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The Children of Cain: Melville's Use of the Abject Lineage from the Bible

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THE CHILDREN OF CAIN: MELVILLE'S USE OF THE ABJECT LINEAGE FROM THE
BIBLE

THE CHILDREN OF CAIN: MELVILLE'S USE OF THE ABJECT LINEAGE FROM THE
BIBLE

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in English

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ABSTRACT

This study looks at how the abject lineage—consisting of Cain, Ishmael and Esau—has played an influential role in the works of Herman Melville. While many critics have explored the relationship between Melville and these characters in the past, my study proposes that the author was intimately aware of the differences between these characters and their relationship to God and used these differences to compose his works. Ultimately, Melville struggled with the need for an abject lineage, and this struggle manifests itself most prominently in the evolving silence of Christ from *Mardi* to “Bartleby.”

This dissertation is approved for recommendation
to the Graduate Council.

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When someone pursues a Ph.D. in anything, it is never in a self-contained space. Energy that is used to obtain the degree is drawn from other areas of one's life: family, friends, loved ones, etc. It requires a great deal of patience on the part of those with whom you share your life. I am grateful that those I love most dearly have had—and continue to show—patience with my, at times, seemingly selfish, monomaniacal pursuit of my own white whale.

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Lastly, I thank Herman Melville, whose constant struggle with Christianity on the pages allowed me to better reflect upon my own relationship with God off of them. May this study do you justice.

DEDICATIONS

I dedicate this dissertation to my family. Their constant support throughout my pursuit of a Ph.D. never let me forget that I am and always will be simply their son and brother. As I move forward in my life, I hope to never forget this.

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God try and forgive me and bless my mother...I do not repent the blow I struck. I may before God but not to man. I think I have done well, though I am abandoned, with the curse of Cain upon me. When if the world knew my heart, *that one* blow would have made me great, though I did desire no greatness. (qtd. in Rhodehamel and Taper 155)

The above quote sounds as if it could have come from any number of the dark Romantic poets who so influenced many of the works of Herman Melville. This quote, however, is actually taken from the diary of John Wilkes Booth, dated Friday, April 21st, 1865. The reason why I begin with the words of a man whose deplorable act still reverberates in our minds today is because of the bifurcating tone with which Booth speaks. He does not feel remorse for his actions; he feels justified in them. Booth concludes this entry in his journal with an allusion to Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. He writes, "I do not wish to shed a drop of blood, but 'I must fight the course' 'Tis all that [sic] left me" (qtd. in Rhodehamel and Taper 155). These final sentiments indicate that he has become a man who is burdened by two diametrically opposing visions of the Divine: His omnipresence, in the form of the metaphorical mark Booth now feels upon his brow; and the simultaneous sense of loneliness in the form of the chasm that now exists between the murderer and his maker.

Booth's use of Cain acts as a self-reflective admission that what he has done is a deplorable act. Cain also laments his actions before God, which is essentially what Booth admits to, that he may regret his action "before God, but not to man." Booth does not directly ask God for forgiveness; he merely hopes for it. To ask God for forgiveness directly would be to solicit an answer, and Booth is either not ready to hear what that answer will be, or he already knows in his heart what the answer is. He has become an abject figure, and he uses the familiar biblical character of Cain in order to make others understand this internal struggle that will forever shape

his life. Melville understood just how powerful of an ethos this was, and he used it throughout his literature.

In *Omoo*, Melville mentions a “renegado from Christendom and humanity—a white man” (353) among the Tahitians who is “tattooed in the face” with a mark that was “Far worse than Cain’s” (353). What is interesting about this section is that later in his works Melville will use similar references to Cain as a way to explore the idea of predestination. However, in *Omoo* the horror is not that God has marked this man, but that “he had voluntarily submitted to this embellishment of his countenance” (353). There is a sense of autonomy in Melville’s abject figures that gives them a type of power. In relation to their position to God, however, this power is virtually useless. It is, in a Calvinistic sense, little more than an illusion. As Melville must have learned early on in his dealings with Calvin’s doctrines, the all-encompassing will of God can never be subverted; therefore, a rebellious spirit does little more than create a show of force, a theatrical event. It is perhaps with this in mind that Melville gives us his stage direction in *Moby-Dick*.

Cain is the progenitor for what I am simply calling the abject lineage of the Bible. They are the first-born sons of the great early patriarchs of Genesis, consisting of Cain, Ishmael and Esau. The abject sons carry with them the blood of the elect, but they do not share in their respective brothers’ election. They are exiles, orphans in both flesh and spirit, and yet these figures help shape the history of the Bible and the elect line. Melville was not the only author in his time to write about the impact of these figures on society. Hawthorne too understood this concept when he wrote in the *Scarlet Letter*, “Hester Prynne came to have a part to perform in the world. With her native energy of character, and rare capacity, it could not entirely cast her off, although it had set a mark upon her, more intolerable to a woman’s heart than that which

branded the brow of Cain” (190). Melville internalized the abject ethos even more than Hawthorne, for his most charismatic antiheroes all display the fiery vigor of Cain; the longing for a strong patriarchal bond, like Ishmael; and the willingness to sell their birthright for a pot of lentils, like Esau. This study proposes that Melville understood the intricacies of these figures, and that this internalization of the abject ethos significantly shaped the arch of his literary canon.

Part 1: Arriving at the term “Abject”: Kristeva and Milton Considered

Kristeva’s *Powers of Horror*

I use the term “abject” throughout my study. I would be remiss if I did not at least mention Julia Kristeva’s book, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Although my use of the word is somewhat different from Kristeva’s, I would like to highlight portions of her book that helped me to better understand the term “abject” in regard to literature. First, let us look at how Kristeva defines the term. For Kristeva, the abject is essentially an idea that “disturbs identity, system, order” (4). That the abject figures of the Old Testament disturb the order of things is self-evident to anyone with even the slightest familiarity with their respective stories; however, we always need to keep in mind the looming sense of not simply Calvinism, but Melville’s specific use of Calvin. What Melville seems to have focused on the most in his use of Calvin’s doctrine is that all-encompassing notion of Providence. To someone like Melville who had a firm understanding of Calvinistic doctrine, the idea of “disturbing” God’s system would make little sense, for nothing can occur without the will or consent of God. This will be discussed in more depth throughout the work; however, the following quote from Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion* should suffice to serve as a proper foreground.

Since God claims to himself the right of governing the world, a right unknown to us, let it be our law of modesty and soberness to acquiesce in his supreme authority regarding his will as our only rule of justice, and the most perfect cause of all things—not that absolute will, indeed, of which sophists prate, when by a profane and impious divorce, they separate his justice from his power, but that universal, overruling providence from which nothing flows that is not right, though the reasons thereof may be concealed. (125)

Thus, Kristeva's definition here works well enough in terms of how Melville's abject figures may disturb *our* system of order—for who would not be disturbed by the presence of a figure like Bartleby in one's life? However, when we think about how much of Melville works seem to be so heavily influenced and infused with a Calvinistic spirit, it is important that we understand that there is no chance for any individual to disturb the Calvinistic system of Providence.

Another reason why I wish to separate my own use of this word from that of Kristeva's is that her definition includes more "evil" in it—evil in the old fashioned, uncomplicated sense. She tells us that "Abjection...is immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady: a terror that disassembles, a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it, a debtor who sells you up, a friend who stabs you" (4). Certainly Cain's act of murder is a sinister and deplorable act, and Kristeva's definition here can even be argued in terms of Esau's willingness to sell his birthright for a pot of lentils; however, Melville's approach in writing his abject figures is not based upon a simple evil, such as the definition provided for us by Kristeva. One of the main arguments that I am making in this study is that we cannot simply lump these figures together. Yes, Cain, Ishmael and Esau all share similar qualities that make them abject—such as exile, distance from home and God, etc. However, their relationships to and with God are not the same, and we should not read them as such. Ishmael is abject, but he is not hated by God. He is not "evil" in the sense that Cain is considered. We need to pull apart these characters so that we can better understand how Melville uses them.

Miltonic Interest

In Book I of *Paradise Lost*, Milton's Satan gives his fellow fallen angels a motivational speech so that he may rouse them to battle. He says,

...Princes, Potentates,
 Warriors, the Flow'r of Heav'n, once yours, now lost,
 If such astonishment as this can seize
 Eternal spirits; or have ye chos'n this place
 After the toil of Battle to repose
 Your wearied virtue, for the ease you find
 To slumber here, as in the Vales of Heav'n?
 Or in this *abject* posture have ye sworn
 To adore the conqueror?...(Italics mine I.315-23)

Milton uses his Satan figure as an antithetical character to Christ; thus, the pomp that we see in the words here is meant to be looked at in relation to Christ's and God's speeches, which are said with the same amount of zeal, but to different ends of course. Nonetheless, what we find in Satan's speech is a type of abject logic. First, he reminds his comrades of their original lineage, referring to them as "Princes" and "Potentates." This of course fuels within them a feeling that they have a right to certain graces that have been unfairly taken from them by God.

Theologically speaking a simple reference to the book of Job—that God gives and God takes away—is sufficient to show just how far they have fallen from a true understanding of God's omnipotence. Satan then tells the angels that the "Flow'r of Heav'n" was once their own, but it is "now lost." Of course, this will come back to haunt Satan in book four, when in his famous monologue he admits the limitations of his own power in relation to God, and that the required service to the Lord is in fact easy, compared to what He gives back in return. Cain and Esau both have a distorted sense of just how important their birthrights really were. We can see this in their willingness to give them up for the sake of jealousy and the price of food.

The most dangerous part of Satan's speech, however, is the final goading of the fallen angels to recognize their "abject posture." It is in this section that Milton's Satan is actually being his most honest and forthwith. One of the arguments that I put forward throughout this study is that it is the consciousness of the abject in his relationship to God that ultimately brings about the most suffering. The abject is fully aware that he is outside of the election of God. The early American Puritans struggled with the idea of knowing their elect status, whether or not they were in good graces. This helped drive them toward a constant state of attempting to improve their relationship with God. The abject already knows that he is outside of the covenant. He is like Hawthorne's Ethan Brand, cursed with the knowledge of his own damnation.

As Milton does throughout *Paradise Lost*, Satan's words are spoken with grand eloquence—similar to Ahab's—but these words are hollow. We can see the hurt within them, the distance that Satan feels between himself and his Creator. In Melville's copy of Milton, he marks lines 603-05 from Book I, which describe the face of Satan: "Of dauntless courage, and considerate pride / Waiting revenge: *cruel his eye, but cast / Signs of remorse and passion to behold*" (Italics my own; Grey 124). Melville draws attention through his markings to the whole of that passage, but he underscores the italic part. Satan's ability to awaken the fallen angels to their abject status is one such way that we can enter the discussion in this study, for the abject characters of the Old Testament carry with them many of the same traits as that of the ones Milton's Satan highlights above. They have a noble lineage; they are exiled from God; and they are fully conscious of their abjectness, which can have the effect of soliciting a sense of sympathy. Undoubtedly, this is what authors like Byron, Coleridge and especially Blake saw in Milton's epic poem, and out of this interpretation we get beautiful Romantic poetry. However,

as much as we enjoy the charisma of Milton's Satan, to read the fallen archangel as a heroic figure is bad theology—and it is especially bad Calvinism.

As Robert Milder notes, “Melville's heroes resemble, and openly draw upon, the legendary antiheroes (Ishmael, Cain, the Wandering Jew) sometimes featured as interim or crisis phases within the Romantic myth of fortunate return” (Milder 31). That he had a certain amount of sympathy for the abject is fairly obvious; however, it is not as straightforward as the Romantics' depictions of God as a tyrannical ruler, for as Milder also states in the same study, “Melville did not hate God. He wanted to be, and to receive divine recognition as being God's servant” (Milder 116). Although Melville does have sections in his works where he seems to rail against the Divine, there are also moments where he shows a tremendous amount of insight into the nuances of each story, including God's role in each tale. Melville may have also seen in these characters a bit of the embodiment of the American Christian spirit, plagued by the notion of being a part of the “elect,” the new “chosen people,” and yet marked with a spirit of exile and self-reliance that can often seem more in line with an abject spirit.

Part 2: How the Abject Ethos Came to Be

Puritan Inheritance

In R.W.B. Lewis's *The American Adam*, he discusses the American hero as an Adamic figure who “has no world to begin with, but seeks one to come” (128). The Adamic hero is an elect figure, and a popular figure to help define the mindset of early America. For all the struggles of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob they at least have the comfort of knowing that they are under the covenant of God. This of course mirrors the distinction of the American as the new chosen people, under a covenant of election. However, Lewis is careful to make sure that we do

not lump the Adamic hero in with other rebellious figures of literature. He states, “The Adamic hero is an ‘outsider,’ but he is ‘outside’ in a curiously staunch and artistically demanding manner. He is to be distinguished from the kind of outsider—the dispossessed, the superfluous, the alienated, the exiled—who began to enter European fiction in the nineteenth century and who crowds its almost every page in the twentieth” (128). Lewis’s acknowledgement that Adam is a type of outsider is important, and he is right in differentiating that outside nature as being distinctly Adamic. Although Adam and Eve are exiled from the Garden of Eden, they are not exiled from God spiritually. This mindset allowed the early American Puritans to better cope with their own situations in difficult times. Perhaps the most telling example of this is found in Winthrop’s journal, in which he tells the story of the mouse overcoming the snake. Winthrop writes:

...Mr. Wilson, a very sincere, holy man, hearing of it, gave this interpretation: That the snake was the devil; the mouse was a poor contemptible people, which God had brought hither, which should overcome Satan here, and dispossess him of his kingdom. Upon the same occasion, he told the governor, that, before he was resolved to come into this country, he dreamed he was here, and that he saw a church arise out of the earth, which grew up and became a marvelous goodly church. (1:84)

Thus, while there is a sense of loneliness—a mere mouse against such a threatening predator as a snake—there is also a sense of power and election that stems out of that loneliness.

The American ethos has always included the notion of the wayward pilgrim, struggling to come to the New World, where people may escape tyranny and oppression, and embrace the will of a God who has blessed them on their journey to establish a new Eden. As Obenzinger phrases it: “Reenacting biblical narratives, the Puritans did not need to visit the Holy Land: they brought Palestine with them” (23). In a sense, they brought Eden with them as well, and just as the

dwellers of the original Garden could not maintain its glory forever, neither could the Pilgrims who came to the new garden.

The story of the wayward Pilgrim coming to America is still a popular tale that continues to be handed down throughout generations. William V. Spanos is correct when he notes that this story is a “‘representational’ discourse that has acquired hegemonic status (in the sense of becoming a truth discourse that has achieved universal legitimacy)” (27). Simply put, even if we wish to argue against the veracity of the story, the impact of the “lie”¹ has led to truths about the American psyche. For Spanos, Melville rejects this imagined discourse and is “committed to discrediting” it (210-11). That Melville understood the good and bad implications of such a narrative on the American mindset can be found in his works through various characters; however, to say that he set out to discredit the myth seems a bit too staunch of a reading. Melville, like Hawthorne, did not so much attempt to discredit the myth as much as it seems he set out to expose it in order to convey the effects of the story on others. Thus, for the lawyer in “Bartleby,” the myth allows him to feel righteous about his Christian dealings with the scrivener, but on Bartleby himself, an abject character, the myth is merely a reminder that it is not open to him.

For Melville, the abject figures become an integral motif in his works because they cannot fully accept God, nor can they dismiss Him. Part of the abject struggle stems from the puritanical inheritance that both Hawthorne and Melville internalized and then attempted to, at times, expiate in their works through rich allegory and symbolism. As Leslie Fiedler states,

¹I place quotation marks around “lie” because just as one part of the public can go too far in granting too much veracity to the story, there are also those who deny the parts of the story that are true. A balanced view that takes into account the economic implications of both why the Pilgrims came and why they struggled, in correlation with the religious underpinnings for their leaving England, is a much better method for trying to understand the mindset of the early American Christian.

“That tradition was born of the profound contradictions of our national life and sustained by the inheritance from Puritanism of a ‘typical’ (even allegorical) way of regarding the sensible world—not as an ultimate reality but as a system of signs to be deciphered” (29). What these decipherable signs led to is a room for interpretation. Coming out of the Romantic movement—which we can say cleared away some of the cluttering thoughts of the Enlightenment in order to make some room for authors like Hawthorne to creatively breathe—the writers of the American Renaissance thrived on the notion of such a space of imagination. Richard Chase is right to point out that “The American imagination, like the New England Puritan mind itself, seems less interested in redemption than in the melodrama of the eternal struggle of good and evil, less interested in incarnation and reconciliation than in alienation and disorder” (11). Melville will aptly write the influence of the early American ethos in his review, “Hawthorne and His Mosses.” He writes,

Whether Hawthorne has simply availed himself of this mystical blackness as a means to the wondrous effects he makes it to produce in his lights and shades; or whether there really lurks in him, perhaps unknown to himself, a touch of Puritanic gloom,—this, I cannot altogether tell. Certain it is, however, that this great power of blackness in him derives its force from its appeals to that Calvinistic sense of Innate Depravity and Original Sin, from whose visitations, in some shape or other, no deeply thinking mind is always and wholly free. (1159)

Certainly, it seems Melville could never fully detach himself from these notions of “Innate Depravity and Original Sin” either.

Christ’s Humanity vs. Christ’s Divinity in Nineteenth-Century America

One important aspect of the abject argument is predicated on the duality that emerges in the nineteenth century which saw Christ in more human terms. Domhnall Mitchell notes, “the transformation of Christ’s suffering into a mirror of personal suffering, which can be seen either

as an audacious imaginative appropriation or as a greedy exploitation...is also a response to shifts in nineteenth-century theological thinking, which saw Christ transformed from abstract deity to a kind of everyman figure” (191). The problem with this in a purely theological approach is that the more one humanizes Christ the more one is prone to take away the salvific aspect of Jesus’s power. R.E. Watters sees this motif in Melville’s writings as early as in *Mardi*, where he finds a profound “identification of self not with an immanent divinity but instead with an imminent humanity” (35). This shift toward the “everyman figure” allows individuals to feel Christ-like, not in his or her ability to love and forgive as Christ, but in his or her ability to feel the weight of burdens, of a personal cross to bear. Melville’s own works show signs of this focus on the humanity of Christ.

In Melville’s *Battle Pieces*, it is the poem “The Martyr” which may help us better understand how the author approached the duality of Christ and the Father. Even though *Battle-Pieces* consists of poems that were published after the works focused on in this study, part of my contention is that Melville’s use of the abject led him to write stories that progressively conveyed the silence of Christ, but not Jehovah (God as Father). This absence removes the salvific aspect of Christ’s divinity from the works of Melville, and thus, his characters are often left in a space of either damnation—self-inflicted or Godly ascribed—or at best a purgatorial state of ambiguity. This absence of Christ is visible in *Moby-Dick*, but it truly manifests itself in *Pierre*. The tone of the poem below from *Battle-Pieces* will better help us to understand both the humanity that Melville values in Christ’s suffering and how the author separated Jehovah from His Son.

He lieth in his blood—
 The father in his face;
 They have killed him, the Forgiver—
 The Avenger takes his place,

The Avenger wisely stern,
 Who in righteousness shall do
 What the heavens call him to,
 And the parricides remand; ("The Martyr" 142 18-25)

The first aspect of this poem that we need to comprehend is that Melville does understand the nature of the Godhead as being one in the same: thus, there is the Father in Christ's face. He then, however, separates the two: Christ is the Forgiver; Jehovah is the Avenger. The Calvinistic tone of the next three lines cannot be overlooked. The depiction of God as wisely stern and righteous harkens back to Calvin's notion that all things must come through the Divine, and that even the most beloved of God are tested to their limits. Robin Grey, in her discussion of Melville's reading of *Paradise Lost*, goes as far as to say that "Melville is wholly uninterested in creation, or the Son's productive powers. For Melville, the power rests firmly with God; issues of obedience and free will are irrelevant and without meaning" (55). This reading goes a bit further than my own, as I disagree with the extremity of the notion that Melville was "uninterested" in the "productive powers" of the Son; the many allusions to Christ's Sermon alone are indicative of the fact that there is a great interest in the productive powers. The problem for Melville's Christ is one of language. In the works—especially *Pierre*—the liturgical language of the Old Testament seems to drown out the voice of the Son, thus rendering Christ's role to that of a philosopher more than a savior. Melville was not the only poet of the nineteenth century who seems to have viewed things in a similar vein.

Emily Dickinson

Thomas W. Ford rightly points out that "Emily Dickinson, too, wavered between doubt and belief all of her life and, like Melville, was too courageous to give up her honest pursuit of truth" (177). The problem with discussing Emily Dickinson is that one poem can easily be used

to argue against another, for she wrote so many powerful poems that espouse multiple strains of thought that perhaps the only truly conclusive thing that we can say about her religion is that it was something she truly contemplated. Wherever her “honest pursuit of truth” led her, she continually found inspiration for her art through acceptance, at times, and also rejection of God, Christ, and the Bible. Her poetry reflects this bifurcation. We can see this struggle in the poem below.

Far from Love the Heavenly Father
 Leads the Chosen Child,
 Oftener through the Realm of Briar
 Than the Meadow mild.

Oftener by the Claw of Dragon
 Than the Hand of Friend
 Guides the Little One predestined
 To the Native Land. (J# 1021)

In the poem, God leads Jesus not with love but with the “Claw of Dragon.” The term “Dragon” can be read as a reference to Satan from the book of Revelations: “the dragon, that old serpent, which is the devil, and Satan” (Revelations 20.2). Dickinson’s God is not depicted as a loving father figure; rather, He becomes a symbol of selfish power, leading the Son away from love and toward His preordained suffering. Clearly, Dickinson’s God is a God to be feared. This seems to have caused Dickinson much strife. She appears uncomfortable in her poetry with the idea of a God who commands one to “fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body” (Matthew 10.28). Although she may have found little comfort in the paternal image of God, she did find some comfort in the image of the Son, although it is not the divine characteristics of Christ that Dickinson found appealing.

Dickinson’s wavering bouts with Christian doctrine often leave critics with an inability to pinpoint exactly where she stands on her religious principles, much like Melville. For

Christians, death is supposed to be a returning home, a parting from this world into a better one. Dickinson, however, in the poem that follows, is certainly not at peace with leaving the material world behind.

God is indeed a jealous God –
He cannot bear to see
That we had rather not with Him
But with each other play. (J# 1718)

This rebellious temporal-bound poet is the Dickinson that many critics tend to focus their attention on when discussing her relationship to religion; however, often times, Dickinson's more serene poems are glossed over. In poem 1145, she seems to be completely comforted in the notion of going to Heaven.

In thy long Paradise of Light
No moment will there be
When I shall long for Earthly Play
And mortal Company – (J# 1145)

Here, Dickinson believes that once she is in Heaven, she will no longer yearn for the company of mortals. What we see in this poem is a woman who, despite her misgivings about the theology, finds mercy and comfort in the idea of leaving the troubles of the temporal world behind. When compared to other poets who have written on the subject of the wonders of Heaven, it is quite a bland poem; however, in the context of the works of Emily Dickinson, it is almost like the eye of a hurricane. It is a moment of peace, amongst a whirlwind of tribulation. We find these moments of peace in Melville's works as well.

Dickinson's problematic relationship with her faith continues to fascinate scholars. Elizabeth Phillips is correct when she says, "Had [Dickinson] accepted the shibboleths of conventional Christianity, she would not only have been a different poet but a less disquieting one" (202). Her struggle to reconcile the wrathful God of the Old Testament with the more

sensitive God, manifested in the Son, of the New Testament is inherently clear in her poems, and it is this internal struggle that makes her poetry so engaging.

Part 3: Melville's Religious Approach: Kitto, Augustine, and Calvin

Kitto's *Cyclopedia*

There is ample evidence to show that Melville was at least familiar with John Kitto's *Cyclopedia* when he wrote *Moby-Dick*.² Howard P. Vincent's claim that Kitto's *Cyclopedia of Biblical Literature* was "a standard decoration for English and American parlor tables" (271) in nineteenth-century homes gives us at least a cultural point of reference for how Melville may have been acquainted with Kitto's work. There are, however, critics who believe that Melville had a more intimate knowledge with the *Cyclopedia*.

In "Bible Leaves! Bible Leaves!" Elise New states, "Kitto's contribution to Melville's [*Moby-Dick*] is largely methodological. Kitto helps Melville to adumbrate the epistemological necessity of the historical, or Hebraic, method that Melville will...go on to refashion into a virtue" (296). Essentially New argues that Melville sought to raise the stature of Hebraism, which for New stands for historical truth, against the lies of the Hellenistic present-day Christianity that Melville faced in his own time. In response to New's claims, Ilana Pades offers a counter argument in which she admits that although New's study is intriguing, Melville's "endorsement of the historicism of biblical scholarship...is far from uncritical. What is more, Melville is equally intrigued by the exegetical potential of allegorical readings. He plays

²Sealts does not cite Kitto as a verified source, but he does acknowledge that it is one of the works with which scholars believe Melville may have had direct or indirect knowledge (70). Bercaw lists Kitto in her study (#421).

historical and allegorical readings of the Bible against each other...[, thriving] on both while uncovering their respective limitations” (48).

That Melville drew upon Hebraic literature when writing his works is evident. However, I would not go so far as to argue that Melville found more “Truth” in Hebraism than he did in anything else he read and took from. New is correct in pointing out that “Melville’s Hebraism extends...to a defense of truth’s accountability to and fertilization in law—that is, in idea ratified by practice. For Melville, both acts and words become part of a historical body of precedent and practical knowledge with purview over and conversance with the hearkening present” (299). Whereas New seems to find in Melville a strength in his defense of the Hebraic word, I find in the author a growing sense of lethargy, a weakness in his spirit, as he attempts to fight off the historicity of the Old Testament in light of a New Testament, Christian understanding.

Augustine

In *Pierre*, Melville writes that “The gods love the soul of a man; often, they will frankly accost it; but they abominate his body” (299). In Henry A. Murray’s 1949 edition of *Pierre*, he rightly notes that this view was “incorporated into Christian theology, especially through the influence of St. Augustine...” (492-3). Augustine’s reading of the eternal struggle between the flesh and the spirit can be rightly considered in the realm of common knowledge, especially when we understand how influential Augustine was in the shaping of Judeo-Christian theology and on John Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. The entry in Kitto’s 1845 *Cyclopedia* of the story of Cain and Abel takes into account Augustine’s reading of the murder. The entry in Kitto reads, “St. Augustine, speaking of regeneration, alludes to Abel as representing the new or spiritual man in contradistinction to the natural or corrupt man, and says, ‘Cain founded a city on

earth, but Abel as a stranger and pilgrim looked forward to the city of saints which is in heaven” (1: 9). Wyn Kelley, in *Melville’s City*, does a tremendously thorough job of discussing how Melville utilizes Augustine’s theology of the two cities in his works, showing just how “urban form and its popular literary representations enter into Melville’s work, shaping his plots, coloring his language, and signaling his dialogic relation with the city and its culture” (2). Ultimately, we find that Melville very much seems to have internalized the duality between urban and suburban, city of man and city of God. It is for this reason that Augustine plays such an important role in this study.

Kitto and the Abject Figures

Although we don’t have specifics as to which edition of Kitto’s *Cyclopedia* Melville may have read, it is fascinating to look at the differences between the earlier 1845 edition and the later 1865 one. What we find in the later edition is a more Romantic reading of the abject figures. Thus, just as Melville seems to have evolved in his own use of and interaction with these forlorn figures of Genesis so too did Kitto’s own work. The 1865 edition of the *Cyclopedia* goes beyond the point of focus for this study—my final chapter deals with “Bartleby, the Scrivener” (published in 1853). Nonetheless, Melville’s works up to and including “Bartleby” appear to anticipate the more Romantic and at times sympathetic reading of the abject figures that we do find in the 1865 *Cyclopedia*.

On the subject of Cain, the entry in Kitto’s work reads, “It is easy to understand how the passion of envy or jealousy wrought in the heart of the offender; but some degree of mystery attends the immediate origin of his crime” (1845 1: 370)³. Later, in 1865, we find Cain

³In order to avoid any confusion, I will use 1845 and 1865 here to denote the different editions.

“represented as a sullen, self-willed, and self-confident man, of an arrogant temper and vindictive spirit; who would neither humble himself before God nor patiently endured the want of that approval which he had not cared duly seek” (1: 412). The language here that is being employed sounds like a Romantic depiction of the biblical figure. Much of this study focuses in on the point that the abject, as the firstborn son, should be the primary recipient of the birthright. In the *Cyclopedia* it says of Cain that if “he would follow the course which was proper and needful he should still retain that pre-eminence over his brother to which his birthright entitled him” (1865 1: 412). There is a sense that Cain could have done something in order to avoid his abject lot. There is some biblical precedent to consider for this reading.

God says to Cain, “If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him” (Genesis 4.7). What comes out of Cain’s exile, however, is not all bad. We also find in the earlier 1845 edition the following: “It may be worthy of observation, that especial mention is made of the fact, that Cain having travelled into the land of Nod there built a city; and further, that his descendants were chiefly celebrated for their skills in the arts of social life” (1: 367). The later edition also mentions this note as well. Cain’s exile leads to the building of the first city, which possesses “some of the advantages [of music, metalworking]” but also “some of the evils of civilization” (1865 1: 412). Thus, even in Kitto’s *Cyclopedia*, there is a sense of heroism for the abject figure, albeit mentioned passively.

In 1845, it appears as if Ishmael’s abject lot is downplayed somewhat. We read, “It would seem to have been the original intention of his mother to have returned to Egypt, to which country she belonged; but this being prevented, she was content to obtain for her son wives from thence” (2: 51). In 1865, however, we find that a shift in how we view Sarah’s role has taken

place. It says, “the wrath of Sarah was awakened, and she insisted that both Hagar and her son should be sent away. This was a very hard matter to a loving father; and Abraham would probably have refused compliance with Sarah’s wish, had he not been apprised in a dream that it was in accordance with Divine intentions respecting both Ishmael and Isaac” (1: 26). Sarah is described as a wrathful individual. Wrath is quite a different term than that of jealousy, which we certainly could point out in the story of Ishmael.

The Old Testament mothers play a tremendous role—and I would go as far as to say second only to God—in the shaping of both the elect and the abject lineage in the Bible. That Melville understood this can be seen most vividly in *Pierre*, through Mary Glendinning. However, it is also worth noting the name of the ship that eventually comes to rescue the wayward narrator of *Moby-Dick: The Rachel*. Rachel is another of the Old Testament mothers who have an important role to play in the unfolding of the early stages of Genesis, and as I will argue in chapter three, Melville will look at this story in a similar way through Ishmael, when we are told the story of Captain Gardiner of the *Rachel*, and his frantic search to recover a lost son.

Esau’s story is written in such a way as to show the class differences between the abject and the elect. In the *Cyclopedia* it is written that “...Jacob appeared to partake of the gentle, quiet, and retiring character of his father, and was accordingly led to prefer the tranquil safety and pleasing occupation of a shepherd’s life to the bold and daring enterprises of the hunter, for which Esau had an irresistible predilection” (1845 2: 62). In the later edition we find a similar understanding of the temperaments of both brothers, but the language is much more forceful. It says, “While Jacob was led by his less robust make and quiet disposition to fulfil [sic] the duties of a shepherd’s life, and pass his days in and around his tent, Esau was impelled, by the ardour [sic] and lofty spirit which agitated his bosom, to seek in the toils, adventures, and perils of the

chase, his occupation and sustenance” (1865 1: 818). The relegation of the abject to being men of the earth has tremendous implications in terms of their metaphorical and spiritual value. The elect—Abel, Isaac, and Jacob—are all shepherds, which of course places them in direct line with Christ as the Good Shepherd. What is most interesting about the entry is that it places the burden of vocation squarely on the shoulders of the abject. In other words, it is Esau’s “lofty spirit” that makes him suitable for such a life.

In terms of the selling of Esau’s birthright, the summary we find in Kitto’s 1845 edition is a somewhat scathing commentary as to Jacob’s motives.

That selfishness and a prudence which approached to cunning had a seat in the heart of the youth Jacob, [sic] appears but too plain in his dealing with Esau, when he exacted from a famishing brother so large a price for a mess of pottage, as the surrender of his birthright. Nor does the simple narrative of the Bible afford grounds by which this act can be well extenuated. (2: 62)

The 1865 edition also paints the elect son of Isaac in a somewhat undesirable light. It reads, “Urged by cravings of hunger, alarmed even by the fear of instant death, Esau sold his birthright to his younger brother, confirming the contract by the sanction of an oath. Jacob having thus got his price, supplied the famishing Esau with needful refreshments” (1: 818-19). If we look at the words being used, “cravings, alarmed, famishing,” we find a strong case to bring against Jacob for not simply offering his brother some of his food. Both Augustine and Calvin will argue against such a charge on Jacob’s character, on the merits that Esau, in the end, sold his birthright for nothing more than lentils, and that he should have been more mindful of the importance of what he had been given.

The 1865 entry on Esau goes on to read, “Arrived now at years of maturity, Esau, when 40 years of age, married two wives, Judith and Bashemath, both of whom were Canaanites, and, on account of their origin, were unacceptable to Isaac and Rebekah, *especially the latter*”

(emphasis mine 1: 819). The last part of Kitto’s statement, that Rebekah was especially vocal about the need for Isaac to not take a Canaanite for a wife, will become an integral part of the argument presented in chapter four, where the role of the matriarch of the elect is discussed in relation to the abject and elect lineage of the Bible. Suffice it to say, the summary presented here by Kitto is very much in tune with Mary Glendinning’s role in *Pierre*.

The interpretation of Rebekah’s deception of Isaac—procuring the patriarchal blessing for Jacob instead of Esau—is similar to how Calvin interprets the story. In both accounts, Rebekah’s deceitful stratagem is not excused; however, the argument is proposed that it serves a purpose in that it fulfills the Providence of God. In the 1845 edition, Rebekah is adamantly defended.

It cannot be denied that this is a most reprehensible transaction, and presents a truly painful picture; in which a mother conspires with one son in order to cheat her aged husband, with a view to deprive another son of his rightful inheritance. Justification is here impossible; but it should not be forgotten in the estimate we form that there was a promise in favour [sic] of Jacob, that Jacob’s qualities had endeared him to his mother, and that the prospect to her was dark and threatening which arose when she saw the neglected Esau at the head of the house, and his hateful wives assuming command over herself. (2: 62)

The 1865 edition reads similarly. It says, “One essential particular remained—the father’s blessing. If this should be given to Esau, all hope was gone; for this, like our modern wills, would hand the inheritance and the accompanying headship of the tribe to Esau and his wives” (1: 819). Kitto’s transference here from the will of God to “ours” is an indication that the blessing could have actually gone to Esau, in some way against the original dictum by God that the elder (Esau) shall serve the younger (Jacob). This seems much more in line with Augustine’s notion of the war between the two cities and that this could have been a large blow against God’s chosen people.

If Melville did read or glance through Kitto's *Cyclopaedia* he would have found the entries concerning the abject figures to be quite literary in nature and very much in line with the notion of an elect and abject lineage. Melville may have read the following line and found it to be quite truthful: "The fathers of the Church, particularly Augustine, regard Esau as the representative of the damned, while they admire Jacob as that of the elect" (1845 I. 653). The language in Kitto's work is dramatic—and we can certainly make the argument that it is Romantic as well. That Melville was aware of both Augustine and Calvin's main points is certainly believable. That both of these theologians had a tremendous impact on the shaping of Christianity in America in general is inarguable. It is for this reason that my own study relies heavily on both of these figures to create a scaffold from which Melville could have drawn some theological knowledge for his works. Certainly there are other influences that helped Melville shape his own sense of Judeo-Christianity: Dante, Milton, and perhaps even his own mother. Nonetheless, it is how the works of Augustine and Calvin shaped both Melville and the society around the author that informs the religious approach of this study.

Part 4: Breakdown of Each Chapter

Chapter 1: *Mardi* and the Creation of the Abject Mindset

With the success of *Typee* and *Omoo* behind him, Melville could now look to pure fiction as his mode for announcing to the world his ideas. *Mardi* is Melville's first purely fictional novel, and at times it reads like a first novel, complete with rough, meandering passages. However, there are also wonderful sections that show us the brilliance of the man who would

eventually write *Moby-Dick*. The first chapter of this study outlines the ways in which Melville formulates what will become the ethos of the abject figure.

Three aspects of the novel will receive attention in chapter one. First, we will look at the failure of Taji's cosmopolitan views to aid him during his shipwreck with the Viking, Jarl. The failure of cosmopolitanism in the face of self-preservation leads Taji to his murderous act against the priest, Aleema. The murder simply cannot be rationalized away by Taji's mind, and thus, the second focus of this chapter is predicated on how theology—more specifically Taji's rise to a god—becomes the only means by which he can come to terms with the fact that he has committed a Cain-like act of murder. Finally, the third section looks at Taji's rejection of Alma (Christ). Having already succumbed to the mindset of the abject, Taji can no longer live in a world that is dictated by another being than himself, even a loving figure like Alma. It is for this reason that Taji will sail off into the void. In his last act as god over himself, he will choose to sail off into the oblivion, which either leads to death or ultimate knowledge.

