

**Tribhuvan University**

**Representation of Mid-nineteenth Century American Society: A New Historicist  
Reading of *Moby-Dick***

**A Thesis Submitted to the Department of English, Faculty of Humanities and Social  
Sciences in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the  
Degree of Master of Arts in English**

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**Letter of Recommendation**

Mr. Ramesh Tripathi has completed his thesis entitled “**Representation of Mid-nineteenth Century American Society: A New Historicist Reading of *Moby-Dick***” under my supervision. He carried out his research from 2072/05/01 B.S. to 2073/02/02 B.S. I hereby recommend his thesis be submitted for viva voce.

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**Letter of Approval**

This thesis entitled “**Representation of Mid-nineteenth Century American Society: A New Historicist Reading of *Moby-Dick***” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Mr. Ramesh Tripathi has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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## . Abstract

This research paper aims to show the representation of mid-nineteenth century American society in Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*. It finds out that *Moby-Dick* as a literary text was shaped by the culture in which it was written. Likewise, *Moby-Dick*, as a literary text, functions as a historical discourse interacting with other discourses. The research reveals that Ishmael, as a narrator, is neither objective nor free from prejudice rather he is guided by his cultural background. The findings of the study show a significant interrelationship between truth, knowledge and power in the process of discursive formation. The text is analyzed from the new historicist perspective of Michael Foucault, Stephen Greenblatt, Catherine Gallagher and Louis Montrose. From the new historicist perspective, the objective of the research paper is to dig out the literary representation of mid nineteenth century American society in *Moby-Dick*.

## **Representation of Mid-Nineteenth-Century American Society: A New Historicist**

### **Reading of *Moby-Dick***

This project analyzes the representation of mid-nineteenth century American society in Herman Melville's novel *Moby-Dick*. Most basically, this paper examines the cultural, social, economic, ideological aspects of mid-nineteenth century American society and their representation in *Moby-Dick*. Likewise, this project evaluates *Moby-Dick* as a literary text that was shaped by mid-nineteenth century American culture in which it was written. It considers *Moby-Dick* as a cultural artifact that tells us something about the interplay of discourses that were predominant in mid-nineteenth century American society. *Moby-Dick*, as a literary text, accompanies issues of race, gender, ethnicity, religion, labor, democracy, capitalism in its representation of mid-nineteenth century American society. Here, the novel functions as a literary text, functions as a historical discourse interacting with other cultural, social, ideological, discourses like the discourse of consumer capitalism, the discourse of empire building, the discourse of racial otherness, the discourse of slavery etc. These abovementioned discourses are in a state of overlapping and competing with one another throughout the novel. Moreover, this paper also locates the relationship between truth, knowledge and power in its representation. This paper examines how Ishmael, as a narrator, views historical events as narrative, as stories in the novel. Throughout the novel Ishmael, as a narrator deconstructs the traditional opposition between history (factual) and literature (fictional) in the novel. He presents both fact and fiction parallel. This paper views the literary text *Moby-Dick* and the historical background in which it was written are equally important because text and context are mutually constructive: they create each other. For this paper, *Moby-Dick* can only be evaluated in its social, historical, political contexts.

Herman Melville was born on 1 August 1819 in New York City, as the second son of his parents. After his father's business failure and death in 1832, Herman left school at fifteen. He worked as a clerk, farmer and teacher but could not get success. Then, he involved in sea voyage. In 1839, he became a cabin boy on a voyage to Liverpool. He depicts his first voyage experience later in his novel *Red Burn* (1849). His next voyage was on a whaler, the *Acushnet*, in 1841 to the south sea provided raw materials for his famous novel *Moby-Dick* (1851). He also lived among cannibals during his second voyage. After further adventures, Melville returned home as a seaman and in 1847 he married Elizabeth Show and settled in New York. In 1850, he bought a farm near Pittsfield, Massachusetts and formed a friendship with the author Nathaniel Hawthorne. He died on 28 September 1891. Melville received little literary attention during his lifetime. But, now he is recognized as one of America's greatest literary figures. He enjoyed sea voyage adventure and depicted his real life experience in his literary creation.

*Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life* (1846) was the first literary creation of Melville. It was set among the Typee Indians in the Marquesas Groups of Islands, where Melville had spend four months in 1842, after his escape from the whaler *Acushnet*. The narrative deals with his discovery of the valley of the Typees, a cannibal tribe in the interior of Mukhheva, and of his life there till his fear of being eaten leads to his escape. The Typees are depicted as children of nature. They are blood thirsty and cruel, but are also generous and hospitable. The third literary creation by Melville was *Mardi* (1849), which is an incoherent account of the pursuit of a South Sea Cytherea, named Yillah, a white woman who has been brought up by the native priests for sacrifice. In *Red Burn* (1849) Melville depicts his experiences on the *High Lander*; the ship on which he made his first voyage in 1837 to Liverpool.

Likewise, Melville presented a picture of an American man-of-war in *White-Jacket* (1850). However, it was *Moby-Dick* (1851) that recognized Melville's greatness in fiction. Melville's next book *Pierre: or The Ambiguities* (1852) was laid in a rural district, is an extraordinary mixture of imagination, emotion and futility.

Melville also wrote stories for Putnam's Magazine and Harper's Magazine. Some stories, like "The lighting Rod Man", "Happy failure", and "Jimmy Rose" couldn't get literary success. But, Beneto Cereno, printed in Putnam's magazine, October to December, 1855, is a master piece.

After thirty years of inactivity in fiction, Melville wrote *Billy Budd*, man between November 1888 and April, 1891. It is a straight forward story of contrasted crime and innocence. Melville was skeptical writer, who showed darkened face of transcendentalism in his literary creations.

