Roped Solidarity

The Aesthetics of Human-Animal Bonding in Melville's *Moby-Dick* and Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*

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ABSTRACT: This paper investigates the literary aesthetics of ropes and argues that ropes represent a poetics of connection and disconnection between humans and other (non)humans in the spirit of new materialism. Drawing on Michel Serres's philosophical contract theory, ropes can be regarded as the cords of an accord, which become taut and visible in seagoing narratives; in this paper, Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1851) and Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* (1957) are discussed, as both novels devote much attention to the ship's rigging or rope-work, as well as to the lines of attachment between humans and whales or marlins respectively. Both novels show that upon being roped, an aesthetics of spectrality is introduced, marked by a radical dissolution of binaries such as active/passive or subject/object. This paves the way for a poetics of solidarity, especially in those moments in which the ropes are taut and solid so that the pulls of either agent are felt.

KEYWORDS: Rope, Seagoing Narratives, Whale, Marlin, Contract, Solidarity, Spectrality

'What are you knotting there, my man?'
'The knot, 'was the brief reply, without looking up.
'So it seems; but what is it for?'
'For some one else to undo.'
(Herman Melville, *Benito Cereno)*

Introduction: Rappelling Down from the Mountains to the Sea

In Bong Joon-ho's 2017 film *Okja,* a young girl named Mija, who lives on a small farm in the mountains of South Korea, bonds with a genetically modified pig, the titular Okja. Whenever Mija goes out to the mountainous woods to collect food, she usually takes Okja with her, and since Okja often indulges in playfully mischievous behavior, Mija keeps Okja on a leash (11:44 – 14:11). For the longest part, the hemp rope around Okja's neck is slack, until Mija slips and is about to fall down a cliff. Reacting swiftly, Okja can prevent the calamity by first pinning down the tightening rope under her hoof and then clutching it with her teeth, leaving Mija suspended mid-air. However, unable to maintain a firm position on the slippery slope, Okja cannot pull on it to rescue Mija. Desperate for an alternative strategy, Okja's acute sense of her environment reveals a sturdy tree trunk protruding from the cliff. The rope firmly in her snout, she accelerates towards it and uses the trunk as a pivot to hoist Mija to safety by

valiantly jumping down the other side, letting go of the rope at the last moment to not drag Mija down with her into the forest canopy.

As this scene demonstrates, ropes can bring a specific aesthetic of connection to the fore. The way the rope transposes from a leash into a literal lifeline reveals an inherent ambiguity of roped connections in that ropes can serve as tools of control as well as security. The scene also presents a rope in its two phenomenological modes—slack versus taut—that are interrelated but should be conceptually distinguished. Speaking with philosopher Michel Serres, whose book *The Natural Contract* (1990) will be central to an aesthetic theory of ropes, ropes undergo "a strange metamorphosis" when they become "hard and stiff" after being "at rest, soft, coiled, folded, sleeping" (106). Slack ropes are more common in the "landlocked daily routine" (100), where they are in stand-by and invisible, while taut ropes are in deployment, and in a fundamental sense alive and awake, especially when traversing perilous spaces. That is why there is a prominence of ropes in fictional and nonfictional accounts of mountaineering, for example in John Muir (1984), Andrew Greig (1992), and Jon Krakauer (1997), where for the tethered party the rope is not only a guarantor of safety but also a symbol of solidarity and attachment. This is in many ways even reflected in the material makeup of the rope itself "in that it is a multiple redundant structure made from a number of parallel load-bearing elements, which are usually twisted together in some way to allow the assembly to operate as a cohesive whole" (Evans and Ridge 133). Thus, in contradistinction to metallic chains, the fibrous architecture of a rope, the way it is composed of tender strains that receive their resilience by virtue of their entanglement and interconnection, reflects the communitarian potential of roped parties. Unlike chains, ropes excel in keeping the configuration of structures and groups together without imposing total rigidity.

While in some extreme cases mountaineers forgo the use of ropes, such as in free solo climbing as portrayed in the documentary *Free Solo* (2018), an absence of ropes is unthinkable for seagoers. In fact, the seagoing vessel is a product of remarkably complicated rope-work, so much so that Serres quips: "What was the sailing ship if not an exquisitely complicated gigantic knot?" (104). In the "landlocked daily routine," a minor mistake such as a sloppy knot is often inconsequential and venial, whereas in the other world, such a minuscule oversight can cause disaster. In *Peter Simple* (1834), an early example of the then-nascent genre of nautical fiction, the eponymous captain admonishes his crewmates that, after having cast off, the "consequence of any carelessness or neglect in the fitting and securing of the rigging will be felt now" (52). Similarly, Rudyard Kipling's short story "The Ship That Found Herself" (1895) features a talking ship, with parts of the ship asserting "I need fourteen wire-ropes, all pulling in different directions, to hold me steady" (22). And in Yann Martel's *Life of Pi* (2001), the protagonist, whose life depends on the roped connection between lifeboat and raft, watches how the "rope tensed and lifted out of the water and wavered in the air" and understands that it "only needed […] a knot to become undone" for him to "be lost" (202). Just like the mountains, the sea's openness and freedom are somewhat deceptive: at first, seagoing carries the promise of disconnection from the usual world, and leaving the harbor is to "sever all

bonds" (Serres 99). Quite the contrary, a single glance at the ship's rope-work shows that seagoing necessitates an even more heightened level of connectedness: "Unbound? No: Bound fast" (104).

Against this background of what could be termed a seagoing rope aesthetics, two classic works of two well-known US-American writers shall be revisited: Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick; or, the Whale* (1851) and Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952). Even though both novels have received their fair share of attention, their surprisingly rich and multifaceted discussions of ropes have not yet been accounted for; in fact, a perusal of these works will reveal that both Melville and Hemingway can be classified as poets of the rope. Both devote much space to a painstaking delineation of a sailing ship's rigging and rope-work, but what is most remarkable is that they also write about roped connections between human and nonhuman agents: in the case of Melville, with whales, and in the case of Hemingway, with a marlin. These connections are parasitic at the outset, as the animals are harpooned to be killed for various reasons, including money, competition, and vengeance; however, precisely these harpoonings trigger processes of "becoming-whale" and "becoming-marlin" respectively, in addition to growing misgivings about such necropolitical schemes of fishing, hunting, and killing. In both novels, it is ultimately the failure of catching Moby Dick or the marlin that induces in the respective characters a change of heart toward a decentering of the human and ecological awareness. More specifically, the struggle to catch them invokes what Timothy Morton calls "spectrality" in *Humankind: Solidarity with Nonhuman People* (2017): with the human and nonhuman agent tethered together, the in-between rope visualizes an ontological spectrum that makes it impossible to disambiguate the impact of one body on the roped matrix from the other. Therefore, in both novels, a recurring question is whether humans are doing the fishing or if they are in fact being fished themselves: this is roped spectrality, exploding comfortably entrenched, but hopelessly dysfunctional, dualisms between active/passive or subject/object.

