The Power of Being:
The Multiplicity of Life in Herman Melville’s
*Moby-Dick*

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摘要

本論文以梅爾維爾的《白鯨記》文本為研究中心，探索德希達理論中的存有力量；依海德格所定義的存在觀點，闡明《白鯨記》中生命的多元性。此處界定海德格式的存在論述，是為了建立出：自我的存在如何在生命進程中，辨識出己之存在的在場與存有之間，所共同享有與不同擁有的特性。

論文總共分四章，在導論與第一章中，闡明文學行為（閱讀與寫作），如何產生虛擬現實及真實現實。進一步以虛擬現實中角色以實瑪利的在場，於讀者閱讀時產生我即是彼的想像，在閱讀置換中，讀者領悟到在場的必然，是源於存有的在場與不在場。此時，作者梅爾維爾的敘事形式，使得作者的地位與存有的地位產生平行，作者書寫的自我指涉，與德希達文學理論中的大書產生關連性。

第二章中，採用傅柯的理論，討論《白鯨記》中亞哈船長的瘋狂是如何建構出其權力，亞哈的權力主要源自其對於主體性的追尋。第三章中，採用薩伊德的美國帝國主義理論，來探討《白鯨記》中白鯨以及皮考克船的文學隱喻。此一文學隱喻可以視為政治方面的法西斯主義以及美國帝國主義的縮影；同時探討了捕鯨船建立的權力空間是全球化的標誌，也探討了政治權力與文化權力的關聯性。

第四章中，採用阿岡本的理論探討在《白鯨記》中因例外狀態的建構而產生的裸命，使用在誓約形成法之力量下的裸命，來探討人的主權性其實是關於對解放自我存在的渴望。為了解放書中自我存在的困局，必須要回到文學行為中的讀者解讀。另外採用阿岡本的彌賽亞議題來創建閱讀中的彌賽亞時間，當彌賽亞時間在文學行為完成時出現，則產生了當下的時空。當下的時空完成了存有為主體性的生命，此一生命便是合一的生命，在文學行為中的虛擬現實與真實現實的相遇，產出了時間的意義性—成為存有。

關鍵詞：存有、在場、生命、權力、瘋狂、彌賽亞時間
Abstract

My thesis aims to take Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick* to explore Jacques
Derrida’s theory to elucidate the power of Being. I take Martin Heidegger’s definition
of the notion of Dasein to demonstrate the relevance of “presence,” which I use in my
thesis to illustrate the multiplicity of life in *Moby-Dick*. I take Heidegger’s assertion
on presence to construct the idea of self-presence and further reveal how the features
of self-presence are distinguished from and related to those of Being.

The thesis consists of four chapters. In the Introduction and Chapter 1, I illustrate
how the literary act (reading and writing) generates a virtual reality in the reader that
exists concurrently with the reader’s actual reality in life. I further take Ishmael’s
presence in the virtual reality to expound that the reader generates the imaginary life
form of “I am,” the character Ishmael. In the process of replacing the
presence-identity, the reader comes to understand that the necessity of the presence is
derived from the absence and existence of Being. The narrative form that Melville
creates aligns the position of the author to be similar to that of Being. The
self-referential quality that Melville creates in *Moby-Dick* generates a relationship
with the only one book that is mentioned in Derrida’s *Writing and Difference*.

In Chapter 2, I take Michel Foucault’s theory to discuss how the madness of
Captain Ahab constructs his power in *Moby-Dick*. Ahab’s power originates from his
searching for subjectivity. In Chapter 3, I use Edward W. Said’s discussion on
American imperialism to illustrate the literary metaphor of Moby Dick and the
Pequod. In the political aspect, the literary metaphor can be viewed as the epitome of
fascism and American imperialism. Concurrently, I explore how the power-space that
the whaling ships construct marks the phenomenon of globalization. I also discuss the
relations with cultural power and political power.
In the fourth chapter, I take Giorgio Agamben’s theory to discuss the bare life, which is generated from the state of exception. I use the power of the law formed by the vow on the Pequod to discuss how the bare life pertains to the sovereignty of mankind. The sovereignty of life generates from the desire to liberate the self-presence. To liberate this predicament in *Moby-Dick*, I elaborate on my interpretation of the literary act. I take Agamben’s messianic issues to create messianic time in reading. This messianic time appears when the literary act has been completed, which generates the time-space of the now. This fulfills the life form that employs the Being of the subject within-life-itself. This is the oneness of life. The virtual reality and actual reality that interact during the literary act give birth to the significance of time as being the Being.

Keywords: Being, presence, life, power, madness, messianic time
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Introduction

Motivations and Backgrounds

Herman Melville (1818-1891) is an American author, whose legendary reputation was established following the publication of his novel, *Moby-Dick* (1851). The basic setting of the novel inherits its literary significance from the *Holy Bible* and shows its literary influence from the works of Shakespeare. Melville’s intention is clearly to follow the tradition of the literary canon to create an American epic.

*Moby-Dick* proves that the life journey of becoming an independent American is ideologically driven by the need to seek out a personal, unique way of life, which is presented as the eagerness to reach the peak of greatness in order to be a successful man. It also presents one of the traditional fantasies of the American hero—that being a hero originates from a man’s life struggles and his accomplishment of being successful as the outcome of his work. In the novel, Melville transforms a commercial whaling journey aboard the Pequod into a group of commutative expectations pertaining to the attainable hero legend. Geographically, the story narrative begins from the land (Nantucket) and ends in the sea (Pacific Ocean), which partially illustrates that the author’s literary intention is to take a grand geographical journey. The setting is designed to fortify the characteristic power of American individuality. In addition, the corresponding soliloquy of Ishmael reveals a singularity state in which a person can experience himself or herself on the margin of life and death.

In other words, Melville creates the protagonists such as Ishmael and Ahab to challenge the traditional thoughts of being an independent man and the manner in which one reaches the state of mental freedom. The real state of being does not mean to be enlightened by knowledge obtained through some rational, cognitive process. Subtly, the author uses *Moby-Dick* as an epic metaphor to express his perceived ideal
of liberation. This type of liberation is based on the political ideology of classical liberalism, yet the genuine sign of being truly liberated is not limited to freedom from economic burden and political manipulation. In this respect, the ambitious work of *Moby-Dick* is Melville’s interpretation of the universal state of man’s life derived from the interaction of socialized power and the inherent power of life.

To clarify the overall structure of *Moby-Dick* in my thesis, Melville’s background must first be introduced. He was born in New York City on August 1 in 1819. He was from a successful merchant family, but their fortune was lost after the sudden death of Melville’s father, Allen, in 1832. Before writing *Moby-Dick*, he worked as a school teacher in Massachusetts from 1837 until 1839. In 1839, Melville became a sailor and finally completed his sea journey in Hawaii in 1842. In 1841, he enlisted aboard the Acushnet, sailing from New York on a whaling voyage, which ended in 1842. As “a child of the American Revolution” and “of the War of 1812” (Parker and Hayford ix), Melville employs his revolutionary American concerns to expound his literary vision of the epic tradition. He adopts the ideas of political power, commercial activity, religious concern, transcultural ponderings, dilemmas of globalization, racism, and philosophical thought to interpret the multiplicity of life and the eagerness of finding the ultimate solution for the fate of humankind.

In *Sound the Whale: Moby Dick as Epic Novel*, Christopher Sten indicates that “many critics have gone on record as calling *Moby-Dick* an epic or acknowledging it has significant ties with the epic tradition” (2), asserting that Melville’s attempt is to show “the powers behind the great spiritual epics of the world are the same powers that propelled its major religious methodologies” (3). Nevertheless, my understanding of *Moby-Dick* departs from Sten’s argument. I argue that Melville wants to use *Moby-Dick* as an epic simile to discuss the states of political power and spiritual
struggle. The book implies that political power actually originates from a cognitive awareness of the spiritual struggle. It especially enacts the danger of misusing political power and the perplexity of acknowledging the unavoidable pain of the programmed physiological recession of one man’s life, in both body and time. I also consider that Melville intends to take the shipwreck of the Pequod as a metaphor to reveal the passage of spiritual growth in the context of individualism. Concurrently, freedom and the importance of individuality are addressed in the book. Based on the background of his own life experiences, Melville knows that the context of a story could be a literary experiment and a metaphor for errors made in the past.

In my thesis, it is not my intention to use *Moby-Dick* to construct any definite conceptual definition of power or life. Modern criticisms and scholars provide a means for literary criticisms to justify and demonstrate some of Melville’s intention in *Moby-Dick*, but these works cannot with all certainty encompass all the literary clues in the context of the original text. Only the author can reveal evidence of his literary ambition for his creation, and only in part. Melville demonstrates a great deal of care about the literary position of his *Moby-Dick* in a letter to Nathanial Hawthorne:

I have written a wicked book, and feel spotless as the lamb. Ineffable socialites are in me. I would sit down and dine with you and all the gods in old Rome’s Pantheon. It is a strange feeling—no hopefulness is in it, no despair. Content—that is it; and irresponsibility; but without licentious inclination. (*Moby-Dick* 545)

Apparently, Melville is serious in his view of *Moby-Dick* as an honest confession of life and literature. The book is partially an account of his personal history, which is evident in both the plot creation and characterization. It seems that he hopes that *Moby-Dick* can break traditional monotheism and transcend the gap between religious
faith and social discipline. This is evident in his desire to celebrate with Hawthorne and “all the gods in old Rome’s Pantheon.” He intends for *Moby-Dick* to explore the possibilities of personal freedom and human relationships, and he is careful to avoid implanting erotic fantasies and events in the book, implying that the literary ideal embedded in this story focuses on the functionalization of delivering power to humankind. Evidently, what Melville mentions to Hawthorne justifies his intention in *Moby-Dick*: it is the will of humankind that creates the conditions necessary for success and dominates the necessity of action. Power generates from the need to take action and infuses its impact in the consequences of those conditions. Nonetheless, Melville worries that the book cannot successfully convey his literary intentions to the reader. Accordingly, he writes to Hawthorne, wishing that at least his friend will understand the vision of the book. This is why he proclaims that *Moby-Dick* is “a wicked book,” yet he is in a state of being content during its creation.

In my opinion, *Moby-Dick* is an ambitious book that expresses the modern Prometheus dilemma. The author creates the legendary character, Captain Ahab, who displays a type of deliberate madness and commits vengeful acts to manipulate the Pequod crew to state his desire to kill Moby Dick. Captain Ahab views Moby Dick as the doomed symbol of terror. According to Ahab’s Christian knowledge, Moby Dick represents the sea monster, the Leviathan, and Ahab himself has the right to fight this beast to regain his reputation as captain and commander of his ship.

By contrast, Ishmael is a figure of spiritual ambition, for he desires to view his survival as God’s providential arrangement. Thus, Ishmael asserts his “going on the whaling voyage” (22) as “part of [a] grand programme of Providence that was drawn up a long time ago” (22). Therefore, Ishmael narrates the shipwreck story to prove that it is the fate of doom “cajoling me into the delusion that it was a choice resulting
from my own unbiased free will and discriminating judgment” (22). Ishmael obviously desires to prove that his survival is a meaningful decision from the Almighty God. He attempts to prove that his life deserves to be preserved after the tragic event that eventually unfolds. In this case, Ishmael intends to apply traditional Christian theology to describe his whaling journey and the meaning of life. The structure of his narrative shows his subtle intention to be the literary symbol of pre-Christ. Ishmael wants his narrative to portray the metaphysical allusion of preparing for the second coming of Christ.

Nevertheless, I do not want to draw on a Christian theological perspective in my thesis. *Moby-Dick* is a creation of Melville, and so biblical material could only be viewed as a form of literary evidence that supports my arguments. Basically, I suggest that Ishmael, Ahab, and other figures in *Moby-Dick* are multiple reflections of the “One” life; this does not pertain to the separated consciousness of one man’s life, but a form of life that is beyond human morality and represents the consensus of being an individual amidst a rapidly changing world. Specifically, the meaning of the “One” life in my thesis argument may approximate the idea of “all the gods in old Rome’s Pantheon.”

However, the idea of the “One” life is not limited to religious meaning. My thesis assumes to be a literary supplement of the perceived idea of presence rather than a judgmental interpretation of any ideology. What Melville truly discusses in the book is the life struggles one ensues in living through suffering and the myths associated with self-identification. This is why my thesis is entitled “The Power of Being: The Multiplicity of Life in Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick*.” I believe that Melville constructs the journey of *Moby-Dick* to inform the reader that life is based on the intertwined implications of the self and other people, and it is essential to
distinguish between individual satisfaction and public well-being. The substrate of life consists of the continual human will to create presence.

Here, I take Martin Heidegger’s notion of “Dasein” in *Being and Time* to address the issue of “presence.” Heidegger asserts that this word means that an entity’s experience of his or her being is beyond logical and formal aspects, because the entity is understanding a developed realization that his being accords to the “presence at hand” (*Being and Time* 26). Heidegger illustrates Dasein as a “moment of vision” that is generated from the instant space-time being of “now”—a temporal within-time-ness phenomenon (*Being and Time* 388). As Heidegger asserts, “Dasein has forgotten itself in its ownmost thrown potentially-of-being” (*Being and Time* 388). I believe that Dasein is a phenomenon of the person who recognizes that the being of himself or herself is distinguishable from that of others because of the passage of time. I consider that Heidegger’s explanation on Dasein is close to my thesis concern on the phenomenon of presence, because I also use “presence” to identify the life state of humankind.

Specifically, I take Michael Inwood’s *A Heidegger Dictionary* to expound the details of “presence” as follows:

The Greek *parousia*, “a being present, presence, arrival”, is compounded from *ousia* and para, ‘beside, by, etc.’. *Pareinai* similarly means “to be [einai] present [para]”. (The form *ousia* stems from the feminine present participle of einai, ousa.) Heidegger held that ousia meant “presence” . . . making-present characterizes Dasein in its being-in-the-world . . . That is why this Dasein . . . always means that is expresses itself, its very own being towards the world-can say “now this, now that”. (*A Heidegger Dictionary* 174-75)
Briefly, Heidegger reckons the significance of “presence” as an independent performance before an entity, which is a scene that determines the state of being. It is a scene shot by the indispensable power from the outer world, and within the time of “now,” the entity receives a vision that focuses itself and appears in space. Therefore, the entity compels itself to feel only itself in the here and now.

For my thesis argument, I want to tackle the concept of “presence” as the figure that is initially formed by the power of free will. In this thesis, free will is the will that a person exercises in taking or cancelling an action. It does not pertain to the overall concept of living consciousness, but the type of will by which a person owns his or her right to make reality remain or change according to his or her determined choice. A person’s choice of the free will is about their concern of wanting their presence of being to be shown in reality or for it not to be revealed in a given situation. My point is that any action must first be shaped in a person’s mind, and it is the decision of that person to involve his or her will that determines whether or not their free will be shown. Even in a literary work, a successful author can make characters show their free will and persona, which are presented as a type of literary performance. For me, reading Moby-Dick requires an understanding that the multiple characters in the structured narrative all belong to the commutative elements. These elements more or less influence the development of the narrative and eventually establish the whole book. Therefore, I propose that it is the power to exercise will to create presence that determines the narrative meaning of the characters’ lives and Ishmael’s only chance for survival.

The will power to create presence puzzles those who do not understand the value of the self and others, but it occasionally reveals genuine hints to them that death is inescapable. Once people realize that their value of life is not defined by the value that
others place upon them, they return to their rationality to face their coming death and deal with the rest of their lifetime by their own free will. Nonetheless, once people are controlled by obsession or deprivation of their freedom by the will of others, they become confined in a state of suffering or madness. Melville emphasizes a type of American-based multiplicity of life in *Moby-Dick*, but almost all the characters—regardless of their statuses—finally end up in the shipwreck, and only Ishmael’s soliloquy exists. Clearly, Melville sets Ishmael as the witness of the whole journey. The shipwreck and story of the Pequod have fundamentally changed the rest of Ishmael’s life; the survivor Ishmael carries the collective memory and endures as a witness to the representative “One” life of the whole narrative.

**Literature Review**

In general, dissertations and essays about *Moby-Dick* focus on the following issues: the ungraspable narrative of the book; Ahab’s satanic blasphemy; Ishmael’s desolate inner world and his relationship with the pagan Queequeg; and specific discussions on Starbuck, Stubb, Pip, Fedallah, Flask, and other members of the Pequod crew. Some topics take Mapple’s sermon on Jonah and the whale, Ishmael’s ponderings on category, and the whiteness of the whale (*Moby Dick*) to illustrate the intertwined phenomena between the developing field of science and nineteenth-century fundamentalist speech on Christology, animality, and the reflective judgment of imperialism.

In *Melville and the Theme of Boredom*, Danial Paliwoda reckons that Melville attempts to deal with the “numbing and deadening consequences of confronting or evading boredom” (Introduction 12). He further asserts that boredom is evidently a cause of evil in *Moby-Dick*. He takes Ishmael and Ahab to prove his assertion:
“Ishmael is not alone in his shocked recognition of boredom’s blackness. Even Ahab experiences bouts of boredom; it appears as if his monomania shields him from it ("Moby-Dick God or the Devil" 108). Apparently, Paliwoda points out that it is a sense of nothingness that causes wrongdoings in Moby-Dick. Nonetheless, I do not purpose that this sense of nothingness is the root of mad urges or evil. In fact, I believe that experiencing the boredom of life is the occasion when a person starts to realize that he or she should change his or her life state. When a person experiences the blankness of boredom that appears in his or her presence, it does not imply that person has become evil. Instead, the blankness of boredom is a clear manifestation signifying that the inner self is at work, in that the person is reconsidering the meaning of his or her life. Boredom means that this individual entity should not be confined by the routine of life. Feeling bored hints that this life entity should take action to break the status quo to find a new way of living or a solution to the problems in his or her own life. It is an inborn sense of responsibility that a man or woman aspires to take action to establish his or her own life, rather than relying on the endlessly unsatisfying unknown while journeying toward the manifestation of his or her devastating being in the blankness of boredom.

To clarify the sense of nothing, I take Sharom Cameron’s The Corporeal Self Allegories of the Body in Melville and Hawthorne as a definitive explanation: “But while ‘nothing’ would seem to be the absence of identity, for Ahab it comes (falsely) to constitute identity, for ‘nothing’ is the one state in which differences are not perceived” (Moby-Dick; 41). Cameron later raises the questions that a man or woman who suffers from the void of meaning in life would intend to change the feeling of nothingness by projecting his or her identity as a way of power control, which inevitably influences the perceptions of other people. The main reason is that the
projector finds a similar feature of in the void feeling from the other man. Therefore, she raises the identity issue to illustrate Melville’s Ahab:

Why am I not identical to the world—that is, why must I be a position to (have to) understand the world from which I differ?

Why am I not identical to myself—that is, made of a single substance, purged of ambivalence and contrary desires, as Ahab tries to purge himself of Pip, or of that aspect of himself which is drawn toward Starbuck rather than Fedallah (the man Pequod’s crew) or as the Pequod’s men purge themselves of femal sexuality? (“Moby-Dick; Or, The Whale” 41).