Though, Melville has written numerous fiction and non fiction books. I have selected *Moby-Dick* for my research. I will deeply analyze the issue of representation of contemporary society in *Moby-Dick*. The major objective of this study is to excavate the cultural components which plays vital role in producing *Moby-Dick*.

Ishmael, the narrator, decides to go on a whaling voyage. On his way to New Bedford, he meets Queequeg, a cannibal harpooner dweller of the South Seas. They select the ship Pequod captained by Ahab. On Christmas day, the Pequod starts its three-year voyage around the watery world to hunt whales. Pequod sails throughout the watery world, capturing whales and meeting other whaling ships. The pequod approaches the equator, where Ahab involves into three days chase with Moby Dick. Except Ishmael, all perish during third day chase of Moby-Dick when Moby-Dick sinks Pequod. Ishmael is rescued by the ship Rachel.

Most of the critics, who have examined *Moby-Dick*, contend that *Moby-Dick* is a satiric novel. Likewise, some critics call *Moby-Dick* an allegorical novel. Critic, Thomas A Bailey discusses the novel as an allegorical. As Thomas A Bailey states:

This epic novel was a thrilling allegory of good and evil, told in terms of the conflict between whaling captain, Ahab, and a giant white whale, Moby-Dick. Captain Ahab, who lost a leg to the marine monster, swore revenge. His pursuit finally ended when Moby-Dick rammed and sank Ahab's ship, leaving only one survivor. (376)

However, another critic like Richard Ruland and Malcolm Bradbury view *Moby-Dick* as factual account of whaling voyage. They find fact and fantasy mixed in *Moby Dick*. As Richard Ruland and Malcolm Bradbury state:

... Melville started it as a factual account of the whaling industry, but it crossed with his reading of Shakespeare, his involvement with Hawthorne, his wish to write a "wicked" book to interrogate the persistent innocence of his age. This is the book's motto (the secret one)-ego non baptiso te in nomine but make out the rest yourself", he wrote excitedly to Hawthorne; Ahab uses the same words to give a harpoon a diabolic baptism. (160)

Critic Alfred Kazin finds *Moby-Dick* a difficult book to classify and place it into a particular genre. *Moby-Dick* consists of so many elements which are brought from different sources and combine them into one. As Alfred Kazin states:

... It is a book which is neither a saga, though it deals in large natural forces, nor a classical epic, for we feel too strongly the individual who wrote it. It is a book that is at once primitive, fatalistic and merciless, like the very oldest books, and yet peculiarly personal, like so many

twentieth-century novels, in its significant emphasis on the subjective individual consciousness. (225)

However, this study aims to disclose the issue of literary representation of mid-nineteenth century American society in *Moby-Dick* through the discursive formation. This study views *Moby-Dick* through the perspective of historical context.

During 1980s, the new literary movement emerged in American literary arena which is termed “new historicism” by Stephen Greenblatt, who is its leading theorist and practitioner. New historicism is practiced and developed by critics like Stephen Greenblatt, Louis Montrose, Catherine Gallagher and Alah Liu in the United States. New historicists are mainly influenced by French philosopher Michel Foucault and American cultural anthropologist Clifford Gertz. New historicism appeared in the United States as a reaction against literary formalism. New historicism views history as subjective, nonlinear, cultural rather than objective and the direct recreation of the past. Since new historicism is literary movement, it evaluates history and literature hand in hand. For new historicism, literature is only the part and parcel of the culture in which it was produced.

Louise Montrose, one of the leading advocates of new historicism, in his article professing the Renaissance lays out: “Our analysis and our understandings necessarily proceed from our own historically, socially and institutionally shaped vantage points” (23). Likewise, he also elaborates the close relationship between text and context. Montrose asserts that new historicism can be characterized as a “reciprocal concern with the historicity of texts and the textually of history” (24).

Similarly, another critic Catherine Gallagher explains new historicism as: “Reading literary and non-literary texts as constituents of historical discourses that are both inside and outside of texts” (37). For Stephen Greenblatt, any reading of a

literary text is a question of negotiation, a negotiation between text and reader within the context of a history. Greenblatt and other new historicist critics reject any attempts to produce a 'whole' or final reading and argue for readings which are not fixed.

Thus, the preliminary concern of new historicism is to locate the relationship between texts and the cultural system in which they were produced. In terms of new historicism, a literary text can only be evaluated in its social, historical, and political context.

This paper uses new historicism as analytical tool to find out the desired conclusion. Since *Moby-Dick* is a novel that accompanies lots of issues which are directly or indirectly related with the time and place in which it was produced, to locate the exact relationship between literary and other meaningful social practices in *Moby-Dick*. New historicism is an appropriate tool. Since the main objective of this paper is to find out the context of *Moby-Dick*, new historicism is appropriate.

New historicists argue that the production of literary text is a cultural practice. They reject any notion of absolute distinction between literature and other cultural practices. For them literary texts are embedded within the social, economic and cultural circumstances in which they were produced. As Stephen Greenblatt states, art is "made up along with other products, practices, discourses of a given culture"(13). New historicism as a theoretical approach to literary texts attempt to refigure the relationship between texts and cultural context in which they were produced. In new historicism, a literary text can only be evaluated in its social, historical and political context. New historicists explain how text is not only represents culturally constructed patterns, but also reproduce cultural construction. Here, *Moby Dick* is examined on the basis of its cultural context.

