# UNIVERZITA KARLOVA V PRAZE – FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA

ÚSTAV ANGLOFONNÍCH LITERATUR A KULTUR

## Interpreting Narrative Techniques in *Moby-Dick*

## Interpretace narativních technik v *Bílé velrybě*

## BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

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Praha, červen 2015

Studijní obor (subject):
Anglistika-amerikanistika

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**Abstrakt**

Cílem této práce je zmapovat narativní strategie použité v *Bílé velrybě*. Z hlediska různých teorií vyprávění práce zkoumá a charakterizuje především vypravěčovu spolehlivost (Wayne C. Booth) a narativní situaci (Franz K. Stanzel). Izmael je považován za prototypického nespolehlivého vypravěče. Práce hodnotí projevy jeho nespolehlivosti. Zvláštní pozornost je věnovaná nedůslednostem ve vyprávění (Izmael opakovaně mizí z vyprávění, některé původně výrazné postavy postupně ustupují do ústraní, jiné mizí úplně). V otázce přístupu k nim jsou brána v potaz stanoviska odborníků. Zmíněné jevy autor práce chápe jako projev záměrně a vědomě zapojené do vyprávění, nikoli jako důsledek unáhleného průběhu tvorby. Vedle formálních nedůsledností, vyprávění v *Bílé velrybě* obsahuje nepravidelnosti tematického charakteru (např. pochybný žebříček hodnot podle Rimmon-Kenanové). Za použití Stanzelovy narativní teorie práce sleduje Izmaelovu oscilaci mezi „vypravěčem" a „reflektorem." S využitím obou koncepcí práce hodnotí *Bílou velrybu* ze dvou odlišných perspektiv a pokouší se osvětlit složitou vyprávěcí strategii románu. Práce zkoumá zapojení různých narativních technik, jejich možné důsledky na interpretaci Izmaele a dopad jeho svébytného vyprávění na strukturu a podobu *Bílé velryby* (tj. román s prvky dramatickými a esejistickými). Text *Bílé velryby* je chápán jako nasměrovaný na čtenáře a různorodé narativní techniky jsou tedy vyloženy jako prostředek, který čtenáři zaručuje širší možnosti a pole působnosti při interpretaci.

Po úvodu do problematiky práce hodnotí Izmaele z hlediska Boothovy teorie. Druhá kapitola se zaměřuje zejména na definici a zhodnocení výše zmíněných nepravidelností ve vyprávění. Vychází z předpokladu, že jejich primární funkcí je zdůraznění vypravěčovy nespolehlivosti. Odliší a projedná formální a tematické projevy Izmaelovy nespolehlivosti. Tato kapitola se také zabývá měnícím se postavením

Queequega a Bulkingtona, a interpretací alegorických jmen v rámci vyprávění. Třetí kapitola zkoumá narativní situaci z hlediska Stanzelovy teorie. Tato část pojednává o Izmaelově vývoji od postavy vypravěče k postavě reflektora a následné oscilaci mezi těmito póly. Zvláštní pozornost je věnována dramatickým kapitolám románu. Předposlední kapitola se zaměřuje na interpretaci vypravěčské situace, k čemuž využívá poznatky ze dvou předcházejících oddílů. Izmaelovy sklony k podrývání různých podob autorit jsou analyzovány v kontextu encyklopedického románu. Následuje interpretace vzájemného působení tematických a formálních aspektů *Bílé velryby*, která obsahuje Melvillův přístup k „mental theatre.“

Klíčová slova: Herman Melville, *Bílá velryba*, narativní techniky, interpretace, nespolehlivý vypravěč, vypravěč, reflektor, encyklopedický román.

**Thesis Abstract**

The objective of this thesis is to map the narrative strategies of Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*. By applying different narrative theories to *Moby-Dick*, it explores and assesses mainly the narrative reliability (Wayne C. Booth) and the narrative situation (Franz K. Stanzel). Ishmael is generally considered to be an example of an unreliable narrator and in this thesis manifestations of his unreliability are evaluated. Special attention is devoted to the inconsistencies in the narrative (e.g. recurring disappearances of Ishmael, shifts in focus on some of the characters, complete disappearances of other characters) and their treatment, taking the general academic consensus into account. Such phenomena are discussed as deliberately and consciously incorporated into the narrative, rather than being a result of a precipitated writing process. Apart from the formal inconsistencies, the narrative also includes incongruities of thematic nature (e.g. questionable value-scheme according to Rimmon-Kenan). By employing Stanzel's narrative theory, the thesis discusses Ishmael's oscillation between "narrator" and "reflector," with special focus on the dramatic chapters. Using both of these conceptions, *Moby-Dick* is assessed from two different perspectives, hopefully shedding some light on the complex narrative strategy of the novel. The thesis discusses the implications of the employment of various narrative techniques for the interpretation of Ishmael and the effect of his idiosyncratic narrative on the structure and nature of *Moby-Dick* (novel with elements of drama and essay). *Moby-Dick* is viewed as being oriented towards the reader and the various narrative techniques are treated as means of granting the reader greater authority and freedom in his or her interpretation of the book.

After the introduction, Ishmael is evaluated from Booth's point of view, with special focus on the definition and evaluation of the aforementioned incongruities in the

narrative; the initial hypothesis being that their primary function is to affirm the narrator's unreliability. Formal and thematic manifestations of Ishmael's unreliability are distinguished and discussed. The second chapter also deals with the changing status of Queequeg and Bulkington, and with the interpretation of the allegorical names in the context of the narrative. The third chapter examines the narrative situation using Stanzel's narrative theory: the chapter deals with Ishmael's development from the narrator to the reflector and the subsequent oscillation between the two opposing poles. Special attention is devoted to the dramatic chapters. The penultimate chapter zeros in on the interpretation of the narrative situation, making use of the observations gained in the previous discussion. Ishmael's subversive tendencies are analyzed in the context of the encyclopedic novel. Following is the interpretation of the interplay between the thematic and the formal aspects of *Moby-Dick,* including the discussion of Melville's employment of the mental theatre.

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## 1. Introduction

Since the Melvillean revival of the 1920s *Moby-Dick* has not left the Anglophone literary spotlight. For nearly a century now, critics have plunged into the book's unfathomable depths and produced a plenitude of criticism. The question of genre has been particularly contentious: Charles Olson, for instance, asserts that *Moby-Dick* "has the rise and fall like the movement of an Elizabethan tragedy."[1] Other critics assume a more ambivalent viewpoint and conceive of *Moby-Dick* as a conflation of various genres, such as Harold Bloom who describes it as "a giant Shakespearean prose poem."[2] The employment of the diverse genres bears vital implications for the process of interpretation: it reflects Ishmael's endeavor to capture reality in all its multifariousness, and the individual genres consequently imply respective narrative situations.

Surprisingly little academic attention has been dedicated to the analysis of the narrative structures of *Moby-Dick,* let alone to the interpretation of Ishmael's oscillation among different narrative techniques, roles, voices and discourses. Carolyn Porter provides the most elaborate interpretation of Ishmael as the narrator and of his rhetoric in particular; according to her, Ishmael is a "narrative voice."[3] John Bryant agrees on the matter and describes Ishmael as the narrative voice as well.[4] Rather than approaching Ishmael as a character in the traditional sense, this thesis shares the viewpoint with Porter and Bryant and discusses Ishmael as a narrative voice. The

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[1] Charles Olson, *Call Me Ishmael* (New York: Grove Press, 1947) 66.

[2] Harold Bloom, "Harold Bloom's *Moby-Dick*," *radioopensource.org.* October 2011. <http://radioopensource.org/harold-blooms-melville/> 9 September 2014.

[3] Carolyn Porter, "Call Me Ishmael, or How to Make Double-Talk Speak," *New Essays on Moby-Dick*, ed. Richard H. Brodhead (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 79.

[4] John Bryant, "*Moby-Dick* as Revolution," *The Cambridge Companion to Herman Melville*, ed. Robert S. Levine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 67. Apart from the narrative voice, Bryant also conceives of Ishmael as a creative consciousness (Bryant, 67). Potential shortcomings of such assessment are discussed in Chapter Four.

objective is to attempt a detailed analysis of the narrative strategies of *Moby-Dick* with particular focus on the inconsistencies within the narrative (Ishmael's disappearances, alternations between the teller and the reflector modes). Special emphasis is placed on the interpretation of the phenomena in question.

The initial hypothesis is that the inconsistencies in the narrative situation are not a result of a precipitated writing process: a close reading reveals well-knit interplay between the formal and thematic aspects of the novel. The incongruities in the narrative situation will therefore be interpreted as deliberately and consciously incorporated in the narrative. Ishmael's identity is in constant flux and transition, which is caused by the fact that he attempts to record the reality of whaling and the whale in their full scope; in order to achieve those ends, various narrative techniques have to be employed. This observation reflects the fragmentary nature of *Moby-Dick*, which is in line with Schlegel's concept of the fragment as an autonomous work of art, whose unity is not a totality "but rather […] a "chaotic universality" of infinite opposing stances."[5] Apart from the aforementioned possible motivations, *Moby-Dick* contains attempts to stage the unconscious and the subconscious. Logically, the narrative strategy has to follow and be altered as well.

The structure of the thesis corresponds to the methodology employed. Chapter Two will submit *Moby-Dick* to Wayne C. Booth's seminal concepts of unreliable and self-conscious narrators. Apart from Booth, the chapter will also confront *Moby-Dick* with the narrative theories of Gérard Genette, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, and with Carolyn Porter's "Call Me Ishmael, or How to Make Double-Talk Speak." Ishmael's narrative unreliability will be discussed in relation to Rimmon-Kenan's distinction

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[5] Allen Speight, "Friedrich Schlegel," *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (The Metaphysics Research Lab, Center for the Study of Language and Information, Stanford University, 2 November 2011) <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/schlegel> 30 April 2015.

between various kinds of unreliability; it will be asserted that Ishmael's unreliability does not take on the form of merely reporting events he could not have witnessed, but also manifests itself by his interaction with society. The chapter will also provide readings of the shifts in focus on Queequeg, of Bulkington's disappearance and of the biblical names. The second chapter will approach the narrative situation from Franz Stanzel's perspective. Special attention will be devoted to the narrator-reflector dichotomy, to Ishmael's development from one of the poles to another and the oscillation between them (i.e. the alternations between the modes of showing and telling).

Classification of the narrative situation will be used to facilitate orientation within *Moby-Dick* rather than being the aim of the thesis itself. Having attempted to categorize the narrative situations in the two preceding chapters, Chapter Four will investigate the implications of the various narrative techniques for possible interpretations of *Moby-Dick*. The interpretation of the phenomena connected with the varying narrative situations is conceived of as the fundamental part of the whole thesis. It will be propounded that the novel resists classification and narratological analysis, as the reader is confronted with a series of fragments rather than with a traditional narrative situation—"chaotic universality" is favored over "a totality" and the narrative situation therefore cannot be grasped, like the hedgehog of Schlegel's metaphor.[6] The following subchapters will present interpretations of those fragments: firstly, a reading of Ishmael's subversive tendencies in the context of the encyclopedic novel will be provided and secondly, interactions between the thematic and the formal features of *Moby-Dick* will be interpreted with special focus on the shifts in the narrative modes

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[6] Allen Speight, "Friedrich Schlegel," *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (The Metaphysics Research Lab, Center for the Study of Language and Information, Stanford University, 2 November 2011) <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/schlegel> 30 April 2015.

(telling and showing). The chapter will conclude with a discussion of Melville's attempt to capture the unconscious and the subconscious states of the human psyche and his engagement with the mental theatre.

## 2. Chapter Two

### 2.1. Ishmael's Unreliability

The author of the concept, Wayne C. Booth, defines the (un)reliability as follows: a narrator is reliable when he "speaks or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author's), unreliable when he does not."[1] The notion of the narrator's reliability, or the lack thereof, is not taken as an absolute, as Booth contends it is a matter of degree rather than of kind.[2] Consequently, the narrator's reliability and its degree serve to facilitate the reader's orientation within the narrative and to discriminate between patently unreliable (e.g. Holden Caulfield in J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*) and fairly trustworthy narrators (e.g. Nick Carraway in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*). Ishmael falls into the former category, i.e. he is an unreliable narrator. In *Moby-Dick* violations of the narrator's reliability appear as early as in the very opening of the narrative proper ("Loomings")[3]: Carolyn Porter asserts that in the opening paragraph Ishmael "establishes in embryo a pattern to be repeated and developed in the chapter as a whole, where boundaries are invoked in order to be crossed and finally blurred."[4] Porter contends that Ishmael shifts "from eccentricity to normality"—his desire to "sail the seas" is "representative rather than exceptional"[5] and he therefore transforms from an outcast to the mouthpiece of "all men."[6] As will be shown, the process of constant change is symptomatic of Ishmael. His

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[1] Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago University Press: Chicago, 1966) 158 – 159.
[2] Booth 165.
[3] That is, after the two paratexts, "Etymologies" and "Extracts."
[4] Carolyn Porter, "Call Me Ishmael, or How to Make Double-Talk Speak," *New Essays on Moby-Dick*, ed. Richard H. Brodhead (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 73.
[5] Porter 74.
[6] Porter 73.

first transgression, that between "the land and the sea,"[7] is of a thematic nature, although *Moby-Dick* contains violations of formal character as well.

