

The Melville-Hawthorne Friendship and Its Impact on *Moby-Dick*

Connie Townley: McNair Scholar

Dr. Steven Olsen-Smith: Mentor

English



As arguably one of the most famous literary works produced by any American writer (often deemed as the great American novel), Herman Melville's novel *Moby-Dick* and its genetic history have been subjects of extensive scholarship over the last seventy years. Every aspect of Melville's personal life, his considerable creative and personal hardships, as well as the influences which brought forth such an enigmatic and uniquely devised novel, have been all deeply explored and hotly debated. Melville's friendship and admiration of Nathaniel Hawthorne is widely believed among scholars to be a major influence and catalyst which fueled Melville's decision to depart from his original conception of *Moby-Dick* as an adventure novel (such as his earlier successful novels, *Typee*, *Redburn* and *White Jacket*), to a major creative and philosophical undertaking. On the heels of Harrison Hayford's groundbreaking exploration of the genetic history of *Moby-Dick* in his essay "Unnecessary Duplicates," I will explore the late addition of Queequeg as Ishmael's "bosom" friend in the opening "shore chapters" of the novel as it mirrors the Hawthorne/Melville friendship, and how their relationship influenced Melville's revision of *Moby-Dick*.

Harrison Hayford's 1978 essay, "Unnecessary Duplicates" explores the genetic progression and order of Melville's writing of *Moby-Dick*. Hayford argues that the inclusion of several duplications, which suggest that the novel was written out of order and that several passages that were included later in the writing process, (including the opening chapters which develop the Ishmael/Queequeg friendship) were dramatically expanded in the final revisions of the novel. Hayford suggests that the replacement of the more conventional character of Bulkington by Queequeg as Ishmael's companion in the opening chapters was part of an intentional shift on the part of Melville to evolve the book from an adventure tale to a narrative of more creative depth and philosophical significance. Hayford argues that duplications within the narrative suggest that Melville was in the process of ongoing revisions, for which he intended to edit more thoroughly, but due to pressure to finish, was unable to complete the intended edits before publication. Duplications remained in the final version of *Moby-Dick* which gives chronological clues to Melville's evolution as a writer as well his specific plan to alter the emphasis and major themes of the book.

Hayford suggests that the writing of the shore chapters (Chs.1-22) occurred in three stages. The first stage, Hayford proposes, did not include either Queequeg or Bulkington, but instead added both in the second stage. The third and last stage as Hayford suggests, removes Bulkington and includes Queequeg as Ishmael's "comrade" (Hayford, 46). A move away from Bulkington as Ishmael's companion does more than add narrative interest; it lays a foundation for Ishmael's questioning of faith, exploration of religious conventions and his desire to gain connection with a "bosom" friend through the unconventional choice of Queequeg.

Hayford's ideas surrounding the inclusion of the shore chapters as the last addition to Melville's revisions to *Moby-Dick* seems especially relevant when considering the trajectory of the Ishmael/Queequeg friendship, which inexplicably breaks off after the conclusion of "shore chapters." The closeness of the friendship all but disappears once the Pequod leaves shore and is never revisited with the same richness throughout the rest of the book. Though Queequeg is mentioned in passing as a harpooner, and his physical illness is included in "Queequeg in his Coffin," (Ch. 110) it is not with the same connection and spirit of camaraderie that the reader experiences the friendship in the opening chapters of the book. Though Ishmael feels some level of camaraderie towards Queequeg, there is no mention of their shore experiences throughout the rest of the book, as he is "losing almost entirely his purported status" (Sattelmeyer, 214). This seems strange considering the significance of their exchange in the opening chapters as spiritually bonded, "boon companions," sharing the same bed, to no further mention of their friendship. The richness in which Melville describes the friendship in the opening chapters leaves the reader confused and rather disappointed that it is never revisited with the same depth throughout the rest of the novel.

