

## **History Honors Project**

Nineteenth-Century Whaling and the Environment:  
An Exploration of the Cultural Influences on Whaler's  
Interactions with Nature

By

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## Introduction

In Melville's groundbreaking American epic *Moby-Dick*, as the story nears the climax and the *Pequod* tears at full speed through the water towards its ghastly ghostly foe, Ishmael, the stories narrator, takes a break from the action to reflect on whether the whale as a species, is diminishing thanks to over half a century at that point, of whaling. Beginning his reflections, Ishmael exhorts whales as a species genealogically coming, "from the head-waters of the Eternities,"<sup>1</sup> seemingly giving them deific status. Likewise, In another example of this same deification of whales, just the chapter before, Ishmael reminisces about a temple "the Rafters and Beams of which are made of Whale-Bones," at which "if you be an Nantucketer, and a Whaleman, you will silent worship there."<sup>2</sup> Yet, in contradiction it seems, to a species held in such high esteem, at the end of Ishmael's ponderings, he concludes that the whale is "immortal in his species, *however perishable in his individuality*"<sup>3</sup> (emphasis mine). Ultimately therefore, whales were never at risk of being anything other than plentiful in the world's oceans and could continue to be mercilessly hunted by humankind. The tension evident in these lines by Melville, between exploitation and immortality, is one which is deeply rooted in religious influence as well as in continually changing views of animals occurring at the time, through the spread of domestication and pet keeping in America. For much of the population but specifically whalers, nature in general, but specifically whales, were viewed as gifted to mankind for its use by God both implying at least to whalers in the nineteenth-century, their continued provision and mankind's right to exploitation.

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<sup>1</sup> Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*, New York: Barnes and Noble Classics, 2003, 530.

<sup>2</sup> Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 529.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 534.

The previous scene created by Melville, a fellow whaler himself, highlights a number of distinct tensions faced by North American whalers in the mid-nineteenth-century. The result of these tensions were a significantly more complex relationship between whalers and the natural environment. As briefly mentioned, it is important to note the religious undertone that pervades this scene. More than just this scene in fact, religion underscored much of Melville's work, American literature, and the society for which this literature was produced at large. To exhort whalers to the position of "from the head-waters of the Eternities," is to assert a belief in eternity as well as its ultimate preeminence, a staple feature of Christianity, the prevailing religion in the United States during the nineteenth-century. Noting the religious permeation in whaling society and literature, is important because it is from these dual creeds of the Christian doctrine in which man is given "dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth,"<sup>4</sup> as well as extolled to seek God within nature,<sup>5</sup> the same thing they were given dominion over, which was a main contributing factor in the more complex relationship between whalers and the environment.

Though for Melville, religious belief appears much more complex than for the general person, it is nonetheless prevalent however small it grew throughout his life. Raised by Christian parents, Herman Melville found himself introduced to religion at a formative age. Yet, hard times throughout his childhood--his family facing multiple deaths and bankruptcies during Melville's upbringing--seem to have had a profound effect on how he viewed God, and certainly, how he viewed death. More than hard times though, the cynicism evidenced in Melville's discussions of Christianity seems to imply that Melville had more than one negative interaction with those who use Christianity for manipulation and gain, professing Christianity to a significantly higher

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<sup>4</sup> *The Holy Bible*: "English Standard Version," Genesis 1:26, Wheaton: Crossway Publishing, 2001.

<sup>5</sup> See: Romans 1:20, Psalm 19:1, Colossians 1:16, Isaiah 55:12, Isaiah 44:24, Psalm 8:1-9, Deuteronomy 30:19.

degree than they act out the part. “Better to sleep with a sober cannibal than a drunken Christian,”<sup>6</sup> Melville writes in chapter three of *Moby-Dick*, and in chapter ten he makes it all the more explicit admitting that “Christian kindness has proved but hollow courtesy.”<sup>7</sup>

Following his voyages, Melville also evidences a much more distant, transcendental, and interpretive, theology than the traditional Christianity in which he was raised. At the end of the chapter presaging the formal Christian sermon by Father Mapple which takes up chapter eight of *Moby-Dick*, Melville provides his current view of things. In so doing, displaying both the ways his experiences have caused him to reinterpret his religion, as well as the ways he saw religion disillusioning effects on people. He writes, “Methinks we have hugely mistaken this matter of Life and Death. Methinks that what they call my shadow here on earth is my true substance. Methinks that in looking at things spiritual, we are too much like oysters observing the sun through the water, and thinking that thick water the thinnest of air.”<sup>8</sup>

In a general sense, Melville’s religious views can be interpreted as progressive even when held up against a modern light. When Ishmael is faced with sleeping in the same bed as a black cannibal, Melville writes lines that would certainly confound nineteenth-century as well as modern, American Christians and their general support of anti-immigration policies, when he ponders, “what is worship?---to do the will of God---*that* is worship. And what is the will of God?---to do to my fellow man what I would have my fellow man to do to me---*that* is the will of God. Now, Queequeg [the cannibal], is my fellow man.”<sup>9</sup> It is also telling that in a discussion of cannibals and Christians, Melville grouped himself with the cannibals not the Christians, writing, “It’s a mutual, joint-stock world, in all Meridians. We cannibals must help these

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<sup>6</sup> Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 50.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 81.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 66.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 82.

Christians.”<sup>10</sup> Evidencing the hypocrisy which probably played a large part in driving him away from his Christian upbringing, Melville with seemingly equal parts self-reflection and disgust, writes of the Quaker Captain Bildad in *Moby-Dick*, that he, “Though refusing from conscientious scruples, to bear arms against land invaders, yet himself had illimitably invaded the Atlantic and Pacific; and though a sworn foe to human bloodshed, yet had he in his straight-bodied coat, spilled tuns upon tuns of leviathan gore.”<sup>11</sup> Yet despite all this doubt, Melville cannot seem to shake his belief in God, no matter how much he grew to resent and hate him. “For what are the comprehensible terrors of man compared with the interlinked terrors and wonders of God!”<sup>12</sup> Melville exclaims seemingly exacerbated by the onslaught of these terrors.

John Gatta a professor of English at The University of The South: Sewanee, excellently sums up the dissonance that was felt and perpetuated by American Christians in the nineteenth-century. In his fantastic book *Making Nature Sacred: Literature, Religion, and the Environment in America from the Puritans to the Present*, he writes that for those in the United States during the eighteenth and nineteenth-century, “untamed nature was at once a challenge, a force to be mastered by human industry, and a revelatory field of divine Creation.” The passage by Melville, with which I began this essay, is important because it highlights as Gatta’s quote does, that for whalers, the need for control and dominion, over nature through human industry, was ordained by God, and therefore impossible to view as exploitative. However easy it is to do so now with a modern lens. Yet, Christianity also taught people that God and his divine holiness, could be found and in fact, was also an intrinsic part of the natural world, and that God could be found and experienced in nature. This led to the complexity which I will discuss throughout this essay. For example, in the beginning passage from *Moby-Dick*, Ishmael does not just recount the

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 92.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 107.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 142.

conquering of a whale and the typical use of its body for industrial purposes, but of how its bones were removed, cleaned, and constructed into something for the benefit of man on an aesthetic level, by making it a house of worship. This practice of making nature sacred through human domestication further complicated the relationship between humans and the environment, especially for those in the whaling industry, because it meant a line had to be drawn between those parts of the environment deemed “sacred” versus those that were not. How were such lines drawn? What was it that made one dog, whale, or plot of land, worth saving while others of like kind were consumed? What made one whale worthy of being preserved as a house of worship while most were brutally dissected and every conceivable part of them repurposed for human production? For whalers, the decision seemed arbitrary, yet regardless, human control was asserted. If killed, the whale becomes a product in service of humankind. If preserved, the whale, no less free of human domination, becomes a puppet something to see in a museum, or marvel at as a house of worship. Once brought into human presence, it is almost impossible for nature to leave again with its own autonomy.

Humankind and especially whalers, interactions with the natural world on top of being influenced by religion, were further complexified by the rise of domestication and pet keeping in America, and a growing ethic of kindness that was being championed by progressive Christians. This new era of religious thought that followed the Second Great Awakening, resulted in many people challenging and rethinking the human-animal relationship. Going further than rethinking, many Christians of the time were working towards a more holistic way of living life arguing that being kind to animals was essential for rebuilding God’s promised paradise. Even more consequently as Harriett Beecher Stowe puts it, how humans interacted with the natural world

was direct evidence for whether someone was a Christian or not.<sup>13</sup> Especially for those who worked directly with animals such as whalers, the complexities regarding their actions with the natural environment and its religious implications, could often have a crushing weight on sailors. And, as we shall see in this essay, resulted often, in guilt and further mismanagement of animals as the natural environment and its treatment, was constantly changed and redefined by whalers. The tenuous line between affection and domination often shifting and ill defined by society at large, but especially by whalers, lead to a further complexity in how whalers interacted with the natural environment on top of the complexity generated by competing views of the natural world and especially whales, perpetuated by religion. Though Melville was to a degree, forced to be part of this society of exploitation due to the time and place in which he was born, there are continued examples throughout this essay and his extensive writings, that he often struggled with and sometimes pushed back against, the exploitation of the natural world. He himself, being intimately familiar with the atrocities regularly visited upon whales and any other unfortunate creatures who find themselves in the path of whaling ships, due to his own service aboard such a vessel.

The complex relationship experienced by whalers between them and the environment, is by no means confined to only Melville's work. In logs of ship's journeys such as that of the *Dauphin* (1877), *Susan* (1841), and *Nauticon* (1848), passages and notes by the captain, the first mate, or in the rare case of the ship *Nauticon* the captain's wife, about the sperm whale's being hunted as well as in regards to other animals that were caught and kept onboard the ships for varying lengths of time even sometimes as personal pets, provide us with evidence that those aboard whaleships were faced with vastly different encounters with animals than people on land.

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<sup>13</sup> Harriet Beecher Stowe to Henry E Burton, esq., 20 December 1881, Hartford: Stowe-Day Foundation.

These different encounters, forcing them to re-evaluate their relationship as humans, with animals and the rest of the natural world. In published accounts of whaling voyages such as Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1851), William B. Whitecar's *Four Years Aboard a Whaling Ship* (1860), and Francis Allyn Olmsted's *Incidents of a Whaling Voyage* (1841), as well as the real voyages that inspired these tales such as Melville's years as a whaler aboard the *Acushnet*, there is further and varying strings of evidence that there was something unique about how whaler's viewed and interacted with, animals that was not often seen in the larger population. Within the many different types of literature about the nineteenth-century whaling industry in the United States, by whalers as well as civilians who found themselves aboard whaleships, there is continued examples of a more complex relationship between whalers and the environment, influenced by competing claims of their religion, a desire to tame nature through domestication, and generational and familial characteristics of the whaling industry.

The purpose of this essay then, is two-fold: First, to demonstrate that there is a more complex relationship between those aboard whaleships in the mid-nineteenth-century, and the animals and nature they encountered, compared to the rest of society. Furthermore, this more complex relationship often resulted in a disconnect in which some animals were valued and others were not, or even at times as is the case with sperm whales, a disconnect in which some animals as a species were valued but as an individual were not, resulting in further, more widespread, destruction of the environment. Evidence of which will be provided using the sources mentioned in the previous paragraph. Second, having provided sufficient evidence of this complex relationship, using the same sources, I will set forth my theory on the cultural influences that gave birth to and nourished these relationships and mindsets between whalers and the natural world. Arguing specifically as indicated previously, that there is a more complex

relationship between whalers and the environment influenced by competing claims of their religion, a desire to tame nature through domestication, as well as by the generational and familial characteristics of the whaling industry.