“Call me Ishmael”(7). The novel begins with this eye catching sentence. Ishmael, as a narrator unveils the novel *Moby-Dick* along with his real life experience. From the very inception of the novel, Ishmael tends to blur the distinction between literary and non-literary events and present them parallel. He represents himself as a member of contemporary American society, who is surrounded by contemporary social and cultural circumstances like poverty, economic hardship, psychological isolation, depression, family fragmentation, racial pride, prejudice and male chauvinism. Ishmael juxtaposes his private life activities, historical facts and the main plot of the novel. He equally locates cultural background from which he himself and his literary creation emerge. Ishmael might be the alter ego of Herman Melville. Melville creates Ishmael as the narrator, who narrates his own real life experiences. The narrator reverberates biographical elements of Melville throughout the novel. In real life Melville was orphan, when he was thirteen year old his father died. Here, in the novel Ishmael calls himself orphan. In epilogue Ishmael closes the novel by stating: “It was the devious-cruising “Rachel”, that in her retracing search after her missing children, only found another orphan” (493). It seems that Melville choses the word “orphan” intentionally to connect his real life to the fictional narrative of Ishmael. After being orphan, Melville encountered poverty, economic hardship, depression and psychological isolation. Thus he creates poverty stricken, psychologically depressed narrator Ishmael.

Ishmael depicts his poor condition in his narration. He highlights his poor condition in particular and poverty of 1830s American society in general. Ishmael introduces himself as poor common American who is going to join sea voyage. Ishmael represents himself as poor and states: “...having little or no money in my

purse...” (9). He not only narrates his poor condition but also represents contemporary poor American society. He states:

I stuffed a shirt or two into my old carpet-bag, tucked it under my arm, and started for Cape Horn and the Pacific. Quitting the good city of old Manhattan, I duly arrived in New Bedford. It was on a Saturday night in December. (12)

Here, Ishmael represents his economically poor condition, his journey towards seashore and cold climate of December. He further elaborates how poverty hits each and every corner of contemporary American society when he narrates “The Spouter-Inn: - Peter Coffin.” “...the dilapidated little wooden house...” (14). By presenting poor condition of the Inn, he tries to represent contemporary American society which was bitterly beaten of economic hardship of 1830s to 1840s.

Due to poverty and consistent failure to satisfy his needs, Ishmael is trapped into the state of deep psychological disorder. He is inclined to commit suicide. He states his pathetic condition as:

Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet; and especially whenever my hypos get such an upper hand of me, that it requires a strong moral principle to prevent me from deliberately stepping into the street, and methodically knocking people’s hat is off-then, I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can. This is my substitute for pistol and ball. (7)

Ishmael represents his own personal depression and frustration in the form of literary narration in above mentioned paragraph. Here, he functions as a spokesperson of the common Americans who are the victim of poverty.

Quite controversially, Ishmael reflects contemporary American youth's sentiment regarding adventurous activities like whaling. He discloses common American's risk chasing tendencies by imposing the rhetorical questions: "Why is almost every robust boy with a robust healthy soul in him, at some time or other crazy to go to sea? (9)" This rhetorical question connotes lots of message regarding contemporary American society. It shows how contemporary American society is related to sea for its livelihood. Likewise, he also tries to justify his desire to go to sea through the discourse of whaling. Here, he presents historical facts and literary sentiment side by side:

Why did the old Persians hold the sea holy? Why did the Greeks give it a separate deity, and own brother of Jove? Surely all this is not without meaning. And still deeper the meaning of that story of Narcissus, who because he could not grasp the tormenting, mind image he saw in the fountain, plunged into it and was drowned. But that same image, we ourselves see in all rivers and oceans. It is the image of the ungraspable phantom of life; and this is the key to it all. (9)

Ishmael seems to oscillate between advantages and disadvantages of the sea. He looks positive towards sea when he mentions Persians and Greeks who regard sea as holy deity that is the source of livelihood for human beings. However, Ishmael deconstructs the traditional historical truth that regards sea as holy deity by highlighting the myth of narcissus.

From the very inception of narration, Ishmael seems not only a narrator who is sole literary character, but also the representative of contemporary Anglo-American Christian male who embodies cultural traits of Mid-nineteenth century American society. He narrates himself as a brave, adventurous, risk chasing, curious, self-reliant, individualistic non-conformist person. He states: "... I am tormented with an everlasting itch for things remote. I love to sail forbidden seas, and land on barbarous coast" (11). Here, Ishmael very powerfully expresses his desire to sail forbidden seas and his desire to travel remote areas.

The terms "forbidden seas" and "remote areas" might be used to refer those waterly worlds and territories that were not part of America, but America wanted to possess them. The particular desire of Ishmael to sail forbidden seas and to travel remote areas might be the representation of general American sentiment to colonize, and it creates the discourse of colonialism throughout the novel. Similarly, in chapter III "The Spouter-Inn", Ishmael mentions the landlord of The "Spouter-Inn" who hopes to get the news about Feejees from the whaling ship *Grampus*. Ishmael narrates as: "...the landlord cried, "That's the *Grampus's* crew. I see her reported in the offing this morning; a three years' voyage, and a full ship. Hurrah, boys' now will have the latest news from the Feejees" (18). The landlord seems eager to hear the latest news about Feejee. He represents mid nineteenth century American desire to colonize foreign lands.

