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CREATURE DIVINE: A STUDY OF ANIMALS IN AMERICAN-ROMANTIC LITERATURE

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the College of Graduate Studies

Lamar University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in English

by

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December 2020

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CREATURE DIVINE: A STUDY OF ANIMALS IN AMERICAN-ROMANTIC LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

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by

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American-Romantic authors, such as Washington Irving, Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville, and Emily Dickinson, include animals within their works because they envision them as embodiments, or avatars, of the Divine, that is, of the Divine Presence of God within creation. Animals are not just background elements of the natural setting; animals are proof of Heaven on Earth. This study analyzes the works of these authors, namely: Irving's "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," Poe's "The Black Cat," Melville's *Moby-Dick*, and many examples of Dickinson's poetry. This analysis reveals that animals may serve as avatars of God to enact justice for mankind's hubris, and they may also remind us that both human beings and creatures are part and parcel of God. By serving as avatars of the Divine, animals may restore equality between all of God's creations.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am beyond grateful to all of those with whom I have had the pleasure to work during this thesis project. Each of the members of my Graduate Committee has provided me with extensive professional guidance and taught me a great deal about writing and analyzing the greatest works of literature.

A special thanks to Dr. Daigrepont, who has helped me through this project from start to finish, and has provided both enlightenment and humor that I will appreciate for all time.

I would like to thank my parents, who have always supported me with their loving guidance. Nobody has been more important to me in this pursuit than my husband and my daughter. They are the reasons that I continue to pursue my education and dream big.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

"What is a country without rabbits and partridges? They are among the most simple and indigenous animal products; ancient and venerable families known to antiquity as to modern times; of the very hue and substance of Nature, nearest allied to leaves and to the ground,--and to one another; it is either winged or it is legged… .The partridge and the rabbit are still sure to thrive, like true natives of the soil, whatever revolutions occur…That must be a poor country indeed that does not support a hare" (Thoreau 229). When Henry David Thoreau wrote these words in his most well-known work *Walden*, he had recently finished his project to "live deliberately" in the woods at Walden Pond. Though he is just one of many American Romantics, Thoreau's words achieve resonance across the centuries for how simply he was able to capture the reflections of many Romantic authors: the creatures of the world are of great import.

For Thoreau, animals are "of the very hue and substance of Nature" (229). They are precious because of their innate relationship to Nature, the place that is the epitome of greatness and true emotion for Romantics. It is the space where a person gains access to the Divine and Liberating Presence of God, away from the often-demanding requirements of established religion and society at large. Thoreau is not alone in his assessment on Nature and creatures, as many other American-Romantic authors have also shown this tendency. By analyzing selected works from American-Romantic authors, such as Washington Irving, Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville, and Emily Dickinson, it becomes evident that these authors find significance in animals not just because they live where the sense of the Sublime may be cultivated but because this Divine Influence appears

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within the animals themselves. Through studying character, symbolism, and imagery, readers will see how animals take on special roles in many American-Romantic works because they are living proof of the *sublime* in Nature and even avatars of God, manifestations of God's moral and even spiritual influence.

Looking at Washington Irving's "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" in the first chapter, I will analyze how Irving describes the town of Sleepy Hollow and its inhabitants. Through Irving's descriptions, it is apparent that Sleepy Hollow, or Tarry Town, is so idyllic as to represent a type of Heaven on Earth. When Ichabod Crane, the greedy outsider from Connecticut, threatens to turn Sleepy Hollow into a land-speculation enterprise, he upsets the natural balance of Sleepy Hollow. It is up to the native people, and a borrowed horse named Gunpowder, to expel Ichabod from Paradise. This is the first example in this study that will show the moral willfulness of animals and their important role in reestablishing natural harmony when it is threatened.

Edgar Allan Poe's "The Black Cat" shines a light on another wily animal, this time a simple house cat and beloved pet. By studying the action of "The Black Cat" and the character of the feline form, the reader can discern that Poe uses the cat purposefully as judge, jury, and executioner of the unnamed narrator. The power that Poe gives to the cat, like the power that Irving gives to Gunpowder, is indicative of the amount of importance that both authors see in creatures as possessed of knowledge unbeknownst to their human "masters." An innate wisdom reflective of their nature as avatars of the Divine.

Perhaps one of the most instructive examples of the portrayal of an animal as an avatar of God, Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* expresses clearly the belief that a divinely-

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guided creature can enact punishment on a defiant and vengeful human being. While *Moby-Dick* is often lauded for its history of seafaring, whaling, and sailor culture, the story of Captain Ahab, his thirst for revenge, and the heavy symbolism have been studied by many scholars for decades. By looking at how the narrator describes both the White Whale and Captain Ahab, the reader will see how the story fits into the theme of willful animals and their part in restoring balance in the world by correcting the behavior of defiant, often blasphemous men. Just as the cat in Poe's story judges the narrator, and Irving's Gunpowder physically expels Ichabod from Sleepy Hollow, Melville's white whale serves in the same capacity to punish the antagonist for his extreme pride, or hubris.

This study would not be complete without an analysis of selected Emily Dickinson poems. It is not difficult to find the topic of Nature and animals within Dickinson's works, as these topics made up a large part of her collection. Famous for her beloved birds and bees in her works, Dickinson made a point to not only embrace creatures within her poems but also place herself in relationship to the animals, in a similar vein as other Romantic authors, such as Thoreau's experiment to live in solitude in the woods. The chapter on Dickinson will serve as a contrast to the other chapters because she shows how human beings should live: in balanced harmony with all of God's creatures. Her reflecting in Nature reveals that we may access God simply by understanding a shared connection with animals.

The majority of this project will comprise a close reading of the aforementioned authors and their works, and how creatures appear as manifestations of the Divine. In the chapters on Irving, Poe, and Melville, there is a clear argument that animals serve as

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avatars of God in order to restore balance when it has been disrupted by mankind's hubris. In the last chapter on Dickinson, the readers will see that Dickinson offers suggestions to correct mankind's faults and that there is a simple solution: quiet contemplation in Nature and an understanding of equality between human beings and creatures. All of the chapters reflect the Romantic ideal that human beings and animals are part and parcel of the Divine Being, who may be accessed by all in Nature.

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Chapter 2

The Idyllic Town and Its Animal Protector in "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow"

In Washington Irving's famous tale "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," he tells the story of Ichabod Crane, a native of Connecticut, who moves into the region of Sleepy Hollow to teach lessons to the village children. What most will recall about the story is that Ichabod Crane disappears and is never seen again by the residents of Sleepy Hollow following his late-night ride against the spectral Headless Horseman. This is the account that all remember; however, when analyzing Irving's detailed descriptions of Sleepy Hollow, Ichabod, and Ichabod's nemesis, Brom Bones, the story evolves into a much more interesting tale. Through Irving's depictions, the town of Sleepy Hollow, and its ancient inhabitants, appear to represent a type of Heaven on Earth. Irving's characterizations of Ichabod, particularly his lofty dreams of land speculation, make him into an adversary promising to upset the serenity of Sleepy Hollow. Brom, assumed to be the Headless Horseman, becomes the protector and hero of the village by chasing away Ichabod and marrying the lovely Dutch heiress, Katrina. Although many scholars have studied the relationship among Ichabod, Brom, and Sleepy Hollow, as well as the issues of Ichabod's bachelorhood and English heritage, American colonialism, and the economic depression of the early 1800s, one minor character is rarely discussed: Gunpowder, the somewhat worn and temperamental horse loaned to Ichabod. By giving Gunpowder a distinctive personality, and a starring role in the final action of the story, Irving makes the creature into the ultimate savior of this tiny Eden. When readers view Sleepy Hollow as a type of Heaven on Earth, a place where a person may access God's presence, along with the culmination of Ichabod's late-night ride upon Gunpowder, the

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story develops into a town's attempt to protect natural bounty and good from an expansionist and money-driven tyrant. Having a simple, yet willful, horse as the redeemer of Paradise is perhaps the most significant part of Irving's story. As part of the natural environment, where God's influence is most within reach, Gunpowder could be a manifestation of God's Divine spirit. Seeing Sleepy Hollow as a natural haven, as well as envisioning Gunpowder's apparent readiness to out Ichabod, one can imagine God's own hand at work through one of His creatures.

Part of the lull of Washington Irving's stories is his ability to render the settings into such a lifelike state that the readers can almost place themselves there at the exact moment of his telling. In "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," Irving depicts the town of Sleepy Hollow with such vivid detail that readers may feel certain they have visited. Sleepy Hollow is not only beautiful because of its aesthetic appeal and nostalgia, but also because it embodies one of the most significant aspects of Romanticism: nature. The town is enveloped by a beautiful natural environment and its people appear to truly understand and respect it, as they make their livelihoods as farmers. According to Irving's narrator, Sleepy Hollow is dreamlike because it is "one of the quietest places in the whole world" with its "uniform tranquility" and "sabbath stillness" (Irving 41). Residents of the town live in a "listless repose" due to the "drowsy, dreamy influence" of the surrounding area (42). The whole atmosphere is so steeped in this soothing silence that it is said to harbor all manners of ghosts, spirits, and haunts, including the infamous Headless Horseman. The narrator emphasizes the dreamlike quality of Sleepy Hollow so intensely that it is not difficult to imagine that a person could greet the sublime in one's daily travels. The village is also pleasing because it is shielded from the bustling

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commotion of city life and for its unchanging and unwavering constancy. In Sleepy Hollow "populations, manners, and customs remain fixed, while the great torrent of emigration and improvement, which is making such incessant changes in other parts of this restless country, sweeps by them unobserved" (43). This stasis disconnects the contentment of Sleepy Hollow from the disorderliness of fast-paced, and often avaricious, cities across the states. Irving's portrayal of the village thus seems to suggest that the "sequestered…and sheltered" Sleepy Hollow is where true, honest Americans live and thrive, in comparison to places where others continually compete for money and status (42). This aspect of Sleepy Hollow is highlighted in Irving's depiction of the residents who live there: the townsfolk are made up of "old farmers, a spare, leathern-faced race, in homespun coats and small clothes," "withered little dames…with homespun petticoats," and "buxom lasses, almost as antiquated as their mothers, excepting a straw hat, a fine riband, or perhaps a white frock" (53). These inhabitants live in a seemingly ideal environment, exhibiting a quintessential Romantic lifestyle through their dress and demeanor. What better people to understand nature and live among God's handiwork than farmers and their family members, who create their homesteads with their own hands and thrive in steadfast serenity. They are so much a part of their environment that the narrator compares their voices to the "hum of a bee-hive" (43).

