To my family and cohort for their ever-constant support
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For as much as it represents exploration, ingenuity, and freedom, the ship has secured a place for itself in the Gothic imagination as a space of claustrophobic terror and enslavement. As a Foucauldian heterotopia, the space of the ship is indeed “a place without a place,” which functions only in relation to the void that surrounds it. However, the asylum a ship provides is what also makes it a prison, trapping its passengers with any hostile elements that may be aboard.

Focusing on a select group of texts, but primarily on Herman Melville’s “Benito Cereno” and *Moby-Dick*, this thesis examines the ship, that “heterotopia par excellence,” as a Gothic environment. It discusses not only the ship’s potential for Gothic horror, but also the role of the ship in the establishment of Nautical Gothic as a unique literary phenomenon that explicitly addresses the anxieties and monstrosity of imperialism.

Finally, this study will examine the heterotopia of the ship in more contemporary Gothic fiction – particularly, science fiction/horror films like Ridley Scott’s *Alien*, in which the Gothic trappings of the ship are transferred over to the spacecraft.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

There is a great deal of Gothic imaginary at stake in Foucault’s concept of heterotopias – that is, spaces that act as counter-sites and which exist “outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality” (4). The decrepit monasteries, castles, and catacombs favored by Gothic authors all neatly fit this categorization and all found a place in the early American Gothic tradition as addressed by Eric Savoy in his essay "The Rise of American Gothic:"

the perverse pleasures that acquired conventional status in the Gothic by the early nineteenth century – claustrophobia, atmospheric gloom, the imminence of violence – were generated in early American literature, too, and by such standard architectural locales as the haunted house, the prison, [and] the tomb" (168)

One location Savoy does not mention here (and, indeed, that is rarely discussed in scholarly work on the Gothic at large) is that which Foucault calls the “heterotopia par excellence:” the ship.

For as much as it represents exploration, ingenuity, and freedom, the ship has secured a place for itself in the Gothic imagination as a space of claustrophobic terror and enslavement. As a Foucauldian heterotopia, the space of the ship is indeed “a place without a place,” which functions only in relation to the void that surrounds it. However, the asylum a ship provides is what also makes it a prison, trapping its passengers with any hostile elements that may be aboard.

Focusing on a select group of texts, including Herman Melville’s “Benito Cereno” (1855) and Moby-Dick (1851), this study will examine the ship, that “heterotopia par excellence”, as a Gothic environment. It will discuss not only the ship’s potential for Gothic horror, but also the role of the ship in the establishment of Transatlantic Gothic
as unique literary phenomena that explicitly address the anxieties of imperialism and slavery. Naturally, this discussion will consider the role of the slave ship and its understandable importance in American Gothic Horror (from “Benito Cereno” to Beloved).

Given its status as a liminal space in both a real and figurative sense, the ship has, unsurprisingly, been a frequent setting for Gothic tales that blur the boundaries of gender and sexuality. As one of the many sites of 19th century homosociality, the ship furthermore has secured a place for itself in the queer cultural imaginary. This is well acknowledged; however, the ship’s role in the queer Gothic imaginary remains largely and surprisingly under-explored in scholarship. With Jack Halberstam’s concept of queer space and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s readings of homosociality in the Gothic as lenses, this study also seeks to examine the ship’s place in queer Gothic with all its trappings of liminality, queer doubling, and gender-bending.

Finally, this study will briefly examine the heterotopia of the ship in more contemporary Gothic fiction – particularly, sci-fi/horror films like Ridley Scott’s Alien (1979), in which the Gothic qualities of the ship are transferred over to the spacecraft. Often referred to as “a haunted house movie in space,” Alien not only utilizes the claustrophobic space of the ship for optimum horror, but, like the Transatlantic Gothic before it, brings some of the more monstrous consequences of imperialism to light.
The role of the ship in the globe’s cultural imagination (and economic development, as Foucault rightly notes), carries with it dark undercurrents. With expansion and exploration comes imperialism, and it is impossible to ignore the ship as a space of horror and unspeakable cruelty in the context of black slavery, which is of particular importance to the American Gothic tradition. In the introduction to *Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation*, Teresa A. Goddu acknowledges “American gothic’s problematic status: it is an historical mode operating in what appears to be an historical vacuum” (9). Similarly, in her work *African American Gothic: Screams from Shadowed Places*, Maisha Wester discusses the anxiety of early American Gothicists who wished to craft a Gothic tradition independent of British influence and argues that “concerns over the persistence of the past in the American Gothic allude to anxieties over the inability to create anything that was actually new” (18). It had been generally agreed upon that a nation with so little history of its own could not possibly have any sort of unique literary tradition, let alone one in a genre as deeply rooted in history as the Gothic (a critique that has still not fully dissipated). Genre studies scholar Leslie Fiedler, in fact, described American Gothic as “a pathological symptom rather than a proper literary movement” (135) – a fair comment, considering the proliferation of Gothic iconography and tropes throughout multiple genres of American fiction. But if American Gothic is a symptom, then what is the illness that it belies?

The obvious answer is the legacy of slavery and other acts of systemic inhumanity that remain beneath the floorboards of America. Maisha L. Wester notes in *Screams From Shadowed Places* that American Gothic, and, in particular, Southern
Gothic “can be understood as a genre that is aware of the impossibility of escaping racial haunting and the trauma of a culture that is not just informed by racial history, but also haunted and ruptured by it” (25). Other proponents of the argument that blackness and slavery are key factors in differentiating American Gothic include Harry Levin, Jerrold Hogle, and Leslie Fiedler who argued that “the proper subject for American gothic is the black man, from whose shadow we have not yet emerged” (75). In a similar vein, in her explication of John Howinson’s Blackwood tale “The Florida Pirate” (1821), Gretchen Woertendyke addresses the notion of America’s insufficient historical context straight on:

Without a substantive European past like that of Britain, however, America supposedly has no gothic sensibility; but such an assumption is only plausible if one looks at the “face of a fair country” – at whiteness, that is. The moment the writer or critic turns away from the “fair” face of the nation, the material conditions for a gothic tale seem to overcrowd all other literary possibilities (312).

In Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination, Toni Morrison agrees with this assessment, arguing that, in many ways, black slavery “enriched the country’s creative possibilities”:

The result was a playground for the imagination. What rose up out of collective needs to allay internal fears and to rationalize external exploitation was an American Africanism – a fabricated brew of darkness, otherness, alarm, and desire that is uniquely American (38).

While it is undeniable that slavery and blackness are indeed preoccupations of the American Gothic it is vital to avoid a reductive view that these preoccupations are exclusively American. Doing so is problematic for a number of reasons. First, such a view relies on the presumption that British and early American history and literary traditions can be so neatly delineated; second, because such a delineation, to a degree, absolves the British of their participation in the slave trade; and, third, because this view
dismisses the British Gothic works that addressed blackness and slavery like Charlotte Dacre’s *Zofloya* (1806) and even Austen’s *Mansfield Park* (1814). One of the key elements of the ship as a Gothic heterotopia is precisely its role in imperialism and globalization, which brought to British Gothic an anxiety-riddled novelty by means of the frightening and new “exotic” Others who, by the 1790s, had begun to displace the wicked Italians so common in Gothic tales. Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert convincingly argues that with “the inclusion of the colonial, a new sort of darkness – of race, landscape, erotic desire and despair – enter[ed] the Gothic genre” (229).

The vehicle of the ship is what permitted early globalization and, as Stephanie A. Smith rightly notes in her essay “The Sea: Melville and *Moby Dick*”: “The sea allowed those who sailed upon it to communicate between cultures, nation-states, families; it was a means by which many kept in touch over vast distances both geographic and geopolitical – a means of information exchange, as is the internet today” (427). It is only right to understand the ship as a literary space, then, in terms of intercultural connections and triangulation. This is especially important in the context of slavery, for, as noted by Paul Gilroy in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, “The image of the ship – a living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion […] immediately focus[es] attention on the middle passage” (4). This focus on the Triangle Trade is echoed in Toni Morrison’s Gothic novel *Beloved* (1987) in a stream-of-consciousness monologue by the titular character as she has feverish, horrific flashbacks of the middle passage – memories she herself could not possibly possess, indicating that she is not merely the ghost of her mother Sethe’s past, but the ghost of slavery itself. In the sequence, particular attention is paid to the claustrophobia of the
hold where the slaves are kept tightly packed in together in unspeakably inhumane condition (“someone is thrashing but there is no room to do it in” [210]), the living forced into prolonged, intimate contact with the dead and dying (“we are all trying to leave our bodies behind the man on my face has done it” [210]).