Formally, Ishmael violates the boundaries of the first person narrator in the episodes which include detailed descriptions of the scenes he could not have witnessed and which lack manifestations of his narrative persona. "The Specksynder" concludes with Ishmael elaborating on the ongoing royal conceit: "I must not conceal that I have only to do with a poor old whale-hunter like [Ahab]" and, consequently, "all outward majestical trappings and housing are denied me."[8] The following chapter includes the first disappearance of the narrative persona. The chapter does not contain a single grammatical reference to Ishmael and he does not manifest himself physically (given the strict nautical hierarchy, Ishmael could not have witnessed the scene), and yet it includes the ongoing royal conceit (the mates as the Emirs). Despite Ishmael's ostentatious absence, painstaking description of the dinner scene in the cabin is provided: "Over his ivory-inlaid table, Ahab presided like a mute, maned sea-lion on the white coral beach" (128). The violation of the first person boundary is even more appreciable in the following declaration: "It was a sight to see Queequeg seated over against Tashtego, opposing his filed teeth to the Indian's" (130). The following chapter, "The Mast-Head" provides stark contrast to Ishmael's absence in "The Cabin-Table," as it opens with the narrator's reference to himself: "It was during the more pleasant weather, that in due rotation with the other seamen my first mast-head came round" (131). The sudden shift from the narrator's absence to the vehement reference to his own persona in the two adjacent chapters corroborates to the deliberate unreliability.

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[7] Porter 73.
[8] Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*, ed. Hershel Parker and Harrison Hayford (New York: Norton, 2002) 127. All future page references will be to this edition and will be included in parentheses in the text.

Ishmael's unreliability is not manifested merely formally, i.e. by breaking the precepts of the first person narration. Carolyn Porter asserts that Ishmael "has usually been regarded by modern readers as genial, tolerant, open-minded – in short, as a comic and sane counterweight to the mad Ahab."[9] His moral outlook appears to be immaculate, as shown in his and Melville's prophetic approach towards the equality between ethnicities. However, the situation would have differed in the mid-19th century: Ishmael sides with renegades and outcasts of society, which would arguably have been deemed questionable, improper and perhaps even immoral in Melville's day. In this respect, he exhibits the third kind of unreliability according to Rimmon-Kenan, i.e. "the colouring of the narrator's account by a questionable value-scheme."[10]

Ishmael subverts the traditional hierarchy by celebrating a common sailor, a Nantucketer; he extols the whalemen for their merit rather than their ancestry. Although this phenomenon is one of the underlying themes of *Moby-Dick*, it will be discussed in relation to chapters 24 – 27, which address the topic overtly. In "The Advocate," Ishmael creates the humorous and incongruent image of a harpooneer entering "into any miscellaneous metropolitan society," who "in emulation of the naval officers […] append[s] the initials S. W. F. […] to his visiting card" (97). The "emulation" is explicated by Parker and Hayford's footnote: "the initials on the officers' calling cards would have been U.S.N." (97). Parker and Hayford go on to argue that Ishmael assumes the position of a lawyer in defense of the whalers, using legal rhetoric (97), which exemplifies the interaction between the thematic and the formal features in *Moby-Dick*. In "Knights and Squires," Ishmael informs the reader that "[t]he august dignity [he] treat[s] of is not the dignity of kings and robes, but that abounding dignity which has no robed investiture" (103) and explicates the negative assessment of whalers by the

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[9] Porter 94.

[10] Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London: Routledge, 2001) 101.

society in "The Advocate": "[d]oubtless one leading reason why the world declines honouring us whalemen, is this: they think that, at best, our vocation amounts to a butchering sort of business" (98). The defense of the nobility of whaler's profession proceeds, as Ishmael questions the division between the classes; first, he concedes to the unvoiced, but implied accusation: "[b]utchers we are, that is so" (98) only to blur the boundaries between different social strata by placing their profession in perspective: "butchers of the bloodiest badge have been all Martial Commanders whom the world invariably delights to honour" (98).

The nobility of the whaler's vocation is extolled even more explicitly in the highly subversive chapter, "Knights and Squires," in which the narrator bestows knighthood on the three mates. The three harpooneers are invested with the rank of the squire, traditionally associated with the feudal system (the narrator relies on the extratextual correspondence between the harpoon and the squire's spear). Hayford and Harrison contend that the refusal and mockery of the traditional hierarchy earned Melville harsh criticism in the contemporary reviews and even resulted in the exclusion of "Postscript" in the British edition of *Moby-Dick* (101). The reader is presented with the image of "[a]n Anacharsis Clootz deputation from all the isles of the sea, and all the ends of the earth" (107), making use of the same metaphor as in The Confidence-Man to describe the variety of the passengers of the *Fidèle*: "a piebald parliament, an Anacharsis Cloots congress of all kinds of that multiform pilgrim species, man."[11] According to *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Anacharsis Cloots was a radical democrat during the French Revolution, who "[a]s head of a delegation of 36 foreigners (his self-proclaimed "embassy of the human race"), […] addressed the revolutionary National Assembly on June 17, 1791" and declared "that the whole world adhered to the

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[11] Herman Melville, *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade*, ed. Hershel Parker (New York: Norton, 1971) 6.

democratic ideals of the Revolution."[12] The metaphor therefore serves to show that instead of the artificial hierarchy, the narrator favors the "democratic dignity, which on all hands, radiates without end from God" (103).

Equally suspicious and subversive is Ishmael's approach to religion. In "A Bosom Friend," Ishmael declares that he "was a good Christian; born and bred in the bosom of the infallible Presbyterian Church" (57). For Ishmael, to worship is to share his faith with Queequeg's, which appears to be an innocuous act in the former's view, as he cannot imagine "the magnanimous God of heaven and earth" being "jealous of an insignificant bit of black wood" (57). If the narrator is to introduce his faith to Queequeg, he must "unite with [Queequeg] in his; ergo, [Ishmael] must turn idolator" (57). He describes the ritual, clearly jocularly and subversively at the same time:

> So I kindled the shavings; helped prop up the innocent little idol; offered him burnt biscuit with Queequeg; salamed before him twice or thrice; kissed his nose; and that done, we undressed and went to bed, at peace with our own consciences and all the world (57).

The interaction between Ishmael and Queequeg and their nascent friendship in the early stages of the narrative are arguably the most important phases of Ishmael's development as a character, as they mark the culmination of his overcoming the angst of the Other. His role as a character will gradually erode after the opening of the novel (discussed below). The interaction between Ishmael and Queequeg also reflects his subversive approach to strict social norms, which are frequently based on artificial boundaries (e.g. the civilized man vs. the savage). Ishmael repudiates such boundaries and consequently, as Porter argues, he "commands some authority over [his] own territory – a no man's

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[12] "Jean-Baptiste du Val-de- Grâce, baron de Cloots," *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, Encyclopædia Britannica, 2015 <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/122085/Jean-Baptiste-du-Val-de-Grace-baron-de-Cloots> 24 May 2015.

land, a marginal space between the known and the unknown."[13] Queequeg occupies a similar space and becomes a foil character to Ishmael—he too is an outcast who has left his native land. Ishmael reports that although there was "excellent blood in his veins—royal stuff" (59), Queequeg abandoned the safety of his homeland and "sought a passage to Christian lands" (59). The combination of the two cultures is ultimately manifested in Ishmael's subversive declaration: "Queequeg was George Washington cannibalistically developed" (55).

Booth asserts that both reliable and unreliable narrators can be either unsupported or uncorrected by other characters, narrators, or "simply provided externally, to help the reader correct or reinforce his own views as against the narrator's."[14] Ishmael's unreliability is of the third kind; he is proven to be unreliable externally—*Moby-Dick* is oriented towards the reader and requires his or her active participation. As Wayne C. Booth contends, "if [the narrator] is discovered to be untrustworthy, then the total effect of the work he relays to us is transformed."[15] Once the reader spots the incongruities in the narrative and evaluates them accordingly, it shakes the foundations of his or her interpretation of the whole novel.

## 2.2. Manifestations of the Narrative Self-Consciousness

Wayne C. Booth defines self-conscious narrators as those who are "aware of themselves as writers."[16] Ishmael frequently alludes to and thematizes the process of writing, although as is shown in Chapter Four, a continuity of such tendency cannot be proved. Instead of dealing with Ishmael as a prototypical self-conscious narrator, the following subchapter deals with elements of the narrative self-consciousness.

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[13] Porter 79.
[14] Booth 160.
[15] Booth 158.
[16] Booth 155.

At his most extreme, Ishmael states the exact minute of writing. In the discussion of the whale spout, he acknowledges that the subject has been a matter of contention so far, i.e. "down to this blessed minute"—the moment he finds himself currently in—"fifteen and a quarter minutes past one o'clock P. M. of this sixteenth day of December, A. D. 1850" (290). Giving the exact date is also a manifestation of the temporal tension between the act of writing and the events in the narrative. Using Genette's *Narrative Discourse*, Rimmon-Kenan distinguishes four relations between the act of narration and the story: ulterior, anterior, simultaneous, and intercalated;[17] the temporal relation of the narration of *Moby-Dick* being the ulterior. Although such a claim seems self-evident, it is vital to assert it as it is responsible for the narrative tension between the younger and older Ishmael, and it also allows the narrator to allude to events as yet unrevealed to the reader. Genette defines such instances as "advance mentions,"[18] or "insignificant seeds,"[19] sometimes even imperceptible, whose "importance as a seed will not be recognized until later, and retrospectively."[20] According to Genette, the nature of the reaction that the advance mentions foment in the reader depends greatly on his or her reading experience and can be exploited and/or subverted.[21] Moreover, since the established situation is that of ulterior narration, Ishmael's sudden reappearance in "Epilogue" is a logical outcome of the narrative situation: since Ishmael establishes himself as the narrator of the events that befell the *Pequod*, it is implied that he has survived her wrecking. As Ishmael informs, he has sailed more than once, e.g.: "separate citations of items, practically or reliably known to me as a whaleman" (170),

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[17] Rimmon-Kenan 89 – 91.
[18] Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Ewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983) 75.
[19] Genette 76.
[20] Genette 76.
[21] Genette 77.

or "[…] long experience in various whalemen of more than one nation has convinced me that in the vast majority of failures in the fishery […]" (234).

The first chapter, appositely titled "Loomings," concludes with a celebratory image of a whale parade: "[…] endless procession of the whale, and, mid most of them all, one grand hooded phantom, like a snow hill in the air" (22). Upon leaving Nantucket, the *Pequod* and her crew "blindly plunged like fate into the lone Atlantic" (96). Ishmael is aware of the finale and therefore he is granted the authority to utilize such foreboding lexicon, which also explains one of the adjoining advance mentions: "the Pequod thrust[ing] her vindictive bows into the cold malicious waves" (96). Ishmael unmasks Ahab's intention, which is by this time in the narrative unknown to the reader. Subtle advance mentions are diffused throughout *Moby-Dick*, e.g.: "So still and subdued and yet somehow preluding was all the scene, and such an incantation of reverie lurked in the air, that each silent sailor seemed resolved into his own invisible self" (179). Genette asserts that the "avowedly retrospective character"[22] of the first person narration "authorizes the narrator to allude to the future […] situation."[23] It also fortifies the impression of predeterminism, as discussed below in relation to Elijah. It is arguably most perceptible in the opening chapter, in which Ishmael describes "the great flood-gates of the wonder world" that swung open" (22), and "the wild conceits that swayed [him] to [his] purpose" (22).

The process of writing is most overtly thematized in "Cetology." As a character, Ishmael's importance has eroded: instead of the narrator-character from the opening chapter, Ishmael's voice is transformed into one of much greater authority, in which he declares that "it is some systematized exhibition of the whale in his broad genera, that I

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[22] Genette 67.
[23] Genette 67.

would now fain put before you" (115). Ishmael conflates the subject matter with the act of writing: to write on the whale is such a demanding task that the "mere act of penning [his] thoughts of this Leviathan" (349) wearies him. Jocularly, Ishmael comments on the fact that even the size of his writing has to be enlarged, as he reports that "[u]nconsciously, [his] chirography expands into placard capitals" (349). The subject is such a weighty one that it deserves to be written with a special quill: "Give me a condor's quill!" (349) and the amount of ink he will require is vast: "Give me a Vesuvius' crater for an inkstand!" (349). Ishmael further comments on the act of writing on the whale and claims that it makes him "faint with their outstretching comprehensiveness of sweep," since it in fact means to "include the whole circle of sciences, and all the generations of whales, and men, and mastodons, past, present, and to come" to be found not only on Earth, but also "throughout the whole universe, not excluding its suburbs" (349). In the quoted excerpts, Ishmael thematizes the process of writing, whereby furnishing the narrative with a self-conscious dimension. However, the text of *Moby-Dick* itself does not contain sufficient evidence to this phenomenon, as will be discussed in Chapter Four.

