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“Famous”, “Immortal” – and Heroic? The White Whale as Hero in Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick*

Introductory remarks

Rarely has an animal figured so centrally in a work of American fiction as has the white whale, Moby Dick, from the eponymous 1851 novel by Herman Melville. *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale*, as the full title reads, has been the subject of countless readings from a broad range of criticisms. Whereas, arguably, *Moby-Dick* ranges as “the great unread American novel” (Inge 696), it may easily be one of the most researched works of American literature. Scholarly studies of *Moby-Dick* abound as the academic interest in the novel has been unbroken since the so-called Melville revival that set in during the 1920s. As early as the mid-1990s, Leonard Slade observed that

[...] the number of interpretations of the White Whale is nowadays almost too great to be surveyed, and the arbitrariness which has been frequently displayed in these interpretations is almost proverbial. (Slade ix)

Some twenty years later, the number has multiplied, making a comprehensive survey all but impossible.¹

Among the wealth of academic investigations of the novel, studies focusing solely on Moby Dick are comparatively rare. While the lion’s share of studies center on the ship’s monomaniac captain, Ahab, and the charismatic narrator, Ishmael, the whale itself has been accorded far less scholarly attention. More often than not, Moby Dick is read in his² relation to Ahab, and in the majority of studies the whale is treated as a symbol or an allegory rather than an actual character in its own right: as a symbol of evil or of goodness, of man’s relationship with the universe, as a phallic symbol, as a symbol of the universe itself, as a symbol of the father (in his capacity to punish), or the mother (in the symbolic equation of the maternal womb and the tomb) (cf. *ibid.* ix-x). While the argument of this article is certainly not to deny the symbolic and allegorical dimension of the whale in the novel, it nevertheless proposes a reading of the whale as that

which he is in the first place: an animal. Reading *Moby-Dick* from the perspective of critical animal studies, the article aims to re-direct attention to the animal that provides the novel its title and to describe his role in the story as a heroic figure. As the goal of critical animal studies is

to question dominant Western articulations of the human/animal binary that overwhelmingly view this division of the world into human and animal as a fact (Gross 2)

the perspective allows us to suspend the division between human and animal and thus challenge the notion that certain sets of traits or attributes are specifically human and inapplicable to animals. The attributes (loosely) subsumed under the concept of heroism are a case in point.

Besides being a meaningful symbol on the metaphysical level of the novel or a mere projection surface for Ahab’s obsessions, Moby Dick is in fact a fictionalized historical animal based on early nineteenth-century reports of a white whale called Mocha Dick as well as a huge whale involved in the sinking of the ship *The Essex* in 1820.³ As this article aims to demonstrate, Melville’s combination of legends surrounding individual whales and contemporaneous zoological knowledge about whales into the construction of Moby Dick has resulted in a heroized portrait of the whale. Despite the multiple references in the novel to the whale as “monstrous” (Melville 62, 177) and even “malicious” (160, 178), this article reads Melville’s white whale as a highly complex element in the novel whose monstrosity is a form of superiority over the human characters constituting the basis for a heroizing discourse. The heroization of the whale in the novel is achieved by means of a natural-historical discourse that lays the foundation for the animal’s superior powers; by means of ascriptions of agency, especially in the animal’s response to his human attackers; by means of such qualifications of the animal as majestic, dignified, or indomitable; as well as by means of the possibility of his immortality as an inherent characteristic of heroes.

Of whales and men: Critical animal studies and *Moby-Dick*

The prerequisite for approaching *Moby Dick* as a hero in the novel is to accord an animal character the capacity to assume heroic qualities, which traditionally are so firmly tied to the notion of human superiority and their resulting exclusive claim to heroism. Heroic figures, as Ralf von den Hoff et al. have described, may be real or fictitious, dead or alive, but they are generally assumed to be human (cf. von den Hoff et al. 8; cf. also 10). The present approach, then, has become feasible with the help of critical animal studies, which is a fairly recent criticism within literary and cultural studies. Since the early 2000s, a wide range of studies have staked out the field of critical animal studies and have introduced significant parameters for the reading and rereading of (predominantly western) literature and culture with a special focus on animals. Seminal works among them are Paul Waldau's *Animal Studies: An Introduction* (2013), Dawne McCance's *Critical Animal Studies: An Introduction* (2013), and *The Oxford Handbook of Animal Studies*, edited by Linda Kalof (2017).⁴