A specific ethics can be distilled through such an aesthetics of ropes, as both novels embark, in Serres's nomenclature, toward a "natural contract," a configuration that is primarily characterized by being considerate of and responsible for nonhumans too. In moments of danger, when the ropes become taut and hard, and the bodies and bonds are felt, ropes "imitate solids" (Serres 106), which can be regarded, albeit with some concessions, as a bond of solidity, or *solidarity*, in congruence with Morton's typology. In *Moby-Dick,* the chasers die, except for Ishmael, and in *The Old Man and the Sea,* the chased dies—in both constellations, these deaths annul the bonds, leading to a slackening of the taut ropes and the termination of solidarity. These chases thus allegorize a key moment in the Anthropocene as, amid what is often referred to as the "Sixth Extinction" and large-scale animal suffering, the bonds that connect humans and animals become ever more conspicuous: we are all in the same boat.

Ropes at Sea: Contractual Solidarity with Humans and Nonhumans

The first step toward an aesthetics of the rope is by dint of a remarkable etymological connection. Serres points out that "the cord, the bond, *lien* in French, which we read only abstractly in the terms *obligation* and *alliance,* but more concretely in *attachment*" (45) is "at the origin of the term *contract,*" and hidden in the term "accord" is "a similar cord that draws or tracts us together" (60). The reason for Serres's intervention into contract theory, and his insistence to update the old social contract into a new natural contract, is his early diagnosis of the ecological pitfalls of anthropocentrism, as "[e]xclusively social, our contract is becoming poisonous for the perpetuation of the species" (36). Indeed, famous social contract theories of the Enlightenment, ranging from Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651) to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *The Social Contract* (1762), have only tethered humans to humans, and, disregarding nonhumans, have thus formally instigated and legalized what Morton calls "the Severing," "a foundational, traumatic fissure between […] *reality* (the human-correlated world) and *the real* (ecological symbiosis of human and nonhuman parts of the biosphere)" (*Humankind* 13). Serres diagnoses a similar elementary disconnect from nonhumans in social contract paradigms and thus demands that "we must envisage […] a new pact to sign with the world: the natural contract" (15). This social component in the natural contract is pivotal—the natural contract does not so much supplant as complete the social contract—which the rope, a human-made meshwork of twined natural fibers, exemplifies, particularly by virtue of this "naturalcultural" (Haraway 28) aspect. In that regard, the constitution of the sailing ship, in both the legal and aesthetic sense, may be especially pertinent to bringing this relationship to the fore. A ship's rope-work can thus be deemed a naturalcultural nexus, as it is based on the rope in which natural and cultural elements are twisted into one another. Furthermore, since many of Serres's insights and vignettes are strongly informed by his seagoing experiences as a youth, his philosophical system is particularly well-suited for the present reading of sailing ship narratives.

An aesthetic theory of ropes benefits greatly from the tenets of new materialism. Serres himself steers in this direction when he emphasizes that "a cord […] materializes our relations or changes them into things. If our relations fluctuate, this solidification settles them" (45). He thus ascribes weight and solidity to relations, dispelling widespread assumptions about their immateriality and fluidity. Similarly, in an effort to engage in what she calls a "*zoe*-egalitarian turn," Rosi Braidotti insists that a "vital bond between the humans and other species" (*Posthuman* 71, 79) is necessary, with "vital" here being equivalent to "material." In light of Braidotti's skepticism about the merit of anthropomorphizing animals, she seeks to elude the presupposition of the spurious category of the "human" that feigns generality but has always been exclusive. Instead, she advocates for "posthuman relations" in order "to see the inter*relation* human/animal as constitutive of the identity *of each*" (79, original emphasis). In other words, it is slightly inaccurate to postulate that humans on one side and animals on the other have decided to bond with a tether dangling in the middle; rather, the bonding comes ontologically first, and the categories of the human and the animal spawn thereafter.

In that process, the rope transmogrifies into a spectrum, and humans and animals become spectral. Its pulls and vibrations reflect the admixture of human/animal agency and intentionality, to the point where the bond itself is elevated as an agential player. This echoes Jane Bennett's typology of vibrant matter, which "replaces the discrete agent and its 'residual individualism' with a 'spectrum' of 'agentic capacities" (30), specifically in order "to dissipate the onto-theological binaries of life/matter, human/animal" (x). Ultimately, the aestheticization of the human/animal bond in the form of ropes imbues it with a thick materiality—and here it is helpful to consider Braidotti's and Bennett's slash in "human/animal" as the rope—in an attempt to "foreground […] the middle grounds of their interaction" (Braidotti, *Posthuman* 79). The focus on this middle ground helps accentuate the fact that these bonds are existential to the human; and, as we shall see, they can be positive or negative, symbiotic or parasitic.

In conjunction with this renewed interest in the in-between space of relations between humans and nonhumans, the materiality of the rope grants a phenomenological and physical dimension to bonds. Following this line of thought, one particularly crucial point can be distilled: the human/animal rope rectifies the misconception that an ecological awareness would be tantamount to understanding that humans are connected to every other life form in the environment, and by extension, the world. This is a fundamentally faulty assumption, and the tricky part is to understand what is usually meant by the word "connected," even though, scientifically speaking, this may indeed be a valid statement. As Timothy Clark observes, ecology as a scientific term can operate with an "everything is connected to everything" model by presupposing that organisms are tied "to the surroundings in which they live," but the humanities' use of the term "ecology" points to an "ethics" that investigates what "kind of [a] relationship […] human beings ought to have to the natural world" (152). This is an important insight of new materialism: Thick ropes occupy space, and thus cannot be multiplied at whim; the human is ecologically connected to everything, but not ethically. Being roped denotes a thick, concentrated, and ultimately selective connection. Indeed, when Donna Haraway states that "nothing is connected to everything; everything is connected to something" (31), she foremost articulates an ethical statement, arguing that meaningful, ethical connections presuppose a basic level of disconnectedness too. This is further evidenced by Haraway's introductory question regarding the nature of human/nonhuman kinships: "What shape is this kinship, where and whom do its lines connect and disconnect, and so what?" (2). Haraway's use of the terms "shape" and "lines" with regard to such connections motivates this present investigation on the materiality of bonds and relationships, which are here conceived of through ropes. In short, ethics cuts some ties from ecology, and fortifies others, making them thicker and sturdier, more resilient, ropelike.