New historicism is famous for its equal representation of literary and non-literary elements in the process of the formation of the literary creation. New historicists revolt against the notion that creates hierarchy between literary and non-literary things. For new historicists, history and literature are inseparable from each other. Catherine Gallagher explains new historicism as "reading literary and non-

literary texts as constituents of historical discourses that are both inside and outside of texts” (37). He finds both literature and history equally important in the process of discursive formation. Likewise, another critic Louise Montrose asserts that the new historicism can be characterized as a “reciprocal concern with the historicity of texts and the textuality of history”(23). For him “the historicity of texts” means "the cultural specificity, the social embeddedment of all modes of writing." With “the textuality of history” Montrose suggests that we cannot have “access to a full and authentic past,” and we cannot have access to “a lived material existence, unmediated by the surviving textual traces of the society in question” (20). Here, in the novel, Ishmael as a narrator and Melville as the author both represent "historicity of text" and “textuality of history”.

In the similar vein, in chapter XIV “Nantucket”, Ishmael, first presents the legend of how Nantucket was settled by the red man, and then, he tries to justify contemporary American desire to colonize. Ishmael explains:

In older times an eagle swooped down upon the New England coast, and carried off an infant Indian in his talons. With loud lament the parents saw their child borne out of sight over the wide waters. They resolved to follow in the sight over the wide waters. They resolved to follow in the same direction. Setting out in their canoes, after a perilous passage they discovered the island and there they found an empty ivory casket the poor little Indian’s skeleton. What wonder, then that these Nantucketers, born on a beach, should take to the sea for a livelihood! And thus here these naked Nantucketers, these sea-hermits, issuing from their ant-hill in the sea, overrun and conquered the watery world like so many Alexander; parcelling out among them the Atlantic,

Pacific, and Indian oceans, as the three pirate powers did Poland. Let America add Mexico to Texas, and pile Cuba upon Canada; let the English over swarm all India, and hang out their blazing banner from the sun; two third of this terraqueous globe are the Nantucketer's ...  
(59-60)

Ishmael chronologically narrates the discourse of empire building in above cited paragraph. He starts from the legend of how red men cultivate America and their gradual development and their desire to be colonizer. Ishmael highlights contemporary American desire to expand borders where possible. In the United States, the spirit of nationalism increased significantly during mid-nineteenth century. The term "Manifest Destiny"- the desire to expand the boundaries of the United States became the single-minded goal for American. According to American history, from 1820s to the 1840s, USA annexes Texas, Oregon, and Utah. During mid-nineteenth century, the discourse of territorial expansion took center stage. Interestingly, here, Ishmael textualize historical facts. He represents contemporary American historical archives of encroachment in the form of literary narrative.

Throughout the novel the discourse of whaling is connected with lots of other discourses. Sometimes the discourse of whaling is narrated as social and cultural phenomenon; sometimes the discourse of whaling is evaluated as economic activity; sometimes the discourse of whaling is examined on the basis of historical development. Moreover, Ishmael analyzes the evolution of whaling in America: the gradual development of whaling in America; the economic importance of whaling in contemporary capitalistic American society.

Ishmael evaluates how whaling promotes consumer capitalism in America through the discourse of whaling. In this process, he compares New Bedford with Nantucket in whaling. Ishmael states:

New Bedford has of late been gradually monopolizing the business of whaling, and though in this matter poor old Nantucket is how much behind her, yet Nantucket-was her great original- the type of this carthage- the place where the first dead American whale was stranded.

(12)

Here, Ishmael judges the activity of whaling through the perspective of consumer capitalism. He finds New Bedford more successful in comparison to Nantucket in promoting capitalism through whaling. He exploits the particular activity of whaling to show the contemporary American society which is totally guided by the tenets of consumer capitalism. Throughout the novel he narrates lots of whaling related historical, cultural, literary episodes that promotes the discourse of consumer capitalism. In chapter XVI "The Ship", Ishmael reports massive investment in whaling industry by public of Nantucket: "People in Nantucket invest their money in whaling vessels, the same way that you do yours in approved state stocks bringing in good interest" (68).

The massive investment of money in particular sector to gain good profit shows how contemporary American promotes capitalism in American. More importantly, Ishmael gives historical facts to prove his literary statement that the discourse of consumer capitalism was one of the prominent discourses of mid-nineteenth century American society. Ishmael presents:

...how comes it that we whale men of American now outnumber all the rest of the banded whale men in the world; sail a navy of upwards

of seven hundred vessels; manned by eighteen thousand men; yearly consuming 4,000,000 of dollars; the ships worth, at the time of sailing, \$20,000,000; and every year importing into our harbours a well reaped harvest of \$7,000,000? How comes all this, if there be not something puissant in whaling? (97)

Ishmael presents exact data to justify his logical argument that the whale hunting is one of the major industries that promotes capitalism in American. More importantly, he marginalizes the issue of moral and ethical aspect of killing and butchering of whales in massive scale. Ishmael judges the discourse of whaling on the basis of its economic profits and gains. Likewise, he totally neglects the issue of environmental impact of killing whales. He also marginalizes the issue of environmental impact of killing whales. He also represents the discourse of whaling on the basis of its ups and downs in the process of its growth and development. For him, initially, the human history witnessed whaling as the means of colonialism. Later the whaling is recognized as the means of promoting capitalism. Ishmael elaborates:

If American and European man-of-war now peacefully rides in once savage harbours, let them fire salutes to be honour and the glory of the whale ship, which originally showed them the way, and first interpreted between them and the savages. Until the whale fishery rounded Cape Horn, no commerce, but colonial, scarcely any intercourse but colonial, was carried on between Europe and the long line of the opulent Spanish provinces on the pacific coast. It was the whale man who first broke through the jealous policy of Spanish crown, touching those colonies; and if space permitted, it might be distinctly shown how from those whale man at last eventuated the

liberation of Peru, Chili and Bolivia from the yoke of old Spain, and the establishment of the eternal democracy in those parts. (98)

Ishmael shows three implications of the discourse of whaling: The discourse of colonialism; the discourse of democracy; the discourse of capitalism. First, the white people of Europe, those who are in power, use whaling as the means of colonialism. First they colonize the water world and then they colonize countries and states through the discourse of whaling. As Foucault states power circulates through each and every corner of society. Those who are colonized revolt and establish democracy in their nation. After the establishment of democracy, the power shifts and holds by capitalists who create the discourse of capitalism through whaling.