The narrative self-consciousness is elaborated on more subtly as well. "The Crotch" opens with a self-conscious sentence: "Out of the trunk, the branches grow; out of them, the twigs. So, in productive subjects, grow the chapters" (234). The chapter falls into the category and context of the documentary chapters, in which Ishmael records the reality of whaling. In the chapters in question, emphasis is put on external action and the narrator forsakes one of the tenets of narrative fiction, the "succession of fictional events."[24] The reference to the "productive subjects" (234) is therefore ambiguous: Ishmael might be alluding to the documentary chapters, as well as to *Moby-*

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[24] Rimmon-Kenan 2.

*Dick* as a whole, or to both. The reader encounters a similar ambiguity in the conclusion of "Cetology," in which the narrator declares that "[t]his whole book is but a draught— nay, but the draught of a draught" (125); the construction can either mean a "preparatory draft" or a "draft as a product of another draft." The semantic ambivalence grants a reader greater freedom in his or her interpretation.

The 46th chapter, "Surmises" gives an account of Ahab's mental processes. The narrator informs us that "[Ahab] knew […] that however magnetic his ascendancy in some respects was over Starbuck, yet that ascendancy did not cover the complete spiritual man any more than mere corporeal superiority involves intellectual mastership" (177). The narrator seems to be able to enter Ahab's psyche: "Nor was Ahab unmindful of another thing" (178), or: "[…] Ahab was now entirely conscious that […] he had indirectly laid himself open to the unanswerable charge of usurpation" (178). The narrator even elaborates on a simile which appears in "Knights and Squires," in which Starbuck's "interior vitality" is likened to "a patent chronometer" (102). In "Surmises," the narrator resumes the simile, as he proclaims that "Starbuck's body and Starbuck's coerced will were Ahab's" provided that "Ahab kept his magnet at Starbuck's brain" (177). One of the possible readings is that Ahab controls Starbuck by means of spiritual magnetism, i.e. he draws him nearer by the great force of his authority. However, other possibilities arise in connection to the simile from the 26th chapter: Ahab disrupts Starbuck's mental capabilities by approximating the magnet to the metal handiwork (Starbuck as the chronometer), thus rendering it dysfunctional.

In the conclusion of "Surmises," the narrator informs the reader that "[f]or all these reasons then, and others perhaps too analytic to be verbally developed here" (178), Ahab was well aware of pursuing the "natural, nominal purpose of the Pequod's voyage" (178). The truth-value of the whole chapter is immediately questioned:

> Be it as it may, his voice was now often heard hailing the three
> mast-heads and admonishing them to keep a bright lookout, and
> not omit reporting even a porpoise. This vigilance was not long
> without reward (178).

The quoted passage combines the tentativeness ("[b]e it as it may") with disinterested description. In effect, the authority of the content of the whole chapter is subverted and the verity of the depiction of Ahab's inner dilemma questioned. Ishmael is aware of being the writer and admits his limitations: he is unable to enter Ahab's psyche and correctly record his mental procedures. Concurrently, the narrator makes use of the tension between the narrated events and the act of narration and visions Ahab as a maneuvering politician, e.g. "I will not strip these men, thought Ahab, of all hopes of cash—aye, cash" (178), or in the two aforementioned quotes (Starbuck as the chronometer, Ahab's awareness of being open to accusations of usurpation). The name of the chapter also refers to its contents: the whole of it appears to be factual, but the ending reveals the chapter to be mere hypotheses of the narrator's.

## 2.3. Shifts in Focus on Queequeg and the Disappearance of Bulkington

Inarguably, Queequeg is allotted a less important role than his introduction into the narrative suggests. Similarly to Ishmael, Queequeg's importance wanes as the narrative progresses. Porter acknowledges the significance of the friendship between the two characters and asserts that "Ishmael's meeting with Queequeg and their developing friendship […] provides the novel's opening movement with its narrative center."[25] Porter goes on to argue that the bond between the two characters is "so deep that Queequeg becomes virtually a double, a shadow self for Ishmael."[26] On occasions in which Ishmael disappears from the narrative, Queequeg consequently has to disappear

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[25] Porter 80.
[26] Porter 81.

as well; his reappearances are to a certain degree parallel to Ishmael's. The narrative unreliability therefore manifests itself on the formal level in Queequeg's disappearances and in the changing focus on his persona. On the thematic level, Ishmael's relationship reveals the "questionable value scheme"[27] as discussed above.

Ishmael gradually abandons the physical boundaries of his body and therefore ceases to be a character in the traditional sense. As a consequence, there are seldom occasions of his development as a character. The most significant of them is his encounter with Queequeg resulting in an experience that will eventually result in the obliteration of Ishmael's fear of the Other. After the initial dread that Queequeg causes in Ishmael, he concludes during the same scene that "[i]t is better to sleep with a sober cannibal than a drunken Christian" (36) and, as he turns in, he confesses that he has "never slept better in [his] life" (36). The two characters begin to develop their friendship: not only do they share the bed, but Ishmael also partakes in the heathen ritual, Queequeg shares his finances and they agree to sail together. Ishmael states the "[t]his soothing savage had redeemed" his "splintered heart and maddened hand [that] were turned against the wolfish world" (56), i.e. the suicidal Ishmael of the opening paragraph, in which he presumably contemplates suicide as he describes sailing as the "substitute for pistol and ball" (18). Queequeg possesses an air of indifference that Ishmael visions as frankness and is drawn to it: "[…] his very indifference speaking a nature in which there lurked not civilized hypocrisies and bland deceits" (56). As a result, Ishmael decides that he will "try a pagan friend […] since Christian kindness has proved but hollow courtesy" (56). Later on, Queequeg shows his viewpoint free of prejudice and intolerance: "It's a mutual, joint-stock world, in all meridians. We cannibals must help these Christians" (64). As Porter argues, befriending Queequeg

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[27] Rimmon-Kenan 101.

"accorded [Ishmael] a socially designated place to stand on the boundary between civilized and savage."[28] Therefore, they both occupy a similar, if not identical space outside the norm: Queequeg has left his native homeland, and Ishmael forsook the Christian society. Carolyn Porter contends that Queequeg also initiates Ishmael into the world of whaling, which has a negative implication as well: Ishmael, like the rest of the crew with the exception of Starbuck, falls victim to Ahab's magnetism.[29]

After Queequeg and Ishmael share a "pleasant, genial smoke" that "left [them] cronies," the former "pressed his forehead against [Ishmael's]" and declared them "bosom friends" (56). To describe the bond established between the two characters, Queequeg uses an expression that, as Ishmael informs us, translates into English as "married" (56), possibly resulting in a jocular reaction. It also follows Ishmael's description of the scene of their sharing the bed: "I found Queequeg's arm thrown over me in the most loving and affectionate manner. You had almost thought I had been his wife" (36); Ishmael even describes their […] as their "hearts' honeymoon" (57). Since they have become bosom friends, Queequeg proclaims that he "would gladly die for [Ishmael]" (56). Queequeg's magnanimity takes on nearly literal level in "Epilogue," in which Ishmael is salvaged by the coffin that was bound for Queequeg; their friendship transcends death. Although Queequeg ceases to be the centre of the focus once Ahab's drama takes on its full scope, he frequently resurfaces in the course of the narrative.

In "The Monkey Rope," he and Ishmael are literally tied together. The apparatus is described as a rope "attached to a strong strip of canvas belted round [Queequeg's] waist" (255). Ishmael declares that it was a "humorously perilous business for both of [them]," as it was "fast to Queequeg's broad canvas belt, and fast to [Ishmael's] narrow

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[28] Porter 106.
[29] Porter 101.

one" (255). He goes on to depict them as "wedded" again, and describes the hemp as "Siamese ligature"—Queequeg is therefore his "own inseparable twin brother" (255) and Ishmael can't conceive of cutting the rope should the situation demand so. Their fate is mutual. Ishmael finds his situation parallel of "this Siamese connexion with a plurality of other mortals" (255): "If your banker breaks, you snap; if your apothecary by mistake sends you poison in your pills, you die" (255 - 256). Ishmael learns tolerance from their friendship and even states that his "free will had received a mortal wound," as he ceases to exist as an individual and is inspired to "metaphysically […] conceive of […] the situation" and describes his dissolving individuality, which has been transformed into "a joint stock company of two" (255).

Bulkington, who has according to Richard Chase been "destined for some heroic role," is eventually "dismissed with a poetic epitaph."[30] In "The Lee Shore" Ishmael refers to the chapter as to the "stoneless grave of Bulkington" (96), which already foreshadows the intention to figuratively throw Bulkington over board. The treatment of Bulkington is therefore is similar to that of Queequeg. As is the case with the latter, the introduction of the former suggests greater role than he is eventually granted. Unlike Queequeg, Bulkington disappears completely.

The enigmatic Bulkington is therefore open to interpretation. Carolyn Porter, for instance, asserts that Ishmael's interest in the sailing is "representative, rather than exceptional" and that the substitute of "sea for land as the local of man's ontological condition" is ultimately symbolized by Bulkington.[31] Bulkington's disappearance consequently marks the completion of Ishmael's transformation from the water gazer to the seeker of the "highest truth" that resides in "landlessness alone […], shoreless,

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[30] Richard Chase, "Melville and *Moby-Dick*," *Melville: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Richard Chase (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1965) 50.
[31] Porter 74.

indefinite as God" (97). Ishmael is therefore motivated to proclaim that it is better to "perish in the howling infinite, than be ingloriously dashed upon the lee, even if that were safety" (97), as he embarks on the journey, both physical and spiritual. Porter goes on to argue that Ishmael has already crossed the boundary between the land and the sea and that the "normal attributes of land and sea have been inverted"[32] and the reader is—similarly to Ishmael—"compelled not only to wander but to wonder."[33] Bulkington resists simple interpretation, by which he paradoxically opens himself to a plethora of possible readings. Indeed, after his second and ultimate appearance in "The Lee Shore," the reader is tempted to ask the same question as his fellow sailors in the earlier scene: "[W]here is Bulkington?" (29), and perhaps also inquire "who is Bulkington?" In terms of narratological analysis, his introduction into the narrative and the sudden disappearance serve to fortify Ishmael's unreliability.

### 2.4. Allegorical Names

As Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan asserts, the analogous name can be "based on literary or mythological allusions."[34] Melville borrows several names from the Old Testament, but as will be shown, the analogies between the two texts are treated in an idiosyncratic fashion. As Nathalia Wright argues, "[e]laborate symbol and detailed parallel was foreign to Melville's genius."[35] Rather than providing an entire parallel, "a hint is given, a tradition implied; upon complete application the pattern breaks down."[36] The following subchapter deals mostly with Ahab, Elijah and Ishmael. Apart from this triad, the book also contains other biblical names: the names of the two owners of the

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[32] Porter 74.
[33] Porter 75.
[34] Rimmon-Kenan 68.
[35] Nathalia Wright, "Biblical Allusions in Melville's Prose," *American Literature*, Duke University Press 12.2 (1940): 190, JSTOR <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2920476>, 2 May 2015.
[36] Wright, "Biblical Allusions in Melville's Prose" 190.

*Pequod*, Bildad and Peleg, are taken from the Scripture, and so is the name of the vessel that rescues Ishmael, *Rachel*. The idiosyncratic treatment of the Biblical parallels is one of the manifestations of Ishmael's subversive tendencies, discussed in greater detail in the third chapter.

Ishmael learns the name of the captain under whom he will sail from Captain Bildad, who also reminds Ishmael that "Ahab of old […] was a crowned king" (78). Wai-chee Dimock contends that hardly any nineteenth-century reader would have missed the meaning of Ahab's name and be surprised by his fate; according to Dimock, "Ahab can only mean what his name says he means" as he is "characterized by that name, summarized by it, and doomed by it."[37] Ishmael immediately recalls the biblical prophecy of Elijah to Ahab: "In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine,"[38] and inquires: "When that wicked king was slain, the dogs, did they not lick his blood?" (78). As a consequence, Ahab is according to Dimock "a bearer of meaning" and "less a living thing" than "a legible sign," i.e. "personified name" or a "human receptacle invested with a signifying function."[39] The narrative strategy employed is, as Dimock asserts a "narrative tautology": since Ahab is ensnared within his name, "the ending is clearly immanent" already in the beginning, and all the temporal development merely serves to "reenact[…] what is in place from the very first."[40] It is exactly this circular argument that defines Ahab's fixedness in time and space.

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[37] Wai-chee Dimock, *Empire for Liberty: Melville and the Poetics of Individualism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991) 131. Unlike Ahab, Ishmael's name does not become a receptacle for meaning, although he follows some of the biblical parallels. Moreover, Ahab's circular reasoning is juxtaposed by Ishmael's linear thinking.
[38] 1 Kings 21: 19, Harrison and Hayford's footnote (78).
[39] Dimock 131.
[40] Dimock 131.

