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"Thou Art Skylarking with Me": Travesty, Prophecy, and Ethical Mutuality in *Moby-Dick*

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Abstract: "A Bosom Friend," Chapter 10 of *Moby-Dick*, concludes with a literary travesty on the Golden Rule, a norm of obligation to others as to self. If God's will is that we treat our neighbors as ourselves, and if the narrator, Ishmael, desires his neighbor Queequeg join him in Presbyterian worship, then he must join his new friend's devotion to his god, Yojo: "ergo, I must turn idolator." This is after Ishmael has heard Father Mapple's sermon on Jonah, and after Queequeg has become his bedmate at the Spouter-Inn in New Bedford. Queequeg also heard Mapple preach, though left early to return to the inn. So the sermon scene is framed by Queequeg scenes. From one angle, putting Yojo beside the biblical God, or whale hunting with the Golden Rule, can seem to dismiss as absurd these juxtapositions' terms and questions: of sin, the designs of God, and prophetic calling versus fate, chance, and whoever happens to be one's neighbor. From another angle, were such terms merely 'travestied' as negation, little import would remain in deploying them. This essay considers how, in Chapters 7–12, 16–18, 94, and elsewhere in *Moby-Dick*, Melville's juxtaposing parody, satire, travesty and the like with compelling religious and ethical concerns—a rhetoric he occasionally calls "skylarking"—contributes to the novel's realization of a narrative ethics of mutuality.

Keywords: Melville; Jonah; Golden Rule; literary travesty; parody; mutuality; narrative ethics

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1. Travesty, Juxtaposition, and the Golden Rule

"A Bosom Friend," Chapter 10 of *Moby-Dick*, concludes with a literary travesty on the Golden Rule, a norm of obligation to others as to self, with analogues in many traditions.[1] The narrator opines that since God's will is that we treat our neighbors as ourselves; and if he, Ishmael, desires his neighbor Queequeg join him in Presbyterian worship, then he must join his new friend in devotion to the carved figure of his god, Yojo: "ergo, I must turn idolator."[2] This happens in New Bedford, after Ishmael has heard Father Mapple's sermon on Jonah, and after Queequeg has become his bedmate at the Spouter-Inn, but before they depart for Nantucket, where they will sign onto the Pequod. As it happened, Queequeg also heard Mapple preach but left early to return to the inn. So the scene at the Whaleman's Chapel is framed by Queequeg scenes. This essay considers how, in Chapters 7–12, 16–18, 94, and elsewhere in *Moby-Dick*, Melville's juxtaposing of parody, satire, travesty, and the like with serious religious or ethical concern—a rhetoric he occasionally calls "skylarking"—contributes to a narrative ethics of mutuality, even, in the end, creaturely mutuality.

Melville was a master of sustained satire, particularly in *Mardi* and *The Confidence-Man*. But parody and satire are terms with a broader compass than what I have in mind here: a kind of mockery that depends, for its humor or offense, on our recognizing the seriousness of what is mocked. T. Walter Herbert once referred to Melville's spoofing of Calvinism as "specific and deliberate travesty" (Herbert 1977, p. 99), which seems fitting. A literary travesty may entail whole works, such as seventeenth century French poet Paul Scarron's parodies of the *Aeneid*,[3] or certain moments in works. Applied to real life, the term is entirely negative, as in "a travesty of justice." But in the arts, "to travesty" something can be entertaining. A near synonym is "burlesque," but associations with burlesque shows may make it less useful. (Although travesty itself does have a theatrical meaning associated

with actors playing other genders.) Another possibility, "lampoon," does not quite capture a travesty's potential to offend, as with *Moby-Dick*'s flights of irreverence toward reverence. And while Mapple's sermon on Jonah is too serious to be considered a travesty on the sermons Melville could have heard as a whaleman in New Bedford, there are reasons to think that the book of Jonah, despite its typological reception in Christianity, was itself a satire on the prophetic tradition. Melville would have noticed narrative oddities and what Ilana Pardes calls "unsettling questions,"[4] suggesting to some that Jonah's text parodies prophecy as an institution, yet on behalf of aspects of prophetic religion.

Of the many prophetic dimensions of *Moby-Dick* itself, there is a tension between the sin-and-grace anxiety of Mapple and the serene *Gelassenheit* of Queequeg. Both Mapple and Queequeg have stoic attitudes in respect to intimations of reality beyond comprehension and expression. And whether the ultimate is located in divine providence or cosmic contingency, to both men ultimacy must be borne and accepted in spite of its inscrutability.[5] Ishmael is one who willingly risks hermeneutical *mis*-understanding in addressing contrary aspects of reality that can neither be resolved nor synthesized away. From one angle, putting Yojo with Jehovah,[6] or sperm whale hunting with the Golden Rule, can seem to dismiss these juxtapositions' religious or ethical terms and questions: of sin, justice, the designs of grace, prophetic call versus fate, chance, and whoever happens to be one's neighbor or random bedmate. But were he simply negating such terms, little import would remain in deploying them.[7] When held together in juxtaposition, their ambiguous meanings appear really real, as it were, with Ishmael and Queequeg among their witnesses.

Consider how the Pequod's two Nantucket owners, Captains Bildad and Peleg, agree to hire Queequeg only after being assured the harpooner is part of a properly Christian society. May we regard Ishmael's defense of his pagan friend to Bildad as kind of truthful travesty?

> "[A]ll I know is, that Queequeg here is a born member of the First Congregational Church. He is a deacon himself, Queequeg is."
>
> "Young man," said Bildad sternly, "thou art skylarking with me—explain thyself, thou young Hittite. What church dost thee mean? answer me."
>
> Finding myself thus hard pushed, I replied. "I mean, sir, the same ancient Catholic Church to which you and I, and Captain Peleg there, and Queequeg here, and all of us, and every mother's son and soul of us belong; the great and everlasting First Congregation of this whole worshipping world; we all belong to that; only some of us cherish some queer crotchets noways touching the grand belief; in *that* we all join hands." (chp. 18, p. 79, Melville's italics)

Ishmael's ecumenical riff criticizes Bildad's presumption to know who is embraced by God and who is not, yet the critique affirms the existential and ethical import of the question of ultimate inclusivity. Travesty in this instance is a witting, apophatic way of mis-understanding, or understanding 'under erasure,' that which is ken yet beyond our ken.[8] It is also a protest against spiritual pride, which might jibe with the book of Jonah's being a prophetic travesty against prophetic presumption. And Ishmael's riff challenges us—a bit like a parable of Jesus—to grant credence to its affirmation or reject it as incredulous.

That *Moby-Dick* simply rejects Christianity—and, as well, Queequeg's rituals as standing in for religion generally—will likely always have advocates. So Lawrance Thompson can write of *Melville's Quarrel with God*, and Herbert of *Moby-Dick and Calvinism: A World Dismantled*. Harold Bloom, in *The Daemon Knows*, thinks Father Mapple's "colors of rhetoric conceal a Melvillian, un-Christian gnosis: 'his own inexorable self.'"[9] Such views risk reducing religion in Melville to sharp critiques of cognitive, propositional belief. While Melville's beliefs are not my primary issue here, there has been increasing appreciation of his undiminished interest in scriptural paradigms and religious questions throughout his life and work, both in regard to epistemology—his writing career's commitment to what Brian Yothers pointedly titles *Sacred Uncertainty*[10]—and ethics, especially Melville's sense

that the practical imperatives of neighbor love extend across religious, cultural, and ethnic differences.

