



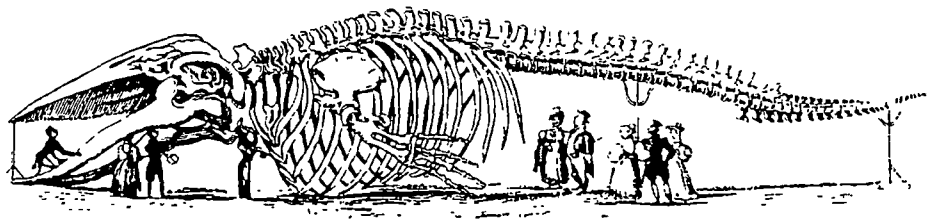
## The Archetypal Quest and Moby-Dick: Melville's "Ecological, Cosmic Democracy"

Mary Jenkins (B.A., Dip. Ed.)  
The Centre for Environmental Studies  
University of Tasmania  
Thesis for Master of Environmental Studies (coursework).

The above illustration is reproduced from an advertisement for Neil Triffit's theatrical production of *Moby-Dick*, in the programme for the Melbourne International Festival (Victoria), inserted in the *Australian*, 2.6.1990.

## Contents

	Page
Statement	ii
Foreword	iii
Abstract	v
1. Introduction	1
2. Melville's "Ecological, Cosmic Democracy"	17
3. The Archetypal Quest	39
4. Woman and the Quest, Nature, the Goddess, and the Serpent.	55
5. Conclusion	80
Bibliography	91



The above illustration of the 'Skeleton of the Great Northern Rorqual' (from the Naturalist's Library, Edinburgh, 1837) is adapted from a reproduction in the Penguin edition of *Moby-Dick* (as cited), Fig 13.

### Statement

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university and to the best of the author's knowledge and belief the thesis contains no copy or paraphrase of material previously published or written by other persons except when due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

## Foreword

This paper is hoped to be a contribution to literary ecology, a study which Joseph Meeker describes as:

... the study of biological themes and relationships which appear in literary works. It is simultaneously an attempt to discover what roles have been played by literature in the ecology of the human species. Many academic disciplines must contribute to the study of literary ecology. Literary form must be reconciled if possible with the forms and structures of nature as they are defined by ecological scientists, for both are related to human perceptions of beauty and balance. Characters in literature may also be analyzed as typical or atypical representatives of the human species, and their behaviour compared to patterns of behaviour among other animals as described by contemporary ethology. Philosophical ideas defining the relationship between man and nature are often expressed or implied in literary works, revealing a history of human beliefs concerning the meaning of natural processes, and also revealing the cultural ideologies which have contributed to our contemporary ecological crisis. Most important, literary ecology makes it possible for us to study the function of literary art as it influences the survival of the human species.<sup>1</sup>

It was late in the development of my thesis when I read the work of Joseph Meeker and Rebecca Raglon, but since doing so, Meeker's *Comedy of Survival* and Raglon's article 'Literature and Environmental thought: Re-Establishing Connections with the World',<sup>2</sup> have been uppermost in my mind. My thanks go to Tom Crowley and Joan Clyburn, Canadians who visited Tasmania, for bringing to my notice these academic studies in literary ecology.

I wish to acknowledge the role of Dr. John Todd, and the staff and students of the Centre for Environmental Studies, for the non-hierarchical facilitation to learning that has contributed to the best study years of my (mature age student) education. The multi-

disciplinary nature of the Centre, and its general climate of openness to developing ideas, has given encouragement to work that is sometimes considered controversial. As Raglon points out in her paper, environmental studies can be considered subversive, as does anything that goes against the *status quo* of a society becoming increasingly geared towards development at any cost.

My warm and particular thanks go to Drs. Peter Hay and Ruth Blair for the pleasure of learning with them. Peter, my supervisor, and Ruth, (providing additional supervision beyond her responsibilities in the Department of English), gave me their support, encouragement - and books - at a time when their work loads were already extremely heavy.

I thank Graham Griffin for our early discussions on 'the quest', Airlie Alam for her adaptations of illustrations used in the thesis, and Juliet Chapman and Nita Saunders for guiding and assisting me through the mechanics of the final stages of this "draught of a draught" when it seemed as if it would never reach an end.

My thanks also to all those who, knowingly and unknowingly, contributed to discussions guided towards the Whale, the 'meaning of life' and the quest. Their tolerance and good humour was exceptional.

---

<sup>1</sup> Meeker, Joseph, *The Comedy of Survival*, Guild of Tutors, Los Angeles, 1980, p. 29.

<sup>2</sup> Raglon, Rebecca, 'Literature and Environmental thought: Re-Establishing Connections with theWorld', *Alternatives: Environmental Advocacy in the Arts*. Faculty of Environmental Studies, Ontario (Canada), 17: 4, 1991.

## Abstract

### The Archetypal Quest and *Moby-Dick*: Melville's "Ecological, Cosmic Democracy"

The quest is an archetypal theme of myth and literature, one which indicates the dreams, ideas and beliefs of a society. Our myths, and our literature, contribute to the way we are today, how we are shaped, how we think, and how we act. "Intentionally, or accidentally, [they have] been a major source of the models used to perpetuate our past".<sup>1</sup>

Much can be learnt from the wisdoms of these stories. However, we need to be aware of the fact that the dominant recorders of society's myths, literature, and history, including the Bible, have been men who, in many instances, have been able to achieve political and social ends by the manipulation of these recordings.

Today we have the patriarchal, technocratic, inverted quest for domination and 'progress' at the cost of nature; and opposed to this, the ecosophic quest: that of "ecologically wise action and ecological wisdom"<sup>2</sup> which seeks to regain harmony and egalitarian relationships between man and man, man and woman, and humankind and nature. The questers of Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*, Captain Ahab and Ishmael, in their opposite roles (one heading towards disaster and the other

towards survival) can be seen to represent the two kinds of quests described.

Ahab is the tragic hero-quester. He is capable of greatness but is flawed by *hubris* and his dark desire for vengeance against the whale which has dismembered him, Moby Dick. Ishmael, the narrator of the novel, turns away from Ahab's mad, inverted quest. His progressive insights, his bonding with his dark partner, and his acknowledgement of the whale as a fellow being, contribute to his 'democratic' attitude and to his survival. It is through Ishmael's eyes that we see Melville's "ecological, cosmic democracy".<sup>3</sup>

If we are to change our direction from its present course, which seems to be one directed towards disaster, we need to learn from the past, but with a reminder of how the past has been transmitted to us. We need to actively strive towards reshaping our future, so that we perpetuate archetypes that are nature-oriented. We need to consciously re-verse and re-request a shaping of our present and our future, bearing in mind Melville's reminder of the "obstinate survival of old beliefs".<sup>4</sup> Change will occur only with a change of our thinking patterns:

The borders of our minds are ever shifting  
And many minds can flow into one another...  
And create or reveal a single mind, a single energy.  
(W.B.Yeats)

- <sup>1</sup> Joseph Meeker, *The Comedy of Survival*, Scribner's Sons, New York, 1974, p.7.
- <sup>2</sup> Alan Drengson, 'What is Ecosophy?', *The Trumpeter: Journal of Ecosophy*, 7:1, 1990, p.1.
- <sup>3</sup> Milton R. Stern, *Discussions of Moby-Dick*, D.C.Heath, New York, 1960, p.118.
- <sup>4</sup> Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick or, The Whale*, Penguin, London, 1972, p.415.



## 1. Introduction

In the present century, when man is actively destroying countless living forms, after wiping out so many societies whose wealth and diversity, had, from time immemorial, constituted the better part of his inheritance, it has probably never been more necessary to proclaim, as do the myths, that humanism does not begin with oneself, but puts the world before life, life before man, and respect for other before self-interest: and that no species, not even our own, can take the fact of having been on this earth for one or two million years - since, in any case, man's stay here will one day come to an end - as an excuse for appropriating the world as if it were a thing and behaving on it with neither decency nor discretion.

(Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Origin of Table Manners*)<sup>1</sup>

The quest is a major theme of mythology and literature. It is associated with the idea of progress: a going forward, a journey towards an ideal.<sup>2</sup> Levi-Strauss, in the above quotation, pinpoints the dilemma when human self interest, rather than the search for the ecological ideal, is dominant. How does one put "the world before life, life before man, and respect for other before self interest", particularly in a world in which progress has come to mean power at any cost, rather than the progress associated with the gaining of maturity and ecological wisdom?

Captain Ahab, the protagonist of Melville's *Moby-Dick*, is an example whose actions show the disastrous effects of narcissistic self-interest. His "mad", inverted quest jeopardises the metaphorical ship-world of the *Pequod* and her crew. Ahab, with his overwhelming pride and arrogance, puts his desire for revenge before all.

Through progressive insights, the narrator of the novel, Ishmael, presents an opposing point of view which shows *homo sapiens* to be part of a world in which everything is connected to everything else, with no species having inherent precedence over any other. Ishmael survives because, unlike Ahab, he learns humility and recognises that he is part of a great interconnected whole - of Melville's "ecological, cosmic democracy",<sup>3</sup> as Milton Stern describes it.

*Moby-Dick* is just one literary example of a quest through which insight can be gained into "our ecological crisis" and its roots. The crisis of today that Levi-Strauss, Joseph Campbell, Rachel Carson, Riane Eisler, Lynn White Jnr., other scientists, anthropologists, environmentalists and ecologists, as well as social and religious leaders, speak about, is in many ways paralleled in stories related to prehistoric and prediluvian worlds: the Iron Age; the wastelands of enchanted Britain; and the dark seaworld of Melville's creation.

Myths not only serve to explain why the world is as it is (in terms of the intentions and actions of supernatural beings) but also serve to establish a rationale for social customs and observances - sanctions for the rules by which people conduct their lives. Myths "stick together to form a mythology", a large interconnected body of narrative about which a society is concerned. As part of this "sticking together" process myths take root in a specific culture and it

is one of their functions to tell that culture what it is and how it came to be. Myths become part of a system of hereditary stories which were once believed to be true<sup>4</sup> and get thought in us without us knowing<sup>5</sup>:

Myth is not chosen after intellectual deliberation because it can be adapted to action; it is an instinctive choice, accepted with all one's being, and it is compounded more of faith than of reasoning. Myth is one of the elements of consciousness; in the collective consciousness it exists as a reality, which finds an echo in the individual consciousness as language sometimes does ... Without myth action becomes impossible.<sup>6</sup>

Literature incorporates and expands on myth and makes an important contribution to the record of human existence. Joseph Meeker writes, "Intentionally, or accidentally, literature has been a major source used to perpetuate our past".<sup>7</sup>

As knowledge and cultures change so do the myths, the gods, and the stories. Sometimes they are adapted for political and social reasons, to serve the ends of the powerful or the ambitious. There is also an interplay with scientific and technological developments. Literature frequently anticipates science, and science is beginning to cross-fertilise with myth. Levi-Strauss states:

... some things we have lost, and we should perhaps try to regain them, because I am not sure that in the kind of world in which we are living and with the kind of scientific thinking we are bound to follow, we can regain these things exactly as if they have never been lost; but we can try to become aware of their existence and their importance ... modern science is not at all moving away from these lost things ... more and more it is attempting to integrate them into the field of scientific explanation ... the real separation

occurred in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. At that time, with Bacon, Descartes, Newton, and the others, it was necessary for science to build itself up against the generation of old mythical and mystical thought, and it was thought that science could only exist by turning its back on the world of the senses, the world we see, smell, taste, and perceive; the sensory was a delusive world, whereas the real world ... could only be grasped by the intellect and ... was entirely at odds with the false testimony of the senses.<sup>8</sup>

In spite of the developing integration of the world of the senses into scientific explanation, the cross fertilisation of myth with science, and the renewed recognition of human interconnectedness in a living world - an *anima mundi* - incorporation into scientific explanation has remained peripheral. Mainstream science still rejects mythical and 'primitive' nature-oriented beliefs, and perpetuates the rift between humans and nature. The quest for 'progress' at nature's expense continues even though there is a growing awareness of a tragedy in process. Technological and scientific domination, aimed towards even greater human power, and the fulfilment of more and more consumer needs, has increased a sense of alienation from nature.

Orthodox religion, as well as science, has turned its back on the senses and mythical and mystical thought. Fear of "syncretism"<sup>9</sup>: the bringing of cultural and pagan beliefs into the Christian faith, has embedded a fear of woman and nature; and resistance to the return of women to positions of authority in the Church.<sup>10</sup>

Long before the break away from mythological and mystical

thought in the Enlightenment, there was historical change which brought about a devaluing of women and nature, and was then reflected in the myths. Around 4,500 B.C. the nature-female-goddess mythology began to be taken over by the hunter-warrior-god mythology. This occurred as hunter-warriors invaded peaceful, agricultural societies. They moved in waves and spread throughout Europe, North Africa and India, bringing with them their warrior gods.<sup>11</sup>

Our "environmental crisis" is often held to have its roots in early patriarchal myths, the *Genesis* myth,<sup>12</sup> and a compounding mythology of a god-given supremacy of man over woman and nature. One of its mythological roots rests with Prometheus, the Titan who formed man from clay and then stole fire from Zeus in order to give man the power to dominate all other animals and subdue them. Prometheus, like Ahab, was guilty of the archetypal flaw of *hubris*.

The quest for domination has created hierarchies, and a separation between man and man, man and nature, and man and woman. The patriarchal drive towards a materialistic, scientific and technological paradise is one in which nature is seen as an abundant, infinite resource and humans appropriate the world "as if it were a thing ... behaving on it with neither decency nor discretion".<sup>13</sup>

An alternative to the dominant, patriarchal quest is one of feminised, caring ideals which incorporate the full cycle of nature:

birth, death and renewal. To use Arne Naess's word, it is an "ecosophic" quest: *eco* meaning household, *sophic*, related to the Goddess of wisdom, Sophia, - wisdom in our household place.<sup>14</sup> The ecosophic quester seeks to progress towards the maturity of an egalitarian, fulfilled identity, which extends to relationships which recognise the kinship of human and non-human nature within the cosmos.

In ecosophy there is a kind of primitivism which, rather than seeking progress by the domination and use of nature, seeks harmony with nature,<sup>15</sup> but with it goes a realisation that it is no longer possible to live as we did in the prepatriarchal, distant past. Although a solution to our ecological crisis, via science and technology, may not seem possible, there could be an imaginative redirection of scientific and technological expertise to work in harmony with nature. However, before this can happen there has to first be a change in thinking - the start of ecosophy.

Alan Drengson, the editor of *The Trumpeter: Journal of Ecosophy*, describes the meaning of ecosophy for humans as:

ecological wisdom, which is not discursive knowing, but a state of harmonious relationships with Nature. The earth has wisdom and each species has a wisdom peculiar to it, which is exemplified in flourishing, beyond bare survival. "Flourish" means an optimal state of self-fulfilment and self-realisation. In human beings this requires a form of self knowledge peculiar to language using, self reflexively aware beings. What constitutes self and how far self identification extends is part of the human enquiry relevant to realising ecosophy.<sup>16</sup>

The desire for self-knowledge is, as Drengson states, part of human enquiry. The concept of what constitutes self, and a fulfilled human being, is a changing concept related to our understanding of the cosmos. However, our ideas of the cosmos and our relationship with nature are, today, confused. Many of our creation myths have become out of date or extinct. As the etymology of the word myth (utterance) implies, stories need to be recreated and re-uttered. The speaking, writing, or acting out of a creation myth is more than a rehearsal, "it is the occasion for a re-creation of the essential relations between man and the world".<sup>17</sup>

The myths and archetypes which have helped to shape us and our ways of thinking, are part of our collective unconscious and are not totally known.<sup>18</sup> We sometimes catch glimpses of them in our dreams, when we do not consciously strive to remember, or when we are most tired or relaxed, and, as writers often relate, through epiphanic moments: unexpected enlightened insights. The stories of today become part of the past and the collective unconscious. With the possibility that we are shaped by our mythological and historical past comes a growing awareness that it is necessary to create new cosmic stories, and to consciously work towards reshaping our present and our future. A recognition of the past can help to bring about the understanding that we need to develop healing ways.

The myths that children now observe are the profit-oriented modern myths expounded by the electronic media. Times of story telling are limited and overwhelmingly related to a Christian

mythical world. Creation myths, the multiple tales of mysterious world beginnings, and how we, in Australia, have become part of an ancient Aboriginal world, are not every Australian child's precious inheritance. The barren nature of children's mythology is reflected in the barren and destructive nature of adult existence.

Many adults are like Ishmael at the start of *Moby-Dick*: wanderers and 'orphans', often isolated, alienated - even suicidal - and needing an exodus from city worlds, or from a world likely to be blown apart not by the breath of a god, but from the blast of our own mechanical devices.

In any story much can be learnt by the exclusions in the story telling, as well as the inclusions. Women, for instance, are not usually represented as questers. Robert Johnson believes that women do not have the same needs to quest that men have, and that their wisdom is inherent. In his book *He: Understanding Masculine Psychology*, Johnson describes Sophia as "the feminine half of God. The Shekinah in Jewish mysticism". He says: "It comes as a shock to a man to discover that wisdom is feminine, but all mythologies have portrayed it so".<sup>19</sup> Wisdom may be an inherent feminine quality, however it is possible that women have not generally been portrayed as questers, in *search* of wisdom, because it has been helpful for proponents of patriarchy to keep women domesticated and enclosed.

Nature, in story telling, is usually personified as female, with a changing, mysterious character, sometimes appearing as an aid to



man on his journey, sometimes as an obstacle - to be overcome by the hero. In metaphoric wastelands nature no longer is seen to exist. The eternal struggle against the winter force of darkness is seemingly lost. It is in comedy, rather than tragedy, that there is the possibility of a seasonal rebirth. In literature of more recent times the rebirth part of the cycle becomes uncertain or ambiguous - a reflection of a doubtful future, as it is in *Moby-Dick*. Melville shows aspects of nature symbolised in the whale, Christlike, protean, suffering and wounded. He also shows nature's complexities, and her capability of striking back. In the indefinite "Albino," bisexual whale is not only a mysterious facelessness, but also an ambiguity, encompassing good and evil: "In *Moby-Dick* Melville may have followed nature by supplying in the white whale a 'cunning alphabet' for each of us to read our own lesson".<sup>20</sup>

Melville weaves his story around a journey which James E. Miller describes as "life on a whaler on a sea of metaphysics".<sup>21</sup> It starts as a biblical archetype with an exodus and ends with a paradise regained; but it is an archetypal journey which takes many twists, turns and reversals. The symbolic regaining of paradise is not one of reunion and joy but one of dense ambiguities and of unanswered questions; questions which reflect the problems Melville perceived of his time.

