On Narrative Digression and Nonsequential Interpolation: Comparative Study of Works by Li Ju-chen and Melville

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I. Introduction

Of intense interest to narratologists, an important symposium entitled "Narrative: The Illusion of Sequence", was held at the University of Chicago in late October 1979. The fundamental issues discussed at this symposium centered on the nature and value of narrative art. In reference to the value of narrative, two schools of thought are involved: the consideration of narrative either as "a mode of imposing order on reality" or "as a way of unleashing a healthy disorder."[1] Regarding the nature of narrative, there are three main arguments: (1) what are the minimum conditions for narrativity? (2) how much distortion can a narrative endure before it becomes something else? and (3) what is the relationship between different versions of a story?[2] All these debates eventually lead the reader back to the initial question of what narrative is *per se*, and how it differs from other kinds of literary discourse, such as exposition, description, and so forth. Among all the theoretical hypotheses, I find Seymour Chatman's to be the most relevant and representative. He defines narrative as follows:

> ... Narrative itself is a deep structure quite independent of its medium. In other words, narrative is basically a kind of text organization, and that organization, that schema, needs to be actualized: in written words, as in stories and novels.[3]

He continues to elaborate the theory that narrative texts contain a double time structure:

> All narrative . . . combine the time sequence of plot events, the time of the *histoire* ("story-time") with the time of the presentation of these events in the text, what we call "discourse-time."[4]

The above statement establishes three facts: first, narrative work requires a double and an independent time, that of "the time line of the story" and of "the time line of the discourse." Secondly, both story-time and discourse-time are basic requirements of narrative writing. Thirdly, in realistic narrative, story-time is the fixed course for the development and comprehension of external reality, while discourse-time is the unfixed and free communication of the inner experience which allows the mind to make connections between sensitive and authentic experience on the one hand, and to transcend the demarcation of the linear and chronological time on the other hand.

Most readers have no problems with the linear story-time method of narration; it is the discourse-time technique that confuses readers and, consequently, leads the reader to the problem of the illusion of narrative sequence.

In the light of these theories, my paper is a response to the problem of the illusion of narrative sequence, especially in reference to its by-products: namely, narrative digression and nonsequential interpolation. As a means of illustration, examples from the texts of Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*[5] and Li Ju-chen's *Ching-hua yüan*[6] will be cited.

II. Illusion of Narrative Sequence and Conventional Theory

The conventional theory holds that any well conceived narrative work should have a main theme and a central plot and, consequently, follow the standard laws of writing, such as those delineated by Tzvetan Todorov in his *Poetics of Prose*:

> . . . The law of stylistic continuity, the law of priority of the serious, and law of noncontradiction . . . the law of nonrepetition . . . the antidigressive law. . . .[7]

The mainstream of theoreticians of the novel recognizes non-sequential narration, strayed disruption, non-essential repetition, and digressions as

serious structural flaws, because they break the progression of the narrative flow. We all know that the conventional notion of a single and complete well-conceived plot has been firmly established by Aristotle. For example, when commenting on the plot in narrative poems, he states that plot should be properly constructed "like those of tragedies; they should centre upon a single action, whole and complete."[8] Joseph Addison likewise declares in *The Spectator:* "Nothing should go before it [plot], be intermix'd with it, or follow after it, that is not related to it."[9] This anti-digressive law has been treated as an axiom continuously until the nineteenth-century as observed by Leonard Orr:

> This anti-digressive law was so valorized during the nineteenth-century, that the Victorian novel implies "a positive warning to the reader not to drag into a story any associations that are artistically irrelevant to it. To novelists who work with the continually expansive, open-ended notion of textual digression, in any of its forms, no particular association can be deemed "artistically irrelevant."[10]

Inevitably, as the writing of novels has evolved, there has been a shift from a dominant central plot to "a continually expansive, open-ended notion of textual digression" in which action-narrative is constantly mixed with different stories, interpolated statements, scholarly comments, and abstract analyses. This change is mainly due to the novelists' newly found awareness of the growth and change in the concept of the imagination and a recognition of the relationship between experience and form. In other words, the crucial disjunction between subjective consciousness and objective reality makes the writer reconstruct the order of his perceived world, mirror its intricacies, and impose aesthetic harmony upon its many manifestations through the writer's narrative skills. Therefore, it is the conscious mind and its ontological beliefs that guide the progression of a fictional narrative. And it is the conscious mind and the capacity for introspective thought that comprise the order of reality in the narrative composition.

