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WHEN THE UNIVERSAL TRUMP IS PASSED AROUND

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

Molly Ann Garthwaite

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When the 'Universal *Trump* is Passed Around'¹

In the opening chapter of *Moby-Dick*, Ishmael contemplates the notions of fate and free will while expressing his motives to step on board the *Pequod*. If it is fate, then the events that were about to take place during his life at sea would have been “drawn up a long time ago” (Melville 22), and he imagines a headline to his life that may have read something like, “*Grand Contested Election for Presidency of the United States*” (Melville 22). I often ask myself what many of the eighteenth century American Romanticism writers like Herman Melville would have to say about our society and country today – What would they think of us? Would they be proud? Would they see their hope and vision for America’s future being played out right in front of their eyes? Maybe they would cringe at the realization that their readers were too blind or complacent to listen to their warnings. Or perhaps they would just sit back and laugh, however grudgingly, at the sheer irony of the situation, confronted with a classic case of “I told you so.” As Melville, through Ishmael of course, was contemplating his fate, imaging the *headline* of his life – “*Grand Contested Election of the United States*” – was he inadvertently writing ours too? Whatever the case may be – coincidence, prophecy, or fate – it is hard to ignore the incredible parallels between America in 1851 and our America today.

¹ From Chapter 1, *Loomings*, where Ishmael “Who aint a slave? Tell me that. Well, then, however the old sea-captains may order me about – however they may thump and punch me about, I have the satisfaction of knowing that it is all right; that everybody else is one way or other served in much the same way – either in a physical or metaphysical point of view, that is; and so the universal thump is passed round, and all hands should rub each other’s shoulder-blades, and be content.”

As a millennial college student who was raised in an era of progress, reform, and acceptance, I have become increasingly aware of the complex polarity of beliefs among the American people that contribute to our nation's current divide. With that said, I feel that my twenty-first century reading of *Moby-Dick* – a novel often perceived as a literary antique of the American Renaissance – was an interesting and timely journey. Like Ishmael, I am still trying to decipher the divine and mystical question of fate. But, I cannot help but feel that in my last year at college, I was meant to *choose* a senior seminar dedicated to a slow, careful reading of the story of the great White Whale in a time that lined up perfectly with quite possibly the most “Grand Contested Election” that our nation has ever known.

I realize that I am by no means the first to draw on the parallels between Melville's complex text and our contemporary world. However, like interested readers and critics before me, it is imperative to set up the seemingly obvious metaphor that *Moby-Dick* and the *Pequod* convey – to see our nation in 2016 (and maybe even the world) as a ship of our own. In his essay “Moby-Dick and American Political Symbolism,” Alan Heimert first explains the history behind the persisting and classic analogy of country and ship that first breached at the onset of the Mexican War in 1840. Melville's *Pequod* was “strikingly similar to the vessels which rode the oratorical seas of 1850. It sails under a red flag, and its crew – in all its ‘democratic dignity’ – compromises a ‘deputation from all of the isles on earth’” (Heimert 501). Additionally, Melville's ship is made up of “all contrasting things” and manned by *thirty* isolates” (501). Today in our contemporary America, we are in many ways perpetrators of that same ship metaphor; as citizens and active members of society, *we* are the crewmembers on board this ship towards the never-ending quest of equality. The question then becomes, who is our Captain? Intrinsic to the definition of democracy, the latter is up to us, and on November 8th, 2016, we watched with wide

eyes – many in disbelief – the polls come in and the voices of the American people elect the next *Captain* of our ship, Donald Trump.

Now, is this a stretch? How is it that the peg-legged, scar-faced, rugged, devoted seaman who is obsessed with the irrational hunt for the great white whale is in any way comparable to the 70 year-old, blonde haired billionaire, real-estate owner, and reality T.V star who whimsically decided to run for president? While their *physical appearances* of the superficial and the natural may juxtapose one another, beneath the surface the similarities between Donald Trump and Captain Ahab are unnervingly strong. My intimacy with this book and my fair political awareness made it easy for me to begin drawing the character comparisons between these two perceived leaders. But, admittedly, I was struck on election night as I watched the steady stream of votes come in, signifying the irrefutably large popularity of Donald Trump. On November 9th, I, like many others, felt the quake of the “universal *Trump*.” And so, as the direction of our nation took an unpredictable turn, so did the trajectory of this paper.

