



Anti-Companionship and the White Whale: A Failed Recognition

Ștefania Misăilă

PhD Candidate, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University, Iași

ABSTRACT: This article proposes a reinterpretation of the antagonistic relationship between Captain Ahab and the object of his obsession, Moby Dick, and adversarial otherness that ends in a destructive mutual recognition. The development of the article was made possible by employing three theoretical frameworks that facilitated a more detailed explanation for how this dynamic is not only fueled by obsession, but also by a refusal to admit the possibility of a dialogic connection with something that can hardly be understood. The first part was dedicated to Emmanuel Levinas' ethical philosophy that revolves around the idea of the face and how the whale's physical presence openly demands that Ahab recognize the Other as being something outside his control, a demand that was, without a doubt, refused, the consequences materializing as retaliation from the whale. The second part focused on Donna Haraway's theory of companion species which is deliberately inverted in order to allow for a description of Ahab and Moby Dick's relationship as being transformative but, instead, it becomes mutually destructive, connecting two parties of different species to a common end. Finally, the third part focused on Aristotle's tragic *anagnorisis*, the hero's transition from ignorance to absolute knowledge, but with a little twist: the captain's recognition is a perversion of this classical idea because he does see something more powerful than his own will, but he consciously chooses to defy it than learn about the very thing that has limited him from the very beginning. The close reading of Herman Melville's most popular novel and the forementioned theories allowed for a new lens for understanding the tragedy of the American will which rests on the idea that if other does not submit, then it is not a companion.

Corresponding Author:

Ștefania Misăilă

Published Online:

August 26, 2026

License:

This is an open access article under the CC BY 4.0 license:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

KEYWORDS:

companionship, tragedy, adversary, nonhuman other

Cite the Article: Misăilă, S. (2026). *Anti-Companionship and the White Whale: A Failed Recognition*. *International Journal of Human Research and Social Science Studies*, 3(8), 768-774. <https://doi.org/10.55677/ijhrsss/08-2026-Vol03I08>

INTRODUCTION

What does it mean to be an anti-companion? To be somebody or something that does not present a reliable shoulder to rest on and also not a foe that seeks nothing but to destroy every bit of humanity left in yourself? Roughly said, it is an absolute paradox that helps the protagonist meet his goal, not by following the script envisioned before embarking on his journey, but by becoming the unwanted revelator of the hero's deepest self. Once put in this position, the protagonist, in our case, the infamous Captain Ahab, can either refuse the revelation and move on with another endeavor, or become consumed by the blue abyss of his troubled spirit.

Before one could start reading Herman Melville's magnum opus, *Moby-Dick*, or *The Whale*, they might get idea of a journey that focuses on a wild sea creature and the trials of a naval crew trying to capture it. Despite its short chapters, all 135 of them present eloquent descriptions of what it means to set sail, work with everything, from the crew to the boat, and be led by a captain that might seem a little bit off the grid, but sensational when it comes to his will. However, if one would say that its core revolves just around that, a senile and mad old man obsessing over a dense creature, we wouldn't even be able to call it a 'core' but more likely 'the surface' because this 1851 epic novel is not just about a literal hunting, but about a sprawling and profound philosophy that beautifully braids the knowledge of real maritime adventures and the contemplations on the human condition, man versus nature – by extension, God – fate and, of course, existence. Initially, Melville wrote it as a lightweight commercial and rough reminiscence of the days spent sailing, but it turned out to one of the major titles present in the American literary canon and, on a global scale, among the greatest piece of literature written in the English language.

As mentioned previously, the deceptiveness of its core can steal from the regular readers their need to digest the complexity behind mere explanations about harpoons or how oddly shaped a sperm whale can be. Despite that, the promising beginning presents

Ishmael, a retired schoolmaster deep into the November blues, reconfiguring himself for the sea life. Signing himself for the whaling ship named *Pequod* and befriending a tattooed harpooner of Polynesian ancestry, Queequeg, learns about the figure that rules the vessel, Captain Ahab. Though he is by far not a timid individual, the captain does not make an apparition only many days after the ship set sails, but once he does, the exterior offers him the traits of a legendary figure in the many tales told on board. Chapter 16 paints a perfect description, “He’s a grand, ungodly, godlike man [...]” (98) about a one-legged individual, one organic and the other made of white ivory sculpted from the jawbone of a whale, that dominates the ship not through despotism, but through knowledge and experience.

