

An Abstract of the Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies Thesis of:

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Symbolic Investiture in *Moby Dick*: The Finitude of Metaphor

Established readings hold that the incompleteness of Ishmael's self-introduction indicates that his name is far less important than his virtues and his willingness to surrender utterly to the forces of nature; that Ishmael's anonymity suggests humility: that the lack of self-importance signified by a disregard for one's own name is the primary virtue needed to survive the trials of this epic quest.

I propose that the significance of Ishmael's negation of the "name-of-the-father," is that it signals a discord in Ishmael's symbolic order. Ishmael's anonymity indicates that he is in need of a replacement for this primordial metaphor for the master signifier. During the course of Melville's sweeping narrative, I argue that the sperm whale replaces Ishmael's father's name as the metaphor for that which brings order and law to his signifying chain. In the Whale, Ishmael finds and assimilates into his signifying chain that which he needs in order to make sense of the world, and of himself.

For Ishmael, finding liberation from the hysteria of which his fixation on the whale is a symptom, is contingent upon changing the paternal metaphor for the master signifier into something that can be successfully and meaningfully assimilated into his signifying chain. This new metaphor is ideally an image with which the subject can live in a way that allows him to simply "enjoy his symptom," rather than struggle against it in a repetitive fixation, or by a denial and negation of it. Ishmael's ability to give us an amazing narrative as well as a passionate cytology comes from his ability to move through the world in a way that no longer suggests a malignant inner struggle against the haunting absence of the incomplete symbolic, allowing him to accept the law-giving power of the symbolic without remaining traumatized.