Pip, "Moby-Dick", Melville's Governmentality

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In the 125th chapter of *Moby-Dick*, three days prior to his fateful encounter with the white whale, Captain Ahab becomes hopelessly attached to Pip, a young black shipkeeper from Tolland County, Connecticut, a character Ishmael described as "the most insignificant of the Pequod's crew" and to whom Ahab had given no attention in the preceding 390 pages of the narrative (319). Ahab's melancholic attraction to Pip becomes so affecting—"I feel prouder leading thee by thy black hand than though I grasped an Emperor's!"—that it threatens to derail the captain's previously unswerving resolve, recovery of which requires Ahab's threatening to screw Pip to his captain's chair (392).

> *Lad, lad I tell thee thou must not follow Ahab now. The hour is coming when Ahab would not scare thee from him, yet would not have thee by him. There is that in thee, poor lad, which I feel too curing to my malady. Like cures like; and for this hunt, my malady becomes my most desired health. Do thou abide below here, where they shall serve thee, as if thou wert the captain. Aye, lad, thou shalt sit here in my own screwed chair; another screw to it, thou must be.* (399)

This abrupt, seemingly unmotivated break in the narrative line is so utterly out of synch with the sequence of narrative events and so violently disrupts the momentum that Melville's story line had been gathering that it seems a scene from an altogether different narrative.

Despite its brevity, Ahab's intense encounter with Pip nonetheless figures in draft form a series of prototypically Melvillean dilemmas—the sovereign law's relationship to radical innocence, the representational limits of slave insurrection, the racial subcontract, the colonial specters of global modernity, the limit conditions of communicative discourse. Rather than engage with the interpretive conundrums encrypted within this scene, Melville scholars have selected works from titles on the author's B-list—*Billy Budd, Benito Cereno, Bartleby, the Scrivener*—to explicate them. When Melville scholars address this relationship at all, they describe it as a reprise of King Lear's interactions with the fool, so

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as to remark upon Melville's mastery of the generic conventions of the British Renaissance.[1]

This essay constitutes a preliminary effort to link Ahab's interaction with Pip to Melville's engagement with the dilemmas saturating this scenario by situating *Moby-Dick* within the context of a project that I have tentatively called novel governmentalities.

I have chosen the phrase *novel governmentalities* to refer to the role that novels in particular play in shaping and altering the conduct of conduct. *Governmentality* is the term of art that Michel Foucault invented to describe the encompassing processes linking the way in which individual subjects conduct themselves ("ethics") with the forms of power and domination through which states regulate the conduct of national populations.[2] Novels constituted the form that governmentality assumed when it targeted the modalities of expression, political proclivities, schemata of perception, affective dispositions, and embodied beliefs through which governing rules and norms were internalized to supply, secure, and maintain readers' forms of conduct and programs of self-governance. Because of their capacity to take hold of the processes of behaving, thinking, and feeling immanent to their readers' conduct and to create structures of desire and affective protocols that introduced, secured, and valorized new forms of life, novels implemented both registers of governmentality.

To restrict novels to a domain of signifying practices is to pay insufficient attention to the ways in which this cultural technology constituted, legitimated, and sometimes altered the institutional conditions that regulated disparate aspects of the social order. *Moby-Dick*, the specific instance of novel governmentality with which this essay is concerned, at once investigated and advanced a network of economic, political, and aesthetic practices that emerged in the nineteenth cen-

1 Sharon Cameron and C. L. R. James, the two critics who have devoted serious critical attention to Pip, have described him as the part of Ahab's mind that "is driven out," in the case of Cameron (27), and as a "dramatization of the unattainable vision that floats in Ahab's disordered mind," according to James (56).

2 Michel Foucault famously understood the state to be more affecting through the state technics that individuals adapted to cultivate themselves. I found the following passage from his essay on governmentality especially pertinent to my thinking about *Moby-Dick*:

> *The fact that government concerns things understood in this way, this imbrication of men and things, is I believe readily confirmed by the metaphor which is inevitably invoked in these treatises of government, namely that of the ship. What does it mean to govern a ship? It means clearly to take charge of the sailors, but also of the boat and its cargo; to take care of a ship means also to reckon with winds, rocks and storms; and it consists in that activity of establishing a relation between the sailors who are to be taken care of and the ship which is to be taken care of, and the cargo which is to be brought safely to port, and all those eventualities like winds, rocks, storms, and so on; this is what characterizes the government of a ship. . . . Government, that is to say, has a finality of its own, and in this respect again I believe it can be clearly distinguished from sovereignty.* (93–94)

Foucault's analytics of discourse and power has also influenced the scholarship of the critics and scholars who have refined my understanding of novel governmentality. I am especially indebted to Ian Baucom for inspiring the theoretical paradigms organizing this essay's thematic line and for attuning me to the importance of the conflictual relationship between speculative and testamentary discourses to the history of the modern novel.

tury to intervene in the domain of morals and manners of its reading publics. This domain, commonly known as culture, was figured as both the object and the instrument of governance.

