The spires of form geometric shapes as symbolic forms in Melville's Moby-Dick.

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THE SPIRES OF FORM: GEOMETRIC SHAPES
AS SYMBOLIC FORMS IN MELVILLE'S MOBY-DICK

by

COLLEEN GAIL MARKLE CASSANO

A Thesis
submitted to the
Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
through the Department of
English in Partial Fulfillment
of the requirements for the Degree
of Master of Arts at
⊙ the University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

1984
ABSTRACT

This thesis examines Herman Melville's symbolic system in *Moby-Dick*, with an emphasis on the geometric shapes that recur insistently throughout the text. In an essentially phenomenological reading, the subtle proliferation of lines, enclosures, images of circularity and triangularity are examined in their function as symbolic forms constituting the work. An appendix serves to situate Melville in the symbolist tradition and to characterize the role of symbols as they are here applied to *Moby-Dick*, while it contrasts symbolism with allegory. The geometrical images are examined as evocations of mental landscapes, illuminating the characters, and as binary oppositions pointing to essential ambiguities in philosophical realms. Thus, the symbology is seen as having both intrinsic and extrinsic functions. In the thesis, the symbolic forms are viewed as constituting clusters that aggregate around the whales, the men, and the ships that inhabit the work. Further, the symbolic system is viewed as a process wherein the form can be seen to evolve from the content; indeed, the text can be seen to be generated from the perspectives advanced within it. The evolving symbolic system is viewed as dynamic, consisting of a series of metamorphoses that serve to reinforce the underlying multivalencies in the symbols themselves. Specifically, the thesis contrasts the rigid, mechanistic, geometrical shapes and the fluid, organic natural world. The text can then be viewed as a contest between the temporally confining linear world of Ahab,
and the fluxional natural circular world of the whales and Ishmael. However, such a reading is tempered by the inherent ambiguities in the oppositions that characterize the work: while the natural world appears idyllically benign, it is no less cannibalistic than the world of man. By detailing the many and varied geometrical images, the thesis attempts to convey the richness of Melville's web of symbols, the interconnectedness and fusion of the system, and his transcendence of the narrative mode, by the depth and complexity of his visual imagery.
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated, with love:

to my beautiful daughter
Alethea (Gk. truth), a perfect
co-incidence of the word
and the thing

and

to my guru.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank all of the Professors in the English department who have encouraged me to undertake this thesis by their nurturing support and have given me the incentive to finish by their unflagging exasperation. I am indebted to my parents for babysitting such long hours. To my daughter Alethea for mothering me and (as she puts it) for babysitting my parents. To Nancy Peel and Beth Proctor for helping with the last minute typing. To my incomparable sister-in-law, Jeannette, for volunteering, happily, to come from Toronto to do the typing, because she wanted to. To my committee: Professor Gene McNamara for first introducing me to the White Whale, and for agreeing to direct the thesis; my second reader, Professor John Ditsky, for his helpful advice; and my third reader, Professor Walter Skakoon, for his innumerable suggestions. I particularly wish to thank my director and my third reader for overseeing the preliminary draughts. They are powerful symbols themselves.
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A subtle chain of countless rings
The next unto the farthest brings;
The eye reads omens where it goes,
And speaks all languages the rose;
And, striving to be man, the worm
Mounts through all the spires of form.

Emerson, "Nature."
INTRODUCTION

We are symbols and we inhabit symbols.

Emerson, "The Poet"

In *Moby-Dick*, the symbols that we are and the symbols that we inhabit loom before us in a tableau that melds even as it contrasts the world of man and the world of nature. Isolated on the sea with only the sky above and the ocean below, on a voyage of predetermined length, wherein most of the physical action encompasses a period of only three days, the symbols are culled from the air, the sea and the ship. Herein lies Melville's genius, for from such limited resources, he draws a wealth of symbols, so that what is ostensibly a whaling voyage of fixed duration becomes a universal experience etched in a timeless space. Because we are dealing here with symbols, we must probe for their significance. Ishmael's apostrophe to Ahab, "Oh, Ahab! What shall be grand in thee, it must needs be plucked at from the skies, and dived for in the deep, and featured in the unbodied air!" (p. 130), is a valid *modus operandi* for the examination of the symbolic system: it must be "plucked at," and "dived for." It must, moreover, be "featured," (given features) or it will be as blank and meaningless as the profile of the whale ("...I say again he has no face") (p. 318), even though it is featured in the "unbodied air." In a book such as *Moby-Dick*, with its shifting values, "unbodied air," or "the proverbial evanescence of a thing writ in water" can be "as reliable as the steadfast land" (p. 453, 4).
What evolves through the symbolic system is a mental landscape. However, beyond these intrinsic, centripetal features of the symbols, other dimensions come into force, adding a philosophical dimension to the work. That is, as the symbols reach into the realms of moral dilemmas, they are at once immediate and transcendental. This extrinsic, centrifugal force establishes, by the nature of the symbols themselves, a contest between the geometrical artifices of man and the fluid, organic world of nature. By revealing the ambiguities, or, more accurately, multivalencies inherent in these symbolic worlds, Melville challenges the reader to examine the symbols we are (Are we agent or principal, good or evil, or both?) and the symbols we inhabit (Is nature chaotic or nurturing?), bringing into play questions of fate and free will, man's role vis-à-vis nature and the impact of nature on man.*

If it is true that nature in Moby-Dick represents the "chaos bewitched" of the picture in The Spouter-Inn, it becomes essential that man assert himself. And this is what Ahab does. However, his resolution, while it may overcome contradictions and lend a unifying purpose to nature and man (that they exist to serve Ahab) will ultimately serve to sever nature and man. Ahab's comprehension of the sphere is only a means to know his enemy, the better to rend it.

Ahab's tools, human and mechanistic, are at his disposal to cut into nature as he cuts into its representation, the

*See Appendix for an historical perspective justifying a view of Melville as a symbolist writer.
whale, to chart; to fragment, dissect, arrange and impose his will on it. It is not merely a question, though, of man versus nature, of an opposition of Ahab and the Whale. Nature becomes an inimical force that must be conquered in order for man to survive. This is Ahab's view. The chaotic element he perceives can only be mastered by destroying its agent or principal, the White Whale. On the other hand, through Ishmael's vision, meditation and water are wedded (p. 13), obviating the necessity for man to vanquish nature. There exist, in Nature, properties to benefit the mind.

Questions arise in the reader's mind, then, such as—"Are there evil forces (in man, in nature)?" and "Is some evil necessary?" In other words, does the Whale possess a "malicious intelligence" or is he only Ahab's projection? If nature is malevolent, is man's intervention desirable, or, in fact, necessary?

The focus, here, is on the subtle pervasion of geometrical images in the work. Into the natural symbolic landscape of the ocean, with the heavens above, and all that lurks in the depths, sails the Pequod, an invader in the cosmos, disrupting the life cycle, cutting into Nature.

The constellations of natural symbols from the fluid universe into which the ship sails contain essential oppositions of maternal and paternal principles, the "soft-cymballing moon," and the "fierce circus-running sun." Throughout the text, these symbols are identified with the characters and the oppositions blur inconspicuously so that
the ambiguities inherent in nature and man are revealed. Thus, white becomes synonymous with evil, the sea and land can be either safe havens or abandonment, a coffin becomes a life-buoy, a whale line salvation, or damnation, the pursuer pursued.

The Pequod is a floating emblem of the material world opposed to the natural world. On its deck walks Ahab, on life and death, one leg a living member, the other the jaw bone of a dead sperm whale, a downward pointing triangle. The Pequod is armed with geometrical artifices of man, triangles of steel and iron, forged, mechanistic tools of destruction. The ship not only contrasts the mechanical world of man with the sphere of nature, it contrasts the natural and supernatural—the ship becomes demonic, touched with fire, the crew other than flesh and blood—granite, marble, dead wood.

In the air and in the deep are moving, living circles and triangles, birds, oysters, flesh that bleeds. The triangles of the Pequod, the crutch, masts, lance are, at times, upward pointing, symbols of transcendency, or downward pointing, suggestive of a descent into Hell. Yet the correspondences are dynamic. The voyage can be seen as man's intervention in the world of nature, his attempt to impose order on chaos by bloody means. However, with Ahab at the helm, as whale after whale is passed by in search of one White Whale, it seems that Ahab is making chaos
of the business of whaling. In charting and single-mindedly pursuing that one Whale, is he chasing the phantom whale, is the Whale chasing him, or is he chasing the "ungraspable phantom of life"—his own image?

Such questions arise because the symbolic forms, when they function as character revelations, become constellations clustering around the characters. However, the constellations are overreaching so that one particular set of symbols might function as vehicles for more than one character. Thus, the symbolic forms that magnetize around Ahab closely parallel those of Moby Dick, so that one might expect their fates to intertwine. Ahab and Jonah are symbolically linked initially, but an eventual break in the similarities shows their stories to be falsely parallel. The seamen come to represent an amalgam: all are symbolically equated with Ahab, become Ahab. As parts of Ahab, they become all of Ahab that represents anti-nature—lines, harpoons, every sharp-edged, man-made forged instrument that sails with the ship. The whale's natural element is the sea, and while he shows superficial characteristics of Ahab and the ship, he is fundamentally an inhabitant of the natural world. His is the cyclical world of nature that is shared by Ishmael, whose symbolic tie is to the vortex, which, while it drowns the savage crew, becomes a life-giving element to him. In the end, Ishmael, the Whale and the sea remain, the artifices of man having been consumed by the sea.
Ishmael's admission of ambiguities, his "negative capability," allows him to survive to tell the tale. His Protean qualities stand contrasted to Ahab's fragmented, rigid psyche. Ahab, and the crew, in their blind allegiance to him, deny parts of their being, unscrew their navel as it were (p. 363). They see in the round doubloon not a unity or trinity, but a monolithic I, not the eye of Emersonian thought which sees all. In their failure to accept the multiplicity of the universe, to submit to the flux, is their doom.

"The Life-Buoy," the pivotal chapter illustrating the crew's persistent failure to read omens introduces the myth of Proteus with the grey Manxman as the wise prophet. The crew, startled by wailing from the sea, is warned by the Manxman that these are the cries of newly-drowned men, prophesying their doom. Ahab laughs, explaining the cries as only those of seals, again recalling the myth of Proteus. Immediately afterwards, when the first sailor to mount the mast falls off and drowns, the crew, despite the Manxman's denials, considers this not foreshadowing, but fulfilment of an evil already presaged.

Ahab orders that the coffin be transformed to a life-buoy, thus setting the stage for the rescue of Ishmael, who, paradoxically observes but does not act in this chapter. The crew, however, fails to heed the prophecy of the Manxman-Proteus. In the myth, Proteus reveals the truth through a series of
transformations, by a process of symbolization only to those who are patient to remain through the transformations until he returns to the symbol of flux, the sea. The life-buoy is a symbol linking Ishmael with Proteus, predicting his fate—as he alone is cognizant of the transformations.

Transformation is a recurrent symbolic theme revelatory of the flux of the universe, a process so gradual that it is unobserved, allowing for constant renewal with no visible change. The problem of appearance versus reality is thus symbolized by the constantly circular sun and the waxing and waning moon. In this thesis, the focus is on geometrical images such as the circle, lines, triangles, and containers not as rigid shapes, but as symbolic, dynamic form. A cataloguing of the images, listing them as they appear in the text, explaining their configurations and composition, detailing variations in meaning or assimilations to other symbols would, in itself, fail to render the essence of the book. The essential in symbols is their ability to reconcile opposites, and as such they represent action, not mere static substance. The symbols congregate by a magnetic attraction around a character just as the opposite poles of a magnetic substance attract. A similar magnetic force is present between Ahab and Crew, a simultaneous attraction and repulsion. Symbolism is then a striving to fit together disparate elements to form a whole. A cataloguing of images would then be ineffective as "whiteness" must be considered simultaneously with "the blackness of darkness"; while the whale is a Sphinx
he is also a snow hill, or a geometrical circle that cannot be squared.

Moby-Dick is a symphonic work with recurring motifs; it is not a work of obvious artifice. Only by examining the content as it relates to form can one hope to do justice to Melville's vision without distorting it. The work consists of expanding symbols which appear irregularly, and grow as they accrete "meaning from a succession of contexts."

In general terms, the symbols unfold in the narrative in the following manner: the story itself is circular as it ends where it began, with Ishmael, whose attempt at circumnavigation only leads him back to the beginning. But he knows this, and still goes to sea, as a type of necessary Coleridgean expiation, for, on meeting the Albatross, Ishmael exclaims:

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, where those that we left behind secure, were all the time before us.

Were this world an endless plain, and by sailing eastward we could forever 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.

(p. 204)
The novel begins with images of circularity, Ishmael and man circumambulating on a Sunday afternoon, everyman as wanderer like the Biblical Ishmael, tracing a circular path. It is Sunday, the sun's day, and afternoon, and most of the action in the novel takes place in the light of that sphere. In his ennui, man is seen to wander aimlessly or follow the same circuitous route which forever returns him to the same place, presumably to the same condition, "a drizzly damp November of the soul." In order to escape from the repetitive torpor of existence, Ishmael follows yet another circular route, a circumnavigation. With the open independence of the sea comes the realization that what we leave behind always looms ahead; there is no escape. While there is no escape, there is a reconciliation, for the Ishmael who went to sea to escape his fascination with coffin warehouses, his morbidity of spirit, gratefully clings to the coffin spirited up from the depths at the end.

While the Manhattoes circle their insular city, the Pequod, a moving island, circles the globe. Around the Pequod are inscribed other circles, those of the whales. Depending upon the proximity of their enemy, man, they either sport in arenas of whales, vast concentric circles wherein the entire life span of the whale can be observed, or form furious circles, terrifying tornadoes that suck down into the sea all that is trapped in the vortex, or, spiralling upwards, send it flying, dismantled, fragmented.
The movement of the ship on the water is a rolling, just as the whales roll on themselves, as Ahab rolls towards Moby Dick in the final chase. This is a lulling, rocking motion that we come to recognize, in the final image of Ishmael on his coffin life-buoy, as a return to infancy. The mother sea and the coffin wrought by loving hands hold Ishmael buoyant on the "dirge-like main."

Ishmael has a fascination for movement. The vortex compels him. He is aware of the movement of the water, the whales, the ship, and Ahab as he paces. This fascination brings into play a leit-motiv of movement of the geometrical sun and moon and the breezes that encircle the craft. Yet this setting serves as a presentiment of horror, "warmest climes but nurse the cruellest fangs" (p. 413); the round universe is but a camouflage for the cannibalistic jaws.

The business of whaling repeats the circular motif: the whale's blubber is peeled off in corkscrew fashion; the blood of the whale merges with the water in expanding circles; the blubber is boiled in round pots. Cutting into this round universe are sharp triangular images. In contrast to the fluidity of the circular images, these are inflexible, granite-like. Some are naturally formed—mountains, volcanoes, tornadoes—others are man-made—harpoons, masts, spades, pyramids. They are distinguishable not only by shape, but also by colour. They are grey or black—iron, steel, marble, granite—admitting no light, or absorbing it. The circular sun and doubloon are lustrous. The whiteness
of the whale is defined as containing both—no colour and all colour.

Crisscrossing this world of circles and triangles is a myriad of lines. The path of the Pequod, even though it traces a large circle, is a zig-zag course following the whale. The whale, Ahab, Queequeg and the coffin are marked by mazes. The charts in Ahab's cabin are a manic counterpart to the lines on his forehead. Whale lines become nooses. All horizontal lines belie the serenity that accompanies the mat-weaving scene—the looming looms before us as portentous as the whale.

The lines extending to and from heaven, Father Mapple's ladder and the monkey-rope only become "dangerous liabilities," dragging men down. The prevalent movement in the book is downward and even those images which are directed to the sky, such as the masts and candles, are touched with the demoniac and are thus not symbols of transcendency. All the upward triangles which would represent ascendency, light or warmth, are tainted by whiteness, and whiteness inspires "the knowledge of the demonism in the world." The downward static triangles all point to water and the unconscious. If "Moby-Dick lies close to the world of dreams," it is a haunting primal dream. Through the powerful imagination of Melville, Ishmael's world becomes the readers'.
Chapter I

OF WHALES

The classification of the constituents of a chaos, nothing less is here essayed.

This chapter is divided into three sections: The Whale, Whales, and The White Whale. The progression is from generic whale to whale as community, to the White Whale, which shatters the system. A similar progression will be seen in the following chapters, wherein a discussion of men and ships will ultimately focus on the anomaly to the system, so that from these communities of whales, men and ships we are left with the three renegades, Moby Dick, Captain Ahab, and the Pequod.

The first section in this chapter examines the generic whale as it springs from the etymology. The whale is viewed as action—rolling and vaulting. Even in the picture in the Spouter-Inn, the action of vaulting inspires "a sort of indefinite, half-attained, unimaginable sublimity." Yet graphic and pictorial representations of the whale consistently fail to capture its essence. Even the etymology cannot encompass the whale. Although the whale is anatomized throughout the text, his true substance can never be captured.

The second section examines how whales are shown in the text to be members of schools or families, and are observed
at work and play. This view of the whales underscores their mammalian characteristics and the brutal intrusion that the whaling industry is. The community of whales is a circular, almost idyllically depicted world, a still centre in the tornadoed frenzy of existence.

The third section, on Moby Dick, examines the deviation from the system of classification of whales. Moby Dick is a renegade; he does not conform either to the general system of whales nor to the communal reciprocity of the clan. He is, moreover, examined more for the emotions he evokes than for his idiosyncratic characteristics. He is the total of his effect. He is, furthermore, given dimensions more prodigious than his own bulk: he is seen as primordial landscape, as myth, as deity, as the powerful atemporal forces of the pyramid or the vortex. The general whale eludes capture in print or image; the whales by their likeness to man make capture barbaric, and the White Whale can never be captured; he is not only immortal and ubiquitous, he is an outer mask for an inner reality.
THE WHALE

From the first page of *Moby-Dick*, the proteiform nature of the whale is established, not by the cumulative impact of the narration, for it does not begin for several pages. The narration is preceded by and, in fact, derives from the *Etymology and Extracts*.

