

Symbolic Representations in Herman Melville's Moby-Dick

Dr. R. Kanagaselvam¹, M.A., M.Phil., B.Ed., PhD., Asst. Professor of English, K S R Institute for Engineering and Technology, (Affiliated to Anna University, Chennai), K.S.R. Kalvi Nagar, Tiruchengode – 637 215, Namakkal (Dt.).

Mr. P. Mohan², M.A., M.Phil. B.Ed., Assistant Professor of English, K S R Institute for Engineering and Technology, (Affiliated to Anna University, Chennai) K.S.R. Kalvi Nagar, Tiruchengode – 637 215, Namakkal (Dt.).

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ABSTRACT

The symbols and metaphors used by Moby-Dick in Herman Melville's outstanding work distinguish this novel from others. Each character or aspect has its symbolic value to the reader throughout the novel, which is conveyed through allegory. If a tangible thing embodies or indicates fundamental notions that enlighten and expand the knowledge of a piece of literature, it is called a symbol in literature. Some of the most well-known symbols of American literature were found in Moby-world, a fictional realm created by Melville. In this novel, the symbolic representations do not necessarily imply straightforward. The readers must have deep study to interpret the meaning of each symbol. This paper analyses the symbolic meaning of the metaphors represented by the author.

Keywords: Dark Romanticism, Death, life, adventure, Voyages, failure

Herman Melville's fictions are representative of the genre known as 'Dark Romanticism.' He released his novel Moby-Dick in 1851, in the same year Harriet Beecher Stowe published Uncle Tom's Cabin and Nathaniel Hawthorne published, The Scarlet Letter. In dedication to fellow Dark Romantic writer Nathaniel Hawthorne, Melville wrote, "In token of my admiration for his genius, this book is inscribed to Nathaniel Hawthorne." (The New York Times)

Herman Melville grew up hearing stories of naval adventures. In particular, Melville was intrigued by stories of whaling voyages and other seafaring exploration. In 1839, when he was twenty years old, he embarked on his voyage of discovery, beginning as a cabin boy on the merchant ship St. Lawrence. In January 1841, he was aboard the whale ship Acushnet. Having had a series of adventures, some of which were misguided, he decided to leave the sea and return to his mother's home in the fall of 1844 and resolved to write about his experiences.

Thomson describes that the elements of Dark romanticism are flourished in his narration, "force and stature heighten the soft idealistic ruminations and metaphysics of the Romantics, pronouncing instead a rawness of expression that achieves singular clarity and resolution" (Thomson 11).

"Call me Ishmael," begins the novel, becoming one of the most famous beginning lines in American literature: "Call me Ishmael." According to the biblical account, he is disinherited and expelled from his family in favor of his half-brother, Isaac. The title indicates that the narrator is a bit of an outcast, a vagabond, and a member of no specific family other than that of humanity. This is accurate. Ishmael demonstrates his independence by stating that he never sails the ocean as a passenger since passengers tend to rely on others, feeling seasick or experiencing other issues; worse, they must pay for their journey rather than being compensated for their time on the ship. He also has no desire to have any specific position on the ship, such as captain or chef, because he despises "all decent, respectable toils" and has enough difficulty just taking care of himself. Because this work employs such a solid first-person narrative voice, the reader may anticipate that this will be Ishmael's story, rather than Moby Dick's, Ahab's, or anybody else's, throughout. Ishmael, not Melville, the author, is the narrator in this story. Moby-Dick is concerned with the depths and complexities of meaning, predominantly expressed through the narrator. Ishmael is first and

foremost an observer. He shies away from taking responsibility for others, yet he has a genuine affection for his pals. He does not mind working in a servile capacity.

A symbol in literature is a tangible object representing or suggesting essential concepts that inform and deepen our understanding of a piece of literature. Some of the most well-known emblems in American literature may be found in Moby-world. Dick's Being well recognized does not mean that the symbols are simple or easy to comprehend or interpret. As the topics in the novel, the symbols are ambiguous in a way that adds to the story's richness. The White Whale is one of the most well-known literary emblems in the United States. What it signifies is dependent on who is paying attention. Moby Dick is like another whale in Starbucks' eyes, except he is more hazardous than the others. Ahab's motivations for switching the purpose of the ship, from gathering oil to killing the White Whale, are called into question early in the narrative by Starbuck. Starbuck describes seeking vengeance on a "dumb animal... which merely hit thee from blindest instinct!" on the quarter-deck in Chapter 36 as "blasphemous." If there is anything else about the whale that Starbuck notices, it is that Moby Dick signifies the captain's insanity and a significant detour from the ship's true objective.

The captain of the Samuel Enderby, who has lost an arm to the White Whale, considers the whale a magnificent treasure in terms of both glory and sperm oil, yet he

appears to be pretty sensible in his wish to leave the whale to its own devices. Ahab is told to kill him since he would bring "great honor" to the crew." "There would be great glory in killing him, I know that, and there is a ship-load of precious sperm in him, but, hark ye, he is best let alone; don't you think so, Captain?" (100).

The whale represents pure evil, and Captain Ahab believes his responsibility to remove that evil from the world. According to the ship's crew, the whale is a perfect topic for folklore and a convenient scapegoat for any of their problems. Instead of discussing their anxieties, they talk about the whale's anxieties. As well as being associated with Death, given its white color and fatal effects on all who come into contact with it, the whale has also been interpreted as a distant, deist view of a distant God, as well as the impending expansion of white colonialism and economic plundering of undeveloped countries, among other things.