Archetypal themes, images and characters are woven into Melville's "key to all mythologies":<sup>22</sup> the journey underground, paradise to Hades, the Promethean rebel-hero, and the scapegoat.<sup>23</sup>

Women and female archetypes are not part of a whaling hunt,

but there is a feminine presence which is mysterious and covert. Before the ship's departure Aunt Charity contributes bibles and advice for the succour of the crew's spirits. Religious advice and charity are shown as inadequate for the men's needs, particularly when Ahab leads his crew in demonic behaviour and rituals. Ahab's quest is a journey into darkness and a vindictive quest to conquer the white whale, but it is also a search for the lost or invisible father, and for the mother he never really knew.<sup>24</sup> Surrogate motherhood is personified in the moods of the sea. She is the Great Mother in her creative and devouring aspects. The saviour who rescues Ishmael from the devouring sea is the ship *Rachel*, also a surrogate mother, who finds just another "orphan" in her search for the missing children.

The ecosophic quest is exemplified in Ishmael, the sole survivor of the whaling ship. His attempts to list, catalogue, and to know the whale, are part of an unfinished story in which Ishmael learns to "own" (acknowledge) the whale and its mystery. In doing so he begins to turn away from the quest to know and to destroy Moby Dick. Ishmael accepts the darkness, and his shadow feminine self, in his partnership with Queequeg, the pagan harpooner. In Ishmael's name ("God hears") are invested multiple Biblical meanings - and ironies, as the presence of God is in doubt - but there are also associations with Ishmael's biblical namesake, the father of a new nation, which invest the 'Epilogue' with some hope.<sup>25</sup>

Throughout Ishmael's narration in the novel we are made aware of a cosmic, intricate web: a series of life-lines, heartstrings,

and umbilical cords, both metaphoric and real, in which humanity and all of nature are interconnected and are one. When the lines become ensnared or disconnected madness or mayhem is the result (as in the "accident of whaling" which causes injured, ensnared whales to wound and murder each other; the severing of the life-line of the little black cabin boy, Pip, when he is overboard; and the final snarl in a line, which for Ahab becomes a noose).

What Joseph Meeker describes as the "profound insight at the heart of the science of ecology" is also Melville's: "that nature is indivisible and therefore it can not be comprehended by studying only its isolated fragments"; and that "[h]umans are part of every system they are capable of observing".<sup>26</sup> The first ecological law of interconnectedness is part of Melville's cosmic understanding.

Ishmael's humane traits of insight, wisdom and love, together with self mockery and humility (which is the opposite of Ahab's *hubris*), makes Ishmael's journey a kind of anti-heroic, comic quest, through which he gains experience and survives to tell the tale. The story he tells is one of archetypal tragedy, but with elements of romance, comedy, irony and parody, the classic ingredients from which archetypes are formed. According to Northrop Frye the cause of a happy ending in comedy is usually brought about by some act of humility. When there is tragedy it is usually as the result of the violation of a moral law, whether human or divine.<sup>27</sup>

As our own world also becomes tragic and closer to a wasteland, our future becomes more uncertain. More and more species become

extinct, including the "great whales" spoken of in *Genesis*. Rachel Carson wrote in 1962, in the *Silent Spring*:

As man proceeds towards his goal of the conquest of Nature he has written a depressing record of destitution not only against the earth he inhabits but life that shares it with him.<sup>28</sup>

Men have shown by their acts that indeed they are supreme, but only in their power to destroy. Through man's greed and his desire to dominate, to know all, to conquer all, to penetrate pristine places and the remaining wilderness; mountains, land, and forests have been despoiled and species have been deprived of their habitats. Even the most inventive human beings have not been able to reproduce the great subtlety, diversity and interconnectedness of nature as we have known it. Within this patriarchal, inverted and destructive quest for power is the mechanical and reductionist belief that everything is knowable and that the sum of the parts, when examined and dissected, will lead to knowledge of the whole.

Nothing is sacred as man (and sometimes woman) interferes with all life, often with cruelty. Man's view of himself as a supreme re-creator, able to put back in his own image that which has been destroyed, is a narcissistic view, related to *hubris*.

In Collard and Collucci's *The Rape of the Wild*, Freud is quoted as saying:

Today man has come very close to the attainment of his ideal, he has almost become God himself ... Man has, as it were, become a kind of prosthetic God. When he puts on all

his auxiliary organs he is truly magnificent. Future ages will bring with them new and probably unimaginably great advances ... and will increase man's likeness to God still more.<sup>29</sup>

Freud's idea of man as a "prosthetic God" is another extension of the 'Genesis' myth which is often interpreted to mean a god given right to "dominate" and subdue", resulting frequently in the use and abuse of nature - and of women. Freud, and Jung even more so, have however, contributed much to reconnect us with mythology: through their understanding of levels of consciousness, their interpretation of myths and dreams, and their emphasis placed upon the importance of the metaphor and the symbol in the understanding of culture. The idea of a fulfilled, mature, human being has become one psychologically associated with integrated spiritual, masculine and feminine traits; and the harmonious connection of human consciousness to the unconscious, and to the collective unconscious, all of which are believed to affect the way we interpret knowledge and the world around us <sup>30</sup>:

If we call something 'rational' or 'meaningful' in our conscious mind, and accept it as a satisfactory 'explanation' of things, it is probably due to the fact that our conscious explanation is in harmony with some preconscious constellation of contents in our unconscious.<sup>31</sup>

Jung believes that archetypal statements are based upon instinctive preconditions that have nothing to do with reason; they are neither rationally grounded nor can they be banished by rational arguments:

They have always been part of the world scene -

numinosity of archetypal processes. Practical consideration of these processes is the essence of religion, in so far as religion can be approached from a psychological point of view.<sup>32</sup>

Consideration of the processes of levels of consciousness and their representations are, as Jung states, part of the essence of religion from a psychological point of view, but somehow our representations have become distorted or trapped in conservative orthodoxy. We need to shape our present and our future by re-mything through stories which are alternatives to those which have dominated our patriarchal past. Our archetypes may reach back to the times of nature religions and human - nature partnerships, but they have become, in many instances, archetypes created by power-seeking men who have reinforced myths of the violent, warrior, quester hero as ideal. We need to re-vision alternatives to the myths which perpetuate the quest for domination and the conquest of nature. Melville contributes to this revisioning. In his novel of an ecological, cosmic, democratic world, man in his inverted quest is doomed, but man acknowledging or "owning" nature and, symbolically, the feminine, survives.

---

<sup>1</sup> Claude Levi- Strauss, *The Origin of Table Manners: Introduction to a Science of Mythology*, Harper & Row, New York, 1979, p. 508. (Unless otherwise stated subsequent references will refer to this, 1979, publication).

<sup>2</sup> *Dictionary of the English Language*, Collins, Sydney, 1986. Definitions of "progress" include: 1. Movement forwards especially towards a place or objective. 2. Satisfactory development, growth or advance. 3. Advance towards completion.

<sup>3</sup> Milton R. Stern, *The Fine Hammered Steel of Herman Melville*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana (U. S. A.), 1960. p. 78.

<sup>4</sup> M.H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, Rinehart & Winston, New York, 1981. p. 111.

- <sup>5</sup> Claude Levi-Strauss, *Myth and Meaning*, Schocken, New York, 1979.
- <sup>6</sup> Pierre Grimal (ed.), *Larousse World Myths*, Gallery Books, New York, 1965, p.13.
- <sup>7</sup> Joseph Meeker, *The Comedy of Survival*, Scribner's Sons, New York, 1974, p. 7.
- <sup>8</sup> Levi-Strauss, 1979, *op. cit.*, pp. 5, 6.
- <sup>9</sup> Mark Brolly (the Age [Melbourne], 9th February, 1991), reported on the of The World Council of Churches Assembly in which debate showed the tumult going on in the Church. Professor Chung Hyun-Kyung, a female professor from Korea, attracted criticism from orthodox Council members for "syncretism". She was reported as saying (in what is close to an echo of the Levi-Strauss quotation at the start of the Introduction to this thesis) that human survival now depended on people putting all life, rather than themselves at the centre of creation; and that traditional Christian theology and Western thinking put the human being, especially men, at the centre of the created world, with power to control and dominate creation. Modern science and models for development were based on this assumption - a kind of thinking that was alien to many Asian people and the indigenous people of the world. They believed that the earth was the source of life and that nature was "sacred, purposeful, and full of meaning".
- <sup>10</sup> The World Council of Churches Assembly, A.B.C., *Encounter*, 17th February, 1991. Female theologians were outspoken as they gave support to their sisters in Australia, and elsewhere, who are still excluded from entry to the Church as ordained ministers.
- <sup>11</sup> Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth*, Doubleday, New York, 1988, pp. 167-170 (Unless otherwise stated subsequent references will refer to this, 1988, publication); Charlene Spretnak, *The Spiritual Dimensions of Green Politics*, Bear & Co., New Mexico, 1986, pp.31-36; Riane Eisler, *The Chalice and the Blade*, Harper & Row, San Francisco, 1987, p.73. This is expanded in chapter 4.
- <sup>12</sup> Lynn White Jr., 'The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis', *Science*: 155, 1967, pp. 1203-7.
- <sup>13</sup> Levi-Strauss, 1978, *op. cit.*, p. 508.
- <sup>14</sup> Alan R. Drengson, 'What is Ecosophy', *The Trumpeter: Journal of Ecosophy*, 90:7, p. 1
- <sup>15</sup> Abrams, *op. cit.*, pp. 146,7. "Primitivism and Progress. A primitivist is someone who prefers what is 'natural' (in the sense of what exists prior to and independently of man's reasoning and contrivance) to what is 'artificial' ( in the sense of what man achieves by thought, laws and conventions, and the complex arrangement of a civilised society)". "Primitivism is as old as man's recorded thought, and is reflected in the myths of a golden age and a lost Garden of Eden."
- <sup>16</sup> Drengson, *op.cit.*, pp. 1, 2.
- <sup>17</sup> David Maclagan, *Creation Myths: Man's Introduction to the World*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1977, p. 10. See also Brian Swimme, 'The Cosmic Creation Story', in Griffen, Ray (ed.), *Postmodern Proposals*, State University of New York Press, New York, 1990, pp. 47-56.

- <sup>18</sup> C. J. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, Fontana, London, 1983, pp. 235, 411, 419, 420.
- <sup>19</sup> Robert A. Johnson, *He: Understanding Masculine Psychology*, Harper & Row, New York, 1989, p. 50. This is discussed more fully in chapter 4.
- <sup>20</sup> Milton R. Stern, *Discussions of Moby-Dick*, D.C. Heath & Co. Boston, 1960, p. 78.
- <sup>21</sup> James E. Miller, *Quests Surd and Absurd: Essays in American Literature* University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1967, p. 163.
- <sup>22</sup> Harold Beaver, Introduction to Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick or, The Whale*, Penguin, London, 1972, p. 21. All references in the text are to this edition.
- <sup>23</sup> Abrams, *op. cit.*, p. 111.
- <sup>24</sup> Ishmael also was motherless, he was brought up by his stepmother.
- <sup>25</sup> There is ambiguity in the two sections of *Genesis* relating to Ishmael: *Genesis* 16:12, "Ishmael will be a wild man; his hand will be against any man and every man's hand against him", and *Genesis* 21:1, "... for I will make of him a great nation".
- <sup>26</sup> Meeker, *op. cit.* p. 19.
- <sup>27</sup> Northrop Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism*, Princeton University Press, Princeton (U.S.A.), 1971, p. 9.
- <sup>28</sup> Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, (Eng.), 1973, p. 87.
- <sup>29</sup> Andree Collard and Joyce Contrucci, *Rape of the Wild: Man's Violence Against Animals and the Earth*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington & Indianapolis, 1989, p. 66.
- <sup>30</sup> C. J. Jung, *Man and His Symbols*, Picador/Pan, London, 1978; Emma Jung, *Animus and Anima*, Spring Publications, Texas, 1957; Johnson, *op. cit.*
- <sup>31</sup> Jolande Jacobi, cited in C. J. Jung, 1978, *op. cit.*, p. 383.
- <sup>32</sup> C. J. Jung, 1978, *op. cit.*, p. 386.



## 2. Melville's "Ecological, Cosmic Democracy"

Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* is generally recognised as one of the world's greatest novels, not so much for the enthralling hunt of the great white whale as for its metaphysical perceptions. D. H. Lawrence, irritated by what he called "the piousness of the man" but inspired by the writer, calls it "a great book" and goes on to say: "in his sheer apprehension of the world, then he is wonderful, his book commands a stillness of the soul, an awe".<sup>1</sup>

*Moby-Dick* is, on the surface, an adventure story of the hunt for a great whale. Beyond this it is a metaphysical journey into the meaning, or non-meaning of life, the existence or non-existence of God, and the place of human beings in nature. The *John Bull* review of *The Whale, (Moby-Dick)*, described it as: "... not a mere tale of adventures, but a whole philosophy of life".<sup>2</sup> Melville's philosophy expresses doubt concerning the ability of man to discover what he eternally seeks. Michael Gilmore states:

*Moby-Dick* is a book about man's attempt to understand and interpret his world ... It addresses the problem of knowing in a context that is metaphysical rather than social or moral ... Melville does not have confidence in man's power to fathom the secrets of the universe. On the contrary, he challenges the notion that the meaning of existence can be discovered by man.<sup>3</sup>

The search to know "the meaning of existence" is the major theme of *Moby-Dick*. Ahab is the archetypal tragic hero-quester and

the captain of the doomed whaling ship, the *Pequod*. He is capable of grandeur but becomes demonic as he exerts his will on the crew and draws them into his inverted quest, the archetypal demon-dragon hunt for the white whale, Moby Dick. There is in Ahab's hunt the inevitable discovery of the heart of darkness: the dark side of the hunter who seeks to know and to destroy that which is beyond him in a compulsion to "strike through the mask" of the "ungraspable phantom of life"(p. 701).

Influenced particularly by his readings of Carlyle, Hawthorne (to whom he dedicated *Moby-Dick*) and Shakespeare's plays of the tragic kings, Macbeth and Lear, Melville expanded the tragic, metaphysical, and dark aspects of the novel:

It was that 'power of blackness' which so fixed and fascinated Melville; out of those epic insights and that dark hereditary strain - a bifocal vision that is both Ishmael's and Ahab's - were born the complex splendours of *Moby-Dick* (p. 24).<sup>4</sup>

Melville wove not only literary allusions into *Moby-Dick* but also multiple mythical and biblical characters into the character of Ahab, including Narcissus, Osiris, Prometheus, Lucifer, Adam, Samson, Job, Jonah and Noah. The mythologies and narratives of all time and place seem to be merged in Ahab and all the components of mythic tragedy are woven around him; the Passion is included, with Ahab, like the whale he hunts, at times a prototype of Christ.<sup>5</sup>

*Moby-Dick* developed into a drama of mythical, paradoxical and intertextual density, one involving both comedy and tragedy. Ironical humour, contradictory symbolism, puns and *double entendres*, as well as the exodus rebirth theme, are devices used by Melville which have links that are closer to literary comedy (and Ishmael) than tragedy (and Ahab). Perhaps he used them for sheer enjoyment but most likely as a means of survival through subterfuge. Without such devices Melville's eroticism, his ideas of democracy, and his questioning of the God still powerful in his time, made him and his "wicked book" <sup>6</sup> vulnerable to the mores of his society.

Through the two representatives of opposing thought and action, Ahab and Ishmael, Melville expressed the questions which fascinated and troubled him, and caused him to change his novel from what was conceived as a "romantic comedy" to a "hellbent voyage through all time and space".<sup>7</sup> The dual aspects of nature, both creative and destructive, dark and light, are always present in Melville's sea-world. The dark, destructive, tragic aspect of nature and all its mysteries, absorbs, challenges, and infuriates Ahab and draws him into the vortex of his own making. Because of progressive insights Ishmael turns away from tragedy. Although aware of the darkness he becomes bonded with life.

Melville demonstrated his unease with God but showed wonder in his observations of nature. He wove a vital, intricate web of interconnectedness: between men of diverse faith, colour and origins, man and beast and all of nature, in his "ecological, cosmic democracy". The pagan sailors save their 'superior' crewmen and are shown to be equal to any man, black or white, or to the challenges of life and death. The little black cabin boy, Pip, is loving and allseeing (like Lear's fool) and mad when he becomes physically disconnected, his life-line severed. Pip's connections remain with the "ancient tongues" that he speaks "in the strange sweetness of his lunacy" (p.591). Even the alienated "isolato", Captain Ahab, is vitally - and fatally - connected: he is bound by cords, visible and invisible, to the whale, Pip and the crew. The interconnectedness of *Moby-Dick* shows the idea of man's supremacy to be just another myth related to the *Genesis* myth, the myths of Narcissus, Prometheus, and all the other myths interwoven in the novel which have as their themes archetypal delusion and self love (p. 95).<sup>8</sup>

Because of his 'marriage' ties with the 'savage' harpooner, Queequeg, Ishmael loses his grimness of the soul and feelings of aggression towards humanity, nature and the whale. He acknowledges the whale and gives up the quest to know and

catalogue everything pertaining to its life and mythology: "Unless you own the whale, you are but a provincial and a sentimentalist in Truth" (p. 591).

