"Ego non baptizo te in nomine patris..."

Sacred and Profane Violence
In *Moby-Dick*

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Introduction

In an article published in *American Literary History* in Winter, 1992, Andrew Delbanco charts the topology of Melville criticism in the decade of the '80s. The article bears out my own observation that a tendency exists for recent critics to reduce the importance of Melville's texts. The root, I believe, of this tendency is the current prevalence of "criticism with an agenda." The bulk of recent criticism has been written in terms of race, sex, sexual orientation, law, history, and contextualism, each of which represents something to be shown about Melville's attitudes and their relation both to our time and to his own. What unifies all these agendas is the role of the critics' own desires in forming their views of Melville.

> As best I can make out, the pressing issue for most critics seems to be whether Melville, with all his proclamations of "landlessness" and "the open independence of the sea," was able to think outside the constricting categories of his own culture. This sort of question seems to have special urgency for many academic writers of today, since a negative answer furnishes a large target for 'prosecutorial' criticism (McCall 109), while a positive answer provides an inspiring instance of the mind's ability to transcend history. Such transcendence is a power that some academics implicitly claim — a little jealously — for themselves. Both of these answers are objects of desire, and if literary theorists have agreed on anything lately, it is that writing is all about desire, with the result that many differences among critics seem to depend mainly on which answer to the history question (how imprisoning is culture, and how far did Melville break out?) promises more satisfaction. There is, for some, a certain pleasure in ratifying one's own subversive insights by finding them adumbrated; for others there is a superior pleasure in the retrospective act of judgment.
>
> (Delbanco 710)

Delbanco makes explicit many critics' desire to turn away from the text itself in their attempts to place it in relation to culture. The result of this desire is that critics seem more often *to judge* a text as an expression of the values of its author

and his culture, rather than *analyzing* the text itself. With a few exceptions, notably Dan McCall, Barbara Johnson, Toni Morrison, and Edward Saíd, the Melville critics of the '80s are guilty of this self-serving judgmental criticism.

It seems that this form of criticism assumes a definitive reading of the text — assumes the analysis of the text has been finished, and all that remains is to place it in reference to culture as an expression of the critic's own desires. In my own opinion, the analysis is not a task which is — or can be — finished. *Particularly* not a text so encyclopedic as *Moby-Dick*. With this paper, I wish to reject this self-serving mode of criticism and return to the text as an end unto itself. In other words, my own desire is to reverse the privileging of criticism over text.

Moby-Dick presents intriguing patterns of violence that I believe to be in need of further exploration. I have chosen for my essay into the territory of violence a specific theoretical grounding in the field of cultural anthropology and myth criticism; however, it is not my desire to assert the theory over the text. Rather, I wish to show that theory can function as an instrument to shed light on a text and open it up in new directions. Theory, I believe, should provide a useful orientation to a text — which itself should not be mutilated in order to fit it into the agenda of the theory.

The publication of Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* in 1890 produced a new form of cultural anthropology with a set of assumptions and judgments that remained largely unquestioned until 1972, when René Girard published *Violence and the Sacred*. Girard's book targets specifically Frazer's notion that ritual proceeds from myth; he wishes to invert this causal link and show that myth, in fact, proceeds from ritual. Girard deals primarily in cultural patterns of

violence which we may divide into the categories of *sacred* and *profane*. What I term profane violence is violence that is reciprocal: the violence of the feud, for example, in which clans strike retaliatory blows against one another in an ever escalating cycle. Because this violence threatens to escalate until it destroys the entire community, it must be checked. The check to profane violence is sacred violence in the form of the ritual sacrifice. The community, in order to break the reciprocal cycle of violence, unanimously concentrates its cumulative guilt and desire for revenge onto a surrogate victim, which bears the brunt of the society's violence. It is in this unanimous act of sacred violence that myth is born.

Girard's description of a dual sacred and profane nature of violence seems particularly relevant to the patterned violence of Ahab's vengeful quest to destroy Moby Dick. Girard's attention to the rite also applies to Ahab's repeated corruption of religious rituals. This thesis will provide a reading in four parts of *Moby-Dick* based in Girard's analyses of sacred and profane violence and of the rite of sacrifice. The first part will examine Father Mapple's sermon on Jonah as evidence of the allegorizing imagination which reads physical objects as spiritual symbols, and examine Girard's own exploration of Jonah. It will then show how Ahab both shares and corrupts this characteristic. The second part will provide a close reading of Ahab's quest as a corruption of the rite of sacrifice. The third part will contrast the figures of Ahab and Ishmael in terms of the allegorizing imagination. The fourth and final part of the thesis will provide an explicit reading of "The Chase" against Ishmael's "Epilogue" as offering opposing alternatives of violence and peace, and conclude by showing how Ishmael offers his own form of redemption from the cycle of reciprocal violence.

Chapter 1: The Example of Jonah

Our exploration of Jonah's relevance to *Moby-Dick* will begin with an examination of Father Mapple and his sermon. The chapters entitled "The Chapel," "The Pulpit" and "The Sermon" recount Ishmael's visit to the Nantucket whaleman's chapel of Father Mapple. The chapel is frequented primarily by sailors like Ishmael, about to leave on a years-long whaling cruise in the Pacific and Indian oceans. Its pastor, Mapple, is a former sailor himself, and its interior architecture is that of a ship. The pulpit is fashioned in the shape of a ship's prow and is not reached by stairs; instead, it substitutes "a ladder, like those used in mounting a ship from a boat at sea" (44). It is appropriate that any sermon preached from this pulpit be linked to sailing and the ocean. It is especially appropriate that the sermon preached on the eve of Ishmael's departure on a whaling voyage concern Jonah and the whale.

Mapple and his church represent a strong symbolic linkage between the Bible and the sailing ship. The chapel itself combines elements of church and ship; Mapple stands for both the preacher and the sailor. He begins his sermon with a metaphor of rope-making, which is an important ship board occupation: .

> "Shipmates, this book, containing only four chapters — four yarns — is one of the smallest strands in the mighty cable of the scriptures. Yet what depths of the soul does Jonah's deep sea-line sound! what a pregnant lesson to us is this prophet! What a noble thing is that canticle in the fish's belly! How billow-like and boisterously grand!"
> (47)

The Bible is likened to a cable (rope), and the book of Jonah to a strand of that rope; rope serves innumerable functions on a ship, not least of which is the securing of sails, which provide a ship's motive power. The metaphor thus characterizes the Bible as a tool necessary for sailing the ship of the soul. The chapters of Jonah are called yarns, doubling the metaphor — it refers to both

textiles and sea-stories. Melville thus links his own "yarn" to the scriptures in its grandness and complexity.

Father Mapple insinuates himself into this rope-weaving. He takes the strands of Jonah's story, interprets them, and weaves from them a meaning, a lesson. Father Mapple brings meaning to the story of Jonah by interpreting it, thereby making the act of interpretation a part of Jonah's "yarn." Father Mapple's sermon points out the "two-stranded lesson" of Jonah's story — "a lesson to us all as sinful men, and a lesson to me as a pilot of the living God" (47). Jonah's sin is that of all sinners: his "willful disobedience of the command of God ... which he found a hard command" (47). Mapple points out that to obey God is always to disobey ourselves.

> "All the things that God would have us do are hard for us to do — remember that — and hence, he oftener commands us than endeavours to persuade. And if we obey God, we must disobey ourselves; and it is in this disobeying ourselves, wherein the hardness of obeying God consists."
> (47-48)

Mapple claims that to obey God, one must disobey oneself. The natural desires of man are always at odds with the desires of God. The proper position of the "pilot of the living God" is one of constant self-abasement: the giving up of one's own desires for the desires of God (47). Jonah, however, fails to maintain this self-denial. God's command to Jonah is to serve as a prophet to the sinful people of Nineveh and deliver a warning to them that, unless they repent, God will destroy their city. Jonah presumably fears that the people of Nineveh will slay him if he gives them this prophecy. Thus, he secretly boards a ship bound from Joppa to Tarshish in an effort to flee the will of God. Tarshish was, in Jonah's time, about as far from Israel as one could get by ship; Jonah was fleeing to the ends of the known earth. Jonah's flight is a further sin against God.

When Jonah leaves Joppa, God sends a storm against the ship on which he

is a passenger. To calm the storm, Jonah is cast overboard and is swallowed by a whale. Mapple's sermon is a retelling of the Jonah story with an accompanying application of Jonah's case to the lives of his listeners.

> "Jonah prayed unto the Lord out of the fish's belly. But observe his prayer, and learn a weighty lesson. For sinful as he is, Jonah does not weep and wail for direct deliverance. He feels that his dreadful punishment is just. He leaves all his deliverance to God, contenting himself with this, that spite of all his pains and pangs, he will still look toward His holy temple. And here, shipmates, is true and faithful repentance; not clamorous for pardon, but grateful for punishment. ...Shipmates, I do not place Jonah before you to be copied for his sin but I do place him before you as a model for repentance. Sin not; but if you do, take heed to repent of it like Jonah."
>
> (52)

Here is the first strand of Mapple's lesson, the one directed at his congregation: repent well of disobedience to the Lord, and turn towards disobedience of the self. Proper repentance will be rewarded, as it is in Jonah. Having properly repented, Jonah is soon forgiven and vomited by the whale "out upon the dry land," whereupon he proceeds to Nineveh and preaches God's word with great success (Jonah 2:10).

But for Father Mapple, there is the second strand, "that other and more awful lesson" (Melville 53). God has chosen Father Mapple, as he has Jonah, to preach his lesson to sinners.

> "Shipmates, God has laid but one hand upon you; both his hands press upon me. I have read ye by what murky light may be mine the lesson that Jonah teaches to all sinners; and therefore to ye, and still more to me, for I am a greater sinner than ye. And now how gladly would I come down .. and listen as you listen, while some one of you reads *me* that other and more awful lesson which Jonah teaches to *me*, as a pilot of the living God. How being an anointed pilot-prophet, or speaker of true things, and bidden by the Lord to sound those unwelcome truths in the ears of a wicked Nineveh, Jonah, appalled at the hostility he should raise, fled from his mission, and sought to escape his duty and his God by taking ship at Joppa. But God is everywhere; Tarshish he

> never reached. As we have seen, God came upon him in the whale, and swallowed him down to the living gulfs of doom, and with swift slantings tore him along 'into the midst of the seas,' where the eddying depths sucked him ten thousand fathoms down, and 'the weeds were wrapped about his head,' and all the watery world of woe bowled over him. Yet even then beyond the reach of any plummet — 'out of the utmost belly of hell' — when the whale grounded upon the ocean's utmost bones, even then, God heard the engulphed repenting prophet when he cried. Then God spake unto the fish; and from the shuddering cold and blackness of the sea, the whale came breeching up towards the warm and pleasant sun, and all the delights of air and earth; and 'vomited out Jonah upon the dry land;' when the word of the Lord came a second time; and Jonah, bruised and beaten — his ears, like two sea-shells, still multitudinously murmuring of the ocean — Jonah did the Almighty's bidding. And what was that, shipmates? To preach the Truth to the face of Falsehood! That was it!
>
> This, shipmates, this is that other lesson; and woe to that pilot of the living God who slights it. Woe to him whom this world charms from Gospel duty! Woe to him who seeks to pour oil upon the waters when God has brewed them to a gale! Woe to him who seeks to please rather than to appal! Woe to him whose good name is more to him than goodness! Woe to him who, in this world, courts not dishonor! Woe to him who would be not true, even though to be false were salvation! Yea, woe to him who, as the great Pilot Paul has it, while preaching to others is himself a castaway!"
>
> (53-54)

Mapple is the anointed preacher, or pilot-prophet, of the living god, and, as such, is charged "to preach the Truth in the face of falsehood" (54). The name, *pilot-prophet*, emphasizes the dual role of the preacher as both speaker of truth and spiritual guide; these roles make the preacher responsible for the souls of his flock. Jonah's other lesson is that the preacher, because he is responsible for the souls of other men, must be doubly careful of his own. Mapple claims to be a greater sinner than any of his flock because he is merely a man, while his role as pilot-prophet calls him to be a higher example. Any sin is thus doubled for him, for it is at once a failure to obey the will of God that he do the right, and an implicit leading of others astray.

In the final paragraph of the above passage, Father Mapple points out the

contrast between inner truth and outer falsehood. Mapple postulates an inner world of knowable truth that must be reflected in the outer world. "Woe to him who, *in this world*, courts not dishonor! Woe to him who would not be true, though to be false were salvation!" (54) The material world — "this world" — is clearly set against the spiritual world. The repeated rhetorical structure links the material world with falsehood, the spiritual with truth. The opposition thus created points toward the "allegorizing imagination" of the preacher, the tendency to read the world as a series of spiritual symbols (Brodhead 155-56). The truth is thus figured as something which is *internal*. The actions of the individual in the outer world must always be aligned with this inner truth; false actions are read as signs of sinful inner corruption. Thus, Jonah's flight from the will of God is taken to be sign of his spiritual falsehood. He is punished, repents, and returns to the fold, purged of the inner falsehood.

This possibility for inner truth is reaffirmed by the close of Mapple's sermon. To him who obeys God and God alone, delight is held out, which balances the woe of the earlier passage.