Here, I am considering how Melville employs travesty and skylarking to interpret 'compelling uncertainty' about ultimacy and ethical mutuality.[11] In his uses of such tropes, Melville juxtaposes straightforward senses (e.g., a biblical moral command) with unanticipated applications or contexts (e.g., a "pagan" neighbor) in ways similar to metaphor. The literal senses remain in play along with the parodic, thereby creating distancing effects not reducible to affirming or negating propositions but which carry semantic and imperative weight. Any juxtaposition opens some distance or space between the matters set side by side. To say the sense of religious or ethical uncertainty created here is *compelling* not only means that this distance becomes noticeable. As a performative utterance, a skylarking trope can also proffer a claim, compelling one to *enter the space* and *attend to*—or else turn away from—the critical distance opened by the juxtaposed senses and contexts. Travesty and skylarking, then, may instigate relations of challenging mutuality.[12]

Rather than over-theorize this point, we can look at two more instances. The first has already been mentioned, when Ishmael contemplates Queequeg's devotion to Yojo.

> 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. (chp. 10, pp. 52–53; Melville's italics)

The Golden Rule here is Luke 6:31, "As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise" (KJV) and other passages.[13] Ishmael surrounds the principle with phrasing obviously parodic. Since it is Roman Catholics not Presbyterians who are known for papal infallibility, a doctrine which Protestants have often deemed idolatrous, Queequeg's worship of a "bit of black wood" is put in the same whaleboat with all Christianity. What counts as travesty is twisting the Rule into an imperative to embrace another's 'idolatry,' by way of tendentious questions—can God "possibly be jealous . . . ?" "But what is worship?" "And what is the will of God?" "And what do I wish . . . ?"—and a syllogistic "ergo." Mikhail Bakhtin would analyze the passage as exemplifying the "authoritative word" of religion and reason reorchestrated in the word of Ishmael.[14] Then how far does the authoritative "do likewise" remain in play in this redeployment—so that *we* really are directed to "unite" with our pagan neighbors' worship?

In "The Ship" (chp. 16), Ishmael, having sailed with his friend by packet from New Bedford to Nantucket to locate a whaleship, encounters Queequeg's sacred hermeneutics. "Queequeg now gave me to understand" that whichever ship Ishmael "infallibly" selects for them to sign onto, even by chance, would reveal Yojo's own providential choice.

> I have forgotten to mention that, in many things, Queequeg placed great confidence in the excellence of Yojo's judgment and surprising forecast of things; and cherished Yojo with considerable esteem, as a rather good sort of god, who perhaps meant well enough upon the whole, but in all cases did not succeed in his benevolent designs. (pp. 63–64)

A formal premise of *Moby-Dick* is that it is written as Ishmael's retrospective narrative.[15] How Melville conceived it has been subject to speculation—was it always to be the tragedy of Ahab, or was it first imagined as a romance of whales and whaling?[16] In any case, the narrative we have is that of the sole, traumatized witness to a shipwreck—"I only am escaped alone to tell thee"[17]—caused by a whale yet owing to Ahab's monomania. If so,

whatever Ishmael says about religion is likely said with the voyage's demise silently in mind. Here, what is travestied is divine providence, signaled by theological language ("benevolent designs") redeployed into Queequeg's proposing that Ishmael's choice of a ship must reveal the will of Yojo. Since the Pequod's destiny will be fatal, it may seem the doctrine of providence is emphatically dismissed. While this judgment is subject to nuances, the God of Jonah and Job is nonetheless commented on through Yojo, a not very effective but well-meaning and "rather good sort of god."

2. Father Mapple and the Book of Jonah

"The Sermon" (chp. 9) that Ishmael and Queequeg attend at the Whaleman's Chapel is not itself travesty or parody—except possibly in the stage business framing it and, indirectly, in its scriptural origins. There are few hints that Ishmael the sailor understood it any differently than Mapple did.[18] Much of Ishmael's commentary here and in "The Pulpit" (chp. 8) has to do with how Mapple performed the sermon, and how his performance and the gale outside affected him as he preached. His theater is a high pulpit shaped like a sailing vessel's prow, behind which a painted angel peers down on a ship struggling in a storm against a rocky shore. In front of this backdrop, he climbs a rope ladder, pulls it up into the pulpit after him, and speaks to his congregation rather nautically. Ishmael worries we might dismiss all this as crowd-pleasing, for "Father Mapple enjoyed such a wide reputation for sincerity and sanctity." Yet, were these not "mere tricks of the stage"? "No," he thought, "there must be some sober reason"—the theatrics "must symbolize something unseen." Did Mapple's "physical isolation" in the pulpit signal his "spiritual withdrawal" from the world? With such queries did Ishmael read the gestures of this "faithful man of God."

> What could be more full of meaning?—for the pulpit is ever this earth's foremost part; all the rest comes in its rear; the pulpit leads the world. From thence it is the storm of God's quick wrath is first descried, and the bow must bear the earliest brunt. From thence it is the God of breezes fair or foul is first invoked for favorable winds. Yes, the world's a ship on its passage out, and not a voyage complete; and the pulpit is its prow. (chp. 8, pp. 43–44)

Of course, these are generalizing pieties—as theatrical in their way as Mapple's pulpit business—that tell us nothing of the sermon itself except to suggest gravity to come.

Modern scholarship finds Jonah intriguing. The text of this "book"—its four chapters require less than two Bible leaves[19]—is full of puzzles, apart from the fish story. Its genre and date are uncertain, most likely a fifth-to-third century reflection of Israel's exile. Mapple thinks its message is clear, until reaching the sermon's end; but Melville must have enjoyed the biblical text's ironies and hyperboles, for Jonah itself can seem an extended parody or joke, a travesty on prophecy.[20] And Melville's own travestying continues in chp. 83, "Jonah Historically Regarded," as he spoofs nineteenth-century naturalistic and historicist explanations of Jonah's big fish. Pardes brilliantly elaborates on the "parody" of John Eadie's short entry on Jonah in John Kitto's 1845 *A Cyclopedia of Biblical Literature*.[21] Kitto's volumes were making available to wider audiences the new 'higher,' historical criticism of biblical texts; however, Eadie was one of the more conservative, Protestant contributors. He did summarize various modern hypotheses purporting to make plausible the odd aspects of Jonah and his fish, but then Eadie defended the tale's literal particulars, with one psychologizing exception: the holy man's refusal of God's call "must have sprung from a partial insanity."[22] Melville's later chapter on Jonah has fun with both the modern hypothesizing he would have found in much of Kitto and with Eadie's orthodox credulity.[23] His inclination to receive scripture as mythic and poetic in its authority might include forms of parody as part of its prophetically critical power.

