The Scarlet Letter studies social stigma and yet, by means of allegory, maintains a curious distance from the world, from the "flesh and blood of action." Melville's novel embraces that "flesh and blood," yet seems ostensibly about anything but social stigma. As I will discuss in this chapter, Ishmael has already learned White-Jacket's lessons and therefore Ishmael combats metaphysical rather than social isolation. Then why include a study of *Moby-Dick* in a book about social stigma in American fiction?

*Moby-Dick* becomes an implicit reflection on social stigma by focusing on the vision that results from Ishmael's social invisibility. His vision is not social, but his invisibility is. Thus Melville implies that wisdom for the American, symbolized in part by the omniscience Ishmael achieves as narrator, requires his social invisibility. This makes Melville akin to the transcendentalists because, in going to sea, Ishmael escapes the landed concerns of his society, which include social hierarchy and social stigma.

At the same time, as I will indicate in the discussion that follows, Ishmael carries with him the Puritan tendency to focus on objects in the material world that are physically marked. In so doing, he manifests the Puritan epistemology in which social behavior is analogous to the inner scrutiny of meditation but at the same time he removes himself from the community within which the Puritans of Hawthorne's novel create and contain their identity. For Ishmael does not need to exclude other human beings from the world in order to discover who he is. He turns not to stigma but to symbolism. Unlike Ahab, who attributes malice to the inscrutable and then pursues it in the manifest form of the white whale, thereby demonstrating his own Puritanism, Ishmael is content to focus on those qualities of the physical world that are marked in order to transcend
to an understanding of the ineffable, the absolute world of "landlessness."

Ahab's pursuit is analogous to Hester's initial branding in the sense that Ahab, like the Puritans, searches for meaning inherent in physical stigma (for Ahab, of course, the stigma is his ivory leg). Yet Ahab is also like Dimmesdale. He is discreditable like the minister; he cannot reveal the true nature of his pursuit of the whale to the "community" of men aboard the Pequod. The search for knowledge in such a context of discredibility, for Dimmesdale and for Ahab, can produce metaphysical isolation. Ishmael attempts to overcome such isolation.

Much more than Hawthorne's narrator, Ishmael is "struck" by markings. As a sailor, Ishmael focuses on Ahab's marked quest in order to achieve self-consciousness and narrative omniscience. As a narrator, Ishmael focuses on things that are marked in order to achieve symbolic significance for his narrative. Art itself becomes Ishmael's substitute for the social scapegoat the Puritans needed. And Melville escapes the allegorical level Hawthorne remains mired in because, unlike Hawthorne, Melville allows his own narrator to participate in the real action of the narrative as a sailor on board the Pequod.

Melville achieves both the "flesh and blood of action" and Ishmael's "transcendental imagination" precisely because Ishmael is a character as well as a narrator in his fiction. Hawthorne pushes toward creating a narrator who is a "character" in the tale by introducing The Scarlet Letter with "The Custom-House," but he does not achieve the resolution between "the Actual and the Imaginary" or fact and fancy or the physical and the metaphysical that Melville does. Melville's triumph is his ability to envision conflicting views—and conflicting worlds—at the same time. Melville is able to balance unity with multiplicity—the realm of the absolute with the finite relative world. As Feidelson writes, "The whale is simultaneously the most solid of physical things and the most meaningful of symbols. The voyaging intellect of Ishmael interacts with the material world to generate symbolic meaning." Ishmael's tolerance for mystery, for "landlessness," finds no analogue in The Scarlet Letter. Whereas Hawthorne is uncomfortable with duality, Ishmael relishes it.

Therefore Melville's fear that "without some hints touching the plain facts," some readers "might scout at Moby-Dick as a monstrous fable, or still worse and more detestable, a hideous and intolerable allegory" is actually a jest. "Going a-whaling yourself" allows Ishmael the "flesh and blood of action" and therefore Moby-
Dick moves beyond what the medieval philosophers considered the allegorical level of meaning. Melville's novel is purely analogical. *Moby-Dick's* analogies allow Melville to transcend Hawthorne's "mere" allegory and Ishmael's attempt to "contain" his experience within his narrative becomes much more convincing than Hawthorne's literal choice of the scarlet letter as a "container" for symbolic significance.

Ishmael's narrative provides Melville with a physical "container" for symbolism. Yet that symbolism is open to interpretation. As Feidelson expresses it, "the entire book, which constitutes [Melville's] reading [of the universe], is only 'a draught—nay, but the draught of a draught.' The reader inherits the job. *Moby-Dick* is a developing meaning. 'I put that brow before you. Read it if you can.'" Ishmael's narrative demonstrates the effects the Puritans hoped for from their epistemology yet failed to reach because they lacked Melville's transcendental imagination. Had the Puritans been able to embrace the "power of blackness" instead of attempting to contain it in social stigma, they might have succeeded in sharing Ishmael's "clean tabernacles of the soul."

Both Hawthorne and Melville are concerned with subjective knowledge. However, whereas Hawthorne doesn't think it should be made objective for all the world to glimpse, Melville feels compelled to reveal it. Therefore, although Melville is not explicitly concerned with stigma in the social sense, the range of markedness is even greater in *Moby-Dick* than in *The Scarlet Letter*. Melville is not content merely to discern the signs of universal meaning; he creates them and allows the act of perception, for Ishmael, to become epistemology. For it is by looking, by noticing, that Ishmael, as a type of the American fictional narrator, "marks" the significance of objects in the world and transcends, however temporarily, metaphysical isolation. And it is by focusing on Ishmael that the reader can do the same. Ishmael serves as the reader's "marker" in the same way that Ahab is the mark Ishmael follows in his quest for the "grand hooded phantom."

I

Marius Bewley writes, "We are sometimes inclined to lose sight of the elementary fact that the whole complex movement of *Moby-Dick* originates in Ahab's inability to resign himself to the loss of a leg." If Bewley is correct, then *Moby-Dick* becomes, like *The Scarlet Letter*, a study of physical branding. But unlike Hawthorne, who directs the reader's attention to the "rag of scarlet cloth" in "The Custom-House," Melville opens *Moby-Dick* not with Ahab or the story of
Ahab's crippling, but with Ishmael. And Ishmael is marked not by a physical stigma but by his isolation from the universe. He suffers a case of the spleen, describes grimly the "damp, drizzly November in my soul," and knows it is "high time to get to sea as soon as I can" whenever "my hypos get such an upper hand of me." In contrast with the prefatory pages of the narrative, in which Melville's "sub-sub" has marked "whatever random allusions to whales he could anyways find in any book whatsoever, sacred or profane" (p. 2), Ishmael lacks precisely what the "Extracts" seem to contain—a point of reference.

The critical controversy surrounding this novel emerges from Melville's separation between Ishmael's metaphysical quest and Ahab's revenge pursuit of the whale. In nineteenth-century terms, Emerson's dichotomy between the materialist, "who takes his departure from the external world, and esteems a man as one product of that," and the idealist, who "takes his departure from his consciousness, and reckons the world an appearance," simplifies to an extreme the duality of Ahab and Ishmael. However, within the text, the separation becomes further complicated as a problem of narration. Is it Ishmael's experience "some years ago" with Ahab's voyage that now, in the present tense of the opening sentence, leads him to tell the story? Or do ontological dilemmas lead him to interweave his narrative of metaphysical correspondences and his fascination with Ahab's pursuit? If Ahab motivates the novel, then Ishmael's search becomes his attempt to understand the thematic significance of Ahab's voyage. If the novel results from Ishmael's a priori ontological meditations, just as Ishmael attempts to rid himself of the "hypos" in his soul by going whaling, then the "marking" in the novel—by no means limited to Ishmael's portrayal of Ahab, but including Queequeg, Pip, Moby Dick, and Ishmael himself—becomes the narrator's means of resolving his "hypotheses" about the universe by constructing metaphysical correspondences. In this second view, whaling becomes Ishmael's "reading" of the universe, one interpretation of the reality he constructs; the quest and the telling become synonymous activities for the narrator.

Melville struggled with similar narrative problems prior to writing *Moby-Dick*: in form if not in intensity, *White-Jacket* creates a narrative design that Melville then adapts to his larger theme. *White-Jacket*, more explicitly than the later novel, is a narrative occasion as much, if not more, than the record of a voyage, even though the narrator remains humorously faithful to his form: "But, though not a few good chapters might be written on this head, I must again forbear; for in this book I have nothing to do with the
shore further than to glance at it, now and then, from the water; my
man-of-war world alone must supply me with the staple of my mat-
ter; I have taken an oath to keep afloat to the last letter of my
narrative." The novel allows Melville discursive exposition on the
structure of the man-of-war, the activities within, and an allegorical
representation between the shipboard world and the landed one; the
ship becomes a theater, a chapel, a college, and a social state, as well
as the implied extension of White-Jacket’s own individual con-
lict—he, too, is a man-of-war. Yet the relative weakness of *White-
Jacket* is built into the novel from the beginning; for the voyage is
one, not in search of adventure or vengeance, but simply “homeward
bound.” Not until *Moby-Dick* does the literal correspondence be-
tween life on land and life at sea reach thematic integration.

But it is curious that, in finding the physical vehicle (whaling)
that will sustain a voyage with physical as well as metaphysical
purpose, Melville leaves behind the particular focus that allows the
earlier novel its moments of metaphysical intensity. Ishmael, unlike
White-Jacket, is not a scapegoat. In the earlier novel, the narrator’s
jacket, with all of its other idiosyncrasies, has the misfortune to be
white among a black-coated crew. If White-Jacket could only com-
mand enough black paint to discolor the coat, he feels he would
escape both the assaults of the elements and those of his fellow
sailors. But the paint is denied to him; and his resultant visibility
makes him the scapegoat of social dis-ease. In addition, the lack of
consistent integration between Ishmael’s roles as sailor and nar-
rator is decidedly not a problem in *White-Jacket*. When White-
Jacket the sailor climbs onto the mast, White-Jacket the narrator
falls off. And the sailor/narrator’s moment of arraignment at the
mast by Captain Claret (chap. 67), one of the dramatic climaxes of
the earlier novel, contrasts markedly with the absence of any face-
to-face encounter between Ishmael and his captain, Ahab.

Thus, in a study of marked characters in American fiction, it
makes sense to consider White-Jacket; and less immediate sense to
deal with Ishmael. Yet Melville’s distinction between the earlier
novel, whose narrator is visibly marked in his fictional world, and
*Moby-Dick*, whose narrator is marked only for the reader, empha-
sizes a transition between what I term in my chapter title social
physics and metaphysics. In the earlier novel, the narrator explores
the artist’s perception of his social role; White-Jacket achieves vis-
ion after he transcends his social visibility. In *Moby-Dick*, Ishmael
combats not social but metaphysical isolation. In a sense, White-
Jacket is a more primitive Ishmael; and from this point of view,
Ishmael has already learned White-Jacket’s lessons.
Hester Prynne and White-Jacket are scapegoats, marked by their social groups. In a social situation, where the character has become visibly manifest, to recognize the mark (Hester's letter, the white jacket, Ahab's leg) does not constitute a visionary act. Therefore, the very visibility of the narrator's social identity in *White-Jacket* limits his vision; he has been named by his crewmates and has accepted that social definition of himself. His white jacket serves as his psychological and emotional defense in a way that both protects him, because he can blame the jacket, and limits him, because he accepts the narrow definition of his differentness. He achieves moments of vision, and certainly perceives the allegory in his situation that the other men on the *Neversink* do not; but he clothes his observations in physical form until the moment of his symbolic "rebirth" at the end, when out of necessity he cuts himself loose from his jacket to keep from drowning in its limitations. As *White-Jacket* indicates, the mark itself limits the marked man's knowledge of himself and he becomes, as in Hawthorne, a literal manifestation of the marking community's own obscured self-knowledge, their particular form of limited vision.

