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**THE DANGERS OF LIVING THE "HALF-KNOWN LIFE": WHAT MOBY-DICK CAN
TEACH US ABOUT NATURE**

An honors paper submitted to the Department of English, Linguistics, and Communication
of the University of Mary Washington
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Departmental Honors

Katherine Barth

May 2017

By signing your name below, you affirm that this work is the complete and final version of your paper submitted in partial fulfillment of a degree from the University of Mary Washington. You affirm the University of Mary Washington honor pledge: "I hereby declare upon my word of honor that I have neither given nor received unauthorized help on this work."

Katherine Barth
(digital signature)

05/11/17

The Dangers of Living the “Half-Known Life”: What *Moby-Dick* Can Teach Us About Nature

At the time Herman Melville was grappling with the monstrous manuscript that was to become *Moby-Dick*, America was engaged in its own battles of global expansionism, including the Mexican War and the War of 1812, environmental devastation, unfair class conditions, the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, and shifting ideals of the self, other, and collective in American culture (Armstrong 1039). Unbeknownst to Melville, whose novel would go unappreciated during his lifetime, *Moby-Dick* would become prime fodder for 20th and 21st century literary critics and scholars who both critiqued and praised Melville’s literary accomplishment. However, *Moby-Dick* is much more than a novel that seeks to entertain readers with its tale of the mysterious White Whale and the monomaniac Captain Ahab; it is a novel that can be used as a way to train students how to think. Specifically, the novel can be used to explore the physical, emotional, and spiritual realms of nature and analyze our interactions with them. In academia, we are quick to apply ethics to areas of study involving human subjects as examples of social injustice or scientific inquiry, but this means we often overlook nontraditional areas of ethical exploration such as the treatment and portrayal of nature in literature. After all, “the book’s subject is not just the monster Captain Ahab tries in vain to slay but ‘the whale’ as a species”--the whale as a part of nature--the whale as integral to an environmental community (Karcher 104). While studying this novel, I found Ishmael’s experiences with nature not only symbolically significant and personally gratifying, but also a lens through which to praise and critique our own interactions with nature.

Of course, there is no denying that approaching *Moby-Dick* requires certain literary tools, much like chasing Moby Dick in the novel requires harpoons, whale line, and copious amounts

of labor. Unlike the White Whale however, the novel itself is much more conquerable. A prepared reader should approach *Moby-Dick* with an open mind, a willingness to read research outside of the text, a tolerance for Melville's continual digressions, and a ready sense of bawdy humor. Since persuading students to read *Moby-Dick* would still prove more difficult than hunting the White Whale himself, I prefer to invite readers to consider how exploring the theme of nature in *Moby-Dick* not only causes us to deeply consider our relationship with the physical world but also our relationship with ourselves and our fellow humans.

According to Sonja Foss and Cindy Griffin, efforts to change others' thoughts have roots in control and dominance (4) which means that an attempt to persuade an audience that our way of looking at the world is correct and that our values, beliefs, and ideals are worth embracing, "establishes the power of that change agent over another" (Foss and Griffin 3). Therefore, by inviting my audience to "develop [their own] interpretations, perspectives, courses of action, and solution[s] to problems different from" my own throughout this analysis of the novel, I aim to cultivate genuine understanding rather than consensus (Foss and Griffin 16).

I willingly acknowledge "the possibility that audience members are content with the belief systems they have developed, function happily with them, and do not perceive a need to change" (Foss and Griffin 3). In this kind of invitational approach, change is not the desired outcome. This is not to say that change is not important; however, individuals change as a result of knowledge and understanding and not because they have been convinced that a particular way of thinking is superior to their own. Therefore, my paper aims to be neither assertive nor persuasive, but rather explanatory.

I.

“Why should we not also enjoy an original relation to the universe?”