## Words About Whales

Contrasting descriptions of whales as a species versus a specific whale being hunted in individual interactions, often, exhibit well the complex relationship between whalers and the whales they hunted. In Melville's descriptions of whales for example, one can often note a distinct contrast in which whales as a species are praised for their mystery and beauty, which is often attributed with a spiritual aspect. However, all this appears to be completely dissociated and discarded, when it comes to hunting, harpooning, and harvesting the dozens of whales captured on each whaling voyage. Whether Melville intended his poetic descriptions of whales to be direct juxtaposition against the violence and gore visited upon whales in his epic, or whether simply, these poetic descriptions are the Christian beliefs of his childhood in which nature was holy and awesome, and served as a place to experience God, is open for interpretation. Whether intentional or not though, these poetic descriptions do stand in juxtaposition against the gore and violence in *Moby-Dick*. Demonstrating through prose, the competing Christian convictions largely at the root of the complex relationship experienced between Whalers and their environment, in which God was to be found and experienced in the natural world yet the natural world was fully humankind's to rule and enact dominion over. The dual tenants of Christianity in which humans are to seek God in nature as well as have full dominion over all of nature for their own use, I believe, is one of the main cultural contributors to the complexity experienced by

whalers in interactions with the natural environment. These tenants which found new emphasis in the Second Great Awakening beginning in the 1780s and peaking in the early nineteenth-century, played a crucial role in the development of the United States first great industry. Arguably, setting a tone which is still seen throughout American business, of ruthless consumption of natural resources. More than just in *Moby-Dick* too, as this section will attest, evidence of a complex relationship especially between how whales were viewed in person versus as a species in theory and description, can be found in many different and contrasting sources which recorded information about whales in the mid-nineteenth-century.

Though often at their most explicit in Melville's work, they are in no way limited to it. From Melville's works of more popular fiction based on two actual whaling voyages he made in the early 1840s, to the business and factual centered logs of ships such as the *Acushnet*, *Nauticon*, and *Susan*, as well as in more privately written and posthumously published accounts intended generally for personal pleasure or health, such as George Barker's *Thrilling Adventures of the Whaleship Alycone*, Francis Allyn Olmsted's *Incidents of a Whaling Voyage*, and William B. Whitecar's *Four Years Aboard the Whaleship*, evidence of a complexity in how nineteenth-century whalers viewed, discussed, and interacted with whales was evident. Culturally influenced by the competing claims in Christianity that God is revealed in nature and nature is humanities to have rule and dominion over, this complexity can be seen in the contrasting descriptions of whales often used in the varying forms of journals regularly kept during these voyages.

Though intended to exist in balance with each other, as Gatta points out, from the beginning, "settlers were more eager to possess than to be possessed by the land." As Gatta continues, they showed "considerably more interest in mastering than in marvelling over their

new physical environment.”<sup>14</sup> Aggressively expanding into the New England countryside, Puritan settlers invoked biblical stories such as the Israelites being granted the land of Canaan and God driving the Canaanites out of their land, as evidence that God championed their expansion.<sup>15</sup> Gatta in his book attempts to answer a pivotal question in religion and environmental history, which is “to what extent did Puritan doctrine—or, for that matter, fundamental teachings of biblical Judaism and Christianity—feed the impulse of English colonizers to destroy “wilderness” and to achieve decisive mastery over nature?” And indeed, does answer this question, finding “religious rhetoric justifying active exploitation or ‘improvement’ of the land abounds in colonial writing.”<sup>16</sup> One clear example of this can be found in the minutes of a town hall meeting discussed by George F. Willison in which it is recorded: “Voted, that the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof; voted, that the earth is given to the Saints; voted, that we are the Saints.”<sup>17</sup> Continuing throughout the rest of the seventeenth and eighteenth-centuries, the stress on “mastering over marvelling,” continued to prevail as Europeans “settled,” more accurately, stole, thousands of miles of land out from under indigenous peoples. During the Second Great Awakening however, these creed’s began to be challenged and as the Enlightenment encouraged people to question everything, they began to turn their sights on what seemed to be the great contradictions of Christianity.

As people began questioning how they could maintain control over the environment in a way that still honors and glorifies nature and its holiness, we begin to see the complexity which is on full display in the lives of whalers, begin to grow in the cultural psyche. For example, in Johnathan Edwards writings, though he still affirmed the great Chain of Being, he still believed

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<sup>14</sup> John Gatta, *Making Nature Sacred: Literature, Religion, and Environment in America from the Puritans to the Present*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004, 4.

<sup>15</sup> John Gatta, *Making Nature Sacred*, 7.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> George F. Willison, *Saints and Strangers*, New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1945, 392.

that those lower creatures still had their own integrity and that “‘the lower creatures' did not exist solely for man.” In articulation of a timeless conundrum that plagues us even today in our relation to animal life, Edwards elsewhere wrote, “Some men would be moved with pity by seeing a brute- creature under extreme and long torments, who yet suffer no uneasiness in knowing that many thousands of them every day cease to live, and so have an end put to all their pleasure, at butchers' shambles in great cities.”

Edwards in the previous quote, highlights a key factor in the growing complexity that religion encouraged between humans and the natural world. Animals and humans as civilization continued to develop, often now lived their lives in closer and closer proximity to each other. So people were more regularly faced with the contradictions which ran rampant in their philosophies towards the natural world. As Gatta summarizes, “Edwards's observation is verified today by the immense slaughter of animals that supports the American fast-food industry, though many of those who consume such foods go to considerable lengths to protect the life and health of household pets.”<sup>18</sup> In the same way, turning back to the beginning of the nineteenth-century, we can see Edwards observation verified in the “immense slaughter,” of whales that provided light for the world against the backdrop of domestication in the early nineteenth-century, and the rise for the first time, of the household pet a topic which will be discussed in the following section.

One of the reason's this complexity is clear in the whaling industry, especially in accounts written of whaling voyages at the time, most of all fictional ones, is because the literary genre, of which there certainly was one, was one which like the whaling industry in America as a whole, was extremely tight-knit. Many authors of whaling voyages including Melville, read

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<sup>18</sup> John Gatta, *Making Nature Sacred*, 11.

many other accounts of whaling voyages before writing their own, often borrowing liberally from each other in the process. As Richard J. King notes in his natural history of *Moby-Dick: Ahab's Rolling Sea*, there was an “extraordinarily high literacy rate among sailors: from seventy-five to ninety percent.” “Reading cultures thrived aboard ships,” King continues, providing the specific example of James Osborn, the second mate aboard the *Charles W. Morgan*, who kept note of each book he read during their three year voyage, reaching a total of seventy-five books.<sup>19</sup> An astounding number considering the exhausting lives of whalers discussed in other parts of this essay. In further evidence of the tight-knit literary community within the whaling voyage genre, the first book on Osborn’s list, John Mason Good’s *The Book of Nature* (1826), was referenced specifically by Melville in another of his novels, *White-Jacket*.<sup>20</sup>

As King notes in *Ahab's Rolling Sea*, and the previous example attests, it was not just whalers that read the accounts of whaling voyages but other authors as well. Within the years preceding Melville’s *Moby-Dick*, at least six other accounts of whaling voyages were published some of which are also discussed in this essay, including *The Whale and His Captors* (1850), *Etchings of a Whaling Cruise* (1850), *Incidents of a Whaling Cruise* (1841), *Narrative of a Whaling Voyage Round the Globe* (1840), *The Natural History of the Sperm Whale* (1839), and *An Account of the Arctic Regions, with a History and Description of the Northern Whale Fishery* (1820). These “Fish Documents,” as King terms them, “provided factual information and stylistic influence for Melville when he sat down to write his fictional voyage,”<sup>21</sup> and certainly provided the same for each other. So too, Melville, certainly provided further influence and information in *Moby-Dick*, for those authors of the genre that followed him. King summarizes

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<sup>19</sup> Richard J. King, *Ahab's Rolling Sea*, Chicago: The University of Chicago press, 2019, 21.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 27.

the world of whaling literature also evidencing again, the close-knit qualities of the American whaling community writing, “Melville created *Moby-Dick* within a crowded market of popular sea voyage narratives in which copying pages of others’ writing was common and even scholarly.”<sup>22</sup>

Whales specifically, rather than other animals or aspects of the natural world, served as the focus of so many fictional voyages, and of humankind’s assertion of dominion in general, because of the recognizable and provocative symbol of power that they were. In much the same way buying a Ford “Mustang” provokes ideas of strength and speed. Furthermore, the conquering of whales served not just as the ultimate assertion of power and manliness, but since God’s actions through the whale in the story of Jonah, and thanks to the continued assertion as Father Mapple puts it in *Moby-Dick*, that “God is everywhere,”<sup>23</sup> conquering a whale to a degree, meant conquering God, and was not just the ultimate assertion of manliness but of human superiority. As Melville says of *Moby-Dick*, mankind “piled upon the whale’s hump the sum of all the general rage and hate felt by his whole race from Adam down.”<sup>24</sup>

Though all the sources in this essay vary widely in their intention and audience, the experiences of their authors are all more similar than different. As is true of the many voyages made by thousands of men, out of the American harbors of Nantucket and New Bedford, during the nineteenth-century. One reason for this is the close-knit community which permeated the North American whaling industry with all its business running out of just one or two ports for most of the nineteenth-century. For many as it was for Melville, a lineage of life on the sea as well as “the frustrations of the land, [and] the need of a job,”<sup>25</sup> was enough to drive you into the

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid. 29.

<sup>23</sup> Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 77.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 226.

<sup>25</sup> Wilson L Heflin, *Herman Melville’s Whaling Years*, Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004, 14.

mysterious arms of the ocean. The story of Captain Valentine Pease, Jr.'s family, the captain of Melville's first voyage aboard the *Acushnet*, bears out further just how intrinsically knit whaling was into the DNA of many in the north east. Of the nineteen sons had by Captain Valentine Pease, Sr. Hefline notes that "one died young, and seventeen grew up to become masters of whaling vessels," furthermore, "seven of eleven daughters married whaling captains."<sup>26</sup> It is specifically due to this so tightly knit community, that we see such similar language throughout these many varying types of sources, and that their comparison in historical research such as in this essay, is possible.

The whaling industry in North America during the nineteenth-century, was so interconnected in part, because it almost totally existed in two cities only on the northeastern coast of the United States: Nantucket and New Bedford,<sup>27</sup> Nantucket alone claiming pre-eminence for much of the nineteenth century, until the industry and its ships grew so large that they could no longer enter Nantucket's harbor due to a sandbar. Following this, New Bedford, less than a hundred miles away on the mainland coast, grew up to equal the output of Nantucket and share the crown. The seas, their kingdom. As Melville puts it, "Let America add Mexico to Texas, and pile Cuba upon Canada; let the English overswarm all India, and hang out their blazing banner from the sun; two thirds of this terraqueous globe are the Nantucketer's."<sup>28</sup>

Within these two cities, everyone knew someone who worked in the industry and more often than not, had multiple relatives who worked in the industry. In speaking to how much of a community wide ordeal whaling was, Obed Macy in his history of Nantucket describes an exciting day on the island of Nantucket:

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 19.

<sup>27</sup> Lance E. Davis, Robert E. Gallman, and Karin Gleiter, *In Pursuit of Leviathan: Technology, Institutions, Productivity, and Profits in American Whaling*, 4.

<sup>28</sup> Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 92.

In 1800, on the tenth of the fourth month, a number of whales were seen on the north side of the island, from one to three leagues distant from the land. Several boats were immediately sent in pursuit of them, and, on coming up with them, commenced an attack with that spirit and activity which is ever drawn out on such occasions. A great number of spectators on shore were pointing their glasses towards the scene of action, to view the operations of their townsmen, who were now engaged in the conflict. At length they had the gratification of seeing two of the monsters of the deep yield to the dexterity of their pursuers. In the course of the day, the whales which had been killed were towed into the harbor and brought to the wharf. The people were familiar with every circumstance relative to whaling, but many had never beheld the animal of whose prodigious size they had heard so much. To exhibit one of the whales to the best advantage, it was drawn upon the wharf, where thousands of people during the day had an opportunity of beholding what had hitherto been to them only the theme of their songs or of their fireside.<sup>29</sup>

As Macy puts it later, “The whaling business, as we have already shown, is the source of almost all the employment of every class of citizens on the island. There is hardly an individual, who does not, directly or indirectly, receive a share of the profits or participate in the losses of each voyage.”<sup>30</sup>

Herman Melville had both an uncle and cousin who worked in the whaling industry before him.<sup>31</sup> As Heflin puts it in his biography of Melville’s whaling years, “there was a generous family precedent of nautical careers and interest in the sea.”<sup>32</sup> There were also many family names who more or less, were the high court of the New Bedford and Nantucket societies, whose names were synonymous with many generations worth of service in the whaling industry such as the Pease. Of Captain Valentine Pease thirty prodigy spread over three households, Heflin records that “Of the nineteen sons, one died young, and seventeen grew up to become masters of whaling vessels; seven of eleven daughter married whaling captains.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Obed Macy, *A History of Nantucket*, Mansfield: Macy and Pratt, 1835, 151.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* 178.

