



“That Unfailing Comfort Is, It’s All Predestinated”: Ishmael’s Calvinist Journey in Moby-Dick

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“That unfailing comfort is, it’s all predestinated”: Ishmael’s Calvinist Journey in *Moby-Dick*

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A Thesis in the Field of English
for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies

Harvard University

November 2017

Abstract

This study examines Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* through the lens of Calvinism, analyzing Ishmael's journey through the narrative in light of this particular theology. The text itself, through specific words that continue to surface, demonstrates the need for a Calvinist lens, bringing new illumination to the narrative, to Ishmael's journey, and to *Moby Dick*. There is already much scholarship on the religious and biblical influences in the text, and many scholars mention the Calvinistic influences in their work; two scholars in particular have embarked upon looking at part of the text through a Calvinist lens. But this study gives Ishmael's spiritual journey a full treatment from beginning to end in light of Calvinist theology. One can pinpoint specific doctrines of Calvinism that show Ishmael's journey to be one of salvation: Ishmael's total depravity in the opening chapters; his being drawn by Providence – the Doctrine of Irresistible Grace – towards the journey; his loss of free will, a positive thing under an ultimately sovereign God, in "The Mat-Maker"; his conversion moment in "The Hyena"; the endurance of his faith – the Doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints – in "The Try-Works"; his ultimate survival – the Doctrine of Unconditional Election – at the discretion of the "predestinating head" of *Moby Dick*; and how his spiritual journey as one of the elect counters the journey of Ahab, a reprobate. Thus, this study traces Ishmael's journey, bringing light and depth to the elements of his narrative through this specific theological lens.

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Chapter I.

Introduction

The lookout of the Rachel spotted the figure floating between the waves sometime after first light, calling his discovery from the masthead. Eagerly the ship tacked forward, the captain already at the rail peering through the glass to see if they, indeed, had found his missing son. But the man floating in the sea was not his. Rather, this stranger who seemed to have appeared supernaturally, floating on what seemed to be a sealed coffin covered in carvings, was a simple seaman from the *Pequod*, sunk the day before. He had spent a whole day and night upon that coffin, untouched by the roving sharks around him, untouched by the sea-hawks hovering above, and he was the last, the only, to have survived the carnage. But why?

Herman Melville's 1851 novel *Moby-Dick* is one of the most well-known novels of the American literary canon. Considered confusing at best and unreadable at worst in its day, *Moby-Dick* was Melville's attempt at writing something Shakespearean, yet it could not stand up to his more popular early novels about adventure stories in the South Pacific. Melville fell into anonymity in his lifetime (one obituary even spelled his name wrong), and *Moby-Dick* was relegated to the whaling sections of libraries. Yet a Melville renaissance began in the early twentieth century after a copy of a previously unknown novel, *Billy Budd*, was discovered in a bread box, and only seems to be blooming as time passes. Today, *Moby-Dick* is not only read in many literature classrooms, it is the subject of volumes of literary criticism in almost every genre of theory, the focus of dozens of

“marathon-reads,” and has entered the realm of pop culture. The term “a White Whale” has become a common idiom. But in surveying both scholarly and cultural responses to *Moby-Dick*, the focus always lands on, somewhat appropriately, Moby Dick and/or Ahab. Granted, Ahab’s chase of the whale constitutes the major action point of the plot, and overshadows the more metaphysical writings of Ishmael; watch any *Moby-Dick* movie and Ishmael reduces to a speechless background character. Yet Ishmael is the narrator of the novel and, unlike Nick Carraway, who seems a blank, invisible observer of Gatsby’s story, Ishmael is very much alive in voice, observance, commentary, and story, active and vocal in the creation of his narrative.

Perhaps the focus strays off of Ishmael because he, as a character, *does* very little in the novel, and *talks* very much, and his chatter seems just that. But Ishmael the narrator is telling and revealing his own journey of personal revelations of theology, philosophy, and faith. He starts as a selfish, cynical, faux-broadminded man, but after the events of the novel he goes forth enlightened, wiser, humbled, and devoted to something outside of himself. His narrative is a *bildungsroman* of his own spiritual formation, a narrative of revelation, but also a narrative of salvation.

The elements of Ishmael’s story tend to be viewed as somewhat disparate events: his depression in the first chapter; his friendship with Queequeg; his cynicism and sharp wit; his time on the *Pequod*, when the character of Ishmael all but disappears; the divergent chapters on whale biology, history, classification, and the like; and his ultimate rescue at the end of the novel. Scholars tend to be a little hard-pressed when it comes to tracing a coherent narrative line through all of the events, but these events, and the meaning behind them, come sharply into focus when viewed through the lens of Calvinist theology:

Ishmael's predestinated fate, his total depravity evident in the early chapters and his unmerited election despite it, his being drawn towards the voyage by inexplicable means, a conversion moment when he surrenders to the plans of a sovereign God, his revelation about the mysteries of his existence, his quest for knowledge, his deliverance from an evil captain, and his ultimate rebirth. Moby Dick, as either God or a representative of God, inherently fits the idea of a Calvinist God – his whiteness representing holiness, his perceived immortality, his judgments, his ability to predestine and choose people for death or salvation – and is not a devious monster out to destroy, but a sovereign, benevolent worker of God's justice. Reading Ishmael's journey with an understanding of Calvinism traces a coherent narrative line through the text.

As Thomas Werge states in his essay "*Moby-Dick* and the Calvinist Tradition":

To delineate certain aspects of the Calvinist tradition in *Moby-Dick* is not to attempt to make Melville into a Calvinist. But it is to suggest that Melville—often reluctantly—acknowledges and sympathizes with Calvinist ideas and emphases. For the concerns of *Moby-Dick* must be linked not only to Melville's preoccupation with the problem of knowledge but to his recognition of the course of that problem in the Fall of man. The effects of the Fall on man's knowing and willing are indelible. And the nature and implications of those effects, like the controlling ideas and even the metaphors of *Moby-Dick*, become coherent only in the light of the Calvinist tradition. (502)

When viewed through this lens, Ishmael's seemingly disparate experiences link together in a narrative arc that lines up with Calvinism's understanding of the stages of salvation, and gives deeper, richer meaning not only to Ishmael himself, but to Moby Dick. One can see Ishmael's story as a spiritual journey, one that is evidenced in the text through a number of passages: the Calvinist Doctrine of Irresistible Grace when Ishmael abandons his free will and is drawn by fate towards his journey on the *Pequod*; the evidence of his

total depravity in his critique of the Christian Church and his joining with Queequeg in idol worship; and his further abandonment of free will in “The Mat-Maker.” Ishmael’s moment of conversion is found in “The Hyena”; his further understanding of surrendering his fate to a sovereign God, and the kind of comfort that surrender brings, is found in “The Line”; and he recognizes Moby Dick as the agent of God’s election and justice. Ishmael’s ultimate election comes at the end of the novel, where Moby Dick has predestinated him to be the only one saved from the blasphemous Ahab and his idolatrous crew. Ultimately, placing a Calvinist lens upon this text argues for an understanding of Moby Dick as the representation of a benevolent God bestowing salvation upon Ishmael, who goes on to write the “Bible” – the text of the narrative, with its histories, chronicles, plays, and various stories – about his “God,” the White Whale.

Chapter II.

Why a Calvinist Reading?

There are a number of theological systems that can be used to better understand the text of *Moby-Dick*, and they all allow for interesting, intricate readings. Yet the text itself surfaces clues that lead the reader towards Calvinism as the lens that has the most to offer in its ability to shed light on and sharpen the focus of certain events and passages. The two clues are Ishmael's frequent use of the word "predestination" and his frequent use of the word "Leviathan."

The word "predestination" is only found five times in the text of *Moby-Dick*, yet it is a word that has such a narrow connotation that relates to a specific doctrine of belief, its presence should signal to the reader that it is being utilized in a specific way. The first occurrence is in Stubb's soliloquy after Ahab professes his ulterior motive for the whaling voyage and his hunt for Moby Dick, reassuring himself that "come what will, one comfort's always left—that unfailing comfort is, it's all predestinated" (145). The second occurrence is during the *Town-Ho*'s story, and refers to Radney being the "predestinated mate" (204) who is eventually killed by Moby Dick. The third is when the *Pequod* meets the ship the *Virgin* on a "predestinated day" (276). The fourth is shortly before Pip is lost at sea for a night, where the *Pequod* is referred to as a "sometimes madly merry and predestinated craft" (319). The last, and possibly most striking, attribution of the word "predestination" is to Moby Dick himself, as he bears down upon the *Pequod* ready to smash it: "all their enchanted eyes [were] intent upon the whale, which from side to side strangely vibrating

his predestinating head, sent a broad band of overspreading semi-circular foam before him as he rushed” (425). The term is applied somewhat liberally by Ishmael to various objects and people, and does not refer to one specific kind of predestinated person or affair. Since predestination refers to the idea that specific actions or events have been planned beforehand, and that a person has no ability to change the outcome of that action or event, the word’s presence significantly contributes to the text’s questions about fate and free will. However, predestination as a theological term links specifically to Calvinism and the Doctrine of Predestination, the idea that an omniscient, sovereign God has predestinated, or elected, certain people for salvation or damnation, regardless of that person’s past and future actions. Because of the weighty connotation of this word, it is likely that the text is pointing towards the presence of Calvinistic theology.

The text also makes use of the word “Leviathan” as a clue towards Calvinism by evoking the Book of Job and God’s greatest and most threatening creature: the whale. From the very beginning of the book, in the prologue chapter “Extracts,” the word “Leviathan” is used to describe a whale or whales, and is attached to a more heightened, biblical meaning; “And God created great whales” is the first extract, and “Leviathan maketh a path to shine after him; / One could think the deep to be hoary,” from the Book of Job, is the second (8). There are twelve uses of the word “Leviathan” in “Extracts,” ranging from the Bible to Rabelais to *Montgomery’s World Before the Flood*. Ishmael first uses the word “leviathan” instead of the word “whale” as early as the second chapter, and in Chapter 3, “The Spouter-Inn,” makes reference to “the great leviathan himself” (26) when attempting to describe what he sees in the obscured painting when first entering the inn. Ishmael goes on to use the word “leviathan” over one hundred times throughout the rest of *Moby-Dick*,

both lower-cased and capitalized. Like the word “predestination,” the word “leviathan” can have a general meaning of, simply, a whale (as the Norton critical edition notes), yet it is a more specific connotation that Ishmael points towards: Chapter 41 of the Book of Job, where God appears to Job out of the whirlwind to argue his complete sovereignty over nature, using his created creatures Behemoth and Leviathan as examples. The Lord asks, “Can you draw out Leviathan with a fishhook / or press down his tongue with a cord? ... Can you fill his skin with harpoons / or his head with fishing spears?” (*ESV* Job 41:1, 7). The answer, obviously, is no, in that God has created a creature – in this case, a large whale – that is too ferocious and wild for man to tame; only God is able to subdue it. Therefore, Leviathan represents God’s authority on the earth. Ishmael is thus comparing whales in general, and Moby Dick specifically, to God’s Leviathan. Even the chapter entitled “Moby Dick” in *Moby-Dick* is Chapter 41, adding additional allusion to Job Chapter 41. This chapter, and all the later chapters in Job, serve to highlight God’s utter sovereignty over all things – time, circumstance, life and death, nature, election, and salvation – which is one of the foremost attributes of the God of Calvinism. Calvinistic theology is rooted in a high view of God’s sovereignty, and by directly evoking God’s complete sovereignty with the use of the word “leviathan” via Job, Ishmael is again signaling Calvinist theology as a way to understand his story.

Chapter III.

Literary Background

The foundational scholarship on the religious influences of and allusions within Melville's work was pioneered by William Braswell's *Melville's Religious Thought* (1943), Nathalia Wright's *Melville's Use of the Bible* (1949), and Lawrence Thompson's *Melville's Quarrel with God* (1952). These three books look at Melville's body of work as a whole, asking how Melville's own biography has influenced his writing, what specific uses of the Bible or religious imagery has Melville included in his work, and what further interpretive depth those allusions or symbols bring to the text. These works attempted to make initial sense of, and draw conclusions about, the religious content of the novel, and have been used as a platform upon which other, more focused scholarship, has been built.

