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A THEORY OF *MOBY DICK*

WILLIAM S. GLEIM¹

Moby Dick, by Herman Melville, has been the subject of many essays, all of which pay the highest tribute to the power of the author; but touching the obscurity of the book, I have never seen other than vague comments on symbolism and transcendentalism. If the reader will approach Melville's point of view with the understanding that the book is composed partly of parable and allegory, if he will read with a separate intention, he will find a treasure of hidden meanings, the existence of which the casual reader would never suspect. As a great artist, Melville understood the relation of mystery and obscurity to the sublime, for he believed that "wonderfullest things are ever the unmentionable" and that "it is in vain to popularize profundities." His method was indirect and ambiguous, for his purpose was to convey ideas, without definite expression; to present the great enigma of life, in an enigmatic manner, and to emphasize the mystery of the ineffable mysteries.

Sufficient material lies on the surface to give the reader a lead, for Melville realized the danger of too much obscurity when he said: "Yet in some dim, random way, explain myself, I must, else all these chapters might be naught." The reader is invited to look deeper than the printed word, moreover, by such remarks as: "all these things have their meanings," "it must symbolize

¹ All quotations for which no credit is given are taken from the text of *Moby Dick*.

something unseen," "an allegorical meaning may lurk here," or, "I must be content with a hint." Melville made this extensive use of symbols, both as a challenge to the discernment of the reader, and as an addition of force to his thought.

The value of symbols as a medium of expression was noted by Carlyle: "In a symbol there is concealment and yet revelation, here, therefore, by silence and by speech acting together, comes a double significance, and if both the speech be itself high, and the silence fit and noble, how expressive will their union be." The mystical writings of Swedenborg also exercised a strong influence on Melville, evidences of which may be found in many instances in *Moby Dick*. To Swedenborg, the Bible seemed to be written in symbols, that is, objects in the "natural world" were used to represent "spiritual things." The "internal sense" of those symbols is the material of his work, entitled *Heavenly Arcana*. In his *Doctrine of Correspondences*, Swedenborg said:

It has been given me to know from much experience, that in the natural world, and in its three kingdoms, there is not the smallest thing which does not represent something in the spiritual world, or which has not something there to which it corresponds.

This passage is paraphrased by Melville, in his apostrophe:

O Nature and O Soul of man, how far beyond all utterance are your linked analogies; not the smallest atom stirs or lives on matter, but has its cunning duplicate in mind.

Another proof of this influence occurs in Melville's passage:

Hither and thither, on high, glided the snow-white wings of small unspckled birds; these were the gentle thoughts of the

feminine air; but to and fro, in the deeps, far down in the bottomless blue, rushed mighty leviathans, sword-fish and sharks, and these were the troubled, murderous thinkings of the masculine sea.

—which embodies the teaching of Swedenborg, that “good thoughts are represented by birds, noble and beautiful,” and that “fishes signify scientifics,” and also that “whales and large fish, signify the generals or universals of scientifics.” There is a definite analogy between the Swedenborgian sense of the word “scientifics” used in this connection, and the inference which may be drawn from Melville’s lines.

Many of the symbols in *Moby Dick* are definitely stated; some are suggested; about many the author is entirely silent.

Now Melville, although saturated with philosophy and metaphysics, was not a philosopher; that is, he produced no theory of his own, and, what is more, he derived no comfort from the conclusions of others. His valuation of all such is shown in the line: “Throw all these thunderheads (Locke, Kant, et al.) overboard, and then you will float light and right.” The only escape from the torture of consciousness, as he felt it, was through either faith or insanity. He was the victim of his own cogitations concerning the unknowable; yet he could not resist the urge of inquiry as he confesses: “I love to sail forbidden seas and land on barbarous coasts.” This is a typical line with a double meaning, for literally it describes his personal experience; but figuratively, it reveals his passion for speculating on the mysteries of the infinite. The interpretation is justified by the following analogy, which connotes a “forbidden sea” and the danger of embarking on it:

For as this appalling ocean surrounds the verdant land, so in the soul of man there lies one insular Tahiti, full of peace and joy, but encompassed by all the horrors of the half-known life. God keep thee. Push not off from that isle, thou canst never return.

