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CAPTIVITY IN MELVILLE

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CAPTIVITY IN MELVILLE

A Thesis

by

OSCAR SACRISTE JR

Submitted to Texas A&M International University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

August 2022

Major Subject: English

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Approved as to style and content by:

Chair of Committee,	Nathaniel R. Racine
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ABSTRACT

Captivity in Melville (August 2022)

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Initially, Melville's works seem romantic and adventurous, and some may even argue that they are autobiographical. However, he also covers a wide range of serious subjects, including religion, philosophy, and socioeconomic issues. As such, Melville engages with a range of issues and conveys a deeper meaning through his writings, often through the use of allegory. This thesis examines Melville's works through the lens of allegorical reasoning by also considering the numerous biblical allusions, which Melville employs throughout his works. It is through this connection that readers are able to relate them to the larger themes of captivity and capitalism and their central roles in Melville's narratives. Whether it is a sailor longing to explore an island, a captain seeking an elusive whale, or a scrivener unwilling to work, Melville's characters are constantly in search of a better life, desiring an escape from their oppressive circumstances. What is revealed, however, is that although his characters may escape one captivity, they find themselves held captive by their new set of circumstances. For this reason, although captivity and its relationship to capitalism are often obscured in Melville, an allegorical reading of his works can help to further the socioeconomic and historical contexts established in the critical conversation.

DEDICATION

To my wife of twenty-seven years, who learned more than she ever wanted about Herman Melville.

To my three children who inspire me.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to express my gratitude to Dr. Nathaniel Racine for his mentorship and guidance throughout this project, the unsung hero. I also would like to thank my defense committee, which generously shared their expertise and knowledge with me, Dr. Lindberg, Dr. Murphy, and Dr. Salinas. To Dr. Manuel Broncano, thank you for inspiring me to write about Herman Melville.

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INTRODUCTION

To consider the full scope of Herman Melville's fiction involves a reader's willingness to engage with aspects of "popular" literature such as romance and adventure alongside the more "serious" considerations of philosophy and religion found within. To fully contextualize Melville's fiction, one also needs to consider the autobiographical sources of inspiration as well as real socioeconomic factors that defined his historical moment. One way to bring these many aspects together is to consider the allegorical significance and profound implication of these works as portraying the themes of captivity and capitalism as applying to characters throughout his body of work in different ways. In Melville's writing, both captivity and capitalism emerge in various ways. For instance, In *Typee*, the narrator Tommo is captive to his ship or the Typee tribe. In *Moby-Dick*, the adventure at sea develops into a quest for revenge against the white whale to which Ahab becomes captive. Similarly, in *Bartleby*, who is captive to an office or a boss who appears more interested in maintaining his own reputation than for the well-being of his employees. What is the nature of captivity in Melville? On the surface of Melville's narratives, it appears that his characters are in constant pursuit of freedom, whether it is a sailor longing to explore an island, a captain obsessed with a sperm whale, or a scrivener who refuses to work.

To answer the question, "what is the nature of captivity in Melville," one's attention must turn to scholars like Mike Berthold. According to Berthold, the social construct at work in Herman Melville's fiction is, "man is born in chains and is everywhere in chains" and, he

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continues, “Melville seemed obsessed by his characters’ struggle with an inner dichotomy of frustration, melancholy, and wanting to be free from the chains of captivity” (Berthold 549). It is important to note that Berthold is here referencing Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Social Contract*. The actual statement that Rousseau makes in his book is, “Man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains” (Rousseau 591). Berthold appears to be relating Rousseau’s “man is born free and in chains’ to Melville’s narrative characters. The struggles of Melville’s characters and their desire for freedom from hardship can often be directly traced to labor conditions and the development of a modern capitalistic society during the mid-nineteenth century. It is often the tension between owner and laborer that create the narrative tension in Melville.

According to Manuel Broncano, “Melville was a seasoned handler of literary imagery” (494). Broncano writes that, in *Beneath the American Renaissance*, David Reynolds “convincingly demonstrates that the great authors of the period made extensive use of genres considered sub-literary and incorporated images and themes close to popular literature” (Broncano 493). He continues:

This affected writers such as Hawthorne, Poe, Melville, Whitman, Emerson, and, in her way even Emily Dickinson [...]. These writers incorporated into their texts an abundance of popular images and motifs, yet also reconstructed them by giving them greater depth and subjecting them to an artistic control they originally did not have. Melville’s white whale is a good illustration since it resembles scores of pseudo-mythical and abominable creatures. (Broncano 493-94)

Broncano’s point helps to support the argument of this thesis: that the imagery found within Melville’s work allows for the allegorical interpretation of them. To define what is meant by allegory, the *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* provides a straightforward definition of “a story or visual image with a second distinct meaning partially hidden behind its literal or visible meaning [...]” (Baldick 8).

The allegorical interpretation of *Typee*, one of Melville's earlier adventure stories, presents a critique of capitalism and its role in Melville's society. *Moby-Dick*, which also begins as an adventure story, quickly invites allegorical interpretation in its complex weaving of philosophical meditations with the action of the whaling ship. There is little adventure in "Bartleby," however, which transports the reader to Wall Street and provides an even more direct opportunity to employ allegorical reasoning. For the purposes of this discussion, each of these three works will be considered in terms of the implications of a capitalist society on the primary characters. The nature of allegorical interpretation is speculative and the same should be said for this discussion. Nevertheless, one can speculate that among Melville's objectives was to critique capitalism. Scholars such as Dennis Berthold and Douglas Furrh suggest that Melville's early works seemingly escape modern civilization, but they nevertheless engage with the dreadful conditions of free-trade capitalism in New York during the mid-nineteen hundreds. As a result of Douglass Furrh's research, he contributes to the discussion by drawing on Melville's personal experiences: "Melville was quick to diagnose the social horrors of starving laborers because he had seen this before: both in Liverpool docks as covered in *Redburn* (1849) and the Sandwich Islands as documented in his novel *Typee* (1846)" (31). Furrh's analysis of Melville's narratives continues to suggest an allegorical critique of capitalism. As an example, in this quote Furrh implies that class wars are destroying the common people: Concerning the Sandwich Islands, Melville writes that "the two classes are receding from each other," "and the common people [...] are fast being destroyed by a complication of disorders, and the want of wholesome food" (Furrh 31).

Melville was no stranger to class conflict. Melville's narratives are riddled with the continuous labor wars between classes. According to Dennis Berthold, Melville was involved in defending the lower-class community during the Astor Place riots despite Melville's status as a member of the upper class. Berthold writes, "Astor Place riot and the signed petition by Melville that appeared in the *New York Herald* asking William Charles Macready, the Shakespearean actor, to continue his American tour in spite of the riot at the Astor Place Opera House" (Berthold 429). After signing this petition, Melville was identified with upper-class society despite his ideological opposition to such a society found throughout his writings. The presence of his signature on the petition became a source of negative publicity for those fighting for fair wages: "Melville's signature on the petition opens a new struggle for the author, who was known as the rebellious proletarian of *Typee* (1846) and *Omoo* (1847), who was not identified with New York's upper-class partisans of law, order, and Anglophilia" (Berthold 429). Berthold also suggests that Melville's political position on the labor wars was clarified by the Astor Place riot. This riot was caused by artistic differences between William Charles Macready, who was a symbol for the aristocratic community, and Edwin Forrest, the hero of the working class. According to Berthold the riots were polarizing because of what both men represented: "What made the Astor Place riot such a polarizing event in American culture was that both upper and lower classes, however ill-defined they might have been in sociopolitical terms, had sharply demarcated heroes in the figures of Macready and Edwin Forrest, the leading American Shakespearean" (Berthold 432). Berthold's commentary provides significant insight enabling the reader to identify the allegory hidden in Melville's works, such as *Typee*, *Moby-Dick*, and "Bartleby."

Research shows that Melville was not only living in New York during the city's struggles over free-trade capitalism and laborers starving to death due to the insufficient wages, but Melville himself would also have experienced the harsh realities of free-trade struggles, demonstrated in his novel *Typee*. The imagery, symbolism and metaphorical aspects of Melville's narratives contribute to the construction of an allegorical message, one suggesting that capitalism is synonymous with captivity. The added context of the labor wars offers a strong argument that the laboring class is held captive by the owners of industry and commerce.

Melville's readers lived through the class wars, so the allegorical implications of Melville's stories would have been more readily apparent in his own era. David Kuebrich describes Melville's frustration with the labor war arguments that dominated his time. For instance, Kuebrich writes, "Prior to beginning work on 'Bartleby' in early 1853, Herman Melville had not only encountered many of the essential arguments structuring the radical labor tradition, but he had also personally tasted the frustration and oppression fueling its inner spirit" (Kuebrich 381). As scholars generally agree that Melville's narratives are somewhat autobiographical, it is reasonable to use his personal experience with contemporaneous "frustration and oppression" of nineteenth-century labor movements as a way of beginning a discussion of how Melville incorporates his viewpoint into different texts throughout his career. Through such an approach, the role of captivity and the desire for freedom gain a central role in the literary appreciation of this important author.