Melville wrote *Moby-Dick* in the mid nineteenth century, when America was experiencing dramatic, and for some, disturbing, technical 'progress'. "[T]he mighty Leviathan of the modern railway"(p. 665) that he writes about is associated with the technocratic and mechanical thrust of expansionism. It became a metaphor for both the whale and "mechanical" Ahab with his "heart of wrought steel" (p. 677). Rapid change brought conflicts, of thought as well as action. Darwin had not yet written his *Origin of the Species* but his *Voyage of a Naturalist* was in the library of the man-of-war on which he travelled home from the Pacific. It is included in the 'Extracts', at the beginning of *Moby-Dick*. Melville was most likely aware of the new theories of evolution which were about to strand previous believers in cosmic uncertainties.

Many of the early American colonisers planned to reform the land and to create their 'New Eden' where nature was abundant and available. The aboriginal sense of the sacred relationship between human and non-human life was not part of their religion. Christian, and specifically Calvinistic beliefs, were part of the inheritance that travelled with them. As immigration expanded attitudes became more exploitative than reformist and there was domination of 'unfeeling,' 'mechanical' nature rather than stewardship.

The view of nature as unfeeling and mechanical, existing for man's use and convenience, was seen differently by the Romantic writers. Melville, inspired by Hawthorne, shared their rejection of the mechanistic view of nature but went further, delving into the deeper, darker mysteries and complexities of man, and of nature in her dual aspects of creation and destruction (reflecting the Hindu myth of Kali). Captain Ahab and his monomaniacal quest represent man's destructive power:

The concentrated power of Ahab and his immense practical capacity, are at the service of a purpose which is entirely mad. Melville saw this early, that the technical resources being released by modern science, like the economic power made available to modern capitalism, did not necessarily represent the triumph of human reason: just as often, the effect was to offer improved means, for the gratification of irrational ends.<sup>9</sup>

Nature was under the assault of new technologies and weapons. The aboriginal people and the abundant wild life of America including the great buffalos on land and the great whales at sea, were under seige from the hunters. Melville made his ironic comment on the decimation of the Indians. He named the *Pequod* after an extinct race. The ship's exodus from the city is on Christmas day. It is a gloomy day, full of forebodings, one anticipating tragedy, not one celebrating a birth. As in Greek tragedy we are given many indications, particularly in the chapter 'Loomings', of a fateful, yet ambiguous, ending to the journey: "... tis an ill voyage! ill continued ..." (p. 617).

The years Melville spent at sea as a harpooner gave him experience and practical knowledge of whales, and the whaling industry. This provided for him the background which enabled him to blend factual information and the practicalities of a sailor's existence, with a questioning of whaling mythology "befitting a fundamental activity of man in his struggle to subdue nature ..." <sup>10</sup> The time in which he wrote *Moby-Dick* was the peak period of the "great American whalers". The sperm whale was then their target; between 1835 and 1846, six hundred ships were hunting them.<sup>11</sup> The co-operative efforts of whales to defend themselves is recorded by Melville:

... owing to the unwearied activity with which of late they have been hunted over all four oceans, the Sperm Whales, instead of almost invariably sailing in small detached companies, as in former times, are now frequently met in extensive herds, sometimes embracing so great a multitude, that it would almost seem as if numerous nations of them had sworn solemn league and covenant for mutual assistance and protection. To this aggregation of the Sperm Whale into such immense caravans, may be imputed the circumstance that even in the best cruising grounds, you may now sometimes sail for weeks and months together, without being greeted by a single spout; and then be suddenly saluted by what sometimes seems thousands and thousands (p. 490).

Melville portrays an aboriginal, or a primitive view of nature under attack by a hunter who in his quest dominates, subdues and trivialises the life, the body and the spirit of the whale. Although Melville plays with his reader, through his black humour, disguised meanings and puns, with the whale Melville is serious. When a

slaughtered whale's 'member' becomes part of the crew's feasting and clothing it is not the whale that is shown to be reduced and ridiculous but man and his institutions. As, for example, when the crewman-meat mincer takes the pelt of the "grandissimus" and from it makes himself a tunic: "Arrayed in decent black; occupying a conspicuous pulpit; ... what a candidate for an archbishoprick, what a lad for a Pope were this mincer" (p. 531). The 'supremacy of man' is continually undercut as Melville shows the physical and metaphoric littleness and vulnerability of man, contrasted with the magnificence and power of nature and the whale.

In a most moving and eloquent chapter, 'The Grand Armada', Melville uses his poetic prowess, as well as his sailor's knowledge, to describe the tragedies of whaling and the "decline of a great species, hunted all over the four oceans" (p. 490). The snarling of vital lines, links in a great cosmic interconnectedness, indicate a tragedy in process. The whalers chase a herd of whales whose frantic commotion becomes "gallied"<sup>12</sup> - stilled with fright (p. 493). The harpooners and their crews move to the heart of the great herd where they see cubs - infants that seemed hardly a day old, which "might have measured some fourteen feet in length, and some six feet in girth" (p. 497) attached by the long coils of the umbilical cord - by which they sometimes become entrapped. "Some of the subtlest secrets of the seas seemed divulged in this enchanted pond. [The sailors] saw young Leviathan amours in the deep" (p. 498). The men are captivated as they reach out to fondle the playful whales. As they



lie entranced they see:

... a whale wounded, carrying with him half the harpoon line; and in the extraordinary agony of the wound, was now dashing among the revolving circles ... carrying dismay wherever he went ... this whale had become entangled in the harpoon-line that he towed; he had also run away with the cutting spade in him; and while the free end of the rope attached to that weapon, had permanently caught in the coils of the harpoon-line around his tail, the cutting spade itself had worked loose from his flesh. So that tormented to madness, he was now churning through the water, violently flailing with his flexible tail, and tossing the keen spade about him, wounding and murdering his own comrades (p. 499).

In this "accident of whaling" Melville shows an example of the destructiveness of man, and the compounding effect of his violent, and often thoughtless, acts. When the great web of interconnectedness becomes broken, snarled or entangled, madness, mayhem, and death is the result. Before the horror of the "accident" whales had come "snuffling around" the whalers, "like household dogs" and the scene had been one of fearless harmony, fertility and wonder:

... far beneath this wondrous world upon the surface, another and still stranger world met our eyes as we gazed over the side. For, suspended in those watery vaults, floated the forms of the nursing mothers of the whales, and those that by their enormous girth seemed shortly to become mothers. The lake, as I have hinted, was to a considerable depth exceedingly transparent; and as human infants while suckling will calmly and fixedly gaze away from the breast, as if leading two different lives at the time; and while yet drawing mortal nourishment, be still spiritually feasting upon some earthly reminiscence; - even so did the young of these whales seem looking uptowards us, but not at us, as if we were but a bit of Gulf-weed in their new-born sight

(p. 497).

In other incidents we are made to feel the great suffering of the whales, suffering inflicted in ignorance and in cruelty: when a lance is slowly turned, deliberately driven into an ulcerous growth of a blind old whale as he is being killed; and into another for "the innermost life of the fish" until its heart bursts (p. 393). In the chapter, 'The Dying Whale', four whales are slaughtered and: "All nature dies in the lovely sunset in which sea, sky, sun and whale stilly died together" (p. 606).

In scene after scene Melville shows the wounding and the tragic waste of a godlike, but defensive, creature: "Moby Dick seeks thee not" (p. 680). Even in death the whale is not demeaned but is shown as a continuing presence, a haunting ghost (pp. 414-5). The malevolence of the whale is shown to be a reflection not only of Ahab's maddened mind but of his fear: of the unknown mysterious monster, of the wild, the undomesticated, and the shadow of what is sexually suppressed in himself. In the all male journey of the *Pequod* and her crew, there are sexual undertones in homosexual relationships which can be viewed, symbolically, as an expression of wholeness or interconnectedness, but in Ahab's monomania there is inversion and no symbolism of renewal.

According to Martin Pops, in *The Melville Archetype*,<sup>13</sup> Melville's archetypal quester seeks to find his identity in the quest

for the sacred: for the realisation of the soul, and for sexual fulfilment. Jung describes sexual fulfilment as an important expression of psychic wholeness.<sup>14</sup> Ishmael's narration, and relationship with Queequeg, contrasts with Ahab's and shows sexual ease, and for the whale a wonder rather than a fear. Ishmael is "impelled by considerations touching on the great dignity and inherent sublimity of the sperm whale". For him the whale is no common, shallow thing: "He is both ponderous and profound" (p. 482). "Dissect him how I may, then, I go skin deep, I know him not and never will" (p. 487). Through Ishmael's observations and meditations the reader is given outpourings of respect and admiration: "O man! admire and model thyself after the whale!" (p. 414).

The protean Moby Dick is the biblical Leviathan, a serpent-dragon, an evil monster, Satan and a holy, crucified god, or semi-god, the guardian of a great mystery.<sup>15</sup> Yet there is a sustained image of a great "fish" suffering, lanced by the pronged harpoons of the whalers, forever carrying the punishment for man's sins. Accused, like Eve and the serpent and perpetually hunted, the whale is inflicted with the archetypal blame for 'man's fall'. Through Ahab's eyes all evil is "humped" upon the whale:

The White Whale swam before him as the monomaniac incarnation of all those malicious agencies which some deep men feel eating in them, till they are left living on with half a heart and half a lung. That intangible malignity which has been from the beginning; to whose dominion even the modern

Christians ascribe one-half of the worlds; which the ancient Ophites of the east revered in their statue devil; -Ahab did not fall down and worship it like them; but deliriously transferring its idea to the abhorred white whale, he pitted himself, all mutilated, against it. All that most maddens and torments; all that stirs up the lees of things; all truth with malice in it; all that cracks the sinews and cakes the brain; all the subtle demonisms of life and thought; all evil, to crazy Ahab, were visibly personified, and made practically assailable in Moby Dick. He piled upon the whale's white hump the sum of all the general rage and hate felt by his whole race from Adam down; and then, as if his chest had been a mortar, he burst his hot heart's shell upon it (p. 283).

When Ahab admits the whale's grandeur, it is in association with himself; he takes on aspects of the whale he hunts as well as the *Pequod* and her past - their glory and their pain: "Bowed and humped as though [he] were Adam, staggering beneath the piled centuries since Paradise" (pp. 651, 2). Even the ship "groaned and dived, and seemed the material counterpart of her monomaniac commander's soul" (p. 553).

Ahab believes himself persecuted. Yet, self willed, he has spent forty years of continual whaling, forty years on the pitiless sea to "make war on the horrors of the deep" (p. 651). Like the Israelites, he has experienced forty years of privations, peril and storm time. Images of darkness surround him. He stays below deck for the early part of the voyage, recuperating from a dark winter and his injuries, of mind and body. His fire-branded visage, and his ivory leg, give him a demonic appearance. Ahab has been mysteriously exposed to fire, in "an elemental strife at sea" (p. 219). Twice he has been struck

by a whale, the first time by Moby Dick. The second strike came from the replacement leg, fashioned from the polished bone of a sperm whale's jaw, which lanced Ahab in the groin. There is irony in Ahab's name and a relationship with his namesake, the biblical "wicked king" who worships a false god and builds an ivory house - Ahab becomes rebuilt with ivory.

When the 'king' is sick and wounded the land too is barren. Maimed Ahab is associated with a king, infertility and wastelands. He is like the Fisher King, of the Grail Legends, whose activities are restricted to fishing because of injuries to the groin; and the mythical priest-king-god, Osiris, who sails the world in a ship and who hunts Typhon, the monster who dismembers Osiris once a year, before a season of darkness.<sup>16</sup>

Stricken in body and mind, yet in his own eyes semi-divine, Ahab becomes maddened with Promethean delusions and misuses his power as commander of the ship in his "violent rebellion against God" (p. 642). He is a disconnected, isolated man, lacking the common bonds of humanity: "... Ahab stands alone among the millions of the peopled earth, nor gods, nor men his neighbours!" (p. 663). He is disconnected from the feminine world, from his wife and child, of whom Starbuck reminds him of at the end, and from friends and companionship. It is the dark, devouring Kali Goddess: the "dark Hindoo half of nature", the devouring "infidel and queen", who "truly speaks to Ahab" (p. 606). "[T]he queenly personality lives in

[Ahab]" (p. 617) but he is out of touch with the creative and kindly aspect of the Goddess and nature and has a sense of loss:

But thou art my fiery father; my sweet mother I know not, Oh, Cruel! What hast thou done with her? There lies my puzzle; but thine is greater". Thou knowest not how came ye; hence callest thyself unbegotten; certainly knowest not thy beginning, hence callest thyself unbegun (p. 617).

Ahab turns away from the love and compassion that could have saved him: from Pip and from Starbuck, his second mate. Neither the concern shown by Starbuck nor the combined allure of Pip and the feminine, gentle air and "winsome" sky, reflected in a temporarily benign Pacific Ocean, are able to turn Ahab from his stubborn and satanic course, or from his manipulation of the crew. Only when it is too late does he see nature in her kindly aspect and realise that his life has been ill focused, a waste, and a tragedy:

Ahab leaned over from the side, and watched how his shadow in the water sank and sank to his gaze, the more and more that he strove to pierce the profundity. But the lovely aromas in that enchanted air did at last seem to dispel, for a moment, the cankerous thing in his soul. That glad, happy air, that winsome sky, did at last stroke and caress him; the stepmother world, so long cruel - forbidding - now threw her affectionate arms round his stubborn neck, and did seem to joyously sob over him, as if over one, that however wilful and erring, she could yet find it in her heart to save and to bless. From beneath his slouched hat Ahab dropped a tear into the sea; nor did all the Pacific contain such wealth as that one wee drop (p. 650).

Pip is the "suppliant", the faithful friend to Ahab. His unmitigated helplessness and destitution is the face of isolation, is

the kind which attacks the deepest fear in ourselves. When Pip falls overboard and is cast off into the ocean he is scared, literally, out of his wits. His 'umbilical' line has been deliberately cut, and there is no mother, or father for Pip. He sees: "the amoral, infinite, eternal universe so crammed with life forms that man can no longer consider himself the centre of the universe", he is but man "orphaned into another creature in the totality of existence".<sup>17</sup> Pip is the dark shadow from whom Ahab finally turns away - in another act of tragedy.

Ahab makes his final harpoon strike when Moby Dick rises, Christlike, on the third day of the chase. He becomes caught by the neck as the harpoon line which connects him to the whale runs foul. It becomes not a life-line but a halter around his neck. As the stricken whale sounds he takes a 'wedded' Ahab with him. Like Oedipus and Sampson, Ahab experiences blindness and dizziness and the inability to see his adversary. All are archetypal experiences before a fall. The fatal flaw which brings about Ahab's downfall is the archetypal flaw of tragic heroes: the flaw of *hubris*. In Ahab's last descent, "Melville posits not mechanical law but the universal vitality of Nature, embracing death as preludial to rebirth".<sup>18</sup>

As the microcosmic world Ahab commands comes to an end, the trinity of spires are the last of the ship to disappear. No symbol of God remains. In striking at the whale Ahab strikes at himself. A piece of heaven goes too, a sea-hawk caught in the ship's red flag,

between the mast and the hammer of a crewman. The ship "like Satan would not sink to hell till she had dragged a living part of heaven with her..." (p. 685).

The replacement for the 'father' is Ishmael. He is an apostle, a seer, a man of his word,<sup>19</sup> and the sole survivor of the crew left to carry on with the story. Ishmael has travelled full circle in his mental and physical journey. His departure "with November in his soul" (p. 93) and an inclination towards suicide, becomes a rebirth as he is liberated from the sea that has held narcissistic fascination for Ahab and for him:

To be Ahab is to be unable to resist the hypnotic attraction of the self with its impulse to envelop and control the universe. To be Ishmael is to be able at the last minute to resist the plunge from the masthead into the sea one has with rapt fascination been gazing at, to assert at the critical moment the difference between the self and the not-self (p. 35).

Ishmael's adventuring imperils only himself but Ahab "draws a whole world to destruction" (p. 35). During Ishmael's journey all he has is his "carpet bag", his ego,<sup>20</sup> as he starts his travels into the depths of psychological awareness, the Jonah-like journey into the belly of the whale. He is seen as the precursor of the quester in modern literature who, in spirit, "is Ishmael still, searching for a strayed, runaway, or uncreated self".<sup>21</sup>

The meeting which results in bed-cuddling with Queequeg, "a huge tattooed South Sea Islander",<sup>22</sup> is one of the most humorous



parts of the novel and one which brings about a major change in Ishmael. After bed sharing, because there was no room at the inn, the men become bonded in a 'marriage' with even a 'child' between them - Queequeg's hatchet (a pun on hatch it). The union becomes Ishmael's life support until death parts them: "no more my splintered hand and maddened heart was turned against the wolfish world. This soothing savage had redeemed it" (p. 146). Ishmael and Queequeg become literally and symbolically tied together in a multiplicity of life-lines. In the chapter 'The Monkey Rope', both men are roped together. Queequeg is suspended overboard and attached to Ishmael, who is on deck. A slip would mean death, from the sharks below, for them both. They are symbolically woven together in 'The Mat-Maker', a chapter in which they entwine threads for a mat on a "fixed warp", while Ishmael muses on fate and free will and sees their destiny in the "the Loom of Time" (p. 316).

Ishmael's major turnabout from the inverted quest occurs in the chapter 'The Tryworks'. During an hallucination Ishmael sees what seems to him an image of Ahab's hell:

[The men on watch] narrated to each other their unholy adventures their tales of terror told in words of mirth; as their uncivilised laughter forked upwards out of them, like the flames from the furnace; as to and fro, in their front, the harpooners wildly gesticulated with their huge pronged forks and dippers; as the wind howled on, and the sea leaped, and the ship groaned and dived, and yet steadfastly shot her red hell further and further into the blackness of the night ... (p. 533).

The ship's tiller, inverted during Ishmael's momentary loss of consciousness, is corrected and capsizing is prevented. Ishmael is shocked and shaken into an awareness of the danger of prolonged gazing into darkness. His experience is one that carries with it a lesson and a warning:

Look not too long in the face of the fire, Oh man! Never dream with thy back to the compass; accept the first hint of the hitching tiller; believe not the artificial fire, when its redness makes all things look ghastly. To-morrow, in the natural sun, the skies will be bright; those who glared like devils in the forking flames, the morn will show in far other, at least gentler, relief; the glorious, golden, glad, sun, the only true lamp - all others but liars! Nevertheless the sun hides not Virginia's Dismal Swamp, nor Rome's accursed Campagna, nor wide Sahara, nor all the millions of deserts and of griefs beneath the moon. The sun hides not the ocean, which is the dark side of this earth, and which is two thirds of this earth. So, therefore, that mortal man who hath more of joy than sorrow in him, that mortal man cannot be true - not true, or undeveloped. With books the same. The truest of all men was The Man of Sorrows, and the test of all books is Solomon's, and Ecclesiastes is the fine hammered steel of woe. 'All is vanity'. ALL (p. 535).