<sup>31</sup> Wilson F. Heflin, *Herman Melville’s Whaling Years*, 6.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* 9.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* 19.

Beginning with Susan Vedeer's decision to join her husband aboard the ship *Nauticon* during her husband's voyage, taking her children with her, and the growing popularity of the practice from the 1850s on, we also see further increase in the rate in which sons found themselves bound to the industry of their fathers, learning almost identically, their beliefs, practices, and customs. On 8/18/52, Susan records an instance of David her son catching Speckled Hagletts as pets, already asserting dominance over nature, a behaviour likely learned from his father on their many days aboard the whale ship together. David, like his father, would join the whaling industry, as would every other Vedeer son who was raised aboard the *Nauticon* as their father scoured the oceans for whales.<sup>34</sup> It is through these familial lines that the complex relationship between whalers and the natural world and the disconnect it often resulted in, grew ever deeper and wider. Compounding on religion's influence and cultures continually changing attitude towards animals, which ensured exploitation's position against the attacks of time, guaranteeing industrialization's rise on the backs of whales as well as thousands of other forms of life, including humans.

Generally, whaling voyages made by North American whalers sailed out of first Nantucket and as the industry grew, moved primarily to the harbor in New Bedford. This was due in large part, to a sand dune laying at the entrance of the Nantucket harbor making it unpassable for ships as they got larger and larger throughout the nineteenth-century, as well as due to benefits which came from being connected to the mainland.<sup>35</sup> Spanning four to five years, the voyages made by these ships such as those made by Melville and the other whalers examined in this essay, generally consisted of first sailing south and around the cape of South America before hitting a number of the islands off South America's west coast, before often zig-zagging

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<sup>34</sup> Betsy Tyler, *A Thousand Leagues of Blue: The Pacific Whaling Voyages of Charles and Susan Vedeer of Nantucket*: Nantucket Historical Society, 2019.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. 102.

across the Pacific ocean often winding up in and around east Asia, before zig-zagging across the Pacific again, revisiting the South American whaling grounds, and returning home. While variants of these patterns certainly existed, with whale ships oftentimes sailing from South America directly north to the Arctic before visiting the whaling grounds in and around east Asia. Or, sailing first across the Atlantic and rounding the African Cape before crossing up to the East Asian seas, across the Pacific, to South America, and back. Generally regardless of the order, there were a handful of whaling grounds and ports almost universally visited by whale ships in the nineteenth-century including by the whalers focused on in this essay. This similarity in direction taken by whaling ships, along with similarities discussed earlier, highlights why comparisons between these voyages are needed and warranted.

During Melville's four years, four months, and ten days aboard the *Acushnet* for example, of which he was one of fifty-five men ultimately with twenty deserting along the way, the ship journeyed down the east coast of the Americas. First visiting Rio De Janeiro before heading around Cape Horn, into the South Sea, up to Peru, west into the Pacific for a season, before journeying back east to the Galapagos islands, indirectly back south to Tumbez, Peru, before taking 1,122 days to cross the Pacific ocean to Nukahiva a distance of three thousand miles, which generally only took a ship 121 days. During these 1,122 days Melville's ship only saw two whales and captured none,<sup>36</sup> offering fairly sufficient explanation for Melville's desertion on the island of Nukahiva, once he arrived. In contrast to this, the fictional voyage of the *Pequod* strikes out hard to the east, before cutting south down the northwest African coast, back southwest towards South America, swung down around the Cape of Good Hope, diagonal across the Indian ocean, into the South China Sea, just south of Japan, and into the Pacific.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 112.

<sup>37</sup> Richard J. King, *Ahab's Rolling Sea*, 6.

Steeped in stacks of both scientific as well as fictional writing at the time of Melville's penning of *Moby-Dick*, in its six hundred plus pages we can find many consistent and varying references to the whales that bear such a centrality to this epic work. In our very first description of "the great whale himself,"<sup>38</sup> found in "Loomings" the first chapter of *Moby-Dick*, Melville dubs the Cetacea of the seas "mysterious monsters."<sup>39</sup> The narrator poeticizes their "island bulk," warning of their "nameless periles,"<sup>40</sup> and expresses to the reader a general view of the whale as something mythological in size, merciless in temperament, and most important of all: *Monstrous*. The term "monstrous" was an important moniker for the justification of the whale's need, to call back again to Gatta, "to be mastered by human industry." Astoundingly, "more than one half of Melville's selections make the point that whales are very large, many others, that they are evil or monstrous."<sup>41</sup>

Melville's second mention of whales occurring in chapter fourteen "Nantucket," is of a similar poetic vein. "The mightiest animated mass that has survived the flood," Melville declares, "most monstrous and most mountainous! That Himmalehan, salt-sea Mastodon, clothed with such portentousness of unconscious power, that his very panics are more to be dreaded than his most fearless and malicious assaults!"<sup>42</sup> While certainly, villainy and size are the main focuses of this description as they were in the first quotes, already here, we can sense a bit of the growing complexity in how the whale is viewed with a growing emphasis on their magnificence, an innate part of an environment inhabited by God. One of the main influences for Ishmael our narrator, in this complexity, is the words of the Nantucket pastor who in chapter nine of

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<sup>38</sup> Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*, New York: Barnes and Noble Classics, 2003, 32.

<sup>39</sup> Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 32.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Lance E. Davis, Robert E. Gallman, and Karin Gleiter, *In Pursuit of Leviathan: Technology, Institutions, Productivity, and Profits in American Whaling, 1816-1906*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997, 1.

<sup>42</sup> Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 93.

*Moby-Dick* “The Sermon,” in focusing on the story of Jonah a man who disobeyed God, was swallowed by a whale, repented, and was regurgitated back on to dry land where he finally obeys God, impressed in Ishmael the truth that was pivotal to the Christian creed which was that “God is everywhere,”<sup>43</sup> even, in whales.

From there, though Ishmael now aboard the *Pequod* has not yet seen a single living whale, his mentionings of them growing now more frequent, have also continued to extoll the whale. In chapter twenty-four “The Advocate,” Ishmael gleefully exclaims that “the whale is declared ‘a royal fish.’” In chapter twenty-seven they are “wondrous.” Dealing directly with the whale in chapter thirty-two “Cetology,” *Moby-Dick*’s narrator deems the whale “unshored, harbourless immensities,” and, “the most majestic in aspect.” Further descriptions by Melville of whales continue to be exceedingly honorific and admirational as well as numerous: “Gallant,” “mystical,” “well nigh ineffable,” “Immortal,” “noble,” “sublime,” and “omnipotent,”<sup>44</sup> are just a few of the further descriptions used repeatedly by Melville throughout *Moby-Dick*, in descriptions of sperm whales as well as discussions of their anatomies.

At times, Melville even goes so far as to humanize and anthropomorphize whales. He notes how the bones inside a whale's fin “almost exactly answer to the bones of the human hand,” and how “like man, the whale has lungs and warm blood.” At another instance, Melville remarks that a whale “looked like a portly burgher smoking his pipe of a warm afternoon,” and even extolls humankind to be more like whales writing, “oh man! admire and model thyself after the whale,” before going one step further and crowning whales as the king of creatures, “Of

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 77.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 146, 153, 169, 173, 213, 230, 306, 391, 406, 415.

erections, how few are domed like St. Peters! Of creatures, how few vast as the whale,” bearing “immense superiority,” “high and mighty,” with “god-like dignity.”<sup>45</sup>

Yet, strikingly, once whales are actually seen, and the first lowerings by the *Pequod* occur in pursuit of them in chapter forty-eight, the descriptions and monikers used for whales shift dramatically as whales themselves subconsciously shift in the minds of whalers from wondrous creatures in which to find evidence of God and his glory, to something specifically created to be dominated and used for the benefit of humankind. Now, instead of “fine” or in any way being viewed as beautiful, individual beings, the whale while the whaler is in hot pursuit of it, is othered and deindividualized for humankind’s exploitation and consumption. During the *Pequod*’s first lowering for a whale, Stubb’s the first mate, in his bombastic and abrasive style of leading one of the boats that rowed in pursuit of whales, now within close proximity uses no flourishing monikers or adulating adjectives referring to whales now with a degree of disconnection as “a fish,” or “the fish,” as well as “their prey,” all these terms are used repeatedly in the multiple lowering’s made by the *Pequod* throughout *Moby-Dick*.

In another reference that continues to deindividualize while also implicating the rising wave of industrialization and science at the time, Melville, after the captains of both the *Virgin* and the *Pequod* both raised an alarm simultaneously, describes the sperm whale as a “leviathan lamp-feeder.” In addition to these terms as well, in many of the lowerings referenced previously, Melville also repeatedly resorts back to the demonizing moniker of “monster.” In man’s immediate environment rather than a magnificent creature and a bearer of God’s glory much as human kind is said to bear God’s image,<sup>46</sup> the whale now as its lifeless body is being slowly towed back to the ship, is “the trophy,” and “a vast corpse.” When Stubb’s after killing a whale,

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid. 315, 361, 335, 362, 386, 406.

<sup>46</sup> See: Ephesians 2:10, Genesis 1:26-27, 9:6, 5:1, 1 Corinthians 11:17.

sits down to eat a part of it prepared for him by the *Pequod's* cook, the whale is seemingly reduced to livestock when it's dubbed "prize ox of the sea." Far now from "immortal," after being ravaged by whalers, the whale unfastened from the side of the *Pequod*, skin, fat, teeth, bone, and brain, harvested for human consumption, is nothing more than a "vast white headless phantom," as it "floats farther and farther from the ship," the "great mass of death," "for hours and hours from the almost stationary ship that hideous sight is seen," "till lost in infinite perspectives."<sup>47</sup> The contrast and complexity is clear, whales as a species and nature in general, were wondrous places for reflection and to find God, yet the needs of humankind demanded their murder and harvesting on an individual level that was also seemingly justified by God's granting to man of dominion over the earth.

While Melville clearly exhibits this contrast, the degree to which he supported the exploitation he demonstrated, often recognizing it as such due to his disillusionment with Christianity, was certainly far less than the degree to which he discussed and demonstrated it. However adamantly Melville wants to exclaim the whaler as hero and the whaleship as a conquering steed, the truth is much more constantly in *Moby-Dick*, Melville reveals to us depiction after depiction of whalers in which they are painted in the worst of lights often with disgust if not resentment. More often than not, Melville as he was with Christianity, seemed disillusioned with the whaling industry. On top of that, as I argue in my essay "The Whale, The Whaler, and the World," which is an ecocritical evaluation of Melville's *Moby-Dick*, Melville, though certainly not on the level of the modern environmentalist, is certainly as an apt a representation of proto-environmentalism as any American author of the period. Though his environmentalism is often significantly more veiled than Thoreau's idealistic depictions on

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 270, 338, 328, 412, 344, 345, 353.

Walden's Pond, or Whitman's ethereal and spiritual connections to all living things, Melville's fights and stands against established society are no less severe for their subtlety. It is not an accident for example, that after the *Pequod* kills its first whale, Stubbs, the first mate, sits down to a steak of whale meat and Melville scathingly holds up a mirror to human industry noting that Stubbs was not the only thing feasting on whale's flesh that night for "Mingling their mumblings with his own mastications, thousands on thousands of sharks, swarming round the dead leviathan, smackingly feasted on its fatness"<sup>48</sup> rather, Melville here as he often did, was alluding to the base and barbarous actions of the whaling industries, and to a larger degree humanities, people often interacting with the environment in the same way as sharks.