-Emerson *Nature* (1836)

It seems that our relationship to the natural world in the 21st century is instead a relationship with the portrayal of nature in television, books, digital mediums, synthetic materials, and domesticated experiences. Emerson, in *Nature*, states that

[p]hilosophically considered, the universe is composed of Nature and the Soul ... therefore, all that is separate from us, all which Philosophy distinguishes as the NOT ME, that is, both nature and art, all other men and my own body, must be ranked under this name, NATURE. (Emerson 8)

Emerson believes that everything is part and parcel of nature. According to Emerson, “Nature” is that which man does not alter--such as “the air, the river, the leaf”--which means nature is best communed with in the “fields and woods” where one is “not alone and unacknowledged” (24) but in constant conversation with the environment around him. Leave it to Melville to one-up Emerson and choose a locale immeasurably more vast and infinitely more curious for his epic novel: the ocean. Here, the ultimate communion with nature occurs through Ishmael’s narration of his own experiences and those of his crew mates.

Subsequently, following Melville’s iconic opening line, “Call me Ishmael,” the novel begins with Ishmael equating his depression and suicidal tendencies to a “damp, drizzly November in [his] soul”; to remedy his plight, he considers sailing out into “the watery part of the world” (Melville 18). Ishmael believes that he is not alone in his longing for the sea and that all men “cherish very nearly the same feelings towards the ocean” (Melville 18). Ishmael implies that this desire for nature, and the ocean in particular, is present in all men, which “indicates

human[s] have an innate affinity for nature and need nature for aesthetics, intellectual, cognitive, and spiritual meaning” (Mustapa 333). Ishmael experiences an emotional pull to place himself as close to nature as possible aboard a whaling vessel, demonstrating a move from self-harm toward self-healing since time spent in nature is Ishmael’s “substitute for pistol and ball” (Melville 18). Thus, nature becomes a restorative site for Ishmael since, as “everyone knows, meditation and water are wedded for ever” (Melville 19). As Ishmael sets sail aboard the *Pequod* on Christmas day, he begins the ultimate exploration of both human and ecological nature.

II.

According to a scientific review regarding human connection with nature, Nor Diyana Mustapa argues there are three types of contact that can occur with the natural environment: “direct, indirect and vicarious or symbolic experience” (331). Direct experience with nature relies on physical contact without the presence of human control, such as when Ishmael and the crew of the *Pequod* lower to hunt whales. Not only do they come in bodily contact with the whales and the ocean, but they also have no control over the outcome of a hunt or the actions of the whales themselves. This form of interaction is the most unpredictable, as witnessed in “The First Lowering.” In the whaleboat, Ishmael experiences the tangibly dangerous realities of whaling. He recounts “[A] gush of vapor shot up nearby; something rolled and tumbled like an earthquake beneath us. The whole crew were half suffocated as they were tossed helter-skelter into the white curdling cream of the squall. Squall, whale, and harpoon had all blended together” (Melville 187). Ishmael nearly drowns when he is tossed into the churning water with the distressed whale in the midst of a squall. Suddenly, his power in relation to that of the physical

world is greatly diminished. Our desire to control our physical environment makes scenarios like this very uncomfortable because we realize how little power we ultimately have over nature.

Conversely, indirect contact with nature is an observation or an interaction in a controlled setting. For example, Ahab has an indirect experience with nature one evening as he solemnly offers this description of the setting sun from the stern window of his cabin: “Yonder, by the ever-brimming goblet’s rim, the warm waves blush like wine. The gold brow plumbs the blue. The diver sun--slow dived from noon--goes down” (Melville 142-43). Here, Ahab observes the sunset from behind the glass of his cabin window in relative safety. The glass becomes a lens through which he can view the world without directly interacting with it, limited to his sense of sight. He can only see the slimmest “rim” (42) of the golden sinking sun and observe that the water appears deep red “like wine” (43) when the light hits it, but he can neither hear the waves lapping at the ship’s hull nor feel a breeze from behind the glass, nor can he smell the salty air.