Throughout the following chapters, *Typee*, *Moby-Dick*, and "Bartleby, the Scrivener" will be examined, as well as their allegorical relationship to capitalism and captivity. Although these

masterpieces seem to depict an adventure at sea and disgruntled scribes, it is the reader's responsibility to discover Melville's allegorical meaning for themselves. However, despite all the stories about adventures in the South Seas, whale chasing and office protocol, there is a more profound story about capitalism and captivity that is understood when viewed allegorically.

CHAPTER I

In 1846, Melville introduced his readers to a sailor named Tommo and the cannibalistic tribe called Typee. Tommo was a crew member on board a whaling ship, the *Dolly*, hunting sperm whales. Tommo's experience as a crew member was horrible, so he decided to escape the harsh conditions on board the *Dolly* and take his chances with the cannibalistic tribe. This passage found in Melville's *Typee* gives insight into Tommo's decision to stay on board and continue his contract or to abandon his responsibility and the inhumane treatment of the crew members:

Our ship had not been many days in the harbor of Nukuheva before I came to the determination of leaving her. That my reasons for resolving to take this step were numerous and weighty, may be inferred from the fact that I chose rather to risk my fortunes among the savages of the island than to endure another voyage on the *Dolly*. To use the concise, point-blank phrase of the sailors, I had made up my mind to "run away." (*Typee* 30)

Tommo's decision to run away and endure the savages on the island speaks volumes to the intensity of oppressive working conditions endured by the crew of the *Dolly*, Michael Berthold's approach to understanding Melville's *Typee* is to look at the narrator's life from the lens of captivity, writing that, "In Melville's fiction, man is born in chains, and everywhere there are chains. Through Tommo, *Typee*'s narrator, Melville dramatizes the search for a way of talking about the inescapable fact of captivity, which continuously mocks the American paeans to independence so widespread during Melville's lifetime." Berthold continues, "What *Typee* initiates for Melville is an authorial quest, sustained throughout his fiction, to measure man's desire to be free against the forces that conspire to keep him captive" (549). In chapter thirty of *Typee*, Melville's narrator speaks to his readers about the violation of both the

parties' contract, regarding being a crew member on board the *Dolly*. If any of the crew members had a complaint they were met with violence from the captain:

In numberless instances had not only the implied but the specified conditions of the articles been violated on the part of the ship in which I served. The usage on board of her was tyrannical [...] The captain was the author of these abuses; it was in vain to think that he would either remedy them or alter his conduct, which was arbitrary and violent in the extreme. (*Typee* 30)

Melville keeps his protagonist in captivity, whether Tommo feels enslaved to the articles he signed that legally bound him to the *Dolly* for the period of a voyage, or when he becomes a captive of the Typee tribe, when both he and Toby (his shipmate who escaped the *Dolly* with him) become caged by the island's terrain. From the beginning of his narrative, Melville suggests that his readers recognize that everyone is held captive in some way or another.

The reader can also be understood as being held captive by the narrator's plight, just as Tommo is held captive by the signed contract, which in this case represents the free-trade system that Melville would have been keenly aware of in New York City at the time he wrote *Typee*. David Kuebrich's insight further contributes to the conversation of the importance of captivity to Melville's narratives:

[...] in New York City in the late 1830s, his subsequent decision to become a commercial sailor and whaler, and the quasi-enslavement he experienced at sea-gave him an acute personal sense of the discrepancy between the nation's economic practices and its purported democratic and Christian ideals, an understanding he would soon embody in one of his most baffling tales. (381)

Melville's personal experiences with, and his growing frustration over, the abuse of the working class, finds its way into the thematic preoccupations of *Typee*, which can be understood as an allegory of captivity within the capitalist system, as the struggle of labor wars in New York City

finds expression in the chains that hold Melville's protagonist in captivity to the *Dolly*. This finds further expression when he becomes a prisoner of the Typee tribe.

Melville lived in New York between the time of 1844 through 1850 (Kuebrich 383). As a resident of New York, Melville would have known the growing struggle between the upper and lower classes of society. A call for labor reform was at the heart of the community, as Kuebrich describes,

In July the tailors, the city's largest and most oppressed group of skilled workers, launched what became the "bloodiest and most divisive" strike of the pre-Civil War period. On 4 August some three hundred marching tailors were attacked by police, and in the subsequent melee at least two tailors were slain (making the first incident in which U.S. workers were killed by police in a labor dispute), dozens were injured and forty arrested. Throughout this time, workers continued to insist upon their God-given right to, among other things, land and the full value of their labor. (381-82)

One can argue that Tommo's mistreatment on and subsequent escape from the *Dolly* is Melville's metaphorical representation of the labor wars happening in New York, otherwise presented as captivity in Melville's fiction.

Additionally, the reader comes to understand that Tommo wanted freedom from himself and his life of discontentment. Federico Bellini observes that melancholy can be understood as a product of Western culture and capitalism. Bellini's research confirms that Melville's narratives, including *Typee*, are filled with melancholy characters who are dissatisfied with life. Bellini writes, "In this novel, one finds Melville's prototypical representation of a melancholy character trying to get away from his despondency by starting an adventure, a recurrent motif throughout Melville's oeuvre" (6). Bellini continues with his point regarding Melville's melancholy characters, "Nonetheless, if on the one hand melancholy is an

idiosyncratic peculiarity of the characters, an aspect of their way of being, on the other it is presented as the symptom of their dissatisfaction with life in the modern Western society” (8).

Maybe Tommo’s reflection is a projection of his author, as Melville seems to connect captivity with Western culture. The assumed superiority of Western culture is a point of contention within the story of *Typee*. Tommo’s disdain for the missionaries’ religion and ideology suggests that the natives on the island are better off without the vices and evils of Western culture. The following excerpt from *Typee* further supports the points made by Bellini and Kuebrich concerning the roles played by discontentment and captivity in Melville’s narratives:

From this, as from all other foreign inflictions, the yet uncontaminated tenants of the Typee Valley were wholly exempt: and long may they continue so. Better will it be for them forever to remain the happy and innocent heathens and barbarians that they now are, than, like the wretched inhabitants of the Sandwich Islands, to enjoy the mere name of Christians without experiencing any of the vital operations of true religion, whilst, at the same time, they are made the victims of the worst vices and evils of civilized life. (215)

According to Tommo, Western culture presents itself as liberating, civilized and sophisticated, which is often merely superficial, having the effect of placing such peoples in captivity. Tommo would rather the Typee tribe remain “heathens and barbarians” than to become what he would call, “victims of the worst vices and evils of civilized life.” What further complicates the narrative is that Tommo experiences the reverse situation as with those he called “heathens.”

That the people of Typee should remain the same and avoid influence from the West, as Bellini writes, Tommo wants to escape from savages only to return to the vices and evils of civilized life. D.H. Lawrence highlighted that the fact that “his leg, that would never heal in the paradise of Typee, [begins] quickly to get well” once he leaves the valley is a symbol of

Melville's incapacity to "go back to the savages," that is, to consider life among the Typees as a real alternative to "civilization" (Bellini 12). An example of the so-called civilized life Tommo desires to return to are the harsh conditions on board the *Dolly*; every crew member who was working for wages had to endure the horrific treatment of the captain if they wanted to be compensated for their labor while at sea. The sick had been inhumanly neglected and all articles of the contract signed by Tommo were violated (*Typee* 30).

The contract signed by Tommo for employment on the *Dolly* is an example of abdicating his rights within the free-trade system; in other words, only one individual benefits from a capitalist system, and it is the originator of that contract. Tommo's understanding of the contract held all parties responsible. However, the captain did not bind himself to the same level of responsibility. All crew members were obligated by signature to fulfill their responsibilities. Meanwhile, the captain behaved however he desired regardless of the words in the document.

Capitalism's hypocrisy is exposed through the lens of Tommo's work experience on board the *Dolly*. The *Dolly*, which lacks any form of natural life and is characterized primarily by the intensive work demanded of the crew, becomes an allegory of the mechanized modern world, devoted to a relentless process of production and to the expansion of its dominion. As Bellini describes it, the *Dolly* is in the early stages of capitalism "The economic endeavor of the ship will not stop until all the available resources have been deployed and consumed [...]" (8). Douglass Madison Furrh writes in his article, "The Freedom to Starve: Melville, Marx and the Trans-Atlantic Political Discourse of the Starving Laborer," that, while Marx and Engels would write their manifesto several years after the publication of *Typee*, the negative practices and

principles of capitalism were already manifest in Melville's society, as seen in the nautical context of *Typee* (29, 30).

