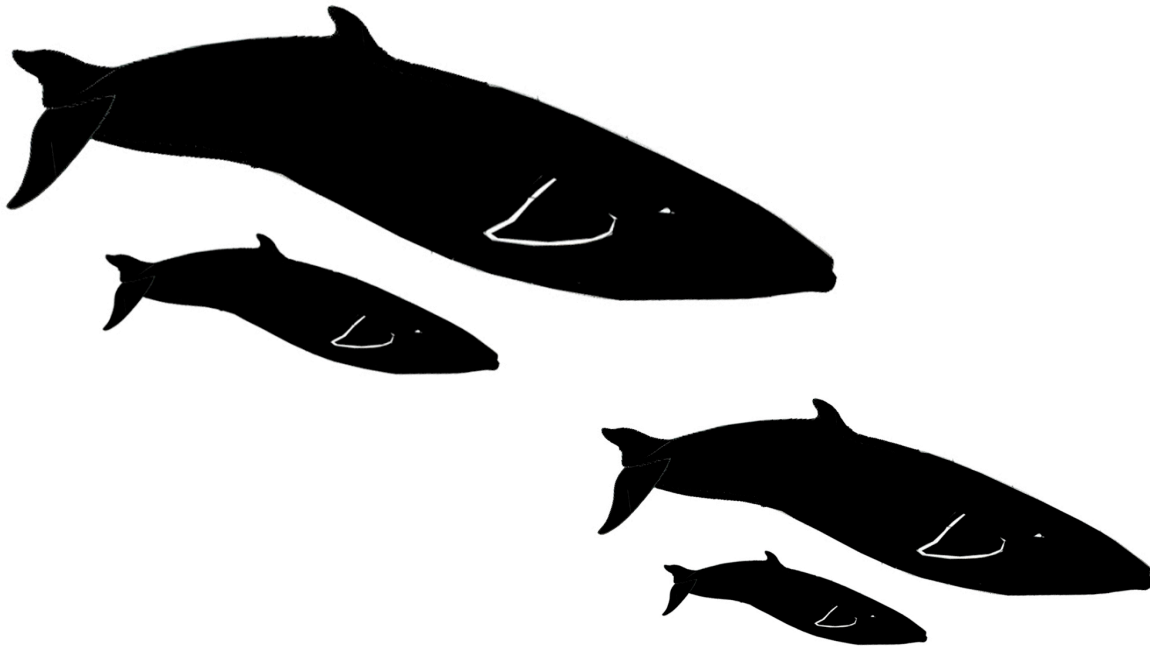


UNIT: MOTIVES FOR READING

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MOTIVES FOR READING: FAN CULTURE, POP CULTURE, AND COLLABORATIVE READING PRACTICES

BY HENRY JENKINS

Why Do We Read?

The study of how and why readers read has become an important subfield of Media and Cultural Studies. Work in this tradition ranges from the study of the personal associations formed by individual readers as they encounter canonical literary texts to research into large scale "interpretive communities," such as the fandoms that emerge around popular television shows. The way we teach students to read in schools represents one possible way of reading a text, an institutionally specific set of practices that emerge from the field of literary studies. This approach is valuable, to be sure, but may be radically different from what readers do with books when they choose to read them on their own. Indeed, students often experience a disconnect between the two sets of activities. For those students for whom reading in school is a struggle, their displeasure may block them from picking up books in their everyday life. In other words, we may be teaching them NOT to read even as we think we are teaching them how to read.

So, in this section, I want to call your attention to the range of motives and purposes that shape the reading of popular media texts; my hope is to give you some background on the range of different experiences and perspectives your students bring into the classroom. This Teachers' Strategy Guide will encourage you and your students to "go meta"—that is, to pay attention to how and why they are reading a difficult book like *Moby-Dick*. Rather than ignore those elements that make Melville's novel challenging, we want you to acknowledge those challenges and to help students broaden their strategies for confronting them. When I studied *Moby-Dick* in high school, my teacher, Mrs. Hopkins, had a very clear motive for why I was supposed to be reading the book—to find allusions to the Bible—which had little or nothing to do with my own reasons for wanting to read the book—because I had enjoyed the film version and wanted to spend more time in Melville's world.

These different motives, in turn, require different strategies for reading. Literary scholar Peter J. Rabinowitz argues that genre, for example, represents less a category of texts than an approach to reading⁵. He suggests that genre involves "reading as." My teacher was encouraging me to read *Moby-Dick* as a retelling of the biblical story of Jonah, while I was reading *Moby-Dick* as the story of men against whales. Rabinowitz argues that the choice of a genre involves alternative strategies for interpretation. First, he talks about "rules of notice," that give priority to certain aspects of narratives as potentially significant while assigning others to the margins. No one can pay attention to every detail in a book as expansive as *Moby-Dick*, but how do we decide what to notice? Second, genre sets "rules of signification" that determine what meanings can be ascribed to the significant details we've identified. How do I know what the white whale means? Third, "rules of configuration" shape the reader's expectations about likely plot developments. We know that when Ahab and his crew find the whale, they are not likely to give it a big hug or fire machine guns or tap dance on its back or try to communicate its songs to visitors from another world. Fourth, "rules of coherence" shape the extrapolations readers make. Once we have read a book, certain questions linger. What, for example, happened to Ahab's son who is referenced by the captain of the *Rachel*? Depending on our goals for reading, we may be encouraged to speculate further or forget about these loose ends.

Seeking insights into how people read literature, David Bleich asked male and female students to retell the plot of William Faulkner's story "A Rose for Emily." He found significant differences in male and female

⁵ Peter J. Rabinowitz, "The Turn of the Glass Key: Popular Fiction as Reading Strategy," *Critical Inquiry* (March 1985), 418-431.

responses⁶. Male students read for authorial meaning, perceiving a "strong narrational voice" shaping events, while female students "experienced the narrative as a world" that exists beyond the short story. Male students tried to recover what Faulkner meant, while female students got inside the heads of the characters. The male students moved quickly to interpretation even when they were trying to recount the plot while the female students felt freer to add their own speculations into their account. Not surprisingly, the males' reading strategy is the one most often promoted through the classroom, where the author's voice is seen as more important than the character's, and where recovering meanings is valued more than speculating about what might happen after the story ends. Yet, in promoting this strategy, we may be discouraging other forms of reading and motives for reading that are also rewarding.

In one of my early research projects, I looked at three very different communities of readers who were invested in the television series, *Star Trek*: mostly male MIT students, mostly female fan fiction writers, and the Galaxians, a group of gay, lesbian, and bisexual fans⁷. The male MIT students were most interested in the technical aspects, classifying episodes based on which body of scientific knowledge they evoked, and using them as a starting point to speculate about future discoveries and innovations in their chosen disciplines. The female fans were much more interested in the strong emotional ties between the characters—romances, friendships, and community bonds. The Galaxians saw *Star Trek* as a social utopia that embraced diversity. These different motives impacted what each group took away from the series. For example, when asked about each of the regular characters, the male MIT students described them as autonomous problem-solvers, identifying what actions they took to "save the ship," whereas the female fanzine writers read the characters through their relationships as mentors, friends, lovers, and shipmates. The male MIT students translated their enthusiasm for the series into "nitpicking," criticizing errors in the science, making models of ships, or playing computer and role playing games centered on combat situations. The female fans responded by writing stories, especially stories that loosely fell into the romance genre, and making music videos, which likewise focused on the emotional lives of the characters.

