



FACULTY OF EDUCATION AND BUSINESS STUDIES
Department of Humanities

Manifestations of Capitalism from a Marxist Perspective

**A comparison of Cultural Values and Moral Codes in *Moby Dick* and
*David Copperfield***

Graham Hepworth

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Handledare: Iulian Cananau
Examinator: Marko Modiano

Abstract

This is a study of Charles Dickens *David Copperfield* and Herman Melville *Moby Dick* from a Marxist perspective, exploring the different manifestations of the capitalist system, with critical reference to the theories of Raymond Williams and Terry Eagleton. It will attempt to understand cultural differences, values and moral codes, that the two novels reveal about Victorian England and Antebellum America, at this point in literary history, the decade of time with 1850 at its centre. The thesis will explore how the cultural legacy and ambitions of each nation is represented in each of the novels. By comparing the central themes of each work, the study will attempt to illustrate how capitalism is expressed specifically in each nation.

Key words

Marxism, Victorian, antebellum, Romanticism, Realism, feudalism, bourgeois, aristocracy, capitalism, manifest destiny

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1 Introduction

Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* and Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* were first published within one year of each other, in 1850 and 1851 respectively. *David Copperfield* can be categorised as an example of realist writing, depicting in its characters the hardships and challenges of the times. It can also be classified as a romance novel, considering the female relationships that David develops with Em'ly, Dora and Agnes, and is even regarded as a form of autobiography with many incidents related to Dickens' own life. *Moby Dick*, by contrast, is recognised as a clear example of romantic literature, emphasising individualism and emotion, as portrayed through characters such as Ahab, as well as glorifying the medieval past and the natural world. These classifications are simplifications of the complexity involved in each respective novel where traces of both categories can be respectively found, especially at this moment in history, which saw a shift in the dominance of Realism over Romanticism. Each work is now recognised as firmly belonging to the established Western Canon of literature, from each country of origin, Britain and America. *David Copperfield* was successful from its release, attracting readership as a serialised newspaper narration, while *Moby Dick* failed to capture the interest of a wide readership on release and only rose to popularity after Melville's death.

Britain and America are both strongly associated with the rise of capitalism, the economic system where the means of production is held in private hands, and where the production of goods and services is based upon supply and demand in the general market rather than through any form of central planning. It was the economic system that socialism and Karl Marx was most critical towards and which is used as a base for for the critical background to this study, Marxist literature criticism. The American state is indeed founded upon the principles of capitalism, where the federal government restrains itself from the ownership of any corporation. The American Constitution also protects the free market, for instance, article 1, section 8, the protection of innovation through copyright. However, very quickly after ratification, the Constitution and the principles of capitalism were compromised by the system of black slavery that established itself most strongly in Southern States. This compromised the individual's ownership of their own labour. Slavery was a British institution introduced into America under British law between 1620 and 1776. Its existence divided the nation and ultimately led to the American Civil War 1861- 1865. It is an example of just one of the

issues that differentiates the different ways in which capitalism and its social values were expressed in Britain and America, the greater understanding of which, forms the basis of this study.

The decade of time with 1850 at its centre, is the period in British and American cultural history, for which this study will use as its main reference. This study will compare examples of how *David Copperfield* and *Moby Dick* illustrate reflections of this historical time and the comparative similarities and differences in each cultural and sociological setting. The *Manifesto of the Communist Party* was itself published within this period, in 1848. It will use Marxist literary criticism as the foundation for its investigation, which stresses the importance of understanding literary work in relation to its detailed historical setting. It is particularly relevant at a time today when this approach is challenged, for instance by Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History*, who argues that any further political development has stopped. Marxist criticism, however, through its wide frame of critical reference can still provide new insights and show that this development continues and that there is still much to learn from new detailed understandings of literary sources. The choice of a comparative approach is hoped to add to the understanding of how capitalism is differentiated in both Britain and America, with its focus of study centred on the two novels selected.

2 Theoretical Background Marxist Criticism

The Marxist criticism that forms the base of this study focuses its attention on the work of the British theorists Raymond Williams and Terry Eagleton. These have been chosen for their own way of showing how Marxist theory can be applied to literary analysis and most importantly how this links with 'cultural materialism'. The foundation of any Marxist analysis is to be understood in the writing of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. It calls for a classless society and the recognition of a new proletariat that would better represent the economic situation of the time and the wave of industrial production that transformed social relations through the new organisation of labour. The preceding 'feudal' culture of land ownership and rule by members of the aristocracy had been replaced by a new bourgeois culture, where the distribution of wealth was based on new economic factors of production. The term 'bourgeois' has its origins in the European expansion of city bound craftsmen and tradesmen from the eleventh century

onwards. It was given a very negative association in the socialist writings of Marx and Engels. Marx did not believe that the changes brought about following the feudal system had established a more equal system. “The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones” (14).

In their writings, Marx and Engels described a materialist conception of history, where the term ‘base’ was used to identify the economic element, situation and movement and ‘superstructure’ referred to all the institutions supporting the economy, including the political, juridical and theoretical. The term ‘hegemony’ went beyond independent notions of culture and ideology, to express the complex interlocking of political, social and culture forces. It is this notion of how elements are interrelated that lies at the centre of Marxist criticism.

Bourgeois societies are criticised for their relation to history. Eagleton in interview said, “A society that can live only by contemporary resources is poor indeed. It is a structural effect of late bourgeois societies that they must repress history, because they must suppress alternative forms of history and also that their history tends to be the history of the same, tends to be the eternal return of the commodity in whatever fashionably varied guise that returns” (Petro 10). Marxist criticism seeks a deeper understanding of historical events. Williams offers a number of definitions including that of civilisation, seen as an achieved state of development, recognising the movement through different ages including that of the Enlightenment where rationality through knowledge and reason was seen to overcome ignorance and superstition. Marxism called on the human capacity not only to understand its position but to build a representative social order. Marxism argued for a return to human brotherhood. According to Marx and Engels modern man was to make his own history through the process of determining his own means of life. This was seen as a way of bridging the gaps that had been created between society and nature and where new relationships would be found between society and economy. “[The bourgeoisie] has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of Philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, it has set up that single, unconscionable freedom - Free Trade. In one word, for exploitation,

veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation” (Marx 15).

In the section titled “Dominant, Residual, and Emergent” from Williams *Marxism and Literature*, Williams discusses the different social structures present in any cultural group. Residual is the influence of old cultural practices on modern societies, consciously or unconsciously, built into the infrastructure of the dominant culture. Residual is differentiated from other archaic, outdated, abandoned cultural practices. Residual practices are active in shaping a society, even if it does not come from the dominant culture itself. Williams recognises organized religion, rural community, and monarchy as three important residual traits of culture. Emergent culture is described as the new cultural ideas and practices that are being created constantly in a society by groups and individuals. Regarding public versus private in dominant culture, practices that are not openly of the dominant culture are seen to be practiced in private. The dominant culture can do nothing to prevent this, whether or not it approves of these practices. “Therefore no dominant social order and therefore no dominant culture ever in reality includes or exhausts all human practice, human energy, and human intention” (125). *David Copperfield*, as it will be illustrated, overlays the different social structures of residual and emergent, to give more clear definition to the new middle class.

Williams and Eagleton are more recent exponents of Marxist literary criticism. The originality of Marxist criticism lies not in its historical approach to literature, but in its revolutionary understanding of history itself (Eagleton *Marxism* 3). The aim of Marxist criticism is to explain the literary work more fully; and this means a sensitive attention to its forms, styles and meanings. But it also means grasping those forms, styles and meanings as the products of a particular history (Eagleton *Marxism* 3). No matter what content a particular novel of the time may have, it shares certain formal structures with other such works: a shifting of interest from the romantic and supernatural to individual psychology and ‘routine’ experience; a concept of life-like, substantial ‘character’; a concern with the material fortunes of an individual protagonist who moves through an unpredictably evolving, linear narrative. This changed form, is the product of an increasingly confident bourgeois class, whose consciousness has broken beyond the limits of older, ‘aristocratic’ literary conventions (Eagleton *Marxism* 23). This is certainly true of the characters in both *David Copperfield* and *Moby Dick*, who give clear examples of personalities coming to terms with the bourgeois middle class values of their time.

