

Daniel Peck

Un-essay Project

I found that there's something oddly trusting about using a typewriter. It might sound corny but there's something humanizing about it, in a way. Each press of the key is so definite and discrete; I was often very hesitant during larger words or when I lost my immersion in the writing. I would press the wrong key, and simply look on as an (mostly) irreparable mark had been printed eternally on my pristine document. Although there were times that I was frustrated by those marks, as I continued to press on, I came to an odd acceptance of these parts of what I wrote. Although I did start over many a time for small errors, which were the most infuriating when at the end of a long and hard to type page, I gave up that seeking of perfection, and thought more on why I was typing errors, and when I stumbled in my writing. Though is it Daniel, God, or who that makes such mistakes and stumbles through the words?

The other part about typing on a typewriter was the anachronism of the whole project. Even while I'm writing this paper, I am writing down ideas, back-spacing them into oblivion, and refining sentences. I even typed "sentences" wrong four words ago, and was able to fix that mistake easily, with absolutely no consequences. The current medium of electronic typing gives me the freedom to think about what I want to write on the fly. I have a game plan of sorts, but the details follow more as those abstract ideas remind me of the small details of writing. I can explore and ponder without fear of running out of paper, time, or mistakes. The typewriter offers a sharp contrast to all that, and even while I was typing what someone else wrote, I had to be strongly familiar with the text in order to reasonably type it efficiently and

without many errors. I can't put my finger on it, but the typewriter to Microsoft word, is somewhat what Pony Express mail is to a text message.

This chapter is one of the best in the whole book. Finally, we receive a glimpse into Ahab's real emotions during this whole chase. There were so many times I wanted to know what Ahab thought about the old world. I wanted someone to ask him, "do you regret it?" or "why don't you just stop?" and hear a legitimate answer. This chapter gives it in spades. There's something here that fits the typewriter. Perhaps it's the expression of mistakes and doubts and hesitations. My own cautious hesitation before each word felt like Starbucks slow build to finally approach the old, so very old, man.

In order to prepare for this chapter, I had to get everything right, unfortunately I couldn't get it done during one of the few great thunderstorms we had this semester, so I had to supply my own thunderstorm "soundscape." The storm was not to give me an ocean like feel, but rather as if I was in a dark, gable-ended inn, in Nantucket. I also had to do it in a place where I could have a good smoke of the pipe, and with some real Virginia Cavendish to boot. But the scene was finally set and I began.

So perhaps to start with a few of the smaller syntactical frustrations I had. Melville uses far too many exclamation points. They require a few keys, as it is a combination of an apostrophe and period, and definitely pull me from the flow that I often got into. The actual book I'm using had weird un-capitalized letters after exclamation points and periods. I wasn't too sure what to do about those, and I am 90% sure they are editorial oversights, but I opted to leave them in the typed project, as some were clearly oversights, but some felt intended. I left as is. But the worst of these small problems was when Melville used one of his beautiful, yet oversized

words to describe something, which often left me to split it between lines, which might've been the more irksome part of it of all.

Yet, what joys! Writing on that rickety, masterpiece, is second to none. The chapter is full of such beautiful imagery, and feeling that come to life with each definite stroke! I really was far too close to this text, but maybe that's what typing it brought me? I rose and fell with Starbuck during this whole chapter. I felt the lugubrious nature of their quest finally emerge victorious over the glimpse of hope as I typed the final sentence and put my own stamp of approval in the form of a period. Often, my mistakes would stem from, I found, a couple words that were truly gripping beforehand, and I would be lost in them as my hands kept trying to push into the next word. I was able to watch the text spring into existence before my eyes, in such an analog way, that electronic typing couldn't hold up against it.

Within this whole book, Ishmael, and Melville it would seem, is rocking back and forth between this idea of darkness and purpose. Ishmael can't seem to make up his mind whether or not the reader should pursue the things we are drawn to pursue, or whether we should look not too long into that fire, not to dream with a hand on the helm. But rarely do we have anyone looking backwards. What if we chose wrong? What if we wished we could've done things differently? This chapter makes light of the idea that even if we went back in time, knowing what we know, often we, as humans, would do the exact same thing. We can barely know why we do anything we do, as a real motivation is hard to discern just like Claggart's was not fully known to him.

This chapter, in my humble opinion, is the lodestone for this entire book. There's such a deep beauty that is described in the beginning of the chapter, one of

bliss and of freedom. The language is full of azure and blue, color and transcendence. The words lifted me as I typed them. Having lived on a boat for 5 months, I can truly say there is no greater peace than looking on to a horizon where a placid sea and sky meet in a splendid, blue, dichotomy. All this writing on it really brought me back to that place. I felt so parallel to Ahab in this, as the same feelings of tranquility and celestial presence I felt, he seemed to feel as well, which brought him to his conversation with Starbuck.

The significant aspect is not his reflection nor his lament, which I originally felt pulled towards, but after writing, I believe it is the paragraph in which he responds to Starbuck's desires to go back home. It is a tricky world we inhabit, as we cannot understand our own motivations, as they are the norm and only true narrative that sits well with us, and we cannot understand other's motivations, as their hearts and minds will always be too far away, too abstract. Ahab confronts this idea with the quintessential line, "Is it I, God, or who that lifts this arm?" It grabs the concept of purpose, motivation, intelligent design, and consequences of actions, such a quagmire of ideas of which philosophers, historians, literary scholars, theologians and so many more have been trying to make sense.

Yet Ahab has the most peaceful response to that question that one can imagine. "Aye, toil we how we may, we all sleep at last on the field." Maybe the weight of the chapter is not held in it's struggle to figure out whether or not we should or shouldn't pursue the dark, obsessive thing we wish to seek, but rather how we can reconcile our pursuit with our lives? We will always be confronted with the question "in the end, was it worth it?" whether that be in what we study, who we love, where we want to explore, or any number of situations. I typed up Ahab's final response to Starbuck,

and it brought forth me trying to figure out that question. I don't really know what to think of that question. It feels so invasive to even be asking myself.

As I typed the end, however, it brought a deep sadness in me. I can't get the line "But blanched to a corpse's hue, the Mate had stolen away," out of my head! The incredible parallelism of opening with such vibrant color, and closing with the scene fading into an atheistic, colorless, all color is perfect in its execution.

When I reached the end of a page, I had to really sit and think if what I had just produced was good enough to whatever standard I wanted. I would be reading a passage and would think about what Ahab was saying, "is this what I really wanted?" I had to ask myself that question about each page. Was this page what I wanted it to be? It has a few errors and some thoughts remained unfinished and had to overflow into the next line. Maybe this is me being corny and trying to pull what I read into what I was typing, but just like when I had already talked about the idea of errors above, I had to decide if the page was worth keeping; however, I can't easily erase like on Microsoft word. The definite nature of the typewritten page is easily representative of Ahab's own life. The keys were pressed, the words written, and this regret or worth that he's concerned with is as futile as myself trying to type over my small mistakes. And when we look retrospectively on our lives, and can't even understand why we made the trifling mistakes on our trivial typewritten pages, but we can only know that we inevitably were meant to make them, isn't that a little tragic?