

MELVILLE'S *MOBY-DICK*

1851-1951

FIFTY-TWO years ago—in 1899—Professor Archibald MacMechan of Dalhousie College courageously undertook “to reverse a judgement” in literary history and criticism. Melville’s *Moby-Dick* was one of the books which had meant most to him for some twenty years; yet in those years he had “seen only one copy exposed for sale, and met only one person (and that not an American) who had read it.” He had found that the only place where real appreciation was to be found was in the writings of the English sea novelist, Clark Russell. Professor MacMechan felt deeply that Melville’s “achievement is so considerable that it is hard to account for the neglect into which he has fallen.” To begin the work of literary rehabilitation, he published his article “The Best Sea Story Ever Written” in the *Queen’s Quarterly* for October, 1899, taking his title from judgement on *Moby-Dick* by Russell.

Fifty-two years have passed, and now in this October, 1951, on the 100th birthday of *Moby-Dick*, Professor MacMechan would be gratified—if perhaps also astonished—at the “complete success” of the rehabilitation of Melville’s and of *Moby-Dick’s* fame for which he worked but hardly dared hope. Today Melville is widely regarded among American, British, and French critics, professors, and lay readers as one of the “greats” of nineteenth century literature, American or otherwise. Now Melville is the subject of more scholarly studies than any other one American writer; an incomplete bibliography of Melville studies would list at least 570 books and articles, 112 on *Moby-Dick* alone. Melville seminars are given in the graduate schools of English at Chicago, Columbia, Harvard, Princeton, Yale and other leading American universities, and in Canada, at Toronto. All of his books and even his fugitive pieces are (or soon will be) back in print, in numerous American and British editions; a *Complete Works* in fourteen volumes, prepared by a group of scholars, has begun to appear. A Melville Society of over 100 scholars is active. *Moby-Dick* may be bought in magnificently illustrated limited editions or in a Pocket Book edition (or in “Classics Comics”) in the nearest drug-store. It has been dramatized for radio frequently on national hook-ups; it has been recorded by Charles Laughton; it (or some slight resemblance to it) has appeared on the screen twice, and new produc-

tions are talked about; it is being prepared by a well-known composer as a libretto for possible Metropolitan Opera production; it has inspired poems by poets as various as W. H. Auden, Hart Crane, John Masefield and E. J. Pratt. In our time *Moby-Dick* has been the greatest phoenix rising out of nineteenth century imaginative literature in English.

The most significant aspect of this rise in Melville's reputation is not the mere change from near oblivion to fame, it is the change in the judgement of the profundity of thought and the fineness of artistry in Melville's work. How this judgement has changed can be observed in a review of readings of *Moby-Dick* from the year of its first publication to the present.

The earliest readings of *Moby-Dick* that are available now are those made by reviewers when it was first published. Plainly most reviewers began their readings of the book with expectations, for Melville had established himself overnight in the public eye five years before with his first charming, provocative South Sea narrative, *Typee*. His sequel, *Omoo* (1847), consolidated his fame as a lively narrator and commentator. His change of pace in *Mardi* (1849), where he let loose his satirical and metaphysical imagination, had puzzled reviewers somewhat; his *Redburn* (1849) and *White-Jacket* (1850) were more straightforward narratives of personal adventure, and affirmed his reputation. Consequently when most reviewers opened *Moby-Dick*, they could expect something unconventional, personal, and vigorous; they already granted Melville some degree of genius—for direct and forceful narration; perhaps too they hoped that he would not stray again, as he had done in *Mardi*, from the pleasant paths he had blazed in *Typee* and *Omoo*. But when they read *Moby-Dick* they found that he had strayed. *Moby-Dick* wasn't another *Typee*, or even another *Mardi*, and it wasn't like any other contemporary book of adventure or romance. As a result one or two attacked the book savagely; most mixed their praise with censure; a few praised it highly; only a few had glimpses of what we see today.

