THE UNENDING QUEST FOR THE SYMBOLIC MEANING OF MOBY DICK

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THE UNENDING QUEST FOR THE SYMBOLIC
MEANING OF MOBY DICK

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CHAPTER I

THE UNENDING QUEST FOR THE SYMBOLIC MEANING OF MOBY DICK

From the first sentence, "Call me Ishmael," to the last sentences: "On the second day, a sail drew near, nearer, and picked me up at last. It was the devious-cruising Rachel, that in her retracing search after her missing children found only another orphan," the reader of Moby Dick senses that he is reading a masterpiece, and like the knights of old in their search for the holy grail he begins the unending quest for its full meaning. Like Launcelot, who saw glimpses of the holy vessel but was never able to reach it, the reader at various times feels that he nearly has the deeper allegorical meanings within his grasp; but just at the moment when he thinks the quest is ended, the truth again eludes him.

I. THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Numerous studies have already been made of Melville's greatest novel, and many of these are bright beacons which help to illuminate the way for the literary quester; nevertheless, this writer considered it worthwhile to investigate the pattern of the archetypal symbols, a study which had not been done previously. The purpose of this investigation
was not to dispute previous studies, but rather to shed
more light on the work which many critics deem the greatest
American novel.

Concerning the inability of critics to agree on
the definitive thematic interpretation of the novel, Harry
Levin wrote: "Since he [Moby Dick] is an irreducible
symbol, an archetype of archetypes, there is no cogency
in the varying labels with which his interpreters have
attempted to tag him. To evade reduction into categories
is the essence of his character. As a sperm-whale he
concretely embodies a generative principle, which is
intimated by the sexual interplay of the ninety-fourth
and ninety-fifth chapters. But as a sport, lusus naturae,
he is a preternatural being; he is everything and nothing,
the absolute, 'the great gliding demon of the seas of
life.'"\(^1\) Again Levin wrote: "Melville's book is not a
mystery, to paraphrase C. S. Lewis on Hamlet: it is a
book about a mystery."\(^2\) While this writer disagrees that
Moby Dick is not a mystery (for who can ever feel that the
quest is ended?), she would agree that it is a book about
a mystery. It is an account of a pursuit of the "ungrasp-

\(^1\)Harry Levin, The Power of Blackness (New York:

\(^2\)Ibid., p. 224.
able phantom of life.\footnote{1}

Readers of the novel have agreed that it can be read on many levels. There is the literal level, which tells the reader what happens to Captain Ahab and his crew on the Pequod as they sail from Nantucket on a whaling expedition. A second level is the allegorical level, which tells what to believe. On this level the reader can see the pursuit of Moby Dick as a struggle between the forces of good and evil. On the moral level he can read the book to discover what to do. A fourth level on which to read the book is the anagogical, which tells the reader whither to strive. The journey of the Pequod crew is certainly a philosophical quest. Melville in his great masterpiece was attempting to answer the question of which he wrote in a letter to Nathaniel Hawthorne:

"Why, ever since Adam, who has got to the meaning of his great allegory--the world?"\footnote{2} That Melville saw the quest as unending is apparent in the first chapter of the novel, in which, in describing the ocean, he wrote:

\footnote{1}{Herman Melville, \textit{Moby Dick} (New York: The Modern Library, 1950), p. 3.}

Why did the old Persians hold the sea holy? Why did the Greeks give it a separate deity, and own brother of Jove? Surely this is not without meaning. And still deeper the meaning of that story of Narcissus, who because he could not grasp the tormenting, milt image he saw in the fountain, plunged into it and was drowned. But that same image, we ourselves see in all rivers and oceans. It is the image of the ungraspable phantom of life, and this is the key to it all.¹

Like the ocean, which mirrors different lights and shadows, Melville's novel reflects different images for different readers, and even different images for the same reader at different times. This fact certainly signifies the richness and depth of the novel. While Melville may not have been entirely aware of what he was composing, he was conscious enough to include passages which point out how the reader should pursue his quest. Like Ishmael, who had a difficult time trying to make out the subject of a smoke-darkened painting which he saw at the Spouter Inn, the reader must examine the novel in every light which is available and then determine what he sees in it.

To show parallels between the Grail Legend and Moby Dick. The purpose of this thesis will be to study the anagogical level. Examining the anagogical level in the light of Jessie L. Weston's From Ritual to Romance, this writer will discuss each of the major symbols of the

¹Melville, loc. cit.
Grail legend. Passages from these legends which illustrate each aspect of the pattern will be quoted, along with parallel passages from Melville's novel.

To determine relationships between Moby Dick and ancient fertility rituals. Various scholars who have examined the Grail legend have formulated differing theories as to the source of the legend. Among these theories are the Celtic theory, which sees the Grail as the talisman of Tuatha De Danann of Celtic mythology; the Judaeo-Christian theory, which sees the Grail as an allegorical presentation of the conversion of the sacred relics of the Old Testament into the symbols of Christianity; and the Ritual or Vegetation theory. This study is based on the hypothesis which relates the Grail legend to the rituals of primitive man. In writing of the Grail stories, Jessie Weston comments: "The Grail romances repose eventually, not upon a poet's imagination, but upon the ruins of an august and ancient ritual, a ritual which once claimed to be the accredited guardian of the deepest secrets of Life."\(^1\)

In addition to showing the parallels which exist between Moby Dick and the archetypal symbols of the Grail legends, the writer of this thesis will attempt to demonstrate that the archetypal symbols of Moby Dick likewise stem from the

ancient vegetation rituals which had as their ultimate object the initiation into the great mystery of life. To illustrate the richness of each of Melville's archetypal symbols, the writer will quote from accounts of ancient rituals as recorded by such scholars as Sir James Frazer.

II. THE ORGANIZATION

The total study will be organized in six chapters. Chapter II will analyze the Waste Land and the Fisher King. The Quester and the Initiation archetypes will be examined in Chapter III, and the fourth chapter will show the parallels with the Perilous Chapel and the Bleeding Lance and Cup. The significance of the archetypal pattern will be discussed in Chapter V, and a summary of the entire thesis will be given in Chapter VI.

In Chapters II through V numerous quotations will be given from the Grail stories, Moby Dick, and anthropological research to illustrate the specific parallels. When secondary sources will give further substantiation or clarification, they will also be used.

III. THE VALUE OF THE STUDY

While the primary aim of this thesis is to illustrate that the pattern of the Holy Grail is found in Moby Dick, a secondary aim is to present evidence for
C. G. Jung's hypothesis concerning the psychological significance of literature. He explained the special emotional response to the "primordial images" or archetypes present in a literary work. This writer feels that much of the greatness of Melville's novel comes from his success in translating the "primordial image" of rebirth or atonement (at-one-ment) with God into modern language—or as Newton Arvin described it, "... both immediate and primordial, both local and archetypal, both journalistic and mythopoetic."¹ This study will have achieved its purpose if some readers of Melville's masterpiece can use it as a guide as they pursue their quest for the deeper meanings of the novel.

CHAPTER II

THE WASTE LAND AND THE FISHER KING

A central idea in the Grail stories is the motif of the Waste Land, and directly related to this is the archetype of the sick king (Fisher King, Grail King). A careful examination of Moby Dick reveals that these archetypal symbols are also present in Melville's novel.

I. THE TWOFOLD AIM OF THE GRAIL QUEST

In her investigation of the Grail stories to discover the task of the Quester, Jessie L. Weston examined the Bleheris and Did Crône versions of Gawain, the Perceval of Chrétien de Troyes, Perlesvaus, Sone de Nansai, and Malory's Morte d'Arthur. Her conclusion was that

... the aim of the Grail Quest is twofold; it is to benefit (a) the King, (b) the land. The first of these two is the more important, as it is the infirmity of the King which entails misfortune on his land, the condition of the one reacts, for good or ill, upon the other. . . .

The Bleheris version of Gawain describes how the hero, who does not understand the nature of his quest, takes the place of a knight who had been slain. He does not inquire concerning the Grail; consequently the land

\[1\text{Weston, op. cit., p. 21.}\]
continues to be waste. Finally, Gawain does ask concerning the Lance and there is a partial restoration of the fertility of the land, and the waters once again flow and the vegetation is green. The Du Crône version differs in that the Grail King is in a deathlike trance. In this version, however, Gawain knows what is expected of him and asks the question which delivers the Waste Land.  

In the Perceval of Chrétien de Troyes, the sickness of the Fisher King is paramount. There is, however, some description of the Waste Land. The home of Perceval is in the Waste Forest, and when Perceval is to leave his home and go to Arthur's court, his mother tells him about the wasting of the land:

Ha! Alas! How badly am I treated! Fair sweet son, I thought to guard you so well from knighthood that you might never hear it spoken of, nor ever see anything of it. You should have been a knight, fair son, if it pleased God that he had protected your father and your other friends for you. There was no knight of such great worth, so dreaded nor so feared, fair son, as your father was, in all the Isles of the Sea. You can indeed boast that you fall away in nothing from his lineage nor mine, for I am born of knights, of the best of this country... Your father, and you do not know it, was wounded in the legs so that he remained a cripple. His great land, his great treasures, which he had as a worthy man, went entirely to ruin, and he fell into great poverty. The gentle men were wrongly impoverished, disinherited, and exiled... lands were devastated and the poor people outraged, so that he fled from those who was able to flee. Your father had

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1 Ibid., pp. 12-13.
this manor here in this Waste Forest; he was not able to flee, but in great haste had himself brought in a litter, for elsewhere he did not know where he might hide.¹

Later in the story there is other description of the Waste Land. After Perceval leaves Gornemant de Goort, he goes to Velrepeire, where he sees nothing except "sea and water and waste land."² The wasted condition of the place becomes more obvious when Perceval enters the castle.

And if he had indeed found the land outside waste and bare, inside nothing made it better for him, for everywhere he went he found the streets desolate and the old houses fallen in, for there was in them neither man nor woman. There were two minsters in the town where were two abbeys, the one of trembling nuns, the other of dejected monks. He did not find the minsters well adorned nor well tapestried; rather he saw the walls cracked and split and the towers uncovered, and the houses were open night and day. No mill grinds there, nor oven bakes in any place in the whole castle; nor was there bread nor cake nor anything which might be sold by which one might gain a denier.

Thus he found the castle. For there was in it neither bread nor pastry, nor wine nor cider nor beer. Toward a palace covered with slate the four sergeants have led him and dismounted and disarmed him. At once a youth comes down the steps of the hall bringing a gray mantle. He put it around the knight's neck, and another stabled his horse where there was no wheat nor hay nor fodder except a little, for there was none in the house. The others have him go up the steps in front of them. In the hall, which was very beautiful, two worthy men and a maiden came


²Ibid., p. 41.
to meet him. The worthy men were white-haired, not so much that they were completely white. They would have been of fine age with all their strength and all their force if they did not have trouble and worry...  

Still later Perceval goes to the castle of the Fisher King, who has been maimed and cannot walk. While he is with the Fisher King he sees a "white lance... and there issued from the iron of the lance a drop of blood..." but Perceval, who remembers the training of Gornemant de Goort, "fears if he should ask, that it might be thought villainous of him, therefore he did not ask." Later he sees a well-attired damsel holding a grail between her two hands. When she enters "so great a brightness came there that the candles lost their light... "The youth saw them pass and did not dare ask of the grail whom one served with it..." "Whether good or evil befall him for it, he does not inquire or ask." After Perceval leaves the castle of the Fisher King, he meets a damsel whose knight has just been killed. In talking with her, he tells of his visit to the castle; she questions him about whether he has asked about the Lance and Grail. Following his reply that he has not asked any questions, the damsel reveals that Perceval's failure to ask the

\[\text{1Ibid., p. 42. 2Ibid., p. 69. 3Ibid.} \]
\[\text{4Ibid., p. 70. 5Ibid.}\]
questions means that the Fisher King's malady cannot be cured which in turn means that the land will continue to be waste.

Perceval the caitiff! Hal! Wretched Perceval, how unfortunate were you then when you did not ask all this, for you would have bettered so much the good king who is maimed, for he would have wholly regained his limbs and would hold his land, and so great good would have come of it. But now know that great trouble will you and others have of it. For the sin toward your mother, know this, for she died for grief of you, has it happened to you. I was nourished together with you at your mother's for a very long term. I am your cousin-german and you are my cousin-german, nor does it trouble me less that it has thus mischanced you that you have not known of the grail what one does with it and to whom one carries it, than it does for your mother who is dead or for this knight whom I loved and held very dear for the reason that he called me his dear friend and loved me as a noble, loyal knight.  

While in several versions of the Grail story the task of the Quester is primarily to restore the strength of the Grail King (Fisher King), the restoration of the land would apparently come as a result of the renewed vitality of the King.

II. PARALLELS BETWEEN THE GRAIL ARCHETYPES AND MOBY DICK

Ahab the Grail King. The Grail castle is inhabited by the Grail King, a man who suffers from an infirmity which in turn has entailed misfortune for others. Commonly in the Grail stories the Grail King is referred to as the

Ibid., pp. 76-77.
Fisher King. In commenting about this figure in the legends Jessie L. Weston wrote:

... the character of the Fisher King is of the very essence of the tale, and his title, so far from being meaningless, expresses, for those who are at pains to seek, the intention and object of the perplexing whole. The Fisher King is, as I suggested above, the very heart and centre of the whole mystery, and I contend that with an adequate interpretation of this enigmatic character the soundness of the theory providing such an interpretation may be held to be definitely proved.¹

While Miss Weston and R. S. Loomis differ in their explanation of the origin of the Grail legends (Weston is the leading exponent of the Ritual theory, whereas Loomis argues for the Celtic theory), they agree concerning the importance of the stories of the Fisher King and the Waste Land and also concerning the relationship between the malady of the Grail King and the wasting of the land.²

In From Ritual to Romance Miss Weston has given an explanation of how the Grail King came to be known as the Fisher King. In Borron's Joseph of Arimathea there is an account of Joseph's wanderings, during which time some of his companions committed a sin. By God's command, Brons, who was Joseph's brother-in-law, caught a fish, which,

¹Weston, op. cit., p. 136.
along with the Grail, provided a mystic meal which only the righteous were permitted to eat. Afterward Bruns was called "The Rich Fisher." In the Perceval story he was called "The Fisher King."1

The various accounts of the search for the Grail differ as to the description and identity of the Fisher King. Concerning this, Miss Weston wrote:

... he is sometimes described as in the middle life, and in full possession of his bodily powers. Sometimes while still comparatively young he is incapacitated by the effects of a wound and is known also by the title of Roi Mehaigne, or Maimed King. Sometimes he is in extreme old age, and in certain closely connected versions of the legend the two ideas are combined, and we have a wounded Fisher King, and an aged father, or grandfather. But I would draw attention to the significant fact that in no case is the Fisher King a youthful character; that distinction is reserved for his Healer, and successor.2

In Perceval by Chrétien de Troyes the Fisher King is a maimed king of middle age. He is described as "a handsome worthy man who was partly gray-haired."3 When Perceval sees him in his castle the Fisher King is "leaning on his side."4 The King greets Perceval with "Friend, may it not grieve you if I do not rise to meet you; for I am not able to do so."5 Later in the evening, after the

1Weston, op. cit., pp. 116-17. 2Ibid., p. 119.
3Chrétien de Troyes, op. cit., p. 67.
4Ibid. 5Ibid.
incident when Perceval sees the Bleeding Lance and Cup, the King excuses himself and again refers to his infirmity. He says: "I have no power of myself, so it will be necessary for me to be carried away." After Perceval leaves the castle, he meets a damsel who tells him about how the Fisher King became maimed.

The maiden said: "Fair sir, a king he is, well do I dare say it to you; but he was wounded and maimed without fail in a battle so that he has not been able since to help himself. He is still so in anguish because of it that he cannot mount a horse; but when he wishes to disport himself or undertake any amusement he has himself put in a boat and goes fishing with a hook; for this is he called the Fisher King."  

In Malory's Morte d'Arthur, the Grail King is named Pelles. Despite numerous differences between Malory's account of the Quest and other versions, the situations concerning the Grail King are very similar. He is described as lying upon a couch when Gawain and Launcelot arrive at the Castle of Carbonek. An old wound given him by Balyn many years previously still troubles him. When Gawain takes away the Curse of Desolation, King Pelles is still "unhealed of his grievous wound and still the Castle of Carbonek and all those who dwelt in the Waste

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1 Ibid., p. 71. 2 Ibid., p. 75. 3 Roger Lancelyn Green, King Arthur and His Knights of the Round Table (London: Penguin, 1953), p. 239.
Lands must remain a people cut off and apart from the rest of the land of Britain. Finally, the Holy Knight of God, Sir Galahad, arrives.