In the wake of the election, the divide in America was blatant, as half of the population was elated with Trump’s victory while others mourned with the implications of this new reality. *What would Ishmael have thought?* In the same way that I was concerned with the strange and irrational fascination with Captain Ahab, after the election, I became more interested in the crew of this new America, particularly those who, over the course of the campaign, had stirred below the deck in their support of Trump. So, before diving into a close psychoanalysis between president and captain, it is critical to understand who was on board– who were the individuals to whom Ahab and Trump were speaking? And more importantly, why were so many of them apt to listen?

In his essay titled “The Myth of Democratic Expectancy,” Harry Slochower aims to make

sense of the interesting power relations on board the *Pequod*. He states that “Ahab’s crew are somewhere between individual differentiation and ‘the melting pot’” (Slochower 264) and also highlights Melville’s decision to make all of the crewmembers “more or less depersonalized stereotypes” (264). Along with Ishmael, the philosophizing protagonist, Melville fills the *Pequod* with an intentionally diverse yet stereotypical crew. Starbuck: “steadfast” and reasonable; Stubb: happy-go-lucky and fearless; Flask: ignorant and confrontational; Queequeg, Tashtego, and Daggoo – three strong and talented harpooners who “generously supply the muscles for the native American mates” (Heimert 502); a carpenter; a blacksmith; a youthful African American ship keeper, Pip; Ahab’s mysterious and primitive boat crew... All of these members are significantly distinct but ultimately “unable to act jointly in their common interests” (Slochower 264). Additionally, it is worth noting that the three *white* mates who, in the hierarchy of the ship fall right below the Captain, are described as true New Englanders and pure American men, receiving higher pay than the rest of the racially and economically diverse crew. While the reasons for stepping onto *the Pequod* into the sea of an unquestionable return may have been slightly different for each individual – seeking sanity, solitude, or a source of income—it cannot be ignored that these whalers chose to *leave land*. At this stage of American development in 1851, “There is as yet no cohesive commune” (263). *This* was the America that Melville was writing to – a ship compromised of a crew with no sense of community and a deficient affirmation in national identity. In ways that would not have been apparent had it not been for a close reading of this *historical* text, *The Pequod* – its crew, captain, and overall ship dynamics – is a microcosm of eighteenth century America that unfortunately is still at sail today. In the past decade, there has been a gradual decrease of trust and harmony among the American people across racial, economic, and political lines. Together, these intense disparities have contributed

to the accessibility of Trump's reign.

In March of 2016, as presidential candidates for each party began to seriously take the stage, many Americans reported as being “unhappy with many facets of current institutions and politics” (Brady and Rivers). Much of this unhappiness was rooted in economic and political skepticism as more than two thirds of the population still maintains the belief that the economy favors the wealthy and that government is wasting their money (Brady and Rivers). According to polls conducted by the American National Election Study, in the last 16 years the number of Americans believing the worst of Washington's *corrupt* government officials has increased dramatically (Brady and Rivers). On a multitude of levels, our increasingly diverse *crew* is divided along the tension- filled categories of social class, race, and ethnicity. As of July, 60% of people revealed feeling that race relations have gotten *worse* under President Obama – a striking eighteen point increase since the last poll in 2014 (Richardson). Of those polled, “White respondents were more likely than minorities to say that race relations have gotten worse” (Richardson). Additionally, after the killing of five white Dallas police officers in July, a majority of both the white and black community expressed that they were “unsurprised” by the violence (Russonello). Amidst all of the violence, marches, and protests, Donald Trump's political platform was somehow strengthening. Acknowledging the association between national division and Trump's entrance onto the political stage, professor of politics Eric Kaufman boiled down Trump's radical following to a few unanswered yet fundamental questions of his supporters: “What does it mean to be a part of this nation? Is it not ‘our’ nation anymore, ‘our’ meaning the ethnic *majority*” (Taub)? The “ethnic majority” of the white working class – the portion of the population that Trump won over at the polls on November 8th by an unprecedented margin (Beauchamp) – had long been feeling left out of their version of the American dream,

and the rhetoric of Donald Trump spoke directly to their anger, fears, and anxieties about the future.