During his writing of *Mardi* Melville began expanding his list of reading materials quite exponentially. One section will look at how Melville seems to have drawn from Byron's *Manfred*. In a sense, Manfred can be looked at as an abject figure; however, what separates him from the biblical abject figures is that he has transcended the suffering thought of his abjectness. In other words, whereas figures like Cain and Esau are hyper conscious of their exile from God—Ishmael is a different case—Manfred seems to have somehow found peace in his position. Nonetheless, the rebellious spirit of Byron's character shares many attributes with Cain, and undoubtedly Melville could see these characteristics in Byron's play. In addition to *Manfred* chapter one also looks at how Melville may have been influenced by Byron's play, *Cain*—although this play will be looked at in more detail in the second chapter.

Chapter 2: Captain Cain

The focus of the second chapter is on Ahab from *Moby-Dick*. I begin this section by taking an in-depth look at the story of Cain and Abel from the Bible. The argument that I propose is that it is Melville's Ahab who is the true Cain of Melville's works. Both Taji from *Mardi* and Jackson in *Redburn* certainly convey aspects of the biblical Cain; however, neither of those characters includes the necessary pathos that the original Cain seems to exude in the wake of the murder of his brother.

One of the main arguments that I put forward in my second chapter is that Ahab is an amalgamation of Solomon Gessner's Cain from *The Death of Abel*; Byron's Cain from his drama, *Cain*; and Coleridge's Cain from his unfinished piece, *The Wandering's of Cain*. Gessner's Cain represents the human and emotional reaction to the fratricide—this Cain is portrayed as a broken man for his transgression against God and Abel, whereas Byron's Cain represents a more philosophical figure, seeking justification for his part in God's divine plans. Coleridge's story begins after the murder has already taken place. This version of Cain seems to be in line with both Gessner's and Byron's, utilizing a heightened sense of pathos and philosophical inquiry in order to portray his version of Cain. In "The Symphony" we hear the emotional Cain depicted by both Gessner and Coleridge, especially when Ahab asks Starbuck if it is "not hard...that with this weary load I bear, one poor leg should have been snatched from under me" (406). However, soon after Ahab's cathartic moment, we see Byron's philosophical Cain emerge, the man who asks "Is it I, God, or who, that lifts this arm?" (406). Ahab represents active resistance against God, fate, and the system of being labeled chosen or abject.

Chapter 3: Ishmael: A Special Case of the Abject

Both Ahab and Ishmael represent abject figures, but to different ends. Ishmael by name alone is an indicator that Melville had the abject lineage in mind. My contention in this chapter is that one of the reasons why Melville uses the name “Ishmael” is because even though the biblical figure is part of the abject lineage, he is nonetheless treated differently than that of Cain or Esau. Ishmael is told by God that he will be looked after, but that he will not receive the chosen birthright. This privilege will go to Isaac instead. This special case, however, makes Melville’s Ishmael able to move in and out of the various social groups aboard the *Pequod*. Whereas Ahab is marked by an external force—like the biblical Cain—Ishmael’s markings—his tattoos—are done of his own accord; there is self-agency in Ishmael. Even though he is denied the birthright, Ishmael’s relationship with God is completely different from that of Cain and Esau. The biblical Ishmael’s covenant with God allows him to survive in the desert, and it is for this reason that, as I argue toward the end of the chapter, that Melville’s Ishmael survives the attack of Moby Dick.

This chapter bolsters its thesis by looking at three major points concerning Ishmael: first, how Ishmael is, for lack of a better term, the most blessed of the abject figures; second, that there is an Emersonian nature to Ishmael that will help us understand how Ishmael becomes aware of his abject nature; third, that there is a type of reconciliation that takes place in *Moby-Dick* between the mothers of the Old Testament and the abject sons.

Chapter 4: The Second Esau: the Fall of Pierre into Abjectness

Jenny Franchot asserts that Melville’s literature “constitutes an antireligious domain of subversive indictment against a god who has failed man and whose absence has generated a

modern voice of recrimination and alienation” (157). That Melville’s works are “antireligious” is debatable. Certainly Melville takes religion to task at times for its ability to be used as a weapon in the name of personal gain, but to call his writing antireligious is a bit too all-encompassing for such a complex author. Where Franchot is absolutely correct, however, is in the sense of alienation in the voice of Melville’s characters at the physical absence of Christ, for Jehovah is present and represented in the Word of the Bible—through the many dispensations that arise out of the Old Testament, but Christ is not represented as such. This absence in the works of Melville not only creates a state of alienation, but it creates an atmosphere where the characters appear stifled by the Old Testament Jehovah, and in search of the New Testament Christ. We see this particularly in *Pierre*.

This chapter discusses three points of interest in order to show the impact that the story of Jacob and Esau had on the penning of Melville’s *Pierre*: first, the influence of mothers of Genesis on the creation of the abject and elect lineage; second, the way class and location impact our reading of the abject figures in relation to the society around them; and finally, the growing feeling of despair at the silence of the voice of God in conjunction with how Melville separates Christ and God in terms of the heart and the mind. I also bring Goethe into this last section as a possible source of inspiration for Melville’s distinction between heart and mind.

Chapter 5: The Problem of the Abject, as Seen by the Elect

The fifth chapter of the book will deal mostly with “Bartleby, the Scrivener.” Paul Michael Rogin asserts, “Melville wrote like an Ishmael while living as an Isaac” (51). The argument that I will be putting forth in this chapter is that Melville’s lawyer is in fact confronting the notion of Christian charity in the face of an emerging capitalistic society. By placing the

story on Wall Street, Melville is once again, as he did with *Pierre*, bringing us to the environment of the abject: the city. For Melville, the big city serves as a place for the abject to thrive.

This chapter proposes two points: first, that when we look at the lawyer through the lens of his elect status, we find that Melville is drawing our attention to a type of plight of the elect, as they also find themselves grappling with the strict nature of God's Providence, and how despite their yearning to be their brothers' keeper, they find themselves unable to circumvent the fate that has been laid before them. Secondly, I look at the gradual decay of Bartleby in terms of a very specific aspect of Calvin's theology concerning God's ability to give the abject a sense of temporary grace, which although providing a temporary relief from suffering, in the end, still leads the abject to a state of damnation.

Chapter 1: *Mardi* and the Creation of the Abject Mindset

Much of the criticism that is written on *Mardi* focuses on Melville's foray into the romance genre in conjunction with the increasingly expanding list of works that he read during the years he was composing the novel. As Hyland Packard notes:

[Melville] began writing *Mardi* in the spring, 1847, and it was published in spring, 1849. During this time, especially because of his reading in Evert Duyckinck's library, Melville changed what and how he wanted to write. The interaction between his new ideas and his desire to express them, and the means of expression literary and folk custom provided produced *Mardi*. (241-2)

That these readings influenced how Melville approached *Mardi* is certainly evident enough in the textual allusions and paraphrasing that we find in the novel.⁴ Although we can certainly view *Mardi* as an important point of artistic departure for Melville, we should be careful to note, as Erin Suzuki and others argue, the similarities between the arguments presented in *Mardi* and his previously published novels of adventure, specifically in terms of Melville's careful negotiation between Judeo-Christianity as philosophy of life and Judeo-Christianity as institution of salvation.⁵ It may be a bit overzealous to say that *Mardi* is the mark of a new Melvillean voice; however, it is a bolder step than his previous works toward a more profound understanding of how philosophy, art, history and religion help to shape the human psyche.

By the time Melville was writing *Mardi*, he had already been receiving some scathing reviews for *Omoo*. These reviews, however, would not be his only problem. As Lorei Robertson-Lorant points out:

⁴ Merrell R. Davis's *Melville's Mardi, A Chartless Voyage* is still an important resource for anyone who is interested in pursuing a study of the novel and the author's mindset during the years he was composing *Mardi*.

⁵ Erin Suzuki's argument is premised on a similar idea that was brought up by Hershel Parker as well in the first volume of his expansive biography of Melville: the idea that Melville reused a prominent source—Ellis's *Researches*—in *Mardi* to convey the “missionary hypocrisy Melville condemns” in *Omoo* (Suzuki 374). Thus, we should be hesitant to announce the penning of *Mardi* as the beginning of a completely “new” Melvillean authoritative voice of fiction.

The reading public had Melville pigeonholed. They saw the author of *Typee* and *Omoo* as a sailor who wrote travel books, not as a professional author who was the satirist and Shakespearean poet-seer Melville aspired to be. To them he was a common sailor who was erudite enough that they could feel smart for reading him, but not so much so as to make them feel ignorant by comparison. Melville thought that with *Mardi* he had made a breakthrough, but publishers and readers persisted in seeing him as the “man who lived among the cannibals.” (200)

This fame that he accrued because of his adventure tales would eventually lead Melville to declare in a June, 1851 letter to Hawthorne: “All fame is patronage. Let me be infamous: there is not patronage in *that*” (Horth 193). It is true that Melville attained notoriety for himself as the man who lived among the cannibals; however, there was a price to pay for this. He had to fend off attacks as to the veracity of his adventure tales. This led Melville to write his tongue-in-cheek preface to *Mardi*.

Not long ago, having published two narratives of voyages in the Pacific, which, in many quarters, were received with incredulity, the thought occurred to me, of indeed writing a romance of Polynesian adventure, and publishing it as such; to see whether, the fiction might not, possibly, be received for a verity: in some degree the reverse of my previous experience. This thought was the germ of others, which have resulted in *Mardi*. (xvii)

Even at this early stage of authorship, Melville was aware that one could write things that were more truthful to the human condition in fiction than in the most factually accurate of history books. As the philosopher of *Mardi*, Babbalanja, tells us, “what are vulgarly called fictions are as much realities as the gross mattock of Dididi, the digger of trenches” (283). Melville understood that without the limitation of the scathing eye of factual correctness, a greater truth could be revealed to the reader. One of these greater truths that Melville pursues in *Mardi* is how to understand the mind of the abject figure.

Like Milton R. Stern, I too separate *Mardi* into three different sections.⁶ In this chapter, I pursue the argument that Melville's quest is separated into three different sections. The first section exposes how the narrator's cosmopolitan vision of the world proves useless when he is pushed to survive. The second section consists of Taji's enlightenment as to the plight of the abject through fratricide and his interaction with theology, philosophy, history, and poetry (art). In the third section, Taji has become fully subsumed by the ethos of the abject, which culminates in his inability to live in a world where one must live with a certain amount of ignorance in order to survive, and finally leads to his rejection of Alma (Christ). *Mardi* is perhaps Melville's most thorough and honest exploration into the philosophy of theology, for it is in this novel that the author does not simply explore the quandary of balancing fear, love and godliness—something that will become the central focus in much of Melville's writings—but it is also in *Mardi* where the author creates a place for his perfect vision of Christianity to reside.

Section 1: The Awakening of the Abject Mind

In the beginning of the novel, the narrator—Taji, as he will come to be known—is a man who sees the world in a cosmopolitan light. First, we need to discuss what is meant by “cosmopolitan” in Melville's time. In *Melville & Repose*, John Bryant notes that “In midcentury America the good name of Cosmopolite had degenerated to signify little more than ‘wanderer’ and ‘dabbler,’ or ‘intellectual vagabond’” (118). The cosmopolitan nature of Melville's narrator is one who believes in a cosmic unification of the world. He is “no one at all, a man without allegiance or creed” (Bryant 118). Taji declares:

⁶Stern breaks the story up into three sections: the first part, which he refers to as the “factual” stories leading up to the loss of Yillah; the second part, which is essentially the Hautia-Yillah parts of the tale; and the third part of the story, which belongs to Babbalanja and Media (68).

All of us have monarchs and sages for kinsmen; nay, angels and archangels for cousins; since in antediluvian days, the songs of God did verily wed with our mothers, the irresistible daughters of Eve. Thus all generations are blended; and heaven and earth of one kin: . . . All things form but one whole; the universe a Judea, and God Jehovah its head. (12)

R.E. Watters reads this as a Melvillean universal vision of “identification of self not with an immanent divinity but instead with an imminent humanity” (35). On the surface, Watters’s assertion appears accurate. If we extend this notion beyond its secular vision and into the realm of theology, or more specifically Calvin’s theology, we come across an inherent problem. While Taji’s vision is one that attempts to unify humanity under the umbrella of God’s protection, it’s a gross misunderstanding of how Providence works: that some individuals are born to do great things, to be great, and some are not. Thus, from a purely theological perspective, Taji’s vision here of unification comes across as naïve.

Taji’s attempts to universalize the human condition are constantly contradicted. When he tells us that the crew of the *Arcturion* believed him to be a “nob” (14), Taji says, “It was because of something in me that could not be hidden; stealing out in an occasional polysyllable; an otherwise incomprehensible deliberation in dining; remote, unguarded allusions to Belles-Lettres affairs; and other trifles superfluous to mention” (14). He is acknowledging—although unaware at this time—that *not* all individuals are the same. The reason why the rest of the crew isolate themselves from him is because he carries with him an air of superiority, and we can certainly read in his own comments on the situation an elitist perspective. He does not—or cannot—yet see that his dubious cosmopolitan vision of the world is couched in elitism. We can see this class interplay displayed more egregiously when he tells us how he became acquainted with Jarl (his Viking, as Taji will call him).

Taji's description of Jarl can best be described as quaint. He mentions that the Viking, "True to his calling...was very illiterate; witless of Salamanca, Heidelberg, or Brazen-Nose; in Delhi, had never turned over the books of the Brahmins" (13). While we can read these words in a similar vein to that of Ishmael, there is a difference between Ishmael's reading of Queequeg and Taji's description of Jarl. Ishmael has a genuine fraternal affection for Queequeg; Taji does not. And yet, the narrator would have us believe that he does. While we can argue that Taji genuinely believes that he has affection and respect for Jarl, it is his elitist nature and naïve belief that all humans share the same starting point in life that makes him such a danger to Jarl and to others around him. Let's not forget that Jarl is killed for the sake of Taji's quest for Yillah. Early in Taji's interactions with Jarl, he makes it clear that he wishes to separate himself from those who would be considered vagrants. He says that the Viking "must have taken me for one of the House of Hanover in disguise; or, haply, for bonneted Charles Edward the Pretender, who, like the Wandering Jew, may yet be a vagrant" (14). Within this thought is Taji's attempt to distance himself from wanderers, from those who may be deemed abject. He continually finds ways to separate himself from others while at the same time claiming a fraternal vision of equality. He even goes as far as to admit the possibility that his relationship with Jarl is not quite as equal as one would think.

Sailors have multiple types of relationships with each other; however, one of these types that Taji tells us he shares with Jarl is referred to as "chummies." There are different aspects of this relationship. The "cunning" chummy, which is an individual who "played the sleeping partner in his hammock" while the other (the simple chummy) "was made to do all the work" (15). Taji cannot help but admit that of the two, he would appear to be more of the cunning variety—although he denies that he actually is one. That Taji admits he is of the "cunning" type

is again a way for him to create categories within the constructs of humanity. As this study will show in future chapters, this categorization will have a tremendous effect on how the abject is differentiated from the elect, especially in terms of one's vocation. Taji finalizes his introduction of Jarl by saying, "Now my Viking for me, thought I, when I cast about for a comrade; and my Viking alone" (15). Again, we can say that this is another instance of Melville's fraternal notion of camaraderie, but we have not been given sufficient reasons to believe that Taji's feelings are genuine.

As I briefly mentioned earlier, in some ways, Taji's philosophical tone anticipates the Ishmaelian voice of cosmic unification—that all humanity is connected in some degree by universal truths such as suffering (the universal thump for Ishmael) and the notion that humanity has a common ancestry through Adam and Eve. Even if we take Taji's words as truthful, they sound wonderful, but in the scheme of actual biblical theology these thoughts are at best problematic, and at worst they are outright wrong. The main problem is that Taji has not yet attained the knowledge of how a god thinks; he lacks the understanding of divine logic. Taji will acquire this knowledge along the way in his journey, however, through the musings of his companions, and he will also attain this knowledge through his act of murder, as well as his ascension to the status of demigod. What this will lead to in Taji is the abandonment of any universal notion of humanity. He will come to a realization that is similar to Milton's Satan: "...whom hast thou than or what to accuse, / But Heav'n's free Love dealt equally to all?" (*Paradise Lost*⁷ 4.68-9). Satan's ambition was to reach a level where he did not have to pay homage or submit to God, and to become a being that is free from the confines of following the path of another. Satan's lamentation—which becomes justification for Romantics—is that

⁷ Further references to *Paradise Lost* will be shortened to *PL*.

“...had his powerful Destiny ordain'd / Me some inferior Angel, I had stood / Then happy” (*PL* 4.56-8). Taji's lamentation will be a rejection of the idea that one must live with a certain amount of willful ignorance about the inequality of the world, and it is this belief that will lead Taji to choose the path that he does at the end of the novel. Whereas in the beginning Taji does not interiorize that “something in [him] that could not be hidden,” (14) which was viewed by the crew of the *Arcturionas* pretentiousness, this “something” will actually become Taji's justification for his quest for Yillah, as well as justification for his continuing pursuit of her into the void at the end of the novel. In order for Taji to reach this point, however, he must first cast off any vestiges of his cosmological belief system once and for all.

Jumping Ship with His Viking

When both Taji and Jarl leave the *Arcturion*, we are introduced to a common theme in Melville's writings: two men in a highly stressful situation and physically in close proximity to each other. In the chapter titled, “They are Becalmed,” the narrator experiences the first indications of hatred and distrust for his fellow man. After drifting for two days with Jarl, on the third day the narrator notes “a change came over us” (49). He begins to hate the man that he must share his space with. This growing discontent is so strong that the narrator exclaims, “What sort of expression my own countenance wore, I know not; but I hated to look at Jarl's. When I did it was a glare, not a glance. I became more taciturn than he. I can not tell what it was that came over me, but I wished I was alone” (49). He is expressing uneasiness with how Jarl is now looking at him, but the narrator also admits that he does not know what his own countenance looks like. This leads Taji to exclaim, “From being cast away with a brother, good God deliver me!” (50). This is undoubtedly what Jarl is thinking as well, but because Taji lacks

a sense of true introspection at this point, he truly believes that he does not know why Jarl would look at him in the way that he is. He does not fathom the prospect of how Jarl may be thinking the exact same thing. This inability to truly universalize the human condition will help Taji justify his unique position as leader of the quest for Yillah. This theme of fraternal uneasiness can be found in virtually all of Melville's works from *Typee* to *Billy Budd*, as well as in Melville's own life.⁸ What we always come to learn in situations like this is that idea of maintaining a harmonious, fraternal bond between brothers is predicated on both parties suppressing the ego and the drive for survival and advancement—advancement in virtually all aspects of life.

It is out of jealousy for Abel's offering to God that Cain murders his brother, and when we look further into this story, it can also be read in terms of Cain's growing apprehension of his possible displacement as the elect, being that Cain was the first born son of Adam. The idea that God may have felt more love or respect for Abel is not present in the Bible until after the offerings are placed on the altar; however, as Wyn Kelley points out, Melville should have been aware of Byron's play, *Cain*. Byron's influence will be discussed in much more length later in this chapter, but suffice it to say, Byron's Cain struggles with this idea that prior to his questionable offering, God already had more respect and love for Abel than for the firstborn Cain. The exchange between Cain and Abel just prior to the murder is a sufficient example.

Cain: Abel, I pray thee, sacrifice alone—
JehovaLoves thee well.

Abel: *Both* well, I hope.

Cain: But thee the better: I care not for that;

⁸ Melville's own relationship with his brothers will be discussed in more length in future chapters. However, it is of interest to note that *Mardi* is "Dedicated to my brother, Allan Melville."

Thou art fitter for his worship than I am.... (*Cain* 3.1.189-93)

Just as Wyn Kelley points out in her study of Melville's use of Cain, "Often Cain stands in ironic counterpoint to naïve notions of brotherhood and social harmony" (25). This is indeed the case with Taji. However, his naiveté will be stripped from him as he progresses through his quest for Yillah.

Up until Taji's casting away with Jarl, he is unable to fully understand why or how such a heinous act as fratricide can occur, but this does not last for long. Even at this early stage in the novel, prior to the quest for Yillah, Taji is already beginning to explore, through his own apprehensions, the dark thoughts that are inherently within the human heart. As is often the case with Melvillean narrators, this initial act is only the catalyst for what will eventually become a perpetual state of inquiry as to the individual in relationship to the rest of humanity and to God.

When Taji reflects on the sinking of the *Parki* and his own salvation, he says "We hear of providential deliverances. Was this one? But life is sweet to all, death comes as hard. And for myself I am almost tempted to hang my head, that I escaped the fate of my shipmates; something like him who blushed to have escaped the fell carnage at Thermopylæ" (25). While we can certainly read Taji's reaction here in the framework of the idea of survivor's remorse, there is more to it than that. Taji is not so much interested in *how* he survived, but *why*. The former of these two—the *how*—implies that there is a definitive answer available: whether it is a logical one or a supernatural one. The metaphysical "why" is a question that has no definitive answer. Providence can serve as an answer to both the *how* and the *why*, but we can already see that it will not satisfy Taji to learn that the answer is as simple as God's will. Nonetheless, the "why" is the bane of the dark romantic hero's existence, because he or she is usually consciously aware

of God's role in his or her perpetual state of suffering. Taji will come to understand this all too well at the end of the novel.

One of the ways in which Melville shows us that Taji's thoughts are beginning to shift toward a more profound understanding of theology is through the narrator's echo of one of Shakespeare's most famous lines: "There are more wonders than the wonders rejected, and more sights unrevealed than you or I ever dreamt of" (39). Melville is showing us here his internalization of Shakespeare, as this is a clear echoing of Hamlet's "there are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, / Than are dreamt of in your philosophy" (1.5.164-5). As Hershel Parker notes, Melville "thought of Shakespeare in terms of the tragedian's dark meanings, not the way those meanings were expressed" (1: 617). Parker is correct. The darkness that both Melville is pursuing in his writing and that Taji is pursuing in his own quest is the unknowable, the limitations of the human mind to comprehend all things. Thus, if we accept that Hamlet is in fact being confronted by the actual ghost of his father, we are simultaneously drawn into a discussion of the nature of the afterlife, as well as the rationale for why a ghost would feel the need to be avenged when vengeance belongs to God. The questions become almost endless, and none of our rational answers seem to sufficiently address any of these questions. It is precisely this openness, this moving from the "how" to the "why," that makes Taji the type of character who is predisposed to becoming lost in the ethos of the Romantic quest. Already, Taji is stripping away his cosmopolitan veneer in favor of a selfish desire to know and to conquer the unknown.

It is in the shark classification section that we become even more aware of just how contradictory Taji's views are of humanity at this point in the text. Taji ponders the correlation between the name of something, and its identity and classification in relation to the rest of the

world. He tells us that through German naturalists “Müller and Henle, who, in Christening the sharks, have bestowed upon them the most heathenish names, they are classed under one family; which family, according to Müller, king-at-arms, is an undoubted branch of the ancient and famous tribe of the Chondropterygii” (40). Taji’s ultimate point is that there are many different types of sharks, and yet the fact that they are all classified under the same name as shark—a classification that includes both the docile whale shark and the much feared Great White—“is all wrong. As well hate a seraph, as a shark” he says. He adds, “Both were made by the same hand” (40). What Taji doesn’t realize is that he is engaging himself in the very problem of the abject. Melville wants us as readers to be conscious of Taji’s position here. In defense of the shark name, Taji says “No Fury so ferocious, as not to have some amiable side. In the wild wilderness, a leopard-mother caresses her cub, as Hagar did Ishmael” (40-1). This allusion to Hagar seems straightforward, but there is more here than just an allusion.

Here is one instance where we must separate Taji from the author of the novel. Melville understood the story of Ishmael and Hagar very well. He would have known that this allusion being made by Taji does not really make sense in its totality. The Bible says of Ishmael that “he will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man’s hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren” (Genesis 16.12). Nowhere does it say that Hagar was a wild woman or ferocious. So then it must be that Hagar is simply being compared to the loving side of the leopard-mother, but even in this case the allusion is quite weak. Hagar is portrayed as a tender mother in the Bible, crying for her son’s predicament. The truth is that a better example for Taji’s point would have been Hagar’s counterpart in the biblical tale: Sarah. It is Sarah who forces Hagar and Ishmael to leave—thus displaying the ferocity of the leopard, but she is also clearly a loving mother to her son, Isaac. The mothers of the elect/abject play

perhaps a more important role in the molding of the elect line than even God. This is a major concern of Melville's *Pierre* as well.

What Melville is showing us with Taji's allusion is that the narrator understands very little about the Bible and about how Jehovah actually thinks. The narrator's attempt to sound intelligent about his understanding of the Bible in actuality unveils his inability to comprehend the ethos of God's will. God is clearly moved by Hagar's tears, but he nonetheless reminds both Abraham and the reader that His covenant will still be with Isaac, not Ishmael. Interestingly enough, Melville will come back to this same comparison of the ferocity of the leopard and the tenderness of the mother in "Benito Cereno" when he has the American captain, Amasa Delano, make the same comparison with the African women aboard the *San Dominick*: "He was gratified with their manners; like most uncivilized women, they seemed at once tender of heart and tough of constitution; equally ready to die for their infants or fight for them. Unsophisticated as leopardesses; loving as doves" (704). And just like Delano, Taji is simply oblivious to just how right and simultaneously wrong he is.

The Hagar and Ishmael reference is used by the narrator as simply common knowledge; the common reader who reads quickly through the reference will be in agreement with Taji and let the reference go without much of a fight. Taji cannot, or will not, think outside of the knowledge that has been handed down to him, his cosmopolitan vision. He has knowledge, but he does not know how to think, how to internalize. Taji has not been introduced to king Media, Babbalanja, Mohi, or Yoomy as of yet, and thus he has not been sufficiently introduced to the primary means in which humans attempt to rationalize life: theology, philosophy, history, and art. All of these approaches are necessary in understanding how the abject's story will be both told and understood. Taji is, as Lawrence Thompson argues, "represented as a type of blindness

at this stage” (60). It is only once he has journeyed with these allegorical figures of the humanities that he will understand what it means to be abject.

Section 2: Learning to Think Like a God

The Politics of Sacrifice

The most significant point of action in *Mardi* is Taji’s murder of the priest (Aleema) and the claiming of Yillah as his personal property. Taji is successful in stopping Aleema from commencing with the ritualistic sacrifice of the young maiden, Yillah; however, Taji is not able to hold on to his female companion for long. She eventually runs away, and it is here that the plot of *Mardi* becomes stagnant again, revolving around the pursuit of reclaiming Yillah. John Evelev notes a change in Melville’s narrative voice when the story turns to the quest to find Yillah. For Evelev the journey becomes “the challenging task of coming to terms with the philosophical questions that earlier models of philosophy no longer answer” (312). Evelev’s statement refers to more global modes of philosophy that have tested humanity for centuries, but I would argue that the answer is a more personal one for Taji. The previous approach to life—cosmopolitanism—that Taji espouses earlier in the novel can no longer serve its purpose after the murder because it denies him that which he wants the most: to control Yillah. As John Wenke points out, Yillah will eventually become little more than “a fit companion for [Taji’s] invented god-self” (180), and thus when she disappears soon after she is rescued the quest for her reclamation has more to do with “a lost ideal” (Wenke 180) than any claims of romantic feelings that Taji expresses throughout the novel. The remainder of the quest narrative in *Mardi* is predicated on the search for and the recapturing of Yillah at all costs. Along the way in this search, however, Taji’s views on life begin to change. As he takes on the persona of the local

demigod, known as Taji, so too do his decisions and justifications become geared toward his newly-created godly status. He begins to think like a god, to feel as if he has a right to lay claim to all that he desires. And just like Ahab, he will take everyone to the grave with him if need be to attain that which he feels he deserves most.

Taji's murderous act appears at first to be a sudden and spontaneous one. He says, "Ere I knew it, my cutlass made a quick lunge. A curse from the priest's mouth; red blood from his side; he tottered, stared about him, and fell over like a brown hemlock into the sea" (133). While Taji is successful in preventing the sacrifice, it is not without some expressed reservation as to the motives behind his actions. Immediately after the murder has taken place, Taji admits,

By this hand, the dead man had died. Remorse smote me hard; and like lightning I asked myself, whether the death-deed I had done was sprung of a virtuous motive, the rescuing a captive from thrall; or whether beneath that pretense, I had engaged in this fatal affray for some other, and selfish purpose; the companionship of a beautiful maid. (135)

In *War in Melville's Imagination* Adler argues that Taji, "like civilized man, reenacts the original sin, which to Melville is not that of Adam and Eve but that of Cain" (16). Fratricide for Melville is indeed one of the most egregious and unforgivable acts, but there is more involved here than just the act of fratricide. Taji's language here is important, especially his designation of Yillah as "beautiful."

Taji's initial intentions of freeing Yillah appear to be noble at first. He says, "hearing of the maiden, I waited for no more. Need I add, how stirred was my soul toward this invisible victim; and how hotly I swore, that precious blood of hers should never smoke upon an altar" (131). The stirring of his soul and the sworn oath that he takes at this point sound like the words of a chivalric knight who will never rest until the damsel in distress has been rescued. However, these thoughts are tainted by his identification of Yillah, just prior to these lines, as a "beautiful

maiden” (131). The first problem is the sequence of Taji’s words. Yillah is beautiful, and yet Taji uses the term “invisible victim” to describe her. We can attempt to reason that Taji simply means that she is being concealed by the tent in which she is being held, and thus an invisible victim, but Melville does not write the sequence to allow us to follow along in this way. She may be physically concealed by the tent but it is clear that her image has been burned into Taji’s thoughts; she is very much visible in his mind. The problem with this identification of Yillah as “beautiful” is that she now becomes a sacrificial commodity of a certain value, a high value at that. In other words, would Taji be able to rouse such chivalric passions for a less attractive woman? If we look back at Taji’s description of Samoa’s wife, we see that looks do matter. He says of Annatoo, “I was much less conciliated by the person of Annatoo; who, being sinewy of limb, and neither young, comely, nor amiable, was exceedingly distasteful in my eyes” (90). Yillah is a beautiful maiden, a valuable sacrifice, and when we look at the story of the Bible’s first murder, we see that these types of designations matter there as well.

In the story of Cain and Able we are reminded that one of the main points of contention between the two brothers is the value of their sacrifices. Cain’s offer of the “fruit of the ground” is not acceptable to God, but Abel’s offering “of the firstlings of his flock and the fat thereof” (Genesis 4.3-4) is accepted. The role of both Cain and Abel’s disposition in the matter—the nature of what is in their hearts—shall be discussed later. For now, we should limit our focus to the “market” value of their offerings. Augustine, in *The City of God*, discusses the politics of proper sacrificing. He says, “The truth is, that sacrifice is ‘rightly offered’ when it is offered to the true God, to whom alone we must sacrifice. And it is ‘not rightly distinguished’ when we do not rightly distinguish the places or seasons *or materials of the offering*, or those to whom it is distributed for food after the oblation” (Italics Mine 437).

The fact that the Bible is explicit about how Abel's gift are of the "firstlings" of his animals represents his willingness to part with material possessions in favor of the more spiritual gifts bestowed by God. We are not told that Cain gives the best of his fruit, and thus we can read this offering metaphorically as his unwillingness to part with the best of his material possessions. Cain's decision not to give of his best is a manifestation of his selfishness; his act of killing Abel is the manifestation of his jealousy. In a sense, this is also what is transpiring in *Mardi* as well. Taji is judging Yillah not in terms of her value as a human being, but in her value as sacrifice. She is too great for the islanders' god, but not for himself, not for the demigod, Taji. Like Cain, he wishes to withhold such a great sacrifice for himself.

It is not so long after Yillah is taken from the canoe and claimed by Taji that the consequences of his act begin to haunt his mind. Taji broods, "in fancy, I saw the stark body of the priest drifting by. Again that phantom obtruded, again guilt laid his red hand on my soul" (145). That Taji begins to question his fratricidal act is understandable; however, what makes this section so telling as to Taji's changing mindset is how he rationalizes away the murder. He says, "But I laughed. Was not Yillah my own? by my arm rescued from ill?" (145). In Taji's mind, he has indeed earned the right to claim her as his own. When the rest of his companions join in on the hunt for the missing maiden, Taji will be exposed to many types of approaches for understanding life. Through this exposure, he will learn to think like a god.

The Impact of Philosophy, History, Art and Divine Logic on Taji

When Babbalanja, Yoomy, Mohi and Media join the quest for Yillah, they have a profound impact on Taji's approach to how a god thinks. As was mentioned earlier, all of these figures represent different aspects of humanity: Babbalanja represents philosophy; Yoomy, art;

Mohi, history; and Media, divine logic. What all four of these figures provide for Taji is knowledge of the human condition. Taken individually they do not stand on their own merit, but together, they are a formidable force for understanding how humans interact with both each other and with a god. We see how all of these work together when the conversation turns to the subject of damnation.

Mohi, the historian, asks Babbalanja if he denies the existence of “the everlasting torments?” (350). To which the philosopher responds, “Tis not worth a denial. Nor by formally denying it, will I run the risk of shaking the faith of thousands, who in that pious belief find infinite consolation for all they suffer in Mardi” (350). Mohi does not understand how people can find comfort in the notion of a place of damnation. Babbalanja explains that “Sooner will they [believers of Alma (Christ)] yield you the isles of Paradise, than it” (350). His point is that people believe that it is more likely that there is a type of Hell than a Heaven. In Babbalanja’s answer he is expressing a natural depravity in the human condition; it’s essentially a type of Original Sin. Certainly, he is not the only individual to recognize such an inherent condition in humans. Plato, in the second book of *The Republic* in a rather matter-of-fact way simply says, “there’s far more bad than good in the world” (74). Babbalanja adds that the followers of Alma are “right in clinging to it as they do; for...the great end of the prophet’s mission seems to have been the revealing to us Mardians the existence of horrors, most hard to escape. But better we were all annihilated, than that one man should be damned” (350). Interestingly enough, Babbalanja doesn’t add that salvation was also revealed in the “great end of the prophet’s mission.” His point then would seem to be that people find Hell a more believable concept because of the suffering that one can witness here on earth; the suffering of the great prophet is just one example of this. The question of how one witnesses salvation is not one that is broached

because there is no real shared indicator for such a feeling—something that would haunt both the first and second generation Puritans of America. Babbalanja has taken a more philosophical approach to this discussion, but King Media and Yoomy will also have their say as well.

King Media does not share in the interest of such a discussion. He doesn't care about the idea of Heaven or Hell because he is "a king, and a demi-god" so he will "leave vulgar torments to the commonality" (350). As a demigod, Media does not feel the need to be concerned with such issues because he is thinking like a god. A god will not experience such things, and therefore, he is disconnected and somewhat dismissive of the argument. Yoomy, the poet/artist however, exclaims, "I reject it. Could I, I would not believe it. It is at variance with the dictates of my heart; instinctively my heart turns from it, as a thirsty man from gall" (350). As I will argue in more depth in the section on *Pierre*, Melville identifies Christ with the heart and Jehovah with the mind. Yoomy's declaration that his heart turns away from it like a thirsty man from gall is an allusion to the book of Matthew and Christ: "And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, a place of skull, / They gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink" (Matthew 27.33-4). Yoomy's words come to represent Melville's own position of Christ as surpassing the dictates of Jehovah. Yoomy will reject anything that is not in accordance with the loving doctrine that he feels to be the epitome of godly love for humanity. Again, this isn't to say that Yoomy is more right than any of the rest. The point is that all of the positions work together to create knowledge in general of the human condition, and more specifically of the abject's condition. Separately, these approaches to life are at odds with each other constantly, as we see in quite a few points throughout the text when the companions argue over just about anything and everything.

Of the four companions, it appears that King Media is at odds with Babbalanja's philosophy more than any other because it stretches the boundaries of the usefulness of faith without love. Media says to the philosopher, "Meditate as much as you will, Babbalanja, but say little aloud, unless in a merry and mythical way. Lay down the great maxims of things, but let interferences take care of themselves" (369). It's not simply that Media wants to be merry—although that is partially what concerns the king. What Media is expressing here is a genuine discussion of the usefulness of philosophical banter when it is offered without the intentions of actually furthering the betterment of the human condition. This is one of the points that Byron's Manfred makes as well. Manfred says that philosophy is "of all our vanities the motliest, / The merest word that ever fool'd the ear / From out the schoolman's jargon" (*Manfred* 2.1.9-12). Manfred will play a larger role in Taji's movement toward a greater understanding of the abject, but suffice it to say that Byron's impact on Melville in the composition of *Mardi* should not be underestimated.

Media continues his questioning of the necessity of philosophy when he informs Babbalanja of the following:

The free, airy robe of your philosophy is but a dream, which seems true while it lasts; but waking again into the orthodox world, straightway you resume the old habit. And though in your dreams you may hie to the uttermost Orient, yet all the while you abide where you are. Babbalanja, you mortals dwell in Mardi, and it is impossible to get elsewhere" (370).

Media's words here are very clear. He is not interested in what the human condition wishes to be; he is only interested in what it is. Melville is showing the breadth of his literary knowledge here, as he also seems to be invoking another writer here as well. Media is essentially summing

up an important Machiavellian idea—although the King is not consciously aware of it—of “a man who neglects what is actually done for what should be done moves towards self-destruction rather than self-preservation” (50). That Melville may have had Machiavelli in mind here becomes more believable when we find that the author of the *The Prince* is alluded to more explicitly in chapter 138, where Taji speaks about “some Machiavel of a philosopher” who suggested that “the object of war might be answered without going to war” (440). Coming back to Media’s harsh words for Babbalanja, the philosopher cannot help but concede the point. He admits, “My lord, you school me” (370). Up against the straightforward dictums of a god, what hope does philosophy have? Philosophy may be used to understand the reasons behind godly logic, but it cannot alter it; it cannot avert the pull of Providence. This is in a sense what Romantics like Byron and Coleridge understood about figures like Cain, Ishmael, and Esau: that one can reason and philosophize about the “why” of Providence, but it ultimately does little good when the answer is simply “because.”

