THE DYNAMIC ENCOUNTER: SHAKESPEAREAN INFLUENCE ON STRUCTURE AND LANGUAGE IN MOBY-DICK

DISSERTATION

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By

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It is the purpose of this study to prove that the influence of Shakespeare on Melville's art in Moby-Dick is most clearly manifest and most concretely demonstrable in the style and structure, in the linguistic and dramatic forms of the novel. At the beginning, two questions are raised which it is the task of the investigation to answer: How is the sudden maturity of Melville's style in Moby-Dick to be explained? And what is the exact nature of the influence of Shakespeare on this style?

In answer to the first question the study identifies three major intellectual experiences which profoundly influenced Melville just before and during the composition of Moby-Dick: the failure of his experiment with the metaphysical style in Mardi, his discovery of Hawthorne's "blackness" in the summer of 1850, and his reading and then rereading of Shakespeare's plays.

Chapter II presents evidence which demonstrates that the first two of these intellectual events had little direct influence on the style and structure of Moby-Dick and that the sudden transformation of the style of the novel is
attributable to Melville's encounters with Shakespeare's plays in the winter of 1849 and again in the summer of 1850. This latter conclusion is supported, not only by biographical and other forms of empirical evidence, but also by stylistic and structural evidence. An analysis of this internal evidence, presented in Chapters III and IV, answers the question concerning the exact nature of Shakespearean influence on the structure and language of *Moby-Dick*.

Melville learned from Shakespeare a dramatic technique and stylistic method. He so completely absorbed Shakespeare's dramatic structural techniques that he transferred such devices as the use of playscript form, various types of long soliloquies, and numerous directly-borrowed scenes from Shakespeare's plays into *Moby-Dick* without much effort at integrating them into the forms of narrative prose. Less obvious, however, are the pairing and balancing of contrasting foil characters and the pairing and balancing of parallel or contrasting actions, symbols, or themes, two elements of Shakespearean dramatic structure which have entered into the larger structure of *Moby-Dick* and therefore have profoundly affected its central unity.

Shakespearean influence on language in *Moby-Dick* is evident in both diction and sentence structure. From Shakespeare Melville learned to use parts of speech with great freedom, to coin new words, and to make verbal compounds the
basic resource of his vocabulary. And from Shakespeare Melville also learned to combine words into rhetorical patterns which could convey a meaning which was greater than the sum of the meanings of the individual words. These rhetorical patterns include compound, double, and transferred epithets, and figures based on a pattern of three.

An understanding of the influence of Shakespeare on the structure and language of *Moby-Dick* is important because the plays of Shakespeare gave Melville a sudden insight into the significance of form and because his absorption of Shakespearean rhetoric enabled him to solve a serious artistic problem. In *Moby-Dick* Melville wished to write a work of symbolic fiction which would have both epic scope and tragic depth, but his difficulty lay in finding a structural and stylistic method which would provide the amplitude necessary to epic and at the same time could achieve the compression and verbal economy necessary to tragedy. He solved this problem by learning from Shakespeare to create a multi-layered dramatic structure and to use a dramatic language which becomes one layer of that structure. In Shakespeare's greatest plays there is a virtual fusion of form and meaning, and it is this fusion which, in its greatest moments, the language of *Moby-Dick* achieves.
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CHAPTER I

A GREAT ARTIFICE

Although the influence of Shakespeare on Moby-Dick is, according to one critic, a "familiar fact," surprisingly, almost no detailed analysis has been made of the effect reading Shakespeare had on Melville's style. In fact, the style of Moby-Dick seems to have received little specific attention from any point of view. Yet the influence of Shakespeare on Melville's style needs to be investigated, for the style of Moby-Dick is radically unlike the style of Melville's other novels, and it is in the language, the characteristic modes of expression, the poetic and dramatic forms, what we might call the "rhetoric" of Moby-Dick, that the influence of Shakespeare's art upon Melville's is most clearly manifest and most concretely demonstrable.

Anyone who comes to the reading of Moby-Dick directly from Mardi, Redburn, and White Jacket, as Melville's contemporaries might have done, will immediately be struck by the way Melville's style bursts into sudden maturity. From the very opening paragraph of Moby-Dick there is an intensity, a tautness, a power in the language which is not to be found in any

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of the earlier novels. Commenting on the "extraordinary resourcefulness and inventiveness of Melville's language" in Moby-Dick, Newton Arvin says,

For this there is nothing in his earlier books to prepare us fully, though there are hints of it in the best passages of Redburn and White-Jacket. In general, however, the diction in those books is the current diction of good prose in Melville's time; it has a hardly definable personal quality. Now, in Moby Dick, it takes on abruptly an idiosyncrasy of the most unmistakable sort; it is a question now of Melvillean language in the same intense and special sense in which one speaks of Virgilian language, or Shakespearean, or Miltonic. It is a creation, verbally speaking; a great artifice; a particular characterizing idiom; without it the book would not exist.²

To even the superficial reader of Moby-Dick, this statement will hardly seem an exaggeration. From the very beginning, the language of Moby-Dick is a "great artifice"; it shows Melville's intuitive understanding of the organic relationship between language and myth; it is part of the significant form of the novel, as inseparable from it as the character of Ahab or the white whale himself. But granted that these statements are true, how are we to account for this language? How are we to explain the abrupt change, in a matter of months with no transitional work, from what F. O. Matthiessen calls the "honest but stiff writing"³ of Melville's earlier books,

²Arvin, p. 162.

including *White Jacket*, to the "bold and nervous lofty language" which in *Moby-Dick* becomes, as Arvin says, "a vehicle capable of bearing a great imaginative weight, of expressing a great visionary theme"? And what, exactly, is the nature of this vehicle? What are the qualities of "Melvillean language" in *Moby-Dick* that make it "a particular characterizing idiom," that give it its peculiar and personal features so that we tend to recognize a passage from *Moby-Dick* almost the same way we say a certain line of verse "sounds" like Shakespeare, or Virgil, or Milton?

To answer the first of these questions, we must attempt to identify the various ideas, events, and experiences which seem to have been influencing Melville at the time he was conceiving and writing *Moby-Dick*. Although it is naturally impossible to trace exactly the genesis of any work of fiction, there is ample evidence, both external and internal, to suggest that there were three major events, or intellectual experiences, which profoundly influenced Melville just before and during the composition of *Moby-Dick*: the failure of his experiment with the metaphysical style in *Mardi*; his meeting with Hawthorne and his discovery of Hawthorne's "blackness"; and his reading and then rereading of Shakespeare's plays.

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4 Arvin, p. 152.
Important as the first two of these influences may have been to other aspects of the creation of Moby-Dick, there is little evidence to suggest that either of them had any appreciable effect on Melville's style. In fact, according to F. O. Matthiessen, some of the most serious failures of Mardi are attributable to "the uncertainties of Melville's unformed style."\(^5\) Matthiessen analyzes a passage from the chapter "Dreams" in which at one point the "sentence structure breaks in the middle into virtual incoherence,"\(^6\) and he comments that Melville's rapidly developing and expanding inner life "demanded new ranges of language for its expression."\(^7\) But in Mardi Melville was never quite able to create this new range of language. His handling of symbolism is particularly inept, for instead of allowing the symbols to grow naturally out of the concrete material of his fable, as he was later to learn to do in White Jacket and in Moby-Dick, he imposed the meanings on them from without, inventing a set of artificial symbols and then trying to endow them with some sort of concrete fictional reality. While this is certainly a legitimate method of handling symbolism, as writers like Dante, Bunyan, and Swift have amply proved, it is not a method that Melville was ever able to use with any success.

In Mardi, argues Matthiessen, Melville "had not yet developed

\(^5\) Matthiessen, p. 384.  \(^6\) Matthiessen, p. 385.  \(^7\) Matthiessen, p. 385.
a controlled heightening of diction that could make the reader accept the lack of verisimilitude." He had not yet learned to ask the fact for the form as Emerson would have put it, and, consequently, his first attempt to "dive into the souls" of men became what he later feared his readers would make of Moby-Dick—"a hideous and intolerable allegory."

Profound as the effect of his meeting with Hawthorne in the summer of 1850 was on Melville's intellectual development, there is no evidence that it had any influence on the style of Moby-Dick. Melville's interest in Hawthorne's art was not in the forms of the tales but in their "blackness"; he was impressed by Hawthorne not as a stylist but as a master of the "Art of Telling the Truth." "In short," says Leon Howard, "[Melville's] reading of Hawthorne's stories and his meeting with their author . . . served as a catalytic agent for the precipitation in words of a new attitude toward human nature which his mind had held in increasingly strong solution for some years." From Hawthorne he received not a "new range of language" but a new range of philosophical and moral convictions, and he was stimulated by the excitement of his discovery to follow Hawthorne's example in trying to express these convictions in a work of symbolic fiction. It is possible,

8Matthiessen, p. 422.

speculates Howard, that after meeting Hawthorne and rereading Shakespeare's plays in August of 1850, Melville began to revise his partially finished whaling story, hoping to make it a "medium through which these convictions could reach Shakespearean heights of expression."\(^{10}\)

Both the failure of his experiment in *Mardi* and his discovery of Hawthorne are important mileposts in Melville's artistic development, but neither of these influences, nor the many others which had, in one way or another, an effect on him, leads us even indirectly to the sudden liberation of his style in *Moby-Dick*. For that we must look to the event which was, by his own admission, the most important spiritual and intellectual experience of his artistic life—his reading of Shakespeare's complete works, essentially for the first time, in the winter of 1849. In writing *Mardi* Melville had attempted without much success to endow fictional experience with symbolic meaning; in *Redburn* and *White Jacket* he occasionally approached a symbolic method more congenial to his desire to present "the very axis of reality" than was the turgid and incoherent allegory of *Mardi*. "But," says Matthiessen, "he did not find a valuable clue to how to express the hidden life of men, which had become his compelling absorption, until he encountered the unexampled vitality of Shakespeare's language."\(^{11}\) True, he was indebted to other

\(^{10}\)Howard, p. 169. \(^{11}\)Matthiessen, p. 423.
stylists, notably Carlyle and Thomas Browne, for some of what he had learned:

But his possession by Shakespeare went far beyond all other influences, and, if Melville had been a man of less vigor, would have served to reduce him to the ranks of the dozens of stagey nineteenth-century imitators of the dramatist's stylistic mannerisms. What we actually find is something very different: a man of thirty awakening to his own full strength through the challenge of the most abundant imagination in history. Since Melville meditated more creatively on Shakespeare's meaning than any other American has done, it is absorbing to try to follow what the plays meant to him, from the superficial evidence of verbal echoes down through the profound transformation of all his previous styles.\footnote{Matthiessen, p. 424.}

To trace what the plays of Shakespeare meant to Melville as evidenced by the rhetoric--the style and structure--of Moby-Dick is the purpose of this study.

So much has apparently been written about the influence of Shakespeare on Melville that another study of the subject may seem superfluous. But an examination of the scholarship shows that while it is true that a great deal has been written about some aspects of Melville's encounter with Shakespeare, very little concrete and detailed analysis has been made of the profound effects his absorption of Shakespearean rhetoric had on Melville's style. What studies have been made of Shakespearean influence on the language of Moby-Dick are sketchy and superficial; they are often embedded in discussions of some other aspect of the novel's structure or meaning, and
they tend to leave the impression that either the writer has not noticed the parallels between Shakespeare's style and Melville's, or he thinks they are so obvious that no comment on them is necessary. Significantly, no study of Melville's rhetoric has begun with an analysis of Shakespeare's mature stylistic practices, from which Melville seems to have learned his craft so well. It is the intention of the present study to begin with such an analysis.

Scholars who have attempted to describe and assess the influence of Shakespeare on Melville can be divided roughly into three categories according to their apparent purposes and the various points of view from which they approach the subject: (1) those biographers and critics who are mainly concerned with tracing Melville's intellectual and artistic development; (2) those who attempt to elaborate and support a theory concerning the stages of composition of Moby-Dick and the influences on it; (3) those who see the importance of the influence of Shakespeare primarily in the overall tragic vision of the book and in the characters, especially as Ahab may derive from one or more of Shakespeare's characters, particularly Lear, Macbeth, and Timon. There is, as would be expected, a good deal of overlapping among these groups of critics especially between groups one and three, and only the first two give any consideration to the question of stylistic influence, but this classification at least provides a
convenient method of reviewing the literature. It should be pointed out, of course, that the majority of Melville scholarship does not fit into any of these categories because many critics approach *Moby-Dick* from points of view which do not concern themselves with the influences on the novel or the process of its composition, and, consequently, they do not say much, if anything, about Melville's reading of Shakespeare.

Of the studies of Melville's intellectual and artistic development which belong to the first category, F. O. Matthiessen's section on Melville in *American Renaissance* and Newton Arvin's *Herman Melville, A Critical Biography* are by far the most important for a consideration of the influence of Shakespeare on the style of *Moby-Dick*. Leon Howard's *Herman Melville, A Biography* certainly belongs with these since Melville's intellectual growth is one of Howard's major interests, but apart from saying that Melville attempted in *Moby-Dick* to "reach Shakespearean heights of expression,"¹³ Howard does not give any attention to the nature of Melville's stylistic debt to Shakespeare. In an article published in *The Shakespeare Association Bulletin* in 1932,¹⁴ Raymond G. Hughes does mention a few verbal echoes and allusions and includes a short paragraph on Melville's diction, but Hughes's study is superficial at best and in any case has long since

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¹³Howard, p. 169.

been superseded by more recent and more thorough scholarship on Melville. Both Matthiessen and Arvin, however, not only assume that Melville's encounter with Shakespearean structure and language had a profound influence on the rhetoric of Moby-Dick, but attempt to analyze, at least to some extent, the nature of that influence and the effect it had on the language of the novel.

Like all of his work, F. O. Matthiessen's discussion of Moby-Dick in American Renaissance is suggestive and full of insight. But his analysis of Melville's style is unfortunately more provocative than definitive. As the passages already quoted show, Matthiessen's basic assumption is that the encounter with Shakespeare was the single most important event in Melville's artistic life, and he even goes so far as to say that "without the precipitant of Shakespeare, Moby-Dick might have been a superior White Jacket";¹⁵ but his support of this statement and of a number of others similar to it is disappointingly meager. His analysis of language is limited primarily to verbal echoes and to a few examples of Shakespearean diction; he mentions "Shakespeare's patterns" but gives no attention to rhetorical patterns or figures of speech; while he points out that several of Ahab's early speeches are written in what is virtually blank verse, he does not attempt to analyze any of the numerous other forms

¹⁵Matthiessen, p. 416.
of rhythm Melville evidently learned from Shakespeare; and though he says that Melville had "gained something of the Shakespearean energy of verbal compounds" and "something, too, of the quickened sense of life that comes from making one part of speech act as another," he gives only three examples—"full-freighted" as a compound and "earthquake" and "placeless" as adjectives coined from nouns—when, in fact, there are dozens of examples (and sometimes more significant ones) of both of these devices of rhetoric in Moby-Dick. Matthiessen's discussion of the structural devices Melville took from Shakespeare—stage directions, the soliloquy, dramatic irony, use of foil characters—is likewise brief and leads almost immediately into a consideration of other aspects of the Shakespearean influence, tragic vision, characterization, and the theme of the discrepancy between appearance and reality which Melville found so fascinating not only in the plays of Shakespeare but in Hawthorne's tales as well. In sum, Matthiessen's discussion of the style of Moby-Dick must be considered as a valuable introduction to the subject rather than as a definitive and exhaustive treatment.

In the amount of detailed analysis provided to support his assumptions about Shakespearean influence on the rhetoric of Moby-Dick, Newton Arvin's study is more satisfying than Matthiessen's. Although Arvin also limits his discussion to

16 Matthiessen, p. 431.
a few paragraphs on diction (and devotes only one short paragraph to the structural devices, he at least gives a number of examples of characteristic words, coinages, unusual parts of speech, compounds, and the reliance on verbs of action, all of which seem to be as characteristic of Melville's language in Moby-Dick as they are of Shakespeare's in any of the mature tragedies. Arvin also attempts to show some of the ways Melville was able in Moby-Dick to "incorporate [his whaling experiences] in a high form . . . in which prose and symbol might be completely fused in a powerful, polyphonic whole,"\(^{17}\) but the scope of his study as a whole is too broad to allow him to linger long on any one part of it, and he soon passes on, as does Matthiessen, to other aspects of the structure and meaning of Moby-Dick. Ironically, it is this very breadth of purpose that limits both Matthiessen and Arvin in their treatment of the style of Moby-Dick, for in the context of a survey of all of Melville's life and work—and in Matthiessen's case, of the lives and work of other writers as well—neither critic has space to expand on any one subject to the extent which ideally it may require. And yet, limited though they are, these two studies have apparently been taken as the last word on the matter since, as far as can be determined, no more recent study has attempted to go significantly beyond Matthiessen and Arvin in describing and analyzing

\(^{17}\text{Arvin, p. 144.}\)
Shakespearean influence on the structure and style of Moby-Dick. It would seem, therefore, that such a study is not only well justified, but perhaps even well overdue.

The discussions of the stages of composition of Moby-Dick which comprise the second category of studies of the influence of Shakespeare on Melville will be examined in some detail in Chapter II, and consequently, little need be said about them here. These theories, developed by such scholars as Charles Olson, Howard P. Vincent, Leon Howard, George R. Stewart, and, more recently, James Barbour, are of interest to the present study primarily because most of them give some attention to the relationship between Melville's reading of Shakespeare and the revision he apparently made in Moby-Dick in the late summer of 1850, and most of them use stylistic and linguistic evidence to support their theories concerning the nature of this revision.

Most of the scholarship on the general influence of Shakespeare on Melville falls into the third group of studies—those which deal with what is seen as Shakespearean influence on the tragic vision, themes, or characters in Moby-Dick. In the forties and fifties F. O. Matthiessen, Charles Olson, and Newton Arvin all discussed Shakespearean influence on Melville's concept of tragedy and on the characters of Moby-Dick in book-length studies. In the sixties and seventies a number of articles and several dissertations have discussed
these same subjects. Of these, Julian Markels' essay "King Lear and Moby-Dick: The Cultural Connection"\textsuperscript{18} and Julian C. Rice's "Moby Dick and Shakespearean Tragedy"\textsuperscript{19} are perhaps typical. Both of these articles are concerned with defining the nature of Shakespearean tragedy and with showing how Moby-Dick does or does not fit this definition. Neither of these studies is particularly satisfactory or convincing, and neither says anything about the language or structure of the novel. For convenience, we may also include in this category Roma Rosen's 1962 dissertation (Northwestern) "Melville's Uses of Shakespeare's Plays" and another article by Markels, "Melville's Markings in Shakespeare's Plays."\textsuperscript{20} Both of these studies are merely analyses of Melville's notations in the margins of his seven-volume edition of Shakespeare's plays and can hardly be said to be studies of Moby-Dick per se. Since they do not address themselves to the question of what effect Melville's fascination with Shakespeare had on the style and structure of Moby-Dick, but confine themselves to counting and codifying the markings in Melville's edition of Shakespeare's plays, these two studies are of little use to a discussion of Melville's rhetoric.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{18} Massachusetts Review, 9 (1968), 169-76.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Centennial Review, 14 (1970), 444-68.
\item \textsuperscript{20} American Literature, 49 (1977), 34-48.
\end{itemize}
The answer to the question what is the exact nature of the influence of Shakespeare on the structure and style of Moby-Dick forms the bulk of the following study. Shakespearean influence on Melville's rhetoric manifests itself in two ways. First of all, it is apparent in certain structural elements, some of which Melville appears to have borrowed directly from Elizabethan drama and to have imposed on his narrative with very little effort at integration. Numerous critics have complained—with some justification—that the most obvious of these elements, the chapters in Moby-Dick written in playscript form, are "lumbering" (Matthiessen) and "far from being very successful in execution" (Arvin). But these chapters represent only the most superficial and certainly the least significant Shakespearean structural elements in the novel. More organic and hence much more important are the varied and skillful uses of the several kinds of Shakespearean soliloquies, the employment of various forms of dramatic irony, and, particularly, the use of groups of foil characters not only as a device of characterization but of structure as well, a technique which produces at times in Moby-Dick the same kind of structural irony one finds in a play like Henry IV, Part I or King Lear.

21 Ira Konigsberg, Samuel Richardson and the Dramatic Novel (Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1968), p. 112, uses this term to describe the "formal elements of a playscript"—speaker tags, scene directions in italics, and so forth. The term "playscript" will be used in this sense throughout this dissertation.
Just as Shakespearean influence on structure in Moby-Dick goes beyond mere playscript form, so the effect of Shakespeare's language on Melville's style goes far beyond mere diction. The effect on diction is important, of course; it is evident in the way Melville coins words, forces one part of speech to act for another, invents compounds. But what gives the language of Moby-Dick its distinctly Shakespearean flavor is the almost infinite variety of ways Melville employs Shakespeare's rhetorical patterns, his characteristic sentence structure and figures of speech. In fact, the novel is a virtual catalog of Shakespeare's rhetorical figures. Double epithets, compound epithets, figures built on patterns of three, transferred epithets (hypallage), devices of parallelism and antithesis, rhyme, assonance, alliteration, and regular meter are almost as characteristic of Melville's prose as they are of Shakespeare's verse. And as in Shakespeare's plays, wherever the emotional content of a passage in Moby-Dick tends to intensify and regularize the sentence rhythm--in Ahab's speeches and in Ishmael's more impassioned meditations, for instance--these rhetorical figures and patterns can usually be found in clusters.

The immediate effect of these structural and stylistic devices is to dramatize and poetize Melville's fiction. But their real significance for an understanding of Moby-Dick as a unified work of art goes much deeper, for Melville's
absorption and assimilation of Shakespeare's rhetoric enabled him to solve a serious artistic problem with which he was faced when he reconceived the shape and purpose of *Moby-Dick* in the summer of 1850 and decided to change his "romance of the southern sperm whale fisheries" into a work which would express both epic and tragic themes. This problem was, as Newton Arvin describes it, "to take the small, prosy, and terribly circumscribed form he had inherited," that is, the travel-adventure narrative which had been the basis of his previous books, and somehow make it capable of both epic scope and tragic depth. Melville solved this problem in part, as a number of scholars have pointed out, by adding the cetological chapters and the minutely detailed descriptions of the workings of the whaling industry. But the amplitude thus gained, while indispensable to the epic sweep and grandeur Melville wished to impart to his book, made achieving the economy and compression necessary to tragedy doubly difficult.

He extricated himself from this difficulty in a way that was both brilliant and, for the mid-nineteenth century, unique. He used the structural and stylistic devices and techniques he had absorbed from his reading of Shakespeare's plays to

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22 Arvin, p. 144.

present Ahab's story, and by so doing he was able to delineate
the character of Ahab and to tell the history of his monomania
in the dramatic terms the tragic themes associated with Ahab's
pursuit of the white whale required. The cetological chapters
and the descriptions of the processes of whaling gave Moby-
Dick the variety and plenitude necessary to epic romance; the
dramatic language Melville had learned from Shakespeare pro-
vided the immediacy, objectivity, compression, and verbal
economy essential to romantic tragedy.

There was also one other reason for Melville's need to
present Ahab's story in the language of drama. Ishmael often
has a great deal of difficulty in accurately describing
Ahab's character and motivation and in expressing the deeply
rooted causes and less-readily visible effects of his mono-
mania. The problem is that he is attempting to describe a
madman, but he lacks the technical vocabulary necessary to his
task. The language of modern psychology had not yet been
invented in 1850, and the terms which a twentieth century
critic may use to analyze Ahab's mental and emotional state
were unavailable to Melville. That he was partially aware of
this problem is suggested by Ishmael's statement that "what
the white whale meant to Ahab" has only been "hinted."24

24 Herman Melville, Moby-Dick or The Whale, ed. Charles
Feidelson, Jr. (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964), p. 252. All
quotations from Moby-Dick are from this edition and are sub-
sequently cited in the text.
Since Ishmael is handicapped in this fashion, Melville was forced to allow Ahab's character to develop dramatically, to present Ahab primarily through his own words and actions as a character is presented in a play. For this purpose he employed the language and the devices of structure he had absorbed from Shakespearean drama.

