

# Moby-Dick: A Study of the Shakespearean Resonance

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Received: December 16, 2024

Accepted: February 12, 2025

Online Published: February 24, 2025

doi:10.5539/ells.v15n1p47

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5539/ells.v15n1p47>

## Abstract

This paper explores the pervasive echoes of Shakespearean tragedy in Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*, highlighting the profound impact of Shakespeare's work on Melville's literary style and thematic exploration. Although several scholars have previously examined this influence, this study seeks to provide a more in-depth and comprehensive analysis by employing two primary research methods: parallel comparative research and archetypal analysis. Through parallel comparative research, the paper draws direct comparisons between Melville's *Moby-Dick* and Shakespeare's tragedies, focusing on shared themes, character types, and structural elements. By carefully tracing specific Shakespearean references and the ways in which Melville adapts them, this analysis reveals how Melville's work resonates with the depth and complexity of Shakespeare's plays. Additionally, archetypal analysis is employed to explore the universal patterns of character and story found in both Shakespeare's tragedies and Melville's novel. This method examines how Melville's characters, particularly Ahab, embody tragic archetypes reminiscent of Shakespeare's flawed protagonists, such as *Macbeth* and *King Lear*. The study also investigates how these archetypes contribute to the novel's overarching themes of fate, obsession, and human frailty. Furthermore, the paper analyzes the syntax and diction used in *Moby-Dick*, demonstrating how Melville adopts Shakespearean stylistic elements, such as formal language and poetic structures, to deepen the emotional and philosophical weight of his narrative. By exploring the multifaceted influence of Shakespeare, this study argues that *Moby-Dick* is enriched by a Shakespearean resonance that provides it with a layered, complex context, illuminating Melville's craft and his novel's tragic dimensions.

**Keywords:** Melville, Shakespeare, *Moby-Dick*, tragedy, Ahab

## 1. Introduction

It is undeniable that Melville is a voracious reader. Among the array of writers he favored, including Dante, Plato, Milton, among others, he was most fascinated by Shakespeare and Hawthorne. He began reading Shakespeare at the age of 19 and more than once mentioned his indebtedness to his plays. In 1849, he wrote to his friend Evert Duyckinck that he was re-reading Shakespeare, "I have lived more than 29 years and until a few days ago, never made close acquaintance with the divine William.... I am mad to think how minute a cause has prevented me hitherto from reading Shakespeare" (Pommer, 1950, p. 30). Melville was particularly immersed in Shakespeare's presentation of the tragic theme and his depiction of the "darkness" of human nature. Later in life, he wrote: "No utter surprise can come to him who reaches Shakespeare's core; That which we seek and shun is there—Man's final lore" (Melville, 1964, p. 44). Matthiessen comments that "Melville thought more creatively about Shakespeare's meaning than any other American" and his meditation "freed his work from limited coverage and expressed profound forces of nature" (Matthiessen, 2021, pp. 424, 428), thus transforming him from a popular travel-and-adventure writer of the day into the timeless, universal author he had yearned to become.

Numerous scholars and critics have observed the profound influence of Shakespeare on Herman Melville's work. As early as 1932, Raymond G. Hughes pointed out pertinent similarities and consistencies between Shakespeare and Melville. Charles Olson's essay "Lear and Moby-Dick" which was later expanded into a book (*Call Me Ishmael*, 1947) analyzed Melville's creative writing process, identifying *King Lear* as a play which "has the deepest creative impact" (1930, p. 47) on Melville. Raymond R. Long in his doctoral dissertation *The Hidden Sun: A Study of the Influence of Shakespeare on the Creative Imagination of Herman Melville* (1965), systematically traced the development of Shakespearean influence on Melville from his early novels to *MD*, *Pierre*, *The Confidence-man* and *Billy Budd*. Roma Rosen, through a study of Melville's notes and marks in his copy of Shakespeare's plays, clarified the latter's response to them and compared the influence they had on his

composition of *MD* and *Pierre*. Anthony F. Ruotolo in 1972 again compared the dramatic structure, tragic theme, language characteristic, and characterization of *MD* and *Macbeth*. Christopher Ohge etc., utilizes computation and digital text, studies Melville's Marginalia in Shakespearean dramatic works and the close relations with the themes of human fall, death, and action., pointing out that "Melville constructing new paths in his own writing from his experiences of reading Shakespeare" (Ohge et al., pp. 37–67).