T. Walter Herbert, Jr., with his book *Moby-Dick and Calvinism: A World Dismantled* (1977), and his essays "Calvinism and Cosmic Evil in *Moby-Dick*" (1969) and "Calvinist Earthquake: *Moby-Dick* and Religious Tradition" (1986), was the first to bring an extensive Calvinist reading to the text of *Moby-Dick*. Herbert focuses on theodicy in the text, or the problem with the presence of evil in the world when there is a sovereign, supposedly benevolent God. Citing the Calvinist idea of a sovereign God that defines human history and action, and also citing the arguments against Calvinism that declare such a God to be vile, sadistic, and monstrous, Herbert attempts to reconcile Ahab's stance against this God (as represented by Moby Dick), as well as trace both Ahab's and, to a much lesser extent, Ishmael's spiritual journey (more on Herbert later). Thomas Werge, in

his essay “*Moby-Dick* and the Calvinist Tradition” (1969), also brings a Calvinist lens to the text, likening Ishmael’s inability to fully comprehend and know the mysteries of *Moby Dick* (also a representation of God) to the inscrutability of Calvinism’s sovereign God. Both scholars are using the doctrines and tenants of Calvinism to lend understanding to the text, yet both authors choose to examine one focused area of their subject matter.

Beyond Herbert and Werge, mentions of Calvinism creep into most critical works on Melville, as its strongly Calvinistic elements cannot be ignored; mentions about the Calvinist influence in *Moby-Dick* in particular and Melville’s work in general show up in Jamie Lorentzen’s book *Sober Cannibals, Drunken Christians: Melville, Kierkegaard, & Tragic Optimism in Polarized Worlds*; Yvor Winger’s *Maule’s Curse: Seven Studies in the History of American Obscurantism*; Hubert Dreyfus and Sean Dorrance Kelly’s *All Things Shining: Reading the Western Classics to Find Meaning in a Secular Age*; Lakshmi Mani’s *The Apocalyptic Vision in Nineteenth Century American Fiction*; and even in F.O. Matthiessen’s massive tome *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman*. But not since Herbert and Werge has there been scholarship devoted solely to analyzing the text through that particular theological lens. Still, scholarship on *Moby-Dick* and its biblical elements has not ceased, and one can find modern essays regarding the Seaman’s Bethel hymn (Olsen-Smith); references to Jonah in Father Mapple’s Sermon (Mariani) and within the rest of the text (Pardes); the biblical influences that produced a Gothic overtone (Lackey); Melville’s personal religious journey (Kazin); general usage of biblical influences (Rosenfeld); Ishmael’s salvation (Weissbuch and Stillians); references to the Book of Job (Booth, Holman, Pardes, Stout, Hoffman, Young); the influences of Old Testament stories and rabbinical midrash interpretations on

Moby-Dick (Gellman); the Bible's influence on the text's prose (Alter); the text of *Moby-Dick* as commentary on the Bible itself (Hutchins); and *Moby-Dick* as "sacred text" (Buell).

Despite the individualized looks at the theological influences in *Moby-Dick*, "theological literary theory" has somewhat fallen out of popularity. Jonathan A. Cook's book *Inscrutable Malice: Theodicy, Eschatology, and the Biblical Sources of Moby-Dick*, published in just 2012, is the first full book of scholarship that has been published in decades devoted solely to the theological aspects of the novel. And this, as Cook says, is a concern:

While many of these works [on other aspects of the novel] have deepened our understanding of Melville's iconic novel, over the last few decades there has been less attention paid to the overarching religious and moral concerns that shaped Melville as a writer, such as the problem of evil, the decline of Christianity, the disappearance of God, the historicizing of the Bible. This may well be the result of the defamiliarization of the Bible and Judeo-Christian religious traditions within contemporary academia, despite the work of such influential literary critics as Northrop Frye, Frank Kermode, Robert Alter, and Harold Bloom, and despite recent advances in our understanding of the biblical text as literary and mythological construct. (5-6)

Cook goes on to give evidence that certain readings of *Moby-Dick* become "unavoidably reductive" (6) without proper understanding of the theological implications of the text. Part of his thesis argues "that biblical themes of theodicy and eschatology give distinctive shape and meaning to *Moby-Dick*" (6). Therefore, it is essential to read *Moby-Dick* through a theological lens in order to surface the deeper questions in clearer ways, and, with such a disjointed narrative of one hundred thirty-five stand-alone chapters, expose the narrative's connective tissue.

Chapter IV.

Herbert, Calvinism, and *Moby-Dick*

As previously stated, T. Walter Herbert, Jr. produced scholarship in the 1970s that focused on the Calvinistic influences found in *Moby-Dick*, and the implications thereof. Though he wrote shorter essays, his ideas about the subject are fully fleshed out in his 1977 work *Moby-Dick and Calvinism: A World Dismantled*. The book first examines Melville's religious background and complicated relationship with God, free will, and religious obedience, then turns to the text to evaluate the dialogue Calvinism has with both Ahab and Ishmael's journeys. Herbert, though, does not read Ishmael's journey as being reflective of a salvation narrative understandable by applying a Calvinist reading to the text. He does not recognize *Moby Dick* as playing a role in Ishmael's spiritual journey, nor does he investigate the role of predestination or election within Ishmael's journey. While he sees Ishmael as pushing against Calvinism at the least or completely rejecting it at most, there is also a more negative view of Calvinism that is detectable within his critique. There is also a lack of clear theological definitions which could have solidified and deepened his reading, and a presumption of the reader's knowledge of Calvinism (which, due to the decline of Biblical literacy in the twentieth century, may only be limited to a few specific, stereotypical assumptions). Still, though Herbert does not venture into a full analysis of Ishmael's spiritual journey, he examines four areas of the novel: Ishmael's spiritual quest and what he is seeking, Father Mapple's Calvinist sermon, Ishmael's unorthodox relationship with Queequeg, and what Ishmael ultimately discovers after his journey.

Herbert calls Ishmael a “spiritual quester” (95) and discusses Ishmael’s search for knowledge amidst the theological framework of the novel. He gives to Ishmael much more autonomy and free will in his quest than even the narrative of *Moby-Dick* suggests, which shows a passive Ishmael carried along by the hand of fate, as we shall see. Herbert reads Ishmael’s introduction as showing evidence of “spiritual distress,” recognizing that Ishmael has “adopted rueful skepticism about the prospects of spiritual quests because he has himself pursued one” (95). This skepticism comes from frustrated conclusions; Ishmael’s cannot and will not be able to discover anything about God. Yet Herbert suggests that Ishmael sets off on his spiritual quest to deliberately discover what he supposedly is not able to, stating that “Ishmael’s personal explorations [are endowed] with an independence of spirit abhorrent to orthodox [Calvinist] thought, arranging his departure into the wonder-world of meditation with a deliberate scoff at Calvinist doctrines of man’s spiritual blindness” (100). Herbert sees Ishmael’s obsession with gaining knowledge about whales in general, and the White Whale in particular, as a kind of blasphemy: Ishmael not only uses his imagination to probe into the depths and wonders of the whales (Herbert cites an “orthodox mistrust of imagination” [130-131]), he categorizes whales in the chapter “Cetology,” attempting to make a system of the unknowable things of God (132). Herbert argues that where Job bowed down to the mystery of God, Ishmael stands up and wants to know more, which is an affront to God. While Ishmael insists on discovering what is unknowable, we will see that his search for knowledge is one that will deepen his understanding of the divine, inspired by the divine. To call Ishmael blasphemous is to align him with Ahab, as Herbert does in parts of his critique. Yet the blasphemy of Ahab is rooted in offense, anger, and the desire for vengeance on the unknowable. Ishmael’s search for

knowledge is rooted in curiosity and desire to understand his God better, as well as humility in recognizing when his research will yield him nothing more but mystery.

Herbert focuses in on Calvinism's influence when he examines the content and effects of Father Mapple's sermon on Jonah. Of it, he states:

Father Mapple's sermon arises directly from that orthodox [Calvinist] piety which liberals considered an insult to human dignity. He presents the whale's attack upon Jonah as an instance of God's wrath against the original sin in which all men live. There can be no unjustified worldly suffering, in the orthodox view, since all the miseries of this mortal life cannot satisfy God's indignation against the innate refusal of men to obey him. (109)

Herbert addresses the depravity found in Jonah – the affliction and guilt portrayed by Father Mapple – and insists that depravity requires the “total self-aborrence from the convicted sinner” (112). This definition suggests that someone who is pre-converted (Jonah in the whale) has the ability to recognize their own total depravity and sinful nature, and begin a fight against it. This does not line up with Calvinism's understanding of total depravity, which is the complete depravity of the pre-converted person because of a state of inherent sin that results in the turning away from God and lack of desire for anything associated with him – a state only God can overcome. The idea that a person can fight against their sinful nature and achieve salvation is not Calvinism.

Herbert goes on to say that the only way to redemption and salvation Calvinism teaches is to “violate the dictates of [man's] fallen nature” and “[submit] to [God's] wrath as it manifests itself in everything that crosses the natural man and awakens his fear” (109, 113), and this is why Father Mapple insists that God will command obedience rather than persuade by logic. This reading of Mapple's sermon focuses not only on an individual's attempt at self-salvation (which, in Calvinism, is impossible), but also denies the presence

of the Doctrine of Irresistible Grace (which we shall see). It also interprets the doctrines and implications of Calvinism in a more negative light, specifically with the utilization of the word “wrath.” God’s wrath is really God’s judgment, which can also be interpreted as God’s justice. The word “wrath” tends to incite fear and anxiety, as it suggests an authoritative God exacting violence and destruction. Yet by using the word “justice,” it insinuates the idea of evaluation and parity, and the idea that consequences are being enacted after a just verdict or decision has been made by a benevolent, fair judge. One thinks more positively about God’s *justice* being exacted than God’s *wrath*, yet Herbert chooses to describe Calvinism with the more negative term. Herbert’s use of the word “wrath” gives Father Mapple’s sermon, the center of Calvinist theology in the novel, a negative impression.

Herbert sees Ishmael showing “great enthusiasm” for Father Mapple, the “embodiment of Calvinist authority” (96) in the text, yet also sees his isolation in the pulpit as evidence that individuals cannot achieve “independent religious insight. The orthodox [Calvinists] held that no vision of spiritual truth is possible apart from God’s sovereign disclosure of himself” (97). This suggests that there is no possible way to ever understand anything of God, yet there are chapters and chapters of Ishmael’s revelatory knowledge on his God that says he is able to; the idea of revelation, which is across the Bible, is the idea that God grants wisdom and understanding of himself and his ways through sudden, specific knowledge. What Herbert assumes is that Ishmael never comes to conversion or to an intimate knowledge of God, but, according to the evidence in *Moby-Dick*, he does.

Ishmael’s budding intimacy with Queequeg, Herbert recognizes, is evidence of his affront to the Biblical teachings against idolatry. But Herbert does not see Ishmael’s

relationship with Queequeg, in all its various unorthodox facets, as being evidence of the total depravity of a pre-converted Ishmael. Instead, he sees it as just the beginning stages of Ishmael's evolving understanding of spirituality. By befriending a cannibal who prays to a wooden idol, Herbert suggests that Ishmael is expanding his understanding of spirituality, faith, and adherence to doctrine, and is moving towards a more progressive, universal understanding of humanity. Ultimately, Herbert concludes that Ishmael "seeks a universal Truth that acknowledges the innate human dignity shared by Christian and cannibal alike. His quest therefore is inherently theocentric, aiming towards the realization of a single divine reality which is conceived to lie at the heart of moral Truth" (106). It is true that Ishmael's quest is inherently theocentric, as shown by his obsession with understanding Moby Dick and his mystery. It is questionable, though, that Ishmael is after a worldview that is universally humanistic in its stance towards Christians and cannibals, considering that this near-Unitarian viewpoint of Ishmael's drops out of the narrative once the *Pequod* takes to the sea, only about a quarter of the way into the novel. The idea of the interaction with and equality of mankind surfaces again at points during the text, but Ishmael's search is not about that. It is, as was stated, theocentric: centered on finding and understanding who God is, and then through God, the understanding of man.

Unfortunately, though, Herbert believes that Ishmael never arrives at what he is seeking, finding "no way to achieve a unitary vision of divine Truth capable of sustaining and guiding the moral self" (159). Instead, Herbert states that Ishmael finds himself caught between Father Mapple's and Ahab's versions of God, "contrasting versions of the theocentric conception of moral integrity" (161). It is hard, though, to see that Ishmael is inherently seeking after a way to morally order his world, considering that the amount of

narrative space he gives to pondering morality is negligible to his content on whales, on fate and free will, on Ahab's plight, and on the *Pequod's* function as a whaleship. If Ishmael is caught between the two conflicting views of God presented by Mapple and Ahab, he never states it, never wrestles with it. Also, since Ishmael is presented as another Jonah, and as an anti-Ahab, the reader must align his journey with Father Mapple's sermon and theology.

