

Northrop Frye And The Tragedy
Of Identity In *Moby-Dick*

NORTHROP FRYE AND THE TRAGEDY OF IDENTITY IN *MOBY-DICK*

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ABSTRACT

The following discussion of Northrop Frye and Herman Melville is based on the theoretical framework outlined in *Words With Power* which emphasizes the "demonic" and "titanic" elements in the ascent and descent of the hero's quest. The study focusses upon Frye's archetype of the labyrinth and the Biblical typology which aids the critic in the task of literary interpretation. Frye claims that "anyone interested in both the Bible and literature will eventually find himself revolving around the Book of Job like a satellite" (Frye WP 310). Melville's *Moby-Dick* is "interested" in the Bible more than any other source; it revolves around the mysteries therein which condemn the "titanic" elements that appear to lead to the discovery of a "Knowledge" or "Wisdom" related to Original sin. Thus, Ahab is a Promethean figure whose challenge of the demonic categorization of this area of imagery in the Bible is inextricably related to Job's challenge of God and subsequent invocation of Leviathan. In an application of Frye's theory of the patterns of ascent and descent imagery outlined in *Anatomy of Criticism*, *The Secular Scripture*, and *Words With Power*, chapters 1 & 2 examine the purely "demonic" descent of the quest hero and its "positive analogies" in the myth of Narcissus. Chapter 3 discusses the "titanic" descent quest in relation to its "presiding deity" Prometheus (Ahab), and chapter 4 briefly addresses the images of ascent surrounding Ishmael at the end of the novel. Notably, each chapter also examines the relation of the quest to patterns of Leviathan symbolism which are also represented in the image of the whale. Finally, the Conclusion reconsiders the Biblical Leviathan and Job's vision of "primal creation" which Frye points to in his verbal universe or *axis mundi* imagery.

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Chapter 1 - The Demonic Descent Quest

Introduction

"... I shall follow the endless, winding way -
the flowing river in the cave of man."

Herman Melville, *Pierre*.

(Melville PA 126)

In *American Renaissance*, Matthiessen writes that "the Bible was the most deeply rooted element in [Melville's] reading" (Matthiessen 463), and that the "theological decay" which conditioned the writer's thought lead to the dilemma of "reassert[ing] the significance of Original sin [without any] orthodoxy that he could accept" (458). In *Melville's Moby-Dick: A Jungian Commentary*, Edinger suggests that Jungian archetypes provide the best hermeneutic for understanding the various types of symbolism in *Moby-Dick*. According to Jung, the personality is transformed by archetypes which emerge spontaneously as a compensatory form of action whenever psychological development is arrested in the individual (Jung PT 178). This is the function of the collective unconscious which releases archetypes that mobilize the inertia of the libido and continue the growth of the individual toward an authentic identity or "real" self (178). In Frye's definition, an archetype is strictly a literary device - that is, a recurring image. Frye uses Biblical typology as an aid to literary interpretation without taking any position on the psychological significance of the archetype. In *Words With Power*, Frye suggests that "anyone interested in both the Bible and literature will eventually find himself revolving around the Book

of Job like a satellite" (Frye WP 310). I associate Frye's interest in the redeeming vision of Job (explicated through his *axis mundi* imagery or vertical dimension of the imaginative cosmos) with the conclusion to Edinger's Jungian analysis that "the archetypal core of *Moby-Dick* is the Job archetype" (Edinger 142). In fact, Jung and Frye are both well suited for interpreting Melville's work, as their critical frameworks deal with the same mythological motif of the dragon-slaying hero which structures the whole of *Moby-Dick*. However, I submit that an analysis of Frye's theory of the structure of romance reveals that his literary archetypes (emphasizing the special relation of literature to the Bible) uncover the presence of structural features whose systematic importance to *Moby-Dick* otherwise escapes notice. Hence, I will proceed to "murmur politely" that reading *Moby-Dick* as a quest-romance suggests a meaning that varies from the Jungian significance, and, as Frye defines the role of an extra-literary schematism, "shows things in a new light" (Frye AC 7).

It is noteworthy that I am applying Frye's theory of the patterns of ascent and descent imagery in order to reveal the specific meaning of the conventions which make up one of the generic forms in the book. That is, it might appear that I am arguing the work's strict resemblance to a traditional narrative romance. In dealing with this matter I refer to Boughn's assertion on *Moby-Dick* that "no rationally limited genre can approach the rich complexity of imagination's engagement with the world" (Boughn 193). Nina Baym also points to the problem of classifying *Moby-Dick* as a distinct genre, and identifies twenty-four different genres in *Moby-Dick* including sermon, short story, political and moral essay, satire, dictionary, encyclopedia, drama, travelogue, novel, and epic (Baym 909). The present study focuses on the descent-and-return sequence of Biblical myth and its submarine tonality in *Moby-Dick*. Frye first points to

the significance of this archetype in *The Secular Scripture*:

What entertains us is the archetype of death and rebirth... The feeling that death is inevitable comes to us from ordinary experience; the feeling that new life is inevitable comes to us from myth and fable. The latter is therefore both more true and more important. Such themes in romance are often linked with the providential framework of the Christian universe which is contemporary with so much of it. (Frye SS 132)

In *Anatomy of Criticism*, Frye refers to two concentric quest myths in the Bible; the "Genesis-apocalypse myth" and the "Exodus-millennium myth":

In the former Adam is cast out of Eden, loses the river of life and the tree of life, and wanders in the *labyrinth* of human history until he is restored to his original state by the Messiah. In the latter Israel is cast out of his inheritance and wanders in the *labyrinths* of Egyptian and Babylonian captivity until he is restored to his original state in the Promised Land. Eden and the Promised Land, therefore, are typologically identical, as are the tyrannies of Egypt and Babylon and the wilderness of the law. (Frye AC 191)(italics mine)

Christ wanders in the desert for forty days and nights in the situation of Israel's forty years, and his victory is both the conquest of the Promised Land and the raising of Eden out of the labyrinthine wilderness (191). Frye continues that "the biblical myth has parallels in the Jonah story and in the elaborate fishing imagery in the Gospels, where the descent of Christ to a lower world is given a submarine dimension as he and his disciples become 'fishers of men'" (Frye

SS 148). Hence, I suggest that the captain of the *Pequod* wanders in a labyrinthine sea in the situation of Adam, Israel, and Christ: "forty years of continual whaling! forty years of privation, and peril, and storm-time! forty years on the pitiless sea! for forty years has Ahab forsaken the peaceful land, for forty years to make war on the horrors of the deep" (Melville 443).

In *Moby-Dick*, the *agon* or conflict (the archetypal theme of romance) is dialectical¹: Ahab's monomaniac pursuit of the White Whale is a demonic parody of Christ's conquest and symbolic victory over death. The archetype of the labyrinth or "image of lost direction" ² expands into an elaborate type of symbolism (including labyrinths, hieroglyphics and weaving) which unfolds primarily in the Narcissistic descent of Ishmael and Ahab in pursuit of the monster in the maze. Finally, in accordance with Frye's theory outlined in *Words With Power*, I submit that the "demonic" (death-centered) or destructive plunge which threatens to destroy the identity of both characters is also a "titanic" (creative) descent in search of Wisdom or Knowledge. Ahab and Ishmael both engage in the obsessive act of water-gazing with the White Whale as the predominant image in each character's field of vision that threatens to drag both characters down (in the tradition of Narcissus) into a fatal labyrinth of self. Matthiessen's assertion (mentioned above) that Melville's purpose is to "reassert the significance of original sin" is related to the Narcissistic descent in the sense that an escape from the labyrinth can only be effected through a transforming vision like that of Job who is awarded a vision of primal

¹ "The central form of romance is dialectical: everything is focussed on a conflict between a hero and his enemy." *Anatomy of Criticism*, 187.

² "Corresponding to the apocalyptic way or straight road, the highway in the desert for God prophesied by Isaiah, we have in this world the labyrinth or maze, the image of lost direction, often with a monster at its heart like the Minotaur. The labyrinthine wanderings of Israel in the desert, repeated by Jesus... fit the same pattern." *Anatomy of Criticism*, 150.

creation. Thus, the ascent from the depths of the maze with the hoards of Wisdom intact is the fulfilment of the quest for the "real" self or authentic identity; it is a paradisaal vision of a world that we feel we have lost³. As Frye affirms, "self-recognition, or attaining one's original identity, reverses all the Narcissus and twin and doppelganger themes that occur in the descent" (Frye SS 152).

Finally, I propose that the quest for original identity is crucially related to what Frye terms the "kerygmatic"⁴ or fifth mode of language (*The Great Code*) which addresses ways of using language that are appropriate to a sense of identity with the world. The "kerygmatic" mode goes beyond both the current "descriptive mode" and the "poetic mode" of myth and metaphor to the establishment of a transcendent state, or what Alvin Lee calls a "principle of identity" (Lee 36). The attainment of a larger perspective allows Job to raise the treasure hoard of Wisdom or Knowledge which each member of the *Pequod* also seeks in their individual attempts to "read" the Whale. In "Cetology," Ishmael divides all the whales in the seas into "primary BOOKS" (Melville 120), but later asserts that "when the Leviathan is the text, the case is altered. Fain am I to stagger to this emprise under the weightiest words of the dictionary" (379). Ishmael is confronted with the threat of nonbeing which he experiences through the inadequacy

³ The Structure of Frye's mythological universe: Man's "natural home" is the world of "ordinary experience"; it is located above the "demonic world" or "hell" and below "earthly paradise" (Eden before the "fall") which he seeks in search of original identity. Above "earthly paradise" is "heaven... the place of God's presence beyond time and space." The fourth level or lowest world is purely demonic in Christianity, whereas in romance it is a world where rewards of wisdom and wealth are sought. *The Secular Scripture*, 97-98.

⁴ *kerygma* is proclaimed doctrine, but Frye differs from the theologians in arguing that it has a content of myth as well as straight proclamation. *Words With Power*, 133.

of words (in the descriptive mode) to accurately describe the external world. *Moby Dick* is a text that is read but cannot be comprehended: the quest for the Whale is analogous to searching for and raising the elusive treasure hoard which awaits the hero at the heart of the labyrinth. Thus, Frye's intermediate world and its central *axis mundi* imagery offers a clue to grasping the "ungraspable phantom of life" in Melville's cosmology, as it also belongs exclusively to the verbal universe. In fact, Ishmael decrees that Ahab owes his very being to the *axis mundi* or vertical dimension of the cosmos: "'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!'" (130). In the following chapters, I will examine the Narcissistic descent of Ahab as a Promethean archetype, as well as the eventual ascent of the book's narrator, Ishmael.

Chapter 2 - Descent of the Promethean Narcissus

In "Ahab's Greatness: Prometheus as Narcissus," Woodson attests that "the greatest of Melville's achievements in writing *Moby-Dick* is to make us see in Ahab the naked dramatic identity of creative and destructive impulses within the human soul" (Woodson 443). Ahab is a divided man; he is self-alienated and uncertain of his relation to the world. In "The Promethean Archetype in Milton and Melville," Frye examines Ahab's plight in a comparison of Milton's universe to the imaginative cosmology of Melville's world:

[Ahab] lives in a universe which has been polarized without reference to the physical

structure in Milton's universe. That is, in physical structure Milton has created order, symbolized by the stars in heaven; and chaos, which is way down there; and a kind of absolute space. But Melville's world doesn't have those spatial landmarks. [Ahab] lives in a universe which is polarized between identity and alienation. (Frye PA 123)

Melville places Ahab in the position of the fire-god Prometheus⁵ who is perpetually tormented by vultures as a punishment for furnishing man with the gift of fire (the creative principle). However, as Chase points out, fire is a "double" principle: "it can create and it can destroy; and without perpetual tending, the act of creation becomes itself an act of destruction" (Chase 45). Chase continues that "God attempts to defeat the heroic defender of man by forcing him into the pattern of the beast or the machine. The hero attempts to escape this fate and to preserve the *elan* of human intelligence, creativeness, and adaptability" (51). However, instead of preserving the Promethean *elan* and enduring the punishment inflicted by the "clear spirit" or divine, Ahab embraces the destructive potential he discovers in creativity and attacks the Leviathanic Zeus. For Ahab, the crew of the *Pequod* represent a demonic machine which he enlists "to the more certain accomplishment of that monomaniac thought of his soul" (Melville 171):

"'D'ye feel brave, men, brave?'" [shouts Ahab]

"'As fearless fire,'" [cries Stubb]

"'And as mechanical,'" [replies Ahab]. (459)

⁵ "A will to identify with... the destructive element is what is really driving Ahab. Ahab has, Melville says, become a 'Prometheus' with a vulture feeding on him." *Words With Power*, 284.

On the fated third day of the chase, Ahab calls upon his mechanical crew to perform his vengeful deed, declaring "‘Ye are not other men, but my arms and legs; and so obey me’" (465). However, Ahab himself becomes a machine, admitting that the "path to my fixed purpose is laid with iron rails, whereon my soul is grooved to run" (147) in search of the mechanized whale or "mighty leviathan of the modern railway" (177). Notably, Ishmael warns of the danger of equating the "mechanical" with the destructive principle and so with the divine: "God help thee, old man, thy thoughts have created a creature in thee; and he whose intense thinking thus makes him a Prometheus; a vulture feeds upon that heart for ever; that vulture the very creature he creates" (175). The monomaniac's dedication to what Chase calls the "mechanico-apocalyptic aspect of the divine fire" (Chase 47) means that Ahab's fate is to be perpetually devoured from within by the White Whale which is his vulture.

Significantly, Ahab embraces the mechanical element of divine fire, and as "fearless fire" himself challenges God that he knows something which the omnipotent does not know:

‘I know that of me, which thou knowest not of thyself, oh, thou omnipotent. There is some unsuffusing thing beyond thee, thou clear spirit, to whom all thy eternity is but time, all thy creativeness mechanical. Through thee, thy flaming self, my scorched eyes do dimly see it. Oh, thou foundling fire, thou hermit immemorial, thou too hast thy incommunicable riddle, thy unparticipated grief.’ (Melville 417)

Ahab claims that "thy right worship is defiance" (416) in the knowledge that creation becomes destruction when the Promethean *elan* becomes mechanical. Significantly, Chase affirms that "the human *elan* is the one weapon which can defeat the tyrant God; it is the one attribute God

Himself needs if He is to keep his throne" (Chase 51). I associate the Promethean *elan* with what Frye calls the "mysterious 'knowledge of good and evil'" in Genesis 3 "where God seems to be addressing other gods in a spirit of something very like panic" (Frye WP 194). I submit that it is the knowledge forbidden to Adam and Eve, a "special kind of knowledge, dangerous in the wrong context" (194), which Ahab claims to possess in proud defiance of a malignant divine. A purely demonic force empowers the Promethean Ahab⁶ in his quest for the Leviathan, and underlying this quest is the desire to know or understand the mysteries of existence:

Moby-Dick is as profound a treatment as modern literature affords of the leviathan symbolism of the Bible, the titanic-demonic force that raises Egypt and Babylon to greatness and then hurls them into nothingness; that is both an enemy of God outside the creation, and, as notably in Job, a creature within it of whom God is rather proud. The leviathan is revealed to Job as *the ultimate mystery of God's ways*, the 'king over all the children of pride' (41:34), of whom Satan himself is merely an instrument. (285)(italics mine)

Moby Dick is a latter day incarnation of Job's Leviathan, and Ahab believes that he grasps at the power that will unveil the Biblical mysteries of existence. The monomaniac realizes that there is a close connection between titanic and demonic power, and turns creative potential into destructive power in search of the divine in his own being:

⁶ "The world of titans, primeval giants and devils has usually been regarded as simply evil, and the word 'demonic' is normally used... to mean a death-centered parody of human life." *Words With Power*, 276.

‘I’m demoniac, I am madness maddened! That wild madness that’s only calm to comprehend itself! The prophecy was that I should be dismembered; and - Aye! I lost this leg. I now prophesy that I will dismember my dismemberer. Now, then, be the prophet and the fulfiller one. That’s more than ye, ye great gods, ever were. (Melville 147)

Ishmael points to the frailty of man which Ahab seeks to overcome in search of the Knowledge that will equate him with God:

And brave as [man] might be... [he] yet cannot withstand those more terrific, because more spiritual terrors... That immaculate manliness we feel within ourselves, so far within us, that it remains intact though all the outer character seem gone... Thou shalt see it shining... [that] which, on all hands, radiates without end from God; Himself! The great God absolute! The centre and circumference of all democracy! His omnipresence, our divine equality! (104)

Ahab contemplates man’s fear of the divine, stating “I do deem it now a most meaning thing, that that old Greek, Prometheus, who made men, they say, should have been a blacksmith, and animated them with fire; for what’s made in fire must properly belong to fire; and so hell’s probable” (390). Ahab repeatedly makes a claim for man’s demonic nature and potential to wield power, ordering the carpenter to construct an ideal man that will not flee in the face of the divine: “Imprimis, fifty feet high in his socks; then, chest modelled after the Thames Tunnel; then, legs with roots to ’em, *to stay in one place...* [and] no heart at all...” (390)(italics mine).