In this sense, the perceived world and reality as expressed in *Moby-Dick* and *Ching-hua yüan* are in accord with the major premises of the "discourse-time" narrative theory, which has as its assumption the concepts of "illusion expectancy" and "mediacy of presentation." These concepts are expressed lucidly by Franz Stanzel in his *Narrative Situation in the Novel:*

> The narrative situation determines the structure in two ways. It determines the order in which the narrator or author can unfold the fictional world before the eyes of the reader. At the same time the narrative situation and its specific guise bring the reader to expect a definite consistency of illusion from the narrative.[11]

It is in the presentation of *Moby-Dick* and *Ching-hua yüan* and in the interpretation of the so-called "illusion expectancy" and "mediacy of presentation", that we find both Melville and Li Ju-chen rely on narrative digression and non-sequential interpolation.

III. Definition of Digression and Its Sub-categories

According to the consensus of narratologists, digression is defined as an authorial break or shift from action-narrative to encyclopedic or anatomical writing. This narrative device can be manifested in a variety of ways, namely, cataloguing devices, reflexive texts and text-metaphors, and embedded texts.

(1) Cataloguing Device:

In the first type of narrative digression, the cataloguing device, the author simply lists concrete objects or itemized things which do not alter the action-narrative.

In light of this definition, first I shall concentrate on the one-hundred-chapter vernacular novel *Ching-hua yüan* (*Romance of the Mirrored Flowers*, ca. 1820) by Li Ju-chen (ca. 1763 – ca. 1830).[12] It is a novel of ideas – often-mentioned yet seldom-read. Thematically speaking, the novel reveals the author's deep concern with the dualism of transitory illusion and the ultimate reality inherent in man's own mind. The story is presented through a highly developed narrative of satire and allegory structured around the mythological plot of a Taoist fairy's fall from grace and her subsequent trials in the mundane world to regain her immortality. The two leitmotifs, "the flower in the mirror" (*ching-hua*) and "the moon in the water" (*shui-yüeh*) express the dilemma of man's existence, where he is caught in the dichotomy between appearance and reality, and the temporal and the eternal. Li Ju-chen's allegory of tacit and explicit literary narration

shows life to be full of errors and misconceptions. He believes that spiritual emancipation can only be achieved through the workings of forces greater than man. Such emancipation is the goal of Taoist philosophy, as is made clear in the discussion of life's ephemerality and renewal in *Chuang-tzu's* chapter entitled "Ch'i-wu" or the "Equalization of Things."[13] Li Ju-chen in the novel abnegates any rationally contrived pattern of existence. His characters return to a form of life in which temporal matters become insignificant.

This detached attitude is carried out quite convincingly through the sheer volume of complex material that he attempts to present. For he attempts nothing less than the expression of an entire, synthetic world view, inclusive of all stages and types of human experience as he observes and understands them. Li Ju-chen is often criticized for creating a lengthy encyclopedic discourse in his novel while neglecting plot development. Furthermore, in the episodes which celebrate the one hundred talented girls (chapters 69-94), he is accused of providing only a brief story outline which is accompanied by an enormously long list of irrelevant bits of information, giving the average reader the uncomfortable feeling of having been "overfed" on a rarefied diet of obscure and specialized subject – among them medicine, music, phonetics,[14] mathematics,[15] divination, astrology, and chess – which unfortunately prove to be only so much froth, and leave one "under nourished" of anything of real substance.

In reference to the cataloguing device, it is first necessary to point out that Li Ju-chen's lengthy narration of his statistical and scholastic warehouse are not by any means unique or even new to the Chinese literary tradition. Rather, they represent the extreme culmination of one current in its evolution, since the majority of Chinese fiction may be characterized in general as being heavy in both informative detail and episodic looseness. Lu Hsün cites Hsia Ching-chu's *Yeh-sou p'u-yen* (*A Rustic's Idle Talk*) and Ch'en Ch'iu's *Yen-shan wai-shih* (*An Unauthentic Talk of Yen-shan*) as perfect examples of this literary tradition.[16]

Secondly, in a sense, Li Ju-chen's indulgence in the use of the cataloguing device reflects his motive for writing *Ching-hua yüan*; in fact, in many respects, he accomplishes his general purposes. He is deeply committed to the idea of writing a novel on various subjects. The novel gives him a chance to use various literary devices and to display what he has culled from his years of learning. Most importantly, the close interrelationship between the author and the content serves a valuable function in itself, that is, to

supply a wider intellectual, philosophical, and social context for the story proper.