Melville's impassioned supplication reveals his intention to make the superficial story the vehicle for a deeper and darker conception:

If then to meanest mariners, and renegades, and castaways, I shall hereafter ascribe high qualities, though dark; weave round them tragic graces; if even the most mournful, perchance the most abased among them all, shall at times lift himself to the exalted mounts; if I shall touch that workman's arm with some ethereal light; if I shall spread a rainbow over his disastrous set of sun; then against all mortal critics, bear me out in it, thou just Spirit of Equality, which has spread one royal mantle over all my kind. Bear me out in it, thou great democratic God! who didst not refuse the swart convict, Bunyan, the pale poetic pearl; Thou who didst clothe with doubly hammered leaves of finest gold, the stumped and paupered arm of old Cervantes.

The assumption of equality to Bunyan and Cervantes clearly shows his purpose to compose an allegorical crusade, for Bunyan was the master of allegory, and Cervantes invented an immortal crusade for the betterment of human conditions. The argument for such an expedition, as gathered from the text, is that mankind is the helpless victim of predestinated suffering, and that for all the misery in the world, some unspeakable power is responsible, which Melville described as "that intangible malignity which has been from the beginning." Melville undoubtedly intended to refer to what we commonly call Fate, and as an attempt to counter and combat man's condition, Melville conceived the parable of the great adventure of the hunting of the White Whale.

This fantasy tells of a practical redeemer who feels in his own heart the total sum of human suffering, and seeks out the living symbol of all that misery and endeavors to destroy it, hoping thereby to annihilate the principle behind it, and thus to relieve the human race of its hereditary curse, for "Ahab was intent upon an audacious, immitigable and supernatural revenge." Many instances show that the Whale is intended as a symbol for Fate, a few of which may be cited:

In the great sperm whale, this high and mighty god-like dignity, inherent in the brow, is so immensely amplified, that gazing on it, in that full front view, you feel the Deity and the dread powers more forcibly than in beholding any other object in living nature.

And when Tashtego sights the first whale:

. . . he stood hovering above you half suspended in air, so wildly and eagerly peering towards the horizon, you would have thought him some prophet or seer beholding the shadows of Fate, and by those wild cries, announcing their coming.

It was also hinted that Moby Dick is "immortal" and "ubiquitous," and also that "he might have seemed the gliding great demon of the seas of life." In noting the awe-inspiring quality of the color white, Melville observed: "Of all these things, the albino whale was the symbol." Moby Dick was the idealized representative of his species. Even another line is to the same purpose: "the whale, which from side to side, strangely vibrating his predestinating head." This identification is confirmed further by the detailed anatomy and habits of the whale, which are perfectly analogous to the attributes of Fate: all combined, they connote a blind, senseless, brainless, capricious, malignant, and irresistible power. And final-

ly, to fasten the responsibility for human suffering upon the whale, we have the line: "here was this old man, chasing with curses, a Job's whale around the world."

Captain Ahab explained his working theory to his mates as follows:

All visible objects are but pasteboard masks, but in each event—in the living act, the undoubted deed,—there, some unknown, but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask. If man will strike, strike through the mask! That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate; and be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal, I will wreak that hate upon him.

This idea is similar to that of Goethe:

The intellectual, not satisfied with what is put before him, considers as a mask, everything that presents itself to his senses. He knows that a higher spiritual life, roguishly obstinate, hides itself behind the visible cloak.

It is apparent from many analogies in the text that Captain Ahab, in his hidden character, championed the cause of mankind. He is associated with Anacharsis Clootz in these words: "An Anacharsis Clootz deputation accompanying old Ahab in the 'Pequod,' to lay the world's grievances before that bar from which not very many of them ever come back." (The bar of *Unreason* is implied here.) This Anacharsis Clootz, with the hope of redressing the wrongs of humanity, headed a delegation, from all nations, to the Bar of the Assembly, in Paris, styling himself "The Orator of the Human Race."

Perseus, according to Melville, rescued Andromeda from a *whale*, and the analogy between Ahab and that classic champion, lies in the line: "his whole high, broad form seemed made of solid bronze and shaped like Cellini's cast Perseus." And during the storm Captain Ahab

had in mind Prometheus, stealing fire from heaven. Prometheus, too, was a defender of the human race: he taught mankind the arts of life—as when Ahab magnetized the sail-maker's needle! Prometheus defied the gods—so did Captain Ahab, crying out: "Ye great gods . . . I laugh and hoot at ye." The identification is quite clear in another passage: "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 his heart forever. . . ." In short, Captain Ahab's character, in its relation to the supernatural expedition, is a composite of all the historical and mythical rebels against Destiny.