One perspective within the field of critical animal studies is the exploration of "human self-conception through animals" (Gross 4). Aaron Gross, in the introduction to his 2012 co-edited volume *Animals and the Human Imagination: A Companion to Animal Studies*, asserts that

[...] to make animals present [rather than to see them as absent referents], we first need to gain some purchase on how animal others are embedded in human self-conception – in the human imagination (the landscape of our mind) and the imagination of the human (how we imagine the meaning of humanity). (ibid. 16)

In this sense, considering *Moby Dick* a hero in the novel brings the animal from the margins to the center as, arguably, more often than not humans take centre stage in "the landscape of our mind". Likewise, interpreting *Moby Dick* as a hero in the novel affects "how we imagine the meaning of humanity". As the whale takes on a typically human role – that of the hero – and the two characters swap, to a certain degree, supposedly human and non-human qualities in the struggle with his antagonist Ahab, readers are urged to inquire into the very meaning and the scope of the term 'humanity'.

Mario Ortiz Robles, in his 2016 book *Literature and Animal Studies*, explores the implications of the "strict division Western culture establishes between humans and animals" and finds that it is in its essence "literary in nature"

(Robles 3). In *Moby-Dick*, chapters as diverse as the 32nd chapter, "Cetology", which is dedicated to the natural characteristics and natural history of the animal, or the 42nd chapter, "The Whiteness of the Whale", revolving around the metaphysical implications of the whale's colour, demonstrate the all but endless diversity of ways in which an animal can be constructed through literature. As has been noted, "[as] a symbol the White Whale in *Moby-Dick* is endlessly suggestive of many meanings [...]" (Slade 1) – and so he is as an animal and hero. If it is within the power of literature to establish a strict in-group/out-group dynamic between humans and animals, by implication it is also within its power to undermine, or even eliminate it. Robles further specifies:

[...] our relation to non-humans has most often been premised on our willingness to assert our domination over nature. The invention of the animal has thus been instrumental in the development of human culture by creating the conditions of possibility of our own invention as civilized beings. (Robles 4)

This divide, which made possible humans' self-perception as civilized, at the same time meant

the manipulation of animals by making them not only inferior to humans but, to the precise degree that they do not possess the attributes that make humans distinctive, also incapable of objecting to how they are treated. (ibid 14)

Yet, when we turn our attention to *Moby-Dick*, it becomes clear that the white whale's defiance to being slaughtered is indeed a form of objection to the way whales are treated; it is a form of resistance to the usual course of events in which the whales are hunted, killed, and different parts of their bodies are turned into commodities, as various chapters in the novel detail. In this sense, a challenge to the assumption that animals are incapable of objection equals a challenge to the related assumption that humans are superior and (by implication the only) civilized beings. It is in this challenge to these assumptions that one may find the very foundation of *Moby Dick*'s heroism.

Famous, supernatural, immortal: *Moby Dick* and the categories of the heroic

When young whales at large are called "brawny, buoyant heroes" (Melville 303) in the novel, this

all but invites an interpretation of the white whale as a hero and betrays his basic aptitude for this status. Any approach that explores Moby Dick as a heroic figure in the novel, then, needs to take as its point of departure a definitional delimitation of what is understood by the term 'hero'. This, however, is complicated by the fact that the concept of the hero is demarcated by historically variable connotations rather than by unambiguous and unalterable defining criteria (cf. Schinkel 9). A widely shared assumption seems to be that a figure's characterization as a hero presupposes a remarkable deed (cf. Schneider 20; Schinkel 9). By implication, this deed is accomplished willfully rather than accidentally. It may be this deliberateness of one's actions that most crucially impedes the identification of animals as heroes. After all, they are widely considered to act upon instinct and to be incapable of pondering their choices. In light of this, it is all the more significant that sperm whales in general, and Moby Dick in particular, are repeatedly described as intelligent in the novel. Thus, sperm whales are said to "[act] with *wilful, deliberate designs* of destruction" (Melville 181; my emphasis). Moby Dick is ascribed an "unexampled *intelligent* malignity" (ibid. 159) and a "malicious *intelligence*" (ibid. 448; my emphases). Even though he is explicitly referred to as a "brute" (ibid. 163) and an "animal" (ibid. 227), and thus unmistakably categorized as non-human, he seems to demonstrate mental capacities that exceed what can be expected of animals, which allows him to face humans on an equal footing.