Marxists view the novel as a 'bourgeois epic', unlike its classical counterpart, revealing the homelessness and alienation of man in modern society (Eagleton *Marxism* 25). The novel arises when the harmonious integration of man and his world is shattered; the hero of fiction is now in search of a totality, estranged from a world either too large or too narrow to give shape to his desires (Eagleton *Marxism* 25). *David Copperfield* is focused precisely on the ways that its main protagonist tries to adapt himself to the challenges of the time, while in *Moby Dick*, Ahab becomes lost in his obsession to capture the white whale. Marxist criticism searches for the 'alienations' of capitalism. A great writer can be seen to draw together all the contradictions of general and particular, conceptual and sensuous, social and individual, into a complex totality. From a Marxist viewpoint, it is the most historically significant and progressive examples, which lay bare the society's inner structure and dynamic. The realist writer, then, penetrates through the accidental phenomena of social life to disclose the essences or essentials of a condition, selecting and combining them into a total form and fleshing them out in concrete experience (Eagleton *Marxism* 26). *David Copperfield* illustrates this for instance through the ways it critically challenges class stereotypes for instance the character of Steerforth, while *Moby Dick* challenges racial prejudices of the time.

Religion is one area that will not be used for detailed comparison. This in part due to the fact that *David Copperfield* makes very little reference to religious belief or practice, with the exception of the church pew that David's family occupy (24) and the account of David and Dora's wedding, chapter XLIII. *Moby Dick* on the other hand makes direct reference to religion, for instance the contrasting religious beliefs that crew members hold, Queequeg who worships an idol that looks like "a three days' old Congo baby" (116). This is similar to the crew's ethnic diversity, and another example of how diversity was portrayed positively. Religious morality was seen as a corner stone in establishing the middle class both in Britain and America. "For many middle class parents, their children's inheritance should be their education and religious principles" (Davidoff 21). The representation of religion is one of the aspects of bourgeois society that Williams is critical towards. In *A contribution to the critique of Hegel's philosophy of right*, Marx wrote symbolically of religion, "the heart of a heartless world, the soul of soulless conditions," and "the sigh of the oppressed creature". Eagleton talks of Marxism's beginning, in response to a Christian movement which had betrayed its origins (Eagleton *Reason* 67). Eagleton draws attention to the argument that advanced capitalism is inherently agnostic, while the theologian Karl Barth describes the

Capitalist system more extremely as “almost unequivocally demonic” (Eagleton *Reason* 65). Eagleton in particular highlights the religious aspect of faith which he recognises as one of the big qualities that suffered as a consequence to the Enlightenment and Age of Reason. In *Moby Dick*, Ahab held the strongest faith and conviction in his quest to slaughter the white whale, but ultimately to a catastrophic end.

Before this study uses Marxist criticism as its base for comparing different key aspects of the two novels, *David Copperfield* and *Moby Dick*, an outline will be presented of the major historical events that helped to shape both the nations of Britain and America up until this point in history.

3 Historical background in England and America

In literature and the arts, the Romantic Age, which peaked in 1848 at the start of Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte’s dictatorship in France, and the subsequent Age of Realism, were both symptoms of the industrial revolution and the rationalisation brought about during the Age of Enlightenment and the Scientific Revolution. Romanticism glorified qualities of intuition and emotion over those of rationalisation and reason, placing high value on the achievements of heroic individuals, of which Ahab in particular is an example. Realism, of which *David Copperfield* is in part an example, attempted to represent its subject matter more truthfully and honestly. Socialist realism was later to become the official Soviet art form, institutionalized by Joseph Stalin in 1934 and adopted by allied Communist parties worldwide.

In the area of religion, Henry VIII separated the English Church from Rome and disbanded the monasteries, establishing the protestant based Church of England as the dominant denomination. “Secularism”, a term first used by the British writer George Jacob Holyoake in 1851, expressed the development of the power of reason over religious faith and superstition. It had contributed to the earlier Age of Enlightenment, bringing all areas of human life including religion under the influence of reason. The rights of man were seen not as God given but as natural benefits of Nature. Beliefs of education, society and state were separated from those of religion. Britain was quick to endorse secularist principles, aligning this alongside political liberalism. America was by contrast, founded on the basis of religious freedom and with a ‘deistic’ base, where God was believed to have created the universe, but not to have interfered since. America

held onto the belief that religion is a relevant part of the political discourse and the beliefs of the Quakers and values of Puritanism were very influential.

America was founded as a British colony after Christopher Columbus was credited with the discovery of the lands that were named the Americas in 1492. The 'Old World' that existed before the discovery of the Americas, was dominated in England by the feudal system, incorporating the legal and military customs introduced by the Normans, following the victory of William the Conqueror in 1066. Under this system, all land was owned by the King, with one quarter kept by the King as personal property, a percentage given to the church while the remainder was leased out under strict controls. It led to the establishment of an 'aristocratic' class of medieval nobility throughout Europe, holding positions of power, realised through land ownership and the possession of military rank. This formed the base on which capitalism was founded. Opportunities were presented to individuals for the increasing of personal wealth through maximising profits from land ownership, for instance by renting out of land to those able to pay the highest price. Successful tenant farmers for instance, could develop into agrarian capitalists. The process of enclosure and ownership of common land further encouraged the new rich or bourgeoisie. This development is cited by Marxist historians as an example of the unfair class conflict present in the growing capitalist society, and in particular how the peasantry were undervalued. The trade and commerce that developed between towns known as mercantalism, replaced the feudal system, but it was the Scottish philosopher and economist Adam Smith (1723-1790) and his book *The Wealth of Nations*, which established capitalism globally. Smith believed in a 'just price' and laws of the new market economy with 'self interest' as the basis for an expansionist economy and society (Davidoff 20).

Jamestown, America's first permanent English colony founded in 1607, heralded the 'New World', and the start of changes in the way society was ordered. These were increased with the introduction of industrialisation when new sources of wealth and income were made possible and independent of the feudal order. A new structure of class and social hierarchy established itself, challenging the feudal order, and giving people new forms of status and hierarchies of authority, while at the same time marking membership to a particular social group (Adams 5). The changes brought with it a wave of revolutionary movement that swept across Europe. Over 50 nations challenged the long established monarchical structure in favour of more Republican based nation states. The American Revolution, 1775-1783, fought out in the 13 northern

British colonies by crown loyalists and a colonial government, against names now synonymous with Independence, including Benjamin Franklin, George Washington and John Adams, had established freedom from British rule. The Declaration of Independence, signed in Paris 1783, saw the formation of the new nation, taking possession of all land east of the Mississippi and south of the Great Lakes. It saw the resolution of the Constitution of the United States, establishing new federal national government, with representation in the Congress and House of Representatives. Conflicts between Britain and America continued, for instance, in 1812 the British Royal Navy made a blockade of trade routes both in America and France. The Antebellum period, characteristic of *Moby Dick*, is the time leading up to the American Civil War (1861-1865) and the conflicts surrounding the rights of free individuals in the face of slavery, an issue which divided the nation but which Melville in *Moby Dick* cannot be seen to make any clear reference to. This despite Melville's own association to the debate, where his father-in-law, Judge Shaw, imposed the Fugitive Slave Law 1850, forcing captured runaway slaves to be returned to their owners even from free states. There were strong feelings from supporters of both sides of the argument. The abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison proclaimed "No Union with slave holders!" (Delbano 155).

