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The Return of the Rachel- A Critique of Melville's Moby-Dick

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THE RETURN OF THE RACHEL: A CRITIQUE OF MELVILLE'S MOBY-DICK

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CHAPTER I

THE STORY OF MOBY-DICK

Ishmael, who tells the story, having found it convenient to go to sea, arrived at New Bedford to spend the night while on his way to Nantucket. At New Bedford, Ishmael met Queequeg, a pagan from a South Sea island. The friendship which followed between the two resulted in their going together on a whaling voyage.

Before leaving New Bedford, Ishmael attended a church service at the Whaleman's chapel. Father Mapple, a former sailor, delivered a sermon on Jonah. The theme of the sermon was obedience to the will of God.

In Nantucket, Queequeg, trusting in his wooden god Yojo, had decided that Ishmael should select the ship on which they would sail. The third ship that Ishmael inspected was the Pequod, which he chose. Captains Peleg and Bildad were the chief owners of the vessel. Nantucket Quakers, they had retired from whaling, and at this time were merely provisioning the Pequod; Captain Ahab was to be the captain during the voyage.

The day before sailing, an old man by the name of Elijah made several curious remarks about Captain Ahab and the coming voyage. Christmas morning, the day of sailing, Elijah met Ishmael and Queequeg and asked if they had seen the phantom figures sneak on board the Pequod just before dawn.

Captain Ahab had gone down into his cabin after arriving on board the Pequod before the rest of the crew arrived. The Pequod had reached

the warm waters of the equatorial zone before Ahab made his appearance to the crew. Up to this time, there was a certain amount of gossip and rumor about Ahab. Most of the crew knew that a white whale had bitten off Ahab's one leg during a previous whaling voyage.

Soon after Ahab made his appearance on deck, he gathered the crew together and told them of his purpose, which was to capture the white-whale, Moby Dick. Ahab received the sworn loyalty of the crew in his chase for the whale, and he nailed a doubloon to the mast; the doubloon was the prize for the first man who spotted Moby Dick.

While cruising south, Ahab had a whale boat fitted out for himself. The boat had a special hole and notch for his wooden leg. Ordinarily only the mates lowered away for a whale.

Whenever Ahab met another ship, his only question was about the white whale. As the Pequod sailed south around Cape Horn, he studied maps to locate the feeding grounds, the routes of the whales, and the places where Moby Dick had been seen. Ahab became more tense as the voyage progressed.

The three mates, Starbuck, Stubb, and Flask, were merely interested in storing whale oil for wages. They did not share Ahab's desire for revenge on the white whale.

After arriving in the Pacific, the first whales were seen. Immediately after the notice was given, five orientals appeared and became the crew for Ahab's boat. The harpooner was Fedallah. These were the phantom figures that Elijah had spoken about to Ishmael and Queequeg. These oriental natives had remained hidden up to this time.

Soon after this first encounter with whales, Stubb managed to kill a whale of another group that was sighted. Stubb had the cook prepare a

whale steak for him. That same evening, the cook, commanding the sharks to be quiet, preached a sermon to them.

One of the ships met was the Jeroboam. The Jeroboam's crew was infected with a contagious disease. On board the ship, there was a mentally unbalanced person whose name was Gabriel. Gabriel had convinced the crew that his prophecies were taking place, and in this way gained control over the crew. The crew of the Pequod was frightened by Gabriel and the incidents on the Jeroboam. Ahab also seemed to sense an ill wind, a result of Gabriel's impulsive and irritating remarks.

The Pequod soon after met the Virgin, a Dutch whaling ship. The crews of the two ships chased the same whales, the Pequod's crew making the victory. Stubb further proved his competence in this competitive type of whaling when he persuaded the French captain of the Rose-Bud, the next ship the Pequod met, that the whale tied along side the Rose-Bud was worthless. Stubb was rewarded for his shifty talking when he towed the dead whale to the Pequod and dug out the valuable ambergris from under the whale's ribs.

Shortly after meeting the Rose-Bud, Pip, the colored cabin boy, was enlisted as a temporary crew member for Stubb's boat. During an encounter with a whale, Pip fell out of the boat and almost drowned. The experience left him mentally deranged. Afterwards Pip spoke of himself as having drowned; the real Pip was dead. Ahab forbade the crew to make fun of Pip.

Not long afterward, Ahab ordered the carpenter to make a new leg for him out of a whale bone. Ahab also commanded the blacksmith to make a new harpoon for him.

It was about this time that Queequeg became quite sick. Thinking

that he was going to die, he asked the carpenter to make a coffin. Overcoming his illness, after remembering that he had something he must do before death, Queequeg converted his coffin into a sea chest. Later the coffin-sea chest was used as a life-buoy for the Pequod.

Soon after, a typhoon struck. The Pequod was almost at the mercy of the wind and the sea. During the storm, the corposants, the yard arms, began to burn, because of the lightning. The crew was terrified. Ahab made several vile oaths, and behaved in somewhat of a frenzied manner.

The Rachel was one of the next ships that the Pequod met on the high seas. The captain of the Rachel was searching for one of his sons that had been lost when a whale boat overturned during an encounter with a whale. Ahab refused to help the captain of the Rachel to search for his son.

Ahab had gradually become more determined in his pursuit of the white whale. At one time, he smashed the quadrant on the deck, because it could not tell him where Moby Dick was. He centered his attention solely on the chase and his revenge of the whale.

It was Ahab who first sighted Moby Dick. The encounter lasted three days. On the first day, the white whale smashed Ahab's boat. On the second day, the white whale killed Fedallah, Ahab's harpooner. On the third day, Ahab was hanged by the rope of his harpoon which he had just thrown at Moby Dick.

Moby Dick, head-on, rammed the Pequod, which sank. Ishmael managed to remain free from the swirling eddy of the sinking Pequod, and hung on to Queequeg's coffin that had been used as a life-buoy. In the epilogue, the Rachel rescued Ishmael, the sole survivor.

CHAPTER II

PROBLEMS INVOLVED

> The unharming sharks, they glided by as if with padlocks on their mouths; the savage sea-hawks sailed with sheathed beaks. On the second day, a sail drew near, nearer, and picked me up at last. It was the devious-cruising Rachel, that in her retracing search after his missing children, only found another orphan.[1]

Ishmael remained as the only survivor of the Pequod after the vain attempt by Captain Ahab to plant his harpoon in the life-center of the great white whale. In this dramatic struggle with Moby Dick, both men are vital centers of thought. What allegorical and symbolical intent Melville had when he wrote the novel he did not say. As the author, he spoke through Ishmael and Ahab, yet without identifying himself with either one. Interpretations of Melville through the novel and interpretations of the novel itself are varied, as critics and readers seize upon one of the several emphases. It is in part because of Melville, the cryptic man, that some have returned to his works. Others are interested primarily in the problems Melville poses in his novels as Moby-Dick, which in several respects evades a final interpretation. Regardless of the approach, Melville's Moby-Dick remains as one of the outstanding novels in the English language.