However, as Frye points out, "what this power looks like depends on how it is

approached. Approached by Conrad's Kurtz through his Antichrist psychosis, it is an unimaginable horror: but it may also be a source of energy that man can put to his own use" (Frye WP 285). It is notable that the source of Ahab's Prometheanism is foreshadowed by Father Mapple's sermon about Jonah's refusal to preach in Nineveh, as Ahab's rebellion has overtones of the Antichrist's demonic relation to God.⁷ As Friedman observes, Mapple's message is wrong to suggest that man must choose between affirming the self and affirming God (Friedman 82). Mapple warns that "Woe to him who would not be true, even though to be false were salvation" (Melville 50), suggesting that absolute truth or knowledge of the divine transcends man's relation to God. In fact, the origin of Ahab's Prometheanism can be traced to the following message:

'But oh! shipmates! on the starboard hand of every woe, there is sure delight; and higher the top of that delight, than the bottom of the woe is deep... Delight is to him - a far, far upward, and inward delight - who against the proud gods and commodores of this earth, ever stands forth his own inexorable self. (50-51)

Friedman comments on this passage, asserting that "this is Prometheus, enduring endless agonies, yet standing forth his own inexorable self, against Zeus - the proud god of this world" (Friedman 82). Jonah is a fugitive from God who flees his vocation of preaching the truth to the people of God. Ahab, however, bears no words of truth to his crew but rather assumes the

⁷ "[The Antichrist] is described in the New Testament (II Thessalonians 2:4) as someone who 'as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.' This figure combines the statue or heathen presence profaning the Holy of Holies (Matthew 24:15) with a kind of demonic Narcissus who claims to be God himself." *Words With Power*, 278.

authority of an unrepentant Jonah to attack and destroy. Significantly, Frye traces the demonic origins of Ahab's "power" to the mysteries of the Bible, marking Genesis 6:1-4 as a possible starting point to the demonic story:

... the 'sons of God' were attracted by the 'daughters of men,' descended to the earth and begat on them a race of giants. These giants seem to have been a factor in provoking Noah's flood, yet they seem to have survived the flood, as their descendants continue to terrify the Israelites on the very borders of the Promised Land (Numbers 13:33). (Frye WP 274)

Frye continues that another possible origin of the demonic is the "missing quadrant" of imagery in the "P account⁸," or mystery surrounding the fall of the rebel angels which is later expounded in the Book of Enoch (272). In *Moby-Dick*, Melville's Ishmael recounts precisely the same sources to which Frye attributes the demonic beginnings of man. First, in a footnote to "The Spirit-Spout" (Melville 199) he refers to the Book of Enoch, while the mystery of the terrified Israelites who encounter giants that make their own men appear as grasshoppers (Numbers 14:32-33) is noted in "The Line" (238). Finally, the central demonic story of Genesis 6:1-4 is given full version:

... all men his descendants, unknowing whence he came, eyed each other as real

⁸ "There are two creation myths in Genesis, distinguished by the names they use for God. The first extends from Genesis 1:1 to Genesis 2:3. Although it stands first, it is the later of the two accounts; it uses the word Elohim for God, is probably post-exilic, and is known as the Priestly account (P). The second, which begins at Genesis 2:4, is called the Jahwist account (J), as it refers to God as Jahweh Elohim..." *Words With Power*, 156.

phantoms, and asked of the sun and the moon why they were created and to what end; when though, according to Genesis, the angels indeed consorted with the daughters of men, the devils also, add the uncanonical Rabbins⁹, indulged in mundane amours. (199)

Ishmael ponders the mysteries of his existence in relation to the self, and maintains that the quest for highest truth is a condition of human nature: "in landlessness alone resides the highest truth, shoreless, indefinite as God - so, better is it to perish in that howling infinite, than be ingloriously dashed upon the lee" (97).

In "Brit," the image of brit-eating whales recalls a grass mower in the initiation of a bond between land and sea that is broken only when the sea becomes infested with sharks. The introduction of this element of alienation severs the bond between land and sea which becomes analogous to the divided self: "Consider all this; and then turn to this green, gentle, and most docile earth; consider them both, the sea and the land; and do you not find a strange analogy to something in yourself... Push not off from that isle, thou canst never return" (236). In essence, to be on the sea in *Moby-Dick* is to be in the self, and for a Narcissus to inhabit this dangerous element is to risk a fatal plunge. Hence, the division within Ahab's self and his alienation from the external world (mentioned above) is a disabling factor which prevents the ship's captain from relating to any external significance in the world. Schirmeister affirms this view, stating that "Brit... constitutes a brief meditation on the alienated object world, a sorrow typically suffered by Narcissus himself" (Schirmeister 66). Similarly, Woodson attests that

⁹ Melville's note cites the "Rabbins" as "the Jewish authors of two uncanonical works, the Book of Enoch [mentioned above], and Book of Jubilees. *Moby-Dick*, 199.

[Ahab's] 'ray of living light' becomes 'a blankness in itself'; or life allows an easy, sliding, deceptive identification and fusing of mind and thing, as self becomes 'thing,' and the light becomes the fire and the vulture both, collapsing... in a suicidal cannibalism. (Woodson 447-8)

Frye notes this common theme of decent narratives in a statement which addresses the fear that fuels Ahab's monomania:

Man apparently cannot do without some sense of meaning directed toward himself: if the feeling that the world was created or designed for him fails, he will settle for a belief that he is uniquely accursed, the scapegoat of creation. It is the feeling that there is nothing at all outside himself aware of his existence that drives him up the wall - that is, drives him up the ladder of the *axis mundi* in search of something that conforms to his paranoia. (Frye WP 288)

Ahab cannot bear the ambivalent treatment that he receives at the hands of nature throughout his whaling career. The quest for Moby Dick is conceived to fill the void or defer the terrifying possibility that man's significance is belittled in the grand scheme of "things." Hence, the crew of the *Pequod* descends into "a society held together by a kind of molecular tension of egos, a loyalty to the group or the leader which diminishes the individual" (Frye AC 147). Ishmael recalls the shouts of the crew which are heard in a rally,¹⁰ and his own dedication to the purpose of hunting and killing the White Whale: "my shouts had gone up with the rest; my oath

¹⁰ "... the social relation is that of the mob." *Anatomy of Criticism*, 149.

had been welded with theirs; and stronger I shouted, and more did I hammer and clinch my oath, because of the dread in my soul. A wild, mystical, sympathetical feeling was in me; Ahab's quenchless feud seemed mine" (Melville 155). Ishmael writes his last will and testament, henceforth regarding his life "as good as the days that Lazarus lived after his resurrection" (197). He declares that "here goes for a cool, collected dive at death and destruction, and the devil fetch the hindmost" (197), in his resignation to the demonic descent.

However, there is also a symbolic dimension to the descent of Ahab and his crew into "the world of nightmare and the scapegoat"¹¹: the White Whale is the scapegoat of Israel, and the *Pequod's* crew are God's people who are sold into bondage and doomed to wander in a labyrinthine wilderness. Frye affirms this view, stating that "in the Bible the sea and the animal monster are identified in the figure of the leviathan, a sea-monster also identified with the social tyrannies of Babylon and Egypt" (Frye AC 150). He continues that "in a further concentration of metaphor, the maze would become the winding entrails inside the sinister monster himself" (150). Thus, Ishmael wanders amid the "winding, shaded, colonnades and arbors" (Melville 375) of a labyrinthine whale skeleton, corresponding to Frye's assertion that "the object of pursuit becomes the surrounding forest [or sea] itself" (Frye SS 104). For Frye, the sea¹² and the White Whale itself are a maze in a submarine and subterranean world that is disruptive to an individual's identity. In his comparison of Milton and Melville, Frye comments that "everything

¹¹ "... the world of the nightmare and the scapegoat, of bondage and pain and confusion... the world also of perverted or wasted work, ruins and catacombs, instruments of torture and monuments of folly." *Anatomy of Criticism*, 147.

¹² "the sea is particularly the image of an unconscious which seems paradoxically to forget everything and yet potentially to remember everything." *The Secular Scripture*, 148.

in the Bible and in Milton's *Paradise Lost* is thrown in the direction of God's command the sea, of his ability to control chaos, so its characteristic of a great nineteenth century epic that the sea gets out of hand" (Frye PA 124). In *Moby-Dick*, Pip goes mad amidst the "heartless immensity" of the ocean where he experiences an extreme sense of isolation and perceives only meaninglessness. Similarly, Ahab experiences an incomparable sense of immensity amidst the Pacific which poses the threat of nonbeing or annihilation; the possibility that behind everything which appears to bear meaning, is nothing. Schultz affirms this view, stating that for Ahab, "the heartless immensity has one meaning; it is his antagonist, and in the intense concentration of *himself*, he transforms himself into a heartless immensity" (Schultz 54).

According to Frye, the result of this experience is a descent further into a nightmarish world of dream characterized by a loss of identity¹³ which occurs when the "theme of curiosity" (Frye SS 104) is distorted. This third group of *axis mundi* imagery - that is, the descent from the world of "ordinary experience," begins with the fall of Adam and Eve described in the "J account" (Frye WP 272). Frye compares this portion of the descent to the opening of Pandora's box implying a "collapse of the rightful order in the mind" (Frye SS 104). However, I prefer to associate the demonic version of the memory with the labyrinth of human history which results after the Fall when the remaining shadow of the self has forgotten "the original identity of what it accompanies" (124). The quest for original identity is forgotten, and the remaining vision is "the darkest knowledge at the bottom of the world, the vision of the absurd, the realization that only death is certain, and that nothing before or after death makes sense" (124-

¹³ "The structural core is the individual loss or confusion or break in the continuity of identity, and this has analogies to falling asleep and entering a dream world." *The Secular Scripture*, 104.

5). Cameron best describes the demonic vision of Pip, and the abandonment of the quest symbolized in his descent: "As Pip is cast away from the lines of human desire, all longing, whether for immortality, or power, or knowledge, longing even for the salving presence of others - all are nothing before the huge indifference of the world" (Cameron 583). Pip is confronted with the threat of nonbeing - that is, he disappears to himself and cannot acknowledge his own (inner) existence unless completed from without. The cabin-boy struggles to comprehend the loss when he is left alone in Ahab's cabin: "Here he this instant stood; I stand in his air, - but I'm alone. Now were even poor Pip here I could endure it, but he's missing" (Melville 437). Notably, this reduction in self occurs after repeated attempts to reaffirm his identity in relation to the ship's captain: "'No, no, no! 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 part of ye'" (436).

Significantly, a temporary union does occur between the captain and his cabin-boy when Ahab momentarily empathizes with the overwhelming sense of nothingness or "thought of annihilation" (169) (Ishmael's words) that he also feels: "'There is that in thee, poor lad, which I feel too curing to my malady... as if thou wert the captain'" (436). Ahab is aware of Pip's plea for a union amidst the malignancies of a world which severs the self or fragments the identity. In fact, this severing aspect of the world is represented through Ahab's leg which is severed during battle with Moby Dick. However, the monomaniac rejects the boy's plea for anything more than a partial union, and orders Pip to keep his madness in check: 'Weep so, and I will murder thee! have a care, for Ahab too is mad. Listen, and thou wilt often hear my ivory foot upon the deck, and still know that I am there" (436). In Woodson's view, Ahab seeks no bonds

amongst his fellow man but rather feeds on what is outside the self in the spirit of Ishmael's universal cannibalism of the sea (Woodson 443); "all whose creatures prey upon each other, carrying on eternal war since the world began" (Melville 235-36). Notably, I think Frye would attribute Ahab's spurning of Pip to a rejection of "the infantile [which] tends to block off the quest for... wisdom and energy which is the real object of the descent, and substitute for it a renewal of dependence on parental projections" (Frye WP 287-8). Ahab thrusts Pip aside out of the fear that the presence of the child jeopardizes the quest, just as he dismisses all thoughts of his wife and child for the purpose of his task:

‘What is it, what nameless, inscrutable, unearthly thing is it; what cozening, hidden lord and master, and cruel, remorseless emperor commands me; that against *all natural lovings and longings*, I so keep pushing, and crowding, and jamming myself on all the time; recklessly making me ready to do what in my own proper, natural heart, I durst not so much as dare?’ (Melville 445)(italics mine)

In this moment of self-awareness, a temporary union is formed with Starbuck who witnesses Ahab's confession in a scene that recalls the earlier joining with Pip. I propose that in accordance with Frye's night world, such a union serves as a demonic parody of the "true" marriage between the Bride of Israel (and the Church), and the Bridegroom, Christ. Frye aligns this demonic union or marriage with incest or Oedipal taboos behind which "is the suggestion that the hunter is seeking a false identity which is the same thing as his own destruction" (Frye SS 105). He continues that "the Oedipal quest is the tragic version of the Christian one... the Oedipus who kills his father and possesses his mother sexually is the contrasting figure to the

Christ who appeases the Father and rescues a bride who is symbolically very close to the mother" (Frye WP 218). Thus, Ahab who desires total isolation for the completion of his vengeful purpose unwittingly abandons the quest for original identity, and with the pretence of hunting Moby Dick pursues a false identity in a labyrinth of self.

Ahab's demonic descent in search of a false identity is also a Narcissistic plunge away from the paradisaal self or Edenic identity. Frye affirms this view, stating that

Adam, after his fall, changes his identity, and the later one may be said to be the shadow or dreaming counterpart of the one he had before. The Classical parallel to the Adam story, as several Renaissance mythographers noted, is the story of Narcissus, where we also have a real man and a shadow... *What Narcissus really does is exchange his original self for the reflection that he falls in love with*, becoming, as Blake says, "idolatrous to his own shadow." (Frye SS 108)

At the beginning of his narrative, Ishmael establishes the crucial relation between the quest for identity through the White Whale and the Narcissus story which emerges as a "positive analogy"¹⁴ to Christian mythology:

And still deeper the meaning of that story of Narcissus, who because he could not grasp the tormenting, mild image he saw in the fountain, plunged into it and was drowned. But that same image, we ourselves see in all rivers and oceans. It is the image of the ungraspable phantom of life; and this is the key to it all." (Melville 14)

¹⁴ "... a more liberal view of Classical mythology as a kind of supplement or counterpoint to the Christian one..." *The Secular Scripture*, 145.

In this sense, Ahab projects an elaborate image of himself upon the White Whale, and leans over the edge until the day of his plunge and death by drowning:

Slowly crossing the deck from the scuttle, Ahab leaned over the side, and watched how his shadow in the water sank and sank to his gaze, the more and the more that he strove to pierce the profundity... Starbuck saw the old man; saw him, how he heavily leaned over the side... (443).

Ahab desires to view the very image behind his life and so discern the secret meaning of his existence by worshipping his own inexorable self. He becomes "idolatrous" to the present "shadow" of his being in an attempt to become "god-like" through the imagination. Thus, I submit that Ahab's discovery of his image creating powers is equivalent to eating from the tree of Knowledge. His "fatal curiosity" to find out the mysteries of existence or grasp the "ungraspable phantom" results in a symbolic "fall" away from a paradisaical vision. Fiedelson affirms the intractable paradox of the quest, stating that "the phantom is ungraspable as long as we stand on the bank; and the ocean is annihilative once we dive into it" (Feidelson 29). Interestingly, Edinger attests that a Biblical taboo or "profound patriarchal antipathy [exists] toward the image-making power of the psyche," and aligns this taboo with the motif of incest which parodies the forthcoming marriage of Christ and the Redeemed (Edinger 51). Hence, I propose that in the attempt to be "god-like," Ahab makes a frantic plunge in hate and revulsion and so becomes the antithesis of his identity quest, or Antichrist in relation to Biblical myth.

Ahab's attempt to grasp the self through the image of the White Whale and subsequent

death by drowning symbolizes his entry into the night world.¹⁵ Frye states that "the reflecting pool is a mirror, and disappearing into one's own mirror image, or entering a world of reversed or reduced dimensions, is a central symbol of descent" (Frye SS 108). Notably, I am focussing on the purely reflective aspect of Narcissus, and on the images closely related to the mirror image in the descent pattern. To this effect, Frye points to the related image of "special" or "antiquated" language (110) used by the "double" (a shadow of the original self), which is particularly apparent in the speech patterns of the *Pequod's* captain:

'Take off *thine* eye! more intolerable than fiends' glarings is a doltish stare! So, so; *thou* reddenest and palest; my heat has melted *thee* to anger-glow. But look ye, Starbuck, what is said in heat, that thing unsays itself... Ah! constrainings seize *thee*; I see! the billow lifts *thee*! Speak, but speak! - *Aye, aye! thy* silence, then, that voices *thee*.' (Melville 144)(italics mine)

The antiquated style of Ahab's language is most apparent when contrasted with the more modern prose employed by the sailor and narrator of the same voyage, Ishmael. Frye asserts that the use of such language is related to the theme of "charm": "the use of words for emotional purposes derived from the magical casting of a binding spell" (Frye SS 110). In the speech quoted above, Ahab charms the crew so that a "binding" oath is declared to hunt the White Whale:

¹⁵ "In Ovid's story [Narcissus] simply drowns, but drowning could also be seen as passing into a lower or submarine world." *The Secular Scripture*, 108.