Many have referred to the rise and popularity of Donald Trump as nothing short of a phenomenon. The discourse in the early stages of the candidate's campaign that persisted into the brutal presidential race has highlighted the national division as members from all parts of society have voiced confusion, fear, sadness, anger, and loud political patronage. Looking back, it seems that the apparent "frustration with and alienation from status quo politics have helped drive Mr. Trump's rise" (Taub). For people who have endured financial hardships and blame a crooked government for wasting (or even stealing) their money, a billionaire businessman like Donald Trump was appealing. Recognizing the huge portion of Americans who have long been unhappy with the direction of our country, Trump successfully framed his entire campaign around the promise to "Make America Great Again" – to turn our ship around. In essence, Trump was the antithesis of all the *corrupt* politicians who, to many struggling Americans, had contributed to their economic hardship. A similar sort of phenomenon exists on *board the Pequod* that ultimately makes Captain Ahab – however mysterious, vengeful, or irrational he may be – so enticing. For, while they (the crew) are "as yet unformed, Ahab is a finished and closed mold" (Slochower 264). In the same way that Ahab inadmissibly embodied traits of a master seaman and whaler, Trump was the figure of a master businessman and real estate mogul. Even before setting sail, the vulnerable state of the crew makes the mere idea of Ahab intriguing, and they willfully sign their souls away to him and the foreboding sea. After learning broken, secondhand details about the crazed Captain's authority, Ishmael attempts to articulate and understand the immediate draw towards this man who, to readers, cries doom. He confesses to feeling "a strange awe over him; but that sort of awe" he says, "which I cannot at all describe,

was not exactly awe; I do not know what it was. But I felt it; and it did not disincline me towards him; though I felt impatience at what seemed like mystery in him, so imperfectly as he was known to me then” (Melville 79). Here, Ishmael may well represent the desperate American citizen of the twenty-first century – so tired, confused, and looking for solidarity – that the shock or sheer newness of someone like Donald Trump may be justification for his appeal.

On the other side, the unhinged and lurid behavior of the Republican candidate ignited a rage of its own. Democratic candidate, Hillary Clinton, commonly voiced the idea that was shared and perpetuated by supporters that “Donald Trump does not have the temperament to be our commander and chief,” On the *Pequod*, perceptive onlookers of the crew noticed Ahab’s maddened temper, but as the novel’s end and ship’s destruction proves, they were “not sufficiently ego-centered to rebel anarchically” (Slochower 264). During the infamous *Quarter-Deck* scene when Ahab makes his grand, long awaited entrance before the crew to reveal that they will *only* be hunting the great Moby Dick, Melville explicitly highlights Ahab’s monomania and hypnotic power over all those on board. For example, after getting slight pushback from his “steadfast” first mate about the lunacy of his secret and selfish agenda, Ahab responds, “Talk not to me of blasphemy, man; I’d strike the sun if it insulted me. For could the sun do that, then could I do the other” (Melville 140). This threat is representative of Ahab’s overall short fuse and ill temperament – a trait that Donald Trump revealed of himself numerous times over the course of his political campaign. For example, in response to media critics, Trump promised (through Twitter) to launch an assault on free press and “open up our libel laws so when they [the media] write purposely negative and horrible and false articles, we can sue them and win lots of money” (Easley). Additionally, during the second presidential debate, Trump threatened to throw his opponent, Hilary Clinton, in jail if he were to win the election. Whether he was

loudly expressing beliefs of voter fraud to explain a loss or threatening to build a wall that would keep immigrants out of the country, both of which intentionally and successfully rallied genuine anxieties of his supporters, Trump did not shy away from his natural temperament. According to Barbara Res who served as vice president of construction of the Manhattan Trump Tower, “As far as the anger is concerned, that’s real. For sure. He’s not faking it... the fact that he gets mad, that’s his personality” (McAdams). From merely listening and watching Trump’s reactions to negative criticism or opposition over the course of the campaign, the deep-rooted anger was evident.