After he nails into the mainmast a Spanish coin, also known as a doubloon, the captain finally unravels the hidden purpose of *Pequod*. Under the pretenses of a commercial whaling voyage lies his greatest purpose, which is to hunt a specific beast that terrifies the oceans, a creature so white, so gigantic and so legendary not only through its physical presence, but also thorough the absolutely intelligent mercilessness. This entity that borders a whole maritime pantheon is Moby Dick, the very one that torn off one of Ahab’s legs. “Death to Moby Dick!” (184) is the collective pact of the whaling ship, a statement that ties every member on it to a single purpose, a purpose that only serves Captain Ahab’s obsessive attachment to a being that both offended him through a direct injury, but also through dismantling his pride, becoming, thus, a vessel of one man’s wound.

The Atlantic is crossed by *Pequod* fueled by the fire of pursuit, around the Cape of Good Hope, sailing away through the vast Indian Ocean and continuing onwards into the Pacific. So far, the journey met other whales too which were, without a doubt, murdered and used as practice dummies for the real albino menace. However, as days pass, the real confrontation is approaching through different signs such as warmer waters and frequent omens until Moby Dick shows itself to the crew, terrorizing and depleting the spirit of everyone on board for three whole days. The chase in the heart of the Pacific has an obvious denouement, but that does not happen until the mad captain, Ahab, strikes one last time, aiming at the whale’s “pasteboard mask” (182). He refused to be reduced to his biological condition, to his limits that won’t allow to confront the limitless that hides under the thick skin of the whale.

Swallowed by the navy vortex and leaving it almost blank and undisturbed, the ship *Pequod* disappears into the Pacific, except for something: Queequeg’s coffin. Carved with the initial intent of serving as the reminder and therapy to its creator, it is seen shooting back to the surface where, the narrator and sole survivor, Ishmael, clings desperately. It has become a miniature ark, a cradle that was meant for his friend, which now serves him for a day and night until *Rachel*, a ship in search of ‘orphaned’ sailors, finds and saves him so he can tell the story of the great captain of *Pequod* that dares to fight fate with his own bare hands.

METHODOLOGY / THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In order to delve deeper into the anti-companion dynamics between the mad Captain Ahab and the terrifying White Whale, Moby Dick, one must employ a blend of philosophy, animal study and literary analysis, an integrated theoretical bricolage of tree useful lens. Firstly, one shall understand what the 20th century Lithuanian philosopher, Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995), refers to through the idea of ethics of the face, offering thus a valuable theoretical approach of understanding the sperm whale’s complexion when confronted with Ahab who shows signs of walking over the Otherness of his opponent, a blatant refusal to acknowledge its irreducible uniqueness and dignity for the sake of ‘ethical’ domination. By extension, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, no matter who and what the Other is. Secondly, the research shall focus on the concept of companion species developed by the American scholar, Donna Jeanne Haraway, but with a twist: purposefully inverted, enabling this way to not perceive this monomaniac chase as just that, but also as a perverse compatibility that unravels truths about Ahab and the whale equally. It could allow for a rational vocabulary that does not rest exclusively in the area of antagonism, but moves past that, an entanglement of fates. Two entities that shape each other while, simultaneously, bound to eliminate the other’s existence. The idea of ‘companion’ to ‘anti-companion’ for two different species can definitely foreclose dark subliminalities powered by intense mutual acknowledgement. In the end, the Aristotelian tragic anagnorisis could offer a better comprehension of the existential crisis which rationalizes Captain Ahab estrangement from lucid reasoning. Through anagnorisis, classical tragedy focuses on how the hero begins his journey shrouded in pride and ignorance, only for later to acquire higher understanding by experiencing revelatory moments. Just like King Oedipus, whose long-standing metaphorical blindness to the truth about his father and mother, pushed him to gauge his eyes out, thus obtaining a higher spiritual understanding at the cost of physical blindness. In Ahab’s case, the anti-companionship manifested by the presence of the whale shall be able to act as an agent of absolute revelation, shattering Ahab’s solipsism and opening the doors to the truth about his position in relation to the universe. However, the captain deliberately inverts the model, his hubris would rather bow down to his own blindness than accept any awakening truth about the godless world he is part of. To him, Moby Dick represents the entire theology of evil, his doomed existence becoming more valuable than the revelatory defiance of his foe. In this way, the anti-companion exposes an anti-anagnorisis that blocks the end of the chase, and consequently the end of the novel, from a cathartic experience for the audience. In this way, these tripartite theoretical approaches, the Levinasian ethics, inverted companion species theory and the tragic anagnorisis, should offer a robust framework to construct and solidify the idea of anti-companionship not only as an archetype, but also as a failed dialogic relationship.