For reasons which will appear in the sequel, Captain Ahab was identified also with Ahab, King of Israel, the first hint of which occurs in the line: "Ahab of old, thou knowest, was a crowned king," and then in a perfectly direct manner on board the ship, when "little Flask enters King Ahab's presence."

Even the opening lines of the story are partially allegorical, introducing, as they do, one of the most important symbols—*water*, representing *truth*. This symbol is hidden in the lines:

—let the most absent minded of men be plunged in his deepest reverie,—stand that man on his legs, set his feet a-going, and he will infallibly lead you to water, if water there be in all that region. Should you ever be athirst in the great American desert, try this experiment, if your caravan happen to be supplied with a metaphysical professor. Yes, as everyone knows, meditation and water are wedded forever.

According to Swedenborg, also, water is the symbol of a certain kind of truth. The ocean is "the image of the ungraspable phantom of life," therefore, the ocean

is the symbol of life. There follows the clause, "and this is the key to it all," which clearly shows the hidden subject.

This same symbol is used silently, when Ishmael sees "thousands upon thousands of mortal men fixed in ocean reveries," which indicates the extent to which the mysteries of life occupy the thoughts of mankind. But it is definitely stated when Ishmael, watching Queequeg at work upon a whale remarks, "That sea you gasp in is life."

For Melville the ocean was a living symbol, which further confirms its analogy to life, for when off the Cape of Good Hope, he added to his musings: "And heaved and heaved the black sea, as if its vast tides were a conscience, and the great mundane Soul were in anguish and remorse for the long sin and suffering it had bred." And again: "Not a modern sun ever sets, but in precisely the same manner, the live sea swallows up ships and crews."

It is interesting to compare with these the impressions of another mystic, Lafcadio Hearn: "I must confess, that when I am either in the sea or upon it, I cannot fully persuade myself that it is not alive—a conscious and a hostile power. Reason, for the time being, avails nothing against this fancy."

The allegorical expedition begins with the ship, which is itself the symbol of the *world*. This interpretation was provided by Ishmael, in his chapel meditation, when he concluded, "The world's a ship, on its passage out." Both the eastern and the western hemispheres were included in the symbolical ship, for her hull was built in America, and her masts were cut in Japan. Moreover, she

was very old. "Her ancient decks were worn and wrinkled . . . her venerable bows looked bearded, . . . she was a thing of trophies—a cannibal of a craft, . . . a noble craft; but somehow a most melancholy." Her name, *Pequod*, was that of a tribe of Indians, "now extinct as the ancient Medes"—which symbolized *time*. *Space* was the blank waste of water, into which Ishmael gazed at the suggestion of Captain Peleg, and into which the ship was destined to sail. *Fate* was symbolized by parts of the whale, with which the ship was abundantly furnished, for "her bulwarks were garnished like one continuous jaw, with the long, sharp teeth of the sperm whale, . . . and the tiller was in one mass, curiously carved from the lower jaw of her hereditary foe." All of which signifies that *the world is encompassed by Fate*; and that *the world is controlled by Fate*, and also that *Fate is inimical to the world*.

This symbolical ship was manned by personifications of the spiritual qualities of mankind. Captain Ahab, in his capacity of commander, personified the *will*, or *Ego*, or *soul*, or whatever it is that gives us our sense of identity and consciousness. The crazy Elijah, "the prophet of the wharves," as Ishmael called him, who gave mysterious hints concerning the doubtful character of the proposed voyage, referring to Captain Ahab, said, "He's got enough (soul) to make up for all deficiencies in other chaps," and Ahab also said of himself, "Ahab's soul's a centipede that moves upon a hundred legs." Captain Ahab's personification of the *Ego* is shown by his reading of the doubloon. He saw nothing in all the symbols but himself. He said, "All are Ahab," and "There's something ever egotistical in mountain tops."