To be brief, Ahab himself tries to rebuild his identity by influencing others; he wants to establish a new crew for the Pequod according to his own controlling charisma and position of authority. He needs the whole crew to assist him to reap payment for the loss of his leg by killing Moby Dick, and he seeks to exert his power over the crew to achieve this objective, and in doing so cure his mental trauma of nothingness.

Tracing back to Ahab’s mental illness, Moby Dick is the subject that carries Ahab’s anger and the Pequod’s crew’s objectifying passion toward the sea journey. In A Hero’s Journey, William Ellery Sedwick considers that “The White Whale is all evil to Ahab . . . . The White Whale has a tremendous power to do harm. But unless the world is so denatured as to be synonymous with harmful or dangerous, he cannot be called evil. If a man sees evil in him, then it is his own evil which is reflected back at him” (“Moby-Dick in Herman Melville: The Tragedy of Mind” 143).

Here, I must point out that the evil in the story does not generate only from Ahab or Fedallah’s inner world. Instead, it is the whole Pequod crew who form the collective consciousness that is driven to kill the white whale; specifically, it is their evil intent that creates a field of destructive evilness. The reason is that Ahab is only
the captain of the Pequod; the fact is that this position could be easily filled by other crew on the ship. If Starbuck or other exclusives would dare to revolt against Ahab’s order, the narrative tone of the story would be different. Hence, I believe that it is the collective consciousness of evil that results in the tragedy. The evil is rooted in every crew member’s subconscious, for they all want to kill Moby Dick to acquire reputation or material benefit. It seems that Ishmael is the only man who keeps an objective view of the white whale, because he does not view it as a token of evil. Ishmael ponders the white whale as a symbol of natural mystery.

With this context in mind, I return to the relationship among Ishmael, Ahab, and “whiteness”. It should be noticed that it is the pervasive horror and worship toward the “whiteness” that exalt Ahab’s position and power to Ishmael, as Literature, Disaster, and the Enigma of Power: A Reading of ‘Moby-Dick’ argues in its context:

Ishmael’s encounter with whiteness has the essential relation to his encounter with Ahab. Understanding what the riddle of whiteness meanings in Ishmael’s case cannot be separated from understanding the enigma that Ahab is for Ishmael; So powerfully did the whole grim aspect of Ahab affect me, … the barbaric white leg on which he partly stood. (124)

Before encountering Ahab, Ishmael tries to exile himself at sea to escape his own melancholia. Once he sees what he believed to be a scared captain stand erect with his physical wound and psychological pain, he is moved by the captain’s courage of confronting his great suffering in life. For Ishmael, Captain Ahab presents the kind of masculinity that overwhelms the trauma of existing as—or more simply, being—a fragile body. This is why Ishmael subconsciously chooses to become one of Pequod’s members—he requires a dangerous quest to fasten his inner weakness of forsaking the potential meaning found in the act of being an individual. This type of danger is not
about prolonging the coming of death, but about the way of facing it within the
constraints of one person’s limited power. The whaling journey symbolizes Ishmael’s
humane hope of obtaining the will power to deal with the harshness of reality. In other
words, the sea becomes a power-space for the Pequod crew to interact with their inner
evil.

Still, Ishmael’s survival ultimately depends on the lifebuoy that was actually
intended to be a coffin for his bosom friend, Queequeg. As Christopher Sten writes,
Queequeg reworks the countenance of little surrogate god, Yojo, to suit his
inner vision. Neither man’s action sacrilegious because both work out of the
inner necessity of the returning hero . . . . Queequeg is more than the guide
who will show Ishmael the way to the hidden god . . . . He is the god, and
image of that “inexorable self” at the center of every successful hero. A
pagan, savage, and illustrate . . . (14)
Simply, Melville creates Queequeg to purify the civilized arrogance that Ishmael had
acquired before meeting him, and their relationship forms from Ishmael—despite
being a Christian—doubting the conservative doctrine of Queequeg’s faith. After
befriending Queequeg, he quickly accepts Queequeg’s suggestion that Ishmael should
find the whaling ship (even the suggestion originally comes from Yojo, a pagan idol,
and Ishmael accepts Queequeg’s faith in Yojo).

Queequeg is the ideal image of a natural man; he is gifted with specific skills
precisely for hunting whales, and his constitution is strong, as evidenced by him
recovering from a fatal illness. Queequeg’s character represents the traditional epic
hero, because he is healthy, strong, loyal, and determined to kill his target. From this
perspective, Melville intends to illustrate a healthy uncivilized figure to set off
Ishmael’s disillusionment from civilized society. Nonetheless, after boarding the
Pequod, Queequeg becomes a tool for implementing Ahab’s power. The sacrifice of his blood ultimately symbolizes the crew’s oblation to Ahab’s satanic vow. The pagan involves himself in the fight with the spiritual war of satanic desire and the Christian God. His Yojo seems powerless and shows no sign of redeeming him from this whaling voyage. In fact, the wearing away of Queequeg’s physical body completely erodes his natural identity, for his presence on the Pequod is dominated by Ahab’s manipulation and Fedallah’s political power. He maintains his status as a hero in his laboring works, but his life seems to be destroyed after the shipwreck.

In this case, the coffin lifebuoy becomes the last remnant of his heroic act toward the living. It appears that Melville wants to employ the destruction of this heroic pagan to reveal that it is the power of the employer to obtain the real vested interest, rather than the power of the employees. The relation between Queequeg and his contract to the Pequod is a satirical narrative of the modern labor force. Given this context, the question arises as to why Melville employs Ahab as a prefiguration of a Satanist. In T. Walter Herbert, JR’s “Calvinist Earthquake: Moby-Dick and Religious Tradition,” Herbert assumes that “Ahab is paradoxically mad because of his mind struggle to the orthodox descriptions of the ravages of sin” (New Essays on Moby-Dick 129). Herbert considers that “Moby-Dick is a work like the Book of Job, or Augustine’s Confessions . . . in which art and sacred are fused . . . . Melville does not attack traditional ideas about God with the object of replacing them with better ideas; his mission is prophetic, that of calling us to a deeper life” (New Essays on Moby-Dick 113). In this respect, the reader must reconsider Melville’s religious description on Father Mapple’s sermon: “God had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah” (Moby-Dick 49).
According to Herbert, the literary comparison between Mapple’s Jonah and Captain Ahab signifies God attitude toward the plan for humankind’s redemption: “Jonah accepts the whale’s attack as a divine correction; Ahab takes it as an outrageous affront. Jonah yields to the divine assault in terror; Ahab resists it in fury. Jonah moves on to do his Lord’s bidding; Ahab sets out upon an ‘audacious, immitigable, and supernatural revenge’” (New Essays on Moby-Dick 125).

Herbert gives sufficient evidence to define Ahab as a satanic antihero; nevertheless, I hold a different viewpoint on Ahab’s death. The evil of Ahab is not about his anger being focused on killing Moby Dick, but his attitude toward his crew and his ultimate hunting method. I do not consider that, in Moby-Dick, Jonah is the model of God’s only chosen survivor. It should be noted that after the shipwreck, Ishmael is saved and narrates his story, which epitomizes and keeps alive the literary lives of the other Pequod numbers; therefore, Moby-Dick signifies the complicated modern conflict between the inner struggle of men and women and the outer quest for finding a meaningful end for each individual life.

The discussed scholarly works express a literary interpretation of the presence of Ishmael and Ahab. In my thesis, I consider that these works can explore the ideological relations between power and life and can be used in my thesis to formulate a clear discussion on Moby-Dick. I propose that power manipulation and life cognition construct the form of human presence in both body and mind.

**Methodology**

I shall explain why I mainly apply Jacques Derrida’s theory and Michel Foucault’s theoretical findings to explore my research topics: presence, power, and madness. In addition, to expound the life issues in Moby-Dick, I use Edward W. Said’s
work of Giorgio Agamben’s concept on bare life to intensify my standpoint on linking *Moby-Dick* with the idea of the oneness of life. I elaborate on the life issues with political aspects and power theories to present the possibility of the existence of consciousness in Melville’s *Moby-Dick* from my reading interpretation. In my opinion, *Moby-Dick* presents the multiplicity of humanity and philosophical thoughts on human life toward the universal dilemma and the paradox of humanism.

Here, I take Derrida’s arguments to explain the function of literary criticism in the text. Derrida asserts that literary criticism is “structure in every age, in its essence and destiny” (*Writing and Difference* 5). He argues that literary criticism derives its totality and configuration from the text. It is significant that Derrida views literary criticism as a type of ideological structure. When the structure of literary criticism appears, it implies that there exists a possibility of the life state being deconstructed by other causes. According to Derrida, the nature of the structure is to discover its “catastrophic consciousness,” because the structure “is perceived through the incidence of menace, at the moment when imminent danger concentrates our vision on the keystone of an institution, the stone which encapsulates both the possibility and the fragility of its existence” (*Writing and Difference* 6). Once a literary criticism becomes an ideological structure, the act of reading generates a type of power that drives the reader to search for the permutations of multiple interpretations, which projects intertextual reconsiderations onto the original text.

Reading is, according to Derrida, and active process of assembling the meaning of writing. This is what I discuss regarding my reading of *Moby-Dick*. I argue that Ishmael stands for the “keystone” position in the structure of *Moby-Dick*. Without Ishmael, *Moby-Dick* cannot reveal the essence of human isolation or hold the reader to keep an objective literary distance from the whole story structure.
On the other hand, Derrida argues that writing and reading are literary acts. He further explains how a literary act influences life experiences. In *Writing and Difference*, he argues:

One must be separated from oneself in order to be reunited with the blind origin of the work in its darkness. This experience of conversion, which found the literary act (writing or reading), is such that the very words “separation” and “exile,” which always designate the integrity of breaking-off with the world and a making of one’s way within it, cannot directly manifest the experience, they can only indicate it through a metaphor whose genealogy itself would deserve all of our efforts. (Derrida 8)

Derrida explains that the literary act itself is a metaphor for the subconscious world. Because of its feature of “separation” and “exile,” the literary act actually creates an imaginary world in which messages from the literary text are transferred and transformed. His observation reveals that the presence of the characters and the reader are actually being unconsciously positioned in a space of exile. In other words, a literary act should be viewed from two aspects: one is the characters in the text, who consciously present their separated presence with the development of the whole story, and the other belongs to the reader—because of his or her reading, he or she is unconsciously assimilated into the development of the story. The reader’s cognition and imagination are activated by reading. During reading, the reader, in his or her determined position, reads the text in his or her reality, yet the mind of the reader creates a type of virtual reality, which creates a sense of exile. Specifically, the characters in the story make the reader feel as if their presence is floating in exile on the waters, and this is because both the reader and the characters belong to the same
vehicle (the text). The literary act creates a feeling of separation. The main reason is that the story carries both the determined (written) destiny of the characters and the notification from the reader. In this case, reading and writing undergo a similar experience of being separately grouped with certain characters and words. Reading may thus become a type of nihil to the reader, if he or she feels exile and separated from others within his or her own virtual reality. Nevertheless, reading can also become an experience in which the reader can also present the proof of the integrity of the literary act that Derrida mentions, as long as he or she is aware that this virtual reality is projected into actual reality. Here, I must point out that the text itself exists in reality, simply because of the fact that it has been printed. Both the reader and the text exist as a part of existential reality. Once the reader knows it is within actual reality that he or she experiences the virtual reality, he or she can overcome the sense of isolation that is experienced while reading. Because the reader recognizes that his or her feelings of separation and exile are their own temporal creation through the literary act, the reader understands that the integrated reality never leaves him or her during reading. It is the reader’s imagination and notification that subconsciously determine which feelings are experienced during the literary act.

According to Derrida, the reader and the author to experience the literary act as a type of metaphor that guides people through experiencing different feelings through the text. I agree with his viewpoint but go further to state that Derrida deliberately avoids comparing the literary act (as a type of virtual reality) to make relations with the author and the reader. Therefore, it may cause the misconception that the literary act is just an isolated, individual act. In general, I divide the literary act into two parts: one part is Derrida’s type of individual experiences within the integrity of the literary act, the other part is the integrity itself (the whole reality), for it generates the
individual experience of separation and exile. In other words, it is a game of the mind for the reader to allow the literary act to affect his or her feelings of being an entity in virtual reality. This can be quite dangerous; if people experience a breakdown through their own interpretation of a literary act, they may generate an illusion of nihil and even be controlled by their self-created virtual reality. What I aim to achieve in my thesis is to use Derrida’s theory and *Moby-Dick* to illuminate a solution for the negative illusion that can be generated in the literary act. I argue that understanding the literary act presents a virtual reality to the author and the reader, and they should know that what they feel when reading the text is a personal creation of their projected inner interpretation toward reality. Certainly, in my thesis, the whole reality contains both the text and the literary act that the reader and the author experience.

Regarding the issues of madness and power, I use Michael Foucault’s *Madness and Civilization* to explain the literary meaning of madness and its function in *Moby-Dick*. The reason I take Foucault’s viewpoint to discuss madness in my thesis is due to his special argument on the topic:

> What is constitutive is the action that divides madness, and not the science elaborated once this division is made and calm restored. What is originative is the caesura that establishes the distance between reason and non-reason; reason’s subjugation of non-reason, wresting from it its truth as madness, crime or disease, derives explicitly from this point. (Foucault xii)

Foucault illustrates that people generally reckon madness as the opposite side of reason. Accordingly, being mad must imply that a mad person’s human rights have been deprived by others’ seemingly rational judgments. Foucault gives the reader a clear picture to understand the ridicule of only view of madness—as the normative opposite of nonreason. In *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault points out that madness
does not mean being in a state of nonreason. To illustrate his opinion on the aspect comprising reason and madness, Foucault comments:

The man of madness communicates with society only by the intermediary of an equally abstract reason which is order, physical and moral constraint, the anonymous pressure of the group, the requirements of conformity. As for a common language, there is no such thing; or rather, there is no such thing any longer; the constitution of madness as mental illness, at the end of the eighteenth century, affords the evidence of a broken dialogue. (Foucault xii)

From Foucault’s observation, I see a similar situation of madness related to Captain Ahab and Pip in Moby-Dick. Both of these literary figures embody Foucault’s argument of the broken dialogue and the abstract communications toward the outer world. Captain Ahab subconsciously utilizes his madness to ignite the passion of the whole crew to embark on a heroic quest and face destruction without feeling. On the other hand, Pip’s mad dialogue reflects his suffering of having being abandoned by the Pequod. Both Captain Ahab and Pip demonstrate the phenomenon of how people in their madness deal with the reason that exists in the outer world. Moreover, this demonstration of madness is deliberately shown in Madness and Civilization, Foucault states that “The experience of madness was clouded by images of the Fall and the Will of God, of the Beast and the Metamorphosis, and of all the marvelous secrets of Knowledge” (Foucault XIV). Foucault’s description of madness expresses a type of mysterious life experience. It dichotomously covers sacred-profane ideas and challenges the ideology of being humane. In Moby-Dick, madness mysteriously takes over Ahab and Pip’s capacity for taking rational action for their own well-being—both
of them are overwhelmed by fantasy. While Pip’s madness is the result of suffering, Ahab’s madness manifests as a type of dangerous desire that devours his rationality.

Ahab’s madness mostly presents in his power control over the Pequod crew. To expound the power issue, I choose Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* as the major theoretical discussion. I also take Steven Luke’s *Power, A Radical View* to define the concept of power. Notably, Foucault deliberately expresses his argument on the issue of power and its relation with the body, discipline, and punishment. Foucault asserts that “power produces knowledge” (*Discipline and Punish* 27) and further argues that “power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations” (*Discipline and Punish* 27). This means that power inevitably constructs a field that produces knowledge that serves the power-created space, and knowledge that generates more power is then constructed and grown by the power-created space, enabling the existence of knowledge to retain its power. The reason I take the power-knowledge concept is because of its referential meaning to the manner in which Captain Ahab employs his power in *Moby-Dick*. Ahab’s knowledge of being a captain infuses his power with the Pequod, and he uses his knowledge to deepen the power of his personal influence over the crew so that they work and serve his purpose—to kill Moby Dick. In my thesis, I provide further evidence of this power-knowledge concept in *Moby-Dick*.

In addition, power is the tool with which the punishment is delivered. Foucault argues that, historically, punishment has gradually evolved from punishment of the body to that of soul.
The punishment-body relation is not the same as it was in the torture during public executions. The body now serves as an instrument or intermediary: if one intervenes upon it to imprison it, or to make it work, it is in order to deprive the individual of a liberty that is regarded both as a right and as property. (Discipline and Punish 11)

According to Foucault, the body is an intermediary that presents individual liberty. If the body is punished by power, the punishment becomes a strategy that deprives the liberty of a man or woman’s body. Subtlety, the punishment tortures the body and mind from being controlled by the power of others. In Moby-Dick, I use Foucault’s punishment theory to explain how mental punishment drives Ahab mad. I also use this punishment-body relation to expound the negatives of power abuse in Moby-Dick. I explain further the body relation between discipline and punishment from the power aspect presented in the novel. My thesis explores how Ahab governs disciplinary power on the Pequod. Moreover, to explicate the concept of power, I draw on Steven Luke’s Power, A Radical View as a literary assistant for my thesis, in which Luke’s viewpoint on power is adopted to illustrate Ahab’s power employment.

After my discussion on Ishmael’s literary presence, Ahab’s madness, and the power issue, I explore Melville’s intended setting for the two characters. Why does Melville create Captain Ahab and Ishmael to establish such a desolate story? The bleak view constructed by humankind and nature somehow presents a particular American literary impression. Therefore, I discuss the cultural impressions placed upon Americans in the novel. These impressions include political expansion, the ambition for globalized commerce, and the basic nationality of the founding of the ideal America (specifically, the United States of America). I draw on Edward W. Said to elaborate the American impressions in Moby-Dick to focus on the political and
cultural implications of the literary setting. Said’s assertion is used to prove that, from the perspective of that seemingly ideological conflicting Palestinian-American author, the image of Americans implies a dominant sense of political supremacy among people in the country.

... an image of Americans as “a new race of people, independent of the sin-darkened heritage of man, seeking a totally new and original relationship to pure nature as hunters, explorers, pioneers and seekers.” Such imagery keeps recurring in nineteenth-century literature, most memorably in Melville’s *Moby-Dick*, where, as C.L.R. James and V.G. Kiernan have argued from a non-American perspective, Captain Ahab is an allegorical representation of the American world quest; he is obsessed, compelling, unstoppable, completely wrapped up in his own rhetorical justification and his sense of cosmic symbolism.