Another parallel between the two Ahabs is the engagement with false prophets, which is represented in *Moby-Dick* by Fedallah, as Wright asserts.[41] The analogy breaks down, too: in *Moby-Dick*, it is Ahab who misinterprets the prophecy of Fedallah that only hemp can kill him (377), instead of the prophecy being erroneous itself. Ahab proudly declares: "I am immortal then, on land and on sea" (377). Paradoxically, Fedallah seems to function as a false prophet, but his prophecy comes true. Ishmael and Queequeg encounter Elijah in "The Prophet." Both the names of the chapter and of the character indicate the intention to pursue the biblical parallel. However, Ishmael describes Elijah's ramblings as "ambiguous, half-hinting, half-revealing, shrouded sort of talk" (88). As Wright asserts, "[o]f all analogies suggested by Biblical characters none is completely conceived and carried out."[42] In the case of Elijah, the parallel is even subverted. Despite the fact that Ishmael "pronounced [Elijah] in [his] heart, a humbug" (88), he admits in "Ahab" that his "diabolical incoherences uninvitedly recur[red] to [him], with a subtle energy [he] could not have before conceived of" (108).

Wai-chee Dimock asserts that "Elijah's field of knowledge actually lies not in the future but in the past,"[43] i.e. that he informs Ishmael and Queequeg of what has already happened to Ahab, rather than foretelling him his doom.[44] He inquires if they have heard

> Nothing about that thing that happened to [Ahab] off Cape Horn, long ago, when he lay like dead for three days and nights; nothing about that deadly skrimmage with the Spaniard afore the altar in Santa?—heard nothing about that, eh? Nothing about that sliver calabash he spat into? (87)

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[41] Wright, "Biblical Allusions in Melville's Prose" 187 – 189.
[42] Wright, "Biblical Allusions in Melville's Prose" 190.
[43] Dimock 132.
[44] Dimock 132 – 133.

Dimock suggests that Melville's "prophets" are rather "spokesmen for their own age" with an ideological dimension to it, as they use "spatialized time" that was "the very condition for Manifest Destiny."[45] The course of action would include "equating geography with destiny," which would by "conflating time and space" recompose time and incorporate it "as a vehicle for spatial aggrandizement."[46] According to Dimock, the strategy was to invoke "Providence" and assert that "this manifest destiny had not spatial limits."[47] Dimock then goes on to argue that this "same mechanism could just as easily victimize and destroy" as the Native Americans "too happened to be subjects of spatialized time."[48] One of the first victims of the spatial aggrandizement in North America were the Pequot people; the connection is established between the nearly exterminated tribe and the vessel that Ishmael sails. Melville criticizes the US political ideology (e.g. American westward expansion); Ahab therefore presents the menaces of democracy, as is will be discussed below.

Dimock's interpretation establishes a broader political framework for Ishmael's narration. In the conclusion of "Loomings," Ishmael cannot explain why he decided to sail a whaler and prompts that "the invisible police officer of the Fates, who has the constant surveillance over [him], and constantly dogs [him]" (21) and who "influences [him] in some unaccountable way" (22) can "better answer than any one else" (22). Ishmael asserts that the decision to board a whaler was not a decision at all and that it was all a "formed part of the grand programme of Providence" (22) and that the Fates, "those stage managers" (22) cajoled him "into the delusion that it was a choice resulting from [his] own unbiased freewill and discriminating judgment" (22). The past and the

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[45] Dimock 133.
[46] Dimock 133.
[47] Dimock 133.
[48] Dimock 133.

future are manipulated by political propaganda and the repressive apparatuses of the state; manifestations thereof pervade Ishmael's conception of Providence.

According to Nathalia Wright, owing to the biblical parallel, Ishmael is established as a prototypical "wanderer and outcast."[49] When Ishmael was perishing in the desert, "the prophecy of the name [i.e. Ishmael translates as "God shall hear"] was fulfilled and his life was saved by a miraculous spring."[50] In "Epilogue" Ishmael too is rescued by a spring—the coffin life-buoy that saved him was "liberated by reason of its cunning spring" (427). Paradoxically, the life of the biblical Ishmael is preserved by water, while the Ishmael of *Moby-Dick* is threatened by the ocean. The biblical parallel comes full circle in the final scene of *Moby-Dick* as the "devious-cruising Rachel" in "her retracing search after her missing children, only found another orphan" (427).

However, the potential of Ishmael's name is frequently made use of from the very opening of the novel. The impression of the opening sentence is rather tentative and it does not necessarily imply that Ishmael is the narrator's actual name. Given the great deal of unreliability that Ishmael exhibits in the course of the narrative, the reader is most likely to doubt the verity of the narrator's name. Ishmael addresses himself mentally, e.g. "Ha, Ishmael, muttered I, backing out, Wretched entertainment at the sign of 'The Trap!'" (24), "Yes, Ishmael, the same fate may be thine" (45), or in "The Ramadan," he addresses himself thus verbally: "I say, Queequeg! why don't you speak? It's I—Ishmael" (79 - 80). However, there is only one occasion in which another character addresses Ishmael by his name. When signing up for the *Pequod*, Captain Peleg proclaims: "Now then, my young man, Ishmael's thy name, didn't ye say? Well

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[49] Nathalia Wright, *Melville's Use of the Bible* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1949) 47.
[50] Wright, "Biblical Allusions in Melville's Prose" 187.

then, down ye go here, Ishmael, for the three hundredth lay" (77).[51] The name appears merely twenty times in the course of the whole narrative, including the opening sentence and Peleg's address (twice during the dialogue). The scarce occurrence of references to Ishmael reflects his insignificance as a character. In contrast, Ahab is referred to 512 times, including the names of the chapters, which mirrors his solipsism, as well as his prominence as a character. Ishmael's self-addresses might therefore serve to remind the reader of the narrator's name.

Ishmael's (possibly assumed) name mirrors his exiled status, and true to it, he observes everything from a distance. Booth distinguishes several kinds of distances; the kind that Ishmael exhibits is that between the narrator and other characters.[52] An early example thereof is to be found in "The Sermon," during which Ishmael disappears (discussed below) and states that Father Mapple "made all his simple hearers look on him with a quick fear that was strange to them" (53). Ishmael approaches the realm of the reflector during the episode alluded to; the commentary does in effect suggest exclusion of Ishmael and, as a result, an intellectual distancing. Although he refers to himself as "an unlettered Ishmael" (275), his intellect is evident in a number of allusions, some which are deliberately misquoted in order to support his unreliability and/or self-consciousness (e.g. "Cetology"). Ishmael's intellect and erudition is palpable in his knowledge of the Bible (he recalled and paraphrased the passage off-hand) or in his knowledge of the whalelore in "Cetology," in which he refers to a variety of sources. Ishmael's social status is alluded to in the beginning, as he enumerates the motivations for going to sea, having "little or no money in [his] purse" (18). In terms of religion, Ishmael has deviated from the Presbyterian Church by participating in the rite with Queequeg. Once initiated into the world of whaling, Ishmael retains some of the

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[51] Ishmael does not give his name in the course of the chapter, nor does he describe doing so.
[52] Booth 156.

features of an outsider and his descriptions approach the disinterested omniscient narration, providing a bridge to the future development of the narrative.

## 3. Chapter Three

### 3.1. Defining the Reflector

Franz Stanzel contends that as opposed to the narrator, in case of a reflector character, the events of the outer world are mirrored, or reflected on the reflector's psyche.[1] The difference between the two opposing poles is based on the level of "mediacy," a term coined by Stanzel: the reflector character does not narrate, and in effect does not verbalize his or her perceptions, thoughts, or feelings.[2] The events are therefore presented as if *in actu*, which establishes the impression of immediacy.[3] One of the implications is that the reflector is largely ignorant of the future development of the story.

Stanzel's achievement in *A Theory of Narrative* is indisputable; his approach, however, turns out to be somewhat constrictive for the analysis of prose with a more complex narrative situation, such as *Moby-Dick*. Although Ishmael disappears from the narrative at times, the reader may project him onto the scene and it is merely an impression of his absence that Ishmael creates. In this sense, Ishmael approximates the realm of the reflector. In a reaction to *A Theory of Narrative*, Genette even states that Ishmael occupies the same focal point as Lambert Strether from Henry James's *The Ambassadors* (a prototypical example of a reflector character), and that the only difference between the two characters is that Ishmael is also a narrator.[4] Stanzel assigns Ishmael to a single point on his typological circle of narrative situations, to the

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[1] Franz K. Stanzel, *Teorie vyprávění*, trans. Jiří Stromšík (Praha: Odeon, 1988) 180. Paraphrased by the author.
[2] Stanzel 180.
[3] Stanzel 178.
[4] Genette 187.

"narrating I."[5] However, locating Ishmael in a section, or an area, rather than to a single point appears to be a more apt approach to the labyrinthine narrative situation of *Moby-Dick*; exploring the circle counter-clockwise, it is safe to conclude that Ishmael displays features of other narrative situations as well: "experiencing I," "camera eye," "reflector character appearing," "scenic presentation (dialogue scene)," and finally, "narrator withdraws."[6]

The narrative situation in the dramatic chapters follows similar patterns. Rather than assigning Ishmael to a single point on the circle, he seems to belong to the section between "reflector appears" and "narrator withdraws."[7] His position on the scene is, as will be discussed below, mostly imagined by the reader. By doing so, Ishmael transgresses the boundaries between the teller and the reflector character and between the modes of showing and telling. Violating the limitations of the narrative situation is one of the manifestations of Ishmael's subversive tendencies, as discussed in the previous chapter in relation to Carolyn Porter's essay. The boundaries are crossed both thematically and formally, frequently interacting to thematize the difficulty of capturing reality within a sign system.

### 3.2. Gradual Development from the Narrator to the Reflector

The transition from Ishmael the narrator to Ishmael the reflector is a gradual rather than abrupt process. Chapters similar to "The Quarter-Deck" present a perplexing situation. Not only does the chapter in question include purely dramatic devices, such as asides, but Ishmael seems to have disappeared and, as a consequence, such passages

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[5] Stanzel 280. Stanzel acknowledges Ishmael's oscillation between the narrator and the reflector character, as a way of searching for the adequate rhetoric (Stanzel 183). However, there is no further explanation of the phenomenon.
[6] Stanzel 280 – 281.
[7] Stanzel 281.

read like prose with a 3$^{rd}$ person omniscient narrator when read in isolation, i.e. outside the context of the preceding and the following chapters. The narrator is not referred to in the course of the whole chapter, not even in the descriptions of the whole crew, e.g. "[…] was the impulsive rejoinder from a score of clubbed voices" (137). The situation is even more appreciable in the following excerpt:

> More and more strangely and fiercely glad and approving, grew the countenance of the old man at every shout; while the mariners began to gaze curiously at each other, as if marveling how it was that they themselves became so excited at such seemingly purposeless questions (137 – 138).

However, he confesses his presence during the scene in the opening of the 41$^{st}$ chapter, "Moby Dick": "I, Ishmael, was one of that crew […]" (152).[8] The reader either presences Ishmael on the scene on the basis of the previous reading or projects him on the scene retrospectively; either way, Ishmael exhibits features of the reflector figure.

A close reading of the narrative situation in the chapters preceding "The Quarter-Deck" brings forth questions and complexities related to the narrative situation. The first forays into the realm of the reflector appear as early as in the 9$^{th}$ chapter. Ishmael does not manifest his physical presence and he does not refer to himself grammatically: not a single "I" of the narrator appears as Ishmael gives way to the description of Father Mapple's sermon. Moreover, the chapter contains dramatic elements, whereby foreshadowing the future theatrical development of the novel, in which the narrator becomes redundant. The pulpit reminds the reader of the stage, Father Mapple's idiosyncratic interpretation of the Jonah story of a performance, which is completed by his histrionic pose after the sermon: "He said no more, but slowly waving a benediction, covered his face with his hands, and so remained kneeling, till all

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[8] The temporal distance between the act of narration and the narrated events allows the narrating Ishmael to dissociate himself from the choices his younger self has done. As has been discussed in relation to "Surmises," in retrospect Ishmael visions Ahab negatively.

the people had departed, and he was left alone in the place" (54). It is unclear to whom the narrator refers to in "all the people" and whether the description includes or excludes Ishmael. Ishmael distances himself and leaves the reader to question whether he waited until all people departed, or whether the 1st person narrative situation has been violated.

Put back into context, the surrounding chapters provide a framing device: "The Sermon" is framed by "The Pulpit" and "A Bosom Friend" respectively. Franz Stanzel asserts that the reader will preserve a certain standpoint toward the story (with a relevant space-time orientation) until a noticeable change takes place.[9] The narrative situation is violated subtly and the narrative flow is therefore presumably undisrupted in this early example. Ishmael refers to himself as the narrator in both of the two surrounding chapters, e.g. "I had not been seated very long […]" (46), "I pondered some time […]" (47) in the former chapter; "Returning to the Spouter-Inn from the Chapel, I found Queequeg there quite alone" (54), "With much interest I sat there watching him" (55) in the latter one.