The ship’s role in the middle passage has secured it the designation of a site of horror in the Gothic tradition, having served as both a prison and a tomb for so many millions and, overall, the catalyst of slavery, and, more importantly, slave violence, in the rise of American Gothic cannot be underscored enough. The violence of the Haitian Revolution, in particular, should not be underestimated. Gretchen Woertendyke indeed points to the slave revolt in Saint-Domingue as a key incident in the gradual split between the American and British Gothic traditions:

The emerging American gothic of [the Blackwood tale] “The Florida Pirate” does not simply look to Britain for its cultural anxieties, despite the legacy of British gothic features that remain; but instead, it goes out, away in space from the metropolitan origin and out in time, to a future cut from its native fabric of anxieties – both in its violence and idealism. Thus, the geographic space of the early American nation gives rise to a new historiography, one in which the ideology of slavery is refracted through the lens of its geopolitical relationship to the French colony of Saint-Domingue, and, as a result, radically reconfigures the most national of the literary genres: the gothic (329).

Woertendyke rightly argues that the anxiety over slave rebellion instilled by the Haitian Revolution plays a clear role in early American Gothic texts like Edgar Allan Poe’s Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym (1837) and Herman Melville’s “Benito Cereno” (1855) and that the “nebulous world of the ship” in these texts serves as a kind of theater in which the political and social conflicts of the United States could be performed: “Each [text] manifests power struggles between a formerly enslaved black crew and a hapless white narrator, playing out the cultural fantasies of what might happen if black slaves (as
well as the working class) were to possess authority. These scenes are unimaginable, and thus unavailable, on land but keenly performed on the shifting ground of the “ship” (316). As a sociopolitical microcosm free of the bounds of the nation (as many real ships were in the 19th century, particularly whalers being notably multiethnic) the ship, then, provided a nebulous, in-between space where anxieties about authority and slavery could be safely explored and even challenged.

In no text is the anxiety of a shipboard slave rebellion more explicitly handled than in Herman Melville’s “Benito Cereno”. First serialized in 1855 and later included in Melville’s *The Piazza Tales* (1856), the novella is based (almost) directly on the memoir of Captain Amasa Delano whose vessel, in 1805, indeed ran across a Spanish ship whose captain and sailors had been overthrown by the slaves aboard. Melville made some changes to the tale, two of which are worth particular attention. First, Melville changed the name of the overthrown Spanish vessel from the Tryal to the San Dominick, likely in reference to Saint-Domingue, the site of the Haitian Revolution. Second, Melville changed the date of Captain Delano’s encounter from 1805 to 1799, the immediate aftermath of the Haitian Revolution when Toussaint L’Ouverture still ruled the island. In *Screams From Shadowed Places*, Maisha L. Wester notes that “Benito Cereno” “represents the problem of slavery and rebellion, locating only victims and villains, but no heroes” (89) and points to Charles Crow’s 2009 work *American Gothic* to extrapolate the ways in which the text renders violence ambiguous: “The masked figures prefigure not only the ambiguous situation on the ship, but the brutal realities of slavery wherever it is found” (61).
Crow aptly calls the San Dominick “a kind of floating allegory” for slavery and the ship’s depiction as a space of danger, putrefaction, and human ugliness is bolstered by Melville’s calling upon of Gothic imagery and a kind of deconstruction of traditional Gothic settings. When the San Dominick first appears, Delano likens it to a floating monastery, a setting quite common in the Gothic tradition:

Upon gaining a less remote view, the ship, when made signally visible on the verge of the leaden-hued swells, with the shreds of fog here and there raggedly furring her, appeared like a white-washed monastery after a thunder-storm, seen perched upon some dun cliff among the Pyrenees. But it was no purely fanciful resemblance which now, for a moment, almost led Captain Delano to think that nothing less than a ship-load of monks was before him. Peering over the bulwarks were what really seemed, in the hazy distance, throngs of dark cowls; while, fitfully revealed through the open port-holes, other dark moving figures were dimly descried, as of Black Friars pacing the cloisters (Melville, “Benito Cereno” 36).

The monastery, of course, has a solid place in British Gothic literature not only for its romanticized aura of decay and abandonment, but also due to anti-Catholic rhetoric (monasteries in Horace Walpole and Ann Radcliffe novels are not sufficient, there must also be a couple mad monks running around) and anxieties regarding religion as a whole. In Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic, Anne Williams points to a Freudian model of family dynamics to account for Gothic fiction’s obsession with monastic settings: “[T]hese family dynamics are equally inherent in the structure of the Roman Catholic Church, where monks and nuns are ‘brothers’ and ‘sisters,’ where priests are called ‘father’ and abbesses ‘mother’” (46). Anxieties about power dynamics in the “family” may likewise be at play in “Benito Cereno,” given the paternalistic rhetoric concerning slavery in the 19th century that configured slaves as childlike and in need of protection from their white “fathers.” The analogy of the San Dominick to a monastery also taps into Gothic anxieties concerning Otherness, which, again, had been part of
British Gothic’s obsession with monasteries and the need to establish a binary between “Enlightened,” Protestant England and the superstitious, wicked Catholic European continent. When Delano comes aboard the ship, he is indeed the only American and, the reader can assume, Protestant, otherwise surrounded by Catholics and West African animists.

Still in a Gothic vein, Melville also likens the San Dominick to a castle:

Battered and mouldy, the castellated forecastle seemed some ancient turret, long ago taken by assault, and then left to decay. Toward the stern, two high-raised quarter galleries—the balustrades here and there covered with dry, tindery sea-moss—opening out from the unoccupied state-cabin, whose dead-lights, for all the mild weather, were hermetically closed and calcaded—these tenantless balconies hung over the sea as if it were the grand Venetian canal. But the principal relic of faded grandeur was the ample oval of the shield-like stern-piece, intricately carved with the arms of Castile and Leon, medallioned about by groups of mythological or symbolical devices; uppermost and central of which was a dark satyr in a mask, holding his foot on the prostrate neck of a writhing figure, likewise masked (Melville, “Benito Cereno” 37).

A veritable Chekhov’s Gun, the San Dominick’s stern-piece has been the subject of a great deal of scholarly analysis with the image of the masked satyr pinning down his victim having been read as both pro-slavery and anti-slavery, in turn. Scholars who take the anti-slavery reading, like Charles Crow, make note of the ambiguity of the image (the figures are masked), making a convincing case that the masked satyr is both Babo and Captain Aranda/Don Benito Cereno; both slave rebellion and slavery itself. Melville’s description of the shield as a “relic of faded grandeur” and centering of it in a description of the ship as decaying and ancient not only is Gothic, but positions the imagery of slavery and slave violence itself as archaic and diseased – an outmoded way of life that brings nothing but violence and putrefaction.
Still not finished drawing upon Gothic archetypal setting, Melville also compares the San Dominick to an abandoned manor house with Captain Delano observing that one of the ship’s balustrades, “partly stained with pitch and partly embossed with moss, seemed the charred ruin of some summer-house in a grand garden long running to waste” (62). In his moments of reflection, Delano frequently likens the ship to a country house and the sea to the moors surrounding it:

Trying to break one charm, he was but becharmed anew. Though upon the wide sea, he seemed in some far inland country; prisoner in some deserted château, left to stare at empty grounds, and peer out at vague roads, where never wagon or wayfarer passed.

But these enchantments were a little disenchanted as his eye fell on the corroded main-chains. Of an ancient style, massy and rusty in link, shackle and bolt, they seemed even more fit for the ship’s present business than the one for which she had been built (62).

The last two lines of this description again present slavery (“the ship’s present business”) as archaic and corroded (the “ancient style,” “rusty” main-chains), arguably making anything but an anti-slavery reading of the novella difficult. The horror of slavery disrupts Delano’s romanticizing of the dark enchantments of the ship in what can be read as a kind of breaking of the fourth wall, perhaps condemning readers for similar romanticizing.