No one would want to reduce Melville’s great work to a mere literary decoration of events in the real world; besides, Melville himself was very critical of what Ahab was up to as an American. (*Culture and Imperialism* 288)

Said points out that the primitive animacy of accepting a person’s wild nature is a particular American feature. Ahab compares himself with the Supreme Being, whereas his rival is a mere sperm whale. By contrast, Ishmael seeks universal faith. In addition, the other Pequod crew members are the embodiment of different aspects of American cultural identity. The crew indulge themselves in Ahab’s visionary speech and lose their capacity to accept objection from the subaltern. The Pequod crew, in fact, work for money and worldly fame, not for conscience. In brief, it is the captain’s obsessive heroism and the crew’s herd behavior that ultimately lead to the shipwreck.
In addition to Said’s theoretical discussion on imperialism, I also take Richard Sennet’s *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization* to explore the spatial relations and its function on the human body. Sennet asserts that “[t]he spatial relations of human bodies obviously make a great deal of difference in how people react to each other, how they see and hear one another, whether they tough or are distant” (Sennet 17). The spatial restraints collect human bodies, thereby producing collective memory, which invents a space for political manipulation. This supporting evidence explains why Ahab and his men epitomize a dominant feature of being the primitive animacy of nineteenth-century American society.

In the final part of my thesis, I employ Georges Agamben’s theory to represent my own literary critical interpretation of “presence” in *Moby-Dick*. The books I choose from Agamben are *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans* and *State of Exception*. The reason I take Agamben to summarize my thesis is because of his deliberate discussion on the messianic context and the political state of being an abandoned individual in society. I employ the messianic issue to summarize the calling of Ishmael the dead Pequod crew. Here, I must emphasize that the messianic related discussion is a type of literary supplement in my thesis. I do not seek to take certain religious aspects to construct or replace my assertion on the multiplicity of life. Instead, I justify that it is the power of presence that constructs an ideal life state for mankind, which is the oneness of life. This is why I require biblical material and Agamben’s messianic issues to illustrate the nature of the meaning of the oneness of life in *Moby-Dick*.

I also propose that the literary implication of the Pequod is similar to Agamben’s idea on life in *State of Exception*. I argue that it is justifiable to use Agamben’s political discussion and metaphysical religious searching to derive a meaningful
picture of political life. The employment of Agamben’s political life in my thesis is to assist the reader in experiencing freedom and independence after reading the literary text, *Moby-Dick*. Having read *Moby-Dick* and as the author of the thesis, I aim to illuminate a type of universal research path for understanding the way that a person can be one unique individual, accompanied with his or her personal created virtual reality, yet still live consciously within the genuine knowledge of the unchangeable total reality—the One, the eternality. To illustrate my thesis intention clearly, I use *The Agamben’s Dictionary* to explain Agamben’s theoretical attitude toward “life”:

“Agamben’s work is littered with reference to conceptions of life, though he argues that ‘life’ is not a biological concept but a political one. In keeping with this, his own approach to the philosophy of life is to attempt to grasp the ways that life has been central to the history of Western politics” (*The Agamben’s Dictionary* 123-24).

Apparently Agamben’s consideration of life approximates my thesis exploration on the issue of human life in *Moby-Dick*. I use Agamben’s recognition of life as evidence to support the idea that Melville intends to use *Moby-Dick* to demonstrate the realistic form of a truly liberal man’s life. The novel basically reflects a type of American ideological liberty from the nineteenth century. However, I also reckon that *Moby-Dick* can be read as a political metaphor that conflicts its arguments on the power of presence, which can be inferred from the existence of hegemony, capitalism, and Marxism in the novel. The main reason is that *Moby-Dick* is a work that displays great concern on the issues of power, life, and action driven by free will.

To simplify my thesis concern on the issue of life, I focus on the meaning of presence in life in *Moby-Dick* and the evolution of related developments: madness and the vacation from the inner self of free will. Therefore, I use Agamben’s invented conception on “bare life” to explain why power originally operates and functions on
man’s body and will. According to *The Agamben Dictionary*, “bare life” is the third type of life meaning created by Agamben. The first two life types are “bios” and “zoe.” Bios mainly relates to living organisms, and zoe is the type of life that the Supreme Being (God) has, as derived from its controlling power. Agamben finds that “bare life” should be added to interoperate the relations between power and life. According to *The Agamben Dictionary*,

Agamben adapts this term from Welter Benjamin’s essay, “Critique of Violence”, in which it figures as “the bearer of the link between violence and law” (*HS* 65). In Agamben’s analysis, bare life forms a couple with sovereignty, whose “fundamental activity” is “the production of base life” (*HS*, 181). . . . Agamben argues that modern times progressively reduce human beings to bare life: A life that is neither human nor animal, but rather an inhuman kind of life that exists at the limits of ethical and political categories. The “werewolf” (*HS*, 107), who exists in a zone of in distinction between the animal and the human, is one of the examples of bare life that Agamben cites. (30)

In this respect, I take “bare life” to discuss the politicized abandoned life in *Moby-Dick*, and finally, I use Agamben’s messianic interpretation to explore my genuine wanting to discover the essence of creating a free and blank space in which the “bare life” condition is restored in *Moby-Dick*.

**Outline of Chapters**

In my study of *Moby-Dick*, Ishmael initiates and ends the shipwreck story. My thesis views Ishmael as a man who realizes the nature of his life through the experience of his whaling journey. Ishmael is a man who responds to his calling
through his narrative voice, and his presentation of the story represents the structure of a tragic event. My thesis consists of four chapters. Chapter 1 applies Derrida’s *Writing and Difference* to discuss the figure, Ishmael, and the biblical implications in *Moby-Dick*. I reckon Ishmael as a figure who pushes the narrative flow. Ishmael’s narrative provides the reader an opportunity to involve himself or herself differently in reading and interpreting the story. In this respect, Ishmael’s narration enables the reader to decode the hidden ideological metaphor through their reading experience. Accordingly, I draw on Derrida’s viewpoint on interpretation, sign, and structure to discuss the significance of Ishmael’s presence. In Chapter 2, I mainly use Michael Foucault’s power theory to interpret Ahab’s revenge and his power influence on the Pequod crew. The relationship between power abuse and madness are also mentioned. I argue that Ahab’s power operation and madness reveal the presence of his life. In Chapter 3, I take Edward W. Said’s theory and Richard Sennett’s *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization* to expound the political meaning of the Pequod. The cultural impression of the book presents the political vision of nineteenth-century America. The Pequod crew are a literary nationality metaphor to nineteenth-century Americans. The story epitomizes the danger of fascism and its conflicts with other political ideologies. The followers of power commit their lives to a specific ideology. Chapter 4, the final chapter, explores the significance of the whaling journey. I also briefly summarize the philosophical vision of the book and identify Ishmael as the chosen representative of the “One” life in the book. Finally, I point out that the “One” life is the metaphysical projection of the oneness of life, which generates from the history of searching for the universal truth—this can also be interpreted as the eternality of finding the original meaning of being.
Expected Findings and Contribution

I expect that my thesis will intervene in literary disputes on Ahab’s madness. I suggest that Ahab is the one who, in addition to exerting his power and will in a frank manner, lives beyond moral principles. Yet he is not evil in the sight of the Pequod crew. His madness mainly manifests as his power manipulation of the Pequod crew. He is controlled by a vengeful drive and fantasy of being a leading authority.

Moreover, I indicate that Ishmael is the power supplement of Ahab, because he is mentally distant from Ahab’s controlling speech. His life embodies the oneness of life. I use Derrida’s concept of deconstruction and biblical knowledge to explain the allegorical meaning of Moby-Dick. I expect to find a literary interpretation that departs from a traditional theological point of view. I hope that my thesis can justify the relationship between power and life. Ahab is the embodiment of the power concept; Ishmael is representative of the “One” life. I assert that power originates from the prejudice of valuing the essentiality of individuality. Ultimately, power is just a type of embodiment of the life narrative.
Chapter One

Ishmael and His Call

Behold, thou art with child, and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name

Ishmael; because the Lord hath heard thy affliction. And he will be a wild man...

(Holy Bible, Genesis 16: 21)

Melville’s Moby-Dick comes under the influence of the Holy Bible. The biblical meaning of the name “Ishmael” originally refers to an abandoned child with an affliction from his mother, Hagar. Hagar’s lamentation is heard by God. God promises Hagar that her child will be “a wild man” (Holy Bible, Genesis 16:13). This prophecy for Ishmael in the Bible becomes a literary clue for Melville to establish the biblical metaphor in the name-identity to form the shape of the narrator, Ishmael in Moby-Dick.

In the beginning of Moby-Dick, the narrator issues a demand to the reader to “Call me Ishmael” (18). This proposition suggests that Melville decides for Ishmael to experience the affliction of abandonment and grow up in a natural state. In the story, Ishmael signifies the name-identity given to him, which presents as the state of being a man without any ideological bond with dogmatic religious beliefs or ethnic groups. At least in this book, the narrator, Ishmael, is free from fundamentalist ideological judgments.

In Moby-Dick, Ishmael plans his sea journey to “substitute for pistol and ball” (18). His suffering is evidently rooted in biblical heritage, but he does not hold the traditional Christian faith. According to Herbert, “Ishmael dreams of a truth that is universal that absorbs what is genuine in the diverse pieties of humankind while refusing to grant a monopoly on religious truth to any of the ‘queer crochets’ men use to set one system on belief against another” (“Calvinist Earthquake” 120). That is,
Ishmael celebrates the universal truth in life and he needs to develop his mentality in order to seek for truth, rather than faith.

Regarding the truth that Ishmael attempts to find, the reader must first determine the constitutive function and angles of the narrator, Ishmael. In *Ishmael’s White World: A Phenomenological Reading of Moby-Dick*, Paul Brodtkorb clearly analyzes Ishmael’s mentality: “Since Ishmael uses the very way that he presents (that is, sees, hears, feels, reports, judges) what he narrates in order to justify to us his total existence, the relation that is his reconstitution of his world and self is formally present in his rhetorical purpose” (Brodtkorb 4). From Brodtkorb’s perspective, Ishmael mainly presents a world that includes his presence within the narrative structure in *Moby-Dick*. In other words, Ishmael witnesses the historical truth of his presence. Brodtkorb also addresses the relation between Ishmael’s presence and truth: “Mind activity participate in the constitution of fact” (Brodtkorb 4). In addition, “What Ishmael experiences, then reconstitutes in the form of language, is not separable from his varying states of mind” (Brodtkorb 11). According to Brodtkorb, Ishmael’s language indicates the “facts” from his experiences, and the textual “facts” are based on his perceived presence. Briefly, Ishmael’s narrative is influenced by his mental reaction and value in interpreting the historical truth of the cause and effect to this shipwreck.

Ishmael seeks universal truth in his narrative, and he endows his story with a fatalistic shadow. Thereby, his arrival becomes an enclosed literary constitution that is limited to his personal viewpoint and the meaning of the suffering that he experienced in life. Rowland A. Shrill gives an extended analysis on Ishmael’s ambitious narrative of the universal truth:
Ishmael had been committed, from early in his questing, to seek out an exhilarated world and to explore its resonances in relation to the tangled web at the center of his own heart. The final implications of his humanity, he senses, can only be settled in the context of, and in an authentic response to that encompassing symbolic world which rises up around him. In the process implied by taking the span of portents—that is, in the process of expecting a full-freighted world, of discovering in it portents of a transcendent dimension, of scrutinizing the contours of these portents, and of possessing their significance for his life—Ishmael learns of the last complications of human life, learns of the revelatory, but ultimately opaque, character of life in history, and learns that his mortal condition derives its own significance only in an integral response to the immense mystery which is intermittently present to him. (95)

Sherrill asserts that Ishmael intends to seize the metaphysical significance from the outer world. Although Ishmael finally recognizes that human life cannot transcend the mysterious power of nature, he believes that the mortal condition eventually becomes a meaningful form of presence derived from the vision of nature. To explain Sherrill’s argument, I point out that death is not the main issue of the book. Ishmael’s survival implies that the mystery of life pertains to the awareness of the presence. Life is not a rehearsal for death, but a single performance by every self-aware presence.

Ishmael’s identity in the book reveals Melville’s subjective view of life. As William V. Spanos asserts, “Melville puts Ishmael as proper name, as identity, under erasure. The narrator, as the sequel more explicitly and audaciously reveals, becomes ‘Ishmael/Melville,’ . . . an inquiring subject who is himself the object of inquiry, a
‘constitutor’ who is himself the ‘constituted,’ as it were, the seer, who is himself the seen” (*The Errant Art of Moby-Dick* 76).

Obviously, Ishmael is against the authority and presents his individuality in seeking the universal truth. His rebellious free spirit leaves him a space to calmly judge Ahab’s madness and power. As Spanos argues, Melville makes Ishmael an erased self-projecting image. Melville’s purpose for Ishmael is to create a literary afterimage that retains the memory and sensations from the story; meanwhile, the processing of the sequence of plot developments evidently initiates and ceases with the will power of the narrative voice. In other words, Ishmael’s narrative produces a mirroring world: the narrator is both the executor within *Moby-Dick* and the manipulator of the orientation of the story structure. His power certainly comes from Melville’s planned setting of the book. In this case, I agree with Spanos’s “Ishmael/Melville” argument on this literary identity.

Although Ishmael is a literary representation of the author, he is not responsible for the shipwreck—it is Ahab who is predominantly responsible for this fatal incident. Ahab is the one who has the power to control the Pequod. Ahab and Ishmael are participants in the same journey, yet their life principles differ considerably. Brodtkorb provides a metaphysical viewpoint on discussing the difference between Ishmael and Ahab.

Like Ahab, Ishmael tries by going to sea to reinvent his future by willing a change in its patterned character. His ascents to the masthead are as much attempts to get out of time as to get out of circular movement; the inviting vortex leads to eternity as well as to restful stasis.

Ishmael would like to escape endless circularity. A final vertical movement, he hopes at certain points, would free him; but throughout the book he remains
caught in the horizontality of time. He plays the temporary man, to Ahab’s man of eternity. His attempt to fill the emptiness of his experience of Ahab and the whale is finally an attempt to give meaning to all of time. (Brodtkorb 100)

Ishmael attempts to escape from the emptiness of his life. Through his journey, he never ceases seeking spiritual redemption. His journey leads him out of the condition of inertial melancholia. Thereby, he calls for theological recognition to prove that his survival has ended his rooted melancholia. In fact, his survival is a witness for Ahab’s endless quest. Ahab is the man who attempts to challenge himself to determine the mystery of eternity. Ishmael is only a man who applies Ahab’s experience to prove the power of life. In other words, Ishmael absorbs Ahab’s life power and internalizes the journey as spiritual redemption for his life experience. Therefore, the presence of Ahab must carry metaphysical significance through the journey. I conceive that Ahab symbolizes the subconscious mind of a Western man. Ahab rejects Hebraic-Christian values because he strongly relies on his reason and emotions. In other words, Ahab reckons himself as the controller of his own life. He refutes the Christian God father figure in order to seize the power of his free will. Ahab wants to be an independent man rather than a child of the Almighty God.

The will to dominate takes over a part of Ahab’s humanity. His focus on his loss eventually drives him mad. Brodtkorb argues that Ahab is driven mad by his disabled body. From this aspect, Ahab leads Ishmael to face the natural state of the mind and reality. During the journey, Ahab effectively becomes the Father of Ishmael’s abandoned mentality. For Ishmael, Ahab certainly is not the substitutive symbol of the Father, but as a male figure that forms a substantial part of Ishmael’s life history. The other reason I assert that Ishmael views Ahab as a father figure is based on their biblical names. In fact, Melville wants to use *Moby-Dick* to reconcile the tragic stories
from the Bible. That is why he chooses the name Ahab to act as a catalyst for
Ishmael’s motivation in relation to their life quest. Through the narrative in
*Moby-Dick*, Ishmael obviously holds a type of sympathetic love and impressive
admiration toward Ahab. If God calls Ishmael to honestly face his life condition, then
Ahab is the father who calls the Pequod crew (including Ishmael) to stand against the
struggles of life. From this perspective, Ishmael inherits Ahab’s mental projection of
masculinity toward spiritual suffering and physical weakness. According to Melville’s
setting, Ishmael actually has two fathers in *Moby-Dick*: one is the Christian Father,
God, who gives and saves Ishmael’s body; the surrogate father is Captain Ahab,
because he teaches Ishmael how to exercise power to implement man’s free will to
derive a vision that alters the unsatisfying reality.

Nevertheless, Ahab is not the duplicate ideological founder of Ishmael’s mind.
Eventually, Ishmael evolves himself to face the tragic end of the Pequod and its crew:
he decides to narrate the whaling voyage, and this is a sign that his survival is driven
by the need to obtain an opportunity to deal with the seemingly paradoxical conflicts
between the two father figures. This seemingly impious story is actually Melville’s
ambitious work for combing traditional interpretative Christian faith and the
ideological chaos of the nineteenth-century America. I propose that *Moby-Dick* is
intended to be read as a literary classic on modernity, because it involves
philosophical pondering on theology, science, political power, and the free state of
individuality, and it constitutes the historical necessity of the inevitable deconstruction
in an isolated community (the Pequod).

Based on my topic, Ishmael and his call, I suggest that Ishmael’s call is not a
single call to the Christian God, but to consciousness of the reality that he experiences.
He skillfully employs multiple narrative voices in his own narrative voice. Ishmael’s
narrative voice shows that he wants to know the genuine meaning of the whole story. In other words, Ishmael calls for a sufficiently meaningful response to his chaotic historical condition after the shipwreck occurs.

In the next two sections of this chapter, I describe my understanding of Ishmael and his narrative presence. In the first section, I explain the biblical relations of Melville’s literary intention of the plot setting and illustration of the characters. In the second section, I apply Derrida’s *Writing and Difference* to depict the metaphysical presence and signifying structure of the whole book.

**Biblical Allusions in Melville’s *Moby-Dick***

*In Rama was there a voice heard,*

*lamentation, and weeping,*

*and great mourning,*

*Rachel weeping for her children,*

*and would not be comforted,*

*because they are not.*

*(Holy Bible, Matthew 16:18)*

In the Epilogue of *Moby-Dick*, Ishmael narrates that his life is saved by “the devious-cruising Rachel, that in her retracting search after her missing children, only found another orphan” (427). According to Melville’s setting, the Rachael represents the godmother of the orphan, Ishmael. The Rachael provides a new and temporary habitat for Ishmael to leave the “soft and dirge-like main” (427). To Ishmael, the encounter with the Rachael symbolizes and occasion that helps him to return to the earth to narrate his sea journey. I refer to the Rachel as Ishmael’s godmother on the basis of the Hebrew meaning of the name “ewe”. From a literary perspective, Ishmael
becomes the lamb symbol under Christian beliefs, for his life is a type of rebirth from the Rachael, the ewe. Here, I must justify the lamb symbol of Ishmael in *Moby-Dick* does not signify that this protagonist embodies the real state of innocence.

In principle, my literary concern differs from the biblical announcement from the representative Lamb of God, Jesus. As shown in the Bible, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Certainly, Ishmael’s presence in *Moby-Dick* is not equal to Jesus’ theological significance as the agent of God in the *Holy Bible*. My use of the lamb image in my thesis is due to my reading and reasoning of Melville’s historical background. The Lamb of God symbol must have inspired Melville’s writing of Ishmael’s suffering in and survival of the sea journey. Therefore, I argue that Melville/Ishmael feels that the whole story of the whaling journey embellishes the process of how to be liberated from an imprisoned mentality. That is, after Ishmael is saved by the Rachael, he takes his tragic experiences into his narrative, which is not intended to present fear toward sinful acts. On the contrary, Ishmael’s narrative is a type of propitiation to the sacrifice of the Pequod crew. It also represents that Melville’s *Moby-Dick* tries to employ the biblical lesson to multiply the prophetic warning by his literary work.

Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the rightness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man’s disobedience of one shall many be made rightness. Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through rightness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord. (*Holy Bible*, Romans 5:18-21)
I take this quote from “Romans” to support my view that Ishmael’s narrative belongs to the work of a lamb. Attempting to comfort the laboring death and manifesting the rightness of God are the main reasons that he uses many biblical materials to construct the story.

Moreover, according to the Epilogue, “The unharming sharks, they glided by as if with padlocks on their mouths; the savage sea-hawks sailed with sheathed beaks” (427). Ishmael strongly reckons that it is the Father who leads to him being saved by the Rachael. Henceforth, Ishmael is as innocent as a lamb in his doubtful quest toward Christian faith, the only thing he must do is to write down the historical events that caused him to become—much to his regret—the only survivor of the shipwreck. The narrative mask of Ishmael means that the narrator now lives in his newborn identity: a man child who serves God for the well-being of humankind.

Why does Ishmael believe himself to be as innocent as a lamb and to have the right to narrate his story with the permission of the Father? The other reason comes from the Pequod’s first encounter with the Rachael. In Melville’s writing, the captain of the Rachael had lost two sons while whaling. “The majority first” (398) had been picked up, but the twelve-year-old boy was completely lost. Melville’s literary act uses the survival of Ishmael to replace the lost son on the Rachael. Behind the setting for the Rachael, Melville actually has multiple literary exponents drawn from the Bible:

The sons of Rachel; Joseph, and Benjamin (Holy Bible, Genesis 35:24) and Rachel travailed, and she had her labor. And it came to pass, when she was in hard labor, that the midwife said unto her. Fear not thou shalt have this son also. And it came to pass, as her soul was in departing, (for
she died) that she called his name Benoni: but his father called him Benjamin. And Rachael died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem. (Holy Bible, Genesis 35:16-19)

The last son of Rachel is Benjamin (meaning “son of my days” in Hebrew), who was born before the family came to Bethlehem (meaning “house of bread” or “house of meat” in Hebrew). In the Bible, Benjamin’s parents are Rachel and Jacob. Rachel is Jacob’s first love, and she is also the woman who steals her father’s pagan idols from his household (under the pretense of sparing him from the wrath of God for his sins of idolatry). This means that she demonstrates wisdom by protecting Jacob’s property right and belief in God. On the other hand, Jacob is also known as Israel in the Bible, which means “triumphant with God”; Jacob also takes this name because he had prevailed with God’s messenger. From these biblical statements, the reader of Moby-Dick should not forget that the boy lost from the Rachael symbolizes the biblical figure of Benjamin. In the novel, Ishmael takes Benjamin’s position on the Rachael. This signifies that Ishmael believes in the idea of himself being “the son of his days.” From the intertextual literary and biblical aspects, Ishmael is the new spiritual member of the Israel family. Therefore, he dares to assume that his existence is being protected and promised by God.

Nevertheless, it should also be noted that the biblical Benjamin is not the son who was born in Bethlehem. He is not the God-promised Messiah (the root and the offspring of David “Revelations, 22:16”) who has the power to save and liberate the whole world or a group of chosen people. Nonetheless, it means that what Ishmael has experienced has a marked impact on the formation of his future life. His narrative and presence cannot accomplish genuine redemption for the death of the Pequod crew, yet people who read his story are given a chance to learn some lessons. Despite this
limitation, the narrative of Ishmael is continuously looking forward to the promise of
the end of humankind’s suffering. In fact, it is Melville who tries to create a literary
figure that is functionally similar to the promised Messiah in order to solve the doubts
of modernity pertaining to man’s presence of being. In this case, the reader can view
Moby-Dick as Melville/Ishmael’s attempt to save the life of oneself, rather than the
ambitious intention to empower the protagonist to be the only agent for redeeming a
group of chosen people.

In Moby-Dick, Ishmael is a man who endlessly doubts the meaning of the
whaling journey. Toward the end of the narrative, it seems that Ishmael has found a
biblical answer to explain his journey and new identity. However, I note that
Melville’s setting for Ishmael is not only for finding a biblical position to then
illustrate the whole story. In fact, Ishmael’s narrative voice occasionally dissolves in
the narrative structure. This shows that Ishmael is a complicated figure because of the
appearing and disappearing of his uncertainly throughout the whole story. Therefore,
the literary meaning of Ishmael’s presence must be handled carefully by the notion
from Derrida’s Writing and Difference.

Ishmael’s Presence in Moby-Dick

In the Introduction of my thesis, I argue that Ishmael represents a “keystone” in
the narrative structure. I also assert that the literary act (writing or reading) can
generate a virtual reality among the text, the author, and the reader. Now I take
Derrida’s idea of the text (book) to illustrate the literary significance among
Moby-Dick, the author, and the reader. Derrida define the literary act of writing
signifies the impossibility of writing the Book. He defines the Book with Mallarmé’s
argument that the Book is “the only One,” and “that it has [unwittingly] been
attempted by every writer, even by Geniuses” (Derrida 10) to reveal its content through their writing. The Book that allures every writer to write for the “age-old truths” (Derrida 10). Derrida asserts that “[t]o write is not only to know that the Book does not exist and that forever there are books, against which the meaning of a world not conceived by an absolute subject is shattered . . . making us deplore the absence of the Book from under the burden of too many texts!” (Derrida 10).

Although Derrida states that the text cannot totally present the genuine meaning of the Book, he does not realize that there is actually a parallel between the text and the Book. That is, Melville stands for the position of the mysterious creator (God), and the text of the author is similar to the Book of God. I take Melville’s Moby-Dick to explain this interesting parallel. The author (Melville) uses the text (Moby-Dick) as a partial referent to his own life. Nonetheless, Melville himself does not belong to the text—it is the text that belongs to both the author and itself. When the text encounters other literary texts, a space is generated that partially overlaps the text itself and intertextual literary texts. Both the text and intertextual literary texts have the chance to attract readers. During reading, this attraction causes the reader to project his or her inner world to create a virtual reality. In Moby-Dick, Ishmael is the main narrator of the text; therefore, the reader more or less focuses on Ishmael’s presence to experience the historical line and spatial field of the text. In other words, while reading, the reader becomes Ishmael in their virtual reality. When the reader indulges himself or herself in reading, his or her life form (in actual reality) temporarily changes into the protagonist’s life form (in virtual reality). That is, the reader becomes an imaginary creature of his or her own mental creation while reading the text. In Moby-Dick, when the character Ishmael asserts “Call me Ishmael” (18), another life form is temporarily generated in the mind of the reader. The reader becomes Ishmael,
because, in his or her virtual reality, the reader accepts the idea that he or she is associated with “me” (Ishmael) in the novel. When reading *Moby-Dick*, the reader inevitably experiences the creative life form from the author’s partial references. However, the reader creates a virtual image of himself or herself as Ishmael because of “I am.” In actual reality, the reader is not equal to Ishmael; it is the reader-created virtual reality that enables the reader to feel like they are the protagonist, Ishmael. So within the virtual reality, the reader imagines that he or she becomes Ishmael, yet the reader’s imagination of becoming Ishmael still contains the free will and humanity of the reader. After all, becoming Ishmael while reading is the same as becoming the creative life form that is generated by the author, Melville. Once the reader realizes that the identity of Ishmael is Melville’s partial self-reference, the reader then understands the being of the author through his or her own being.

As long as the reader understands that the presence of Ishmael is also the partial presence of the author, the author becomes a part of the reader’s inner self. The reader and the author become “us” while experiencing the “I am” of Ishmael’s narrative voice. Once the reader understands Ishmael’s presence as a stone position within the textual structure, they partially experience the author’s authoritarian power. As the author, Melville has the authority to modify Ishmael’s life, and he finally chooses to allow Ishmael to survive, which means that in the virtual reality of the reader’s “I am,” Ishmael is still alive in the text. Verily, once the reader leaves the text, he or she can experience their genuine life force and celebrate their presence in actual reality. Since I take *Moby-Dick* and Melville as respective parallels to the Book and God, I consider that it can be viewed that the presence of Ishmael is similar to the presence of the self. The presence of the self can be modified by the author (God), yet actual reality allows the self to have free will and humanity to experience the virtual reality, and this gives
the reader the opportunity to determine whether or not to leave his or her self-created virtual reality. In this case, the self can become a being who understands the being of the author (God).

In *Moby-Dick*, Ishmael makes frequent use of soliloquy to propose his presence. Before the whaling voyage, he went to a Whaleman’s chapel to see the marble tablets of people who had become victims of their sea journeys. He presumed that his fate might be the same in encountering the coming death in his sea journey. Ishmael later changes his negative feeling toward the coming sea journey with the soliloquy as a challenger to the unknown future:

Yes, Ishmael, the same fate may be thine. But somehow I grew merry again. Delightful inducements to embark, fine chance for promotion, it seems—aya, a stove boat will make me an immortal by brevet. Yes, there is death in the business of whaling—a speechlessly quick chaotic bundling of a man into Eternity. But what the? Methinks we have hugely mistaken this matter of Life and Death. Methinks that what they call my shadow here on earth is my true substances. Methinks that in looking at things spiritual, we are too much like oysters observing the sun through the water, and thinking that thick water the thinnest of air. Methinks my body is but the lees of my better being. In fact take my body who will, take it I say, it is not me. And therefore three cheers for Nantucket; and come a stove boat and stove body when they will, for stave my soul, Jove himself cannot. (45)

This quote indicates that Ishmael regards his physical body as a vehicle that follows the world trend, but the substance of presence is not genuinely included. He does not care who or what can take his body, because the world cannot deprive his real life
through physical death. He considers that his real life is founded in his soul, the mental state of his true being.

In the soliloquy, Ishmael clearly divides his presence into two parts: the body and the soul. However, this dualism concept on his presence finally leads him to feel like a homeless orphan. The reason is that Ishmael lost the idea that his presence is actually within and without the being of the narrative of time and space. By this I mean that the presence of Ishmael understands himself within his lifespan, yet once the narrative is completed at the end of *Moby-Dick*, the presence of Ishmael still endures in the mind of the reader. Because *Moby-Dick* begins with an already experienced narrator who escapes from the structure of time and space within the story, this is why I assert that the presence of the narrator, Ishmael, can be viewed as a type of being that can transcend the constituted time and space of the story.

Now, I need to expound Ishmael’s presence into Derrida’s idea of the “Being.” According to Derrida, the Being is a phenomenon that enables the “be” to be a possible “Here”; I assert that this “be” is a reflection of the presence. In other words, Ishmael’s presence can be viewed from two perspectives: one is the collective “be” that makes the narrator becoming Ishmael, and the other is the Being that forms the narrator to begin and end his narrative presence. As Derrida asserts, “Being is not above the existent does not imply that it is beside it” (Derrida 138). In *Moby-Dick*, it means that the narrative presence of Ishmael is included in the Being.

Why should the idea of “the Being” be discussed in the notion of presence? The answer is simple—the presence cannot enact his or her “to be” without the existence of the Being, Derrida states,

In reality, there is not even a distinction in the usual sense of the word, between Being and existent. For reasons of essence, and first because Being
is nothing outside the existent, and because the opening amounts to the
ontico-ontological difference, it is impossible to avoid the ontic metaphor in
order to articulate Being in language. (138)

In other words, the Being exists in the notion of presence, and language becomes a
tool that reveals the metaphysical idea of the Being is a substantial metaphor within
the presence of the narrator. *Moby-Dick* presents the idea of the Being with Ishmael’s
narrative voice. Nevertheless, I must still confirm that the Being cannot fully explain
the presence of Ishmael. Once the book ends, Ishmael’s presence becomes an
independent notion that cannot be intruded by any outer language, because the story
presented in the book is done. In other words, within *Moby-Dick*, the presence of
Ishmael is determined and defined by the narrative voice. The narrator, Ishmael,
declares himself an orphan, and there is nothing to do with this statement within the
text. There is only one space that is created by the narrator that may change the
determined orphan situation—that is, the interpretation of the reader. Therefore, the
literary act becomes a necessary action to state the truth that presence is not merely
existence, but it also includes the seeming absence of “the Being.” As long as the
reader recognizes that Ishmael’s presence is involved in the Being, the act of reading
becomes an interpretation of redemption, in which the reader is saved by ridding
himself or herself of Ishmael’s assertion of the orphan image. Finally, the presence of
Ishmael becomes a sign that signifies the isolation of humankind, and the sign can
change the implications of Ishmael’s statement according to the different
interpretations of different readers.

Regarding the narrative structure of *Moby-Dick*, Ishmael’s presence of being a
narrator actually relies on the coffin lifebuoy of his bosom friend, Queequeg.
Therefore, I shall discuss how the friendship constructs the presence of Ishmael’s
vision toward life. I take the beginning of the friendship as textual evidence to explain the change of Ishmael’s isolated inner world:

As I sat there in that now lonely room . . . the evening shades and phantoms gathering round the casements, and peering in upon us (Ishmael and Queequeg) silent, solitary twain . . . . I began to be sensible of strange feelings. I felt a melting in me. No more my splintered heart and maddened hand were turned against the wolfish world. This soothing savage had redeemed it. There he sat, his very indifference speaking a nature in which there lurked no civilized hypocrisies and bland deceits. Wild he was; a very sight of sights to see; yet I began to feel myself mysteriously drawn towards him. And those same things that would have repelled most others, they were the very magnets that thus drew me. I'll try a pagan friend, thought I, since Christian kindness has proved but hollow courtesy. (56)

Obviously, Ishmael’s loneliness is changed by the presence of Queequeg. At that time, Ishmael’s gaze passes through the lonely space and focuses on another man, Queequeg soon feels the need to know more details about this savage stranger. It is evident that Ishmael’s seemingly lonely presence can be extended and changed by knowing the presence of another man. Forming new relationships with others assists Ishmael in redefining his presence and helps him leave the original madness of loneliness.

As to why Queequeg has such charisma to attract Ishmael’s attention to help him to leave the original loneliness, I consider the main reason is that Queequeg is not confined in the mainstream conservativeness of nineteenth-century American society. Queequeg came from the wild, and his wild nature has not been acclimated by the civilized products of alienation and anxiety. In other words, the wild nature of
Queequeg prevents him from experiencing negative self-condemnation by traditional moral principles. Queequeg is free in his mental state because he is not bound to any ideological value of becoming successful or failing. His life mainly serves for his basic requirement of physical life. Queequeg’s indifference toward conservative American ideology exhibits the characteristic of being a noble savage, which finally attracts Ishmael’s attention. At that time, Ishmael is trapped in his doubt regarding Christian faith and metaphysical thoughts pertaining to the meaning of civilized suffering. Yet the encounter with Queequeg enables him to experience the mystery of life as being beyond one man’s inner thoughts on how to find a satisfying explanation to solve the dilemma in life.

Queequeg’s presence inevitably influences Ishmael’s dualism concept of presence. On the other hand, the reason that Queequeg accepts Ishmael as his bosom friend originates from Queequeg’s inner feelings about being baptized again through the whaling voyage, which provides Queequeg with an opportunity to return to his homeland (60). I propose that the relationship between Ishmael and Queequeg actually exhibits the essence of “presence” from the notion of the Being—that is, the willingness to accept the arrival of the other man. The genuine relationship is established between the acceptance of other man’s presence, which allows the suffering man, Ishmael, to escape from the inner exploration and find a new gate (Queequeg) as an agent to allow the outer world to become meaningful to him once again.

Within the narrative structure of *Moby-Dick*, the coming of Queequeg inspires Ishmael to become aware of his surrounding world, the Being, which has prepared Ishmael this bosom friend so that he can accept the following sea journey. How does the relationship between these two strangers evolve in *Moby-Dick*? A crucial point
occurs in the morning when Ishmael finds “Queequeg’s arm thrown over me in the most loving and affectionate manner. You had almost thought I had been his wife” (36). It is this crucial moment that allows Ishmael to redefine his relationship with this stranger, Queequeg, who is no longer considered a cannibal by Ishmael, but signifies him as a husband figure who protects and loves his partner, Ishmael. This conscious approval constitutes the relationship between the two strangers into a relationship between brothers.

Henceforth, it should be noted that Ishmael broadens his narrow and limited presence into another substantial entity, Queequeg. This is why Ishmael defends Queequeg as a member of “the same ancient Catholic Church” (84) to which “all of us, and every mother’s son and soul of us belong the great and everlasting First Congregation of this whole worshipping world” (84). This statement reveals a topological space that is created by the acceptance of different entities. What Ishmael experiences through Queequeg causes him to identify that the genuine faith of God is already present in every lively entity.

Another reason that Ishmael defends Queequeg comes from the overlapping memory that Queequeg inadvertently cures Ishmael’s childhood trauma. According to Ishmael’s narrative, when he was a child, he was punished by his stepmother, which left him with a traumatic memory:

...a supernatural hand seemed placed in mind (Ishmael)... I lay there, frozen with the most awful fears, not daring to drag away my hand; yet even thinking that if I could but stir it one single inch, the horrid spell would be broken... I lost myself in confounding attempts to explain the mystery. Nay, to this very hour I often puzzle myself with it. Now take away the awful fear, and my sensations at feeling the supernatural hand in mine were
very similar, in the strangeness, to those which I experienced on waking up and seeing Queequeg’s pagan arm thrown round me. (37-38)

The context proves that the presence of Ishmael has been subtly changed from a self-centered abandoned child to a man who is cared for. Ishmael understands that Queequeg is the man who dragged the traumatic child out of his forsaken darkness. In other words, Queequeg is the one who helps Ishmael to face his traumatic history and recover mentally when he recognizes the positive qualities of Queequeg. In other words, Ishmael takes the beloved behavior of Queequeg to replace his traumatic fear of the historical darkness.

Knowing the existence of Queequeg makes Ishmael understand the meaning of his encounter with his past trauma. Here, I use Derrida’s argument to explain the philosophical implication of the literary encounter in *Moby-Dick*:

...of the present as the absolute form of experience, one already must understand what time is, must understand the *ens* of *praes-ens*, and the proximity of the *Being* of *this ens*. The present of presence and the presence of the present suppose the horizon, the procomprehending anticipation of Being as time. (Derrida 134)

Now, I must explain the meaning of the Latin words “*ens*” and “*praes*.” By definition, “*ens*” implies “being” and “something having existence”; “*praes*” is an adverb, which means “at hand” and “now.” Therefore, Derrida indicates that the absoluteness of presence is a type of experience that declares its being accords with the Being that surrounds the being. The Being, according to Derrida, provides sufficient clues to let the being experience the existence of now.