Similar patterns are traceable after Ahab's appearance. When Ahab makes his appearance for the first time, it is Ishmael using his narrative voice and the 1st person pronoun to declare: "[r]eality outran apprehension; Captain Ahab stood upon his quarter-deck" (108). The name of the following chapter is composed of a stage direction, "Enter Ahab; to Him, Stubb" (110) and includes Ahab's first spoken replica, "[i]t feels like going down to one's tomb" (110). The captain of the *Pequod* renders the whole narrative dramatic and using the stage direction as a name of the chapter is

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[9] Stanzel 86.

therefore parallel to the commencement of Ahab's drama.[10] Ahab eclipses Ishmael as the narrator, as well as the character. Consequently, "Enter Ahab; to Him, Stubb," and the two following chapters, "The Pipe" and "Queen Mab" exclude references to Ishmael.

In the context of the narrative in its full scope, "Loomings" and "Epilogue" can be read as the framing device of the whole story, since they unite the disrupted narrative situation. Ishmael introduces himself and foreshadows the story he is about to relate in the opening chapter, while in "Epilogue," he "step[s] forth" (427) to reestablish the narrative situation, whereby establishing the continuity of the narrative. Moreover, on the basis of the information provided in "Epilogue," the reader projects Ishmael on the scene retrospectively, as discussed above in relation to the opening of "Moby-Dick." The narrator pursues the theatrical conceit associated with Ahab to conclude his drama: "[t]he drama's done" (427) and to explicate his absence in the narrative by paraphrasing the preceding chapters in which he did not manifest himself. Ishmael's sudden reappearance resembles the theatrical device of deus ex machina. Ishmael reports that

> [i]t so chanced, that after the Parsee's disappearance, I was he whom the Fates ordained to take the place of Ahab's bowsman, when that bowsman assumed the vacant post; the same, who, when on the last day the three men were tossed from out of the rocking boat, was dropped astern (427).

The chapters prior to "Epilogue," beginning with "The Pacific" and especially "The Chase—First Day," "The Chase—Second Day" and "The Chase—Third Day" include a voice that resembles the disinterested, omniscient or the camera eye narration, reinforced by the frequent use of the passive construction, even in descriptions possibly including Ishmael, e.g.: "[b]ut when [Ahab] was helped to the deck, all eyes were

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[10] The quoted excerpt is a supreme example of the interaction between the thematic and the formal facets in the novel.

fastened upon him" (417). After Ishmael mounts the post of Ahab's bowsman, the narrative situation still bears visible traces of a third person narrator, e.g.: "[s]uddenly the waters around them slowly swelled in broad circles […]" (422). Ahab and the events completely sideline Ishmael as a narrator and as a character. He becomes a peripheral character, one that is not referred to as an individual. For the last time, the scenic description transforms to the teller mode, and Ishmael concludes the whole narrative in the same mode as it has opened in "Loomings."

As opposed to the earlier instances of Ishmael's disappearances (e.g. "The Sermon"), which contain subtle violations of the narrative situation, the later stages of the narrative contain transgressions on a larger scale (e.g. "The Chart"). The framing chapters furnish Ishmael's presence, which is essential in order for the reader to imagine Ishmael on the scene as its reflector. In case of "The Sermon," this fact is reinforced by the spatial boundaries of the chapel in which the sermon takes place. The interpretative process then progresses by means of inertia of the reader's perception: the recipient projects Ishmael on the scene on the basis of the previous development of the story. On such occasions, Ishmael exhibits the prototypical features of a reflector: as a narrator, he denies his presence, is banished from the act of narration and, as a consequence, the illusion of immediacy is established.[11] According to Stanzel, such illusion is typical of the reflector character.[12] However, rather than being a prototypical reflector, Ishmael merely retains some of the features of the reflector character.

In this respect, "The Sermon" foreshadows the future dramatic development of the narrative, e.g. in "The Quarter-Deck," but also in the later chapters composed of dramatic dialogues or soliloquies. It also foreshadows the utilization of the features

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[11] Stanzel 178.
[12] Stanzel 178.

associated with the reflector mode on a larger scale than a single chapter. Ishmael steps aside and there is very little incursion on the narrator's part. The little prose of "Hark!" for instance bears resemblance to a stage direction:

> It was the middle-watch; a fair moonlight; the seamen were standing in a cordon, extending from one of the fresh-water butts in the waist, to the scuttle-butt near the taffrail. In this manner, they passed the buckets to fill the scuttle-butt. Standing, for the most part, on the hallowed precincts of the quarter-deck, they were careful not to speak or rustle their feet. From hand to hand, the buckets went in the deepest silence, only broken by the occasional flap of a sail, and the steady hum of the unceasingly advancing keel (165 – 166).

Indeed, with imperceptible adjustments, such as the change of tense, one can easily conceive of finding the quoted excerpt in the form of a stage direction. The prose resembles the disinterred narrator as one finds for instance in Hemingway's "The Killers,"[13] which is marked by very little narrative commentary and the prevalence of dialogue.

## 3.3. Dramatic Chapters

The dramatic chapters vary in the degree of mediacy. The most explicit of them is "Midnight, Forecastle," which comprises solely of dramatic dialogue. The amount of immediacy is therefore very high (i.e. minimal narrative intrusion). Although the chapter does not contain any reference to Ishmael as a character, the reader might project him into the center of the narrative: it is through his view that the fictional reality is filtered, constructed and refined. Ishmael even admits his presence intratextually in "The Castaway." The narrator introduces Pip by referring to "Midnight, Forecastle": "Poor Pip! ye have heard of him before; ye must remember his tambourine

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[13] Frequently quoted by narratologists as an example of narrator's minimal intrusions, e.g. Genette 166.

on that dramatic midnight, so gloomy-jolly" (319). The situation is similar to the retrospective projection discussed above in relation to the opening of "Moby Dick."

The situation is even more problematic in the three soliloquies preceding "Midnight, Forecastle," i.e. "Sunset," "Dusk," and "First Night-Watch." The text does not contain any such justifying reference as in "The Castaway" and it is unlikely that Ishmael could have witnessed the three soliloquies, given the strict nautical hierarchy. However, the chapters can be approached as products of Ishmael's imagination: it enables him to invent those events, to project himself onto the scene as the reflector, or even to enter the thought processes of the individual characters. Ishmael therefore challenges the traditional boundaries between the narrator and the reflector, between showing and telling as well as between diegesis and mimesis.

In the opening of "Midnight, Forecastle," the reader is asked to envisage the scene by a stage direction: "*Foresail rises and discovers the watch standing, lounging, leaning and lying in various attitudes, all singing in chorus*" (145). To use an anachronism, the following scene reminds the modern reader of a salad bowl: a panoply of sailors of all imaginable nationalities parades before the reader's mind's eye. There are Nantucket, Dutch, French, Iceland, Maltese, Sicilian, Long-Island, Azore, China, Old Manx, Lascar, Tahitan, Danish, English, St. Jago's sailors, Pip and Daggoo (145 – 151). Presenting the scene in question in the mode of telling is hardly conceivable. The mode of showing, or the dramatic dialogue, seems suitable: it contains minimal narrative mediacy and consequently, it emphasizes the reader's imagination.

"The Deck Towards the End of the First Night Watch," "Midnight.—Forecastle Bulwarks," "Midnight Aloft.—Thunder and Lightning," "The Cabin," "The Deck" consist of scenic descriptions. Moreover, the names of the chapters themselves suggest

locations, which are further on specified by means of stage directions, e.g. "[*The man-top-sail yard.—Tashtego passing new lashings around it.*]" (385). The stage directions are utilized instead of the narrator's intrusions, which are used not only to describe the locales, but also to delineate interaction between individual characters, e.g. "[*Ahab moving to go on deck; Pip catches him by the hand to follow*]" (399). At the same time, instead of using the traditional layout of dramatic dialogue, as in "Midnight, Forecastle," the chapters in question include alternations in direct speech, using quotation marks, as in "The Deck":

> "Life-buoy, Sir. Mr. Starbuck's orders. Oh, look, Sir! Beware the hatchway!"
>
> "Thank ye, man. Thy coffin lies handy to the vault" (395).

The 108th chapter, "Ahab and the Carpenter" opens with the carpenter's soliloquy, which is interrupted by Ahab's arrival. The text continues similarly to the quoted excerpt, the only difference lying in the exclusion of the quotation marks, e.g.:

> Well, manmaker!
>
> Just in time, Sir. If the captain pleases, I will now mark the length. Let me measure, Sir (359).

Although Melville experiments with the degrees of mediacy, the various means of representing speech interaction between the characters in the quoted excerpts do not influence the overall impressions. The mediacy of the chapters is very low and the mode of showing prevails.

Frequently, the reader is asked to participate directly in the narrative process. For instance, Chapter 97, "The Lamp," does not include Ishmael as a narrator, although he is presumably projected on the scene by the reader based on the previous chapter. Instead, the text addresses the reader directly: "Had you descended from the Pequod's

try-works to the Pequod's forecastle […]" (329).[14] The reader is therefore asked to participate actively during the interpretation and his or her imagination is emphasized. The stress on the reader's mental projection is even more appreciable in the opening of the 107th chapter, "The Carpenter": "Seat thyself sultanically among the moons of Saturn, and take high abstracted man alone; and he seems a wonder, a grandeur, and a woe" (356). The chapter contains references to theatre: the *Pequod*'s carpenter "now comes in person on this stage" (356) and his "vice-bench" is described as "one grand stage where he enacted all his various parts so manifold" (356). The narrative situation again transforms into scenic description and the following chapter, "Ahab and the Carpenter" consists of identical means of representation. In the context of the following chapter, inviting the reader to seat him- or herself pursues the dramatic conceit: the reader is invited to imagine Ahab's drama. The stress on the reader's imagination will be discussed in the following chapter.

### 3.4. Oscillations between the Narrator and the Reflector Character

Equally important to the fact that Ishmael approaches the realm of the reflector character are the alternations between the two opposing poles. Stanzel introduces the concept of "narrative rhythm," which he defines as an oscillation between the narrator's activity and inactivity in the course of the narrative.[15] In *Moby-Dick*, it manifests itself in the alternation between the two modes, the teller and the reflector. According to Stanzel, it serves to vitalize the narrative, and results in a different situation in the beginning and in the end.[16] Although the narrative situation is reestablished in "Epilogue," the modifications bear unalterable implications for the assessment of

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[14] Addressing the reader appears as early as in the 3rd chapter, "The Spouter-Inn": "Entering that gable-ended Spouter-Inn, you found yourself in a wide […]" (26).
[15] Stanzel 83.
[16] Stanzel 83.

Ishmael as the narrator. Booth contends that the reflector character allows the author to "show a narrator changing as *he narrates*,"[17] a contention clearly applicable to Ishmael. The oscillation renders Ishmael's identity fluctuating; any attempt to categorize him according to a theoretical definition is therefore bound to fail. Ishmael appears as a character within the story (though merely peripheral), a narrator, he approximates the realm of the reflector or retains some of the prototypically authorial features in the essayistic chapters. Most importantly, rather than being a character in the traditional sense, Ishmael is a voice that permeates the whole narrative and unifies the individual fragmented discourses that take on the form of a narrative prose, drama, or essay.

The narrator-reflector oscillation takes place based on the boundaries between individual chapters, as has already been shown in the case of "The Sermon," as well as within the chapters themselves. For instance, in "The Mat-Maker," Ishmael appears as a character at first: "Thus we were weaving and weaving away when I started at a sound so strange […]" (179). His self then becomes a part of the whole crew, as he refers to himself and his naval comrades: "Tashtego reporting that the whales had gone down heading to leeward, we confidently looked to see them again directly in advance of our bows" (180). Towards the end of the chapter, however, the mode of showing is predominant: "But at this critical instant a sudden exclamation was heard that took every eye from the whale" (180). The following chapter, "The First Lowering" opens as if it were narrated by a third person omniscient narrator, e.g. "Such was the thunder of his voice, that spite of their amazement the men sprang over the rail […]" (181). The description of the beginning of the chase opens with: "Hardly had they pulled out from under the ship's lee, when a fourth keel […]" (181) and continues: "But with all their eyes again riveted upon the swart Fedallah and his crew, the inmates of the other boats

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[17] Booth 157. Strangely enough, the confusion of the two terms, narrator and reflector, that the quote from Booth might cause applies perfectly to Ishmael, who is in fact a conflation of the two concepts.

obeyed not the command" (181). Ishmael partook in the chase as well, as he informs the reader later on: "For me, I silently recalled the mysterious shadows I had seen creeping on board the Pequod during the dim Nantucket dawn, as well as the enigmatical hintings of the unaccountable Elijah" (183). Based on the events of the previous chapter, the reader is aware of Ishmael's presence in the scene. In this respect, Ishmael approximates the reflector mode.

Ishmael's quest for the appropriate narrative means of representation is parallel to his journey of self-revelation. One of his primary preoccupations is the non-correspondence between the appearance and the actual reality, overtly addressed in "The Candles":

> Warmest climates but nurse the cruellest fangs: the tiger of Bengal crouches in spiced groves ceaseless verdure. Skies the most effulgent but basket the deadliest thunders: gorgeous Cuba knows tornadoes that never swept tame northern lands. So, too, it is, that in these resplendent Japanese seas the mariner encounters the direst of all storms, the Typhoon (119).