Ishmael's cry had gone up with the rest of the crew, in allegiance to Ahab and his mad quest, but after his hallucination he is no longer welded to his captain's dark will. Ishmael's advice to the reader is: "Give not thyself up, then, to the fire, lest it invert thee, deaden thee ... There is a wisdom that is woe; but there is a woe that is madness" (p. 535). After Ishmael's physical and metaphoric turnabout there is little action from him. He remains an observer

and a narrator as he exhibits for the reader his egalitarian sea-world view. As Ishmael journeys he becomes in accord with the world. He comes to terms with the powers of the dark and learns to accept the dual and cyclical aspects of nature:

Would to God these blessed calms would last. But the mingled, mingling threads of life are woven by warp and woof: calms crossed by storms, a storm for every calm. There is no steady unretracing progress in this life; we do not advance through fixed graduations, and at the last one pause:- through infancy's unconscious spell, boyhood's thoughtless faith, adolescence' doubt (the common doom), then scepticism, then disbelief, resting at last in manhood's pondering repose of If. But once gone through, we trace the round again; and are infants, boys and men, and Ifs eternally (p. 603).

The bonding of common humanity, and the dark with the light, link Ishmael to life. Queequeg, Christlike, metaphorically gives up his life so that Ishmael can live. His pagan wisdom has prepared him for the realities of life and death. The coffin-lifebuoy ('boy' meaning Queequeg), which supports Ishmael in the sea, had been prepared by Queequeg for himself. His body and the coffin are one, both are covered with the same cosmic, hieroglyphic, tattoos (pp. 592-3).<sup>23</sup> The acceptance of the dark shadow, represented by Queequeg, means life for Ishmael. The non-acceptance of the dark shadow, represented by Pip, means death for Ahab.

For Ishmael there is the possibility of becoming integrated and 'whole'. His symbolic union, of the feminine and the masculine, represents the tentative prospect of a feminised new world as all

signs of the old order disappear and are shrouded by the sea.<sup>24</sup> After becoming forcibly separated from the "mechanical" father, Ishmael is rescued from the sea by the "devious-cruising *Rachel*". "In her retracing search after her missing children, [she] only found another "orphan". Nature is then seen through the romantic eyes of a survivor (p. 687):

Buoyed up by that coffin, for almost one whole day and night, I floated on a soft and dirge-like main. The unharmed sharks, they glided by as if with padlocks on their mouths; the savage sea-hawks sailed with sheathed beaks (p. 687).

Just as Ishmael travels his circular journey, from suicidal inclinations to a rebirth, so Melville also travels his circular journey, through darkness and catastrophe, before returning to the "romantic adventure" (p. 15) with which he began. The 'Epilogue' is a second ending to *Moby-Dick*, one in which Ishmael's rebirth is a romantic alternative to the tragedy that has preceded. In the two endings Melville shows us the two worlds of paradise and hell which Frye describes as "the idealised world of pastoral and romance and the absurd, suffering world of irony and satire".<sup>25</sup> After the world of the *Pequod* has subsided (as before, in the Flood) another world begins, to "trace the round again" (p. 535) of birth, death and rebirth. Ishmael becomes Adam reborn.

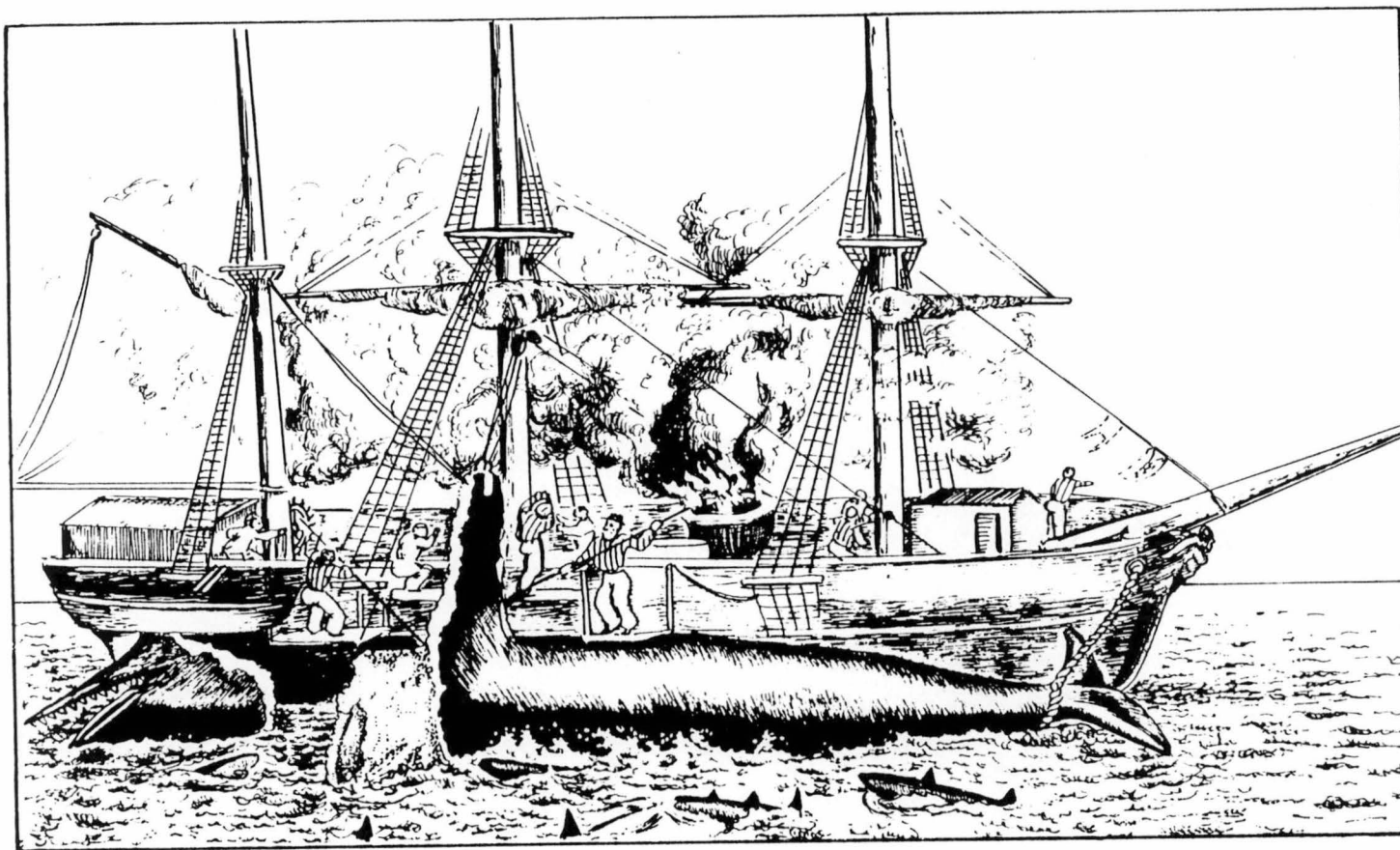
---

<sup>1</sup> D.H. Lawrence, in Stern, *op.cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>2</sup> Jay Leyda, *The Melville Log: A Documentary Life of Herman Melville*, Harcourt, Brace & Co., New York, 1951, Vol. 1. p. 431.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Gilmore (ed.), *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Moby-Dick*, Prentice-

- Hall, Eaglewood Cliffs (N.J.), 1977, p. 1.
- <sup>4</sup> Beaver, *op. cit.*
- <sup>5</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>6</sup> Leyda, *op. cit.*, p. 435.
- <sup>7</sup> Stern, 1957, *op. cit.*, pp. 18, 19.
- <sup>8</sup> Beaver, *op. cit.*, p. 95. "And still deeper the myth of Narcissus, who because he could not grasp the tormenting, mild image he saw in the fountain, plunged into it and was drowned. But that same image is of the ungraspable phantom of life; and this is the key to it all".
- <sup>9</sup> Brian Way, *Herman Melville: Moby-Dick*, Edward Arnold, London, 1978, p. 50.
- <sup>10</sup> Gilmore, *op. cit.*, p. 59.
- <sup>11</sup> Edward Goldsmith and Nicholas Hildyard, *Battle for the Earth: Today's Key Environmental Issues*, Child & Associates, Brookvale (New South Wales), 1988, p. 331. "By the 1920's the stocks were practically exhausted".
- <sup>12</sup> Shakespearean language - *King Lear*.
- <sup>13</sup> Martin Pops, *The Melville Archetype*, Kent State University Press, New York, 1970, preface: ix.
- <sup>14</sup> Jung, 1983, *op. cit.*, p. 19.
- <sup>15</sup> Martin Pops, *op. cit.*, pp. 267-8, lists the three principal ways in which Moby Dick has been characterised by critics: as "Good" by Marius Bewley, in *The Eccentric Design*; as a "Satan-God with 'Evil' predominant, by Lawrance Thompson, in *Melville's Quarrel with God*; and as "Indifferent" by, among others, Newton Arvin.
- <sup>16</sup> Bruce Franklin, *The Wake of the Gods: Melville's Mythology*, Stanford University Press, Stanford (U.S.A.), 1963, p.73; Melville, *op. cit.*, cf. "Typhoon", pp. 611-21.
- <sup>17</sup> Stern, 1957, *op. cit.*, p. 122.
- <sup>18</sup> Gilmore, *op. cit.*, p. 69.
- <sup>19</sup> The *Koran* (translation N.J.Dawood), Penguin, Harmondsworth (Eng.), 1983, p. 35.
- <sup>20</sup> Leyda, *op. cit.*, p. 410.
- <sup>21</sup> Janis P. Stout, *The Journey Narrative in American Literature: Patterns and Departures*, Greenwood Press, Westport (Connecticut), 1983, pp. 13,14.
- <sup>22</sup> Lawrence in Stern, 1960, *op. cit.*, p. 36.
- <sup>23</sup> Qeequeg's "twisted tattooing ... had been the work of a departed prophet and seer of his island who, by those hieroglyphic marks, had written out on his body a complete theory of the heavens and the earth, and a mystical treatise on the act of attaining truth!" The meaning is lost to Ahab and so becomes a "devillish tantalisation of the gods!"
- <sup>24</sup> The future is "tentative" because there is ambiguity in the name Ishmael and because the sharks have [*padlocked*] mouths and the sea-hawks [*sheathed*] beaks", It is unlikely that there will be a future of peace and harmony, or a return to a golden age, if man, as Ishmael, will "forever have his hand against any man and every man's hand against him", *Genesis* 21:16:12. (See 'Introduction' reference 25 in this thesis).
- <sup>25</sup> Frye, *Fables in Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology*, Harcourt, Brace & Jovanovitch, San Diego, 1963, p. 34.



### The Peeling of the Whale

"Now as the blubber envelopes the whale precisely as the rind does an orange so it is stripped from the body precisely as an orange is sometimes stripped by spiralizing" (*Moby-Dick*, p.410).

The above illustration is an adaptation from J. Ross Browne, *Etchings of a Whale Cruise* (New York, 1846), in the Penguin edition of *Moby-Dick* (Fig. 9).

### 3. The Archetypal Quest

Since the earliest days of civilisation the quest has been a major theme of story telling. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, the Grail Legends, *The Odyssey*, *Ulysses*, *Moby-Dick*, *Zen and the Art of Motor-Cycle Maintenance* and *Oscar and Lucinda* are a diverse selection of the many and varied quest stories reaching from the earliest known writings to contemporary literature.

The quest is a dominant biblical theme, the archetype of archetypes, involving an exodus and a journey. It is related to the seasonal journey of life, death and rebirth, and to the idea of progress, a going forward. Within the fixed framework (of life and death) there are many variations of the journey. Ideas of progress change according to the beliefs of the time. Contemporary conceptions of progress can be simplified and narrowed down to two: the progress of human glorification, which can lead to *hubris* and disaster, or the progress related to the developing of maturity and ecological wisdom - *ecosophy*.

The earliest known quest was the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, which was recorded on tablets before the third millenium BC.<sup>1</sup> The epic was partly historical but became mythological as it was absorbed from Sumerian into Babylonian story telling and became syncretised into other quest stories.<sup>2</sup> Gilgamesh, the fifth king of Uruk, after the Flood, was described as a greatly gifted warrior king but also as a tyrant. He is the first tragic hero of whom anything is known, one

who "plays the part of the knight who kills the dragon".<sup>3</sup> Enkidu is the dark shadow and nature brother, created to accompany Gilgamesh on his journey. (He is to Gilgamesh what Queequeg is to Ishmael, and Pip to Ahab). Gilgamesh and Enkidu bring down the trees of the cedar forests and its guardian monster. They slay the Bull of Heaven - a monster personifying seven years of drought (signifying a 'wasteland'), sent by the Goddess Ishtar as a punishment for their behaviour. After the bull is killed, Gilgamesh calls to the singing girls, "Gilgamesh is the most glorious of heroes, Gilgamesh is the most eminent among men".<sup>4</sup> This pride, and preoccupation with fame, brings pain and hardship to Gilgamesh. Enkidu, punished for both their sins against nature, and their insults and threats to Ishtar, the Goddess of love and war, suffers shame and dies. Gilgamesh, after the loss of his beloved companion, becomes absorbed in the problem of mortal man against the laws of separation and death. He gains the flower of immortality from the sea but loses it to a sea-serpent - the 'dragon' protector of the secret of life. Humbled and worn out with labour, Gilgamesh returns to the walled city of Uruk. He gains insight (as Ishmael does, in part) "... into the full significance of the high rewards of a genuinely deep human relationship and the profound wisdom of loss".<sup>5</sup> In the epic journey of Gilgamesh we are shown a very human concern with mortality, the search for knowledge, and for an escape from the common lot of man. The final lesson that Gilgamesh learns is that his destiny is to be king. Everlasting life is not his destiny.<sup>6</sup>



The quest myths are a way of questioning and interpreting the world of the time. They include the all-encompassing quest for knowledge; the desire to understand the meaning of life, death, and immortality; the need to understand the relationship of humans with nature; and the eternal question of the existence or non-existence of god or the goddess (the lost father or mother).

When the loss of the Earth Mother and nature-oriented 'pagan' beliefs was followed by loss of the 'father', in the wake of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, a no god scenario became a possibility. It was unsettling for orthodox Christian believers, to discover that not only was woman not born of man, but that a personified god had not created the world. This perceived loss, first of all of the Goddess of Creation, the Earth Mother and then God the Father, contributes to the need to search. Without faith or spiritual belief, love, and a feeling of connectedness, humans sense an incompleteness which cannot be fulfilled by the glorification of man, or the new 'gods' of materialism, science, or technology.

Joseph Campbell believes that the loss of the goddess contributed to the gap between humans and nature. He also believes that we lost our ability to be "in accord with the world" as we identified with Christianity and other Western and Near Eastern religion and found the need to fight (the demon) evil. He quotes the Zen philosopher, D.T. Suzuki: "God against man, man against man, man against nature, nature against man - a very funny religion" <sup>7</sup>:

In other mythologies one puts oneself in accord with world, with the mixture of good and evil. But in the religious system of the Near East you identify with the good and fight the evil. The biblical traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all speak with derogation of the so-called nature religions. The shift from a nature religion to a sociological religion makes it very difficult to link back with nature.<sup>8</sup>

Gustav Le Bon (1879), reinforced the religious belief that it was necessary for man to combat evil - by fighting rivals and the environment:

It is the man who fights for two or more in the struggle for existence, who has all the responsibility and the cares of tomorrow, who is constantly active in combating the environment and human rivals ...<sup>9</sup>

Myths are sometimes told polemically, with the purpose of pointing out the wrong direction of an individual or a community, or a corruption of their values. When the masculine quester is destructive, and/or narcissistic in pursuit of his personal glorification, and guilty of the archetypal flaw of *hubris* (like Gilgamesh and Ahab), he is usually punished or killed.<sup>10</sup> At the end of his journey the lesson of humility is learnt by Gilgamesh. For Ahab there could be no return journey as he stubbornly resisted benign or humbling influences.

The trials of the quest are set up to test human endurance. There is usually a battle or a series of battles from which the romantic hero emerges a victor. The dragon is the archetypal antagonist, complex and ambiguous in its role, like Moby Dick. It can be: the monster-

guardian of a great treasure or mystery; a symbol of nature, a god, or goddess, in whom good and evil is frequently combined; or the representative of lust.

The story of Jonah and the whale is an example of a mythic theme that is, according to Joseph Campbell, practically universal.<sup>11</sup> It is a descent into the dark, of the hero going into the fish's belly and ultimately coming out transformed. The whale has become an archetypal symbol. In a death and resurrection theme it represents the power of life locked in the unconscious. The creature and the water are the life or the energy of the unconscious which, according to Campbell, overwhelms the conscious personality and must be disempowered and controlled. "The ultimate dragon is within you, it is your ego clamping you down".<sup>12</sup> It is a journey in which the hero needs to come to terms with the powers of dark.

The dragon, in psychological analysis, is also the devouring aspect of a man's attachment to his mother. The slaying of the dragon mother reflects the oedipal fear of incest.<sup>13</sup> This fear is symbolised in Ahab's lancing of the whale and his forty year battle against nature. It is part of the narcissistic image of immature man who is unable to wean himself from his own self-image, or from the mother. Ahab's fight is also against the father. Eric Neumann sees this as:

... the fight with the First Parents, a fight in which the murders of both father and mother, but not one alone, have their ritually prescribed places.<sup>14</sup>

The hero-dragon battle is the symbolic expression of growing up. For contemporary 'primitive' societies, such as those of the Australian Aboriginal people, the weaning away from the parents is performed in initiation rites, in which a symbolic mood of death is created from which may spring the symbolic mood of rebirth. A lesson in humility is learnt by the experience of ordeals.

