

Moby dick by herman melville

Literature



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“ At length, by dint of much wriggling, and loud and incessant expostulations upon the unbecomingness of his hugging a fellow male in that matrimonial sort of style, I succeeded in extracting a grunt; and presently, he drew back his arm, shook himself all over like a Newfoundland dog just from the water, and sat up in bed, stiff as a pike-staff, looking at me, and rubbing his eyes as if he did not altogether remember how I came to be there, though a dim consciousness of knowing something about me seemed slowly dawning over him.

Meanwhile, I lay quietly eyeing him, having no serious misgivings now, and bent upon narrowly observing so curious a creature. When, at last, his mind seemed made up touching the character of his bedfellow, and he became, as it were, reconciled to the fact; he jumped out upon the floor, and by certain signs and sounds gave me to understand that, if it pleased me, he would dress first and then leave me to dress afterwards, leaving the whole apartment to myself.

Thinks I, Queequeg, under the circumstances, this is a very civilized overture; but, the truth is, these savages have an innate sense of delicacy, say what you will; it is marvelous how essentially polite they are; I pay this particular compliment to Queequeg, because he treated me with so much civility and consideration, while I was guilty of great rudeness; staring at him from the bed, and watching all his toilette motions; for the time my curiosity getting the better of my breeding.

Nevertheless, a man like Queequeg you don't see every day, he and his ways ere well worth unusual regarding” (3, 4)?. Although it tends to run-on, the rhythm of this passage is easy to follow. It reflects Ishmael, the
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narrator's train of thought, which also tends to flow sporadically, as one's thoughts often do. Repetition is displayed in use of the words dog, breeding, creature, and savage to bring to light the narrator's feeling of superiority in regards to Queequeg. Parallelism is shown in Ishmael's attitude of supremacy versus Queequeg's attitude of inferiority. This was possibly done to give a preview into the irony later shown.

Later we will explore this repetition and parallel in more detail. Irony is characterized as Ishmael realizes it is he who has behaved uncivilized, and Queequeg who has behaved in a more civilized manner. This helps the reader to see the wrongfulness of Ishmael's pre-judgment. Imagery is displayed through the description of Queequeg shaking himself all over, equated to a "Newfoundland dog" to highlight the prejudice and intolerance that is Ishmael's nature. In the beginning, this passage strongly exhibits apprehension and slight implications of homosexuality.

This tactful manner in which the author chooses to introduce homosexuality is likely due to the society in this era's strong refutation of such conduct. The first line displays the narrator's objection to being embraced in a "matrimonial sort of style" by Queequeg, calling such an action "unbecoming". The body language, brought to life by descriptive words such as "wriggling, loud and incessant expostulations, illuminates the strength of Ishmael's objections. As Queequeg awakes, he is described to be in somewhat of a daze, and having awakened "as stiff as a pike-staff".

Ishmael also describes Queequeg upon awakening as "though a dim consciousness of knowing something about me seemed slowly dawning over him". The time frame in which they are awakening is interpreted as if in

reference to sexual euphoria, perhaps like one who has awakened from a one night stand. The phrase “ under the circumstances” also highlights the unusualness and awkwardness of the situation, which also attributes to the narrator’s tone of bewilderment. He is thoroughly befuddled by Queequeg’s actions. To him these actions are unusual and uncivilized. Later in the passage Ishmael exhibits a slight tolerance.

He states that under the circumstances, Queequeg’s offer to allow him to dress in privacy is a “ very civilized overture”. This is a turning point in regards to Ishmael’s attitude of superiority; however, although he speaks positively here, there is a condescending tone to this statement. It implies that Queequeg is not normally civilized. The term “ Newfoundland dog” serves to de-humanize Queequeg. That being said, it is beneficial to the reader to know that Newfoundland dogs at this time were working dogs for fishermen, usually described as “ gentle giants”.

So here, the duality of Ishmael is hinted at. He downgrades Queequeg by calling him a dog, yet it is a breed that is known to be of great stature yet also having a gentle nature. This is a point where Ishmael’ internal struggle between right and wrong (tolerance and intolerance) once again peeks out at the reader. This internal struggle was first introduced when Ishmael had not yet met Queequeg and was chastising himself for pre-judging, stating that “ after all I may be cherishing unwarrantable prejudices against this unknown harpooner” (8)?.

In its entirety, this passage demonstrates fact versus observations as it reveals how it is Queequeg, rather than Ishmael, who is quite polite, considerate, and civilized. The themes of pre-judgment, tolerance, and then <https://assignbuster.com/moby-dick-by-herman-melville/>

acceptance (in said order) are exhibited in Ishmael's initial anxiousness prior to meeting Queequeg, tolerance once he has met Queequeg, and finally acceptance once he gets to know Queequeg. This passage reveals some of the stories overall themes of fear and rejection of homosexual relationships, as well as how innocently these types of relationships develop.

Racial inequalities and injustices, which are also main themes, are explicitly illuminated. The story's main theme of vengeance is shown in this particular passage in reverse. Queequeg never reacts to Ishmael's initial attitude of superiority in a revengeful way. He instead continually shows him kindness and respect. Insight is provided through this passage's choice and subtle delivery of subject matter. A key to understanding the work Moby Dick as a whole is in close observation and interpretation of said passage, which provides numerous hints at the larger theme(s).