In order to properly address the ethics behind the function of an anti-companion, an adversary whose aim, above every act of defiance displayed in the novel, is to open Captain Ahab’s eyes to his own irreversible choices, one is in need of employing a proper

theoretical vocabulary that justifies how the presence of the Other can address the mental state of the individual that tries to oppose its existence. Harmony is exchanged for resistance and depreciation, an idea which Levinas touches upon lightly in the Preface of his book *Totality and Infinity. An Essay on Exteriority* (1979), idea which is characteristic to Western philosophy that only reduces the importance of the Other to “the concept of totality” (21). Later he explains shortly why that phenomenon is happening, suggesting that from a traditional point of view, this philosophy has been characteristic to the ontological field of understanding where the individual takes the Other and brings it closer, if not, on par, to and with the idea of ‘the Same’ through the help of neutrality of circumstance. In this way, the intelligibility of the Being is secured. (43) In other words, if the Ego fails to decipher the complexity of who is in front of him, it is better to bring it at the Ego’s level of understanding in order to avoid confusion and, why not, an inferiority complex. In order to counter this, Levinas points to the idea of ‘the face’ which belongs to the Other not necessarily only in the physical and ordinary form, but face as the epiphany of something that exceeds one’s comprehension of what is real and what is extraordinary. “The face of the Other at each moment destroys and overflows the plastic image it leaves me, the idea existing to my own measure and to the measure of its *ideatum* – the adequate idea.” (50-51) The same face also commands not respect, but protection of what it holds, a command that stops the ego from trying to eliminate it because no one can have ownership over its existence, but can only become responsible for what happens to it. This is the infinity behind the face speaking. (199) This represents the core of Levinas’s claim about the ethics of the Other, inviting, thus, the reader to absorb the dynamic between Captain Ahab and Moby Dick as not only a mere ‘the hunter and the hunted’ antagonistic trope, but as an incredibly intense failure to respond to the Otherness of the whale.

Following the logic of the Levinasian theory, Ahab represents the Western ontological approach, his monomania being a violent reaction towards totality, towards reducing the White Whale to something he can grasp and defy. This type of attitude is present not only in the whale’s case, but also reported to other beings “All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks.”, and of course, his obsessive quest is to “strike through the mask.” (Melville, Ch. 36, 182) in order to reveal what the force is which curses him from beneath. In this way, everything that surrounds Ahab, from the ant to the sun, is bound to being a wall that conceals the truth he so seeks. Moby Dick’s ‘face’, the white and huge hump, the immense brow and its all-knowing eye, is immediately rejected for any unbeknownst knowledge that could help him thrive in revelation, becoming, thus, in a fatalistic way, only a mere impediment from a self-proclaimed and imposed verity. The Levinasian ethics would refer to this instance as a philosophical breach of ethics that would only lead to a realistic and physical assassination because the Otherness of the White Whale stops thriving in its supposed divine condition, and only becomes a symbol of what the Self wants to project onto it. In the captain’s case, it becomes a mask that protects the entire theology of evil. However, Moby Dick openly defies this deliberate attempt at its existence, exercising the right to preserve its greater position in the universe besides being a mere gigantic aquatic creature that wanders the currents. This way of maintaining its relevance can be understood through the whiteness off its outer shell, a generator of meanings that stretches to whatever the individual decides to project onto it, be it bluntness, terror, emptiness, otherworldliness, “heartless voids and immensities of the universe” and “a colourless, all-color of atheism” (Ch. 42, 213). Simultaneously, the whale also evokes absolute beauty, such as “the sweet tinges of sunset skies and woods... and the gilded velvets of butterflies, and the butterfly cheeks of young girls”. Ishmael’s meditation on the duality of Ahab’s creature becomes both a subject to admire and to dominate. The closing line for Chapter 42: The Whiteness of the Whale, strongly reinforces that “Wonder ye then at the fiery hunt?” (214) Additionally, in Chapter 135, focused on the third and last day of the chase, exists a passage that emphasize the idea that whatever Moby Dick represents to the crew and to Captain Ahab, it will always be that type of agency which cannot be conquered and mastered, a crucial realization that dawns onto the latter, quoting “Moby Dick seemed combinedly possessed by all the angels that fell from heaven.” (592)

