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Metaphysics and the Charge of Misanthropy : Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Circles" as a Cipher for Understanding the Connection between Robinson Jeffers and Herman Melville

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Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Circles" as a Cipher for Understanding the Connection between Robinson Jeffers and Herman Melville

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Abstract

Herman Melville's and Robinson Jeffers's metaphysical thoughts reflect Ralph Waldo Emerson's notion of looking towards Nature for discovery; all three writers' observations of Nature influence how they see humanity's place in existence. Both Melville and Jeffers observe Nature decentralizing humanity, which distinguishes their views from Emerson's. Where Jeffers's verse sternly voices this message, openly criticizing the anthropocentric viewpoint, Melville utilizes humor, subtly confronting the anthropocentric proponent and downplaying humanity's power. Jeffers garners the label of misanthrope, whereas Melville's metaphysical realm in *Moby-Dick* largely escapes this charge with the masking quality of his humor.

Comparing both writers' texts to an Emersonian observance of Nature reveals Jeffers's and Melville's ideas of humanity's place in the cosmos. While observing the confluence of agreement in their conclusions, readers can delineate the effect of the tones employed by Jeffers and Melville. Such close reading can reveal the influence of Emerson, the similarity of metaphysical notions between Jeffers and Melville, and the effect of humor on a reader's reception.

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Introduction

Robinson Jeffers's poetry espouses a distinctive view of what it means to live as a human – that humanity is not the reason for existence rather only a part of it. Under scrutiny a reader can discover how many of his views accord with Herman Melville's metaphysical considerations in *Moby-Dick*. Because of Ishmael's ironic tone, the correlation is not obvious; the tone masks the viewpoint, for some a disagreeable one, that humanity is not central to the universe, let alone in a superior position. Some of these disagreeing types are disparaging persons and tend to dismiss Jeffers's poetry as misanthropic, while *Moby-Dick* eludes this dismissive charge. Using Ralph Waldo Emerson's directive to look toward Nature for a deeper understanding of the human being, both Jeffers and Melville conclude that humans comprise only a small part of the universal flux (the metaphorical ubiquitous tides of the oceans especially exhibit the flux). This fact clearly separates the latter two writers from Emerson. Regardless, Emerson's directive provides a starting point of discussion about two American authors' similar philosophical views. To start: look to Nature to discover humanity.

Describing his familiar Californian coastline, recapturing the Greek tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, or Euripides, or intertwining both the coastline scenes and tragedies with authoritative effect, Jeffers's poetry articulates a metaphysics that faces the churning Pacific Ocean, embracing its beautiful violence. "Inhumanism" is the word for his philosophy: turn away from humanity and embrace the surrounding beauty to gain its

transhuman significance (*SP* 721).[1] Humans have the ability to do this because of their conscious minds. This is Emerson's reason for giving humanity an elevated station: the conscious quality of a human's life allows for consideration of beauty in existence. Jeffers believes the end of existence is beauty, though beauty may be little more than our word for our feeling of it, hence transhuman significance: because humans perceive the idea of beauty as humans and then attach the meaning to the word, it represents the idea of beauty; God as a whole or other parts of nature may, and most likely do for Jeffers, perceive the beautiful in a different way.

Much of Jeffers's recondite philosophy emerges from his personal observation of Nature, though he also read extensively when young and throughout adulthood. These readings understandably influence him too. Of these readings Emerson affects him greatly because of his directive to look to Nature for understanding. An ideal example of Nature informing Jeffers's understanding comes from the Pacific coastline's ruggedness. The truth he sees in Nature is the constant strain of continued existence: he "has seen these ways of God: [he] know[s] of no reason / For fire and change and torture and the old returnings," such as the tides of the Pacific ("Apology for Bad Dreams" *SP* 144). The ubiquitous tension permits beauty, and this consideration finds eidetic reproduction in his verse. Whereas Emerson feels Nature is the symbol of God, helping humanity discover the truth in the predominant, Emersonian soul, Jeffers finds Nature as its own purpose. Further delineating his metaphysics, Jeffers writes that the soul of a human dissipates – the death scenes in "Cawdor" support this, as Martial and Hood's bodies decompose and

[1] All references to Robinson Jeffers's poetry will have a *CP* for his *Collected Poetry* with the volume number following and then the page number. *SP* and *SL* respectively stand for his *Selected Poetry* and *Selected Letters*.

the nerve "cells bec[o]me unfit to express / Any human or at all describable form of consciousness. //…The personal show [the individual's body and soul] [is] over" (*CP I*: 451). But like Emerson, Jeffers feels that observing Nature permits humanity to uncover Truth in conjunction with Beauty. One truth, for Jeffers, is that the totality of Nature, extending to the broader universe, is God (in "At the Birth of an Age," "the Hanged God's" soliloquy provides support [*CP II*: 481-4]; many other instances appear in Jeffers's poetry), and humanity is simply a part of God with no greater importance than any other part. This distinction between the two shows an evolution in Jeffers's thought since his encountering Emerson. Clearly there is a difference, as Emerson sees Nature as a tool for a human, whereas Jeffers sees a human as only a part of Nature – or even a tool of God –, but the expression of each writer's metaphysical idea – in terms of vocabulary choices and images of Nature – still bears considerable relation to the other. As Alan Brasher notices, "Jeffers and Emerson are very much in agreement [of the transcendent effect nature has on a human's spirit]; however, the character of a [hu]man's intercourse with nature clearly separates the two" (149).

After reading *Moby-Dick* with these thoughts on Emerson and Jeffers's relationship, I found similar correlation with Melville too. Strains of Emerson's ideas appear in Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*, too, whether directly influenced by Emerson's writing or not (Sten 32). More often than not, Melville's ideas correspond more closely with Jeffers's "inhumanistic" view, though on the surface it does not always appear so. The sailor's lifestyle certainly permits Melville to see humanity's relationship with Nature from a different perspective than Emerson metaphorically behind the pulpit facing a congregation of people. Like Jeffers, Melville experiences the incredible beauty of the

ocean *and* its destructive, ever-changing, relentless power. His view of Nature expressed in *Moby-Dick* may be seen in the enigmatic white whale and the consistent images of the sea; his characters' meditations while at sea express his vacillating opinions, which range from championing Pantheism to mocking Transcendentalism. Even with these ranging opinions, it is, more so, the sardonic expressions of Ishmael that tend to conceal Melville's metaphysical opinions and thus makes the comparison to Jeffers not readily apparent. Regardless, the discussion of humanity's place in existence – with an evolving sense of humanity's relationship with Nature – appears in Melville's novel as in Emerson and Jeffers's works, yet Jeffers's writings receive the charge of misanthropy more often.

The approach to existential conversation in terms of style and content naturally differs between these three authors' writings. Whereas Emerson begins with humanity, placing the importance of discovery in terms of a human's experience and life, Jeffers intentionally turns away from humanity to reveal the nature of the "divinely superfluous beauty" that he sees manifest in Nature; he denies an anthropocentric worldview without representing a misanthropic one. Jeffers's poetry portrays human lives to reveal his perception of truth, which supposes that the pain and tragedy of humanity is merely the manifest condition of existence; the chance to observe Beauty is enough to warrant the harshness of life. Melville utilizes humans' lives in order to uncover the essentials of existence, similar to Emerson's use of Nature, but Melville, like Jeffers, warns of the indifference the rest of creation manifests towards humanity, moving away from Emerson's anthropocentric ideas. Melville softens this message, though, with Ishmael's humorous storytelling, a marked difference from Jeffers's poetry's blunt decrees, violent actions, or even incestuous relations.

This thesis moves in two chapters. The first compares each writer's metaphysics with the others, beginning with the relationship between Emerson's and Jeffers's metaphysics because the idea for the paper came from that connection; it ends with Melville and Jeffers's association because of their similar perspectives of humanity's place within Nature and, intriguingly, their writings' disparate receptions when voicing those similar perspectives. After examining the interplay between the three writers' metaphysical ideas, the seeds of Emerson's influence and the similarities between Jeffers and Melville's existential ruminations, the second chapter shows how Melville's humor shields *Moby-Dick* from a misanthropic charge that Jeffers's metaphysics so often acquires. The thesis structure elucidates the similar metaphysical viewpoints of Jeffers and Melville, deriving from their observations of Nature, and closes with the delineation of tone between Jeffers's and Melville's writings that, in turn, enforces the *why* in the disparity of reception.

Chapter I:
Looking to Nature:
The Relationship between Emerson, Jeffers, and Melville

Section 1: Emerson and Jeffers

> The eye is the first circle; the horizon which it forms is the second; and throughout nature this primary figure is repeated without end.
> (Emerson "Circles" 252)

This first sentence of "Circles" tells much about which direction Ralph Waldo Emerson's thought moves: it begins with a human's eye and states that what the eye perceives it creates, or "forms." The fourth sentence of the essay starts with the word "We," reinforcing the reading that the eye is a human one. Emerson then asserts that the rest of nature conforms to the eye's image, a circle with a center; the center is the "I." The "I" is "the highest emblem," or symbol, "in the cipher," or the secret or key, "of the world," so that the self is the way to understanding (Emerson "Circles" 252). Therefore, the essay is "anthropocentric," meaning he "regard[s] humankind as the center of existence" (Oxford American Dictionary). Emerson the philosopher starts with a human and projects him outwards to decipher the world, as Charles Gray Shaw asserts in 1914 when he says that, for Emerson, "'I am' is categorical; all else…is purely hypothetical" (69): the only thing unconditionally evident is the self and its existence – everything else remains uncertain. For Robinson Jeffers, in stark contrast, this Cartesian starting point does not arise because the existence of everything is more fundamental than the transient existence of humanity, the Earth, or even the Sun ("The Beauty of Things" [*CP III*: 369], "Nova" [*CP II*: 530], etc.); however, to be sure, his materials and methods never reach much beyond the rants of his characters', such as Reverend Barclay and the old Gore ranch caretaker soliloquies. The result is that Jeffers's metaphysics decentralizes

humanity; in contrast, Emerson places the import of existence on the human when he starts by saying imitation of the eye produces everything else.