The first entry introduces us to one persona of the whale:

While you take in hand to school others and to teach them by what name a whale-fish is to be called in our tongue, leaving out, through ignorance, the letter H, which almost alone maketh up the significance of the word, you deliver that which is not true.

(Hackluyt)

The remaining entries in the *Etymology* and the text itself address the problem of what a whale-fish is to be called. Melville begins with this quotation, only to disregard it, for Melville's view is antithetical to Hackluyt's. It is never Melville's intent to teach others by what name a whale-fish is to be called, for a coincidence of the word and the thing would render the whale as a mere substance. Melville's whale can be seen, like the sea, only in a state of flux, as a stage of becoming. So he is determined by his movement—rolling, vaulting. He is process, not image.
Hakluyt further determines that the "H" makes up the significance of the word. Melville's world does not consist of signs or signification, but ambivalence. To look for the significance of a word is to look for denotation. Melville's world is connotative; it is not Emerson's analogical world.

Furthermore, if leaving out the "H" delivers that which is not true, then the text of *Moby-Dick* is a deliverance of that which is not true. Beginning with the Etymology, the Whale is frequently seen as a wall. Ishmael provides data to conclude that he can be seen as a physical barrier. To Ahab, the whale is an impenetrable psychic barrier throughout.

Richardson gives whale as coming from the German *wallen*, and the ME root of the word wall is *wall*. It could then be said that omitting the "H", whether through ignorance or deliberation, leaves us with wall. If the "H" can be taken to suggest Heaven, Hell and horror we begin to realize that, for the purposes of this book, the opening quotation does not apply. Whale as wall is of major significance in this work, for the Whale becomes just this to Ahab, a wall, ultimately more horrible than whale as it represents the "horror of the half-known life" as impenetrable mystery:

"Hark ye yet again,—the little lower layer. All visible objects, man, are but 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 a man will strike, strike through the mask! How can the prisoner peep 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."

(p. 144)

The whale is but a "pasteboard mask" which, in action, "puts forth the mouldings of its features." Ahab must strike, not to reach the inner substance, for there may be none, but to reach outside. The wall, then, is but a barrier to reality that is not realized in substance, only in "each event," the "living act," and the "undoubted deed."

If, on the other hand, the letter "H" does make up the significance of the word, it suggests both Heaven and Hell, and so, from this opening quotation, a binary opposition is established that carries through the entire work, endowing the whale with benevolent and malevolent impulses and actions. The reader, through Ishmael's eyes, catches glimpses of the terror and glory of whaling and is compelled by "The Whiteness of the Whale" to set aside all previous modes of perception and feel, with mounting terror, the awful horror of white. The failure of Ahab to recognize anything but the horror sets him apart from the narrator and the reader, imprisoned in a monomania which admits no multiplicity, and thus, determines his fate.

The second and third entries in the Etymology:
"WHALE.***Sw. and Dan. hval. This animal is named from roundness or rolling; for in Dan. hvalt is arched or vaulted."

Webster's Dictionary

"WHALE.***It is more immediately from the Dut. and Ger. Wallen; A.S. Walw-ian, to roll; to wallow."

Richardson's Dictionary. (p. 1)

introduce the motif of whale as movement, rolling and vaulting. The whale is identified with circularity and rolling so that our perception of him is not that of a wall, or a triangular fin slicing horizontally through the waves, but, rather, as a round object which rolls and circles, mimetic of the movement of the earth itself as it rotates and revolves, suspended in the cosmos. Or, the whale is seen as a bridge, suspended in the air as in the picture in the Spouter-Inn. Throughout the text, images of rolling and vaulting recur as emblems of the whale, the ship, Jonah and, finally, in Ahab's last movements as he rolls towards the Whale.

The following three entries introduce yet another shape that the whale assumes, that of a conical, or phallic representation. In a list of the words for whale in thirteen different languages, of interest is the French baleine, a modification of the Greek phalaina, akin to phallos (penis). This term, if viewed as reproductive, anticipates the opening quotation of the Extracts: "And God created great whales." This quotation is appropriately from Genesis, since the book conforms to Biblical structure and the extracts generate
the text. However, the veracity of this statement is belied by the text: the whale's genesis is undetermined. The phallic imagery continues throughout the text not only as shape, but also as generative material: in "The Cassock," "A Squeeze of the Hand," globules of sperm, sperm whales and most notably in the name of the sperm-coloured whale itself—*Moby-Dick*. Even the movement of the whale at times approximates the movement of sperm. The whale can then be seen as a masculine entity wriggling through a feminine sea. On the other hand, the Fegeeian name for whale, *pekee-nuee-nuee*, has the sound of a feminine diminutive, introducing the fact that whales are communities; they cavort in schools and have family ties. Like humans, they are mammals; they give birth and nurse their young. Thus, the extracts only serve to illustrate that "in relation to an eventual essence of the whale even the best names remain inappropriate."¹

The penis itself is given a chapter entitled "The Cassock," where it is compared in mockingly reverential terms to a black cone strikingly similar to the ebony idol of Queegueg. The cone, a variation of the combination of circle and triangle, recurs throughout the work as a representation of invincible force—"in the tornadoed brow and pyramidal intransigency of Ahab, the pyramidal indomitability of the whale and the deceptive voracity of the vortex; here it affords an opportunity for Rabelaisian humour:

Arrayed in decent black; occupying a conspicuous pulpit; intent on bible leaves;
what a candidate for an archbishoprick,
what a lad for a Pope were this mincer. (p. 351)

Severed from the whale, the penis is employed by the mincer as a form of protection for his clothing as he drops blubber into the try-pots. The "enigmatical object" is not revered, but used as a vehicle to ridicule ceremony.

Yet, in "A Squeeze of the Hand," sperm is seen as a panacea, the attainment of a nirvana when squeezed, a cementing factor that allies the crew. The sperm mimics the whales' movement on the sea "concreted into lumps, here and there rolling about in the liquid part." It is the crew's duty to squeeze the lumps into fluid. Ishmael finds, after a few minutes of squeezing, that his fingers feel like eels; they begin to "serpentine and spiralize." At times, Ishmael's metamorphoses are visible, physical manifestations of psychic states. Here, the serpent imagery is not ominous, as it will be with Ahab. Ishmael sits, bathing his hands in the "soft, gentle globules of infiltrated tissues" which subsequently break and discharge their opulence, "like fully ripe grapes their wine." The morning wears on and Ishmael squeezes the sperm until he almost melts in it and finds himself squeezing his co-labourer's hands, mistaking them for the globules. His concentration shifts, then, from the sperm to his co-workers as, squeezing their hands and regarding them sentimentally, he rhapsodizes:
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. (p. 349)

Ishmael wants the experience to last forever, since he has 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; now that I have perceived all this, I am ready to squeeze case eternally. In visions of the night, I saw long rows of angels in paradise, each with his hands in a jar of spermaceti. (p. 349)

Leaving aside the reductio ad absurdum, the emphasis on the heart not the mind here proposed by Ishmael and exemplified by the communal squeezing of the sperm, is the lesson glimpsed too late by Ahab who has partaken of his communjon from a "murderous chalice" which "spiralizes" and "forks out at the serpent-snapping eye" (p. 145). While Ishmael received profound satisfaction from the magnetic properties of the sperm, Ahab's recognition of his failure results in his dropping a tear onto the sea which, unlike the sperm that contracts, gathering others to some common centre, expands in an infinite emptiness. Starbuck, watching Ahab, seems to hear "the measureless sobbing that stole out of the centre of the serenity around" (p. 443). From his "close-coiled woe," he responds to the azure day around him, gathering Starbuck close:
"...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 my child in thine eye." (p. 444)

While Ishmael learns from the experience with the sperm
that mankind is a chain of being, Ahab is only using Starbuck
as another tool, a magic glass. Having avowed human nature,
he becomes fallen nature as Starbuck's exhortations to return
to Nantucket go unheeded—Ahab shakes like a "blighted fruit
tree" and casts "his last, cindered apple to the soil"
(p. 444).

In so doing he absolves himself of will and ascribes
his actions to external forces:

"By heaven, man, we are turned round and
round in this world, like yonder windlass,
and Fate is the handspike." (p. 445)

The Etymology and Extracts, then, introduce some of the
major motifs and establish the prevalent characteristics of
the whale. These will be expanded upon later in the work so
that the reader will have acquired a map to the genus whale
which he then must, of course, abandon once the White Whale
surfaces.

Following the Etymology and Extracts on the whale, the
book proceeds to establish the mise en scène, and introduce the
dramatis personae, and it is not again until the thirty-
second chapter that the whale surfaces; inevitably, signalling
the irrevocable beginning of the voyage as voyage:
Already we are boldly launched upon the deep;  
but soon we shall be lost in its unshored,  
harborless immensities.  

Before an encounter between whale and ship takes place, Ishmael claims that "a systematized exhibition of the whale in its broad genera" is "almost indispensable to a thorough appreciative understanding of the more special leviathanic revelations and allusions of all sorts which are to follow." This task, which amounts to nothing less than "the classification of the constituents of a chaos" (p. 117), cannot be viewed as mere interpolation, as some have seen it, breaking the narrative thread. 

Neither is it an attempt to impose order on the chaos. It is rather a charting of the characteristics and the vagaries of the whale which ultimately cannot be fixed, subject as they are to the flux of time, season, evolution, the effect of the chase, and whether the whale is pursuer or pursued.

Even were it possible to fully describe the whale in its minutiae, Melville's point here is that it is unnecessary. In the biographical sketch of Queequeg, his island home of Kokovoko cannot be pinpointed because "It is not down in any map; true places never are" (p. 12). Paradoxically, Kokovoko is seen to become more real by its very lack of geographical boundaries, since Melville allows our imagination to shape it.

Such deliberate ambiguity, or even apparent lacunae in the text, rather than condemning it to insubstantiality
as one might suspect, instead free it from conformity and mathematical precision. A text freed from such strictures gains strength through the necessity for the reader to involve his consciousness with the pervasive atmosphere of the work, thus heightening the effect. What Melville accomplishes by refusing to fill in the blanks in his systems is very much what Henry James proposed in the preface to *The Turn of the Screw*:

> Only make the reader's general vision of evil intense enough, I said to myself...and his own experience, his own imagination, his own sympathy (with the children) and horror (of their false friends) will supply him quite sufficiently with all the particulars. Make him think the evil, make him think it for himself, and you are released from weak specifications.  

> Just as the painting at the Spouter-Inn must remain indistinct to permit the action of the imagination, so too, Melville's system of cetology:

> My object here is simply to project the draught of a systematization of cetology. I am the architect, not the builder. (p. 118)

> From this draught, we have the framework for a system of motifs that can be amplified from the Extracts, Etymology and Cetology. The circular motif is introduced as movement and shape—the reference to Starbuck's eye is one of many references to eyes and ways of looking at the world; the sperm introduces both the circular and the spiral motifs, and the whale as rolling or vaulting is one of many references to movement back on itself or looming over. Also, the
triangularity of the fin, the conical shape of the penis, and the whale as snow hill introduce the triangular element into the work which will be seen again as pyramids and harpoons with relation to others in the work.

The Cetology begins with Melville's definition of the whale as "a spouting fish with a horizontal tail" (p. 119), at once relegating the whale to the world of the sea by calling it a fish rather than a mammal, yet distinguishing it from other fish by its horizontal and vertical properties.

Having established the properties of the whale, he then lists the various types of whales according to size in divisions of Folio, Octavo and Duodecimo, a classification reserved for books and so named to identify the number of leaves to a sheet. Thus whale and book become synonymous, with Melville assuming the "ponderous task" which no ordinary letter-sorter is equal to, writing the book by swimming through libraries and sailing through oceans.

Furthermore, the identification of the whales with leaves introduces the concept of layering. Ahab, in his manipulation of Starbuck, a "revivified Egyptian" seeks yet a "lower layer," as though he must reach beyond the second skin of mummification to the being behind the mask of death who waits for reincarnation. Similarly, the whale is wrapped in two skins, the outer skin blanketing the whale as the counterpane covers Ishmael and Queequeg. The deliberate use of the term counterpane for both the skin and
the blanket implies a physical and psychical union—Queequeg as yet another layer of Ishmael, Ishmael as yet another layer of Queequeg. The layering or masking serves a dual purpose: the unfolding or metamorphosizing of one character into another form, or the transposition or revelation of one in the other. In another form, rebirth is associated with layering in the image of the lotus, with its "noiseless, measureless leaves" and its Eastern mythical associations with the birth of the creator. The term Folio (L. folium, leaf) anticipates the lotus, the chrysalis (torpid encased stage between larva and imago), the rosebud and the manner in which the book itself is written, a gradual unfolding of stratification. In other words, as Ishmael moves from the suspended state of his enclosed cocoon of existence through the text to his apocalyptic realization, so must the text move from Genesis to Apocalypse. The text, then, comprises a structure that is inherently romantic in its adherence to organic form. It advances by a series of epiphanies which point inwards and are then assimilated into the text.

This mode of structure maintains Aristotelian form; its advances serve only to return to a centre from which the text unfolds; the reading of the text mimics the movement of the Pequod's undulating course. In Coleridge's view, it is serpentine in its movement:

The reader should be carried forward, not merely or chiefly by the mechanical impulse of curiosity, or by a restless desire to arrive at the final solution, but by the
pleasureable activity of mind excited by the attractions of the journey itself. Like the motion of a serpent which the Egyptians made emblem of intellectual power; or like the path of sound through the air;--at every step he pauses and half recedes, and from the retrogressive movement collects the force which again carries him onward.  

Bezanson recognized in the structure of *Moby-Dick* a similar organic principle:

The method of the book is increasingly genetic, conveying the effect of a restless series of morphic-amorphic movements.

Folio also recalls the pale Usher, dusting lexicons and grammars. Dusting reminds him of his mortality, but he is preoccupied with the surface of books; he dusts; he doesn't read. If the anatomy is incomplete it is because one cannot know through abstraction. Reading brings one closer; writing more so; but only by living the book can one ever approach the experience.

While the etymology of the word Folio suggests a structural mode of perception and narration in the text, the structural mode of the Folio itself demonstrates how the process functions. The Folio begins with what Ishmael terms a "systematized characterization" of the whale. The system rapidly disintegrates into conjecture and concludes with a long list of yet-unclassified whales and phantom whales, "mere sounds, full of Leviathanism, but signifying nothing" (p.127).

The system first introduces the largest whale, the *Sperm* whale, with a promise to enlarge upon his peculiarities in
other places. Only his name, or misnomer, is discussed here. We discover that the name was erroneously applied to another whale thought to supply the sperm. Moreover, when this misconception was corrected, we discover that the name is inappropriate for, "Philologically considered, it is absurd" (p. 120). The whale was named as the result of a misapprehension as to the source of the substance which actually is located in the head. This statement of the etymological absurdity of the sperm whale's name is one of many statements drawing attention to names, if only to assure us that they are not applicable. These will be discussed at greater length in the next chapter.

While Ahab strives to "feature" himself, the whale is systematically defeatured. The system of cetology began by invalidating the very name of the Sperm whale. Throughout the text, his anatomical features are considered, only to be dismissed. Although he is measured and dissected, no physical characteristic other than bulk remains. He is found to have no external nose (p. 284), only a spout hole, and that is not on his face, but on the top of his head. His eyes and ears are not on his face, but at the sides of his head. The absence of these features makes the front of his head a "dead, blind wall." Yet the skull is virtually boneless until twenty feet back from the forehead. The skull is pure androgenity, described in ambiguous sexual references. This boneless mass is "as one wad," the sperm "so impregnably invests all that apparent effeminacy" (p. 285).
The blubber wraps the body as "the rind wraps an orange," so too the head, but with a "boneless toughness," so that the sharpest lance "impotently rebounds from it." Furthermore, "I do not think that any sensation lurks in it."
The whale is simultaneously androgynous sexuality and asensual. He has no "proper olfactories" (p. 312), he has no voice (p. 312). His brain is so hidden that many deny he has one (p. 293). He has no spout; it is nothing but mist. He has no gills, and therefore lives without breathing. His digestive organs are so "inscrutably constructed" that he is incapable of digesting an arm. The essence of the whale cannot be concretized:

The more I consider this mighty tail, the more do I deplore my inability to express it. At times there are gestures in it, which, though they would well grace the hand of man remain wholly inexplicable. In an extensive herd, so remarkable, occasionally, are these mystic gestures, that I have heard hunters who have declared them akin to Free-Mason signs and symbols; that the whale, indeed, by these methods intelligently conversed with the world. Nor are there wanting other motions of the whale in his general body, full of strangeness, and unaccountable to his most experienced assailant. Dissect him how I may, then, I but go skin deep; I know him not, and never will. But if I know not even the tail of this whale, how understand his head? much more, how comprehend his face, when face he has none? Thou shalt see my back parts, my tail, he seems to say, but my face shall not be seen. But I cannot completely make out his backparts; and hint what he will about his face, I say again he has no face. (pp. 317-318)

The reference to spermaceti in the beginning of the cetelological system foreshadows Tashtego's plunge into, and subsequent deliverance from, the head of the Sperm whale.
Replete with sexual innuendo, mocking in tone, Melville compares the "precious perishing" in the "very whitest and daintiest of fragrant spermaceti", "coffined, hearsed, and tombed in the secret inner chamber and sanctum sanctorum of the whale" to the "delicious death" of a honey-hunter who, seeking honey in the "crotch" of a tree, is "sucked" in and "embalmed;" or to many who have tumbled into "Plato's honeyhead", and "sweetly perished" there. Whatever Ishmael might say about the pleasures of the hearth, home and wife, it is not to the hearth-side that he retreats in the drizzly November of his soul; rather, he sets out on a quest at sea. From the opening scene where he finds himself pausing before coffin warehouses, the ultimate entombment, to the epilogue where he perceives a coffin as a transportation to life, Ishmael undergoes a transformation of spirit. He perceives that comfort does not necessarily reside in domesticity: a crow's nest can be as soothing as a hammock. Similarly, domestic joys do not preclude terror:

All men live enveloped in whale-lines. All are born with halters round their necks; but it is only when caught in the swift, sudden turn of death, that mortals realize the silent, subtle, ever-present perils of life. And if you be a philosopher, though seated in the whale-boat, you would not at heart feel one whit more of terror, than though seated before your evening fire with a poker, and not a harpoon, by your side. (p. 241)

Besides the Sperm whale, the other whale with a sizeable entry in the system of cetology is the Fin-Back whale who introduces the concept of angularity. The Fin-Back is
identifiable by his angular, pointed fin that at times is
the only visible part of him. He is pure triangle, a
moving pyramid.