In Britain, the middle class had been pacified by the Reform Act 1832, changing the electoral system and giving wider representation to new boroughs including those that had risen under the industrial expansion of towns and cities. The working class still felt badly represented, and the 'Chartist' movement led a petitioning of the government in 1848. A peaceful resolution was found where all men were given the vote and a reform in the requirement that a certain property holding was needed for Members of Parliament. Meanwhile the Corn Laws 1846, saw the government remove protectionist agricultural tariffs on food and grain, effectively lowering food prices and opening up opportunities for free trade.

It was the introduction of industrialisation that most dramatically transformed the lives of the greater population. It created new work environments and procedures that placed new demands on the organisation of work and life. The previously 'artisan' based organisation of life, where a person would most often carry out his work from home, was replaced by a new system that gathered together larger groups of workers, dividing up the production process while separating work and home lifestyles. A new

social structure was required to operate this system and the new 'liquid capital' that it created further enhanced the rise of a new social grouping, the middle class.

It was also a time of upheaval and expansion. The Mexican War 1846-48, fought over rights to the Republic of Texas, saw new states further enlarging America after the Mexican Peace Treaty 1848 and creating an ever changing frontier, where families claimed tracts of land setting up farmsteads on previously open natural landscape. In the cities that quickly grew up, industrial production quickly expanded creating job opportunities for new immigrants. Expansion raised the question of how these new territories should align themselves to the question of slavery. John C. Calhoun, made a speech on the Oregon Bill, 1848, claiming:

[The Declaration of Independence contained] the most false and dangerous of all political errors. [...] To this error his proposition to exclude slavery from the territory northwest of the Ohio may be traced, and to that the ordinance of '87, and through it the deep and dangerous agitation which now threatens to engulf, and will certainly engulf, if not speedily settled, our political institutions, and involve the country in countless woes (Calhoun).

The impact of the conflict between North and South and the wave of European Revolutions, led to an increase in migration within America as well as immigration from Europe to America. The "Know Nothing" movement was opposed to Catholic immigration, holding Pope Pius IX responsible for the failure of the Revolutions of 1848 to overthrow monarchic rule, for instance in France where Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte returned from exile to lead the new Republic.

Religious association and belief was an important aspect of life for many in America. The Protestant religious revival known as the "Second Great Awakening" began in Connecticut in the last decade of the eighteenth century, helping the establishment of many reform movements. Before 1820, the first settlers had succeeded in re-creating a New England social organisation that included the reincarnation of such seventeenth century institutions as the corporate family economy, a patriarchal household structure, and the covenanted religious community. These throwbacks to the days of the Puritans, however, coexisted with the culture, economics, and society of the eighteenth century, with habits of trade, industry, and benevolence that had been acquired east of the frontier, especially in Connecticut (Ryan 59).

Although there were features that can be seen to unite the developing nations of Britain and America at the time of 1850, most notably industrialisation and the establishment of the middle class, the historical legacy of each nation raised issues that clearly separated their future development. As the comparisons between *David Copperfield* and *Moby Dick* will now discuss, these were focused in Britain on issues including the need of the middle class to distinguish itself from the aristocracy, while in America on issues including how expansion could be best achieved.

4 Comparisons of *David Copperfield* and *Moby Dick* from a Marxist perspective

4.1 Bourgeois class society versus egalitarian, ethnic diversity

One of the fundamental aspects of Marxist literary criticism is that concerning class structure and in particular how the bourgeois class utilises and represses the working class.

The bourgeoisie keeps more and more doing away with the scattered state of the population, of the means of production, and of poverty. It has agglomerated population, centralised the means of production, and has concentrated property in a few hands. The necessary consequences of this was political centralisation. Independent, or but loosely connected provinces, with separate interests, laws, governments, and systems of taxation, became lumped together into one nation, with one government, one code of laws, one national class-interest, one frontier, and one customs-tariff (Marx 17).

David Copperfield and *Moby Dick* portray contrasting features of the bourgeois society in Britain and America. *David Copperfield* concentrates on the characteristics that are important in the establishment of the new middle class and how this can be seen to differ both from the aristocratic class and that of the lower class. Regarding how the different classes are interrelated, Raymond Williams describes how specific social processes create different ‘ways of life’, where ‘civil society’ is viewed as a specific historical form, and where bourgeois society is the product of a capitalist mode of production. “The bourgeoisie [...] has made barbarian and semi barbarian countries dependant on the civilised ones” (Williams *Marxism* 18).

David Copperfield is born into a privileged lifestyle. A clearer indication of the level of this privilege is given by Davidoff who refers to the aristocratic habit of leaving children in the care of nursemaids and servants (335). This describes the environment in which David grows for the first five years of his life. But financial resources are limited and David must establish a personal income and place in society. The education that David gets with the help of his aunt Betsey, helps him to establish himself professionally and firmly rooted in the middle class. This is in contrast to the character of James Steerforth, a representative of the aristocratic class who has a servant Littimer and financial resources that allow him to do whatever he pleases, without having to work or make himself useful, besides being unsympathetic to those below him in social ranking. During David's first night stay at Steerforth's home in Highgate, Steerforth reveals his views about the poor, "They are not expected to be as sensitive as we are. Their delicacy is not to be shocked, or hurt very easily. They are wonderfully virtuous, I dare say [...]. but they have not very fine natures, and they may be thankful that, like their coarse rough skins, they are not easily wounded" (Dickens 247). David's character is free to move between different social classes throughout the novel, without showing any sign of arrogance. It gives him contact with the humble, honest family of his old maid Peggotty, who live in a converted boat in Yarmouth. By contrast, Steerforth's aristocratic lifestyle is judgemental. Mrs Steerforth in a confrontation with Mr Peggotty regarding her son's disappearance with Emily, says that she will never allow her son to marry below himself, "Such a marriage would irretrievably blight my son's career, and ruin his prospects. Nothing is more certain than it never can take place, and never will" (Dickens 386).

Moby Dick presents a social structure arranged to meet the task of commercial whaling, the voyage in which the largest part of the text is concentrated. It is a relatively egalitarian structure, with equal rights shared by the majority, with the clear exception of Ahab who is more a class of his own. Ahab is the only crew member who is singled with his own cabin, the place where the ship's officers eat dinner together, chapter 34 "The Cabin-Table". The narrative voice of Ishmael notes in chapter 33 "The Specksynder", that the whalers depend upon one another for successful hunting, and that a whaling ship is less hierarchical than other vessels. Ishmael reflects upon the dignity of the working man, finding evidence of God in even the "meanest mariners", admitting that he will frequently ignore people's faults to instead emphasize what binds all men together, "The great God absolute! The centre and circumference of all

democracy! His omnipresence, our divine equality!” (Melville 212). Melville suggests that it is possible and important to live side by side one another. Social class is given very little reference, all crew members are equal in their quest and purpose, differentiation is instead focused on ethnicity. Melville objected to racial discrimination. “Seamen have strong prejudices,” he wrote in 1855, “particularly in the matter of race,” though aboard a whaleship (about the closest thing in antebellum America to an integrated society) there was, according to one black sailor writing in 1857, “no distinction as to colour” – and it was on a whaleship that Melville’s adult consciousness had been formed (Delbano 156).

A series of work partnerships are described concerning the different small harpoon boats. Each mate is a native born American and commands his own small harpoon boat, with a “squire,” his harpooner, from other parts of the world. “The native American liberally provides the brains, the rest of the world as generously supplies the muscles” (Melville 216). However, the partnerships can be seen to comment on ethnic oppression. The mate Stubb who represents the American West, for instance, is paired with Tashtego, a native American Indian, commenting on the power that the white Americans held was dependant upon the subordination of the Native American Indian. Amongst the lowest ranked is Pip, the Pequod’s cabin boy, a poor black boy from Alabama “beating his tambourine” on ship (Melville 217). He is drafted in as a replacement oarsman in Stubb’s harpoon boat, chapter 93 “The Castaway”, and jumps overboard when a whale raps the bottom of the boat. After a warning from Stubb of the consequences of repeating this act, Pip gets left in the sea’s “heartless immensity”, when Stubb goes in chase of a whale. It is the Pequod that finally rescues Pip, but who never fully recovers from the experience of feeling left in the vast ocean. Ahab acknowledges Pip’s plight and in another example of the way in which *Moby Dick* supports egalitarianism and ethnic diversity, linking this to spiritual qualities, says that his cabin will now be Pip’s, because the boy touches his “inmost center” (Melville 631).