The inhumane conditions on board the *Dolly* cause Tommo and another crew member named Toby to plan a strategy for escape. They are escaping in search of a utopian life. They make their escape only to be disappointed with what they discover (*Typee* 58). Tommo wanted freedom from the treatment onboard the *Dolly*, and now he wants freedom from the fear of living among cannibals. Tommo developed two relationships within the Typee tribe, one with Kory-Kory and the other with a beautiful young woman, Fayaway. However, those relationships would not be enough to silence the yearning for freedom within Tommo's heart. Again, this points to the discontentment in the heart of Melville's characters. The irony is that Melville's characters, over and over again, would rather risk death than remain trapped in their current condition, whatever that condition might be.

Tommo and Toby subject themselves to all kinds of dangers in the endeavor to escape the island. There was an ambiguous utopia in Tommo's mind. If he could get to the other side of the mountain, he would find what he is looking for: relief from the ship's burden and freedom from Western culture and its capitalist ideal. Tommo's idea of freedom appears to parallel Thomas More's *Utopia*. *Utopia* has been interpreted by scholars such as Douwe Fokkema as a satire and a criticism of autocratic rule (31). It should be noted that More's idea was intended to be a mockery of Henry VIII, rather than to present a realistic paradise. Continuing, Fokkema writes, "Raphael Hytholdaeus tells the narrator of *Utopia* the story of his journey to an island of the Brazilian shores. He is known as 'the dispenser of nonsense'" (42). Clearly, Fokkema's insight confirms what Melville is conveying through Tommo, that a utopian

future is a figment of one's imagination, made of smoke and mirrors. Moreover, that a utopian future is a dream. However, Tommo considered any place other than on board the *Dolly* to be a utopia. According to More, Utopia is a place that gives equal freedom to its citizens. Every person has the opportunity to gain wealth and live a happy and liberated life from the tyranny of King Henry VIII. More writes, "For Justice cannot exist where all the best things in life are held by the worst people; nor can anyone be happy where property is limited to a few, since even those few are always uneasy, and the many are utterly wretched" (35). As More argues in *Utopia*, only the wealthy advance in life and so, in order for the poor to have an equal opportunity at a happy life, they must be given the same chances as the wealthy. The captain of the *Dolly* is the equivalent of the wealthy in Thomas More's *Utopia*; his position in life afforded him benefits not available to Tommo or the crew. The captain did not abide by the articles of the ship, additionally, his position as captain gave him authority over the crew, instead of appropriately managing his authority, he abused his power (*Typee* 31).

More's ideas attempt to visualize a society in which a greater good is offered to all its citizens. More's belief was that every person, rich or poor, have responsibilities to one another and should be held accountable as such. The poor were to earn their keep; in like manner, the rich were to help the poor. Brian Cummings writes,

More is an icon of private rights against the public good, individual freedom against tyranny, conscience against the letter of the law. As a victim of the state, More creates a near-perfect case of conscience, a philosophical exemplum that, even if it had no relation to the historical record, would show us with peculiar accuracy the shape of our paradoxical relationship to human legal institutions. (463)

Melville's Tommo offers one example of how More's conscience might prevail over tyranny.

Tommo presents himself as an honest man (*Typee* 4). Tommo's desire for abandoning the ship

was beyond the labor war between him and the captain, as it was also a violation of Tommo's conscience: "Our ship was now wholly given up to every species of riot and debauchery. Not the feeblest barrier was interposed between the unholy passions of the crew and their unlimited gratification" (*Typee* 25). Interestingly, Tommo did not appear to be interested in compromising his values in order to remain employed aboard the *Dolly*.

Thomas More was unwilling to violate his conscience. As a result, he was prepared to die. In the same way, Tommo was willing to give up his life for his morality. Charles Trinkaus connects Melville's Tommo and Thomas More as individuals who were willing to become martyrs for their conscience, writing, "Might I suggest that maybe Melville's allegory is taking a step beyond young America's capitalism and presenting Tommo as a humanist? Socrates, the martyr to the cause of the 'examined life,' is unquestionably evoked when thinking of More the martyr for his faith" (91). Melville's Tommo is engaged with the concept of an examined life from the very beginning of the book. After six months at sea, Tommo was exhausted by legitimate grievances against the system that held him. As a result, Tommo was unwilling to participate in the depraved behavior on board the ship; Tommo has examined his life and is unhappy with what he has seen and experienced, leading to his adventure among the Typee.

Tommo ultimately found himself longing to return to the unbearable working conditions aboard the *Dolly*. While his escape from the *Dolly* was intended to liberate him from the socio-economic struggles of western society, it ultimately led him to the Typee tribe, where he was held captive as a prisoner. After escaping from the Typee tribe, Tommo found himself again aboard the *Dolly*, with its Western culture of captivity and capitalism. Unlike Tommo in *Typee*,

whose desire was to flee from the whaling ship, Melville's creation in *Moby-Dick* longed to be on board their ship hunting sperm whales.

CHAPTER II

Of all Melville's fiction, *Moby-Dick* is perhaps the most recognized. It was originally published in 1851. There is a strong connection between most of Melville's narratives, such as *Typee*, *Benito Cereno* and *Billy Budd*, in that they can each be understood as allegorical critiques of a larger socioeconomic system that holds people captive. In a similar manner, *Moby-Dick* can be read as a captivity narrative. There appears to be no escaping Melville's intentional character development where his characters are captive, "man born in captivity." Melville's works provide two perspectives on captivity, specifically *Typee*, *Moby-Dick*, and "Bartleby." There are two aspects that bind the characters together: 1) they are captive to their dissatisfaction of life, and 2) they are captive to the system of wages and labor. In either case, Melville's characters serve as an allegory for the class conflicts that existed during the mid-nineteenth century in New York City, where Melville resided. Two examples of captivity as defined here are *Moby-Dick's* two central characters, Ahab and Ishmael. Ahab and Ishmael might also be considered Melville's two most complex characters and both struggle with the desire to escape their individual captivity. Ahab is described as a monomaniac who cannot stop hunting the great white whale, whereas Ishmael is one of Melville's more ambiguous characters, preferring to die than to be without the sea.

The first appearance of Melville's Ahab, a godlike character, worshipped as the god of the sea, occurs in chapter twenty-eight:

He looked like a man cut away from the stake, when the fire has overrunningly wasted all the limbs without consuming them, or taking away one particle from, seemed made of solid bronze, and shaped in an unalterable mould, like Cellini's cast Perseus. Threading its way out from among his grey hairs, and continuing right down one side of his tawny scorched face and neck, till it disappeared in his clothing, you saw a slender rod like mark, lividly whitish. (*Moby-Dick* 924)

Melville's frequent allusions to the Bible throughout *Moby-Dick*, particularly surrounding his character Ahab, suggest a textual interpretation in terms of the visible correlation between two Biblical stories: that of Moses in Exodus and that of the golden image found in Daniel. From these two stories, Melville combines two entities being worshiped, one of which is God and the other a golden statue, which influences the reader to conclude that Ahab has a god-like quality.

In this analogy, the owners of the ships are considered to be in a superior position to their crew members. Those who choose to work as whalers have forfeited all freedom in regard to their time on board. Additionally, the captains of the ships serve as representatives of their owners. Consequently, they must be obeyed at all costs. It appeared as captain of the ship, Ahab answered to no one, just as God did. It is, however, imperative to note that Ahab is not God. He is a hired crew member who is abusing his limited authority as a captain at sea, similar to the captain on the *Dolly*. As a result, the crew was subjected to the harsh realities of wage slavery. It is clear that Melville intends for Ishmael to perceive Ahab in a particular manner.

Also important in the above description of Ahab is the fire that does not consume the ship captain. This is a direct reference to Moses and the burning bush, one of the few places in the Bible in which fire does not consume what it is burning, as seen in the following excerpt from Exodus:

Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight— why the bush does not burn up." When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!" And Moses said, "Here I am." "Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." (*NIV, Bible. Ex. 3.1-5*)

God speaks to Moses from within the bush that is on fire, however, it is important to remember that the bush is not consumed, nor is Ahab burned by the fire. In order to understand Melville's Ahab, the comparison of God with Ahab is critical. Both of them are burned, but neither is consumed by the fire. Ahab appears to be endowed with attributes that are comparable to those of God in Melville's story.

Furthermore, God instructs Moses to not approach the bush because where he is standing is holy ground. Comparably, Ahab was a god-like image, therefore, he was to be obeyed and worship like a god. At this part of the narrative Ishmael had only heard tales about the infamous Captain Ahab. Moments before Ahab arrives on the deck these are the words of Ishmael:

It was one of those less lowering, but still grey and gloomy enough mornings of the transition, when with a fair wind the ship was rushing through the water with a vindictive sort of leaping and melancholy rapidity, that as I mounted to the deck at the call of the forenoon watch, so soon as I levelled my glance towards the taffrail, foreboding shivers ran over me. Reality outran apprehension; Captain Ahab stood upon his quarter-deck (*Moby-Dick* 924).