From its starting point, "Circles" constantly works back towards the human and its faculty of thought; Emerson turns inward, which is the greatest difference between Emerson and Jeffers's metaphysical thinking. In Emerson's essay "Nature," a reader learns that underneath the "not-me" of a human – which is the body, art, and Nature – and more true lies the "me," and this roots his soul in something far greater than humanity's transient time on Earth. The essay "Circles" divines things beyond a human's factual scope (for example, "[p]ermanence is but a word of degrees," for a human can never truly understand permanence nor infinity ["Circles" 252]), but this is only so a human utilizes these bits of wisdom for *its* improvement and exultation, the ideal of conjoining with God as the "me": "The immortality of man is as legitimately preached from intellections as from the moral volitions," so Emerson finds humanity's conscious abilities, its faculties of learning, a reason for humanity's impermanence, as much as from the religious sense of being morally upright ("Circles" 266). Thus, Emerson advocates the study of Nature to benefit the individual human. Jeffers, on the contrary, considers the things of nature valuable to a human, but not necessarily for *a human's* own glory ("Post Mortem" [*CP I*: 204-5], "On Building with Stone" [*CP I*: 394], "An Artist" [*CP I*: 390]). The conscious mind is for learning[2], and a human is "one of God's sense-

[2] Here I am considering just the conscious mind, rather than the subconscious, intuitive, or instinctual minds that react. Learning is a process that requires consideration of past events against present options. Other animals learn, but at considerably slower rates and often through instinctual reactions. An animal may learn a trick that brings it pleasure or sustenance, but it does not comprehend or understand it has learned a trick; it only desires the ends without reflection.

organs" meant to discover things about that perfect complete ("Untitled" *SP* 693). Jeffers is saying that a human is only part of the whole, while Emerson feels it is a key part, if not all. This is the greatest point of separation between Emerson and Jeffers; the former feels an individual soul is greatly, if not solely, important, as evinced by the things of Nature serving it, while the latter feels that the individual serves the whole that he calls God.

Even as Emerson sees that "[e]verything looks permanent until its secret is known," which seems to marginalize humans (and certainly all other things, too), he declares that the "life of man is a self-evolving circle, which, from a ring imperceptibly small, rushes on all sides outwards to new and larger circles, and that without end" (253): he is declaring a human's everlastingness since "everything" is every thing other than a human – if not it would be contradictory because the use of "self-evolving" and "rushes" describes the "life of man," denoting measurements of time and space. There is contradiction between the two statements above from Emerson. Certainly someone as thoughtful and skilled as Emerson reconciles these statements – if only because these sentences occur in adjacent paragraphs. At one level these statements reflect ideas brought forth in "Nature": "Each creature is only a modification of the other": "Unity…lies under the undermost garment of Nature"; "it (Nature and Unity) pervades Thought"; "Every universal truth…implies or supposes every other truth" (Emerson 23). Really these quotations are taken at chance from the pages of that essay. Almost every page asserts that a human is to use Nature to discover, or recover, its unity with God, making Nature a tool for humanity to become the "me." Emerson justifies his seeming inconsistency in "Circles" when he says, "By going one step farther back in thought,

discordant opinions are reconciled by being seen to be two extremes of one principle and we can never go so far back as to preclude a still higher vision" (255). So how can everything not be permanent while a man self-evolves without end? The start is that a human's soul, which manifests itself in thought, dwells, or is part of, the larger soul of existence: "Every man supposes himself not to be fully understood; and if there is any truth in him, if he rests at last on the divine soul, I see not how it can be otherwise" ("Circles" Emerson 254). If a human is not "*fully* [it. added] understood," it is because there is more to be explained; if there is "truth" in the human, and here connoting truth as God, then to understand the human is to understand God because the human's thought will not "rest" until it reaches the "divine soul" or God. Since there is "no end in nature" – because God is "the Unattainable" and the things of nature the words of God meant to help humans understand God – a human who continues thinking, considering the things of nature, the words of God, will never reach an end since God is unattainable. But, again, *everything* is not permanent, only the "self-evolving" human "rushing outwards."

The reconciliation of these conflicting declarations is in "Nature": "Words are finite organs…[that] cannot cover the dimensions of what is truth" (23). "Everything" refers to the infinitely divisible parts that both Jeffers and Melville acknowledge, but not the totality that is the infinite, "the moral fact of the Unattainable, the flying Perfect," or more simply God (Emerson "Circles" 252). Without construing the word "everything" as such, Emerson contradicts himself. Though this reading absolves[3] Emerson from inconsistency (in this instance), it does not negate his anthropocentric focus, and in

[3] As Dr. Katharine Rodier points out, to Emerson his whole philosophy does.

regard to its focus on language, a utility of man, it reinforces the looking inward toward humanity of his writings.

Emerson consistently returns to a human, or a human's spirit/thought, as the start of and measure for the manifest natural world. The natural world merely performs an act for humanity so that humans may better know God in order to conjoin with the "me": the things of nature "are words of God" (Emerson "Circles" 258). Words, Emerson relates, only find necessity when there is discordance between people. Literature, composed of words, forms larger and more complex symbols of metaphor, creating a "point outside the hodiernal circle…whence [a man] may command a view of [a man's] present life" ("Circles" 257). That is, literature allows for an explanation of the instance a writer writes as a way for others (or the writer, anachronistically applying Derrida) to understand the writer, the time, or the subject without being inside of the *hodie* (*hodie* is Latin for "day"). The word "circle" throughout "Circles" represents a completeness, in most instances referring to the life of a human, but in this case applicable to a work of a human.

Jeffers's coastal Californian tragedies ("Tamar," "Roan Stallion," "Women at Point Sur," "Cawdor," etc.) and Melville's voyages (*Moby-Dick*, *Typee*, *Omoo*, and *White-Jacket*) provide examples of hodiernal circles, as each type of story allows a reader to engage an otherwise distant environment for most readers. So a human may compose a "circle" of literature in order to make the "circle" of its life expand beyond the hodiernal circle within which it exists, creeping towards permanence. Therefore, if natural things "are words of God" and part of a man's day, Emerson implies disconnection between God and humanity, as language allows for understanding between

humans. The parts of nature surrounding humanity serve as a tool (i.e. words) to get back to God, or an understanding with/of him: "In the thought of tomorrow there is a power to…marshal thee to heaven" (Emerson "Circles" 254): nature helps "marshal," or connect or combine, each human to the "me." Jeffers, instead of seeing natural things as God's evidentiary tools for humanity, observes the relationship in a different way. The "not-me" relates to Jeffers in that a human is only a part, but that body, unlike Emerson's viewpoint, is as much a part of God, the totality, as the soul; the further discrepancy is that the soul, for Jeffers, is transient like the body. This key point is why Jeffers wants to turn away from humanity and contribute in the miniscule way a human can, through conscious consideration, to God's wholeness. By witnessing and considering, as only a human can (at least as far as any human has perceived), the things of nature, a person may add to existence by helping God in the discovery of himself, Jeffers thinks: "This is man's mission:/ To find and feel" ("Untitled" *SP* 693). Whereas Emerson in "Circles" sees everything around humanity as harmonizing tools, Jeffers finds God is everything surrounding humanity and humanity itself. Emerson's existential consideration marginalizes Nature by itself; Nature's sole use as reconciliation with God, while Jeffers feels natural things' movements as God's, as much as any human's life.

This Emersonian line of self-centered thinking disturbs Jeffers's notion of Inhumanism, on one hand, and yet accords with it, on the other. It is apparent that "[t]urn[ing] outward from each other," or Inhumanism, does not agree with anthropocentric thought, especially when reading the remainder of the Jeffers's dictum: "Turn…to the vast life and inexhaustible beauty beyond humanity" ("Preface," *The Double Axe and Other Poems SP* 721). Yet concluding that one must accept humanity's

lack of importance in the universe requires a deep evaluation and revaluation of humanity as a whole and as an individual self. Or as Patrick Dooley phrases it,

> An *aesthetic* impetus initiates a metaphysical and is followed by an ethical repositioning: "a recognition of the astonishing beauty of things and their living wholeness" causes us to reappraise our ontological standing, which in turn makes it our newly recognized moral duty to accept an appropriate, albeit reduced position in the scheme of things. (18)

Precisely because one studies the natural environment and incorporates, assimilates, and considers the observations – similar to processing speech – one can understand the marginal role humanity plays in the universe in Jeffers's reasoning. In a way this observational process mirrors Emerson's use of Nature to link him to the "me": studying Nature produces a new role for a human – albeit, for Jeffers, one with no more importance for him than any other part of nature, whereas Emerson's feeling from glimpsing Nature allows him to assume a role of self-importance by conjoining with God.

For Jeffers observing the natural world produces, aside from the discovery of humanity's peripheral position, the feeling of beauty. This observing of the beautiful and his subsequent poetry "aping" God's beauty is what he chooses to do with his "excess energy," rather than participating in "self-interference, self-frustration, self-incitement, self-ticking, [and] self-worship" that Jeffers sees as the condition of introverted, or anthropocentric, humanity ("Preface," *The Double Axe and Other Poems CP IV*: 419). Beauty plays a considerable role in his thought; it is what God wants: "he [God] wants what man's/ Feeling for beauty wants: – if it were fierce as hunger or hate and deep as the grave" ("The Inhumanist" *CP III*: 259). The construction, here, implies the considerable

inferiority of humans: God's desire is necessary and insatiable, metaphorically like a human's appetite, and permanent as a man's death; God's "feeling for beauty" is what continues existence like food fuels a human's body. In other words humans cannot approach the immensity of God, as they are only a minor part in Jeffers cosmology. Curiously, this line about God's want creates a link with Emerson's immersion and transcendence in the "me," as an overwhelming feeling brought on by the "words," or beautiful things, of the "not-me," Nature, produces a union with God. Both Jeffers and Emerson, thus, write of unions between humans and God. The union's difference is a matter of degrees; the discrepancy is the pull of metaphorical gravity – in this case the metaphorical sense of gravity is a necessary, heavy, and ceaseless attraction in God, instead of a human's temporal feeling for beauty. Beauty, in Jeffers's metaphysical view, fuels existence, and humans can recognize the beautiful fleetingly. They cannot, according to Jeffers though, conclude as Emerson does that the upwelling feeling for it precludes an eventual union with God, implying, for Emerson, that a human is central to existence as the "me."