With this picture of Sleepy Hollow embedded in the mind's eye of the reader, Irving introduces the character of Ichabod Crane to serve as a contrast to the heavenly community. Ichabod, the "country schoolmaster," appears as less hardy and earthy than his Sleepy Hollow counterparts: he is "tall, but exceedingly lank" with limbs so long and feet so large and "his whole frame most loosely hung together" that he looks more like a

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"scarecrow eloped from a cornfield" than a person (43). Merely Ichabod's sleek frame and appearance differentiate him from those of Sleepy Hollow; where the residents are essentially born from the earth, the description of Ichabod portrays him as a supplanted being, one who serves to scare *away* nature. Irving's narrator likens him to the "genius of famine descending upon the earth," promising to destroy all that is good and bountiful (43). As a teacher, Ichabod has the "authoritative voice of the master" and utilizes corporal punishment on his pupils when necessary, an act stressed by the narrator as one that is used more upon "the tough, wrong-headed, broad-skirted Dutch urchins" (43-44). His physical characteristics, along with his pedagogical personality, further suggest that Ichabod is unlike the labor-worn tenants of Sleepy Hollow. Instead of integrating himself into the Dutch society, Ichabod appears to enjoy his "superior" status as an educated, New England "gentleman-like personage" and instructor (45). Irving's narrator makes this clear when discussing the country wives' opinions of Ichabod. The ladies of the neighborhood view him as a man with "vastly superior taste and accomplishments to the rough country swains" and the young men hang back "envying his superior elegance and address" (45). Through the stark contrast between the Yankee Ichabod and the Dutch residents, and by Ichabod's promise to correct the disorderly Dutch children, an image of Ichabod as the troublesome intruder, creating discord within a balanced, equitable society, continues. Ichabod not only is physically disconnected from Sleepy Hollow in appearance but also actively segregates himself as existing above the down-to-earth inhabitants.

Perhaps the most significant aspects of Ichabod Crane that disconnect him from this Heaven on Earth are his greed and aspirations for wealth, and consequently, gluttony

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and social ambition. The narrator describes Ichabod as having “the dilating powers of an Anaconda,” someone who enjoys food so much that his mouth waters in its presence and food simply drops to his stomach without being savored (44). This rather comical characteristic is seen when he falls head over heels for the “blooming lass” Katrina Van Tassel (46). Ichabod yearns after Katrina because of her beauty but she is an even more “tempting…morsel” after he visits her family abode, ripe and rich “with the sumptuous promise of luxurious winter fare” (46-47). He even forgets about the “plump” Katrina completely as he reimagines the Van Tassel’s farm animals as dishes of food; the description portrays Ichabod’s interest in the animals as mere love for their ability to fill his stomach: “the pigeons were snugly put to bed in a comfortable pie” (47). Ichabod looks at the farm animals not only as potential pies but also as profitable sources of cash, along with the farm land, and something he can sell in order to live more handsomely elsewhere. Ichabod’s dreams of wealth and status place him at great odds with the ideal of respecting and living in nature as it exists and not for what it could render as liquidated capital. Ichabod’s distinction from this ideal is even more noticeable when one contrasts Ichabod with Baltus Van Tassel, Katrina’s father. Baltus is “a thriving, contented, liberal-hearted farmer” who is “satisfied with his wealth, but not proud of it,” as he resides among the birds, pigs, and variety of other creatures on his farm (47). Baltus is part and parcel of his homestead, the natural environment, and seemingly at one with his farm animals, whereas Ichabod detaches himself physically and emotionally. Though Irving does not describe Baltus’ own agricultural activities or husbandry, one assumes that if Baltus is satiated, then he preserves the balance present in Sleepy Hollow. He does not raise livestock speculatively to sell his animals to the highest bidder and does not send

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"his eyes or his thoughts beyond the boundaries of his own farm," whereas Ichabod's relationship with the animals of Sleepy Hollow only derives from his desire to swallow them whole (47). The description of Baltus' farm only further stresses its heaven-like qualities. His vast barn, which "might have served for a church," housed a variety of playful and lively creatures: swallows, martins, pigeons "enjoying the sunshine," porkers, geese, ducks, turkeys, fowls and more all represent this feeling of true bounty and dynamic energy (47). One does not have to leave the comforts of one's home to find God's presence; it is readily available to those who step outside their doors into the open air of Sleepy Hollow.

Once Irving presents Abraham Van Brunt, or Brom Bones, initially Brom seems like an annoying, overbearing competitor also trying to win over the heart of Katrina. Brom is a "burley, roaring, roystering blade" who shows off through his strength and his horsemanship, as well as by the pranks he commits across the village (49). While Brom's tricks and braggadocious behavior may upset his competition, Irving's narrator stresses that Brom has "more mischief than ill-will" and that the villagers not only look upon his deeds with good humor but also look up to him and trust his judgment (49). Sleepy Hollow's acceptance of Brom's horseplay, and Irving's own description of the character, displays the disparity between Ichabod and those in Sleepy Hollow. Brom is physically different than Ichabod, but they are also unalike in the sense that Brom is more down-to-earth and a sincere Dutchman. Though Brom is only one of many of Ichabod's adversaries when it comes to Katrina, he is Ichabod's greatest rival and the character who appears most ideally in tune with his natural surroundings. Brom belongs to Sleepy Hollow and utilizes nature to his advantages, through his skill with horses and his

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knowledge of the surrounding area's natural pathways and shortcuts. Irving's use of the name Ichabod, meaning "inglorious" in Hebrew, is a sharp contrast to the character of Abraham (Brom's namesake) in the Bible (Daigrepont 75). One might assume that with Brom's dashing looks, powerful muscles, and abilities, Ichabod would give up the ghost; however, Ichabod perseveres in the fight due to his supreme confidence and belief that his superior English heritage will win him Katrina and her bounty.

Perhaps because of Ichabod's foolish bravado, Irving provides Ichabod with a contrary sidekick: a horse named Gunpowder. Although scholars rarely discuss Gunpowder and how he assists in the forced departure of Ichabod, the horse is not only significant for his actions but also for what he represents. Gunpowder is a willing participant in restoring goodness and balance to the idyllic Sleepy Hollow, though he is a simple creature. Gunpowder is a "broken-down plough horse" lent to Ichabod, who needed transportation to the Van Tassel party (Irving 52). When Irving's narrator describes Gunpowder, he highlights the horse's old age but even more so the horse's personality: Gunpowder "had outlived almost every thing but his viciousness" and "there was more lurking deviltry in him than in any young filly in country" (52). Gunpowder, as an inhabitant of Sleepy Hollow, is automatically contrasted to his rented rider, who makes an extremely awkward sight when seated upon Gunpowder. Ichabod's knees were "nearly up to the pommel of the saddle…his sharp elbows stuck out like grasshoppers" (52). In comparison to the skillful master horseman of Brom, Ichabod does not create a symbiotic relationship with the animal; he is a gangly impostor disconnected from the natural surroundings. Ichabod's detachment from nature is stressed even more when his phantasmal suspicions are heightened by "every sound of nature" (45). The moans and

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cries from the birds at night drive him almost to madness, and even the fireflies startle him to the point of apoplexy. Both Irving and Hans Van Ripper, Gunpowder's owner, may be making an obvious point in providing Ichabod with Gunpowder: Ichabod does not belong in the heaven-like Sleepy Hollow because of his aspirations for wealth, status, and desire for change. Gunpowder seems to make this unseemliness evident in his late-night ride with Ichabod, when the horse does everything but follow Ichabod's commands. Gunpowder refuses to cross the bridge and "nearly sent his rider sprawling over his head" and seems "possessed with a demon" when he darts down the opposite pathway (58-59). Gunpowder's determination helps the Headless Horseman to catch up to Ichabod and it eventually seals Ichabod's doom. As an ancient and native resident of Sleepy Hollow, Gunpowder and his resistance suggest that even he does not believe Ichabod belongs there and wishes to be rid of him, like a pestering flea. Having an animal complicit in Ichabod's exit, Irving stresses the importance of animals and Gunpowder's willing participation in keeping evil at bay from the divine presence in Sleepy Hollow. Gunpowder is a part of Sleepy Hollow because of his birth but he achieves a much greater position in the story as a savior of Paradise, seemingly as a manifestation of God's moral influence to punish Ichabod for his greedy aspirations.

After Ichabod is pelted by the Headless Horseman's head, or pumpkin, and he is thrown from Gunpowder, the townspeople of Sleepy Hollow never find out what actually happened to Ichabod. Rumors range from the spectral, that Ichabod is the Headless Horseman's latest victim, to the practical belief that Ichabod has left town to hide in shame. What is important to note is what the residents of Sleepy Hollow do after Ichabod is gone: the belongings that Ichabod left behind, his "magic books and poetic scrawl," are

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subsequently burned by Gunpowder's owner, Van Ripper, as he swears that "he never knew any good come of his same reading and writing" (60). The rest of the inhabitants, unwilling to put forth much effort in locating Ichabod, go about their merry business, relocate the school, and hire a new instructor. The burning of Ichabod's books and the shrugging of shoulders by the Sleepy Hollow villagers show their indifference to Ichabod's wellbeing and depict an active protest against what Ichabod symbolized. If Irving is attempting to contrast the heavenly qualities of Sleepy Hollow against Ichabod's aspirations, imagined superiority, and overconfidence, then the best way to do so is to have all of Sleepy Hollow reject him. First, Katrina rebuffs his advances and prevents him from reaching his lofty goals, then the Headless Horseman, believed to be Brom Bones, starts the chase to run him out of Sleepy Hollow, and lastly, his borrowed horse sets him up for failure by physically expelling him out of town. Laura Plummer and Michael Nelson add on to this discussion by arguing that it is the women of Sleepy Hollow who accomplish the most in finally ousting Ichabod. The authors assert that Irving's story is more so about the "preservation" of a "decidedly female place" against a character who wishes to overawe and overcome both the women and the town of Sleepy Hollow (175-176). After all, it is the country wives who help maintain the story of the Headless Horseman and other ghostly tales, and "Brom unwittingly serves as the means to achieve the goal of the female community" (180). The idea that Sleepy Hollow is a predominantly female-centric society agrees with the image of the town as an ideal representative of a Heaven on Earth. As a Heavenly village, Sleepy Hollow is not only bursting with natural life but also it produces and continues that life, just as do women who birth new life into the world. If the women of Sleepy Hollow drive Ichabod away to

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protect their female influence over the area, they are also defending the inherent features present in nature's cycle and the life-giving aspect of God's spiritual influence.