Herbert concludes that Ishmael determines that life is a series of repeating moments and motions (164); that the chapter "A Squeeze of the Hand" is Ishmael's recognition of his quest's failure and his return to the more sensual, more idolatrous inclinations he sought after in the early chapters (166); that the presence of Queequeg's uninterpretable explanations of the universe on the coffin mean that there is no perceptible truth to be ultimately learned, that "the elaborate mute ikon is useful only [as] the means of a survival whose ultimate significance is left in doubt" (168). This conclusion seems to ignore all the knowledge and wisdom that Ishmael has gained, and his growth as a character throughout the novel.

Ultimately, Herbert insists that Ishmael is ultimately saved "by chance" (169). The idea of chance does not exist within Calvinist theology, as it would imply that there are elements of life that God has no control over, or has no forethought about. There is nothing left to chance (or, as Herbert deems it in the footnote, "luck") in a narrative rife with ideas of predestination, Providence, God's foreknowledge, prophecy, etc., Calvinistic topics Herbert does not address in his treatment on Ishmael. Significantly lacking in Herbert's discussion of Ishmael is the idea of election, which essentially defines and gives meaning to the "Epilogue" (as will be explored below). It seems that Herbert's reading is one where

he sees no evidence of a salvation narrative, or is not delving deep enough into the doctrines and tenants of Calvinism in order to truly fit the pieces together. There seem to be many more steps that can be taken down the path of using Calvinism to inform and enlighten Ishmael's journey.

Chapter V.

Ishmael Begins His Journey

The novel begins with the often-quoted declaration “Call me Ishmael.” Much has been written about the nuance of this opening line, about how the narrator immediately conceals a true identity from the reader and asks to be referred to as a moniker or avatar, perhaps setting him up as an unreliable guide to the tale he is about to tell. Yet the narrator, the man referring to himself as Ishmael, is telling this story in hindsight (we know this because he talks about telling a story in a later chapter two years after the events of *Moby-Dick*). Who is “Ishmael,” then, with which this narrator is aligning himself as he tells his story? The biblical Ishmael was the first-born son of Abraham, who, after receiving a promise of conceiving an heir in his old age with Sarah, did not trust the prophecy and conceived a child with his servant, Hagar. He later does conceive a son with Sarah – Isaac, who is God’s chosen – and Abraham sends both Hagar and Ishmael away from the household. Ishmael, according to prophecy, would become “a wild donkey of a man, / his hand against everyone / and everyone’s hand against him, / and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen” (Gen. 16.12). Ishmael is cast out of his father’s house, denied an inheritance, and told to make his way alone in the wilderness. Through hints in Ishmael’s story, we discover that the narrator may have been a member of a well-known family in upstate New York, yet is now making his way on his own, much like his biblical namesake. Parallels or not, the narrator Ishmael deliberately aligns his identity with that of the biblical Ishmael, a spiritual outcast without a father or inheritance. The name “Ishmael” means

“Gods hears,” and it is here we have the first inkling that God’s hand is upon our narrator, even though Ishmael’s mind may be far from him.

We discover this hand of God upon Ishmael (though, again, he does not recognize it as such) in the first chapter, “Loomings.” Ishmael finds himself “grim about the mouth” (18) in a kind of existential depression, and knows that a voyage to sea can cure whatever ails him. He states that when he gets into this funk he needs to get to sea, calling it his “substitute for pistol and ball” (18). Ishmael would rather sail on a ship than relieve his stress by going into war, yet in the next sentence he compares his going to sea with Cato’s suicide. Ishmael is not the type of man to admit deep, concerning things about himself, so a witty defusing to the fact that he could have been suicidal would be in character. If Ishmael is that far gone, why does he believe that a journey to sea will cure him? Could he be in need of salvation of which he is not aware? He has received relief before by being near water, by sailing, by getting away from land, but this time seems different, as he admits to being drawn to sail away by an unseen force:

...this the invisible police officer of the Fates, who has the constant surveillance of me, and secretly dogs me, and influences me in some unaccountable way—he can better answer than any one else. And, doubtless, my going on this whaling voyage, formed part of the grand programme of Providence that was drawn up a long time ago. (21-22)

Ishmael goes on to admit that while he is unsure why exactly “those stage managers, the Fates” (22) put him down for the part he was to play in the voyage of the *Pequod*, he admits that he recognizes “the delusion that it was a choice resulting from my own unbiased freewill and discriminating judgment” (22). Ishmael is being drawn into the voyage, which

will ultimately lead to his salvation, by God's irresistible grace, one of Calvinism's doctrines.

The Doctrine of Irresistible Grace is the idea that despite man's sinful, fallen nature, God can overcome and overwhelm a person's so-called "free will" in order to draw him or her towards belief and faith. Of God's grace, John Calvin writes that "when the Lord identifies these two things in the conversion of his people—the removal of 'their heart of stone' and the gift of 'a heart of flesh'—he openly testifies that to turn us toward goodness everything which is of ourselves must be effaced, and that everything which takes its place must come from his grace" (*Institutes* 73). In Chapter 10 Tenant II of the Westminster Confession of Faith, the idea of irresistible, or efficacious, grace is combined with the idea of calling: "This effectual call is of God's free and special grace alone, not from any thing at all foreseen in man, who is altogether passive therein, until, being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit, he is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed by it." When God extends his grace for salvation to someone, they cannot – and essentially do not want to – resist it, which explains Ishmael's need to go to sea, the place where he will ultimately encounter God (and Moby Dick). Opponents to Calvinism insist that God's grace is resistible, and that it is up to the individual whether they want to respond or not. Yet according to Calvinism, where mankind is totally depraved to the point of never being able to, or wanting to, turn to God on their own, the idea that someone could choose whether to respond to salvation or not simple does not make sense: no one ever would. Ishmael understands that he does not have a choice. Irresistible grace results in effectual calling, demonstrated by God's love and mercy through his sovereignty over mankind, which many theologians considered a joyful and positive thing. As Jonathan

Edwards stated in his sermon “God’s Sovereignty in the Salvation of Man,” “The glory of God eminently appears in his absolute sovereignty over all creatures, great and small. If the glory of a prince be his power and dominion, then the glory of God is his absolute sovereignty” (58). Ishmael’s entire narrative is essentially a recounting of his being drawn, inexplicably, towards events, people, and revelatory knowledge.

Ishmael, of course, is unaware of this. All he knows is that there is some compulsion towards moving in a certain direction, following a kind of destiny that he is aware has already been designed for him by some unseen sovereign force he senses but cannot understand completely. As Daniel G. Hoffman points out, the chapter title “Loomings” can be read both ways: not only as a foreshadowing of something to come, but a pun on weaving, as a recurring image of the novel is the idea of everyone’s individual destiny being woven together by the Fates. He states that “Ishmael’s quest from the beginning is to seek out and read the pattern of the loom. ... The weaving image...represents both the creative and dynamic elements in Ishmael’s view of the cosmos” (219).

The idea that Ishmael is being lead to play a part in a play written long ago, and recognizing the illusion that he has any choice in saying no to the matter, becomes a recurring theme in *Moby-Dick*, as predestination, foreknowledge, and prophecy play major roles in the narrative. Ishmael has a distinct understanding that there is a larger, more powerful force just beyond observation that is leading him on his voyage and that continues to guide him while on the *Pequod*. Prophecy becomes an influence in the narrative, too, as various characters recognize that they cannot shake off the fate of what has been foretold of them, particularly Ahab, who has to deal with three prophecies: the old squaw Tistig, who declared that his being named Ahab, after the evil Old Testament king, would prove

prophetic (78); the prophecy that he would lose his leg to a whale (87); and Fedallah's more detailed prophecy about Ahab's death by hemp, coming after two visible hearses on the sea and Fedallah's own death (377), a prophecy that Ahab believes is too outrageous to come true, yet it does. Ishmael and Queequeg even run into a man who calls himself Elijah, after the prophet who prophesied against King Ahab. He, in a somewhat convoluted way, warns the two men about sailing with the *Pequod*, yet states, in an echo of Ishmael, that "what's to be, will be... Any how, it's all fixed and arranged a'ready" (88). Ahab states this inability to change one's fate from something that was already predetermined when he tells Starbuck at the end of the novel that "this whole act's immutably decreed. 'Twas rehearsed by thee and me a billion years before this ocean rolled" (418). Nathalia Wright, in one of the foundational works of religious scholarship on *Moby-Dick*, explains that while the prophecies and prophets in the text vary in their allusions – soothsayer, Biblical prophet, apocalyptic foreteller – "the entire story [of *Moby-Dick*] may be said to be the account of the fulfillment of their prophecies" (79). These passages confirm the overarching influence of a sovereign God who has predestined and predetermined the path of each individual "before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1.4).

Chapter VI.

Ishmael and Total Depravity

Ishmael's journey, both literally and figuratively, begins at the Spouter-Inn in New Bedford, and in these early chapters, Ishmael shares nearly nothing about his upbringing or what triggered him to want to go to sea, yet the reader is given an insight into his spiritual curiosity and rejection of the traditions of his past. The two main plot points in these chapters – Ishmael's befriending of the cannibal Queequeg, and Ishmael's rejection of his Christian faith – tend to be characterized by scholars as evidence of his more progressive theology, yet these moments are what serve to show evidence of Ishmael's total depravity.

The Doctrine of Total Depravity, sometimes called the Doctrine of Total Inability or the Doctrine of Original Sin, speaks to mankind's fallen nature caused by Adam's defiance in the garden. Total depravity can be best summed up by this statement from Genesis: "The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6.5). As many theologians point out, total depravity is not that every person is constantly acting out the worst evils he or she can perpetrate, but that mankind is thoroughly and completely corrupted to the core by sin, even though a person may do good things or commit positive acts. Because of this corruption, mankind inherently lacks a moral compass (or his or her compass points towards immorality all the time), losing any kind of autonomy in salvation. As Chapter 9 Tenant III of the Westminster Confession of Faith reads, "Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying

salvation: so as, a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto.” Of total depravity, Calvin comments that “being evil and depraved in every part of our nature, we are already, solely because of this corruption, justly condemned and convicted in God’s sight, for only righteousness, blamelessness and purity are acceptable to him. So even children from their mother’s womb bring their perdition with them” (585). This doctrine lays the foundation for the sovereign work of God; if a person cannot ever move himself or herself towards righteousness and repentance because the inherent inclination is always against God, then the work of salvation remains God’s work alone. It is the first point on the journey of salvation, and where Ishmael begins his journey as well.

At the Spouter-Inn, Ishmael is offered a choice between the only remaining sleeping options: a bench in the main room, or share a bed with a harpooner, a “dark complexioned chap” who “eats nothing but steaks, and likes ‘em rare” (28); after attempting to sleep on the bench, Ishmael chooses the bed, and with both witty observation and comedic slapstick, describes the harpooner’s return, Queequeg’s foreign customs and attributes, their first night and subsequent nights together, and their fast friendship. One of the focal points is the time they spend in bed (a whole chapter is devoted to it) and Ishmael compares their lying in bed together to a marriage: “There is no place like a bed for confidential disclosures between friends. Man and wife, they say, there open the very bottom of their souls to each other; and some old couples often lie and chat over old times till nearly morning. Thus, then, in our hearts’ honeymoon, lay I and Queequeg—a cosy, loving pair” (57). While it was not unusual for travelers or guests of the same sex to share a bed, modern scholarship has placed this friendship under a queer theory lens. Herbert, in his essay “Calvinist

Earthquake: *Moby-Dick* and Religious Tradition,” draws out the spiritual issue of what may be a more than a platonic relationship between Ishmael and Queequeg, stating that “to us, idolatry and homosexuality may seem quite different things, but to orthodox Calvinists they were closely connected forms of the same perversion” (117). He goes on to reference the opening of Romans, where Paul writes about the depravity of mankind, one of its attributes being that “men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another” (Rom. 1.27). Already Ishmael displays evidence of innate depravity in his unsanctioned relationship with Queequeg, and the friendship reveals more of the depravity of his soul as he begins to question his faith.