What Do We Read For?

The Web has made it much easier for us to see different groups of readers in the process of reading favorite texts. We can take those insights back with us into the classroom as we think about what might be going on inside the heads of different students, each with her own motives that shape what she is likely to get out of a book. We might start with the basic question—what are you reading for?—and realize that different readers pay attention to different kinds of information.

Consider, for example, the *Patrick O'Brian Compendium* [<http://www.patrickobrian.com/>], a website where readers of a popular series of sea novels have pooled information, each tackling a different body of knowledge. On this site, you can see, for example, a breakdown of all of the medical issues (wounds and diseases) the characters confronted and how they were cured; other readers have catalogued the ships or developed a time line of the events, researched vintage recipes or produced a glossary of old naval terms. Looking at this site, we can imagine readers going through the books with yellow highlighters, marking different passages. That's precisely what we hope will happen in your classrooms as you encourage students to identify their own interests in *Moby-Dick*.

As we turn towards other fan websites and discussion lists, we may also pay attention to the different things readers do with texts. For example, this website [www.politedissent.com/house_pd.html] represents a medical student's reactions to *House, M.D.* For each episode, he describes the medical issues and practices

⁶ David Bleich, "Gender Interests in Reading and Language," in Elizabeth A. Flynn and P. P. Schweickart (eds.) *Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Texts, and Contexts* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

⁷ John Tulloch and Henry Jenkins, *Science Fiction Audiences: Watching Star Trek and Doctor Who* (London: Routledge, 1995).

depicted and critiques them against his own professional knowledge and experience. Fans call this approach "nitpicking."⁸ The reader recognizes that one can have an entertaining episode which misrepresents medical information, but he also takes pleasure in testing his own evolving knowledge against the series.

This *Battlestar Galactica* site [http://en.battlestarwiki.org/wiki/Continuity_errors_\(RDM\)](http://en.battlestarwiki.org/wiki/Continuity_errors_(RDM)) involves a different form of nitpicking: it is primarily focused on identifying continuity errors, places where the program contradicts earlier information. Fans collectively see if they can spot the mistakes and thus demonstrate their mastery over complex long-form narratives.

Lost is famous for its mysteries and puzzles⁹. Whether you like the series or not depends on your interest in these enigmas. This website <http://lost-theories.com/> has become a place where fans share and evaluate their theories. Fans might describe this activity as speculation.

After every episode, *Survivor* fan David Bloomberg explains why the contestant booted that week lost the game. You can see an example at <http://www.realitynewsline.com/cgi-bin/ae.pl?mode=1&article=article7926.art&page=1>. Over time, he has developed some core questions he asks about the contestants' strategies, identifying mistakes they made, and in the process, anticipating which characters will be voted off the island next. In fandom, this mode of reading is known as spoiling, since its goal is not simply to interpret what happened but also to predict future developments¹⁰.

A site like *Television Without Pity* [<http://www.televisionwithoutpity.com>] involves another fan practice: the recap. Here, amateur and professional writers summarize what happened for the benefit of those who missed an episode. The tone of this site is snarky—the writers enjoy the series, but part of their enjoyment stems from not taking the series too seriously.

Some of what readers do online looks very much what readers do in classrooms: they form interpretations, often by tracing allusions to other works, as occurs in this fan's account of religious and mythological allusions in *The Matrix* franchise: [<http://www.briandemilio.com/matrix.html>].

A striking feature of all of these sites is that they represent a social process of reading. Fans go online to talk with other readers who are engaging with the same books and television shows. As they do so, sharing their reading experiences allows them to grow closer, forming friendships with others through their common reading practices. Here, readers may also debate different ways of interpreting shared texts, and in the process, they often spell out their assumptions about the nature of reading. Fans engage in close readings, citing specific passages, debating interpretations, and constructing arguments to support their analysis. Fans often say such conversations open a favorite series to new interpretations, allowing them to see things they might have missed, and providing them new motives to watch the episodes again.

These fan discussion forums illustrate one of the core new media literacy skills—**collective intelligence**. These communities of readers operate in a world where nobody knows everything, everybody knows something, and what is known by any member is available to the group as a whole on demand. The NML White Paper defines collective intelligence as "the ability to pool knowledge and compare notes with others towards a common goal." Pierre Levy, who coined the term "collective intelligence," states very clearly that a networked society is one where each participant develops a distinctive expertise which can contribute to the

⁸ Henry Jenkins, "The Merits of Nitpicking: A Doctor Diagnoses House," *Confessions of an Aca-Fan*, January 18 2007, http://henryjenkins.org/2007/01/the_merits_of_nitpicking_a_do.html.

⁹ Henry Jenkins, "Getting *Lost*," *Confessions of an Aca-Fan*, Aug 25 2006, http://henryjenkins.org/2006/08/getting_lost.html.

¹⁰ Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), see Chapter One.

group's common ventures¹¹. People working together and sharing information are able to address questions far more complex and arrive at answers far more quickly than any single member could do. Such a social structure places great value on diversity: if each member contributes his or her own expertise, the community is strengthened by the diversity of its participants.

Right now, very few activities in schools support collective intelligence. Schools are still modeled on the ideal of the autonomous learner; individuals are expected to know everything within themselves and thus seek nothing from others. To bring collective intelligence into the classroom, we first have to allow students to develop their own expertise and thus to take responsibility for helping the class to understand one aspect of the shared problem. Rather than having the students all read the same book for the same reasons, you might encourage the students to become more self-conscious about what they hope to get out of the book and allow them to pursue very different projects through their reading. In this way, they will not simply be trying to identify what their teacher thinks they should learn. Rather, they will be sharing with the teacher and their class what they discovered from reading the book in their own way.

Terms

Nitpicking—A fan reading practice which involves testing fictional representations against real world practices (such as reading *House* for its medical accuracy) or searching for continuity errors that break down the coherence of the fictional world.

Spoiling—A fan reading practice that involves seeking to predict developments in a fictional text before the author reveals that information, either through internal analysis or through outside sources.

Speculation—A fan reading practice which involves extrapolating beyond the information provided in a series to explore other aspects of the represented world.

Recaps—A fan reading practice that involves summarizing the events of fictional texts for the benefits of those who missed them, often involving some form of snarky commentary.