How it was that they so aboundingly responded to the old man's ire - by what evil magic their souls were possessed, that at times his hate seemed almost theirs; the White Whale as much their insufferable foe as his; how all this came to be... would be to dive deeper than Ishmael can go. (Melville 162)

A "spell" is cast on the crew (Starbuck excepted) which results in a "loss of freedom of action" (Frye SS 110) that I associate with the plight of the hero in the lower reaches of the night world or labyrinth. Henceforth, as the search for the White Whale nears the equator, the freedom to hunt other whales or discourse with other ships is lost to the sole purpose of the chase. Ahab himself experiences this loss of freedom in search of the monster at the heart of the maze. In fact, he breaks the "golden rule" in his refusal to postpone the hunt and assist the *Rachel* in the search for castaways: "I will not do it. Even now I lose time. Good bye, good bye.. God bless ye, man, and may I forgive myself, but *I must go*." (Melville 435)(italics mine).

However, Ahab's speech to his crew and imperative to "take off thine eye" does more than affirm various descent themes; it also associates the "I" with the eye, or identity with vision. Schirmeister argues that Melville conceives of his characters "primarily as visualizing agents," just as the identity of Narcissus is constituted solely by what he sees (Schirmeister 64). Accordingly, Ishmael asserts that "no man can ever feel his own identity aright except his eyes be closed" (Melville 55), while Ahab pleads to look into a "human eye" before his fatal descent into the labyrinth: "Close! Stand close to me, Starbuck; let me look into a human eye; it is better than to gaze into sea or sky; better than to gaze upon God'" (444). Similarly, Ahab queries whether his eyes will survive his being: "Will I still have eyes at the bottom of the sea, supposing I descend those endless stairs" (462). During Pip's descent, "strange shapes of the

unwarped primal world glided before his passive eyes" (347) indicating a translation of being into vision, or a manifestation of being through vision. Following Pip's ascension from the depths of a nightmarish vision, he equates identity with being in his verb conjugation before the doubloon: "'I look, you look, he looks; we look, ye look, they look'" (362). Pip is referring to Ahab's observation that in the act of staring at the doubloon, "every man in turn but mirrors back his own mysterious self" (359). The doubloon is a substitute for Moby Dick, and the various interpretations of the coin point to the disfigurement of the world when apprehended through the self which relies upon vision. Thus, Ahab's imperative to "take off thine eye" or to "skim your eyes for him" (144) demands something of a religious conversion to the monomaniac's idolatrous vision. In "The Candles," Ahab asks "open eyes; see, or not? (417), and then pleads to the gods about the distress he experiences through vision: "Take the homage of these poor eyes, and shutter-hands. I would not take it. The lightning flashes through my skull; mine eye-balls ache and ache..." (417). In his fury, Ahab commands his crew to "put on his eyes" and so adopt an inward vision. In fact, the Promethean captain says he would create man with no "eyes to see outwards... but [with] a sky-light on top of his head to illuminate inwards" (390). Ahab desires an omniscient view of the world and in his fatal curiosity cannot bear the thought that the whereabouts of Moby Dick is knowable, and yet unknown to himself: "This instant thou must be eyeing him. These eyes of mine look into the very eye that is even now beholding him; aye, and into the eye that is now equally beholding the objects of the unknown, thither side of thee, thou sun!" (144). Ahab is haunted by the elusiveness of knowledge in the world and curses the sun which needs no chart because it holds the White Whale perpetually in its view.

In contrast to Ahab's Promethean model of vision, Ishmael's ideal model is the sperm whale with eyes located on either side of its head: "at the same moment of time [it can] attentively examine two distinct prospects, one on each side of him and the other in an exactly opposite direction... this combination makes neither believer nor infidel, but makes a man who regards them both with equal eye" (314). Ishmael's notion of vision distinguishes Ahab's self-alienating ego from the other center of personality, the self. Edinger affirms this view, stating that

Consciousness by its very nature exists by the separation of opposites by acquiring unilateral vision. The Self, the suprapersonal center of the personality has bilateral vision... it incorporates both sides of a pair of opposites in the total view and hence conveys wholeness. (Edinger 79)

Ishmael's conception of vision teaches that antithetical moral values may co-exist; whiteness may evoke majesty, nobility and divinity, as well as malevolence, demonism, racism, and nihilism. Similarly, he observes that ambergris is produced in the sick whale's bowels: "Now that the incorruption of this most fragrant ambergris should be found in the heart of such decay; is this nothing? Bethink thee of that saying of St. Paul in Corinthians, about corruption and incorruption; how that we are sown in dishonour, but raised in glory" (Melville 343). In this manner, Ishmael ponders at length the ambiguities of whaling, and later draws analogies to the mysteries of existence and paradoxes of life. As Schultz attests, the narrator's pursuit of the whale begins when the voyage is over: "To know one particular whale, Moby Dick, he must know whales in general; to know whales in general, he finds himself struggling to see all

reality" (Schultz 53). Significantly, in his struggle to know and understand the mysteries of whaling, Ishmael refers to the "over curious" hunter and the "unknowability" of the whale spout which he equates directly with vision:

And as for this whale spout, you might almost stand in it, and yet be undecided as to what it is precisely... You cannot go with your pitcher to this fountain and fill it, and bring it away... I do not much doubt it, that if the jet if fairly spouted into your eyes, it will blind you. The wisest thing the investigator can do then, it seems to me, is to let this deadly spout alone. (Melville 313)

Ishmael observes that man's irrepressible desire to know (since the garden of Eden) is threatened by vision in the "ordinary world" of experience which is no longer pure or redemptive. He concludes that survival and self-affirmation are dependent upon the acceptance of ambiguity and paradox in the world. For Ishmael, the limits of the "knowable" are clearly marked and defined by boundaries which lead only to self-annihilation.

However, this discovery is not made without twice risking a fatal plunge into a nightmarish abyss. Feidelson observes that Ishmael opens the narrative by identifying "voyage with vision" (Feidelson 28). That is, from the outset the entire narrative assumes the necessity of water-gazing:

There now is your insular city of the Manhattoes, belted round by wharves as Indian isles by coral reefs... Look at the crowds of water-gazers there... What do you see? - Posted like silent sentinels all around the town, stand thousands upon thousands of mortal men fixed in ocean reveries. (Melville 12)

Next, Ishmael observes the ship owner Bildad¹⁶ (reminiscent of Job) who gazes aimlessly out to sea: "Bildad lingered long... looked towards the wide and endless waters... looked towards the land; looked aloft; looked right and left; looked everywhere and nowhere" (96). Similarly, aboard the *Pequod* "the seamen were lazily lounging about the decks, or vacantly gazing over into the lead-colored waters... and such an incantation of revery lurked in the air, that each sailor seemed resolved into his own invisible self" (185). On the masthead, this self-absorbing "everywhere" and "nowhere" threatens Ishmael's life when he awakens from his Platonic dreaming to the nightmarish realization that he is one slip of a hand or foot away from a destructive plunge:

... lulled into such an opium-like listlessness of vacant, unconscious reverie is this absent-minded youth by the blending cadence of waves with thoughts, that at last he loses his identity; takes the mystic ocean at his feet for the visible image of that deep, blue, bottomless soul... In this enchanted mood, thy spirit ebbs away to whence it came; becomes diffused through time and space... 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. (140)

Feidelson aligns Ishmael's loss of self into "sheer vision" on the masthead with Emerson's famous dictum, "I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all" (Feidelson 29). Ishmael becomes nothing but a seer of a multiplicity of images that are himself, and moves

¹⁶ Job in his misery is visited by three friends named Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. (Job 2:11)

toward a diffusion of the self in a quasi-hypnotic or mystical state. The self transcends immediate location and enters the realm of "true" place which, Melville affirms, "is not down in any map; true places never are" (Melville 56).

However, as Schirmeister asserts, "the masthead vision is illusion, dependent on a place in which illusion cannot be recognized as such. With one slip... the illusion evaporates and threatens what was once the all-seeing self with its own fragility" (Schirmeister 67). That is, perfect solipsism is based on illusion that can only bring death. The self recoils from this seductive mystical dimension in the horror of being swallowed up or absorbed into a "heartless immensity" of sea. Notably, most critics agree that Ishmael's going to sea represents an attempt to evade the threat of nonbeing by becoming part of a larger entity. In fact, the narrator gives himself the name of an outcast or wanderer¹⁷ which suggests a curious lack of identity. Ishmael calls this affliction the "universal hump" and advises that the only cure is for "all hands... [to] rub each other's shoulder-blades, and be content" (Melville 15). He gains refuge from the "thought of annihilation" (169) and affirms his identity by participating in a movement - that is, in the joint effort of whaling and hunting Moby Dick. However, a deeper fear of engulfment and complete dissolution emerges when Ishmael nearly plunges headlong into the boundless sea. Thus, I submit that the sanctuary of self which Ishmael seeks with the masses threatens a more permanent loss of identity. As I mentioned above, for a time Ishmael's shouts go up with the rest of the crew, but not without some "dread in [his] soul" (155) of an even more destructive "slip" from his fragile "hold" on life. The "mild phantom" (14) that Ishmael initially seeks in

¹⁷ It is a name without context or home: "The name was in common [Biblical] use to mean an exile or outcast." Melville's note. *Moby-Dick*, 12.

his yearning to recapture his own essence becomes a "*demon phantom* that, some time or other, swims before all human hearts" (204). His fear is that "while chasing such over this round globe, they either lead us on in barren mazes or midway leave us whelmed" (204).

Interestingly, the motif of water-gazing is repeated throughout Melville's works. In *Redburn*, the protagonist of that name describes the experience of being aloft for the first time:

For a few moments I stood awe-stricken and mute. I could not see far out upon the ocean, owing to the darkness of the night; and from my lofty perch, the sea looked like a great, black gulf, hemmed in, all around, by beetling black cliffs. I seemed all alone; treading the midnight clouds; and every second, expected to find myself falling - falling - falling, as I have felt when the nightmare has been on me. (Melville RB 78)

Similarly, in *White-Jacket*, White-Jacket refers to the constant threat of a fatal plunge while in the position of the main-top man aboard his ship: "I lay entranced now dozing, now dreaming; now thinking of things past, and anon of the life to come. Well-time was the latter thought, for the life to come was much nearer overtaking me than I could imagine" (Melville WJ 313). White-Jacket does eventually plunge when he is twice jerked by the pitching of the ship causing his white-jacket to wrap itself around his head and force him headlong into the sea. Notably, in his descent, White-Jacket resembles Ishmael whose field of vision is also dominated by an image of whiteness - the White Whale. Thus, I suggest that the pursuit of Moby Dick in the later descent narrative is the evolution of an image that is conceived in Melville's earlier novels which treat similar themes of descent. In "The Imp of the Perverse," Poe states that a fall from a great height "involves that one most ghastly and loathsome of all the most ghastly and loathsome

images of death and suffering which have ever presented themselves to our imagination" (Poe 1223). Thus, in the awareness of the ghastly images he projects, Ishmael attests that "without imagination no man can follow another into these halls" (Melville 376). Notably, in addition to the nightmarish experience on the masthead, Ishmael gazes into the fires of the try-works while at the tiller and envisions the *Pequod* "freighted with savages, and laden with fire, and burning a corpse, and plunging into that blackness of darkness" (354). The self-absorbed narrator turns around at the tiller after falling asleep, and then upon awakening nearly capsizes the ship (foreshadowing the final descent of the *Pequod*).

In "The Doubloon," the motif of water-gazing in search of the mighty image in each character's field of vision takes on a deeper meaning in relation to Ahab's solipsistic epistemology. The monomaniac captain expands his vision until it encompasses all things; he represents himself as the geographical features of the doubloon, and by extension as the world itself:

'There's something ever egotistical in mountain-tops and towers, and all other grand and loft things; look here, - three peaks as proud as Lucifer. 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; and this round gold is but the image of the rounder globe...' (359)

In its extreme solipsism, the self assumes a purely visionary function and is represented as a place, which is a figure for comprehensiveness or measurement of possibilities. As Schirmeister puts it, "that there is no world but the one projected by each man's vision is not fanciful but necessary; if the self can only see itself, the world can be reduced to the point that is the self,

to the Drummond light raying itself on all things" (Schirmeister 64). Notably, Schirmeister is referring to *The Confidence Man* wherein Melville refers to character as "a revolving Drummond light, raying away from itself all round it" (Melville CM 14). The critic continues that "Melville carries the solipsistic reductions between self and world to an extreme that undoes the dialectic between inside and outside" (Schirmeister 65). In a later discussion it will become apparent that this "dialectic" is the life-line of the hero; it is the thread of Ariadne which Theseus (and later Ishmael) cling to in order to escape the labyrinth¹⁸, and it is the monkey-rope that forces Ishmael to place his life in the hands of Queequeg. Finally, it is the bond or line (mentioned above) offered by Pip but refused by the self-alienated captain. Ahab reduces reality to a mirror-like opacity by staring at the doubloon, as well as by gazing at the sea. Ishmael repeatedly observes how "Ahab for hours and hours would stand gazing dead to windward, while an occasional squall of sleet or snow would all but congeal his very eyelashes together" (Melville 202). However, the inside and outside dialect of the labyrinth is most apparent when Ahab ascends to the perch with

Starbuck *being the one who secured the rope at last; and afterwards stood near it.* And thus with one hand clinging round the royal mast, Ahab gazed abroad upon the sea for miles and miles, - ahead, astern, this side, and that, - within the wide expanded circle commanded at so great a height. (440)

Matthiessen refers to Ahab's solipsistic affirmation through vision as "a fearful symbol of the

¹⁸ Melville's note: "Arsacidean twine" as "a recollection of the way Theseus found his way back out of the Cretan labyrinth after killing the Minotaur." *Moby-Dick*, 375.

self-enclosed individualism that, carried to its furthest extreme, brings disaster both upon itself and upon the group of which it is a part" (Matthiessen 459). Ahab is a "self-appointed Messiah" (459) or false Christ whose whale line drags him to the heart of the labyrinth signalling a demonic parody of the thread of Ariadne - the line of Salvation.

Chapter 3 - The Titanic Descent Quest

The demonic descent is "a quest which, like death itself, must be carried out alone" (Frye WP 288). However, Frye continues that "there is still a more radical creative descent" (288) at the bottom of the night world which retraces the origins of wisdom and power. It is the area of *axis mundi* imagery sought by Frye which includes demonic as well as titanic elements in the quest. In the Bible, the titanic is identified with the demonic; creative energy threatens the Bible's ascendancy (276) and is associated with evil in the spirit of Blake's Antichrist (*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*) whose evil is "'the active springing from energy'" (278):

There is always a good deal of ambivalence about technological developments, both inside and outside the Bible, partly because a great deal of such development is inspired by war... destruction being the mother of invention... The release of titanic powers in man through invention is feared and dreaded at every stage in history, partly because technology... is readily projected as a mysterious, external and sinister force. (294-5)

The technology employed by the smith in mythology has a sinister reputation (296) which carries over to Perth (the blacksmith) in *Moby-Dick* who assists Ahab in forging his devilish

harpoon. Interestingly, Perth is an ironic type of Job figure; Melville thus aligns the Biblical taboo expressed towards the smith's creativity with the misfortunes suffered by a righteous man:

He had been an artisan of famed excellence, and with plenty to do; owned a house and garden; embraced a youthful, daughter-like, loving wife, and three blithe, ruddy children; every Sunday went to a cheerful-looking church, planted in a grove. But... the bellows fell; the forge choked up with cinders; the house was sold; the mother dived down into the long church-yard grass; her children twice followed her thither; and the houseless, familyless old man staggered off a vagabond in crape; his every woe unreverenced; his grey head a scorn to flaxen curls! (Melville 402).

This ironic treatment of the Joban theme in *Moby-Dick* points to the crucial inclusion of the titanic aspect of the quest, and the central influence of romance upon the author's adapted mythology. The "sin" of Prometheus is the transmission of "fire" which is man's primary means of technology. It is a "mysterious" and "sinister" sort of knowledge reminiscent of both the Edenic fall and the Biblical symbolism surrounding the mysteries of existence which are repeated in *Moby-Dick*.¹⁹

Significantly, Frye's observation that *Moby-Dick* is closer to the pattern of romance coincides with Melville's unorthodox version of Biblical myth which includes the titanic aspect of the quest:

¹⁹ See the discussion of Melville's treatment of the Biblical origins of the demonic. p. 12-13.