In *Moby-Dick*, the lack of social marking agents complicates the question of marking. Who marks Queequeg? Moby Dick? Pip? Ahab? Ishmael? The narrator suggests that social stigma is a landed concern that Ahab, in particular, avoids by going to sea. On land, Ahab must "dissemble" his madness and motives, so that "when with ivory leg he stepped ashore at last, no Nantucketer thought him otherwise than but naturally grieved, and that to the quick, with the terrible casualty which had overtaken him. . . . Had any one of his old acquaintances on shore but half dreamed of what was lurking in him then, how soon would their aghast and righteous souls have wrenched the ship from such a fiendish man!" (pp. 161–62). Ishmael recognizes Ahab's dissembling, in the chapter "Moby Dick," and implies that, on land, Ahab might have become, in Goffman's terms, socially discredited. In the novel, however, Ahab's brand becomes both a narrative and a metaphysical focus, not a social one; as do Queequeg's markings, the White Whale's hieroglyphs and legends, and Pip's madness. These markings and legends do not escape the notice of the *Pequod*’s crew, but the whalemen avoid interpretation as surely as they avoid mutiny.9

Further, not even Ishmael bears a social mark. Although his opening sentence suggests that he is marked in the Biblical sense and cast out to wander, only Ishmael himself—and the reader—recognizes his alienation. Within the novel, he enjoys a privileged and private view without being, himself, visible. Queequeg is the
only other crew member of the *Pequod*, after Peleg and Bildad leave the ship, who even acknowledge a relationship with Ishmael; certainly Ahab does not. Thus, although Ishmael is clearly marked for the reader by virtue of his name, he possesses an anonymous invisibility aboard ship.

That the crew should not recognize Ishmael's stigma would seem to reflect that the focus of the novel for the narrator is personal rather than social. In itself, Ishmael's marking does not place him beside Hester Prynne, or beside Joe Christmas or Invisible Man, whom I discuss in later chapters; and yet, in the novel's juxtaposition with *White-Jacket* and *The Scarlet Letter*, we must consider him marked even more than those other fictional bearers of social stigma. It goes almost without saying, for the reader who is familiar with *White-Jacket*, that visibility leads to social exclusion. Ishmael, in achieving the invisibility of a White-Jacket finally stripped of the jacket, also moves beyond the limitations of White-Jacket's vision, and Melville's succeeding novel thus reflects on social stigma by focusing on a character whose social identity has been all but obliterated by anonymity, whose vision results, as surely as Hester's visibility resulted, from the social blindness of his fellow sailors.

*Moby-Dick* becomes, in part, Ishmael's meditation on the relationship between vision and visibility. In his meditative moments at the masthead, Ishmael possesses a self-consciousness that White-Jacket's social exclusion imposed on him, but that Ishmael voluntarily chooses. White-Jacket complains that whereas other crewmen escaped detection, "their identity undiscoverable—my own hapless jacket forever proclaimed the name of its wearer. It gave me many a hard job, which otherwise I should have escaped . . . how easy, in that mob of incognitos, to individualize 'that white jacket,' and dispatch him on the errand." The errands to which he refers often send him "to communicate some slight order to the captains of the tops." White-Jacket thus, he implies, spends more time ascending aloft than the other crewmen; and so even in *White-Jacket*, the masthead becomes associated with meditation and vision. The narrator writes, "I am of a meditative humor, and at sea used often to mount aloft at night, and, seating myself on one of the upper yards, tuck my jacket about me and give loose to reflection." White-Jacket's visibility increases his opportunities for meditation; and from such an altitude, encased in the jacket, which the narrator wears as protection from the cold, he is pitched into the sea at the end of the novel and almost drowned. Only by ripping the jacket open with his knife, "as if I were ripping open myself," does he escape death by water—or by the hands of his own comrades, who
mistake the jacket for some white shark about to make an end to him, and fill it with harpoons an instant after the narrator frees himself from it. The harpooning of the jacket and White-Jacket’s narrow escape establish paradigms that Ishmael in *Moby-Dick* self-consciously explores.

II

Ishmael’s resolve to go to sea reverses both the *Neversink*’s journey and classical quest narrative. The *Neversink* and Homer’s *Odysseus* are homeward bound, whereas Ishmael’s quest initially has no goal, except as this goal romantically “looms” in the distance, just beyond the horizon of thought; fog or darkness shrouds, distorts, and exaggerates its form. Although according to *The Oxford English Dictionary* the origin of the verb “loom” is unknown, the word’s suggestion of impending occurrence or lurking in shadows indicates that whether or not some earlier form may have derived from the Latin *lumen*, or *light*, “loomings” connotes a potential dawning. Related words, *to lumine*, for example, or *illumine*, and the Latin *luminare*, *heavenly body*, all suggest qualities of light and reflected light. Ishmael must go to sea “whenever my hypos get such an upper hand of me” in order to escape the “lunacy” or reflected light of his “loomings.”13 Further, the primordial connotations of “loomings” indicate, throughout the quest that follows, that the origins of the quest are more important to Ishmael initially than some known goal. For he comes to define his own goals, and in so doing, defines a romantic theme: the rejection of theology and the substitution of personal myth.14

It is clear from the beginning that Ishmael feels driven, compelled, to the sea. At first glance, Ishmael suggests that the sea is an escape: “This is my substitute for pistol and ball. With a philosophical flourish Cato throws himself upon his sword; I quietly take to the ship.” In his next thought, however, he implies that the sea itself embodies the same desire in every man: “There is nothing surprising in this. If they but knew it, almost all men in their degree, some time or other, cherish very nearly the same feelings toward the ocean with me” (p. 12). He cites the water-gazers, the land-bound tradesmen, as evidence that “almost all men,” whether or not they consciously know it, share some subjective experience that motivates them to act, and states, “Yes, as every one knows, meditation and water are wedded for ever” (p. 13).

The meditative act is one kind of reflection for Ishmael, also involving a looming, a dawning of light. Thus he explains the story of
Narcissus, "who because he could not grasp the tormenting, mild image he saw in the fountain, plunged into it and was drowned." The image Narcissus sees is that of his own "self" reflected in the water; but it is also all of nature, as Ishmael explains. "But that same image, we ourselves see in all rivers and oceans." The image of nature reflected in the sea and the reflection of self viewed in meditation are one and the same thing. "It is the image of the ungraspable phantom of life; and this is the key to it all" (p. 14).

The looming moment is the one just prior to visual manifestation, just before the phantom assumes form. It is the earliest impulse of the oceanic nonmanifest to become a wave of creation; and thus the verbal force of "loomings" suggests a prelude to action. Ishmael sees and motivates in one nebulous compulsion: going to sea is his meditation; the nature of self-reflection is the recreation and display of creation; and mystery, all that he does not understand, initially motivates him. Ishmael explains this compulsion as "an everlasting itch for things remote. I love to sail forbidden seas, and land on barbarous coasts" (p. 16). Going to sea thus securely "grounds" the former landsman, but in a more satisfying way; the meditative act fulfills a basic need in water gazers; and the ocean of forms and patterns incorporated in the novel reflects the intensity of the light the narrator achieves. Moby-Dick is Melville's attempt to construct a many-faceted "scope," an instrument of vision. As Charles Feidelson expresses it, "The first chapter of Moby-Dick is the statement of a point of view. Ishmael opens his narrative by identifying voyage with vision: the field of man's vision is the sea . . . the sensibility of the individual man opens onto the ocean. . . . Beneath the jocular tone these initial paragraphs create an effect of irrepressible need. The attraction of the mind to the sea is life itself as a quest for knowledge." 15

Ishmael's response to the oil painting on the wall in the Spouter-Inn characterizes in small his approach to knowledge in the novel. He describes what he sees:

But what most puzzled and confounded you was a long, limber, portentous, black mass of something hovering in the centre of the picture over three blue, dim, perpendicular lines floating in a nameless yeast. A boggy, soggy, squitchy picture truly, enough to drive a nervous man distracted. Yet was there a sort of indefinite, half-attained, unimaginable sublimity about it that fairly froze you to it, till you involuntarily took an oath with yourself to find out what that marvellous painting meant. Ever and anon a bright, but, alas, deceptive idea would dart you through.—It's the Black Sea in a midnight gale.—It's the unnatural combat of the four primal elements.—It's a blasted heath.—It's a Hyperborean winter scene.—It's the breaking-
The irony of the multitude of his farfetched interpretations of the painting is emphasized by the conspicuous lack of any theological interpretation—for, with regard to the pervasive symbolism of the rest of the novel, a reader might wonder why Ishmael does not also think of the Trinity, or the three crosses of the Crucifixion. But the dramatic "stop" Ishmael puts to the process of interpretation suggests his substitution of whaling for theology: it is a democratic theme, whose legends have not yet been imbued with religious significance, and whose factual lore has not even been properly interpreted. "In fact, the artist’s design seemed this: a final theory of my own, partly based upon the aggregated opinions of many aged persons with whom I conversed upon the subject. The picture represents a Cape-Horner in a great hurricane; the half-foundered ship wrettering there with its three dismantled masts alone visible; and an exasperated whale, purposing to spring clean over the craft, is in the enormous act of impaling himself upon the three mast-heads" (pp. 20–21). Ishmael's own interpretation is very funny, and seems to be quite as arbitrary as the interpretations he rejects.

In light of the correspondence he discovers in the sea as a symbol of the source of knowledge, Ishmael's choice to interpret the "nameless yeast" of the painting as a seascape becomes less arbitrary. He has already recognized that whaling is a poetic conceit: "in the wild conceits that swayed me to my purpose, two and two there floated into my inmost soul, endless processions of the whale, and, midmost of them all, one grand hooded phantom, like a snow hill in the air" (p. 16). And in narrating *Moby-Dick* Ishmael retrospectively orders the process by which, as a young man, he came to focus on whaling as a vehicle for resolving the miscellaneous struggles of consciousness before it becomes conscious of itself, finds a voice, and identifies a quest. Marking becomes his literary method as well as his epistemological technique for arriving at self-consciousness.  

*Moby-Dick* begins at the beginning of Ishmael's quest, not in medias res. Ishmael the storyteller has learned from Ishmael the man: the process of achieving symbolic significance originates in concrete detail. Thus, although Ishmael suspects that his quest for origins will lead him to pursue the "snow hill in the air," he also realizes that his more immediate problems concern food and lodging. He does not disregard the practical goals of the whaling industr-
try that resulted in the opulence of the houses in New Bedford; there are material gains from "light" as well as philosophical ones. Motives for founding the garden in the new world—for planting parks "upon this once scraggy scoria of a country" (p. 38)—were economic as well as religious.

Neither does Ishmael allow economy to replace theology (he has his own substitute—he is willing to accept any "lay" for a berth on the Pequod and a chance to pursue metaphysical phantoms), and on his first morning in New Bedford, he begins his landed leave-taking by visiting a chapel. His decision to seek a congenial berth in a whaling ship has led him to consider his grave. Yet he dissociates his metaphysical curiosity from his own death.

Yes, there is death in this business of whaling—a speechlessly quick chaotic bundling of a man into Eternity. But what then? 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 the thinnest of air. Methinks my body is but the lees of my better being. In fact take my body who will, take it I say, it is not me. (p. 41)

Ishmael's attempt at self-conviction here mixes false bravado and genuine innocence and parodies Emersonian Platonism; at the same time, he tries to interpret the significance of Father Mapple's masthead pulpit: "there must be some sober reason for this thing; furthermore, it must symbolize something unseen. Can it be, then, that by that act of physical isolation, he signifies his spiritual withdrawal for the time, from all outward worldly ties and connexions?" (p. 43). Ishmael finds that the "act of physical isolation" must "symbolize something unseen" and thereby explains his fascination for things that are marked—isolated from their own kind. This fascination leads Ishmael to accept Queequeg as a bedfellow: "With much interest I sat watching him. Savage though he was, and hideously marred about the face—at least to my taste—his countenance yet had a something in it which was by no means disagreeable. You cannot hide the soul" (pp. 51–52). And it leads him to choose the grotesquely inlaid and antiquely marked Pequod as his literal whaling vehicle.

Within his transcendental epistemology, by which Ishmael aligns himself with other marked objects and creatures and attempts spiritual withdrawal, the contrast of dialectical opposition becomes his point of view, his reminder of his own mortality and its inner spiritual essence. Lying in bed with Queequeg, having overcome his
initial aversion to the cannibal's tattoos, he understands the essence of dialectical self-consciousness:

truly to enjoy bodily warmth, some small part of you must be cold, for there is no quality in this world that is not what it is merely by contrast. Nothing exists in itself. If you flatter yourself that you are all over comfortable, and have been so a long time, then you cannot be said to be comfortable any more. . . . For this reason a sleeping apartment should never be furnished with a fire, which is one of the luxurious discomforts of the rich. For the height of this sort of deliciousness is to have nothing but the blanket between you and your snugness and the cold of the outer air. Then there you lie like the one warm spark in the heart of an arctic crystal. (p. 55)

Later in the novel, he states, "as for me, if, by any possibility, there be any as yet undiscovered prime thing in me . . . then here I prospectively ascribe all the honor and the glory to whaling" (p. 101). The "prime thing" and the "warm spark" that the narrator hopes to discover finds its physical correspondence in the whaler's search for sperm oil, for "the whaleman, as he seeks the food of light, so he lives in light. He makes his berth an Aladdin's lamp, and lays him down in it; so that in the pitchiest night the ship's black hull still houses an illumination" (p. 355). The light and spiritual heat Ishmael comes to associate with sperm oil, landlessness, and masthead reverie form the corresponding physical "cure" for his metaphysical problem, his soul's "drizzly November." He leaves behind his landed Presbyterianism: "meditation and water are wedded forever."