Then Sir Galahad turned to King Pelles, and went towards him carrying the Bleeding Spear in his hand. And King Pelles raised himself on his elbow and said:

"Sir Galahad, good Knight of Logres and my grandson, you are right welcome and long have I desired your coming. For such pain and such anguish have I endured these many years as surely no man ever suffered. But now I trust to God that the end of my pain is at hand, and so I shall pass out of this world and be at peace."

Then Galahad held the Spear so that the drops of blood fell into the wounds of the Maimed King; and at once Pelles was cured of his sufferings, and his flesh was as whole and unscarred as if Balyn had never struck the Dolorous Strike.

When all these things were accomplished, Percivale and Blanchefleur became king and queen of Carbonel and all the wide lands which surround the castle and which were never more waste or desolate.

From the Grail stories certain characteristics of the Grail King are apparent. He is a man of middle age or older. There is the implication of innate strength, but he is no longer of great physical prowess, for he suffers from some wound.

Just as the Fisher King archetype is a central idea of the Grail stories, so is it also present in Moby Dick. Captain Ahab is a fisherman and a good one. In the chapter

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1 Ibid., p. 242. 2 Ibid., pp. 246-47.
"The Prophet" Ishmael tells Elijah what he has heard about Ahab's skill and says: "... I've heard that he's a good whale-hunter, and a good captain to his crew."¹

The choice of the name Ahab is symbolic, for Ahab was one of the kings of Israel. He had defied God by worshipping idols, and he took the law into his own hands by appropriating his neighbor's vineyard. Elijah warned Ahab that unless he repented Jehovah would not send rain to the land. Ahab did not repent and, according to 1 Kings 17:7,² "... it came to pass after awhile, that the brook dried up because there was no rain in the land." There is further evidence of the wasting of the land when verses 11 through 14 give an account of Elijah's visit to the widow's home in Zarephath:

And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thy hand. And she said, As Jehovah thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but a handful of meal in the jar, and a little oil in the cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die. And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou hast said; but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it forth unto me, and afterward make for thee, and for thy son. For thus saith Jehovah, the God of Israel, The jar of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that Jehovah sendeth rain upon the earth.

¹Melville, op. cit., p. 92.
²All Biblical references are from the Standard American edition of the Revised Version of the Bible.
While the symbolism of Ahab's name could certainly be carried too far, most readers and critics of *Moby Dick* would agree that Melville wanted his readers to make certain analogies between Captain Ahab and King Ahab, for on several occasions he referred to the captain as king. That King Ahab was a "sick" king and Israel suffered because of him can be determined quite definitely. There is also a suggested parallel that the sickness of the Fisher King (Grail King), King Ahab, and Captain Ahab is an impairing of their sexual powers. In writing of the Fisher King, Jessie L. Weston quoted a passage from *Sone de Nansai*, a thirteenth century French romance which contains incidents which are similar to the Arthurian legends but which are not directly related to Arthur. The hero is Sone, who goes to Norway to visit a Grail castle which is a monastery located on an island. There Sone meets Joseph of Arimathea, who is known as the Fisher King. God had punished Joseph because of his foolish marriage to a pagan princess. Not only is Joseph crippled but a blight has also befallen the land, which is called Lorgres (Logres), a name given it because of its sorrows. The passage describing Joseph's

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1 Melville, *op. cit.*; e.g., p. 126 and p. 146.

wound stated: "'His loins are stricken by this bane/ From which he suffers lasting pain.' Later Miss Weston quoted another passage to show the connection between the impaired sexual powers of the king and the fertility of the land:

Lorgres his land was from this day
Called by all, and truth to say,
Well should Lorgres be named with tears,
With bitter weeping, grief and fears.
For here no fertile seed is sown,
Neither peas nor grain are grown,
Never a child of man is born,
Mateless maidens sadly mourn;
On the trees no leaf is seen
Nor are the meadows growing green,
Birds build no nests, no song is sung,
And hapless beasts shall bear no young,
So is it while the sinful king
Shall evil on his people bring.
For Jesus Christ does punish well
The land wherein the wicked dwell.  

The impaired sexual powers of Captain Ahab are certainly suggested by the injury which Ahab received before the Pequod sailed from Nantucket.

For it had not been very long prior to the Pequod's sailing from Nantucket, that he had been found one night lying prone upon the ground, and insensible; by some unknown, and seemingly inexplicable, unimaginable casualty, his ivory limb having been so violently displaced, that it had stake-wise smitten, and all but pierced his groin; nor was it without extreme difficulty that the agonizing wound was entirely cured.

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1 Sone de Nansai (ed. Goldschmidt, Stuttgart, 1899), ll. 4775-76, quoted by Weston, op. cit., p. 22.
2 Ibid., ll. 4841-56, pp. 22-23.
3 Melville, op. cit., p. 460.
The destroying of Ahab's fertility has been noted by many writers. James Baird writes:

In this black mass on his quarter-deck, Ahab, dismasted and pierced by the god who may never be known till the firmament splits asunder, stands as symbolic Western man shorn of his native power and fertility of primitive being.  

Concerning Ahab's impaired sexual powers, Harry Levin writes:

Ahab, dismasted, bears a darker and deeper trauma of a more intimate nature; his whalebone leg, in a mysterious accident, seems to have pierced his groin and wounded his manhood. . .

The wounding of the Fisher King is an important detail of the Grail stories. Similarly, the wounding of Ahab provided Melville with the exciting force for the development of his plot. On several occasions he described by means of narration by a character the incident when Ahab's leg was "crunched by the monstrosest parmacety that ever chipped a boat!" In addition to the first injury which necessitated his wearing of the ivory leg, Ahab had the further misfortune of a second injury which maimed him far more severely, at least psychologically. Before introducing Ahab to his readers, Melville gave them several

3 Melville, op. cit., p. 71.
clues as to the extent of this psychological injury.

I don't know exactly what's the matter with him; but he keeps close inside the house: a sort of sick, and yet he don't look so. In fact, he ain't sick; but no, he isn't well either. Anyhow, young man, he won't always see me, so I don't suppose he will thee. He's a queer man, Captain Ahab—so some think—but a good one. Oh, thou'lt like him well enough; no fear, no fear. He's a grand, ungodly, god-like man, Captain Ahab; doesn't speak much; but, when he does speak, then you may well listen. Mark ye, be forewarned; Ahab's above the common; Ahab's been in colleges, as well as 'mong the cannibals; been used to deeper wonders than the waves; fixed his fiery lance in mightier, stranger foes than whales. His lance! aye, the keenest and surest that out of all our isle! Oh! he ain't Captain Bildad; no, and he ain't Captain Peleg; he's Ahab, boy; and Ahab of old, thou knowest, was a crowned king!1

Various descriptions of the physical appearance of Ahab are analogous with those of the Fisher King in the Grail romances. The account of his first appearance on the deck of the Pequod gives many of the parallels.

There seemed no sign of common bodily illness about him, nor of the recovery from any. He looked like a man cut away from the stake, when the fire has over-runningly wasted all the limbs without consuming them, or taking away one particle from their compacted aged robustness. His whole high, broad form, seemed made of solid bronze, and shaped in an unalterable mould, like Cellini's cast Perseus. Threading its way out from among grey hairs, and continuing right down one side of his tawny scorched face and neck, till it disappeared in his clothing, you saw a slender rod-like mark, lividly whitish. It resembled that perpendicular seam sometimes made in the straight, lofty trunk of a great tree, when the upper lightning tearingly darts down it, and without wrenching a single twig, peels and grooves out the bark from top to bottom ere running

1 Ibid., pp. 79-80.
off into the soil, leaving the tree still greenly alive, but branded. Whether that mark was born with him, or whether it was the scar left by some desperate wound, no one could certainly say. By some tacit consent, throughout the voyage little or no allusion was made to it, especially by the mates. But once Tashtego's senior, an old Gay-Head Indian among the crew, superstitiously asserted that not till he was full forty years old did Ahab become that way branded, and then it came upon him, not in the fury of any mortal fray, but in an elemental strife at sea. Yet this wild hint seemed inferentially negatived, by what a grey Manxman insinuated, an old sepulchral man, who, having never before sailed out of Nantucket, had never ere this laid eye upon wild Ahab. Nevertheless, the old sea-traditions, the immemorial credulities, popularly invested this old Manxman with great preternatural powers of discernment. So he said that if ever Captain Ahab should be tranquilly laid out—which might hardly come to pass, so he muttered—then, whoever should do that last office for the dead, would find a birthmark on his body from crown to sole.

While the archetype of the Waste Land appears primarily in the opening chapters of the novel, the archetype of the Wounded or Sick King appears constantly throughout the novel, for we are aware of Ahab's injury before he appears on deck, and we are also made very much aware of the misfortune for the crew of the Pequod because of his injury.

His bone leg steadied in that hole, one arm elevated, holding by a shroud; Captain Ahab stood erect, looking straight out beyond the ship's ever-pitching prow. There was an infirmity of firmest fortitude, a determinate, unsurrenderable willfulness, in the fixed and fearless, forward dedication of that glance. Not a word he spoke; nor did his officers say aught to him though by all their gestures and expressions, they

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1Ibid., pp. 120-21.
plainly showed the uneasy, if not painful consciousness of being under a troubled master-eye. And not only that, but moody stricken Ahab stood before them with a crucifixion in his face; in all the nameless regal overbearing dignity of some mighty woe.¹

The frequent references to Ahab's injury and its effect upon him help to build the archetypal symbol of the Sick King (Grail King). While most of the allusions to the Waste Land are in early chapters, the subordinate images which reveal the symbol are consistent throughout the novel. In describing Melville's symbolistic method, R. W. Short compared him with William Blake, who has been described as thinking visually. In other words Melville's method was to present numerous subordinate images which, when considered together, reveal the symbol.

With studied detail he presented a host of subordinate images--hooks, yards, trying vats, and stripping rigs--images of unfamiliar objects he had to make the reader visualize clearly if some of them were later to become small moons of light. These images, then, formed a frame in which he gradually made out his picture. As the picture grew, the images themselves began to reveal their essential (symbolic) meanings . . . ²

The Waste Land. By this method one becomes aware of the Waste Land symbol. Such direct passages as "Are the

¹Tbid., p. 122.

green fields gone?"1 certainly suggest barrenness. The reference to "a damp, drizzly November in my soul"2 likewise suggests coldness and sterility. Elsewhere in the novel, Melville conveyed a sense of coldness, sterility, and death through such passages as the following:

It was a very dubious-looking, nay, a very dark and dismal night, bitingly cold and cheerless.3

It stood on a sharp, bleak corner, where that tempestuous wind Euroclydon kept up a worse howling than ever it did about poor Paul's tossed craft. . . . "It maketh a marvelous difference, whether thou lookest out at it from a glass window where frost is all on the outside, or whether thou observest it from that sashless window, where the frost is on both sides, and of which the wight Death is the only glazier."4

Shaking off the sleet from my ice-glazed hat and jacket, I seated myself near the door, and turning sideways was surprised to see Queequag near me. Affected by the solemnity of the scene, there was a wondering gaze of incredulous curiosity in his countenance. This savage was the only person present who seemed to notice my entrance; because he was the only one who could not read, and therefore, was not reading those frigid inscriptions on the wall.5

I had not been seated very long ere a man of a certain venerable robustness entered; immediately as the storm-pelted door flew back upon admitting him. . . . 6

While he was speaking these words, the howling of the shrieking, slanting storm without seemed to add new power to the preacher, who, when describing Jonah's sea-storm, seemed tossed by a storm himself.7

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1 Melville, op. cit., p. 2.  
2 Ibid., p. 1.  
3 Ibid., p. 7.  
4 Ibid., p. 9.  
5 Ibid., p. 35.  
6 Ibid., p. 37.  
7 Ibid., p. 46.
Spite of this frigid winter night in the boisterous Atlantic, spite of my wet feet and wetter jacket, there was yet, it then seemed to me, many a pleasant haven in store; and meads and glades so eternally vernal, that the grass shot up by the spring, untrod-den, unwilted, remains at midsummer.

What a fine frosty night; how Orion glitters; what northern lights! . . . But what thinks Lazarus? Can he warm his blue hands by holding them up to the grand northern lights?

Further on, from the bright red windows of the "Sword Fish Inn," there came such fervent rays, that it seemed to have melted the packed snow and ice from before the house, for everywhere else the congealed frost lay, ten inches thick in a hard, asphalitic pavement.

If, instead of such images, Melville had substituted warm for cold, green for white, soft for sharp or hard, grass for snow, or Zephyr for Euroclydon, what a different emotional response the reader would have and what a different archetypal symbol would be evoked. Few readers would argue that they do not respond emotionally to Melville's imagery or in turn to his symbols, which are formed by an aggregate of symbolic materials.

To develop further the archetypal symbol of the Waste Land, Melville used the image of an old city, especially one which had been laid in ruins. When Ishmael left for his whaling voyage, Melville wrote: "Quitting the good old city of Manhatto, I duly arrived in New Bedford." Also

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1 Ibid., p. 103. 2 Ibid., p. 10. 3 Ibid., p. 8. 4 Ibid., p. 7.
the three ruined cities of old--Gomorrah, Tyre, and Carthage--are all referred to in the opening pages of the novel. Melville wrote: "Hal thought I, ha, as the flying particles almost choked me, are these ashes from that destroyed city, Gomorrah?" Later in the novel when Ishmael goes to the chapel, he hears Father Mapple preach about Jonah. As Father Mapple tells about Jonah's visit to the captain of the Tarshish ship, he describes what the sailors say about Jonah, and again there are references to ruined cities of the ancient world.

"Jack, he's robbed a widow;" or "Joe, do you mark him; he's a bigamist;" or "Harry lad, I guess he's the adulterer that broke jail in old Gomorrah, or belike, one of the missing murderers from Sodom."2

"Besides though New Bedford has of late been gradually monopolizing the business of whaling, and though in this matter poor old Nantucket is now much behind her, yet Nantucket was her great original--the Tyre of this Carthage;--the place where the first dead American whale was stranded."

Melville has not been the only writer to use the image of the city, especially an old city, to suggest the wasting of the land. Such lines as 60-65 from T. S. Eliot's The Waste Land refer to an old city, to its darkness, dampness, and death.

Unreal City,
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,

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1Tbid., p. 8. 2Tbid., p. 42. 3Tbid., p. 7.
A crowd flowed over London bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many.
Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.

Melville, though a "Smyrna merchant" himself for all those long years in the Customs House, saw urban society as a desert waste land from which both he and Ishmael had to escape to sea.

The idea that death is associated with the desolation and decay of the Waste Land is present in the Grail stories. Likewise in *Moby Dick* it is an image associated with the archetypal symbol of the Waste Land. The opening paragraph of the novel describes Ishmael's mood before setting out on his journey to "see the watery part of the world." Melville wrote: 

"... whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet..."2 In describing the waste land of New Bedford, Melville wrote: "Such dreary streets! blocks of blackness, not houses, on either hand, and here and there a candle, like a candle moving about in a tomb."3 Critics have already made much of the name of the proprietor of "The Spouter Inn."

Coffin?—Spouter? Rather ominous in that particular

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connexion, thought I. But it is a common name in Nantucket, they say, and I suppose this Peter here is an emigrant from there. As the light looked so dim, and the place, for the time, looked quiet enough, and the dilapidated little wooden house itself looked as if it might have been carted here from the ruins of some burnt district, and as the swinging sign had a poverty-stricken sort of creak to it, I thought that here was the very spot for cheap lodgings, and the best of pea coffee.1

In the same paragraph one may observe other words than coffin which suggest the symbol of the desolation and death of the Waste Land: ominous, dim, dilapidated, ruins, burnt, poverty-stricken, and cheap. Throughout the novel in fact, the Waste Land, and especially the symbol of death, is repeatedly evoked through such symbolic words as gallows, shroud, tombstone, tomb, ashes, blood, crucifixion, whiteness, and blackness.