This critique is to clarify the relation of the ship Rachel to the rest of the story. The Rachel carries with it certain symbolical implications that have been neglected in interpretations and criticisms of

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[1] Herman Melville, Moby-Dick (New York: Books Inc., n.d.), Epilogue, p. 479.

Moby-Dick. In chapter CXXVIII, "The Pequod Meets the Rachel," the symbolic meaning suggests Jacob's wife Rachel crying in the wilderness because her sons are not, Jeremiah 31:15. The continuation of this symbolism in the epilogue would include a more definite recognition of the influence of Christianity on Melville than some critics would admit, namely, that Ishmael's rescue by the Rachel symbolically is Christian brotherly love effecting its universal significance in answer to Melville's problem.

Such an interpretation is quite possible; it is one which offers a new perspective to the novel, and its acceptance would alter some of the conventional criticism of Moby-Dick. It is herewith admitted that this "Christian" interpretation of the Rachel and her rescuing of Ishmael, although seen in the light of the total novel, is to a certain extent by inference, an inference yet based on facts and symbols. The determining factor is the extent of the interpretation of the symbols presented in their relation to the symbolic whole and its culmination.

There are several questions that have to be answered in the pursuit of the symbolic clarification of the Rachel. One question is Melville himself; does Melville's own thought include the possibility of the Christian symbolism in Ishmael's rescue by the Rachel? There is the problem of the extent of Melville's Christianity. There is no evidence to prove that Melville had ever completely accepted Christ by definition. At the same time, there is little doubt about Melville's sympathy with the Christian's brotherly love as exemplified by Jesus. Another question to be considered is the focal point of the theme: man's attempt to penetrate the unfathomable mysteries of life and to reach ultimate truth.

Does the theme center chiefly about Ahab, or does it center about Ahab and Ishmael, the latter beneficially experiencing, in part, the symbolic adventure of Ahab? A final question is the importance of the epilogue in the novel. Is the epilogue an essential in the symbolic whole? The importance of the epilogue in any novel is usually relative; often its purpose may be questioned. One function, perhaps the chief function, is to bridge the gap between the imagined reality of fiction and the reality of the perceptual world. Another function of the epilogue, a mechanical one and strictly speaking an unnecessary one, is to give untold and minor answers to the problems not given or solved in the novel proper. The justification of the inclusion of the epilogue in the interpretation of the total novel would depend upon the continuation of the symbolic, or even non-symbolic, structure and also upon the release of any dramatic tension not fully released in the novel proper. These questions are answered as the interpretation of the Rachel and her rescuing Ishmael within the perspective of the total novel is developed.

In all fairness, it ought to be stated that the answers to these questions centered about the symbolic clarification of the Rachel constitute the extent and the possibility of the "Christian" interpretation. It is to be kept in mind that the whole novel is involved in this interpretation; the Rachel incidents are not isolated for interpretation, but are taken in their place and seen in the perspective of the dramatic whole.

CHAPTER III

CHRISTIANITY FOR MELVILLE

At the time of writing Moby-Dick (1850), Melville's attitude toward Christianity was one of confusion. His awareness of the force of Christianity subjectively and objectively is quite apparent in the preceding novels, in which he expresses a mounting opposition to Christianity. Because of the double predestination of a loving and a wrathful God, a Calvinist could objectively reconcile the evil in a supposedly divine-created universe with a sovereign God. What stopped Melville was the centering of this problem within himself, and then from himself to others. At heart Melville was democratically sociable, and his interest in truth would not sanction a division of the religious and the metaphysical. His lack of patience with New England Puritanism sponsored a critical observation of man per se, comparable to Hawthorne, and of God in His universal relation to man. The crux of the matter was the rigidity of evil.

Christianity did not answer his problems. Melville had to search higher, perhaps lower, to grasp the impenetrable phantom of life. He was painfully aware of the elusiveness of this search. In a letter to Hawthorne (March, 1851) he wrote,

> And perhaps, after all, there is no secret. We incline to think that the Problem of the Universe is like the Freemason's mighty secret, so terrible to all children. It turns out, at last, to consist in a triangle, a mallet, and an apron, - nothing more! We incline to think that God cannot explain His own secrets, and that He would like a little information upon certain points Himself. We mortals astonish Him as much as He us. 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 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.[2]

Melville knew that in some way God was connected with the object of this search for truth. His difficulty was the approach. The Calvinistic background was uncomfortable. In another letter to Hawthorne (June, 1851), Melville wrote, "The reason the mass of men fear God, and at bottom dislike Him, is because they rather distrust His heart, and fancy Him all brain like a watch."[3] The wounded emotional disturbance of Melville is revealed in the remark enclosed in parentheses following the above quoted sentence, "You perceive I employ a capital initial in the pronoun referring to the Deity; don't you think there is a slight dash of flunkeyism in that usage?"[4] In Moby-Dick, Ahab, seeing Pip the crazed cabin boy, cries, "There can be no hearts above the snow-line."[5]

Melville considered Jesus rather effeminate for a man's world, where evil lurked, sometimes in the open. At this time he had not identified Jesus with the Christ; what he knew of Christ was shrouded by the man Jesus and his teachings.

> And whatever they may reveal of the divine love in the Son, the soft, curled, hermaphroditical Italian pictures, in which his idea has been most successfully embodied; these pictures, so destitute as they are of all bramminess, hint nothing of any power, but the mere negative, feminine one of submission and endurance, which on all hands it is conceded, form the peculiar practical virtues of his teachings.[6]

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[2]Willard Thorp (Ed.), Herman Melville (Chicago: American Book Co., 1938), p. 388.

[3]Ibid., p. 392.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Herman Melville, op. cit., p. 434.

[6]Ibid., pp. 316-17.

Melville disliked the submissive element which he regarded as characteristic of Jesus and His teaching. The South Sea travels and the years as a sailor had revealed too much to Melville for him to acquiesce to a philosophy of submission. Man was made of nobler stuff. Brotherly love solved many ills of mankind, but yet it was a love of respect for the fellowman, an admiration and common bond between strong and self-willed men who had a spark of divinity in them. In the first two chapters entitled "Knights and Squires," Ishmael says,

> But this august dignity I treat of, is not the dignity of kings and robes, but that abounding dignity which has no robed investiture. Thou shalt see it shining in the arm that wields a pick or drives a spike; that democratic dignity which, on all hands, radiates without end from God; Himself! The great God absolute! The centre and circumference of all democracy! His omnipresence, our divine equality![7]

This element of confidence in man provided the spring board for Melville to leap into the realm of the mysterious. The bitterness that he found in this search was blamed on God. Even man was frequently isolated as an object of reproach. The Christian church, which failed to provide fruit for his energetic mind, was a sore disillusionment. The weaknesses of the church were apparent, and the ill methods of the missionaries (Typee, Omoo) only heightened his aversion for organized Christianity. As Melville later revealed in Clarel, he believed that the followers of Christ had perverted His basic teachings. As William Braswell points out, when Melville wrote Mardi (publ. 1849) he doubted God's goodness and despaired over the nature of man. His serious religious thinking had so far led him only to a pessimism that had failed to respond to the principles of Christ; to these principles, however, he

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[7]Ibid., p. 96.

could still attribute wisdom and beauty.[8] But he was still searching.