In my introductory chapter, I discussed the relationship between Eastern meditation techniques and American transcendentalism. There are moments at the masthead where Ishmael seems to achieve a state of "transcendence" that resembles Eastern enlightenment, and in retrospect, Father Mapple's pulpit loses some of its queerness. Ishmael calls himself "a dreamy meditative man" (p. 136), and he confesses that from his vantage point a hundred feet above the decks, he "kept but sorry guard," having "the problem of the universe revolving in me" (p. 139). He describes the masthead experience in Emersonian terms:

but lulled into such an opium-like listlessness of vacant, unconscious reverie is this absent-minded youth by the blending cadence of waves with thoughts, that at last he loses his identity; takes the mystic ocean at his feet for the visible image of that deep, blue, bottomless soul, pervading mankind and nature; and every strange, half-seen, gliding, beautiful thing that eludes him; every dimly-discovered, rising fin of some undiscernible form, seems to him the embodiment of those elusive thoughts that only people the soul by continually flitting
through it. In this enchanted mood, thy spirit ebbs away to whence it came; becomes diffused through time and space. . . . (p. 140)

He later writes, "in that dreamy mood losing all consciousness, at last my soul went out of my body" (p. 241). The experience becomes a common one—"that unaccountable drowsiness which ever would come over me at a midnight helm" (p. 354).

The Eastern influence does not pervade the surface of the novel, and as theology Ishmael rejects it as he rejects all theologies, but its presence is unmistakable. In one passage, marked by the peculiarly humorous tone Ishmael adopts whenever he speaks directly of spiritual philosophies, Christian or pagan, he talks about the Indian Vedas, "or mystical books, whose perusal would seem to have been indispensable to Vishnoo before beginning the creation, and which therefore must have contained something in the shape of practical hints to young architects, these Vedas were lying at the bottom of the waters; so Vishnoo became incarnate in a whale, and sounding down in him to the uttermost depths, rescued the sacred volumes. Was not this Vishnoo a whale-man, then? even as a man who rides a horse is called a horseman?" (p. 306). The word veda, in Sanskrit, means knowledge; thus the Vedas refer both to the eternal truth that, by its nature, is timeless, and to the earliest cognized form of this knowledge by the epic poet Veda Vyasa about 5,000 years ago. Melville deals with both the philosophical and the literal notion of the Vedas. Literally, he jokes about "Vishnoo" rescuing "the sacred volumes." Although Vishnu names a particular Hindu deity, this deity is itself just one manifestation in Eastern philosophy of three essential forces of life, or gunas. These forces are contained in the interplay between sattva, rajas, and tamas, roughly the forces that express creation, put it forth and maintain it, and serve to retard or destroy its growth. Vishnu manifests the rajas guna, and thus, in Melville's analogy, represents the force in creation that provides the initial spur to put forth; thus he "rescued" the Vedas.

The conceptual connection between this rajas force and the whale's activities clarifies Ishmael's own compulsion for landlessness. Ishmael describes "Vishnoo," incarnate in a whale, "sounding down in him to the uttermost depths." The whale's activity of "sounding" or diving provides Ishmael's own link in the analogy between ocean gazing and meditation. The noun "sound" and the verb have different origins, according to The Oxford English Dictionary. The noun originates from the Latin sonus, or melody, and the verb from the Old English sund, or swea. The associative link between the two may possibly be that sound results from vibrations striking
the eardrum, but not from diving. Diving in water does produce sensation in the eardrum, however; and the verb sound may associate these two vibratory effects. Physics has demonstrated that sound travels through water in physical waves. Ishmael expresses his knowledge of an "inner ear" that deepens ordinary hearing as "inner vision" suggests more than ordinary sight. "Is it not curious, that so vast a being as the whale should see the world through so small an eye, and hear the thunder through an ear which is smaller than a hare's? But if his eyes were broad as the lens of Herschel's great telescope; and his ears capacious as the porches of cathedrals; would that make him any longer of sight, or sharper of hearing? Not at all.—Why then do you try to 'enlarge' your mind? Subtilize it" (p. 280). It is therefore interesting to note that sounds—particular words or "mantras"—are used extensively as literal vehicles for "diving" in Indian meditation techniques. Without possessing knowledge of these Eastern techniques, Ishmael still finds the most life-supporting vehicle available to him, which for Ishmael the whaleman is the pursuit of the whale (if only he could be pursued at the depths he sounds) and for Ishmael the narrator the established cognition and realization of his quest as a metaphysical conceit.

A. N. Kaul writes, Ishmael "comes very close to regarding [the universe] as one indivisible totality—a vast ambiguity of man, fish, and the elements, of good and evil. But while such an insight bears remarkable affinity to the viewpoint of oriental metaphysics, Ishmael achieves it not through oriental contemplation but through sustained action. Though he does not pursue Moby-Dick out of vengeance, yet pursue him he must if he is to comprehend him and to resolve the problem of the universe." Ishmael's moments on the masthead are analogous to "oriental contemplation" in the sense that being on the lookout for whales provides him with a focus or "mantra" for meditation. As Howard Vincent expresses it, "Whaling is the tonic chord to which we turn again and again, finally concentrating on one particular whale." In my understanding of transcendental meditation, there is no contradiction between contemplation and what Kaul terms "sustained action." Contemplation or meditation is a prelude to action, not a retreat from it. The world of action serves to deepen the experience of meditation. In this sense, Ishmael's "pursuit" of the whale is as much metaphysical as it is physical. As Feidelson writes, "He who would follow Ishmael must exert the symbolic imagination, for Ishmael's 'pursuit' of the whale is the evolution of an image. Although the meanings that develop are disquieting, and the whole process tends to become a 'fiery hunt,' he has no other approach." Ishmael's ability to "evolve his image,"
in Feidelson's words, increases as a result of his time on the masthead. His "meditations" on the whale increase Melville's powers as a symbolist.

But meditation in whatever form produces only moments of transcendence; beneath the masthead exist the "Descartian" vortices, the sharks beneath the surface calm of the sea. If, as Ishmael describes his experience amidst the "grand armada of whales," "amid the tornadoed Atlantic of my being, do I myself still for ever centrally disport in mute calm; and while ponderous planets of unwaning woe revolve round me, deep down and deep inland there I still bathe me in eternal mildness of joy" (p. 326). Amid the "eternal mildness," equally, there lurks the "tornadoed Atlantic of my being." Such is Pip's experience, which Ishmael mentions "is common in that fishery; and in the sequel of the narrative, it will then be seen what like abandonment befell myself" (p. 347):

The intense concentration of self in the middle of such a heartless immensity, my God! who can tell it?... The sea had jeeringly kept his finite body up, but drowned the infinite of his soul. Not drowned entirely, though. Rather carried down alive to wondrous depths, where strange shapes of the unwarped primal world glided to and fro before his passive eyes.... He saw God's foot upon the treadle of the loom, and spoke it; and therefore his shipmates called him mad. So man's insanity is heaven's sense. (p. 347)

This loom is the ocean floor in Ishmael's "Vishnoo" analogy; it is the "unwarped primal world;" and it is such a powerful experience that it is, in Wordsworth's phrase, "all gratulant if rightly understood." If imperfectly understood or unknown, those initial "loomings" that prelude manifestation become twisted into the loomings of purposelessness, lack of reference, lunacy; "and therefore his shipmates called him mad. ..."25

In the early chapters of the novel, then, Melville establishes Ishmael's subjective search. He suggests that understanding the unknown, "landlessness," provides the object of his quest, that whaleing provides his means, and that Ishmael's fascination with markings expresses his attempt to transcend an inner spiritual dissatisfaction. With the appearance of Ahab, Ishmael's miscellaneous "loomings" find their fullest focus, and Ahab's own quest for Moby Dick becomes Ishmael's adoptive search.

III

Ishmael enters into a consideration of Ahab's significance by examining his physical marks in the same process that has initiated his various speculations from the opening of the narrative. When
The Mark and the Knowledge

Ahab first appears on the deck of the Pequod. Ishmael states, "reality outran apprehension." Even more scarred than Ishmael had imagined, Ahab's brand literally and completely marks him, as extensive tattooing and hieroglyphs mark Queequeg and the white whale. The visual effect of the scars recalls Hawthorne's treatment of physical marks. "Threading its way out from among his grey hairs, and continuing right down one side of his tawny scorched face and neck, till it disappeared in his clothing, you saw a slender rod-like mark, lividly whitish... Whether that mark was born with him, or whether it was the scar left by some desperate wound, no one could certainly say" (p. 110). The superstition circulates among the crew that "if ever Captain Ahab should be tranquilly laid out—which might hardly come to pass...—then, whoever should do that last office for the dead, would find a birthmark on him from crown to sole" (p. 110). Contrary to expectation, it is not the leg itself that Ishmael first notices:

So powerfully did the whole grim aspect of Ahab affect me, and the livid brand which streaked it, that for the first few moments I hardly noted that not a little of this overbearing grimness was owing to the barbaric white leg upon which he partly stood... I was struck with the singular posture he maintained. (p. 110)

And Ishmael concludes, "after that morning, he was every day visible to the crew" (p. 111).

Ahab's visibility has greater significance for Ishmael than for the rest of the sailors, however, and the second major section of the novel, beginning particularly with chapter 28, "Ahab," meditates on this significance. Ishmael attempts, particularly in the chapters "Moby Dick" and "The Whiteness of the Whale," the metaphysical interpretation of markings, of legends; but his metaphysical speculation at this point in the narrative takes the form of his narrative concentration on Ahab, and the order and unity of the section provide a blueprint for both Ishmael's interpretation of Ahab and the reader's interpretation of Ishmael.

The unity of the second major narrative section is established in two ways. First, this is the only section in the novel where Ahab and Ishmael both function together in presence aboard the ship. After chapter 42, "The Whiteness of the Whale," Ishmael as character does not appear again until the end of the novel, with a couple of brief exceptions, and Ahab does not make an extended appearance again until chapter 99, "The Doubloon." Second, although the events within the section do not all take place during the same day. Melville nevertheless achieves temporal unity in the progression from early morning when Ahab first appears on deck, to "The Cabin
Table” (chap. 34) and “The Mast-Head” stillness—“it is noon” (p. 130), to Ahab's solitary watch at “Sunset,” to the “First Night-Watch,” and to “Forecastle.—Midnight,” in the chapter just preceding Ishmael's reflections on “Moby Dick” and “Whiteness.”

Ishmael the narrator imposes this order, not Ishmael the sailor; and he resolves not only Ahab's retrospective significance but also his own function as a character in the fiction. Ishmael remains literally on board the Pequod in the early chapters of this section until the narrator, revealing the internal logic of the work, draws a correspondence between his own metaphysical fears and Ahab's externalized, physical means of dealing with similar fears. Ahab's entrance into the novel makes it possible for Ishmael to step back from dramatic action. He thus becomes an observer of the scene he narrates, as the middle chapter of the section, “The Mast-Head,” indicates.

I have discussed Ishmael's description of the meditative experience the lookout evokes. In the context of “The Mast-Head,” it is clear that Ishmael's view operates at some physical remove—“a hundred feet above the silent decks” (p. 136). Throughout the rest of the novel, as omniscient narrator, he retains his position at the mast, able to observe without actually being part of the scene. The microcosmic contrast Melville sets up here between the action below on deck and the drama of Ishmael's metaphysical warfare recalls White-Jacket's moments of introspection. For like White-Jacket, Ishmael, too, experiences the world in a man-of-war; he is such a world, such a man in conflict, and thus the masthead is not a “crow's nest,” as much as he might like it to be. (The crow's nest on the Greenland whaler, by contrast, contains a partial enclosure, securely furnished with locker, rifle, and bottle [p. 137].)

In the drama that follows, Ahab becomes an understudy for the Ishmael who remains on the narrative mast. Ishmael's fascination with Ahab seems initiated by the brand Ahab wears; but in fact, Ishmael further "marks" Ahab's meaning because of the similarities, as well as the differences, in their pursuits. Ishmael's narrative treatment of Ahab is not unlike Hawthorne's narrator's treatment of Chillingworth. For Chillingworth, and for the storyteller who would be an interpreter of signs, knowledge may lead to (self) possession.

