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CHASING THE LEVIATHAN:

RELIGIOUS AND PHILOSOPHIC UNCERTAINTY IN MOBY-DICK

by

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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION: RELIGIOUS AND PHILOSOPHIC UNCERTAINTY

Melville's Moby-Dick gives rise to an unusually distinct sense of the objective and subjective origins of experience. About Ahab we tend to think more of the objective conditions, the external events or root forces, that produce his tragic fate. About Ishmael we think more of the subjective elements of his characterization. Yet both figures are also developed through the antithetical term of experience. Ahab's struggle with an hostile universe is depicted through the subjective manifestations of those same harsh forces within him; and Ishmael's characterization in his role as retrospective narrator is, in a literary sense, preceded by his more denotative, dramatically defined role in the plot.

Many interpretations of Moby-Dick neglect one pole of the experiential dialectic or the other. Lawrance Thompson, for example, in Melville's Quarrel with God, focuses on what I would call the "objective" aspects. He explores Ahab's sense of conflict with the evil forces in the world, how these forces manifest themselves in Ahab, and how, inexorably, Ahab concludes there is an evil Deity responsible for the world's malevolence. As for the multiple views of man, nature, and God expressed by Ishmael, these Thompson sees as part of Melville's "flexible formula of sustained irony."[1] This formula enables Melville to "conceal from certain types of readers"—the heresy hunters—"the

fact that there is a close identity of viewpoints between Ishmael and Captain Ahab."[2] Ishmael's view is fixedly anti-Christian and entirely metaphysical in Thompson's opinion; the only explanation of evil in the world for Ishamel, as well as Ahab, is that God—not man!—is the "'Original Sinner,'" the "Author of Evil."[3]

At the other end of the spectrum of critical opinion is Paul Brodtkorb, Jr.'s Ishmael's White World. Here the universe of Moby-Dick is defined strictly in terms of Ishmael's subjectivity; that subjectivity, it is true, Brodtkorb believes can be understood from how Ishmael "sees, hears, feels, reports, judges"[4] external things; yet, in the end, because of the shifts in men's moods and the endless processes of nature, external things have no certain reality. An "indecisive ambivalence," says Brodtkorb, "in its broad spectrum of intensities, defines Ishmael's feeling for most of the things of his world"; "in fact," he adds, it "largely defines that world."[5] In other words, there are no objective premises about the world from Ishmael's point of view, no incontrovertible actions or spiritual givens. There is only whiteness, ambiguity, nothingness. Moby-Dick presents a world which finds meaning only through the aesthetic structure and strategy of its telling.

What is lacking from both of these general approaches is an appreciation of the antithetical term of experience. A work such as Brodtkorb's does not appreciate the degree to which Ishmael's conception of existence has been affected by Ahab's tragic destruction; it does not appreciate the degree to which the mental values of the narration rise out of objective evidence of the world's malice toward

man. On the other hand, a view such as Thompson's does not see the importance for Melville of the fluid and various viewpoints about man. nature, and God expressed by Ishmael, nor does it take seriously enough the naturalistic, psychological, poetical, and democratic polarity of Ishmael's thought. Melville may identify with Ahab's sense of the predominance of evil in the world, with its harsh momentum and frightening spiritual consequences, but the affirming impulses toward human fellowship, spiritual correspondence with nature, and artistic quest for truth are human values to which Melville is also committed, though his commitment unquestionably confronts him with the problematical nature of belief.

This study of Moby-Dick, then, might be said to differ from other studies in that, on grounds of aesthetic and philosophic appropriateness, it gives ample place to both the objectively definable and the subjectively elusive aspects of existence. It treats and draws together the interrelations of not only Ahab's tragedy and Ishmael's narration, but also Ishmael's "story" and the psychological implications of Ahab's portrait. I see Ahab's drama as the center of the book; the main themes grow largely out of his conflict with the hard, irreducible tragic facts of the world; from there they spread outward into Ishmael's impressionable life as a seaman and his ultimate development as the teller of the tale. I agree with Warner Berthoff that Moby-Dick, like Melville's previous novels, is not the romance of education that "now and then" it seems "on the point of becoming."[6] Though Ishmael's growth on the Pequod dovetails with his later worldliness as a narrator, Moby-Dick is not a novel of a young man's

education. Where in a more conventional novel Ishmael's personal relations and psychological development would have been fully represented, in Moby-Dick the whale, instead, is taken up as an object of inquiry. Ishmael becomes a chronicler, a naturalist, an encyclopedist, a symbolist of the whale. Metaphysical implications about the hidden nature of things, as well as the philosophic problem of knowledge itself, emerge as major concerns. And all the while Ishmael's development as a protagonist is subordinated to a long succession of expositional chapters and nonfictional goals.

Ahab is furiously certain in thought and deed, Ishmael is chipper, comprehensive, and uncertain; but behind both characters lies the same point of focus, the same axial concern—the problem of evil. What is the metaphysical explanation for the suffering of man? How is this reconcilable with a just, wise, or benevolent God? The example of Job demanding to know why the righteous suffer figures strongly in the behavior of both. But the taunts Job undergoes and submits to serve as bitter antitheses to the air of independence and free-thinking within which Ahab and Ishmael move and think. "Canst thou draw out leviathan with an hook?" God demands of Job in the Forty-first chapter of The Book of Job. He continues:

> Canst thou fill his skin with barbed irons? or his head with fish spears?
> . . . . . .
>
> Behold, the hope of him is in vain. . . .
>
> None is so fierce that they dare stir him up: who then is able to stand before me?[7]

Melville's answer? Ahab and Ishmael are.

In Moby-Dick, according to Nathalia Wright, Melville "consistently represented the 'leviathan' of Job as a whale, as it was in popular tradition though it had long been identified" otherwise by bibilical scholars.[8] Moreover, profiting from the varying associations which the biblical leviathan has had attached to it—it has been seen, at different times, as symbolizing the chaos of nature, Satan, and the inscrutable powers of God[9]—Melville was able to link the sperm whale of his story with many of the naturalistic and metaphysical connotations he wished to develop. Ahab, we are told, chases a "Job's whale round the world" which he has identified with "that intangible malignity which has been from the beginning."[10] Ishmael, too, particularly in his role as systematist of the whale, sees himself as chasing a Jobian leviathan which he associates with the foundation of God's creation. Of his plan to systematize the genus of the whale, Ishmael says:

> But it is a ponderous task. . . . To grope down into the bottom of the sea after them; to have one's hands among the unspeakable foundations, ribs, and very pelvis of the world; this is a fearful thing. What am I that I should essay to hook the nose of this leviathan! The awful tauntings in Job might well appal me. "Will he" (the leviathan) "make a covenant with thee? Behold the hope of him is vain!" But I have swam through libraries and sailed through oceans; I have had to do with whales with these visible hands; I am in earnest; and I will try. (32: 118)

An humbly cloaked Prometheanism if there ever was one! Ishmael is even unafraid to mock the august intonings of God in Job. Deriding the leviathan said to be "made without fear,"[11] he jests satirically when an huge whale disappears under the Pequod with three harpoon lines in him:

> Is this the creature of whom it was once so triumphantly said—"Canst thou fill his skin with barbed irons? or his head with fish-spears? The sword of him that layeth at him cannot hold, the spear, the dart, nor the habergeon: he esteemeth iron as straw straw. . . ." This the creature? this he? Oh! That unfulfilments

> should follow the prophets. For with the strength of a thousand thighs in his tail, Leviathan had run his head under the mountains of the sea, to hide him from the Pequod's fish-spears! (81: 300)

In blasphemous verbal jest and in defiant monologue, in comic interlude and tragic action, in naturalistic study, encyclopedic satire, and symbolist evocation the origin of evil is persistently probed and speculated upon in Moby-Dick. This pursuit of ultimate truth, moreover, has the undeniable potential of producing flaccid and histrionic results if the mood of metaphysical reproach that motivates the quest dominates the tone of the entire process. And insofar as Ahab is concerned, there is some shrillness and stiltedness, a touch of stagy hysteria as Ahab gesticulates at a mute heaven. Melville lacks detachment from his hero. Yet, on the whole, Melville's quest for the nature of reality is neither so strident nor accusatory that mere recognition of Melville's quarrel with God or listing of his heterodox suppositions will suffice as critical commentary. In Moby-Dick, we find a vastly complex and ironic world, full of multitudinous representations and equally multitudinous perspectives of life. As a result, nothing less than a complete reading of the work will be aesthetically sufficient. The evolution of the theme of religious and philosophic uncertainty is, as I hope to show, its central and guiding motive.

In Moby-Dick can be discerned two distinctly different ideas of God and nature—the Puritan concept of a hidden God, outside the created world and unknowable, and the romantic sense of a divine immanence in the natural world. J. Hillis Miller observes that most

romantic writers begin with the feeling that "all the traditional means of mediation have broken down"[12] and that they must struggle alone with language in the natural world to renew their contact with the "divine" forces of life. He says that

> . . . romanticism therefore defines the artist as the creator or discoverer of hitherto unapprehended symbols, symbols which establish a new relation, across the gap, between man and God. The artist is the man who goes out into the empty space between man and God and takes the enormous risk of attempting to create in that vacancy a new fabric of connections between man and the divine power.[13]

In the use of the whale in Moby-Dick as a central symbol of the "interlinked terrors and wonders of God" (24: 99), we recognize the type of effort that Miller is describing. Also, in Ishmael's delineation of the terrifying absence he senses at the heart of the universe as a result of Moby Dick's whiteness, we can recognize the void that plagues the romantic sensibility, which only a newly discovered relation to the divine power of nature can fill.

But Melville is not strictly a romantic, though in the variety of romantic ideas and writers lie many of the influences on his work and thought. An older, theologically more difficult view of God's relation to the world and the limits of Divine revelation also exercises a powerful influence over his imagination. In the strict Reformation thought of Calvin or that of the English Puritan rebels, man cannot, directly or indirectly, penetrate the face of the Deity or His purposes with our world. God is hidden and inscrutable and reveals himself to men only through the Word of the Bible and through the Spirit of the Son. Karl Barth, the noted theologian, explains the relation between God's inscrutableness and His revelation this way:

> The revelation attested in the Bible is the revelation of the God who according to His nature cannot be unveiled to man. Inscrutability . . . hiddenness belongs to the nature of Him who is called God in the Bible. As Creator, this God is distinct from the world, i. e. as the person He is, He does not belong to the realm of what man as a creature can know directly about God. Nor can He be unveilable to him even indirectly, in the created world, because He is the Holy One, whom to see, even to see indirectly, would require other eyes than ours. . . . Thus it is of the nature of this God to be inscrutable to man. . . . [However] it is the Deus revelatus who is the Deus absconditus, the God to whom there is no way and no bridge, of whom we could not say or have to say one single word, had He not of His own initiative met us as Deus revelatus. Only when we have grasped this as the meaning of the Bible do we take in the bearing of its pronouncement that God reveals Himself, i.e. that He has assumed a form for our benefit.[14]

Rather than one dominant world-view or the other, then, it is the yoking together, the fusion, of the inacessible, withdrawn Protestant idea of God with the romantic sense of divine immanence in nature that gives Moby-Dick such extraordinary naturalistic élan coupled with such a charged metaphysical backdrop.[15] One result of this combination of early Protestant and later romantic influences on Moby-Dick is that absolute truths about God and heavenly governance are seen simultaneously as obscured and hidden yet dimly shadowed forth, recessively present. The natural world, as a result, both begs for interpretation yet presents a ready temptation for subjective excess and spiritual error. Such a double feeling about the presence of "significance" and the danger of undue subjectivity is reflected in the passage describing Ahab's scrutiny of the gold doubloon hammered to the mast:

> . . . he seemed to be newly attracted by the strange figures and inscriptions stamped on it, as though now for the first time beginning to interpret for himself in some monomaniac way whatever significance might lurk in them. And some certain significance lurks in all things, else all things are little worth, and the round world itself but an empty cipher. . . . (99: 358)

Another consequence in Moby-Dick of this amalgam of Reformation and nineteenth-century influences is that final truths, pursued in symbols of nature, must be obtained amidst an immense variety of natural phenomena, so that metaphysical meanings abound in direct proportions to the multitudinousness of natural objects. Replacing what may have been the hierarchical importance of only certain natural facts for earlier imaginations—of, let us say, meteors, lightning, weather changes—in Moby-Dick there is a more empirical involvement in the potential significance of all facts of nature, no matter how alien, dissonant, and diverse. Thirdly, as the "highest truth" (23: 97) in Moby-Dick is always, finally, inacessible because of the diverse implications of matter and the excesses of the mind, the problem of knowledge in pure epistemological terms is also a subject of major importance.

When placed beside the heroic and comic properties of man that emerge in the process of his search for truth, the fruits of the quest, as a genuine goal, often seem less than convincing. Indeed, it may be that, in the final analysis, what really stirs Melville is not the substance of divine revelations so much as the passionate and indomitable will of man to resist a sense of nullification and to struggle for meaning at whatever cost. For Melville, the alternative to this struggle was the utter collapse of man's viability in the universe. In Ahab's determination to encounter the destructive visage of life head-on we see a tragic version of this heroic struggle for truth; in Ishmael's encyclopedic project to classify the "constituents of chaos" (32: 117) we see a comic variant. Yet in both cases it is

really the same intellectual heroism, the same Promethean necessity, which is celebrated. Melville articulates this crucial quality of mind in one of his letters to Hawthorne when he speaks of

> . . . the apprehension of the absolute condition of present things as they strike the eye of the man who fears them not, though they do their worst to him,—the man who . . . declares himself a sovereign nature (in himself) amid the powers of heaven, hell, and earth.

And he goes on:

> He may perish; but so long as he exists he insists upon treating with all Powers upon an equal basis. If any of those other Powers choose to withhold certain secrets, let them; that does not impair my sovereignty in myself; that does not make me tributary. And perhaps, after all, there is no secret.[16]

Accepting no solace from old beliefs, man must pit himself against the true facts of his existence. Even if they are entirely hostile to his peace of mind, he must face them down.

Hawthorne's entry in his English Notebooks (written when Melville visited him at the Consulate in Liverpool in 1856) is the best first-hand observation we have about Melville's religious mentality. Hawthorne writes:

> A week ago last Monday, Herman Melville came to see me at the Consulate looking much as he used to do (a little paler, and perhaps a little sadder), a rough outside coat, and with his characteristic gravity and reserve of manner. . . .
>
> He stayed with us from Tuesday till Thursday; and, on the intervening day, we took a pretty long walk together, and sat down in a hollow among sand-hills (sheltering ourselves from the high, cool wind) and smoked a cigar. Melville, as he always does, began to reason of Providence and futurity, and of everything that lies beyond the human ken, and informed me that he had "pretty much made up his mind to be annhilated"; but still he does not seem to rest in that anticipation, and, I think, will never rest until he gets hold of a definite belief. It is strange how he persists—and has persisted ever since I knew him, and probably long before—in wandering to and fro over these deserts, as dismal and monotonous as the sandhills amid which we were sitting. He can neither believe, nor be comfortable in his unbelief; and he is too honest and courageous not to try to do one or the other.[17]

It is often argued about Moby-Dick that Ishmael, once he is free of Ahab's diabolism, forgoes a metaphysical viewpoint for a naturalistic one. Wright, for example, maintains that ". . . Ishmael bypasses the whole problem of evil in human experience, which obsesses both Job and Ahab, and describes a natural world which is neither good nor bad but sheerly marvelous, or in Job's words, 'too wonderful for me.'"[18] Robert Zoellner likewise believes that Ishmael learns to live in the world "free of Ahab's version of Leviathan as deific correlate."[19] It is, however, the view that emerges in the course of this study that Ishmael's narrative viewpoint fluctuates without resolution between a theological fear of a heavenly evil as the cause for the evil in the world and a naturalistic view which sees sharks as sharks, natural force as natural force, and the demons of man's mind as the product of a largely psychological dynamic, resolvable in terms of man's relation to himself. To the very end, Ishmael remains as involved with the metaphysical problem of evil as with the creation of a "nature myth"[20] to replace a vanishing and/or repudiated God.

Though to some degree linear and progressive, life is seen as predominantly cyclical in Moby-Dick. "There is no steady unretracing progress in this life," says Ishmael; and he goes on: "we do not advance through fixed gradations, and at the last one pause. . . . But once gone through, we trace the round again; and are infants, boys, and men, and Ifs eternally" (114: 406).

The nature of Melville's relation to orthodox Christian thought, in particular to the Calvinist concepts of original sin and predestination, is also a literary question of considerable importance here,

especially when we realize the extent of Melville's use of Calvinist material in Moby-Dick. Without Calvinism Ahab's characterization would not have been possible. Melville uses Calvinism as the fiery mold out of which to cast his hero's romantic rebellion. As T. Walter Herbert, Jr. explains, he uses not only the "typical themes and motifs of Calvinist theology" (such as Calvin's view of the biblical King Ahab as an example of a reprobate) but also the nineteenth-century attacks on Calvinism "of having envisaged a God who is a brutal monster."[21]

In Melville's comments about original sin in "Hawthorne and His Mosses"—written while Moby-Dick was in progress—we find a mixture of involvement and historical detachment that appears to have been characteristic of Melville's feelings about Calvinist precepts. Speaking ostensibly of Hawthorne, he says:

> Certain it is, however, that this great power of blackness in him derives its force from its appeal to that Calvinist sense of Innate Depravity and Original Sin, from whose visitations, in some shape or other, no deeply thinking mind is always and wholly free. For, in certain moods, no man can weigh this world, without throwing in something, somehow like Original Sin, to strike the uneven balance.[22] (Stress mine.)

Freud would describe the world's weight in terms of the frustrations and conflicts of early childhood, Conrad would come to see it in his novels as a "heart of darkness" or "destructive element"; but before the advent of modern, materialist thought, "something, somehow like Original Sin" was necessary for the thinking man—for the writer and for the reader—to conceptualize for himself the predominance of suffering in man, nature, and society. Consequently, while Melville was "not a religious man in the sense of making ultimate commitments to God or Church," he felt, as Richard Chase observes, "that he must

go along with religion part way, at least to the extent of using its terminology and concepts and believing in them as an artist, prophet, and moralist. . . ."[23] Other than the fact that Melville is to have attended the Dutch Reformed Church with his mother during his childhood and teens, there is really no hard evidence of his exposure, at a formative age, to the harsh dogmas of sixteenth-century Calvinism. Yet only an obtuse reader, having completed Moby-Dick, would disagree with Newton Arvin that "Melville's mature mind is incomprehensible save partly against this dark-hued distance [of Calvinism]."[24] Within a literary context, predetermination may become transmuted to a sense of tragic inevitability or naturalistic fatalism; original sin may become "that intangible malignity that has been from the beginning" or "all truth with malice in it" (41: 160); the Deus absconditus may be symbolically reconceived as the impenetrable riddle of the whale's wall-like brow; yet the structuring influence of Calvinism is unmistakable, both in the thinking of the two main characters and in the assumptions Melville makes about the inherited attitudes of the audience to which he may appeal. Certainly it is from Calvinist pessimism that Melville draws the intellectual courage to insist, in the face of a largely optimistic and progressive era, that "the subtle demonisms of life and thought" (41: 160) shall comprise the subject matter of his book.

Melville's relation to Christian orthodoxy, then, might best be described as a strong philosophical sympathy, wherein his fundamental conviction of a "blackness, ten times black"[25] never ceases to be the axis of his thought, while the explanation of this "malignity" exists on a shifting scale of viewpoints that moves back and forth between

the metaphysical and the naturalistic. Metaphysical explanations for the existence of evil in the world abound in Moby-Dick; there are Gnostic, Manichean, Satanic, and, of course, Calvinist interpretations expressed by the characters. As for anti-metaphysical attitudes, there is one particularly prominent view that emerges. This is the obliquely implied view that the natural world may be morally neutral, neither "good" nor "evil" although man's involvement with his own well-being may, inescapably, press upon him a certain amount of abstract and generalized terminology about the nature of things. Such a direction of thought, when taken to excess, moreover, would seem to be what Ahab represents, given the high degree of personalized categorization that occurs in his outlook. In the same letter to Hawthorne quoted before, Melville displays a very disengaged, sceptical sense of religious language and labels. He says:

> But it is this Being of the matter; there lies the knot with which we choke ourselves. As soon as you say Me, a God, a Nature, so so soon you jump off from your stool and hang from the beam. Yes, that word is the hangman. Take God out of the dictionary, and you would have Him in the street.[26]

Melville's point, as I understand him, is that codified concepts of religion militate against religious experience—against the "Being of the matter." Furthermore, it is but a small extension of this idea to add that if you did not have theological labels such as "good" and "evil," then you wouldn't have the problem of explaining man's unhappiness or of reconciling it with a Deity. Indeed, the whole problem seems to arise from certain abstract, allegorizing tendencies of the mind, and to become unbearable in those individuals who are forever triangulating between their deeds, what happens to them, and

God. Yet, typical of Melville's oscillating viewpoints, this very type of intellectual habit—Melville's letter notwithstanding—is exactly the sort of metaphysical imagination we are dealing with in Moby-Dick. Natural facts are always possible symbols of spiritual facts; and the consequence of this inbred, symbolic approach to natural phenomena is that no matter how far away from Christian shores the characters may be, sunlight and darkness, calms and storms, terrors and wonders, sharks, squid, whale features, etc. are always potential expressions and symbols of cosmic forces.

The view of Moby-Dick I am propounding here is of a work that is speculative and open-ended; yet unlike the sorts of old beliefs Melville derides because they are "never bottomed on the earth" (69: 262), the sense of reality we find in Moby-Dick is never free to drift too far. The significance of things may be multiple; but the irreducible reality of human suffering is always there like a force of gravity, giving weight and focus to all speculations.

CHAPTER II. MORE ON THE CRITICAL FOCUS: MIND AND MATTER

One sometimes has the impression about Moby-Dick that Melville is as interested in the evolving consciousness of the narrator as he is in the story intended for representation. From the primary subject matter of Ishmael's and Ahab's voyage on the Pequod, there rises an additional dimension of imaginative activity whose symbolic perceptions, analogies, fancies, and far-ranging associations heighten our sense of the work to an improvised, on-going exploration—an unfinished quest whose unfolding perceptions in the "narrative present" are as important as the story-line in the "narrative past."[1] Sometimes, indeed, the presence of certain images, thoughts, and points of view articulated by Ishmael while relating the tale of his first whaling voyage seem explicable only in terms of his later maturity intruding on the story. This is not uncommon to first-person retrospective narratives, where the cumulative effect of the story defines the manner in which the protagonist relates it. Yet in Moby-Dick the effect of the final outcome seems to shape Ishmael's thoughts to such a degree that it is as if his characterization of his neophyte self is often little more than the mature narrator putting himself in the story. For example, at the close of Chapter 1, after describing the exotic and perilous nature of whaling, as well as "the overwhelming idea of the whale

himself," as the bases of his attraction to whaling, he says that "by reason of these things":

> the great flood-gates of the wonder-world swung open, and in the wild conceits that swayed me to my purpose, two and two there floated into my inmost soul, endless procession of the whale, and, midmost of them all, one grand hooded phantom, like a snow hill in the air.[2]

Access to the "wonder-world" of the imagination—not merely youthful anticipation of a first whaling voyage—is what is being described here, with the "endless procession of the whale" floating "two and two" representing the duality of good and evil that is to characterize Ishmael's view of nature. But how has he acquired this foreknowledge of a bi-polar viewpoint at the start? Similarly, there is no obvious explanation of how the neophyte Ishmael in Chapter 1 knows that Moby Dick, when he is sighted in Chapter 133, will have "a hump like a snow-hill" (133: 446). At this point in the story, he has not learned, as he will through rumor once he is aboard the Pequod, that Moby Dick has a "snow-white wrinkled forehead, and a high, pyramidal white hump" (41: 159). The best explanation for this fact and for the perhaps still larger question of how Ishmael is able to conceive of the natural world in dualistic terms from the outset (by Chapter 24 he is already alluding to "interlinked terrors and wonders of God" [24: 99]) is to realize that Moby-Dick is a work that deeply reflects the assumptions of the romantic tradition in which Imagination is viewed as preceding nature because it brings it into existence. To the romantics, without human imagination and the processes of art, nature as man knows it would not exist. ". . .we receive but what we give, / And in our life alone does Nature live," says Coleridge in "Dejection" ("Dejection: An Ode,"

47-48). In "Tintern Abbey" Wordsworth says he is a lover not only of the "green earth" but of the "mighty world/Of eye, and ear"—both what they "perceive" and what they "half-create" ("Lines," 103-07). It is the mind of man that gives order, unity, and value to an otherwise barren nature. Hence we might explain the description of the white whale at the end of Chapter 1 by saying that it is a false distinction to say Ishmael cannot know certain things until they have happened, for we are not dealing with an orthodox character with a past and present, but with a representative of the author's imaginative relationship to the story, with a symbol for what Feidelson calls the "voyaging mind."[3]

This set of assumptions, however, while not misguided as the basis for certain general observations about the romantic or symbolist attributes of Moby-Dick, is sufficiently anti-rational when applied to the full length and breadth of the work as to render it relatively fruitless as a critical premise. One cannot, after all, analyze the meaning of Ahab's story when caught up in an "epistemological merry-go-round"[4] of not knowing what things Ishmael describes about him are imagined and what are from experience. With such plastic, unlimited premises about the nature of reality, what is to stop an interpreter from claiming that Ahab's diabolical greatness is merely a figment of Ishamel's imagination? or that the white whale is really a friendly fellow blown all out of proportion by paranoid characters?

The inadequacy of this sort of approach, which Feidelson's remarks on Moby-Dick in Symbolism and American Literature[5] do much to encourage, derives from the fact that there is no established sense of what is real and of man's conflict with what is real, both of which are

intrinsic aspects of Melville's view of life. In a poem of Melville's, "The Aeolian Harp," (published in John Marr and Other Sailors in 1885, though perhaps written a good deal earlier[6]) there is a clear statement of Melville's view of the relationship between Imagination and the Real, a view which appears to have held true throughout his mature life, and which, to a considerable degree, runs counter to the romantic and transcendental view described above. Conceived, it would seem, with Coleridge's "The Eolian Harp" and Shakespeare's The Tempest in mind as poetic contrasts, this poem—like Melville's other poems, "The Berg" and "The Maldive Shark"—objectifies the inexorable and destructive aspect of life. While the other two poems use an iceberg and a shark as symbols for the alien and annhilative forces of the universe, "The Aeolian Harp" uses a derelict hull drifting night and day, "Pilotless on pathless way," "From collision never shrinking," "Fatal only to the other!/Deadlier than the sunken reef," as "Waylayingly it drifteth."[7]

The wind-harp of the title was "an instrument that functioned in the romantic imagination as proof, in a poetic sense, of an immanent benevolent deity or oversoul." Receiving and amplifying "whatever messages . . . the wind was communicating," the wind-harp pervades romantic and transcendental literature[8] as a symbol of creative process. Hence in contrast to Coleridge's use of the wind-harp in his poem and to Ariel's transformation of reality into the Ideal in The Tempest, Melville stresses in "The Aeolian Harp" that the Imagination provides a version of reality that is less ideal "than Ariel's rendering of the Real." The poem begins with two introductory stanzas that indicate a diminished capacity for transmuting the Real into the Ideal:

List the harp in window wailing
   Stirred by fitful gales from sea:
Shrieking up in mad crescendo—
   Dying down in plaintive key!

Listen: less a strain ideal
   Than Ariel's rendering of the Real.
What that Real is, let hint
   A picture stamped in memory's mint.

And, after a detailed and vivid description of the pilotless water-logged hull, the poem ends:

O, the sailors—O, the sails!
O, the lost crews never heard of!
Well the harp of Ariel wails
Thoughts that tongue can tell no word of!

Quintessential to Melville's view of reality, then, is an alien, destructive element, an element that the Imagination can scarcely grasp or express, and that cannot be transmuted into spiritually or aesthetically more plastic terms; at best, through symbolism, it can be dimly suggested. Imagination and Reality, Spirit and Matter, are to a significant extent antithetical. And it is this same intuition of a quintessential conflict between man and matter that is represented through Ahab's struggle with the white whale in Moby-Dick. Ahab's conflict, in many ways, is symbolic; it is an almost abstract representation of man's conflict with the antagonistic aspects of existence. It embodies for Melville a "rendering of the Real" in its most irreducible, concrete, and objectified terms. The meanings of his story, therefore, need to be enunciated first, and on their own distinct terms, before an analysis of Ishmael's exploration of reality is undertaken.

Another reason one should begin in Moby-Dick by getting one's footing on the plot-level rather than in Ishmael's narration is the element of indeterminancy[9] that characterizes Ishmael's viewpoint. In considering the narrator's explorations into the nature of God, good, evil, and the natural world, the reader rapidly comes up against the problem of the fluid and shifting point of view. There are probably few works of literature that have as unsettled a notion of the ultimate nature of things combined with as firm and vital a sense of physical realities. In wishing to test our intuition that Ahab's belief in the white whale's total evil is fallacious, for instance, we find little to assist us consistently toward an alternative view of Moby Dick. Some chapters would seem to corroborate Ahab's view of the whale, and other chapters, or moments in the narration, would seem to contradict it. Also, when confronted with a passage such as the one that describes the vision of Pip's terror-stricken soul, the substance of what is described—those "joyous, heartless, ever-juvenile eternities" (93: 247)—defies interpretation. The language and imagery used in depicting this prophetic glimpse into the numinous world is private, obscure, and contradictory—much like a Symbolist poem; moreover, there is no comparable vision of the "unwarped primal world" (93: 247) by which to gauge the deliberateness or the arbitrariness of the language used; nor is there similar usage or imagery elsewhere in the work by which to establish some secondary points of reference. This desire to establish some guidelines of interpretation becomes all the more apparent when we encounter a passage that makes a statement susceptible to broad application. For instance, as a paragraph that deals with the

sea's ferocity draws toward a close with the sentence "No mercy, no power but its own controls it" (58: 235), the reader is sorely tempted to hold up this clear-cut, seemingly unironic statement regarding the independence of the natural world and claim it is trustworthy enough to contribute to a general perspective concerning the relationship between God and nature. But the sophisticated reader, responding to some deep instinct, may yet demur from efforts to draw such conclusions.

The temptation is tremendous to establish for oneself a normative sense of Moby Dick, of the character of the sperm whale generally, and of God himself; and without question all searching readers would do so if they found they were able—if they were not deterred by some lurking sense of the fragmentary nature of experience in Moby-Dick; and if, in addition, the heightened perceptions this fragmentary quality prompted did not undercut the very concept of a normative, authorial point of view. The sensitive reader, confronted by a welter of differing perspectives, some deriving from characters, others expressed by Melville himself in the parts of the narrative where he speaks through Ishamel, begins to fear that there is no such thing as a "true" view of Moby Dick or of the God he is thought to mask. The reader begins to suspect, moreover, that there are no passages produced by the author that will provide this sort of orientation. On the contrary, only ingenuous statements expressing religious cliches provide such surety, and they appear to exist, as Lawrance Thompson argues, for the reader to be gulled by a comfortable optimism which the action[10] or the force of former commentary contradicts. Wisdom, in fact, seems to lead the reader in the opposite direction, away from a desire for rational

certainty and toward a recognition of Melville's conscious sense of limitation in ascertaining ultimate things. Ishmael seems to inhabit a realm of fluctuating, incomplete points of view, where perceptions of higher truth are partial and transient, moving shots at a moving object, and with the final nature of truth remaining inaccessible and indeterminant.

This sense of cognitive limits renders Moby-Dick, as I have said, a speculative work at many points; and it suggests that a reader's awareness of this important area of inconclusiveness is very much a part of a total reponse to the work. Furthermore, it makes a brief description of the characteristic interplay between mind and matter of considerable importance. Acquiring a sense of the mixture of revelation and limitation that characterizes the narration is, in many ways, to get as close as possible to the philosophic experience of the text.

Instead of the unfolding consciousness of the narrator stressed by Brodtkorb and Feidelson, we are on firmer ground if we begin by recognizing the vital, indissoluable world of things. Meaning for the Transcendentalist flowed from the ubiquitous realm of spirit, and from the union of matter with mind or spirit localized in each man. But for Melville matter was an inextricable intermediary between the mind and the higher forces of life. Should matter become dissolved in a state of spiritual transcendence, we drift slowly into a world of widening illusions and seductive dreams. Such rhapsodic experiences were not without some truth about man's capacity for spiritual harmony; what made them into something dangerous was that they tended to induce an illusion of boundless pleasure and security and to persist—at least

for the innocent individual, such as the figure in "The Mast-Head"—until life burst back with a horror.

In this chapter on Moby-Dick Newton Arvin says of Melville: "Transcendentalist though he was at the center of his mentality, Melville had too tough and too capacious a mind to fall willingly into mere vaporous and subjective idealism. He was," Arvin continues, "a romantic idealist with a passion for actuality, for precise knowledge, for facts."[11] Facts were, in many ways, the source of Melville's imaginative energy, especially the elemental facts of the sea and the far-flung lives of the men who sailed on it. Not only did the details of a whaling voyage provide a vivid and exotic picture of existence, but they were also a tonic stimulant for the deep emotions and ideas that became reflected in them symbolically. In the chapters that examine the whale's physiognomy we find an example of this use of factual material for more extensive purposes. One intention of these chapters is to enlarge our sense of the awesome powers of the whale and, by implication, of nature itself. But another of its purposes is to convey by means of "such portenousness of unconscious powers" an impression of the Deity that could have created this "mightiest animated mass that has survived the flood" (14: 62). And we observe, significantly, that it is only through extensive representation of the physical facts of the sperm whale's body that Melville is able to elaborate his intuitions about the supernal powers that could have created such a colossus. It is only through details such as the whale's featureless forehead "plaited" with strange signs (77: 286) or the "mystical" honeycomb of sperm oil behind the forehead's "dead,

impregnable, uninjurable wall" (76: 285) that Melville feels on solid enough ground to develop his symbolic climate, where every literal detail seems saturated in deific overtones.

Where facts made possible the transcendental-symbolist experience of unfolding meaning, they also resisted the mind's voracious appropriations. Facts for Melville threw down the challenge: they stated the limits of the mind and asserted the otherness, the tormenting inscrutability, of matter. Like the whale's forehead, their disdainful separateness from man embodied nothing less than the ability of the universe to obstruct and to harm him—to dash him to pieces if it pleased and leave him uncomprehending to boot. The division between man and the objective world was inescapable; it was an inherent part of human experience; and any attempt to "Live in the all"[12] at the expense of this dualism was a device to avoid the hardship, the terror, and the uncertainty that made the life of thought and action such a potentially heroic and dangerous endeavor.