The years from about 1847 to 1852 were a transitional stage for Melville. Mardi was a necessary step to the writing of Moby-Dick, and it is from the time of the publication of Moby-Dick (1851) that the developments to the writing of Clarel can be traced. Writing Moby-Dick was a turning point for Melville intellectually. At this time, although he did not believe in the New Testament definition of Christ, he was not opposed to it and in his own way tried to understand Christ. Most critics and biographers of Melville would agree that he was not anti-Christian, but a-Christian.

There is a strange relation between Moby-Dick and Pierre (publ. 1852) which has little if anything to do with the interpretation of each, but is important for the analysis of Melville's thinking at that time. Both novels were a catharsis for Melville. Issues that were brewing during the previous years provided a momentum that could only be satisfied by a purging of the intellect as well as the emotions. It seems as if Melville was subject to a degree of catharsis while writing Moby-Dick, and the thorough development of Ahab and his problem provided a release in its culmination that gave Melville through Ishmael a continuation of thought and spirit which was a relief from the preceding intellectual tension. The emotional counterpart followed in Pierre. The predominance of the intellectual over the emotional in Moby-Dick, and of the emotional over the intellectual in Pierre is rather obvious. This observation of Moby-Dick and Pierre does not overlook or disregard the political, meta-

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[8] William Braswell, "Herman Melville, A Critical Study," (Unpublished Doctor's Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1934), p. 70.

physical, and social aspects of Mardi, Moby-Dick, and Pierre respectively. This catharsis was an excruciating weakening of his literary and perhaps mental prowess, as after he had written these two books his pen lost its force. The bitterness that he had and the hurt of disillusionment had lost their voice. He was no longer one crying in the wilderness alone, but was ready prey for the influence of his Holy Land journey, the pyramids and Christ.

Throughout his life, Melville found it difficult to distinguish between God and fate. The powers of darkness were not flexible enough for a rational or spiritual explanation. His classic illustration of fate in Moby-Dick, Queequeg and Ishmael weaving with sword and hand "as if this were the Loom of Time," was not modified.[9] Melville did not doubt the existence of some supernatural being or of some predetermining cause. Speaking of the human soul, Pierre says, "For surely no mere mortal who has at all gone down into himself will ever pretend that his slightest thought or act solely originates in his own defined identity."[10] Ahab remarks,

> What is it, what nameless, inscrutable, unearthly thing is it; what cosening, 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? But if the great sun move not of himself; but is as an errand-boy in heaven; nor one single star revolve, but by some invisible power; how then can this one small heart beat; this one small brain think thoughts; unless God does that beating, does that thing, does that living, and not I. By heaven, man, we are turned round and round in

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[9]Melville, op. cit., p. 181.

[10]Herman Melville, Pierre (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1930), Bk. X, p. 197.

this world, like yonder windlass, and Fate is the handspike.[11]

As Ishmael said, "All men are enveloped in whale lines."[12] This thinking led Melville to tolerate the idea of the irresponsibility of God, and at times he expressed his anger in vehemence and sarcasm. Ahab exploded against God for having no pity on Pip the cabin boy, but for subjecting him to the horrors of the sea and the rebuke and the scoff of the crew. In Pierre, after stating that "the country was a glorious benediction to young Pierre," Melville says,

> We shall yet see again, I say, whether Fate hath not just a little bit of a word or two to say in this world; we shall see whether this wee little bit scrap of latiny be very far out of the way - Nemo contra Deum nisi Deus ipse.[13]

In Clarel,

> This world clean fails me: still I yearn.
> Me then it surely does concern
> Some other world to find. But where?
> In creed? I do not find it there.
> That said, and is the emprise o'er?
> Negation, is there nothing more?
> This side the dark and hollow bound
> Lies there no unexplored rich ground?
> Some other world: well, there's the New-
> Ah, joyless and ironic too![14]

W. E. Sedgwick notes Melville's growing awareness of the irrespon-

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[11]Melville, Moby-Dick, pp. 452-53.

[12]Ibid., p. 239.

[13]Melville, Pierre, Bk. I, p. 15.

[14]Herman Melville, Clarel (London: Constable and Co., Ltd., 1924), I, p. 49.

sibility of God in the chapter, "The Deck," of Moby-Dick.[15] As Ahab came on deck, he noticed that the carpenter who had shaped the wooden leg for Ahab was now making a life-buoy out of Queequeg's coffin. Ahab was somewhat vexed by the unprincipled "jack-of-all-trades." The carpenter in turn believed Ahab to be an odd old man, and maintained a knowing aloofness from Ahab, the man and his problems.

The lack of distinction between God and fate and the resulting confusion was associated with Melville's space-time consciousness. His historical consciousness was a vital issue in his thinking of the universe and of man. Melville, in Mardi, showed his sympathy and intimacy with space and time. Babbalanja says,

> Do you believe that you lived three thousand years ago? That you were at the taking of Tyre, were overwhelmed at Gomorrah? No, But for me, I was at the subsiding of the Deluge, and helped swab the ground, and build the first house. With the Israelites, I fainted in the wilderness; was in court when Solomon outdid all the judges before him. I, it was, who suppressed the lost work of Manthco, on the Egyptian theology, as containing mysteries not to be revealed to posterity, and things at war with canonical sprictures...[16]

Charles Olson states that the Pacific for Melville was "an experience of SPACE," that "gives the sense of immensity." "She is HEART, SEA,

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[15] W. E. Sedgwick, Herman Melville; A Tragedy of Mind (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949), p. 106. In connection with this irresponsibility of God, Sedgwick quotes Emily Dickinson:

> It's easy to invent a life,
> God does it every day-
> Creation but a gambol
> Of His authority...
> The Perished Patterns murmur,
> But His perturbless plan
> Proceed- inserting here a Sun-
> There - leaving out a Man.

[16] Herman Melville, Mardi (Boston: L.C. Page and Co., 1923), p. 260.

twin and rival of the HEART LAND." Melville's "comprehension of PAST (was) his marriage of spirit to source."[17] In this throbbing space with an active remembrance of things past, Melville tried to locate the main-spring of the universe. There was a grasping of the concrete to provide a basis for his search for what ultimately gave life and meaning to the subjects of the universe.