From the beginning, Irving affectionately describes the natural beauty of Sleepy Hollow, its wildlife, its rosy and ancient inhabitants, its unchanging steadfastness, and the peaceful and dreamy qualities of the town. Ichabod Crane encroaches upon this idyllic setting and immediately distinguishes himself from the whole of Sleepy Hollow: he sees himself as an "educated" schoolmaster, though he has only read four books, as better than the Dutch country bumpkins seeking Katrina's affection, and as more deserving of the Van Tassel estate because of his New England heritage. But Ichabod is merely a trespasser, threatening to damage what makes Sleepy Hollow idyllic. Irving's characterization of Ichabod, Brom Bones, the residents of Sleepy Hollow, and especially Gunpowder, crafts Ichabod's story into that of a disruptive force that wants to change the village and destroy what makes it an ideal type of Heaven on Earth. By having Gunpowder, the avatar of God's moral influence and one of Sleepy Hollow's most earth-born inhabitants, physically drive Ichabod out of Sleepy Hollow, Irving protects the idyllic town from modernity, greed, and superficiality. Gunpowder, though just a broken-down creature, plays his role as savior keenly and allows Paradise to exist with God's ever-present influence.

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Chapter 3

The Informative Howl in Poe's "The Black Cat"

For decades, readers and scholars have analyzed Edgar Allan Poe's works through so many different perspectives that they are almost impossible to list. His well-known works are remembered for their macabre details or their heart-wrenching verses, although Poe also ushered in some of the earliest works of detective fiction. Readers know not only his most famous poems and short stories but also some of the unfortunate and lurid details of his personal life: the abandonment of the family by his father and the death of his mother when he was two years old, his devotion to his second mother, Mrs. Frances Allan, who also died prematurely, the death of his brother Henry shortly after, his struggles with school, gambling debts, even a court-martial from West Point, his later problems with excessive drinking and constant shifts in employment, his marriage to his teenage cousin, who would die of tuberculosis, as well as his own suspicious death in Baltimore. There is no one alive who would say that Poe's own life was uninteresting.

Many scholars cannot help but read his poetry through a lens that reflects his actual life and the problems he experienced in his short time on Earth; however, it would be erroneous to overlook his works as outstanding examples of the Romantic literary movement. Poe, like several other American writers during the mid-nineteenth century, was influenced by Romantic perspectives like the importance of nature and how humans may gain access to God's divinity. Poe's enigmatic "Prose Poem" titled *Eureka* gives us a sense of what Poe purportedly thought of the Divine Being, though many Poe enthusiasts still grapple with the confusing nature of this essay. Scott Peeples asserts that the essay makes most sense "as a 'romance,' specifically a story about the story of the

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universe, as 'plotted' by God" (161). Overall, *Eureka* posits that the artist is the true visionary of our world, in direct competition with the "cold" scientist. In Poe's vision, God created "a simple but expanding universe" and much like Ralph Waldo Emerson, Poe states that human souls are eternal and come from the Divine Being (163, 164). Though Poe may not seem like a typical Romantic, he sees God as much a part of our own perceptible Earth as He is in the greater universe. Also like his other contemporary Romantics, Poe often dealt with some intense emotions, particularly moral anxiety, and the feeling that God exists in the vicinity of human beings. While he is not renowned necessarily for his works including animals, as many other Romantic authors are, two of Poe's most famous works are "The Black Cat" and "The Raven." Both works heighten the feelings of dread and unease experienced by the narrators; however, "The Black Cat" includes an integral sense of divine judgment and righteousness emanating from an animal, as well as a suggestion that creatures are superior to human beings. Just as Washington Irving uses an animal, a broken-down plough horse, to enact God's justice in "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," Poe creates a short story with two cats to show that animals can be the living embodiment of God's influence, which is ever-present and tangible in the form of the two cats, remaining watchful of the daily deeds of human beings. "The Black Cat" is a telling example that creatures can provide us with a sense of the sublime, even if their presence brings about a character's undoing.

The story within "The Black Cat" is not difficult to follow and understand; however, one of the problems with the story itself, as expounded by other scholars, is that Poe creates an unreliable narrator to tell it. The narrator is excitable yet sincere to the point that he agrees his story is unbelievable but also just "a series of mere household

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events" of seeming unimportance. He admits that he cannot trust his own senses but insists that he is not "mad" (Poe 695). In Ed Piacentino's article "Poe's 'The Black Cat' as Psychobiography: Some Reflections on the Narratological Dynamics," he has engaged the story by looking at the "narratological dynamics" in order to make sense of the narrator's brutal act of killing his pet and his wife (155). This method uncovers potential reasons for the murder of the narrator's wife by analyzing what the narrator says and *does not* say. Piacentino argues that the narrator's childhood remembrances, and ultra-sensitivity, reveal "a troubled psyche and the real motive for the murder of his wife" (159). This practical way of reading the story allows the audience to understand the events as told by the narrator and what he reveals, or *does not* reveal. In this chapter, I will follow this method to illuminate the importance of animals and how the actions of the animals in the story bring justice to the victims.

Although Poe's narrator is an unreliable one, the reader sees moments of cleverness and clarity from the narrator, even if the narrator does not wholly connect the ideas to obvious instances. The narrator himself helps to set up his own foreboding duality: he was *once* a person that had a "tenderness of heart" toward animals, whose unselfishness and "self-sacrificing love" placed them at great odds to "mere *Man*" (Poe 695). Animals, at least in the narrator's childhood, held an exemplary place even above the scope of man. When the narrator marries, he increases his love exponentially by taking in all manners of pets, including an all-black cat named Pluto. The narrator admits that his temperament changed quickly because of alcoholism, leading to his abuse of his wife and his beloved pets. In a fit of rage, and a fanciful feeling that the cat purposefully "avoided [his] presence," the narrator grabs the cat and even "deliberately" cuts out one

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of the cat's eyes (696). According to the narrator, he was seized with the "fury of a demon" and was so unlike himself that he imagined his soul left his body, seemingly to explain why he had done such an uncharacteristic act (696). The narrator does not dwell on the issue of Pluto's evasiveness as a reason for his attack, but it is not lost on the reader that Pluto's avoidance of the narrator shows a keen intuitive understanding that maybe the narrator does not wish to admit in his own slowly-deteriorating mind.

The narrator continues to emphasize the contrast between animals and human beings when describing further events that happen after the initial attack. Pluto survives his disfigurement but unsurprisingly continues to avoid the narrator when he draws near. By having the cat avoid his owner once more, Poe has given the cat still more knowledge than such a creature is often presumed to possess. The cat's avoidance enrages the narrator with a "spirit of perverseness" that, he claims, is "one of the primitive impulses of the human heart" (696). So as to really display the difference between animals and human beings, the narrator asks the reader a question: "Who has not, a hundred times, found himself committing a vile or a silly action, for no other reason than because he knows he should *not*?" (696-697). Such perverse and knowing action appears to be man's undoing, admitted by the narrator, and the explanation as to why the narrator ends up hanging the cat "in cool blood" (697). The narrator, meaningfully, states that this deed has placed him "beyond the reach of the infinite mercy of the Most Merciful and Most Terrible God" (697). Though the reader receives warning signs that the narrator is not wholly lucid, it is interesting that the narrator makes so many poignant discoveries. He confesses to several wrongdoings, particularly to those enacted on his pets, and states that it is those actions which have placed him out of God's Divine scope. He makes the deeds

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even more cruel by stressing the assumed innocence and selfless nature of animals, in complete opposition to his willful activities. It is this presupposed innocence, and the creeping revelation that Pluto might have more wisdom than supposed, that drives the narrator to madness and his murderous actions.

While the narrator does not connect his murder of Pluto to the subsequent event of his house erupting in flames, the suggestion is not lost on the reader that a higher power might be responsible. The narrator begins to question his sanity and his actions when he sees a very clear sign: the image of a cat, with a noose around its neck, burned into the wall behind his ruined bed. He attempts to satiate his fears by concluding that someone threw Pluto's dead body through his window; however, the reader can question seriously the narrator's own inferences, and theorize that the narrator is only trying to shift responsibility away from himself. Possibly to make up for Pluto's death, the narrator seeks out a new cat and is surprised to find one very similar to Pluto, except for a very large white splotch on its chest. The narrator soon grows to dislike the second cat even more for its "evident fondness" for the narrator (698). One of the reasons why the narrator came to hate Pluto was the cat's pointed avoidance of his master, a detail that infuriated him to the point of murder. A similar thing happens with the unnamed second cat, but in reverse: the second cat apparently loves him too much and will not leave him alone. The narrator then becomes the one to evade the cat and he flees "silently from its odious presence, as from the breath of a pestilence" (698). The reader begins to believe that the cat is showing such affection on purpose, even if not yet realized by the narrator, potentially because of the narrator's previous murder of Pluto. The narrator's growing hatred of the cat is exacerbated when the narrator notes that the second cat is also missing

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one eye, like Pluto, and the cat continues to increase its affections toward the narrator. Just as Pluto, though a mere housecat, appeared to have more knowledge than assumed normal by the narrator, the second cat seems even more adamant with a yet unspoken message: the cat knows what the narrator did to Pluto and is a physical, daily reminder of his evil actions.

The narrator is only driven more into madness when the new cat's indefinite white splotch morphs into a much more distinguished image of the gallows. This acute detail pushes the narrator over the edge, but also into a much more enlightened state of mind. Instead of excusing the noticeable symbols as mere coincidences, the narrator allows his emotions to pour forth and he postulates that the cat is there as a moral agent to torment him for his murder of Pluto. The cat, a "*brute beast*," has it out for him "a man, fashioned in the image of the High God" (699). These revelations only heighten the narrator's confusion; he is now knowledgeable to the cat's purposeful presence but also cannot conceive that a mere creature could perform judgment on a human being made in God's image. He suffers from nightmares but also palpable fears: the cat sits upon his chest as the narrator sleeps and breathes in his face, apparently to remind him of his nefarious deeds. The story reaches one climax as the narrator is tripped by the cat when descending the stairs. He is thrown into "a rage more than demoniacal" and, aiming a blow at the cat, he penetrates his wife's skull with an axe (699). The narrator excuses this action by again claiming that a demon came over him, but he without hesitation concocts a plan for concealment with "entire deliberation" and clear-headedly buries his wife's body within a false wall in his new house, suggesting that the narrator's actions are entirely his own (699). After his proud, funereal achievement, the narrator vows to kill

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the second cat, though he cannot find him. He sleeps, supposedly free of guilt, and believes his "future felicity" is secured (700).