Delano’s analogy, however, does hit upon one of the most important features of the ship as a Gothic/horror setting: its isolation. Melville’s clever analogy positions the sea as a desolate landscape and the ship as a house turned prison by its remoteness. The San Dominick indeed was a prison for the slaves aboard and, though Delano does not know it, has since become a prison for the Spaniards, trapping them with their murderous former captives. The inability to escape or even so much as breathe without Babo and the other Senegalese knowing it is part of what drives Benito Cereno to
hysteria and Melville heightens this sense of claustrophobic dread even further by comparing the San Dominick to one final traditional Gothic environment – a tomb:

As [Delano’s] foot pressed the half-damp, half-dry sea-mosses matting the place, and a chance phantom cats-paw—an islet of breeze, unheralded, unfollowed—as this ghostly cats-paw came fanning his cheek; as his glance fell upon the row of small, round dead-lights—all closed like copered eyes of the coffined—and the state-cabin door, once connecting with the gallery, even as the dead-lights had once looked out upon it, but now calked fast like a sarcophagus lid (61).

This moment is an echo of a brief description given in the first appearance of the ship: “while, like mourning weeds, dark festoons of sea-grass slimily swept to and fro over the name, with every hearse-like roll of the hull” (37). That the San Dominick serves as a tomb for several of the Senegalese and the Spanish goes without saying, but “Benito Cereno” is not the first incident that Melville uses sepulchral language in reference to a ship.

In *Moby-Dick* (1851), the Pequod (and the sea itself) are referred to time and time again as tombs, the threat of death ever-present onboard (and given the dangerous conditions of whaling, this is of little surprise). Ahab, in particular, recognizes the claustrophobia of a ship below deck:

Old age is always wakeful; as if, the longer linked with life, the less man has to do with aught that looks like death. Among sea-commanders, the old greybeards will oftenest leave their berths to visit the night-cloaked deck. It was so with Ahab; only that now, of late, he seemed so much to live in the open air, that truly speaking, his visits were more to the cabin, than from the cabin to the planks. "It feels like going down into one's tomb,"—he would mutter to himself—"for an old captain like me to be descending this narrow scuttle, to go to my grave-dug berth" (Melville, *Moby-Dick* 126-7).

Ahab, like the Spaniards, unwittingly turns his ship into a real tomb of his own devising. In the case of the Spaniards, death, or the threat of death, is inescapable precisely because of the inhospitable environment surrounding the ship – that is, the sea. There
is simply nowhere to go. For Ahab and the crew of the Pequod, death comes when the ship is no longer able to sustain life (being destroyed by the White Whale) and forfeits her crew to the sea. The image of a ship as a tomb and a claustrophobic space is made effective precisely by its vulnerability. One breach in the hull, one missing engine part, even a dead calm is enough to leave a ship’s crew at the mercy of the elements and the further out to sea the ship ventures, the more evident this vulnerability and the inability to escape becomes. Melville keenly understood this and calls attention to it during Delano’s observations aboard the San Dominick: “Observing the ship, now helplessly fallen into a current, with enchanted sails, drifting with increased rapidity seaward” (Melville, “Benito Cereno” 55). It is the “helplessly” that is worth note here, as though the San Dominick were powerless in the face of fate propelling the ship ever further out to sea.
CHAPTER 3
FLOATING IN THE BLACK: THE GOTHIC SHIP IN SCIENCE FICTION

Landlessness is, of course, a motif stressed in *Moby-Dick*. In his 1899 review of the novel for the Ontario Queen’s Quarterly, Archibald MacMechan points out that:

In no other tale is one so completely detached from the land, even from the very suggestion of land. Though Nantucket and New Bedford must be mentioned, only their nautical aspects are touched on; they are but the steps of the saddle-block from which the mariner vaults upon the back of his sea-horse. The strange ship “Pequod” is the theatre of all the strange adventures. For ever off soundings, she shows but as a central speck in a wide circle of blue or stormy sea; and yet a speck crammed full of human passions, the world itself in little (631).

The ship as a microcosm in this “wide circle of blue or stormy sea” is indeed explored at length in *Moby-Dick* and the sense of claustrophobia and entrapment that this can inspire has been likewise examined in films that have spawned, in part, from *The Whale* – many of them, curiously enough, science fiction/horror films.

Both *Moby-Dick* and these films keenly understand the ship as a heterotopic environment. Floating in the sea or in space, the ship functions in relation to the space that surrounds it – a place without a place. It sets out into the beyond and returns, its hold full of cargo, stories, and new knowledge, and so it is little wonder that science fiction has adopted many of the same tropes used in maritime fiction. Our own sea now mapped and space now truly the “final frontier”, the heterotopia of the spacecraft has, in a large capacity, assumed the role of the “reserve of the imagination” (7).

Long before John F. Kennedy referred to space as the new sea, people drew parallels between the ocean and outer space. The comparisons certainly make sense, as a spacecraft has more in common with a ship than an aircraft, as far as self-sufficiency and the need for long-term organization onboard go. A spacecraft can cut its engine and drift; a plane cannot. A spaceship can house a crew for months, even years,
at a time; a plane cannot. Why throw out thousands of years of maritime technique, organization, and jargon when it could simply be adopted, analogizing new concepts and places in terms and images that people are intimately familiar with? Especially when the sea and the heavens have so long been entwined? Not only did sailors use the stars for navigational purposes, but many physicists up until the early 20th century held the belief that celestial bodies actually floated in a fluid-like substance called luminiferous aether, believing that light waves had to have something to propagate through. This aether, “invented for the planets to swim in” according to the 1878 edition of Encyclopedia Britannica (“ether”), does not exist, of course, but, in the 19th century, was a concept well-entrenched in the laws of physical science and, thus, may help explain why space has entered the popular imagination as a sort of second ocean.

Moby-Dick is full of celestial imagery, laced with references to constellations, including, of course, Cetus, “the whale,” who is sometimes referred to as “Leviathan.” In Immortal Monster, Joseph Andriano draws attention to this imagery as a deliberate attempt on Melville’s part to construct Moby Dick as a modern variation of the Biblical Leviathan myth. Andriano contends that Melville clearly understood that if his monster were to have true potency, it must be a creature of multiple realms; that a true Leviathan cannot be forever bound to the sea, but must “subsume both land and sky, then indeed go beyond the sky” (1):

Nor when expandidly lifted by your subject, can you fail to trace out great whales in the starry heavens, and boats in pursuit of them [...] Thus at the North have I chased Leviathan round and round the Pole with the revolutions of the bright points that first defined him to me. [...] With a frigate's anchors for my bridle-bitts and fasces of harpoons for spurs, would I could mount that whale and leap the topmost skies, to see whether the fabled heavens with all their countless tents really lie encamped beyond my mortal sight! (Melville, Moby-Dick 271)
Ishmael’s characterization of the whale as a space vehicle is surprisingly characteristic of the novel, which, on several occasions, makes reference to the concept of space travel. Ahab likens the Earth itself to a ship hurtling through space, noting that whales have penetrated the deepest depths of the sea "where in her murderous hold this frigate earth is ballasted with the bones of millions of the drowned" (311).

Like the traditional, sea-faring ship, the spacecraft can also prey upon fears of entrapment and claustrophobia. The potential for this environment as a site of horror has been explored in countless science fiction films, including *Event Horizon* (1997) and classic B-movie *It! The Terror from Beyond Space!* (1958), which details a rescue mission to Mars where only one survivor from a previous expedition is found. This survivor, Col. Edward Carruthers, insists that the rest of his crew were killed by a Martian beast, but the leader of the rescue mission, Col. Van Heusen, refuses to believe him, instead insisting that Carruthers must have killed his crew. Noting that Van Heusen does not bother locking him away, Carruthers expresses grudging relief that “At least I enjoy the freedom of the ship,” to which Van Heusen replies “Why not? Can you think of a better prison?” (Bixby). The confines of the ship soon becomes a fatal disadvantage as it becomes clear that Carruthers’ hostile Martian lifeform is indeed real and has stowed away aboard the ship, picking off crew members one by one.

It is a plot adopted by Ridley Scott’s 1979 classic *Alien*, which dialed up both the sheer horror of the hostile creature and the claustrophobia of the ship via effective cinematography and camerawork. The crew of a commercial mining/towing vessel Nostromo awakens from hyper-sleep to find that they have been knocked off course by the ship’s central computer M.U.T.H.U.R/“Mother.” The ship has received a suspicious
distress signal that the crew, per the orders of their corporation, are forced to answer. They investigate the derelict planet from which the signal is originating and soon find themselves entangled in a terrifying game of cat and mouse with a brutally violent creature that has invaded their ship. The opening shots of the film draw the viewer through the winding, labyrinthine hallways of the Nostromo (a name likely inspired by Joseph Conrad’s seafaring tragedy). The ship is gritty, clearly lived-in, with disorienting round rooms and narrow, uniform hallways, full of sharp turns and so very many places for a thing to hide.