It must be emphasized that in no way was Melville a mere imitator of Shakespeare's style. What he did was something quite different and much more significant. He intuitively "mastered Shakespeare's mature secret of how to make language itself dramatic,"\(^{25}\) and he seems instinctively to have understood and to have assimilated into his best practice what Emerson repeatedly says in his lectures and essays about the theory of language--that words themselves are little dramas. At its best, the language of *Moby-Dick* becomes, as language always is in Shakespeare, one level of dramatic structure. Through the agency of Shakespeare, Melville was able to create in *Moby-Dick* a language and a structure which gave him, to use one of his own metaphors, enough "sea room to tell the truth in."

\(^{25}\)Matthiessen, p. 430.
"Dolt & ass that I am," Melville wrote to Evert Duyckinck on February 24, 1849, "I have lived more than 29 years & until a few days ago, never made close acquaintance with the divine William. Ah, he's full of sermons-on-the-mount, and gentle, aye, almost as Jesus. I take such men to be inspired. I fancy that this moment Shakspeare in heaven ranks with Gabriel Raphael and Michael. And if another Messiah ever comes twill be in Shakesper's person.--I am mad to think how minute a cause has prevented me hitherto from reading Shakspeare. But until now, every copy that was come-atable to me, happened to be in a vile small print unendurable to my eyes... But chancing to fall in with this glorious edition, I now exult over it, page after page.--"¹ The experience here described is perhaps unique in modern literary history: a man of thirty, who was already an established author in his own right, suddenly, and essentially for the first time, making dynamic contact with one of the greatest creative imaginations in history. Although it can be demonstrated, from some quotations

in his earliest piece of published prose—"Fragments from a Writing Desk"—and from some allusions in Mardi, that Melville was exaggerating somewhat in telling Duyckinck that he had never read Shakespeare at all until he had "lived more than 29 years," there seems little reason not to take him at his word concerning the emotional and intellectual excitement his first serious reading of the plays produced in him. As a pupil at the Albany Classical School in 1835 and as an eighteen-year-old rural schoolmaster in 1837, he had undoubtedly acquired a schoolboy's knowledge of Shakespeare, but he had certainly never read all the plays and had never meditated on "the things that make Shakespeare, Shakespeare" until he began to go through Shakespeare's complete works in February 1849. This first serious encounter with Shakespeare was to have a profound influence on the shape and contents of the book he was to begin writing only a year later, for it is safe to say, without at all discounting the importance of the meeting with Hawthorne, that Melville's reading of Shakespeare was the single most important influence on the creation of Moby-Dick.

Almost as significant as the encounter itself was the time at which it occurred. By the first of February, 1849, Melville was in Boston at the home of his father-in-law, Judge Lemuel Shaw, anxiously awaiting the birth of his first child and the publication of Mardi, his first attempt at a work of symbolic fiction, for which he and his sister Augusta had
finally finished reading proof on January 27. The child of his body, a son, arrived in due course on February 16, but the child of his brain was subjected to numerous delays, including a change in publishers, and did not appear in England until March 17, and it was nearly a month later, April 14, that Harpers finally got out the first volume of the American edition of Mardi. Frustrating as the slowness of Mardi's appearance was for Melville, the weeks of waiting were of great importance to his subsequent literary development, for they gave him the leisure to rest and read at a time when, as Leon Howard suggests, "his own flights into rhetorical prose and experiments with hidden meanings while writing Mardi had left him hungry for the deeper substance and sensitive to the rarer flavors of literature. . . ."² He was naturally in a state of considerable nervous excitement during this time of waiting for the publication and the first reviews of his most ambitious attempt at serious literature, and although he went to hear Emerson lecture and Fanny Kemble read Macbeth and Othello, "most of his tension found its escape in the imaginative perception of his reading."³ He expressed himself "agreeably disappointed in Mr. Emerson" in a letter in March to Duyckinck because, he explained, "I had heard of him as full of transcendentalism, myths & oracular gibberish. . . . To my surprise, I found him quite intelligible. . . . Now,

²Howard, p. 129. ³Howard, p. 130.
there is something about every man elevated above mediocrity, which is, for the most part, instinctually [sic] perceptible. This I see in Mr. Emerson. And, frankly, for the sake of the argument, let us call him a fool;—then had I rather be a fool than a wise man.—I love all men who dive. Any fish can swim near the surface, but it takes a great whale to go down stairs five miles or more; & if he don't attain the bottom, why, all the lead in Galena can't fashion the plumet that will.

I'm not talking of Mr. Emerson now—but of the whole corps of thought-divers, that have been diving & coming up again with bloodshot eyes since the world began."^4

It was while he was in such a frame of mind as this—and with the image of the "great whale" already present in his imagination—that Melville encountered Shakespeare, the greatest "thought-diver" of all. He found in Shakespeare, says Leon Howard,

hints of his own deepest and often unclarified thoughts. . . . It was Melville's good fortune, at a time when all his circumstances combined to make him a sensitive and thoughtful reader, to have his attention directed to the one author who could justify his sensitivity yet allow him to pursue his thoughts in terms of people rather than abstract ideas. Shakespeare gave him the most important direction he received during his journey in the world of the mind.5

The exact nature of this "journey in the world of the mind," whose ultimate destination was to be the story of Ahab

^4Letter 55, Letters, pp. 78-79.

^5Howard, pp. 130-31.
and the White Whale, can only be deduced from *Moby-Dick* itself, but some indication of the direction Melville's imagination was to take and some idea of what his immediate reactions to Shakespeare were can be found in the seven volumes of his edition of Shakespeare, the edition "in glorious great type" published by Hilliard and Gray, Boston, 1837, which is now in the Harvard College Library. It is not known exactly how Melville happened to "fall in" with this edition of Shakespeare. Merton M. Sealts in *Melville's Reading: A Check-List of Books Owned and Borrowed* describes the set as "The Dramatic Works . . . With a Life of the Poet, and Notes, Original and Selected . . . Boston, Hiliard, Gray, 1837. 7 v. Rebacked" and adds the notation: "Apparently the edition [purchased in Boston?] mentioned in Melville's [sic] letter to Evert Duyckinck of 24 Feb 1849 . . . Annotated," but precisely how Melville discovered the edition or from whom he purchased it has not been definitely determined. But whatever the circumstances, Melville's "falling in" with the Hiliard and Gray edition must be considered one of the most fortunate accidents in modern literary history, since not only was the print large enough to allow Melville to read Shakespeare by the hour despite his poor eyesight, but the

6 (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1960), No. 460, p. 93.
size of the volumes was such that he was able to mark and annotate the plays as he read.

Ever since 1938 when Charles Olson published an article entitled "Lear and Moby-Dick" (later expanded in Call Me Ishmael [New York, 1947]), in which he drew conclusions about Moby-Dick from the markings Melville made in his edition of Shakespeare's plays, scholars have eagerly studied these markings in attempts to deduce exactly what they mean. The latest of these studies is an article in which Julian Markels offers "a summary of Melville's 491 markings in the seven-volume Hilliard & Grey [sic] edition of the plays that he acquired in 1849" for the purpose of exhibiting "the range and variety of Melville's markings more fully than has yet been done," challenging "the prevailing impression that he was inspired chiefly by Shakespeare's intimations of a godless or demonic universe," and delineating "the actual configuration made by the whole set of markings taken as an aggregate." In a footnote in which he describes his system of counting and attempts to explain the discrepancy between his count of 491 markings and the count of 365 arrived at by Roma Rosen in her 1962 dissertation Melville's Use of Shakespeare's Plays (where she "classified descriptively the whole set of markings")

7 Twice a Year, 1, 165-89.
8 "Melville's Markings in Shakespeare's Plays," American Literature, 49 (1977), 34.
9 Markels, p. 34, n. 1.
Markels lists the plays in the order of frequency with which they were marked—Antony and Cleopatra, King Lear, Measure for Measure, Henry VIII, The Winter's Tale, Twelfth Night, Julius Caesar, Timon of Athens, Hamlet, Much Ado About Nothing, Cymbeline, All's Well That Ends Well, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Love's Labours Lost, Henry V, The Two Gentlemen of Verona, Pericles, The Tempest, As You Like It, Coriolanus, Richard II, Troilus and Cressida, The Taming of the Shrew, The Merchant of Venice, The Merry Wives of Windsor, Romeo and Juliet, Othello, 1 Henry IV, Titus Andronicus. (The Comedy of Errors, Macbeth, 2 Henry IV, 1,2,3 Henry VI, and Richard III were not marked.) He also describes Melville's characteristic ways of marking passages: "Sometimes Melville marked a single passage several ways, for example by underlining the text, side-lining the passage in one margin, and check-marking it in the other margin." Melville also "X"d lines or passages and wrote comments either at the top or bottom of the page or in the side margins.

Markels admits, in another footnote, that the task of understanding the meaning of Melville's markings in his Shakespeare set is a difficult one:

There is of course serious difficulty in arriving at confident inferences about the meaning of Melville's markings, and the more finely one tries to discriminate among them the less authoritative one can hope to be. Melville made very few

10 Markels, p. 34, n. 2.
annotations that might serve to gloss the side-lines and check marks. There is no significant correlation between the frequency or intensity with which he marked a play and the frequency, context, or impact of his allusions to that play in his fiction. Nor is there any way to know whether some plays are marked more heavily than others not because they meant more to him but because they were newer to him. From the Shakespearean allusions in Melville's first five novels and from other biographical evidence, I would guess, for example, that he left a play like Macbeth completely unmarked in The Hilliard & Grey edition not because he was less excited by it than by some others but because he was deeply familiar with it already.\textsuperscript{11}

In spite of these difficulties, Markels believes the "attempt to discriminate among the markings finely enough to constitute a general interpretation" is worth making if only because of "the many fragmentary interpretations hinted at by critics, sometimes unwittingly."\textsuperscript{12} However, it cannot be said that he is entirely successful in fulfilling the three-fold purpose stated at the beginning of the article. Although he claims to be compiling a "representative list" of the markings, he omits, without explanation, "some examples already too familiar," and it is perhaps partially in consequence of this omission that his attempt to challenge the prevailing opinion among scholars that Melville tended to darken Shakespeare's meaning fails to be convincing. His choice of examples and his analysis of them do not completely support his contention that "Melville was excited not only by Shakespeare's depiction of ingratitude and malice, the conflict of appearance and reality,

\textsuperscript{11}Markels, p. 35, n. 3. \textsuperscript{12}Markels, p. 35, n. 3.
and the possibility of cosmic demonism, but also by Shakespeare's depiction of loyalty and trust rewarded, the identity of appearance and reality, and the possibility of cosmic harmony,¹³ nor does the number of his quoted examples in this relatively short article "exhibit the range and variety of Melville's markings" as fully as Markels implies. If other scholars who have studied the annotations in Melville's Shakespeare have not attempted to analyze their meaning more fully, it is perhaps because they have been less willing than Markels appears to be to ignore the "serious difficulty" even Markels admits is inherent in such an undertaking.

Fortunately, it is not necessary for us to attempt to solve these difficulties in order to prove the importance of the markings in the Shakespeare set for a study of the influence of Shakespeare on Melville's rhetoric in Moby-Dick. For this study, the importance of the markings is two-fold. First, the very fact that there are markings and that there are many—seventy-six in Antony and Cleopatra; forty in King Lear; over thirty in Measure for Measure and Henry VIII; between twenty and thirty in The Winter's Tale, Twelfth Night, Julius Caesar, Timon of Athens, Hamlet, Much Ado About Nothing, and Cymbeline according to Markels' count—shows that Melville read and re-read hundreds of lines and passages in Shakespeare with the profoundest concentration, that he "meditated creatively" on

¹³ Markels, p. 35.
the meanings of these passages until his "own sense of life" was "so profoundly stirred by Shakespeare's that he was subconsciously impelled to emulation,"\textsuperscript{14} as the verbal echoes and the stylistic devices which appear in \textit{Moby-Dick} will demonstrate. After a period of such creative and attentive reading, it is no wonder that, as George R. Stewart suggests, Melville's mind was "teeming with Shakespearean phrases."\textsuperscript{15}

Second, a large number of the lines and passages Melville marked in his Shakespeare contain examples of the stylistic devices he was later to use brilliantly in \textit{Moby-Dick}. This is apparent even among the relatively few passages Markels cites and among the even fewer passages Jay Leyda reprinted in \textit{The Melville Log}.\textsuperscript{16} A speech from \textit{As You Like It} which Markels reports Melville side-lined contains a double epithet--"your virtues, gentle master, / Are sanctified and holy traitors [italics added] to you" (II.iii.12-13)--and this same device occurs in Viola's speech to the captain in \textit{Twelfth Night} which Melville marked, apparently, Markels claims, because he was struck by passages "in which the identity of appearance and reality accompanies the display of mutual trust among people."\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{14} Matthiessen, p. 416.

\textsuperscript{15} George R. Stewart, "The Two Moby-Dicks," \textit{American Literature}, 25 (1954), 429.


\textsuperscript{17} Markels, pp. 44-45.
There is a fair behaviour in thee, captain;
And though that nature with a beauteous wall
Doth oft close in pollution, yet of thee
I will believe thou hast a mind that suits
With this thy fair and outward character. (I.ii.47-51)

In pursuing this same line of argument, Markels quotes a passage from The Winter's Tale which Melville side-lined. One line of this passage contains a figure based on a pattern of three, a figure which Melville used in Moby-Dick almost as frequently as Shakespeare used it.

I shall report,
For most it caught me, the celestial habits,
Methinks I should so term them, and the reverence
Of the grave wearers. O, the sacrifice!
How ceremonious, solemn and unearthly [italics added]
It was i' the offering. (III.i.3-8)

Several of the passages from the Hilliard and Gray volumes which are reprinted in The Melville Log are the same ones Markels quotes, but one which Leyda used but Markels omits is Isabella's famous speech from the second act of Measure for Measure. According to Leyda's note, "Melville scores":

Thou rather, with thy sharp and sulphurous bolt,
Split'st the unwedgeable and gnarled oak,
Than the soft myrtle:--But man, proud man!
Dressed in a little brief authority,--
Most ignorant of what he's most assured,
His glassy essence,--like an angry ape,
Plays such fantastic tricks before high Heaven,
As make the angels weep; who, with our spleens,
Would all themselves laugh mortal. (II.ii.115-23)

These lines contain two examples of the double epithet--"sharp and sulphurous bolt" and "unwedgeable and gnarled oak." A passage from Love's Labor's Lost which Leyda says Melville
"scores, underscores, & checks" contains in the phrase "deep-searched" a typical Shakespearean compound:

. . . Study is like the heaven's glorious sun, 
That will not be deep-searched with saucy looks. 
(I.i.84-85)

It must be emphasized once again that no attempt is being made here to imply that Melville marked lines and passages in his edition of Shakespeare which contained the rhetorical figures he was later to incorporate into his own style in Moby-Dick because he was consciously studying Shakespeare's language with an idea of imitating it. Shakespeare's mature style is so much his own creation that it has never been successfully imitated, and such an attempt, even by a writer of Melville's vigor, must surely have ended in failure. But, Shakespearean influence on the style of Moby-Dick is significant largely because Melville seems to have absorbed and then reproduced Shakespeare's language involuntarily and unconsciously. Whatever else the markings Melville made in his Shakespeare may mean, they show that he read Shakespeare with such deep and concentrated attention, even to the point, possibly, of automatically committing many passages to memory, that, by the time he came to write Moby-Dick he had come into complete possession of an idiom which everywhere suggests Shakespeare's language but is in no case an imitation of it.

18Leyda, I, 289.
Intense as Melville's excitement at his first real discovery of Shakespeare was, the encounter was slow to bear fruit. There were, quite probably, a number of psychological reasons for the delay, but the more immediate and practical cause was the financial and critical failure of Mardi. The public, expecting from Melville only another tale of adventure in the South Seas, was sorely puzzled and disappointed by Mardi, and the professional reviewers, even those like the Duyckincks in The Literary World who were predisposed in Melville's favor, could find little to praise in it. The Home Journal, says Leon Howard,

"... went out of its way to be friendly; but the Boston Post, which normally approved the writings of a known Democrat, damned [Mardi] as "not only tedious but unreadable"—"Rabelais emasculated of everything but prosiness and puerility." The first English reviews were either lukewarm or almost entirely bad. The Athenaeum had taken the lead by writing that "among the hundred people who will take it up, lured by their remembrances of 'Typee,' ninety readers will drop off at the end of the first volume; and of the remaining[,] nine will become so weary of the hero when for the seventh time he is assaulted by the three pursuing Duessas who pelt him with symbolical flowers, that they will throw down his chronicle ere the end of its second third is reached--with Mr. Burchell's monosyllable by way of comment."

The Literary Gazette [London] "tried to be kind," but even it was forced to admit that "it has posed us, and is a 3 vol. metaphor into the application of which we can only now and

19 Howard, pp. 131-32.
then catch a glimpse."  

And, continues Howard, "the best that Bentley's Miscellany, the organ of [Melville's] own publisher, could say was that Mardi was a book 'which the reader will probably like very much or detest altogether, according to the measure of his imagination.'"  

Although Melville tried to put the best possible construction on these early reviews, it was apparent by the end of April, 1849, when Elizabeth Melville commented in a letter to her mother "there seems to be much diversity of opinion about 'Mardi'" that Melville would have to write another book and that if he wished to keep bread on his table it must be something which would please the public better than Mardi was doing. By early June he was again at work upon the first of three planned pot-boilers.  

Although the first two of these, Redburn and White Jacket, did not exactly lapse back into the reportorial prosiness of Typee and Omoo, stylistically these books are more closely of a piece with Melville's first three novels than they are with Moby-Dick. In fact, there is only one passage in anything Melville wrote before August-September, 1850, that gives the least hint of what kind of influence the experience of reading Shakespeare was to have on him. This passage, probably written in the late summer of 1849, is the description of the

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20 quoted in The Melville Log, I, 293.
21 Howard, p. 132.
fall from the yardarm in Chapter 92 of White Jacket:

Just then the ship gave another sudden jerk, and, head foremost, I pitched from the yard. I knew where I was, from the rush of the air by my ears, but all else was a nightmare. A bloody film was before my eyes, through which, ghost-like, passed and repassed my father, mother, and sisters. An unutterable nausea oppressed me. . . . Ten thousand pounds of shot seemed tied to my head, as the irresistible law of gravitation dragged me . . . toward the infallible centre of this terraqueous globe.

. . . As I gushed into the sea, a thunderboom sounded in my ear; my soul seemed flying from my mouth. The feeling of death flooded over me with the billows. The blow from the sea must have turned me, so that I sank almost feet foremost through a soft, seething, foamy lull. Some current seemed hurrying me away; in a trance I yielded, and sank deeper down with a glide. Purple and pathless was the deep calm now around me, flecked by summer lightnings in an azure afar. The horrible nausea was gone; the bloody, blind film turned a pale green; I wondered whether I was yet dead, or still dying. But of a sudden some fashionless form brushed my side--some inert, soiled [probably a misprint for "coiled" which appears in the English edition] fish of the sea; the thrill of being alive again tingled in my nerves, and the strong shunning of death shocked me through.

. . . What wild sounds then rang in my ear! One was a soft moaning, as of low waves on the beach; the other wild and heartlessly jubilant, as of the sea in the height of a tempest. Oh soul! thou then hearest life and death: as he who stands upon the Corinthian shore hears both the Ionian and the AEgean [sic] waves.22

It is hardly necessary to analyze this passage in detail or to compare it specifically with other passages from White Jacket to show its difference from anything Melville had so

far written. In it, says F. O. Matthiessen, Melville has suddenly "realized the physical sources of rhythm. . . . He has learned the way to create an experience by means of the most subtly varied movement of his prose." Melville did not actually fall overboard during his own service in the frigate United States; his source for the incident was Nathaniel Ames' A Mariner's Sketches (1830). "Yet," continues Matthiessen, "his handling of this material is Shakespearean, since, relieved of the necessity of inventing, he has been able to release all his energy to imagine the sensation as a whole." He was learning that reading is "as much a part of assimilated experience as adventures," and though he planned and actually got "half way" into another sea adventure story based on the one segment of his own experience he had not yet used in fiction (except briefly in Mardi), his months aboard the whalers Acushnet, Lucy Ann, and Charles and Henry, the catalyst was at work in his imagination. It required only the "double excitement" of discovering Hawthorne and re-reading Shakespeare in the summer of 1850 to change the romance of the sperm whale fisheries into a masterpiece.

The story of the composition of Moby-Dick is fascinating in itself, but perhaps just as fascinating, at least to the literary scholar, is the history of the literary detective

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23 Matthiessen, p. 391.  
24 Matthiessen, p. 394.  
25 Matthiessen, p. 395.  
26 Matthiessen, p. 373.
work which led to the elaboration of the now widely accepted theory about the composition of the novel, a "history of investigation," says James Barbour in the most recent article on the subject, "frequently marked by shrewd and brilliant literary scholarship." Before discussing his own version of the theory, Barbour ably summarizes the work of his predecessors:

From the time the book was revived in 1919 until 1939, it was assumed that Moby-Dick was of seriatim composition begun in February, 1850, and completed in early autumn, 1851. This assumption was first questioned by Leon Howard in a paper delivered to the MLA convention in New Orleans in 1939. On the basis of the slight evidence then available he inferred that there may have been a major revision of the novel after August, 1850, when the manuscript was described as "mostly done." This inference was later supported by the discovery of letters in which Melville described the stages of composition of the early narrative. In 1947 Charles Olson in Call Me Ishmael . . . announced, "Moby-Dick was two books written between February, 1850, and August, 1851. The first book did not contain Ahab. It may not, except incidentally, have contained Moby-Dick."

Howard P. Vincent in The Trying-Out of Moby-Dick (Boston, 1949) hypothesized a revision that began much later, in the spring of 1851, when Melville acquired Owen Chase's Narrative, his source for the sinking of the Pequod.

But the two works that were to settle matters were still to be written. Leon Howard returned to the topic in his biography Herman Melville . . . [in which] he described Melville's inspirational revision of the early whaling narrative as under the tutelage of Shakespeare and Hawthorne he began philosophically and histrionically to reshape his "whaling voyage." Finally George R. Stewart in "The Two Moby-Dicks" [American Literature, 25 (1954), 417-48] identified the point at which the revision began:

he concluded that the early chapters (1-16) were original; they were stitched by transitional chapters (17-22) to the revised narrative (23-"Epilogue").28

Although the details of this theory of the process of composition of Moby-Dick vary—Barbour, for instance, believes there were "three well defined" stages in the composition rather than two—the general outline of the hypothesis that emerges from all these studies is quite clear. This hypothesis is that Moby-Dick was begun as just another tale of high seas adventure, based on Melville's own experiences in the whaling industry (with a "little fancy" thrown in to enliven the "truth of the thing" as he wrote to Dana), and that in the summer of 1850, under the stimulus of some significant spiritual and intellectual event or events, Melville reconceived the work and rewrote it in its present form, perhaps from the beginning but certainly from about Chapter 23 on. But the exact place in the novel at which the revision began is of less importance to a study of the style of Moby-Dick than the fact that there was a revision and that most of the scholars who have investigated the subject appear to agree that the spiritual and intellectual events which caused Melville to reconceive his romance of the whaling industry in terms of symbolic tragedy were the meeting with Hawthorne and the re-reading of Shakespeare. Charles Olson, in his strange little book Call Me Ishmael (1947), was perhaps the first to make a

28Barbour, pp. 343-44.
categorical statement of this view. His evidence was the markings in Melville's edition of Shakespeare and the essay on Hawthorne which Melville wrote in late July of 1850. Through May and perhaps into June of 1850, says Olson, Melville was still trying to write a popular book for the market.