Returning focus to the *Quarter-Deck* again, Ismael remembers the way he conformed to the rest of the ship’s enthusiasm at Ahab’s powerful speech:

I, Ishmael, was one of that crew; my shouts had gone up with the rest; my oath had been welded with theirs; and stronger I shouted, and more did I hammer and clinch my oath, because of the dread in my soul. A wild, mystical, sympathetic feeling was in me; Ahab’s quenchless feud seemed mine. With greedy ears I learned the history of that murderous monster against whom I and all the others had taken our oaths of violence and revenge. (Melville 141)

Almost seamlessly, Ahab is able to completely change the articles of agreement for their journey and rally the crew to join him in his revenge-seeking hunt. Thus, “he succeeds in persuading the crew that his objective is identical with their own... and they act as if they were all a collective Ahab” (Slochower 263). After recognizing the support from those below him, Ahab “stood for an instant searchingly eyeing every man of his crew. But those wild eyes met his, as the blood shot eyes of the prairie wolves meet the eye of their leader” (Melville 152). By silencing any “vague, rebellious murmurings” (Slochower 263) Ahab is able to capitalize on his diverse crew’s

vulnerability, manipulating their individual motivations so that they merge with his own. In the final chapters of the novel, after finally sighting Moby Dick himself, Ishmael remembers “all the individualities of the crew, this man’s valor, that man’s fear; guilt and guiltlessness, all varieties were welded into oneness, and were all directed to that fatal goal which Ahab their one lord and keel did point to” (Melville 415). Thus, Ahab’s power over his crew as the “hero pitted against the collective” (Slochower 263) ultimately leads him to take his monomaniacal obsession to unhealthy heights” (Faller 84), which, in the end, leads to his death.

It is remarkable how Ahab is able to relatively easily and unquestionably change the rules of whaling that all other men on board had agreed to when they signed on board. Donald Trump seemed to also change on some of his initially proposed *articles of agreement* in terms of his policy (a realization that may be particularly interesting for those who were ever skeptical about his genuine desire to *win* the Presidency). Just one day before the election, NBC journalist Jane Timm said that “after more than a year of campaigning, hundreds of interviews, stadium rallies, debates, speeches and press conferences, it is still difficult to glean a platform from the Republican nominee's powerfully incoherent rhetoric and constantly evolving views”. To make her case, Timm compiled a list of “141 distinct shifts on 23 major issues,” some of which include abortion, immigration, guns, and taxes. These issues have markedly been seen as unwavering in the eyes of the Republican Party, yet despite it all, Trump maintained the support to get him elected.

As an author, Melville’s progressive thinking and national attentiveness leads him to illustrate Ahab in a particular way, and explicitly reveal images that convey the Captain’s monomania and ill temperament to his readers. Today, the media coverage on Donald Trump highlights his similar unreserved responses to conflict or resistance. As citizens and

crewmembers looking to these authoritative figures—whether we agree with them or not – we are subjected to the ways they react emotionally. Recently, psychologists have shown how fundamental features of human personality are applied in the world of politics. In the article “The Mind of Donald Trump” published by *The Atlantic*, the findings reveal the ways that ego, motivation, and temperament can be *critical* to a candidate’s appeal and actually predict the actions a president may take while in office. To simplify matters, these psychological scientists have settled on a relatively simple taxonomy known as “the Big Five” (McAdams):

1. *Extroversion*: gregariousness, social dominance, enthusiasm, reward- seeking behavior
 2. *Neuroticism*: anxiety, emotional instability, depressive tendencies, negative emotions
 3. *Conscientiousness*: industriousness, discipline, rule abidance, organization
 4. *Agreeableness*: warmth, care for others, altruism, compassion, modesty
 5. *Openness*: curiosity, unconventionality, imagination, receptivity to new ideas
- (McAdams)