It is easy to imagine that Melville, inspired by his friendship with Hawthorne, intended to expand and integrate the richness of the Ishmael/Queequeg friendship throughout the rest of the narrative, if he had not been so rushed by publishing demands. The disconnection and contradictory nature of the Ishmael/Queequeg friendship

lends merit to Hayford's argument that the significance of the close friendship described in the early chapters of the book were not added until the final stages of Melville's writing of the manuscript, and were influenced by the introduction of Melville's friendship with Hawthorne.

In his article published in 1940, Melville scholar Leon Howard, published his essay, "Melville's Struggle with the Angel" in which Howard argues that Melville was not an inherently great writer and struggled both technically and artistically with his writing. Howard cites Hawthorne and Shakespeare as important influences in Melville's development of a stronger narrative style in *Moby-Dick*. Howard regards Hawthorne as catalyst in Melville's departure from the "exhausted autobiographical pattern of personal experience," which Howard believes to be a literary device Melville depended on too heavily in the writing of his earlier books, (such as *Typee*, *Whitejacket* and *Redburn*) and became a hindrance in the creative development of his writing, substituting for any real "narrative invention" (Howard, 203). Howard argues that Melville's professional admiration for Hawthorne developed into a default mentorship that showed Melville the possibilities of his creative aspirations under the tutelage of "the man who could teach him his art" (Howard, 204).

Howard P. Vincent's 1949 book, *The Trying out of Moby-Dick*, also suggests that *Moby-Dick* was written in two distinct stages, and that Melville's impetus for revision was influenced by the quality of his artistic vision as well as the influence of Nathaniel Hawthorne. Vincent suggests that Melville was "rotten-ripe" for a release and "revolution" of "forces long gathering" from years of creative frustration as well "as the sudden and magnificent release of those Shakespearean forces when Melville met Hawthorne" (Vincent, 14). Vincent does not share Howard or Barbour's belief that Melville was inherently lacking as a writer, declaring Melville as "completely the master of his journalistic materials" (Vincent, 14). In a nod to William Wordsworth's famous passage from *The Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*, Vincent suggests that *Moby-Dick* was a product of Melville's growing maturity and skill as an artist and the outcome of "powerful emotion recollected in tranquility" as compared to his earlier books (such as *Typee*) which were created from "vivid experience recollected in immediacy" (Vincent, 14).

In January 1954 George R. Stewart published his essay, "The Two *Moby-Dicks*," outlining the genetic history based on "internal evidence" of the composition of *Moby-Dick*. Stewart introduces the idea of the "Ur-Moby Dick" (pre-revision) and the "*Moby-Dick*" as we know it now (Stewart, 418). Stewart believes that the opening "shore chapters" belong within what he describes as the "Ur-Moby-Dick" in its original state and describes this section as "very slightly revised" (Stewart, 417). Similar to Howard, Stewart suggests that it is Melville's lack of technical skill, which led to his struggles to revise the book. Howard suggests that a lack of organization, planning and an overactive creative disposition on the part of Melville are contributing factors to the unfinished nature of *Moby-Dick*, saying "If there is one thing that seems certain about Melville as a writer, it is that he did not plan a book carefully to begin with or even think it through in his mind," leading to Stewart's suggestion that, "If a writer is unable to think his book through at first trial, he may also be unable to think it through at second trial or at third. Thus we may conceive of Melville—his creative imagination always outrunning his critical judgment and his technical skill" (Stewart 447). Stewart cites "shifts in conception and function of characters" as evidence for the revisions of *Moby-Dick*. This shift, Stewart argues, can be seen most clearly in the character of Ishmael, suggesting Melville's transition of the book from "a south seas tale" to a more thoughtful and artistic endeavor, suggesting that Ishmael begins "able to reproduce what people are thinking, and he has thus ceased to be a mere character in the book and has become a spokesman of the all-knowing author" (Stewart, 439).