Like Ishmael, Melville believed that “a man can be honest in any sort of skin.” Having served with black men of all qualities, he dismissed the various theories with which some apologists for slavery argued that they were suited by nature for servitude (Delbano 156). In an act that most closely recalls the structuring of feudal society, Ahab makes use of a ritual to win loyalties and bind the crew together. Ahab orders his men to drink from one flagon that gets passed around, telling the harpooners to cross their lances before him, taking the weapons and anointing Queequeg, Tashtego, and Daggoo,

“my three pagan kinsmen there—yon three most honourable gentlemen and noble men” (Melville 264). Ahab as Captain, takes full possession of his role as leader of the Pequod, a position that is challenged on a number of occasions, as discussed further in section 4.7, but Ahab holds onto his authority. In his own personal vendetta to kill the white whale at all costs, Ahab is indeed guilty of grossly misusing his authority, which ultimately leads to death and destruction for the Pequod and its crew.

4.2 Industrialisation, westward expansion and slavery

As already outlined, industrialisation was one of the major contributing factors in the development of bourgeois culture and capitalism. Industrialisation was a favourite Dickensian theme, where the hardships of the environment were often portrayed, for example *Hard Times* published 1854. Furthermore, industrialisation transformed the environment and created new urban centres. “The bourgeoisie [...] has created enormous cities, has greatly increased the urban population as compared with the rural, and has thus rescued a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life. Just as it has made the country dependent on the towns, so it has made barbarian and semi-barbarian countries dependent on the civilized ones, nations of peasants on nations of bourgeois, the East on the West” (Marx 17).

Industrialisation affected all areas of civilisation and culture. A society increasingly based on new forms of property and the use of “liquid capital”, could no longer depend on traditional forms of male dominance embedded in the traces of a feudal military system which had been inherent in land ownership (Davidoff 451). Britain was the leading industrial nation in Europe during the 1800’s. In America, the transformation to industrial production was underway but overshadowed by other challenges, including the moving frontier and western expansion. America’s emergence as Europe’s leading industrial nation was delayed until the 1880’s.

Industrialisation, however, is not a central theme of *David Copperfield*. There is only one direct reference to industry, a wine bottling warehouse, “supplying wine and spirits to certain packet-ships” (136) which travelled to the East and West Indies, part owned by the man that David’s mum marries, Mr Murdstone and run by his business partner Mr Quinion positioned on the Thames in London. David gets sent away to work at the warehouse, aged ten, as “a little labouring hind” (135). It is a miserable place “the

squeaking and scuffling of the old grey rats in the cellars; and the dirt and rottenness of the place” and of his work companions ”no words can express the secret agony of my soul as I sank into this companionship” (136). David gets very little pay and lives primarily on bread (140). David is sent to live with the Micawber family, who are happy to have a lodger, and an extra income to help their own financial difficulties. They later decide that they must leave London in an attempt to salvage some financial stability. It is an act that prompts David to run away from his own misery, in search of help from his aunt Betsey. But David later returns to live in the urban environment of London, where he works at the Doctors’ Court as an apprentice, living in lodgings with Mrs Crupp, an old lady promises to take care of David as though he were her own son (Dickens 296). The industrial centre of London during this period is portrayed mainly as a place where David is able to benefit from the professional and social opportunities and the network of establishments that the centre presents.

Industrialisation was an important aspect of the developing bourgeois in America. In particular it provided a source of income for the wave of immigration that flooded American centres following the revolutionary uprisings across Europe, who provided the manual workforce to operate the factories, while the native born middle class administered production. This division of labour is similar to that upon the Pequod, made up of white overseers and dark underlings, even replicating that of “the American army and military and merchant navies, and the engineering forces employed in the construction of the American Canals and Railroads” (Delbano 158). Beneath the ebullience was a sense of foreboding that the social problems accompanying industrialisation – worker unrest, disease born of insanitary conditions, predatory crime among the poor – were heading for America like a toxic cloud drifting in from Europe (Delbano 103). At the outset the undertaking of the Pequod is a capitalist venture, part of the whaling industry, which had become monopolized around the port of Nantucket, New Bedford, from where the Pequod sails. The Pequod sought material profit through the collection of spermaceti and ambergris, first through the hunting and slaughter of whales and then the processing of whale carcasses. The Pequod becomes a floating factory in chapter 96 “The Try Works”. Lighting up the darkness of the night “licked up by the fierce flames .[...]. as the wind howled on, and the sea leaped, and the ship groaned and dived, and yet steadfastly shot her red hell further and further into the blackness of the sea and the night, and scornfully champed the white bone in her

mouth” from her stone furnace in which the bodies of her victims are consumed while the “spermaceti, oil, and bone pass unscathed through the fire” (Melville 533).

But two other issues played a more urgent role in the development of America at this time. One was the westward expansion of the frontier. “In that spring of 1850, the United States was facing the question of how to organise the vast territories it had won in the war. Comprising all of present day California, Nevada, and Utah, and parts of New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, and Wyoming, the Mexican cession, formally ratified in the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo on February 2, 1848, quickened westward migration; and when gold deposits were discovered in California later that year the march of settlement became a stampede” (Delbano 149). The Pequod’s voyage can be compared to this expansionist undertaking, seeking out new territories through the exploration of the world’s oceans. The other big issue facing America was slavery. “When *Moby Dick* began to take shape in Melville’s mind, the dispute between North and South over race and slavery was coming to crisis. Political orators of all stripes warned that the ship of state was ‘about to be dashed to pieces amidst the breakers with which she was visibly almost in contact’. In *Moby Dick* politics became a central element in a larger constellation of themes. The Pequod becomes a replica of the American ship of state; its thirty-man crew (“isolates federated along one keel”) matched in number the thirty states that constituted the Union in 1850” (Delbano 158). But Melville can only be seen to make symbolic reference to each of these national issues.

4.3 Liquid capital versus ‘lay payments’

Material possession and the means of wealth that allowed individuals to live up to certain standards of living was very different between the class divisions of bourgeois society. The new middle class had established a material independence and a new source of income and wealth that was no longer connected to the feudal system of land and property ownership. “But modern bourgeois private property is the final and most complete expression of the system of producing and appropriating products, that is based on class antagonisms, on the exploitation of the many by the few” (Marx 22). The new source of income and wealth was greatly enhanced by industrialisation and through the creation of diverging institutions that extended a new network of systems

throughout Britain. The property and land ownership of the aristocracy can be seen as an example of Williams' "subsidiary" older form of wealth, while the "dominant" form is that of "liquid capital", used by the new middle class. This dominant form presents opportunities for self-improvement and it is almost expected feature of the new middle class, where individuals will strive towards personal development. This is well exhibited in the changes that David Copperfield experiences, working his way up from being an apprentice in the Doctors' Courts before progressing to become an independent writer.