Then something happened. What, Melville tells:

I somehow cling to the strange fancy, that, in all men hiddenly reside certain wondrous, occult properties . . . which by some happy but very rare accident (as bronze was discovered by the melting of the iron and brass at the burning of Corinth) may chance to be called forth here on earth.

When? Melville is his own tell-tale: he wrote these words in July, 1850. They occur in an article he did for Duyckinck's magazine.

The subject is Hawthorne, Shakespeare and Herman Melville. . . . Within a matter of days after it was written (July 18ff.), Melville had abandoned the account of the Whale Fishery and gambled it and himself with Ahab and the White Whale.

The germinous seeds Hawthorne has dropped in Melville's July soil begin to grow . . . . Above all, in the ferment, Shakespeare, the cause. The passages on him--the manner in which he is introduced, the detail with which he is used, the intensity--tell the story of what had happened. Melville had read him again.

Though neither of them is as definite in tone as Olson, both Howard and Vincent reached similar conclusions on the basis of much the same evidence, that is, on the basis of primarily external evidence--the Hawthorne essay and the

letters Melville and his friends wrote during the summer and early autumn of 1850 in which there are references to the composition of *Moby-Dick*. But despite the undoubted value of this kind of evidence, the hypothesis derived from it was still somewhat tentative. The amount of evidence is too scanty and the references to *Moby-Dick* are too few and too vague to make it possible to establish a direct causal relationship between the events of Melville's life in the summer of 1850 and the form of the novel he finally sent to the publisher over a year later. It remained for George R. Stewart to produce by means of an analysis of the text of *Moby-Dick* itself evidence which not only confirms the theories of Olson, Howard, and Vincent, but which also supports his own detailed hypothesis showing the exact stages of composition of the novel and the nature of the revisions Melville made in it.

Whether one agrees with all the details of Stewart's theory or not, his use of one kind of internal evidence—changes in style—is particularly important to a consideration of the influence of Shakespeare on the reconception of *Moby-Dick*. In discussing various kinds of stylistic evidence which support his hypothesis that the novel was significantly rewritten after Chapter 15, Stewart quotes a passage from Chapter 16 which seems to him to be inconsistent in style, not only with the rest of that chapter, but with all of the
first part of the book, the part which Stewart believes was allowed to stand in the final manuscript essentially unrevised.

... Still, from the audacious, daring, and boundless adventure of their subsequent lives, strangely blend with these unoutgrown peculiarities, a thousand bold dashes of character, not unworthy a Scandinavian sea-king, or a poetical Pagan Roman. And when these things unite in a man of greatly superior natural force, with a globular brain and a ponderous heart; who has also by the stillness and seclusion of many long night-watches in the remotest waters, and beneath constellations never seen here at the north, been led to think untraditionally and independently; receiving all nature's sweet or savage impressions fresh from her own virgin voluntary and confiding breast, and thereby chiefly... to learn a bold and nervous lofty language—that man makes one in a whole nation's census—a mighty pageant creature, formed for noble tragedies. Nor will it at all detract from him, dramatically regarded, if either by birth or other circumstances, he have what seems a half wilful overruling morbidness at the bottom of his nature. For all men tragically great are made so through a certain morbidness. (p. ill)

Stewart sees Shakespeare as an influence in this crucial passage:

This passage is extremely important in that it brings in for the first time almost all the ideas which are seen in the character of Ahab later in the story and from which develop the special qualities of Moby-Dick. Melville seems suddenly to have realized that by having his chief character a Quaker he could justify the use of the so-called poetic language which was considered necessary for poetry in the mid-nineteenth century. ... Along with this he justifies in this passage the use of "a bold and nervous lofty language" such as would be "formed for noble tragedies." ... In other words, Melville here seems suddenly to take fire, to see his way toward the device of poetic language, to catch the conception of a great tragic character, to see a kind of tragic flaw that at the same time can exist in the character and produce the tragedy.

This passage is the first in which we feel the Shakespearean influence begin to take over. Not only
does Melville mention "tragedies," but he also
makes a comparison with "a Scandinavian sea-king,
or a poetical Pagan Roman." The most natural
assumption is that he was thinking of Hamlet in
the former instance. Certainly, the only probable
nominees for his Roman would be Brutus or some other
classic from Shakespeare's Roman plays.30

In the course of further analysis of stylistic evidence,
Stewart points out that the first part of Moby-Dick, which
shows few signs of revision, contains only three possible
Shakespearean allusions (and these seem by no means certain)
but that after Chapter 22 the Shakespearean influence is con-
tinuous and pervasive. And, of course, if Stewart had carried
his analysis of Shakespearean stylistic influence far enough,
he might have noticed in the passage about the language of
the Quakers several of the devices of Shakespearean rhetoric
Melville learned to use with such skill in the revised part
of Moby-Dick, especially the triple epithet in the phrases
"audacious, daring, and boundless adventure" and "virgin
voluntary and confiding breast."

Although James Barbour, in the article mentioned above
(see footnote 27), criticizes Stewart because "his assumptions
and methodology were too limited: he believed there was only
one seam in the book, and he ignored external evidence that
would have altered his conclusions,"31 his own conclusions,
drawn from this allegedly ignored external evidence, are not
essentially different from those of his predecessors. He
summarizes his assumptions thus:

30Stewart, p. 436. 31Barbour, p. 344.
Moby-Dick is the result of a planned composition extending through the first two stages of writing: progress on the original narrative was steady until August and then the cetology was added to it. The final stage of writing involved the revision and some eleventh-hour patchwork in joining the two narratives. The parts Melville composed during these periods can be identified (the initial chapters have been generally accepted as part of the first story) by following Melville's methodology and tracing datable sources. For example, the cetological chapters were added to the early narrative; therefore, they should lead us back to the remains of the first whaling voyage. The later revision of the book was strongly influenced by Shakespeare; therefore, the echoes and obvious borrowings from the tragedies should allow us to identify the revised portions of the novel.\(^{32}\)

Despite his assertion that "the importance of Hawthorne and Shakespeare in the revision of Moby-Dick needs no comment," Barbour agrees with the other investigators that one of the ways the revised portion of Moby-Dick can be identified and dated is by tracing the Shakespearean influence. He argues, as other critics have done, that this influence is especially noticeable in the character of Ahab:

It is Shakespeare, however, that is most evident in Melville's reshaping of Ahab: alternately Ahab plays the roles of Lear, Hamlet, Macbeth, Richard III, King Henry, and Timon; he appears in dramatically conceived scenes; his language, its rhythms and allusions underscore the pervasive influence of Shakespeare. . . . The incidence of dramatic elements in the novel (dramatic sub-titles, stage directions, and soliloquies) show that the Shakespearean influence occurs with much greater frequency in certain sections of the books [sic]. . . .

Those sections in Moby-Dick that have been associated with the original narrative--1-22 and

\(^{32}\) Barbour, p. 355.
60-92—evidence only minimal Shakespearean influence. The influence occurs in chapters 23-59 and 93-
"Epilogue," but even within these chapters certain ones demonstrate considerably stronger influence.\(^{33}\)

Barbour concludes that in the chapters in the revised narrative which are dominated by Ahab--36-42 and 106-"Epilogue"--the influence of Shakespeare is "pervasive" and "consistent."

Barbour disagrees with Olson, Howard, and Stewart about the exact stage in the composition at which these chapters showing Shakespearean influence were written, arguing that although "it is generally assumed that Melville began to revise his narrative soon after writing his review of Hawthorne's *Mosses*. . . . evidence suggests it was probably not until the next year."\(^{34}\) Whether this is so or not, the important point here is that Barbour joins these other scholars in dating the reconception and revision of *Moby-Dick* sometime after August of 1850, that is, after the publication of the essay in which Melville himself set forth his response to his second encounter with Shakespeare.

If the markings Melville made in his Hilliard and Gray in February of 1849 show something of the nature of his first excitement at this discovery of Shakespeare, the essay entitled "Hawthorne and His Mosses By a Virginian Spending July in Vermont," which he wrote in late July of 1850 and published in the August 17th and 24th numbers of *The Literary World*,

\(^{33}\)Barbour, p. 357. \(^{34}\)Barbour, p. 350.
gives an even clearer idea of what kind of mature understanding and appreciation of the plays he had come to by the time he had read Shakespeare a second time. For the emphasis on Shakespeare in the essay leaves little doubt that Melville had indeed been rereading the tragedies (and perhaps all the plays) at the same time he was immersing himself in *Mosses from an Old Manse* and meditating deeply on the almost Shakespearean "blackness" of its author. As Charles Olson says, the subject of the essay is as much Shakespeare as Hawthorne, and it is more Herman Melville than either. "It is a document of Melville's rights and perceptions, his declaration of the freedom of a man to fail,"\(^{35}\) that is, to write the sort of books he wanted to write, the "sort of books which are said to 'fail,'" as he had declared earlier that same spring. In writing about his fascination with the "blackness" he perceived Hawthorne and Shakespeare had in common, Melville revealed something of the intellectual excitement which was soon to impel him to reconceive his semi-documentary account of the whale fishery and to turn once again to the symbolic method he had "failed" with in *Mardi*.

Now it is that blackness in Hawthorne, . . . that so fixes and fascinates me. . . . This blackness it is that furnishes the infinite obscure of his background,—that background, against which Shakespeare plays his grandest conceits, the things that have made for Shakespeare his loftiest, but most

\(^{35}\) Olson, p. 38.
circumscribed renown, as the profoundest of thinkers. For by philosophers Shakespeare is not adored as the great man of tragedy and comedy. But it is those deep far-away things in him; those occasional flashings-forth of the intuitive Truth in him; those short, quick probings at the very axis of reality:—these are the things that make Shakespeare, Shakespeare. Through the mouths of the dark characters of Hamlet, Timon, Lear, and Iago, he craftily says, or sometimes insinuates the things, which we feel to be so terrifically true, that it were all but madness for any good man, in his own proper character, to utter, or even hint of them. Tormented into desperation, Lear the frantic King tears off the mask, and speaks the same madness of vital truth. In Shakespeare's tomb lies infinitely more than Shakespeare ever wrote. For in this world of lies, Truth is forced to fly like a scared white doe in the woodlands; and only by cunning glimpses will she reveal herself, as in Shakespeare and other masters of the great Art of Telling the Truth,—even though it be covertly, and by snatches.36

Olson is surely right in what he says about this passage and the essay of which it is the heart:

The Mosses piece is a deep and lovely thing. The spirit is asweep, as in the book to come. The confusion of May is gone. Melville is charged again. Moby-Dick is already shadowed in the excitement over genius, and America as a subject for genius. You can feel Ahab in the making, Ahab of "the globular brain and ponderous heart," so much does Melville concern himself with the distinction between the head and the heart in Hawthorne and Shakespeare. You can see the prose stepping off.37

Although Olson's impressionistic style occasionally tends to obscure the soundness of his reasoning, he has, nevertheless,


37 Olson, pp. 38-39.
here put his finger on the significance of the Hawthorne essay and of the passage in it on Shakespeare to Melville's sudden change of direction in *Moby-Dick*. For the passage shows that Melville had suddenly realized, perhaps with the force of the "shock of recognition" he speaks of elsewhere in the essay, that if an author has things to say which are "so terrifically true" that he cannot "utter, or even hint of them" in "his own proper character," then he must employ for his purpose, not a documentary, but a dramatic and symbolic method. If he would speak the "sane madness of vital truth," he must speak through the mouth of a "dark" character who can become an emblem of the very truth he speaks and not merely through the mouth of an observer-narrator. If he would probe the "very axis of reality," he must do so as an allegorist and a dramatist rather than as a philosopher or a reporter, revealing the truth by "cunning glimpses," "covertly, and by snatches" rather than telling it plainly and straight out. It is this sudden insight into the significance of form which their works gave him that made Shakespeare and Hawthorne so important to Melville. Although the "blackness" which so fascinated him in both the plays and the tales may have contributed to, or at least confirmed, the nature of the truth he had to tell, it was their dramatic and symbolic method that made all the difference for the creation of *Moby-Dick*. 
Between them, Shakespeare and Hawthorne accomplished Melville's final initiation into the deepest secrets of "the great Art of Telling the Truth."

If Herman Melville had never written Moby-Dick, or if he had merely finished it, as he began it, as "a romance of adventure, founded upon certain wild legends in the Southern Sperm Whale Fisheries, and illustrated by the author's own personal experience, of two years & more, as a harpooneer," all these facts about his reading of Shakespeare and all the documents recording the facts—the marked Shakespeare volumes, the letters to Duyckinck, Dana, Bentley and Hawthorne and their letters to Melville and others about Melville's work, the essay on Hawthorne—would be merely interesting sidelights on literary history, of little use to any but the most pedestrian literary biographers. The facts of an author's life, even the facts of his intellectual life, are of importance and interest to a literary critic only so far as they illuminate the works of literature which he produced, and there would be little need for a detailed understanding of Melville's encounter with Shakespeare if the book which in the beginning "did not contain Ahab" and "may not, except incidentally, have contained Moby-Dick" had remained nothing

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39 Olson, p. 35.
more than a fictionalized account of an actual whaling voyage. But, of course, that is not what it remained at all. After August, 1850,—that is, after Melville had undoubtedly been rereading Shakespeare and meditating deeply upon the "intuitive Truth" in him—a profound change occurred not only in the content but also in the form of *Moby-Dick*. As we have seen, what external evidence is available strongly supports the inference that the direct and immediate cause for Melville's reconception of the novel was the double excitement of his discovery of Hawthorne and his rereading of Shakespeare. But the exact nature of this reconception and the specific effects which the reading of Shakespeare's plays had on the structure and language of the revised story can only be deduced from an examination of *Moby-Dick* itself. To make such an examination is the purpose of the remainder of this study.
CHAPTER III

DRAMATIC STRUCTURE

Profound as the influence of Shakespeare's creative processes was on Melville's art in *Moby-Dick*, he seems never to have attempted to write a play. This was not altogether because he may have realized that his genius was not suited to the task. "Melville," says Newton Arvin, "would have written badly for the stage, whenever he had lived. His imagination was profoundly nondramatic." But an even more important reason may have been a critical bias, which Melville shared with many of his contemporaries, that considered the real depths of Shakespeare's thought impossible of expression on the "tricky stage." In fact, Melville went so far as to imply that he wished Shakespeare himself had written in some other form!

In March of 1849, shortly after he had finished his first thorough reading of the plays, Melville wrote to Duyckinck: "--I would to God Shakspeare had lived later, & Promenaded in Broadway. Not that I might have had the pleasure of leaving my card for him at the Astor, or made merry with him over a bowl of the fine Duyckinck punch; but that the muzzle which

\[1\] Arvin, p. 155.
all men wore on their souls in the Elizabethan day, might not have intercepted Shakspers full articulations. For I hold it a verity, that even Shakspeare, was not a frank man to the uttermost.\textsuperscript{2} And, in the essay on Hawthorne, written after his second reading of Shakespeare, he expresses even more plainly his feeling that the plays are an inadequate medium for "probing" the "intuitive Truth" in Shakespeare, the "profoundest of thinkers":

For by philosophers Shakespeare is not adored as the great man of tragedy and comedy.\textquoteleft\textquoteright Off with his head! so much for Buckingham!\textquoteleft\textquoteright this sort of rant, . . . brings down the house,\textquoteright those mistaken souls, who dream of Shakespeare as a mere man of Richard-the-Third humps, and Macbeth daggers. . . . It is the least part of genius that attracts admiration. And so, much of the blind, unbridled admiration that has been heaped upon Shakespeare, has been lavished upon the least part of him. And few of his endless commentators and critics seem to have remembered, or even perceived, that the immediate products of a great mind are not so great, as that undeveloped, (and sometimes undevelopable) yet dimly-discernible greatness, to which these immediate products are but the infallible indices. In Shakespeare's tomb lies infinitely more than Shakespeare ever wrote. And if I magnify Shakespeare, it is not so much for what he did do, as for what he did not do, or refrained from doing. . . .

But if this view of the all-popular Shakespeare be seldom taken by his readers, and if very few who extol him, have ever read him deeply, or, perhaps, only have seen him on the tricky stage, (which alone made, and is still making him his mere mob renown)-- if few men have time, or patience, or palate, for the spiritual truth as it is in that great genius;-- it is, then, no matter of surprise that . . . Nathaniel Hawthorne is a man, as yet, almost utterly mistaken among men.\textsuperscript{3}

\textsuperscript{2}Letter 55, \textit{Letters}, pp. 79-80.

\textsuperscript{3}"Hawthorne and His Mosses," pp. 541-42.
It is, Melville continues, exactly because Hawthorne "refrains from all the popularizing noise and show of broad farce, and blood-besmeared tragedy" and is "content with the still, rich utterances of a great intellect in repose" that Melville dares to suggest that in Hawthorne's tales "Shakespeare has been approached." As a thinker and as a truth-teller, Hawthorne may have "gone as far as Shakespeare into the universe," and it is by reason of this similarity in the character and depth of their thought that "the difference between the two men is by no means immeasurable." Quite obviously, Melville was a product of his age in admiring Shakespeare as a thinker, as a philosopher-poet, rather than as a master of dramatic form.

Charles Olson argues that Melville's wish that Shakespeare had been a philosopher instead of a dramatist "uncovers a flaw in himself," that "as an artist Melville chafed at representation" and that he had to "fight himself to give truth dramatic location"; but another section of the Mosses essay shows that Melville's attitude toward Shakespearean drama was not due entirely to biased personal taste. He realized that Jacobean tragedy was not a viable art form in mid-nineteenth century America, and he recognized the dangers which rampant "bardolatry" posed for writers like Hawthorne and himself who were trying to create a native literature.

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4 Olson, pp. 42-43.
out of the unique materials of the American experience.

This absolute and unconditional adoration of Shakespeare has grown to be a part of our Anglo Saxon superstitions. The Thirty-Nine Articles are now Forty. Intolerance has come to exist in this matter. You must believe in Shakespeare's unapproachability, or quit the country. But what sort of a belief is this for an American, a man who is bound to carry republican progressiveness into Literature, as well as into Life? Believe me, my friends, that men not very much inferior to Shakespeare, are this day being born on the banks of the Ohio. And the day will come, when you shall say who reads a book by an Englishman that is a modern? The great mistake seems to be, that even with those Americans who look forward to the coming of a great literary genius among us, they somehow fancy he will come in the costume of Queen Elizabeth's day,—be a writer of dramas founded upon old English history, or the tales of Boccaccio. Whereas, great geniuses are parts of the times; they themselves are the times; and possess a correspondent coloring.5

After such a declaration of American literary independence and particularly after so much deprecation of what Olson calls "Shakespeare's dramatic significance," it is perhaps little short of amazing that the forms of Shakespearean tragedy have so deeply affected the structure of Moby-Dick. But Melville would not be the first writer whose critical statements were sometimes at odds with his artistic practice, and the structure of Moby-Dick is in itself, as Newton Arvin points out, a "series of paradoxes":

Few books of its dimensions have owed so much to books that have preceded them, and few have owed so little; not many imaginative works have so strong and strict a unity, and not many are composed of such various and even discordant materials; few

5"Hawthorne and His Mosses," p. 543.
great novels have been comparably concrete, factual, and prosaic, and few . . . have been so large and comprehensive in their generality, so poetic both in their surface fabric and in their central nature. In form alone Moby Dick is unique in its period. . . .

A book such as Moby-Dick, Arvin continues, could have been written only by an American of Melville's generation, working, as Melville did, in a sort of "isolation" from the characteristic mode of the English or European novel of his time—that is, the social novel or novel of manners, the novel of "real life." Melville "belonged to a society that was in some of its aspects too archaic to find a natural place for forms so advanced as these, and his own origins . . . were partly in oral story-telling, the story-telling of sailors and travelers, and partly in forms that were either subliterary or at the best on a modestly and hesitantly literary level." His first books had been "reportorial travel books," and, as the history of the composition of Moby-Dick show, he first conceived of his "romance of the southern sperm whale fisheries" as little more than another such travel-adventure "narrative." But when he reconceived the work under the stimulus of his rereading of Shakespeare in the summer of 1850, he was suddenly faced with a new and complex structural problem. This problem was, as Arvin describes it,

6 Arvin, p. 151. 7 Arvin, p. 152.
to take the small, prosy, and terribly circumscripted form he had inherited, and somehow make it a vehicle capable of bearing a great imaginative weight, of expressing a great visionary theme. His problem was to find the bridge between J. Ross Browne [Etchings of a Whaling Cruise] and Camoens. He had quite failed to find it in Mardi; he had run away from his true matter in pursuit of an allegorical will-o'-the wisp, and the result had been fiasco. A better wisdom had come to him in consequence; a better sense of his own right path. His own right path was . . . to remain faithful to his own crass, coarse, unideal, and yet grandiose material—the life of American whalers—and to make of its unpromising images his symbols, of its hardly malleable substance his myth.®

Melville solved this structural problem, in part at least, "by resorting, at one point or another, to traditional styles that had no association in anyone's mind with the Novel." The most pervasive and readily identifiable of these traditional styles in Moby-Dick is the dramatic form he had learned from his reading of Shakespeare. When Melville reconceived his story and his central character, he seems to have done so in essentially dramatic terms, and as a result, he wove into the basic narrative fabric of his novel a large number of Shakespearean dramatic devices, some used consciously and to some extent imitatively, but by far the greater number subconsciously transmuted by his own imagination into organic patterns of the structural unity of Moby-Dick.

The most obvious of these dramatic devices is the use in a number of chapters of playscript form. Chapters 26 and 27,

®Arvin, p. 152. 9Arvin, p. 154.
titled "Knights and Squires" (which may be an allusion to the "hundred knights and squires" of King Lear) and Chapter 28, titled simply "Ahab," present a list of *dramatis personae*; Chapters 29, "Enter Ahab; to him, Stubb," 36, "The Quarter-deck," and 119, "The Candles," blend narrative with script-like setting and stage directions, and Chapters 40 and 108 are in almost pure playscript form with stage directions and speaker tags taking the place of narration. A number of chapters--37-39 and 120-122--begin with stage directions (of which the title of the chapter is sometimes a part) setting the time and place of the scene and then present either one character in soliloquy (Chapters 37-39 and 122) or two characters in dialogue (Chapters 120, 121, and 129).

The placement of two groups of these script-like chapters, Chapters 37-40 and 120-122, is structurally significant, for each group comes directly after an intense, dramatic scene which forms a kind of climax for its particular portion of the story. Chapters 37-40--"Sunset," "Dusk," "First Night Watch," and "Midnight, Forecastle"--immediately follow Ahab's challenge to the crew and the swearing of the oath "--Death to Moby Dick!" in "The Quarter-Deck," a scene which brings to a close the first section of the novel and introduces the conflict which will lead to the final catastrophe. Chapters 120-122--"The Deck Towards the End of the First Night Watch," "Midnight--the Forecastle Bulwarks," "Midnight Aloft--Thunder and Lightning"--come after Ahab's defiance of the lightning
and the typhoon in "The Candles," a chapter which forms a sort of "fourth act" climax since Ahab's refusal to heed Starbuck's plea to turn the typhoon into a fair wind and head for the Cape of Good Hope and home makes the last fatal confrontation with Moby Dick inevitable.

These chapters achieve an objectivity, immediacy, and variety of tone and point of view unfortunately lacking in Melville's earlier books. While some critics have objected to these passages in dramatic form because some of them, in themselves, are not very well done, other scholars have praised them because of the overall effect they have on the novel. "The book as a whole gains something vital from these chapters, including the weaker ones," says Newton Arvin. "It gains as a musical composition does by shifts of rhythm and modulations of key: the total structure is by so much the more various, complex, and irregular as a result, and the threatening monotony of movement . . . is forestalled. Moreover, the peculiar immediacy that the dramatic style always produces is achieved."10

The importance of these dramatic chapters to the significant form of Moby-Dick goes far beyond immediacy and variety of tone. A number of these scenes appear to have been borrowed from, or at least suggested by, scenes in Shakespeare; consequently, the thematic relationship which the perceptive reader

10Arvin, p. 155.
sees between a passage in *Moby-Dick* and a passage in Shakespeare enables Melville's scene to function as an allusion. Perhaps the most successful of such scenes is Chapter 108, "Ahab and the Carpenter: The Deck--First Night Watch," which, besides employing dramatic devices of stage business, soliloquy, and dialogue, is a sort of replay of the gravedigger scene in *Hamlet*. Since the two scenes are thematically and structurally related, on one level the echoes of *Hamlet* function in *Moby-Dick* as does any allusion, but the dramatic form in which the chapter is written serves to reinforce the reader's response and therefore adds yet another level of meaning. It may be instructive to analyze this chapter in some detail and to compare it with its parent scene in *Hamlet* in order to show how skillfully Melville was able to use Shakespearean dramatic techniques without ever giving the impression that he was deliberately imitating the dramatist or directly borrowing from the plays.