As Captain Peleg expresses it earlier in the novel, "'stricken, blasted, if he be, Ahab has his humanities!'” (p. 77). And Ishmael apostrophizes him: "Oh, Ahab! what shall be grand in thee, it must needs be plucked at from the skies, and dived for in the deep, and featured in the unbodied air!” (p. 130). Ahab's mystery hides some-
thing “grand” for Ishmael, and his narrative exploration of Ahab, “diving deep” into the captain’s grimness, is akin to searching for “any as yet undiscoverable prime thing in me.” Ahab has his own meditative tendencies, is engaged in his own ontological pursuit: “‘Hark ye yet again,—the little lower layer. All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks. But in each event—in the living act, the undoubted deed—there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask” (p. 144). His desire to “strike through the mask,” to penetrate “that inscrutable thing,” is akin to Ishmael’s need to experience the unknown, to see beneath the literal surface. Much later in the novel, Ahab again shows his direct metaphysical fraternity with Ishmael’s concerns when he states, “O Nature, and O soul of man! how far beyond all utterance are your linked analogies! not the smallest atom stirs or lives in matter, but has its cunning duplicate in mind” (p. 264). But the philosophical contrast is as striking as the similarities; like Ahab, Ishmael views the “linked analogies” but unlike Ahab, who vows, “‘and be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal, I will wreak that hate upon him’” (p. 144), he does not attribute malice to the inscrutable. Yet Ishmael is reticent to reveal any man’s weaknesses of character: “for it is a thing most sorrowful, nay shocking, to expose the fall of valor in the soul . . . man, in the ideal, is so noble and so sparkling, such a grand and glowing creature, that over any ignominious blemish in him all his fellows should run to throw their costliest robes” (p. 104). If Ahab, like Chillingworth, is demonically maddened, Ishmael, unlike Hawthorne’s narrator, does not condemn him for it. Ahab becomes a focus for Ishmael’s own pursuit in spite of his madness, not because of it.27

Ishmael explicitly claims his fraternity with Ahab in the opening lines of “Moby Dick”:

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, sympathetical feeling was in me: Ahab’s quenchless feud seemed mine. (p. 155)

Ishmael initially aligns his sympathies with Ahab in part because he also has “marked” Moby Dick—the “snowhill in the air.” Like Ahab, Ishmael attributes a fundamental malice to the whale, an “unexampled, intelligent malignity,” but his imagination is “struck” by the whale’s marked physical characteristics and legendary intelligence:
But even stripped of these supernatural surmisings, there was enough in the earthly make and incontestable character of the monster to strike the imagination with unwonted power. For, it was not so much his uncommon bulk that so much distinguished him from other sperm whales, but, as was elsewhere thrown out—a peculiar snow-white wrinkled forehead, and a high, pyramidal white hump. These were his prominent features; the tokens whereby, even in the limitless, uncharted seas, he revealed his identity, at a long distance, to those who knew him. (p. 159)

Similarly, the physical encounter, the malignant “assault,” initiated Ahab’s obsession. Since the moment of that encounter, “Ahab had cherished a wild vindictiveness against the whale, all the more fell for that in his frantic morbidness he at last came to identify with him, not only all his bodily woes, but all his intellectual and spiritual exasperations” (p. 160). Ishmael’s spiritual “thirst” manifests itself, in Ahab, as a “quenchless” blood thirst. “Ahab and anguish lay stretched together in one hammock . . . then it was, that his torn body and gashed soul bled into one another; and so interfusing, made him mad” (p. 160). It was not just the physical encounter with the whale but the deepening influence of physical pain, and the gradual “interfusing” of mental and physical anguish, that leads to Ahab’s madness—not an ordinary madness, like Ishmael’s spleen, but a demoniac madness, “‘I am madness maddened! That wild madness that’s only calm to comprehend itself!’” (p. 147). Ahab’s spiritual anguish turns to physical pain, and his metaphysical quest into a real hunt.

But for Ishmael, Moby Dick’s physical markings and Ahab’s physical hunt lead to metaphysical speculation, and in the final chapter of the section, he considers the problem of interpreting the whale’s “whiteness.” Further, he establishes a division between Ahab’s hunt and his own pursuit: “What the white whale was to Ahab, has been hinted; what, at times, he was to me, as yet remains unsaid” (p. 163). For Ishmael, the whale is one more vehicle; it is means, not end. For Ahab, Moby Dick remains the goal of the quest. “The Whiteness of the Whale” results from Ishmael’s careful plotting, first of his choice of whaling, of the Pequod, and then of Ahab and Moby Dick, as his particular focus for narrative quest, and from establishing Ahab as the character within the narrative who will continue the physical pursuit while Ishmael becomes the inconspicuous meditative whaleman content to follow the chase at some distance and to engage in his own metaphysical speculations as accompaniment and counterpoint to the dramatic action taking place below him on deck. The narrator essentially frees himself from
participation in the action and achieves, in "Whiteness," his "deepest dive" into interpretive meditation.

"Whiteness" marks the successful achievement of one narrative problem, and thus, after the "First Lowering" into dramatic action following the expository chapter, Ahab does not again appear in the novel until much later. But it also develops a new narrative concern that Ishmael introduced in chapter 32, "Cetology," and that emerges as an extension of both Ishmael's Platonism and his achievement of narrative distance at the masthead. Ishmael's style in "Whiteness" is logical exposition, and he develops his argument by an accumulation of references to whiteness that contrast "whatever is sweet, and honorable, and sublime" with that "elusive something in the innermost idea of this hue, which strikes more of panic to the soul than that redness which affrights in blood" (p. 164). Yet "aside from those more obvious considerations touching Moby Dick, which could not but occasionally awaken in any man's soul some alarm, there was another thought, or rather vague, nameless horror concerning him, which at times by its intensity completely overpowered all the rest; and yet so mystical and well nigh ineffable was it, that I almost despair of putting it in a comprehensible form. It was the whiteness of the whale that above all things appalled me. But how can I hope to explain myself here; and yet, in some dim, random way, explain myself I must, else all these chapters might be naught" (p. 163).

The "despair" that Ishmael expresses in this passage is occasioned by the ineffability he faces, by the difficulty of explaining the whale's "mystical" horror in a "comprehensible form." Yet if he does not succeed in "explaining" himself, "all these chapters might be naught." He has replaced his initial pursuit of the "snowhill in the air" by his search for a way to "explain myself"; Ahab's whale hunt becomes the focus of his story, but he must also find a way to tell that story, must create a comprehensible form for the overpowering intensity that "whitens" him, appalls him. By telling the story, Ishmael may "share" it as well as find a container—hence a finite limitation—for the internal chaos that led him to the sea in the first place. In "Cetology," he stated, "the classification of the constituents of a chaos, nothing less is here essayed" (p. 117). Thus Ishmael's pursuit, for all its metaphysical semblance, is akin to Ahab's physical hunt: if he can make a convincing correspondence between cosmos and microcosmos, he will succeed in externalizing his own demon—the grimness about his mouth, his soul's "drizzly November." Art, for Ishmael, becomes a constructive scapegoat, as well as a vehicle for self-knowledge and spiritual transcendence.
IV

In "Whiteness," he recognizes the goal of his achievement but he recognizes also that he must bridge the elements of his dialectical vision in order to reach that goal. The symbolism by which man accounts for whiteness enables him to view himself, to make objects out of his own subjective perception of the world. But Ishmael is dissatisfied with all symbolizing that emerges from mood making and wants to understand that deepest perception of whiteness, by which it "calls up a peculiar apparition to the soul." To account for this apparition is, "without dissent," necessary for the man of sense, in order to retain his sense and avoid "madness maddened"; and yet, to directly analyze it, "would seem impossible" (p. 166).

Ishmael continues, "Let us try. But in a matter like this, subtlety appeals to subtlety, and without imagination no man can follow another into these halls. And though, doubtless, some at least of the imaginative impressions about to be presented may have been shared by most men, yet few perhaps were entirely conscious of them at the time, and therefore may not be able to recall them now" (p. 167). The logic he would use, in an attempt to achieve that "fixed point," is the logic of imagination, the logic of analogy; and he asserts (recalling his opening claims in "Loomings" that linked every man, whether or not he realizes it, to the sea) that there are levels of experience that may not have been cognized at the conscious level, but that nevertheless remain "imaginative impressions" that may be appealed to by the subliminal logic Ishmael proposes to use. The presentational style of the chapter begins at this point to assume the characteristics of a Platonic dialogue, Ishmael setting forth points that need to be dealt with, backing off in defense, agreeing, disagreeing, questioning; and in all, attempting the objective view of his subject that will lead him to the construction of a formal bridge to ease the dialectical opposition he described as "the one warm spark at the heart of an arctic crystal," and that he begins to clarify in "Whiteness" and succeeding chapters.

After Ishmael's introspections on whiteness, the direction of the narrative moves outwards. In the portion of the novel that "Whiteness" concludes, the narrator's attention seems to have acquired a new focus, Ahab; and although there is a narrative transition here, after which Ahab becomes a tangential concern until the final section, the first question the narrator addresses after "Whiteness" concerns Ahab's management of time before he can hope to find Moby Dick. He writes, "the premature hour of the Pequod's sailing
had, perhaps, been covertly selected by Ahab, with a view to this very complexion of things. Because, an interval of three hundred and sixty-five days and nights was before him; an interval which, instead of impatiently enduring ashore, he would spend in a miscellaneous hunt" (p. 174). In chapter 46, "Surmises," he considers Ahab's reasons for continuing to hunt other whales besides Moby Dick. It may be, he reasons, that Ahab was "by nature and long habituation far too wedded to a fiery whaleman's ways, altogether to abandon the collateral prosecution of the voyage" (p. 182). He rejects the possibility that Ahab's monomania may have extended to all sperm whales and concludes,

the subtle insanity of Ahab respecting Moby Dick was noways more significantly manifested than in his superlative sense and shrewdness in foreseeing that, for the present, the hunt should in some way be stripped of that strange imaginative impiousness which naturally invested it; that the full terror of the voyage must be kept withdrawn into the obscure background (for few men's courage is proof against protracted meditation unrelieved by action); that when they stood their long night watches, his officers and men must have some nearer things to think of than Moby Dick. (p. 183)

Ahab realizes that the "final and romantic object," Moby Dick, will not sustain the men throughout the long search, without some "hopes of cash—aye, cash" (p. 184).

The problem Ahab confronts in these chapters is also Ishmael's narrative problem. In the rest of the novel, like Ahab, Ishmael faces the necessity of sustained effort. The "full terror" of the novel, as well as the hunt, must be withdrawn into the background. The narrative parenthesis expresses the significance of introspective tension—"for few men's courage is proof against protracted meditation unrelieved by action." In spite of moments of unity on the masthead, or of extended metaphysical speculation ("Whiteness"), Ishmael understands that prolonged exposure to the elements of nature and of soul may test or break the courage of a strong man. Thus, Pip's excessive concentration of "self in the middle of the sea clouds his sanity. However surely Ishmael's inner desire continually leads him to return to masthead meditation, his moments of introspection are eased and his capacity renewed in dramatic action. This is the necessary balance he phrases between "meditation and action." The opening moment—"Call me Ishmael"—and the Epilogue collapse the novel into a nucleus. Ishmael arrives at the point in consciousness at which he can state, "Call me Ishmael." by having moved through his own concentration of self in the middle of the sea, in the Epilogue. Yet in order to move from opening to ending mo-
ments meaningfully in the novel, Ishmael must expand the full cumulative manifestation of deepening awareness; and thus he eases the narrative exposition and masthead reverie by the explicitly dramatic scenes.

The dramatic action not only eases and renews the meditative facility but it also prepares for new insight; it actually creates the physical situation that then may be transcended in meditation. In the broad scheme of the novel, neither the narrator nor the reader is sufficiently prepared to realize the eventual significance of Ahab's encounter with Moby Dick in these yet early moments of the narrative. At the same time, action serves as a necessary prelude to the accumulation of significance, realized and articulated in the introspective moments. Thus, Ahab instructs his men to keep an eye out for whales; and thus, Ishmael comes down from the masthead to participate in the first lowering and enacts his mortal fears by drafting his will. The narration of events in this first lowering pushes their dramatic action further; it also creates new opportunities for the introspective narrator.