Material possession and liquid capital are a constant source of hardships and conflict. Mr Micawber, whose family David lives with when he starts work at the bottling warehouse, is an example of a person who is made to face the consequences of falling into debt, sent to the debtors prison, until able to resolve debts (Dickens 144). Money is repeatedly a cause for conflict and David is cheated out of his money on a number of occasions. The money given to David by Peggotty, when first sent to Salem House, is the cause of dishonesty at the Inn where they stop, where the waiter takes advantage of David, eating his food and asking for a large over proportionate tip. At Salem House the remainder of the money, "seven shillings", is taken by Steerforth "You had better give it to me to take care of", who uses it to his own satisfaction on luxuries, a bottle of currant, almond cakes, biscuits and fruit (80). On another occasion while leaving London in search of his aunt Betsey, David is robbed of money and possessions when he tries to secure help of a "long-legged young man". David witnesses Aunt Betsey, potentially the victim of extortion, giving a large amount of money to a lowly, ill-dressed man, "Trot! My dear Trot! I don't know what I'm about to do" (Dickens 290). Traddles is another victim of the hardships of money, saving up to marry his true love. He has collected two pieces of furniture, a flowerpot and a small table, intended to help with the material establishment of home, when they are married "Its not a great deal towards the furnishings, but it's something" (Dickens 336). Furthermore, Traddles is found to be living with the Micawber family, whose financial situation has only deteriorated. David tries to warn Traddles to be careful with his money and possessions. Traddles replies "I haven't got anything to lend", but says that he has lent his name, which Micawber has used to clear his debt (Dickens 350). In another example of the misery caused by financial plight, David falls in love with Dora, the daughter of David's boss Mr Spenlow, but feels unworthy, having little material wealth by comparison with that of Spenlow. They marry and David fears that he does not possess

the material means to satisfy the expectations of Dora. When the two move into a house and take on a number of servants, David and Dora are cheated by their servants “It appeared to me, on looking over the tradesmen’s books, as if we might have kept the basement story paved with butter, such was the extensive scale of our consumption of that article” (Dickens 524).

The ownership of material possession and access to “liquid capital” presented in *David Copperfield* is sharply contrasted with that presented in *Moby Dick*. Material possession plays no role on board the Pequod where crew members all share the material conditions provided. Ownership of the Pequod is held in the largest share by two former sailors, Captain Bildad and Captain Peleg, while other smaller shares are “held by a crowd of old annuitants; widows, fatherless children, and chancery wards; each owning about the value of a timber head, or a foot of plank, or a nail or two in the ship. People in Nantucket invest their money in whaling vessels, the same way that you do yours in approved state stocks bringing in good interest” (Melville 169). There is very little use of money and liquid capital onboard the Pequod. Food, drink and accommodation are provided in the terms of agreement for undertaking the voyage. Payment for services to the crew is made in agreement with the ship’s owners at the start of the venture. This is in the form of a ‘lay’, a part of the total sum of the value of their cargo payable on the boats successful return. Ishmael is given the three hundredth lay by the ship’s owner Peleg, while Queequeg after impressing the owners with his skill, hitting a tiny spot of tar on the water with his harpoon, is given the ninetieth lay, “more than ever was given a harpooner yet out of Nantucket” (Melville 186).

Crew members are not seen to develop in their roles during the voyage, there is little opportunity for any person wanting to advance into a new position. Recognition and reward is through some act that might be pleasing to the captain. Ahab offers a financial incentive to any crew member, when he speaks to the ships crew for the first time. “Whosoever of ye raises me a white-headed whale with a wrinkled brow and a crooked jaw [...]. he shall have this gold ounce, my boys!” (Melville 259). The gold piece is nailed to the main mast as a constant reminder to the crew. It is the subject of its own chapter 99 “The Dubloon”, when the symbolism of the imagery on the gold ounce is interpreted by each of the crew in turn. Pip is the last to have his say, remarking that the coin is the ship’s naval, the thing at the centre of the ship that holds it together. It is Ahab who later claims the reward himself, when he finally spots the white whale after taking over watch from aloft the main royal-mast (chap 133). Because Ahab must use

men as his tools, he has to be careful to maintain their loyalty throughout the long sea voyage. Ahab knows that he can appeal to their emotions for a limited time, sharing Ahab's greatest desire to slaughter the white whale, but that cash in the form of collection of ambergris and spermaceti, is a more reliable motivator. "I will not strip these men of all hopes of cash" (Melville 314). To keep the crew satisfied, Ahab must content himself with the slaughter and collection of other prey, even if he has only one purpose, the slaughter of the white whale.

4.4 Education and self improvement versus natural qualities and nature

One of the key means by which the middle class was able to establish itself was through education. A new range of institutions were established, based on the principles of the elite boarding schools of Eton, Cambridge and Oxford, with a strong connection to the moral principles expounded through the Christian church. This served a number of functions. It helped to accommodate changes in family life, where the role of educating a child was taken away from the mother and given to a person with special training, aimed at preparing boys to enter one of the new range of jobs, more focused on management skills. It also saw the splitting up of the nuclear family, where boys would often be sent away to a boarding school. "The end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth can be understood as a transition between a system built around informal training of children by the family, kin and community to one which relied on institutions created specifically for educational or professional training" (Davidoff 235). The educational institutions for boys that emerged at this time were not yet set to meritocratic standards. Both staff and pupils were often appointed through patronage, kinship or friendship. Education was expensive and something that a family had to finance, available only to a small percentage of the population.

David Copperfield illustrates different examples of education. For the first five years of life, David is taught at home by his mother. The home environment changes dramatically when David's mother marries Mr Murdstone, who also brings his sister into the house. The strict, critical atmosphere badly affects David's concentration and performance, and after one bad lesson, Mr Murdstone beats David savagely. David retaliates by biting Murdstone's hand. David gets locked in his room for five days before learning that he is to be sent away from home to a boarding school, Salem

House, run by Mr Creakle, a friend of Mr Murdstone. On arrival, David must wear a placard on his back identifying him as the one that bites (Dickens 77). David is beaten with a cane on the first day (Dickens 83). It is a bleak environment, that gets the full force of Dickens' characteristic critical commentary. "I gazed upon the schoolroom into which he took me, as the most forlorn and desolate place I had ever seen [...]. There is a strange unwholesome smell upon the room, like mildewed corduroys, sweet apples wanting air, and rotten books. There could not well be more ink splashed about it, if it had been roofless from its first construction, and the skies had rained, snowed, hailed, and blown ink through the varying seasons of the year" (Dickens 74). The school can be viewed in the light of the prison institutions that Foucault discusses in *Discipline and Punish*, considered further in section 4.5, institutions that impose themselves on individuals in a very authoritarian manner. "In a school carried on by sheer cruelty, whether it is presided over by a dunce or not, there is not likely to be much learnt. I believe our boys were, generally, as ignorant a set as any schoolboys in existence; they were too much troubled and knocked about to learn; they could no more do that to advantage, than any one can do anything to advantage in a life of constant misfortune, torment, and worry" (Dickens 87).

In a further variety of education, David seeks the help of his aunt Betsey, and is taken to meet Mr Wickfield, and a new school is recommended, Doctor Strong's in Canterbury. David is behind to begin with but quickly rises to the top of his class and settles in happily. "Doctor Strong's was an excellent school; as different from Mr. Creakle's as good is from evil. It was very gravely and decorously ordered, and on a sound system; with an appeal, in everything, to the honour and good faith of the boys, and an avowed intention to rely on their possession of those qualities unless they proved themselves unworthy of it, which worked wonders. We all felt that we had a part in the management of the place, and in sustaining its character and dignity. Hence, we soon became warmly attached to it" (Dickens 202). David rises to be the top boy at the school and at the age of seventeen he graduates fully prepared for the next step of entering into a profession. This is in contrast to David's aristocratic friend Steerforth, who is not seen to benefit from his education attending a top college at Oxford but bored by his studies (Dickens 242). The aristocracy did not have to rely on education alone to establish their place in society.