For one, Melville's disillusionment and disagreement with the whaling industries and the actions of society can be seen in the times in which he in *Moby-Dick*, pushes back against the capitalist society he finds himself wrapped up in, and the ambivalence which those who spearhead such societies and enterprises have towards all life, human and animal alike. In an instance of Melville questioning the shaky lines set up by nineteenth-century society in regards to humans and their interactions with the natural world, Melville notes that though some look on the killing and eating of whales as gross or bad, much as they were beginning to see the consumption of dogs, cats, and horses, surely too, Melville speculates, "the first man that ever murdered an ox was regarded as a murderer; perhaps even hung"<sup>49</sup> Yet, in much the same way as the man who went from hunting whales to selling human heads, continued exploitation by members of society, led to desensitization and slow acceptance. Yet again, in another passage, Melville knocks at the door of a modern environmental philosophy that does not see a distinction between human and every other species stating, "Go to the meat market of a Saturday

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 346.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. 354.

night and see the crowds of live bipeds staring up at the long rows of dead quadrupeds. Does not that sight take a tooth out of the cannibal's jaw? Cannibals? Who is not a cannibal?"<sup>50</sup>

Melville in this same passage also fires shots against the foundations of Christianity. Drawing attention to the hypocrisy evidenced by Christian's of the time pretense that the natural world was holy and a place to experience God set against the backdrop of their daily destruction and exploitation of the natural world, Melville concludes that "it will be more tolerable for the Fejee that salted down a lean missionary in his cellar against a coming famine; it will be more tolerable for that provident Fejee, I say, in the day of judgement, than for thee, civilized and enlightened gourmand, who nailest geese to the ground and featest on their bloated livers in thy paté-de-foie-gras."<sup>51</sup> One-hundred and seventy odd years later and I feel the power and conviction of Melville's words as potently as if they just rolled off the printing presses.

This too, is not the only time Melville highlights the hypocrisy of the church's position towards the natural world. With sad resignation later in the journey, he remarks that whales must die "to illuminate the solemn churches that preach unconditional inoffensiveness by all to all."<sup>52</sup> Even on a metaphorical and representative level, exploitation of other humans is prevalent. It is after all, after a tribe of Native Americans from what is now Massachusetts, driven to destruction by European action and disease, which the *Pequod* is named after.

As Melville depicts the merciless world which exploitation perpetuates, you can see his continued attempts to push back against it. In a brief moment of boy-like optimism Melville muses that rather than being engaged in killing and destruction, "all hands should rub each other's shoulder-blades, and be content."<sup>53</sup> Sentences later, looking at the bustling, capitalist, society of New Bedford the capital of the American whaling industry at the time, Melville

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. 418.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. 30.

remarks that “The act of paying is perhaps the most uncomfortable infliction that the two orchard thieves entailed upon us . . . The urbane activity with which a man receives money is really marvellous, considering that we so earnestly believe money to be the root of all earthly ills.”<sup>54</sup> It is with a similar level of irony that Melville describes one of the *Pequod’s* owners Captain Bildad who as discussed earlier, “Though refusing from conscientious scruples, to bear arms against land invaders, yet himself had illimitably invaded the Atlantic and Pacific; and though a sworn foe to human bloodshed, yet had he in his straight-bodied coat, spilled tuns upon tuns of leviathan gore.”<sup>55</sup>

Furthermore, there are many times throughout the pages of *Moby-Dick* in which the accustomed celebration and happiness that was often all too prevalent in the logs of whaling voyages when they killed a whale, seemed to be lacking in Melville’s descriptions of events. As if looking back on his participation in an industry of exploitation, he through the lenses of distance and time could see the destruction he perpetuated and might have been aware of its wrongs both on an environmental and moral level. During breakfast in the Spouter Inn, Melville recalls how many whalers who had just returned from extensive voyages, “men who have seen the world,” “had boarded great whales on the high seas--entire strangers to them--and duelled them dead without winking,” “maintained a profound silence. And not only that, but they looked embarrassed.”<sup>56</sup> In these passages we can see the shame and guilt creeping through. Many years of brutalizing animals led to a shame and embarrassment that seems to most clearly evidence itself in front of those who are most aware of the brutal actions required to kill a whale, such as here at the Spouter Inn, where whalers ate with whalers, all aware no matter how civil they may act around the table, how savage they were upon the sea. As Melville notes in his observations

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid. 31.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. 107.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. 58.

of Queequeg, “You cannot hide the soul,”<sup>57</sup> and though attempts might be made, the guilt and pain of a life lived exploiting others will always seep out whether at breakfast or in books.

Yi-Fu Tuan, in his excellent work *Dominance and Affection*, draws attention to the complexity experienced by whalers when he writes, “While in art and religion humans show an enduring tendency to see animals as the embodiment of power and as larger than life, in day-to-day existence they unhesitatingly dominate and exploit animals in myriads of ways.”<sup>58</sup> However, it is clear that this complexity also led to questioning the governing rules of society and at times struggling with the actions required for asserting humankind's dominance of the earth. This can especially be noted in the whaling industry, where the act of finding, catching, killing, cutting, hoisting, mincing, boiling, and then barrelling a whale before scrubbing, brushing, folding, drying, burning, and polishing the ship, all while maintaining regular shipping duties ensuring the continued sailing and maintenance of the vessel, would take days each time and often be repeated incessantly. The result of which was a general tone of pessimism and loathing by whalemens for their work, expressed in incessant drinking<sup>59</sup> and regular desertions<sup>60</sup> amongst ships crews. Melville himself, deserting two ships, once in Nukahiva aboard the New Bedford whale ship *Acushnet* which, during her four years of hunting whales, shipped fifty-five men of which twenty deserted and eight were discharged,<sup>61</sup> as well as deserting from the ship

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid. 79.

<sup>58</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan, *Dominance and Affection: The Making of Pets*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984, 72.

<sup>59</sup> See: Log/journal of the ship Susan, 1841 Nov. 22-1846 May 28, Cincinnati: Cincinnati & Hamilton County Public Library Genealogy & Local History Department, digitized: 2008, 6, Francis Allyn Olmsted, *Incidents of a Whaling Voyage, New York, D. Appleton and co., 1841*, 12, Briton Cooper. *Whaling Will Never do for me: the American Whaleman in the Nineteenth Century*, Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2009, 15.

<sup>60</sup> See: Wilson L. Heflin, *Herman Melville's Whaling Years*, Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004, 30, Log/journal of the ship Susan, 1841 Nov. 22-1846 May 28, Cincinnati: Cincinnati & Hamilton County Public Library. Genealogy & Local History Department, digitized: 2008, 5, William B. Whitecar Jr. *Four years aboard the whaleship. Embracing cruises in the Pacific, Atlantic, Indian, and Antarctic oceans, in the years 1855, '6, '7, '8, '9*, Philadelphia, J. B. Lippincott & Co.; [etc., etc.] 1860, Francis Allyn Olmsted, *Incidents of a Whaling Voyage, New York, D. Appleton and co., 1841*, 13, 17, Briton Cooper. *Whaling Will Never do for me: the American Whaleman in the Nineteenth Century*, Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2009, 92, Log/journal of the Ship Susan, 1841 Nov. 22-1846 May 28, 1841.

<sup>61</sup> Wilson L. Heflin, *Herman Melville's Whaling Years*, Nashville: Vanderbilt

that saved him from cannibals in Nukahiva, the New Bedford Whale ship *Lucy-Anne*, before deserting that ship as well, some months later, in Tahiti<sup>62</sup> during his three years of whaling service between 1841-1844, roughly a decade before the publication of *Moby-Dick* in 1851. As Briton Cooper Busch in his book *Whaling Will Never Do For Me* summarizes, “any voyage lasting over a single season could expect to turn over a substantial percentage of its crew before it reached home.”<sup>63</sup>

It seems clear as well, that this complexity between how whales were viewed from afar versus how they were viewed when being interacted with directly, lead to a degree of moral and philosophical guilt and turmoil. Gatta, points out that “though Ahab remains oblivious to every manifestation of whale suffering, Ishmael and some others can see beyond the joy of the kill.”<sup>64</sup> In another example, “Ishmael describes the *Pequod's* first kill in graphically gory terms, without shades of triumph,” and, when the ship encounters a great herd of sperm whales in “The Grand Armada,” Ishmael is evidently touched by the “peaceful concernments of cow and newborn calves who sport lovingly beside their boat's gunwales while a solitary whale bearing an ‘agonizing’ wound, flailing lethally among his fellows with a loose cutting-spade, presents an ‘appalling spectacle.’”<sup>65</sup> This specific example of Ishmael’s interest in the baby whales, also speaks to the role affection plays in domination specifically through domestication, which will be discussed further in the following section. Though it might appear that Ishmael’s motives have

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University Press, 2004, 30.

<sup>62</sup> Wilson L. Heflin, *Herman Melville's Whaling Years*, xxiii.

<sup>63</sup> Briton Cooper Busch. *Whaling Will Never do for me: the American Whaleman in the Nineteenth Century*, Lexington:

University of Kentucky Press, 2009, 92.

<sup>64</sup> John Gatta, *Making Nature Sacred : Literature, Religion, and Environment in America from the Puritans to the Present*, 22.

<sup>65</sup> Lawrence Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the U.S. and Beyond*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001, 208–209.

changed, his desire for domination is as prevalent in his affection as his brutalization, both indicating a desire for ultimate control over another living being.

Evidence of a struggle with the complexities experienced by whalers in regards to how they interacted and viewed whales and nature, is more numerous the more upper class the individual is. Therefore it is more prominent in the works of fiction written by Herman Melville such as *Moby-Dick*, *Typee*, and *Omoo*, as well as in whaling voyages experienced by upper class men for pleasure and health, such as the voyages of William Comstock. In the many other forms of literature kept during whaling voyages and discussed in this essay, such as more business and scientific documents about whales like those recorded by Susan Vedeer, evidence of this complexity exists as well. William Comstock, who in 1838, while sailing in the Pacific, witnessed a scene of whalers harpooning a calf, letting it go, waiting for the mother to attempt to save her calf and then harpooning the mother, reflected with the same lack of typical joy, that the scene was, “appalling for any but the whaler.”<sup>66</sup> In another passage in which Comstock is watching the trying out of the whale, that is the period from attaching the whale to the ship through to the end of its blubber being boiled, evidence of a complex relationship and deep struggle between humankind and how they interacted with nature is clear. He writes:

The head is cut off, and the brain pan cleft in two parts. The brains are taken out and carefully preserved; when mixed with batter, and fried like fritters, they are an excellent dish. The steward also takes possession of the best parts of the “lean,” for the use of the cabin. he chops it up fine, like sausage meat, mixing in sage, pepper &c. it is then fried in balls, and is justly esteemed a rarity. The refuse of the lean is given to the crew, who cook it as best suits them. The flukes and fins are hung up to dry on the main stay; they are thus preserved for a great length of time. After they have thus been displayed for months, weathered many a blast and steamed in many a sun, they are taken down and boiled thoroughly. I consider them good eating; but men differ in opinion, or lawyers could not live. The jaw contains much juicy blubber; the oil is good for razors. The jaw being well cleaned, serves for a whaler's comb, a fashion first introduced by mermaids. The ribs

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<sup>66</sup> William Comstock, *A Voyage to the Pacific: Descriptive of the Customs, Usages, and Sufferings on Board a Nantucket Whale-ships* Boston : O.L. Perkins, 1838, 17.

and trucks are cast into the sea. The blood is washed off the deck, and every one looks as innocent as if no murder had been committed.<sup>67</sup>

What is of pivotal importance in this quotation is Comstock's denouncement of murder at its conclusion, and the implication that such rigorous cleaning is done after each whale is try'd out, because of some guilt connected to the murder. As if to clean every inch of the ship is to clean the stains off of the whaler's very souls for the "murder" they had committed.