Moby-Dick also served as a case through which the conventions and rules underpinning the practices of this domain could be changed.[3] Melville's novel includes a compendium of the general rules and norms regulating the archive of imperial governance. In revealing the interconnecting networks of economic, affective, and psychic stratagems by which Ahab anchored his administrative state in the life world of the crew, *Moby-Dick* made visible the institutional registers in which this literary practice was inscribed.

Read as a catastrophically exemplary event, *Moby-Dick* opens a vista in which a total event becomes retrospectively and prospectively visible—the inauguration of a finance-driven regime of US global hegemony that began with the commercial imperialism of the nineteenth century and mutated into debt imperialism at the outset of the twenty-first. Dominated at both ends by the stocks, bonds, and other financial instruments of speculative capital, US global capitalist modernity circulated through an archipelago of circum-oceanic port cities and was facilitated by white settler colonialism, market revolutions, the slave system, the massive collateralizing of networks of finance, goods, and the inauguration of a transnational state of exception.[4]

Moby-Dick's role as an agent of governmentality became clearest during the Cold War when the novel was not, for scholars of American literature, merely an object of analysis. It had become one of the planetary vehicles responsible for the global hegemonization of US Americanist values. Melville's novel provided American studies scholars with an instrument of global soul making that extirpated any historical witness to US colonial-imperial violence and elevated the liberal values of freedom and individual autonomy into the geopolitical agencies putatively responsible for the progressive movement of world history. After *Moby-Dick* was made to predict the world-scale antagonism of the Cold War, this frame narrative assisted in structuring the understanding and self-organization of the exemplary national society that it at once represented and propagated.[5]

In *Moby-Dick*, competing governmentalities structure and shape the field of possible action of Melville's characters: one traffics in the speculative language of

[3] James turned *Moby-Dick* into *the* reference manual for an understanding of the rules of US imperial governance.

[4] *Moby-Dick* is at once a truth event governed by the general norms of the historical circumstances in which it is situated and an event that serves as a exceptional case from which those circumstances and norms can be deduced. After writing *Moby-Dick*, Melville remains faithful to this catastrophic truth event by turning his later work into occasions to continue Ishmael's novel governmentality by other means. These later works bear witness to the melancholic facts encrypted within Ishmael's testamentary discourse. For a formulation of the significance of truth events, see Alain Badiou's *Being and Event*. Baucom explains the pertinence of the truth event to the formation of Anglo-American global modernity (117–23).

[5] For an elaboration of the significance of *Moby-Dick* to Cold War Americanization strategies, see Donald E. Pease, "*Moby-Dick* and the Cold War," and William V. Spanos (2–36).

contract; the other is informed by the testamentary language of melancholy.[6] The novel dramatizes Melville's anxious fascination with the power of the imagination to construct both speculative and melancholic objects. The antagonism between the speculative and melancholic discourses that organize Ishmael's narrative could be described as a contest between different modes of investing in the spectacle of humanity—claims of contract and finance capital on the one side and melancholy and testimony on the other. It is not only the affections of the social body that are at stake in this conflict but also incompatible ways of securing those affections to the disposition of the imagination. Where finance capital invests the social body in imaginary values, melancholic sentimentality trades in imaginative sympathy.[7]

Both melancholic and speculative projects share the presupposition that the narrator's relation to the crew's humanity is an investment. But Melville situated Ishmael's narrative at the site of their insuperable opposition. As a figure of novel governmentality, Ishmael's testamentary witness to the shipwreck of the crew stands in agonistic relationship with his position as the disinterested observer who oversees the composition of the narrative's speculative fabulations.

In *Tarrying with the Negative*, Slavoj Žižek constructs a critical genealogy of the disinterested observer and the witness that explains the roots of this antagonism in a context pertinent to *Moby-Dick*. Žižek follows Hegel's account of the role that revolutionary terror played in reformulating the subject's self-alienation in dealing with the social substance of the state. "Under prior feudal, sacral, or courtly regimes of public virtue, the subject . . . alienated itself, surrendered its right to self-possession in exchange either for honor, the promise of Heaven, or some other reward" (Baucom 54–55). "However," Žižek cautions, "when we reach the apogee of this dialectic, 'absolute freedom,' the exchange between the particular and the universal Will, the subject 'gets nothing in exchange for everything'" (23). The subject is required to alienate itself to the sovereignty of the state not in the name of some compensation or promise of reward but in the name of an abstract, collective project of freedom. In so doing the subject is obliged to participate in a nonequivalent exchange—the alienation of the particularized individual's desires, interests, and beliefs for the sake of and in the name of absolute freedom as a collective ethical imperative. Nothing else is offered in exchange for the right to continued existence that the subject cancels in the name of that project. The subject negates its right to possess itself and secures nothing but the state's demand for that negation in return.