One of the most interesting examples of Melville's habit of fusing life and death symbols is to be seen in Chapter CII, "A Bower in the Arsacides." Ishmael tells about an experience which he had had when he was a guest of his "late royal friend Tranquo, king of Tranque."2 One of the wonders Ishmael saw while there was the body of a huge sperm whale which had been washed ashore. It is sheltered in a "grand temple of lordly palms." Melville further described it:

Now, amid the green, life-restless loom of that

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1 Ibid., p. 9. 2 Ibid., p. 445.
Arsacidean wood, the great, white, worshipped skeleton lay lounging—a gigantic idler! Yet, as the ever-woven verdant warp and woof intermixed and hummed around him, the mighty idler seemed the sunning weaver; himself all woven over with the vines; every month assuming greener, fresher verdure; but himself a skeleton. Life folded Death; Death trellised Life; the grim god wived with youthful life; and begat him curly-headed glories.\(^1\)

The color symbols of whiteness and blackness, as well as such a symbol as the ocean, are further examples of Melville's use of symbols with a multiplicity of meaning. In fact, they are what Susanne Langer calls "charged" symbols. In giving an example of what she meant by such symbols, Miss Langer wrote:

A ship is another example—the image of precarious security in all-surrounding danger, of progress toward a goal, of adventure between two points of rest, with the near, if dormant, connotation of safe imprisonment in the hold, as in the womb. Not improbably the similar form of a primitive boat and of the moon in its last quarter has served in past ages to reinforce such mythological values.\(^2\)

While the Pequod can mean all of these things, Melville's description certainly also gives the suggestion of the Waste Land:

You may have seen many a quaint craft in your day, for aught I know; square-toed luggers; mountainous Japanese junks; butter-box galliots, and what not; but take my word for it, you never saw such a rare craft as this same rare old Pequod. She was a ship

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\(^1\)Ibid., p. 447.

of the old school, rather small if anything; with an old-fashioned claw-footed look about her. Long seasoned and weather-stained in the typhoons and calms of all four oceans, her old hull's complexion was darkened like a French grenadier's, who has alike fought in Egypt and Siberia. Her venerable bows looked bearded. Her masts—cut somewhere on the coast of Japan, where her original ones were lost overboard in a gale—her masts stood stiffly up like the spines of the three old kings of Cologne. Her ancient decks were worn and wrinkled, like the pilgrim-worshipped flag-stone in Canterbury Cathedral where Beckett bled. But to all these her old antiquities, were added new and marvelous features, pertaining to the wild business that for more than half a century she had followed. Old Captain Peleg, many years her chief-mate, before he commanded another vessel of his own, and now a retired seaman, and one of the principal owners of the Pequod,—this old Peleg, during the term of his chief-mateship, had built upon her original grotesqueness, and inlaid it, all over, with a quaintness both of material and device, unmatched by anything except it be Thorkill-Hake's carved buckler or bedstead. She was apparelled like any barbaric Ethiopian emperor, his neck heavy with pendants of polished ivory. She was a thing of trophies. A cannibal of a craft, tricking herself forth in the chased bones of her enemies. All round, her unpanelled, open bulwarks were garnished like one continuous jaw, with the long sharp teeth of the sperm whale, inserted there for pins, to fasten her old hempen thaws and tendons to. Those thaws ran not through base blocks of land wood, but deftly travelled over sheaves of sea-ivory. Scorning a turnstile wheel at her reverend helm, she sported there a tiller; and that tiller was in one mass, curiously carved from the long narrow lower jaw of her hereditary foe. The helmsman who steered by that tiller in a tempest, felt like the Tartar, when he holds back his fiery steed by clutching its jaw. A noble craft, but somehow a most melancholy! All noble things are touched with that.

The color symbols of white and black, which Melville used so frequently, have been dealt with extensively by various critics. To discuss these symbols in connection

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1 Melville, op. cit., pp. 68-69.
with the Waste Land archetype does not invalidate their meaning in other contexts, but rather is further proof of Melville's artistry. His mind was like that described by Susanne Langer:

A mind to which the stern character of an armchair is more apparent than its use or its position in the room, is over-sensitive to expressed forms. It grasps analogies that a riper experience would reject as absurd. It fuses senses that practical thinking must keep apart. Yet it is just this crazy play of associations, this uncritical fusion of impressions, that exercises the powers of symbolic transformation.¹

That Melville was aware of the multiplicity of meaning of his archetypal symbols is apparent from several statements in his Chapter XLII on "The Whiteness of the Whale."

Though in many natural objects, whiteness refiningly enhances beauty, as if imparting some special virtue of its own, as in marbles, japonicas, and pearls; and though various nations have in some way recognized a certain royal pre-eminence in this hue; even the barbaric, grand old kings of Pegu placing the title "Lord of the White Elephants" above all their other magniloquent ascriptions of dominion; and the modern kings of Siam unfurling the same snow-white quadruped in the royal standard; and the Hanoverian flag bearing the one figure of a snow-white charger; and the great Austrian Empire, Caesarian heir to overlording Rome, having for the imperial color the same imperial hue; and though this pre-eminence in it applies to the human race itself, giving the white man ideal mastership over every dusky tribe; and though, besides, all this, whiteness has been even made significant of gladness, for among the Romans a white stone marked a joyful day; and though in other mortal sympathies and symbolizings, this same hue is made the emblem of many touching, noble things—the innocence of brides, the benignity of age; though among the Red Men of America the

¹Langer, op. cit., p. 100.
giving of the white belt of wampum was the deepest pledge of honor; though in many climes, whiteness typifies the majesty of Justice in the ermine of the Judge, and contributes to the daily state of kings and queens drawn by milk-white steeds; though even in the higher mysteries of the most august religions it has been made the symbol of the divine spotlessness and power; by the Persian fireworshippers, the white forked flame being held the holiest on the altar; and in the Greek mythologies, Great Jove himself being made incarnate in a snow-white bull; and though to the noble Iroquois, the midwinter sacrifice of the sacred White Dog was by far the holiest festival of their theology, that spotless, faithful creature being held the purest envoy they could send to the Great Spirit with the annual tidings of their own fidelity; and though directly from the Latin word for white, all Christian priests derive the name of one part of their sacred vesture, the alb or tunic, worn beneath the cassock; and though among the holy pomps of the Romish faith, white is specially employed in the celebration of the Passion of our Lord; though in the Vision of St. John, white robes are given to the redeemed, and the four and twenty elders stand clothed in white before the great white throne, and the Holy One that sitteth there white like wool; yet for all these accumulated associations, with whatever is sweet, and honorable, and sublime, there yet lurks an elusive something in the innermost idea of this hue, which strikes more of panic to the soul than that redness which affrights in blood.1

Certainly one of the "elusive somethings" that exist concerning whiteness is that of sterility and barrenness.

In his description of the white albatross, Melville further developed this idea. When Melville described the albatross, he suggested the solitariness as well as the mystery which is associated with the bird. That Melville was aware of the power of the ambivalence of his symbols is obvious from a footnote he wrote concerning the white

bear of the poles:

With reference to the Polar bear, it may possibly be urged by him who would fain go still deeper into the matter, that it is not the whiteness, separately regarded, which heightens the intolerable hideousness of that brute; for, analysed, that heightened hideousness, it might be said, only rises from the circumstance, that the irresponsible ferociously of the creature stands invested in the fleece of celestial innocence and love; and hence, by bringing together two such opposite emotions in our minds, the Polar bear frightens us with so unnatural a contrast.¹

Just as desolation, decay and death are suggested by the color white, so are these ideas inherent in the color black, which Melville used so frequently in Moby Dick. Also there is ambivalence in his use of this symbol. Walter Weber was describing this characteristic of Melville's symbols when he wrote about "... his insistence upon one vision embracing two disparities."² C. G. Jung recognizes this characteristic of the archetypal symbol:

... these archetypes are true and genuine symbols that cannot be exhaustively interpreted, either as signs or as allegories. They are genuine symbols precisely because they are ambiguous, full of half-glimpsed meanings, and in the last resort inexhaustible.³

¹Ibid., p. 188.
Another of Melville's ambivalent archetypal symbols is the ocean, which suggests the water of life. In addition to this suggestion, there is in the symbol the idea of sterility, death, timelessness, and eternity.\footnote{1} In writing about the symbols in Melville's novel, Richard Chase notes the ambivalence of the symbol of the sea: "(We might notice here that the sea and land do not appear as symbolic constants in Melville's books. They have different symbolic meanings in different contexts.)\footnote{2} Even a cursory examination of a few passages concerning the ocean will reveal the ambivalence of the archetypal symbol.

When gliding by the Bashee Isles we emerged at last upon the great South Sea; were it not for other things, I could have greeted my dear Pacific with uncounted thanks, for now the long supplication of my youth was answered; that serene ocean rolls eastward from me a thousand leagues of blue.

There is, one knows not what sweet mystery about this sea, whose gently awful stirrings seem to speak of some hidden soul beneath; like those fabled undulations of the Ephesian sod over the buried Evangelist St. John. And meet it is, that over these sea-pastures, wide-rolling watery prairies and Potters' Fields of all four continents, the waves should rise and fall, and ebb and flow unceasingly; for here, millions of mixed shades and shadows, drowned dreams, somnambulism, reveries; all that we call lives and souls, lie dreaming, dreaming still; tossing like slumberers in their beds; the ever-rolling waves but made so by their restlessness.\footnote{3}

\footnote{1}{See passage quoted in this thesis on page 4.}
\footnote{3}{Melville, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 477-78.}
When on that shivering winter’s night, the Pequod thrust her vindictive bows into the cold malicious waves, who should I see standing at her helm but Bulkington! I looked with sympathetic awe and fearfulness upon the man, who in mid-winter just landed from a four years’ dangerous voyage, could so unrestingly push off again for still another tempestuous term. The land seemed scorching to his feet. Wonderfulest things are ever the unmentionable; deep memories yield no epitaphs; this six-inch chapter is the stoneless grave of Bulkington. Let me only say that it fared with him as with the storm-tossed ship, that miserably drives along the leeward land. The port would fain give succor; the port is piteful; in the port is safety, comfort, hearthstone, supper, warm blankets, friends, all that’s king to our mortalities. But in that gale, the port, the land, is that ship’s direst jeopardy; she must fly all hospitality; one touch of land, though it but graze the keel would make her shudder through and through. With all her might she crowds all sail off shore; in so doing, fights against the very winds that fain would blow her homeward; seeks all the lashed sea’s landlessness again; for refuge’s sake forlornly rushing into peril; her only friend her bitterest foe!

Know ye now, Bulkington? Glimpses do you seem to see of that mortally intolerable truth; that all deep, earnest thinking is but the intrepid effort of the soul to keep the open independence of her sea; while the wildest winds of heaven and earth conspire to cast her on the treacherous, slavish shore?

But as in landlessness alone resides highest truth, shoreless, indefinite as God—so better is it to perish in that howling infinite, than be ingloriously dashed upon the lee, even if that were safety! For worm-like, then, oh! who would craven crawl to land! Terrors of the terrible! is all this agony so vain? Take heart, take heart, O Bulkington! Bear thee grimly, demigod! Up from the spray of thy ocean-perishing—straight up, leaps thy apotheosis!

But let me have one more good round look aloft here at the sea; there’s time for that. An old, old sight, and yet somehow so young; aye, and not changed

1 Ibid., pp. 105-6.
a wink since I first saw it, a boy, from the sand-hills of Nantucket! The same!--the same!--the same to Noah as to me. There's a soft shower to leeward. Such lovely leewardings! They must lead somewhere--to something else than common land, more palmy than the palms. Leeward! the white whale goes that way; look to windward, then; the better if the bitterer quarter.  

The juxtaposition of "wide-rolling watery prairies and Potters' Fields" as a description of the ocean is typical of Melville's ambivalent symbolism. Melville's ocean is the primal water which created all life and which will claim all life. His death by water is the return of life to the matrix of creation. There is in the symbol of the ocean both fertility and sterility. There is both the image of life and the image of death. Relative to this James Baird writes:

All life is there, and all death, and thus all time. As Moby Dick opens, Ishmael thinks of the legend of Narcissus (in that same initial paragraph in which the oneness of tree and cross is recalled)--Narcissus "who because he could not grasp the tormenting, wild image he saw in the fountain, plunged into it and was drowned." That same image we see, he says, in all rivers and oceans. "It is the image of the ungraspable phantom of life; and this is the key to it all." Water bears forever in its depths the illusoriness of all life; and every image of reef and lagoon, every image of existence lifted from the great original depths must descend finally into that illimitable, ancient world of ocean.  

In Melville's account of the landmen's life in

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1 Ibid., p. 556.
2 Baird, op. cit., p. 359.
New York; his references to King Ahab; the descriptions of barren, cold Nantucket; the allusions to the ancient, ruined cities of Gomorrah, Tyre, and Carthage; and his frequent use of the ambivalent symbols of whiteness, blackness, and the ocean, he develops the archetypal symbol of the Waste Land. To escape from this "wasteland," Melville has his Quester, the wandering Ishmael, go to sea in search of the "ungraspable phantom of life." At sea Ishmael and his shipmates get many good drenchings with water, which is a well-known fertility symbol. To go to sea for the "ungraspable phantom of life" or the Holy Grail follows the pattern of the Grail stories, for the Grail Castle was always located near the water and the trip was made on the enchanted ship.

III. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE ARCHETYPES AND PRIMITIVE RITUAL

Two of the main archetypal symbols of the search for the Grail, the Waste Land and the Fisher King, have been shown to be present in Melville's Moby Dick. If one accepts Miss Weston's hypothesis that the Grail legends are romances which developed from the fertility rituals of the primitive people, one could logically assume that Melville's pattern of symbols has a relationship to the symbolic patterns of primitive culture. To illustrate the richness of these two archetypal symbols which Melville
used, the next step will be to examine accounts of the ancient rituals.

An integral part of the fertility ritual was the sacrificial death of a sick king in order to restore the fertility of the land. In *The Golden Bough* Sir James Frazer recorded how primitive people often believed that their personal safety and, in fact, that of society was directly related to the vitality of their king; therefore they took "the utmost care of his life, out of a regard for their own."¹ The king was, however, mortal, so to avert the catastrophe which would befall the land upon his death the loyal subjects felt it their obligation to kill the king as soon as his powers would begin to fail. They felt it imperative to transfer the king's soul to a vigorous successor, and the transfer should be made, they believed, before the soul's energies had been depleted. If they should wait too long, the young successor would not be vigorous and the land would not be fertile.² While most of the accounts in *The Golden Bough* deal with rituals from the ancient world, Frazer also has some evidence that the same practice exists among primitive people in modern times.

²Ibid.
In Cambodia the mystic kings of Fire and Water are put to death when the elders of the tribe think that they cannot recover from an illness.¹ Among the Shilluk of the White Nile a similar tradition prevails. The kings of Shilluk are revered; yet because of their belief that the fertility of the land is directly related to the vitality and health of the king, he is put to death when he begins to lose his strength. One of the symptoms of his loss of vitality is "his incapacity to satisfy the sexual passions of his wives, of whom he has very many, distributed in a large number of houses at Fashoda."² Frazer explains the killing of the Shilluk king by stating:

In general the principal element in the religion of the Shilluk would seem to be the worship which they pay to their sacred or divine kings, whether dead or alive. These are believed to be animated by a single divine spirit, which has been transmitted from the semi-mythical, but probably in substance historical, founder of the dynasty through all his successors to the present day. Hence, regarding their kings as incarnate divinities on whom the welfare of men, of cattle, and of the corn implicitly depends, the Shilluk naturally pay them the greatest respect and take every care of them; and however strange it may seem to us, their custom of putting the divine king to death as soon as he shows signs of ill-health or failing strength springs directly from their profound veneration from him and from their anxiety to preserve him, or rather the divine spirit by which he is animated, in the most perfect state of efficiency; nay, we may go further and say their practice of regicide is the best proof they can give of the high regard in which they hold their kings. For they believe, as we have seen, that

¹Ibid., p. 310. ²Ibid., p. 311.
the king's life or spirit is so sympathetically bound up with the prosperity of the whole country, that if he fell ill or grew senile the cattle would sicken and cease to multiply, the crops would rot in the fields, and men would perish of widespread disease. Hence, in their opinion, the only way of averting these calamities is to put the king to death while he is still hale and hearty, in order that the divine spirit which he has inherited from his predecessors may be transmitted in turn by him to his successor while it is still in full vigour and has not yet been impaired by the weakness of disease and old age.¹

Among Frazer's accounts of the killing of the king to assure the fertility of the land, he records several which tell of self-destruction. In the Central African kingdom of Bunyora there has been a custom, which continued until recent years, that as soon as the king became ill or old he was to take his own life. He did this by draining a poisoned cup. Should he falter in doing this, it was his wife's duty to give him the cup, for only by his death could the fertility of the land be maintained.²

Our study has already equated Captain Ahab with the Grail King. Clearly the impaired vitality of Ahab has brought destruction upon the crew of the Pequod. There is, however, after the death of Ahab, a "rebirth." Out of the "black bubble at the axis of that slowly wheeling circle"³ Ishmael is reborn from the "womb" of the sea. He is given

¹Ibid., pp. 312-13. ²Ibid., p. 315.
³Melville, op. cit., p. 566.
life because of death. A symbol of death, Queequeg's coffin, buoys him up until his rescue by the Rachel. The death of the Fisher King (Ahab) has brought an end to the Waste Land. No longer does the ocean rage; it is "a soft and dirge-like main." Even the animals of the sea are different. The sharks glide by "as if with padlocks on their mouths; the savage sea-hawks sail with sheathed beaks."