This salient attention toward the materiality of kinship relations is critical, as ecofeminist new materialism has grown wary of the hyperconnected subject, precisely because connections have different degrees of significance and importance. With recourse to the tenets of deep ecology, that branch of philosophy that conflates ecological and ethical connection, Braidotti

laments "geo-centered theories that propose a return to holism and to the notion of the whole earth as a single, sacred organism" by rejecting "technological culture" (*Posthuman* 84-5). This leads, per Braidotti, to an exaggerated demand for a dissolution of the subject in its environment, and a radical equity among all lifeforms. Val Plumwood similarly attests to "a set of boundary problems encountered by forms of deep ecology" and "an arrogance in failing to respect boundaries and to acknowledge difference" (178). Indeed, even though connections introduce an ontological spectrum, on which it is not possible to point to where a human begins and a rabbit ends, "a human is not a rabbit" (Morton 98). The rope can introduce such a spectrum of difference without collapsing into dualist hierarchies.

Recalling that the cords are, per Serres, manifestations of contractual bonds that ought to become natural on top of their being social, the mixture between social ethics and natural ecology is already administered, making it a particularly fruitful model for the present task of finding a balance between connection and disconnection. On the other hand, in addition to the ontological problem of being connected without being identical, in other words, being spectral, a radical form of ecological thinking, a model that does not distinguish between ecology and ethics would amount to an equal right to exist among all lifeforms, including bacteria and viruses. This would result in a nightmarish natural contract devoid of any social component. That is why "we simply can't extend rights to all nonhumans all at once. So it's shocking to say that AIDS has just as much a right to exist as a human being" (Morton, *Dark Ecology* 152). Aside from this ecological discourse, a similar and instructive criticism was launched against actor-network theory as facilitating a network model in which connections among all objects are principally homogenous and hence of the same significance. Undoubtedly, there is merit to such a model, because it can "in principle associate any element with any other. No border limits its extension" (Latour, *Modes* 41). However, associative freedom comes at the cost of attributing varying degrees of intensity to the associations between nodes. For that matter, it is instructive to see that Bruno Latour modifies the network model precisely by adopting new materialist strategies, those that uphold connections to some and disconnections to others: "The [ecological] operation comes down to reopening of two canonical questions: what existents have been *chosen,* and what forms of existence have been *preferred*?" (*Facing Gaia* 37, original emphasis). Fortified associations result from a decision based on a contract, akin to how a courtroom pronounces judgment. Thus, being roped means having decided, literally "having cut," other bonds after a trial, to be then able to twirl those strands to forge a major bond.

It is in this sense that the materiality of the bond, the rope, counteracts a principal equivalence among all connections. New materialism's focus on the materiality of bonds is precisely to showcase that relations and links are not free of charge because that would make them inflationary and meaningless. Precisely by virtue of the cord's thickness and weight, hyperconnectivity is ruled out. Morton argues that any doctrine based on an overload of connections is in fact rather akin to "fascism" (*Humankind* 23), drawing on the etymology of *fasces,* a bundle of sticks roped in place so firmly that any wiggle room is precluded. This is a

highly important negative end of roped connections: if they are performed solely in the service of a "higher" entity like the State or God, they can become imprisoning and chain-like too, epitomized by "The Binding of Isaac" in the Old Testament. Although ropes can also circumvent this problem of gratuitous bonding, the ambiguity of ropes is predicated on the danger of it derailing into a fascist bondage, where connections become so firm and dominant that the parts of the connection are erased in favor of the connection itself. That way, only the bundle in its entirety matters, which Morton rejects as a form of "explosive holism" (25) that operates at the expense of its parts. A rope can only constitute the tenet of a natural contract if being tethered does not signify imprisonment and control, but responsibility and solidarity.

Seagoing narratives, especially those in quest of animals, prove to be especially useful for this purpose because the ship does not merely reflect but embody the social contract. Following Michel Foucault's instructive notion of "heterotopia," there are, for any given society, spaces that invent "the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect" (2), from which many insights into the intricacies of the social structure can be distilled. Foucault famously closes his essay by positing that the "ship is the heterotopia par excellence" (9). That heterotopias disclose "the set of relations" of society coincides in large parts with Serres's notion of the maritime vessel that is "casting off toward the rope, the cord" (104), in which the rope-work signals "a system of relations, a set of exchanges" (107). In other words, the ship's rigging allows for a heterotopic analysis, through which specifics in human-human and human-animal relations are laid bare. Turning now to Melville's and Hemingway's novels, it will be particularly interesting to investigate the moments when the slack ropes become taut and solid, which mark in some instances the bonding of solidarity and, in others the bondage of fascism. The ships in both novels extend their ropes into the territory of the nonhuman, at first with parasitical intent in the wake of harpooning them, but it is precisely that harpooning that paradoxically introduces the groundwork for bonds of solidarity to be forged.

Becoming-Whale: *Moby-Dick*

In light of *Moby-Dick*'s depiction of a maniacal whale hunt by the vengeful Captain Ahab, the novel seems, at first, hardly to be an auspicious contender for expressing multispecies bonding, let alone solidarity, with nonhumans. However, making this assertion would be to confuse story and plot; *Moby-Dick* is an inherently polyvocal novel with multiple narratological strategies at play to frame the whale hunt as inherently flawed and problematic, especially against the backdrop of the 1850s that saw "the American whaling industry [going] through a period of unparalleled growth, productivity, and profits" (Dolin 241). Melville's aesthetics of ropes will address both the shortcomings and merits of such bonds. Deeply ambiguous as they may be, the rope will be instrumental in showing that humans and nonhumans are contractual partners, and thus by definition in solidarity. However, on multiple occasions that solidarity is ignored and betrayed, leading to the destruction of the ship and the death of the crewmates

on board. This ethical imperative of solidarity is further aesthetically supported by a fundamental confusion—or, more precisely, spectralization—of agency, mainly in order to dismantle untenable orders of hierarchy. Melville portrays whaling as an activity in which it becomes unclear whether the ship or the whale is doing the fishing, and that acts of kindness and violence will be reciprocated in like manner. It is through ropes that Melville shows that the harpoon that is hurled at the whale ultimately ricochets back and strangles the crewmates of the Pequod, showing that a social contract will become "poisonous" (36), to repeat Serres's term, if it has not been upgraded to a natural contract.