Upon internalizing this collective categorical imperative, the modern subject becomes an anonymous, interchangeable bearer of a universal will to freedom. The Enlightenment subject does not relate to itself as a particular desiring will, but, as the self-addressed addressee of a universal project, it "typicalizes" itself as an abstract representative of universal humanity (Baucom 45).

6 Baucom provides a nuanced formulation of the relationship between speculative and testamentary discourses (21–34).

7 For further elaborations of the antagonistic cooperation between finance capital's traffic in imaginary values and melancholic sentimentality's production of imaginative sympathy, see James Chandler, Deidre Lynch, and Mary Poovey.

According to Žižek, it was not merely the Enlightenment state that alienated the subject from its particularity so as to bind it to a collective will. It was also the financial market. Žižek specifically argues that the subject generated by finance-capital emerged at the same moment that the individual became a subject of the Enlightenment. In the following passage, Žižek discerns a conceptual link between the genesis of modern self-consciousness and the notion of paper money underpinning finance capital:

> *In order to arrive at paper money as we know it today, the deictic promise with concrete dates and names had to be depersonalized into a promise made to the anonymous "bearer." . . . And the subject who came to recognize itself as the anonymous "bearer" is the very subject of [modern] self-consciousness, . . . [a subject that] has to relate to itself, to conceive of itself, as (to) an empty "bearer" and to perceive the empirical features which constitute the positive content of the particular "person" as a contingent variable.* (28–29)

In Žižek's view, abstract reason and financial speculation were predicated on one another. The Enlightenment's conceptual categories and the paper-money form underpinning financial exchange served as mutual conditions of possibility and comparable general equivalents.

The categorical imperative that the Enlightenment revolution articulated in disseminating its governmentality—the terror-secured demand that the person of individualized, particularized desires, wills, purposes negate herself or himself under the abstract sign of the citizen—and the modern subject that fashioned itself by disinterestedly identifying with the financial exchanges of credit and risk of global capitalism provided the dual origins of modern subjectivity (Baucom 65–66). The double origin of the modern subject and the modern as a period concept also produced a foreclosed figure as the effect of these twin speculative revolutions. Žižek calls this figure "the witness." The witness sits in an agonistic relationship with the disinterested observer who oversees the advent and administration of the Enlightenment state. The witness is a successor figure to the sympathetic observer who legitimates that state. As witness to the Enlightenment's negation of the self, this figure interrupts the subject position that has foreclosed it. Whereas the Enlightenment subject repeatedly tries to constitute or solidify itself through what it voids and causes to vanish, the witness is encrypted as the locus of what it has lost. To speak of the witness is not to speak of an Enlightenment subject but to speak of the figure that the subject-effects of the global Enlightenment annul.

The witness can itself serve speculative functions— Žižek's account of the homology between the subject of finance capital and the subject of the Enlightenment serves as a good example of a speculative witness. A witness becomes testamentary when it invests in the melancholic properties of what it witnesses. In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Giorgio Agamben resurrects a term of art in Roman law, *homo sacer*, to bear witness to the scenario through which the Enlightenment revolution effected the negation of the particularized individual. A figure that the sovereign could kill yet not sacrifice, *homo sacer* defined the relationship between sovereign power and humanity. When the sovereign imperium

engaged a human life form, it had the power to denude the individual of all its signature, particularized attributes and reduce it to a bare biological body. The "bare life" the *homo sacer* embodied was, "from the point of view of sovereignty, the original political element."[8] Citizens had to pay for their participation in political life with their unconditional subjection to the sovereign's power of death. If bare life named the condition that a particular individual's life form assumed in its encounter with sovereign power, the reduction of the individual to the condition of bare life also named that which inaugurated sovereign power. Power became sovereign in and through the primordial biopolitical act of reducing human life forms to the condition of bare life.