The greater influence that the friendship with Queequeg has on Ishmael is that it forces Ishmael to confront his own belief system, regarding God and the nature of man, now that he has a friend with a very different belief system than his. Ishmael witnesses Queequeg make offerings to Yojo, the carved wooden god Queequeg carries with him, and witnesses Queequeg embark upon a Ramadan fast. Ishmael as an observer betrays himself; as a narrator who paints himself a seeker and an outcast in the first chapters, he takes a narrow-minded, Colonialist view of Queequeg, calling him “a creature in a transition state—neither caterpillar nor butterfly. He was just enough civilized to show off his outlandishness in the strangest possible manner. His education was not yet completed. He was an undergraduate” (38). (It must be remembered that Queequeg is a skilled harpooner who outranks and out-earns Ishmael by far on the *Pequod*'s voyage.) Ishmael recognizes the dilemma, one that will force self-reflection and reconsideration: He cannot keep Queequeg at arm's length, treating him as an Other anymore, because Queequeg has become his friend. As such, Ishmael cannot ignore Queequeg's particular religious

practices and viewpoints. These questions are what lead to Ishmael's wrestling over how to act out a Christian faith in the presence of a South Pacific Islander who worships a wooden idol:

I was a good Christian; born and bred in the bosom of the infallible Presbyterian Church. How then could I unite with this wild idolator in worshipping his piece of wood? But what is worship? thought I. Do you suppose now, Ishmael, that the magnanimous God of heaven and earth—pagans and all included—can possibly be jealous of an insignificant bit of black wood? Impossible! But what is worship?—to do the will of God—*that* is worship. And what is the will of God?—to do to my fellow man what I would have my fellow man to do to me—*that* is the will of God. Now, Queequeg is my fellow man. And what do I wish that this Queequeg would do to me? Why, unite with me in my particular Presbyterian form of worship. Consequently, I must then unite with him in his; ergo, I must turn idolator. So I kindled the shavings; helped prop up the innocent little idol; offered him burnt biscuit with Queequeg; salamed before him twice or thrice; kissed his nose; and that done, we undressed and went to bed, at peace with our own consciences and all the world. (57)

Ishmael, as idol worshipper, is in a fallen state. One of the frequently repeated warnings in the Bible, specifically in the Old Testament, is against idol worship; there is an obvious connection between Queequeg setting his wooden idol by the fireplace and kindling shavings for Yojo's offering and the mockery of idol worshipers in Isaiah, which describes how they fashion an idol from one side of a piece of wood, and use the other side to keep themselves warm (Is. 44.15).

There is also a detectable disdain through Ishmael's sharp-tongued commentary for the Christian Church and its teachings. After finally meeting Queequeg and settling into bed with him, Ishmael notes that it is "better [to] sleep with a sober cannibal than a drunken Christian" (36). In Queequeg's biography, Ishmael observes that while Queequeg desired to leave his home and learn all he could about Christians, he found that "even Christians could be both miserable and wicked; infinitely more so, than all his father's heathens" (60).

Ishmael seems ripe for turning away from “the bosom of the infallible Presbyterian Church” and seems to have found a companion that will give him an alternate faith or exacting of religion. While George Mariani points out that “Ishmael’s rhetoric turns its irony not so much against Christian ethics as against those institutional forms that turn religion into unquestionable dogma” (41), Ishmael is essentially extracting Christian ethics from religious institutions; the institutions may have failed Ishmael, but it was never the institutions that would ultimately save him. Yet Ishmael doesn’t know any better. He is simply following his fallen nature’s path – a rejection of the things of God, turning towards the idol worship of man – and proving the total depravity in himself. According to Calvinist theology, even though Ishmael is doing what he thinks is right by encompassing and participating with his fiend’s idolatry, he is just as fallen and lost as all the rest, including Starbuck, the most pious character in the novel, and Ahab, who openly commits blasphemy over and over again. But in the midst of Ishmael’s existential and theological questioning comes a sermon that can serve as a pointer for Ishmael – if he will listen to it.

Chapter VII.

Father Mapple and Jonah's Calvinist Journey

Breaking from these revelations about his cynicism against the traditions and practices of his Presbyterian (a Protestant denomination) upbringing, we find Ishmael eagerly attending church, where the sermon he hears advocates for submission to the goodness and mercy of a just, sovereign God, reinforcing the Calvinist themes of the narrative. Upon entering the chapel, Ishmael browses the marble tablets upon the wall carved with epitaphs of the men lost at sea, and he gets lost in thought over the nature of life, death, and the unknown of heaven. Father Mapple, a retired sailor and harpooner who runs his church as if he were at the helm of a ship, climbs up into his pulpit carved like the bow of a whaler and begins his sermon by leading the men in a hymn. The hymn that Ishmael writes out, adapted from a Dutch Reformed hymn based on Psalm 18, was revised by Melville to more aptly fit the story of Jonah; for instance, the opening stanza "Death, and the terrors of the grave" was changed to "The ribs and terrors in the whale" (Battenfeld 574). In Steven Olsen-Smith's analysis of the hymn, he proponently states that Melville's changes to the hymn give it a more Calvinistic bend, incorporating the ideas of total depravity suggested by the words "gloom" and "black distress," the inability of the narrator to save himself, and the rescue of a sovereign "Deliverer God"; even the change from describing God as "Awful and bright" to "Awful, yet bright" gives "the twofold image of a deity terrible in its aspect yet supremely good and merciful. The profile accords with the

Calvinistic theology of Melville's Reformed background and of traditional Christianity in America" (Olsen-Smith 45). It is a perfect precursor to Father Mapple's sermon.

Father Mapple retells the story of Jonah in colloquial fashion to the sailors gathered in the pews, ultimately stressing Jonah's delightful surrender to God, who is his only chance at deliverance from the belly of the whale. Jonah is given a command by God to preach to the citizens of Nineveh. Jonah refuses and flees, boarding a boat at Jaffa to sail to Tarshish. Yet the boat is so threatened by storms, the crew knows there is a passenger on board who has a secret that is threatening their safety. They draw lots to determine it is Jonah, and he is taken and thrown into the sea. There, he "drops seething into the yawning jaws awaiting him; and the whale shoots-to all his ivory teeth, like so many white bolts, upon his prison. . . . 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" (52). Father Mapple goes on to explicate that Jonah's example is "true faith and repentance; not clamorous for pardon, but grateful for punishment" (52). This type of obedience, Mapple concludes, is pleasing to God. As he wraps up his sermon, his message, at the surface, is to be quick to repent, like Jonah. Yet there is a deeper theology he is espousing, as his language gets tied up in Calvinistic leaning: Jonah realized that there was nothing good in him, and surrendered to a sovereign God, knowing that "for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose" (Rom 8.28), including judgment in the belly of a whale.

Mapple moves into doxology at the end of his sermon, relishing in the kind of delight one can find when one surrenders to God, yet, like Jonah, couples the knowledge of God with the idea of chastisement, saying that "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” (54). Mapple, like Jonah, does not find God’s judgment and chastising to be offensive, but good for the believer, and Mapple echoes some of the Puritan poets who found solace in the sovereignty of God amidst suffering: “I pray you learn to be worthy of his pains who correcteth; and let him wring, and be ye washed; for he hath a Father’s heart, and a Father’s hand, who is training you up, and making you meet for the high hall” (Rutherford 28); “O Lord God... Grant that I may be salted with suffering, / with every exactment tempered to my soul, / every rod excellently fitted to my back, / to chastise, humble, break me” (Valley of Vision 91); “Consider well and wisely what the rod, / Wherewith thou art from year to year chastised, / Instructeth thee: repent and turn to God, / Who will not have his nature be despised” (Wigglesworth ll. 435-438); “Then, coming out, behold a space / The flame consume my dwelling place. ... I blest His name that gave and took, / That laid my goods now in the dust. / Yea, so it was, and so ‘twas just. / It was his own, it was not mine, / Far be it that I should repine” (Bradstreet ll. 15-16, 18-22). This ideology harkens back to Job who, after losing his possessions, his children, and his health, declares, “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1.21).

Father Mapple’s sermon is essentially setting the theological tone for the rest of the novel, even hinting at the struggles to come. Jonah is a man who was disobedient to God, and after “God came upon him in the whale” (53), he surrendered to God, seeing his chastisement as part of the good work to bring him to repentance. Cook confirms that “The basic lesson of Mapple’s Jonah sermon, the sovereignty of God and the depravity of man, is illustrative of a Calvinist dogma that still reigned supreme in many Congregational,

Presbyterian, and Dutch Reformed pulpits even amid the liberalization of theology that was gradually transforming the American religious landscape in the early nineteenth century” (57). The challenge that Mapple proposes is whether his congregation will surrender to God in the face of adversity and trial, or rebel against him, and the text is going to show us both: Ishmael surrenders, while Ahab rebels.

Much has been written about the use of Jonah in this sermon and its implications on the narrative of the novel, specifically Ishmael’s role in relation to the story of Jonah. Daniel G. Hoffman, in his essay “*Moby-Dick: Jonah’s Whale or Job’s?*,” recognizes that because Moby Dick himself takes on a kind of divine, supernatural element, then “it is inevitable that the Biblical legend of Jonah [would] govern much of the metaphor and the action” (207-208). Ishmael would then be cast in the role of Jonah: his disobedience against God would have been his “denial of life” (211) in the opening strains of the novel; his confinement inside the belly of the whale would be his time on the *Pequod*, itself adorned with whalebone and likened to the whale itself; and after the *Pequod* sinks, Ishmael “is cast forth as Jonah was spewed from the mouth of the fish” (211). According to Hoffman, Ishmael’s Ninevites are the readers of his tale (212). Ilana Pardes in *Melville’s Bibles* asks similarly: “What would happen, Melville ventures to ask, if we were to transfer Jonah from biblical times into the nineteenth century and split his figure between the outcasts and renegades of an American whaling ship? What new interpretations would emerge once Jonah is set in a context where intimate encounters with the bodies of great fish are a daily experience?” (47). She goes on to detail how Ishmael’s many chapters on whale biology, whale skeletons, whales heads, etc., is Ishmael figuratively “viewing the whale from within” (60). Mariani also recognizes that “Ishmael becomes a sort of ‘resurrected’ Jonah

who can tell the story of how a wicked leader and his community were eventually punished and annihilated” (45), Jonah’s ultimate hope for the leaders and people of Nineveh (though things did not turn out the way Jonah wanted them to). Yet while Ishmael seems to be mirroring the journey of the Biblical Jonah, Hoffman poses a good question: Is Moby Dick Jonah’s whale, or Job’s whale?

Despite the focus on Jonah and his internment in the belly of a whale, Ishmael recognizes that Moby Dick is in the vein of Job’s whale. Ishmael consistently refers to whales in general, and Moby Dick specifically, as either Leviathan or leviathans, thus, as we already saw, evoking the book of Job. At the end of the chapter on Moby Dick, Ishmael specifically refers to him as a “Job’s whale” (158) that Ahab is pursuing. At the opening of “Cetology,” where he will attempt to make a systematic record of all the various types of whales, Ishmael recognizes the intricate and almost God-like feat which he is about to undertake by pressing back against God’s challenge in Job that man is unable to know the mysterious of the eternal:

What am I that I should essay to hook the nose of this leviathan! The awful tauntings in Job might well appal me. “Will he (the leviathan) make a covenant with thee? Behold the hope of him is vain!” But I have swam through libraries and sailed through oceans; I have had to do with whales with these visible hands; I am in earnest; and I will try. (116)

Ishmael also aligns Moby Dick with the Leviathan of Job by quoting a passage from Job as the epigraph to his epilogue: “And I only am escaped alone to tell thee” (427). Throughout the narrative, Ishmael elevates Moby Dick from a simple creature who should be killed for economy (as Starbuck views Moby Dick) to god-like status, a “grand hooded phantom” (22) lifted from the pages of the Old Testament. C. Hugh Holman in “The

Reconciliation of Ishmael: *Moby-Dick* and the Book of Job” recognizes that “the influence of Job [in *Moby-Dick*] is pervasive and controlling, basic and thematic, the most informing single principle of the book’s composition” (477), and points out that Melville marked forty-seven verses in Job in his Bible, “almost all of them dealing with the darkness of life, the inscrutability of God, the desire for self-justification, or the might attributes of Leviathan” (479). Janis Stout in “Melville’s Use of the Book of Job” confirms that Moby Dick, for Ishmael, is a Job’s whale “because it serves the same function for him as the leviathan does for Job: that is, it brings him to a point of wonder, acceptance, and wisdom” (77). Pardes expands upon that point, not only comparing Ishmael to Job, but putting forth the idea that Ishmael continues Job’s meditations on God and Leviathan, and that “this unexpected partial unveiling of divine secrets, this teasing gift of vision, is an intimate call to explore further the sublimity of Leviathan, using the divine account as a point of departure” (27). While Ishmael – and, as we will see, Ahab – is assigned the role of Jonah to play in this narrative, Moby Dick is not simply a passive vehicle bringing him from one state to the next, but is the focal point of curiosity, awe, contention, and mystery at which he gazes and through which he is trying to arrive at the truth. In Job, Leviathan is showcased as an example of God’s supremacy in creation, and God’s absolute power and sovereignty.