James Barbour's 1970 thesis titled "The Writing of *Moby-Dick*," explores the genetic history of Melville's writing of *Moby-Dick* and introduces the concept of *Moby-Dick* written in "three distinct stages of composition and not two as previously presumed" (Barbour, vii). Similar to Howard, Barbour argues that the opening chapters of *Moby-Dick* were written in the first stage of writing, and not as part of the final revision. Barbour outlines through his study the three main literary influences: "Shakespeare, Hawthorne and Carlyle," which he contends most influenced and informed Melville's revision of *Moby-Dick*. Barbour suggests that Hawthorne's most significant influence on Melville's writing is the introduction of "evil" as it pertains to development of the character Ahab's "monomania" embodied by the white whale. Barbour goes on to say, "The blackness inherent in the 'Mosses' tales is an inseparable part of *Moby-Dick*. It forms the backdrop against which the novel unfolds" (Barbour, 154).

More recent criticism has offered interpretations of Melville and Hawthorne's friendship which emphasizes the homoerotic aspects of their friendship, including much speculation surrounding the true extent and nature of their relationship based primarily on content within Melville's letters to Hawthorne and Melville's essay, "Hawthorne and His Mosses." Robert Milder in his 2008 essay, "The Ugly Socrates-Melville, Hawthorne, and the Varieties of Homoerotic Experience," explores the Hawthorne/Melville friendship as it relates to different interpretations and definitions of "homoerotic experience," both historically and through a primarily Freudian critical lens. In his introduction, Milder points to the difficulties inherent in offering any definitive social definition to the Melville/Hawthorne friendship, but offers within his argument what he calls "provisional speculation"

(Milder, 72). Milder also suggests that when interpreting the homoerotic or homosexual nature of same-sex relationships, one must contextualize based on the historical nature and social norms of the time, offering “In a world of gradation, ambiguity, and cultural otherness, signs and behaviors that today would be taken as proclamations or hints of homoeroticism could seem sufficiently innocuous to pass muster even among the conventional” (Milder, 75). Milder makes the argument that Melville experienced a similar sense of abandonment when Hawthorne left the Berkshires in 1851 for England, to that of the loss of his father in adolescence, and how this reflected in Melville’s writing of his later novel, *Pierre*. Milder makes the connection between Freud’s essay, “Mourning and Melancholia” and the sense of loss felt by Melville after the death of his father, which was again triggered by Hawthorne’s departure from his life.

Laurie Robertson-Lorant’s essay “Mr. Omoo and the Hawthornes: The Biographical Background” provides an overview of the evolution of the Melville/Hawthorne friendship, from Hawthorne’s review of Melville’s first novel *Typee* in 1846 to Hawthorne’s death in 1864. Robertson-Lorant opens the essay by quoting the most homoerotic of Melville’s lines from “Hawthorne and His Mosses” in which he describes Hawthorne as having inspired him artistically by having “dropped germinous seed into my soul” and “He expands and deepens down, the more I contemplate him; and further, shoots his strong New-England roots into the hot soil of my Southern soul” (Melville, 529) describing these passages as an “eroticized rendering of the conventional trope for seminal artistic influence rivals some of the sexiest passages in literature” (Robertson-Lorant, 27). The context of the homoerotic nature of the friendship is a basis for Robertson-Lorant’s historical outline of the Melville/Hawthorne friendship, speculating throughout the significance and nature of their friendship. Robertson-Lorant shares Milder’s opinion regarding the significance of Hawthorne’s departure to England, as reawakening Melville’s sense of isolation and abandonment, and rekindling his grief for the loss of his father early in life, suggesting that, “The loss stirred up grief for the loss of his father long buried in his soul” (Robertson-Lorant, 43). Robertson-Lorant offers no basis, or specific biographical evidence that would substantiate her argument or would suggest that Melville had any awareness of such connections between Hawthorne leaving and his father’s death within his lifetime.

