate what Ishmael's ethical extension can achieve. The sharks 'glided by as if with padlocks on their mouths'; the savage sea-hawks sailed 'with sheathed beaks'; (Epilogue) Ishmael's boat floats until he is rescued by the '*Rachel*'. James McIntosh interprets that Ishmael survives at the end through friendship and natural magic (James McIntosh 50). But I agree that Ishmael is saved by love, the love from Queequeg and the love he extends to the animals. Ishmael's survival is not out of the natural magic, but the consequence of harmonious relation between man and nature which Ishmael has developed during the course of the *Pequod* and what's more he benefits.

Ahab and Starbuck die. The *Pequod* sinks. It is Ishmael, however, who survives to tell the tale, and it through him that Melville articulates his most dearly held values (David Herd xix). Based on his observation that there are a lot of affinities between the whale and human being, Ishmael conjoins man and nature, which helps redeem him from Ahab's monomania and Starbuck's utilitarianism, and form his own judgment about the whale: he extends the love or ethical concern between the human being to the whale. The extension of Ishmael's ethical concern epitomizes the blueprint of the man-nature relation. The moral of *Moby-Dick*, so far as man-nature relation is concerned, is that what attitude human being takes towards nature should not be that of Ahab's mastery and Starbuck's exploitation, but Ishmael's extension of ethical concern on which the harmony between man and nature is formed; the harmony between man and nature is the ultimate salvation of the fate of human being. However, Melville is clearly aware that in the time of optimism, his worries and melancholy go unheeded by his contemporaries. No wonder when he is rescued by the *Rachel*, he realizes that he becomes an "orphan".

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