Jonah is called to prophesy to Nineveh, an Assyrian city of unspecified wickedness and enmity with Israel. Called, Jonah flees his call. His reasons are inexplicable, but it seems he fears God's wrath upon himself far less than he fears God showing the Ninevites mercy

(4:2). So Jonah boards a ship bound for Tarshish, on the far side of the Mediterranean world. His voyage is extraordinarily interrupted by "a mighty tempest" and "a great fish"—not specifically a whale—which swallows him whole. And within the fish he offers to God a psalm-like prayer (2:1–9), which interrupts the narrative and is the only part of Jonah that does not suggest parody. The psalm's verses represent, writes Pardes, a "liminal site, between life and death, in the solitary, silent, seductive womb-tomb of the deep" (Pardes 2008, p. 63), where Jonah appears to rediscover, with thanksgiving, his prophetic call.

However, when the narrative picks up, the uncertainty of his vocation is again apparent. Delivered from the fish, he arrives at Nineveh, tells them their great city will be overthrown in forty days, and is bitterly disappointed when, against expectations, they do repent. The king, the people, even the cows and sheep repent—in sackcloth no less!—and are spared destruction. It is puzzling why this turn so angers Jonah that he wants to die. God sends signs: a gourd bush to shade him from the sun, then a worm to wither the gourd, deepening Jonah's depression and making him look ridiculous. The moral, in the book's last two verses, is God's odd rhetorical question: "Thou hast pity on the gourd . . . . And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?" (4:10–11).

Such is the text on which Father Mapple preaches. He first leads those gathered in a hymn adapted from Isaac Watts, based on Psalm 18 and reminiscent of Jonah's song of gratitude.[24] Then the sermon: this short book, Mapple says, addresses two sorts of hearers, sinners and prophets, that is, ship's "pilots" like himself. A good narrative preacher, he embroiders the story with maritime particulars, inviting us to inhabit it while making his point. Namely that Jonah—a cowardly and conscience-convicted "God-fugitive" whom the crew, "not unreluctantly,"[25] casts overboard for bringing on misfortune—never presumes to beg for mercy, not even inside a whale, but pleads only that God deal with him as God sees fit. From this we are to "learn a weighty lesson."

> Then Jonah prayed unto the Lord out of the fish's belly . . . . He feels that his dreadful punishment is just. He leaves all his deliverance to God, contenting himself with this, that spite of all his pains and pangs, he will still look towards His holy temple. And here, shipmates, is true and faithful repentance; not clamorous for pardon, but grateful for punishment. (chp. 9, p. 48)

Gratitude for just punishment is what makes Jonah the "model for repentance" Mapple offers the congregation. There is something bracing about this model, an austere wisdom as if from Ecclesiastes, a stoicism that accepts whatever God's seasons may bring.[26] Meanwhile outside, on this Sunday in New Bedford, the elements rage. He "seemed tossed by a storm himself." And "all his simple hearers look on him with a quick fear that was strange to them" (p. 49).

Mapple pauses now, and apparently "communing with God and himself," readies himself to introduce the second message of Jonah, directed to prophets and preachers. He accuses himself of Jonah's sin, of failing to "preach the Truth to the face of Falsehood." He punctuates this theme with a litany of six woes, as in, "Woe to him who seeks to pour oil upon the waters when God has brewed them into a gale! Woe to him who seeks to please rather than to appal! . . . Yea, woe to him who . . . while preaching to others is himself a castaway!" (pp. 49–50). It is unclear why he regards himself guilty of prophetic negligence. Perhaps the reference, below, to senators and judges alludes to the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, to which Melville's father-in-law, Massachusetts Judge Lemuel Shaw, acquiesced.[27] Is then Mapple admitting to moral quietism? He reaches a point of exhaustion, as if emptied out: "He drooped and fell away from himself." But then rallies, and his face transforms into "deep joy" as he names six delights to surely accompany every woe. "Delight" be to whomever

> "gives no quarter to the truth, and kills, burns, and destroys all sin though he pluck it out from under the robes of Senators and Judges. Delight,—top-gallant

> delight is to him, who acknowledges no law or lord, but the Lord his God, and is only a patriot to heaven." . . .
>
> He said no more, but slowly waving a benediction, covered his face with his hands, and so remained, kneeling, till all the people had departed, and he was left alone in the place. (p. 50)

Mapple notices neither the humor in Jonah nor the irony that the prophet was angry that Nineveh repented.[28] Concerning Nineveh's conversion and deliverance (a more extravagant sign of grace than Jonah's being vomited out of a fish) he says nothing. Perhaps the sermon and its performance are to be as strange as scripture itself, and he may hope to puzzle his congregation into wondering upon the import of what they have heard. But Ishmael implies that in kneeling, as everyone departs, Mapple was now as isolated as they had been—"silent islands of men and women"—when waiting in the Whaleman's Chapel (chp. 7, p. 40) before he entered.[29]

And perhaps, indirectly, in the sermon's and Jonah's negations there are affirmations that go unmentioned but become explicit elsewhere in *Moby-Dick*. The opposite of Mapple and his congregants' shared isolation would be shared mutuality, and a possible meaning of the book of Jonah is further extension of God's providential care and wisdom to Israel's geographic and social others, such as to the Ninevites. Mapple implies nothing of this sort, nor does Ishmael at this moment. But Queequeg, we should remember, was among the chapel's congregants. Another though unlikely affirmation in Jonah concerns the gourd plant that protected the disconsolate Jonah, who did "pity" it when it withered. Phyllis Trible observes that only here do we learn Jonah pitied the gourd, adding that the KJV's "spare" in 4:11 is the same Hebrew verb as "pity" in 4:10.[30] The overt point might be that while Jonah pities the plant, God pities the Ninevites. More covertly, God's caring for the dim Ninevites with their livestock, and Jonah's caring for his lost gourd plant, are part of a larger pattern of care. By the end of *Moby-Dick* we may be asking whether this pattern of mutuality is extended to other creatures, including sharks, giant squids, and of course, whales.

Mapple's was, to be sure, a good sermon. We would be 'with him all the way,' impressed by his rhetorical turn from addressing all sinners to himself alone, and we would be stirred by the antitheses of woes and delights. His summons to live with ethical courage before God and Truth would be commendable. Nevertheless, our sense of the sermon should remain odd, which may be a salient point of its performance. Namely, that *the uncertainty with which Mapple leaves his hearers* does succeed, as true prophecy must, in appalling rather than pleasing—*but appalling to what purpose and whose*? We are given little time to ponder this query before we again meet the harpooner, Queequeg, who had returned to the Spouter-Inn.

3. Queequeg, Juxtaposed with Mapple

At the inn, in chp. 10, Queequeg also creates an impression of isolation as he whittles on Yojo, paying no notice when Ishmael enters and finds his friendly bedmate's "indifference . . . very strange." Queequeg's seeming indifference prompts another of Ishmael's musings on difference and lack of difference among "savage" and "civilized," which may strike us as variously enlightened and erroneous.[31] He does not care for Queequeg's Polynesian tattoos but affirms that beneath them and under his shaven head (oddly reminding Ishmael of George Washington's head) there resides a *soul*. "You cannot hide the soul. Through all his unearthly tattooings, I thought I saw the traces of a simple honest heart; and in his large, deep eyes, fiery black and bold, there seemed tokens of a spirit that would dare a thousand devils." What impresses Ishmael about Queequeg, in contrast to Mapple, is his tranquility, equanimity, and integrity. Here I demur from Herbert's otherwise keen reading of Mapple, that "the juxtaposition of Queequeg's worship with Mapple's is not intended to obliterate the appeal of the preacher's staunch integrity" (Herbert 1977, p. 105). The juxtaposition obliterates not the sermon's content so much as Mapple's integrity as

self- as well as communally isolated. Ishmael interprets Queequeg as a person who, while strange, is restrained in his companionability and is sublimely at one with himself.