Thirdly, this encyclopedic narration demonstrates that far beyond the typical view of Li Ju-chen as a simple story teller, he is better seen as a creator of allegorical fables which express his philosophical truth. His digressive narration is multileveled like his subject matter, as he takes a Janus-like stance looking both outward through his imaginative expression and inward toward the epistemological and the aesthetic questions within himself. This dual narration bears fruit in his novel. His perceptions of life and philosophy are expressed through his art which gives it its theme, form, content, and especially, its interrelated viewpoints. In the "Gate of Wealth" episode in chapters 99 and 100, for example, Li Ju-chen depicts the downfall of Chang Hung, who is an embodiment of greed and openly admits his difficulty in differentiating between material and spiritual wealth. The fall of Chang Hung is treated both contextually and structurally in a wandering manner: Li Ju-chen reveals the moral lesson through both a symbolic and literal materialistic setting. The degradation is internalized through material objects, until Chang Hung dies from suffocation:

> One day, taking out a mirror, Chang Hung looked into it and saw only his hoary face and frosted temples. Suddenly he remembered when he once climbed up the ladder and drilled a hole through the coin. In a twinkling of an eye, it was as if what had happened sixty years ago now reappeared. When he first came here, he had been energetic and vigorous. But now, to his surprise, he was aged and senile. Life was just like a spring dream. If he had known earlier that a hundred years would end like this, he could have seen through many things that he had done. It was useless to talk about it now. Instead he retraced the old path and took a look at the place where he had climbed the ladder years before. When he reached the hole in the coin, he put his head through it to look outside, unexpectedly the hole gradually shrank and entrapped his neck, and he could move neither forward nor backward.[17]

However much the dream-like ending and its narration have nothing to do with the central thread of the plot, this is but another variation of Li Ju-chen's perception of life. To him, life is a distortion of man's image of himself. Consequently, this distortion blocks man's capacity to

comprehend things beyond his own perception.

Fourthly, the encyclopedic comments scattered throughout the text further reveal his intentions in writing *Ching-hua yüan*. The author expresses his reason for writing a book through the words of his character, Lin Chih-yang, in chapter 23. Lin Chih-yang states a desire to write a book that, "while seeming to be for entertainment, would actually indirectly serve to foster good through its allegory."[18] It would be a book about everything and with nearly as many subjects as covered in "the Miscellaneous Philosophies and the Hundred Schools."[19] In short, it is a book whose form would exist by virtue of the inner strength of its "clear meaning, rectifying truth, and complex subtlety."[20]

The point posed here is that, for all his claims, the novel is really written to justify Li Ju-chen's conception of fiction, and it is geared to the ideal of preaching truth in itself. His belief is that only the novelist can set before his reader the complexities, ambiguities, and creative aesthetics of man. The novelist has no prescription to offer, but as he candidly puts it, he "seeks the ultimate truth."[21] It is through this firm commitment to truth that the outward all-embracing form of the novel can convey an inwardly "truthful" subject to explain, as he puts it, "things in the universe."[22] From this viewpoint, Li Ju-chen is indeed heralding the significantly modern notion that the writer's own mental reality is the primary determinant of his concepts of the novel and its art, which then in turn give the novel its self-contained form.

Lastly, the cataloguing digression serves as a satirical device to criticize the intellectual blindness of Chinese scholars and "pseudo-civilization." This is illustrated in the beginning episode of the journey to the "Scholars' Country" (Chün-tzu kuo):

> The three of them [T'ang Ao, Lin Chih-yang, and To Chiu-kung] walked into the main street. They noticed that the people all wore scholar's scarves and green gowns. And some of them wore blue garments. Even merchants dressed in the scholarly style, elegant, and refined, without businessmen's mannerisms.[23]

Immediately, the scene shifts from this "refined" appearance to the actual ignorance of the inhabitants. We hear Lin Chih-yang unwittingly remark:

> They all said, "we have heard of only *Lao-tzu* but never of

> *Shao-tzu*. We don't know when this *Shao-tzu* was published and what its content is. . . ." I thought that since there is a work entitled *Lao-tzu*, certainly there should be a *Shao-tzu*. Because you two contantly talk about *Ch'ien-Han shu* and *Hou-Han shu,* and *Wen-tzu* and *Wu-tzu*, when I mentioned *Lao-tzu*, I unconsciously spoke out the name of *Shao-tzu*. I thought that to add one more book might make it sound better.[24]