While found most clearly in upper class accounts, even in the business and scientific writings about whaleships, evidence of the aforementioned complexity between how whalers viewed and interacted with whales and nature, is clear. For example, aboard the ship *Nauticon*, which sailed out of New Bedford in 1848 returning in 1853, in the ship's logs, a book used to keep business records of the voyage such as the wind, temperature, whales sighted, barrels of oil gained from each whale, as well as incidents between the crew, desertions, and any other pertinent information, kept in this rare instance by the master of the ship Charles A. Vedeer's wife Susan C. Austin Vedeer, who accompanied her husband in his voyages beginning a bit of a trend among Nantucket women in the late 1840s and 50s,<sup>68</sup> we see an early echoe of Melville, as Susan Vedeer remarks how "noble,"<sup>69</sup> whales are. Obed Macy, a whaleman and amateur historian, continues to demonstrate the prevalence of the complexity exhibited in the contrasting descriptions of whales in *Moby-Dick*, by again echoing Melville in his descriptions of whales as "mighty," "wondrous," "vast," "beyond conception," and with "unmeasured strength."<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> William Comstock, *A Voyage to the Pacific: Descriptive of the Customs, Usages, and Sufferings on Board a Nantucket Whale-ships*, 17.

<sup>68</sup> Betsy Tyler, *A Thousand Leagues of Blue: The Pacific Whaling Voyages of Charles and Susan Vedeer of Nantucket*: Nantucket Historical Society, 2019.

<sup>69</sup> *Log/journal of the Ship Nauticon*, 1848 Sept. 13-1853 Mar. 24, day 11/21/52.

<sup>70</sup> Obed Macy, *A History of Nantucket*, Mansfield: Macy and Pratt, 1835, 151.

Continuing in the same vein, In Francis Allyn Olmsted's diary of a whaling voyage in 1841, *Incidents of a Whaling Voyage*, he remarks that "the great sperm whale," is the "monarch of the seas."<sup>71</sup> Olmsted, a native of the North Carolina foothills, and son of physicist Denison Olmsted, a pioneer in astronomy in the early nineteenth-century,<sup>72</sup> went on a whaling voyage between 1839-1840 for his health, before graduating from Yale medical school in 1844. On top of providing further evidence of the complexity between whalers and the whales they hunted and the environment they hunted them in, Olmsted also provides direct evidence for the prevailing belief at the time that God could be directly found in the natural world, writing in a diary entry that rivals the elevated prose of Melville's treatises on the whale, that, "Whilst in the boats I saw a whale breach or leap bodily into the air, his vast bulk appearing in base relief, suspended for a moment in mid air — the sky above, the sea beneath — and although it was not so perfect a display of the creature's immensity and power as I often afterwards witnessed, still I was struck with the greatness of the Creator's works in this, to us, almost unknown element."<sup>73</sup>

Olmsted, like the other whalemens surveyed so far, struggled with how to justify "the greatness of the Creator's works," in the sperm whale, against the graphic and troubling sights of harpooning and killing a whale. One instance of the later, which Olmsted vividly recalls, details a whale, "lashing the water with his gigantic flukes, and bellowing like a whole bevy of mad bulls, from the intense pain he suffered in dying."<sup>74</sup> In *The thrilling adventures of the whaleship Alycone*, written by George Barker in 1853, he, upon watching a whale being harpooned and killed, was also shocked by the gruesome and barbarous method and remarked with a superior air that "the modern method of capturing whales is to shoot a vial of cyanide of potassium into

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<sup>71</sup> Francis Allyn Olmsted, *Incidents of a Whaling Voyage*, New York, D. Appleton and co., 1841, 34.

<sup>72</sup> Wilson, J. G.; Fiske, J., eds, "Olmsted, Denison," *Appletons' Cyclopædia of American Biography*, New York: D. Appleton, 1900.

<sup>73</sup> Francis Allyn Olmsted, *Incidents of a Whaling Voyage*, 36.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.* 57.

the whale with a bomb which explodes inside the whale, killing it instantly.”<sup>75</sup> As if, it was not the killing of the whales, but simply the time it took, that was unseamly to see and participate in. As we can see, the complexity evidenced in Melville’s work in which there is a struggle between exploiting and extolling nature leading to a complex relationship between these whalers and their environment often with negative effects, is not unique to Melville but is fairly endemic in all styles of writing about whaling voyages throughout the 1840s and 50s.

As mentioned in the beginning of this section, one of the main cultural contributors to the complexity experienced by whalers in interactions with the natural environment, is the dual tenants of Christianity in which humans are to seek God in nature as well as have full dominion over all of nature, for their own use. These tenants which found new emphasis in the Second Great Awakening which began in the 1780s and peaked in the early nineteenth-century, played a crucial role in the development of the United States first great industry and arguably set a tone which is still seen throughout American business, of ruthless consumption of natural resources. Putting nature on a pedestal in which God is found also co-opted the same nature as solely for humankind’s consumption and in places where these dual components were experienced on a daily level as it was for those in the whaling industry, the result was a complexity in the relationship between whalers and their environments that at times lead not to further connection, but further disconnection with the natural world allowing further exploitation. As Timothy Morton, a leading ecologist of the early twenty-first century wrote, “putting something called Nature on a pedestal and admiring it from afar does for the environment what patriarchy does for the figure of Woman. It is a paradoxical act of sadistic admiration.”<sup>76</sup> The result of which, as

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<sup>75</sup> George Barker, *Thrilling Adventures of the Whaleship Alycone*, Peabody, Mass., G. Barker, written: 1853, published: 1916, 29.

<sup>76</sup> Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2007, 5.

Morton further hypothesizes, is the establishment of exploitation through domination not this time of women, but of “something over there called nature.”<sup>77</sup>

The sadistic side of admiration towards the whale that Morton hypothesizes about in the abstract, is evident in the steps taken by Melville in *Moby-Dick*, to dissect whales in the name of science, which drove those in the novel to commit atrocity after atrocity towards whales. Melville, with his large assortment of “fish documents,” including works recently published by Darwin, Curvier, Beale, Thoreau, Bowditch, and even Francis Allyn Olmsted’s account discussed above,<sup>78</sup> attempted to surpass these in a novel that would not just be interesting but informational, at the cost of completely devaluing that animal which he like his own creation: Ahab, was focused on with unceasing intensity. All-in-all, as the physicist Harold Morowitz noted in his article “Herman Melville, Marine Biologist,” “17 of the 135 chapters of *Moby-Dick* ‘deal primarily with the anatomy, physiology, ecology, metabolism, and ethology of the sperm whale.’”<sup>79</sup> Yet in order to obtain such information we encounter scenes in *Moby-Dick*, such as that described in chapters seventy-four and seventy-five, where a decapitated right whale and sperm whale head sit tied to the two front sides of the *Pequod*, as Ishmael walks back and forth between the two huge bulks of skin and bone, making comparisons and measurements.<sup>80</sup> In another instance described in Melville’s novel, Ishmael’s desire to get a complete measurement of a sperm whale he encountered on an island in the *Arsacides*, which had been claimed by an indigenous king and converted into a sacred temple with priests continuously fanning a flame who’s plume of smoke rose steadily out of the whales head, drove him to desecrate the whole site brushing away vines, breaking ribs, and cutting down trees.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, 8.

<sup>78</sup> Richard J. King, *Ahab’s Rolling Sea*, Chicago: The University of Chicago press, 2019, 31.

<sup>79</sup> Richard J. King, *Ahab’s Rolling Sea*, 19.

<sup>80</sup> Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 386-394.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.* 519-520.

In Ahab's lust for the white whale we can certainly also see the intertangleings of admiration and sadism which putting nature on a pedestal leads to. Ahab so mythologized Moby-Dick and revered him, that he bestowed him with "supernatural agencies," raising Moby-Dick to the status of a whale both ubiquitous "encountered in opposite latitudes at one and the same instant of time," and immortal "for immortality is but ubiquity in time."<sup>82</sup> Ahab raised Moby-Dick up and in doing so, created distance between him and that which he had put on a pedestal. Piling upon the whale's white hump "the sum of all the general rage felt by his whole race from Adam down," Moby-Dick swam before Ahab "as 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."<sup>83</sup> While religion certainly played a key role in the complexity evidenced between whalers and the natural world, religion can not be held accountable for all of it. On top of religion, the growing popularity of pets and the rise of domestication in the period between 1830-1880, which resulted in a great transformation in the human-animal relationship for Americans, also played a key role in the complex relationship between humans and the natural world.

The keeping of pets aboard whaling ships in the nineteenth century reveals interesting information about the complexity discussed between humans and the natural world especially in regards to the deeply intertwined ways that domination asserts itself through affection. As Yi-Fu Tuan notes, though domestication might be dressed in affection, it is rooted in domination. "affection is not the opposite of dominance; rather it is dominance's anodyne—it is dominance with a human face." For many sailors especially whalers who spent years in the merciless hands of the ocean, domestication was an opportunity to assert dominance over the natural world while

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid. 225.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. 226.

caught up in an environment which was totally and completely out of their control. As Tuan goes on to observe, “Dominance may be cruel and exploitative, with no hint of affection in it. What it produces is the victim. On the other hand, dominance may be combined with affection, and what it produces is the pet,”<sup>84</sup> and it is through this light that we will examine the accounts of pets kept aboard whaling ships in the nineteenth century.

## **Pets in the Pacific**

Domestication’s contribution to the complex relationship between whalers and the rest of the natural world, like the role of religion, is especially evident in the accounts of whalers who often kept pets aboard whaleships during their long and arduous voyages across the world’s many oceans. Katherine Grier in her excellent history of pets in America, demonstrates that pets began to grow in popularity in the early nineteenth-century and by around 1870, “the array of pets in American households was a pretty close approximation of the range of species found in the present day.”<sup>85</sup> From the beginning, Grier notes that “tenderhearted youngsters suffered when they tried to rationalize the differences between kinds of animals,”<sup>86</sup> and grapple with the complexity that grew out of a time when pets were becoming popular while “traditional animal-human interactions associated with farming and transportation,” in which animals were continually abused, killed, and eaten, was still a regular occurrence.

As household pets grew in popularity human’s were again faced with complexity and philosophical contradiction, when it came to the growing field of medicine that developed

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<sup>84</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan, *Dominance and Affection: The Making of Pets*, 2.

<sup>85</sup> Katherine Grier, *Pets in America*, Chapel-Hill: The University of North Carolina, 2006, 12.

<sup>86</sup> Katherine Grier, *Pets in America*, 14.

around animals and caring for pets. As Grier notes, pet doctoring reaffirmed “the commonsense view of the similarity between animal and human bodies that shaped the practice.”<sup>87</sup> As humanity learned that animals felt pain as they did, the continued pain they caused on animals that weren’t their pets, were regularly called into question. By the 1880s, ethics towards animals had developed to the point that the idea “that animals were entitled to enjoy their lives,”<sup>88</sup> was one that was growing and growing among people day by day.

Beginning with the introduction of a domestic ethic of kindness to animals such as Lydia H. Sigourney’s *Letters to Mothers* (1838), in which she wrote, “instruct [your child] that the gift of life, to the poor beetle, or the crawling worm, is from the Great Father above,”<sup>89</sup> we see a view of animals begin to shift. The shift in thought towards being kind to animals was also growing thanks to a new era of religious thought following the Second Great Awakening, in which people such as Charlotte E.B. Tonna, an English evangelical, was rethinking the human-animal relationship, writing that the “restoration of kind relations between humans and animals was an important step toward rebuilding the paradise,”<sup>90</sup> which God originally intended earth to be. Forty years later, Harriet Beecher Stowe echoed and reemphasized this fact writing that “the care of the defenceless animal creation is to be an evidence of the complete triumph of Christianity.”<sup>91</sup> By 1860, Grier notes that how humans interacted with animals was a key identifier of morals and character writing that, “Gentle treatment of animals was regarded as an important attribute of good character and a useful test for distinguishing a good neighbor and citizen from a bad one.”<sup>92</sup> The fact that such an ethic of kindness towards animals was spreading even while “human life

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid 88.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. 161.