Like God in the book of Exodus, where the bush and the ground were God's, the quarter-deck similarly belonged to Ahab. In addition to the "burning fire," Melville mentions "solid bronze," this appears to be another biblical reference, although, not from the book of Exodus but from the book of Daniel. In the second chapter of the book of Daniel, King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream of a statue. The statue was made with different material and each section of the statue represented different kingdoms:

Your Majesty looked, and there before you stood a large statue—an enormous, dazzling statue, awesome in appearance. The head of the statue was made of pure gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay [...] "After you, another

kingdom will arise, inferior to yours. Next, a third kingdom, one of bronze, will rule over the whole earth (Dan 2.31-32; 39).

Daniel tells King Nebuchadnezzar that the third kingdom, the one made with bronze will rule over all the earth. A point that can be overlooked, however, the implications are that Ahab would rule over all the sea. He is the god of the sea. He seemingly cannot be killed, though, the great whale once tried and was unsuccessful. However, nature would not fail a second time when Ahab and the whale battle at the end of the narrative, Ahab is killed by the whale. As Ahab represents everything that is wrong with capitalism, it can be observed that those at the top of the food chain will not always remain there.

Ahab's narcissism appeared to have no limits, "talk not to me of blasphemy, man; I'd strike the sun if it insulted me" (*Moby-Dick* 967). The statue of Perseus provides additional evidence of Ahab's godlike nature. According to Greek mythology, Perseus is the son of Zeus, who kills the monster Medusa. Throughout Melville's narrative, anthropolatry is implicitly and explicitly present. Whereas the tribe worships their chief in *Typee*, hence a similar manner to the worship of Ahab. Another correlation of biblical allusion is the prophet Elijah who prophesied the death of King Ahab in the first book of Kings chapter twenty-one. Elijah, an old shipmate, prophesied the death of Captain Ahab. To illustrate, "Names down on a paper? Well, well, what's signed, is signed; and what's to be, will be; and then again, perhaps it won't be, after all. Any how, it's all fixed and arranged a'ready; and some sailors or other must go with him, I suppose; as well these as any other men, God pity 'em!" (*Moby-Dick* 892).

In this analysis, the observation of several similarities exist between Melville's Ahab and the Ahab of the Bible continues to help the reader make connection with the owner/upper-class community, usurping their position over the laborers/lower-classes. Melville's theological

background leaves virtually no room for misinterpretation of Captain Ahab. In its most fundamental form, Captain Ahab symbolizes the worship of man. Ultimately, Ahab's image represents the greed inherent to a capitalist system. The desire to gain monetary benefit from the resources provided by the sperm whale is what drives the story of *Moby-Dick*.

To further support the idea that man desires to be worshiped, the story of the Garden of Eden becomes applicable. An argument can be made that man's desire to be like God originated in the Garden of Eden. The serpent's form of temptation was to be like God. Adam and Eve yielded to the idea and ate of the forbidden tree:

Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden? The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" "You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. (Gen. 3.3-6)

Humanity's desire to resemble God is demonstrated in the dialogue with Eve. As she observed, the fruit was delicious and pleasing, but more importantly, it was desirable for gaining wisdom and becoming like God. As a result of Melville's biblical illusions, it appears that the reader is led to contemplate how to avoid becoming hubristic like Eve, or to put it more precisely, like Ahab by acting as if there are no consequences for their behavior. Despite the fact that the connection might seem obscure to a modern reader, it is evident that readers in the mid-nineteenth century were well versed in the Scriptures. According to Mark Heidmann, the ordinary person in the nineteenth century would have been familiar with Melville's constant

use of biblical allusions. Therefore, biblical references embedded in Melville's narratives would not have been as confusing as they might be for many readers today.

Throughout Melville's *Moby-Dick*, there is an ever-present suggestion that humanity strives to be god-like. As Melville's Ahab is compared to a god, he is hubristic and egocentric, perhaps even implying that any one of his readers can become an Ahab. As a result of Ahab's obsession, he is determined to kill the great whale. His obsession caused him to lose sight of his responsibilities as a captain. As an example, he was given the responsibility of hunting and capturing sperm whales by the owners. For all intensive purposes, the ship served as a floating factory. In addition, he was to treat his crew with respect as co-workers not captive slaves. A possible interpretation of Melville's *Moby-Dick* could be that the owners/upper classes have lost their way in their pursuit of wealth. During the hunt for Moby-Dick, Ahab chose to lose his life, the lives of his crew, and the life of his ship. Liane Norman discusses the idea of captivity and slavery through the relationship of master and man. For instance, the dynamics between Ahab and the crew on board the *Pequod*:

It is in such assumptions about the relationship between master and man, that one relegates the other to trivial, trifling, distasteful tasks, that creates part of the dramatic tension of the story. It is if Melville is asking, can an employer subordinate a MAN to practical necessities? The reasonable answer is, of course, he can and must. But the disturbing problem is that such an answer contradicts the constitutional promise that every man is equally free to pursue his own happiness as well as the Christian demand of unconditional brotherhood.
(Norman 28)

More ambiguous than Ahab, is Melville's Ishmael, the narrator of the story. "CALL ME ISHMAEL" (*Moby-Dick* 795), is how Ishmael introduces himself to the reader in the opening sentence, however, his character remains cryptic throughout the story. It is as though the narrator steps in and out of time when he refers to himself as Ishmael. Ishmael, like Ahab,

appears to possess characteristics that are reminiscent of God. For example, Ishmael seems to be omniscient and omnipresent throughout the narrative. Consequently, the narrator is a complex character, and the reader is given a different perspective based on the way he frames his narrative. The readers may find themselves in the preacher's position when Father Mapple delivers his sermon on Jonah, thereby inferring that everyone is guilty of sin. The complexity of the narrator is one of the ways Melville engages the reader and, more importantly, weaves Ishmael in and out of the text, projecting his allegorical messages of captivity and capitalism. Ian McGuire addresses Ishmael's defeatist attitude of slavery in this quote, "To be a slave, Ishmael suggests, is unavoidable since, if we are not dominated by a plantation owner or a ship's captain, we are all surely dominated by the Almighty. The reasoning is comically fallacious, of course, but Melville's point, here and probably throughout, is as much to provoke as to convince" (McGuire 289). In the context of Melville's life in New York from the 1840s through the 1850s, the statement, "who ain't a slave" is neither satire nor sarcasm; it was a reality for many Americans whether they were indentured servants, paid laborers, or actual enslaved persons.

Contrary to what Ishmael says in regards to the seemingly universal condition of being a slave, he's obviously being facetious, as "One of the key tenets of free laborism was (contradicting Ishmael) that 'we' are not and should not be slaves" (McGuire 290). Whether a crew member on a whaler or a scrivener, we are all living captive to wage slavery. Ian McGuire continues the discussion of wage slavery, for instance, "For Ishmael, wage slavery, rather than being (as many free labor advocates argued before the Civil War) the iniquitous and un-

American product of a particular economic system is, like slavery in general, simply a universal condition" (290).

According to Carl Strauch, scholars have focused on Ishmael as the narrator, character, and consciousness of the story, as "He continues to say that if a reader is to have full understanding of Melville's narrator, we must read the narrative backwards starting from the vortex" (469). In chapter thirty-two, the story of the sperm whale is explained by Ishmael as he shows how throughout time, the whale has dominated humans. Strauch identifies a dualism in Melville's book through the intertwining of personalities, such as Ahab and Fedallah, or Queequeg and Ishmael:

Ishmael, alone of the crew, is miraculously saved by Queequeg's coffin spewed up by the vortex. This event is the climax not only of the book but also, as we shall see, of a consistent pattern throughout, the burden of which is an existential affirmation of life over death; and I take it, therefore, that Ishmael's role is, in Melville's shifting dualism, as significant as that of Ahab. And this is not to say Queequeg's role may not, ultimately, be the most important. (Strauch 468)

The dualism in Melville's characters does not allow Ishmael, the protagonist, to escape unscathed in his own story.

Although this may be true, Allen Austin presents what he calls "The Three-Stranded Allegory of Moby-Dick." Rather than approach the narrative as Strauch did, narrator, character and conscience, Austin writes "the relationship between Ishmael and Ahab have been interpreted in three different ways: Ishmael rejects Ahab's view, Ishmael shares Ahab's view, and that Ishmael sympathizes with Ahab's view" (344). In other words, Melville's Ishmael believed that man is not central to the universe and, additionally, Ahab constantly tries to impose man's will on the universe. Ishmael, then, is himself a type of Ahab. For instance, he is

full of anger, passion, and hatred for Moby-Dick. Furthermore, he has lost sight of his purpose, his love for the sea. Sailing the sea gave him freedom from the earthly struggles on land. It is the substitute for “pistol and ball” (*Moby-Dick* 795). According to Melville, if Ishmael is not sailing, he would rather be dead. The voyage of the ocean was freedom for Ishmael, until he fused his passions with that of Ahab.