Robert Sattelmeyer in “Shanties of Chapters and Essays” takes up the work of interpreting the genetic history of *Moby-Dick*, where earlier scholars, (especially Hayford) left off, offering his own review of previous genetic scholarship. Sattelmeyer introduces the idea of the “shanty chapter,” which references a passage from one of Melville letters written on June 29, 1851, to Hawthorne, “I have been building some shanties of houses (connected with the old one) and likewise some shanties of chapters and essays.” Sattelmeyer uses the term “shanty passages-text written to reconcile or explain inconsistencies and changes of course that, when isolated, allows us to draw inferences about both the original element of the novel and Melville’s reasons for changing them” (Sattelmeyer, 201). Sattelmeyer illuminates several “shanty” chapters and passages throughout *Moby-Dick* that lend significant evidence to the idea of Melville rewriting or revising the opening shore chapters toward the end of his revision. Sattelmeyer, like Hayford argues that Queequeg underwent “major rewriting and amplification of his character in the early chapters, for he clearly plays a diminished role as the novel develops” (Sattelmeyer, 214).

Much has been written regarding the genetic history of *Moby-Dick*, beginning with Leon Howard’s “Melville’s Struggle with the Angel” and reaching the apex with Harrison Hayford’s “Unnecessary Duplicates,” which lays the foundation for much of what is currently accepted regarding the order of revisions of *Moby-Dick*. It is from this foundation, and through the study of Melville’s letters, his essay “Hawthorne and His Mosses” as well as Melville’s markings in his copy of “Mosses from an Old Manse” that the significance of Hawthorne’s friendship and artistic influence can be most fully considered. Looking at all of the evidence illuminates aspects of the friendship which have been overlooked in both genetic scholarship and more current criticism regarding the friendship, specifically pertaining to Melville’s introduction of the Queequeg/Ishmael friendship as part of the final revision of the book, and to the extent to which this creative act reflects or derives from the friendship between Melville and Hawthorne. Much of the current criticism focuses predominantly on the homoerotic and psychoanalytical nature of the friendship. Neither a view that focuses solely on the possible psychosexual and homoerotic nature of friendship, nor one that chooses to entirely ignore it, can ever fully account for the significance of Hawthorne’s artistic influence as a catalyst in Melville’s creative and spiritual life.

In “Hawthorne and His Mosses,” Melville praises Hawthorne’s ability to probe the dark center of “spiritual truth” (Melville, 523), stating “it is the blackness in Hawthorne, of which I have spoken, that so fixes and fascinates me” (Melville, 521). The same spiritual doubts and anxieties that Melville recognizes and appreciates in Hawthorne are mirrored in Ishmael’s connection and fascination with Queequeg. Ishmael embraces the alternative spirituality Queequeg offers as a way of declaring his independence from the hypocrisy of the dominant Christian paradigm at one point saying, “I’ll try a pagan friend, thought I, since Christian kindness has proved but hollow courtesy” (Melville, 56). This exploration of “hypocrisy and narrow-minded fanaticism” (Robertson-Lorant, 43) and morality in the opening chapters becomes “a criticism of American social and ethical thought” (Vincent, 80) which is integral

to the revisions of *Moby-Dick* in later chapters. Melville, knee deep in revisions, undoubtedly found inspiration in Hawthorne's ability to probe deeply into the hypocrisy inherent in spiritual matters, and statements of artistic integrity in such stories as "The Artist of the Beautiful" which spoke to his own desire for artistic freedom and to produce a work free from the limitations of the material world.