According to Agamben, the sovereign subject of human rights that the Enlightenment ostensibly installed to oppose this oppressive dynamic in fact reproduced it:

> *Declarations of rights represent the originary figure of the inscription of natural life in the juridico-political order of the nation-state. The same bare life that in the* ancien régime *was politically neutral and belonged to God as creaturely life and in the classical world (at least apparently) clearly distinguished as* zoē *from political life (*bios*) now fully enters into the structure of the state and even becomes the earthly foundation of the state's legitimacy and sovereignty. A simple examination of the text of the Declaration of 1789 shows that it is precisely bare natural life—which is to say, the pure fact of birth—that appears here as the source and bearer of rights.* (*Homo Sacer* 127)

In Agamben's view, the Enlightenment instituted the sovereign subject of human rights through reduction of the individual's particularity into "bare life." Hence the politics of human rights cannot oppose the modern production of bare life because it articulates the relays *within* the modern sovereign subject through which the state establishes its dominion over life itself. The foreclosure of the recognition of this interior abjection consolidated the coherence of the Enlightenment subject's sovereignty. The sovereign Enlightenment subject must disavow recognition of the *homo sacer within* so as to differentiate modern "enlightened" politics from the prior oppressive order. Agamben has resurrected this archaic figure to bear witness to the always already foreclosed procedures whereby particularized individuals get reduced to what Žižek describes as the vacant subject of the Enlightenment. The *homo sacer* became a testamentary witness in bearing the melancholic, experiential knowledge of this foreclosure.[9]

[8] "[T]he inclusion of bare life in the political realm constitutes the original—if concealed—nucleus of sovereign power" (*Homo Sacer* 6).

[9] Agamben elaborates on the role of *homo sacer* as witness in *Remnants of Auschwitz*. But his are not the only theoretical scenarios through which the testamentary witness becomes imaginable. Jacques Lacan locates the figure of the "destitute subject" between two deaths—the death of the social symbolic order and the death of the socially mandated subject. See *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*. Jacques Derrida turns to Paul Celan's poetry to elucidate a distinction between complete witnesses, who did not survive, and the survivors who bear secondary witness to this complete witness.

Interpreters of *Moby-Dick* have tended to focus their attention on Ishmael's speculations about the ideological, economic, and symbolic costs of the catastrophe he narrates. But this perspective has obfuscated if not eclipsed Ishmael's affecting witness to the historical trauma he underwent.[10] Ishmael does indeed bear disinterested witness to the emergence and triumph of an abstract, speculative hypercapitalized modernity; but his narrative also attests to the emergence from within global American modernity's speculative culture of the testamentary discourse of a survivor.[11]

Pip's Witness

According to Agamben, "the value of testimony lies essentially in what it lacks; at its center it contains something that cannot be borne witness to" (*Remnants* 34). That something gets conveyed in the following passage, in which Ishmael describes what happens after Pip, who is doubly terrified—of whales and of drowning at sea—suddenly gets tangled up in a whaling rope and falls overboard at the very moment that Stubb, the boat's commanding officer, spots a whale and gives chase:

> *When the whale started to run, Pip was left behind on the sea, like a hurried traveller's trunk. . . . It was a beautiful, bounteous, blue day; the spangled sea calm and cool, and flatly stretching away, all round, to the horizon, like gold-beater's skin hammered out to the extremest. Bobbing up and down in that sea, Pip's ebon head showed like a head of cloves. No boat-knife was lifted when he fell so rapidly astern. Stubb's inexorable back was turned upon him; and the whale was winged. In three minutes, a whole mile of shoreless ocean was between Pip and Stubb. Out from the centre of the sea, poor Pip turned his crisp, curling black head to the sun, another lonely castaway, though the loftiest and the brightest. . . . But the awful lonesomeness is intolerable. The intense concentration of self in the middle of such a heartless immensity, my God! who can tell it? . . . Stubb's boat was now so far away, and he and all his crew so intent upon his fish, that Pip's ringed horizon began to expand around him miserably. By the merest chance the ship itself at last rescued him; but from that hour the little negro went about the deck an idiot; such, at least, they said he was. The sea has jeeringly kept his finite body up, but drowned the infinite of his soul. Not drowned entirely, though. Rather carried down alive to wondrous depths, where strange shapes of the unwarped primal world glided to and fro before his passive eyes; and the mermerman, Wisdom, revealed his hoarded heaps and among the joyous, heartless, everjuvenile eternities, Pip saw the multitudinous, God omnipresent coral insects, that out of the firmament of waters heaved the colossal orbs. He saw God's foot upon the treadle of the loom, and spoke it; and therefore his shipmates called him mad.* (321–22)

[10] For an explanation of this dynamic, see Pease, "*Moby-Dick* and the Cold War."

[11] Eyal Peretz has read Ishmael's discourse as a sign of the emergence from within Euro-American modernity's speculative culture of the historical witness whose testamentary discourse runs counter to it (33–39).

Ishmael's account of Pip's encounter with the oceanic abyss causes him to abandon the speculative subjunctive that characterized his earlier style of narration. In this passage, Ishmael takes up an idiom that bears narrative witness to Pip's trauma by transposing it into a quasi-scriptural encounter with the untranslatable source of human utterance—"He saw God's foot upon the treadle of the loom and spoke it." Ishmael's incorporation of biblical cadences and scriptural figures within the mortal secular language through which he obtains access to Pip's near-death experience invests his testamentary witness with an uncannily sacred resonance.