The *will* is suggested by the description of Ahab's determination: "The path to my fixed purpose is laid with iron rails, whereon my soul is grooved to run. Over unsounded gorges, through the rifled hearts of mountains, under torrent's beds, unerringly I rush. Naught's an obstacle, naught's an angle to the iron way." But an interesting restriction was attached to this personification, for Captain Ahab had an artificial leg, which was made of whale ivory, signifying that *the will is limited by Fate*. This interpretation is justified by the description of Ishmael's intention to go on a whaling voyage and his speculations on Fate's program, which he believed had him billed for that act:

I think I can see a little into the springs and motives which being cunningly presented to me, under various disguises, induced me to set about performing the part I did, besides cajoling me into the delusion that it was a choice resulting from my own unbiased free will and discriminating judgement.

The characters of the three mates, Starbuck, Stubb, and Flask, are so thoroughly analysed in the chapter "Knights and Squires," that it is obvious they personify three of the Greek schools of philosophy, among which mankind is divided in a general way: *Platonism, Epicureanism, and Stoicism*. The readings of the symbols on the gold doubloon verify this identification. These Starbuck interpreted to mean: faith, hope, and righteousness, a slant toward Platonism. But Stubb thought that they represented the comedy of life, and the potential means of pleasure, and thus acts as conventional spokesman for the chief consideration of the Epicurean. Flask could see nothing but the practical purpose for which the coin was nailed to the mast and the money value of the

gold, standing in the author's mind as the exemplar characteristic of Stoicism. This classification was summed up by Ahab, when he said, "The round gold is but the image of the rounder globe, which, like a magician's glass, to each and every man in turn but mirrors back his own mysterious self." In the light of this interpretation, then, a meaning is given to the following obscure speech: "Starbuck—Stubb, ye two are the opposite poles of one thing, Starbuck is Stubb reversed, and Stubb is Starbuck." (reversed)—or in other words: the highest quality of mankind is spirituality and the lowest quality is sensuality.

Next in importance come the harpooners, of whom Queequeg personified *Religion*, as may be inferred from his many devotions; Tashtego personified *Sin*, for he resembled "a son of the Prince of the Powers of the Air," and Daggoo personified *Ignorance*, for he was "the dark side of humanity." Now it may be noted that religion, sin, and ignorance are fundamental qualities, and that they all were personified by *aborigines*, and furthermore, that Queequeg, who personified Religion, served Starbuck, who personified Platonism; and Tashtego, who personified Sin, served Stubb, who personified Epicureanism; and also that Daggoo, who personified Ignorance, served Flask, who personified Stoicism—all of them strictly in character.

Of the three persons who were introduced before the ship sailed, Captain Bildad, named for Job's equivocal friend, personified *Hypocrisy*, as was shown by his attempt to cheat Ishmael with an unfair "lay," and to read his Bible at the same time. But Captain Peleg, the literal meaning of whose name is "division," and who per-

sonified *Honesty*, insisted that Ishmael should receive a fair share of the profits. "Blast ye, Captain Bildad," he said, "If I had followed thy advice in these matters, I would afore now had a conscience to lug about that would be heavy enough to founder the largest ship that ever sailed around Cape Horn." The third personification is hidden by its "blinding palpableness," for, "she was a lean old lady, of a most determined and indefatigable spirit; but withal, very kind hearted, . . . never did any woman better deserve her name, which was *Charity*."

The crew of this symbolical ship represented the entire human race; for they were gathered from "all the isles of the sea," and "all the ends of the earth."

As a sailor, Melville said, "Call me Ishmael," a name which may have been suggested by self-pity; but it is more likely that it was used because, according to Swedenborg, it signifies the "Spiritual and Rational man."

Bulkington personified *Reason*. He was introduced at the "Spouter Inn," by an ambiguous paragraph, describing the nature of reason, with the significant statement that Bulkington should become his shipmate, "though but a sleeping-partner one, so far as this narrative is concerned,"—meaning that reason would have no place in the fantastical allegory.

In the chapter entitled, "The Lee Shore," Bulkington's character is more definitely set forth. In this chapter, Ishmael exclaimed, "Who should I see standing at her helm but Bulkington!"—That is, *the world is guided by reason*. And again, "The land seemed scorching to his feet"—water being the symbol of truth, land would suggest the opposite, an interpretation confirmed

by the words, "in landlessness, resides the highest truth." The analogy to a storm-tossed ship is used to portray the struggle which reason must make to keep clear of dogmatism, which is represented by "the lee shore," "Better is it to perish in that howling infinite, than be ingloriously dashed upon the lee, even if that were safety!" This chapter contains the direct question to the reader, "Know ye, now, Bulkington?", which implies an allegory hidden in the text.