Lastly, Ishmael experiences symbolic encounters with nature in “visual and verbal interface[s]” (Mustapa 331) that explain natural elements without actually coming in contact with them. For instance, when Ishmael discusses the basis for his whale knowledge in the “Cetology” chapter we learn that he is an avid reader and an eager intellect. Some of the books that Ishmael cites regarding the sperm whale’s “zoology and anatomy” include; “the Bible; Aristotle, Pliny; Aldrovandi; Sir Thomas Browne; Gesener” and more (Melville 115). These works inform Ishmael’s later encounters with whales. Though he is considered a greenhorn, Ishmael knows the whale as an animal and species better than any of his crew mates. If nothing else, his education has made him an astute observer of the whale. In these books, he does not

encounter nature directly, but reads about others' experiences with whales and the characteristics of the animal.

These three types of interaction in the novel supply the characters with varying degrees of involvement with the natural world. We can also see how these different encounters with nature provoke certain emotional responses from the characters such as fear in the case of Ishmael's near-downing experience or anguish from Ahab at the sight of the sunset because he lacks the capacity to enjoy its loveliness.

In the same way that the crew members experience nature, we can likewise interact with nature directly, indirectly, and symbolically. In fact, teaching the novel begins a progressive process of learning about, observing and experiencing nature, respectively. I would argue that teaching literature that presents nature in challenging ways allows students to develop their "connection to nature and positively influences their interest in participating in nature-based activities and environmental behavior" (qtd. in Mustapa 336). Contrary to popular assumption, a "study by Zelenzy (1999) found that indirect experience through environmental education in a classroom is more effective in developing positive environmental behavior than direct experience with nature" (Mustapa 336). Thus, *Moby-Dick* encourages "positive environmental behavior" by providing a form of "symbolic experience" (336). If students do not experience direct or indirect encounters with nature, teaching about nature through books and classroom instruction lays the foundation for understanding these elements before students encounter them.

According to Mustapa and her colleagues, those "with [a] lack of experience and exposure with nature will see themselves [as] separate[] from the natural world," which is why teaching children and students to notice and interact with the natural environment becomes

essential in shaping later attitudes toward the environment (331). The current lack of involvement with the natural world that seems to pervade most education is called “Nature Deficit Disorder” (qtd. in Mustapa 331). This phenomenon can “lead[] to changes in [an individual’s] quality of life” by affecting their cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development (333). Though Ahab does not exhibit a lack of involvement with the natural world, he has instead suffered a grievous injury that has spurred his contempt for nature. Ahab’s loss of his leg was such a traumatic experience, that he harbors a disdain for the natural environment because he feels he has been unjustly abused by it. Similarly, his profession places him in a compromising position in that it relies on the hunting and killing of whales as a commodity; it is, in essence, a job that requires him to be emotionally callous towards the environment. In the same way that a lack of direct contact with nature or education about nature and the physical world stunts our ability to care about environmental concerns, negative experiences with nature can damage our affinity for it. It is interesting to note that even though Ishmael almost drowns, he does not experience the physical loss of a limb like Ahab does. Because of this loss, Ahab develops “‘bio phobia,’ defined as a negative affiliation towards nature” that in turn encourages the destruction of the natural environment as a feared locale (qtd. in Mustapa 332). Ahab views nature as “something to be controlled rather than protected and preserved” (Mustapa 332). Ishmael and Ahab embody two contrasting approaches to nature: Ishmael appreciates nature and critiques environmental degradation and excessive consumptionism, while Ahab is intent on not only pursuing Moby Dick, but dominating and exterminating a creature that becomes the novel’s quintessential symbol of nature. Moby Dick personifies the unknown, mysterious, and untamable nature of the ocean, which Ahab becomes intent on destroying in pursuit of vengeance. Instead

of viewing the whale as a creature that reacts instinctively, Ahab interprets the whale as “sufficiently powerful, knowing, and judiciously malicious,...with direct aforethought to stave in, utterly destroy, and sink a large ship” (Melville 173). Often, our approach to nature seems to align more with Ahab, when instead we should strive to be more like Ishmael. In the words of Aldo Leopold, we need to reposition ourselves from “conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it” (Leopold 64). Ahab certainly exhibits a “conqueror” mentality when it comes to the ocean and the white whale.