> At first ["savages"] are overawing; their calm self-collectedness of simplicity seems a Socratic wisdom. I had noticed also that Queequeg never consorted at all, or but very little, with the other seamen in the inn. He made no advances whatever; appeared to have no desire to enlarge the circle of his acquaintances. All this struck me as mighty singular; yet, upon second thoughts, there was something almost sublime in it. Here was a man some twenty thousand miles from home . . . thrown among people as strange to him as though he were in the planet Jupiter; and yet he seemed entirely at his ease; preserving the utmost serenity; content with his own companionship; always equal to himself. Surely this was a touch of fine philosophy . . . . (p. 51)

This characterization of Queequeg can imply a complex judgment on the sermon. Father Mapple was long on gratitude for divine punishment but short on how redemption might translate into happiness or "delight," other than the delights of preaching against injustice. He himself was not finally delighted but isolated in his pulpit. Penance without reconciliation among the world's separated would indeed be isolating, and his performance further effectuates isolation. The worshipers would leave as they came, alone. On the other hand, Queequeg's tendencies to isolation have a different meaning, which Ishmael thinks he understands. His friend's solitary activities create a "melting," a feeling of mutuality and a restored ability to love.

> No more my splintered heart and maddened hand were turned against the wolfish world. This soothing savage had redeemed it. There he sat, his very indifference speaking a nature in which there lurked no civilized hypocrisies and bland deceits. Wild he was; a very sight of sights to see; yet I began to feel myself mysteriously drawn towards him. And those same things that would have repelled most others, they were the very magnets that thus drew me. I'll try a pagan friend, thought I, since Christian kindness has proved but hollow courtesy.

Soon they are in bed again, enjoying the aesthetic contrast of a warm blanket and cold air, smoking and chatting as if "married; meaning, in his country's phrase, that we were bosom friends; he would gladly die for me, if need should be. In a countryman, this sudden flame of friendship would have seemed far too premature . . . but in a simple savage those old rules would not apply" (p. 52).

Is this contrast—Mapple's austere stoicism and the harpooner's peace and civility—only a matter of cultural or religious judgment? In other words, is Ishmael affirming the unprepossessing friendship of cannibals like Queequeg over Christian divines like morose Mapple and the complacent Bildad and Peleg, the Pequod's Quaker owners who will soon hire them? A simple affirmative might be reasonable had Melville, in *Moby-Dick*, confined himself to whaling and the anthropological adventures of *Typee* and *Omoo*. But as he wrote, his design had to accommodate the tragedy of Ahab's obsession. Some see signs of the sermon's being inserted late in the book, part of revisions featuring Ahab's tragic fall. But however constructed, the novel's eventual shape should resist our treating Mapple's unhappy conscience and Queequeg's unselfconsciousness as an either-or, with the noble savage getting the last word. There are many last words. And the literal last words are both biblical and 'other.' The whaleship Rachel finds not her "missing children" (Jeremiah 31:15) but "another orphan."

The juxtapositions of Mapple with Queequeg, Christian belief with Polynesian ritual—and of skylarking, parody, and travesty with existential tragedy—reveal a world that is prophetic: in the sense of disclosures of truth and meaning that are also critiques of distorting structures and applications of power. Disclosure and critique in *Moby-Dick* is further characterized by tensive themes the novel hesitates to resolve. We notice: (1) How the contrast between the self-conscious anxiety of Father Mapple's standing before

God and the loyal calm of Queequeg opens up compelling uncertainties concerning life, nature, God, and creatures.[32] (2) How Ahab, in opposing God and nature, will confront such objective uncertainty by seeking invalidly to resolve it by deeming a certain whale altogether bad and resigning himself to the perversion of creation by seeking vengeance, also bad. (3) That Ishmael is our witness to—and retrospective interpreter of—Queequeg's equanimity, Ahab's hubris, and even Moby Dick's consciousness of suffering and joy.

An oft-unnoticed aspect of Ishmael's witness concerns a moment of irresolution in the story of his account of mutuality with Queequeg. Ishmael tells of being saved by Queequeg's coffin-lifebuoy after Moby Dick departs, yet without mentioning Queequeg's name or his final moments. The harpooner Tashtego's disappearance in the waves is recounted, and of course Ahab's, but not Queequeg's.[33] While the omission could be an accident of Melville's rush to complete a manuscript already being typeset, it might be suggestive of Ishmael's retrospective grief or his 'sacred uncertainty.' Their love, be it fraternal or romantic, has been shown to be 'true,' but his last, partial silence about Queequeg asks—neither negatively nor affirmingly—whether mutuality indeed gives ultimate meaning to a cosmos of stars, persons, and whales.

These subject matters, concerning mutuality and ultimate meaning, are not negated but given nuanced examination by the global rampage of the Pequod and the outcome of the story. One can say of *Moby-Dick* that by probing into the sufficiency of ethical mutuality and divine grace, it does not deny but validates their import *as questions* that put habituated ways of understanding at risk.[34] As questions these subject matters can entertain or discomfit us—with spoofs on the Bible, sexuality, and the British Crown often censored from the British edition[35]—yet are revealed as subjects that 'matter' to us, even in doubt. Thus, the comic theological travesty that Ishmael offers near the end of "A Bosom Friend" is not travesty only but something to be considered as to its specific terms, literally *and* ironically.

When read only as irony, Ishmael's argument might appear to deny the terms being ironized, as unreal, irrelevant, or worse.[36] But were the terms merely denied (worship, divine will, obligation to "my fellow man," idolatry) then no sense would remain. The more nuanced point might be that the terms' literal senses are inherently uncertain, requiring ironic expression and understanding. If they are to be taken at all, they cannot be taken only historically or only figuratively.[37] Elucidations of fellowship, divine will, or the Golden Rule cannot be confined by letters or figures. Hans-Georg Gadamer speaks of horizons of understanding that meet or fuse around open "questions" as well as discrete "subject matters," and he speaks as well of the "hermeneutical priority of the question."[38] Melville's juxtapositions of scripture, character, and circumstance—whether straightforward or with sharp humor—explores the ontic quiddity and ontological priority of religious and ethical questions he finds inescapable.[39]