The theology of the Book of Job also plays a role in Ishmael’s narrative, as Ahab becomes an anti-Job rebelling against God’s sovereignty in the agent of Moby Dick, the Leviathan. Job’s main theme is theodicy, or reconciling the sovereignty of a good, just God with the problem of evil in the world. Job is a man who is sinless and upright in the eyes of God, yet Satan challenges God to that fact, stating that if Job were to endure loss or

suffering, he would renounce him. God therefore allows Satan to kill Job's children and livestock, and to strike him with leprosy. Still, despite the loss, and despite his friends gathering around him insisting he must have done something wrong to incite such violence, Job clings to his faith, until God appears in a whirlwind to him declaring his sovereignty. The challenge in Job arises in the fact that Job was sinless and pure, yet suffering came upon him, suffering that was allowed at the hand of God. Job, like Father Mapple, like Calvin, understands that if God is sovereign, then all things must come from him, even what mortal eyes perceive as good or bad situations; we can know that God has a plan and purpose for suffering, but may never know why we have to endure suffering in the first place. Ahab's dilemma mirrors Job's: Ahab's leg is bitten off by Moby Dick in a confrontation, an act of violence that Ahab believes was unjustified, resulting in deep, prolonged suffering. Instead of recognizing God's sovereignty and trusting that "everything happens for a reason," Ahab fights back against the problem of evil. He sees Moby Dick as either God or the agent of God exacting an unprovoked act of violence against him, and he wants to know why; instead of waiting patiently in faith, like Job does, for God to appear (to explain himself or not explain himself), Ahab wants to find God and force an explanation from him for the presence of unjustified suffering. This is what is behind Ahab's speech from "The Quarter-Deck":

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

white whale principal, I will wreak that hate upon him. Talk not to me of blasphemy, man; I'd strike the sun if it insulted me. (140)

Ishmael admits shortly thereafter that “a wild, mystical, sympathetic feeling was in me; Ahab’s quenchless feud seemed mine” (152), yet the reader is left to wonder what that feud is. If that feud is indeed the question about why there is suffering in the world when there is a supposedly a good God ruling over creation, then Ishmael takes a very different path of attempting to answer that question. Instead of hunting down God, embodied by Moby Dick, to exact revenge upon him, Ishmael seeks after God, embodied by Moby Dick, desiring more and more knowledge of him and his ways, his history, his story, his actions, and his presence, in order to arrive at his answers. In many ways, Ishmael comes to the same ending as Job does, acknowledging that knowledge of Moby Dick is too great for him, “things too wonderful for me, which I did not know / ... I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, / but now my eye sees you; / therefore I despise myself, / and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42.3-6). Like God in Job, Moby Dick starts out as a rumor and legend, and at the end of the novel becomes a very visible reality.

Ishmael is oblivious to his metaphoric role in all of this, though, as he leaves the sermon without any further thought to it, strange for a narrator who seems to ponder everything that passes through his brain, and who seems to have a commentary for all he witnesses. But Ishmael, like anyone who is in a pre-salvation depraved state, thinks no more about the things of God and, instead, returns to the room he and Queequeg share, immediately musing upon his new friend and his friend’s religion, coming to the conclusion to join in worship with him; “ergo, I must turn idolator” (57). Only hours after hearing Father Mapple’s sermon, Ishmael bows down and worships a wooden idol. Yet

Ishmael is not rejected from the guidance of Providence, and as he and Queequeg travel to Nantucket to find a whaling ship to sail on, the predestination of his journey only seems to become stronger. Queequeg insists that Ishmael choose the ship they are to sail on, as his little god Yojo tells him to leave his fate up to Ishmael. Once attached to the *Pequod*, Ishmael and Queequeg encounter Elijah on the docks who gives them some history on Ahab and some of his blasphemous doing before issuing a kind of cryptic warning to stay away from the *Pequod*. Ishmael ultimately dismisses the comments. Here again, though, is another marker along Ishmael's path signaling a way that has already been laid out for him, towards events that he has no control over. Ishmael may use the word "fate" to describe this, but behind "the pasteboard mask" there is an intelligent designer who has already determined Ishmael's steps, and who is channeling him towards the voyage on the *Pequod* for a reason.

Chapter VIII.

On the *Pequod*

When Ahab appears after the *Pequod* leaves shore, still recovering from the incident on his previous voyage when Moby Dick ripped off his leg, he makes it plain that he is not interested in putting in a day's whaling work, but is intending to use the voyage for the pursuit of Moby Dick and the crew as his hunting party. It was the white whale that "dismasted me" (139), and in his speech to the crew he calls the whale "that inscrutable thing" (140) that has insulted and offended him (one can trace the use of the "mutilated hero" motif from Classical literature through the Grail legends directly to Ahab, where a leg or thigh wound is metaphoric for castration or impotence). According to Ishmael,

All that most maddens and torments; all that stirs up the lees of things; all truth with malice in it; all that cracks the sinews and cakes the brain; all the subtle demonisms of life and thought; all evil, to crazy Ahab, were visibly personified, and made practically assailable in Moby Dick. He piled upon the whale's white hump the sum of all the general rage and hate felt by his whole race from Adam down; and then, as if his chest had been a mortar, he burst his hot heart's shell upon it. (156)

Both Ishmael and Ahab are on spiritual journeys after Moby Dick, which will manifest in different ways. (Ironically, the most religious member of the crew, Starbuck, sees Moby Dick as no kind of incarnation or representation of God at all, and simply as a "dumb brute" [139].)

Shortly after Ahab's speech to the crew about his quest comes the narrative's first use of the word "predestination," spoken by Stubb, the happy-go-lucky second mate musing to himself in the chapter "First Night-Watch." Faced with Ahab's revelation, and

now essentially forced to follow along with the hunt, Stubb concludes that “ha, ha’s the final consequence. Why so? Because a laugh’s the wisest, easiest answer to all that’s queer; and come what will, one comfort’s always left—that unfailing comfort is, it’s all predestinated” (145). Stubb’s few, simple words evoke big questions: If God or a higher divine power is in control of everything, what is there to worry about? These words are overheard by a still pre-converted Ishmael, wandering the deck like Emerson’s transparent eyeball, observing yet never interacting with the events happening around him. He is a passive participant upon the ship, writing chapters of overheard conversations and descriptions of the captain and the mates, writing his philosophic musings down, taking notes for future research. Stubb’s words are, again, another signpost for Ishmael indicating that his path is predetermined for him; there is safety upon that path, and that, in fact, surrender to his predetermined fate may be the only way to survive.

Shortly after comes the chapter “Moby Dick,” Chapter 41, an allusion to Job Chapter 41, where Leviathan makes his first appearance, furthering the comparison of Moby Dick to a large creature representing God’s power and authority on earth. Ishmael may also be indicating to his reader through this allusion to consider what Leviathan is, and to consider the great story and theology of Job as well (as we have already seen). In this chapter, Ishmael recounts the history of Moby Dick, and, like researching the contents of the painting in the Spouter-Inn before coming to his own conclusion, he “with greedy ears...learned the history of that murderous monster against whom I and all the others had taken our oaths of violence and revenge” (152). Ishmael’s history of Moby Dick is one of human story, telling of times and places when Moby Dick was seen, the descriptions and encounters associated with him, all the time recognizing the superstition that accompanies

the stories, because “the hidden ways of the Sperm Whale when beneath the surface remain, in great part, unaccountable to his pursuers” (154) – it reads much like Old Testament narratives of men and women’s stories, and their encounters with the Lord. Still, while Ishmael seeks after “authoritative record” (154), his descriptions of the whale borders on angelic, and he himself insinuates that the deaths Moby Dick caused were “not wholly regarded as having been inflicted by an unintelligent agent” (156). He then relates the scenario of Ahab’s attempt at stabbing Moby Dick from his whaleboat, only to have his leg “reaped away” (156) in return. Ishmael concludes the chapter with some long-awaited commentary on these events, calling Ahab a:

grey-headed, ungodly old man, chasing with curses a Job’s whale round the world, at the head of a crew, too, chiefly made up of mongrel renegades, and castaways, and cannibals—morally enfeebled also, by the incompetence of mere unaided virtue or right-mindedness in Starbuck, the invulnerable jollity of indifference and recklessness in Stubb, and the pervading mediocrity in Flask. ...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. (158)

Ishmael in his pre-converted state sees Moby Dick as “the deadliest ill” (158), aligning himself with Ahab’s “quenchless feud,” (152), and uses the chapter “The Whiteness of the Whale” to expound upon the dread Moby Dick causes because of his whiteness – a kind of nothingness, a blankness, “a colorless, all-color of atheism from which we shrink” (165). Still, Ishmael admits that while it was known what Moby Dick meant to Ahab, “what, at times, he was to me, as yet remains unsaid” (159). Ishmael, though leaning towards fear and vengeance and anger steaming from his humanity, is still allowing himself to be open to learning, to seeking, to approaching greater revelatory knowledge.

Chapter IX.

Weaving Salvation

Ishmael begins to understand the divine workings behind the scenes of his life and the illusion of free will in the chapter “The Mat-Maker.” He and Queequeg are busy weaving a mat to attach to the side of their boat for padding, and Ishmael reads greater meaning into what they are doing:

It seemed as if this were the Loom of Time, and I myself were a shuttle mechanically weaving and weaving away at the Fates. There lay the fixed threads of the warp subject to but one single, ever returning, unchanging vibration, and that vibration merely enough to admit of the crosswise interblending of other threads with its own. This warp seemed necessity; and here, thought I, with my own hand I ply my own shuttle and weave my own destiny into these unalterable threads. Meantime, Queequeg’s impulsive, indifferent sword, sometimes hitting the woof slantingly, or crookedly, or strongly, or weakly, as the case might be; and by this difference in the concluding blow producing a corresponding contrast in the final aspect of the completed fabric; this savage’s sword, thought I, which thus finally shapes and fashions both warp and woof; this easy, indifferent sword must be chance—aye, chance, free will, and necessity—nowise incompatible—all interweavingly working together. The straight warp of necessity, not to be swerved from its ultimate course—its every alternating vibration, indeed, only tending to that; free will still free to ply her shuttle between given threads; and chance, though restrained in its play within the right lines of necessity, and sideways in its motions directed by free will, though thus prescribed to by both, chance by turns rules either, and has the last featuring blow at events. (179)

It may seem like wordplay, some fanciful and fun musings in what is an otherwise mundane, boring task on an endless sea, yet Ishmael is trying to reason out one of the biggest philosophical, existential question of the ages: Fate or free will? He recognizes in the “straight warp of necessity” that there are certain aspects to the world that are unchangeable, “not to be swerved from its ultimate course,” yet Ishmael believes that he is

weaving his own destiny through the immutable threads; Queequeg is weaving his own as well, sloppier, more childlike to Ishmael's clean, neat construction, "producing a corresponding contrast in the final aspect of the completed fabric." Yet he likens Queequeg's "easy, indifferent sword" to chance, and it launches Ishmael on a deeper layer to attempt to reconcile chance, necessity, and free will. His version of free will is bound by constraints, the unalterable things he mentions; in the case of weaving, it is the stable warp, while his woof is able to create what it wants. Ultimately Ishmael's woof is still going back and forth upon a prescribed track, and in order to have a mat be the end result, Ishmael cannot allow any creativity to alter the final product. He also states that chance, free will, and necessity are not mutually exclusive, can exist together all at once, and are woven together, yet concedes that chance eventually rules the day "and has the last featuring blow at events." While chance, fate, determinism, and predestination all have nuanced definitions, they all refer to the idea of the absence of free will, that a person has no control over their destiny. Ishmael philosophically understands that, yet this begins his journey to knowing it realistically. When the first whale is called out from the mast, Ishmael starts, and "the ball of free will dropped from my hand" (179). His dropping of his own free will begins an eighteen hour period that will end with Ishmael's conversion.

The *Pequod* hunts its first whale, and Ishmael is one of the rowers in Starbuck's boat. In pursuit of a whale, Starbuck sails his crew into a mist where neither the *Pequod* nor the other boats can be seen, and while attempting to harpoon the whale, the boat overturns. It is righted, but the seas are too heavy to bail out, and since none of the other boats are able to be seen or hailed, the crew of the whaleboat stays put through the night.

It is only in the morning that the crew, “wet, drenched through, and shivering cold, despairing of ship or boat,” (187) are finally rescued by the *Pequod*.

Ishmael, shaken by the terror of being essentially abandoned at sea overnight, thinks the universe is playing a joke on him, “though the wit thereof he but dimly discerns, and more than suspects that the joke is at nobody’s expense but his own” (188). He asks around the crew to try to understand if being left at sea overnight is a common occurrence, and he is reassured that it is. Furthermore, he is reassured that he was in the safe, capable hands of Starbuck, “the most careful and prudent” (188), so that no harm would have come to him. Ishmael lost control of his fate; free will had dropped from his hand, and he was instead left in a dangerous situation where his only recourse was to trust his life to someone else’s care. The nonchalance of the crew’s response to Ishmael’s concerns are a lived-out representation of Stubb’s philosophy of the comfort of predestination; if everything has already been planned, there is no use in panicking over any situation, calm or dangerous, as one is already in capable hands. It is the perfect Calvinist response.