> His natural sense of time was in its relation to space. It was not diverted as Christ's was, away from object, to the individual, and the passage of the personal soul. To Melville the intimate and the concrete of the present, as for an example he felt it at Constantinople, enabled a man to loose himself into space and time, and in their dimensions, to feel and comprehend such an object as the Pyramids, to create, in like dimensions, an Ahab and a white whale. Time was not a line drawn straight ahead toward future, a logic of good and evil. Time returned on itself. It had density, as space had, and events were objects accumulated within it, around which men could move as they moved in space. The acts of men could move as a group stood, put down in time, as a pyramid was, to be re-examined, re-enacted.[18]

It was in the realm of this space-time consciousness of Melville that he stumbled and was caught by the paradoxial timelessness of the historical Christ. Up to the time of his Holy Land journey, Melville's Calvinistic conception of a sovereign God was not changed, and it was the harshness of the Sovereign that made it difficult for him to see the gentle Christ as the same God. It seems that much of Melville's thinking about Christ was kept separate from his thinking about the sovereign God, as it was not easy to fit Christ and His love into the same picture with the Sovereign. When Melville did think of Christ and the Sovereign

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[17]Charles Olson, Call Me Ishmael (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1947), p. 114.

[18]Ibid., pp. 101-2.

as one entity, he thought Christ's principles to be too impractical, perhaps too flimsy, to withstand the unyielding force of the wrathful God. Melville's obsession with fate meanwhile encouraged his attempt to rationally identify the omnipotent God in the cosmic whole. The fearful sublimity of such a Force, in spite of his reason, however, loosed the strands of his cosmos, and when Melville went to Jerusalem from Egypt, Christ shattered his heretofore space-time consciousness. Olson says,

> It is LAST ACT. When Melville went from the Pyramids to Jerusalem he lost all he had gained. The power so to describe the Pyramids leaves him, as did the power to do Moby-Dick, prey to Christ. He had observed in Egypt that the Sphinx has its "back to desert and face to verdure." Melville reversed his Sphinx. He thought he faced verdure in Christ. It turned out to be desert.[19]

The tragic flaw for Melville was he stopped with 33 A.D. His own fear of death had led him this far on his journey. But to connect the historicity of Christ with the nineteenth century and his own immortality seemed to be too much for him. For some reason, Melville could not turn Christ into someone he could love. "Two weeks in the Holyland sealed Melville in a bitterness of disillusion from which he never recovered."[20]

> The stones, the rubble in the pool of Bethseda, Sodom's "bitumen and ashes," the Dead Sea with the foam on its beach "like slaver of mad dog," and the Holy Sepulcher "a sickening chest" led Melville to one final question: Is the desolation of the land the fatal embrace of the Deity? Melville became Christ's victim, and it was death, and lack of love, that let him be it.[21]

This was Melville's struggle with Christ. He had never relinquished his belief in fate, with which God was still indistinguishable. But God

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[19] Ibid., p. 98.

[20] Ibid., p. 99.

[21] Ibid.

and fate receded into the background, although still inimically present. In Billy Budd, written just before his death, Melville approached the problem of good and evil more calmly than ever before, but as William Plomer states, he was "accepting the situation because of its necessity; 'and to meet that tragedy bravely was to find peace, the ultimate peace of resignation, even in an incongruous world.'"[22] The last paragraph of the epilogue of Melville's long poem Clarel expresses a similar thought.

> Then keep thy heart, though yet but ill-resigned-
> Clarel, thy heart, the issues there but mind;
> That like the crocus budding through the snow-
> That like a swimmer rising from the deep-
> That like a burning secret which doth go
> Even from the bosom that would hoard and keep;
> Emerge thou mayst from the last whelming sea,
> And prove that death but route life into victory.[23]

Oddly enough, Billy Budd is somewhat effeminate, which is offset, however, by his robust physique. The symmetrical features of his face and torso suggest a Greek god of early Olympian days. Handsome enough for the rest of the crew to call him "Beauty," Billy Budd seemed learned, instigated by the intrinsic goodness of his heart and will, to ignore the bluff and manly vulgarity of his shipmates. His death was one of graceful submission, as if he were almost pleased to die in innocence. Billy Budd had resigned himself to the over-all "goodness" of fate. Melville had been acutely affected by the submissive Jesus.

William Braswell says of Melville,

> While Melville's attitude toward Christ himself changed, it was the loving-kindness taught by Christ that gave rise to

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[22]Herman Melville, Billy Budd, Edited by William Plomer (London: John Lehmann, 1947), Intro., pp.8-9.

[23]Melville, Clarel, II. p. 298.

Melville's lasting idealism. From Typee one would infer that at the time of writing that book Melville still believed in the divinity of Christ. Mardi testifies to his great doubt in the matter; yet in the chapters on the isle of Serenia he pays one of the finest conceivable tributes to the religion that embraces Christ as the Master. In White Jacket he used the teaching of Christ in making an earnest and impassioned plea to his fellowmen to remedy some of the worst evils of their civilization. Moby-Dick, however, is singularly lacking in reference to Christ, and here it is even hinted that Jesus was epicene and not worthy of admiration. Pierre acknowledges the heavenly perfection of Christ, but severely indicts his ideals as impracticable, and liable to make a man run blindly into greater sins than he normally would commit. The pain of disillusionment made Melville at least occasionally regret that he ever lost his faith in Jesus, as the lament in his journal of 1856-57 and the agonizing in Clarel testify. Christ was the greatest and the dearest spiritual influence in his life.[24]

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[24]Braswell, op. cit., pp. 208-9.

CHAPTER IV

AHAB AND ISHMAEL

Ahab was the promethean butt of Melville's wrath. In the whale story Ahab is man, man trying to bring God down to a level on which he can have a hand-to-hand combat to determine if what is not known is. Ahab also wanted vengeance to expiate the evil he suffered by the hands of fate. As the heavy pewter lamp "threw shifting gleams and shadows of lines upon his wrinkled brow," Ahab examined the courses on the wrinkled charts, and, subject to the old Manxman's mysterious remark about the scar that extended from head to toe on Ahab, the crew measured the bold whiteness of the scar with Ahab's growing vengeance. Ahab, who vowed revenge on principal or agent, became enshrouded in his own lines; the line meant for the destruction of the whale was his own nemesis.[25] Boynton states,

> This is the story of Eve and of Prometheus, the perennial story of man's struggle for spiritual victory in the midst of harrassing circumstances, and in the midst of a world where fate opposes the individual in the form of his own thwarting self.[26]

Ahab's problem was universal, and to solve this problem he chased a monstrous white whale for a fatal encounter. The irony of the event is the whale tried to evade Ahab's searching quest for him, and it was not until Ahab insistently pursued the whale into a death-to-death situation that the latter squared away and met his monomaniacal foe.