Symbolically, he is linked to Ahab: he is not gregarious
but solitary, he "seems a whale-hater, as some men are man-
hater" (p. 122). He is a monolith on the face of the sea,
"his straight and single lofty jet rising like a tall, misan-
thropic spear upon a barren plain" (p. 122). Like Ahab, he
is marked; he is the "banished and unconquerable Cain of his
race, bearing for his mark that style upon his back (p. 122)."

He is also linked to Ahab by the Biblical reference
to the sundial of Ahaz where, by divine intervention, time
is called back:

When the sea is moderately calm, and slightly
marked with spherical ripples and this gnemon-
like fin stands up and casts shadows upon the
wrinkled surface; it may well be supposed that
the watery circle surrounding it somewhat
resembles a dial, with its style and wavy
hour-lines graved on it. On that Ahaz-dial
the shadow often goes back. (p. 122)

In the Biblical story of the Ahaz-dial, Hezekiah, his
death prophesied by Isaiah, turns his face to the wall and
prays. God, as he is immune to natural laws, turns back
time. The whale, then, is given similar abilities. He is
deified (albeit with Ishmael's qualifications: it may well
be supposed, somewhat).

Ahab, with malevolent intent, makes a similar movement:
...slouched Ahab stood fixed within his skuttle; his hid, heliotrope glance anticipating gone backward on its dial; set due eastward for the earliest sun. (p. 460)

"Slouched Ahab" with his furtive glance affords a contrast to the majesty of the whale. Although their actions are similar, the magic Ahab practises is black magic. Thus, he is compared to and contrasted with the whale: the whale is apotheosized, Ahab is satanized.

"There are some enterprises in which a careful disorderliness is the true method" (p. 19). Here, whaling is a metaphor for the book. A similar disorderliness surrounds the system of cetology. The Sperm Whale and Right Whale are treated only briefly, with the explanation that they will be dealt with more fully later; the Hump Back is said to be misnamed since the Sperm Whale also has a hump; the Razor Back is unknown but for his name; the Sulphur Bottom is seldom seen and never chased; the Grampus is not generally classed among whales; the Black fish is clearly misnamed since most whales are black, so Ishmael suggests the name Hyena Whale; the Narwhale was misnamed since his horn was originally taken for a nose; of the Killer, nothing is known to the naturalist; of the Thrasher less is known than of the Killer; of the Duodecinomes, named by Ishmael since they must somehow be distinguished, there is Huzza, since he swims in hilarious shoals; the Algerine is found, Ishmael thinks, in the Pacific; and there is the mealy-mouthed porpoise, whose other aspects are spoiled by that feature.
So that the true facts of the system are either unknown or deferred, deliberately so, for:

Finally: It was stated at the outset, that this system would not be here, and at once, perfected. You cannot but plainly see that I have kept my word. But I now leave my Cetological System standing thus unfinished even as the great Cathedral of Cologne was left, with the crane still standing upon the top of the uncompleted tower. For small erections may be finished by their first architects; grand ones, true ones, ever leave the copestone to posterity. God keep me from ever completing anything. This whole book is but a draught—nay, but the draught of a draught. Oh, Time, Strength, Cash, and Patience! (pp. 127-8)

The cetology becomes the method by which the writer attempts to portray the ineffable:

Thus, this particular scene which tries "to grope down" into the very beginnings of writing is not definitive, but indispensable as it may be, it cannot be fixed once and for all and is repeated throughout the text. For its mise en scène obeys the movements of writing itself which displace its final expression constantly. This expression is deferred backwards and forwards along the line of the text...  

The system of cetology cannot be complete, moreover, because Moby-Dick "shatters the whole system;" he is "the pure movement of deviation," just as Ahab might shatter the system of whaling Captains, or Moby-Dick the system of whaling voyages.

"To MAGNIFY is the mark of Moby-Dick." Only by diminution of the physical properties of the whale can the essence of his whale loom, the "antemosaic unsourced existence of the unspeakable terrors."
The cetology fails for precisely the same reason that most paintings fail to capture the whale. Ishmael deals with this in two chapters, "Of The Monstrous Pictures of Whales" and "Less Erroneous Pictures." He attempts in the former to prove that "imaginary portraits" of the whale are "all wrong," and, in the latter, that only the French have captured the "picturesqueness" of things, the English and Americans seeming content with "presenting the mechanical outline of things, such as the vacant profile of the whale; which, so far as picturesqueness of effect is concerned, is about tantamount to sketching the profile of a pyramid" (p. 231).

Ishmael traces the "monstrous" pictures beginning with the Indian incarnation of Vishnu, half man, half whale. Even that small section is "all wrong," as it resembles "the tapering tail of an anaconda." (Later, Ahab and Fedallah are seen as anacondas). The "Christian" portraits are no better: Guido's is a "strange creature," Hogarth's monster "undulates" on the surface, a "sort of howdah" on his back, with a "distended tusked mouth." The whales of old binders and primers are "fabulous" creatures.

The scientific representations are no better, the whales are "lying among ice-isles" "like great rafts of logs," "with white bears running over their living backs" or represented with perpendicular flukes, a "prodigious blunder."

A work drawn to scale by a captain in the English navy has a whale's eye which resembles "a bow-window some five
feet long."

Books of Natural History depict the whale as "an amputated sow," a "hippogriff," or a species that does not "have its counterpart in nature." Cuvier's whale is not a sperm whale, but a "squash." "Perhaps he got it as his scientific predecessor in the same field, Desmarest, got one of his authentic abortions; that is, from a Chinese drawing" (p. 227).

The whales on ship-signs are "Richard III. Whales, with dromedary humps," "their deformities floundering in seas of blood and blue paint."

These mistakes do not surprise Ishmael; they are depictions of a "stranded fish" and as such, are as accurate as those of a wrecked ship. For the whale, "in his full majesty and significance" can only be seen in water where his "vast bulk" is out of sight; he cannot be hoisted in the air so as to preserve "all his mighty swells and undulations." While a young whale might be so observed, such is "the outlandish, eel-like, limbered, varying shape of him, that his precise expression the devil himself could not catch". Viewing the skeleton is no help, for the skeleton "gives very little idea of his general shape;" it bears the same relation to the whale as "the insect does to the Chrysalis that so roundingly envelops it."

The whale, then, must remain unpainted, "there is no earthly way of finding out precisely what the whale really
looks like." Only by going whaling can you "derive even a tolerable idea of his living contour," "but by so doing, you run no small risk of being eternally stove and sunk by him."

The representations all fail because the whale is depicted out of his element. He can only be, paradoxically, observed as action, and then he is largely out of sight. Only by the turbulence in his wake can he be rendered; thus, the semi-successful renderings by the French painters. In Ishmael's description of the first painting, very little is said of the whale (who is beneath the boat); he describes the action as "wonderfully good and true." This is a tempestuous, brooding landscape such as Turner created. Ishmael admits that serious fault might be found with the anatomical details of the whale, but he dismisses this.

In the second drawing, the whale is "rushing through the deep," the foreground "all raging commotion." "The French are the lads for painting action." Thus, the whale is the total of his actions, he is catalyst; the only true representation of the whale would be the rendering of a process. It does not consist in perfecting anatomical detail; like the probing for the grand in Ahab, it must be "plucked at from the skies, and dived for in the deep, and featured in the unbodied air."
WHALES

The whale is "antemosaic unsourced existence"; his terror is in the stark whiteness of the sea, the mountains, the prairie. He comes from the sea, and the etymology of cetology recalls monsters. Thus, in the explication of whale, we have the concept of fish and the mythical world of sea-creatures. Where whales are viewed as communities, another aspect is revealed. Here, whales are equated with mammalian values. They are viewed through familiar and conciliatory metaphors.

In "The Grand Armada" whales are equated with "herds," "caravans" and "fleets," nomadic groups, or armadas, purposeful communities. The familial reciprocity of these beings serves as a foil to the solitary self-sufficiency of the white whale when he takes the stage.

In a metaphor familiar to readers of Melville, the whales are observed to form a great semi-circle with a "continuous chain of whale-jets" like a "thousand cheerful chimneys." The whales become moving pieces of land, evoking comforting sensations of home and hearth.

If whales can be equated with one motif, it is that of the circle as it represents unity. The whales advance "gradually contracting the wings of their semicircle, and swimming on, in one solid, but still crescentic centre" (p. 320).
Upon becoming aware of the Pequod, this army of whales closes ranks, their spouts transformed from the familiar coziness of chimney smoke to "flashing lines of stacked bayonets." The now frightened or "gallied" whales, "in all directions expanding in vast irregular circles" swim aimlessly or float paralyzed like "dismantled ships." In their dismay they are like sheep pursued by wolves, or human beings "herded together in the sheep-fold of a theatre's pit" who trample each other to death at the alarm of fire. We are reminded of the crew of the Pequod in the face of the whale as we are asked to withhold amazement at the whales, "for there is no folly of the beasts of the earth which is not infinitely outdone by the madness of men" (p. 322).

Though the gallied whales are in violent motion, they neither advance nor retreat. The crew then has the opportunity to harpoon one. Boat and whale are tied as the whale heads straight for the heart of the herd.

What is felt by the harpooners is not terror, but an ecstasy:

For as the swift monster drags you deeper and deeper into the frantic shoal, you bid adieu to circumspect life and only exist in a delirious throb. (p. 59)

Paradoxically, from the panic of the circumference to the throb of the radius, what is found at the centre of the commotion is serenity:
Yes, we were now in that enchanted calm which they say lurks at the heart of every commotion. And still in the distracted distance we beheld the tumults of the outer concentric circles, and saw successive pods of whales, eight or ten in each, swiftly going round and round, like multiplied spans of horses in a ring; and so closely shoulder to shoulder, that a Titanic circus-rider might easily have over-arched the middle ones, and so have gone round on their backs. (p. 324)

The circular path of the whale is transformed in this chapter from instinctive herding, to offensive armies, to the arena.

In the centre, as though deliberately locked up there, are the cows and calves, some attached by long coils of umbilical cord, like whale lines spiralling in the air from a floating whale. There is peace, even joy, at the centre of the hunt. Here, the circle of the whale becomes the eye of the tornado of Ishmael, the calm centre.

And thus, though surrounded by circle upon circle of consternations and affrights, did these inscrutable creatures at the centre freely and fearlessly indulge in all peaceful concerns; yea, serenely revelled in dalliance and delight. But even so, amid the tornadoed Atlantic of my being, do I myself still forever centrally disport in mute calm; and while ponderous planets of unwaning woe revolve round me, deep down and deep inland there I still bathe me in eternal mildness of joy. (p. 326)

Ishmael and the young whales are entranced while at a distance a war is carried on "within the first circle" while other enraged whales dart to and fro across the circles, and a lone-wounded whale, like Arnold at the battle of Saratoga, dashes "among the revolving circles," a harpoon line and
cutting spade still attached to him, bringing death and mutilation to the other whales. The whales begin to crowd, "in more and more contracting orbits the whales in the more central circles began to swim in thickening clusters" (p.327), until "the entire host of whales came tumbling upon their inner centre, as if to pile themselves up in one common mountain" (p. 327).

The circles dissolve, only to reform again at another time, in another place. Even if not encountered by a whaler, the whales exist in our imagination, somewhere on the globe. Arguing that certain species are not becoming extinct, only frequenting other seas, Melville envisions yet another charmed circle, recapturing the crystalline opening scenes:

As upon the invasion of their valleys, the frosty Swiss have retreated to their mountains; so, hunted from the savannas and glades of the middle seas, the whale-bone whales can at last resort to their Polar citadels, and diving under the ultimate glassy barriers and walls there, come up among icy fields and floes; and in a charmed circle of everlasting December, bid defiance to all pursuit from man. (p. 384)

The whales are living mandalas. The circles in which they disport enclose their entire biological history, intimate a psychical pattern of integration, and suggest a paradigm of communal interaction.

The circles of Melville are like The Magic Circle of Walden:
The circle on Walden is less the obvious cycle of the seasons than a number of subtly suggested circular figures, overlapping as well as concentric. ...The web is but another name for the intricate lines of relationship that shape the total structure. But all are so woven together that the whole vibrates when any part is touched, and the ultimate motion is toward circumference.

They are contained within and are emblematic of the work. Within the text, only Ishmael avails himself of the insights offered by this dynamic mandala. Ahab and the crew choose as their inspiration the ambivalent symbol of the White Whale, the static mandala—the doubloon.
THE WHITE WHALE

The White Whale is viewed, throughout the text, in much the same way as the doubloon, that is, the entire cast is summoned to reflect upon it and authorities are quoted to add weight to the interpretation. In the words of Stubb: "There's another rendering now, but still one text. All sorts of men in one kind of world, you see" (p. 362). He is speaking of the effect of the doubloon. There is also but one White Whale, who, upon examination, forever yields yet another layer. The intrinsic power of each lies in what is extrinsic, only by the peripheral turbulence of each can we hope to approach their values.

The doubloon has commercial value, as does the whale. It is for the monetary value of the doubloon that the crew is incited to hunt the White Whale, quite forgetting that their role is to hunt whales for their remuneration.

If whale and doubloon are text, each assumes subtext. The doubloon is round and golden, emblazoned with a sun. Yet it is not the "glad hay-making" sun that beams upon the arena of playful whales, but the fierce Ecuadorian "circus-running" sun whose unremitting rays beat down upon Ahab's tragic arena.

The doubloon becomes the omphalos that the crew, in their zeal to unscrew, fail to recognize as the nucleus. To remove the doubloon from the mast, or its counterpart,
the whale from his element is to remove the hub (as Pip says, unscrew your navel and your backside falls off).

While the shape of the doubloon echoes the shape of the whale's watery home, and the Andes' summits on it recall the terror of whiteness, the doubloon also contains a flame, a tower and a crowing cock, all more symbolic of the demonism that Ahab commands.

The doubloon, the White Whale and Ahab are inextricably linked from the time Ahab, in his "nailed firmness," nails the doubloon to the mainmast until he is, in turn, in Pip's words, nailed by the whale.

To follow the whale is to enter the abîme, "Winding far down from within the very heart of this spiked Hotel de Cluny where we here stand," "far beneath the fantastic towers of man's upper earth" (p. 161). The quotation refers to Ahab's "larger, darker, deeper part," his "whole awful essence," tortuous as Jonah's, and beneath the spiked masts of the Pequod winding down in the labyrinthine ocean lurks the essence of the whale. The motif of the labyrinth threads through the work: a rigid, devouring puzzle. An approach to it, such as Ahab's, imposing a more rigid structure on it, looking for meaning leads to a "wisdom that is woe" or a "woe that is madness". Only by flexibility, by threading a serpentine path can one hope to emerge from the maze and not be trapped in its deviousness. Ishmael's salvation is through Queequeg, in "The Mat-Making" he "weaves" his own "destiny," the labyrinth
copied from Queequeg's body to his coffin is mastered by Ishmael. He leads the way out of the maze; Ahab and the crew charge into it blindly. (p. 375).

Why the whale commands such fierce pursuit is not for Ishmael to know. The crew's blind obedience to Ahab suggests that they had been "specially picked and packed by some infernal fatality to help him in his monomaniac revenge" (p. 162). It is not for Ishmael to explain the quest:

--What the White Whale was to them, or how to their unconscious understanding, also, in some dim, unsuccessful way, he might have seemed the gliding great demon of the seas of life,—all this to explain, would be to dive deeper than Ishmael can go. The subterranean miner that works in us all, how can one tell whither leads his shaft—by the evershifting, muffled sound of his pick? (p. 162-3)

Ishmael is essentially flexible and non-judgemental. His consciousness is groping. He describes what he sees but does not go beyond that; from action, he does not assume intent. Even though he gives himself up "to the abandonment of the time and the place" (p. 162-3) and sees nothing but evil in the White Whale when he abandons himself to the hunt; at other times he is able to see other than terror in the whale.

Ishmael is set apart from the crew's identification with Ahab's motive, since he reserves a chapter to himself to tell of his response to the White Whale.

What the white whale was to Ahab, has been
hinted; what, at times, he was to me, as yet remains unsaid. (p. 163)

Unsaid because it is ultimately "ineffable" and, as such, must forever remain unsaid. Yet, inevitably, Ishmael must attempt to say it, to draft the structure of his vague, nameless horror.

But how can I hope to explain myself here; and yet, in some dim, random way, explain myself I must, else all these chapters might be naught. (p. 163)

What is so appalling to Ishmael is the whiteness of the whale which evokes a vague "instinct of the knowledge of the demonism in the world," an instinct recognized even by a "dumb brute" (p. 169).

But Ishmael identifies with the whales in general, for the "charmed, churned circle" where whales disport themselves and mothers and nursing infants repose surrounded by "circle upon circle of consternations and affrights" is an echo of his own psychic state.

And thus, though surrounded by circle upon circle of consternations and affrights, did these inscrutable creatures at the centre freely and fearlessly indulge in all peaceful concernments; yea, serenely revelled in dalliance and delight. But even so, amid the tornadoed Atlantic of my being, do I myself still forever centrally disport in mute calm; and while ponderous planets of unwaning woe revolve round me, deep down and deep inland there, I still bathe me in eternal mildness of joy. (p. 326)

From this calm centre, one can still recognize that beyond the visible expanse of the spherical universe is an unknown:
Though in many of its aspects this visible world seems formed in love, the invisible spheres were formed in fright. (p. 169)

The Platonic idea of the music of the spheres becomes, through the terrifying presence of the White Whale, a fugue in both senses of the word. In the text, the theme of terror is contrapuntally reintroduced periodically until it builds to a climax on the third lowering. Fugue, from the Latin fuga (flight) implies Ishmael's abandonment of the shore, his willing entry into the composition by escaping the familiar world to take part in the hunt, thus entering the invisible spheres.

We now know what the White Whale was to Ahab, the crew and Ishmael. What remains is a scientific view, which is afforded by Lavater, a physiognomist, and Gall and Spurzheim, phrenologists.