The gravedigger scene in *Hamlet* comes at the beginning of Act V, just after Ophelia's death has been poignantly described by Gertrude and when the plot which will shortly bring about Hamlet's death has already been concerted between Claudius and Laertes. Therefore, the themes of death and of the shortness of human life and the fleetingness of earthly glory are partially supported by the scene's placement in the overall structure of the play. Alfred Harbage calls the
scene a "visual and verbal 'memento mori'... appropriate in a play whose protagonist is so consistently preoccupied with death that he is often emblematized as a black-clad figure with skull in hand," but, he argues, the episode, "however macabre, does not strike us as morbid; in fact it has a curious vitality, like the medieval representations of the 'dance of death.'"

Harbage suggests that the First Gravedigger is a foil to Hamlet because, being a "humorist," he serves as a sort of sounding board—or as a present-day comedian might say, a "straight man"—for the prince, who is "the 'humorist' in chief" of the play. But Hamlet is also a "humorist" in another sense, for, as he is presumably mad, he is suffering from a disproportion in his complexio or temperamentum of one of the four "Humors." In fact, he has become the classic example of the melancholy man, the man in whom the elements "cold" and "dry" have overwhelmed the other humors. However, the First Gravedigger, who sings at the work of grave-making and who has a "sturdy imperviousness to death," is a


12 Harbage, p. 335.

13 C. S. Lewis, in The Discarded Image (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1964), p. 172, chooses Hamlet to illustrate his definition of the "Melancholy Complexion" and reminds us that Hamlet "diagnoses himself as melancholy."

14 Harbage, p. 336.
man of a much different temperament. He is, in fact, an example of the "sanguine" personality in which the elements "hot" and "moist" combine to produce a man who sleeps well, who has pleasant dreams, and who is generally "merry."\textsuperscript{15} His predominant humor is, therefore, the exact opposite of Hamlet's.

But the gravedigger also serves as a foil to Hamlet in another and more important way. Although the minds of the two are "not unlike in their workings,"\textsuperscript{16} since both enjoy speaking in paradox, the gravedigger is, nevertheless, a man who thinks in unimaginative, factual, and almost completely literal terms. He has so little inclination to generalize that even his answer to his own riddle—that a grave-maker builds "stronger than a mason, a shipwright, or a carpenter" (V.i.38-39) because "the houses he makes last till doomsday" (1. 56)—seems hardly more to him than a statement of fact. His literal-mindedness exasperates Hamlet, who, of course, does not think in this way at all. "How absolute the knave is!" he exclaims. "We must speak by the card, or equivocation will undo us" (V.i.128-29). Hamlet's way is to look beyond specific instances to universal principles. Whereas to the gravedigger Yorick's skull is nothing more than the remains of a person he has once known—a "whoreson mad fellow" (1. 164) who "poured a flagon of Rhenish on my head once" (11. 167-68)—to Hamlet, in whose imagination the skull, just in itself, is

\textsuperscript{15}Lewis, p. 171. \textsuperscript{16}Harbage, p. 336.
"abhorred," it is less a reminder of one particular man than a reminder that "to this favor" all men, including men like Alexander and Caesar, must eventually come. This basic contrast in their habits of thought, the contrast between the gravedigger's "sturdy imperviousness to death, and Hamlet's intellectual vigor in expatiating upon it," not only makes clear the gravedigger's function as a foil for Hamlet, but also provides the internal structure of the scene, which, as the clown and the prince exchange questions and answers, develops a kind of contrapuntal rhythm.

Although the differences in context, setting, and subject matter between the gravemaking scene from Hamlet and Chapter 108 of Moby-Dick are naturally great, the two scenes are, nevertheless, surprisingly similar in structure. That Melville was thinking of Hamlet when he wrote the chapter and intended for his readers to do the same when they read it is made explicit by a verbal echo of the play which occurs about halfway through the chapter. When the carpenter replies to Ahab's inquiry, as to why he is constantly sneezing, with "Bone is rather dusty, sir," Ahab advises him to "take the hint, then; and when thou art dead, never bury thyself under living people's noses" (p. 599), a phrase which is a variation on Hamlet's "hint" to those who are searching for the body of Polonius: "But if indeed you find him not within this month,

17Harbage, p. 336.
you shall nose him as you go up the stairs into the lobby" (IV.iii.35-36). This "hint" to the reader that he should see in Melville's scene an allusion to a scene in Hamlet and should see the carpenter as Melville's version of the First Gravedigger is made even broader some pages later when, finding him turning the coffin he had recently made for Queequeg into a life-buoy, Ahab specifically compares the carpenter to "the grave-digger in the play" who "sings, spade in hand" (p. 665). Since the carpenter not only makes legs but "the next day" makes "coffins to clap them in" (p. 665), he is, as Ahab says, an "undertaker," and so is as close to being a gravedigger as is possible aboard a ship in mid-ocean.

But the similarity between Melville's carpenter and Shakespeare's gravedigger goes beyond this likeness in their occupations. Their characters and personalities are alike as well. Although the Pequod's carpenter is perhaps not so "thumpingly clever" as the "grave-digger in the play," he is, as Ishmael is at pains to tell us, not altogether without "wittiness," and he is like the gravedigger in having a kind of unimaginative literalness about him, a "half-horrible stolidity" (p. 595) which makes him, like his counterpart in Hamlet, "unawed by the living or the dead, patronizingly knowledgeable in speaking of his own craft, and durable as the tanner's skin."^18

^18 Harbage, p. 336.  
^19 Harbage, p. 336.
Thus, this carpenter was prepared at all points, and alike indifferent and without respect in all. Teeth he accounted bits of ivory; heads he deemed but top-blocks; men themselves he lightly held for capstans. But while now upon so wide a field thus variously accomplished, and with such liveliness of expertness in him, too; all this would seem to argue some uncommon vivacity of intelligence. But not precisely so. For nothing was this man more remarkable, than for a certain impersonal stolidity as it were; impersonal, I say; for it so shaded off into the surrounding infinite of things that it seemed one with the general stolidity discernible in the whole visible world; which while pauselessly active in uncounted modes, still eternally holds its peace, and ignores you, though you dig foundations for cathedrals. Yet was this half-horrible stolidity in him . . . oddly dashed at times, with an old, crutch-like, antediluvian, wheezing humorousness, not unstreaked now and then with a certain grizzled wittiness; such as might have served to pass the time during the midnight watch on the bearded forecastle of Noah's ark. . . . You might almost say, that this strange uncompromisedness in him involved a sort of unintelligence; for in his numerous trades, he did not seem to work so much by reason or by instinct . . . [as] by a kind of deaf and dumb, spontaneous literal process. (pp. 595-596)

If the carpenter does not exactly sing at his work, as does the gravedigger, he does something which is only one step removed from it--he constantly talks to himself. He is "a great part of the time soliloquizing; but only like an unreasoning wheel, which also hummingly soliloquizes; or rather, his body was a sentry-box and this soliloquizer on guard there, and talking all the time to keep himself awake" (p. 596).

Having introduced the carpenter in this brief sketch in Chapter 107, Melville thereafter allows his character to develop dramatically, and most of the chapters in which he appears are written solely or partially in dramatic rather
than in narrative form. This technique allowed Melville to use in Chapter 108 not only the general outline, structure, and themes of the gravedigger scene from *Hamlet*, but also to establish the relationship of the two main characters as foils. It is this central contrast—between the "stolid," unimaginative, literal-minded artisan and the half-mad, monomaniacal, philosopher-captain—which provides in Melville, as in Shakespeare, the structural and thematic unity of the scene.

There is no narration in Chapter 108. Even the title, "Ahab and the Carpenter. The Deck--First Night Watch," is a part of the stage directions, printed in italics, and enclosed in parentheses, with which the chapter begins. These directions show us the carpenter at his vice-bench and "by the light of two lanterns busily filing the ivory joist" (p. 597) for a new whalebone leg for Ahab, whose previous one has been damaged. "Slabs of ivory, leather straps, pads, screws, and various tools of all sorts [are] lying about the bench. Forward, the red flame of the forge is seen, where the black-smith is at work" (p. 597). As he works at filing the bone, the carpenter "hummingly soliloquizes":

Drat the file, and drat the bone! That is hard which should be soft, and that is soft which should be hard. So we go, who file old jaws and shinbones. Let's try another. Aye, now, this works better (sneezes). Halloa, this bone dust is (sneezes)—why it's (sneezes)—yes, it's (sneezes)—bless my soul, it won't let me speak! This is what an old fellow gets now for working in dead lumber. Saw a live tree, and you don't get this dust; amputate a live bone, and you don't get it
(sneezes). . . . Lucky now (sneezes) there's no knee-joint to make; that might puzzle a little; but a mere shinbone--why it's easy as making hoppoles; only I should like to put a good finish on. Time, time; if I but only had the time, I could turn him out as neat a leg now as ever (sneezes) scraped to a lady in a parlor. Those buckskin legs and calves of legs I've seen in shop windows wouldn't compare at all. They soak water, they do; and of course get rheumatic, and have to be doctored (sneezes) with washes and lotions, just like live legs. (pp. 597-98)

It is apparent from this speech that the carpenter, like his counterpart the gravedigger, enjoys a paradox--"that is hard which should be soft, and that is soft which should be hard"--and recognizes an irony almost as readily as Hamlet does--"Saw a live tree, and you don't get this dust; amputate a live bone, and you don't get it (sneezes). . . . Those buckskin legs and calves of legs I've seen in shop windows . . . soak water, they do; and of course get rheumatic, and have to be doctored . . . just like live legs."

This contrast, introduced by the carpenter's half-humorous soliloquy, between artificial legs and live ones, between "live bone" and "dead lumber" becomes the central theme of the chapter when, a little later in the scene, Ahab, himself something of a dealer in paradox, takes up the carpenter's line of thought and comments on the odd fact that "when I come to mount this leg thou makest, I shall nevertheless feel

20The alert reader will recognize this phrase as an echo of the gravedigger's line: "your water is a sore decayer of your whoreson dead body" (V.i.160-61).
another leg in the same identical place with it; that is, carpenter, my old lost leg; the flesh and blood one, I mean. Canst thou not drive that old Adam away?" (p. 600).

The carpenter, in his literal and unimaginative way, does not realize that Ahab is speaking metaphorically, and the ensuing exchange points up the contrasting modes of thought of the two men, the carpenter thinking and speaking only of the physical and Ahab of the metaphysical.

Truly, sir, I begin to understand somewhat now. Yes, I have heard something curious on that score, sir; how that a dismasted man never entirely loses the feeling of his old spar, but it will be still pricking him at times. May I humbly ask if it be really so, sir?

It is, man. Look, put thy live leg here in the place where mine once was; so, now, here is only one distinct leg to the eye, yet two to the soul. Where thou feelpest tingling life; there, exactly there, there to a hair, do I. Is't a riddle?

I should humbly call it a poser, sir.

Hist, then. How dost thou know that some entire, living, thinking thing may not be invisibly and un-interpenetratingly standing precisely where thou now standest; aye, and standing there in thy spite? In thy most solitary hours, then, dost thou not fear eavesdroppers? Hold, don't speak! And if I still feel the smart of my crushed leg, though it be now so long dissolved; then, why mayst not thou, carpenter, feel the fiery pains of hell for ever, and without a body? Hah!

Good Lord! Truly, sir, if it comes to that, I must calculate over again; I think I didn't carry a small figure, sir.

Look ye, pudding-heads should never grant premises.--How long before the leg is done? (p. 600)

Fully as exasperated with the carpenter's literalness as Hamlet is with the gravedigger's, Ahab leaves the workman to
"bungle away at it" (p. 601) and turns to go, but, like Hamlet, he makes some concluding generalizations:

Oh, Life! Here I am, proud as Greek god, and yet standing debtor to this blockhead for a bone to stand on! Cursed be that mortal inter-indebtedness which will not do away with ledgers. I would be free as air; and I'm down in the whole world's books. I am so rich, I could have given bid for bid with the wealthiest Praetorians at the auction of the Roman empire (which was the world's); and yet I owe for the flesh in the tongue I brag with. By heavens! I'll get a crucible, and into it, and dissolve myself down to one small, compendious vertebra. So. (p. 601)

The reference to a Greek god and the image of the crucible serve to remind the reader of another theme introduced by Ahab earlier in the scene. This is the theme of fire, and though it is a secondary theme in Chapter 108, it is a major one associated with Ahab elsewhere in the book. If Hamlet is obsessed with death, Ahab is obsessed with fire, particularly with fire worship and the fires of hell, and seeing Perth, the blacksmith, working at his forge beyond the carpenter's bench, the captain launches into a discourse on the myth of Prometheus in which he not only argues the probability of hell, but suggests a formula by which Prometheus' creation--man--might be improved upon:

What's Prometheus about there?--the blacksmith, I mean--what's he about?
He must be forging the buckle-screw, sir, now.
Right, It's a partnership; he supplies the muscle part. He makes a fierce red flame there!
Aye, sir; he must have the white heat for this kind of fine work.
Um-m. So he must. I do deem it now a most meaning thing, that that old Greek, Prometheus, who made men, they say, should have been a blacksmith, and animated them with fire; for what's made in fire
must properly belong to fire; and so hell's probable.
How the soot flies! This must be the remainder the
Greek made the Africans of. Carpenter, when he's
through with that buckle, tell him to forge a pair
of steel shoulder-blades; there's a pedlar aboard
with a crushing pack.

Sir?
Hold; while Prometheus is about it, I'll order
a complete man after a desirable pattern. Imprimis,
fifty feet high in his socks; then, chest modelled
after the Thames Tunnel; then, legs with roots to
'em, to stay in one place; then, arms three feet
through the wrist; no heart at all, brass forehead,
and about a quarter of an acre of fine brains--and
let me see--shall I order eyes to see outwards? No,
but put a sky-light on top of his head to illuminate
inwards. There, take the order, and away.

Now, what's he speaking about, and who's he
speaking to, I should like to know? Shall I keep
standing here? (aside)
'Tis but indifferent architecture to make a
blind dome; here's one. No, no, no; I must have a
lantern. (pp. 598-99)

Since Ahab's metaphysical speculations are incomprehensible
to the carpenter, when Ahab says he "must have a lantern" to
illuminate the head of his imaginary man made "after a
desirable pattern," the carpenter takes him literally and
attempts to hand him a real lantern from the workbench. The
resulting misunderstanding creates a half-comic interlude
which forms a kind of bridge linking the first part of the
chapter with the second:

Ho, ho! That's it, hey? Here are two sir;
one will serve my turn.

What art thou thrusting that thief-catcher
into my face for, man? Thrusted light is worse
than presented pistols.
I thought, sir, that you spoke to carpenter.
Carpenter? why that's--but no;--a very tidy,
and I may say, an extremely gentlemanlike sort of
business thou are in here, carpenter;—or would'st thou rather work in clay?
   Sir?—Clay? clay, sir? That's mud; we leave clay to ditchers, sir.
   The fellow's impious! What art thou sneezing about?
   Bone is rather dusty, sir.
   Take the hint, then; and when thou art dead, never bury thyself under living people's noses.
   Sir?—oh! ah!—I guess so; so;—yes—oh, dear!

(p. 599)

In Hamlet, the prince's "concluding generalizations in rime effect a transition from the prose of the grave-making scene to the blank verse of its fantastic sequel." This sequel is the confrontation between Hamlet and Laertes in Ophelia's grave, and, according to Harbage, "there can be little doubt that this outburst of Hamlet, who will admit no rivals in his all-compassing grief, . . . is an authentic lapse in rationality. . . ." Therefore, Hamlet's "madness," which had been the subject of a joke in the exchange with the gravedigger earlier in the scene, becomes suddenly vividly and frighteningly real not only to the characters in the drama but to the audience as well. In Moby-Dick also we are not long allowed to forget that the major character is mad, for the carpenter comments on Ahab's madness in the first part of the soliloquy which concludes Chapter 108.

CARPENTER (resuming his work)

Well, well, well! Stubb knows him best of all, and Stubb always says he's queer; says nothing but that one sufficient little word queer; he's

queer, says Stubb; he's queer--queer; and keeps
dinning it into Mr. Starbuck all the time--queer,
sir--queer, queer, very queer. (p. 601)

As proof of Ahab's queerness, the carpenter points to the
whalebone leg he is making and to the captain's strange
behavior and mysterious way of talking:

And here's his leg! Yes, now that I think of it,
here's his bedfellow! has a stick of whale's jaw-
bone for a wife! And this is his leg; he'll stand
on this. What was that now about one leg standing
in three places, and all three places standing in
one hell--how was that? Oh! I don't wonder he
looked so scornful at me! I'm a sort of strange-
thoughted sometimes, they say; but that's only
haphazard-like. Then, a short, little old body
like me should never undertake to wade out into
deep waters with tall, heron-built captains; the
water chucks you under the chin pretty quick, and
there's a great cry for life-boats. And here's
the heron's leg! long and slim, sure enough! Now, for
most folks one pair of legs lasts a lifetime, and
that must be because they use them mercifully . . .
But Ahab; oh he's a hard driver. Look, driven one
leg to death, and spavined the other for life, and
now wears out bone legs by the cord. Halloa, there,
you Smut! bear a hand there with those screws, and
let's finish it before the resurrection fellow comes
a-calling with his horn for all legs, true or false,
as brewery-men go round collecting old beer barrels,
to fill 'em up again. What a leg this is! It
looks like a real live leg, filed down to nothing
but the core; he'll be standing on this to-morrow;
he'll be taking altitudes on it. (pp. 601-02)

Critics who object to the dramatic chapters in Moby-Dick
because some of them "just in themselves, are far from being
very successful in execution" should perhaps except

23 Another possible verbal echo of Hamlet; reminiscent of
Hamlet's remark that the dust of Alexander might be used to
"stop a beer barrel" (V.i.199).

24 Arvin, p. 155.
Chapter 108 from such a negative judgment, for this chapter demonstrates how thoroughly Melville had absorbed and assimilated the dramatic techniques he had learned from his reading of Shakespeare. First of all, it is almost perfectly unified structurally and thematically. It has a completely symmetrical ABCBA structure, with the carpenter's opening and closing soliloquies being "A," the two metaphysical dialogues between Ahab and the carpenter being "B," and the comic interlude concerning the lantern and the carpenter's sneezing forming the bridge "C." Its themes grow naturally out of the dramatic situation and are supported by appropriate visual symbols--the blacksmith's forge and the piece of whale's jawbone out of which the carpenter is making Ahab's leg--just as Yorick's skull is an emblem of the theme of death in the grave-digging scene in Hamlet. And because these themes and their supporting symbols are major themes and symbols of Moby-Dick, Chapter 108 not only has internal unity, but it is organically related to the rest of the novel as well. It is, in short, a self-contained unit (a kind of one-act play) and a part of the larger structure of the book as a whole.

Although none is so fully developed as is Chapter 108, there are a number of other scenes in Moby-Dick which are borrowed from or at least suggested by Shakespeare: the swearing of the oath on the crossed lances in "The Quarter-deck" and the address to the whale's head in "The Sphinx" borrowed from Hamlet; the storm scenes, the defiance of the
gods, and the scenes between Ahab and Pip from *King Lear*; and the giving of Fedallah's threefold prophesy in "The Whale Watch" almost certainly from *Macbeth*. Like Chapter 108, these borrowed scenes are integrated both thematically and structurally into the novel, and the dramatic form in which many of them are cast serves to emphasize their function as allusions.

As Chapter 108 demonstrates, the use of playscript form in part of *Moby-Dick* provided Melville with the opportunity to employ another convention of Shakespearean drama, the soliloquy. This device is particularly convenient for the presentation of Ahab. Isolated by his monomania from normal human intercourse, Ahab communes mostly with himself, and the dramatic soliloquy makes it possible for the reader to learn more about the inner agonies and compulsions of the captain than Ishmael is able to reveal, even in his expanded role of omniscient narrator.

In his mature plays Shakespeare uses the soliloquy with great versatility. Many of the speeches delivered by a character when he is alone on the stage are addressed directly to the audience and are therefore more in the nature of monologues. Some of these monologues are partly choral in function, serving to give the audience necessary pieces of information about the plot, about the off-stage action, or about the character and motivation of the speaker himself. Since the speaker is conscious of having hearers, he may
adjust his revelations accordingly, and the audience may have to be cautious in its interpretation of such monologues. But in the true soliloquy, the character is not addressing the audience but is merely speaking his thoughts aloud. "It is interesting to note," says Alfred Harbage, "that such soliloquies are not given to characters who otherwise appear incapable of introspection. These true soliloquies are the most revealing, if not precisely of what the character is truly like, at least of what he truly supposes he is like." In the true soliloquy the character is presented as if he were involved in a process of thought, sometimes in mere general reflection, as in Hamlet's musings on suicide, "but more often in passages which reveal also the movements of his mind, his perplexities and resolutions. At times this revelation is so subtle that Shakespeare shows not only [the character's] mind working, but even the subconscious thought beneath." Hamlet's soliloquy in Act III when, on the way to his mother's room, he comes upon Claudius praying, illustrates just such a process of thought:

Now might I do it pat, now 'a is a-praying,  
And now I'll do't. And so 'a goes to heaven,  
And so am I revenged. That would be scanned.  
A villain kills my father, and for that I, his sole son, do this same villain send  
To heaven.

25Harbage, pp. 82-83.

Why, this is hire and salary, not revenge.
'A took my father grossly, full of bread,
With all his crimes broad blown, as flush as May;
And how his audit stands, who knows save heaven?
But in our circumstance and course of thought
'Tis heavy with him; and am I then revenged,
To take him in the purging of his soul,
When he is fit and seasoned for his passage?
No.
Up, sword, and know thou a more horrid hent.

(III.iii.73-88)

In *Moby-Dick* it is the true soliloquy that Melville takes over from Shakespeare and uses with great variety and subtlety of effect. The narrative form of the novel relieves him of the need for the expository soliloquy, although some of Ishmael's semi-narrative meditations, as in "The Whiteness of the Whale," take on something of the character of dramatic monologues. But the self-revealing soliloquy and the process-of-thought soliloquy are used in a great variety of ways, primarily by the two most introspective characters in the book, Ahab and Starbuck.

One of the first of Ahab's soliloquies occurs in the first chapter which is written entirely in playscript form. Chapter 37, "Sunset," begins with stage directions in italics, which show us Ahab sitting alone in his cabin at sunset musing on his actions and motives in the wild, pagan ritual of the quarter-deck scene which has just ended. In the soliloquy which composes the chapter, we learn, for the first time, something of Ahab's inner self.

I leave a white and turbid wake; pale waters,
paler cheeks, where'er I sail. The envious billows
sidelong swell to whelm my track; let them; but first I pass.

Yonder, by the ever-brimming goblet's rim, the warm waves blush like wine. The gold brow plumbs the blue. The diver sun--slow dived from noon,--goes down; my soul mounts up! she wearsies with her endless hill. Is, then, the crown too heavy that I wear this Iron Crown of Lombardy... 'Tis iron--that I know--not gold. 'Tis split, too--that I feel; the jagged edge galls me so, my brain seems to beat against the solid metal; aye, steel skull, mine; the sort that needs no helmet in the most brain-battering fight!