Its uniqueness in theme, structure and style led some reviewers, reading it in the light of contemporary adventure or romance, to adverse criticism. It was "an ill-compounded mixture of romance and matter of fact." "As eccentric and monstrously extravagant in many of its incidents as even *Mardi*." Its narrative was ill-managed, disconnected, spasmodic: "All the rules which have been hitherto understood to regulate the composition of works of fiction are despised and set to

naught." "The catastrophe is hastily, weakly and obscurely managed." The prose style was denounced by many for "bombast, caricature, rhetorical artifice, and its low attempts at humor."—"American" some British reviewers said. As to meaning and intention, Melville was obscure, perhaps deliberately so; "Horrors and heroics . . . belonging to the worst school of Bedlam literature . . ."

But even the reviewers who wrote in this way (with one or two exceptions) saw much in the book which they felt was highly effective. There was a wild, humorous poetry, vivid description of the processes of whaling; realistic sketches of sailor life; lively humor. Much of contemporary fiction was of variety-show appeal, and the variety and melodrama here worked on many reviewers, who were content to enjoy what they could and let the rest go.

Although a number of reviewers felt that *Moby-Dick* was a falling off from *Typee* and *Omoo*, a few found it more "bewitching"; the effects of the imagination, the language, the humour, the descriptions, were wilder and more intense. A very few hinted that it was better because it was more profound in thought and finer in artistry. A twenty-five page review in the *Revue des deux Mondes* noted with approval the transcendental quality of thought, and placed Melville along with Emerson, Hawthorne, and Poe as the great American writers. The top reviews which showed the deepest insight were in journals in close touch with Melville. The reviewer for *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, the house organ of *Moby-Dick's* American publishers, wrote in the December, 1851 issue that:

The author has constructed a romance, a tragedy, and a natural history, not without numerous gratuitous suggestions on psychology, ethics, and theology . . . Beneath the whole story, the subtle, imaginative reader may perhaps find a pregnant allegory, intended to illustrate the mystery of human life. Certain it is, that the rapid, pointed hints which are often thrown out, with the keenness and velocity of a harpoon, penetrate deep into the heart of things, showing that the genius of the author for moral analysis is scarcely surpassed by his wizard power of description.

The other reviewer, in the *Literary World* (22 November, 1851), whose editor, Evert Duyckinck was a personal friend of Melville's, thought it "a most remarkable sea dish—an intellectual chowder of romance philosophy, natural history, fine writing, good feeling, bay saying . . ." He objected to the book's

proportions and opacity, and was disturbed by the hetrodoxy implied. But he also saw Captain Ahab as:

a dark disturbed soul arraying itself with every ingenuity of material resource for a conflict at once natural and supernatural in his eye, with the most dangerous extant physical monster of the earth embodying, in strongly drawn lines of mental association, the vaster moral evil of the world. The pursuit of the White Whale thus interweaves with the literal perils of the fishery—a problem of fate and destiny—to the tragic solution of which Ahab hurried on, amidst the wild stage scenery of the ocean.

Nathaniel Hawthore, who was Melville's neighbour and friend while he was writing *Moby-Dick*, and to whom *Moby-Dick* was dedicated, wrote to Duyekinek about this review:

What a book Melville has written! It gives me an idea of much greater power than his preceding ones. It hardly seems to me that the review of it, in the *Literary World*, did justice to its best points.

Unfortunately no account of how Hawthorne read the book has survived.¹

The reviews of 1851 must be taken for what they are worth, for reviewing then was even more partisan for non-literary reasons than it is now. Melville's publishers—Bentley in London, and Harper and Brothers in New York—obviously were puffing the book in their house organs; certain other reviews as obviously were attacking the book for non-literary reasons. Moreover, the opinion of reviewers often does not reflect the opinion of most readers. Consequently surer evidence of how it was received may be gained by surveying the contemporary sales figures.

