



March 1987

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### Recommended Citation

Colby Library Quarterly, Volume 23, no.1, March 1987, p.39-51

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## Forms of Insanity and Insane Characters in Moby-Dick

by PAUL MCCARTHY

AHAB is not the only insane figure in Melville's *Moby-Dick*. Elijah, Gabriel, Pip, Fedallah, possibly Ishmael, Perth the blacksmith, and others are close to or on the other side of "the thin red line" separating the sane from the insane. Many background characters in *Redburn*, *White-Jacket*, and *Pierre* occupy the same general area. All such characters belong in the descent, beginning with Jimmy in *Typee* and continuing with Jackson in *Redburn*, that exhibits some form or degree of insanity or madness.

Studies of Melville's fascination with insanity usually center on his family, literary influences, or on Ahab. Studies exploring psychological aspects customarily do so in terms of twentieth-century knowledge, Freudian or Jungian in particular.<sup>1</sup> This paper will instead focus on several characters in *Moby-Dick*, including Ahab, and on Melville's psychological insights as expressed in mid-nineteenth-century terms. We can learn much about the quality of such insights if these are examined within the context of American psychological knowledge, 1830-1860.<sup>2</sup>

The likely sources of Melville's knowledge remain to a large extent conjectural. Melville had various scientific interests and read or consulted books on geology, astronomy, ichthyology, botany, and other sciences.<sup>3</sup> To satisfy his curiosity and to gather information for novels, he became an avid reader also of dictionaries and cyclopaedias. He repeatedly consulted the useful *Penny Cyclopaedia* for information on various topics as he wrote *Redburn*, *White-Jacket*, *Moby-Dick*, and *Israel Potter*. It is my contention, which I shall not attempt to prove here, that he read also an excellent article in the *Cyclopaedia* or comparable materials on insanity. A set of the *Penny Cyclopaedia* and many pertinent books on psychology and other sciences were available in the New York Society Library, which,

1. Leon Howard, *Herman Melville: A Biography* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1951), pp. 163-65, 169-72; Newton Arvin, *Herman Melville* (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1950), pp. 172-74; Henry A. Murray, "In Nomine Diaboli," in *Moby-Dick Centennial Essays*, Intro. by Hillway and Mansfield (Dallas: Southern Methodist Univ. Press, 1953), pp. 10-21; Edwin Haviland Miller, *Melville* (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1975), pp. 54, 19, 195, *et passim*.

2. See Henry Nash Smith, "The Madness of Ahab," in his *Democracy and the Novel: Popular Resistance to Classic American Writers* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1978), pp. 35-55, 173-77. He discusses contemporary views of insanity, especially monomania. See my "Facts, Opinions, and Possibilities: Melville's Treatment of Insanity through *White-Jacket*," *SNNTS*, 16 (Summer, 1984), 167-81, for a detailed discussion of forms of insanity, possible sources, and insane figures.

3. See Tyrus Hillway, "Melville's Education in Science," *TSL*, 16 (Fall, 1974), 411-25.

as Sealts explains, the writer visited while he was living with his family and relatives at 103 Fourth Avenue in New York City in the late 1840's.<sup>4</sup>

Whether Melville's knowledge of abnormal psychology came from printed sources, experiences at home and as a sailor, or, as appears most likely, from these and a powerful mind, it appears to be abreast and in some respects ahead of scientific knowledge of that day. Melville's early novels and *Moby-Dick* in particular include characters and explanations reflecting a firm understanding of the two chief forms of insanity then: moral insanity and monomania, both of which are carefully defined in the *Cyclopaedia* article and in influential books by Isaac Ray and James Prichard.<sup>5</sup> Moral insanity was defined in 1835 by Prichard, an eminent English psychiatrist, as a " 'morbid perversion of the feelings, affections, and active powers, without any illusion or erroneous conviction impressed upon the understanding: it sometimes co-exists with an apparently unimpaired state of the intellectual faculties.' " The nature of the disease is determined mainly by the dominant emotion which may be a form of anger, elation, or gloom. Moral insanity usually involves changes in habits and manner and evidences of antisocial behavior. The main feature is that reasoning ability remains unimpaired. Actually, as implied, severely troubled emotions are usually accompanied by some degree of reasoning impairment.<sup>6</sup> The classification of monomania, also defined in the *Cyclopaedia*, was devised by the French psychiatrist Jean E. D. Esquirol in 1838 to replace the traditional term and class of melancholy which he regarded as imprecise and for the use of poets and moralists. "The word monomania expresses an anormal [*sic*] condition of the physical or moral sensibility, with a circumscribed and fixed delirium." Prichard defined monomania as a "form of insanity . . . characterized by some particular illusion or erroneous conviction impressed upon the understanding, and giving rise to a partial aberration of judgement." The monomaniac would retain the power to reason correctly on subjects or areas not included in the illusion. In most cases of monomania, reasoning ability in any area will show some impairment. Monomania apparently assumed more bizarre or extreme forms than moral insanity, including the grandiose and misanthropic.<sup>7</sup> Some experts regarded the disease as