Northrop Frye, in *The Anatomy of Criticism*, describes the quest as usually associated with romance and the conflict between the hero and the demon. There is a cycle in which there is death and a rebirth as the hero 'dies' in his battle, but reappears, often as the son. When the demon appears as the father he is associated with sterility, old age and "moribund life". The dragon fought is Satan; and the "reluctant bride" is the church.<sup>15</sup>

Ahab, in *Moby-Dick*, is the impotent king, the "demon father", and the hero who dies in his battle. Moby Dick, becomes the satanic whale, and a kind of "reluctant bride" wedded to Ahab by the harpoon line that finally binds them together. Ishmael is the 'son' who reappears, the second Adam and the perpetuator of the quest-romance.

There is optimism in the quest-romance, which Frye, in the *Anatomy of Criticism* describes in ritual terms. It is:

the victory of fertility over the wasteland. Fertility means

food and drink, bread and wine, body and blood, the union of the male and female. The precious objects brought back from the quest, or seen or obtained as a result of it, sometimes combine the ritual and psychological associations. The quest romance has analogies to both rituals and dreams and the rituals examined by Frazer and the dreams examined by Jung show the remarkable similarity in form that we should expect of two symbolic structures analogous to the same thing. Translated into dream terms, the quest is the search for the libido or desiring self for fulfillment that will deliver it from the anxieties of reality but will still contain that reality.<sup>16</sup>

The search for the white whale, *Moby Dick*, is one which combines the romantic quest with all the phases of tragedy described by Frye,<sup>17</sup> with many ambiguities and reversals. The qualities of the whale and Ahab are alternatively heroic or demonic. Maimed Ahab is at times associated with malice, darkness, confusion, old age, infertility, and the moribund life described by Frye as "demonic mythical characteristics". These characteristics are sometimes transferred to the whale. In the ambiguous whiteness of the whale can be absorbed the evil, or the good, imposed upon him. Melville's devices and reversals do not allow the reader to stay in the comfortable world of romance and innocence, or to be "delivered from the anxieties of reality",<sup>18</sup> but face the reader with the wisdom of past mythological, ethical systems. In the world of experience there is the realisation that hell is not an external creation. Like Ahab's embodiment of evil in the whale, the creation of hell is in ourselves.<sup>19</sup>

In *Moby-Dick* there is a constant reminder of biblical myths and the Crucifixion. Ahab and the whale, both satanic at times, also

appear like the crucified Christ. This is reinforced by the Christian symbolism that is always in the background: the trinity of masts (the three crosses of Golgotha); "the three mighty heaven-abiding peaks, that almost seem the Trinity" (on the doubloon, p.542); the harpoons and lances (a reminder of the final strike by the lance to Christ); and the crucified whale, triply lashed to the ship, as Christ was lashed to the cross.<sup>20</sup>

The quest in Christian mythology seeks reunion with God and thereby everlasting life; or to attain the Millenium in the hope of the return of the Saviour and peace for believers; or a return to the fertility of a golden age. In the Holy Grail mythologies of *The Matter of Britain* 'renewal' is through the Grail, the symbol of God, and the fertile cornucopia of nature. Paradoxically this could only be achieved by a denial of nature - and of woman. Only an 'innocent', un-knowing virgin can achieve a sighting of the Grail, and reunion with God. What Lancelot could not achieve (because of his adultery with Queen Guinevere) is achieved by the pure son Galahad. He is the heir to a succession of maimed kings, including the Fisher King and the 'son' who takes on the hereditary right which previously had belonged to Percival. Galahad's lineage goes back to King David, who was an ancestor of Christ. In him is vested the Christian hope for renewal, a return to the Golden Age and the end of the enchantment of Britain. Lancelot stands for Adam, the imperfect man, and Galahad for Christ as the second Adam, as man perfected. According to Richard Cavendish, the sin committed in Eden, the sin which brought death to the world, is identified as lust. Desire is the

root of death, virginity is the passport to immortality.<sup>21</sup>

The Grail legend is, as David Maclagan states:

an "exclusive mythology which chooses to overlook the body's participation" as against an "inclusive mythology which is prepared in varying degrees to admit the body, the notion of the organism as a whole."<sup>22</sup>

According to Jung,<sup>23</sup> every society has its idea of the archetypal paradise, or golden age that, it is believed, once existed and will exist again. The first age was:

an age of innocence and happiness called, The Golden Age. Truth and right prevailed ... The forest had not yet been robbed of its trees to furnish timbers for vessels, nor had men built fortifications round their towns. There were no such things as swords, spears, or helmets. The earth brought forth all things necessary for man, without his labour in plowing and sowing.<sup>24</sup>

The Iron Age was the age that, in mythology, preceded the Flood. It was then that greed and violence dominated. Men became seafarers and tore down the forests to build ships. The earth became no longer common bounty but was divided off into possessions. Iron and gold were produced and there was war.<sup>25</sup>

As part of our search for understanding we look to the region of the Persian Gulf from which the *Epic of Gilgamesh* originated. Mesopotamia has long been regarded as the cradle of civilisation - yet it is a region in which continual warfare and destruction has occurred. There have been great losses: human, environmental and

historical. In these wars the values of ecosophy have been overcome by the heroics of 'saviours' fighting the demon monster, most recently for the treasure of oil.

Professor Edward Said, of Columbia University, in a radio commentary on the Gulf War, compared President Bush with Captain Ahab. He described him as "monomaniacal" and "fixed in purpose".<sup>26</sup> Bush was the 'saviour' purportedly intent on rescuing a community from the tyrant Saddam Hussein. The destructive quest, to fight the dragon monster, became inverted by revenge and greed. Language and instruments of warfare were dehumanised so that the 'enemy' seemed to be of another species. Attacks and strikes were made on "rats", "dogs", and "pigs" by machines that resembled mythical monsters - sharklike aircraft, dragonlike tanks, and amphibian sea beasts. War reports avoided the use of words like murder, death, or suffering. People and corpses were rarely mentioned. Joseph Meeker states: "Predatory ethics *require* that animals of other species be killed, and at the same time *forbid* that members of one's own species be killed."<sup>27</sup> Attacks on our own species were disguised in such a way as to make it seem that "strikes" were made against members of another species - as if by this we could be deceived into believing that the murder was therefore proper.<sup>28</sup>

Once again war has been supported by the majority of people who have been brought up on the patriarchal, warrior mythology of heroism - the mythology which is still perpetuated in our education,



and celebrated in our rituals and in the 'media'. The present day treasure, guarded by the dragon-monster, has become the treasure of oil, not gold. It is a treasure that is just as precious to energy-addicted communities as to energy-demanding aggressors.

Our quests have brought us fragmented knowledge and enormous technological expertise so that we are now in the position 'to take over' from nature as science and technology create powerful new tools for man's aggrandisement. Yet this knowledge also shows us to be limited beings. Scientific powers, to create and reproduce, do not balance the adverse human impact on nature: the pollution of land, sea and air or the reduction of species. We have become the most dangerous animal on earth.

A sense of respect, humility, and a kinship with nature, has for many become lost in the quest for knowledge and for 'progress' via scientific orthodoxy. The belief, still held by some scientists, is that everything is knowable, and the sum of the dissected parts will lead to a knowledge of the whole, and that from this knowledge we can profit. Profit is invariably at the cost of nature.

From microscopic observation and analysis, to macroscopic visions of outer-space, our quests for resources and spaces to examine and conquer are widened. The mounting collection of amazing facts, technological equipment, machinery and armaments (toys for the boys!), gives the delusion called progress - and takes us further away from the meaning of progress associated with a coming

to maturity. Within the dominant paradigm of assumptions imagination is channelled down fixed paths, and feelings are kept under control. Overlooked is the language of violence and rape and the myriad ways in which we penetrate, probe, explore, consume and destroy, often in ignorance, the life of the earth, sea, sky, and biosphere. We have sought to gain power through 'progress' but have lost our relationship with the world.

In *Zen and The Art of Motor-Cycle Maintenance*, Robert Pirsig wrote:

"You never gain something but that you lose something" And now he began to see for the first time the unbelievable magnitude of what man, when he gained the power to understand and rule the world in terms of dialectic truths, had lost. He had built empires of scientific capability to manipulate the phenomena of nature into enormous manifestations of his own dreams and power and wealth. But for this he had exchanged an empire of understanding of equal magnitude: an understanding of what it is to be part of a world, and not an enemy of it.<sup>29</sup>

The effort to understand "what it is to be part of a world, and not an enemy of it", is part of the ecosophic quest in which we seek to reconnect with our spiritual 'parentage' by determining our identity and relationship with nature.

If our beliefs are tied up in the mechanistic notion of nature as inanimate, our ideas of self will relate to this image and be limited. There can be no true relationship with something that is inanimate and therefore cannot respond. If, however, the view of the cosmos

is the *emerging* scientific view - that the earth is alive, an *anima mundi*, a world with soul, or spirit, and memory in everything<sup>30</sup> - then there is the possibility of a kinship between human and non-human life.

Our questing continues as we try to understand not only who we, and our metaphoric parents are, but how we can survive, as individuals, as a species, and as part of Planet Earth. There is a sense of isolation and insecurity today which is not a new feeling - at least for those who are no longer supported in their belief in a saviour God. This isolation is Melville's preoccupation. In *Moby-Dick* we are the metaphoric orphans that he writes about, outcast like Ishmael, cast adrift like Pip, in a teeming cosmos, unable to feel confident in ourselves or our future when we see all around us, as Pip did, a seeming "indifference", and the destruction and pollution that is part of our human 'progress'.

The deep desire to return, or to regain what has been lost, is part of the urge to quest which continues today. There is a belief, shared by Riane Eisler, that through a recognition of a lost past (that now, because of archeological finds, is believed to have existed), we can learn to regain a more spiritual, nature-oriented, partnership society.<sup>31</sup> Reconnection with the belief that a life harmonious with nature is possible, gives us the optimism necessary to work towards overcoming the problem of the dominant quest which has many of the destructive aspects of the Iron Age.

By examining myths and literature, and the meaning of the quest-journey and progress today, we can achieve a better understanding of our relationship with the world. We can also learn from the changes or exclusions in story telling, as, for example, the change from an agricultural society to a hunter-warrior society, or the changing role or invisibility of women in mythology and literature (as well as history).

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Introduction, N.K.Sandars, Penguin, Harmondsworth (Eng.), 1972.

<sup>2</sup> Sumerian people inhabited Mesopotamia between the fourth and second millennium B.C. They began the world's first urban civilisation: cities such as Ur, Lagach, and Erech (Uruk) *Collins Concise Encyclopedia*, Peerage, London, 1984, p. 344.

<sup>3</sup> *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>5</sup> Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>7</sup> Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Stephen Jay Gould, *The Panda's Thumb*, Norton, New York, 1980, p. 154. Gould calls Le Bon "the chief misogynist of Broca's school".

<sup>10</sup> Jung, 1983, *op. cit.*, pp. 116, 118, 124.

<sup>11</sup> Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, p. 149.

<sup>13</sup> Pierre Grimal (ed.), *Larousse World Myths*, Gallery, New York, 1965, p.175.

<sup>14</sup> Eric Neumann, cited in Pops, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

<sup>15</sup> Frye, 1971, *op. cit.*, pp. 187-190.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 193, 4.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, p. 215

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, p. 193.

<sup>19</sup> Levi-Strauss, 1979, *op. cit.*, pp. 193, 4: "We now find that mythology also contains an ethical system, but one which, unfortunately, is far remote from our ethic that its logic is from our logic ... the inherent ethic of the myth runs counter to the ethic we profess today. It teaches us, at any rate, that the formula 'hell is other people', which has achieved such widespread fame, is not so much a philosophical proposition as an ethnographical statement about our civilisation. For, since childhood we have been accustomed to fear impurity as coming from without. What they assert, on the contrary, is that 'hell is

ourselves', savage peoples give us a lesson in humility which, it is to be hoped we may be capable of understanding".

<sup>20</sup> See illustration p. 38.

<sup>21</sup> Richard Cavendish, *King Arthur and the Grail: The Arthurian Legends and their Meaning*, Book Club Associates/Weidenfeld & Nicholson, London, 1978, p. 170.

<sup>22</sup> MacLagan *op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> Jung, 1978, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Bullfinch, *Bullfinch's Mythology*, Avenal/Crown, New York, 1979, p. 14.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, p. 15

<sup>26</sup> Edward Said, A.B.C. *Background Briefing*, February 19th, 1991.

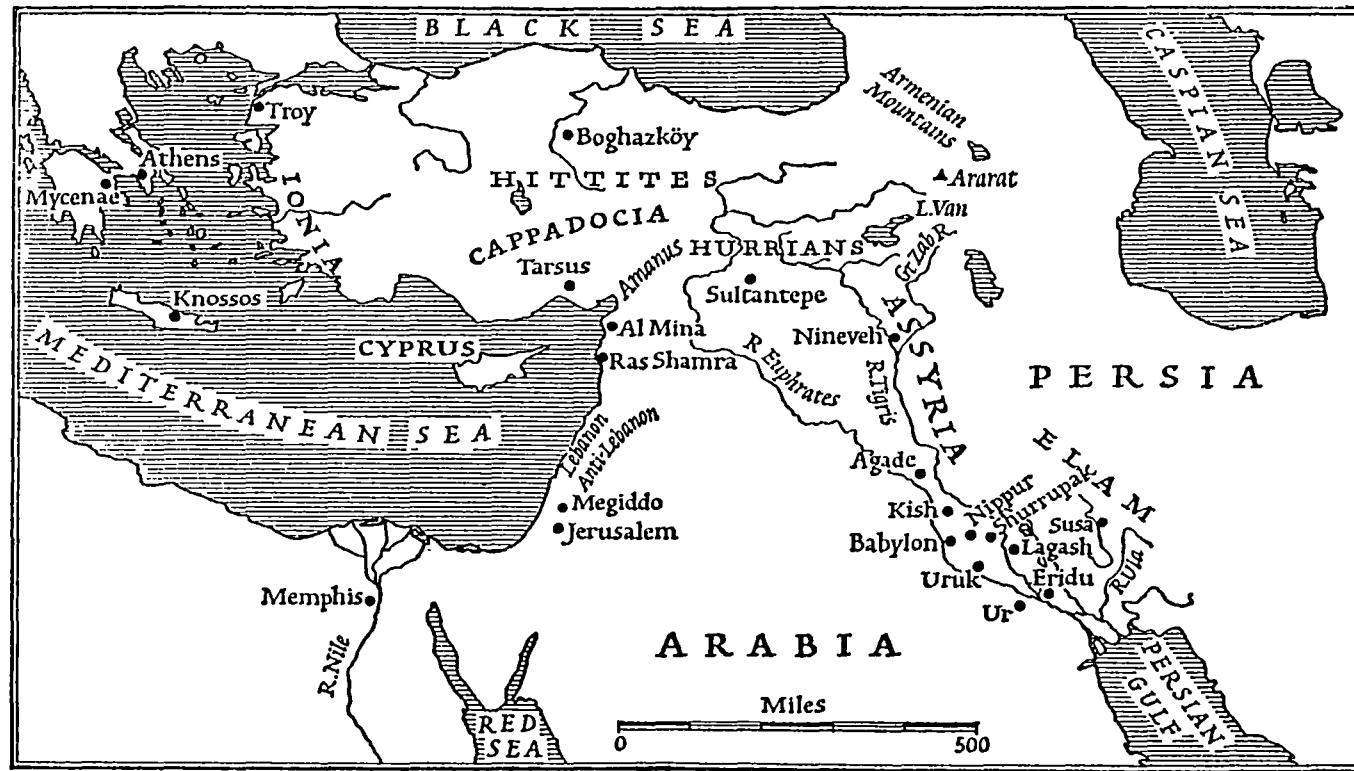
<sup>27</sup> Meeker, *op. cit.*, pp. 142-3: "Humans appear to be unique among predators in their enthusiasm to destroy members of their own species - perhaps this unusual genetic behaviour can be attributed to some genetic deficiency which may lead humans ultimately to join the rest of nature's failures in the biological graveyard of extinction".

<sup>28</sup> *Time Life* (March, 1991) have followed up the Gulf war with a series of war books. A publicity leaflet offered free gifts with an order for "*The New Face of War* : model kits of the "stinger hummer", an all-terrain vehicle to use in "Surgical Strike Force Units". The high gloss, colour leaflet described the book as: "A true story of fighting men and fighting machines. Of deadly, newfangled technology. And good old-fashioned courage". It describes "screaming *Tomcat* vehicles, "*Seawolf* subs", and a "monstrous Trident sub as silent as a shark- and immensely more deadly", "*Scorpion*" and "*Leopard* tanks", "bat-winged fighters", "snake-eye bombs", "*Navy Seal*" personnel; and the enemy with their "hit squads and *sleeper* agents programmed to liquidate the leadership of their target countries at a moment's notice."

<sup>29</sup> Robert M. Pirzig, *Zen and the Art of Motor-Cycle Maintenance: an enquiry into values*, Corgi, Ealing (Eng.), 1976, p. 372.

<sup>30</sup> Campbell, 1988, *op. cit.*; Riane Tennehaus Eisler, *op. cit.*; Jung, *op. cit.*, 1978; Meeker, *op. cit.*; Rupert Sheldrake, 'The Laws of Nature as Habits: A Postmodern Basis for Science', in *Postmodern Proposals* (ed. David Ray Griffen), State University of New York Press, New York, 1990, pp.79 - 86.

<sup>31</sup> Eisler, *op.cit.*, chapters 5 & 13. This is expanded in chapter 4 of this paper.



Map of the Ancient Orient from the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (p. 6).

#### 4. Woman and the Quest, Nature, the Goddess, and the Serpent.

The female as quester is rare in mythology and literature. Woman's role has been recorded mostly as 'helpmate' or consort to man and the gods. There is a growing body of work which shows that the shaping of this role, and the belief that women are inferior, has been the result of patriarchal domination and the suppression of woman and the goddess as autonomous beings; and that this suppression has had an adverse ecological effect on the planet.<sup>1</sup> Women and nature have an age old association.<sup>2</sup> In order to understand why the female quester has not been shaped as an archetype we need to examine the role of women, and of nature, from the earliest days of civilisation.