Two qualities emerge from the descriptions: the prevalence of Egyptian myth in the description of the physical properties of the whale, and the reiteration of the ambiguous comparisons that prevail in the text—oppositions of land and sea, femininity and masculinity, entombment and freedom. Furthermore, the whale can be seen to comprise a continuum of shapes, while remaining, himself, virtually amorphous.

The Sperm Whale is a Sphinx, pyramidal and covered with hieroglyphs. The Sphinx is feminine, so we have the contradictory Sperm Whale as Sphinx. The sphinx recalls
riddles, even as the motifs of hieroglyphs and labyrinths. If the Sperm Whale is the Sphinx, can Ahab be seen as Oedipus? His mother is widowed; he goes blind at the end, he is linked symbolically to the sun.

The Sperm Whale is pyramidal in configuration and in his silence. He is, then, linked to transcendence and the sun gods, and, therefore, again to Ahab.

He is hieroglyphical, "obliquely crossed and re-crossed with numberless straight marks in thick array," which seem engraved not on the skin, but on the body itself. "These are hieroglyphical; that is, if you call those mysterious ciphers on the walls of pyramids hieroglyphics, then that is the proper word to use in the present connection" (p. 260). Hieroglyphs are sacred carvings, so the carvings on the whale gain another dimension—they refer to a deity. Melville transports the myth from the Nile, Americanizing it by declaring that one sperm whale was marked with characters resembling the "famous hieroglyphic palisades" on the Upper Mississippi. It is to these hieroglyphs on the Upper Mississippi that the whale is akin, for, like them, he remains undecipherable.

Physiognomically, the whale is a prairie, lacking a nose. While such a feature would be indispensable in landscape gardening, where a "spire, cupola, monument or tower" would complete the scene, or on a face, on a whale, it would be impertinent, a détraction from the sweeping grandeur of the plain.
A frontal view shows a brow so grand,

You feel the Deity and the dread powers more forcibly than in beholding any other object in living nature. For you see no one point precisely, not one distinct feature is revealed; no nose, eyes, ears or mouth; no face; he has none, proper; nothing but that one broad firmament of a forehead, pleated with riddles; dumbly lowering with the doom of boats, and ships and men. (p. 292)

The Sperm Whale, by assuming the awful power of nature, recalls the powers of heaven and hell. The same pleated riddle of a forehead becomes Ahab's as his charting of the whale becomes visible on his brow: "...some invisible pencil was also tracing lines and courses upon the deeply marked chart of his forehead" (p. 171). On the third day of the chase, Ahab pits his forehead against Moby-Dick's: "Forehead to forehead I meet thee, this third time, Moby-Dick!"

In profile, a semi-crescentic depression in Moby Dick's forehead is like Lavater's Mark of Genius in man. Ahab has his mark, Moby Dick has his too. Yet, the whale's mark is a sign of genius that is evidenced by his "pyramidal" silence. He becomes like Ahab in Stubb's dream. The "wrinkled granite hieroglyphs" were deciphered by Champollion, but no one can decipher the "Egypt of every man's and every being's face." Ishmael's challenge to the reader is "I put that brow before you. Read it if you can" (p. 293). The brow of the whale has become the brow of Ahab; both become the book.

Phrenologically, the whale is explored in a chapter entitled "The Nut." The move from triangle to circle,
recalling the theme of potentiality (nut as seed). He has no visible brain, he is pure instinct, yet a riddle:

If the Sperm Whale be physiognomically a Sphinx, to the phrenologist his brain seems that geometrical circle which it is impossible to square. (p. 52)

Dissected, the jaw is a "moderately inclined plane" on a level base, but in life this plane is "almost squared by the enormous superincumbent mass of the junk and sperm." At the high end of the skull is a crater which acts as a womb to the sperm, while in another cavity not more than ten inches long and at least twenty feet from his forehead sits the "mere handful" of the monster's brain, secreted in him like a "choice casket." Phrenologically, he is a delusion. It would be more fitting if the labyrinthine convolutions of sperm represented his brain.

Lying in strange folds, courses, and convolutions, to their apprehensions, it seems more in keeping with the idea of his general might to regard that mystic part of him as the seat of his intelligence. (pp. 162-163)

Failing to define the whale by his skull, we turn to the backbone wherein, according to Ishmael, resides much of a man's character:

I would rather feel your spine than your skull, whoever you are. A thin joist of a spine never yet upheld a full and noble soul. (p. 294)

The whale's first neck-vertebra represents a "triangular figure with the base downwards," such that the vertebrae
resemble "a strung necklace of dwarfed skulls" (p. 294).

In body symbolism, the cosmic axis is equated with the spinal column. Threaded around the spine are chakras (depicted as wheels or lotus flowers) which are situated around the spine in ascending order representing levels of consciousness. The whale's spine is therefore connected to the symbolism of the centre, the hub of life with all the attendant symbols such as the sun (whales as sun worshippers p. 317), omphalos (Pip and the navel), and the cosmic axis, the still centre in the midst of turbulence (circles of whales, Ishmael's insular Tahiti). Of course, a strung necklace of skulls can refer symbolically to time the devourer—relating again to the Sphinx.

By whatever manner we endeavour to solve the mystery of the White Whale, it forever eludes us. The awesome presence of the whale at once renders inadequate any description of him and we must say as was said of Ahab "reality outran apprehension."

When the whale is encountered, the first day of the chase, the sea is a "noon-meadow," his hump "slides" along the sea, a "musical rippling playfully accompanying" his shadow, bright bubbles "danced" by his side, "gay fowl softly feathering the sea" at his side, the "shattered pole" of a lance projecting like a flag-staff. "A gentle joyousness—a mighty mildness of repose in swiftness, invested the gliding whale." He seems like a ship gliding through the
water—not a whaling vessel, but a cruise ship.

Appearance belies the reality. His serenity allures only to lure the unsuspecting mariner. "That quietude is "but the vesture of tornadoes." Rising from the water "his whole marbleized body "forms an arch, he is revealed as a "grand god," his "glittering mouth" like a "marble tomb." With "malicious intelligence" he gnaws at the boat, retreats then approaches again "vertically thrusting his oblong head up and down in the billows; and at the same time slowly revolving his whole spindled body." He then resumes his "horizontal attitude" swimming round and round, churning the water. The serene circle becomes a terrifying maelstrom:

The sight of the splintered boat seemed to madden him, as the blood of grapes and mulberries cast before Antiochus's elephants in the book of Maccabees. Meanwhile Ahab half smothered in the foam of the whale's insolent tail, and too much of a cripple to swim,—though he could still keep afloat, even in the heart of such a whirlpool as that...For so revolvably appalling was the White Whale's aspect, and so planetarily swift the ever-contracting circles he made, that he seemed horizontally swooping upon them. (p. 450)

Yet the Whale holds more than terror. He represents, by his muteness, a characteristic Melvillian attribute, greatness. The Sperm Whale is both "ponderous and profound" and therefore in the company of such as Plato, Pyrrho, the Devil, Jupiter and Dante. To this mystical company, Ishmael adds himself, for looking in a mirror, while composing a treatise on Eternity, he sees a "worming and undulation" over his head, a mist that surrounds the heads of all deep thinkers. This
mist is not only a product of mental activity, but a divine intuition. The Sperm Whale’s vapor is sometimes arched by a rainbow:

And how nobly it raises our conceit of the mighty, misty monster, to behold him solemnly sailing through a 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. 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. (p. 314)

The rainbow represents the divine vision, tempered by doubts but illuminated by flashes of intuition. The Sperm Whale, here, serves as the Catskill Eagle does, to elucidate the sensibility of Ishmael: his rainbow is Ishmael’s.

The third day of the chase, as the Whale surfaces, he hovers for a moment in the “rainbowed air.” There is a double significance to the rainbow.

First, the rainbow is the many-coloured veil of Maya. The Whale is usually apprehended in the text as a dumb blankness, an absence of colour, whereas the Bouton-de-Rose and the blood-tinged sea are garish, nature painted like a harlot to disguise the charnel house within.
The text moves from absence of colour to an excess of colour; each is an artificiality. With the rainbow, there is the "concrete of all colours;" it is a true representation of the "whiteness" of the whale, fanned out for us to behold; folded, it becomes whiteness no longer terrifying. So the true hue of the whale is represented by the rainbow, misty, pastel.

Secondly, the reappearance of the rainbow on the final day of the chase leads us in a circular fashion to the beginning, to the sub-sub-librarian and Genesis and recalls the Biblical story of Noah. God's covenant with Noah that there would be no more floods was illustrated by the appearance of the rainbow. The Pequod, with three years' water in her hold, has been compared to the ark: "So that did you carry them the news that another flood had come; they would only answer—'Well, boys, here's the ark!'" (p. 319).

The reappearance of the rainbow, while it returns us to the beginning, also leads us to the end of the text, where, "the great shroud of the sea rolled on as it rolled five thousand years ago" (p. 469), or, at the time of the flood. The sea remains constant through change. In a similar manner, Moby Dick has been shown to be symbolic of permanence through flux. From the time of the flood to the time of the text, all the history, myth and data that Melville has amassed within the text becomes transitory in comparison to the numinous
White Whale, ubiquitous and immortal.
Chapter II

OF MEN

MARINERS, RENEGADES AND CASTAWAYS

This chapter will be largely a study of Ahab and Ishmael. Since a study of Ahab and Ishmael would be incomplete without reference to Pip and Queequeg, I have also devoted some space to them mainly as they function as symbolic indicators of fate, and also as they initiate or embody two major themes: connectedness versus isolation, lost direction (the maze) versus the straight road (the apocalypse).

I would like to make a few brief, general comments on the other mariners. They are relatively underdifferentiated in the text, representative of "one federated keel;" thus, their function is to serve Ahab, while remaining faceless themselves.

Initially introduced under the appellation "Knights and Squires," Ishmael idealizes the mariners. Starbuck has no "physical superfluousness," but this does not indicate "bodily blight", rather, "the condensation of the man." He is closely wrapped up in his skin, "embalmed with inner health and strength like a revivified Egyptian." He is a "patent chronometer." His life was "a telling pantomime of action, and not a tame chapter of sounds." Yet, "certain qualities" at times "overbalanced" the rest. He was "uncommonly conscientious," and inclined to superstition: "outward portents
and inward presentiments were his." At times these "bent the welded iron of his soul." Courage was not a sentiment, "but a thing simply useful to him." His bravery, "while generally abiding firm in the conflict with seas, or winds, or whales, or any of the ordinary irrational horrors of the world," did not extend to "more terrific, because more spiritual terrors, which sometimes menace you from the concentrating brow of an enraged and mighty man."

Stubb is associated with his short black pipe and thus, by his name and his trademark, he seems physically inferior to the towering Ahab. He is unaware of the perils of whaling; he "converted the jaws of death into an easy chair."

Flask had no reverence for the whale or apprehension of danger. To him, the whale was but a "magnified mouse." He is, like Starbuck and Stubb, physically concentrated. He is metaphorically utilitarian. Mankind can be divided into "wrought nails and cut nails"—Flask is a wrought one, "made to clinch tight and last long." He is not a living tree, but a squat timber, called "King-Post" because he is like a "short, square timber."

Starbuck, Stubb and Flask, then, are all characterized by a certain diminution of body. Traditionally, if the body is a container for the mind, any reduction of the body (such as a loss of limb) circumscribes one, bringing one closer to self, while offering protection from the elements and from the hostility of fellow men. However, Starbuck, Stubb and...
Flask are basically selfless automatons; unwrapping the layers will reveal nothing; they are lacking soul. Their spareness of body acts in a reverse fashion to that of Ahab and Queequeg, whose concentration of body only strengthens their souls which seem barely contained by their bodies. The prophet remarks of Ahab's soul: "He's got enough, though, to make up for all deficiencies of that sort in other chaps" (p. 86). Ishmael notes of Queequeg "You cannot hide the soul. Through all his unearthly tattooings, I thought I saw the traces of a simple honest heart; and in his large, deep eyes, fiery black and bold, there seemed tokens of a spirit that would dare a thousand devils" (p. 52). When seized with a fever, though his body is waning, "like circles on the water, which, as they grow fainter, expand; so his eyes seemed rounding and rounding, like the rings of Eternity" (p. 395).

Starbuck, Stubb and Flask's souls become possessed by the "evil magic" of Ahab. Whatever virtues they possess are insufficient in the face of Ahab's concentrated potency. While Ishmael's initial portrayal of the crew as Knights and Squires has the ring of the heroic, his true judgment is encapsuled in the chapter "Moby Dick":

Here, then, was this grey-headed, ungodly old man, chasing with curses a Job's whale round the world, at the head of a crew, too, chiefly made up of mongul renegades, and castaways, and cannibals--morally enfeebled also, by the incompetence of mere unaided virtue or right-mindedness in Starbuck, the invulnerable jollity of indifference and recklessness in Stubb, and the pervading mediocrity in Flask. Such a crew, so officered
seemed specially picked and packed by some infernal fatality to help him to his monomaniac revenge. (p. 162)
AHAB

Reality outran apprehension: Captain Ahab stood upon his quarter-deck.

The full force of the White Whale can only be realized at peril to life and limb; so too can the awful essence of Ahab only be captured by observing him in action. The White Whale is essentially ambiguous—he is white yet inherently black; the monumental effort required to attempt to reconcile these ambiguities, and the ultimate realization that they cannot be reconciled, make him the powerful symbol that he is. Traces of him leave a deep imprint on our consciousness. In a similar manner, the most revelatory statement that can be made of Ahab is that he is a "grand, ungodly God-like man." The interplay of these irreducible qualities capture the essence of the man and the beast without ever resolving their ambiguous natures.

Ahab plays out his part in the drama that he has constructed ("this whole act is immutably decreed") without becoming fully cognizant that the intelligence he directs towards the destruction of the whale is insufficient to overcome the sheer bulk of that force in nature.

He becomes the whale, taking on its physical characteristics, without realizing that he is cutting himself off from life on the land. To become the whale is to return to the sea, for the whale is metaphorically the sea. He gives up his soul to the whale; it becomes "a formless somnambulist

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being, a ray of living light, to be sure, but without an object to color, and therefore a blankness in itself" (p. 175), like the ungodly terror of the whale, a "dumb blankness, full of meaning, in a wide landscape of snows—a colorless, all-color of atheism from which we shrink" (p. 169).

The constellation of symbols surrounding Ahab are replete with images of sterility, as though being dismasted by the whale has precipitated a psychic disfigurement. In addition to images of barrenness, images of metallic devices and naturally destructive forces abound: he is a pyramid (p. 115), a cannon-ball (p. 112), a hurricane with Stubb a sapling (p. 144), a coggèd circle fitting into the crew's various wheels (p. 147), a match lighting the crew as ant-hills of powder (p. 147), a train ("the path to my fixed purpose is laid with iron rails; naught's an obstacle, naught's an angle to the iron way") (p. 147), a mortar ("as if his chest had been a mortar, he burst his hot heart's shell upon it") (p. 160), he has a tornado brow (p. 193), his glance "shot like a jayelin" (p. 358), he wore "the same aspect of nailed firmness" (p. 358), he is an iron statue (p. 400), with lips like the lips of a vice (p. 400), he is an anvil (p. 435), and he has a splintered helmet of a brow (p. 442).

Where Ahab is described in terms of nature, it is fallen nature: he is a "crushed grape," a man "cut away from the stake, when the fire has overrunningly wasted all the limbs without consuming them" (p. 110), scarred as a tree struck by
lightning, "greenly alive, but branded" (p. 110), like a "blighted fruit tree he shook, and cast his last, cindered apple to the soil" (p. 444). On the second day of the chase, Ahab verbalizes this—never admitting that he is scarred more than skin deep:

"Ye see an old man cut down to the stump; leaning on a shivered lance; propped up on a lonely foot. 'Tis Ahab—his body's part; but Ahab's soul's a centipede, that moves upon a hundred legs." (p. 459)

Trees are representative of life below the level of consciousness, an intermediate state between matter and mind. Ahab is then in this intermediate state, neither inanimate nor sentient. While a tree can be a symbol of ascendancy, Ahab becomes a stump, dismasted like his ship. A stump is without branches thus is the antithesis of the tree of life, and the unity of the One and the Many that trees represent. Ahab is then an unbalanced man, like a tree with no branches reaching heavenwards, only roots to the underworld.

Ahab's family tree is also truncated. He is a virtual genealogical isolate, and thus an example of those creative individuals who must unencumber themselves of their history to generate their future. His is a Grand-llama-like exclusiveness, or the withdrawal of St. Stylite's a hermitic existence prior to a work of creation.

When Ahab first appears, he "looked like a man cut away from the stake" (p. 109). He is not seen as a stump,
but as a majestic tree. His scar

...resembled that perpendicular seam sometimes made in the straight, lofty trunk of a great tree, when the upper lightning tearingly darts down it, and without wrenching a single twig, peels and grooves out the bark from top to bottom, ere running off into the soil, leaving the tree still greenly alive, but branded. (p. 110)

Ahab is, then, a classic Romantic figure in his symbolic composition. In romance, the suspension of natural law reduces nature largely to the animal and vegetable world. Tragic heroes then become the highest points in the human landscape, and as such are inevitable conductors of electrical power about them, or victims of it, great trees struck by lightning. ²

As Ahab views his own metamorphosis from a tree, greenly alive, to a stump, he rationalizes the change by a false equation:

"I've known some ships made of dead trees outlast the lives of men made of the most vital stuff of vital fathers." (p. 459)

Ahab is unable, because of his life experience, to identify with a vital father, since his mother was widowed when he was only an infant. Indeed, he described his own wife as a widow. His child, then, is without a father. In contrast to the circles of whales, life on the Pequod is life without father. The ship's crew is a community of men, perhaps more spiritually akin to the lost boys of Peter Pan, with time
ticking away like the clock inside the crocodile. Ahab is not a father figure to the crew, he is more akin to the literary figure of the elder brother, leading a revolt against their progenitor.

If it is the mark of Melville to magnify, I believe it can be said that it is the mark of Ahab to vacillate between magnification and diminution. He consistently minimizes portents while simultaneously aggrandizing the whale until it obliterates every other perception. "To any monomaniac man, the veriest trifles capriciously carry meanings" (p. 200). His magnification of the whale is accompanied by a diminution of self. He is obsessed with his age, his amputation: he comes to view his very soul as an insect.