Scholars further seem to agree that one of the constitutive factors of heroes is that the hero's deeds are told to an audience, that they are narrated and medially represented and communicated (cf. Schneider 20; von den Hoff et al. 11). In the case of Moby Dick, this criterion is met on the intradiegetic level. At many points in the novel, readers are informed that Moby Dick's reputation grew out of the many stories told about him, which are composed of both legends and eye-witness reports. Long before they lay eyes on the white whale, Ishmael and the crew of *The Pequod* hear tales about disastrous and deadly encounters between the animal and various whalers;

[...] in maritime life, far more than in that of terra firma, wild rumors abound, wherever there is any adequate reality for them to cling to

Ishmael observes in chapter 41, titled "Moby Dick", adding:

the outblown rumors of the White Whale did in the end incorporate with themselves all manner of morbid hints, and half-formed

foetal suggestions of supernatural agencies, which eventually invested Moby Dick with new terrors unborrowed from anything that visually appears. (Melville 156)

Moby Dick's fame, or infamy – the borders between these two concepts are fluid at best – constitutes another indication of his heroism. Not just any whale in the wide oceans, Moby Dick is individualized⁵ and identified not least by means of story-telling and mythicization.

With these two preconditions in place, the heroization of the whale in the novel is achieved by means of a variety of (partly overlapping) discourses, which Melville intertwines skilfully. First, it is the natural-historical discourse that lays the foundation for the animal's superior powers. In chapter 32, "Cetology", whales are approached scientifically in an attempt to circumscribe and classify their species. As a sperm whale, Moby Dick is a superlative creature in many respects:

[The sperm whale] is, without doubt, the largest inhabitant of the globe; the most formidable of all whales to encounter; the most majestic in aspect; and lastly, by far the most valuable in commerce; he being the only creature from which that valuable substance, spermaceti, is obtained. (ibid. 120)

These superlatives indicate that whales, and Moby Dick as a particular whale especially so, challenge the limits of the ordinary. Moby Dick's extraordinariness and his purported "supernatural agencies" (ibid. 156) are among those traits attributed to him that qualify him for the characterization as a hero. In his inquiry into the purpose and function of heroes, Christian Schneider claims that

the fundamental structure of the hero [...] consists in his/her superhumanity⁶ – a quality that in its transcendence of the human always lends itself to the suspicion of inhumanity as well. (Schneider 20)⁷

Thus, according to this perspective, the ascription of heroism to Moby Dick does not appear incongruous with the presentation of his supernatural powers in a rather negative light and their connection to violence, terror, and ferocity.

Second, the aforementioned implication that Moby Dick acts deliberately ties in with a notion of agency ascribed to the animal.⁸ Rather than a passive victim of humans' actions, Moby Dick actively responds to his human attackers. The relationship between humankind and whales, as Richard Ellis has demonstrated in his thoroughly researched book *Men and Whales*, has predominantly revolved around whaling, the violent act of killing whales for human subsistence or, in

the industrialized west, profit. Ellis points to the paradoxical notion of heroism in this paradigm, in which the roles of persecutor and persecuted are quite clearly distributed:

Because whaling has always been attended by tales of heroism, and of killing the great creatures in the face of hostile elements [...] it has come down to us as a noble and occasionally even enlightened profession. (Ellis ix)

Moby Dick's agency, and the claim of his heroism derived from it, lies not least in the reversal of the traditional roles: Moby Dick defies the whalers' attempts to kill him and instead becomes "murderous" (Melville 155; 459) himself. Only "seemingly" so is he Ahab's "unsuspecting prey" (ibid. 447). As he eventually kills those who had set out to hunt and kill him, he assumes an agency that singles him out and bestows a heroic quality onto him.

Third, Moby Dick's violent and allegedly vicious actions as well as his reputation for being murderous are contradicted by various qualities that are attributed to all (sperm) whales, and thus to the white whale as well. These include, but are not limited to, such traits as being "majestic" (ibid. 106; 120), "mighty" (ibid. 293), "wondrous" (ibid. 106), "ponderous and profound", or of "great inherent dignity and sublimity" (ibid. 313). This catalogue of positive attributes stands in stark contrast to Moby Dick's (alleged) malignity and contributes to his characterization as a hero. What these characteristics – might, dignity, majesty, sublimity – have in common is that they evoke a notion of superiority. Described as "a noble animal" (ibid. 227), the whale commands admiration and respect. This is further articulated in the assertion that the "the great monster [the sperm whale] is indomitable" (ibid. 294), which, once more, underscores the notion of his superiority.