4. Charles Knight, ed., *Penny Cyclopaedia and Supplement* (London: Charles Knight and Co., 1833-1838), 29 vols.; hereafter designated as *Cyclopaedia* article, 12, 484-88, draws extensively from James Prichard, *A Treatise on Insanity and Other Disorders of the Mind* (London: Sherwood, Gilbert, and Piper, 1835), a highly regarded mid-century study; and to some extent from E. Esquirol, *Mental Maladies: A Treatise on Insanity*, trans. E. K. Hunt, M.D. (Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1845); I. Ray, M.D., *A Treatise on the Medical Jurisprudence of Insanity* (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1838); and others. Books on insanity by Esquirol, Prichard, Ray, and others, and the *Cyclopaedia* were available in the Society Library. See *Alphabetical and Analytical Catalogue of the New York Society Library with the Charter, By-Laws, Etc., of the Institution* (New York: R. Craighead, Printer, 1850); M. M. Sealts, Jr., *Melville's Reading: A Check-list of Books Owned and Borrowed* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1966), pp. 15-16, 128.

5. Norman Dain, *Concepts of Insanity in the United States, 1789-1865* (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1964), pp. 73, 73-75. Prichard, *A Treatise*; Ray, *A Treatise on . . . Jurisprudence*.

6. Prichard, pp. 12, 13, 18; Ray, p. 139.

7. Esquirol, pp. 199-203; Prichard, pp. 26-34.

an outgrowth of moral insanity; others regarded the two diseases as separate.<sup>8</sup>

Insane figures in Melville's earlier fiction show symptoms of the two diseases. The diseases are evident also in *Moby-Dick* figures but in greater depth and complexity, as this paper will attempt to show.

## I

IT SHOULD be stated first that most characters aboard the *Pequod* are not mad, crazy, or close to "the thin red line." They appear reasonably steady and reliable despite duty aboard a crowded whaler, under a mysterious, iron-fisted captain, and in generally dangerous waters. Starbuck has daily burdens, memories of relatives lost at sea, and worries about the ship's mission and Ahab. Starbuck remains steadfast. So do most others. Some, however, are mad or fairly close to the line. Ishmael, close to the line at times, and Fedallah, clearly over it, will not be considered because of a lack of space and their complex mental conditions. The ship's carpenter is at least close to the line. He is dependable, skillful, and resourceful, but indifferent to others. "A stript abstract," "a pure manipulator," the carpenter regards crew members not as people,<sup>9</sup> but as things. Only a "wheezing humorousness" and "a certain grizzled wittiness," both evident in meetings with Ahab, save him from the alienation and pains of moral insanity (p. 388). The blacksmith Perth is regarded as sane by Ahab, but Ahab cannot penetrate Perth's solemnity to discover a hidden madness, a condition traceable to the past. Losses of his wife and children affected Perth far more grievously than Ahab and others realize. Years of sorrow, hardship, and alcoholism left a profound melancholy and made Perth one of Melville's most deeply sad characters. He is sadness, saddened—to paraphrase the description of Ahab as " 'madness, maddened' " (p. 147). In the attempt to forget, Perth chose the sea instead of suicide because, in Ishmael's words, the sea is "more oblivious than death" (p. 402). The sea isolates Perth from the past, just as his solemnity and age isolate him from shipboard life. The blacksmith appears to be suffering from a form of monomania; in the early years of alcoholism and sorrow, he may have shown symptoms of moral insanity.