Among all the relevant researchers, that of F. O. Matthiessen proves the most convincing. His American Renaissance offers abundant examples to illustrate Melville's dramatic speech under the Shakespearean influence. He claims that, it is not until Melville "encountered the unexampled vitality of Shakespeare's language" that he "found a valuable clue to how to express the hidden life of men, which had become his compelling absorption" (2021, p. 423) .

## 2. Plot and Theme

Influenced by Shakespeare, Melville was fond of dramatic presentation, and his novels were full of dramatic conflicts and paralleled Shakespearean plots .

The opening of *MD* is cloaked in a weird, oppressive and mysterious atmosphere. Chapter 3, "The Spouter-Inn", depicts an uncanny oil-picture on the wainscots: "a Cape-Horner in a great hurricane; the half-foundered ship weltering there with its three dismantled masts alone visible; and an exasperated whale, purposing to spring clean over the craft, is in the enormous act of impaling himself upon the three mast-heads" (Melville, 1999, p. 31). The painting itself serves as a prophetic symbol of the incoming story. Before the sailing of Pequod, the mysterious tune of novel is further strengthened by Chapter 19, in which Elijah's "ambiguous, half-hinting, half-revealing" remarks, and his "insane earnestness" and "solemnly derisive sort of laugh" (p. 109) all inevitably remind us of "prophet greeting" of the three witches in *Macbeth*. In chapter 117 the Parsee Fedallah prophesies to Ahab that "two hearses must verily be seen by thee on the sea; the first not made by mortal hands; and the visible wood of the last one must be grown in America" and Ahab would be killed by hemp. A similar scene takes place in *Macbeth*, as the three witches promised, Macbeth becomes the king. He is in "blood Stepp'd" and "bent the know the worst" (Act III, Scene IV). Then, he turns to the master of the witches—three apparitions to remove his doubt. He is told that "none of woman born shall harm Macbeth" and "Macbeth shall never vanquished be until Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill shall come against him" (*Macbeth*, Act IV, Scene I). It turns out things develop as prophesied. Fedallah dies before Ahab, with the whale being his hearse, and Ahab is killed by the rope (the hemp) with the boat being his hearse. Similarly, Macbeth is killed by Macduff who was "from his mother's womb untimely ripped" (Act V, Scene VII) .

Chapter 36 in *MD* draws a parallel with an incident in *Hamlet*. Ahab's sailors obey the demagogue and swear to take revenge with their barbed harpoons, "Drink, ye harpooners! drink and swear, ye men that man the deathful whaleboat's bow—Death to Moby Dick!" (Melville, 1999, p. 178). It is echoing Hamlet's making his friends swear to keep the secret. "Swear by my sword", said Hamlet, "never make known what you have seen tonight" (*Hamlet*, Act I, Scene V).

Melville had expertise in utilizing dramatic techniques to develop and enhance atmosphere. In *MD*, Chapters 38 and 39 present the inner monologues of Ahab, Starbuck, and Stubb, respectively, echoing Shakespearean methods. Chapters 40 and 43 depict the sailors' dialogues and actions in a quasi-theatrical style. Through Ahab's extensive monologue in Chapter 37, readers gain insight into his psyche, learning about his family, life experiences, as well as his conceit, fragility, mightiness, madness, and desperation. This is further illustrated by his interactions with the carpenter in Chapter 108, with Stubb in Chapter 121, and with Starbuck in Chapter 131. Moreover, several subsequent chapters commence with stage directions to aid in character portrayal and plot progression. For instance, Chapter 120, titled "The Deck towards the End of the First Night Watch (Ahab standing by the helm, Starbuck approaching him)"; and chapter 121, "Midnight-The Forecastle Bulwarks (Stubb and Flask mounted on them, and passing additional lashing over the anchors there hanging.)" offer such examples. Other examples are scatter throughout Chapter 36–40, 70–72, 77, 108, 122, 127 and 129.