Looking at the qualities that define each of the five personality traits and then reflecting on some of the rhetoric and behavior that Trump revealed over the course of the campaign, it was not all that surprising to learn that he has exhibited a trait profile of “sky-high extroversion combined with off-the-chart low agreeableness” (McAdams). Honing in specifically on just the ideas of *social dominance* and *reward seeking* that correspond to extroversion as well as levels of *modesty* and *care for others* that are associated to agreeableness, Captain Ahab and Donald Trump meet again. Considering the established hierarchy of a whaling vessel that permits the captain the highest power and the incredible title of Commander in Chief, Trump’s chase of the White House and Ahab’s sole chase for the White Whale epitomizes an extrovert’s quest for dominance and reward. Additionally, extroverts tend to take “high-stake risks” and are “driven to

pursue positive emotional experiences, whether they come in the form of social approval, fame, or wealth” (McAdams). For figures like Trump and Ahab, who often take the stage with considerably “low levels of *openness*” and rarely question their deepest convictions,” their monomania is at the center of their actions. On the *Pequod*, the “obsessive nature of Ahab’s hunt” makes him care only for his quest, show little care for the lives and safety of his crew, and wish “only to force the crew mechanically to his will” (Ausband 201). When Starbuck goes below to Ahab’s cabin to inform him of the leaks on ship and suggest that they pause their journey to tend the repair, Ahab responds heatedly, “There is one God that is Lord over the earth, and one Captain that is lord over the *Pequod*. – On deck!” revealing his incredible lack of humility and disregard for the crew’s well-being (Melville 362). While no evidence of a tweet has surfaced that Donald Trump has *literally* compared himself to God, Trump did (not so modestly) declare that due to his economic success, his plan to grow the economy would make him “the best president for jobs that God ever created” (Miller) In reference back to the examples of angry temperament, psychologists think that for Trump, his anger is “the operative emotion” behind his “high-leveled extroversion as well as his low agreeableness”; it is anger that “lies at the heart” of his charisma and “permeates his political rhetoric (McAdams). According to the psychologists, anger can fuel malice, but it can also motivate social dominance, stimulating a desire to win the glorification of others.

In his essay titled “The Myth of Democratic Expectancy,” Harry Slochower explains Ahab’s motivation like this:

The exclusive stake in the chase of *Moby Dick* is the righting of a personal wrong suffered by Ahab. It is Ahab's leg which the White Whale bit off. It is his and only his person which was violated, his private need and private pique which are alone involved.

To the crew, whaling is a practical business, a form of employment. They have no special interest in Moby Dick. It is in Ahab's interests and his interests solely that the crew is endangered and perishes, (Slochower 263).

Obviously, Ahab's quest is powered by pure vengeance, rage, and malice for the great white whale. There is no confusion around Ahab's motivation, but the unifying question for comparison purposes here then becomes what motivated Trump to step onto the political stage in the first place? Why would he trade his comfortable life of wealth, fame, and business to take on the incredible position as leader of the free world? Considering his lack of policy, unhinged rhetoric, and exaggerated use of the media to gain attention, many have argued that Donald Trump never actually wanted to become president. In an interview in 1987, Barbara Walters asked Trump the hypothetical question of whether he would like to simply be appointed President of the United States rather than having to run for the job (McAdams). Trump's response? "No. It's the hunt that I believe I love" (McAdams).

It's the hunt that I believe I love.

On one level, the basis and ease of this reply brings to question the degree of seriousness to which Trump approached the duty of the Oval Office. In which case, we have to acknowledge this principal difference between the President-elect and Captain of the Pequod, for Ahab approached his hunt towards Moby Dick with the highest, ultimately tragic level of fixation and seriousness. Nevertheless, as readers keenly aware of Melville's stylistic clues that the solitary chase towards the immortal white whale is destined for doom, we may wonder if Ahab himself ever *truly* believed that he could kill Moby Dick. Interestingly, "It is the pursuit itself, more so even than the actual attainment of the goal, that extroverts," like Trump and Ahab, find so

gratifying (McAdams). While we can all agree that Ahab was tragically devoted to his rewarding vengeance of *Moby Dick*, was it actually the *hunt* that he loved and needed even more?