4. Creaturely Mutuality and the Ontological Priority of the Question

This sense of heuristic realism in *Moby-Dick*, of possibilities hovering as queries over the boundaries of ethics and ontological mutuality, enlarges the more we learn of Ishmael's witness to Queequeg. The effects of literary travesty—where authoritative meanings are redeployed to generate indeterminate yet compelling disclosures and critiques—depends on accumulation over many chapters and styles. In "The Ramadan" (chp. 17), Ishmael declares a "charitable" hermeneutic of religion but is panicked by Queequeg's catatonic fasting and meditation in the lotus position. "Heaven have mercy on us all—Presbyterians and Pagans like—for we are all something dreadfully cracked about the head, and sadly need mending" (p. 74). "I have no objection to any person's religion . . . . But when a man's religion becomes really frantic . . . then I think it's time to take that individual aside and argue the point with him." So when finally Queequeg rises from his trance, a relieved Ishmael—formerly a schoolmaster—declaims a lecture on religious history, recounting

> the rise and progress of the primitive religions, and coming down to the various religions of the present time, during which time I labored to show Queequeg that all these Lents, Ramadans, and prolonged ham-squattings in cold, cheerless rooms were stark nonsense; bad for the health; useless for the soul; opposed, in short, to the obvious laws of Hygiene and common sense . . . . In one word, Queequeg, said I, rather digressively; hell is an idea first born on an undigested apple-dumpling; and since then perpetuated through the hereditary dyspepsias nurtured by Ramadans. (p. 77)

However, Ishmael's blithe reductionism is undercut by Queequeg, who is said to ignore such matters "unless considered from his own point of view." He "thought he knew a good deal more about the true religion than I did," and looks upon Ishmael with "condescending concern and compassion, as though he thought it a great pity that such a sensible young man should be so hopelessly lost to evangelical pagan piety" (p. 78).

The Ramadan episode might seem a skewering of all religion, "Presbyterians and Pagans alike." Until, that is, we remember the harpooner's other-directed heroism. He dives into the sea to rescue a scoundrel (chp. 13) and enters a sinking whale carcass to save a trapped friend (chp. 78)—making Queequeg something of a redeemer figure—or recall how he supervises the construction of his own coffin after contracting a fever (chp. 110). The fever itself even comes of minor heroism: Queequeg labors deep in the Pequod's hot, slimy hold to locate a whale oil leak. Calmly anticipating death, he asks to be laid in the coffin, along with Yojo and his harpoon, as if to test its fitness for voyaging to the sacred stars. After a sudden, miraculous recovery he remakes the coffin into a sea chest and on it carves hieroglyphs of his own astrological tattoos. The awed crew queries him about his restoration. He explains that "at a critical moment" he remembered a duty he had left unfinished on shore and simply

> changed his mind about dying: he could not die yet, he averred . . . . In a word, it was Queequeg's conceit, that if a man made up his mind to live, mere sickness could not kill him: nothing but a whale, or a gale, or some violent, ungovernable, unintelligent destroyer of that sort. (p. 351)

In Queequeg we find, at once, trust in Yojo, devotion to duty, preternatural will-to-power, and equanimity toward death and life. The story of the coffin does not end there; circumstances lead to his giving it to be refashioned into the ship's new life-buoy (chp. 126), a device without which we would not now be reading Ishmael's narrative.

Yet if such moments suggest the superiority of Queequeg's spirit of charity over that of the Christians in the novel, the picture still has nuanced ambiguities. In "Biographical" (chp. 12) we learn he is a crown prince. Ishmael recalls asking if he would ever return to Kokovoko, his (fictional) island realm, to assume its throne.[40] Queequeg thinks he would first have to feel "baptized again," purified or sanctified according to his own world's ways. In the meantime, he will continue seafaring with Christians. It was they who "had made a harpooner of him, and that barbed iron was in lieu of a scepter now" (p. 56). Yet, how can Queequeg expect to be purified among the corrupting whalers of Christendom? And why should his soul need purification? Perhaps because he knows his royal destiny will depend on tragedy, his father's death. Perhaps because he is a prodigal who knows he may not survive to attain his inheritance.

If Queequeg signals the novel's qualified admiration for indigenous religions, Ishmael's frequently interrupted moments of "reverie" signal ambivalent concerns with transcendental awareness, democratic idealism, and ethical mutuality—as when he contemplates the ocean's narcoleptic, empty horizon or dreamily parses the "loom" of time, freedom, and fate (e.g., chp. 35, "The Mast-Head," chp. 93, "The Castaway," and chp. 47, "The Mat-Maker").[41] These concerns come together in the light travesty of Chapter 94, "A Squeeze of the Hand." Ishmael recalls a private reverie experienced while sitting on deck one morning, his hands in a tub of milky white spermaceti harvested from the "case," or cavity in the head of a sperm whale.

As he was squeezing out the lumps, the oily softness and intense fragrance altered his awareness. "I declare to you, that for the time I lived as in a musky meadow; I forgot all about our horrible oath"—that is, the crew's declaring loyalty to Ahab's obsession—"I felt divinely free from all ill will." And as he continues to describe the squeezing and of being overtaken by a transcending sense of unity ("a strange sort of insanity"), the less private the memory becomes. We learn he was not alone there but sitting with sailors around the tub, who were unwittingly squeezing hands. Their "friendly, loving feeling" dissolved all "social acerbities." Ishmael felt "almost melted" into the sperm and now proclaims to his readers, "Come; let us squeeze hands all around; nay, let us all squeeze ourselves into each other; let us squeeze ourselves universally into the very milk and sperm of kindness." Besides its homoerotic undertones (if not overtones) the scene is a material affirmation of social solidarity that becomes a call to mysticism—a melting into common awareness—a call that deflates into absurdity.

> Would that I could keep squeezing that sperm for ever! For now, since by many prolonged, repeated experiences, I have perceived that in all cases man must eventually lower, or at least shift, his conceit of attainable felicity; not placing it anywhere in the intellect or the fancy; but in the wife, the heart, the bed, the table, the saddle, the fire-side, the country; now that I have perceived all this, I am ready to squeeze case eternally. In thoughts of the visions of the night, I saw long rows of angels in paradise, each with his hands in a jar of spermaceti. (p. 309)

And yet, is this angelic vision absurd only? Read one way, the communal kneading of spermaceti is a joke whose double entendre is so outrageous as to be lost on censors in 1851.[42] It suffered no expurgations in the British edition; not only did the sexual subtext survive, so did the parody of "visions of the night" from Job 4:13. Seen another way, Ishmael's happy travesty of a circle of whalemen squeezing sperm signals a principle often implied in the romance and tragedy of *Moby-Dick*, what Jürgen Habermas would see as a 'regulative ideal' of community and wellbeing, a normative scene of mutuality by which to judge Ahab's project.[43] The Pequod's crew is international, multiracial, and cooperative to a fault. So these ways of reading the squeeze of the hand—as democracy and communality ideally desired, while absurdly realized—remain superimposed. The chapter follows the tragic mysticism of "The Castaway," when Pip loses his mind after being abandoned overboard; yet the "Squeeze" chapter's sense of community has been compared to the eucharist, answering Ahab's diabolic travesty of baptism.[44]

So "Come; let us squeeze hands all around . . . ." Even when our narrator is disappearing from the story (on occasions Ishmael could not have directly witnessed, such as Ahab in his cabin) he is inviting us to enter the story, frequently addressing us as "you." When Bildad exclaims, "Thou art skylarking with us," he may indirectly signal the narrative's ethical relationality with the reader—not that Ishmael is always skylarking, but that Melville's narrative is addressing us. As Adam Zachary Newton understands it, narrative ethics is not principally about the norms that govern, or fail to govern, a fictional story's world—such as the biblical Golden Rule or the love command, both crucial to Ishmael's (and Melville's) ecumenicity. Still less is narrative ethics primarily about the moral lessons a story may be conveying, intentionally or not. Fundamentally, a story's narrative world—or its *narrating* activities—creates an ethical relationship with us (whether or not it takes a first-person form). Narrating, for Newton, entails implicit authoring-audience relations, character-representation, and reading-interpreting.[45] A narrative meets us much as persons do, in relations entailing risks and responsibilities: to attend, to respect, to be present—or not. That is, our relations with a story also entail the risks of turning away from its invitation to take and read.