This process—the alternation of introspection and action, inward and outward focus—becomes firmly established throughout the third large narrative section of the novel, which I mark as beginning after “Whiteness,” and continuing for more than half the novel's length until another turn occurs roughly between the chapters “The Doubloon” (chap. 99) and “Ahab's Leg” (chap. 106). One clear example of the narrative progression of meditation and action is indicated by the sequence of chapters beginning with “Stubb Kills a Whale” (chap. 61), dramatic action that necessitates explanation in “The Dart” and “The Crotch” (chaps. 62 and 63); these chapters are then followed by more action, in “Stubb's Supper” (64), which necessitates further exposition, “The Whale as a Dish” (65). The introspective extension of the cetological exposition may lead to Ishmael's comic view, as in “The Shark Massacre” (66); or to his metaphysical speculations concerning the treachery hidden beneath life's “loveliest tints of azure,” in “Brit” (chap. 58), “Squid” (59), “The Grand Armada” (87), and “The Castaway” (93). The reader must have “nearer things to think of” than Ahab's pursuit, whereas Ishmael tries to overcome the limitations of his own vision—“all this to explain, would be to dive deeper than Ishmael can go”—and like Ahab, he contents himself for the duration with the discrete insights that result from miscellaneous metaphysical meditation and that he expresses as objective exposition.

Stylistically, the formal shifts into dramatic dialogue indicate the duality Ishmael balances. The most extensive stylistic shift occurs
just prior to "Moby Dick" and "Whiteness," in the chapter "Forecastle.—Midnight," in which the narrator limits his exposition to brief and parenthetical stage directions. The dramatic presentation emphasizes the absence of a narrator (Ishmael, by this chapter, has ascended the mast), maintaining the contrast between meditation and action, although there are other points to the chapter—few sailors speak or sing more than once, and by far the majority of voices belong to Asian or island sailors, literally emphasizing a statement Ishmael made earlier in the novel, that "the native American liberally provides the brains, the rest of the world as generously supplying the muscles" (p. 108) of the whaling industry. The Pequod's deck microcosmically contains representatives from "the rest of the world." Ishmael's metaphysical quest has elements of nationality, for he also discovers, by contrast, his "American" identity. His "diving" into meditation becomes, itself, symbolic activity; by going whaling, he dives also into the past, choosing to disembark from Nantucket, "the place where the first dead American whale was stranded" (p. 17)—suggesting that he must imaginatively travel back in time in order to understand his present historical situation. And he tells the reader to test for himself the truth of his assertion that "meditation and water are wedded forever"—"Should you ever be athirst in the great American desert" (p. 13), he claims, you will invariably be drawn to water if there is any to be found.

The dialectical movement of the novel also explains the temporal inconsistency of "The Town-Ho's Story" (chap. 54) and "A Bower in the Arsacides" (chap. 102). Alan Cheuse suggests that Ishmael's relation of Steelkilt's story to the Spanish dons in Lima becomes one occasion during which he "practices" story telling. The "darker thread" of the story he tells there is the threat of mutiny that, owing to the "strange delicacy" of the sailors on board the Pequod who heard the full story of Steelkilt and Radney, but who did not circulate it among the rest of the crew, "never reached the ears of Captain Ahab or his mates" (p. 208). Ishmael realizes that the sailors did not tell the full story because they did not know "how," and Ishmael learns to do so in Lima, sometime after the Rachel picks him up but sometime before he begins the narration of Moby-Dick, because he is forced to define his terms. "'Lakeman!—Buffalo! Pray, what is a Lakeman, and where is Buffalo?' said Don Sebastian, rising in his swinging mat of grass" (p. 209). "'Canallers!' cried Don Pedro. 'We have seen many whale-ships in our harbors, but never heard of your Canallers. Pardon: who and what are they?"' (p. 214). Cheuse interprets these questions as "the imperative directed to the American
narrator to define his terms," and suggests that "The Town-Ho's Story" records that intermediate stage in Ishmael's evolution as a storyteller when he remains the pre-epic narrator.

"Moby Dick!" cried Don Sebastian; "St. Dominic! Sir sailor, but do whales have christenings? Whom call you Moby Dick?"

"A very white, and famous, and most deadly immortal monster, Don;—but that would be too long a story." (p. 221)

Similarly, the "Bower in the Arsacides" records Ishmael's invitation "years ago" from the (fictional) lord of Tranque to spend holidays, and to crawl inside the skeleton of the stranded sperm whale that the Arsacideans had deified. The measurements he makes are hasty (the priests object to his measuring their god) and he has them tattooed on his right arm, but "there are skeleton authorities you can refer to, to test my accuracy" (p. 375).

The accuracy and the authority with which Ishmael here and elsewhere invests his metaphysical correspondences reflect his attempt, as he states in "The Affidavit" (chap. 45), "to take away any incredulity which a profound ignorance of the entire subject may induce in some minds" (p. 175). "For this is one of those disheartening instances where truth requires full as much bolstering as error. So ignorant are most landsmen of some of the plainest and most palpable wonders of the world, that without some hints touching the plain facts, historical and otherwise, of the fishery, they might scout at Moby Dick as a monstrous fable, or still worse and more detestable, a hideous and intolerable allegory" (p. 177). "Fable" becomes one element in Ishmael's dialectic that, like theology, no longer sustains; he wants to construct a fabulous history that will assess and extend "plain facts, historical and otherwise," without resorting to the mechanics of allegory. Telling a believable story about the white whale will heal the schism between science and myth, and enable Ishmael to locate, in his authority as teller, his own myth of origins, the "warm spark," and the "prime thing."

The novel becomes, therefore, a schoolroom, and the narrator's stance professorial. Chapter 55 opens, "I shall ere long paint to you as well as one can without canvas, something like the true form of the whale as he actually appears to the eye of the whaleman" (p. 224). But in strict academic fashion, he first takes it upon himself to exhaust the "Monstrous Pictures of Whales" that prove false portraits, to credit the "Less Erroneous Pictures of Whales, and the True Pictures of Whaling Scenes," and to give an account of whales in other media, "in Paint; in Teeth; in Wood; in Sheet-Iron; in Stone; in Mountains; in Stars" (chap. 55, 56, 57). "But these manifold mis-
takes in depicting the whale are not so very surprising after all. Consider! Most of the scientific drawings have been taken from the stranded fish; and these are about as correct as a drawing of a wrecked ship, with broken back, would correctly represent the noble animal itself in all its undashed pride of hull and spars. . . . The living whale, in his full majesty and significance, is only to be seen at sea in unfathomable waters" (p. 227). In addition, the skeleton of a whale provides very little clue to the appearance of his true form. He concludes, "the great Leviathan is that one creature in the world which must remain unpainted to the last" (p. 228). Precision is impossible in either a purely scientific or a purely imaginative portrayal of the whale. Only the subjective experience of "going a-whaling" will yield "a tolerable idea of his living contour," but the risks involved in such a means of gaining knowledge about the subject are fundamental—"you run no small risk of being eternally stove and sunk by him" (p. 228). In all, he warns the casual student away.

In the following chapter, "Brit," Ishmael suggests that the difficulties in attempting a portrait of the whale that will be both objectively and subjectively valid is the historian's analogue to the dangers the sailor faces in leaving land behind.

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. God keep thee! Push not off from that isle, thou canst never return! (p. 236)

In emphasizing the dangers for the real and the ideal adventurer, the passage contains its own humor. Just as Ishmael's physical concerns push him to desire that same precise knowledge of the whale he warns his readers against, so his metaphysics requires his theological "landlessness"; but the tone of mock danger that the passage reveals suggests a contrast between the physical and metaphysical dangers of Ahab's, contrasted with Ishmael's, quest; there are moments when even Ishmael cannot quite believe that the soul's dangers are as great as the body's, but he has chosen the former "perils" and must convince himself they are real. Ishmael is not alone in his attempt at self-conviction; and his exploration of "cetology" externalizes the problems of the scientific researcher who wishes to add something concrete to the body of knowledge. Just as Starbuck and Stubb represent the Janus faces of subjective perspective, a howl and a laugh,31 so there are heroic and mock-heroic
approaches to objective knowledge and the objective portrayal of imaginative experience.

Ishmael's chief concern, throughout the third expository section, might be phrased as the wisdom of logic compared and contrasted with the teachings of analogy. What lies at the essence of subjective knowledge that impels its objective manifestation? Why is it not in itself sufficient? And, conversely, what are the values as well as the limitations of empirical means of gaining knowledge? The emphasis on "cetology" pushes toward objectivity by using a scientific term to focus on knowledge that, in spite of science, can only be gained by "going a-whaling yourself." But the novelty of the term, in spite of the technical knowledge Melville does in fact reveal, creates a duality. "Cetology" itself is one vast analogy.

Ishmael plays philosophically with this duality after Stubb captures his sperm whale by suspending his explanation of cutting-in and trying-out while Stubb and Flask kill a right whale. He then sets up the "two great whales, laying their heads together" on opposing sides of the ship, and says, "let us join them, and lay together our own, . . . To the Nantucketer, they present the two extremes of all the known varieties of the whale. As the external difference between them is mainly observable in their heads; and as a head of each is this moment hanging from the Pequod's side; and as we may freely go from one to the other, by merely stepping across the deck:—where, I should like to know, will you obtain a better chance to study practical cetology than here?" (p. 278). "The Sperm Whale's Head—Contrasted View" (chap. 74) and "The Right Whale's Head—Contrasted View" (chap. 75) set up an artificial balance for the moment of exposition, during which the narrator suggests that the sperm whale's head represents Kant and the right whale's, Locke. The philosophical contrast between subjective versus objective means of gaining knowledge varies the problem of duality, but the narrator rejects the classification itself as an oversimplification that slows his pursuit—"throw all these thunderheads overboard, and then you will float light and right" (p. 277). 

He continues his analogical method, cites the whale's visual apparatus as evidence of his comprehensive and subtle mental faculties, then interprets its superiority to man's. Concerning human powers of perception, "so long as a man's eyes are open in the light, the act of seeing is involuntary; that is, he cannot then help mechanically seeing whatever objects are before him" (p. 279). However, the act of seeing may not be equated with the art of focusing; and from experience we know that it is impossible to focus on two separate points at the same instant. "But if you now come to separate these
two objects, and surround each by a circle of profound darkness; then, in order to see one of them, in such a manner as to bring your mind to bear on it, the other will be utterly excluded from your contemporary consciousness" (pp. 279–80). In the whale, he theorizes, since each eye possesses its own range of visual perception, without possibility of focus, both "must simultaneously act."

This analysis of the position of the whale’s eyes corresponds to the physical description of the scene on board the Pequod as well as to Ishmael’s philosophical duality. For, as Ishmael implicitly compares the two, the Pequod itself becomes a massive head with two fronts, each whale head’s "contrasted view" literally suggesting the appearance of each eye on one whale. Thus, he momentarily considers the superiority of the whale’s vision and suggests, in effect, that all of man’s "intellectual and spiritual exasperations" result from his inability to focus on more than one point at any one instant. This results in a continual running back and forth across the deck: neither man’s attempt to reconcile duality, nor his ability to accept it, can match the whale’s, whose visual powers support "simultaneous perception."

In a logical deck crossing, he then considers the other side of his contrast, noting in what respect man’s visual scope permits his ascendancy over the whale’s limited vision. "Man may, in effect, be said to look out on the world from a sentry-box with two joined sashes for his window. But with the whale, these two sashes are separately inserted, making two distinct windows, but sadly impairing the view" (p. 279). Man’s scope compensates for the whale’s ability to focus; the whale may simultaneously hold opposing views, but man may consider the whole question, even though he must resolve it to a single view. The Pequod, whale heads attached, embodies philosophy, where holding opposing views of the world may lend new windows, but result in an overall impaired view. It also provides an analogue for the limitations of whaling, the limitations of Ishmael’s chosen focus. The whale hunters on deck cannot appreciate the metaphysical implications of their struggles; in contrast, the man on the mast achieves the elevation requisite to the synthesis of distanced scope, but like Hawthorne’s narrator, misses the physical combat.

After he has cut the right whale’s head loose, Ishmael returns to an investigation of the sperm whale’s head and his literal description of the scene. He compares the whale’s "case," where the sperm oil is contained, with the "great Heidelberg Tun," and states, "I know not with what fine and costly material the Heidelberg Tun was coated within, but in superlative richness that coating could not
possibly have compared with the silken pearl-colored membrane, like the lining of a fine pelisse, forming the inner surface of the Sperm Whale's case" (p. 287). This Heidelberg Tun of the whale is his "sanctuary," and its contents are his primary source of value. Explicitly in this chapter, Melville's cetology becomes an analogy for sperm oil; in digging out his extensive whale lore, he provides a literary experience of boiling for spermaceti. The "sanctuary," where the oil may be extracted by the bucketful, also provides the sperm whale with his physical power—it is his "battering ram" as well as the clue to his buoyancy. Without the oil, the head sinks "like lead."