> "But oh! shipmates! on the starboard hand of every woe, there is a sure delight; and higher the top of that delight, than the woe is deep. Is not the main-truck higher than the kelson is low? 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. Delight is to him whose strong arms yet support him, when the ship of this base treacherous world has gone down beneath him. Delight is to him, who gives no quarter to the truth, and kills, burns, and destroys all sin though he pluck it out from under the robes of Senators and Judges. Delight, — top-gallant delight is to him, who acknowledges no law or lord, but the Lord his God, and is only a patriot to heaven. Delight is to him, whom all the waves of the billows of the seas of the boisterous mob can never shake from this sure Keel of the Ages. And eternal delight and deliciousness will be his, who coming to lay him down, can say with his final breath — O Father! — chiefly known to me by Thy rod — mortal or immortal, here I die. I have striven to be Thine, more than to be this world's, or mine own. Yet this is nothing; I leave

> eternity to Thee; for what is man that he should live out the lifetime of his God?"
>
> (Melville 54)

The rhetorical pattern is identical to that of the earlier passage: "woe/delight to him who...." The parallel structure of delight and woe is an extension of the inner/outer distinction Mapple makes earlier. Delight stems from truth, woe from falsehood. Delight is also internal — "a far, far upward and inward delight" —, while woe stems from the outer world — "Woe to him who, in this world, courts not dishonor" (54). The ultimate effect of this opposition is twofold (as is everything in Mapple's sermon): first, it sets the standards of godliness and evil by which characters may be measured. Second, it establishes a tension between inner and outer levels of significance which will become the basis for Ahab's quest for Moby Dick. The double-stranded lesson of Jonah thus becomes a path by which *Moby-Dick* may be understood.

In *Violence and the Sacred* , René Girard reads yet another lesson in the story of Jonah: he takes the story to be a parable of sacrificial crisis and resolution. For Girard, ritual sacrifice is not an act of mediation between man and god, but an attempt to "deflect upon a relatively indifferent victim ... the violence that would otherwise be vented upon [society's] own members" (Girard 4). Violence is a self-propagating phenomenon. One individual's act of violence on another individual will always bring retribution; and the retribution will bring further retribution, and so on. Such a cycle of reciprocal violence is dangerous to a society whose furthest reaches could eventually become caught up in a feud which started from a single assault. Thus, retributive violence is not permitted. Violence, however, when unappeased, "seeks out and always finds a surrogate victim" (2). This substitute victim becomes the target for an act of communal, unanimous violence which erases the original act from memory.

> Once we have focused our attention on the sacrificial victim, the object originally singled out for violence fades from view. Sacrificial substitution implies a degree of misunderstanding. Its vitality as an institution depends on its ability to conceal the displacement upon which the rite is based. It must never lose sight entirely, however, of the original object, or cease to be aware of the act of transference from that object to the surrogate victim; without that awareness no substitution can take place and the sacrifice loses all efficacy.
>
> (5)

This misunderstanding is a key element of the sacrifice. The substitution of the surrogate victim for the original object of violence must be partially concealed. If it is explicitly recognized that the substitution has been made, then the sacrifice does not satisfy the impulse for violence against the original object. On the other hand, if the substitution is not implicitly understood, then one of two things takes place: either no substitution, and thus no sacrifice, can be made; or the victim and the original object become confused.

This confusion is termed by Girard the *sacrificial crisis*, the loss of distinction between the original object of violence and the surrogate victim. Girard points out the typical characterization of retributive violence as impure. It operates like a contagious disease, *infecting* its actors and objects; the taint of violence is "ritual impurity" (28). It is this inertia toward infection which causes thwarted violence to "hurl itself on a surrogate" (30). The unanimous violence of the sacrifice, however, purifies. "Ritual is nothing more than the regular exercise of 'good' violence" (37). It removes from society the threat of further contagion by at once masquerading as and rejecting retributive violence. When, however, the sacrificial crisis occurs, purifying violence becomes one with impure violence — all distinction between the two is erased. In the face of the sacrificial crisis, therefore, purification is no longer possible.

Girard points us to the story of Jonah as an example of the workings of the rite of sacrifice. Jonah, of course, attempts to flee God's command that he go to

Nineveh and prophesy its destruction. Once his ship is at sea,

> The Lord sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken.
>
> Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god, and cast forth the wares there were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of them. But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep.
>
> So the shipmaster came to him, and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not.
>
> (Jonah 1: 3-6)

For Girard, the ship, with its passengers and crew, represents the community threatened by sacrificial crisis in the form of the storm (Girard 313). But it would be equally appropriate to link the storm to retributive violence, because violence is antecedent to the sacrificial crisis, which is a result of the confusion of impure and purifying violence. Of the necessity to counter violence with more violence, Girard himself writes: "Violence is like a raging fire that feeds on the very objects intended to smother its flames. The metaphor of fire could well give way to metaphors of tempest, flood, earthquake" (31). The threat of violence is like a natural threat — such as a storm. The cycle of retributive violence is the most direct threat to the community; the storm is the most direct threat to the ship. Like the threat of violence, the storm is quieted by a unanimous act of violence: the sacrifice of Jonah.

Perhaps Girard identifies the storm as the sacrificial crisis because each man calls to a different god, indicating "a breakdown in the religious order" (313). The sailors' reaction to the storm is a truer reflection of the sacrificial crisis: this society has no religious identity. No one knows what the cause of the storm is, which god has brought it. They cannot tell one sort of violence from another. The ship's jettisoned cargo represents the abandoning of distinctions in a desperate attempt to heal the rift of violence (313).

Girard emphasizes the role of chance in finding the storm's cause. For the primitive man who uses overt ritual sacrifice, chance reflects the divine will and thus is trusted to reveal the truth:

> Chance embodies all the obvious characteristics of the sacred. Now it deals violently with man, now it showers him with gifts. Indeed, what is more capricious in its favors than Chance, more susceptible to those rapid reversals of temper which are invariably associated with the gods? The sacred nature of Chance is reflected in the practice of the lottery. In some sacrificial rites the choice of a victim by means of a lottery serves to underline the relationship between Chance and generative violence.
>
> (314)

The story of Jonah illustrates the use of chance in sacrificial selection. When the storm threatens to destroy the community of the ship, the crew cast lots to find who is responsible. Chance, as the instrument of divine will, is thus the selector of the sacrificial victim.

> And they said every one to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us. So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah.
>
> Then they said unto him, Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil is upon us; What is thine occupation? and whence comest thou? what is thy country? and of what people art thou?
>
> And he said unto them, I am an Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land.
>
> Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him, Why hast thou done this? For the men knew that he had fled from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them.
>
> Then they said unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous.
>
> And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you; for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you.
>
> Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to bring it to the land; but they could not; for the sea wrought and was tempestuous against them.
>
> Wherefore they cried unto the Lord, and said, We beseech thee, O Lord, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for thou, O Lord, hast done as it pleased thee.
>
> So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the

> sea ceased from her raging.
>
> Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the Lord, and made vows.
>
> (Jonah 1: 7-16)

The lot falls to Jonah, and it is therefore his Hebrew god who has sent the storm. The random outcome of the lots is thus transformed into a figure of necessity and divine will. Jonah understands and accepts the role he must play: he directs them to cast him into the sea to calm the storm. This is a narrative of ritual sacrifice. A violent threat to the community is present, and a victim is randomly chosen to avert it. Jonah satisfies the conditions of resemblance and nonresemblance which must be met by the surrogate victim. He is empirically unrelated to the storm; the sailors cannot simply look at Jonah and attribute the storm to him. Yet he is also named as its cause by the will of God in the form of chance. The violence which was directed against all becomes directed at him alone. His expulsion-sacrifice saves the community.

The success of such a ritual sacrifice serves a religious purpose: it tends to validate the rite itself and sanction future sacrifice. In the case of Jonah, this purpose is telescoped with religious conversion. The crew's sacrifice of Jonah to the Hebrew god, whom they do not worship, is an implicit acknowledgment of that god. Indeed, the crew offers up further sacrifices and vows to God, whom the ritual has validated as the true divinity. This conversion prefigures Jonah's own success in Nineveh. Girard compares the ship to the city where Jonah is told to preach (313). When the sailors are faced with their destruction, then saved, they turn to this new Hebrew God, as do the people of Nineveh. Jonah's sin and return to the role of pilot-prophet thus brings a two-fold conversion of communities.

An important aspect of the tale of Jonah as sacrifice which Girard does not explicitly treat is that the crew readily accepts not only the fall of the lot, but the

storm itself, as the will of God. For sacrifice to function, the threat of violence must always be perceived as coming from outside the community, often from a supernatural source. If it is explicitly acknowledged as coming from an individual or group within society, no sacrifice can take place, and the cycle of retribution will continue. There are three elements of ritual sacrifice: a threat, a god, and a surrogate victim. Whether or not any of these elements is *actually* supernatural or mediative to the supernatural does not matter. What does matter is that the violence is transferred onto the victim, the god is perceived as satisfied, and the crisis is averted (92). The ascription of these elements to the realm of the supernatural reveals the mythologizing process necessary to sacrifice. In the case of Jonah, all that is empirically given is a particularly violent storm. All else is ascribed *by the actors* in the drama to the supernatural: the storm as divine wrath, the fall of the lots as divine will and truth, the sacrifice as directed toward God, and the calming of the waters as evidence of God's satisfaction. God thus becomes truth for the sailors. The ritual of sacrifice in its capacity of ending the cycle of reciprocal violence lends credibility to the myth. That the sacrifice removes the threat — here perceived as supernatural — is taken as verification of the myth the sacrifice itself created. Sacrifice thus inevitably leads to the creation and acceptance of myths.

This understanding of the mythologizing process implicit in sacrifice returns us to the figure of Father Mapple as pilot-prophet. Mapple's sermon reveals a tendency to read objects as spiritual images; his metaphor of rope-making is an excellent example.

> "Shipmates, this book, containing only four chapters — four yarns — is one of the smallest strands in the mighty cable of the scriptures. Yet what depths of the soul does Jonah's deep sea-line sound! what a pregnant lesson to us is this prophet! What a noble thing is that canticle in the fish's belly! How billow-like and boisterously grand!"
>
> (Melville 47)

Mapple likens Jonah's tale to rope, then transforms this image into a complex which characterizes the Bible as a necessary tool for spiritual progress. Mapple grasps at objects as signifying spiritual truths, and as tools for reaching those truths. Mapple's allegorizing imagination recalls the mythologizing process of sacrifice, for sacrifice ascribes supernatural meanings to worldly occurrences. In Jonah's case, for example, the storm, the fall of the lots, and the storm's end are all ascribed to divine will. This mythologizing parallels the process in which Mapple engages; he takes the story itself and weaves into it his "two-stranded lesson." That is, he takes the factual account of Jonah and reads it as a lesson of divine will which applies to both himself and his flock.

Mapple explicitly continues to read objects as spiritual symbols in the course of his sermon. Note, for example, the hymn he sings to open his sermon:

> The ribs and terrors in the whale,
> Arched over me a dismal gloom,
> While all God's sunlit waves rolled by,
> And left me deepening down to doom.
>
> I saw the opening maw of hell,
> With endless pains and sorrows there;
> Which none but they that feel can tell —
> Oh, I was plunging to despair.
>
> (46)

The voice is Jonah's, but, in the act of singing, Mapple links himself to Jonah as pilot-prophet; it is a shared voice. Like Jonah, who perceives the storm as the wrath of God, Mapple is a reader of the world in spiritual terms. In the second stanza, the whale's opening mouth is called "the maw to hell," and Jonah's descent into the ocean is a plunge to despair. The natural, empirical images are transformed into allegories of spiritual trial. The allegorizing imagination does not, however, belong to Mapple alone. It is a primary characteristic of the pilot-prophet. The pilot-prophet is in essence a preacher, a spiritual guide. As such, he *necessarily* allegorizes the world into spiritual images.

Ahab is the central pilot-prophet of *Moby-Dick*. He is first marked as such by his allegorizing imagination. In "The Quarter-Deck" Ahab delivers his metaphysical reading of the world.

> "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."
> (178)

Ahab reads all objects as "pasteboard masks" which hide the true nature of reality. All physical reality is but a facade for Ahab, a dumb representation of the true, spiritual reality beyond. His figuration is similar to Father Mapple's in the "woe" passage of the sermon. Truth is, for Ahab, internal, beneath the false mask which is external reality. Like Mapple, his allegorizing imagination reads objects as concrete representations of spirit. The allegorizing imagination is the characteristic of the pilot-prophet — the preacher —, and its presence marks Ahab's speech on the quarter-deck as a *sermon*, though he does not present it as such. Ahab envisions himself as able to move past the pasteboard deception of the outer world to get at the truth within. The above speech is delivered to Starbuck as an attempt to guide the mate to the perception of inner truth. Thus, Ahab takes upon himself the role of the preacher, the spiritual guide, who delivers the lessons which he may read in the world by virtue of the allegorizing imagination. Ahab is the captain of the *Pequod*; he is its primary pilot, its guide in the world of objects. Ahab's sermon also makes him its guide in the spiritual world. As captain, he is responsible for the lives of his crew. By making himself his crew's minister, he takes responsibility for its souls.