The famous London firm of Bentley published *Moby-Dick* as *The Whale* on 18 October, 1851, in a small edition of 500 copies, in three decker format, at the standard 31 shillings, 6 pence. But *The Whale* failed to sell. In the first six months, 287 copies were sold or distributed, and Bentleys estimated the "probable eventual loss" would be £350. Bentleys later bound up their remainders in single fat volumes and disposed of them. No other English editions appeared in the nineteenth century. Consequently even counting a few hundred copies which may have found their way into English circulating

1. The only reviewing of Melville's work of this period which I have found so far in Canadian periodicals is a discussion of *Pierre* in the editor's columns of the *Anglo-American Magazine*, I (1853); wonder is expressed at how the genius which produced the unusual *Mardi* could go so far astray in producing the bewildering *Pierre*; *Moby-Dick* is not mentioned.

libraries, the readers of *Moby-Dick* in Britain before 1900 could not have been more than a few thousand at the best, in a day when a popular novel sold 40,000 copies in eight weeks.

The American sale was slower but more continuous than the British. Harper and Brothers printed their first edition of 500 copies in single volume on 19 November, 1851, selling at \$1.50. Two years later, when their plant and warehouse was gutted by a disastrous fire, 297 copies of *Moby-Dick* were destroyed; sixty were saved. Thus in the first two years in America, 141 copies were sold or distributed. Apparently the sixty copies which were saved satisfied the trade for the next ten years, for Harpers did not reprint *Moby-Dick* until 1863. The next American edition came nearly thirty years later, in 1892, when Arthur Stedman, a young admirer of Melville's, edited new editions of *Typee*, *Omoo*, *Mardi* and *Moby-Dick*. Two more American editions followed in 1893 and 1899.

So British and American publishers published only the two original editions and four reprints in the nineteenth century. Consequently relatively few readers could have read *Moby-Dick* in the nineteenth century. It was read more widely between 1900 and 1922, for twelve more editions were published during that time. How many have read it since is suggested by the fact that British and American publishers alone have published over 100 editions since 1922.

That reviewers—and probably the reading public—found the book a perplexing mixture is not surprising. *Moby-Dick* was one of the first of a new kind of fiction. Hitherto fiction was a sub-literary form, written to entertain or to propagandize the audience; most of it still is. But a new kind of fiction was born with Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), and Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1851). These three books were new in motivation and in intention. They were written primarily to express private visions; they were, in varying degrees, compelled expressions; they had to be written. And their authors sought for and found original forms which organically expressed their private visions. Like *Moby-Dick*, *Wuthering Heights* and *The Scarlet Letter* were judged by contemporary reviewers in the light of contemporary fiction, and their compelled nature and organic form unperceived. Mid-nineteenth century fiction, in general, was formed to produce in the reader a series of strong emotional responses, not necessarily related in an overall pattern of meaning; "Hopalong Cassidy" serials and soap operas today are its lineal descendants

and work on the audience in much the same way. The action was literal; the meaning was one-levelled and plain. But *Moby-Dick* was written in "the iron grip"; it was formed to express an overall pattern of meaning; its action is symbolic and multi-levelled. Nineteenth century fiction did not demand symbolic reading from its reader; it is true that readers were familiar with allegory in fiction, but allegory of the one-for-one correspondence as in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. And one has to read a book symbolically and speculatively conceived in a very different way to the way one reads dogmatic allegory.

While writing *Moby-Dick*, Melville was quite aware of the dangers of ascribing to meanest mariners high qualities and dark, tragic graces. He also was aware of the dangers of trying to body forth symbolically the "penultimate". He knew *Moby-Dick* was strange in form; shocking in intensity; out-of-bounds and uncongenial in its speculation. He was prepared to have it "fail". But it had to be written this way.¹

II

When, still writing in "the iron grip", Melville followed *Moby-Dick* by *Pierre: Or the Ambiguities* in 1852, the reviewers described *Pierre* as morbid, if not mad. Their tendency now was to believe that Melville had started off on the wrong path in *Mardi*, had gone farther in *Moby-Dick*, and over the edge in *Pierre*. This tendency was reinforced by *The Confidence Man* (1857). After *Moby-Dick* the reviews of Melville's new books grew fewer; the excellence of many of the short stories and sketches and of *Israel Potter* which he produced between 1853 and 1857 did not do much to alter this tendency. This perspective on *Moby-Dick* also was expressed in three lengthy articles, surveying Melville's whole career, which appeared in *The New Monthly Magazine* (1853) and *Putman's Monthly Magazine* (1853 and 1857). These admired his early "genius", but deplored the growing "extravagance" and "wildness", "the trick of metaphysics and morbid meditation." All three advised him to return to the matter and style of *Typee* and *Omoo*.