Evidence now exists of prehistoric matrilineal or partnership social structures, and of agricultural beginnings - before those of hunting and gathering, or mechanisation - which established the ideology of a "peaceful, art-loving woman creatress". This harmonious time was known as the Golden Age (described in the previous chapter): an age "which can be found in the myths and legends of a long lost past", and is echoed in the myths of the Garden of Eden.<sup>3</sup>

In the Near East, and in the great river valleys of the Ganges, Nile, Tigris, and Euphrates - the "cradle of civilisation" - the earth was once sanctified because it was the body of the goddess.<sup>4</sup> From her womb came all life. Before mythical separations of the gods and the world she was the earth, the sky, and the light.

Creation goddesses included Sophia, Gaia, Isis, Demeter, and the Great Mother Tiamet, also known as the Abyss or the Inexhaustable Source. "Wisdom" writings state that it was Sophia who breathed into Adam at his creation - in defiance of her son the Demiurge. She is the goddess said to have sent a long line of her own prophets, Jesus among them, to impart her spiritual essence, or gnosis, to humanity.<sup>5</sup>

Nature, in Near Eastern and European mythology, was personified as multiple gods and goddesses, in varying aspects and forms. The nature goddess was often represented as a serpent, dragon, leviathan, fish, or whale. Gradually the role of nature and the goddess changed, from a subject for worship, to a monster that the hero (including Ahab) sought to conquer in his archetypal journey. The Great Goddess originally was vested with power because of her association with fertility and immortality. She was the Creatrix able to both give life and take it away. In her devouring



aspect she was a threat. For this the gods, and power seeking men, sought to overcome her. Fear of the female, in her devouring, monster aspect, is the fear of nature, sexuality, and death, which man has to overcome. Until he does so, woman, and the serpent, remain an obstruction to his quest.

Before ceasing to exist as an authoritative, wise, nurturing and creative figure, the goddess often became a consort, supporter, or guide to men and the gods, like Athena. Later the darker aspect of the goddess became emphasised. As a seducer-enchantedress-devourer she was able to divert, delay, or prevent men from staying on their charted course, like the Sirens and the lusty Circe who turned men into swine, and the fays and temptresses of the Arthurian legends. When Gilgamesh (of the Sumerian *Epic of Gilgamesh*) returns from his journey, the remaining temple in the precincts of the city of Uruk is Ishtar's. She is the goddess who punishes Gilgamesh for his insults, threats, and *hubris*. Ishtar is portrayed in the epic as a vengeful, warrior goddess whose position is being threatened. Her fertile and loving aspect is no longer embodied.<sup>6</sup>

By around 1,750 B.C. matriarchal society was finished in Europe and the Near East. It was mythologised in the *Enuma Elishas* (the Babylonian "Genesis") in "a critical moment in history" when the male oriented myth took over.<sup>7</sup> The chief god of the Pantheon, Marduk (later known as the sun god) overthrew the Goddess Tiamet. He sent winds into her throat, blew her to pieces, and with

her dismembered parts recreated the heavens and the earth:

Tiamat (and) Marduk, the wisest of the gods,  
 advanced against one another;  
 They pressed on to single combat, they approached for  
 battle.  
 The lord spread out his net and enmeshed her;  
 The evil wind, following after, he let loose in her face.  
 When Tiamat opened her mouth to devour him,  
 He drove in the evil wind, in order that (she should) not (be  
 able) to close her lip.  
 The raging winds filled her belly;  
 Her belly became extended, and she opened wide her mouth.  
 He shot off an arrow, and it tore her interior;  
 It cut through her inward parts, it split (her) heart.  
 When he had subdued her, he destroyed her life;  
 He cast down her carcass (and ) stood upon it.  
 After he had slain Tiamat, the leader  
 Her band broke up, her host dispersed ...  
 The lord trod upon the hinder part of Tiamat,  
 And with his unsparing club he split (her) skull.  
 He cut the arteries of her blood  
 And caused the north wind to carry (it) to the out-of-the-way  
 places.  
 When his fathers saw (this), they were glad and rejoiced ...  
 The lord rested, examining her dead body.<sup>8</sup>

Marduk's consumation of Tiamet became a "key archetypal event".<sup>9</sup> It is an example of a mythological time in which goddesses were disposed of, often violently. Rapes became a common mythical occurrence and a metaphor for the treatment of the earth. Pagan understanding, reverence for nature and the spirit of things, was lost as gods replaced the Earth Mothers and become Creators, reshaping the world. Jupiter made Pandora; Zeus gave birth to Athena, fully armed; The Judaeo-Christian God created the world. He formed man and then woman as a 'helpmate'. From Adam's rib came Eve.<sup>10</sup> Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary, through the

spirit of God. Sophia was "there at the beginning", but as God's consort, not as Creatrix.<sup>11</sup>

The symbol of eternal life, invested in the female because of her ability to procreate, was also invested in the serpent because of its ability to regenerate by shedding and renewing its skin. Immortality, associated with the goddess and the snake, became the legendary gift of the gods that men forever seek.<sup>12</sup> It is one that (for men) leads to *hubris* and punishment (as it did with Gilgamesh and Ahab).

As the gods usurped the position of goddess, the serpent was adopted by them to reinforce their own authority and power. The serpent, like the goddess, was gradually diminished in status until it became predominantly a symbol of evil. As reverence diminished, the goddess, the serpent and nature became subjected to domination and abuse.<sup>13</sup>

Evidence of early goddess and human affinity with the serpent was shown in embodiments or close associations. The form of the Goddess Tiamet was a fish or a dragon; In ancient Egyptian mythology the cobra Goddess Ua Zit is the original creatrix of the world. Astarte, the Canaanite Goddess, is depicted with a serpent. A Sumerian bas relief, dated around 2,500 BC. and called the Goddess of the Tree of Life, shows two goddesses next to two serpents. Tiresias, the blind prophet, gained knowledge of being male and female when in the form of a serpent. Second century Ophites ("Serpentists") revered the serpent and believed that the serpent had spoken the truth to Adam and Eve.<sup>14</sup> In Orphic mythology the

creator of the world was torn out of a silver egg and entwined with a serpent, representing Time as the boundary of the created world.<sup>15</sup>

Naseen Khan, writing about the way trees and snakes are valued in India, said:

The life of the tree goes on, deep under ground, where snakes - sacred in India, unlike the Eve-recalling West - have their homes. Bowls of milk and offerings can be seen round the base of the trees: and in the South, where the snake is particularly venerated, carved stone bas reliefs of snakes set under the tree ask for help with female fertility.<sup>16</sup>

In the Christian mythology of the "Eve-recalling West", the woman and the serpent were held responsible for the Fall because of their disobedience to God's will:

Associated with the goddess is the serpent, and the symbolic mystery of life. The male-god oriented group rejected it in association with woman, but used it for an embellishment to their own power image. There is an historical rejection of the Mother Goddess implied in the biblical story of the Garden of Eden. Women are blamed for the downfall because they represent life.<sup>17</sup>

Pandora and Eve were 'first women' who inherited the myth of the goddess as troublesome and evil. Pandora's transgression was that in her curiosity she released a multitude of plagues from a jar. There is, however, another story, less detrimental to women: that Pandora released from her dowry box the blessings given to her by the gods, leaving only the blessing of hope.<sup>18</sup>

In 'Genesis' both woman and the serpent are cursed by the "Lord God". The serpent and woman are condemned to enmity, and the

woman to sorrow and subjection:

I will greatly multiply thy sorrow, in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband and he shall rule over thee.<sup>19</sup>

According to Paul, in his letter to Timothy, Eve sinned because she was deceived by the serpent, and for that there was punishment:

Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection ... I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed then Eve. And Adam was not deceived but the woman being deceived was in transgression.<sup>20</sup>

The Christian story of Eve and the serpent in the Garden of Eden, is one that Campbell believes amounts to "a refusal to affirm life", and a myth which corrupts the whole world for us: "If nature is thought of as corrupt, then every spontaneous act is considered sinful and must not be yielded to".<sup>21</sup> Campbell continues:

In the biblical tradition we have inherited, life is corrupt, and every natural impulse is sinful unless it has been circumcised or baptised. The serpent was the one who handed the apple to man. This identification of the woman with sin, of the serpent with sin, and thus life with sin, is the twist that has been given to the whole story and the doctrine of the fall.<sup>22</sup>

In the West, belief in the Creatrix was replaced, in gradual stages, with a belief in an all-powerful, white, European god who had created light and dark, the heavens, the earth and all of nature.<sup>23</sup>

The Christian god replaced multiple nature gods and goddesses, and beliefs in spirits - in birds, animals, plants, trees, rocks, and places, in which there was a kind of immortality, and collective memory, represented in the *anima mundi* and the *genus loci*.

Christian interference in the lives of many aboriginal societies has frequently disturbed their protective relationship with the land. However there are still aboriginal people of so-called primitive societies who relate to the spirits or souls of animals, stones and place, and see them as a vital part of their own existence. Examples are South Pacific Islanders, American Indians, and the Australian Aborigines. The quest for 'progress' at the cost of nature has not, on the whole, been their way. Neither has the idea that man is empowered to dominate and subdue all of nature. The earth is their Mother, and the trees and animals their brothers and sisters.<sup>24</sup> There is a respect for the land, and the food that is eaten - in those communities that have not been greatly affected by Western ways.

Bill Neidje, an Aboriginal elder, says:

Rock stays  
 earth stays  
 I die and put my bones in cave or earth.  
 Soon my bones become earth  
 all the same.  
 My spirit has gone back to my country  
 my mother.<sup>25</sup>

The myth of male supremacy, reinforced by the Christian Church, and the 'Genesis' myth, contributed to the belief that women and nature should be treated as inferior; it is also believed to be at the root of our ecological problems:

And God said, let us make man in our image ... and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the cattle, and over every creeping thing upon the earth. So God created man in his own image ... male and female created he them ... to replenish the earth and subdue it.<sup>26</sup>

White in his now classic paper, *The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis*,<sup>27</sup> argued that Christian attitudes concerning the relation of humanity to nature were at the root of our ecological crisis and that for this Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt. His argument has been taken up by many writers. There is also debate regarding the meaning of "dominion and "subdue". "Dominion" may be interpreted to mean responsible stewardship, or wanton exploitation. It is an old debate among theologians, as Meeker points out.<sup>28</sup> It is possible that more subtle meanings of the words were understood, in the original Hebrew, than those of current dictionary interpretations. However, the Bible continues to be used to justify entrenched positions, often against woman and nature.

Biblical stories were not the work of one man, edited by another. Many hands and minds were involved in their forming, and ambiguities and conflicting statements therefore resulted. To further complicate the process, stories were frequently accepted literally when the intentions of the writer may have been symbolic. Certain elements have, however, a sticking action, and attitudes of domination over nature and woman are still present today. The Judaeo-Christian story of domination is compounded in Roman and Greek mythology, and acted out in the present day practises of the Church, and mainstream agriculture, industry, technology and science (at the time of writing the Australian Presbyterian Church banned women from becoming ministers. They based their argument on the above Biblical quote - Paul's letter to Timothy)<sup>29</sup>. Modern mythologies perpetuate the myths of male creation, as men (and sometimes women) become the deluded new 'gods' of science and technology - able to inhabit new worlds, genetically engineer new life, clone, fertilise artificially, and replace (in theory) that which has been lost.

Patriarchal institutions have perpetuated associations of the verbs to "dominate" and "subdue" in ways and language that link woman and nature with coitus and rape. Campbell makes the connection when he describes the take-over of the feminine pre-eminence in



agriculture:

In the domestication of the human race women played the dominant role in planting and harvesting ... She is the first planter. Her magic power of giving birth and nourishment is associated with the earth. The male takes over the agricultural lead which simulates coitus in the plow plowing the earth.<sup>30</sup>

Men held on to their agricultural lead, and through the sixteenth, seventeenth, and part of the eighteenth century, often showed violent opposition to female autonomy and affinity with nature.

Cynthia Cockburn describes the process:

In the witchhunting years of the Inquisition thousands of women across Europe were ritually burned or drowned in a frenzy of misogyny. It was a forerunner of the male Enlightenment (so-called) stamping out the remaining vestiges of women's autonomy, outlawing women's traditional forms of knowledge and installing the rule of Reason. The dawn of modern science was, as Francis Bacon put it in 1602, "The Masculine Birth of Time".<sup>31</sup>

"Science built itself up against the old generation of mystical thought"<sup>32</sup> as men became the masters of knowledge, science, and rationalism.<sup>33</sup> Nature was seen as mechanical, inanimate, purposeless and without soul or intrinsic value, mere matter for the use of human beings.<sup>34</sup> "For Protestants such as John Locke, John Calvin, and the New England Puritans, God had authorised human domination over the earth".<sup>35</sup> Carolyn Merchant states: "The view of nature associated with witchcraft was personal animism. The

world of witches was antihierarchical and everywhere infused with spirits. It was believed that they could control the forces of nature; destroy crops, and bring plagues".<sup>36</sup>

Women with sexual, nurturing, and healing powers were accused of having a demonic affinity with nature:

The earliest doctors among the common people of Western Europe were women who had learned the virtues and use of herbs ... But while for many hundred years the knowledge of medicine, and its practise among the poorer classes, was almost entirely in the hands of women and many discoveries in science due to them, yet an acquaintance of herbs soothing, ... or healing in their qualities was then looked upon as having been acquired through diabolical agency.<sup>37</sup>

The massacre of women was deemed normal: "to appease the wrath of God". Witches represented the remains of a pagan religion which Christianity was determined to stamp out. The intent of the witchhunt was to "break down and destroy strong women, to dismember and kill the Goddess, the divine spark of being in women".<sup>38</sup> The Church, according to Mary Daly, feared and hated women's knowledge and power. Action was taken against spinsters, midwives, widows, and healers - women who took responsibility for their own lives. The witchhunt was not perpetrated solely by the uneducated, or superstitious; the more 'learned' the man was, the more likely he was to support the oppressors.<sup>39</sup>

Fear of goddess powers in women probably contributed to the burning of their bodies. There was a belief that the body of a goddess should not be destroyed by any other means as "the magic force inherent in it might contaminate the earth".<sup>40</sup>

As woman lost her role as nurturer of the earth her place became the home from which the hero could make his journey. Not only was nature, as wilderness, seen as a threat to humanity, but also encroaching nature became a perpetual threat to the order of civilised households. The domain of man's 'helpmate' needed to be more civilised than the land outside, land which men had to fight and conquer. It became the housewife's role to stay at home not only to care for the family but to keep marauding nature at bay.

The enclosure of women meant that the female quest had little or no place in myths or in the literary classics. Religion, literature and art, until the late nineteenth century, were predominantly the domain of the male. Even a creative or intellectual quest was frequently denied women. For female writers and artists to be active masculine attire or a pseudonym was often necessary. When women did start to venture out into the public domain they relied on the support of a husband, brother or mentor. An example is Emily Dickinson, now renowned as a great American poet. She did

not see any of her work acknowledged in her lifetime. It is said that she had no desire to publish, yet she wrote:

This is my letter to the world  
which never wrote to me

The world did not receive Emily Dickinson's 'letter', the one thousand, seven hundred odd poems that she wrote, because it was suggested, by her mentor, that she "delay to publish".

History is the most traditional source from which we can learn from the past. However, it is his-story. Women have been invisible in many history books. From a female perspective, and for those seeking more than the 'facts' of history, it can be an unsatisfactory source of information. Only in very recent times have women begun to exist in history books.<sup>41</sup>

Novels depicting life in the centuries before female emancipation showed that without the love or support of a man, the path for a woman branching out on her independent search was likely to end in disaster (particularly for one without money). At best an uncertain future could be anticipated, or a life on the fringes of society. Examples are in literary characters like Richardson's Clarissa, Chopin's Edna Pontellier (in *The Awakening*), Flaubert's

Madame Bovary, Carey's Lucinda ( in *Oscar and Lucinda*)<sup>42</sup>, and women of the novels of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Thomas Hardy and D.H. Lawrence. Women stayed in metaphoric castles, like Blanchefleur of the Grail legends. They were kept waiting like Penelope who faithfully spun and waited the return of her hero Ulysses for twenty years; or the lonely Lady of Shalott who died for the lack of a knight's love. They were victims like Andromeda, chained to a rock until her rescue by Perseus.

James Joyce, in a more modern quest, *Ulysses*, built on the scaffolding of Homer's *Odyssey*, breaks the myth of heroism, and the heroic requisite and double standard of the faithful, waiting woman.<sup>43</sup> Molly waits for the return of her husband on his "Bloomsday" of wanderings, but in bed, allknowing, lustfully and adulterously, in a parody of the woman waiting for the heroic quester. Male and female Blooms are reunited in a sexual sign of infinity and connectedness which is symbolised through Molly. She is the infinite nature-goddess-woman - born on the 8th day of the 8th month, 1888 - she is natural and unabashed in her bodily and sexual functions. The parody of a romance quest is completed as Molly couples (in the sign of infinity) with her returned 'hero', as she incestuously dreams of the found 'son' as well as past lovers. Molly literally gets the last word, which goes infinitely on and on

and on, without stop or any punctuation, and ends in a symbolic affirmation of life, love and literature.<sup>44</sup>

Miriam Chadwick is the temptress-seductress of *Oscar and Lucinda*. She seduces the 'hero', Oscar, after he has survived the trials of a great journey through the Australian bush, and prevents him from returning to his true love, Lucinda. The folly of a quest which Lucinda has instigated for her non-heroic, clergymen lover leaves her penniless, loveless and, temporarily, disempowered. After her money is lost to Miriam, Lucinda becomes work-worn as an employee of Mr. Edward Jason's pickle factory. Her wait at home seems to reaffirm the tragedy of the waiting woman. Carey, like Joyce, gives a final twist to his story and makes his female character an exception to much of literary tradition. Lucinda transcends her poverty. We learn, from the narration of the last two pages, of a life which extends beyond the novel. Lucinda is remembered for her "real life" as she becomes fulfilled, famous and political:

Lucinda was known for more important things than her passion for a nervous clergyman. She was famous, or famous at least amongst students of the Australian labour movement. One could look at this letter and know that its implicit pain and panic would be one short jab in the long and fruitful journey of her life. One could view it as the last thing before her real life could begin. But in 1866 Lucinda could not begin to be so disengaged ...<sup>45</sup>

Lucinda becomes representative of the 'New Woman' emerging in the latter part of the nineteenth century - an active woman - and one who shows compassion for any woman attempting to make a life in the outback country of Australia, even to the woman who defrauded her of both her lover and her fortune. In 1866 Lucinda wrote to Miriam: "... I understand the terror you have felt in your soul to contemplate a woman's life alone in New South Wales, then I forgive you".<sup>46</sup>

Women, in life, myth and literature, have generally been closer to the Lucinda of her early life. They have been kept domesticated, in the private domain, within boundaries, away from the public and the wilderness and any experience that was not subservient to man.