In terms of thematic concern, what strikes Melville most about Shakespeare's tragedies is the search for the very "axis of reality". Melville explained this phrase in his review "Hawthorn and Mosses":

...those short, quick probings at the very axis of reality;—these are the things that make Shakespeare, Shakespeare. Through the mouths of the dark characters of Hamlet, Timon, Lear, and Iago, he craftily says, or sometimes insinuates the things which we feel to be so terrifically true, that it were all but madness for any good man, in his own proper character, to utter, or even hint of them. Tormented into desperation, Lear, the frantic king, tears off the mask, and speaks the same madness of vital truth (Melville, 1962, p. 45).

Melville considered Shakespeare “primarily as a great voice of truth” (Matthiessen, 2021, p. 415) and was inspired by his use of “crazy” characters to expose the gap between “appearance and reality”. Like that of Hamlet, Macbeth and King Lear, Captain Ahab’s tragedy is not merely the result of his culpability, but the expression of the fundamental contradiction between human nature and life. It is simply the result of “probing at the very axis of reality”. Melville’s characterizations often came close to replicating Hamlet, driven by revenge and tormented by dilemmas of action and thought. To find out the real murderer of his father and to protect himself, Hamlet uses his “madness to speak”. Ahab is driven mad by his monomania for revenge. Madness is the cunning mask for them to conceal the intellect and sense:

So, in that broad madness, no one jot of his great natural intellect and perished. That before living agent, now became the living instrument. If such a furious trope may stand, his special lunacy stormed his general sanity, and carried it, and turned all its concentrated cannon upon its own mad mark; so that far from having lost his strength, Ahab, to that one end, did now possess a thousand fold more potency than ever he had sanely brought to bear upon any reasonable object (Melville, 1999, p. 196).

In madness, Hamlet takes revenge on Claudius, and Ahab fulfils his mission to kill Moby Dick. Both, with the destruction of other characters in their quest of revenge, complete the course of self-growth and the search for the secret between personal life and times. As a seeker of truth, Ahab fails to realize that truth lies within himself and only the outward love can save him. Just as Daniel Hoffman explains, “But love, to be an effective counter-principle, must find its proper object; should love turn inward, rather than embrace the ‘Not-Me’, it becomes its own opposite, the wish for death” (1921, p. 207). Ahab’s monomaniacal behavior is indicative of a pathological condition, an aspect he fails to acknowledge. He erroneously places the source of his conflict in the whale, when in reality, it is his own inner turmoil that stands in his way. Consequently, he “puts the evil side in the whale on a pedestal and represses his own share of his inner conflict” (Goetz, Fuchs, & Jacobson, 2017, pp 15–20).