Lin Chih-yang's half-witted suppositions about the classics epitomize the intellectual ignorance of Chinese scholars, and accordingly, reflect the common disease of civilized man, who believe that knowledge amounts to a sun total of data. Such a belief increasingly leads to the sheer accumulation of facts through artificial acquisition processes such as rote memorization. The example cited above indicates that apparently Lin Chih-yang believes that the titles of classical works are always parallel, as in the examples of *Ch'ien-Han shu* and *Hou-Han shu*. He then picks up this parallelism and applies it in the fabrication of *Shao-tzu* (literally means "Junior") as a counterpart to *Lao-tzu* (literally means "Senior"). This amusing incident is repeated again later in the "Intellectually Excellent Country" (Chih-chia kuo) when Lin Chih-yang profoundly impresses an old scholar by saying that he is "imbued with poetry and canon, even *Lao-tzu* and *Shao-tzu*."[25]

Like *Ching-hua yüan*, Melville's conception of writing, evidenced in *Moby-Dick*, as an intrinsically self-contained form, has unfortunately been minimized or has even gone wholly unrecognized by literary critics since it was first published in 1851. It has only been within the past fifty years or so that literary scholars, armed with modern literary criticism and theory, have rediscovered it as a great novel. One reason which caused an early negative response may have been due to Melville's fascination with nature in general, and with the ocean and whales in particular. At times, it seems that he approaches sheer self-indulgence through the extremely lengthy, convoluted narrative with which he burdens the reader. However, like Li Ju-chen, Melville's narrative repetitions and anatomical analyses are means by which to convey the novel's real thematic premises in relation to the author's own beliefs and introspective thoughts and taste. Paul Brodtkorb states in *Ishmael's White World: A Phenomenological Reading of Moby Dick*:

> Mind actively participates in the constitution of "fact." What Ishmael experiences, then reconstitutes in the form of language, is nct separable from his varying states of mind. Upon such post-Kantian epistemological assumptions rests the justification of a specifically phenomenological reading of *Moby Dick*. Upon their ubiquitous presence in nineteenth-century romantic thought must rest any claim that such a reading is not finally anachronistic.[26]

a) Cataloguing Text of the Sea-Land Dichotomy:

If the whale is the original and major artistic creation of the novel, then the encompassing imagery of the land-sea dichotomy is Melville's first cataloguing device which reveals his philosophical view and subsequently opens Ishmael's narrative account of his whaling venture. The author's obsession with the symbolic beauty of the sea manifests itself through his repetitive narration on its glory and is further heightened through its contrast with what he perceives as the boring quality embodied in the land. Though life on land provides stability and familiarity, "Safety, comfort, hearthstone, supper. . . and that's kind to our mortalities,"[27] it is aggressively stifling and confining. Melville describes it as "week day pent up in lath and plaster – tied to counters, nailed to benches, clinched to desks."[28]

On the contrary, the sea not only offers challenge, depth, and variety, but it also balances life with its abstract qualities of the Unknown Nature. Melville states:

> Consider the subtleness of the sea; how its most dreaded creatures glide under water, unapparent for the most part, and treacherously hidden beneath the loveliest shades of azure. Consider also the devilish brilliance and beauty of many of its most remorseless tribes, as the dainty embellished shape of many species of sharks. Consider, once again, the universal cannibalism of the sea; all whose creatures prey upon each other, carrying on eternal war since the world began.[29]

b) People Cataloguing:

Melville's excessive repetition of the land-sea dichotomy leads to his

second digressive trait, which is to place the dichotomized theme into the narration through personal intrusions and comments by his narrator, Ishmael. Thematically speaking, the dichotomized human nature of good and evil is seen by Melville as inherent in and, indeed, definitive of the human condition. It is not surprising, therefore, that *Moby-Dick's* characters are relegated to purely symbolic roles – they are little more than one-dimensional caricatures, their recreation merely serving to symbolize the dichotomized abstract contrasts between good and evil. For example, we read Ishmael's narration of the evil embodiment of Captain Ahab:

> . . . for the first few moments I hardly noticed that not a little of his overbearing grimness was owing to the barbaric white leg upon which he partly stood. . . Captain Ahab stood erect, looking straight out beyond the ship's ever-pitching prow. There was an infinity of firmest fortitude, a determinate, unsurrenderable wilfulness, in the fixed and fearless, forward dedication. . . of the moody stricken Ahab.[30]

Ahab's wilfulness and dedication to destroy the whale, *Moby Dick*, is permeated with the constant sound and sight of his white leg, which was "devoured, chewed up, crunched by the monstrousest parmacetty that ever chipped a boat."[31] The embodiment of the abstract dichotomy of good and evil is also seen through Queequeg with his human dignity and goodness, through Starbuck for his embodiment of the sensibility of the Common Man, and through the whale Moby Dick for its embodiment of the Unknown Nature itself.