Emerson emphasizes the transient and, for him, chance feeling of beauty in him stirred by nature. Directly pursuing beauty inherently results in disappointment for the essayist: "The shows of the day [the appearances of beauty] … if too eagerly hunted, become shows merely, and mock us with their unreality … it will not please as when its light shines upon your necessary journey" (Emerson "Nature" 11). Not only does Emerson point out the naturalness of sensing beauty, he makes two other points of emphasis, which further complicate his relationship with Jeffers. That Nature can be anything but real, substantial, or whatever term that may apply is incongruent with

Jeffers's poetry, as in Emerson's thought that Nature can "merely become a show." As Jeffers points out in "Credo" (where his "friend from Asia" may very well point towards Emerson), all the speaker witnesses is there; Nature is not a message from God for a human's reconciliation:

> My friend from Asia has powers and magic, he plucks a blue leaf from the young blue-gum.
> And gazing upon it, gathering and quieting
> The God in his mind, creates an ocean more real than the ocean, the salt, the actual
> Appalling presence, the power of the waters.
> He believes that nothing is real except as we make it. I humbler have found in my blood
> Bred west of Caucasus a harder mysticism.
> Multitude stands in my mind but I think that the ocean in the bone vault is only
> The bone vault's ocean: out there is the ocean's;
> The water is the water, the cliff is the rock, come shocks and flashes of reality. The mind
> Passes, the eye closes, the spirit is a passage;
> The beauty of things was born before eyes and sufficient to itself; the heart-breaking beauty
> Will remain when there is no heart to break for it. (*CP I*: 239)

As the "Asian" (l. 1) takes the blue leaf (of which blue leaves there are few; generally light or dark purples are considered blue, and thus the adjective reinforces the disingenuous reality being created), he settles into a state relating to the "me" of Emerson and finds the Unity with God to create his own sphere of existence.[4] But the speaker does not trust this *kind* of unity: "Multitude stands in [his] mind" (l. 7). The things of the world are things in themselves, as "[t]he water is the water, the cliff is the rock" (l. 9). The "shocks and flashes of reality," the

[4] Some may say that the Asian actively "plucks" the leaf and then "gazes" upon it, hence looking for a "show of the day," but I do not read it in this manner. "Gaze" seems to me a passive word in this instance; he may fix his look upon the leaf, but he is not searching for the leaf's beauty, as the Asian quiets his mind, not entices it to find a moment.

transcendent moments of existence, are, as for Emerson, ephemeral – but for different reasons (l. 9). The birth of the mind and the reception of the eye create the existence forming capacity of conduct for the Asian, which represents the true essence of being for him. The narrator understands that his mind will not always exist, and that what his eye observes and spirit momentarily transcends will be there and was there before the body that generated the mind and held the eye. Returning to Alan Brasher's point, "Jeffers and Emerson are very much in agreement [of the transcendent effect nature has on a man's spirit]; however, the character of man's intercourse with nature clearly separates the two," and this reflects the discrepancy between "Credo's" speaker and its Emersonian like Asian (149).

At once a powerful and delicate matter, the spirit, as defined in "Credo" and represented in other poems of Jeffers, is humanity's gateway between conscious and unconscious existence: it makes a human a "conduit" to God in one way but limits a human's total participation in another. For Jeffers, God stands, at once, with the conscious moment of conceptualization in seeing and wonderfully understanding the all of existence, while also incessantly participating in the flux of time, always in each infinitesimal moment (Hunt). Nature is the latter, while a conscious human is the former, because thinking about the moment necessarily delays the active participation in the moment. For Emerson this dichotomy could not exist since Nature does not exist by itself. It is possible for a human to immerse itself in the flux, acting on instinct, akin to the Emerson moment of transcendence, but these moments are fleeting, unsustainable; this transcendent moment is Jeffers's representation of the spirit when manifest. The consciousness of the speaker's mind in "Credo" finds representation in the word "multitude." Having all his senses firing input into his brain, the manifestation of these senses forms the mind and must select what to project

and what not to project, and then the mind processes the projection, thinking about it. The result is consciousness. No matter how quickly these events take place, a delay remains. For Jeffers this delay of consciousness is enough to separate a human from other natural things immersed in the flux of existence. Yet other animals process senses and must react, but as far as science[5] can say these animals do not consider what the totality of the senses becomes, and thus the seemingly singular place of conscious humanity. Though a human lives consciously, at times it grasps or finds itself captivated by its feeling for beauty, a transcendent moment when the sensuous experience supersedes consciousness. The person is not even aware of it in the moment, so that what it senses is what it is (i.e. Emersonian eyeball, corn, or melon). Jeffers's speaker describes this moment as "heart-breaking," because the spirit, linked to God and of which it is only an ephemeral part[6], only partially quenches its desire for beauty (l. 11).

For Jeffers, the transcendent, happenstance moment does not satiate his (in terms of what he has written in his poetry) thirst for beauty. Perching on his sea-cliff tower, gazing at the ubiquitous view of the sea (i.e. "out there is the ocean's"), or carrying rocks up the Pacific coastline, Jeffers observes all the beauty his hawk-like eyes see. He actively pursues the harsh beauty of the coastline and considers and places his limited view of humanity in the larger cosmos.

Emerson, while utilizing his observations of Nature, seems to claim he is not searching for beauty at all, at least not intentionally. In scenes such as "Boats in a Fog," a

[5] Granted, I did only a cursory search of scientific studies cross-referencing such terms as "conscious," "animal," and "brain function."

[6] It is only ephemeral for the human because at the moment he participates in the flux as he considers the beautiful, reflecting God's perspective.

reader can sense Jeffers purposefully engaging his environment, oscillating between his personal life and the natural world. To relate feelings on humanity's place in existence in terms of beauty in natural events, Jeffers writes of "[s]ports and gallantries, the stage, [and] the arts… / [h]av[ing] a charm … but lack[ing] nobility" (ll. 1-3); he then juxtaposes these human activities with an act full of "bitter earnestness/ [t]hat makes beauty" (ll. 3-4). Though Jeffers may be belittling his own act of writing in comparing it to the "essential realit[ies]" of existence – since writing is not providing food, clothes, or shelter in the strictest sense – he does pledge to be earnest when writing: poetry should consist of "imaginative power activated by strong emotion, so that imagination is not displayed idly for a show, but as if of necessity and in earnest, under emotional compulsion" (Jeffers qtd. in Karman 42). And insofar as he places humans' lives in context of the natural world, he fulfills, as M.A. Quayum purports, Emerson's moral criteria for a human's "reconciliation" that needs to occur in aligning his "moral philosophy" with a human's life (190, 189). Loren Eiseley affirms the reconciliation of nature and humanity in Jeffers's verse when he writes, "It [is] one of the most uncanny and complete relationships between a man and his natural background…in literature" (qtd. in Karman 43).

For example, "Boats in a Fog" images six fishing boats moving "subdued by the fog, patient and cautious" (l. 16); weary of the coastline, each follows the other, using the "shore granite" as its guide, yet that shore is what threatens the boats. The speaker sees "the essential reality/ Of creatures going about their business among the equally/ Earnest elements of nature" in this scene (ll. 21-3). By using the word "creatures," Jeffers places humans on the same level as all other life, but he also writes that humans and their "business" can be as beautiful and noble as a "flight of pelicans" (l. 18). So, in the same instance, his speaker

places humanity on the same level of other things in the world and praises the possibilities of humans – when acting out of necessity. This is where Jeffers sees the potential of humanity, showing that the misanthropic charge is errant. It is, too, a moment of divergence from Emerson, who would not place a man on the same level as the creatures of Nature. And in the very act of studying the natural scene for its beauty, Jeffers also departs from Emerson's directive not to seek the shows of Nature because they will not perform on cue; a walk in the woods to see the "shows of the day," which can be the color and the song of birds, does not provide transcendence, for Emerson, as someone who simply stumbled upon the bird's beautiful aspects. But by actively engaging his surroundings, whether it be his nightly constitutional walk, "watching the stars for their courses … and feeling the direction of the wind and noticing the tides at ebb and flow," or "rolling the granite boulders" for his Hawk Tower in the afternoons, Jeffers experiences the shows of Nature and can then place the, what he see as, true sentiments of a human amongst the stark background he senses (Una Jeffers qtd. in Karman 52, 50). He can also cite the frivolities of humanity that pervert its natural existence, and it is this language that reaps the misanthropic charge. For Jeffers, the difference between the essential and the frivolous plainly emerges when juxtaposing humanity's acts with natural scenes. Maybe Jeffers feels it is necessary for him to actively watch Nature, perhaps fulfilling what he sees as his role in God as a conscious human. Though both writers evince a need for human's placing in nature, Jeffers seeks Beauty in Nature, while Emerson advocates the find of Beauty.

Section II: Emerson and Melville

A similar metaphysical relationship exists between Herman Melville and Ralph Waldo Emerson's writings as between Jeffers and Emerson's. Observations of the natural world allow each writer to glean and then write about humanity's place within existence. In *Moby-Dick* it is the "relation between inside and outside (of the body) itself at which we are asked to look" (Cameron 574-5). Emerson, too, promotes this relationship in asking for reconciliation between "nature and man … the physical and the spiritual, body and soul" (Quayum 190). Each writer approaches notions of identity, how one defines oneself, without "self-centered introversion" that causes such "repugnance" for Emerson, leading to a greater understanding of existence (Matthiessen 8). F.O. Matthiessen continues concerning Melville, "With his Emersonian belief in the divinely inspired poet, he [is] naturally impelled to examine what Emerson and Thoreau had agreed upon as the chief subject on which inspiration could need, man's relation to nature" (405). Melville's writing also evinces concurrence in the belief that "every natural fact" has "symbolic significance" (Matthiessen 405); the high volume of symbolism in *Moby-Dick* supports to this sentiment. However, Melville portrays humanity and Nature's relationship as being darkly symbiotic, because Nature treats humans harshly. This characteristic of *Moby-Dick* transforms the drama into dialectic argument, neither secondary nor primary in terms of significance compared with the actual story, and hence the novel does not work allegorically but symbolically. The result – of looking to Nature for identity without self-absorption and finding conditions less

given to optimism – guides Melville's metaphysical concerns closer to the austere notions and expressions of Jeffers's Inhumanism.

Chapter 93 entitled "The Castaway" especially works in this darker symbiotic way where the harshness of Nature leads to great discovery – unfortunately for the discoverer, he cannot himself relate his findings. The chapter tells of young, gay, and fearful Pip, one of Ishmael's shipmates, who jumps into the vast ocean while his boat's crew pursues a whale. Having been forewarned that were he to jump again he would be left, Pip alas panics and jumps. The chase proceeds without Pip in the boat, while the other boats behind split-off, hunting. Poor Pip is left with his "ringed horizon … expand[ing] around him miserably" (Melville 321). When reading this scene and keeping "Circles" in mind, ringed horizons expanding surely catches the attention: Emerson describes the "life of man … [as] a self-evolving circle … rush[ing] on all sides outwards to new and larger circles," implying that a man may always learn and experience something new (253). So here a lad out to sea and taught a lesson, left to survive of his own tuition, certainly learns; this experience expands his Emersonian circle. How long the lad lives depends upon the "force or truth of the individual soul" (Emerson 253). It also reveals to the boy an identity. Melville's narrative proceeds even as Melville points to an existential concern of identity, abstaining from "self-centered introversion" by imaging a character among the vast part of nature (a very Jeffersian way of writing).