As a matter of fact, Nathaniel Hawthorne’s depiction of darkness fascinated Melville to such an extent that he drew a parallel between him and Shakespeare, “this blackness it is that furnishes the infinite obscure of his (Hawthorne) background,—that background, against which Shakespeare plays his grandest conceits, the things that have made for Shakespeare his loftiest but most circumscribed renown, as the profoundest of thinkers” (Melville, 1962, p. 42). Darkness in humanity is a recurring theme in Shakespeare’s plays, where reality is embodied by “the mouths of the dark characters of Hamlet, Timon, Lear, and Iago” (Hoffman, 1961, p. 207). Melville is obviously “so fixed and fascinated” on “darkness” or “evil” in man. As Olson suggests, “Madness, villainy and evil are called up out of the plays as though Melville’s pencil were a wand of black magic” (Olson, 1947, p. 43). Melville believes that “evil is a preponderant part of the human experience” (Loving, 1974, p. 272) and his influential work, *MD*, serves as the embodiment of “evil”. The enormous and enigmatic whale, Moby Dick, symbolizes unrivaled power and authority with its terrifying white hue. Ahab, with only one lib, is aware of the risks associated with pursuing Moby Dick, but instead of succumbing to evil, he relentlessly pursues it until consumed by it. Caught between the choice of persisting in his futile pursuit and preserving his dignity, Ahab was entangled in a human dilemma exacerbated by his compulsive self-esteem. Melville’s pessimism and anger at the plight of death are palpable in *Moby-Dick*. However, like the brave and morally upright Macduff in *Macbeth* and Edgar in *King Lear*, Ishmael ultimately emerges mentally and physically unscathed, representing the hope of mankind.

### 3. Characterization

The term “archetype”, defined by Frye as “a symbol, usually an image, that recurs frequently enough in literature to be recognized as an integral aspect of one’s literary experience”(1957, p. 365), has significantly influenced numerous writers, including Melville. These influences, which range from the Holy Bible to Shakespeare, have been skillfully borrowed and utilized in the interpretation of his works. Consequently, archetypal analysis emerges as a potent tool for exploring recurring universal patterns, symbols, and character types in literature, particularly those related to shared human experiences. When this method is applied to the examination of *MD* and its Shakespearean influences, it would focus on identifying the manifestation of specific characters from Shakespeare’s works in *MD*, and their subsequent contribution to the novel’s overall meaning.

#### 3.1 Ahab-Macbeth

Hamlet, Macbeth and King Lear are all tragic characters created by Shakespeare. They share some common traits: noble origin (Hamlet is the Prince of Denmark; Lear, the King; Macbeth, the Thane of Glamis and Cawdor); abnormal mental state (Hamlet is “mad in craft”; Lear, for wrath, remorse and desperation; Macbeth, also in hallucination and insomnia); the tragic fate is not brought about by external causes but by their inner

desire or character flaws (Hamlet by his sullenness, hesitancy, and resolution; Macbeth by ambition; Lear by his vanity).

Ahab, the Captain and king on Pequod, is driven by avenging rage against Moby Dick and is so trapped in his paranoia that he is thrown into a state of madness. His fate of perishing in the sea is caused by his arbitrariness. It's undeniable that Ahab mirrors Macbeth in terms of his insomnia. He is so troubled by his "exhausting and intolerably vivid dreams of the night". Then sleep for him is encompassed by "trances of torments" (Melville, 1999, p. 212)

Ahab paces incessantly his quarterdeck, "plunged in his mood" (p. 429). Before his encounter with Moby Dick, he becomes a constant presence on deck, as if to catch the first glimpse of the white whale, forgoing sleep beneath the planks. Similarly, Macbeth, plagued by guilt and restlessness after killing Duncan, finds himself unable to sleep peacefully. His conscience is an unyielding burden: "Macbeth shall sleep no more" (*Macbeth*, Act II, Scene II). As Aristotle posits his *Poetics*: "Tragedy is, then, a representation of an action that is heroic and complete and of a certain magnitude...it represents men in action and does not use narrative, and through pity and fear it effects relief Catharsis to these and similar emotions" (Aristotle, *Poetics*). In this regard, both Macbeth and Ahab's tragedies elicit a similar effect. Although both meet the same fate as their enemies, we observe their internal turmoil, their struggle, their human instincts, and their courage when circumstances dictate. We cannot help but sympathize with and grieve for their fates, ultimately experiencing the "Catharsis" that tragedy aims to evoke.