¹¹ Pierre Levy, *Collective Intelligence: Mankind's Emerging World in Cyberspace* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books, 1997)

HERMAN MELVILLE AS A PROTO-FAN

BY HENRY JENKINS

A central premise of this guide is that all authors were once readers, and their process of reading provides the preconditions for their acts of writing. Wyn Kelley offers her perspective as a literary critic about what we know of Melville as a reader and what traces we can find of his reading practices in *Moby-Dick*. Here, I want to share my take on this. In the discussion that follows, I will apply the vocabulary introduced above to what Melville does in writing about whaling culture. In other words, I want to read Melville as an enthusiast, perhaps even a fan of whaling culture who wrote *Moby-Dick* to share his passion and interest with others.

Speculating

Here is one of the many passages in the book where Melville examines the story of Jonah:

One old Sag-Harbor whaleman's chief reason for questioning the Hebrew story was this: He had one of those quaint old-fashioned Bibles, embellished with curious, unscientific plates; one of which represented Jonah's whale with two spouts in his head—a peculiarity only true with respect to a species of the Leviathan (the Right Whale, and the varieties of that order), concerning which the fishermen have this saying, "A penny roll would choke him"; his swallow is so very small. But, to this, Bishop Jebb's anticipative answer is ready. It is not necessary, hints the Bishop, that we consider Jonah as tombed in the whale's belly, but as temporarily lodged in some part of his mouth. And this seems reasonable enough in the good Bishop. For truly, the Right Whale's mouth would accommodate a couple of whist-tables, and comfortably seat all the players. Possibly, too, Jonah might have ensconced himself in a hollow tooth; but, on second thoughts, the Right Whale is toothless.--*Moby-Dick*, [Ch. 83](#)

In this case, he recounts a conversation among his fellow whaling fans—the old Sag-Harbor whaleman and Bishop Jebb—trying to make sense of contradictions in the source text. Their speculations extend beyond the information given in order to try to reconcile what they know of whales in the real world with what the story tells them about Jonah's encounter with the Leviathan. Contemporary fans would recognize the logic of this exchange: Melville takes an element that doesn't quite work in the original and rather than discarding it, he tries to figure out under what circumstances it might make sense. Fans often describe such creative work as "repairing the damage" created by a distracted artist who didn't think through all of the implications of his or her own story. What if we imagined Jonah inside the Whale's mouth rather than fully swallowed—maybe even inside his tooth? Ah, but these fans have already figured out that the Leviathan must have been a Right Whale, and not wanting to discard all of that fan labor, they want to preserve that theory and so they have to discard this new layer of speculation.

Nitpicking

In this case, the speculations also constitute a form of nitpicking; the above example closely resembles the search for continuity errors on the *Battlestar Galactica* wiki. But we can also see evidence of the kind of interpretive practices demonstrated by the young doctor in training as he critiqued the representations of medical practice on *House M.D.* Such nitpicking comes through most vividly when Melville takes on previous representations of the whale. Here, we see Melville boldly assert his superior knowledge and his desire to "set the record straight," common motives for participation in fan discussion lists:

I shall ere long paint to you as well as one can without canvas, something like the true form of the whale as he actually appears to the eye of the whaleman when in his own absolute body the whale is moored alongside the whaleship so that he can be fairly stepped upon there. It may be worth while, therefore, previously to advert to those curious imaginary portraits of him which even down to the present day confidently challenge the faith of the landsman. It is time to set the world right in this matter, by proving such pictures of the whale all wrong.—*Moby-Dick*, [Chapter 55](#)

But, before he can do so, he must clear away previous representations, in this case, focusing on the anatomical inaccuracies created by artists who have had no direct experience of the living beast:

These manifold mistakes in depicting the whale are not so very surprising after all. Consider! Most of the scientific drawings have been taken from the stranded fish; and these are about as correct as a drawing of a wrecked ship, with broken back, would correctly represent the noble animal itself in all its undashed pride of hull and spars. Though elephants have stood for their full-lengths, the living Leviathan has never yet fairly floated himself for his portrait. The living whale, in his full majesty and significance, is only to be seen at sea in unfathomable waters; and afloat the vast bulk of him is out of sight, like a launched line-of-battle ship; and out of that element it is a thing eternally impossible for mortal man to hoist him bodily into the air, so as to preserve all his mighty swells and undulations. And, not to speak of the highly presumable difference of contour between a young suckling whale and a full-grown Platonian Leviathan; yet, even in the case of one of those young sucking whales hoisted to a ship's deck, such is then the outlandish, eel-like, limbered, varying shape of him, that his precise expression the devil himself could not catch.—*Moby-Dick*, [Chapter 55](#)

I am reminded of a recurring feature on Sequential Tart, a long-standing webzine by and for female comics fans, which regularly posts and critiques unlikely depictions of the female body in various superhero comics. Here, for example, is an excerpt from one tutorial on "Bizarre Breasts."
(http://www.sequentialart.com/archive/july02/bb_0702.shtml):

Bizarre proportions are nothing new to comics; be it the desire to cater to the cheesecake crowd or simply the preference of the artist, distorted anatomy has become commonplace. The fact that "professional" artists may utilize distortions in published works is a bit disappointing, but frankly, if they've gotten the job the odds are they aren't going to feel the need to change their style. That's fine, the world needs laughter. However, what does bother me is the possibility—hell, the reality—that amateur artists are copying this exaggerated anatomy and making these mistakes their own. So, in hopes of reaching those for whom this advice may actually have some impact, I have utilized my meager knowledge of anatomy and admittedly unpolished art skills to bring the world a brief tutorial on one of the comic artists' greatest challenges: the breast.

I don't want to push the parallels here too far, but both passages argue against the absurd and inaccurate representation of anatomy which comes from artists who don't really understand the subjects they are trying to depict.

Cataloging and Collecting

Melville, like modern day fans, refuses to restrict himself to a single text or even a single mode of representation. As he explains, "There are some enterprises in which a careful disorderliness is the true method" ([Chapter 82](#)). And indeed, some of the most productive modes of fan interpretation involve rampant interdisciplinarity and free association, creating unexpected juxtapositions of texts, tracing real and imagined allusions to other works, as we saw in *The Matrix* example above. Melville read everything he could get his hands on—ancient books, religious texts, paintings, scrimshaw, currency, tavern signs, even the stars in the sky. He exhibits here the fan's fascination with cataloging and collecting:

The more I dive into this matter of whaling, and push my researches up to the very spring-head of it so much the more am I impressed with its great honorableness and antiquity; and especially when I find so many great demi-gods and heroes, prophets of all sorts, who one way or other have shed distinction upon it, I am transported with the reflection that I myself belong, though but subordinately, to so emblazoned a fraternity.—*Moby-Dick*, [Chapter 82](#)

I particularly like that last bit about becoming part of a "fraternity" of others who share his passions and knowledge, for this phrase conveys the social bonds within fan communities.