The 'new middle class' value on education that was establishing itself in both Britain and America was not the focus of Melville in *Moby Dick*. The novel instead

places its focus on personality and the value of natural instincts, how well an individual is connected with nature, the experience an individual may have performing a particular duty or carrying out a role. On the morning of the third day of the chase for Moby Dick, Ahab understands better the forces that drive him. "Ahab never thinks; he only feels, feels, feels; [...] to think's audacity. God only has that right and privilege" (Melville 673). One of the most valued skills was that of the harpooner, see also section 4.3, as illustrated by Queequeg and the financial reward that this could bring. But individuals did not work alone aboard the Pequod they often formed part of a small team, for instance the ethnic arrangements of the smaller whaling boats. Formal training was seen as a danger and burden and the way in which an individual could weaken contact with his own personal skills and abilities. Ishmael declares that his greatest accomplishments have been gained while whaling out at sea, "for a whale-ship was my Yale College and my Harvard" (Melville 208). Melville wanted to focus attention instead on the understanding of man's place within the natural world and the respect that this deserved, and that this understanding was valued above education. Despite the hunt that the crew of the Pequod have undertaken, there is a respect for the qualities that the whale possesses. As Ishmael says, "It does seem to me, that herein we see the rare virtue of a strong individual vitality, and the rare virtue of thick walls, and the rare virtue of interior spaciousness. Oh, man! admire and model thyself after the whale! Do thou, too, remain warm among ice. Do thou, too, live in this world without being of it. Be cool at the equator; keep thy blood fluid at the Pole. Like the great dome of St. Peter's, and like the great whale, retain, O man! in all seasons a temperature of thine own" (Melville 414). Indeed the catastrophic climax, the destruction of the Pequod and loss of all but one life at the hands of the white whale, can be interpreted as a warning that man will never rule over nature.

With respect to education, *David Copperfield* can be seen to promote the values on which the middle class were building their identity, while *Moby Dick* can be viewed as a possible warning of the consequences of man's bourgeois industrial developments and that respect must be paid to the natural world and man's position in it.

4.5 Individual needs versus totalitarian unit

The intricate web of institutions that helped to establish the new middle class, as illustrated in *David Copperfield*, is absent in *Moby Dick*. The individual sailors aboard the Pequod cannot be seen to be supported by any form of organised independent group framework, where one is able to express needs and find representation. The crew rather, live and work together in the form of one unit, under the command of Captain Ahab. The ship does perform different activities, for instance after Stubb tricks the captain of a French whaling ship to let go of two whales that they have caught (517). The whales are taken aboard the Pequod, and many different operations are performed before the boiling and extraction of oil is undertaken by crew members working as one team to complete the job in the most efficient way. Leo Marx saw in the crew of the Pequod under Ahab's spell "a pliant, disciplined, committed, totalitarian unit" (Delbano 175). Crew members are seen to use the Pequod as their base from which to perform different duties, called upon during the voyage. There were only a small number of places aboard the ship where there was an exception to the more generally understood flexibility. Ahab's cabin was one of the only private places aboard ship, reserved alone for Ahab, though crew members used it for dining, while Pip was late in the voyage, allowed its freedom. The four small whaling boats were maintained to perform their own specific purpose, related to the specific personalities of the mate squire partnership. The Pequod held its crew captive on board, much like a nation its citizens, except temporarily during the chase from one of the small whaling boats. The Pequod can be interpreted as the symbol of a mini-nation under the leadership of Ahab. The individual personalities and ethnicities all combine to form one egalitarian unit out in pursuit of its own form of capitalist enterprise.

Education was one of the most visible establishments that was set up to develop the aspirations of the middle class, but there was a whole network of other institutions that helped to firmly root this group. A whole new system of law and order was introduced to replace the feudal form of punishment exercised through the extraction of confessions using torture and public execution. A new form of punishment was developed, administered by a new impersonal state apparatus, which attempted to correct the offender and prevent the re-occurrence of future crime. One punishes not to efface the crime, but to transform a criminal (actual or potential); punishment must bring with it a certain corrective technique (Foucault 127). The emergence of the prison was also seen to mark the institutionalisation of the power to punish (Foucault 130). The new industrial landscape was even changing the nature of crime. As wealth increased,

fraudulent crime developed and a new moral value was placed on property relations while stricter methods of surveillance were imposed along with a tighter partitioning of the population (Foucault 77).

In *David Copperfield*, the plight of Mr Micawber and his family is used as an example of the consequences that should be expected of any person who might fall into debt, with the debtors' prisons used to counter bad debt, which were common in Victorian England at this time. Charles Dickens had himself a direct experience of the hardships caused by the debtors' prisons, through his father who had poor control over his spending on drinking and dining. The law profession transformed itself, through the development of a new egalitarian juridical framework. It was made possible by the organisation of a parliamentary, representative regime, and helped the new bourgeoisie to challenge the previously aristocratic, monarchic feudal power structure (Foucault 222). David is employed in law at the Doctors' Commons as a proctor. Through the characters of Mr Wickfield and Mr Spenlow, an insight is given to the social prestige that accompanies this profession. It is seen as one of the corner stones of middle class life, helping to give structure to the evolving values and prestige of the middle class. Training to work in law was connected to ethical principles. It was a trade free from 'perpetual attention to profit and loss', had fewer temptations to vice and 'the most intimate connections with morality' (Davidoff 22). The profession of lawyers, for instance, differed from medicine, by never having had a guild organisation, but instead directly attached to courts with a division between attorneys and solicitors (Davidoff 261). Legal dispute brought many people together, and law was the platform where the middle class and the upper class might meet (Davidoff 265).

4.6 Role of the family unit

The family unit lies at the base of all forms of larger social groupings. The values that establish and sustain family life are the ones that individuals use once outside the home in the wider social context. During the medieval period, characterised by the feudal system of government, aristocratic families were granted ownership of land, held privileged positions of title and rank in return for service to the nobility. Once a family had acquired a tract of land or title, they were able to pass this down as inheritance from one generation to another. The simple, extreme division of social

ordering was established, the privileged and the underprivileged. Britain in the late eighteenth century was still dominated by land ownership. This remained the greatest source of wealth, power and social honour, the real patrimony and the basis of citizenship (Davidoff 198). The new middle class could identify itself with the aristocratic system of protecting family prestige and achievements, but their life patterns differed from those of the aristocracy, the new middle class had to find a source of income which could be used as a base for this class distinction. A typical source of income could be through the management of industrial production, however, this like many other sources, split up home and work life into two different spheres. "The bourgeoisie has torn away from the family its sentimental veil, and has reduced the family relation to a mere money relation" (Marx16).

David Copperfield presents different examples of family life connected to work, for instance Mr Wickfield, a friend of aunt Betsey's and in whose house David stays in Canterbury, carries out his professional work as a lawyer from home. The separation of home and workplace, and the increasingly rigorous gendering of that division, led to a growing isolation of middle class fathers from their sons, who in their early years were immersed in a sphere increasingly designated 'feminine', and then in a phenomenon unparalleled elsewhere in Europe, transported to the all male environment of the boarding schools, which tended to become surrogate family structures (Adams 5). The expanding social mobility available to young men in an industrial society also strained relations between generations and unsettled customary gendering's of male labour, as traditional continuities between the 'places' of father and son were disrupted by participation in that new and more volatile social structure, the career (Adams 5). The gendering of home and work is a strong feature of *David Copperfield*, particularly in the character of David who is influenced greatly by the women around him, for instance aunt Betsey who is portrayed as a strong woman, as illustrated by her obsession with keeping donkeys off her lawn, for instance on the occasion when the Murdstones visit (Dickens 178).

David's mother lives alone with her maid Peggotty at the family home the "Rookery" when David is born, having lost her husband six months previously. The arrangement for the holding of property by females was by no means established at this time, women held very few rights. The increasing use of trust like arrangements was part of a move away from the common law right of widows to traditional dower (or thirds – a fixed part of their husbands estate). With formal repeal of dower in 1833,

wives lost the absolute right to inherit. Only in cases where provisions had been made by trust (or its equivalent) the widow ‘might enjoy the use of her own property’ (Davidoff 209). Under common law, all of a woman’s liquid property, unlike land, became her husbands at marriage. When David’s mother marries Mr Murdstone, Murdstone moves into The Rookery with his sister. David’s home situation is made very difficult through the enforcement of a stringent authoritarian order. Murdstone feels entitled to claim all authority for the household while David’s mother allows to the surrender of her own status as principle caretaker (Dickens 210).