When we come, therefore, to characterize Melville's mentality, we might begin with his unusual interest in technical and naturalistic fact. As Melville worked on Moby-Dick, he enlarged his imaginative grasp of his subject by immersing himself in material written about the whale and whaling. The rise of empirical methods of research and the blossoming of the natural sciences seems, along with his travels, to have brought him to a keen appreciation of the unexplored, novel areas of existence, an attitude which deeply nurtured and reinforced his restless spiritual perspective. Only through a marriage of systematic factual knowledge with his intuitive and symbol-making abilities could

his original sense of things be harnessed and artistically presented. Melville was an "intuitionalist who wished . . . not to forswear the sanctions of the intellect."[13] The discursive, analytic powers of reason were indispensable to a full vision of life.

What, then, of his view of man's intuitive powers? Melville was not a visionary. He did not believe that he had access to absolute, unmeditated truth. In Moby-Dick only Pip sees "God's foot upon the treadle of the loom" (93: 347); and Pip is insane. The mind, for Melville, can experience both moments of intuitive insight and sympathy about the mysteries of the world; and it can also experience moments when matter seems dense and impenetrable. In An Introduction to Metaphysics, Henri Bergson says that there are at base

> two profoundly different ways of knowing a thing. The first implies that we move round the object; the second that we enter into it. The first depends on the point of view at which we are placed and on the symbols by which we express ourselves. The second neither depends on a point of view nor relies on any symbol. The first kind of knowledge may be said to stop at the relative; the second . . . to attain the absolute.[14]

By this strict definition, Melville did not possess metaphysical intuitions of the absolute. His knowledge is always mediated by symbols and rooted in a character's point of view. Melville lacked confidence in transcendental truth. This lack of confidence derived from his sense of the temporary nature of transcendental insights, as well as from the contradictory "revelations" that different "transcendental" moments offered. They might feel as though they were intuitions of the absolute, but he believed they were merely relative intuitive moments, that is, intuitions spawned by one subjective mood or another. In a letter to Hawthorne that Leo Marx has rightly stressed as an important

insight of nineteenth-century thought,[15] Melville comments on the metaphysical moment of intuition. He says

> . . . there is some truth in [it]. You must often have felt it, lying on the grass on a warm summer's day. Your legs seem to send out shoots into the earth. . . . This is the all feeling. But what plays mischief with the truth is that men will insist upon the universal application of a temporary feeling or opinion.[16]

Bardianna's speech in Mardi, although having no direct relation to Moby-Dick, helps us here to understand how Melville may have thought about the nature of metaphysical intuition or, as it is called in the following passage, "reason." The ancient sage says:

> Undeniably, reason was the first revelation; and so far as it tests all the others, it has precedence over them. It comes direct to us, without suppression or interpolation; and with Oro's [God's] indisputable imprimatur. But inspiration though it be, it is not so arrogant as some think. . . . We speak not of visionaries. But if this our first revelation stops short of the uttermost, so with all the others [such as the revelations of the Bible]. If, often, it only perplexes: much more the rest. They leave much unexpounded; and disclosing new mysteries, add to the enigma.[17]

As Braswell observes in his commentary on this passage, the "reason" being described here is the intuitive reason of Plato and the metaphysical reason of Kant and Coleridge; "inspiration" is used as a synonym for it.[18] It is also similar to the Right Reason of Milton and to the divinely inspired reason of Melville's Puritan ancestors, for we are told it is the "first revelation" and has precedence over all others —a reference which Braswell believes is to the ability of reason to test even the Scriptures.[19] The source of this reason, moreover, is divine, although it "stops short" of the complete mystical powers of the visionary.

By the time this metaphysical reason has come down to Melville in 1850, however, it is, as I have suggested, no longer trustworthy. It

is in a state of crisis. The passage from Mardi, which presents a traditional view of this mental faculty, does not reflect the nineteenth-century conflict between empirical and intuitive theories of knowledge, nor does it reflect Melville's more personal psychological insights into the "mischief" variations in mood play with supposedly transcendental intuitions. When we consider metaphysical truths, therefore, with respect to Moby-Dick, the question of their validity may be said to be one of the axial concerns of the work,[20] for the mind's capacity for "divine intuitions" (85: 314) is something that Melville can neither unburden himself of nor securely accede to. In an expansive mood he may tell us that "through all the thick mists of the dim doubts in my mind, divine intuitions now and then shoot, enkindling my fog with a heavenly ray" (85: 314). But in another mood, in the most extended passage of metaphysical inquiry in Moby-Dick ("The Whiteness of the Whale"), we are presented with a vision of the "heartless voids and immensities of the universe" (42: 169)—a vision of the absence of God and, more than that, a vision that seems to throw into question the very authority of the metaphysical faculty, since God, its source, may not exist. Only in Ahab does this metaphysical faculty remain insistent, and the very inflexible power it exercises over him becomes the truest sign of his malady and limitation.

This delineation of the meeting of mind and matter in terms of the resistant nature of matter and the discursive and intuitive powers of the mind is more applicable to the expository chapters which deal with the anatomy and processing of the sperm whale. There the narrator conducts his investigation of the species in an essentially static

context, describing the various parts of a whale chained to the side of the ship with a thoroughness typical of a naturalist. For the other, narrative portions of Moby-Dick, where the story of the Pequod occurs amidst living surroundings of sea and sky, a different conception of the relations between man and world, soul and setting, is called for. The world, in these narrative portions, may be said to consist of many "modes"—a term used by Melville to describe the "impersonal stolidity" of the Pequod's weathered carpenter; a stolidity, he says, that

> . . . seemed one with the general stolidity discernible in the whole world; which while pauselessly active in uncounted modes, still eternally holds its peace, and ignores you, though you dig foundations for cathedrals. (107: 388) (Stress mine.)

A basic state of nature somewhat akin to the primary colors, these modes of nature are usually described in a manner freighted with a sense of their ability to harm or enhance the human situation. They seem to correspond, moreover, to some elemental state of nature as it is found in man, and to reflect or manifest obliquely the intentions of God toward his creation. The ferocity of the sea which we are told in the chapter, "Brit," will "insult and murder" "baby man" and "pulverize the stateliest, stiffest frigate" "for ever to the crack of doom" no matter how much he "may brag of his science and skill, and however much, in a flattering future, that science and skill may augment" (58: 235)—this ferocity, we may assume, is an example of a mode of nature. And that "sweet mystery" of the sea, lyrically evoked in the description of the Pacific "whose gently awful stirrings" are said "to speak of some hidden soul beneath" (111: 399), also embodies a mode of nature, one we recognize from other chapters such as "The

Mast-Head," "The Gilder," and "The Symphony," where the sea also exercises a redeeming or transcendental effect on the soul. The "submarine bridal-chambers and nurseries" of mammalian life discovered by Ishmael beneath his boat at the center of the vast herd of whales in "The Grand Armada" (87: 327) is clearly another mode of nature, an affirming, life-giving facet of things. And, unquestionably, the unbridled rapacity of sharks seen "wallowing in the sullen, black waters" beside the ship and "turning over on their backs as they scooped out huge globular pieces" of the captured whale presents us with still another mode of nature, one that finds its human duplicate (in the same chapter called "Stubb's Supper") in the second mate's cruel treatment of the Negro cook and its supernatural implication in the possible reality of the Devil (64: 249-50).

Gentle and mighty, benign and malicious, calm, tumultuous, these modes of nature are often seen by Melville as existing one within the other, or one concealing or undercutting the other. An "infantileness of ease undulates through a Titanism of power" in the whale's tail (86: 315); and in the sea, the "most dreaded creatures glide underwater, unapparent for the most part, and treacherously hidden beneath the loveliest tints of azure" (58: 325). The most dramatic example of this dualistic sense of nature is the depiction of the character of the "masculine" sea and "feminine" air in the opening of "The Symphony":

> It was a clear steel-blue day. The firmaments of air and sea were hardly separable in that all-pervading azure; only, the pensive air was transparently pure and soft, with a woman's look, and the robust and man-like sea heaved with long, strong, lingering swells, as Samson's chest in his sleep.
>
> Hither, and thither, on high, glided the snow-white wings of small, unspeckled birds; these were the gentle thoughts of the feminine air; but to and fro in the deeps, far down in the bottomless

> blue, rushed mighty leviathans, sword-fish, and sharks; and these were the strong, troubled, murderous thinkings of the masculine sea.
>
> But though thus contrasting within, the contrast was only in the shades and shadows without; those two seemed one; it was only the sex, as it were, that distinguished them. (132: 442)

These three paragraphs offhandedly suggest a bifurcated vision of an anima mundi or world spirit,[21] whose "thinkings" animate the phenomenal world. The same "deep, blue, bottomless soul, pervading mankind and mature" is described in "The Mast-Head" (35: 140); there, however, the "strange, half-seen" forms are mistakenly interpreted by the naive attitude of the young sailor as having no primary, physical reality, only spiritual reality; whereas in "The Symphony" the physical reality is primary. In "The Symphony, a sharp "contrast" is developed between the strong, physical, instinctive, and "masculine" promptings of life, represented by the "mighty" fish rushing "far down in the bottomless blue," and the gentle, dreamy, immaterial, and "feminine" aspects of life, represented by the flight of small birds "hither, and thither, on high." And from these psychologically pregnant characterizations of the modalities of nature, it would seem to be a further implication that in man, as life rises from its primal, instinctive depths into consciousness and becomes more spiritually and intellectually manifested, it also becomes more capricious, more various, and—turning Plato on his head—less true. The inescapable truth, what Ishamel describes as the "truth with malice in it" (41: 160), lies in the primal depths, where Ahab finds his angry power.

But human experience in Moby-Dick is composed of more than just the impersonal and elemental modes of nature. The other variable is the subjective, personal moods of men, the fractured, fluctuating realm

of human emotion and viewpoint. In Pierre, this subjective aspect of human consciousness, its oscillations, ambiguities, and troublesome self-consciousness, dominates the nature of experience. The introverted mind of the narrator submerged in the inner life of his hero defines the nature of reality, with little taken from outward, more objective forms of existence as part of its sense of things. In Moby-Dick this is not the case. The external world, with the active impersonal presence of "uncounted modes" of life, establishes a different balance between private and outward realms of experience. Outward life—dramatic and vigorous, even heroic—dominates. An embracing awe in Moby-Dick at the power of all that is greater than man and the human element in life—at nature and at the still greater forces of life immanent in nature—pervades the novel. In contrast to the moral and psychological inwardness of Pierre, Moby-Dick arises out of a mixture of a theological and a naturalistic world-view, with its sense of the ultimate nature of human experience deriving from the impersonal realms of existence common to man and nature and from the universal forces they embrace.

A brief word about the sequence of what follows: My next chapter deals with the plot and the emergent themes prior to the Pequod's departure. Chapter IV, because Ahab is the dramatic and thematic center, will then treat Ahab's tragedy in entirety, without considering it in light of Ishmael's mediating consciousness. Chapter V treats Ishmael's voyage on the Pequod and seeks to contrast it with the meanings of Ahab's story. Chapter VI completes the discussion of the plot-level

with a scrutiny of Ishmael's relationship to Queequeg and Queequeg's thematic significance in the book; Chapter VI then turns to the literary question of the origin and coherence of the narrative viewpoint—who is talking in the narration? and what are the thematic sources of the coherence between the plot and the free-wheeling narration? Chapter VII looks at the cetology material and attempts to define its function with regard to the plot, as well as its function in terms of the philosophic and comedic goals that supersede the plot. Chapter VIII, finally, treats the image of Moby Dick in the three-day chase and evaluates the symbolic implications of how the white whale is presented.

CHAPTER III. BEFORE THE VOYAGE

Prior to the embarkation of the Pequod, the development of the moral and theological inadequacies of the Christian world is at the center of Melville's thematic purpose. In the narration of these opening chapters (1-23), Ishmael's non-conformity, especially his ebullient iconoclasm, plays a major role in depicting the shortcomings of the spiritual life of the land; eventually, then, he takes leave of the despised world and enters the "open independence" of the sea, where, as "The Lee Shore" tells us, "alone resides the highest truth, shoreless, and indefinite as God."[1]

The young man we meet at the opening of Moby-Dick is given to periods of self-exile. He is a country schoolmaster turned sailor for whom the watery realm offers an occasional release from the frustrations and limitations of the land. With "little or no" money in his purse and "nothing particular" to interest him on shore (1: 12), a vagabond spirit, more than anything else, impels him. Aimless, unattached, and bedeviled by a lively philosophic streak, he strikes us as someone at loose ends spiritually as well as in his social relations, a youthful outcast both freed and made somewhat desperate by his lack of purpose. On the streets of New Bedford, we see him wander around in the cold and dark, exposed to insecurities and impressions which come only to those who have shed the protection of familiar things. A view of man as "sashless window, where the frost is on both sides" (2: 19) is quoted

from a supposed medieval source to describe how he feels; and Ishmael's elaboration on this quotation reflects reasonably well his potential for disillusionment:

> Yes, these eyes are windows, and this body of mine is the house. What a pity they didn't stop up the chinks and the crannies though, and thrust in a little lint here and there. But it's too late to make any improvements now. The universe is finished; the copestone is on, and the chips were carted off a million years ago. (2: 19)

However, despite his capacity for such discomforting intuitions, Ishmael is not formed intellectually. His hostility to the social order makes him apt to start "methodically knocking people's hats off" (1: 12) when in a state of nervous depression; and his response to social and religious hypocrisy prompts in him the most blithe, sweeping irreverence. Of the practice of being paid for work, he asks mischieviously:

> . . . what will compare with it? The urbane activity with which a man receives money is really marvelous, considering that we so earnestly believe money to be the root of all earthly ill, and that on no account can a monied man enter heaven. Ah! how cheerfully we consign ourselves to perdition! (1: 15)

Ishmael's impious and buoyant iconoclasm grows out of a deep uneasiness. Having forsaken the "bosom of the infallible Presbyterian Church" (10: 54), Ishmael is beset by fears for which he can find no solace. His mysterious compulsion to go whaling, despite his apprehension of death, leaves him the victim of unnameable terrors. Rising from the enigma of his own motivation comes uncertainty about his fate and about the forces that will shape it. And it is precisely this uncertainty and sense of exposure to the mortal dangers of existence, complemented by his youthful iconoclasm, that make Ishmael such an effective narrator. His attitudes of impatience with religious

domga and ritual on one hand, combined with his impulse to go whaling and dread at the consequences on the other, form a convincing progression between his restlessness with the social universe and his gradual confrontation with the unexamined dimensions of existence at sea.

The major element, dramatically, in this disengagement from the assumptions and beliefs of the Christian world is Ishmael's decision to try a pagan for a friend. Queequeg, despite his ebony idol, his head peddling, and his cannibal heritage, offers to Ishmael the boon of an incomparable friendship born "naturally and unbiddenly" (10: 53) of affection and trust. It is a friendship, furthermore, whose appeal grows as much out of favorable contrast with Ishmael's knowledge of human relations in the "civilized" world as it does from the brotherly guidance and protection Queequeg offers from the perils of the whaling voyage ahead. Ishmael says of the redeeming intimacies he experiences with Queequeg, alone with him in their room, with a storm "booming" outside and a warm fire within:

> I began to be sensible of strange feelings. I felt a melting in me. No more my splintered heart and maddened hand were turned against the wolfish world. This soothing savage had redeemed it. There he sat, his very indifference speaking a nature in which there lurked no civilized hypocrisies and bland deceits. Wild he was; a very sight of sights to see; yet I began to feel myself mysteriously drawn towards him. And those same things that would have repelled most others, they were the very magnets that thus drew me. I'll try a pagan friend, thought I, since Christian kindness has proved but hollow courtesy. (10: 53)

And it is, of course, from this dramatic irony—that the pagan with the cannibal past proves more pious and serene than all the Christians —that Melville is able to accomplish his playful subversion of civilized values. For Queequeg if not only more assiduous in his

religious devotions, but, as we see through a series of satiric contrasts, he is more valorous and disinterested in response to his enemies and more loyal and generous towards his friends. As the swinging of a loose boom brings consternation to the crew of the schooner on which Ishmael and Queequeg are bound for Nantucket, Queequeg alone has the self-possession to leap overboard and save the "greenhorn" whom the boom has sent flying into the sea—the same greenhorn who, moments before, had mimicked him and called him a cannibal (13: 60). With a similar sense of contrast, when Ishmael decides to "try a pagan friend," little does he imagine what unqualified loyalty awaits him. Queequeg not only returns Ishmael's gesture of friendliness with a proposed smoke of his tomahawk-pipe, a press of their foreheads, and a declaration that they are "married" (i.e., "bosom friends"), but he presents to Ishmael half his worldly possessions in silver coin—and an embalmed head! (10: 53) Finally, when Captain Bildad demands to see papers proving Queequeg is a converted Christian, Bildad offers no resistance to signing him up once he and Peleg have seen Queequeg use his harpoon. Bildad's appelation for Queequeg as a "son of darkness," moreover, seems less than apt, since Queequeg has just completed a twenty-four hour period of fasting and meditation. Nor can we forget that it is the same Bildad who preached to Queequeg, pushing a tract upon him, who later equates profit and virtue as he counsels the departing crew: "Don't whale it too much a' Lord's day, men; but don't miss a fair chance either, that's rejecting Heaven's good gifts" (22: 96). Separated by language, custom, and oceans of time, Queequeg, in his remote integrity,

is at one with the universe and unaffected by men. Enemy, friend, and castigator alike sink before his sublime self-sufficiency.

Another source of this sense of dissatisfaction with the religious beliefs and practices of the land is to be found in the narrative commentary itself. In "The Chapel," as Ishmael enters Father Mapple's church in New Bedford, he sees a small congregation of sailors, sailors' wives, and widows. "Each silent worshipper seemed purposely sitting apart from the other, as if silent grief were insular and incommunicable," and each was "steadfastly eyeing several marble tablets . . . on either side the pulpit," whose inscriptions recorded the deaths of whalemen at sea (". . . towed out of sight by a whale. . . ." "Who in the bows of his boat was killed by a Sperm Whale . . ") (7: 39-40). Ishmael does not know whether any of the people present are in fact related to the men cited in the inscriptions, but from the mournful faces he sees he feels sure that, at the least, they have known similar losses. On the eve of his own Nantucket voyage, as he looks over this solemn scene, Ishmael believes that he can sense in the mood around him the unappeased grief, the horror, even the infidel doubt that loss of a loved one in the "placeless" and soulless oblivion of the ocean has produced. "Oh! ye whose dead lie buried beneath the green grass; who standing among flowers can say—here, here lies my beloved," he laments, contemplating the worshippers,

> ye know not the desolation that broods in bosoms likes these. What bitter blanks in those black-bordered marbles which cover no ashes! What despair in those immovable inscriptions! What deadly voids and unbidden infidelities in the lines that seem to gnaw upon all Faith, and refuse ressurection to the beings who have placelessly perished without a grave. (7: 41)

Churches, tablets, prayers, faith itself—all seem insufficient before the ominous realm of the sea, symbol of a reality beyond the Christian description of things.

And in case this threnody upon unoccupied graves fails to stir in us an intimation of spiritually abysmal deaths, Melville develops the subject further. He employs a series of rhetorical questions designed to underscore the living dread which, despite all Christian assurances of an after-life, continues to trouble the believer. "Why," he asks in the fourth of eight interrogatives do "the Life Insurance Companies pay death-forfeitures upon immortals . . . how it is that we still refuse to be comforted for those who we nevertheless maintain are dwelling in unspeakable bliss; why all the living so strive to hush all the dead; wherefore but the rumor of a knocking in a tomb will terrify a whole city. All these things are not without their meanings," he asserts—the largest of which is that the power of death to distress remains the same, despite long centuries of Christian guardianship. Beneath the surface of men's lives there still lies a festering doubt, an inadmissible need.

Yet having developed this point about the powerlessness of religious doctrine with such purpose, the next sentence, in a sudden reversal, asserts: "But Faith, like a jackal, feeds among the tombs, and even from these dead doubts she gathers her most vital hope" (7: 41). Ishmael goes on then to contemplate the "death in this business of whaling" in the same affirmative tone. An ebullient Platonist all of sudden, he expresses belief in the immortality of the soul ("Methinks my body is but the lees of my better being") and reconciles

himself to a whaler's death: "Take my body . . . take it I say, it is not me." This bewildering reversal of attitudes, however, should not leave us open-mouthed or dubious about the author's control. In fact, our sense of where Melville's sympathies fall between these two points of view should probably not even come into question; what we simply must do is account for the tacked-on paragraph of affirmation at the end, for this pose of awakened conviction. A "sarcastic sop of pretended reassurance," Lawrance Thompson describes it as, suggesting that after all these too explicit "questioning and infidel remarks" Melville "wryly protects himself" from the cautious religious climate of his day. Thus Ishmael is allowed, with a hectic cheerfulness in keeping with his character, to express what amounts to a palliative for the offended reader, a "sop" for the naive, and a sarcastic mock-exercise in conventional optimism for his votaries.[2]

Ishmael's restive response to Queequeg's Ramadam also contributes to the spirit of dissatisfaction with man's subservience to religious ritual and time-honored belief. By means of a lively response on Ishmael's part to Queequeg's strange, day-long meditation, a backhanded swipe is made at the "footmanism" and folly of all religious observation. "Heaven have mercy on us all," says Ishmael "—Presbyterians and Pagans alike—for we are all somehow dreadfully cracked about the head, and sadly need mending" (17: 78). Only a superficial reading of this chapter, however, would take Queequeg's observance as the real source of irritation.

Ishmael has read about "the rise and progress of the primitive religions . . . down to the various religions of the present time"

(17: 81). He is eager to seem like an enlightened young man and professes tolerance for religions far and wide. ". . . I cherish the greatest respect towards everybody's religious obligations, never mind how comical," he assures us,

> and could not find it in my heart to undervalue even a congregation of ants worshipping a toad-stool; or those other creatures in certain parts of our earth, who with a degree of footmanism quite unprecedented in other planets, bow down before the torso of a deceased landed proprietor merely on account of the inordinate possessions yet owned and rented in his name. (17: 78)

If on the surface Ishmael expresses an equalitarianism that derives from a relativistic view of culture, there exists another level to his remarks. While Melville disapproves of the tendency of most religions to condescend to all those less favored by His Word, Melville's tongue is in his cheek here nonetheless. We are not meant to miss the barbed humor with which Ishmael elaborates on just how comical or abominable these objects of his "tolerance" are—neither the suggestion of harsh class oppression perpetuated in the name of fealty to the "deceased landed proprietor" nor the latent imbecility in the choice of ants as an example of collective worship.

As Queequeg's Ramadan continues into the night, the focus of Ishmael's ridicule seems to shift from a general horror at the blind obedience and intolerance encouraged by most religions, to a more directed attack on the worldly utilitarianism of religious observance in Melville's own day. In The Puritan Mind H. W. Schneider describes the evolution of religious thought and practice in America as a result of political and material changes. He points out that

> after the American Revolution, and certainly after the French Revolution, it was idle to build a theology in terms of sovereignty, vindictive justice, and free grace. These concepts had become socially obsolete and therefore Calvinism had no moral basis to which it could appeal.3 (Stress mine.)

Theologians claimed that the "pursuit of happiness and the exercise of benevolence were . . . not merely the secular aims of a new nation, they were embedded in the 'Scheme of God'"[4] itself. God was seen as a "benevolent governor of the cosmic system, whose aim . . . [was] the greatest good of the system," and whose glory was manifest "by his being benevolent."[5] "This profound change in theology," Schneider remarks, "was a frank, though tardy, recognition of the change in morals."[6]

Changes of this sort are perhaps explanatory of why as Queequeg's Ramadan extends into the night, Ishmael seems out of his depth. "You'll starve; you'll kill yourself, Queequeg," he cries, sounding like an anxious mother, his powers of understanding exhausted. Moreover, tha quality of the criteria he cites as he later tries to argue Queequeg out of his religion can only be taken facetiously. They sound every bit like a parody on the practical philosophy of Benjamin Franklin: ". . . I labored to show Queequeg that all these Lents, Ramadans, and prolonged ham-squattings . . . were stark nonsense; bad for the health; useless for the soul; opposed, in short, to the obvious laws of Hygiene and common sense" (17: 81). Inconvenience, physical discomfort, and spiritual distress, he goes on to explain, in the same vein, are the very anathema of religious observance:

> Now . . . I have no objection to any person's religion, be it what it may, so long as that person does not kill or insult any other person, because that other person don't believe it also. But when a man's religion becomes really frantic; when it is a positive torment to him; and, in fine, makes this earth of ours an uncomfortable inn to lodge in; then I think it high time to take that individual aside and argue the point with him. (17: 81)

(It may also strike us in passing that some of the language used to describe the dangers of religious seriousness such as "frantic" and "torment" are used to characterize Ahab, whose religious seriousness is important enough to be the main subject of Moby-Dick.)

This chapter about Queequeg's Ramadan ends neatly. Fulfilling the comic perspective to be derived from a cultural relativism, Ishmael decides that Queequeg is unresponsive to arguments against his religion because he "no doubt thought he knew a good deal more about true religion than I did." Ishmael thinks he sees on the purple-headed Queequeg's face "a sort of condescending concern" as though Queequeg "thought it a great pity that such a sensible young man should be so hopelessly lost to evangelical pagan piety" (17: 82). We have to wait until "The Quarter-Deck" for the presentation of a form of religious earnestness Melville takes more seriously.

With regard to the portion of Moby-Dick that precedes the Pequod's voyage, there is one chapter, dealing with the Christian viewpoint, that does not seem to contain the alienation we see elsewhere. This is the chapter about Father Mapple and his sermon. Most commentators seem to agree about the significance of the fact that Ishmael, eschewing his usual loquacity, listens to the sermon but offers no response. And because of this absence of narrative commentary, the question of Melville's view of the sermon and of how we are to take its themes, with respect to the rest of the work and, in particular, with respect to Ahab, is both large and problematical. Those critics who see in Melville strong anti-Christian elements acknowledge the absence of judgment in the presentation of the sermon; they then go on

to infer, however, from the point of view they find elsewhere in the work, implied criticism of a God who rules by the rod,[7] of Jonah as a model of repentence,[8] and even of Mapple, for failing to realize that his "two-stranded sermon"—preaching truth-telling on one hand and submission of the self on the other—may urge incompatible dicta.[9] Those critics, on the other hand, who see in Mapple's story of Jonah an object lesson from a strictly Christian viewpoint, face different problems. Confronted by the naturalistic universe which emerges throughout the central portion of the book, they must ignore this possibly amoral universe when they insist at the end in applying Mapple's Christianity to judge Ahab's error.[10] It is possible that in the original draft of the novel,[11] there was a more direct relationship, a crisper antithesis, between the moral of the story of Jonah and the error of Captain Ahab. But in the novel as we now have it, no easy transference of values can be made between the historically rooted sermon of Father Mapple and the shifting "modes" and sense of metaphysical indeterminacy that emerges in the rest of the novel. The early portion in New Bedford and Nantucket may be "contiguous" with the remainder of the book; but like "disjointed fragments of the same substance" these two areas are not fully "continuous with one another."[12]

Leaving aside, however, the issue of the intended function of the sermon in an earlier conception of the work, the actual function exerted by Father Mapple and his sermon in the work we now have rises directly from the flavor of the man and the traditional power of the

sermon. Oblique hits at Mapple's salted-down version of the Bible notwithstanding, he comes before us as nothing less than the high-watermark of traditional wisdom and Calvanist, American culture. He has been to sea; he speaks of a "living God"; he stands before his congregation a "greater sinner" than they; and he is supreme in his belief that "if we obey God, we must disobey ourselves." Father Mapple is the best the orthodoxy of the past has to offer—a "pilot-prophet" of "manliest humility"—and as such he is an altogether imposing figure, perhaps not entirely beyond Melville's satire, yet nevertheless able to function as a signal light, an intellectual dye marker, of the traditional Christian viewpoint from which the book is moving away with ever gathering speed. Father Mapple's function, in the end, is the highlighting of the gap between the Christian resolution of the conflict between the worldly self and the soul and the radical reassertion of the problem through Ahab.

Ahab, we are told, has "been led to think untraditionally and independently" (16: 71); his unlimited individualism has removed any basis in his life for Jonah's model of submission to God's will. "Talk not to me of blasphemy, man; I'd strike the sun if it insulted me. For could the sun do that, then could I do the other; since there is ever a sort of fair play herein . . ." he says to Starbuck (36: 144). Ahab seeks complete autonomy for the self; he seeks to make it (in the words Melville used to Hawthorne) "a sovereign nature . . . amid the powers of heaven, hell, and earth."[13] Hence Jonah's model of obedience is the very type of solution which Ahab is consciously in rebellion against; and the supremacy of the harsh, vindictive God found in Jonah's story is an example of the very sort of deific tyranny he is determined to defy.

When Mapple declares near the end of his sermon, "Delight is to him—a far, far upward, and inward delight—who against the proud gods commadores of this earth, ever stands forth his own inexorable self" (9: 51), he is not, of course, referring to the triumph of the worldly self nor to worldly delight. In the deceptive language of religious optimism (which Melville may be satirizing), he means the exclusively spiritual delight of the man "who acknowledges no law or Lord, but the Lord his God" and who can say at his death "I have striven to be Thine; more than to be this world's, or mine own" (9: 51).

Admittedly a spirit of accomodation to the realities of life re-enters our thinking when we consider the meaning of Ahab's destruction. "Religious" intuitions with various modulations of the idea of "acceptance" obviously return to us as we ponder the flaw or moral fault of Ahab's unyielding vengeance. "Pride and disobedience in . . . some dimly Christian senses" may be, as Arvin acknowledges "at the root of Ahab's wickedness." For "Ahab, like Jonah, has in a certain sense sinned through his proud refusal to obey God's will, or its equivalent."[14] But it is the absorbing questions of the equivalent of God's will in the universe of Melville's novel and the equivalent of Christian pride and disobedience in the necessities of Ahab's character which bestir our minds for definition. And whether we decide the true meaning of Ahab's error is—and I cite the alternatives considered by Arvin in his impressive assessment of Ahab's flaw[15]—whether we decide it is the need for moderation based on the Greek ideal, humility based on the teachings of Christ, cosmic piety as found in the mystic, or the fullness of life that rises from connection with

others, we have returned to the realm of acceptance of things which is at the heart of all traditional wisdom.

On Christmas day the Pequod sails. The winter ocean, the freezing spray that night, the long rows of teeth on the ship's sides glistening in the moonlight, and the large tusk-like icicles on the bows all convey the entrance of the Pequod into the chilling Atlantic--an inclement, adverse world, inlaid with imagery from primal depths. Temporarily, as he is piloting the ship, Bildad's "dismal stave of psalmody" about "Sweet fields beyond the swelling flood . . . dressed in living green" (22: 94-95) protects Ishmael from the full blast of separation and from the harsh plunge before him into the isolation of the Atlantic. "Never did those sweet words sound more sweetly" to him than "as the old craft deep dived into the green sea . . . and the winds howled" and Bildad's "steady notes were heard." "They were full of hope and fruition," with "many a pleasant haven in store"—or so it briefly seemed (22: 95). For this sense of happiness is momentary; it reflects the last lingering attachment, the final shades of emotion for what is the known, the loved, the trusted warmth of the past. As Bildad and Peleg descend into the pilot boat, ship and boat diverge and abruptly cleavage occurs:

> the cold, damp night breeze blew between; a screaming gull flew overhead; the two hulls wildly rolled; we gave three heavy-hearted cheers, and blindly plunged like fate into the lone Atlantic. (22: 97)

The outcast must face the seas.

An analysis of the opening portion of Moby-Dick quite properly concludes with "The Lee Shore" (23: 97-98), for "The Lee Shore"

announces all those voyage-connected themes toward which the earlier chapters tend. On one level an idealization of the ethic of indepenence which informs the action, on another a distillation of the philosophy of Moby-Dick's composition, "The Lee Shore" is the embodiment of the idea of art as "symbolic voyage."[16] In it all literal and imaginative levels of the idea of journeying outward toward greater reality are brought into rigorous moral and psychological focus.

The antithesis between the land and the sea provides the basic framework for the chapter. The land is associated with "safety, comfort, hearthstone . . . friends, all that's kind to our mortalities"; the sea, with risk, restlessness, adversity, adventure. Furthermore, in contrast with the "open independence" found at sea, the land also assumes certain negative characteristics in terms of intellectual values: it is typified by a spirit of mental slackness, dogmatism, by a slavishness toward tradition and what is the most comforting, not the most true.

But the richness of these antimonies of land and sea do not fully emerge until the actual conditions of life are acknowledged—until we realize that the forces fronted by the independent being are most analogous to a "gale" or some other powerful, untempered state of nature. Only when this destructive element is acknowledged, do the forces within the soul become clear. Only then do we see that the shore, the land, is the "illusion of security"[17]; and that the sea involves the incessant struggle to resist this subverting illusion, even though destruction by the sea—"that howling infinite"—is more than likely. The dangers of reality may or may not be as fearful on

the land, but they are rendered far more dangerous—psychologically, that is—by the failure to recognize them. Thus the soul must, like a ship in a gale, steer clear of all that is symbolized by the land, and seek "all the lashed sea's landlessness . . . for refuge's sake forlornly rushing into peril; her only friend her bitterest foe!" This is the "mortally intolerable truth" which Melville alludes to, the truth which prompts him to ask "is all this agony so vain?"

Feidelson provides the best paraphrase of this "truth" when he tells us that "the largest paradox of Moby-Dick, prior to any moral judgment, is the necessity of voyaging and the equal necessity of failure."[18] However, when we introduce the element of moral judgment, the choice of the open independence of the sea—of voyaging—becomes equally clear. "All deep earnest thinking" is but the product of the independent life; it rises from such a life as an inevitable consequence, while from the life of the shore arises a caution that enslaves the mind. In states of "landlessness" reside the highest truths. "Shoreless, indefinite," these truths—not to be confused with the "mortally intolerable truth" mentioned before—provide the final reason, the biggest inducement, as to why it is "better . . . to perish in that howling infinite, than be ingloriously dashed upon the lee, even if that lee were safety!"

"But as in landlessness resides the highest truth, shoreless, indefinite as God. . . ." The simile articulates a chord central to the philosophical tenor of the work. It appeals to us for the pursuit of absolute truth and assumes—perhaps rather shrewdly—a body of sentiments regarding such truth shared with its readers. It presents,

one might say, the most lofty rationale in Moby-Dick for sea-going. When we consider, however, what is this "highest truth," only a partial answer is forthcoming. Melville is alluding here to a type of truth rather than to a specific truth. He is alluding, as the simile suggests. to a truth most comparable to the religious experience of God but not necessarily confined to that. For it may also include an intuition of the hostile forces in the universe, even an intuition of their predominance or their source. But whatever the substance of these intuitions, two points can be made: truths about the ultimate nature and origin of things are to be pursued in the course of the work; secondly, the importance of these types of truth is an assumption the author wishes to establish with his readers as a necessary part of their rapport. Finally, one other implication, unobtrusively asserted in the simile, needs to be stressed. God's very existence, as well as his nature, are indefinite in Moby-Dick. They are a "shoreless" uncertainty, a mystic's domain.