Documented in Melville's markings in his copy of "Mosses from an Old Manse," is Melville's attention to Hawthorne's preoccupations with artistic integrity and morality in such stories as "The Artist of the Beautiful" and "The Birthmark," which can be seen as directly influencing Melville's development of characters like Queequeg and Ahab in the later narrative additions to *Moby-Dick*. Not only does Hawthorne's writing influence Melville's narrative style, but the "The Artist of the Beautiful," a tale of an artistically frustrated clockmaker who constantly battles his desires to create art rather than pursue his mundane profession, would surely speak to Melville's struggle to enact his own artistic vision. Melville's markings in this passage suggest he connected to Warland's assertion that, "It is requisite of the ideal artist to possess a force of character which seems hardly compatible with its delicacy; he must have faith in himself while the incredulous world assails him with its utter disbelief" (Hawthorne, 171). Undoubtedly, Melville identified with Warland's assertions of the exclusivity and isolation of the artist. Melville expresses his frustration for his inability to complete *Moby-Dick* in the way he envisioned in his April 1851 letter to Hawthorne, in which he expresses his frustration in the publishing history of his works which are unfinished and therefore incomplete and unable to express his vision, saying "What I feel most moved to write, that is banned—it will not pay. Yet altogether, write the other way I cannot, so the product is final hash, and all my books are botches" (Melville, 539).

Hawthorne provides Melville the sort of psychic support and feeling of connection which propels him to move forward and transcend any lack of ability or external constrictions of a society which did not understand his artistic vision. Hawthorne represented to Melville a path of understanding and a sense of like-minded artistry which fueled Melville's burgeoning creative aspirations. This connection is similar to the sense of connection and longing represented in Ishmael's connection with Queequeg. Queequeg offers the "fraternity of feeling" and connection that Ishmael washed ashore in his "hypos" longs for.

In the opening "shore" chapters, Ishmael describes himself as being in a state of melancholic isolation and spiritual disconnection, finding himself "involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral" (Melville, 18). The introduction of Queequeg as his comrade allows Ishmael the opportunity to experience the physical embodiment and intuitive exploration of an alternative spirituality, laying the foundation for his deeper exploration of philosophical ideas within the later chapters of the book. "Knowing you persuades me more than the Bible of our immortality" (Melville, 546). This connection, which isolates Ishmael also connects him to the loneliness shared by Queequeg. The "fraternity of feeling" is more significant than the isolation of their current circumstances.

It is Hawthorne's willingness to explore the deeper philosophic nature of things, his "boundless sympathy with all forms of being" which speaks to Melville's sense of exclusivity which he feels connects him most deeply to Hawthorne (Melville, 520). The "fraternity of feeling," which Melville explores in his essay "Hawthorne and His Mosses," is similarly shared between Ishmael and Queequeg in the opening chapters of *Moby-Dick*. Ishmael's desire for connection with the heathen Queequeg places him in direct opposition to many of the social mores of his time, mirroring Melville's desire to embrace within his own writing the "blackness," spiritual and philosophical questioning as well as the artistic integrity he finds so important in Hawthorne's writing. Hawthorne's writing influences Melville and bolsters his confidence to explore in depth the deeper philosophic issues of *Moby-Dick*. Melville wishes to write a book that allows him to explore his expanding interest in philosophical ideas for which he finds an ally in Hawthorne.

In the chapter "A Squeeze of the Hand," Melville explores the camaraderie and connection that man feels in the shared experience of isolation. Ishmael describes a transcendent experience through the action of breaking down (with his hands intertwined among his shipmates) the sperm from the head of the whale. The meditative nature of the work allows Ishmael to glimpse into the interconnectedness of man as an alternative spirituality to an interventionist and paternalistic god as well as the interdependence of humans, and the physical and intuitive connection in their loneliness and isolation, "I have perceived that in all cases man must eventually lower, or at least shift, his conceit of attainable felicity; not placing it anywhere in the intellect or the fancy; but in the wife, the heart, the bed, the table, the addle, the fire-side, the country" (Melville, 323). This "attainable felicity" is surely reflected in Melville's decision to include the Queequeg/Ishmael friendship in the opening of the book.