### 3.2 Starbuck- Banquo

The chief mate, Starbuck, is clearly molded as Ahab's "human antagonist" (Ruotolo, 1972, p. 42). In contrast to Ahab's arrogance and superciliousness, Starbuck is a kind and rational individual. He possesses "hardy sobriety and fortitude", and is "uncommonly conscientious for a seaman, and endued with a deep natural reverence" (Melville, 1999, p. 128). The memory of his young wife and child demonstrates his humanity and capacity for love. Starbuck engages in whaling for pragmatic reasons, not for the sake of the "commander's vengeance" (p. 175). He repeatedly advises Ahab, warning him that seeking revenge on Moby Dick is "blasphemous". However, Ahab stubbornly rejects his counsel and even threatens to shoot him. On the first day of the chase, when the whaling ship is attacked by the white whale and Ahab is pulled into water, Starbuck comes to his rescue in Pequod. According to Freud's theory, Ahab represents the "id", whose destruction is the result of uncontrolled impulses (bent on revenge and sacrificing the lives of all the crew members), while Starbuck represents the "ego", which is the rational spirit (bent on stopping Ahab and rescuing him in times of danger, regardless of his own safety).

In chapter 36, Ahab makes the three mates drink to swear an oath. In the face of Ahab's "strong, sustained and mystic aspect", the three "quailed", and "the honest eye of Starbuck fell downright" (p. 178). Starbuck succumbs to Ahab's overwhelming spiritual power (or oppression). Consequently, he fails to prevent Ahab's malicious revenge. Although Starbuck is fully aware that Ahab "shall drag a whole's ship's company down to doom with him" (p. 504) and the only way out to save them is to kill or imprison Ahab, all he can do is to offer "flat obedience". Even when Ahab is sleeping, Starbuck hesitates and lacks the courage to use the musket that Ahab once pointed at him. So, it is the profound fear by Ahab's great evil willpower that inhibits Starbuck's action. All he can do is helplessly observe Pequod's descent into the chasm of fate.

The opposite and unbreakable bond can also be seen between Banquo and Macbeth, with the former acting as antithesis to the latter. Besides Lady Macbeth, Banquo is the first and the only one to know the prophecy of the three witches that forever entwines the fates of the two characters. Of course, he is, like Starbuck, the only person who might have prevented the protagonists from committing the sin of destruction. Despite the witches' mentioning that Banquo's descendants will be kings, the prediction does not instill the same fear in him as it does in Macbeth. Unlike Macbeth, who "seem(s) to fear Things that sound so fair" (*Macbeth*, Act I, Scene III), Banquo remains rational and composed. In this sense, Macbeth represents the ambition and desire of the "id", while Banquo symbolizes the rational "ego".

When Macbeth is granted Thane of Gawdor, he senses Macbeth's ambition: "That, trusted home, Might yet enkindle you unto the crown, Besides the Thane of Gawdor. But 'tis strange; And oftentimes, to win us to our harm, The instruments of darkness tell us truths, Win us with honest trifles, to betray's In deepest consequences" (*Macbeth*, Act I, Scene III). The night when Duncan was stabbed, the dialogue between them again indicates his integrity and faithfulness:

Macbeth: If you shall cleave to my consent, when 'tis, it shall make honor for you.

Banquo: So I lose non In seeking to augment it, but still keep My bosom franchised and allegiance clear, I shall be counseled (Act II, Scene I).

After Duncan's being murdered, Banquo develops suspicion toward Macbeth, stating: "I fear Thou play'st most foully for't" (Act III, Scene I). However, he takes no action, and this inaction leads Macbeth to plot Banquo's death. Macbeth fears Banquo's "royalty of nature" "dauntless temper of mind" and "wisdom that doth guide his valor to act in safety" (Act III, Scene I). He believes that he is being overshadowed by Banquo and his own genius is being suppressed. Like Starbuck, the tragedy of Banquo lies in his failure to act.