_Alien_ is frequently lauded for uniting traditionally Gothic imagery with existential minimalism and it has become a joke in horror circles that the film solves the problem of so many haunted house stories: "If the house is haunted, why not leave?" "You can’t. There’s nowhere to go." A horror story set aboard a ship is a haunted house story with one key difference: there is also an external threat in the form of its surrounding, inhospitable environment. Where can Dr. David Bowman go in _2001: A Space Odyssey_ (1968) when his ship’s computer begins murdering the crew? Or the unlucky rescue team aboard the starship Event Horizon when the ship begins to torture them with nightmarish hallucinations? Where can the crew of the Nostromo or the Pequod go when the authority aboard the ship turns against them? Outside is nothing but placelessness and the creatures swimming through it and, indeed, in the context of terror, the sea often presents itself as an alien, external threat via its inhabitants.

In his 1981 treatise on horror, _Danse Macabre_, Stephen King named three texts that he believed to be at “the foundation of a huge skyscraper of books and films- those twentieth century gothics which have become known as the modern horror story” (60-
Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897), and Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818). “Like an almost perfect Tarot hand representing our lusher concepts of evil,” King writes, “they can be neatly laid out: The Vampire, The Werewolf, The Thing Without A Name” (61). The image of the tarot hand is intriguing as it begs the question “what other texts are in the deck?” Arguably, *Moby-Dick* very much belongs in this hand as one of the key progenitors of a monster different from any named in King’s tarot: The Animal Nemesis. Moby Dick typifies this archetype—an animal antagonist, driven by instinct and without discernible conscience. Perhaps the animal nemesis has encroached on humankind’s environment, perhaps it has been encroached upon, perhaps it has even been restlessly pursued… regardless of the circumstance, it will defend itself and violently, if need be. Moby Dick and other literary monsters in this category are animals, making attempted vengeance against them seem all the more psychotic, but, conversely, making them all the more potent a threat. A thing without conscience—that kills from instinct—is a thing without mercy. It is precisely this fact marine biologist Matt Hooper uses to try to spur the mayor of Amity into action in *Jaws* (1975):

Hooper: Mr. Vaughn, what we are dealing with here is a perfect engine, an eating machine. It's really a miracle of evolution. All this machine does is swim and eat and make little sharks, and that's all (Benchley).

The whale is equally lauded as a marvel of natural engineering in Moby Dick, measured and documented in its cetology chapters with detail bordering on obsession. It is this element of the architectural/biomechanical that makes Moby Dick’s status as a potential antagonist so complex. The animal nemesis is a villain that is not a villain. At least, not if one factors conscience and accountability into villainy… not that this makes such a flawlessly engineered creature any less frightening.
Such a creature, of course, makes a memorable appearance in *Alien* in the form of the Xenomorph, the terrifying alien that invades the Nostromo. The ship’s insidious medical officer, Ash, startles the crew by stating that there is no way to kill the creature that has been picking them off one by one. “You still don’t understand what you’re dealing with, do you?” He smirks. “The perfect organism. Its structural perfection is matched only by its hostility.” “You admire it,” a member of the crew states with terrible, quiet certainty. Ash regards her with a look of disgust and corrects her: “I admire its purity. A survivor… unclouded by conscience, remorse, or delusions of morality” (O’Bannon). That is the animal nemesis precisely—a thing that embodies the primal desires to survive, to feed, and to procreate.

The creature that Ash describes in *Alien* embodies these desires very well, starting with how it manages to get aboard the Nostromo. Responding to the distress signal, the crew finds themselves in a derelict spacecraft. As they wander further into this labyrinth, a member of the crew, Kane, finds a nest of dozens of strange, fleshy eggs. Looking closer, he sees something squirming inside one of them. The top of the egg splits open and, as he leans in for a better look, the thing inside lashes out, smashing through the glass plate of Kane’s helmet. In the medical bay, the crew is forced to saw his helmet off, removing it to reveal a strange, crablike creature that has affixed itself to Kane’s face. Any attempt to remove it proves too dangerous, as not only does the thing have its tail wrapped tightly around Kane’s throat, it has acidic blood with the potential to eat its way through the hull (demonstrating again the ever-present vulnerability of the ship as an ecosystem).
After a few hours, the thing falls off and Kane awakens, clearly disoriented. At dinner, the crew talk and joke, glad that all has returned to normal. Suddenly, Kane begins coughing and retching. The crew eases him onto the table, where he violently spasms in agony while they look on in horrified confusion. They scream as something in his chest appears to burst, splattering their faces with blood. Suddenly, a thing—long, pale, eyeless—rises from his ruined body and it becomes terribly clear what has been done to Kane. The thing has impregnated him in an act of oral rape, using his body as a makeshift womb and thereby exploding gender boundaries as they are biologically understood. As Ximena Gallardo C. and Jason Smith put it in their book *Alien Woman: The Making of Lt. Ellen Ripley*: “when Kane’s chest exploded and that phallic little beastie escaped from the depth of our unconscious and onto the screen, with it went the primacy of the sexed body in science-fiction films” (14).

The description of the Chestburster as phallic is, of course, entirely apt. Screenwriters Dan O’Bannon and Ronald Shusett wanted emphasis placed on the alien’s potential as a sexual threat, something they believed had never been done in science fiction before, and so enlisted Surrealist artist H.R. Giger to design a beast that oozed sexual menace in each of its life stages: the fleshy egg with a labial opening; the Facehugger, vaginal in appearance, but with crablike fingers that holds its victim’s face immobile as it inserts a member down the victim’s throat; the phallic Chestburster; and, finally, the adult Xenomorph, a biomechanical nightmare with no discernible eyes, a phallic skull, and a prehensile tail that creeps up between its victim’s legs. At the moment of attack, the Xenomorph’s lips (dripping with KY Jelly thanks to the truly inspired design team) pull back to reveal pharyngeal jaws on the end of a rigid
proboscis that darts out, tearing through flesh and bone, and it is this juxtaposition of male and female genital imagery—the phallus and castrating vagina dentata—that is key. The gender of the alien's victim is irrelevant; to it, both women and men are nothing but potential wombs. That the womb this time was a male crewmember was meant to disturb the audience. O'Bannon has stated that Kane's impregnation via interspecies, "homosexual oral rape" was meant to "make the men in the audience cross their legs" (Alien Evolution). To its creators, the alien finds its real power to disturb in the terror of emasculation.

Any student (or scholar, for that matter) who has read Moby-Dick can certainly attest to its status as a symbolist tome of penis jokes. The novel is rife with male sexuality, bawdy jokes and overtly phallic imagery. From the ritualized use of the whale's penis and foreskin in "Chapter 95: The Cassock" to the imagery produced by penetrative harpoons, much of Moby-Dick is a psychoanalyst’s field day. The novel’s preoccupation with the phallus finds no better embodiment than in Moby Dick himself and the loss of Ahab’s leg has since become the Great American Castration Metaphor. Over-determinative psychoanalysis aside, Melville makes a point to make this castration metaphor explicit in "Chapter 106: Ahab’s Leg" in which it is revealed that Ahab had an incident prior to sailing aboard the Pequod when his ivory leg detached and “all but pierced his groin” (Melville, Moby-Dick 463). Melville’s conception of the whale as a castrating force is fascinating, because whales, like the beast in Alien, present a visual dichotomy of male and female genitalia throughout the novel. Whales act as powerful battering rams, but also as wombs as when Queequeg pulls Tashtego from a whale's
skull cavity “and thus, through the courage and great skill in obstetrics of Queequeg, the deliverance, or rather, delivery of Tashtego, was successfully accomplished” (344).

This anxiety/preoccupation with birth is also reflected in descriptions of the ship, as when Pip, recently saved from the sea, delivers an almost trance-like rant, decrying the doubloon that Ahab has nailed to the mast as incentive to the first man to spot Moby-Dick. Pip insists that the doubloon will be the death of them all: “Here’s the ship’s navel, this doubloon here, and they are all on fire to unscrew it. But, unscrew your navel, and what’s the consequence?” (435). The image of the ship as mother/womb indeed makes perfect sense. The ship is life-sustaining, the only thing keeping its crew from oblivion. Alien makes similar comparisons, not only through the Nostromo and its computer MUTHUR, but also via the derelict alien spacecraft the crew of the Nostromo investigate, which, in true Giger fashion, has become notorious for its explicitly vaginal appearance (from its long, ridged tunnels, to the vulva-like openings on its exterior).