As the narrator's detailed physical investigation of the whale proceeds, he continues to stress the unsurpassable difficulties of his task. In the chapter, "The Tail," he writes, "The more I consider this mighty tail, the more do I deplore my inability to express it. . . . Dissect him how I may, then, I but go skin deep; I know him not, and never will" (pp. 317–18). Before he rejects empirical methods as singly adequate means of gaining knowledge, he tests them further in the last chapters of cetology. Up to this point, he states, he has chiefly "dwelt on the marvels of [the whale's] outer aspect" but now wants to "unbutton him still further":

I confess, that since Jonah, few whalemen have penetrated very far beneath the skin of the adult whale; nevertheless, I have been blessed with an opportunity to dissect him in miniature. In a ship I belonged to, a small cub Sperm Whale was once bodily hoisted to the deck. . . . Think you I let that chance go, without using my boat-hatchet and jack-knife, and breaking the seal and reading all the contents of that young cub?

His conclusion after this attempt repeats his earlier discovery:

How vain and foolish, then, thought I, for timid untravelled man to try to comprehend aright this wondrous whale, by merely poring over his dead attenuated skeleton, stretched in this peaceful wood. No. Only in the heart of quickest perils; only when within the eddyings of his angry flukes; only on the profound unbounded sea, can the fully invested whale be truly and livingly found out. (p. 378)

He tires of his academics, and in disposing of the whale's spine, talks about the vertebrae as billiard balls and marbles: "Thus we see how that the spine of even the hugest of living things tapers off at last into simple child's play" (p. 378).

While his objective inquiries have occupied his narrative attention, the spiritual claims he made, early, for his choice of a sea voyage and his pursuit of the great "snow hill in the air" have all but disappeared from his tapering narrative. In his final attempt at
The Mark and the Knowledge
cetological rendering, the chapter, "The Fossil Whale," he invents
some humorous geological terms for describing the "mighty
Leviathan skeletons," but the humor undercuts any further value
Ishmael might attribute to science. "I am horror-struck at this an­
temosaic, unsourced existence of the unspeakable terrors of the
whale, which, having been before all time, must needs exist after all
humane ages are over" (p. 380). In addition to "antemosaic" (before
Moses?) he invents the Leviathan's "pre-adamite traces" (before
Adam?) and describes his "osseous post-diluvian reality" (p. 381).
Each of these terms makes perfect sense in its analogical context;
and as geological wordplays, they explicitly record the narrator's
triumph over logic, if this exaltation has not already been demon­
strated earlier in the chapter:

Friends, hold my arms! For in the mere act of penning my thoughts of
this Leviathan, they weary me, and make me faint with their out­
reaching comprehensiveness of sweep, as if to include the whole circle
of the sciences, and all the generations of whales, and men, and mas­
todons, past, present, and to come, with all the revolving panoramas of
empire on earth, and throughout the whole universe, not excluding its
suburbs. Such, and so magnifying, is the virtue of a large and liberal
theme! We expand to its bulk. To produce a mighty book, you must
choose a mighty theme. No great and enduring volume can ever be
written on the flea, though many there be who have tried it. (p. 379)
The oppositions in Ishmael's dialectic may be extensively sum­
marized as follows: "Extracts" and "Loomings"; the Ishmael of the
novel and the Ishmael of narration; fact and fable in "The Town-Ho's
Story"; objective versus subjective means of attaining Eastern en­
lightenment (the whale as the incarnation of Vishnu); science
("cetology") and poetry (the novel); logic and analogy; realism and
romanticism; Aristotle and Plato; Locke and Kant; the right whale
and the sperm whale; Ahab and Ishmael; the physical and the
metaphysical; visibility and vision; theology and democracy; and so
forth. The coexistence of opposites forms the essential narrative
duality of Moby-Dick, as we move back and forth between "cetology"
and the pursuit of whales. One element is atomistic, when Ishmael
explores physical details to their ultimate significance, often ending
in absurdities that amuse even himself; the alternate rhythm at­
tempts universality, when he tries to create metaphysical corre­
spondences that will establish overriding unity. The physical seems
always to be the initial concern, but as vehicle, and as some tangible
starting place. The transcendental method he explored earlier, in
his Emersonian analysis of his masthead reveries, becomes his
choice of narrative method in an attempt to resolve these dialectical
oppositions. Analyzing and interpreting the white whale, because he symbolizes so many essences at the same time as he is physically massive and complex, provides the novel's skeleton. In himself, the whale represents both visible embodiment and the "heartless voids and immensities of the universe" (p. 169). To capture the first is, in some sense, to contain the latter. "Wonder ye then at the fiery hunt?"

In spite of the skill with which he ends by showing the comprehensive ascendancy of analogy over cetology, however, he has not yet achieved the portrait of Moby Dick that served to motivate his initial sailing and became the metaphor for his spiritual quest. He poses a final inquiry, "whether owing to the almost omniscient look-outs at the mast-heads of the whale-ships . . .; and the thousand harpoons and lances darted along all continental coasts; the moot point is, whether Leviathan can long endure so wide a chase, and so remorseless a havoc; whether he must not at last 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" (p. 383). In this passage the whale hunt is fully reinvested with the symbolism of Ishmael's quest for vision and concomitant self-consciousness. Like the narrator of the novel, the lookouts at the mastheads of whale ships have become "almost omniscient" in their visual powers, and Ishmael wonders whether or not, by the very remorselessness of the chase, man may soon achieve a Leviathanic apocalypse, in which not only the last whale but also the last man may "evaporate in the final puff." But he argues in favor of the whale's immortality—and his own: "Wherefore, for all these things, we account the whale immortal in his species, however perishable in his individuality" (p. 384).

The irony of the increased omniscience of the narrator becomes the clue to his mortality, for the "last man" is only alive to the extent that he is a quester, a whale hunter. Thus, committed to the hunt yet desiring the transcendence that might accompany achieving the quest, Ishmael is caught up in the self-consciousness that accompanies his increasing vision. As he concluded in "Stowing Down and Clearing Up" (chap. 98),

many is the time the poor fellows, just buttoning the necks of their clean frocks, are startled by the cry of "There she blows!" and away they fly to fight another whale, and go through the whole weary thing again. Oh! my friends, but this is man-killing! Yet this is life. For hardly have we mortals by long toilings extracted from this world's vast bulk its small but valuable sperm; and then, with weary patience, cleansed ourselves from its defilements, and learned to live
here in clean tabernacles of the soul; hardly is this done, when—
*There she blows!*—the ghost is spouted up, and away we sail to fight
some other world, and go through young life's old routine again.
(p. 358)

The theme is more conclusively phrased in a later chapter, "The
Gilder," but its placement here at the end of "Clearing Up" both
prepares for the "spouting up" of Ahab that immediately follows in
"The Doubloon," as an element of the narrative that has been sub­
merged but not resolved, and characterizes the marking or sounding
out for whales as the continuing epistemological modus vivendi for
achieving, if "hardly" or momentarily, "clean tabernacles of the
soul."

V

The mark that signals the presence of a whale—"There she
blows!"—and that for Ishmael corresponds to his visionary quest, has
its most significant manifestation in the last section of *Moby-Dick*,
in Ahab's characterization and chase. In the opening sentence of
"The Doubloon," Ishmael states, "in the multiplicity of other things
requiring narration it has not been added how that sometimes . . .
when most plunged in his mood, he [Ahab] was wont to pause in
turn at each spot, and stand there strangely eyeing the particular
object before him" (p. 358). Ahab's own epistemological method is to
focus and by means of focus, to attempt metaphoric scope. "But one
morning, turning to pass the doubloon, he seemed to be newly at­
tracted by the strange figures and inscriptions stamped on it, as
though now for the first time beginning to interpret for himself in
some monomaniac way whatever significance might lurk in them"
(p. 358). The doubloon is the white whale's talisman, the sun's
medal, the globe's circumference, the sign of the zodiac, and for
Ahab, "'this round globe is but the image of the rounder globe,
which, like a magician's glass, to each and every man in turn but
mirrors back his own mysterious self. Great pains, small gains for
those who ask the world to solve them; it cannot solve itself'" (p.
359). The doubloon's zodiac, for Stubb, "'is the life of man in one
round chapter'" (p. 361), and for another sailor, "whoever raises a
certain whale, this round thing belongs to him." The old Manxman
says, "'If the White Whale be raised, it must be in a month and a
day, when the sun stands in one of these signs. I've studied signs,
and know their marks'" (p. 362). And Pip concludes the chapter,
"'Here's the ship's navel, this doubloon here, and they are all on fire
to unscrew it. . . . Ha, ha! old Ahab! the White Whale; he'll nail ye!'"
(p. 408). The doubloon, as the symbol of the white whale, suggests
the source of the self's mystery; it mirrors the interpreter's own birth. For the one who wins it, or nails it, "the life of man" "belongs to him."

The chapter marks the beginning of Ishmael's final attempt to come to terms with both the metaphysical origins of his narrative and the analogical search of the cetological chapters by dramatizing Ahab's own monomaniac pursuit of the white whale. Ishmael allows his cetology to taper off for several chapters, so that even after "Doubloon" and "Leg and Arm" Ishmael must still dispose of the whale's skeleton and the fossil whale before taking up, to the end, the chase. But the concentration of the narrator's focus from "Ahab's Leg" (chap. 106) to the Epilogue reintegrates the separation between Ishmael and Ahab, and reveals Ishmael's own place in Ahab's tragedy.

It is tempting to equate Ahab's view of tragedy with Ishmael's, and equally so to look away from Moby-Dick in its last chapters—to Shakespeare—for a clue to the novel's meaning. In his essay on King Lear, Stanley Cavell equates the blindness of madness with the "avoidance of love." Melville's own recognition of the link between the two is unmistakable, as Ahab ignores Starbuck's appeal to return home: "This whole act's immutably decreed. 'Twas rehearsed by thee and me a billion years before this ocean rolled. Fool! I am the Fates' lieutenant; I act under orders" (p. 459). What Cavell says about Lear applies directly to Ahab; it is only necessary to read one for the other in the following quotation from Cavell's essay:

To overcome knowing is a task Lear shares with Othello and Macbeth and Hamlet, one crazed by knowledge he can neither test nor reject, one haunted by knowledge whose authority he cannot impeach, one cursed by knowledge he cannot share. Lear abdicates sanity for the usual reason: it is his way not to know what he knows, or to know only what he knows. At the end, recovered to the world, he still cannot give up knowledge, the knowledge that he is captured, lost, receiving just punishment, and so he does again the thing for which he will now irrecoverably be punished. It is the thing we do not know that can save us.35

In Cavell's terms, we might say that both Ahab and Ishmael want to "overcome knowing" Ahab tries to do so by making the whale the vehicle for all that he knows, then trying to destroy it.36 For Ishmael, it is precisely to the thing he does not know that he looks for salvation—"in landlessness alone resides the highest truth." Ishmael accepts what he does not know and then investigates alternative means of dealing with it. He recognizes the split between physical and metaphysical, tries to isolate objective means from subjective means of gaining knowledge, and ends on the masthead,
where his meditative and introspective moments of transcendence move him effortlessly from objective to subjective realms and he "loses himself" in the transcendental state. The physical becomes a vehicle for Ishmael to "overcome knowledge" by understanding both the whale and Ahab's need to hunt it; by transcending it, not by destroying it.

If the Shakespearean materials in the last section guide our interpretation of Ahab's tragedy, the use of the dramatic form in general clarifies even more Ishmael's relationship to that tragedy. The rapid scene shifts and numerous soliloquies, the parenthetical stage directions, and the carpenter, on his "one grand stage" (p. 387) a kind of puppeteer, fitting Ahab with leather, hinge, and leg, all serve as constant technical reminders that the narrator of the drama remains behind the scenes, as it were, still metaphysically removed to the masthead. Drama, for Ishmael, remains a means of presenting subjective experience objectively, and thus of transcending the dichotomy between the two. Ahab's tragedy as the crew play it on the boards of the Pequod's deck dramatically reenacts narrative paradigms Ishmael himself acted out in his pre-omniscient state of consciousness prior to the Pequod's sailing and his own achievement of masthead distance.