Pip in the sea is a clear image of Nature's relationship with humanity[7]: one man treading in an ocean with sky above and nothing else in view – the relation between inside and outside, a human and nature. When the two parts truly meet, and a human realizes his meek position, one finds identity. The scene of "The Castaway" literalizes one thrust of Melville's work, which is to discover identity; as Sharon Cameron reads it, "the hermeneutic procedures…exhaust themselves" and the actual (in the sense of a tangible picture: non-abstraction) must replace them (576): Pip is in the ocean with nothing in view but the water and sky. The exhausting of hermeneutic procedures that Cameron sees lessens the likelihood of an allegorical reading of *Moby-Dick*; by giving the reader a scene that could happen, as this could (have) happen(ed) aboard a whaling ship, Melville attaches his metaphysical ideas to what could be an observable event. Grounding the scene in a reality then allows the reader (and writer) room for interpretation since the events may only be representing the events rather than being representative of a larger message; this quality of Melville's novel is one reason why *Moby-Dick* is so rich with criticism.

Even as the events of *Moby-Dick* can be read as real, Melville favors symbolism, as he slips back to metaphor in recounting what Pip goes through before being rescued: "The sea had jeeringly kept his finite body up," while Pip's soul drowns, "[n]ot … entirely, though" (321). Instead his soul finds immersion in

[7] Unless one looks to the story of Jonah in the whale's innards – which Father Mapple so intriguingly describes. Curiously enough the Father cites "the great Pilot Paul" as a "castaway." This sort of cross-reference will be visited later in terms of Emerson's describing of "literature as a point outside of the hodiernal circle" (257).

> wondrous depths, where strange shapes of the unwarped primal world glide[] to and fro before his passive eyes; and the miser-merman, Wisdom, reveal[s] his hoarded heaps; and among joyous, heartless, ever-juvenile eternities, Pip s[ees] the multitudinous, God-omnipresent, coral insects, that out of the firmament of waters heaved the colossal orbs.
> (Melville 321)

The fantastic imagery evoked by this vocabulary tempers the heaviness of its current, as Ishmael's humor does in other sections. It is worth noting that the personified sea is jeering, or being derisive, as it keeps Pip's body alive; Melville implies that Nature only permits survival and thinks little of humanity, which casts a darker shade on humanity's relationship with Nature – unlike Emerson's notion of Nature being God's words for a human to conjoin with God. The use of "heartless" furthers the darker reading of Melville's metaphysical thought, but the juxtaposition with "joyous" keeps the conception of existence from being despairingly dark – like Jeffers, there is more a suggestion that humanity is not central to existence. Meanwhile an unexplained vehicle takes Pip's soul to an elemental place before the conjoining forces of movement, gravity and inertia, have had time to act on anything enough to create recognizable form; this metaphorical place has the "coral insects" and "orbs" that eventually form things like the Earth. At the same time, Wisdom personified appears – "wisdom" implying knowledge and a range of experience over time. So if this scene takes the soul to the beginning of time, Wisdom must not be of time but the *always-now* of omnipresence. In this state pity

does not exist[8]; joy does. It is here where creation exists. The literal picture of a man and sea produces the idea of creation because the separateness results in a need for cognizance rather than simply being, and one circle of relation between inside and outside, actual and symbolic, closes in the identity of humanity, standing alone with consciousness (Cameron 582).

Another "circle opens" when considering that a participant of the story is telling Pip's story. Ishmael tells the reader of Pip's trial, so Ishmael is the one directing the reader to any moral surrounding identity; he is thus the conscious quality of Pip's story and the novel as a whole. As "The Castaway" closes, Ishmael forewarns of his own "like abandonment," implying he is his own source for the description of Pip's moment. Since Pip and his thoughts are alone in the ocean and he returns speaking gibberish, Ishmael's own experience seems a likely source for Ishmael's telling of Pip's experience. Ishmael relates Pip's transcendent instance to readers with coherency, unlike Pip when attempting to relate his discoveries the crew.

Further considering the source of Pip's experience, does Ishmael consider himself insane then? It is Melville who uses Ishmael as his narrator, so is Melville, who composes these scenes, weary of his own sanity, which would provide reasoning for Ishmael's sarcasm? Sarcasm often shields a speaker from insecurities. Aside from the entertaining humor of Ishmael's voice, Melville uses the sarcasm as a shield for his metaphysical thoughts. The way that Melville uses Ishmael and Ishmael uses Pip hints at

[8] This point will be revisited later in comparison with Jeffers and the corresponding view that nature's things in flux do not feel pity (i.e. the symbol of the predatory bird), because they are at the moment of creation and do not dwell on any moment enough to sense the immense pain that things in existence endure.

the nature of Melville's craft – why it is that he writes. Pip could not relate his experience to others constructively, while Melville creates a great piece of American fiction narrated by one Ishmael, bringing to light Melville's revelations on existential concerns, however hedged; these revelations are the sources for fictional experiences like Pip's. Hence, the nature of Melville's *Moby-Dick* is fundamentally exploratory, a voyage, and Ishmael is therefore considered a "'voyager'" – he is a symbol (Feidelson 82).

As Emerson might say, *Moby-Dick* is a "point outside the *hodiernal* circle" for Melville to express his metaphysical thoughts brought on by the symbolism he finds in Nature. Using a mixture of forms, narrative, drama, and, in passages of high quality like Pip's "drowning," poetry[9], Melville relates discoveries of his thought, which fulfills a quality Emerson champions:

> When each speaker strikes a new light, he emancipates us from the oppression of the last speaker to oppress us with the greatness and exclusiveness of his own thought, then yields us to another redeemer, we seem to recover our rights, to become men. O, what truths profound and executable in ages and orbs, are supposed in the announcement of every truth! (Emerson 256-7)

[9] Milton Millhauser argues that *Moby-Dick* is actually a loose tragic poem. Melville's primary tool to convey meanings of depth is symbolism. "Its essential quality is poetic; it offers us not a doctrine but a particular sense of life. Whatever lies beneath this reaches us only in broken hints and broad adumbrations, and if we trace it down it is less likely, the active principle of it, to be an intellectual system than a glimpse into those depths of creative intuition in which the ordered systems have their source. This agrees with the nature of symbolic expression…it operates largely through subconscious associations of which neither the reader nor author need be too specifically aware" (79).

Melville, possibly having read this very passage in Nathaniel Hawthorne's library as supported by a Sophia Hawthorne letter, uses the word "orb" in the context of time, creating a sort of parallel with what Pip witnesses, which is a truth (Sten 32). "Orb" refers to the heavenly bodies of stars, comets, and planets, and the notion that time, while recorded by finite man, really means little in a cycling universe of tidal creation and destruction. Ishmael effectively plays the role of the new speaker, as Emerson considers it, endowing his knowledge of greatness on other humans because he creates it and passes it onto others, sparking their growth. The idea is to promote individual discovery. The writer, by utilizing symbols, appeals to and creates connections that appeal to the singular nature, the general truth underlying each fact. If Melville does take a cue from Emerson to look at Nature for discovery of human identity, then Emerson is a point of departure for Melville[10]; and as Melville says, "No one is his own sire" (qtd. in Minnigerode 32-3). Nevertheless, it is explicitly necessary to think for oneself after having been born and thus receive an identity through self-aware thought.

The title of Chapter 93 is "The Castaway." The word "castaway" rings as importantly as any other feature of this comparison between Emerson and Melville, specifically in the context of birthing and developing the thinking mind. The phrase "cast away" appears twice in Emerson's "Circles" (259, 261). In both instances the expression entails ideas of birth/creation and timelessness of identity. These two ideas are the key features in Ishmael's account of Pip's experience; as stated, presumably Ishmael has a similar experience when floating on the coffin. Each individual's experience is

[10] If Melville did not take a cue from Emerson, or him alone, the coincidence alone is compelling enough for inquiry.

individual; that is the very nature of the experience, of casting away every worldly incident and finding basic tenets of existence when being perfectly alone, yet connected to every truth of Nature available. Being cast away reveals the immense forces of Nature or the symbolic quality of Melville's ocean. By making an Ishmael "kind of voyage, wherein 'all deep, earnest thinking is but the intrepid effort of the soul to keep the open independence of her sea; while the wildest winds of heaven and earth conspire to cast her on the treacherous, slavish shore,'" Melville issues the very expression of relating inside to outside (Matthiessen 287): the brutal conditions of Nature threaten to wreck the voyager, while he continues with his "intrepid effort" for his independent identity.

The exploration allows for the "eternal generation of circles" that Emerson sees in those who "cast away…all…once hoarded knowledge, as vacant and vain" (260-261). But whereas Emerson displays (or explicitly states) only optimism in these voyages of discovery into nature, Melville brings the idea of "aboriginal terrors of the ocean, which no veneer of civilization can gloss over to perceptive eyes" (Matthiessen 288). He warns that Nature's ruggedness pushes, or blows like "winds," humanity to the comfort of the "shore," or towards the safety of humanity's constructions. It is a warning, and thus he sees the shore of humanity as a threat; it is a threat to the independence of an individual's thought, the manifestation of the soul for Ishmael. To achieve the discovery of one's soul, a person must steer toward the open sea and away from the "slavish shore" of humanity. Melville's Ishmael sees a need to escape humanity, pushing toward the symbol of Nature, the sea, in order to find the self, which is the soul. As Jeffers's Inhumanism directs, one is to turn away from humanity, and as Emerson writes, one must

look to Nature to discover the "me," or the soul; Melville works between the two, with the individual needing to be castaway to find truth in his soul.