Moby Dick sails on an azure sea, except when agitated; then, the waves are white-crested. Ahab, in his soliloquy at sunset, in describing himself, is really describing Moby Dick:

"I leave a white and turbid wake; pale waters, paler cheeks, where'er I sail." (p. 146)

Yet, in the same soliloquy, Ahab imagines that he wears the Iron Crown of Lombardy, worn by the Holy Roman Emperors, containing a nail from the Cross.

The crown is iron; Ahab remarks on this:

"'Tis iron--that I know--not gold. 'Tis split, too--that I feel; the jagged edge galls
me so, my brain seems to beat against the
solid metal; aye, steel skull, mine; the
sort that needs no helmet in the most brain-
battering fight."
(p. 147)

Ahab is aware that his crown is not gold. While the
whale and the sea are frequently described in golden hues, and
the doubloon is gold, we are aware that Ahab can never reclaim
it—neither the doubloon nor the golden days of youth, innocence,
nor purity. Neither can he aspire to the zenith of the mythic
ages of man—the golden age. He is not gold, nor even silver,
but bronze and iron, "The permanent constitutional condition of
the manufactured man," thought Ahab, "is sordidness" (p. 184).
Ahab is himself a manufactured man, not a precious metal like
gold. He is a "steel skull" (p. 147); wears an iron crown
(p. 147); runs on iron rails (p. 147); is a cannon-ball (p. 112);
and seems made of bronze (p. 119).

The nail contained in the crown is prophetic; we have
other intimations that Ahab will meet a similar fate. He
stands with a "crucifixion" in his face. "He sleeps with
clenched hands; and wakes with his own bloody nails in his
palms" (p. 174).

The motif of nails is a recurrent one in the text.
Mankind is divided into "wrought nails and cut nails" (p. 106).
Pip sees the nailing of the doubloon to the mast as a presenti-
ment of doom. "Ha, ha!" old Ahab! the White Whale; he'll nail ye!" (p. 363).
On the third day of the chase, when the whale sounds, the waves "hammered
and hammered" the bow as Ahab cried:

"Drive, drive in your nails, oh ye waves! to their uttermost heads drive them in! ye but strike a thing without a lid; and no coffin and no hearse can be mine..." (p. 464)

After the sighting of the Parsee's body, when the crew prepares to set out again, Ahab hears the hammers in the broken boats while "far other hammers seemed driving a nail into his heart" (p. 465).

Ahab's last act as captain is to order Tashtego to hammer the flag. As the ship sinks, Tashtego obeys, and in the act of nailing the flag, nails a bird, folded in Ahab's flag, to the post. The ship, "like Satan, would not sink to hell till she had dragged a living part of heaven along with her, and helmeted herself with it" (p. 469).

Ultimately, the whale does not nail Ahab. Ahab, in his splintered, fragmented psyche becomes Satan the ship, dragging the part of him that is a bird of heaven down to hell. He is also the bird wrapped in his flag; having suffered a somatic loss, he is now to lose his means of transcendence, his wing or soul. Unlike Pip, who drowned corporeally while his soul was buoyant, Ahab now submerges his soul with his physically and psychically flawed self.

Ahab takes to the open seas, yet, paradoxically, he closets himself away in claustrophobic small places. Replete with Freudian overtones, the enclosures the motherless Ahab seeks are nevertheless more representative of the tomb than the womb.
The Pequod herself is such a container, for even though Ahab in his wakeful old age came more often to the deck, he was, in fact, no different from sea-gazers who stood on solid ground to contemplate the ocean. Just as they were removed from the sea by the land, so was he separated from it by the ship.

Below deck, the cave-like atmosphere alternately attracted and repelled him: "It feels like going down into one's tomb,"—he would mutter to himself,—"for an old captain like me to be descending this narrow scuttle, to go to my grave-dug berth." "grave-dug berth" (birth)—this oxymoron is the essence of Ahab, a man who walks on life and death, a resurrected man. He, like Christ, was a man born to die.

Although Ahab is tied symbolically to the sun, he is repeatedly associated with darkness, shadow, death and entombment. The sun is not light-giving for him, it is alternately scorching, another of his tools or the equivalent of flame and fire worship. The sun to him is a false lamp; he belongs, with Fedallah, under the nefarious light of the moon.

While the sun represents enlightenment to Ishmael, Ahab turns from it. If the sun is the eye of God, Ahab, without compunction, strikes out at it: "Talk not to me of blasphemy, man; I'd strike the sun if it insulted me."

Ahab does strike the sun by his symbolic shattering of the quadrant. In "The Quadrant" Ahab changes his perspective
from vertical to horizontal, relying on the compass, log and line rather than the sun to guide him. This avowed intention is obviated by his appointment, in the previous chapter, of Fedallah as his prophet. His movement, then, is downward, following Fedallah's. As pilot of the Pequod, Ahab fails to heed the lesson of "the great Pilot Paul" as told by Father Mapple, for "while preaching to others," he is "himself a castaway."

In "The Quadrant" the quadrant is a mechanical image of the sun, used by Ahab to fix his position. In a parody of the wounded whales rushing to one common centre, the crew of the Pequod, eyes fixed on the doubloon, at high noon head for the equator, the centre of the earth. Ahab becomes exasperated with the sun as pilot, since it can only tell him where he is, not where he will be, or where Moby Dick is. Preferring instead the predictions of Fedallah ("Hemp only can kill thee"), which he takes to be assurances of his immortality, he dashes the quadrant to the deck.

This is his first symbolic turning from the sun, establishing a rift between him and the whales, foreshadowing his final speech beginning "I turn my body from the sun." His decision to abandon the quadrant also establishes a change of perspective, narrowing his angle of vision, by limiting it to the horizontal plane. As a result, approaching objects "loom" as they would not from a view from the mast.

His decision to use the compass also indicates a movement
from science to intuition. While a compass is sufficient for land travel, Ahab is on the sea, and the position of the sun and the configuration of the sky are factors to be considered when one is on a small boat in a large ocean.

The dashing of the quadrant initiates the tragic phase of the novel. The following scenes symbolize an encroaching darkness that is basically unrelieved for the rest of the text. The scene following "The Quadrant", is a scene of pagan fire worship. This chapter, "The Candles", is lit by lightning, "pallid fire", "white flames" "silently burning" in the "sulphurous air," "pale phosphorescence," a ghastly colourless, noiseless scene. The yard arms burn like tapers on an altar, the harpoons are aflame. Ahab allies himself with the dark forces. His harpoon burns like a "serpent's tongue." He extinguishes the flame with a "blast of his breath" saying "thus I blow out the last fear!" foreshadowing his final act, "Thus, I give up the spear."

"The Quadrant" is the counterpart of "The Candles" painted a colourless colour. In "The Quadrant" the mariners eyes are "centrally" fixed on the doubloon, "the unblinking vivid Japanese sun seems the blazing focus of the glassy ocean's immeasurable burning-glass." The sky is "laquered" and cloudless. "This nakedness of unrelieved radiance is as the insufferable splendors of God's throne." Ahab sits, looking through the kaleidoscope of the quadrant at the sun. The Parsee kneels before him, eyeing the same sun, only his eyes "half hooded their orbs," his "wild face was subdued to
an unearthly passionlessness."

The same tableau is presented in "The Candles," only reversed. Ahab and the Parsee are not beneath the sun, but its material representation, the doubloon, and the flame. The Parsee's head is not looking upward, but bowed. This scene initiates a progression into the past, a consistent undermining of all the innovations of what was, in Ahab's time, the sophisticated industry of whaling.

One by one the ships' instruments become useless, so that the ship's course is dependent upon the primitive guide of a mended log and line and the blind instinct of its captain. Ahab destroys the quadrant, the lightning inverts the compass, and the sea parts the log and line. Ahab's action allies him with the two forces in nature. His view, however, is that he is above nature, as he believes he can mend what he and nature have destroyed.

In "The Needle" nature seems a co-conspirator. The sun is an insidious army that Ahab believes is under his command: "Muffled in the full morning light, the invisible sun was, only known by the spread intensity of his place; where his bayonet rays moved on in stacks" (p. 423). The "bayonet rays" do not serve as a guide to Ahab, they march before and after him, his Grand Armada: "Ha, ha, my ship! thou mightest well be taken now for the sea-chariot of the sun. Ho, ho! all ye nations before my prow, I bring the sun to ye!" (p. 423).

The sea becomes emblematic of Ahab's infernal purpose:
"The sea was a crucible of molten gold, that bubblingly
leaps with light and heat" (p. 423).

It is, moreover, under his direction: "Yoke on the
further billows; hallo! a tandem, I drive the sea!" (p. 432).
The forces in nature are subsumed into Ahab's grand scheme;
it is not, then, surprising that he would assume that Moby
Dick would also conform to his orchestration of the universe.

The concept of hubris is introduced here, as Ahab, no
longer slouching, head bent, allows the crew to gaze into
his eyes—"In his fiery eyes of scorn and triumph, you then
saw Ahab in all his fatal pride" (p. 425). The mariners
slink away from Ahab just as they had previously run from him
in "The Candles" as he blew out the burning harpoon and stood
like a "lone, gigantic elm."

He abandons the sun as a guide, relying instead on his
own heliotrope gaze. Most of the action prior to the encounter
with the whale takes place by the light of the moon. Even
when Ahab stands on the deck in the daylight, he is shadowed;
he frequently casts his eyes downward, or wears a hat slouched
over them.

The slouched hat is a symbol of Jonah in Father Mapple's
sermon, associating Ahab with another outcast. One by one,
Ahab divests himself of his land connections or is separated
from them. He discards his pipe and sextant and a bird
steals his hat. He seems to have no recourse but to enter
the belly of the whale, like his prototype.
But in Moby-Dick, the whale is a pyramid, and so becomes not a temporary isolation for Ahab, but his tomb. "The glittering mouth yawned beneath the boat like an open-doored marble tomb" (p. 448). Ahab exchanges his entombment on the Pequod for entombment on the pyramidal whale. The Pequod is a fitting tomb for the melting-pot of the crew. Ahab, named after a king, belongs in the burial place of kings, a pyramid.

Though the crew can be viewed as a slice of America, Ahab is not only set apart from American society, he seems stateless, an anachronism. His soul is entombed in his body; he becomes the hermit in the landscape of the opening chapter, languishing in a hollow tree:

Though nominally included in the census of Christendom, he was still an alien to it. He lived in the world, as the last of the Grisly Bears lived in settled Missouri. And as when Spring and Summer had departed, that wild Logan of the woods, burying himself in the hollow of a tree, lived out the winter there, sucking his own paws; so, in his inclement, howling old age, Ahab's soul, shut up in the caved trunk of his body, there fed upon the sullen paws of its gloom! (p. 134)

Ahab's madness or monomania is a form of lunacy, characterized by metamorphoses. On the long trip home after losing his leg, "his torn body and gashed soul bled into one another; and so interfusing, made him mad" (p. 160). At times, he was "a raving lunatic," at other times he presented a "firm, collected front," but even then, Ahab "in his hidden self, raved on." "Human madness is oftentimes a cunning and
most feline thing. When you think it fled, it may have but become transfigured into some still subtler form" (p. 161). Ahab's madness assumes another, more potent form; his lunacy "contracted," "his special lunacy stormed his general sanity, and carried it, and turned all its concentrated cannon upon its own mad mark" so that Ahab emerges a thousand fold more potent. In his madness, Ahab is allied to the moon since lunacy is a particular type of madness (governed by lunar phases) characterized by intermittent periods of lucidity.

Ahab's name recalls the Biblical King and raises again the question of the coincidence of the word and the thing. Not only is Ahab's name to be pondered, but the whole question of identity is evidenced through the use of appellations. Ahab frequently refers to himself in the third person as though he were someone else, or as if he were comprised of multiple identities. Near the beginning of the story, Peleg exhorts Ishmael to disregard Ahab's name as though an acknowledgment of its Biblical reference would initiate a chain of actions that would ultimately doom Ahab to a repetition of the ill-fated life of his namesake. The act of naming initiates irrevocable action. Peleg means division, a reference to the time when the earth was divided into linguistic groups, while Bildad means son of contention, one of Job's three friends. The owners of the ship allude to Christian and non-Christian chaos. While their names, and Ahab's, are prophetic of the Biblical, mythical tragic unfolding of the story, other
names such as Starbuck and Pip are etymologically ironic. Starbuck, named for a long line of whaling captains, retreats in the face of Ahab's will. Ahab might strike the sun; Starbuck is unable to buck the stars. Pip is what the name indicates, a pip or seed frozen at one state of development. Of course, at the beginning of the text, we are asked to call the narrator Ishmael. Is this because we are to perceive a Biblical parallel? Will he become what we call him?

From "Call me Ishmael" there is a preoccupation on the part of the characters with identity. Stubb affirms: "I am Stubb, and Stubb has his history..." (p. 406). Yet Ahab views Starbuck and Stubb as contradictory forces in one entity:

"Ye two are the opposite poles of one thing; Starbuck is Stubb reversed, and Stubb is Starbuck; and ye two are all mankind; and Ahab stands alone among the millions of the peopled earth, nor gods nor men his neighbors!" (p. 452)

Pip begs Ahab to remain merged with him physically; he wants their hands riveted together, or Ahab to use him in place of his missing leg:

"...Ye have not a whole body, sir; do ye but use poor me for your one lost leg; only tread upon me, sir; I ask no more, so I remain a part of ye." (p. 436)

Pip's seemingly generous offer is negated by the fact that nearly one hundred pages previously, some part of him was lost at sea— he can offer Ahab but a phantom limb. He

The ultimate identity crisis belongs to Ahab, who vacillates between affirming his identity, projecting it on others and questioning it. From Peleg's assertion "Oh! he ain't Captain Bildad; no and he ain't Captain Peleg; he's Ahab, boy,..." and subsequent admonition to ignore the implication of the name, we move to Ahab's projection of self:

The firm tower, that is Ahab; the volcano, that is Ahab; the courageous, the undaunted, and victorious fowl, that, too, is Ahab; all are Ahab. (p. 359)

Ahab "features" himself, assigning himself substance so that he stands out in relief to the blankness around him: "In the midst of the personified impersonal, a personality stands here" (p. 417). Is it a personality, or a persona? Later, Ahab ascribes his actions to an outside agency: "Is Ahab, Ahab? Is it I, God, or who, that lifts this arm?" (p. 445). By the second day of the chase, this wavering is overcome, and an obdurate Ahab again assumes his dauntless posture, although it seems that he can only affirm his identity by relegating all others to an "unfeatured blank:"

"Starbuck, of late I've felt strangely moved to thee; ever since that hour we both saw—thou know'st what, in one another's eyes. But in this matter of the whale, be the front of thy face to me as the palm of this hand—a lipless, unfeatured blank. Ahab is for ever Ahab, man!" (p. 459)
Starbuck has become another instrument to be used by Ahab to accomplish his purpose. "To accomplish his object Ahab must use tools; and of all tools used in the shadow of the moon, men are most apt to get out of order" (p. 183). Ahab's dark intent confines his action, symbolically, to "the shadow of the moon" while it takes place in the blazing sun.

The relationship between Ahab and the crew cannot be seen solely in terms of Ahab's manipulation. At times they willingly allow it. He commands their respect as their "one lord and keel;" more significantly, he fascinates them; they are drawn to him in some undefinable manner just as he is drawn to Moby Dick. Ahab recognizes that "however magnetic his ascendancy," it does not extend to Starbuck's soul, like a magnet, he manoeuvres himself to a position where Starbuck will have to succumb to his force. Ishmael recognizes in "The Quarter-deck" that Ahab is trying to shock the crew "into the same fiery emotion accumulated within the Leyden jar of his own magnetic life" (p. 146). Ahab realizes that inexorable movement towards an object is often indicative of abandonment of reason:

"What is best left alone, that accursed thing is not always what least allures. He's all a magnet!" (p. 368)

Ahab is situated in a long line of Biblical figures who have fallen from grace (Adam, Cain, Noah, Jonah and King Ahab) because of their transgression against their fellow man.
It is an aggregate of this rage that he directs against the whale:

He piled upon the whale's white hump the sum of all the 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. (p. 160)

Ahab represents the collective unconscious of these flawed individuals who were all seemingly not cognizant that their actions would invoke reactions in the form of punishment. 4

As with glass under arm, Ahab to-and-fro paced the deck; in his forward turn beholding the monsters he chased, and in the after one the bloodthirsty pirates chasing him; some such fancy as the above seemed him. And when he glanced upon the green walls of the watery defile in which the ship was then sailing, and bethought him that through that gate lay the route to his vengeance, and beheld, how that through that same gate he was now both chasing and being chased to his deadly end... (p. 321)

Even in death, the whale transfers its qualities, symbolic of the noumenal, to the sea. In "The Sphinx," the beheaded whale transforms the blood-tinged sea and introduces another circular motif: the lotus.

An intense copper calm, like a universal yellow lotus, was more and more unfolding its noiseless measureless leaves upon the sea. (p. 263)

The "universal yellow lotus" recalls Greek and Egyptian mythology since the fruit of the lotus was believed to induce a state which causes one to forget home and family. The blood of the whale, then, has transformed the sea into Lethe, the river in Hades.
The lotus is also a variation of the circle motif. Like the rose, it is a mystical labyrinth or mandala representing creativity and completion. It is primeval, originating in water, and because of its resemblance to the moon symbolizes the earthly reflection of the celestial. In the Indian creation myth, the god Brahma stands on a thousand-petalled lotus, eyeing the four points of the compass as a preliminary orientation, indispensable to the initiation of his work of creation. The moment of Buddha's birth was signalled by the appearance of a lotus flower. He entered it and gazed in ten directions, eight representing the rays of the lotus, plus up and down, a symbolic gesture of survey illustrating his predestination to receive illumination. The spatial orientations of Brahma and Buddha symbolize the human need for psychic orientation, for an integration of thought, feeling, intuition and sensation.

However, in "The Sphinx," Ahab subverts the myth by failing to establish his bearings, and, by, in the antithesis of creation, raising the spade, symbolic of destruction to strike the suspended head.