The narrator examines anatomy and physiology of whales. He also classifies whales into different categories. In chapter XXXI "cetology" he divides whales into three primary books: The 'Folio Whale', The 'Octavo Whale', the 'Duodecimo Whale'. He divides whales on the basis of their use value. He judges whales on the basis of monetary value.

He defines sperm whale as: "By far the most valuable in commerce; he being the only creature from which that valuable substance, spermaceti, is obtained" (118). The sperm whale is highlighted because of its commercial value. Likewise, he elaborates Right whale as: "It yields the article commonly known as whale bone or baleen; and the oil specially known as "whale oil" an inferior article in commerce" (119). Here, Right whale is not noteworthy because its baleen or oil is not valuable in market. For Ishmael, the whale, Hump Back is not useful since its oil is not very valuable. The narrator examines every organ of whale like "bladder", "Ballen", "hump", "fin", "teeth", "skin", "bone", "jaw" on the basis of their use value. In

chapter LXXIV “The Right Whale’s Head-contrasted view”. Ishmael describes the price of Right Whale’s organs in market. Ishmael states:

Look at that Langing lower lip! What a huge sulk and pout is there! A sulk and pout, by carpenter’s measurement, about twenty feet long and five feet deep; a sulk and pout that will yields you some 500 gallons of oil and more ... This particular tongue now before us; at a passing glance I should say it was a six-barreler; that is, it will yield you about that amount of oil. (290-291)

Captain Ahab, along with his crew members, evaluates the value of whales on the basis of their market price. The discourse of whaling hunting is based on commodity culture of contemporary American society.

It seems that contemporary American culture promotes anthropocentrism that gives more importance to human needs, feelings and values. They were totally blind to environmental or ecological aspects. They treat whales as mere commodities. Of course, the whaler Pequod captained by Ahab and accompanied by other crew members is totally devoted to kill maximum whales to earn money. They represents whales as if non-living thing. Throughout the novel, no crew members have any passionate feelings regarding the agonies or pains of whales.

In chapter LXXX “The Pequod meets the virgin” Ishmael narrates the episode in which ‘the Gam’ takes place between the Pequod and the Jungfrau, the German Whaler ship. After a short conversation, there appears a whale near both ships. Both ships want to chase and kill the whale. When they see Whale they forget human relation. Moreover, the crew members of Pequod seems hostile to German ship. They are ready to fight with German Whaler rather than losing Whales. Stubb, the second mate of Pequod seems very furious towards Germans. As he states “I’d like to eat that

villainous yarman-pull-won't ye? (306) this short expression shows how money minded American were during mid-nineteenth century. Likewise, flask conveys similar message when he encourages his friends chasing whale. As flask states: "There goes three thousand dollars, man! - A bank! A whale bank! The bank of England! . . . "(306).

Except Ahab, all crew members are deeply motivated my money chasing tendency. Their sole purpose of killing whales is to earn money. They will even kill human beings or other whale hunters if the situation demands so. In chapter XCII "The Castaway" Ishmael narrates another episode in which Stubb, once again shows American business-minded tendency. Here, Pip, the little Negro boy is reported to fall into the sea. In this time, Stubb rescues him. When Stubb engages himself rescuing Pip, he loses a whale so he becomes angry. His advises Pip not to jump again. He states:

. . . Stick to the boat, Pip, or by the lord, I won't pick you up if you jump, mind that. We can't afford to lose whales by the likes of you; a whale would sell for thirty times what you would, Pip. In Alabama, Bear that in mind, and don't jump any more. (359)

Here, Stubb shows materialistic tendency of contemporary American who halts are deeply motivated by money chasing tendency. He seems aggressive towards Pip who halts him from chasing whales.

New historicism as a literary theory copes with the question of truth, knowledge, power and discourse. Michael Foucault, the prominent figure of new historicism elaborates how truth, knowledge, power, and discourse are interrelated and their practical implication in real life and their literary representation in fiction. He opines that people in the power create a discourse to rule the people by making it a

universal knowledge. The same knowledge becomes truth when it is circulated within particular culture. Through that truth they maintain their power which he calls discursive formation. For Foucault, truth in the society is constructed by the people in the power. For Foucault, power is unstable thing that circulates from each and every corner of the society. Foucault argues:

...power is employed and exercised through a net like organization.

And only do individuals circulated between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising their power. In other words, individuals are vehicles of power, not its point of application. (89)

For Foucault, power is never monopolized by one center. It is exercised through a net like organization. Moreover, Foucault elaborates how the particular discourses produce particular knowledge that is connected with power. By “discourse” Foucault meant “a group of statements which provide a language for talking about-a way of representing the knowledge about-a particular topic at a particular historical moment . . .” (80). Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language. But ... since all social practices entail meanings and meanings shape and influence what we do-our conduct- all practices have a discursive aspect. Foucault is famous for his idea that “discourse produces the objects of knowledge and that nothing which is meaningful exists outside discourse” (82). Here in the novel the question of knowledge truth power and discourse are interrelated.