Appropriation and Transformation

Melville also appropriates and transforms the raw material, retelling classic stories for his own purposes. Consider how Melville manhandles the canon in his retelling of the story of St. George and the Dragon:

Akin to the adventure of Perseus and Andromeda—indeed, by some supposed to be indirectly derived from it—is that famous story of St. George and the Dragon; which dragon I maintain to have been a whale; for in many old chronicles whales and dragons are strangely jumbled together, and often stand for each other. "Thou art as a lion of the waters, and as a dragon of the sea," said Ezekiel; hereby, plainly meaning a whale; in truth, some versions of the Bible use that word itself. Besides, it would much subtract from the glory of the exploit had St. George but encountered a crawling reptile of the land, instead of doing battle with the great monster of the deep. Any man may kill a snake, but only a Perseus, a St. George, a Coffin, have the heart in them to march boldly up to a whale.

Let not the modern paintings of this scene mislead us; for though the creature encountered by that valiant whaleman of old is vaguely represented of a griffin-like shape, and though the battle is depicted on land and the saint on horseback, yet considering the great ignorance of those times, when the true form of the whale was unknown to artists; and considering that as in Perseus' case, St. George's whale might have crawled up out of the sea on the beach; and considering that the animal ridden by St. George might have been only a large seal, or sea-horse; bearing all this in mind, it will not appear altogether incompatible with the sacred legend and the ancientest draughts of the scene, to hold this so-called dragon no other than the great Leviathan himself. In fact, placed before the strict and piercing truth, this whole story will fare like that fish, flesh, and fowl idol of the Philistines, Dagon by name; who being planted before the ark of Israel, his horse's head and both the palms of his hands fell off from him, and only the stump or fishy part of him remained. Thus, then, one of our own noble stamp, even a whaleman, is the tutelary guardian of England; and by good rights, we harpooners of Nantucket should be enrolled in the most noble order of St. George. And therefore, let not the knights of that honorable company (none of whom, I venture to say, have ever had to do with a whale like their great patron), let them never eye a Nantucketer with disdain, since even in our woollen frocks and tarred trowsers we are much better entitled to St. George's decoration than they. --*Moby-Dick*, [Chapter 82](#)

Fans might describe what Melville does here with St. George as a What if? story: what if St. George had been a sea-faring rather than land-loving man? Indeed, we can see Melville as struggling with another fan community over which one of them "correctly" captures what is interesting about this character and his adventures.

But like many later fans, Melville also struggles with how much fidelity the fan writer owes to the original. The author discusses the ways that multiple whalers approaching the same creature determine who can assert ownership over it, declaring some whales to be "fast-fish," that is, already harpooned and bound by a particular ship, and others to be "loose-fish," that is, free of any binds or constraints and thus subject to being grabbed by whichever ship approaches them first. Melville, then, extends this metaphor to talk about the work of the imagination: "What are you, reader, but a Loose-Fish and a Fast-Fish, too?" ([Chapter 89](#)). In other words, Melville is exploring to what degree we get hooked into a story and thus get captured by its author and to what degree our imagination remains unmoored, capable of taking the story wherever we want it to go. In a sense, that's exactly what fans are trying to make sense of when they debate how much they need to follow canon and to what degree they can construct their own fan universe. Read in this way, we can see *Moby-Dick*, often described as the Great American Novel, as a piece of fan fiction which grows out of Melville's fascination for the whale and his mastery over whaling lore. Drawing on a range of stories, responding to competing representations, Melville constructs his own original fiction, which he asserts better captures what fascinates him about man's eternal struggle against the natural order than previous representations.

RICARDO AND RUDY AS READERS

BY HENRY JENKINS

Reading the Characters

What does it mean to read *Moby-Dick* not as a media scholar or as a literary critic but as a creative artist, someone who wants to adapt the book for the stage, someone who is reading it with an eye towards its unfulfilled dramatic potential? This is not simply a task which Ricardo Pitts-Wiley took on himself; it was also a task which he gave to a group of incarcerated youth participating at the Rhode Island Training School. Each student was asked to focus on a single character within the book and try to anticipate what kind of person this character would be if the novel had a contemporary rather than historical setting. Here's how Pitts-Wiley describes the results:

"These young men...liberated my thinking. Through their eyes I was able to see Ahab and his crew as ultra-human beings who were aware of every— moment of their lives. I was able to connect with the world that many of my students came from. Theirs was a world that was full of life, color, and excitement. That world was also violent, remorseless, and devoid of discipline.

"These young men saw a modern *Moby-Dick* in which Ahab was a loving husband and father-to-be. A man who would see his wife and unborn child murdered by the drug lord (whaling interest) that he worked for. They saw Elijah as a man who saw the events of 9/11 before they happened and had tried to tell what he saw to an unbelieving world. They saw Stubb as a ferocious football player, Pip as a soul singer with a message in his music, and Queequeg, the peddler in human flesh, as a pimp. All of these characters were connected by a lust for a better life....The characters they envisioned, like Ahab's crew, had learned to accept the danger of hunting whales or living in poor urban neighborhoods."

This is a task you might set for your own students: rather than trying to take Melville's world in all at once, read it through the eyes of a single character. Try to understand what issues that character faces in the course of the book. Try to figure out what makes this character tick, what motivates him or her to act the way he or she does, what makes him or her feel and think the things he or she says in the book. And then take this one step forward. Don't simply write a profile of the character as he or she exists in this story but use him or her as a vehicle to construct your own story. What kind of person would the character be if he or she was living today, or for that matter, if they were operating in any other context (as frontiersman in the wild west, as crew members aboard a starship, as characters in an anime series).

This is what fan fiction writers call an Alternative Universe Story. In the world of comics, it is called an "Elsewhere" story. Here's how DC Comics describes its Elseworlds series: "In Elseworlds, heroes are taken from their usual settings and put into strange times and places—some that have existed, or might have existed and others that can't, couldn't, and shouldn't exist. The result is stories that make characters who are as familiar as yesterday seem as fresh as tomorrow." DC's Elseworlds series imagines, for example, what Superman would have been like if his spaceship had crash landed into Cold War era Russia rather than Kansas or if he lived inside the world depicted in Fritz Lang's German expressionist film, *Metropolis*. The Elseworld's books read the superheroes as archetypes that would assert themselves in many different historical and generic contexts; they invite a search for the core or the essence of the character even as they encourage us to take pleasure in their many permutations. If we can tinker with his costume, his origins, his cultural context, even his core values, what is it that makes Superman Superman?

For Ricardo, this effort to get his young students to rewrite the characters of *Moby-Dick* could be seen as an attempt to build a bridge between their world and those depicted in the novel. Either way, to create convincing reworkings of these characters requires close analysis, a deep understanding of the essence of who these characters are and what made them into the people they are depicted as within the narrative. It also

requires the reader to take a step beyond and anticipate other possibilities for these characters, including in this case, to imagine the *Pequod* crew as Alba, Que, Daj, Tasha, and Stu, young drug dealers struggling on urban streets, trying to hold together their crew as they go after "Big White Thing."