### 3.3 Fedallah—the Three Witches

Fedallah is the head of smuggled sailors who are the "Phantoms" and "the paid spies and secret confidential agents on the water of devil, their lord" (Melville, 1999, p. 227). He is "a muffled mystery" on Pequod, but "he soon evinced himself to be linked with Ahab's peculiar fortunes", even had "some sort of a half-hinted influence" or "authority" on Ahab (p. 241). Other sailors perceive Fedallah as a "devil in disguise". In Chapter 73, Flask and Stubb engage in a discussion about Fedallah, expressing their belief that "the devil (Fedallah) there is trying to come round him, and get him to swap away his silver watch, or his soul, or something of that sort, and then he'll surrender Moby Dick" (p. 331). Despite these notions, no details regarding his appearance, age or other information are revealed. The three witches always appear with thunder and disappear into the air. Their gender is undisclosed, and their ambiguous presence perplexes Banquo, who struggles to define their nature: "So withered and so wild in their attire, that look not like the inhabitants o' the earth, And yet are on't?... And yet your beard forbid me to interpret that you are" (Macbeth, Act I, Scene IV). Fedallah and the three Witches both function as prophets, predicting the fate of Ahab and Macbeth. However, they are not directly responsible for the destruction of them. As mentioned earlier, the tragic outcome for both individuals is the result of their own choices and internal drives, rather than external influences. As Melville eloquently states, "for with little external to constrain us, the innermost necessities in our being, these still drive us on" (Melville, 1999, p. 177). Neither Fedallah nor the three Witches serve to haunt or dissuade the protagonists. Instead, Ahab and Macbeth, in their deep despair and anguish, seek their guidance and comfort, even if being deceived by false hopes. The ambition for power and the passion for revenge blind them, preventing them from seeing or understanding beyond the prophets.

### 3.4 Pip-Fool

Pip, a young black boy, holds the lowest rank among the sailors aboard Pequod. He is cowardly and lacks knowledge of whaling techniques, leading to him being subjected to verbal abuse and disdain from other sailors. After falling into the sea twice and being deserted by Stubb, Pip descends into madness. Unexpectedly, the mad Pip touches Ahab's "inmost center" (p. 512). He becomes a figure of "holiness" (p. 511) to Ahab. Ahab takes Pip's hand and even treats him as his own son. Although Pip's words may appear deranged, the character is elevated by the author and positioned as a prophet whose words foreshadow imminent danger. For instance, his statement "But here I stay, though this stern strikes rocks; and they bulge through; and oysters come to join me" (p. 522) hints at impending calamity.

The parallels between Pip and the Fool in *King Lear* are hard to ignore. Fools held a special role as servants in court, responsible for amusing and pleasing their masters. They belonged to the lowest class of working people and often faced marginalization and mistreatment. However, the Fool remains loyal to Lear, like Pip's "fadeless fidelity". The seemingly nonsensical ramblings of both characters serve to reveal deeper truths. When Lear becomes blind to the deceptive actions of Goneril and Reagan, Fool's madness exposes the essence of the situation: "when thou clovest thy crown i'th' middle and gav'st away both parts, thou bor'st thine ass on thy back o'er the dirt. Thou hadst little wit in thy bald crown when thou gav'st thy golden one away" (*King Lear*, Act I, Scene IV). Eventually, when Lear loses everything and is abandoned amid a storm, it becomes evident that Fool's judgement was accurate.

## 4. Language

The Shakespearean influence on the language and style of *MD* has been widely acknowledged. Nathaniel Philbrick, in his forward to *Moby Dick* points out that it reads "as if Shakespeare and the translators of the King James Bible teamed up to write a very weird book about whaling" (Melville, 2009, p. 4). Matthiessen believes that if one careful reader traces "the 'kaleidoscopic of Shakespeare's patterns', he may find 'the fragments of his language on almost every page'" (2021, pp. 425–425). While the name "Shakespeare" is only directly mentioned once in Chapter 79, both direct and indirect quotations from Shakespeare's plays permeate the entire novel.