Ishmael, first, narrates the command of Stubb and then, he gives his view:

"Here perhaps Stubb indirectly hinted that though man loved his follow, yet man is a money-making animal, which propensity too often interferes with his benevolence" (359).

Presumably, all crew members of Pequod are guided by American Dream that promotes individualism and material prosperity. Ishmael, as narrator, blurs conventional demarcation line between fact and fancy. He represents historical facts, scientific proofs, statistic data as well as feelings, emotions. Ishmael travels to New Bedford, Massachusetts; where he has to stay in Inn named "The Spouter-Inn! Since the inn is rather full, he has to share a bed with a harpooner from the south pacific named Queequeg. In this particular situation Ishmael seems to oscillate among many cultural aspects like pride, prejudice, fear, anxiety, suspicion. He finds himself as a mere parcel of Anglo-American Christian cultural manifestation. He narrates his feelings about Queequeg who is "non-Christian" "barbarious", "uncivilized!" "Pagan", "Canibal" harpooner. The maze of discourses flux, circulates and intersect within his mind. He traps among the cross-cross of discourses, like the discourse of racial otherness; the discourse of racial harmony' the discourse of white-supremacy; the discourse of homosexual impulses. His relation with Queequeg is so important since it bears so many contemporary issues that were predominant in American society. Hence, his literary narrative functions itself as mid-nineteenth century American history that tells something about contemporary American society.

Ishmael cherishes the preconception about Queequeg before he meets his. His preconception is based on Anglo-American White supremacy which regards other human races inferior than white race. When the landlord of Inn explains the physical appearance of Queequeg "... the harpooner is a dark-complexioned chap (17)". Ishmael feels nervous. His cultural supremacy encroaches upon his rationality and he feels anxiety" "... I began to feel suspicious of this "dark-complexioned" harpooner" (17). Ishmael represents common American sentiment about racism. It is said that Mid-nineteenth century American society was infamous for its racist ideology. During

the mid-nineteenth century African-Americans were mistreated by white Americans on the basis of racism. Here, in this novel Ishmael represents historical fact of racism into the form of literary narrative. However, Ishmael not only shows his racial prejudice, but also confesses his racial prejudice,” “...I might be cherishing unwarrantable prejudice against this unknown harpooner” (20). The discourse of racial otherness is seen throughout the novel. He not only shows racial otherness, but also shows his negative conception regarding cannibal. He refers to cannibals as “savage”, “infernal”, “uncivilized”, “beast”. He represents paganism negatively: He creates binary opposition between white/black, Christian/non-Christian, non-cannibal/cannibal, civilized/savage. He marginalizes black, non-Christian, pagan, savage. He portrays Queequeg’s face as: “... what a sight! Such a face! It was of a dark, purplish, yellow colour, here and there stuck over with large, bleakish looking squares” (23). Ishmael seems to be guided by his preoccupied cultural ideology. Hence, he represents stereotypical image of black harpooner. Here, for Ishmael, face of Queequeg is the matter of criticism rather than his behaviour.

All of a sudden, Ishmael reverses his feelings about Queequeg. He finally agrees to share bed with Queequeg. Queequeg shows friendly behavior towards Ishmael that melted Ishmael’s pride and prejudice. Ishmael summarizes his one night sleeping experience with Queequeg as:” “Upon waking next morning about daylight, I found Queequeg’s arm thrown me in the most loving and affectionate manner you had almost thought I had been his wife”(27).

Ishmael, all of a sudden, discloses very important fact about his relationship with Queequeg. He reveals his sensual feeling about Queequeg. Here, he seems to be attracted to same sex. His emotional tie with Queequeg is the literary representation of contemporary American historical fact of homosexuality. It is reported that mid-

nineteenth century is the nascent period of homosexual rights movements. The discourse of homosexuality try to establish itself within the framework of truth, knowledge, power. Since the discourse of heterosexuality was in power, It does not recognize the homosexual impulses as truth. Ishmael diplomatically raises the issue of homosexuality.

Ishmael narrates lots of episodes in which homosexual impulses is implicitly shown. Ishmael continuously narrates his bed sharing experiences with Queequeg: “For thought I tried to move his arm-unlock his clasp-yet, sleeping as he was, he still hugged me tightly, as though naught but death should part us twain” (29). He narrates Queequeg's behavior passionately. He seems to be pleased by the behavior of Queequeg rather than getting angry.

Ishmael narrates his homosexual desire to sleep together again and again. He reports Queequeg’s request for bed sharing “... he made out to ask me whether we were again to be bed fellows” (49). “I told him yes; where I thought he looked pleased, perhaps a little complemented” (49). Queequeg’s intentional plan to sleep together and Ishmael’s flat acceptance reveals their homoerotic impulses. More importantly, Ishmael criticizes old truth, knowledge about human sexuality that is based on heterosexual discourse. The discourse of heterosexuality rejects homosexual desire as biological desire of human beings. Here, Ishmael tries to deconstruct old truth and knowledge about sexual behaviour and pleasure. Ishmael states:

Man and wife, they say, there open the very button of their souls to each other’ and some old couples often lie and chat over old times till nearly morning. Thus, then, in our hearts’ honeymoon, lay I and Queequeg- a cosy, loving pair. (51)

Ishmael tries to reject old truth and knowledge about sex that only recognize male and female involvement. He also tries to establish new discourse about sex that also recognizes male to male or female to female relation.