When Babbalanja discusses the universal value of religion, he makes the argument that “I do not so much quote Bardianna, as Bardianna quoted me, though he flourished before me” (397). The philosopher’s point is that “The catalogue of true thoughts is but small; they are ubiquitous; no man’s property; and unspoken, or bruited, are the same. When we hear them, why seem they so natural, receiving our spontaneous approval?...Because they but reiterate ourselves; they were in us, before we were born” (397). Media is quick to dismiss this cosmopolitan notion, however. He says, “And there, for Oro’s sake, let it rest, Babbalanja; Bardianna in you, and you in Bardianna forever!” (397). The significance of ending this scene with Media holding the final words is a way to subvert what Babbalanja has just decreed. It’s another instance where the philosopher may wrap him or herself in the warmth of the gesture but

find no real use for it in the real world. Lawrence Thompson may be correct when he asserts that despite the wonderful axioms of love that are expressed about the all-encompassing love of Alma (Christ), it may be that “The rebellious questioning and doubting, the persistent skepticism and agnosticism, are conveyed far more strongly than the mystical affirmation” (63). Media’s position as demigod and king are a quick reminder that the words simply sound pretty, but will hold little weight in actual practice.

When we come to “Bartleby, the Scrivener,” these axioms of universal brotherhood and love will become reminders for just how separated humanity is from each other. The knowledge that Taji gains about human nature allows him to understand the world from the viewpoint of a god. His disposition, however, as deity does not last long. Taji realizes that even if one thinks as a god, or even claims godhood, there are limitations that are attached to this label. The barrier of language and interpretation, as we see from the many viewpoints expressed here on damnation, makes it almost impossible for a god to be fully understood. This will lead Taji to becoming what the Romantics like Byron saw as more than godly, an abject—outside of the realm of ethereal significance, and apathetic toward feelings of the fear of divine retribution.

Section 3: Rejecting God and Becoming the Abject

The Curse of the King of Juam

In book eight of *Paradise Lost*, Raphael tells the story of Adam and Eve’s creation. In Milton’s version, the dialogue between God and Adam that leads to the creation of Eve is philosophically provocative. Adam asks for a mate based upon his superiority to the animals. He says, “...Of fellowship I speak / Such as I seek, fit to participate / All rational delight, wherein the brute / Cannot be human consort...” (8. 389-92). God’s reaction to this request will

help us to understand Taji's choice at the end of Melville's novel to even give up his demigod status.

Seem I to thee sufficiently possessed
Of happiness, or not? who am alone
From all eternity, for none I know
Second to me or alike, equal much less.
How have I then with whom to hold converse
Save with the creatures which I made, and those
To me inferior...? (VIII. 404-10)

We can understand Adam's insecurities about being alone, and we can say that God's words here are more an expression of his being able to understand what it is that Adam is claiming, but nonetheless, it exposes a limitation to even omnipotence. The limitation is in the nature of addressing omnipotence to intellectually limited beings. The abject is not a god; at all times he or she is fully conscious of this fact, and often times he or she is painstakingly reminded. Taji will come to understand the loneliness that comes with godliness, and even though he is not actually divine, it will not stop him from ultimately rejecting his divinity in lieu of the suffering freedom of abjectness.

One of the first instances where Taji begins to learn about the limited nature of being both elect and godly comes from his learning of the history of the kings of Juam. In chapter 72, Mohi (Braid-beard, the historian) informs us of the bloody history steeped in the island of Juam. Teei (king and rightful ruler of the island) was defeated by his brother, Marjora. We are told that "With fratricidal hate, singled out by the ferocious Marjora, Teei fell by that brother's hand. When stripping from the body the regal girdle, the victor wound it round his own loins; thus proclaiming himself king over Juam" (220). This account alone does not necessarily echo the murder of Abel by Cain, nor does it hearken to Ishmael being sent away by Sarah and Abraham. To say that there is some connection to the story of Jacob and Esau is even somewhat of a

stretch; however, the importance of this story to the study of Melville's abject line is more important than just another example of the horrific act of fratricide: the part that connects to the theme of the abject is what comes after this event—the result of Marjora's usurpation.

Mohi tells us,

Long torn by this intestine war, the island acquiesced in the new sovereignty. But at length a sacred oracle declared, that since the conqueror had slain his brother in deep Willamilla, so that Teei never more issued from that refuge of death; therefore, the same fate should be Marjora's; for never, thenceforth, from that glen, should he go forth; neither Marjora; nor any son of his girdled loins; nor his son's sons; nor the uttermost scion of his race. (220)

The result of Marjora's act is that future kings of Juam now look upon the prospect of ruling as that of being trapped: the successor to the throne is literally sequestered in the glen and walled within a cave that separates Willamilla (the glen) from the rest of Juam. This act is accomplished through a ceremony in which the new monarch, "placing the last stone in the gap," (221) relinquishes his own freedom but not his crown.

Rani, a prince and a one-time prospective future ruler of Juam, is recorded in the lore of the island as saying, "What! shall I be a king, only to be a slave?" (221). To be a king, to be elect, means to be confined to not only the laws of the land, but to the laws of history/religion. This leads King Donjalolo to question, "Is liberty a thing so glorious? Yet can I be no king, and behold thee!" (222). The concerns here are genuine ones. Can freedom be so glorious that it can sway one toward willingly choosing it over being the ruler, over relative omnipotence of one's domain? We find such a question being asked of Donjalolo's son. In order to make sure that his only son would remain in line to be king, Donjalolo heeds the words of the oracle's edict, which means that his son can never leave the glen or he will no longer be eligible to rule. Thus, we are told that Donjalolo "had restrained the boy from passing out of the glen" (221). The restless

nature of the boy, and his unwillingness to accept the restraints of being king, leads him to ingest poison and die. Donjalolo's act is a choice to reject the loneliness of election.

This theme that Melville explores in this section of *Mardi* is one that he will come back to again more specifically in both *Pierre* and "Bartleby," where he discusses the complex notion of the elect as a trapped and temporally damned figure. At the heart of this discussion also lies the illusion of choice. King Donjalolo argues, "My fate converges to a point. If I but cross that shadow [leaving the glen], my kingdom is lost" (222). Thus, while it appears that Donjalolo has a choice in the matter, he does not see it that way. To lose his kingdom and give it over to his uncle is not a choice. This is the same illusory choice that Ahab struggles with in the "Symphony" chapter of *Moby-Dick*. Is it truly a choice if one has to go against one's inner self, one's own sense of what it means to be human? This illusion of choice is what helps to create the ethos of the abject. And perhaps nowhere is this ethos more fully understood than in the works of one of the most influential authors for Melville, Byron.

Byronism: The Manfred-Like Taji

As I mentioned earlier, the abject figure is both aware of his or her condition and aware of his or her relationship to God. While we may connect the name of Taji to various cultural myths and legends, the theological underpinnings of *Mardi* are very Byronic in nature, especially when we look at *Manfred*. Melville alludes to Byron's cursed man early on in his novel, and it is certainly not a coincidence that Taji mentions Byron's Manfred toward the beginning of the text. The reason it happens so early in the text is because Taji's mind is not sufficiently prepared to fully internalize the meaning of his own allusion. He uses it more as a passing comment than anything else, as he did with the Hagar reference discussed earlier in the chapter.

Manfred is explicitly mentioned in two different spots of the text. In the fourth chapter, when Taji visits Jarl on the fore-masthead to talk about a plan to abandon the ship, he describes the effect that the fore-masthead has on a sailor. He says, “Manfred-like, you talk to the clouds: you have a fellow feeling for the sun” (16). In Levine’s analysis of this scene, he sees it as a typical Melvillean portrait in which “to be aloft on a ship is to be in an especially free zone, elevated not only physically, but also socially and intellectually” (344). Levine is, of course, correct in noting this observation about Melville’s works; however, we also need to add that the sailor is spiritually free as well.

The name Taji is given to the narrator in order to receive the “unbounded hospitality” (164) of the Mardians. Taji’s announces, “I come from the sun. When this morning it rose and touched the wave, I pushed my shallop from its golden beach, and hither sailed before its level rays. I am Taji” (166). The use of the sun is significant because most of their traveling to find Yillah takes place under the sun. There is also a connection between Taji as a demigod of the sun and Byron’s Manfred as well, which will help us understand how to read the transformation that Melville’s narrator undergoes. Manfred refers to the sun as “Thou material God!” (3.2.14). Manfred has an appreciation for the sun because of the tangible effect it has on individuals. One can actually feel the warmth and see the light that it provides. It is not metaphorical in this sense; it does not need to be interpreted first in order to take pleasure in its warmth or light. We do not need to comprehend its warmth to enjoy it. Whereas there is a need to comprehend the nature of God’s words in order to experience the most from them. The other important aspect of Byron’s sun is that it maintains its glory while providing these tangible results. Byron’s cursed man adds,

...Thou chief star!
Centre of many stars! whichmak’st our earth

Endurable, and temperest the hues
And hearts of all who walk within thy rays! (*Manfred* 3.2.16-19)

We cannot help but read the sun here metaphorically as “Son” as well, as in Christ. If we do so, we see the pathos of Manfred, longing to be infused with a divine temperance, but left with only anger and a reminder of his unpardonable sin. Certainly, Byron was not alone in making such a comparison.

Milton’s Satan does the same when he says, “O Sun, to tell thee how I hate thy beams / That bring to my remembrance from what state I fell” (*PL* 4.36-7). The glory of God reveals and magnifies Satan’s own demise and damnation. Melville not only had an appreciation for Milton, but he seemed to have had an appreciation for Byron’s opinion of Milton as well. In Feiss’s “Melville as a Reader and Student of Byron,” he notes that “four lines in praise of Milton are marked off in a passage contrasting [Milton] with Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey” (192). These lines come from the tenth canto of the “Dedication” to *Don Juan*.⁹ The four lines are as follows:

He [Milton] deigned not to belie his soul in songs,
Nor turn his very talent to a crime;
He did not loathe the Sire to laud the Son,
But closed the tyrant-hater he begun. (lines 78-81)

Both Milton’s Satan and Manfred can see a Christological nature within the sun metaphor. What Byron’s reading of the sun reveals is the yearning for a simple deity, easily understood, easily loved. This will be at the forefront of much of Melville’s own strife in his works, constantly pitting what seemed the more sensible and freely-given love of Christ against the more complex nature of the more hard-earned—perhaps misunderstood—love of Jehovah.

⁹ See Sealts’s #108

There is yet another reference to Manfred in *Mardi* that needs to be explored. When Taji talks about Jarl's nature, he says that the Viking "was nothing of an idealist; an aerial architect; a constructor of flying buttresses. It was inconceivable, that his reveries were Manfred-like and exalted, reminiscent of unutterable deeds, too mysterious even to be indicated by the remotest hints" (36). Taji is correct that Jarl is not Manfred-like, for he lacks what Byron's Manfred understood to be fact: that "Sorrow is knowledge: they who know the most / Must mourn the deepest o'er the fatal truth, / The Tree of Knowledge is not that of Life" (1.1.10-12). Jarl's tattoo of Christ¹⁰ is a sign of his willingness to accept Providence and live with the idea of limitations: limitations in knowledge, in power, and in possessions. Had Jarl been alive at the end of the story, he undoubtedly would have joined the remainder of the crew on the island of Serenia and had lived contently. Taji, however, is not content with limitations, with the idea that he has lost Yillah. What must be made clear is not that Taji takes the place of Jehovah, but that in his transition from demigod to abject, he has found no need to worship God anymore.

Manfred is a cursed figure like Cain, and the suffering that both of these individuals share is not of a physical nature, but one of consciousness of their separation from both temporal and ethereal beings. Manfred says, "I have pray'd / For madness as a blessing—'tis denied me" (2.2.132-3). For Manfred, madness would be a show of divine mercy, a release from that which makes him suffer. He does not deny God's power. In fact, when the Fifth Spirit of act two bids Manfred to kneel before Arimanes, a seemingly powerful being, Manfred's response is:

Bid *him* bow down to that which is above him,
The overruling Infinite—the Maker
Who made him not for worship—let him kneel,
And we will kneel together. (2.4.44-7)

¹⁰Taji tells us that the tattoo is of "our Savior on the cross" (147).

This type of mindset translates into much of Melville's works. There is a true acceptance of Jehovah as an omnipotent being. In doing so, it allows the abject figure to better understand and critique the nature of Providence. And in their greater understanding, their acquisition of grand knowledge, they become like gods themselves; however, they do not seek to rule over others. That would be a tiresome and unworthy affair for them. In this sense, Byron may have articulated the closest ethos to the abject prior to Melville, even more so, perhaps, than Milton with Satan.

When the Abbot visits Manfred in order to get him to mend his ways and receive absolution, the cursed man is dismissive. Important to note, however, is he does not mock the clergyman. There is a respect for the Abbot's office and his work. Manfred is, by all means, beyond the help of the Abbot at this point in the text. The Abbot says of Manfred:

This should have been a noble creature: he
 Hath all the energy which would have made
 A goodly frame of glorious elements,
 Had they been wisely mingled; as it is,
 It is an awful chaos—light and darkness—
 And mind and dust—and passions and pure thoughts,.... (3.1.160-5)

In these words, the biblically abject is summed up. There is a glorious nature to this archetypal figure: Cain goes on to found the City of Man, which Melville will look at more closely in *Pierre* and "Bartleby;" Ishmael becomes the progenitor of his own tribe of people; and even Esau, who is a most hated individual by God for his selling of his birthright, finds forgiveness for his brother who was given their father's blessing through trickery. The abject figure can do great things for society, but they do so without the grace of God. Because of their separation from God, their inner greatness—their ability to achieve great things (and I do not use great in any moral sense) places them in a position where they feel neither altogether with humans nor with gods. It also has the effect of leaving them without a clear sense of good and evil. The Witch

of act two in *Manfred* tells us that the cursed man has done “deeds of good and ill, extreme in both, / Fatal and fated in thy sufferings” (2.2.35-6). Thus Manfred is a product of both who he is, his actions, and the accumulation of his knowledge. This ambiguous nature to Manfred is what Matthiessen saw in both *Mardi* and many of Melville’s works: “The resulting impression is that good and evil can be inextricably and confusingly intermingled—a state that was to be one of Melville’s chief sources of ambiguity” (Matthiessen 384). I would only add to this that in the case of Taji at the end of the novel, good and evil are not intermingled; they are irrelevant.

The Byronic hero is the final step in the Romantic chain that leads to complete abject depravity. When we think of figures like the Ancient Mariner, we remember that his suffering continues under the subjugation of the terms of his penance. When we think of Browning’s Roland there is triumph, not in its end result, but in the knight’s endurance to get to the point where there can be a result, a final battle. Byron’s Manfred and Cain are figures who have entered the Dark Tower and have come out neither defeated nor victorious; they are no more comfortable among humans than they are among gods; they are in a type of Purgatory.

The Rejection of Alma(Christ) and the Acceptance of the Abject

The final chapters of *Mardi* have left critics somewhat bewildered as to what actually happens to Taji.¹¹ The Romantic and Miltonic influences on Melville should not rule out the possibility, as Tyrus Hillway points out, that, like the Ancient Mariner, Taji is left in a sort of perpetual state of questing through eternity as punishment for not accepting Alma (Christ).

However, one question that we must ask is whether Taji is conscious of this as being a

¹¹Tyrus Hillway’s essay, “Taji’s Abdication in Herman Melville’s *Mardi*,” does an excellent job of noting that Taji’s final act does not necessarily have to be the ending of his life. There is the possibility that Taji’s quest will continue on into eternity (204).

punishment. For figures like Cain and Manfred, it is the consciousness of their state of being that creates the suffering. As Fred Parker succinctly phrases it: “In Byron’s heroes it often seems to be—with familiar Romantic emphasis—the intensity of consciousness itself that constitutes the alienated self: knowledge as alienation” (1-2). Taji is very conscious of his decision to follow Yillah into the void, but he does not seem to necessarily care that this is a damning choice. In *Moby-Dick* it is in “The Symphony” chapter, through his cathartic moment with Starbuck, that Ahab informs us that he is fully aware that he is a damned individual. Taji, however, does not seem to have such a reflective moment; Melville does not offer us any such pathos. It is not about simply rejecting Christ and Christianity. As Hillway points out, “Having rejected Christianity, [Taji] now rejects the consolations of the world as well” (207). This rejection of both the world and God shows us that Taji has become a truly abject figure.

Briefly returning to Manfred, his final act of defiance is to abdicate himself, much like Taji does at the end. Manfred tells the spirit who has come to take him away to eternity:

Thou didst not tempt me, and thou couldst not tempt me;
 I have not been thy dupe, nor am thy prey—
 But was my own destroyer, and will be
 My own hereafter.—Back, ye baffled fiends!
 The hand of death is on me—but not yours! (III. IV. 137-41)

Although Hautia-Yillah does tempt Taji to his damnation, it is not Hautia-Yillah that forces him into his final act. He exclaims, “Now, I am my own soul’s emperor; and my first act is abdication! Hail! realm of shades!” (654). Like Ahab, Taji no longer lays claim to the responsibility of his fellow man; he is long past caring about his fratricidal act. This is why Taji refuses to heed the warning issued by Babbalanja: “for Yillah thou wilt hunt in vain; she is a phantom that but mocks thee; and while for her thou madly huntest, the sin thou didst cries out, and its avengers still will follow” (637). But Taji no longer cares about his sin, and he is far

removed from his cosmopolitan musings of brotherhood that he displays in the beginning of the story. When Mohi cries out, “He’s seized the helm! eternity is in his eye! Yoomy: for our lives we must now swim,” (654) Mohi is right to be afraid. Taji would have taken both the historian and the poet with him into the void, just as Ahab drags the crew of the *Pequod*—save Ishmael—down to total destruction.

The narration of the final moments in the novel is two-fold. It says that Taji “[turned his] prow into the racing tide,” which would indicate a choice, an active participation in his damnation, and yet the line goes on to say that the racing tide “seized me like a hand omnipotent” (654). God and the abject are always linked together, not always in battle—as we will see in the case of Ishmael in the third chapter. The abject figure always understands that he or she is still part of a world that is run by God. Nonetheless, Taji is offered the “choice” to stay with the rest of his companions on Serenia; however, he refuses to do so. For an author like Melville, who seems to have struggled so much with how to balance the love and suffering of Christ/Jehovah, to have a character—a primary narrator at that—willfully reject what seems to be a Christological paradise is quite baffling. And yet there are reasons for Taji to do so.

Michel Despland notes that “Those characters who settle for Serenia seem to do it out of fatigue” (114) more than any other true spiritual awakening. The quest of *Mardi* is a long one—for both the characters and the reader; nonetheless, we do the story a bit of an injustice to say that these characters “settle” for a place that Melville—and many others—may have wished existed in real life. The reason that Taji’s companions are able to let go and embrace Alma is because they are able to internalize him. Babbalanja is correct when he says, “But here [the phantoms] may not come: nor those, who, tempting, track thy path. Wise counsel take. Within our hearts is all we seek: though in that search may need a prompter. Him I have found in blessed Alma”

(637). All of these figures can put Alma above themselves, above what they stand for: philosophy, history, and art. Even in the case of the divine logic of Media, he is advised to “Let no man weep, that thou may’st laugh; no man toil too hard, that thou may’st idle be. Abdicate thy throne: but still retain the scepter. None need a king; but many need a ruler” (637). Babbalanja’s words here are addressed to Media, but we can read them as being addressed to Melville’s perception of Jehovah as well. The word “abdicate” appears again at the very end of the novel, when Taji announces, “Now, I am my own soul’s emperor; and my first act is abdication!” (654). It is right after this declaration that Taji sails into the void. To accept Alma (Christ) is to abdicate one’s will.

Bruce. H. Franklyn offers the following thought:

Once we recognize the fact that there is only one true sun, one divine light, one supreme prince, one Absolute in Mardi, we may return to the myths about the other incarnate suns, other divine princes, other absolutes. The true Alma appears in a world swarming with dangerous myths, including the most dangerous myth of all, the myth of Alma” (Franklin 50).

The dangerousness of the “myth of Alma” is that it *does* appear to actually be a utopian vision of wonder. This is an ideal that human beings cannot really fathom, and thus, in a sense, it does appear as wild as any of the other myths of the journey. Kenneth Bernard reads the novel as “the story of paradise regained and then lost again” (23). Melville’s subsequent works, up to and including *Billy Budd*, all in some way deal with this cyclical notion of paradise being regained and then lost again. However, for Melville, such a utopian vision of pure Christian love cannot exist because it cannot be truly fathomed by human logic.

In the wake of Melville’s previous travel narratives “the prospects of adventure and romance suggested before the end of the first chapter of *Mardi* were as attractive as any could wish” (103), as Merrell R. Davis notes in his study. *Mardi* may begin like one of his early travel

narratives, as some early reviewers of the book noted, but by the end of the novel the reader feels as though he or she has been led on a journey into a void of nothingness along with the narrator.¹² If the entranceway to this ethereal space had a sign above it, it would not be quite as pessimistic as Dante's call in the *Inferno* to abandon all hope; rather, Melville's sign would assume that much of the traveler's hopes have already been lost before entrance, and that this path leads one directly toward becoming the abject. F.O. Matthiessen offers his own vision of *Mardi* as Melville expounding upon the notion that "good based on an initial act of evil is doomed to end in disaster" (384). Melville will continue to pursue this idea in *Moby-Dick* as well. However, by the time he writes *Pierre* he will explore how evil based on an initial act of good is also doomed to end in disaster. Through *Mardi* Melville shows us the vast complexity of the human spirit. That Taji would reject the utopian-like state of Serenia for the phantom of Yillah speaks to how clouded the human heart can potentially become. While Taji lacks the grandeur and pathos of Ahab, he is, nonetheless, a figure who foreshadows the monomaniacal captain of Melville's greatest work of art. Thus, *Mardi* remains a critical piece of work for understanding how Melville came to truly internalize the ethos of the abject.

¹² The critical reception of *Mardi*, as Hetherington's *Melville's Reviewers: British and American 1846-1891* notes, ranged rather widely. "Of the fourteen 1849 British reviews, five which admitted the charm of the opening chapters were negative in final judgment" (110). Many of the reviewers, both British and American reference both *Typee* and *Omoo* in comparison, a problem that Melville attempted to address in his preface. However, one American critic of the Democratic Boston *Post* said of Melville's preface, which I have included a little ways down in this chapter, "He [Melville] had better stick to his 'fact' which is received as 'fiction,' but which puts money in his purse, than fly to 'fiction' which is not received at all" (Hetherington 114).

Chapter 2: Melville's Captain Cain

The relationship between Melville and the biblical Cain figure is not unexplored. Wyn Kelley, in her essay "Melville's Cain," makes some integral connections between the two: "Cain represents for Melville the paradox of human society....For Melville, at the center of human culture lies an Original Crime, an ancient fratricide which modern man inherits and is doomed to repeat even in his most civilized state" (27). Indeed, Melville could see a distinguishable, malignant characteristic within human nature that requires at all times a conscious effort to suppress. Balancing the needs of society and the needs of the soul is a concept almost wholly irreconcilable for Melville. Although Cain was a failure as a figure of Judeo-Christian virtue, his feelings of exile and strife at the hands of an angry God are quite easy to identify with. Melville internalized Cain's angst much in the same way that other dark Romantics did, and the result is one of the most dynamic characters in all of American literature.

For Melville, the story of Cain and Abel represents more than an act of murder. It also represents an irreconcilable relationship between God's will (Providence) and the will of humans. Cain's fratricide opens up a space for a dialogue to pursue what Melville, and other romantic authors, would find to be problematic questions pertaining to the rift between divine and human logic. One of these problematic dialogues that rises to the forefront of consciousness is not only the conundrum of how bad things can happen to good people, but that it is seemingly all lumped under the will of the same God. Melville's Dutch Calvinistic upbringing plays a major role in making him increasingly sensitive—like his monomaniacal captain, Ahab—to this complex arrangement of good and evil being intermingled together. Although Abel is pious and good he is still killed by his brother, and since God is omnipotent it is not unjust to say that He allows this murder to happen—or in terms of Calvin's theology, that He designs it.

Another question brought about by this act of fratricide is the nature of one's responsibility to mankind. How does one avoid the label of a Cain and become his or her brother's keeper? We can see these themes routinely surface in Melville's works from the natives in *Typee*, to the antagonistic acts of Claggart, prompting the murderous actions of Billy in *Billy Budd*. These themes are all tied to the murder of Abel. This chapter focuses on the influences that led to Melville's understanding and interpretation of the biblical Cain. Ahab is Melville's Cain, a figure tormented by the consciousness of his existence, his exile, and the feeling that free will is but an illusion.

Section 1: Influences

Theological Influences

The appearance of Cain in the Bible, though profound, is quite short. He is credited with the first murder of humanity, and he is often used as a prime example of pride and jealousy. The event that leads to the enmity between Cain and God is the rejection of Cain's offering.

And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering: But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell. (Genesis 4.3-5)

Though it is not explicitly said why God rejects Cain's offering, we can see from this piece of scripture that God not only has respect for the offering, but for the person as well. This rejection of Cain and his offering leads to the murder of his pious brother, Abel. "And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him" (Genesis 4.8). This murder does not go unnoticed by God. "And the

Lord said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper? "(Genesis 4.9). Cain's question to God concerning if he is his brother's keeper will become a source of many debates in later portions of Judeo-Christian scripture in terms of the typological readings of Christ as the fulfillment of Old Testament scripture. The question of just how responsible an individual is for his or her fellow human being is a critical theme throughout the Bible, as well as throughout Melville's texts.

Cain is punished for his murderous act, and he is sentenced into exile, but not before he is marked by God. "And the Lord said unto him, Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the lord set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him" (Genesis 4.15). This mark serves two purposes. It brands Cain as a murderer and protects him from being killed by others. Thus, God is reserving the right to be the one to end Cain's life. One of the questions that we have to be careful with is whether or not this is God's vengeance or justice speaking here? For the Romantics, it is vengeance; for theologians it is justice. Though the actual scriptural account of Cain is short, there is much interest in the story amongst biblical scholars.

Concerning Cain's fall from grace, there is little contention in the church of Christianity. Traditional views of Cain, such as the one depicted in St. Augustine's *City Of God*, attribute the murderous deed to a natural war between the city of man and the city of God. According to Augustine, "Cain was the firstborn, and he belonged to the city of men; after him was born Abel, who belonged to the city of God" (431). Along with ushering in the concept of sin into the world, the fall of Adam and Eve planted the roots for spiritual conflict. For Augustine, it is this conflict of temporal values versus ethereal values that prompts the events of Cain's fall and fratricide: "[T]hat which fell out between Cain and Abel illustrated the hatred that subsists

between the two cities, that of God and that of men” (435). Concerning the rejection of Cain’s offering, Augustine offers one possibility to explain God’s discontent with the sacrifice. Cain “gave to God something of his own but kept himself to himself” (437). Here Cain serves a purpose. The story shows that an individual must give up his or her will in order to achieve a true connection with God. For Christians, Cain serves as a very clear depiction of a prideful man of the world, unwilling to drop what he owns and pick up the mantle of following Jesus. It is for this reason that Cain was found to be a very useful figure for Protestant reformers in their crusade to reform Christianity.

Martin Luther, the forerunner of the Protestant Reformation, utilized his interpretation of scripture to bolster his belief that the Catholic Church was corrupt and untrue to the doctrines of Christ. One of the chief stories Luther uses to convey his beliefs is the story of Cain and Abel. In Luther’s lectures on the Book of Genesis, he states, “there is no doubt among us today that the church of the pope is the church of Cain. We, however, are the true church. Just as Abel did no harm to Cain, so we, too, not only do no harm to them but allow ourselves to be harassed, condemned, and slain by the pope’s church” (254). Here, Luther uses Cain, a powerful image of evil, easily recognizable to all Christians, to establish his doctrines against the Catholic Church. Furthermore, for Luther, Cain is an example of God’s wrath to those who boast of greatness in nobility, another sin that Luther attributes to his oppressors. Luther states, “God acted properly when He permitted Cain to fall this way as an example for the entire world, so that no one might boast of the nobility of his blood” (256). This management of the bloodline is one of the most important themes of the Old Testament, leading all the way through to the New Testament as well. Melville displays more than just an awareness of this importance: *Pierre*, the novel which directly follows *Moby-Dick*, will deal with this issue explicitly. Cain is a powerful and yet

perplexing figure in Judeo-Christian doctrine. There is little in the Bible to account for the motives behind Cain's act; yet, it is for this very reason that many find the story so intriguing. One such individual who found Cain to be a useful figure was none other than Jonathan Edwards.

Still utilized as a source of great spiritual enlightenment, the words of Jonathan Edwards could still be heard in many sermons in the New England area during the nineteenth century. Melville was aware of the influence of Edwards in Massachusetts, especially during his years living in the Berkshires. Hershel Parker, in his biography of Herman Melville, notes that while in the Berkshires, "Melville had marked a paragraph about Edwards" (795) that discussed the minister's contributions in the settling and ministering of Stockbridge Massachusetts. Parker believes Melville took some devilish delight in knowing that he was writing his books of spiritual conflict in a place noted for its spiritual strength. Parker further comments, "Edwards...was still fresh in the mind when Melville later wrote to Hawthorne that he had written a wicked book" (1: 796). This wicked book is of course *Moby-Dick*. In Edwards's explication of Genesis, he offers this interpretation of Cain's wrath. "Abel was a penitent believer, like the publican that went away justified. Cain was unhumbled, and his confidence was in himself, like the Pharisee who glorified himself, but he was not so much justified before God" (327). Edwards's use of the word "justified" is important here, because it recalls to his listeners the Puritan doctrines of Justification and Sanctification. If one was "justified," meaning elect, one would then become "sanctified" in the eyes of the world: sanctified in the sense that the inner grace would manifest itself externally through signs.

According to Edwards, Cain did not place his strength in God. Instead, he placed it in himself. For this reason, Cain's offering was not justified or sanctified in the eyes of God. It is

Cain's defiant character and his actions that prompt the rejection of his sacrifice. The commentary that Edwards provides concerning the dialogue between God and Cain serves as an important example of the rhetorical power that the story of the first murder held and still holds today. Edwards states, "'If thou dost not well, sin lieth at the door.' Not at Cain's door, but at God's door. His wicked doing lay as it were at the door of God's temple, to prevent his admittance and acceptance with God, stood as a partition wall between God and Him" (327). Cain's defiant spirit and actions led to his separation from God's grace; this partition is both metaphorical and salvifically literal. Edwards was not alone in finding Cain to be a useful figure for instruction. In fact, people of the nineteenth century were so intrigued by this marked figure that Cain could be found in virtually every aspect of culture, including the education of the youth.

In 1834, a book titled *Early Piety* was published to help guide parents in raising their children to be better Christians. The author of the book, Jacob Abbott, uses stories in the Bible to promote dialogues between parents and children. In doing so, the hope is that the children will learn to be more pious. The story of Cain and Abel serves as one of the primary lessons in the book. The author constructs the story in the form of a dialogue between a mother and her child.

[Cain] was very much displeased; and it is very remarkable that he was displeased, not only against God, but *he was angry with his brother*, who had not done him the least wrong. That is the way with us all. If you should do wrong, and your sister do right, and I should blame *you*, and praise *her*, you would be tempted to feel angry with her, just because she had been so happy as to do her duty. How wicked such a feeling is! Cain, however, had that feeling; and little children have it very often. It shows itself in different ways. Cain, being a strong man, rose against his brother in the field and killed him. But young children who are weak and small would only strike each other, or say unkind things to one another. Now God is displeased with us when *we have these feelings*, whether we show them by unkind words, or by cruel violence. (37-8)

This passage carries with it some interesting underlying commentary: first, it admits that there is the propensity for Cain to be within us all; the potentiality is there. Secondly, and more importantly, it very accurately displays the problems that many of the Puritans faced. Arminianism, being a doctrine of works, was seen by the Puritans as heresy against a God who provided grace as a means of getting to Heaven. The problem, however, is that one's works are nonetheless attached to one's ability to convey sanctification. In other words, if one is elected to receive God's grace, he or she will display this grace in his or her works by virtue of that grace. If one did not appear to have this grace, it would manifest itself in bad works and appearances. Thus the two worlds are inextricably linked. The struggle then became how to manage these two worlds, to, as Perry Miller notes, "find some possible grounds for proving the necessity of 'works' without curtailing the absolute freedom of God to choose and reject regardless of man's achievement" (54). This careful negotiation becomes all the more difficult when, such as is the case in the passage regarding Cain's hateful feelings referenced above, the mere appearance of hateful feelings becomes indicative of one's state of salvation. The passage attacks the feelings themselves, not simply the manifestations of these feelings by way of one's actions. So the question that remains is, how does an individual control his or her emotions? This quandary helped pave the way for authors like Gessner, Coleridge, and Byron to focus on the emotional disconnect that Cain felt between he and God even prior to the rejected offering.

Gessner, Byron and Coleridge

According to Sealts it is very possible that Melville indeed owned a copy of Salomon Gessner's *The Death of Abel* in his collection (#223a). In Gessner's version, Cain is given a more detailed account of his feelings. Gessner expounds on the traditional notions of Cain as a

character of envy and pride; however, it is not a simple story of hubris and murder. There are moments in the story where Cain exudes pathos. Gessner's Cain concludes that he is a product of God's will. His position in the affairs of the world has been decreed without his consent. Cain exclaims, "On my unhappy head the almighty has poured forth the cup of malediction. It is not for me Nature displays her beauties; nor do the streams of bliss, of which you take such plenteous draughts, flow for me" (10). The Cain portrayed in *The Death Of Abel* is a much more sympathetic character than the more traditional depictions of the cursed Cain as a solely evil being. The result is a Cain that is much more human and more relatable.

Cain, like many others who attempt to rationalize thoughts of angst, is overwhelmed by his feelings of malevolency and sorrow. The Bible's limited account of Cain's life up until the murder does not give us much of a motive for his fratricidal act, other than the rejected offering. Even this does not substantiate the murder. It is only until after he has committed his heinous act and is cowering in the presence of God that we can begin to see more human characteristics in Cain. This is not the case in Gessner's version. Upon learning that his father, Adam, has fallen greatly ill, "Cain, in spite of the roughness of his temper, had shed tears at the groans and discourse of his father" (54). This is not a Cain without a heart. It is only in the moments of outright defiance, calling God's will into question, that we can begin to see the remnants of the traditional view of Cain as a prideful and jealous man.

"Here I am!" cried Cain in a voice of thunder: "Here am I, thou soft favourite!—thou dear minion of the vengeful, Eternal and of all nature!—thou, whose viperous race are one day solely to engross all the felicity of this world! Yes, so it must be. It is fit that there should be a tribe of slaves, as beasts of burden to the favourite lineage. (71)

Though this statement is indeed blasphemous, it is not sacrilegious simply for the sake of defiance. Cain realizes that his brother has won the love of not only his parents but of God as

well. Even in the moments in which Gessner depicts a prideful Cain, these are moments that can be looked upon as very humanistic. Furthermore, Gessner's Cain is not without love for his brother. He states, "Must I hate my brother because I was not always weeping over him, or persecuting him with my embraces?—I never hated my brother—no, never. I saw, indeed, with pain, that he, by his softness and effeminacy, stole from me the affection of Adam and Eve" (44). Gessner depicts a Cain who is upset with his place in the world. Gessner's choice to have Cain refer to his parents as Adam and Eve further shows us his feelings of detachment toward his parents. He cannot come to terms with his predestined life of sorrow. Though Gessner's Cain elicited much sympathy for his more humanistic qualities, Byron's Cain will also receive much attention for his more philosophical depiction of the marked man from the book of Genesis.

We have already discussed in chapter one portions of Byron's *Cain* as it relates to *Mardi*, but it plays an important role here as well in Melville's writing of *Moby-Dick*. Byron's depiction of Cain is quite different from Gessner's. In *The Death Of Abel*, we can see very human emotions in Cain that lead to his act of murder. Byron's Cain seems to be led by a will to understand why things are. Cain exclaims: "Toil! and wherefore should I toil? / – because / My father could not keep his place in Eden. / What had I done in this? / I was unborn: I sought not to be born; nor love the state / To which that birth has brought me" (I. i. 64-66). Byron's Cain realizes that the burden of sin did not come from his own actions, but from the actions of Adam and Eve. This causes great strife between Cain and the rest of his family.