Dry heat upon my brow? Oh! time was, when as the sunrise nobly spurred me, so the sunset soothed. No more. This lovely light, it lights not me; all loveliness is anguish to me, since I can ne'er enjoy. Gifted with the high perception, I lack the low, enjoying power; damned, most subtly and most malignantly! damned in the midst of Paradise! Good night--good night! (waving his hand, he moves from the window.)

... They think me mad--Starbuck does; but I'm demoniac, I am madness maddened! That wild madness that's only calm to comprehend itself! The prophecy was that I should be dismembered; and --Aye! I lost this leg. I now prophesy that I will dismember my dismemberer. Now, then be the prophet and the fulfiller one. That's more than ye, ye great gods, ever were. I laugh and hoot at ye... The path to my fixed purpose is laid with iron rails....

(pp. 225-27)

This soliloquy is important not only because it reveals the inner workings of Ahab's mind and his own perceptions and attitudes concerning his psychological state, but because it introduces a number of the themes and images which are associated with Ahab throughout the rest of the book. For this reason, it is both a self-revealing soliloquy and an expository soliloquy and is somewhat reminiscent, in the way it sums up previous action and foreshadows action to come, of the soliloquies of such Shakespearean characters as Richard the Third, Iago, and Edmund in King Lear.
As the analysis of Chapter 108 has already suggested, one of the characteristics of Ahab's mind is his tendency to indulge in metaphysical speculation; consequently, many of his soliloquies are philosophical meditations on the nature of the universe and his destiny in it. At first glance, these soliloquies may seem similar to Ishmael's meditations in such chapters as "The Whiteness of the Whale" or "A Squeeze of the Hand," but whereas Ishmael's meditations are usually general and unspecific, Ahab's soliloquies are concrete and dramatic because, under the influence of his monomania, he applies all his philosophical speculations to himself. This habit is illustrated in his interpretation of the meaning of the doubloon which he has nailed to the mast as a prize for the first man to sight Moby Dick:

There's something ever egotistical in mountain-tops and towers, and all other grand and lofty things; look here,—three peaks as proud as Lucifer. The firm tower, that is Ahab; the volcano, that is Ahab; the courageous, the undaunted, and victorious fowl, that, too, is Ahab; all are Ahab; and this round gold 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. Methinks now this coined sun wears a ruddy face; but see! aye, he enters the sign of storms, the equinox! and but six months before he wheeled out of a former equinox at Aries! From storm to storm! So be it, then. Born in throes, 't is fit that man should live in pains and die in pangs! So be it, then! Here's stout stuff for woe to work on. So be it, then. (pp. 550-51)
Already possessed by his monomania and with his purpose fixed early in the novel, Ahab is seldom seen in the actual process of formulating his designs. Few, if any, of his soliloquies show the process-of-thought structure which is characteristic of many Shakespearean soliloquies. In *Moby-Dick*, it is the soliloquies of Starbuck which reveal the full agony of a man who is trying to make up his mind. In a scene perhaps purposely reminiscent of the one from *Hamlet* quoted above (III.iii.73-88), Starbuck stands outside Ahab's cabin door with a loaded musket in his hands and wrestles with the temptation, seemingly justified by circumstances, to kill Ahab as he sleeps:

"He would have shot me once," he murmured, "yes, there's the very musket that he pointed at me;--that one with the studded stock; let me touch it--lift it. Strange, that I, who have handled so many deadly lances, strange, that I should shake so now. Loaded? I must see. Aye, aye; and powder in the pan;--that's not good. Best spill it?--wait. I'll cure myself of this. I'll hold the musket boldly while I think.--I come to report a fair wind to him. But how fair? Fair for death and doom.--that's fair for *Moby Dick*. It's a fair wind that's only fair for that accursed fish.--The very tube he pointed at me!--the very one; this one. . . . Aye and he would fain kill all his crew. Does he not say he will not strike his spars to any gale? Has he not dashed his heavenly quadrant? and in these same perilous seas, gropes he not his way by mere dead reckoning of the error-abounding *log*? . . . But shall this crazed old man be tamely suffered to drag a whole ship's company down to doom with him?--Yes, it would make him the wilful murderer of thirty men and more, if this ship come to any deadly harm; and come to deadly harm, my soul swears this ship will, if Ahab have his way. If, then, he were this instant--put aside, that crime would not be his. Ha! is he muttering in his sleep? Yes, just there,--in there, he's sleeping. Sleeping? aye, but still alive, and
soon awake again. I can't withstand thee, then, old man. Not reasoning; not remonstrance; not entreaty wilt thou hearken to. . . . --But is there no other way? no lawful way?--Make him a prisoner to be taken home? What! hope to wrest this old man's living power from his own living hand? Only a fool would try it. Say he were pinioned even; . . . he would be more hideous than a caged tiger, then. I could not endure the sight; could not possibly fly his howlings; all comfort, sleep itself, inestimable reason would leave me on the long intolerable voyage. What, then, remains? The land is hundreds of leagues away. . . . I stand alone here upon an open sea, with two oceans and a whole continent between me and law. . . .--Is heaven a murderer when its lightning strikes a would-be murderer in his bed . . . ? --And would I be a murderer, then, if"--and slowly, stealthily, and half sideways looking, he placed the loaded musket's end against the door.

"On this level, Ahab's hammock swings within; his head this way. A touch, and Starbuck may survive to hug his wife and child again. . . . --But if I wake thee not to death, old man, who can tell to what unsounded deeps Starbuck's body this day week may sink, with all the crew! Great God, where art thou? Shall I? shall I? --The wind has gone down and shifted, sir; the fore and main topsails are reefed and set; she heads her course." (pp. 650-52)

Besides depicting with a great deal of psychological realism the process of Starbuck's thought at the specific moment when he is faced with the necessity of making the choice between mutiny or "tamely" suffering Ahab to "drag a whole ship's company down to doom with him," this soliloquy dramatizes an idea which Ishmael has suggested in his first attempt to analyze the power Ahab seems to hold over the mates and the crew. This idea, which becomes a recurring theme as the struggle between Ahab and Starbuck develops, is that "mere unaided virtue or right-mindedness" is no match for the forces of true evil. In Chapter 41, titled "Moby Dick,"
Ishmael concludes that the crew of the Pequod is "morally enfeebled . . . by the incompetence of mere unaided virtue or right-mindedness in Starbuck, the invulnerable jollity of indifference and recklessness in Stubb, and the pervading mediocrity in Flask" (p. 251) and that "such a crew, so officered, seemed specially picked and packed by some infernal fatality to help [Ahab] to his monomaniac revenge" (p. 251). He hints at the catastrophe which is to be the final result of Ahab's "one only and all-engrossing object" (p. 251) when he admits that although he too was possessed by some "evil magic" during the quarterdeck scene, he "could see naught in that brute [Moby Dick] but the deadliest ill" (p. 252). In Chapter 123, "The Musket," this final catastrophe at last becomes inevitable. Like Hamlet when he rationalizes himself out of killing the king while he is praying, Starbuck, by "curing" himself of the temptation to murder Ahab, lets slip by forever his one real opportunity to avert the disaster toward which the Pequod is rushing.

Tragic characters are not the only ones in Shakespeare or in Melville who express themselves in soliloquy. The soliloquy is often used for comic effect. Shakespeare's greatest comic soliloquizer is Falstaff, whose "catechism" in the fifth act of 1 Henry IV neatly balances Hotspur's apostrophe to honor earlier in the play. Having been told by Prince Hal that he "owe[s] God a death," Falstaff protests:
'Tis not due yet: I would be loath to pay him before his day. What need I be so forward with him that calls not on me? Well, 'tis no matter; honor pricks me on. Yea, but how if honor prick me off when I come on? How then? Can honor set to a leg? No. Or an arm? No. Or take away the grief of a wound? No. Honor hath no skill in surgery then? No. What is honor? A word. What is that word honor? Air—a trim reckoning! Who hath it? He that died a Wednesday. Doth he feel it? No. Doth he hear it? No. 'Tis insensible then? Yea, to the dead. But will it not live with the living? No. Why? Detraction will not suffer it. Therefore I'll none of it. Honor is a mere scutcheon—and so ends my catechism. (V.i.127-39)

In Moby-Dick, the practical homespun philosopher is Stubb, whose prosy, colloquial style seems often to echo something of the tone and quality of Falstaff's. After getting the worst of an argument with Captain Ahab early in the voyage, Stubb talks himself out of his resentment:

"I was never served so before without giving a hard blow for it," muttered Stubb, as he found himself descending the cabin-scuttle. "It's very queer. Stop, Stubb; somehow, now, I don't well know whether to go back and strike him, or—what's that?—down here on my knees and pray for him? Yes, that was the thought coming up in me; but it would be the first time I ever did pray. It's queer; very queer; and he's queer too; aye, take him fore and aft, he's about the queerest old man Stubb ever sailed with. How he flashed at me!—his eyes like powder-pans! Is he mad? Anyway there's something on his mind, as sure as there must be something on a deck when it cracks. . . . I guess he's got what some folks ashore call a conscience; it's a kind of Tic-Dolly-row they say—worse nor a toothache. Well, well; I don't know what it is, but the Lord keep me from catching it. . . . Here goes for a snooze. Damn me, it's worth a fellow's while to be born into the world, if only to fall right asleep. And now that I think of it, that's about the first thing babies do, and that's a sort of queer, too. Damn me, but all things are queer, come to think of 'em. But that's against my principles. Think not, is my eleventh commandment; and sleep when
you can, is my twelfth--So here goes again. But how's
that? didn't he call me a dog? blazes! he called me
ten times a donkey, and piled a lot of jackasses on top
of that! He might as well have kicked me, and done
with it. Maybe he did kick me, and I didn't observe
it, I was so taken all aback with his brow, somehow.
It flashed like a bleached bone. What the devil's
the matter with me? I don't stand right on my
legs. . . . " (pp. 173-74)

This soliloquy follows the process-of-thought pattern, and
like the soliloquies of the other characters, Stubb's talk
with himself reveals not only his own personality but gives
us still another point of view on Ahab.

Just how completely Melville absorbed and assimilated
Shakespeare's dramatic techniques can be seen in his use of
another convention of the Jacobean stage which he seems to
have taken over unconsciously from Shakespeare's plays--that
is, the indication of setting, scenery, properties, and stage
business in the dialogue itself rather than in stage directions
written on the script for use of the actors and director only
as in a modern play. Such a convention was necessary to a
Jacobean playwright in creating a dramatic illusion on a stage
without sets and with only minimal properties and costumes,
and far from being an encumbrance, the device often provides
Shakespeare with opportunities to write some of his best
descriptive poetry. The opening of Scene 3 of Act II of
Richard II is a famous example:
BOLINGBROKE. How far is it, my lord, to Berkeley now?
NORTHUMBERLAND. Believe me, noble lord,
    I am a stranger here in Gloucestershire.
These high wild hills and rough uneven ways
    Draws out our miles and makes them wearisome.

Macbeth's "Is this a dagger which I see before me, / The
handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee! / . . . I
see thee yet, in form as palpable / As this which now I
draw" (II.i.34-42) indicates the action and the properties to
the audience as well as to the actors, and in Romeo and Juliet
Benvolio says: "He ran this way, and leap'd this orchard
wall" (II.i.5), thus showing us a piece of scenery that could
not possibly have been really present on Shakespeare's stage.

But why Melville, with all the novelist's freedom of
description and narration available to him, should have used
this Shakespearean stage convention as often and as skill-
fully as he did can only be understood as an indication of how
completely he conceived of Moby-Dick in dramatic terms. In
many of the chapters blending narration and script form, such
as "The Quarter-deck," he puts as much of the stage business
as possible into the dialogue, in order, evidently, to avoid
interrupting with exposition the overall tone and rhythm of
the scene. Much of the dialogue in the scene of the oath-
swearing is uninterrupted by narration, yet the action is
clearly indicated:

"Drink and pass!" he cried, handing the heavy
charged flagon to the nearest seaman. "The crew
alone now drink. Round with, round! Short
draughts--long swallows, men; 'tis hot as Satan's
hoof. So, so; it goes round excellently. It spiralizes in ye; forks out as the serpent-snapping eye. Well done; almost drained. That way it went, this way it comes. Hand it me—here's a hollow; [sic] Men, ye seem the years; so brimming life is gulped and gone. Steward, refill!

"Attend now, my braves. I have mustered ye all round this capstan; and ye mates, flank me with your lances; and ye harpooneers, stand there with your irons; and ye, stout mariners, ring me in, that I may in some sort revive a noble custom of my fisherman fathers before me. O men, you will yet see that—Ha! boy, come back? bad pennies come not sooner. Hand it me. Why, now, this pewter had run brimming again, wer't not thou St. Vitus' imp—away, thou ague!

"Advance, ye mates! Cross your lances full before me. Well done! Let me touch the axis." (p. 223)

Another example of Melville's use of this device is in the comic chapter "Stubb's Supper," where Stubb teases the Negro cook, Fleece. The reactions of the listener are implicit in the words of the speaker:

"You said up there, didn't you? and now look yourself and see where your tongs are pointing. But, perhaps you expect to get into heaven by crawling through the lubber's hole, cook; but, no, no, cook, you don't get there except you go the regular way, round by the rigging. . . . Drop your tongs, cook, and hear my orders. Do ye hear? Hold your hat in one hand, and clap t'other a'top of your heart, when I'm giving my order, cook. What! that your heart, there?—that's your gizzard! Aloft! aloft!—that's it—now you have it. Hold it there now, and pay attention." (p. 390)

F. O. Matthiessen uses an example of this convention of indicating the action in the dialogue to demonstrate "how thoroughly," in Moby-Dick, "the drama has come to inhere in the words." 27 He quotes Ahab's statement in his address to

27 Matthiessen, p. 431.
fire in "The Candles"--"... there's that in here that still remains indifferent"--and comments on "the compulsion to strike the breast exerted by [the] clause." A similar compulsion is exerted by Ahab's soliloquy before the doubloon quoted above which ends "here's stout stuff for woe to work on" (p. 551). Even an unimaginative reader will hardly fail to picture Ahab striking, or at least pointing to, his own breast as he speaks, and consequently, the meaning of the sentence, that heroic human flesh can withstand whatever woe the gods can heap upon it, is dramatized.

But the drama in Moby-Dick does not "inhere" only in single sentences or in particular scenes or in the speeches of certain characters. At least two elements of Shakespearean dramatic structure have entered into and informed the larger structure of the novel and therefore have profoundly affected its central unity. These are the pairing and balancing of contrasting "foil" characters or groups of characters and the pairing and balancing of parallel or contrasting actions, symbols, or themes so as to create several levels of meaning.

The use of a foil character is often thought of primarily as a technique of characterization; that is, a foil contrasts with the protagonist in ways which emphasize the protagonist's own characteristics. Hamlet's friend Horatio performs something of this function in Hamlet, and in Moby-Dick, Starbuck,

\[\text{Matthiessen, p. 431.}\]
though he is Ahab's antagonist, is also his foil, for he represents the kind of man Ahab might have been (and perhaps actually was) before he encountered Moby Dick and set out on his quest for "supernatural revenge." As we have already seen in the discussion of the gravemaking episode from Hamlet and of Chapter 108 of Moby-Dick, a foil relationship between characters can be used to provide the central structure of a scene, and it is this function of the foil that Melville takes over from Shakespeare and uses as one of the unifying principles of Moby-Dick.

Although the pairing and balancing of contrasting characters or groups of characters is used as a structural device in a number of Shakespeare's plays, the play in which such a system of contrasts is most fully developed is 1 Henry IV. Cleanth Brooks and Robert B. Heilman point out the significance of these pairings in Understanding Drama:

... if Henry IV, Part I does have a principle of unity, it is obviously one which allows for, and makes positive use of, an amazing amount of contrast. ... Prince Hal and Percy Hotspur are obvious foils for each other; they are specifically contrasted again and again throughout the play. But one of the most important contrasts developed in the play is that between Falstaff and Percy Hotspur.

... Percy Hotspur not only is Hal's rival but also furnishes an ideal of conduct toward which Hal might aspire (and toward which his father, the king, actually wishes him to aspire). Falstaff represents another ideal of conduct--and here, consequently, finds his foil in Hotspur. ...

... It is almost as if Shakespeare were following, consciously or unconsciously, the theme of Aristotle's Nichomachean ethics: virtue as the mean between two extremes of conduct. This suggestion
can be used to throw a good deal of light on the relationship of the characters of Falstaff, Prince Hal, and Hotspur to each other.\textsuperscript{29}

Brooks and Heilman use the theme of honor to illustrate this relationship between the three major characters in the play and particularly the foil relationship between Falstaff and Hotspur. They quote the beginning of Hotspur's speech on honor in Act I and part of Falstaff's "catechism" in Act V and then comment on what effect these two contrasting attitudes have on the central theme of the play (which they take to be "a study in the nature of kingship" and the "study of [Prince Hal's] development").\textsuperscript{30}

Falstaff's common sense is devastating; but it is also crippling—or would be to a prince or ruler. . . .

But Hotspur's chivalry is crippling too. He wants to fight for honor's sake: he will not wait for reinforcements because it will beget more honor to fight without waiting for them; but, on the other hand, he will not fight at all (Worcester fears) if he hears of the king's mollifying offer, for then his pride will be saved, his honor preserved, and the political aspects of the rebellion can go hang; for Hotspur has little or no interest in them. . . .

If one assumes the necessity for leadership (and there is little doubt that the Elizabethan audience and Shakespeare did), then Hotspur points to an extreme which the truly courageous leader must avoid quite as clearly as he must avoid the other extreme represented by Falstaff. . . .


\textsuperscript{30}Brooks and Heilman, p. 216.
Falstaff is too "practical"; Hotspur, not "practical" enough.31

It is, of course, Prince Hal who stands between these two extremes, who is a part of both worlds—the world of the court and the battlefield represented by Hotspur and the world of the Boar's Head presided over by Falstaff—and it is therefore Prince Hal who provides the unifying force in the play.

Exactly this same kind of pairing and balancing of characters occurs in Moby-Dick. Though the reader will, of course, immediately notice the two parallel groups of three mates and three harpooneers, particularly since, in the two chapters titled "Knights and Squires," Ishmael specifically points them out, a less obvious, but at the same time a much more significant, trio of foil characters consists of Ahab, Queequeg, and Ishmael. It is important that the reader recognize and understand this grouping of characters because, just as the relationship of Falstaff, Prince Hal, and Hotspur dramatizes the system of contrasts which provides the principle of unity in 1 Henry IV, so the thematic and structural relationship of Ahab, Queequeg, and Ishmael likewise dramatizes a system of contrasts and functions as the major unifying principle in Moby-Dick.

Although Ahab and Queequeg are not usually thought of as character foils, they are, like Falstaff and Hotspur, foils

on a thematic level. This thematic level comprises the basic philosophical conflict in *Moby-Dick*: the conflict between the "head," the intellectual, rational, questing, masculine part of man, represented by Ahab, and the "heart," the instinctive, emotional, accepting, feminine (and pagan) part of man represented by Queequeg. The contrast between Ahab and Queequeg dramatizes the exaltation of the will at the expense of instinct, the concentration of thought inward as opposed to the diffusion of feeling outward, isolation and mutilation in contrast to brotherhood and wholeness, the deliberate choice of death over life.

Throughout *Moby-Dick*, from his soliloquy in the "Sunset" chapter to his last deliberate refusal to heed the longings of his "own proper, natural heart" (p. 685) in "The Symphony," Ahab is associated with the head, with the "globular brain" (p. 111), with the restless, ever-searching intellect of Western civilized man, which admits no limits to its ability and its right to know all things and defies even Nature and God himself when they dare stand in the way of the quest for ultimate knowledge. In his soliloquy in Chapter 37, "Sunset," Ahab admits that he has no ability to feel such emotions as joy. He boasts of his intellect and strength of will and flings defiance in the face of the gods, daring them to try to swerve him from his "fixed purpose" of hunting their agent, *Moby Dick*, to his death:
Gifted with the high perception, I lack the low, enjoying power.

What I've dared, I've willed: and what I've willed, I'll do! The prophecy was that I should be dismembered; and--Aye! I lost this leg. I now prophesy that I will dismember my dismemberer. Now, then, be the prophet and the fulfiller one. That's more than ye, ye great gods, ever were. I laugh and hoot at ye, ye cricket-players, ye pugilists. I will not say as schoolboys do to bullies,—Take some one of your own size; don't pommel me! No, ye've knocked me down, and I am up again; but ye have run and hidden. Come forth from behind your cotton bags! . . . Come, Ahab's compliments to ye; come and see if ye can swerve me. . . . The path to my fixed purpose is laid with iron rails, whereon my soul is grooved to run. (pp. 226-27)

By Chapter 108 Ahab's intellect has so far repressed the other parts of his nature that he imagines his ideal man as a creature with "no heart at all, brass forehead, and about a quarter of an acre of fine brains" (p. 599). Because his whole being is concentrated inwards, this new man needs no eyes to see outwards, but only a "sky-light on top of his head to illuminate inwards" (p. 599). And in "The Symphony," the last chapter before the sighting of Moby Dick and the beginning of the final conflict, Ahab, in spite of his own longings and Starbuck's pleading, deliberately turns away forever from the claims of home, of wife and child, sets himself "against all natural lovings and longings" (p. 685), and "recklessly" makes ready "to do what in [his] own proper, natural heart, [he] durst not so much as dare" (p. 685). Starbuck, who has begged him to choose life and home, steals away "blanched to a corpse's hue with despair" (p. 686),
leaving Ahab to gaze into the eyes of Fedallah, which, reflected in the water, show him, not an image of his wife and child as Starbuck's eyes have done, but a mirror image of himself, isolated, mutilated, alienated from all human feeling, and doomed to the death Fedallah has foretold.

Queequeg, on the other hand, is everywhere in the novel associated with the heart, with affection and brotherhood, with marriage and birth (or rebirth), with the deliberate choice of life instead of death. On the first morning of their acquaintance, Ishmael awakes to find Queequeg's arm thrown around him in a "bridegroom clasp" (p. 54), hugging him "tightly, as though naught but death should part" (p. 54) and with Queequeg's tomahawk between them "as if it were a hatchet-faced baby" (p. 54). Though Ishmael at first sees himself in a "pretty pickle" to be "abed here in a strange house in the broad day, with a cannibal and a tomahawk" (p. 54), he is impressed by the cannibal's "innate sense of delicacy" and the "civility and consideration" with which Queequeg treats him, and the two soon become "bosom" friends. In Chapter 10, "A Bosom Friend," Ishmael studies Queequeg as they sit together in the Spouter Inn:

With much interest I sat watching him. Savage though he was, . . . his countenance yet had a something in it which was by no means disagreeable. You cannot hide the soul. Through all his unearthly tattooings, I thought I saw the traces of a simple honest heart; and in his large, deep eyes, a fiery black and bold, there seemed tokens of a spirit that would dare a thousand devils. (p. 82)
Describing Queequeg's head and forehead, Ishmael unconsciously introduces the contrast between the harpooneer and Captain Ahab, for whereas Ahab's head is a "steel skull" with a "brass forehead," and his brow, in Stubb's phrase, "flashed like a bleached bone," Queequeg's "head was phrenologically an excellent one" (p. 82). It reminded him, says Ishmael, "of General Washington's head, as seen in the popular busts of him. It had the same long regularly graded retreating slope from above the brows, which were likewise very projecting, like two long promontories thickly wooded on top. Queequeg was George Washington cannibalistically developed" (p. 82).

The effect Queequeg has on Ishmael is to stir in him "strange feelings," to bring about a "melting" within him, and to give him a sense of serenity and reconciliation: "No more my splintered heart and maddened hand were turned against the wolfish world. This soothing savage had redeemed it. There he sat, his very indifference speaking a nature in which there lurked no civilized hypocrisies and bland deceits. . . . I'll try a pagan friend, thought I, since Christian kindness has proved but hollow courtesy" (pp. 83-84). In token of his intention to try a "pagan friend," Ishmael proposes "a social smoke," and he and Queequeg seal their new friendship and their feeling of brotherhood by passing the tomahawk pipe between them. Again the contrast between Queequeg-Ishmael and Ahab is suggested when, only a few chapters later, in the first of
his deliberate acts of repudiation of human relationships, Ahab throws his pipe, the symbol of brotherhood, overboard.