The narrator's boastfulness creates his downfall as the authorities search his house for his missing wife. The narrator, highlighting *man's* fault once more, reveals that "the glee at my heart was too strong to be restrained. I burned to say if but one word, by way of triumph, and to render doubly sure their assurance of my guiltlessness" (701). The narrator praises the construction of the cellar and raps his cane upon the newly-constructed wall, setting off a wailing cry to come forth from behind the structure. In a sentence only comical to the reader, the narrator exclaims "But may God shield and deliver me from the fangs of the Arch-Fiend!" (701). The cat, now clearly an embodiment of God's righteousness, informs the authorities as to the wife's whereabouts with a howl "half of horror and half of triumph" (701). The narrator fully realizes that it is the cat that sentences him to death for his unthinkable murders: "the hideous beast whose craft had seduced me into murder and whose informing voice had consigned me to the hangman" (701).

Many scholars have attempted to make sense of Poe's "The Black Cat" for years, from studying the roles of gender, to psychoanalyzing the narrator, and understanding the historical context of anti-rational thought; however, none have definitively come to a conclusion as to what the story means or why Poe wrote it. In Heidi Hanrahan's "'A series of mere household events': Poe's 'The Black Cat,' Domesticity, and Pet-Keeping in Nineteenth-Century America," she states that "The Black Cat" is not supposed to make sense. Hanrahan asserts that "The Black Cat" is merely "a tale first and foremost about a man and his beloved pet [and] can be read as Poe's commentary on nineteenth-century

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American domesticity" (40). She discusses how Poe shows not only that "depictions of domesticity and horror often share settings" but also that the narrator's violent reactions "indicate a resistance to the promises of domesticity" (40). Ann V. Bliss argues in her article "Household Horror: Domestic Masculinity in Poe's The Black Cat" that the narrator struggles against the domestic lifestyle and also his own latent femininity, a position similar to Hanrahan's own conclusions. For Hanrahan, the cats in Poe's short story are simply pets and should be viewed as such in order to understand the importance of pets and domesticity during the nineteenth century. Hanrahan concludes that there is no decisive reason why the narrator killed both his cat and his wife, and her insistence to view the black cat as an animal, instead of a larger signifier, helps the readers to understand only the significance of pets in the nineteenth century. Hanrahan does not show how the cats in Poe's story exist as manifestations of God's presence, holding court in the company of the narrator.

Other scholars, such as Joseph Stark and Magdalen Wing-Chi Ki, also point out the seemingly motiveless murder in "The Black Cat" and look at the story in its historical context and from a position consistent with traditional ethics. Stark focuses on the issues that arose between scientific theory and religious enlightenment in the mid-nineteenth century to argue that Poe may have wanted to show the "difficulties in both scientific and religious thought" by writing a story that does not show a clear cause for why the narrator murdered his wife (255). Wing-Chi Ki argues that Poe's story is "fundamentally ethical" and that Poe's narrator is encouraged by his "drive ethics," which are in complete opposition to traditional ethics "on the side of the good and the social order" (569). Stark admits that Poe's own religious convictions are hard to grasp, but that there is evidence

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that Poe was familiar with religious writings and even wrote his own “theological treatise,” as mentioned before, titled *Eureka* (258). Stark argues that the story is “radically ambivalent” and that it “explores the issues of moral responsibility and the inexplicability of human evil but supplies no solution” (263). Conceivably that is exactly what Poe meant to do: the motive for the murder cannot be explained by rational thought or religious explanation. Stark glosses over another interesting point in the discussion by mentioning the narrowing gap between “rational human and irrational animal,” as laid out by the scientific community in the nineteenth century, and Poe’s own essay (*Eureka*), which discusses “the mysterious line between the seeming instinct of an animal and the reason of a human” (257-258). Poe asserts that animal instinct “is referable only to the spirit of the Deity itself, acting directly, and through no corporal organ, upon the volition of the animal” (qtd. in Stark, 258). Through Poe’s own ruminations, the reader understands a little more about Poe’s religious thoughts but even more importantly his thoughts about the presence of the Divine Being in animal form and a suggestion that animals are avatars of God’s influence.

Though the narrator is in disbelief that a simple cat bested him, there are several times that the narrator admits to the superior nature of animals, specifically in contrast to his own behavior. Creatures, like Pluto, exude selfless love whereas men have “paltry friendship and gossamer fidelity,” a love that is unable to withstand troubles (Poe 695). It is his killing of the tender Pluto which places him beyond the saving grace of God. Besides Pluto’s supreme devotion, the narrator focuses also on Pluto’s perceptiveness and the more adamant pressure that the second cat places upon the narrator, which grants the cat more knowledge than supposed to be normal for an animal. Already stressed from the

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murder of Pluto, the narrator cannot stand mentally the torment he experiences when his fears become physical with the growth of the second cat's white fur. Opposite to what he had stated earlier, the narrator then scoffs at the idea that a beast could judge someone made in the image of God. The narrator calls out to God for deliverance from his enemy after rapping the cellar wall; however, as if God truly heard his plea, the cat's howl delivers the narrator to his execution. Poe's "The Black Cat" suggests, even more so than Irving's "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," that animals embody not only an uncommonly keen perception but also that creatures are more morally righteous than human beings, or those who upset the harmonious balance in Nature. Because of their knowledge, innocence, and their ability to provide love, even to those undeserving of it, they are the perfect avatars for God's ever-present divinity.

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Chapter 4

The Demogorgon: A Restoration of Balance on Earth in Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*

Seemingly cursed, Herman Melville suffered from a variety of misfortunes throughout his young adult life and into his career as a writer in the mid-nineteenth century. Destitute from an early age by the death of his father, Melville spent years of his young adulthood searching for a steady income. At the age of twelve he worked as an apprentice clerk in a bank, then joined his brother in the fur business a short time later, and set sail as a crewman on several ships in his early twenties. He experienced the harsh realities of multiple whaling ventures and even deserted the *Acushnet,* anchored in the Marquesas Islands, because of low morale aboard the ship in 1842. His bad luck only increased when he and his fellow crewman came upon the cannibalistic Taipis, instead of the friendly Happa tribe which they sought, and he suffered a serious leg injury. He escaped the island a month later and even served in the United States Navy for a short time when something surprising happened: he found some success as a writer. Using his account of his time with the Taipis, Melville wrote and published *Typee* in 1846 and finally saw what he thought would be his economic future. However, with the publication of his masterpiece, *Moby-Dick*, in 1852, he saw little critical acclaim for any of his works during his own lifetime. He spent most of the rest of his later life trying to earn an income from any business that would hire him. The failure to supply his family with a stable support system was exacerbated with the death of his son Malcolm, from suicide, and the death of his son Stanwix, from tuberculosis. Herman Melville died September 28, 1891 with not much fame nor fortune to his name; he was only rediscovered and appreciated in the 1920s, seventy years after the publication of *Moby-Dick*. Melville may or may not

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have seen the irony of his own life compared to his most well-known work: the sailors aboard the *Pequod* were cursed themselves, just as he had seemingly been in his life (Hillway 17-43).

Many of Melville's books have a maritime theme, such as *Typee*, *Omoo*, *Redburn*, and *Moby-Dick*; he had served on many frigates as well as whaling ships and took several excursions across the seas throughout his lifetime. Similar to the way they treat Edgar Allan Poe and his own works, readers and scholars attempt to place Melville's own biographical information into his stories, particularly because Melville meant to do so. Melville's seafaring stories not only reflect his own life but also reflect the growing Romantic literary movement in the mid-nineteenth century. Against the backdrop of the Panic of 1837, a severe financial crisis in United States history, many people were likely desperate for a return to simpler times and a reconnection with nature. Stories about the high seas and the livelihood of sailors reminded readers of freedom, independence, and also the results of hard, but gratifying, work (33-43). Many Americans, "numbering over a hundred thousand people," even sought out "utopian experiment[s]" in order to find, or create, a Heaven on Earth by establishing secluded communities (Nye 53-61). This information can be helpful in viewing *Moby-Dick* as a prime example of Romanticism, even when Melville did not always adhere to every tenet of the literary movement or even desire to do so (Hillway 26-27). Like the works of Poe's "The Black Cat" and Washington Irving's "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," Melville's *Moby-Dick* displays the Romantic aspects of nature's grandeur and man's relationship to an omnipresent God, but perhaps in an even more terrifying way. Prophetic and allegorical, *Moby-Dick* shows what may happen when the ever-present and world-immanent Divine Being is seemingly

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angry at mankind's hubris and embodies an animal avatar to bring about Nemesis. Whereas Poe chooses a black cat and Irving chooses a horse to provide the perspective of the sublime, Melville chooses a foreboding, gargantuan, and seemingly preternatural creature: an albino sperm whale. *Moby-Dick* is another great example of how animals may be used in literature to provide us with a sense of Divine presence and moral and spiritual supremacy over fallible mankind, restoring natural balance in a chaotic world.

Moby-Dick tells a simple story: the protagonist, Ishmael, joins a whaling ship, the *Pequod*, to hunt for whales but finds himself entrenched in the Captain's vengeful plan to hunt a White Whale, called Moby Dick. For Ishmael, the revelation of Captain Ahab's motive must be disheartening; Ishmael joined the *Pequod* crew not only to hunt for whales but also to gain something much more valuable: "the ungraspable phantom of life" (Melville 3). It is this seemingly unobtainable, and therefore precious, dream that seduces Ishmael to the sea; the ocean allows him to sail away from the known and engulf himself in the mysterious unknown. For Ishmael, the whale encapsulates these desires of freedom and adventure. When speaking of the whale he surmises: "Such a portentous and mysterious monster roused all my curiosity. Then the wild and distant seas where he rolled his island bulk; the undeliverable, nameless perils of the whale; these, with all the attending marvels of a thousand Patagonian sights and sounds, helped to sway me to my wish" (6). Ishmael yearns for the unburdened nature of the whale but there is something also supernatural at hand; the sea has "magic in it" and a "mystical vibration" which calls men to its expanse (2, 3). Ishmael repeats that "the Fates" signed his name on the list, stressing that his "choice" was Divine Providence (5). Ishmael's vision of the hand of the Divine Being is made even more apparent when he discusses the tale of Jonah as "a

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lesson to us all as sinful men" (42). Jonah, who did not heed God's command, was made into a "model of repentance" when God "came upon him in the whale" and swallowed him whole (48-49). It is this foreboding story that sets the scene before Ishmael boards Captain Ahab's boat.