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[25] Melville, Moby-Dick, pp. 166. 102, 477.

[26] Percy H. Boynton, More Contemporary Americans (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1928), p. 41.

After the whale had dismantled Ahab of his leg, Ahab determinately sought vengeance. What at first was a conflict between man and whale assumed symbolic proportions. Ahab's "hidden self" raved on, and rather than to sublet the spirit of his energy he "did now possess a thousand-fold more potency that ever he had sanely brought to bear upon any one reasonable object."[27]

> Ahab had cherished a wild vindictiveness against the whale, all the more fell for that in his frantic morbidness he at last came to identify with him, not only all his bodily woes, but all his intellectual and spiritual exasperations. The white whale swam before him as the monomaniac incarnation of all those malicious agencies which some deep men feel eating in them, till they are left living on with half a heart and half a lung. That intangible malignity which has been from the beginning; to whose dominion even the modern Christians ascribe one half of the worlds; which the ancient Ophites of the east reverenced in their stature devil;- Ahab did not fall down and worship it like them; but deliriously transferring its idea to the abhorred white whale he pitted himself, all mutilated, against it. 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 made practically assailable in Moby Dick. He piled upon the whale's white hump the sum of all general rage and hate felt by his whole race from Adam down; and then, as if his chest had been a mortar, he burst his hot heart's shell upon it.[28]

His hurt pride became symbolical for the hate that all mankind felt against the tyrannical position in which humanity was embedded. Ahab came to grips with himself and found that he was wanting. What hints there were that his problem was in himself were transferred to the hump of the white whale. His helplessness encouraged this transfer. Common disaster a man could take and file away as an ugly facet of life, but to

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[27] Ibid., p. 155.

[28] Ibid., pp. 154-5.

be the victim of an unscrupulous, unknown principal twisted the soul of "a mighty pageant creature" who seemed to have a "half wilful over-ruling morbidness at the bottom of his nature."[29] Ahab seemed to regard the whale as a "machine out of human control," and as R. V. Chase remarks, "In his violent motions we seem to see the mechanism of the universe, innocent of all human intelligence and feeling."[30] It was this void of sympathy that perverted Ahab's attention; he could only see himself as a helpless victim of an unprincipled onslaught. Appeasement was not for a self-willed man, but vengeance; "I'd strike the sun if it insulted me."[31] This was the fixed course that Ahab ran. To Starbuck, Ahab says,

> All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks. But in each event - in the living act, the undoubted deed- there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask. If man will strike, strike through the mask! How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall? To me, the white whale is that wall, shoved near to me. Sometimes I think there's naught beyond. But 'tis enough. He tasks me; he heaps me; I see in him outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing it. That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate; and be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal, I will wreak that hate upon him.[32]

To do this, Ahab baptized his harpoon with the death-tempered blood of the three harpooners, Tashtego, Queequeg, and Dagoo. "Ego non baptizo te in nomine patris, sed in nomine diaboli!"[33]

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[29] Melville, Moby-Dick, p. 62.

[30] R. V. Chase, Herman Melville, A Critical Study (New York: Macmillan Co., 1949), p. 53.

[31] Melville, Moby-Dick, p. 136.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid., p. 409.

Ahab, who says, "I am madness maddened!", attacks evil with "that wild madness that's only calm to comprehend itself!"[34] Such a demonic will he possessed that he considered his cause as one to benefit all humanity. Watching the sun set, Ahab says, "Is, then, the crown too heavy that I wear? This Iron Crown of Lombardy. Yet is it bright with many a gem, I, the wearer, see not its far flashings; but darkly feel that I wear that, that dazzlingly confounds."[35] His encounter with the whale could only result in victory or death, and Ahab sensed that his monomania was fighting powers that were perhaps little aware of his awful hate. To mistake himself for a savior was more than he would admit, but the drive was there. This whole world was wrapped up in his own existing self.

> Captain Ahab stood erect, looking straight out beyond the ship's ever pitching prow. There was an infinity of firmest fortitude, a determinate, unsurrenderable wilfulness, in the fixed and fearless, forward dedication of that glance. Not a word he spoke; nor did his officers say aught to him; though by all their minutest gestures and expressions, they plainly showed the uneasy, if not painful, consciousness of being under a troubled master-eye. And not only that, but moody stricken Ahab stood before them with a crucifixion in his face; in all the nameless regal overbearing dignity of some mighty woe.[36]

Ahab's purpose "by its own sheer inveteracy of will, forced itself against gods and devils into a kind of self-assumed, independent being of its own."[37] His life on board ship became almost a nightmare. Sleep, sound sleep, was a thing of the past. The inevitable pacing on the

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[34] Ibid., p. 140.

[35] Ibid., p. 139.

[36] Ibid., p. 103.

[37] Ibid., p. 170.

quarter-deck and the long silent watching, looking somewhere for the object on which he would seek vengeance with all the hate boiling up within him, betrayed the dynamic will of a restless, demonic energy; "...what trances of torments does that man endure who is consumed with one achieved revengeful desire. He sleeps with clenched hands; and wakes with his own bloody nails in his palms."[38] As R. V. Chase says, "But there is this difference between Ahab and Christ; these are Ahab's own nails. He is not a sacrifice; he is a suicide."[39]

Ahab's relation to the crew reveals several aspects of his doomed revenge. The crew was caught, almost hypnotically, by the irrevocable vow that Ahab made. Most of the crew were ignorantly unaware of what was transpiring. Many of them, subject to the superstition of sea lore and primitive astrological soundings, experienced only a subdued pleasure tinged with disaster in this three year whale voyage. Fedallah, Ahab's harpooner, was the human counterpart of the burning corposants that Ahab cursed and worshiped. Ahab's relation with Fedallah was comparable to that of Faustus and Mephistopheles. Even though Ahab called himself "Fate's lieutenant," he finds his life diabolically linked with the prophet and fire-worshiper, Fedallah. Stubb remarked to Flask, "I take that Fedallah to be the devil in disguise."[40] And Ahab with Fedallah's death realized that the first part of the Parsee's prophecy had already been fulfilled; only Ahab's encircling harp remained.

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[38] Ibid., p. 169.

[39] Chase, op. cit., p. 44.

[40] Melville, Moby-Dick, p. 275.