The sexuality present in both Alien and Moby-Dick is largely absent of morality and any distinctive gender boundaries. The true sexual threat of the animal nemesis and the mechanical space of the ship as a womb is that both imply that everything we think we understand about sexuality, both morally and biologically, can be subverted. While such an understanding of sexuality can certainly prove exciting or freeing to many, it will undoubtedly unsettle some and will most likely continue to be a fear exploited by writers and filmmakers desiring to make the audience uncomfortably cross their legs.

In Danse Macabre, Stephen King makes a distinction of the kinds of responses a reader can (or should) experience reading horror. There is terror, the “finest” of these;
horror, which induces more of a physical response; and, at the bottom, “gag-reflex revulsion” or “the gross-out” (37). Terror is placed at the top of this hierarchy, because it is “of the mind” (37); it is the kind of disturbance that gnaws, an emotion inspired by betrayal, helplessness, and the uncanny experience of coming in contact with a person who does not behave like a person. Someone, in other words, like Ahab, who disregards his crew’s safety in pursuit of a personal agenda. Such a situation is frightening because it is an aberration. Fealty is owed to a captain and, in exchange, a captain should never betray his or her crew’s trust, but this is precisely what Ahab does—abuse his authority. The thought of someone who has so clearly come unhinged wielding absolute authority is, of course, completely terrifying and it is this aspect that Ahab-like figures in horror often tap into. Any sign of disagreement or autonomy on the part of the crew is met with either a violent lashing out, such as Captain Quint in Jaws brutally smoothing the Orca’s CB radio as Martin Brody attempts to call the Coast Guard for help, or with an eerie, implacable mission statement, such as Khan Noonan Singh delivers in Star Trek II: Wrath of Khan when his crew expresses concern over his obsession with destroying Captain Kirk:

He tasks me. He tasks me, and I shall have him! I'll chase him round the Moons of Nibia, and round the Antares Maelstrom, and round perdition's flames before I give him up! (Sowards).

This speech is, of course, directly based on one of Ahab’s many rants in Moby-Dick, a copy of which can be seen in a shot of Khan’s bookshelf:

He tasks me; he heaps me [...] Aye, aye! and I'll chase him round Good Hope, and round the Horn, and round the Norway Maelstrom, and round perdition’s flames before I give him up (Melville, Moby-Dick 164).

Khan references Moby-Dick again and again throughout his pursuit of Captain Kirk, whom he holds responsible for the death of his wife, right up to his last words.
“No,” he hisses as the USS Enterprise recedes into the distance, “No, you can't get away. From hell's heart, I stab at thee. For hate's sake, I spit my last breath at thee” (Soward). Again, a direct quote from Ahab: “Towards thee I roll, thou all-destroying but unconquering whale; to the last I grapple with thee; from hell's heart I stab at thee; for hate's sake I spit my last breath at thee” (Melville, Moby-Dick 571-2). 

Wrath of Khan is perhaps the most self-conscious example of Ahab’s presence in sci-fi-horror, but it is intriguing to note that he has left his mark on the genre in stranger, subtler ways.

Part of the terror of Ahab is not just his authority, but his omnipresence aboard the Pequod. In the tight confines of the ship, there seems to be no place to escape him to the point that it feels as though Ahab and the Pequod has become a single entity:

From even the barely hinted imputation of usurpation, and the possible consequences of such a suppressed impression gaining ground, Ahab must of course have been most anxious to protect himself. That protection could only consist in his own predominating brain and heart and hand, backed by a heedful, closely calculating attention to every minute atmospheric influence which it was possible for his crew to be subjected to (213).

It is suggested that Ahab, like the motherboard of a spacecraft, has absolute control of his vessel, right down to the atmosphere. He is hyper-aware of everything that goes on aboard his ship, his incentive gold coin staring out from the mast like a terrible, inhuman eye. An echo of Ahab can be found in Stanley Kubrick’s 2001: A Space Odyssey (1968) in the form of the ship’s computer HAL 9000, who stares out from the control panel with a monstrous, unblinking eye of his own. Self-assured that he is “foolproof and incapable of error” (Kubrick), HAL nevertheless begins to malfunction. Worried, the ship’s mission pilots Dr. David Bowman and Dr. Frank Poole retreat to a private pod where they can speak without having HAL overhear. They agree to deactivate the computer if the malfunctions continue, unaware that HAL is reading their lips through the pod bay
window. At this “imputation of usurpation,” HAL decides to protect himself, determined that nothing jeopardize the ship’s mission. His response is to sever one of the crewmembers’ oxygen hose and to cut all life support functions to the three crewmembers resting in cryogenic animation, murdering all but one member of the crew.

The concept of Ahab as a kind of cyborg is not actually so far-fetched, considering how heavily Melville’s novel utilizes biomechanical imagery. Ahab, in particular, often seems more machine than man, fired in a foundry and cast in "bronze" (Melville, Moby-Dick 123). He understands his relationship to the crew in highly mechanical terms: “My one cogged circle fits into all their various wheels, and they revolve” (167). He is not the only character figured this way in novel (the crew is likewise described—they are the “wheels”, after all), but what makes Ahab’s case so disturbing is just how thoroughly his humanity has been stripped away. Not only is Ahab likened to a gear in his function aboard the ship, his insides have been figuratively replaced with them:

Ahab, without speaking, was slowly rubbing the gold piece against the skirts of his jacket, as if to heighten its luster, and, without using any words, was meanwhile lowly humming to himself, producing a sound so strangely muffled and inarticulate that it seemed the mechanical humming of the wheels of his vitality in him (162).

Unlike his crew, Ahab is literally tireless in his task. His thirst for revenge propels him forward like a locomotive engine. He is that impossible perpetual motion machine, never tiring, never giving up, even if it means risking the lives of his crew who he skillfully manipulates to his purpose.

In “The Sea: Melville and Moby Dick,” Stephanie A. Smith points out that the Pequod’s “multi-racial, multi-ethnic crew is managed by fear, cunning, superstition and
passion as Ahab stirs up the crew's blood-lust to land the white whale, a lust that runs counter to any normal profit motive the crew ought to have:"

By sponsoring a ruthless ship that refuses the ties of family, warmth, profit, compassion, understanding, and even the idea of mutual dependency; by throwing aside all that binds one man to another in nineteenth-century society and thus by eschewing the underlying certainties of the religion, politics, and culture of his time, Ahab has made his ship into an antisocial capitalist machine, inhuman and inhumane, bent only on the kill, until at last it is fastened to its fate, and take down by Moby-Dick” (431).

This fear of human life being rendered secondary to a capitalist mission also appears in Alien. Determined to find a way to kill the Xenomorph, First Lieutenant Ellen Ripley logs into the ship’s computer, MUTHUR, and discovers that the ship has been given “Special Order 937 - Science Officer Eyes Only.” With an emergency command override, she is able to access the details of this order:


Ripley is then attacked by Ash the science officer, who is quickly revealed to be an android installed by the corporation controlling the Nostromo. The Company’s desire to obtain the Xenomorph in hopes of utilizing it as a biological weapon continues throughout the Alien franchise, at the expense of many characters’ lives. This clear anti-capitalist (or at least capitalist-critical) vein of the franchise points towards what Valdine Clemens acknowledges, in _The Return of the Repressed: Gothic Horror from The Castle of Otranto to Alien_, as a “cultural anxiety about the current world-wide transition to a global corporate economy, or corporate ‘feudalism’ as it is sometimes called” (216). The strength of the Company (The Weyland-Yutani Corporation, the viewer learns in the sequel _Aliens_) is, of course, physically embodied not only by Ash, but by the Nostromo.
herself and MUTHER whose perverse appellation is also examined by Valdine Clemens in *The Return of the Repressed*:

The appellation of “Mother” given to the company and its ship is clearly euphemistic, for contracts and laws notwithstanding, the corporation functions as an impersonal, heartlessly aggressive force. Its oppressive, monolithic power is emphasized visually by frequent shots from beneath the moving ship, which appears to take over the entire screen (217).