Thus, Newton's narrative relationship—informed in part by Emmanuel Levinas and also, I suggest, Martin Buber[46]—is effectuated and disclosed through a story's language, rhetoric, hybrid genre types, and questioning; and the disclosure is itself critically probed through the story. *Moby-Dick* lends itself to interpretation in such terms. Not only through

its characters and their actions, temptations, and contemplations, but—like the Jonah story—also though its turns of rhetoric. The rhetorical capacities of travesty to goad and potentially offend, and of skylarking to irritate and potentially delight, testify to this novel's many ways of effectuating mutuality within its world and with its readers. But what of *creaturely mutuality*? It is a question that can arise given that the main character is, arguably, a particular whale and a "stricken whale" at that.[47]

This claim may seem doubtful, given how the crews of the Pequod and other ships have projected onto Moby Dick "inscrutable malice,"[48] and that Melville may have read and written by whale oil lamplight.[49] Doubtful—but not entirely doubtful, for sometimes *Moby-Dick* applies the regulative ideal of mutuality to whales' lives as well. Ishmael thinks it ironic that commercial warfare against whales is the devotion of Bildad and Peleg, Quakers averse to human slaughter; he dubs them "fighting Quakers . . . Quakers with a vengeance" (chp. 16, p. 68). Melville thought the Fall was a notion whose realism was hard to dispute, a doctrine that Milton, after Paul, believed affected nature as well as history.[50] Indeed, if the capacity for aggrieved vengeance is among Ahab's "humanities," then crediting it to the whale grants Moby Dick at least some portion of humanity. Moby and Ahab, as creatures wounded and aggrieved, do understand each other, on which basis their conflict climaxes.[51] But if vengeance is inter-creaturely, why not fellow-creaturely feeling as well? Is the ethical mutuality of the love command and Golden Rule also creaturely?

Consider how Ishmael and Queequeg once encountered the secret lives of whales. The moment occurs in a long whaling episode, "The Grand Armada" (chp. 87), a chapter that is neither skylarking nor travesty but exciting adventure and poignant recounting. The Pequod, outracing Malay pirates while hunting for Moby Dick, encounters large whale herds. Pacific whales, we are told, had "by some wonderful instinct" begun to form great "caravans" for their protection. Effectively so, for while the Pequod's whaleboats do succeed in harpooning a number of them, only one is captured. In the commotion, Queequeg and Ishmael's boat finds itself in a calm "lake" surrounded by concentric circles of cows and calves. Some swim by the boat's gunwales peacefully, almost like pets. And below the surface, the crew sees—and is seen by—other, maternal wonders in the deep.

> For, suspended in those watery vaults, floated the forms of the nursing mothers of the whales, and those that by their enormous girth seemed shortly to become mothers. The lake, as I have hinted, was to a considerable depth exceedingly transparent; and as human infants while suckling will calmly and fixedly gaze away from the breast . . . even so did the young of these whales seem looking up towards us, but not at us, as if we were but a bit of Gulf-weed in their new-born sight. Floating on their sides, the mothers also seemed quietly eyeing us. (pp. 289–90)

Queequeg spots a baby whale dragging a long umbilical cord, still attached to its mother and at risk of entanglement in harpoon lines, a common danger, Ishmael says. "Some of the subtlest secrets of the seas were revealed to us. We saw young Leviathan amours in the deep." While the more distant circles of whales were full of consternation, those in the center enjoyed "peaceful concernments." In retrospect, despite his own being a stormy, "torpedoed" soul, Ishmael is glad that this memory of maternal, creaturely mutuality can "still bathe me in eternal mildness of joy" (p. 290).

Do the complex strands, then, of *Moby-Dick*'s prophecy of the Golden Rule and love command apply also to "Leviathan amours?" The phrase sounds a bit like travesty; and as an ethical norm, creaturely mutuality perhaps seems anachronistic for the nineteenth century. Yet, metaphorically and emotionally, the book is not only a celebration of Ishmael and Queequeg's friendship and a caution about Mapple's isolation, Ahab's idolatrous hubris, and that of the instrumentalizing world represented by the whaling industry. *Moby-Dick* gives the last word if not to Moby Dick—whom Melville's brother and sometime agent, Allan, regarded as the novel's hero[52]—then to Ishmael's witness to the whale. True, Ishmael's language at times reflects Ahab's and the crew's projection of malevolent

intelligence upon this "monster," to whom Ishmael lost everyone he knew on the Pequod, including Queequeg. But those moments must be set alongside others describing the sufferings of whales and their divinely glorious manifestations. Thus Moby Dick:

> A gentle joyousness—a mighty mildness of repose in swiftness, invested the gliding . . . . glorified White Whale as he so divinely swam . . . . But as if perceiving this [Ahab's] stratagem, Moby Dick, with that malicious intelligence ascribed to him, slidingly transplanted himself, as it were, in an instant, shooting his pleated head lengthwise beneath the boat. (chp. 133, pp. 392–93)

To develop these thoughts about Moby Dick's consciousness, perceptions, and 'methods' would require other essays and adjudications.[53] But circling back to Father Mapple's, Queequeg's, and Ishmael's pieties, we may ask: does not the little idol, Yojo, stand for abiding queries associated with a "bosom friendship" and ethical mutuality undergirding religious and political life? Such queries return us to Ishmael's syllogistic trope on a universalizing love that must embrace a pagan's idolatry if it is to embrace humanity and creatures. *What is worship? To do God's will. And what is God's will? To do for others what I would have them do for me . . . . Ergo, I will turn idolater*. The travesty, here, opens compelling queries into neighborliness and suffering that will iterate throughout *Moby-Dick*. They are questions that will be probed and tested by the tragedy of Ahab's chase and the deaths of Queequeg, the Captain, all but one of the crew, and tested by the stricken whale himself.

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Abbreviation

M-D *Moby-Dick*

Notes

1 On the Golden Rule, see Ricoeur (1992, pp. 218–27), and Hart (2009, p. 254).

2 Melville ([1851] 2018, p. 53); hereafter, I cite the 1851 novel parenthetically and, in footnotes, abbreviate it as M-D. Moby Dick, unhyphenated, will refer to the whale, not the novel. For 'scare quotes,' I use single inverted commas; actual quotations have double marks, as per American usage. I do not italicize the names of fictional ships, such as the Pequod and the Rachel.