There was a greater movement of family fortunes and status within the new class structuring, individuals could move up or down in social scale, often taking with it the reputation of the whole family. Micawber who is not able to solve his family’s financial situation in Britain, finally takes an opportunity to start a new life with his family in Australia, while Uriah Heep elevates his own position and that of his mother through ignoble means before these are revealed and Heep is exposed in chapter LII. David is seen to make good use of his extended sphere of family relationships. Aunt Betsey finances his education and provides the connections that help to get David started in work. In an example of almost adopted family relations, David starts work in the Doctors’ Court in London, moving into lodgings with Mrs Crupp, an old landlady who promises to take care of David as though he were her own son (Dickens 296). In *David Copperfield*, individuals are often judged in terms of their family status. Family members show great loyalty and support for one another. Mr Peggotty gives up his own freedom when it is discovered that Steerforth has run away with Little Em’ly, vowing not to rest until she is found “I’m going to seek my neice through the wureld .[...]. No one stop me” (Dickens 374). When Em’ly is discovered Mr. Peggotty resolves that he and Little Em’ly will move to Australia. In contrast to being in disgrace at home as a “fallen woman”, Em’ly will be unknown in Australia, “No one can’t reproach my darling in Australia. We will begin a new life theer” (Dickens 596).

The family relationships portrayed in *David Copperfield* are almost non-existent in *Moby Dick*. A reference is made to the family that Ahab is believed to have. The ship’s owners Bildad and Peleg, believe Ahab to be harmless despite loosing a leg to Moby Dick on a previous voyage, as he is known to have a young wife and infant child ashore “By that sweet girl that old man has a child .[...]. Ahab has his humanities” (Melville 177). Late in the chase, Ahab and Starbuck exchange stories about their wives and children, Ahab talks sadly about his wearying quest for Moby Dick and calls

himself a fool and thinks himself pathetic, “God! God! God! – crack my heart! – stave my brain! – mockery! Mockery! Bitter biting mockery of grey hairs” (Melville 652). At the outset, while staying at the Sprouter Inn, Ishmael and Queequeg are seen to go into their own marital arrangement. ”How it is I know not; but there is no place like a bed for confidential disclosures between friends. Man and wife, they say, there open the very bottom of their souls to each other; and some old couples often lie and chat over old times till nearly morning. Thus, then, in our hearts’ honeymoon, lay I and Queequeg – a cosy, loving pair” (Melville 148). The all male crew are away at sea for a three year voyage, hunting the white whale. The relationship of the men is portrayed as being very close, harmonious, even idyllic, where each man helps the other and special bonds are formed, for instance in chapter 27 “Knights and Squires”. All activities are carried out together and the men have very little privacy. The crew can be seen to adapt to, even prefer, this form of male family bond. Ahab stands out as the one exception, engrossed in his own personal obsession, but capable of paternal qualities, for instance, the protection he gives to Pip. The situation that the men found themselves in aboard the Pequod, in some ways reflected the extremity of family life on the frontier. Great movement was experienced here by family members, as new farmlands were claimed at the ever expanding frontier and where families were very quickly split up to accommodate this changing frontier. Once society was a congregation of families, now it was construed as some mysterious, impersonal web of forces existing beyond the cottage gate (Ryan 234).

4.7 Interpretations of manliness

The establishment of new middle class brought with it challenges for the way that masculinity should be adapted away from the form established by the aristocracy. “The gentleman is the most pivotal and contested norm of mid Victorian masculinity, because it served so effectively as a means of regulating social mobility and its attendant privileges. Egalitarian understandings of the gentleman, developed in the eighteenth century in resistance to aristocratic hegemony, turned it into a norm that could be realised by deliberate moral striving (Adams 152). Another explanation, “The highest virtue of manhood is not martial valour but moral courage (Adams 188). In summary, “Middle classes, critical of many aspects of aristocratic privilege and power, sought to

translate their increasing economic weight into a moral and cultural authority. Their claim to moral superiority was at the heart of their challenge to an earlier aristocratic hegemony. They sought to exercise this moral authority not only within their own communities and boundaries, but in relation to other classes. Their ‘proud pretensions’ their critique of the established dominance of the landed class and their belief in their capacity to control and improve the working class, which was at the centre of their claims, was articulated within a gendered concept of class (Davidoff 30). The gentleman was transformed from a form most closely associated with inherited distinctions of family and rank, to something more closely associated with behaviour, social mobility and privileges (Adams 6). Masculine nature in gentry terms, was based on sport and codes of honour derived from military prowess, finding expression in hunting, riding, drinking and ‘wenching’ (Davidoff 110). Evangelical challenges to aristocratic manhood – promoted an ideal of masculine discipline traditionally reserved for a priestly caste (Adams 86). At the same time manliness required a new form of self-discipline. Manhood could no longer be seen to be sustained within domesticity and was instead taught within the institution of the public school (Adams 10).

The Victorian gentleman is a central feature of *David Copperfield*, both in its definition and level of respectability. It is portrayed in contrasting ways, for instance the authoritarian stern hand presented by Mr Murdstone, regarding David’s learning, “Now, Clara, be firm with the boy” (Dickens 55). There is the aristocratic variation as portrayed by Steerforth, full of self-assuredness, charm and arrogance. At Salem House in a classroom exchange with one of the masters Mr Mell, trying to silence the class, Steerforth replies, “Silence yourself, whom are you talking to?” (Dickens 89). The lawyer Mr Spenlow, of Spenlow and Jorkins in whose firm David undertakes his apprenticeship, concerning David’s request to cancel his articles, Mr Spenlow’s needs to consult his partner before making any decision, “Heaven forbid Copperfield, that I should do any man an injustice (Dickens 417). As previously discussed in section 4.6, the nature of the family unit was changing, while many new institutions were being established that helped to bond people in new ways, with it the role and identity of the male had to change. It had to reflect the growing strength and independence apparent in female identity. *David Copperfield* portrays a number of strong independent female characters, in particular aunt Betsey, during the visit of Mr Murdstone and his sister to discuss responsibility for David’s future, in an exchange with Miss Murdstone, “Let me see you ride a donkey over my green again and as sure as you have a head upon your

shoulders, I'll knock your bonnet off, and tread upon it!" (Dickens 184). The male role had also to adapt to the stronger female, who was more than prepared to stand up for individual rights.

In contrast to the narrative form of *David Copperfield*, *Moby Dick* can be viewed as an example of epic adventure, such as Homer's *Odyssey* and its leader Odysseus from Greek mythology. Ahab is cast as a strong leader surrounded by devoted and subservient followers. This can be seen to pay homage both to the tradition of hero worship, to the ancient world and to Greek culture which laid the foundation for much of Western civilisation. Ahab appears before the crew for the first time with wooden leg and scar across face, standing in a hole bored into the deck. When questioned about his injuries, Ahab, "Aye my hearties, it was Moby Dick that dismasted me [...]. it was that accursed white whale that razed me; made a poor pegging lubber of me for ever and a day!" (Melville 261). His physical injuries have left a bigger mental scar, the obsession that now possesses him, to hunt and kill the white whale at all costs and which is ultimately destructive for crew and boat. In Melville's time the orator was a democratic hero, and Ahab, deploying what one critic calls his "language of the screamer" was amongst the best of them (Delbano 171). Ahab is an illustration of the reciprocal love that exists between a demagogue and his adoring followers (Delbano 173). Ahab makes use of a ritual to bind his crew together, making them take the iron off of their harpoons to use as drinking goblets, drinking together as Ahab proclaims, "God hunt us all, if we do not hunt Moby Dick to his death!" (Melville 265). Ahab, "All my means are sane, my motive and my objects mad." In his ranting Ahab gives his men ground for believing in their own heroic significance to his campaign to purify the world (Delbano 174). Obedience was crucial to maintaining onboard discipline and the chain of command, and captains were allowed and even expected to be tyrants (Melville 220). Ahab's obsession to kill the white whale at all costs, becomes ever more extreme, as witnessed when the Pequod encounters the Rachel. Captain Gardiner, after affirming that he has seen Moby Dick and climbing aboard Ahab's ship, begs Ahab for help to find his son, whose whale boat was lost in the chase after the White Whale. Ahab refuses to waste time that could be used in pursuit of Moby Dick (Melville 640). Ahab does not easily accept criticism. When Stubb complains about Ahab's pacing on deck, Ahab calls him a dog and advances on him, Stubb retreats (Melville 223). Ahab's command is challenged on a number of occasions. When it is discovered that oil casks are leaking in the hold, Starbuck suggests to Ahab that they stop to repair them. Ahab

refuses to stop, saying that he doesn't care about the owners or profit. When Starbuck objects, Ahab points a musket at him, but soon after Starbuck's departure, Ahab orders the casks to be repaired, a "prudential policy" to avoid angering the crew (Melville 587). Later, after a bad storm and an argument concerning Ahab's orders about the ships rigging, Starbuck goes down to make a report to Ahab, seeing a row of muskets, considers shooting the sleeping Ahab, but Starbuck can't justify shooting a sleeping man.