To resume our identification of characters with abstractions: the Manx sailor personified *Prescience*, for, "the old sea traditions invested this old Manxman with preternatural powers of discernment." The ship carpenter personified the practical virtue, *Art*; for "he was singularly efficient in those thousand nameless mechanical emergencies, continually recurring in a large ship." Perth, the blacksmith, personified *Remorse*, for he had been ruined, physically and socially, through intemperance. The black cook personified *Profanity*, as revealed by his mock sermon to the sharks. Dough-Boy, the steward, personified *Cowardice*, as shown by his cringing behavior on all occasions. Fedallah, who foretold the fates of Ahab and himself, personified *The Future*, although his prophecy was false and misleading. He was hidden from the inhabitants of the symbolical world, and the mysterious sounds which emanated from his hiding place, from time to time, symbolized *Omens and Portents*. Elijah, who spoke to Ishmael, near the wharf, was the true prophet, saying, among other remarks incoherent, "Oh I was going to warn ye against—but never mind. Good-bye to ye. Shan't see ye again very soon, I guess; unless its before the Grand Jury," by which he

means the Day of Judgment, having foreseen the catastrophe. The reason for Melville's including both true and false prophets, is marked in the likeness of Captain Ahab to Ahab, King of Israel.

Melville attached the highest importance to the spiritual power, which he represented in the person of "the most mournful, perchance the most abased among them all," the little black boy, Pip, symbolizing *Intuition*. The subjects Melville dwelt upon are beyond the reach of reason; therefore, he thought reason was a limiting faculty. He evidently concluded that knowledge of the Infinite could be acquired only through intuition, that is, by direct cognition, if the cumbersome cogs of reason were once destroyed by insanity. Consequently when Pip lost his mind, Melville "spread a rainbow over his disastrous set of sun," as follows:

The sea had jeeringly kept his finite body up, but drowned the infinite of his soul. Not drowned entirely, though. Rather carried down alive to wondrous depths, where . . . Wisdom revealed his hoarded heaps . . . and ever-juvenile eternities. 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; and wandering from all mortal reason, man comes at last to that celestial thought, which, to reason, is absurd and frantic.

Insanity is further glorified when Pip "lifted himself to the exalted mounts," saying to the supposedly-dying Queequeg:

Poor rover! will ye never have done with all this weary roving? where go ye now? But if the currents carry ye to those sweet Antilles, where the beaches are only beat with water-lilies, will ye do one little errand for me? Seek out one Pip, who's now been missing long: I think he's in those far Antilles. If ye find him, then comfort him.

Starbuck, overhearing him, murmurs, "So, to my fond faith, poor Pip, in this strange sweetness of his lunacy, brings heavenly vouchers of all our heavenly homes. Where learned he that but there?" These words throw light on the obscure last line in the Lee Shore chapter, referring to Bulkington, who personified reason, "Up from the spray of thy ocean-perishing—straight up, leaps thy apotheosis"—which goes to say that reason, though drowned in the sea, was glorified by changing to celestial understanding.

Every spoken word is the symbol of the emotion which gave it utterance; so the words used by the sailors, in the allegorical play, which was staged on the fore-castle, symbolize the virtues, vices, passions, and other qualities of mind and heart. Emotions common to all mankind are spoken in chorus, and the meanings of the somewhat obscure dialogue, are here given in the order in which the characters speak:

All	<i>Love</i>
1st. Nantucket sailor	<i>Common sense</i>
Mate's voice	<i>Authority</i>
2nd. Nantucket sailor	<i>Obedience</i>
Dutch sailor	<i>Thoroughness</i>
French sailor	<i>Initiative</i>
Pip	<i>Indifference</i>
French sailor	<i>Joy</i>
Iceland sailor	<i>Sorrow</i>
Maltese sailor	<i>Imagination</i>
Sicilian sailor	<i>Frivolity</i>
Long Island sailor	<i>Thrift</i>
Azore sailor	{ <i>Enthusiasm</i>
Azore sailor	
Pip	<i>Destructiveness</i>
China sailor	<i>Fantasy</i>