This juxtaposition of the mother and a cold, impersonal force is highlighted in a scene near the climax of the film in which Ripley desperately attempts to override the ship’s self-destruct detonation sequence. In spite of her best efforts, Ripley just misses the override deadline and cries out to the ship for help “Mother! I’ve turned the cooling unit back on! Mother!” MUTHUR, implacable as ever, replies “The ship will self-destruct in T minus five minutes,” causing Ripley to finally lose control completely. “YOU BITCH!” she screams, smashing the computer monitor with the butt of her flamethrower. It is a moment echoed at the end of James Cameron’s sequel *Aliens* (1986) when Ripley must protect Newt (her newly adopted daughter, for all intents and purposes) from the Alien Queen and coldly states “Get away from her, you bitch” before blowing the Queen out of the ship’s airlock. Together, these two scenes draw a comparison between the Company and the Xenomorphs, making it clear that Weyland-Yutani is every bit as cold, calculating, and ruthless as the organism that it pursues, just as much as Ahab and his nemesis the white whale. Indeed, by the end of *Alien*, as with *Moby-Dick*, nearly the entire crew is dead. Only Ripley escapes by setting up the Nostromo to self-destruct in an attempt to kill the Xenomorph and bailing out in one of the ship’s “life boats.” Hoping to eventually be picked up, she enters cryogenic animation aboard the lifeboat and drifts through the abyss in a death-like sleep, like Ishmael atop Queequg’s coffin.
CHAPTER 4
THE SHIP AND QUEER GOTHIC SPACE

Over the past few decades, more and more considerations of the Gothic as a literary mode have broadened to include queer readings. This is thanks, in part, to scholars like Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and George Haggarty who recognized not only that did early Gothic writers of the Romantic period share sexual identities that resisted stable definition (what we might now retroactively label as “queer”), but that Gothicism itself is inherently, structurally queer. With its emphasis on liminality, transgression, and the unspeakable, the Gothic is indeed the perfect mode for addressing concerns about sexuality, homosociality, and queerness, particularly if we grant the term “queer” a broader definitional scope than simply “homosexual.” This is vital not only for the sake of a more inclusive and accurate understanding of the term, but also if we are to understand queerness as a destabilizing force that blurs neat boundaries and identity distinctions. While Eve Sedgwick grants that the dichotomy of homosexual vs heterosexual remains at the heart of the definition of the term “queer,” she stresses that queer thinking has spun “outward along dimensions that can’t be subsumed under gender and sexuality at all: the ways that race, ethnicity, postcolonial nationality criss-cross with these and other identity-constituting, identity-fracturing discourse” (Sedgwick, Tendencies 9). It seems only too appropriate, then, to examine the queer Gothic in a space where racial, ethnic, national, and colonial identities are likewise constituted and fractured: the ship.

As a homosocial space that has been romanticized as an arena of masculine work and athleticism, it is perhaps no surprise that naval and maritime iconography has become well-entrenched in the queer male cultural imaginary. From the works of
Herman Melville to gay pulp erotica, homoeroticism in literature and art of the sea has been well noted by both academia and the queer community more broadly. One example of this, which will prove useful to this study, is the case of Théodore Géricault’s 1819 painting *le radeau de la Méduse* whose appearance in more contemporary queer culture was detailed in Caleb Crain’s article “Lovers of Human Flesh: Homosexuality and Cannibalism in Melville’s Novels.” The painting, which was inspired by the real wreck of the Medusa in which survivors were forced to eat the bodies of the dead to survive, depicts a dozen survivors huddled together on a raft. As Crain notes, “Despite a dozen days without food and water, there is no sign of inanition in the men. Their torsos are still perfectly—appetizingly—sculpted. Many of the men are nude, draped over each other in affectionate stupor” (26). The homoeroticism of the scene has earned the painting some social currency in queer culture, with most 20th century allusions to the scene appearing in the 1980s and 1990s. The painting featured on the cover of The Pogues 1985 album *Rum, Sodomy, and the Lash*, and, in 1993, a play about an AIDS support group ran in Greenwich Village under the title *The Raft of the Medusa*.

Notably absent from the painting is any reference to the cannibalism that took place aboard the actual raft of the Medusa, an omission that Caleb Crain argues is instead represented by the homoeroticism of the image:

> Géricault and his audience must also have seen this homoeroticism, but they probably understood it differently, as a kind of symbolic thinking, where one violation of social norms stood for another. It was understood that men did not normally do this with their bodies. The unusual male-male intimacy was representing an extremity too grisly for canvas (26).

As a liminal space where the firm lines of race, sexuality, and social class were frequently blurred or even broken down, the ship is a space where such metaphoric violation can occur. The ship’s liminality and status in the cultural imaginary as a space...
of transgression make it an ideal environment for queer Gothic, and it is these attributes of the ship that breed the boundary-crossing “monsters” of shipboard gothic from Alien’s intersex Xenomorph to the cannibals and mutinying slaves of Herman Melville’s fiction.

Caleb Crain, of course, relates Le radeau de la Méduse’s interchange of two “unspeakable” male intimacies – cannibalism and homosexuality— to Melville’s novels where, Crain argues, the discovery of cannibalism often resembles the discovery of homosexuality in Gothic novels (“An irresistible curiosity impels the hero. He is attracted to something repulsive; he is not in control of his own action” [32]). It is an interplay of disgust and desire that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick details in her examination of male homosociality in Between Men. This “homosexual panic” forces men into a state of paranoia, revulsion, and even projected violence whenever they become aware of any kind of attraction to another man. This panic’s presence in the Gothic, Sedgwick argues, is not to be located in latent homosexuality, but in the historical foregrounding of “intense male homosocial desire as at once the most compulsory and the most prohibited of social bonds” (Sedgwick, “The Beast” 153).

In a British Victorian context, these anxieties about masculinity and homosociality were being worked through in the metaphoric (and very Gothic) heterotopia of the monastery by authors like Thomas Carlyle who celebrated the figure of the monk as a chaste man of letters. The monastery became a safely-distanced zone for Victorians to engage with the troubled distinction between homosocial and homosexual, which was complicated by the strict, bourgeois division of the all-male work sphere from the domestic sphere. Herbert Sussman details this use of the monastery as a metaphoric for coping with male anxiety in his book Victorian Masculinities:
if normative bourgeois manliness is defined as success within the world of work inhabited solely by other man, bourgeois masculinity is also defined in relation to the domestic sphere within criteria that value the role of breadwinner for a domestic establishment and that situate affectionate as well as sexual life within marriage. In short, normative bourgeois masculinity enforces compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory matrimony.

It is this tension in bourgeois masculinity between the homosocial and the heterosexual that energizes the Victorian idealization of monasticism. For those middle-class male writers dissatisfied with the demands of this hegemonic valorization of domesticity, marriage, and even heterosexuality, the monastery as a sacralized, celibate all-male society safely distanced in time provides a figure through which they could express in covert form, or as an open secret, their attraction to a world of chaste masculine bonding from which the female has been magically eliminated, an attraction that clearly resonated with the longings of their middle-class male readers (4-5).

Sussman rightly likens this use of the safely-distanced space of the monastery to “Victorian manly tales of shipboard life” (5), even mentioning Melville. Indeed, like the monastery, the ship is, of course, “an imaginative zone in which male writers negotiate the troubled boundary between the homosocial and the homosexual” (5), but it is a shame that Sussman’s reference to shipboard adventure fiction is so brief as, in the case of Melville, it is a more literal parallel than perhaps even Sussman realizes.

Melville’s fiction frequently makes use of monastic and clerical language and, curiously enough, this occurs most often in scenes where some element of either homoeroticism or curious expressions of hypermasculinity are at play. Take, for example, the infamous Moby-Dick chapter “The Cassock,” which describes the process of removing and drying a whale’s foreskin and turning the black pelt of skin into a long vest, nicknamed a “cassock” after clerics’ robes. This vest, which is seen by the crew as being invested with some form of mysticism, is then worn, for luck, by the mincer who has the most dangerous job aboard the ship.
In “Benito Cereno,” narrator Captain Amasa Delano describes the decrepit slave ship he encounters as “a white-washed monastery:”

Peering over the bulwarks were what really seemed, in the hazy distance, throngs of dark cowls; while, fitfully revealed through the open port-holes, other dark moving figures were dimly described, as of Black Friars pacing the cloisters (Melville, “Benito Cereno” 36).

It’s a comparison Melville uses to deliberately draw upon the European Gothic tradition, but also to underscore anxieties about paternalism in both monastic language and pro-slavery rhetoric. However, Sussman’s analysis of 19th century understandings of monasticism in relation to masculinity adds an additional valence that bolsters the arguments of some critics who have read the monstrously co-dependent relationship between Benito Cereno and the slave Babo as being tinged with homoerotic anxiety.