CHAPTER IV. AHAB'S BRAIN-BATTERING FIGHT

Captain Ahab is a hunter of whales. For forty years, for a thousand lowerings, he has "furiously, foamingly chased his prey." Forsaking "the peaceful land" and making "war on the horrors of the deep,"[1] he has remained a combatant in a combative world. In the course of events, moreover, his conception of the universe has darkened, until it has verged on the idea of a deliberate cosmic malice. And at some point still prior to the action, in the "inflamed, distracted fury" which overtakes him in the strife of the hunt, "blindly seeking with a six inch blade to reach the fathom-deep life" of an old white bull whale, Ahab loses his leg. ". . . suddenly sweeping his sickle-shaped lower jaw beneath him," we are told, "Moby Dick . . . reaped away Ahab's leg, as a mower a blade of grass in the field." Ahab is forced to turn homeward. And it is then as "Ahab and anguish lay stretched together in one hammock, rounding in mid winter that dreary, howling Patagonian Cape" that Ahab goes mad. In the monomania that arises he transfers to the whale the blame for "not only all his bodily woes" but for "all his intellectual and spiritual exasperations." He believes the whale turned on him with "malice," perhaps with "intelligent malignity" (41: 159-160). As he contemplates his antagonist—the conflict now internalized—the white whale swims "before him as the monomanic incarnation of all those malicious agencies which some deep men feel eating in them":

> All that most maddens and torments; all that stirs up the lees of things; all truth with malice in it; all that cracks the sinews and cakes the brain; all the subtle demonisms of life and thought; all evil, to crazy Ahab, were visibly personified, and make practically assailable in Moby Dick. (41: 160)

In his unabating rage, he piles "upon the whale's white hump the sum of all the general rage and hate felt by the whole race from Adam down." His own case becomes a magnified instance of the general state of mankind, afflicted by a God who decreed the fall of man and then judged all men guilty.

While Melville never uses the words "Calvinist," "original sin," or "eternal damnation," his portrayal of Ahab's resentment against the wilful malice of the universe is shaped by his familiarity with the case traditionally made against Calvinist doctrine, and especially by the strong emotional resentment evidenced by the anti-Calvinist. T. Walter Herbert, Jr. demonstrates how Melville uses "clearly discernable elements of attack on Calvin's God" in his development of Ahab.[2] Some of the arguments of the anti-Calvinists—which Herbert shows Melville was familiar with[3]—are worth reviewing here, for they enhance our sense of the emotional and intellectual arguments implicit in Ahab's characterization. While Melville overtly does not make Ahab an unreconciled Calvinist, he does use both the model of the Calvinist reprobate foreordained to damnation and the traditional intellectual attacks on Calvinism to define the contours of Ahab's personality and thought; and in so doing, he achieves a pertinence that might not otherwise have been possible.

Calvin asserted that man fell because of God's decree (so that God "might effect that which was <u>according</u> to his <u>decreeing</u> will"[4]); and

that while man was henceforth totally and permanently corrupt because of his "evil will," God in his "infinite and incomprehensible majesty"[5] was absolutely righteous. In reaction to this belief, the opponents of Calvinism demanded to know how God could decree the fall of Adam without Himself becoming the "author of sin."[6] (This would seem to be the gist of what is on Ahab's mind when, witnessing the predatory patterns of nature, he says to Starbuck: "Look! see yon Albicore! who put it into him to chase and fang that flying-fish? Where do murderers go, man? Who's to doom, when the judge himself is dragged to the bar?" [132: 445]). Another assertion of the opponents of Calvinism which coincides with Ahab's point of view is the charge that if God knew he was going to damn man when he created him, then the creation was an act of hatred, not love.[7] and its creator was a brutal monster. Finally, there is the belief (not greatly different from Ahab's indentification with the mutiny of Satan) that the existence of a cruel and unjust God, moved by a harmful impulse toward mankind, can only lead men into terrifying and gloomy spiritual alienation; that

> if this doctrine [this conception of God and of the origin of sin] be true, at the final judgment the conscience and intelligence of the universe will and must be on the side of the condemned . . . . Heaven and hell would equally revolt at it, and all rational beings conspire to execrate the almighty monster capable of such a procedure.8

After a number of preliminary chapters at sea, Ahab calls the crew together and delivers a speech about the real purpose of the voyage. As Starbuck complains that it is "blasphemous" to seek "vengeance on a dumb brute that simply smote thee from blindest instinct," Ahab moves into an exposition of the wrenched, compelling logic of his vengeance (36: 144-45). He presents in philosophic

language what amounts to a beleaguered transcendental viewpoint, with a violent conception of visionary heroism. All "visible objects" are "pasteboard masks" to him. It is only "in the living act, the undoubted deed" that "some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth . . . its features from behind" the opaque (the "unreasoning") mask. As though inside a prison of sensory data, walled in by visible objects, man must strike through the mask by thrusting himself through the physical world. Only thus can he hope to achieve a "trans-phenomenal perception"[9] of what lies behind the phenomenal wall. And for Ahab "the white whale is that wall, shoved near." "Sometimes I think there's naught behind," he says, moving between thoughts of revenge and revelation. "But 'tis enough. He tasks me; he heaps me; I see in him outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing it. That inscrutable thing"—the designing malevolence behind the whale's walled assault—"is chiefly what I hate"; and whether the white whale is "agent" or whether the white whale is "principal"—prime mover—"I will wreak that hate upon him." Unable to submit to the "inscrutable," he will throw himself upon it and meet hate with hate; he will declare "a sort of fair play"—a "ruthless democracy"[10]—between himself and the Powers that be.

That evening watching the sunset (37: 146-147) the same loss of correspondence with the "visible objects" of the physical world, described in philosophic terms in "The Quarter-Deck," is depicted aesthetically. As Ahab watches the "color-world"[11] "yonder, by the ever-brimming goblet's rim," he sees pure sensuous pagaentry without underlying significance. An occasion for sport with language rather

than for substantive thought, he describes how "the warm waves blush like wine," "the gold brow plumbs the blue," "the diver sun—slow dived from noon,—goes down." And only then, as his "soul mounts up . . . [and] wearies with her endless hill" at nightfall, does more serious reflection occur. He recalls:

> Oh! time was, when as the sunrise nobly spurred me, so the sunset soothed. No more. This lovely light, it lights not me; all loveliness is anguish to me, since I can ne'er enjoy. Gifted with the high perception, I lack the low, enjoying power. . . . (37: 147) (Stress mine.)

Deprived of spiritual confluence with the physical world, of rising and setting in harmony with it, Ahab has only his gift of "high perception," the metaphysical faculty; the satisfaction and comfort of the "low, enjoying power" of the senses is no longer his. He lives in a world of metaphysical truths, divorced from the normal sources of nourishment around him.[12] He feels elected to a realm of designing cosmic agencies, like the American Puritan fathers of old. And like Satan setting eyes on Eden in Book IV of Paradise Lost, he feels "damned, most subtly and malignantly! damned in the midst of Paradise!" (37: 147).

Ascendant with the fall of night, Ahab sees himself linked with the "endless hill" of Christ. The darkness, of which he now imagines himself overlord, seems crowned with too heavy a burden; and it makes him think of the Iron Crown of Lombardy, believed to contain a nail from the Cross and worn at the coronation of Holy Roman Emperors.[13] Yet his partial identification with Christ, who died so that mankind could be saved,[14] yields to the antithetical image of the Deceiver. Ahab imagines that he wears a crown "bright with many a gem," and that "I, the wearer, see not its far flashings; but darkly feel that I wear that, that dazzingly confounds" (37: 147). No longer sustained by the

luminous world without, he imagines his strength and inspiration derive from the adumbrated, unnatural, and demonic powers of his tormented world within. Visions of communion with diabolical forces flow in his mind. Adrift in his hatred, with no allegiance but to his anger's felt reality, he surrenders to an imaginative identification with the forces of darkness. He even conceives his hold over the minds of the crew to be dependent on his use of dark arts and on his participation, through the Mephistophelean Fedallah, in devil-worship.

But the most decisive aspect of Ahab's identification with the destructive forces of existence is his identification with fate. Ahab taunts the gods in "Sunset": "Ye cannot swerve me, else ye swerve yourselves!" (37: 147). And in "The Chase—Second Day," as Starbuck pleads with him to give up his doomed pursuit, Ahab responds, with an allusion to predestination: "This whole act's immutably decreed. 'Twas rehearsed by thee and me a billion years before this ocean rolled. Fool! I am the Fates' lieutenant; I act under orders" (134: 459). In his dismembering clash with Moby Dick, Ahab perceives himself as having been the victim of an inexorable, and perhaps intentional, malice—of "that wall shoved near"—and he tries to transform his fate by means of a still future event in which he will play the actor, not the acted-upon The crown, at once symbolic of his Christ-like suffering, as well as his diabolical anti-self, he also imagines as emblematic of the galling grip of fate. "'Tis iron," he says, "that I know—not gold. 'Tis split, too," he adds, alluding to his divided being, "—that I feel; the jagged edge galls me so, my brain seems to beat against solid metal." And then in an interesting transference of qualities from the

iron-bound, fate-like crown to himself, he goes on: "Aye, steel skull, mine; the sort that needs no helmet in the most brain-battering fight!" (37: 147). Only an equivalent composition will suffice against an iron foe. Hence in "Ahab and The Carpenter," Ahab orders, in a similar spirit of "reckless hyperbole,"[15] an ideal man with "no heart at all, brass forehead, and about a quarter of an acre of fine brains" (108: 390). Ahab's solution to the implacable, all-destroying quality of fate is to identify himself with it, to fuse himself to it, drawing hate from hate: it is to become the protagonist of his own pursuing fate.

Ahab seeks to foreordain his own destruction in an effort to correct what are inescapable truths about himself and his past. Whether he is destroyed or destroys his destroyer is of less importance to him than that <u>his</u> will prevails. "What I've dared, I've willed; and what I've willed, I'll do!" he says in "Sunset" (37: 147). "Ahab is forever Ahab," he says elsewhere (134: 459). What is insupportable to him is the inevitability in which he feels ensnared; and still more insupportable because more implicating is the recognition of his complicity in the "inevitable" conflict in which he finds himself. Immured in a toiling life-flow of events that approximate the Calvinist reality of predestination—having for forty years reflexively made war on the deep, "more a demon than a man" (132: 443-44)—Ahab's solution to his damnation is to become a superhuman multiple of himself—to become "madness maddened" (37: 147), rage enraged. It is to turn what Herbert describes, in discussing the Calvinist reprobate, as the "impacted, reciprocating" rage felt "as an infliction of the rage and

hate of God"[16] into a superhuman fury and then, by an act will, to use this fury to transcend the "decreeing will" of God. "The prophesy was that I should be dismembered," Ahab says. (Actually, Peleg reports that the "old squaw Tisig" said that "the name would somehow prove prophetic" (16: 77)—presumably a reference to the wicked biblical King Ahab, also subjected to the prophesies of an "Elijah.") ". . . and —Aye! I lost this leg. I now prophesy that I will dismember my dismemberer. Now, then, be the prophet and the fulfiller one. That's more than ye, ye great gods, ever were" (37: 147).

"Sunset" concludes with the image of the railroad chosen to personify Ahab's purpose and the rails the path whereon his "soul is grooved to run." It is not suprising that he composes his final hyperbole for his demonic resolve from the mechanistic power, the fiery machinery, of the iron horse. He brags:

> The path to my fixed purpose is laid with iron rails, whereon my soul is grooved to run. Over unsounded gorges, through the rifled hearts of mountains, under torrents' beds, unerringly I rush! Naught's an obstacle, naught's an angle to the iron way! (37: 147)

The career of Captain Ahab is an illustration of the truth that character is destiny or fate; and when we look more closely at his characterization, something of a thesis, or at least a deepened perspective, emerges around the idea stated in "The Quarter Deck" that "foregoing things" are contained within us (36: 147). Not only Ahab's collision with Moby Dick but the material of his psychological torment imply a pre-existent psychic nightmare that has, by the logic of events, come true.

While characterization in prose romance such as Moby-Dick may be, as Richard Chase observes, "narrow" though "deep," lacking the close detailed rendering of a character in relation to his social milieu, his private life, or his past,[17] the freedom of conception and intensity of effect[18] typical of romance make possible certain "generic" or "archetypal" truths of the heart and mind.[19] And one such generic or archetypal truth of the heart is the existence in Moby-Dick of a residual conflict in Ahab, an antecedent and fundamental bias, which is, all the time, the exacerbating factor of his experience, the controlling truth of his "fate." If Ahab's plight is symbolic for Melville, as I believe it is, of the universal and inevitable conflict between man and things and man and God, then on this same nearly formulaic, ideal level Ahab's predisposition for furious struggle may be seen as "symbolic" of the exacerbating psychological reality that necessarily develops in men as part of their eternal conflict with things.

We first see these "inner necessities" (36: 145) of Ahab's being in the quarter-deck speech, when with a clear sense of menace, Ahab describes the phantasmal figure of the white whale in his mind. "He tasks me; he heaps me," he says, "I see in him outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing it" (36: 144) (Stress mine.). In the description in Chapter 41 ("Moby Dick") of the effect the "intangible malignity which has been from the beginning" has on Ahab and of how he

> did not fall down and worship it like . . . [the ancient Ophites of the east]; but deliriously transferring its idea to the abhorred white whale, he pitted himself, all mutilated, against it (41: 160)

—in this description we again see the conflict assuming a shape within him, not simply as a vivid anticipation of a future encounter, but as a relentless, interior struggle, with the "abhorred white whale" having become the mountainous antagonist against which he keeps throwing himself, "all mutilated." Finally, we also see evidence of this a priori mental reality in Ahab's use of the psychic multiple "I am madness maddened" to convey his compounded, habitual rage. Madness is man's natural state to Ahab. "In no Paradise myself," he says to the blacksmith,

> I am impatient of all misery in others that is not mad. Thou should'st go mad, blacksmith; say, why dost thou not go mad? How can'st thou endure without being mad? Do the heavens yet hate thee, that thou can'st not go mad? (113: 403)

And if it is correct to assume that by going mad Ahab means afflicted by insane rage, then "madness maddened" means rage enraged. Theologically this inescapable condition of rage may be seen as the subtle web of evil through which God "damns the reprobate by decreeing they shall hate him and thereby displays an incalcuable . . . hatred of his own."[20] Psychologically, this same condition may be viewed as a pattern of feeling and perception that conforms unconsciously to an earlier stage of life. But these two viewpoints, when held up side by side, interpenetrate. They are an excellent example of the psychological depths into which Melville was carried by his imaginative embrace of the idea of original sin; and they both point to the same thing: the existence in Ahab of an embroiling, a permanently warping, antagonism from which he cannot escape.

But it is really from our accumulated impression of Ahab that we acquire our intuition of his terrified inner sense of menace, coordinate

with his monomaniac power. There is in Ahab an unmistakably phallic dimension to the loss of his leg and to the nature of the terror he undergoes. One's intuition of the phallic nature of this threat, moreover, is all the more strengthened when Melville, wishing to reinforce the exasperations afflicting Ahab, tells us that one night before sailing from Nantucket Ahab was found "lying prone upon the ground":

> by some unknown and seemingly inexplicable, unimaginable causalty, his ivory limb having been so violently displaced, that it had stake-wise smitten, and all but pierced his groin; nor was it without extreme difficulty that the agonizing wound was entirely cured. (106: 385)

The physical details, however, are of less importance than a recognition of the persistent sense of threat and fearful frenzy abounding in Ahab; for it is this frenzy—this "characterizing" "frantic thing" (44: 175)—that becomes transformed through his obsession with revenge into a fanatical power.

In the orchestrations of Ahab's will we see that menacing power which is the obverse side of his menached psychology. In his use of hypnotic speeches, alluring symbols, rites of devil-worship to gain ascension over the minds of the crew; in his decision to strip the hunt of that "strange imaginative impiousness which naturally invested it," so that the "full terror of the voyage" could be kept in the background (46: 183); and in his scheming, methodical intention to re-encounter Moby Dick a year hence in the Season-on-the-Line and in the intervening time to occupy them with "miscellaneous hunt" and himself with the hope of a chance encounter (44: 174);—in sum, in his complete control over the crew's destiny and in his subordination of

their lives to his single-minded purpose, Ahab exercises a frightening, an archetypal power. Unapproachable and overbearing, manipulative, with recourse to dark arts and subject to dark influences, planted on an ivory leg and housing in his "compacted aged robustness" (28: 110) a passionately dangerous wish for supernatural revenge, Ahab casts the shadow of a towering paternal tyranny; he casts the spectre of an "irresistible dictatorship" (33: 129) over the minds and bodies of the crew.

Having forsaken the "eternal, living principle or soul in him" for his "one supreme purpose" (44: 175), Ahab is the Faustian immoralist, an over-reacher whose autonomous mind has carried him into ragged extremes. He believes he can generate a living purpose, a significant commentary, drawing his energies from the powers of destruction, from hate and rage and interminable reproach. But, as Richard Chase observes, "the 'nemesis of creativity' . . . has overtaken Ahab . . . . No longer can he oppose the divine Tyrant with the only weapon which can defeat Him [the human élan]; for now Ahab must play the game of the Tyrant."[21] We see this "nemesis of creativity" most poignantly symbolized on the last day of the chase. Ahab rows out to meet his adversary and the sharks, symbol of the <u>destructive element</u> from which he has drawn his power, are waiting there:

> . . . as Ahab glided over the waves the unpitying sharks accompanied him; and so pertinaciously stuck to the boat; and so continually bit at the plying oars, that the blades became jagged and crunched, and left small splinters in the sea, at almost every dip.
>
> "Heed them not! those teeth but give new rowlocks to your oars. Pull on! 'tis the better rest, the shark's jaw than the yielding water."
>
> "But at every bite, sir, the thin blades grow smaller and smaller!" (135: 465-66).

By the time the Season-on-the Line has drawn near and Ahab has given the order to head the ship toward the equatorial cruising grounds, a year, roughly, has elapsed. In terms of the progress of the novel, seventy-four chapters occur between the description of Ahab's eternal soul fleeing the "scorching contiguity" of his frantic mind in "The Chart" (44: 175) and his navigational order in "The Quadrant" (ch. 118) to head the ship for the equatorial Pacific. These chapters contain only occasional dramatic or descriptive material about Ahab: once the "internal dramatic force"[22] of Ahab's mind and purpose has been established, Melville's focus shifts to his other major subject: whaling and the physical specimen of the whale as both anatomic and symbolic phenomenon. In these largely discursive sections (held together by the narrative of a hunt or an occasional "gam") an "omnisciently exhaustive" (104: 378) interest in sperm whales is developed that complements, without fully crediting, Ahab's obsession with Moby Dick. However, these chapters also provide a necessary antithesis to Ahab's solipsistic epistemology. In contrast to his pursuit of one whale as his sole object of vengeance and source of revelation, and in contrast to his fierce insulation from the life around him, the cetelogical chapters utilize a haphazard and abundant variety of "data" for their "inquiry" into the whale; moreover, they undertake this inquiry with an imaginative susceptibility so spacious in scope, so various in intellectual viewpoint and hue of mood, that the very nature of inquiry becomes, obliquely but inevitably, an overwhelming issue and produces what one commentator describes as a "dimension of tone that means as much, finally, as the great action does."[23]

This tone, at obvious odds with Ahab's relentless and nearly toxic seriousness, implies that "the undertaking and the inquiry of the book are a vast joke" and that "only laughter can make life bearable amid such terrors."[24]

In the intervening time since the Pequod traveled the first leg of its circumnavigation of the globe, a modulation of viewpoint has occurred in Ahab. This change first becomes evident in "The Dying Whale" (ch. 116) where the strange spectacle of dying sperm whales turning sunward to expire "somehow" conveys to Ahab a "wondrousness unknown before." Entranced by the fact that "here, far water-locked . . . in these most candid and impartial seas; where to traditions no rocks furnish tablets . . . life dies sunwards full of faith," Ahab questions his own faithlessness. Yet he is quickly turned about by the observation: "but see! no sooner dead, than death whirls round the corpse, and it heads some other way." And this other way—the "dark Hindoo half of nature"—is still the "infidel" realm on which he places his self-belief—what he calls his "prouder, if a darker faith" (116: 409). Now, however, in contrast to his former perception of a completely malign universe, strong elements of a twin, sunward aspect of reality are conceded. Just how these two aspects may be reconciled though—always a problem for Ahab—is not yet clear.

The major statement in the later portion of the book of Ahab's view of God and Ahab's relation to the forces of good and evil comes in "The Candles" (ch. 119). The speech is a difficult one, full of Melville's penchant for allusions to "fiery fathers" and "sweet mothers," his transmutations of values between "light" and "dark," and

a tightly packed abstract language that sometimes leaves much to the reader between sentences. Conceivably, an argument might be made that this speech reflects no more than another transitory perspective and is of no definitive meaning. However, this concern would seem to be countered by the fact that "The Dying Whale" and "The Symphony," the one coming before this chapter and the other somewhat later, both contain relatively similar changes in Ahab. Admittance of feelings of wonder or love and a perception of "good" occur in both; so that, taken as a unit, they argue strongly that the "candles" speech to be interpreted not only for what it says, but for its relation to Ahab's earlier speeches.

When the Pequod is hit by a typhoon, Ahab refuses to let Starbuck throw the links of the lightening rods into the sea. "Let's have fair play here, though we be the weaker side," he insists, as the yard-arms grow "tipped with a pallid fire; and touched at each tri-pointed lightning-rod-end with three tapering white flames." From a Christian vantage point "each of the three tall masts . . . silently burning . . . like three gigantic wax tapers before an altar" (119: 415) portend evil for Ahab's persistence in his purpose. Even the pagan harpooners are transfixed and silenced by the "pale phosphorescence" falling over them from the masts. Yet entering the dramatic summit of his heroism, Ahab is braced by the manifestations of an angry and forewarning heaven; and in a breath of apocalyptic nihilism declares: ". . . the white flame but lights the way to the White Whale!" (119: 416). Transfigured by his vision of a superhuman defiance, he asks that the main-mast

links be given to him to hold; he wants to feel the fiery pulse against his own; and with one foot on the kneeling Fedallah, and one arm outflung in a posture of soliloquy, he delivers the following speech to the "tri-pointed trinity of flames":

> "Oh! thou clear spirit of clear fire, whom on these seas I as Persian once did worship, till in the sacramental act so burned by thee, that to this hour I bear the scar; I now know thee, thou clear spirit, and I now know that thy right worship is defiance. To neither love nor reverence wilt thou be kind; and e'en for hate thou cans't but kill; and all are killed. No fearless fool now fronts thee. I own thy speechless, placeless power; but to the last gasp of my earthquake life will dispute its unconditional, unintegral mastery in me. In the midst of the personified impersonal, a personality stands here. Though but a point at best; whencesoe'er I came; wheresoe'er I go; yet while I earthly live, the queenly personality lives in me, and feels her royal rights. But war is pain, and hate is woe. Come in thy lowest form of love, and I will kneel and kiss thee; but at thy highest, come as mere supernal power; and though thou launchest navies of full-freighted worlds, there's that in here that still remains indifferent. Oh, thou clear spirit, of thy fire thou madest me, and like a true child of fire, I breathe it back to thee." (119: 416-17)

As before in Ahab's characterization, one is struck by the absence of explicit Christian usage and yet by the presence of Christian problems or their equivalent being grappled with. In the curious matter of Ahab's proclamation that he once worshipped the "clear spirit of clear fire" "as Persian" until he was burned "in the sacramental act," we have also Ishmael's description in an earlier chapter of the same "slender . . . lividly whitish mark" running down one side of Ahab's face and neck (28: 110). Furthermore, it may be that in the "prophet" Elijah's list to Ishmael of Ahab's past mishaps and misdeeds in Chapter 19, his mention of "that thing that happened to him off Cape Horn, long ago, when he lay like dead for three days and night" (19: 87), hints at how Ahab got the scar. However, Melville has selected, as part of his effort to make Ahab a forbiddingly powerful character with a

heretical and mysterious past, to leave the origin of this scar obscure —with the one real[25] exception of Ahab's own explanation in the "candles" speech.

In the "candles" speech Ahab claims that he has worshipped fire "as Persian," that is as a Zorastrian from Persia, and that it was in so doing he obtained this scar, presumably from lightning at sea. Yet when we consider, above and beyond Meville's obvious desire to give an exotic and unwholesomely Oriental flavor to Ahab's spiritual status, that Melville may have enjoyed the allusion here to Ahab's embrace of the Manichean heresy, then this curiosity of fire-worship, from an intellectual standpoint, takes on suprising significance. Manicheism, a combination of Gnostic Christianity, Buddhism, and Zorastrianism, "took the dualism of Zorastrianism, spiritualizing the struggle between light and dark into warfare between good and evil."[26] Citing Melville's reading in Bayle[27] where he would have been exposed to a "hardly veiled bias to Manicheism," Matthiessen discusses the probable basis of Melville's attraction to the Zorastrian myth, especially to its account of the origin of the forces of darkness and evil.[28] For while Calvinists, among other Christians, claimed it was heretical to believe in the existence of an independent principle of evil, Zorastrianism saw the war between the forces of light and dark as the "motive power of the universe,"[29] with the spirit of light and fire headed by the god, Ormazd, who wills the good, and the spirit of darkness headed by his twin and antagonist, Ahriman, who wills the evil, and with whom he is in conflict throughout history. Melville's "loose remark" in Chapter 41 that "'the modern Christians ascribe one half of the worlds' to the dominion of evil" most probably, Matthiessen believes, grows out of

Melville's interest in Manicheism;[30] and Matthiessen goes on to say that there and elsewhere in Moby-Dick where Zorastrianism is depicted

> Melville may have meant to imply that, no matter how strenuously the theologians, especially the Calvinists in his own background, defended themselves from the charge of that [the Manichean] heresy by insisting that evil was allowed to exist only by Providence; nevertheless, the dark battleground of sin with which their believers were faced admitted in fact evil's partial dominion.31

One critic has constructed from the Zorastrian material an attractive thesis, whose only weak point may be an absence of a clear sense of intent on Melville's part. Charles C. Walcutt in an article, "Fire Symbolism in Moby-Dick,"[32] and in a chapter on Moby-Dick in a more recent book,[33] has suggested that if we acknowledge the Zorastrian division of the world implicit in Ahab's fire-worship and place his mishap "in the sacramental act" prior to his encounter with Moby Dick (as it would seem we must), then we have a clear line of development in Ahab's view of reality. Walcutt says:

> Ahab first worshipped fire as the destroyer of evil, in the authentic Zorastrian manner, considering it the principle of light. When doing so he was struck by lightning: fire burned him. The burning was the counterpart of his being maimed by Moby Dick, although we must assume that it happened before his fated encounter with the Whale . . . and that the latter spurred him on from disillusion to indignation and madness.34

Ahab, in other words, went from a view of the world as a divided battle-ground and of himself as a "believer in good-menaced-by-evil to the desperate conviction that evil lay at the heart of reality."[35] The crisis of belief precipitated by his being burned climaxed with the loss of his leg; henceforth he saw the world as completely malign and menacing; and this is where we find him when the action of the novel opens.

In the "candles" speech, consequently, we have still another stage in Ahab's development. No longer is he a "hater," at odds with the universe, and blindly seeking to destroy the "unknown but still reasoning thing" that has wounded him.[36] No longer is he the "fearless fool" of the quarter-deck speech who says,"I'd strike the sun if it insulted me." Now he concedes the "speechless, placeless power" of what he calls the "clear spirit of clear fire"—his mode of address in the speech for the Deity. He even expresses a willingness if God comes in his "lowest form of love" to "kneel and kiss thee." But if God comes at his "highest" as "mere supernal power," then he cannot worship him. There is no reason to: since God is kind to "neither love nor reverence" and his response to both is the same—human mortality—Ahab may as well assert his "mortal sovereignty in the face of an immortal sovereignty."[37] Too much himself to accept the traditional preachment of self-blame and repentance when visited by suffering, he may as well "dispute" God's "unconditional, unintegral mastery"[38] in himself. He will come back at things with a self-reliant credo: "In the midst of the personified impersonal, a personality stands here." Man is the measure of good,[39] and though God "launchest navies of full-freighted worlds, there's that in . . . [him] that still remains indifferent."

Ahab—to use Melville's words from his letter to Hawthorne—is a man who says "No! in thunder," and who "insists upon treating with all Powers upon an equal basis."[40] He may perceive, as he could not before, that there is something beyond him, something in terms of scope and potency greater than himself. But his relation to this higher power is dictated by a guiding perception of their relative commonality.

For if there is good and evil in man and the world, there is good and evil in God's sphere. "Oh, thou clear spirit, of thy fire thou madest me . . ." he asserts, drawn still deeper into heresy by the belief that God himself is overshadowed by some vaster malevolence. "Light though thou be," he says in the speech's second paragraph," thou leapest out of darkness" (119: 417). Neither abject worship nor utter repudiation are therefore appropriate. Man shares and reflects God's imbalance. The "right worship" of God—one which restores man's spiritual lineage to its troubled source—is a sort of devoted "defiance": "Oh . . . thou madest me, and like a true child of fire, I breathe it back to thee." While there may be consanguinity between man and God, there is also, invariably, as the only basis of man's dignity, pride nurtured in hate.

Yet why is it that Ahab cannot profit from his emotional growth and insight? Why does he have to go on to his destruction if he sees God's own plausible limitation? The answer would seem to lie in the fact that, despite his sympathetic awareness, his feeling about the existence of evil predomimates and supersedes the power of his insight to free him. The spirit of opposition with the malevolent world is "the necessity of what he has found to be the nature of being";[41] indeed, without the opposition, without the firey breath of man in response, there could be no integrity, no Ahab. In its totality, Moby-Dick is a tragic interpretation of a life, not a romantic study of a character who is able to develop according to his evolving consciousness of self. Moby-Dick at base stresses the inevitability with which character translates into fate and the fixed conditions,

not chance occurrences, by which an individual life is governed.[42] Consequently, what we have described thus far is the delineation of the fixed conditions out of which the tragic action stems. Ahab's tragic fate has been taut within him like a drawn bow all along; and what remains is the movement toward the inevitable final action.

The one real pause occurs in "The Symphony." In the long speech to Starbuck, a lament over the toil and separation from the human satisfactions in his life,[43] Ahab briefly relents. Although "formed for noble tragedies" (16: 71) and supposedly having his "humanities" (16: 77), Ahab, in fact, has thus far revealed little of himself but his impulse for revenge. Yet as a result of his hour of hesitation in "The Symphony," many of the mechanical and rather inhuman aspects of his characterization are offset. In one speech, with its wrenching vision of the ample, affectionate life "by the green land" and "by the bright hearth-stone" (132: 444), Ahab's inadequacies as a protagonist are diminished, and the humanistic, Promethean claims made for him at the end as a "sky-hawk" who steals "a living part of heaven" (135: 469) are enhanced a critical degree.

"The Symphony" shares many continuities with the symbolic material glimpsed in "The Grand Armada," a chapter which serves as something of a watershed for the vision of the harmonious possibilities of existence in Moby-Dick. Ishmael's and Queequeg's whaleboat in "The Grand Armada" is drawn into the center of vast herds of circling whales; among the cows and the calves, in a lake-like calm, "far beneath this wondrous world upon the surface," they see "the forms of the nursing mothers" "suspended in those watery vaults" (87: 325). And in "The Symphony"

Ahab sees reflected through Starbuck a related vision of the emotional basis of existence he has denied. "Stand close to me," he tells the first mate, "let me look into a human eye; it is better than to gaze into sea or sky; better than to gaze upon God. By the green land; by the bright hearth-stone! this is the magic glass, man; I see my wife and child in thine eye" (132: 444). When they lower for Moby Dick, Starbuck is instructed to stay on board. But the most revealing portion of this speech, descending like a plumb-line into the sources of Ahab's social, psychological, and aesthetic alienation, occurs earlier as Ahab laments his "forty years of privation . . . and storm-time . . . on the pitiless sea":

> Aye and yes, Starbuck, out of those forty years I have not spent three ashore. When I think of this life I have led; the desolation of solitude it has been; the masoned, walled-town of a Captain's exclusiveness, which admits but small entrance to any sympathy from the green country without--oh, weariness! heaviness! Guinea-coast slavery of solitary command! (132: 443)

Receptivity to the part of life we associate with connectedness, with being a child and being a parent, with the emotions, the appetites, the senses—all this is implied by "the green country," to which, we are told, Ahab, in his narrowly constricted world, can admit "but small entrance," And it is not suprising—in fact, on a psychological level it makes sense—that it is the "step-mother world" of sea, air, and sky "so long cruel" that on this mild lyrical morning throws "affectionate arms round his stubborn neck" and does "seem to joyously sob over him" (132: 443). As the wee tear drop from Ahab's heart admits, the need for nurture never completely ends.

But let us listen to Leo Marx whose interest in the motifs of pastoral verdure and industrial machinery in this passage and elsewhere in Moby-Dick has yielded a valuable perspective:

> To a remarkable degree . . . [Ahab's] obsessions are traceable to his vocation. As he describes it, his life stands forth as a pathological instance of the traits nutured by a society obsessed with accumulation, competitive performance, and power. Ahab's mind has been formed by the chase . . . Earlier, on the quarter-deck, he had described the whale as a wall shoved near; and now, speaking to Starbuck, he pictures himself as a lifelong prisoner within the "'walled-town of a Captain's exclusiveness, which admits but small entrance to any sympathy from the green country without . . .'" Here, drawing together the pastoral imagery developed by Ishmael, Melville imparts an astonishing range of implications to Ahab's elegy. Estrangement from greenness is symptomatic at once of a collective and an individual illness.44

As Starbuck urges his Captain to turn the ship to Nantucket, Ahab, at first, seems responsive. He joins in the fantasy about "such mild blue days, even as this, in Nantucket," about their wives and children waiting (132: 444). But abruptly his glance is averted. "What is it?" he asks,

> what nameless, inscrutable, unearthly thing is it; what cozening, hidden lord and master, and cruel, remorseless emperor commands me; that against all natural lovings and longings, I so keep pushing, and crowding, and jamming myself on all the time; recklessly making me ready to do what in my own proper, natural heart I durst not so much as dare? Is Ahab, Ahab? Is it I, God, or who, that lifts this arm? (132: 444-45)

Ahab cannot understand what drives him on. What is the source of his absolutism? He may be driven by obscure inner warfares; he may, by the nature of his career, have been rendered "pathological" by the time the action of the book opens; but the compulsion he experiences to wrest from life secrets of universal significance also implies a different specie of motivation: the extraordinary imperatives of the mind to discover truth. In discussing Melville's heroes, William

Ellery Sedgwick describes "the tragic necessities the human mind is under, out of its own deepest nature, to apprehend 'the absolute condition of present things,' regardless of the desolation that it invariably brings."[45] And it is this heroic level of motivation that must take its place among insights of a less ennobling nature to complete an analysis of Ahab.