Cain feels the burden of Original Sin and questions why he must be punished for a crime which he did not commit. This questioning of God's will leads to a philosophical journey, in which Lucifer utilizes a Socratic method of answering Cain's questions with more questions. At one point, Lucifer asks Cain, "Why art thou wretched?" (II. ii. 482). Cain replies, "Why do I

exist? / Why art *thou* wretched? why are all things / so? (II. ii. 483-5). We can see Cain's struggle here to understand the will of God. Cain becomes a figure in pursuit of higher knowledge. Yet, it is this pursuit and attainment of knowledge that leads Cain to his murderous act. Byron's Cain not only witnesses the future of his lineage as subordinates to Abel, but he also witnesses the souls that are toiling in Hell. For Byron's Cain, God is a tyrant who allows for death and suffering. Cain decides to strike his brother dead in hopes of thwarting these events from coming to fruition. Therefore, much like Gessner's depiction, the murder becomes an act of violence stemming from a man seemingly pushed to the edge of sanity by a cruel, unjust God. For Calvin, God cannot be "unjust" because of His omnipotent nature. All things are decreed as such because He says so. Gessner's Cain becomes a victim of his emotions. Byron's Cain uses philosophy to challenge the very structure of God's Providence by asking why things are predestined the way they are. Coleridge's story begins where Gessner and Byron's ends, after the murder is accomplished. He will utilize both emotion and philosophy to argue the unfair nature of God's doctrines toward his mortal creations.

Although Coleridge's *Wanderings of Cain* is unfinished, it nonetheless adds an interesting twist to the many depictions of Cain. Coleridge opens his story with a somber Cain. Already banished for having committed the murder, Cain states, "The Mighty One that persecuteth me is on this side and on that; he pursueth my soul like the wind, like the sand-blast he passeth through me; he is around me even as the air! Oh that I might be utterly no more! I desire to die" (362). Cain is haunted by God's omnipresence in nature, and, at this point of the story, he is utterly destroyed by his sentence of exile. We are reminded of the marking of Cain, and how God reserves the right to terminate Cain's life. Coleridge's Cain wants nothing more than death because death would mean an escape of consciousness. In this sense, Cain is

experiencing a hell on earth. Cain's "countenance told in a strange and terrible language of agonies that had been, and were, and were still to continue to be" (362). Cain is not alone, however.

Enos, Cain's son, leads his father to a spot where there is a pitcher of water and some food. Here, they meet a specter in the form of Abel; however, they are quick to find that the pious Abel is suffering as well. The ghost of Abel shrieks, "The Lord is God of the living only, the dead have another God" (364). What this is actually referring to is Matthew, 22.32, in which Christ admonishes the Sadducees who do not know scripture. He asks them if they remember the words of the Father: "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?..." Christ then says, "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." Seeing Abel in a state of torment causes Cain to rejoice "secretly in his heart" (364). He no longer feels wretched by his exile. Instead, Cain feels justified in his acts of defiance. No longer the villain, Cain becomes a hero, defying the subjugation of a tyrannical ruler.

Although we may never know how Coleridge originally planned to end this piece, from what we do have, we can see a similar pattern to that of both Gessner and Byron. All three of these authors have different approaches of penning their portrayals of Cain; however, they all try to rationalize why the events took place in the Bible, and why God judges Cain as harshly as he does. Furthermore, they all, in typical romantic fashion, focus on how Cain responds emotionally to all that transpires. Melville, with his own qualms concerning the will of God, was undoubtedly drawn to these themes as well, and it appears he too felt the need to address these concerns. He would do so through his own version of Cain: Captain Ahab.

Section 2: Ahab as Cain

There were many cultural aspects that helped shape Melville's mindset in regard to his understanding of the abject ethos. *Moby-Dick* was certainly not the first time Melville penned a Cain-like figure. In between writing *Mardi* and *Moby-Dick* Melville wrote *Redburn* (1849) and then *White-Jacket* (1850). Although this study does not delve into these two novels in any great detail, we should note their importance as to their role in helping to shape the type of character that will lead to Ahab. Of these two novels it is Jackson from *Redburn* who seems the most Cain-like figure prior to Ahab. It is worth looking a little bit at this character in order to see just how far Melville progresses from the somewhat flat character of Jackson to the dynamic captain of the *Pequod*.

We are told by the narrator in *Redburn* that Jackson is prone to enter into arguments with other sailors in order to convey the point that

there was nothing to be believed; nothing to be loved, and nothing worth living for; but everything to be hated, in the wide world. He was a horrid desperado; and like a wild Indian, whom he resembled in his tawny skin and high cheek bones, he seemed to run a muck [sic] at heaven and earth. He was a Cain afloat; branded on his yellow brow with some inscrutable curse; and going about corrupting and searing every heart that beat near him. (104)

Just as we saw in *Mardi*, Redburn—the narrator—speaks from a naïve perspective early on in the novel. He can see the hatred that is espoused by Jackson clearly enough, but he can't quite figure out why this ornery sailor is the way that he is. Redburn can't see that Jackson is simply reflecting all of the hatred and doubts that reside within his own psyche. Jackson is a Cain afloat, but he is not the all-evil figure that Redburn portrays him to be here. We are told soon after the above quotation that:

there seemed even more woe than wickedness about the man; and his wickedness seemed to spring from his woe; and for all his hideousness, there was that in his eye at times, that was ineffably pitiable and touching; and though there were moments when I almost hated this Jackson, yet I have pitied no man as I have pitied him. (105)

Melville does not pursue pathos in Jackson. For this reason we do not get a sense of the importance of Jackson's character in the text. He turns out to be more of a wicked figure than what he could have been potentially if Melville had decided to pursue the Cain ethos more fully. In other words, he is more of a biblical Cain than Byronic Cain. This is not the case, however, when we come to Ahab.

Is Ahab, Ahab?

Peleg reminds us at the beginning, before we even meet the captain of the *Pequod*, that "Captain Ahab did not name himself. 'Twas a foolish, ignorant whim of his crazy, widowed mother, who died when he was only a twelvemonth old. And yet the old squaw Tistig; at Gay-head, said that the name would somehow prove prophetic" (78). The fact that Melville writes Ahab's origin as being named by his widowed mother is significant in terms of how important the role of women are in the process of creating the elect and abject. We can be assured that Melville understood this relationship because of the name of the vessel that rescues Ishmael at the end of the book, the *Rachel*. Rebekah, the mother of both Jacob and Esau, sent Jacob away in order to protect him from his brother's wrath. Jacob will return with a proper wife for his elect status, and the name of Jacob's wife is in fact Rachel. With the name Ishmael, Melville makes a direct connection to the namesake of his narrator. With Ahab, he chooses a different name to convey the ethos of Cain. The question becomes: why did Melville use Ahab from the Bible? First we will need to become more acquainted with the story of the biblical Ahab before we can begin to see how Melville uses that figure along with Cain to create his captain of the *Pequod*.

Ahab was a king of Israel and is most famous for being evil. We are told: “But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord...” (Kings 1.27.25). God sends his prophet, Elijah, to Ahab in order to enact justice for killing and possessing land belonging to Naboth (Kings 1.21.19). Upon being confronted by Elijah, Ahab is anything but defiant. In fact, “when Ahab heard those words, that he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly” (Kings 1.21.27). Immediately, Ahab humbles himself before the prospect of God’s wrath. This has the desired result of divine mercy. God says to Elijah, “Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days: but in his son’s days will I bring the evil upon his house” (Kings 1.21.29). God’s actions here are twofold: on one hand, he shows mercy to Ahab by not punishing him directly; on the other hand, He punishes the son of Ahab. The Bible says that Ahaziah (Ahab’s son) “did evil in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the way of his father, and in the way of his mother...” (Kings 1.22.52). The word that we have to concentrate on here is “did,” as in he acted. This should act as justification for God’s punishment of Ahab’s son. Thus, God’s words, that he will bring evil on his son’s days, is not a threat or punishment: it is simply divine prophecy, God revealing Providence. This is a Calvinistic reading of the Bible, and the theologian does comment on this section.

According to Calvin, “forgiveness of sins never can be obtained without repentance” (408). For Calvin, the mercy that God shows Ahab is a temporal one only, for “what did Ahab gain by the mitigation of his punishment except that he did not suffer it alive on the earth?” (402). Thus, Ahab’s pardon has little weight in the grand scheme of salvation. Calvin is weighing the suffering on earth against the eternal suffering of damnation. Calvin further expounds on this section by adding that “God yielded to the feigned repentance of Ahab, that he

might show how ready he is to listen to his elect when, with true contrition, they seek his favor” (576). The point is that those who are elect should feel comforted by the fact that if God is willing to show such mercy to those who are not Justified before God, then He must be even more willing to show mercy to His elect people should they need His grace. Nonetheless, we walk away from Calvin’s reading with a somewhat bifurcated sense of God’s intentions in regard to Ahab. For all of the connections that we can make to the biblical Ahab with Melville’s own, we are still limited by what Marius Bewley notes in “Melville and the Democratic Experience”: that the biblical “Ahab didn’t have a great will, but he had a leech-like will...and what we see is not a Titan but a weakling. Melville’s Ahab is certainly not a weakling” (98). There are still connections, however, that can be made between the two figures, and these connections become all the more apparent when we look closely at Father Mapple’s sermon.

Toward the end of Father Mapple’s sermon, he sums up the important lesson he wishes for sailors to take away with them when they leave to go out to sea:

For sinful as he is, Jonah does not weep and wail for direct deliverance to God, contenting himself with this, that spite of all his pains and pangs, he will still look towards His holy temple. And here, shipmates, is true and faithful repentance; not clamorous for pardon, but grateful for punishment. And how pleasing to God was this conduct in Jonah, is shown in the eventual deliverance of him from the sea and the whale. Shipmates, I do not place Jonah before you to be copied for his sin but I do place him before you as a model for repentance. Sin not; but if you do, take heed to repent of it like Jonah. (52)

Critics often—and understandably so—focus on the connection here between Jonah and the whale. Considering the subject matter of Melville’s novel, it is understandable. However, if we shift our focus from Jonah to the idea of repentance and Calvin’s use of the biblical Ahab as a central figure who can be used to convey the multiple levels of God’s mercy, we find that Father Mapple may actually be figuratively speaking more to Ahab than even to our narrator, Ishmael. Criticism of Mapple’s sermon often focuses on Ishmael’s interpretation and relaying of Mapple’s

words; however, it is worth exploring Brodtkorb's assertion that "what [Mapple] says has little relevance *to* Ishmael (though, of course, a great deal to Ahab.) Ishmael cannot appropriate the sermon in Father Mapple's terms, he can only reproduce it" (58). I would not go as far as to say that it has "little relevance" to Ishmael, but I would agree that Ishmael, at this point in the narrative, seems unable to grasp the fullness of what Mapple is saying. Ishmael seems more preoccupied with Mapple's performance as preacher than with the actual sermon. It is this preoccupation with performance over substance that will ultimately lead Ishmael to be so easily overcome by Ahab's grandness. Ahab, however, seems to comprehend both aspects, the performance and the substance. This is easily indicated by the way in which Ahab can move in and out of both the performative world and the philosophical one.

What we find in Mapple's sermon is a doctrinal problem for an astute reader like Melville, and a problem that plagued the early Puritans as well. The problem lies in how one is supposed to repent if one does not feel an actual sense of remorse? Melville's Ahab comes close to feeling remorse in "The Symphony" chapter, but it does not last. His hyper-conscious awareness of his state of damnation does not allow him to maintain feelings of genuine remorse. Consciousness is central to the abject figure's suffering, and there is no better reminder to Ahab of his condition than his mark.

Ahab's Mark

The exact origin of Ahab's mark is a mystery; however, one possible account for the mark is given to us by the Gayhead Indian: "But once Tashtego's senior, an old Gayhead 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” (110). Cain too was not born with his scar, but rather he earned it as well at the hands of God. Although the validity of the mystic’s statement can be called into question, having never actually laid eyes on Ahab prior to this voyage, these supernatural prophet-like figures used by Melville throughout the novel all seemingly have heightened senses of perception. Concerning the validity of the old Gayhead Indian’s statement, we are told, “the old sea-traditions, the immemorial credulities, popularly invested this old Manxman with preternatural powers of discernment” (110). Ahab’s mark has the same effect that Cain’s does: it marks him among others; it separates him from those aboard the ship; and, more importantly, it helps to define his fate from that moment forward. The scar is a reminder to him of his quest and his suffering. We can see just how much the scar impacts the captain’s mindset in one specific scene that takes place between Ahab and Perth, the blacksmith.

The interaction between Ahab and Perth helps us to understand just how far the Captain has fallen from grace. When Ahab asks the blacksmith how he—Perth—can live in this fiery forge “without a scorch,” Perth responds, “Because I am scorched all over, Captain Ahab” (370). This is a peculiar response. Like the metal he hammers and shapes, Perth has been beaten down into a figure who no longer questions his Providential position in the grand scheme of things. The scorches that cover his body have become infused with him internally; all of his suffering has been merged simply into one approach of understanding: the human condition. This is what Ahab and Cain cannot do; they cannot reconcile the scars of being human, the inherited scars that come from Original Sin. Perth continues, “I am past scorching; not easily can’st thou scorch a scar” (370). There are two parts to Ahab’s response to this line that we need to look at more closely.

The first response is a heroic one. “Well, well; no more. Thy shrunk voice sounds too calmly, sanely woful [sic] to me. In no Paradise myself, I am impatient of all misery in others that is not mad. Thou should’st go mad, blacksmith” (370). Ahab makes a reference to Paradise in order to draw our attention to the fallen state of humanity. It also has the effect of conveying Ahab’s inability to let go of the loss of the once Edenic state of humanity. The consciousness that there was once a place where none of this suffering could have ensued is another part of Ahab’s torment. What the monomaniacal captain does not see, however, is his own part in a sort of re-enactment of the Fall that will take place on the *Pequod*. Calvin has a specific word for figures like Ahab who avoid their own part in the continuation of humanity’s sinful nature. For the theologian these individuals are called reprobates:

The reprobate, though they groan under the lash, yet because they weigh not the true cause, but rather turn their back, as well upon their sins as upon the divine judgment, become hardened in their stupor; or, because they murmur and kick, and so rebel against their judge, their infatuated violence fills them with frenzy and madness. Believers, again, admonished by the rod of God, immediately begin to reflect on their sins, and, struck with fear and dread, betake themselves as suppliants to implore mercy. Did not God mitigate the pains by which wretched souls are excruciated, they would give way a hundred times, even at slight sings of his anger. (429)

Calvin’s thoughts here are what so infuriates someone like Ahab, because the reprobate cannot even claim madness to be his own. Calvin reasons that there is still mercy in the punishment of God, for if He really wanted to unleash His wrath upon those whom He deems unworthy, surely He could do so with little effort. There is little that we can argue against here in Calvin’s reading. An omnipotent being such as Jehovah could dispatch with Ahab with little effort. Nonetheless, Ahab believes that he can still use madness to his advantage, as a weapon against God.

T. Walter Herbert Jr. puts forth that “Melville achieved in *Moby-Dick* a sophisticated, acute, and prophetic attack on the scheme of theological ideas that was taken as an accurate description of ultimate reality in his time” (5). This is certainly the case; however, I would add that there is still much to say in regard to how Ahab views and utilizes madness to his advantage. Ahab encourages Perth to go mad because madness is a mechanism that the captain believes he can use to deal with his own forlorn consciousness; it is a potential space where God cannot enter. Madness is Ahab’s shield against the feeling of being abject; it is the lashing out of a child in many respects similar to the passage quoted toward the beginning of this chapter about how children should avoid these Cain-like emotions and actions. It is Ishmael who tells us that “If such a furious trope may stand, his [Ahab’s] special lunacy stormed his general sanity, and carried it, and turned all its concentrated cannon upon its own mark; so that far from having lost his strength, Ahab, to that one end, did now possess a thousand fold more potency than ever he had sanely brought to bear upon any one reasonable object” (157). As Herbert notes, “Implicit in any diagnosis of insanity is a conception of the real world, and of what ideas and feelings constitute a suitable response to it” (4). Madness is counter to the logic that we would deem to be “normal” for society, and since all society can be seen as human beings enacting the workings of Providence, Ahab will find madness to be too logical for him as well, since it is simply the counter to sanity. For Ahab, the answer is to become “madness, maddened,” to take upon “That wild madness that’s only calm to comprehend itself!” (143). If Ahab cannot be loved, he will put himself in a place where love does not matter: an elevated madness that is incomprehensible to both God and the rest of humanity. Milton’s Satan adheres to this principle as well when he says, “Be then [God’s] Love accurst, since love or hate, / To me alike, it deals eternal woe” (*PL*

4.69-70). The second part of Ahab's response to Perth, however, reads more like admiration for the blacksmith's sanity.

Ahab continues his rant on the usefulness of madness by asking Perth, "say, why dost thou not go mad? How can'st thou endure without being mad? Do the heavens yet hate thee, that thou can'st not go mad?" (370). If we read this passage with too much momentum—in due part because Melville connects this section and the previous one with nothing more than a semicolon—we miss the genuine emotion and importance of the questions. However, the repetitive nature of the questioning of why Perth cannot go mad helps us to hear just how important it is to Ahab that he learn the blacksmith's secret for how to deal with suffering through sanity. There are multiple ways to look at this, however.

One way that we can read this question is that Ahab is trying to make sense of why God allows him to be mad but does not grant Perth the same. The wording of Ahab's question—do the heavens yet hate thee—is twofold. He could be asking why God has *not* shown mercy and granted Perth madness, or why God *has* shown him mercy by *not* making the blacksmith mad. The part of Perth's character that Ahab simply cannot grasp is the blacksmith's ability to endure in spite of the fact that he is a castaway, to accept his position in Providence. The only way that Ahab can rationalize Perth's contentment is by wondering if God has yet indicated to the blacksmith that he is an abject individual. Perth understands his position as blacksmith, and he is confident in his trade abilities, but what Ahab does next is a calculated move to create, if not madness, fear in the blacksmith and a sense of the hate that he himself feels.

Ahab says to Perth, "And I suppose thou can'st smoothe almost any seams and dents; never mind how hard the metal, blacksmith?" (370). Perth anticipates what Ahab is about to refer to: "Aye, sir, I think I can; all seams and dents but one" (370). The response here is a

recognition of Perth's limited nature as a human being. It is the fruition of the book of Job, where the forlorn figure finally understands that he or she simply cannot fathom all aspects of divine wisdom, thus recognizing the limitations of humans:

“Look ye here, then,” cried Ahab, passionately advancing, and leaning with both hands on Perth's shoulders; “look ye here—*here*—can ye smoothe out a seam like this, blacksmith,” sweeping one hand across his ribbed brow; “if thou could'st, blacksmith, glad enough would I lay my head upon thy anvil, and feel thy heaviest hammer between my eyes. Answer! Can'st thou smoothe this seam?” (370)

The purpose of this exchange is to create madness in the blacksmith and to transmit the feeling of hatred that Ahab feels both toward and from God. No one can smooth away the mark of Cain that is upon Ahab's brow except for God. The second “*here*” that has been italicized indicates that Perth was avoiding the first call to look at the mark. Ahab forces Perth to recognize the scar, to look the Captain's suffering in the face, to “strike through the mask” (140). Ahab, like Milton's Satan, longs to be cleansed of the curse, but he refuses to concede his own role in receiving the curse.

After Perth admits that the Captain's scar is the one dent that he cannot fix (370), Ahab tells the blacksmith that “it is unsmoothable; for though thou only see'st it here in my flesh, it has worked down into the bone of my skull—*that* is all wrinkles!” (370). The scar has penetrated—or is still penetrating—the skull and has made its way into his mind. Like Hawthorne's “Birthmark” it has become interwoven into the very being of Ahab, and to remove the scar would mean death. Ahab ends this exchange by saying “But, away with child's play” (370). The comma there gives the reader an interesting choice as to how to read the end of this exchange. We are given the option to read the “But” with the same force that Ahab has been using against Perth, but the comma allows us to relax the tone, which would indicate that there is a playfulness—a devilish delight—here as well in Ahab's tone. He has accomplished what he

set out to do, and what he has been doing throughout the entire journey aboard the *Pequod*: Ahab has transferred his own madness onto another. For even though Perth recognizes that he is being asked to make weapons in the name of the devil (370), he is, at the present moment, more afraid of Ahab than he is of God. This is one of the reasons why God exiles Cain. It is because the abject figure can have a profound impact on others.

Cain in Exile

The notion of exile is a key element in understanding the abject ethos. There are two aspects we need to look at when discussing exile and the abject figure: the internal and external elements involved. Prior to the external exiling of an individual—as in the physical removal of the individual—there must be an internal feeling of exile. Cain’s act of fratricide is an act of jealousy. Byron and Gessner romanticize it with a sense of pathos, but even if we simply look at the biblical passages we can see a line of progression that leads to this. After his offering is not accepted by God, Cain is reprimanded, but he is not cursed. God simply says to him, “If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him” (Genesis 4.7). This is a warning and in a sense a foreshadowing of the murder to come. We need to take note of the last part of God’s warning, the power of desire and the need to control it. The idea of controlling one’s passions is certainly one that the early American Puritans believed in; however, the problem was what to do with these passions? Controlling one’s passions does not mean one still does not feel them. The founder of Providence in Rhode Island, Roger Williams—a type of abject figure himself—understood this.

John Winthrop notes in his journal that “Mr. Williams and the rest did make an order, that no man should be molested for his conscience, now men’s wives, and children, and servants, claimed liberty hereby to go to all religious meetings” (286). Williams institutes this order in order to allow people to fully seek out their Christianity, but it has another effect on women. It makes them pursue their own vision of Christianity, a less patriarchal view, thus going against the decree that wives should be made subject to their husbands. A man named Verin disputed the decree on this account. Winthrop, with a bit of tongue-in-cheek mockery, notes that “In conclusion, when they [Williams and the rest] would have censured Verin” they realize that they can’t because “their order was, that no man should be censured for his conscience” (I. 287). This is a wonderful victory for Winthrop, or so he thinks. In reality, however, it is more of a point to Williams. Verin exercised his right to object to an interpretation of a law; he expressed his displeasure and was offered the right to practice his Christianity as he saw fit. We are told by Winthrop that Anne Hutchinson’s rise to spiritual heretic is also in part due to the need to relieve the conscience.

Winthrop states,

First, her successe, she had in a short time insinuated her selfe into the hearts of much of the people (yea of many of the most wise and godly) who grew into so reverent an esteeme of her godliness, and spiritual gifts, as they looked at her as a Prophetesse, raised up of God for some great worke now at hand, as the calling of the Jewes, &c. so as she had more resort to her for counsel about matter of conscience, and clearing up mensspirituall estates, then any Minister (I might say all the Elders) in the Country. (I. 252)

The role that she takes on is that of spiritual counselor, and because she doesn’t have any real power in terms of salvation—unlike the Catholic clergy—people could tell her about their thoughts and not worry about what effect this might have on their receiving of grace. This

proved to be a powerful role for Hutchinson, and this newfound power did not go unnoticed by Winthrop and the rest of the magistrates.

When Anne Hutchinson was brought to trial for her heretical remarks, which sought to bridge the gap even closer between the individual and Christ, Governor Winthrop found himself involved in a somewhat precarious position of balancing the roles of the religious and communal leader. When church members questioned Winthrop as to his part in the proceedings against Hutchinson and the rest of the heretics, Winthrop writes the following in his journal:

He would give them one reason, which was a ground for his judgment, and that was, for that he saw, that those brethren, etc., were so divided from the rest of the country in their judgment and practice, as it could not stand with the public peace, that they should continue amongst us. So, by the example of Lot in Abraham's family, and after Hagar and Ishmael, he saw they must be sent away. (257)

Winthrop believes that there is a need to preserve the community at the expense of the individual. Winthrop's interpretation here is not wrong; there is certainly biblical precedent for exile. The abject figure can have a tremendous impact on those around him or her. It is for this reason that the abject must be kept separate from the majority of society, in order to avoid contamination. We have previously seen the impact that Ahab has on Perth, but he has an even greater impact on the crew at large. Certainly we need not look further than the "Quarter-deck" chapter to see just how profound of an impact the abject can have on individuals.

Throughout *Moby-Dick*, we cannot help but marvel at the sheer strength of Ahab's will in his pursuit of the White Whale. His heroic qualities throughout the novel are mythical in nature. More specifically, we can see Ahab's almost supernatural power over his men in the infamous "Quarter-deck" chapter. Not only is Ahab able to rouse the passions of his crew, but they are dumbfounded by the power he is exerting over them. "More and more strangely and fiercely glad and approving, grew the countenance of the old man at every shout; while the mariners

began to gaze curiously at each other, as if marveling how it was that they themselves became so excited at such seemingly purposeless questions” (141-2). When Stubb, Flask, and Starbuck are confronted by the magnetic stare of Ahab they can only look away in fear. “The three mates quailed before his strong, sustained, and mystic aspect. Stubb and Flask looked sideways from him; the honest eye of Starbuck fell downright” (146). Stubb, Flask, and Starbuck realize Ahab has full control over the crew of the *Pequod*, and that his power is all-consuming. Ahab asserts, “There is one God that is Lord over the earth, and one Captain that is lord over the *Pequod*” (394). This should immediately recall to our minds Coleridge’s interpretation of Cain, when Abel tells us that there is one god of the living and one god of the dead. In addition, just as we saw in Byron’s *Manfred*, Ahab is well aware of the fact that there is a supernal Godhead who rules the greater world, but like the exiled Cain does in the Bible, Ahab uses his exiled state to create his own society aboard the ship; he will rule Hell if he can’t be a part of Heaven. The need to keep the abject isolated from others is predicated on the fact that the abject can accomplish great things. Certainly, we cannot deny Ahab’s greatness (I do not mean in any moral sense). This greatness, however, has an additional effect of creating another form of exile.

Not only does the crew realize Ahab’s greatness, but also he himself recognizes that a lesser man would not be able to sustain the passions that flow through him. Ahab tells us: “[M]aybe, ‘tis well. For did ye three [Starbuck, Stubb and Flask] but once take the full-forced shock, then mine own electric thing, *that* had perhaps expired from out me. Perchance, too, it would have dropped ye dead” (146). Like the Fin-back whale described by Melville to be of “wondrous power,” (122) Ahab has a greatness in him which gives him the ability to rouse the passions of those aboard the *Pequod*, so that his vision becomes their vision; his passion becomes their passion. Although Ahab utilizes the men aboard his ship to help him on his

crusade, he believes that the killing of Moby Dick has been decreed for him alone, and he will stop at nothing to accomplish the destruction of the White Whale. In the same vein that Milton parallels Christ and Satan in *Paradise Lost*, Melville parallels the story of Cain in Ahab through the captain's self-aggrandizement and likening himself to the power of Jehovah, that vengeance will be his. Like Cain, Ahab is willing to kill his brother if it means a chance to spite Moby Dick and God. This greatness, however, works in a circular fashion: his greatness separates him from others; his separation from others exiles him further, internally. Thus, no matter if the abject figure is with a thousand people or no one, he or she is always in a perpetual state of exile. It is this constant state of solitude that also creates our feelings of sympathy for Ahab's eventual course of destruction.

The Pathos of Ahab

For all of his blasphemous defiance in the face of God, Ahab nonetheless shows moments of true tenderness and pathos, especially when he is reminded of his family. We are told that Ahab has both a wife and a son back home in Nantucket. Peleg tells Ishmael, "wrong not Captain Ahab, because he happens to have a wicked name....No, no, my lad; stricken, blasted, if he be, Ahab has his humanities!" (77). Upon meeting *The Bachelor*, a ship on course for home, Ahab questions the captain for any information he may have concerning the whereabouts of Moby Dick; however, the cheery nature of this ship grows tiresome for Ahab. He says, "Thou art a full ship and homeward bound, thou sayst; well, then, call me an empty ship, and outward-bound" (408). These words mean more than simply describing the different courses of the two ships. Ahab is an empty ship, forever linked to the pursuit of Moby Dick. Following this exchange with *The Bachelor*, we are told "Ahab, leaning over the taffrail, eyed the homeward-

bound craft, he took from his pocket a small vial of sand, and then looking from the ship to the vial, seemed thereby bringing two remote associations together, for that vial was filled with Nantucket soundings” (408). Ahab longs to go home but does not, or rather cannot, due to his monomania. He, like Cain, is exiled from his home because he is unable to subdue and conquer his pride: “Socially, Ahab was inaccessible. Though nominally included in the census of Christendom, he was still alien to it” (131). These narrated words addressing Ahab’s position in the Judeo-Christian world are indicative of the plight of many of Melville’s characters. The awareness of the existence of Christ, an individual offering salvation and peace from temporal sufferings, and yet to feel outside of the realm of the acceptance of that figure is too much for someone like Ahab to bear. We can see this anxiety expressed by the early American African preacher, Lemuel Haynes.

In approximately 1776, Lemuel Haynes, who would become a leading black minister in New England, pushed against the continued notion of the curse of Ham, arguing that “Whether the Negroes are of Canaan’s posterity or not, perhaps is not known By any mortal under Heaven.” Haynes adds to this notion that “Our glorious hygh priest hath visably appear’d in the flesh, and hath Establish’d a more glorious Oeconomy [sic]” (qtd. in Saillant 238). “whether he was Africans’ progenitor or not, was a curse upon the generations of his descendents that was lifted by the Atonement.”¹³ The “Atonement” he is referring to is the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. There are two very key aspects to Haynes’s argument that stand out. It is interesting that he, somewhat, concedes that Ham may be the progenitor of the African race. He does so in a very logical manner in terms of framing his argument. The veracity of this claim is secondary to

¹³ These are the words of John Saillant, taken from page 238 of a chapter from *African Americans and the Bible* entitled, “Origins of African American Biblical Hermeneutics in Eighteenth-Century Black Opposition to the Slave Trade and Slavery.”

his main point: that Christ's sacrifice should have given the African race all the same rights to salvation that it had given the white culture. The problem for Haynes is that he was fighting against a culture that was based on the belief that not all of the people even of their own community were going to receive grace and salvation. The Puritan logic that was still—and still manifests itself in ways today—prevalent does not believe that all have a right to salvation. Thus, Ahab's feeling of being excluded from this covenant of grace manifests itself in his destructive nature, in his war against God. As it is with the biblical Cain, Manfred, and Milton's Satan, it is the consciousness of this predicament that makes the abject suffer.

In "The Symphony" Melville shows us just how miserable it is to be a part of the abject, simultaneously feeling the pull toward and the pushing away by God. Ahab, "from beneath his slouched hat...dropped a tear into the sea; nor did all the Pacific contain such wealth as that one wee drop" (405). We have no reason to believe that Ahab's pathos here is not genuine. Herbert notes, "Setting forth Ahab as a heroic embodiment of the madness which perceives God's evil, Melville progressively reveals that such heroism is monstrous" (92). I would alter this idea slightly. The heroic embodiment of madness is a choice by the abject; it is seemingly the only choice that is truly their own. Melville does not reveal the heroic ethos of this to be monstrous; he reveals the need for it to be monstrous. Ahab poses the question to Starbuck, "is it not hard, that with this weary load I bear, one poor leg should have been snatched from under me?" (406). When Cain is cursed for the murder of Abel, he laments, "my punishment is greater than I can bear" (Genesis 4.13). This is Ahab's moment of pure honesty; it's the closest he will come to forgiveness for his transgressions against God and humanity. Ahab "feel[s] deadly faint, bowed, and humped, as though [he] were Adam, staggering beneath the piled centuries since Paradise" (406). Like Atlas—or perhaps a better example is Bunyan's Pilgrim—he can feel the weight of

the world upon him; he can feel the weight of his sins, but he is ill-equipped to know what to do about it. The only thing that he feels he can do is to try to reconnect with humanity, in this case Starbuck: “let me look into a human eye; it is better than to gaze into the sea or sky; better than to gaze upon God” (406). The abject always feels this weight of judgment upon him or her, but they don’t all experience the same amount of it. Ahab realizes that it is futile to try to reconcile God’s will through intellectual means. He states, “Here’s food for thought, had Ahab time to think; but Ahab never thinks; he only feels, feels, feels; *that’s* tingling enough for mortal man! To think’s audacity. God only has that right and privilege” (419). As we will see in the coming chapter of this study, the biblical Ishmael does not suffer as much as either Cain or Esau, and certainly Esau does not feel the brunt of God’s hatred as much as Cain. It is for this reason why we can see many similarities between Ahab and Ishmael and yet they are very different from each other in their approach to the world and to their relationship with God.

As Ahab continues to lament his plight, he mentions that he has seen “little Miriam and Martha, laughing-eyed elves, heedlessly gambol around their old sire; sporting with the circle of singed locks which grew on the marge of that burnt-out crater of his brain” (405). Miriam and Martha may be a reference to Mary and Martha, the two sisters from the book of Luke—Miriam being a form of the name Mary. When Christ comes to their home, we are told that Mary “sat at Jesus’ feet, and heard his word” (Luke 10.38). Martha, meanwhile, is “cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me” (Luke 10.4). Christ responds, “Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: / But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her” (Luke 10.41-2). The “old sire” that Ahab is referring to in the quote above is the loss of the presence of Christ. Both Martha and Mary have

the comfort of directly being addressed by Christ, of knowing His presence. This idea of the lack of presence of Christ will come back at the end of the novel when Starbuck shouts on the second day of the chase, “‘Great God! but for one single instant show thyself,’ cried Starbuck; ‘never, never wilt thou capture him, old man—in Jesus’ name no more of this, that’s worse than devil’s madness’” (418). When we unpack Starbuck’s plea, we see the irony in these words. Moby Dick, the whale itself, is indicative of God’s presence; however, just as Starbuck invokes the name of Jesus, we realize that it is not Jehovah that Starbuck wishes to see, but the Son.

This moment of humanity that Ahab shares with Starbuck in “The Symphony” only reminds the plagued captain of his fall from grace. It creates another sensation of extreme consciousness as to his real position in the world. We are told that “Ahab’s glance was averted; like a blighted fruit tree he shook, and cast his last, cindered apple to the soil” (406). Certainly there is no more blighted tree than the Tree of Knowledge, which never should have been touched. Ahab queries,

What is it, what nameless, inscrutable, unearthly thing is it; what cozening, hidden lord and master, and cruel, remorseless emperor commands me; that against all natural lovings and longings, I so keep pushing, and crowding, and jamming myself on all the time; recklessly making me ready to do what in my own proper, natural heart, I durst not so much as dare? Is Ahab, Ahab? Is it I, God, or who, that lifts this arm? (406).

Ahab becomes lost in a theological/metaphysical debate. He cannot come to terms with the notion that divine logic is not the same as human logic. Melville is coming back to his favorite book of the Old Testament here: the book of Job. The message we take away from the book of Job is the idea that there are simply things that must be accepted, without cause or reason. Fedallah’s menacing appearance at the end of the chapter can also be read in terms of the part Satan plays in creating suffering in Job’s life. Satan in the book of Job is clearly under the control of an omnipotent God. This also speaks to the Calvinistic principles embedded within

Melville's mind as well from when he was a young boy—that God decrees all things, good and bad. Ahab's questions concerning "Where do murderers go, man! Who's to doom, when the judge himself is dragged to the bar?" (407) have Romantic tones to them. Alfred Kazin reads this as Ahab's cry of "fear that man's covenant with God has been broken" (44). The problem for Ahab is not the disappearance of the covenant but the omnipresence of it—and the ever presence of the power of the Divine. If God judges humanity, then who can judge Him? The answer is of course no one. "The Symphony" is the entire plight of the abject from birth to death. Ahab is a man who seemed born for this life. He did not choose it; it was chosen for him. It is the fruition of the Calvinistic doctrine of election. Whereas early Puritans struggled with the concept of knowing whether or not they were justified before God, Ahab feels as though he already knows he is damned. The result of this state of consciousness is that like Milton's Satan and even Taji he will do the only thing he feels he can do: he will act. This action will be to bring war upon God.

Section 3: The War with Heaven and an End to Cain's Wandering

Herbert points out, "This dilemma lies at the heart of *Moby-Dick*, where Ishmael and Captain Ahab come to terms with a whale whose career of wanton destruction suggests a God run amok" (112). That God seems to have a hand in Moby Dick's destructive nature is fairly straightforward; however, the actions of the White Whale do not seem to be of a "God run amok." Rather, Moby Dick's actions seem pure and calculating. When Ahab speaks with the English captain, Boomer, of *The Samuel Enderby*, Ahab finds that the two have a common malady. The captain of the English ship has lost an arm to Moby Dick. Unlike Ahab, Captain Boomer realizes the futility in attempting to capture Moby Dick. He states, "No more White

Whales for me; I've lowered for him once, and that has satisfied me. There would be great glory in killing him, I know that; and there is a shipload of precious sperm in him, but, hark ye, he's best let alone; don't you think so, Captain?"—glancing at the ivory leg" (368). Ahab replies, "He is. But he will still be hunted, for all that. What is best let alone, that accursed thing is not always what least allures. He's all magnet!" (368). The *Samuel Enderby* crosses paths with *Moby Dick* multiple times, yet the only time the White Whale inflicts harm upon the ship and its crew is when they lower in an attempt to capture him. *Moby Dick*'s actions are acts of retribution on a people in search of riches and glory; it is a microcosm for God's decree to not eat of the Tree of Knowledge, to not take from that which is off limits.

Moby Dick's final attack on the crew of the *Pequod* is described in God-like terms. "Retribution, swift vengeance, eternal malice were in his whole aspect, and spite of all that mortal man could do, the solid white buttress of his forehead smote the ship's starboard bow, till men and timbers reeled" (468). Further indication that *Moby Dick* can be seen as an agent of God's vengeance lies in the story of Jonah, which is the central character of Father Mapple's sermon. After Father Mapple reads his hymn, the first line of his sermon is "Beloved shipmates, clinch the last verse of the first chapter of Jonah—'And God had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah'" (45). Later in the sermon, he states, "God came upon him in the whale, and swallowed him down to living gulfs of doom" (50). Had Melville not utilized the story of Jonah in his novel, critics would still point to the parallels between Ahab and the crew's defiance toward an angry, vengeful God; however, Melville invites the comparison by using it in Father Mapple's sermon. There is, however, a more important story from the Old Testament that we must look at in order to understand Melville's use of the whale.