Melville employs different ropes to portray human-human and human-nonhuman relations. In that regard, it is helpful to take into account two major types of ropes at play: one, the rope-work of the ship, and two, the lines of the harpoon. Beginning with the rigging, it is helpful to remember Foucault's concept of the ship as heterotopia, a space in which society's relations are mirrored. Melville points to the doubling of Nantucket, the whaling town from which the Pequod disembarks, by making the connection between the town and the ship as its microcosm abundantly clear: "Merchant ships are but extension bridges; armed ones but floating forts; even pirates and privateers, though following the sea as highwaymen the road" (61). For the Nantucketer, other ships and resources are but "ploughed" as though they were part of "his own special plantation" (61). Similarly, social strata are likewise doubled, as almost nobody working hands-on in the "American whale fishery [is] Americans born, though pretty nearly all the officers are" (101). Thus, despite the ship's sailing into open waters, it is as though it had never disembarked: The Pequod is a mirror image of Nantucket.

It is Ahab, however, who severs the connection to Nantucket and imposes upon the sailors a new social contract, where for the first time an idiosyncratic poetics of the rope comes to the fore. The person to represent the contractual agreement between the Pequod and its shareholders in Nantucket, one that dictates to maximize profits by hunting whales and extracting their oil, is Starbuck; when Ahab unilaterally communicates his incentive to hunt Moby Dick instead of executing the contract, Starbuck reminds him of "the business we follow," that is "to hunt whales, not my commander's vengeance" (132). Ahab, however, wins the consent of the crewmates and establishes an autocratic "sultanism [that] became incarnate in an irresistible dictatorship" (120)—literally a dictators*hip*—and a salient poetics of the rope accompanies this coup. In the aftermath, Starbuck laments that "the ineffable thing has tied me to him; tows me with a cable I have no knife to cut" (137) and Ahab, at the point of everyone's realization of their impending doom and amid possible attempts at slackening the ropes and lowering of the sails to desist from chasing the whale, "swear[s] to transfix with [his harpoon] the first sailor that but cast loose a rope's end" (368), crying: "All your oaths to hunt the White Whale are as binding as mine; and heart, soul, and body, lungs and life, old Ahab is bound" (368). In nautical contexts, the double valency of the word "bound" is especially striking, as sailing to a specific area necessitates being bound or roped together, a phrase often repeated in exchanges between sailors: "Where are you bound? and for what are you bound?" (203). Here, Melville and Serres's poetics of seagoing are most

harmonious: Melville demonstrates that upending the bonds of the Nantucket contract does not lead to a boundlessness but to another type of binding, and Serres similarly asserts that "casting off, which unties one set of bonds, had retied another" (101). In short, seagoing is expressly not an attempt at disconnection, but rather the opposite, it assures that connectivity "undergoes a phase change and solidifies" (101), such that slack ropes become taut.

One of the chief aesthetic conceits of *Moby-Dick* is that Ahab's usurpation of power runs parallel to the tightening of the rope-work, reflecting Morton's etymological reference regarding "fascism" as described above—a bundle of sticks roped firmly together. This comes even more saliently to the fore in the description of Ahab's harpoon:

> At one extremity the rope was unstranded, and the separate spread yarns were all braided and woven round the socket of the harpoon; the pole was then driven hard up into the socket; from the lower end the rope was traced half way along the pole's length, and firmly secured so, with intertwistings of twine. This done, pole, iron, and rope—like the Three Fates—remained inseparable (356-57).

Like the harpoon, the entire rope-work, that is the social contract, is firmly and unilaterally in Ahab's hands. Furthermore, referencing the weaving of the fates hints at the renewed "boundedness" of the ship's destination, giving conclusive evidence to Serres' premonition: "[D]oes becoming human consist of forever unbinding so as to bind elsewhere and otherwise? Do we cast off only to change cords?" (101). In other words, Ahab's rescinding the contract that binds the Pequod economically does not lead to unboundedness, but to another contract that binds them fatefully.

Having rewoven the contractual agreements of the Pequod, Ahab's dictatorship immunizes him against attempts at insurrection or mutiny, much to Starbuck's chagrin. In fact, Ahab entrusts his life to Starbuck when he asks him to elevate him upon the mast-head: "Take the rope, sir—I give it into thy hands, Starbuck" (386). Like the aforementioned scene of *Okja* shows, being held by rope becomes a matter of life and death since

> when in working with his hands at some lofty almost isolated place in the rigging, which chances to afford no foothold, the sailor at sea is hoisted up to that spot, and sustained there by the rope; under these circumstances, its fastened end on deck is always given in strict charge to some one man who has the special watch of it. Because in such a wilderness of running rigging, whose various different relations aloft cannot always be infallibly discerned by what is seen of them at the deck; and when the deck-ends of these ropes are being every few minutes cast down from the fastenings, it would be but a natural fatality, if, unprovided with a constant watchman, the hoisted sailor should by some carelessness of the crew be cast adrift and fall all swooping to the sea. (386)

Ahab can be certain of his immunity and Starbuck's grudging obedience because, as Serres points out, "sunder[ing]" the "collectivity" while seagoing is akin to "exposing itself to the destruction of its fragile niche" (40). Ahab's usurpation of the ropes reflects the concept of a

forced human-human solidarity. In Serres' words, the "seagoing pact is in fact equivalent to what I'm calling a natural contract" (40), because in this context, sundering ropes at sea—sundering the collectivity—is akin to a collective death sentence.