Father Mapple's sermon provides more direct links between Ahab and Jonah. Mapple describes Jonah's fitful sleep in the state-room of his ship:

> "Jonah throws himself in his berth, and finds the little state-room ceiling almost resting on his forehead. The air is close, and Jonah

> gasps. Then, in that contracted hole, sunk, too, beneath the ship's water line, Jonah feels the heralding presentiment of that stifling hour, when the whale shall hold him in the smallest of his bowel's vaults.
>
> Screwed at its axis against the ship's side, a swinging lamp slightly oscillates in Jonah's room; and ... the lamp, flame and all, though in slight motion, still maintains a permanent obliquity with reference to the room; though, in truth, infallibly straight itself, it but made obvious the false, lying levels among which it hung. The lamp alarms and frightens Jonah; as lying in his berth his tormented eyes roll round the place, this thus far successful fugitive finds no refuge from his restless glance. But that contradiction in the lamp more and more appalls him. The floors, the ceiling, and the side are all awry. 'Oh! so my conscience hangs in me!' he groans, 'straight upwards, so it burns; but the chambers of my soul are all in crookedness!'
>
> Like one who after a night of drunken revelry hies to his bed, still reeling, but with conscience yet pricking him, as the plungings of the Roman race-horse but so much the more strike his steel tags in him; as one who in that miserable plight still turns and turns in giddy anguish, praying God for annihilation until the fit passed; and at last amid the whirl of woe he feels, a deep stupor steals over him, as over the man who bleeds to death, for conscience is the wound, and there's naught to staunch it; so, after sore wrestlings in his berth, Jonah's prodigy of ponderous misery drags him drowning down to sleep."
>
> (50)

Mapple's description of Jonah is a definition and performance of his allegorizing imagination. He constructs the entire account of Jonah's sleep as a vehicle for the figure of the lamp, which represents the conscience of the sinner; it reveals with its unfailing light the inconsistencies and guilt of the man's soul. Mapple reads the lamp, a physical object, as a spiritual symbol for Jonah's conscience; he also figures the truth as inner conscience, while the external world is figured as "false" and "lying." The lamp may also be read as defining the pilot-prophet: "in truth, infallibly straight itself, it but made obvious the false, lying levels among which it hung." The lamp parallels the figure of the pilot-prophet, who must "preach the Truth to the face of Falsehood" (54). Like the lamp, the pilot-prophet makes clear the falseness of the world and lays bare the inner truth.

This passage bears remarkable similarity to Ishmael's description in Chapter

41, "Moby Dick," of the savaged and torn Ahab sleeping, following his first encounter with the white whale:

> Ahab and anguish lay stretched together in one hammock, rounding in mid winter that dreary, howling Patagonian Cape; then it was, that his torn body and gashed soul bled into one another; and so interfusing, made him mad. That it was only then, on the homeward voyage, after the encounter, that the final monomania seized him, seems all but certain from the fact that, at intervals during the passage, he was a raving lunatic; and though unlimbed of a leg, yet such vital strength yet lurked in his Egyptian chest, and was moreover intensified by his delirium, that his mates were forced to lace him fast, even there, as he lay sailing, in his hammock. In a strait-jacket he swung to the mad rockings of the gales.
>
> (200-201)

Both Jonah and Ahab are confined for a period of trial and crisis, Ahab by a strait-jacket, Jonah by the cabin's lock. Jonah's discomfort in his cabin is "the heralding presentiment of that stifling hour, when the whale shall hold him in the smallest of his bowel's wards" (50). Mapple's account is a precursor of Jonah's crisis of conscience in the belly of the whale. Ahab's own sleep represents his own time "in the whale's belly" — it *is* his crisis. Jonah struggles with his conscience, while Ahab struggles with the onset of his monomania. Both passages exhibit the inner/outer opposition in which the pilot-prophet deals. In Jonah's case, it is figured as the inner truth which is revealed by the lamp in the midst of outer falsehood. In Ahab's confinement, however, the opposition is given in terms of body and soul: "his torn body and gashed soul bled into one another, and so interfusing, made him mad" (201). Jonah is ultimately able to keep the inner and the outer separate; in Ahab, the mingling of the inner with the outer produces madness. The loss of distinction between body and soul prefigures the loss of distinction of the sacrificial crisis. In Mapple's sermon, distinction leads to sacrifice, which removes the threat of the storm. Because Ahab is unable to retain distinction, no such sacrifice will finally be possible for him; violence will

overwhelm Ahab.

While Jonah moves in his crisis toward repentance and forgiveness, Ahab moves into madness and sin. Jonah's sin is that he does not bow to the will of God and travel to Nineveh to preach God's truth. Ahab's sin also lies in disobedience, but of a different sort. In "The Quarter-Deck," Ahab addresses Starbuck, who calls Ahab's rage at Moby Dick blasphemous:

> "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! ... I see in [Moby Dick] outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing it. That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate; and be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal, I will wreak that hate upon him."
>
> (178)

Ahab's sin is his incessant desire to *know* Moby Dick, to thrust through the pasteboard mask and see what lies beyond. The desire for knowledge here equals the desire for supremacy over Moby Dick, even over God. Ahab reads the white whale as representative of spiritual truth, and God is the ultimate spiritual truth. Ahab will not accept a subordinate place in either the material or the spiritual world. Ahab continues to Starbuck:

> "Talk not to me of blasphemy, man; I'd strike the sun if it insulted me. For could the sun do that, then could I do the other; since there is ever a sort of fair play herein, jealousy presiding over all creations. But not my master, man, is even that fair play. Who's over me?"
>
> (178)

Ahab considers himself the equal of God, able to strike at even the sun. Ahab's initial attack on Moby Dick is thus an attack not only on the whale, but on God himself. Ahab attempts to possess what lies within the realm of God, implicitly placing himself in God's position through his own concept of "fair play." Ahab's rage is indeed blasphemy, as Starbuck says. Ahab's "sermon" marks him as a

prophet-pilot, but it marks him also as the lowest of sinners; as Father Mapple says, Ahab, "while preaching to others is himself a castaway" (54).

Our understanding of Girard's text adds layers of significance to the correspondence between Ahab and Jonah. Each man plays a role in the sacrificial rite, but where Jonah offers himself up as its victim, Ahab corrupts the process, as we will see (in more detail) in the next chapter.

This correspondence between Ahab and Jonah suggests that Ahab is the rightful victim of a sacrifice, but he does not offer himself up; rather, he embarks upon a quest to hunt down the agent of his wounding. Though Ahab is eventually killed, his community, the *Pequod*, is destroyed before him. Seen in the light of *Violence and the Sacred*, Ahab's sin is not simply his pride, but the ways in which he corrupts the rite of sacrifice and embraces reciprocal violence. These are more awful sins than the disobedience of Jonah who sought only to flee from God's will, not to replace it with his own. Ahab's corruption of the rite fits well within Father Mapple's scheme of sin. Ahab is a pilot-prophet, a spiritual guide for his crew. His is the responsibility for their lives and souls. Not only does he seek to be a god, he leads to destruction the men with whose lives he is entrusted. The debt for his sin is not paid merely by Ahab himself, but by the *Pequod* and her crew. What sin could be greater for the "pilot of the living God" (47)?

Chapter 2: The Corruption of the Rite

As Ahab prepares himself, in Chapter 113, for his final confrontation with Moby Dick, he has the *Pequod*'s blacksmith, Perth, forge him a new harpoon. Ahab seeks a harpoon with supernatural powers with which to smite the whale, and he transforms the iron's tempering into a twisted black-magic baptism in heathen blood.

> Fashioned at last into an arrowy shape, and welded by Perth to the shank, the steel soon pointed the end of the iron; and as the blacksmith was giving the barbs their final heat, prior to tempering them, he cried to Ahab to place the water-cask near.
>
> "No, no — no water for that; I want it of the true death-temper. Ahoy, there! Tashtego, Queequeg, Daggoo! what say ye, pagans! Will ye give me as much blood as will cover this barb?" holding it high up. A cluster of dark nods responded, Yes. Three punctures were made in the heathen flesh, and the White Whale's barbs were then tempered.
>
> "Ego non baptizo te in nomine patris, sed in nomine diaboli!" deliriously howled Ahab, as the malignant iron scorchingly devoured the baptismal blood.
>
> (532)

Ahab here twists the holy sacrament of baptism into an evil pagan rite. Christian baptism in water is a rite which symbolizes rebirth unto God; the harpoon's baptism in blood is to give it "the true death-temper." The harpoon is to be used only to slay Moby Dick — its barbs are called the White Whale's. Ahab corrupts the rite of baptism on every level. Not only does Ahab use blood to baptize his harpoon, he uses the heathen blood of his harpooneers. The use of Latin in the religious ceremony is Christian (as Ahab's his archaic Quaker speech pattern) but the words are absolutely unholy: "I baptize you not in the name of the father, but in the name of the devil." This baptism reflects Ahab's rejection of all that is godly. Not only does he attempt to replace God's will with his own, he systematically corrupts the holy sacraments of the church.

Ahab, then, is established as a corrupter of holy rites. But these explicit examples of corruption can stand as figures for Ahab's larger corruption of the rite of sacrifice. It has already been suggested that Ahab may be the rightful victim of a sacrifice which would save the community of the *Pequod*. Ahab's reciprocal conflict with Moby Dick poses danger to the *Pequod*. Ahab's continued pursuit of the white whale will be seen to be both a rejection and a corruption of the purifying rite. Without the sacrifice to check violence, Ahab's quest finally ends as it must: in tragedy.

As we begin our exploration of Ahab's corruption of the sacrifice, we first must focus specifically on the sacrificial crisis, the condition resulting when proper distinction is not made between the original object of reciprocal violence and the surrogate victim of unanimous violence. It is important that the victim not be the original object; if violence is performed on that person, the cycle of retribution is still open. Yet the victim must bear some resemblance to the object it replaces, or the violent impulse will go unsatisfied:

> Once we have focused our attention on the sacrificial victim, the object originally singled out for violence fades from view. Sacrificial substitution implies a degree of misunderstanding. Its vitality as an institution depends on its ability to conceal the displacement upon which the rite is based. It must never lose sight entirely, however, of the original object, or cease to be aware of the act of transference from that object to the surrogate victim; without that awareness no substitution can take place and the sacrifice loses all efficacy.
>
> (Girard 5)

Sacrifice is necessarily an ambiguous act. It must at once conceal and acknowledge the object and the substitution of the victim for that object. The replacement of the original object of violence with the surrogate victim must be hidden so that the object will cease to be a target for violence; yet, without a degree of awareness of the substitution, the sacrifice cannot function to place the

burden of violence on its victim.

The cycle of reciprocal violence always consists of more or less symmetrical acts: one actor strikes another, who retaliates and is in turn retaliated against. Reciprocal violence is thus always mimetic in nature. One act brings another, symmetrical act, and so on. This is the basis of retribution: an eye for an eye. In a reciprocal conflict,

> Each blow upsets the equilibrium, threatening to decide the outcome then and there. It is immediately followed by a new blow that not only redresses the balance but creates a symmetrical disequilibrium that is itself, naturally enough, of short duration.
>
> (45)

The adversaries trade blows in an ever-escalating, never-resolved battle. Such indecisiveness will soon cause the conflict to grow beyond its original participants to include the society as a whole. If the resulting danger is not expiated in an act of sacrifice, the entire society can be brought down.

However, the balance of the adversaries eventually makes it difficult to distinguish between them or to make "any distinction ... between 'good' and 'wicked' characters" (47). It also becomes impossible to distinguish between impure (reciprocal) and purifying (unanimous) violence. In the face of total nondistinction, sacrifice thus becomes impossible, and reciprocal violence spreads, blow exchanged for blow, until the community is engulfed. Distinction must *always* be present in violence if that violence is to be contained by sacrifice. This distinction, however, cannot be total, or the sacrifice ceases to be a substitution and does not close the cycle of violence.

The sacrificial crisis, therefore, can be defined as "a crisis of distinctions — that is, a crisis affecting the cultural order" (49). Order depends on cultural distinctions, and it is the loss of distinction which often gives rise to conflict between individuals within a society(49). The individual requires his identity as

individual; when his distinctness is removed, he enters into conflict to regain it. Girard points toward stories and myths of enemy brothers whose lack of distinction is both the badge and the genesis of their conflicts: Cain and Abel, Romulus and Remus (61). Such pairs bring with them the potential for society's destruction in the cycle of retributive violence. This potential excites the fear of the society, and one or the other of them is often exiled, like Cain, or destroyed, like Remus, by an act of unanimous violence. In any case, the cycle of retributive violence is headed off and harmony restored (57).

In *Moby-Dick*, Melville establishes a reciprocal conflict between Ahab and the whale that eventually reaches the point of sacrificial crisis. The conflict is begun by Ahab, who sets upon Moby Dick during a whaling voyage off the coast of Japan. Ahab "dashed at the whale ... blindly seeking with a six inch blade to reach the fathom-deep life of the whale" (Melville 199). It was then that the whale "reaped away Ahab's leg, as a mower a blade of grass in the field" (199). The cycle of retribution has begun even before the action of Melville's narrative begins. The desperation and futility of Ahab's attack, measured against the ease and power of the whale's reprisal, do not meet Girard's demand that violence be symmetrical and equal, with neither combatant more than briefly gaining the upper hand (45). But the two are alike in escaping the first encounter essentially unscathed: "there seemed no sign of common bodily illness about [Ahab]," (134) and "after repeated, intrepid assaults, the White Whale had escaped alive" (198). Violence has thus far been unable to truly harm either, and this balance is maintained through much of the narrative. After Moby Dick has destroyed his boat and broken off his whale-bone leg on the second day of the chase, Ahab cries,

> "Even with a broken bone, old Ahab is untouched; and I account no living bone of mine one jot more me than this dead one that's lost. Nor white whale, nor man, nor fiend, can

> so much as graze old Ahab in his own proper and inaccessible being."
>
> (610)

Ahab figures Moby Dick's assaults on himself as futile — even as his own initial attack was futile against the whale. The ineffectuality of the reciprocal adversaries' attacks is clear here. Neither can gain the upper hand, and the futility of the attacks begins to erase the distinction between them. Not only does the violence feed itself in a reciprocal cycle, but the effacing of difference becomes part of the cycle that will lead inevitably to catastrophe.