Ahab's Demise

In his copy of the Bible, Melville shows great interest in the book of Job, specifically in the relationship between the massive power of the leviathan, believed to be a whale, and God's ability to manipulate such a powerful creature. In the book of Job, Melville underscores the following line: "Of God's great power in the leviathan" (Cowen 185). Though there are many pertinent critical studies on the origins of the White Whale, it appears that in this passage, Melville is acknowledging the power of God and His ability to utilize at His command the greatest force of strength in the ocean, the whale. For Ahab, *Moby Dick* is more than a whale. Ahab states, "Would now the wind but had a body; but all the things that most exasperate and outrage mortal man, all these things are bodiless, but only bodiless as objects, not as agents" (461). Clark Davis notes, these lines "come...from a...man whose inability to accept the body as body, the world's body and his own part in it, has led him to see his own conception of himself behind it—a maliciously intent brain, 'a most cunning' captain" (9). Though Ahab understands that an attack on *Moby Dick* is an attack on God himself, he embraces this affront. It comes back to the curse of consciousness for Ahab. He is aware, like Cain, that his destruction must come from the hand of God. He exclaims, "Nor white whale, nor man, nor fiend, can so much as graze old Ahab in his own proper and inaccessible being" (417). Ahab's exclamation that no white whale can so much as graze him is indicative of his belief that *Moby Dick* is not just any whale who happens to be white. He feels that there must be something else behind the White Whale. The hatred that he lumps upon the White Whale is the entire ethos of fallen humanity and abject suffering. Though Ahab seemingly accepts his predestined role as antagonist to God, he does not do so without contempt.

When Ahab and the crew see the “tri-pointed trinity of flames” (382) above the ship, Ahab places his foot “upon the Parsee” and says, “Oh! Thou clear spirit of clear fire, whom on these seas I as Persian once did worship, till in the sacramental act so burned by thee, that to this hour I bear the scar; I now know thee, thou clear spirit, and I now know that thy right worship is defiance” (382). What Ahab is re-enacting here is the challenge of the prophets that takes place in the Bible. The biblical king Ahab has his priests, representing Baal, participate in a challenge of godly authority against Elijah and the God of Abraham. Of course, Elijah wins. This is one of the scenes that leads to Ahab’s humbling actions referenced earlier in this chapter. We can read Ahab’s words from above in a few ways. He may be enacting a pact with a Pagan force that he once worshipped, as he says, in order to gain greater power—a Faustian pact. Another way we can read this, however, is that he is addressing Jehovah, and that this is the moment in which Ahab becomes fully conscious of his abject state: that it is through his defiance of God that he plays his part in Providence. Just like Cain, the mark that Ahab is given is a sort of rebirth into the role of the abject.

Following the line alluded to above, Ahab says, “whencesoe’er I came; wheresoe’er I go; yet while I earthly live, the queenly personality lives in me, and feels her royal rights” (382). Cain, as the first born son of Adam and Eve, has royal rights to the lineage, but he is banished by God. Ahab, in his reference to his royal rights, is making reference to the fact that he can feel his birthright in his blood; he can feel the potential greatness within him. The queenly personality can also be read as a reference to Eve, alluding to the defiant nature that can be found in the first mother. Eve’s transgression against God’s decree to not pluck the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge is a defiant one, but it plays an important role in the Providence leading to the coming of Christ. Ahab continues, “But war is pain, and hate is woe. Come in thy lowest form

of love, and I will kneel and kiss thee” (382). The first part of this is quite genuine. Ahab is wearied and worn down from his constant feelings of hate. This is brought even more to the forefront in the “Symphony” chapter where we find out just how broken of a man Ahab is. Robert Milder notes that “it is not even knowledge that Ahab seeks so much as *acknowledgment*. Like his ancestral archetype, the captive king whose spiritual exile he shares, Ahab craves recognition that he is heaven-born and, if not heaven-destined, then at least, by nature and bearing, heaven-worthy” (98). Ahab wants another type of acknowledgement here as well. When he asks for God to come in thy lowest form of love, this can be interpreted as a reference to Christ: God as man.

Ahab’s defiance is met with power, but this showing of divine power is exactly what the Captain is indifferent to at this point. Ahab says, “and though thou launchest navies of full-freighted worlds, there’s that in here that still remains indifferent” (382). The indifference that Ahab feels is because he is not afraid of being destroyed. Quite the contrary, he welcomes it. What he is afraid of is living; he can no longer bear the life of exile that he has been living. In response to Ahab’s words, we are told that there are “sudden repeated flashes of lightning; the nine flames leap lengthwise to thrice their previous height; Ahab, with the rest, closes his eyes, his right hand pressed hard upon them” (383). God gives Ahab exactly what he did not want, but what is important about this direction is the fact that Ahab hides his own eyes. Had Melville written that Ahab stood unmoved at the flashes of light it would tell us that Ahab truly is unaffected by the power of God, but he flinches. There is a part of Ahab that still must recognize the power that is before him.

Earlier in this scene Ahab tells his crew to “Look up at it [the flames]; mark it well; the white flame but lights the way to the White Whale!” (382). How we read the flames is

essentially how we will read God's motives in this scene. In book three of *Paradise Lost*, Satan sees stairs that "were such as wheron Jacob saw / Angels ascending and descending" (III. 510-11). Milton acknowledges the dual nature of the stairs as a means of both ascending and descending: "The Stairs were then let down, whether to dare / The Fiend by easy ascent, or aggravate / His sad exclusion from the doors of Bliss" (III. 523-5). We can read the stairs either way depending on how we want to envision God. Like the ladder that descends in front of Milton's Satan, we can read the flames above the *Pequod* in two ways: God is giving Ahab a way out of the situation he is in—in other words, if one knows where Moby Dick is then one can turn to the opposite direction—or God is goading him on toward Moby Dick. Dark Romantics would read the flames as a mockery, but that doesn't discredit the opposite view. In fact, it is Starbuck—the only man who seems to truly maintain much of his composure throughout the novel—who tells us that "The gale that now hammers at us to stave us, we can turn it into a fair wind that will drive us toward home. Yonder, to windward, all is blackness of doom; but to leeward, homeward—I see it lightens up there; but not with the lightning" (380). God is providing a means home for the ship, but Ahab either does not, or cannot, see anything but the mockery in the show of power.

Ahab acknowledges the formation of his character as being "darkness leaping out of light, leaping out of thee!" (383). This passage is a form of mockery; it is mocking the biblical notion that humans are made in the image of God. Ahab is in the image of the God that he sees before him: an entity of destruction. He uses this acceptance of his image of God as destructive force to declare, "now I do glory to my genealogy" (383). He is doing glory to his literary genealogy of the abject, specifically the Bible's Cain and Milton's Satan. He will bring war upon God out of pride and jealousy. Starbuck attempts to warn Ahab that "God is against thee,

old man; forbear! 'tis an ill voyage!...let me square the yards while we may, old man, and make a fair wind of it homewards, to go on a better voyage than this” (383). This warning is eerily similar to God’s warning to Cain prior to the murder: “If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him” (Genesis 4.7). The better voyage is one that will lead to salvation and to forgiveness, but Ahab, with his “fiery dart” in hand holds the men to their allegiance: “All your oaths to hunt the White Whale are as binding as mine; and heart, soul, and body, lungs and life, old Ahab is bound” (383). Ahab perverts the crew and leads them all to destruction, all except for Ishmael.

Ahab reaches the pinnacle of his greatness not in whether or not he actually destroys Moby Dick, but in the act of defiance itself, in taking action against God and the Whale. Ahab exclaims, “Towards thee I roll, thou all-destroying but unconquering whale; to the last I grapple with thee; from hell’s heart I stab at thee; for hate’s sake I spit my last breath at thee. Sink all coffins and all hearses to one common pool! and since neither can be mine, let me then tow to pieces, while still chasing thee, though tied to thee, thou damned whale! *Thus*, I give up the spear!” (426). Often we are tempted to read this final scene as Ahab’s exit—and certainly in most respects it is. However, let us not forget that Ahab is tethered to the Whale. In other words, the vision that we should take away from this is that Ahab is perpetually still chasing Moby Dick. Just how haunted Moby Dick/God is by this thought is left to interpretation, but we should ask ourselves if in this final vision of the monomaniacal captain this is God mocking Ahab, or Ahab mocking God with this final scene? We can find one possible answer to this question in the final words before we get to the “Epilogue.”

Just prior to the “Epilogue,” we are told that “Now small fowls flew screaming over the yet yawning gulf; a sullen white surf beat against its steep sides; then all collapses, and the great shroud of the sea rolled on as it rolled five thousand years ago” (427). The reference to the great flood in which Noah and his family were the only survivors carries with it important connotations when we think about the case of Cain. There is a question that needs to be answered: was Cain in fact destroyed by the flood? The Bible says that all were killed except for the select few mentioned above, but Cain is a special case. He was specifically marked to roam the earth as punishment for his crime of fratricide. If the flood actually did kill Cain, then we can read this as an act of compassion on the part of God. It would have given the marked man the peace that he so desperately wanted; it would have given him an escape from his consciousness on earth. If we turn to *Moby-Dick*, we know that Ahab is killed by the Whale, but we are still left with the same question of God’s intentions. We are told that the *Pequod* “would not sink to hell till she had dragged a living part of heaven along with her, and helmeted herself with it” (427). The living part of heaven is referring to a sky-hawk that gets caught in the flag of the ship. The bird takes on the properties of the raven and the dove which were both used as messengers for Noah, but the difference is that this bird, this messenger, is actually dragged down with the ship. The bird also parallels Starbuck, who, despite his greatest efforts to thwart Ahab’s mad chase, is nonetheless a victim of the mad quest.

Conclusion

Satan could not defeat God in battle, but he could steal away a small victory in the Fall of humanity. The above reference in the previous paragraph, that a small bit of heaven was dragged down with the *Pequod*, is a small victory for Ahab, for Cain. Melville will take this idea even

further in *Pierre*. *Moby-Dick* can be read as Melville's war in heaven; *Pierre* is Melville's war on earth. There is virtually no divine force to deal with in *Pierre*; in *Moby-Dick* we have the Whale. In Ahab, Melville has created the king of the abject figures. Ahab represents the active pursuit of vengeance against God. There are clear overtones that echo Milton's Satan in terms of the language and characteristics, but what Melville does with Ahab is create a figure whose fiery passion for answers to Providential inquiries make him worthy of our sympathy. As Robert Milder phrases it, "What vindicates Ahab, finally, is not what he does, or nearly does; it is what, through the arduousness and pain of attempting it, he becomes" (111). What Ahab becomes is an active force. Although his heretical tirade is nothing short of blasphemous, it nonetheless provides readers with a vehicle from which to explore dark truths. Ahab is the active answer to Job's silent suffering. Newton Arvin says, "one cannot avert one's eyes from the fact that good and innocent men—Starbuck, Queequeg, and others—are involved in Ahab's doom" (192). The term "good," however, is quite arbitrary in the Calvinistic sense, and it does not help us really understand any better why Ishmael survives. When we come to Ishmael in the next chapter, we find another type of abject figure, sharing in some of the characteristics of Cain and Esau, but with a type of covenantal blessing by God to keep an eye on him. It is for this reason that Ishmael alone survives the wrath of God.

Chapter 3: Ishmael: A Special Case of the Abject

In Newton Arvin's study of *Moby-Dick* he notes a connection between Ishmael and Ahab. This connection is predicated on a parental love that he believes is at the crux of both characters' desire to hunt Moby Dick. Arvin writes, "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" (173). Arvin's study here is predicated more on a secular and psychosexual reading of the White Whale than my own; however, I would argue that Arvin is still correct in focusing on the parent/child relationship that runs throughout the novel. My study of Ishmael's role in the abject discussion of Melville's works is also highly dependent upon a careful study of this relationship, albeit with more focus on the biblical relationship between God as father figure and His abject children, and certainly Ishmael is one of the key figures in understanding the ethos of the abject.

From the very first line of *Moby-Dick* we are immediately drawn into a game of biblical allusions. The immediate question is almost always why the narrator asks us to call him Ishmael. Thomas Dumm sees the "injunction to call him by that name may itself be understood as a demand or plea that we help him evade the ghost of his former self" (400). Dumm's point is one revolving around the idea of agency and of naming one's self. Certainly the act of naming inherently brings with it a certain sense of authority. I would argue that Ishmael's willingness to identify himself with the same name as the biblical figure is a way of embracing his identity, of asserting agency and defining himself in relation to the world around him. It is interesting that Melville's narrator would align himself with a figure from the Bible such as Ishmael, an abject

figure. However, the closer we look at Melville's narrator, the more we begin to see an evolution and an awakening taking place within Ishmael.

Clearly, as he did with the names Elijah and Ahab, Melville wants us to utilize our knowledge of the biblical Ishmael in order to help us understand his own wayward sailing narrator. However, in order to more fully comprehend the ways in which Ishmael's abjectness differs from that of Ahab, we need to understand the differences between the biblical Ishmael and the rest of his abject brethren, for although in the Bible both Cain and Ishmael are abject figures, God does not have the same relationship with both. Natalia Wright notes that both the biblical and the Melvillean Ishmael "seem to lead charmed lives" (50). The biblical Ishmael does not seem to lead a charmed life; he does, and it is a charmed life based upon a covenant with God. This is not a covenant of grace, such as is offered to the elect. This is a covenant of a watchful eye, of a type of abject mercy that Calvin will try to define through the term "reprobate."

This chapter explores three major points concerning Ishmael: first, we need to explore how Ishmael is, for lack of a better term, the most blessed of the abject figures; second, the Emersonian nature of Ishmael as a way of reading the narrator's evolution toward an awakening to his abject nature; third, Ishmael's deliverance from destruction, and Melville's quasi-reconciliation between Abraham and his exiled son. First, we should re-familiarize ourselves with Ishmael's story.

Section 1: A Special Case of the Abject

As we have seen in the introduction to this study, abject figures share many distinct qualities: in exile, both internally and externally; forever haunted by the consciousness of his or

her position as it relates to God; and that there is a greatness in him that is productive to society only because it is not concerned with salvation. Although these similarities tend to be the focus of much of Melville's studies—as well as the majority of studies involving the biblical figures themselves—it is the differences between Cain, Ishmael and Esau that make them unique to each other, and Melville shows in his works that he indeed understood these differences. One of the major differences between all three of these figures is the involvement of God in the process of creating their abject status. When Cain is exiled, God does not work through anyone. He speaks directly to Cain, marks him, and sends him on his way. With Ishmael, there is a mediator involved both on behalf of the elect line and on behalf of the abject line as well. The story begins with Abraham, Sarah, and distrust in God's promise to provide an heir.

Sarah believed herself to be barren and unable to conceive a child, so she gave her handmaid, Hagar, to Abraham in order to give him a child. Immediately upon conception, jealousy enters into the story, and Sarah wishes to send away Hagar before she can give birth. When Hagar flees, she is visited by an angel who tells her to go back to Sarah and submit to her mistress in order to be taken back into the house (Genesis 16.1-16). It is also in this section that Ishmael is given his name, which means God hears. The angel says to Hagar, "Behold, thou art with child and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name Ishmael; because the Lord hath heard thy affliction. / And he will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren" (Genesis 16.11-12). There are two important points that we need to focus on here. First, this is a scene of genuine mercy—a mercy that will lead to a special Ishmaeleian covenant. Secondly, when God says that "he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren," this is one of the characteristics that Melville will infuse into his own Ishmael. Melville's character is able to move in and out of society, both

the elect and abject, in a way that Cain is not able to. This will give Melville's Ishmael a sense of autonomy and agency that will allow him to relay the story in the way that he does, with a cosmopolitan sensibility.

Once Isaac is born, Sarah comes to the realization that her son by blood will have to share his birthright with the firstborn, Ishmael. This of course reintroduces the jealousy element of the story, and Sarah calls for both Hagar and Ishmael to be sent away into exile (Genesis 21). This is a political move on the part of Sarah, and she will not be the only Old Testament mother to make such a decision. God's acquiescence with Sarah's request is befitting a divine logic that seeks to develop one elect line. When Abraham falls into despair at the thought of Ishmael being sent away, God says to him the following: "Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called" (Genesis 21.12). Clearly He is comforting Abraham with His words, but at the same time He is explaining in a very clear way why Ishmael needs to be removed. God certainly has the power to tell Sarah that both Hagar and Ishmael will stay in the household, and that Ishmael will share in the birthright, but this is not the goal of God at this point in the Bible: it is to establish His covenant with the elect and to preserve it. He does, however, provide the following additional comfort to Abraham. He says, "And also of the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation, because he is thy seed" (Genesis 21.13). We have to remember that while this is a genuine moment of mercy by God, for the Calvinist, it is nothing more than a temporal gift, which is not of great value because it will not get one any closer to salvation. This idea will be discussed further in the coming section on Calvin.

God does not simply comfort Abraham; He addresses Hagar as well. We are told, "And God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto

her, Whataileth thee, Hagar? fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is” (Genesis 21.17). The fact that God goes out of His way to address not only Abraham, one of the patriarchs of the elect line, but Hagar as well is indicative of the fact that there is a sense that God understands the precarious situation at hand. Finally, we are told, “And God was with the lad [Ishmael]; and he grew, and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer” (Genesis 21.20). I will argue in chapter four that Ishmael’s designation as an archer is indicative of his abject status as well, but for now it suffices to note that God is with Ishmael. He does not abandon him. Nor does it say that He ever does. This is why we cannot look at Ishmael in the same light as Cain or Esau. Ishmael is the most elect of the abject, and Melville seemed to have understood this concept when he penned his own version of the biblical figure.

As I argued in the previous chapter, Ahab is Melville’s vision of Cain, and even though I will show how Ishmael is a different type of abject figure, they still do share many of the abject traits. It is for this reason that Ishmael and Ahab seem to have a kinship, a connection, and yet they remain separate in how they view the world around them, especially when the subject is predestination. As Brodtkorb Jr. notes, if predestination is to “Ahab an outrage because it seems to him reductive of human dignity, to Ishmael...predestination is wholly ambivalent. Able to neither accept nor reject, yet finding the issue important, Ishmael, as usual, has it both ways” (94). The biblical Ishmael’s position to Jehovah is somewhat similar to this: He can neither fully reject nor accept Ishmael.

Augustine and Calvin

Augustine reads the story of Isaac and Ishmael similarly as he did with Cain and Abel. He interprets the relationship in terms of the two distinct cities: the city of men and the city of

God. The birth of Ishmael, typologically, prefigures the birth of Isaac. He interprets the exiling of Hagar and Ishmael as follows:

This interpretation of the passage, handed down to us with apostolic authority, shows how we ought to understand the Scriptures of the two covenants—the old and the new. One portion of the earthly city became an image of the heavenly city, not having a significance of its own, but signifying another city, and therefore serving, or “being in bondage.” For it was founded not for its own sake, but to prefigure another city; and his shadow of a city was also itself foreshadowed by another preceding figure. For Sarah’s handmaid Hagar, and her son, were an image of this image. (433)

The preceding figure that foreshadows the birth of Ishmael is Cain, who is the progenitor of the city of men. Thus, just as God did with Cain, Ishmael—representing the city of men—will have to leave so that the elect lineage may remain pure.

The separation here of the abject and elect is quite understandable; however, what do we make of the mercy that God shows Ishmael? Calvin has a somewhat similar interpretation of Ishmael and the abject as to that of Augustine, with a slightly more matter-of-fact reading of God’s omnipotence. Calvin writes:

for though none are enlightened into faith, and truly feel the efficacy of the Gospel, with the exception of those who are foreordained to salvation, yet experience shows that the reprobate are sometimes affected in a way so similar to the elect, that even in their own judgment there is no difference between them. Hence it is not strange, that by the apostle a taste of heavenly gifts, and by Christ himself a temporary faith, is ascribed to them. Not that they truly perceive the power of spiritual grace and the sure light of faith; but the Lord, the better to convict them, and leave them without excuse, instills into their minds such a sense of his goodness as can be felt without the spirit of adoption. (362)

Calvin begins by reminding us that not all, even those who are good, will be saved. However, there are times when even the abject can feel a type of “grace” from God. He does not come out and say that this is mercy—and certainly if Calvin thought that it was mercy he would have told us. It is simply a “temporary faith” that allows them to feel the grace of God, but not fully comprehend it. The problem with this reading is the part where Calvin says that “even in their

[the reprobates'] own judgment there is no difference between them [the elect].” For the abject figures this would be the ultimate form of mercy, a feeling that they are not different from the elect in God’s eyes, but as I have argued in the case of Cain and Melville’s Ahab, this is simply not true. Cain is marked *specifically* so that he can be reminded at all times of his transgressions. It would seem that Calvin’s reading fits the Ishmaelean type of the abject more accurately; however, in the case of Melville’s Ishmael, this does not last. The effect of Ahab’s plight will awaken in Ishmael the truth that he is not part of the elect.

The Abject in the Presence of the Word

In the chapter titled, “The Chapel,” Ishmael philosophizes about the relationship between spirit and matter. He tells us:

Methinks we have hugely mistaken this matter of Life and Death. Methinks that what they call my shadow here on earth is my true substance. Methinks that in looking at things spiritual, we are too much like oysters observing the sun through the water, and thinking that thick water the thinnest of air. Methinks my body is but the lees of my better being. In fact take my body who will, take it I say, it is not me. (45)

Critics have noted the analogy of the oyster to the water as being a type of play on Plato’s allegory of the cave, and there certainly are parallels to be made. However, we can also approach this notion of the shadow from the perspective of Calvinism. In the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin says, “We may add, that the reprobate never have any other than a confused sense of grace, laying hold of the shadow rather than the substance, because the Spirit properly seals the forgiveness of sins in the elect only, applying it by special faith to their use” (362). Ishmael feels as though the shadow is the true substance. For Calvin, Ishmael has been sufficiently duped into believing he has a type of grace. In believing that his shadow is the true substance, he is the type of “confused” figure that Calvin writes about. Since the spirit has been

effectively closed off from the reprobate (the abject), as Calvin tells us, what else is the abject left with but the body, and since the body is also cursed—in the case of Cain especially—the abject is left with merely the ethereal form of the body, which is the shadow. The shadow is not a representation of the soul, I would argue, for both Ishmael and Calvin; it is merely a reflection of the matter, the mortal husk that encases the soul, and as we know especially well from Ahab, the body is merely a reminder of Original Sin and the limitations of humanity.

Ishmael in Exile

Even with his watchful covenant, Ishmael does carry with him many of the burdens of the abject: the first and foremost being that he is a figure in exile. As Alfred Kazin notes, “Ishmael is not merely an orphan; he is an exile, searching alone in the wilderness” (42). It is not so much that he is in exile and left to wander that makes the abject unique; the Israelites are also left to wander for forty years after they are delivered from Egypt. The difference between the exile of the Israelites and the exile of the abject is not where they go, but where they cannot go and what they cannot seek. Cain and Ishmael are not welcome back to the land of their fathers’ God¹⁴. They are able to establish homes elsewhere, but they cannot return to the place where the chosen people reside. This creates a feeling of unrest that is similar to the notion of the Wandering Jew, but it has an added level of horror in that it extends itself spiritually as well. The abject is conscious of the fact that he is not welcome. As previously mentioned, Ishmael’s abject nature is special. God does watch over him, but the son of Hagar is nonetheless driven from both his

¹⁴ Esau is a special case in this regard. It is Jacob who leaves at first to preserve his elect status, but eventually Esau will be forced to leave (Genesis 36.6). Esau’s status will be discussed in more detail in the forthcoming chapter.

father and more importantly his father's God. Melville's Ishmael also displays this bifurcated nature.

Ishmael is in a state of mind that requires a separation from the society of land dwellers. He finds the only solution to his woes is to set sail.

Whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet; and especially whenever my hypos get such an upper hand of me, that it requires a strong moral principle to prevent me from deliberately stepping into the street, and methodically knocking people's hats off—then, I account it high time to get to the sea as soon as I can. (18)

Ishmael's only means of escaping these feelings of suicide and general discontent is to sail away on a ship, which, though having its own set of laws separate from those on land, still contain many remnants of the society in which he is trying to escape from. However, this is a self-exiling by Ishmael's own choice. Whereas God exiles the biblical Cain for his crime of murder, Ishmael makes the decision to exile himself, so that he does not resort to violence—so that he does not become a Cain. Ishmael struggles, however, with this notion of not becoming a Cain-like abject figure. We witness this struggle when Ishmael is listening to Father Mapple.

The topic of Father Mapple's sermon is the story of Jonah and the whale, but that isn't what initially draws Ishmael's attention. What interests Ishmael is how Father Mapple isolates himself physically by removing the ladder that leads to the pulpit from which Mapple is speaking. Ishmael says, "Can it be, then, that by the act of physical isolation, he signifies his spiritual withdrawal for the time, from all outward worldly ties and connexions? Yes, for replenished with the meat and wine of the word, to the faithful man of God" (47). What Ishmael is fascinated by is the ability of Father Mapple to separate the spiritual life and the secular. Mapple is able to reinvigorate his spirit *through* physical isolation. This isolation allows him to fulfill Christ's decree to be in the world but not of it (John 17.13-16). For the abject figure, this

is virtually impossible. Isolation has the opposite effect. It acts as a reminder that they are outside of the covenant of grace. For all of the wrestling that Ishmael does with the symbolism of Mapple's pre-sermon actions, we do not get much commentary on the actual sermon. At the end of Mapple's words, we are told that "He said no more, but slowly waving a benediction, covered his face with his hands, and so remained, kneeling, till all the people had departed, and he was left alone in the place" (54). Once again Ishmael focuses on the aspect of isolation. It isn't until everyone has left his vision that Mapple will open his eyes to the world, but until that point, he will remand himself into isolation until a time he sees fit. This brings us back to the very beginning of the book: Ishmael also remands himself into isolation from the land by going out to sea, and since the chosen line is very much tied to land, it makes sense that Ishmael would simply choose to leave land altogether in order to try and reconnect with humanity. God does provide a kingdom for Ishmael, as per His agreement with Abraham, but it is still not the land of his father.

A Self-Marked Man

In chapter 102, "A Bower In the Arsacides," we come to find that, despite his ranting in the opening of the novel concerning Queequeg's tattoos, Ishmael is marked as well¹⁵; however, unlike Ahab, Ishmael brands himself.

The skeleton dimensions I shall now proceed to set down are copied verbatim from my right arm, where I had them tattooed; as in my wild wanderings at that period, there was no other secure way of preserving such valuable statistics. But as I was crowded for space, and wished the other parts of my body to remain a blank page for a poem I was then composing—at least, what untattooed parts might remain—I did not trouble myself with the odd inches; nor, indeed, should inches at all enter into a congenial admeasurement of the whale. (346-7)

¹⁵ I thank Dr. John Bryant for pointing this out to me.

Ishmael is asserting power and ownership over his own body. Just as he comes to the conclusion to exile himself in the beginning of the novel, here we see him exerting his free will again. He chooses to mark himself, rather than allowing God to make the decision for him. Whereas Cain is marked by God; Ishmael marks himself. In doing so, he does not become a victim of his fate, but an active participant in it. This is perhaps the most important aspect of Ishmael's character for us to remember: that Ishmael is given a type of "grace" that allows him to move about the world in a way that makes him feel that he is in control of his own existence. He does not yet have the hyper-consciousness of Ahab, whose missing leg and scar seem to be a constant reminder of his abject status. It will not remain this way for Ishmael, however. He will eventually become caught up in the plot to kill Moby Dick, and in doing so, he will become conscious of his own abject nature.

Section 2: Emersonian Indifferentism

In his review of *Moby-Dick* in the November 22nd, 1851 edition of *The Literary World*, Evert Duyckinck breaks the novel down into three separate books. The third book, dealing with Ishmael's musings of the world, is of interest considering the company with which Duyckinck places Ishmael. Duyckinck says:

Book III, appropriating perhaps a fourth of the volume, is a vein of moralizing, half essay, half rhapsody, in which much refinement and subtlety, and no little poetical feeling, are mingled with quaint conceit and extravagant daring speculation. This is to be taken as in some sense dramatic; the narrator throughout among the personages of the *Pequod* being one Ishmael, whose wit may be allowed to be against everything on land, as his hand is against everything at sea. This piratical running down of creeds and opinions, the conceited indifferentism of Emerson, or the run-a-muck style of Carlyle is, we will not say dangerous in such cases, for there are various forces at work to meet more powerful onslaught, but it is out of place and uncomfortable. We do not like to see what, under any view, must be to the world the most sacred associations of life violated and defaced. (404)

It is Duyckinck's reading of Ishmael as Emersonian indifferentism that is of most interest to this section. That there is an Emersonian influence in *Moby-Dick* has been argued by scholars such as Nina Baym and Natalia Wright. The persisting debate continues to be predicated on what Melville actually read and didn't read prior to the publication of *Moby-Dick*. Sealts makes a persuasive argument as to what Melville may have read during his trip to Boston in 1849 (63). Sealts's argument is predicated on the fact that Melville most likely had knowledge of Emerson's works prior to writing "Hawthorne and His Mosses," and that he probably would have "bought or borrowed one or more of Emerson's books before he left Boston" (63). There does seem to be enough of an indication, both textually and in terms of the likelihood of the time that Melville did read Emerson, to pursue the influences of Emerson on Melville's works—certainly Duyckinck felt so. The question then is what specifically of Emerson's influence is there in Ishmael? One way to look at this influence is through the lens of Ishmael's special status as an abject figure, but first, we should note some of the connections that Melville made with Emerson prior to the publishing of *Moby-Dick*.

In his often-quoted letter to Evert Duyckinck, dated March 3rd, 1849, Melville pays a compliment to Emerson after hearing him lecture. He says of the transcendentalist, "I love all men who *dive*" (Horth 121). Walter Bezanson rightly notes that "Ishmael's deepest anxieties...come from the Bible and Shakespeare; nor should one forget the profound confluences, in very different ways, with Emerson (for his New World aura, his Ishmaelite sense of self and of alienation, for his willingness to 'dive')" (191). Melville's propensity to be engaged by figures who seek out deeper truths—to dive—was already evident in his works prior to his hearing Emerson's lecture, but it's not surprising that Melville may have found some of Emerson's more deeper notions of brotherhood to be of interest.

Emerson is not without his faults, however. Melville continues to say in the same letter from above, “I could readily see in Emerson, notwithstanding his merit, a gaping flaw. It was, the insinuation, that had he lived in those days when the world was made, he might have offered some valuable suggestions. These men are all cracked right across the brow” (Horth 121). Sealts is perhaps correct that Melville’s reaction here may have had more to do with what “New Englanders were saying about [Emerson] during the 1840’s” (62). In other words, Melville is saying what he thinks people want to hear. However, we should not be too hasty to dismiss the idea that Melville may have had legitimate misgivings about the magnanimous orator. We can see the deep-seeded Calvinistic roots still embedded within Melville’s mind, for Calvin would certainly agree that the presence of man, even an exceptional man, at creation would not change the way in which God would go about laying out His path of Providence. Ahab is a great man—not in a moral sense, but in a Romantic one—but he comes face to face with his limitations both in terms of the body and the spirit. Bezanson rightly points out that “Ahab surely reminds readers of Milton’s Satan, of the pervasiveness of Byronism in romantic literature, of the ‘great man’ theory as variously expressed by Carlyle and Emerson” (198). Ishmael, however, is not necessarily a great man—at least certainly not in the sense that we would consider Ahab to be great, but Emerson has his own method for devising what greatness is in an individual.

In “The Over-Soul,” an essay that Melville may have read prior to the publication of *Moby-Dick*,¹⁶ Emerson defines two types of individuals: one speaking “from within,” and one speaking “from without.” Emerson writes:

¹⁶Sealts posits in “Melville and Emerson’s Rainbow” that the unmarked essays from Melville’s 1862 edition of Emerson’s *Essays* (#204) may be the ones that he read in 1849 while in Boston (63). Both the “The Over-Soul” and “Circles” fall into this group of unmarked essays from the 1862 edition.

The great distinction between teachers sacred or literary,—between poets like Herbert, and poets like Pope,—between philosophers like Spinoza, Kant, and Coleridge, and philosophers like Locke, Paley, Mackintosh, and Stewart,—between men of the world, who are reckoned accomplished talkers, and here and there a fervent mystic, prophesying, half insane under the infinitude of his thought,—is, that one class speak *from within*, or from experience, as parties and possessors of the fact; and the other class, *from without*, as spectators merely, or perhaps as acquainted with the fact on the evidence of third persons. (395)

As I have argued from the beginning of this study, it is the weight of consciousness that causes most of the suffering of these abject figures—that they are aware of their position in the world as it relates to God. It is this weight of understanding that causes what Emerson here is referring to as the half insanity from the infinitude of thought in someone like Ahab. We cannot deny that Ahab has a bit of the philosopher in him; he is extremely intellectual, but Alfred Kazin is correct when says that “Both are thinkers, the difference being that Ishmael thinks as a bystander, has identified his own state with man’s utter unimportance in nature” (43). Ahab is also a man of action, a man who speaks from within, utilizing the type of experience that Emerson refers to above. We recall Peleg’s description of Ahab to Ishmael before the *Pequod* sets sail:

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 the surest that, out of all our isle! Oh! he ain’t Captain Bildad; no, and he ain’t Captain Peleg; *he’s Ahab*, boy.... (78)

The reason why Ahab can speak from within is because he, like Cain and Esau, feels the weight of God’s hatred; he has actually *experienced* it firsthand. In the case of Melville’s Ishmael, however, we see that he is more of the type of individual who speaks “from without,” a bystander who experiences the hatred through Ahab, at least until he has gathered enough experience.

Undoubtedly, Ishmael displays some of the character traits that Emerson mentions of the individuals who speak from within, but Ishmael gains this experience from the quest itself. It is through the compiling of Ishmael's tale that he gains the type of experience that he needs to speak from without. As John Bryant argues: "What Ishmael learns far more than Ahab is that knowledge is experiential; knowing exists solely in essaying, the trying out of self and idea" (186). While I would not go so far as to say that Ishmael learns about the power of experience more than Ahab—one could argue that he learns *from* Ahab—I would say that Ishmael is very much a figure who is open to the "trying out of self" and experience. Much of his philosophy comes from his commentary on the things that he is experiencing at the time. Although Ishmael is relating to us a story that has already taken place, he is able to maintain a sense of the present, of experiencing the events all over again with the reader. Cromphout explains this duality in Ishmael rather well:

Narrator Ishmael, moreover, is concerned with both narrative and narration. When focusing on narrative, he tries imaginatively to recapture the moods and hopes and perceptions of fore-castle Ishmael and his companions; his narrative deals with the then, with an experience already completed. When focusing on narration, Ishmael's concern is with the now—with his ongoing endeavor to put into words what happened then. (29)

Thus, we witness what we deem to be an actual growth in Ishmael from inexperience to experience by the end of the novel. Ishmael tells us in the "Moby Dick" chapter that to explain how the crew—including himself—could become so enraptured by Ahab's call to the hunt "would be to dive deeper than Ishmael can go" (158). We are reminded that it was Emerson's ability to dive that Melville was drawn to, but here Ishmael cannot dive deep enough—at least not yet.

All throughout *Moby-Dick*, Ishmael attempts to accumulate experience and to find meaning in the events that he is witnessing. One of the early moments in the novel where we see

Ishmael voice this position is when he is signing up to sail aboard the *Pequod*. Peleg asks Ishmael, “Now then, thou not only wantest to go a-whaling to find out by experience what whaling is, but ye also want to go in order to see the world? Was not that what ye said? I thought so. Well then, just step forward there, and take a peep over the weather-bow, and then back to me and tell me what ye see there” (72). Ishmael attempts to symbolically read what he sees, describing his view as “monotonous and forbidding; not the slightest variety that I could see” (72). When Ishmael returns with seeing nothing more than the water, Peleg says to him, “Well, what dost thou think then of seeing the world? Do ye wish to go round Cape Horn to see any more of it, eh? Can’t ye see the world where you stand?” (72). Peleg is making fun of Ishmael’s attempts to symbolize the voyage. We can certainly snicker at Peleg’s comment and read it in terms of economy and class differences; however, interestingly enough, there is also a difference of biblical class here. In the Bible, Peleg belongs to the line of Shem, one of the three sons of Noah. We recall that it is Ham, the son of Noah who saw his father’s naked body, who is cursed. Shem is part of the chosen lineage. Therefore, there is an element of the elect speaking to the abject here. Nonetheless, for both Bildad and Peleg this is a voyage of economy; they aren’t interested in symbolically reading the world, nor are they interested in finding God at sea. In fact, Peleg’s matter-of-fact point has some merit. One can witness the world from wherever he or she is standing: earth is earth, whether it is someone’s backyard or in the Amazon. Yet, this is not enough for Ishmael. He wants to see what is beyond that which is right in front of him; it is inherently inside of him to look past the shadows on the wall and see the figures that are casting those shadows, just as Ahab asks the crew to strike through the mask. It is this looking for what is beyond that will lead Ishmael to eventually be Emerson’s hero who speaks from within.