That night the presence of whales is suspected; and the next morning Moby Dick is sighted. The three-day chase that ensues has an unabating fanatic intensity to it. Boats and men, Ahab's ivory leg, even the Parsee, Fedallah, are lost—heedlessly expended by Ahab as he labors in vain to destroy the white whale. On the third day—a brief and fitting reversal—Ahab is momentarily by-passed as Moby Dick is drawn to the larger foe,of the ship. And as the rammed Pequod sinks, and her captain watches his "death-glorious" ship go down, he makes his final speech to his everlasting enemy: "Towards thee I roll, thou all-destroying but unconquering whale; to the last I grapple with thee; from hell's heart I stab at thee; for hate's sake I spit my last breath at thee." Accursed and fulfilled by the hempen bond of fate, he cries, "Let me then tow to pieces, while still chasing thee, though tied to thee, thou damned whale[Thus, I give up the spear! (135: 468).

CHAPTER V. ISHMAEL'S VOYAGE

In the first chapter of Moby-Dick a number of points are made about Ishmael's desire to go to sea and about sea-going generally. Ishmael, as the book begins, is in the midst of a chronic sort of depression. He feels "grim about the mouth." "A damp, drizzly November"[1] plagues his soul. His "hypos," furthermore, have a decidedly suicidal cast, so that he is drawn to coffin warehouses, to the rear of funerals, and to "stepping into the street and methodically knocking people's hats off." But before his tenseness or morbid obsession with death carries him too far, he resorts to going to sea. "With a philosophical flourish Cato throws himself upon his sword," he says; "I quietly take to ship" (1: 12). There, his suicidal cravings will be realized or the sea will drive off his spleen and set him right.

Yet Ishmael is not all despondence and death-thoughts. He is alive to the sea as a place of discovery—to the fact that "meditation and water are wedded for ever." ". . . almost all men in their degree, some time or other, cherish very nearly the same feelings towards the ocean with me," he says. For this reason, he believes, all men must consider "the meaning of that story of Narcissus, who because he could not grasp the tormenting, mild image he saw in the fountain, plunged into it and was drowned." We all see "that same image . . . in all rivers and oceans," he adds—the image not only of our physical selves but of our mental reality. Beneath the beguiling mirror on the surface lies unfolding depth between self and world, bottomless reflection.

Moreover, that image is none other than "the image of the ungraspable phantom of life." It is the challenge the mind throws up to the adversary power of life, and "this is the key to it all" (1: 12-14).

The whale looms large, phantom-like, even before the voyage. Ishmael's chief motive in going whaling, he says, is "the overwhelming idea of the great whale himself." His imagination is stirred by "such a portentous and mysterious monster" and by "the wild and distant seas where he rolled his island bulk." In extending the boundaries of the known, he hopes to educate himself in what is fearful. "Not ignoring what is good," he says, "I am quick to perceive a horror, and could still be social with it—would they [the horrors] let me—since it is but well"—he adds wryly—"to be on friendly terms with all the inmates of the place one lodges in" (1: 16).

Going to sea, then, is Ishmael's attempt to acknowledge the horrors and perils of existence, to flee (in the language of "The Lee Shore") the "jeopardy" of the "slavish shore" and seek the "open independence" of his soul. It is his way of yielding to his deepest fears without succumbing to the land-locked solutions of tradition and orthodoxy, his way of confronting his hypos alone. And as with the demi-god Bulkington, for whom "all deep, earnest thinking is but the intrepid effort of the soul to keep the open independence of her sea" (23: 97), for Ishmael, too, the elemental struggle of <u>being</u> is the only earnest mode of <u>thinking</u>. In his self-educated originality, he sees no choice but to surrender to the phantasmal depths and hope to "come out"[2] at a better place.

In Chapter III of this study, we saw that even before the voyage, anticipation of the ocean stirred the acids of skepticism in Ishmael.

Neither benevolent, nor perceivably governed, the untamed chaos of the sea appeared to conform not at all to Christian postulates about God or the world. Christian assurances of an after-life seemed an insufficient bulwark for the strains of doubt. In the Whaling Chapel, the empty tombstones—"bitter blanks"—opened up in him a core of frightening intuitions about the vast waste of the sea and the real nature of death. Spiritual voids and infidel thoughts, yawned before him, too horrible to allow. Yet it is a necessity of Ishmael's nature to acknowledge fears and doubts that most cannot; and as the voyage begins, we watch him continue to confront this inescapable core of intuitions, and on a scale made all the more frightening through first-hand experience.[3] In "The First Lowering," Ishmael's fear about there being "death in this business of whaling" (7: 41) promptly proves true, as Starbuck puts his boat on the back of a whale in the midst of a squall. And as they regain the whaleboat, Ishmael's sense of man's abandonment in the universe, first sensed in "The Chapel," is also underscored:

> In vain we hailed the other boats; as well roar to the live coals down the chimney of a flaming furnace as hail those boats in that storm. Meanwhile the driving scud, rack, and mist, grew darker with the shadows of night; no sign of the ship could be seen . . . . Starbuck contrived to ignite the lamp in the lantern; then stretching it on a waif pole, handed it to Queequeg as the standard-bearer of this forlorn hope. There, then, he sat, holding up that imbecile candle in the heart of that almighty forlornness. There, then, he sat, the sign and symbol of a man without faith, hopelessly holding up hope in the midst of despair. (48: 194-95)

Finally, in the series of chapters that follow "Stubb Kills a Whale" (chs. 62-66), the wolfishness of society, translated at sea to the sharkishness[4] of man and nature, is apparent all around. Evident in Stubb's cruel treatment of the black cook, Fleece, alluded to in the

analogy between the feeding sharks and sea-war between nations (64: 249), this frightening manifestation of nature is most concretely embodied in the "wondrous voracity" (66: 256) of the sharks themselves. "Around a dead sperm whale, moored by night to a whale-ship at sea," says Ishmael, the sight is such that you are apt to "suspend your decision about the propriety of devil-worship, and the expediency of conciliating the devil" (64: 250). "Peering over the side you could just see them . . . wallowing in the sullen, black waters, and turning over on their backs as they scooped out huge globular pieces of the whale of the bigness of a human head" (64: 249).

Yet while Ishmael is alive to fearful possibilities and infidel conceptions of God and the universe, he lives primarily in a world of process, not of formulated viewpoint. At the center of his consciousness lies his fear of the "transcendent horrors" (42: 164) implied by the idea of whiteness in Moby Dick; but Ishmael, nevertheless, is on sociable terms with the sun-lit world of the mast-head and the possibilities of spiritual oneness with the rolling watery pastures of the sea. In fact, the point about Ishmael is that his consciousness is a keyboard of possibilities, fluid, shifting, by turns haunted and eagerly responsive to the world of nature and fellowship. And related to this absorption in the full spectrum of life of Ismael's passivity. Even following his ratification of Ahab's wild purpose with the rest of the crew, his relation to life is one of pliant immersion in his surroundings, at best imaginative involvement not active quest. He likens himself to a "skiff in tow of a seventy-four"; and then adds, suggesting a mixture of sensuous laxity and unconscious dread: "For

one, I gave myself up to the abandonment of the time and the place; but while yet all arush to encounter the whale, could see naught in that brute but the deadliest ill" (41: 163).

Ishmael is not empowered, within the conception of the book, to successively formulate and actively pursue the spectral apparitions of his soul. In terms of the hierarchical order on the ship, Ishmael is no more than a common seaman, subservient to Ahab's authority and, for that matter, the authority of the first and second officers as well. And in terms of the different fictional modes of heroism that occur in Moby-Dick paralleling these actualities of rank, Ishmael is a hero of what Northrop Frye describes as the "low mimetic mode, of most comedy and of realistic fiction." He is "superior neither to other men nor to his environment . . . [he] is one of us" and "we respond to a sense of his common humanity."[5] Ahab, on the other hand, is a hero typical of the "high mimetic mode, of most epic and tragedy." Formed from a more refined set of human probabilities, he is, within Frye's categories, "superior in degree to other men . . . [he] is a leader. He has authority, passions, and powers of expression far greater than ours, but what he does is subject both to social criticism and to the order of nature."[6]

To cite these underlying mimetic "postulates" about Ahab's and Ishmael's "power of action"[7] is another way of observing why Ishmael's role in the plot diminishes and Ahab's grows. Ahab, in his rebellion against the heavens, in his vengeance without regard for the crew, supersedes Ishmael as a literary subject. And as a result of the dominance and the dramatic requirements of Ahab's tragic story with its

"royal" locus on the quarter-deck, the importance of Ishmael wanes. While his story is not over, it has been displaced:

> I, Ishmael, was one of the crew; my shouts had gone up with the rest; my oath had been welded with theirs; and stronger I shouted, and more did I hammer and clinch my oath, because of the dread in my soul. A wild, mystical, sympathetical feeling was in me; Ahab's quenchless feud seemed mine. (41: 155)

Thus does Ishmael return at the start of Chapter 41, after Ahab has triumphed over the moral will of the mates and they have drunk apostatically to the death of Moby Dick—as "one of the crew." In his reduced status and profile, moreover, it is only in terms of his "wild, mystical, sympathetical feeling" for Ahab that we may say he continues to figure in the main plot about Ahab. Largely in terms of a subliminal level of imaginative activity, with Ahab active in his mind as a sort of magnificent alter-ego or tragic double, may we say Ishmael's energies are presented as continuing to center around Ahab's hunt. Melville prepares us for this deep level of identification with Ahab by revealing, even before the voyage, Ishmael's reaction to Peleg's description of the moody Captain. Ishmael had not yet set eyes on him; yet he says he felt a "certain wild vagueness of painfulness concerning him. . . . a sympathy and a sorrow. . . . a strange awe" (16: 77), as though the very idea of pride to the point of wickedness gripped Ishmael in places foreign to his understanding. Following the one lengthy exposition of what Moby Dick means to Ishmael in "The Whiteness of the Whale," his involvement with Ahab goes underground, until it is picked up many chapters later in "The Try-Works," where Ishmael's compliance with Ahab ends.

In that one major exception, where Ishmael's, not Ahab's, views of Moby Dick are given, Ishmael's explorations assume cosmic proportions; the White Whale, a god of myth, presses forth ultimate truths. If for Ahab the Whale represents the inscrutable, seemingly intentional malice of the universe, for Ishmael his whiteness represents an elusive horror about the world which strikes panic in his soul, and is only worsened by the "accumulated associations" of whiteness "with whatever is sweet, and honorable, and sublime" (42: 164). ". . . when divorced from more kindly associations," moreover, "and coupled with any object terrible in itself," this elusive quality heightens that "terror to the furthest bounds" (42: 164); so that whiteness while "at once the most meaning symbol of spiritual things . . . the very veil of the Christian's Deity . . . [is] the intensifying agent in the things most appalling. . . ." (42: 169).

In "the supernaturalism of this hue" (42: 166), two spectral realities are most prominently shadowed forth about the nature of the world. The first is the impression that there is a noumenal void[8] at the heart of reality, an emptiness gleaned in three different ways: from the "indefiniteness" of whiteness which opens up in man a feeling of "the heartless voids and immensities of the universe"; from the ambiguity of whiteness which, "in essence," "is not so much a color as the visible absence of color, and at the same time the concrete of all colors," so that it whispers of "blankness, full of meaning"; and from the "white shroud" of nothingness that can be deduced from the theory of the "natural philosophers," who say that we know nothing about actual "substances," and that the envelope of color which we see is "laid on from without" by light; while light itself, "operating without

medium [air] upon matter, would touch all objects, even tulips and roses, with its own blank tinge" (42: 169-70).

But the other major specter shadowed forth by whiteness is even more terrifying. For if empirical approaches to knowledge suggest to Ishmael that he is a traveler in a palsied world, the intuitions of Idealism speak of demonic vibrations. Defending himself from the charge of having succumbed to morbid fears, Ishmael gives the example of the Vermont colt frightened, without any basis in experience, by a bison robe shaken before him. In such an example, he says

> . . . thou beholdest even in a dumb brute, the instinct of the knowledge of the demonism in the world. Though thousands of miles from Oregon, still when he smells that savage musk, the rending, goring bison herds are as present as to the deserted wild foal of the prairies, which this instant they may be trampling into dust. (42: 169) (Stress mine.)

In himself Ishmael senses the same instinct: ". . . the muffled rollings of a milky sea; the bleak rustlings of the festooned frosts of mountains; the desolate shiftings of the windrowed snows of prairies; all these, to Ishmael, are as the shaking of that buffoalo robe to the frightened colt!" Neither he nor the foal know "where lie the nameless things of which the mystic sign gives forth such hints," yet for both "somewhere those things must exist. Though in many of its aspects this visible world seems formed in love, the invisible spheres were formed in fright" (42: 169). (Stress mine.) In other words, although the "aesthetic coherence of the world" almost persuades us of the benignity of the cosmos,[9] the masterless demonic energies we sense everywhere point us in a different direction.

Blake, in his poem "The Tyger," also contemplates the problem of the coherence of the universe formed in love and fright, when he asks

the tiger, "Did he who made the Lamb make thee?" And Blake's answer is yes: the fearful symmetries of the tiger and the gentle love of the Lamb arise from one divine vision. For Melville, however, the question is answered negatively. Again and again, he cannot tally the terrible energies of mind, nature, or society with the Christian idea of God. While "The Whiteness of the Whale" goes no farther in explaining the reason for these "inevitable spheres formed in fright," there are two causes, it would appear, that Melville was entertaining—one, the possibility of a limited Deity, ever exposed to the inroads of an "evil" greater than Himself; and, two, the absence of God altogether.[10]

When Ishmael says at the end of "The Whiteness of the Whale" ". . . of all these things the Albino whale was the symbol. Wonder ye then at the fiery hunt?" we might answer no, since one can hardly hate and join in to destroy a God that has disappeared or a demonism manifested everywhere. But we must remember that Ishmael has, in fact, stepped back from the full landscape of his fears, and entered Ahab's world of a defined and incarnate Antagonist.

On a strictly social and psychological plane, Ishmael's oath is, in Erich Fromm's phrase, an "escape from freedom," a surrendering on the part of democratic man to the powerful imperatives of a tyrannical individualist, and to anonymity in the mob. Hence the logic, again, of the dramatic predominance of the "high mimetic" heroism of Ahab and the near-dissolution of Ishmael's story and mental values in the narrative. But Ishmael, it must be stressed, never completely vanishes. In yielding to Ahab's purpose and to the premise that Moby Dick is God's agent or a cosmic principle which must be hunted down, Ishmael

is yielding to certain solutions to problems too deep for him to answer. How far should one go with anger and despair about human suffering? How much independence from traditional beliefs should the true thinker aspire to? What relationship should men find with the demonic aggressions within themselves? Questions like these vex Ishmael from the beginning of the book, and in his "wild" and "sympathetical" incorporation of Ahab into his own psyche, extreme solutions to these problems are tested.

In "The Try-Works" Ishmael's involvement with Ahab ultimately produces an infernal vision of the Pequod as an embodiment of her captain's soul; and as a result of a nightmare-like experience while at the helm, he grows aware of his abdication of selfhood and the danger posed by Ahab's unchecked inversion of values.

As they begin boiling down, "trying out," the whale blubber in huge metal try-pots, the flame-lit ship assumes a diabolical and protean life:

> . . . the Tartarean shapes of the pagan harpooneers. . . . with huge pronged poles . . . pitched hissing masses of blubber into the scalding pots, or stirred up the fires beneath, till the snaky flames darted, curling, out of the doors to catch them by the feet. The smoke rolled away in sullen heaps. To every pitch of the ship there was a pitch of the boiling oil, which seemed all eagerness to leap into their faces. . . . the watch . . . [looked] into the red heat of the fire, till their eyes felt scorched in their heads. Their tawny features, now all begrimed with smoke and sweat, their matted beards, and the contrasting barbaric brilliancy of their teeth, all these were strangely revealed in the capricious emblazonings of the works. . . . as to and fro . . . the harpooners wildly gesticulated with their huge pronged forks and dippers; as the wind howled on, and the sea leaped, and the ship groaned and dived . . . then the rushing Pequod, freighted with savages, and laden with fire, and burning a corpse, and plunging into the blackness of darkness, seemed the material counterpart of her monomaniac commander's soul. (96: 353-54)

"So seemed it to me, as I stood at her helm," says Ishmael, "and for long hours silently guided the way of this fire-ship on the sea. Wrapped, for that interval, in darkness myself, I but the better saw the redness, the madness, the ghastliness of others" (96: 354).

But "the continual sight of the fiend shapes" before him at last begets "kindred visions" in his own soul. Yielding to an "unaccountable drowsiness" which comes over him at the midnight helm, Ishmael almost loses control of the ship. In a moment of horrible disorientation, wakened from a brief sleep, he sees no binnacle lamp, no compass or card before him, only jet gloom broken by flashes of red. He experiences the "stark, bewildered feeling, as of death" that "whatever swift, rushing thing" he stood on was "not so much bound to any haven ahead as rushing from all havens astern." Significantly, in his sleep, he had turned around and was facing the ship's stern, with his back to the prow and the tiller "inverted"[11] by his side. He faces back "just in time to prevent the vessel from flying up into the wind, and very probably capsizing her. How glad and how grateful," he adds "the relief from this unnatural hallucination of the night, and the fatal contingency of being brought by the lee!" (96: 354).

This relief, of course, comes not just from righting the ship, but, on a plane of allegory, from righting the unmanned conditions of Ishmael's soul, until now ceded to Ahab's vengeance. The apostrophe that ensues signifies an awakening from the spiritual debility just dramatized:

> Look not too long in the face of the fire, O man! Never dream with thy hand on the helm! Turn not thy back to the compass; accept the first hint of the hitching tiller; believe not the artificial fire, when its redness makes all things look ghastly. (96: 354)

While at first in darkness himself, Ishmael was simply better able to see "the redness, the madness, the ghastliness of others"; then, however, proximity became influence. Infiltrating his soul, the redness of the artificial fire made all things ghastly and unnatural. The effect of diabolism, symbolized by his loss of the helm, involves the severance of his link with reality. Life rushes not forward, but backward, away from itself, "as of death." Since Ishmael is powerless to escape the thralldom of Ahab's ship, perhaps he may be said, at this point, simply to recognize the disease inherent in Ahab's extreme inversions, simply to register the violations of spirit and nature. We, however, as readers, are expected to begin to measure Ahab's diabolism against the spiritual consequences on someone more like ourselves, and through the moral consciousness of this "other" hero to construct a more balanced standpoint beyond Ahab.

It is at this point R. W. B. Lewis' s often-quoted observation about Melville's art and mind is most revealing. He says that for Melville "truth was double—that it was dialectical and contained, so far as any poet could utter it, in a tension."[12] "Moby-Dick," he says, "is an elaborate pattern of countercommentaries, the supreme instance of the dialectical novel—a novel," he would have it, "of tension without resolution."[13] Ishmael's capacity for harmony with nature, men, and spirit counterbalances and defines the possibilities of existence eclipsed by Ahab. The contrasts between the two are the backbone of the literary design. The mystic moments in "The Mast-Head" (ch. 35), however youthful and naïve, have to be taken together with

the hardened, disillusioned realities about Ahab presented in "The Quarter-Deck" (ch. 36) before either can be viewed in a proper light. For each, in a sense, is half the whole truth; and together they involve a progression toward or, at least, a commentary about that wholeness.

For this reason, then, "The Try-Works" (ch. 96), which darkly illuminates Ahab's moral universe, must be examined "in a tension" with "A Squeeze of the Hand" (ch. 94), its sister chapter, in order that the doubleness of truth may be sorted through, may be weighed and balanced against the rest of the work, and the dialectical resolution—if there is one—found.

In that sister chapter, when Ishmael is assigned duty squeezing the lumps out of the cooling sperm oil, he finds it is "such a clearer! such a sweetner! such a softener! such a delicious mollifier!" that for a time he forgets "all about our horrible oath." ". . . in that inexpressible sperm," Ishmael says

> I washed my hands and my heart of it; I almost began to credit the old Paracelsan superstition that sperm is of rare virtue in allaying the heat of anger: while bathing in that bath, I felt divinely free from ill-will, or petulance, or malice, of any sort whatsoever. (94: 348)

From the extraordinary events of "Cisterns and Buckets," where Tashtego nearly drowns in the whale's case and Queequeg "delivers" him from "Plato's honey head" (78: 290), the sperm oil is already associated with transcendental states of mind. But in "A Squeeze of the Hand," which seems to bubble with all the emotive richness closed off by Ahab, sperm oil becomes an agent of the desire for physical oneness, of the wish for brotherly love and democratic rapture no less erotic than

any passage in Whitman. "Squeeze! squeeze! squeeze!" cries Ishmael:

> . . . I squeezed that sperm till I myself almost melted into it; I squeezed that sperm till a strange sort of insanity came over me; and I found myself unwittingly squeezing my co-laborer's hands in it, mistaking their hands for the gentle globules. Such an abounding, affectionate, friendly, loving feeling did this avocation beget; that at last I was continually squeezing their hands, and looking up into their eyes sentimentally; as much as to say,—Oh! my dear fellow beings, why should we longer cherish any social acerbities, or know the slightest ill-humor or envy! Come; let us squeeze hands all round; nay, let us all squeeze ourselves into each other; let us squeeze ourselves universally into the very milk and sperm of kindness. (94: 348-49)

This unabashed declaration of homo-erotic love as a basis for social cohesion (the antithesis of Ahab's detestation of "mortal inter-indebtedness" [108: 392]) culminates finally in a benign and pastoral vision of an "attainable felicity" in which man has been released from the despotic energies of the mind. Admittedly a vision of lowered expectation (when Ishmael is not squeezing sperm, the malice of experience returns), it speaks of a preference for the heart not the head, creature comforts not the restlessness of the imagination, social stability not the titanic eruptions of the self. From the vantage of experience, Ishmael says:

> Would that I could keep squeezing that sperm for ever! For now, since by many prolonged, repeated experiences, I have perceived that in all cases man must eventually lower, or at least shift, his conceit of attainable felicity; not placing it anywhere in the intellect or fancy; but in the wife, the heart, the bed, the table, the saddle, the fire-side, the country. . . . (94: 349)

To note that this is less a synthesis than a slackening of dialectical tension, however, should help give the lie to this seductive eddy of benevolence. The ideal of a Roderick Random ensconced with his Narcissa in the country has little bearing on the possibilities

within which the work is conceived. The resolutions of pastoral romance or of neo-classical integration into the social order are both outside the scheme of things for Ishmael, who is the essence of the outsider, not the ostracized heir. Ishmael wants to be on social terms with the horrors of life, not the adjacent property. "To produce a mighty book, you must choose a mighty theme," Melville has him tell us elsewhere. "No great and enduring volume can ever be written on the flea, though many there may be who have tried it" (104: 379), he adds.

Another of these heroic declarations in Moby-Dick that illustrates the true temper of the narrative persona is: "For unless you own the whale, you are but a provincial and sentimentalist in Truth. But clear Truth is thing for salamander giants only to encounter. . . ." (76: 285-86). This reference to "salamander giants"—men, that is, who can live in fire struggling with Truth—takes us to the very heart of the Promethean position which comprises the dialectical antithesis of the views articulated in "A Squeeze of the Hand." In "The Try-Works" Ishmael sees clear Truth about himself and Ahab by living with Ahab in the fires of human tribulation. He sees the redness and madness of others, only to find himself drawn into the same vertiginous sphere. The soliloquy which completes "The Try-Works," moreover, in contrast to the wisdom after "prolonged, repeated experience" in "A Squeeze of the Hand," is far more consistent with the assessment of life in the work as a whole. While the "artificial fire" may be at fault in making all things ghastly, the natural light of day—"the glorious, golden, glad sun"—in fact reveals a continent of darkness within the cheer:

> . . . the sun hides not Virginia's Dismal Swamp, nor Rome's accursed Campagna, nor wide Sahara, nor all the millions of miles of deserts and of griefs beneath the moon. The sun hides not the ocean, which is the dark side of this earth, and which is two thirds of this earth. So, therefore, that mortal man who hath more of joy than sorrow in him, that mortal man cannot be true—not true, or underdeveloped. (96: 354-55)

The "clear truth" that Ishmael grasps, therefore, is not so very different from Ahab's truth about "the clear spirit of clear fire" in "The Candles" (119: 416-17). Ahab believed he was purified by fire to see the impure and compromised truth of God. "There is some unsuffusing thing beyond thee, thou clear spirit, to whom all thy eternity is but time, all thy creativeness mechanical, "Ahab says. "Through thee, thy flaming self, my scorched eyes do dimly see it." And Ishmael, somewhat abandoning Ahab's metaphysics about evil for a more naturalistic description of terrestrial pain, nevertheless finds the world two-thirds grief—such depth of woe that "the righteous man" who Proverbs says "wisely considereth the house of the wicked" stands in danger of being led "out of the way of understanding."[14] He concludes consequently: "Give not thyself up . . . to the fire, lest it invert thee, deaden thee; as for the time it did me. There is a wisdom that is woe; but there is a woe that is madness" (96: 355)—a woe like Ahab's.

Without question, it is the affections of the heart that save Ishmael from giving himself to the fire irrevocably. However, we miss the meaning of "The Try-Works," if we fail to recognize that it is the creative power within the anger and pain, which, when brought into equilibrium with something humanistic, enables him to rise above Ahab's impasse and give birth to the "Catskill eagle," the native tragic

artist that lies "in some souls." Prophesied by Melville in "Hawthorne and His Mosses," and heralded here in the triumphal resolution of "The Try-Works" soliloquy, that tragic spirit of genius (for which Ahab is the prototype) is best evidenced in Ishmael's narration of Moby-Dick, where we see he "can alike dive down into the blackest gorges, and soar out of them again and become invisible in the sunny spaces"; where we see him transvalue depths into humane heights, so that "even if he for ever flies within the mountains" and "in his lowest swoop" he is still higher than the birds that soar "upon the plain" (96: 355).

Melville's view of creativity included, to some degree, the idea of Promethean suffering, even a diabolical taint. Artistic genesis, true development, ambition for the "high hushed world" (24: 101)—all of the deep and powerful achievements of life—involved for Melville the smoke-filled meanings of the metaphor of the trying-out of the blubber. As the whale must burn and be consumed in his own smoke in order to render oil, so must man—symbol-maker, spiritual apprentice, and mature tragic artist—"inhale" and "live in" the horrible "smoke" of the pit (96: 353). The same holds true for civilization itself, whose contradictory moral life is well represented by the fishery. Says Melville of an old blind bull whale mercilessly hunted down by the Pequod:

> . . . he must die the death and be murdered, in order to light the gay bridals and other merry-makings of men, and also to illuminate the solemn churches that preach unconditional inoffensiveness by all to all. (81: 301)

Through transgression comes the light we live by.[15]

As R. W. B. Lewis observes, "At some stage or other, Melville felt, art had to keep an appointment with wickedness. He believed with Hawthorne that, in order to achieve moral maturity, the individual had to engage evil and suffer the consequences. . . ."[16] The journey of the moral and psychological imagination to realize its own sources of strength is a journey into the forces of darkness, into the protean and destructive energies of the mind. To ". . . strengthen Man with his own mind" says Byron in "Prometheus (line 38) the hero not only rebels but sins against the order of the heavens. (This ode, along with Manfred and Cain, were a shaping influence on Melville's thinking about Ahab.)[17] He may act out of "sympathy for and participation in human suffering," but the relief he brings involves the "impious drive of his will" and a glorification of human aspiration that is not without its criminal pride.[18] Symbolized in the myth by the theft of the fire, this linking, this tension, between the gift and the impiety produce Ahab's satanism: they lead directly to glorying in a greatness bound, inextricably, to the destruction of innocents. Thus, while as a symbol "To Mortals of their fate and force" ("Prometheus," line 46) Ahab is triumphant, as a man and leader he is a "defiant defeat."[19]

Wherein, then, does Ishmael's correction of Ahab's Prometheanism lie? At what point does Ishmael, the humanist, balance Ahab's heroic severities? Byron's error, according to Blake in "The Ghost of Abel," "is to have insisted that the Imagination necessarily participates in the diabolical, so that the poet must be exile, outcast, and finally criminal."[20] And to some extent the essence of Ishmael's achievement and commentary on Ahab may be found in this criticism of Byron.

Because of Ishmael's greater openness to the natural world, because of his anti-heroic tendencies, and his intimate friendship with Queequeg, the "sense of radical sin" and the "vicious circularity"[21] of Ahab's experience do not entrap Ishmael. If as character and narrator he is vexed by the problem of evil—which implies a religious frame of reference throughout!—he is nevertheless far more free of conventional moral thinking, more, as Blake would have it, the real Man, Imagination. But the point is, the difference between Ahab and Ishmael never grows absolute. Melville's (and Ishmael's) "ideal" of the developed man—someone "fitted to sit down on tomb-stones, and break the green damp mould with unfathomably wondrous Solomon" (96: 355)—is not someone liberated from the burden of fallen consciousness. The Adamic transparence of the Beginning is never really recovered: the mist may clear some but the veil of appearance always throws one back upon the rhythm of one's fears. In Moby-Dick there is no indication of Ishmael escaping the circularity of experience. On the contrary, in "The Gilder," we are told (scotching, one would think, any ideas of an ultimate breakthrough): "There is no steady unretracing progress in this life; we do not advance through fixed gradations, and at the last one pause...." (114: 406).

Ishmael's achievement is trickier, and more complicated. It lies not only in a humanist counterstance to Ahab, but in the nature of his consciousness which has accepted its own terms of knowing and being. Ishmael arrives at a consciousness in the end, which, in Keats' phrase, is able to be "in uncertainties . . . without any irritable reaching" after identity or static truth;[22] and so which, on the central problems

like God, is able to be "neither believer nor infidel" but a "man who regards them both with equal eye" (85: 314).

Ishmael's freedom from contending value and viewpoint, his release from the compulsions of will, spell a deepened area of inwardness, a realm of being free from the circumstantial; they spell an opening into "the wonder-world" (1: 16) of the imagination. Where Ahab embodies the exhaustion of thought, experience, and civilization—its own worst enemy!—Ishmael rerepresents an organic and meliorative set of values that emerges from the life of the mind itself: values of process, spontaneity, detachment, unheroicness, flow; values whose power of renewal and vision the heroic can never safely eschew.

As a dialectical counter-term to Ahab, then, Ishmael is clear enough. In contrast to Ahab's hypercivilized state, Ishmael's being grows out of a partial submission to the clear depths of the mind itself. It should also be pointed out that Ishmael, in the course of the plot, never fully integrates his organic mentality with the Ahabian impulse toward heroic assertion. It is only from the qualities of mind he reveals as a retrospective writer that we may infer that a final synthesis takes place.

CHAPTER VI. QUEEQUEG; AND THE PROBLEM OF THE NARRATIVE VIEWPOINT

The range of critical opinion concerning Ishmael's role as character, narrator, and locus of meaning in Moby-Dick is broad and varied. It extends from the belief that Ishmael has no function in the plot,[1] to the belief that it is his story, not Ahab's, at the center of the book;[2] and from the notion that the work's meaning is to be found strictly in the narrative past of the story-time,[3] to the belief that the meaning lies largely in the narrative present, in the subjective process of narration.[4] The last chapter considered the slender thread of Ishmael's story; while not placing him at the book's center, it was an argument for the perception of that continuity. This chapter completes that argument by examining Queequeg and his relation to Ishmael; then it turns to the thorny problem of the coherence of narrative point of view.

I

The pivotal factor enabling Ishmael to balance the equation between Ahab's diabolism and his own more naturalistic and humane potential is Queequeg. Portrayed with consistency and realism in the chapters set in New Bedford and Nantucket, Queequeg, with Ishmael, drifts to the periphery of the work later on, making only occasional

appearances in places such as "The Mat-Maker" (ch. 47), "The Monkey-Rope" (ch. 72), "Cisterns and Buckets" (ch. 78), "The Doubloon" (ch. 99), "Queequeg in his Coffin" (ch. 110), as well as in the hunt scenes. Yet mid-book his closeness and influence on Ishmael persist, though somewhat behind the scenes. Ismael is Queequeg's bowsman; they work side by side; and we are reminded now and again of that same "bosom" friendship between them, with the same "marital" overtones playfully initiated at the Spouter Inn. Although their relationship has been reduced to a more impersonal, mythic formality in places like "The Mat-Maker" and has been used, on these occasions, as a vehicle for other lines of thematic development, Queequeg's beneficial personal value for Ishmael would seem to be confirmed—indeed mutely celebrated —by the end. For the life-bouy that was once Queequeg's coffin, bursting to the surface from the center of the spinning vortex, keeps Ishmael afloat once the Pequod has gone down. It is Queequeg's legacy. Conspiring with the "cunning spring"[5] of fate, the coffin life-bouy enables Ishmael to partake of the loving savage's "immortal health" (110: 395), and to make the same translation of death into rebirth as is implicit in its symbolism.

Queequeg's function in Moby-Dick is twofold. On a thematic level, he occupies an important place in the "countercommentary" between the main characters: his natural, pagan condition of being, while historically and culturally inaccessible to the Western protagonists, nevertheless discredits the efficacy of Western spiritual orientations. Self-sufficient, without ruling passion, filling the man-eating void of the universe (Ishmael's demonic whiteness) with his own cannibalism and

courage, Queequeg is an exemplar of a mortal intrepidness, a natural benevolence, a religious piety, and a spiritual transcendence that diminish and comically comment on both protagonists' obsession with accounting for evil and solving cosmic mysteries. Tatooed from head to toe with "a complete theory of the heavens and the earth" and "a mystical treatise on the art of attaining truth" (110: 399), Queequeg's body is emblematic of the fact that he lives within the "uncounted modes" (107: 388) of nature, "whose mysteries not even [he] . . . could read, though his own live heart beat against them" (110: 399). Queequeg lives immersed in the totality of existence, in the sharkishness and the gentleness of natural things, and he enacts all parts "carelessly," unthinkingly" (47: 185), with a noble indifference to his fate. And while not offering a model that Ishmael may duplicate, the indisputable potency of his position in the cosmos does imply that even for Western individuals a religious response along the lines of what Arvin calls a "naturalistic theism"[6] or "cosmic piety"[7] would be more attuned to life than their own swollen presumptions.