The absence of differentiation, which leads to the sacrificial crisis, is developed through both the continuing cycle of violence between Ahab and Moby Dick and the accompanying symbolic linkage between the two. It is difficult to chart any development of this linkage alongside the development of the cycle of retribution, because the cycle has begun as the narrative opens, and with the introduction of the two antagonists, the linkage is already presented. But the chapter entitled "Queen Mab" provides some grasp on the link between the two. The chapter relates the dream of the second mate, Stubb.

> "Such a queer dream, [Flask], I never had. You know the old man's ivory leg, well I dreamed he kicked me with it; and when I tried to kick back, upon my soul, my little man, I kicked my leg right off! And then, presto! Ahab seemed a pyramid, and I, like a blazing fool, kept kicking at it."
>
> (142)

In the dream, Ahab kicks Stubb with his false leg, who, when he returns the kick, kicks his own leg right off. Ahab then undergoes a seeming transformation into a pyramid, which Stubb continues to kick at (142). Stubb, participating in reciprocal violence, is made to resemble Ahab through the loss of his own leg — the loss of differentiation between the two then leads Stubb to continue the cycle.

Stubb's dream at once represents the ceaseless, senseless cycle of violence

and begins to establish the link between Ahab and Moby Dick in terms of death. In Chapter 41, "Moby Dick," the whale is described as having "a high, pyramidical white hump" (198). Ahab — in "Queen Mab" — and Moby Dick are thus both metaphorically linked to pyramids. The link between Ahab and the pyramid, and thus Moby Dick, is reinforced by at least one reference in the chapter to Ahab's "Egyptian chest" (200). The link of Ahab and Moby Dick to the pyramids of Egypt does not simply draw a correlation between the two, but also links them to death — for the pyramids are simply grand tombs. In the first day of the chase, Moby Dick is again compared to a tomb: "the glittering mouth yawned beneath the boat like an open-doored marble tomb" (549). The death they are linked with is the inevitable result of their reciprocal struggle: death on a grand scale, though no tomb can be Ahab's.

This link is continued in other physical descriptions of Ahab and the whale. The livid white scar that runs "from Ahab's grey hairs ... right down one side of his tawny scorched face and neck" (134) certainly recalls the "same shrouded hue" which so "streaked, and spotted and marbled" Moby Dick (199). Each of the antagonists is marked as different from others of his kind: Ahab standing above and apart from men, Moby Dick equally remote from the whales of the sea. And the whale's "snow-white wrinkled forehead" (198) is linked to Ahab's own. As Ahab plots the possible courses of the white whale in "The Chart,"

> the heavy pewter lamp ... for ever threw shifting gleams and shadows of lines upon his wrinkled brow, till it almost seemed that while he himself was marking out lines and courses on the wrinkled charts, some invisible pencil was also tracing lines and courses upon the deeply marked chart of his forehead.
>
> (215)

In charting Moby Dick's course, Ahab is attempting to *know* the whale; his violence is couched in terms of knowledge. Thus, Ahab's quest is not simply for

vengeance, but is also an epistemological quest. Ahab's "wrinkled brow" directly parallels the "wrinkled forehead" (198) of Moby Dick. But the wrinkles seem to be of his own making. In the act of plotting the whale's course, Ahab is plotting the same course — his knowledge of Moby Dick — onto his own countenance. Ahab lays the whale over himself like a template, and traces the wrinkles there. Ahab is indeed marking himself, making himself over in the image of the whale, erasing the distinctions between the two of them until they are one and the same.

Ahab's false leg, which replaces the leg claimed by the whale, is carved from the bone of a sperm whale's jaw. The use of whalebone simultaneously recalls the agent of Ahab's maiming and enacts a symbolic vengeance on that agent. The agent of Ahab's dismemberment, Moby Dick's jaw, is crooked and "sickle-shaped." Its malformation parallels Ahab's crippling, yet it remains the sole and strong cause of the wound — the jaw is at once crippled and healthy. Ahab is likewise both crippled and healthy. Despite his missing leg, "there seemed no sign of bodily illness about him" (134). Through a reciprocal act of violence, Ahab claims another whale's straight, unwarped jaw in place of his limb. On one hand, this is a symbolic vengeance on Moby-Dick through a surrogate victim. Here, Ahab upholds the rite by choosing (albeit out of necessity) a victim to receive the full force of his violence, though he then fails to let the violence be quelled. On the other hand, however, it is no revenge at all, since Moby Dick stands apart from other whales. Ahab's authority as the "great lord of Leviathans" (141) does not extend to Moby Dick — he remains adversarial with respect to the whale, his violence merely reciprocal. Here we may already see the presence of the sacrificial crisis. Pure and impure violence are confounded; there is no way to separate the two. It is for this reason that Ahab continues in the cycle of violence. He has already made himself over in the image of Moby Dick, corrupting the rite and preventing the sacrifice from occurring.

We can see the sacrificial crisis drawn out quite clearly between Ahab and Moby Dick. Distinction between the two is, in many ways, impossible. True, one can say that, "Ahab is a man; Moby Dick remains a whale," but in terms of their *conflict*, the pair move into a state of nondistinction. This nondistinction is, as with Cain and Abel or Romulus and Remus, both the mark and the genesis of their conflict. It grows with the conflict, yet it lies at the conflict's heart. The individual requires his distinction and enters into conflict to regain it. Ironically, the conflict only heightens the lack of distinction between Ahab and Moby Dick. Ahab's epistemological quest is thus misguided. For Ahab, to kill Moby Dick is to *know* him. But *knowledge* postulates a knowable other. In the face of nondistinction, otherness is effaced — Ahab cannot know Moby Dick because he cannot distinguish the whale from himself. Because reciprocal violence only further removes difference, violence toward Moby Dick can never restore Ahab's distinction. Yet the initial similarity requires violence. Ahab is in what Girard terms a *double bind*: he is caught between two opposing imperatives: to reclaim his distinction and to disclaim violence (Girard 147).

Ahab's desire for individuality is also a desire for knowledge and mastery over Moby Dick. Girard states that

> violent opposition ... is the signifier of ultimate desire, of divine self-sufficiency, of that "beautiful totality" whose beauty depends on its being inaccessible and impenetrable.... [the actor in a reciprocal struggle] strives to master it by means of a mimetic counterviolence and measures his own stature in proportion to his failure. If by chance, he actually succeeds in asserting his mastery over the model, the latter's prestige vanishes. He must then turn to an even greater violence and seek out an obstacle that promises to be truly insurmountable.

We may see something of this in Ahab's characterization of Moby Dick: the white whale is Ahab's ultimate obstacle. Although Ahab is the "great lord of

Leviathans" (Melville 141), his mastery of whales is insufficient, so he moves on to the greatest of whales. But Moby Dick comes to be more than *whale* to Ahab. He is in some sense "that beautiful totality": impenetrable and inaccessible, yet to be penetrated. To return to "The Quarter-Deck":

> "How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall? To me, the white whale is that wall, shoved near to me. Sometimes I think there's naught beyond. But 'tis enough. He tasks me; he heaps me; I see in [Moby Dick] outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing it. That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate; and be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal, I will wreak that hate upon him."
>
> (178)

The word *inscrutable* is a direct synonym for Girard's *impenetrable*. Yet Ahab intends to penetrate the impenetrable mystery of Moby Dick. Ahab assigns meaning to Moby Dick, makes him the repository of all knowledge that is beyond the world of men. Ahab's violence may be seen as for the purpose of knowledge. It is an attempt to *know* Moby Dick and, thus, what lies beyond him. Here we return to Ahab as pilot-prophet. His corruption of his role as pilot-prophet is now seen to be linked to his corruption of the sacrificial rite. Ahab's desire for the knowledge that Moby Dick represents leads to violence which, because it brings with it the nondistinction of the sacrificial crisis, cannot be quelled with an act of sacrifice.

We must now discuss the *monstrous double* as a consequence of mimetic desire and violence. While the constant symmetry of conflict, combined with the action of mimetic desire, causes the observer of the struggle — i.e., the reader — not to be able to recognize difference between the participants, the participants themselves can recognize no similarity between themselves. Only the outside perspective, which can perceive reciprocity and unity, can "discern the workings of the violent resolution, the cryptic process by which unanimity is reformed against and around the surrogate victim" (Girard 159). When all difference

between the rivals has been eliminated and similarity achieved, they become *doubles*. The resulting interchangeability makes the act of sacrificial substitution possible — it is the ambivalent ground where difference is hidden enough to allow the substitution of the surrogate victim.

This doubling of the actors in the reciprocal struggle is an external perception. Normally, the antagonists do not perceive the similarity between themselves: Ahab certainly sees no initial resemblance between himself and Moby Dick. Rather, he sees Moby Dick as the *other*, which he must defeat and grasp. But in the unresolved conflict, there will eventually come a moment when a form of doubling is perceived from within the conflict and only from within it. The symmetry of reciprocal conflict is presented as a dynamic equilibrium; the differences separating the adversaries shift back and forth with each blow struck in the conflict. As the conflict grows in intensity, these shifts in balance pass so quickly that they become blurred to the individual in conflict; instead of individual moments, he sees a composite of all the previous extremes (159). Where before he saw himself and his rival as "incarnations of unique and separate moments in the temporal scheme," he now perceives "two simultaneous projections of the entire time span" (160). The individual moments of the temporal struggle are telescoped into projections of each side of the entire struggle. The subject and the object are "caught up in a constant exchange of differences. The same set of images is projected almost simultaneously in two symmetrical locations" — in the subject and the object (164). The exchange of differences implicit in the equilibrium of the reciprocal struggle cause exactly the same image to be perceived by the subject as the "me" and the "not-me." It is at this point that the *monstrous double* appears. Each actor sees his rival and himself as identical projections of their struggle; distinction between them has been lost. The monstrous double is monstrous because it forces the subject of

violence to perceive that he is *just like* his rival. However, the appearance of the monstrous double does not represent the actual elimination of differences, but the confusion of them. It thus occupies

> the equivocal middle ground between difference and unity that is indispensable to the process of sacrificial substitution — to the polarization of violence onto a single victim who stands for all others. The monstrous double gives the antagonists, incapable of perceiving that nothing actually stands between them (or their reconciliation), precisely what they need to arrive at the compromise that involves unanimity *minus* the victim of the generative expulsion. (161)

The monstrous double represents the ambiguity of sacrificial substitution, which requires both distinction between and unity of the object of violence and the surrogate victim. The moment of the monstrous double's appearance is exactly the moment at which sacrificial substitution can take place because the confusion of distinctions satisfies the requirement that difference be both acknowledged and hidden. Because distinction is not recognized, the original object of violence is obscured to the point where substitution can function and the sacrifice can proceed (5). Because nothing stands between the rivals, a position is reached where their violence can be redirected onto a surrogate victim.

The monstrous double appears as an hallucination, as "two simultaneous projections of the entire time span" (160). Its existence has an unreal character and cannot be verified empirically. This is the basis for its terror and fascination for the participant in the conflict. The monstrous double is both an internal projection of the "me," and an external projection of the "not-me." Thus, it attacks the actor in reciprocal violence from within *and* from without. It seems too bizarre to originate in the world of man. The double is thus often attributed to the gods or to *possession*. Ahab perceives Moby Dick in exactly this hallucinatory fashion. As Ishmael says in the chapter, "Moby-Dick,"

> The White Whale swam before him as the monomaniac incarnation of all those malicious agencies which some deep men feel eating in them, till they are left living on with half a heart and half a lung. That intangible malignity which has been from the beginning; to whose dominion even the modern Christians ascribe one-half of the worlds; which the ancient Ophites of the east reverenced in their statue devil;— Ahab did not fall down and worship it like them; but deliriously transferring its idea to the abhorred white whale, he pitted himself, all mutilated, against it. All that most maddens and torments; all that stirs up the lees of things; all truth with malice in it; all that cracks the sinews and cakes the brain; all the subtle demonisms of life and thought; all evil, to crazy Ahab, were visibly personified, and made practically assailable in Moby Dick.
>
> (Melville 200)

The language here is of hallucination: "the White Whale *swam* before him." Swimming is not only physical motion; it also recalls the swimming of vision when confronted with mirage. Ahab's allegorizing imagination makes of Moby Dick the physical avatar of a metaphysical malice; the whale is moved by this malice, as if possessed by it. The perception which creates the monstrous double goes hand in hand with the action of Ahab's allegorizing imagination in reading Moby Dick as the "monomaniac incarnation of all those malicious agencies which some deep men feel eating in them" (200). Ahab not only perceives in Moby Dick a monstrous double but also makes him the sum total of all evil. That is, the doubling of Moby Dick and Ahab creates in the old man Moby Dick's counterpart; Ahab makes himself the nemesis which will be able to thrust through the pasteboard mask of the whale and grasp what lies beyond.