c) Library Cataloguing of the Ocean and Whale:

In order to describe Ahab's relentless pursuit of Moby Dick, Melville draws from world geography and the history of the whaling industry to explore the various whale species and to give a vivid description of the seven seas. The ever-present and the ever-flowing masterless ocean as described by Melville not only blurs the clear-cut outline of narrative progression, but also blurs the vision of his one-dimensional characters. Under the merciless and powerful sea, Melville's narrative structure, like the uncontrolled ship *Pequod*, exists only in the broadest sense, and yet its presence cannot be denied. Ishmael, the novelist's first person narrator, is unable

to comprehend the feelings and human sensibilities of his crew. After all, the world of the *Pequod* is the world of insanity, where frail human and robust hero alike are driven mad when they fail to reconcile the outer with the inner world. Such an intertwining of apparent realities results in a discontinuous narrative. Captain Ahab's original purpose to hunt the whale for its oil is forgotten in his obsession for revenge against Moby Dick:

> As if to strike a quick terror into them, by this time being the first assailant himself, Moby Dick had turned, and was now coming for the three crews. Ahab's boat was central; and cheering his men, he told them he would take the whale head-and-head, – that is, pull straight up to his forehead, – a not uncommon thing; ... But skillfully manoeuvred, incessantly wheeling like trained chargers in the field; the boats for a while eluded him; though, at times, but by a plank's breadth; while all the time, Ahab's unearthly slogan tore every other cry but his to shreds.[32]

The description ends with Ahab shouting:

> Ye see an old man cut down to the stump; leaning on a shivered lance; propped up on a lonely foot. 'Tis Ahab – his body's part; but Ahab's soul's a centipede, that moves upon a hundred legs.[33]

The physical manifestation of a tormented soul is reflected in Melville's attempt to wrench order from a chaotic environment. Such a description depicts the need for this kind of halting description. Only by eliminating the momentary irrelevancies and digressions can order be discovered. However, to find a suitable narrative technique, Melville must accommodate the chaos of the irrational pursuit of Moby Dick. Thus Melville does not use objective narration, but uses Ishmael's 1st-person narration instead. There is no attempt to achieve photographic reality. The repetitive descriptions of Moby Dick, the white leg, the powerful ocean, although quite relevant to Ahab, exclude much else about the other crew members, thus rendering the adventurous voyage merely a caricature. The slow halting progression of the narrative also becomes for Melville the instrument for explaining the futile pursuit, a pursuit of an object larger than life itself.

Hence, in retrospect, the descriptions of the second attmept to kill Moby Dick add little to one's understanding of the whale or even the sea. Paul Brodtkorb expresses this view in his *Ishmael's White World:*

> As the book progresses, being increasingly becomes tinged with nonbeing. In such a world, like Ishmael, we all *are*, but might as well not be. For much of the book we hardly know *where* we are – true places are not down on any map – as the course of the novel wanders from plot to anecdote to documentation, bogus and real, to speculation and back to plot, which hovers over the digressions like the memory of an eternal plan.[34]

(2) Reflexive Texts and Text-Metaphors:

By means of a reflexive text, the artist is able to seize the authentic experiences of human subjectivity in its act of life and to incarnate them into the text. Like the reflexive mirror, this narrative device allows the writer to relive the experience in its unfolding, and to simultaneously grasp things in their immediate revelation to perception. In a similar vein, the definition of text-metaphors is metaphor for writing the text, or the text-within-the-text itself.

In reference to the reflexive text or reflexive mirror approach, a good illustration can be found in the closing statement of Li Ju-chen's *Ching-hua yüan*:

> The mirror's [*ching*] light that reflects the truly talented man,
> Its varieties [hua-yang] all found in history.
> It you wish to know the complete reflection from the mirror,
> Wait for some future *yüan.*[35]

I have analyzed this poem in my study, *Li Ju-chen*:

> This short poem makes use of a mock pedanticism to make Li Ju-chen's most logical discreet presentation of this introspective thought and thematic meaning. In the first two lines, "the mirror's light" represents a distorted reality; thus, its reflections of the "truly talented man" and "its varieties" are ephemeral, unreal. The third and fourth lines state indirectly that in order

> to conceive of true reality, one needs to be detached from partial reality and to wait for a *yüan* ("affinity") to bring back the unity of a "whole reflection" of the truth. These two lines, then, describe the transition from the destruction of an old and false perception of reality to the crystallization of a new conception of it: hence, the implicit theme of the novel. Another interesting thing that should be pointed out is that the combination of three Chinese characters in the passage – *ching, hua, yüan* – actually form the title of this work, *Ching-hua yüan.*[36]