If the ropes binding Starbuck and Ahab are rather inimical, yet business-like and formal, Ishmael casts the opposite kind of cord, one of cordiality, to Queequeg. The Ishmael-Queequeg relationship has prompted some critics such as Leslie Fiedler to read *Moby-Dick* "not only as an account of a whale-hunt, but also as a love story, perhaps the greatest love story in our fiction" (370). Fiedler describes this relationship in the nomenclature of the rope, speaking of "the tie which binds Ishmael to Queequeg" (370), and this is no coincidence given that Ishmael and Queequeg are prominently tied together in the chapter called "The Monkey-Rope," which also raised the interest of some critics in a "ecomaterialist" reinterpretation of Melville (Mentz 59). Queequeg's task to remove the sperm from a dead whale with a blubber hook requires him to "descend upon the monster's back," and to prevent him from falling, Ishmael holds him by a rope that is

> fast at both ends; fast to Queequeg's broad canvas belt, and fast to my narrow leather one. 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 in his wake. So, then, an elongated Siamese ligature united us. Queequeg was my own inseparable twin brother; nor could I any way get rid of the dangerous liabilities which the hempen bond entailed. (244)

In addition to traces of a commencing spectrality upon being roped together—Ishmael is becoming-Queequeg and vice versa—this passage bespeaks an unparalleled level of unconditional solidarity, even to the point of preferring joint death to a sundering. However, it is critical to point out that both couplets, Ahab/Starbuck and Ishmael/Queequeg convey bonds of solidarity. To illustrate this point, Morton's description of the ambiguity of solidarity is useful, as in moments of reliance, "symbionts can become toxic or strange-seeming relationships can form," but, either way, the "right word to describe this reliance between discrete yet deeply interrelated beings is 'solidarity'" (11). Bonds of solidarity can be cordial when the connected agents thrive, or fascist when they flounder, but they are bonds of solidarity precisely because that thriving or floundering can only happen in concert; one agent's thriving cannot arise of a floundering of the other or vice versa.

The second major mode of rope-casting, the harpoon, goes beyond human-human tethering and physically binds together the crewmates with whales when hunting. Whale-hunting now becomes instrumental in the construction of an all-encompassing communitarian solidarity: "Before lowering the boat for the chase, the upper end of the line is taken aft from the tub, and passing round the loggerhead there, is again carried forward the entire length of the boat, resting crosswise upon the loom or handle of every man's oar" (218). The two ontological modes of ropes previously introduced are invoked in the description of the whaling-line, as, in its slack mode, "so graceful the repose of the line, as it silently serpentines about the oarsmen before being brought into actual play" (219). The tautness occurs shortly thereafter,

when "the harpoon was hurled," when "the same moment something went hot and hissing along every one of their wrists. It was the magical line" (221). Here, harpooning introduces the moment of contractual solidarity as every oarsman contributes to pulling in the whale while the ropes are taut. In the spirit of heterotopia, however, this line does not only connect the oarsmen; in fact,

> this is a thing which carries more of true terror than any other aspect of this dangerous affair. But why say more? All men live enveloped in whale-lines. And if you be a philosopher, though seated in the whale-boat, you would not at heart feel one whit more of terror, than though seated before your evening fire with a poker, and not a harpoon, by your side. (219)

Again, Melville introduces an element of spectrality into the matrix of line-connections, and the structure of Ishmael's assertion that "[a]ll men live enveloped in whale-lines" is reminiscent of him asking "Who ain't a slave?" (19) and, more importantly, when the harpooneer Stubb eats a whale: "Who ain't a cannibal?" (231). In other words, Melville uses the phenomenology and aesthetics of whale-lines to show not only how the cord extends to Nantucket and America at large, as the American society craves whale oil and is thus involved in the lines of this hunt, but also that all of society's members, comprising Indigenous Peoples, African Americans, and many more, are unified through the cord precisely in the moment of killing a whale. Through binding cords all groups are in concordance. As Queequeg is feared and shunned by many at the outset because he is a "comely looking cannibal" (33), the involvement of the squad, and by extension, the American society, in killing and eating the whale and extracting its oils and ambergris renders everyone a cannibal, disarming any discriminatory attempts at vilifying the Other. The signatories of this contract are on equal footing.

This form of spectrality—it has become impossible to distinguish "cannibal" and "non-cannibal" as everyone is "becoming-cannibal"—also structurally applies to the human-nonhuman bond at the moment the whale is harpooned. The scheme of harpooning is deployed because the first "dart" of the harpoon is supposed to injure the whale so that "when pierced even by so small a point as a harpoon, a deadly drain is at once begun upon his whole arterial system" (269), and then to hold onto the ropes because "the longer the stricken whale stays under water, the more he is exhausted" (268). One particularly interesting consequence is that the moment of taut ropes—the whale seeks to escape the assault—at the same time marks the moment in which the whale commandeers the ship. Ishmael remembers that "there have been examples where the lines attached to a running sperm whale have, in a calm, been transferred to the ship, and secured there; the whale towing her great hull through the water, as a horse walks off with a cart" (167). This circumstance ties in with Serpil Oppermann's observation that *Moby-Dick*—and also *The Old Man and the Sea* for that matter—"depict the ocean as awe-inspiring and uncontrollable" (7), dispelling the fantasy of full nautical control and oceanic mastery and, ultimately, the "binary view of the ocean" (DeLoughrey 151).

In light of this collective non-binary becoming-whale, epitomized by the roped connection, special attention should be given to Ahab, who not only carries a prosthesis leg made of "whalebone" (107) but also is, in a deeply ambiguous sense, in total solidarity with Moby Dick. Analogous to Ishmael's vow to perish with Queequeg should he drag him into the depths, Ahab follows Moby Dick to his death. Deleuze and Guattari speak, in this context, of *Moby-Dick* "in its entirety" as "one of the greatest masterpieces of becoming; Captain Ahab has an irresistible becoming-whale" (284), precisely because Moby Dick is "the terrible *Fishing Line* with nothing on the other end, the line that crosses the wall and drags the captain . . . where? Into the void . . ." (291). Ahab is eerily aware of the spectral realization that he is not so much the fisher as the fished, as he asks in the novel's finale: "Is it Ahab, Ahab? Is it I, God, or who, that lifts this arm? (390). Given that muscles and tendons are also lines that can be slackened and tightened, Ahab's depression stems from his utter inability to comprehend his subjection to a default ropedness—the "default" condition in the terminology of Morton (19)—and the corresponding sacrifice of some level of agency. Ahab embodies a form of anthropic toxicity in that he cannot tolerate that no captain is ever fully in charge. A moment's contemplation could lead him to a fundamental insight, like Aldo Leopold, who rejoices at the fact of fishing and being fished at the same time: "I sit in happy meditation on my rock, pondering, while my line dries again, upon the ways of trout and men. How like fish we are: ready, nay eager, to seize upon whatever new thing some wind or circumstance shakes down upon the river of time!" (37) Ahab's ironic climax is the fact that it is not Moby Dick that kills him, but his own cords: "The harpoon was darted; the stricken whale flew forward; with igniting velocity the line ran through the groove;—ran foul. Ahab stooped to clear it; he did clear it; but the flying turn caught him round the neck, and voicelessly as Turkish mutes bowstring their victim, he was shot out of the boat, ere the crew knew he was gone" (409). The spectrality of Ahab's becoming-whale is thus a corresponding entanglement in the lines of fate and the harpoon—both of which he wove for himself, fulfilling Starbuck's dire prophecy regarding Ahab: "Hemp can only kill thee" (362). Similarly, Pip, a black crewmate, becomes "entangled" in the lines of a darted harpoon, and when the "line swiftly straightened," his face turns "blue" (306). Alluding to the noose, the rope that chokes, this scene demonstrates that an unnatural social contract will lead to the death of human and whale.