Themes of descent often turn on the struggle between the titanic and the demonic within the same person or group. In *Moby-Dick*, Ahab's quest for the whale may be mad and "monomaniacal," as it is frequently called, or even evil so far as he sacrifices his crew and ship to it, but evil or revenge are not the point of the quest. The whale itself may be only a "dumb brute," as the mate says, and even if it were malignantly determined to kill Ahab, such an attitude, in a whale hunted to the death, would certainly be understandable if it were there. What obsesses Ahab is in a dimension of reality much further down than any whale, in an amoral and alienating world that nothing normal in the human psyche can directly confront. (Frye WP 284)

Frye calls this "axial survey" the "ladder of lower wisdom," and calls Prometheus the presiding deity whose power underlies titanic or creative energy (277). Interestingly, the Bible places the titans of the "sexual" creation myth²⁰ in the purely demonic realm where they retire at the bottom of the night world. Alternately, in the tradition of romance, Melville designates Ahab as Prometheus and aligns him with the "artificial" creation myth.²¹ Frye asserts that "clearly one intention of the Eden story is to transfer all spiritual ascendancy of the pre-Biblical earth-

²⁰ "... creation myths are of two main types, depending on whether man is looking up or down from his middle earth... if we look down, we see the cycle of animal and plant life, and creation myths suggested by this would most naturally be sexual ones, focusing eventually on some kind of earth-mother... if we look up, we see, not different forms of life emerging, but the same sun rising in the east... an artificial creation myth, a world made, not born, and made by a conscious and planning intelligence. Such a myth tends to be associated with a sky-father..." *The Secular Scripture*, 112.

²¹ "The artificial myth won out in our tradition, and the lower world became demonized, the usual fate of mythological losers. But many echoes of a very different feeling about the lower world linger in romance." *The Secular Scripture*, 112-113.

goddess to a symbolically male Father-God associated with the heavens" (191). In *Moby-Dick*, Melville reasserts the significance of the Edenic myth in an adaptation of Prometheus who, according to Frye, is "part of a recurring structure in religion" (Frye PA 119). Prometheus of the Biblical "chaos archetype" (119) is displaced into a context which is exemplified by the fusion of Prometheus and Dionysus as "the fusion of reason and nature on a genuinely demonic level" (Frye WP 279). This is the Promethean *elan* or link between creation and destruction - that is, the titanic and demonic powers combined in the figure of the crucified titan tortured by a malicious sky-god.

Frye aligns Ahab's Prometheanism with the Gnostic belief that the order of nature is fundamentally corrupt (Frye PA 122). Thus, a God who would produce this order must be an evil God against whom Jesus of the Passion (and Prometheus) fought: "Ahab has the Promethean elements about him, but you'll notice that he gives up the central Promethean quest of the search for fire. He says that the right worship of fire is defiance" (123). However, I submit that the Gnostic element in *Moby-Dick* is most apparent in the Romantic theme of the "lost heir": "[those] who seem to be first in line for a divinely ordained inheritance, but are passed over for younger successors..." (Frye WP 282-3). Frye associates Ishmael's plight with the passing over of Lucifer by God the Father in honor of the newly begotten Christ (*Paradise Lost*, Book V). As Frye notes, the diabolism of Lucifer's heroic stature is directed against the sky-god of authoritarian Christianity and "idealizes a figure who partakes of human nature, including its evil aspects, on the ground that the moral conformity demanded by the sky-god deprives humanity of its essential creative energies" (282-3). Thus, the Bible's suppression of the titanic quest is linked to the mysteries of existence which guard the tree of Knowledge. The mystery

surrounding the missing quadrant of imagery in Genesis (discussed earlier) is central to both Ishmael's quest whose Biblical name symbolizes the struggle between demonic and titanic forces, and to Ahab's search for Leviathan as "the ultimate mystery of God's ways" (285). In the guise of the presiding deity of the titanic quest, Ahab's quest for Moby Dick is a struggle to know all that is deemed unknowable and called demonic to the comprehending powers of man.

Interestingly, Franklin observes that throughout the novel, several dragon-slaying myths are mentioned in relation to Moby Dick. That is, Melville makes an effort to assimilate god-images of many of the world's mythologies to the White Whale. For example, Moby Dick is declared to be "the incarnation of Vishnu... learnedly known as the Matse Avatar" (Melville 225). Next, the mad sailor Gabriel pronounces him "the Shaker God incarnated" (267), while on the first day of the chase he is likened to "Jove... [the] great majesty Supreme" (447). However, as Wright affirms on the topic of leviathan symbolism, Melville uses Biblical allusions as "the chief method of creating an extensive background for his narratives" (Wright 198). In fact, the nature of Ahab's quest demonstrates Melville's own dissatisfaction with the Bible's association of the titanic with the demonic or destructive impulse. As Young attests, the author dismisses both orthodox and liberal interpretations in search of deeper truths in the Bible (Young 390). Significantly, the critic continues that "the degree to which he succeeded is nowhere more evident than in his interpretation of Job's Leviathan" (390). Thus, Ahab is a "grey-headed, ungodly old man, chasing with curses a Job's whale round the world" (Melville 162), as God's example of incomprehensible wonder and might in the universe. Thornton Booth emphatically identifies Ahab with Job, stating that while Job submits to the whirlwind, Ahab does not yield to omnipotence in the storm (Booth 34). Booth concludes his study that Ahab has the greater

integrity (43) which is similar to Bloom's assertion that "Ahab, an authentic American, demands victory, rather than the great defeat of another Golgotha" (Bloom 5). However, I prefer Stout's assertion that Job's acceptance "is a sign of new wisdom rather than of abject surrender" (Stout 77). In this way, Ishmael's eventual dismissal of the monomaniac's relentless search for the White Whale (and by extension knowledge) better represents the entire story of Job including defiance, reconciliation, and perhaps even enlarged vision.

Stout also rightly observes that both Job and Ahab are destined to fail because they seek to apply human standards to the workings of the universe (77). Thus, Frye asserts that "God starts from the most obvious feature in the situation: the fact that Job does not understand it" (Frye WP 311). Job first invokes Leviathan as a monster opposed to divine rule suggesting that God should do battle with evil instead of with man (Job 3:8). Similarly, Ahab misinterprets his situation and believes that he cries out against divine injustice. As Young affirms, "Ahab traces the actions of Moby Dick to his Creator and views the whale's malevolence as indicating an essential corruption at the heart of the universe" (Young 393). To Ahab, the White Whale is an instrument of a malign god to which he attributes his suffering and symbolically the suffering of the whole world:

All that most maddens and torments; all that stirs up the lees of things; all truth with malice in it; all that cracks the sinews and cakes the brain; all the subtle demonisms of life and thought; all evil, to crazy Ahab, were visibly personified, and made practically assailable in Moby Dick. He piled upon the whale's white hump the sum of all the general rage and hate felt by his whole race from Adam down... (Melville 160)

Although Job sees the forces of evil prevailing in the world, he does not conclude with Ahab that God is the ultimate source of evil. Job also later repents when confronted by the power and ultimate mystery of God, while Ahab accepts his retrograde status and is "intent on an audacious, immitigable, and supernatural revenge" (162). At this point, Chase attests that

[Ahab] is no longer the true Prometheus, but the false; he is no longer Christ; but Caesar; he is no longer Orpheus, whose subtle lute led men out of their primitive status into the motion of growth, but the tyrant captain. No longer can he oppose the divine Tyrant with the only weapon which can defeat him; for now Ahab must play the game of the Tyrant. (Chase 54)

Ahab's assertion of the Promethean *elan* or creative principle against the divine subverts his quest into a demonic pursuit, as a result of the limited perspective employed in the interpretation of Leviathan. As Young points out, "it is from a human perspective that Leviathan takes on the mythic dimensions of a monster of chaos. Job has invoked the mythic Leviathan, but God's response deflates the myth" (Young 390). Thus, Yahweh responds to Job's initial taunt that Leviathan is part of the created order and therefore man's adversary alone (391):

'Can you pull in the leviathan
with a fishhook
or tie down his tongue with a rope?'
(Job 41:1-2)

Man is forced into a battle with the natural world, and while Job relents, Ahab remains obstinate

and perishes not in a cosmic confrontation but at the hands of the White Whale on a relentless sea. Notably, Ishmael echoes the Book of Job in his contemplation of whaling and the immensity of the *Pequod's* quest in the natural world: "To grope down into the bottom of the sea after them; to have one's hands among the unspeakable foundations, ribs, and very pelvis of the world; this is a fearful thing. *What am I that I should essay to hook the nose of this leviathan*" (Melville 118)(italics mine).

Significantly, the motif of fishing and hooking the Leviathan symbolizes the descent of the hero, Christ, into the "whale-dragon" Satan to rescue the redeemed people or Bride, the Church:

The leviathan is usually a sea-monster, which means metaphorically that he *is* the sea, and the prophecy that the Lord will hook and land the leviathan in Ezekiel is identical with the prophecy in Revelation that there shall be no more sea. As denizens of his belly, therefore, we are also metaphorically under water. (Frye AC 191).

Frye also refers to an undisplaced version or "death-and-rebirth form of the dragon quest [which] is a descent through his open mouth into his belly and back out again, the theme that appears in the biblical story of Jonah and is later applied to Christ's descent into hell" (Frye SS 119). I associate Frye's undisplaced form of the myth with Jungian interpretation which focuses on the psychological meaning of the Jonah story, as well as the archetypal motif of which it is an example. In *Symbols of Transformation*, Jung cites Frobenius who describes the myth of the hero being devoured by a monster:

A hero is devoured by a water-monster in the West. The animal travels with him (inside) to the East. Meanwhile, the hero lights a fire in the belly of the monster, and feeling hungry, cuts himself a piece of the heart. Soon afterwards, he notices that the fish has glided onto dry land; he immediately begins to cut open the animal from within; then he slips out... The hero may at that time free all those who were previously devoured by the monster. (Jung ST 210).

Edinger points out that for Jung, the monster represents "unconscious psychic energy in its natural state" (Edinger 36). However, more important are the formal features of the worldwide myth which are repeated in Frye's account of Christian mythology and present in *Moby-Dick*: the typical hero is engulfed by a "monster"; he struggles and then proceeds to attack and sever the vital organ from within so that he can liberate those who are imprisoned in the "monster's" belly. Although the connection to Jung remains speculative, Frye's Christian framework deals with the same mythological motif of the dragon-slaying hero:

Now if the leviathan is the whole fallen world of sin and death and tyranny into which Adam fell, it follows that Adam's children are born, live, and die inside his belly. Hence if the Messiah is to deliver us by killing the leviathan, he releases us... Again, if we are inside the dragon, and the hero comes to help us, the image is suggested of the hero going down the monster's throat, like Jonah (whom Jesus accepted as a prototype of himself), and returning with his redeemed behind him. (Frye AC 190)

Significantly, Adams points out that for Jung the most fundamental complex is the phenomenon of engulfment (Adams 171). In accordance with Frye's Biblical typology, the hero is also

swallowed whole which I align with the theme of engulfment underlying the most fundamental fear of annihilation threatening the "peg-leg" Ahab and the sailor Ishmael.²² However, in his discussion of *Moby-Dick*, Adams refers to Jung's more obscure "Jonah-and-the-Whale complex" and attests that the "whale-dragon" can also partially engulf the hero. That is, a part can symbolize the whole (synecdoche) such as Ahab's leg which is devoured by Moby Dick. In Jung, the hero who struggles with the monster and is not overcome wins the hoard:

If a man is a hero, he is a hero because, in the final reckoning, he did not let the monster devour him, but subdued it, not once but many times... Anyone who... lets himself be devoured by the monster - and vanishes in it, attains the treasure that the dragon guards, but he does so in spite of himself and to his own greatest harm. (Jung RE 169)

Ahab descends to the place of the hoard but cannot salvage the buried treasure; he is devoured by the monster and exposes both himself and his crew to the "greatest harm." In the first passage I cited by Jung, the devoured hero travels toward the east in the belly of the monster. However, Ahab cannot settle the account from the inside and proceeds in pursuit of the White Whale with his course "due eastward for the earliest sun" (Melville 460). Ahab predicts to meet Moby Dick "on the Line" (at the equinox when the equator intersects the ecliptic) when the sun is in Pisces. Adams points out that the sign of the fish is also "the sign of the prophet Jonah" (Adams 175) which again links Ahab's quest for Moby Dick to the Biblical leviathan. He points to Jung's assertion that Pisces may derive from a myth "about a heroic night journey and

²² See the discussion of Ishmael's darkest horror on the masthead; the fear of engulfment and nonbeing, as he ponders his near plunge into the boundless sea. p. 27.

conquest of death, where the hero is swallowed by a fish ('whale-dragon') and is then reborn" (Jung ST 211). I submit that Jung's assertion corresponds with Frye's emphasis on Jonah as a "prototype" of Christ the "Ichthys," who stands in opposition to Leviathan, the Antichrist. Notably, the story of Jonah alludes to the day of Judgment prophesied in Isaiah which Melville sources in his *Extracts*: "In that day, the Lord with his sore, and great, and strong sword, shall punish Leviathan the piercing serpent, even Leviathan that crooked serpent; and he shall slay the dragon [Vulgate: whale] that is in the sea" (Melville 2).

The solar nocturne of Jonah's night sea journey and the image of Pisces which corresponds to Ahab's prediction of "a particular set time and place... when all possibilities would become probabilities" (173), suggests that Ahab is a Christ figure fated to do battle with the immortal Leviathan. As Chase affirms, "the memory of the true Savior remains, though obscurely, in Ahab's personality; he works out his fated failure with the ghostly scaffolding of the Savior's career on earth" (Chase 44). Accordingly, Ahab "lay[s] like dead for three days and nights" (Melville 87) and is then reborn. Similarly, "moody stricken Ahab [stands before his crew] with a crucifixion in his face" (111), and claims to wear the "Iron Crown of Lombardy" which (according to Melville's note) is "said to contain a nail from the Cross" (147). However, as I noted above, Ahab is a false hero who attacks from the outside and cannot pierce Leviathan's impenetrable surface to the core. That is, the true hero does not attempt to catch the fish at a safe distance, but exposes himself by lunging down the throat of the monster. Significantly, this central movement is symbolized by Ahab's final toss of his devilish harpoon: "Towards thee I roll, thou all destroying but unconquering whale; to the last I grapple with thee; from hell's heart I stab at thee; for hate's sake I spit my last breath at thee" (468). However,

Ahab's resolve to "sink all coffins and all hearses to one common pool... [and] let them tow to pieces" affirms his status as a false prophet and false Christ who dooms his people to destruction rather than redeeming them from death.

Adams rightly observes that "if Ahab were really the crucified, he would bait a hook with his own body... Ahab, however, is a harpooner, not a compleat angler" (Adams 175). This notion of baiting the hook with the self is apparent in "Leg and Arm" where Ahab sights another whaling ship and hails captain Boomer, who has recently lost his arm to the White Whale. The peg-leg captain of the *Pequod* cannot climb up the rope-ladder let down from the ship's deck, and so a huge whaling tackle and blubber hook is lowered to make the "catch." In a gesture toward self-baiting, Ahab "slid[es] his solitary thigh into the curve of the hook" (Melville 364) and is hoisted up to the deck. In the ensuing discussion about Boomer's battles with the White Whale, the captain attests, "'Moby Dick doesn't bite so much as he swallows'" to which the ship's surgeon then adds, "'Well then... give him your left arm for bait to get the right'" (368). Again, Adams suggests that "if Ahab were a true Christ, he would take Bunker's advice and bait a blubber-hook with the only leg he has left; Moby Dick would rise to the bait, and Ahab would have an opportunity to retrieve his lost leg and hook the Leviathan" (Adams 177). The true hero baits the hook with his own body, and is not devoured even when engulfed by the monster. Hence, the true hero is Christ alone who survives the quest in order to emerge from the depths of the monster along with the Redeemed (the Church). Finally, I agree with Adams' assertion that if Ahab were not a false Christ the novel would have an altogether different ending, and that it is the possibility of "messianic resolution" to the plot which makes *Moby-Dick* such a tragedy (177).