French sailor	<i>Ecstasy</i>
Tashtego	<i>Apathy</i>
Old Manx sailor	<i>Grief</i>
3rd. Nantucket sailor	<i>Excess</i>
Lascar sailor	<i>Foresight</i>
Maltese sailor	<i>Passion</i>
Sicilian sailor	<i>Continnence</i>
Tahitian sailor	<i>Patriotism</i>
Portuguese sailor	<i>Observation</i>
Danish sailor	<i>Confidence</i>
4th. Nantucket sailor	<i>Boldness</i>
English sailor	<i>Loyalty</i>
All	<i>Self-esteem</i>
Old Manx sailor	<i>Foreboding</i>
Daggoo	<i>Superstition</i>
Spanish sailor	<i>Spitefulness</i>
Daggoo	<i>Forbearance</i>
St. Jago's sailor	<i>Speculation</i>
5th. Nantucket sailor	<i>Inquisitiveness</i>
Spanish sailor	<i>Malice</i>
All	<i>Excitement</i>
Tashtego	<i>Blasphemy</i>
Belfast sailor	<i>Strife</i>
English sailor	<i>Justice</i>
Old Manx sailor	<i>Judgment</i>
Mate's voice	<i>Prudence</i>
All	<i>Self-preservation</i>
Pip	<i>Fear</i>

All throughout the voyage, the works of Fate are made manifest by what befalls the persons on other ships the *Pequod* meets. As types these persons symbolize the world. The *Town-Ho's* story tells of the swift retribution which overtook a cruel mate, signifying *the vengeance of Fate*. Those on board the *Virgin*, without a drop of oil, felt *the parsimony of Fate*. The captain of the *Rosebud*, a French perfumer, was per-

suaded to give away a bad-smelling whale, which, unknown to him, contained ambergris, thus was a victim of *the irony of Fate*. To those on board the *Samuel Enderby*, Fate brought *Contentment*. Fate gave *riches* to the crew of the *Bachelor*, with every container overflowing with oil. To the father on board the *Rachel*, Fate brought *sorrow*, by robbing him of his two young sons. The ship *Delight*, with her boats stove, and five men lost, suffered *the malignity of Fate*. And all this good and evil was wrought by the *Whale*.

As the day of doom drew near, omens and portents increased. Heavenly guidance was rejected, symbolically, by the destruction of the quadrant, and the self-sufficient egotist relied upon his earthly powers, the futility of which is revealed in the breaking of the rotten log-line. And the last scene should be noted for its intimate resemblance to Swedenborg's description of the manner in which Celestial Intelligence is revealed to the inhabitants of the spiritual world. Spoken language is not used; instead, images of things in the natural world are shown as symbols, and the corresponding spiritual meanings are comprehended infallibly.

Likewise, during the encounter with the White Whale, on the second day, Fedallah, who personified the Future, disappeared; but on the third day, when the whale was again attacked, the body of Fedallah was discovered entangled among the numerous lines which were wrapped around the whale. Thus is *the future bound up with Fate*.

There is a striking parallel in the tragic ends of both Captain Ahab, of the *Pequod*, and Ahab, king of Israel. Both men were marked by Fate—the king, by a heav-

only council, and the captain by "a slender rod-like mark, lividly whitish." The Biblical doom of Ahab, king of Israel (1 Kings XXII:20-22), was arranged when the Lord said:

Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead? . . . And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the Lord, and said, I will persuade him. And the Lord said unto him, wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also: go forth and do so.

Notwithstanding that the king had been advised of his impending death, he persisted in persecuting the true prophets and believing the false ones.

So Captain Ahab cursed Gabriel of the ship *Jeroboam* (who was credited by his shipmates with prophetic powers) when Gabriel, referring to a man who had recently been killed by the White Whale, said, "Thou art soon going that way." And Captain Ahab, too, acted on the favorable version of the future, as told him by Fedallah. So both Ahabs tried to circumvent Fate, and both were destroyed.

Josephus it was who wrote, commenting on the death of Ahab, King of Israel, "We may also, from what happened to this king, consider the power of Fate; that there is no way of avoiding it, even when we know it."