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Archetypes

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Thank you, Father, for your voice in my Good Memory,
For the fruit of your long patience in my mind,
For all that was and what was better so,
For the gleaming store of treasures I received,
The time and place and measure all forgotten
In the glimmering silver-gray of River Lethe

Most precious beneath your gentle waves, O Lethe,
Treasures lie unseen but not forgotten,
So fused in my mind to Good Memory received.

ARCHETYPES or the Great White Whale

by

David Sparenberg

Over many years I've held to the learned idea that the narrative of Faustus-Faust—the man who sells his soul to the personalities of darkness to attain knowledge for control and manipulation of nature—is guiding archetype and psychological profile for the alpha individuals of techno-scientific Western Civilization, and this civilization's threadbare colonial and post-colonial imitators. Nor have I surrendered the concept. Indeed, it would be less than honest not to admit having toyed with the Faustian temptation and my counting the literary expressions by Marlowe and Goethe among my favored studies.

Why, to this very day we uncover the Faustian type in commanding positions, especially in business, politics, the military; genetics. Presently a mounting confrontation unfolds between those possessed by the type and those of the oppressed, or should I say dis-possessed, standing in oppositional solidarity against the soul bartered world order, and rift division between the privileged holding power and powerless expendables.

Notwithstanding, it should be recognized that the Faustus-Faust mythic form is Euro-centric in origin and the European narrative and European authority are no

longer in ascendance. To be sure the decline of Europe's influence is the result of total wars and the irreconcilable tensions between knowledge for progress and the progression of borderless destruction and genocidal marathons stretching from the murderous nonsense of Flanders Fields to the mathematical sadism and racial lunacy of Auschwitz-Birkenau.

The Faust archetype is weakened in the collective psyche, yet does not utterly collapse or all together disappear. The powerful continue to prey on the vulnerable and naïve in the name of some principle or ideal. Meanwhile, the old archetype concedes interior territories and morphs into a more virulent, obsessive and fatalistic character change—a revision contemporaneous with the Americanization of the global narrative.

In brief, the archetype is no longer solely rooted in the deal making acquisition of knowledge to control but flourishes from draconian capacity to destroy. The metamorphosis is significant in kinship as well as departure, mirroring our transcontinental history's eradication of indigenous peoples and the aggressive transformation of pristine wildernesses into systems of exploitation and profit.

Consequently of late I have turned my imagination to considering another and, I suspect, more accurate variety of the model for the hubris of domination and the pathology that leads to the right of revenge—the right, that is, to eliminate the opposition of otherness, possessing a certain “endtime mindset” and shaping the world course of our species. I do so with alarm and increasingly anxious trepidation. For it is not Faustus, not Faustus today and certainly not Faust alone, who looks out menacingly from behind the social masks and social fabric of a tacit conspiracy to destroy the earth because of its other-than-human mystery. Rather, it is the Faustian cousin Ahab, stark, maniacal, sociopathic Captain Ahab; hate fueled, life threatening, proudly crippled and adversarial; who emerges from the shadows of a near forgotten literature into the Krieg-light of a fanaticized destiny—Ahab, with spigot plugged into and tapping the irksome, murky brew of a powerful, intoxicating human madness.

After all, it is the Ahab archetype, relentless, malicious, compelling, unheeding moderation and the humility of caution, who is prepared to sacrifice his ship and crew—the whole of this earthship Pequod—in a single minded determination to hunt down and kill the untamed, elusive spirit of the deep; that presence in creation that waits for men in suffering, loss and death on the mystic and even desolate high seas of an existence simultaneously compelled to cope with the forces of consciousness and mortality. Individual consciousness and individual and universal mortality.

Perhaps it will make a significant if unsettling impression to recall here that this same, our own embittered Captain Ahab borrows name and more than name from

Ahab of the Bible? There we find recorded in the First Book of Kings this cryptic line: “Ahab son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord more than all who were before him.” ...More than all... more than all before...ah!

Let me fill out a visual composite of the Ahab archetype for the mind’s eye, drawing on but two word pictures from Melville’s novel. Through these words look with me, see the man, as an image of man—as a way of destruction that individual men might slip into to act out their festering fears, wounds and plots of defiance and vengeance. Ahab: crippled, symbolizing imbalance, scarred, bearing the marks of crucifixion through time, stricken by both mono- and megalomania, also revealing extravagant imbalance, hard hearted and hard fisted in his authority, surrounded by a profit lusting crew, hunting and slaughtering whales for oil, disconnected from all pathos and compassion, hell bent upon Moby Dick, and commanding, without external reference, his ship of doom.

The image is harrowing and strikes with terror, not least because somehow beneath the surface of daily compliance it feels disturbingly near, distressingly familiar. Listen now, and carefully, attentively and carefully, to the voice itself.

“Then tossing both arms, with measureless imprecations, he shouted out: ‘Aye! Aye! and I’ll chase him round Good Hope and round the Horn, and round the Norway Maelstrom, and round perdition’s flames before I give him up. And this is what ye have shipped for men, to chase that white whale on both sides of land, and over all sides of earth, till he spouts black blood and rolls fin out’...”

Again, harken here, for soul’s sake, for sake of the earth, as Ahab espouses a pernicious philosophy that eclipses the raw capitalism of the New England seaboard as well as a theology lending argument to apocalypse: “All visible objects...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 except 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, for be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal, I will wreck that hate upon him. Talk not to me of blasphemy... 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 creation.”

Howsoever the language is found hurtling over the top and tintured with the archaic, the mood and tone resonates within contemporary ego-inflation, self-

appointed self-importance and carries within its body-articulate an entire civilization's age old spirituality of outrage and betrayal.

At this moment, as at other times in solitude, I am left to wonder how many, if any, Ishmaels, might escape the furthest consequences of Ahab's command and our ongoing voyage toward collective suicide—this human judgment against the justice of otherness, which is the vast display of creation showing an apportioning divinity. In Melville's American masterpiece, Ahab dies, all with him are lost, save a sole survivor, Moby Dick lives and vanishes; as if some gigantic sea deep or cosmic swimming hearse; back into the depths and origins of life. Then the abandoned remnant bear witness to an insane and nihilistic folly.

“So floating on the margin of the ensuing scene, and in full sight of it, I was then but slowly drawn toward the closing vortex... Round and round then and ever contracting toward the...black bubble at the axis of that...wheeling circle, like another Ixion I did revolve. Till, upward gaining that vital center, the black bubble burst, and now...rising with great force, the coffin life-buoy shot lengthwise from the sea, fell over, and floated by my side. Buoyed up by that coffin...I floated on a soft and dirge like main.”

How striking that far seeing Melville makes comparison in his closing reflection to Ixion from Greek mythology. Ixion, who too violated divinity and was sentenced to Hades where, according to Ovid in the *Metamorphosis*, the malefactor is described as “Ixion, pursuing and running away from himself on his wheel”: an accurate depiction of antithetical humanity condemned to hell in the confine of a mirroring while overmastering technology. How similar to the outcry of Shakespeare's *Lear*, “I am bound upon a wheel of fire....” Here yet is another human mouthing of the consequence of an equally human madness!