Frye expands upon the dragon-slaying motif and the central movement of the true hero, stating that "if the leviathan is death, and the hero has to enter the body of death, the hero has to die, and if his quest is completed the final stage of it is, cyclically, rebirth, and, dialectically, resurrection" (Frye AC 192). In *Moby-Dick*, there are several occurrences which follow descent and ascent patterns symbolic of the quest hero's archetypal route. For example, Queequeg rescues men twice physically and once symbolically from fatal descents. First, on the schooner bound for Nantucket, Queequeg rescues a hapless traveller who has fallen overboard:

The greenhorn had gone down... Queequeg now took an instant's glance around him, and seeming to see just how matters were, dived down and disappeared. A few minutes more, and he *rose again*, one arm still *striking out*, and with the other dragging a lifeless form... The poor bumpkin was restored. (Melville 61)(italics mine)

Next, Ishmael describes Queequeg's rescue of Tashtego who takes a fatal plunge into the "Heidelburgh Tun" of a whale:

... poor, buried alive Tashtego was sinking utterly down to the bottom of the sea... The next, a loud splash announced that my brave Queequeg had dived to the rescue... we saw an arm thrust upright from the blue waves; a sight strange to see, as an arm thrust from the grass over a grave... and soon after, Queequeg was seen boldly *striking out* with one hand, and with the other clutching the long hair of the Indian. (289)(italics mine)

I propose that in each rescue the symbolism of the descent into the labyrinthine leviathan, and the loss of the self (and by extension original identity until redeemed by Christ) is apparent in

the figure of Queequeg. Finally, the casket built for the harpooner's body and converted into a life-buoy escapes the whirlpool and "owing to its great buoyancy, *rising with great force...* [shoots] lengthwise from the sea, [falls] over, and float[s] by [Ishmael's] side" (470)(italics mine). Significantly, Queequeg copies from his body to the lid of the coffin the "hieroglyphic marks" bearing "a complete theory of the heavens and the earth, and a mystical treatise on the art of attaining truth" (399). However, these mysteries are "destined in the end to moulder away with the living parchment whereon they [are] inscribed" (399) until the coming of the true Messiah who will be engulfed but not devoured, and so redeem God's people - Israel, the Bride of Christ.

The image of the spiral or maelstrom is closely related to the crucifixion and resurrection motif in the novel. The *Pequod* descends beneath the surface of the ocean with the final image of "a red arm and a hammer hover[ing] backwardly uplifted in the open air, in the act of nailing the flag faster and yet faster to the subsiding spar" (469). This final image of Tashtego's arm breaking the surface recalls the image of Queequeg's arm in each of his rescues (outlined above) "striking out" and ascending from the "dead." Thus, Ishmael revolves around the whirlpool "like another Ixion" (470) symbolizing the descent and ascent of Christ, while also recalling God's speech to Job out of a spiral whirlwind. Notably, Ixion is a figure in Greek myth who is bound to a fiery wheel that revolves eternally as a punishment from Zeus for attempting to seduce Hera. Thus, by evoking the image in his own narrative, Ishmael in a sense reprimands himself in his descent and ascent for resembling the pattern of Christ. Edinger points to the spiral as a circular movement toward or away from any axis, asserting that "it is an apt symbol for the process of individuation, which is a kind of circumambulation in ever smaller circles of

the Self" (Edinger 139). Thus, I submit that Ishmael's shedding of the ego or false image of Christ is represented through the axis or spiral which is a symbol of the Self. Ishmael does not desire to be god-like, but rather communicates a vision of human progress that remains incomplete. In the retelling of his tale, the narrator declares, "God keep me from ever completing anything. This whole book is but a draught - nay, but the draught of a draught" (Melville 128). Ishmael declares that "the truest of all men was the Man of Sorrows, and the truest of all books is Solomon's, and Ecclesiastes is the fine hammered steel of woe. 'All is vanity.' All" (355). Thus, the narrator's reality is embraced in cyclical images which express the futility of man's earthly efforts: "There is no steady unretracing progress in this life; we do not advance through fixed gradations, and at the last one pause... but once through, we trace the round again" (324).

Edinger continues that "Moby Dick is the fiery wheel of torment to which Ahab was bound by his inflated identification with deity" (Edinger 139). The critic points to Jung's assertion that the separation of the ego from the original state requires the enduring of a wound (141). I associate this psychological fact with Frye who connects fishing in the Gospels both with Adam, and with the impotent "fisher king" in *The Waste Land*:

The ritual analogies of the myth suggest that the monster *is* the sterility of the land itself, and that the sterility of the land is present in the age and impotence of the king, who is sometimes suffering from an incurable malady or wound... as close to castration symbolically as it is anatomically. (Frye AC 189)

Ahab loses his leg to Moby Dick which results in a second and more mysterious wound which

symbolizes Adam's fall from Eden and the loss of original identity: "... he had been found one night lying prone upon the ground, and insensible; by some unknown, and seemingly inexplicable, unimaginable casualty, his ivory limb having been so violently displaced, that it had stake-wise smitten, and all but pierced his groin..." (Melville 385). Ahab's wound to the groin is inextricably related to the quest for Knowledge which is first symbolized by Medieval Grail quests.²³ In *From Ritual to Romance*, Jessie Weston rewrites the saga of the fisher king: the story describes a curse which blights the entire kingdom with sterility due to evil acts (the rape of maidens) committed in the royal courts. However, the curse extends beyond the desolation of the country and the lost virility of the inhabitants, as the kingdom also suffers the loss of "the knowledge of good and evil" resulting in a desolation of body and mind (Weston 121). I equate the fisher king's loss of Knowledge with Ahab's lost awareness of a paradisaal vision²⁴ which is responsible for the abandonment of the quest for original identity. The captain of the *Pequod* is the impotent fisher king whose land (the sea) has been blighted by a curse which afflicts the rest of the crew. Moby Dick swims before each sailor in the form of a "flitting apparition... treacherously beckoning [them] on and on... [while] strange forms in the water [dart] hither and thither" (Melville 201) in the enchanted waters where the spell cannot be broken. Significantly, the albatross is a symbol of the mysterious Knowledge of the divine which is lost in the world of ordinary experience. As Ishmael attests, "I remember the first albatross I ever saw... Through its inexpressible, strange eyes, methought I peeped to secrets which took

²³ "Lance and grail, at least in the Grail's developed form as a chalice or cup, have an analogy to male and female genital organs." *The Secular Scripture*, 121.

²⁴ See the discussion of Ahab's fatal plunge in the position of the Antichrist in pursuit of a false identity or antithetical quest for original identity. p. 19-20.

hold of God" (165). Thus, in the tradition of Coleridge's *Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner*, the crew of the *Pequod* is ill-fated for the crimes of the monomaniac fisher king and his blasphemous pursuit of the White Whale.²⁵

At this point in the titanic descent, Frye turns to an undisplaced form of the Theseus myth where the monster is no longer the sterility of the land,²⁶ but rather a macrocosmic world of dark caves and shadows representing the bowels or belly of the Leviathan. Frye points to the "pure" or Classical myth which has a "positive analogy" in the descent and ascent of Jonah and Christ for the sake of the Redeemed:

The image of the dark winding labyrinth for the monster's belly is a natural one, and one that frequently appears in heroic quests, notably that of Theseus. A less displaced version of the story of Theseus would have shown him emerging from the labyrinth at the head of a procession of the Athenian youths and maidens previously sacrificed to the Minotaur. (Frye AC 190)

Significantly, the image of the labyrinth of Cretan legend recurs throughout *Moby-Dick*. For example, Ishmael describes that "the counterpane was of patchwork, full of odd little parti-colored squares and triangles; and this arm of [Queequeg's] tatooed all over with an interminable Cretan labyrinth of a figure" (Melville 32). I have argued elsewhere that the anatomy of the

²⁵ "[The Leviathan] also seems closely associated with the natural sterility of the fallen world, with the blasted world of struggle and poverty and disease into which Job is hurled by Satan and Adam by the serpent in Eden." *Anatomy of Criticism*, 189.

²⁶ In *The Waste Land*, Eliot recalls the Biblical image of physical and spiritual sterility in *The Valley of Dry Bones* (Ezekiel 37) which Melville projects to some extent upon the sea.

Leviathan also recalls the image of a labyrinth, though again it is notable that the specific mythical reference is to the maze of Cretan design: "Between his ribs and on each side of his spine he is supplied with a remarkable involved Cretan labyrinth of vermicelli-like vessels, which vessels, when he quits the surface, are completely distended with oxygenated blood... The anatomical fact of this labyrinth is indisputable" (311). In an article on Frye's archetypal labyrinth, "The Image of Lost Direction," Fletcher examines the meaning of the Cretan model which provides the original labyrinth for Western literature (Fletcher 332). He discusses the mythos attached to the Cretan legend and its several stories involving Theseus, Aegeus, Ariadne, Daedalus, Minos, and the Minotaur. According to Fletcher, the labyrinth has a single point of entrance, and while direction keeps changing it offers no choice of path from the entrance to the center, and back to the outside again (334). Thus, it appears that the traveller has no choice of direction and can only decide whether to stop or to keep moving (334). Notably, the suggestion that the labyrinth offers no freedom of movement corresponds to Edinger's Jungian view that "when crucial inner development is involved, there can be no freedom of choice; one must choose the necessary and inevitable; failure to so choose amounts to a regression, with perhaps fatal psychic consequences" (Edinger 38). However, instead of regression, I prefer to associate the single choice in the maze with Frye's version of the "freezing" or "paralysis" which besets Theseus in Greek myth and is related to the descent theme of metamorphosis (Frye SS 116-117). Fletcher calls it "a labyrinth of iron determinism" (Fletcher 335) which forces the hero to follow the correct path to the center and back out again. Interestingly, the critic notes that the above material regarding the peculiar nature of the labyrinth is relatively common knowledge:

The Cretan design passes down the centuries as an intact geometrical shape... its

significance depended upon its seven "rings," with their permutations to larger numbers, with varied angular shapings (e.g., rectangular shapes, or polygons) yet never losing the one cardinal property of preventing the traveller from straying from the single possible path to the centre. (336)

Hence, I submit that Melville's specific reference to Queequeg's "squares and triangles" (as well as the several other references to the labyrinth of Cretan design) is made in the knowledge of the peculiar direction image being invoked throughout the novel.

In "A Bower in the Arsacides," Ishmael likens his progress through a labyrinthine whale skeleton to "the way Theseus found his way out of the Cretan labyrinth" (Melville's note)(Melville 375). The narrator describes his struggle to find the single entrance and exist to the maze:

To and fro I paced before this skeleton - brushed the vines aside - broke through the ribs and with a ball of Arsacidean twine, wandered, eddied long amid its many winding, shaded colonnades and arbors. But soon my line was out; and following it back, I emerged from the opening where I entered. (375)

However, as Fletcher astutely observes, the traveller cannot get lost; the thread only serves an orienting purpose for the traveller who traverses a true *intrico* type maze (Fletcher 335). The critic continues that the traveller suffers a quite different sort of disorientation: the road still exists though the traveller has lost sight of it (335), just as Ahab loses sight of the true quest for authentic identity in his symbolic descent into a labyrinth of self. Accordingly, it is only possible

to escape the Minotaur (the hero's dark shadow) through a transforming vision (reminiscent of Job) which reveals the true road once again. Fletcher attests that two points designating the "path of life" cease to provide orientation (330) until life becomes a set of labyrinths unfolding in time. Thus, the line of Aracidean twine represents the defeat of discontinuity (338); Theseus (and Ishmael) cling to the line in order to maintain contact with the outside world, or symbolically remain outside of the maze. Earlier in this discussion I called it the "line of salvation" or life-line of the hero²⁷ which prevents a solipsistic reduction between self and world throughout the hero's descent. Fletcher affirms this view, stating that Frye's "image of lost direction" results when the hero fails to bridge the chasm between inside and outside the labyrinth (338). Thus, the hero requires not a sense of direction, but a symbolic link or marriage with the outside while in the maze.

In the discussion of Frye's third group of *axis mundi* imagery, I argued that the demonic version of the memory leaves only a shadow of the self which abandons the authentic identity quest.²⁸ For Ahab, a false quest results out of this "error" which Frye calls "the opposite or parody of truth" (Frye SS 142). Again, I associate Frye's "collapse of the rightful order in the mind" (104) with Fletcher's study of the Cretan labyrinth where memory fails to work and the monster in the maze is "Error"; "a terrifying, self-consuming dragoness of convoluted, deformed thoughts" (Fletcher 339). The maze induces a dangerous forgetfulness: Theseus forgets Ariadne on the island of Naxos, and then forgets to hoist the white sail to signal victory to his despairing

²⁷ See the discussion of the hero's dialectical relations. p. 30-31.

²⁸ See the discussion of the third group of *axis mundi* imagery: the descent from the world of "ordinary experience" beginning with the fall of Adam and Eve. p. 16.

father Aegeus, who throws himself into the sea. Thus, Ahab becomes lost in a labyrinthine world of forgetfulness where he is doomed to repeat his errors in a nightmarish realm where there is no continuity with the past. He cannot learn from each near fatal encounter with the White Whale, but must continue the mad pursuit with a false sense of fate. However, as Fletcher argues, this "lost direction" can be superseded by a "found direction" on a higher level which achieves continuity with the past:

In its pure form it is a flat layout, a plane figure, in which all choices of change of direction are made in a two-dimensional space. Daedalus, the inventor of the maze, knew about this inherent property of his invention. Thus, when imprisoned there by Minos, he adds a knowing third dimension, and flies out. (339)

Daedalus learns not to rely upon the memory in the dark labyrinthine world, and so experiences a transforming vision which allows him to see the road anew. I submit that the point of Daedalus' ancient method of escape is the provision of a "positive analogy" to Job's transforming vision as outlined by Frye:

[God] answers Job by recapitulating his original creation in the form of a vision which is held up in front of Job in the present. Job is not allowed to look back to a chain of causation in the past, which would be a matter of relying on the wrong type of memory. He has reached the end of his narrative in his present situation, and must now look up and down. What he sees is the good creation in its original unspoiled form: at one pole there is the intelligible harmony when the morning stars sang together; at the other is the leviathan who is king over all the children of pride (41:34). (Frye WP 311)

In effect, Daedalus reaches the end of his "narrative," or life; he looks up and flies out of the maze by adding a vertical dimension to a limited horizontal construct. On this higher level, the prevailing quality in the maze is an excessive "presentness"; the present becomes the summation of an infinite past. The hero conquers the demonic memory and the monster of "Error" who devours those who remain disillusioned in the maze.

Significantly, without referring to a specific narrative Fletcher expands on the sort of escape required from a labyrinthine sea:

When a fourth dimension of time is added to the thinking of the maze, the traveller is able to know where he entered, what directional changes he has made by following the thread, what is the orientation of these changes, and what is the amount of total sum of movements. This is precisely the kind of information required by an ocean voyager, if he is to travel toward any destination across a vast, undifferentiated plain of the sea.
(Fletcher 340)

In *Moby-Dick*, the severing of Ahab's "line" is symbolized by the loss of his leg to Moby Dick, while his refusal to grasp a replacement line is apparent in his rejection of Pip and Starbuck's attempts to achieve a symbolic union.²⁹ Ahab refuses any assistance in his attempt to chart the White Whale amidst a "heartless immensity" of ocean:

Ahab thus pondered over his charts. Almost every night they were brought out; almost

²⁹ See the discussion of Ahab's severed leg indicating a severed world, and Pip's attempt to replace the leg and form a bond or marriage of disparate selves. See also the discussion of Ahab's confession and brief union with Starbuck. p. 17-18.

every night some pencil marks were effaced, and others were substituted. For with the charts of all four oceans before him, Ahab was *threading a maze of currents and eddies*, with a view to the more certain accomplishment of that monomaniac thought of his soul. (Melville 171)(italics mine)

Frye continues that this part of the quest is characterized by increasing alienation and loneliness of the hero (Frye SS 115). Thus, in his cabin at night lonely Ahab predicts the course of Moby Dick across a boundless sea without the information provided by the "fourth dimension" or vertical perspective. In fact, Ahab's attempt to find Moby Dick recalls Frye's assertion that "in ordinary life there are two central data of experience that we cannot see without external assistance: our own faces and our own existence in time. To see the first we have to look in a mirror, and to see the second we have to look at the dial of a clock" (117). The notion of seeing the face by looking at its reflection is related to the Narcissus commentary of the descent, while seeing our own existence in time is the affirmation of self and completion of the quest. As I have argued above, the entire crew engages in the act of water-gazing in an attempt to affirm their positive existence and so shun the possibility of eternal negation represented by the monster in the maze. The quest for Moby Dick is the search for the "vertical dimension"; that is, a redeeming vision which shall enable each individual to overcome their identity crisis and (like Daedalus) escape the labyrinth of self. Ishmael senses the struggle of vertical and horizontal forces aboard the *Pequod*:

The strange, upheaving, lifting tendency of the taffrail breeze filling the hollows of so many sails, made the buoyant, hovering deck to feel like air beneath the feet; while still

she rushed along, as if two antagonistic influences were struggling in her - one to mount direct to heaven, the other to drive yawningly to some horizontal goal. (Melville 200)

Ishmael realizes the potential in such vision and attests, "would I could mount that whale and leap the topmost skies, to see whether the fabled heavens with all their countless tents really lie encamped beyond my mortal sight!" (233). Notably, Frye asserts that the night world is a world of objectifying images which take on "a good deal of importance" (Frye SS 117). In this way, I suggest that Ahab's quadrant is the "dial" on Frye's clock which the monomaniac captain dashes in a declaration of his refusal to "live" vertically:

'Science! Curse thee, thou vain toy; and cursed be all the things that cast man's eyes aloft to that heaven, whose live vividness but scorches him, as these old eyes are even now scorched with thy light, O Sun! Level by nature to this earth's horizon are the glances of man's eyes; not shot from the crown of his head, as if God had meant him to gaze on his firmament.' (Melville 412)

Ahab rejects all vision except that which is level with the horizon, declaring himself "lord of the level loadstone" (425). The potential for a redeeming vision is annihilated because he sees only linearly and refuses the line of Ariadne which shows the way up and out of the maze.