Rereading and Rewriting

On July 26, 2007, the New Bedford Whaling Museum hosted a conversation between two artists who had recently created stage versions of *Moby-Dick*, both involving moving the story into a more contemporary setting. One was Ricardo Pitts-Wiley and the other was Rinde Eckert who had been inspired to write an opera which was based on *Moby-Dick*. Their comments offer some interesting insights into what it is like to read *Moby-Dick* as a creative artists looking for material to inform your next project. Each of these comments would be worth discussing with your students, both because of what they have to say about *Moby-Dick: Then and Now* and what they have to say about the challenges and rewards of reading Melville's novel:
(indented)

"I describe my research as hunting, which means I'm looking for a thread, I'm looking for my spine, the thing that's going to serve like the king-post in the whaleboat. My first reading was, I suppose, what everyone's first reading is: you just submit as you go through it. This confirmed my assumptions about the work."—Rinde Eckert.¹²

Eckert here talks about a first-time reading as opposed to subsequent rereading. Your students will be doing well to read Melville's novel once, but there may well be other books that they have read more than once—or barring that, films and television shows they have seen multiple shows. Reruns are the norm on television and in the age of DVDs, we increasingly own movies so we can see them many times. So, how does the experience change between first and subsequent viewings? What do you see on second and third viewings that you missed on the first time through? Do you "submit as you go through" the story the first time? Do you gain greater control over the narrative upon subsequent encounters? Why do you choose to reread or reencounter some stories when you get everything you want out of others on the first experience?

On the third reading, one particular point jumped out at me. It's Ahab pacing on the deck. He's smoking his pipe, and it's not satisfying. Melville writes, "He tossed the still lighted pipe into the sea. The fire hissed in the waves; the same instant the ship shot by the bubble the sinking pipe made. With slouched hat, Ahab lurchingly paced the planks." I thought, this is masterful. This emblem of bourgeois life, even the intent to recover that bourgeois life in the pipe, he [Ahab] finally gives that up. At that moment he's dedicated to his path; now there's no turning back, and at that moment we have the image of the pipe sinking and the bubbles coming up. We have that vertical thing, the fire sinking and the air coming up in the form of bubbles. At the same time he [Melville] takes us right into the straightforward motion of that ship.

"The same instant the ship shot by the bubble the pipe made." So you have this cross, one thing that's going vertically down, and the vector that's going across. Then, as the coup de grace, he reinforces that with, "With slouched hat, Ahab lurchingly paced the planks." He creates a second cross, so we have this juxtaposition of vectors that creates two crosses. I thought, this is just so simple, but it's complex. I went on to the fourth reading, and I was saying, it just keeps on going, I don't think there's any end to it.—Rinde Eckert

Here, Eckert describes what he discovered on his third reading of the book, singling out moments which might have seemed insignificant before but which inspired him to think about the story from a different perspective. Can we compare this with some of the examples students have identified of things they discovered in their favorite films or television programs when they watched them for a third or fourth time? Are there moments in *Moby-Dick* which seem to them especially interesting or telling, even if they do not

¹²

Rinde Eckert, *Leviathan: A Journal of Melville Studies* 9.3 (Oct 2007): 157-172.

receive much attention in the novel? If so, how might one expand upon such a moment, making it the focus of a short vignette or scene in a play? It is this recognition of unrealized potential that becomes the basis for new kinds of creative expression. This is what fans look for when they look for a starting point for fan fiction. They find a line, a gesture, a facial expression which they think requires further reflection and elaboration. And they use that moment as an inspiration for an original story.

"You have this image of years' worth of goods stowed in. Everything is completely meaningful. A ship can't afford anything that doesn't belong. Everything has to be used. Everything has to have double uses. Melville's whole novel is like the ship, packed with all this stuff. You need everything. You need the practical stuff. You need the provisions. You need to know."—Rinde Eckert.

Having read the book many times now, Eckert comes away with a greater respect for the structure of the whole: he has discovered why every detail is there, what each adds, and how much this narrative gives subsequent artists to work with. Some contemporary writers have talked about the "encyclopedic" quality of many contemporary long form stories—book series, film franchises, or television series, which may extend over many installments and which give one this sense of there being more information than any given reader can absorb. Indeed, what we are calling collective intelligence comes into play as readers and viewers master different aspects of the story world and share them in the context of an online community's ongoing discussion of the work. Eckert is not simply looking at the richness here as a reader, though. He is also describing what the text looks like to an artist who comes after Melville and is looking for things he might plunder and deploy in his own world building.

Ricardo Pitts-Wiley describes his reading process with a clear eye towards the appropriation and transformation of Melville's materials: "In a sense you go through a process of trying to make your idea fall apart. Every step of the way you say, I want to put up barriers; I'm going to see how many barriers the novel will present to me, so that this project will fail before we get to the end of it."

Here, Pitts-Wiley starts with a set of ideas he wants to explore within his play, and he reads the novel against those themes, trying to see if his interpretation holds up in the face of Melville's own writing. Pitts-Wiley describes the process as a struggle between reader and writer, each trying to assert his own control over the material.

Eckert adopted a similar metaphor of reading as an act of resistance:

There is a sense in which you are bound as an artist to wrestle with your material. I think you take a great book most seriously if you take yourself seriously in the process of making your own work. The best homage to Melville is to attempt to make your own great work with the inspiration of a great work. To a certain extent you have to be a little ornery in the process.

What do you make of this image of the reader/writer as a fighter doing battle with the original author? How might we compare this with other common ways of thinking about the adaptation process where we are told to be "faithful" to the "spirit" of the original work or to try to preserve as many of the details as possible? What does this say about our own experiences as readers? Is our task to try to get at what the author intended us to find or are we freer to engage with the work with our own imagination, with our own insights about the world, for our own purposes? One literary theorist Michel De Certeau talks about readers as "poachers" who take what they need from the stories they encounter, owning no loyalty to the original author, serving only their own interests and desires. Can we see Ricardo Pitts-Wiley and Rinde Eckert as "poaching" from Melville to create something new, rather than as being "unfaithful" adapters of the original source material?

Pitts-Wiley offers a very specific description of the process he used to convert Melville's novel into a stage play: "I downloaded the entire novel and went through page by page and took out everything that wasn't in quotes. That's the way I started. Okay, now I had a seventeen-hour script. Now you go back through, and you

say, what's important? When is it active? Where are the verbs? Okay, here is a strong verb sequence; I need it. Then you go back through, and you say, What's the duplicate scene? How do I replicate this scene for today?"

So, here, as a reader in the process of becoming an author, he asks very pragmatic questions. He's trying to find lines which his actors can speak and actions which they can perform. He's looking for moments in the novel which offer parallels to contemporary concerns. You might compare this process of reading through the novel with a pen in hand to the kinds of notes you are asking your students to take as they read the novel. Having asked them to establish a goal for taking notes, they now have to make decisions about what elements of the novel matter to them and why. They have to decide which passages to underline and which passages to skip over.

Rudy as a Reader

How does acting change how you read a text? In the video interviews of Rudy Cabrera, a high school student and cast member of Mixed Magic Theatre, Rudy offers a compelling account of his own transitions as a reader in this segment. (The clip can be accessed at <http://techtv.mit.edu/videos/489-rudy-on-reading> .) Here, Rudy describes a range of different modes of reading, and we suspect some of your students will recognize themselves in these descriptions.