The natural contract, a contract of solidarity, is therefore a peace treaty in which breaching the terms of agreement leads to death, brought to the fore by these roped connections. Aesthetically, the natural contract necessitates an acknowledgment of a level of spectrality and must go beyond what Braidotti calls "a new negative bond between humans and animals" (*Posthuman* 70), in which their mutual demise takes centerstage. A "positive bond" would be one of symbiosis, and there is a transforming moment in seeing the material bonds between the whales themselves that demonstrates that these should receive more attention:

> As when the stricken whale, that from the tub as reeled out hundreds of fathoms of rope; as after deep sounding, he floats up again, and shows the slackened curling line buoyantly rising and spiralling towards the air; so now, Starbuck saw long coils of the

> umbilical cord of Madame Leviathan, by which the young cub seemed still tethered to its dam. Not seldom in the rapid vicissitudes of the chase, this natural line, with the maternal end loose, becomes entangled with the hempen one, so that the cub is thereby trapped. (290)

The umbilical cord is here depicted as the life-giving "natural line" that is counterposed to the death-giving line of the harpoon. As Ishmael watches this pod of whales tied together in peaceful solidarity, schemes of harpooning become an "appalling spectacle," triggering traumatic and "agonizing" realizations about the "peculiar horror" (291) of whaling for profit and revenge.

In contradistinction to Ahab, Ishmael is the voice of positive bonding. He, like Leopold, comes to the realization that could have saved the Pequod from its demise, namely the realization of spectrality, shortly after the whale massacre in the chapter “The Grand Armada,” namely the distinction between “Fast-Fish and Loose-Fish” (294). While a “Fast-Fish belongs to the party fast to it,” a “Loose-Fish is fair game for anybody,” with a fish being “technically fast, when it is connected with an occupied ship or boat, by any medium at all controllable by the occupant” (295). Ishmael’s insight is to see the allegorical power of this distinction when applied to the condition of humans, when he realizes that “possession” generally, being “the whole of the law” (296), follows the logic of the fast-fish, while “Rights of Man and the Liberties of the World [are] but Loose-Fish,” culminating in the central question: “And what are you, reader, but a Loose-Fish and a Fast-Fish too?” (297). In light of another rope metaphor by Serres, this is the moment of comprehension, in that “bonds *comprehend,* since they join or grasp or seize several things, beasts, or men together” (107, original emphasis). The spectral moment of becoming-whale reveals that the uncomprehending harpooneer and their crewmates will become entangled by their own lines if they are thrown indiscriminately and profligately.

To summarize, one central punchline of the preceding analysis of ropes is that Moby Dick does not actively kill the crew, but their own cords that are derived from ill-devised accords. Here, the fascist social contract that did not heed the requirements of the natural contract, finds its end, hinting at Serres’s succinct observation: “Crises tear contracts” (105). However, the second conclusion is that positive, symbiotic bonding is possible as Ishmael, and *Moby-Dick* by extension, carry home another message, another proposal for a social order, another contract. Ishmael survives to tell the tale because he is picked up by the Rachel, a ship whose captain, prioritizing the search for his missing son over the pursuit of sperm whales, had earlier pleaded for Ahab’s assistance, only to be met with his cold refusal to "touch not a rope-yarn" (382). It is interesting to observe that the Pequod follows an Iliadic structure—it is a taut linear line of force that privileges war and violence, whereas the “devious-cruising Rachel,” drawing slack lines and circles after Moby Dick has thrown their loved ones overboard, is the homecoming vessel, the Odyssean circular structure, that, “in her retracing search after her missing children, only found another orphan” (410), namely Ishmael. In other words, the Rachel wavers and meanders, it “rocks,” as Morton describes “as *rocking* the inner dynamic

of action based on a readily available solidarity that includes nonhumans" (179). Analogous to how Nausicaa rescues the shipwrecked Odysseus, the Rachel casts ropes of solidarity and kindness, and, representing ecofeminist new materialism further evidenced by her name, stresses its solidarity with humans and nonhumans by cutting the necropolitical ties to Moby Dick and rendering them lifelines for her afflicted children. As discussed, these cuts are what allow meaningful and ethical connections in the first place. Indeed, with Okja's letting go of the rope in mind, Serres's observation that "Separation is sometimes a loving solution" (105) resonates profoundly with Melville's nautical fiction, not only in *Moby-Dick* but also in a poem titled "John Marr and Other Sailors" (1888, 12):

> Twined we were, entwined, then riven
> Ever to new embracements driven.

Becoming-Marlin: *The Old Man and the Sea*

There is only a limited amount of rope, and deep connections are not gratis: this will be one of the essential takeaways from a rope analysis of Hemingway's existentialist novel. During one of poor fisherman Santiago's hopeless cruises along the coastlines of Peru in search of fish, he serendipitously finds himself connected to a marlin that starts "eating the sardines that covered the point and the shank of the hook" (29). Even though Hemingway has not often been read along the lines of environmental humanities, an ontological spectrality similar to the one in *Moby-Dick* ensues from Santiago's interaction with the marlin. Also, Santiago's binding with the marlin lasts three full days, highly reminiscent of the three-day duration of "The Chase" in *Moby-Dick*. It is furthermore striking that in the few critical works on Hemingway's poetics of ecology, *The Old Man and the Sea* is rarely, if at all, mentioned; for example, in the collected issue *Hemingway and the Natural World* (1999), contributions do not focus on the last major fictional novel of his career, and in the edited collection of Harold Bloom titled *Ernest Hemingway's The Old Man and the Sea* (2008), the significance of the rope is not highlighted, even though it is overly present in the novel.