<sup>89</sup> Lydia H. Sigourney, *Letters to Mothers*, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1846, 35-36.

<sup>90</sup> Charlotte B. Tonna, *Kindness to Animals*, Philadelphia: American Sunday-School Union, 1845, 8,9,12.

<sup>91</sup> Harriet Beecher Stowe to Henry E Burton, esq., 20 December 1881, Hartford: Stowe-Day Foundation.

<sup>92</sup> Katherine Grier, *Pets in America*, 182.

was absolutely dependent on the labor of animals and on the products of their bodies, and when almost no one doubted that human beings had the divine right to be in charge of all the world's creatures,"<sup>93</sup> meant that the human-animal relationship by the 1840s and 1850s, when the whaling industry was at its height, was also at its most complex.

American's contribution to the whaling industry and its capability for exploitation of the natural world, was at its highest in the mid-nineteenth-century. Though the whaling industry was briefly stalled at the beginning of the nineteenth-century by the war of 1812, "Peace brought a dramatic reversal:"

American whaling entered a four-decade period of such growth and prosperity that it is known as the Golden Age. Demand for whale products grew as the populations of Europe and America increased and industrialization quickened. At the same time, supply rose as a new generation of whalers discovered, opened, explored, and exploited a series of hunting grounds ranging from the South Pacific to the Seychelles and from Japan to the Western Arctic. Between 1815-19 and 1855-59 American output of sperm oil increased almost fivefold, of whale oil more than elevenfold, and of whalebone more than fortyfold. Over a similar period, the real value of the industry's output rose by more than a factor of eleven.<sup>94</sup>

The fact that humankind's exploitation of the natural world was arguably at its highest or at least in competition for such a title, at the same time in which Christianity and culture was being upended by the Industrial Revolution and by new cultural developments such as domestication and an ethic of kindness towards animals and the environment, is no coincidence. Humanity's evaluation of animals and the environment removed the two from each other creating a distance that is palpable in the minds and actions of people in the early and mid, nineteenth-century.

Most especially though, the re-evaluation of the human/animal relationship expressly paved the way for unprecedented exploitation. While some animals certainly made it out of their

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<sup>93</sup> Katherine Grier, *Pets in America*, 131.

<sup>94</sup> Lance E. Davis, Robert E. Gallman, and Karin Gleiter, *In Pursuit of Leviathan: Technology, Institutions, Productivity, and Profits in American Whaling*, 38.

re-evaluation in much better standing than before such as dogs, cats, rabbits, and horses, as well as others, the amount of animals who found themselves valued less by humanity rather than more, far exceeds any other outcome. The escalation of atrocities towards those animals determined to have less value and therefore who were most according to them, ordained by God to serve human growth, was further exacerbated by the growing divide between human and animal lives which was perpetuated by the Industrial Revolution. Out of sight and therefore out of mind, the exploitation of trees, people, cows, chickens, often still horses, and especially whales, was justified and encouraged.

The growing divide between which parts of nature were to be valued and which were not, succinctly exemplifies the disconnect with nature which is perpetuated by its continued reverence and the complex relationship with the environment which that results in. Tonna, Stowe, Sigourney, Whitman, Thoreau, every one of these writers penned fiery denunciations of America's mistreatment of animals and nature directly under the gentle light of lamps fueled by whale oil. Each drop of oil, minute of light, for each paragraph penned by these philosophers, many gallons of blood, the blood both of man and of whale, spilled into the world's oceans turning blue seas red. Yet, you will not find any words by Tonna, Stowe, Sigourney, Whitman, or Thoreau, penned in denouncement of the whaling industry. As quoted earlier in this essay, Melville was aware of the great amount of death which propped up the words which plead for animal's lives. Of whales, Melville states, "he must die the death and be murdered, in order to light the gay bridals and other merry-makings of men, and also to illuminate the solemn churches that preach unconditional inoffensiveness by all to all."<sup>95</sup> As William Comstock puts it, "every energy, every thought, and every wish of man is engrossed by Sperm Oil and Candles."<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 418.

<sup>96</sup> William Comstock, *A Voyage to the Pacific: Descriptive of the Customs, Usages, and Sufferings on Board a Nantucket Whale-ships* Boston : O.L. Perkins, 1838, 11.

Keeping pets, often exotic ones, aboard whaleships and in whaling ports, was a more common phenomenon than might be expected. Though in some ways these practices mirrored the common pirate trope of having a parrot on your shoulder in that to a degree the keeping of pets was for companionship, and in the distinct aspect of subordination. On a larger level, the relationships between whalers and animals that they kept as pets during their voyages, was as is generally the case, much more nuanced and complex than the trope might suggest. This is most clearly evidenced in the common practice amongst whalers of keeping their pets ultimately for consumption or simply consuming them out of practicality, once they past. While on the face of it, and certainly to a degree, instances of pets being kept aboard whaleships can be viewed as moments of connection and solace in what was a trying and tumultuous life. On a deeper level, with Tuan's words in mind, it is important to consider these moments of domestication as attempts by whalers to assert dominion and control in an environment which was absolutely uncontrollable at least at the time.

Though there are not many instances of pets in *Moby-Dick*, in Melville's own personal voyages there are a few instances of pets being kept which provide further evidence of a complex relationship between whalers and the natural world, one which pets and practices of domestication directly contributed to. During Melville's first voyage on the *Acushnet*, for example, they briefly made port at the town of Santa in Lima, and while there, members of Melville's ship recall meeting a surgeon W.S.W. Ruschenberger, who "visited the home of 'one of the magnates of the land' who kept 'a mistress, and an immense Baboon for her amusement.'"<sup>97</sup> From Melville's journeys, we also find that whalers while in port, also often, flirted with the line between affection and domination indicating a continually increasing

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<sup>97</sup> Wilson L Heflin, *Herman Melville's Whaling Years*, Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004, 70.

complexity in the interactions between whalers and the environment. In the Peruvian port of Tumbez for example, whalers were seen frequently chasing alligators and riding donkeys for pleasure.<sup>98</sup> When Melville's ship the *Acushnet* visited Tumbez in 1843, on top of participating in the chasing of alligators and riding of donkeys, Heflin a biographer of Melville's voyages, notes that "before the craft sailed, a good many of the men acquired as pets for the next cruise wild Tumbez monkeys and parrots."<sup>99</sup> In another example, aboard the ship *Susan*, which sailed between 1841-1846, the log keeper notes a set of days in which the sailors borrowed a dog presumably for relaxation and enjoyment, during a gam (A meeting of two whaleships), with a promise to return the dog to the original ship a few days later in a port they would both be visiting.<sup>100</sup>

Occurrences of monkeys and other animals, as pets, and pets aboard whale ships in general, as mentioned earlier with the case of a differentiation between how whales were viewed at a distance versus directly, was certainly not confined to Melville and his voyages alone. Susan Vedeer, mentioned earlier, who accompanied her husband captain Charles Vedeer during his voyages aboard the *Nauticon*, notes during her log entry on 10/28/48, that another captain's wife brought her "a monkey and some birds," of which, the birds survived for a while however the monkey as most wild monkeys forced to live on whale ships did, died quickly and was "buried overboard."<sup>101</sup> In another log entry on the same voyage, Susan Vedeer also notes how her son David spent the day catching Speckled Haglets, a type of sea bird, to keep as pets<sup>102</sup> demonstrating the degree to which the exploitation of pets especially through domestication, is a

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<sup>98</sup> Wilson L. Heflin, *Herman Melville's Whaling Years*, 107.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.* 107.

<sup>100</sup> *Log/journal of the Ship Susan*, 1841 Nov. 22-1846 May 28, 1841, 2/2/43.

<sup>101</sup> *Log/journal of the Ship Nauticon*, 1848 Sept. 13-1853 Mar. 24, day 10/28/48.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.* 8/18/52.

learned behaviour. David himself, would grow up to be a whaler as did most of Charles and Susan Vedeer's sons<sup>103</sup> and indeed, many of the sons of whalers.<sup>104</sup>

One clear nexus of complexity for whalers on these voyages, when it came to animals intended for affection/domination, is in the case of Galapagos tortoises. These tortoises were often kept as pets on whaling voyages because of their intellect and durability while also prized as choice eating in a diet composed generally of old, mouldy, and stale food, once their "beloved" pets passed. As Heflin notes in his book on Melville's years as a whaler, "Although whales came to calve and to seek squid in deep waters near [the Galapagos Islands] it was 'turpining' that most attracted whaling vessels to the group during the period of the *Acushnet's* maiden voyage. Tortoises, some of them weighing over five hundred pounds and large enough to carry a man, flourished in these isles. They could live up to eighteen months without food or water (while aboard the whale ship), and provided fresh and delicious meat at no extra cost to whalers who were tired of a monotonous diet of barrelled pork and beef, hardtack, and fish." There are also multiple instances in Susan Vedeer's log of the ship *Nauticon* in which they, like Melville, participate in catching tortoises though much more specifically with the intention of eating them.<sup>105</sup> Further instances can also be found in George Barker's *Thrilling Adventures of the Whale Ship Alycone*, in which he recalls visiting an island in which, "There were a number of giant sea-turtles sunning themselves on the shore." Barker recounts how his shipmates, "turned two of the larger ones over on their backs and later towed them to the schooner."<sup>106</sup> In contrast to Vedeer and Barker's intentions however, the log keeper who was probably the first mate, of the

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<sup>103</sup> Betsy Tyler, *A Thousand Leagues of Blue: The Pacific Whaling Voyages of Charles and Susan Vedeer of Nantucket*: Nantucket Historical Society, 2019.

<sup>104</sup> Wilson L Heflin, *Herman Melville's Whaling Years*, Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004, 9.

<sup>105</sup> *Log/journal of the Ship Nauticon*, 1848 Sept. 13-1853 Mar. 24, day 5/6/49.

<sup>106</sup> George Barker, *Thrilling Adventures of the Whaleship Alycone*, Peabody, Mass., G. Barker, 1916, 23.

ship *Susan*, another New Bedford whale ship, noted that a sailor had a pet turtle and was sad when his turtle fell down a hole in the ship and the sailor was “obliged to put him out of his misery.”<sup>107</sup> While it is not indicated whether in this instance the sailor went ahead and ate the animal or not, the resonance of affection within the tale, implies that this might have been an example one of one of the few times an animal crossed over truly, to being a pet rather than simply a favorite animal. This indicates yet again, the complex relationship whalers navigated in regards to the natural world they consistently tried to dominate and domesticate.

The complex relationship evidenced by the thin line between affection and domination in domestication, is also something that was often mirrored in the cultures that occupied many of the islands visited by whaleships in the nineteenth-century. For example, throughout the islands of Southeast Asia and the Pacific, “pups and piglets are fed and nurtured by the women and become their playthings and pets.”<sup>108</sup> J. Macrae, a visitor to the Pacific islands in 1825, vividly described a scene wherein he “noticed a young woman walking along the street, and at the same time suckling several puppies that were wrapped up in a piece of tapa cloth hanging round her shoulder and breasts.”<sup>109</sup> even as recent as the 1950s, evidence was recorded of a Papuan mother, “nursing with one breast a child of about two to three years old and with the other breast a piglet.”<sup>110</sup> Of course, though for a while These animals are held “in great estimation, little inferior to their own offspring,”<sup>111</sup> yet even still, much like in the complex relationships whalers had with tortoises, “the tenderly nurtured animals,” cared for by Pacific islanders, “are destined

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<sup>107</sup> *Log/journal of the Ship Susan*, 1841 Nov. 22-1846 May 28, 1841.