But in the midst of this failure of perception, there is one statement by an anonymous writer which revealed an insight unmatched until the twentieth century. It appeared as a

1. It is not within the scope of this article to interpret how Melville himself read his book. How he did has been told in F. O. Matthiessen's *American Renaissance*, indirectly in Charles Olsen's *Call Me Ishmael* (1947), and in more detail in Howard Vincent's *The Trying-Out of Moby-Dick* (1949), pp. 13-52.

paragraph in the Melville article in the Duyckinck's *Cyclopaedia of American Literature* (1855):

In 1851 *Moby-Dick* or the Whale appeared, the most dramatic and imaginative of Melville's books. In the character of Captain Ahab and his contest with the whale, he has opposed the metaphysical energy of despair to the physical sublime of the Ocean. In this encounter the whale becomes the representative of moral evil in the world. In the purely descriptive passages, the details of the fishery, and the natural history of the animal, are narrated with constant brilliancy of illustration from the fertile mind of the author.

This unusually perceptive statement of theme is possibly an abstraction of the theme of the book from Melville himself. At least it is probable that the article was written by someone in close communication with him, and he probably knew of its contents before publication for the Duyckinck brothers were among his closest literary friends.

After 1860 Melville's work ceased to be written about for some twenty-five years. He himself deliberately withdrew from public view, working after 1866 as inspector of customs in New York, and devoting his spare time to reading, and to writing what he wanted to write. His earlier books—especially *Typee* and *Omoo*—continued to trickle out into the reading public, but his new books were of poetry, privately printed in small editions. Although he became almost forgotten by the general public, his reputation was high among certain American and British literary men. In 1886 the English sea novelist, Clark Russell, opened a correspondence with him, assuring him that his reputation was "very great" among discriminating readers. Such seeds of appreciation grew slowly in the early years of the 1890's, assisted by the republication of *Typee*, *Omoo*, *White-Jacket* and *Moby-Dick*, edited by Arthur Stedman. While Stedman was preparing his new editions, Melville died, at the age of seventy-two, on 29 September, 1891. His death brought notices which deplored his undeserved obscurity. In what was written on him in these years one can see a shifting in the evaluation of his work. He still was valued for his South Sea romances, but now recognition was given to *Moby-Dick* as his finest book. It was "praised as the greatest sea story ever written", for its verisimilitude in depicting sailor life, for its poetic description of the moods of the sea, and for the figurative quality and the intensity of its language. Parts still obscured the whole.

This awakening of interest in Melville as the writer of South Sea romances AND of *Moby-Dick* coincided with an awakening of interest in American literature as a field of reputable study. From here on, and especially after 1919, professors were to do much in sustaining and nourishing Melville's reputation. The pioneer historical surveys of American literature by Professor Nichols of Edinburgh (1882), and Professor Richardson (1887), lumped Melville among the "Lesser Novelists" as a South Sea romancer. The first professor to write of *Moby-Dick* with zeal and at length was Archibald MacMechan of Dalhousie. He was impressed by the strong effects in *Moby-Dick*, not by the profundity of its meaning. To him it had three elements:

the Scottish thoughtfulness (which he did not enlarge upon;) the love of literature; and the love of adventure It is large in idea, expansive; it has Elizabethan force, freshness, and swing, and is, perhaps, more rich in figures than any style but Emerson's.

He afforded only brief glimpses of the themes of the book:

The book is not a record of fact, but of fact idealized a story of undying hate The hero of the book is . . . the mystic white monster of the sea.