The title, *Ching-hua yüan*, is itself one of the major text-metaphors that appears throughout the novel. *Ching-hua*, "the flower in the mirror," is a metaphor for the conflict between appearance and reality: the mirror can only reveal the reflection of reality, not the substance. In the very first chapter, Li Ju-chen presents this metaphor along with the parallel *shui-yüeh*, "the moon in the water," using them to illustrate the illusory nature of the Fairy of the Hundred Flowers' attraction to the appearance of things in the mundane world:

> I have heard that the Star-god of Literature is in charge of earthly literary events. Often recently I have seen the red light from his Dipper Palace spreading throughout the heaven. . . . Such a phenomenon points to an affulgence in the human arts. Alas! Our discipline is too shallow for us to know the time and place such an omen refers to.[37]

The Fairy's attachment to illusory appearance is tantamount to a rejection of its polar opposite, transcendental reality. Consequently in the narration she is banished from the Taoist garden of paradise. Later in chapter 47, these two text-metaphors reappear to signal the progressive spiritual awareness of T'ang Hsiao-shan, the first secular name for the reincarnated Fairy. Formerly she had stood in the realm of ultimate reality and looked "down" to see her illusions reflected in the "mirror" and "water" of the mundane world. Now she has progressed sufficiently "upward" in her journey of self-discovery so that upon re-encountering the "mirror" and "water" she then awakens to the truth of her original divinity and her destiny which is to return to the garden of paradise.

The introspective and conscious approach of this narrative device is also transmitted and echoed through the author-narrator convention in *Moby-Dick*. Melville utilizes Ishmael to introduce his story: "Call me Ishmael. Some years ago – never mind how long precisely – . . . I thought I would sail about a little and see the watery part of the world."[38] The sea, "the watery part of the world," is the text-metaphor of his philosophical commentary. William Ellerg Sedgwick believes the "sea" is "the most powerful of Melville's symbols,"[39] and Newton Alvin believes the "sea" gives the novel an "intenser literalness than it otherwise had."[40] In its immensity and unsearchable depths, and in its formlessness, the sea is the very image of Nature. Nothing can conquer or comprehend it. After all, the world of Nature is a mysterious place. The sea, the shark, the whale, and Captain Ahab are made to embody "the intangible malignity that has been from the beginning"[41] and that has forever set itself against the reality of life itself.

Although the text-metaphor of the sea is frequently mentioned throughout the entire novel, ironically, it is not Ishmael's best-understood object. In the opaqueness of the sea, Ishmael feels the mystery of the force in its minuteness and multitudinousness. To him, and hopefully to his readers, the sea stands for the mysterious, opaque, explosive, absurd, and unknowable character of reality. Reality is dense, impenetrable and unintelligible because it is so vast and extensive. This is why Ishmael's friends and superiors, the crew and Captain Ahab, venture forth into this reality and flounder. The sea is beyond meaning and order. Ahab's failure is an evident example of the failure of man, the ultimate tragedy of the limited powers of life itself:

> The first boat we read of, floated on the ocean, that with Portuguese vengeance had whelmed a whole world without leaving so much as a window. That same ocean rolls now; that same ocean destroyed the wrecked ships of last year. Yea, foolish mortals, Noah's flood is not yet subsided; two thirds of the fair world it yet covers.[42]

In this sense, Melville's use of the text-metaphor of sea establishes a philosophical point of view through which the patterns of whaling ventures appear, and through which thematic abstractions are presented.

(3) Embedded Text and Nonsequential Interpolation:

The concept of an embedded text, commonly known as an interpolated text, refers to a story-within-the-story which has a close tie with text-metaphors and with reflexive texts. Since the function of the embedded/interpolated text does not alter or move the narrative action, it can be considered as a text beyond the narrative. Usually such text would consist of three different types:

a) Anecdotes or theories told by characters other than the narrator himself;
b) References, documents, jokes, of other works not directly related to the plot development;
c) Allusions, extracts, or external materials which have no independent identities outside the text in which they are embedded.