Looking at Ahab, many critics of *Moby-Dick* have said that the captain's main "sin is his separation from humanity. His deliberate, continued, and complete estrangement from the rest of mankind nourishes his monomania, and he willfully dooms himself and his followers to destruction in his quest for revenge" (Ausband 201). Now, when it comes to the "separation" from humanity, the relative consistencies between Ahab and Trump up to this point breaks down. While Ahab literally separates himself from his crew, locking himself in his cabin and making few appearances on deck unless absolutely necessary, Trump seems to be "detached" from humanity in a different, non-literal way. Along with and connected to his apparent love for the "hunt," Trump has made clear that he also loves the spotlight. Ultimately, he successfully "plays his role in an outgoing, exuberant, and socially dominant manner" (McAdams) that somehow interestingly speaks to a large portion of American society.

In her article "The Psychology Behind the Trump Phenomenon," Allysen Efferson explains Trump's popularity by unpacking the deep psychological origins. She, too, divulges that for Trump's "cadre of supporters" there was a "profound sense of betrayal from the government" and an accumulating number of people who identify with feeling "sidelined for the last seven years," eluding to the aforementioned popular belief that for some, the American Dream was in question (Efferson). For this portion of the population, it was precisely these feelings that made them ignore the "huge, blatant character issues because they think the trade off will get them something greater: freedom" (Efferson). Notably, this longing for liberation is the driving force behind Ishmael's initial decision to "head off to sea as soon as he could" (Melville 18). As our perceptive protagonist recognizes that he is "growing grim about the mouth" and feels the

“damp, drizzly November” in his soul, Ishmael realizes that a life as a sailor is, in fact, his “substitute for pistol and ball” (Melville 18). For him, the ocean is a form of medicine – and Ahab is the revitalizing presence that greets him at the port.

Over the course of the 2016 presidential race, Donald Trump was often referred to as a sort of symptom, or worse, a disease, that resulted from America’s division (Schweltzer). *Federalist* publisher, Ben Domenech, however, told CBS in February that contrary to popular belief, Donald Trump is neither the “disease” nor the “symptom.” Rather, he is the “beta test of a cure from the perspective of the people” (Efferson). Domenech’s thoughtful articulation led me to draw another similarity between the *Pequod* and our ship today: To twenty-first century readers of *Moby-Dick* who are privy to Melville’s progressive and cautionary messages or to the politically engaged individuals of America who have recognized the “established order of the political fray over the course of the past several years,” the awe and fascination towards egotistical authority figures like Trump and Ahab quite literally “seems like chaos” (Efferson). But, to the soul-searching divided crew of the *Pequod* or the economically frustrated and governmentally suspicious members of the working class, “it looks a lot like democracy” (Efferson).

In chapter 29, “Enter Ahab; to him, Stubb,” philosophizing Ishmael disappears for a moment as narrator of the this *grand contested election*, and Melville presents us with one of the many comedic scenes of the novel where Stubb boldly tells his peg-legged captain to be quiet and that his pacing above deck is bothersome. To this, Ahab calls his second-mate a dog, “a donkey, a mule, and an ass” and orders him to retreat to his “kennel” or else he would “clear the world of thee” (Melville 112). The chapter closes with Stubb retreating to his bunk, telling readers, “Think not is my eleventh commandment; and sleep when you can is my twelfth”

(Melville 112). On election night, perhaps subconsciously Stubb's commandments were speaking to me, because I faintheartedly chose to shut my eyes, tame my nerves, and turn off the T.V that steadily revealed Trump's ominous victory. Overnight, I began to realize the ripple effect of the "universal *Trump*" across the globe, as voices and thoughts of my fellow crewmembers at home and abroad were expressing deep concern and fear for the future. But, as Melville put it best, "Ignorance is the parent of fear" (39). Looking back, I realize that my fear was connected to a sense of shock, and that sense of shock came from gravitating towards voices and thoughts that correspond to my own – it came, sure enough, from my ignorance. Likewise, my distress was not the result of Donald Trump alone, but more so even to his large following of support that I wrongfully brushed aside with the apparent "chaos" of it all. At first, looking at the country's national divide served as an *explanation* for Trump's victory, but only when I realized fear was looming for *everyone* on board did I take a cleansing sigh of understanding and compassion; ultimately, both sides of the divide were afraid of the broader unknown; We just differed on our perceptions and experiences that led us to such strong views. For many of my fellow shipmates, Donald Trump was the suitable *cure* for their resonating "damp, drizzly November" souls (Melville).