Frye continues that not only clocks and mirrors appear as objectifying images, but humans are objectified and dehumanized into "something subintelligent and subarticulate" (Frye SS 116). Thus, Ishmael says that "[Pip] saw God's foot upon the treadle of the loom, and spoke it; and therefore his shipmates called him mad" (Melville 347). In his madness, Pip is driven to silence; solitude turns into a castigation of self and a driving out of speech. Pip descends to

the hoards of wisdom, but when he returns he is inarticulate and appears to ramble like an idiot before the rest of the crew: "‘And I, you, and he; and we, ye, and they, are all bats; and I’m a crow, especially when I stand a’top of this pine tree here. Caw! caw! caw! caw! caw! caw! Ain’t I a crow?’" (362). Frye argues that such a mutation in speech indicates an identification of human and animal natures (Frye SS 118) which corresponds once again to the Theseus myth in its most undisplaced form:

At the bottom of the night world we find the cannibal feast, the serving up of a child or lover as food... Theseus puts an end to the offering of young Athenians to the Minotaur in the underground labyrinth of Crete... At the furthest remove from this we find a demonic parody of the same image, the bestial conjunction, usually, of a male animal and a human female. Thus the Minotaur was the result of the impregnating of Pasiphae by a bull. (118)

The identification of human and animal is also present in the metamorphosis motif⁵⁰ which is central to the underlying quest for the "misermernan, Wisdom" whose "hoarded heaps" (Melville 347) await the hero at the bottom of the night world. In his discussion of *Moby-Dick*, Olson refers to the story of a fisherman from Boeotia named Glaucus who finds an herb to revive fish (whales) that are stranded ashore. According to the legend, Glaucus eats the herb himself and experiences a metamorphosis into half fish, half man (Olson 113). Olson rightly

⁵⁰ "The image of the hunter pursuing an animal is never very far from metamorphosis... metamorphoses are the normal transformations of the structure of myth. Every aspect of fall or descent is linked to a change in form in some way, usually by associating or identifying a human or humanized figure with something animal or vegetable." *The Secular Scripture*, 105.

observes that the sea creature is the "misermerman" that Pip meets at the bottom of the ocean, which is also the Biblical leviathan itself. Thus, Pip says of Ahab and the doubloon, "'Ha, ha! old Ahab! the White Whale; he'll nail ye... Oh, the gold! the precious, precious gold! - the green miser'll hoard ye soon'" (Melville 363). For Pip, the half-human, half-animal monster (Leviathan) in the maze is analogous to the "green miser" or misermerman whose hoarded heaps Ahab seeks to raise from the depths. Adams affirms this view, stating that "in iconographic terms the merman is equivalent, in every essential respect, to Jonah and the Whale" (Adams 172). As Frye himself attests, "the dragon guarding the hoard, is... lineally descended from the sea monster of many myths who has swallowed all the water in the world, and continues to devour all the youth and beauty it can get" (Frye SS 121). Hence, Pip ascends to the depths and sees Jonah and the whale; the Biblical Leviathan and the fallen world of man which is equivalent to the belly or bowels of the whale.

The treasure hoard also refers to "wealth in its ideal forms, power and wisdom" (Frye AC 193) which must be sought in the depths that are inhabited by the great Leviathans alone. Thus, Ahab's "curiosity touching [the] leviathan" (Melville 228) is revealed in his mutterings to the severed head of a captured whale: "'Speak, thou vast and venerable head... and tell us the secret thing that is in thee. Of all divers, thou has dived the deepest'" (264). Similarly, Ishmael associates the pursuit of wisdom with the sounding of Leviathans at sea:

... the Vedas, or mystical books, whose perusal would seem to have been indispensable to Vishnoo before beginning the creation... were lying at the bottom of the waters; so Vishnoo became incarnate in a whale, and sounding down in him to the uttermost depths, rescued the sacred volumes. (306)

As Chase attests, "the inscrutable secrecy, the profound wisdom of God are in Moby Dick" (Chase 51). However, I submit that the secrets of creation or mysteries of existence can only be discovered by experiencing the essence that the whale is said to embody. In "A Squeeze of the Hand," Ishmael thinks he captures this essence in the act of squeezing spermacetti: "'I declare to you, that for the time I lived in a musky meadow; I forgot all about our horrible oath; in that inexpressible sperm, I washed my hands and my heart of it... I felt divinely free..." (Melville 348). However, Lukacs comments on the narrator's false sense of freedom, stating that Ishmael's "abandonment of the time and the place" (163) is itself rooted in time and place (Lukacs 150). In essence, Ishmael attempts to reaffirm the self by transcending his own sense of being while constrained by the human limitations of time and space in the role of narrator. Accordingly, I argue that Ishmael experiences a false transcendence which eventually threatens to engulf or squeeze the self "universally into the very milk and sperm" (Melville 349) of "otherness." The dangers of participating so fully in the "other" is also revealed in "The Monkey-Rope," where Queequeg's slightest error while fixing a blubber hook into a captured whale threatens a plunge for both men into a shark-infested sea. Ishmael's identity is threatened when his self dissipates into the "other" with the declaration, "my free will had received a mortal wound... that another's mistake or misfortune might plunge innocent me into unmerited disaster and death" (271). Notably, Ishmael's extensive study of whale cetology also fails to lead the narrator to the discovery of truth and remains "only an opinion" (259). Thus, he later concludes all of his detailed dissections of Leviathans, stating that "dissect him how I may, then, I but go skin deep; I know him not, and never will" (318). To the narrator, the "phantom demon" swims before any artist as "unknown Archipelagoes, and impenetrable Japans" (400):

... the great Leviathan is that one creature in the world which must remain unpainted to the last. True, one portrait may hit the mark much nearer than another, but none can hit it with any very considerable degree of exactness. So there is no earthly way of finding out precisely what the whale really looks like. And the only mode in which you can derive even a tolerable idea of his living contour, is by going a whaling yourself; but by so doing, you run no small risk of being eternally stove and sunk by him. Wherefore, it seems to me you had best not be too fastidious in your curiosity touching this Leviathan. (228)

Ishmael's warning that man's curiosity will lead to his downfall recalls the "fatal curiosity"³¹ associated with original sin, and the "desire to know" which results in the Edenic Fall. In fact, the narrator attests that "only in the heart of quickest perils; only when within the eddyings of his angry flukes; only on the profound unbounded sea, can the fully invested whale be truly and livingly found out" (378). Ishmael discovers that to know the whale means to hunt the Leviathan in its habitat which is fatal to man: "our souls are like those orphans whose unwedded mothers die in bearing them: the secret of our paternity lies in their grave, and we must there to learn it" (406). Significantly, in his fatal descent Ishmael imagines the Leviathan itself to declare that "thou shalt see my back parts, my tail... but *my face shall not be seen*" (318)(italics mine). I associate the taboo surrounding the sighting of the Leviathan with the warning in Exodus that man's desire to know God fully or to be "God-like" is punishable by

³¹ See the discussion of Frye's motif of "fatal curiosity" and vision in relation to Ahab who desires an "omniscient" view of the world. p. 23-24. See also Ishmael's warning regarding the "over-curious hunter". p. 25-26.

death: "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live... you will see my back; *but my face must not be seen*" (Exodus 33:20-23)(italics mine). Hence, in *Moby-Dick*, to know the whale and the secrets manifested in its mysterious being is to hunt the whale by sounding to fatal depths where no man can raise the "hoarded heaps." In this respect, Starbuck recognizes what Chase refers to as "the horror... of God as tyrant and annihilator... in Moby Dick" (Chase 51). Thus, he pleads to Ahab, "'Shall we be dragged by him to the bottom of the sea? Shall we be towed by him to the infernal world? Oh, oh, - Impiety and blasphemy to hunt him more!'" (Melville 459). The truth which the Leviathan bears has the potential to either transform the hero's ego into an authentic self, or to subvert it into insanity. In accordance with Frye's Biblical typology, "man's insanity is heaven's sense" (347); whereas the false hero is doomed to perish, only Christ (the true hero) can descend into the whale's belly without being devoured by "that Celestial thought" (347).

Frye notes that "when it is wisdom that is sought in the lower world, it is almost always wisdom connected with the anxiety of death in some form or other, along with *the desire to know what lies beyond* (Frye SS 122)(italics mine). Ahab himself declares that his pursuit of the whale is an attempt to discover truth in the universe by striking through the "pasteboard masks" at what lies beyond:

'Hark ye yet again, - the little lower layer. All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks. But in each event - in the living act, the undoubted deed - there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask. If man will strike, strike through the mask! How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall? To me, the white whale is that wall,

shoved near to me. Sometimes I think there's naught beyond. But 'tis enough. (Melville 144)

The monomaniac captain abhors visible objects and wishes to get beyond to the living act which he thinks is fraught with meaning. To Ahab, "some certain significance lurks in all things, else all things are little worth, and the round globe itself but an empty cipher" (358). Thus, he declares, "'Oh! how immaterial are all materials! What things real are there, but imponderable thoughts?'" (432-33). In "The Grand Armada," Ishmael *looks down* and beholds a vision of primal creation beyond the visible surface of "things":

But far beneath this wondrous world upon the surface, another and still stranger world met our eyes as we gazed over the side... The lake, as I have hinted, was to a considerable depth exceedingly transparent; and as human infants while suckling will calmly and fixedly gaze away from the breast... even so did the young of these whales seem *looking up* towards us... (325)(italics mine)

Ahab also seeks a world beneath the surface, but keeps his eyes level with the horizon; he refuses to look up and down, and therefore cannot experience a redeeming vision. He is in the position of Narcissus who falls toward water in death because he cannot touch, nor understand his own identity. This failure to comprehend existence at the level of the body results in the inability to perceive the invisible essence central to the self. Notably, Ahab is at least partially aware that his horizontal vision as a demonic Narcissus prevents him from comprehending the living self. He poses this dilemma to the carpenter: "'How dost thou know that some entire, living, thinking thing may not be invisibly and uninterpenetratingly standing precisely where thou

now standest; aye, and standing there in thy spite?" (391). The unknowability of "things" haunts Ahab like the demon phantom of a tormented Narcissus, and causes him to invest Moby Dick with "new terrors unborrowed from anything that visibly appears" (156). The image of the White Whale becomes that of the body itself which is a surface to be interpreted, though it ultimately baffles interpretation. Thus, Ahab's thoughts are written on his brow by "some invisible pencil... tracing lines and courses upon the deeply marked chart of his forehead" (171). Similarly, Fedallah is seen "eyeing the right whale's head, and ever and anon glancing from the deep wrinkles there to the lines in his own hand" (278). Notably, Ahab does penetrate the mysterious surface of the whale with his harpoon, but he loses his life in a destructive plunge to the bottom of the ocean. He is faced with an enticing wall "shoved near" which eventually smites the bow of the *Pequod* destroying the ship and its crew. Thus, the cost of tearing down the mask and getting "beyond" is self-annihilation; the horror that the "little lower layer" opens to Ahab is that what seems irrational is really rational, and yet unknowable.

Moby-Dick is about affirming one's existence in the face of annihilation. Frye agrees with Teunissen's assertion that "if Moby Dick is an instrument of an omnipotent God... then Ahab must inevitably be destroyed by the whale. If, on the other hand, he kills the whale, he may discover that there's nothing behind it and become a mere fisherman" (Frye PA 123-24). That is, to hunt "a Job's whale" is to face death, whereas to kill the whale is to face the "thought of annihilation," or nothingness of life. As Feidelson puts it, "the diabolism of *Moby-Dick* is more an effect than a cause of Melville's method. In pursuing the symbolic voyage to the utmost, but realizing at the same time its ineffectuality, Ahab is ruined while Melville discovers that he is potentially an Ahab, the devil's partisan, the nihilist" (Feidelson 676). Melville declares that he

has written a "wicked book" (Metcalf 108) because of the intractable paradox which underlies the quest and links Ahab's divine or "clear spirit" to nothingness. Significantly, Frye examines the connection between God and nihilism beginning with the *ex nihilo* doctrine and the question, "What did God make the world from, or out of?" to which he supplies the orthodox answer, "out of nothing" (Frye WP 288). Frye points to the double meaning of nothing as meaning both "not anything" and "something called Nothing" (spelled with a capital "N"), examining the non-existent in relation to the negative-existent:

So if we say that nothing is co-eternal with God, we make a very innocuous, not to say tautological, statement, but if we say 'Nothing (nothingness, something called nothing) is co-eternal with God' we are making a very different statement, and to many people a most disturbing one. Bergson's 'Existence is a conquest over Nothing' needs the capital, otherwise it means that there is no conquest at all. (289)

Similarly, I submit that Ahab struggles with the invisible essence or "Nothing" which is coexistent with being. He remarks that "'sometimes I think there's naught beyond. *But 'tis enough*'" (Melville 144)(italics mine). To Ahab, the "round globe" is "but an empty cipher" (358) whereupon his existence depends on embracing Nothingness which in turn annihilates his being. As Woodson affirms, "Ahab is never sure whether he is everything or nothing" (Woodson 450); he is a Narcissus who experiences "the ultimate emptiness on the other side of the mirror, [and] at the end sees himself reduced to a billow, to a brief disturbance on the blank surface of 'things'" (453).

In essence, self-annihilation results from the blasphemous attempt to be "God-like" by

grasping at the Nothingness which is co-eternal with God. Frye also points to Boehme who shows that the conception of God is crucially related to Nothingness:

Boehme's vision of the creation anticipates Hegel in speaking of a negating negation, a transforming of God from nothingness to an infinite something, which left the nothingness behind as a kind of vacuum suction, drawing everything within its reach into non-being. The abandoned nothingness is the principle of evil, the Lucifer or light-bearer which turns into the adversary of light, or Satan, after the light or Word has freed itself... The essential point is the association of nothingness and divine creation... (Frye WP 289)

In *Moby-Dick*, the quest for identity results from this threat of nonbeing or "vacuum suction" which later draws the *Pequod* and its crew toward the center of the "vortex." In "The Whiteness of the Whale," Melville describes the "adversary of light" or nihilistic principle asserting the vacuum:

... consider that the mystical cosmetic which produces every one of her hues, the great principle of light, for ever remains white or colorless in itself, and if operating without medium upon matter, would touch all objects, even tulips and roses, with its own blank tinge... so the wretched infidel gazes himself blind at the monumental white shroud that wraps all the prospect around him. (Melville 170)

This "blank tinge" is apparent in the affliction of the monomaniac "when what seemed Ahab rushed from his room, [and he] was for the time a vacated thing, a formless somnambulistic

being, a ray of living light, to be sure, but without an object to color, and therefore a blankness in itself" (175). Thus, Ishmael attests that it is the whale's "spiritual whiteness chiefly, which so cloth[s] him with divineness... though commanding worship, at the same time enforc[ing] a certain nameless terror" (166). In an attempt to be "God-like," Ahab embraces this "terror" or negative potential which

strikes more of panic to the soul than that redness which affrights blood. This elusive quality it is, which causes the thought of whiteness, when divorced from more kindly associations, and coupled with any object terrible in itself, to heighten that terror to the furthest bounds. (164)

Ahab couples the harpoon with the nihilistic "thought of whiteness" or potential for nonbeing, embracing the principle of evil in a diabolic baptism of his harpoon: "Ego non baptizo te in nomine patris, sed in nomine diaboli!"³² (404). Ahab's peg-leg also possesses an "incantation of [that] whiteness... [which] is at once the most meaning symbol of spiritual things, nay, the very veil of the Christian's Deity" (169). Woodson affirms this view, stating that "with his lifeless limb... [Ahab] symbolically straddles existence and nonexistence" (Matteson 106). Thus, I propose that the monomaniac participates in the existence of a malignant divine (projected onto Moby Dick) by grasping the "infinite" symbolized in his whale-bone leg, while at the same time dedicating his purpose to the "light-bearer" (Lucifer) in the role of a dejected Prometheus. Hence, Ahab's descent in pursuit of lower wisdom is the descent of "Antichrist [who] can

³² "... *sed in nomine diaboli!*" "I do not baptize you in the name of the father, but in the name of the devil." Melville's note, p. 404.

descend to hell, even harrow it, but what he brings up is only a hell to earth" (Frye WP 293). The *Pequod* descends "like Satan... dragg[ing] a living part of heaven along with her" (Melville 469); the hero who embraces the Promethean *elan* descends into nothingness in a demonic parody of the true hero's negating of negation for the sake of the Redeemed.