The creation of the monstrous double, again, "gives the antagonists, incapable of perceiving that nothing actually stands between them (or their reconciliation), precisely what they need to arrive at the compromise that involves unanimity *minus* the victim of the generative expulsion" (Girard 161). Because the nondistinction requirement of sacrificial substitution has been met, the conflict is near resolution — sacrifice is possible. But Ahab cannot perceive the fact. His

desire for power prevents the selection of a surrogate victim to halt the conflict. No compromise is possible; the only victim he can perceive is Moby Dick. Ahab appears to grasp the white whale as the victim of sacrifice, with Ahab himself as the sacrificer. The rhetoric describing Ahab's pouring of evil onto Moby Dick is couched in terms which recall the very act of sacrifice: "He piled upon the whale's white hump the sum of all the general rage and hate felt by his whole race from Adam down; and then, as if his chest had been a mortar, he burst his hot heart's shell upon it" (Melville 200). This passage describes the selection of a surrogate victim — Moby Dick — who is made to bear the burden of all evil. The violence of the artillery image seems sacrificial: it recalls the pouring of the heart's blood out upon an altar — Moby Dick's hump. The passage also reflects the sacrificial crisis, for the image is of Ahab sacrificing himself on the altar of Moby Dick. Ahab has confused the distinction between himself and Moby Dick to the point where even he cannot even distinguish between himself and the white whale; the doubling of the antagonists has come to be perceived from within the struggle. The words suggest that Moby Dick is to be the victim of a sacrifice, but the mortar image has Ahab as that victim. The crisis is compounded by Ahab's apparent position as both sacrificer and sacrificed and by the fact that Moby Dick is party — in the form of the altar — to the sacrifice of which both he and Ahab seem the victim. Ahab is confusing the distinctions between himself and Moby Dick, and under these circumstances of total assimilation, the sacrifice cannot occur.

Ahab has, in essence, corrupted the very rite which serves to protect his community.

> "I see in him outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing it. That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate; and be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal, I will wreak that hate upon him."
>
> (164)

Ahab swears vengeance on Moby Dick for his maiming, which is perceived as an act of malice. He has claimed the right to choose the sacrificial victim for his violence — he has usurped the unanimity necessary to the rite of sacrifice for his own, claiming the right to speak for his community. As early as his speech on the quarter-deck, Ahab states, "I do not order ye; ye will it" (180). In assigning to Moby Dick the role of the bearer of evil, Ahab has designated as the surrogate victim of sacrifice the agent of his own crippling. Doing so, he confuses Moby Dick as the object of violence with the sacrificial victim. The surrogate victim and the object of violence should not be the same, or else the cycle of retribution is left open. This is no sacrifice at all; it cannot restore harmony and stop the violence. Rather, it can only give rise to further violence. Ahab's initial view of the whale threatens to make a travesty of the rite of sacrifice. What must be on the part of the community a unanimous act of violence has become one man's misguided and monomaniacal attempt at eradicating "evil" in the form of Moby Dick, the adversary that Ahab himself helped create. The fact that Ahab is able to get the crew behind him should not be perceived as unanimity; Starbuck remains apart from the quest, and Ishmael eventually separates himself from it. Ahab confuses all things involved in the rite: purifying and impure violence, victim and object, himself and the white whale. Thus, Ahab's "sacrifice" inevitably goes wrong. In Girard's terms, it is reciprocal violence masquerading as purifying violence, and it thus ends in destruction and tragedy.

The creation of the monstrous double has its own consequences for the reading of Ahab's quest as a quest for knowledge. Ahab wishes at once to master and to understand Moby Dick as agent or principal of hidden, inscrutable malice, "which has been from the beginning" (184). But as the cycle of reciprocal violence which he has initiated removes the difference between himself and Moby Dick, Ahab unwittingly incorporates himself into the mixture, creating a

monstrous, mimetic double. As Ahab attempts to plumb the depths of malice which he perceives in the white whale, he is searching himself, for *he* has invested Moby Dick with that malice — the whale is "dumb blankness; full of meaning:" the meaning which Ahab himself brings (212). The knower and the known, the sacrificer and the sacrificed are one and the same. Ahab's vigil at the side of the *Pequod* in "The Symphony" is at once a searching of himself and of the malice he seeks to know, but as he searches his shadow in the water, it "[sinks] to his gaze, the more and more he [strives] to pierce the profundity" (590). His insight into malice must finally be an insight into himself.

In his search for meaning, Ahab always arrives at himself. Chapter 99, "The Doubloon," offers a particularly vivid illustration of this fact. Each of eight crewmen approaches the Ecuadorian doubloon, which Ahab has nailed to the main-mast as a reward to him who first raises Moby Dick on the day he is killed, and examines its symbology, reading eight different meanings into it. Ahab approaches first, and offers his interpretation of the coin.

> On its round border it bore the letters, **REPUBLICA DEL ECUADOR: QUITO**. So this bright coin came from a country planted in the middle of the world, and beneath the great equator, and named after it; and it has been cast midway up the Andes, in the unwaning clime that knows no autumn.. Zoned by these letters you saw the likeness of three Andes summits; from one a flame; a tower on another; on the third, a crowing cock; while arching over all was a segment of the partitioned zodiac, the signs all marked with their usual cabalistics, and the keystone sun entering the equinoctial point at Libra.
>
> Before this equatorial coin, Ahab, not unobserved by others, was now pausing.
>
> "There's something ever egotistical in the mountain-tops and towers, and all the other grand and lofty 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, which, like the magician's glass, to each and every man in turn but mirrors back his own mysterious self. Great pains, small gains for those who ask the world to solve them; it

> cannot solve itself. Methinks now this coined sun wears a ruddy face; but see! aye, he enters the sign of storms, the equinox! and but six months before he wheeled out of a former equinox at Aries! From storm to storm! So be it, then! Here's stout stuff for woe to work on. So be it, then."
> (471-72)

Ahab reads himself into the symbols on the coin's face: the tower, the fire, and the cock all are read as standing for Ahab himself. Where Father Mapple reads objects as signifying spiritual truths, Ahab places *himself* in the role of that truth: "all are Ahab; and this round gold is but the image of the rounder globe, which, like a magician's glass, to each and every man in turn but mirrors back his own spiritual self." The spiritual truth that the world stands for is characterized as something that the observer himself brings; he perceives in the world the reflection of himself; he solves the world in terms of himself. The search for meaning in the world — or in Moby Dick — is therefore fruitless, for the only meaning one may ever find is the meaning one gives to it. Ahab, however, does not seem to apply this observation to the whale. Though Ahab himself must be perceived as bringing meaning to Moby Dick, the whale remains to him the pasteboard mask through which he must strike to get at the meaning beyond. By not applying this understanding to Moby Dick, Ahab fails to make the final discovery that he is, himself, the source of the "inscrutable malice" (178) that he perceives in the whale.

Ahab's epistemological quest should lead him to this realization that he has *made* Moby Dick bear the burden of malice. Along with this realization should come the oedipal discovery that Ahab is, himself, the source of evil in his community. I mean "oedipal discovery" here in Girard's sense. Oedipus is accused by Tiresias of committing the crimes of patricide and incest, crimes which erase distinctions between father and son, thus leading to potential sacrificial crisis (Girard 70). Oedipus reacts with anger, throwing the accusation back at

Tiresias. This accusation attributes to Tiresias sole responsibility for the sacrificial crisis, but both men share equal responsibility, for their nondifference and reciprocal anger endangers their society. The assumed perpetrator of these crimes — Oedipus, in this case — is designated the source and repository for society's ills and becomes the target for unanimous violence. Oedipus' discovery is that he is this source and repository; Ahab should make the same discovery, but he fails to do so. Starbuck perceives Ahab's oedipal nature: "'See, Moby Dick seeks thee not. It is thou, *thou*, that madly seekest him'" (Melville 619). Melville makes the link between Ahab and Oedipus quite clear: as Ahab states when he sees Moby Dick bearing down on the *Pequod*, "'I grow blind; hands! stretch out before me that I may grope my way. Is't night?'" (621). Ahab is "blinded," as is Oedipus, but his blinding comes too late. Oedipus' blinding and exile are a sacrifice to save Thebes, while Ahab's community is already doomed to destruction for his sins.

In his misguided attempts to sacrifice Moby Dick, Ahab is himself sacrificed. But his sacrifice comes too late to save the *Pequod*. He is ultimately the agent which destroys, and the destruction ultimately comes as the result of a series of misreadings. Ahab misreads Moby Dick, not realizing that he himself has given meaning to the whale's dumb blankness. He misses the necessity for an outside party as sacrificial victim to end the reciprocal violence. He misreads Fedallah's prophecies as signs of his own immortality, rather than of his impending doom. And he misreads himself in envisioning himself as savior and knower, for he ultimately is a self-deceived destroyer.

Ahab's confounding of object of violence and sacrificial victim leads to the destruction of his community, the *Pequod*. His mad quest brings upon his ship and crew the violence which he sought to vent on Moby Dick — the violence belongs to him as much as to the white whale. As Moby Dick destroys the *Pequod*, "retribution, swift vengeance, eternal malice [are] in his whole aspect,

and spite of all that mortal man could do, the solid white buttress of his forehead [smites] the ship's starboard bow, till men and timbers [reel]" (571). The retribution, vengeance, and malice in the whale's aspect — which has already been linked to Ahab's own aspect — belong to Ahab himself. Ahab has filled Moby Dick with his own meaning, his own malice. When Ahab darts his harpoon, seeking to the last to destroy the enemy he has created, he seals his own doom. It is Ahab he sacrifices; the malice he seeks to strike at is his own.

Ironically, here the violence finally ends. Ishmael alone escapes to tell of the insane voyage. As Moby Dick sinks beneath the waves, and the lone boat follows the *Pequod* to the bottom of the sea, Ishmael is spared, for the plague of violence is satisfied and requires no more blood. Finally, it is not Moby Dick who is the source of all evil, the agent of inscrutable malice, but old Ahab. And the white whale, once Ahab is gone, is robbed of his meaning, returned to dumb blankness, and thus leaves Ishmael as the bearer of the tale. Ishmael's salvation carries an element of redemption, despite Ahab's corruption of the sacrificial rite. In his Epilogue, Ishmael writes, "the drama's done" (625). If *Moby-Dick* may be called a drama, it must be a tragedy. Ahab is its tragic hero, brought low by his misunderstanding of his own violence. The aftermath of tragedy always brings the return of order and peace. But with Ahab is also destroyed the community of the *Pequod*, leaving only Ishmael. To what community is order restored? To the other community in which Ishmael as narrator exists: the community of readers. Ishmael offers images of community to his readers which, unlike Ahab's, are not tainted by violence. Ishmael thus stands as an alternative to Ahab's violence and holds out a form of redemption from Ahab's violence and corruption.

Chapter 3: Ishmael and Ahab

As we have seen, a theory can provide deep insights into a text. All theory, however, is limited. These limits are often as illuminating as the theory itself. Although Girard's understanding of the sacrificial rite seems almost tailor-made for an examination of the conflict between Ahab and the white whale, this conflict does not make up the whole of *Moby-Dick*; the novel may be "about" Ahab, but it must not be forgotten that it is narrated by Ishmael. The persona of Ishmael always intervenes between the reader and Ahab, some times more obtrusively than others. *Moby-Dick* is Ishmael's book. He chooses what the reader is given, he provides editorial and philosophical comment. A full reading of *Moby-Dick* must make some account of Ishmael. Girard's theory, however, cannot account for Ishmael, for he lies outside the cycle of violence that Girard describes. The limits of *Violence and the Sacred* having been reached, we must proceed beyond Girard to examine Ishmael's link to Ahab and his position beyond his captain's mad quest.

Chapters 41 and 42 — "Moby Dick" and "The Whiteness of the Whale" — provide an excellent opportunity to draw lines of similarity and opposition between Ahab and Ishmael. "Moby Dick" offers Ishmael's analysis of the meaning of Moby Dick to Ahab; "The Whiteness of the Whale" delineates what the whale means to Ishmael himself. The primary purpose of these chapters is to explore possible meanings of Moby Dick, but they also reveal much about the characters of Ahab and Ishmael.

In "Moby Dick," Ishmael begins by describing his own reaction to Ahab's speech upon the quarter-deck.

> I, Ishmael, was one of that crew; my shouts had gone up with the rest; my oath had been welded with theirs; and stronger I shouted, and more did I hammer and clinch my

> oath, because of the dread in my soul. A wild, mystical, sympathetical feeling was in me; Ahab's quenchless feud seemed mine. With greedy ears I learned the history of that murderous monster against whom I and all the others had taken our oaths of violence and revenge.
>
> (Melville 194)

The language of this passage places Ishmael in two positions simultaneously: with Ahab and the crew in vengeful passion, and also distant from them, separate from the communal experience. When he writes that, "I, Ishmael, was one of that crew; my shouts had gone up with the rest; my oath had been welded with theirs," he places himself inside the violent community. But he also insists on his individuality with his insistent repetition of *I* and the use of his name, and then by pointing out the dread in his soul. The same is true when he writes, "I learned the history of that murderous monster against whom I and all the others had taken our oaths of violence and revenge." Melville, in the persona of Ishmael, avoids using the word *we*, even when it would seem easiest. "I and the others" implies distance between the speaker and the crew, where *we* would imply full and unconditional identification. This simultaneous identification and rejection is also present in the sentence, "A wild, mystical, sympathetical feeling was in me; Ahab's quenchless feud seemed mine." Although Ishmael describes his feeling as *sympathetical* — "feeling with" — he makes it clear that Ahab's feud *seemed*, and not was, his.

Ishmael's peculiar position — both inside and outside of the quest — is important to *Moby-Dick*. As a part of the crew and the quest, he earns the right, and the knowledge, to write it down, to tell others. Yet he must remain outside the quest to remain outside the cycle of mimetic violence and survive; Ishmael is the only member of the crew who survives Ahab's tragic perversion of the sacrificial rite. His position is thus necessary to the narrative: someone must survive to tell the tale and thus give meaning to it.