However, there is an important question that must be addressed when it comes to the Levinasian approach: is the White Whale’s retaliation through violence, such as injuring Ahab by biting off his leg, its intelligent ruining of ships and boats, and the culminating act of dragging the captain to the depths and killing everyone on the *Pequod*, a justifiable chain of reactions when the command of not killing the face is ignored? The answer is short but inherently profound, a clarification given by Levinas himself who focuses on the asymmetry of the relation between the Self and the Other. “The face resists possession, resists my powers.” (197) because it is not a force that can be touched, but a moral value that the ego cannot dominate, and Moby Dick’s retaliation is not a mere right to exercise, the right to protect, but a natural consequence when Ahab decides to breach a moral law. The gesture of the anti-companion, shrouded in Levinasian ethics, is to bluntly refuse to be reduced to a mere symbol, exceeding the captain’s pejorative to a readable and easily to manipulate existence.

Melville’s language while describing Moby Dick’s resistance is used in such a specific way that only showcase how tactful the whale is. Its marking intentionality has become both a legend and a reality. Chapter 45 would just prove that “he then acts, not so often with blind rage, as with wilful, deliberate designs of destructions of his pursuers”. (228) On the third day, after Moby Dick succeeded in destroying Ahab’s boat and the rest of what once represented *Pequod*, it slowly departs from the scene, probably bored, probably tired, but definitely victorious, leaving only Ishmael alive to tell the tale. Its “intelligent malignity” (201) rests in the active traits of the whale, a performance so responsive and so direct that it only strengthens the silent address of the anti-companion. This elusive resistance is what Emmanuel Levinas claims rest on, that the other is untouchable at any level, even though it might seem

that the Self has everything under control (39). These failures to capture the whale are not errors of coordination, but an ethical relation that Captain Ahab refuses to come to terms with. The contemporary Romanian philosopher, Gabriel Liiceanu, in the book written in his native language *Tragicul. O fenomenologie a limitei și depășirii* (2019) touches upon the idea of finitude and how true tragedy becomes relevant when one's limits are overstepped (a line of potential thought in the latter part of this research), an idea that can be taken as a lesson given by the whale itself. Its elusiveness only shows to Ahab that one shall be humble of his own finitude, that he shall recognize that there are forces that outmatch his will. Contrary to that, he finds insult in this, serving instead as fuel for him monomania.

Our captain shares with his crew one of his most convincing philosophical claims very early on in the novel, precisely Chapter 36: The Quarter-Deck, which encapsulates the architecture of his ethical failure in front of the Otherness of the White Whale. To him, this creature is just a mere surface, a blank screen behind which rests "some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features" (182). His endeavor is to unravel what kind of evils hide behind its masks and confront them head-on. In Levinas' vocabulary, as mentioned a couple of paragraphs ago, it is the pure presentation of how the Western philosophy treats the depths of what it cannot understand, he denies Moby Dick any genuine exteriority and agency, its color cannot purify but multiply the chaos it represents. The anti-companion dynamic is solidified at this very moment, offering a medium through which these two beings can communicate, but it is entirely perverted by the obsessive monologue of the captain. Both cannot coexist, one must win and the other shall lose. Maybe, at the end of the day, this was Captain Ahab's frustration: his condition is far below what Moby Dick represents. His monologue, as powerful and as convincing might be, his last thought ended with his existence. His maddening efforts failed within the solid thread of reality, but thrive in the mind of those who read him as a legendary figure.