Chapter 4 - The Titanic Ascent Quest

In "Leviathan in the Book of Job and *Moby-Dick*," Young proposes that the obvious lack of interaction between Ahab and Ishmael suggests that Melville intends to separate their journeys (Young 394). Ishmael is not only employed as a common sailor with the "three hundredth lay" (Melville 76), but he also gets no nearer to the business of the captain than being a late replacement on Stubb's whaling boat. Hence, I propose that Melville offers two visions of reality; that of the false and true quest, though neither Ahab nor Ishmael fulfil the role of the true hero. In the latter portion of the narrative, Ishmael betrays his avowed purpose to hunt Moby Dick and detaches himself from the quest of Ahab and the rest of the crew. In fact, the sailor called Ishmael almost completely disappears from the story. For example, in the sequence of chapters from "The Quarterdeck" to "Midnight Forecastle," there is no narrator to all intents and purposes. Thus, at the beginning of the chapter entitled "Moby Dick," Ishmael reestablishes his position as sailor stating that "'I, Ishmael, was one of that crew...'" (155). I submit that even following this brief disappearance, Ishmael increasingly becomes more of a symbolic presence or reporting visionary than a sailor, and only the careful reader will discern the narrator's crucial reference to himself in the third person. That is, on the third day of the chase Ishmael is the

detached survivor reporting the events of a doomed expedition, but more importantly he is "the third man helplessly dropping astern, but still afloat and swimming" (466). I propose that this seemingly innocent mention of a sailor cast overboard provides the narrative with what Frye calls the "Houdini motif"; an escape from the slavery and restraint imposed upon the hero by the labyrinth of human history (Frye WP 140). In essence, Ishmael must escape the destruction of the *Pequod* in order to become Job's messenger and retell the tale after pondering its significance in the position of an observer. Interestingly, Frye refers to the ingenuity or *froda* of Ulysses in the Polyphemus story whereby the escaping hero gets out of the cave by being mistaken for a sheep (Frye SS 133). I associate this assimilation of human and animal forms with Daedalus' clever escape from the labyrinth with the half-man, half-bull Minotaur of the night world.³³ Thus, I suggest it is ironic that Ishmael avoids being pulled into the center of the vortex and dragged to the caverns of the monster not by a display of guile, but by being tossed from a boat and clinging to the coffin (turned life-buoy) which luckily emerges beside the forlorn sailor.

Frye continues that the ascent from the demonic world of darkness to a world of light during the phase of escape is associated with myths of the origin of fire and the presiding deity of the titanic quest, Prometheus (133-4). Interestingly, he refers to Frost's poem "West-Running Brook," in which the hero's ascent is described as a figure of the imagination or human consciousness resisting the descending force of nature (Frye WP 294). In *Moby-Dick*, Ishmael begins to resist the downward pull of the ship's fate long before his final escape from the vortex

³³ See the discussion of Daedalus' incorporation of a vertical dimension in order to escape the labyrinth of Cretan Legend. p. 51-2.

of the *Pequod*. As Lukacs affirms, "Ahab may not care that Narcissus drowned, but Ishmael does" (Lukacs 152). The dreaming on the masthead which nearly causes a fatal plunge is repeated at the helm where Ishmael nearly becomes culpable for the deaths of all aboard the *Pequod*. However, in the latter incident a more heroic recovery is made by the sailor whose earlier experience alarms him sufficiently to prevent the ship from capsizing. As Schultz affirms, "a wiser man than when he stood watch for the first time in the masthead, Ishmael now knows that one must see the possibilities for horrors not only in life at large, but also in one's self. Yet he knows that to concentrate on such horrors is to annihilate life" (Schultz 53). Ishmael learns that his identity lies in his consciousness of his mortality: "Never dream with thy hand on the helm!... Give not thyself up, then, to fire, lest it invert thee, deaden thee, as for the time it did me. There is a wisdom that is woe; but there is a woe that is madness" (Melville 354-55). In accordance with Frye's structure of the ascent quest, Ishmael persists in the struggle³⁴ to preserve his identity by shifting between sailor and narrator³⁵ (mentioned above) and casting off the bonds which imprison the rest of the crew. Boughn affirms this view, stating that "Ishmael with his constantly shifting identity and his complete disappearance from the novel at times embodies an androgynous, erotic way of being in the world" (Boughn 180). Notably, Frye refers to these various shifts as "an opposite kind of metamorphosis, the growing of identity through the casting off of whatever conceals or frustrates it" (Frye SS 140). In effect, this metamorphosis

³⁴ "One of the things that comedy and romance as a whole are about, clearly, is the unending, irrational, absurd persistence of the human impulse to struggle, survive, and where possible escape." *The Secular Scripture*, 136.

³⁵ "The standard escape device of romance is that of escape through a shift of identity..." *The Secular Scripture*, 136.

reverses the loss of identity first experienced in the demonic descent.

However, at the "recognition scene," rather than returning to the hero's origins or history relating to his birth,³⁶ Ishmael's orphan status is reaffirmed in the death of his new "family," the crew of the *Pequod*. That is, Melville appears to invert the typical recognition scene of the romance quest in order to reaffirm the more bleak Biblical symbolism surrounding both Ishmael and the *Rachel* as outcasts and wanderers. However, the outcast's warning to "look not too long in the face of the fire, O man!" (Melville 354) once again recalls Prometheus through whom Frye pursues the remaining portion of the creative ascent in its four aspects: the purgatorial, technological, educational, and Utopian. In effect, Frye argues that "these correspond to the four main aspects of Prometheus: the tormented champion of mankind, the bringer of fire to man, the god of forethought (the traditional meaning of his name) and the ultimate creator of humanity" (Frye WP 294). Accordingly, Ishmael's repeated allusions to Ahab's central identification with "the tormented champion" point to the purgatorial aspect of the myth. Thus, the author's final mixing of Romance with Biblical sources in the scene of recognition recalls the debate regarding titanic imagery³⁷ while evoking the symbolism of both traditions. That is, in the tradition of Prometheus, the titanic energy is likened to a furnace "from which the redeemed emerge purified like metal in a smelting operation" (296). In the Bible, "images of refinement and purification in a furnace recur in connection with language (Psalm 12:6) as well

³⁶ "As a rule the recognition scene involves producing some equivalent of a birth certificate, which causes the action to return to the point of the hero's or heroine's birth." *The Secular Scripture*, 136.

³⁷ See the discussion of demonic and titanic imagery in the Bible and in Romance, p. 29-30.

as in the afflictions of life (Proverbs 17:3, Isaiah 48:10)" (296-7). Notably, the furnace modulates into the human body (297) (a symbolic crucible for purification) which corresponds to the bodily image of Moby Dick as a projection of the surface of the physical body.³⁸ Henceforth, the human body becomes "a metaphorical crucible for the spiritual body that arises from it" (297) suggesting that Promethean purgatory is "an after-death world of purification, normally symbolized by fire" (298).

In this way, I propose that Melville links the Promethean purgatorial vision evoked by Ishmael's multiple references to fire with the Biblical pattern for the purgatorial process modelled after the Exodus narrative. I have argued above that the underlying structure of *Moby-Dick's* descent narrative is the "second episode" which describes a "wandering in the wilderness, a labyrinthine period of lost direction, where one generation has to die off before a new one can enter the Promised Land" (299). I now suggest that the narrative remains incomplete until the ascent pattern is fulfilled in accordance with the third and final episode:

The third stage is the entry into the Promised Land, where Moses, personifying the older generation, died just outside it. In Christian typology (GC 172; *Paradise Lost* xii, 307 ff.) this means that the law, which Moses symbolizes, cannot redeem mankind; only his successor Joshua, who bears the same name as Jesus, can invade and conquer Canaan. And yet Canaan seems a rather shrunken and anticlimactic form of the paradisaal land of promise flowing with milk and honey that was originally promised to Israel. Perhaps Moses was really the only person to see the Promised Land; perhaps the mountain

³⁸ See the discussion of the White Whale as the body itself which is read but baffles interpretation. p. 60-61.

outside it he climbed in his last hours was the only place from which it could be seen.
(299)

For Frye, the escape from the labyrinth is crucially related to the hero's "vision of liberation";³⁹ freedom is nothing if it is not freedom to build or work toward the realization of a vision. In the labyrinth of Cretan design, Daedalus (and Theseus) achieve a vision which enables the hero to subdivide the maze and escape imprisonment. Notably, Frye comments that "because of the frequency of the convention of escape, we may sometimes feel that there is something illusory about the dungeon or whatever: however dark and thick-walled, it seems bound to turn into a womb of rebirth sooner or later" (Frye SS 134). In essence, the liberating vision which enables the hero to see the road anew is connected to an atmosphere of nightmare which one escapes by waking up (134). Thus, in *Moby-Dick*, Ishmael awakens on the masthead to rediscover his foothold and prevent a destructive plunge, while at the helm he arouses himself to correct the course of the floundering ship. However, in "The Pacific," it appears to be Ishmael's acceptance of limited truths and various ambiguities in life which leads to his most crucial vision:

To any meditative Magian rover, this serene Pacific, once beheld, must ever after be the sea of his adoption... The same waves wash the moles of the new-built Californian owns, but yesterday planted by the recentest race of men... while all between float milky-ways of coral isles, and low-lying, endless, unknown Archipelagoes, and impenetrable Japans.

³⁹ "In romance it is much more frequently the individual, the hero or heroine, who has the vision of liberation, and the society they are involved with that wants to remain in a blind and gigantic darkness." *The Secular Scripture*, 139.

Thus, this mysterious, divine Pacific zones the world's whole bulk about; makes all coasts one bay to it; seems the tide-beating heart of earth. Lifted by those eternal swells, you needs must own the seductive god, bowing your head to Pan. (Melville 399-400).

Unlike Pip who goes insane because he cannot bear the "awful lonesomeness" and "intense concentration of self in the middle of such a heartless immensity" (347), Ishmael swims away from the vortex to safety. Matthiessen points to the above passage calling it Melville's best writing, stating that "in a few more words than those of the Gettysburg Address, Melville gave, as Lincoln was to give, the essence of his thought and poetry" (Matthiessen 463-64). It is a view of life which the narrator adopts in his acceptance of the mysteries surrounding his existence; Ishmael conquers all inherent curiosities and so avoids the self-annihilation that Ahab suffers by transforming himself into the nothingness which threatens his very existence. In essence, Ishmael resists the downward pull of nature into the layer of the monster by abandoning the quest for the hoarded heaps of Wisdom.

Frye refers to this stage of the ascent as "the separation between the lower world and those who are destined to escape from it" (Frye SS 137). Ishmael's final separation from the dark purpose of the crew is a "conscious detachment" which involves "recognizing the demonic as demonic" (137). Ishmael abandons the destructive descent of Ahab and his crew and searches for a means of escape from the labyrinth. At this point, I recall the line of Ariadne in the Theseus myth which becomes the monkey rope in *Moby-Dick* that symbolizes Ishmael's marriage with Queequeg, and by extension with humanity itself. Thus, Ishmael remarks that

I saw that this situation of mine was the precise situation of every mortal that breathes;

only, in most cases, he, one way or other, has this Siamese connexion with a plurality of other mortals. If your banker breaks, you snap; if your apothecary by mistake sends you poison in your pills, you die. True, you may say that, by exceeding caution, you may possibly escape these and the multitudinous other evil chances of life. But handle Queequeg's monkey-rope heedfully as I would, sometimes he jerked it so, that I came very near sliding overboard. Nor could I possibly forget that, do what I would, I only had the management of one end of it. (Melville 271)

Ishmael realizes that a risk of grave injustice underlies the structure of society, and that his fellow crew members who compose the "other" in the microcosmic world aboard the *Pequod* may lead to the destruction of his own self. Thus, Ishmael distances himself from the rest of the crew and becomes an observer of the progress his "monomaniac" captain and crew make toward their demonic end. In a sense, Ishmael cuts the "line" which remains fastened to the horizontal dimension of existence; he reaches the end of his narrative on the third day of the chase and knows it is "the end of that thing - be that end what it may" (463). Interestingly, Frye states that the separation of life from death "is part of the Bible's final apocalyptic vision" (Frye WP 141). In this way, the segregation of Ahab and his crew into the pattern of death parodies the apocalyptic end prophesied in Revelation - that is, the final marriage of Christ and the Redeemed. Thus, I submit that Ishmael's vision of primal creation in "The Grand Armada" is especially significant, as the sighted umbilical cord of the whale can be equated with a harpoon line. That is, the titanic and demonic aspects of the quest appear once again to be inextricably related in the sense that the means to a redeeming vision is linked to Ahab's destruction at the moment he refuses to give up the "line." In this way, the monomaniac's vision of the line level

with the horizon becomes inadequate; by hurling his lance at the end of his "narrative," Ahab secures a fatal monkey rope which drags him down into the mouth of hell.

In contrast to this demonic parody of the Apocalypse, I propose that Ishmael's final "reuniting" with Queequeg's coffin "is intended as some sort of allegory of the Last Judgment" (Frye SS 141). The narrator clings to Queequeg's coffin and is so rejoined to the cannibalistic harpooner in a gesture towards the marriage of the Bridegroom (Christ) and the Bride (the Church) in the Bible's final "recognition scene." The coffin turned life-buoy (another symbol of the mixing of demonic and titanic forces) is the "talisman of recognition"; it symbolizes original identity (145) which is then sought by "return[ing] to the beginning of the story and interpret[ing] it more truly" (145). Thus, as I have argued above, Ishmael's quest begins when the voyage is over and the broken current of memory is restored to the "surviving elements" (the narrator) of the demonic descent. Frye describes the total cycle of recognition: "the descent into the lower world, the fish [or whale] as a denizen of that world, [some object] symbolizing the current of memory, disappearing and returning, the period of its return being the signal for reunion" (148). Ahab abandons the authentic quest in the labyrinth where the disruption of time alienates the memory, but it is resumed by the narrator following subsequent voyages and studies which provide the means to offer a more truthful account of the tale. Thus, the story is not distorted by a hero who embraces a false quest during his descent, but recalled with added insight by the hero who sees the road anew and seeks timeless truths by continually subdividing the labyrinth of life.

Frye comments on this aspect of the ascent quest, stating that "the closer romance comes to a world of original identity, the more clearly something of the symbolism of the garden of

Eden reappears" (149). The presiding deity of this axial survey, "the ladder of higher love," is not Prometheus (previously identified with the demonic and titanic descent), but Eros (Frye WP 277) whose informing presence dominates the ascent:

Romance... eventually takes us into the great Eros theme in which a lover is driven by his love to ascend to a higher world. This ascent is full of images of climbing or flying, of mountains, towers, ladders, spiral staircases, the shooting of arrows, or coming out of the sea on to an island. (Frye SS 151).

In accordance with this theme, Queequeg's coffin shoots violently forth from that "vital centre... liberated by reason of its cunning spring, and, owing to its great buoyancy, rising with great force" (Melville 470) from the sea. The image signals the union of "lovers" who first embraced at "The Spouter-Inn" and declared the nuptial agreement that "naught but death should part us twain" (33):

He seemed to take to me quite as naturally and unbiddenly as I to him; and when our smoke was over, he pressed his forehead against mine, clasped me round the waist, and said that henceforth we were married; meaning, in his country's phrase, that we were bosom friends; he would gladly die for me, if need should be. (53)

It is in part a sexual bond that Ishmael affirms in his attempt to "unlock [the cannibal's] bridegroom clasp" (33); that is, a bond which corresponds to the sexual nature of the "upward

quest."⁴⁰ There are several other explicit sexual moments in *Moby-Dick*: the erotic vision of new born whales at the center of the Grand Armada is repeated in "A Squeeze of the Hand" where Ishmael beholds a celestial vision of "angels in paradise, each with his hands in a jar of spermaceti" (349). Significantly, Ishmael's sentimental longing to squeeze himself into his shipmates resembles a form of erotic love:

I squeezed that sperm till a strange sort of insanity came over me; and I found myself unwittingly squeezing my co-laborers' hands in it, mistaking their hands for the gentle globules. Such an abounding, affectionate, friendly, loving feeling did this avocation beget; that at last I was continually squeezing their hands... (348-49)

However, similar to the horror of awakening on the masthead or staring into the fires of the try-works, Ishmael is horrified at the realization that his sensuality is aroused in dead flesh. Notably, this eroticism mixed with horror is deepened in the description of the men in the blubber-room where "toes are scarce" (350) to the experienced veteran who handles the flesh of the whale.

Boughn rightly observes that "Melville related sexual imagery to the modes of being he was exploring. He identified sexual union with the release of erotic energy, and that release, in turn, he identified with the union of the self and the world" (Boughn 185). In essence, I suggest that the fear of engulfment symbolized by the loss of self while squeezing spermaceti is linked to the latter image of severed bodily appendages which represent the severing of self and world.

⁴⁰ "Here again we see that there are two forms of the upward quest, one a sublimated quest ending in virginity, the other a sexual quest ending in marriage." *The Secular Scripture*, 152.