III.

Surrounded by shimmering water, everywhere Ishmael turns he finds nature reflecting back the purest image of himself. To Ishmael, the ocean becomes a reflective looking glass. He implores us to

[c]onsider the subtleness of the sea; how its most dreaded creatures glide under water, unapparent for the most part, and treacherously hidden beneath the loveliest tints of azure. Consider also the devilish brilliance and beauty of many of its most remorseless tribes, as the dainty embellished shape of many species of sharks. Consider, once more, the universal cannibalism of the sea; all whose creatures prey upon each other, carrying on eternal war since the world began. (Melville 225)

In this instance, we can read the sea as a metaphor for ourselves. As humans, we are masters of manipulation, especially when it comes to controlling how we are perceived by others. Like the sea, we mask our inner “most dreaded creatures [...] beneath the loveliest tints of” our crafted personalities (225). We cultivate a perception of ourselves that we want others to see while our

innermost secrets remain “unapparent for the most part, and treacherously hidden” (225). Like the creatures of the sea, we are constantly at war with each other and ourselves, even at the risk of destroying ourselves or our fellow human. Ishmael realizes that he sees himself when he looks at nature and that he is more like nature than he originally thought. He continues by comparing both sea and land to the human soul:

Consider all this; and then turn to this green, gentle, and most docile earth; consider them both, the sea and the land; and do you not find a strange analogy to something in yourself? For as this appalling ocean surrounds the verdant land, so in the soul of man there lies one insular Tahiti, full of peace and joy, but encompassed by all the horrors of the half known life. (Melville 225).

Here, Ishmael reiterates that “the horrors of a half known life” are our ignorance of ourselves and our ignorance regarding our relation to the natural world. When we become so focused on our own bodies, we forget that we are a part of nature, which surrounds us like the sea surrounds the land. To Ishmael, the landsman is the fool who sticks to his shore and never dips his toes in the waters of nature, while the seaman explores all the oceans of the world but forgets to explore himself. Ishmael, then, is the traveler who communes with both himself and nature. The traveler spends time on land “full of peace and joy,” and then sets sail in the ocean to discover all the wonderful “horrors” of half the life he never knew existed (Melville 225). Ishmael leaves land and examines both himself and nature, while Ahab remains the seaman, who never sets foot on land: who never stops to fully examine his own soul. He pines to Starbuck, “Forty years of continual whaling! forty years of privation, and peril, and storm time! forty years on the pitiless

sea! for forty years Ahab has forsaken the peaceful land, [...] out of those forty years I have not spent three ashore” (Melville 405).

Thus Ishmael implores “do you not find a strange analogy to something in yourself” concerning these natural places (Melville 225)? When I personally spend time in nature, I find it easy to analyze myself. For instance, combining both Emerson’s and Melville’s natures together, I often find myself drawn to hikes that lead to water. On one occasion, I hiked for five hours just to reach water. I was rewarded with a beautiful cascading waterfall, with a pristine swimming hole underneath. The water reflected my image back like a rippled mirror. Had I not read *Moby-Dick*, I would not have realized that I was looking at a perception of myself through nature; I would not have known that my reflection in that swimming hole was the most natural recreation of my image that nature could produce. I felt like the traveler Ishmael, who, in finding water, finds himself.

IV.