David Copperfield and *Moby Dick* can be seen to present widely contrasting portrayals of manliness. On the one hand, how male identity could be seen to be adapting itself to changing circumstances and on the other, that of a crazed demagogue, unwavering in his personal obsession. The final comparison will consider the political implications that each novel present.

4.8 Liberal political freedom versus manifest destiny

The decade surrounding 1850 can be seen as a time of great change with consequences affecting many different aspects of life. The final comparison will consider more closely the political atmosphere in Britain and America, that is expressed in the two novels. The widespread dissatisfaction with the excess and corruption of the aristocracy, for instance, that associated with the Prince Regent 1811-1820, and the call for greater representation of all strata of society not least the underprivileged, expressed itself nationally in quite different ways. The historical development of society was expressed in the writings of Marx and Engels, "But whatever form they may have taken, one fact is common to all past ages, *viz.*, the exploitation of one part of society by the other. No wonder, then, that the social consciousness of past ages, despite all the multiplicity and variety it displays, moves within certain common forms, or general ideas, which cannot completely vanish except with the total disappearance of class antagonisms" (Marx 26).

In Britain public unrest was contained by the Corn Laws 1815-1846, which had previously set tariffs and trade restrictions on imported food and grain, in order to favour domestic producers. The material benefits that Britain had been making from its overseas colonial expansion, was now more widely visible, which provided both a clear market for its own industrial production and a source of new raw materials. *David*

Copperfield cannot be seen to promote any greater British national interest. It makes only passing reference to its overseas colonies. One is provided by the headmaster at David's school in Canterbury, Doctor Strong, who on suspicion of Jack Maldon luring away the love of his young wife, sends Jack Maldon away on a commission to India. Another is David's first work at the bottling warehouse, providing supplies for the seagoing voyages departing from the docks in London, while Micawber and his family, at the end of the story, leave Britain for Australia, similar to Mr Peggotty, Em'ly and Martha, who travel on the same boat, to make a new start in life. *David Copperfield* is instead focused on the liberal freedom of the individual. Each character, within the broad social framework, is free to choose and determine their own personal development. The section 4.1 considered the aspect of class mobility. David is the clear example of a middle class character, able to develop thanks to the strength of new liberal ideals that would dominate the development of Victorian Britain under William Gladstone. These promoted free-trade, low taxation and freedom of choice, all perfectly suited to Britain as a developing capitalist society. David is able to influence his own personal destiny, developing a writing career, moving away to Switzerland to reflect upon life, before finally returning to marry Agnes.

As discussed in section 3, America had been founded by European capitalists. Despite the victory of Independence, the connections to the Old World had not been forgotten. The newspaper commentator, John L. O'Sullivan in 1845, coined the term 'Manifest destiny' as a summary of the obligation that many Americans felt to be their duty to save the Old World through its own good example (Delbano 15). *Moby Dick* reflected amongst other things, the ideals of a nation that saw itself as the last best hope of earth in the wake of the failure of the European democratic revolutions of 1848. A democratic wind was sweeping away the remnants of feudalism as humankind embraced the doctrine (as Melville was to call it in *Moby Dick*) of 'divine equality' (Delbano 103). The antebellum United States was still a very Protestant country whose few novelists had to contend with what Henry James was later to call "the old evangelical hostility" to the art of fiction (Delbano 74). They were proud of, even boisterous about, their fathers' part in throwing off the Old World master whom they had reason to hate. Mixture of nostalgia and resentment, they never quite knew whether to remake themselves into Yankee democrats or to defend their parent's quasi-aristocratic Old World tastes (Delbano 75). Political debate often questioned whether national interest was best served by developing industry at home or by preserving the

rural purity of the United States and relying on imports from Europe for finished goods (Delbano 76). The establishment of new industrial centres and the influx of an immigrant work force, led the New England reformer Lydia Maria Child, to reflect that New York was “a sort of common sewer for the filth of nations.” (Delbano 102). Industrialisation could not be halted and would help America to generate one of the most prosperous capitalist economies. But in contrast to the liberal ideals of Britain, *Moby Dick* can be seen to illustrate the background of America’s rich multi-cultural population, living and working side by side under egalitarian terms of equality, with the vision and commitment of its leadership projecting the nation on its path of ‘manifest destiny’, to save the world.

5 Conclusion

It has been very revealing to focus a study around the decade with 1850 as its centre, during which both *David Copperfield* and *Moby Dick* were written. The use of a Marxist literary perspective and the work of Eagleton and Williams, has provided a structure for gaining a detailed understanding of the capitalist systems in both Britain and America. Through a comparison of the two novels, a clearer understanding has been gained of the differences that separate the two nations. While the development of nation states is a continuous process of upheaval and change, this study has focused on those aspects that were specific to this decade. The study has also attempted to show how this period was linked to the specific cultural heritages of each nation. Each nation attempted to adjust itself to its own specific challenges and the crisis surrounding bourgeois society on both continents. This was most clearly expressed in Britain through the definition of its class groupings and liberal permissiveness, while in America through issues of race, cultural expansion and the wish to fulfill a ‘manifest destiny’.

The study has illustrated a number of clear differences in the ways that capitalism is expressed in Britain and America. *David Copperfield* and *Moby Dick* cannot be claimed to give any comprehensive representation of all the issues present at the time in their respective countries of writing, but are instead representative of the issues that each novelist choose to draw particular attention to for its readership. *David Copperfield* expresses both the challenges and demands that the capitalist system placed

on bourgeois class consciousness, and the striving for recognition that the new middle class sought, at a time when the bourgeois feudal order still persisted. Industrialisation created the background and opportunity as a new source of wealth through the use of 'liquid capital', while the establishment of new institutions including those within education, law and order and a new definition of gender roles, helped to add definition to the different class groupings in Britain at the time, with the focus in the novel centred around the middle class. *Moby Dick* on the other hand, expresses the capitalist ideals of America through its own bourgeois focus on expansion, how this might be achieved in an egalitarian multi-cultural context, where everyone is seen to contribute to the whole, while at the same time respecting 'old world' feudal principles, how success or failure relies on its leadership. The differences help us today to understand more clearly those issues that strongly contribute to the definition of each nation, and to give a historical reference to how each nation has developed up to the present date. Mention must also be made of the limitations of a study of this nature, not least due to the complexity and wealth of material presented in each novel and all the interpretations that are possible.

There are comparisons that the reader may wish to draw today between the current developments of each nation. Examples, for instance, in Britain include the plight of the nation, particularly the middle class, following the Brexit withdrawal from the European Union, while in America, Donald Trump and the nation's leadership and the present course that America is following, is once again in question. Comparisons with present day developments and how these can be linked back to each nation's historical legacy, using the specific time frame of the decade surrounding 1850 and the issues raised in *David Copperfield* and *Moby Dick* as a reference for clearer understanding, all help to show how a comparative literary study can be both most revealing and relevant.

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