Starbuck was the only positive support that Ahab recognized. "Uncommonly conscientious for a seaman, and endued with a deep natural reverence," he was inclined to "superstition; but to that sort of superstition, which in some organizations seems rather to spring, somehow, from intelligence than from ignorance."[41] Starbuck is the one who draws from Ahab that touch of humanity that Pip also cultivated. "Close! stand close to me, Starbuck; let me look into a human eye; it is better than to gaze into sea or sky; better than to gaze upon God." And looking into Starbuck's eye, Ahab exclaimed, "This is the magic glass, man; I see my wife and my child in thine eye."[42] But this is the same Starbuck to whom Ahab also cried, "There is one God that is Lord over the earth, and one Captain that is lord over the Pequod."[43]

It remained for Pip, however, to give Ahab the jolt of humanity's clinging sympathy. Ahab and Pip were victims of the same forces, Ahab by his own will and Pip in all innocence. This innocent suffering of Pip summoned what pity Ahab had left in him. The bond between Ahab and Pip was the common knowledge of man's hopelessness. The substance of this knowledge was that good and evil are equal forces, but that evil had a more direct bearing on man. Geoffrey Stone's comment is, "Pip could tolerate this knowledge because, so to speak, there was no Pip."[44] This was Pip's dominance over Ahab.

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[41] Ibid., p. 95

[42] Ibid., p. 452.

[43] Ibid., p. 398.

[44] Geoffrey Stone, Melville (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1949), p. 184.

Ahab responded to the hopeless suffering of another victim and blamed the heavens for it.

> Oh, ye frozen heavens! look down here. Ye did beget this luckless child, and have abandoned him, ye creative libertines. Here, boy; Ahab's cabin shall be Pip's home henceforth, while Ahab lives. Thou touchest my inmost centre, boy; thou art tied to me by cords woven of my heart-strings.[45]

But Ahab's course was lain with iron rails. His wrath was no longer a lashing fury that dashed everything in its wake, but had become the slow, tortuous burning of a self-asserted end. Ahab could not change, in spite of Pip's remorseful attachment.

> Lad, lad, I tell thee thou must not follow Ahab now. The hour is coming when Ahab would not scare thee from him, yet would not have thee by him. There is that in thee, poor lad, which I feel too curing to my malady. Like cures like; and for this hunt, my malady becomes my most desired health.[46]

Ahab's malady took both to their watery graves.

Ishmael is the one sustaining technical and symbolical force in the total novel. What Ishmael represents and what he reveals of Ahab's tragedy, along with his own interpretation, is the symbolic whole. His role as an actor decreases as Ahab and his tragedy, the chief plot from which the theme derives its dignity, develops. Ishmael is no more important to Ahab than the cook that prepared Stubb's whale steak. Among the crew members, Ishmael is accepted; it is his sponsorship of Queequeg that gives Ishmael his chief role as an actor in the story. Because of Ishmael the observer, he seems to remain above the action taking place, although he is still a part of it. Ishmael shares with Melville the

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[45] Melville, Moby-Dick, p. 434.

[46] Ibid., p. 443.

relating of the tragic events, the former's function often being that of the chorus, as Olson assumes his function to be in the epilogue.[47]

Ishmael himself was quite aware of fate's hand in world affairs. Reflecting on why it was "those stage managers, the Fates, put me down for this shabby part of a whaling voyage," he is not certain, but he says,

> now, that I recall all the circumstances, I think I can see a little into the springs and motives which being cunningly presented to me under various disguises, induced me to set about performing the part I did, besides cajoling me into the delusion that it was a choice resulting from my own unbiased freewill and discriminating judgment.[48]

However, Ishmael never did succumb to a pessimistic view of life or to the bitterness of a victim of malignant forces. He saw life in its totality, and in this universe there was still some good. When Ishmael went to sea, it was because land and people had crowded him into the restlessness of an onshrouded individual. He needed the openess of the air and the sea and their meditation to regain his stable composure. With Queequeg the pagan, Ishmael found his true self. Matthiessen remarks, "when Ishmael recognized that 'the man's a human being just as I am,' he was freed from the burden of his isolation; his heart was no longer turned against society."[49] This same response of Ahab to Pip came much too late for Ahab. Ishmael's friendship with Queequeg developed the former's latent philosophy of brotherly love. Ishmael began to realize the universal scope of a mutual friendship as binding as his and Queequeg's.

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[47] Olson, op. cit., p. 51.

[48] Melville, Moby-Dick, p. 5.

[49] F. O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 443.

Just what the true significance of this brotherly love was Ishmael did not know. He only saw it as an antidote to the cruel tricks that fate at times played on man. But the results were sufficiently gratifying for him in this life on earth. There was no creed for Ishmael; in fact, his friendship with Queequeg transcended all creeds.[50] When Queequeg "seemed anxious" that Ishmael join him in worshiping Yojo, Ishmael responded with the following syllogism.

> but what is worship?- to do the will of God?- that is worship. And what is the will of God?- to do my fellow man what I would have my fellow man to do to me - that is the will of God. Now, Queequeg is my fellow man. And what do I wish that this Queequeg would do to me? Why, unite with me in my particular Presbyterian form of worship. Consequently, I must then unite with him in his; ergo, I must turn idolator.[51]

Later Ishmael introduced Queequeg to Bildad and Peleg as "a born member of the First Congregational Church...of this whole worshipping world; we all belong to that; only some of us cherish some crotchets noways touching the grand belief; in that we all join hands."[52]

The height of Ishmael's enthusiasm for this brotherly love came in the chapter, "A Squeeze of the Hand," in which he spoke of the affection engendered in him by squeezing the ambergris of Stubb's "dearly purchased"

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[50] In his notes, Journal of a Visit to London and the Continent by Herman Melville 1849-1850, Edited by Eleanor Melville Metcalf (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1948), p. 143., Melville copies the following quotation from Anastasius or Memoirs of a Greek, by Thomas Hope, Esq. "'Let us become brothers; let religion sanctify our intimacy, so as to divert it of its dangers;'- and upon this he proposed to me the solemn ceremony, which, in our church, unites two friends of either sex in the face of the alter by the solemn vows, gives them the endearing appellation of brothers or sisters, and imposes upon them the sacred obligation to stand by each other in life and in death."

[51] Melville, Moby-Dick, p. 44.

[52] Ibid., p. 74.

whale. Squeezing the "soft, gentle globules of infiltrated tissues," he sometimes mistook his co-laborers' hands for the gentle globules and an overwhelming emotion of friendship seized him; "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."[53] The superfluity of this emotion was solidified into a more sober observation, however.