Santiago's skiff is significantly smaller than the Pequod, and there is a particularly interesting economy of lines at play. In preparation for his venturing out to the deeper waters, Santiago installs fishing rods on all sides of the skiff, and loops "each line, as thick around as a big pencil" onto a "green-sapped stick so that any pull or touch on the bait would make the stick dip and each line had two forty-fathom coils" (21). This is rope ecology informed by new materialism: there cannot be an infinity of lines, and they have to be used economically and carefully. Indeed, when Santiago sees the marlin hooked to the rod, he must adjust his network of connectivity. By the force of the marlin's pull and the enormity of the shadow, Santiago quickly understands that "he was fast to the biggest fish that he had ever seen and bigger than he had ever heard of"—in fact the marlin is "two feet longer than the skiff" (46)—so that the marlin's jerking on an already taut line would jeopardize the skiff. He therefore "unroll[s] off the first of the two reserve coils" and later even begins to "cut the line against the wood of the

gunwale" and then "cut the other line closest to him and in the dark made the loose ends of the reserve coils fast" (37), in the hopes to "give more line" (31) to the marlin; at a later stage this process is even called "feeding" (62). This showcases once again the ethical underpinning of rope connections, insofar as the prerequisite to bonding materially as opposed to imaginarily is predicated on selected disconnections.

What ensues is a bonding of reciprocity, along with an extremely dynamic and dramatic give-and-take of lines that results in a rapid alternation between the slack-and-taut mode of the rope. Both the marlin and Santiago are utterly invested with their entire bodies in this bonding, and Santiago grows sensitive to the marlin's locomotion: "I could make the line fast. But then he could break it. I must hold him all I can and give him line when he must have it" (32). Ecologically speaking, this is anti-fascist solidarity: Santiago deliberately leaves wiggle room to the ropes, as he understands, unlike Ahab, that ropes that are "taut up to the very edge of the breaking point" (39) for too long result not only in the death of the harpooneer and the harpooned, but furthermore in the collapse of the ship, and, by extension, against the backdrop of Foucault's concept of heterotopia, the fabric of societal structure. However, akin to Ishmael, he vows: "Fish […], I'll stay with you until I am dead" (38). Even though Santiago starts to speak with the fish, the wordless channel of communication between them is the line: "You're feeling it now, fish, […] and so, God knows, am I" (41). In this unique phenomenology, then, ropes constitute a prelinguistic medium of connection, as bodies, when moving ever so slightly, wordlessly transmit ripples and vibrations to other bodies interlinked in the roped network. Not only do rope ecologies allow human-nonhuman communications, but they also foreground the rope as a vibrant object that comes alive with the agents tethered together; tapping into Bennett's vocabulary of a vital materialism, the rope acquires a "thing-power" defined as the "strange ability of ordinary, man-made items to exceed their status as objects and manifest traces of independence or aliveness" (xvi). Indeed, Santiago's statement that the fish and himself are feeling "it"—the rope—rather than the specific influence of the other valorizes the mode of connection and at the same time reveals the rope's partial independence from the sole authority or control of either agent.

After a while, the roped connection introduces spectrality as well, first in terms of a lack of nautical mastery, and second with regard to a dissolution of Santiago as a subject such that he is becoming-marlin in the process. Comparable to how the Pequod is hooked fast to a whale in motion, the marlin starts to drag "the boat […] slowly off toward the north-west" amid an "added drag now from the easterly breeze" (50). Occasionally, the marlin "jumped again and again and the boat was going fast" (62-3), showing that the marlin is as much captain of this skiff as Santiago. Santiago then asks:

> Then his head started to become a little unclear and he thought, is he bringing me in or am I bringing him in? If I were towing him behind there would be no question. Nor if the fish were in the skiff, with all dignity gone, there would be no question either. But they were sailing together lashed side by side and the old man thought, let him

> bring me in if it pleases him. I am only better than him through trickery and he meant me no harm. (76)

As Santiago is alone, he has to think of a contrivance of how to not lose the tension of the line, and his solution is to effectively harpoon himself with his line. Like Odysseus resisting the song of the sirens, he regularly is "wrapping himself in two loops of the rope" (79) and leans against it to keep the tension, but also feels and responds to the marlin's movements even when sleeping: "He adjusted the sack and carefully worked the line so that it came across a new part of his shoulders and, holding it anchored with his shoulders, carefully felt the pull of the fish and then felt with his hand the progress of the skiff through the water" (38). In great pain, he starts bleeding, but he understands that he "must cushion the pull of the line with my body and at all times be ready to give line with both hands" (58). The pull-and-push dynamic is thus not only incumbent on Santiago; when the marlin circles, slows down, or comes closer to the skiff, it is the marlin that gives rope to Santiago. In addition to a loss of authority in nautical matters, the onset of Santiago's becoming spectral is when he feels that his hands are not following his orders, and have become eerily autonomous: "Surely it will uncramp to help my right hand. There are three things that are brothers: the fish and my two hands" (47). This is highly reminiscent of Ahab's existential confusion: "Is it I, God, or who, that lifts this arm?" (Melville 390). These rope-interactions lead to his realization of his becoming-marlin shortly thereafter, when he explicitly wishes that "Man is not so much beside the great birds and beasts. Still I would rather be that beast down there in the darkness of the sea" (51), resulting in a bond of mutuality: "You are killing me, fish, the old man thought. But you have a right to. Never have I seen a greater, or more beautiful, or calmer or more noble thing than you, brother. Come on and kill me. I do not care who kills who" (71). Being bound by rope and bleeding is an existentialist predicament that Santiago and the marlin share, with a central punchline of the novel emerging: in harpooning the marlin, Santiago harpoons himself, too. An aesthetics of bonded solidarity emerges.