<sup>108</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan, *Dominance and Affection: The Making of Pets*, 93.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

for consumption,” with dog meat, in particular, being regarded by Pacific Islanders as a great delicacy.<sup>112</sup>

Ultimately too, though contributing to the complex relationship felt by whalers nonetheless, Tuan argues that caring for something or someone while also desiring to eat that thing, is more synonymous and less of a dissonance than we might think and of course then, is carried out in societally acceptable fashions such as with certain animals. “What we love we wish to incorporate, literally and figuratively,” Tuan writes continuing by providing some examples:

In a moment of exuberance, Chekhov exclaimed, ‘what a luxurious thing Nature is! I could just take her and eat her up . . . I feel I could eat everything: the steppe, the foreign countries, and a good novel.’ Robert Browning said that he had such a love for flowers and leaves that, every now and then in an impatience at not being able to possess them thoroughly, he wanted to "bite them to bits." G. K. Chesterton confessed that in the Geological Museum certain rich crimson marbles, certain split stones of blue and green made him wish his teeth were stronger. W. N. P. Barbellion, reflecting on Chesterton's desire, concludes grimly: "There is no true love short of possession, and no true possession short of eating. Every lover is a beast of raven, every Romeo would be a cannibal if he dared."<sup>113</sup>

Nonetheless, regardless of the relationship between affection and consumption, the tenuous line between affection and domination was often shifting and ill defined by society at large but especially by whalers. This led to a further complexity in how whalers interacted with the natural environment on top of the complexity generated by competing views of the natural world and especially whales, perpetuated mainly by religion at the time.

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid. 9-10.

## **Gardens in the Galapagos**

One final place in which we can see this same complexity between how whalers viewed and interacted with the natural world as they encountered it, is in the rising popularity of the personal and city garden throughout the nineteenth-century. In the logs and journals already reviewed in this essay, as well as in fictional accounts such as Melville's, Olmsted's, and Comstock, we can see evidence of whalers interest and value of exotic gardens. Most notes in these accounts are concerned mainly with the fruits taken from these gardens, but also in observations in regards to indigenous gardening practices. Evidence suggests that these gardens were valued and prized by whalers when encountered throughout the world's ports. Yet, in whaler's value of these gardens, as in their value of pets, we can see the continued influence of domination hiding within the skin of affection.

What makes whalers' treatment of the natural world all the more complex and interesting, is that often, the very things whalemen neglected at home which were preeminent components of Nantucket's decline in agricultural production, were also the very same things prized in the gardens of port cities visited by whalers across the globe. Susan Vedeer, during her voyage with her husband aboard the *Nauticon*, would regularly criticize islands they visited in which only "A few trees and bushes,"<sup>114</sup> were found, yet seems to never realize the hypocrisy evident in such comments from a Nantucket native. When Francis Allyn Olmsted went on his 1841 voyage for his health, he was regularly struck by man's extensive and cultivated gardens in island ports. When sailing by the island of Fayal, off the coast of Portugal, Olmsted remarked on the "many vineyards on the sloping side of the mountains, looking to us like so many squares in a quilt of

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<sup>114</sup> *Log/journal of the Ship Nauticon*, 1848 Sept. 13-1853 Mar. 24, 5/6/49.

the most luxurious green.”<sup>115</sup> At another island in which Olmsted’s ship briefly made port, he visited a garden where:

beautiful flowers met our eyes in every direction, and those that had faded before we left the United States, were here exhibited in full bloom. Roses and Artemisias of various kinds, I recognized as old acquaintances; while many varieties of flowers, that were quite new to me, perfumed the air. Many plants I noticed were here growing in neglected luxuriance, that with us require the most careful treatment. Geraniums towered upward to the height of tall shrubs, while the hydrangea was scattered over the garden as one of the most common flowers. The hydrangea, as well as several other flowers, which with us are of a pink color, when transplanted to these islands, turns blue, and vice versa.<sup>116</sup>

Olmsted’s observations of island gardens are incredibly interesting because as with Comstock, the inhabitants of these island ports who were often from across globe, demonstrate another example of a life lived more deeply enmeshed with nature than the lifestyles practiced by American whalers, experienced first hand by Olmsted. Furthermore, North American whalers visiting these gardens were also regularly faced with the benefits of this enmeshed life, often seeing solutions for agricultural problems they themselves were faced with, yet these solutions were never taken home, shared, and incorporated for their own benefit. While wind ravaged crops and soil on Nantucket, on these islands, Olmsted saw solutions for the winds devastating power and ways to protect crops that never seemed to be shared at home where harvests continued to decrease. In one such example, Olmsted notes with excitement, a moment on one of the islands when “the method of rearing the orange tree from the slip, was exhibited to us.” Olmsted recounts how gardeners on the island would construct “an enclosure of tall reeds woven together [which] surrounds the tender orange slip to protect it from the violent winds that frequently sweep over these hills.”<sup>117</sup> Yet Olmsted, while making these observations, makes no note or notice of how effective such practices might be at home. While of course oranges cannot

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<sup>115</sup> Francis Allyn Olmsted, *Incidents of a Whaling Voyage*, New York, D. Appleton and co., 1841, 45.

<sup>116</sup> Francis Allyn Olmsted, *Incidents of a Whaling Voyage*, 34.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.* 34.

grow in Nantucket, these same practices could have been easily transferable to many tree and vine vegetables which were most ravaged by the sea wind. Later on the same island, a similar moment occurs when, faced with the same technique again, Olmsted notices bananas “growing in an excavated hollow, a necessary protection against the violent winds.”<sup>118</sup>

For whalers such as Vedeer and Olmsted, their ability to see solutions to their own agricultural problems without mention or adoption of those solutions at home, again indicates a disconnect between whalers and the environment and a complexity in how whalers viewed and interacted with the natural world. While people like Vedeer and Olmsted were certainly not full-fledge farmers, and so cannot necessarily be held accountable for such a complexity their mentioning these devices implies they were aware of their importance and so did have some knowledge of farming. Regardless of this influence on the complex interactions between whalers and the natural world, further influence can be seen as in the cultural popularity of pets, in the growing popularity of gardens, where attempts at control which underpin domestication of animals and plants alike, perpetuated a distance between urban and domesticated nature versus the truly natural world.

What makes mentions of these gardens interesting, is that many of the practices of sustainable cultivation observed and valued by whalers in these island gardens, were practices largely neglected at home in their own cities of New Bedford and especially Nantucket. At home, rather than abundant plants and rich soil, decades of neglect and over farming, had resulted in soil destruction and an uncultivable environment. It was this slow decline in farming capability which was largely responsible for driving Nantucketers to the sea in the pursuit of whales in the first place, kickstarting the American whaling industry which would dominate the globe in the

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid. 35.

nineteenth-century. In the same way that the dual views of whales explored in the first section, in which whales were valued in the abstract but victimized in the immediate, evidenced a complex relationship through a seemingly unexplained disconnect, this dual relationship with gardening and agriculture in which gardens were valued by whalers in exotic ports but neglected at home, evidences a similar disconnect. Providing further evidence for the complexity discussed throughout this essay, between whalers and whales, as well as much of the rest of the natural world, which they encountered on a regular basis.

When Ishmael visits Nantucket in chapter fourteen of *Moby-Dick*, the place from which the famed *Pequod* was to depart on its auspicious voyage, we get a vividly desolate and realistic description of the neglect and paucity of natural life on the island of Nantucket during the mid-nineteenth century. Deemed little more than an “elbow of sand, all beach without a background,”<sup>119</sup> Ishmael goes on to describe Nantucket as a place where weeds must be planted, wooden pegs must be imported from “beyond the seas,” and pieces of wood are “carried about like the true cross in Rome.”<sup>120</sup> “One blade of grass,” Ishmael tells the reader, “makes an oasis, three blades in a day’s walk a prairie.”<sup>121</sup> Beneath Ishmael’s words we can sense that Melville is aware of the price that had been paid in the process of industrialization. However, in Melville’s description of Nantucket we can also sense some of the anger that many on the island of Nantucket felt towards the sea as it literally tried to engulf them. “All beach without a background,” as Ishmael describes it, the waves were often literally knocking at the doors of those who lived on Nantucket. Is it any wonder they were motivated to try and conquer it? Gatta asserts that the ship was an extension of western civilization,<sup>122</sup> and that was largely how

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<sup>119</sup> Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 93.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> John Gatta, *Making Nature Sacred: Literature, Religion, and Environment in America from the Puritans to the Present*, 157.

Nantucketers felt. The island was a pushing off point more than a place of residence, at least for men. As Melville writes at the end of “Nantucket,” “Let America add Mexico to Texas, and pile Cuba upon Canada; let the English overswarm all India, and hang out their blazing banner from the sun; two thirds of this terraqueous globe are the Nantucketer’s.”<sup>123</sup> So just like they had on land in the eighteenth-century, at sea in the nineteenth-century, Nantuckers rapaciously scoured the globe taking and killing without concern for the outcome.

Of course, Nantucket was not always so desolate. Obed Macy, the amateur historian and whaler met in the previous section, accounts in his *History of Nantucket*, how upon arrival on the island, settlers found it “covered with wood.”<sup>124</sup> Yet, repeated clear cutting of the islands forests for the production of homes and the islands first industries, meant that by 1750, the island more closely resembled the Nantucket described by Ishmael in 1851, rather than the verdant Eden arrived in by settlers in the late 1600s. Macy, in his history of Nantucket, accounts how throughout the eighteenth-century without trees, the winds ravaged crops and ruined soils to the point that farmers on Nantucket went from producing roughly fifty bushels of corn an acre at the beginning of the eighteenth-century to producing around ten bushels of corn an acre by 1800.<sup>125</sup> He describes how the “forest has disappeared, and the greatest part of the island is left a naked plain, where the gale meets with no obstruction and animals find no refuge.”<sup>126</sup>

William Comstock on departing from the island of Nantucket for his voyage to the Pacific in 1838, in the same lyrically expressive tone used to describe whales quoted in the earlier section, upon seeing the desolation of the island from afar, having once known its Edenic beauty, with overflowing conviction exclaims, “Oh! my Country, how shalt thou account to the

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<sup>123</sup> Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 94.

<sup>124</sup> Obed Macy, *A History of Nantucket*, Mansfield: Macy and Pratt, 1835, 30.

<sup>125</sup> Obed Macy, *A History of Nantucket*, 24.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.* 35.

God of all nature, for the cruel deeds which thou hast exercised toward thy brethren of the forests.”<sup>127</sup> Here, Comstock is noting the environmental destruction that had ravaged the island of Nantucket. But also, in these lines, Comstock evidences a much more modern view of Christianity as well as a philosophy that borders on proto-environmentalism, in his view of the world as deeply interconnected or as Morton would say, “enmeshed,” his term for a truly equal and ecological world. One without “habitual distinctions between nature and ourselves,”<sup>128</sup> where “Animals are not animals. Humans are not animals. Animals are not human. Humans are not Human.”<sup>129</sup> By stating that man would have to account to God for his actions against trees, Comstock is giving to trees a status of equality unimagined in the nineteenth-century. One still unmet even today. At a time even before the theory of evolution, species hierarchy was governed by a strict Chain of Being in which humankind and trees were nearly at two opposite ends. And yet, Comstock is asserting that like humankind will have to answer for his sins committed against other humans, so too, humanity will have to answer for their sins committed against trees. Raising trees and people up to parity, at least in the eyes of God.

What is interesting, is that in large part, the short sightedness and complex relationship with the environment they were sure was theirs to wield dominion over, which resulted in the destruction of the Nantucket forests and the reduction in crop yield, is the same short sightedness and disconnect found in the whaling industry. In both scenarios, depleting yields and over production ruined the industry and in the case of whaling, drove the earth's largest species to the brink of extinction. Throughout the second half of the seventeenth and first half of the eighteenth centuries, Nantucket farmers farmed prodigiously and without second thought, ignoring regularly

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<sup>127</sup> William Comstock, *A Voyage to the Pacific: Descriptive of the Customs, Usages, and Sufferings on Board a Nantucket Whale-ships* Boston : O.L. Perkins, 1838, 4.

<sup>128</sup> Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, 63.