He concluded on a note which shows an interest of the new literary generation of the 1890's in the vigorous and the romantic: "To a class of gentlemen-adventurers, to those who love books and free life under the wide, open sky, it must always appeal."

Professor Barrett Wendell (1900) and George Woodberry (1903) revealed that they had not read any—or much—of Melville, but Professor Trent (1903) thought it a creation not unworthy of a great poet, although he objected to its length its heaping up of detail, and its imitation of "Carlylean" stylistic tricks. Evidence of greater insight was displayed by Ernest Rhys in his "Introduction" to his "Everyman's Library" edition in 1907:

He was not only a writer of sea-tales but a transcendentalist in oilskins, who found a vaster ocean than the Pacific in his own mind, and symbolized in the whale the colossal image of the forces of nature that produce and that overpower man.

Professor Carl Van Doren, in the *Cambridge Dictionary of American Literature* (1917) gave much more space to Melville than earlier historians, but said much the same as Trent had said; Van Doren was to say more later.

On the whole, interest and insight grew slowly during the 1900's and 1910's. "Everyman's" edition went out of print; little more was written about the book until the end of the First World War. Then it became apparent that a silent revolution in the reading of *Moby-Dick* had been working.

In August, 1919, the centenary of Melville's birth brought forth a number of articles which mark the sea change that occurred in the reading of the book in the 1920's and 1930's. The nature of the new readings is seen most clearly in Professor Raymond Weaver's study in the *Nation* (2 August, 1919), and in Professor Frank Jewett Mather, Jr.'s in the *Review* (9 and 16 August, 1919). Both men placed *Moby-Dick* as Melville's unquestionable masterpiece; both read it as a symbolic tragedy; both thought it a book of profound wisdom. Typical of most of those who followed them, they were interested primarily in the meaning, and they located the meaning in the conflict between Ahab and the Whale, seeing the Whale as the reincarnation of all the vast moral evil of the Universe.

This "re-discovery" of Melville was encouraged by an edition of *Moby-Dick* in the Oxford "World's Classics" introduced by a fervent testimony from Viola Meynell. This edition was followed by several other editions, and a *Standard Edition* of Melville's work in twelve volumes (four were added later) published by Constable in London.

To the new literary generation after the First World War, *Moby-Dick* and Melville were exciting discoveries. Melville they found was one of the few members of an "Underground" working within Victorianism. These readers were learning new frames of reference in which to interpret human behaviour and motivation; Darwin, Fraser, Freud, and Marx were being absorbed. They had a new sensitivity to native American culture. They were concerned with the Ishmael-like "plight" of the artist in America. They recognized the compelled nature of great art. They accepted Croce's concepts that a work of art was an organic fusion of form and content, and that a work should be judged in its own terms. They welcomed experimentalism in form and content. They accepted with little question that great literature could be expressed in the novel.

All of these assumptions and interests are evident in the readers who wrote of *Moby-Dick* in the 1920's. Raymond Weaver, in his pioneer scholarly biography (1921) read *Moby-Dick* as an allegory which expressed the adventure of Melville's soul in growing despair and woe. D. H. Lawrence (*Studies in*

Classic American Literature), (1922) read it as symbolic, but he doubted if even Melville knew exactly of what; yet, *Moby-Dick* symbolizes:

the deepest blood being of the white race The last phallic being of the white man. Hunted into death of upper consciousness and the blind will. Our blood-self subjugated to our will.