Ishmael's position gives him peculiar abilities as a narrator. Despite the fact that Ahab never speaks to him or interacts with him in any way, Ishmael is able to comment intimately on the inner workings of Ahab's mind and soul, as he does most notably in the chapter, "Moby Dick." I say "most notably"; I mean also "most obtrusively." All of the chapters dealing with Ahab contain commentary which must be acknowledged as Ishmael's, but which is not usually figured as Ishmael's. In these chapters, Ahab is at the foreground, and the presence of Ishmael as narrator is effaced. "Moby Dick" is figured explicitly as Ishmael *telling* us how Ahab understands the white whale. By doing so, Ishmael recounts Ahab's maiming, then explains the process by which Ahab comes to give Moby Dick his meaning.

> His three boats stove around him, and oars and men both whirling in the eddies, one captain, seizing the line-knife from his broken prow, had dashed at the whale, as an Arkansas duellist at his foe, blindly seeking with a six inch blade to reach the fathom-deep life of the whale. That captain was Ahab. And then it was, that suddenly sweeping his sickle-shaped lower jaw beneath him, Moby Dick had reaped away Ahab's leg, as a mower a blade of grass in the field. No turbaned Turk, no hired Venetian or Malay, could have smote him with more seeming malice. Small reason was there to doubt, then, that ever since that almost fatal encounter, Ahab had cherished a wild vindictiveness against the whale, all the more fell for that in his frantic morbidness he at last came to identify with him, not only all his bodily woes, but all his intellectual and spiritual exasperations. The White Whale swam before him as the monomaniac incarnation of all those malicious agencies which some deep men feel eating in them, till they are left living on with half a heart and half a lung. That intangible malignity which has been from the beginning; to whose dominion even the modern Christians ascribe one-half of the worlds; which the ancient Ophites of the east reverenced in their statue devil;— Ahab did not fall down and worship it like them; but deliriously transferring its idea to the abhorred white whale, he pitted himself, all mutilated, against it. All that most maddens and torments; all that stirs up the lees of things; all truth with malice in it; all that cracks the sinews and cakes the brain; all the subtle demonisms of life and thought; all evil, to crazy Ahab, were visibly personified, and made practically assailable in Moby

> Dick. He piled upon the whale's white hump the sum of all the general rage and hate felt by his whole race from Adam on down; and then, as if his chest had been a mortar, he burst his hot heart's shell upon it.
>
> (200)

Ishmael's account of Ahab focuses on violence and on Ahab's allegorizing imagination. Violence is, as we have seen, the chief element of the plot of Ahab's quest. Ishmael here approaches this violence, recounting the first acts in the cycle of violence, and indicates its reciprocal nature with his attention to Ahab's perception of malice in Moby Dick and to Ahab's vindictiveness. Ishmael notes Ahab's role in creating the figure of Moby Dick on which he desires vengeance: "he piled upon the whale's white hump the sum of all the general rage and hatred felt by his own race." Because he has access to Ahab's thoughts and also is able to objectively judge the workings of those thoughts, Ishmael is able to perceive that Ahab reads Moby Dick as the physical manifestation of all other-worldly malice.

The allegorizing imagination is a characteristic that Ishmael shares with Ahab. In "Moby Dick," Ishmael provides his own reading of Ahab's deepest soul.

> This is much; yet Ahab's larger, darker, deeper part remains unhinted. But vain to popularize profundities, and all truth is profound. Winding far down from within the very heart of this spiked Hotel de Cluny where we here stand — however grand and wonderful, now quit it;— and take your way, ye nobler, sadder souls, to those vast Roman halls of Thermes; where far beneath the fantastic towers of man's upper earth, his root of grandeur, his whole awful essence sits in bearded state; an antique buried beneath antiquities, and throned on torsoes! So with a broken throne, the great gods mock that captive king; so like a Caryatid, he patient sits, upholding on his frozen brow the piled entablatures of ages. Wind ye down there, ye prouder, sadder souls! question that proud, sad king! A family likeness! aye, he did beget ye, ye young exiled royalties; and from your grim sire only will the old State-secret come.
>
> (201-2)

This passage describes and enacts the allegorizing imagination, which always descends to uncover the "little lower layer," the "State-secret" which is ever-present beneath surface reality. The figure of the Hotel de Cluny is a particularly apt one for use in examining the allegorizing imagination. The Hotel is built above ancient Roman baths which one may descend to see. The Hotel may stand as a figure for external reality, the "pasteboard mask" which lies over a primal actuality. "Nobler, sadder souls" will wind their way down to the truth beneath the surface in order to see it for themselves. This "lower layer" is described as man's "root of grandeur, his whole awful essence," which sits keeping its State-secret. Ishmael finds that, for Ahab, the secret is inscrutable malice, "all that stirs up the lees of things" (200). Ishmael figuratively delves beneath the surface of Ahab to get at his darker part; he explores Ahab's madness, searches for its roots. But if the allegorizing imagination is a characteristic Ishmael shares with Ahab and Father Mapple, it does not carry with it Ahab's pride; Ishmael recognizes limits to his probes. He acknowledges his limits in sounding the reasons for the crew's response to Ahab, for example:

> 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 hatred seemed theirs; the White Whale as much their insufferable foe; how all this came to be — what the White Whale was to them, or how to their unconscious understandings, also, in some dim, unsuspected way, he might have seemed the gliding great demon of the seas of life,— all this to explain, would be to dive deeper than Ishmael can go.
>
> (203)

Where Ishmael recognizes limits to his questioning, though, Ahab does not. As Ahab says in "The Quarter-Deck":

> "I'd strike the sun if it insulted me. For could the sun do that, then I could do the other; since there is ever a sort of fair play herein, jealousy presiding over all creation. But not my master, man, is even that fair play. Who's over me? Truth hath no confines."
>
> (174)

Ahab places himself over all creation in his ability to seek the truth. For Ahab, truth — and his ability to seek it — has no confines. We now can begin to see Ishmael as an alternative to Ahab. Ishmael, like Ahab, possesses the imagination necessary to the pilot-prophet. However, Ishmael is more valuable as a spiritual guide, for he recognizes that some secrets must remain secret. Where Ishmael can cease his delving for truth, Ahab cannot, and thus falls prey to violence. His incessant desire for knowledge is a desire for mastery, and it brings him inevitably into a conflict from which he cannot escape.

Ishmael, in fact, perceives that prolonged searching into the "little lower layer" of reality can be spiritually dangerous. In "The Try-Works," Ishmael takes his shift at the tiller, guiding the *Pequod* through the night sea while the flaming try-works casts its red light on the ship's passage.

> So it seemed to me, as I stood at her helm, and for long hours silently guided the way of this fire-ship on the sea. Wrapped, for that interval, in darkness myself, I but better saw the redness, the madness, the ghastliness of others. The continual sight of the fiend shapes before me, capering half in smoke and half in fire, these at last begat kindred visions in my soul, so soon as I began to yield to that unaccountable drowsiness which ever would come over me at a midnight helm.
>
> (463-64)

The *Pequod* is linked to Ahab, and her red-lit movement through the sea might be taken to stand for the motion of Ahab's epistemological quest for the "State-secret" of man's soul. The red light of the try-works lays bare to Ishmael that secret, the "madness, the ghastliness" (463) which is the "whole awful essence" of man's inner self (200). The knowledge sought through the epistemological quest is seen to be demonic in nature.

As Ishmael is exposed to this demonic truth, he begins to yield to an "unaccountable drowsiness" (464) that becomes dangerous to his life and, figuratively, to his spirit. Ishmael enters into a sort of trance and unknowingly

turns to face the stern of the ship, almost turning the *Pequod* into the wind and capsizing her. Ishmael delivers a warning not to give oneself up totally to this demonic truth.

> Look not too long in the face of the fire, O man! Never dream with thy hand upon the helm! Turn not thy back to the compass; accept the first hint of the hitching tiller; believe not the artificial fire when its redness makes all things look ghastly. To-morrow, in the natural sun, the skies will be bright; those who glared like devils in the forking flames, the morn will show in far other, at least gentler, relief; the glorious, golden, glad sun, the only true lamp — all others but liars!
>
> (464)

To look too long at the "State-secret" of man's nature is to risk spiritual inversion, to turn one's back on reality and become that demonic truth; it is to turn one's back on the spiritual compass which must be our guide in the world. Without that compass, man abandons himself to the demonic redness of the inner light. The revealing glow of the try-works is described as artificial. Its redness makes all things appear ghastly despite the fact that, when they are lit by the natural sun, "those who glared like devils in the forking flame" will be shown in "far other, at least gentler, relief." Through his artificial/natural rhetoric, Ishmael asserts that the search for inner truth can be misleading. Ahab insists on finding meaning in the world, but this insistence is revealed to be artificial; he constructs his meaning, then places it in the world of objects. By doing so, Ahab displays his own spiritual inversion — he has turned his back on the compass and given himself up to the "inscrutable malice" that he perceives in Moby Dick.

Although Ishmael points out that the insistent search for inner truth can be spiritually dangerous, he also recognizes the necessity for inner searching. The presence of darkness is not always allayed by the light of the natural sun: it is there, and it must be acknowledged, though not embraced.

> Nevertheless the sun hides not Virginia's Dismal Swamp,

> nor Rome's accursed Campagna, nor wide Sahara, nor all the millions of miles of deserts and griefs beneath the moon. The sun hides not the ocean, which is the dark side of this earth, and which is two thirds of this earth. So, therefore, that mortal man who hath more of joy than sorrow in him, that mortal man cannot be true — not true, or undeveloped.
>
> . . .
>
> But even Solomon, he says, "the man that wandereth out of the way of understanding shall remain" (*i.e.* even while living) "in the congregation of the dead. Give not thyself up, then, to fire, lest it invert thee; as for the time it did me. There is a wisdom that is woe; but there is a woe that is madness. And there is a Catskill eagle in some souls that can alike dive down into the blackest gorges, and soar out of them again and become invisible in the sunny spaces. And even if he for ever flies within the gorge, that gorge is in the mountains; so that even in his lowest swoop the mountain eagle is still higher than other birds upon the plain, even though they soar.
>
> (464-65)

Ishmael works a strange inversion of imagery: he figures the sun as that which hides the truth. Some very dark truths, however, even the sun cannot hide. Ishmael indicates that there is indeed a dark side to man and to the earth which even the light of the sun cannot obscure; and that dark side may even be the greater part of the whole. To be true, man must be aware of the darkness of the world. Yet he must remain aware of the light as well: "there is a wisdom that is woe; but there is a woe that is madness." The wisdom here is awareness of woe in the form of the dark side of reality; the madness is to give oneself over to that woe completely. Ahab is a victim of the "woe that is madness." Ahab's insistent prying into the depths of darkness is a departure from "the way of understanding" because it denies the other side of the world. And though Ahab, like the mountain eagle who remains in the gorge, soars above less reflective men, he does not represent the ideal allegorizing imagination, which is able to "dive down into the blackest gorges, and soar out of them again and become invisible in the sunny spaces." Ahab's perspective is imbalanced — he is trapped in the gorges of darkness and violence. Ishmael, on the other hand, demonstrates that

he is able to escape these depths into the light of the sun.

Ishmael's ability to balance the light and dark meanings of the world finds many outlets in the text. In "The Whiteness of the Whale," for example, Ishmael attempts to explain what Moby Dick means to him, yet he acknowledges that his explanation is insufficient to the power of the white whale to horrify.

> What the white whale was to Ahab, has been hinted; what, at times, he was to me, as yet remains unsaid.
>
> Aside from those more obvious considerations touching Moby Dick, which could not but occasionally awaken in any man's soul some alarm, there was another thought, or rather vague, nameless horror concerning him, which at times by its intensity overpowered all the rest; and yet so mystical and well-nigh ineffable was it, that I almost despair of putting it in a comprehensible form. It was the whiteness of the whale that above all things appalled me. But how can I hope to explain myself here; and yet, in some dim, random way, explain myself I must, else all these chapters might be naught.
>
> (204)

Ishmael acknowledges that any explanation he can offer for the "vague, nameless horror" of the white whale will be "dim, random" — that is, incomplete. This impossibility of full explanation is Ishmael's explicit statement that some secrets are ultimately not to be yielded up and that to look too long in the face of that horror is the path to madness. The meaning of Moby Dick is such a secret. It is described as "mystical and well nigh ineffable," like the demonic vision of "The Try-Works."

Because of the otherworldly character of Moby Dick, his secret cannot be put into words; yet Ishmael attempts to give some notion of the "vague, nameless horror" of the whiteness of the whale. He catalogues the highest and best associations of the color white, then goes on:

> yet for all these accumulated associations, with whatever is sweet, and honorable, and sublime, there yet lurks an elusive something in the innermost idea of this hue, which strikes more of panic to the soul than that redness which affrights in blood.
>
> (205)

Ishmael is forced to return to an "elusive something" in Moby Dick's hue which remains hidden. When whiteness is combined with an object already terrible in itself, the product is simply loathsome — but the reason still escapes explanation. Ishmael is unable to ever affix definite meaning or cause to the "vague, nameless horror." He is unable to penetrate Moby Dick's surface to get at the "elusive something" beneath. The rhetorical pattern of the chapter, in fact, reflects the action of Ishmael's imagination — it hints at potential meanings, but never settles upon a single meaning. Ishmael thus is set in contrast to Ahab, who always attempts to thrust through the "pasteboard mask" and affix definite meaning, rather than being satisfied with any "elusive something." The only conclusion that Ishmael arrives at is the idea that, since white is also the absence of color, perhaps the elusive something is, then, an elusive *nothing*: "a dumb blankness, full of meaning" (212). The nature of the horror Moby Dick holds, he suggests, is that something so apparently meaningful as the white whale could actually be *meaningless*. Ishmael is content with meaninglessness, where Ahab insists upon meaning.