The American professor, Donna Jeanne Haraway, offers an eloquent examination and dismantling of the separating force between the human and animal. By making a rapid abstraction of this duo, we go back again at the relation between man and nature, between the corrupted and the incorruptible, but this shall not be a normality because one would assume that the man is automatically inferior to his environment when, in fact, he is a part of the natural world. In this way, the companionship becomes a mutual constitution. *Where Species Meet* (2008) puts forward the general idea that species, no matter of what caliber, do not form and evolve on their own, they are proceeding through life independently, but, in fact, they naturally maintain a profound interaction. This specific interaction benefits their evolution. (32) An indisputable example given by Haraway revolves around man's best friend: the dog. They have co-created each other so beautifully that both parties have shaped in order to create grounds to maintain their relationship. Dogs changed their temperament, bodies and behavior whilst human adorned their cultures, work habits and emotions. Basing on the logics of this framework, the non-humanity of the critters that surround the man are not mere blank screens onto which he can reflect his superiority, but they are "beings who recognize one another, who respond to the presence of a significant other" (236), partners that actively take part, each from their worlds, into the creation of a shared and bigger one. Reducing the respect among beings of similar or same construction will not be able to facilitate a constructive relationship, this is why the ability to respond to our significant other, be it human, cat, dog or whatever living being, shall be nurtured through respect not because it is ethically correct, but because the otherness of what neighbors the human is, in itself, a different universe meant to be understood and not conquered. Depending on how one looks at it, the laboratory is a place where humans and animals meet in order to facilitate scientific evolution which also reveals the unfortunately a complex inequality between them. Haraway does not agree with the esoteric justification of such practices and that they require a different methodology of comprehending this relationship. This way she mentions the non-mimetic sharing of pain, an ethical engagement of recognizing the responsibility to respond to the animal's own suffering without having to experience it. (84) The man shall seek a harmonious reciprocity with the otherness of his companion to facilitate a proper continuity where all species mirror each other's procreative responsiveness.

One could argue, however, that in case of Melville's *Moby Dick*, it accurately provides a tragic counter-model. The potential of progressive continuity is inverted despite the fact that the grammar of species companionship remains valid, but it is transformed into an engagement powered not by evolution but by destruction. Through this relationship, Ahab-Moby Dick, is based on Haraway's fundamental theoretical structure about companion species, where, as mentioned previously, it should allow for an open and life-giving cooperation, but, in fact, those two agents take part, in a world-breaking partnership. A clear distinction should be reinforced immediately, which is that Ahab-Moby Dick relationship should not be confused with the generic hunter-pray dynamic, similar to how a ranger tracks a lion. It is true that the plot of the novel takes place during a period where the whaling industry was at its peak and that *Pequod* had a commercial and methodical butchering of whales for oil, reducing the being, in this way, to a mere commodity meant for profit, but the novel states it clearly that the ship's design was a convincing façade that hid Ahab's private vengeance redirected towards a complex white whale: "Men, it is Moby Dick ye have seen – Moby Dick – Moby Dick!" (Chapter 36, 180), "it was Moby Dick that dismasted me... 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. ... What say ye, men, will ye splice hands on it, now?" (181). The reason why their dynamic is not a mere predator-prey situation it's due to the lack of any logic that offers the functionality of predation. In other words, a hunter's motive behind killing an animal is justified by survival control, and even sport, where the animals are trying to either retaliate or flee right away, consequently ending most of the times in death. Captain Ahab's reality does not rest on the riches he could get from hunting down Moby Dick, despite the fact that its worth is renowned, but on how defeating this creature presents

the principles of his identity, a living proof of the malicious universe. The whale is not fleeing from him and becomes an adversary that taunts and terrifies in return. It is a bond of perverse significant otherness, intensifying violence that can be understood, in other terms, inverting Haraway's perspective, as a *significant adversariness*. Captain Ahab on his own it's just a captain, which also means that without Moby Dick he is not Ahab. The whale, without all of the symbolic weight given by Ahab, would only be just a creature among other beings similar to its biology.