The resistance to substitution of this encrypted scene places it outside the realm of speculative exchange. But Pip's ordeal also draws upon figures that Ishmael invoked in what might be described as the primal scene of his testamentary discourse:

> *If, then, to meanest mariners, and renegades and castaways, I shall hereafter ascribe high qualities, though dark; weave round them tragic graces; if even the most mournful, perchance the most abased, among them all, shall at times lift to himself the exalted mounts; if I shall touch that workman's arm with some ethereal light; if I shall spread a rainbow over his disastrous set of sun; then against all mortal critics bear me out in it, thou just Spirit of Equality, which hast spread one royal mantle of humanity over all my kind!* (103–4)

Although it is inscribed in chapter 26 of the novel, this passage does not represent an event that has already taken place within the narrated action. Moreover, the time in which this scene takes place is not contemporaneous with the narration of *Moby-Dick*. The passage grants Ishmael access to the scene from within which the narrating "I" is still deliberating so that he can attest to his resolve to do narrative justice to the characters and events in *Moby-Dick*. Ishmael's witness is at once the agent and effect of the invocation he addresses to the Spirit of Equality. Ishmael's invocation can only be successfully borne out if the Spirit of Equality enjoins Ishmael to the ethical imperative to find words that would confound "all mortal critics" by attesting narrative witness to the tragic fate of the mariners, renegades, and castaways.[12]

The Spirit of Equality responds to the entreaties of Ishmael's aggrieved witness by inspiring the words that have lifted Pip, clearly the "most mournful, perchance the most abased" of the mariners, renegades, and castaways, to the most "exalted mounts." "Pip" names a character as well as the horrific event to which he is inextricably tethered. This passage reveals the figurations through which Ishmael's testamentary discourse took melancholy property in Pip's trauma and passed it on. Ishmael's determination to bring Pip back to life demanded that he bear witness to the inexchangeable singularity of the "Pip event." This catastrophic event brings to light the subject-canceling and identity-negating triumphs of a culture of speculation as the catastrophic truth to which this scene offers testimony.

[12] For further discussion of the importance of this scene of writing to the composition of *Moby-Dick*, see Pease, "Narrative."

Pip embodies the figure that Jacques Derrida has called a complete witness, one who cannot bear witness because he has touched bottom and drowned. The survivors speak in the stead of such a witness. According to Derrida, the value of survivors' testimony lies essentially in their discovering that they must also be witnesses and be able to testify "before their consciences or before others, to what they have attended, to what they have been present at, to what they have happened to be in the presence of: the testimony of the [complete] witness" (Derrida 200). That testimony gets conveyed in what Ishmael says Pip envisioned. Pip may have seen God's foot upon the treadle of the wheel. But he has not survived to tell of it. He instead became completely submerged in what he witnessed. Pip's "drowning" involved his becoming flooded by too much to be processed as speech. This seemingly infinite stream of primal inspiration seemingly emanating from the primal source of utterance itself has drowned the dimension of Pip that can bring back the news of the infinite to the realm of finitude.

After this experience Pip speaks a language that "no longer signifies and that, in not signifying, advances into what is without language, to the point of taking on a different insignificance—that of the complete witness, that of he who by definition cannot bear witness" (Agamben *Remnants* 39). Pip the castaway's witness becomes the basis for Ishmael the survivor's bearing secondary witness as his testamentary narrative. Pip, who has been part of the crew up to this point, now feels himself so completely cut off from the crew that his alienation has assumed the status of the social death productive of the slave. Nations produce death-worlds, in prisons, death camps, and slave systems. Edith Wyschogrod has argued that these death-worlds were instituted to create and contain the imagined conditions of death (113–15). The civilizations that instituted these death-worlds produced the illusion that the containment of mortality within these restricted encampments engendered an immortality structure for their own symbolic orders. Through his representation of Pip's fate on board the *Pequod*, Melville shows the reader how the imagined condition of death, the experience of being dead while alive, is generated.

The image of the plantation, the image of the slave ship, the image of the Pequot massacre, all flash up as Pip drowns. Pip was the *Pequod*'s Jonah man. Floating toward the abyss, Pip became the mediator with it. Pip bears the remainder of his life as witness to his own demise. Pip does not return as a saved body; he returns as a drowned man. By remaining bound to the event of his drowning, his presence among the crew turns the ship into a death-world.

Pip is the part of the crew that has gone missing, and that, like Ahab's leg, is lost beyond reattachment. As the portion of the crew that has already undergone their fate, Pip returned as a messenger from the abyss that would soon include them within its catastrophic reach. The ordeal of those who went from the belly of the ship into the infinitely more turbulent belly of the ocean's depth did not die.