Ahab's relationship to Starbuck, as a type of Ishmael's relationship to Queequeg, becomes one of the most curious of these dramatic reenactments, beyond Ahab's obvious externalization of Ishmael's spiritual pursuit into a whale hunt. Ahab tells Starbuck, the second day of the chase, "'Starbuck, of late I've felt strangely moved to thee; ever since that hour we both saw—thou know'st what, in one another's eyes'" (p. 459). Starbuck alone witnesses the profundity of Ahab's isolation:

From beneath his slouched hat Ahab dropped a tear into the sea; nor did all the Pacific contain such wealth as that one wee drop.

Starbuck saw the old man; saw him, how he heavily leaned over the side; and he seemed to hear in his own true heart the measureless sobbing that stole out of the centre of the serenity around. Careful not to touch him, or be noticed by him, he yet drew near to him, and stood there. (p. 443)

In this passage, Starbuck creates for himself the privilege of creeping past Ahab yet at the same time locates his own "centre" in his captain's. The last sentence of the passage emphasizes the physical proximity of the two men, yet the concomitant lack of physical contact—"Careful not to touch him . . . he yet drew near to him." In this unique moment, Ahab's hatred does not defend him against the advances of love, and briefly he seems to allow Star-
buck’s nostalgia for his wife and boy a place in his own perspective. The moment is accompanied by, perhaps evoked by, Starbuck’s apostrophe to Ahab, "'Oh, my Captain! my Captain! noble soul! grand old heart, after all! . . . this instant let me alter the course!'" But the moment passes, and "Ahab's glance was averted; like a blighted fruit tree he shook, and cast his last, cindered apple to the soil" (p. 444). He calls on his own lack of free will to turn anything to good:

"Aye, toil how we may, we all sleep at last on the field. Sleep? Aye, and rust amid greenness; as last year’s scythes flung down, and left in the half-cut swaths—Starbuck!"

But blanched to a corpse’s hue with despair, the mate had stolen away. (p. 445)

The atmosphere of this sequence in "The Symphony" (chap. 132) reminds the narrator of a wedding. He describes the clearness of the day: "Aloft, like a royal czar and king, the sun seemed giving this gentle air to this bold and rolling sea; even as bride to groom" (p. 442). Ahab reminisces about his "young girl-wife I wedded past fifty," and Starbuck has his own vision—"'Tis my Mary, my Mary herself! . . . See, see! the boy's face from the window!'" (p. 444). At the same time, Ahab and Starbuck realize an intimacy paralleled in the novel only by Ishmael and Queequeg, in bed together in Nantucket, as if "in our hearts' honeymoon" (p. 54); as Ahab states, "'I see my wife and my child in thine eye.'"

In this context, it is also significant to note that in one of the few brief appearances of Ishmael in the narrative after the chapter "Whiteness," he finds himself tied to Queequeg by the monkey-rope, as Queequeg climbs on a sperm whale's back. Ishmael's own welfare depends on Queequeg's ability to retain his balance—"we too, for the time, were wedded"—and he states, "So strongly and metaphysically did I conceive of my situation then, that while earnestly watching his motions, I seemed distinctly to perceive that my own individuality was now merged in a joint stock company of two: that my free will had received a mortal wound; and that another's mistake or misfortune might plunge innocent me into unmerited disaster and death . . . still further pondering, I say, I saw that this situation of mine was the precise situation of every mortal that breathes; only, in most cases, he, one way or other, has this Siamese connexion with a plurality of other mortals" (p. 271).

The paradigm the wedding references suggest, in which Ahab and Starbuck reenact the intimacy of Ishmael and Queequeg, sets up Ishmael as a second fictional center, a counterpoint to Ahab in the last section but separate from him, and in spite of his detached
stance as narrator. In effect, within the narrative, Starbuck acts out an integration between Ishmael and Ahab that cannot be dramatically enacted by the narrator of *Moby-Dick*. The moment of Starbuck's apostrophe to Ahab echoes Ishmael's own moment in the chapter "The Specksynder," which I cited earlier—"Oh, Ahab! what shall be grand in thee, it must needs be plucked at from the skies, and dived for in the deep, and featured in the unbodied air!" (p. 130). But the kind of intimacy the narrator externalizes into a physical closeness between Ahab and Starbuck is not even possible between Ishmael and Ahab, quite simply because, in order to achieve narrative omniscience, Ishmael forfeits his dramatic role as sailor and "Ahab" becomes his aesthetic creation. It is part of the narrative triumph in the last chapters of the novel, the fictional stowing down and clearing up, that Ishmael, by means of his own projected resemblance to Starbuck, gains such "proximity" to Ahab, yet without sacrificing his masthead distance. Throughout the narration of the chase, Ishmael speaks of the whalers in the third person—"The hand of Fate had snatched all their souls... They were one man, not thirty" (p. 454). And he does not become part of it until the third day, when, as he states in the Epilogue, "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 the rocking boat, was dropped astern" (p. 470). The narrator's proximity to Ahab becomes a technical device by which Melville demonstrates the similarities between Ishmael's quest and Ahab's, even to the end of the novel; but a vision of these similarities is available only to Ishmael and the reader, not to Ahab. Ahab sees Starbuck, with his limited vision; but Ishmael is never visible to him. The meaning of Ahab's tragedy, throughout, is accessible to Ishmael, but not to Ahab himself.

In the closing chapters Pip, like Starbuck, strengthens the integration of Ishmael and Ahab and demonstrates Ahab's blindness. I have already quoted Ishmael's fraternity with Pip; in "The Castaway," he describes Pip's isolation in the sea and asserts "what like abandonment befell myself." Ahab's madness occasions his own intimacy with Pip; he finds comfort in Pip's insanity in an echo of Edgar and Lear on the heath: "'Here, boy; Ahab's cabin shall be Pip's home henceforth, while Ahab lives. Thou touchest my inmost centre, boy; thou art tied to me by cords woven of my heart-strings’" (p. 428). And he states a few pages later, "'There is that in thee, poor lad, which I feel too curing to my malady. Like cures like; and for this hunt, my malady becomes my most desired health’" (p. 436). Ahab uses Pip's madness and "maddens" it, thereby disregarding
the heightened perception that led to Pip's apparent insanity. Only Ishmael interprets Pip's "wretched laugh" as a mockery of the "black tragedy of the melancholy ship" (p. 405), not an indication of maddened vision. And Ishmael watches the transcendental vision Queequeg experiences when he thinks he is about to die: "like circles on the water, which, as they grow fainter, expand; so his eyes seemed rounding and rounding, like the rings of Eternity" (p. 395). Pip and Queequeg have momentarily transcended the boundaries of death; but only Ishmael is capable of interpreting these experiences in this way. Ahab hastens his own tragedy when he rejects Pip's vision. But even though he is conscious of doing so—"like cures like"—the closest Ahab comes to enlightenment is death.

VI

An obvious critical question arises in dealing with Moby-Dick: why is the novel so long and the chase so brief? This narrative problem finds its solution in Ishmael's "intense concentration of self" in the momentary Epilogue. The Epilogue records the combined physical intensity and the transcendental state of consciousness Ishmael experiences, briefly, as he floats on the sea with Queequeg's coffin as a life buoy. The full significance of this moment depends on all the "miscellaneous hunt" that precedes; but it manifests none of it. In the final episode, the mammoth construction of the novel disappears, dissolves into the lyric Epilogue, "and the great shroud of the sea rolled on as it rolled five thousand years ago" (p. 469). In the last moment, Ishmael floats "on the margin" of the scene, yet "in full sight of it." The closing vortex he describes is his intense vision of the "heartless void," and yet, though caught up in the revolving suction, when he gains the center, "the black bubble upward burst," and he is liberated. He has transcended the physical where he is still an orphan and floats unharmed, floats on the waves of unity with the universe that follow the transcendent moment.

Ishmael's suspension in the sea lasts for a day. He floats on a coffin—thus experiencing a symbolic triumph over death that Ahab had implicitly predicted in his final monomaniac curse but does not himself achieve: "'Thus, I give up the spear!'" (p. 468). If Ahab attributes to himself, like Dimmesdale, the fate of crucifixion, the narrative, by closely integrating Ahab and Ishmael in the last section, predicts Ishmael's resurrection. The "coffins" Fedallah had ascribed to Ahab's fate are nowhere to be found in the last scene; Ishmael floats on the coffin Queequeg made. Marius Bewley calls this "resurrection" Ishmael's return to life, "cured of that spiritual
malady from which we see him suffering in the first chapter of the book."

And yet, in spite of this "resurrection," in spite of the momentary sanctuary Ishmael finds, the real tragedy of *Moby-Dick* obtrudes in the Epilogue. The novel's "solution" to the dialectical opposition that motivates quest—the separation of Ahab and Ishmael—finds its limits. Ishmael's moment is but temporary. "On the second day, a sail drew near, nearer, and picked me up at last. It was the devious-cruising *Rachel*, that in her retracing search after her missing children, only found another orphan" (p. 470). The *Rachel* is errant; and it catches up Ishmael, once again, in its miscellaneous wanderings. The *Rachel* does not find what she is looking for, but "only" finds Ishmael. And Ishmael's moment of metaphysical integration—when "the savage sea-hawks sailed with sheathed beaks"—can only serve to heighten his sense of isolation when he returns, as he must, to the physical. He qualifies his transcendence by his reference to Ixion's wheel. Will Ishmael, like Ixion, be forever chained to the physical vehicle that can only be momentarily transcended if at all? Ishmael floats "on the margin" of Ahab's tragedy, with this relationship to it: Ishmael's tragedy is not the lack but the impermanence of vision; not the promise of death, but the return to viewing.

If there exists any clearer picture of Ishmael's attempt and the final qualifications inherent in his success, it may be found in "The Gilder" (chap. 114) whose title seems to refer back to the doubloon and to interpret (to "gloss' or gild) the novel in its golden light. In this chapter, Ishmael describes first the "times of dreamy quietude, when beholding the tranquil beauty and brilliancy of the ocean's skin, one forgets the tiger heart that pants beneath it" (p. 405). "All this mixes with your most mystic mood; so that fact and fancy, half-way meeting, interpenetrate, and form one seamless whole" (p. 406). Ishmael substitutes this seamless interpretation of "fact and fancy" for theology; he attempts to resolve duality; and he expresses the novel's transcendental rhythms—balancing analogy and cetology, meditation and dramatic action, retrospection and narrative re-creation. But such scenes, however "soothing," are also temporary.

Would to God these blessed calms would last. But the mingled, mingling threads of life are woven by warp and woof: calms crossed by storms, a storm for every calm. There is no steady unretracing progress in this life; we do not advance through fixed gradations, and at the last one pause:—through infancy's unconscious spell, boyhood's thoughtless faith, adolescence' doubt (the common doom), then skepticism, then disbelief, resting at last in manhood's pondering repose of If. But once gone through, we trace the round again; and are infants,
boys, and men, and Ifs eternally. Where lies the final harbor, whence we unmoor no more? In what rapt ether sails the world, of which the weariest will never weary? Where is the foundling's father hidden? Our souls are like those orphans whose unwedded mothers die in bearing them: the secret of our paternity lies in their grave, and we must there to learn it. (p. 406)

With the sinking of the Pequod, the metaphysical distance between Ishmael the sailor and Ishmael the narrator collapses. The moment of transcendence is temporary—time-bound; but in the ordering of time in the novel, Ishmael at the last steps forth to begin again the telling; "Call me Ishmael." The warp and woof of the transcendental method returns Ishmael to the miscellaneous search for a focus that opens the novel, to the lunacy of loomings; and Moby-Dick ends by qualifying its own philosophical and methodological assumptions.

Watters states that "for Melville, the more nearly omniscient the observer, the more true and valuable his interpretation." Moby-Dick demonstrates the fusion of the interpretative act and the attainment of omniscience. Because Ishmael marks a focus for his interpretations of the cosmos in the microcosmos (the analogies he draws by means of cetology), he dives deeper into understanding each time he engages in the introspection of his masthead meditations. The omniscience he achieves, removed from the deck of the Pequod, serves to further his ability to engage in the interpretation of cetology and to create the analogies that transcend the limitations of knowledge of the physical world.

Ishmael's epistemology is so compelling that one feels tempted to ask whether the very act of marking may not reflect the way we learn about the world. The "Extracts," with their suggestion that some sub-sub librarian has gone through and "marked" all the books that exist for references to the whale, imply that the reader's interpretation of the novel involves an analogous process—of underlining or marking. The reader's own "extracts" from the novel become our "reading" of the text in the same way that Ishmael's cetology becomes Melville's "reading" of the world. Ishmael "floats on the margin" like a living marker of (our) life's text. We mark what we find significant in what we read in an attempt to underline or emphasize it.