This moment, in the chapter “The Hyena,” is Ishmael’s conversion point. Ishmael goes below deck to write his will. Something about finalizing the release of his earthly possessions and surrendering himself to his fate becomes his point of salvation:

After the ceremony was concluded upon the present occasion, I felt all the easier; a stone was rolled away from my heart. Besides, all the day I should now live would be as good as the days that Lazarus lived after his resurrection; a supplementary clean gain for so many months or weeks as the case might be. I survived myself; my death and burial were locked up in my chest. I looked round me tranquilly and contentedly, like a quiet ghost with a clean conscious sitting inside the bars of a snug family vault. (189)

Ishmael does not write that he gained peace of mind; he writes in theological terms, employing the image of death and resurrection, likening himself to Lazarus who was dead but rose from the grave at the beckoning words of Christ, a foreshadowing of Christ's own death and resurrection. Ishmael does not write that he feels relaxed; he writes that he feels clean, his wet, drenched night at sea akin to a kind of baptism for him to cleanse his soul of sin. Ishmael does not write that he survived the night; he writes that he survived himself, in that his old man, in the words of Paul in Romans, was put to death, and a new man came forth, cleansed, saved, and reborn. In Ishmael's surrendering to his predestinated fate, he finds salvation, peace, and even courage, as the concluding line of the chapter suggests that Ishmael is now ready for whatever may come to pass in his life, whatever the consequences may be.

A few chapters later, in "The Line," we see the regenerated Ishmael musing about whale lines, or the ropes that are attached to harpoons and curled in the bottom of the whaleboats. Ishmael goes into detail on how they are made, how they are run about a whaleboat, and how they unravel themselves after a harpoon is darted into a whale. It is another divergent chapter of information about the whale fishery and does not move the action on the *Pequod* forward, yet the last paragraph reveals an Ishmael decidedly surrendered to the workings of Calvinist predestination, even echoing Stubb's words about fate determined by a sovereign God as comfort:

All men live enveloped in whale-lines. All are born with halters round their necks; but it is only when caught in the swift, sudden turn of death, that mortals realize the silent, subtle, ever-present perils of life. And if you be a philosopher, though seated in the whale-boat, you would not at heart feel one whit more of terror, than though seated before your evening fire with a poker, and not a harpoon, by your side. (229)

Ishmael, who previously approached the world around him with cynicism, then with a false idea of free will, is now able to orient himself to his circumstances with calm soul and surrender, and the comfort of knowing that the details of his life have already been planned out for him.

Chapter X.

Losing and Gaining a Narrative Voice

Once onboard the *Pequod*, the narrative takes a very noticeable shift: Ishmael disappears. Actually, the physical Ishmael of the narrative – the one the reader has been following through the streets of New Bedford and Nantucket, the one who has a wise quip for all he sees around him, the one who begins a wonderful, strange friendship with Queequeg, the one who is embarking on his first whaling voyage – all but disappears, replaced by Ishmael the omniscient narrator, as if Ishmael's personality has split and one side has left the other behind. Ishmael's attitude towards whaling and the voyage shifts as well, from considering whaling as a fun, adventurous way to see the world to considering it the epitome of man's economic ventures and relationship to nature, and from portraying Ahab as a grumpy "old hunk" (21) of a sea captain to portraying him as heightened to a Shakespearean tragic hero. Described by the observing Ishmael and also by a strangely omniscient Ishmael who is now able to read thoughts and transcribe monologues held in private rooms, the action of the *Pequod* is interspersed with narrated histories of whaling, prolonged character sketches of the crew, extensive evaluations of whale cetology and biology, short plays of the action on deck, divergent stories, legal briefings, surveys of whales in art, and dreamy philosophy. Ishmael is revealing himself as the writer of this story, the one who has control over the narrative, but he is also shifting the reader's eye towards the true main character of the novel, the one around which all things have their meaning: Moby Dick. If Moby Dick is God, or represents God's will upon the earth, then

Ishmael is centering the themes of his novel around his attempt at knowing and understanding this divine whale; Ishmael's collection of stories, histories, surveys, philosophies, plays, and narrative is his attempt at writing the "Bible" of Moby Dick. Ishmael becomes a Gospel writer, a prophet, a scribe, a historian, a psalmist, and a revelator infused with inspiration from the divine. He has a way with words, as the reader knows from his wit, and offers his talent as worship.

One of the questions most readers of *Moby-Dick* have is why there are so many divergent chapters. Why does Ishmael have us read page after page of cetology, or chapters comparing the physiology of certain whales' heads, or about the bone structure of certain whales, or about how whales were depicted accurately or inaccurately in paintings and illustrations? Why can't the narrative just stick with the action on the *Pequod*, and not continuously dive down into the depths of these side paths, which have waylaid many readers from completing the journey? The answer can best be explained by Joseph Conrad in his novel *Heart of Darkness*, in the description of how Marlow tells his stories: "to him the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of these misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine" (48). For Ishmael, the ultimate truth of Moby Dick, of God, of the Leviathan, of everything "behind the pasteboard mask," is unknowable, but he desires to get at it anyway, and the way he will get at the kernel is through the misty halo: through whale cetology, biology, art, history, measurements, tales, songs, surveys, and on and on. An early hint to this approach at knowledge is found when Ishmael walks into the Spouter-Inn in New Bedford, and sees a painting on the wall whose likeness he cannot understand or discern. Ishmael never

reaches a conclusion about the portrait until after he does his research, “aggregat[ing] opinions of many aged persons with whom I conversed upon the subject” (26). Ishmael eventually determines a conclusion, but not in the moment; this is why the narrator Ishmael steps in at this point in the narrative, telling his story but also fitting the pieces together only in hindsight, only after years of studying, pondering, and processing.

Thomas Werge, in his essay “*Moby-Dick* and the Calvinist Tradition,” recognizes Ishmael’s search for knowledge and truth as something inherently Calvinistic: “It is with the problem of epistemology that any discussion of *Moby-Dick* and Calvinism must begin” (484). Werge explains that, for Calvin, knowledge of God and knowledge of the self is vital for wisdom, yet true, full knowledge of God is tainted by man’s total depravity, resulting in a kind of tension in pursuing the kernel, so to say. This tension appears in the narrative, as “Melville also stresses the futility of man’s knowledge throughout *Moby-Dick* and consistently uses it as a commentary on man’s efforts to understand leviathan by capturing and measuring him in a man-made system or category” (487). Yet man should not simply give up on knowing God; rather, God’s inscrutability, his omniscience, and his judgments, should produce awe and wonder. But there is a danger that exists in the tension, and “if man attempts to transgress the boundary between God’s judgments and essence and his own understanding, then, he will lose himself in the deep” (491). Because Ishmael is ultimately saved and spared, he must embody the kind of awe and wonder that sees the magnitude of God’s inscrutability, and searches into it only to the point of recognizing the unknown and bowing to it. Ahab, on the other hand, desires that knowledge of the divine, and refuses to bow to it; he is the anti-Job, wanting to tame and kill Leviathan, not repent and kneel before the Lord in dust and ashes.

What Ishmael slowly cobbles together in his collection of knowledge about Moby Dick is that the whale is the representative of God, and may in fact be God. His early chapters already laid the foundation of understanding Moby Dick as likened to Leviathan, the example of God's sovereignty and omnipotence upon the earth. While the first use of the word "predestination" is Stubb's way of understanding his place in the world, the last use of "predestination" is attributed to Moby Dick himself, as he swims towards the *Pequod* in an attempt to sink it, "vibrating his predestinating head" (425). Those words are the narrator's words, Ishmael's words, attributing the ability to determine life or death for each human on the *Pequod* solely to Moby Dick. There are other clues, too, that Ishmael weaves in as he tells stories from his adventures after the *Pequod*, such as in the chapter "A Bower in the Arsacides" where he finds a sperm whale skeleton on display, its head an altar, on an island in the South Pacific. When Ishmael desires to measure it, like Ezekiel measuring out the temple, they ask him, "Dar'st thou measure this our god!" (346). In the chapter "The Fossil Whale," Ishmael tells of coming upon another whale-bone altar in Africa, stating that "if you be a Nantucketer, and a whalerman, you will silently worship there" (351). The *Pequod* encounters the ship the *Jeroboam* during its voyage, a ship virtually taken over by a threatening prophet named Gabriel, who "pronounc[ed] the White Whale to be no less a being than the Shaker God incarnated" (252). In "The *Town-Ho's* Story," a story about the sailors Steelkilt and Radney aboard the ship the *Town-Ho*, Moby Dick is once again implicated at the agent of predestination. Radney, who unduly challenges Steelkilt, is "the predestinated mate...the fool had been branded for the slaughter by the gods" (204), and is ultimately dragged to his death by Moby Dick, with no other sailor touched. It is implied that Moby Dick has lived for a long time, and may perhaps be

immortal, that he has not been able to be killed, and that there is some kind of intelligence or choice into how he kills. He is also a white whale, and while Ishmael in his chapter on “The Whiteness of the Whale” never explores the symbolism of whiteness as representative of godly purity and holiness, Moby Dick, as a white whale, cannot avoid the implication. Additionally, Ahab is not the hero of this book, and is constantly being aligned with evil, blasphemy, and idolatry; therefore, his “enemy,” the divine being he is railing against, would be the hero of the book. Ishmael himself never outwardly calls Moby Dick God, or the representative of God on earth, yet he allows the stories, histories, and narratives he builds up around Moby Dick to speak for him.

Chapter XI.

Journeying Through the Fire

After Ishmael's conversion, the voyage continues, as previously stated, vacillating between action aboard the *Pequod*, and the divergent chapters on whale biology, history, cetology, and the like that give example to Ishmael's quest for knowledge about Moby Dick. What Ishmael experienced is explained by the Doctrine of Irresistible Grace, in that he was inexplicable and thoroughly drawn to the sea, drawn to the *Pequod*, and drawn to Moby Dick by no effort of his own, essentially overpowered by what was planned for him. His moment of conversion in "The Hyena" would be considered, theologically, his moment of justification, where Christ's atonement would reconcile him to God. After justification comes sanctification, when the regenerate learns and grows in his new faith. This is made possible by the indwelling spirit of God, who, as Calvin explains, "may be called a key by which the treasures of the heavenly kingdom are opened to us, and his illumination, the eye of our mind which allows us to gaze on them" (258). This is evidenced in Ishmael's search for knowledge about Moby Dick specifically, and whales in general. Ishmael reveals that his fascination with Moby Dick did not end once the *Pequod's* journey did, but that his fascination only grew. Since this was his first time whaling (and since he had quite an amateur's knowledge of it when he struck out), we can come to the conclusion that all the information and knowledge he includes in this narrative was discovered after the events of the *Pequod's* voyage. He continues to ask about and seek after revelation about Moby Dick. He tells stories of Moby Dick to others. He researches histories about the great whalers and

explorers. He becomes an expert on whale biology and cetology. He continues on whaling voyages, and continues interviewing people from Nantucket to the South Pacific to enlighten him on what they know. He even tattoos whale skeleton dimensions on his right arm (346). Interestingly, the future Ishmael refers to Moby Dick as a “most deadly immortal monster” (211), yet his consideration of Moby Dick as a monster does not deter his devotions, and explains very well the tension of the faithful, best summarized by Job’s exclamation, “Though he slay me, I trust him” (13.15). Ishmael was not a man from a whaling family, or obsessed with whaling since he was a child. As far as can be discerned from the first chapter, he was from an Upstate New York, landlocked town, from a wealthy family, made his way as a schoolteacher at one point, was either ousted from or exiled himself from his family, and went on a few merchant marine voyages. Something happened on the *Pequod* to pivot his life’s devotions toward whales and whaling, and that event was an encounter with Moby Dick. Ishmael, who had earlier seemed to align himself with Ahab’s “quenchless feud” begins, after embarking upon his own spiritual search and research, to pull away from that alignment, coming into his own thoughts about Moby Dick.