But it is in the chapter "Queequeg in His Coffin" (Chapter 110) that the thematic contrast between Queequeg and Ahab is most significant, for in this chapter Queequeg does what Ahab refuses to do—he chooses life over death. Having contracted a serious fever, Queequeg requests the carpenter to make him a coffin, and when the coffin is brought to him, he asks to be placed in it, "to make trial of its comforts, if any it had" (p. 610). After he has lain in the coffin a few minutes and Pip has spoken a sort of eulogy over him, Queequeg seems satisfied and asks to be returned to his hammock. But, continues Ishmael,

... now that he had apparently made every preparation for death; now that his coffin was proved a good fit, Queequeg suddenly rallied; soon there seemed no need of the carpenter's box; and thereupon, when some expressed their delighted surprise, he, in substance, said, that the cause of his sudden convalescence was this;--at a critical moment, he had just recalled a little duty ashore, which he was leaving undone; and therefore had changed his mind about dying: he could not die yet, he averred. They asked him, then, whether to live or die was a matter of his own sovereign will and pleasure. He answered, certainly. In a word, it was Queequeg's conceit, that if a man made up his mind to live, mere sickness could not kill him: nothing but a whale, or a gale, or some violent, ungovernable, unintelligent destroyer of that sort. (pp. 611-12)

Now that he no longer needs the coffin for its original purpose, Queequeg uses it for a sea-chest and carves the lid with "all manner of grotesque figures and drawings" (p. 612), which seem to Ishmael to be copies of the tattooing on
Queequeg's body. It is this tattooing--by means of which a "departed prophet" had written out on Queequeg's body "a complete theory of the heavens and the earth, and a mystical treatise on the art of attaining truth" (p. 612)--that makes Queequeg a riddle to unfold; a wondrous work in one volume; but whose mysteries not even himself could read, though his own live heart beat against them; and these mysteries were therefore destined in the end to moulder away with the living parchment whereon they were inscribed, and so be unsolved to the last. And this thought it must have been which suggested to Ahab that wild exclamation of his, when one morning turning away from surveying poor Queequeg--"Oh, devilish tantalization of the gods!" (p. 612)

The contrast between Ahab and Queequeg is implicit in this exclamation; for Ahab, who is attempting to unravel the greatest of all mysteries--the mystery of evil--by the application of his intellect and his will, is baffled by Queequeg, who represents a kind of truth that, if it can be understood at all, cannot be understood by the mind, but only by the instinct, by the intuition.

Like Prince Hal in 1 Henry IV, Ishmael stands between these two extremes, between the "globular brain" of Captain Ahab and the "ponderous heart" of Queequeg, between intellect and will on the one hand and intuition and instinct on the other. Just as some readers mistake the hero of 1 Henry IV, readers of Moby-Dick sometimes tend to forget that Ishmael, as much as Ahab, is the hero of the novel. In fact, Moby-Dick has two protagonists: Ahab, whom we might call the "plot
hero," and Ishmael, who is the "thematic hero," and throughout the book their stories run parallel. Ahab is the "plot" hero because he is the hero of the action; he is the central figure of the external conflict (the quest for revenge on Moby Dick), and though he endows the White Whale with metaphysical significance, his encounter with him is worked out on the physical level. Ahab's presumption that he can understand the enigma of evil merely by the use of his intellect and his will and that he can then destroy evil by killing its physical embodiment, the Whale, brings about his own destruction and that of his ship and his crew. But Ishmael, too, is the hero of a quest; he, too, is searching for a way to unravel the mystery of existence and a way, if not to destroy evil, at least to live with it without going mad or having recourse to "pistol and ball"; and the fact that Ishmael survives the encounter with Moby Dick while Ahab perishes indicates that, on the thematic level at least, he succeeds where Ahab fails. Ishmael alone of all the characters in Moby-Dick learns to face woe without going mad or becoming demonic.

William Ellery Sedgwick argues that Ishmael survives because, although he is powerfully drawn to Ahab, although he felt sympathy for him, although he swears the oath to hunt Moby Dick and for a time "Ahab's quenchless feud seemed [his]" (p. 239), he is open to contrary influences.\footnote{William Ellery Sedgwick, The Tragedy of Mind (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1944), pp. 84-88, 119-26, in Moby-Dick: Norton Critical Edition, p. 646.}
importantly, he is open to the influence of Queequeg. In the chapter titled "A Squeeze of the Hand" he concludes "that in all cases man must eventually lower, or at least shift, his conceit of attainable felicity; not placing it anywhere in the intellect or the fancy; but in the wife, the heart, the bed, the table, the saddle, the fireside, the country" (p. 533). In the climax of his own inner drama, his "unnatural hallucination" in "The Tryworks," Ishmael realizes that "there is a wisdom that is woe; but there is a woe that is madness. And there is a Catskill eagle in some souls that can alike dive down into the blackest gorges, and soar out of them again and be come invisible in the sunny spaces" (p. 543). It is because he preserves his "freedom of spirit, alike to plunge and to soar," says Sedgwick,\textsuperscript{33} that Ishmael survives.

Against the strong attraction he feels for Ahab, Ishmael manages to keep his spiritual balance, his spiritual and intellectual freedom. Sharing Ahab's perceptions and feeling himself drawn to Ahab's desperate conclusions, he manages to so hold himself that he keeps in view the whole circle of life's possible issues. His soul, like Bulkington's, ... keeps "the open independence of her sea."\textsuperscript{34}

But although Ishmael's quest appears to succeed where Ahab's fails, we must be careful about carrying our interpretation too far. Ishmael does not quite reach a complete reconciliation. His view at the end of \textit{Moby-Dick} does not quite form a synthesis of the two opposing forces--the head and the

\textsuperscript{33}\textit{Sedgwick}, p. 647. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{34}\textit{Sedgwick}, pp. 647-48.
heart—which are in conflict in the novel the way Prince Hal's concept of honor at the end of 1 Henry IV represents a synthesis of the opposing concepts of honor in that play. Although he escapes the fatal magnetism of Ahab, Ishmael cannot quite give up his intellectual doubts and identify totally with Queequeg and intuition. Consequently, his final position is what one critic calls a sort of "armed neutrality." He has, in his own words, "doubts of all things earthly, and intuitions of some things heavenly; this combination makes neither believer nor infidel, but makes a man who regards them both with equal eye" (p. 480).

Any conclusions we draw, then, about the significance of Ishmael's survival must be, like his own, heavily qualified. Sedgwick sums up the meaning of Ishmael's quest by comparing the ending of Moby-Dick to the ending of Mardi:

Between [Ishmael] and Ahab there is a divergency which repeats the divergency between Babbalanja and Taji at the end of Mardi. Babbalanja and Taji stood for opposite pulls in Melville's temperament. We can be more specific and say they stood for opposite exigencies in the religious consciousness which was paramount in Melville's nature. Ahab's last act was like Taji's: "Now I am my own soul's emperor, and my first act is abdication." So saying, Taji, like Ahab after him, disappeared. . . . But while Ishmael is a foil for Ahab as Babbalanja is for Taji, we cannot go the full length and identify his escape with Babbalanja's conversion in Serenia. Indeed, any single conclusion drawn from his escape would be false. It is simply one episode among

several that make up Ishmael's own story, the whole force of which, if it can be said to conclude at all, is to conclude against conclusions. 36

As the foregoing discussion has demonstrated, one of the ways Melville solved his structural problems in Moby-Dick and drew together into a unified whole his disparate and "hardly malleable" materials was to borrow from Shakespeare a method of pairing and balancing contrasting foil characters so as to create a unified thematic and symbolic structure. But the particular method of relating contrasting characters and themes which we find in 1 Henry IV is not the only one Shakespeare employed, nor is the thematic and structural relationship of Ahab, Queequeg, and Ishmael the only example of Melville's use of this strategy in Moby-Dick. A slightly different system of parallel characters and actions occurs in Shakespeare in the Gloucester subplot of King Lear, and Melville uses a similar type of structure in Chapter 100 of Moby-Dick, where Ahab meets Captain Boomer of the Samuel Enderby, a man who has also lost a limb to the White Whale.

The use of a subplot to parallel and provide a background for the main action is a common technique in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama. In tragedies like Doctor Faustus and The Changeling the subplot is often a comic version of the central story, and in certain kinds of comedies, especially in Shakespeare's romantic comedies, the subplot (or plots, since there

36 Sedgwick, p. 648.
is often more than one) usually involves groups of low-life characters whose situations and romantic entanglements parody and burlesque the actions of the romantic lovers in the main plot. In *King Lear*, the subplot consists of a group of characters and an action which parallel the characters and action of the main plot so closely that the "parallelism between the faithful and unfaithful daughters of Lear and the faithful and unfaithful sons of Gloucester . . . has been criticized as artificial and too obvious." These various kinds of multiple plots may be related and integrated into the play in a number of ways, but the general function of the subplots is the same in nearly all the plays in which they are used--besides providing variety of tone and point of view, the subplot provides a thematic commentary, either by direct statement or, more often, by means of irony, on the action and themes of the main plot.

It is exactly this function that the Gloucester subplot performs in *King Lear*. Far from being artificial and forced or "overload[ing] the play with matter," the story of

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39 Goddard, p. 145.
Gloucester is important because, in the words of Harold C. Goddard, "Shakespeare . . . contrived the pitiable tale not primarily for its own sake but to throw into high relief the far sublimier story of Lear." One of the themes of the main plot, the contrast between sight and insight, between physical blindness and spiritual blindness, is repeated in the subplot; Gloucester's physical blindness is an emblem, not only of his own, but of King Lear's spiritual and moral blindness, and Gloucester's insight in Scene 6 of Act IV, where he and the King encounter each other and "the two central stories [are brought] together for mutual commentary," foreshadows the King's final insight at the end of the play. Both men undergo a process of spiritual growth, and for each, affliction brings, at last, insight and submission, but with this important difference, that, because Gloucester is a man of only ordinary perceptions, he is not, like Lear, a character of tragic dimensions, and therefore, his story takes place on a lower plane.

Structurally, then, the relationship between the two plots in King Lear is based on a paradox; the two stories and the two protagonists both parallel each other and contrast with each other at one and the same time. Superficially, Gloucester is a mirror image of Lear and his story is the same as the King's, but actually, the two men contrast,

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40 Goddard, p. 147.  
41 Harbage, p. 425.
because where Lear is tragic, Gloucester is merely pathetic. Gloucester gives in to despair and attempts suicide, but Lear never once wishes for death even though "nature, man, and apparently the gods conspire[e] to make [life] an endless agony of crucifixion."\(^{42}\) Lear's story has universal significance; the very cosmos writhes with his agony. But Gloucester's story, powerful though it is, remains earthbound; the episode of the blinding notwithstanding, it arouses our pity but not our terror, and therefore it does not produce in us the catharsis which Lear's suffering and death produce. Gloucester is a goodhearted, well-intentioned, if somewhat sensual and morally weak, human being; but King Lear is the truly tragic hero whose character and actions rise above the purely realistic level to become symbolic.

In *Moby-Dick*, the foil relationship between Captain Ahab and Captain Boomer of the English whale ship *Samuel Enderby* turns on a similar paradox. On the surface, Boomer is Ahab's twin. He lost an arm to the White Whale during the same hunting season in which Ahab lost his leg and, like Ahab, has had it replaced with an artificial limb of whalebone made by the ship's carpenter. He and Ahab are about the same age, and both are experienced, seasoned whale-ship captains who join in a whale hunt in their own whaleboats and act as their own harpooneers. And their encounters with Moby Dick are remarkably

\(^{42}\) Goddard, p. 149.
similar. At Ahab's insistence Boomer describes how Moby Dick caused the loss of his arm.

"One day we lowered for a pod of four or five whales, and my boat fastened to one of them. . . . Presently up breaches from the bottom of the sea a bouncing great whale, with a milky-white head and hump, all crows' feet and wrinkles. . . . And harpoons sticking in near his starboard fin."

"Aye, aye--they were mine--my irons," cried Ahab, exultingly--"but on!"

"Give me a chance, then," said the Englishman, goodhumoredly. "Well, this old great-grandfather, with the white head and hump, runs all afoam into the pod, and goes to snapping furiously at my fast-line. . . . How it was exactly . . . I do not know; but in biting the line, it got foul of his teeth, caught there somehow; but we didn't know it then; so that when we afterwards pulled on the line, bounce we came plump on to his hump! instead of the other whales's. . . . Seeing . . . what a noble great whale it was . . . I resolved to capture him, spite of the boiling rage he seemed to be in. And thinking the hap-hazard line would get loose, or the tooth it was tangled to might draw . . . I jumped into my first mate's boat . . . and snatching the first harpoon, let this old great-grandfather have it. But, Lord, look you, sir--hearts and soul alive, man--the next instant, in a jiff, I was blind as a bat--both eyes out--all befogged and bedeadened with black foam--the whale's tail looming straight up out of it, perpendicular in the air, like a marble steeple. No use sterning all, then, but as I was groping at midday, with a blinding sun, all crown-jewels; as I was groping, I say, after the second iron, to toss it overboard--down comes the tail like a Lima tower, cutting my boat in two. . . . To escape his terrible flailings, I seized hold of my harpoon-pole sticking in him and for a moment clung to that. . . . But a combing sea dashed me off, and at the same instant, the fish . . . went down like a flash; and the barb of that cursed second iron towing along near me caught me here" (clapping his hand just below his shoulder); ". . . and bore me down to Hell's flames, I was thinking when, when, all of a sudden, thank the good God, the barb ript its way along the flesh--clear along the whole length of my arm--came out nigh my wrist, and up I floated. . . ." (pp. 560-61)
This account looks not so much backward to Ahab's first "almost fatal encounter" (p. 246) with Moby Dick as forward to Ahab's final three-day duel with the whale. Though this last encounter with Moby Dick covers three days instead of a few minutes, in some details the fight is very much like Captain Boomer's.

On the first day, Moby Dick snaps Ahab's boat "completely in twain," leaves the crew clinging to "two floating wrecks" and spills Ahab out of the boat so that "he fell flat-faced upon the sea" (p. 693). On the second day, all three boats fasten to him, but Moby Dick attacks the boats so furiously with a "lashing tail" that he eventually becomes entangled in the harpoon lines and draws the boats up to him just as Captain Boomer's boat had been drawn onto his hump.

At last in his untraceable evolutions, the White Whale so crossed and recrossed, and in a thousand ways entangled the slack of the three lines now fast to him, that they foreshortened, and, of themselves, warped the devoted boats towards the planted irons in him; though now for a moment the whale drew aside a little, as if to rally for a more tremendous charge. Seizing the opportunity, Ahab first paid out more line: and then was rapidly hauling and jerking in upon it again--hoping that way to disencumber it of some snarls--when lo!--a sight more savage than the embattled teeth of sharks!

Caught and twisted--corkscrewed in the mazes of the line, loose harpoons and lances, with all their bristling barbs and points, came flashing and dripping up to the chocks in the bows of Ahab's boat. (p. 703)

Though Ahab manages to avoid being impaled on one of these spare harpoons as Captain Boomer had been, Moby Dick dashes
two of the boats together with his tail and then "while the
two crews were yet circling in the waters . . . and while the
old man's line--now parting--admitted of his pulling into the
creamy pool to rescue whom he could;--in that wild simultaneous-
ness of a thousand concreted perils,--Ahab's yet unstricken
boat seemed drawn up towards Heaven by invisible wires,--as,
arrow-like, shooting perpendicularly from the sea, the White
Whale dashed his broad forehead against its bottom, and sent
it turning over and over, into the air; till it fell again . . .
and Ahab and his men struggled out from under it" (p. 704).

On the third and last day, Ahab, like his English counter-
part, is almost blinded by foam a moment after he has hurled
his harpoon into Moby Dick's hump.

Hearing the tremendous rush of the sea-crashing
boat, the whale wheeled round to present his blank
forehead at bay; but . . . catching sight of the
nearing black hull of the ship . . . of a sudden, he
bore down upon its advancing prow, smiting his jaws
amid fiery showers of foam.
Ahab staggered; his hand smote his forehead.
"I grow blind; hands; stretch out before me that I
may yet grope my way. Is't night?" (pp. 718-19)

Blinded and "groping" (Captain Boomer's exact word), Ahab yet
is able to cast his last harpoon, but the next instant he is
cought around the neck by the "flying turn" of the whale line
and "voicelessly as Turkish mutes bowstring their victim, he
was shot out of the boat, ere the crew knew he was gone. Next
instant, the heavy eye-splice in the rope's final end flew
out of the stark-empty tub, . . . and smiting the sea, dis-
appeared in its depths" (pp. 721-22).
So Ahab is carried down "to Hell's flames" by the White Whale just as Captain Boomer had expected to be, but with the significant difference that, because he has, unlike the sensible Boomer, deliberately sought a second engagement with Moby Dick, Ahab does not come up again. And herein lies the paradox which is at the heart of the thematic relationship between Captain Ahab and Captain Boomer, for, however much the two captains may seem to be copies of each other in their experiences with Moby Dick, they are in reality exact opposites. Though each has lost a limb to the White Whale and each has "shipped" (in Dr. Bunger's phrase) an ivory limb made by the carpenter to replace the lost one, the two men have reacted to their mutilation in totally different ways. From the moment Moby Dick first wounded him, Ahab had cherished a wild vindictiveness against the whale, all the more felt 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. The White Whale swam before him at the monomaniac incarnation of all those malicious agencies which some deep men feel eating in them, till they are left living on with half a heart and half a lung. That intangible malignity which has been from the beginning; to whose dominion even the modern Christians ascribe one-half of the worlds; which the ancient Ophites of the east reverenced in their statue devil;--Ahab did not fall down and worship it like them; but deliriously transferring its idea to the abhorred white whale, he pitted himself, all mutilated, against it. All that most maddens and torments; all that stirs up the lees of things; all truth with malice in it; all that cracks the sinews and cakes the brain; all the subtle demonisms of life and thought; all evil, to crazy Ahab, were visibly personified, and made practically assailable in Moby Dick. He piled upon the whale's white hump
the sum of all the general rage and hate felt by
his whole race from Adam down; and then, as if his
chest had been a mortar, he burst his hot heart's
shell upon it. (pp. 246-47)

Lying for the long weeks of the homeward voyage "stretched
together in one hammock" with anguish, Ahab's "torn body and
gashed soul bled into one another; and so interfusing, made
him mad" (p. 248). During the passage around Cape Horn, he
was a "raving lunatic" and even when "to all appearances, the
old man's delirium seemed left behind him, . . . even then,
when he bore that firm, collected front, however pale, and
issued his calm orders once again; and his mates thanked God
the direful madness was now gone; even then, Ahab, in his
hidden self, raved on" (p. 248).

Not so Captain Boomer. The English captain is as sane as
Ahab is mad. Asked by Ahab if he had been unable to "fasten,"
(that is, to harpoon the whale) on the two subsequent occasions
when the Samuel Enderby had crossed Moby Dick's wake, Captain
Boomer exclaims: "Didn't want to try to: ain't one limb
enough? What should I do without this other arm? And I'm
thinking Moby Dick doesn't bite so much as he swallows" (p. 563).
Unlike Ahab, Boomer and his friend, the ship's surgeon, ascribe
no particular metaphysical or supernatural significance to the
whale's attack on Boomer's boat, and the surgeon explains,
somewhat humorously, that "what you take for the White Whale's
malice is only his awkwardness. For he never means to swallow
a single limb; he only thinks to terrify by feints" (p. 564).
Dr. Bunger then jestingly proposes that his captain might "pawn one arm for the sake of the privilege of giving decent burial to the other," that is, might let the whale have another chance at him so that he can retrieve his undigested arm from Moby Dick's belly. But Captain Boomer wants nothing more to do with Moby Dick.

"No, thank ye, Bunger," said the English Captain, "he's welcome to the arm he has, since I can't help it, and didn't know him then; but not to another one. No more White Whales for me; I've lowered for him once, and that has satisfied me. There would be great glory in killing him, I know that; and there is a ship-load of precious sperm in him, but, hark ye, he's best let alone; don't you think so, Captain?"--glancing at the ivory leg. (p. 564)

But Ahab, in the grips of his monomania, declares that "what is best let alone, that accursed thing is not always what least allures" (p. 564), and he amazes the good-humored Englishman by the vehemence with which he demands to know which way Moby Dick was last seen heading.

"Good God!" cried the English Captain, to whom the question was put. "What's the matter? He was heading east, I think.--Is your Captain crazy?" whispering Fedallah. (p. 565)

Despite the similarity in their experiences, Ahab and Boomer are philosophically incomprehensible to each other, and "with back to the stranger ship, and face set like a flint to his own" (p. 565), Ahab quits the Samuel Enderby to continue his mad pursuit of Moby Dick, leaving the bewildered Captain Boomer vainly hailing him.
Ultimately, the contrast between Captain Boomer and Captain Ahab is the same as the contrast between Gloucester and the king in King Lear. Boomer, like Gloucester, is an ordinary man; he is a man of humor and common sense and of courage and wisdom enough to endure with patience and dignity the misfortunes which come to him in the course of his dangerous calling, but spiritually and intellectually he is no match for Ahab. As he himself implies when he says that his one encounter with Moby Dick has satisfied him, he is not the stuff of which heroes are made, and he is no more capable of achieving Ahab's tragic dimensions than Gloucester is of achieving Lear's. Melville's purpose in telling Boomer's story was the same as Shakespeare's purpose in the Gloucester subplot—the story of Boomer's encounter with the White Whale throws "into high relief" the "far sublimier" story of Ahab's mad but unrelenting and unflinching pursuit of "his heaven-insulting purpose" (p. 228). Captain Boomer is only one of several whaling ship captains Ahab encounters who are in some way or another his foils, and the story of Boomer's mutilation by Moby Dick, like the story of Gloucester's blinding, is presented on a realistic and literal (at times almost comic) level. But Ahab's story, like Lear's, is symbolic and universal because Ahab conceives of himself as "the Fates' lieutenant" (p. 707). Like King Lear, he becomes the representative of "his whole race from Adam down" (p. 247), and
thematically, his struggle with Moby Dick is the story of every man's struggle with evil and with the ambiguities of life. By presenting Ahab's story dramatically, Melville makes us participants in it, and though Ahab dies unrepentant and unredeemed, we can hardly withhold our admiration and our sympathy. In "Seven Moby-Dicks," John Parke says "... not even Lear, who cracks too easily and whose fault is so much more trivial, can stir us so."43

To speak of the structure of Moby-Dick is to speak of an organism which, like the whale himself, is composed of layers. In it, says F. O. Matthiessen, Melville presents, successfully for the first time, "a succession of levels of experience, distinct and yet skillfully integrated,"44 the kind of structure T. S. Eliot suggests exists in a Shakespearean play:

In a play of Shakespeare you get several levels of significance. For the simplest auditors there is the plot, for the more thoughtful the character and conflict of character, for the more literary the words and phrasing, for the more musically sensitive the rhythm, and for auditors of greater sensitiveness and understanding a meaning which reveals itself gradually. And I do not believe that the classification of audience is so clear-cut as this; but rather that the sensitiveness of every auditor is acted upon by all these elements at once. . . . 45


44 Matthiessen, p. 412.

Critics disagree about the identification and significance of these layers in *Moby-Dick* and even about their number. William Ellery Sedgwick identifies "two actions in the book which although they mesh are distinct from one another . . . the Shakespearean or outward tragic action [which] includes Ahab's conflict with forces outside himself and, also, the bitter, agonizing self-conflict which follows on its heels" and the inward or "Dantesque" action which "lies entirely with Ishmael" and "like the action that extends from first to last in the *Divine Comedy* . . . is the action of man's comprehension slowly completing itself."\(^{46}\) Other critics, among them Howard Vincent and J. A. Ward,\(^{47}\) see besides these two actions, a third which encompasses what Vincent calls the "cetological center" of the book. And, in his article "Seven Moby-Dicks," John Parke attempts to identify and isolate for discussion seven thematic levels, following roughly Eliot's order of increasing complexity.