Major insane characters in *Moby-Dick* receive a more thorough and analytic scrutiny. Elijah, the inquisitive stranger in Nantucket, seems to be merely quaintly eccentric, a part of the scene around the Nantucket docks. He is mild, rather quiet, and approachable. Yet his mannerisms and remarks raise serious doubts as to his sanity. Prichard refers to

8. Prichard examines moral insanity and monomania at length, and describes each one as a distinct form of insanity, p. 21. He does explain that a condition of moral insanity can lead to monomania, pp. 36–38. Ray distinguishes between the two diseases, pp. 161–63, 168–70; and explains also that moral insanity can "pass into intellectual mania," or monomania, p. 173. See also Dain, pp. 73–74.

9. Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1967), p. 388. Hereafter, page references to this edition will be placed in the text.

"reputed persons of a singular, wayward, and eccentric character . . . (with) . . . something remarkable in their manners and habits . . . (leaving) . . . doubts as to their entire insanity."<sup>10</sup> Going further, Ishmael describes Elijah as "a little damaged in the head . . . crazy . . . cracked," as someone who has "broken loose from somewhere" (pp. 86, 87, 91). Ishmael may exaggerate. Elijah's preoccupation with his past, however, makes him indifferent to routine life. The general consequence is a loss of sensibilities noticeable in friendship and social relations, a diminution of normal social emotions. His tattered appearance, strange remarks, and unusual pertinacity separate him from others and suggest a form of moral insanity. Possible monomania is also indicated in Elijah's obsessive thoughts of Ahab and expectations that strangers will heed his warnings, although in the scientific vocabulary of the time Elijah is not a monomaniac. An 1842 study of insanity and jurisprudence by Prichard makes clear that in monomania the hallucination, delusion, or obsession centers primarily on the individual's self. "The predominate feeling . . . is always a selfish desire or apprehension, and the illusory ideas relate to the personal state, and circumstances of the individual."<sup>11</sup> This conception applies to Ahab or Gabriel but not to Elijah whose obsessive concerns are with others but not with himself. In the general sense he is not self-centered.

The remarkable Gabriel aboard the *Jeroboam* is one of Melville's most emphatically insane figures, suffering it appears with a complex form of monomania. Ray explains that in simple monomania the individual is obsessed with one idea but that in a complex form the individual is involved with "a train of morbid ideas."<sup>12</sup> Gabriel is dominated by various morbid ideas. The ideas and behavior are both strongly influenced by biblical materials, some interpretations of which are highly individualized. Although the general course of Gabriel's monomania may be predictable, his day-to-day performance is not only unpredictable but threatening. Causes of the insanity lie in his background.<sup>13</sup> Gabriel was "originally nurtured among the crazy society of Niskayuna Shakers, where he had been a great prophet," trained in their "cracked, secret meetings," and involved in many cultish practices, including descent "from heaven by way of a trap door" and possession of a replica of the seventh vial. Such influences point toward monomania with "frantic delirium" and a restless activism as consequences. To gain a berth aboard the *Jeroboam*, Gabriel hides his fanaticism beneath a "cunning peculiar to insanity." Once he is aboard ship, "his insanity broke out in a freshet" (p. 266). He announces himself as Gabriel, demands that the captain jump overboard, and in-

10. Prichard, p. 12.

11. James Cowles Prichard, *On the Different Forms of Insanity in Relation to Jurisprudence* (1842), p. 69.

12. Ray, pp. 162-64.

13. Authorities then differed as to causes of insanity and classes of causes. See Dain, pp. 7-8, and Prichard, *A Treatise*, pp. 156-209.

forms everyone that he is "the deliverer of the isles of the sea and vicar-general of all Oceanica" (p. 266). Regarding himself as the prophet of God, Gabriel can act, think, or hallucinate as he wants, or so it appears. He regards the whale as the Shaker God, releases (he believes) a plague on the ship, and on occasion works peacefully with the crew. At times, Gabriel's incoherent, highly excited behavior suggests a form of mania although as Prichard makes clear mania differs from monomania in important respects.<sup>14</sup> Despite Gabriel's occasional periods of lucidity and calmness, his reasoning ability reveals flaws of conception and logic. Nonetheless, his delusions rule not only himself but the crew and officers as well. Gabriel's "measureless self-deception" is more than matched by "his measureless power" of ". . . deceiving" others (p. 267).

