A Critical Analysis Of Moby Dick Essay, Research Paper

?Moby Dick is biographic of Melville in the sense that it discloses every nook and cranny of his imagination.? (Humford 41) This paper is a psychological study of Moby Dick. Moby Dick was written out of Melville?s person experiences.

Moby Dick is a story of the adventures a person named Ishmael. Ishmael is a lonely, alienated individual who wants to see the ?watery part of the world.? Moby Dick begins with the main character, Ishmael, introducing himself with the line ?Call Me Ishmael.? (Melville 1) Ishmael tells the reader about his background and creates a depressed mood for the reader. Call me Ishmael. “Some years ago-nevermind how long precisely- having little or no money in my purse, and nothing particular to interest me on shore, I thought I would sail about a little and see the watery part of the world.” (Melville 1) Ishmael tells the reader about his journeys through various towns such as New Bedford, Nankantuket. Eventually while in Nankantuket, Ishmael signed up for a whaling voyage on the Pequod. The Pequod was the whaling boat Ishmael sailed on where such characters as Queequeq, Starbuck, and the captain of the ship, Ahab, all journeyed together.

Not long once at sea, the captain of the ship, Ahab reveals his plan to hunt down a white whale named Moby Dick. Ahab was veteran sailor, a man that had a heart of stone. Ahab had a personal grudge against Moby Dick. Moby Dick was responsible for taking off Ahab?s leg in a previous voyage. Ahab?s plan was essentially an unauthorized takeover, what the whaling company had not in mind. Ahab was very irrational and ludicrous; his plan seals the fate for himself and the crew of the Pequod. In the tragic ending of Moby Dick, all of the characters die except for Ishmael. Ishmael survived Moby Dick?s attack of the ship with the help of a coffin that his close friend Queequeq built. Ishmael of Moby Dick was a special character because he closely relates to the author?s own life. There are many symbolism?s between Ishmael of Moby Dick and Herman Melville?s own life. The name Ishmael can be traced back to the Bible. The Biblical story of Ishamel is one of a rejected outcast. This ?rejected outcast? can be linked to Ishmael of Moby Dick and Herman Melville?s own life. In Herman Melville?s Moby Dick, Ishmael is symbolic of the author?s own life.

Herman Melville?s childhood played an important part in his life. Herman Melville?s childhood is evident throughout his writings. Herman Melville?s childhood was an unconventional one. There were many twists and turns that Herman experienced. Melville was born on August 1, 1819, in New York City, the third of eight children. His mother?s family the Gansevoorts of Albany were Dutch brewers who settled in Albany in the seventeenth century achieving the status of landed gentry. ?The Gansevoorts were solid, stable, eminent, prosperous people; the (Herman?s Father?s side) Melvilles were somewhat less successful materially, possessing an unpredictable. erratic, mercurial strain.? (Edinger 6) This difference between the Melville?s and Gansevoorts was the beginning of the trouble for the Melville family. Herman?s mother tried to work her way up the social ladder by moving into bigger and better homes. While borrowing money from the bank, her husband was spending more than he was earning. ?It is my conclusion that Maria Melville never committed herself emotionally to her husband, but remained primarily attached to the well off Gansevoort family.? (Humford 23) Allan Melville was also attached financially to the Gansevoorts for support. There is a lot of evidence concerning Melville?s relation to his mother Maria Melville. ?Apparently the older son Gansevoort who carried the mother?s maiden name was distinctly her favorite.? (Edinger 7) This was a sense of alienation the Herman Melville felt from his mother. This was one of the first symbolists to the Biblical Ishamel. The following are a few excerpts from some of Melville?s works that show evidence of his childhood. A passage from Melville?s Redburn shows that Melville was attached to his mother, ?The name of the mother was the centre of all my hearts finest feelings.? (Melville 33) The following poem that Melville wrote shows his unreciprocated love for his mother.

I made the junior feel his place

Subserve the senior, love him too;

And soothe he does, and that is his saving grace

But me the meek one never can serve,

Hot he, he lacks quality keen

To make the mother through the soon

An envied dame of power a social queen. (Melville 211)

Herman?s father?s side originally Scots with connections in the peerage, were Boston merchants. Herman?s father, Allan Melville, was a merchant and importer dealing with French goods.

Allan Melville?s family was not as high on the social ladder as the Gansevoorts were. ?Allan Melville seems to have been socially charming and sensitive, but basically weak, with a long standing dependence on his father, and more especially on his wife?s bother Peter Gansevoort.? (Humford 33) ?Allan Melville?s sons may have found a more substantial father experience with their maternal uncle Peter Gansevoort.? (Edinger 8) Hermans father was to busy with business causing his children to find their uncle as the father figure. This was the start for the financial collapse that later happened Allan Melville was unrealistic and had a lot of wishful optimism. ?He seems to have been a man who constantly lived beyond his means, continually expecting a great windfall to be around the corner.? (Humford 35) When Allan Melville was borrowing money for his business, he was trying to fulfill his wife?s social ambitions by moving into larger homes. Eventually that bubble burst and Allan Melville had fallen into a total financial and psychological collapse. Although Allan Melville meant well, he was not managing his money properly and all of this stress took a toll on his family

The masculine figure in the family was the uncle, Peter Gansevoort. Not long after Allan Mellville?s financial collapse he died. Herman?s father?s death and his father?s dependence on Peter Gansevoort probably had an effect on Herman?s early psychological development. Its effects would show up in his later writings. Herman?s relatives helped the struggling family in any way they could, but they had their own interests too. At the age of twelve Herman Melville was forced to stop his education and go to work.