> 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 the fancy; but in the wife, the heart, the bed, the table, the saddle, the fire-side, the country.[54]

Ishmael believed that "in the soul of man there lies one insular Tahiti, full of peace and joy, but encompassed by all the horrors of the half known life." He realized the necessity of clinging to that "insular Tahiti," for he continued, "God keep thee! Push not off from that isle, thou canst never return!"[55]

Ishmael watched Ahab depart into the "horrors of the half known life," never to return. He seemed to realize that the probings of Ahab's dark soundings were prompted by an inner evil necessity. The persuasion of the crew to follow after the white whale, the nailing of the doubloon to the mast, the burning corposants, and Ahab's proud boasting when he fixed the compass revealed to Ishmael that Ahab was destined for

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[53] Ibid., p. 351.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid., p. 234.

some heroic tragedy. Ishmael basically remained aloof from Ahab's problem, but beneficially learned from Ahab's vile death that man even in his smallness, subject to fate, could live. And what powers mankind could wage war against were beyond the scope of man's feeble reach. Ishmael saw in Ahab the moral of Father Mapple's sermon reversed; "if we obey God, we must disobey ourselves; and it is in this disobeying ourselves, wherein the hardness of obeying God consists."[56]

There is more to Moby-Dick than just Ahab's tragedy. The overtones of Ahab's relation to Pip, after the latter almost drowned, suggest an alternative. The alternative is Ishmael, transcending his choric function in this respect, who saw that mankind did not have to share Ahab's manner of death. That many were carried to their death with Ahab was a consequence of the vital issues at stake when weak minds are blindly led by a maddened brain. Ishmael's brotherly love maintained itself as an underlying mental and emotional aspect of the theme, and it is through Ishmael that Ahab's tragedy becomes vicariously forceful.

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[56] Ibid., p. 35.

CHAPTER V

THE RACHEL

> But by her still halting course and winding, woful way, you plainly saw that this ship that so wept with spray, still remained without comfort. She was Rachel, weeping for her children, because they were not.[57]

When Ahab refused to aid the Rachel's captain in searching for the lost son, Ahab rebuffed all further efforts of persuasion and said, "God bless ye, man, and may I forgive myself, but I must go."[58] If Ahab could have forgiven himself, he may have forgotten to do so in the heat of his pursuing Moby Dick. But the Rachel didn't forget and returned to pick up one of the Pequod's own sons. Ishmael quotes Job, "And I only am escaped alone to tell thee," as he is taken from the coffin life-buoy.[59] This rescue culminates Ishmael's philosophy symbolically. Brotherly love is reciprocal; the fellowship that Ishmael practices and held supreme over Ahab's demoniac vengeance was the means of his own rescue.

> The drama's done. Why then here does any one step forth?- Because one did survive the wreck.[60]

The plot strand of Ahab alone does not fill the totality of the novel. Ishmael's contribution to the plot demanded fulfillment because of his symbolic force. That he did survive the wreck supplied additional

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[57] Ibid., p. 443.

[58] Ibid., p. 442.

[59] Ibid., p. 478.

[60] Ibid.

release from the dramatic tension that was not fully provided by the death of Ahab.

Withholding the full release of this dramatic tension restrains the full catharsis of the tragedy in its development of the theme. Ending the novel with Ahab's death, the positive alternative of Ishmael is not allowed its culmination, since the cause and effect progression of events develops an expectation that is not satisfied merely by its contrast to Ahab's revenge. To eliminate Ishmael's symbolic development in the epilogue, which symbolically is part of the structural whole, checkmates a full response to the theme.

Queequeg's coffin served as a life-buoy for Ishmael before the Rachel rescued him. This coffin had served several purposes. One of them was the life-buoy of the ship Pequod; to this Ahab responded,

> Oh, how immaterial are all materials! What things real are there, but imponderable thoughts? Here now's the very dreaded symbol of grim death, by a mere hap, made the expressive sign of the help and hope of most endangered life. A life-buoy of a coffin! Does it go further? Can it be that in some spiritual sense the coffin is, after all, but an immortality preserver![61]

The possible implications for Ahab were meaningless, but for Ishmael were concrete unto life. The continuation of the symbols of the life-buoy coffin, the Rachel, and the developed meaning of Ishmael in the epilogue provides the structural and symbolic culmination of the total novel.

Whether or not Melville intended Ishmael's brotherly love to be the answer for man in a fixed world is a question for Melville to answer.

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[61] Ibid., pp. 439-40.

The structural and symbolical unity suggest it; his own preoccupation with Christianity allows it.

CHAPTER VI

VARIED APPROACHES

> Yes, there is death in this business of whaling - a speechlessly quick chaotic bundling of a man into Eternity. But what then? Methinks that in looking at things spiritual, we are too much like oysters observing the sun through the water, and thinking that thick water the thinnest of air. Methinks my body is but the lees of my better being. In fact take my body who will, take it I say, it is not me. And therefore three cheers for Nantucket; and come a stove boat and stove body when they will, for stave my soul, Jove himself cannot.[62]

Ahab could not think of life as blissfully and as hearfully as Ishmael. Ahab thought that he could attain a "better being" by piercing the wall of the absolute, or else he could find a self-gratifying satisfaction in the experience of an asserted attempt.

It is this self-asserted tragedy of Ahab and the whale that many critics of Moby-Dick have seized as the focal point for their interpretations of the novel. The symbolic meanings given to Ahab and the whale are varied, and as Lewis Mumford says,

> Each man will read into Moby-Dick the drama of his own experience and that of his contemporaries: Mr. D. H. Lawrence sees in the conflict a battle between the blood-consciousness of the white race and its own abstract intellect, which attempts to hunt and slay it: Mr. Percy Boynton sees in the whale all property and vested privilege, laming the spirit of man: Mr. Van Wyck Brooks has found in the white whale an image like that of Grendel and Beowulf, expressing the Northern consciousness of the hard fight against the elements; while for the disciple of Jung, the white whale is the symbol of the Unconscious, which torments man, and yet is the source of all his proudest efforts.[63]

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[62] Ibid., p. 31.

[63] Lewis Mumford, Herman Melville (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., Inc., 1929), p. 194.

Mumford himself draws somewhat of a moral conclusion from Moby-Dick. The alternative to Ahab's method is a cultural growth for the sake of humanity in the face of higher powers.

> By physical defiance, by physical combat, Ahab cannot rout and capture Moby Dick: the odds are against him; and if his defiance is noble, his methods are ill chosen. Growth, cultivation, order, art - these are the proper means by which man displaces accident and subdues the vacant external powers in the universe: the way of growth is not to become more powerful but to become more human.[64]

H. A. Myers states, "Ahab's is the struggle of a man with a romantic purpose and a Calvinist conscience."[65] Ahab feels that there is a "meaning in his life which eludes him," since he can find little real contentment in the purpose from which he cannot swerve.[66] It is not until Ahab is about to cast his last harpoon at the white whale that he has his flash of insight; "Oh, now I feel my topmost greatness lies in my topmost grief."[67] Myers says that Ahab's "unconquerable spirit and his unyielding will are meaningless without the suffering which brings them out and gives them significance."[68] John Freeman says,

> It is strength that survives as the dominant impression of Moby-Dick, ... Strength first, but sadness next. The man that has more of joy than sorrow in him, he (Melville) declares, cannot be true. The Man of Sorrows was the truest of all men, the truest of all books is Solomon's, and Ecclesiastes the fine-hammered steel of woe.[69]

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[64] Ibid., p. 186.