Ishmael, though, finds himself not among friends and fellow believers, but amongst a crew following a man set upon destroying the whale, going against God himself, blaspheming and swearing oaths in the name of the devil. Though it appears that not all the men are as monomaniac and hell-bent as Ahab – Starbuck essentially “plays along” with Ahab, calling him out when needed yet taking no action to righting the ship; Stubb has a very nonchalant attitude about what is going on aboard the ship; Flask does not seem to care – all the men are caught in his vengeful task, and the three harpooners not once but

twice take part in a “Black Mass” upon the ship. The first appears during Ahab’s first speech to the crew after he reveals his plan about chasing and killing Moby Dick. The crew acquiesces to the hunt, and Ahab passes around the flagon to each man, sealing their commitment (141). Afterward, he asks the three harpooners, “my three pagan kinsmen,” to offer up the socket end of their harpoons so they can be filled with the “fiery waters from the pewter” (142). Thus, in a Last Supper-like ceremony, the crew drinks. A similar ceremony, only darker, occurs towards the end of the novel, as the *Pequod* begins to narrow in upon Moby Dick. Ahab forges his own harpoon with which to kill the White Whale, and calls the three harpooners again to help him temper it with their blood: “‘Ego non baptize te in nomine patris, sed in nomine diabolic!’ deliriously howled Ahab, as the malignant iron scorchingly devoured the baptismal blood” (372). When first introduced, Ahab is immediately likened and linked to his Biblical namesake, King Ahab, who “did evil in the sight of the Lord, more than all who were before him. . . . Ahab did more to provoke the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him” (1 Kings 16.30, 33). Starbuck even refers to his plan as “blasphemous” (139). There is something unholy about this captain and the voyage everyone is being drawn upon.

Ishmael becomes aware of the spiritual darkness of the ship in the chapter “The Try-Works” while he is on watch. As the ship’s crew works through the night to slice up and try down a freshly caught whale, Ishmael has full view of the operations below him while he steers the ship. His descriptions conjure up something from the pit of hell: “darkness,” “flames,” “sooty,” “fire,” “burning,” “pitch,” “sulphur,” “hearth,” and “smoke.” He describes the men pitching the pieces of whale into the fire as the “Tartarean shapes of the pagan harpooners,” who “looked into the red heat of the fire, till their eyes

felt scorched in their heads” (327). Their figures were covered in soot, and they “narrated to each other their unholy adventures, their tales of terror told in words of mirth; as their uncivilized laughter forked upwards out of them” (327). Ishmael concludes that “the rushing *Pequod*, freighted with savages, and laden with fire, and burning a corpse, and plunging into that blackness of darkness, seemed the material counterpart of her monomaniac commander’s soul” (327). Ishmael then dozes off, and in a waking dream turns himself around so that he is facing the stern of the ship. Waking, he fearfully senses the world slipping away from him, with no compass to guide him, and after he rights himself finds that he was moments away from possibly capsizing the ship. To this he offers a rhetorical address; in understanding Ishmael as cocooned within God’s predestined will, saved from damnation, with the open eyes of spiritual sight, his warning reads like a sermon, a somewhat tempered “fire and brimstone” sermon, yet one that might echo the imagery of something like Edwards’ “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God”:

Look not too long in the face of the fire, O man! Never dream with thy hand on the helm! Turn not thy back to the compass; accept the first hint of the hitching tiller; believe not the artificial fire, when its redness makes all things look ghastly. Tomorrow, 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! ... 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, deaden thee; as for the time it did me. (328)

His revelation about the hellishness of the ship is not only about viewing the crew as depraved, vengeful Ahab acolytes, but is the first revelation in seeing his own depravity that he was, at his conversion, separated from, something that is now in his past. Ishmael is also living out the Doctrine of Perseverance of the Saints, which means that anyone

chosen, saved, and called by God cannot lose his or her salvation. As Calvin explains it, those whom God has chosen and called should be confident that they will be not only be cared for but that Christ has made specific promises about keeping and caring for those whom his Father has given him (*Institutes* 488-489). This is not to say that the saint is off the hook for continual repentance and discipline, nor is it to say that a saint's sin nature is completely eradicated at once; faith must have its fruit, sin must be continually put to death in the flesh, and obedience must be walked out daily. Perseverance simply means that "the fight will be fought and will not be finally lost" (Piper 66). This continues the Calvinist theme of God's sovereignty over humanity in salvation, alone working to determine a person's predestinated means of salvation and endurance towards glorification. On the *Pequod*, surrounding by the unholy working of the captain and the crew, Ishmael's faith and salvation is being held steadfast.

Chapter XII.

On the Third Day, and Epilogue

The Doctrine of Unconditional Election is probably Calvinism's most famous and most distinct doctrine, stating that all people who gain salvation do so by God's choice alone, and by no acts or choice they made themselves; in other words, there are a chosen set of people predestined for salvation. This is a tenet seen throughout the New Testament to explain how salvation works, as Jesus explains to his followers that "you did not choose me, but I chose you" (John 15.16) and that "all that the Father gives me will come to me" (John 6.37), referring to the chosen believers. The apostle Paul is the one who explains that "those whom [God] foreknew he also predestined... And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified" (Rom. 8.29-30), thus presenting the idea of God choosing individuals for salvation before they did anything of merit. Calvin looks to Paul's writing, showing readers that his "words tell us that the salvation of believers is based on God's good pleasure in election, and that this grace is not acquired by works but comes to them from his unmerited goodness" (*Institutes* 470). This doctrine builds upon the idea that a person is totally depraved by original sin by stating that there is nothing that mankind can do to merit or warrant election, and that it is God's choice and free gift to anyone he chooses. It means that no one, by their actions or thoughts, disqualifies themselves from salvation; it also means that no one, by their supposedly good actions, can gain salvation. The choice is arbitrary and unpredictable, or so it appears to man. An understanding of this doctrine is

particularly important in understanding Ishmael's salvation and ultimate rescue at the end of the novel; it could be asked, "Why Ishmael?" The answer would be that there is no reason why that could be discernable by man.

It is within the Doctrine of Unconditional Election where predestination plays a role. As stated previously, predestination refers to the idea that specific actions or events have been planned beforehand, and that a person has no ability to change the outcome of that action or event; the Doctrine of Predestination is the idea that an omniscient, sovereign God has predestined, or elected, certain people for salvation or damnation, regardless of that person's past and future actions. While there have been many opponents to Calvinism who base their opposition on this doctrine and declare that this kind of structure to salvation makes God a monster, there are many who discover delight and comfort in it, including, as we have already seen, Father Mapple. As theologian Loraine Boettner explains:

The doctrine that men are saved only through the unmerited love and grace of God finds its full and honest expression only in the doctrines of Calvinism. Through the election of individuals the truly gracious character of salvation is most clearly shown. ... In the Calvinistic system it is God alone who chooses those who are to be the heirs of heaven, those with whom He will share His riches in glory. (95-96)

Unconditional and unmerited election as determined by God's pleasure alone, where those chosen for election were determined "before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1.4), begs the question of what is called "double predestination," or the concept that while God chose some for salvation and glory, he chose others for rejection and damnation. Those not chosen for salvation are reprobates, whom God "passes over...leaving them to their own devices. He does not coerce them to sin or create fresh evil in their hearts. He leaves them to themselves, to their own choices and desires, and they always choose to

reject the gospel” (Sproul 16). As can be seen, Ishmael has been the one predestined for election, whereas Ahab has not.

While Ishmael already had what is considered a conversion moment in the cabin of the ship, his full moment of election is yet to arrive. Sailing on the *Pequod*, the blasphemous ship led by the evil Ahab, bound towards an encounter with God’s agent upon the earth, there is the question of survival: Who, if any, will be saved? There is a Gethsemane moment in the chapter “The Symphony” when Ahab contemplates turning back, returning to Nantucket to his family and forgetting about Moby Dick. But he decides to continue on. The so-called “fight” with Moby Dick takes three days, and once again Ishmael the crewmember disappears from the action of the narrative (we find out later that he was cast into the water on Day Three after his whaleboat capsized), and simply assumes the task of storyteller, relating the hurried, action-filled events from the chase. The prophecies about Ahab’s death all come true in quick succession, and as Ahab in his whaleboat attempts to kill Moby Dick, the whale turns his attention to the *Pequod*. The crew watches his advance, “...all their enchanted eyes intent upon the whale, which from side to side strangely vibrating his predestinating head, sent a broad band of overspreading semi-circular foam before him as he rushed” (425). Moby Dick head-butts the ship, causing it fatal damage, and in coming about is harpooned by Ahab – whose neck gets caught in the whale line, pulling him under. The ship goes down, and everyone perishes.

Except for one.

The “Epilogue,” which reveals that Ishmael is the *Pequod*’s lone survivor, begins with an epigraph from Job: “And I only am escaped alone to tell thee.” We discover that not only did he survive the wrecking of the *Pequod* and the subsequent vortex created by

the suction of the sinking ship, but that it was Queequeg's coffin, sealed up and made into a lifebuoy earlier on in the narrative, that he floated upon. The sharks, which had been such a ferocious force in the novel, "glided by as if with padlocks on their mouths; the savage sea-hawks sailed with sheathed beaks" (427). Ishmael is saved the following day by the ship the *Rachel*, with whom the *Pequod* had met a few days previous, searching for the captain's lost son.

After such a journey, the epilogue shows definitively that Ishmael was saved because he was elected, chosen by God – and chosen by Moby Dick – for salvation (not by luck or chance, as Herbert has suggested). First, the entire crew of the *Pequod* dies, either from the sinking of the ship, by Moby Dick directly, or by the sharks and sea-hawks (since there were other men in the water besides Ishmael), yet Ishmael is kept safe from all of those threats. Second, the only way he is able to stay alive is by being buoyed up by the coffin-turned-life-buoy, an item that ended up hanging on the back of the ship as a spare life-buoy by a mere afterthought; the item was predestinated to be used to help Ishmael survive, yet no one knew it at the time. Third, Ishmael's evocation of the epigraph from Job likens him with the escaped messengers from Job, those who survived calamity to report back to Job with the recount of God's devastation and his losses. Ishmael, like the wedding guest of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," is a sailor who survived only to be burdened with a tale to tell (and, as we have seen in the narrative, he has told the tale of Moby Dick again and again). Fourth, Ishmael is saved by the *Rachel*, "that in her retracing search after her missing children, only found another orphan" (427). Rachel was an Old Testament matriarch; Rachel is also symbolic of the nation of Israel as a whole, and the reference loosely ties to Jeremiah 31:15: "'A voice is heard in Ramah, / lamentation and

bitter weeping. / Rachel is weeping for her children; / she refuses to be comforted for her children, / because they are no more.” The context is prophecy to the nation of Israel, whose children are “no more” because they have been carried away to the Babylonian exile, yet Jeremiah is prophesying that someday the land and the people will be restored. Ishmael’s reference of being one more orphan taken in by the *Rachel* is not only saying that he was found by the nation of Israel, the root of the church, and adopted in as a son to a spiritual family, but he could also be echoing Christ’s promise in John 14:18 that “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.” Therefore, Ishmael was divinely saved from life-threatening peril not only to be adopted into a spiritual family but also, like Jonah, to be saved in order to bring a message to others.

But why was Ishmael the one to be saved? Of all the people on the ship, one could argue that Starbuck, the pious first mate who was the most faith-filled and of best character, should have been the one to survive. Or perhaps Pip, the innocent boy who, after having been lost a night at sea only to go crazy, should have survived. There is no visible, pinpointable reason why Ishmael was chosen, but such it is with God’s election: It is unmerited. Calvin expounds upon this idea by stating that:

For Moses’ testimony which he cites, ‘I will have pity on whom I have pity, and will show mercy to whom I show mercy,’ is the same as saying that God is moved to pity and kindness solely because that is his will. Accordingly what Augustine writes in another place is still true: ‘God’s grace does not find those it is to choose, but makes them fit to be chosen.’ (472).

It all weaves together: Ishmael, still in a depraved state, is elected for salvation by God through no merit or work of his own. He is pulled by God’s irresistible grace towards the voyage on the *Pequod*, where he has his conversion moment. His eyes are opened to

revelation and knowledge about God, and he devotes his life to finding out more about the mysteries of the divine. God's grace and mercy allows him to persevere through trials, supernaturally saving his life, giving him a spiritual family and a purpose. Ultimately, the Calvinist reading of Ishmael's spiritual journey hangs upon seeing his rescue from the *Pequod* as evidence of his election.

The scholarship devoted to Ishmael's spiritual journey, and the final conclusion of that spiritual journey, tends to vary greatly: Thomas Werge presents ideas of Ishmael's uncertainty and ambivalence to faith (498); H.C. Brashers explains that Ishmael's journey is one of self-salvation towards balanced understanding of self and universe (149); William A. Young says his journey "symbolizes American faith in reason and democratic virtue" (395); Janis Stout explains that, like Job's, his journey bring him to "a point of wonder, acceptance, and wisdom" (77); William Rosenfeld says it is the discovery of "tranquility only after [Ishmael has] relinquished the quest for intellectual certainty" (324); C. Hugh Holman explains that the journey is Ishmael's "reconciliation to the nature of his world" and that he is able to see the wonder in *Moby Dick* (489); it is his quest for love, Daniel G. Hoffman writes, where Ishmael is able to "dissever the bonds of hatred and vengeance and so qualify for survival from the annihilation that Ahab willed for all the rest" (214); finally, Ted N. Weissbuch and Bruce Stillians insist that "Ishmael is not 'saved' in any way other than the literal meaning of the word; nor is he 'redeemed'," calling for an anti-salvation message in the text (71). Many do see that Ishmael is undertaking a spiritual journey, one to discover aspects of God, or self, or morality, yet there are many opinions on what he finds. As stated above, Calvinism provides the interpretive key in order to gain access into a more articulate reading of the events of his journey.