Eventually, however, Santiago hoists the dead marlin on his skiff, and that is where any act of cordiality ends abruptly. The exclusively social contract seems to prevail, but Santiago's hunt is also a failure because he cannot claim the fish for himself because of sharks. Sharks are also featured in *Moby-Dick,* and they similarly figure as agents that demonstratively contest the anthropocentric claim of humans on their harpooned objects as their possessions by eating it before the ship can reach land. In both novels, the treatment of sharks makes it unmistakably clear that a natural contract cannot be achieved by means of such profligate killing of sharks. To prevent the sharks from feasting upon the whale's flesh, Queequeg "kept up an incessant murdering of the sharks" (Melville 232) and Santiago likewise "raised the club high and brought it down heavy and slamming onto the top of the shark's broad head" (Hemingway 88) whenever they veered too close. Santiago must realize, ultimately, that he "did not kill the fish only to keep alive and to sell for food," but "for pride and because [he is] a fisherman" (81). Even though he repeats that he "loved him when he was alive and [he] loved him after"

(81), disentangling himself from the marlin would have been the true gesture of love as previously discussed regarding the Rachel in *Moby-Dick* and *Okja*.

A central insight from the previous considerations is that agents bonded in solidarity can only experience "winning" and "losing" in concert. Santiago understands this when he tries to win and claim his "game," the harpooned marlin. For that purpose, he clubs the white sharks appearing on the surface, which is highly reminiscent of baseball, especially against the background of his interest in the career of the "great Joe DiMaggio" (13) and the coverage of baseball games through the radio. Santiago thus killed the marlin and the sharks literally *for sport,* as though playing baseball, which indicates that only the social contract had been operative. However, his trophy—the bare skeleton of the marlin—emblematizes failure. Unlike sports, the inescapable condition of solidarity in the natural contract dictates that Santiago and the marlin could only win or lose together, but Santiago's insistence of winning on the condition of another party losing reveals the advantage of a heterotopic reading. The skiff is an extension of society and Santiago's ropes are a reflection of a poisonous social contract; they inevitably fail at the sea, where the ropes are taut and any betrayals of solidarity are visibly catastrophic.

Conclusion: Roped Spectrality

A literary aesthetics of ropes shows that there is a spectrum and spectrality between humans and nonhumans. Irretrievably bound together in times of ecological catastrophe, the ropes will be tauter everywhere as the world is in tension; they eventually turn into specters, eerily vibrating, moving, and pulling ever harder on those that seek to run away in vain. Indeed, solidarity is inscribed into the real in a way that cannot be circumvented. Both *Moby-Dick* and *The Old Man and the Sea* excel in pronouncing such an aesthetics of ropes by showing that distinctions between subject and object, between active and passive, between fisher and fished, and between harpooneer and harpooned explode. This spectrality, the dissolution of binary opposites, in turn lays the groundwork for an understanding of solidarity: "We are in this together, but we are not one and the same," as Braidotti (2020) emphasizes with respect to the bindings between humans and nonhumans.

But how can we determine if the animal wants to be bound to us? A helpful reference is Philip Pettit's 1997 book *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government.* In this book, he argues that a new contract theory is needed, in which "the notion of consent is displaced by that of contestability" (12). This is because consent can be manufactured—for instance by media, following Noam Chomsky's famous argument in *Manufacturing Consent* (1995)—and the signature on a contract can be forced. The harpoon can be regarded as manufactured consent, and this can be a promising avenue for ascertaining whether animals consent to or contest the ropes. Moby Dick and the marlin explicitly do not because the ropes cast by harpooneers are parasitic. In fact, it is remarkable that they do not attack the human contractors but rebel against the lines: The "White Whale made a sudden rush among the

remaining tangles of other lines; by so doing, irresistibly dragged the more involved boats of Stubb and Flask towards his flukes; dashed them together like two rolling husks on a surf-beaten beach, and then, diving down into the sea, disappeared in a boiling maelstrom" (400). Similarly, toward the finale of the chase, the marlin in Hemingway's novel is "banging and jerking on the line," and even "hitting the wire leader with his spear," in fact "several times" (67). In other words, Moby Dick and the marlin rebel against the lines and the anthropocentric rope-work, and because the human contractors do not relieve the pressure, they suffer eventually through the very cords they have cast themselves. Serres makes clear there is no alternative contract to the natural contract, and that solidarity is nonnegotiable. Either the bonds are negative or positive—we die together or live together—but we are in relationships of solidarity nonetheless; in Serres' succinct formula, there is "either death or symbiosis" (34).

Seen this way, ropes bring the interplay between disconnection and connection to the fore. Feminist new materialism shows that connections matter—also in the literal sense, they are *matter*—which requires sacrifices, choices, and selections regarding what agents we opt to bond with. It is too easy to say "we are connected to everything," but more necessary, and infinitely more difficult, to valorize specific life forms to which we are connected, and designate those to which we are disconnected.

It is furthermore striking that both novels show how the realization of solidarity occurs at the paradoxical moment when the animals are caught and close to dying, as that is also the moment of humans communicating non-linguistically with the bodies of animals through ropes. This could also be regarded as an allegory of many humans in western societies finding their bonds with animals after "the Severing," to use Morton's term. Despite the large-scale Cartesian disconnect and estrangement from the lives of animals for centuries, it is no coincidence that our bonds with animals are felt precisely when their welfare is ubiquitously disturbed and their livelihoods are jeopardized. After the ropes are hurled at the whale or the marlin, they are bound to die, and as we are—in both senses—drawn by their dying, a particular connection and affective sense of solidarity is invoked. Not only do Ahab and Santiago harpoon themselves when harpooning the animal, but also the reader. Indeed, bound by invisible yet taut ropes, it is the power of aesthetics to invoke this particular sense of spectral solidarity in the reader who is "but a Loose-Fish and a Fast-Fish too" (Melville 297).

As long as the ropes are still taut, there is vulnerable life on either end. However, both novels have also shown that killing the animal leads to a slackening of ropes, whereby spectrality is dispelled and solidarity is forsaken. In spite of this, both novels point to opportunities of hopeful symbiosis even in these dire situations. This had already been addressed in a poem that strongly influenced both novels, namely Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (1798). Shortly after the gratuitous killing of an albatross, a curse imposes a deadly calm on the sea. The rope-work becomes slack and the ancient mariner's crew suffers many deaths. Only after the mariner becomes appreciative of the birds and fish ("O happy living things!" (178)) does the wind pick up in speed, and the "ghastly crew" immediately "'gan work the ropes" (180) to safely arrive at the "lighthouse" (185). Here, the roped enmeshment

between humans and animals becomes abundantly clear, as does the possibility to always repent, re-evaluate, and adjust the rope-work in everyone's favor.

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