The most striking of the mad figures—with the exception of Ahab—is Pip. The young cabin boy is more intricately mad than Elijah and Gabriel, for he can be profound as well as silly. Likely causes of his insanity began in his Connecticut boyhood. Poverty, his father, dancing on the village green, Pip's love of life—all illustrative of the "peaceable securities" (p. 345) in the village—could hardly prepare him for whaling dangers and tough shipmates who would be indifferent to his welfare. Nor would memories of home be of real benefit. Lonely, moody periods would become part of Pip's life. His natural buoyancy fading as months went by, Pip felt increasingly apprehensive, even fearful. Signs of moral insanity likely appeared. Most disturbing of all activities would be the whale lowerings, the worst part of the "panic-striking business in which he had somehow unaccountably become entrapped." In his first lowering for a whale, Pip evinces "much nervousness." In the second, he jumps from the whaleboat. In the third lowering, unable to control fear or imagination, Pip jumps for the last time. The consequences are profound. Left alone "in the middle of the heartless immensity," Pip is overwhelmed by a form of monomania. The comparable effects of Pip's abandonment and Ahab's loss of leg can be expressed in terms of soul. After Ahab's loss of leg, his body and soul intermingle, with insanity as a likely consequence. After Pip's submersion, his body remains intact but his soul is drowned. "Not drowned entirely though," Ishmael adds. Thereafter, Pip appears increasingly eccentric, incomprehensible, or "mad" (p. 347).

The nature of Pip's insanity, like that of Elijah and Gabriel, is revealed through language and speech. Melville's insights into speech behavior were not matched by views of Prichard, Ray, and other scientists who apparently did little research into speech habits of the insane. Elijah's speech is revealing, Ishmael regarding it as "'ambiguous, half-hinting, half-revealing, shrouded sort of talk'" (p. 88). Elijah's remarks are nonetheless sprinkled with facts about Ahab and sometimes make sense. References to "souls," Ahab's mysterious assistants, the signing of articles,

14. Prichard, pp. 71-72.

for example, are obscure, and a few statements, figures of speech, and individual words appear vague or irrelevant. Elijah's obsessive concerns are most emphatically revealed in repetitions of " 'nothing' " phrases and in remarks about the ship's papers: "Well, well, what's signed, is signed; and what's to be, will be; and then again, perhaps it won't be, after all. Anyhow, it's all fixed and arranged a'ready" (p. 87). Gabriel's speech, usually described rather than presented, generally fits the occasion or mood. It can be full of rhetorical pronouncements about Gabriel's own positions or goals. He "commands" the captain, or he "publish(es) his manifesto" (p. 266). While the *Jeroboam* pursues the whale, Gabriel, from the mast-head, hurls "forth prophecies of speedy doom to the sacrilegious assailants of his divinity" (p. 268). Sometimes he speaks in tones of biblical warnings. During the *Pequod-Jeroboam* gam, Gabriel cries " 'Think, think of the fevers, yellow and bilious! Beware of the horrible plague. . . . Think, think of thy whale-boat, stoven and sunk! Beware of the horrible tail' " (p. 267). Sometimes, as in pronouncing the white whale to be the Shaker God, Gabriel breaks out "in his gibbering insanity" (p. 267).

Pip's speech shows greater range, depth, and individuality. The usual tone is light and school-boyish as in Pip's "crazy-witty" refrains before the mast-head: " 'I look, you look, he looks: we look, ye look, they look,' " which is repeated twice. The refrain is repeated a third time, with noticeable variations, in "And I, you, he: and we, ye, and they, are all bats; and I'm a crow, especially when I stand a'top of this pine tree here. Caw! caw! . . . Ain't I a crow?" (p. 362). While the schoolboy recitation includes serious philosophic overtones, it exhibits a bizarre silliness that gains release in references to " 'bats' " and " 'crows.' " Pip creates another word game as Queequeg lies ill and Pip calls out, " 'Form two and two! Let's make a General of him. . . . Oh for a game cock now to sit upon his head and crow!' " (p. 398). The lyrical references to bats, crow, and game-cock are obscure in meaning and origin although indicative of a wide-ranging imagination. A similar extravagant attempt to break down ordinary bounds of reality appears in the shift from crow to bird to crow as in scare-crow, with bones for sleeves and trousers. Connections and transitions are often omitted in his speech. Yet philosophic turns can appear at any time: in references at the mast-head to origins, death, resurrection, and God, and in the imagined scene of admirals and captains in Chapter 129.