In chapter forty-one, he makes an oath to hunt the great whale. “I, Ishmael, was one of that crew; my shouts had gone up with the rest; my oath had been welded with theirs; and stronger I shouted, and more did I hammer and clinch my oath, because of the dread in my soul” (*Moby-Dick* 983). Melville would not allow his narrator to escape the curse of Ahab. The difference between Ishmael and Ahab is that Ishmael, in the end, is the only survivor of a tragic story of human struggle.

Melville is straightforward in how he feels about his fellow human beings; we are all Ahab’s, therefore, in a constant pursuit of our own great whale. Ahab’s character demonstrates humanity’s desire for dominance. For instance, Ahab wanted supremacy over the crew, in addition to nature itself (the great whale) and that is exactly what he spends his life pursuing; however, nature does not concede to the demands of Ahab. No matter what nature does to deter Ahab, his obsession prevails. Ahab’s persuasion of his crew is form of captivity where the leader dictates the direction of the lives under his control, because while there is an appearance of being given a choice, there was really no choice at all. “Aye, and say’st the men have vow’d thy vow; say’st all of us are Ahabs” (*Moby-Dick* 1342).

The irony of the chase in *Moby-Dick* is that the great whale is uncatchable. Even when Ahab spears him, the rope wraps around Ahab’s neck and he is pulled out to sea by the whale:

“The harpoon was darted; the stricken whale flew forward; with igniting velocity the line ran through the groove; -ran foul. Ahab stooped clear it; he did clear it; but the flying turn caught him round the neck, and voicelessly as Turkish mutes bowstring their victim, he was shot out of the boat, ere the crew knew he was gone” (*Moby-Dick* 1406).

The death of Ahab was tied to the one thing he craved too much and that was to catch the great whale. The point made when the whale swims away with the body of Ahab is that the object of one’s obsession might very well become their ruin. Although capitalism presents itself as a liberating force, Melville exposed the truth about capitalism and wage slavery through the characters he created. As a consequence, Melville's narratives convey an allegorical message about capitalism and captivity; consequently, what Ahab thought would free him actually enslaved him to a lifetime pursuit of something he could never attain.

CHAPTER III

With the publication of “Bartleby, the Scrivener,” in 1853, the focus of Melville’s creative work shifts from adventures at sea to life in New York City. In this story, the reader follows a sequence of events in the life of an egocentric lawyer who demonstrates more concern for his reputation than for his fellow man, Bartleby, a scrivener whose actions further suggest Melville’s engagement with free-trade and labor laws and their role in sparking the labor wars between the lower and upper classes.

A comprehensive understanding of capitalism in Melville’s work is provided by Douglas Madison Furrh, who writes that, “through Melville’s critique of European imperialism and hunger from his first novel, *Typee*, to Wall Street, where he conducts a searing indictment of free-trade capitalism through his characterization of Bartleby and his fellow scriveners” (31). Furrh suggests that, “Melville’s narrators inability to see social relations as constituted by relations of economic power and the power of capitalist ideology to blind him from the suffering of his employees” (29).

A lawyer with a distinguished reputation is immediately introduced to the reader as the story’s narrator. The reader is also introduced to Bartleby, the lawyer’s employee. It is likely that the lawyer knew next to nothing about his new employee. Bartleby, however, would prove to be the most significant test of his character.

The lawyer is both the protagonist and the antagonist in “Bartleby, the Scrivener.” The behavior of Melville’s complicated scrivener, Bartleby, raised questions about capitalism through a would-be benevolent wealthy capitalist (the lawyer) who, on the surface, is compassionate and forbearing, Christian, one might say. In addition, the analysis questions the

character of not only the charitable lawyer but also the immovable scrivener's "I would prefer not to" attitude. As the story unfolds, it becomes evident that the characteristics of the lawyer are self-serving rather than benevolent.

The lawyer's desire was to be seen as an employer with Christian values who is merciful and just, thus the continual references to Judeo-Christian virtues. For example, the lawyer desired to hurt Bartleby at one point in the story physically; instead, he recalled the Christian command to love, by thinking, "When this old Adam of resentment rose in me and tempted me concerning Bartleby, I grappled him and threw him. How? Why, simply by recalling the divine injunction: 'A new command give I unto you, that ye love one another.' Yes, this it was that saved me" (Bartleby 661). Nonetheless, his charitable deeds are motivated by what other people think of him instead of just being charitable for charity's sake.

Critics such as Douglas Furrh, Barbara Foley, and Thomas Dilworth point out that understanding the historical background of New York City is crucial to understanding the narrative as well as the relationship between the narrator and Bartleby. Thomas Dilworth's analysis corresponds with Douglas Furrh's, although Dilworth suggest that the reader's understanding of the narrator is as equally important to discerning the struggles of labor wars in New York City. For instance, Dilworth's examination of Melville's "scrivener" focuses on what he calls the "inner story"—the lawyer's relationship with Bartleby can only be fully understood in connection with the outer story, which entails the lawyer's snug business among rich men's bonds and mortgages, and title deeds (1).

At first glance, the narrative appears to be only about a "pallidly neat, pitifully respectable, and incurably forlorn scrivener" ("Bartleby" 642). However, numerous critics have

argued that, beneath the layers of Melville's rhetoric, the narrative takes shape not only around the neat, respectable forlorn scrivener, but also around the narrator, as equally essential, if not more, to interpreting the story. Andre Furlani suggests that, "As a character, Bartleby is quite thin, and to make of him an imaginative recreation of known characters distorts his role in Melville's story" (336). Additionally, Furlani believes that Bartleby "is an affect rather than a personality—he is a force, almost talismanic, exerting an influence on a character" (336).

In addition, the scholars have drawn attention to the lawyer's conscious decisions during his encounters with Bartleby; similarly, Melville even draws attention to the lawyer's conscience and the consequences of his choices ("Bartleby" 647). Dilworth interprets the lawyer's behavior to fit into two categories classical renaissance, and Christian: "The balanced proportion suggests that he is what has been called, since the Renaissance, a Christian humanist- someone who (like Erasmus and like Thomas More, another lawyer) incorporates in his philosophy and behavior the values of both Christianity and Classical antiquity" (2).

Dilworth uses the example of the statue of Cicero in the lawyer's office to illustrate the Christian and Classical virtues at play in the story. Furlani and Dilworth both interpret the narrative from a Socratic point of view. Melville opens a window for the reader to observe the metamorphosis of his lawyer under the scrutiny of self-imposed stress on his conscience, much like Tommo in *Typee*. In reality, Melville and his readers know that the type of behavior Bartleby demonstrates would be unacceptable and not tolerated. Considering the above statement, the sensible conclusion is that the lawyer is projecting his guilty conscience on his employee. The question must be asked why does the lawyer permit this unacceptable treatment from Bartleby? An assumption is that Melville takes his lawyer through a personal

transformation and given the opportunity to correct any misconception he might have about life and, more importantly, about himself. For this reason, Furlani writes: “Melville’s debt to Plato is critical. By 1850 Melville had begun to acquire the six-volume Bohn edition of Plato’s works, and the use he made of it is everywhere apparent in his works. To no other philosopher does he allude more frequently, for instance, structurally, *Mardi*, *The Confidence-Man* and *Clarel* display the diversity of Platonic dialogue” (337).

The lawyer is in a constant flux between doing what is noble and just or, alternatively, yielding to what Melville calls the “old Adam” (*Bartleby* 661). The opportunities for character transformation are numerous. As an illustration of the narrator’s struggle to be noble, Melville mentions the Cicero statue in the lawyer’s office twice. Dilworth places the statue of Cicero in the context of the Classical tradition and of Christian-humanism, which supports Furlani’s argument of Platonic influence in Melville’s fictions, specifically, “*Bartleby, the Scrivener*.” The contrast between the lawyer’s idea of friendship and the symbolic image of Cicero indicates the lawyer’s desire to establish a reputation as someone of noble character. Cicero’s bust would have served as contextual evidence to the reader that the lawyer viewed friendships as mirroring Cicero’s philosophical concept of relationships. According to Dilworth, the lawyer’s concept of friendship and Cicero’s definition of friendship are drastically different. Their friendship is not mutual. A study of Cicero by Dilworth suggests that Melville’s narrator is self-deceived about what friendship is:

For Cicero, friendship involves genuine, deeply felt affection, which he repeatedly calls “love,” using the Latin *caritas* and *amor*. Between the lawyer and Bartleby there is no love. There is no evidence that Bartleby, loves the lawyer—quite the contrary, in fact—and although the lawyer’s behavior may suggest love for Bartleby, his interior disclosures indicate, as well shall see, that he feels no love for Bartleby. Neither man qualifies, according to Cicero, to be or

to have a friend. Cicero writes that is a combination of “good will and love” in response to “virtue. [...] There is no way friendship can exist without virtue.” (3)

By appeasing his conscience through the idea of friendship, the lawyer attempts to validate his behavior toward Bartleby. According to Cicero, genuine friendship is characterized by both goodwill and love. Considering that the lawyer employed Bartleby, it appears that he viewed himself as a friend. The lawyer’s treatment of Bartleby, however, contradicts Cicero’s definition of friendship. In the absence of any previous connections between the lawyer and Bartleby, how could they be friends? For instance, the lawyer states that there was no information about Bartleby prior to his employment with his firm, “I believe that no materials exist for a full and satisfactory biography of this man. It is an irreparable loss to literature. Bartleby was one of those beings of whom nothing is ascertainable, except from the original sources, and in his case those are very small. What my own astonished eyes saw Bartleby, that is all I know of him, except, indeed, one vague report which will appear in the sequel” (“Bartleby” 635).