The archetypal pattern of death and rebirth which is present in the death of Ahab, the Fisher King, whose maiming has brought about a Waste Land to the Pequod microcosm, and the return to life of the orphan wanderer Ishmael gives a universal experience to Melville's masterpiece. Furthermore, his use of the symbols of the search for the Grail strikes a deep emotional response in the reader.

Much more can be said about the connection between Moby Dick and the fertility ritual which entailed the sacrificing of the Sick King, but further discussion will be suspended until more parallels have been made between the novel and the entire Grail pattern, at which time their relationship will be more striking.

\[^1\]_Tbid._
CHAPTER III

THE QUESTER AND THE INITIATION

I. PARALLELS BETWEEN THE GRAIL

ARCHETYPE AND MOBY DICK

If an analogy is to be drawn between Melville's 
Moby Dick and the pattern of the search for the Holy Grail, 
one must identify the Quester, a central character in each 
of the varying tales dealing with the Grail. The Grail 
hero is not the same person in each of the versions. In 
Parzival, according to Wolfram von Eschenbach, Perceval is 
the quester; in the Wauchier version Gawain seeks and finds 
the Grail; and in the later version by Malory, Galahad, 
Launcelot's son, is the successful young hero. The identity 
of the Quester varies with the versions, but the descrip-
tions are very similar. In each case the Quester is a 
brave young man who demonstrates wisdom, strength, and 
humility. Regarding the qualifications of the Quester, 
Alfred Nutt wrote: "Neither Chrétien, Gautier, nor Manes-
sier lays stress upon special qualifications in the quest-
hero for the achievement of his task."1

Ishmael as Quester. Certainly the Quester archetype

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1 Alfred Nutt, Studies in the Legend of the Holy 
is present in Moby Dick; in fact, Melville wasted no time in telling his readers that his story was to deal with a wanderer, a seeker. From those opening three words, "Call me Ishmael," the reader knows that the narrator will take him on a journey or quest.

The choice of the name Ishmael was not a haphazard one. Melville knew that the reader would immediately bring to mind the son of Abraham and Hagar. The account of Ishmael comes from the Book of Genesis. In Chapter XVI when Jehovah announces to Hagar, the handmaiden of Abraham's wife Sarah, that she is to have a son by Abraham, he tells her to call the son Ishmael and says concerning him: "And he shall be as a wild ass among men; his hand shall be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell over against all his brethren." Later, after Abraham's wife has a son Isaac, Sarah wants Abraham to cast out Hagar and Ishmael. Genesis XXI, verses 14-20, is an account of the wandering of Hagar and Ishmael:

And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and took bread and a bottle of water, and gave it unto Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, and gave her the child, and sent her away; and she departed, and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba. And the water in the bottle was spent, and she cast the child under one of the shrubs. And she went, and sat her down over against him a good way off, as it were a bowshot: for she said, Let me not look upon the death of the child. And she sat over against him, and lifted up her voice, and wept. And God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called out Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar? fear not; for God heard the
voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thy hand; for I will make him a great nation. And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink. And God was with the lad, and he grew; and he dwelt in the wilderness, and became, as he grew up, an archer.

Like the Ishmael of old, Melville's Ishmael had been condemned to a life of wandering. There are numerous references in the novel to places which he has visited. In fact, he tells the reader that he has circled the globe.

... at the North have I chased Leviathan round and round the Pole with the revolutions of the bright points that first defined him to me. And beneath the effulgent Antarctic skies I have boarded the Argo-Navis, and joined the chase against the starry Cletus far beyond the utmost stretch of Hydrus and the Flying Fish.  

Further, Ishmael describes himself as a "wild ass among men" when he says of himself:

Long exile from Christendom and civilization inevitably restores a man to that condition in which God placed him, i. e., what is called savagery. Your true whale-hunter is as much a savage as an Iroquois. I myself am a savage, owning no allegiance but to the King of Cannibals; and ready at any moment to rebel against him.  

The Pequod crew as knights. While Ishmael is the Quester, one can certainly think of all of the members of the crew as questers. The suggestion is present in various places throughout the novel; but Melville obviously wanted

\[1\] Melville, op. cit., p. 273.  \[2\] Ibid., p. 271.
to assure the reader's noting this, for he entitled both Chapters XXVI and XXVII, which deal with the Pequod crew, "Knights and Squires." In identifying Starbuck, Stubb, and Flask as knights, Melville wrote:

And since in this famous fishery, each mate or headsman, like a Gothic Knight of old, is always accompanied by his boat-steerer or harpooneer, who in certain conjunctures provides him with a fresh lance, when the former one has been badly twisted, or elbowed in the assault; and moreover, as there generally subsists between the two, a close intimacy and friendliness; it is therefore but meet, that in this place we set down who the Pequod's harpooners were, and to what headsman each of them belonged.¹

When he identified the Squires, Melville wrote:

First of all was Queequeg, whom Starbuck, the chief mate, had selected for his squire. . . . Tash-tego was Stubb the second mate's squire. . . . Curious to tell, this imperial negro, Ahasuerus Daggoo, was the Squire of little Flask, who looked like a chessman beside him.²

A reader of the Arthurian romances might see certain parallels between Melville's knights and those of the romances. Arthur's knights were accomplished in all the arts of knighthood, including that of jousting. In writing about his questers, Melville defended whaling as an art equal to that of knighthood when he wrote in the chapter entitled "The Advocate":

But if, in the face of all this, you still declare that whaling has no aesthetically noble associations connected with it, then am I ready to shiver fifty

¹Tbid., p. 117. ²Tbid., pp. 117-18.
lances with you there, and unhorse you with a split helmet every time.¹

In another passage Melville spoke of the Pequod crew, in fact all whalmen, as the equal of the knights of the order of St. George:

Thus, then, one of our own noble stamp, even a good whalman, is the tutelary guardian of England; and by good rights, we harpooneers of Nantucket should be enrolled in the most noble order of St. George. And therefore, let not the knights of that honorable company (none of whom, I venture to say, have ever had to do with a whale like their great patron), let them never eye a Nantucketer with disdain, since even in our woolen frocks and tarred trousers we are much better entitled to St. George's decoration than they.²

Ceremonies for initiation into knighthood. Certainly reminiscent of the scenes around the Round Table is the scene which Melville described in "The Quarter Deck."

Receiving the brimming pewter, and turning to the harpooneers, he ordered them to produce their weapons. Then, ranging them before him near the capstan, with their harpoons in their hands, while his three mates stood at his side with their lances, and the rest of the ship's company formed a circle around the group; he stood for an instant searchingly eyeing every man of his crew... "Drink and pass!" he cried, handing the heavy charged flagon to the nearest seaman. "The crew alone now drink. Round with it, round! Short draughts—a long swallows, men..."

Attend now, my braves. I have mustered ye all round this capstan; and ye mates, flank me with your lances; and ye harpooneers, stand there with your irons; and ye, stout mariners, ring me in, that I may in some sort revive a noble custom of my fisher-

men fathers before me. O men, you will yet see that...

"Advance, ye mates! Cross your lances full before me. Well done! Let me touch the axis." So saying, with extended arm, he grasped the three level, radiating lances at their crossed centre; while so doing, suddenly and nervously twitched them; meanwhile glancing intently from Starbuck to Stubb; from Stubb to Flask... The three mates quailed before his strong, sustained, and mystic aspect. Stubb and Flask looked sideways from him; the honest eye of Starbuck fell

Silently obeying the order, the three harpooneers now stood with the detached iron part of their harpoons, some three feet long, held, barbs up, before him.

"Stab me not with that keen steel! Cant them; cant them over! know ye not the goblet end? Turn up the socket! So, so; now, ye cup-bearers, advance. The irons! take them; hold them while I fill!" Forthwith, slowly going from one officer to the other, he brimmed the harpoon sockets with the fiery waters from the pewter.

"Now, three to three, ye stand. Commend the murderous chalices! Bestow them, ye who are now made parties to this indissoluble league. Ha! Starbuck! but the deed is done! Yon ratifying sun now waits to sit upon it. Drink, ye harpooneers! drink and swear, ye men that man the deathful whaleboat's bow--Death to Moby Dick! God hunt us all, if we do not hunt Moby Dick to his death!" The long, barbed steel goblets were lifted; and to cries and maledictions against the white whale, the spirits were simultaneously quaffed down with a hiss. Starbuck paled, and turned, and shivered. Once more, and finally, the replenished
pewter went the rounds among the frantic crew; when, waving his free hand to them, they all dispersed; and Ahab retired within his cabin.

This emotionally intense scene when Ahab joins his questers together in the search for the "grand hooded phantom," the Holy Grail, is similar to the ceremony when knights pledged themselves to a task. There is the partaking of "communion" as they pass the cup around and also a blessing of the weapons when Ahab, the celebrant, touches the "three level, radiating lances." Like Arthurian knights they have stood in a circle and pledged their lives. Now, all of the Pequod crew are united.

Later in the novel, there is another ceremony on the occasion when Ahab's own harpoon is forged. Instead of having the blacksmith temper the weapon in water as is usually done, Ahab will use blood--the blood of his pagan harpooneers:

"No, no--no water for that; I want it of the true death-temper. Ahoy, there! Tashtego, Queequeg, Daggoo! What say ye, pagans! Will ye give me as much blood as will cover this barb?" holding it high up. A cluster of dark nods replied, Yes. Three punctures were made in the heathen flesh, and the White Whale's barbs were then tempered.

"Ego non baptizo te in nomine patris, sed in nomine diaboli!" deliriously howled Ahab, as the malignant iron scorchingly devoured the baptismal blood.

An oath has been made in blood, and with this oath, all the

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1Tbid., pp. 163-65. 2Tbid., p. 484.
crew of the *Pequod* have been initiated as questers--seekers for the "ungraspable phantom."

II. RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE ARCHETYPES AND PRIMITIVE RITUALS

The worship of *Dionysus*. The initiatory motif in *Moby Dick* has been equated with this motif in the Grail romances; now parallels must be made with the patterns of initiation in primitive rituals. In her *Birth and Rebirth*, which discusses the religious meanings of initiation in human culture, Mircea Eliade points out that initiation rites had virtually disappeared by the medieval period, but the motif appeared in the literature, especially those stories concerning the Grail quest. Regarding this she writes:

> In the Grail Castle, Percival has to spend the night in a chapel in which lies a dead knight; thunder rolls, and he sees a black hand extinguishing the only lighted candle. This is the very type of the initiatory night watch.¹

In her discussion of the other ordeals of the Heroes, Mircea Eliade points out how they are suggestive of the descent to Hell and as such form part of an initiation. Further she states that the end result of the quest is the

healing of the Sick King, and thereby the Waste Land is regenerated. She concludes: "Now it is well known that the function of sovereignty is generally bound up with an initiatory ritual."¹

The initiation into a fertility cult was a ritual similar to that undergone by the Grail heroes and that in which Ahab's men participated. One of the main fertility cults was connected with the worship of Dionysus, the god of wine. The episodes concerning his life reproduce the processes of nature as well as objects of nature so closely that they seem to be allegories. Like the other vegetation gods Dionysus supposedly had died a violent death, but he was brought to life again. This story of his suffering, death, and resurrection was enacted in the sacred rites of his cult. In his account of the myth and ritual concerning Dionysus, Sir James Frazer described how the Cretans celebrated a biennial festival at which they represented the suffering and death of Dionysus. A live bull was torn to pieces by the worshippers after which they roamed the woods carrying a casket which was supposed to contain the sacred heart of Dionysus.

Where the resurrection formed part of the myth, it also was acted at the rites, and it even appears that a general doctrine of resurrection... was

¹Ibid.
inculcated in the worshippers. . . .

Frazer further pointed out how, while Dionysus was a deity of vegetation, he was represented as an animal, usually with the horns of a bull, and was referred to as "cowborn," "bull," and "bull-shaped." In Cynaetha an annual festival was held in the winter. Men of the community greased their bodies with oil and selected a bull from the herd of cattle and carried it to the sanctuary of Dionysus.

Dionysus was supposed to inspire their choice of the particular bull, which probably represented the deity himself. . . and the rending and devouring of live bulls and calves appear to have been a regular feature of the Dionysiac rites.

Frazer concluded that we cannot doubt that in rending and devouring a live bull at this festival the worshippers of Dionysus believed themselves to be killing the god, eating his flesh, and drinking his blood.

In addition to eating the flesh of an animal, the worshippers of Dionysus, according to Frazer, also drank great quantities of wine. In characterizing the Dionysian ritual, one could say that it demanded that its worshippers "let themselves go." The ritual of the Dionysian cult was an orgiastic worship in which the votaries wrought themselves into a sacred frenzy and believed themselves united

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1Frazer, op. cit., p. 452.
2Ibid., p. 453. 3Ibid.
with the deity. In describing the rituals Mircea Eliade writes:

The initiatory rites reactualize an origin myth, which relates the adventures, death, and resurrection of a Divinity. We know very little about these secret rites, yet we know that the most important of them concerned the death and mystical resurrection of the initiand.1

Psychological analysis of the Dionysian ritual. Carl Jung was also interested in these rituals and has analyzed them psychologically. He wrote:

The Dionysian satyr-feasts, according to every analogy, were a sort of totem-feast with an identification backward to a mythical ancestry or directly to the totem animal. The cult of Dionysus had in many ways a mystical and speculative tendency, and in any case exercised a very strong religious influence.2

According to Arthur Fairbanks it was this feature which made the Dionysian cults so popular and also the

... revival in his worship which made him one of the greater gods of Greece was in large measure due to conditions present in Greece itself. Dissatisfaction with ancient formalism in religion, and in particular the rising sense of individualism with its demand for a god that came into closer contact with each man were potent factors in the elevation of the wine god to the Olympus in which Homer gave him no place.3

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1Eliade, op. cit., p. 112.
This explanation of the popularity of the cult is
similar to that of Friedrich Nietzsche, who wrote:

The Greeks were keenly aware of the terrors and horrors of existence; in order to be able to live at all they had to place before them the shining fantasy of the Olympians. Their tremendous distrust of the titanic forces of nature: Moira, mercilessly enthroned beyond the knowable world; the vulture which fed upon the great philanthropist Prometheus; the terrible lot drawn by wise Oedipus; the curse on the house of Atreus which brought Orestes to the murder of his mother: that whole Panic philosophy, in short, with its mythic examples, by which the gloomy Etruscans perished, the Greeks conquered—or at least hid from view—again and again by means of this artificial Olympus. In order to live at all the Greeks had to construct these deities. The Apollonian need for beauty had to develop the Olympian hierarchy of joy by slow degrees from the original titanic hierarchy of terror, as roses are seen to break from a thorny thicket. How else could life have been borne by a race so hyper-sensitive, so emotionally intense, so equipped for suffering? The same drive which called art into being as a completion and consummation of existence, and as a guarantee of further existence, gave rise to that Olympian realm which acted as a transfiguring mirror to the Hellenic will. The gods justified human life by living it themselves—the only satisfactory theodicy ever invented.1

This anxiety about existence or the possibility of non-existence has been stated by Silenus, the companion of Dionysus. King Midas sought for a long time for Silenus; and when at last he came upon him, he asked Silenus what was the best and most desirable thing for man. Nietzsche,

in giving an account of Silenus' reply, wrote:

The daemon remained sullen and uncommunicative until finally, forced by the king, he broke into a shrill laugh and spoke: "Ephemeral wretch, begotten by accident and toil, why do you force me to tell you what it would be your greatest boon not to hear? What would be best for you is quite beyond your reach: not to have been born, not to be, to be nothing. But the second best is to die soon."  

Explanation of the ritualistic ceremonies of the Pequod crew. Melville described the initiation of the Pequod crew in the chapter "The Quarter Deck." Following this chapter he told of the monotony of life aboard a whaling vessel when all the crew had to do was view the mirror of ocean and philosophize. In the chapter "Stubb Kills a Whale," Ishmael gives an account of what it was like to stand watch for hours:

It was my turn to stand at the foremast-head; and with my shoulders leaning against the slackened royal shrouds, to and fro I idly swayed in what seemed an enchanted air. No resolution could withstand it; in that dreamy mood losing all consciousness, at last my soul went out of my body; though my body still continued to sway as a pendulum will, long after the power which first moved it is withdrawn.