John Freeman, in his volume on Melville in the "English Men of Letters" series (1926) centered on the theme of the book, which he thought was the eternal conflict between opposites, or—better still—between rivals. Vindicating his pride against almightiness, Ahab-Lucifer was overthrown but unsubdued. Freeman was impressed first by the strength of the book, then by its sadness. E. M. Forster (*Aspects of Fiction*, 1927) discussed the book as his central example of fiction as prophecy. What was most important was "its tone of voice." It "reached far back"; it was spasmodically realistic; it gave us the sensation of song or sound; it faced towards unity:

We get false if we say that (the contest) is between good and evil, or between two unreconciled evils. The essential in *Moby-Dick*, the prophetic song, flows athwart the action and the surface morality like an undercurrent *Moby-Dick* is full of meanings; its meaning is a different problem. It is wrong to turn the *Delight* or the coffin into symbols because even if the symbolism is correct, it silences the book. Nothing can be stated about *Moby-Dick* except that it is a contest. The rest is song.

He also thought that it is to his conception of evil that Melville's work owes much of its strength.

In the 1920's prominent American readers centered their interpretations in the Ahab-Moby Dick conflict. Carl Van Doren saw Ahab as the Yankee Lucifer-Faust; Henry Canby thought Ahab was doomed when he lost touch with the will of God; Percy Boynton saw the struggle as man's perpetual struggle for spiritual victory over inscrutable forces; the ocean was the symbol of boundless truth, the land was the threatening reef of human error. and Moby Dick was the symbol of all property and privilege. Fred Lewis Patte saw Ahab (and Melville) as a pre-Neitzschean; V. L. Parrington dealt with its democratic individualism; Matthew Josphson saw Melville's career as the failure of the artist in American culture. Lewis Mumford, who had started his study of Melville in the highly influential *The Golden Day* (1926) made in his spiritual biography of Melville (1929) one of the most comprehensive readings of the decade.

He read it as a story projected on more than one plane and with multiple meanings. It was:

fundamentally a parable on the mystery of evil and the accidental malice of the universe. The white whale stands for the brute energies of existence, blind, fatal, overpowering, while Ahab is the spirit of man, small and feeble, that pits its purpose against this might, and its purpose against the blank senselessness of power. Ahab had more humanity than the gods he defies, but became inhuman—the image of the thing he hates.

He also suggested a concept which should be explored later:

Moby-Dick is one of the first great mythologies to be created in the modern world, created, that is, out of the stuff of that world, . . . and not out of ancient symbols.

In the 1930's interest shifted from the interpretation of the meaning of *Moby-Dick* to the work of Melville scholarship as a whole. Charles Anderson, John Birss, Robert Forsythe, and V. H. Paltsists did valuable work in recovering many more of the facts of Melville's life. Other scholars made closer examinations of the rest of Melville's work, of his thought, of his relationship with his times, of his literary sources and techniques. Here one can only mention the extended studies: Vega Curl's *Pasteboard Masks: Facts as Spiritual Symbols in the Novels of Hawthorne and Melville* (1931); Stanley Geist's *Herman Melville: The Tragic Vision and the Heroic Ideal* (1939); W. S. Gleim's *The Meaning of Moby-Dick* (1938); a one-for-one decoding on Swedenborgian lines, which ignored E. M. Forster's warning that such a mode of reading silenced the book. Chapter-length studies of aspects of the book were made by Pelham Edgar and Yvor Winters. Leon Howard made the first suggestion that *Moby-Dick* had been written in two states, and he also presented Ahab as consciously modelled on the Coleridgean concept of the Shakespearean tragic hero. There were, of course, Marxian interpretations. Willard Thorp's bibliography and balanced introduction in his Melville volume in the "American Writers Series" (1937) helped smooth the way for reading and further scholarship.

In 1941 the late F. O. Matthiessen (American Renaissance) presented what is still the most suggestive analysis and synthesis of what Melville created in *Moby-Dick*. Matthiessen concentrated on the writing itself, on Melville's developing concepts of art and technique and on his relationship with his cultural past and present. He assumed that the book was sym-

bolic in a more fundamental sense than earlier critics had, in the sense which the term was to have in the 1940's. He examined more closely than earlier scholars the structure, the language, the matching of the tragic forces, the themes, and the deeper implications. He showed the fertilizing force of Shakespeare and Hawthorne on Melville. Finally he applied another concept which was to be explored more fully in the 1940's, the concept of Melville as the artist who is at once more primitive and more civilized than his contemporaries. He concluded (to paraphrase) that the greatness of *Moby-Dick* lay finally in its power to take man beyond history to the source of his elemental energies.