It was believed that both nature and woman needed to be tamed before they could fulfill their 'natural' roles and become gardens and wives. Ebenezer Howard, a nineteenth century landscape architect, assumed that:

Once domesticated both [nature and women] can be exploited for man's benefit, worshipped as symbols of beauty, used for pleasure, and retreated to for comfort. Both are resources, commodities provided for man which must be properly managed if this potential is to be realised. Their conquest confirms the masculine ego in its status as lord and master of creation.<sup>47</sup>

Baudelaire went even further. To him woman in her 'natural' state was "abominable":

Woman is the opposite of the Dandy. Therefore she should inspire horror. Woman is hungry and she wants to eat, thirsty and she wants to drink. She is in rut and she wants to be possessed. Woman is natural, that is to say, abominable.<sup>48</sup>

It is only in more recent times that women have regained a status by which they can be considered as something more than a sexual object, a helpmate to men, or more than the Other. Views of the "misogynist" Le Bon, which were published in France's most respected anthropological journal, concluded that woman's role, because of her brain size, was "to raise children, love, and be passive"<sup>49</sup>:

In the most intelligent races, as among the Parisians, there are a number of women whose brains are closer in size to those of gorillas than to the most developed male brains. This inferiority is so obvious that no one can contest it for a moment: only its degree is worth discussion. All psychologists who have studied the intelligence of women, as well as poets and novelists, recognise today that they represent the most inferior forms of human evolution and that they are closer to children and savages than to an adult, civilised man. They excel in fickleness, inconstancy, absence of thought and logic, and incapacity to reason. Without doubt there exist some distinguished women, very superior to the average man, but they are as exceptional as the birth of any monstrosity, as, for example, of a gorilla with two heads; consequently, we may neglect them entirely.<sup>50</sup>

Thus gorillas and women were considered inferior beings.



According to Le Bon, a distinguished woman was considered a freak. Because of this perceived inferiority women were excluded from many institutions, including schools, until female emancipation in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Yet remnants of these outdated notions still exist. Academic disciplines, including science, philosophy, psychology and anthropology, have only recently begun to include woman - *her-she* - in the general discourse.

It is possible that female quests not only have been prevented, because women were kept 'in their place', but that the quests were so different they were not recognised as such. The possibility also exists that the female quest may be less dramatic, and because of the restraints, more interior than exterior. It may also be that time has not yet allowed the necessary tests to be passed for archetypal themes to have become apparent. It is mainly in feminist literature, such as Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*, Marilyn Robinson's *Housekeeping*, and Annie Dillard's *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*<sup>51</sup> that the theme of the quest is taken up, and mythology rewritten to allow for the reshaping of language and the female role - one that recognises the mother but also seeks alternative ways of expression for women. Nurturing themes often expand to the care of humans, and non-humans, beyond the traditional family circle. Aspects of continuity other than those of parenthood are developed, through the re-

forming and contribution of ideas that perpetuate diversity and life on the planet, and the development of wisdom, imagination, and creativity, often in art and literature.

In our own time many ecologists and feminists are returning to mythology in a search for the female perspective that has been eliminated from most of history, only to find that in myths, as in history, the patriarchal view has dominated and a female perspective has been, in most cases, eliminated. It is however possible to learn from what is not there, by the gaps, in myths, literature and history.

We need to look further than history's understanding of the world and its creation, to the experiences and imaginative responses to life recorded in myth and literature. These all contribute to our world memory, the collective unconscious, which then affects our behaviour and our future. Women need to be careful, however, that the hunter-warrior role in a battle against nature is not perpetuated. A more honoured place is sought, one with a distinct identity which needs to be relational to man but not merged with man. It does not need to be on a battle field. If the shaping of our present society is based on the past, which has been mainly patriarchal in thought and action, we need to be consciously

selective as we transform past stories into the present and perpetuate them in the future.

There is the need today for a re-mything of a cosmic story, and the re-visioning of a future which encompasses active, ecosophic, and female archetypes - archetypes which do not associate women, the serpent, and nature with evil, or perpetuate their suffering. The resurgence of the mythology of Sophia encompasses feminine, spiritual power in nature:

... the maternal symbol reappears, not just as a source of the original life, but as the final goal of spiritual development. Here the woman appears as the eschatological Feminine, the divine Sophia, or Holy Wisdom, where self, community and Nature, human and divine reunite in ultimate redemption.<sup>52</sup>

Johnson sees wisdom, related to the Goddess Sophia, as woman's inherited trait, a trait which eliminates her need to quest.<sup>53</sup> However, granting to women intrinsic wisdom can be a subtle restraint to female autonomy. Women may have achieved cultural wisdom, in the status of mother and nurturer, but it is a mistake to attribute wisdom to all women without recognising the journey that many have had to take for wisdom to be achieved. Wisdom, in mythology, may come to the enclosed, waiting woman, but outside of mythology and fairy tales it is for many a dreary role and not always one of choice. The gaining of knowledge is often restricted. Passivity has generally been for women. Action has been for men.

The myths of an ideal time, the search to regain what has been lost, the search for the lost mother or father, and for love, have been incorporated, with dream, into psychological interpretations of human behaviour. Man, in his journey, has to come to terms with the archetypal feminine, the *anima*. He needs to kill the dragon-monster (sometimes the mother) and rescue the maiden (the feminine in himself) in order that he can become whole, wise, and mature.<sup>54</sup> The mythological maiden-lady-princess, or woman of his dreams, is usually imaged as unloved and solitary: on an island, tied to a rock, imprisoned in a tower or castle, and waiting for her saviour-hero-lover. The theme of the waiting woman runs throughout mythology and literature to modern media interpretations.

Today there is a recognised need for female action as well as male. For female autonomy the masculine *animus* needs, in psychological terms, to be united with the feminine *anima*, in order that passivity and inaction can be overcome, and understanding, knowledge, and wisdom can be actively sought and acquired.<sup>55</sup> However, the restraints on the female journey are still many. They are often imposed by females, as well as males, in efforts to uphold the comfort and *status quo* of patriarchy. There needs to be a return of the goddess - not as a personified individual deity (and this is

important) but in the recognition of the cosmic, interconnected, spiritual, and physical divinity inherent in the diversity of life we see all around us, and the spirit within us. Campbell believes that "[y]ou get a totally different civilisation and a totally different way of living according to whether your myth represents nature as itself a manifestation of divinity..."<sup>56</sup> He links this mythological understanding with a contemporary scientific hypothesis:

I think the Goddess is coming back. There's a young scientist who's using the term "morphogenetic field", the field that produces forms. That's who the Goddess is, the field that produces forms ... the source of your own life ... The female represents what in Kantian terminology we call the forms of sensibility. She is time and space itself.<sup>57</sup>

- 
- <sup>1</sup> Campbell, *op. cit.*; Riane Eisler, *op. cit.*; Susan Cady, Marian Ronan, Hal Taussig, *Wisdom's Feast*, Harper & Row, San Francisco, 1989. pp. 9-14.
  - <sup>2</sup> Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, Harper & Row, San Francisco, 1983 (preface 1990), p. X1X; Rosemary Radford Ruether, *New Woman New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation*, Seabury Press, Minnesota, 1975, pp.186.
  - <sup>3</sup> Eisler, *op. cit.*, *passim*.
  - <sup>4</sup> Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 169. See map at the beginning of this chapter.
  - <sup>5</sup> Cady, Ronan, Taussig, 1989, *op. cit.*, *passim*.
  - <sup>6</sup> *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, *op. cit.*, *passim*.
  - <sup>7</sup> Campbell, *op. cit.*, pp. 165-9.
  - <sup>8</sup> Daly, *op. cit.*, p. 107.
  - <sup>9</sup> Campbell, *op. cit.*, pp. 165-8.
  - <sup>10</sup> *Genesis* 2: 18-22.
  - <sup>11</sup> Cady, Ronan, Taussig, *op. cit.*, *passim*.
  - <sup>12</sup> Today's scientific 'achievements' mean that by cloning, *in vitro* fertilisation, and other methods, this power is a limited possibility.
  - <sup>13</sup> Pierre Grimal ed., *op. cit.*; Eisler, *op. cit.*
  - <sup>14</sup> Lawrance Thompson, *Melville's Quarrel with God*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1952, p. 459.

- <sup>15</sup> Maclagan, *op. cit.*, p. 16.
- <sup>16</sup> Naseen Khan, 'Indian Trees', *Pulp*, Common Ground, London, Summer 1989, p. 10.
- <sup>17</sup> Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 48.
- <sup>18</sup> Bullfinch, *op. cit.*, p. 14.
- <sup>19</sup> *Genesis*, 2: 14 -16.
- <sup>20</sup> 'Timothy' 1: 2, 11-14.
- <sup>21</sup> Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 99; cf. Eisler, 1987, p. 89.
- <sup>22</sup> Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 47.
- <sup>23</sup> White, *op. cit.*, pp. 1203 - 7.
- <sup>24</sup> Bill Neidjie, *Australia's Kakadu Man*, Resource Managers, Darwin (Australia), 1986, *passim*.
- <sup>25</sup> *ibid*, p. 62.
- <sup>26</sup> 'Genesis', 1: 26-28
- <sup>27</sup> White, *op. cit.*
- <sup>28</sup> Meeker, 1974, *op. cit.*, p. 42.
- <sup>29</sup> 'Timothy', *op. cit.* The *Mercury* (Tasmania), 12th September, 1991, reported on the front page: "Ban on Women Ministers Reimposed". The National General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, held in Sydney, voted overwhelmingly to stop women from entering the clergy. Debate focused on the quoted Biblical passage in 'Timothy': "I permit no woman to have authority over men; she is to keep silent".
- <sup>30</sup> Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 101.
- <sup>31</sup> Cynthia Cockburn, 'Woman in the Wood', *Pulp*, *op. cit.*, p. 30.
- <sup>32</sup> Levi-Strauss, *op. cit.*, p. 508.
- <sup>33</sup> Abrams, *op. cit.*, p. 49: "Enlightenment. The name applied to the intellectual movement and cultural atmosphere which developed in western Europe during the seventeenth century and reached its heights in the eighteenth."
- <sup>34</sup> Merchant, 1990, *op. cit.*, pp. 128-9. In early days of the Enlightenment a new metaphor was perceived by Johannes Keppler (1571-1630), that "the celestial machine is to be likened not to a divine organ but to a clockwork".
- <sup>35</sup> *ibid*, p. 131.
- <sup>36</sup> *ibid*.
- <sup>37</sup> Matilda Joslyn Gage, cited in Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*, The Womans Press, London, 1979, pp. 217, 8.
- <sup>38</sup> Daly, *op. cit.*, pp. 178-222.
- <sup>39</sup> *ibid*.
- <sup>40</sup> Cavendish, *op. cit.*, p. 188. Queen Guinevere, in the Arthurian legends, was condemned, by King Arthur, to be burned to death, because of her adultery with Lancelot. This suggests that "the old tradition of Guinevere as goddess had lingered on" and that because she was sacred she could die no other way. Guinevere escaped her sentence as Lancelot came to her rescue.
- <sup>41</sup> In the two volume recommended texts used (*The West and the World*) during my mature age student education (1980) women were not mentioned at all. In one of the volumes a document relating to Queen Victoria was appendixd.
- <sup>42</sup> Lucinda suffers the fate of most women of her time but becomes an exception in a

life that extends beyond the book.

- <sup>43</sup> Molly Bloom, is named after the herb "Moly", which causes Ulysses' crew to succumb to the enticements of the Goddess Circe, and turns them into swine.
- <sup>44</sup> James Joyce, *Ulysses*, Penguin, London, 1960, pp. 659-754.
- <sup>45</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>46</sup> Peter Carey, *Oscar and Lucinda*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia (Queensland), 1988.
- <sup>47</sup> Gould, *op. cit.*, p. 68. Sir Ebenezer Howard (1850-1928) was an English town planner, founder of the Garden City concept which was expounded in *Tomorrow: A Peaceful Path to Reform* (1898) and as *Garden Cities of Tomorrow* (1902). He founded the Garden Cities Association (1899). *Collins Concise Encyclopedia*, *op. cit.*, P.274.
- <sup>48</sup> Stern, 1957 *op. cit.*, p. 248.
- <sup>49</sup> Gould, *op. cit.*, p. 154.
- <sup>50</sup> *ibid.*, p. 155.
- <sup>51</sup> This does not include science fiction and the literature on female Utopias.  
Annie Dillard's 'pilgrimage' is perhaps an odd choice for a female quest. It is perhaps the kind of quest that is unrecognisable because it breaks from the tradition of heroic questers. Annie seeks to understand the world of nature at Tinker Creek. It is her way of be-ing in nature - rather than conquering nature. Like Ishmael she "owns" or acknowledges nature. Annie Dillard is not deluded, death, as much as life, she sees as part of a sacred cycle.
- <sup>52</sup> Ruether, *op. cit.*, p. 154.
- <sup>53</sup> Johnson, *op. cit.*, pp. 50.
- <sup>54</sup> Jung, 1957, *op. cit.*; Campbell, 1988, *op. cit.*
- <sup>55</sup> Jung, Emma, *Animus and Anima*, Spring Publications, Dallas (Texas), 1957, *passim*.
- <sup>56</sup> Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 99.
- <sup>57</sup> Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 169. Refer also Rupert Sheldrake, *The Presence of the Past: Morphic Resonance and the Habits of Nature*, Vintage, New York, 1989. Cover notes: "Science - Sheldrake's central notion is the idea of morphic resonance, the transmission of forms and behaviours through repetition in time".

## 5. Conclusion

Much of mythology is contradictory or paradoxical - as is Melville's novel, *Moby-Dick*. Myths are the result of many voices and minds interpreting their times and reshaping the past to suit the present - deliberately, or accidentally, like whispers sometimes repeated exactly, and sometimes gathering something of the hearer's interpretation. When stories or themes repeatedly show consistencies they become the archetypes that are strongly embedded in our consciousness and collective unconscious. The quest theme is the archetype of archetypes, and the binding theme in *Moby-Dick*. It is a theme that works within the framework of life and its seasons: the exodus, the going forward, the progress of the journey, and death and rebirth. Winter is the delving or disappearance into the darkness, the unconscious, the metaphoric wilderness, or the belly of the whale. When the dark season goes beyond its natural limits, as it does for Ahab in his over concentration on the "Hindoo-Kali" destructive aspect of nature, the metaphoric world is in danger of becoming an unseasonable wasteland, doomed and tragic, and in need of rescue.

Darkness surrounds and is embodied in Ahab. Long after the start of the voyage he emerges from the gloom of his cabin. His mind, like his body, is maimed - warped by his desire for revenge on the whale that struck back at him. Ahab would "strike at the sun" if it insulted him. His *hubris* is the archetypal flaw which can only lead



to disaster. At the crucial times of Ahab's fleeting vulnerability to the love and compassion shown to him, satanic influences appear to hold him to the fixed path he has chosen. His boat crew appear, like phantoms and demons, from the bowels of the ship, to support him in the final days of the chase. It is as if Ahab has prepared for every 'weakness' that could turn him away from his quest. There is no hope for the world of the *Pequod* and her crew under such a commander.

The "dumb brute" against whom Ahab wreaks his vengeance is the symbolic monster deeply embedded in the human psyche. It is the mythological dragon of the unknown and the fearful - in self and nature which Melville recognised:

... in the pursuit of those far mysteries we dream of, or in tormented chase of the demon phantom that, some time or other, swims before all human hearts; while chasing such over this round globe, they either lead us in barren mazes or midway leave us whelmed (p. 340).

Ahab's quest, to strike at the whale and to fathom its mysteries, is "blasphemous" and self- destructive, as well as fixed in its course. The true, ecosophic quest is not the linear quest of the warrior and the hunter, it is circular (like Ishmael's journey), according to the seasons, and involves a return. Sometimes there needs to be deviation from the circular pattern, like that of the "devious cruising [*Rachel*]," which tracks backwards and forwards in order to find the way, and some of what has been lost.

Ishmael is a 'seer', able to recognise and meditate on nature's wonders. He is sensitive to the invisible bonds of interconnectedness. Ishmael acknowledges the feminine as well as the masculine, the dark and the light and he adapts to his circumstances. Acknowledging or 'owning' the whale - the symbol of nature, in all its mysterious, and seemingly contradictory aspects (creative and destructive) - is an example of true progress. It is the mythological and psychological way to maturity and wholeness. Within this kind of progress there can be hope for the rescue of a wasteland and its orphans.

Ishmael's Job-like emergence from the sea is a kind of rebirth, one which follows the disastrous end of the *Pequod* and her crew. The 'Epilogue' is a tentative Pandoran re-opening of the box of hope, of new world beginnings after a flood. The patriarchal, sterile order established by the mad captain has been washed away, purged for the renewal of life in the 'son'.

The parallels of the quests of Ahab and Ishmael are suggestive rather than precise. There is much, however, that shows that Ahab's "mechanical" quest is not one to emulate - in spite of his manly grandeur and heroics. In our own world we have heard the prophecies, seen the omens, and read the signs that warn us that we could be entering a season of prolonged darkness. Our problems are manifold. The earth is showing signs that it will not be an infinite

provider for populations out of control. There is division in the world between materialist consumers and the hungry or starving whose land and resources are being consumed by the powerful and the rich. We are capable of eliminating whole countries and of spreading poisonous gases and toxic wastes throughout the world, yet the production, sales, and use of war weapons continues.