Queequeg's spiritual peace is such that even when he catches a fever and is near death, his eyes, "like circles on water, which, as they grow fainter, expand," are said to seem as if they were "rounding and rounding, like rings of Eternity" (110: 395)—in contrast, it may be, to the contracting circles which close over Ahab's ship. "An awe that cannot be named would steal over you as you sat by the side of this waning savage," says Ishmael

> and saw as strange things in his face, as any beheld who were by-standers when Zoraster died. . . . no dying Chaldee or Greek had higher and holier thoughts than those, whose mysterious shades you saw creeping over the face of poor Queequeg, as he quietly lay in his swaying hammock, and the rolling sea seemed gently rocking him to his final rest, and the ocean's invisible flood-tide lifted him higher and higher towards his destined heaven. (110: 395-96)

We have had some evidence already of Queequeg's hold on the continuity of life and death. In Nantucket during his Ramadan, he was able to remain in a living stasis of meditative trance seemingly indefinitely. Now, however, "that immortal health in him which could not die, or be weakened" (110: 395) creates an altogether noble pathos; it becomes the final proof, the fruition, of his "wisdom," and reminiscent of the death of Socrates. So, when he rallies and claims it was because he had "recalled a little duty ashore, which he was leaving undone," Socrates' last words may well echo in our minds as having been done one better. For "it was Queequeg's conceit that, if a man made up his mind to live, mere sickness could not kill him: nothing but a whale, or a gale, or some violent, ungovernable unintelligent destroyer of that sort" (110: 398).

In addition to his thematic function in the book, Queequeg's other major role is to serve a psychological helpmate to Ishmael. In "A Bosom Friend" (ch. 10), Ishmael indicates, once he and Queequeg have begun to relax with one another, how the "wolfish world" has driven him into a corner; and how, also, he finds that his new savage friend produces a "melting" in him that relieves him of conflict: "No more my splintered heart and maddened hand were turned against the wolfish world. This soothing savage had redeemed it" (10:53). And this pattern on Ishmael's part, of finding release and openness to life through his trust and intimacy with the pagan harpooner, is at the heart of the psychological deliverance that Queequeg effects. Clearly, the wolfishness of society and sharkishness of nature—elements in what Ishmael describes above as "the violent, ungovernable, unintelligent" forces of

the world—do not vanish with a change in viewpoint; yet a change of viewpoint can affect one's ideas about these forces; and such a shift from an inwardly and outwardly conflicted struggle to an unAhabian impulse toward integration is essential to the transformation Ishmael undergoes.

Paradoxically, then, the "soothing savage" provides Ishamel with the basis to civilize the savage forces of mind and world. And while, of course, there is a rich irony in the fact that it is the savage who does the redeeming, there is an altogether serious assertion of positive value between them. Beneath the marital parody shimmers an engrossing depth of psychological transaction. Leslie Fiedler has written persuasively of the "redemptive love of man and man"[8] between them and has seen fit, moreover, to insist that

> it will not do to sentimentalize or Christianize Melville's pagan concept of love. It is not caritas, which he celebrates; and his symbol for the redeeming passion is Priapus rather than the cross.[9]

Yet I would argue that, rather than an insinuation of homosexuality, what enables Ishmael to free himself from conflict is the opportunity he finds with the pagan harpooner to integrate what he fears; and that it is his secure and feminine involvement with the savagery of existence, identified and literally embodied in the cannibal Queequeg, which constitutes the "redeeming" element in their relationship. Through the parodic characterization of Ishamel as adoring wife, in particular when Queequeg embarks on one of his dangerous duties or courageous feats, we are reminded of the observant, the receptive, the lovingly absorbed role Ishmael has adopted vis-à-vis the adversary and irrational world. In "The Mat-Maker," though there is no literal

danger, Queequeg is, in fact, associated symbolically not only with the masculine principle while Ishmael is more tenderly cast as "attendant or page of Queequeg"; but Queequeg is ultimately identified with the brusque, impulsive power of "chance" itself (47: 185), with the very "violent, ungovernable, unintelligent" forces of life that Ishmael is trying to come to terms with.

Although there may be some disagreement about the exact psychic mechanism involved, there ought not be much question that, as the coffin engraved with "grotesque figures and drawings" (110: 399) from Queegueg's tattooed body is reported in the Epilogue to have risen to the surface, the "immortal health" of Ishmael's cannibal friend is what assists him over the omnivorous void of sharks and death. This is the reason, I suppose, that as one commentator has remarked: "The dramatic use of the coffin at the end of the novel . . . presents to the reader a symbol . . . which needs no further elaboration because psychologically it satisfies his aesthetic sense of completeness. . . ."[10]

II

That there is disagreement about the extent of Ishmael's role as character and narrator, and about the meaning he generates, is not surprising. For while the convention of a first-person narrative does provide sufficient coherence and momentum for the reader to come away with an impression of unity, closer study unquestionably brings one up against the fact that the cetology chapters do not contribute or refer us to the development of Ishmael either in the plot or as a conventional retrospective narrator. In the broad belt of whaling chapters extending

from Chapter 55 to 105, although Ishmael is still "ostensibly"[11] the narrator, the philosophic interests and lines of development exceed our idea of Ishamel's character and take him beyond the role we foresaw as narrator of Ahab's tragedy and his own peripheral involvement. Other imperatives and priorities, philosophically related to but not rooted in the story, begin to prevail, and press "Ishmael" into the forefront, now as the narrator whose experience, curiosity, originality, and high-spirited showmanship become "the chief formal precipitant of interest and of significance."[12] To appreciate just how greatly Melville departs from the strict use of the retrospective first-person narrative, one has only to review (with Warner Berthoff) some of the uses Melville puts it to—uses which are usually reserved, if at all in the novel, for the autonomy of a third-person viewpoint. Moving above the story and "around it, as well as through it, in relative freedom,"[13] Melville is able to achieve a "casual digressiveness," an "exploratory looseness," and an "easy freedom of inclusion"[14] usually associated with essayistic third-person narratives such as Tom Jones. Yet by doing so under the guise of first-person speaker, he is able to retain all the advantages classically associated with a speaker who has lived through the action—the "mimetic freshness," "colloquial muscle," "quick urgency of personal testimony," and the "insinuating authority of the truly sincere."[15] With one foot in the action and the other in the narrative present, such a narrator can expiate at length on the technical aspects of the whale's physiognomy and then point to them in a whale carcass hoisted on the Pequod's deck.

Yet between the worldly development of the narrator and the unfinished development of Ishmael the seaman (who claims the whale-ship as his Yale and Harvard) there is a large, problematic gap. Understandably, the fictional illusion of Ishmael the seaman generating Ishmael the narrator, and their common identity being the source of everything said in the work, breaks down for many readers, or, at least, flags seriously. Critics give an indication of this lapse when, in formalistic terms, they observe that Ishamel describes things that he could not have been privy to; or when they assert that the ascendance of the dramatic mode of presentation in the last thirty chapters and, in the final hunt, of a third-person narrative obviates the ability to say anything precise about where Ishmael winds up: he is neither in the plot nor in the narrative.[16] One might even complain that the assumption of Ishmael the seaman becoming the narrator taxes our credibility unduly: he may have been shown to have great powers of sympathetic imagination, but we know Melville's metaphysical genius is what is really being presented in places places such as "The Whiteness of the Whale," not merely Ishmael's viewpoint.

Yet this, like the other criticisms mentioned above, is finally besides the point. A literary convention if used with aplomb and confidence—not self-consciousness or apology—may give a writer the basis to hope that his artistic enthusiasm, his creative bravura, will enable him to bridge certain gaps, transcend certain areas, of improbability or formal irregularity. Art, after all, is persuasion; and there are no hard and fast rules to the art of persuasion; in the case of the novel, there are only mimetic strategies which succeed or fail.[17] And

while asserting that Melville's handling of the narrative convention succeeds is not in itself a proof of the fact, I believe the illusion of a first-person narrative does hold up sufficiently for a coherent reading to take place, and for demonstrable reasons, not only for the fact that I believe it works.

Ishmael, as we observed in the previous chapter, changes in the course of the story, he makes a choice in "The Try-Works" that brings him closer to his true potential; and this change, combined with what he learns from Ahab's tragedy, may be shown to have clear and basic continuities with the matured consciousness of the narrative personae. Coherence in Moby-Dick is the product of the unity between the type of experience Ishmael undergoes and the narrator's acute and tautened worldliness.

Fully realized in the opening chapters, a survivor at the end, Ishmael cannot be devalued in the middle to the status of a disembodied voice[18] or a narrative vehicle which has served its purpose once Melville has been taken to the center of the action.[19] While he unquestionably undergoes gross transformations—changing from quester to observer, from individual to type—his function in the plot and in the final meaning is embodied objectively in "The Try-Works," in his relations with Queequeg, and in his survival. Though no longer a full-bodied character developed and revealed consistently through plot-line, he becomes, in the middle of the book, an everyman, a "democratic everyman" as Berthoff puts it more precisely.[20] He is like you and I—Frye's low mimetic hero—with a moral constitution, a plebian wholeness, and a creative resource which Ahab, in his diseased greatness, has negated.

And his role as mythic everyman is to provide, as I have tried to show, a moral and psychological litmus test for Ahab's diabolical greatness. Measuring Ahab by criteria common to all men, Ishmael represents the democratic and humanist vistas, the cycle of renewal, beyond Ahab's autocratic pessimism.

Linking plot and narrator are a number of recurrent themes which serve as bonds, stitches in the seam, between Ishmael's experience and the narrator's later consciousness. One of them is the phonomenon of the "universal thump" mentioned in the first chapter:

> What of it, if some old hunks of a sea-captain orders me to get a broom and sweep down the decks? What does that indignity amount to, weighed, I mean, in the scales of the New Testament? . . . . Who ain't a slave? Tell me that. Well, then, however the old sea-captains may order me about—however they may thump and punch me about, I have the satisfaction of knowing that it is all right; that everybody else is one way or other served in much the same way—either in a physical or metaphysical point of view, that is; and so the universal thump is passed around, and all hands should rub each other's shoulderblades, and be content. (1: 15)

While presented as if part of Ishmael's moral insight from the outset, it is hard to read this passage without feeling that it actually represents the fruition of experience garnered at the end. In addition to the idea of a thump or "blow"[21] directly related to Ahab's traumatic crippling, the stress on the relative scale of things, the allusion to the metaphysical point of view, plus the rejection of the heroic in favor of collective quietism, all speak of the wisdom of the survivor.

Another causal link between plot and narrative is the theme of "the ungraspable phantom of life," called, in the first chapter, "the key to it all"—the theme, that is, of Narcissus and the incipient dangers of the subjective phantom-quest. As though the hazards of a solipsistic viewpoint were already something under his belt, something

experienced, crystalized, formulated, Ishmael speaks about mid-way through the book of the "tormented chase of that demon phantom that, some time or other, swims before all human hearts." Offering the following soliloquy in response to Ahab's orders, "Up helm! Keep her off round the world" he laments:

> Round the world! There is much in that sound to inspire proud feelings; but whereto does all that circumnavigation conduct. Only through numberless perils to the very point whence we started. . . .
>
> Were this world an endless plain, and by sailing eastward we could for ever reach new distances, and discover sights more sweet and strange than any Cyclades or Islands of King Solomon, then there were promise in the voyage. But in pursuit of those far mysteries we dream of, or in tormented chase of that demon phantom that, some time or other, swims before all human hearts, while chasing such over this round globe, they either lead us on in barren mazes or midway leave us whelmed. (52: 204)

It is noteworthy, however, that while Melville has placed this concept of the mental phantom at the center of the work's view of human aspiration, drama, and defeat, Ahab himself is not lead on in "barren mazes" or "midway whelmed": a cut above other men, he achieves the encounter with objective reality, the apotheosis of greatness in "the living act, the undoubted deed," he wants. While the function of this passage is to utilize as foreshadowing the knowledge of the end, it also provides the general rule with which to measure Ahab's greatness.

Still a third connective (we have really touched already on the most important one elsewhere, the whale pursued in the action and narration as a source of revelation)—still a third connective between the story and its after-effects on the narrator is the ideal of heroism asserted in "The Lee Shore," the notion of "the necessity of

voyaging" despite "the equal necessity of failure."[22] This rather modernist claim for "the problematic as a style of existence and inquiry"[23] is, like the wisdom of the "universal thump," yet another example of the "closing vortex" (Epilogue: 470) of the end being brought to bear on the whole, in this case both as foreshadowing and as jaw-clenched idealism in which "anxiety [is] the premise of responsibility."[24]

But, finally, the most important contribution to one's sense of the work's unity derives from the bi-polarity of the described world. Whether it be in sequence of dramatic event or in antipodal fluctuation of natural realities, the narrative, always touching within a short space of time on both the wonder and terror, the sense of revelation and concealment, the feeling of trust and of dread that flows from human event and viewpoint—always touching on both these poles of experience, the narrative consciousness is congruent with the deepest ingredients of the dramatic plane of Moby-Dick. Ahab is driven to nihilistic fury by the fact of disjunction between man, world, and God. Yet Ishmael, sympathetic to Ahab, is given at the same time to "mystic moods" where "fact and fancy, half-way meeting, interpenetrate, and form one seamless whole" (114: 406). He must find the means to hold together the divergent tendencies of mind and world, swinging on the one hand toward disillusionment and doubt, and on the other toward beguiling visions of aesthetic wholeness and spiritual completion. This is the central challenge to Ishmael as a character; and it is also implicitly the central challenge to Ishmael as a representative of the conceiving imagination of Moby-Dick, which must also grapple with the

terrible disunities of mind and world. And that Melville succeeds in holding the world together—however marginally—and that Ishmael as a character provides us with the generic type of experience that authenticates that "success" seems corroborated by the passage from "The Fountain" celebrating the man who regards doubt and belief with "equal eye":

> . . . all have doubts; many deny; but doubts or denials, few along with them, have intuitions. Doubts of all things earthly, and intuitions of some things heavenly; this combination makes neither believer nor infidel, but makes a man who regards both with equal eye. (85: 314)

Having passed in "The Try-Works" through Ahab's doubts of all things, Melville-as-Ishmael arrives at a partial restoration of equilibrium, a balance made possible by an acceptance of life on its own annihilative terms and, where that is not enough, by recourse to the formal autonomy of art. For only the man whose spirit can affirm life beyond infidelity and beyond belief can grasp the formal potentialities and the spiritual resources of an art determined to face the worst head on.

CHAPTER VII. CETOLOGY: THE COMIC AND PHILOSOPHIC EFFECT

> When Hippocrates was now come to Abera, the people of the city came flocking about him, some weeping, some entreating of him that he would do his best. After some little repast, he went to see Democritus, the people following him, whom he found (as before) in his garden in the suburbs all alone, "sitting upon a stone under a plane tree, without hose or shoes, with a book on his knee, cutting up several beasts and busy at his study." . . . Hippocrates demanded of him what what he was doing. He told him that he was "busy in cutting up several beasts to find out the cause of madness and melancholy."
>
> —Anatomy of Melancholy, Robert Burton

In the preceding chapters we have been looking at Melville's dramatization of his religious doubts and suspicions within the tragic context dominated by Ahab. Rigid, fixed, Ahab's belief in the malice of the universe is hardened close to a certainty. His will to do battle with Moby Dick is but another reflection of the fateful malice he sees passing through all things, and toward which he believe the only "right worship is defiance."[1] Ishmael, too, as we have seen in the chapter (V) about his experience, participates in Ahab's view of a hostile universe, full of underlying horrors. Troubled on one hand by atheistical voids and on the other by an instinctive "knowledge of the demonism in the world" (42: 169), he inevitably falls under Ahab's sway and the diabolical captain's "struggle for a definitive death,"[2] although his own nature impels him toward rebirth. Yet in his own outlook Ishmael —flexible, open, accessible to the beauties of the world, though in league with Ahab against the horrors—is apt to laugh at the dangers

around him rather than wish to annihilate them. From the start a comic vision animates his viewpoint. "The tragic spirit," says Edward H. Rosenberry in Melville and the Comic Spirit, "looks for destiny and is blind to compromise; the comic spirit looks for adjustment, and the sense of humor, which is its principal organ, is a juggler of values."[3] For Melville, moreover, remarks Rosenberry, "mirth and sorrow were evidently twin products of a heightened sensibility."[4] They produced tragi-comic blends of exposition and dramatic conception which extended Melville's range beyond the "significant darkness" (106: 386) typical of Ahab.

To some extent we have already looked at how comedy contributes to "the ambiguities of attitude from which the ideas inherent in the story are viewed."[5] In our examination of the pre-voyage chapters, we saw Ishmael's irreverent humor taking swipes at religious parochialism, and we spoke of the underlying dread and uncertainty prompting his buoyancy. But we have yet to consider what Jane Mushabac in a recent study sees as a humor in the tone by which Ishmael's narration envelops the tale and "releases the tension of Melville's awareness of the difficulty of human existence. . . ."[6] It is to the "cetological center,"[7] moreover, that we must turn to look at this comic aspect, for it is there, with a desperation at the heart of his vivacity, that Melville tries to offset the grim tonalities of Ahab's tale with a "literary-scientific extravaganza."[8] Juggling tragic darkness with comic lightness Melville embarks on an intellectual project worthy of the size of the whale, one that is epic, robust, and animated by a triumphant consciousness of its own ambiguous situation.

In the Renaissance prose humorists and their later disciples, Mushabac argues, Melville found the model for Ishmael as a "soliloquizing monologist"[9] and for the "showmanship of a literary-scientific extravaganza" where "the author is, above all, determined to outdo anything prior to scope and method, as well as to suggest continually the farce of this sort of determination."[10] Countering Richard Chase's claim that Melville primarily exploits Americana and American folk humor, she argues

> American folklore is only one part and the final part of what Melville was absorbing and building upon. This was the whole tradition of prose humorists who, from the Renaissance on, played with the excitement of the opening of the frontier, of land and knowledge, the new man of infinite potentials.[11]

Mushabac shows that from Rabelais Melville took "a way of spelling out the feeling of prodigiousness and bounty"[12] which the American tall tale only helped him to "transform and tighten" into a "fish story."[13] From Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy, Melville took "not just the form of the anatomy, but his subject and a purpose, to cure his own melancholy by writing"[14] about it and analyzing its root causes in the world. And from Bayle's Dictionary, Melville took the mischievous art of the encyclopedic and exegetical commentary which "disentangled complexities only to reknot them again" and which, despite its "quiet ridicule" of man's reason, never really "disparages man's love of his mind" and "of thinking."[15]

In Mardi, there occurs a speech containing some of Melville's thoughts about the relation of humor to despair:

> There is laughter in heaven, and laughter in hell. And a deep thought whose language is laughter. Though wisom be wedded to woe, though the way thereto is by tears, yet all ends in a shout. But

> wisdom wears no weeds; woe is more merry than mirth; 'tis a shallow grief that is sad. Ha! Ha! How demoniacs shout; how all skeletons grin; we all die with a rattle. . . . Humor, thy laugh is divine, whence mirthmaking idiots have been revered, and therefore may I. . . . . All sages have laughed; let us . . . Rabeelee roared; let us; the hyenas grin, the jackals yell; let us. . . .[16]

After remarking that "the heart is not whole, but divided," the speech concludes with the point that laughter is man's way of hugging the human, the heart in himself, when in despair with the inhuman aspect of reality.[17]

In Moby-Dick there occurs a related speech about desperate humor—probably the best statement of Ishmael's comic resilience in the face of negation; it occurs in "The Hyena," a chapter on whose title the above passage from Mardi provides an excellent gloss. Having come to realize that his death in the whale-boat is nearly certain, he says:

> There are certain queer times and occasions in this strange mixed affair we call life when a man takes this whole universe for a vast practical joke, though the wit thereof he but dimly discerns, and more than suspects that the joke is at nobody's expense but his own. However, nothing dispirits, and nothing seems worth while disputing. He bolts down all events, all creeds, and beliefs, and persuasions, all hard things visible and invisible, never mind how knobby; as an ostrich of potent digestion gobbles down bullets and gun flints. And as for small difficulties and worryings, prospects of sudden disaster, peril of life and limb; all these, and death itself, seem to him only sly, good-natured hits, and jolly punches in the side bestowed by the unseen and unaccountable old joker. . . . There is nothing like the perils of whaling to breed this free and easy sort of genial, desperado philosophy. . . . (49: 195-96)

This "genial, desperado philosophy" that comes over Ishmael in "extreme tribulation" has in it a sort of spiritual and intellectual cannibalism, a predacious adaptation to the nonhuman world, that springs to life only with the exhaustion of hope. Suggestive of Queequeg's non-moralistic vitality, Ishmael's "philosophy" is full of an unprincipled energy and appetite that gobbles down "all event, all creeds, and beliefs" with a

a bottomless need born of hopelessness and the will to survive.[18] It rises in Ishmael when the chips are down "as a kind of psychological safety valve,"[19] observes Rosenberry. But, for our present purposes, still more important is the fact that this "wayward mood" has all the same attributes as the omnivorous and maniacal determination that seizes Ishmael later, when, in his role as storyteller, he is prompted to address his terror at life by discoursing on the source and symbol of his fear, the sperm whale. There, bolting down "all events, all creeds, and beliefs," Ishmael's desperate comic energy generates the pattern of his inquiry, the exhaustive, encyclopedic method, whereby he tries to plumb the mystery of the whale and the origins of supernal power. And while it may originate in desperation, there is also a touch of heroism in Ishmael's project. For somewhat less a victim of hubris than Ahab, Ishmael nonetheless is driven in the cetology section to know the unknowable, and to adopt an "outreaching comprehensiveness of sweep, as if to include the whole circle" of life (104: 379). He is aware of the impracticality of the endeavor. He senses the irreducibility of the problem. Yet he allows himself to be carried away[20]—such is the caliber of all great systematists![21]

As early as Chapter 24 there are essayistic chapters that Melville interpolates into the story in order to shape the reader's atttiude about the whaling material and the main points of the action. "The Advocate" attempts to counter opinion among landsman that whaling is "a rather unpoetical and disreputable pursuit" (24: 98). "The Affidavit" seeks to overcome the "incredulity" which ignorance of

whaling may induce in the reader as to the fact that the "Sperm Whale is in some cases sufficiently powerful, knowing, and judiciously malicious . . . to stave in, utterly destroy, and sink a large ship; and what is more . . . has done it" (45: 175; 178). But it is only in Chapter 55 that Ishmael begins to concern himself primarily with his encyclopedic treatise on the whale. There would also seem to be some set of factors in the story that prompt him, at this point, to shift to investigation of the whale in the narrative present. For if Ishmael's expectations are corroborated that the whale-hunt is the place to bring a man into full awareness of the terrors and wonders of life, from his very first lowering he also quickly perceives the mortal dangers associated with whaling. In addition, we may note that while the magnitude of the whale may leave him much to ponder, he experiences no direct intuitive glimpse through the wall of reality as Ahab had described. The only moment of truth he participates in is the bloodbath witnessed after Stubb kills a whale in Chapter 61, and this is hunter's primitive truth at best. Whaling, on the whole, leaves Ishmael, not illuminated, but terrified and overawed; it leaves him powerless before the absolute power of life and death. All he can do is write his will and get ready for a "cool, collected dive at death and destruction" (49: 197).

As a result, when it comes to telling his story, Ishmael turns increasingly in the chapters that follow "The Hyena" to the whale as an object of study and to the challenge of describing whaling life and technique. Though he keeps one foot in the time-frame of the tale, with the other, he moves outside it, to a position where he is

free to give whatever form he wishes to his harration. Leaving in abeyance the story of Ahab's conflict with Moby Dick, he embarks full tilt on his encyclopedic anatomy. In any case, it is the middle of the voyage, with the dramatic climax between antagonists a long way off, and the uneventful days aboard ship having to be profitably filled.

The question of what is the aesthetic effect and philosophic significance of this shift from story to encyclopedic anatomy constitutes the primary issue of this chapter. J. A. Ward, in an impressive and valuable article, "The Function of the Cetological Chapters in Moby-Dick," argues that Melville's inclusion of massive amounts of expository material does not suspend the action or affect the thematic unity of the work. "The whale," he argues, "is the common denominator, both object of exposition and object of quest."[22] He points out, further, that the quest motif is dominant in both the narrative and expositional sections, so that the purpose in both cases is "physical and metaphysical capture." He asserts in sum:

> Never before in Melville's fiction had there been such a complete union between physical object and spiritual truth; with the whale as object, as the central force and symbol in the universe from the point of view of both Ahab and Ishmael, it was possible for Melville to explore the physical dimensions and spiritual implications of the whale without hindering the movement or digressing from the theme of the book.[23] (Stress mine.)

Yet this view is a half-truth at best, an inadvertent victim of the tendency of literary analysis to find the level of discourse—even if quite abstract—through which the unity of a problematical work may be demonstrated. For the movement of Moby-Dick is "hindered" in the sense of its being altered, though not harmed. And as for the theme of the work—the quest for the nature of reality—while cetology may not

digress from this intellectual pattern, in terms of scope of subject and method of treatment there is again profound change: there is expansion and to such a degree that it can only be viewed as a deliberate metamorphosis of aesthetic effect.

In this chapter it will be my purpose to demonstrate that an extreme sense of epistemological discord and fragmentation, as well as a sense of indeterminacy, are the aesthetic and philosophic goals of the chapters (55-105) at the center of Moby-Dick. Melville, as I will try to show, accomplishes this by introducing into Ishmael's treatise on the whale an unwieldy and heterogeneous mass of subject matter, as well as a multiplicity of theories of knowledge and types of erudition through which reality may be understood. Some few of these approaches to knowledge, such as a documentary and symbolist approach, are artistically reconcilable, even symbiotic; but most, like anatomical dissection and living intuition, are not; are mutually exclusive. All, in any case, are in turn unsatisfying and incomplete; and they speak of an epistemological disarray in the face of complex and discordant planes of experiences which Melville clearly sought to represent and evoke, formally as well as in term of declared theme. "I wonder, Flask, whether the world is anchored anywhere; if she is, she swings with an uncommon long cable. . . ." (121: 420), says Stubb to his mate as they tie down the anchor. And it is precisely the artistic equivalent, in terms of form and content, of this kinesthetic sensation of a "world of mind"[24] swinging from a long cable, without any points of reference, or unified theory of knowledge, that Melville is seeking to communicate.

This sense of epistemological disarray I would attribute to a number of factors both in Melville's own life and in the period in which he lived. As a result of his years as a seaman, Melville acquired a multitudinous sense of the outer world as a realm of formidable actuality, diversity, and intellectual challenge. Another cause of this sense of dissaray is Melville's view of the mind as subjective, fragmentary, and susceptible to unending fluctuation and contrariety. And still a third factor is his awareness of planes of thought divergent from direct and living intuition, analytic methods of study, which the nascent spirit of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century rationalism had popularized and brought into direct conflict with his ideas of faith or the trustworthiness of transcendental intuitions. In Melville's journal of 1856-57 he records his frustration over the effect of the "higher criticism," whose empirical studies of the Bible and Church legend had destroyed the imagination of faith in his time.[25]

It is worth noting, also, that Melville's diversified sense of the world without, as well as his problematically complex sense of the world within, induce him to embrace a rationalist's system of seeking truth. Melville was all too aware that moments of local, subjective intensity were apt to produce a mountain of conflicted points of view. And in the half-serious hope of overcoming this abundance of conflicted views, he embraces the rationalist method of seeking to grasp the whole truth by exhaustively studying each of its parts. In this way, also, with a comprehensive sampling of the data about the whale, he hopes that local findings will not overpower his perspective and that he can, in the end, transcend diversity.

Yet this conscientious thoroughness which presumably leads to metaphysical finality, of course, does not. Neither the comic Renaissance model, which takes an ironic view of the feasibility of inquiry, nor Melville's own artistic and philosophic instincts, produce intellectual finality. "The dead, blind wall," says Ahab, "butts all inquiring heads at last" (125: 427). And while Ahab is referring to the resistant nature of matter, if we add the manifold and shifting forms of outward things and inward thoughts, we have a sense of the philosophic and religious uncertainty Melville saw himself up against.

This sense of fragmentation and uncertainty is also represented in the dramatic areas of the book, most explicitly in "The Doubloon," where each character interprets the meaning of the drawing on the gold coin hammered to the mast. At the end of a line of interpreters—each of whom interprets the coin true to character—Pip crystallizes the scene's rather modest point about the relativism of men's views. "I look, you look, he looks; we look, ye look, they look," he says, adding after his fourth repetition, ". . . and they, are all bats" (99: 362)—blind, it would appear. Even Ahab, normally trapped in his egocentric "high perception," catches the essence of the lesson. After interpreting the three figures on the Andes peaks as representing himself, he comments ruefully:

> . . . and this round gold is but the image of the rounder globe, which like a magician's glass, to each and every man in turn mirrors back his own mysterious self. Great pains, small gains for those who ask the world to solve them. . . . (99: 359)

In the cetology section Melville takes the problem of knowledge touched on in the dramatic areas and establishes it beside the quest

theme as a pervasive concern. ". . . some certain significance lurks in all things," says Melville, "else all things are little worth, and the round world itself is but an empty cipher" (99: 358). And granting the world is not a cipher—which it may be, according to Ishmael on the meaning of whiteness—the quest for truth never escapes both the problem of human subjectivity and the transience of natural phenomena "pauselessly active in uncounted modes" (107: 388). Because man lives in time, changing perceptions of changing objects may be as close as man can come to final truths.[26]

My goal, then, in this chapter will be to illustrate the inharmonious, fragmentary experience of reality as well as the final sense of indeterminacy, that Melville sought to convey. We will first look at the discontinuous approaches to knowledge which are adopted in the study of the whale and see how this problem of approach[27] is quickly defined and developed as a significant theme in itself. Secondly, we shall look at the heterogeneity of material in order to indicate how it too contributes to the fragmentary, indeterminate effect. But most important, I hope to show what the function is of this immense diversity of subject matter <u>in terms of the story</u>. Much has been made of the documentary, informative material serving as "ballast" to keep the romantic intensity of the tale "anchored to matter-of-fact reality"[28]; and, no doubt, it does serve this function. But the cetology material has a more important and usually ignored function. Tentatively, inconclusively, it validates the various viewpoints expressed by the main characters; and in so doing enriches and sustains the ultimate mystery which the work seeks to represent.

As a part of Melville's plan for Ishmael to be carried away in the cause of knowing the whale, he has him bring to bear on his inquiry a farcical mass of pseudo-erudition and specialization. The whale, as Howard P. Vincent observes, is considered from nearly every conceivable angle of formalized knowledge[29]—from the sociological in "Fast Fish and Loose Fish" (ch. 89), from the phrenological in "The Prairie" (ch. 79), from the legendary in "The Honor and Glory of Whaling" (ch. 82), from the paleontological in "The Fossil Whale" (ch. 104), from the anatomical in many chapters such as "The Fountain" (ch. 85) and "The Tail" (ch. 86), from the gastronomic in "The Whale as a Dish" (Ch. 65), and from the art historical in "Monstrous Pictures of Whales" (Ch. 55) and the two chapters that follow. This satire on erudition again would seem to be a norm of the tradition in wich he was working. "A constant theme" of this tradition, which Northrop Frye traces back Menippean satire and which he renames "anatomy," is "the ridicule of the philosophus gloriosus. . . . The novelist," Frye says,

> sees evil and folly as social diseases, but the Menippean satirist sees them as diseases of the intellect, as a kind of maddened pedantry which the philosophus gloriosus at once symbolizes and defines.[30]

This satiric use of specialized areas of knowledge as an organizing principle does not, I think, require further proof; closer demonstration, however, is needed to indicate how Melville brings into high relief the theme of incomplete and sometimes contending modes of knowledge, and how they are played off against each other in the comic vein. A motif emerges of hectic, often circular appropriation and

repudiation of different epistemolgies and their working methods; and while this does not supersede the substantive process of investigation into the whale, the recurrent pattern on the narrator's part of embrace and rejection does seem to refer us to the persistent sense of opposition that existed in the philosophic and literary culture of Melville's time: between science and religion, between poetry and reason, between transcendental intuition and empirical observation, between first-hand experience and knowledge derived through cultural transmission—between all these antitheses are to be found the contrary forces of the age.

In the first unit or sequence of cetology chapters (55-57), Ishmael conducts an encyclopedic survey into the portrait of the whale in the visual arts, and in the process many different ways to acknowledge —through analytic science, through living intuition, through poetic vision—are depicted, isolated and discussed. Typically, his scorn is most keen for "the scientific Frederick Cuvier, brother to the famous Baron," who may never have seen a living whale, though he wrote a natural history about them, including illustrations of the sperm whale:

> Before showing that picture to any Nantucketer, you had best provide for your summary retreat from Nantucket. In a word, Fredrick Cuvier's Sperm Whale is not a Sperm Whale, but a squash. Of course, he never had the benefit of a whaling voyage (such men seldom have), but . . . got it as his scientific predecessor in the same field, Desmarest, got one of his authentic abortions; that is, from a Chinese drawing. And what sort of lively lads with the pencil those Chinese are, many queer cups and saucers inform us. (55: 227)

But less intolerant, finally, of those who have never really pursued the whale, Ishmael narrows in on the problem of scientific drawings. He says they have been taken from stranded—that is, beached—whales and that

"these are about as correct as a drawing of a wrecked ship, with broken back, would correctly represent the noble animal itself in all its undashed pride of hull and spars" (55: 227). Analytic science, in other words, loses the living truth; scrutinizing the whale out of his natural medium, it deprives him of his animated vitality.

What, then, of first-hand observation, the sort of contemplative intuition easily accessible to the seaman-truth-seeker? At first, Ishmael seems to favor this approach, saying, "The living whale, in his full majesty and significance, is only to be seen at sea in unfathomable waters"; but then he adds that "afloat the vast bulk of him is out of sight, like a launched line-of-battle ship. . . " (55: 227-28). Apparently, while we may grasp the living majesty of the whale, and while we may gain poetic pleasure and insight in contemplating him, now we fail to satisfy the rational intellect with a definable totality. The truth remains submerged in unfathomable waters of mind and world. ". . . and out of that element," he goes on, "it is a thing eternally impossible for mortal man to hoist him bodily into the air, so as to preserve all his mighty swells and undulations" (55: 228). You cannot extrapolate the pure object of consciousness from the medium of its existence, just as you cannot hoist a full-grown sperm whale living from the sea.