But, like the plays of Shakespeare, whose dramatic forms, as we have just seen, so profoundly influenced it, the structure of *Moby-Dick* cannot be confined within the limits of any one definition of form, even of organic form. It, like

\(^{46}\)Sedgwick, p. 642.

King Lear and Antony and Cleopatra, tends to strain beyond the limits of its principal medium. Walter E. Bezanson perhaps expresses the situation best:

It is time in fact to admit that our explorations of structure [in Moby-Dick] suggest elaborate interrelations of the parts but do not lead to an overreaching formal pattern. For the reader pre-disposed to feel that "form" means "classical form," with a controlling geometric structure, Moby-Dick is . . . an aesthetically unsatisfying experience. One needs only to compare it with The Scarlet Letter, published a year and a half earlier, to see how non-classical it is. . . . But surely there is no one right form the novel must take. . . . For Hawthorne the structural frame of reference was neo-classical; for Melville it was romantic.

To go from The Scarlet Letter to Moby-Dick is to move from the Newtonian world-as-machine to the Darwinian world-as-organism. In the older cosmology the key concepts had been law, balance, harmony, reason; in the newer, they became origin, process, development, growth. . . .

Of course the poets had been there first. Coleridge had long since made his famous definition of organic form in literature. The roots of his theory had traveled under the sea to the continent of Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman . . . where they burst into native forms in the minds of a few men haunted simultaneously by the implications of the American wilderness, by the quest for spiritual reality, and by the search for new literary forms. Moby-Dick is like Emerson's Essays and Poems, like Walden, like Leaves of Grass, in its structural principles. In the literature of the nineteenth century it is the single most ambitious projection of the concept of organic form.48

"A PARTICULAR CHARACTERIZING IDIOM"

One of the layers of Moby-Dick, one of the "levels of significance,"\(^1\) consists of the language itself, of the "words and phrasing,"\(^1\) of the characteristic diction and rhetorical patterns. The language of Moby-Dick, says Newton Arvin, "takes on abruptly an idiosyncrasy of the most unmistakable sort; it is a question now of Melvillean language in the same intense and special sense in which one speaks of Virgilian language, or Shakespearean, or Miltonic. It is a creation, verbally speaking; a great artifice; a particular characterizing idiom; without it the book would not exist."\(^2\) In Moby-Dick, Melville suddenly "mastered Shakespeare's mature secret of how to make language itself dramatic."\(^3\)

The transformation of Melville's style in Moby-Dick seems sudden and abrupt because there is almost nothing in any of his previous books to prepare us for it. The turgid and incoherent style of Mardi is one of its major faults; in it, according to F. O. Matthiessen, Melville "had not yet developed a controlled heightening of diction that could make

\(^{1}\) Eliot, p. 151. \(^{2}\) Arvin, p. 162. \(^{3}\) Matthiessen, p. 430.
the reader accept the lack of verisimilitude." In Redburn, and especially in White Jacket, Matthiessen goes on to say, . . . he fell between two goals. He was a master there neither of realism, nor of an intensified reality. The general level of honest but stiff writing, which had tended also to characterize his early travel books, can be briefly instanced by this description of a dying sailor: "I could not help thinking, as I gazed, whether this man's fate had not been accelerated by his confinement in this heated furnace below; and whether many a sick man round me might not soon improve, if but permitted to swing his hammock in the airy vacancies of the half-deck above, open to the port-holes, but reserved for the promenade of the officers." The defects need hardly be labored. The style is workmanlike enough, but its want of vividness comes from conventional rather than idiomatic phrasing ("if but permitted"), and from a diction still influenced ("accelerated by his confinement") by merely formal standards of correct-ness.

One need only compare this "workmanlike" but "conventional" passage from White Jacket with the description of the dying whale in Chapter 116 of Moby-Dick to see what a profound change occurred in Melville's language in hardly more than a year:

It was far down the afternoon; and when all the spearings of the crimson fight were done; and floating in the lovely sunset sea and sky, sun and whale both stilly died together; then, such a sweetness and such plaintiveness, such inwreathing orisons curled up in that rosy air, that it almost seemed as if far over from the deep green convent valleys of the Manilla isles, the Spanish land-breeze, wantonly turned sailor, had gone to sea, freighted with these vesper hymns.

Soothed again, but only soothed to deeper gloom, Ahab . . . sat intently watching [the whale's] final

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4 Matthiessen, p. 422.  5 Matthiessen, pp. 422-23.
wanings from the now tranquil boat. For that strange spectacle observable in all sperm whales dying—the turning sunwards of the head, and so expiring—that strange spectacle... somehow to Ahab conveyed a wondrousness unknown before.

"He turns and turns him to it,—how slowly, but how steadfastly, his homage-rendering and invoking brow, with his last dying motions. He too worships fire; most faithful, broad, baronial vassal of the sun! ..." (pp. 628-29)

There is certainly no question here of "want of vividness," of "conventional rather than idiomatic phrasing," or of merely formal diction. In fact, the phrasing and diction are anything but conventional. Ahab's address to the dying whale demonstrates not only what had happened to Melville's language between the completion of White Jacket in the late summer of 1849 and the reconception and revision of Moby-Dick in the fall and winter of 1850-1851, but why it had happened. Ahab's soliloquy contains, in the phrases "his homage-rendering and invoking brow," and "most faithful, broad, baronial vassal," Melville's variation on three of the most characteristic elements of Shakespeare's style: the formation of a verbal compound ("homage-rendering"), the joining of two words of similar meanings into a single rhetorical figure known as a "double epithet" ("homage-rendering and invoking brow"), and the combining of three nouns, verbs, or adjectives (often alliterated) into a figure based on a pattern of three ("most faithful, broad, baronial vassal"). Several more examples of these Shakespearean rhetorical figures occur only a few lines further along in this same chapter: the compounds
"too-favoring," "wide-slaughtering," "all-quickenning" and the double epithets "candid and impartial seas" and "trebly hooped and welded hip of power" (pp. 629-30). The conclusion seems inescapable that Melville solved his stylistic problem in Moby-Dick as he had solved his structural problem: by borrowing and assimilating into his own style the diction and the rhetorical patterns he had absorbed from his reading of Shakespeare.

The liberation of Melville's style in Moby-Dick "through the agency of Shakespeare," says Matthiessen,

was almost an unconscious reflex. Unlike Emerson he discussed at no point the origins and nature of language. The great philologist Jacob Grimm had . . . arrived at mythology through his investigation of speech. Words and fables became finally inseparable for him, and he sought their common source in the most primitive and most profound instincts of the race, in its manner of feeling and imagining. It may be said of Melville that he intuitively grasped this connection. In his effort to endow the whaling industry with a mythology befitting a fundamental activity of man in his struggle to subdue nature, he came into possession of the primitive energies latent in words. He had already begun to realize in the dream-passages of Mardi that meaning had more than just a level of sense, that the arrangement of words in patterns of sound and rhythm enabled them to create feelings and tones that could not be included in a logical or scientific statement. But he did not find a valuable clue to how to express the hidden life of men, which had become his compelling absorption, until he encountered the unexampled vitality of Shakespeare's language.®

As Matthiessen implies, the stylistic problem Melville faced in creating a mythology for the whaling industry was

®Matthiessen, p. 423.
similar to his structural problem. He wished, as he expressed it in the essay on Hawthorne, to "[tear] off the mask, and [speak] the sane madness of vital truth," to "probe the very axis of reality," in short, to endow fictional experience with symbolic meaning. He had attempted to do this in Mardi, but because he had not yet found an artistic master who could initiate him into the deeper secrets of "the great art of telling the truth," his style was not equal to the task, and he succeeded only in creating what he later feared the critics would make of Moby-Dick—a "hideous and intolerable allegory."

After discovering Hawthorne's "blackness" and after rereading and "meditat[ing] creatively"7 on Shakespeare's plays in the summer of 1850, he seems suddenly to have realized how to "elevate the narration of his tale" so as "to express the strangeness and the grandeur that were latent in it,"8 and how to create a "bold and nervous lofty language" which would be a suitable medium for the making of myth. He learned from Shakespeare "that rhetoric [does] not necessarily involve a mere barren formalism, but that it could be so constructed as to carry a full freight of emotion."9 His encounter with the "unexampled vitality of Shakespeare's language" taught him that if he were to create in Moby-Dick a "high poetic form," he must do so, not by imposing the poetry "allegorically" on

7 Matthiessen, p. 424. 8 Arvin, p. 154.
9 Matthiessen, p. 424.
his material from without, but by allowing his material to "render up its own poetic essences." ¹⁰

George R. Stewart identifies a passage in Chapter 16 of Moby-Dick which, he suggests, represents the exact point at which Melville came to this realization, at which he "seems suddenly to take fire, to see his way toward the device of poetic language." ¹¹ We have examined this passage before in a slightly different context (see Chapter II, p. 40), but it will bear quoting again:

There are instances among them of men, who, named with Scripture names—a singularly common fashion on the island—and in childhood naturally imbibing the stately dramatic thee and thou of the Quaker idiom; still, from the audacious, daring, and boundless adventure of their subsequent lives, strangely blend with these unoutgrown peculiarities, a thousand bold dashes of character, not unworthy a Scandinavian sea-king, or a poetical Pagan Roman. And when these things unite in a man of greatly superior natural force, with a globular brain and a ponderous heart; who has also by the stillness and seclusion of many long night-watches in the remotest waters, and beneath constellations never seen here at the north, been led to think untraditionally and independently; receiving all nature's sweet or savage impressions fresh from her own virgin voluntary and confiding breast, and thereby chiefly, but with some help from accidental advantages, to learn a bold and nervous lofty language—that man makes one in a whole nation's census—a mighty pageant creature, formed for noble tragedies. (p. 111)

Stewart argues, on the basis of stylistic evidence, that this passage is the first in which we feel the Shakespearean influence begin to take over. Not only does Melville mention "tragedies," but he also makes a comparison with a "Scandinavian sea-king, or a

poetical Pagan Roman." The most natural assumption is that he was thinking of Hamlet in the former instance. Certainly, the only probable nominees for his Roman would be Brutus or some other character from Shakespeare's Roman plays.\textsuperscript{12}

Not only does this passage contain the first certain allusions to Shakespeare in \textit{Moby-Dick}, but it is also the first which contains any of the Shakespearean stylistic devices which occur with increasing frequency from this point on in the novel. The phrases "audacious, daring, and boundless adventure" and "virgin voluntary and confiding breast" are the first examples of Melville's use of the rhetorical figure based on a pattern of three which, in Ahab's speeches, in Starbuck's soliloquies, and in Ishmael's meditations, becomes a signature of Melville's mature style.

The effect Melville's "possession by Shakespeare"\textsuperscript{13} had on \textit{Moby-Dick} goes far beyond mere conception of character and creation of multi-level dramatic structure. The influence of Shakespeare's language so permeates the whole fabric of the novel that it extends not only to phrasing and sentence structure but to the very words themselves. Melville's encounter with Shakespeare's language gave him "a range of vocabulary for expressing passion far beyond any that he had previously possessed";\textsuperscript{14} he learned from Shakespeare to use parts of speech with more freedom than he had hitherto done, to create

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{12}Stewart, p. 436.
\item \textsuperscript{13}Matthiessen, p. 424.
\item \textsuperscript{14}Matthiessen, p. 425.
\end{itemize}
verbal compounds of great power and vividness, and even to invent new words if no already-existing ones could be found which would "probe the very axis of reality" as accurately and precisely as he wished to probe it. And he also learned how to combine words into rhetorical patterns which, because of the emotional effect of their sound and rhythm, could convey a meaning which was greater than the sum of the meanings of the individual words. Under the tutelage of Shakespeare, "Melville came into full possession of his own idiom" and created in Moby-Dick a language which everywhere suggests Shakespeare's language but is in no case an imitation of it.\textsuperscript{15}

Although Melville, because of his own intellectual and artistic vigor, managed to avoid being reduced "to the ranks of the dozens of stagey nineteenth-century imitators of [Shakespeare's] stylistic mannerisms,"\textsuperscript{16} Moby-Dick nevertheless contains a large number of actual verbal echoes of Shakespeare's lines. With his mind fairly brimming over with Shakespearean phrases, Melville seems often to have reproduced them unconsciously. The reader who knows his Shakespeare well cannot help hearing in Ahab's command to Stubb, "Down, dog, and kennel!"\textsuperscript{17} an echo of the ironic remark of Lear's Fool:

\textsuperscript{15} Matthiessen, p. 428. \textsuperscript{16} Matthiessen, p. 424. 

\textsuperscript{17} Unless the location of a quotation is of some significance to the argument, no page numbers will be given for short quotations from Moby-Dick. In the examples of diction and rhetorical figures, italics are added unless otherwise indicated.
"Truth's a dog must to kennel" (I.i.i.105); nor will he fail to recognize in Ishmael's description of Moby Dick's first attack on Ahab—"no turbaned Turk, no hired Venetian or Malay, could have smote him with more seeming malice"—Melville's version of Othello's last words:

Where a malignant and a turbaned Turk
Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,
I took by th' throat the circumcised dog
And smote him—thus. (V.i.i.352-56)

The Danish sailor's address to the ship in Chapter 40 ("Midnight, Forecastle")—"Crack, crack, old ship!"—is reminiscent of Lear's invocation, "Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks" (II.i.92), and the passage in Chapter 41 beginning "so with a broken throne, the great gods mock that captive king" echoes both verbally and thematically Gloucester's bitter remark:

As flies to wanton boys, are we to th' gods,
They kill us for their sport. (Lr. IV.i.36-37)

At times Melville uses a Shakespearean allusion for burlesque effect, as when Ishmael parodies Macbeth's famous lines

It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing. (V.v.26-28)

by saying that he omits certain minor species of whales, such as the Junk Whale and the Quog Whale, from his catalog because he "can hardly help suspecting them for mere sounds, full of Leviathanism, but signifying nothing." Or an echo of Shakespeare's imagery may be used to lend added vividness to an image in Moby-Dick. Describing the swinging out of the whale
boats before the first lowering, Ishmael says "the three boats swung over the sea like three samphire baskets over high cliffs," which alludes to Edgar's description of the "cliff" to which he has pretended to lead his blind father:

Halfway down
Hangs one that gathers sampire--dreadful trade;
Methinks he seems no bigger than his head.

(Lr. IV.vi.14-16)

Occasionally a Shakespearean echo in Moby-Dick may include only one key word of the original as in "the great Kraken of Bishop Pontoppodan may ultimately resolve itself into Squid," which draws the mind irresistibly to Hamlet's "O that this too sullied flesh would melt, / Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew" (i.ii.129-30).

Sometimes Melville's Shakespearean reminiscence, instead of depending on exactly corresponding words, consists more of a general echo of the tone, imagery, or subject matter of a Shakespearean passage. Ahab's address to the whale's head in Chapter 70, "The Sphynx," besides alluding to the similar address to Yorick's skull in Hamlet, may also, in its description of the "awful water-land" under the sea, remind the reader of Clarence's dream in Richard III. While the seamen who have been working at decapitating a whale are below eating their noon meal, Ahab comes on deck and stands musing over the "blood-dripping head [which] hung to the Pequod's waist like the giant Holofernes's from the girdle of Judith":
It was a black and hooded head; and hanging there in the midst of so intense a calm, it seemed the Sphynx's in the desert. "Speak, thou vast and venerable head," muttered Ahab, "which though ungarnished with a beard, yet here and there lookest hoary with mosses; speak, mighty head, and tell us the secret thing that is in thee. Of all divers, thou hast dived the deepest. That head upon which the upper sun now gleams, has moved amid this world's foundations. Where unrecorded names and navies rust, and untold hopes and anchors rot; where in her murderous hold this frigate earth is ballasted with bones of millions of the drowned; there, in that awful water-land, there was thy most familiar home. Thou hast been where bell or diver never went; hast slept by many a sailor's side, where sleepless mothers would give their lives to lay them down. Thou saw'st the locked lovers when leaping from their flaming ship; heart to heart they sank beneath the exulting wave. . . . Thou saw'st the murdered mate when tossed by pirates from the midnight deck; for hours he fell into the deeper midnight of the insatiate man; and his murderers still sailed on unharmed. . . .
(pp. 405-06)

In Richard III, the Duke of Clarence, imprisoned in the Tower, tells his jailor of a terrible and prophetic dream he has had of drowning:

O Lord! methought what pain it was to drown!
What dreadful noise of waters in mine ears!
What sights of ugly death within mine eyes!
Methoughts I saw a thousand fearful wracks;
A thousand men that fishes gnawed upon;
Wedges of gold, great anchors, heaps of pearl,
Inestimable stones, unvalued jewels,
All scatt'red in the bottom of the sea:
Some lay in dead men's skulls, and in the holes
Where eyes did once inhabit, there were crept
(As 'twere in scorn of eyes) reflecting gems,
That wooed the slimy bottom of the deep
And mocked the dead bones that lay scatt'red by.
(I.iv.21-33)

This speech is full of dramatic irony because only a few lines later Clarence is murdered by being drowned in a butt of malmsey, and Ahab's soliloquy in "The Sphynx" also seems a
prophetic description of his coming fate when, caught round the neck by the "flying turn" of his own harpoon line, he will be forced to "dive" with Moby Dick to the bottom of the sea.

Some of these verbal echoes of Shakespeare in Moby-Dick seem to be little more than unconscious borrowings, but "where the borrowed material has entered into the formation of Melville's own thought, the verbal reminiscences begin to be significant."\(^{18}\) When Ishmael calls the crew "an Anacharsis Cloots deputation" who are going "to lay the world's grievances at the bar from which not very many of them ever come back," the embedded "allusion to Hamlet's 'bourn' from which 'no traveller returns,' serves to increase our awed uncertainty over what lies before them."\(^{19}\) The same sort of added significance may attach to Starbuck's response to Ahab's challenge in "The Quarter-deck"--"I am game for his crooked jaw, and for the jaws of Death too, Captain Ahab, if it fairly comes in the way of the business we follow" (p. 220)--if we remember Macbeth's answer to Lady Macbeth's similar challenge:

I dare do all that may become a man;
Who dares do more is none. (I.vii.47-48)

And, as we have already noted, the references to Hamlet in the scene between Ahab and the carpenter serve to turn the entire chapter into an allusion. These verbal reminiscences, like the borrowed scenes discussed in Chapter III, enrich and

\(^{18}\) Matthiessen, p. 425.  \(^{19}\) Matthiessen, p. 425.
deepen the reader's response to a passage and make it possible for Melville's language, like his structure, to function on several levels at once.

But verbal echoes are perhaps the least important feature of the influence of Shakespeare's language on Melville's language in *Moby-Dick*. Much more significant, and at the same time much more interesting, are several types of Shakespearean diction which are often found in clusters in Ahab's speeches and in the especially dramatic sections of the novel, particularly the use of one part of speech for another, the invention of verbal compounds, and the outright coining of words. By examining Shakespeare's use of these devices and then analyzing Melville's use of the same or similar ones in *Moby-Dick*, we can see how completely Melville absorbed and assimilated Shakespeare's characteristic diction and adapted it to his own purposes.

"Of all the schemes of grammar in Elizabethan English," says Sister Miriam Joseph in her study of Shakespearean rhetoric, "anthimeria, the substitution of one part of speech for another, is perhaps the most exciting. More than any other figure of grammar, it gives vitality and power to Shakespeare's language, through its packed meaning, liveliness, and stir."20 However, modern readers of Shakespeare are often

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perplexed by this grammatical freedom and may be, at least momentarily, confused by the use of an adjective where one would expect a noun as in "my false o'erweights your true," a noun used as a verb--"He words me"--or an adjective where modern grammar requires an adverb as in "I am sudden sick."

To some extent, these unusual parts of speech are merely features of Elizabethan grammar and diction which in our day (and in Melville's) have become archaic but which at the time he wrote were not peculiar to Shakespeare. But Shakespeare's versatility with parts of speech far transcends any conventions, particularly in the making of verbs from nouns and adjectives. "Most Elizabethan and Jacobean authors use nouns freely as verbs, but they are not very venturesome," Sister Miriam Joseph quotes Alfred Hart as saying. "The last plays of Shakespeare teem with daringly brilliant metaphors due solely to this use of nouns and adjectives as verbs. . . . they add vigour, vividness and imagination to the verse . . . almost every play affords examples of such happy valiancy of phrase."21

The following examples were chosen from the plays which seemingly had the most influence on Moby-Dick--Antony and Cleopatra, King Lear, Hamlet, and Macbeth:

And that which most with you should safe my going,
Is Fulvia's death. (Ant. I.iii.55)

My bluest veins to kiss, a hand that kings
Have _lipped_, and trembled kissing. (Ant. II.v.31-32)

Dow'red with our curse, and _strangered_ with our oath (Lr.  I.i.203)

Sure her offense
Must be of such _unnatural_ degree
That _monstrers_ it (Lr. I.i.218-20)

You have obedience _scanted_ (Lr. I.i.279)

A little to _disquantify_ your train (Lr. I.iv.239)

My sea-gown _scarf'ed_ about me (Ham. V.ii.12)

till he _unseamed_ him (Mac. I.ii.22)

Hundreds of similar usages are to be found throughout Shakespeare's plays, particularly in the later ones, but even these few examples give an idea of how Shakespeare creates a many-layered linguistic structure, inventing verbs which go far beyond their primary functions into the realms of metaphor and symbol. "In reading Shakespeare's work chronologically," concludes Sister Miriam Joseph, "one notices that his language grows in ease, range, and mastery, in its capacity to be vivid, sudden, condensed. These qualities of Shakespeare's later style result in no small measure from his consummate skill in using the schemes of grammatical construction."22

Another characteristic of Shakespeare's diction is the coinage of a compound, usually an adjective, which functions both as a modifier and as an image. Participial adjectives

22Sister Miriam Joseph, p. 64.
are his favorite kinds of modifiers, and the compounds are usually made by yoking a participle with a noun which it modifies and then by employing the whole unit as a descriptive phrase which works on one level as metaphor. Although the compound epithet was not discussed as a separate figure by Tudor rhetoricians, it was "popular with Elizabethan writers." However, "Shakespeare used it more copiously and with greater freedom than his fellow dramatists, and by means of it created language picturesque, sudden, and evocative." Again the examples are numerous:

With plenteous rivers, and wide-skirted meads

A still-soliciting eye (Lr. I.i.231)

the imperfections of long-ingrafted condition

For they are yet but ear-kissing arguments

oak-cleaving thunderbolts (Lr. III.ii.5)

I am marble-constant (Ant. V.ii.239)

Jove's lightnings... more momentary

And sight-outrunning were not. (Temp. I.ii.201)

By their oppress'd and fear-surprised eyes

With an untitled tyrant bloody-sceptred

\(^{23}\)Sister Miriam Joseph, p. 124.