Last, the notion of indomitableness is closely related to the rumours of Moby Dick's immortality (cf. ibid. 221):

[some whalemens declared] Moby Dick not only ubiquitous but immortal (for immortality is but ubiquity in time); that though groves of spears should be planted in his flanks, he would still swim away unharmed; [...]. (ibid. 158)

The very concept of immortality revisits the notion of supernatural capacity as their own mortality is an (often) painful reminder of humans' limitations and evanescence. It is this mere idea of his immortality that thus positions Moby Dick outside of the realm of the human and of the ordinary. When the narrator observes "the glorified

White Whale as he so divinely swam" (ibid. 447) alongside *The Pequod* before the final confrontation, the connection between Moby Dick and a higher domain is intimated. Immortality – understood figuratively, of course – signifies that the memory of one's character traits and deeds will survive long after one's demise with the help of story-telling and is as such an inherent characteristic of heroes.

That *Moby-Dick*, revolving around the adventures aboard a whaling ship, has been interpreted in terms of the heroic is little surprising. From the beginnings of *Moby-Dick* criticism, in fact, Ahab and the whale were cast as hero and villain (cf. Slade 1). Since heroes, as Scott T. Allison and George Goethals remark, are frequently delineated vis-à-vis villains (cf. ibid. 15), the characterization of Moby Dick as the villain against which Ahab was laid out as the hero appeared all but natural. Far from being considered himself in terms of the heroic, the whale seems to have been understood primarily as the antagonist who, physically and mentally, maimed Ahab in the past, haunted him over the years, and provoked the captain's further actions.

The abundant criticism on Ahab has proposed numerous and divergent readings of the character, which also include his identification as a hero of different kinds. Ahab "has been perceived as classical tragic hero (predominantly of the Faustian, Promethean, or Shakespearean kind)" (Recker 33)⁹ as well as an example of "the isolated romantic hero" (Friedman 99). "The mediator between Ahab and the tragic hero of old [...]," Maurice Friedman writes, "is the romantic hero with his titanic suffering and his dark morbidity" (ibid. 100-101).

Against the backdrop of various critical readings of the novel that try to determine what kind of hero Ahab is, it seems tempting to categorize the whale as hero of different kinds accordingly. Such a categorization, however, is complicated not least by the fact that Moby Dick is an animal character. Unlike in the case of Ahab, who has been likened to such heroic literary predecessors as Prometheus, Faust, King Lear, or Macbeth, there is no precedent in western literature that would provide a suitable point of reference for the whale. The terms and definitions that are applicable to Ahab thus do not necessarily prove useful in the case of Moby Dick. And yet, the whale's heroic qualities to some extent intersect with what has been established as characteristic of Ahab. In his reading of Ahab as a Promethean character, Maurice Friedman declares: "Like every hero, he is a mixture of the divine and the demonic" (Friedman 81).

Moby-Dick criticism, as Astrid Recker has

pointed out, has seen an “Ishmaelian turn” (Reker 34) as the focus has shifted from Ahab onto Ishmael, which has also entailed the exploration of Ishmael in terms of the heroic. In this vein, Ishmael’s whaling voyage appears as a hero’s journey, with the motif of the voyage signifying the character’s development and growth. Again, this is not easily transferable onto the character of the whale. As a creature of the sea that is constantly in motion, the whale’s heroism cannot, per definition, be grounded in the almost formulaic pattern of the hero’s departure from familiar terrain, venture into the unknown, and return to the home community in an altered, wiser version of the former self (cf. Smith xv-xvi). In this sense, Moby Dick, it would seem, is closer in its specific heroism to that character in the novel that is cast most explicitly as his adversary, namely Ahab.

Monika Schmitz-Emans, in her exploration of heroism, *Moby-Dick*, and its adaptation into comic books, also focuses on Ahab as the novel’s central heroic figure, whom she interprets to be a tragic, Aristotelian hero and a modern, rebellious hero at the same time (cf. Schmitz-Emans 138). She, too, refers to the whale as an “animal devoid of reason”,¹⁰ and she, too, assigns him the role of the antagonist (cf. *ibid.* 139). And yet, she points out that

the White Whale is no less polyvalent than Ahab. On the one hand, he can be viewed as the epitome of a nature that humans aim to subjugate forcefully; on the other hand, he is by no means simply a victim but also represents the merciless side of nature. (*ibid.* 139)¹¹

It is this polyvalence that Schmitz-Emans detects in the figure of Moby Dick that also characterizes his role as a hero in the novel.