The Inner Object is Awakened

The narrative shift in *Moby-Dick*, where we lose much of Ishmael's personal voice and gain a more omniscient narrative, marks an important point in the tale. I would contend that one possible way to look at this shift is through the full awakening of Ishmael to his abject nature. In the "Castaway" chapter, Ishmael begins to see the role of being a castaway within the scope of its relationship to Providence. Ishmael narrates the story of Pip and how the young boy jumped from the whaling boat not once but twice. On the second time, "Pip turned his crisp, curling, black head to the sun, another lonely castaway, though the loftiest and the brightest" (321). Ishmael further adds that "Pip's ringed horizon began to expand around him miserably" (321). Andrew Delbanco reads this moment in terms of the supreme loneliness that accompanies this ringed horizon. He writes:

Alone in the open ocean, Pip watches his "ringed horizon...expand around him" as the whaleboats pursue their prey, leaving him to bob in the ocean's "heartless immensity." It is an image of abandonment that makes Poe's caves and dungeons seem childish contrivances, and its horror...is so far beyond imagining that Melville comes at the experience obliquely, through a contrasting image that makes us feel the terror of being cut loose into the indifferent infinite. (160)

The result of Pip's abandonment is that he becomes a disturbed figure; however, while we may be tempted to read Pip's seemingly insane rants as a loss of self, we should also consider the possibility that he has gained another type of consciousness. Like Ahab, Pip will become truly aware of just how abandoned he really is in the world. Emerson may also provide us with another approach for reading the ringed horizon.

In Emerson's "Circles," one of the essays that Melville may have read in 1849, Sealts believes that Melville "would surely have responded to Emerson's fascination with energy and movement, process and transformation, expressed in the very imagery of such an essay as

“Circles” (63). In the essay, Emerson writes, “The life of man is a self-evolving circle, which, from a ring imperceptibly small, rushes on all sides outwards to new and larger circles, and that without end. The extent to which this generation of circles, wheel without wheel, will go, depends on the force or truth of the individual soul” (404). The idea that the extension of the circles is dependent on the force or truth of the individual is important in the context of Melville’s own circles (the ringed horizon) from *Moby-Dick*. The ringed horizon is an extension of one’s true self, and in the context of Melville’s circles we see how they reveal Ishmael’s proximity to the abject.

Earlier in the novel, the meaning behind the ringed horizon is interpreted for us by the Old Manxman. He says, “Ready formed. There! the ringed horizon. In that ring Cain struck Abel. Sweet work, right work! No? Why then, God, mad’st thou the ring?” (151). The ringed horizon has an abject element to it. It contains the frustrations that accompany divine election and predestination. Cain kills Abel out of jealousy, and this jealousy stems from the love that God shows Abel. Therefore, the ability to comprehend the ringed horizon is in a sense an ability to comprehend the abject. Pip has now entered this realm of the abject, and there is again a possible biblical connection to be made here. I mentioned earlier that Peleg is a reference to the generations of Shem, Noah’s blessed son. Melville could be making another connection here with Pip. There was a belief that the African race was born out of Noah’s cursed son, Ham¹⁷. While I do not go into the curse of Ham in any great length in this study, Ham can easily be considered a type of abject figure as well. Pip’s introduction to the ringed horizon can be read as an awakening to his own abject nature, and the effect that it has on him is essentially one that appears comprehensible to only a few aboard the ship.

¹⁷ In chapter 2, I mentioned the African preacher in America named Lemuel Haynes who sought to fight this belief.

Ishmael can see—and somewhat comprehend at this point along with Pip and Ahab—the type of madness that accompanies the consciousness of one’s abjectness. Ishmael tells us, “Pip saw the multitudinous, God-omnipresent, coral insects, that out of the firmament of waters heaved the colossal orbs. He saw God’s foot upon the treadle of the loom, and spoke it; and therefore his shipmates called him mad. So man’s insanity is heaven’s sense” (322). Although Ishmael distances himself from Pip here through a detached, narrative form, we know that Ishmael can see these images as well because he is interpreting them for us. William B. Dillingham has a different interpretation of how Ishmael reads circles. Dillingham sees concentric circles in *Moby-Dick* as a way of reading the puzzle of how to get to a state of inner calmness: “The outside rings move [Ishmael] rapidly and against his will, but the inner circles are calmer. Movement slows and the hidden center is tranquil” (5). It comes down to puzzles for Dillingham. If one can traverse the chaotic outer rings and reach the hidden inner core of self-awareness, one can attain a sense of tranquility. Ahab can never do this because his monomaniacal pursuit keeps him on the outside rings by choice. He maintains his madness as a weapon against God and the Whale. Dillingham admits, however, that “Ishmael is not always confident...of reaching the hidden center” (7). There are two aspects to consider in this reading. The first is that it implies a sense of self-agency that is difficult to reconcile with the Calvinistic world that Melville is portraying both in the novel as a whole and in the providential nature of ringed horizon itself. The simple answer for why neither Ahab nor Ishmael can reach the tranquil inner section of the circles is because God does not will it. Second, for the abject, self-awareness and consciousness of one’s position in the world does not bring tranquility but strife. It has the opposite effect of what Dillingham offers: coming to the center of the circles only brings one to madness.

The difference here between Ahab and Ishmael is that Ahab does not have the ability to detach himself—he cannot leave the circle like Ishmael can, to move in and out of the madness of consciousness. It is also why Ishmael can tell us that “There are certain queer times and occasions in this strange mixed affair we call life when a man takes this whole universe for a vast practical joke, though the wit thereof he but dimly discerns, and more than suspects that the joke is at nobody’s expense but his own” (188). For Ahab, if there is a joke, it is a cruel joke to elicit more suffering in humanity. The transition to the mindset of the abject is a gradual process in Ishmael; however, it takes its largest step in chapter 41.

The Inner Abject is Awakened

The chapter titled “Moby Dick” is where we see the inner abject really begins to come to the surface of Ishmael’s mind. The different narrative styles that are employed in this chapter are indicative of the change that has taken place within him. Let us first look at how the chapter begins.

I, Ishmael, was one of that crew; my shouts had gone up with the rest; my oath had been welded with theirs; and stronger I shouted, and more did I hammer and clinch my oath, because of the dread in my soul. A wild, mystical, sympathetical feeling was in me; Ahab’s quenchless feud seemed mine. (152)

Ishmael not only gives us a personal “I” but he announces his name again, as if he is giving us testimony in a court, and we as readers bear witness to his statement. First, he includes himself in the mass of men aboard the ship, but then he separates himself from them. He shouted “stronger” and hammered his oath “more” than the rest because of the “dread” in his soul. Matthiessen states, “The one thing that could redeem ‘the wolfish world,’ the Ishmael of *Moby-Dick* found, was sympathy with another human being” (443). Throughout the text, Ishmael has proven his cosmopolitan worth, his fraternal place in the world among the masses of human

beings, but here he wants us to note that the power of Ahab's hatred affects him more than the others. This is the Cain in Ahab speaking to his abject brother, Ishmael, which elicits the "wild, mystical, sympathetical feeling" that makes "Ahab's quenchless feud seem" his own. In a sense it *is* his own. There is another aspect of the narrative form in this chapter that seems to indicate that a type of enlightenment has taken place in Ishmael.

Ishmael regales us with the legend of Moby Dick, and how whalers come to believe in the superstitious nature of the White Whale, but it is when his story turns to explaining Ahab's part in the tale that his narrative voice begins to truly change. Ishmael tells us:

The White Whale swam before him as the monomaniac incarnation of all those malicious agencies which some deep men feel eating in them, till they are left living on with half a heart and half a lung. That intangible malignity which has been from the beginning; to whose dominion even the modern Christians ascribe one-half of the worlds;...All that most maddens and torments; all that stirs up the lees of things; all truth with malice in it; all that cracks the sinews and cakes the brain; all the subtle demonisms of life and thought; all evil, to crazy Ahab, were visibly personified, and made practically assailable in Moby Dick. He piled upon the whale's white hump the sum of all the general rage and hate felt by his whole race from Adam down; and then, as if his chest had been a mortar, he burst his hot heart's shell upon it. (156)

This section sounds more like a defense of the type of rage that Ahab exhibits in his pursuit of the whale, especially when he brings in the fact that "even the modern Christians" must admit that there is a certain type of evil that is "intangible" and present from "the beginning." Ishmael acknowledges that there is such an evil in the world and then explains how Ahab simply transfers the intangible evil to a tangible object in the Whale. The reference to the "hate felt" by the generations of Adam is very much akin to the type of hate that the Romantics made manifest in their Cain-like figures. Ishmael's words are also going to be repeated somewhat closely by Ahab in the beautiful "Symphony" chapter in which Ahab tells Starbuck that he feels "bowed, and humped, as though I were Adam, staggering beneath the piled centuries since Paradise" (406).

Ishmael's description of Ahab's torments is easily understandable to the wayward narrator because there is a part of him that feels the same. By the end of the chapter, Ishmael takes it upon himself to not only defend Ahab, but to call upon individuals to recognize Ahab's greatness and his right to claim a kingship.

Ishmael says:

So with a broken throne, the great gods mock that captive king; so like a Caryatid, he patient sits, upholding on his frozen brow the piled entablatures of ages. Wind ye down there, ye prouder, sadder souls! Question that proud, sad king! A family likeness! Aye, he did beget ye, ye young exiled royalties; and from your grim sire only will the old State-secret come. (157)

Ishmael is losing himself in the abject mindset here. Ishmael sees a "family likeness" in Ahab, in the Cain that resides within the Captain. Ishmael is one of the "young exiled royalties," those who have the blood of the elect within them, but have no claim to it. He is as much defending himself as he is Ahab. Cain is the progenitor of these exiled royalties, and Ishmael can see that it is only from this "grim sire" that the truth of this will come to the surface. He recognizes the torment that comes from being an abject figure.

Section 3: Reconciliation and a Covenantal Promise

Reconciliation

In *Exiled Royalties*, Milder sees Ishmael in a more universal, castaway sense. He writes, "[Ishmael's] 'free and easy sort of genial, desperado philosophy' ...is desperate...because, like all humanity, he is an outlaw from Creation, disinherited and left to fend for himself in the world like the biblical Ishmael in the desert" (88). As we have already seen, the biblical Ishmael is not left alone; he is carefully watched by God. That Melville understood just how different Ishmael is from the rest of the abject figures can be seen in a few key sections of the novel. One such

instance that makes it clear that Melville was astutely aware of the political nature of the elect line is when the *Pequod* meets the *Rachel* in the chapter of the same name. Melville is drawing our attention through this allusion to the elect line. The name of the ship is a reference to one of the wives of Jacob, brother of Esau. The *Rachel* is in search of its captain's lost son. Ishmael tells us why the captain's son was not on board with his father when the attack by Moby Dick occurred.

Nantucket captains will send a son of such tender age away from them, for a protracted three or four years' voyage in some other ship than their own; so that their first knowledge of a whalerman's career shall be uneneruated by any chance display of a father's natural but untimely partiality, or undue apprehensiveness and concern. (398)

In order to avoid nepotism, captains will send their sons aboard a different vessel. This is not unlike how the negotiation of the chosen line works in the case of the biblical Ishmael; he too must be sent away in order to avoid any unnecessary favoritism. Of course it is not Abraham who initiates the exiling of his son; it is his wife, Sarah, with the blessing of God. The role of the mother in shaping the elect line will be discussed in much more detail in the fourth chapter of this study, as *Pierre* deals with this topic specifically. However, suffice it to say that the mothers of the abject and elect arguably have the most impact in shaping the "rightful" line of the elect. It would seem that Melville is making an allusion to this notion here in *Moby-Dick*.

The *Rachel* is a ship with a father who is looking for his son; it doesn't care about Moby Dick at this point, and thus doesn't care about vengeance. Instead, it is choosing to place family above revenge. Ahab appears to internalize the plea of Captain Gardiner for assistance in finding his lost boy. Ishmael narrates, "Meantime, now the stranger was still beseeching his poor boon of Ahab; and Ahab still stood like an anvil, receiving every shock, but without the least quivering of his own" (398). The shocks that Ahab is receiving are blows of consciousness. He can feel

the suffering of the other captain, but it cannot warp his sense of revenge; it only fuels it. Stubbornly yells, “We must save that boy” (398) but his cries are to no avail. What makes this short chapter so appealing is that it is a chance for Ahab to actually do some genuine good, to help reunite a father with his son, but Ahab is far beyond helping others. It’s not that Ahab is confused by the two concepts: he knows that helping Gardiner would be an act of good will. This is a conscious effort on Ahab’s part to place his vengeance above goodness, and it is Melville’s chance to show us just how far Ahab has fallen, and in a sense just how disconnected from humanity the abject can become. We should remember at all times that it is Ishmael who is relaying these stories and images to us. This tale of a reunion between father and son takes on a whole new meaning when we look at it from the perspective of our narrator.

We are told that the captain of the *Rachel* had been placed in quite a precarious position when the melee ensued between Moby Dick and his ship. The story is relayed as follows:

not only was one of the Captain’s sons among the number of the missing boat’s crew; but among the number of the other boats’ crews, at the same time, but on the other hand, separated from the ship during the dark vicissitudes of the chase, there had been still another son; as that for a time, the wretched father was plunged to the bottom of the cruelest perplexity; which was only solved for him by his chief mate’s instinctively adopting the ordinary procedure of a whale-ship in such emergencies, that is, when placed between jeopardized but divided boats, always to pick up the majority first. (398)

Gardiner had been faced with the choice of choosing which son to rescue. The captain did not make the decision; it was made for him, it and based upon the notion that there is a greater good that outweighs the suffering of an individual. In a sense, Ishmael is retelling us the story of Abraham, Ishmael, and God: that Abraham had to give up his son, Ishmael, for the sake of the betterment of the greater good, the elect, and to keep the chosen bloodline as pure as possible. Both God and Abraham are faced with a similar situation as that of Captain Gardiner. Therefore, who better to tell this story to us than Ishmael, the son who is at the center of the predicament?

Ishmael tells this story with a clear sense of sympathy for Gardiner's plight. We are told that one "plainly saw that this ship that so wept with spray, still remained without comfort. She was Rachel, weeping for her children, because they were not" (399). The full line from the Bible that Melville is referencing here is the following: "In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not" (Matthew 2.18). The context of the quote has to do with Herod killing the young males in order to stop the prophecy of the birth of Jesus from coming to fruition. Ishmael's use of the line here, however, has other connotations.

Rachel is not weeping for Ishmael, Cain, or Esau. Nonetheless, it is the *Rachel* that will eventually come back to pick up Ishmael after Moby Dick has destroyed the *Pequod*. In terms of a typological reading, all the suffering that the abject must endure—especially in the cases of Ishmael and Esau—is to pave the way for the birth of Christ and the redemption of humanity as well. Melville's Ishmael is in a post-redemptive world, however. The messianic prophecy of the Old Testament is already fulfilled for the Christian. This is why the *Rachel* is finally able to come back for one of her lost sons at the end of the novel. This may be Melville's way of creating a type of reconciliation between the elect and abject—that Rachel, acting on behalf of the rest of the mothers who helped shape the chosen line, is in some way receiving the abject children back into her arms. Ishmael's providential deliverance at the end of the novel can certainly be read as God's acquiescence with this notion.

The Covenant Fulfilled

One of the many questions that surface throughout textual analysis of *Moby-Dick* is why does Ishmael survive the attack and no one else? Alfred Kazin notes, "one feels in the end that it

is only the necessity to keep one person alive as a witness to the story that saves Ishmael from the general ruin and wreck” (46). Though it would appear that much of Ishmael’s salvation might be attributed to chance, the intense philosophizing over the nature of Providence should dissuade us from reading the ending based on pure luck. Wright says of both Melville’s Ishmael and the biblical one that “Both seem to lead charmed lives, though among Melville’s heroes Ishmael is unusual in this respect. As Hagar’s son was saved by a miracle from a death in the desert, so with the wreck of the *Pequod* only the sailor Ishmael escapes, and that by a margin so narrow as to seem miraculous. This is a parallel unacknowledged by Melville’s actual text” (51). If we read further, however, in the epilogue, we do see Melville acknowledge that Providence is at work.

In the epilogue Ishmael tells us that, “*The unharming sharks, they glided by as if with padlocks on their mouths; the savage sea-hawks sailed with sheathed beaks*” (427). This should be enough for us to see that Melville wants us to read, along with his narrator, that there is a divine logic happening here. We are still left with the question, why Ishmael? Starbuck is certainly a better Christian, more worthy of the grace of being saved. The answer to this question comes back to the origin of Ishmael in the Bible.

Though Ishmael shares many of the characteristics of Cain, he does not share the same fate as the cursed character from Genesis. Ishmael is a bifurcated figure. Rogin sees a type of salvation for Ishmael at the end of the novel in part because of the sacrifices of captain Gardiner from the *Rachel*. He notes, “The twelve-year-old son is dead; so is the savage brother, and so is Ahab. Together their deaths rescue Ishmael. Read optimistically, that ending prophesies the liberation of the enslaved black children of Israel. It restores the outcast Ishmael to the Christian fold” (141). Although he does claim Ahab’s quest as his own, Ishmael is also

able to simultaneously separate himself from it. Ishmael says of Ahab's monomaniacal quest, "God help thee, old man, thy thoughts have created a creature in thee; and he whose intense thinking thus makes him a Prometheus; a vulture feeds upon that heart for ever; that vulture the very creature he creates" (170). Ishmael's words, "God help thee," is important when consider that, as mentioned earlier, Ishmael's name means God hears. Arvin makes an interesting point that "The capacity to imagine an all-embracing love, which proves to be Ishmael's salvation, Ahab has fatally lost" (174). I would argue that it's not simply the ability to "imagine an all-embracing" but to actually know that it exists, to have actually experienced it through the mercy that God shows to both Ishmael and his mother, Hagar. This is what allows Ishmael to call to God for help in a moment of genuine prayer for the lost Ahab. Obviously God does not pay heed to this prayer, but we should not dismiss Ishmael's request here as a mere platitude.

Ishmael's introspective and questioning nature does not meld well with the very public and punitive nature of God. This duality in Ishmael may have led Lawrence Thompson to argue that Ishmael "writes that 'Epilogue' in such a way as to feign a God-like indifference" (239). I would argue that Ishmael is not feigning indifference, nor is he actually indifferent. He is simply an individual who understands his place in the world as an abject figure. We certainly cannot say the same for Melville's protagonist in the novel that follows *Moby-Dick*, *Pierre*.

Chapter 4: The Second Esau: the Fall of Pierre into Abjectness

Touted by the author as a foray into the sentimental novel genre, Melville's *Pierre* was written with the intention of being popular; however, it proved to be nothing of the sort. Even among Melville critics it holds a rather unfavorable position. For scholars such as Emory Elliot, "*Pierre* does not engage to any extent in the metaphysical, religious, and philosophical issues with which Melville was struggling in *Mardi* and *Moby-Dick*" (193). I would argue that Elliot is undervaluing the novel quite a bit here. Rather, as William B. Dillingham suggests, there are ample reasons to read the novel as "one of [Melville's] boldest experiments in fiction, an expression of the same interests and insights in a radically different form" (148). The importance of *Pierre* to the study of the Melville canon has been somewhat undervalued, critically speaking.¹⁸ It is in *Pierre* that we truly begin to see the author's literary descent into the growing silence of the Divine that would come to define some of his more well-known characters in his later works, such as *Bartleby* and *Billy Budd*. We can certainly see vestiges of Melville's struggle with the absent voice of God in previous works—in Starbuck's final plea to God to "for one single instant show thyself" (418) for example. In *Moby-Dick*, however, we have the presence of divine aggression in the Whale; whether it is God or not, to Ahab it is at the very least a representation of godly power. With *Pierre* we do not even have that. In a sense, Melville's fiction after *Moby-Dick* follows the pattern of the stories of the abject figures. There

¹⁸ Andrew Delbanco puts forth, for example, a very tightly argued psychosexual interpretation of Melville's novel against the author's own life, but he also takes Melville to task for having his actions out of sufficient ratio with the character's emotions (he uses Eliot's reading of Hamlet as an example), referring to *Pierre* as "Ahab gone camp" (199). There are moments where the language gets away from Melville, but the theological implications of what *Pierre* is attempting to explore are a far cry from "camp," and I would argue more disconcerting to the mind than the grand eloquence we get from the speeches of Ahab or the cosmopolitan musings of Ishmael.

is less of a presence of the voice of God in the biblical story of Jacob and Esau, and there is less of a presence of the manifestations of God in *Pierre* as well.

It is in *Pierre* that Melville offers perhaps his darkest reading of the Bible, class, and an evolution of consciousness in his fiction toward what may be interpreted as the deafening sound of the silence of God. Whereas in *Moby-Dick* Melville uses Cain and Ishmael to foreground his tale, in *Pierre* Melville invokes the story of Jacob and Esau to use as a scaffold from which he can explore God/Christ. We have evidence that Melville not only read the account of Jacob and Esau but that he seemed to be rather engaged by this story. He makes numerous markings and even comments on the futility of Jacob's service to God in his Bible (Cowen 90). Having read the biblical tale, Melville would have keenly been aware of the marked difference between Esau's plight and that of Cain's or Ishmael's: namely the absence of the voice of God.

Previously, when the chosen lineage had to be renegotiated with the exiling of Cain and Ishmael, God plays an active role in the process of both decisions in order to preserve the sanctity of His own covenant: with Cain he directly expels the murderer from his sight, and with Ishmael God explains to Abraham that the son that he shares with Hagar must be sent away. In the story of Jacob and Esau, however, God is not as directly involved—this is not to argue that there is no sense of divine will, but simply that the magnanimous voice is not as explicitly present. This chapter essentially looks at three aspects of Melville's *Pierre* in relation to Jacob and Esau: first, the matriarchal influence of the chosen mothers in the Bible; second, the importance of class and location in relation to biblical lineage; and third, the growing feeling of despair at the silence of the voice of God.

The Selling of the Birthright

We have already looked at the stories of both Cain and Ishmael. Esau's story is somewhat more complicated. One of the reasons for this complexity is that there is a significant difference in how God is involved in the story. There are essentially two parts to the story: the first part has to do with the selling of the birthright and the second part deals with the receiving of the patriarchal blessing. When Rebekah is pregnant with both Jacob and Esau she can feel a struggle going on in her womb. She asks God, "If it be so, why am I thus?" (Genesis 25.22). To this God says, "Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger" (Genesis 25.23). This is the magnanimous voice of God, but it does not present itself again in the story of Jacob and Esau until much later. As God reveals, Esau is born first, and he will eventually become the servant of Jacob, but it is the way in which this all comes to be that makes the story such a complex one to interpret. The selling of Esau's birthright is relayed as follows:

And Jacob sold pottage: and Esau came from the field, and he was faint. And Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage, for I am faint: therefore was his name called Edom. And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright. And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me? And Jacob said, Swear to me this day; and he swore unto him: and he sold his birthright unto Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage and lentiles; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright. (Genesis 25.29-34)

There are of course two ways to look at what transpires here. First, it is difficult not to feel somewhat sympathetic with Esau in that he tells us that he is starving, "at the point to die."

Jacob has the means to provide sustenance, but he will do so only in return for the birthright.

There is, however, something important to consider here. Judeo-Christianity is always in some way concerned with the battle between the flesh and the spirit. In a purely theological reading,

there can be no sympathy for Esau, who was thinking more about the temporal repercussions—the flesh—than the spiritual ones. What it comes down to is that Esau sold something of great spiritual value for nothing more than lentils. This is later confirmed when in the book of Hebrews it said, “Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright” (12.16). It is for this reason that God will declare, “...Was not Esau Jacob’s brother? saith the Lord: yet I loved Jacob, / And I hated Esau...” (Malachi 1.2-3). The second part of this story, the blessing of Isaac, is also somewhat complex because of the way in which Jacob receives it.

Isaac’s position as patriarchal figure of the elect gives him great power. Upon reaching old age, he wishes to give his eldest son, Esau, a blessing. The story is relayed as such:

And it came to pass, that when Isaac was old, and his eyes were dim, so that he could not see, he called Esau his eldest son, and said unto him, My son: and he said unto him, Behold, here am I. And he said, Behold now, I am old, I know not the day of my death: Now therefore take, I pray thee, thy weapons, thy quiver and thy bow, and go out o the field, and take me some venison; And make me savoury meat, such as I love, and bring it to me, that I may eat; that my soul may bless thee before I die. (Genesis 27.1-4)

Isaac’s wishes are quite clear. Rebekah, however, favors Jacob. Therefore, she devises a plan that will allow Jacob to pass himself off as Esau. Essentially Rebekah cooks the meat and clothes Jacob in such a way that he appears—and feels—as hairy as Esau (Genesis 27.5-18). The plan works. Isaac is tricked into giving the blessing to Jacob instead of Esau. When Esau finds out, he is downtrodden, learning that Isaac’s blessing has made Jacob his lord (Genesis 27.37). Rebekah’s deceit paves the way for Jacob to become a fully elect individual, leaving Esau to the relegation of the abject figure, along with Cain and Ishmael. The question that should immediately surface is why the need for deception? Rebekah’s role in this story is not that dissimilar to that of Sarah, who also directly helps shape the line of the elect by exiling

Ishmael from the home. Because God is not as directly involved in this story—in the sense that He does not delineate by command the process by which His will is to be accomplished—more interpretation needs to be done than in the previous abject cases.

Augustine and Calvin

In order for Augustine to make sense of the selling of the birthright for a pot of lentils, he will look at it in terms of Esau's lustful desire to own what belongs to his brother. He writes:

The primacy of the elder was transferred to the younger by a bargain and agreement between them, when the elder immoderately lusted after the lentils the younger had prepared for food, and for that price sold his birthright to him, confirming it with an oath. We learn from this that a person is to be blamed, not for the kind of food he eats, but for immoderate greed. (505)

We can see that Augustine is reading this in purely theological terms. It is not so much that Esau needed to eat food, but that he needed *those* particular lentils, and if we look back at the story we notice that Esau does say “Feed me...with that same red pottage.” Augustine is putting forth the case that Esau certainly could have looked to another source of food to satiate his hunger, but that he lusted for the ownership of Jacob's food. It becomes a case of coveting that which belongs to another. Esau's failure is his inability to recognize the importance of his birthright; he is selling God for the pot of lentils as well.

Augustine's reading of the blessing of Jacob is somewhat more closely related to his previous interpretations of the other abject figures, choosing to separate the characters in terms of the two cities: the city of God and city of man. Augustine writes,

Now we understand here that the seed of Jacob is separated from Isaac's other seed which came through Esau. For when it is said, ‘In Isaac shall thy seed be called, by this seed is meant solely the city of God; so that from it is separated Abraham's other seed, which was in the son of the bond woman, and which was to be in the sons of Keturah. But until now it had been uncertain regarding Isaac's twin sons whether that blessing belonged to both or only to one of them;

and if to one, which of them it was. This is now declared when Jacob is prophetically blessed by his father, and it is said to him, “And thou shalt be an assembly of peoples, and God give to thee the blessing of Abraham thy father.” (507)

Augustine’s words here are interesting. He says that it was “uncertain” as to who the blessing belonged to, whether it would be both or one of them. The answer to the question, for Augustine, is revealed in the moment that Jacob is blessed by Isaac. Certainly the moment that Jacob is blessed is the actual time that Jacob becomes truly the elect between the two brothers; however, we can’t forget that just prior to the birth of both sons that God decrees that the elder will serve the younger. The blessing then is essentially the fulfillment of the prophecy that was already told to Rebekah. Therefore, it is not necessarily “uncertain” who would get the blessing, but it is uncertain *how* it was going to happen. Augustine’s reading here, however, does not take into full consideration Rebekah’s role in the story.

Calvin’s reading of this scene is particularly interesting because it more directly addresses Rebekah’s part in placing Jacob in the right position to receive the blessing of Isaac.

Calvin writes,

Rebekah...divinely informed of the election of her son Jacob, procures the blessing for him by a wicked stratagem; deceives her husband, who was a witness and minister of divine grace; forces her son to lie; by various frauds and impostures corrupts divine truth; in fine, by exposing his promise to scorn, does what in her lies to make it of no effect....In the same way, we cannot say that the holy patriarch Isaac was altogether void of faith, in that, after he had been similarly informed of the honor transferred to the younger son, he still continues his predilection in favor of his first-born, Esau. (376)

Calvin does not mince words here about what Rebekah does for Jacob. He calls her actions “wicked.” However, if we think about this in terms of Calvin’s notions of Providence it makes sense that he would be able to call Rebekah’s actions reprehensible while at the same time reminding us that she was told that Jacob would be the elect over Esau. Therefore, while

Rebekah did not do God justice in *how* it was accomplished, it still inevitably accomplishes God's will. Calvin tells us, "For as the particular error of Rebekah did not render the blessing of no effect, neither did it nullify the faith which generally ruled in her mind, and was the principle and cause of that action" (376). It is interesting that Calvin would come back to the side of Rebekah here by saying that her reprehensible strategy should not make us question her allegiance to God, for the fact remains that her actions do pave the way for God's will.

Section 1: Matriarchal Influence

Michael Paul Rogin, in *Subversive Genealogy*, reads *Pierre* as Melville's commentary on a shift that was taking place in the nuclear family structure: "Mother-love was to take the place of patriarchal authority, which was losing its control over society" (163). We can see this playing out in Melville's own life as well. Hershel Parker notes that Maria Gansevoort Melville was only "intermittently determined to bring her second son into a life of formal piety and the hope of a life hereafter in heaven" (1: 795). However, while in the Berkshires, she "began to put pressure on Herman to become part of the community, and in conservative western Massachusetts being part of the community meant going to church" (1: 795). Just like the Puritans of the seventeenth and early eighteenth century, Maria could not escape the often-alluded-to quandary of how one could be Justified before God and not Sanctified before eyes of one's community. Parker goes on to state the following:

Maria Gansevoort Melville was not the haughty aristocrat that Melville made Mary Glendinning, the fictional mother of *Pierre*, the hero of the book he wrote after his whaling book, but she was a supremely bossy woman whose reforming zeal now was focused all too sharply on her oldest living son. She had the best reasons—the safeguarding of Herman's immortal soul and the safeguarding of Herman's career, and both directly affected her and her daughter's futures. (1: 795)

While Parker is correct in noting that Melville's mother is not the aristocratic Mary Glendinning, she is nonetheless a protector of not only her child's soul but of the family name. In this regard, she falls in line with Mary Glendinning, and subsequently with the matriarchal figures we find in the early part of the book of Genesis.

Mary Glendinning, Protector of the Word

The ways in which Mary uses her influence over Pierre seem to indicate that Melville may have drawn much of his inspiration from the Old Testament figures of Sarah and Rebekah and their roles as the protectors of the family, for even though God reveals to Rebekah the future of her two sons, He leaves the means by which the revelation comes to fruition up to Jacob's mother. From the beginning of *Pierre* we find that, much like Rebekah, Mary has a tremendous amount of influence over the shaping of her son's future. In an exchange over breakfast, we witness a playful exchange between mother and son, with Pierre denying his tendencies to act like Shakespeare's Romeo, while expressing a sympathy for the "deplorable end" (18) that Romeo experiences. To Pierre's sympathetic feelings, Mary responds with the following:

"It was his own fault though."

"Poor Romeo!"

"He was disobedient to his parents."

"Alas Romeo!"

"He married against their particular wishes."

"Woe is me, Romeo!"

"But you, Pierre, are going to be married before long, I trust, not to a Capulet, but to one of our own Montagues; and so Romeo's evil fortune will hardly be yours. You will be happy. (18)

There is a subtext here that needs to be looked into more closely. Pierre's reaction here is tongue-in-cheek, but his mother's words are to be taken rather seriously. Her final words of this same chapter sound like a biblical supplication on behalf of her son's constitution.

Pray heaven he show his heroicness in some smooth way of favoring fortune, not be called out to be a hero of some dark hope forlorn;—of some dark hope forlorn, whose cruelty makes a savage of a man. Give him, O God, regardful gales! Fan him with unwavering prosperities! So shall he remain all docility to me, and yet prove a haughty hero to the world! (20)

We are told that Lucy's mother, Mrs. Tartan, "years ago laid out that sweet programme [sic] concerning Pierre and Lucy; but in this case, her programme happened to coincide, in some degree, with a previous one in heaven, and only for that cause did it come to pass, that Pierre Glendinning was the proud elect of Lucy Tartan" (27). Even in the case of Lucy's mother there is an understanding that the women will protect the purity of the family lineage. She too acts like Rebekah, willing to impose a strategy that will ultimately lead to what she believes to be the will of God. By the end of the novel, with all of the death and destruction, we get the sense that Pierre should have taken heed of his mother's warnings. Certainly, Pierre's attempt to rescue Isabel from her life as an outcast is not something that either Pierre's nor Lucy's mother believe is a good idea because they know that even the introduction of this abject side of the family can lead to the destruction of the chosen lineage which has been in place for so long in the Glendinning family.

Mary, Falsgrave and Pierre at the Breakfast Table

Perhaps the most telling scene in the novel that conveys Melville's awareness of the role of mothers in the shaping of the elect line can be seen during the conversation that takes place between Pierre, his mother, and Reverend Falsgrave at the breakfast table. The topic of

discussion is DellyUlver, her affair with a married man, and the child that has been conceived out of that affair—this is of course a microcosm of the main plot of the novel. While Mrs. Glendinning tells us that she is meeting with Falsgrave in order to decide “what is to be done” in regard to the “wretched affair of Delly” (96), she informs us that “[her] mind is made up” (96) before Falsgrave has even arrived. There will be no true discussion on the matter. What Melville is doing with this section is exploring the relationship between the written word of God and the word put into action. The scene becomes an allegorical battle: Falsgrave is the representation of the active voice of God; Mary Glendinning represents the Bible as the written word, and protector of biblical tradition; and Pierre represents the individual trying to make sense of both worlds. Pierre attempts to mediate this discussion, but he soon learns, just as the Reverend does, that it is difficult to argue against the unchangeable nature of the written Word.

From the beginning of the conversation it becomes quite clear that Falsgrave is uncomfortable with Mary’s rather staunch reading of the Bible. He wants there to be room for interpretation, and more importantly, for a sense of mercy in the matter at hand. However, Mrs. Glendinning does not see any room for such a reading. She asks the Reverend, “what are the words of the Bible?” (100). When Falsgrave responds to the prompt with scripture, it is with “some slight reluctance in his tones” (100). The reluctance is there because he knows that he is being trapped. He attempts to find room for mercy by saying that just because “The sins of the father shall be visited upon the children to the third generation,” it “does not mean...that the community is in any way to take the infamy of the children into their own voluntary hands” (100). It is he, as a clergyman, who is supposed to be the protector of the word of God, which is why Mary Glendinning is quick to respond to Falsgrave’s attempts at finding a humane way of dealing with the situation through interpretation with her prompting him to actually voice

scripture out loud. She is thereby forcing him to vocally acknowledge the fact that biblical precedent does exist for such a situation as the case of DellyUlver.

Pierre's mother says to Falsgrave:

But if we are entirely to forget the parentage of the child, and every way receive the child as we would any other, feel for it in all respects the same, and attach no sign of ignominy to it—how then is the Bible dispensation to be fulfilled? Do we not then put ourselves in the way of its fulfilment [sic], and is that wholly free from impiety? (100)

She is daring the reverend to go against the word of God. In doing so, she can also justify her own feelings of animosity toward anything that can potentially besmirch the sanctification of a family's bloodline; she takes her place with Eve, Sarah, and Rebekah as one of the matriarchal protectors of the chosen lineage. She is not thinking about Delly; Mary is thinking about the long term effects of the family's legacy and its future. It is perhaps for this reason that Melville names Pierre's mother Mary, so as to make this scene even more disturbing: that the mother of Christ would not find mercy for this wayward figure. Melville uses this conversation to explore the idea that perhaps Mary Glendinning's call for what appears to be an un-Christian act of cruelty to banish DellyUlver and her child may actually be Divine proclamation. We can't forget that this is not without biblical precedent, as the abject figure is a banished child. There is something peculiar about this scene, however. The battle that is taking place is essentially based on an Old Testament theology of preserving the elect bloodline. The problem with this is that the Reverend, Pierre and Mary are all Christian. The elect line has already been protected all the way through to Christ, and yet the conversation is somewhat void of Christian representation. It is perhaps as Watters argues, "The love Melville perceived at the root of Christ's teachings impelled him to condemn the logic of the Old Testament Jehovah" (Watters 47).

In a review of *Pierre* dated November 16th, 1852, in the *American Whig Review*, the author, George Washington Peck, summarizes the novel and pans it right from the beginning by calling it “A bad book! Affected in dialect, unnatural in conception, repulsive in plot, and inartistic in construction” (Higgins and Parker 441). This is certainly not in any way an uncommon review; however, what is of interest to this section of the study is the way in which he identifies and refers to the character of DellyUlver. Peck writes, “when Pierre and Isabel arrive accompanied by a young lady of loose morals named Delly, they find no house or welcome” (445). From this point on in the review he continues to use the title “lady of loose morals” instead of her name, Delly. He writes, “Mr. P. Glenginning, having the responsibility upon his back of Mrs.—Miss Isabel, his wife-sister...and the young lady of loose morals,” which is then followed rather closely in print with “in company with Isabel and the young lady of loose morals” (446). Clearly there is a social commentary being made here. Peck seems to have had no problem with taking away Delly’s humanity by removing her name. This is not so different from Mary Glendinning’s call to assign “ignominy” (100) to not only Delly’s actions but the fruit of those actions, the child.