\(^{24}\)Sister Miriam Joseph, p. 124.
In *Moby-Dick*, Melville displays an "energy of verbal inventiveness . . . that it is hardly too much to call . . . Shakespearean."²⁵ From his reading of Shakespeare he learned the art, essentially dramatic, of compressing several meanings into one word and making it work as a multi-level metaphor, and if he does not coin verbs from nouns as often as Shakespeare does, he nevertheless sometimes uses the device with magnificent creativeness: "who didst **thunder** him higher than a throne"; "he tasks **me**, he **heaps** me"; "it **spiralizes** in ye"; "basket the deadliest thunders." Often the reader is startled by other unusual parts of speech, for instance, verbs used as nouns, nouns used for adjectives, or nouns and adverbs made into participles: "sinewing it"; "constrainings"; "uncon- tinented"; "uncatastrophied"; "last, cindered apple"; "stumped and paupered arm"; "earthquake life"; "uninterpenetratingly"; "leewardings"; "tantalization." Newton Arvin comments on this aspect of Melville's diction:

. . . the manner in which the parts of speech are "intermixingly" assorted in Melville's style--so that the distinction between verbs and nouns, substantives and modifiers, becomes a half unreal one--this is the prime characteristic of his language. No feature of it could express more tellingly the awareness that lies below and behind *Moby-Dick*--the awareness that action and condition, movement and stasis, object and idea, are but surface aspects of one underlying reality.²⁶

²⁵Arvin, p. 164. ²⁶Arvin, p. 165.
Nearly every page of Moby-Dick, at least after Chapter 22, gives evidence that Melville had absorbed the energy of Shakespeare's verbal compounds. In many of these--"circus-running sun," "heaven-insulting purpose," "all-ramifying heartlessness," "teeth-tiered sharks,"--Melville employs the brilliant Shakespearean device of yoking a Germanic and a Latin word together into a single unit of sense. The effect, besides metaphoric vividness, is an infinite possibility for variations of rhythm. The same kind of rhythmic variety is also possible with the purely Germanic compounds where, as with Shakespeare's favorite modifiers, the second word of the pair is a participle: "thunder-cloven old oak," "full-forced shock," "heaven-abiding peaks," "air-freighted," "tide-beating heart," "all quickening sun," "full-freighted worlds."

Melville sometimes also, though much less often, creates a compound with two words of Latin origin--"ocean-perishing," "message-carrying air," "close-coiled woe," "valor-ruined man,"--but in all except the first of these examples the total feeling and tone of the metaphoric unit is Germanic because the nouns modified--"air," "woe," "man,"--are all Germanic.

Some other examples of Melville's compound epithets may be listed briefly:

serpent-snapping eye, brain-battering fight, wonder-freighted, tribute-rendering, freshet-rushing carpet, joy-childlessness, soft-cymballing.

Matthiessen, p. 431.

In a number of these the two words of the compound are linked by either external (initial) or internal alliteration: "serpent-snapping," "brain-battering," "death-devouring," "land-like," "world-wandering," "freshet-rushing," "soft-cymballing," "sidelong-rushing." This use of similar sounds welds the elements of the compound solidly into a single image and gives to Melville's prose the same kind of metaphoric vividness and compression that it gives to Shakespeare's verse.

The compounds of both Shakespeare and Melville derive their vitality as adjectives from the fact that as participles they are half verbs. As such, they impart to the linguistic structure a dramatic movement and life of its own. By making verbs, coined if need be, and adjectives derived from verbs, the basic resource of his poetic vocabulary, Melville was able to make language itself part of the organic structure of Moby-Dick.

But the influence of Shakespeare's style on Melville's style in Moby-Dick is not limited to diction. It is not only the choice of words but the combination of them into certain recurring rhetorical patterns which gives the language of Moby-Dick its distinctly Shakespearean flavor. In fact, Melville was so hypnotized by Shakespeare's rhetoric that, as Matthiessen demonstrates, he "broke at times into what is
virtually blank verse." Matthiessen shows that Ahab's attempt to persuade Starbuck to his own point of view in "The Quarter-deck" can be printed as blank verse:

But look ye, Starbuck, what is said in heat,  
That thing unsays itself. There are men  
From whom warm words are small indignity.  
I meant not to incense thee. Let it go.  
Look! see yonder Turkish cheeks of spotted tawn--  
Living, breathing pictures painted by the sun.  
The pagan leopards--the unrecking and  
Unworshipping things, that live; and seek and give  
No reasons for the torrid life they feel!

"[This] division into lines," Matthiessen continues, "has been made without alteration of a syllable, and though there are some clumsy sequences, there is no denying the essential pattern." Nor is this passage the only instance of "such unconsciously compelled verse" in Moby-Dick. Ahab's soliloquy in Chapter 36 opens:

I leave a white and turbid wake;  
Pale waters, paler cheeks, where'er I sail.  
The envious billows sidelong swell to whelm  
My track; let them; but first I pass.

And Starbuck's meditation in Chapter 37 also begins with measured language:

My soul is more than matched; she's overmanned;  
And by a madman! Insufferable sting . . .

Matthiessen may be justified in complaining that these unconscious departures into verse in the early chapters of Moby-Dick represent a weakness. Melville's first excitement

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28 Matthiessen, p. 426.  
29 Matthiessen, p. 426.  
30 Matthiessen, p. 426.
over his discovery of Shakespeare "called forth from him an almost physical response" and "the first result might have been that he started to write high-flown speeches entirely under the dramatist's spell."\textsuperscript{31} But this response did not last long. As even these "weak" passages indicate, what Melville learned from Shakespearean rhetoric was not how to write "high-flown speeches" in blank verse, but how to combine words into rhetorical patterns or figures which would convey meaning on both the literal and symbolic levels at the same time.

The phrases "unrecking and unworshipping things" and "white and turbid wake" are examples of Melville's variation on what is perhaps Shakespeare's "favorite syntactical figure\textsuperscript{32}--the double epithet, a figure in which two words, nouns, verbs, or modifiers, of identical or very similar meaning are joined with a conjunction and used as a single unit. The following examples are again a selection from Antony and Cleopatra, King Lear, Hamlet, and Macbeth:

\begin{quote}
And is become the bellows and the fan To cool a gypsy's lust. (Ant. I.i.9-10)

How unremovable and fixed he is (Lr. II.iv.94)

All weary and o'er watched (Lr. II.ii.177)

The winds and persecutions of the sky (Lr. II.iii.12)

Their numbed and mortified bare arms (Lr. II.iii.15)

Th' extravagant and erring spirit hies (Ham. I.i.154)
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{31}Matthiessen, p. 427. \textsuperscript{32}Harbage, p. 14.
Within the book and volume of my brain (Ham. I.v.103)

Cancel and tear to pieces that great bond
(Mac. III.ii.49)

Stop up th' access and passage to remorse
(Mac. I.v.42)

Alfred Harbage in his William Shakespeare: A Reader's Guide makes what seems a conservative estimate that "dozens" of examples of this kind occur in every play.

The general effect is plenitude, the particular purpose to give force and amplitude to ideas, but it may be noticed [in many of the examples] that a simple word defines or glosses a complex word, often in a Germanic-Latin pair. A notorious instance is where "breathe-borne gossip" is called "exsufflicate and blown surmises." The effect can be both instructive and amazingly vivid. When Claudio [Measure for Measure] is shuddering at the thought of death--"to lie in cold obstruction and to rot"--the Latanic obstruction (stagnation) gives the process, and Germanic rot the result.33

A slightly different variation of the double epithet is the pattern formed on a series of three verbs, nouns, or modifiers, the last two of which are usually, though not always, joined by a conjunction. This figure is especially prevalent in the first act of King Lear, but it also occurs elsewhere:

No less in space, validity, and pleasure (Lr. I.i.81)

Be as well neighbored, pitied, and relieved (Lr. I.i.118)

It is no vicious blot, murder, or foulness (Lr. I.i.227)

33 Harbage, p. 19.
Without our grace, our love, our benison (Lr. I.i.265)
knaves, thieves, and treachers by spherical predominance;
drunkards, liars, and adulterers by an enforced obedience
of planetary influence (Lr. I.ii.119-21)

Our chiefest courtier, cousin, and our son
(Ham. I.ii.117)
melt,
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew (Ham. I.ii.129-30)

But this most foul, strange, and unnatural
(Ham. I.v.28)
such wanton, wild, and usual slips (Ham. II.i.22)
you secret, black, and midnight hags (Mac. IV.i.48)

In Moby-Dick Melville uses the Shakespearean double
epithet in a number of ways. He is particularly fond of the
pattern of three, using it, as well as its parent figure, as
the basis for the almost infinite modulations of his sentence
rhythms. Not only the number and variety of the figures but
the creativeness and originality of word combinations within
them is truly surprising. Combinations such as "bold and
nervous lofty language," "unrecking and unworshipping things,"
"white and turbid wake," "untouchable and immaculate to any
foulness," "vindictive princes and potentates of fire," "grand
and lofty things," "a beacon and a hope," "plumed and glitter-
ing god," "invisibly and uninterpenetratingly," "homage-
rendering and invoking brow," "candid and impartial seas,"
"trebly hooped and welded hip of power," expand at intervals
into patterns of three:

audacious, daring, and boundless adventure;
virgin voluntary and confiding breast;
strong, sustained, and mystic aspect;
gay, embattled, bantering bow;
one only and all-engrossing object;
audacious, immitigable, and supernatural revenge;
powerful, knowing, and judiciously malicious;
green, gentle, and most docile earth;
the courageous, the undaunted and victorious fowl;
most faithful, broad, baronial vassal;
coffined, hearsed, and tombed;
joyous, heartless, ever-juvenile eternities;
a wonder, a grandeur, and a woe;
prudent, most wise, and economic reasons.

As in many of the compounds, Melville ties two, and sometimes all three, of the words together with alliteration. The purpose is the same as it is in the compounds—to weld the individual elements of the figure into a single image which will evoke a single emotional response.

Perhaps an even more startling Shakespearean rhetorical figure is sometimes called a transferred epithet. Renaissance rhetoricians called this hypallage, a device in which an adjective is forced to modify a noun which it cannot logically modify. When Desdemona asks Othello, "Alas, what ignorant sin have I committed?" she means "what sin that I am ignorant of"----

34 Sister Miriam Joseph, p. 56.
it is she that is ignorant and not the sin. Banquo, musing on the appearance and then sudden disappearance of the witches, asks Macbeth:

Or have we eaten on the insane root
That takes the reason prisoner? (I.iii.84-85)

Again, insane logically modifies Banquo and Macbeth and not the root, which only causes insanity. Transferred epithets of this kind occur frequently in the tragedies and history plays:

And strew'd repentant ashes on his head (Jn. IV.i.111)
This was the most unkindest cut of all. (JC III.ii.188)
He rais'd the house with loud and coward cries (Lr. II.iv.43)

I heard myself proclaim'd,
And by the happy hollow of a tree
Escap'd the hunt (Lr. II.iii.1-3)
With Tarquin's ravishing strides (Mac. II.i.55)

Hath made his pendent bed and procreant cradle (Mac. I.vi.7-8)

Shines o'er with civil swords (Ant. I.iii.45)
Forgive my fearful sails! (Ant. III.ii.55)
Which with usurping steps do trample thee (R2 III.ii.16)
And never brandish more revengeful steel (R2 IV.i.50)
With rainy marching in the painful field (H5 IV.iii.111)
On your imaginary forces work (H5 Pro.18)

In many of these examples--"imaginary forces," "repentant ashes," "coward cries," "procreant cradle," "painful field"--the syntax can be made logical by making the modifier into a
noun and then into the object of a preposition: "forces of imagination," "ashes of repentance," "cradle of procreation," "field of pain," and so on. The effect of these figures is to set up a kind of violent internal strain and tension between the words of the unit, between intuition and logic, which makes for images of great power and compression. As images, the figures require that we respond to them in more than one way, emotionally as well as intellectually.

On the device of hypallage--"shivering winter's night," "slavish shore," "watery loneliness," "unreasoning mask," "desperate wound," "crippled way," "weary watch," "unparticipated grief," "heavenly quadrant"--depends much of the inner tension which helps to give the style of Moby-Dick its dramatic life and symbolic power. Whenever dramatic tensions and inner conflicts are particularly evident in the action of the novel or in the thoughts of the characters, these transferred epithets are especially likely to occur. The first two in the list are from the "six-inch" chapter "The Lee Shore," which introduces the central paradox of the conflict between land and sea. Two more--"desperate wound" and "crippled way,"--occur in Ishmael's first descriptions of Ahab, his wound and his inner turmoil. "Unreasoning mask" appears in one of Ahab's speeches in "The Quarter-deck," and Starbuck uses the phrase "heavenly quadrant" in his soliloquy outside Ahab's cabin door as he wrestles with the temptation to kill Ahab while he sleeps. But the most original, most
compressed, most emblematic of these instances of hypallage is the phrase "thy unparticipated grief" from Ahab's defiant invocation of fire in Chapter 119, "The Candles." Again, the context of the figure is a paradox—"Light though thou be, thou leapest out of darkness; but I am darkness leaping out of light, leaping out of thee!" (p. 642)—and paradox is in itself a rhetorical figure expressing a central, internal tension. Just as Hamlet's mixed metaphors in his meditation on suicide—"to take arms against a sea of troubles" (III.i.59)—are symptoms of his inner conflicts, so Ahab's mental agonies, his frustration and hatred, betray themselves in his wrenched syntax. The rhetorical figure itself becomes, in such a passage as this, an emblem of the scene in which it occurs.

It must be said again, even at the risk of seeming to belabor the point, that Melville's language in Moby-Dick is in no case merely an imitation of Shakespearean rhetoric. As this discussion of the diction and rhetorical patterns in Moby-Dick has demonstrated, Melville so completely adapted Shakespeare's characteristic diction and syntax to his own purposes and usage that even directly borrowed words and phrases appear in fresh and vivid, sometimes even startling, combinations and, therefore, seem as much Melville's creation as Shakespeare's. Matthiessen emphasizes this point in the conclusion of his brief analysis of the influence of Shakespeare on Melville's diction:
Melville came into full possession of his own idiom, not when he was half following Shakespeare, but when he had grasped the truth of the passage in The Winter's Tale that "The art itself is nature," when, writing out of his own primary energy, he could end his description of his hero in language that suggests Shakespeare's, but is not an imitation of it: "But Ahab, my captain, still moves before me in all his Nantucket grimness and shagginess; and in this episode touching emperors and kings, I must not conceal that I have only to do with a poor old whale-hunter like him; and, therefore, all outward majestical trappings and housings are denied me. 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!"

In driving through to his conception of a tragic hero who should be dependent upon neither rank nor costume, Melville showed his grasp of the kind of art "that nature makes," and fulfilled Emerson's organic principle. His practice of tragedy, though it gained force from Shakespeare, had real freedom; it did not base itself upon Shakespeare, but upon man and nature as Melville knew them. Therefore, he was able to handle, in his greatest scenes, a kind of diction that depended upon no source. . . . Melville had learned under Shakespeare's tutelage to master, at times, a dramatic speech that does not encroach upon verse, but draws upon a magnificent variety and flow of language. . . .

Matthiessen, pp. 428-29.
CHAPTER V

THE AXIS OF REALITY

It has been the purpose of this study to prove that the influence of Shakespeare on Melville's art in Moby-Dick is most clearly manifest and most concretely demonstrable in the style and structure, in the linguistic and dramatic forms, in the "rhetoric" of the novel. In Chapter I two questions are raised which establish the focus of this investigation: How is the sudden maturity of Melville's style in Moby-Dick to be explained? And what is the exact nature of the influence of Shakespeare on this style?

In answer to the first question this study identifies three major events, or intellectual experiences, which profoundly influenced Melville just before and during the composition of Moby-Dick. These were the failure of his experiment with the metaphysical style in Mardi, his discovery of Hawthorne's "blackness" in the summer of 1850, and his reading and then rereading of Shakespeare.

As the evidence presented in Chapter II demonstrates, the first two of these intellectual events had little direct influence on the style of Moby-Dick. In fact, the influence of Mardi is almost entirely negative, and the significance of the failure of Melville's first attempt at symbolic fiction lies
in the fact that he failed to solve in *Mardi* the same structural and stylistic problems he was later, under the influence of Shakespeare, to solve so brilliantly in *Moby-Dick*. The influence of Hawthorne, too, profound though it was on some aspects of the reconception and revision of *Moby-Dick* after the summer of 1850, did not have an appreciable effect on Melville's style, for, according to Newton Arvin, Melville was incapable of following Hawthorne's line of artistic development. "He could not move, as Hawthorne had done, from the romantic tale to the psychological romance, from 'Young Goodman Brown' to *The Scarlet Letter.*"\(^1\) It would, in any case, have been unprofitable for Melville to take Hawthorne's tales and novels as structural models, because, as Walter E. Bezanson points out, "for Hawthorne the structural frame of reference was neo-classical," while "for Melville it was romantic."\(^2\)

It was, then, the third of these spiritual and intellectual experiences, Melville's encounters with Shakespeare's plays in the winter of 1849 and again in the summer of 1850, which led to the sudden transformation of the style of *Moby-Dick*. This conclusion is supported, not only by biographical and other forms of empirical evidence, but also by internal evidence--stylistic and structural--which can be extracted from *Moby-Dick* itself. An analysis of this internal evidence,

\(^1\)Arvin, p. 89. \(^2\)Bezanson, p. 669.
presented in Chapters III and IV of this study, provides an answer to the question concerning the exact nature of the style of *Moby-Dick* and further supports the argument that the influence of Shakespeare on Melville's art in *Moby-Dick* is most clearly discernible in language and structure.

Essentially, what Melville learned from Shakespeare was a dramatic structural technique and stylistic method. He seems to have so completely absorbed Shakespeare's dramatic techniques that he transferred some Shakespearean structural devices directly from the plays into his novel without even bothering to change the "formal elements of [the] playscript"\(^3\) into narrative prose. These devices include the use, in some chapters, of playscript form, the various types of long soliloquies, and the numerous scenes in *Moby-Dick* which were borrowed from scenes in Shakespeare's plays. Less obvious than these devices, but at the same time just as important to an understanding of the dramatic structure of *Moby-Dick*, are the pairing and balancing of contrasting foil characters or groups of characters and the pairing and balancing of parallel or contrasting actions, symbols, or themes, two elements of Shakespearean dramatic structure which entered into and informed the larger structure of *Moby-Dick* and therefore profoundly affected its central unity.

\(^3\)Konigsberg, p. 112.
Shakespearean influence on the rhetoric of Moby-Dick is even more pervasive than it is in structure. This influence is evident not only in the diction of the novel, but in the sentence structure and phrasing as well. Melville's encounter with "the unexampled vitality of Shakespeare's language" taught him to use parts of speech with great freedom, to make verbal compounds the basic resource of his poetic vocabulary, and even to coin new words if no already-existing ones could be found to serve his purpose. From Shakespeare he also learned to combine words into rhetorical patterns which could convey a meaning which was greater than the sum of the meanings of the individual words. Under the influence of Shakespeare, "Melville came into full possession of his own idiom" and created in Moby-Dick a language which everywhere suggests Shakespeare's language but is in no case an imitation of it.

An understanding of the influence of Shakespeare on the structure and language of Moby-Dick is important for two reasons. First, the plays of Shakespeare gave Melville a sudden insight into the significance of form, and second, his absorption of Shakespeare's rhetoric enabled him to solve a serious artistic problem with which he was faced when, under the influence of this insight, he reconceived the shape and purpose of Moby-Dick.

4Matthiessen, p. 423.  5Matthiessen, p. 428.
All five of the novels Melville had written before he revised *Moby-Dick* had been to some extent semi-documentary travel-adventure narratives, having for their major themes a young man's initiation into adult experience and his increasing awareness of the realities, particularly the unpleasant realities, of modern Western civilization. Even *Mardi*, in which he had attempted to explore these themes on a deeper level, degenerates, at times, into little more than a sort of metaphysical sight-seeing expedition, and *Redburn* and *White Jacket*, though they show a somewhat more mature control of their material and a beginning of an understanding of the use of symbols, largely confine themselves to realistic social comment from the point of view of an autobiographical hero-narrator. But by the time he was "half-way in the work" of writing his "romance of the southern sperm whale fisheries" in the early summer of 1850, the need which had been for some time growing in Melville "to descend deeper and deeper into [the] obscure and questionable regions of the mind and to move on . . . to a larger, bolder, more complex, and more symbolic manner"\(^6\) had become overwhelming. What he wanted to do in *Moby-Dick*, as he implies in the essay on Hawthorne written in August of 1850 after he had been rereading Shakespeare's plays, was to imitate King Lear, to "tear off the

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\(^6\) Arvin, p. 89.
mask" and "speak the sane madness of vital truth." After encountering the "blackness" in both Hawthorne's tales and Shakespeare's plays, he felt that he had things to say which were "so terrifically true, that it were all but madness for any good man, in his own proper character, to utter, or even hint of them," and he suddenly realized, perhaps with the "shock of recognition" he speaks of in the Mosses essay, that if the "vital truth" he had to tell could not be told "in his own proper character," that is, through the mouth of a thinly disguised autobiographical narrator, then he must employ a dramatic and symbolic rather than a documentary method. If he wished to "probe the very axis of reality," he must do so as an allegorist and a dramatist rather than as a philosopher or a reporter, and he must establish as his hero, not an observer-narrator, but a "dark" character who could become an emblem of the truth he speaks. From Shakespeare, he learned that poetry could not be imposed on his material from without but that the material must be allowed to render up its own poetic essences. In short, Shakespeare's plays gave Melville a sudden understanding, which he had hitherto lacked, of the organic relationship between form and meaning.

However, his intellectual excitement over the significance of form he had discovered in Shakespeare made it impossible for Melville to continue writing the kind of book he had started to write. The book he had reported "halfway"
finished to Dana in May of 1850 was, as he described it in a letter to his English publisher, "a romance of adventure, founded upon certain wild legends in the Southern Sperm Whale Fisheries, and illustrated by the author's own personal experience, of two years & more, as a harpooneer."\(^7\) Charles Olson suggests that this book almost certainly "did not contain Ahab"; it "may not, except incidentally, have contained Moby-Dick,"\(^8\) and F. O. Matthiessen argues that if Melville had not revised it under the stimulus of his second reading of Shakespeare, the book might have been no more than a "superior White Jacket."\(^9\)

This revision, however, confronted Melville with an artistic problem which, in his previous books, he had been unable to solve. In essence this problem was, as Newton Arvin defines it, "to find a fictional style in which there would be a particular kind of dynamic balance between fact and form, between concept and symbol, between the general and the particular."\(^10\) In the new Moby-Dick, Melville wanted to do two things: he wanted to "endow the whaling industry with a mythology befitting a fundamental activity of man in his struggle to subdue nature,"\(^11\) but at the same time, he wished to "probe the very axis of reality" and to "speak the sane

\(^8\)Olson, p. 35.
\(^9\)Matthiessen, p. 416.
\(^10\)Arvin, p. 100.
\(^11\)Matthiessen, p. 423.
madness of vital truth" through the mouth of a "dark" character in a language which could "reach Shakespearean heights of expression." In other words, he wished to write a work of symbolic fiction which would have both epic scope and tragic depth. His difficulty lay in finding a structural and stylistic method which would provide the amplitude necessary for the epic sweep and grandeur he wished to impart to the book and at the same time could achieve the economy and compression necessary to tragedy.

As we have seen, Melville solved this problem by learning from Shakespeare to create a multi-layered dramatic structure and to use a dramatic language which, itself, becomes one layer of that structure. A dramatist, and especially a tragic dramatist, needs to create several "levels of significance," because he has only the speeches of the characters to use. He has to achieve great compression because he must tell his tale in a short time--in the "two hours traffic of our stage"--and must present it all at one "sitting." Hence, the dramatist's language must do a number of things at once: portray action, delineate character, suggest emotion, motivation, attitudes. It must present, at the same time, both realism and a heightened reality. This presentation of reality can be done only symbolically and metaphorically. The use of a metaphoric, rhetorical language

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helps to provide compression and to create multiple levels of significance because it helps to fuse form and meaning. In Shakespeare's greatest plays, this fusion is so nearly complete that form becomes part of the meaning; the language and the fable are inseparable. It is this fusion of form and meaning which, in its greatest moments, the language of *Moby-Dick* achieves.

F. O. Matthiessen calls the influence of Shakespeare on the creation of *Moby-Dick* a "matching of the forces." However, an analysis of the style that resulted from that "matching" suggests that what happened was more in the nature of a meeting and fusing of the primary energies of two creative imaginations. Forged in the white heat of that meeting and tempered by Melville's own peculiar genius, the language of *Moby-Dick*, like Ahab's harpoon, became an instrument for striking, as Melville said Shakespeare did, to "the very axis of reality."

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14 Matthiessen, pp. 431ff.
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