I propose that the mysterious experience of Ishmael and Queequeg can be deliberately expounded by Derrida’s assertion. That is, Ishmael’s encounter with
Queequeg can be viewed as the being (Ishmael) experiencing the mysterious experience by realizing the existence of another being (Queequeg). Henceforth, the presence of Ishmael partially experiences the mystery of the Being. Subtly, Ishmael is aware of the time that he is with Queequeg, and the existence of Queequeg presents Ishmael with a vision that presents a horizon with which Ishmael reviews his past and decides his future according to Queequeg’s words. In summary, Ishmael employs the relationship with Queequeg to extend the timeline of his story. Without Queequeg, Ishmael cannot choose the Pequod or survive through the shipwreck to complete his narrative. I propose that Queequeg is the man who fixes Ishmael’s temporarily dynamic narrative, and the existence of Queequeg further represents that Ishmael’s presence of the whole narrative structure is beyond the bond of space and time. By narrating Queequeg, Ishmael becomes the author of his story. It could also be said that the narrator Ishmael forms Queequeg to constitute his narrative structure. Therefore, the narrator Ishmael becomes Queequeg through their established relationship during the narration.

In Moby-Dick, the narrator Ishmael finally becomes part of the Being because of his encounter with Queequeg. This is why Melville makes Ishmael as a narrator who appears and disappears. It is essential that Ishmael narrates Queequeg in his story, for the relationship between the two men finally creates an invisible space for the narrator to transcend the whole structure of his story. The presence of Ishmael can also be viewed as a substantial image of the Being from the whole vision.

Here, I take Derrida’s statement on Being to clarify this:

Now, Being is not simply a predicate of the existent, no more than it is the existent’s subject. If it is taken as essence or as existence (as Being-such or Being-there), or, more profoundly and more originally, if it is taken as the
unitary focal point of all these possibilities, then the Being of the existent
does not belong to the realm of predication, because it is already implied in
all predication in general, and makes predication possible. And it makes
every synthetic or analytic judgment possible. It is beyond genre and
categories, transcendental in the scholastic sense, before scholasticism had
made of the transcendent a supreme and infinite existent, God himself.

(136)

Derrida asserts that it is not the existence of the subject that define Being. Instead, it is
the Being that creates and contains all the predicted possibilities of the existence of
the subject. In other words, the Being has shown itself in every possible existence and
absence. In *Moby-Dick*, both the presence of Ishmael and his narrative voice exhibit
the feature of the Being as an invisible existence that sequentially drives the narrative
voice to appear and vanish. Thus, I suggest that the essential quality of the power of
the Being is the time that continuously promotes all the literary acts to occur and end.
In summary, the meaning of time is about being the Being.

Therefore, the meaning of Ishmael’s presence reveals a form of the Being that
attempts to use time to explore the self of a man to locate its magnificent power in a
certain narrative structure. I consider that the narrator Ishmael himself is unaware of
the power of Being during the narration. Thus, the narrator Ishmael still holds an
isolated tone when narrating his story. It is clear that Ishmael’s narrating of the story
behind the biblical namesake due to his doubts of being forsaken by the Being (God).
In this respect, Ishmael tries to link his presence with Queequeg and the Pequod crew.
He wishes to make his life into a keystone that creates a topological space and
meaningful historical time to construct the whole story into a stable structure, which
can renew this negative attitude toward the doubts of being nothingness and meaningless after the shipwreck occurs.

In this chapter, I employ the biblical allusions to illustrate Melville’s literary intension to transform the seemingly literary tragedy into the interpretable presence to his readers. I further take Derrida’s theory to tackle the presence of Ishmael in *Moby-Dick*. By employing Derrida’s discussion on presence and the Being, the thesis presents a new picture which clearly shows the relations with the text and the Book; the author and the Being; the presence of Ishmael and the self of its readers. I want to use the virtual reality, which the readers and the text cooperate on creation of the literary act, to illustrate the philosophical significance of reading and writing. The virtual reality, I believe, is the epitome of the presence of the self. By exploring the meaning of virtual reality, the readers can further understand the relations with the being in presence and the Being. In other words, the presence of the self demonstrates the power of Being.

Surely, Ishmael’s presence does not just contain a metaphysical life quest; the narrator Ishmael must still fulfill his physiological needs to live. In this case, the whaling journey becomes an epitome of a society that allows its participants to earn a living. In fact, the whaling journey gradually broadens Ishmael’s vision on his presence according to political power and economic effects. On the Pequod, the presence of Ishmael is no longer that of an independent man; instead, he is inevitably under control by the authority of the hierarchical system. Captain Ahab is the leader of the Pequod, who exerts his will power to direct the whole Pequod crew. Once the whaling journey begins, Ishmael cannot escape his social duty from his contract to the Pequod. From this perspective, Ishmael experiences that the presence of the self can be regulated by political power. In the next chapter, I focus on the influence of
Captain Ahab to discuss how his power influences the presences of the whole Pequod crew.
Chapter Two

Madness and Power

In this chapter, I first discuss Melville’s setting regarding Captain Ahab’s left leg, which was bitten off by Moby Dick. I suggest that Melville symbolizes the lost left leg to imply that Captain Ahab has left his spiritual home during his forty-year career at sea. Ahab can no longer find happiness in his job or his life. Therefore, he says “It feels like going down into one’s tomb,” he would mutter to himself, “for an old captain like me to be descending this narrow scuttle, to go to my grave-dug berth” (110). Ahab’s depression leads him to keep searching for a target to kill in order to prove his ability. The encounter with Moby Dick drives his ambition to achieve the heroic goal of killing this horrific emblem of wild nature. In other words, Moby Dick embodies Ahab’s desire to kill whales in his sea realm. Ahab seeks to be the king of his sea career by being anointed from Moby Dick’s oil and blood.

The other setting of Melville’s regarding Ahab is revealed in Ahab’s first appearance in the novel. Based on Ishmael’s narrative voice, the Pequod is “shot from out her harbor” (108) on Christmas. When Ahab first appears upon his quarter-deck, Ishmael’s experience is that “foreboding shivers ran over [him]” (108). This symbolizes Ahab as the reality of being a self-made man facing coming death while having the resurrection of his spirit told through Ishmael’s story. In other words, Melville attempts to use the temporal setting of Christmas day (the festival for celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ) to create another biblically rooted epic to express that physical death is not the ultimate truth of death in reality; instead, it is the death of the spirit that represents the real state of death. Ishmael’s “shivers” in response to Ahab symbolizes Ishmael’s subconscious recognition of another man who has
experienced spiritual death and is intent on his spiritual resurrection by making manifest his will power.

Unlike Ishmael’s abundant thoughts on the metaphysical issues of life and death, Ahab exhibits his presence through his determination to kill Moby Dick in order to prove to himself and his crew that he deserves to be the supreme ruler of this ship.

To achieve this goal, Ahab employs seditious speech to ignite the Pequod crew and unite them as one man with the same determination, as indicated at the end of the story:

They were one man, not thirty. For as the one ship that held them all though it was put together of all contrasting things—oak, and maple, and pine wood; iron, and pitch, and hemp—yet all these ran into each other in the one concrete hull, which shot on its way, both balanced and directed by the long central keel; even so, all the individualities of the crew, this man’s valor, that man’s fear; guilt and guiltlessness, all varieties were welded into oneness, and were all directed to that fatal goal which Ahab their one lord and keel did point to. (415)

In this paragraph, Melville analogizes the whole Pequod crew as an organic entity that carries the same resolution under the influence of Ahab’s will power.

This raises the question of how Ahab could control the whole Pequod crew with his madness. I suggest that the main reason is that Ahab’s madness is deliberately concealed by his knowledge and power. Ahab publicly shows his suffering and the wound to the Pequod crew to ignite their compassion and leads them to vow to seek out and kill his target. Therefore, the following paragraphs introduce the concepts of madness, power, and discipline to illustrate Ahab’s authority on controlling the whole
Pequod crew. I take Foucault’s theory to explore the signified meaning of the character Ahab.

**Madness**

I own thy speechless, placeless power; but to the last gasp of my earthquake life will dispute its unconditional, unintegral mastery in me. In the midst of the personified impersonal, a personality stands here. Though but a point at best; whencesoe’er I came; where soe’er I go; yet while I earthly live, the queenly personality lives in me, and feels her royal rights. But war is pain, and hate is woe. Come in thy lowest form of love, and I will kneel and kiss thee; but at the highest, come as mere supernal power; and though thou launchest navies of full freighted worlds, there’s that in here that still remains indifferent. (*Moby-Dick* 382)

Ahab’s challengeable statement regarding the power of nature gives his crew a clear impression that their captain insists on the nobility of personality in earthly life. His passionate assertion presents the facticity that nature appears indifferent and impudent to the mental suffering of humankind. However, Ahab’s assumption that nature holds the sovereignty to govern the fate of humankind is mainly an emotional judgment generated from his self-experience. That is, Ahab’s speech about nature having the innate right of being the sovereign that controls the will and fate of humankind can be viewed as a sign that he believes that he himself is the victim of the sovereignty of nature. Subtly, Ahab consciously takes nature as his only opponent because he believes it is nature that took away his left leg and pushed him to experience great suffering in his mind and body. Ahab’s judgment about
nature-sovereignty seems logical in his speech, yet the speech to the crew and nature also presents the symptom of his madness.

In *Madness and Power*, Foucault critiques that madness is a form of human self-exploration toward mystery. He says that “to respect madness is not to interpret it as the involuntary and inevitable accident of disease, but to recognize this lower limit of human truth, a limit not accidental but essential” (76). According to Foucault, madness should be recognized as a reflective phenomenon toward man’s interpretative aspiration toward truth. Foucault refers to truth as pertaining to humanity, which means that human truth is not about scientific factuality, but the factuality of human life. In principle, “the lower limit human truth” that Foucault refers to in his madness dissertation is combined with two psychological aspects in universal humanity: one is the everlasting philosophical question among everyman—who I am? The other is the individual desire to search for the meaning of life. This raises the question of why Foucault believes that madness stands in a lower position of the limits of human truth. I assume that Foucault considers that madness is a syndrome of the image of human life being no more than an illusion viewed through a broken mirror. In other words, people who are confined in madness cannot recollect or analyze their historical time in an objective manner. Madness makes people selectively recall their painful experiences in life while rendering them unable to recall the happiness of their life experiences. In summary, madness confines people to live in a “blank zone,” which leaves them with no choice but to directly face the darkness in their mind. There seems no hope for mad people, for all they can do is to fight against their personal and historical suffering within their fantasy and articulate broken dialogue as their only form of communication with the outer world. I consider that madness is indeed the “lower limit” of human truth, but madness also provides
those who are afflicted with a chance to touch the core of human truth. Once this has been revealed, mad people may recover from their mental prison. It should be noted that madness is a type of mental confusion, as long as the truth of “who I am?” and “the meaning of life” has been presented to mad people, they may transcend the suffering and puzzlement of their mental confusion. Foucault refers to madness as being essential limit of human truth, meaning that he believes that madness is an ongoing mental phenomenology throughout human history, because the nature of being remains an ongoing area of development in religion, psychology, and philosophy.

In *Moby-Dick*, Pip is another distinct character who strongly presents the symptoms of madness. Pip is, according to Ishmael’s narrative, an “over tender-hearted, was at bottom very bright, with that pleasant, genial, jolly brightness peculiar to his tribe,” although in another respect Pip seems “an under slender, clumsy, or timorous wight in the ship” (319). Based on Ishmael’s viewpoint, Pip loves living in peaceful security and protects himself with his keen desire for life. Nevertheless, when he is abandoned by the Pequod crew at sea, his damaged mind finally causes his insanity. I believe that Pip’s insanity is Melville’s literary setting, the purpose of which is to verify the relationship between death and being.

For example, when Queequeg was thought to be dying, Pip says to Queequeg, “Seek out one Pip, who’s now been missing long; I [Pip] think he’s in those far Antilles. If ye [Queequeg] find him, then comfort him; for he must be very sad;… Now, Queequeg, die; …” (365). Obviously, Melville lets the mad Pip split into two personalities: one is the drowning Pip, who leaves his happiness when the accident happens; the other is the alive yet insane Pip, who believes Queequeg’s seemingly coming death can recover sad Pip’s lost pleasure of living. In other words, the insane
Pip had lost his historical sense of living in the security and brightness he had previously experienced. The insane Pip suffers from the memory of being abandoned by his crew members, and he believes that his life has already ended, buried at sea. According to Pip’s broken dialogue and logic, only a dead person has chance to comfort the traumatic historical memory in the aspect of the soul. Therefore, the insane Pip celebrates Queequeg’s death. Pip’s insanity shows his uncertainty about whether he is actually alive after being abandoned and almost drowning. His timeline temporarily paused on that traumatic day. The insane Pip is nothingness in facing his now-time, because he believes he is a coward and that he has been abandoned by the other crew members.

Melville’s other unique setting on Pip’s insanity is shown in Chapter 129. In this chapter Pip catches Ahab’s hand and wishes that the captain could use Pip as a substitute for Ahab’s lost leg. Pip tells Ahab that he wants to “remain a part of ye [Ahab].” Pip’s request on the one hand shows the loss of the confidence he had in his subjective self after having the trauma burned into his mind; on the other hand, Pip intends to use his language to objectify his presence into the protective power of Ahab’s authoritative presence. In summary, madness mires the subjectivity of the self in some perceived death that occurred in the past. Here, I want to point out that the subjectivity of the self presents supporting evidence of the presence of humankind. Madness allows the self to face the danger of the subjectivity of the self being removed by the outer world. I consider the loss of self-subjectivity as a type of spiritual death, because it suspends the self’s original presence of being imprisoned in the state of its historical past. It should be noted that madness is a type of spiritual death, in which a person is chained to a certain historical presence to the self, but madness may operate another strange occasion to the self so that it may reconstruct
the subjectivity. Once mad people realize their new subjectivity in reality, their chained mind may be placed in a difficult situation. That is, mad people may create a new subjectivity to allow themselves resurge from the traumatic historical death in order to continue their being.

To expound the relationship between madness and the subjectivity of being in a state of insanity, I use Foucault’s assertion on madness and language. In *Madness and Civilization*, he points out to:

> Language is the first and the last structure of madness, its constituent form; on language are based all the cycles in which madness articulates its nature . . . . such discourse is both the silent language by which the mind speaks to itself in the truth proper to it, and the visible articulation in the movements of the body. (94)

Foucault proposes that the language articulated by mad people constructs both their perception of themselves and their presence in the outer world. Simultaneously, their language takes over the subjectivity of their body. Take Pip as an example; the insane Pip considers himself incapable of being his previous self, and so all he can do is to become an object that can be used by others. In summary, the insane Pip believes that he is worthy only of being Ahab’s lost leg, and through the articulation of his mad words, the subjectivity of Pip has been replaced by his projected image—Ahab’s leg. Being Ahab’s lost leg allows Pip to reconstruct a new subjectivity of self to continue to retain the significance of his being on the Pequod, yet Pip’s new subjectivity has been transformed by his mad words into a nonautonomous object.

I propose that in *Moby-Dick*, madness presents a crucial character of transforming the being of the subjectivity of the self into a group-self presence. That is, the subjectivity of the individual becomes an object that mad people strive to
capture, but what mad people finally attain is the group-self presence that derives from their fantasy and the intentioned establishment of their new subjectivity. This is because madness allows people to lose their original self-identification, and the manner in which that they intend to recover from their traumatic past is to use their language to reconstruct a new reality that can recognize their subjectivity in life once again. Usually, the new reality is about the image that mad people seek to become or obtain to express their newfound value, which is generated by their traumatic history. In *Moby-Dick*, Ahab wants to kill Moby Dick because he feels his dignity has been eroded by the whale. Henceforth, Ahab projects his subjectivity onto his determination to kill the white whale. In other words, Moby Dick becomes the emblem of Ahab’s subjectivity, which loses in his mad thoughts. It could also be that Ahab in his madness had objectified his presence in searching for power to control the whole Pequod crew, which would assist him by markedly increasing the likelihood of him being able to kill Moby Dick; by doing so, the traumatized Ahab can acquire a new subjectivity to substitute for his lost leg.

In summary, I propose that madness takes over the subjectivity of men and women by fracturing their memory. To reclaim the lost self-identification, mad people would most likely use their language to objectify their presence, because their mind has been controlled by their past loss. They intend to project themselves onto another image. Moreover, they would strongly believe that without taking action or following their obsessive fantasy, they would be completely lost in a seemingly indifferent world. The language of mad people simultaneously presents their emotions and desire to become a new self by projecting their subjectivity onto other concrete objects. In the next section, I focus on how Ahab’s madness objectifies a certain subject, Moby
Dick, and the fantasy of obtaining the new subjectivity is gradually twisted into the desire of attaining the power to control to the Pequod crew.

**Power**

In old Norse times, the thrones of the sea-loving Danish kings were fabricated, saith tradition, of the tusks of narwhale. How could one look at Ahab then, seated on that tripod of bones, without bethinking him of the royalty it symbolized? For a Khan of the plank, and a king of the sea, and a great lord of Leviathans was Ahab. (*Moby-Dick* 113)

In *Moby-Dick*, Ishmael describes Captain Ahab as the king of the sea on the Pequod. This description emphasizes Ahab’s authority over the Pequod crew. As captain, Ahab has the right to issue orders and force his men to obey his words while on the whaling voyage. The reason that Ahab is described as the king is based on his orders, which have a type of legal validity. Most of his words to his men bring about instantaneous obedience. For example, when Stubb asks Ahab to lower his noise at midnight, the captain bluntly tells him to go back to his “nightly grave; where such as ye [Stubb and the other Pequod crew] sleep between shrouds, to use ye to the filling one at last.—Down, dog [Stubb] and kennel!” (111). Apparently, Ahab views Stubb and his men as a subaltern part of his governing power. In the previous section, I explain how the Pequod crew finally becomes an organic unit. However, before the whole Pequod crew reach consensus about killing Moby Dick, Ahab actually views himself a sovereign ruler of his ship and his whaling course. All his men represent the governing body of his sovereignty, so Ahab has the right to cut off the part that repulses him or promote the part that he favors. This is why Ahab secretly brings Fedallah on board the ship and takes Fedallah’s prophecy as the evidence-based
governing direction of the telos of the whaling voyage. In summary, Ahab initially rules the ship as a dictator; therefore, his power is comparable to that of an absolute monarch throughout the whaling voyage.

To expound the manner in which how Ahab exerts power to retain his leadership and why the whole crew gradually gives up their right to discourse to resist Ahab’s compulsory whaling purpose is due to the captain’s knowledge on power. Here, I take Steven Luke’s *Power: A Radical View* to illustrate the base of power from the principal version. According to Luke, power is not equal to the capacity of domination. In fact, Luke points out that when abusing power to manipulate others, the function of power becomes “productive, transformative, authoritative and compatible with dignity” (Luke, 109) for those who accept it. Luke also mentions that the essential contestedness of power concept is actually about “the power to decide what is decided” (Luke, 111). I consider that Luke emphasizes that power is not a single direction that initiates from an origin and then influences subsequent events. Instead, power has a quality of multiplicity in influencing time, space, relationships, and events. I argue that it is the singularity of the decision to exert power that generates the subsequent events and decides the power-space.