Ere forgetfulness altogether came over me, I had noticed that the seamen at the main and mizzen mastheads were already drowsy. So that at last all three of us lifelessly swung from the spars, and for every swing that we made there was a nod from below from the slumbering helmsman. The waves, too, nodded their indolent crests; and across the wide trance of the sea,

\[1\]Ibid., p. 29.
east nodded to west, and the sun over all.¹

Earlier in the novel, in the chapter, "The Mast-Head," Melville discussed at greater length the monotony of manning the masts and the trance-like state which results from this task:

"Why, thou monkey," said a harpooneer to one of these lads, "we've been cruising now hard upon three years, and thou hast not raised a whale yet. Whales are scarce as hen's teeth whenever thou art up here." Perhaps they were; or perhaps there might have been shoals of them in the far horizon; but lulled into such an opium-like listlessness of vacant, unconscious reverie is this absent-minded youth by the blending cadence of waves with thoughts, that at last he loses his identity; takes the mystic ocean at his feet for the visible image of that deep, blue, bottomless soul, pervading mankind and nature; and every strange, half-seen, gliding, beautiful thing that eludes him; every dimly-discovered, uprising fin of some undiscernible form, seems to him the embodiment of those elusive thoughts that only people the soul by continually flitting through it. In this enchanted mood, thy spirit ebbs away to whence it came; becomes diffused through time and space; like Cranmer's sprinkled Pantheistic ashes, forming at last a part of every shore the round globe over.

There is no life in thee, now, except that rocking life imparted by a gentle rolling ship; by her, borrowed from the sea; by the sea, from the inscrutable tides of God. But while this sleep, this dream is on ye, move your foot or hand an inch; slip your hold at all; and your identity comes back in horror. Over Descartian vortices you hover. And perhaps, at mid-day, in the fairest weather, with one half-throttled shriek you drop through transparent air into the summer sea, no more to rise for ever. Heed it well, ye Pantheists!²

After the months of manning the masts, it is little wonder

that the men aboard the Pequod felt a horror about themselves and their existence. Frequently they must have asked themselves why they were there, why they had been born, and why they did not die. Pip was not the only one who felt this horror and thought of death as the answer to life. The crew, when they first partook of the "communion" at the initiation ceremony in Chapter XXXVI, decided to forget the horrors of their existence and "let themselves go," joining Ahab in his Dionysian ritual.

The Dionysian tendency became uppermost in their psyches, and they were carried along by Ahab's frenzy. In describing the Dionysian tendency Nietzsche said that it is the freeing of unmeasured instinct, the breaking loose of the unbridled dynamics of the animal and the divine nature. This state represents horror at the annihilation of the principle of individuation and at the same time rapturous delight at its destruction. The Dionysian tendency is, therefore, comparable to frenzy which dissolves the individual into collective instincts and contents, a disruption of the secluded ego of the world. It is an unfolding, a streaming upward and outward. It is a flood of mightiest universal feeling which bursts forth, intoxicating the senses like strong wines. It is a drunkenness
in the highest sense.¹ In The Birth of Tragedy Nietzsche wrote of the Dionysian capacity of a people as being able to dispel the terror and horror of existence:

Schopenhauer has described for us the tremendous awe which seizes man when he suddenly begins to doubt the cognitive modes of experience, in other words when in a given instance the law of causation seems to suspend itself. If we add to this awe the glorious transport which arises in man, even from the very depths of nature, at the shattering of the principium individuationis, then we are in a position to apprehend the essence of Dionysiac rapture, whose closest analogy is furnished by physical intoxication.

Not only does the bond between man and man come to be forged once more by the magic of the Dionysiac rite, but nature itself, long alienated or subjugated, rises again to celebrate the reconciliation with her prodigal son, man. . . . Now the slave emerges as a freeman; all the rigid, hostile walls which either necessity or despotism has erected between men are shattered. Now that the gospel of universal harmony is sounded, each individual becomes not only reconciled to his fellow but actually at one with him—as though the veil of Maya had been torn apart and there remained only shreds floating before the vision of mystical Oneness. Man now expresses himself through song and dance as the member of a higher community; he has forgotten how to walk, how to speak, and is on the brink of taking wing as he dances. Each of his gestures betokens the same power which makes the animals speak and the earth render up milk and honey. He feels himself to be godlike and strides with the same elation and ecstasy as the gods he has seen in his dreams. No longer the artist, he has himself become a work of art: the productive power of the whole universe is now manifest in his transport, to the glorious satisfaction of the primordial One. The finest clay, the most precious marble—man—is here kneaded and hewn, and the chisel blows of the Dionysiac world artist are accompanied by the cry of the Eleusinian mystagogues: "Do you fall on your knees, multitudes, do you divine your creator?²

When Ahab, as celebrant of the communion at the initiation ceremony, ordered the men to drink the "fiery waters" from the "murderous chalices" of their harpoons, the men of the Pequod crew became intoxicated. They were drunk with the frenzy of the chase for the "ungraspable phantom." They were no longer individuals; they had become one by means of the ceremony.

The worship of Dionysus continued, and in Chapter LXI, "Stubb Kills a Whale," the reader sees the ritual continue. After Ishmael sights the gigantic sperm whale, the entire crew awakens from the monotony of life aboard a whaler, and they become one in their assault on the whale.

As if struck by some enchanter's wand, the sleepy ship and every sleeper in it all at once started into wakefulness; and more than a score of voices from all parts of the vessel, simultaneously with the three notes from aloft, shouted forth the accustomed cry, as the great fish slowly and regularly spouted the sparkling brine into the air... ...

"Start her, start her, my men! Don't hurry yourselves; take plenty of time—but start her; start her like thunder-claps, that's all," cried Stubb, spluttering out the smoke as he spoke... ...

"Woo-hoo! Wa-hee!" screamed the Gay-Header in reply, raising some old war-whoop to the skies; as every oarsman in the strained boat involuntarily bounced forward with the one tremendous leading stroke which the eager Indian gave... ...

And thus with oars and yells the keels cut the sea. Meanwhile, Stubb, retaining his place in the van, still encouraged his men to the onset, all the while puffing the smoke from his mouth. Like desperadoes they tugged and they strained, till the welcome cry
was heard—"Stand up, Tashtego!—give it to him!"...

"Haul in—haul in!" cried Stubb to the bowsman; and, facing round towards the whale, all hands began pulling the boat up to him, while yet the boat was being towed on. Soon ranging up by his flank, Stubb, firmly planting his knee in the clumsy cleat, darted dart after dart into the flying fish; at the word of command, the boat alternately sterning out of the way of the whale's horrible wallow, and then ranging up for another fling.

The red tide now poured from all sides of the monster like brooks down a hill. His tormented body rolled not in brine but in blood, which bubbled and seethed for furlongs behind in their wake. The slanting sun playing upon this crimson pond in the sea, sent back its reflection into every face, so that they all glowed to each other like red men...

... And now abating in his flurry, the whale once more rolled out into view; surging from side to side; spasmodically dilating and contracting his spout-hole, with sharp, cracking, agonized respirations. At last, gush after gush of clotted red gore, as if it had been the purple lees of red wine, shot into the frightened air; and falling again, ran dripping down his motionless flanks into the sea. His heart had burst!}

The whale, that "colossal bullock," was dead, and the Dionysian worshippers were ready for the dismemberment and the sacramental meal:

About midnight that steak was cut and cooked; and lighted by two lanterns of sperm oil, Stubb stoutly stood up to his spermaceti supper at the capstan-head, as if that capstan were a sideboard.

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1 Melville, op. cit., pp. 283-87.
2 Ibid., p. 291. 3 Ibid., p. 292.
The capture of the whale and Stubb's eating of the whale steak can be aptly compared with the orgiastic rituals of the fertility cults, especially the Dionysian. Melville even made the analogy to the totem animal of the cult when he spoke of the whale as a "colossal bullock" and "the great prize ox of the sea."1 Also like the rituals of the primitive cults, Baird observes, is the scene in which Stubb kills the whale, and all of the men of the Pequod "are made red, all one, in the aura of that primal blood of life."2 In comparing the scene with a sacramental act, Baird writes:

In the God-stained light of that evening sea each becomes one with his fellows in his redness and in his acceptance of the blood-mysteries of the lord of the primitive waters. He stands before an ancient sign of sacrificial blood, and on his countenance he wears the color of primitive man's blood nature, even that redness which courses vastly within the inscrutable whiteness of Moby Dick.3

Another comparison can be made between the Dionysian rituals and Moby Dick after one reads Chapter XCV, "The Cassock." Here Melville described the mincer who removes the dark pelt of the cone of the whale. After this is dried, the mincer cuts slits for arm holes and slips it on and is "invested in the full canonicals of his calling."4

\[1\] Ibid., p. 299.  
\[2\] Baird, op. cit., p. 337.  
\[3\] Ibid.  
\[4\] Melville, op. cit., p. 418.
This practice of wearing the skin of the totem animal is reminiscent of part of the Dionysian ritual, when the women would, in their frenzy, devour the flesh of the totem animal and then wrap the skin of the animal around themselves. This had the effect of making them one with the totem-god.

This study has been aimed at showing parallels between *Moby Dick*, the Grail legends, and primitive rituals, with the ultimate aim of giving the reader of *Moby Dick* greater insight into the anagogical level of Melville's masterpiece. Parallels have been found in the archetypal symbols of the Waste Land, the Fisher King, the Quester, and the Initiation. As these symbols have been examined in the light of Jungian psychology, this writer has observed that they are related to the archetype of the sacrament, which conveys the feeling of oneness with one's fellow men and atonement (at-one-ment) with God. In the next chapter the esoteric symbol of the sacrament, the Grail, will be examined, as well as two other symbols of the Grail pattern, the Perilous Chapel and the Bleeding Lance.
CHAPTER IV

THE PERILOUS CHAPEL AND THE BLEEDING LANCE AND CUP

I. PARALLELS BETWEEN THE GRAIL SYMBOLS AND MOBY DICK

The symbol of the Perilous Chapel. The mysterious chapel is an important symbol in the Grail stories. Of this Jessie Weston wrote:

Students of the Grail romances will remember that in many of the versions the hero--sometimes it is a heroine--meets with a strange and terrifying adventure in a mysterious Chapel, an adventure which, we are given to understand, is fraught with extreme peril to life. The details vary: sometimes there is a Dead Body laid on the altar; sometimes a Black Hand extinguishes the tapers; there are strange and threatening voices, and the general impression is that this is an adventure in which supernatural, and evil, forces are engaged.¹

The suggestion of the supernatural is very definitely present in a modern version of Malory's Morte d'Arthur. The first passage is an account of Launcelot's visit to the chapel, and the second tells of the visit of Percivale and Bors:

Then she said: "Sir, follow this path and it will bring you to the Chapel Perilous; and I shall remain here until you return . . . And if you do not return, then will there be no knight living who can achieve this adventure."

Down the path went Launcelot, and came before long to a strange, lonely chapel in a little clearing. Then he tied his horse to a tree and went into the churchyard

¹Weston, op. cit., p. 175.
on foot. And on the end of the chapel he saw hanging many fair shields turned upside down; and suddenly thirty great knights dressed in black armour stood beneath the shields, taller by a foot and more than any mortal man; and they gnashed their teeth and glared horribly at Sir Launcelot.

Then, though he was much afraid, he drew his sword, put his shield before him, and charged into the midst of them. But they scattered on either side of him without speaking a word or striking a blow; and he grew bolder, and entered into the chapel. The interior was lit only by one dim lamp which cast weird shadows beneath the low stone arches; and he was ware of a corpse stretched upon a stone slab and covered with a silk cloth.

Stooping down reverently, Sir Launcelot cut a piece of the oloth away; and as he did so, the floor moved as if an earthquake had shaken the chapel, and the lamp swung, creaking dismally on its chain until the shadows seemed to writhe and clutch at him.1

Early next morning Percivale and Bors stood bare-headed in the doorway of the little chapel and saw the hermit kneeling before the altar, while Launcelot lay like a dead man on a black bier in the little chancel. For long they stood there in the quiet shadow, with bowed heads, praying also for Launcelot: and then quite suddenly the Holy Grail was in the place, hanging in a great halo of light above the altar, shining so brightly that both the watchers sank on their knees and buried their faces in their hands. When they looked up again Launcelot was kneeling too—but of the Holy Grail there was no sign, only the light of the rising sun shining down upon him through the little round rose-window above the altar.2

In still another scene in Malory's version of the Grail legend there is a description of a Perilous Chapel located in an isolated, mysterious setting:

1Green, op. cit., pp. 109-10. 2Ibid., p. 197.
One night as he rode wearily along he came to a stone cross at the parting of two ways and saw by the cross a slab of white marble. But it was so dark that Sir Launcelot could not clearly see what it was. Not far from the cross there stood an old chapel, its battered walls half hidden in dense folds of ivy.

In each of the preceding episodes from Malory's account of the Perilous Chapel the description has suggested the supernatural, and the general impression has been one of great mystery. Another Perilous Chapel scene, the episode of Sir Hector and Sir Gawain, has even more of the details of the Perilous Chapel which Miss Weston has found significant.

So talking, they rode out of the dead forest and came to the little chapel by the stone cross. As the darkness was falling fast they tied their horses to a tree and went into the chapel, where they made themselves as comfortable as they could in two of the pews. And there, between waking and sleeping, they beheld strange things.

First, in the darkness they saw a single candle moving slowly towards them; and as it came near they saw that a hand held it, and an arm covered in red samite on which hung a bridle. But beyond the arm there was nothing, and yet it moved just as if someone were walking through the chapel carrying the candle and bridle.

In front of Sir Hector the arm stopped, and a voice spoke out of the empty air, saying:

"Knight, full of evil faith and poor belief, these two things have failed you: you have not followed the Light nor bowed your neck to the bridle: and therefore you may not come to the Holy Grail."

\(^2\)Ibid., p. 229.
Then the arm with the candle passed on into the sanctuary and faded from sight.

"I must go," said Sir Hector sadly; and when he had bidden farewell to Sir Gawain he went out of the chapel, mounted his horse, and rode sorrowfully back to Camelot.

But Gawain knelt in the darkness in front of the altar; but presently as he raised his face from his hands he saw a great silver candlestick with seven lighted candles in it standing on the altar in a great halo of light. But in spite of it, all the chapel was as dark as ever. Then, as he watched, there came a great clutching black hand out of the darkness and extinguished the candles one after another, until all was dark once more.1

Sebastian Evans' translation of the first volume of Perceval le Gallois ou le Conte du Graal tells of King Arthur's visit to the Perilous Chapel as well as a dream which the young squire, Chaus, had of a visit to the chapel. The general impression of the Perilous Chapel is, as Miss Weston described it, a place where evil forces are at work. This is especially true of the account of the squire's dream of a visit to the Perilous Chapel:

He looked to the right hand and seeth a chapel in the midst of the launde, and he seeth about it a great graveyard wherein were many coffins, as it seemed him. He thought in his heart that he would go towards the chapel, for he supposed that the King would have entered to pray there. He went thitherward and alighted. . . . None did he see there in one part or another, save a knight that lay dead in the midst of the chapel upon a bier, and he was covered of a rich cloth of silk, and had around him waxen tapers burning that were fixed in

1Ibid., pp. 237-38.
four candlesticks of gold. This squire marvelled much how this body was left there so lonely, insomuch that none were about him save only the images, and yet more marvelled he of the King that he found him not, for he knew not in what part to seek him. He taketh out one of the tall tapers, and layeth hand on the golden candlestick, and setteth it betwixt his hose and his thigh and issueth forth of the chapel, and remounteth on his hackney and goeth his way back and passeth beyond the graveyard and issueth forth of the launde and entereth into the forest...

So, as he entereth into a grassy lane in the wood, he seeth come before him a man black and foul-favoured, and he was somewhat taller afoot than was himself a-horseback. And he held a great sharp knife in his hand with two edges as it seemed him. The squire cometh over against him a great pace and saith unto him, "You that come there, have you met King Arthur in this forest?" "In no wise," saith the messenger, "But you have I met, whereof am I right glad at heart, for you have departed from the chapel as a thief and a traitor. For you are carrying off thence the candlestick of gold that was in honour of the knight that lieth in the chapel dead. Wherefore I will that you yield it up to me... Howbeit, the squire smiteth with his spurs and thinketh to pass him by, but the other hasteth him and smiteth the squire in the left side with the knife and thrusteth it into his body up to the haft. The squire, that lay in the hall at Cardoil, and had dreamed this, awoke and cried in a loud voice: "Holy Mary! The priest! Help! Help, for I am a dead man!"