Section III: Melville and Jeffers

Symbolism in Tragedy and Perspective

> Literature is a point outside of the hodiernal circle through which a new one may be described. The use of literature is to afford us a platform whence we may command a view of our present life, a purchase by which we may move it…/Therefore we value the poet. All the argument and all the wisdom is not in the encyclopedia, or the treatise on metaphysics, or the Body of Divinity, but in the sonnet or the play. (Emerson "Circles" 257)

The writings of Melville and Jeffers function in a highly symbolic way that highlights key aspects of the writers' metaphysical thoughts.[11] Tragic elements leak into and sometimes pour over their works. Tragedy serves as a symbol of humanity's relative powerlessness to Nature. Neither writer relies solely on plot but instead interjects personal feelings on the proceedings; these personal interjections help reveal the metaphysical implications underlying the writings. The very nature of the tragedy emerges from the helplessness of the players to prevent the impending doom; complex characters like Ahab and Cawdor take on inevitable events, eliciting an irritating *and* sympathetic response from readers. The effect is to displace humanity as central to existence.

In *Moby-Dick* Melville's strongest character, Ahab, is a great symbolic force, "that of the conventional tragic hero": "Ahab [is] … king in his own realm … and his

[11] For a brief, strong analysis of the importance of symbolism for Meville in *Moby-Dick* see Charles Feidelson, Jr.'s "Symbolism in *Moby-Dick*." Robert Brophy's *Robinson Jeffers: Myth, Ritual, and Symbol in his Narrative Poems* provides an extensive discussion of symbolic significance for Jeffers's poetry.

character, combin[es] great gifts with a decisive moral flaw," his monomania (Millhauser 76). The tragic hero symbolizes the futility of human endeavors against the unrelenting forces of Nature, often construed as circumstances of fate or Providence. Many of Jeffers's narrative characters, Cawdor in his canyon, Barclay at Point Sur, or King Pentheus of Thebes, epitomize the tragic hero.

Ahab's pursuit of the unconquerable, because indefinable (see Chapter 42, "The Whiteness of the Whale"), putting at risk everything surrounding him reflects Jeffers's conceptualization of Pentheus in "The Humanist's Tragedy." Utilizing *The Bacchae* from Euripides, Jeffers comments on humanity's unceasing desire to progress towards an undefined and, hence, unconquerable end, especially due to the anthropocentric connotation of progress. Denying another's religion, King Pentheus wishes to keep his people isolated, focusing on their own culture. Pentheus's denial of the other religion, which promotes a message of perverted Inhumanism, leads to his death and to impending disarray in Thebes. Through his speaker and Pentheus, who has just seen his Dionysan-worshipping mother carnally drunken and mad, Jeffers voices his concern over humanity's indeterminate pursuit of pleasure:

> O fools, boats without oars borne on the flood of passion,
> Forgetting utterly all the dignity of man, the pride of the only self-commanding animal,
> That captains his own soul and controls even
> Fate, for a space. The only animal that turns means to an end. "What end? Oh, but what end?"
> It cried under his mind, "Increase the city? Subdue the earth? Breed slaves and cattle, and one's own
> Off-shots, fed and secure? Ah fruitless-fruitless
> Generations forever and ever….For pleasure" – he spat on the earth – "the slight collectible pleasure
> Surplus to pain?"…

> "The generations," he thought suddenly, "aspire. They better; they climb;
> as I
> Am better than this weak suggestible woman my mother. Had I forgotten
> a moment the end
> Of Being? To increase the power, collectedness and dignity of man. – A
> more collected and dignified
> Creature," he groaned, "to die and stink."
> ("The Humanist Tragedy" *CP I*: 381)

Alternately, this section rises and falls with its stance towards humanity's existence; men should be pulling oars to a point, but for the purpose of power and dignity over all else on Earth, when men decay like all else? The internal thoughts of Pentheus churn over the futility of living a purpose, yet the king still tries to convince himself that there are great, inherent virtues that create purpose. The unconscious, intuitive aspect of his mind pulls at him, crying under his conscious mind, as he asks to what end humanity strives; the seemingly despairing conclusion is that it is all "fruitless" and intended for "pleasure." He then consciously tries to rationalize humanity's "progress," similar to Ahab's rationalizations as he talks with both Starbuck and Pip. There is a purpose, and that is self-improvement. He bases his idea of purpose, though, upon being better than his mother, symbolic of the anthropocentric world: his ideal of betterment relates only to other humans not to the greatness of the universe. This end of pleasure and self-improvement through an inverted cultural system pushes Pentheus towards his tragic act of intervening with the Dionysian gatherers: he is symbolically frustrating the will of other men – directly contradicting Jeffers's thoughts in *The Double-Axe's* preface where Jeffers sees humans as having excess energies turned into war. Jeffers uses Pentheus as a symbol of humanity's, as he views it, errant anthropocentric ways.

Instead of focusing on the inversion of humanity that Jeffers does, Melville constructs a monomaniac Ahab as a symbol to warn against humans challenging Nature.

In doing so he also, like Jeffers, displaces humans' centrality; his angle suggests how humanity is not greater than or in control of Nature. Ahab, pursuing the whale, voices his own dichotomy of similar forces as Pentheus: he oscillates between questioning his lifelong whaling career and ravenously hunting Moby Dick (Melville "The Symphony" 404-7). For all his knowledge of the dangers of the sea and whaling on it, Ahab madly and vengefully rushes upon this one white whale without recognizing his own means bringing him his end – he is not playing his part as a conscious human, as Jeffers would see it.

Without quite the "dignity" of Pentheus but certainly with the gusto, Ahab gives an emotional outpouring to Starbuck just before the encounter with Moby Dick. Melville's construction for the frantic passage, with all its exclamations and rhetorical questions, reflects the emotional struggle of Pentheus's monologue; neither man can easily let go of his importance among other humans. In both passages humanity's self-bestowed importance is not rational when deeply considered. In this particular section, Ahab goes through his late-life crisis, wailing to Starbuck: "Forty years of continual whaling! forty years of privation, and peril, and storm-time! forty years on the pitiless sea! for forty years has Ahab forsaken the peaceful land, for forty years to make war on the horrors of the deep!" (Melville 405). The captain ends answering why he has done his job for forty years: he means "to make war on the horrors of the deep," which is another way of saying making war on Nature. This becomes Ahab's end, the source of his tragic tale, and a vain aim in the minds of Melville, Jeffers, and even Emerson, as the latter sees Nature as the word of God.

Is making war on Nature much different than subduing the Earth, as Pentheus proposes for one of humanity's ends? It does not appear to be. With Ahab continuing to stumble over thoughts of his wife and child, then jumping back to forty years of whaling, he lets out with a series of questions: "Why this strife of the chase? why weary, and palsy the arm at the oar, and the iron, and the lance? how the richer or better is Ahab now?" (406). The chase may be directly referring to the whale, yet, like the cliché of men living the rat race, it could generally point to a human's pursuit of pleasure, a notion upon which Pentheus touches: the irony being that the harder one chases to directly increase pleasures, the more pain will be inflicted upon the body through its exertions – the mental pain is apparent by the mere idea of the speech: he is questioning his life! Ahab's troubles stem from his monomania, or thinking himself central to the world, and his monomania blinds the conclusions he is drawing in this section, that his hunting may be for naught; ignoring his conclusions and indulging in his blind passion to challenge Nature, as symbolized by the white whale, lead to his insanity: Melville, like Jeffers and Emerson, debases the self-indulged human.

Though Ahab states the costs of his profession, feeling "faint, bowed, and humped, as though [he] were Adam, staggering beneath the piled centuries since Paradise," he still finds he must hunt Moby Dick, the source of his tragedy (Melville 406). Referencing Adam correlates Adam's sin to Ahab's chase – both Adam and Ahab commit unnecessary acts that carry the weight, for them, of obligation. Ahab's pursuit results in his death and the crew's: Melville symbolically represents how one human with enough desire affects everyone's life, and this desire stems from a human tragically feeling himself too important in Ahab's case whereas Adam just was important, as the

first human. Similarly, Jeffers's Cawdor lusts over Fera, and the result is a self-contained family being dismantled, or in Pentheus's case the city of Thebes falls apart. Both writers realize the danger in one person submitting to another's will, which relates to humanity's interdependence. Cawdor controls his family in his canyon, while not controlling his own emotions; the dependence others have on him results in their detriment. Similarly, Ahab's decision to continue the chase for his personal fulfillments – since the *Pequod's* journey already had produced financially in terms of its hold being full of oil – means that the crew must as well, resulting in their deaths. The tragic characters symbolize the error in humanity's inversion and feeling of self-importance.

Perspective

Unlike the rest of his mates, the storyteller lives in Moby-Dick. Ishmael living may also be Melville making a subtle point (a point other than, someone must tell the story): the thinking human who can step outside of humanity's self-involved world, if only briefly, gives himself a chance to avert disaster. Ishmael points out that he is "given to unseasonable meditativeness," of which Jeffers's old man in "The Inhumanist" may be also guilty (135). Like King Pentheus's messenger who tells of the King's mother's actions, Ishmael guards himself by becoming involved in the least way possible.[12] For Jeffers's own life, writing poetry on the isolated coast, it appears he tries to live – as much as possible – in this manner; it is not that he can remain independent, but that he tries to interact only out of necessity, with which principle Emerson agrees. Ishmael,

[12] Also look to "The Double-Axe: II. The Inhumanist" where the Old Man explicitly states this same idea, especially in regard to his lifestyle and the poem's conclusion as he watches the horizon during nuclear holocaust.

storming through the town streets, realizes he must go to sea, even though that means an intimacy with other men deeper than what he appears to have on land; however, importantly, his impact on the narrative as an actionable character becomes less and less as the story progresses. Only when necessary does Ishmael appear to advance the narrative, but otherwise he is "a presence, a visionary activity, rather than a man" (Feidelson 83). Though Jeffers often fulfills this criterion in his own poetry by simply having an omniscient speaker, he does utilize the "I" perspective at timely points, inserting himself (or his thoughts) into the poetry ("Tamar," "Roan Stallion,"[13] "Women at Point Sur," "Cawdor," etc.). Feidelson notes how Melville executes this perspective and why, which correlates with Jeffers's use of the "I" perspective:

> It is Melville's own voice that utters the passage on the heroic stature of Ahab. This apparent violation of narrative standpoint is really a natural consequence of the symbolic method of *Moby-Dick*. The distinction between the author and his alter ego is submerged in their common function as the voyaging mind. In fact, the whole book, though cast in the form of historical narrative, tends to the condition of drama, in the sense that it is a presentation, like Ishmael's vision of the whale processions, in which both Melville and Ishmael lose themselves. The frequent references to drama and the actual use of dramatic form in a number of chapters reflect the visionary status of the entire action. (83-84)

[13] "Humanity is the start of the race; I say/ Humanity is the mould to break away from, the crust to break through, the coal to break into fire,/ The atom to be split" ("Roan Stallion" *CP I*: 189).