Validation of the lawyer’s good conscience would mean that he is what he thought of himself, virtuous, benevolent and reasonable. When Bartleby refused to comply with the request of his employer the consequence should have been to terminate the scrivener’s employment immediately; however, “there was something about Bartleby that disarmed the lawyer so he began to reason with him” (“Bartleby” 644). As a result of the lawyer’s virtues, he is in a dichotomous moral situation. He wishes to emulate the traditions of Christianity, while at the same time he wishes to indulge in what the Bible would refer to as the attitudes of the flesh, the “old Adam.” In his discussion of the story, Stephen Greenblatt explains that the lawyer struggled with the dichotomy of self-fashioning. Greenblatt states, “The simplest observation we can make is that in the sixteenth century there appears to be an increased self-

consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulable, artful process. Such self-consciousness had been widespread among the elite in the classical world, but Christianity brought a growing suspicion of man's power to shape identity: "'Hands off yourself,' Augustine declared. 'Try to build yourself, and you build a ruin'" (Greenblatt 2).

It is exactly this self-awareness that Melville conveys through his protagonist. The lawyer would rather be hostile and violent towards Bartleby than to truly follow his Christian values. By attending church, the lawyer ensures that society sees him as being a good Christian, "Now, on Sunday morning, I happened to go to Trinity Church, to hear a celebrated preacher" ("Bartleby" 650), suggesting that his primary motivation for attending church was to hear a renowned preacher and to be seen doing so.

The true purpose for attending church, however, should be to gain a deeper understanding of Christ, whatever the fame of the given preacher. By focusing on the preacher, the lawyer reveals a lack of sincerity in his self-examination. Dilworth continues his analysis of the lawyer's internal battle between right and wrong by observing that "The classical and Christian traditions overlap considerably and are not limited to the virtues they prioritize, but they do prioritize different virtues. The Classical tradition prioritizes reason; the Christian tradition, love. The lawyer is inwardly divided between these virtues. He embodies the preeminent Classical value but not the preeminent Christian value" (5).

The lawyer's motives never seem to move past his self-centered attitude. There is a point in the story when Bartleby is called an "incubus." The lawyer was fed up with the passive resistance from Bartleby. The lawyer says, "I resolved to gather all my faculties together, and for ever rid me of this intolerable incubus" ("Bartleby" 663). This is the point of the story where

a case can be made that Bartleby could be a spiritual being, or an embodiment of the lawyer's embodiment conscience. The implication is that Bartleby is a kind of Mephistopheles sent to test the lawyer. In the Christian faith, God permits a person to face all kinds of tests to obtain spiritual maturity. For example, in the Book of James, the author instructs his readers to, "rejoice when you face all kinds of trials, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything" (1.2-4). Melville would have been familiar with the Judeo-Christian values, as he was raised in the Dutch Protestant tradition. It is well known that Melville's extensive knowledge of the Bible influenced every story Melville published (Heidmann 341). Melville's use of Biblical rhetoric creates a spiritual tension within the narratives he writes. Mark Heidmann's assessment of Melville's Biblical knowledge will aid in further understanding the lawyer. Heidmann states:

We have profited from examining the direct evidence of Melville's reading in such major figures as Homer, Shakespeare, Arnold, Byron, and Hawthorne. And we have benefited from careful studies of the indirect evidence of how Melville read Plato, Milton, Bayle, and various contemporary works [...] The most puzzling of these, in my opinion, is a fuller understanding of Melville's reading of the Bible, for the importance of the Bible is a given in Melville scholarship. (341)

A knowledge of Melville's theological understanding becomes essential when he employs spiritual aphorisms, for instance, "a new command I give you," or his reference to the Old Testament story of Sodom and Gomorrah, found in the book of Genesis, "for a moment I turned into a pillar of salt" ("Bartleby" 644). God destroyed the two cities because of their wickedness and refusal to obey God. Lot was instructed to take his two daughters and wife and escape to the city Zoar. Lot and his family were also instructed to not look back at Sodom and Gomorrah. Lot's wife disobeyed and turned back and, at that moment, she was turned into a

pillar of salt. Melville correlates the behavior of Bartleby's "I would prefer not to," statement with the disobedience and wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah, therefore, the lawyer turns into a pillar of salt. Melville's biblical aptitude enables him to create multiple dimensions within his narratives.

There is also the argument that Bartleby may be a spirit. A parallel can be drawn between Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* and Melville's lawyer when the lawyer refers to Bartleby as an "intolerable incubus." Both Faustus and the lawyer are self-deceived and blinded by their pride. During the opening scene of the play, *Doctor Faustus*, Faustus is afflicted with pride (McCullen 7). So too, in the opening of "Bartleby," the lawyer displays a great deal of pride and self-achievement. Similarly, to Mephistopheles, whose purpose is to mislead Faustus, Bartleby the "incubus" drives the lawyer insane. It may be Melville's way of illustrating man's struggle between good and evil.

While this may be true, Melville appears to wish to transform his protagonist into a person of noble character. One of the purposes of the lawyer's story (as in the context of *Moby-Dick* mentioned in the previous chapter) is to give readers an opportunity to examine their own lives to discover if there is any dissonance between how they view themselves and reality, particularly with regard to the privilege of society and their awareness of the conditions of the starving workers. The lawyer lacks this self-awareness. Similarly, Liane Norman introduces the idea that the reader is both a participant and a judge: "that is he finds himself sympathizing with the Lawyer, putting himself in the Lawyer's place, and then, having identified his interests and reactions with the Lawyer's being required to judge the Lawyer and, thus, himself" (22). In

this sense, by engaging with these characters, the reader is engaging with the tensions of the New York City labor and class wars of Melville's era. For instance, Douglass Furrh writes,

Approaching the narrative historically might shed some light on the already complex narrative, providing assistance with interpretation. Labor strikes in the 1840s and '50s New York City is clearly essential to understanding Melville's emaciated and principled clerk. Engaging a New Historicist approach, "Bartleby, the Scrivener" is situated within the political and economic discourses of the 1850s where chronic hunger and starvation plagued the free laborer. (1)

Barbara Foley advocates that Melville's "Story of Wall Street" delivers an entirely new layer of interpretation when read in the context of the New York crisis of the 1850s. Foley's insight give credibility to the allegorical interpretation with her research, "Familiarity with mid-nineteenth-century class struggles in New York- and with the contemporaneous discourse about these struggles- is indispensable to a complete understanding of 'Bartleby'" (Foley 1). With this in mind, the lawyer and Bartleby both take on a new role for the reader. For instance, the lawyer is not a kind, charitable and friendly character, however it may appear on the surface. What the lawyer was most concerned with was his reputation and capital:

And as the idea came upon me of his possibly turning out a long-lived man, and keep occupying my chambers, and denying my authority; and perplexing my visitors; and scandalizing my professional reputation; and casting a general gloom over the premises; keeping soul and body together to the last upon his savings (for doubles he spent but half a dime a day), and in the end perhaps outlive me, and claim possession of my office by right of perpetual occupancy: as all these dark anticipations crowded upon me more and more friends continually intruded their relentless remarks upon the apparition in my room; a great change was wrought me. ("Bartleby" 663)

The narrator's thoughts are important throughout the narrative and are especially so in what they reveal here. The lawyer was in a room full of other lawyers and professionals conducting business, when Bartleby was asked to "retrieve some documents from another lawyer's office and Bartleby would tranquilly decline and remain standing in the middle of the room"

("Bartleby" 663). The lawyer was embarrassed and thought to himself that if Bartleby was granted longevity, he would remain in the lawyer's chambers the entire time. Bartleby would undermine his authority, confuse his visitors and, most importantly, ruin his reputation. The lawyer's motives appear to be exposed with his ranting about losing his authority and professional reputation. This is another example of the lawyer's disharmony. The lawyer's behavior was overtly benevolent towards Bartleby, however covertly, his heart was filled with resentment and malice.