Melville's own "marginal" notes become integral parts of the text in the chapters on cetology. Melville implies that knowledge transcends method. In Moby-Dick, manifest and nonmanifest, like "fact and fancy," become "intertwined." Yet in floating "on the margin" of the scene, Ishmael is preparing to deal once again with
The reader can anticipate Ishmael's return to the world of metaphysical "hypos" as the integration of visionary and vision breaks down and Ishmael recognizes the need for further questing.

In the novel that follows *Moby-Dick*, Pierre once again becomes the "dreamer of the avenging dream." Like Ahab, Pierre possesses the "dark, mad mystery in some human hearts, which, sometimes, during the tyranny of a usurper mood, leads them to be all eagerness to cast off the most intense beloved bond, as a hindrance to the attainment of whatever transcendental object that usurper mood so tyrannically suggests. . . . Weary with the invariable earth, the restless sailor breaks from every enfolding arm, and puts to sea in height of tempest that blows off shore." When man pursues the transcendental object without regard for the bonds of human relationship, his heart turns to stone and his attempt to resolve ambiguities results in violence. In the limitations of Ishmael's visionary transcendence and the despair that leads Pierre to suicide, Melville anticipates the return, in Faulkner, to a fictional community that regards social exclusion as religious ritual, and for which the catharsis of violence replaces spiritual peace. In Faulkner's studies of marked or "marginal" men, sociology becomes just one manifestation of the truths Melville reveals in his cetological, analogical "reading" of the world.

Notes

2. Ibid., p. 179.
8. Harry Henderson's discussion of *White-Jacket* is interesting in this context. He writes, "*White-Jacket*, as a novel of protest, not only strikes out for the abolition of flogging, but penetrates beyond an attack on a single evil to get to the roots of a multiform contradiction between democratic professions and practices of tyranny and privilege." In *Moby-Dick*, "Melville was able to shift the locus of revolt from the social plane of *White-Jacket* to the metaphysical. . . . *Moby-Dick* is the unique example, among [Melville's] many formulations of the dilemma of progressive revolt, of a work
in which the social and metaphysical levels of his drama of ideas do not threaten to
drown each other out . . . " (Versions of the Past: The Historical Imagination in

9. As Ishmael observes, "By some tacit consent, throughout the voyage little or no
allusion was made to it, especially by the mates" (p. 109). They do, however, interpret
the doubloon's meanings. The doubloon is a symbol, whereas Ahab's leg is a stigma.

10. White-Jacket, pp. 120–21.

11. Ibid., p. 76.

12. Ibid., p. 394.

13. As critics have frequently noted, "loomings" also anticipates "God's foot upon
the treadle of the loom" which Pip sees (p. 347) and the metaphor of weaving, which
Melville uses throughout (for example, in the phase "one seamless whole" [p. 406]).

14. This is Newton Arvin's interpretation of the novel. See his critical biography,
Herman Melville (New York: Viking, 1950).

15. Feidelson, p. 28.

16. As A. N. Kaul remarks, "whale fishing in itself has no ultimate significance. It
is a vehicle for the fulfillment of man's moral, social and metaphysical destiny (The
American Vision: Actual and Ideal Society in Nineteenth-Century Fiction [New Ha­
and whaling is his focus.

17. In his excellent study of Melville's sources, Howard Vincent is unfortunately
unable to provide the reader with a definitive source for Melville's interest in and/or
information about Indian religion and oriental mythology in general. See The
Tryng-Out of Moby-Dick (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965),
pp. 277–80, for an incomplete discussion of the subject.

18. See Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (trans.), On the Bhagavad-Gita: A New Transla-

19. Ibid., p. 128.

20. For a detailed discussion of Moby Dick as Vishnu, see chapter 11 of James
Baird's Ishmael: A Study of the Symbolic Mode in Primitivism (Baltimore: Johns

21. The analogue of ocean diving is used by Maharishi in his commentary on the
Bhagavad-Gita to describe the process of meditation. He states, "Part of the training
for one who wishes to become a good swimmer is the art of diving. When one is able to
maintain oneself successfully in deep water, then swimming on the surface becomes
easy. All action is the result of the play of the conscious mind. If the mind is strong,
then action is also strong and successful. The conscious mind becomes powerful when
the deeper levels of the ocean of mind are activated during the process of transcen­
dental meditation, which leads the attention from the surface of the conscious mind to
the transcendental field of Being. The process of diving within is the way to become
established in Yoga" (p. 136). Maharishi's technique of settling down the mind and
leading it to the transcendental field is accompanied by a vehicle of sound, which
Maharishi prescribes as that particular sound most harmonious for the individual.
See chapter 1 for a more detailed description of transcendental meditation.

22. Kaul, p. 266.


25. Vincent interprets these passages differently. He suggests, "The paragraphs
descriptive of the dreamer in the masthead may well bear the weight of another
interpretation: that they here constitute an implicit satire of the unitarian point of
view, especially as manifest in the Transcendental philosophy of the Over-Soul" (p.
151).

26. Actually there is a narrative transition at work for several chapters, during
which the Pequod leaves shore behind; Peleg and Bildad depart; "Postscript" suggests
that a major break has been achieved; and some introductory chapters describe the
names and positions of the mates aboard ship.

There have been other attempts to split the novel into sections for purposes of
critical exposition, for example Newton Arvin's fourfold design in Herman Melville
(New York: Viking Press, 1960). Arvin describes the four basic "movements" of the
narrative as follows: "All the introductory chapters, up to the sailing of the Pequod"
form the first; "A second unmistakable wave is the one that comes to its crest in the scene on the quarter-deck, when Ahab nails the doubloon to the mainmast. The whole central portion of the book, from the sunset scene in Ahab's cabin to the encounter with the bitterly misnamed craft, the Delight, forms a third movement. . . . The fourth movement naturally begins with 'The Symphony' and comes to a close with the catastrophe itself—the Epilogue forming a kind of musical coda . . ." (pp. 157-58).

Although Arvin's demarcations emphasize some of the narrative high points, they do not reveal the design of Ishmael's metaphysical search as the organizing principle of the narrative.

27. Another way to express the contrast between Ahab and Ishmael is to see Ahab's quest as flawed in the same way that the Puritan meditation is doomed to failure. Kaul calls Ahab's "total egocentricity: the recurring fatal flaw in the literature of a culture where Calvinistic self-absorption had finally issued into action as the unfettered activity of isolated and self-sufficient individuals" (p. 268). In Ishmael's quest, Puritanism "issues into action" as epistemology; in Ahab's quest, monomania replaces inner scrutiny. Thus, as Charles H. Cook, Jr., writes, "Aware of the human temptation to project simple, personal meanings upon things which are formless or incomprehensible, Melville may be giving us the tragedy of a man who yields his whole soul to this temptation, who inflates his own private hurt into the hurt of all mankind, and who allegorizes the inflictor of this hurt as the dwelling place of all evil. Is Ahab an example of that deadly brand of reformer whose obsession with one evil blinds him to the enigmatic ambiguity of the moral world?" ("Ahab's Intolerable Allegory," Boston University Studies in English, 1 [1955-56], p. 45). Ahab resembles that particular "brand of reformer" in The Scarlet Letter whom Hawthorne gives us in the personages of the Puritan magistrates. Is Ahab "the creator of a hideous and intolerable allegory?" Cook asks (p. 45), implying that allegory represents the failure of the Puritan imagination to comprehend ambiguity. Such is the nature of the "flaw" Kaul refers to that, without it, Ishmael is able to transcend the limitations of Ahab's perception of the world.

28. Vincent suggests that the same process explains Ishmael's shift to cetology: "In order to build to the first great climax of the book—the doubloon scene at the mainmast—Melville must momentarily change pace, descend to a pianissimo. Nothing is more fatiguing, either in art or in life, than unrelieved tension. . . . Melville later acknowledges this, obliquely, when he mentions Ahab's recognition that although his men consent to pursue the White Whale with him, nevertheless they must be allowed diversion, for instance, to hunt for other whales along the way" (p. 122).


30. There are several excellent discussions of the relationship between "The Town-Ho's Story" and the novel. See for example Warner Berthoff, The Example of Melville (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), pp. 133-38. According to Berthoff, "The Town-Ho's Story" was published a month before Moby-Dick (Vincent confirms this) and attests to Melville's originality within the then-popular mode of the picturesque anecdote (p. 137). Don Geiger, in "Melville's Black God: Contrary Evidence in 'The Town-Ho's Story'," in Discussions of Moby-Dick, ed. Milton R. Stern (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1960), pp. 93-97, argues that Melville portrays a "special, Calvinist version of Christian justice, more marked by wrath and punishment than by love" in both the tale and the novel. Sherman Paul's analysis is possibly the best of all. He states, in "Melville's 'The Town-Ho's Story'," (American Literature 21 [1949]: 212-22. Copyright 1949 by Duke University Press. Reprinted in Stern, pp. 87-92. All page references are to the reprint edition.) "The Town-Ho's Story' offers an alternative and variant meaning of the significance of the white whale. It is a tragic but not an unwarrantably pessimistic tale that inspires awe of, but not an aversion to, the whale; it marks the beginning of that feeling of attraction for the whale which Melville nurses carefully in the seven remaining [encounters with whaling ships] and without which the dramatic focus on Ahab's monomania would be diminished. Furthermore, the themes and characters of the story, and its symbolic techniques, make it Melville's 'Ethan Brand,' the kind of short story the significance of which . . . penetrates the main body of an author's work" (p. 87). Paul further states, commenting on the larger significance of the tale, that the "apparent failure in the basis of American democracy has its counterpart in the mutiny that takes place on the Town-Ho. The ship-as-society or world-in-itself is a recurrent symbol in Melville's work and in 'The Town-Ho's Story' becomes a stage on which is acted one possible failure in human institutions. . . . [T]he evil . . . brings on a mutiny by enlarging the sense of separation that had taken place between
Steelkilt and Radney, or, symbolically, between those who rule and those who obey. Melville suggests that all would have been well if Radney had only recognized that portion of the right of manhood in Steelkilt which was due even a slave ..." (p. 92).

31. See the chapters "Dusk" and "First Night-Watch."

32. For one full discussion of the philosophical polarities Kant and Locke represent for Ishmael, see Robert Zoellner, The Salt-Sea Mastodon: A Reading of Moby-Dick (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), chapter one, "Kant and Locke: The Protometaphorical Substrate." (Zoellner's usefulness is limited, however, by his insistence on using jargon, often at the expense of clarity.)

33. As Feidelson states: "It is quite possible to take poetry as the norm and to regard logical statement as the fantasy ... The literary symbolist is inclined to consider poetry as peculiarly symbolic, in that poetry (and, by extension, all literature) holds to the creative speech from which logic tends to depart. From this point of view, the symbolic status of literature constitutes a positive victory over logic, the reinstatement of 'concrete fact' in the face of abstract fiction" (p. 55).

34. R. E. Watters supports this view. He states, in "The Meanings of the White Whale," in Stern, pp. 77–86: "This necessity to learn and include everything in order to comprehend the essential principle is the true artistic justification of Ishmael's compiling the mass of whaling details given in Moby-Dick. He is attempting to see the whale not partially, as a personified malignancy, a natural peril, a challenge, or a monetary value, but omnisciently, as a possibly intelligible microcosm in a possibly intelligible cosmos. The meaning of the white whale, for Ishmael, seems to be either the totality or essential of all meanings—in a word, attainable only by omniscience" (p. 83).


36. Feidelson terms Ahab's "refusal to remain in suspense" (p. 33).


38. Feidelson states: "Ishmael's status remains provisional. He accepts ambiguity and indefiniteness—he is 'buoyed up by that coffin'—and yet somehow manages to retain his own identity" (p. 33). Ishmael retains his own identity because he cannot permanently transcend physical reality. Feidelson's choice of the word "provisional" is interesting in this context. In the sense that Ishmael, in spite of the vision he achieves, must "return to viewing," must go off, like the Pequod's crew, in search of other whales, he does remain pro- or pre-visional.

39. Watters, p. 78.

40. See Charles Olson's Call Me Ishmael (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1947), for a discussion of Melville's own markings in his edition of Shakespeare. The references to Shakespeare in Moby-Dick serve as Melville's "interpretation" of Shakespeare's work.

41. Alan Cheuse formulated the expression of this idea.