On the basis of Moby Dick’s polyvalence and the definitional parameters laid out above, Moby Dick can indeed be understood as a hero, albeit not unambiguously so. His heroic traits, as has been shown, are juxtaposed with his description as monstrous, malicious, and murderous. Rather than undermining Moby Dick’s status as a hero in the novel, however, this ambivalence seems nothing if not appropriate within the overall framework of the novel. Ahab, who is more readily identified as the/a hero in the book, is also not unambiguously outlined as such: Harold Bloom calls him the “greatest of American fictive hero-villains” (Bloom 1). Neither is the character of Ishmael without incongruities.

What, for the most part, was perceived as a lack of coherence and therefore deemed flawed by contemporary audiences in Melville’s day, has alternatively been recognized as a literary style that preceded and foreshadowed modernism.

Whereas *Moby-Dick* and other works by Melville are frequently labelled romances (in the sense specified by Hawthorne in the preface to *House of the Seven Gables*) and literary history has registered his works as belonging to American romanticism, his oeuvre still defies an overly ready categorization as romanticist due to the many modernist features. Moby Dick, one may thus argue, would not qualify as a Melvillean hero, if he were to ‘check the boxes’ too easily.

In order to claim for himself the status as a hero, Moby Dick relies on defiance. Not only does he defy the role of the victim in which so many of his fellow whales have suffered brutal deaths at the hands of the whalers, he also defies the very limits of his animal-ness. Among the many metaphysical questions that the novel delves into, one could also count the question of the nature and purpose of the human–animal dichotomy. As whales, and Moby Dick in particular, assume supposedly human qualities, as detailed above, Ahab in turn, in his maniac rush after the white whale, seems to forfeit some of the qualities that make humans human, most notably reason, self-control, and free will.

In this vein, Mark K. Burns’s argument with regard to *Moby-Dick* and race could be taken one step further. Burns offers an in-depth study of the chapter “Cetology” and argues that Ishmael’s and science’s inability to neatly classify different whales into various species serves as a metaphor for the unjustified and unsuccessful attempt to classify human beings into racial categories (cf. Burns 204-207). By encouraging the analogy between “human as well as leviathan society” (*ibid.* 204), the novel not only challenges mechanisms of stereotypification and classification of human beings; it can also be understood as questioning the legitimacy of differentiating strictly between, systematically separating, as well as hubristically hierarchizing the two realms in the first place.

Concluding remarks: Moby Dick’s ambivalent heroism

When Mario Ortiz Robles states that animals play a marginal role in the consideration of modern literature but acknowledges that “[...] there are animals in this literary tradition, some even as famous as Moby Dick” (6; my emphasis), he singles out the whale in Herman Melville’s novel as a benchmark figure for the fame of animals in literature. Yet, even though Moby Dick is doubtlessly (one of) the best-known animal(s) in world literature, he is rarely primarily considered as such in scholarly studies. The extent to which

Moby Dick is not only a symbol but an animal that is made present (cf. Gross 16) in the text becomes evident from the fact that

Melville exhaustively anatomizes the whale from its wrinkled brow to its flexile tail, from its translucent skin to its dry bones. (Edwards/Marr 12)

Melville's whale is a multifaceted creature that combines allegorical projections, historical components, elements of legend and myth, and zoological details. Thus, if Moby Dick emerges from the above considerations as an ambivalent hero, this is utterly appropriate with regard to the overall tone and complexity of the novel. Ahab and Ishmael are no less ambivalent in their characterization, utterances, and actions. To what extent Melville may have envisioned his whale as a hero may only be surmised; but neither does this article attempt to trace the author's intent, nor does it ultimately matter for the insights gained from the above observations.

Heroes, as Schneider has observed, originate in the moment of their identification as heroes; their existence is inextricably tied to their recognition by others (cf. Schneider 19-20). Thus, an interpretation of Moby Dick as a hero depends on the willingness of human beings to recognize the heroic dimension of his character and actions. Seeing as he is repeatedly described as a "monster" (Melville 155; 159; 221), this does not go without saying. Apart from the more positive explicit ascriptions, which make him appear heroic and which highlight the ambiguity of his character, Moby Dick emerges as a hero based on what he does:

Overcoming obstacles creates surprisingly different heroes. Some heroes – some real and some fictional – are not even human. (Allison/Goethals 13)

The fictional Moby Dick, like his real-life counterparts Mocha Dick and the whale that sank *The Essex*, lends himself to a characterization as a hero not least because he emerged victorious from a battle whose odds were so strongly cast against him. When Moby Dick is portrayed as "a Sperm Whale of uncommon magnitude and malignity" (Melville 155), it needs to be remembered that this (alleged) malignity is acted out in an overall scenario that is determined by humans' assault on whales and the formers' intrusion into the territory of the latter.