Reinforcing Liane Norman's approach to reading *Bartleby*, the reader is challenged throughout the narrative to judge the characters. The lawyer seems to be justified with his emotional roller coaster from the readers perspective. Melville appears to solicit the judgment of his readers, for example, "Bartleby would remain standing immovable in the middle of the room" ("Bartleby" 663). Melville intentionally creates his scrivener to seem irrational so that the readers judge him harshly Liane Norman's research helps support the harsh judgement of Bartleby with this statement, "It is impossible to approve of so commercial a view of goodness, yet because the reader has so recently identified himself with the lawyer, sharing his indignation, sharing his sympathy, the reader cannot dissociate himself quickly enough to escape" (Norman 30).

The work of Melville consistently suggests the failure of the capitalist system, and there is much that resonates among his stories in this sense. "*Bartleby*" continues the discussion that began with Tommo's broken contract of employment on board the *Dolly* and its own parallels with the discontentment of lower-class workers in New York City. Within the ongoing discussion among scholars over Bartleby's struggle with the lawyer, Barbara Foley cites David Kuebrich in

her analysis by writing that, “If Bartleby does not depict class struggle directly, it is as David Kuebrich has indicated, very much about ideological struggle as well as alienation; indeed, the conflict between Bartleby and his boss cannot be understood apart from the contemporaneous discourse about class polarization” (2). Kuebrich continues to point out that the central interest of the story is the confrontation between Bartley and the lawyer. On the one hand, “the lawyer represents the values and the Christian community who have justified merging their political and Protestant ideology with economic gain by condoning the abuse of exploitation of lower-class worker” (386). Although this may be true, Melville’s scrivener stands opposed to and in direct contrast with the lawyer. Bartleby’s passive resistance would set the stage for all lower-class workers unwilling to accept the labor conditions of the mid-eighteen hundreds. His resistance is in response to the impersonal, unequal, and exploitative working conditions (386).

Symbolically, the lawyer represents everything that could be wrong with capitalism as a system that exploits people for profit, controlling their lives in the name of progress, but motivated by greed. Just as capitalism is often imbued with a higher cause, so too does the lawyer present himself as a good Christian who intends to help Bartleby, but reveals his true motives to be superficial and self-serving.

A further problem with capitalism is its tendency to exploit people at any cost, even at the cost of other people’s lives. Nancy D. Goldfarb critiqued Melville's lawyer as having a biased narrative; she stated that the narrative was skewed in favor of the lawyer's viewpoint:

His narration is, to some extent, an expression of and means of coping with his guilty conscience on account of the part he played in Bartleby’s sad end. Representing himself as Bartleby's benefactor assuages his conscience. Though the facts of his story appear to be accurate, the narrator’s perspective on those facts are gradually revealed to be examples of what is since the 1970s has become known in the American political arena as ‘spin,’ a “bias or slant on

information, intended to create a favorable impression when it is presented to the public.” (240)

In short, the lawyer is a man out to control a tiny universe with an inflated and self-serving rhetoric (Pinsker 18). As Graham Thompson argues, the office space serves as a symbol of capitalism, moreover the restraints capitalism imposes on society: “The office and its various functions are tied so closely into capitalist development. Once it became necessary to control and finance industrialization, and once offices became the focal points for communication and the control of complexity, it was no longer tenable to run large, international concerns from the houses of merchants” (398). The office is now the central command center of control over the lives of its employees.

What characterizes the lawyer is, as Thompson described, a desire to control everyone in his office or on his payroll. *Bartleby*, “preferred not to be controlled.” Comparatively, Melville implies through the behavior of the lawyer that the reader, if not cautious, is endanger of being caught by the greed and success of capitalism at the expense of other people. Douglass Madison Furrh observes the power of capitalism to transform a person of good character into a person of questionable morals. Furrh writes, Wall Street and the power of capital to transform “virtue into vice, vice into virtue” allowing the violence encoded into the capitalist ideology to appear just; thus, the free-trade ideology and its arranged social order is maintained- spite of the systemic hunger afflicting the laboring poor where “twenty thousand men and women [are] starving in New York at this moment” (Furrh 3).

The workforce of New York’s lower class ends up starving to death. The upper class were often protected from such horrors, however, those part of the free- trade capitalist

system became intimately familiar with the dreadfulness of death by starvation (Furrh 3). Furrh quotes Engels' *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844* to further his argument:

If the bourgeoisie. Does him the favor to enrich itself by means of him, wages await him which scarcely suffice to keep body and soul together, if he can get no work he may steal, if he is not afraid of the police, or starve, in which case the police will take care that he does so in a quiet and inoffensive manner. [...] the bourgeoisie, from which the jury is selected, always finds some backdoor through which to escape the frightful verdict, death from starvation. The bourgeoisie dare not speak the truth in these cases, for it would speak its own condemnation. (6)

The lawyer presented himself as benevolent toward the laborer by looking to employ more scribes, "because the work had increase in light of him receiving the Master in Chancery position" ("Bartleby" 641). Meanwhile, Bartleby is starving to death. Melville's point is that for those who are at the top of the social economic system there are a different set of rules than for those at the bottom. Bartleby eventually gets arrested for trespassing, and as a result, he gets put in jail. The point can be made that Melville wanted his audience to be aware of the danger capitalism presented. Additionally, if capitalism is allowed to reign free without checks and balances, it will imprison all those at the bottom of the economic stratus and continue to make rich all those at the top.

To conclude his narrative, Melville returns to the Bible and references Job, "with king and rulers of the earth, who built for themselves places now lying in ruins" (Job. 3.14) Melville's affection for the Bible is paramount at the conclusion of his allegory of capitalism. The injustices of the wealthy exploiting the poor beyond reprehensible according to Engels. The wealthy have discovered loopholes in the legal system, therefore they seldom, if at all, are held responsible for their abuse of the lower class. The bourgeoisie are the people who the lawyer represents in

the narrative and, as a result, Melville asks his readers to consider the condition of the human heart, thereby understanding that we all are capable of mistreating people.

The lawyer justifies his behavior by convincing himself of his Christian values and his own benevolent heart. In fact, when Melville references the Bible, it often feels like he is challenging his readers to momentarily ponder their own faults before reading on. For instance, when the lawyer turns into a pillar of salt. The reader quickly remembers the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, trying to identify the reasoning for Lot's wife turning into a pillar of salt. The conclusion is she was rebellious to the instruction of the angels. Is Melville juxtaposing the disobedience of Bartleby to the disobedience of Lot's wife? If so, then readers have but one recourse, to examine themselves to determine whether or not they are being obedient to the capitalist owner.

In contrast, when Melville references another Bible verse out of the New Testament Gospels, he quotes Jesus and his call to love at what appears to be one of the lawyer's more vulnerable moments in the story. The new command is to love. Love has no limits. The Apostle Paul writes to the Corinthian church what love is and what it is not:

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails (1 Cor. 13.1-8)

When Jesus is challenging his disciples to love, this is what authentic Christian love looked like.

Paul is speaking about the ability to be benevolent but if you do not love it means nothing. The

lawyer was not able to comprehend the new command Jesus wanted his followers to adhere to.

It is appropriate to say that the lawyer was focused on one dimension of love, similar to the individual in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, however, to be complete in love the lawyer needed to care for Bartleby on an emotional level rather than just financially. Moreover, Melville's use of Biblical principles as allegories was not solely for the benefit of his readers, but also to impact a wider audience, the New York community as a whole. Melville seems to have intended by writing his narratives to bring about change in the labor wars of the 1800s. Melville understood that his stories were not only read by the lower class but also by the upper class. Thus, the reference to Job chapter three verse fourteen, is logical when it occurs at the end of Bartleby's life, as a four-word eulogy: "His dinner is ready. Won't he dine to-day, either? Or does he live without dinning?' 'lives without dinning,' said I, and closed the eyes. 'Eh!- He's asleep, aint he?' 'With kings and counsellors,' murmured I'" ("Bartleby" 671).

Massimo Verdicchio suggests that Melville's citation of Job gives indictment to Wall Street: "These verses point out that all the wealth and greatness that Kings and Counsellors accumulate and accomplish in life ultimately come to nothing, implying that the worldly riches are not worth aiming for and human achievements are doomed to failure. This could be taken as a possible admonition to those on Wall Street, like John Jacob Astor, if not the lawyer-narrator, whose only goal is to accumulate wealth and power" (446). This suggests that, in many ways, Melville's "Story of Wall Street" was an attempt to better the human conditions of people dying of starvation at the hands of capitalism.

Verdicchio continues his point about the tragic death of Bartleby. He writes that the lawyer, like the readers, were seduced by the aloofness of Bartleby, his passive resistance, the immovable statue in the middle of the room; his solitary existence in search for of purpose and future, of instance, Verdicchio refers to it as humanizing Bartleby, turning him into a living being. Now that he has passed away he is no longer the enigma that makes everyone around him uncomfortable and confused. That's what readers do when reading literature. Verdicchio quotes Nietzsche's, *Human, All too Human*: "in reading, we prove our humanity; and by humanizing fiction, we demand the literature be faithful to the facts of history and that it be ethical [...]" (447). One of the ways Melville humanizes Bartleby is through his free will and his choice not to eat. His fortitude to live by his principle, "I would prefer not to" refuses to comply with society and the capitalistic system.