Hence, the image of severed ties prevails throughout the narrative⁴¹: Cameron points to Pip's plunge into the ocean which symbolizes the first severance at birth with the difference that consciousness is present to comprehend the separation (Cameron 581). Accordingly, the antidote to Ahab's monomania is a reuniting with his lost family which represents the whole of humanity (582). Finally, the *Rachel* recalls Rachel "weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because her children are no more" (Jeremiah 31:15), while the bond between the narrator and his whaling family is also severed at the end of the book. In this way, the quest for identity is a search for a previous state of existence or life prior to humanity's separation from each other. Thus, as Cameron affirms, "the real question is not, as it so deceptively appears in [*Moby-Dick*], 'What do things mean?' but rather, 'Why am I not attached to those meanings - why am I separate from the reality I am therefore forced to know?' Not being separate would replace knowledge" (Cameron 582). As I have argued earlier, Ahab is haunted by the detachment that he experiences in relation to the world; it drives him up the *axis mundi* in search of a scapegoat upon which to pile his hate of that "inscrutable thing". Ahab's solipsistic vision of himself in all things which he projects upon the doubloon (and by extension the world) questions his separation from meaning or significance in the world. Notably, it is a link that can only be reestablished by finding the self or authentic identity known in the unfallen world of experience.

In "The Symphony," the relation between erotic imagery and Ishmael's quest for an authentic self returns to the symbolism of the Biblical recognition scene:

⁴¹ See the discussion of Ahab's severed ties with both his family and other crew members. p. 17-18. See also the symbolism of Ahab's severed leg in relation to the final harpoon line and "horizontal" vision. p. 52-53.

Aloft, like a royal czar and king, the sun seemed giving this gentle air to this bold and rolling sea; even as bride to groom. And at the girdling line of the horizon, a soft and tremulous motion - most seen here at the equator - denoted the fond, throbbing trust, the loving alarms, with which the poor bride gave her bosom away. (Melville 442)

I submit that the evocative language in this passage links the "sexual quest" to the symbolic union at the Apocalypse. Frye affirms this view, and continues that

The traditional symbolic basis of the sexual quest, which goes back to the Song of Songs in the Bible, is the identification of the mistress' body with the paradisaal garden... there is a sense in which *virginity is an appropriate image for attaining original identity*: what is objectively untouched symbolizes what is subjectively contained... (Frye SS 153)(italics mine)

I suggest that Ishmael's renewed quest for original identity is in the position of the Bride; a role he rejects⁴² for the role of Adam and the search for his "real self as it would have been if Adam had not fallen and man's original identity had been preserved" (152). The quest for original identity quest is renewed upon the restoration of the memory; Ishmael reaches the "surface of the earth" (147) and proceeds to recover his authentic self. For Ishmael, a rediscovery of the self leads to a new understanding of what it means to be human: to acknowledge "visible truth," and to accept the multiplicity and ambiguity of meaning in the world which remains forever uncontained. Ishmael learns that titanic and demonic forces co-exist without contradiction, and

⁴² See the discussion of the end of the novel where Ishmael rebukes himself for assuming the role of "another Ixion," or a false Christ.

that the menace of nonbeing is essential to affirming his existence in a fallen world. Notably, such self-recognition in the face of annihilation reverses the solipsistic Narcissus complex (152) which afflicts Ahab in his demonic descent and leads to his ultimate demise.

Chapter 5 - Conclusion

Frye asserts that "one becomes the ultimate hero of the great quest of man, not so much by virtue of what one does, as by virtue of what and how one reads" (157). I associate Ishmael's extensive categorization and division of whales by size in "Cetology" with the concept of Eros; that is, the phallogocentric drive urges the establishment of control through the classification of an apparently chaotic world. Schultz affirms this view, stating that "to give structure to a vision is to be most human" (Schultz 540). Cameron also discusses the novel's preoccupation with reading, stating that "the novel's tension is between the spirit and the letter, one exegetical in its focus, the other affixed to the bodily thing itself. The novel dramatizes a return to the letter, to the literalization that kills" (Cameron 576). Thus, in *Moby-Dick*, the task of the quest hero is to interpret the incomprehensible text of the whale which dominates each character's field of vision. As Frye affirms, the quest for Knowledge or Wisdom is "usually communicated in some kind of dark saying, and riddles and ciphers and oracular utterances of all kinds... [which] go back to very ancient imaginative patterns" (Frye SS 122). In *Moby-Dick*, these ancient patterns appear as hieroglyphics or signs that carry an indecipherable meaning. In "The Blanket," Ishmael describes the whale's blubber as "all over obliquely crossed and re-crossed with numberless straight marks in thick array" (Melville 260) which baffles the interpreter who gazes

at the body of the Leviathan:

In some instances, to the quick, observant eye, *those linear marks*, as in a veritable engraving, but *afford the ground for far other delineations*. These are hieroglyphical; that is, if you call those mysterious ciphers on the walls of pyramids hieroglyphics... By my retentive memory of the hieroglyphics upon one sperm whale in particular, I was much struck with a plate representing the old Indian characters chiselled on the famous hieroglyphic palisades... Like those mystic rocks, too, the mystic-marked whale remains undecipherable. (260)(italics mine)

The novel is about reading hieroglyphics in order to find the monster which becomes a figure for the self in the labyrinth of life. The whale is remade into a book of nature, though it can teach us nothing that is not ourselves. Hence, the cannibal who himself is covered with hieroglyphics, is seen "comparing notes; looking at his thigh bone" (362) and at the markings on the whale, while Fedallah tries to read the whale "glancing from the deep wrinkles there to the lines in his own hand" (278). In "The Doubloon," Starbuck observes that Ahab "seems to read Belshazzar's awful writing" (360) which refers to a reading of "doom" that only Daniel can interpret (Daniel 5)(Melville's note). Thus, staring at the doubloon is analogous to water-gazing in search of the sacred text inscribed on the Leviathan. In this way, the crew of the *Pequod* remains baffled by their own mystical markings, and by those which are objects of perception or mirrors of the seeing self:

Champollion deciphered the wrinkled granite hieroglyphics. But there is no Champollion to decipher the Egypt of every man's and every being's face... how may unlettered

Ishmael hope to read the awful Chaldee of the Sperm Whale's brow? I but put that brow before you. Read it if you can. (292-93)

Lukacs asserts that Ishmael's "forays into philosophy, art history, geology, physiognomy... [are] efforts to explain how to read the whale" (Lukacs 148). Ishmael explores the skeletal remains of a sperm whale "reading all the contents of that young cub" (Melville 373) and observing how "the ribs were hung with trophies; the vertebrae were carved with Arscidean annals, in strange hieroglyphics" (374). However, unlike Ahab's blasphemous attempts to raise the "hoarded heaps," Ishmael accepts the limitations of the "knowable" and warns that the "wall" placed before man's intellect is the "great golden seal" signifying God (293).

Significantly, Friedman calls Ahab a "Modern Promethean" like Nietzsche's Superman for whom God is dead (Friedman 84). For modern man the death of God means that the only way to find significance in the world is to identify truth with the self. Accordingly, Ahab's extreme egoism allows him to include the self in universal truth: "'Who's over me? Truth hath no confines'" (Melville 144) he exclaims in an extreme assertion of the ego. Ahab claims a sense of self in an infinite world and insists that the divine's withholding of truth negates the possibility of possessing boundless mysteries or supreme Knowledge. The modern Promethean is threatened by his own assertion of God's nonexistence and insists upon finding the self behind the "pasteboard masks." Interestingly, in his discussion of Frye, Lee indirectly points to the flaw of Ahab's solipsistic epistemology:

When Nietzsche... says that God is dead and when the French astronomer and mathematician Laplace... says that God is a hypothesis no longer necessary to his

science, the statements make good sense, within the context of the descriptive language being used. But, says Frye, God is not an object to be described or represented within the particular, recognisable linguistic mode or verbal framework out of which such statements come. The God who is dead because he cannot be described as an object is not dead at all but 'entombed in a dead language.' (Lee 44)

Again, as Frye attests, the fulfilment of the hero's quest comes by virtue of *how* one reads which refers to the hero's vision and results in either the subdivision of the maze or else lost direction. Frye points to "sentimentality" as the most dangerous form of original sin (Frye WP 140) which results from placing secondary or human concerns over primary concerns.⁴³ This leads to a societal breakdown into "simple brutality and barbarism," and "genocide that eventually turns on itself" (309).

In *Moby-Dick*, I submit that a restoration of original identity is achieved by ministering to primary concerns; man must be reconciled with nature which in turn leads to a reconciliation from an alienated state with God. Ahab is disillusioned in the belief that man attains fulfilment through his knowledge and control over nature. In essence, he blinds himself by isolating the self to the point that it is swallowed up by the impersonal. This is symbolized by the Promethean's creation of a monstrous model of man devoid of all personality which points to Ahab's annihilation of the self or total lack of humanity. Friedman affirms this view of the Promethean's quest, stating that "the fire is a symbol not only of evil, but also of suffering, of

⁴³ "Secondary concerns" or concerns of "lower vision" refer to distinctly human concerns: law, art, consciousness of community. "Primary concerns" or the attainment of "higher vision" is the concern over food, sex, possessions, freedom of movement, health, equality, love. *Words With Power*, 309-310.

the search for truth, of the full and intense use of man's spiritual energies, and of that elemental sphere in which the human mind cannot long sojourn without madness" (Friedman 100). Thus, as Frye argues, Ahab represents "man giving himself away to his own creation, a sort of Frankenstein nightmare" (Frye PA 124). In fact, Ahab annihilates all sense of humanity until he can no longer detect any other being aside from his own: "'Ye are not other men, but my arms and legs; and so obey me'" (Melville 465). This sort of lower vision results in the attempt to comprehend the world in the descriptive mode of language. Ahab "reads" the whale, but he misinterprets the position of the self in the world, as well as the relation between self, nature, and God. In opposition to Ahab's preoccupation with "secondary concerns" or interpretation of the universe in limited human terms, Frye proposes "higher vision" through *kerygma* which transcends the descriptive mode and restores earthly paradise to man (Frye WP 140-41). Lee rightly observes that "kerygmatic language is metaliterary and functions on the other side of the poetic, taking us through the territory of literature on the way to something else..." (Lee 42-3). The kerygmatic mode is a fifth mode posited beyond the imagination which, according to Lee

... is the area of Frye's criticism in which he points most explicitly to the limitations of literature, and then proceeds to the idea of a possible metaliterary identity between text and reader... Kerygma, then, simultaneously both uses and goes beyond both the rhetorical or ideological mode and the poetic or imaginative mode. (42-3)

Thus, the authentic identity quest is fulfilled through *kerygma*; it allows man to exceed human limitations of the "knowable" caused by the alienation between God, self, and world (nature) when man loses his paradisaal vision and falls into the world of "ordinary experience." It involves

the identification with a "myth to live by" and a reader response which leads to a revolution of consciousness. Significantly, Frye points to the Bible as uniquely kerygmatic in the Western World; it contains a "spiritual" language which transcends the constructive capacities of language in the four previous ordinary modes.⁴⁴

Frye points to Job who learns to subordinate secondary concerns and is awarded "higher vision": this vision comes when God points out the inadequacy of his questions and demonstrates that understanding comes not directly, but by placing one's concerns in a larger context. Interestingly, Job rightly expresses human primary concerns for "freedom against servitude, for happiness against misery, for health against disease" (Frye WP 312), while God's reply sets aside trivial issues of guilt and innocence and presents the sufferer with a vision of primal creation. Job reaches the end of his "narrative" and is restored to his original state through a revitalized vision or renewed individuality. The basic thematic influence of Job upon *Moby-Dick* is the sufferer's immediate denial of the justice of his afflictions and his inability to get beyond the human perspective. In accordance with Frye's view, the intractable paradox which afflicts Melville's Ahab is that

The mysteries represented in metaphor by the first creation in Genesis, the mysteries of birth and death... can never be understood because they can never be objectified. But there is a creation that mystifies and a creation that reveals, and the latter is identical with the former. (312)

I propose that the "inscrutable thing" which is knowable but remains unknown refers to the

⁴⁴ See the discussion of Frye's modes of language. p.5.

elusive quality inherent in the structure of language itself. Hence, Frye asserts that "hell is in front of us because we have put it there; paradise is missing because we have failed to put it there" (312). Frye's structural framework is modelled after nature's cycle which is geared for two movements: the descent through time and space to death and annihilation of existence, and the ascent which attains a present and presence in another dimension altogether. I submit that Frye invites us to embrace the vision of Job beyond time; a perspective of reality comprising the view from far above and far below. It is here that "we soon come to see that the ultimate sources of hampered movement are time and space as we normally experience them" (185). Significantly, the disappearance of time and space is associated with Jacob's ladder which is "not a human construction but an image of the divine will to reach man" (152). Man's potential for a redeeming vision is attributed to the ultimate authority; literature articulates a vision which must be aligned with the divine in order to achieve fulfilment or "total vision."

Significantly, the demonic counterpoint of Jacob's ladder is the Tower of Babel (152) which symbolizes man's futile attempt to reach God from the world of "ordinary experience." Ahab adopts the role of the purgatorial Promethean because

... purgatorial vision seems, so far as it is connected with creative human effort, to point directly upward to the paradisaal world, as it does in Dante, to a world above time where the poet 'present, past and future sees' with Blake, or sings with Yeats 'Of what is past, or passing, or to come.' (305-6)

However, Ahab tries to fulfil the quest by "reading" Moby Dick while hampered by his fallen state, and so plunges into a false search for Wisdom where the limitations of time and space

distort the attainment of knowledge and annihilate all existence. For Ahab, language fails to yield truth in the tradition of Babel in Genesis 11 which describes a blasphemous attempt to see God that is crushed due to the performative failure of words. The writing on the whale remains indecipherable because Ahab refuses to place his concerns in a larger context and so attain the deeper apprehension and power available through the imagination. As a result, Ahab descends into the "labyrinth" of the fallen world where his movement is hampered and his freedom is lost. Once again I turn to Frye who asserts that

The idealized image of free movement in the Bible is that of the wandering sheep of the twenty-third Psalm, for whom everywhere is home, and who represent a pastoral existence whose disappearance in the Bible is symbolized by the murder of the shepherd Abel. Cain introduces the contrasting image of human life as an exile, and the exile, who can go everywhere except home... this type of wandering exile is ascribed by Jesus to his own earthly life (Luke 9:58). (185)

I associate this image of freedom with the identity quest in *Moby-Dick* which is a search for a previous state or world of "unfallen experience" where time is "inner energy" and space is a "natural place" or "home." Ahab chooses the "first" movement and plunges through time and space to the annihilation of his identity, while Ishmael *appears* to achieve another dimension due to his association with the ascending coffin. However, as Matteson rightly argues, it is questionable how much progress Ishmael makes during the course of the narrative. That is, he begins the journey hoping to reaffirm his being in the face of non-existence, and "ends up clinging for life to a potent symbol of nonbeing, a coffin" (Matteson 116). It is also notable that

Ishmael is once again orphaned at the end of the novel; he unwittingly resembles the first exile of the fallen world and thereby is a Christ figure wandering without a true home in this world.

Ishmael's survival appears to suggest that salvation lies in liminality; the narrator's status remains provisional in his acceptance of ambiguity and indefiniteness in the world. Instead of striking through the "pasteboard masks" and being annihilated by the "thought of whiteness," Ishmael remains, in a sense, "buoyed up by that coffin" (Melville 470). As Young attests, "*Moby-Dick*, like Job, affirms the mystery of the sacred, beyond the human capacity to comprehend" (Young 398). Man's inability to grasp the truth at the heart of the universe is symbolized by the inscription upon Ishmael's object of ascent of "a complete theory of the heavens and the earth" (Melville 399) forever out of the reach of man. Thus, Stout concludes that "Melville's own interpretation of the Book must have involved at least the overwhelming display of power, the denial that man's intellect could grasp all, and Job's endurance, patient or not, through his sufferings" (Stout 72). However, I submit that *Moby-Dick* does not achieve the reconciliation between God and man which is apparent in the Book of Job. As Schirmeister astutely observes, "[Melville's] sympathies are still with the visionaries of this world, even if they are Ahab" (Schirmeister 67). The author points to Job's challenging of God and the possibility of transcending the present framework in order to gain universality. Ishmael fails because his narrative fails in the attempt to achieve the "abandonment of time and space." The narrator concludes from his vision in "The Pacific" that survival depends upon maintaining a state of suspense: he does not look up and down and so remains oblivious to the fact that "the sea remains itself, and yet becomes the sky in the floating 'milky-ways of coral isles': and thus it comes to include all of space, the whole galaxy of thought" (Matthiessen 465). Accordingly,

I suggest that it is the role of the reader to be liberated by keeping alive a vision which is embodied in the structures of literature and myth. That is, the reader faces the same choice as Ishmael once he has reached the end of the narrative. We are in the position of Job's messenger, and must return to the beginning of the "story" and begin interpreting it "more truly"⁴⁵ in search of ourselves. The completion of the "voyage" means that the quest begins anew with the hope of "annihilating everything we thought we knew, and restoring everything we have never lost" (Frye WP 313).

⁴⁵ See the discussion of Ishmael's quest for original identity which begins when the voyage is completed. p. 73.

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