

Saam Aghevli - Moby Dick Project Proposal

I plan on focusing on the treatment of the unknown in Moby Dick. The entire novel encompasses existential themes of religion, god, and man's place in the universe.

Different characters interact with the unknown in many ways. Ishmael simultaneously ridicules traditional religious norms while acknowledging a sense of awe and wonder at life that seems, at times, essentially spiritual. He is well versed in matters of the bible, and relates many of his experiences to traditional christian biblical stories. Captain Ahab, on the other hand, views Moby Dick as the ultimate realization of his god. He knows not how or why, but he sees the monster as a divine foe he must vanquish or let vanquish him. Many references to whales throughout the book are steeped in spiritual language, and one can read many descriptions of whaling and Moby Dick himself as expositions on the themes of god and the meaning of life.

I want to trace these themes throughout the book and see what, if any, sense I can make from them. I want to observe how references to god may shift throughout the novel, as Ishmael transitions to a life on land to one on sea and finally in his pursuit of Moby Dick. I have not yet decided which characters I will focus on, but plan to investigate Ishmael, Moby Dick, Queequeg, Captain Ahab, Father Mapple, Gabriel, Fedallah, and Elijah. Similarly, there are many references to whaling itself as somewhat of a spiritual journey, and I plan to look to these for more points of reference.

In terms of the presentation of my data, I have not yet decided what will be the most effective. I could see a networked graph perhaps showing other dimensions of religious references, but I also believe incorporating the dimension of time into my analysis will reveal more about the direction the book points with respect to religion - as the characters get closer and closer to Moby Dick, a somewhat godly character, an underlying trace to Melville's abundant religious themes may become more evident.