Ishmael, along with Queequeg goes to Nantucket, the traditional capital city of whaling industry. There, Ishmael selects the whaler Pequod for their three year sea voyage. He has to do hard bargain with Bilded and Pelg, the captains of the ship, in terms of wages or what he calls “lays”. He introduces Paleg and Belded as Quaker by decent. Ishmael states: “Now, Bilded, like Peleg, and indeed many other Nantucketers, was a Quaker, the Island having been originally settled by that sect” (68). According to Oxford Dictionary Quaker/Kweik (r)/n a member of the society of friends, a Christian religious group that meets without any formal ceremony and is strongly opposed to violence and war (1232).

Here, Ishmael intentionally highlights “Quaker”- a new religious sect rather than mainstream christianity. Since Bilded and Peleg are “Quaker” by decent, they oppose or reject conventional norms and values of traditional Christianity. They are non-conformist, non-orthodox, liberal, common American in term of religious faith. It shows the democratic atmosphere of contemporary American society. It also relies the message that contemporary American society enjoys liberty and freedom.

Ishmael adds another practicality of Bilded and Peleg's religious faith. It is said that Quaker opposes violence and war, but Ishmael represents Quaker as whale-hunter. Ishmael states: “For some of these same Quakers are the most sanguinary of all sailors and whale-hunters. They are fighting Quakers; they are Quakers with vengeance” (68).

Here, the narrator combines two opposite sides of religious faith and background reality. For Ishmael, on the one hand religious faith in nonviolence, on

the other hand practical reality of killing and violence. Ishmael further presents Peleg's view regarding religious faith: "he had long since come to the safe and sensible conclusion that a man's religion is one thing and this practical world quite another" (69). It is said that diversity in social structure is the main cause of religious diversity in contemporary American society. However, Ishmael, along with other Christian crew members are guided by orthodox Christian ideology. Sometimes they find other religious norms and values strange, illogical and irrational. Ishmael criticizes Queequeg's Muslim religious faiths. "... His Ramadan only comes once a year; and I don't believe it is very punctual then" (78). In the similar vein, Bilded demands religious document which proves that Queequeg was converted into Christianity. Bilded demands: "He must show that he's converted. "Son of darkness", he added, turning to Queequeg, "art thou at present in communion with any Christian church" (80). Bilded seems more orthodox than Peleg in religious matters. Ishmael represents him as pious man who spends his most time reading Holy Scriptures. However, he seems more miser than Peleg in practical issues like equal distribution of profit: The most striking example of nonconformist American is Captain Ahab who is atheist at all. Ahab doesn't have any religious norms and values at all. He rejects not only traditional Christianity but also all form of religious faiths. Peleg introduces Ahab to Ishmael, "he's a grand, ungodly, god like man ..." (71).

Here, the crew contains members from various religious backgrounds. The diversity of crew is the literary representation of contemporary American society's historical diversity. The mid-nineteenth century American society is consisting of various religious, cultural, ethical, social, economic norms and values. All elements function as organic whole under the surveillance of democratic norms and values.

Both Melville as an author and Ishmael as the narrator intentionally avoid female characters in *Moby-Dick*. The novel *Moby-Dick* doesn't have any female character at all. The avoidance of female character shows male domination in contemporary American society. The discourse of masculinity does not recognize women as essential human beings rather than it treats women as residual part of male. Since male were in power they creates knowledge that is based on the truth that women are subordinate human beings unable to operate without the help of their male counterpart. Ishmael only twice and thrice mentions women throughout the novel. Moreover, he represents women negatively. He, for the first time, refers Bilded's sister when the ship Pequod is loaded with necessities before its departure for three year voyage. Here, Ishmael reports Bilded's sister doing domestic work of managing kitchen foodstuffs. He says, "Chief among those who did this fetching and carrying was captain Bilded's sister..." (87). He refers her by calling Bilded's sister rather than mentioning her real name. Likewise, Peleg seems totally preoccupied by patriarchal ideology when he introduces Ahab's mother to Ishmael immediately after their agreement to sail together. Peleg states:

Captain Ahab did not name himself. This is a foolish, ignorant whim of his crazy, widowed mother, who died when he was only a twelve month old. And yet the old Squaw Tistig, at Gay Head, said that the name would somehow prove prophetic. And perhaps, other fools like her may tell the same . . . (74)

The literary representation of stereotypical image of women shows the condition of women in contemporary American society.

Pequod leaves Nantucket on a cold Christmas day with a crew made up of man from different cultural backgrounds. The diversity of crew shows the diversity of

contemporary American society which consist of different races, ethnic groups, immigrants, cultural backgrounds. The cultural diversity of crew members is the literary representation of historical, social, cultural reality of mid-nineteenth century American society. Ishmael introduces crew members, who are brave, adventurous, risk chasing, devoted, disciplined, diligent, hard working, self-reliant, non-conformist. The crew is led by captain Ahab consist of three mates: Starbuck, Stubb, Flask; three harpooners: Queequeg, Tashtego, Daggoo and the narrator Ishmael along with other minor characters. Ishmael mentions the traits of Captain Ahab randomly in the novel. But, he narrates the traits of other major character chronologically in chapter XXV “Knights and Squires”. In this process, Ishmael introduces Starbuck as:

The chief mate of the Pequod was Starbuck-the chief mate of the whaler Pequod was a native dweller of Nantucket. He is Quaker by decent... Starbuck was no crusader after perils; in him courage was not a sentiment; but a thing simply useful. To him, and always at hand upon all morally practical occasions.... (100-101)

He is courageous practical man. Of course, he might be the representative of contemporary American whale hunter. Likewise, Ishmael introduces second mate Stubb, who is also noteworthy for his personality and attitude. Ishmael comments:

Stubb was the second mate. He was a native of Cape Cod; and hence, according to local usage, was called a cape-cod-man. A happy-go-lucky; neither Craven nor valiant, taking perils as they came with an indifferent air; and while engaged in the most imminent crisis of the chase, toiling away, calm and collected as a journey man joiner engaged for a year. What he thought of death itself, there is no telling whether he ever thought of it at all, might be a question. (103)

Stubb, like Starbuck is also brave, courageous, punctual, hardworking, risk chasing person. Ishmael represents Stubb as an American hero who does not even think about death when he was chasing his target. Similarly Ishmael introduces Flask as:

The third mate was Flask, a native of Tisbury, in Martha's vineyard; a short, stout, ruddy young fellow, very pugnacious concerning whales, who somehow seemed to think that the great leviathans had personally and hereditarily affronted him; destroy them whenever encountered.