Behind Pip's rich, confusing language lies a complex monomania. It centers, on the one hand, on his seeming awareness of God. When Pip descends into the ocean, he sees or believes that he sees "God's foot on the treadle of the loom" and evidence of God's mighty creations. In the sense that the book is a romantic creation, Pip does see these unique things. Although he may need to be insane to see them, he sees them. On the realistic level, Pip is hallucinating. In this sense—the one stressed in this

paper — Prichard's explanation of an hallucination is pertinent. An hallucination is the consequence of a "very intense . . . morbid reverie . . . (which) . . . produces . . . false impressions . . . (of) . . . unreal objects as actually present."<sup>15</sup> Pip's belief in his own death is hallucinatory. At other times Pip explores profoundly if erratically — perhaps in illustration of Starbuck's explanation in Chapter 110 — aspects of resurrection, the ship's fate, and perspective. Profound himself, Ahab is well aware that Pip draws upon deep sources for his "wondrous philosophies" (p. 433). Only Ahab and possibly Ishmael can understand Pip at such times. Unlike Gabriel, Pip is not physically driven to express religious or philosophic truths. His expression and insight are natural and instinctive.

On the other hand, Pip's monomania centers at times on his alleged cowardice and physical absence referred to above. This obsession dwells on self, but, unlike Gabriel's, Pip's obsession is usually self-deprecatory. In wandering about on the deck, he proclaims his cowardice by repeatedly crying out, " 'shame' " and " 'coward.' " This conception of self contrasts most significantly to Ahab's grandiose self-conceptions. A related obsession is Pip's belief that he is not Pip. Pip has drowned and is therefore dead; or, Pip, a coward, has run away. Yet, as the actual Pip exists physically, he must be someone else: he is, therefore, the bell-boy, the ship's crier, who identifies himself with the refrain, " 'Ding, dong, ding' " (p. 427). These views of identity and Pip's jump from the whale boat manifest a profound self-hatred. Not until befriended by Ahab does Pip become aware of his own individuality, of his need for someone else or Ahab's need for him. Otherwise, his only positive sense of self comes when paradoxically he denies the self in order to express profound truths.

## II

WITH the possible exceptions of *Pierre* and *Bartleby*, Ahab represents Melville's deepest exploration of the nature of insanity. Three aspects of that exploration will be considered. One is the prominence of moral insanity in the history of Ahab's madness. Another is the likelihood that the history began many years before Ahab's loss of leg. A third is that the history of insanity covers three periods, not two as commonly assumed.

That Ahab would be comparatively sane for forty or fifty years and then lose his sanity after a traumatic event at sea appears unlikely. Although details of Ahab's background are sparse,<sup>16</sup> they indicate the likelihood of an inception of disease in the relatively early years. Ishmael attributes Ahab's "half wilful over-ruling morbidness at the bottom of his nature" to "birth or other circumstances" (p. 71); the circumstances are

15. Prichard, p. 115.

16. Smith's summary of events, p. 41, has proven helpful. Miller believes that Ahab's "paranoia is traceable to his first year of life," "his mind and body scarred" from that time, pp. 196, 198.



left rather vague. The mother was described as “crazy” and both parents were dead before Ahab was one year old. The identity of the foster parents is not disclosed. Even if they were supportive, Ahab’s early years must have been indeed difficult. A sense of loneliness and deprivation would deepen in his early years, compounded, as Ahab grew up, by thoughts of his mother, her madness, and his father. The first years at sea may have exacerbated Ahab’s feelings of differentness and separation.

Whatever Ahab’s early reactions to the sea, he likely did well. As it was not uncommon in the nineteenth century for an able young man to rise rapidly and become a ship captain, Ahab, brilliant and determined, may have done so. Whenever he assumed a captain’s responsibilities, Ahab no doubt proved capable. He would adapt well and learn quickly. But year after year of whaling hardships and routines would prove frustrating and hardening. Sensibilities would suffer. Feelings of isolation would grow. The first signs of moral insanity may have appeared early in what Ahab describes later as “the forty years of privation and peril” (p. 443). The early years could mark the beginning of a first stage when privation and loneliness became hard facts of life. Ahab could share his thoughts and ideas with few; he may have been close to no one. On three to four year voyages, there would be little more than whaling maps, day-to-day routines, brief consultations with mates, occasional lowerings, long periods of no whale sightings, thoughts of home, periods of introspection. Ahab’s “low enjoying power” and ability to “think untraditionally and independently” (pp. 147, 71) may have widened the gap between himself and others. Isolation, hardship, frustration, changes, and responsibilities would grind away at amenities and sympathies. At forty Ahab had likely become crotchety, moody, aloof, with vaguely understood angers and discontents. Obscure incidents at forty, which the reliable Elijah<sup>17</sup> testifies to, — lying as though dead for three nights and days and the deadly skirmish with the Spaniard — would strengthen hatreds and determination alike.