A comparison of these scenes from Grail romances with passages from Moby Dick will reveal that in addition to his use of the symbols of the Waste Land, the Fisher King, the Quester, and the Initiation, Melville also has used the symbol of the Perilous Chapel. In the second chapter of the novel, "The Carpet Bag," Melville has such

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a scene. His description of Ishmael's visit to the Negro church includes many of the details which Jessie L. Weston has identified as belonging to the symbol of the Perilous Chapel.

Such dreary streets! blocks of blackness, not houses on either hand, and here and there a candle, like a candle moving about in a tomb. At this hour of the night, of the last day of the week, that quarter of the town proved all but deserted. But presently I came to a smoky light proceeding from a low, wide building, the door of which stood invitingly open. It had a careless look, as if it were meant for the uses of the public; so, entering, the first thing I did was to stumble over an ash-box in the porch. Hal thought I, ha, as the flying particles almost choked me, are these ashes from that destroyed city, Gomorrah? But "The Crossed Harpoons," and the "Sword-Fish?"--this, then must needs be the sign of "The Trap." However, I picked myself up and hearing a loud voice within, pushed on and opened a second, interior door.

It seemed the great Black Parliament sitting in Tophet. A hundred black faces turned round in their rows to peer; and beyond, a black Angel of Doom was beating a book in a pulpit. It was a negro church; and the preacher's text was about the blackness of darkness, and the weeping and wailing and teeth-gnashing there. Ha, Ishmael, muttered I, backing out; Wretched entertainment at the sign of 'The Trap!'l

The feeling of mystery and peril is present as well in the description of Father Mapple's Chapel in New Bedford with the description of "frigid inscriptions on the wall" and the "black-bordered marbles which cover no ashes." Melville described Ishmael's visit there with these words:

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1Melville, op. cit., p. 8.
Returning from my first morning stroll, I again sallied out upon this special errand. The sky had changed from clear, sunny cold, to driving sleet and mist. Wrapping myself in my shaggy jacket of the cloth called bearskin, I fought my way against the stubborn storm. Entering, I found a small scattered congregation of sailors, and sailors' wives and widows. A muffled silence reigned, only broken at times by the shrieks of the storm. Each silent worshipper seemed purposely sitting apart from the other, as if each silent grief were insular and incommunicable. The chaplain had not yet arrived; and there these silent islands of men and women sat steadfastly eyeing several marble tablets, with black borders, masoned into the wall on either side of the pulpit....

Shaking off the sleet from my ice-glazed hat and jacket, I seated myself near the door, and turning sideways was surprised to see Queequeg near me. Affected by the solemnity of the scene, there was a wondering gaze of incredulous curiosity in his countenance. This savage was the only person present who seemed to notice my entrance; because he was not able to read, and therefore, was not reading those frigid inscriptions on the wall. Whether any of the relatives of the seamen whose names appeared there were now among the congregation, I knew not; but so many are the unrecorded accidents in the fishery, and so plainly did several women present wear the countenance if not the trappings of some unceasing grief, that I feel sure that here before me were assembled those, in whose unhealing hearts the sight of those bleak tablets sympathetically caused the old wounds to bleed afresh.

Oh! ye whose dead lie buried beneath the green grass; who standing among flowers can say--here, here lies my beloved; ye know not the desolation that broods in bosoms like these. What bitter blanks in those black-bordered marbles which cover no ashes! What despair in those immovable inscriptions! What deadly voids and unbidden infidelities in the lines that seem to gnaw upon all Faith, and refuse resurrections to the beings who have placelessly perished without a grave. As well might those tablets stand in the cave of Elephanta as here.\textsuperscript{1}

\textsuperscript{1}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 34-35.
In his description of Father Mapple's Chapel in New Bedford, Melville's reference to the Vedic art in the Brahmin caves of India prepares the reader for another "chapel," the Arsacidean chapel which Ishmael had visited and measured. The details of the Perilous Chapel of the Grail legends are all there in his description of the huge temple made from the skeleton of a vast sperm whale. There are the strange voices, the image of death, the darkness and light, and the stone-like altar.

When the vast body had at last been stripped of its fathom-deep enfoldings, and the bones become dust dry in the sun, then the skeleton was carefully transported up the Pupella glen, where a grand temple of lordly palms now sheltered it.

The ribs were hung with trophies; the vertebrae were carved with Arsacidean annals, in strange hieroglyphics; in the skull, the priests kept up an unextinguished aromatic flame, so that the mystic head again sent forth its vapory spout; while, suspended from a bough, the terrific lower jaw vibrated over all the devotees, like the hair-hung sword that so affrighted Damocles.

It was a wondrous sight. The wood was green as mosses of the Joy Glen; the trees stood high and haughty, feeling their living sap; the industrious earth beneath was as a weaver's loom, with a gorgeous carpet on it, whereof the ground-vine tendrils formed the warp and woof, and the living flowers the figures. All the trees, with all their laden branches; all the shrubs, and ferns, and grasses; the message-carrying air; all these unceasingly were active. Through the lacings of the leaves, the great sun seemed a flying shuttle weaving the unwearied verdure. Oh, busy weaver! unseen weaver!—pause!—one word!—whither flows the fabric? what palace may it deck? wherefore all these ceaseless toilings? Speak, weaver!—stay thy hand!—but one single word with thee! Nay—the shuttle
flies—the figures float from forth the loom; the
freshet-rushing carpet for ever slides away. The
weaver-god, he weaves; and by that weaving is he deaf-
ened, that he hears no mortal voice; and by that
humming, we, too, who look on the loom are deafened;
and only when we escape it shall we hear the thousand
voices that speak through it. For even so it is in all
material factories. The spoken words that are inaud-
ible among the flying spindles; those same words are
plainly heard without the walls, bursting from the opened
casements. Thereby have villainies been detected. Ah,
mortal! then, be heedful; for so, in all this din of
the great world's loom, thy subtlest thoughts may be
overheard afar.

Now, amid the green, life-restless loom of that
Arsacidean wood, the great, white, worshipped skeleton
lay lounging—a gigantic idler! Yet, as the ever-
woven verdant warp and woof intermixed and hummed
around him, the mighty idler seemed the sunning weaver;
himself all woven over with the vines; every mouth
assuming greener, fresher verdure; but himself a
skeleton. Life folded Death; Death trellised Life;
the grim god wived with youthful Life, and begat him
curly-headed glories.

Now, when with royal Tranquo I visited this wondrous
whale, and saw the skull an altar, and the artificial
smoke ascending from where the real jet had issued,
I marvelled that the king should regard a chapel as
an object of vertu. He laughed. But more I marvelled
that the priests should swear that smoky jet of his
was genuine. To and fro I paced before this skeleton—
brushed the vines aside—broke through the ribs—and
with a ball of Arsacidean twine, wandered, eddied
long amid its many winding, shaded colonnades and
arbors. But soon my line was out; and following back,
I emerged from the opening where I entered. I saw no
living thing within; naught was there but bones.

The polarity of Melville's symbolism is nowhere
more apparent than in his Perilous Chapel scenes where

\[1\text{Ibid.}, \text{pp. 446-47.}\]
he gives the reader the image of death within life, dust
within verdure, and shadow within light. Like Theseus in
the labyrinth, Ishmael feels the peril which is to come
when he leaves the chapel and pursues his quest. The
mysterious chapel scenes foreshadow the coming tragedy.

II. RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE SYMBOL AND PRIMITIVE RITUAL

Within the symbol of the Perilous Chapel are two
subsidiary symbols of special interest in relationship
to Moby Dick and its connection with primitive ritual.
Both the cross and stone altars have a close connection
with primitive man. Therefore, Melville's frequent use of
these images helps to link the archetypal pattern of Moby
Dick with primitive culture.

The stone as fertility symbol. The frequent reference
to the marble tablets on the wall in Father Mapple's Chapel
and his naming the pulpit in the chapel "Ehrenbreitstein"
after the famous old stone fortress in Coblenz suggests
Melville's interest in the antiquity of stone. In the
Arsacidean Chapel he describes the stone-like altar which
is made of the hard old skull of the sperm whale. Analyz-
ing Melville's pre-occupation with the image of stone,
and with a related image, that of the shadow, one can
better appreciate the polarity of Melville's symbols.
According to Jung, the archetype of the mother appears in the aspect of stone and shadow as well as such related symbols as a cave, a spring, a rose, the mandala, and others.\(^1\) Jung has also pointed out the ambivalent aspect of the mother archetype.

The qualities associated with it are maternal solicitude and sympathy; the magic authority of the female; the wisdom and spiritual exaltation that transcend reason; any helpful instinct or impulse; all that is benign, all that cherishes and sustains, that fosters growth and fertility. The place of magic transformation and rebirth, together with the underworld and its inhabitants, are presided over by the mother. On the negative side the mother archetype may connote anything secret, hidden, dark; the abyss, the world of the dead, anything that devours, seduces, and poisons, that is terrifying and inescapable like fate.\(^2\)

Within the symbol of stone, Melville has conveyed the disparate yet inseparable concepts of life and death.

In *The Golden Bough* Sir James Frazer has given an account of the connection between stones and the fertility rituals:

... within the precinct of Hippolytus at Troezen there were worshipped two female powers named Damia and Auxesia, whose connexion with the fertility of the ground is unquestionable. When Epidaurus suffered from a dearth, the people, in obedience to an oracle, carved images of Damia and Auxesia out of the sacred olive wood, and no sooner had they done so and set them up than the earth bore fruit again. Moreover, at Troezen itself, and apparently within the precinct of Hippolytus, a curious festival of stone-throwing was held in honour of these maidens, as the Troezenians called them; and

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\(^1\) Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, p. 81.

\(^2\) Ibid., p. 82.
it is easy to show that similar customs have been practiced in many lands for the express purpose of ensuring good crops. In the story of the tragic death of the youthful Hippolytus we may discern an analogy with similar tales of other fair but mortal youths who paid with their lives for the brief rapture of the love of an immortal goddess. These hapless lovers were probably not always mere myths, and the legends which traced their spilt blood in the purple bloom of the violet, the scarlet stain of the anemone, or the crimson flush of the rose were no idle poetic emblems of youth and beauty fleeting as the summer flowers. Such fables contain a deeper philosophy of the relation of the life of man to the life of nature—a sad philosophy which gave birth to a tragic practice.¹

The cross as symbol. Still another symbol subsidiary to the Perilous Chapel is that of the cross, often associated with the stone image in Grail stories. For example, in Sir Hector's and Sir Bors' visit to the Chapel in Malory's Grail story, the episode begins with: "So talking, they rode out of the dead forest and came to the little chapel by the stone cross."² Melville too evoked the cross image in his description of the Arsacidean bower, wherein the lordly palm trees stand high and haughty above the skeleton of the great whale. The palm tree, besides calling to mind the cross, also suggests the Tree of Life. James Baird has commented:

¹Frazer, op. cit., pp. 8-9.
²Green, op. cit., p. 237.
Yggdrasill, Tree of Life, is the great mountain ash of the primitive Norseman, his symbol of the universe. In the feeling of at least two primitives, Melville and Hearn, Yggdrasill is the coconut palm. It supplies food, shelter, ointment; it provides the material of the islander's house; it yields oil to embalm the dead. But it is its "sacredness" that passes into the avatar of tree and cross in Melville's art.¹

Melville's cross is an example of what Susanne Langer has called a "charged" symbol. In fact, as Miss Langer has pointed out, the cross is always such a symbol. Concerning the complexity of the cross symbol, she has written:

The cross is such a "charged" symbol: the actual instrument of Christ's death, hence a symbol of suffering; first laid on his shoulders, an actual burden, as well as an actual product of human handiwork, and on both grounds a symbol of his accepted moral burden; also an ancient symbol of the four zodiac points, with a cosmic connotation; a "natural" symbol of cross-roads (we still use it on our highways as a warning before an intersection), and therefore of decision, crisis, choice; also of being crossed, i. e. of frustration, adversity, fate; and finally, to the artistic eye a cross is the figure of a man. All these and many other meanings lie dormant in that simple, familiar, significant shape. No wonder that it is a magical form! It is charged with meanings, all human and emotional and vaguely cosmic so that they have become integrated into a connotation of the whole religious drama--sin, suffering, and redemption. Yet undoubtedly the cross owes much of its value to the fact that it has the physical attributes of a good symbol: it is easily made--drawn on paper set up in wood or stone, fashioned of precious substance as an amulet, even traced recognizably with a finger, in a ritual gesture. It is so obvious a symbolic device that despite its holy connotations we do not refrain from using it in purely mundane, discursive capacities, as the sign of "plus,"

¹Baird, op. cit., p. 299.
or in tilted position as "times," or as a marker on ballot sheets and many other kinds of record.\(^1\)

Melville was quite obviously aware of the blending of the exoteric with the esoteric in the symbol of the cross. In the chapter, "His Mark," Queequeg, the pagan harpooneer, places the sign of the cross, "an exact counterpart of a queer round figure which was tattooed upon his arm,"\(^2\) on the ship's papers when he "signs on" with the Pequod. The sign is a foreshadowing of the true character of this "holy man."

Tree worship among the primitives. Melville's "green, life-restless loom of that Arsacidean wood" is "alive" with the crosses of the lordly palm tree. In addition to suggesting the cross, the palms also give the appearance of the vaulting of a Gothic cathedral, and the reader soon feels that he is viewing a cathedral of the palms. This association of tree and cross is archetypal. In commenting upon Daniel G. Brinton's discussion of tree worship in *Religions of Primitive People*, James Baird has written:

First came the simple symbol of the tree which was the protector. Later the tree was represented by a

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\(^1\) Langer, *op. cit.*, pp. 231-32.

\(^2\) Melville, *op. cit.*, p. 89.
sacred pole as an object for worship. Then came the cross. "In early art the cross as a sacred design is often derived from the conventional figure of a tree, and symbolizes the force of life, the four winds, rain, and the waters." ¹

Numerous references in Frazer's *The Golden Bough* give evidence to the relationship between tree worship and fertility rituals. In Chapter LX, "The Worship of Trees," Frazer wrote:

In the religious history of the Aryan race in Europe the worship of trees has played an important part. . . . From an examination of the Teutonic words for "temple" Grimm has made it probable that amongst the Germans the oldest sanctuaries were natural woods. However that may be, tree-worship is well attested for all the great European families of the Aryan stock. Amongst the Celts the oak-worship of the Druids is familiar to everyone . . . Sacred groves were common among the ancient Germans, and tree-worship is hardly extinct amongst their descendants at the present day. . . .

But it is necessary to examine in some detail the notions on which the worship of trees and plants is based. To the savage the world in general is animate, and trees and plants are no exception to the rule. He thinks that they have souls like his own, and he treats them accordingly. . . .

The conception of trees and plants as animated beings naturally results in treating them as male and female . . . The notion is not purely fanciful, for plants like animals have their sexes and reproduce their kind by the union of the male and female elements. But whereas in all the higher animals the organs of the two sexes are regularly separated between different individuals, in most plants they exist together in every individual of the species. This rule, however, is by no means universal, and in many species the

male plant is distinct from the female. . . . The ancients knew the difference between the male and female date-palm, and fertilised them artificially by shaking the pollen of the male tree over the flowers of the female. The fertilisation took place in spring. Among the heathen of Harran the month during which the palms were fertilised bore the name of the Date Month, and at this time they celebrated the marriage festival of all the gods and goddesses.¹

In a later chapter Frazer gives additional evidence of the connection between tree worship and the primitive fertility rituals.

While the vine with its clusters was the most characteristic manifestation of Dionysus, he was also a god of trees in general. Thus we are told that almost all the Greeks sacrificed to "Dionysus of the tree." In Boeotia one of his titles was "Dionysus in the tree." His image was often merely an upright post, without arms, but draped in a mantle, with a bearded mask to represent the head, and with leafy boughs projecting from the head or body to show the nature of the deity. . . . He was the patron of cultivated trees: prayers were offered so that he would make the trees grow, and he was especially honoured by husbandmen, chiefly fruit-growers, who set up an image of him, the shape of a natural tree-stump, in their orchards. He was said to have discovered all tree fruits. . . . The Athenians sacrificed to him for the prosperity of the fruits of the land.²

In an article published in 1909, William A. Nitze discussed the relationship between primitive ritual and the Grail romances. He wrote:

Thus the mythic force of Arthurian Romance in general is the primitive struggle of man to compel and control the natural, specifically agricultural

forces on which his existence depends; the particular form in which the Grail stories have handed it down is as a life-cult resembling the Greek mysteries.1

One of the arguments which Mitze used for his theory was the relationship with the tree as recounted by Frazer:

The Greek traditions may well be distorted reminiscences of a custom of sacrificing human beings, and especially divine kings, in the character of Dionysus, a god who resembled Osiris in many points and was said like him to have been torn limb from limb. We are told that in Chios men were rent in pieces as a sacrifice to Dionysus; and since they died the same death as their god, it is reasonable to suppose that they personated him. The story that the Thracian Orpheus was similarly torn limb from limb by the Bacchanals seems to indicate that he too perished in the character of a god whose death he died. It is significant that the Thracian Lycurgus, king of the Edonians, is said to have been put to death in order that the ground, which had ceased to be fruitful, might regain its fertility.