In the 1940's while Melville scholars ranged wider and deeper, certain predominating modes of reading are evident. A number of readers have seen the book as a profound expression of religious experience. William Braswell published his earlier thesis "Herman Melville and Christianity" in 1943 as *Melville's Religious Thought*. William Ellery Sedgwick's *Herman Melville: Tragedy of Mind* (1944) made a subtle, detailed examination of the spiritual forces, seeing in Ahab (and all creation) self-conflict between the white and black principles. In 1949, Geoffrey Stone presented a Catholic interpretation in his *Herman Melville*. In 1950, M. O. Percival's *A Reading of Moby-Dick* made a sensitive, extended analysis from a Kierkegaardian viewpoint. These readers, and Willard Thorp in his "Introduction" to his excellent Oxford University Press edition (1948) shifted the location of the learning of the book from the Ahab-Moby Dick conflict to this conflict as framed and evaluated by Ishmael, and illuminated also by the Father Mapple sermon, the three mates, little Pip, Fedallah, the passing ships, and other elements.

Several critics in the 1940's have followed up the suggestion made by Mumford in 1929 that *Moby-Dick* is a great modern myth. Matthiesen's study provided many suggestions. Charles Olsen (*Call Me Ishmael*, 1947) thought Ahab embodied mythically the American will to lordship over Space, or Nature, and that Melville had made a myth for a people of Ishmaels. Richard Chase (*Herman Melville*, 1949), using the books to probe Melville's psyche and American culture, also thought the book "mytho-poetic." He decoded it by using a fusion of concepts from Frazer, Jung, Constance Rourke, and others. Ahab was "the American cultural image"; "a primitive magician—a Shaman"; "the false Prometheus"; "the false Saviour hero"; "both

the father and the son." The central idea of tragedy is the self-defeat of leadership. Moby Dick represents not evil, but purity—inviolable spiritual rectitude.

A third major interest in *Moby-Dick* in the 1940's was in it as a creation of the imagination. This interest is represented most fully in Howard Vincent's *The Trying Out of Moby-Dick* (1949) which examined closely Melville's sources and his method of transmuting them into material for his book. He traced the growth of the book from its earliest germs in Melville's first books, to its published state. Throughout this examination of the creative act, Vincent wove a reading of the book which assumed that the meanings were multiple and that the symbols shifted in significance. He saw the final meaning in a tension between the poles evident in Father Mapple's sermon and Ahab's attitudes in the Candles scene.

The nearest approach to a synthesis of these three major interests was made in Newton Arvin's volume on Melville in "The American Men of Letters" series (1949). Arvin also read the meanings as complex and the symbols as shifting. He analyzed four planes of significance in the book: the literal, the "oneiric" or psychological, the moral, and—the most comprehensive—the mythical. Arvin's analyses reflect many of Matthiessen's suggestions, and the interests of some critics in the 1940's in symbolism, archetypal patterns, and myth.

To note only these full-length studies in this capsule form does an injustice to the illumination they have thrown on *Moby-Dick*; at points some of them also have obscured Melville's book. These few lines also ignore the numerous articles and unpublished and published dissertations which have examined the sources, the symbolism, and the thought of the book, one of the latest of which is an article by R. E. Watters, of the University of British Columbia. "The Meanings of the White Whale" in *The University of Toronto Quarterly*, for January of this year, useful not only in its conclusions but also in its method. Much has been done; much remains to be done. We still lack a comprehensive formal analysis of the fusion of content and form in the book; we still have overlooked much of Melville's skillful counterpointing of themes and orchestration of feeling; we still tend to treat the book as a sea from which we can draw out just the fish we find interesting. What has been written about the book are but soundings; like the Pacific, it is deep, changing, and full of mystery. "Somewhere in these seas . . .", for each of us as readers to find is Moby Dick.