Aboard the ship, Ishmael learns the details of Captain Ahab's battle with Moby Dick, who brutally attacked Ahab's ship and severed his leg years ago. Although this tale is straightforward, Melville shapes the tale into a much more complicated and symbolic, even ancient, story about man's relationship with God. It is through Ishmael that the readers learn about Ahab's frustrations with God and also what makes Ahab into such a volatile and arrogant character. Ahab is a "grand, ungodly, god-like man;" he is vile for his lack of faith in God and even more treasonous in that he purports to be like God himself (83). He, like Jonah, evinces "unsurrendable wilfulness" and as if he were "king of the sea" (125, 130). Melville describes Ahab as completely "alien" to Christendom and at the core of his being he is haughty and obstinate (155). Ahab hunts to excess, making him greedy and gluttonous. This is evidenced through Ahab's appearance: he wears an "ivory leg [that] came from a sperm whale's jaw" and sits upon an ivory stool made from a "tripod of bones" (125, 130). Even Ahab's ship, as a reflection of his leadership, appears savage and willful; the ship is named after a now-extinct tribe of Native Americans, a "cannibal of a craft," and its tiller made, ironically, from the lower jaw of a whale (71). Just as early Americans conquered the Pequot Natives, Ahab seeks to conquer Moby Dick "till he spouts black blood" (166).

Ahab is not only greedy but also proud and obstinate, he cannot relinquish his feelings of hatred that he has for Moby Dick. These frustrations with Moby Dick appear

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to reflect his frustrations with God as well. Ahab is so intent on his chase of Moby Dick that he offers up a gold coin to the first man who spots the White Whale. Starbuck, Ahab's first mate, sees immediately Ahab's vengeful nature and protests the hunt. In response, Ahab curses the sun and tests God: "I'd strike the sun if it insulted me…God hunt us all, if we do not hunt Moby Dick to his death!" (167, 170). In a drinking ceremony with his mates, Ahab blasphemes God even further by stating: "Now, then, be the prophet and the fulfiller one. That's more than ye, ye great gods, ever were" (171). Ishmael explains more about Ahab's struggles after describing Moby Dick's first attack on Ahab: "Ahab had cherished a wild vindictiveness against the whale, all the more fell for that in his frantic morbidness he at least came to identify with him, not only all his bodily woes, but all his intellectual and spiritual exasperations…He piled upon the white whale's hump the sum of all the general rage and hate felt by his whole race from Adam down" (187). Ahab struggles with humanity's suffering and humankind's free will. If God created Man then why does he allow Man to suffer, and why is it so difficult for man to overcome his suffering if Man has free will? One of Ishmael's own reflections about human nature seems to apply to Ahab's problem: "All men live enveloped in whale-lines. All are born with halters round their necks" (290). Before the first day of the chase, Ahab's own feelings about free will are obvious: "What is it, what nameless, inscrutable, unearthly thing is it; what cozening, hidden lord and master, and cruel, remorseless emperor commands me...Is Ahab, Ahab? It is I, God, or who, that lifts this arm?" (551). Ahab is unable to accept the contradictions present in his reality and blames God. Even if Melville did not mean for his work to be symbolic, these repeated details and images are highly suggestive of the tragic pattern in Ahab's quest for Moby Dick. Ahab's

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willfulness, his ungodly nature, his proclamation of a kingly title, his avarice and unreasonableness all spell out his uncontrolled pride and angry defiance of the God Who is supposedly responsible for the universe, and Whom Ahab blames for human suffering.

Most scholars would have a hard time arguing that *Moby-Dick* is not religious in some way; the question seems to be whether Melville's work is a blasphemous critique of nineteenth-century Christianity or a call to return to Biblical teachings. In "The Whale Avatar of the Hindoos in Melville's *Moby Dick*," Bruce M. Sullivan and Patricia Wong Hall argue that Moby Dick is a "manifestation (avatar) of the Hindu deity Vishnu" and that the novel "presents a concept of the divine *at variance* with Christian theological orthodoxy" (358). They assert that Melville's own knowledge of Hinduism and of its tenets of non-violence and karma reflects Melville's desire to shape the white whale into a Hindu deity, and not that of a nineteenth-century version of God. They point out that the character of Ishmael critiques Christians throughout the tale and that "Melville's depiction of divinity's immanence in nature, and his attribution of the qualities of terrifying yet fascinating mystery to Moby Dick, reveal a personal theology deeply at odds with orthodox Christianity" (366). Even though the authors admit that Melville confuses many aspects of Hinduism with other religious sects, they do not put much significance into these mistakes and do not address the contention of some that Melville's message in *Moby-Dick* may have been a call to return to Biblical Christianity instead of orthodox teachings. Zachary Hutchins, in his article, addresses the arguments of whether Melville was critiquing nineteenth-century orthodox Christian theology or Biblical Christianity. He reminds his readers that the messages of non-violence and karma appear throughout the Bible, especially in Jesus' parables, even if nineteenth-century human

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beings were not following or teaching them. Hutchins asserts that *Moby-Dick* questions "nineteenth-century Christian customs but remain(s) faithful to the content and form of the Bible" and even serves as a "third testament… (with) salvific narratives" (19). Hutchins shows that *Moby-Dick* sustains Biblical structure, that Ishmael stands as a prophetic voice, and that the text "reinforces the core messages of the Hebrew and Christian scriptures" (29). Whereas Sullivan and Hall argue that nineteenth-century Christians did not perceive God's immanence in nature, nor his potentially terrifying presence, Hutchins contends that from Melville's perspective his contemporary Christians have just forgotten "God's willingness to chasten as well as exonerate" (33). What is important is that regardless of the authors' arguments about Melville's goal, whether he was criticizing Christianity as a whole or just nineteenth-century Christian orthodoxy, all of the authors claim that the white whale stands as an avatar for a Divine Being, and that even if Melville did not intend to, he emphasized the Romantic qualities of God's omnipresence in nature. Melville himself did not identify as a Romantic, and really disliked Transcendentalists, but *Moby-Dick* espouses one of the greatest tenets of Romanticism: that God is the Oversoul and is present all throughout Creation. God can be accessed by all human beings because all of his Creations are part and parcel of God.

The ways in which Ishmael describes whales reflect these Romantic notions of God as immanent in nature. Melville spends a great deal of time in the book on a spectacular study on Sperm Whales, their locations, and the product that comes from Sperm Whales: spermaceti. It is this product which makes the Sperm Whale so valuable, as well as its magnanimous bulk and features. Speaking through Ishmael in the chapter "The Prairie," Melville describes the full front of the sperm whale's head as "sublime"

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(Melville 355). Its brow protrudes such a "high and mighty god-like dignity" that one feels "the Deity and the dread powers more forcibly than in beholding any other object in living nature" (355). Unlike Ahab, Ishmael comes to a sense of adoration for the many contradictions of the whale: whales can be both beautiful and terrifying. Its grandeur is more appreciated at the most "unfathomable waters" because of its large bulk, but men will never know the whale's true form, even from their skeletons (273). Some of the ways that Ishmael paints the whale are close to extreme adulation: "that vapor…glorified by a rainbow, as if Heaven itself had put its seal upon his thoughts," and "in no living thing are the lines of beauty more exquisitely defined than in the crescentic border of these flukes" (383-384). Through Ishmael's descriptions he reveals that whales appear better than man in several respects. The whale's tail, though amazingly powerful, has "a delicacy in it only equaled by the daintiness of the elephant's trunk"; its "maidenly gentleness" and "tenderness" rival man for its equally masculine and feminine qualities (386). Ishmael claims that he "testified of the whale, pronouncing him the most devout of all beings" while denouncing whalers as "remorseless wild pirates and inhuman atheistical devils" (387, 393). Even when animals do something untoward, it is "infinitely outdone by the madness of men" (394). The whale's proximity alludes to God's all-encompassing presence not only in its physical state but also in its ancient history. According to Ishmael, sailors perceive the whale as immortal and prehistoric: "He swam the seas before the continents broke water; he once swam over the site of the Tuileries, and Windsor Castle, and the Kremlin. In Noah's flood he despised Noah's Ark; and if ever the world is to be again flooded, like the Netherlands, to kill off its rats, then the eternal whale will still survive, and rearing upon the top-most crest of the equatorial

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flood, spout his frothed defiance to the skies" (473). The whale, both like the Divine Being and created by Him, lived long before man in a state of uninterrupted bliss; a sense of calm that Ahab, and likely all men, cannot achieve. Ishmael, in a moment of exhausting rapture, exclaims that his thoughts on the whale "make me faint with their outreaching comprehensiveness of sweep, as if to include the whole circle of the sciences, and all the generations of whales, and men, and mastodons, past, present, and to come, with all the revolving panoramas of empire on earth, and throughout the whole universe, not excluding its suburbs" (466). If one wants to access God, one only needs to be within the beautiful and terrifying presence of the whale.

What may seem confusing about Ishmael's accounts of his whaling voyage and his recollections of Moby Dick is that on one hand he extols whalers as ancient, even virtuous, hunters yet on the other hand he calls them "atheistical devils" (393). Ishmael recalls the beauty and magnificence of Moby Dick but also his external malevolence. Even though this may seem contradictory, Dean Flower argues in his ecological reading of *Moby-Dick* that Melville's purpose is to "restore a vision of both the grandeur and the ultimate, overmastering power of Nature…an 'awefull' power that 'aboriginally' belongs to the sea" (Flower 139). Flower asserts that man and nature are "enmeshed" but that sometimes the "interdependence is violated" (139). Human beings hunt and are hunted, as the case of Moby Dick shows, which reveals an equality among humans and animals; however, the whalers break that relationship with their "unspeakable pollution" by mercenary killing and extraction of whale oil (144). Moby Dick's intelligence, often repeated by Ishmael, is not "blindest instinct" as stated by Starbuck, but a rational reaction to the whaler's hunt. Flower states plainly: "All in all, given the relentless

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malevolence of his attackers, I think he (Moby Dick) behaved rather well" (149). The whalers and Moby Dick, according to Flower, are on an equal playing field in the sense that both are competitors against one another in order to survive. Perhaps it is this equal nature that Ahab cannot process: he, a man with the best harpooners, equipment, and knowledge, is unable to best a White Whale. If we are to see Moby Dick as an avatar of God's sublime presence on Earth, maybe Moby Dick's besting of Ahab and the crew is God's way of restoring the balance of nature.