*Moby-Dick* contains numerous references to Shakespeare's plays. Chapters 26 and 27, "Knights and Squires",

echo King Lear's mention of knights and squires, while Chapter 31, "Queen Mab", draws from *Romeo and Juliet*. Other allusions include *Hamlet's* themes of grief and death, as seen in Chapters 7, 47, and 127, where Melville echoes Shakespeare's lines about hidden sorrow, the samphire trade, and Ahab's connection to death and the gravedigger's song (See Table 1).

Table 1. Shakespearean quotes and references in *MD*

Chapter in <i>MD</i>	Shakespearean Reference	Context in <i>MD</i>
Chapter 26&27: Knights and Squires	<i>King Lear</i> , Act 1, Scene IV: "Here you keep a hundred knights and squires..."	The chapter titles, content, thematic connection reflects Shakespeare's use of knights and squires
Chapter 31: Queen Mab	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i> , Act 1, Scene IV: "I see Queen Mab hath been with you..."	The chapter title and content refer to Queen Mab, a character from Mercutio's famous speech
Chapter 7: The Chapel	<i>Hamlet</i> , Act 1, Scene II: "But I have that within which passeth show; These but trappings and the suits of woe."	The description of the women in the chapel mirrors Hamlet's words on hidden grief and appearance vs. reality.
Chapter 87: Grand Armada	<i>King Lear</i> , Act 3, Scene II: "The wrathful skies, gallow the very wanderers of the dark, and make them keep their caves."	The chapter uses the term "gallied" to describe the whales' commotion, invoking Lear's description of nature's wrath
Chapter 47: The Mat-maker	<i>King Lear</i> , Act 4, Scene VI: "Half way down hangs one that gathers samphire, dreadful trade."	The imagery of boats swinging like "samphire baskets" relates to Edgar's description of a dangerous trade in <i>King Lear</i>
Chapter 127: The Deck	<i>Hamlet</i> , Act 5, Scene I: Gravedigger's song ("Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio...")	Ahab's question to the carpenter parallels Hamlet's interaction with the gravedigger, linking death and coffin imagery.

Inspired by Shakespeare's mastery of dramatizing language, Melville had a deep fascination with his vocabulary, incorporating both direct borrowings and allegorical meanings into his own work. In *MD* the expression of the characters' thoughts reflects a Shakespearean language style, with the integration and transformation of Shakespeare's words becoming "almost an unconscious reflex" (Matthiessen, 2021, p. 423). In addition to the use of pronouns such as "thou, ye, thee, thine, thy" (meaning "you"), the words "whence" (from where), "wherefore" (why), hast(have), wast (were), hie(hurry), dost(do) all have a distinctly Shakespearean quality. Melville captures Shakespeare's "quicken sense of life" (p. 431) by shifting parts of speech, such as using "happy" as a verb and "earthquake" as an adjective, as in expressions like "Oh, happy that the world is such an excellent Listener!" (Melville, 1999, p. 374) and "but to the last gasp of my earthquake life with dispute its unconditional, unintegral mastery in me" (p. 498).

Melville also employs repetition as a literary device, a technique frequently utilized by Shakespeare, which has the function of "emphasizing the closing in of Ahab's madness" (Monore, 2016, p. 66), conveying strong emotions, and heightening tension among the audience. In Chapter 36, titled "The Quarter Deck-Ahab and All", Ahab passionately cries out to his crew:

Aye, Queequeg, the harpoons lie all twisted and wrenched in him; aye, Daggoo, his spout is a big one, like a whole shock of wheat, and white as a pile of our Nantucket wool after the great annual sheep-shearing; aye, Tashtego, and he fan-fails like a split jib in a squall. Death and devils! men, it is Moby Dick ye have seen—Moby Dick—Moby Dick! (Melville, 1999, p. 174)

In *Macbeth*, when Macbeth goes to the weird sisters, he uses the repeated words to express his charged eagerness:

MACBETH I conjure you, by that which you profess (Howeer you come to know it) answer me: Though you untie the winds and let them fight Against the churches, though the yesty waves Confound and swallow navigation up, Though bladed corm be lodged and trees blown down, Though castles topple on their warders' heads, Though palaces and pyramids do slope Their heads to their foundations, though the treasure Of nature's germanes tumble all together Even till destruction sicken, answer me To what I ask you (Act IV, Scene I).