Some may also suppose in the spirit of rational analysis that "from the naked skeleton of the stranded whale, accurate hints may be derived touching his true form." But Ishmael assures us that "though Jeremy Bentham's skeleton, which hangs for candelabra in the library of one of his executors, correctly conveys the idea of a burly-browed

utilitarian old gentleman," the whale's skeleton "gives very little idea of his general shape" or "leading . . . characteristics." He asserts that ". . . the mere skeleton of the whale bears the same relation to the fully invested and padded animal as the insect does to the chrysalis that so roundingly envelopes it" (55: 228).

The first of a series of occasions in cetelogy then occurs where Ishmael asserts the limitations of the mind. For all the preceeding reasons, Ishmael remarks, ". . . any way you may look at it, you must needs conclude that the great Leviathan is that one creature in the world which must remain unpainted to the last" (55: 228). Neither analytic science nor contemplative intuition will fathom his momentous bulk nor penetrate the inner core of his power. Later, in the middle of the cetology material, after putting the empirical and documentary methods of science to serviceable use in studying the whale's head, eyes, and tail, Ishmael nevertheless cries out in frustration once again at all the strange, living motions of the whale he cannot comprehend: "Dissect him how I may . . . I but go skin deep; I know him not, and never will" (86: 318).

But just as his initial criticism of empiricism does not prevent him from taking it up as a serviceable, though limited method, his experience of whaling as a potentially annhilative endeavor does not prevent him from heroically declaring, ". . . the only mode in which you can derive even a tolerable idea of his living contour, is by going a whaling yourself" (55: 228)—that is, by encountering him as Ahab espouses "in the living act, the undoubted deed. And while he is quick to add,

> . . . but by so doing, you run no small risk of being eternally stove and sunk by him. Wherefore, it seems to me you had best not be too fastidious in your curiosity touching this Leviathan (55: 228)

—while he is quick to add this, we know that Ishmael has not much belief in "fastidiousness" when it comes to truth; its presence is just as killing. Thus, at the end of cetology, in Chapter 103, we find Ishmael still punishingly straddling the paradoxical view of quest as, at once, imperative and annhilative.[31] Though as a survivor he knows the consequences of Ahab's quest, though he has experienced the dangers himself, he recommends the living hunt a final time and decries the systematic scientism he has alternatively adopted:

> How vain and foolish . . . for timid untravelled man to try to comprehend aright this wondrous whale, by merely poring over his dead attenuated skeleton. . . . No. Only in the heart of the quickest perils; only when within the eddyings of his angry flukes; only on the profound unbounded sea, can the fully invested whale be truly and livingly found out. (103: 378)

Inevitably, this same paradoxical view shapes Ishmael's judgment of the representations of the whale in the pictorial arts. The ability of a French painter for getting the action of a whaling scene "wonderfully good and true" (56: 229) inclines him to believe that the man "was either practically conversant with his subject, or else marvelously tutored by some experienced whaleman" (56: 230). But it is in the painting of a whaleman (of the scene of his own amputation) that Ishmael's ideas of amputation and revelation, of meaning and death, come together:

> On Tower-hill, as you go down to the London docks, you may have seen a crippled beggar . . . holding a painted board before him, representing the tragic scene in which he lost his leg. There are three whales and three boats; and one of the boats (presumed to contain the missing leg in all its original integrity) is being crunched by the jaws of the foremost whale. Any time these ten years, they tell me, has that man held up that picture, and exhibited that stump to an incredulous world. But the time of his justification

> has now come. His three whales are as good whales were ever published in Wapping, at any rate; and his stump as unquestionable a stump as any you will find in the western clearings. But, though for ever mounted on that stump, never a stump-speech does the poor whaleman make; but with downcast eyes, stands ruefully contemplating his own amputation. (57: 231-32)

Speechless with horror (at "all the subtle demonisms of life and thought"), the crippled beggar is a symbolic embodiment, a type, for the heroic ethic and problematic aesthetic out of which Moby-Dick rises. The only difference, of course, is that Ahab fights back and Ishmael talks back, creates, while the whaleman has been reduced to a cipher.

In this unit of chapters surveying the artistic representations of the whale, a final type of knowledge is introduced which also recurs in cetology. This is poetic vision, vision achieved by going to pseudo-rational extremes, so that method becomes madness, and the hectic obsession with detail becomes a pretext for going beyond rationality—beyond fact—to the realm of transparent vision. Other, more reliable forms of poetic knowledge, through simile, analogy, metaphor, and symbol, are used in cetology; but this most extreme mode of being carried away by the inner movement of the mind, is, in a sense, a polar representation of all the poetic forms of apprehension in Moby-Dick; and as the most extreme example, with the least "analogical probability" (75: 282), it serves to underscore most clearly the antithesis between rational discourse and poetry.

Still not finished with his survey, Ishmael moves from the crippled beggar to skrimshander, the art of the whalemen of carving sketches of their trade on whale teeth or bone. Claiming that this art arises from the "wonderful patience of industry" (57: 232) typical of savage cultures (but also found on whaling ships), Ishmael is able to

make his point about the need for a cannibal, amoral savagery in achieving an art that deals with annhilation and that wrests its vitality, so to speak, from the teeth of the difficulty. "Your true whale-hunter is as much a savage as an Iroquois," he says. "I myself am a savage, owing no allegiance but to the King of the Cannibals; and ready at any moment to rebel against him" (57: 232).

A penultimate shift then occurs: Dürer's woodcuts (Ishmael has just called Dürer "that fine old German savage") stimulate a train of of association about whales carved in South Sea war-wood and placed on American whalers' forecastles, about brass whales used as door knockers, about sheet-iron whales used as weather-cocks on old fashioned church spires. The line of association grows increasingly trivial. Then from real though specious examples of whale art, Ishmael's associations move to the image of the whale read into the world:

> In bony, ribby regions of the earth, where at the base of high cliffs masses of rock lie strewn in fantastic groupings upon the plain, you will often discover images as of the petrified forms of the Leviathan partly merged in grass, which of a windy day breaks against them in a surf of green surges.
>
> Then, again, in mountainous countries where the traveller is continually girdled by amphitheatrical heights; here and there from some lucky point of view you will catch passing glimpses of the profiles of whales defined along the undulating ridges. (57: 233)

What follows is increasing self-absorption and auto-intoxication, an irresponsible whimsy taking over the flow of thought:

> But you must be a thorough whaleman, to see these sights; and not only that, but if you wish to return to such a sight again, you must be sure and take the exact intersecting latitude and longitude of your first stand-point, else—so chance-like are such observations of the hills—your precise, previous stand-point would require a laborious re-discovery; like the Solomon islands, which still remain incognita, though once high-ruffed Mendaña trod them and old Figueroa chronicled them. (57: 233)

Fry describes anatomy, "at its most concentrated," as presenting "us with a vision of the world in terms of a single intellectual pattern";[32] and the fact that ideas or thought-forms are in the saddle here, riding man, instead of the other way around, is underscored still more strongly, as the idee fixe begins to "lift" and "expand" the sphere of vision. Ishmael continues:

> Nor when expandingly lifted by your subject, can you fail to trace out great whales in the starry heavens, and boats in pursuit of them; as when long filled with thoughts of war the Eastern nations saw armies locked in battle among the clouds. Thus at the North have I chased Leviathan round and round the Pole with the revolutions of the bright points that first defined him to me. And beneath the affulgent Antarctic skies I have boarded the Argo-Navis, and joined the chase against the starry Cetus far beyond the utmost stretch of Hydrus and the Flying Fish. (57: 233)

A metamorphosis beyond the romantic's expressive view of creativity and into a symbolist approach occurs here. Romantic poetry, says M. H. Abrams, is not only the "internal made external" but "has its internal source of motion."[33] Thus, in Ishmael's closing lines, the impulse of the imagination largely sheds its correspondence with the external world, except as an expression or symbol for inner, visionary aspiration.[34] Ishmael concludes:

> With a frigate's anchors for my bridle-bits and fasces of harpoons for spurs, would I could mount that whale and leap the topmost skies, to see whether the fabled heavens with all their countless tents really lie encamped beyond my mortal sight. (57: 233)

The poet's mind, evolving through symbols steadily less related to the external world, dreams of mounting the figure of the whale and riding it or being conveyed by it over the last barrier of the dualistic world. With his toes on "bridle-bits" and "spurs," he envisions voyage past the "topmost" limits of the world, to see whether the "fabled heavens" exist beyond his "mortal sight."

It is important to note, however, that Ishmael expresses a wish, and that he cannot leap with poetry into an eternal sphere. Moreover, I would suggest that this passage can be most valuably understood when viewed as a delineation of the limits of poetic vision in Moby-Dick, in contrast with Paradise Lost, its predecessor in the epic, where the fabled heavens are actualized, Monarch and all. As we shall see shortly, symbolism in Moby-Dick does assume a major role as a way to knowledge; but it will be a symbolism rising solidly and consistently out of a bedrock of physical fact, not the complete transcendental departure longed for here. This impulse to nullify the solid, recalcitrant, inscrutable world is fully comprehensible, furthermore, when we remember when it occurs. For as the encyclopedic survey of the pictorial arts comes to a close without a definite image of the whale's form, or even a reliable method of ascertaining it, the impulse to "leap the topmost skies" and eschew all factual barriers is understandable.

The romantic pattern of going to an extreme in order to enter a realm of poetic inspiration is seen also in "The Fountain" (ch. 85). (It can also be seen in Chapter 68, "The Blanket.") "For, d'ye see, rainbows do not visit the clear air; they only irradiate vapor" (85: 314), Ishmael tells us in "The Fountain," where the pseudo-scientific issue about what rises from the whale's spout is resolved in favor of the vapor theory and the vaporous controversy itself becomes, satirically, a road to "wisdom."

"The Fountain" comes near the end of a long and important chain of anatomical chapters that examine the whale's head, eyes, battering

ram, tun, forehead, and brains. In contrast to the metaphysical implications that rise from the documentary complexities of those chapters, the anatomical problem raised by "The Fountain" about whether the whale spouts water or vapor is insignificant and suggests the attenuated sense of proportion that afflicts Ishmael when a line of inquiry has gone on too long. One might therefore describe "The Fountain" as a Baylean spoof on biblical exegesis, with the whale's body serving as the "text." Ishmael actually acknowledges his obsessional degree of involvement when he asks, rhetorically, "But why pester one with all this reasoning on the subject?" and then answers in his own defense, "My dear sir, in this world it is not so easy to settle these plain things. I have ever found your plain things the knottiest of all" (85: 312).

Prior to the onset of visionary confidence, many of the themes and patterns we saw in Chapters 55-57 recur. Indeed, one has the sense of an internal structure of Melville's imagination repeating itself, and of him enjoying, from an ironic vantage, the antics of a scientific inquiry being swept up in the flow of an equally doubtful subjectivity. There is the same epistemological problem that we saw before, of the living object being unapproachable in rational terms:

> . . . as for this whale spout, you might almost stand in it, and yet be undecided as to what it is precisely.
>
> The central body of it is hidden in the snowy sparkling mist enveloping it; and how can you certainly tell whether any water falls from it, when, always, when you are close enough to a whale to get a close view of his spout, he is in a prodigious commotion, the water cascading all around him. (85: 313)

Also, as in the chapters containing the art historical survey, there is the dangerousness of knowledge (in this case, of even empirical inquiry):

> Nor is it at all prudent for the hunter to be over curious touching the precise nature of the whale spout. It will not do for him to be peering into it, and putting his face in it. You cannot go with your pitcher to this fountain and fill it, and bring it away. For even when coming into slight contact with the outer, vapory shreds of the jet, which will often happen, your skin will feverishly smart, from the acridness of the thing so touching it. . . . Another thing; I have heard it said, and I do not much doubt it, that if the jet is fairly spouted into your eyes, it will blind you. The wisest thing the investigator can do then, it seems to me, is to let this deadly spout alone. (85: 313)

Also, as is probably discernable already, there is the same onset of self-intoxicated whimsy, which in "The Fountain" is heightened by the wonderful pun on vapor (suggesting both vapidness and boastfulness), so that all this reasoning about vapor is, in effect, big talk about nothing: "Still, we can hypothesize, even if we cannot prove and establish. My hypothesis is this: that the spout is nothing but mist" (85: 313). This then is followed by the same "expandingly unlifted" tone and scope about the subject, the same fanciful self-absorption that we saw in Ishmael's vision of whales in the starry heavens. Here Ishmael says he is impelled to believe the vapor is only mist because of

> . . . considerations touching the great inherent dignity and sublimity of the Sperm Whale; I account him no common, shallow being, inasmuch as it is an undisputed fact that he is never found on soundings, or near shores; all other whales sometimes are. He is both ponderous and profound. And I am convinced that from the heads of all ponderous profound beings, such as Plato, Pyrrho, the Devil, Jupiter, Dante, and so on, there always goes up certain semi-visible steam, while in the act of thinking deep thoughts. . . .
>
> And how nobly it raises our conceit of the mighty, misty monster, to behold him solemnly sailing through calm tropical sea; his vast, mild head overhung by a canopy of vapor, engendered by his incommunicable contemplations, and that vapor—as you will sometimes see it—glorified by a rainbow, as if Heaven itself had put its seal upon his thoughts. (85: 314)

And then, finally, once indefatigable inquiry has passed through whimsy and expansiveness, access to the "muse" begins. Moreover, the value

of the method shines colorfully through: divine inspiration comes only to those who are able to be carried away in the search truth, for only then does method dissolve into a medium of transparent vision:

> For, d'ye see, rainbows do not visit the clear air; they only irradiate vapor. And so, through all the thick mists of the dim doubts in my mind, divine intuitions now and then shoot, enkindling my fog with a heavenly ray. And for this I thank God; for all have doubts; many deny; but doubts or denials, few along with them, have intuitions. Doubts of all things earthly, and intuitions of some things heavenly; this combination makes neither believer nor infidel, but makes a man who regards them both with equal eye. (85: 314)

Is there again a false sweetness, a delusory sense of poetic flight and religious confidence? To a limited degree there is, especially in the phrase giving thanks to God. This ambiguous optimism does not, however, dominate the passage. Inasmuch as Ishmael claims intuition of only <u>some</u> things heavenly, and inasmuch as this is counterbalanced by "doubts of all things earthly," the passage, on the whole, integrates the expansive tendency with an outlook more solid, broad, and inclusive. The final view transcends the extremes from which it rises.

My purpose thus far has been to bring into view the multiple avenues of knowledge that the cetology material spotlights and, in so doing, to illustrate the sense of epistemological fragmentation that Melville wished to underscore. In Chapters 55-57 and then again later in cetology, we have seen discussed or suggestively characterized different types of knowledge: empirical study, contemplative intuition, intuition (transcendental?) in the living act, second-hand knowledge, and imaginative vision, this latter being a prototype of the whole spectrum of poetic responses to reality that occur but, most especially, of the symbolist approach. Ishmael's pattern of embracing different

ways to knowledge and of then discarding them as they prove unsatisfactory is intended to sharpen our overall impression of the intellectual resourcefulness and the ultimate infeasableness of the narrator's enterprise. It is intended to suggest the mind's incapacity before the boundless dynamism of nature, and perhaps most particularly the fact that "systems of analysis deal in categories, and categories are static, while nature—that to which the categories are applied—is always in process."[35] And as we turn now to consider the heterogeneity of the material in the cetological center, it is worth noting that we will continue to find a multiplicity of emergent viewpoints; these, however, will not consist of abstract references to types of knowledge orchestrated for satiric or philosophic effect; they will be incipient views of reality that rise directly from the physical dimensions of the subject matter at hand.

In discussing the heterogeneity of the material in cetology, its function and meaning, let us start simply by examining a sequence of chapters—those, for instance, that follow the art historical survey—and by asking what, specifically, do they deal with? Too often, for lucidity's sake, writers (this one included) describe this material as being about whales and whaling, and they tend to forget the immense diversity we encounter in reading through this central section. What follows is a series of abstracts on chapters 58-72 that will help to bring the material into more immediate view. These chapters comprise a unit, as did chapters 55-57, in that they contain a sequence of steps in the processing of the whale and that they use Stubb's whale (killed in ch. 61) as a demonstration model.[36]

—"Brit" (ch. 58): Describes the Pequod's falling in with vast meadows of brit; evolves into an essay on the sea as an "everlasting terra incognita" and "foe to man"; and closes with an analogy between the sea and "the horrors of the half known life."

—"Squid" (ch. 59): In the meadows of brit, the ship comes upon a giant and ominious squid.

—"The Line" (ch. 60): Describes the appearance, strength, preparation, and complicated coilings of the whale line in the whale-boat; culminates in an analogy between the "hempen intricacies" in the whale-boat and the lives all men lead "enveloped in whale lines .... [and] born with halters round their necks."

—"Stubb Kills a Whale" (ch. 61): A dreamy calm, broken by a sighting. The pursuit, the exhortation of the crew by Stubb, and the bloody kill.

—"The Dart" (ch. 62): Elucidates a detail from the preceding chapter: the fact that the harpooner and officer change places after the harpoon is thrown in order that the officer may dark the lance; recommends that this practice, as well as the one requiring the harpooner to row, be reformed. The harpooner should dart harpoon and lance, and come to the task fresh.

—"The Crotch" (ch. 63): Another outgrowth of foregoing hunt scene, also explanatory in nature: how the harpoon rests in a "crotch" and how dangerous it is to have two harpoons attached to each whale line.

—"Stubb's Supper" (ch. 64): Comic scene on deck between Stubb and Fleece; contains Stubb's reprimand for his improperly cooked steak and Fleece's sermon to the sharks. Preceded by brief mention of Ahab, and a description of the dead carcass being towed and chained to the ship, and followed by a longer description of the sharks devouring the carcass.

—"The Whale As A Dish" (ch. 65): A gastronomic survey of the edible parts of the whale enjoyed throughout history; culminates in an indictment of civilization for its carnivorous propensities.

—"The Shark Massacre" (ch. 66): The nocturnal massacre of the sharks by Queequeg and a seaman; also the sharks' frenzied voracity.

—"The Cutting In" (ch. 67): In documentary vein, describes at length the raising of the cutting tackle, the insertion of the blubber hook, the heaving at the windlass, the raising to the main top of the bloody mass, and the lowering through the main hatchway of the blanket-pieces into the blubber room.

—"The Blanket" (ch. 68): (Pseudo?) scientific discussion of whether the "thin, isinglass subtance" or the blubber is properly considered the whale's skin. Some whimsy about hieroglphic lines on the whale's skin, followed by analogue about virtue for man as well having "strong individual vitality," "thick walls," and "interior spaciousness."

—"The Funeral" (ch. 69): Describes the stripped whale carcass beseiged by scavengers as it floats into the distance. Becomes the basis of a symbolist meditation on "vulturism of earth" and still another on superstition as the essence of "orthodoxy."

—"The Sphinx" (ch. 70): Brief description of how the whale's head is separated from body and hoisted against ship's side; followed by Hamlet-like soliloquy about the silent knowledge the whale possesses about tragedies at sea.

—"The Jeraboam Story" (ch. 71): Third gam. Consists of story told to Stubb by the Town Ho crew during gam and about a mad, prophet-sailer, Gabriel, who had gained ascendency over the Jeroboam's crew; then relates Captain Mayhew's story from present gam of how Gabriel declared Moby Dick the "Shaker God incarnate" and claimed prophesy of the chief mate's death after the mate had unsuccessfully hunted the White Whale.

—"The Monkey Rope" (ch. 72): Describes previously omitted manner in which the harpooner (Queequeg) stands on the whale's rotating back as the body is stripped of blubber; also pursues, from Ishmael's view point, the symbolic meaning of the "monkey rope" by which Ishmael, on deck, balances Queequeg and dies with him should he fall. Concludes with comic interlude on deck about Aunt Charity having instructed the steward not to give the pagan harpooners spirits.

First let us see what sorts of uniformity can be observed in these chapters; for in terms of manner of presentation, subject matter, and theme, there are, undeniably, small areas of homogeneity. "The Line," "The Dart," and "The Crotch," for example, each describe, in considerable detail, a particular item of whaling gear; each is presented in a like manner, as a first-hand demonstration on Ishmael's part; and two of the three end similarly, by means of poetic analogy or simile. In chapters 64-66 the subject matter of sharks and the "sharkishness" in man as well as in nature comprises another brief span of continuity. We also observe some thematic coherence growing out of the statements in "Brit" that "dreaded creatures glide underwater, unapparent for the most part" (58: 235) and also that the "horrors of the half known life" (58: 236) exist in the mind as well; for the next

chapter is, in effect, an actualization of these claims as the horrible giant squid rises out of the sea. But as for narrative movement in these fourteen chapters providing a sense of progressive unity, there is scarcely any. The chapter about "speaking" the Jeroboam is the only one that furthers the main action and that bears directly on Ahab's vengeance. Ahab's other appearances in "Stubb's Supper" and "The Sphinx" are more reminders of the tone of his presence than additions to his character or the plot.

On the whole, what we come away with these chapters is a sense neither of uniformity of material nor of thematic coherence. Within the circumscribing universe of things on a whaling voyage, there could not be more diversity of subject matter, more microcosmic attention to factual detail, more variety of expositional situation and literary mode, more novelty of macrocosmic reference. Also, at one with this diversity, is the impression of the untiring conscientiousness, the comic busyness, of the narrator trying to do justice to his super-abundant, hydra-headed vision of life. Ishmael alludes to these arduous demands as he introduces an aspect of the cutting-in which he failed to include at the proper time:

> In the tumultuous business of cutting-in and attending to a whale, there is much running backwards and forwards among the crew. Now hands are wanted here, and then again hands are wanted there. There is no staying in any one place; for at one and the same time everything has to be done everywhere. It is much the same with him who endeavors the description of the scene. (72: 270) (Stress mine.)

The impression we receive from this unit of chapters, then, with its abbreviated sequences, its abrupt shifts in venue, proximity, and mode of presentation, with its sense of multitudinous variety and relative

absence of concerted narrative action, is of a plenum of life and of an equally animated and inexhaustible versatility of mind. If there is unity, it is a unity of only the highest, most general sort. The universal dangerousness of life is one unifying element. But most unifying is the mutual abundance of mind and world, yoked together even when antagonistic by an immanent energy, an interrelated and multi-faceted vitality, that animates everything and that the whale both symbolizes and embodies.

Of Melville's aesthetics of heterogeneity two effects can be isolated. One is the implication that not only at the center of the work but, in a sense, at the imaginative center of life itself, there is generative sea of existence, a reservoir of limitless phenomena, whose inexhaustible meanings exceed the limited truth of any particular life, never mind how heroic. This superabundant, supra-human perspective is consonant with the timeless scale of events implied by the five thousand year old sea that closes over the Pequod at the end. But this is only a secondary effect. With regard to the dramatic sections, the function of the unbridled diversity of cetology, as I shall now try to show, is to present authentication of the many and often fluid viewpoints of the main characters, and to do so from a standpoint at some remove from the subjective intensities of the story. In this way, the manifold nature of reality and the problematical indeterminacy of the final nature of things is reinforced and further extended without undue reliance on the philosophical intensities of the characters. Ishmael's terror at atheistical voids; his transient visions of benignity; Ahab's conviction of an inscrutable malice; as well as other

permutations of numinous truth unimagined by the characters; all these things emerge from the teeming variety of the subject matter, and sustain and heighten our participation in the final mystery of things.

Let me give some examples of how material, extrinsic to the characters, clearly suggests the same numinous intuitions as the characters themselves have expressed. First, let us look at validations of Ishmael's feeling of a spiritual emptiness or demonism at the heart of reality. Utilizing a verbal shorthand by which metaphysical connotations can be economically attached to physical events, Melville rather deliberately attempts on occasion to remind us of the meanings of Moby Dick's albino hue as he describes a placid sea as a "vacant sea" (61: 241) or the whale's skeleton as an "utter blank" (103: 378). But in addition to these often casual verbal allusions to Ishmael's insight, there are other moments which depend, to a far greater degree, on the physical properties of the subject matter to symbolize metaphysical truths, moments when the superimposition of verbal cues is only supplemental and the objective qualities of the material contain the symbolic germ. One of these events occurs in the chapter describing the Pequod's encounter with the Albatross, a whaler homeward bound after four years at sea. The Albatross—rather like the "white-lead chapter" about the color white (42: 168)—was always the white ship its name implies; but it is now whitened from wear, not paint:

> As if the waves had been fullers [men who "full" or cleanse cloth during manufacture[37]], this craft was bleached like the skeleton of a stranded walrus. All down her sides, this spectral appearance was traced with long channels or reddened rust, while all her spars and her rigging were like the thick branches of trees furred over with hoar-frost. Only her lower sails were set. A wild sight it was to see her long-bearded look-outs at those three mast-heads. They seemed clad in the skins of beasts, so torn and bepatched the raiment that had survived nearly four years of cruising. (52: 203)

As Ahab inquires about Moby Dick, the "strange captain, leaning over the pallid bulwarks," gives no reply: in the act of answering his megaphone falls into the sea. The moral and physical exhaustion of the Albatross and her crew strike the same note of terror as the albino hue of the whale. They convey the same noumenal void, the same ultimate horror, at the core of life. At the end of four years of quest for "those far mysteries we dream of, or in . . . chase of the demon phantom that . . . swims before all human hearts" (52: 204), the epiphanic Albatross says that the flesh degenerates, the spirit parches, and our most mighty purposes become an empty vessel.

But the most effective authentication of the demonic powers implied by Moby Dick's whiteness occurs in the emergence of the giant squid. Here again we see Melville's artful mixture of physical symbolism heightened by metaphysical shorthand. When first sighted, the giant squid is mistaken for Moby Dick and familiar verbal and imagistic phrases from Chapter 1 are employed. (In Chapter 1 Moby Dick is referred to as a "grand hooded phantom like a snow-hill in the air" [1: 16]):

> In the distance, a great white mass lazily rose, and rising higher and higher, and disentangling itself from the azure, at last gleamed before our prow like a snow-slide, new slid from the hills. Thus glistening for a moment, as slowly it subsided, and sank. Then once more arose, and silently gleamed. It seemed not a whale; and yet is this Moby Dick? thought Dagoo. Again the phantom went down. . . . (59: 236)

Upon taking to their boats, however, the crew finds that the monster, though wondrous and terrible, is not the white whale:

> A vast pulpy mass, furlongs in length and breadth, of a glancing cream-color, lay floating on the water, innumerable long arms radiating from its centre, and curling and twisting like a nest of anacondas, as if blindly to clutch at any hapless object within reach.

> No perceptible face or front did it have; no conceivable token of either sensation or instinct; but undulated there on the billows, an unearthly, formless, chance-like apparition of life. (59: 237)

Faceless, sensationless, formless, chance-like—these abstract qualities, rising from the physical impression of the squid and helping to crystallize its symbolic import, refer us both backward and ahead in the book. Backward, they remind us of the intuition of a demonic and possibly godless and accidental universe from "The Whiteness of the Whale"; and ahead, they refer us to "The Battering Ram," "The Prairie," "The Nut," and "The Tail," where the faceless and sensationless head of the sperm whale becomes a symbol for the "dread powers" (79: 292) of a Deity whose "face shall not be seen" (86: 318).

I have been speaking about the corroboration of Ishmael's views provided by cetology; yet clearly the specter of a faceless and insensate creature correlates with Ahab's view of God as well. What, then, are the validations in cetology of Ahab's belief in an "outrageous strength," "an inscrutable malice," behind the "mask" of the physical world? (36: 144). These occur primarily in the systematic study of the whale, where features such as the whale's forehead seem to signify the brutal Power which Ahab conceives in the cosmos. By means of a whole range of literary techniques,[38] Melville is able, especially with regard to the whale, to persuade us that natural facts may be symbols of spiritual facts. Indeed, in the case of the whale's brow, so close is the correspondence between its physical properties and Ahab's spiritual conception of the Deity—faceless, insensate, outrageously brutal—that the reader himself is almost persuaded by the same Transcendentalist logic that persuades Ahab. The "battering ram"

of the whale's forehead seems virtually to locate the Deity in the physical world; to be "that wall, shoved near" (36: 144). And Melville's use of a linguistic shorthand, which attaches metaphysical connotations to physical facts, insures that we get the point:

> . . . you observe that the mouth is entirely under the head, much in the same way, indeed, as though your own mouth were entirely under your chin. Moreover you observe that the whale has no external nose; and that what nose he has—his spout hole—is on the top of his head; you observe that his eyes and ears are at the sides of his head, nearly one third of his entire length from the front. Wherefore, you must now have perceived that the front of the Sperm Whale's head is a dead, blind wall, without a single organ or tender prominence of any sort whatsoever. . . . The severest pointed harpoon, the sharpest lance darted by the strongest human arm, impotently rebounds from it. It is as though the forehead of the Sperm Whale were paved with horses' hoofs. I do not think that any sensation lurks in it. (76: 284-85) (Stress mine.)

In "The Tail" the same terribly annihilative powers are found as in the whale's forehead; here, however, an impression of delicate beauty as well as dread force emerges:

> In no living thing are the lines of beauty more exquisitely defined than in the crescentic borders of these flukes. At its utmost expansion in the full grown male, the tail will considerably exceed twenty feet across.
>
> The entire member seems a dense webbed bed of welded sinews; but cut into it, and you find that three distinct strata compose it. . . .
>
> But as if this vast local power in the tendinous tail were not enough, the whole bulk of the leviathan is knit over with a warp and woof of muscular fibres and filaments, which passing on either side of the loins and running down into the flukes, insensibly blend with them, and largely contribute to their might; so that in the tail the confluent measureless force of the whole whale seems concentrated to a point. Could annhilation occur to matter, this this were the thing to do it. (86: 314-15) (Stress mine.)

Ishmael goes on:

> Nor does this—its amazing strength, at all tend to cripple the graceful flexion of its motion; where infantileness of ease undulates through a Titanism of power. On the contrary, those motions derive their most appalling beauty from it. (86: 315)

But if the "graceful flexions" of the tail's motions suggest a highly differentiated level of organization, a complexity in which "infantileness of ease undulates through Titanism of power," "The Nut" casts a different light on the whale's cranial development and on the powers of the Creator he may reflect. ". . . to the phrenologist," says Ishmael, the whale's "brain seems that geometrical circle which it is impossible to square." That is, there is not much brain to be found—"about ten inches in length" and depth, a "mere handful"—and they are located "at least twenty feet from his apparent forehead in life," "hidden away behind its vast outworks. . ."(80: 293).

But then again the whale's optics suggest an altogether different set of hypotheses as to his braininess and differentiation. Because the whale's eyes are "far back on the side of the head, and low down, near the angle" of the jaw (74: 278), he can never, explains Ishmael

> see an object which is exactly ahead, no more than he can one exactly astern. In a word, the position of the whale's eyes corresponds to that of a man's ears. . . .
>
> Moreover, while in most other animals . . . the eyes are so planted as imperceptibly to blend their visual power, so as to produce one picture and not two to the brain; the peculiar position of the whale's eyes, effectually divided as they are by many cubic feet of solid head, which tower between them . . . this, of course, must wholly separate the impressions which each independent organ imparts. The whale, therefore, must see one distinct picture on this side, and another distinct picture on that side; while all between must be profound darkness and nothingness to him. (74: 279)

The whale contains a blind area in him, a limitedness within his powerfulness, a clumsiness within his grace and control. This is not a great deal different from Ahab's final vision of the "clear spirit of clear fire" in "The Candles," to whom he says, "Light though thou be, thou leapest out of darkness. . . ." and "There is some unsuffusing thing beyond thee, thou clear spirit, to whom all thy eternity is but time, all thy creativeness mechanical" (119: 417).

Is the whale's brain, then, "so much more comprehensive, combining, and subtle than man's, that he can at the same moment of time attentively examine two distinct prospects, one on one side of him, and the other in an exactly opposite direction?" asks Ishmael. For if such cranial development is possible, then an interesting set of conclusions suggest themselves as to the whale's possible over-complexity:

> It may be but an idle whim, but it has always seemed to me, that the extraordinary vacillations of movement displayed by some whales when beset by three or four boats; the timidity and liability to queer frights, so common to such whales; I think that all this indirectly proceeds from the helpless perplexity of violition in which their divided and diametrically opposite powers of vision must involve them. (74: 280)

Being able to "examine two distinct prospects" at once suggests that the whale may be forced to reason or act upon "divided and diametrically opposite powers of vision" at one and the same time. Gentleness may be able to exist within him at the same time as antagonism, each based on a different sector of vision, much as if "a man were able simultaneously to go through the demonstrations of two distinct problems in Euclid" (74: 280). And as this would seem to explain the "extraordinary vacillations of movement" and the "helpless perplexity of volition" of a whale surrounded by his hunters, it would also seem to contain unmistakable implications about the possible predicament of a Deity, who might be caught between two clashing powers of vision, one benign, the other malevolent, so that they tend to reduce him to helplessness or to cancel each other out.

Finally, derived from the whale's anatomy, there are the seeming authentications of Ishmael's experiences of benignity in man and nature.

The "dead, blind wall" of the whale's forehead, embodiment of the Deity's "dread powers," is not the final reality; behind the wall and for one third the length of his body lies

> . . . one immense honeycomb of oil, formed by the crossing and re-crossing, into ten thousand infiltrated cells, of tough elastic white fibres throughout its whole extent. The upper part, known as the Case, may be regarded as the great Heidelberg Tun of the Sperm Whale. . . . the tun of the whale contains by far the most precious of all his oily vintages; namely, the highly-prized spermaceti, in its absolutely pure, lipid, and odoriferous state. Nor is this precious substance found unalloyed in any other part of the creature. Though in life it remains perfectly fluid, yet, upon exposure to the air, after death, it soon begins to concrete; sending forth beautiful crystalline shoots, as when the first thin delicate ice is just forming in water. A large whale's case generally yields about five hundred gallons of sperm. . . . (77: 286)

We can hardly ignore the pecuniary value of the spermaceti to the crew, as well as the practical value of its many by-products to society, in tallying the whale's spiritual significance. For, just as the whale's destructiveness towards his hunters has been the basis for inferring a possible cosmic malice, so here the many benefits to man must point up a seeming beneficence and cosmic bounty. Most persuasive, however, of a beneficent natural order is the wonderful effect produced by the sperm oil on Ishmael. As he is squeezing case, the oil becomes the very medium of his transformation, the agent of his purification, providing, as Leslie Fiedler points out, "a counter-baptism" to Ahab's baptism of fire.[39] It becomes, in effect, an objective correlative of all the emotive values Ishmael discovers and comes to represent, as a result, a number of largely positive and interrelated aspects of life. First of all, it becomes a symbol for the natural benevolence that exists, in some measure, in man and nature. Secondly, it argues for the actuality of a beneficent strand in the very weave of Creation.