One of the most complex parts of *Moby-Dick* is that the characters all view Moby Dick in distinct ways. One of Starbuck's earlier comments about the White Whale sums up his viewpoints and serves as a contrast to Ahab's own feelings. When discussing Moby Dick responding to Ahab's desire for revenge, Starbuck protests: "Vengeance on a dumb brute! ... that simply smote thee from blindest instinct! Madness! To be enraged with a dumb thing, Captain Ahab, seems blasphemous" (167). Captain Ahab's response reveals that he does not see Moby Dick as simply a dumb brute: "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" (167). Starbuck does not see the whale's actions as willful, whereas Ahab's view of Moby Dick is very Romantic: Moby Dick has agency, wisdom, knowledge, and a soul; all things that point to Moby Dick as part and parcel of the Divine Being. Even though Moby Dick and Ahab are equal as creations of God, Moby Dick is winning the watery battle. At this injustice, Ahab yells out: "I'm demoniac, I am madness maddened!" (172) Ishmael recounts that many of the other sailors agree that Sperm Whales are like "apparitions" and the hunt for such creatures was "not for mortal man" (184). Moby Dick is described as "ubiquitous" and "immortal" and has

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reportedly been encountered at opposite sides of the world at the same time (184). These descriptions make Moby Dick seem all at once like an angel, a symbol for nature, and even Divine. The sailors appear to grant Moby Dick a more mysterious and legendary nature whereas Captain Ahab has realized that Moby Dick *is* an avatar of the Divine Being. Ahab's perception of Moby Dick is even more foreboding not because of the whale's "supernatural surmisings" but because Moby Dick is a physical and tangible entity that can enact real-world consequences in a matter of seconds (186). For Ahab, the Divine Being truly is there to mete out judgment for Ahab's unholy mission. Melville's description of Moby Dick intensifies these fears by making Moby Dick into a *white* whale: he is "ghastly" with a "marble pallor," just like the pale horse of Death (195-196). It is this white "indefiniteness" and absence of color that lays open a contradiction: the color hides *and* reveals at the same time (199). It is as if Moby Dick cannot be truly seen in his huge, grand glory, but he is also so bright that he seems to take up everything surrounding him. The knowledge that Moby Dick can be seen and not truly seen is just like God's presence. One knows that God is there, even if human beings believe that He cannot be seen by the eyes of man. Although infuriated with the White Whale's purposeful attacks, Captain Ahab seems more terrified than anything that he is meeting God face-to-face. Ishmael recounts a foreboding story from another whaling ship, the *Town-Ho*, and how the men encountered Moby Dick earlier. The story "seemed obscurely to involve with the whale a certain wondrous, inverted visitation of one of those so called judgments of God which at times are said to overtake some men" (248). Each time the men come close to the White Whale, the mystery and terror increase.

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The awareness that Moby Dick may represent God's presence exasperates Ahab into a neurotic frenzy. Moby Dick reminds Ahab of God's all-encompassing manifestation and his frustrations over his lack of free will. Moby Dick appears to have a purpose in his movements, making it more apparent that Ahab's arrogant nature will be his undoing. Ahab's feelings are heightened exponentially when Moby Dick is close to the *Pequod* and especially when the White Whale shows his acumen, something not normally attributed to creatures. On the first day of the chase, Moby Dick reacts to the whalers' assaults by swimming headlong into the ship, shearing their smaller boat in half, and circling around in a provoking fashion. On the second day of the chase, Moby Dick wastes no time in attacking first: he seemed "only intent on annihilating each separate plank of which those boats were made" (565). Once Moby Dick snapped off Ahab's ivory leg, Ahab yells at Starbuck in anger: "This whole act's immutably decreed. 'Twas rehearsed by thee and me a billion years before this ocean rolled. Fool! I am the Fates' lieutenant; I act under orders. Look thou, underling!" (569). According to Ahab, God has sent Moby Dick to challenge Ahab; he needs his men on his side to defeat Moby Dick. Although this is what Ahab perceives of the situation, God reveals His power to create real consequences seemingly through His manifestation in the world's creatures. On the final day of the chase, Ahab taunts Moby Dick by declaring "forehead to forehead I meet thee, this third time, Moby Dick!"(572). As if Ahab's own declarations weren't proof enough of his folly to make himself superior to the Divine Being, sharks from below began to nip and gnaw at the oars of the whalers, enacting their own brand of justice. Despite Starbuck's warnings, Ahab is madness personified in his pursuit of Moby Dick. At the very end, Ahab goes down cursing Moby Dick "from hell's heart I stab at thee; for

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hate's sake I spit my last breath at thee" (581). Ishmael recounts of Moby Dick: "Retribution, swift vengeance, eternal malice were in his whole aspect, and spite of all that mortal man could do, the solid white buttress of his fore-head smote the ship's starboard bow, till men and timbers reeled" (580). As the ocean swallows the *Pequod*, and all those upon it save Ishmael, Moby Dick moves along satisfied now that Nemesis has been achieved.

What matters most in *Moby Dick* is what Ahab and the other whalers perceive of the White Whale. For Ahab, Moby Dick is a physical reminder of his inability to grapple with his human limitations and seeming lack of free will. This in turn reminds him of the Divine Being, who is much more of a physical, earthly presence than he assumed. Ishmael, and some of the other whalers, appear to understand and respect Moby Dick's intelligence and purposeful movements, even though these kinds of characteristics are not normally attributed to animals. In *Moby-Dick*, the characters appear to be hyper-aware of what is at stake and what is actually happening: Ahab's monomaniac mission has angered God and He sent a leviathan to enact some earthly justice. Many scholars agree that *Moby-Dick* has a definite religious aspect, calling the readers to return to a more Biblical reorganization of contemporary religion, and even an environmentalist aspect, stating that the balance between man and Nature can be disrupted and restored. Others argue that Melville's book comes at a time where human beings are balancing between two worlds: "an epochal shift from mercantile to industrial capitalism" and a "radically altered relationship between humans and other animals" (Armstrong 1039, 1040). Both the characters in the book and modern-day readers of the novel seem to be in communion with an overarching theme: that Moby Dick is much more than just a White Whale; he is

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a symbol of nature, of man's relationship to the earth and to God, and potentially even an avatar of the Diving Being Himself. Moby Dick is an awful force but also a restorative one.

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Chapter 5

Of Birds and Bees: Emily Dickinson and her Beloved Creatures

Out of all the authors in this study, Emily Dickinson appears to have the closest connection with nature and its creatures, if readers are to use her poetry as evidence. Emily Dickinson is a prime example of the American Romantic movement, but one of the most studied, and most misunderstood, writers of her time. The legends of Dickinson range from an image of her as the broken-hearted, cloistered nun to a despaired woman who cannot comprehend her relationship to religion or what is happening to her potentially-diseased mind. Besides the rumors of her personal life, and whether she was torn apart by a desperate love for unobtainable men or women, Dickinson is known widely for her poems on nature and the small creatures of the garden and the sky (Ferlazzo 13-28). Undoubtedly, her personal life influenced many of her poems, which is what many try to uncover about her; however, if we take a look at her many poems that include animals, we can perhaps understand what Dickinson wanted to say about them and why. Just like many of her Romantic contemporaries, Dickinson uses creatures in her works both as a symbol of something greater, such as freedom and innocence, and in the literal sense of what creatures do in their daily lives. What marks Emily Dickinson as different than the others in this study is not only that she had an "acutely sensitive nature" which made her very affectionate toward such creatures as well as toward children, but also that she placed herself often within the poems right alongside these subjects (16). In many other American Romantic works, authors tend to place animals on a higher, more superior plane of existence than humankind or (as has been shown) the authors use animals to serve as avatars of God battling against their respective protagonists and

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antagonists. Dickinson does often use creatures symbolically to represent ideals, but the works that really stand out are the ones that have a speaker or persona, usually one easily identified with Dickinson, who equates herself with the creatures as if she were a key element of their ordinary being and activities. From her poems, we can see that Dickinson yearns for some of the traits that animals apparently possess, often comparing human beings to animals and even expressing a sense of symbiosis, particularly in her own relationship to the birds and the bees. Just as Dickinson may have pined for unobtainable suitors, it appears that also she pined for the symbolic simplicity of the natural world. Dickinson's poems serve as a great conclusion as she shows us that we are all part and parcel of God, and that animals are joyful reminders that provide us with a sense of the Divine Being's presence in Nature. Dickinson shares the possibility that animals, as avatars of the Divine, are not merely there to correct mankind's errant behavior but they may serve as expressions of God's closeness and accessibility to all.

It was not until 1955 that Harvard University Press published finally all 1,775 poems and fragments written by Emily Dickinson. Because most of her poems were transcribed from her handwritten letters, there have been many publications of her poems to correct mistakes and edits that were done in previous editions. Thomas H. Johnson, editor of *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, allows her poems to speak for themselves: punctuation and capitalization remain unaltered and only minor misspellings are corrected. The Johnson edition does its best to organize her works by earliest known manuscripts, so the readers can grasp any changes within Dickinson's poetry from year to year (x-xi). This chapter will not try to analyze all 1,775 of Dickinson's poems; however, there are more than five hundred of her poems that discuss Nature and animals (Ferlazzo

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94). Looking at her poems on animals as a whole, the reader may understand what Dickinson saw as important and how she understood her place in the world beside her beloved companions. For Dickinson, animals often symbolize Romantic traits, like freedom from modern-world responsibilities, but they also seem to reveal her own true nature, as if the animals are remnants of her heart physically outside of her body. If we are to believe that human beings and creatures are all part of the Divine Being, and that Nature provides a sense of God's presence, then Dickinson appears to show that within her poetry by equating herself with animals.

The first observation that readers may make about Emily Dickinson's poetry is that she writes about the natural world and its many creatures in nearly every poem. Ever a Romantic, Dickinson sees beauty in the smallest of things in Nature and the significance of their role in the world. In the first poem of the Johnson edition, Dickinson calls forth to the muses in exultation to the natural cycle of the world, including both human beings and animals:

> The bee doth court the flower, the flower his suit receives,
>
> And they make a merry wedding, whose guests are hundred leaves;
>
> The wind doth woo the branches, the branches they are won,
>
> And the father fond demandeth the maiden for his son ...
>
> The *worm* doth woo the *mortal*, death claims a living bride,
>
> Night unto day is married, morn unto eventide; (3)

There is a natural rhythm to life and death and we are all a part of its never-ending cycle. This is a common tenet of Romantic thought: human beings and all other creatures are part and parcel of the Divine Being, who is present throughout Nature and may be

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accessed by all. This has been the case in the previous chapters: Irving with his knobby horse, Poe with his black cat, and Melville with his white whale; however, none of them do quite so much as Dickinson to show that we can create a balanced relationship with such creatures, if we were but to realize our common place in Nature. There are many examples in Dickinson's poems in which animals often serve as markers for human beings or she uses them to express profound emotions, like pining for a lost love. In the aforementioned chapters, the animals all serve as avatars of the Divine to bring about Nemesis for humankind's hubris. With Dickinson's poems, we will not only see the more joyous traits of Nature and animals but also how Dickinson equated herself to these creatures in a potential, fervent hope for oneness.