Ahab's quest for definite knowledge leads to a cycle of reciprocal violence which eventually brings the destruction of the *Pequod*. Ishmael, on the other hand, offers images of peace and harmony apart from any search for specific truth — Ishmael does deliver knowledge, but does it in the encyclopedic "cetology chapters" as the narrative moves along. He does not search for meaning to deliver, but delivers what he finds. Because Ishmael is free from the need for certain knowledge, he is free from violence. He holds forth images of reconciliation, which stand opposite to Ahab's violence. However, Ishmael often figures his peace as threatened by the violence which surrounds it, much as Ishmael's peace and the occasional peace of the crew are threatened by Ahab's overbearing quest. Ishmael offers an example of inner peace threatened by outer

strife in the chapter, "Brit."

> Consider the subtleness of the sea; how its most dreaded creatures glide under water, unapparent for the most part, and treacherously hidden beneath the loveliest tints of azure. Consider also the devilish brilliance and beauty of many of its most remorseless tribes, as the dainty embellished shape of many species of sharks. Consider once more, the universal cannibalism of the sea; all whose creatures prey upon each other, carrying on eternal war since the world began.
>
> Consider all this; and then turn to the 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? For as this appalling ocean surrounds the verdant land, so in the soul of man there lies one insular Tahiti, full of peace and joy, but encompassed by all the half-known horrors of the half-known life. God keep thee! Push not off from that isle, thou canst never return!
>
> (299)

This passage returns to the imagery of the "Try-Works" passage, which figures the sea as the "dark side of this world" (465): the things of the sea are "subtle" and "treacherous." The land is now explicitly linked to the lighted world as "green, gentle, and most docile." "Universal cannibalism," treachery, and conflict surround the peace of the land, which represents the inner peace of the man who does not give himself over to the violence of the dark side. Each man has this insular Tahiti, the potential for peace, but even once to abandon this peace is to enter irrevocably into strife; violence is always a threat to the peace of the individual.

The threat of violence to the peace of the individual is also a threat to the community. Ahab's epistemological quest welds the crew of his ship into a community based on and focused on violence. In "The Quarter-Deck," Ahab swears his crew to his quest through an unholy Eucharist which represents his corruption of yet another ritual.

> "Now, three to three, ye stand. Commend the murderous chalices! Bestow them, ye who are made parties to this indissoluble league. Ha! Starbuck! but the deed is done! Yon ratifying sun now waits to sit upon it. Drink, ye

> harpooneers! drink and swear, ye men that man the deathful whaleboat's bow — Death to Moby Dick! God hunt us all, if we do not hunt Móby Dick to his death!" The long, barbed steel goblets were lifted; and to cries and maledictions against the white whale, the spirits were simultaneously quaffed down with a hiss.
>
> (181)

The taking of the cup of the Eucharist is supposed to represent an acceptance of Christ's grace. Here, Ahab corrupts the sacrament into an oath of violence toward Moby Dick. Rather than eternal life, the ritual now is linked to death. The crew is welded into a community of violence which stands opposed to the peace offered by Ishmael.

The atmosphere of violence thus created is a threat to the images of peaceful community which Ishmael proposes. One such image of peace threatened by violence lies in "The Grand Armada," which describes a great fleet of whales, the outer circles of which are consumed by violence and frenzy. The innermost portion, however, is perfectly still and peaceful.

> ...With the tapering force of his departing momentum, we glided between two whales into the innermost heart of the shoal, as if from some mountain torrent, we had slid into a serene valley lake. Here the storms in the roaring glens between the outermost , were heard but not felt. In this central expanse the sea presented that smooth satin-like surface, called a sleek, produced by the subtle moisture thrown off by the whale in his more quiet moods. Yes, we were now in that enchanted calm which they say lurks at the heart of every commotion.
>
> (422)

The language of the passage is that of peace: Melville employs words such as "serene," "smooth," "quiet," and "calm." The peace of the armada's center is complete: whales examine the whaling boat curiously, one mother-whale gives birth, while others nurse their young. The scene is one of domesticity, and the allegorizing imagination of Ishmael does not fail to read into it a meaning for his own existence.

> Amid the tornadoed Atlantic of my being, do I myself still forever centrally disport in mute calm; and while ponderous planets of unwaning woe revolve around me, deep down, deep inland there still I bathe me in eternal mildness of joy.
>
> (425)

As in the "Brit" passage, the ocean here represents strife, and the land, peace. The image of the inland as peaceful returns to Ishmael's figuration of the center of the armada as a lake, amidst the turbulent sea of the maddened whales. Because of Ishmael's balanced perspective, however, he is able to transform the imagery of the hostile ocean into that of a bath; he can descend to the depths, then rise to soar toward the sun.

This peace, however, is threatened by the external violence. In "The Grand Armada," the peace is destroyed by a wounded whale, which flounders about, the spade attached to it flailing out and wounding other whales.

> This terrific object seemed to recall the whole herd from their stationary fright. First, the whales forming the margin of our lake began to crowd a little, and tumble against each other, as if lifted by half-spent billows from afar; then the lake itself began faintly to heave and swell; the submarine bridal-chambers and nurseries vanished; in more and more contracting orbits the whales in the more central circles began to swim in thickening clusters. Yes, the long calm was departing.
>
> (426)

The introduction of violence into the community inverts the former imagery of peace, transforms it into imagery of increasing violence. When violence appears, the "long calm" departs, and the peace of the community devolves into cyclical violence. This passage parallels Girard's formulation of the threat of reciprocal violence to the community: one act of violence can involve the entire community in a cycle which can ultimately destroy the community itself.

"A Squeeze of the Hand," however, gives us an image of peaceful community not explicitly threatened by violence.

> Squeeze! squeeze! squeeze! all the morning long; I

> squeezed that sperm till I myself almost melted into it; I squeezed that sperm till a strange sort of insanity came over me; and I found myself unwittingly squeezing my co-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, and looking up into their eyes sentimentally; as much as to say,— Oh! my dear fellow beings, why should we cherish any social acerbities, or know the slightest ill-humor or envy! Come; let us squeeze hands all round; let us all squeeze ourselves into each other; let us squeeze ourselves universally into the very milk and sperm of kindness.
>
> Would that I could keep squeezing that sperm for ever! For now, since by many prolonged, repeated experiences, I have perceived that in all cases man must eventually lower, or at least shift, his conceit of attainable felicity; not placing it anywhere in the intellect or the fancy; but in the wife, the heart, the bed, the table, the saddle, the fire-side, the country; now that I have perceived all this, I am ready to squeeze case eternally. In visions of the night, I saw long rows of angels in paradise, each with his hands in a jar of spermaceti.
>
> (456)

The squeezing of sperm brings over Ishmael a sense of utter peacefulness and felicity which he describes as "a strange sort of insanity." He offers it to his fellow crewmen — and to the reader —, urging, "Come; let us squeeze hands all round; let us all squeeze ourselves into each other; let us squeeze ourselves into the very milk and sperm of kindness." The main image is one of absolute community, each man's soul squeezed into that of the other. The image of community is surrounded by images of plenty and fecundity — milk and sperm. For Ishmael, this community is a real possibility; yet, it too is impermanent. "Would that I could keep squeezing that sperm for ever": though it still may be held as an ideal, the community must break apart with the end of the squeezing. The second paragraph of the passage reflects Ishmael's rejection of Ahab's mimetic desire. The community represented by squeezing sperm is the polar opposite of Ahab's welding together of the ship's crew for violent revenge. Ahab wishes to know all; Ishmael calls for a lowering of desires: "I have perceived that in all cases man must lower, or at least shift, his conceit of attainable felicity" to the things of the

everyday world. Meaning, Ishmael would have it, may also be found, not only in the "intellect or fancy," but in everyday things lit by the "glorious, golden glad sun" (464): "the wife, the heart, the bed, the table." Where Ahab's placement of desire in metaphysical concepts brings violence, Ishmael's placement of desire in the everyday world brings felicity. When desires are confined to worldly matters, violence — bred by mimetic desire — is not a threat to the community, which can then exist in peace.

Ishmael, then, represents the possibility of a community based in peace. Ahab has abandoned this peace, allowing his mimetic desire for knowledge and mastery of Moby Dick to bring about the cycle of retributive violence which threatens — and eventually destroys — the community which he has forged aboard the *Pequod*. Ahab chooses to know the "half-known life," while Ishmael understands that this State-secret is better left unexplored. The plot of Ahab's revenge represents the peril of a community — and a soul — which is exposed to reciprocal violence. Ishmael, on the other hand, holds out the possibility of peace, and he alone, in his essential self, never abandons his "insular Tahiti." He is therefore spared from the destruction of the community. Ishmael prevents *Moby-Dick* from being simply a revenge tragedy; he offers redemption from the cycle of retributive violence.

Chapter 4: Violence and Redemption

The chapters of "The Chase," along with Ishmael's "Epilogue," provide an opportunity to examine side by side the violent and redemptive aspects of *Moby-Dick*. Ahab's epistemological quest culminates in the patterned reciprocal violence of "The Chase," which ends in the destruction of the community of the *Pequod*. At the moment when violence seems to have engulfed all, however, Ishmael returns to deliver his "Epilogue." Where "The Chase" deals in violence, the "Epilogue" represents the return of the peace that Ishmael offers as an alternative to reciprocal violence. *Moby-Dick*'s conclusion delivers a form of redemption to the community of readers, which has been washed over by Ahab's revenge.

"The Chase — First Day" is the beginning of Ahab's final confrontation with the white whale. At its outset, the night before Moby Dick is actually sighted, Ahab reveals his link to the whale.

> That night, in the mid-watch, when the old man — as his wont at intervals — stepped forth from the scuttle in which he leaned, and went to his pivot hole, he suddenly thrust out his face fiercely, snuffing up the sea air as a sagacious ships' dog will, in drawing nigh to some barbarous isle. He declared that a whale must be near. Soon that very peculiar odor, sometimes to a great distance given forth by the living sperm whale, was palpable to all the watch; nor was any mariner surprised when, after inspecting the compass, and then the dog-vane, and then ascertaining the precise bearing of the odor as nearly as possible, Ahab rapidly ordered the ship's course to be slightly altered, and the sail to be shortened.
>
> (594)

Ahab exhibits an uncanny instinct for locating whales. He notes the odor before any of his men, and he is able to ascertain its bearing more or less precisely. Ahab has been described as a "great lord of Leviathans" (141); his instinctive knowledge of the habits of whales is to some degree expected. Yet the manner in

which he is able to find the whale by scent alone signifies a close link between Ahab and Moby Dick — smell is an intimate sense. When the whale is actually sighted, Ahab cries, "the doubloon is mine, Fate reserved the doubloon for me. *I* only; none of ye could have raised the White Whale first" (593). The sensing of the whale points toward the link between Ahab and Moby Dick in their reciprocal struggle. Ahab points out that only he could have raised the white whale and, in fact, he first raises the whale on each of the chase's three days. The character of this link has already been explored: it lies in Ahab's placing of meaning upon and mimesis of the whale. Ahab creates Moby Dick as the receptacle of "inscrutable malice" (178) by piling "upon the whale's white hump the sum of all the general rage felt by his whole race" (200), and in the process he makes himself over in the image the whale. The reciprocal conflict between Ahab and Moby Dick effaces any distinction between them, creating the sacrificial crisis. In the presence of the sacrificial crisis, according to Girard, an act of sacrifice that will protect the community cannot be made. The cycle of reciprocal violence will inevitably expand to infect and destroy the community. Thus, by recalling the link between Ahab and Moby Dick, this initial passage foreshadows the final acts of violence which will bring destruction on the community of the *Pequod*.

Although "The Chase — First Day" focuses on Ahab's vengeful quest, it also recalls Ishmael's formulation of peace threatened by violence.

> A gentle joyousness — a mighty mildness of repose in swiftness, invested the gliding whale. Not the white bull Jupiter swimming away with ravished Europa clinging to his graceful horns; his lovely, leering eyes sideways intent upon the maid; with smooth bewitching fleetness, rippling straight for the nuptial bower in Crete; not Jove, not that great majesty Supreme! did surpass the glorified White Whale as he so divinely swam.
>
> On each soft side — coincident with the parted swell, that but once laving [the whale], then flowed so wide away — on

> each bright side, the whale shed off enticings. No wonder there had been some among the hunters who namelessly transported and allured by all the serenity, had ventured to assail it; but had fatally found that quietude but the vesture of tornadoes. Yet calm, enticing calm, oh, whale! thou glidest on, to all who for the first time eye thee, no matter how many in that same way thou may'st have bejuggled and destroyed before.
>
> And thus, through the serene tranquilities of the tropical sea, among waves whose hand-clappings were suspended by exceeding rapture, Moby Dick moved on, still withholding from sight the full terrors of his submerged trunk, entirely hiding the wrenched hideousness of his jaw. But soon the fore part of him slowly rose from the water; for an instant his whole marbleized body formed a high arch, like Virginia's Natural Bridge, and warningly waving his bannered flukes in the air, the grand god revealed himself, and dipping on the wing, the white sea-fowls longingly lingered over the agitated pool that he left.
>
> (596-97)

The imagery of peace is clear from the first paragraph: "a gentle joyousness ... invested the gliding whale." The whale is also surrounded by imagery of peace in the "serene tranquillities of the tropical sea" and "longingly lingering sea-fowls." Like the bull-rapist, Jupiter, however, Moby Dick is a figure of supreme potential violence, and below the surface imagery of peace lie "the full terrors of his submerged trunk," and "the wrenched hideousness of his jaw." This veneer of peace laid over violence recalls Ahab's "pasteboard mask" speech, in which reality hides a "little lower layer" (178) of deeper meaning. Ishmael offers similar images of peace with the threat of violence, but the imagery of "Brit" and "The Grand Armada" functions in a subtly different manner. In both chapters, Ishmael locates peace inland, surrounded by the "appalling ocean" (299). Here, the imagery reverts to that of the "Hotel de Cluny" passage: layers and depth. Peace in "The Chase" is located on the surface, concealing the violence beneath. Moby Dick is the very avatar of destructive potential, but the "full terrors of his submerged trunk" and "the wrenched hideousness of his jaw" are hidden beneath the "serene tranquilities of the tropical sea." The shift in figuration in a chapter dominated by

reciprocal violence recalls the fact that Ahab perceives this tranquility as something to be dug through in order to get at the truth beneath. The presence of Ahab's violence subverts Ishmael's imagery, subtly turns it toward violence, rather than peace, because of the location of peace on the surface, or the level of masking reality. This subversion of imagery reflects Ahab's subversion of the rite of sacrifice in favor of reciprocal violence. Sacrifice is a cleansing, peace-bringing act which functions by *concealing* the substitution it entails. When the concealment is not present, sacrifice cannot take place; violence runs amok. In attempting to thrust through the "deception" of peace, Ahab rejects the sacrifice and embraces reciprocal violence.