Andre Furlani makes a parallel between Bartleby and Socrates, "Like Socrates they both refused to accept ostracism and die on principle. The closest the attorney comes to some insight is when he tells the grub-man that Bartley sleeps 'with kings and counsellors', an allusion to Job that evokes a Bartleby redeemed from the world's vain, decaying splendors, a righteous Bartleby standing over the ruins that the attorney's imagination constantly projects" (350).

Job in the Old Testament represents a testing of one's faith. I suggest that maybe the lawyer finally understood the purpose of crossing paths with Bartleby. Melville writes, "The lawyer was disarmed by Bartleby. The first time Bartleby refused to work the lawyer wanted to throw him out of his office, although, there was something about Bartleby that caused the lawyer to reason with him" ("Bartleby" 644). The lawyer was perplexed with Bartleby,

nonetheless, he has an epiphany after his conversation with the grub-man. His revelation was that Bartleby was a test. Bartleby was sent to test the virtuous foundation of the lawyer and all like him, such as the historical figure of John Jacob Astor. Job was tested by God. Melville makes it a point throughout the narrative to emphasize the lawyer's religious commitment through the lawyer's knowledge of the bible also by naming the church he attends.

By quoting the book of Job, then, the lawyer indicates that he might understand the story of his encounter with Bartleby as having been a test. It is important that the lawyer arrived at this perspective on his own. The lawyer realized that he needed Bartleby in his life to fully confront the flaws and shortcomings in his character, such as his superficial preoccupations with money and status. Just as Melville reminds his readers in *Moby-Dick* "that the love of money is the ill of all the earth and on no account can a monied man enter heaven" (*Moby-Dick* 799). The lawyer needed freedom from his self-imagined and Bartleby needed freedom from capitalism. Freedom from captivity comes at a price, but we are never truly free until we confront our own selves. Ah! Captivity. Ah! Humanity.

CONCLUSION

For over a century Melville's fiction has been analyzed, critiqued, and dissected from innumerable perspectives. This thesis has attempted to join this larger conversation in terms of the manner in which captivity relates to the socio-economic context of Melville's own era and the implications of individual human action within this society dominated by the logic of capitalism.

The characters examined in the previous pages—Tommo, Ishmael and Ahab, the unnamed Lawyer and Bartleby—are all representations of captivity. Whether it is the Polynesian Coast, the oceans off Cape Horn, or New York's financial district, wherever Melville places his readers, this common denominator remains. As such, it provides a thread by which the reader can better understand Melville's larger body of work. Despite finding themselves in geographical places of immense beauty, Melville's characters are nonetheless in chains. They are melancholic in nature and most often times appearing to have a dissonance in their everyday life.

Tommo, for instance, has no real evidence of his grievances on board the *Dolly*. His life is miserable not because of life on the *Dolly*. Although the conditions did not seem ideal, they nevertheless appeared manageable.

Certainly, Tommo's concept of freedom possessed a sense of grandeur. Throughout his novel, Melville attempted to convey a sense of freedom that was not actually possible. An individual who is held captive dreams of a freedom that can only be imagined. Melville appears to be implying that freedom does not exist. Despite the fact that humanity has convinced itself that freedom can be achieved if they can escape their current situation, Tommo's story

illustrates the fact that captivity is an inevitable consequence of life on earth. Therefore, Tommo should have never abandoned the crew and escaped on the Island, the consequences of his choices is a dismantled leg, a near death experience and a lost friend in Toby.

There is a possibility that Melville could have adopted the prototypical American desire to escape from his responsibilities, "to be free," that originally inspired him to write *Typee*. By taking his readers on an adventure in his narratives, Melville appeared to offer them an escape from their own captivity. No matter how picturesque the geographical surroundings, the reader will quickly realize what Rousseau realized almost one hundred years earlier, "Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains."

Although Melville presented *Moby-Dick* as another narrative of adventure on the high seas, the story goes beyond the simple concept of an adventure story. As Ishmael signs up for employment on board the *Pequod*, he soon discovers that the captain of the ship Ahab has no intention of hunting sperm whales for commercial purposes. Ahab, however, is looking for one whale that bit off his leg during an earlier encounter. In revenge for the loss of his leg, Ahab becomes obsessed with the pursuit of the great whale.

At first glance, Melville's narrative appears straightforward and devoid of any real significance. As a matter of fact, nothing could be further from the truth; Melville employs a wide range of literary techniques to convey his message, including symbolism, metaphor, and allegory. It is apparent that many themes are prevalent throughout *Moby-Dick*. An important theme in this context is the relationship between capitalism and captivity. Although Melville's text is opaque, the reader is able to discern an allegorical meaning in it. In this sense, the message refers to the captivity of Ahab and Ishmael. As they pursue the great whale, Ahab is

held captive by his desire to avenge the loss of his leg, while Ishmael remains loyal to Ahab's efforts to kill the whale. Throughout Melville's narrative, we can see allusions to capitalism through the relationship between Ahab and Ishmael. For instance, Ahab's image represents the *Pegudod's* owners hired to capture and process sperm whales. In his position, Ishmael represents low-class workers that have little influence over how business is conducted. It is important not to lose sight of the fact that Ahab and his crew are on a whaler; a job must be accomplished.

A factory is also designed to take advantage of low wages to employ as many laborers as possible in order to generate revenue. The reader can certainly infer that although Ahab might seem free to conduct business as he so desired in the end he was just as captive by his obsession with the great whale. In addition to Ahab representing commerce and Ishmael representing labor, what does the whale symbolize? As an example, the reader might consider the concept of capital. There was a great deal of money to be made from the capture and killing of whales. During the slaughtering of the whale, no part of the animal was wasted. Ultimately, Ahab loses his life because of his battle with the great whale which, as a source of raw materials, becomes a representation of capital.

It appears that the narrative's conjecture about captivity and capitalism prevails in the end. Ahab was never able to free himself from the whale, and Ishmael is a captive to the sea, floating on the coffin of Queequeg. Although the factory has been destroyed, the capital (the whale) escaped leaving the reader with endless conclusions.

Likewise, in "Bartleby," the lawyer appeared to have a life so good that there was a disconnect between him and his scrivener, Bartleby. The lawyer appeared to practice "wage

slavery," rather than living out his Christian creed to show righteousness, mercy and justice, ultimately to love. As a direct result of not living up to his own Christian values, the death of his scrivener is on his conscience. The argument is that Melville's narratives are allegorical expressions of captivity and capitalism, and that in his narrative, "Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street," he makes no attempt to conceal his intentions. There is a central theme in Bartleby that focuses on the abusive behavior of wealthy employers toward their low-wage workers. By examining the relationship between Bartleby and the lawyer, Melville exposes the injustices associated with the labor wars in New York City. A reader's personal experience would have contributed to their understanding of how low-class laborers are exploited by capitalist employers. The passive resistance of Bartleby becomes a symbol of all workers who have been mistreated. In addition, Melville's narrator serves as a reminder to all readers to refrain from being blinded by selfish ambitions, but rather to act with justice, mercy, and love towards our fellow citizens. Furthermore, it is essential that the message of human value always takes precedence over financial profit or reputation.

The ambiguity of Melville's characters allows for a multitude of interpretations, which should not be forgotten, although this thesis focuses on one central theme across three important works. One can argue that Melville's idea of freedom is that it enslaves, just as capitalism does. So too is liberty just as elusive as the great whale. The pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness meant something very different for each character. For Tommo, it was the constant search for a better life off the whaler and just over the mountain. For Bartleby, resisting the authority of control, and for Ahab to kill Moby-Dick. In each story, the characters created their own captivity, and equally so, each character could have been their own savior.

For instance, instead of concerning himself with his wealth and reputation, the lawyer could have possibly saved the life of his scrivener.

Overall, Melville's works have provided significant allegories regarding captivity and capitalism. In the classic romance, adventure at sea, and the tale of a Wall Street Scrivener, there is a hidden message regarding the treatment of workers and lower-class people. The argument has been made that Melville used his position as an author to try and expose the labor wars in his era. A modern reader may therefore benefit from studying Melville's narrative. As in Melville's time, there is still a conflict between those at the top and those at the bottom of the financial mountain. The capitalist system appears to only benefit those who are already rich far more than it does the middle class or the poor. The similarities between Melville's characters regarding captivity and capitalism in modern society are evident. In addition, Melville's descriptions of Christianity as evil and wicked are like those expressed in today's culture about Christian values. As a result, further study of Melville's narratives may assist the modern reader in gaining a deeper understanding of humanity and his captivity.

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