And thirdly, much as it serves as a symbol of man's emotive richness, it also serves as a symbol of man's ability to achieve spiritual oneness and poetic inspiration. But as we have observed from both Ishmael's mast-head reveries and his poetic flights as narrator, these transcendental moments are not presented uncritically. Thus in "Cisterns and Buckets" the tun of sperm oil symbolizes the womb-like sweetness of going too deeply into experiential or poetic unity. Once Tashtego is saved from drowning in the whale's case, Ishmael says, obliquely linking this with his own experience on the mast-head:

> Now, had Tashtego perished in that head, it had been a very precious perishing; smothered in the very whitest and daintiest of fragrant spermacetti; coffined, hearsed, and tombed in the secret inner chamber and sanctum sanctorum of the whale. Only one sweeter end can readily be recalled—the delicious death of an Ohio honey-hunter, who seeking honey in the crotch of a hollow tree, found such exceeding store of it, that leaning too far over, it sucked him in, so that he died embalmed. How many, think ye, have likewise fallen into Plato's honey head, and sweetly perished there? (78: 290)

In sum, then, from the hue, forehead, tail, brains, eyes, and case of the whale—as well as from other anatomical parts unmentioned—the cetological center provides data of an empirical sort about the whale, information which, in most instances, also contains a symbolic dimension, an allusiveness about the character of God. This quasi-scientific commitment to presenting objective information about the whale provides us, as a result, with a kaleidescopic richness of natural fact and symbolic connotation, much of which corroborates Ishmael's and Ahab's transcendental intuitions. But in addition to underscoring the primacy of certain metaphysical viewpoints belonging to the main characters, these chapters often provide additional combinations and permutations of the primal forces of the natural world. In "The Tail,"

an "infantilness of ease" is thought to live within the whale's "Titanism of power." In the discussion of the whale's optics, speculation of his "divided and diametrically opposite powers of vision" (with wall of darkness between) raises all sorts of conjecture about the conflicted nature of supernal force. In "Ambergris" (not previously discussed), there is the issue of "incorruption" found, of all places, "in the heart of decay" (92: 342-43), and a suggested parallel with Ahab's diseased greatness.

Which of these best illuminates the ultimate truth? Which analysis of the primal elements of nature coincides most closely with the work's fundamental view of God, nature, and man? Strictly speaking, I believe no chapter offers greater insight than any other; no one provides discoveries that rise above the others. Some chapters may seem more subtle and closer to the full complexion of reality as we sense it in the work; but there is no implication that an overwhelming finality will be arrived at from a particular anatomical precinct.

The "interlinked terrors and wonders of God" (24: 99) are fully revealed neither by the analytic mind nor the symbolist imagination. On the contrary, the underlying comic pattern and tone suggest that the whale is greater than the sum of its parts,[40] greater than the science or the powers of intuition to penetrate a first cause. And as no finite aspect is going to yield absolute truth, as no emergent viewpoint is going to encompass all meaning, each part is, in fact, taken by Ishmael in the quixotic hope that exhaustive study will compensate for man's limitations, while he knows full well it will not.

Also, as it is the terrifying impact of Ishmael's experience on the Pequod that brings him to want to dissect the symbol and source of his terror, the chapters on the whale's anatomy are often presented in the spirit of demonstrations by Ishmael into the root forces and mysteries of life. As often as not, they are efforts to document the radical danger he has known, rather than efforts to press further into the unknown.

For these reasons I find Robert Zoellner's long, intensive scrutiny of the cetology material in The Salt-Sea Mastodon[41] fundamentally misguided. When he says that the cetological center offers us a progressive history of Ishmael's discoveries about himself and nature, Zoellner muscles the text into a pattern of linear meaningfulness that is not there and that is out of step with the prevailing spirit of abundance, diversity, contrariety, and uncertainty. Even if we re-define "plot" to mean the entire temporal movement of the book on the level of retrospection as well as in the time-frame of the voyage, there is still no progressive intellectual advance and resolution of fears accomplished by Ishmael during his encyclopedic effort to know the whale.

Melville does not try to gather together the different emergent viewpoints in cetology. We may sense the primary factors in the equation—especially the reality of benignity and malevolence in the world—but the full equation itself, especially the other side of the equal sign, does not present itself. Melville allows the entire cetological parorama to speak for itself as an unfolding process, full of discontinuous gaps and fragmentary intensities. He uses cetology

to heighten our sense of the problematic indeterminancy of truth, at the same time as it heightens our sense of the constituent elements of the mystery. As for the reader's hope of confronting the metaphysical and epistemological questions of the work more directly—is the universe primarily benign? malignant? inhabited by God? accessible to the mind?—these questions are approached more concentratedly in the mysterious image of Moby-Dick, as he plunges through the scenes of the final hunt. To those questions we shall now turn in a concluding chapter.

CHAPTER VIII: MOBY DICK: THE VESTURE OF TORNADOES

In "The Symphony," on the day before the final chase, Ahab, in his long speech to Starbuck, continues to probe the same problem that has plagued him all along. What is the origin of the strife, the harshness, the searing violence of life? What explains the malice that underpins the world? He sees this malice in the quiet vistas of "smiling sky" and "unsounded sea": "Look! see yon Albicore! who put it into him to chase and fang that flying-fish?"[1] He believes, of course, that he has seen it in the deliberateness, the "infernal aforethought of ferocity" (41: 159), with which Moby Dick reaped off his leg. But now as the final encounter with Moby Dick grows near, he becomes painfully aware of it in himself, in "the madness, the frenzy, the boiling blood and smoking brow, with which, for a thousand lowerings . . . [he] has furiously, foamingly chased his prey—more a demon that a man!" Ashore there is "fresh fruit" and "the world's fresh bread," but for some reason he has forsaken the gratifications of the land and for forty years made war on the "horrors of the deep" (132: 443-44). "Is Ahab, Ahab?" he asks Starbuck. "Is it I, God, or who, that lifts this arm?" (132: 445).

Cognizant as never before of the imprisoning effect of his aggression, Ahab sees his alienation and weariness in the most extreme

of terms. "But do I look very old," he asks Starbuck, "so very, very old. . . ? I feel deadly faint, bowed and humped, as though I were Adam, staggering beneath the piled centuries since Paradise" (132: 144). The occasion is the "clear steel-blue day," with mild air and aromatic wind that Ishmael describes as making such a contrast with dark Ahab:

> Tied up and twisted; gnarled and knotted with wrinkles; haggardly firm and unyielding; his eyes glowing like coals, that still glow in the ashes of ruin; untottering Ahab stood forth in the clearness of the morn; lifting his splintered helmet of a brow to the fair girl's forehead of the heaven. (132: 442)

But on this occasion there is yet another, a deeper reason for Ahab's separation from the sensuous joys of the world. It has to do with the station of his journey, with the phase of final despair and insight he has reached. For the Pequod has spoke the Rachel (ch. 128) which has lost a boat to Moby Dick and, more recently, the Delight (ch. 131), which has also lowered and lost men and a boat. The Pequod clearly is next. And Ahab's identification, after forty years of the chase, with Adam staggering under the weight of history issues at this point from the sealed, irreversible course of his life. Alienated from the purity of natural impulse, all the freshness, all the newness, seems outside him in the clearness of the morning. Furthermore, as the tensions of his inner being grow acute, and his mortality hangs above him like a sentence, the morning seems the emblem of some transcendent and irretrievable realm he has paradoxically renounced and yet captured by going ahead to the end.

"Ahab's constant introspection," observes Walcutt, "makes him, more than other tragic heroes, a sort of spectator, experiencing catharsis at his own tragedy."[2] By the morning of the third and final

day, after two overpowering defeats, and with Fedallah already having "gone before" him (as was conditionally prophesied), Ahab's description of the fresh dawn is paradisical: "What a lovely day again! were it a new-made world, and made for a summer house to the angels, and this morning the first of its throwing open to them, a fairer day could not dawn upon the world" (135: 460). And then as Moby Dick is sighted and Ahab is about to be lowered from his basket in the rigging:

> But let me have one more good round look aloft here at the sea; there's time for that. An old, old sight, and yet somehow so young; aye, and not changed a wink since I first saw it, a boy, from the sand-hills of Nantucket! The same!—the same!—the same to Noah as to me. There's a soft shower to leeward. Such lovely leewardings! They must lead somewhere—to something else than common land, more palmy than the palms. (135: 462)

They lead to death.

I begin this chapter by pointing out the polarities of Ahab's state of mind in "The Symphony" because regarding both Ahab and white whale the theme of an unfallen world appears. In Ahab's case, the idea of a lost paradise is his mode of conceiving the extremity of his own damnation. It is his way of describing his early loss of youthfulness to the tireless war on the deep. But it ought not to be understood as an embrace or belief in an Edenic dimension to nature; Ahab lives in a fallen world. Similarly, in the case of the white whale, there is also what might be taken—erroneously—as an allusion to Moby Dick's being an unfallen creature, full of divine benevolence. We have seen the natural world perceived as benign, malevolent, and many combinations of the two; but we are—or, at least, we should be—unprepared for the possibility that on the first day of the hunt Moby Dick "manifests

himself," and that in his "noumenal epiphany" we see a "deific serenity" quite at odds with what we supposed.[3]

But I raise the possibility only really to contest and strictly limit it. On the first day of the hunt, as the Pequod's boats speed through the sea toward the long sought whale, a spell of symbolist evocation overtakes the narration. Our ability to separate fact from fancy, phenomenon from noumenon, is briefly diminished in a spell of poetic vision:

> Like noiseless nautilus shells, their light prows sped through the sea; but only slowly they neared the foe. As they neared him, the ocean grew still more smooth; seemed drawing a carpet over its waves; seemed a noon-meadow, so serenely it spread. At length the breathless hunter came so nigh his seemingly unsuspecting prey, that his entire dazzling hump was distinctly visible, sliding along the sea as if an isolated thing, and continually set in a revolving ring of finest, fleecy, greenish foam. He saw the vast, involved wrinkles of the slightly projecting head beyond. Before it, far out on the soft Turkish-rugged waters, went the glistening white shadow from his broad, milky forehead, a musical rippling playfully accompanying the shade; and behind, the blue waters interchangeably flowed over into the moving valley of his steady wake; and on either hand bright bubbles arose and danced by his side. But these were broken again by the light toes of hundreds of gay fowl softly feathering the sea, alternate with their fitful flight; and like to some flag-staff rising from the painted hull of an argosy, the tall but shattered pole of a recent lance projected from the white whale's back; and at intervals one of the cloud of soft-toed fowls hovering, and to and fro skimming like a canopy over the fish, silently perched and rocked on this pole, the long tail feathers streaming like pennons.
>
> A gentle joyousness—a mighty mildness of repose in swiftness, invested the gliding whale. Not the white bull Jupiter swimming away with ravished Europa clinging to his graceful horns; his lovely, leering eyes sideways intent upon the maid; with smooth bewitching fleetness, rippling straight for the nuptial bower in Crete; not Jove, not that great majesty Supreme! did surpass the glorified White Whale as he so divinely swam. (133: 447)

In these paragraphs, which describe Moby Dick as the boats approach, the reader has a sense of being "namelessly transported and allured by all that serenity" (133: 447)—the same effect that Ishmael is shortly to attribute to Moby Dick's influence on his hunters. And this, indeed,

would seem to be the intention of the heightened narrative key—to convey the wonder of the men as they finally approach the object of so much rumored divinity, as well as the mythopoeic ecstasy that fills the narration arriving at its central symbol, its sanctum sanctorum of revelations, and finding the whale serene. There is admitted difficulty in defining the narrative viewpoint—is it authorial and omniscient? is it supposed to be Ishmael's during the chase? or Ishmael's retrospectively, imagining itself into the scene, and into Ahab's final days? But for the moment let us forego such speculation and focus on the qualitative transformation of the narrative itself and on what this transformation means.

As the three boats speed through the sea and slowly near their foe, fact and imagination seem to fuse, or, as Ishmael says in "The Gilder, "interpenetrate, and form one seamless whole" (114: 406). Emotions of gaiety and a mood of celebration are perceived in all things around, animate and inanimate, as though they reflected and gave expression to the deep mood of tranquility experienced by the whale. The very details selected by the narrator seem perfectly "imagined" so as to convey the idea of the whale's confluence with his aqueous medium and the Dionysian joy this immersion in nature produces. This unitive moment, moreover, joining whale and world, nature and observer, is consummated ultimately by the rising arc of a visionary art. Hence in the subsequent paragraph, no concrete description is adequate, no imagined setting sufficient. Only a language of pure unconcretized emotion, spiced with a comparison to the Olympian gods in all their erotic license, can convey the supra-human satisfactions that overflow the scene.

In the next paragraph, the swells that "flowed so wide away" on each side of the whale are called "enticings." And it is then Ishamel says: "No wonder there had been some among the hunters who namelessly transported and allured by all that serenity, had ventured to assail it. . . ." And although experience is to teach him that "that quietude [is] but the vesture of tornadoes," he is yet under the spell sufficiently to warrant his recitation: ". . . calm, enticing calm, oh, whale! thou glidest on, to all who for the first time eye thee, no matter how many in that same way thou may'st have bejuggled and destroyed before" (133: 447-48).

Yet having come upon the whale in a state of "noon-meadow" peacefulness that effectively reduces our acceptance of Ahab's viewpoint, subsequent events promptly reassert the basis for Ahab's sense of the whale's malignity. Moby Dick, for reasons that are left undefined, raises the fore part of himself slowly: ". . . for an instant his whole marbleized body formed a high arch, like Virginia's Natural Bridge, and warningly waving his bannered flukes in the air, the grand god revealed himself, sounded, and went out of sight" (133: 448). When he emerges from beneath those "serene tranquillities of the tropical sea" and "waves whose hand-clappings were suspended by exceeding rapture" (133: 448), he has metamorphosed from a god warranting celebration to a murderous beast:

> . . . Ahab could perceive no sign in the sea. But suddenly as he peered down and down into its depths, he profoundly saw a white living spot no bigger than a white weasel, with wonderful celerity uprising, and magnifying as it rose, till it turned, and then were plainly revealed two long crooked rows of white, glistening teeth, floating up from the undiscoverable bottom. It was Moby Dick's open mouth and scrolled jaw; his vast, shadowed bulk still half blending with the blue of the sea. The glittering mouth yawned beneath the boat like an open-doored marble tomb. . . . (133: 448)

". . . as if perceiving" Ahab's "stratagem" of spinning the boat and changing places to face the whale's rising head, "Moby Dick, with that malicious intelligence ascribed to him sidelingly transplated himself, as it were, in an instant, shooting his pleated head lengthwise beneath the boat" (133: 448-49). After the "thrill" of collision the whale is described "obliquely lying on his back, in the manner of a biting shark, slowly and feelingly taking the bows within his mouth"; his "long, narrow, scrolled lower jaw [is] curled high up into the open air"; "the bluish pearl-white of the inside of the jaw was within six inches of Ahab's head"; and "in this attitude the White Whale now shook the slight cedar as a mildly cruel cat her mouse" (133: 449).

A variety of explanations suggest themselves for this crucial shift in Moby Dick's behavior from serenity to malice. Coordinate with the different lines of speculation that the characters and narration have generated, these explanations run the full spectrum of Moby Dick being a naturalistic creature of benign, malicious, or dualistic nature, as well as Moby Dick being a creature of spiritual dimensions also, who reflects an angelic, a demonic, or a bi-polar principle of the cosmos. Finally, there is the view put forth by Paul Brodtkorb, Jr. in Ishmael's White World that Moby Dick is "numinous and mute": mute because his image is "so full of contrariety that it is not manageable under the aspect of causality . . . [and] cannot be structured categorically. . . ."; and numinous because the "urgency of the feelings the whale inspires," compounded by the whale's "intellectual-sensational muteness," prompts a feeling "which quizzically points toward . . . whatever such feelings

will sustain. That 'whatever,'" Brodkorb adds, "may be different for different people, even different for the same person at different times; and it was designed to be." He concludes: ". . . nothingness floods through the interstices of any conceptual net designed to hold Moby Dick's essence."[4]

In the dark view of Moby Dick, in its naturalistic as well as spiritual variants, his serenity and lack of malace as the whaleboats approach may be seen as a deception, with his evil reality hidden beneath the surface and the glittering "mask" of sense impressions exercising a superficial enticement. In the optimistic view, Moby Dick may be seen as benign, without instinct for malice or capacity for forethought; whatever aggression he exhibits may be explained as having been forced upon him by men. In the bi-polar view of him, Moby Dick, swimming peacefully on the first day of the chase, simply may not see his approaching hunters; he is at peace with the watery world; but then he does, he sounds; and when he emerges he is a transformed creature, enflamed by his persecutions by the fishery and intent upon destroying his destroyers.

In light of Moby Dick's behavior in the three-day chase which ensues, rejection of certain of these hypotheses and validation of others is, up to a point, possible. Melville has dispensed with Ishmael's risible tragicomic delivery in the final chapters, wanting instead a third person voice to complete the narration of his tragic action with relative impersonality, and with evenness of focus and tone. Yet while the narration of the last three chapters is more or less neutral and omniscient, narrative qualifications as to what is

directly knowable about Moby Dick's motives and what is only inferential crop up at salient points. For instance, in the previously quoted passage describing the whaleboats' approach on the first day of the chase, we might note that Moby Dick is said to be "seemingly unsuspecting" of the hunters, in order to leave open the alternate possibility that he is not as innocent as he appears. In a similar vein, but with reverse effect, there is the passage (also quoted) describing Moby Dick's last-minute shift in his angle of attack on Ahab's boat, so that the "malicious intelligence ascribed to him" is preceded by the qualifying phrase, "But as if perceiving this strategem, with that malicious intelligence ascribed to him. . . ." In this way, then, based on observed behavior, inferences about Moby Dick's underlying motives are offered, their purpose being to crystallize some of the same lines of interpretation about his basic nature as we encounter in the cetelogical center of the work, as well as to sustain some of the same sense of epistemological limitation and uncertainty. I do not, however, find these limits of interpretation regarding Moby Dick's image as absolute as Brodkorb; within certain parameters, through consistency of inference, Moby Dick's nature can be reasonably defined.

As for the question of the origin of the narrative viewpoint, the distinctions of formal criticism[5] produce more problems here than they solve. The information supplied in the Epilogue that Ishmael was Ahab's bowsman on the third day establishes a first-hand view of the action for Ishmael; it supplies the basis, should a critic wish to, to find in the narration of that day the values of Ishamel's consciousness. Yet I speak only of the last day. It would also appear to be a necessary

inference that Ishmael, who has always been a member of Starbuck's crew, was not among the hunters on the two preceding days. In obedience to Ahab's wish, "all the boats but Starbuck's were dropped" (133: 447). Thus, the ecstatic passage describing the approach to the whale does not —formally speaking—derive from a close-hand, first-person viewpoint. The narration speaks, we may remember, of the generic "hunter" rather than the identifying "I." Ishmael, therefore, must be said to narrate the three-day chase from within only the loosest convention of a first-person retrospective viewpoint, a convention from within which Melville feels free to imagine the locus of Ahab's final days, establishing the desired tragic tone and even abdicating Ishmael's viewpoint altogether—except when themes from the preceding sections of the work require Ishmael's selective intrusions. Neither a "witness narrator"[6] who is in the action nor an "omniscient narrator" who is outside, Melville's narrative persona fulfills the requirements of the tragedy and yet is able to impart the interpretable elaborations appropriate to his romance-anatomy.

Of the various possible views of Moby Dick's nature listed above, let us first consider the naturalistic, Rousseauistic view of him suggested by his unanticipated tranquillity on the first day. We know, as we said, that he has been hunted persistently in the weeks preceding his encounter with the Pequod. Both the Delight and the Rachel have lowered for him. A lance remains in his back. His recent history of persecution, therefore, complemented by his unexpected gentleness, would seem to suggest an alternative hypothesis to Ahab's view of his intelligent malignity: that he is benign and a victim of evil men

against whom he is forced into mortal combat. This view, however, when considered in light of Moby Dick's behavior in the three days of battle proves insubstantial.

The point in question is whether Moby Dick exhibits malice and forethought in the course of the struggle, whether he seems to possess the instinct and volition to execute destructive designs. Zoellner, with his penchant for embracing minority views, has argued strongly against this position. Concerning Moby Dick's rising under Ahab's boat on the first day, he has asserted that "despite Ishmael's anthropomorphic stress on the 'devilish' and 'crafty' movements of the whale, everything he does is well within the response-capacity of any highly-developed animal."[7] And with regard to the whale's assault on all three boats at once on the second day, he says:

> If Melville—or Ishmael—were intent upon demonstrating intelligence or malignity in the White Whale, this handling of the event-continuum represents another missed opportunity. Moby Dick does not choose a single boat, does not decide upon an adversary, does not follow any apparent plan of action. Rather, he engages, like the veritable animal he is, in unfocused "appalling battle" randomly prosecuted "on every side."[8]

A look at the passage in question, however, does suggest that it is intended to make dramatically vivid for the reader Moby Dick's menacing fury; and that his hunters succeed in temporarily eluding him does not significantly diminish the effect of that impression:

> 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. . . . But ere that close limit was gained, and while yet all three boats were plain as the ship's three masts to his eye; the White Whale churning himself into furious speed, almost in an instant as it were, rushing among the boats with open jaws, and a lashing tail, offered appalling battle on every side; and heedless of the irons darted at him from every boat, seemed only intent on annhilating each separate plank of which those boats were

> made. But skilfully manoeuvred, incessantly wheeling like trained chargers in the field; the boats for a while eluded him; though, at times, but by a plank's breath. . . . (134: 456)

Doesn't Moby Dick's assault on all three boats—as though he were one of Homer's heroes pressing into the thick of battle—connote three-fold fury rather than a fraction of the amount required to destroy one foe? But be that as it may, more to the point is the fact that Zoellner's denial of Moby Dick's observably destructive intentions really does not acknowledge the bald facts of the struggle. It does not acknowledge that on all three days Moby Dick initiates the hostiliites; it does not acknowledge that on the first and second days, at some point during the battle, he rises under Ahab's (!) boat; and it does not acknowledge that, for whatever reason, he singles out the entire whale ship as a viable foe and proceeds, as we had been told was possible in "The Affidavit," to charge, stave in, destroy and utterly sink the entire ship. Narrator's interpretative embellishments aside, these are the facts of the case. One might argue, I suppose, that the fishery, in the larger perspective, created this destructiveness, and that Ahab's persistence draws it out to its most enflamed pitch; but the fact remains that, whatever the preconditions, during the three days Moby Dick's behavior demonstrates a sustained malice and a capacity for sustained execution of that malice.

What, then, of the pessimistic view, disseminated by rumor, amplified by superstition, and brought into direst focus by Ahab, that Moby Dick is designing and destructive, not a "dumb brute" (36: 144)—as Starbuck would have it—madly singled out by Ahab, but a creature of inscrutable malice, full of reason behind its "unreasoning" mask,

a creature of power and cunning and wrath? Though the factors listed in the previous paragraph tend to support this view, there is a set of observations about Moby Dick's behavior that may militate against it. This is Moby Dick's practice, after each day of battle, of swimming away from his foes, so that it is they, all night, who must pursue him. Even on the third day, after the first encounter, he swims away; and always he swims in the same direction. His course to leeward, in addition, would also seem to argue against any designing intent, for the Pequod can readily pursue him by sailing "full before the wind" (133: 452), whereas if he had swum to windward—into the wind—direct pursuit would have been impossible. Also, while he swims rapidly, he swims steadily, "at a traveller's methodic pace" (134: 457), as though the Pequod were not of final importance to him but only, as the narration speculates, "a stage in his leeward voyage" (135: 465). As much a sustained aspect of the three-day struggle, therefore, as Moby Dick's accomplished acts of destruction, Moby Dick's nocturnal leeward progress[9] would seem, at least, to balance off the possibility of Moby Dick's total malevolence, and to speak persuasively of his final disinterest in human enemies. Arvin articulates this view of Moby Dick best, when he says, "Demoniac as he can be when hunted and harpooned, he himself seems rather to evade than seek these meetings. . . ." He deals out "ruin only when provoked by his pursuers."[10]

Yet there are two points in the last chapters when the narrator articulates a view entirely consonant with Ahab's position and where Arvin's commonsense view of the problem of Moby Dick's ultimate nature runs into heavy cross winds.

One of these we have we have already discussed, although in a disjointed fashion, and I shall re-quote it as a whole. On the first day, as they row through the calm seas, disarmed and uplifted by Moby Dick's god-like serenity, Ishmael, speaking, it would seem, as a retrospective narrator with foreknowledge of Moby Dick's terrifying transformation, says:

> On each soft side—coincident with the parted swell, that but once laving him, then flowed so wide away—on each bright side, the whale shed off enticings. No wonder there had been some among the hunters who namelessly transported and allured by all that serenity, had ventured to assail it; but had fatally found that quietude but the vesture of tornadoes. Yet calm, enticing calm, oh, whale! thou glidest on, to all who for the first time eye thee, no matter how many in that same way thou may'st have bejuggled and destroyed before. (133: 447-48)

The embayed calm and the sunny sea, though so alluring, are but "the vesture of tornadoes," an enticement that bejuggles, then destroys. It has apparent reality but it seems to have no ultimate reality. To reverse Emerson's monism of eternal good, the apparent beauty and gentleness on the surface of things is but a brief suspension of the evil forces beneath: they allure to destroy. The other statement occurs on the third day of the chase. Here Ishmael overtly articulates, as one of a set of speculative possibilities, that Moby Dick is capable of premeditated deceit. In an effort to account for the whale's retarded pace, he says:

> Whether fagged by the three days' running chase, and the resistance to his swimming in the knotted hamper he bore; or whether it was some latent deceitfulness and malice in him; whichever was true, the White Whale's way now began to abate. . . . (135: 465) (Stress mine.)

We have already mentioned Melville's desire to carry into the tragic denouement some of the various metaphysical viewpoints espoused

by the characters; and that these two statements may be no more than his effort to provide some "outside" support and dignity to Ahab's persecuted view is entirely possible. Yet the first passage in particular contains a familiar air of retrospective wisdom; moreover, when we look at earlier points in the text to see what was Ishmael's position then about the interrelation of "calms" and "storms," we find some corroboration of this Ahabian attitude. In "The Line" we are told that the calms of life are without any ultimate benignity: ". . . the profound calm which only apparently precedes and prophesies of the storm, is perhaps more awful than the storm itself; for, indeed, the calm is but the wrapper and envelope of the storm; and contains it in itself. . . ." (60: 241). Yet it must be acknowleded that "The Gilder," in contrast, asserts a truly bi-polar reality, one that is intrinsically double: "Would to God these blessed calms would last. But the mingled, mingling threads of life are woven by warp and woof: calms crossed by storms, a storm for every calm" (114: 406). There is even the still more affirmative assertion by Ishmael-as-author in "The Grand Armada":

> . . . amid the tornadoed Atlantic of my being, do I myself still for ever centrally disport in mute calm; and while ponderous planets of unwaning woe resolve around me, deep down and deep inland there I still bathe me in eternal mildness of joy. (87: 326)

Interestingly, in the end, the most difficult question in Moby-Dick may not concern the reality of evil but the elusive reality of good. Danger, death, amputation, storm, predation, even the all-but-total destruction of the human universe, is, in large part, the donnée of the work, since the work is narrated from the standpoint of retrospective experience. The real question, therefore, is not whether

there is evil in the world, but whether there is good, or whether Ahab is right that the world is mostly "dark side" (127: 433). By way of further example, if we examine another motif complementary to that of "calms" and "storms," we find Ishmael's presentation again seemingly influenced by Ahab's dark view. In Ishmael's description of the tranquil surface of the sea in mild weather, the sense of beauty and harmony he experiences always, in the end, proves superficial and delusive; invariably, the true reality beneath is remorseless and aggressive. In "The Mast-Head," lulled by mild sunny days, it is a token of the youthful attitude being satirized that the young sailor confuses "every dimly-discovered, uprising fin of some undiscernible form," with the "embodiment of those elusive thoughts that only people the soul," while those forms are really the fins of sharks (35: 140). In "The Gilder" we are told: "there are the times of dreamy quietude, when beholding the tranquil beauty and brilliancy of the ocean's skin, one forgets the tiger heart that pants beneath it. . . ." (114: 405). In "Brit," regarding the "subtleness of the sea," we are told how "its most dreaded creatures glide underwater, unapparent for the most part, and treacherously hidden beneath the loveliest hints of azure" (58: 235). Even in the ecstatic moments, rowing out, on the first day of the chase (when the language of "The Grand Armada" recurs in the description of Moby Dick's "gentle joyousness . . ."), we are really being presented with yet another in the long series of transcendental temptations which the harshness of temporal events promptly undercut.

It would appear, therefore, that while Ishmael survives the Pequod's destruction and the symbolism of the coffin life-buoy connotes

his achievement of a more benign psychological relation to life than Ahab's, we are not presented with a stable apprehension of that psychological reality in Ishmael's aesthetic experience. Life is presented in Moby-Dick as annihilative, as a passage through an adversary medium or "destructive element" which forever erodes man's sense of beneficent possibilities. Portents of something positive, the calm mild days at sea are not imaginary; they clearly exist and form an instrinsic part of the pattern of experience. But exactly what they express or signify about the cosmic scheme, or nature's ultimate particle, or the human mind is something that Melville is seemingly unable fully to resolve. Are these calms evidence, as Ishmael's expansive tendencies would have it, of an equivalent, separate "good" pervading man and nature, one that offsets the reality of "evil" and offers the basis of a strong affirmation? Probably not. But are they, as Ahab is inclined to believe, a hiatus in the assaults and challenges flung at man, but with no ultimate significance; or as Ishmael's psychological advance would seem to suggest, two poles of one inseparable reality, perhaps not equal in force or extent, but nevertheless instrinsically double, combinable, and the basis for human growth, creativity, and spiritual development, even if that development is inescapably tragic?

This differentiation between a monism of evil or a bi-polar unity is never provided. At the heart of the problem may be the volatile and suggestive nature of the mind, always somewhat light-headed because always eager for an affirmation to set against the dark. In this regard, we might recall Hawthorne's observation that Melville "will never rest until he gets hold of a definite belief."[11] To state the problem in

the language of "The Symphony," the depths of life, "strong" and "troubled," ever rushing forward "far down in the bottomless blue," leave no time for a definite good, a stable viewpoint, to be delineated. Ideas of an intellectual good merely flutter around, "hither, and thither, on high" (132: 442).

This ambivalence about a monistic or bi-polar view of Moby Dick and the reality he embodies is, in all likelihood, a reflection of the same ambivalence we find in Melville's attitude toward Ahab. On the one hand, Ahab is celebrated as an exceptional individual, a hero whose adherence to his perception of the remorseless malice of life is both the source of his greatness and his destruction. On the other hand, in chapters such as "Moby Dick"(see 42: 159-60) and "The Chart" (see 44: 174-75), Ahab is portrayed as a disordered and impious person, whose rejections of the dictates of the heart and the collective ideal condemn him to wickedness and error. This ambivalence of attitude, straddling Ahab's rightness as a hero and wrongness as a man, Melville tries to contain within the idea that "all mortal greatness is but disease" (16: 71).

Besides the question of whether Moby Dick embodies a reality that is entirely evil or whether he embodies a fluid and interlinked dualism of good and evil, there is also another aspect of his being that remains uncertain and indeterminate. This is whether he is a naturalistic whale or whether there are spiritual forces, full of reasoning intent, bodied forth in him. We perhaps get an intimation of such portentous possibilities on the first day as "Moby Dick swam swiftly round and round the wrecked crew. . . ." and "so revolvingly

appalling was . . . [his] aspect, and so planetarily swift the ever-contracting circles he made. . ." (133: 450). But the metaphysical overtones about the white whale are not confined to the experience of Ahab's wrecked crew. At times throughout the three-day chase, Moby Dick is described not as an observable finite whale but as a creature in motion. Typically, adverbs—delineators of qualities of motion—are used to describe his moving figure. Moby Dick "rippingly" withdraws from his foes; he "warningly" waves his flukes; the circles he swims around Ahab are "planetarily swift" and "revolvingly appalling" (133: 445-50). When nouns themselves are used they are often namers of motion: "fleetness" (133: 447), "celerity" (133: 448), and "velocity" (135: 468) occur. These sorts of phrases imply three things about Moby Dick: that he is at times irreducible to a static perception, that he sometimes acts instantaneously (". . . with a mighty volition of ungraduated, instantaneous swiftness, the White Whale darted through the weltering sea" [135: 466]) as if outside sequential time, and that there seems at moments to be a cosmic, a "planetary," quality about him. Together they promote the feeling—certainly deliberate on Melville's part—that Moby Dick may be a creature of supernatural origins, whose numinous reality is almost palpable within the blur of his awesome activity.[12]

In addition, this condition of motion tends to serve as an objective correlative for the epistemological uncertainty we have traced in the cetology chapters. In his "untraceable evolutions" (134: 456), Moby Dick gives objective form to the problematic relations between mind and things. Yet while Paul Brodtkorb sees Moby Dick as utterly "mute," and unable to be linked convincingly with preceding ideas of nature and God in the work,[13] I believe that, within the range I've tried to

define, Moby Dick's nature is both compelling and definable. To see in the end only a "nothingness that floods through . . . any conceptual net designed to hold Moby Dick's essence,"[14] is to assume an entirely subjectivist view of "significance." Such an approach seems to lose sight of the fact that reality is defined in Moby-Dick not only by the relativistic interpretations by characters but also by patterns of sustained action, such as Moby Dick's assaults on Ahab's boat and his and other sperm whales' attacks on whale-ships. Like the sheared off leg with which Ahab's conflict begins, Moby Dick's destruction of the Pequod denotes the white whale's incontrovertible malice.

Nothing is left at the end but one orphaned sailor who fate chances to survive. Into the "great shroud of the sea" (135: 469) all significances collapse. Yet that one witness is all that is needed to regenerate the world again and to paint its true form in dark tones.

We have observed how the romance aspects of Moby-Dick are carried over from preceding portions of the work and grafted onto the final tragic action in order to reinforce the angles of interpretation by which the mysteries of Moby Dick may be approached. In both the use of qualifying phrases to state possible lines of interpretations about the whale's underlying motives, and in the depiction of Moby Dick as a fluid rather than a static and empirically comprehensible creature, we have seen two instances where Melville took certain license with his mode and manner of presentation in order to accent the potentialities of his material. In conclusion, one other romance element needs to be pointed out, so as to counteract what may be the impression that Moby-Dick's

closing chapters are strictly concerned with delineating speculative meanings.