3 See definitions in Hall (1967).

4 Pardes (2008, p. 69). Yvonne Sherwood (2000), shows how the book's puzzles and questions of survival, identity, and divine judgment and compassion are not exceptional among the prophets (pp. 284–87); yet Jonah's implied author can appear "impishly, parodically at odds with the tradition" (p. 228).

5 On senses of "ultimacy" in religious and secular experience, see Gilkey (1969, pp. 247–304) and passim.

6 Buell (1986, p. 58), notices that *Yojo* and *Jehovah* are "semihomonyms." This idea is too good to ignore, although I cannot find Melville referring to "Jehovah" in M-D.

7 Melville may have never resolved his religious questions as matters of belief; but as questions, they had the force of revelation. Hawthorne wrote of Melville's doubts about immortality on the eve of his 1856 tour of the holy land, "He can neither believe, nor be comfortable in his unbelief; and he is too honest and courageous not to try to do one or the other." Quoted in Olson (1947, p. 91). On Melville's religious sensibilities, see my references to Goldman (1993); Yothers (2015); Schlarb (2021), below.

8 For writing as if 'under erasure,' see Derrida (1976, pp. 23–24).

9 See Thompson (1952); Herbert (1977); Bloom (2015, p. 131), who quotes from Mapple's sermon. If Bloom claims Melville for Gnosticism, Hamilton (1985) does so for radical ("God is dead") theology. His interpretation of Ahab's "inverted transcendentalism" and hubris is incisive: one "must become God to kill him" (pp. 56–57).

10 Yothers (2015); his is one of the most persuasive recent treatments of religion in Melville.

[11] The title of Edwin Cady's essay, "As Through a Glass Eye, Darkly," quotes Mark Twain's wry remark on James Fenimore Cooper, which can help us think about travesty and scripture in M-D. Cady (1983) writes, "Melville was a great biblical unscriptural writer. Anything may be . . . inverted, pulled inside out, torn down, and reconstructed into its mirror opposite. . . . Yet at last, no matter what Melville did with the Bible, it is certain that he could never have been Melville without it" (p. 38). But Cady also suggests this practice may boil down (like blubber) to "antic Rabelaisianism" (p. 40), which I would dispute.

[12] When in 1851 Melville excitedly wrote Hawthorne, "I have written a wicked book, and feel spotless as the lamb" (Melville [1851] 2018, p. 573), he could have had the novel's skylarking forms of reverent irreverence in mind. His uses of literary travesty may be similar to the alienation effects (*Verfremdungseffekte*) Bertolt Brecht employed to challenge theater audiences; see Benjamin (1968, pp. 147–54). For varied views of how ordinary sense meaning works in metaphor, see Ricoeur (1977); Lakoff and Johnson (1980); F. B. Brown (1983); Soskice (1985). On "performative utterances," see Austin (1962). See also my comments below on A. Z. Newton's views of narrative, representational, and hermeneutical ethics (Newton 1995).

[13] E.g., Matthew 7:12, Leviticus 19:34, and versions of the command to love God and neighbor. Yothers (2015, p. 29), discusses how Melville considered the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7) to be "a touchstone of moral wisdom," crucial but nonetheless difficult to apply amid life's practical contingencies.

[14] See Bakhtin (1981, pp. 324, 342), on "dialogized heteroglossia" and the "authoritative word" in novelistic discourse. Porter (1986) applies Bakhtin to "double-talk" in M-D.

[15] I assume Ishmael's variegated, multi-perspectival voice remains at the center of M-D, even when he famously disappears as narrator. See Bezanson (1953), excerpted in Melville ([1851] 2018, pp. 663–67). On Ishmael's ways of juxtaposing different perspectives on inherently uncertain things, I am indebted to Ashleigh Elser's chapter on Melville and George Eliot in her dissertation on biblical and literary narrative (Elser 2017).

[16] On how Melville while writing M-D may have reconceived it from romance to tragedy, see Vincent ([1949] 1980, pp. 44–49). Delbanco (2005, pp. 346–47), summarizes this well-attested theory. However, Bezanson (1986) thinks the evidence is thin, with Bryant (1998) concurring.

[17] Job 1:15. That Ishmael may be considered a traumatized witness, see Egan (1982). Outside of Mapple's sermon and chp. 83, "Jonah Historically Regarded," Job comes up more often in M-D than Jonah does. Keller (2003, p. 142), reads M-D as a "North American modern midrash on the book of Job," in respect to chaos, indeterminacy, and the limits of understanding. See also Pardes (2008, chp. 1), on Job and aesthetics; Cook (2012), on Job and theodicy in M-D; and Schlarb (2021), on Job and Melville's interest in biblical wisdom literature.

[18] Likely models for Mapple were two Methodists, Enoch Mudge of New Bedford and Edward Taylor of Boston. See Vincent ([1949] 1980, pp. 67–69); Parker (1996–2002, vol. 1, p. 184). Melville was raised by a Dutch Reformed mother and Unitarian father who died when he was twelve; at the time of M-D he attended Unitarian and Episcopal services. But Ishmael is Presbyterian, and the encounter with the divine word in preaching is crucial to Calvinist piety. See Herbert (1977, pp. 30–31, 96–97); Parker (1996–2002, vol. 1, p. 796).

[19] *Moby-Dick* fans learn that "bible leaves" is a technical term for whale blubber sliced very thin (chp. 95).

[20] McKenzie (2005, pp. 2–22), discusses Jonah as hyperbole, parody, and "satirical parable." Trible (1994, p. 108) notes how form critics—reaching no consensus on Jonah's genre—have proposed "allegory, fable, fairy tale, folktale, legend . . . saga, satire, sermon, short story, and even tragedy." Eagleton (1988), discussed by Pardes, calls the book of Jonah a "surrealist farce." He also thinks Jonah resents his being "used as a pawn in God's self-mystifying game."

[21] See Pardes (2008, pp. 48–50, 55–58); "parody" at p. 56.

[22] John Eadie, "Jonah," in Kitto (1845, vol. 2, pp. 142–44).

[23] Pardes (2008, p. 57), considers Melville to play various scholarly approaches to the Bible "against each other, exploring their poetic potential while adding his own contribution."

[24] On how Melville adapts Watts' hymn, "Thee Will I Love, O Lord My Strength," see Elser (2017).

[25] Mapple omits that Jonah had volunteered to be thrown into the sea (Jonah 1:12).

[26] While many find the sermon's implications on sin, repentance, divine sovereignty, providence, and gratitude to be Calvinist (Herbert 1977, p. 110; Cook 2012, p. 57), these are also generic, biblical themes. Missing in the sermon are Calvinist emphases on total depravity, double predestination, election, justification, and sanctification.

[27] Foster (1961, p. 20), thinking the sermon was inserted late into M-D, suggests that "Judges" allud/es to Shaw's ruling in April 1851 that Thomas Sims be returned from Massachusetts to captivity, under the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850; thus, Father Mapple "preaches extreme abolitionist doctrine without mentioning slavery." Yet Delbanco (2012, pp. 33–34), thinks Ahab's rage against a White Whale was a cautionary portrait of "the zealotry that was arising . . . on both sides of the slavery debate."