In addition, in Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault argues that power would place its wielder in danger of becoming an obsessive power controller, because power is a token that determines the bodies of its acceptors. Foucault mentions that in the microphysics aspect,

\[\ldots\] the power exercised on the body is conceived not as a property, but as a strategy, that its effects of domination are attributed not to ‘appropriation’, \ldots\] In short this power is exercised rather than possessed it is not the ‘privilege’, acquired or preserved, of the dominate class, but the
overall effect of its strategic positions . . . . this power is not exercised simply as an obligation or a prohibition on those who ‘do not have it’; it invests them, is transmitted by them and through them; it exerts pressure upon them, just as they themselves, in their struggle against it, resist the grip it has on them. *(Discipline and Punish, 26-27)*

What Foucault mentions about the power concept is a substantial and visible outcome of the way that power is directly exercised on a certain target. Foucault points out that the exercised power is not a compulsory order that snatches the permission of its target, instead, it is a plan that is designed to modify the actions of its target. Foucault argues that this type of power gradually exerts pressure on the body and mind, which ultimately makes the target modify their action during the process of exercising power on themselves.

To explain Luke’s power concept and Foucault’s power theory, I take Starbuck as an example to demonstrate Ahab’s power functioning on Starbuck’s body. Under Ishmael’s description, Starbuck is “the chief mate of the Pequod” (101) and a steadfast man. Starbuck has “hardy sobriety and fortitude,” (102) and such qualities contribute to him becoming a brave and just (although sometimes superstitious) seaman. In other words, Starbuck is a strong believer in Christianity, as evidenced by his belief that Jesus’ protection can accompany him through his “wild watery loneliness” (102) in life.

In *Moby-Dick*, when Ahab professes that his ultimate goal for the whaling voyage is to kill Moby Dick, yet Starbuck is the only person who openly questions his captain’s motive. Starbuck protests, “I came here to hunt whales, not my commander’s vengeance. How many barrels will thy vengeance yield thee even if thou gettest it, Captain Ahab? It will not fetch thee much in our Nantucket market”
(139). In response, the captain publicly creates a power-space in that his words produce a vision for the entire crew. Ahab says:

Nantucket market! Hoot! But come closer, Starbuck; thou requires a little lower layer. If money’s to be the measurer, man, and the accountants have computed their great counting-house the globe, by girdling it with guineas, one to every three parts of an inch; then let me tell thee, that my vengeance will fetch a great premium here!

Hark ye yet again,—the little lower layer. All visible objects, man are but pasteboard masks. But in each event—in the living act, the undoubted deed—there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask. If man will strike, strike through the mask! How can the prisoner reach out side except by thrusting through the wall? To me, the white whale is that wall, shoved near to me. Sometimes I think there’s naught beyond. But ‘tis enough. He (Moby Dick) tasks me; I see him outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing it. That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate; and be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal, I will wreak that hate upon him . . . . Reckon it. ’Tis but help strike a fin; no wondrous feat for Starbuck. What is it more? From this one poor hunt, then, the best lance out of all Nantucket, surely he will not hang back, when every foremast-hand has clutched a whetstone? . . . . (Aside) . . . Starbuck now is mine; cannot oppose me now, without rebellion. (140)

I take Ahab’s long speech to support the argument that in the process of power being exercised, that power expresses knowledge to a certain target, namely Starbuck, in order to draw him into the power-space. For example, when Ahab knows that
Starbuck is under his power at the end of his speech, Ahab and Starbuck become allies, thereby expanding the power-space. Of particular importance, Starbuck is the chief mate of the ship; consequently, if he is defiant toward Ahab, the captain’s power alone would be insufficient to control the crew and achieve the mission. This means that when Starbuck is finally persuaded by Ahab’s words, the hierarchy of power has been constructed. Subtly, when Ahab and Starbuck serve the same purpose of hunting and finally killing Moby Dick, their relationship generates the power-space, which is linked to physical-space (i.e., the sea-space) through purpose (i.e., economic gain).

The Pequod is a power-economic space because it is effectively a type of institution that manages the investment of resources, which includes the time and even the lives of the crew; the economic aspect derives from how the investment is managed while harvesting whales (particularly in this case, Moby Dick). The investment is controlled through power, which Ahab takes and thereby wields the Pequod as a weapon to achieve his goal. In other words, once the hierarchical relationship between Ahab and Starbuck is confirmed (the only one powerful member who could take over Ahab’s position), they create and expand the power-space that unites their purpose—to kill Moby Dick and to profit from harvesting whales. Furthermore, because the power-space is produced by the power-economic complex, a center is created for the power-space. In *Moby-Dick*, that center is Captain Ahab, who is the emblem of authority over the crew once he establishes his power.

Here, what makes Ahab become the authority of the power-space. First, Ahab presents his knowledge to explain why he wants to exercise his power to take action. He explains to Starbuck that the profit from killing Moby Dick is not simply that which can be gained from Nantucket market, but the significant and revolutionary change that can come of unmasking the evilness in nature that threatens the
sovereignty of humankind. Ahab tries to convince Starbuck that if wants to experience wonder in his life, the only way is to kill the legendary Moby Dick. In other words, Ahab hints to Starbuck that if he wants to make his presence become evidently more significant, he should employ his power to unmask the evilness that Moby Dick embodies. His argument is that only through exercising the power can they achieve the goal of destroying the horror among seaman and thereby enable them to regain their right of life with dignity.

In general, the power generated in *Moby-Dick* is exercised to kill Moby Dick and other whales. However, the collective will power that maintains the power of killing the whales render the ship a power-economic complex. While the power-economic complex cruising in the sea to search for the main target—Moby Dick—it is here that the power-economic complex expands its power-space.

In addition, the root of the power that serves the power-economic complex is actually generated from both Ahab’s determination to kill Moby Dick and his knowledge. It could be viewed that it is Ahab’s knowledge and speech that construct the Pequod crew as a hierarchical power structure, which has Ahab as its founder and center. In summary, Ahab is the core of the power-space, and is authoritative in controlling the power-economic complex (i.e., the Pequod). The mad component of the power is Ahab’s belief in Fedallah’s prophecy, which the captain misread and consequently hold the false belief that he is “immortal on land and on sea!” (377). In other words, Ahab’s madness from misreading his presence as an immoral being makes him ignore all the dissuading events and ominous signs from other people and from nature, which finally leads to the shipwreck.

In the Introduction of my thesis, I mention that power can produce the punishment-body relation because controlling that power can cause the body to depart
from its natural state of liberty. In the following and final section of this chapter, I explain how power produces a negative effect in creating the punishment aspect, and finally causes the body to become a punishment-body complex.

**Discipline**

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault argues:

> The body, according to the penalty, is caught up in a system of constraints and privations, obligations and prohibitions. Physical pain, the pain of the body itself, is no longer the constituent element of penalty. From being an art of unbearable sensations punishment has become an economy of suspended rights. (11)

I take this quote to demonstrate that the punishment on the body is about the deprivation of basic human rights. Human rights include both physical and mental aspects. It is known that mental suffering can also trigger physical pain. Therefore, madness could also be reckoned as a type of punishment. In *Moby-Dick*, Ahab’s madness is not manifest at the moment when Moby Dick attacks him; instead, it is the bodily pain and mental suffering that slowly drive him mad. As Ishmael says, “his [Ahab] torn body and gashed soul bled into one another; and so interfusing, made him mad” (156). Thus, the punishment that drives Ahab mad basically comes from his spiritual loss of being a captain and the physical loss of being a physically sound man. In other words, being mad is Ahab’s punishment. Once the mad captain exerts his power on the Pequod, it generates the discipline to influence their bodies into punishment-body complexes.

I now broaden Foucault’s concept of the punishment-body relation. Foucault originally says that punishment that is incurred on the human body renders the body a
punishment-body complex. In my thesis, I offer an alternative explanation of the punishment-body: I reckon that it can also be viewed a social complex. The reason is that once power is produced by authority, the authority has the power to control a group of certain people in certain time-space. Therefore, the discipline that is produced by authority can create a type of power that can control a certain group of people. In this aspect, the punishment-body can be expanding on the political movement that controls the free will of humankind in a type of disciplinary system.

In *Moby-Dick*, Ahab represents that authority, and the Pequod crew become the social body that live under the disciplinary system that is the fruit of Ahab’s mad controlling power. To kill Moby Dick, Ahab “plainly saw that he must still in a good degree continue true to the natural, nominal purpose of the Pequod’s voyage” (178); that is, “all hopes of cash” (178). Once the whaling journey is complete and its purpose of hunting whales fulfilled, the Pequod crew has its obsessions and its compulsory mission—to kill Moby Dick—because the captain’s authority has been established. In other words, the disciplining of the Pequod crew is in how their time is allocated, and this is manipulated by Ahab’s political power. The discipline is thus established by Ahab’s authority, and the purpose of creating that discipline is to kill Moby Dick. Therefore, the Pequod crew gives up their humanity of saving the lost son of the Rachael’s captain, because they have become a punishment-body regulated by their captain’s discipline. Instead of being viewed as a breach of human rights, the captain’s disciplining is regarded as the economical allocation of time. However, the abuse of power forces the economical use of time to serve not for humanity but for the commercial target under the pressure of political power.
In the next chapter, I use Edward Said and Richard Sennet’s theories to illustrate that the political power and power-space are actually the epitome of American imperialism in the nineteenth century and a metaphor of fascism.
Chapter Three

Cultural Impressions in Moby-Dick

In *Moby-Dick*, Melville tackles the geographical setting to expound the influence of his American identity from the land (Nantucket) to the sea. His setting actually presents the expansion of American imperialism in the nineteenth century. It should be noted that the whaling industry is a type of economic cooperation in nineteenth-century America, and ships that undertake whaling journeys are effectively corporations in that industry. In this chapter, I use Richard Sennett’s *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization* to illustrate the phenomenon:

*Homo economicus* lived in space rather than for place. The corporation which began to flourish in the Commercial Revolution treated time like space. It was a structure with a flexible form; it endured because it could change. Its fixities lay in the quantities of time in which it dealt, work organized into daily or hourly wages. (206)

Sennett also clearly distinguishes between space, place, and corporation:

The distinction between space and place is a basic one in urban form. It turns on more than emotional attachment to where one lives, for it involves as well the experience of time . . . . the flexible use of space appeared in conjunction with the appearance of the corporation, an institution with the right to change its activities in the course of time. Economic time unfolded by following up opportunities, taking advantage of unforeseen events. Economics prompted a conjunction of functional use of space and opportunistic use of time. (188)

I quote Sennett so as to explain that this “cooperation” is actually the embodiment of the economical use of space and time, and the manner in which the cooperation
manages its time influences whether it expands or diminishes the power-space. In my thesis, I suggest that the main corporation in *Moby-Dick* is the power-economic complex, the Pequod. It should be noted that this cooperation is founded on the land, in Nantucket. Just as Ishmael describes, “People in Nantucket invest their money in whaling vessels, the same way that you do yours in approved state stocks bringing in good interest” (73). According to Sennett, the setting could be designed to illustrate that the place (Nantucket) founded the cooperation (the Pequod), and the cooperation then becomes a power-economic complex by through the economical use of time in conducting the whaling voyage. The whaling voyage, however, expands its power of controlling the time of the whole crew through the will of the captain. The captain intends to make the sea where he had been sailed as his power-space. I suggest that the center of the power-space is the authoritative Captain Ahab, and the way that Ahab constructs the power-space is by obtaining sufficient information from the outer world, specifically that which would assist him in making immediate decisions to complete his final plan—killing Moby Dick. In *Moby-Dick*, Melville describes how the whaling industry obtains information about the sea:

> Here be it said, that like the vessels of military marines, the ships of the American Whale Fleet have each a private signal; all which signals being collected in a book with the names of the respective vessels attached, every captain is provided with it. Thereby, the whale commanders are enabled to recognize each other upon the ocean, even at considerable distances, and with no small facility. (250)

In the novel, the Pequod for many times encounters another ship that determines how the Pequod’s navigates the whaling voyage. In short, the cooperation makes the time
usage become economic by leveraging the sharing of information so that the cooperation can establish itself in enlarging its power-space.

To understand why time is managed the way it is on the Pequod, the origin of the cooperation must be clarified. The whaling voyage has been financially supported by investors such as Captain Bildad and Captain Peleg. In principal, Bildad and Peleg form a corporation with Chaplain Ahab to hire Ishmael, Queequeg, and the other Pequod members. When Ishmael and the other crew members sign the contract with the Pequod, their time is thereafter controlled by the cooperation through commercial credit. The contract transforms the time usage of each individual into a collective economic-time that is of value to the whaling market. In other words, the Pequod members sell their time in exchange for income and the basic human right to subsistence on the ship throughout the voyage. According to Sennett, the corporation makes flexible use of the space with its economical use of time. I want to emphasize that by embedding the economical use of time into the founding of the corporation, the contract inevitably places a group of people collectively into a common space during the whaling voyage. Through the contract, the individual human bodies become a collective body on the Pequod. Therefore, the individual human body is temporarily transformed into an embodiment of *homo economicus* on the ship.

In the story, the Pequod crew members come from different places, but by working for the corporation and sharing a collective memory on the ship, their identity becomes a type of cultural image of laboring Americans. The reason I suggest the Pequod members as the symbol of laboring Americans is based on their working identity being confirmed in the American cooperation. In addition, the Pequod members are actually controlled by Ahab’s strategy, which could be viewed as the will power of the individuals having been modified by Ahab’s political power. Captain
Ahab, as mentioned in chapter two of my thesis, is the authority of the Pequod. To expound the political metaphor in *Moby-Dick*, I use Edward Said’s theory to illustrate the relation with political power and culture.

In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said claims that “American identity is too varied to be a unitary and homogenous thing; indeed the battle within it is between advocates of a unitary identity and those who see the whole as a complex but not reductively unified one” (XXV). In Chapter 40 of *Moby-Dick*, the background of the Pequod members is partially revealed—Melville lists American, Dutch, French, Icelandic, Maltese, Sicilian, Long-Island, Azores, Chinese, Old Manx, Lascar, Tahitian, Portuguese, Danish, English, Spanish, and so on to display the multiple backgrounds of Pequod members. They all share the same time-space experience in that night. The multiplicity of historical backgrounds and the homogenous sharing experience creates a type of America-centered globalizing intention in the novel. In this respect, this intention pertains to typical American cultural impression.

In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said asserts,

> In time, culture comes to be associated, often aggressively, with the nation or the state; this differentiates “us” from “them,” almost always with some degree of xenophobia. Culture in this sense is a source of identity, and a rather combative one at that, as we see in recent “returns” to culture and tradition. (xiii)

Said argues that culture is an ideological imprint that subconsciously makes people divide themselves into two ideological groups: “us” and “them.” With certain cultural impressions, people who live under their culture reckon themselves subjectively as having the strongest presence in the world. Furthermore, the “us” (the subjective presence) would intend to objectify people who come from other culture and treat
“them” as a kind of otherness, because “them” seems different from the subjective “us.” From Said’s perspective, I suggest that culture is a type of subjective identity that human beings assign to themselves and to others, which associates individuals with certain subjective groups. Under certain cultural aspects, people who believe themselves as such subjective beings would mark people under different cultures as a collective and substantial presence of otherness. In brief, culture is the product of the collective subjectivity from a group of people who treat their history as a treasured tradition and deserve to expand their subjectivity to conquer other otherness, because in identifying other groups, the subjective group attempts to view the different cultures as the collective embodiment of otherness. From the collective subjective perspective, objectifying the difference in cultural identity as otherness is the simplest approach to make the collective subjectivity retain its orthodox identity. Although from the holographic view point, the of cultural identity and the intention of viewing different cultures as it pertains to otherness is a type of collective delusion of the human condition. In fact, it is the subjectivity of cultural identification that assists the noumenon of culture in continuing its being in the stream of time and space. I suggest that the noumenon of culture produces the subjectivity for the basic setting of the individuals, but the individuals may also face the danger that his or her real subjectivity has been controlled by the collective identity, which is the culture that the individuals dwell in.

Here, I further consider that Ahab is Melville’s literary metaphor of a dictator of American sovereignty, and the Pequod members are the literary metaphor of the constituents of the so-called American democracy. That is, the Pequod’s whaling journey symbolizes American history—territorial expansion through military power and economical time usage from the land to the sea. The literary metaphor of the
whales is what Said says, the group of “them” (the otherness from “us”). Therefore, I suggest that by Ahab’s political control, the Pequod members have bound their time and skills to serve the political ideology of killing whales, which signifies the “us” demolishes “them” in the political aspect.

Moreover, this feature exhibits another cultural impression of America—work to liberate the self from historical bonds and obtain self-value. In general, their whaling act could be viewed as a typical commercial activity in American imperialism in the nineteenth century.

Now, I want to illustrate that in *Moby-Dick*, the imprint of American culture does not pertain only to the Pequod. In fact, the Rachael also has a significant American cultural imprint. However, I suggest that only the Pequod pertains to the ideology of American imperialism in the novel. Said claims that “America began as an empire during the nineteenth century” (xxii), and he suggests that the idea of overseas rule—jumping beyond adjacent territories to very distant lands . . . . This idea has a lot to do with projections, whether in fiction or geography or art, and it acquires a continuous presence through actual expansion, administration, investment, and commitment. There is something systematic about imperial culture therefore that is not as it is in Britain’s or France’s and, in a different way, the United States. (xxii)

In addition, Said refers to American imperialism as “a structure of attitude and reference” (xxii). I consider that Said illustrates American imperialism as produced by the power-complex of American culture. Here, cultural power is generated from the historical sequence of events and the political power of contemporary social consensus at that time. In other words, the historical background intertwines with the public opinions that construct the cultural power. Cultural power is closely related to
the attitude with which an individual responds to external stimuli. Furthermore, cultural power enables an individual to take action under his or her customary thoughts. In this case, American imperialism is a product of its cultural power. America was the first democratic country to declare its independence in the world, triggering revolutionary political leaps in other monarchic countries, such as the French Revolution in 1789 and the establishment of the Republic of China in 1912.

Cultural power may provoke great motivation to inspire its people to take action with their will power. Here, an example can illustrate the imprint of cultural power:

When Captain Ahab asks his men “What do ye do when ye see a whale, men?” (137), the final response is “A dead whale or a stove boat!” (137). To interpret the dialogue from cultural perspective, as I assert in the previous statement, when the captain questions his men about a whale, he actually implies only one whale: Moby Dick. In the story, Moby Dick has committed numerous seemingly evil acts against the sea-men. Therefore, to Ahab, Moby Dick is the embodiment of evilness. In other words, the captain reckons himself as representing justice, and so he has the right to provoke his men to kill the white whale. It is a typical self-centered thought, because Ahab does not think of himself and other sea men as having killed more whales than the number of people that the white whale harmed. On the other hand, when the Pequod crew respond, they obviously view the act of killing as their inborn nature and that the economic benefits are worth temporarily sacrificing the right to subsistence. That is, for the Pequod men, the financial profit and sense of accomplishment they derive from their work is worth the risk of paying with their lives. In short, American imperialism stands for an orthodox position, which calls men to sacrifice their lives if needed to expand the power-space through their laboring works. Although their laboring works ultimately serve to benefit the authority while leading them to
sacrifice their own lives by severing from the other group, they still believe that market value is the most important thing in their lives. Cultural power in American imperialism presents the economical use of time and expansion of space as having become a type of collective unconsciousness that can be easily provoked using various political strategies.