Ahab’s marriage at “past fifty” marks the approximate beginning of a second stage of the illness. By this time a recognized leader and whaling captain, “‘a swearing good man’ ” as Peleg describes him, Ahab needed the affection and companionship of marriage. But these disappeared the day after the wedding as Ahab embarked on another long whaling journey. His wife and later son would be sorely missed. Thoughts of them would disturb and frustrate. After admitting to Starbuck that in marrying the girl he had widowed her, Ahab immediately adds, “‘And then, the madness, the frenzy, the boiling blood and the smoking brow, with which, for a thousand lowerings old Ahab has furiously, foamingly chased his prey—more a demon than a man’ ” (pp. 443–44). The “thousand lowerings” may be a hyperbole for dramatic effect or a reference

17. Nathalia Wright, *Melville’s Uses of the Bible* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1949), pp. 76, 66.

to the career of forty years, to the years after he became “‘old Ahab,’” to the years since his marriage, or to the few since the mutilation. It is likely that the “thousand lowerings” extend over a period of ten to twenty years, perhaps longer. If so, the lowerings cannot refer to a period of monomania, a comparatively recent occurrence, but to periods of moody detachment, to times of strong hatreds and angers, all controlled by a “broad mentality,” a strong, firm intelligence. The general condition would be one of moral insanity.

A third and final stage in Ahab's madness begins with his traumatic loss of leg. The most documented and involved, this stage includes early monomaniac hates and angers precipitated by the great “corporal animosity” (p. 160) arising from the loss. The loss would be a physical cause contributing to insanity, as Smith points out.<sup>18</sup> This stage includes also months of suffering when the “final monomania” strikes Ahab as the *Pe-quod* rounds Cape Horn and his “torn body and gashed soul bled into one another; and so interfusing made him mad” (p. 160). This stage includes also a deceptive calmness that misleads the crew into believing that Ahab's delirium has been left behind with the Cape Horn winds. The calmness resembles Gabriel's. For Ahab, however, the delirium or “full lunacy” turning inward is not ordinarily discernible. Chapter 41 contains a compact, somewhat puzzling summary of aspects of Ahab's entire madness, including this form of delirium. Melville uses three synonyms for insanity — “lunacy,” “madness,” and “monomania,” combines them with contrasting adjectives, “broad,” “full,” “narrow,” and “special,” and employs what may be regarded as poetic analysis to trace the progress of insanity from a “broad madness,” or moral insanity, through a “full lunacy,” or violent monomania, through the “narrow-flowing monomania,” or somewhat constricted insanity, to the “special lunacy,” or sharply obsessed monomania, which “stormed his general sanity.” The obsessed stage is accelerated by Ahab's second physical injury — the severe groin wound suffered in Nantucket — which constitutes a second physical cause. In his “monomaniac mind” (p. 385), Ahab regards the subsequent torment as supernaturally related to torment following the leg loss. The groin injury makes him even more determined to exact revenge. Tragic dimensions of the “final monomania” take final shape as Ahab draws upon disappointments of early years, the deepening troubles of middle years, or second stage, to regard the whale at last as “the sum of all general rage and hate felt by his whole race from Adam down” (p. 160). Conceived in terms of Evil, God, a whale, and a whaling captain, Ahab's grandiose delusion is created by a mind both coldly sane and furiously mad. Except under the greatest strain, Ahab thinks rationally on any subject, including his own obsession. Such a portrayal of monomania ran counter to the received opinion. Melville's general portrayal of depths of monomania also ap-

18. Smith, p. 40.

pears to be in advance of portrayals of conscious and unconscious processes of monomania by Esquirol, Ray, and Prichard.