Chapter XIII.

Ahab and the Anti-Calvinist Message

More so than Ishmael, Herbert focuses extensively on Ahab's spiritual journey in his examination of Calvinism and *Moby-Dick*. His essay "Calvinism and Cosmic Evil in *Moby-Dick*" argues that Ahab embodies the antithesis of the positive Calvinism seen in Father Mapple's sermon, and that "Father Mapple's interpretation of the Jonah story is a paradigm of the relations between the Calvinist God and those he redeems. Ahab's story presents the relations between the Calvinist God and the reprobate, those he does not redeem" (1614). Later, of Calvinism, he writes that "Calvin was accused of having envisioned a monster God who put into effect, through predestination, an eternal malice against which mortal effort is futile" (1615). In his book *Moby-Dick and Calvinism: A World Dismantled*, Herbert evokes William Ellery Channing's arguments against Calvinism, who said of it in his 1820 essay "Moral Argument Against Calvinism," that it "contradicts our best ideas of goodness and justice" (107) and, of its place in society at the time, that "Calvinism, we are persuaded, is giving place to better views. It has passed its meridian, and is sinking, to rise no more" (119). In his essay "Calvinist Earthquake: *Moby-Dick* and Religious Tradition," Herbert supports the reading that Oliver Wendell Holmes' "One-Hoss Shay" represents the Calvinism that once held America together and formed its foundation, but then ceased to function as a viable theology (109). Like Jacob Arminius, who was once a student of Calvin yet rejected Calvinist theology because he could not reconcile the doctrine of election, those who push back against Calvinism are those who

push against God's absolute sovereignty and man's complete lack of free will and autonomy within that structure. Ahab can thereby be viewed as embodying the opposite story from Ishmael; whereas Ishmael was drawn by divine grace and elected for salvation, Ahab represents the other group, those who are not drawn by divine grace, and not elected for salvation. He is a reprobate, rebelling within his illusion of free will, hoping to exact some kind of strike in his mortal frustration and anxiety against something outside of his reach, something he has no control over but that has control over him.

That Ahab is a kind of Job has not been lost on scholars (Booth, Pardes, Stout, and Young, to name a few), in that he has been physically afflicted by reasons beyond his comprehension. Job loses his livestock, his children, and his house before being struck with leprosy; Ahab's leg is bitten off in a skirmish with Moby Dick. Yet Job's response is patience and worship; he wrestles through every bit of emotion and thought for thirty-eight chapters until the Lord appears in the whirlwind, but Job never takes the advice of his wife: "Curse God and die" (Job 2.9). What Job is unaware of is that his afflictions are the result of a challenge from Satan to God stating that Job, though perhaps outwardly pious and righteous, will surely curse his God if suffering is brought to him. Job does not. Yet Ahab does, fulfilling Satan's prophecy that a man will hold fast to God if he is not bodily touched, but will deny God if his health is compromised. Ahab therefore becomes the unrighteous version of Job, the kind of man Satan was hoping to coax out, that realized that perhaps there is not a kind, benevolent, friendly God in the heavens, but one whose actions are unpredictable, whose motivation is fickle and indiscernible. That is the view that Ahab embodies. Not only does he "curse God," he, unlike Job, seems to perceive the unpredictable, indiscernible hand behind what happened to him, and seeks out to discover

it and rebel against it. As Ahab proclaims, “The prophecy was that I should be dismembered; and—Aye! I lost this leg. I now prophesy that I will dismember my dismemberer” (143).

Ahab’s theology is best encapsulated in the speech he delivers to his crew in “The Quarter-Deck,” after he informs them that his mission – and by proxy, the crew’s mission – will be to hunt down and kill Moby Dick. This portion of his speech is provoked by Starbuck’s comment that going after a “dumb brute,” thinking there was some kind of sentience or intelligence, or even motive, behind the whale’s attack on Ahab, is “Madness!” (139). To this, he replies:

All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks. But in each event—in the living act, the undoubted deed—there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask. If man will strike, strike through the mask! How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall? To me, the white whale is that wall, shoved near to me. Sometimes I think there’s naught beyond. But ‘tis enough. He tasks me; he heaps me; I see in him outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing it. That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate; and be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal, I will wreak that hate upon him. Talk not to me of blasphemy, man; I’d strike the sun if it insulted me. (140)

Ahab here acknowledges that there is some kind of intelligent hand, or some greater process, or some supernatural oversight, that governs the world outside of the perception of man. His pasteboard mask analogy is just a retelling of Plato’s Allegory of the Cave; Ahab acknowledges that the world is simply shadow or projection, but that there is someone or something quite literally pulling the strings behind the scenes. He desires to strike through the mask, crawl from the cave, discover what is truly behind the seemingly random or unreasonable events that occur. In stark contrast is Ishmael, who from the beginning of the narrative, acknowledges and follows the unseen hand of Providence in his

journey, and sees its workings as fascinating, thought-provoking, and curious. Ahab acknowledges no such thing; the world to him is a prison, the unseen drivers behind it manipulative and unfair. He wonders if there is even anything beyond the perceptible world. What frustrates him the most is the White Whale's inscrutability and his inability to be truly known.

Many preachers, theologians, and laypeople who prescribe to a Calvinistic worldview seem to be equipped with the uncanny ability to weather suffering, and to understand its significance in their life, when it comes from the hand of a benevolent, sovereign God (one thinks of Horatio G. Spafford's hymn "It Is Well With My Soul"). From the writing of the Puritans to the twenty-first century "Neo-Calvinists," suffering, affliction, pain, loss – all the "bad things" of life – are viewed as either a tool towards refining the soul into becoming more Christ-like, or are manageable due to the knowledge that God is ultimately in control. Ishmael, though relatively unscathed throughout the novel (though could his dark thoughts in Chapter 1 suggest an unseen illness or affliction?), understands this surrender to divine Providence, and his self-abandonment is shown in the way he, as a physical character, disappears for most of the novel. Ahab cannot, and does not, understand suffering within this kind of worldview, and sees the White Whale not as chastising him to bring about righteousness, or challenging him – will he curse God and die? – by sheering off his leg. Instead, Ahab aligns himself with Satan, in both ritual and blasphemous pronunciations, and when he finally is able to toss a harpoon towards the object of his hatred, he does so by proclaiming, "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" (426). Ultimately, Ahab is

destroyed by the White Whale, the representative of God who, in “vibrating his predestinating head” (425), condemns Ahab a final time.

Ahab ultimately is not saved, and Ishmael is; Ahab is the reprobate, and Ishmael is the elected. Of the reprobate, Calvin states that “God raises up the reprobate so that in them he might magnify his glory” (473), which could be a summary of Paul’s longer passage in Romans, explaining how the elected and the damned work together to bring glory to God:

Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills. You will say to me then, “Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?” But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me like this?” Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory... (Rom. 9.14-23)

According to this passage, we can read Ishmael as the “vessel of mercy,” though he journeys on and with, quite literally, vessels made for destruction, in both the physical craft of the *Pequod* and the person of Ahab. Ahab and the voyage of the *Pequod* were used as a way to bring Ishmael to his salvation and enlightenment, to spark his curiosity and thirst for knowledge, to get him to the point of surrender to Providence, and to recognize the hand of something divine guiding his steps; for him to be literally and spiritual rescued. As Moses and the Hebrews would not have had their victory without Pharaoh’s hardened heart and resistance, Ishmael would not have had his story without Ahab’s vengeful quest.

Chapter XIV.

Continuation of Scholarship

“Is there—paradoxically—something *beautiful* about this doctrine?” Kathleen Verduin asks her students in her essay “Teaching *Moby-Dick* in a Calvinist Setting.” Having grown up in a Dutch Reformed community and read *Moby-Dick* as a teenager, she writes of her experience exposing her students at Hope College in Michigan – some from strict Calvinist backgrounds, some not – to the epic novel. She writes that initially her students associate Calvinism with harsh theology, one characterizing it as “the continuous fear of God and insecurity in oneself” (76). But examining the doctrines opens up the text, and vice versa. “We talk of Moby Dick as a possible incarnation of a Calvinist God. Primordial, powerful, and entirely self-sufficient, the white whale is a perfect example of Sovereignty; he has, moreover, a ‘predestinating head’ and is, like Jehovah, unknowable” (80). Her students discuss Father Mapple’s faith, and how he presents as a foil to Ahab’s rebellion. Ultimately, her students are able to engage with the text in distinct ways due to their understanding of Calvinism, and Verduin writes that “I feel justified in presenting *Moby-Dick* not only as a great work of American literature but as a model in which my still-Calvinist students may confront their own religious struggles at an artistic distance and as a means for others in the course to understand an unfamiliar tradition” (83).

Verduin’s students had the advantage of understanding the nuance of Calvinist doctrine in order to apply that lens to the text. Unfortunately, many students today no longer have the knowledge of different Biblical doctrine, much less of the Bible, so much of the

allusions and greater meaning inherent in the text is lost. As stated above, Jonathan A. Cook points out that the “less attention paid” to the religious aspect of the novel are due, perhaps, to the “defamiliarization of the Bible and Judeo-Christian religious traditions” (5-6). Since the writers of Melville’s time were steeped in religious understanding from their early years, their characters and themes are inherently shaded by their beliefs. In *Moby-Dick*, knowledge of theology is crucial to seeing and understand increased facets of the narrative, allowing the text to expand and deepen. As shown above, Ishmael’s spiritual journey comes into full color and nuance when explored through a theological lens, specifically a Calvinist one.

Why is this important, though? As Dennis Taylor writes in his essay “The Need for a Religious Literary Criticism”:

A great critical need of our time is for ways of discussing religious or spiritual dimensions in works of literature. We live in an age of critical discourses that are expert in discussing the dimensions of class, gender, textuality, and historical context. Yet an important part of the literature we read goes untouched by our discourses. ... The need for a religious literary criticism is not only reflective of a present scholarly void, but also comes out of a spiritual hunger, felt by many teachers and students, for a way of discussing the intersections of their own spiritual lives with what they read. These two needs, scholarly and spiritual, reflect the extreme difficulty of the subject which invites intellectual short-circuiting and collapse at a number of points.

We can analyze *Moby-Dick* through a post-modern lens, a post-structuralist lens, a post-Colonial lens, a race lens, a queer theory lens, or any of the many other lenses one could apply – and to which the novel opens up much scholarship. But the Bible is one of the most influential books in the world, containing narrative, history, proverbs, poetry, apocalyptic writing, and philosophy; it has much to lend to the understanding of literary works that employ it. While “religious literary criticism” has somewhat fallen out of favor

in the latter half of the twentieth century, specifically in the United States, scholarship on the way literature interacts with the Bible and other religious texts has never gone away, and it seems to be making a resurgence. In Melville scholarship specifically, new scholars are revisiting the text through Biblical lenses (as seen above), a new collection of essays on Melville and religion has just been published (*Visionary of the Word: Melville and Religion*), and *Leviathan: A Journal of Melville Studies* continually publishes work addressing the religious influences in Melville's writing.

But why stop at the Bible? Daniel Herman applies an Eastern Religious lens to the text in his work *Zen and the White Whale: A Buddhist Rendering of Moby-Dick*. Tim Marr's work looks at *Moby-Dick* through the lens of Islam. Philip Young's essay "These be Thy Gods, O Ahab!" discuss the Gnosticism, Zoroastrianism, and Greek mythology in the text. Elisa New's "Bible Leaves! Bible Leaves! Hellenism and Hebraism in Melville's Moby-Dick" views the text through a Hebraic lens. Added to Cook's entire book examining the Christian influences of the novel, there is still ongoing work devoted to looking at the text through a spiritual lens, deciphering its meanings by applying the wisdom of other religious texts or teachings to the narrative. What is noticeable is that these scholars are working now; while the bulk of the theological scholarship on Melville was done in the middle part of the 20th century, modern scholars are still finding ways to enter the text through religious lenses, and it may be an untapped arena of modern scholarship ready to, in Ishmael's words, "speak of some hidden soul beneath" (367).

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