(104)

The representation of literary narrative of three mates connotes the historical fact that contemporary Americans were courageous hardworking, punctual, risk chasing. It does not matter that from which class, gender, race, ethnicity they come, they come with very powerful resolution to win against their target.

Ishmael then introduces harpooners one by one. First, he introduces Queequeg whom Starbuck had selected for his squire. He does not elaborate the personality of Queequeg, since he mentions him throughout the novel. He then introduces Tashtego as:

Next was Tashtego, an unmixed Indian from Gay Head, the most westerly promontory of Martha's vineyard, where there still exists the last remnant of a village of red men, which has long supplied the neighboring Island of Nantucket with many of her most daring harpooners. In the fishery, they usually go by the generic name of Gay Henders. (105)

Tashtego is the representative of aboriginal red-Indian. The inclusion of aboriginal red-Indian as essential member of the whaler Pequod shows the democratic liberal

perspective of contemporary Anglo-American majority who was in power. Finally, the narrator introduces black harpooner Daggoo as: "Third among the harpooners was Daggoo, a gigantic, coal-black negro-savage, with a lion-like tread-an Anusueres to behold" (105). Ishmael seems somehow negative when he introduces black harpooner Daggoo, but he is clear that all American should work together to get success. After introducing his colleagues he recaptures his main point of argument, "The native American liberally provides the brain, the rest of the world as generally supplying the muscles" (106). It shows the American sentiment that how American view the rest of the world. He expresses American spirit or American nationalism that promotes unity among diversity in the process of nation building. He says, "they were every one of them Americans; a Nantucketer, a vine yarder, a cape man" (107). For American nationalism, unity should be maintained among diversity in the process of nation building.

As a narrator, Ishmael represents complete picture of mid-nineteenth century American spirit of nationalism, democracy. Ishmael moves from specific to generic in his argument as:

Chiefly made up of Mongrel renegades, and castaways, and cannibals.  
Morally enfeebled also, by the incompetence of mere unaided virtue or right-minded-ness of Starbuck, the invulnerable Jollity of indifference and recklessness in Stubb, and the pervading mediocrity in Flask. Such a crew, so officered, seemed specially picked and packed ... (162)

Through this novel, the author promotes the spirit of team work of contemporary American people. Despite their issues of disagreement, their social, cultural, economic, racial differences, they come together to build the nation. For Ishmael, "Chance, freewill and necessity no wise incompatible-all interweaving working

together” (107). This short sentence shows American geo-political atmosphere and American psychology that foster people participate in the mission of nation building. Ahab, the captain or the head of the whaler Pequod also shows American ideology that promotes hard work. Ahab states: “(Pull, my boys!) Sperm, sperm’s the play! This at least is duty and profit hand in hand!” (190). It shows American faith in hard work rather on fate or luck. Likewise, Americans have positive attitude even in very reversed situation. They find every difficulty as an opportunity. Here, Flack looks positive in his interpretation of Ahab’s handicapped when he says, “...but he has one knee, and good part of the other leg, you know” (200). The way of contemporary American life, the way of contemporary American cultural norms and values are depicted throughout *Moby-Dick* through literary narrative.

Through meticulous study of the literary texts *Moby-Dick* in accordance with new historicism, the researcher has to reach the conclusion that Melville's *Moby-Dick* is the literary representation of mid-nineteenth century American society.

This thesis on Melville’s *Moby-Dick* examines lots of cultural discourses and analyses them in relation to *Moby-Dick*. It undercuts the notion of autonomy of literary creation and focuses on reciprocity of text and context. It also examines the relationship between truth, knowledge and power. It equally treats literary and non-literary elements as essential components of discursive formation. In the novel, Melville as an another, Ishmael as narrator, Ahab as protagonist and other characters as stakeholder of the ship Pequod function as cultural manifestation rather than autonomous entities free from cultural frame-work.

*Moby-Dick* is an 1851 novel by Herman Melville. It describes the three-year voyage of the whaler ship Pequod to find and destroy the white-whale, led by the captain Ahab. The language, plot, characters and setting represent common American

geography, culture, society of mid-nineteenth century. The novel is written in the form of whaling narratives and many themes run throughout the plot.

*Moby Dick* shows contemporary American coastal life that was somehow dependent on sea for its earnings. Melville chooses common subject matter of whaling to promote the spirit of national literature. Throughout the novel Melville represents lots of cultural issues like race, gender, ethnicity, religion, social norms and values, tradition, superstition, legend, etc. Moreover, he represents historical facts, scientific proofs, statistical data, etc. particularly he represents the history of whaling, the tradition of whaling, the scientific classification of whale groups, the monetary value of whales, the usages of whaling tools. He parallelly presents fact and fiction throughout the novel. In this sense, *Moby-Dick* is a mixture of fantasy, imagination and matter-of-fact.

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