The quarter deck scenes are notable for their dramatic revelations of Ahab's monomania. The deepest probings of Ahab's mind and of his unconscious in particular appear, however, in expository accounts in chapters 41 and 44. A passage in Chapter 41 contains a cryptic metaphor suggestive of Ahab's unconscious, or his "larger, darker, deeper part":

Far beneath the fantastic towers of man's upper earth, his root of grandeur, his whole awful essence sits in bearded state; an antique buried beneath antiquities, and throned on torsoes! . . . He patient sits, upholding on his *frozen* brow the piled entablatures of ages. (p. 161; my italics)

Although the metaphor may be more literary and political than psychological, "his root of grandeur, his whole awful essence" suggests elemental forces in Ahab's unconscious mind, which are suggested also by images of burial and death and by the reference to "frozen brow," a phrase possibly anticipating descriptions of mind in *Pierre*: "Those barbarous hordes which Truth ever nourishes in the loins of her frozen, yet teeming North." Ahab's own "hyperborean regions" of the mind could be implied in this remarkable metaphor.<sup>19</sup> Such images lack the fluidity and brilliance, however, of the "strange shapes of the unwarped primal world . . . glid(ing) to and fro" and awaiting Pip in his own psychological descent into oceans of the mind. Such figures as "joyous, heartless, ever-juvenile eternities" and "God-omnipresent, coral insects," although referring primarily to mundane eternities, convey a sense of uncharted depths of Pip's mind (p. 347). In turn, descriptions in the Ahab passage convey a sense of colossal forces in the mind, not understood or eluded, not even by Ahab. Archetypal images appear in both descriptions. Similar ones of Ishmael also indicate something of the nature of the unconscious. To my knowledge neither Ray nor Prichard was engaged in the middle 1800's in attempts to understand the nature of the unconscious although European psychiatrists, notably German, had been active in that respect for some time.<sup>20</sup>

The boldest explorations of a troubled mind and unconscious appear in Chapter 44's descriptions of Ahab's monomaniac nightmares. Praised for its brilliance, the last paragraph of the chapter is nonetheless faulted for complex abstractions, reliance on coined terms, and other devices for creating a model of Ahab's mind.<sup>21</sup> Such terms as "life-spot," "living principle," "common vitality," and the "spiritual throes" figure are regarded as imprecise. These terms and metaphors nonetheless succeed in creating

19. Herman Melville, *Pierre or the Ambiguities* (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern-Newberry, 1971), pp. 165-67.

20. See Henri F. Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry* (New York: Basic Books, 1970), pp. 205-10, *et passim*.

21. Smith, p. 47. He discusses interpretations by Paul Brodtkorb, Jr., *Ishmael's White World: A Phenomenological Reading of Moby Dick* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1965); and by Robert Zoellner, *The Salt-Sea Mastodon: A Reading of Moby Dick* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1973).

a sense of Ahab's mental turbulence. The "intolerably vivid dreams of the night" may refer to monomaniac nightmares too extreme to be accepted on a cognitive level. They are evidently too extreme in an emotional sense as well, for they occur during a "clashing of phrensies" and concentrate finally in the "throbbing of his life-spot." The last phrase may be, as Feidelson asserts, a reference to the heart.<sup>22</sup> The phrase more likely refers to the area of both head and heart, to the intense pressures Ahab feels in his head and chest. A key metaphor in the Chapter 44 passage begins, "These spiritual throes in him heaved his being up from its base, and a chasm seemed opening in him, from which forked flames and lightnings shot up, and accursed fiends beckoned him to leap down among them . . . (into) this hell . . . yawn(ing) beneath him" (p. 174). Even though the visualization is confused,<sup>23</sup> it effectively dramatizes traumatic effects of Ahab's insane fury. During this period, Ahab's unconscious mind figuratively opens, releasing into the conscious hitherto hidden forces—raging guilts, hates, fears—suggested by the flames and lightning and also by the "accursed fiends" which remain in the unconscious. The Gothic scene suggests the presence in Ahab of powerful religious and personal conflicts that had been long ago repressed but are now erupting into his consciousness, threatening his very life as well as his objectives.

The portrayal in Chapter 44 of Ahab's mental processes contains another source of obscurity or imprecision: a sometimes cumbersome structure of faculties. Yet the four-part paradigm of soul-mind-will-brain provides a framework for Melville's powerful imagery and insights.<sup>24</sup> The paradigm follows naturally from the two-part paradigm of body and soul illustrated in Chapter 7, as Ishmael thinks of the soul as eternal and separate, and also from the account in Chapter 41 as he describes the interfusing of body and soul that brings on monomania. Although mechanical, the paradigm clarifies the tortured workings of Ahab's powerful mind. After Ahab bursts from his cabin, his soul in effect flees from his mind.<sup>25</sup> The separation, however, is figurative not actual. Ordinarily, the mind is "leagued with the soul"; the soul is an "integral" of the mind. Under the great emotional stress of a monomaniac nightmare, the soul or spiritual elements are subjugated or, in a sense, nullified, by the union of mind and will. This union is the "unbidden and unfathered birth" from which the "eternal, living principle," or soul, flees "horror-stricken." This union appears to be the crux of Ahab's "special lunacy," the sharply focused monomania which marks the most radical upset of Ahab's tormented mentality. During the period of such torment the soul is present but subjugated or dormant. The paradigm is vitalized by remarkable imagery which organically relates conscious and unconscious forces of

22. Charles Feidelson, Jr., ed., *Moby-Dick, or, the Whale* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1964), p. 271. Brodtkorb explains that the soul and mind reside in the "life-spot," p. 62.