<sup>129</sup> Morton, *The ecological Thought*, 126.

reducing yields, and failing soil, to the point that scarcely anything could be grown on the island. Throughout the second half of the eighteenth-century and throughout the nineteenth-century, Nantucketers, now driven to the sea, found fresh fields and a whole new dominion.

Of course, initially, as with farming, Macy the Nantucket historian turned whaler, describes that whales were so prevalent that they could be killed from the shore. He recounts that “there was no perceptible decrease of the number of whales during the period of the first thirty or forty years from the commencement of the fishery.”<sup>130</sup> Yet quickly, the parallels between production on land and sea can begin to become evident as Macy notes that after those first decades still before 1800, “The whales began to be scarce at the places where they had usually been taken, which rendered it necessary to explore new coasts in search of them.”<sup>131</sup> From there, the situation continued to worsen. By 1812, Macy notes that ships were venturing into the Pacific ocean and as far away as the coasts of Chili and Peru in the hunt for whales,<sup>132</sup> the Nantucket whaling fleet “constantly increasing, and the whales becoming more scarce.”<sup>133</sup> By 1821, whales were so scarce that nantucketers were sailing zig zag across the vast Pacific all the way to Japan, where in each location, whales at first would be plentiful before being driven to minimal numbers by the reapers who sailed their waters.<sup>134</sup> By 1850, ships like the ones Melville sailed on and wrote about, would traverse dozens of latitudes and longitudes across the Pacific and Atlantic oceans often journeying across the capes of both South America and South Africa, multiple times, west to the Japanese islands, and even north into the arctic in the hunt for that which a hundred years ago could be gotten from their own home shores. The fact that Nantucketers found themselves trapped in a loop of environmental exploitation without

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid. 44.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid. 64.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid. 217.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid. 218.

seemingly noticing the devastating results of their actions I believe, provides us with further evidence for the complex and disconnected relationship whalers had with their environment. A complexity further exacerbated when rather than attempting to rejuvenate their own island of Nantucket, they decided during their multi-year whaling voyages, to turn to the many islands of the Pacific such as the Galapagos, taking valuable resources as they went. Furthermore, the high value and enjoyment gleaned from these island gardens, resulted in a form of admiration underpinned by domination mirroring with gardens, the cultural phenomena which existed around the rise of domestication and pet keeping in the nineteenth-century.

## **Conclusion**

In this essay, we have examined the ways religion and cultural changes such as the development and widespread adoption of domestication, contributed to the complex relationship between whalers and the natural world and the disconnect with the environment which that often lead to. Finally, in answering the question of if and why, there was a complexity in how whalers viewed the natural world, we have to note that while predominantly a product of culture, the complexity exhibited by whalers in how they viewed and interacted with the natural world was also to a degree, a learned behaviour and a product of an industry which was dominated by families and was deeply intertwined. This ensured that a philosophy centered around ever further and harsher levels of exploitation, became normalized within these two specific societies.

On top of normalization, the familial ties that perpetuated these philosophies of exploitation led to the idolization of those who exploited animals. Comstock says “No man is

entitled to respect among them, who has not struck a whale ; or at least, killed a porpoise.”<sup>135</sup>

Ever the enigma, Melville too, even while he seems to resist the whaling industry, and critique its wrongdoings, regularly perpetuates the culture of idolizing whalers and their actions. “Almost all the tapers, lamps, and candles that burn round the globe, burn, as before so many shrines, to our glory!”<sup>136</sup> Melville exclaims in “The Advocate” a chapter devoted entirely to the defense of whalers and their perception in society. At the end of the same chapter he writes, “I know a man that, in his lifetime, has taken three hundred and fifty whales. I account that man more honourable than that great captain of antiquity who boasted of taking as many walled towns.”<sup>137</sup> Unable to ever let anything go, Melville, in a postscript to the previously mentioned chapter, also adds that whalemens should be given special respect because they “supply your kings and queens with coronation stuff,”<sup>138</sup> referencing the custom of anointing kings and queens with oil as part of their coronation.

Far from dated or antiquated, the lives of whalers in the nineteenth-century and the study of the whaling industry which dominated America at the time, continues to be relevant and important in combating some of the challenges we are faced with in the twenty-first-century. The complexity which has been evidenced and discussed between whalers and the natural world is not one restricted to that time and place but rather, seems to be a philosophy born of industrialization, continuing to be present as long as the industrialized world continues to be prevalent. Easily identified in the whaling industry because the whaling industry served as the pinnacle of industry at the time, and a hotspot for challenging continually changing cultural

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<sup>135</sup> William Comstock, *A Voyage to the Pacific: Descriptive of the Customs, Usages, and Sufferings on Board a Nantucket Whale-ships* Boston : O.L. Perkins, 1838, 11.

<sup>136</sup> Herman Melville *Moby-Dick*, 142.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid. 146.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid. 147.

attitudes and beliefs, rather than fading with time, has increased and proliferated, as the problems it was birthed around, have increased as modernity has progressed.

Now, in the twenty-first century, we find ourselves forced to deal with problems that originated centuries before. Rather than resolving the tension between affection and consumption of animals, humankind for two centuries, has ignored it. Even as animals are celebrated, often nearly worshipped, with pets having social media accounts with many millions of followers, and some being literal celebrities appearing in movies, they are consumed and exploited in numbers that would astound those in the nineteenth-century. And yet, if someone from the nineteenth-century visited the modern day, they would be astounded at the distance we have achieved between us and the brutality towards animals and to people at the bottom of the global class system, which underpins every aspect of our lives. Perfecting the “out of sight out of mind,” maxim, few people are aware or care about, the processes of exploitation essential to the “American Dream”.

The parallels between the modern person and the nineteenth-century American whaler only compound from this initial similarity between philosophies and the desire to hide the brutal and exploitative aspects of societal interactions with animals and nature, in light of domestication, and human affection towards animals. Ultimately, the complexity between whalers and the natural world that is evidenced in a contrast in how they interact with the natural world versus how they discuss it, resulting in a disconnect with the natural world in which the environment is destroyed and exploited, perpetuated by religion, the worship and idolization of certain parts of nature, and familial influence, is as present in the modern day as it was aboard any nineteenth-century whaling boat and has cost us dearly, most devastatingly resulting in the climate change that threatens our species and the life of this planet. The idolization of nature and

the way in which that idolization enables exploitation, is a key way in which the modern person mirrors the nineteenth-century American whaler. In much the same way in which whalers praised whales as a species making possible their continued exploitation as individuals discussed in the “Words With Whales” section of this essay, so too, modern societies' nearly biblical reverence for nature enables exploitation on an unprecedented level.

This essay in part, serves as a warning. Here, I have laid out the mindsight which made possible one of the most ruthless harvesting of animals in human history, driving multiple species of whales to the brink of extinction, some of which, having yet to recover. Knowing we in the modern day, exhibit in many ways, the same attitude toward and relationship with, the natural world as whalers, the slow depletion of whales and the ultimate downfall of the whaling industry, should stand as a caution against the direction we as a species are headed.

The first and easiest step towards reconnecting with the natural world and putting a stop to the centuries long cycles of exploitation, is in its discussion. Morton in his discussion of how to establish an ecological philosophy past the conception of nature, asserts as I have attempted to evidence in this essay through an examination of the whaling industry in nineteenth-century America, that, “modern society engages in a process of domination that establishes and exploits some thing “over there” called nature.” Talking about nature brings it into the foreground, it stops it being “That Thing Over There,” the environment, and becomes a participant like humans. Equal with humans. Wrly but truthfully, Morton concludes his discussion stating, “The environment was born at exactly the moment when it became a problem.” Just as man was first separating itself from the natural world, when we most needed a philosophy of care and equality, industrialization and capitalism produced a philosophy of the natural world as an environment, something as we just saw exhibited by Morton, removed from humanity, certainly not equal with

humanity, and therefore available. As many Christians continue to believe today, predestined, to be exploited for human need. As Morton summarizes, “The word environment still haunts us, because in a society that took care of its surroundings in a more comprehensive sense, our idea of environment would have withered away. . . . Society would be so involved in taking care of ‘it’ that it would no longer be a case of some ‘thing’ that surrounds us, that environs us, and differs from us.”

In truth, no matter how far removed from ourselves we try to make nature, the connection is unbreakable and the natural world's influence over mankind will always be dominant and is in itself, an argument for a better relationship between humankind and the natural world. Whether we like it or not, our relationship results in specific influence, and a better relationship with the natural world guarantees better interactions with it. As Leo Marx observes in evidence of the relationship between humans and nature, “disorder in society follows close upon disorder in nature,” and the ever expanding wage gaps, inequality, war, and impoverishment in current society proves Marx's words true. Leo Marx in a brief of analysis of *Moby-Dick* in his book *The Machine in the Garden*, realizes the very things I have argued in this essay. First, Marx realizes that *Moby-Dick* in large part, is a novel about humankind's relationship with the natural world. Picking up on this in Melville's discussion of the whale line, a rope attached to the whaling boat on end and a harpoon on the other hand, ensuring that whales could not escape once they had been harpooned, Marx notes “the astonishing range of of insight released by Melville's whaling trope,” noting that “the simple manila rope is made to seem as an archetype of the physical bond between man and nature.” Second, Marx realizes, as I have proposed in this conclusion, that *Moby-Dick* is a warning. Marx asserts, “The significance that Melville attaches to Ishmael's survival is indicated by the line from Job he takes as the motto of the epilogue: ‘And I only am

escaped alone to tell thee.’ In other words Ishmael’s relation to us, the readers of *Moby-Dick*, is like that of Job’s messenger to Job. The calamity he recounts is a portent of further trials to come.” Today, we are like Job, living through such trials. Yet still, there is a way to mitigate these trials. No matter how dedicated to exploitation we might be, it is never too late to turn the ship around. Mitigation is as easy as reconnection.

As Rachel Carlson asserts in her groundbreaking work *Silent Spring*, which largely kicked off the modern environmental movement, earth is a fabric. “A fabric on the one hand delicate and destructible, on the other miraculously tough and resilient.” In *Silent Spring*, Rachel Carlson pleads with humanity to end its barrages “hurled against the fabric of life,” and instead to find its place simply as a thread, a single species supporting a terrific tapestry. This reintegration proposed by Carlson, is the solution to the relationship humankind has with the natural world and the exploitation which defines it. Across environmental literature the dream of the interconnected/reintegrated/enmeshed world abounds. Lawrence Buell writes of “a new kind of ecological holism, a post-humanist one, one that grants culture to nonhumans even as it insists that humanness including human ‘culture’ is embedded in the ecological process.” Jeffrey Jerome Cohen echoes interconnectedness when he reminisces on how “the Mississippi is an earth artist, but its projects take so long to execute that humans have a difficult time discerning their genius.” Herzogenrath describes it as “a negotiation of dynamic arrangements of cultural *and* natural forces,” Morton as quoted earlier, describes an enmeshed world as a world where “Animals are not animals. Humans are not animals. Animals are not human. Humans are not Human,” and in so doing longs for the very world which Melville seemed to support and the whaling industry existed in antithesis to.

Rather than a negotiation as Herzogenrath suggests, whalers such as Comstock, Whitehead, Olmsted, Melville, and Vedeer, as discussed in this essay, evidence a relationship with the natural world centered around domination. Rather than appreciate the natural world, they sought to subdue it through more aggressive assertions of their own power and capabilities, even past the point of those aggressive assertion's permanent damage to the environment. Though in part valuing the natural world, their valuing of it was in service of further exploitation, often neglecting as evidenced in the discussion of gardens, to participate in the practices which would guarantee them the environment they prized, contented instead, with short term gain at the cost of long term damage. In all of this, whalers serve as an example into how important culture and religion are due to its intrinsic influence on our environmental philosophy as evidenced and discussed previously, but also how exploitative industrialized society is. The whaling industry was one in which exploitation was inescapable for all involved, and as the leading industry at the time, reminds us of the price we pay for industrialization and modernity and calls into question the numerous hypocrisies which underpin our lives.

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