Moby-Dick as Cold War Governmentality Novel

I began these remarks with the observation that Pip's story has no place either in the Americanist canon or in the revenge tragedy at the heart of Melville's text. Pip

did not desire to avenge his "drowning," and Melville commentators have not represented his casting off as crime in need of punishment.

The paucity of commentary about Pip is of a piece with critics' aversion to witnessing the trauma of the *Pequod*'s crew and the series of historical disasters—the Pequot massacre, the Middle Passage, Indian Removal sites—their tragedy "recollects." To justify their erasure, Cold War Americanist literary scholars allegorized the crew's submission to Ahab's overpowering will as a prefiguration of the masses under totalitarian rule. In their commentary on the novel, these critics render Ahab's will to power and the crew's actual domination into more or less interchangeable ontological conditions.

During the Cold War, the difference between voluntary and coerced submission is seen as regulated by Ishmael, who was said to have liberated himself from Ahab's will. Describing them as a discredited population, Cold War critics represent the crew as the reverse image of liberty as liberating or enlightening. When the crew violates the terms of their contract with the owners of the *Pequod*, they also violate the terms guaranteeing their bond with the state. When they disband from the conditions of the contract, their speculative value is annulled. The reverse image of liberty as liberating or enlightening, the crew thereafter become ignominious representatives of forms of life that the world-historical processes responsible for the globalization of Enlightenment values annul, simply marking time until the traumatic shipwreck takes their lives. The crew become the negative referent in the Cold War's biopolitical settlement in which the capacity to be killed is inherent in the condition of being a member of the *Pequod*'s crew (Pease, "Emergence" 102–5).

The position Pip occupies within the history of interpretations of *Moby-Dick* uncannily prefigures the crew's interpretive fate. Pip's catastrophe takes place in a tragic vacuum. Although he is the first human casualty of Ahab's manic quest, the absence of reaction to Pip's tragic ordeal stands in inverse relationship to the superfluity of reactions to Ahab's encounter with Moby Dick.

Pip names what the whale ship did not want. This little piece of refuse is unwanted as a laborer and inconsumable as meat. His outlandish existence is subject neither to Ahab's will nor to the laws of the genre. He is abandoned after falling overboard because he poses an obstacle to the hunt of a normal whale. After Pip gets caught up in the rope used to harpoon whales, Stubb leaves him to die in the water. Although his death recalls Turner's unforgettable image of slaves thrown from slavers, Pip is not sacrificed to ensure the crew's survival. He is not cast out to engender the ship's unity, and no one bears responsibility for or wants to avenge his death. Ishmael's prose bears unforgettable melancholic witness to the event of Pip's drowning. But after Pip returns from his watery grave and irrupts into the crew's network of personal, economic, political, and historical relationships, those relationships remain unchanged.

Ahab and Ishmael

Why does Ishmael not extend his melancholic attachments and sympathetic identification to the remainder of the crew? An answer to this question requires a brief examination of the basis for Ishmael's attraction to Ahab.

In the opening page of his narrative, Ishmael attributes his motive for going out to sea as the will to break out of the melancholic condition he calls the hypos that he fears will eventuate in his suicide. Ishmael signs up as a crew member on board the *Pequod* to discharge his spleen by getting caught up in delirium that promises to immerse him in a flood of intensely animating experiences. Upon boarding the ship, Ishmael reinvests his melancholia in the speculative delirium animating his prose style.

Ishmael's subjunctive style allows him to transform the things he perceives into the rhetoric through which he takes speculative possession of them. In the course of his narrative, he moves from one intellectual model to another, seizing hold of each, then investing each with the subjunctive power of his imagination. In so doing, he converts the facts of his world and all of the events in his life into a persuasive power capable of reckoning them as the money of his mind.

Ahab provides Ishmael's speculative imagination a fantasy of freedom so utterly absolved of constraint that it cannot even bear to be restricted by its own actualization. In the following exchange with Starbuck, Ahab leverages the imaginary values of the market against an Enlightenment ideal that would risk the loss of everything in the furious pursuit of a final reckoning with the malign forces within the universe.