Rudy makes a distinction between "following the words" and "understanding the text." He talks about a mode of reading which ignores punctuation and treats every sentence as a "run-on." We might connect this comment to his later suggestion that he was "flying by the words" before he went back and reread a chapter from *Invisible Man* with a deeper level of comprehension: "I finally connected with this text."

Rudy talks about being "knee deep into the text." This is what we often mean by being immersed into a fictional world. What allows him to make that transition from reading on the surface to getting deep inside the story? How might this relate to the challenges he faces as an actor, learning to embody a character who thinks and feels things differently from the actor himself?

Rudy describes his "responsibility" as an actor to master the text he is going to present on the stage. He distinguishes between learning a summary of what the text is about and learning to "understand it word for word," which he sees as necessary in order to convey the emotional tone of the script. What, if any, are our "responsibilities" as readers to the texts we read?

Throughout this interview, Rudy talks about his relationship to Shakespeare. He has moved from a certain disdain ("I used to find the Dude corny") towards a respect for his reputation ("He's that known for a reason"), and he urges other students to be less "closed-minded" about reading classic works. Along the way, he expresses both an appreciation and a bemusement for Shakespeare's use of metaphors and what now seems like overwrought language. So, can we take pleasure in a text even if we find some aspects of its language puzzling or problematic? How does this relate to the process your students are going through as they learn to deal with Melville's 19th-century prose style? How might we compare that with the puzzlement some adult readers experience with the street slang deployed in the more contemporary sections of *Moby-Dick: Then and Now*?

Rudy talks about "finding a flow" as a reader, getting into a rhythm where he can engage productively with the text. Interestingly, the idea of "flow" first emerged through theoretical work dealing with video games. It describes a moment where one's mind shuts down, and players learn to trust what they have learned with their bodies. So, how might we compare that experience of "flow" when reading a book with the experience of "flow" in playing a game? In neither case do we literally shut down our brains, but we are using our brains differently.

Rudy's interview gives us a good chance to talk with students about their own life histories as readers and what skills/approaches they take to reading a book for class as opposed to reading a book for pleasure. If the goal of this unit is to help students become more self-conscious about different approaches and motives for reading, taking a personal inventory may be a good way for them to cement what they have learned so far.

We might understand acting as a form of play. Play is one of the eleven New Media Literacy skills. We define play as "the capacity to experiment with one's surroundings as a form of problem solving." In the White Paper, we cite work by literacy experts Anne Haas Dyson, Shelby Anne Wolf, and Shirley Brice Heath, who have studied children's play with characters, themes, plots, and language from children's books as part of the ways that they acquire basic literacy skills. Young readers, they suggest, internalize the characters, manipulate the words, and transform the plots in order to bring them more fully under their control. To what degree is this what Rudy and the other actors in the play do when they take on these characters, learn what they are thinking and feeling, and discover the meaning behind their words? What would it mean to think of reading as itself a form of "play"?

MOTIVES FOR READING: FINDING YOUR WAY AND LEAVING THE PATH

BY WYN KELLEY

Introduction: Entering the Text

This unit gives readers tools for engaging with a new text. The activities associated with this unit allow students to figure out why we're there. What are our motives for reading? Then we can think about how we navigate this new place. Are there helpful signs? Can we recognize the author's very different motives in writing the story? Finally we ask what happens if we go in an unanticipated direction or get off the path. This section of the unit shows how *Moby-Dick* addresses these questions.

In looking at motives, signs, and paths, we will be reading in a way that is more like learning the terrain than getting to a destination. This unit encourages readers to recognize and embrace nonlinear and discontinuous reading. With the skills and the activities described in the rest of the chapter, students can raise their awareness of themselves as readers, enjoy the messiness of texts, and feel fewer inhibitions about navigating a challenging work like *Moby-Dick*.

Moby-Dick and Nonlinear Reading: Wandering in New Terrain

In *Moby-Dick* Melville says: "There are some enterprises in which a careful disorderliness is the true method" (Ch 82, "The Honor and Glory of Whaling"). His novel rewards "disorderliness" of reading because it is itself disorderly, though carefully so. Although it has a linear plot, structured around the quest for a whale, it deviates endlessly from its path. The last sentence of the book describes a ship wandering over the sea in a seemingly aimless pattern: "It was the devious-cruising Rachel, that in her retracing search after her missing children, only found another orphan" ("Epilogue"). Melville uses the word "devious" not to mean "duplicitous" or "dishonest" but in its older sense of "circuitous" or "wandering." The reader of *Moby-Dick* is similarly "devious-cruising," invited to follow any number of paths through the narrative.

This disorderliness is precisely what makes many readers consider *Moby-Dick* a confusing and difficult book. It is long. It has digressions. Are we allowed to skim? How do we get through it?

We need not be scared off, though, by a book that seems disorderly. Melville and his readers *liked* long, digressive texts. Long, digressive books have appealed to enthusiastic readers throughout history. And older habits of reading—that is, nonlinearly, digressively, discontinuously, and selectively—have great value to us now as we navigate a wealth of new media. We propose reading *Moby-Dick* as Melville's readers might have read it—and as we read many forms of new media today.

To appreciate nonlinear reading, we need to identify linear reading. Reading literature, at least as understood for the last 150 years or so, has traditionally involved certain expectations of a text:

- It is linear. You start at the beginning and go to the end. Books have a design that you can best appreciate by reading in a given order.
- It is continuous. Books have a unity and cumulative effect that you would lose by jumping around.
- It is complete. You must read it all to get the meaning.
- It is deep. Your first reading gives you "only" surface understanding. You must read and re-read, looking for significant patterns of language and theme, before you can say you understand the text.

This model applies to many kinds of texts, but especially to the classic literary fiction that many teachers use to train students in reading and language arts. Before the rise of the novel, however, in the early part of the eighteenth century, such a model of reading might not have appeared the norm for European and American readers. Before the mid-eighteenth century, many Western readers, if they read at all, sampled from a wide variety of texts for which a linear reading would not have been necessary or even advisable: periodicals,

almanacs, collections (of sermons, poetry, political speeches, essays, letters, tales, travel narratives, biographies), or encyclopedias. A work of history, biography, or philosophy might have required linear reading, but readers could explore a large field of books that did not.