Throughout her poems, Dickinson reveals the great value she discovers in animals: their presence is soothing, they are precious and valuable, they remind her of hope and life, they live in remote simplicity, and sometimes they are necessary for salvation. All of these traits that Dickinson emphasizes in animals are things that she experienced by placing herself literally within Nature in the world outside her home, and often during her many excursions beyond her Amherst home. By immersing herself in Nature, Dickinson shows a desire to become like its creatures and at the same time, to show that she is not merely among them but *is* one of them. Sometimes, Dickinson even reveals her belief that the animals care for her in return, conveying a sense of shared connection. In "I have a Bird in spring," Dickinson is forlorn that a bird of hers has flown away, yet she is hopeful that the bird

Though flown—

Learneth beyond the sea

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Melody new for me

And will return. (7)

The knowledge that the bird will return calms her fears, but she is even happier that the bird will come back *for her*. The readers continue to see Dickinson place herself within her poems, even as part of Nature's ceremonies:

The Bobolink was there—

An aged Bee addressed us—

And then we knelt in prayer—

We trust that she was willing—

We ask that we may be.

Summer—Sister—Seraph!

Let us go with thee!

In the name of the Bee—

And of the Butterfly—

And of the Breeze—Amen! (14)

The poem discusses a mock funeral procession for the end of summer, and Dickinson is a part of its passing: she is included in the "we" and "us" (the birds and the bees) of the poem. This method of inclusion is not found only in Dickinson's poems, but also in Washington Irving's "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," as discussed in the first chapter. Ichabod Crane served as the protagonist to Nature and Gunpowder, the broken-down plough horse, in the story of Sleepy Hollow, but we also saw that Irving revered the symbiotic balance between Nature and the true, earth-born residents of the area. It is Ichabod Crane that disrupts that balance through his main fault: greed.

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For Dickinson, or the persona, animals are just as important in her everyday life as other human beings are. In "I Haven't Told my Garden Yet" the speaker laments that she doesn't have

> quite the strength now
>
> To break it to the Bee— …
>
> The hillsides must not know it—
>
> Where I have rambled so— (27)

Whether or not the poem is about the narrator going for a walk, or dying one day, the narrator reveals the importance of Nature and the Bee to her life: the Bee is such an integral part of her daily life that she is upset to pass potential unhappy news to him. In a rather comical poem, and one that reminds the reader of Robert Burns' "To a Mouse," Dickinson prays for a dead mouse:

> Papa above!
>
> Regard a Mouse
>
> O'erpowered by the Cat!
>
> Reserve within thy kingdom
>
> A 'Mansion' for the Rat!
>
> Snug in seraphic Cupboards
>
> To nibble all the day,
>
> While unsuspecting Cycles
>
> Wheel solemnly away! (32)

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The mouse, or rat, is deserving of the same treatment as humans when they die and she hopes that the mouse has an unending supply of food in its heavenly state. In "It's all I have to bring today," the author appears to regret that she does not have much to offer:

> It's all I have to bring today—
>
> This, and my heart beside—
>
> This, and my heart, and all the fields—
>
> And all the meadows wide— (18)

Although she starts the poem with a disappointed feeling, she continues to add on *all* that she can bring including "This, and my heart, and *all* the Bees/ Which in the Clover dwell." Even though she appears to minimize what she can offer, her emphasis on *all* makes all of these things very valuable. She remarks: "Be sure you count—should I forget/ Some one the sum could tell" to ensure that her listener realizes what she is bringing (18-19). She is bringing not only all of herself, but the things she finds most precious. Their value is increased even more simply for being part of the Divine.

Another approach that Dickinson employs to show her closeness with creatures is to have animals stand as symbols for human beings and Romantic ideals. Frequently, Dickinson compares humans to birds in a variety of ways. In her many poems to Susan, her sister-in-law, she likens her to a bird:

> The other, as a bird in her nest,
>
> Builded our hearts among …
>
> And still her hum
>
> The years among,
>
> Deceives the Butterfly;

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Still in her Eye

The Violets lie

Mouldered this many May. (12-13)

In “I had a guinea golden,” Dickinson ponders the loss of a guinea in the sand and a “crimson Robin” that flew away:

Time brought me other Robins—

Their ballads were the same—

Still, for my missing Troubadour

I kept the ‘house at hame.’ (16-17)

The Robin, it is assumed, symbolizes a man, or lover, who has left and is traveling far away. Again, in “It did not surprise me,” Dickinson compares a person’s departure to a bird:

Traverse broader forests—

Build in gayer boughs,

Breathe in Ear more modern

God’s old fashioned vows—

This was but a Birdling—

What and if it be

One within my bosom

Had departed me? (23)

Often, Emily Dickinson compares herself and her feelings to birds. In “Her breast is fit for pearls,” Dickinson speaks about an unnamed “her” who deserves rare and precious

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things, like pearls and thrones; however, the speaker cannot give these things. Instead, the speaker has something greater and simpler to offer:

> Her heart is fit for *home*—
>
> I—a Sparrow—build there
>
> Sweet of twigs and twine
>
> My perennial nest. (43)

As mentioned before, the narrator expresses her lack of expensive trinkets to offer, yet because she gives *all* that she has it is more than anyone could ask for. In "Mama never forgets her birds," a mother bird cares tenderly for her little birds, but the "Mama" could very well stand for Mother Nature and the little sparrows as human beings: "If either of her 'sparrows fall,'/ She 'notices,' above" (77). What should the reader grasp about Dickinson's theme of having animals stand in for human beings? One can only conjecture, but it seems to fit within this argument that creatures and humans are more equitable than one may assume, particularly if one adheres to the idea that God is immanent in Nature. This idea of God's immanence, and the equality between human beings and creatures, is made apparent in Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*, as Captain Ahab realizes that the White Whale may be an avatar of the Divine Being and is working against him to correct his wayward behavior. There is supposed to be a balance between creatures and human beings, and individuals like Captain Ahab are throwing that balance off course.

Because birds appear so frequently in Emily Dickinson's poems, many have studied and analyzed this motif. In his article "Emily Dickinson and the Robin," George H. Soule, Jr. asserts that the figure of the robin was not only a "source of inspiration for

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her poetic imagination" but also representative of her poetry and how she saw herself as a budding poet (67). Soule reveals that the robin "was more than a convenient poetic symbol" for Dickinson and he shares a letter that Dickinson wrote to a young girl as thanks for a gift. In the letter, Dickinson hopes that the girl loves birds and she states that this love "is economical. It saves going to Heaven" (75). Soule asserts that Dickinson saw in the robin a sign of immortality, which she desired for her poems; however, that "fame" was not achieved in her lifetime. Though Dickinson's dreams were not always a reality, the robin became "a particularly concrete intimation of immortality" for her, as the robin always returned to Amherst each spring (76). Dickinson could create a Heaven in her own backyard with the reassurance of this continual homecoming. Like God's immanence in Nature, the robin was constantly there to remain a comforting presence. It appears Dickinson wished to share this comfort by giving her own advice to the young girl: one does not have to die to access Heaven.

The significance of animals and Nature appears even stronger as the readers continue reading through Dickinson's poems. In "Pigmy seraphs—gone astray," the narrator speaks of a flower's beauty and how Paris and Venice could not compare:

> Paris could not lay the fold
>
> Belted down with Emerald—
>
> Venice could not show a cheek
>
> Of a tint so lustrous meek— …
>
> I had rather wear her grace
>
> Than an Earl's' distinguished face—
>
> I had rather dwell like her

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Than be 'Duke of Exeter'—

Royalty enough for me

To subdue the Bumblebee. (65)

For the speaker, it is more significant to cull the favor of a bee than that of any human presence, however "distinguished." The attention of the flower and the bee is more grounded, more perfect, and more real than pins and royal titles. A similar feeling is apparent in the poem "What would I give to see his face?" In the speaker's answer to the question, she states:

I'd give—I'd give my life—of course—

But *that* is not enough!

Stop just a minute—let me think!

I'd give my biggest Bobolink!

That makes *two*—*Him*—and *Life*!

You know who 'June' is—

I'd give her—

Roses a day from Zanzibar—

And Lily tubes—like Wells—

Bees—by the furlong—

Straits of Blue

Navies of Butterflies—sailed thro'—

And dappled Cowslip Dells— (113)

For Dickinson's persona, her life isn't enough to offer, so she decides to give her most precious treasures: birds, bees, and butterflies. Dickinson sees in animals the most vital

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things in life. Although jewels, crowns, and thrones may survive for a long time, they are not as continual as the blossoms of the world or the ever-present nature of birds. This idea that animals may symbolize something even greater than their physical state is probably most realized in one of Dickinson's more famous poems:

> 'Hope' is the thing with feathers—
>
> That perches in the soul—
>
> And sings the tune without the words—
>
> And never stops—at all—
>
> And sweetest—in the Gale—is heard—
>
> And sore must be the storm—
>
> That could abash the little Bird
>
> That kept so many warm—
>
> I've heard it in the chillest land—
>
> And on the strangest Sea—
>
> Yet, never, in Extremity
>
> It asked a crumb—of Me. (116)

Hope, symbolized by a bird, is strong, everlasting, life-giving, continual, and also comforting. Lastly, it does not demand favors in return. The bird provides a sense of these positive, sustaining traits, much like what we may feel from God's immanence. One contrast to these affirming feelings that one may get in the Divine's presence is shown in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Black Cat." The presence of the black cat for the narrator is foreboding, dark, and terrifying. Much like the other works where an animal may serve as an avatar of God to correct faulty behavior, in "The Black Cat" the narrator has

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committed an extreme error by killing the beloved family pet. Dickinson's poems appear to serve as a type of correction in their own way by highlighting the unity between creatures and human beings; one needs to simply respect that connection.

One of the important aspects of Emily Dickinson's life that many biographers note is that Dickinson "never became a professed member of the church" (Ferlazzo 29). She believed in a Creator but did not seem to accept the traditions and the authority of the established church. Paul Ferlazzo points out that Dickinson expressed concern in many of her poems over the fallen human condition and the likelihood of salvation after death, although she was heavily influenced by Ralph Waldo Emerson's "stress on self-reliance and immediate personal experience over tradition" (33-37). Other scholars see these "vacillations" as a "bracing and delightful companion … as we, too, wrestle with the existential questions of life that surface in our ministries and in our private lives" (Cook 428). Readers can see the concern about salvation, a common worry for mankind, in her poem "Going to Heaven":

Going to Heaven!