In the following section, I describe the literary metaphor of Moby Dick from cultural and political aspects to deconstruct the setting of *Moby-Dick*. The section presents the white whale’s literary relation with the cultural impressions of America.

**The Whiteness of Moby Dick**

In *Moby-Dick*, Ishmael narrates his consideration to display the possible meanings for the whiteness of Moby Dick for an entire whole chapter. Ishmael concludes,

> It [the whiteness] is at once the most meaning symbol of spiritual things, nay, the very veil of Christian’s Deity; and yet should be as it is, the intensifying agent in things the most appalling to mankind.

Is it that by its indefiniteness it shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of the universe, . . . and at the same time the concrete of all colors; is it for these reasons that there is such a dumb blankness, full of meaning, in a wide landscape of snows—a colorless, all-color of atheism from which we shrink? . . . . And of all these things the Albino whale was the symbol. Wonder ye then at the fiery hunt? (165)

I suggest that Ishmael’s conclusion to the whiteness of Moby Dick actually presents his doubt to the ultimate meaning of the Christian God. Apparently, Ishmael swings between his Christian belief and atheism. To Ishmael, the idea of God seems like a
king who holds supreme power and treats his people with a mechanical, programmed rationality. Therefore, Ishmael doubts the necessity of believing in God. He further provides an option to himself, atheism, and expounds the reason of being an atheist as his participation in the hunt for Moby Dick—the emblem of God’s mysterious power.

In principle, Ishmael reckons that hunting the white whale is similar to the scientific search that drives men and women to keep searching for truth. Here, the truth pertains to the presence of God and self-reflection on the meaning of the human condition from political and religious aspects. I must emphasize that America is a country that revolted against the monarchy of England. America still inherits its Christian beliefs from England; henceforth, the motto of founding America has been “in God we trust.”

Now, a question arises when Ishmael is pondering the whiteness of whale—what is the real meaning of the idea of God to humans? It means that Ishmael attempts to rationalize the idea of God with his philosophical thoughts and decision to hunt the white whale, because wonders such as the white whale are an exhibition of God’s almighty power. In fact, Ishmael obviously considers that the white whale represents the monarchical power that is given by God as the divine right of the sea. In short, Moby Dick is the emblem of a certain political power from Ishmael’s viewpoint. Ishmael believes that the Pequod inherits its power from the American Revolution, whereas the white whale inherits its power from monarchical tyranny. That is, Ishmael is actually seeking the truth of being an independent man by acting under God’s permission. Here, the idea of God becomes an overhead position, because God cannot liberate humankind through His wonders; only a person with the will power to become an independent being can liberate the self-presence from his or her spiritual
puzzling and obtain political power to protect the natural and legal right of being a man or woman in the world.

On the contrary, from a modern perspective, the political significance of *Moby-Dick* can be viewed as a literary metaphor of fascism. In other words, the Pequod (on behalf of the ideology of America imperialism) and Moby Dick reveal the concept of fascism in modern politics. Fascism views political violence as a means for protecting an ethnic group without being bound to morality or law. Adolf Hitler (1889-1945) and his Nazi Party are the most significant representatives of fascism in history. Here, I use only a very narrow definition of fascism to describe the literary significance of Moby Dick. In principle, the thesis adopts the concepts of political violence, an ethnic group, and acting without moral or lawful limitation as features of fascism to describe the setting of the white whale. It should be noted that the fascism features of Moby Dick are actually generated from Ahab’s determined chase.

From the literary aspect, the political ideology of fascism (Moby Dick) has been triggered by American imperialism (the Pequod) in Melville’s writing. In final part of the story, Ahab seeks the white whale for three days before finally infuriating the white whale:

Almost simultaneously, with a mighty volition of ungraduated, instantaneous swiftness, the White Whale darted through the weltering sea. But when Ahab cried out to the steersman to take new turns with the line, and hold it so; and commanded the crew to turn round on their seats, and tow the boat up to the mark; the moment the treacherous line felt that double strain and tug, it snapped in the empty air!

“What breaks in me [Ahab]?? Some sinew cracks!—’tis whole again; oars! Oars! Burst in upon him!”
Hearing the tremendous rush of the sea-crashing boat, the whale wheeled round to present his blank forehead at bay; but in that evolution, catching sight of the nearing black hull of the ship; seemingly seeing in it the source of all his persecutions; bethinking it—it may be—a large and nobler foe; of a sudden, he bore down upon its advancing prow, smiting his jaws amid fiery shower of foam.

(424)

The chasing scene signifies at least two distinct social phenomena in *Moby-Dick*. From the captain’s perspective, the chasing signifies the extensive over-development of the power-space. As mentioned earlier, the Pequod is the embodiment of the power-economic complex; As for a further understanding is that the sea-space can be considered a market space in the economic aspect. In other words, the hunting of Moby Dick by the Pequod presents a typical commercial behavior; that is, a business trust that is formed through cooperation. Here, the purpose of the business trust is to obtain a monopoly over the market, and the whales in the sea can be viewed as passive consumers who suffer from exploitation from the violence of the ships. From this respect, the white whale represents the embodiment of revolutionary violence against commercial exploitation by other entities in cooperation (ships). Ishmael mentions that in the white color of the whale “lurks an elusive something in the innermost idea of this hue, which strikes more of panic to the soul than that redness which affrights in blood” (160). It is suggested that what Ishmael is describing the feeling of terror. In other words, the white whale carries a mark of terror to humankind. Specifically, it is the revolutionary violence of Moby Dick that truly carries the mark of terror to its hunters. Moreover, Moby Dick is the only whale that successfully counters all the hunting ships in the story. Therefore, the image of Moby Dick actually presents the dictatorship of the proletariat.
As I assert that in the story, the Pequod represents American imperialism, and the whale hunt represents the political and cultural power that fulfills the purpose of imperialism. The whales are passive consumers whose benefits and right to life have been legally deprived by power-economic complexes (ships) in the sea (the market place or the power-space). Consequently, the whales represent the lowest class under the cultural and political power of imperialism—this is why I invoke the dictatorship of the proletariat to describe Moby Dick. In the novel, Ishmael compares “the whale-ship is the true mother of that now mighty colony” (99). If the reader understands that in some respect Melville chooses the whaling industry to illustrate the deprivation of capitalism by strengthening its power-space (politically meaning the colonial space and embodiment of political power), he or she will soon understand that the revolutionary power of the white whale carries the feature of Marxism in political and economic perspectives.

The second phenomenon of interpreting the scene of hunting the white whale implies the question: how does Marxism turn into fascism from the political aspect? Here, I return to the text itself to take the literary evidence to support my argument.

In Moby-Dick, an entire chapter is devoted to Ishmael discussing cetology, as he quotes from an oceanographer, “on account of their [whales] warm bilocular heart, their lungs, their moveable eyelids, their hollow ears, penumintrantem feminam mammis lactantem, and finally, ex lege nature jure meritoque” (117). The oceanographer suggests that whales must be considered as separate from typical fish. In short, whales are mammals. In addition, in describing the famous whale, Ishmael states that “not only was he famous in life and now is immortal in forecastle stories after death, but he was admitted into all the rights, privileges, and distinctions of a name; had as much a name indeed as Cambyses or Casar” (171). It indicates that
Melville illustrates the cetology to inform his readers that whales are the political metaphor of an ethnic group. The famous whale is compared to the emperors of ancient Rome, which implies that it is the metaphor of the sovereign ruler of his realm (the sea).

Earlier in my thesis, the main concern is that the sea-space is effectively a marketplace for the fruits of cooperation. Here, the sea-space becomes another metaphor of political power. To the whales (proletariats), the sea-space is the political space in which localization and globalization are confronted. In short, most of the whales (proletariats) cannot successfully revolt against the hunt (commercial globalization by political strategy). Most of the whales are sacrificed to the forces of globalization. Only the famous whales can transform the whales (proletariats) into a competitive entity capable of resisting the hunt (globalization). It is proposed that Moby Dick is the ideological embodiment of fascism because of the features among Melville’s description of whales. The manner in which Moby Dick destroys the Pequod presents an act without moral or lawful limitation. Based on my political assumption of the story, the way that Moby Dick destroys the Pequod can be viewed as fascism destroying American imperialism.

To investigate why Melville assigns such a desperate story to the fate of the Pequod, the thesis proposes that the will power of demolishing evilness from certain types of cultural power and political strategy is the origin of the destruction of the power-space. In other words, the will power to destroy the other power-space (the whales’ sea) creates an ideological bias. In fact, real evil generates from ideological bias, and such bias inevitably creates a vacuum that allows nothing but violence between both sides to occur in the campaign; in Moby Dick, it is the fight between
whales and humankind. I further suggest that the story is actually the ideological campaign between fascism and American imperialism.

The vacuum, which is generated and ended by violence, is the only way to restore equilibrium in the state of from the struggle evoked by ideological bias. I consider that the real state of life is not limited within a certain time-space. I suggest that the real state of life is the liberation from the ideological contest of obtaining the power-space. In other words, I suggest that the vacuum can also be viewed as an occasion for reviewing the fallacy of the ideological belief that results from the operation of the political power, cultural power, and pure violence, and the outcome of the final confrontation in a historical encounter. The historical encounter is not about the end of life, but the end of ideological fallacy.

In the final chapter of my thesis, I provide a resolution regarding the significance of the seemingly tragic story. I seek to identify a means for liberating and regaining the real state of life by drawing on Giorgio Agamben’s theory of bare life, and I offer my own suggestion for creating a new state of life in *Moby-Dick.*
Chapter Four
The Oneness of Life

In *Moby-Dick*, Melville illustrates a shipwreck story told from the perspective of Melville/Ishmael. Earlier in my thesis, it initiates the discussion of the relationship between Derrida’s idea of Being, the functioning process of power, and the philosophy of madness and discipline. The following sections further extend my understanding on the political implications behind *Moby-Dick*. The propose of the discussions is to elucidate that all the power-space constructs and ideological contentions in the story actually provide an occasion for the reader to figure out the real state of life. The thesis identifies the real state of life as the oneness of life, because I believe that the principle of life is hidden within different historical backgrounds, timelines, and spaces, which generate a temporary time-space for its interpreters to understand the meaning of self-presence. For *Moby-Dick*, I take Georgio Agamben’s *State of Exception* and *The Time That Remains: A commentary on the Letter to the Romans* to illustrate the oneness of life in my thesis. My thesis title is “The Power of Being: The Multiplicity of Life in Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick.*” Here, the main concern is that it is the will power to understand and push forward the presence of humankind, and the outcome of different historical backgrounds with the collective consensus produce the cultural and political power to make human beings subconsciously live under their cause-effect cycle and eventually face the danger of death. Their feedback to deal with their programmed time-space life creates the multiplicity of their beings in their own presence, but they can never avoid the shadow of death throughout the historical trauma, which forces them to contemplate the ultimate meaning of life and death again and again. First, however, it must be clarified that by death I do not mean that physiological programmed death that occurs
to every physical human body. Rather, my thesis suggests that the word “death” is a concept contrasting against the presence of the Being. In Chapter 1, the focus is that the Being presents within and without the limitation of time-space. It is also shown that the significance of time is being the Being, which means that the beings being able to realize the feature of the Being is not confined to the programmed time-space. In this chapter, I further propose that the essence of the Being is the oneness of life. As long as the beings know the principle of the oneness of life, they can get liberate themselves from the fear of facing the issue of death. Death is, as I propose, the fallacy of recognizing the presence of beings. That is, my thesis concerns that the issue of death can be proved as an ideological fallacy in the understanding of the presence of the Being. In this chapter, I intend to determine how the beings in *Moby-Dick* can be made into the Being.

First, I must take Agamben’s *State of Exception* to illustrate the necessity of bare life in *Moby-Dick*. Agamben asserts that bare life is a life state in which one has been abandoned by the protection of law. The ambivalence of bare life is about its denial, which is brought about by the influence of political power, and the exceptions that apply to political power, which present the facticity that bare life is the life state that exhibits the sovereignty of the reality of life in itself. In other words, Agamben suggests bare life as a form of life that shows its sovereignty as one under the politicized abandonment. My thesis further suggests that bare life is a form of life that sustains its life power by foregoing any ideologies in the nature of life that might infringe upon its sovereignty. According to Agamben, bare life can be produced by a state of exception that transforms the original state of law into an emergency institution of law. Under an emergency, only political power exists, and the void of the law operates a power-space to fulfill the will power of the governing subject. In
summary, the state of exception produces a power-space that allows the presence of bare life to exist. In Agamben’s *State of Exception*, he asserts,

[i]n the case of law, the application of a norm is no way contained within the norm and cannot be derived from it; otherwise, there would have been no need to create the grand edifice of trail law. Just as between language and world, so between the norm and its application there is no internal nexus that allows one to be derived immediately from the other.

In this sense, the state of exception is the opening of a space in which application and norm reveal their separation . . . a norm whose application has been suspended. In this way, the impossible task of welding norm and reality together, and thereby constituting the normal sphere, is carried out in the norm of the exception, that is to say, by ultimately necessary to suspend its application, to produce an exception. In every case, the state of exception marks a threshold at which logic and praxis blur with each other and a pure violence without logos claims to realize an enunciation without any real reference. (40)

I quote the paragraph to emphasize that the state of exception marks the force of implementing laws that invalidate power. The state of exception actually creates a law-invalidation power-space, within which pure violence intends to operate a blankness of mind and body to recreate a new recognition of self-presence. In brief, the state of exception concerns the sovereignty of self-presence most in the blank and law-invalidation power-space. I consider that bare life is a life state that intends to redefine the necessity of the reality around the self-presence. In brief, the state of exception concerns the sovereignty of self-presence most in the blank and law-invalidation power-space. I consider that bare life is a life state that intends to redefine the necessity of the reality around the self-presence. Bare life goes further to change or destroy the norm of the historical past which law-functioned already. In principle, bare life exhibits the will power that intend to recreate its historical position and influence in the state of exception. I suggest that being positioned in the state of
exception can be considered as a self-trial, for the law-invalidation power-space provides an occasion to the self-presentation with merely the self-presentation of being positioned in that state, which derives from the will power to face the blankness of mind and body. To be brief, the will power that is generated from the self takes action to transform the meaning of self-presentation into the only witness and judge, who judges the immediate effect on the self and self-creating power-space. It should be noted that the final operation of power entails two options: being invalid or being valid. The state of exception offers the self a chance to prove the presence of the self as being valid or invalid through the employment of the self’s will power. In other words, I consider that bare life is a life state that life-in-itself proves the sovereignty of life, regardless of whether pertains to the will power of the self or not.

Now, I take Agamben’s *The Time That Remains* to illustrate the origin of the law. Agamben asserts: “[T]he oath thus belongs to one of the most archaic areas of the law, the sphere French scholars call *predroit*, literally, prelaw, a prejuridical sphere in which magic, religion, and law are absolutely indiscernible from one another” (114). According to Agamben, the oath pertains to the field of the law. In *Moby-Dick*, Captain Ahab proclaims the evilness of Moby Dick, which creates an emergency state, and he then forces the Pequod crew to make the following oath:

> Now, three to three, ye stand. Commend the murderous chalices. Bestow them, ye who are now made parties to this indissoluble league. Ha! Starbuck! but the deed is done! Yon ratifying sun now waits to sit upon it. Drink, ye harpooners! Drink and swear, ye men that man that deathful whaleboat’s bow—Death to Moby Dick! God hunt us all, if we do not hunt Moby Dick to his death! (142)
Ahab and his men make the oath, which pertains to juridical territory on the Pequod. However, Ahab also creates a state of exception in which the contract with the other stockholders is abandoned. The contract states that the interests of the voyage are in whale hunting, but Ahab forcefully changes this law, and calls for the life of Moby Dick and all the Pequod men. That is, once the oath to kill Moby Dick is in effect, the white whale and all the Pequod men are forced to accept the actuality of bare life on themselves. Here, my thesis purposes that the white whale also pertains to the bare life because of Ahab’s cohesive oath, which enforce either the death of the white whale or death of the Pequod men. Therefore, the thesis proclaims that in reality, there are two types of bare life being created after the Pequod oath is made. The first type of bare life has been created by Ahab and the consensus of the Pequod crew. This type of bare life causes the Pequod to be the only representative of the beings (all the Pequod members), which means that the Pequod carries the programmed power aimed at fulfilling the oath.

I suggest that this type of bare life, which is created under the emergency sovereignty, holds the intention of being sacred amidst the violence. That is, if the Pequod successfully kills the white whale, their bare life would possibly change into a state of sovereignty over us/me. Here, I use the “us/me” term to illustrate that the power that generates from the Pequod is not only for a collective purpose; it also serves the individual seeking change. In short, the power simultaneously pertains to a group of men and derives from the individual will power of each member. If the Pequod succeed in killing Moby Dick, they would fulfill the contract and fulfill the oath, which would assist them with leaving their original social class. In the novel, Melville describes the Pequod men as being in the lower social class on the land. They sell their time and labor for cash and cannot find a stable life identity on the land.
If the Pequod men were to successfully kill Moby Dick, they could advance their social status in life on the land. Therefore, the sea becomes a power-space that temporarily liberates the Pequod crew by enabling them to leave their original life statues on the land, and this type of bare life aims to manipulate power and construct a power-space in order to regain sovereignty over the self.

The second type of bare life pertains to Moby Dick. The white whale has already attained sovereignty over itself in the sea. The reason that Moby Dick is also considered an example of bare life is because of the emergency of being hunted; the whale must employ pure violence to defend the sovereignty of its own life. In other words, being hunted by the Pequod forces Moby Dick to fulfill the oath made aboard the Pequod. That is, the oath forces Moby Dick to reconstruct its sovereignty by destroying others’ power-space. I consider that for Moby Dick, the sea becomes a confronting space that generates power to destroy the power-space established by humans. This type of bare life aims to restore the liberation of the original state of life and destroy the established power-space, which threatens the sovereignty of the nature of life.

To be brief, the bare life constructed by the collective will power aims to create the power-space to obtain sovereignty from the outer world (i.e., society); in response, the bare life that is created by others’ malicious will power would generate a destructive force to maintain the sovereignty from the liberated individual.

I want to emphasize that the bare life concept pronounces the importance of sovereignty and the eagerness of being liberated from the emergency state. Yet Agamben does not present a solution to address the seemingly conflicting ideas between the sovereignty within life and liberation from the status quo. Basically, it must be clarified that the liberation of life presents a type of spiritual release, which
does not need to be imprisoned by the ideology of social class or be confined by the
dichotomies of right/wrong or good/evil. I suggest that the real liberation in life must
obtain the sovereignty of life. In principal, the sovereignty of life is about the
authority of the self, whose power can manage to maintain the individuality of his or
her self-presence and interact with others with the right to construct or destruct
power-space.