In comparison with cataloguing or reflexive digressive methods, embedded/interpolated texts have a more complex nature – they multiply the levels of fictionality. As Tzvetan Todorov clearly articulates in the following passage:

> But what is the internal significance of embedding, why are all these means assembled to give it so much emphasis? The structure of narrative provides the answer: embedding is an articulation of the most essential property of all narrative. For the embedding narrative is the *narrative of a narrative.* By telling the story of another narrative, the first narrative achieves its fundamental theme and at the same time is reflected in this image of itself. The embedded narrative is the image of that great abstract narrative of which all others are merely infinitesimal as well as the image of the embedding narrative which precedes it. To be the narrative of a narrative is the fate of all narrative which realizes itself through embedding.[43]

In *Ching-hua yüan*, the clearest example of embedded texts is found in the episode set in the mythological K'un-lun Mountain in which the birthday of the Queen Mother of the West is honored. On the surface, it is an episode of the interplay of mythological gods and immortals. However, through careful reading, one finds that it plants the seed of this fictional theme: it hides the conflict between divine and demonic natures. Seen from an allegorical point of view, both the divine and the demonic are

elements of man's inherent nature and are presented through their coexistence in this mythological paradise, the realm of transcendental reality "above" that of appearance. These elements persuasively stand as the indirect cause of the quest-romance that moves within the confines of man's illusion and Li Ju-chen's characters as well. The following premonition expressed by the Queen Mother is an example:

> Truly, the girl's discipline is shallow.... How could she know that many causes and effects that will happen in the future are the result of today's quarrel? The colored brush has just put a dot on her forehead and has revealed the scheme of her fate. Unfortunately, she seems to be still in her dream and unaware of its significance. This is her predicted fate, and nothing can be done about it.[44]

In chapter 54 of *Moby-Dick*, the episode of "the *Town-Ho* Story as Told at the Golden Inn" is another example of embedded/interpolated text. *Town-Ho* is the name of a whaler ship whose story is told by its crew. As it was sailing in the Pacific Ocean, the ship took on water and the crew subsequently mutinied. However, this mutiny was abruptly interrupted by the appearance of Moby Dick who devoured the harpooner on the boat. When the ship docked much of the crew deserted for fear of Moby Dick.

Although this episode is told by a third person narrator, and its activity is separated from the irrelevant to the main thread of the novel, it renders a thematic parallel between the *Town-Ho* and the *Pequod*. Through the objective point of view of the third person narrator, the *Town-Ho* crews becomes a key element in forecasting the forthcoming doom of the *Pequod*. Through a narrator other than Ishmael, this episodic embedded text invites the reader to see yet another side of the destructive Moby Dick, whereas Ishmael, as the first person narrator, can do no more than describe what he sees and what he feels.

Other interpolated texts in *Moby-Dick* include "Etymology" and "Extracts" in the beginning chapter, in which Melville uses recognized authorities to glorify the whale and the whaling industry. In the episodes of the Leviathanic histories (ch. 101), the "Lexicon" (ch. 53), and Father Mapple's sermon (ch. 9), each embedded text contributes to the complexity of the main narration. The multiplication of narrators and narrators within narrators, the effacement of Ishmael, and the authoritative presence of

trustworthy and reliable sources are used strategically in *Moby-Dick*. These devices are used to invite the reader to move step by step, by way of a gradual unveiling of the story, into the center of Melville's theme of the novel, his vision of life itself.

V. Conclusion

I began this paper with a discussion of the nature and value of narrative, and of the novel's dependence on the story- and discourse-time theories that are embedded in the levels of straight forward and digressive narrations. In reference to digressive devices, examples from *Moby-Dick* and *Ching-hua yüan* have been cited to convey the belief that cataloguing, reflexive, and imbedded narrations can prove to be very powerful and effective devices in a narrative work. These digressive and interpolated passages are parts of an essential technique which can generate and intensify hidden thematic abstractions. In this sense, digressive narrations and nonsequential interpolations are appropriate methods which can constitute the elements of a narrative genre in a pragmatic sense – the telling, the listening, and the passing on of any given story.

Notes

1. W. J. T. Mitchell, ed., *On Narrative* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. ix. For further reference, see Boris Uspensky, *A Poetics of Composition: The Structure of the Artistic Text and Typology of a Compositional Form,* trans. Valentina Zavarin and Susan Wittig (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983); Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971); Frank Kermode, *The Sense of Ending* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975); Bertil Romberg, *Studies in the Narrative Technique of the First Person Novel,* trans. Michael Taylor and Harold Borland (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1962); and Eric S. Rabkin, *Narrative Suspense* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1973).
2. *On Narrative,* p. ix.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 117.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 118.
5. The text used in this study is based on Norton's edition. *Moby-Dick* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1967), edited by Harrison Hayford and Hershel Parker.
6. The text used in this study is based on the one-hundred-chapter edition of the novel published by Chung-hua shu-chü (Hong Kong, 1974). This edition is a reprint based on the "Chieh-tzu yüan edition," hereafter cited in the Notes as *CHY*. Translations of the text throughout this study are my own. For further information, see Hsin-sheng C. Kao, *Li Ju-chen* (Boston: Twayne Publishers,

1981).