A primary text for European and American culture, and a major influence on *Moby-Dick*, was the Bible. According to historians of the book, early modern readers and printers approached this long, often disorderly text with a number of “finding aids”—concordances, commentaries and annotations, illustrations, and maps—that made it possible to navigate the work in different ways, according to one’s own interests.¹³ Ministers selected and elaborated on particular passages for their sermons, rather than proceeding linearly through the text. Parishioners sometimes noted, collected, and annotated passages in what were called “commonplace books.” In the periods before cut-and-paste digital technology, people created literary collections of their own by gathering favorite materials from other sources: moral tracts, poetry, sermons, fiction, and periodical essays. For those without formal education—especially women and members of the laboring classes—such personal collections compensated for the lack of books and instruction and allowed readers to pursue their own learning. As Matthew Brown argues in his essay, “Undisciplined Reading,” such habits emphasized “disorderly reading,” a search for what concerns the reader rather than for mastery of the whole text.¹⁴

The books that inspired Melville’s writing of *Moby-Dick* include many that one would never read continuously from start to finish. Besides the Bible, he also loved travel books and encyclopedias, which in his day presented a cornucopia of information lavishly illustrated and displayed. One of his favorite sources, the *Penny Cyclopaedia*, included topics from history, natural history, myth, popular culture, and science. Melville also read natural histories of whaling, like Thomas Beale’s *The Natural History of the Sperm Whale* (<http://www.boisestate.edu/melville/>), where one might browse through information on whales, whaling paraphernalia, oceanography, anatomy, personal anecdotes from sailors and captains, and the history of “the fishery.” Like the “cabinets of curiosity” popular with Europeans and Americans in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, books like these collected motley samples of different cultures and kinds of knowledge from all over the world and placed them in a convenient location: the almanac, the encyclopedia, the taxonomy of species, even philosophical works that aimed to gather knowledge in one place. The arrangement may seem disorderly to us, but it preserved the wonder of discovery, of multiplicity, of travel through a richly exciting landscape.

Reading *Moby-Dick*, we need to keep in mind Melville’s restless and imaginative love of “curiosities” from all over the world of print and other sources. But this mode of reading and writing—browsing from a wealth of sources and collecting materials in a new form—should seem quite familiar to readers in a digital environment. Although linear reading clearly has its uses, we should not insist on it at the expense of more fluid, self-motivated, selective, and flexible modes of reading.

Locating Motives in *Moby-Dick*

To recognize one’s motive for reading this book, it helps to see that Melville had many motives for writing it. He had a story of danger and heroism displayed in Ahab’s quest for vengeance. He wanted to convey information about whales and whaling, some derived from personal experience, some from libraries. He hoped to surpass the great masterworks of England and Europe by authors like Shakespeare, Milton, Rabelais, Bacon, Browne, Montaigne, Plato, Locke, and Kant. He also longed to excel as an American author,

¹³ See Peter Stallybrass, “Books and Scrolls: Navigating the Bible.” In Jennifer Anderson and Elizabeth Sauer, eds., *Books and Readers in Early Modern England: Material Studies* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 2002), 42-79.

¹⁴ Matthew Brown, “Undisciplined Reading,” *Common-Place* 8.1 (October 2007). <http://www.common-place.org/vol-08/no-01/reading/>. March 15, 2008.

drawing on the language and themes of his own culture. He wished to make his readers laugh at the comic bewilderment of his novice whaler, Ishmael. And he wanted to take his readers on soaring flights of philosophy and fancy. He wrote in a “nervous lofty language” (Ch. 16, "The Ship") such as never had been seen before. He wanted to show places that appear on maps and also ones that are “not down on any map; true places never are” (Ch. 12, "Biographical").

Teachers might ask their students as well as themselves: Why are you reading the book? Are you interested in the story? Do you want to learn more about whales? Are you excited by the violence of the hunt? Are you fond of sailing or navigation? Are you ambitious to master a text that many people have found difficult? Each of these motives will structure one’s reading experience, leading a reader to certain passages, certain destinations in the text. Your motive shapes your decisions about which signs you will heed and which you will ignore.

Similarly for Melville, different motives inspired him to use certain distinctive kinds of language, to adopt different voices that appear throughout the book. Some of Melville’s voices and their different motives appear as follows:

Ishmael/The Narrator. Melville’s protagonist narrates the opening chapters (1-23) continuously, and then submerges himself, often turning the action over to dramatic scenes in which he does not always appear. His voice re-emerges as Ishmael (instead of a disembodied speaker) in chapters like "The Mast-Head," "Whiteness of the Whale," "The Mat-Maker," "The Hyena," "The Town-Ho’s Story," "The Monkey-Rope," "A Squeeze of the Hand," "The Try-Works," "Bower in the Arsacides," "Queequeg in His Coffin," and "Epilogue." His is a genial, engaging, friendly voice, but note the omniscience of his narration, the events he describes but could not have seen. These peculiarities of his narration suggest that Ishmael wants to move fluidly through the text, that in Ishmael's voice Melville announces his freedom and power to write any way that he pleases.

The Dramatist. Melville stages certain chapters as Shakespearean scenes and soliloquies: Chapters 29-30, 36-40. (Chapter 42, "Whiteness of the Whale," might be seen as Ishmael's soliloquy). The Shakespearean mode, sometimes tragic, sometimes shading into comedy or melodrama, returns later in the novel in Ahab's final sections, with soliloquies by the Carpenter and Blacksmith, Ahab addressing the ocean in "The Symphony," and the men delivering final speeches in "The Chase, Third Day." These speeches and soliloquies use the archaic pronouns (“thee,” “thou”), sonorous rhythms, and elaborate diction of Shakespeare’s plays. The voice of the dramatist suggests an aspiration toward high art, impressive language, and cultural status. In these sections, Melville seems to be competing with his literary predecessors, writing as the new American Shakespeare.

The Advocate. This voice begins in Ch 24 ("The Advocate") and serves to defend the whalers and their profession from detractors or explain its significance to the ignorant. It also surfaces at the end of many anatomical and technical chapters and in "The Specksynder," "The Affidavit," the end of "The Whale as a Dish," "Jonah Historically Regarded," and "Fast Fish and Loose Fish." It is passionate, political, historical, and lawyerly. Melville appears here to want to persuade a reader that his subject is important historically, economically, even mythologically.

The Preacher. Melville produces a preacher character, Father Mapple. But Ishmael adopts a sermonic voice himself in Ch 18, "His Mark," where Bildad remarks that he gives as good a sermon as the Deacon, and later the ship’s cook Fleece preaches in African American dialect to the sharks. Ishmael uses a preacherly tone for philosophical and symbolic thinking as well as religion, as in "The Mast Head" or "The Try-Works." Other examples might include "The Lee Shore," "The Whiteness of the Whale," "The Mat-Maker," or "The Spirit-Spout," with the Preacher surfacing at the ends of chapters, as the Advocate sometimes does. The voice of the Preacher proclaims Melville's interest in writing a new Bible for his culture, one steeped in the idioms of working people as well as religious authorities.

The Humorist/Satirist. This figure jokes often in the opening chapters and surfaces later in a wealth of sexual humor and bawdy puns, physical slapstick and sly satire. "The Cassock" offers a sustained example, as does "Heads and Tails." Puns and wordplay break into even serious scenes. Social satire and

political humor enliven chapters like "Schools and Schoolmasters," or, with more barbed effect, "Fast Fish and Loose Fish." As wit and satirist, Melville in this voice appears to undermine the seriousness of the religious, political, or cultural arbiters who hold sway in nineteenth-century society.