Herman Melville manages to allow the reader to identify many instances where their bond, though significant, offers a clear confession of admiration despite mutual hatred. However, the most important, I believe, are the following: "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." (Chapter 36, 182) here, the whale becomes the main agent of his turmoil and anger, it becomes his own aim without which he would only be a whaling captain that lacked luck when it comes to one of his legs. Later, in Chapter 133, the words "gentle joyousness" hold hands with the malice mentioned previously, creating, thus, the image of an established partner in their shared vendetta, a creature so complex that it can defy and answer its enemy's attacks with an identical obsession. What is the result, one might ask? A looping significant otherness where one offers the other identity and vice versa. They both become trapped in the loop of their monomania, from the human side being more obvious because, in comparison to the whale, Ahab can communicate his hatred more through words than action. In Moby Dick's place, its action speaks volumes on par with Ahab's voice and, consequently, by destroying *Pequod*, killing everyone on board and dragging the captain into the navy depths of the ocean, it ends the sentence of their feud. The reading is, thus, dealing with a monomaniac vs. accursed creature hidden behind the Ahab – Moby Dick dynamic, a dark-mirror that distorts Haraway's companion species narrative.

The focus on the last three chapters reveals a lethal intimacy between the two agents. As Captain Ahab reduces the distance between him and the whale, he gets rid of any impersonal attachment to his obsession, transforming "Towards thee I roll, thou all-destroying but unconquering whale, to the last I grapple with thee, from hell's heart I stab at thee, for hate's sake I spit my last breath at thee." (597) into a vow of complete detest and defiance, a dark serenade that solidifies their significant adversariness to his last breath. Interestingly enough, the captain also recognized that Moby Dick is untouchable and unconquerable, a force out of his control that, despite his limits, he is giving his last breath to hold onto the very subject of his erasure and as the harpoon is thrown towards the whale, the flying line wraps around his neck, yanking him into the depths of the ocean, an incredibly poetic way of intensifying the idea of his last breath. This does not only bind Ahab, but Moby Dick as well because both become one in the uncharted navy depths, descending as one body. Haraway's philosophy focuses on the idea of material-semiotics which, in the novel's case, it is happening but has no lifespan. The duality's capacity of becoming one with the otherness of the companion should have served a probable physical ability to live, but, in fact, this knot has a worldly limit and what is actually beyond it maintains their pact. Ahab sought that type of knowledge that cannot be inhabited by the limits of his mind, a lesson that Moby Dick has to teach him violently. One does find companionship between the captain and his whale, but Melville's cosmos pushes for a fatality of fates where nobody wins, only the universe whose rules cannot be changed at the man's whim. The anti-companionship found in the white whale becomes, thus, a dark twin of the companion-species theory. There is a connection, there is a response-ability and there is a possibility of evolution, but all becomes too complex for the regular mind to accept death as the ultimate incident that bonds the two agents together.

Before taking a look at how Aristotle's *Poetics* could locate the tragic nature of Ahab's fate reported to Moby Dick, once shall expand on the etymology of the word "companion", a term which secured its place in the English vocabulary through early French influences. Just like any other word, the term can be traced back even further, as mentioned earlier, the Old French *compaignon* was inherited from the Late Latin term *companiono*, which, in its very self, it's a union of *com-* which refers to "together" or "with" and *-panis* that points to idea of food, such as "bread". Linguistically speaking, a companion is somebody with who you share your bread by breaking it, sustaining in this way not only nourishment, but an understood co-dependency. By adding the Greek prefix "anti-", which can primarily be understood as the idea of being against or opposed, one shall actually look at its secondary meaning, which refers to a placeholder, something that substitutes the original position. In Christianity, for example, the word antichrist (ἀντίχριστος) could carry two meanings. The first is worldly understood as someone who is against Jesus Christ, "Who is the liar? It is whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a person is the antichrist – denying the Father and the Son." (1 John 2,22 NIV) The second meaning refers to the fabricated version of Christ, someone that claims to be Him in order to deceive and spread the false teachings, "but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world" (1 John 4:3 NIV). This is why, in this way, the anti-companion term is not only a reference to someone or something that represents the enemy of a cause, but it can be also seen as a mutuality that rests in conflict, a void where rationality disperses and a dependency that ends in death instead of life. Captain Ahab chose this kind of bond where he wants Moby Dick to become a placeholder of such companion, an overwhelming presence in his conscious, his intellect using all of its resources, his inner mediations, all to dominate the whale which is not there for the sake of simple companionship, but as a force which perverts the very idea of a companion. One is focusing on a relationship whose destructive effect is reciprocated tenfold because as this conflict started initially between Ahab and Moby Dick, its conclusion affecting the whole *Pequod* crew. This is why, the idea of the anti-companion can be understood as a tragic trope, the inability to coexist and cooperate procreativity, a companion