In the opening of "The Gilder," "tranquil beauty and brilliancy of the ocean's skin" (372) is described, but the narrative voice points out that "the tiger heart […] pants beneath it" and that the tiger's "velvet paw but conceals a remorseless fang" (372). One of the earliest examples is the scene in which Ishmael tries on Queequeg's poncho. Kevin J. Hayes acknowledges the humorous contribution of the episode (approaching earnest problems with humor is characteristic of Ishmael), but also validates the serious implications: "Ishmael is frightened at the sight of himself wearing the poncho because he realizes how fluid identity can be. […] Ishmael's mirror image is both himself and someone else, someone scary and frightening."[18] The "someone else," naturally, is Queequeg, one of the book's epitomes of the Other; Ishmael's fear during the scene of

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[18] Kevin J. Hayes, *The Cambridge Introduction to Herman Melville* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007) 50.

Queequeg's arrival therefore stems from the unknown face of the Other. Through the experience of interaction between himself and the Other, Ishmael obliterates the dread with Queequeg as a spiritual guide. The angst caused by the fluctuating identity, however, is not to be eliminated and is consequently played out and performed throughout the whole narrative—both thematically and formally.

F. O. Matthiessen asserts that Ahab is built to the stature of a Shakespearean king.[19] Naturally, his grim grandeur implies eclipsing other characters, including Ishmael. As a character, Ishmael is of very little import; when about to sign up for the voyage, he is offered "the seven-hundred and seventy seventh [lay]" (76). This is asserted by the little interaction between Ishmael and other characters, with the exception of Queequeg. Once Ahab's drama takes on its full scope, Ishmael naturally steps aside and the importance he had as a character (especially in the opening) is obliterated completely. In the course of the narrative, he becomes a prototypically peripheral character. Occasionally, he resurfaces to articulate some of his contemplations, only to vanish again. Genette contends that "[a]bsence is absolute, but presence has degrees."[20] He discriminates between the "autodiegetic" narrator, i.e. such a narrator who remains in the centre of the narrative as its main protagonist, and "one who plays only a secondary role."[21] Most importantly for *Moby-Dick*, this role almost invariably "turns out to be a role of an observer and witness."[22] Genette goes on to argue that "[i]t is as if the narrator cannot be an ordinary walk-on in his narrative: he can be only the star, or else a mere bystander."[23] Ishmael is a peripheral character (he cannot influence the events once on

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[19] F. O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance* (New York: OUP, 1968) 445.
[20] Genette 245.
[21] Genette 245.
[22] Genette 245. Ishmael is even one Genette's examples.
[23] Genette 245.

board of the *Pequod*), whose importance erodes to such an extent that he occasionally disappears from the narrative altogether.

In "Ahab and the Carpenter," the mode of showing prevails. The situation is identical in the following chapter, "Ahab and Starbuck in the Cabin." Ishmael is absent in both of the chapters—it is only a matter of conjectures whether he projects himself onto the scene (using his imagination) in order to experience and witness them as the reflector, or whether one should read the latter chapter as being narrated by a third person omniscient narrator. The reader is once again addressed and asked to imagine the scene mentally: "For an instant in the flashing eyes of the mate, and his fiery cheeks, you would have almost thought that he had really received the blaze of the levelled tube" (362). By invoking the reader's imagination, the reader's and Ishmael's process of mental projection are paralleled. The situation changes in "Queequeg in His Coffin," which contains Ishmael as a narrator-character: "[…] at this time it was that my poor pagan companion, and fast bosom-friend, Queequeg, was seized with a fever, which brought him nigh to his endless end" (363). The oscillation takes place for the last time in "The Pacific," in which Ishmael manifests himself for the last time until "Epilogue": "were it not for other things, I could have greeted my dear Pacific with uncounted thanks […]" (367).

## 4. Chapter Four

### 4.1. Interpretation of the Narrative Situation

Having assessed Ishmael from two narratological perspectives, Booth's and Stanzel's, the most important query as yet remains unanswered: who or what is Ishmael and what are the implications of the idiosyncratic narrative situation for the interpretation of *Moby-Dick*. Martin Green appears to have a clear view on the matter: "Indeed, after the first few chapters, Ishmael does not exist at all. His name alone survives (recurs), as a narrative device of the crudest kind."[1] Ishmael's insignificance as a character after the introduction of Ahab is unquestionable, but as has already been argued, Ishmael cannot be approached as a traditional narrator-character. The situation is further complicated by Ishmael's eclecticism: whether he approaches the realm of the reflector or the authorial narrator, he never assumes precisely the point of being one of the two, but appropriates some of the typical features instead (e.g. the experimental approach to the varying degree of mediacy in case of the reflector, or shifting the poles from character-narrator to the authorial narrator). Therefore, dismissing him altogether would seem a grave mistake: although Ishmael dissolves as a character, he assumes a narrative voice that permeates the novel and on occasions makes a very perceptible appearance. It is exactly this freedom that allows Ishmael to assume some of the typical features of the reflector character or the authorial narrator, instead of adhering to the restrictive boundaries of the first person narrator-character, i.e. the mode in which he introduces himself in the opening of the narrative. As will hopefully be shown in this

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[1] Martin Green, "The Insignificance of Ishmael," *Moby-Dick as Doubloon: Essays and Extracts (1851 – 1970)*, ed. Hershel Parker & Harrison Hayford (New York: W. W. Norton, 1970) 337.

chapter, Ishmael is hardly to be considered "a narrative device" of merely nominal importance.

Some critics assume a more ambivalent position. Lawrence Buell contends: "I do not mean to take a firm position on the issue of whether Ishmael actually ceases to become the narrator of portions of *Moby-Dick.*"[2] He goes on to argue that "the final section and the earlier dramatic chapters provide support for such a claim," but at the same time, "one could also argue that Melville has chosen to alternate between using Ishmael as conscious intermediary and using Ishmael as a conduit of vision,"[3] i.e. between narrator (teller) and reflector modes, which has been the terminology used in this thesis. It is questionable to what extent the projection of Ishmael on the scene is a construct taking place within the recipient's psyche. This phenomenon has been discussed in relation to "Midnight, Forecastle" in the previous chapter.

The projection of Ishmael into scenes of his absence can take on an extreme dimension. John Bryant asserts that in Chapter 41, "Ishmael returns transformed; no longer a central character, he has become the novel's central consciousness and narrative voice."[4] Such a reading interprets Ishmael as the artistic consciousness, i.e. as the author of Ahab's drama, who pulls the strings of the characters during their performance. Naturally, Ishmael has to forfeit the role he occupied in the beginning and, as Bryant contends, Ishmael's importance as a character erodes.[5] Ishmael the character occasionally resurfaces (e.g. his interaction with Queequeg in "The Monkey-Rope"), but he appears to have transformed himself into a narrative voice. Such a reading also raises the question to what extent *Moby-Dick* is the story of Ahab and, on the other

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[2] Lawrence Buell, "*Moby-Dick* as Sacred Text," *New Essays on Moby-Dick*, ed. Richard H. Brodhead (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1991) 72.
[3] Buell 72.
[4] John Bryant, "*Moby-Dick* as Revolution," *The Cambridge Companion to Herman Melville*, ed. Robert S. Levine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 67.
[5] Bryant 67.

hand, of Ishmael. John W. Young even goes as far as to argue that "the Ahab drama is presented in the framework of Ishmael's personal narrative,"[6] formally bound by "Loomings" and "Epilogue."

John W. Young visions Ishmael as a "synthesizing narrator,"[7] one possessing a "creative consciousness" that enables "the distinction between past and present" to "dissolve in his synthesizing mind."[8] It is Ishmael in this mode, who enters Ahab's[9] and Starbuck's thoughts;[10] he has to transcend the boundaries delineated for the first person narrator to achieve those ends. Young goes on to argue that the shift in the narrative is accompanied by a change in the formal features as well, as Ishmael uses speech tags at first, but gradually forsakes them as he moves inward, into the subconscious.[11] Young asserts that Ishmael's creative imagination is further characterized by his "triple consciousness": the narrator who reminisces, the dramatist who recreates, and the philosopher who reflects upon them.[12] Since Ishmael does not make his appearance in the dramatic chapters, Young concludes that he is their narrator[13]—in Young's reading, Ishmael is not the lens through which the fictional reality is transferred to the reader, but the artistic consciousness. Such a reading provides a possible motivation for Ishmael's absence in "The Quarter-Deck": having receded from the narrative in the chapter in question, Ishmael distances himself from the choices his younger self has made. As has already been pointed out, he confesses his participation in "Moby Dick." The paradox of such an interpretation is that Ishmael manifests his presence through his absence.

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[6] John W. Young, "Ishmael's Development as Narrator: Melville's Synthesizing Process," *College Literature* 9.2 (1982): 107, JSTOR <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25111433> 23 April 2014.
[7] Young 97.
[8] Young 98.
[9] Young 98.
[10] Young 101.
[11] Young 101.
[12] Young 100.
[13] Young 104.

Young's interpretation explains the shifts from "actor-narrator to stage manager,"[14] but at the same time cannot be fully corroborated, as the text does not contain a continuous metalevel. That is not to state that such a reading is wrong: *Moby-Dick* is oriented towards the reader and is composed in such a manner as to foment a multitude of possible interpretations.

*Moby-Dick* eludes narratological analysis for the same reason for which it resists classification: rather than dealing with the traditional narrative situations, the reader encounters a string of fragments, which seem very loosely connected (e.g. drama and encyclopedic novel). The disparate discourses employed in *Moby-Dick* are parallel to the Romantic status of a fragment as an autonomous work of art completely independent of its environment, as propounded by Schlegel: "[a] fragment, like a small work of art, has to be entirely isolated from the surrounding world and be complete in itself like a hedgehog."[15] Owing to its dynamic and recalcitrant nature, the individual meaning, similarly to the hedgehog, cannot be grasped and is oriented towards the future and individual reading.[16] Ishmael invokes God in the conclusion of "Cetology" to keep his work unfinished, whereby asserting its status as a fragment. The infinitude of possible meanings in the case of Melville pertains to the various fragmentary discourses which reflect one of the thematic preoccupations of *Moby-Dick*, the attempt to capture reality within a sign system. In order to do so, the narrative necessarily has to employ a whole range of genres: prose, drama, essays, encyclopedic entries, as well as various kinds of rhetoric. The thematic facet reflects the formal features as the employed genre frequently reflects the situation within the narrative, as will be discussed below. The

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[14] Young 97.

[15] Allen Speight, "Friedrich Schlegel," *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (The Metaphysics Research Lab, Center for the Study of Language and Information, Stanford University, 2 November 2011) <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/schlegel> 30 April 2015.

[16] Allen Speight, "Friedrich Schlegel," *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (The Metaphysics Research Lab, Center for the Study of Language and Information, Stanford University, 2 November 2011) <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/schlegel> 30 April 2015.

attempt to document life in its entirety using multifarious forms of discourses with particular emphasis on experience foreshadows the tenets of pragmatism.

Ishmael is unable to confine the actual whale into clean-cut categories, using man made hierarchies and consequently resorts to using separate fragments instead. He acknowledges the fragmentary nature of *Moby-Dick* in "The Affidavit," in which he declares that he "care[s] not to perform this part of [his] task methodically" but instead he will "produce the desired impression by separate citations of items" (170). The various fragmented discourses find their way in the yet unwritten poem that Ishmael reserved parts of his body for, as he wished it to "remain a blank page for a poem [he] was then composing" (346 – 347). Ishmael's narrative voice seems to possess synthesizing powers, but it is questionable to what extent these are a scheme within the recipient's mind as a result of an attempt to make order out of chaos (similarly to the projection of Ishmael as the reflector onto the scenes of his absences). The text of *Moby-Dick*—like the whale himself—refers to nothing but to itself; rather than providing evidence of either of the two tendencies (synthesizing powers vs. fragmentary nature of the text), *Moby-Dick* is ambiguous and contains elements of both. In this respect, the interpretation is left up to the reader.

**4.2. The Encyclopedic Novel and Ishmael's Subversive Tendencies**

One of the most prominent interactions between the various discourses is the hybrid form of the encyclopedic novel. According to Edward Mendelson, encyclopedic novels "attempt to render the full range of knowledge and beliefs of a national culture, while identifying the ideological perspectives from which that culture shapes and

interprets its knowledge."[17] Literature indeed has an ideological dimension for Melville. In "Hawthorne and his Mosses" he urges his fellow countrymen to pursue originality in their writing, as well as to value their own artists: "[l]et America then prize and cherish her writers; yea, let her glorify them."[18] Rather than identifying itself with "a single plot or structure," the encyclopedic narrative encompasses "a broad set of qualities," all of which include "full account of a technology or science" (1270).[19] The narrative situation consequently follows these tendencies and reflects them.