When Ahab encounters Moby Dick, his concentrated force is insufficient against the "charmed churned circle" of the whale. Ahab is a circular metaphor of land—against the forces of the sea, he will only sink. The crew watches, helpless, on the circumference while Ahab's head becomes the centre of the churned circle, with straining eyes, then, they remained on
the outer edge of the direful zone, whose centre had now become the old man's head" (p. 450). Ahab, too is impotent: "helpless Ahab's head was seen, like a tossed bubble which the least chance shock might burst" (p. 450). Ahab lies "crushed" in Stubb's boat, like a grape or a mulberry under the foot of Antiochus' elephants, emitting "nameless wails" from "far inland." "Nameless wails" are insufficient as incantations against the one named whale. At the heart of Ahab is turbulence, not the charmed expanding circle of the sperm whale, but a contracting circle, gathering intensity: At the centre of the charmed circle of the sperm whale, or Ishmael's insular Tahiti, is an enchanted calm. Ahab's centre is the antithesis, filled with "instantaneous intensities."

In an instant's compass, great hearts sometimes condense to one deep pang, the sum total of those shallow pains kindly diffused through feeble men's whole lives. And so, such hearts, though summary in each one suffering; still, if the gods decree it, in their life-time aggregate a whole age of woe, wholly made up of instantaneous intensities; for even in their pointless centres, those noble creatures contain the entire circumferences of inferior souls. (p. 451)

Ahab dies a noble death, defiant to the last, caught up in his whale line, still pursuing his whale though tied to him. All the prophecies come true; the omens are recognized as such. In his final movement of rolling towards the whale he simultaneously unites the beginning of the book, where the first movement of the whale is to roll into the chapters, and the ending, where both the whale and Ahab become one with the sea. Both take on another layer as "the great shroud of
the sea rolled on as it rolled five thousand years ago" (p. 469).

While Ahab might be "ungodly," it is precisely his qualities as man that lend him numinosity. He is not man aspiring to be God-like, to elevate himself to a position above himself. For Melville, man is "a wonder, a grandeur, and a woe;" his inherent qualities are sufficiently awesome. The encounter between Ahab and Moby Dick is epic pot because it can be viewed as mythic being against mythic being or insensate numinous pursuer versus man, but as mammal versus mammal on the perilous surface of the sea. Though one has prodigious bulk, the other is armed with harpoons and lines to sap his strength by spilling his blood, and submerging him in the sea until he gasps for air.
ISHMAEL (God hears)

While Ahab and Moby Dick are multi-faceted in terms of the symbolism applied to capture each, Ishmael is essentially anonymous. Ahab and Moby Dick are rendered by an accumulation of symbols until their full potency is reached in the concluding scenes. Ishmael's consciousness assumes many faces, but he, like the whale, has no face. He is determined largely by his point of view.

Ahab and Moby Dick wage their battle in the charmed circle; Ishmael is haunted by the vortex, although it is ultimately his salvation. It can be argued that he, like Pip, survives corporeally; his soul lost forever in the depths, or that he survives a spectre, like the Ancient Mariner, doomed to retell the tale. If the latter is the case, the vortex seals his fate, relegating him to an Ishmaelite existence, haunted by the vision of the drowned crew, another orphan wandering the earth. If the ending represents a symbolic rebirth, then he has gained wisdom, not woe and the circular path of the novel assumes the shape of the Romantic ascending spiral. There is ample evidence to support this interpretation in the text alone. Whatever the interpretation, Ishmael sets out to circumnavigate the globe to save himself from the contemplation of coffin-warehouses only to be saved, in the ending, by the very thing he sought to avoid—a coffin, now turned lifebuoy.
Contemplation is a key word in determining Ishmael's function. His primary actions are mental ruminations. Aside from reporting the action and affording an encyclopedic view of the whale, Ishmael's main function is as a filtering consciousness. He has the necessary dramatic and physical distance to contemplate. While on the lookout, he abdicates his responsibility to the crew by failing to look ahead for whales in order to fulfill the more significant function of imparting Melville's philosophy. Equally as important, though, is the fact that, by looking downwards, he alone really considers the sea as a factor in the drama. His speculations on Ahab and the whale are balanced by his recognition of the sea as a force without peer.

At the beginning of the voyage comes the view from the mast-head, a warning to Pantheists who might become mesmerized by the apparent tranquility of the sea:

There is no life in thee, now, except that rocking life imparted by a gently rolling ship; by her, borrowed from the sea; by the sea, from the inscrutable tides of God. But while this sleep, this dream is on ye, move your foot or hand an inch; slip your hold at all; and your identity comes back in horror. Over Descartian vortices you hover. And perhaps, at mid-day, in the fairest weather, with one half-throttled shriek you drop through that transparent air into the summer sea, no more to rise forever. Heed it well, ye Pantheists. (p. 140)

This passage has been widely discussed as the opposition of material necessity and transcendental idealism, a variation on the theme of the One and the Many. "Pantheistic reverie is
a concentration on Unity of the One, whereas the Descartian vortices contain multiplicity. Unity is but a delusion of youth; the mature mind must seek to maintain a balance between the One and the Many.6

There is no question that, if the Descartian vortices are considered metaphorically, Ishmael does take the plunge by being aware of the material world. Taken factually, this passage reveals that Ishmael alone is aware of the sea as multitudinous. From the height of the masthead as he considers the sea, he is aware not only of it movement but of the forces underlying its changing face. Others in the ship focus on the whale or the doubloons; Ishmael alone considers drowning from his first mention of Narcissus on. Others attribute their fate to the whale; Ishmael places it where it belongs, with the sea.

Ishmael considers the vortex in another form as well, that of the tornado-like vortex of the whales. Here, he is contrasted with Ahab whose outer aspect resembles the force of the tornado, while he is compared to the peaceful community of whales:

And thus, though surrounded by circle upon circle of consternations and affrights, did those inscrutable creatures at the centre freely and fearlessly indulge in all peaceful concerns; yea serenely revelled in dalliance and delight. But even so, amid the tornadoed Atlantic of my being, do I myself still forever centrally disport in mute calm; and while ponderous planets of unwaning woe revolve round me, deep down and deep inland there I still bathe me in eternal mildness of joy. (p. 326)
His is a still centre, the eye of the storm, containing joy "deep inland" in contrast to Ahab's turbulent core containing "nameless wails" "far inland."

In the ending, even the vortex subsides for him. He does not plunge into it in a cataclysmic slip of the foot; he is slowly, inexorably drawn into the contracting spiral:

I was then, but slowly, drawn towards the closing vortex...

Round and round, then, and ever contracting towards the button-like black bubble at the axis of that slowly wheeling circle, like another Ixion I did revolve. Till, gaining that vital centre, the black bubble upward burst; and now, liberated by reason of its cunning spring, and, owing to its great buoyancy, rising with great force, the coffin life-buoy shot lengthwise from the sea, fell over, and floated by my side. (p. 470)

Ishmael becomes the vortex. Its downward motion has taken the crew and ship with it, its strength is dissipated and Ishmael is saved by its vertical thrust. He is an ironic Ixion, for the wheel that Ixion was bound to was fiery. Ixion's sin was an attempted seduction of Hera for which he was punished by Zeus. Ishmael's revolting is not punishment but salvation.

The brilliant sun in "The Quadrant" holds no allure for Ahab, neither does it function as illuminator. Ahab demands prophecy of it and so dismisses it, turning instead to fire worship in the next chapter. Ishmael's experience with fire, in "The Try-Works" in a reversal of Ahab's action, causes him to turn to the sun, "the only true lamp—all others
but liars!" (p. 354). Ishmael views fire as inverting, deadening. Its artificial light paints everything a ghastly hue. This is not to say that Ishmael's sun is that of the pantheist, for he recognizes that the sun "hides not the ocean, which is the dark side of this earth, and which is two-thirds of this earth." By extension, a man with more joy than sorrow is "not true, or undeveloped." "With books the same," Ishmael's sun does not illuminate the darkness; it makes it visible.

Melville is clearly attempting here to justify his tragic view of life that predominates his work. A remark he makes on the chiaroscuro of Hawthorne is helpful in elucidating his own work:

For spite of all the Indian-summer sunlight on the hither side of Hawthorne's soul, the other side--like the dark half of the physical sphere--is shrouded in a blackness, ten times black. But this darkness but gives more effect to the evermoving dawn, that forever advances through it, and circumnavigates his world. (p. 540)

In the discussion of Ahab, it was pointed out that he is associated with enclosures representing entombment. Ishmael is also associated with enclosures, but they do not foreshadow death, but a return to the womb. To Ishmael, enclosures are protective and comforting rather than endangering and claustrophobic. He has integrated them into pleasant associations with home and hearth. He bemoans the fact that southern whale ships are not provided with "those enviable little tents or pulpits, called Crow's-nests." (p. 137).
And it is much to be deplored that the place to which you devote so considerable a portion of the whole term of your natural life, should be so sadly destitute of anything approaching to a cosy inhabitiveness, or adapted to breed a comfortable localness of feeling, such as pertains to a bed, a hammock, a hearse, a sentry box, a pulpit, a coach, or any other of those small and snug contrivances in which men temporarily isolate themselves. (p. 137)

Perhaps the difference is, as is suggested in the text, that the old fear sleep and enclosures as they are a reminder of impending death. Ishmael is too young for such concerns. On the other hand, enclosures and life aboard ship all indicate a life ruled externally. Ahab is a leader; he cannot allow others to restrict him. Ishmael willingly allows his life to be directed with the rationalization "Who aint a slave? Tell me that" (p. 15).

From the narrative standpoint, it has been argued that Ishmael, as narrator, provides a false centre, as a great part of the theme is not recorded through his sensibility. This is also true of his role within the novel—he is always a little off-centre, removed from the sphere of Ahab’s influence. Essentially, he explains his failure to attend to his duty to sing out for whales by claiming a more fundamental loyalty—"with the problem of the universe revolving in me, how could I..." (p. 139).

Ishmael’s peripheral view can, in part, be explained by the fact that he is a tyro; this is his first whaling voyage and he is caught up in the activity around him. Moreover, it ties him symbolically to the whale, for though man looks out
on the world "from a sentry-box with two joined sashes for his window" (p. 279), the whale can simultaneously view two distinct objects, making his brain "much more comprehensive, combining and subtle" than man's. This ability to reconcile opposites, or symbolize, is characteristic of Ishmael. It is, furthermore, recognized by Ishmael as he equates the "warming and undulation" over his head that he views in the mirror (while pondering, after six cups of hot tea), with the canopy of vapor over the whale.

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. (p. 314)

While Ishmael's vision is peripheral, like his circumnavigation, it moves towards a centre. Whether the still centre of his being, the calm in the centre of the vortex, or the charmed circle of the whale, the balance in the symbolism suggests that Ishmael has attained a state of peace wherein his life is integrated into the life of the cosmos.

"No more my splintered heart and maddened hand were turned against the wolfish world." (p. 53) Movement along a vertical axis evades the torpor of temporal circularity. Through the symbol of the vortex and his bond with the "soothing savage", Queequeg, Ishmael transcends the constrictions of cyclical nature through redemptive reintegration with human nature.
Man is a pip, the universe, an apple. Pip is one of many examples of unrealized potentiality, in this instance, of men. He is an emblem of the crew. His repeated references to himself as a boy serve to distinguish him from Ahab who refers to himself throughout as an old man, while, at the same time, implicate the crew in his regression or failure to mature. Pip, however, has a reason for his failure to grow; he has been traumatized by his experience as a castaway.

Pip, like Ahab the ungodly God-like man, is defined by an oxymoron: his jolly moroseness. He represents the manic depressive nature of the crew who, like the lamp in Ahab's room, oscillate with no apparent steadiness. These sudden swings in behaviour, so common in adolescence, characterize Pip, and, by extension, the crew. They are all frozen in the turbulence of adolescence. It is of their own volition, however, for they have, by choosing to go on the hunt, entered a community of men or boys. Like Ahab, who rejects the comforts of old age by tossing away his pipe, they have rejected their maturity.

While Pip is representative of the crew, it is to Ahab that he is symbolically linked. Ahab goes so far as to install Pip in his cabin: "Do thou abide below there, where they shall serve thee, as if thou wert the captain" (p. 436).
Yet Ahab does not just elevate Pip to his own stature, he places him somehow above him, or Pip becomes the part of Ahab that is god-like. While Ahab reveres Pip, calling him a "holiness," he sees Pip not as another, but as part of him; or a surrogate son.

"Thou toucheat my inmost centre, boy; thou art tied to me by cords woven of my heart strings." (p. 428)

Pip touches Ahab's centre, and Ahab sees Pip revolving around him as his circumference, the fixed outer limit of his being. "True art thou, lad, as the circumference to its centre" (p. 436). A circumference is in constant balance with its fixed central point and thus, Ahab's perception of his relationship to Pip is one of symbiosis. Ahab then is a fixed, stolid point and Pip's revolution about him might indicate that the two lead a charmed existence; if Pip is a "holiness" so too must Ahab be, given their relationship. On the other hand, a fixed centre can represent obstinacy, a failure to submit to the flux of life, while a circumference is volatile. Thus, while their relationship to each other is representative of unity, if we look beyond to their role in nature or society, their self-sufficiency does not admit to anything other than an adversarial stance. Ahab is obdurate and inner-directed, Pip is mercurial and unswerving in his path. Unlike Ishmael, each has no referent outside himself.

Pip is tied to Ahab by " cords" woven of Ahab's heart
strings. When Pip clings to Ahab's hand of "velvet shark-skin," it is transformed into a monkey-rope: "This seems to me, sir, as a man-rope; something that weak souls may hold by." Ropes represent here, necessary connections between unequals. The implication is that neither gains, as the Manxman comments:

"There go two daft ones now. One daft with strength, the other daft with weakness. But here's the end of the rotten line—all dripping, too. Mend it, eh? I think we had best have a new line altogether." (p. 428)

Lines only serve as bondage or extensions of self where self is lacking. Thus, Ishmael and Queequeg are joined by the monkey-rope, a "dangerous liability", and Ahab puts his life in Starbuck's hands by allowing him to control the rope only so that he (Ahab) can demonstrate Starbuck's inability to rebel. Lines also sever man from the community. Father Mapple's rope isolates him from the congregation, and, of course, the ultimate parody of lines as symbols of human connectedness is Ahab's final bonding to the whale.

The fate of Pip foreshadows the ultimate outcome of the voyage. Shortly after the encounter with the Rose-bud, the representation of potentiality, we are given an intimation that the rose is never to flower, through the fate of Pip:

It was but some few days after encountering the Frenchman, that a most significant event befell the most insignificant of the Pequod's crew; an event most lamentable, and which ended in providing the sometimes madly merry and predestinated craft with a living and ever accompanying prophecy of whatever shattered sequel might prove her own. (p. 344)
The prophecy is enacted by a series of metamorphoses that Pip undergoes from black to shroud white to the fires of hell. He first presents an interplay of black and white, a contrast to Dough Boy. Then he becomes a play on black and white as his "drowned bones now show white, for all the blackness of his living skin." (p. 436). He has the "brilliance" of black, although his misadventure "blurred his brightness." This was a temporary subduing for he was "destined to be luridly illumined by strange wild fires" (p. 345), like a diamond which, in the clear air of day will glow healthily, when set against a "gloomy ground," not lit by the sun, gives off "fiery effulgences, infernally superb." Pip is the human representation of the shift from "The Quadrant" to "The Candles."

His fall into the sea leaves him "Bobbing up and down," his ebony head like a head of cloves. Cloves again recall unrealized potential as they are the bud of a tropical tree. They are further prophetic in that cloves is from the Latin clavus, Old French clou, or nail, foreshadowing the ending, the literal nailing of the representative of nature, the bird, to the mast.

Again, when he is left behind on the sea, he performs a symbolic act: "Out from the centre of the sea, poor Pip turned his crisp, curling black head to the sun" (p. 347), a gesture that mimics the movements of a dying sperm whale. Ahab interprets the whale's movement as fire worship, so that even in the sea "life dies sunwards full of faith" (p. 409),
but defiant Ahab turns away from the sun in his dying movements.

Pip's reading of the doubloon, a recitation of the subjective case of the verb to look, is perhaps the most objective comment made on it. He recognizes it as central to the ship and becomes prophetic like the Manxman, predicting the shattering of the ship and Ahab's "nailing" by the whale. Although he is small in stature, he is elevated to the stature of a Bulkington. He and Bulkington are regaled in scriptural rhetoric; they have both seen glimpses of the truth and are apotheosized by their immersion in the sea.

Bulkington is the quintessential mariner; Pip belongs to the class of castaways as indicated by the title of his chapter. He, then, reinforces the theme of isolation introduced by the biblical reference to Ishmael, son of Abraham, an outcast in his community, and to Jonah, whose patricide makes him a pariah. He also recalls Melville's intention to "ascribe high qualities, though dark" to "meanest mariners, and renegades and castaways." Melville herein distills the essence of all of the characters while endowing himself with the magnanimity of God promising Noah a rainbow in paralleling God's promise to "spread a rainbow" over their "disastrous set of sun."
QUEEQUEG

While Pip is tied to Ahab by cords woven of Ahab's heart strings, Queequeg is literally and figuratively attached to Ishmael by the monkey-rope-umbilical cord: "an elongated Siamese ligature united us" (p. 271). Queéqueg and Ishmael are seen in matrimonial then filial bonds. As in all Melvillian reference to bonds, they at once afford a respite from isolation and entail "dangerous liabilities."

While it can be said that Ahab's regard for Pip represents a softening of his character in yielding to paternal instincts, Ahab's interest in Pip reveals yet another indication of his preference for men as gauges. Pip has visited the deep; Ahab's intent regard for Pip's opinions such as they are only reveals Ahab's determination to pry statistics or prophecy from the least likely sources. In disavowing his nautical guides, he has returned to witchcraft. By hallowing Pip, the "crazy-witty" one, he has placed him in the tradition of the Elizabethan fool.