The Anatomist. This voice, with its scientific, rational, and encyclopedic tones, appears in "Cetology," first and foremost, and all the chapters on the whale's body. It is influenced by Darwin, Cuvier, and other biologists and comparative anatomists, as well as by practitioners of early science, including medieval bestiaries and Sir Thomas Browne's *Vulgar Errors*. It can be detached, sometimes humorous, but also passionate, even bloody—offering a public dissection of the whale along with the factual information. The motive here seems to be to convince readers that, as Melville was later to say in *Billy Budd*, his story is "no romance" but solid fact based on scientific observation.

The Technician. This voice appears in all the chapters on whaling tools and procedures, ship instruments and navigation, charts and graphs, carpentry and blacksmithing. At a certain point Ahab becomes a technician or engineer himself, as he begins rebuilding his body and refitting the ship so he can keep going. It can get geeky at times, but in his passion for the tools and weapons of whaling, the procedures and practices of its acolytes, Melville's voice as Technician takes pleasure in the process, in all its concreteness and detail.

The Poet, Artist. Ishmael often assumes this voice, from "Spirit-Spout" to the whale-as-art chapters and all over the text. This figure knows literature thoroughly and borrows from great poets and artists of the past. He chooses words for their beauty and makes up new ones; he emphasizes visual effects and scenic description. Some critics have argued that these passages scan in iambic pentameter. Melville's motive here seems to be to sweep his reader away with a vision of the beauty and power of his subject, the grand spectacle of whaling and of his characters' heroic engagement not only with the powerful whale but also with words, images, and ideas.

Once readers can identify particular voices and motives (and one might come up with more than these throughout the book), they can locate places where different voices and motives intermingle in a single chapter; they might pick a chapter and see how many it contains. Students can try writing with one particular motive or convert a section Melville has written with one motive by rewriting it with another.

Off the Path, Into the Margins

One could use a scheme like the one above to mark the text in different ways—according to certain motives that affect patterns of language or types of narration. Thus, one might pay particular attention to plot—dramatic dialogue and action, portrayals of violence, significant changes in characters' situations—and read those sections with that motive. Or one might select only the philosophical musings or lyrical outpourings or anatomy lessons or technical explanations and stick with those. Then one would be "reading with a purpose," achieving mastery of a manageable portion of the text. Such a reading might still be linear in one sense, because it would follow the shape of the novel as Melville wrote it. But it would be discontinuous, selective, and motivated in ways that would break up the linear momentum of the book.

MELVILLE'S MARGINALIA: ANNOTATION AND ORNAMENTATION IN *MOBY-DICK*

BY WYN KELLEY

Marking a text as above allows one to pause in reading, think about a particular passage, and respond to it. If you are reading an online text or one that you don't physically own, it is hard to scribble in the margins, underline words you especially like, or enliven the page with exclamation points, question marks, and emoticons. But Melville seldom read without a pen in hand, and the books he owned are often covered with jottings of all kinds. We encourage students to discover the pleasure of marginalia, in whatever form possible, as a way of getting off the linear path of reading and wandering in the open spaces of the margins. *Moby-Dick* offers many opportunities for annotating, commenting on, illuminating, or reshaping the text.

To get a sense of Melville's habits of annotation, go to Melville's Marginalia Online:

<http://www.boisestate.edu/melville/>. This site reproduces Melville's markings of Thomas Beale's *Natural History of the Sperm Whale* (mentioned above), as well as volumes of poetry (Matthew Arnold, James Thomson) and fiction (Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Mosses from an Old Manse*). These show the many ways Melville made his texts his own, from the inscriptions on the front pages to the checks and underlinings that mark certain passages, to sometimes lengthy comments approving, or more often, violently disputing certain statements. In his copy of Beale he inscribed the title page with his own name, the date when he began reading, and the price: \$3.38. We will talk more in the unit on Adaptation and Translation about his use of Beale as a source (and there is no doubt that he lifted a great deal of material directly from this book and others for *Moby-Dick*), but the annotations also show a mind reading, thinking, marking, and commenting. On a certain drawing of the whale, for example, he writes: "There is some sort of mistake . . . The tail part is wretchedly crippled & dwarfed, & looks altogether unnatural. The head is good" (Beale 33). Reading Beale's description of the whirlpool a whale makes when it dives, Melville writes: "White and green vortex in the blue—as when a ship sinks" (Beale 45). He marks many details that inform passages in *Moby-Dick*, including notes for plot points that he later rejected—a scene, for example, in which Peleg, the Quaker captain, appears at sea.

Melville's *Moby-Dick* also gives examples of his habits of noting, annotating, and commenting on information, images, and ideas. The chapters "The Whiteness of the Whale" and "The Town-Ho's Story" contain footnotes; the one on the albatross in "Whiteness of the Whale" goes on at great length and includes personal reminiscences and literary allusions. Sometimes he will insert a chapter as if to elucidate a point, or comment on something that came before or is about to come. So, for example, at the beginning of Chapter 60, "The Line," he explains: "With reference to the whaling scene shortly to be described, as well as for the better understanding of all similar scenes elsewhere presented, I have here to speak of the magical, sometimes horrible whale-line." Or at the beginning of Chapter 83, "Jonah Historically Regarded," he goes back to pick up a detail from the previous one: "Reference was made to the historical story of Jonah and the whale in the preceding chapter." Chapter 53, "The Gam," sets up "The Town-Ho's Story" with a thorough definition of an unfamiliar term—"gam," or social meeting between ships—and an explanation that prepares for the extraordinary events in the next chapter. Another chapter, "Ambergris" (Chapter 92) supplies a wealth of engaging facts and details.

Most of these comments or even whole chapters do not add anything to the plot and have been included with the other non-plot elements, like the chapters on cetology, technical equipment, and navigation, in readers' denunciations of the book. But if we think of them as *annotations* they offer a different kind of experience. Like the beautiful and detailed scenes that illuminated the texts of medieval books, bringing a powerful visual dimension into the book, these moments in *Moby-Dick* invite us off the path of the plot. Here we wander in another world—sometimes contemplating a piece of scrimshaw or a painting, at other times meditating on odd question like, what does whale meat taste like? Melville seems in one sense to have anticipated every possible annotation or footnote his subject inspires, but in another sense he invites the reader to respond to

an endless array of tasty tidbits. If we think of the book as one part story and three parts marginalia, it starts to look more like the multimedia texts and multi-user domains described elsewhere in this unit. And anyone can play.

Wandering off the path, then, allows a reader to engage with a wide range of interests and experiences and lends itself to a devious-cruising reading of the text. One can read *Moby-Dick* from beginning to end. But remember how *Moby-Dick* begins. “Call me Ishmael”? No: with “Etymology,” a devious cruise through the names for “whale” in a dozen different languages, and “Extracts,” a commonplace book in which are collected all the references Melville could find to whales and whaling in literature over the previous millennia. From the start, Melville invites readers to wander in a world of texts and signs, picking a path that proceeds from their own hearts and minds and encouraging them to embellish the margins with their own designs.