[65] H. A. Myers, "Captain Ahab's Discovery," New England Quarterly, XV (March, 1942), p. 31.

[66] Ibid., p. 29.

[67] Melville, Moby-Dick, p. 477.

[68] H. A. Myers, op. cit., p. 30.

[69] John Freeman, Herman Melville (New York: Macmillan Co., 1926), p.126.

Views of a more extended democratic-social nature, of Moby-Dick, are found in the interpretations of Matthiessen and R. V. Chase, who also give Ishmael a more definite recognition in the novel. Matthiessen takes Melville's concern for American democracy into consideration, and sees Ahab as an individual whose desires and methods would thwart the democratic purpose. Knowing Melville's dissatisfaction with Emerson's philosophy of the Over-Soul and self reliance, Matthiessen also finds in Ahab an example of the danger that results when a selfish mind takes Emerson's philosophy of the self too literally.

> Without deliberately intending it, but by virtue of his intense concern with the precariously maintained values of democratic Christianity, which he saw everywhere being threatened or broken down, Melville created in Ahab's tragedy a fearful symbol of the self-enclosed individualism that, carried to its furthest extreme, brings disaster both upon itself and upon the group of which it is part. He provided also an ominous glimpse of what was to result when the Emersonian will to virtue became in less innocent natures the will to power and conquest.[70]

Ishmael is given a more prominent position in Chase's interpretation. It is apparent, however, that Chase, rather than interpreting Ishmael as a symbolic or even non-symbolic figure in the novel as such, imposes Melville's thinking upon Ishmael in the interpretation of the novel. Although it is true that there is a definite relation and similarity in the ideas of Ishmael and Melville, it is still true, by principles of just criticism, that in the novel itself Ishmael is subject only to the self interpretation of the integrated whole. Chase interprets Moby-Dick in terms of Toynbee's principle of withdrawal and return. This method of interpretation, he has extended to include all of

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[70] Matthiessen, op. cit., p. 459.

Melville's works. The principle of withdrawal and return, Chase believes, can account for the variations in the developments in Melville's thinking.

> Withdrawal has at least three related meanings in Melville's myth. It signifies the spiritual ordeal of the fallen son; his suffering in the dark reaches of the soul; his preparation for the creative emergence or return (Ishmael wandering in the wilderness, preparing himself for the great nation which has been promised him; Prometheus on the rock, suffering and waiting for the time when his example will regenerate Zeus and ensure the cultural progress of mankind). It signifies the post-revolutionary spiritual ordeal of America, the Ishmael or Prometheus among nations. And it signifies the general condition of the modern world, which Melville conceived as having withdrawn (or fallen) from a former state of health, power, and heroism into a wasteland and as trying to return. (This is the explicit subject matter of Clarel.) Without making theological commitments, Melville was often in the state of mind to which Christian thinkers refer when they tell us that in modern times we are in the desolate hours between Good Friday and Easter Sunday.[71]

Ishmael's return, Chase pictures as a search for the father, who would represent the former goodness in an achieved or future state of affairs. Chase is in the following quotation speaking of both Melville and Ishmael.

> Ishmael's search for the secret of his paternity is his attempt to "return." He must first accept the withdrawal in its full horror. He must make a whole system of choices of behavior, accepting the conditions of life they imply, attempting to reconcile them. This is an earthly task. There can be no titanic storming of the heavens, since that is suicide. Ishmael - the American - can succeed if generously coveting the lost paternal values of intelligence, authority, art, and heroism, he realizes that he can return to them only by accepting his human involvement in the filial values, an involvement which allows him to leaven the paternal ideal, to force the paternal ideal to rid itself of violence, power worship, and reaction.[72]

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[71] R. V. Chase, op. cit., p. 37.

[72] Ibid., pp. 37-8.

Many of the interpretations of Moby-Dick are commendable in their scope, in that the dramatic struggle between Ahab and the whale readily lends itself as a case history for any number of theories. The question is, is it just to limit the scope of Moby-Dick to the general tragedy of Ahab and from his struggle to learn a lesson that has present meaning? The adaptation of any part of the novel to illustrate or to prove the validity and the universality of a present issue or consequential principle does not do justice to the structural and symbolic whole.

The basis and the source for the interpretation of any novel is the novel itself. Strictly speaking, the biographical data of the author is irrelevant; the relevance of biographical data in an interpretation of a novel derives force as the data in a secondary way testifies of the validity of the novel's interpretation of itself.

The approach is important. While it is true that Melville's works give much information about his thinking and his life, it does not follow that his works can be interpreted solely in the light of his life and thoughts.

It is the partial treatment of the symbolic force of Ishmael in the structural and symbolic unity of Moby-Dick that has limited many interpretations of the novel. Ahab's struggle itself can be interpreted in several ways since the psychological-social suggestions are varied. These suggestions, however, assume their relative positions in the development of the integrated whole.

CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY

> The faith of Ishmael is small, no greater than a mustard seed, but it is enough to stay his hand and to save him, in the end, sole and single among a crew that had even less faith than he.[73]

The Rachel's rescue of Ishmael culminated his philosophy of brotherly love symbolically. As the events and the dramatic tension in the novel progressed and developed, Ishmael as a symbolic force became more strong, although his immediate role as an actor decreased. Ahab's touch of humanity that Starbuck and Pip innocently aroused intensified the already growing suggestion, in Ishmael and Queequeg, of an alternative to Ahab's vengeance. The cause and effect progression of events in the novel suggested that the alternative was Ishmael and what he symbolically represented.

The justification of including the epilogue in an interpretation of Moby-Dick is dependent upon the inclusion of the symbolic and non-symbolic events of the epilogue in the structural and symbolic whole of the novel. The continuation of the symbolic meaning of Ishmael, the life-buoy coffin, and the Rachel in the epilogue appropriates more definite implications, in that the triad structurally brings together the remaining strands of the over-all plot of the novel.

The dramatic tension of the total novel is not fully released with Ahab's tragic death. The catharsis is frustrated, and the theme is

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[73] H. O. Percival, op. cit., p. 25.

slighted when the symbolic whole is limited to Ahab's dramatic struggle. Ishmael and Ahab are both necessary to provide this cathartic effect. Symbolically and structurally, Ishmael and Ahab constitute the manifestations of the theme.

The novel itself justifies the significance of Ishmael's brotherly love. It is not necessary to prove from Melville's biographical data and his works that Moby-Dick is more than just a story of Ahab. The "Christian" interpretation of Moby-Dick, through the Rachel and Ishmael, does not, however, contradict Melville's own thinking. From the notes of his Holy Land journey and his works, especially the later ones, his concern for Christ is quite apparent.

Moby-Dick is the story of Ishmael and Ahab whose adventures and experiences assumed symbolic proportions. Balancing Ahab with Ishmael, Moby-Dick is the story of a vengeance that did not have to be.

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