With Jeffers the narrative form also includes dramatic elements; his numbered sections move from action to reflection, verse to chorus. In the choral sections, Jeffers's added voice increases symbolism, as Melville and/or Ishmael's interjections in the action do. "Cawdor," in one sweeping inference, can be thought of as symbolizing humanity's way of approaching death. Cawdor, having secured his independence and thus his own sort of power, feels, nonetheless, moved by his desires to conquer more, specifically a young woman, before he dies; this is tragic and noted above as tragic to Melville too. In the verse sections, the drama moves as the older man loses control of his lust and succumbs to the younger – a girl paradoxically positioned at his mercy, while capable of controlling him, a symbol of generational change.[14] The choral scenes of "Cawdor" picture and comment upon three different deaths, two of men, one old, the other young, and an eagle's, Jeffers's symbol of fierce consciousness, a penultimate strength.[15] Each death scene notes the physical effects upon the dead body, a reference to Jeffers's Emersonian examination of Nature.

The language and imagery are fantastic in themselves, but the more appealing description, or relation, concerns itself with the state of consciousness the self/soul goes through as the body begins decomposition, a metaphysical commentary from Jeffers. The narrative deals with the living world's approach towards old age; the choral sections of super-speaker/"I" perspective focus on the dead world's approach towards finality. Both the events interrelate, with the narrative informing the metaphysical conclusions of the choral sections: no person can affirm the after-death experience, so the super-speaker

[14] Auguste Rodin has a sculpture imaging this theme at the Legion of Honor in San Francisco, CA.
[15] See "Rock and Hawk" for the image of the predatory bird.

intuits his, as Feidelson contends with Melville's discussion of Ahab – though Ishmael's irony often overshadows "Melville's own voice." The intuitive conclusions alter the perspective of the standard speakers in Jeffers's work by strongly asserting metaphysical opinion as fact rather than smoothly developing the plot. Melville, in contrast, weakens his interjections with the ambivalence of Ishmael's sarcasm. A reader's response to each writer's metaphysical viewpoint emanates and diverges from this difference, even as each writer utilizes tragic characters and personal voices to transmit metaphysical thoughts. Melville reaches to the metaphysical level only to have Ishmael make light of the profundity, while Jeffers brazenly asserts his thoughts amidst the drama.

The use of tragic drama, the combination of symbolism in tragedy and perspective, correlates in two ways for Jeffers and Melville. By utilizing characters' decisions and resulting movements, a moral can be drawn,[16] which, poetically rendered, opens itself up for interpretation. This moralizing allows for the second point of relation between the two: extra-narrative commentary brings out symbolic significance in the drama. This type of interference in narrative directs a reader, but by its very symbolic nature allows for great play in readers' conclusions. *Moby-Dick* becomes so much to so many precisely becomes of its "voyaging"; it is only how far and to what level the reader follows that determines the interpretation. Poetry becomes poetry, in one sense, when it allows for varying levels of penetration, or as Jeffers describes:

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[16] Jeffers may use the term "warning" instead of "moral" (which he actual rails against in "Poetry, Gongorism, and a Thousand Years"), as in: "There was a time when human sacrifice was needed to save people…Or an imagined victim in a story, suffering things we all feel liable to but hope to escape. Wasn't this one of the perhaps conscious function of Greek tragedy?...[W]e endow a person in a story with a certain excess of thought or passion and see what their logic leads to, and are thus perhaps *warned* (italics added) ourselves, so he suffers instead of us" (*SL* 196).

> I think it is the business of the writer of poetry, not to express his own gospel, but to present images, emotions, ideas, and let the reader find his good in them if he can. Not to form a way of thought but perhaps to activate thoughts. So that I feel no impulse to disengage my own meaning…from the web of verses, and even wish not to, in order to keep an innocence of mind on my own account. Not to become too self-conscious about my meanings. There may be symbolism in my verses, but I shouldn't want to degenerate into allegory. (*SL* 208-9)

By presenting the image of the tragic hero, while laying out ideas surrounding the drama, Jeffers does what he says a poet should, though he may, at times, interfere when he uses his super-narrative voice ("Tamar," "Roan Stallion," "Women at Point Sur," "Cawdor," etc). Evaluating *Moby-Dick* by Jeffers's "business of the writer" reveals a similarity in construction with Jeffers's verse. The access of the reader determines if the literature will become useful in the Emersonian sense of the point outside the hodiernal circle. When Emerson says that "each speaker…emancipates us from the oppression of the last speaker to oppress us with the greatness and exclusiveness of his own thought, then yields us to another redeemer," he seems to imply what Jeffers is ("Circles" 256-7); the influence of the writing extends thought beyond the last moment, initially weighting the mind to the image, action, thought, etc. of the poem, but this weighting strengthens the mind to move beyond the norm and "lift" heavier ideas. When both Melville and Jeffers introduce the "I" perspective into their works, which is not to say pushing a conclusion on a reader, they are providing a circle within the initial circle their work is, so readers may have another point/perspective by which to decipher messages; the reader may reach new

levels or find richer meaning in the texts then. But if these two writers' metaphysics, and even an element of style, share so much in common, why then does Melville's *Moby-Dick* often escape the misanthropic charge that Jeffers's poetry frequently receives?

Chapter 2:
Jeffers ← Misanthrope; Melville ≠ Misanthrope: Humor as a Reason for Disparate Receptions

> Melville: I read Moby Dick aloud to my boys a few years ago and was much impressed. There is greatness in it; there was also much that I resented – the tiresome humor that spoils too much American work.
> Robinson Jeffers in a letter responding to Frederic Ives Carpenter, November 1933

In "Poetry, Gongorism, and a Thousand Years," Robinson Jeffers describes his idea of greatness in poetry. A poet should be able to express his creation in terms that will be understood in a millennium. As a poet he aspires to greatness with his tragic narratives and direct, ascetic shorter poems, constructing a philosophy grounded in observation of the natural world. This greatness relates to a gravity of sorts that draws readers outside of the cultural context of the immediate time (or the hodiernal circle in Emerson's terms) because its content deals with "[p]ermanent things, or things forever renewed, like the grass and human passions," not a passing concern like Elian Gonzalez (some readers of this may say, "Who?") (*SP* 728).

In Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*, Jeffers observes his idea of greatness (implying that the criteria for greatness in "Gongorism" extends beyond genre). It is apparent why when juxtaposing his writing (which presumably intends to fulfill his criteria for a lasting poetry) with passages of *Moby-Dick* that focus on the "permanent things" of existence; it is also easy to notice the difference in tone between the two writers when touching on the "permanent things," and thus Jeffers's issue with Melville's humor, which largely resides in Ishmael's sardonic tone. Often Jeffers's austere and highly symbolical poetry deals with humanity's place in the universe and what God and God's role is. These are, in Jeffers's view, permanent themes to be significant for readers 1000 years from now: the way in which a writer pursues the matters influences the text's 1000+ year survival.

Jeffers writes with directness about these themes; Melville chooses humor, redirecting a reader's attention from the serious, tedious nature of the subjects.

Examining the two persons' writings in concert produces a confluence in the metaphysical realm, as has been shown in chapter one with their usages of symbolism and perspectives. The executions diverge as Melville hedges with sarcasm when the poetry of Jeffers fully commits itself to the ideas propounded in the verse. By explicating the passages of corresponding metaphysical opinion and emphasizing Melville's use of humor within those passages, one may understand how Melville averts the misanthropic charge that Jeffers's poetry receives and also recognize the inaccuracy of the misanthropic label on Jeffers's metaphysical philosophy.

* * *

> "[T]hat ha, ha's the final consequence. Why so? Because a laugh's the wisest, easiest answer to all that's queer; and come what will, one's comfort's always left – that unfailing comfort is, it's all predestined," says Stubb.
> (Melville 145)

And so Stubb voices, with his cozy humor, a sentiment Melville frequently capitulates to in *Moby-Dick*: things cannot be helped – it's as they were destined to be. To have a laugh at the difficult circumstances of life is "easiest," rather than to confront the difficulties directly, like, say, Jeffers's poetry. Direct confrontation is harder for "folks" to deal with and often causes them to react with squeamish aversion. The thorny theme of fate, or predestination, versus freewill mixed with random chance courses through Melville's novel. The sardonic voices surrounding the queries prevent any position from being dominant or direct; the closest a reader may find to a definitive

position comes from Stubb in the passage above, but it is hard to take a character like him seriously. As Flask questions him, "Now do you mean what you say, and have been saying all along, Stubb?" To which Stubb responds, "Mean or not mean, here we are at the ship" (Melville 261). The exchange demonstrates the uncertainty in ascertaining the true opinion of any metaphysical discussion in *Moby-Dick*; the conversation is a symbol, connoting that whatever passes, whatever may be underneath the surface of the story, there are no direct statements and certainly nothing of allegory. Therefore Melville's metaphysical viewpoint cannot be pinned down, and he cannot be deemed a misanthrope even if close readings show that his novel shares much in common with Jeffers's "misanthropic" Inhumanism.

Moby-Dick has been read in myriad ways, and among those readings proposed, Ishmael is pursuing one of the great questions of humanity: "Is there Providence, free-will, or chance?" (Canaday). Ishmael declares in "Loomings" that the "grand programme of Providence" and "the invisible police officer the Fates" constructed his story long ago, though he continues reevaluating the issue throughout his tale (Melville 22). Due to the frequency of the theme's appearance, one can deduce its relative importance to the novel, yet satire often surrounds the theme's expression. Jeffers, on the other hand, trusts in science, and his writings evince the influence of the discipline. His use of tragedy, at the same time, suggests an attraction to Fate. His trust in science, though, places the circumstances of tragedy within the sphere of natural occurrence, appearing as chance or fate only until discovering the reason(s) for the events (which may be never). The difference between the two opinions is not much other than the spin put on them: Melville jokes about a human's limited abilities to decipher events of his life, while

Jeffers remarks that a human may consciously grasp some clue of a matter, but its limited abilities prevent its understanding of any "grand programme," as Ishmael might say. The latter point may be bleak for those readers inclined to consider Jeffers's view(s) misanthropic.