7. Tzvetan Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 54-55.
8. Aristotle, "On the Art of Poetry," in *Classical Literary Criticism*, trans. T. S. Dorsch (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1975), p. 65.
9. Joseph Addison, *The Spectator*, no. 267 (Saturday, January 5, 1711-12), *Addison & Steele: Selections from the Tatler and the Spectator*, 2nd edition, edited by Robert J. Allen (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1970), p. 353.
10. Leonard Orr, "Digression and Nonsequential Interpolation," *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, vol. 9, no. 2 (Spring, 1979), p. 95. For further reference, see J. Hillis Miller, *Fiction and Repetition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982) and Alexander Gelley, *Narrative Crossings* (Baltimore & London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1987).
11. Franz Stanzal, *Narrative Situations in the Novel*, trans. James P. Pusack (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971), p. 21.
12. The exact date of the completion and publication of this novel is uncertain, and such *Ching-hua yüan* scholars and researchers as Sun Chia-hsün, Hu Shih, H. C. Chang, and others, give the work various conjectural dates stretching from 1820 to 1825. The most reliable source we have today is the statement by Li Ju-chen's brother-in-law, Hsü Kuei-lin, in which Hsü comments that the novel was probably completed around 1820.
13. For the original text, see Chuang Chou, *Chuang-tzu* (Taipei: San-min shu-chü, 1963).
14. Li Ju-chen wrote *Yin-chien* (*The System of Phonetics*) in 1805. In a pioneer study of Li Ju-chen entitled "*Ching-hua yüan* ti yin-lun" ("An Introductory Study about *Ching-hua yüan*") published in 1923, Hu Shih (1891-1962) comments upon the distinguishing characteristics and overall contribution of Li's phonetic theory for bearing the following characteristics: 1) emphasizing practical application, 2) stressing the significance of current pronunciation, and 3) having the courage to modify the ancient system of phonetics.
15. See Yu Wang-luen, "Knowledge of Mathematics and Science in *Ching-hua yüan*," *Orieus Extremus*, 21, no. 2 (1974), p. 219.
16. See Lu Hsün, *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1964), p. 317. Lu Hsün calls this type of fiction "the novels of erudition," that is, those works written by their authors "to display erudition and literary talent."
17. *CHY*, ch. 99, pp. 762-763.
18. *CHY*, ch. 23, p. 165.
19. *Ibid.* "The Miscellaneous Philosophies and the Hundred Schools" represent Chinese philosophy in general. In *Ching-hua yüan*, Li Ju-chen gives a detailed account of his philosophical visions and beliefs.
20. *CHY*, ch. 52, p. 382.
21. *CHY*, ch. 48, p. 357. This statement is both very relevant to Li Ju-chen's thematic practice and very consistent with his avowed philosophical intention; it also allows his novel to be labeled a "metaphysical novel," or "philosophical novel."
22. *CHY*, ch. 100, p. 772.
23. *CHY*, ch. 23, p. 161.
24. *CHY*, ch. 23, pp. 164-165.
25. *CHY*, ch. 31, p. 227.

26. Paul Brodtkorb, Jr., *Ishmael's White World: A Phenomenological Reading of Moby Dick* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 11.
27. *MD* (hereafter in the Notes, *Moby-Dick* will be referred to as *MD*), ch. 23, p. 97.
28. *MD*, ch. 1, pp. 12-13.
29. *MD*, ch. 58, p. 235.
30. *MD*, ch. 28, pp. 110-111.
31. *MD*, ch. 16, p. 69.
32. *MD*, ch. 134, p. 456.
33. *MD*, ch. 134, p. 459.
34. Paul Brodtkorb, Jr., p. 114. For reference, see Merlin Bowen, *The Long Encounter: Self and Experience in the Writings of Herman Melville* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1963).
35. *CHY*, ch. 100, p. 772.
36. *Li Ju-chen*, p. 121.
37. *CHY*, ch. 1, p. 2.
38. *MD*, ch. 1, p. 12.
39. William Ellerg Sedgwick, *Herman Melville: The Tragedy of Mind* (Cambridge, 1945), p. 97.
40. Newton Alvin, *Herman Melville* (New York, 1950), p. 168.
41. *MD*, ch. 41, p. 160.
42. *MD*, ch. 58, p. 235.
43. *Poetics of Prose*, p. 77 ff.
44. *CHY*, ch. 2, p. 9.