23. Smith, pp. 47-48.

24. Zoellner, pp. 95-98.

25. For different interpretations, see Brodtkorb, pp. 63, 64; Zoellner, pp. 98-100.

Ahab's mind. Despite confusions of language and ideas, the long passage in Chapter 44 provides a more convincing portrayal of deep mental anguish and upset than case studies of Ray or Prichard dealing with comparable conditions.<sup>26</sup>

Shakespeare's plays and heroes no doubt influenced Melville's conception of Ahab's will, and accounts of religious and dramatic figures by Bayle and Carlyle may have contributed to that conception.<sup>27</sup> The idea may have derived something also from Upham's scientific *Outlines of Imperfect and Disordered Mental Action*, a copy of which was available in the New York Society Library and likely available also, Wilson Heflin explains, in the enlisted man's library of the *United States* on which Melville sailed in 1843–1844.<sup>28</sup> A professor of psychology, Upham regarded the mind as consisting of the intellect, sensibilities, and will. An important aspect of the will is power which is not a faculty but an attribute suffused throughout the mind and concentrated in the will. Any decision or action of the will is based on power, which becomes a factor therefore in any "disordered action" of the will.<sup>29</sup> A disordered action, or "insanity of the will," is more likely to come from insane aspects of other parts of the mind than from internal defect of the will. Upham's simplistic explanations clarify Ishmael's complex accounts. Ahab's rationality, or mind, driven by monomaniac conceptions of self and power, nullifies the effects of the soul, and, in aligning itself with the disordered will, creates the delusions of a global mind. In such a development the will has power and is also powerless. Upham's description of the effects of a "deep-rooted and permanent melancholy" upon the will also clarifies the powerful account of Ahab's midnight upset.<sup>30</sup> Although Upham's scientific accounts and Melville's dramatic exposition cannot be lengthily compared because of their different purposes and audiences, only Melville's fictional account creates a credible sense of the ineluctable mysteries and complexities of the mind.

### III

MELVILLE's whaling world is inhabited in part by insane characters, several of whom—Elijah, Gabriel, Pip, and Ahab—illustrate the writer's impressive scientific insights as well as superb techniques. Ahab may embody Melville's most acute understanding of the mind of someone on the

26. Ray, pp. 162–66; Prichard, pp. 37–43.

27. Howard, pp. 165, 171–72. Millicent Bell, "Pierre Bayle and *Moby Dick*," *PMLA*, 66 (1951), 626–48.

28. Thomas C. Upham, *Outlines of Imperfect and Disordered Mental Action* (New York: Harpers, 1840). M. M. Sealts, Jr., "A Second Supplementary Note to *Melville's Reading* (1966)," *Harvard Library Bulletin*, 27 (1979), 330–35, 331, includes helpful information on Professor Wilson Heflin's new evidence concerning books in libraries aboard the *United States* during Melville's tour of duty, 1843–1844. The enlisted man's library included "Selections from (Harper's) Family Library," p. 331. Professor Heflin kindly informed me in a letter dated July 25, 1981, that he is reasonably certain that the Upham book, #100 in the Family Library, was aboard ship during the tour. I am indebted to Professor Heflin for the information. Upham, pp. 21–22. Howard refers to Upham, pp. 171–72.

29. Upham, p. 383.

30. Upham, pp. 396–97, 383–84.

far side of "the thin red line." Characters in *Moby-Dick* and in earlier works testify to an understanding that likely began during the family upsets and tensions of Melville's boyhood years, accumulated practical insights and confirmations in years of personal observations at sea, and developed subtlety and depth in the productive writing years. Whether works after *Moby-Dick* present richer treatments of insanity is a moot point. If Melville did not charter deeper areas of the insane mind in portraying such figures as Pierre, Bartleby, and Claggart, he did examine somewhat different areas and with familiar sensitivity, concern, and understanding.