> *[Starbuck:] Vengeance on a dumb brute . . . that simply smote thee from blindest instinct! Madness! . . . I am game for his crooked jaw, and for the jaws of Death too, Captain Ahab, if it fairly comes in the way of the business we follow; but I came here to hunt whales, not my commander's vengeance. How many barrels will thy vengeance yield thee even if thou gettest it, Captain Ahab? it will not fetch thee much in our Nantucket market.*
>
> *[Ahab:] Hark ye yet again—the little lower layer. All visible objects, man, are but pasteboard masks. But in each event—in the living act, the undoubted deed—there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask. If man will strike, strike through the mask! How can the prisoner reach outside by thrusting through the wall.*
>
> *To me, the white whale is that wall, shoved near to me. Sometimes I think there's naught beyond. But 'tis enough. He tasks me; he heaps me; I see in him outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing it. That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate; and be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal, I will wreak that hate upon him. Talk not to me of blasphemy, man; I'd strike the sun if it insulted me. For could the sun do that, then could I do the other; since there is ever a sort of fair play herein, jealousy presiding over all creations. But my master, man, is even that fair play. Who's over me? Truth hath no confines!* (139–40)

Rather than directly respond to Starbuck's accusations, Ahab intensifies the anger informing them to an apocalyptic pitch; then he projects his prophetic rage against the malignity inherent in the appearances of a nihilistic universe. In so doing, Ahab personifies the sovereign violence of the law even as he articulates Starbuck's desire to overthrow a malign ruler.

Instead of remaining the oppressive captain whose exploitation of the men's labor would justify Starbuck's mutiny, Ahab, in representing himself as the enraged victim of a malicious cosmic design, lays apocalyptic claim to the right to mutiny. As he takes Starbuck down "the little lower layer," Ahab at once acts out Starbuck's motive for mutiny and does so within a scene that has virtually eliminated any separate role for Starbuck to play. By transferring defiance onto this apocalyptic scene where it appears utterly coincident with his character, Ahab becomes the portal through which Starbuck's defiance can achieve its most effective force.

Whaling was one of the most advanced capitalist industries in the nineteenth century. But the *Pequod* was not merely a factor in the whaling industry. As a joint stock company, the ship was also a finance-dominated regime of accumulation in which the evaluation of future profits was the decisive variable. Ahab does not bind this whaling company to himself by way of a contractual agreement. Embodying the breach of contract with the ship's owners, Ahab transgresses the laws of the mercantilist market as well as the whalers' law that says any healthy whale encountered must be hunted without choosing one over the other. Having become the malignity he opposed, Ahab governs the *Pequod* in a state of exception.

After Ahab changes the terms of the crew's contract, he effectively leverages the *Pequod*'s joint stock company's economic motives into the animating rationale for an Enlightenment adventure that endows the economic risk involved in whale hunting with a militantly moral foundation. He thereby turns the *Pequod* into a war machine. Ahab's finance-military complex is underwritten by the potlatch logic of general expenditure, the willingness to sacrifice everything in pursuit of Moby Dick. This bioeconomic logic becomes so implicated with the restricted exchanges with which the *Pequod* negotiated the modern capitalist order that it threatens to consume everything in a disaster beyond recuperation.

Finance capital installs speculation at the very core of production. In place of self-interest and rational expectations, the operative collective emotions it fosters include belief, faith, and apprehension. Ahab's aspiration to uncover the productive vital energies, the value of values, within all creation is founded upon a life-principle of crisis-ridden desire. His drive to push beyond limits and his need to reimpose them are mutually constitutive. Although both needs are predicated on his corresponding desire to devalue life, they nevertheless transform Ishmael's and the rest of the crew's melancholia into psychic resources for the captain's militancy. The crew's frenzied desire to avenge Ahab's apocalyptic accident involves them in nonnormalizable practices of preemption and catastrophic risk.[13]

Onboard the *Pequod*, the Enlightenment transactions that Žižek describes get reproduced as a sublime spectacle as the crew displays its willingness to negate the full table of individual wills and freedoms in exchange for Ahab's apocalyptic quest. Ahab's quest expresses Ishmael's and the other crew members' desire to be swept up by a melancholia-defying delirium. Ishmael's contribution to this enterprise involves the conversion of melancholic despair into manic resolve through the power of his prose: "I, Ishmael, was one of that crew; my shouts had gone up

[13] For a brilliant discussion of the relationship between finance capital and bodily surplus, see Melinda Cooper.

with the rest, my oath had gone up with the rest; my oath had been welded to theirs; and the stronger I shouted, and more did I hammer and clinch my oath, because of the dread in my soul" (152).

Although commentators have concentrated on Ishmael's vexed relationship with Captain Ahab, I have shown Pip to be more intimate with the *Pequod*'s commander than any crew member. When Ahab speaks with members of the *Pequod*'s crew, he personifies the body of rules (the ruling metaphors and collective representations) through which speech must be articulated before it can be taken up as persuasive. In addressing the crew, Ahab simultaneously speaks as an interlocutor and voices the meta-rules through which the crew's speech is regulated. Ahab monopolizes the legitimate use of symbolic violence—rules, assumptions, and grammar of speech rationality—that determines what will and what will not count as a felicitous speech act.