The color white, which is often linked with purity and tranquility, has primarily negative connotations in *Moby-Dick*, beginning with the concept of inscrutability. In *Moby-Dick*, the color white has predominantly negative connotations. If you stop to think about it, white is essentially the complete lack of color, and in this case, the color is related to the complete absence of significance. It is the ultimate white object, and it is also entirely unintelligible. Each crew member has his or her interpretation of Moby-Dick, depending on how he or she thinks fit. The

abundance of white imagery in Ishmael's portrayal of waves breaking, animals living in poverty, and especially people with albinism demonstrates to the reader that Ishmael dreads and dislikes a hue that most people find comforting.

In this tale, the sea serves as yet another metaphor. Unless they are in the midst of a storm, the water appears reasonably to the eye. Even in the strongest winds, however, the vast amount of life that exists beneath the water's surface remains hidden. According to Ishmael, the sea serves as a metaphor for the boundaries of what it is possible to know. Because humans do not have access to God's all-seeing eye, individuals can only depend on their observations to make decisions. He does not know everything irritates Ishmael, who wants to know everything.

Another one of Ahab's prominent emblems is the Pequod, a whaling ship led by the character of Captain Ahab. In his life, Ahab's purpose is to slay the enormous white whale named Moby-Dick, who had previously stolen Ahab's leg. A quest for Moby-Dick takes the Pequod on a journey that is doomed from the start by the story's characters. Since the ship is named after a tribe of Native Americans in Massachusetts that did not survive following the advent of European settlers, its very name implies failure. The ship, painted a gloomy black and studded with whale bones and teeth, is filled with images of Death that can be found anywhere the sailors look. It is designed to seem like a coffin, which it will eventually become. The whaling ship the

Pequod, which represents doom, Moby-Dick the whale, which represents contradiction and the wild things in life, and a sailor's coffin, which represents both life and Death, are examples of such items. Every one of these symbols is employed effectively by Melville, and they aided the reader in comprehending the overall meaning of the work. Another symbol used in Melville's classic is a coffin that belongs to Queequeg, a sailor on the Pequod. Its meaning changes from Death to life as the book progresses. Queequeg first has the coffin built when he is seriously ill and fears Death. However, when Queequeg recovers, he uses it as a chest to store his possessions. It is later rigged as a lifebuoy, representing life for the sailors on the Pequod. When the ship sinks and Ishmael, a sailor on the Pequod and the narrator of the story, uses the coffin to stay afloat, it saves not only his life but the life of the tale.

In Moby Dick, a coffin belonging to Queequeg, a sailor on the Pequod, is another image that is employed. As the novel unfolds, the meaning of the phrase shifts from Death to life. Queequeg orders the coffin's construction when he is seriously ill and afraid of dying. When Queequeg can recuperate, he uses the chest as a storage space for his belongings. It is fashioned as a lifebuoy in later years, indicating the sailors' ability to survive at sea. During a shipwreck and the usage of a coffin to save the Pequod from sinking, Ishmael, a sailor aboard the ship and the narrator of the narrative, ends up saving his life and the whole saga. Later in the story, the coffin is transformed into the ship's new

life preserver, and it is ultimately responsible for transporting Ishmael to safety. As a result, what had begun as a sign of Death has transformed into a symbol of life. When it comes to his attitude to preaching, Father Mapple's pulpit in the Whaleman's Chapel does an excellent job portraying this former harpooner. Everything about the chapel conjures up life and death images of the high seas. Father Mapple is the captain of the ship, and the members of the congregation are the crew members. The pulpit itself is designed in the shape of a ship's prow, and it is decorated with an oil painting depicting an ocean liner in the middle of a storm off the coast of rocky coast, with an angel of hope keeping watch over it. In a short amount of time, we can observe that the pulpit symbolizes pastoral leadership and suggests that God himself is the captain of this ship. Apple's "shipmates," as he refers to the members of his congregation, frequently find themselves amid storms on rocky shores either in the form of ships or symbolically in the form of their whole lives. They are in desperate need of the hope and solace that God's grace, as portrayed by the angel, can provide. Another symbol is Father Mapple's pulpit. To get to the pulpit, Mapple had to climb a rope ladder, similar to the one used to board a ship from a boat at sea. Afterward, he draws the rope up behind him, thus closing himself off from the rest of the world. Similarly, when a whaling ship loses communication with the shore, the skipper assumes the job of a pilot, and the ship transforms into a floating microcosm at sea. Throughout the novel, Melville uses

contrast; in this instance, the contrast is between Mapple and Ahab. Apple is an aged yet robust man of God who sees his job as a captain navigating his ship over choppy waves while willingly yielding to the dictates of a higher power. Ahab is an ungodly guy who has no problem exerting power, but he despises the idea of being subjected to it. His disobedience is something he wears with pride. According to this interpretation, the pulpit represents the correct posture for a ship's captain, who fulfills his responsibility by guiding his congregation toward knowledge of and commitment to carrying out God's purpose.

To conclude the present article by stating that Herman Melville's classic novel, *Moby-Dick's* symbols and metaphors make this novel unique. The tale is narrated in an allegoric manner, with each character or element in the story having its symbolic significance to the reader. A symbol in literature is a physical item representing or suggesting essential concepts that inform and deepen our understanding of a piece of literature. Some of the most well-known emblems in American literature may be found in *Moby-world*. *Dick's* Being well recognized, on the other hand, does not mean that the symbols are simple or easy to comprehend or interpret. As the topics in the novel, the symbols are ambiguous in a way that adds to the story's richness. Lincoln states:

Moby-Dick, a priceless, timeless piece of literature by Herman Melville, contains deep symbolism that helps the reader understand the book's meaning. Melville uses the Pequod to symbolize doom, *Moby-Dick* to symbolize random and uncontrollable nature, and Queequeg's coffin to symbolize Death, then life. Without these symbols, *Moby-Dick* is a good read. With them, it is a thought-provoking masterpiece that has been enjoyed by several generations and will be enjoyed by many more to come. (Lincoln)

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