that is replaced to annihilate and not protect, holding the failed possibility of knowledge. This is a sacrifice of the companion in the name of substitution, all done by Ahab's harpoon and immovable will.

The idea of *anagnorisis*, as understood from the Preface in Aristotle's *Poetics*, refers to "the change from ignorance to knowledge, which produces either friendship or animosity between the persons doomed to happiness or misery", in other words, it is about the *recognition* (ἀναγνώρισις) of the truth that was initially taken for granted. Theoretically speaking, this term corresponds to the idea of *peripeteia* which presents an abrupt *reversal* of fate in order to make room for an intense tragic effect onto the protagonist. In this way, the hero is allowed to see the truth of what he represents and what kind of repercussions his actions have on others, something he only half acknowledges. Sophocles' hero, Oedipus, manages to discover his true nature, a discovery that represents the backbone of the play and the tragedy that destroys him. But this negative effect is not due to his failure of recognizing on time the weight of his actions, but how what he has done and believed up until then represents the very substance of his identity, his spirit and how nothing can turn back to its original form. Knowledge is intellectually transformative, but in this case, the very same knowledge pities the one that is bound to sleep in the grave he dug with his own hands.

One should ask, then, what happens to the hero that is offered all the leads to recognize on time the weight of his deeds, the hero who is given all the mirrors and a persistent Otherness that offers a clear image of his boundaries but still refuses to accept what he's given? What happens to the protagonist that chooses to reign in ignorance even if that costs his life? Such case actually exists and it is portrayed masterfully in Herman Melville's novel. The American writer creates a context in which the idea of an anti-anagnorisis is possible, a situation where Captain Ahab refuses to accept a different kind of knowledge, becoming thus a slave of his own beliefs, but in order to understand clearly why this perversion takes place, one shall decipher the whale as a powerful admin of recognition.

The classical tragedy introduces recognition through different, if not, most often, organic signs, such as a scar or an injury received after a conflict outside or within the novel, but certainly all of them point towards the protagonist's concealed identity, proving, from the very beginning, that his fate is set in stone, his limits have been decided. Moby Dick inflicts such organic sign onto Captain Ahab, and it is visible: though the novel does not mention which, one of the captain's legs is torn off and then replaced from the jawbone of another sperm whale. But "why from a sperm whale" one might ask? For the same reason why he internalized the dependency on Moby Dick, a bound that reminds him of his intent to destroy the very same thing that, symbolically, holds him up. The whale is not just a simple, dumb animal that deserves to be hunted only because, from a standpoint that concerns the possibility to be rational, is inferior, but because it represents where Ahab's limits rest, a being that could show him where his position in the universe is. Throughout the second half of the novel, the captain near-encounters not only Moby Dick, but also potential revelations, recognition becoming, thus, a weapon of annihilation that feeds off the whale's sight.

It is indeed true that the quote "all visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks" has been highly debated and the literature has great and valuable explanations for this particular section from the 35th Chapter, and for that one shall add another weight to it, especially when read from the Greek tragedy standpoint where masks have been used as great revelatory agents of the character's identity. It uses the exterior to empathize the interior. It does not hide but, instead, pushes the inward towards the outward. To think that the mask is separate and unrelated to the face of the individual means that the person is not genuine towards the rest of the world, this is why one could claim that they are a continuation of each other that starts inside. In Ahab's case, however, the whale's mask is precisely what he must get rid of so he can profane the entity behind it. He lacks, in a very hubristic way, the ability to recognize something as more than just a surface. The anti-anagnorisis behind his actions reverses the demands of Greek tragedy that pushes the hero to perceive the self through the mask to achieve revelation whilst, for the captain, that just becomes a barrier he needs to breach, an immense white lie without which he would have to look at his own void fueled by projected meanings.