Even so, what does the theme of Fate matter to a discussion about whether one's metaphysical philosophy is misanthropic or if another shrouds his similar views in jest? It can work in two ways that may seem to create more ambivalence: 1) fate over freewill, or choice, suggests that humans are not powerful so not central to the universe/existence; or 2) a higher being constructs or predetermines the course of humans' lives, so that gives humanity a central role in existence since a higher being pays enough attention to construct a story. For Jeffers this dichotomy resolves itself in his clear statement of Inhumanism, which lessens humanity's importance and relies on a Nature based on science.[17] Within Melville's metaphysical scheme choice #1 is more appropriate: Ahab's quest against the symbol of Nature, the whale, is a failure (one strike against an anthropocentric view), and the closing of the novel shows "the great shroud of the sea roll[ing] on as it rolled five thousand years ago," connoting the preeminence of Nature over humanity. Jeffers, too, uses the ocean as signifier to redirect the focus away from humanity: "This huge, inhuman, remote, unruled, this ocean will show us/ The inhuman road" ("The Torch-Bearers' Race" ll. 17-8, *CP I*: 99). If humanity holds a higher place in the cosmos, it does not seem fitting that its time would be so short, a mere "five thousand

[17] Though section IV of "The Inhumanist" uses a bit of humor in describing the fates of Franklin D. Roosevelt and Adolf Hitler, casting a shade of doubt on Jeffers's viewpoint of Fate as more than a symbolic tool of literature. However, the support in such direct statements as in the preface of *The Double Axe* outweighs the poke in section IV.

years" of record, or, more importantly, that its existence does not impact the sea, a symbol of Nature for Melville and Jeffers.

Furthering this reading of Melville and highly exhibiting the overt sarcasm is Ishmael's description of his story aboard the *Pequod*:

> It came as a sort of brief interlude and solo between more extensive performances. I [Ishmael] take it that this part of the bill must have run something like this:
>
> *'Grand Contested Election for the Presidency of the United States.*
> 'WHALING VOYAGE BY ONE ISHMAEL.
> 'BLOODY BATTLE IN AFFGHANISTAN'. (22)

The use of hedging phrases, such as "as a sort of," "I take it," and "like this," limits the authority of Ishmael's voice; limiting the authority sheds doubt on the sincerity of Ishmael's belief in Providence. One also sees the sarcasm in describing the election as "grand" when later observing Ishmael's reverence to the "The Grand Armada" of whales in chapter 87. With a reference to and play on the once grand armada of Spain, the chapter devalues the degree of importance humanity has on the Earth; the whales are superior to man-made ships in these descriptions. With this information in hindsight, one can see that Ishmael downplays the actual importance of these altogether human events, which frame his own minor story. But without carefully reading *Moby-Dick* and reconsidering earlier sections against the whole work, one can miss the way in which Ishmael mocks humanity's inverted struggles, as they mean little to the whole of existence. The gentle humor clouds the reader's view of the judgments Melville makes, especially those finding parallels to Jeffers's existential notions, which receive scrutiny by critics who consider him a misanthrope.

Chief among the reasons for the dismissive condemnation of Jeffers as a misanthrope is his directive to turn away from man. Though his narratives enter into human lives through tragic events, generally the denouement of his poems, long or short, is to shift emphasis to the beauty surrounding humanity. Often his poems actions attack the anthropocentric, stressing the error, as he see it, in predominantly focusing on human beings and their constructs in the world. Some, such as Lee Zimmerman, read this as only expressing "disdain for humans," and they miss the admiration Jeffers has for humans when not being self-involved (651). "A flight of pelicans/ Is nothing lovelier to look at" (ll. 18-9) when humans go "about their business among the equally/ Earnest elements of nature" (ll.22-3), he writes in "Boats in a Fog" (*CP I* : 110). Humans have the potential for beauty as any bird, which Jeffers reverences. He places humanity "equally" within nature, but as long as humans act in earnestness. And though a great deal of disdain may be present, the poetry does not blindly hate humanity, as a misanthrope would. As much as Jeffers's Inhumanist voices his displeasure for humanity's ways (i.e., " 'They'd shit on the morning star/ If they could reach it'" – a rare bit of humor at that ["The Inhumanist" *CP III*: 260]), he elicits sympathy for both his daughter and the terrified man whom he twice saves (though he certainly voices a distaste for the latter too). The Inhumanist even refers to Copernicus and Darwin with respect, as their studies support the dislocation of humanity from a central role in the universe and the world, using in earnest their (greatest) human faculty, thought.

It is in poems like "The Coast-Road" where critics most often attack and dismiss Jeffers as a misanthrope. The poet seems scathing mad when describing "progress" humanity is making when building a coastal road, becoming more self-involved in the

process, and as stressed, he wants humanity to do the opposite, to turn outward to face the beauty of Nature and only interact with other humans out of earnest necessity. In turning outward, Jeffers trusts that people will understand their role in the cosmos, which is not the all-important part of creation, but a conscious part. Critics interpret his hatred of the acts of humans for hatred of the actors. If the critics would look to figures like Cawdor, they could see the qualities, independent, "self-armored," strong, "never beguiled," that Jeffers's admires ("Cawdor" *CP I*: 417); they would also see the qualities he despises in humans. Depending upon others weakens Cawdor; his desire for Fera clouds his judgment, leading to the tragic act of killing his son. The interplay between the good and the bad qualities of the character shows the reader Jeffers's ideal human; even having an ideal dismisses the misanthropic notion of his poetry because it places expectation upon something, implying the potential for value. Knowing Jeffers's larger vision of humanity, rather than isolating a particular passage of poem that is only one detail in his metaphysics, allows a reader to understand the difference from Jeffers hating the act of a human(s) versus hating humanity as a whole, similar to the way in which *Moby-Dick's* early symbolism may be lost on a reader who does not consider the rest of the text against it.

Ishmael, as observer and voyager, appropriately represents a man turning outward from humanity in the mold of Jeffers's ideal human. In the first paragraph, Ishmael thinks, "it requires a strong moral principle to prevent [him] from deliberately stepping into the street, and methodically knocking people's hats off" (Melville 18). The hat represents fashion, an anthropocentric concern. His "moral principle," a unique human faculty that Jeffers champions, makes him turn away from his ire toward other humans

and instead to the sea. This image sets the tone of the novel. Humor overshadows the implications of what Melville, through Ishmael, is saying: in a major way, he is criticizing humanity's self-concerned ways. Who has the most stylish hat (even as modern people look back at the time and find the hats so similar to prevent distinguishing) annoys Melville enough to write a novel about voyaging outward from societal concerns into the timeless element of the sea, chasing the timeless leviathan of the sea, even as his interjecting musings temper his societal attacks.

Jeffers does not temper his societal criticism, directly attacking certain human practices in his shorter poems and using symbolism (e.g., incest in "Tamar") and sensational action (e.g., Barclay's rape of his daughter) in his longer poems to do so. Without the temperance of societal critique, Jeffers's readers may feel threatened; thus, they counterattack or try to dismiss his philosophy of Inhumanism or even his poetry almost altogether (saying he is just a bitter old man who hates other people).[18] Melville avoids attacks with Ishmael's humorous chiding of human customs; then he places Ishmael off to sea away from the frivolous city mores; while out to sea Ishmael can describe the essential aspects of humans staying afloat and alive on a ship. It is also important to note that, as humans, Ishmael and the other men also take in the harsh beauty of the natural environment.[19]

The approach to the violent beauty in/of Nature further highlights the way in which a reader can delineate Melville and Jeffers's approach: Jeffers's descriptions instill

[18] Yvor Winters was famous for lambasting Jeffers's poetry, specifically because of his symbolic use of incest (Carpenter 95).

[19] As Dr. Rodier has also pointed out, creating Ishmael also affirms/creates the possibility of such alternative responses – deleting those options has other effects.

an uneasiness that Melville's humor softens. An untitled poem written in the last ten years of Jeffers's life embodies his larger view of existence:

> So we scream and laugh, clamorous animals
> Born howling to die groaning: the old stones in the dooryard
> Prefer silence: but those and all things have their own awareness,
> As the cells of a man have; they feel and feed and influence each other,
> each unto all,
> Like the cells of a man's body making one being,
> They make one being, one consciousness, one life, one God.
> (*SP* 691)

Humanity exists between the interchange of the painful "scream" and the joyous "laugh." The simile about the cells of the body relates that each object in the universe is a part of the greater God and that humans are "animals," not anything greater. Every thing has a role, and often the role calls for suffering. A human who feels himself important to God may take offense by the requisite suffering – Ahab's monomania concerning the whale stems from that sort of anthropocentric thinking. But understanding that every individual thing is a part of the living God, and that every part of God is subject to pain, implies that God is a self-torturer, which helps Jeffers cope with being a suffering creature himself. Emerson's interpretation of Nature could not reach to such a level because the things of Nature for him are words for humans; Nature only serves an individual human's journey to the "me." Jeffers and Melville already observe humans as a part of the whole, and their writings imply that the rest of the whole shows no favoritism for humanity.

Recapturing the idea that "without strain there is nothing," Jeffers explicitly elaborates upon this implication in a letter with an if-then statement: "If God is all, [then] he must be suffering," and following logically, "since an unreckoned (sic) part of the universe is always suffering" (Jeffers *SL*: 240). God's suffering must be self-inflicted, for he is all, which means there is no one outside him to inflict it. Jeffers's narratives

provide "imagine[d] victims/ Lest [his own] flesh be chosen the agonist" ("Apology for Bad Dreams" *CP I*: 209); these imagined victims serve as symbols of the brutish reality of suffering existence. Though Melville does not overtly treat this idea of God's self-inflicted suffering, Ishmael does find that "the universal thump is passed round," which implies an amount of suffering to each part of creation (Melville 21). The jovial quality of the expression eases the notion upon the reader. A passive reader may miss the harsh implications of Ishmael's comment; even a passive one would not likely miss Jeffers's.

A symbol, for Melville, of what delivers the "thump" is the whale's tail (please excuse the rhyme). Melville devotes Chapter 86 to its description. Though much of the chapter takes an earnest tone, the opening sentence is a joke: "Other poets have warbled praises of the soft eye of the antelope," Ishmael says, but "less celestial, I celebrate a tail" (293). By opening with comedy, Ishmael moderates the solemnity of the tail's symbolic connotation. The whale, as icon of existence, uses its tail for "[f]ive great motions," and description of each motion's use follows (Melville 294). As with Jeffers's conception of a violent and beautiful Nature, the tail's strength has "appalling beauty…[and r]eal strength…often bestows" beauty (Melville 294). Figuring the whale as existential symbol and the tail as its force of motion confers the aspect of universal flux upon the tail. The flux is the strain of Nature that allows for existence to continue, and the end of existence, for Jeffers, is beauty, as it is what God wants.[20]

[20] Melville never directly opines what God, or the white whale, wants. Maybe the white whale's aggressive actions towards the whalers who (attempt to) harm him implies that Melville sees God as applying some version of the Golden Rule: 'if you mess with me, I'm going to mess with you.'