Luc Herman asserts that the open status is symptomatic of the encyclopedic novel and that "Diderot already indicated in the eighteenth century that the encyclopedia was essentially an open form."[20] Identical tendencies are traceable in *Moby-Dick*; Ishmael proclaims that he leaves his "cetological System standing thus unfinished," immodestly likening it to "the great Cathedral of Cologne" that too was not finished, "with the crane still standing upon the top of the uncompleted tower" (125). For Ishmael, the openness of his work is a prerequisite for greatness, and the openness of the genre he pioneers is used to support it, as he declares that "small erections may be finished by their first architects" but the "grand ones, true ones, ever leave their copestone to posterity" (125). Luc Herman goes on to argue that "undermining the idea of a neat and definite body of knowledge"[21] is typical for the encyclopedic novel and it is exactly this notion that is played out throughout the bulk of *Moby-Dick*, in "Cetology" in particular. The book is

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[17] Edward Mendelson, "Encyclopedic Narrative: From Dante to Pynchon," *Comparative Literature* 91.6 (1976): 1269, JSTOR <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2907136> 3 May 2015.
[18] Herman Melville, "Hawthorne and his Mosses", in Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*, ed. Hershel Parker and Harrison Hayford (New York: Norton, 1967) 544.
[19] Mendelson 1270. Mendelson asserts that "[e]ncyclopedic narratives also offer an account of an art outside the realm of written fiction" and observes that *Moby-Dick* contains the whale-paintings (Mendelson, 1270 – 1271). Ishmael scrutinizes "a very large oil-painting" with "a long, limber, portentous, black mass of something hovering in the centre of [it]" (26) in the opening paragraphs of "The Spouter-Inn."
[20] Luc Herman, "Encyclopedic Novel," *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, ed. David Herman et al. (Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2010) 138.
[21] Herman 138.

by definition incomplete, thus perpetuating its own existence by being open to interpretation.

Porter asserts that "Ishmael's position entails what his voice everywhere reveals – a deeply subversive relation to all forms of discourse."[22] This is most overtly manifested in "Cetology." Ishmael sets out by dismissing Linnaeus's taxonomy and asserts that the whale is "*a spouting fish with a horizontal tail*" (117). He informs the reader that he has consulted the classification with two messmates, "Simeon Macey and Charley Coffin, of Nantucket" who "united in the opinions that [Linnaeus's] reasons set forth were altogether insufficient" (117). The actual reality of whaling is juxtaposed with the zoological record of the whale, and ensues in comical effect as Charley even "profanely hinted [that Linnaeus's reasons] were humbug" (117). "Cetology" is ironic: while Ishmael opens the chapter by dismissing Linnaeus's classification, he continues in a taxonomist fashion, i.e. he merely classifies the known classes of the whale.

The whole chapter is a supreme example of what Carolyn Porter terms "double-voiced discourse."[23] On such occasions, Ishmael "speaks with the full authority of the culture whose authority he is out to subvert."[24] In "Cetology," Ishmael uses the book printing terminology; as Parker and Hayford assert, "[f]olio, octavo, and duodecimo are technical terms by which printers and booksellers classify the size of books and their pages, from large to small" (118). While Ishmael follows *Penny Cyclopædia* in excluding "Lamatins and Dugongs (Pig-fish and Sow-fish of the Coffins of Nantucket),"[25] he deviates—as Parker and Hayford argue—"from the method and its degree of scientific precision" (117). Parker and Hayford observe that "[Melville's]

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[22] Porter 84.
[23] Porter 94.
[24] Porter 93.
[25] Melville's footnote, 117.

classifying whales simply by size deliberately defies the elaborately detailed scientific system readily available in the *Penny Cyclopædia* article" (118). Moreover, Melville's "adopting bibliographical terminology for size" results in "an added humorous fling" (118). In other words, Ishmael uses the learned discourse in order to subvert it—it is implicitly suggested that the individual categories are merely human constructs invented for the purpose of orientation. In this respect, whales and books are classified by the selfsame limiting principles. The passages taken from the *Penny Cyclopædia* article are misquoted on purpose; by doing so, Ishmael foreshadows the thematization of the impossibility to capture the Leviathan in all his gargantuan proportions. Ishmael demonstrates the limits of the bookish knowledge by using it.

Ishmael not only misquotes, but also deliberately fails to deliver the intended meaning. One of his motivations is to show the inability to confine reality into a sign system. According to Mendelson, "all encyclopedias provide an image of their own scale by including giants or gigantism."[26] Apart from the thematic preoccupation with the whale, Ishmael goes a step further and conflates the subject matter with the size associated with the book printing in "Cetology." In "The Fossil Whale" Ishmael asserts that writing on a weighty subject implies greatness, as he declares that "[t]o produce a mighty book, you must choose a mighty theme (349) and that "[n]o great and enduring volume can ever be written of the flea, though many there be who have tried it" (349). The whale he so painstakingly attempts to capture eludes him, even though he dedicates individual chapters to some of the whale's body parts, e.g. "The Tail," "The Sperm Whale's Head" or "The Right Whale's Head." Earlier on, Ishmael declares that the sperm whale "lives not complete in any literature" (116) and in the subsequent part of the narrative attempts to remedy the insufficient textual record. After disproving the

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[26] Mendelson 1271.

misrepresentations of the whale in chapters 55 and 56, "Of the Monstrous Pictures of Whales" and "Of the Less Erroneous Pictures of Whales, and the True Pictures of Whaling Scenes," Ishmael implicitly concludes that he cannot document the whale in his entirety. The whale evades him, and the only occasion that Ishmael is enabled to take measurements of an adult whale is when the whale is dead. Not "troubl[ing] [himself] with odd inches" (347), he describes the occasion when he measured the whale in "A Bower in the Arsacides" and lays the measurements for the reader in "Measurement of the Whale's Skeleton."

In the conclusion of "Squid," Ishmael juxtaposes the actual experience and its inaccurate textual equivalent: "By some naturalists who have vaguely heard rumors of the mysterious creature, here spoken of, it is included among the class of cuttle-fish" (227). Ishmael encountered an actual squid and he is therefore aware of the difference in size between the two animals, as he states that the squid "would seem to belong to the class of the cuttle-fish" in "certain external respects," but "only as the Anak of the tribe" (227). The proclamation is in line with the rejection of Linnaeus's classification of the whale; Ishmael has witnessed the whale first-hand and is familiar with the horror of whaling, which motivates him to write that "against Linnaeus's express edict," "down to the year 1850, sharks and shad, alewives and herring […] were still found dividing the possession of the same seas with the Leviathan" (117).

According to Edward Mendelson, the encyclopedic novel "can describe the whole range of physical science" and therefore "examples from one or two sciences serve to represent the whole scientific sector of human knowledge."[27] Ishmael's idiosyncratic approach to cetology as a field of science has already been discussed. In the conclusion of "The Prairie," Ishmael writes that "Champollion deciphered the wrinkled granite

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[27] Mendelson 1269.

hieroglyphs" (274). The sign system, albeit with difficulty is still decipherable, unlike the face of a human being: "But there is no Champollion to decipher the Egypt of every man's and every being's face" (274 – 275). Using a fallacy, Ishmael then equates physiognomy with all sciences: "[p]hysiognomy, like every other human science, is but a passing fable" (275). By doing so, he tries to prove the futility of the human attempt to explicate the natural phenomena and the universe: "If then, Sir William Jones, who read in thirty languages, could not read the simplest peasant's face in its profounder and more subtle meanings, how may unlettered Ishmael hope to read the awful Chaldee of the Sperm Whale's brow?" (275). Ishmael exposes the inadequacy of science, but at the same time uses its authority in "Cetology;" while he rejects the scholarly discourse, he plunders it for information and authority, i.e. he uses the "double voiced discourse" according to Porter.

The inclusion of the encyclopedic elements implies the shift in the narrative situation. In the chapters in question, the narrative situation approaches the realm of the authorial narrator. Since Ishmael assumes the role of the author of those chapters, and since in some of them the process of writing is thematized, he exhibits narrative self-consciousness. The self-consciousness is buttressed by the use of footnotes, which predominantly appear in the encyclopedic chapters. According to Rimmon-Kenan, incorporation of footnotes in a work of fiction "automatically draws attention to the presence of a narrator reflecting on his own narration."[28] As a result, the footnote undermines "either the credibility of the text or the reliability of the narrator or both."[29] In case of *Moby-Dick*, both the credibility of the text and the narrator's reliability are affected by the use of the footnotes, as their use "emphasizes the status of the text as

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[28] Rimmon-Kenan 100.
[29] Rimmon-Kenan 100.

artifice, provoking reflections about fictionality and textuality which are typical of self-conscious narratives."[30]

To use an anachronism, *Moby-Dick* contains metafictional elements. Linda Hutcheon defines metafiction as "fiction about fiction—that is, fiction that includes within itself a commentary on its own narrative and/or linguistic identity;"[31] the genre of metafiction is therefore defined by its relation to the narrative self-consciousness. Rather than being an either/or question, it is according to Hutcheon a matter of degree, instead of kind.[32] The reader encounters similar problem as in dealing with the narrator-reflector dichotomy. It is questionable to what extent is the narrative self-consciousness embedded within the text of *Moby-Dick* itself, and to what extent it is a construct taking place within the recipient's mind: *Moby-Dick* undoubtedly contains elements of metafiction (Ishmael's self-consciousness), but at the same time, the text itself does not contain sufficient evidence to prove a continuous metalevel. Although repeatedly, manifestations of Ishmael's self-consciousness occur and are thematized only scarcely—he does not operate in the fashion of the narrator of *Tom Jones* or *Vanity Fair*, who frequently allude to the process of writing and share their viewpoint on the development of the narrative.

### 4.3. The Interaction between the Thematic and the Formal Features

Conceptually, the narrative situation of *Moby-Dick* eludes the possibilities of narratological analysis. It has been shown that when confronted with Stanzel's "ideal situations," *Moby-Dick* resists classification as the narrative situation is too complex for

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[30] Rimmon-Kenan 100.
[31] Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1986) 1. Hutcheon argues that metafiction is not a 20th century invention and discusses its predecessors, namely *Don Quijote* and *Tristram Shandy* (Hutcheon, 8, 142).
[32] Hutcheon 37.

Ishmael to be assigned to a single point on the typological circle.[33] While Ishmael introduces himself as the narrator-character and interacts with other characters in the beginning (e.g. Queequeg and Peter Coffin), he soon abandons the realm of the first person narrator. His identity is in constant flux and the narrative situation consequently oscillates. It is vital to assert that Ishmael never becomes a prototypical narrator or reflector, but retains some of the features associated with the two poles: instead of an "ideal" narrative situation, the reader is confronted with a mixture of fluctuating identities through which a narrative voice addresses the reader. This subchapter attempts to interpret the interaction between the thematic and the formal features of *Moby-Dick*.

One of the causes of the elusive character of *Moby-Dick* is the fact that the narrative situation does not focus solely on the diverse means of representation, but more importantly on their purport in the narrative. In "The Quarter-Deck," Ahab declares that "[a]ll visible objects […] are but as pasteboard masks" (140). The thematic and the formal features interact: Ahab, a character within the story, makes use of a dramatic simile, while the story is undergoing a change of means of representation. Though not comprised of a dramatic dialogue, the narrative situation switches to showing, or the reflector mode; Ishmael the narrator is eclipsed by Ahab and the means of representation therefore have to be modified. The chapter is a pivotal moment in the narrative and the mode of representation reinforces its importance, as it dramatizes Ahab's manipulative techniques by means of a primitive ritual. It is worth noting that the narrative follows these patterns later on as well, i.e. all important scenes are staged, rather than told. Description of Ahab also favors showing.

Ahab's machinations not only foreshadow the future employment of dramatic means of representation on a larger scale, but are also used to articulate the potential

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[33] Defiance towards classification is discussed above in relation to "Cetology."

dangers of democracy—the only opponent of Ahab's intention is Starbuck, whose voice is drowned out in the turmoil of the raging crowd. The sailors seal their fate by a free vote, whereby providing Ahab with the necessary means for the destruction of Moby Dick. By asking Starbuck to "call everybody aft" (137), Ahab exerts his cunning to the utmost: he creates illusion of equality, all the more striking in the undemocratic nautical setting. Ahab's ritual bears a strong resemblance to a dramatic performance and the dramatic conceit takes on another dimension, as the deck of the *Pequod* becomes a stage. The parallels between the events of the story (dramatizing the primitive ritual), and the formal features (shift from telling to showing) testify to the interaction between the formal and the thematic features. It is also essential to consider the order in which the events are presented: Ahab is first performed, and an attempt to capture his true self follows in "Sunset." The alternations between the reflector and teller mode therefore serve to interact with the thematic aspects of the novel. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan asserts that showing is more dramatic and more vivid as it "reduces the narrator's role to that of a 'camera'" and leaves it up on the reader to imagine the scene.[34] Ishmael recedes from the narrative, rendering it more dramatic, and cedes his authority onto the recipient.