Pure anagnorisis would refer to something that is far more intense than the unraveling of a truth, hence its perversion should not mean that is less dramatic, but, in fact, it puts Ahab in an existential crisis. The Danish philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard, in his work *The Sickness Unto Death* (1941) offers a precise analysis of the man's spirit forced to recognize the weight of the despair, which is the "disrelationship in a relation which relates itself to itself" (21), a phenomenon that is faultily looked at as something passive, similar to a bodily and internal medical issue. In simpler terms, it is about how the individual refuses to acknowledge the realistic position of his self, position established by something that is beyond his understanding. The self wants to escape its limits and become its own master, a despair to belong to the oneself defiantly (111). This is, in a very precise way, where Melville's captain is positioned, ever since the moment where he nails the doubloon to the mast he has become the sole captain not of a mere ship, but the captain of his own fate. Moby Dick becomes, in this way, the very representation of the limit that stop him from achieving complete sovereignty, a permanent reminder that the world does not start and end with him and he is limited by powers outside his own control. The whale reveals itself as the otherness that refuses to be controlled, creating the conditions for a genuine anagnorisis. However, instead of allowing the truth to wash over him and teach him about acceptance and modesty, Ahab seeks to be the one that is choosing to not be related to the whale and to redefine the relation with it. The "unconquering whale" part from the final speech of the last chapter offers a perfect image of Ahab's tragic anagnorisis which pushes forward the idea that he recognizes the truth behind the whale but still chooses to spit at it, just as an existential self-damnation where the captain vehemently chooses

defiance over knowledge. His suffering could have become meaningful had he accepted the presence of the whale, just like a mirror held up to him, the captain smashes it with his own hands.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the tripartite theoretical approaches allow for a clearer perception of the Ahab-Moby Dick dynamic, transforming it more into an ethical failure than just a mere hunt. First of all, by employing Levinas's philosophy, the whale's 'face' lays the captain's limitations, powering a confrontation where one demands submission whilst the other asks for existential autonomy. As expected, Ahab refuses to accept something that he cannot understand, trading responsibility with violence because he perceived nothing ethical about the whale's indifference, but pure insult. Second of all, thanks to the inverted companion species theory, it has been proven that the mutual becoming of the captain and Moby Dick has collapsed, transforming it into an anti-companionship that seeks nothing but the other's annihilation. They are connected, even as different species, but without the aim to facilitate a procreative dynamic. They do not consider each other partners in evolution, but pure obstacles meant to triumph over each other, a terrifying form of "significant otherness". Finally, after reanalyzing the Aristotelian idea of the anagnorisis, Captain Ahab does not benefit from the revelatory power of the truth, but instead he becomes even more aggravated by the unfairness of the godless world he is part of. As any other tragic hero, he recognized that there is something bigger than him, an entity for which he consumed forty years of his life, a force beyond his comprehension, all reduced to his own way or recognition "to the last I grapple with thee (Chapter 135, 597), a hero's declaration of eternal rebellion. Death becomes the manifestation of a tragic anti-companionship, a Melvillian diagnosis of the American lack of tolerance for anything outside its absolute control.

REFERENCES

1. John 2:22 NIV BibleGateway. n.d. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20John%202%3A22&version=NIV>. 11 August 2026.
2. John 4:3 NIV BibleGateway. n.d. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20John%204%3A3&version=NIV>. 11 August 2026.
3. Aristotle. *Poetics. Literally Translated with Explanatory Notes and An Analysis*. London: Sothis Press, 1819. PDF Document.
4. Haraway, Donna Jeanne. *When Species Meet*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008. PDF document.
5. Kierkegaard, Søren. *The Sickness unto Death*. Translated with an Introduction by Walter Lowrie. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941. PDF Document.
6. Levinas, Emmanuel. *Totality and Infinity. An Essay on Exteriority*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1979. PDF document.
7. Liiceanu, Gabriel. *Tragicul. O fenomenologie a limitei și depășirii*. București: HUMANITAS, 2019.
8. Melville, Herman. *Moby-Dick, or, The Whale*. With a foreword by Jay Parini. Grand Britain, U.K.: Alma Classics, 2017.