While Melville does not propose an end of existence, Jeffers sees the two aspects of God, flux and consciousness, as contributing to His end; the latter being, dually, a human's gift of consideration and bane that pulls a human out of the flux, and humanity helps comprise the conscious aspect of God (Hunt). Ishmael notes that "some significance lurks in all things," which consciousness allows a human to apprehend, so the tail's significance is its motion, which manifests itself in appalling beauty (Melville 331). In "At the Birth of an Age," Jeffers writes the "vision of the self-hanged God: … If I [God] were quiet and emptied myself of pain, breaking these bonds,/ Healing these wounds[, there would be nothing]: without strain there is nothing" (*SP* 506,). Jeffers envisions existence as God "tortur[ing him]elf/ To discover [him]self," and what God wants and discovers, as noted in Chapter 1, Section 1 above, is "the enormous and terrible beauty of things" ("Not Solid Earth" *CP IV*: 540). The straining element of Jeffers is equivalent to the symbolic tail, the force of propulsion, the force of continued existence, Ishmael describes. Melville, introducing the symbol with a joke, eases into the idea of God's force of continuum, whereas Jeffers addresses the subject more directly. Exemplified in "this peaking of the whale's flukes," or the appearance of God's influence above the surface, the impact of God on the course of events relates to the tail's movements, which "are gestures," for Ishmael, and they are "wholly inexplicable" (Melville 295, 296).

But Ishmael tells the audience in "The Whiteness of the Whale" that there must be some attempt at explanation: "how can I hope to explain myself here; and yet, in some

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Or an alternative reading of Melville's vision of God's purpose may be in the simple notion of recurrence: in chapters such as "Schools and Schoolmasters," the images of whales circling and cycling dominate.

dim, random way, explain myself I must, else all these chapters might be naught" (Melville 159). The uncertainty Ishmael feels relieves itself with humor through the hedging voice; "in some dim, random way" is a form of self-deprecation, which is a familiar tool for most comedians. Why the chapters might be for naught is due to the symbolic import of a whale that is white. The enigmatic color of the whale relates to the ultimate why of existence, its means and ends; the metaphor is for God's incomprehensibility. But the driving necessity to continue trying to explain means everything to being a human – which is a very Emersonian trait – otherwise existence becomes worthless or "naught." The key is not to become as Ahab, resorting to madness and ignoring his reason, even though his unceasing desire is admirable. Cawdor, when his judgment clouds with desire, relates to Ahab; in the end Cawdor reclaims his control, quiets his desire, and returns to a person more admirable to Jeffers. Cawdor overcomes his desire and atones for the misleadings of desire; "nothing" would have been best, but the Oedipal act of gouging his eyes proves acceptable even as it is "self-indulgen[t]" ("Cawdor" *CP I*: 521). The coolheaded, discerning figure utilizing his faculties for discovery of things outside of humanity fulfills Jeffers's ideal human quality; thus, the Inhumanist voices his liking of Copernicus and Darwin. Ishmael, cataloging the things of the ship and sea, attempting to explain as much as his mind can comprehend, approaches the greatness of an ideal Jeffersian human (though his humor may spoil him a bit for Jeffers).

The greatness Jeffers reads in Melville's *Moby-Dick* appears in the themes like the ideal man. Ishmael is a character of greatness, voyaging through the sea, a symbol of Nature, attempting to uncover the gestures of God manifest in Nature. He probes into the

state of existence; he asks whether all is predestined, whether a human may ultimately decide his own course, or whether chance occurrences rule over creation. His descriptions of men going about their business among the equally earnest elements of nature, as Jeffers says, bestow a great quality of character upon Ishmael ("Boats in a Fog"). The story of *Moby-Dick*, as William Faulkner describes it, of "all against the grave and tragic rhythm of the earth in its most timeless phase: the sea," reflects Jeffers's idea of greatness and much of Jeffers's own poetry (640). The seriousness of the themes becomes corrupted for Jeffers with the interjected humor of Ishmael and characters like Stubb. In his poetry Jeffers chooses to undertake these same themes as Melville but without the (what can be) alleviating humor. Instead he writes with a directness that may disturb some readers; when confronted by these metaphysical themes and blunt opinions of Jeffers's characters, these readers, out of discomfort, may then deem Jeffers's writings misanthropic. Seeing Jeffers and Melville in concert reveals their similar metaphysical opinions. Highlighting the way in which Melville's humor serves as a spoon full of sugar to help the difficult themes go down gives a reader the opportunity to reconsider Jeffers's viewpoint as something other than misanthropic.

Conclusion

However much Ralph Waldo Emerson's and Robinson Jeffers's metaphysics may diverge, Emerson's idea of observing Nature to gain insight into humanity's place greatly influences Jeffers's viewpoint and, consequently, his poetry. Understanding this influence allows a reader to see a similar relationship between Emerson's metaphysics and Herman Melville's metaphysics in *Moby-Dick*. Who Jeffers called a "youthful enthusiasm," and who caused Melville to read for an entire day in the Hawthorne's household, impacts both Jeffers's and Melville's writings (*SL*: 14, Sten 32). In part because of their affinity towards Emerson's writings, the two writers own words share a great deal in terms of vocabulary and ideas. The use of words like "orb" and "multitudinous" to describe natural scenes appears in all three writers' works; similarly, notions of the unknowable infinite of existence course throughout each of the three writers' works. Deriving truth about humanity by looking to Nature is a convergent idea in Emerson's, Jeffers's, and Melville's writings. After each author observes Nature, each author offers a reader a different conclusion about humanity's place, though with Jeffers and Melville not diverging as much.

Emerson differs from Jeffers when Emerson finds that Nature is a human tool to conjoin with the "me": Nature has no value in itself; it is for humanity. Jeffers's "Credo" decisively strikes down the idea that Nature is for humanity or that Nature does not exist outside of humanity. Going further, Jeffers's tragic narratives, like "Cawdor," illustrate the powerlessness humans have when confronted by Nature's inevitable elements. Picturing his characters in the harsh Big Sur area of California, Jeffers has them weakly

entertain desire and suffer corresponding, severe consequences. Symbolic elements, such as incest, represent the dangers of humanity ignoring Nature and overvaluing an anthropocentric world. Instead of separating from Nature, Jeffers feels humans should use their conscious minds to consider the beauty of Nature however harsh it may be. When doing so humans can fulfill their part of God, Jeffers feels; since God is both conscious and ever in flux, humanity's consideration of the beautiful serves as part of God's discovery of himself, as Jeffers says in "The Hanged God's Soliloquy" in "At the Birth of an Age." Whereas Emerson writes of Nature as a tool for a human to identify with the "me," Jeffers writes of humanity's need to observe the beautiful, serving as part of God in doing so.

In a similar manner as Emerson and Jeffers, Melville writes of the way a human can find identity by looking to the symbolic significance of Nature, and his consequent narrative is an exploratory voyage of Ishmael's discoveries of existence. Melville sees Nature as being more severe than Emerson, more closely aligning him with Jeffers's metaphysics. Melville images his view of humanity twice when the castaways, Pip and Ishmael, find themselves alone in the ocean: humans are small and cannot truly command anything, as there is only a great, ultimately unknowable expanse surrounding them. Unlike Pip, though, Ishmael attempts to understand whatever he can, and in that regard a reader can see a similarity with what Emerson and Jeffers find as a positive trait for humans. In contrast, Ahab, similar to Jeffers's Cawdor at his worst, illustrates what happens to the human that challenges Nature, as Ahab is ultimately killed by the whale; Ahab also represents the danger of humans blindly following other humans, as his crew suffers the death at sea as a result of following Ahab; Cawdor's family serves as an

analogy to Ahab's crew after Cawdor's failings break apart his household. The tragedy of both Ahab and Cawdor symbolizes a human's powerlessness when faced with the supremacy of Nature. Jeffers's and Melville's metaphysical viewpoint, here, departs from Emerson's observation of humanity and Nature's relationship.

However, to see Jeffers and Melville in agreement may be difficult because of their contrast in writing styles. While Jeffers writes directly about his metaphysics during his "I" perspective moments, Melville imbues *Moby-Dick* with the ironic humor of Ishmael and the overt laughter of characters like Stubb. Though Melville also "violat[es] narrative standpoint," as Charles Fiedelson Jr. notes, his narrator and other characters convolute readers' opinions about Melville's metaphysical views (83). The poetry of Jeffers works together; even from his narratives and shorter poems to his prose introductions, Jeffers expresses a consistent metaphysical viewpoint. In his most definitive statements, characters like the Inhumanist sternly condemn the inward looking human, asking, instead, for humans to turn outward; it is in the outward things of Nature where humans may discover the other parts of God, helping God to discover himself, as Jeffers voices in an untitled poem.

Moby-Dick's tone does not allow for condemnation of anything – at least not seriously; thus, an anthropocentric reader does not feel threatened by *Moby-Dick*; the same cannot be said for that same reader encountering Jeffers's writings. Ishmael's comments in "Loomings" about taking hats off others heads seem more funny than critical. Jeffers's criticism and cynicism regarding the progress of a coastal road contains no humor, and readers like Lee Zimmerman find the lines disdainful. If similar readers to Zimmerman find that Jeffers's focus is humanity itself, it is plain to see how

"misanthropic" could be used to describe Jeffers's poetry. The label is an error, though, because the lines direct the criticism at the actions of the humans not the humans themselves. Ishmael implies just as much criticism in his comments about the conventions of the shipping profession, but a joke is never far behind his words.

Even when describing the perils of the whaling industry and the unforgiving aspects of the ocean, Ishmael and Stubb jest. Jeffers rarely does. His constructed images of Nature and humanity's place within it can be brutal at times. However, the reverence he shows for humans acting in earnest dispels any notions of misanthropy. Jeffers finds greatness in *Moby-Dick*, and much of that greatness can be found in Ishmael and the crew working earnestly to live aboard the Pequod. Jeffers view of humanity and his metaphysical philosophy as a whole contains no misanthropy. Melville writes of similar metaphysical ideas in *Moby-Dick*, and readers rarely deem it a work of misanthropy. Understanding the similarity between the two writers' ideas helps a reader reevaluate Jeffers's poetry.

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