Once Ahab's imagery is established, violence is imminent, and the form which the violence takes fits directly into Girard's theory. The tendency which Girard notes for violence to feed upon itself is clearly drawn out. After destroying Ahab's boat on the chase's first day,

> Moby Dick swam swiftly round and round the wrecked crew; sideways churning the water in his vengeful wake, as if lashing himself up to still another and more deadly assault. The sight of the splintered boat seemed to madden him, as the blood of grapes and mulberries cast before Antiochus's elephants in the book of Maccabees.
>
> (599)

One act of violence clearly breeds another. The reference to blood is particularly telling. Girard refers to violence as a plague which spreads unless halted, and identifies blood as the ultimate contaminant — and disinfectant (36). The "blood of grapes and mulberries" is, of course, wine, and wine is used in the Holy Eucharist to signify the blood of Christ which removes the taint of sin. Christ is symbolically sacrificed in the Eucharist to remove man's sin. While blood spilled in sacrifice is fresh and flowing, always removed at the conclusion of the rite (37), the blood of a victim of reciprocal violence is symbolic of the violence itself when it is allowed to remain and coagulate. The first leaves no stain; the second is filthy

and impure As long as the distinction between the pure and the impure remains, any pollution can be washed away (38). Ahab has, however, mingled the pure and the impure, and his violence can only breed more of its kind, because the distinction between purifying and impure violence becomes impossible. Moby Dick is maddened by "the sight of the splintered boat," which is linked to blood. Because this figural blood is spilled in reciprocal violence, rather than sacrifice, it urges Moby Dick to further violence — it spreads the taint of violence.

The impossibility of one participant in the struggle getting and keeping the upper hand is also represented. In the reciprocal conflict, the combatants constantly trade blows, each gaining and then losing advantages. The conflict goes on in this manner, growing until the community itself is finally destroyed.

> It is often the case that when a boat is stove, its crew, being picked up by another boat, help to work that second boat; and the chase is thus continued with what is called double-banked oars. It was thus now. But the added power of the boat did not equal the added power of the whale, for he seemed to have treble-banked his every fin; swimming with a velocity which plainly showed, that if now, under these circumstances, pushed on, the chase would prove an indefinitely prolonged, if not a hopeless one.
> (601)

As soon as Ahab and his crew gain an advantage over Moby Dick, it is taken away, and the advantage switches sides. Ahab, however, returns to his ship, and retakes the advantage in speed — then promptly oversails the whale. The conflict can reach no resolution "under these circumstances," and the chase is resumed until violence resumes on the second day.

By the second day of the chase, there is no peace whatever associated with Moby Dick. Rather than being spotted by his spout, with wavelets and bubbles breaking on his sides, Moby Dick bursts through the surface of the water.

> For not by any calm and indolent spoutings, not by the

> peaceable gush of that mystic fountain in his head, did the White Whale now reveal his vicinity; but by the far more wondrous phenomenon of breaching. Rising with his utmost velocity from the furthest depths, the Sperm Whale thus booms his entire bulk into the pure element of air, and piling up a mountain of dazzling foam, shows his place to the distance of seven miles and more. In these moments, the torn, enraged waves he shakes off, seem his mane; in some cases, this breaching is his act of defiance.
>
> (606-07)

Where on the first day of the chase, Moby Dick is sighted by "indolent spoutings" amidst the "serene tranquillities of the tropical sea," (597) now, the whale strikes with full force up through the confining water, "booms" into the air with a mane of "torn, enraged waves." The act of breaching is described as defiant, and its very character is violent. Moby Dick is no longer surrounded by peace, but by violence. By breaching, he defies Ahab, seeming to invite further violence.

Once the whale-boats are lowered, Moby Dick does not proceed on his passage, as he did in the previous encounter. Instead, he rushes straight at the boats in apparent anger. "As if to strike a quick terror into them, by this time being the first assailant himself, Moby Dick had turned, and was now coming for the three crews" (607). Moby Dick initiates this melee, as Ahab had the last, and will again on the third day. The blows between Ahab and the whale alternate, each taking in turn the initiative; this is the pattern of a reciprocal struggle written on the large scale. On the small scale, the pattern remains, with Ahab harpooning the whale, who then destroys one or more of the boats. However, on each of the three days, Moby Dick strikes the final blow, the very last of which brings the *Pequod's* destruction. Moby Dick is not only a participant in the reciprocal struggle, but the agent of the violence by which the community is destroyed.

Thus, the whale's survival of the struggle reflects, not his victory over Ahab, but the victory of violence over the community. Throughout the chase, the

violence between Ahab and Moby Dick results in no lasting harm to either. The crew's harpoons never seem to harm Moby Dick, only to madden him. On the first day, Ahab seems broken by the destruction of his boat, but his plight is brief: "In an instant's compass, great hearts sometimes condense to one deep pang, the sum total of those shallow pains kindly diffused through feebler men's whole lives" (600). And when his whale-bone leg is shattered on the second day, Ahab is still unharmed.

> "But even with a broken bone, old Ahab is still untouched; and I account no living bone of mine one jot more me, than this dead one that's lost. Nor white whale, nor man, nor fiend, can so much as graze old Ahab in his proper and inaccessible being."
>
> (610)

Ahab is invulnerable to Moby Dick's violence, just as the whale is to Ahab's; indeed, Ahab calls Moby Dick, "thou all-destroying but unconquering whale" (623). Though Moby Dick destroys everything that surrounds Ahab, he cannot actually defeat him. Yet, the scale of the violence grows on each successive day, resulting first in the destruction of one boat, then three, then of the *Pequod* herself.

Unable to harm Ahab, Moby Dick does destroy the *Pequod*. When, on the third day, Ahab's harpoon line breaks, the whale turns towards Ahab's ship.

> Hearing the tremendous rush of the sea-crashing boat, the whale wheeled round to present his blank forehead at bay; but in that evolution, catching sight of the nearing black hull of the ship; seemingly seeing in it the source of all his persecutions; bethinking it — it may be — a larger and nobler foe; of a sudden, he bore down on its advancing prow, smiting his jaws amid the fiery showers of foam.
>
> (620-21)

Moby Dick turns toward a target which he *can* harm, Ahab's ship. Ahab is the true source of the whale's persecutions, but Moby Dick transfers his ire to the ship, as if he could harm Ahab by harming his ship. His attack on the *Pequod* is

characterized as an act of revenge.

> Retribution, swift vengeance, eternal malice were in his whole aspect, and spite of all that mortal man could do, the solid white buttress of his forehead smote the ship's starboard bow, till men and timbers reeled.
>
> (622)

Thus, the ship's destruction may be seen as an attempt at harming Ahab, who bemoans the fact that he cannot go down with his sinking ship: "Am I cut off from the last fond pride of meanest shipwrecked captains?" (622). By striking simultaneously at Ahab and the community of the *Pequod*, Moby Dick acts out his dual role as both actor in the reciprocal struggle and agent of the violence which reaches out from that struggle to destroy the community.

Yet, to the last, Ahab seeks revenge. As the *Pequod* sinks, he attacks Moby Dick yet again.

> "Toward 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. Sink all coffins and all hearses to one common pool! and since neither can be mine, let me then tow to pieces, while still chasing thee, though tied to thee, thou damned whale! *Thus*, I give up the spear!"
>
> (623)

Ahab's prideful insistence on conquering Moby Dick yet endures, though Ahab seems finally to come to the oedipal discovery that he is himself the source of the evil he perceives in the whale. Ahab cries, "from hell's heart I stab at thee!" indicating his knowledge of his own damnation. Like Oedipus, Ahab perceives his sin; however, Ahab does not accept sacrifice. Though the struggle has run its course and destroyed the community, Ahab makes a final embracing of reciprocal violence and strikes a final, futile blow against Moby Dick. As he completes his soliloquy, Ahab strikes the last blow, but not a victorious one; he is slain by the rope trailing from his boat.

> The harpoon was darted; the stricken whale flew forward;

> with igniting velocity the line ran through the groove; — ran foul. Ahab stooped to clear it; he did clear it; but the flying turn caught him round the neck, and voicelessly as Turkish mutes bowstring their victim, he was shot out the boat, ere the crew knew he was gone.
>
> (623)

He lances the whale, and when the whale leaps forward to *flee*, he is caught by a loop in his own line. Ahab's death comes not through the action of Moby Dick, but by chance, and by his own hand. Moby Dick, therefore, has no true victory over Ahab; the only direct harm he causes him is the original loss of his leg, and Ahab denies that this harms his true being (610). Ahab's affirmation of his own sin and the inability of Moby Dick to harm him directly indicate that, though Ahab perishes, the white whale has no direct victory over him. The victory is of violence over the community. As the white whale swims off, his violence spent, the men of Ahab's boat are sucked down by the whirlpool created by the sinking ship, save one. And save one — Ishmael — the community of the *Pequod* is destroyed.

Ishmael is spared the destruction of the community because he does not fully participate in violence, offering instead hope for a community not dominated and destroyed by violence.

> "And I only am escaped alone to tell thee." *Job.*
>
> The drama's done. Why then does one here step forth? — Because one did survive the wreck.
>
> It so chanced, that after the Parsee's disappearance, I was he whom the fates ordained to take the place of Ahab's bowsman, when that bowsman assumed the vacant post; the same, who, when on the last day the three men were tossed from out the rocking boat, was dropped astern. So, floating on the margin of the ensuing scene, and in full sight of it, when the half-spent suction of the sunken ship reached me, I was then, but slowly, drawn toward the closing vortex. When I reached it, it had subsided to a creamy pool. Round and round, then, and ever contracting towards the button-like black bubble at the axis of that slowly wheeling circle, like another Ixion I did revolve. Till, gaining that vital centre, the black bubble upward burst, and owing to its great

> buoyancy, rising with great force, the coffin life-buoy shot lengthwise from the sea, fell over, and floated by my side. Buoyed up by that coffin, for almost one whole day and night, I floated on a soft and dirge-like main. The unharming sharks, they glided by as if with padlocks on their mouths; the savage sea-hawks sailed with sheathed beaks. On the second day, a sail drew near, nearer, and picked me up at last. It was the devious-cruising Rachel, that in her retracing search after her missing children, only found another orphan.
> ("Epilogue")

The epigraph to the "Epilogue" is taken from the words of the messenger to Job, who informs him that God has destroyed his servants and livestock (Job 1:16). The address is from the "I" of Ishmael's narrative voice, to his reader's "Thee." The "Epilogue" continues the conversational pattern of narration which Ishmael establishes with *Moby-Dick*'s first words: "Call me Ishmael" (3). By addressing his reader directly, Ishmael points toward a community consisting of himself and his reader, which stands in opposition to the community destroyed by Ahab's reciprocal violence, and which remains following that destruction. The reemergence of Ishmael's voice represents the return of order to the scene of violence which has consumed the community of the *Pequod*. Ishmael characterizes his tale as a drama: "the drama's done." He thus establishes himself as a figure which represents this restoration of order following tragic violence, like the Prince in *Romeo and Juliet*, Creon in *Oedipus Rex*, and Horatio in *Hamlet*.

The restoration of peace and order brings a refiguration in the "Epilogue's" imagery of violence and death. Voracious sharks glide by Ishmael in the water "as with padlocks on their mouths," and the "savage sea-hawks [sail] with sheathed beaks." Queequeg's coffin, too, is transformed from a figure of death to one of salvation. The image of the whirlpool has also been transformed. The whirlpool which represents violence slows, and its "half-spent suction" pulls Ishmael "but slowly" to its center, where the crew of the *Pequod* is pulled in

almost instantly. The violence that the whirlpool stands for is spent, and the whirlpool now has a "vital center" from which salvation springs in the form of Queequeg's coffin. With the death of Ahab and the departure of Moby Dick, violence has disappeared, leaving the community of Ishmael and his reader in peace. The plot of Ahab's epistemological quest entraps Ishmael, and the reader, like Ixion in the circular motion of reciprocal violence. Unlike Ixion, however, we are released from that cycle. By replacing Ahab's unholy community of vengeance with a sanctified community which is left with images of peace, Ishmael holds forth redemption from the all consuming plague of violence.

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