Those meanings, as have been traced in this chapter, are, in reality, secondary to the impact of the tragic action and the dimension of moral judgment the treatment of the action implies. For though the work on one hand prizes Ahab as an exceptional individual willing to sink to hell to steal "a living part of heaven," (135: 469), it also passes judgment on him as a man. This judgment is best expressed by the adage a man reaps what he sows. In order to render this judgment artistically, Ahab is shown by Melville at the end to encounter in objective conditions the same demonic reality that has exemplified his inner life. By Ahab's rigid adherence to one idea of himself and the world, his moral reality is shown to become his circumstantial reality, his character his fate. There are three epiphanal moments when his inner corruption is manifested in outward events or in how those events are described. The first is when his head becomes the center of the "direful zone" (13: 450) around which the enraged whale swims, causing us to consider his role in eliciting such appalling malice. The second is the observation that the sharks seem to follow his boat on the third day without molesting the others; the oars grow smaller and smaller, as though his destructive purpose can no longer be supported. The third is the use of Calvinist terminology by the narrator in describing Moby Dick as he charges the Pequod:

> . . . the whale, . . . from side to side strangely vibrating his predestinating head, sent a broad band of overspreading semicircular foam before him as he rushed. Retribution, swift vengeance, eternal malice were in his whole aspect, and spite of all that mortal man could do, the solid white buttress of his forehead smote the ship's starboard bow. . . . (135: 468) (Stress mine.)

The significance of this passage—scarcely intended to signal an embrace of Calvinism—lies in the assertion that character is fate and that the ship—symbol of Ahab's "unsurrendering" and "uncracked" will (135: 468) —shall be destroyed by the very vision of pervasive malice that typifies Ahab's view of the heavens and the earth. The reality of that malice is the terrible truth that no man eludes and that Ahab brings down upon himself, defiantly, from the bottom of "hell's heart" (135: 468).

NOTES

CHAPTER I

[1]Lawrance Thompson, Melville's Quarrel With God (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1952), p. 7.

[2]Ibid., p. 151; information in dashes, p. 11.

[3]Ibid., pp. 6; 30.

[4]Paul Brodtkorb, Jr., Ishmael's White World: A Phenomenological Reading of Moby Dick (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1965), p. 4.

[5]Ibid., p. 112. See p. 113 for a summary of the "indecisive ambivalence" which characterizes Ishmael's view of the phenomenal world.

[6]Warner Berthoff, The Example of Melville (New York: W. W. Norton & Co. Inc., The Norton Library, 1972), p. 124.

[7]The Book of Job. 41: 1, 7, 9-10.

[8]Nathalia Wright, "Moby Dick: Jonah's or Job's Whale?" Notes and Queries 37 (1965), 190-91. The leviathian of Job was identified as referring to the crocodile.

[9]Thompson, p. 171.

[10]Herman Melville, Moby-Dick, eds. Harrison Hayford and Hershel Parker (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., A Norton Critical Edition, 1967), ch. 41, pp. 160-62. All subsequent references to Moby-Dick will appear in parentheses in the text. While page numbers will vary with editions, chapter numbers should be the same.

[11]Job, 41: 33.

[12]J. Hillis Miller, The Disappearance of God: Five Nineteenth Century Writers (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, The Belknap Press, 1963), p. 13.

[13]Ibid., pp. 13-14.

[14]Karl Barth, The Doctrine of The World of God, Prolegomena to Church Dogmatics, Vol. I, i, trans. G. T. Thompson (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1936), p. 368.

[15]Charles Feidelson Jr., in Symbolism and American Literature (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1953), has established convincingly the connection between the habit of nineteenth-century American writers of finding in nature symbols of their mental and spiritual activity and the habits of mind of the seventeenth-century American Puritans who saw in the events of the New England wilderness expressions of God's attitude toward them. The establishment of this line of influence, moreover, tends to somewhat diminish the importance of English and Continental romanticism on a writer such as Melville, replacing it with the allegorizing and typological imagination of the English and New World Puritans, and subordinating nineteenth-century romanticism to the role of having provided him with an aesthetic philosophy. Yet even in this diminished role, there seems little doubt that romanticism provided Melville with the impetus to explore nature with both the realistic detail and subjective standpoint which would not have otherwise been possible. Feidelson says of the Puritan view of nature with its aesthetic limitations: "The symbols themselves were meager, for the mental economy of the Puritans gave little scope for aesthetic realization of the natural world. These men narrowed 'the meaning of God' to the meanings of a crabbed schoolmaster. Yet the symbolizing process was constantly at work in their minds. For them, the word 'wilderness' inherently united the forty years of the ancient Hebrews with the trials of the New England forest" (pp. 78-79).

[16]Letter to Hawthorne, April 16?, 1851. The Letters of Herman Melville, eds. Merrell R. Davis and William H. Gilman (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1960), pp. 123-25.

[17]Nathaniel Hawthorne, The English Notebooks, ed. Randall Stewart (New York: MLA, 1941), pp. 432-33.

[18]Wright, p. 193.

[19]Robert Zoellner, The Salt-Sea Mastodon: A Reading of Moby-Dick (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1973), p. 154.

[20]Newton Arvin, Herman Melville (New York: Viking Press, 1950), p. 189.

[21]T. Walter Herbert, Jr., "Calvinism and Cosmic Evil in Moby-Dick," PMLA, 84: 6 (1969), 1613; 1616.

[22]Herman Melville, Moby-Dick, eds. Hayford and Parker, "Hawthorne and His Mosses," pp. 540-41. This critical essay on Hawthorne's Mosses From an Old Manse was first published in The Literary World in two installments on August 17 and 24, 1850.

[23]Richard Chase, Herman Melville: A Critical Study (1949; rpt. New York: Hafner Publishing Co., 1971), p. 55.

[24]Arvin's discussion of the probable nature of the Calvinist doctrine Melville heard in the Dutch Reformed Church in North Albany and in New York City, as well as the influence of Calvinism on Melville's mature world-view, is the best of the biographical treatments. See Herman Melville, pp. 30-35.

[25]Herman Melville, "Hawthorne and His Mosses," p. 540.

[26]Letter to Hawthorne, April 16?, 1951. The Letters of HM, pp. 123-25.

CHAPTER II.

[1]For the distinctions of "narrative past" and "present" see: Barry A. Marks, "Retrospective Narrative in Nineteenth Century American Literature," College English, 31 (1971), 366-75; esp. 366-68.

[2]Herman Melville, Moby-Dick, eds. Harrison Hayford and Hershel Parker (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., A Norton Critical Edition, 1967), ch. 1, p. 16. All subsequent references to Moby-Dick will appear in parentheses in the text. While the page numbers will vary with editions, chapter numbers should be the same.

[3]Charles Feidelson, Jr., Symbolism and American Literature (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1953), p. 31. He says: "Ishmael, unlike most fictive narrators, is not merely a surrogate for an absentee author. Behind him always present as a kind of Doppelgänger, stands Herman Melville. As Ishmael the narrator enters more deeply into his symbolic world, he increasingly becomes a presence, a visionary activity, rather than a man; we lose interest in him as an individual, and even Ishmael the sailor almost drops from the story. Ishmael the visionary is often indistinguishable from the mind of the author himself. It is Melville's own voice that utters the passage on the heroic stature of Ahab. This apparent violation of narrative standpoint is really a natural consequence of the symbolic method of Moby-Dick. The distinction between the author and his alter ego is submerged in their common function as the voyaging mind."

[4]Carl Woodring, "Nature and Art in the Nineteenth Century," PMLA, 92 (1977), 195.

[5]Feidelson, pp. 27-35; 183-86.

[6]William H. Shurr (The Mystery of Iniquity: Melville as Poet, 1857-91 [Lexington, Ky.: The Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1972], p. 136) feels that "at least the finishing touches were put on" the poem "within the few years before it was published." His reasoning is that the sub-title—At The Surf Inn—links it with the Melvilles' vacations at Surf House on Fire Island during the summers of 1885 and 1887-89.

[7]Herman Melville, "The Aeolian Harp," in Collected Poems of Herman Melville, ed. Howard P. Vincent (Chicago: Parkard and Company, Henricks House, 1947), pp. 194-96.

[8]Shurr, p. 134.

[9]I shall be using this term, as the dictionary defines it, to mean "the condition or quality of being indeterminate" (Random House Dictionary, ed. Jess Stern), and not as it has become colored by the Heisenberg Indeterminacy Principle of physics where it implies that to study something is to change it.

[10]See, for example, the statement "But we are all in the hands of the Gods" (93: 346) that preceeds Stubbs abandonment of Pip at sea.

[11]Newton Arvin, Herman Melville (New York: Viking Press, 1950), p. 169.

[12]Letter to Hawthorne, June 1?, 1851. The Letters of Herman Melville, eds. Merrell R. Davis and William H. Gilman (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1960), p. 131.

[13]Arvin, p. 169.

[14]Henri Bergson, An Introduction to Metaphysics, trans. T. E. Hulme (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, The Knickerbocker Press, 1912), p. 1.

[15]Leo Marx, The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1964), p. 281.

[16]Letter to Hawthorne, June 1?, 1851. The Letters of HM, p. 131.

[17]Herman Melville, Mardi And A Voyage Thither, eds. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern Univ. Press, Newberry Library, 1970), pp. 576-77.

[18]William Braswell, Melville's Religious Thought (1943; rpt. New York: Octagon Books, 1973), pp. 19-20.

[19]Ibid., p. 20.

[20]Leon Howard, Herman Melville: A Biography (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1967), pp. 178; 188.

[21]Warner Berthoff, The Example of Melville (New York: W. W. Norton Co. Inc., 1972).

CHAPTER III.

[1]Herman Melville, Moby-Dick, eds. Harrison Hayford and Hershel Parker (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., A Norton Critical Edition, 1967), ch. 23, p. 97. All subsequent references to Moby-Dick will appear in parentheses in the text. While page numbers will vary with editions, chapter numbers should be the same.

[2]Lawrance Thompson, Melville's Quarrel With God (Princeton: Univ. Press, 1952), p. 161.

[3]H. W. Schneider, The Puritan Mind (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1958), p. 231.

[4]Ibid., p. 201.

[5]Ibid., pp. 198-99.

[6]Ibid,, p. 201.

[7]Robert Zoellner, The Salt-Sea Mastodon: A Reading of Moby-Dick (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1973), pp. 50-64.

[8]Thompson, p. 163.

[9]Ibid., pp. 164-65.

[10]See, for example: T. Walter Herbert, Jr., "Calvinism and Cosmic Evil in Moby-Dick," PMLA, 84: 6 (1969), 161-19. Part of his thesis is that "Melville establishes an antithesis between the doctrine of Father Mapple's sermon and the conduct of Captain Ahab" (p. 1613). Yet his concluding paragraph seems to admit the emergence of a totally unchristian universe in the main portion of the book. It reads: "We may now recognize, finally, that Melville does not use theological materials in order to argue the merits of Calvinism or any rival Christian theology. He does not thrust doctrinal controversy before us; such terms as 'reprobate,' 'Calvinist,' and 'original sin' are never used in Moby-Dick. Instead, Melville uses traditional religious themes to develop the character of an actual cosmic evil which challenges the validity of Christian theology altogether. . . ." (Stress mine.)

[11]See Leon Howard, Herman Melville: A Biography (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1967), pp. 162-79.

[12]Ibid., p. 167.

[13]Letter to Hawthorne, April? 16?, 1851). The Letters of Herman Melville, eds. Merrell R. Davis and William H. Gilman (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1960), p. 124.

[14]Newton Arvin, Herman Melville (New York: Viking Press, 1950), pp. 179-80.

[15]Ibid.

[16]See Charles Feidelson, Jr. Symbolism and American Literature (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1953). Feidelson's ideas about Moby-Dick seem to stem from "The Lee Shore." Certainly, his pages on Moby-Dick are the finest application of these ideas to the work as a whole; whether such an approach is exhaustive or not, however, is another question.

[17]Thompson, p. 171.

[18]Feidelson, p. 35.

Chapter IV.

[1]Herman Melville, Moby-Dick, eds. Harrison Hayford and Hershel Parker (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., A Norton Critical Edition, 1967), ch. 132, pp. 443-444. All subsequent references to Moby-Dick will appear in parentheses in text. While page numbers will vary with editions, chapter numbers should be the same.

[2]T. Walter Herbert, Jr., "Calvinism and Cosmic Evil in Moby-Dick," PMLA, 84: 6 (1969), 1613-1619.

[3]Herbert finds in a check-list of Melville's readings that while writing Moby-Dick he "had at hand a celebrated anti-Calvinist treatise," John Taylor's The Scripture Doctrine of Original Sin, proposed to a Free and Candid Examination. Published in London in 1740, attacked by Jonathan Edwards in 1758, the work passed through numerous editions and was referred to in 1853 by Edward Beecher as a "celebrated work against original sin" which played an important role in liberalizing New England theology (Herbert, p. 1613). Also, Herbert points to a work of a theologian writing at the same time as Melville, R. S. Foster's Objections to Calvinism (Cincinnati, Ohio, 1849). Foster's prominence eight years after the publication of the work brought him the presidency of Northwestern University and, later still, of Drew Theological Seminary. Herbert does not "propose Melville read Foster," but that he is an "important anti-Calvinst," still, like Melville, reacting intensely to the old orthodoxy; and that he is someone "whose outcries help bring into focus Melville's depiction of cosmic evil" (Herbert, p. 1614).

[4]Calvin's Calvinism, trans. Henry Cole (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1950), pp. 126-27.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Herbert, p. 1617. For this and for the subsequent arguments of the anti-Calvinist, as well as for the above example from Calvin, I am indebted to Herbert.

[7]Ibid., p. 1614.

[8]R. S. Foster, Objections to Calvinism (Cincinnati, Ohio, 1849), pp. 53-54.

[9]Robert Zoellner, The Salt-Sea Mastodon: A Reading of Moby-Dick (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1973), p. 3.

[10]Letter to Hawthorne, June 1?, 1851. The Letters of Herman Melville, eds. Merrell R. Davis and William H. Gilman (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1960), p. 127.

[11]Zoellner, p. 4.

[12]For the most extensive discussion of the separation in Ahab of the "high perception" and the "low, enjoying power" see Richard Chase, The American Novel and Its Tradition (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Anchor Books Edition, 1957), pp. 90-92.

[13]Hayford and Parker, eds. Moby-Dick, p. 147.

[14]Other moments when Ahab is identified with Christ, the Redeemer, are when he is said to stand before the crew "with a crucifixion in his face" (28: 111); and when we are told that he "sleeps with clenched hands; and wakes with his own bloody nails in his palms" (44: 174). Such instances, however, while reinforcing Ahab's savior-like concern with the suffering of man, are not really consistent with his role as the accuser of God, because his accusation carries him into diabolical extremes. The Promethean motif, to be discussed later in this chapter, is, to a great degree, a more convincing archetype; however, here too, an incongruity with the immoralism of his satanic rebellion exists.

[15]F. O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1941), p. 453.

[16]Herbert, p. 1615.

[17]Richard Chase, The American Novel And Its Tradition (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Anchor Books Edition, 1957), pp. 12-13.

[18]Ibid., p. 21.

[19]Ibid., p. 19.

[20]Herbert, p. 1615.

[21]Richard Chase, Herman Melville: A Critical Study (1949; rpt. New York: Hafner Publishing Co., 1971), p. 54.

[22]Leon Howard, Herman Melville: A Biography (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1967), p. 172.

[23]Charles C. Walcutt, Man's Changing Masks: Modes and Methods of Characterization in Fiction (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966), p. 122.

[24]Ibid.

[25]There are also two possibilities mentioned by the crew when Ishmael sees the scar in Chapter 28—one that Ahab was born with it, and the other that it was a scar left by some wound. Concerning the latter possibility, the old Gay-Header among the crew, more "superstitiously" asserts that it was acquired at age forty, "not in any mortal fray, but in elemental strife with the sea" (28: 110).

[26]"Manicheism," The Columbia Viking Desk Encyclopedia, II, 3rd edition (1968), 660.

[27]Matthiessen refers to Melville's letter to Evert A. Duyckinck of April 5, 1849, where Melville wrote: "I bought a set of Bayle's Dictionary the other day, & on my return to New York intended to lay the great old folios side by side & go to sleep on them thro' the summer. . . ." See The Letters of HM, p. 85.

[28]Matthiessen, p. 439.

[29]"Zorastrianism," The Columbia Viking Desk Encyclopedia, II, 1201.

[30]Matthiessen, p. 439.

[31]Ibid.

[32]Charles C. Walcutt, "Fire Symbolism in Moby-Dick," Modern Language Notes, 59 (1944), 304-10.

[33]Charles C. Walcutt, Man's Changing Masks: Modes and Methods of Characterization in Fiction (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1966), pp. 104-23.

[34]Walcutt, "Fire Symbolism in Moby-Dick," MLN, 307.

[35]Ibid., p. 306.

[36]Ibid.

[37]Lawrance Thompson, Melville's Quarrel With God (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957), p. 230.

[38]Is this not an MS or author's error that should read "unconditional, integral"—i. e. complete—"mastery"?

[39]Walcutt, Man's Changing Masks, p. 114.

[40]Letter to Hawthorne, April 16, 1851. The Letters of HM, pp. 124-25.

[41]Both quoted material and the question raised come from: Walcutt, "Fire Symbolism in Moby-Dick," MLA, 308-09.

[42]Extremely helpful here has been Henry Alonzo Meyers' essay: "Captain Ahab's Discovery: The Tragic Meaning of Moby Dick," New England Quarterly, 15 (1942), pp. 19; 23; 33; et passim.

[43]Leo Marx, The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1964), pp. 314-17.

[44]Ibid., p. 315. In contrast to the machine imagery used by Ahab, and identifiable with a Faustian mechanistic civilization, Marx shows how images of verdure are used by Ishmael to describe his transcendental experiences at sea. Ishmael's task, according to Marx, is to integrate the sentimental pastoral romanticism with which he begins the voyage with his experience with the fluctuations and dangers of reality at sea; it is to achieve a "new definition of felicity or greenness." See Marx, pp. 277-319; esp. 287.

[45]William Ellery Sedgwick, Herman Melville: The Tragedy of Mind (New York: Russell and Russell Inc., 1944), p. 18.

CHAPTER V.

[1]Herman Melville, Moby-Dick, eds. Harrison Hayford and Hershel Parker (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., A Norton Critical Edition, 1967), ch. 1, p. 12. All subsequent references to Moby-Dick will appear in parenthesis in the text. While page numbers will vary with editions, chapter numbers should be the same.

[2]Robert Zoellner, The Salt Sea Mastodon (Berkeley: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1973), p. 127. See Zoellner's seventh chapter, especially pp. 126-27, for an excellent section on Ishmael's "hypos."

[3]Zoellner's seventh chapter is most provocative on just this point about Ishmael's "three major hypos" of "death," "void," and the "pervasive sharkishness of nature and of man" (p. 127), and about how they recur at sea after their emergence on land (in "The Chapel" predominantly).

[4]This is Zoellner's coinage, p. 127.

[5]Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton: Univ. Press, 1957), p. 34.

[6]Ibid., pp. 33-34. An interesting sidelight suggests itself around the idea that while Ahab is a tragic character "subject both to social criticism and to the order of nature," he thinks of himself as a mythic, god-like man who is "superior in kind both to other men and to the environment of men" (Frye, p. 33). And from the conflict between these two selves—the one imagined into reality, the other inherently true—issues the tensions of his being.

[7]Ibid., p. 33.

[8]Zoellner, p. 135.

[9]Ibid., p. 136.

[10]This latter possibility receives strongest treatment in the chapter on what whiteness suggests to Ishmael. Yet it is the former possibility of a limited God that coincides with the attitudes expressed or implied by Melville most commonly in Moby-Dick. William Braswell suggests Melville first encountered the idea of a limited Deity in Bayle. From that author's Dictionary Historical and Critical, Melville probably became acquainted, not only with Manicheism as an explanation of evil, but also with the Gnostic theory that the "Creator of the universe is an inferior Deity." (See: Melville's Religious Thought [1943; rpt. New York: Octagon Books, 1973], p. 52.) And while I'm reluctant to bring evidence into the text from outside Chapter 42 to bolster my interpretation of what Ishmael means by "the invisible spheres were formed in fright," I do think it is worthwhile at least to list here some of the other occasions where a comparable idea of a fearful cosmic principle of evil is alluded to; in this way, whether Gnostic in influence or not, that such an idea was on Melville's mind may at least be established. Foremost is Ahab's vision of God in "The Candles," where he says to the "clear spirit": "Light though thou be, thou leapest out of darkness," and then some lines later: "There is some unsuffusing thing beyond thee, thou clear spirit, to whom all thy eternity is but time, all thy creativeness mechanical" (119: 417). Secondly, there is the remark that when one comes near the living, hunted whale, one sees "the interlinked terrors and wonders of God! (24: 99); and then, in a similar vein, the symbolically suggestive statement, that in the sperm whale—"That Himmalehan, salt-sea Mastodon, clothed with such portentousness of unconscious power"—"his very panics are more to be dreaded than his most fearless and malicious assaults!" (14: 62). Lastly, though this is more a description of the manifestations of cosmic evil, there is the memorable description in "The Funeral" of the insatiable forces of destruction devouring a whale carcass:

> Slowly it floats more and more away, the water round it torn and splashed by the insatiate sharks, and the air above vexed with rapacious flights of screaming fowls, whose beaks are like so many insulting poniards in the whale. The vast white headless phantom floats further and further from the ship, and every rod that it floats, what seems square roods of sharks and cubic roods of fowls, augment the murderous din. . . .
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Oh, horrible vulturism of earth! from which not even the mighty whale is free. (69: 261-62)

[11]Melville's choice of word appears dictated by the fact that it offered the double and more common meaning of "up side down," in addition to "reversed." Ishmael's turning about, in this way, is made symbolic of Ahab's inversion of values.

[12]R. W. B. Lewis, The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 143.

[13]Ibid., p. 146.

[14]This last phrase—quoted in "The Try-Works" directly from Proverbs 21: 16—would seem to be associated in Melville's mind with the former statement in Proverbs 21: 12 that "The righteous man wisely considereth the house of the wicked. . . ." Taken together, they comprise a variant on the "mortally intolerable truth" of "The Lee Shore": let the wise man know evil; but let there be no faith that he will survive that knowledge.

[15]Melville's letters during his composition of Moby-Dick indicate the dominance of this same trope of rendering light-giving oil from the dross of blubber by cooking it in infernal fires. He writes to Richard Dana, when at work on the novel only a matter of months: "It will be a strange sort of a book, tho', I fear; blubber is blubber you know; tho' you may get oil out of it, the poetry runs as hard as sap from a frozen maple tree;—& to cook the thing up, one must needs throw in a little fancy. . . ." (Letter of May 1, 1850; See: The Letters of Herman Melville, eds. Merrell R. Davis and William H. Gilman [New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1960], pp. 106-08.) Then, over a year later, nearer to finishing, the metaphor takes on a more seasoned and blasphemous flavor. He writes to Hawthorne: "Shall I send you a fin of the Whale by way of a specimen mouthful? The tail is not yet cooked—tho' the hell-fire in which the whole book is broiled might not unreasonably have cooked it all ere this." He ends by declaring that the same satanic oath "deliriously howled" by Ahab ("Ego non baptizo te in nomine patris, sed in nomine diabli!" [113: 404]) is, in fact, "the book's motto (the secret one) . . ." (Letter of June 29, 1851; See The Letters of Herman Melville, pp. 132-33).

[16]Lewis, p. 140. Lewis's lengthy discussion of Melville in light of the try-works soliloquy has been a valuable help on Melville's view of spiritual and creative growth. See pp. 127-46 of American Adam.

[17]On Byron's influence see: Joseph Mogan, Jr., "Pierre and Manfred: Melville's Study of the Byronic Hero," Papers on English Language and Literature, 1 (1965), 230-40. Or: Edward Fiess, "Byron and Byronism in the Mind and Art of Herman Melville," Diss. Yale 1951.

[18]Harold Bloom, The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., An Anchor Book, 1961), p. 261. Bloom's discussion of Byron is instructive in understanding the Ahabian impasse. See pp. 259-63.

[19]Ibid., p. 263. A phrase on Byron, applicable to Ahab.

[20]Ibid., p. 269.

[21]Ibid., p. 261. Again, this is Bloom on Byron.

[22]Letter to George and Thomas Keats, Sunday 21, 27 (?), 1817. The Letters of John Keats: 1814-1821, Vol. I, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1958), pp. 191-94.

CHAPTER VI.

[1]Charles C. Walcutt, Man's Changing Masks: Modes and Methods of Characterization in Fiction (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minesota Press, 1966), pp. 104-23; esp. 118-120.

[2]Robert Zoellner, The Salt-Sea Mastodon: A Reading of Moby-Dick (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1973). Zoellner speaks of Moby-Dick as an "anti-heroic and counter-epic document" (p. 179); he sees Ahab as an "ugly" unheroic hero (ch. VI, esp. pp. 105-09), a foil for the story of Ishmael's transformation and the humanization of Ishmael's view of nature (chs. VIII and IX).

[3]The implicit premise of Zoellner's reading, since he traces a fully developed transformation of Ishmael during the time of the voyage.

[4]Charles Feidelson, Jr., Symbolism and American Literature (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1953), pp. 27-35; 183-86. See also: Paul Brodtkorb, Jr., Ishmael's White World: A Phenomenological Reading of Moby Dick (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1965).

[5]Herman Melville, Moby-Dick, eds. Harrison Hayford and Hershel Parker (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., A Norton Critical Edition, 1967), Epilogue, p. 470. All subsequent references to Moby-Dick will appear in parentheses in the text. While page numbers will vary with editions, chapter numbers should be the same.

[6]Newton Arvin, Herman Melville (New York: Viking Press, 1950), p. 190.

[7]Ibid., p. 181.

[8]Leslie A. Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel, New Revised Edition (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1969), p. 371.

[9]Ibid., p. 373.

[10]Louis Leiter, "Queequeg's Coffin," Nineteenth Century Fiction, 13 (1958), 249-54.

[11]Richard Chase, The American Novel and Its Tradition (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., An Anchor Books Edition, 1957), p. 109.

[12]Warner Berthoff, The Example of Melville (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., The Norton Library, 1972), p. 115. Berthoff's chapter on Melville's narrators (pp. 115-32) seems to me the very best on the subject, and I am indebted to him throughout this section for his stress on Melville's innovative adaptation of the first-person narrative convention.

[13]Ibid., p. 122

[14]Ibid., p. 117.

[15]Ibid., p. 118.

[16]What they omit is that he is in the Epilogue.

[17]Berthoff makes pretty much the same point about the "ability to rouse the reader's attention and confidence" in "the game of persuasion" (p. 117).

[18]Says Walcutt: ". . . [Ishmael] has no function in the plot. He does not engage in a conflict that leads him to the point of a choice. He is therefore essentially disembodied, and when he takes a form it may be any form the moment requires. Consistent characterization he does not have; it is possible to attach the rich speculations evoked by the novel to almost any image of Ishmael the reader imagines" (Man Changing Masks, p. 120).

[19]Says Feidelson: ". . . the drama does not take place in vacuo; the symbolic nature of the action depends on its being perceived. This is the reason why Ishmael is necessary in the book, despite the fact that he and Melville often merge into one. Ishmael is the delegated vision of Melville: he can enact the genesis of symbolic meaning, whereas, Melville, speaking solely as an omniscient author, could only impute an arbitrary significant" (Symbolism and American Literature, pp. 31-32).

[20]Berthoff, p. 181.

[21]The only treatment of this very central theme is Zoellner's chapter in The Salt-Sea Mastodon called "The Universal Thump: Jehovah's Winter World" (ch. IV, pp. 53-71).

[22]Feidelson, p. 35.

[23]Irving Howe, "The Idea of the Modern," in The Idea of The Modern in Literature and the Arts, edited with an introduction and commentary, Irving Howe (New York: Horizon Books, 1967), p. 19.

[24]Ibid.

CHAPTER VII.

[1]Herman Melville, Moby-Dick, eds. Harrison Hayford and Hershel Parker (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., A Norton Critical Edition, 1967), ch. 119, p. 416. All subsequent references to Moby-Dick will appear in parentheses in the text. While page numbers will vary with editions, chapter numbers should be the same.

[2]Edward H. Rosenberry, Melville and the Comic Spirit (1955; rpt. New York: Octagon Books, 1969), p. 123.

[3]Ibid., p. 2.

[4]Ibid., p. 87.

[5]Ibid., p. 116.

[6]Jane Mushabac, "Humor in Melville's Fiction," Diss. City University of New York 1977, p. 12; 14.

[7]Howard P. Vincent, The Trying-Out of Moby-Dick (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1949). The quoted phrase is the name of one of the parts of Vincent's book.

[8]Mushabac, p. 201.

[9]Ibid., p. 200.

[10]Ibid., p. 201.

[11]Ibid,, p. 176. See pp. 198-201 for comments specifically about Chase.

[12]Ibid., p. 177.

[13]Ibid., p. 202.

[14]Ibid., p. 180.

[15]Ibid., pp. 42-43.

[16]Herman Melville, Mardi And A Voyage Thither, eds. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern Univ. Press, Newberry Library, 1970), ch. 183, p. 613.

[17]Ibid., p. 613-14.

[18]This speech reminds one of Henry Miller's Tropic of Cancer, where with a sexual accent, we find the same comic triumph beyond hope and beyond morality.

[19]Rosenberry, p. 123.

[20]Mushabac, p. 168.

[21]I have been speaking here about Ishmael in his role as narrator, and I have been trying to suggest the harmony between his character in the story and his demeanor in the narration as an anatomist. Let me, however, re-state the fact stressed in my sixth chapter, that Ishmael's conduct as a narrator does more than merely reveal his character; it engages him in exposition whose purpose can only be grasped in terms of Melville's aesthetic and philosophic goals for the cetelogy material. These goals, moreover, involve Ishmael in a strategy of exposition for which he is clearly little more than a convenience, a jumping-off point, a mask. As a result, I shall be shifting, in the course of this chapter, between the designation "Ishmael" and the designation "Melville" when discussing the narrator. When speaking about the underlying artistic goals, I have tended to say "Melville"; when speaking about acts of exposition on the part of the "I" voice, I have tended to say "Ishmael." Common sense, I think, makes this inexact approach preferable to the artificiality of "Ishmael-Melville" or the absolute adherence to "Ishmael," no matter how strongly the force of the author's presence is felt. Judging by Robert Zoellner's book, saying "Ishmael" exclusively tends to enlist one in the pretense that every word and image in the narration reflects Ishmael's mind, Ishmael's intention, and that Melville just happens to "agree."

[22]J. A. Ward, "The Function of the Cetological Chapters in Moby-Dick," American Literature, 28 (1956), 168.

[23]Ibid., p. 167.

[24]Herman Melville, Mardi, ch. 169, p. 557.

[25]Entry of Thursday February 5th 1857. Herman Melville, Journal Up The Straits: October 11, 1856-May 5, 1857, edited with an introduction by Raymond Weaver (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1971), pp. 106-08.

[26]Paul Brodtkorb, Jr. also considers the philosophical basis of indeterminacy. See Ishmael's White World (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1965), pp. 24-27.

[27]Used within a far more general context, this term is Feidelson's. See Charles Feidelson, Jr., Symbolism and American Literature (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1953), pp. 28-34.

[28]Ward, p. 169.

[29]Vincent, p. 356.

[30]Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957), pp. 309-11. Frye classifies Moby-Dick as "romance-anatomy" (p. 313).

[31]Feidelson, p. 35.

[32]Frye, p. 310.

[33]M. H. Abrams, The Mirror and The Lamp: Romantic Theory and The Critical Tradition (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1953), p. 22.

[34]From romantic theory, it is only a short distance, Abrams shows by citing Mill's essays on poetry, to the point where the "reference of poetry to the external universe disappears . . . except to the extent that sensible objects may serve as a stimulus or 'occasion for the generation of poetry'." "Thus severed from the external world," he goes on linking romantic and symbolist theory, "the objects signified by a poem tend to be regarded as no more than a projected equivalent—an extended and articulated symbol—of the poet's inner state of mind" (Abrams, pp. 24-25).

[35]Brodtkorb, p. 27.

[36]Matthiessen also views this sequence of chapters concerning Stubb's whale as a unit. See American Renaissance (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1941), p. 419.

[37]Harrison Hayford and Hershel Parker, eds. Moby-Dick, p. 203n.

[38]How Melville is able to move to different anatomical aspects of the whale and to continue to suggest various ideas about God is an interesting literary question. What, in other words, are the conditions of his symbolism, the context in which it finds its life? One factor is Melville's intensive description of the god-like qualities or metaphysical properties attributed to Moby-Dick by Ahab (ch. 41) and Ishmael (ch. 42). Another factor is Melville's assiduous effort to document the sperm whale's "two-fold enormousness" of size and power in "The Affadavit" (ch. 45). Still another is the use of calculated poetic sentences that speak of the sperm whale in terms of the primary forces of nature or the primal elements of Creation. And a final one is the use of phrases which imply mythic exaltedness to the whale such as "majestic bulk and mystic waves" (27: 106) and "most exalted potency" (80: 294). As a result, then, of these and I am sure other devices, each time Melville examines a physical aspect of the sperm whale, there is a sense in which a theological level of demonstration is taking place about the nature of nature and God.

[39]Leslie A. Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel, New New Revised edition (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1967), p. 372.

[40]Ward, p. 182.

[41]Robert Zoellner, The Salt-Sea Mastodon (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1973), chs. VII-XII. Zoellner significantly puts little stress on the meditation in "The Gilder" which underscores the cyclical nature of human "growth."

CHAPTER VIII

[1] Herman Melville, Moby-Dick, eds. Harrison Hayford and Hershel Parker (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., A Norton Critical Edition, 1967), ch. 132, p. 445. All subsequent references to Moby-Dick will appear in parentheses in the text. While page numbers will vary with editions, chapter numbers should be the same.

[2] Charles C. Walcutt, "Fire Symbolism in Moby-Dick," Modern Language Notes, 59 (1944), 309.

[3] Robert Zoellner, The Salt-Sea Mastodon (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1973), pp. 239-50.

[4] Paul Brodtkorb, Jr. Ishmael's White World (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), pp. 144-46.

[5] See, for example: Norman Friedman, "Point of View in Fiction: The Development of a Critical Concept," PMLA, 70: 5 (1955), 1160-84.

[6] Friedman, pp. 1174-75.

[7] Zoellner, p. 254.

[8] Ibid., p. 255.

[9] Zoellner is first-rate on the leeward flight. See pp. 255-58.

[10] Newton Arvin, Herman Melville (New York: Viking Press, 1950), p. 187.

[11] Nathaniel Hawthorne, The English Notebooks, ed. Randall Stewart (New York: MLA, 1941), pp. 432-33.

[12] Brodtkorb, to whom I am indebted for my language here, says that the only idea we get of Moby Dick is a "hurriedly blurred view of the whale as a mysteriously animated object" (p. 25).

[13] Ibid., p. 143.

[14] Ibid., p. 146.

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