Puns are indeed both a word game and a rhetorical device employed by Shakespeare to create specific effects. They rely on the relationship between the sound and meaning of words, or the transformation between the signifier and the signified. In Shakespeare's plays, puns serve multiple purposes beyond amusement. They can be used to provoke thought or emotions, as well as to provide clarification or emphasize certain ideas. Shakespeare skillfully weaves puns into his dialogues, enriching the depth and complexity of his characters and

themes. Here is one example from *Hamlet*:

King Claudius:... But now, my cousin Hamlet, and my son...

Hamlet: (Aside) A little more than kin, and less than kind.

King Claudius: How is it that the clouds still hang over you?

Hamlet: Not so, my lord; I am too much i' the sun (Act I, Scene II).

“Kin”, “kind” and “sun” underscore the embarrassing paradox that confronts Hamlet: Claudius, who has married Hamlet’s mother, is now more than his uncle, but he is apparently reluctant to be addressed Claudius’ son. The puns here create a sense of ambiguity and conflict within the character of Hamlet.

Similarly, the use of puns in *MD* is also pervasive, with “at least 58 puns in *Moby-Dick*” (Rosenberry, 1969, p. 193) identified by Edward H. Rosenberry. A good case in point is the metaphysical dialogues between Ahab and the Carpenter where the seemingly insane nonsense conveys complex signification. In Chapter 108, When Ahab sees the carpenter sneezing while making him the new leg, he asks: “What are you sneezing about?” The carpenter responds with a pun: “Bone is rather dusty, sir”. Then Ahab responds with another pun: “Take the hint, then; and when thou art dead, never bury thyself under living people’s noses” (Melville, 1999, p. 467). Again, in Chapter 127, when Ahab sees the carpenter making life-buoys out of a coffin, he calls him “as unprincipled as the gods”. The carpenter answers: “But I do not mean anything, Sir. I do as I do.” Then Ahab rejoins: “The gods again...” (p. 516), further deepening the metaphysical undertones of their conversation.

## 5. Conclusion

Melville undeniably drew extensively from Shakespeare, more than any other writer of his time. The portrayal of Ahab as a tragic hero-villain, with his madness and blasphemy, overshadows both Hamlet and Macbeth. The influence of Shakespeare can be seen in the novel’s dramatic techniques, parallel scenes, plot presentation and characterization, all of which reflect Shakespearean elements. Additionally, the language in *Moby-Dick* is imbued with direct and indirect quotations from Shakespeare, further reinforcing their literary connection. Melville also demonstrates a debt to Shakespeare in his use of dramatic language skills, such as repetition and puns, as well as the borrowing from and transformation of Shakespearean diction. In conclusion, *MD* is suffused with distinctive Shakespearean elements that contribute to its enduring appeal. The blend of originality and Shakespearean style enhances the charm of this literary masterpiece, securing its place as one of America’s greatest works of literature.

## Acknowledgments

I greatly appreciate the valuable contributions of our community advisory committee members. We would also like to thank the Hubei Provincial Department of Education Foundation and every team member who took the time to participate in this study.

## Authors’ contributions

Not applicable.

## Funding

This work was supported by Hubei Provincial Department of Education Foundation [project number 21Q178].

## Competing interests

Not applicable.

## Informed consent

Obtained.

## Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Canadian Center of Science and Education.

The journal’s policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

## Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

## Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

### Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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