In "The Whiteness of the Whale" chapter Melville moves beyond Hawthorne's preoccupation with darkness and "puritanic gloom" by introducing the power of whiteness as a symbol of relativism, atheism, and the potential of God's indifference to man which is equally terrifying, (if not more) as the concept of sin, explaining: "with whatever is sweet and honorable, and sublime there yet lurks an elusive something in the innermost idea of

this hue, which strikes more of panic to the soul than that redness which affrights in blood” (Melville, 160). In his February 12, 1851, letter to Evert A. Duyckinck, Melville writes about what he finds lacking in Hawthorne's preoccupation with sin, “Still there is something lacking—a good deal lacking—to the plump sphericity of the man. What is that?—He doesn't patronize the butcher—he needs roast-beef, done rare” (Melville, 535). Melville's philosophy surrounding the idea of “whiteness” can be seen as a direct response to Hawthorne's “too largely developed” fascination with darkness and sin, suggesting that sin itself is irrelevant when weighed against the potential of God's non-existence (Melville, 522).

The connection in *Moby-Dick* between Ishmael and Queequeg in the shore chapters lends a sense of the intuitive connection which Melville strives for, as well as adding some much needed humor to the narrative. Melville preoccupied with uncovering “the Truth” does not forget to highlight the absurdity and humor within the expansive darkness and “whiteness” of the universe. The intuitive attention paid to corporeal experience, which Melville finds lacking in Hawthorne's writing, underlines his need for connection and hope, among the existence of hypocrisy and conceit inherent to man. Melville speaks to the hollowness in human isolation in the “Castaway” chapter, perhaps also illuminating the perils of internal isolation at the hands of over intellectualization, and writing “But the awful lonesomeness is intolerable. The intense concentration of self in the middle of such a heartless immensity, my God! Who can tell it!” (Melville, 321). Melville finds the intuitive connection he desires in Hawthorne's writing, tempering the frustration of his artistic failures and isolation, discovering a kindred spirit, as he writes in his November 17, 1851, letter to Hawthorne, “But, I felt pantheistic then—your heartbeat in my ribs and mine in ours, and both in God's. A sense of unspeakable security is in me this moment, on account of your having understood my book” (Melville, 545).

The replacement of Bulkington with Queequeg as Ishmael's “bosom” friend signals a shift or desire for a development of characters with a more intuitive and physical connection. The sharing of the bed and Ishmael's participation in Queequeg's worship is also symbolic of this change in Melville's writing. This closeness, if viewed within the context of the historical timeline and development of the friendship of Ishmael and Queequeg is most definitely influenced by the friendship between Melville and Hawthorne. The “fraternity of feeling” that Melville speaks of in “Hawthorne and His Mosses,” can be seen as prototypical in development of the close friendship between Queequeg and Ishmael. The friendship offers lightness to the novel as well as a sense of connection to the overall bleakness in it. It is connection that Ishmael craves which draws him to Queequeg, despite his initial reservations and fears. The friendship of Queequeg and Ishmael is necessary to the development of Ishmael's philosophical explorations in later chapters of the book.

If the genetic history is preoccupied with what Melville would consider an overly intellectualized preoccupation of what is known, current criticism would surely slide to the other extreme of instinctual speculation. What genetic scholarship and current criticism has failed to do up to this point is integrate the significance and influence of the friendship on Melville's artistic vision and revision of *Moby-Dick*, while also carefully considering what exists in genetic scholarship. Hayford's introduction of “Unnecessary Duplicates” as the apex of genetic scholarship, offers the most believable explanation for revision, answering the baffling question of exclusion of the Ishmael/Queequeg friendship throughout the rest of book, and highlights the importance of the Melville/Hawthorne friendship to the major thematic changes to the revision of *Moby-Dick*. Melville, inspired, yet ultimately unsatisfied with Hawthorne's preoccupation with darkness, is driven to explore the concept of “whiteness” and atheism, which remains as one of the enduring images and matters of philosophical importance in *Moby-Dick*. Similarly, the inclusion of the Ishmael/Queequeg friendship to the novel remains as some of the most striking, humorous and relevant imagery from the novel, not only inspiring a new wave of current criticism but also illuminating even further the degree and magnitude of Hawthorne's influence on Melville's revisions of *Moby-Dick*.

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