It is clear that this understanding of the monastery as a heterotopic space for working through the tension between the homosocial and the homosexual is present in American literature as well as British. For Melville (one of “those middle-class male writers dissatisfied with the demands of this hegemonic valorization of domesticity, marriage, and even heterosexuality” [5] that Sussman references), the monastery as a safely distanced, all-male space is clearly attractive, and this shows in his descriptions of his favored homosocial space of the ship where “the demands of marriage and even of heterosexuality have been eliminated” (5).

This use of metaphoric spaces to renegotiate one’s dissatisfaction with heteronormativity is very much in line with Jack Halberstam’s concept of queer space which refers both to the place-making practice within postmodernism in which queer people engage and to “new understandings of space enabled by the production of queer counterpublics” (6). Halberstam argues that “queers use time and space in ways
that challenge conventional logics of development, maturity, adulthood, and responsibility” (13). If we are to follow this line of thought, then the ship certainly qualifies both literally and metaphorically as a queer space where compulsory marriage and procreation can be suspended in favor of intense male-male social bonds.

Melville certainly does away with the compulsory marriage that bourgeois masculinity enforces (and female characters in Melville are few and far between, to say the least), but even goes a step further and queers the domestic space as well. In *Moby-Dick*, the divide between the male sphere of work and the domestic sphere is a very prominent one, as it is a separation between the sea/ship and the land, respectively. However, the only domestic scene we are given on the land does not include any women either. Ishmael is a bachelor and the only talk of domestic bliss the reader gets before Ishmael embarks on his journey is not with a woman at all, but with his new friend (and queer double) the harpooner Queequeg. In the place of a traditional domestic scene that Ishmael is to leave behind on the land, the first chapters of *Moby-Dick* treat the reader to a narrative of Ishmael’s burgeoning, and immediately physically intimate, friendship with Queequeg after they are forced to share a bed at the Spouter’s Inn. This situation, which at first terrifies Ishmael, quickly becomes extremely amenable to them both:

Man and wife, they say, [in bed] 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, *Moby-Dick* 44).

If, as the Victorians would hold, bourgeois masculinity is to be defined not only by success within the all-male world of work, but in relation to the domestic sphere, then Melville sees to it that this domestic sphere is also a homosocial one.
Much has been said about the curious nature of Ishmael and his “bosom friend” Queequeg in Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick* and how the portrayal of their relationship changes from intimate, curious, and highly charged in the first quarter of the novel to barely a footnote in the rest of the book. Queequeg is a figure of intense intellectual, and possibly sexual, magnetism for Ishmael in the first twenty chapters of *Moby-Dick*. He is studied, admired, learned, and then seemingly is, as D.H. Lawrence put it, “forgotten like yesterday’s newspaper” (Sanborn 246).

In his essay “Whence Come You, Queequeg?” Geoffrey Sanborn challenges Lawrence’s grouse by insisting that “the infamous diminishment of Queequeg’s presence in the book does not mean that Ishmael never felt anything for him, that it was never anything more than a relationship of intellectual and political convenience” (246). Sanborn insists that anyone who complains about this diminished presence is not fully grasping the way Melville understood love. However, this diminishment seems to have affected Sanborn as well. Although Ishmael insists that, once on the ship, he “clove to Queequeg like a barnacle” (Melville, *Moby-Dick* 61), Sanborn points out that “it is a strangely undramatized cleaving” (Sanborn 243) and that this may suggest that the bond between Queequeg and Ishmael is not one of romantic love. Sanborn argues that if it were indeed love, it would have been Ishmael that Queequeg saves from drowning, not some random “bumpkin,” and that it would have been Ishmael who nursed Queequeg back to health. These events, Sanborn insists, would have reinforced the idea that Ishmael and Queequeg were truly “knit” (242).

However, I would argue that the lack of such events—indeed the lack of the intimacy between them that dominated the first quarter of the novel—is actually what
reinforces the indissolubility of their bond. By the time Ishmael and Queequeg have set sail, they have subsumed each other, halves of the other. They have become such counterparts that any explicit mention of their interaction is almost unneeded—it is, in a way, a given. As Ishmael’s narrative voice fades, he experiences what Queequeg experiences and, vice versa, and, in that, Sanborn is indeed correct when he identifies the most important aspect of their relationship as the way “it presents us with a way of being alone in which we are nonetheless together and a way of being together in which we [sic] are no longer ourselves” (251).

The most explicit suggestion of this kind of duality in wholeness comes in the infamously matrimonial language used to describe Ishmael and Queequeg’s relationship. The references to Ishmael as Queequeg’s “wife” (Melville, *Moby-Dick* 25) and Queequeg as a “bridegroom” (26) are sanctified when Queequeg “marries” them by pressing his forehead against Ishmael’s, clasping Ishmael close and declaring it so (43). They spend the rest of their “wedding night” in the same bed they were first forced to share:

> 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 (44).

The next morning, the physical intimacy of their friendship is reinforced, suggesting that they have, as “husband and wife,” become one flesh:

> We had lain thus in bed, chatting and napping at short intervals, and Queequeg now and then affectionately throwing his brown tattooed legs over mine, and then drawing them back; so entirely sociable and free and easy were we; when, at last, by reason of our confabulations, what little nappishness remained in us altogether departed, and we felt like getting up again, though day-break was yet some way down the future (44).
The most important moment in this passage (and, naturally, the most titillating/curious to readers) is Queequeg entwining and un-entwining his legs with Ishmael's. Sanborn expounds upon this:

Here, Ishmael and Queequeg are not filling out one another’s fantasies, substituting for something lost and nonexistent, inciting and satisfying and reinciting one another's sexual desire. Instead, they are perceiving correspondences of form—**my legs, your legs**—and gravitating toward the appearance of sameness. Each is appearing as the extension of the other’s form, the inaccurate replication of the other’s presence in the world (Sanborn 248).

This extension of the other’s form captures Ishmael and Queequeg’s relationship precisely; the mapping of each other’s physical similitudes that feels so intensely erotic. In learning one another’s bodies, they perceive their own more keenly and the line between self and other begins to blur and Sanborn is right to perceive the shift from “I” to “we” (248) which immediately follows this passage and is to continue throughout the rest of the chapter.

I would not necessarily agree, however, that this stretching of the other’s limbs, as it were, is not fulfilling something in each of them. The crux of Queequeg and Ishmael’s relationship seems to be what they can learn from one another; how they might be able to make one another more whole. Prior to their “marriage,” each is figured as being somehow incomplete. Ishmael describes his own heart as “splintered” (Melville, *Moby-Dick* 51) and notes that Queequeg “was a creature in the transition state—neither caterpillar nor butterfly” (27). Ishmael is referring to Queequeg’s status as an “undergraduate” in the ways of civilization (27), but the uncomfortable connotations of this are eased somewhat after their “marriage” when Ishmael admires Queequeg’s total comfort in a sea of people “as strange to him as though he were in the planet Jupiter” (50):
All this struck me as mighty singular; yet, upon second thoughts, there was something almost sublime in it. [...] he seemed entirely at his ease; preserving the utmost serenity; content with his own companionship; always equal to himself.

Queequeg here presents an interesting dichotomy that is played with only a few pages later in Chapter 11: Nightgown. After their “honeymoon,” Ishmael sits wrapped up in bed next to Queequeg with his eyes closed to better enjoy the “snugness of being in bed. Because no man can ever feel his own identity aright except his eyes be closed; as if darkness were indeed the proper element of our essences, though light be more congenial to our clayey part” (54). By denying himself his sense of sight, Ishmael is capable of perceiving his own body and his own self-hood in a way he is unable to when his eyes are open. In darkness, the physical differences between the Self and the Other, are rendered irrelevant. It is that “strange feeling” of “melting” inside himself (51) that Ishmael experienced the night before during the “honeymoon.” In the darkness, the edges of the body become indistinct and Ishmael can more acutely feel the snugness of the bed (his and Queequeg’s body heats comingling) and more distinctly hear his own breath and Queequeg’s. Two selves, but something like one body.

Opening his eyes, Ishmael is met with the less personal darkness “of the unilluminated twelve-o’clock-at-night” and experiences “a disagreeable revulsion” (54). The illusion is broken, but something similar to Ishmael’s lost feeling of hyperaware peacefulness shortly follows. Queequeg strikes a light and the two sit huddled together, smoking Queequeg’s tomahawk pipe, Queequeg full of “serene household joy” and Ishmael “only alive to the condensed confidential comfortableness of sharing a pipe and a blanket with a real friend” (54).
Ishmael and Queequeg’s relationship is peppered with moments that, at once, emphasize both duality and wholeness. When Ishmael awakens after his first night in The Spouter’s Inn, he is surprised to find Queequeg’s arm wrapped around him. He only realizes it is there because of its “weight and pressure” (25), as he finds he can barely distinguish between Queequeg’s skin and the quilt wrapped around them:

The counterpane was of patchwork, full of odd little parti-colored squares and triangles; and this arm of his tattooed all over with an interminable Cretan labyrinth of a figure, no two parts of which were of one precise shade—owing I suppose to his keeping his arm at sea unmethodically in sun and shade, his shirt sleeves irregularly rolled up at various times—this same arm of his, I say, looked for all the world like a strip of that same patchwork quilt (25).