[28] Wright (1949, pp. 84–91), notes how the sermon ignores Jonah's ending and thinks it has more resemblance to the message of Jeremiah.

[29] See Yothers (2015, in chp.1 and on pp. 94–95). One of the theses in *Sacred Uncertainty* is that a dialectical concern for "solitude" and "communion" runs consistently through Melville's works. When one side of the polarity overly dominates the other, there

will likely be serious distortion, even harm. The isolation Mapple's sermonic performance reflects and perhaps effects would be indicative of this dialectic.

30 See the discussion in Trible (1994, p. 234).

31 See Pardes (2008, chp. 3), on Ishmael's religious associations, and Timothy Marr's chapter on Melville, Ishmael, and Islam (Marr 2006). The most problematic characterization in M-D is Ahab's secretive, Zoroastrian harpooner, Fedallah. On Queequeg idealized as Maori, see Sanborn (2011). Ni (2016) explores historically and constructively "pagan" encounters in world literature (though not Melville's encounters). Melville attempts to reconstruct the constructs *savage* and *pagan*.

32 On "uncertainty," see Yothers (2015). I also have in mind the definition of "truth as subjectivity" in Kierkegaard ([1846] 1941, p. 182): "An objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation process of the most passionate inwardness"—where the objective otherness of an uncertainty is as crucial as its subjective reception.

33 In chp. 135, the Pequod sinks with its three harpooners manning the tops of the masts, the last ones alive onboard.

34 Herbert (1977, pp. 80–85), argues that as Melville began writing M-D, his attitudes toward the efficacy of democracy and the justice of providence were unsettled, consciously ambivalent. Goldman (1993, p. 4), exploring "protest theism" in Melville's epic-length poem *Clarel*, argues that its pilgrimage to the holy land reflects "not a normative biblical faith" but nonetheless a biblically allusive, "nondogmatic faith that empowers human beings to protest and to lament human fate but nevertheless to give the human heart in love to God."

35 E.g., in the quote above, from chp. 10 ("I was a good Christian . . . "), the third sentence ("Do you suppose . . . Impossible!") was deleted from the British edition.

36 Holstein (1985) implies that Ishmael's application of the Golden Rule to Queequeg's worship and Melville's treatment of Jonah intend only blasphemy.

37 For Pardes (2008, p. 48), Melville was no less critical of historicist exegesis of scripture than of allegorical, yet was "equally intrigued by the exegetical potential" of both.

38 See Gadamer (1989, pp. 292–99, 362–79), where "subject matter" translates *die Sache*, the thing or content.

39 Yothers (2015, pp. 125–26), considers (regarding ambiguities in *The Confidence-Man*) how Melville's expressions of skepticism reflect not "disengagement from ultimate questions, leading to a suspended state that is not belief, not unbelief, not yet something in between, but rather a continuing and impassioned inquiry." Schlarb (2021, p. 9), writes that Melville "oscillated between skepticism and the need to believe throughout his life and writing career." That Melville embraced theological-philosophical questions as real, meaningful, yet unanswerable is a principal point in Kring (1997), a reflection on Melville's in light of late nineteenth-century Unitarianism (see pp. 124, 145–46).

40 On Queequeg's being patterned after a Maori chief, Tupai Cupa (Te Pehi Kupe), see Parker (1996–2002, vol. 2, p. 40). Sanborn (2011) argues that as M-D progresses, Queequeg acquires idealized Maori attributes (pp. 16, 101–7).

41 Though he disputed Emerson's optimism, Melville can be deemed a 'pessimistic transcendentalist,' and the two are closer than sometimes thought; see Delbanco (2005, pp. 281–82); Bloom (2015, p. 22); Evans (2018, pp. 11–13 and passim). Emerson ([1984] 2003), in "Experience" (1844), speaks of "the Fall" and of how "we do not see directly, but mediately, and that we have no means of correcting these colored and distorting lenses which we are . . . . Nature and literature are subjective phenomena; every evil and every good thing is a shadow that we cast" (pp. 182–83). Melville also thought the idea of the fall realistic; see below.

42 Delbanco (2005, p. 202), deems the passage "less freighted with sexual meaning in its nineteenth-century idiom than it might seem today." Yet M-D's next chapter, "The Cassock," is noted for its veiled phallic whale humor.

43 I offer the squeezing of spermaceti as imaging Habermas's hypothetical, future scene of unrestrained communication serving as a "regulative principle" for diagnosing ideologically distorted discourse in the present and past (see Habermas [1971] 1988, p. 314). Melville's worries about the limits of democracy did not invalidate his commitments to the ideal of democracy and to cosmopolitanism.

44 See Yothers (2015, p. 96); in M-D, chp. 113, "The Forge," Ahab christens his new harpoon with blood drawn from the harpooners Tashtego, Daggoo, and Queequeg, intoning, "Ego non baptizo te in nomine patris, sed in nominee diaboli" (p. 356). This liturgy is a vexed issue for interpreting the novel's assessment of Christianity.

45 See Newton (1995, pp. 17–18), on "narrational," "representational, and "hermeneutic" ethical moments.

46 Buber's category of "spiritual beings"—i.e., expressive forms including works of art as they address us (Buber [1923] 1970, pp. 57, 60–61)—anticipates Newton's employment of Levinas's "saying-said" distinction (Newton 1995, p. 5), where "the said" is a story's content, while its "saying" occurs in its performing and relating. On Buber's inclusion of expressive forms and natural creatures (even trees) in I-Thou mutuality, see Kepnes (1992); Berry (1985, chp. 1).

47 "Stricken whale," chp. 135, p. 409. Animal suffering, particularly whale suffering is a recurring awareness in M-D, obscured by Ishmael's choosing to serve on whaleships and his acquiescence to Ahab's vendetta (chp. 41). On the whale Moby Dick as hero, see below.

48 This phrase from M-D, chp. 36, is the title of Cook (2012).

[49] Ishmael says that while the world looks askance at "whale hunters, yet does it unwittingly pay us the profoundest homage . . . for almost all the tapers, lamps, and candles that burn around the globe, burn, as before so many shrines, to our glory!" (chp. 24, p. 92).

[50] When Eve eats the forbidden fruit in *Paradise Lost* (9.782–783), "Earth felt the wound, and nature from her seat/Sighing through all her works gave signs of woe" (Milton [1674] 2007), after Roman 5:12 and 8:22. In an 1850 essay praising "Hawthorne and His Mosses," Melville wrote that "in certain moods, no man can weigh this world, without throwing in something, somehow like Original Sin, to strike the uneven balance" (in Melville [1851] 2018, p. 549).

[51] Keller (2003, p. 149): "Ahab is a wounded creature, whose fury directs itself against another fierce and wounded creature."

[52] Allan Melville writing in 1851 to British publisher Richard Bentley of his brother's last-minute request to change the book's title from *The Whale* to *Moby-Dick*; too late, for the UK edition's pages had already been set up. The American edition, titled *Moby-Dick*, was published a month later. For details, see Parker (1996–2002, vol. 1, p. 863).

[53] Schlarb (2021, p. 38): "Like Ahab, Ishmael discerns a purposeful methodology in the whale" and in "its inscrutable movements."

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