Ishmael goes whaling to commune with nature for healing, even though we do not know exactly what has driven him to contemplate suicide in the first place. We only know that when Ishmael’s “hypos gets such an upper hand on” him that he can stand it no longer, it is “high time to get to the sea as soon as” he can (18). Emerson, in *Nature* claims, “[T]o the body and mind which have been cramped by noxious work or company, nature is medicinal and restores their tone. (Emerson 14). Indeed, when we travel into nature as a form of escape we are looking for relief from something, be it “noxious work or company,” or perhaps school or stress in general. When I feel especially anxious or stressed, I find relief in spending time with animals, particularly horses. It is hard to explain exactly how nature seems to alleviate tension and anxiety, but I am

always overcome with a very tangible feeling of relief when I step into the barn and hear a welcoming whinny. In the *Moby-Dick*, Ishmael finds similar relief in the mast-head. When he first scales the rigging to the lookout, he recounts that

all life's most mundane worries quickly fall to the wayside; a sublime uneventfulness invests you; you hear no news; read no gazettes; extras with startling accounts of commonplaces never delude you into unnecessary excitements; you hear of no domestic afflictions; bankrupt securities; fall of stocks; are never troubled with the thought of what you shall have for dinner (Melville 133).

Nature has a way of filtering out the “mundane worries” that often seem so pressing. In the same way that Ishmael leaves behind the “gazettes” and news of “stocks,” we must learn to sometimes leave behind social media and the constant stream of incoming text messages and let “sublime uneventfulness invest [us]” (133). I often hear students complain about their unhealthy connection to their phone and their obsession with maintaining their social presence, yet they do nothing to remediate what they admit is a problem. When I ask them if they could turn off their phone for a day and leave it in the house when they go somewhere, the answer is always no; it is too vital to their existence. Nature can provide healing for what seems an unhealthy obsession with technology and virtual reality. Even a short solitary walk in the woods without some device feels oddly freeing. As Gregory Grewell reminds us, “[w]hether climbing the mast-head or taking a subterranean dive, Ishmael finally shucks [t]his dualistic view of the universe and foregoes horizontal goals to move toward Spirit”(1)--that is, the body and nature aligned.

Grewell asserts that, “[a]s readers, we should identify with and read the story of Moby-Dick [sic]

as Ishmael's. From young bumpkin to wise magian, Ishmael grows and learns to understand" nature (1).

Whaling for Ishmael becomes a healthy escape from psychological issues. It also becomes an engaging physical distraction as well. Emerson has this to say regarding the power of nature: "I feel that nothing can befall me in life,—no disgrace, no calamity (leaving me my eyes), which nature cannot repair" (Emerson 11) meaning that nature is the ultimate form of medicine regardless of the ailment. Discussing how restorative nature becomes in the novel for Ishmael, who no longer even worries what he "shall have for dinner," is a way to examine our own weaknesses and issues and challenge ourselves to consider nature a remedy (Melville 133).

V.

Melville presents the reader with two very contrasting images of nature in *Moby-Dick*, which illustrate our dichotomous relationship with the physical world. Like Ishmael and Ahab, who approach nature very differently, Melville provides scenes of nature designed to encourage readers to see themselves interjected in the novel as well as to provide scenes that cause us to cringe and begin to critique our actions as individuals and as a society. The majority of *Moby-Dick's* plot circulates around the action of the whaling industry--a site of immense wealth in the 1850's, with whaling towns such as New Bedford rising as economic leaders in the whale oil market. Whale oil quite literally illuminated the American landscape. Soon, however, this demand came at a great environmental cost--whales needed to be slaughtered at faster rates to keep up with the excessive consumption of oil. Though Ishmael freely partakes in this industry, he gradually realizes that his actions and the actions of the crew could potentially jeopardize the survival of the whale as a species. He ponders "whether Leviathan can long endure so wide a

chase, and so remorseless a havoc,” realizing the fragility of a species faced with greed and consumerism (352). Whales may “be exterminated from the waters, and the last whale, like the last man, smoke his last pipe, and then himself, evaporate in the final puff” if whaling continues at such a rate (352). Never before had man been able to capitalize on nature in such a fashion. Not only this, but nature begins to be shaped by man, as when “these Leviathans, in small pods, were encountered much oftener than at present, and,...influenced by some views to safety, now swim the seas in immense caravans” (Melville 353). Ishmael nonchalantly says, “That is all,” somehow failing to acknowledge that man’s aggressive pursuit of the whales has led them to forsake their natural behavior and seek safety in numbers and avoid coastal grounds. In one scene, Ishmael describes a situation in which a whale becomes tangled in the line with all manner of harpoon and cutting spade stuck in him. Panicked, the whale begins a bloody slaughter of the other whales close to him. Ishmael recounts,

