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ECL 522 Final Paper

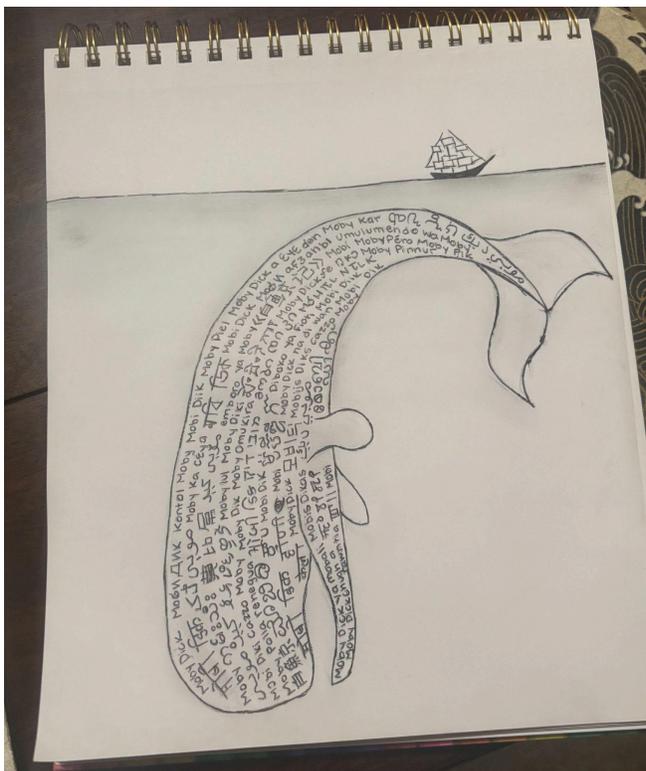
Throughout this semester we have spent reading Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, we have truly seen just how much the story is not simply just a novel about killing a whale. Instead, it truly is a novel about how to read. The narrator, Ishmael, instructs us often to look back at parts of the text and rethink them from a different light. Through narration and class discussion, I truly was able to see this novel from so many different perspectives and because of that, I chose to do a creative project that represented that. For my illustration, I really wanted to emphasize the way in which *Moby Dick* as a story really can mean so many different things based on where you look at it from. *Moby Dick* as a novel teaches the readers to look at meaning from multiple angles as well as encouraging us to read the surfaces presented in order to create our own individual interpretation.

When it comes to looking at events in this novel from multiple perspectives, one of the most significant ways in which the story asks you to do that is through the narrative voice of Ishmael. There are many instances throughout the novel where he speaks directly to the audience, but one moment that truly stuck out to me the most was in Chapter 70, The Sphynx, where he says "Do you not marvel, then, at Stubb's boast, that he demanded by ten minutes to behead a sperm whale?" (Melville 338). Melville, in writing this novel, does not expect the reader to know the details of whaling or the anatomy or scale of the sperm whale and that provides him with an opportunity to teach the readers. To teach them, not just of the sperm whale, but of the ways in which we should look back on moments when more information is revealed to us and look at it through this changed perspective. In this instance, Ishmael had given the readers a very limited view on what beheading the sperm whale takes and then slowly peels

back the layers, teaching the readers what it entails. He follows this instruction by asking the readers to go back and think about what they had learned earlier but from the other side of the lesson.

The lesson on reading that really stuck with me was through the novel's instruction on reading surfaces. Melville sees the world as a story that exists for us to interpret ourselves. Chapter 99, The Doubloon, offers this example up perfectly. This chapter centers around each member of the Pequod reading and interpreting the gold coin that is nailed to the mast of the ship. This coin takes on a different meaning for each character due to their unique perspectives and goals. Each man on the ship interprets the symbolism of the coin as a reflection of themselves, each one seeing it extremely different despite the coin remaining the same. Ralph Waldo Emerson in his speech *The American Scholar* provides a very similar lesson as Melville on reading and interpreting the world around us for ourselves. In his speech, he says "Books are for the scholar's idle times. When he can read God directly, the hour is too precious to be wasted in other men's transcripts of their readings." Emerson is trying to urge people to stop looking solely at the works and perspectives of other people for the answers to everything. He is trying to get people to understand that works of value come from looking at and analyzing the world around us from our own perspectives because we each will walk away with a unique take on it. This is reflected so significantly throughout the novel *Moby Dick*, but specifically in chapter 99. The characters all look at the doubloon from their own standpoint and don't allow the ideas of others to corrupt their own sight. This chapter is so significant because it teaches the readers to understand that the meaning that resides in the story of *Moby Dick* is not something for us to all understand in the same way. It is not a fixed idea, but one that is created through interpretation that we develop throughout the process of reading.

For my creative project, I decided to expand on the idea of individual interpretation and place it upon the figure of the whale. The way in which I represented this idea was by illustrating the whale with the name “Moby Dick” written across it in a plethora of different languages. With this visual, I wanted to reflect how a person’s background, where they come from and the language they speak among many other things, truly shapes the way in which they view and interpret a story. By using the name of both the novel and the name of the whale, I wanted to truly emphasize how a meaning can change so drastically, even in something as small as a simple name. Throughout *Moby Dick*, both Ishmael and Melville dissect the whale for the reader, breaking it down and peeling back the layers in order to teach the audience how to read and understand meaning. My illustration aims to reflect this process by placing interpretation onto the surface of the whale, allowing for people to see that the meaning comes from looking at it from different views.



Works Cited

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. "The American Scholar." 1837

Melville, Herman, et al. *Moby-Dick, Or, The Whale*. Penguin Books, 2003.