Herman?s older brother Gansevoort who was conventionally the successful one owned a hat store. After a few months of job hunting with no luck Herman decided to work at his brother?s hat store. Gansevoort eventually opened a law office and later became prominent in politics. Working at his brother?s hat store Herman felt, ?This is not the way Herman doubtless felt that one?s adolescence should open.? (Humford 40) All of Melville?s ambitions to go to college, become an orator, and travel were stopped. ?Herman was as unambitious as a man of sixty. Such careers do not begin at a hat shop.? (Humford 41) This lost and aimless feeling was similar to the feelings that the Biblical Ishamel felt.

Unable to get his bearings, not knowing what to do at the age of twenty, Herman signed up as a common sailor on a merchant vessel sailing for Liverpool. (Edinger 22) After four months Herman was back from his voyage still lost and aimless. At the age of twenty one he signed up for a four year voyage on a whaling ship. (Edinger 22) While people his age were in college Melville wrote in Moby Dick, ?A whaling ship was my Yale College and Harvard.? ?From a cultivated, genteel environment, Melville was suddenly plunged, unprepared into the coarse life of the sea.? (Rosenberry 31)

?Moby Dick begins with the striking sentence, ?Call me Ishmael,? we are immediately confronted with the figure of the rejected outcast, the alienated man.? (Porter 15) At the beginning of Judaic mythical history stands the figure of Abraham, the progenitor of the Jews. Abraham had two sons, Isaac, the legitimate, the accepted one, and Ishmael, the illegitimate, the rejected one. In the Bible (Gen:16) an angel speaks to Ishmael?s mother Hagar saying;

Behold, you are with a child and shall bear a son; you shall call him Ishmael; because the Lord has given heed to your affliction. He shall be a wild ass of a man, his hand against every man and every mans? hand against him, and he shall dwell over against all his kinsman. (Gen:16)

Ishamel and his mother Hagar were cast into the wilderness to die. God saved Ishmael who lead the Muslims. Issac, Ishmael?s brother was a follower of Christianity. From a Christian viewpoint Ishmael was the enemy, and one who must be repressed and rejected. ?To himself, Ishmael is the rejected orphan who through no fault of his own has been cruelly cast out and condemned to wander beyond the pale.? (McSwenny 25) This sense of rejection can be connected Melville?s life by his mother?s favoritism toward her other son and Herman?s father?s untimely death. Herman?s journeys at sea can also be interpreted as alienation and rejection.

Melville?s writings show that he was preoccupied throughout his life with figure of Ishmael. In Mardi he writes, ?sailors are mostly foundlings and castaways and carry their kith and kin in their arms and legs.? (Melville 21) In Redburn Melville writes ?at last I have found myself a sort of Ishmael on the ship, without a single friend or companion.? (60) In Pierre Melville writes ?so that once more he might not feed himself driven out an Ishmael into the desert, with no maternal Haggard to accompany and comfort him.? (125)

?Melville had what might be called an ?Ishmael complex.?? It had two sources; personal life experience and identification with an archetypal image.? (Edinger 16) The personal cause would be the insanity and death of his father and the following hardships. Melville was twelve and a half at the time when his father died, close to the Biblical Ishmael who was thirteen. In addition, he was rejected by his mother, who favored her first son, ?…acceptance and rejection are properly alternating phases in the developmental process…to become identified with only one these opposites leads to an arrested development.? Herman Melville?s lack of acceptance in his life caused himself to identify with the Biblical figure of Ishmael. (Humford 25) ?Most of the action is seen through the eyes of Ishmael. He will thus represent the author?s ego…? (Edinger 10) Melville was the rejected sibling much like the Biblical Ishmael.

If Melville was personally identified with the figure of Ishmael, it has more than a personal meaning, it represents the opposing attitude. ?To speak as Ishmael means to speak from a position outside the orthodox an conventional.? (Glien 89) If there is any doubt that the name Ishmael symbolizes a state of alienation and despair, this doubt can not survive the first paragraph of Moby Dick.

Call me Ishmael. Some years ago-nevermind how long precisely- having little or no money in my purse, and nothing particular to interest me on shore, I thought I would sail about a little and see the watery part of the world….whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul… (Melville 1)

Numerous literary critics have pointed out the first line of Moby Dick ?Call Me Ishmael.? (Melville 1) ?What does the opening sentence of Moby Dick mean? Ishmael is trying to say never mind what my real name is but think of me as a rejected outcast.? (Dickinson 23) The mood of a ?damp, drizzly November in the soul,? sets the whole mood for the whole novel. ?It is a state of depression, emptiness, and alienation from life values.? (Glien 60)

Herman Melville experienced many hardships in his life; Beginning with his unstable childhood and the slight rejection by his mother, more of a favoritism toward another sibling. The father was not the center male figure in the family, it was the maternal uncle. His father was a weak willed individual who lived beyond his means and had a dependence on his brother in law for financial support. Melville?s father also went bankrupt, had a mental collapse, and then died. These experiences had a psychological impact on him that lasted his whole life. These hardships are evident throughout his writings and symbolized in Moby Dick by the character Ishmael. The name Ishmael can be traced back to the Biblical story of Ishmael, who was alienated child. The story of Ishmael closely relates to Melville?s life. There is a vast amount of evidence proving that Melville knew of the Biblical story of Ishmael and purposely named Ishmael of Moby Dick, Ishmael.

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