Prior to the events of the 36th chapter, Ahab isolates himself in a domain of his own, parallel to his cabin where he "remained invisibly enshrined" (93)—his privacy, "the sacred retreat of his cabin" (108), is not to be intruded upon. As an image of absolute authority, Ahab violates the privacy of other crew members, including their unconscious (Stubb's dream, discussed below). In "The Cabin Table," the narrative has transgressed the boundaries of the first person narration and the imperviousness of Ahab's inner self is described: "Ahab's soul, shut up in the caved trunk of his body,

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[34] Rimmon-Kenan 108.

there fed upon the sullen paws of its gloom" (131). Ahab's unquestionable authority is not to be oppugned by any of the characters and the narrative situation therefore has to be altered yet again in order to explore the protected realm of his unconscious. It is in "Sunset" that description of Ahab's subconscious appears for the first time. Telling, the dominant mode of the pre-"Quarter-Deck" chapters transformed into showing in "The Quarter-Deck" and into soliloquy in the three chapters following.

The narrative situation in "The Chart" is even more intricate. Ishmael does not manifest his physical presence and it remains unclear whether he projected himself into Ahab's cabin or not. However, the narrative situation resembles omniscience and there are even feature of the authorial narrator within the chapter:

> Though the gregarious sperm whales have their regular seasons for particular grounds, yet in general you cannot conclude that the herds which haunted such and such a latitude or longitude this year, say, will turn out to be identically the same with those that were found there the preceding season; though there are peculiar and unquestionable instances where the contrary of this has proved true (168).

Ahab's violation of the common sense is parallel to the transgression of the narrative situation employed in the chapter in question. This observation is even more appreciable in the following excerpt:

> And have I not tallied the whale, Ahab would mutter to himself, as after poring over his charts till long after midnight he would throw himself back in reveries— tallied him, and shall he escape? (169)

The breach of the narrative situation is carried out not only to stage Ahab's inner feud and to perform his subconscious, but it also affirms the narrator's unreliability. Most importantly, the alternations in the narrative situation reflect the thematic preoccupation

of *Moby-Dick*: in order to capture Ahab's inner self, the restrictive boundaries of the first person narrator have to be abandoned and other means of representation exploited.

By including the dramatic elements in a novel, Melville establishes a nexus between his writings and the romantic mode of drama, mental theatre. It denotes "the experience of reading poetic dramatic texts in order to experience them imaginatively."[35] The opposing tendencies of reading a work of fiction, an activity usually associated with one's privacy, and of watching a drama performance (public experience) are therefore reconciled in *Moby-Dick*. In his discussion of mental theatre, Nat Leach contends that "it makes the readers/audience aware that theatrical bodies are not inherently meaningful, but are given meaning by an act of mental projection and interpretation."[36] The reader therefore becomes an active participant and is invited to partake in the act of interpretation. Placing the dramatic chapters in a novel fortifies the intention not to be performed[37] and, more importantly, it places emphasis on the reader's imagination.

Leech goes on to argue that in Byron's drama, as well as in other works of mental theatre, the body becomes a resistance to the idealist philosophies of the mind,[38] an assertion clearly applicable to Ishmael. The chapel environment inspires Ishmael to ponder the opposition between one's physical and spiritual existence:

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[35] Laura Dabundo, ed. *Encyclopedia of Romanticism: Culture in Britain, 1780s – 1830s* (New York: Routledge, 2014) 371.

[36] Nat Leach, "Historical Bodies in a "Mental Theatre": Byron's Ethics of History," *Studies in Romanticism* 46.1 (2007): 4, ProQuest <
http://gateway.proquest.com.ezproxy.is.cuni.cz/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-
2003&xri:pqil:res_ver=0.2&res_id=xri:lion&rft_id=xri:lion:ft:abell:R03949403:0> 24 March.

[37] The attempt to stage and adapt *Moby-Dick* was perhaps most skillfully handled by Orson Welles in *Moby-Dick Rehearsed*, in which equal emphasis is put on the imagination of the audience by eradicating any unnecessary props (using the items at hand, a broom and chairs), as well as by—somewhat anticlimactically—leaving out the presentation of the White Whale himself. Arguably, Welles rewrites Melville in a similar fashion as Melville rewrites Shakespeare: with a great deal of innovation. Coincidentally, Orson Welles plays Father Mapple in the 1956 film adaptation.

[38] Leach 5.

> Methinks we have hugely mistaken this matter of Life and Death. Methinks that what they call my shadow here on earth is my true substance. Methinks that in looking at things spiritual, we are too much like oysters observing the sun through the water, and thinking that thick water is the thinnest of air. Methinks my body is but the lees of my better being (45).

Ishmael concludes, "In fact take my body who will, take it I say, this is not me. And therefore three cheers for Nantucket; and come a stove boat and stove body when they will, for stave my soul, Jove himself cannot" (45). The excerpt foreshadows the development of the whole narrative: by rejecting the bodily, Ishmael approaches the stances symptomatic for the mental theatre. Using the powers inherent to the narrator, Ishmael adumbrates the shift to the reflector. Once again, the thematic aspects of *Moby-Dick* manifest themselves in the formal facet later on, after the outburst of the dramatic elements following "The Quarter-Deck"—there are instances in which Ishmael literally gives up his body in favor of freedom of narrative representation.

The divorce from the physical world also enabled Melville to attempt to represent the unconscious and the subconscious. Melville ventures to refine what he acclaimed most in Shakespeare, as declared in "Hawthorne and his Mosses": "the undeveloped, (and sometimes even undevelopable) yet dimly-discernible greatness," the unconscious, to which the "immediate products" of "a great mid" are but "infallible indices."[39] He defines it as the "occasional flashings-forth of the intuitive Truth […] short, quick probings at the very axis of reality."[40] The primary requisite for representation of the unconscious is Ahab's unquestionable authority, as reflected in his relationship and treatment of other characters.

In order to prevent Stubb from kicking him, Ahab turns into a pyramid in Stubb's dream. The psychological implication is that Ahab's indisputable prerogative is

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[39] Melville, "Hawthorne and his Mosses" 542.
[40] Melville, "Hawthorne and his Mosses" 541.

asserted by invading Stubb in the unconscious state; Stubb equals Ahab with the pyramid unconsciously: the attempt to attack the *Pequod*'s captain physically futile—the authority and hierarchy that the pyramid represents is too firm. The only defense mechanism that Stubb's simplicity and gaiety enables him is "the wisest, easiest answer to all that's queer" (145): laughter. As has been already argued, Ahab is staged rather than told and so does his character follow Melville's dramatic characterization.[41] The thematic aspects therefore interact with the formal facet. Ahab's authority is reinforced by his solitariness and by his primary mode of communication: soliloquy. In dialogue with other characters, Ahab is laconic and aggressive.

The diverse kinds of the representation of Ahab are enabled by the plurality of perspectives: as has been shown, the various narrative modes reflect the situation in the story and its thematic preoccupation. The mode of showing is dramatized as the narrative abandons the conceit of the *Pequod* as the stage and relocates the scene into the recipient's psyche—the movement is from a physically determined to a freely imagined and indeterminate space. The reader's imagination is consequently emphasized; he or she is granted greater authority in terms of interpretation and becomes a co-director of the drama. *Moby-Dick* is therefore both limiting and liberating: although the reader cannot grasp the text in its entirety and can only perform one of many possible adaptations, the text is open to a virtually infinite number of interpretations.

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[41] Ahab's as well as Stubb's importance in terms of characterization is discussed by: Warner Berthoff, "Characterization in *Moby-Dick*", in Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*, ed. Hershel Parker and Harrison Hayford (New York: Norton, 1967) and Charles Olson, *Call Me Ishmael* (New York: Grove Press, 1947).

## 5. Conclusion

In the second and the third chapters of this thesis *Moby-Dick* has been submitted to two different strains of narratology, namely Wayne C. Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction* and Franz Stanzel's *A Theory of Narrative*. Other narratologists have been taken into account as well (Genette, Rimmon-Kenan). The attempt to categorize *Moby-Dick* has been shown to function only partially; although it resists classification, some of the implications of the individual narrative modes (the teller and the reflector) do apply to Ishmael. For instance, the narrative situation switches to showing in order to stage Ahab's drama in "The Quarter-Deck"; the level of immediacy rises and the reader, according to Rimmon-Kenan, is granted greater authority in terms of interpretation.[1] However, *Moby-Dick* eludes the narratological analysis as it does not follow the tenets of traditional narrative situations completely; Ishmael is never part of any "ideal situation," i.e. he never assumes an exact point on Stanzel's typological circle, but by constant oscillation between various means of representation retains some of the features of the individual models. This is caused by the fact that the narrative situation in *Moby-Dick* does not focus on the means of representation but more importantly on their placement and purport within the narrative. The elusive nature of *Moby-Dick* results in the virtually infinite possible interpretations. Rather than providing a clean-cut and definite narrative situation, *Moby-Dick* consists of a series of fragments that are possibly connected within the reader's psyche, though in the text they are not explicitly linked.

The narrative situation is equally problematic in terms of self-consciousness. Ishmael inarguably establishes himself as a strongly self-conscious narrator on a

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[1] Rimmon-Kenan 108.

number of occasions (e.g. "Cetology," "The Affidavit," "A Bower in the Arsacides" or "The Fossil Whale"). However, a continuous metalevel within the text itself cannot be traced and consequently established—as has been asserted, the narrator in *Moby-Dick* does not operate in the fashion of the narrator of *Tom Jones* or *Vanity Fair* and the evidence of the narrative self-consciousness is scarce. It could be argued that the self-conscious patterns are constructed in such a way as to bemuse the reader and coerce him or her into new ways of thinking about the text: although scarce, they are very distinct—be it in form of providing the exact minute of writing ("The Fountain," 290) or referring to the text as a "draught of a draught" ("Cetology," 125). The ambiguity of the narrative situation induces an abundance of possible readings, each of them dependent on the reader him- or herself.

The aforementioned staging of Ahab's drama also manifests one of the preoccupations of this thesis: the interaction between the thematic and formal aspects of *Moby-Dick*. While the prevalent mode of the chapters preceding "The Quarter-Deck" has been that of a teller, it changes in this chapter: Ahab performs the primitive ritual and the narrative situation appropriates the features of showing, or the reflector mode. However, "The Quarter-Deck" is loaded with meaning and it is this multi-layered quality that is symptomatic of *Moby-Dick*: for instance, the character of Ahab enables political reading, which has been touched upon (Ahab and his manipulative skills as a menace to democracy; the historical context and Manifest Destiny). Given the extent and focus of this thesis, interpretation of Ahab as a political figure cannot be done justice to.[2]

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[2] Stimulating political reading of Ahab is provided by James Duban in *Melville's Major Fictions: Politics, Theology and Imagination* (Dekalb: Northern University Press, 1983). Some critics provide reading of Ahab in relation to Ralph Waldo Emerson as a critique of excessive self-reliance, e.g. according to Harold Bloom, he is "self-reliance gone mad" (Harold Bloom, "Harold Bloom's *Moby-*

It has been argued that one of the chief endeavors of Ishmael's is the attempt to record reality and all of its multifarious aspects. The important fact to realize is that Ishmael merely attempts to do so; he is well aware of the futility of his endeavor and acknowledges its fragmentary and incomplete nature in the conclusion of "Cetology" and in "The Affidavit." In this respect, *Moby-Dick* follows Schlegel's concept of the fragment as an autonomous work of art; the various discourses and narrative strategies that are incorporated in the novel form a series of loosely connected fragments, each of which possesses a meaning of its own. Relationships between them are complex and it is questionable if the links between them are a scheme within the recipient's psyche or if they are a part of the text itself. The semi-finished status that Ishmael conceives of as a prerequisite of greatness in "Cetology" is also one of the features of the encyclopedic novel propounded by Edward Mendelson; the encyclopedic elements exemplify one of the primary discourses employed in the narrative used in order to attempt to record reality in its entirety (along with drama and prose). Ishmael exposes the futility of such an endeavor and the limits of the human knowledge by imposing artificial categories on natural phenomena.

By showing that the narrative theory never entirely corresponds to the narrative situation, this thesis did not aim to prove the individual theorists wrong. It has hopefully been shown that in spite of the fact that the narration in *Moby-Dick* eludes narratological analysis, implications of the model situations, such as the narrator-reflector dichotomy, are indispensable to the interpretation of the narrative techniques. The problematic area of the narrator in *Moby-Dick* has been addressed and some of the possible interpretations provided; while some critics disregard Ishmael altogether (e.g. Martin Green), John Bryant for instance conceives of Ishmael as a creative

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*Dick*," *radioopensource.org.* October 2011. <http://radioopensource.org/harold-blooms-melville/> 9 September 2014.).

consciousness and a principle behind the whole narrative.[3] We have taken Porter's viewpoint of Ishmael being the "narrative voice," rather than approaching him as a character or a consciousness. Such complexities arise from the very nature of the text itself: it is both oscillatory and recalcitrant. The whole bulk of *Moby-Dick* has been shown as oriented towards the reader; by its resistance towards classification and defiance towards clean-cut interpretations, the text grants the recipient considerable freedom and it is this freedom that catapults the reader into the interpretative universe.

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[3] Bryant 67.

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