In another review of *Pierre*, dated September, 1852 in *The Southern Literary Messenger*¹⁹, the author refers to Pierre’s attempt to reconcile his father’s sin as “a most laudable thing” (575). The reviewer makes the following comment:

But to accomplish it, Pierre is led to do things infinitely worse than it would be to neglect it. He not only acts like a fool in severing the most sacred ties and making the dearest sacrifices to purchase what he might have obtained at a much lighter expense, but he justifies his conduct by a sense of duty, false in the extreme. He wishes to uphold the just and true, and to do this he commences by stating a lie—his marriage with Isabel. It is in the cause of affection and consanguinity that he is content to suffer, and for this cause, he breaks off the closest and holiest bond

¹⁹In Hugh W. Hetherington’s *Melville’s Reviewers*, he posits that the review may have been written by John R. Thompson (233).

that exists on earth, the bond of filial love, thus causing the mother that bore him to die a maniac. (575)

What is interesting about this review is not so much that it talks about Pierre's misguided notion of justice in the name of "affection and consanguinity," which is of course rather apparent in the novel, but the focus on what the reviewer refers to as the "holiest bond"—that of the mother and child. *Pierre* in many ways represents Melville's most glaring look at the role that mothers play in terms of protecting the purity of the elect line. Wyn Kelley is right to point out that "Pierre's mother's domesticity supports his father's ancestral legacy by helping to nurture the next Glendinning hero. This domesticity is her feminine legacy to Pierre..." (100). A brief look at how the chosen mothers are involved in the marriage process will help us see just how involved Mary Glendinning becomes in her son's life.

Section 2: Marriage and Biblical Class Politics

Marriage is of course an important topic of discussion in terms of maintaining the elect lineage. By the time that Isaac is ready for a bride, Sarah, his mother, has passed away and was buried. Therefore, it is left to Abraham to make sure that his elect son finds a proper wife to keep the lineage pure. Abraham tells his servant, "And I will make thee swear by the Lord, the God of heaven, and the God of the earth, that thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell: / But thou shalt go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac" (Genesis 24.3-4). Even though it is Abraham who is dictating this information, we cannot forget that it was Sarah who laid the groundwork for this by telling Abraham that Ishmael cannot live in the same household as Isaac. Abraham is simply continuing that process. Rebekah will also play an integral role in making sure that Jacob finds the proper wife for an elect son.

After Rebekah orchestrates the blessing of Jacob, Esau expresses that he is angry enough to murder his brother. This prompts Rebekah to tell Jacob that it would be best for him to take a trip to see Laban, her brother, and that she would send for Jacob when the time is right (Genesis 27.45). Directly after she gives Jacob this advice, Rebekah tells Isaac, “I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth: if Jacob take a wife of the daughters of Heth, such as these which are of the daughters of the land, what good shall my life do me?” (Genesis 27.46). There are two points to be made here. First, we can once again see the importance of land, which will also play a role in our reading of *Pierre*. Second, there is an extra bit of interpretation that is required here. Does Rebekah say this because she is genuinely concerned about the women of Heth, or is this another part of her plan to make sure that Jacob has a reason to leave before Esau can harm him? Given that Rebekah is not the only mother of the elect to be so thoroughly involved, and also given how important the chosen lineage is, we can’t simply dismiss that this is probably a genuine concern on her part. Either way, Isaac pays heed to his wife’s words. We are told, “And Isaac called Jacob, and blessed him, and charged him, and said unto him, Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan. / Arise, go to Padan-aram, to the house of bethuel thy mother’s father; and take thee a wife from thence of the daughters of Laban thy mother’s brother” (Genesis 28.1-2). The particularity of the issue of marriage is made even clearer when we look at the other side of the bloodline. When Esau hears that Isaac has told Jacob not to take a wife from the Canaanites, he “went unto Ishmael, and took unto the wives which he had Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael Abraham’s son...” (Genesis 28.9). The mixing of the two worlds—abject and elect—has been closely guarded in the Bible from the beginning, and in *Pierre* we get a sense of what can happen when the two worlds collide.

Location, Location, Location

Location is another important aspect of the chosen and abject discussion. In the Bible, the chosen lineage can essentially live anywhere, as long as they stay faithful to the decrees of God. Melville also makes a distinction in *Pierre* between the land of the chosen and the land of the abject; however, he separates them into two categories: the country and the city. We are given this information right at the beginning of the novel. Melville tells us “do not blame me if I here make repetition, and do verbally quote my own words in saying that *it had been the choice fate of Pierre to have been born and bred in the country*” (13). Of course, in wonderful Melvillean humor, it is his choice. He is the god of this tale, and yet he wants us to make the connection early that this is not a case of randomness, but of fate—it is a divinely ordained choice for Pierre to have been brought up and reared in the country. Melville continues his opening narration by making a specific reference to the connection between the land and God’s chosen people.

So the country was a glorious benediction to young Pierre; we shall see if that blessing pass from him as did the divine blessing from the Hebrews; we shall yet see again, I say, whether Fate hath not just a little bit of a word or two to say in this world; we shall see whether this wee scrap of latinity be very far out of the way—*Nemo contra Deum nisi Deus ipse*.²⁰ (14)

This section of the opening narration is somewhat lighthearted in its tone, right up until the Latin part at the end, which roughly reads as “no one is against God unless it be God Himself.”

Melville isolates God here, reminding the reader that whatever happens in the text can somewhat be attributed to God, for if He wishes at any point to correct the actions of Pierre, He can do so.

While this country landscape helps to maintain the chosen spirit, it is the city that creates the perfect environment for the abject to live.

²⁰Helen Hauser argues that Melville is quoting Goethe’s *Autobiography* here. More will be said about this in the coming section on the influence of Goethe and *Pierre*.

It is of course not a random choice that Melville has Pierre, Isabel and Delly move to New York City. In a letter to Evert Duyckinck, Melville comments on the paved roads of New York City, saying, “There is one thing certain, that, chemically speaking, mortar was the *precipitate* of the Fall; & with a brickbat, or a cobble-stone *boulder*, Cain killed Abel” (*Horth*167). Melville’s odd comment here can be read as his commentary on the ways in which the newly emerging industrialization of the city had already begun to create such fierce competition that there is something inherently abject about the city that lends itself to the Cains of the world. We can see Melville’s connection between the city and the abject playing out also in the ways in which his characters respond to their surroundings. Robert A. Kelly notes, “the immoral forces in the city, so opposite from the moral benevolence of the countryside, act as a barrier to Pierre’s clear understanding of God’s will and word” (23). I would simply add to this argument that while the city may act as a barrier for Pierre to access God, it does not prohibit God from accessing Pierre, should He desire to. Nonetheless, the city and country settings do affect the characters in different ways.

Lucy’s aversion to the city cements her role as being of an elect mindset. She “did not love the city and its empty, heartless, ceremonial ways” (26). Isabel on the other hand found the country to be against her nature. She tells Pierre about the second—or third, she admits her memory is unclear on the matter—house she lived in with “cultivated fields...and many objects of that familiar sort,” but though “It seemed a happy place to some of these people; many of them were always laughing;...it was not a happy place for [her]” (118). Isabel is an unwanted figure in the country, and Lucy is uncomfortable in the city. This is why Isabel seems to become much stronger and outspoken as a character when they all arrive in the city. She is invigorated

by the surroundings; whereas Pierre on the other hand continues his decline both mentally and spiritually.

The place in which Delly, Pierre, and Isabel are all lodging must also be acknowledged for its importance to our understanding of Melville's use of the abject, "The Church of the Apostles." Bruce Rosenstock has more recently made an interesting correlation between Melville, Kant and the danger of all-encompassing theories of evil in relation to *Pierre*. Rosenstock believes Melville is warning us to "guard against the temptation to place confidence in the grand scheme of 'teleological theorists and social reformers'" (22). I would agree with this; however, I would add the distinction that Christ and his Apostles are not a part of these social reformers to be guarded against. Instead, Melville's use of this haven for Pierre is a calling for Christ to come back. It is the *former* Church of the Apostles, now simply the Apostles. Again, Melville is drawing our attention back to the void of God, more specifically Christ. Melville's novel can be read as a failed quest to find Christ, a quest that never seems to have divine legitimacy, and it is here that "Pierre cursed himself for a heartless villain and an idiot fool;—heartless villain, as the murderer of his mother—idiot fool, because he had thrown away all his felicity; because he had himself, as it were, resigned his noble birthright to a cunning kinsman for a mess of pottage, which now proved all but ashes in his mouth" (289). This is a direct allusion to Esau's selling his birthright to Jacob, and it tells us that by the end of the novel, Pierre has in fact resigned his birthright; he also resigns his status as an elect figure and takes his place with Esau as an abject figure.

The Importance of Vocation

Studies on Melville and class often reflect the author's seemingly growing discontent with the widening gap in society that he saw due to industrialization and the role of capitalism in the nineteenth century. While these studies tend to focus more on the economic aspects of class, in this section I will pursue a different type of class structure, one that springs forth from the Bible, and one that Melville seems to be working hard to destroy in *Pierre*. Cindy Weinstein notes that Melville's texts tend to give rise to the idea that "different kinds of work elicit different evaluations of work as well as competing class identities" (203). In Melville's vision of God's world, the abject have a job to do and a place to be—or to be more accurate places not to be. This will become integral to Pierre, who actively seeks admittance into the location of the abject, but is unwilling to participate in the vocational part of the abject class. First, we will need some brief background information to help clarify the vocational part of this argument.

When we are introduced to Cain and Abel, we are told that: "Abel was a keeper of the sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground" (Genesis 4.2). These job assignments are quite intriguing when we consider the metaphorical implications of both, especially if we look forward into the New Testament with Christ being known as the Good Shepherd. When we think of Cain's role as tiller of the ground we are immediately drawn back to Adam's punishment in the Garden. God says, "cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life" (Genesis 3.17)²¹. There is a connection between these abject figures and their class status as secondary to the chosen lineage. In the case of Ishmael he becomes an archer, living in the wilderness (Genesis 21.20). While this may seem to contradict the initial point that the abject line is tied to working the land, when Isaac's son Esau is born, the description that we are given

²¹In Genesis 8.21, it says "And the Lord smelled a sweet savour; and the Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth...." This notion that "man's heart is evil" is an important theme in *Pierre*, for he follows his heart to total destruction.

of Esau's vocation is that he "was a cunning hunter, a man of the field" (Genesis 25.27). We will look at how Goethe possibly influenced *Pierre* more in depth in another section; however, in the *Autobiography*²² Goethe notes this vocation connection as well:

The first human beings were soon divided by occupation, even though they viewed each other as close relatives. The hunter was the freest of all, and out of him developed the warrior and ruler. The tillers of the fields devoted themselves to the earth, erected dwellings and barns to protect their gains, and began to feel pride in the permanence and security provided by their livelihood. As for the herdsman, he seemed to have been granted the widest range and limitless possessions....From the start, these three estates seem to have regarded each other with vexation and scorn.... (109)

Esau is in a sense a composite of both Cain and Ishmael. On the opposite side of this, we have the chosen lineage whose vocation is mostly tied to shepherding.²³ When we look to Melville's novel, he seems very much aware of this connection to vocational classification.

Early in the novel, as Pierre is gazing lovingly into the eyes of Lucy Tartan, he says to her "Thou art my heaven, Lucy; and here I lie thy shepherd-king" (36). This will of course come to fruition in a sense, as Pierre will lead his flock—Lucy, Isabel, Delly—to their demise.

Melville is also commenting on the residual effect of the mindset that was carried over from the ships of England to America in the early seventeenth century. In this new Promised Land of America, the vocation of the elect changes from a literal shepherd to a more metaphorical one, a Christ-like shepherd. The religious orators, the Winthrops, Edwards, and Emersons prod their flocks with words of righteousness, not rods of wood, to keep the people in line.

Melville wants us to make this connection with Pierre, who "seemed to have inherited their docile homage to a venerable Faith, which the first Glendinning had brought over sea, from

²²Sealts #228; Bercaw #296

²³As previously mentioned, Abel was a shepherd; Isaac has "great possession of flocks, and possession of herds (Genesis 26.14); and though Jacob is not initially introduced as a shepherd, he becomes one finally in Genesis, chapter 29, when he meets his future wife, Rachel, who was also in charge of the sheep.

beneath the shadow of an English minister” (7). What Melville is alluding to here is the same idea that came over on the *Arbella*, through the mouth of John Winthrop: “Consider that we shall be as a Citty upon a Hill, the eies of all people are upon us; soe that if we shall deale falsely with our god in this worke wee have undertaken and soe cause him to withdrawe his present help from us” (*American Sermons* 42). Pierre attempts to become this metaphorical shepherd of his people, but he is unable to fulfill that role. After receiving Isabel’s letter, Pierre exclaims, “all piety leave me;—I will be impious, for piety hath juggled me, and taught me to revere, where I should spurn” (66). Piety can demand the spurning of others. In classical literature we have Aeneas’s rejection of Dido at the behest of Zeus for one such example. Nonetheless, this passage is quite damning for Pierre. He is fully aware of the fact that he is going against the will of God. In Winthrop’s logic, Pierre has dealt falsely with God, and this is why God will withdraw His help.

The narrator—speaking in the role of Pierre’s chaotic thoughts, and in almost Greek-like chorus fashion—says of Pierre, “Thy two grand resolutions—the public acknowledgment of Isabel, and the charitable withholding of her existence from thy own mother,—these are impossible adjuncts” (171). Pierre’s attempts to keep these two plans going solicit the following response from the narrator: “this, this ineffable folly, Pierre, brands thee in the forehead for an unaccountable infatuate” (171). The reference to the branding of the forehead can of course be read in Cain-like terms. The only question is how we choose to read this statement in terms of who is doing the branding? Remember, Cain is branded directly by God for his transgressions. Ishmael, in *Moby-Dick*, has a certain self agency that allows him to come to terms with his own abject status and somewhat brand himself. Is Pierre branding himself or is it God who is branding the transgressor again? The narrator indicates that it is the “folly” that brands him,

meaning that it is by his own choice that he is becoming an abject figure. The narrator implores Pierre to “Quit Isabel, and go to Lucy! Beg humble pardon of thy mother, and hereafter be a more obedient and good boy to her, Pierre—Pierre, Pierre,—infatuate!” (171). Pierre will of course not heed the voice of the narrator; he will instead follow his heart, and it is in his choice to follow his heart that he makes the biggest mistake of all.

Section 3: The Silence of God

The Heart and the Head

In *Pierre*, Melville makes a distinction between Christ and God; he separates them into categories of the heart and the mind: the heart being that which feels naturally truthful to the goodness in human nature, and the mind, which contains all of the coordinated elements of time and space that occur in order to preserve a divine plan. Pierre is pulled toward following the heart, Christ in Melville’s world, but in doing so he does not realize that he is at the same time disrupting things that belong to a greater scheme than his own. In describing the Reverend Falsgrave’s character, Mrs. Glendinning says, “if there is any one blemish in [it]...it is that the benevolence of his heart, too much warps in him the holy rigor of our Church’s doctrines” (100-1). In a sense, she is correct. In the early parts of the book of Genesis, we do get a sense of God’s ability to express compassion, even toward his abject figures, but it is never at the expense of preserving His overall plan²⁴. A brief reminder of God’s words to Abraham will suffice here.

And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him. And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee:

²⁴ For Melville, it always comes back to what he saw as an irreconcilable problem of Job: that there is vital theological information that we can simply never understand, and that providence continues on with or without our consent.

Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation. (Genesis 17.18-20)

In this passage we can certainly argue that God is both merciful and compassionate. The lamentations of Abraham are heard and receive a response, but this does not happen later when we return to the story of Jacob and Esau. Again, having read both stories, Melville would have been aware of the fact that God does not offer such consolation to Isaac for Esau's loss of both his birthright and his patriarchal blessing, and we aren't privy to much of an explanation for why things turn out the way that they do, at least not until the book of Romans, chapter 9.

(For the children [Jacob and Esau] being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, *that the purpose of God according to election might stand*, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her [Rebekah], The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. (emphasis mine Romans 9.11-16)

What this passage is pointing out is not that God is without mercy, but that it's a mercy that is divinely ordained, and therefore, outside of human prediction. Pierre makes the mistake of assuming that he will be given help and mercy because his motives are seemingly pure ones, of the heart. In Melville's copy of Psalm 4, he draws a box around the fourth line, which reads "commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still" (Cowen 392). He highlights this part of the psalm, but the first line of it reads, "Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness: thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress; have mercy upon me, and hear my prayer" (Psalms 4.1). Just prior to the discussion that takes place at the breakfast table with the Reverend Falsgrave, Pierre announces, "The heart! The heart! 'tis God's anointed; let me pursue the heart!" (91). For Pierre, pursuing the heart makes all the sense in the world, and yet he can't

escape the all-pervading notion that though he may be following the heart of God, he may not be following the mind of Him.

Referring back to the discussion during breakfast between Pierre, Mary, and Reverend Falsgrave, Pierre attempts to draw Christ out into the open by again coming back to the topic of DellyUlver. When Pierre presses Falsgrave for an answer about how Christ would view Delly's circumstances the Reverend can only respond that it is a common misconception that "conversational opinions on the most complex problems of ethics, are too apt to be considered authoritative" beliefs of the church itself (102). In other words, he does not want his opinion in polite company to be considered the voice of either God or the church. The nervous nature of Falsgrave in this entire exchange seems to indicate not that he cannot answer Pierre's question, but that he simply refuses to. Like another of Melville's characters, Bartleby, Falsgrave would prefer not to. The clergyman's silence is not simply a representation of Falsgrave's failure as a stand in for the Divine, but it is also indicative of the fact that Pierre wants God to answer for Himself, to bless his mission. Of course, it does not happen. This will ultimately lead Pierre to exclaim that "Silence is the only Voice of our God" (204). Essentially, Pierre will adapt the type of logic that Goethe talks about in his *Autobiography*. Goethe writes,

We may prosper under the protection of parents and relatives, we may lean on brothers and sisters and friends, we may be amused by acquaintances and made happy by persons we love, but in the final analysis a human being is always thrust back on himself. Apparently even the Deity has positioned itself to man in such a way that it cannot always respond to his respect, trust, and love, or at least not precisely at the urgent moment. (468)

Pierre disengages from his mother's love only to find that for him God has not responded at the "urgent moment." He feels the weight of Isabel squarely on his shoulders, and it is slowly crushing him.

Pierre does pick up where *Moby-Dick* left off in the sense that when Ahab posits the question of “who’s to doom when the judge himself is dragged to the bar” (407), Pierre attempts to do just this, to drag God out and demand answers, but he is unsuccessful. We are given a potential answer for why this is through a careful reading of the book of Matthew. When Christ is tested in regard to his knowledge of the Mosaic Law by the Pharisees and Scribes, He says, “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone” (Matthew 23.23). Matthew is one of the most marked books in Melville’s Bible and yet he does not allow Falsgrave to use these words of Christ. Melville allows Pierre’s mother to subvert the authority of Christ through Falsgrave’s inability to stand up for the sake of mercy. Given Melville’s affinity for Milton, he could have written Falsgrave here as a heroic one-just-man, like an Abdiel from *Paradise Lost*, but he doesn’t. In the end, it comes down to a matter of divine authority.

In another verse marked by Melville in Matthew, Christ’s authoritative presence is noted: “For He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (Cowen 317). In the often-cited by critics chapter of *Pierre* entitled “The Journey and the Pamphlet,” Pierre reads the words of the philosopher Plotinus Plinlimmon. In this philosophical treatise, Plinlimmon states, “the reason why [Christ’s] teachings seemed folly to the Jews, was because he carried that Heaven’s time in Jerusalem, while the Jews carried Jerusalem time there. Did he not expressly say—My wisdom (time) is not of this world?” (213). When we look back to Falsgrave’s failings to defend Christ’s dispensations, the fault does not lay solely on the Reverend. In fact, Pierre seeks the help of Falsgrave later in the novel, only to conclude that

a hint from heaven assures me now, that thou hast no earnest and world-disdaining counsel for me. I must seek it direct from God himself, who, I now

know, never delegates his holiest admonishing. *But I do not blame thee; I think I begin to see how thy profession is unavoidably entangled by all fleshly alliances.* (emphasis mine 164)

Falsgrave can speak on behalf of God, but Christ's words are the words of God; he carries with Him divine perfection, wisdom, and the ability to remove Himself from the trappings of the world. Pierre begins to realize that this type of perfection cannot be found in the world any more, even in the authoritative figures of the church. This discovery has two effects: first, it forces Pierre to look even closer within his own heart for the answers to his questions concerning Isabel; second, it reinforces a feeling of cosmological loneliness that he had already begun experiencing at breakfast earlier in the novel. He is looking for God, but he cannot find Him.

Goethe and the Heart

In James McIntosh's "Melville's Copy of Goethe's *Autobiography and Travels*" he notes that the author of *Pierre* seems to have found much interest in the fourth book from part one, where Goethe "describes his youthful interest in the Book of Genesis, in particular the stories of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Hagar, and Ishmael. In Melville's copy, the reader marks the sentence, 'The most important events of the world require to be traced to the secrets of families'" (McIntosh 392). Certainly *Pierre* can be summarized as a story about the dark secret of a family, and Goethe, like Melville, was fascinated by the story of the patriarchal figures from Genesis²⁵.

²⁵ Helen A. Hauser in "Spinozan Philosophy in *Pierre*" also notes a connection between Goethe and Melville, identifying Goethe as "a man in whom Melville took considerable interest, even quoting from his *Autobiography in Pierre*" (50). The two quotations she cites are "*Nemo contra Deum nisi Deus ipse*" (14) and "generally useful" (302). Both of these page citations come from the edition listed in my works cited.

One aspect of Goethe's *Autobiography* that may have interested Melville is when the German author discusses his breakdown of religion into two types: universal and individual. He says of the universal that it "requires no faith, since no one can escape the conviction that a great productive, regulating, and guiding Essence is concealed...behind nature." If we think about this it somewhat mirrors the story of the abject figures. Outside of the realm of the elect, their faith in God does not prevent their lot as abject. Of the individual religion Goethe says that "this great Essence has definite preferences and will espouse the cause of a single person, tribe, nation, or territory. This kind of religion is based on faith, which must be unshakeable if it is not to be destroyed..." (112). This can be read in terms of the religion of the elect, because it only requires faith. Thus, Rebekah's act of deception in procuring the blessing for Jacob can be read as simultaneously an egregiously deplorable act and also a testament of her enduring faith in God's will.

Goethe goes on to say, "One can return to a conviction, but not to faith," and that this is "the reason for the constant testing and the delay in fulfilling repeated promises..." (112). The difference between conviction and faith is important, especially in terms of *Pierre*. What Pierre displays throughout much of the novel is not so much faith, but conviction. His faith is essentially jarred from the moment that he reads the letter from Isabel that claims her fraternal connection. We can read this moment in the novel as Pierre's true test of faith, for if he had faith in his father, he would have dismissed the letter completely, but he doesn't. Conviction and faith work as opposing forces in Pierre. The more that he feels convicted in his mission to announce Isabel's rightful place in the world, the less faith he has in God's ability to see the righteousness in his mission. We need only look at the following quote to see where his faith lies in relation to God.

On my strong faith in ye Invisibles, I stake three whole felicities, and three whole lives this day. If ye forsake me now,—farewell to Faith, farewell to Truth, farewell to God; exiled for aye from God and man, I shall declare myself an equal power with both; free to make war on Night and Day, and all thoughts and things of mind and matter, which the upper and the nether firmaments do clasp! (107)

We cannot help but hear Melville once again returning to Milton's Satan, who in his famous book IV soliloquy exclaims, "So farewell Hope, and with Hope farewell fear, / Farewell Remorse: all Good to me is lost; / Evil be thou my Good..." (IV.108-10). While the language is Miltonic, the message is Byronic. Milton's Satan wants to be the antithesis to God, but Byron's Manfred neither wants to be the antithesis to God nor Satan. He is a figure who wishes to stand outside of those definitions. Pierre is also attempting to stand with Byron's Manfred, outside a cosmological power structure, but directly after Pierre makes his claim, the narrator reminds us "But Pierre, though charged with the fire of all divineness, his containing thing was made of clay. Ah, muskets the gods have made to carry infinite combustions, and yet made them of clay!" (107). Ultimately, Pierre's grandstanding against the will of God comes back to the ever-looming notion of mortality. Thus, in the end, the figure that he most resembles here is in actuality his fictional predecessor, Ahab, who was also filled with a divine combustion, only to be reminded in the end that he is nothing more than clay.

John Bryant in "*Moby-Dick as Revolution*" talks in depth about Ahab's "heart-woes," a term stemming from the chapter entitled "Ahab's Leg." For Bryant, part of this heart-woe lies in Ahab's erecting of "God as an unknowing, father-figure version of himself, sans personality, sans self-righteous anger," much in the same vein as Goethe's 'Mother Night' (79). I would argue that in *Pierre* we can also look at this notion of a "heart-woe"; however, we need to do so from the opposite perspective. In other words, Pierre's problem is not his establishment of an unknowing father figure, but the fact that he attempts to establish a knowing one, based on what

he believes to be sound principles of human and Christian justice. The problem, however, is that it is not based upon actual theological underpinnings; it is based upon the passion of the heart. Early in the novel, Pierre describes an actual shrine to his father, a “perfect marble form of his departed father....Before this shrine, Pierre poured out the fullness of all young life’s most reverential thoughts and beliefs. Not to God had Pierre ever gone in his heart, unless by ascending the steps of that shrine, and so making it the vestibule of his abstractest religion” (68). The way in which Pierre attempts to reach God is mitigated through two means: his father and his heart. It isn’t until the end of the novel that he understands that both of these have failed him in his pursuit of divine reason.

Although Sealts does not include a number for *The Sorrows of Young Werther* in *Melville’s Reading*, Bercaw’s *Melville’s Sources* does include it in her list of possible sources in *Pierre* (#302). Both *Werther* and *Pierre* ultimately conclude that following one’s heart, even with benevolent intentions can still lead to destruction. Goethe’s *Sorrows* laments the loss of a love, having tragic repercussions much like *Pierre*. What Melville may have internalized most from Goethe’s novel is the role of following one’s heart in the name of what appears to be righteousness.

Werther laments:

O God! Thou seest my tears. Thou hast allotted us our portion of misery: must we also have brethren to persecute us, to deprive us of our consolation, of our trust in Thee, from Whom all that surrounds us derives its healing and restoring powers? Father, Whom I know not—Who were once wont to fill my soul, but Who now hidest Thy face from me—call me back to Thee; be silent no longer!
(64)

The last line of the quote, Werther’s calling to hear the voice of the Father, is a calling for healing and guidance, much like Pierre’s yearning for the magnanimous voice of God and Christ

to return. For Pierre, however, the silence of God may actually be His answer. It is an answer, however, that Pierre does not wish to hear.

For Leon Chai, *Pierre's* failure in following his heart stems from the idea that “emotional intuitionism...simply doesn't suffice” (71). We cannot deny that it is because Pierre follows his heart that he and all those whom he loves are destroyed; however, this doesn't mean that Melville is espousing the notion that we should not believe in the nature of the heart as still being a viable source of the goodness in humanity. In other words, the failure is not in the heart itself, but rather in humanity's inability to know when following the heart was also in line with following God's mind. This is perhaps the reason why in a letter to Hawthorne, Melville writes, “The reason the mass of men fear God, and *at bottom dislike* Him, is because they rather distrust His heart, and fancy Him all brain like a watch” (192).

Conclusion

Lawrence Thompson's assertion in *Melville's Quarrel with God* that the author was trying to show us that “the dual nature of God is darkened and blackened by the everlasting and all-pervading evil of God, by the innate depravity of God, who constantly mocks and tortures mankind” (259) is a bit too all-encompassing, and it doesn't take into account the affinity that Melville displays at times for Christ's teachings, especially the Sermon on the Mount. If Melville's relationship with God were actually as simple as Ahab's hatred for the Whale then he would not have suffered so much under the weight of his belief and disbelief, as Hawthorne so eloquently relays to us in their last meeting with each other. The problem for Melville is a theological one: the knowledge that the divine plan is hidden, and that its Weaver requires sacrifice from His people, but that His people are ill-equipped to know where their part in the plan begins or ends. It is with this understanding that Melville wrote under the weight of an

irreconcilable religious nature, and it explains why he was so fascinated with the exploration of these abject figures.

Chapter 5: The Problem of the Abject, as Seen by the Elect

What makes “Bartleby, the Scrivener” such an interesting tale is how it fits into the arch of Melville’s works after the disappointment of *Pierre*. What seems like chaotic madness and the struggle to thwart divine will at times in *Pierre* turns into somber resignation by the end of “Bartleby.” Melville’s short story about a socially and spiritually decaying scrivener on Wall Street plays an important role in this particular study in that it is Melville’s most complete artistic resignation to Calvinistic doctrine and the plight of both the abject and the elect. This is not to say that Melville himself was resigned to Calvin’s theology—Hawthorne’s famous quote about his final meeting with Melville would certainly attest to this—but that in “Bartleby” the lawyer achieves a resignation to Calvin’s doctrine of Providence, and the role of the elect in the divine scheme.

“Bartleby” is stripped of the grandeur that we find in Ahab; and it lacks the hyper-romantic pathos that we find in *Pierre*. Instead, we are faced with Calvin’s theology in its most basic form. There are those who are elect and there are those who simply are not. Melville, however, uses the socio-economic setting of Wall Street from his own time to show readers how the negotiation of the elect and abject plays out in the real, every day world. The setting adds an interesting twist to the story, as the lawyer’s election seems to be as much about his economic standing as it does his spiritual one. Melville ties economics and salvation together much in the same way that the early Puritans rationalized the discussion of justification and sanctification: in other words, we can read the lawyer’s success in part with his election. This chapter proposes two points: first, that when we look at the lawyer through the lens of his elect status, we find that Melville is drawing our attention to a type of plight of the elect, as they also find themselves unable to escape the throes of Providence, and more importantly, unable to save their abject

brethren. Secondly, that *Bartleby's* gradual and enigmatic decline in health and in constitution is a result of Melville's reading of Calvin's theology concerning God's ability to give the abject a sense of grace at first, only to find that it is not an eternal grace of salvation.

Family and Melville's Connection

Before we get into the story itself, we need to look at Melville's own family relations to see how he may have understood the pressure of election and abjection on a more personal level. Melville critics have connected aspects of the lawyer in "*Bartleby*" to people whom the author may have known in real life. There are certainly no shortage of possibilities for the inspiration of the lawyer: Melville had two brothers (Allan and Gansevoort) who had practices in New York City; an uncle (Peter Gansevoort), who was an overseer of chancery courts; and the good chief justice of the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts—and father-in-law—Lemuel Shaw. At a fairly young age Melville already had an idea of what it was like for two brothers to be compared to one another, and for one to seemingly be held in higher regard than the other.²⁶ Hershel Parker sees the lawyer as "an accumulation of influences, not least that of the lamented Gansevoort" (2: 176). Parker goes on to say that "In Gansevoort's and Allan's law office at the head of Nassau Street there was paper, pen, and writing surface to spare, so Herman most likely wrote there, doing his best to ignore the occasional client or one of Gansevoort's political visitors....Inevitably, he was caught up in his older brother's anxiety" (1: 355). The anxiety that Parker is referring to is the pull toward maintaining one's good name on the lips of the politically elite: in this case it is the newly-elected President James K. Polk (1. 355-6). There is a push not

²⁶ Parker sees Melville's "docility" as a young man as "a strategy Herman had resorted to after realizing, at some level of awareness, that he had no hope of competing for attention with Gansevoort except through teasing, which he may have begun to outgrow already" (1: 35) by 1826.

simply to attain fame but to also preserve it, which is something that to Melville appeared transparent and elusive. Foley writes, “even as he was consorting with this socially conservative cultural elite, Melville was writing novels—*Mardi*, *Redburn*, and *White-Jacket*—manifesting his profound discomfort with elites and hierarchies of various kinds. By the late 1840s, Melville was living an increasingly intolerable contradiction” (98). The angst that Melville was feeling was his own out-of-place nature, much like the abject figures in a world of the elect. Melville must have seen his own brother’s constant struggle to maintain his elect status in the political world, giving the author another side to the story of the abject and elect—an understanding for how even the elect individuals can experience a type of worldly pressure. Thus, the office setting of “*Bartleby*” seems to be an easy choice for Melville’s tale of how the politics of the abject and the elect has a way of manifesting itself in the modern world.

While Melville certainly displays sympathy for class struggles in terms of labor and even race, the one hierarchy that seems to have puzzled and tested the author the most is the biblical one, because nothing can be done about it; no amount of charity can be provided to appease the Calvinistic notion of Predestination. Melville also displays an acute understanding, however, for how the elect played their own part in Providence. While the biblically elect figures are protected by God, they are not without their own anxieties: Isaac is led to the altar to be sacrificed, and Jacob is threatened by the thought that his brother, Esau, will come back to murder him. An elect figure must have a tremendous amount of faith in God in order to continue to be on the path of righteousness. In the case of figures like David, and other beloved elect individuals, one can stray from the path but then be guided back to the straight and narrow through genuine confession of sins to God. The abject, of course, cannot. Although this would seem to be something that the elect should feel comforted by, for the lawyer, who seemingly

wants to stray from this path to help Bartleby, it simply magnifies the suffering of the scrivener, and the lack of control that humans actually have within the system of Providence.

The Elect in Calvinism

While we often focus on Bartleby's suffering in Melville's short story, the lawyer is not without some strife of his own. In agreement with Augustine, Calvin says the following on the topic of the elect's role in Providence:

Man sometimes with a good will wishes something which God does not will, as when a good son wishes his father to live, while God wills him to die. Again, it may happen that man with a bad will wishes what God will righteously, as when a bad son wishes his father to die, and God also will it. The former wishes what God wills not, the latter wishes what God also wills. And yet the filial affection of the former is more consonant to the good will of god, though willing differently, than the unnatural affection of the latter, though willing the same thing; so much does approbation or condemnation depend on what it is befitting in man, and what in God to will, and toward that end the will of each has respect. (139)

This quote essentially sums up the crux of the problem in "Bartleby." It doesn't matter if the intention of the lawyer is good in trying to save Bartleby; if God wills the scrivener to die then it will be so. Calvin admits that the "filial affection" that the son feels for the dying father in the first example is more "consonant to the good will" of God, but ultimately it cannot effect what God deems necessary to the fulfillment of Providence. This dissonance between what "seems" to be more consonant with the will of God and what actually is divine will is what Melville is highlighting in "Bartleby." The difference in this story from previous tales by Melville is the sense of resignation at the end of the story to this dissonance between ethereal and temporal wills.

Although Calvin makes distinctions between those who are elect and those who are not in terms of their salvation, he does not believe that one's election secures temporal bliss. It is for

this reason that the book of Job plays such an important role in Calvin's understanding of God. Job is the greatest of the men of the east, and even he is not assured happiness on earth. For Calvin, happiness lies in salvation only, and thus he offers the following to help explain the role of earthly bliss in salvation. He states, "If these holy patriarchs expected a happy life from the hand of God (and it is indubitable that they did), they viewed and contemplated a different happiness from that of a terrestrial life" (Calvin 280). Calvin's point is that the elect understand that their happiness will not necessarily come on earth, but in the hereafter. This does not stop the elect, however, from seeking out happiness on earth at the expense of their relationship with God, as we see with such beloved figures as David.

Calvin offers the following as consolation for God's elect: "But when once the light of divine providence has illumined the believer's soul, he is relieved and set free, not only from the extreme fear and anxiety which formerly oppressed him, but from all care" (131). While one may take solace in the comfort that he or she is on the elect side of the divine scheme, humans do not live in a vacuum that is void of others. Melville's stories are centered upon the fraternal nature of humanity; thus, the suffering of others is not something that humans can simply turn a blind eye to—and certainly at the heart of Christianity it does not ask one to do so. This is not to say that Calvin does not believe it is a Christian's duty to be charitable, but in Melville's internalization of Calvin's theology there is little room for mercy for the abject. The lawyer must actually bear witness to the suffering and destruction of Bartleby, and it is for this reason that Melville's lawyer seems just as miserable as the dejected scrivener at times.

In referring to the elect, Calvin states:

This, I say, is his comfort, that his heavenly Father so embraces all things under his power—so governs them at will by his nod—so regulates them by his wisdom, that nothing takes place save according to his appointment; that received into his

favor, and entrusted to the care of his angels, neither fire, nor water, nor sword, can do him harm, except insofar as God their master is pleased to permit. (131)

In the case of Melville's lawyer, he is unable to trust in the will of God, to believe that what is transpiring before him is indeed a part of the divine scheme. Although he attempts to save Bartleby from what seems to be the scrivener's allotted fate, it is not at the expense of the lawyer's elect position. This is the difference between the lawyer and Pierre. The lawyer's "safe" mindset will not allow him to push the boundaries of Providence past a certain point; he will not compromise his chosen position. And yet, when faced with the overwhelming nature of Bartleby's abject status—his suffering—it awakens and magnifies the anxiety of the lawyer's awareness of his own election, which becomes the source of the narrator's grief and forlorn nature at the end of the story.