But agonizing as was the wound of this whale, and an appalling spectacle enough, any way; yet the peculiar horror with which he seemed to inspire the rest of the herd, was owing to a cause which at first the intervening distance obscured from us....at length we perceived that by one of the unimaginable accidents of the fishery, this whale had become entangled in the harpoon-line that he towed; he had also run away with the cutting-spade in him; and while the free end of the rope attached to that weapon, had permanently caught in the coils of the harpoon-line round his tail, the cutting-spade itself had worked loose from his flesh. So that tormented to madness, he was now churning through the water, violently

flailing with his flexible tail, and tossing the keen spade about him, wounding and murdering his own comrades. (Melville 304)

In this scene, Ishmael is distressed not only because the whale has been wounded but because the panicked animal is now unwittingly “wounding and murdering his own comrades.” Leopold asks, “Can the desired alterations be accomplished with less violence?”; that is, could whaling have been as profitable with more sustainable methods of harvesting whale oil (78)? Were accidents like this inevitable given the nature of whaling? Ishmael is certainly upset by not only the whale’s suffering, but the extent to which their mistake causes the maiming of countless other creatures. Ishmael feels this way partly because he, like all humans is a creature of innate connection rather than a creature of control. However, we grow up in a culture that teaches us control is the best way to achieve what we want. Therefore, we don’t naturally gravitate towards control, we are groomed for it. We grow up learning that dominance is power, and power often has the ability to gain the response we desire from others. In this case, however, the attempt to control and kill the whale has disastrous effects.

Ishmael offers this critique concerning realities of the whaling industry, especially the commodification of the whale and excessive consumption of its oil: “For God's sake, be economical with your lamps and candles!” (Melville 170). Here, “Ishmael reveals disdainfully that industry focuses on the production of material commodity” instead of focusing on communal sustenance (Grewell 19). Individuals, unfortunately, do not always stop to consider the value of something before greedily consuming it.

VII.

It seems more recently in our own century, in fact that we have drifted from nature-based education toward more man-made forms of learning and experience. Leopold aptly states,

Perhaps the most serious obstacle impeding the evolution of the land ethic is the fact that our educational and economic system is headed away from, rather than toward, an intense consciousness of land. Your true modern is separated from the land by many middlemen, and by innumerable physical gadgets. He has no vital relation to it; to him it is the space between cities on which crops grow. Turn him loose for a day on the land, and [...] he is bored stiff.[...] Synthetic substitutes for wood, leather, wool, and other natural land products suit him better than the originals. In short, land is something he has 'outgrown.' (Leopold 84)

Not only do we not teach students that nature is more than simply “the space between cities on which crops grow,” but we supplement experiences with nature for experiences with man-made representations of nature (Leopold 84). Or worse yet, no nature at all. The student does not view nature as “vital” because he or she does not know what it is; he is ignorant of the fact that nature sustains him or her. This disconnection maintains that references to nature go unnoticed and unappreciated, especially in literature, because nature is something that people interact with, but it doesn't play a significant role in the student's life. Unlike Ishmael, who finds great delight adrift in the midst of nature, the student finds him or herself “bored stiff” because he or she prefers “[s]ynthetic substitutes” to the real thing (84). Studies show, however, that even the most seemingly insignificant experience with nature is more beneficial than a complete lack of environmental interaction. A study with undergraduate students demonstrated that those with a view of nature through the window of their dormitories had “greater attention abilities” than those

who lacked a view (Mustapa 334). People want to interact with nature but often feel discouraged or distracted because the immediate benefits of engaging with the man-made experiences in front of them is more appealing and requires less effort.