But Osiris was more than a spirit of the corn; he was also a tree-spirit, and this may perhaps have been his primitive character, since the worship of trees is naturally older in the history of religion than the worship of the cereals. The character of Osiris as a tree-spirit was represented very graphically in a ceremony described by Firmicus Maternus. A pine-tree having been cut down, the centre was hollowed out, and with the wood thus excavated an image of Osiris was made, which was then buried like a corpse in the hollow of the tree. It is hard to imagine how the conception of a tree as tenanted by a personal being could be more plainly expressed. The image of Osiris thus made was kept for a year and then burned, exactly as was done with the image of Attis which was attached to the pine-tree. The ceremony of cutting the tree,

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as described by Firmicus Maternus, appears to be alluded to by Plutarch. It was probably the ritual counterpart of the mythical discovery of the body of Osiris enclosed in the erica-tree. In the hall of Osiris at Denderah the coffin containing the hawk-headed mummy of the god is clearly depicted as enclosed within a tree, apparently a conifer, the trunk and branches of which are seen above and below the coffin. The scene thus corresponds closely both to the myth and to the ceremony described by Firmicus Maternus.¹

The account in Frazer of the wooden image of Osiris is reminiscent of Melville's description of the strange-looking hunchbacked image which was Queequeg's idol, Yojo. A further parallel between the Osiris rituals at Denderah and Melville's tale can be made. In Chapter CX, wherein Melville described the coffin of Queequeg, a reader who is familiar with the Firmicus Maternus account will see resemblances. Queequeg had learned that the Nantucket whalemen were buried in "little canoes of dark wood"² which were not unlike those used by his own people when a dead warrior was "floated away to the starry archipelagoes."³ That Melville wanted his readers to see a connection with the primitive culture was hinted when he wrote:

There was some heathenish, coffin-colored old lumber aboard, which upon a long previous voyage, had been cut from the aboriginal groves of the Lackaday Islands, and from these dark planks the

coffin was recommended to be made.\footnote{1}{Ibid.}

This idea was further developed when Melville described Queequeg's preparations for death. When the coffin had been completed, Queequeg had it provisioned for his voyage "adown the dim ages"\footnote{2}{Ibid.}

He then called for his harpoon, had the wooden stock drawn from it, and then had the iron part placed in the coffin along with one of the paddles of his boat . . . also, biscuits . . . a flask of fresh water . . . a small bag of woody earth . . . and a piece of sail-cloth being rolled up for a pillow, Queequeg now entreated to be lifted into his final bed . . . then told one to go to his bag and bring out his little god, Yojo.\footnote{3}{Ibid., p. 475.}

Critics have devoted many words to the significance of Queequeg's coffin—and rightly so. Again Melville had used an object with ambivalent symbolic significance. When Queequeg recovered and began the decoration of this object which was to contain his body after death, the richly decorated coffin took on the appearance of Queequeg himself, for he copied the mysterious signs from his body onto the coffin. Concerning the significance of the tattoos Melville wrote:

And this tattooing had been the work of a departed prophet and seer of his island, who by those hieroglyphic marks, had written out on his body a complete theory of the heavens and the earth, and a mystical treatise on the art of attaining truth . . . \footnote{4}{Ibid., p. 477.}
Later in the tale the coffin is converted into a life-saver and is the "saviour" of Queequeg's partner, Ishmael. The prayer which Ishmael had shouted in Chapter III had finally been answered: "... for God's sake ... Coffin! Angels! save me!" The coffin life buoy rises from the depths of the sea and saves the young Quester, Ishmael.

Round and round, then, and ever contracting towards the button-like black bubble at the axis of that slowly wheeling circle, like another Ixion I did revolve. Till, gaining that vital centre, the black bubble upward burst; and now, liberated by reason of its cunning spring, and, owing to its great buoyancy, rising with great force, the coffin life-buoy shot lengthwise from the sea, fell over, and floated by my side. Buoyed up by that coffin, for almost one whole day and night, I floated on a soft and dirge-like main. The unharming sharks they glided by as if with padlocks on their mouths; the savage sea-hawks sailed with sheathed beaks. On the second day, a sail drew near, nearer, and picked me up at last. It was the devious-cruising Rachel, that in her retracing search after her missing children, only found another orphan.

Water as the source of life. In this highly evocative passage Melville has again united life and death. Melville's sea is the primal water--the source of life. Ishmael has returned to the matrix of creation to the "vital centre, the black bubble ... " Is Ishmael the reborn Dionysus? In writing about Dionysus as the child-archetype, C. Kerenyi stated:

1Ibid., p. 24. 2Ibid., p. 566.
The Iliad speaks of the sea as Dionysus’ refuge . . . According to a Laconian variant of the mythologem, the Dionysus child was washed ashore in a chest with his dead mother. . . . In his cult at Lerna, Dionysus is summoned to rise from the deep . . . Only about one thing are we not altogether clear: How could anybody, even a god, come out of the depths of the sea on a ship, which floats on the water?

We now know that the prime element whose symbol—and nothing more than a symbol—is the sea has the peculiarity that floating in it and rising out of it mean the same thing. Both imply a state of being not yet separated from not-being, yet still being. The dolphin-riding boy of the coins—the classic Greek representation of the Primordial Child-god—is sometimes shown winged, sometimes holding a lyre, sometimes holding the club of Heracles. Accordingly he is to be viewed now as Eros, now as an Apollonian, now as a Hermetic or Herculean figure; we must take him, in fact, as these divinities while they were in the womb of the universe, floating, in their embryonic state, on the primal waters.¹

Like Dionysus, the orphan child of ancient myth, Ishmael has returned to the womb and has been reborn.

A basic symbol from the pattern of the Grail stories, that of the Perilous Chapel, has been observed in such episodes as Ishmael's visits to the Negro church, Father Mapple's Chapel, and the Arsacidian temple. Also, such ambivalent symbolic details as light and shadow, verdure and ashes or dust, whiteness and blackness, have been seen to be present within the symbol. Two of the recurring

symbols of the Perilous Chapel, the stone and the cross, have been found in Melville's novel as well as in the ritual of the primitives.

Related to the symbol of the cross is the Tree of Life, and parallels have been found between the Tree of Life of the primitives and the coffin, which is Ishmael's vehicle of salvation.


The whale as symbol. The next symbol to be examined is perhaps the most elusive symbol in the novel. In analyzing the symbolism of the whale, D. H. Lawrence wrote: "Of course, he is a symbol. Of what? I doubt if even Melville knew exactly. That's the best of it." Critics have variously identified the whale with nature, fate, sex, and even God himself. Concerning the multiplicity of meaning of Moby Dick, Richard Chase has written:

As a symbol the whale is endlessly suggestive of meanings. It is as significant and manifold as Nature herself, and, of course, that is the point. Like nature the whale is paradoxically benign and malevolent, nourishing and destructive. It is massive, brutal, monolithic, but at the same time protean, erotically

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beautiful, infinitely variable. It appears to be unpredictable and mindless; yet it is controlled by certain laws.\footnote{R. W. Short, "Melville as Symbolist," Interpretations of American Literature, Charles Feidelson, Jr., and Paul Brodtkorb, Jr., editors (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 112.}

Concerning this ambivalence of the symbolism of the whale, R. W. Short has written:

He contains all possibilities, at least all that Melville intuitively grasped. Therefore he is evil, though he is not Evil; and he is evil only from the human point of view, which though limited is still of consequence to us. Moby Dick is all that critics have called him and more, for this is a paramount case of a whole greater than the sum of its parts. Too few of the critics have accepted the unmistakable statement of moral ambivalence in the famous chapter, "The Whiteness of the Whale," a statement supported throughout the work by subordinate ironies. We might say that Moby Dick is God. Melville would doubtless have objected to this ascription because of the name's doctrinal adhesions.

Leslie A. Fiedler does not identify Moby Dick as God, yet he also sees the whale as that "ungraspable phantom," the mysterious divine. He has written the following statement concerning his interpretation of the great Leviathan:

Is not Moby Dick, after all, identified with Leviathan himself; and is not Leviathan the immortal symbol of the inscrutability of the created world, a mystery not to be resolved until the end of days? Is not that lower inscrutability, moreover, a type of the higher, of the ultimate mystery of the divine? Melville, for whom in Moby Dick the precepts of the New Testament are irrelevant, and who put in Christ's place a Polynesian harpoon, could not close his ears to the Old Testament challenge: "Canst thou catch Leviathan with a hook?"
And does not the man who tries, does not Ahab become, in his alienation, his sultanism, his pride, blasphemy, and diabolism, finally more monstrous than the beast he hunts? When, on the last day, they confront each other, which is the monster, Moby Dick in his "gentle joyousness," his "mighty mildness of repose," or Captain Ahab screaming his mad defiance?  

Passages in the novel such as the following express the idea that the whale is the emblem of the secrets of life and the mysteries of creation:

But far beneath this wondrous world upon the surface, another and still stranger world met our eyes, as we gazed over the side. 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. . . . Some of the subtlest secrets of the seas seemed divulged to us in this enchanted pond. We saw young Leviathan amours in the deep. And thus, though surrounded by circle upon circle of consternations and affrights, did these inscrutable creatures at the centre freely and fearlessly indulge in all peaceful concerns; yes, serenely revelled in dalliance and delight.

That a creature of the sea is used to represent the "ungraspable phantom," in this fertility drama is understandable, for the belief that all life comes from the water is ancient. Jessie Weston wrote: "Fish is a life symbol of immemorial antiquity, and . . . the title of Fisher has, from the earliest ages, been associated with Deities who

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2Melville, op. cit., pp. 386-87.
were held to be specially connected with the origin and preservation of life."¹ She further pointed out that the fish was first a symbol of Orpheus, later of Christ. Among the mystery cults, fish played an important part as the holy food. The Jewish fish symbolism is concerned with the belief that at the end of the world, Messias will catch the great Fish Leviathan, and divide its flesh among the faithful.² While Melville gave no direct clue that the whale represented God, he did indicate that he was aware that it was conceivable that God might be incarnate in a whale. Several times in Moby Dick, Melville referred to the Oriental myth that Vishnu was incarnate in the form of a leviathan.³ The possibility of the deity's being incarnate in a whale was stated by Melville in Chapter LXXIX when he wrote:

But in the great Sperm Whale, this high and mighty god-like dignity inherent in the brow is so immensely amplified, that gazing on it, in that full front view, you feel the Deity and the dread powers more forcibly than in beholding any other object in living nature. . . . And this reminds me that had the great Sperm Whale been known to the young Orient World, he would have been deified by their child-magian thoughts. . . . If hereafter any highly cultured, poetical nation shall lure back to their birth-right, the merry May-day gods of old; and livingly enthrone them again in the now egotistical sky; in the now unhaunted hill; then be sure, exalted to Jove's high seat, the great Sperm

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³Melville, *op. cit.*, *e.g.*, p. 362.
Whale shall lord it.¹

The implied bisexuality of Moby Dick is quite possibly the reason he has been equated with God and with the mystery of creation. Concerning the whale's bisexuality, Henry A. Murray wrote: "Who is the psychoanalyst who could resist the immediate inference that the image of the mother as well as the image of the father is contained in the Whale?"² Newton Arvin has also observed the androgynous characteristics of Moby Dick in his analysis of the symbolism of the whale. He wrote:

On every ground we are forced to confront a profound ambiguity in Moby Dick and to end by confessing that he embodies neither the father merely nor the mother but, by a process of condensation, the parental principle inclusively. Of his basic maleness there can be no question, not only because we are everywhere reminded of his preternatural power and masculine strength but because, in detail, we are required to contemplate the "battering-ram" of his head, the highly prized spermaceti with which it is so richly stored, his phallus ("The Cassock"), and his tail (with its Titanism of power); there is even a suggested association with the phallic serpent-god of the Ophites. Yet along with all this we cannot ignore a certain bisexuality in the image, if not literally of Moby Dick, then of the Sperm Whale generally; a bisexuality that is conveyed to us partly by the glimpses we have into his "beautiful mouth" and "the great Kentucky Mammoth Cave of his stomach"—that stomach in which, as Father Mapple’s sermon reminds us, Jonah was swallowed up as in a womb—but also, and chiefly, by the obstetric imagery of the chapter (LXXVIII) in which Tashtego falls into the liquid depths of a Sperm Whale's severed head and is rescued or "delivered," like a baby, by

¹ Ibid., pp. 345-46.
Moby Dick is thus the archetypal Parent; the father, yes, but the mother also, so far as she becomes a substitute for the father. And the emotions Moby Dick evokes in us are the violently contradictory emotions that prevail between parent and child. Too little, curiously, has been made of this; what dominates most accounts of the White Whale is the simple vindictive emotion that Ahab is alleged to feel toward him, and of course there can be no question of his Oedipal bitterness toward Moby Dick; his conviction that the Whale is the embodiment of "all the subtle demonisms of life and thought"; in short, "all evil." Yet hatred of this obsessive and even paranoid sort is but the deformation of a still more deep-seated love, and Ahab is as tightly bound to Moby Dick as an unhappy child to a parent too passionately loved. The emotion, however, that the Sperm Whale inspires is not restricted to Ahab's monomaniac vengefulness; from the very outset we are conscious also of Ishmael's feelings, and though at one pole these are identified with Ahab's, at the other they are by no means the same. They are, at any rate, more openly and obviously contradictory: the "grand hooded phantom," as it swims before Ishmael's fancy, may inspire a kind of fear but it inspires also an intensity of mystical longing that is something like love.¹

Just as the symbolism of Melville's white whale has baffled critics, so has the significance of the Grail been debated by the scholars who have searched for the origin of the romances. Alfred Nutt, an upholder of the Celtic theory, saw analogies between the Grail and a cauldron of Tuatha de Danaan. The vessel had the magical power of always satisfying those who ate from it. R. S. Loomis, another proponent of the Celtic theory, has argued

in Arthurian Tradition and Chrétien de Troyes that the prototype was a horn of plenty. Scholars such as A. E. Waite, who argue that the Grail is of Christian origin, identify the vessel as a relic associated with the sacrament of the Last Supper. While the purpose of this study is not to examine various theories which scholars have formulated to explain the origin of the Grail romances, the basic similarity of the explanations should be noted. In each case the Grail represents an exoteric object with esoteric powers— it is a vessel full of mysteries— it is the "un-graspable phantom" in search of which the Pequod ranged over the seas from Nantucket to the Sea of Japan.