It is a description fused with dualism: single shapes of more than one color; the uneven coloration of Queequeg’s tattoo; sun and shade. Even the description of Queequeg’s tattoo as being labyrinthine calls to mind hybridity – the minotaur, half man, half beast. The emphasis is not on pairs, but on parts of a whole. Ishmael awakes to find himself melting with the quilt and with Queequeg. Their edges have become indefinite.

This plurality is explicitly detailed in Chapter 72: The Monkey Rope, in which Ishmael and Queequeg are tethered together by a long cord which, like an umbilical, is affixed to each of their belts “so that for better or for worse, we two, for the time, were wedded; and should poor Queequeg sink to rise no more, then both usage and honor demanded, that instead of cutting the cord, it should drag me down to his wake” (320). Joined by this “elongated Siamese ligature,” Queequeg becomes Ishmael’s “own inseparable twin brother” (320). It is a strange and powerful twinship, however; again, not one of distinct counterparts, but of a single whole. Twins who must bleed when the other bleeds; die when the other dies. As Ishmael sits, tied to his friend, he perceives this in a flash of alarming clarity:
So strongly and metaphysically did I conceive of my situation then, that while earnestly watching his motions, I seemed distinctly to perceive that my own individuality was now merged in a joint stock company of two (320).

Aside from this scene, we are given very little concerning Ishmael and Queequeg’s relationship once they have entered the homosocial sphere of the Pequod. Along with the references to their intimacy, Ishmael’s narrative voice as a whole diminishes as the novel progresses, so the question becomes: has their bond actually weakened or are we, as readers, simply not being granted the same access to it?

Geoffrey Sanborn seems to read this lack as evidence that Ishmael and Queequeg’s intimate relationship, if they indeed had one, was a bit flash-in-the-pan, arguing that it is highly unusual that Ishmael would be barely be present during Queequeg’s illness if their feelings had remained as strong as they were at the start of the novel. However, it is important to note that the chapter in question, Queequeg in His Coffin, is told from Ishmael’s perspective (the narrator refers to Queequeg as “my poor pagan companion” [400]). For this chapter to have been narrated by Ishmael, Ishmael had to have been present at Queequeg’s sick bed (or, rather, sick hammock). There is little to suggest, in the many months of the Pequod’s voyage, that Ishmael and Queequeg’s close friendship was not continuing off-screen as it were. Even in a tome the size of *Moby-Dick*, only a fraction of the journey can be explicitly described and, once aboard the Pequod, the story belongs to Ahab, not Ishmael and Queequeg.

Sanborn argues that Melville “maintains our awareness of the conditions that Ishmael and Queequeg are trying, never entirely successfully, to escape” (Sanborn 230). Indeed, the room back at The Spouter’s Inn – that detached heterotopia of the hotel room – was an escape for Ishmael and Queequeg, one that cannot be recaptured in the
distinct lack of privacy on the Pequod (it is perhaps telling that, before shipping out, Ishmael and Queequeg are resolved to “sleep ashore till the last” [Melville, *Moby-Dick* 80]). While it is unlikely that, once aboard, the two are engaging in any more spooning, there is not enough evidence to suggest that they do not still spend their time together when their duties allow them to.

The odd, fly-on-the-wall style of narration Ishmael adopts halfway through novel admittedly makes Ishmael seem absent from the events he and Queequeg share aboard the Pequod. However, it is important to remember that these are events they do, in fact, share. Ishmael’s highly descriptive accounts of Queequeg’s actions onboard, coupled with his perceivable physical absence from the story at large, makes it sometimes seem as though Ishmael were living vicariously through Queequeg. That when Queequeg is ill, Ishmael is the one in the hammock. It is as though Ishmael and Queequeg have been subsumed into a single secondary character; some hazy concept of IshmaelandQueequeg that is ultimately only supplementary to the plot at hand—that is, Ahab and the Whale. Even in death, they are an inseparable set, becoming the only two survivors of the Pequod, even if Queequeg’s survival is only metaphysical. The coffin that serves as Ishmael’s life raft still bears an important piece of Queequeg: his tattoos, carved into it by Queequeg himself, and, thus, his life, his culture, his philosophy, and his soul. Atop the coffin, Ishmael lays against the labyrinthine pattern that adorned Queequeg’s body—that Ishmael had such a hard time distinguishing from the counterpane on their bed in The Spouter’s Inn—and again melts into it, buoyed by his other half.
Jerrold Hogle attributes the resurgence of the Gothic in Britain in the late nineteenth century to “a pervasive cultural drive to condense various racial and sexual threats to nation, capitalism, and the bourgeoisie [all] in one body” during a period “of potentially collapsing biological, sexual, racial, class, national and even interplanetary boundaries (Hogle 205). It is not a reach to imagine that it precisely this reason that accounts for the popularity of Gothic tales in America throughout the 19th century and onwards to today (even if the concept of Nautical Gothic has since been transferred over to the spaceship). If this is so, then the role that the ship plays in Gothic stories dealing with anxieties of imperialism and globalization is invaluable.

While the bulk of scholarship on broader considerations of Nautical Gothic has focused on British texts like “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” I chose to focus on American texts/the space of the ship in order to call for a deeper consideration of the Gothic as a Transatlantic mode. This, I mean in both in a literal sense (the commercial exchange of Gothic novels across the Atlantic) and the intertextual sense (the ways Nautical Gothic demonstrates the migration and eventual re-articulation of European Gothic tropes to the Americas). Considerations of the ship in Nautical Gothic help illuminate the role of The Middle Passage in rearticulating these Gothic tropes into something more uniquely American, but just as historically grounded and important as European Gothic. Whether prison, womb, or tomb, the potential of the ship as a Gothic heterotopia is very much present in American literature and deserves some much-needed further scholarly attention.
Indeed, the texts discussed in this paper are merely the tip of an American Nautical Gothic iceberg. As scholarship on the American Gothic moves forward, a keener examination of Nautical Gothic is required not only for the study of texts traditionally considered Gothic such as Edgar Allan Poe’s *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, but also for the recovery of Gothic readings of less traditionally Gothic texts such as Melville’s other novels (*Typee, Billy Budd*, etc.), the Nautical works of James Fenimore Cooper, and others. Additionally, the impact that maritime disasters such as the sinking of the Medusa or the whale ship Essex, and their incidents of on-board cannibalism, had on the development of American folklore, horror fiction, and sensationalist journalism deserves more inquiry.

Further, considerations of the ship as Gothic in the context of the transference of Gothic trappings of the traditional ship over to the spacecraft implies that the tropes of Nautical Gothic have not disappeared. This transference highlights just one avenue in which the Gothic has remained relevant, as all of Imperial and Nautical Gothic’s anxieties remain present in science fiction in the mid-20th century (*Alien, Solaris*) through on to today (*Gravity, Prometheus*, etc.). It is a transference that emphasizes not only that there is little “post-colonial” about the post-colonial, but also the Gothic’s status not strictly as an historical genre, but as a mode ever in flux, ever roiling, ever tidal.
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BIографICAL SKETCH

Jaquelin Elliott is a PhD student at the University of Florida where she studies 19th century literature, genre studies, and popular culture. She completed her Bachelor of Arts in English at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, in 2012, and spent the following two years working as a freelance French-to-English translator. In 2014, she began a PhD program at the University of Florida on a six-year-track and, in spring of 2016, successfully defended her integrated MA thesis. Since beginning her graduate studies, Jaquelin has presented conference papers at the South Atlantic MLA, South Central MLA, Children’s Literature Association, International Gothic Association, and International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts. As of 2016, she has a forthcoming article in Revenant: Critical and Creative Studies of the Supernatural and has published book reviews on horror and the Gothic in comics in ImageText: Interdisciplinary Comics Studies. With the core of her focus rooted in the long 19th century, Jaquelin’s academic interests include horror, the Gothic, cultural studies, fan studies, queer theory, and spending far too much time talking about monsters.