While Queequeg represents a noble savage, Ahab's focus is on the savage. He sees Queequeg as the reverse of the finer qualities that predominate: "Oh, devilish tantalization of the gods!" (p. 399). Ishmael's assessment of Queequeg sees beyond the garish exterior, and what he sees there subsumes the savagery to the nobility:

You cannot hide the soul. Through all his unearthly tattooings, I thought I saw the traces of a simple honest heart; and in his
art of attaining truth; so that Queequeg in his own proper person was a riddle to unfold; a wondrous work in one volume; but whose mysteries not even himself could read, though his own live heart beat against them; and these mysteries were therefore destined in the end to moulder away, with the living parchment whereon they were inscribed, and so be unsolved to the last.

(p. 399)

Parchment is the skin of an animal, and Queequeg is equated here with the whale, who—in a similar manner, displays a "Cretan labyrinth of vermicelli-like vessels." There are intimations that the mysteries are to be solved, for Queequeg does not "moulder away" he dies at sea, but not before transferring the markings on his body to the coffin. The riddle becomes Ishmael's and the fact that he alone survives a plunge beneath the surface of the sea marks him as the beneficiary of the riddle. Despite repeated assertions that there are symbolic worlds beyond words, too wonderful or too terrible to tell; nevertheless, we have this book and it must be regarded as an essai. Furthermore, it is stated in the text that an adequate rendition of these mysteries can only come from an author from the dead, and this is what Ishmael is.

For whatever is truly wondrous and fearful in man, never yet was put into words or books. And the drawing near of Death, which alike levels—all, alike impresses all with a last revelation, which only an author from the dead could adequately tell.

(p. 396)

In the first place, he has rebaptized himself Ishmael, and thereby gives himself a new identity. Secondly, after making his last will and testament, he is equated with Lazarus:
Besides, all the days I should now live would be as good as the days that Lazarus lived after his resurrection. ...I survived myself; my death and burial were locked up in my chest. I looked around me tranquilly and contentedly, like a quiet ghost with a clean conscience sitting inside the bars of a snug family vault. (p. 197)

The pun on chest encourages a dual interpretation.

Lastly, the final scene is a symbolic rebirth wherein Ishmael completes the metamorphosis begun by Queequeg, a "creature in the transition state—neither caterpillar nor butterfly."
Chapter 3

OF SHIPS

This chapter will focus almost exclusively on the Pequod since she is an isolato among whalers just as Ahab is an isolato among men, and Moby Dick an isolato among whales. She is, furthermore, the container for most of the symbols in the text, and, at the same time, is a symbol herself.

I have included some of the ships she encounters either because they serve as a foil to the Pequod (the Bachelor's complacency reinforces the restlessness of the Pequod and her captain), or because they function as elaborators of themes (the Rose-bud and circularity).

While there are articles detailing the significance of the gams, I don't believe that such an approach is advisable here. As Bezanson notes:

The ships the Pequod passes may be taken as a group of metaphysical parables, a series of biblical analogues, a masque of the situations confronting man, a pageant of humours within ment, a parade of the nations, and so forth, as well as concrete and symbolic ways of thinking about the White Whale. Any single systematic treatment of all of the ships does violence to some of them. The gams are symbolic, not allegorical.
THE PEQUOD

The Pequod, Ahab and Moby Dick are symbolically equated. They are the primary isolatoes in the text, remarkable for their self-sufficiency yet, paradoxically, each is augmented by retaining some part of the other, so the Pequod is fashioned of whale bones, Ahab's prosthesis is a whale jaw, and Moby Dick is masted with the Pequod's harpoons.

Ahab and the whaler are further identified with the sun, and are thereby self-sufficient but equally self-consuming:

But how now? in this zoned quest, does Ahab touch no land? does his crew drink air? Surely he will stop for water. Nay. For a long time, now, the circus-running sun has raced within his fiery ring, and needs no sustenance but what's in himself.
So Ahab. Mark this, too, in the whaler. (p. 319)

The Pequod is defined, like Ahab and Moby Dick, by an oxymoron; she is "madly merry." Like the "gloomy jolly" Pip, she is "predestinated" for a "shattered sequel" like the extinct race of Indians she was named after. As in the case of Ahab and Moby Dick, the Pequod reveals many faces. In the darkness of the Try-Works, "the rushing Pequod, freighted with savages, and laden with fire, and burning a corpse, and plunging into that blackness of darkness, seemed the material counterpart of her monomaniac commander's soul" (p. 354). Yet Ahab views her as the "sea-chariot of the sun" (p. 423), Amon-Ra's boat in Egyptian myth, or Apollo's chariot, each representing the cyclical in nature. But Ahab's course is not an orderly,
repetitive one. Ishmael views her as commissioned by Ahab to serve his purpose: "The burning ship drove on, as if remorselessly commissioned to some vengeful deed" (p. 353).

Yet he also describes her in familiar terms: the hatch affords a wide hearth, the windlass serves as a sea-sofa. It was Ishmael who chose the Pequod rather than the Devil-dam or the Tit-bit. Ishmael blithely relates that the Pequod Indians are extinct as the ancient Medes, unaware of the prophetic nature of their extinction as they were decimated by the Puritans.

She is a combination of Ahab and Moby-Dick—dark complected and bearded, with wrinkled decks; she is a "thing of trophies," a "cannibal of a craft, tricking herself forth in the bones of her enemies" (p. 67). "A noble craft, but somehow a most melancholy! All noble things are touched with that" (p. 68). Like Moby Dick, she is androgynous. "She" is apparelled like an "emperor." She represents the barbaric embodied in an American whaler, the same juxtaposition of the savage and the noble that Queequeg represents as "George Washington cannibalistically developed."

She represents the interplay of myths, Biblical illusions, and historical lore with secular imagery, alternately dark and light. At times a carnival atmosphere prevails, at other times she is demonic.

The religious imagery combines allusions to the trinity
with the presence of death. Her masts stand stiffly like "the spines of the three old Kings of Cologne" (p. 67). Her decks are worn, like "the pilgrim-worshipped flagstone in Canterbury Cathedral where Becket bled." There are intimations that the Pequod is ill-fated. When she sets sail, the crew gives three cheers but the unified camaraderie gives way to starkness as the ship sets out. She doesn't sail, she plunges, and blindly, not into an azure sea, but into the "lone" Atlantic. The scene is dark and foreboding:

Ship and boat diverged; 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. (p. 97)

The parallels to Noah and his ark have been widely discussed elsewhere. The ship's crew has a mixture of races; Ishmael has visions of whales "two by two." Of course, there are no women on the Pequod. Each parallel only reveals a parodic element. The carpenter, with "crutch-like" "antediluvian humourousness" has a "grizzled wittiness" that would have helped to pass the time "during the midnight watch on the bearded forecastle of Noah's ark" (p. 388). The carpenter, "crutch-like," implies descent rather than deliverance. The ark becomes the Pequod; the carpenter, Ahab. The promise extracted from Noah by God, that he should not eat flesh, or shed man's blood, is subtly undermined by the persistent refrain that all on the Pequod, a cannibal of a ship, are but cannibals themselves. Ahab upholds no covenant. Unlike Noah, he will not be buoyed up by the waves,
but will die in the flood: "Some men die at ebb tide; some at low water; some at the full of the flood; and I feel now like a billow that's all one crested comb, Starbuck" (p. 462). Whereas the whale does not enter into the story at all:

In Noah's flood he despised Noah's Ark; and if ever the world is to be again flooded, like the Netherlands, to kill off its rats, then the eternal whale will still survive, and rearing upon the topmost crest of the equatorial flood, spout his frothed defiance to the skies. (p. 385)

The number forty has multiple significance. Ahab regrets his forty years at sea, and so recalls Noah. Forty days is also the period required for embalming in Egyptian society. Ahab, then, is like Starbuck, a "revivified Egyptian." Furthermore, the period between Easter and the Ascension is forty days, representative of an intermediate period between two states of being. However, the Biblical promises are repeatedly unrealized, a fact that is underscored when the bird who would herald the abating of the flood is nailed to the mast.

The number three, associated with unity and the trinity, is also reversed in the text as it primarily represents anti-Christian images and intervention. The three masts glow Satanically, the chase is a three-day venture ending in death and the three savages are equated with the "Prince of the Powers of the Air," the devil.
THE GAMS

The other ships encountered by the Pequod underscore her eccentricity. Eccentricity creates its own centre--by his position outside of the sphere of other men, we focus on Ahab, so too on Moby Dick. Our focus is on the Pequod precisely because she fails to conform to the standard practices of whaling vessels. The encounter with the Bachelor, a "full ship and homeward-bound" defines the Pequod while it underscores the unresolveable ambiguity of the land-sea opposition. Ahab's response to the Bachelor: "How wondrous familiar is a fool!" "Thou art a full ship and homeward-bound, thou sayest; well, then, call me an empty ship, and outward-bound" (p. 408) defines the ship in terms of his consciousness as a quester while it reveals the inappropriateness of its name. Bachelors, in Melville, are usually smug, complacent men often confined in small places. The quester is, like Melville himself, usually married.

A ship homeward-bound, moreover, has resolved all dilemmas and anticipates rest, or, metaphorically, death. Ahab does not view his ship or his life as a dormant stage between resting points. Rest is anathema to him. The ship is his mind, plunging, weaving, ever-devious. The ship's course is a spider-web, woven by Ahab in hopes that Moby Dick might wander into it, blown by the wind "into the devious zig-zag world-circle of the Pequod's circumnavigating wake" (p. 174).
The Pequod is an isolato, like Ahab and Moby Dick. She consistently contravenes the unwritten code of whaling vessels requiring them to engage in social amenities, to exchange mail and to report on their sightings of whales.

In "The Albatross" it is not the Pequod who fails to establish contact, for the sea claims the speaking trumpet of the Albatross' captain. The portent in the ship's name becomes clear to Ahab as the shoals of little fish abandon the Pequod to surround the Albatross. The mystic qualities of the Albatross embodied in its terrifying whiteness are transferred to the Pequod, making it the specter-haunted ship of Coleridge's rhymne.

Below deck, the mariners appear sepulchred, so that their appearances on deck assume phantom-like associations:

...for one single moment you would have almost thought you were standing in some illuminated shrine of canonized kings and counsellors. There they lay in their triangular oaken vaults, each mariner a chiselled muteness; a score of lamps flashing upon his hooded eyes. (p. 355)

The meeting with the Rose-bud reinforces two of the prevalent motifs in the novel: unrealized potential, and the artifice of nature.

The Bouton de Rose introduces a traditionally feminine symbol of circularity, the rose, evocative of eternity and the creative process. Associated in art with the mandala and Christian rose windows, in psychological terms it is a
symbol of the integration of the psyche, not unlike the lotus. The rose, however, is also an apocalyptic flower, and it is this association that permeates the scene.

The meeting of the Pequod, named for an extinct tribe of Indians, and the Rose-bud (actuality within potentiality) juxtaposes what is no more and what will not be. The trick played on the Rose-bud which results in her loss of the blasted whales, rich in ambergris, signals, by transference, that the voyage of the Pequod will not reach fruition.

The appearance of the Bouton de Rose reintroduces the theme of appearance versus reality. The stem-piece of the gilt labelled Bouton de Rose is emblazoned with a carving of a huge drooping green stalk with copper spikes representing thorns terminating in a symmetrical folded red bud. The flamboyant green, gold and copper, and the red of the bud suggest an intensity that should burst into radiant perfumed bloom. But copper has, in "The Sphinx," already signalled blood, the stalk is drooping, and the rose is symbolically red. The Rose-bud signals the next dramatic action in the text, that is to say, Pip's loss at sea and so foreshadows his unrealized purpose by her own.

The many-coloured Rose-bud is a rainbow of a ship: red copper, gold, green and the blue in the flag. Accompanying this resplendence is the stench from the blasted whales that contaminates the air, affording a contrast with the suggestion of the scent of roses. Melville's understatement
of the smell of the Rose-bud is that it is "less than attar-of-rose." Stubb's comment underscores the theme that the painted image is only a layer or veil covering the permanence behind:

"A wooden rose-bud, eh?" he cried with his hand to his nose, "that will do very well; but how like all creation it smells!" (p. 338)

The smell of creation has already been identified in "The Whiteness of the Whale" as that of a charnel-house:

And when we consider that other theory of the natural philosophers, that all other earthly hues—every stately or lovely emblazoning—the sweet tinges of sunset skies and woods; yea, and the gilded velvets of butterflies, and the butterfly cheeks of young girls; all these are but subtle deceits, not actually inherent in substances, but only laid on from without, so that all deified Nature absolutely paints like the harlot, whose allurements cover nothing but the charnel-house within... (p. 170)

The illusionary in nature is paralleled by art. The motif of momento mori is introduced as Melville paints flashing visual conceptions of the skull behind the outer allurements. The streets of New Bedford, Ahab, Pip, and The Delight serve to reinforce the theme that the permanence behind the image is the death-head reminiscent of Vanitas pictures—a bleached whiteness is never truly concealed by the proliferation of blossoms in the New Bedford streets. The town was founded on whale bones, and objects dredged up from the sea; the "superinduced superficies"² are merely temporal. New Bedford's back country is "bony." "Iron emblematical harpoons" surround the mansion.
The houses and gardens were "harpooned and dragged up hither from the bottom of the sea." In August the horse-chestnuts, "candelabra-wise, proffer the passer-by their tapering upright cones of congregated blossoms." The street is a reversal of the Pequod's black mass in "The Candles":

So omnipotent is art, which in many a district of New Bedford has superinduced bright terraces of flowers upon the barren refuse rocks thrown aside at creation's final day. (p. 39)

Art, like nature, is a trickster. Periodically, the painted veil is pulled aside to reveal the stark reality: Ahab's brow in Stubb's dream "flashed like a bleached bone" (p. 114), Pip's "drowned bones now show white," and the ironically-named Delight's beams are "shattered, white ribs" revealing the interior "as you see through the peeled, half-unhinged, and bleaching skeleton of a horse" (p. 441), the Albatross is "bleached like the skeleton of a stranded walrus."

The Pequod and her crew, in practising the art of whaling, seek to impose their geometrical rigidity on the natural world. The world of the whaling ship reflects the symphonic structure of Moby-Dick, voicing antiphonal themes of art and nature.
CONCLUSION

The appendix shows how Melville fits into the Romantic tradition and that of the Transcendentalists, by his adherence to organic form. It further shows how Melville, while he was part of his literary zeitgeist, was not central to it. His work reaches back; it exists in Eliot's "present moment of the past"¹, even while it echoes the present age.²

Moby-Dick captures the vitality of tradition and projects a new modernism, not because it conforms to any particular narrative mode, past or present, nor because it encompasses any particular theme. In spite of Ishmael's exclamation:

Such, and so magnifying, is the virtue of a large and liberal theme! We expand to its bulk. To produce a mighty book, you must choose a mighty theme. (p. 379)

we know that Pierre had a powerful theme, incest, and yet it is seriously flawed. It is flawed because it is the attempt of a whaling man to embrace gentility. It fails because the language is artificial.

Melville's use of language in Moby-Dick, however, is what makes the book, like the White Whale, ubiquitous and immortal. For Melville uses words to create symbolic worlds. He uses words to create worlds beyond discursive realms.

In the opening note in the Etymology, Hakluyt says that the letter "H" almost alone makes up the signification of the word. While the White Whale is described dialectically as containing both Heaven and Hell, it is not to either one or
the other that he refers, but to an irreconcilable, ultimately unknowable presence (God or Fate, for example). He is, then, beyond Good and Evil.

Melville's symbols are most striking, and most often commented on for their ambiguity. The subtitle of Pierre was The Ambiguities and Melville is frequently viewed as a writer for whom all was despair, the universe but an infinite series or irreconcilable forces. In Moby-Dick, it is true that there are insistent diametrical oppositions, as I have mentioned before—land versus sea; black against white; savagery versus democracy; enclosures versus open spaces. However, what emerges from a study of the symbolic system is not a series of diametric oppositions or nebulous ambiguities, but rather a series of symbols which are in and out of themselves bivalent. In other words, we are not dealing here with black versus white, but with black in white or white in black. While Pip is black and is thus contrasted with white Dough Boy, he is also black and white, black skin with white bones flashing.

The bivalencies exist contemporaneously or as successive transformations such as in Stubb's dream where Ahab is viewed metonymically, first as his jaw bone leg, then as a pyramid, one the inversion of the shape of the other.

We have seen in Melville that nature is inimical to man. Man's need to conquer nature is consistently subverted by nature's evasive, ever-changing face. Art, merely as a simulacrum of nature, only serves to intensify the trickery.
Art and nature, then, each cloak reality in an irresistible but deceptive allure of colour. In *Moby-Dick*, Melville adopts a critical posture in order to approximate the substance beyond the stratified layers, first, by revealing the layers. Secondly, Melville reaches beyond the multi-coloured veil to the blankness, by cloaking *Moby-Dick* in blankness, or "whiteness." The predominant colour in *Moby-Dick* is white—the Whale, the water, the moon and the spirit-spout are all shrouded in white. By removing the garish layers of Nature, and the twice-removed artifice of Art, Melville is able to reach the blank meaningfulness beyond.

Not only does Melville attempt to portray the substance behind the painted veil by adhering to a virtually monochromatic colour-scheme, but he also attempts to portray thematically the stark reality behind the illusion. Melville states that "Ecclesiastes is the fine-hammered steel of woe," and that "all is vanity." By emulating the tone of Ecclesiastes and insisting that truth can only be captured by immersion in angst, Melville is, rhetorically as well as visually, approaching what he perceives as the way to wisdom. By incorporating this vision of mortal anguish into his work, he contrasts himself with the transcendentalist position. He is perhaps closer to Shelley in his belief that "Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass, stains the white radiance of eternity" ("Adonais." ll. 462-63).

While the predominant colour in the text is white, thematically, black predominates.
Ishmael's survival through his bond with Queequeg, and his emergence from the water situate Melville in the Romantic tradition of the enlightened quest and salvation through triumph over isolation. The Epilogue, which was not initially included in the text, tempers the despair which would pervade were it not included. However, the publication of *Pierre*, so soon after *Moby-Dick* casts a retrospective shadow over the vision of humanity revealed in *Moby-Dick* as many of the themes advanced in *Moby-Dick* are expanded upon in *Pierre* to a virtually nihilistic position towards human existence.