There is in the symbol of the whale the image of the Grail. Certainly in the passages in the novel wherein Melville describes the bleeding whales with harpoons stuck in their bodies the reader is reminded of the bleeding lance and cup image of the Grail stories. Likewise the description of the spirit-spout in Chapter LI is very reminiscent of the passages in the Grail legends which describe the appearance of the Grail:

It was while gliding through these latter waters that one serene and moonlight night, when all the waves rolled by like scrolls of silver; and, by their soft, suffusing seetheings, made what seemed a silvery silence, not a solitude; on such a silent night a silvery jet was seen far in advance of the white bubbles at the bow. Lit up by the moon, it looked
celestial; seemed some plumed and glittering god uprising from the sea.\textsuperscript{1}

Strikingly similar to Melville's vision of the whale is the depiction of the Grail in the scene wherein Launcelot visits the mysterious chapel:

Then Launcelot saw the door of the chapel open and the ancient hermit, Xaciens, who had brought Galahad to Camelot, came out carrying the silver candlestick, which he set upon the marble block which now seemed like an altar in front of the cross. Then, as Xaciens stood beside the altar in prayer, suddenly the Holy Grail, covered in a fair white cloth, came gliding on a pure moonbeam and rested awhile near the candles—-and their light seemed as dim as if the sun shone, and dim also was the light of the full moon in the glorious brightness of the Light within the covered Grail.\textsuperscript{2}

Numerous passages which describe the whale in Melville's novel are analogous with descriptions of the Grail. There is, also in the symbol of the whale a connection with the primitive. F. O. Matthiessen, in commenting about this, wrote: "... Melville keeps coming back to the primitive, pre-human energies that are represented by the whale."\textsuperscript{3} To grasp the "ungraspable phantom" the reader must go back to the primitive, or as James Baird expresses it:

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{1}Melville, op. cit., p. 231.
\textsuperscript{2}Green, op. cit., p. 230.
\end{quote}
Each reader must dredge with Melville. The names of God in the whale are the intersections of archaic meanings in the symbol as avatar. Out of primate prehuman energy came the mind of man to measure time; and out of man's blood-consciousness came the necessity for naming his God. Arvin suggests that Melville would have profited by some anthropological knowledge unfamiliar to him: "... he probably did not know, literally, that for many primitive peoples—for peoples as remote from one another as the Annamese, the Tongans, and the Unalit Eskimos—the whale is, or once was, the object of a solemn cult...." There can be no doubt certainly, that this fact would have appealed to Melville. But the totemism of this simple primitive symbol would have taken its place as only a beginning fact. For Moby Dick in his fullness becomes the whole of man's religious history.1

Moby Dick represents, as Harry Levin expressed it, the "lusus naturae ... a preternatural being ... everything and nothing, the absolute, 'the great gliding demon of the seas of life.'" 2

The lance as symbol. In addition to the symbol of the Grail, which has now been equated with the whale in Melville's novel, there is still another related symbol of the Grail pattern which must be examined. This is the symbol of the Bleeding Lance. In relating the Grail stories to the ancient fertility rituals, Jessie Weston speaks of the lance and cup as sex symbols.3 This writer has already

1Baird, op. cit., p. 322.
2Levin, op. cit., p. 223.
3Weston, op. cit., p. 75.
pointed out that critics have interpreted the whale as both a male and female phallic symbol. However, the major male phallic symbol in Melville's novel is Ahab's harpoon. Certainly the consecration of his harpoon in Chapter CXIII reminds the reader of the consecrated lance which Galahad uses. Also, in the passages wherein Melville described the bleeding whales with harpoons stuck in their bodies, the reader recalls the bleeding lance and cup image of the Grail stories. The following example comes from Malory's *The Book of Arthur and His Knights (Le Morte d'Arthur)*:

With that they heard the chamber door open, and there they saw angels; and two bare candles of wax, and the third a towel, and the fourth a spear which bled marvelously, that three drops fell within a box which he held with his other hand. And they set the candles upon the table, and the third the towel upon the vessel, and the fourth the holy spear even upright upon the vessel. And then the bishop made semblant as though he would have gone to the sacring of the mass. And then he took an ubblye which was made in likeness of bread. And at the lifting up there came a figure in likeness of a child, and the visage was as red and as bright as any fire, and smote himself into the bread, so that they all saw it that the bread was formed of a fleshly man; and then he put it into the holy vessel again, and then he did that longed to a priest to do to a mass. And then he went to Galahad and kissed him, and bade him go and kiss his fellows: and so he did anon.

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IV. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE GRAIL AND LANCE AND PRIMITIVE RITUAL

Miss Weston, in developing her hypothesis of the ritual theory, related the Grail symbols to primitive ceremonies. In discussing the connection between the Grail and Lance and primitive ritual she gave an account of a ceremony of the Japanese warrior caste, the Samurai. The young initiate was admitted to the caste after swearing an oath upon a spear. After he had passed a probationary period, during which time he promised to be celibate, a second ceremony was held and he was presented with a cup and was free to marry.¹

The symbolic importance of the cup and lance is shown as well in Frazer's account of a festival which solemnized the death and resurrection of Attis:

Our information as to the nature of these mysteries and the date of their celebration is unfortunately very scanty, but they seem to have included a sacramental meal and a baptism of blood. In the sacrament the novice became a partaker of the mysteries by eating out of a drum and drinking out of a cymbal, two instruments of music which figured prominently in the thrilling orchestra of Attis. The fast which accompanied the mourning for the dead god may perhaps have been designed to prepare the body of the communicant for the reception of the blessed sacrament by purging it of all that could defile by contact the sacred elements. In the baptism the devotee, crowned with gold and wreathed with fillets, descended into a pit, the

¹Weston, op. cit., pp. 75-76.
mouth of which was covered with a wooden grating. A bull, adorned with garlands of flowers, its forehead glittering with gold leaf, was then driven onto the grating and there stabbed to death with a consecrated spear. Its hot reeking blood poured in torrents through the apertures, and was received with devout eagerness by the worshipper on every part of his person and garments, till he emerged from the pit, drenched, dripping, and scarlet from head to foot, to receive the homage, nay the adoration, of his fellows as one who had been born again to eternal life and had washed away his sins in the blood of the bull.¹

Three of the integral symbols of the Grail pattern—the Perilous Chapel, the Grail, and the Bleeding Lance and Cup—have been observed to be present in Melville's story about man's instinct for sacrament and atonement. Further, these symbols have been observed to be significant in ancient rituals.

¹Frazer, op. cit., p. 408.
CHAPTER V

THE HOLY VESSEL

Supplied by a sub-sub-librarian. "It will be seen that this ... sub-sub-librarian\(^1\) has gone questing in the vast body of Melville criticism, Grail lore, and Jungian psychology in search for the "ungraspable phantom" of the symbol pattern in Moby Dick; however, as each lower level was reached this sub-sub-librarian heard the exhortation, "Hark ye yet again, the little lower layer."\(^2\) While the quest to reach the anagogical level is an unending one, this sub-sub-librarian has caught glimpses of Melville's holy vessel.

The structure of the vessel. The major discovery has been the presence of an archetypal pattern in the symbolism. Symbols of the Grail romances--the Fisher King, the Waste Land, the Quester, the Initiation, the Perilous Chapel, and the Bleeding Lance and Cup--have been seen to be present in the archetypal pattern which Melville used to tell his tale of rebirth.

Ahab has been equated with the Fisher King, who, leading Grail scholars have pointed out, is the central

\(^1\)Melville, op. cit., p. xxiii. \(^2\)Ibid., p. 162.
figure in the Grail romances, just as Ahab is the chief character in Melville's romance. This central role of Ahab and the Fisher King has not always been immediately observed, and frequently the Quester erroneously has been given center stage. Like the Fisher King, Ahab suffers from a crippling wound. There is a further parallel in that the maiming of the Fisher King results in the wasting of the land.

Certainly the motif of the Waste Land found its way into the pattern of Melville's imagery. The atmosphere both ashore and aboard the Pequod was cold and bleak. What except a feeling of monotony and horror of one's life could be felt in the sterile, barren atmosphere of the Pequod? The men, however, wanted more. They were questers in search of life's great adventure. They had left the darkness of a Nantucket winter behind and had gone in quest of riches--the sperm whale.

To this sub-sub-librarian the voyage of the Pequod has been a voyage of discovery, and Melville's symbols have taken on deeper meanings as they have been viewed in the framework of the archetypal pattern. Ishmael is the Quester who takes a journey in search of the "ungraspable phantom of life." During the voyage he is initiated into many of the mysteries of life and this orphan, this "wild ass among men," discovers in his initiation that the horrors of his
existence can be forgotten when, in Dionysiac fashion, he lets himself go so that he feels the bond of kinship with his fellow man. He unites with all of the Pequod crew in their frenzied assault upon the great white whale—the totem animal of Nantucket men. Together, "in the long try-watches of the night," they eat biscuit fried in spermaceti oil (tantamount to a communal devouring of the flesh). But the real communion comes when they sit together on the deck of the ship and squeeze the lumps of sperm into fluid.

I bathed my hands among those soft, gentle globules . . . I forgot all about our horrible oath; in that inexpressible sperm, I washed my hands and my heart of it . . . I squeezed that sperm till a strange sort of insanity came over me . . . Such an abounding, affectionate, friendly, loving feeling did this avocation beget; that at last I was continually squeezing their hands, and looking up into their eyes sentimentally; as much as to say,—Oh! my dear fellow beings, why should we longer cherish any social acerbities, or know the slightest ill-humor or envy! Come; let us squeeze hands all round; nay, let us all squeeze ourselves into each other; let us squeeze ourselves universally into the very milk and sperm of kindness.

How different is the Ishmael of Chapter XCIV from the
Ishmael of Chapter I, who said of himself: "... that it requires a strong moral principle to prevent me from deliberately stepping into the street, and methodically knocking people's hats off..." Has not Ishmael, the initiate,

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1 Ibid., p. 299. 2 Ibid., pp. 414-15. 3 Ibid., p. 1.
participated in a transformation ceremony, which in turn has changed him from an outcast to one of the brotherhood?

The suggestion of mystery and the supernatural which is present in the initiation ceremonies aboard the Pequod is further emphasized and developed in the symbols of the Perilous Chapel, the Grail, and the Bleeding Lance. These symbols which complete the pattern of the Grail romances have also been observed in Melville's work.

Techniques for examining the structure. The sub-sub-librarian agrees with Harry Levin that "there is no cogency in the varying labels with which his [Moby Dick's] interpreters have attempted to tag him." However, as more light from the shining Grail pattern is shed on Melville's besmoked painting, the image becomes clearer.

Another light which sheds a bright beam on Melville's masterpiece is the reflection from Frazer's Golden Bough. The same Grail archetype is to be seen in primitive rituals such as the killing of the king to insure the fertility of the land, the initiation into the Dionysian cult, the worship of stones and trees, the killing of the totem animal and bathing in its blood.

Grail scholarship is of such magnitude that this

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1 Levin, op. cit., p. 223.
"merely painstaking burrower and grub-worm of a poor devil of a Sub-Sub" has, according to the magnitude, divided it into three primary categories: I. the Folio, consisting of the Byzantine and Judaeo-Christian theory; II. the Octavo, consisting of the Celtic theory; and III. the Duodecimo, consisting of the Ritual theory. These major theories concerning the origin of the Grail romances have common bases in that all have an exoteric object or act which has esoteric significance. One basis for the Celtic theory is the horn (Grail), which always supplies its users with sustenance and even restores to life any body which is placed in it. Proponents of the Judaeo-Christian theory equate the spear used in piercing the bread or wafer in the Byzantine Communion Mass with the Grail Lance. By this act the bread becomes the body of Christ and the wine in the chalice is transformed into the blood of Christ. A basis for the Ritual theory is the primitive custom of killing a sick or old king to restore the fertility of his kingdom.

The transcendence of life is apparent in each of the explanations of origin. This is not surprising, as psycho-

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1 Melville, op. cit., p. xxiii.
gists have found that "rebirth is an affirmation that must be counted among the primordial affirmations of mankind." While C. G. Jung did not write directly about the Grail pattern, he did comment on the rituals of the Eleusinian mysteries as well as the Christian Mass. Concerning these mysteries he wrote:

The initiate who ritually enacts the slaying, dismemberment, and scattering of Osiris, and afterwards his resurrection in the green wheat, experiences in this way the permanence and continuity of life, which outlasts all changes of form and, phoenix-like, continually rises anew from its own ashes. This participation in the ritual event gives rise, among other effects, to that hope of immortality which is characteristic of the Eleusinian mysteries.  

In commenting upon the Mass, Jung wrote:

The Mass is an extramundane and extratemporal act in which Christ is sacrificed and then resurrected in the transformed substances; and this rite of his sacrificial death is not a repetition of the historical event but the original, unique, and eternal act. The experience of the Mass is therefore a participation in the transcendence of life, which overcomes all bounds of space and time. It is a moment of eternity in time.  

**Evaluation of the structure.** Critics of Melville's *Moby Dick* have been poles apart in their evaluations of Melville's form. One critic with whom this sub-sub-librarian takes issue is R. F. Blackmur, who wrote, in an essay

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on Melville's craft:

He added nothing to the novel as a form, and his work nowhere showed conspicuous mastery of the formal devices of fiction which he used. Unlike most great writers of fiction, he left nothing to those who followed him except the general stimulus of high and devoted purpose and the occasional particular spur of an image or a rhythm. It is not that he is imitable but that there was nothing formally organized enough in his work to imitate or modify or perfect.1

An understanding of Melville's theme (how can form be examined in isolation?) reveals a formally organized novel. While an extensive analysis of Melville's technique is not the purpose of this study, a few brief statements will be made in connection with the further development of the theme of rebirth.

Many of the incidents of the plot involve the transformation of Ishmael's personality from that of an "Isolato" to that of a member of the inner circle of the human community. From the scene in the Spouter Inn where Ishmael met his savage bedmate to the chapter entitled "The Monkey-Rope," Melville was involved in showing his readers how the transformation had occurred. When Ishmael was able to say,

So that for better or for worse, we two, for the time, were wedded; and should poor Queequeg sink to rise no more, then both usage and honor demanded, that instead

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of cutting the cord, it should drag me down in his
wake. . . . Queequeg was my own inseparable twin
brother: . . . "I
the reader is aware that he has observed the enlargement
of a personality.

Melville has accounted for the transformation of
Ishmael's personality and for the actual rebirth of Ish-
mael in the conclusion of the novel by his use of the
ritualistic pattern of the Grail search. Ishmael, the
Isolato, took part in what Jung termed "a sacred rite
which reveals to him Ishmael the perpetual continuation
of life through transformation and renewal."² By the
controlled and conscious use of images that are "symbols
in the sense that their primal origins are in the unconsc-
cious,"³ and by the repetition of the theme of the novel,
man's primordial affirmation of rebirth, Melville has
written a novel which has a rich symbolic pattern and a
unity in composition not yet achieved in other American
novels. The carefully wrought vessel is there for the
reader who is willing to go down to the depths accompanied
by the Jungian lamp of knowledge and the bright beam

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¹Melville, op. cit., pp. 31-19.
²Jung, The Archetypes and the Collective Unconsc-
cious, p. 117.
³Arvin, op. cit., p. 167.
reflected from Frazer's Golden Bough. Only then can be experienced the luminous moment which comes to the Quester who is privileged to view the elusive vessel.
CHAPTER VI

A SUMMARY

In his introduction to Melville's novel, Alfred Kazin wrote: "Moby Dick is not only a very big book; it is also a peculiarly full and rich one, and from the very opening it conveys a sense of abundance, of high creative power, that exhilarates and enlarges the imagination. . . . we come to feel that there is some shattering magnitude of theme before Melville as he writes."¹ To discover this "shattering magnitude of theme" has been the goal of many renowned literary critics who have caught glimpses of the magnitude yet have not been privileged to obtain a panoramic view of it. To help readers see the richness and unity of Melville's novel has been the goal of this thesis.

Previous critical studies have recognized that the richness of Melville's novel comes from its archetypal nature. "It is a book that is at once primitive, fatalistic, and merciless, like the very oldest books, and yet peculiarly personal, like so many twentieth-century novels, in its significant emphasis on the subjective individual

While many Melville critics have recognized the archetypal nature of the novel, their critical explanations have failed to reveal an archetypal pattern which explains the unity which the reader experiences emotionally. To discover the archetypal pattern, the writer of this study has examined the novel in the light of Jung’s *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*.

A first step was to follow Maude Bodkin’s suggestion in *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry* and give careful study to passages from the novel to which the reader responded emotionally. Some of the evocative passages which were examined included those which described Ishmael’s feeling of a “damp, drizzly November” in his soul; his appeal to Peter Coffin to save him; his interest in Father Mapple’s sermon about Jonah; the contemplation of the “deep, blue bottomless soul” of ocean; Ishmael’s philosophizing about Life as he is tied to Queequeg by the monkey rope; Queequeg’s Caesarean rescue of Tashtego; and finally Ishmael’s descent into the “button-black bubble at the axis of that slowly wheeling circle” and his ascent when the “black bubble upward burst.” An examination of these emotion-evoking scenes reveals a psychological unity in the novel.

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The experience communicated by Melville is "the tidal ebb toward death followed by life renewal." ¹

Recalling T. S. Eliot's The Waste Land, a twentieth-century work based upon the theme of rebirth, initiated the next step in the study. An examination was made of Miss Jessie Weston's research concerning the Grail romances to which Eliot had alluded in his notes to The Waste Land. According to her hypothesis as related in From Ritual to Romance, the Grail stories show traces of the initiation rituals of ancient religions, rituals which revealed to the initiate the continuation of life through transformation. Miss Weston identified the symbols in the Grail romances as the Fisher King, the Waste Land, the Quester, the Initiation, the Perilous Chapel, the Grail, and the Bleeding Lance. An examination of Moby Dick revealed that all of these basic symbols of the Grail stories are also present in the novel.

Beyond showing the parallels between Moby Dick and medieval romances, this thesis has also referred to anthropological studies to point out connections with primitive rituals.

The major conclusion reached in this thesis is that

Melville's "shattering magnitude of theme" is the primordial affirmation of rebirth. A further finding of his study is Melville's use of the archetypal pattern of the Grail romances—the Fisher King, the Waste Land, the Quester, the Initiation, the Perilous Chapel, the Grail, and the Bleeding Lance—all images which have stirred men's minds since primitive ages.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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