In *Moby-Dick*, Melville unconsciously sets Ishmael’s narrative voice to embody
the sovereignty of self-presence on the margin of life and death. In the Introduction of
my theses, I consider that Ahab is Ishmael’s power supplement, meaning that Ishmael
employs Ahab’s life history on the Pequod to fulfill his own telos of recognizing the
self-presence among people, and this further brings about Ishmael’s narrative
intention of recreating the power-space from his own point of view. It could also be
argued that it is Ahab who empowers Ishmael with the right to reproduce the presence
of the Pequod crew and further complete Melville’s ambition of creating the book of
life.

For example, when Ishmael and Queequeg are weaving the sword-mat. Ishmael
ponders,

I [Ishmael] say so strange a dreaminess did there then reign all over the ship
and all over the sea, only broken by the intermitting dull sound of the sword,
that it seemed as if this were the Loom of Time, and I myself were a shuttle
mechanically weaving and weaving away the Fates. There lay the fixed
threads of the warp subject to but one single, ever returning, unchanging
vibration, and that vibration merely enough to admit of the crosswise
interblending of other threads with its own. This warp seemed necessity, and
here, thought I, with my own hand I ply my own shuttle and weave my own
destiny into these unalterable threads. Meantime, Queequeg’s impulsive, indifferent sword, sometimes hitting the woof slantingly, or crookedly, or strongly, or weakly, as the case might be, and by the difference in the concluding blow producing a corresponding contrast in the final aspect of the completed fabric; this savage’s sword, thought I, which thus finally shapes and fashions both warp and woof this easy, indifferent sword must be chance—aye, chance, free will, and necessity-no wise incompatible—all interweavably working together. The straight warp of necessity, not to be swerved from its ultimate course—its every alternating vibration, indeed, only tending to that; free will still free to ply her shuttle between given threads; and chance, though restrained in its play within the right lines of necessity, and sideways in its motions modified by free will, though thus prescribed to by both, chance by turns rules either, and has the last featuring blow of events. (179)

From Ishmael’s perspective, he reckons that his encounter with the Pequod is the necessity of fate, and that the free will is the will power that assists him to keep on contemplating the truth of life and inspires him to participate in the literary act—the thesis suggests that *Moby-Dick* is Ishmael/Melville’s autobiography, because the author (Melville) and narrator (Ishmael) are in a self-referential relation during the story. Therefore, I suggest that Ishmael’s pondering while mat-weaving can be viewed as the metaphor of the literary act and the authorship in the process of literary creation. It should be noted that Ishmael working the loom signifies the ongoing process of creating the book of life in Ishmael’s presence. The warp signifies the necessity of the passing of time. The sword, as Ishmael suggests, the chance, is the probability of
producing an inversion that modifies the substantiality of the self-presence in order to understand the necessity of life and the genuine significance of free will.

*Moby-Dick* is not only the book of life among Melville’s literary works but also the book of witnessing the presence of Ishmael’s life history. In other words, *Moby-Dick* is a book that reveals the necessity of recognizing the self-presence by its literary setting and the incorporation of the author and the reader into the literary act. The significance of the whaling voyage is a literary metaphor illustrating the danger of confining the self to a certain ideology, and the shipwreck ending is the implication of pointing the end of historical time shall be initiated by the awareness of repositioning the self-presence among historical events and shall be ended by the finale of memory accumulation. With the narrative voice being presented in public, the self-presence of both the author and the narrator reach through time to the now, because the literary act generates a chance for both sides to reach the same position within and without both virtual reality and actual reality. As I state in the first chapter of my thesis, Melville signifies the Being, and the text *Moby-Dick* signifies the partial referent of the Being. Here, I assume that the survival of Ishmael, who signifies the being in the story, can become the Being (the author) through the acknowledging of his self-presence, which is presented in the whaling voyage. To be brief, I reckon that understanding the presence of the Being will always assist a person with the process of being, and through this, the being can gain actual sovereignty of life. Henceforth, the Being is the real subject within the lifespan of the being, and the being realizes that the self-presence signifies the projections of individuality, but that individuality would not be totally destroyed by awareness of the Being. Instead, once the being realizes the necessity of the Being, the being can lift the veil of the virtual reality
(which was actually created by the being). The being reaches the actual reality created by the Being but still enjoys the virtual reality that is constituted by self-experience.

**Messianic Time in *Moby-Dick***

In this chapter, I attempt to employ Agamben’s *The Time That Remains* to illustrate the aporia in *Moby-Dick*, and present a solution based on Agamben’s messianic issues. First, the term “Messiah” must be defined compactly, which is the figure who is destined to bring the Parousia to all humankind. Parousia is Greek for “presence” or “arrival.” According to Agamben, he asserts that “the messianic does not simply cancel out this figure (the way of being of this world), but it makes it pass, it prepares its end. This is not another figure or another world: it is the passing of the figure of this world” (25). Agamben also raises questions on the Messiah, asking “What does it mean to live in the Messiah, and what is the messianic life? What is the structure of messianic time” (18)? Subtly, Agamben illustrates that the messianic situation is the only real time (6). Agamben says,

> the coming of the Messiah means that all things, even the subjects who contemplate it are caught up in the *as not*, called and revoked at one and the same time. No subject could watch it or act *as if* at a given point. The messianic vocation dislocates and, above all nullifies the entire subject.

(Agamben 41)

Now, I must point out that Agamben assumes that the messianic life must be constituted upon the initiation of messianic time. The coming of the Messiah operates time until messianic time—the only real time—is reached. This produces the messianic vocation that dislocates and nullifies the actuality of the world. In other words, Agamben suggests that messianic time is the time that ends the functioning
chaos of the law and fulfills the telos of the law. The telos of the law is to complete the goal of protecting life.

In *Moby-Dick*, it is apparent that there is no chance for the Messiah to come and save the already completed book, because “history” has been settled by the author. However, it is possible for the readers to find the messianic time to understand the telos of the law. In the story, the law includes the contract to the Pequod and the vow to kill the white whale. From the “historical” perspective, the law does not fulfill its telos. Yet based on Ishmael’s literary act, the telos of the law is given an opportunity to operate a new space and recreate the significance of time through a narrative of memorial images. In other words, the literary act produces the messianic time, which is created by the reader. I suggest that the reader possess a weak level of messianic power that can transform the historic cycle into a null zone of time. This null zone refers to the time-space of the now; I reckon that this time-space has the power to erase the “historical” past (i.e., the story). Nevertheless, the only way to reach this null zone is to face the unfulfilled “historical” past and to fulfill its significance by bringing it to the presence. In other words, by transforming the presence of the “historical” past into the part of self-presence, the reader can complete the allocation of the time of self-presence. By realizing that “I” (i.e., the reader and the author) am the first and the last to participate in the literary act, that “I” (the reader and the author) complete the book of life by taking the “historical” past into the real time of the now, the reader incidentally creates the messianic time by encountering the virtual reality (the text) and the actual reality (including the literary act), and by reaching the null zone. The messianic life is initiated by those who seek its message.

It could also be said that by the end of *Moby-Dick* (book of life), the virtual reality has been established and the end of “historical” time (the end of the book)
produces the beginning of the entire story. In the beginning of *Moby-Dick*, it is Ishmael’s self-presence that presents the fictional narrative of history. This narrative enables the entire book to generate a sense of actuality from the beginning to the end. The actuality of the book is the null zone (the time-space of the now), which creates the “chance” to transform the significance of the “historical” past (the story). When the presence of the book interacts with the presence of the reader, the fictional narrative and facticity of time create the unique presence through the self. In other words, by reading *Moby-Dick*, the reader transforms his or her presence into self-presence, because he or she recreates himself or herself by reading.

Here, I must elaborate on the messianic space. This space refers to creation that occurs after messianic time has been recognized by the self, and when the self is aware of the significance of self-presence. The self-presence realizes that the “historical” past has been confirmed as inevitably coming to the end (because of the inversion of messianic time). In *Moby-Dick*, when messianic time has been recognized by the reader, the exigency of the state of exception has been deactivated, and the law (the commercial contrast and the vow to kill Moby Dick), which is suspended by the shipwreck, is being practiced by the only survivor, Ishmael. Since Ishmael, the juridical person, attempts to complete the suspended law by his narrative voice, the only witness Ishmael generates is a type of authorship for a self-trial based on his accumulative memory. It should be noted that other Pequod members has been sentenced death; therefore, the only entity of this self-trial is the recorder and memory keeper, Ishmael. The judge is the reader, and the authority of the trial comes from the recorders’ framing of the narrative. In other words, Ishmael is simultaneously on trial for the “history” and on trial for his narrative voice. Ishmael also transforms the white whale hunting mission into a mission for the reader to seek out the truth in life. The
reader is forced to recognize whether the sin of hunting the white whale is an offence according the motives of the Pequod crew. Simultaneously, the finished text (the unfulfilled “history” still exists) in itself is the product of the messianic space. Concurrently, the text is found to have invalidated the law after the reader has completed it, whereas the presence of the text remains perceived as effective for its presence has been printed in public, which retains its reading value by every reader.

When messianic time is recognized by the reader, the text fulfills its purpose of being the entity that creates the messianic space. The messianic life signifies two timelines (the virtual time within the text and actual time experienced by the reader), creating substantial overlap between the presence of the text (the virtual reality) and the reader (the being who lives in actual reality). Reading signifies the encounter between the author and the reader, this encounter presents the delay of time from both sides (the author and the reader) yet reading also presents Parousia, which occurs at the same time for both sides. After the encounter has been completed (for the reader, the completion of reading; for the author, the completion of writing), messianic time reveals the essence of completing the self-searching telos of the author (Melville/the Being); simultaneously, the reader (including Ishmael as the only one living recorder and self-reading reader of his narrative/the being) fulfills their search of being an entity in a virtual reality. When both the telos and the experience are fulfilled by readers who understand the significance of the setting of the virtual reality in *Moby-Dick*, the reader further realizes how the substantial life (the reader’s self) understands the presence of virtual beings (Ishmael, Ahab, and other characters in *Moby-Dick*), and this gives the substantial life the opportunity to redefine his or her self-presence after reading and interpreting *Moby-Dick*. 
I must point out that understanding the virtual reality is the motive of realizing the telos of the substantial presence in actual reality. By understanding the dislocation of the sovereignty (through reading *Moby-Dick*, the sovereignty of the reader’s self-presence is temporarily transformed in the presence of Ishmael and Ahab) within the lifespan of being adrift on the sea-space, the reader regains his or her genuine sovereignty, which includes the presence of the Being, and the subject of the substantial life is on the verge of crossing the line between the Being and the self-presence. Therefore, the self-presence of the reader dislocates the virtual reality, which is self-created by the reader, and removes the time line produced by the virtual reality (the mind). The reader can live in the messianic life after the structure of messianic time has been constructed in the reader’s mind. The reader and the text become the entities that create the messianic space, because the reader knows that only one life really exists; that is, the life that relies on the presence of the Being and the only sovereignty of the substantial life is about to transform the self-presence into the Messianic-presence, because the book of life (substantial life) is actually the Parousia of controlling the free will and power of the self to obtain genuine liberation from the spirit. Henceforth, the self-presence suspends the fear of having to face death (the suspension of the reader’s time and self-history). Through the transformation of self-presence into Messianic-presence, the reader and the characters of *Moby-Dick* stop the aimless searching and laboring, the mind within the beings all having been redeemed by the presence of the Being. Provided that the mind accepts Messianic life, the beings know that their history and future all exist in the time-space of the now (the null zone).

To conclude, the significance of creating the self-presence is to enable the self to experience the multiplicity of life through individual free will. The free will creates
different types of power from politics and culture, but the power-space that is constructed or destroyed by the self or other presences has one goal: to determine the significance of the oneness of life and to create a unique self-history within the limitation of the programmed physiological clock. *Moby-Dick* is simultaneously the book of Melville’s life and the book that carries the messianic code for the reader to employ his or her weak messianic power to figure out that the genuine meaning of the Book of Life is the title with the name of “I am the Being.”
Conclusion

Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick* presents the literary ambition of creating an American epic that connects the history of whaling with the power of fulfilling modernization. The image of Americans in the novel is mainly focused on the protagonists, Ishmael and Captain Ahab. My thesis suggests that the virtual reality, which is created by the literary act, transforms the presence of Ishmael into an entity that demonstrates the power of the Being. In short, Ishmael constructs the structure of *Moby-Dick* with his self-presence narratorial voice.

In the Introduction, I propose that *Moby-Dick* projects Melville’s partial referential history of his life experiences. Yet the content of the novel also completes Ishmael’s life journey in searching for a sense of identity. In the novel, Ishmael calls himself an orphan who has been abandoned by the Pequod. I further argue that the self-presence of Ishmael remains even after the reading of the book has been completed. Nevertheless, Ishmael’s presence can change the presence of the reader during reading. Once the reader realizes that in actual reality the novel provides an occasion for the reader to recognize the difference between the self and the notion of self-presence, the reader can make an assumption that the his or her relation with the text and the author actually stands for the relation with the self and the Being (in actual reality). By reading Ishmael autobiographical narration, the reader can gradually realize that the literary metaphor of Ishmael signifies that the inner self recognizes the meaning of life presents the facticity of “I Am.”

Chapter 1 expounds the biblical meaning of the name-identity in *Moby-Dick*. Here, I explain that the *Holy Bible* unconsciously influences Herman Melville’s literary intention to create a book that forms the beginning and the end by the same narrator, Ishmael. Apparently, Melville creates Ishmael in *Moby-Dick* to replace the
narrative position of Jehovah in the *Holy Bible*. In other words, Melville wants to create a book which forsakes the power of Being to manifest the power of human beings.

Melville creates a seemingly desolate ending in *Moby-Dick*, but he does not realize that the book itself shows the power of Being within and without the lifespan of his characters. In other words, Melville does not realize that *Moby-Dick* epitomizes the power that intends to reconstruct the power-space that transcends the limitation of humankind and the eternality of the Being. I suggest that *Moby-Dick* signify the mystery of beings within the presence of power body. The power body pertains to the presence of human beings. In other words, the body of humankind exhibits its presence by obtaining power from the outer world, in order to create the power-space to prove the value of laboring. The telos of constructing or deconstructing power-space serves for the eagerness of manifesting the presence of the self.

In Chapter 2, I consider that Captain Ahab misunderstands his presence by objectifying Moby Dick as a substitute for his subjectivity in life. Ahab experiences the nothingness from his laboring life; therefore, his madness generates from his self-doubt of his presence. Hunting whales is the only thing that Ahab can do; his disabled body strengthens his will power to create a power-space so that nothing can intrude into his life once again. Accordingly, Ahab imagines himself as the hero who must demolish the embodiment of evilness—Moby Dick. Ahab uses his language to proclaim that the subjectivity of the self dignifies his presence, which is equal to the position of God. His declaration of being the only authority on the sea-space demonstrates his madness. Ahab does not recognize that his forty years of whale hunting has violated the life power of the whales. In brief, Ahab’s madness presents a type of twisted self-identification of his presence.
In fact, I propose that madness touches on the universal doubt among humankind; that is, the question “who I am?” In addition, by objectifying another’s presence into the subjectivity of the self, mad people must face the nihilism of their self-presence. Because another’s presence also shows the feature of subjectivity in their lifespan. I suggest that the real subjectivity of self-presence in life is about searching for a balance between mental liberation and substantial achievements. The power generated from madness must face the danger of total destruction of its power-space, because the fallacy of madness is that self-presence is secluded by the presence of others. The feature of isolation of the power-space that is constructed by madness is fragile because madness cannot clearly distinguish self-presence from the presence of others. Therefore, the counterforce that comes from the attacked target is justified to attack madness with pure violence as a form of defense. Nevertheless, madness also generates a possibility of exploring the limits imposed on self-presence by power manipulation. In short, the self-presence continues searching subjectively with eagerness to obtain power in order to prove that the presence is more meaningful to the world than nothingness is. Madness is a phenomenon that magnifies or twists this inherent desire of searching for the ultimate meaning in life. In Chapter 2, I suggest that power constructs the power-space and the ideology that serves knowledge in order to complete the telos of establishing subjectivity in life.

In Chapter 3, I suggest that *Moby-Dick* can be viewed as a prophecy of political ideology in the modern age. I argue that the whale (Moby Dick) signifies the epitome of fascism, and that the whales that have been killed signifies the proletariats, which can be connected to Marxism. The whaling industry signifies capitalism and the seaway that the whaling ships make can be considered as commercial globalism. Moreover, the Pequod epitomizes nineteenth-century America imperialism. I suggest
that the tragic destiny of the Pequod signifies American imperialism eventually being destroyed by fascism. It should be noted that in the novel, the angered Moby Dick is formed by the collective consciousness of the Pequod. Therefore, I propose that Melville intends to imply that American imperialism forces the proletariats to become violent fascists in order to deconstruct the power-space that the Americans initially made to destroy its resisters. In short, I believe that the novel can be viewed as a political metaphor that points out that American imperialism is being constructed by capitalism, global commercialism, and violence. The danger of American imperialism comes from its right to demolish the seemingly evil target. However, the seemingly evil target is being forced to become violent to protect its right of being a liberated being. The dilemma actually comes from the different ideology of determining the genuine meaning of being liberated in life.

In Chapter 4, I adopt Giorgio Agamben’s theory to illustrate the telos of life as a universal principal. I explain that the oath initiates a state of emergency that transforms the life of the Pequod crew into the bare life under Ahab’s imposed state of exception. Moby Dick represents the other type of bare life because its fate is also confined to the oath. I propose that bare life pertains to the sovereignty of being abandoned by the norms of law. Only the life-in-itself exhibits the sovereignty of the concept of bare life. After the shipwreck, Ishmael becomes the only remainder of the bare life, and he employs his narrative voice to tell the story to the reader. The reader has the right to judge Ishmael and the Pequod based on their interpretation. I suggest that the narrative voice that comes from Ishmael makes the task of hunting the white whale an unfulfilled historical event, yet at the same time, the task can be viewed as fulfilled as long as messianic time creates the inversion of the whole story. I propose that messianic time is the time that allows the reader to understand that the telos of the
narrative story is to make the fictional reality interact with the actual reality that creates the time-space of the now, which is the time-space that only real exists in both the author and the readers’ encountering. The only encounter between the author and the reader is through reading *Moby-Dick*; therefore, the novel becomes the book of life when the reader realizes the self-presence hidden by the encounter of fictional time (time in the text) and actual time (time spent reading). Here, I must explain that in Chapter 1, I already illustrate that Ishmael is a literary metaphor representing the self, the “I Am.” In addition, the author, Melville, stands for the literary metaphor of the “Being” within *Moby-Dick*. As long as the reader knows that the only survival in the story represents for the author’s partial reference in history, the reader can recognize that reading makes himself or herself become the imaginary “I” who is Ishmael, and the collective reading experience, which exhibits the feature of “Being,” is without the fictional time of the readers’ mind in the actual time. In other words, the reader and the author hold together the “I” and the “Being” while reading *Moby-Dick*. When the reading of *Moby-Dick* has been completed, the telos of the novel is also fulfilled, because the reader finally realizes that the self-presence constructs their story of life and that the lives of all readers are shared for the same principle of life—I am the Being.
Works Cited