Just a few weeks after election night, political commentator Van Jones articulated his thoughtful analysis on the surrounding shock and confusion that followed Trump's victory. In his speech that encompasses all of the complexities of the election – class, race, skepticism, hate, and fear– Jones eloquently explains Donald Trump's appeal, and more importantly, encourages a closer understanding of those American people who have lost trust the political system: "The reason that this whole thing worked" he said, "is because folks are hurtin' and nobody's listenin' . And hurt people holler! And sometimes...it sounds like Donald Trump, but hurt people holler,

and we have to listen to them” (Jones). Here, we may be reminded of Ahab’s “terrific, loud, animal sob, like that of a heart stricken moose,” when he describes the scaring memory of his first encounter with Moby Dick: “It was that accursed white whale that razeed me; made a poor pegging lubber of me for ever and a day!” (Melville 139) Towards the end of the novel, when the pursuit itself is coming to a close, readers get a small glimpse of humanity from the vengeful Captain in *The Symphony*. In a moment of weakness, Ahab stares into his first mate’s eyes and painstakingly confesses his feelings of lost time, loneliness at sea, and the longing for his wife and family back on land. Now, I have unfortunately yet to see such exposed feelings of compassion and humility from Donald Trump, and his hollers do not appear to be coming from a place of hurt. As for Captain Ahab, readers can continue to interpret his cry as sufficient enough moments of humanity to excuse his self-centered and high-risk hunt. Wherever place and whatever emotion the hollers from Ahab and Trump came from, men on deck or Americans at home watching their televisions were listening, but *did they* feel heard? Amidst the madness of the hunt, where was Perth, the drunken, desolate Blacksmith who lost his home and family before finally giving his life to the sea? Throughout the chaotic presidential campaign, full of noise and scandal from both candidates, where were those people who had been out of work for four years and subsequently had a hard time looking their loved ones in the eye? On the *Pequod* in 1851 and throughout the 2016 presidential election, people were hurting – so, they casted their ballots and lowered into the sea, chasing the great white whale or that glorified promise to make America great *again*.

As someone who was initially shocked and afraid of the results of the most “Grand Contested Election for the Presidency of the United States” (Melville 22), using the metaphor of America as a ship has helped make sense of it all. As I read slowly and began drawing

connections from this classic American Renaissance text to our current national and political state, I was continually brought back to one of Ishmael's first proclamations in Chapter One

Loomings:

Who aint a slave? Tell me that. Well, then, however the old sea-captains may order me about – however they may thump and punch me about, I have the satisfaction of knowing that it is all right; that everybody else is one way or other served in much the same way – either in a physical or metaphysical point of view, that is; and so the universal thump is passed round, and all hands should rub each other's shoulder-blades, and be content.

(Melville 21)

There is something particularly insightful about Melville's notion of the "universal thump." It seems to me that much of that profundity has to do with its inevitability. Between the seemingly unanswerable questions of fate and meaning, Melville clearly articulates that it is not a matter of *if* the "thump" will occur but when. For many American's, this universal thump came when Donald Trump gave his acceptance speech, but for others, a personal thump of their own had already occurred, and throughout the chaotic campaign there were quiet rumblings of pain. "*And so, the universal thump is passed around*" ... but what we do we do? Is it enough to merely sit back now "and rub each other's shoulder-blades?" Perhaps. But, in order for that to happen, the thump –however grand and in whatever form – has to be recognized. As the crewmembers of our 2017 diverse and divided ship of which we elected Donald Trump as our Captain, we now have a choice to *not* be content. Over two-hundred years after Melville warned his fellow crewmembers through his writing of *Moby-Dick*, maybe this recent universal "thump" is loud enough to make us start listening; to make us be the Ishmaels and Starbucks of today; to take turns at the mast head, keep a weather eye, beware of ourselves, and when necessary, speak up.

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