Ahab thus inhabits the space between logical argumentation and sheer force. Speaking from the position of the inconsistency of the social order, he transmutes the crew's heterogeneous and inconsistent motives and purposes into a singular resolve. His eloquence becomes his means of governance by elevating the crew's desire to rebel against him into the power that reduces each member of the crew into an extension of Ahab's will and a substitute for his missing leg.

But Pip does not fall under Ahab's persuasion, and he nearly breaks Ahab of his resolve to kill Moby Dick. Pip names the ineradicable rift within the order that Ahab's pronouncements would occlude. Pip, who both is and is not yet dead, opens a hole in his symbolic authority by embodying the excess plenitude that Ahab cannot rule. This bodily plenitude is the life of the death drive, the life-death of both doomed men.

Pip figures as the *Pequod*'s *homo sacer*. In surviving his own death by drowning, Pip bears experiential witness to what Ahab negates in the crew. Pip bears witness as well to what remains of the particularized individuals whom the twinned financial and Enlightenment revolutions dematerialize and negate. As bare vulnerable human life, the individual particularity that the Enlightenment and market subjects constitutively foreclose, Pip exists within Ahab's sovereign domain as witness to the traumatic events that his speech acts foreclose from recognition.

Pip does not execute Ahab's orders. Pip is the member of the crew who has already suffered the catastrophic consequences of Ahab's will that Pip temporarily survives. And insofar as he has survived the consequences of Ahab's will to power, Pip instantiates the dimension of the crew and of Ishmael that cannot be reduced to an extension of Ahab's will. Ahab's absence of the power of persuasion over Pip produces a difference in their relationship that becomes resonant in the dialogue I cited at the beginning of these remarks.

> *[Ahab:] Lad, lad, I tell thee thou must not follow Ahab now. The hour is coming when Ahab would not scare thee from him, yet would not have thee by him. There is that in thee, poor lad, which I feel too curing to my malady. Like cures like; and for this hunt, my malady becomes my most desired health. Do thou abide below here, where they shall serve thee, as if thou wert the captain.*

> *[Pip:] No, no, no! ye have not a whole body, sir; do ye but use poor me for your one lost leg; only tread upon me sir; I ask no more, so I remain a part of ye.* (399)

This vocal interaction between Pip and Ahab takes place somewhere between the Habermasian account of the ideal speech situation—in which the otherness of the speech agents can be transposed through the agreements between these agents to embrace shared criteria concerning the conditions of communicative rationality—and its Derridian contrary, which describes such shared agreements as coercive regulations of intersubjective encounters that violate the otherness of the speech agents. But their interlocution is irreducible to either of these speech situations.

When Pip descended to the depths of the sea and beheld God's foot upon the treadle of the wheel, he could not be taken down a little lower layer by Captain Ahab's rhetoric. Captain Ahab thrusts his fist through pasteboard masks in order to find the metaphysical world that Pip already occupies.

After Pip asks that Ahab tread on his whole self so as to restore Ahab's missing portion, he literalizes the actual conditions of Ahab's compact with the crew. Like the other members of the crew, he is offering himself as substitute for Ahab's lost leg. But when Pip voluntarily offers to substitute himself, he proffers the exchange after having experienced the catastrophic consequences of Ahab's murderous pursuit. Ahab knows that Pip, in offering to make Ahab whole, is, in speaking as their representative, performing the impossible act of forgiving the man who will have been responsible for the massacre of the *Pequod*'s crew. This recognition *almost* unbinds the ties binding him (and the crew) to his fate.

* * *

I initially described Ishmael's narrative as bearing secondary witness to Pip's witnessing. By way of a much too abrupt conclusion, I need to say that it was through his melancholic investment in Pip's fate that Melville produced a form of novel governmentality that undermines Ahab's governance and poses an alternative as well to the governmentality of the global American modernity, the catastrophic truth event, to which *Moby-Dick* testifies.

Moby-Dick is not merely the testament of Ishmael's survival but the very thing that makes his survival possible. Ishmael's testament does not take place in the past time to which he attests nor in a future time that would consider his testimony completed. Ishmael's narrative is witness bearing and witness engaging. As his means of executing the claims that the past and the dead make on the present, Ishmael's melancholic narrative assumes the occasion of its address as its foundation. When he begins, "Call me Ishmael!," Ishmael calls back into existence the catastrophic event to which he bears narrative witness.

After Ishmael topples into the abysmal space of Pip's abandonment at the novel's conclusion, Ishmael takes the place of Pip and the crew as the surviving mariner—renegade—castaway whose testimony would untie the bonds to the existing governmentality and call forth an alternative. Melville invested Ishmael's melancholic testimony with narrative value to create readers who, as witnesses to

and for Ishmael's novel governmentality, testify to the possibility of a future by passing this story on.

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