The Gulf War occurred in an area of great historical meaning in the history of human civilisation. It was there that the earliest known writings were found on tablets, including the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. It was also there that a 'wasteland' of corpses and orphans has resulted from the war instigated by two "heroic" warriors, President Bush and Saddam Hussein. The major objective of the 'saviour' (Bush) was to protect the rights and lives of people from the "monster" (Hussein). The true objective may have been the covert desire to protect the treasure of oil - the treasure that flamed into images of hell as part of a message to the world - images similar to Ishmael's hellish hallucination in the 'Tryworks'. It is the kind of vision that shocked Ishmael into a consciousness "of something fatally wrong" (p. 534) and led him to change direction. It is a major turning point in the novel, *Moby-Dick*.

This year international Christian leaders met in Australia. Included in their discussion was concern for the environment. Professor Chung Hyun-Kyung was reported as saying that human beings had raped the earth for long enough, and that nature and

earth are beginning to take revenge on us. Clean water, air and food could no longer be a certainty because we had "sinned extensively". She stated that the "split culture of dualism, which had divided body and spirit, world and God, black and white, poor and rich, has to be replaced with an understanding that the webs of our lives are interconnected", and that there needs to be a change from "the culture of death" (represented in the Gulf war), to the "culture of life". The Church has been challenged and is now beginning to face the problems of a seemingly disintegrating world, brought about in part by the domination and suppression of women and nature. Church leaders, women and men, are speaking out in defence of feminine values.

In 1912, the leader of the Bahai world faith, Abdu'l-Baha expressed his vision of a "new age" in which feminine ideals could bring about change:

... man has dominated over woman by reason of his more forceful and aggressive qualities both of body and mind. But the scales are already shifting - force is losing weight and mental alertness, intuition, and the spiritual qualities of love and service, in which woman is strong, are gaining ascendancy. Hence the new age will be less masculine, and more permeated with feminine ideals.<sup>1</sup>

In the eighty years since this was written there is, perhaps, not obvious change, but change is occurring. Women, and men with feminine ideals, are becoming activated to bring about a more spiritual balance: one concerned with healing the rifts that are detrimental to the environment. Our myths and literature are being

re-told and re-written, to include new cosmic, creation stories and a feminine perspective. We are realising that we need to reaffirm ourselves, and nature, through our story telling, as well as our daily actions, so that we do not become 'isolatoes' and 'orphans' alienated from, and destructive to, the rest of nature. We are learning to sense our oneness with nature, the "all" feeling that Melville writes about in a letter to Nathaniel Hawthorne.<sup>2</sup> As we develop our awareness we become "seers" like Ishmael, and learn to act in ways that venerate, and re-value nature in all her diversity: the creatures of the earth, sea and sky, their habitats and our "breathing partners" the trees.<sup>3</sup> We are recognising the great damage we have done to nature, and to our aboriginal relatives. Interconnectedness has become part of our language. Our ecosophic quest is progressing towards maturity.

There is a recognised need for a move away from the heroics of war towards the quieter heroics that exist in nature-oriented storytelling and decision making. The association of women with nature and nurturing is an affinity being shared with men. The search for the kind of absolute revelation in nature, the destructive and dominating quest, associated with Ahab, is changing towards a quest for knowledge and understanding. It is in the seasonal journey that integrity, love, and wisdom, and the maturity to see what has always been here, can be gained:

We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started

And know the place for the first time.<sup>4</sup>

Man, with all his pride and belief in himself as a re-creator has been shown to be fearful of the feminine force associated with nature and the cycles of life. Like Ahab he has been shown to be guilty of *hubris*. Attempts to *know* nature, for purposes of use and development, have resulted in very little knowledge of the cosmos and its life. The idea that nature is chaotic, at every level spontaneous, indeterminate and unpredictable, and mostly a mystery to us consisting largely of "dark matter", is one for which there is a growing acceptance.<sup>5</sup> This mysterious dark matter is, according to Sheldrake, likely to determine the fate of the universe.<sup>6</sup>

We have been like Ahab and other tragic heroes of myth and literature: blind, proud, and unable to recognise the sacred until it is too late. In the land that we Australians have adopted as our home we have ignored our 'landcestors'. Without religion and a sense of nature or place, we have been like Oscar, the alienated quester in *Oscar and Lucinda*, who journeys in the Australian landscape:

He saw nothing. The country was thick with sacred stories more ancient than the ones he carried in his sweat-slippery Bible. He did not even imagine their presence. Some of these stories were as small as the transparent anthropoids that lived in the puddles beneath the river casuarinas. These stories were like fleas, thrip, so tiny that they might inhabit a place (inside the ears of the seeds of grass) he would later walk across without even seeing. In this landscape every rock had a name, and most names had spirits, ghosts, meanings.<sup>7</sup>

Mary Douglas and Aaron Wildavsky also observe our blindness to 'primitive' values, and the problems we face today:

The more we recognise the novelty of our era, the more curious that we should turn around and join the primitive cultures whose views on death and misfortune we recently congratulated ourselves on having transcended. We cannot understand this paradox because our self knowledge is sadly impoverished. We have made a barrier between ourselves and our past. We think ourselves so immeasurably superior that there is nothing that we can learn from our own origins and from other human cultures of our time.<sup>8</sup>

As we learn to overcome the human problem of deluded superiority, our relationship with nature is beginning to change away from the mechanistic 'develop and use' 'I-it' attitude, towards an 'I-Thou' interconnected relationship. Modern scientific thought and the diverse ideas, stories, and observations of feminists, ecologists, psychologists and other concerned individuals, are coming together with many of the thoughts of Melville, the writer.

Alternative ecological technologies are slowly being developed to preserve the earth, and to counteract the social costs of an affluent society - poisoned air, water, and soil. Elements within mainstream technology and science are just beginning to show the imagination that Rosemary Radford Ruether considers necessary:

Clearly an ecological technology will demand great scientific imagination, but an imagination directed toward the common good of the entire world community and one which seeks to integrate the human sociosphere into the biosphere of nature in a positively reinforcing relationship.<sup>9</sup>

Our problem - and, perhaps, our tragedy - is that we are slow to act in the positively reinforcing relationship that Ruether describes. The quest for 'progress', related to the idea of the world as just dead matter 'up for grabs', is one that continues in a power race to get the largest portion of nature's resources before it is too late. Many human beings are like Ahab in their desire to know and conquer all in a quest for progress. In spite of the "loomings", the signs and the omens, 'progress' continues in a narcissistic, self-interested drive - one which leads to ways in which we are capable of destroying not only ourselves but much of the world in which we live.

Levi-Strauss's view, that "in any case man's stay will come to an end",<sup>10</sup> does not mean that the end has to be premature because of our universal negligence and culpability. The possibility that *homo sapiens* may become extinct, as other species have before us, may, for many people, seem incredible. It is difficult to visualise a world without humans, so indoctrinated are we with the idea of ourselves as supreme. Evidence of human greed and *hubris* causes, for many, anxiety and despair, the kind of despair which can 'freeze' us into inaction but which has to be counteracted. Hope, as well as humility, are essential if we are to continue our quest for the maturity that will allow a sustainable life alternative.

Ruether's view of a sustainable life alternative - a new society - is of one "no longer bent on conquering the earth" but one that would



have more time for "artistic work that celebrated being for its own sake". She goes on to say:

... such interiority would not be cultivated at the expense of the community, as in monastic escape from "the world." It would be a cultivation of the self that would be at one with an affirmation of others, both our immediate neighbours and all humanity and the earth itself, as that "thou" with whom "I" am in a state of reciprocal interdependence.

Such solidarity is not utopian, but eminently practical, pointing to our actual solidarity with all others and with our mother, the earth, which is the actual ground of our being. Perhaps this also means a letting-go of that self-infinetizing view of the self that culminates in the wish for personal immortality. One accepts the fact that it is the whole, not the individual, which is that "infinite" out of whose womb we arise at birth and into whose womb we are content to return at death, using the human capacity for consciousness, not to alienate ourselves from nature, but rather, to nurture ... and renew her natural harmonies, so that the earth might be fair, not only for us and our children, but for all generations of living things to come.<sup>11</sup>

Men and women are now working to transform culturally imposed racial and sexual boundaries and hierarchies and to affirm "a state of reciprocal interdependence" that Ruether speaks about. Integrated partnerships are developing in which there is recognition of the human animal as part of the world of nature, and not superior to it. In Australia we are learning to reconnect with our Aboriginal 'landcestors' and their far more ancient, nature oriented, myths and beliefs.

Our hope is in the growing, ecosophic, Ishmaelian awareness of the need to turn away from the tragedy of the inverted, monomaniac, hunter-warrior, heroic quest, and the desire for

"personal immortality", towards the 'comedy' that is circular and seasonal, which accommodates rebirth, renewal and "the culture of life".<sup>12</sup> The re-visioning of myths, and the genesis of new cosmic creation stories is a major part of the change. The cross-fertilization of academic disciplines brings new understanding to science. All contribute to a recognition of the need for a renewed relationship with nature. Change starts with a change of thinking. It can come from many cultures, many perspectives, and many perceptions of nature-oriented 'divinity', and interconnectedness. The change of direction that was Ishmael's can also be ours. We too can be part of an "ecological, cosmic democracy".

---

<sup>1</sup> Abdu'l-Baha, *Star of the West: Journal of Bahai Studies*, 2:1,1989, p. 52.

<sup>2</sup> Leyda, *op. cit.*, p. 413. "You must often have felt it, lying in the grass on a summers day. Your legs seem to send out shoots into the earth. Your hair feels like leaves upon your head. This is the *all* feeling". Melville however, cautions his Pantheist readers of danger in the inability to assert the difference between the self and the nonself (cf thesis p.32).

<sup>3</sup> Bob Brown at the University of Tasmania, April, 1991.

<sup>4</sup> T.S. Eliot, *Little Gidding*.

<sup>5</sup> Rupert Sheldrake, lecture at the Centre for Environmental Studies, University of Tasmania, February, 1990.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Carey, *op. cit.*, p. 492.

<sup>8</sup> Mary Douglas and Aaron Wildavsky, *Risk and Culture: An Essay on the Selection of Technical and Environmental Dangers.*, University of California Press, California, 1972, p. 33.

<sup>9</sup> Ruether, *op. cit.*, pp. 205-6.

<sup>10</sup> Levi-Strauss, *op. cit.*, p. 508.

<sup>11</sup> Ruether, *op. cit.*, p. 211.

<sup>12</sup> This is the theme of Joseph Meeker's *Comedy of Survival*, *op. cit.*

## Bibliography

Abrams, M. H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*.  
Rinehart & Winston, New York, 1981.

Abdu'l-Baha. *Star of the West*. Journal of Bahai Studies, Association of Bahai Studies, 2:1, 1989.

Atwood, Margaret. *Surfacing*.  
Virago, London, 1979.

Beaver, H. Introduction to *Moby-Dick* (see Melville)

Brolly, Mark. *Age* (Melbourne). 9th February, 1991.

Bullfinch, Thomas. *Bulfinch's Mythology* Avenal/ Crown, New York, 1979.

Cady, Susan; Ronan, Marian; and Taussig, Hal. *Wisdom's Feast: Sophia in Study and Celebration*.  
Harper and Row, San Francisco, 1989.

Campbell, Joseph. *The Power of Myth*.  
Doubleday, New York, 1988.

Campbell, Joseph. *The Masks of God: Creative Mythology*.  
Condor, London, 1988.

Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*.  
Paladin, London, 1988.

Capra, F. *The Turning Point*,  
Fontana, London, 1982.

Carey, Peter. *Oscar and Lucinda*,  
Queensland University Press, Queensland, 1988.

Carson, Rachel. *Silent Spring*.  
Penguin, Harmondsworth (Eng.), 1982.

Cavendish, Richard. *King Arthur and the Grail : The Arthurian Legends and their Meaning*.  
Book Club Associates/Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London, 1978.

Chase, Richard Volney (ed.). *Melville: A Collection of Critical Essays*.  
Prentice Hall, New Jersey, 1962.

Chopin, Kate. *The Awakening and Selected Stories*.  
Penguin American Library, New York, 1984.

Cockburn, Cynthia. 'Woman in the Wood', *Pulp*, Common Ground, London, 1989. p. 30.

Collard, Andree and Contrucci, Joyce. *Rape of the Wild: Man's Violence Against Animals and the Earth*.

Indiana University Press, Bloomington & Indianapolis, 1989.

*Collins Concise Encyclopedia*.

PeerAge Books, London, 1984.

Cruden, Alexander. *Complete Concordance to the Bible*.

Letterworth Press, London 1979.

Daly, Mary. *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*

The Women's Press, London, 1979.

Dickinson, Emily. (Ed. Robert N. Linscott). *Selected Poems of Emily Dickinson*.

Doubleday/Anchor, New York, 1959.

*Dictionary of the English language*, (ed. P. Hanks). Collins,

Sydney, 1986.

Dillard, Annie. *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*.

Picador/Pan, London, 1976.

Douglas, Mary and Wildavsky, Aaron. *Risk and Culture: An Essay on the Selection of Technical and Environmental Dangers*.

University of Californian Press, California, 1982.

Drengson, Alan R. 'What is Ecosophy?

*Trumpeter: Journal of Ecosophy*,

7:1, 1990, pp. 1, 2.

Drengson, Alan R. 'Process, Relationships and Ecosophy'.

*Trumpeter: Journal of Ecosophy*,

8:1, 1991.

Dutney, Andrew. 'Creation and the Church: Proposals and Prospects for an Ecological Ecclesiology'. *Ecopolitic Proceedings 11*, Centre for Environmental Studies, University of Tasmania, Hobart, 1987. pp. 84-90.

Eisler, Riane Tennehaus. *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future*. Harper and Row, San Francisco, 1987.

*Epic of Gilgamesh* (ed. N.K. Sanders). Penguin, Harmondsworth (Eng.), 1972.

Feidelson, Charles, Jnr. *Symbolism and American Literature*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1953.

Franklin, Bruce, H. *The Wake of the Gods: Melville's Mythology*.

Stanford University Press, Stanford (U.S.A.), 1963.

Frazer, J. G. *The Golden Bough*.

Macmillan Press, London, 1922.

Frye, Northrop. *The Anatomy of Criticism*.  
Princeton University Press. Princeton, 1971.

Frye, Northrop. *Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology*. Harvest Brace Jovanovitch, San Diego, 1963.

Gilmore, Michael T. (ed). *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Moby-Dick*. Prentice-Hall, Eaglewood Cliffs (New Jersey), 1977.

Goldsmith, Edward, and Hidyad, Nicholas (gen. eds.). *Battle for the Earth: Today's Environmental Issues*. Child & Associates, Brookvale (New. South Wales), 1988.

Gould, Stephen Jay. *The Panda's Thumb*.  
Norton, New York, 1980.

Green, Doyle L. (ed.). *The New Era: Man's Dominion*.  
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints  
Utah, 2:10, 1972, pp. 25-31.

Griffen Ray (ed). *The Re-enchantment of Science*.  
State University of New York Press, New York, 1990.

Grimal, Pierre (ed.). *Larousse World Myths*.  
Gallery Books, New York, 1965.

Hardin, Garrett. 'The Tragedy of the Commons'. *Science*,  
1968, 162: pp.1243-1248.

Heilbrun, Carolyn G. *Reinventing Womanhood*.  
Norton. New York, 1979

*Holy Bible*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (Eng.), 1945.

Homer. *The Odyssey*. (Translation E.V. Rieu).  
Penguin, London, 1951.

Hynes, Patricia, H. *The Reoccurring Silent Spring*, Pergamon, New York, 1989.

Jacobi, Jolande, 'Symbols in Individual Analysis'. Jung, C. G. *Man and His Symbols* (see below). pp. 323-374.

Johnson, Robert, A. *He: Understanding Masculine Psychology*.  
Harper and Row, New York, 1989.

Joranson, Philip N. and Butigan, Ken. *Cry of the Environment: Rebuilding the Christian Tradition*. Bear & Co., New Mexico, 1984.

Joyce, James. *Ulysses*  
Penguin Classics, London, 1960.

Jung, C. G. (ed). *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*.  
Flamingo/Fontana, London, 1983.

Jung, C. G. *Man and His Symbols*.  
Picador/Pan, London, 1978.

Jung, Emma. *Animus and Anima*.  
Spring Publications, Dallas (Texas), 1957.

King-Boyes, M. *Patterns of Aboriginal Culture: Then and Now*.  
McGraw-Hill, Sydney, 1977.

*The Koran* (translation N.J.Dawood). Penguin, Harmondsworth  
(Eng.), 1983.

Kirk, G. S. *The Nature of Greek Myths*.  
Penguin, Harmondsworth (Eng.), 1974.

Lieber, Todd, M. *Endless Experiments: Essays on the Heroic  
Experience in American Romanticism*.  
Ohio State University Press, Ohio, 1973.

Levi-Strauss, Claude. *The Origin of Table Manners : Introduction to  
a Science of Mythology*. Harper and Row, New York, 1979.

Levi Strauss, Claude. *Myth and Meaning*.  
University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1979.

Lewis, R.W.B. *The American Adam.  
Innocence Tragedy and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century*.  
University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1955.

Leyda, Jay. *The Melville Log: A Documentary Life of Herman  
Melville*. Vol.1. Harcourt & Brace, New York, 1951.

Lovelock, J. E. *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth*.  
Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1989.

Lovelock, J. E. 'Elements', *An Atlas of Planet Management* (gen. ed.  
Norman Myers). Anchor/Doubleday, Garden City (New York), 1984.  
p.100.

MacLagan, David. *Creation Myths: Man's Introduction to the  
World*. Thames & Hudson, London, 1977.

*Mabinogion* (ed. Leslie Norris,Translator Lady Charlotte Guest). The  
Folio Society, London, 1980.

Meeker, Joseph. *The Comedy of Survival* .  
Scribner's Sons, New York, 1974. New edition Guild of Tutors, Los  
Angeles, 1980.