So how do we solve the dilemma of environmental disconnection for 21st century students? According to Leopold, “The usual answer to this dilemma is ‘more conservation education.’ No one will debate this, but is it certain that only the *volume* of education needs stepping up? Is something lacking in the *content* as well” (Leopold 67)? We must get individuals to a place of self-accountability where they respect the environment because they personally care about it, not because policy mandates they do. Laws accomplish little if people inwardly continue to resist environmental education and concern. Reading *Moby-Dick* is a way to introduce students to nature and symbolism that seeks to cultivate a respect for the natural world. It is crucial to teach students literature that interacts with nature in challenging ways as a means of encouraging their exploration through indirect and direct experience. In the same way that Emerson believes the vegetables wave and the boughs of the trees nod to him as he passes, the bundled student realizes that the leaves also shiver in the chilly breeze (26).

The ending to *Moby-Dick* is extremely telling of Melville’s ideas about nature and America’s relation to it. The novel ends with the sinking of the *Pequod* by Moby Dick after he violently destroys the ship by ramming against it. If Moby Dick is representative of nature and the *Pequod* symbolizes our attempt to control and suppress nature, then the novel teaches us that nature cannot be conquered any more than the entirety of the ocean can be explored. America’s attitude toward nature needed to be revised to include a healthier respect and understanding for the natural world. The rise of the whaling industry in the nineteenth century fed exploitative attitudes

toward natural environments which makes the death of everyone aboard the *Pequod*, except Ishmael, fitting. Ishmael's attitude toward nature sustains him and prevents him from drowning. As such, he represents a kind of future that America needs to subscribe to. All that is threatening and contrary to nature's best interest could not survive; Ahab's quest against nature, against *Moby Dick*, was doomed from the beginning. Melville shows the reader that even if nature has to sacrifice a bit of itself to achieve its goal, it will do so. In these lines we see Tashtego, in one last act of defiance, refuse to lift his hammer to let the trapped bird fly free:

A sky-hawk that tauntingly had followed the main-truck downwards from its natural home among the stars, pecking at the flag, and incommoding Tashtego there; this bird now chanced to intercept its broad fluttering wing between the hammer and the wood; and simultaneously feeling that ethereal thrill, the submerged savage beneath, in his death-gasp, kept his hammer frozen there; and so the bird of heaven, with archangelic shrieks, and his imperial beak thrust upwards, and his whole captive form folded in the flag of Ahab, went down with his ship... (Melville 426-27)

The sky-hawk, representative of the American Eagle, is drowned by its own misgivings and self-assurances. It becomes evident from these lines that Melville thought America needs a restructuring. Rather than reading the ending of the book as a critique of the American dream, Melville offers us a chance to view destruction as an opportunity to start over. After all, Ishmael survives the wreck to become a wiser, better version of himself. He has learned many lessons aboard the *Pequod*, lessons he will not soon forget and mistakes he will not readily repeat. While

I was at first resistant to the fact that Ishmael is the lone survivor, it seems fitting when I realize that it could not have been someone else, not even Queequeg.

As a student who is seeking a graduate degree in environmental science, I find *Moby-Dick* particularly relevant for 21st-century readers. Not only does the text encourage a romantic and philosophical reading of nature, but it responds to very real environmental concerns in the 1850's. Ironically, I think we can see some of these same abuses still occurring in consumer driven culture today--resource depletion, environmental degradation, species loss, pollution, climate change, loss of biodiversity, waste--of which stem from a disconnection with nature. Leopold aptly states that, "No important change in ethics [is] ever accomplished without an internal change in our intellectual emphasis" (Leopold 70). Thus, teaching students about nature is imperative in order to change attitudes toward environmental concerns, especially for future generations. Not only is *Moby-Dick* an exciting novel, but it is also an effective tool for teaching students environmental accountability, and perhaps it will in time become the stepping stone students need to contemplate the dangers of the "half-known life."

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