In *Moby-Dick*, the rigid modernist world-view espoused by Ahab, the hero, is balanced by the essentially Romantic view of the narrator, Ishmael. Ishmael is linked symbolically with metaphors of flux. He can be seen as symbolically in process, very much like the White Whale. By his fascination with the fluid organic world of flux symbolized by the sea and the constant motion of the vortex, he stands contrasted to Ahab who is symbolically linked to static geometric forms. Ahab's world is the rigid geometrical imposition of forms on nature, forms such as the triangle which serve to confine temporality within their inflexible boundaries. While Ishmael's world is the dynamic creative force of the circle, Ahab's world is in the confines of the ship among the phallic representations of the spears, harpoons, and spades. The ship itself is to Ishmael a vehicle, like the shore, for water-gazing; to Ahab it is another sharp-surfaced object to cut into the circular world of nature.
Ishmael not only exists in the natural world, he is cognizant of it. He sees the sky, the surface of the sea, and the universal cannibalism of the depths as well as the harmonious balance in nature. Ahab sees the whale as but an outward manifestation of an inner reality that is symbiotically devouring him, and the sun not as a light-giving sphere, but infernally scorching. He is a man "gnawed within and scorched without" (p. 162).

Throughout the text, Ahab becomes the aggregate of the rigid geometric figures to which he is equated: his downward triangular leg, the devious lines of his voyage, his tree-stranded harpoon, and the pyramid. There is no change in shape; he is symbolically and psychically obdurate. As his will grows, the symbolic shapes magnify. Ishmael, on the other hand, undergoes psychic and physical metamorphoses. Like the whale, he is layered, and thus comes to represent the theme of the chrysalis in the text. The whale is wrapped in a double skin; Ishmael has a psychic double skin perhaps like a caul that superstition decrees prevents one from drowning.

The Whale becomes the numinous embodiment of the contest between Ahab's need to order nature and Ishmael's gropings to understand it. In the final scenes, we confront both whales. To Ishmael, the whale is an insensate victim who, while he may invoke terror, is essentially benevolent. To Ahab, the whale is a mask projected by a malicious intelligence and as such he must be assailed. However, dissection as a means to
understanding only leads to more pervasive chaos. Nature assaulted by Ahab comes to echo his own disintegrated psyche.

In *Moby-Dick*, the geometric artifices of man battle the organic chaos of nature, and nature prevails. Yet nature is not only inimical to man, but serves as a veil between him and the "white radiance of eternity." Art, as an imitation of nature, only serves to confound any approach to the Truth. In "Hawthorne and His Masses," Melville addresses the problem:

For in this world of lies, Truth is forced to fly like a scared white doe in the woodlands; and only by cunning glimpses will she reveal herself, as in Shakespeare and other masters of the great art of Telling the Truth,—even though it be covertly, and by snatches. (p. 542)

Melville is such a master, for through his Art he transcends this world of lies and speaks "the sane madness of vital truth."
APPENDIX

Melville in the Symbolist Tradition

In *Moby-Dick*, Melville expressly states that he does not want it regarded as "a monstrous fable, or still worse and more detestable, a hideous and intolerable allegory" (p. 177). Nevertheless, in a letter to Sophia Hawthorne, he appears to contradict himself:

I had some vague idea while writing it, that the whole book was susceptible of an allegorical construction, also that parts of it were—but the specialty of many of the particular subordinate allegories, were first revealed to me after reading Mr. Hawthorne's letter, which, without citing any particular examples, yet intimated the part-and-parcel allegoricalness of the whole.¹

Newton Arvin argues, convincingly, that Melville was constrained to use the term allegory, since symbol did not come into use as a literary term until some twenty years later. Although Emerson used the term symbol, he was referring to its function in experience and art.² Furthermore, Emerson's symbol is essentially equivalent rather than polysemantic, and thus is equatable to sign. There seems to be a general consensus in modern criticism, that *Moby-Dick* is not just a work rich in symbols, it is a symbolist romance. The "thing," in this case, preceded the "word," so that what Melville may have called allegory, was, in fact, symbolism.

Melville's consistent refrain was that he was trying to reveal the Truth, but from that one cannot conclude that he was ever attempting to approach verisimilitude. Melville's
world is not the phenomenal world. Through the vehicle of language he elevated words into things, thereby removing them from the realm of discourse. The "things" function on the representational level, while simultaneously embodying symbolic form. The work itself, in addition to the elements which comprise it, can be symbolic. A good basic definition of a literary symbol is articulated by Tindall:

A symbol seems a metaphor, one-half of which remains unstated and indefinite. As in metaphor, the halves of the equation may be related by partial similarity, which is qualitative at times and structural or functional at others but hardly ever imitative or representative.

The literary symbol, an analogy for something unstated, consists of an articulation of verbal elements that, going beyond reference and the limits of discourse, embodies and offers a complex of feelings and thought. Not necessarily an image, this analogical embodiment may also a rhythm, a juxtaposition, an action, a proposition, a structure, or a poem.

Symbolism as applied to literature is an outgrowth of the philosophy of symbolic form. Ernst Cassirer viewed man as a symbolic animal whose languages; myths, religions, sciences; and arts constitute symbolic forms through which he projects and comprehends his reality. While science is constructed of facts, art, like myth and religion, consists of psychic qualities and feelings, sensuous phenomena which defy logical definition. In myth (and Moby-Dick is mythic), according to Cassirer, a substance does not have different attributes, but "each specification as such is substance, i.e. it can be apprehended only in immediate concretion, in direct hypo-

Statization."
The quality shared by objects that provoke aesthetic emotions is defined by Clive Bell as significant form. Roger Fry determines that significant form approximates Flaubert's "expression of an idea," evoked when the artist creates an "expressive-design" or "symbolic form" by which the spirit "communicates its most secret and indefinable impulses." For Susanne Langer (Feeling and Form), a symbol is any device that enables one to make abstractions. Carlyle's symbol is revealing and concealing simultaneously. Kenneth Burke, in The Philosophy of Literary Form, sees Melville's symbolic system as revelatory of a "serial" quality in the "to the end of the line" mode—a "withinness of withinness" (p. 74). These attempts to define the symbol serve to underscore the evanescence of a thing writ on paper, analogous to "the proverbial evanescence of a thing writ on water."

To return to Moby-Dick, if we look again at the opening quotation from Hackluyt, his contention that the letter "H" virtually makes up the signification of the word, we realize how powerful a tool language is as a shaper of reality. Cassirer (Language & Myth) says that the potency of the real thing is contained in the word that creates it. The word creates the thing. The word is, then, a generative device which embodies reality. Melville, then, in the listing of words for whale in the extracts, is myth-making. In obedience to the "demon of etymology," he creates the contents from the form. 5

He begins in the Etymology and extracts by making the whale more than the history and etymology reveal. How then do we explain Melville's apparent denial that this is the case?
So ignorant are most landsmen of some of the plainest and most palpable wonders of the world, that without some hints touching the plain facts, historical and otherwise, of the fishery, they might scout at Moby Dick as a monstrous fable, or still worse and more detestable, a hideous and intolerable allegory.

(p. 177)

While this is heavily ironic in the light of the elaborate nature of some of the "plainest" wonders of the world, the inadvisability of proximity to these "most palpable wonders" and the blatant invention of "the plain facts, historical and otherwise" that abound in the text, what is of import is that it raises the question of allegory. If Moby-Dick is not an allegory, how, then, do we consider it?

Allegory would point to an exact referent outside of itself, and would thus conform to the limits of discourse. In Moby-Dick, the anatomical elements only serve to put into relief the undercurrent in the work. As E. M. Forster argues, while the theme of Moby-Dick is universal, this does not necessarily mean that the author is going to say anything about the universe. On the contrary, he proposes to sing:

The world of the Karamazovs and Myshkin and Raskolnikov, the world of Moby Dick [sic] we shall enter shortly, it is not a veil, it is not an allegory. It is the ordinary world of fiction, but it reaches back.6

for the essential in Moby-Dick: its prophetic song, flows athwart the action and the surface morality like an undercurrent. It lies outside words.7
This is not to say that words are inessential, only that, as Ishmael discovers, the more one tries to conceptualize, the more one becomes aware of the limits of language. Only by symbolizing can one approach the ineffable. Allegory represents a horizontal movement in the text, through serial addition. Symbolism operates from a core and thus conforms to the maintenance of organic form. Allegory is successive, the symbol simultaneous. The effect of these fireworks of symbols produces what Bezanson calls the dream structure of the work, comprised of "flashing concentrations of symbols--that hold for a moment, then disappear." 

The symbol, then, is significant more for its attributes than for whatever substance beyond itself it might point to. Like a present tense intransitive verb, it points neither to the past nor to the future, and is an entity unto itself, requiring no external object to render it complete:

Quant au symbole, il se caractérise par la fusion de ces deux contraires que sont le général et le particulier; ou, selon la formulation préférée de Schelling, par ce que le symbole ne signifie pas seulement, mais est; autrement dit, par l'intransitivité du symbolisant.

The symbol is at once production, intransitivity, motivation, synthesis and expression of the ineffable. Moreover, it establishes an immediate exchange between perceiver and perceived whereas in allegory the perceived is but an intermediary to the ultimate referent.
"...allegory is but a translation of abstract notions into a picture-language," "an abstraction from objects of the senses...," according to Coleridge. A symbol, however, "is characterized by a translucence of the Special in the Individual or of the General in the Especial or of the Universal in the General. Above all by the translucence of the Eternal through and in the Temporal." Symbolism creates new wholes; it is not mere translation. The intransitivity of the symbol determines that Moby-Dick can exist—even though it may be untranslatable. We can then assert the inanity of the question, in paraphrase of Todorov, "What does Moby-Dick mean?" Susan Sontag extends the argument in her essay, "Against Interpretation," concluding "in place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art."

This is not say that meanings should be overlooked, rather that the search for a definitive meaning is ultimately not only an impossibility, but also a detriment to the enjoyment of the text. It is by the play of meanings that the text is enriched:

Moby-Dick is full of meanings: its meaning is a different problem. It is wrong to turn the Delight or the coffin into symbols, because even if the symbolism is correct, it silences the book. Nothing can be stated about Moby-Dick except that it is a contest. The rest is song.

Forster seems here to be using symbol in a more restrictive sense, as pure denotation, more akin to the allegory that Melville
decries. Frye makes a similar contention, assigning the White Whale as a heraldic symbol: "As a unit of meaning, it arrests the narrative; as a unit of narrative, it perplexes the meaning." 16

The symbols herein discussed are those which Bezanson defines as image-symbols as opposed to object-symbols which carry the plot. Image symbols "reveal the psyche of the narrator through images of procreation and animality, mechanization and monomania, enchantment and entombment." 17

By their very nature, these symbols are ultimately irreducible and as such, any system of symbology can never hope nor should it intend to be more than a "draught of a draught." It can, however, point to their essential ambiguity, elucidate some of their meanings and thus afford a glimpse at how the symbolism works in the text:

Though simpler objects, events, or images may connote primarily some one thing, as a shark means rapacious evil, most symbols which Ishmael develops in his narration express a complex of meanings which cannot easily be reduced to paraphrase and are not finally statable in other than their own terms. So it is with the Pequod herself and the ships she passes, with the root metaphors of earth, air, fire and water which proliferate so subtly; and so it is with the most dynamic word-image-symbol of the tale: "White" (or "whiteness"). 18

The American Transcendental movement 19 is heavily indebted to Coleridge's view of the imagination as a synthesizing agent, mediating between sensory apprehensions and the intuitive faculty of the mind. In fact, many Emersonian views appear
largely derivative (compare Emerson's statement: "in good writing, words become one with things" with Coleridge's assertion that "I would endeavour to destroy the old antithesis of Words and Things: elevating, as it were, Words into Things and living things too.").

However, the focus of the Transcendentalist movement differs from that of the Romantic movement in its perception that nature rather than human nature is the centre of the sphere of being. This difference is explicit in Emerson's propositions in "Nature" wherein he defines words in such a way as to restrict their symbolic function, thus rooting them in the empirical realm of Locke and the 18th-Century rhetoricians more than with the Romantic idealists:

1. Words are signs of natural facts.

2. Particular natural facts are symbols of particular spiritual facts.

3. Nature is the symbol of spirit.

Thus, from the first proposition, Emerson's use of symbol can be equated with sign, and herein Emerson differs from Melville. However, in his second proposition, Emerson is allied with Melvillian thought, for in Melville's work, natural facts function as pathways to the spiritual world; however, there is no restriction on Melville's part to particular natural facts.
Emerson's intuition of the spiritual in the material is facilitated by the symbol. Emerson's symbol is that of Carlyle in *Sartor Resartus*. "In the symbol the Infinite is made to blend itself with the Finite, to stand visible, and as it were, attainable there." Emerson's concept of intuition is not the Kantian view of a perception of nature in patterns predetermined by consciousness; the Emersonian view envisages an immediate intuition of the truth through the powers of the imagination. Emerson's view is more comprehensive than Coleridge's in that he makes no distinction between religious intuition and poetic imagination.

Emerson's third proposition, that nature is the symbol of spirit, corresponds to the "linked analogies" of Melville: "O Nature, and O soul of man! how far beyond all utterance are your analogies!" (p. 264). However, their resolutions to the inability of language to encompass the common properties of nature and the mind reveal a fundamental schism between Melville and Emerson. Emerson's solution is to plunge into the Cartesian vortex, to resolve all conflict by becoming one with the divine mind, to "live in the all" of Transcendental idealism.

The Emersonian idealism does not admit to primary oppositions of good and evil in the universe which lends strength to the Coleridgean view of imagination as the reconciliation of opposites. Yeats' comment on Emerson and Whitman, that they "have begun to seem superficial precisely because they lack the Vision of Evil," cannot be applied to the tragic vision of
the later Melville of Moby-Dick and Pierre. Melville and the Transcendentalists conform to the Romantic view of nature illuminated by a lamp. What makes Melville distinctive is that his lamp does not just illuminate, it reveals the chiaroscuro of nature and human nature, for, however much the world is blanketed in "whiteness," the "blackness of darkness" predominates:

...the glorious, golden, glad sun, the only true lamp—all others but liars!

Nevertheless 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. (p. 355)

While Melville worked during the time of the Romantic period, in the milieu of the Transcendentalist movement, and while he shares views common to both movements, it is the tragedies of Shakespeare that he most admired and emulated. It is from Shakespeare that he assimilates the tragic proportions of his work. This harking back to an older tradition puts him out of step with his time, yet, paradoxically allies him not with that tradition, but projects him into the modern age.
Notes

INTRODUCTION

1 All references to the text of Moby-Dick are to the Norton Critical Edition, ed. Harrison Hayford and Hershel Parker (New York: W.H. Norton and Company, 1967), which is the closest to a definitive text and which is based on the first American Edition, with emendations from the first English Edition.


"The realm of nature presents itself as an enigma, only half exposed and known, with the known—from 'the first howling gale' on—so curiously inconsistent in its workings that it seems dichotomized or utterly anarchic. To see the world in every sense as asphere, to resolve the apparent contradictions and comprehend a unifying purpose, becomes thus an acute human need."


Chapter 1


2See the reviews reprinted in Moby-Dick as Doubloon, such as the one by Arthur Hobson Quinn, American Fiction: An Historical and Critical Survey (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1936), p. 152.

"One has to wade through much that is forbidding; the confused introductory chapters and the tiresome lectures on the structure and classification of whales illustrate again Melville's besetting weaknesses, his lack of a sense of proportion and his inability to distinguish fact from fiction."


6Gasche, p. 152.

7Charles Olson, Call Me Ishmael (San Francisco: City Light Books, 1947), p. 71.


Notes

Chapter 2


4See Emerson: "Every act, every thought, every cause is bi-polar, and in the act is contained the counter-action. If I strike, I am struck; if I chase, I am pursued." Works (Fireside ed.; Boston and New York, 1909), X, pp. 13-14.


Notes

Chapter 3

1Bezanson, p. 54.

2A more complete comment on illusion can be found in Melville's Pierre or The Ambiguities (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and the Newberry Library, 1971), pp. 284-85.

"The old mummy lies buried in cloth on cloth; it takes time to unwrap this Egyptian King. Yet now, forsooth, because Pierre began to see through the first superficiality of the world, he fondly weens he has come to the unlayered substance. But, far as any geologist has yet gone down into the world, it is found to consist of nothing but surface stratified on surface. To its axis, the world being nothing but superinduced supericies. By vast pains we mine into the pyramid; by horrible gropings we come to the central room; with joy we espy the sarcophagus; but we lift the lid—and no body is there!—appallingly vacant as vast is the soul of a man!"
Notes

CONCLUSION


2Jean-Paul Sartre says of Melville:
"Nobody has felt more strongly than Hegel and Melville that the absolute is there, around us, dreadful and familiar, and that we are able to see it, as white and smooth as a sheep's bone, if only we draw aside the multi-coloured veils we use to conceal it. We imagine ourselves walking close to the absolute; but as far as I know, nobody except Melville has ventured the extraordinary feat of retaining within himself the indefinable taste of a pure—the purest—quality: whiteness; and of seeking out from this taste an understanding of the absolute which is beyond him. If, as I believe, contemporary literature is trying to grope its way in this direction—among others—then Melville is the most "modern" of writers." ADAM International Review, N. 343-5 (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1970), p. 87.
APPENDIX


   "Il ne faut plus chercher ici l'origine des mots parce que ce sont les mots qui sont à l'origine du mythe. Le contenu ne produit pas la forme, il en est le résultat."


8. "L'allégorie est successive, le symbole simultané."


10. Todorov, p. 245.

11. See Todorov, p. 253:
   "...il produit une description qui synthétise toutes les catégories que caractéristisent la doctrine romantique de l'art: le symbole est à la fois production, intransitivité, motivation, synthétisme et expression de l'indicible; de plus, la différence entre les deux notions est située, plutôt que dans les objets de l'interprétation, dans les attitudes que suscitent ceux-ci. On retiendra aussi l'affirmation d'un échange mutuel incessant entre symbolisant et symbolisé."

13"...la signification intransitive—que l'art fait vivre mais qu'aucun mot ne peut traduire. D'où l'inanité de la question: que signifie l'Iliade." Todorov, p. 195.


15Forster, p. 203.

16Frye, p. 92.

17Bezanson, p. 47.

18Bezanson, p. 47.

19This discussion is largely indebted to F.O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), Book I.
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