The Lawyer's Election

The lawyer describes himself as "an eminently *safe* man" (635). Perhaps a better designation might be that he is a man who is kept safe. Thomas Pribek's reading of the term "safe" in "Bartleby" provides some interesting context for the lawyer's character: "In political slang, a 'safe' man is one who is thoroughly dependable in office—dependable in the sense that he can be relied on not to disturb the vested interests to whom he owes his position, whether elective or appointive" (193). This language can easily be adapted to fit within this idea of the abject and elect. The elect figures of God certainly do not want to disturb the providential order of things—and of course Calvin would say that they can't. They can, however, disobey the will of God, which is what the lawyer will attempt to do to no avail. Pribek continues to say that "Another connotation of 'safe' further implies that the narrator's crime against humanity, so to speak, is his loyalty to conventional values and inability to act by his own moral principle" (194).

Certainly in terms of the Bible, one's ability to remain loyal to conventional values (God's will) in spite of one's own moral feelings is a positive thing; it is at the heart of salvation. When we apply this to Melville's lawyer, it becomes equally problematic in terms of his attempt to reconcile the trappings of the world with God and with his own Christian ideals. This type of reconciliation is not—and should not be—the concern of the elect, and it is important to remember that the lawyer is not merely an ordinary individual on Wall Street. He is an economic descendent of one of the most elect figures ever in terms of New York economy and wealth: John Jacob Astor.

The lawyer tells us, "I do not speak it in vanity, but simply record the fact, that I was not unemployed in my profession by the late John Jacob Astor; a name which, I admit, I love to repeat; for it hath a rounded orbicular sound to it, and rings like unto bullion" (636). Here, Melville connects his lawyer figure with one of the patriarchs of Wall Street economics. Of course, the lawyer is, in fact, using the name of Astor in a vain fashion. Astor's name here is akin to the Bible's use of Abraham; Abraham is not the progenitor of the human race, but he is arguably the most important patriarch. It is certain that the connection that the lawyer made in working with someone as successful as Astor has helped him receive the very office that he is running, and thus, his socio-economic lineage has helped secure for him both a seemingly justified and sanctified life. The problem, however, is that the lawyer lacks the constitution of both Astor and Abraham.

Even with the lawyer's vain boast of his economic lineage, we should note that the approach he takes in running his business is not of a cutthroat variety, not of the type that we might associate with the likes of a John Jacob Astor. Thomas Dilworth proposes that Astor's business dealings in acquiring land and foreclosing on homes in the early nineteenth century is

the key to understanding the lawyer's own feeling of guilt: "the association with Astor, of which the narrator is so proud, implicates him in the very activity for which Astor was despised, and would continue to be despised, by the common people of New York City" (67). That Astor was despised by many of the common people may be true, but the lawyer is not Astor. There are numerous moments in the story where the lawyer seems to choose professional inadequacy over compromising his humanity. When the lawyer gives Turkey a new coat, we can read this in two ways: first, that this is a genuine act of kindness on the part of the lawyer, to provide a warmer garment for a less fortunate individual; second, that Turkey's dress reflected poorly upon the narrator's office, and therefore, the lawyer was acting on his own behalf. The answer as to which reading is more accurate is most likely that it's a little bit of both, but the point is that we cannot and should not dismiss the notion that the lawyer may have been acting in a genuinely charitable fashion, or at least with genuine intentions. These intentions, however, will bring certain problems with them when Bartleby becomes the central focus of the narrator's life.

Section 1: Separating the Abject from the Elect

As we have already discussed throughout this study, family is at the heart of the abject discussion, and it also plays an important role in our understanding of "Bartleby" as well. In Melville's short story we see a conflation of both economy and family in the lawyer's office. This was not uncommon in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. These two worlds, according to Rogin, had begun to evolve due to the growth of capitalistic enterprise and the increasing demand for labor.

The routinization of work undermined the familiarly based set of master-apprentice relations. Employers and reformers claimed, in response, that their social institutions reproduced among strangers those shattered familial and communal bonds. As wage labor replaced household production, the employer

insisted he was united to his workers by deeper ties than those of legal contract and market interest. Employers and their defenders spoke of workplaces as families. (Rogin 196)

It is thus not surprising that Melville would couch the lawyer's attempts to rationalize the appearance of and the need to remove Bartleby from the office in terms of family and heritage. The problem for the lawyer is that for all his success, he is, nonetheless, a poor capitalist in terms of the fact that he could be making even more money by firing Turkey and Nippers and hiring more productive workers. His attempts at showing genuine care and remorse for his employees are what allow him to become sensitive to the plight of the abject scrivener. When it comes time for the lawyer to seriously consider removing the unproductive Bartleby from his office, he concludes that "If he [Bartleby] would but have named a single relative or friend, I would instantly have written, and urged their taking the poor fellow away to some convenient retreat. But he seemed alone, absolutely alone in the universe" (657). This is certainly not the thoughts of a man who is concerned only with the bottom line of his ledgers. There is genuine remorse in the lawyer's words. He feels responsible for the wellbeing of Bartleby, who is as much an Ishmael in a modern wilderness as any other.

At the height of the lawyer's sympathy for the ailing scrivener, he says, "The bond of a common humanity now drew me irresistibly to gloom. A fraternal melancholy!" (652). The subject of the abject and elect is a matter of family, a matter of brothers. Michael Paul Rogin notes that "Chancery courts merged legal proceedings with familial ties" in the nineteenth century (Rogin 196). In a sense "Bartleby" is a type of legal case of the chosen versus the abject. After the lawyer mentions his feelings of melancholy, he says "for both I and Bartleby were sons of Adam" (652). When the lawyer mentions that both he and Bartleby are sons of Adam, we can read this a few different ways. If we take the line in terms of a more globally Judeo-Christian

way, then all individuals can be seen as the sons and daughters of Adam; however, what if Melville wanted us to take this line more literally? As Wyn Kelley points out, “When [the lawyer] reflects sentimentally that ‘both I and Bartleby were sons of Adam,’ he does not ask whether he is not Cain to Bartleby’s Abel” (224). This is an interesting point; however, it does not necessarily add to the overwhelming sense of loss at the end of the story if the narrator is a type of Cain. He certainly does not murder Bartleby; it’s quite the opposite. Nonetheless, Kelley is correct to look at the reference made here by the lawyer in the narrower scope of two brothers who were at odds with God.

Bartleby’s Abjectness

One of the most important aspects of these abject figures that we must remember is that they are not average. They are used by God to achieve great things, including helping to shape the lineage of the elect and their path of Providence. Bartleby fits this role rather well. In terms of his trade skill he is certainly no ordinary man: “At first Bartleby did an extraordinary quantity of writing. As if long famishing for something to copy, he seemed to gorge himself on my documents. There was no pause for digestion. He ran a day and night line, copying by sun-light and by candle-light” (642). He is an exemplary scrivener and is quite useful to the narrator. Had Bartleby continued to work at the pace that he establishes from the beginning, the lawyer certainly would have benefitted greatly in terms of his business. However, little by little, Bartleby begins to pull away from this breakneck pace. He no longer seems interested in serving the cause of the lawyer and his business. This is of course the beginning of the enigmatic decision by Bartleby to simply prefer not to help, but the question always remains, why does this preference come on so suddenly? One such possible reason for this sudden mindset can be read

in relation to how God can implant certain feelings within individuals. Calvin notes that King Jeroboam's revolt against the house of David cannot take place without the will of God.

Therefore, in order for Calvin to justify how something seemingly out of place in the elect's path to righteousness can occur within the construct of Providence, he tells us that:

The people could not revolt from the family of David without shaking off a yoke divinely imposed on them, and yet God himself was not deprived of the power of thus punishing the ingratitude of Solomon. We, therefore, see how God, while not willing treachery, with another view justly wills the revolt; and hence Jeroboam, by unexpectedly receiving the sacred unction, is urged to aspire to the kingdom. For this reason, the sacred history says, that god stirred up an enemy to deprive the son of Solomon of part of the kingdom. (140)

Thus, Bartleby's sudden urge to simply stop producing can also be read in terms of the will of God implanting an obstinate compunction within the scrivener in order to produce a reaction out of the lawyer, as a means of shaping the path of the elect narrator. As a lesser example, we need only refer to how God makes the heart of the Pharaoh obdurate against the words of Moses to let the Israelites leave Egypt. There are instances in "Bartleby" where we see similar instances unfolding.

When Bartleby begins his string of preferences against work, the lawyer at one point admits, "I strangely felt something superstitious knocking at my heart, and forbidding me to carry out my purpose, and denouncing me for a villain if I dared to breathe one bitter word against this forlornest of mankind" (654). In this instance, it would seem as if God may be working through his elect figure to protect Bartleby, but we know that this does not last long. There is clearly a connection between both of these men. Much in the same way that Ishmael seems strangely connected to Ahab's plight, the narrator feels an eerie connection to the scrivener. In attempting to uncover the riddle of why Bartleby exists, the lawyer is in essence discovering the role of his own existence, simultaneously coming to the understanding that the

preservation of Bartleby is not only out of the narrator's hands, but that the lawyer is also playing a part in this story.

When Bartleby begins to prefer not to work, the lawyer attempts to remain calm and make sense of the situation, but eventually he reaches the end of his patience. At one point the narrator says, "I felt strangely goaded on to encounter him in new opposition, to elicit some angry spark from him answerable to my own" (647). Although the lawyer is not completely aware of where this strange feeling is coming from, he is conscious enough to know that it seems alien to his own nature. The lawyer identifies this new feeling as an "evil impulse" which "mastered me" (647). We can certainly read this as nothing more than a simple human reaction to an obviously frustrating sequence of events. However, if this is a spiritual agency then our choices are limited to a fairly dualistic notion of good and evil. Our initial reaction to such a question would usually lead us to believe that if the impulse is evil, as the lawyer initially believes, then it must be of a Satanic origin, but we need to keep in mind that Melville is writing his tale with a Calvinistic vision of the world. And for Calvin, even Satan cannot act outside of the will of God.

Although there is still much debate about the use of the word "Satan" in the book of Job, in terms of whether it is the Devil or simply an "adversary" as the name has been translated, Calvin's interpretation of the book of Job is quite clear.

With regard to the strife and war which Satan is said to wage with God, it must be understood with this qualification, that Satan cannot possibly do anything against the will and consent of God. For we read in the history of Job, that Satan appears in the presence of God to receive his commands, and dares not proceed to execute any enterprise until he is authorized. In the same way, when Ahab was to be deceived, he undertook to be a lying spirit in the mouth of all the prophets; and on being commissioned by the lord, proceeds to do so. (99)

Thus, in Calvin's reading, Satan cannot do anything of his own will; he is as much an agent of God as any other being. This is not to say that Calvin doesn't still read Satan as an adversarial figure, but that "though we say that Satan resists God, and does works at variance with his works, we at the same time maintain that this contrariety and opposition depend on the permission of God" (99). It is interesting then that Melville's lawyer seems to feel an agency moving him toward the need to remove Bartleby from the office. It gets to the point where the lawyer begins to yearn for Bartleby's opposition: "I felt additional incentives tempting me to my fate. I burned to be rebelled against again" (648). Just as we saw earlier, God seems to implant these feelings within his individuals. The lawyer is conscious of his feelings, but he is not completely aware of who or what is pulling the strings that are making him react in such a way. We come to find out through the bust of Cicero that it is God who is pushing the narrator to deal with the problematic scrivener.

Section 2: Poe, the Bust of Cicero, and the Presence of God

It is not long before the lawyer begins to feel drawn into the enigma of Bartleby's existence. Like any individual who wishes to solve a puzzle, the narrator attempts to gather more information about the scrivener by questioning Bartleby as to his history. When the lawyer attempts to do so, we find the scrivener in a state of fear.

He [Bartleby] did not look at me while I spoke, but kept his glance fixed upon my bust of Cicero, which as I then sat, was directly behind me, some six inches above my head. "What is your answer, Bartleby?" said I, after waiting a considerable time for a reply, during which his countenance remained immovable, only there was the faintest conceivable tremor of the white attenuated mouth. (654)

This bust of the ancient Greek lawyer is not just sitting above Bartleby; it is looming over him; it has a mesmerizing effect on the scrivener. Even before Melville used his bust of Cicero to create

an uneasy atmosphere in his story, another great American writer of the nineteenth century had already done so with great success. Yon-Jae Jung, in “The Poe-esque Elements in Melville’s ‘Bartleby the Scrivener’,” picks up where Harry Levin leaves off in terms of connecting Poe’s “The Raven” with Melville’s own gothic short story about Wall Street. Jung says:

Indeed, both title characters, the Raven and Bartleby, appear rather abruptly—Bartleby at a door, the Raven at a window. Both stories also include the incidents involving busts; while Poe’s Raven perches upon a bust of Pallas Athena, Melville’s Bartleby, ostensibly listening to the lawyer’s reasoned pleadings about work, instead keeps “his glance fixed upon my bust of Cicero.” (70)

In Parker’s biography of Melville, he notes that Duyckinck, in 1856, leaked the authorship of “Bartleby,” describing the tale as “a Poeish tale” (2: 188). While I would agree that it is likely that Melville may have had Poe’s “Raven” in mind when he used this scene with the bust of Cicero, I would suggest a different connection here than the one provided by Jung.

In Poe’s “Raven” it is as much about the positioning of the bird than it is about what the bird actually says. The fact that the bust is of Pallas Athena, goddess of wisdom, is quite important. The Raven is situated above wisdom, and thus the bird’s answers come from a place that is beyond human understanding. Essentially, the Raven is providing answers to questions that humans should not know, or are not meant to know; this is, potentially, the wisdom of a god. We can make this connection by looking at the types of questions that are being asked of the Raven. What has Poe’s narrator so frightened is not that his questions are going unanswered, but that they are being answered with authority.

“Prophet!” said I, “thing of evil!—prophet still, if bird or devil!
By that Heaven that bends above us—by that God we both adore—
Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within a distant Aidenn,
It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore.” (85)

The Raven's response is that the speaker will never see his loved one again. The speaker at this point takes these answers to heart, and perhaps that is what Poe wants us to do as well. If the speaker will never see his lost love then this creates a feeling of hopelessness, and yet this is not supposed to be the concern of one who is a believer in God. The greatest reward of Heaven is to be with God, not with loved ones necessarily. Furthermore, at the end of the poem the Raven continues to loom over the speaker with a sense of eternal gloom, much in the same way that the lawyer in "Bartleby" seems forever daunted by the death of Bartleby. When we return to Melville's own use of the bust of Cicero, we see Melville playing a game with his bust as well in terms of its position to those in the room.

Melville is using not only the figure itself—in this case Cicero—but the positioning of the bust to indicate a structure of power and judgment in the office. The bust sits above the lawyer's head, and thus above his position in the office. I would argue that in this case the bust is a stand-in for God, much like it is in Poe's story. It presides over the office, and Bartleby can feel the judgment that it is casting down upon him. Kuebrich has it right when he says that "The story suggests that the employer's dominant status, far from being a right based upon common sense or natural law, is the institutionalization of hubris, or that unbounded pride Christianity defines as a sin against the Lord. Sometimes the lawyer arrogates to himself a god-like right to command and punish" (394). The lawyer's position *is* one of god-like right. While he does comprehend his elect position as authority in the office, the lawyer does not fully comprehend the ramifications of his position against those who are abject. In other words, the lawyer is well aware of the fact that he is economically and socially superior to both Turkey and Nippers, but with the appearance of Bartleby, it is the witnessing of the complete abjectness of the scrivener

that opens up the eyes of the lawyer to just how elect he really is. There is perhaps another connection to be made here with Cicero.

The lawyer's character and trade provide us with some of the possible reasons for why he would use Cicero for his representation of God. Cicero himself was a great lawyer—although he was certainly not a “safe” man as Melville's narrator claims to be. Both William B. Dillingham and Paul Michael Rogin see the lawyer as a figure who lacks authority. Dillingham describes the lawyer as “an emasculated king who rules over his realm only at the pleasure of his subjects” (23). Rogin notes, “The lawyer's lack of authority makes him long for Bartleby's approval” (199). That the lawyer is a weak figure in terms of how he runs his business is undeniable; however, there is a difference between having authority and displaying or putting that authority to use. The fact is that the lawyer *has* authority by his title alone. He does not need to defend that claim. In addition, the lawyer *does* run the office as he sees fit, allowing both Turkey and Nippers to have their respective issues while maintaining their employment. He even uses his position of power to try and find ways to help Bartleby. The fact that Bartleby and the rest of the workers in the office do not always adhere to or recognize this authority is true, but the lawyer has the authority to fire them all, even if he chooses not to. If the lawyer is guilty of anything it is that he does not understand that leadership comes from more than just title: it comes from actions and displays of power. The bust of Cicero serves as another means of showing the lawyer's position in relation to the others in the office.

When we relate the argument of the bust of Cicero more closely to the study of the abject, we see an interesting connection reveal itself. Cicero's first big case that gave him much notoriety was the defense of Sextus Roscius, a man accused of patricide. Roscius's father had been killed in a plot to take his property. Cicero uncovered the conspiracy and successfully

defended his client from being executed. In “Bartleby” we see Melville’s lawyer also in a position in which there seems to be a case involving a father and son. Steven T. Ryan posits that the bust in the lawyer’s office is “best understood as the ancient representation of the father ‘in law’” (118). He continues to say that “Melville’s reaction to Cicero is based on his response to a long tradition of worldly patriarchs—specifically, socially respected fathers who give guidance to their sons” (118). I would agree with Ryan that the bust is a figurehead for a father figure, but I would say that it works best as a stand in for God, the Father. As Melville had done with *Pierre*, he includes God in the form of the Father, but does not include Christ as a mediator for protection. Thus, Cicero’s looming presence over the office, suffocating Bartleby’s ability to speak his mind, can also be read in terms of a presence of God, casting down judgment and maintaining His will.

Section 3: A Problem of Language

Abject Language

Whereas both Ahab and Pierre choose to take action against what they believe is something antagonistic toward the human condition, Bartleby instead chooses to do nothing. The only weapons that Bartleby has at his disposal are his body—literally the fact that he takes up space—and his language. Elizabeth Hardwick is correct when she asserts that “Bartleby, in his mute way, is a master of language” (108). Bartleby can be understood in terms of his favorite word: prefer, as in preference. We can surmise that Bartleby knows his place as the abject by the specificity of his use of the word “prefer.” It is indicative of the understanding he has in respect to his position to the lawyer; it is simultaneously a plea and objection. As Joseph Kuhn delineates, “In differing from ‘I will not’, ‘I *prefer* not’ contains a concession to the interlocutor

and the implicit request that the interlocutor will reciprocally treat the speaker with concession” (37). There is also an implicit recognition of power structure. Bartleby is not in a position to outright refuse anything, for such a refusal would give the lawyer reason to fire him. The lawyer admits that “had there been the least uneasiness, anger, impatience or impertinence in his manner” (643) he would have most likely fired Bartleby. Later on in the story, in response to the scrivener’s preferring not to do a task assigned to him, the narrator retorts, “You *will* not?” To this, Bartleby corrects him: “I *prefer* not” (648). What disturbs the lawyer so much is that Bartleby is acknowledging the hierarchy of power in choosing this very specific way of asserting his opinion. He is not demanding; he is simply informing the lawyer that he would “prefer” not to do something. The only reason why “prefer” works in the same manner as a refusal is because the lawyer allows it to have such a power; he gives the word agency. There is another aspect of the use of this word that we need to pursue as well.

In *Melville’s City*, Wyn Kelley puts forward the argument that Bartleby’s use of the word “prefer” may indicate that he is making an argument for a prior right to the space in which he works: “[Bartleby] makes the place of work his home, and he asserts his prior claim, his preference, to that place. The lawyer’s assumption can have no force over such a claim” (205). Kelley’s argument is situated in the discourse of legal property rights: tenant versus owner. However, such an argument can certainly be made in the discourse of the abject and elect as well. In all three cases of the abject (Cain, Ishmael and Esau), the first born—the one who *should* have the rights to the property and blessings of the father—are ultimately removed from their claim to the inheritance and to the land.

At the same time that they are denied being with God, the abject are always an important part of God’s plan. Bartleby knows that the most he can do is prefer that he be allowed to make

his own decisions; however, this will not keep him from experiencing his allotted fate. He stands at the opposite end of Ahab who is active in his preference. As Hillway notes, by the end of the story, Bartleby's death "is an unobtrusive one, wholly without the crashing wreckage and violence of Ahab's; yet each has asserted himself as a sovereign individual—the one by active and the other by passive defiance of his fate" (116). Hillway is absolutely correct, but we have to wonder if the effect that Bartleby's death has on the lawyer is an effective one.

The Elect Becomes Aware

The final words of the lawyer are "Ah Bartleby! Ah humanity!" (672). Critics have long pondered the implications of the lawyer's words, but the one thing seems abundantly clear is that we are not left with the feeling that the world is a better place now that Bartleby has gone, nor are we left with much hope for the narrator. With "Bartleby" we are left with a lawyer who must live with the knowledge that he is helpless in curtailing Providence. This is something that Melville has in some way always written about, but the lawyer's quiet resignation to what has transpired is unnerving. This is not a complete shock, however, to the lawyer. Deep down he realizes that the death of Bartleby has been coming all along. The lawyer says:

They err who would assert that invariably this is owing to the inherent selfishness of the human heart. It rather proceeds from a certain hopelessness of remedying excessive and organic ill. To a sensitive being, pity is not a seldom pain. And when at last it is perceived that such pity cannot lead to effectual succor, common sense bids the soul be rid of it. What I saw that morning persuaded me that the scrivener was the victim of innate and incurable disorder. I might give alms to his body; but his body did not pain him; it was his soul that suffered, and his soul I could not reach. (653)

This is the kernel of the story in its most concise form. The narrator believes that Bartleby's problem is not a temporal one; it is a spiritual one. It is here that we see that the lawyer understands more than he is willing to confront openly. He knows that it is not up to him to

reach the scrivener's soul. More than this, he realizes that to keep Bartleby in his life further will only create more problems for the narrator in the future. This is essentially what the elect must do with the abject. In all of the cases of the abject—Cain, Ishmael, and even Esau (although Esau is sent away much later in the story)—the abject must be removed from the land in order for the elect to thrive. In a sense, the lawyer is simply coming to terms with an inevitability: Bartleby must go.

The lawyer's sudden realization that there is nothing more that can be done for Bartleby should not be read as a knock on his character. Schechter is right when he asserts that "the fact that the lawyer cannot emulate Christ does not make him into Judas" (362). Hershel Parker offers the following critique: "Jesus is the ideal against whom the narrator is judged, but any superiority the reader feels is undercut by the narrator's willingness to go very far indeed to accommodate himself to Bartleby—farther than most readers would go" (II. 178). The lawyer seemingly could have done an infinite amount of things to try and help Bartleby, and we are not given any indication that Bartleby would have accepted anything that would have led to his earthly salvation. What Melville seems to be proposing through the short story is that there are still limitations to what even Christian charity can do against divine will. Again, this is not to say that Calvin's theology does not call for charity, but that Melville's reading of Calvinism seems more focused on what the author saw as an incongruence between the notion of Providence and the ability of Christ—or Christian brotherhood—to intercede on behalf of others. Davis, in line with Dan McCall's argument in *The Silence of Bartleby*, notes, "I do not find in his [the lawyer's] story hints of duplicity; rather, I see a man who has been led toward a realization of his shortcomings by his encounter with Bartleby" (184). The lawyer's shortcomings are not simply his own. They belong to the human condition, for the reader is also implicated in the

question of what more could have been done to save Bartleby? This is of course the brilliance of the work: that there are simply no answers for the question of what to do with Bartleby. In a sense, it becomes an exercise in the notion of leaving things up to a divine plan.

Right after the scene mentioned above, where the narrator admits that he cannot reach Bartleby's soul, he says, "I did not accomplish the purpose of going to Trinity Church that morning. Somehow, the things I had seen disqualified me for the time from church-going" (653). The irony of such a claim is that it is in moments like the one that the lawyer is facing with Bartleby that one should feel the need to go to church. The reason why he cannot go there is because the lawyer is also going through a type of spiritual crisis. He cannot reconcile Bartleby's position in the world with a Christian doctrine of love. Once again, it is in the book of Matthew, Melville's most quoted gospel, that we may find a better understanding for how to read the role of Christ/Christianity in what is transpiring in the text.

The story of the woman in Bethany who pours expensive oil over the feet of Jesus is useful here. Upon witnessing this act, the disciples become quite upset about it, referring to it as a "waste" (Matthew 26.8). However, Christ says to them, "Why trouble ye the woman? For she hath wrought a good work upon me. / For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always" (Matthew 26.10-11). In the case of Bartleby, he is the poor; there are types of him who are always in the world. The lawyer is left with a greater understanding of Christ's words here than most. There will always be variations of Bartleby in the world, individuals who are suffering, but there is only so much that can be done. When the lawyer recalls the commandment of Christ to "love each; as I have loved you, that ye also love each other (John 13.34), he does just this for Bartleby. However, it is not enough to save the scrivener from his

allotted fate. This is where the resignation to Calvin's emphasis on Providence comes into play. Even in following Christ's decrees, one cannot guarantee salvation for another.

All throughout the story, the lawyer attempts to hold on to his Christian virtue in the face of the secular demands of being a successful businessman, and despite the fact that in the end the lawyer does abandon Bartleby, leaving him to be taken away to the Tombs, we simply cannot deny the many attempts that he goes through in order to save the scrivener; he makes more attempts than what seem appropriate for a man of his economic and social position. As Elizabeth Barnes aptly puts it: "Melville's story reveals a philosophy of Christian love ultimately at odds with a commercial economy of emotion, where the giving of self is circumscribed by sympathy's capacity to address the interests of both parties" (241). Melville depicts a world in "Bartleby" where Christ is present in terms of his injunctions, but is still seemingly overpowered by the will of God.

Conclusion

Perhaps Davis is correct when he says that the lawyer, by the end of the story, "seems, through the act of writing, to be restating the problem of the human condition, and, as the narrator of *Pierre* explains, perhaps the illustrations of this problem are the only possible human solutions" (191). If we follow this logic then what the lawyer has done is to create awareness of this moment, of this figure who seems to have existed seemingly to be destroyed. If he was used simply to bring light to something about the lawyer's character that he was otherwise unaware of then Bartleby's death has served a purpose, as much as we may not want to admit it. Bruce H. Franklin notes that "The narrator, as boss of the office, plays god. What he does not realize, but what his language makes clear, is that he may be playing this role with God himself" (130). The

lawyer is acting, in a sense, with God, and at the end of the tale, he realizes that he has been used just as much as Bartleby has: that in some sense all the world is a stage, as Shakespeare would say, and that there is a show going on at all times, but that one is never fully aware of the part that he or she is playing.

The ending of “Bartleby” in many ways mirrors the ending of Melville’s other well known short story, “Benito Cereno.” Amasa Delano optimistically tells Don Benito that “the past is passed; why moralize upon it? Forget it. See, yon bright sun has forgotten it all, and the blue sea, and the blue sky; these have turned over new leaves.” To which Captain Cereno replies, “Because they have no memory” (754). The exchange between Delano and Don Benito indicates that the horror is not necessarily the actions themselves, but the after thoughts of what has transpired, and the inability to ever really move on in the wake of the traumatic event. In this regard, Bartleby’s death can be read as being both more horrific and more powerful than even Ahab’s.

The lawyer will continue to be haunted by the death of Bartleby, as the speaker is in Wordsworth’s “She Dwelt among the Untrodden Ways,” when he says “She lived unknown, and few could know / When Lucy ceased to be; / But she is in her grave, and, oh, / The difference to me!” (9-12). By the end of the story, the reader is implicated in some ways in the destruction of Bartleby—in the sense that we can offer no advice or help to the lawyer to assuage the death of the forlorn scrivener. The difference, however, is that we can walk away at the end and wash our hands of the situation, as Pilate attempts to do; the lawyer, however, cannot.

Dissertation Conclusion

Hershel Parker notes that on April 6th, 1862, “Melville put in what turned out to be the most important of his 1862 purchases...: Matthew Arnolds’ *Poems*” (2: 502). Parker believes that “Reading Arnold’s ‘Preface’ concluded Melville’s prolonged phase of gathering and testing ideas on aesthetics” (2: 504). In trying to incorporate all the ideas that he had been internalizing through Arnold—Wordsworth and Browning as well—Melville wrote down the following: “Greatness is determined for a man at his birth. There is no *making* oneself great, in any act or art. But there is such a thing as the development of greatness—prolonged, painful, and painstaking” (qtd. in Parker 2: 505). Although the main focus of Parker’s argument is couched in aesthetics, the underlying ethos being displayed here by Melville is nothing less than the problem of the abject.

As I have highlighted throughout this study, we need to be able to read Cain, Ishmael and Esau both together as one entity—the abject—and yet separately as individuals who have their own story and relationship to God. Cain’s act of fratricide ushers murder into the world, but that murder and his eventual exile leads him to become the founder of the first city. Augustine will of course use this to define the differences between the city of man and the city of God; however, we cannot deny that there is a type of greatness to this achievement—albeit not in a moral sense. Cain has, in this sense, developed greatness, through his pain and suffering. In either case where one is born into greatness, or one develops it, none of it can happen without the hand of God. This is perhaps what Melville struggled with most of all in his works.

Each figure—Cain, Ishmael, and Esau—receive their abject status in different ways, and to different ends. Like the dark Romantics, at times Melville may have even seen the rebellious nature of these figures as a type of heroic ideal, but if he did, their heroism finds little merit in

their earthly position. Ahab, for all of his railing, still meets his destruction, brought on by his monomaniacal pursuit of the Whale. Melville, like many early American authors, could not seem to move beyond the comingling of both Providence and free will. The following quote by Calvin conveys just how complex of an issue this really is.

If we design anything contrary to his precept, it is not obedience, but contumacy and transgression. But if he did not will it, we could not do it. I admit this. But do we act wickedly for the purpose of yielding obedience to him? This, assuredly, he does not command. No, rather, we rush on, not thinking of what he wishes, but so inflamed by our own passionate lust, that, with destined purpose, we strive against him. And in this way, while acting wickedly, we serve his righteous ordination, since in his boundless wisdom he well knows how to use bad instruments for good purposes. (127)

The abject figures are “bad instruments” used for “good purposes.” For Melville’s own abject figures, the problem is that they have become crippled by their own consciousness of what Calvin is highlighting in the quote above. Ahab is disturbed in “The Symphony” chapter by the notion that he cannot even control the raising of his own arm. Calvin continues:

And see how absurd this mode of arguing is. They will have it that crimes ought not to be punished in their authors, because they are not committed without the dispensation of God. I concede more—that thieves and murderers, and other evil-doers, are instruments of divine providence, being employed by the Lord himself to execute the judgments which he has resolved to inflict. But I deny that this forms any excuse for their misdeeds. For how? Will they implicate God in the same iniquity with themselves, or will they cloak their depravity by this righteousness? (127)

Calvin is careful not to unravel his intended argument here. He persists in his argument that nothing can be done but through the will of God, which means even “thieves and murderers” are technically “employed by the Lord” to carry out His wishes. Calvin is quick, however, to use almost Platonic-like theological discourse to argue that since God cannot be accused of bringing evil upon the world the blame still must fall on the individuals who are sinning. Melville’s inability to reconcile this notion led to his penning of the great abject characters from his works,

for Ahab, who is arguably the most powerful creation that came from the mind of Herman Melville is not a symbolic manifestation of pure evil. He is undeniably heretical, but we never fully lose the humanity that is within him as well. The abject figures from the Bible serve a similar purpose. They all display emotions that are a part of the human condition. We all feel jealousy, as Cain does; the loneliness of Ishmael; the temptation to succumb to carnal desires, just as Esau. It is for this reason that Melville could not cast them away.

After the Piazza Tales

Melville's use of the abject lineage did not simply end with the publication of "Bartleby." However, I chose to end this study with the story of the forlorn scrivener because it is the tale that perhaps signals a breaking point in the author's works. *The Confidence-Man* is a novel where it appears as if the Devil has run-amok. Shroeder is correct when he asserts that we find in Melville's novel the notion that "...nature is cursed for man's sake; that the natural evil of the universe—an evil which the confidence-man attempts to conceal—represents to man a perpetual emblem of his fall and consequent perilous spiritual state" (372). We get even less of a sense of the salvific nature of God/Christ in the *Confidence-Man*. Instead, we see perhaps the lowest point of the writer's career in terms of his theology. It is as if Melville is writing the book of Job, with each interaction between the confidence-man and the rest of the characters being a type of wager—and the Devil is winning. There is little of the Melvillean sense of heroic greatness, as we saw throughout his works from the Viking, Jarl in *Mardi*, to the seemingly unfinished tale of Bulkington in *Moby-Dick*. Even in "Bartleby" there is a sense that the lawyer does what he can to promote some goodness in the world; after all, he does attempt to save the

scrivener. In the *Confidence-Man*, we are faced with not simply a fallen state, but a state that is irredeemable.

In *Billy Budd* we find remnants of the brilliance that Melville displays in his earlier works, but there is also a much darker and forlorn nature to this unfinished novel that is unparalleled. Namely, there is no longer a struggle to comprehend the Divine, and there is something quite disturbing about this. After Billy has already killed the devious Claggart, we get the sense that there is a need for not simply ethereal salvation, but for temporal justice and mercy for Billy. The chaplain is brought into the story in order to provide godly mediation, but he finds himself to be useless. The narrator tells us, “If in vain the good chaplain sought to impress the young barbarian [Billy] with ideas of death akin to those conveyed in the skull, dial, and crossbones on old tombstones, equally futile to all appearance were his efforts to bring home to him the thought of salvation and a Savior” (1424). The clergyman is unable to speak on behalf of God; he has been stripped of his spiritual vestments and made ineffective by the staunchness of the temporal laws which surround him.

Later, as Billy’s execution looms even closer, the chaplain has a “Brief speech...with the condemned one, but the genuine Gospel was less on his tongue than in his aspect and manner” (1426). Through the failure of language, we are left with nothing but action. The chaplain, “Stooping over, he kissed on the fair cheek his fellow man, a felon in martial law, one who, though on confines of death, he felt he could never convert to dogma” (1426). There is a parallel here between Billy’s forceful blow to Claggart and the chaplain’s kiss upon Billy’s cheek. This is somewhat of an antithesis to what Melville did in *Pierre*, where there is only language, but no physical manifestation of God/Christ. Here, there is only the carnal nature of humanity representing godliness, but there is no language to give it meaning.

Captain Vere, although the figure of authority in this tale, is also rendered useless by the laws. The narrator tells us that Vere was “old enough to have been Billy’s father” (1419). Furthermore, we are told, “The austere devotee of military duty, letting himself melt back into what remains primeval in our formalized humanity, may in end have caught Billy to his heart, even as Abraham may have caught young Isaac on the brink of resolutely offering him up in obedience to the exacting behest” (1419). Isaac is of course saved at the behest of God, but Billy will not share in that fate. He will be sacrificed in the name of duty to the system in place. Billy has become an abject son.

Billy’s final words are “God bless Captain Vere!” (1426). This is essentially Billy’s acceptance of his role as abject, and it is perhaps as close as Melville comes to truly accepting the notion of Providence as understood by Calvin. We should remember the reaction to the announcement that Billy will be executed. We are told, “Their captain’s announcement was listened to by the throng of standing sailors in a dumbness like that of a seated congregation of believers in hell listening to the clergyman’s announcement of his Calvinistic text” (1420). Clearly there is a sense that killing Billy is a sin, but the problem is that not doing so also seems to be one.

Hawthorne’s Last meeting

In the end, we are reminded of Hawthorne’s haunting words, written down in his journal on the subject of his last meeting with Melville. Hawthorne writes, “Melville, as he always does, began to reason of Providence and futurity, and of everything else that lies beyond human ken....He has a very high and noble nature, and is better worth immortality than most of us” (432). Hawthorne’s journal entry on Melville’s preoccupation with “Providence and futurity” is

frequently quoted in scholarship because it encapsulates just how preoccupied Melville seemed when it came to the limited scope of knowledge that humans inherited in the wake of the Fall. However, there is another part of the entry that does not show up as much in Melville criticism. Hawthorne writes, “It is strange how he persists—and has persisted ever since I knew him, and probably long before—in wandering to-and-fro over these deserts, as dismal and monotonous as the sand hills amid which we were sitting” (432-3). What is interesting about these words is not simply that Hawthorne can see the wandering mentality in Melville, traversing the desert in search of something—perhaps home—but that Hawthorne finds it “strange.” In other words, Hawthorne is essentially wondering why Melville bothers to persist when it is clear that there is no such answer to uncover. He uses the term “monotonous” to describe the futility of Melville’s quest. For Hawthorne, the ideas that are being pursued by Melville are exactly what he describes them as in his journal: “beyond human ken.”

Final Thoughts

That Melville truly seems to have grappled with the stories of the abject figures in the book of Genesis is quite apparent. Clearly these characters had a tremendous impact on the shaping of his works, and on his own understanding of how to approach writing Judeo-Christianity in his stories. I do not believe that Melville ever came to a full sense of acceptance of the need for an abject lineage, but I do believe that he understood the complex theological underpinnings that surrounded it. Through a greater understanding of how the abject lineage works in the Bible, we are able to better appreciate the complex—but incredibly engaging—characters that we find in the works of Herman Melville.

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