Since heroized animals ultimately also reflect the ways in which human beings construe their own identity, a reading of Moby Dick as a hero seems all the more significant. Joe Roman describes the (historical) impact of the novel as follows:

By rendering humans puny and insignificant, the whale was sublime, a natural force that could not and should not be subdued. (Roman 91)

To readers in Melville's time, when industrialization increasingly encroached on the natural world, including the oceans, a heroized whale that resisted human dominance over nature and the sea served as a much needed reminder of the limits of human influence and power. Drawn, as Roman rightfully points out, along the lines of the sublime, the figure of the indomitable, noble whale responded to the contemporary preoccupation with this category of thought. Despite many differences, Melville shared with his contemporaries whom F. O. Matthiessen famously grouped together as the writers of the American Renaissance – Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville, and Whitman – an interest in the role of nature in the face of the United States' expanding industrial power. While their views on nature reached into such diverse realms as pantheism, pastoralism, and (early) environmentalism, they overlapped in their proximity to the idea of the sublime. This contemporaneous view of nature as awe-inspiring surfaces in Melville's heroic whale. Inspiring both fear and wonder in humans, the white whale in his unmistakable sublimity commands humans' respect and humility. While the social, economic, and ecological contexts have changed since the mid-nineteenth century, and whales are no longer a widespread commodity to be exploited boundlessly, Moby Dick's heroism is no less relevant in the present day. With whaling restrictions widely – yet, as one might argue, still not sufficiently – in place, the threats that humans pose to whales have shifted. The rise in water temperature due to manmade climate change, the pollution of the seas, and over-fishing continue humans' attack on the whales' world. Against the backdrop of an ambivalent era in which a heightened environmental consciousness and activism stand side by side with the continuation of an exploitative world economy, Moby Dick appears as a hero that has lost none of his meaningfulness.

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1 Given the plethora of research done on *Moby-Dick*, the novel, and Moby Dick, the character, the following can be but a very brief, and inevitably incomplete overview.

2 I follow Melville in the usage of the personal determiners and pronouns he/him/his when referring not only to Moby Dick but also to the sperm whale generically.

3 Cf. Leroux’s extensive volume for a detailed documentation of the historical background to *Moby-Dick*.

4 Again, this is just a small selection of the many works that have been published on the subject in recent years. As critical animal studies continues to be a topical field of study – as, for instance, the B.A. and M.A. program in animal studies offered at NYU manifests – the body of research literature can be expected to expand considerably over the coming years.

5 The fact that the white whale has a proper name adds to this individualisation. In chapter 54, a Spanish whale-man asks: “[...] Sir sailor, but do whales have christenings? Whom call you Moby Dick?” (Melville 221). The obvious answer to the first question is no. Christenings, of course, are a privilege of humans, especially at the time. So the fact that Moby Dick has a name is already an indicator of the unstable boundaries between the realms of humans and animals.

6 I am aware that ‘supernatural’ and ‘superhuman’ are not exact synonyms but regard them as sufficiently close in meaning for them to be relevant in the present context; both signify a deviation from, or a surpassing of what is considered ‘normal’ or usual.

7 The German original reads: “[...] die Grundstruktur des Helden [...] besteht in der Übermenschlichkeit – eine Qualität, die als Transzendenz des Menschlichen immer auch den Ruch von Un-Menschlichkeit hat”.

8 Recent studies have shown that there are “abilities of discernment and decision-making in animals, such that they act upon and respond to reciprocating animals and things in their surrounds that are deemed significant” (Warkentin 26), thus deviating from behaviorist studies that had accounted for animals’ action merely invoking conditioning or instinct (cf. *ibid.* 29). Though, of course, such scientific knowledge was unavailable in the mid-nineteenth century, it backs a perspective of Moby Dick as acting upon “awareness, memory and understanding of previous experiences” (*ibid.* 29).

9 Cf. Recker, as well as Bloom, for detailed bibliographical references to previous readings of Ahab.

10 The German original reads: “ein vernunftloses Tier”.

11 The German original reads: “Der weiße Wal ist nicht minder polyvalent als Ahab. Er kann einerseits zwar als Inbegriff einer Natur betrachtet werden, die vom Menschen gewaltsam unterworfen werden soll, aber er ist andererseits keineswegs nur Opfer, sondern repräsentiert auch die gnadenlose Seite der Natur”.

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