I don't know when—

Pray do not ask me how!

Indeed I'm too astonished

To think of answering you!

Going to Heaven!

How dim it sounds!

And yet it will be done

As sure as flocks go home at night

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Unto the Shepherd's arm! (Dickinson 41)

As if answering the question of how to get to Heaven, Dickinson shows us:

Some keep the Sabbath going to Church—

I keep it, staying at Home—

With a Bobolink for a Chorister—

And an Orchard, for a Dome—

Some keep the Sabbath in Surplice—

I just wear my Wings—

And instead of tolling the Bell, for Church,

Our little Sexton—sings.

God preaches, a noted Clergyman—

And the sermon is never long,

So instead of getting to Heaven, at last—

I'm going, all along. (153-154)

The narrator does not need to attend church services when Nature is her Church, the birds providing the choir. It is noteworthy that Dickinson chooses wings to wear as her dress, a natural adornment for her fellow church members and often a "metaphor[ ] for transcendence" in traditional hymns, and that instead of *getting* to Heaven she has resigned herself that she is already in the presence of God now (Cook 430). The word "get" is mirrored in the earlier poem and conveys a sense of active pursuit to go before the pearly gates. As an alternative, Dickinson decides that she does not need to be so desperate: she may access the Divine Being in the present merely by being in Nature with the creatures as her companions.

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In many of Dickinson's later poems, she continues to highlight what are the most important features of animals and what she seems to desire about them. In "The Morning after Woe," Dickinson appears upset that

> Nature did not care—
>
> And piled her Blossoms on—
>
> And further to parade a Joy
>
> Her Victim stared upon— (172)

The birds continue to chirp and sing, unaware of her own despair after a tragedy. The same mood pervades the poem "I heard a Fly buzz—when I died." The speaker, and the one in the coffin of the poem, hears a fly

> With Blue—uncertain stumbling Buzz—
>
> Between the light—and me—
>
> And then the Windows failed—and then
>
> I could not see to see— (224)

The fly, unknowledgeable about the narrator's death, continues to fly unabashedly. Although the tone of the poems reveals a kind of annoyance on the part of the speaker, there are significant Romantic ideals present: life continues, regardless of woe or tragedy, and creatures pervade our lives, whether we notice them fully or not, and animals' seeming self-possession is something that human beings may crave.

Many of Dickinson's poems, particularly in 1862, emphasize what she sees as the most desirable traits apparent in animals. In "Within my garden, rides a bird," the narrator appreciates the slow and deliberate movements of a bird:

> He never stops, but slackens

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Above the Ripest Rose—

Partakes without alighting

And praises as he goes,

Till every spice is tasted—

And then his Fairy Gig

Reels in remoter atmospheres—

And I rejoin my Dog, (242-243)

The bird revels in all that the garden has to offer and then flies away to remoter, natural places. Remoteness, and more specifically the state of just being alone within Nature, is highlighted by many Romantic authors. Many, like Dickinson herself, attempted to convey this sense of remoteness by discussing more "foreign" animals like leopards and tigers (236, 275-276). Washington Irving does the same in "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" by situating the town in seemingly protected seclusion. The same sense of isolation, however, can still be found in the animals outside nearby, for example in Dickinson's garden, such as the butterflies who "bore away/ Upon a shining sea—" (261). Even a spider can live in a state of quiet:

The Spider holds a Silver Ball

In unperceived Hands—

And dancing softly to Himself

His Yarn of Pearl—unwinds—

He plies from Nought to Nought—

In unsubstantial Trade—

Supplants our Tapestries with His—

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In half the period—

An Hour to rear supreme

His Continents of Light—

Then dangle from the Housewife's Broom—

His Boundaries—forgot— (297)

The spider continues his work in silent reverie, undisturbed by the goings-on of human beings around him. We see not only what Dickinson wishes she had that animals possess, namely—quiet contemplation and liberating isolation, but also that creatures are so intertwined with our world that we often forget their presence and our shared connection, symbolized by the spider's thread.

Dickinson pines for many other traits that animals possess, particularly those of liberty, harmony, and independence. She wishes she could

but ride indefinite

As doth the Meadow Bee

And visit only where I liked

And No one visit me

And flirt all Day with Buttercups

And marry whom I may

And dwell a little everywhere

Or better, run away …

What Liberty! So Captives deem

Who tight in Dungeons are. (328)

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There are several examples in which Dickinson fails to equate human beings with animals, as seen in the aforementioned poem, and she appears jealous at the animals' lack of chains that often bind human beings to certain responsibilities, like marriage. She is amazed at the industry of birds and their "independent Ecstasy" and the fact that butterflies haven't "any tax to pay" (381, 637). In comparison to human beings, the birds, bees, and butterflies are much freer, and in this sense they are superior. Regardless of this inequity, Dickinson yearns to establish and keep commonalities between human beings and creatures:

> Nature is Heaven—
> Nature is what we hear—
> The Bobolink—the Sea—
> Thunder—the Cricket—
> Nay—Nature is Harmony—
> Nature is what we know—
> Yet have no art to say—
> So impotent Our Wisdom is
> To her Simplicity. (332)

Ferlazzo discusses this category of Dickinson's nature poetry as "philosophically challenging" because it purports that "an unbreachable separation exists between man and nature and that nature is at the core indifferent toward the life and interests of man-kind." Although this is not very Romantic, it is very human to question one's place within Nature. As a sort of middle ground, Ferlazzo asserts that Dickinson's largest category of poems "affirms the sheer joy and the appreciation that she feels in the variety

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and spectacle of nature" (95). Irrespective of her human nature to ponder her existence alongside Nature, Dickinson remains an integral part of everything she sees, reminding us that God's presence may be accessed by all, no matter how we perceive of ourselves.

Perhaps the reason why Emily Dickinson's poems seem so different than the other works in this study is that Dickinson's works are much more personal, and the readers can easily deduce that her poetry appears to come from her own heart, although her heart remains a complex and much-studied aspect of her life. Even with the complexities of her writing, such as her use of dashes and random capitalization, and the variety of potential meanings of her poems, it is obvious that Dickinson was a Romantic. Just like Irving, Poe, Melville, and many others, like Whitman and Thoreau, Dickinson clearly appreciated Nature and what it purportedly offered to human beings. As seen with all of the chapters, animals may serve as avatars of the Divine, albeit in different ways. In the chapters on Irving, Poe, and Melville, it is shown that the antagonists are lost in their own narcissism and hubris; therefore, they are punished for their misdeeds by different creatures, who may restore balance. In Dickinson's poems, we see that creatures provide us with a sense of God's closeness, particularly to those who accept the equality between human beings and animals. The Divine Being's presence does not have to be terrifying or foreboding, as seen in the previous chapters; God's presence can bring life-affirming happiness through the flap of wings.

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Chapter 6

Conclusion

When explaining what Romanticism was, at its core, M.H. Abrams, author of *Natural Supernaturalism*, states that Romantic authors "set out, in various yet recognizably parallel ways, to reconstitute the grounds of hope and to announce the certainty, or at least the possibility, of a rebirth in which a renewed mankind will inhabit a renovated earth where he will find himself thoroughly at home" (12). For Abrams, and many other scholars, Romantic authors, like William Wordsworth, William Blake, Percy Shelley, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, shared a hope of "apocalyptic expectation" that would bring about a heavenly paradise (64). This paradise, however, was not limited to an external place but "available on this earth, to each of us, as an ordinary possibility of every day" (27). Through a new way of seeing religion, Romantic writers offered simple solutions for salvation: find the Divine in the commonplace, here on Earth.

These Romantic aspirations can be found in a host of Romantic works throughout the nineteenth century and across the world. There are many other American-Romantic authors that could have been analyzed in this study, like Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman, and William Cullen Bryant; however, a simple survey of their works unveils that they also believed that the Divine may be accessed by common man in the presence of God's creatures. A look at Bryant's "To a Waterfowl" reveals that the narrator pines for the solitary freedom of a waterfowl and feels a lasting, emotional connection to the bird:

Thou'rt gone, the abyss of heaven

Hath swallowed up thy form; yet, on my heart

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> Deeply hath sunk the lesson thou hast given,
>
> And shall not soon depart.
>
> He, who, from zone to zone,
>
> Guides through the boundless sky thy certain flight,
>
> In the long way that I must tread alone,
>
> Will lead my steps aright. (125)

For Bryant, he and the bird are fellow companions on the same journey home, led by the comforting presence of the Divine Being. Simply by observing the solo flight of the bird, Bryant has come to understand the encompassing feeling of God's immanence and he places his faith in Him to lead him "aright" (125). Similar to Emily Dickinson's poems, Bryant's "To a Waterfowl" shows us that we have a peaceful union between human beings and animals, something that is made more apparent in Nature.

Henry David Thoreau, in his well-known experiment of living out in the woods (as seen in *Walden*), shares philosophical advice about life, the human condition, and the problems of modernity. Thoreau calls for people to live more simply as he saw that "the mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation. What is called resignation is confirmed desperation" (7). He tries to show that human beings can reconnect with Nature, its creatures, and live a much more joyful life in quiet contemplation. For Thoreau, the natural condition of mankind is very similar to animals: "Every child begins the world again, to some extent, and loves to stay outdoors, even in wet and cold…Birds do not sing in caves, nor do doves cherish their innocence in dovecots" (23). Besides providing support and advice for how to complete an experiment like his own, Thoreau appreciates the sounds, solitude, and the visitations of woodland creatures. In their presence, he

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states: “I was suddenly sensible of such sweet and beneficent society in Nature, in the very pattering of the drops, and in every sound and sight around my house, an infinite and unaccountable friendliness all at once like an atmosphere sustaining me … I was so distinctly made aware of the presence of something kindred to me, even in scenes which we are accustomed to call wild and dreary, and also that the nearest of blood to me and humanist was not a person nor a villager, that I thought no place could ever be strange to me again” (108). Like Dickinson and Bryant, Thoreau realizes that he may access the sense of the Divine in environments not normally thought to house God’s spiritual essence. Human beings can very easily establish connections with God and animals remind us of that closeness. In the chapters on Irving, Poe, and Melville, we see that animals serve as avatars of the Divine to punish human beings for their hubris; however, we also see animals as tokens of God’s salvific and kind presence. This is made more apparent through Thoreau’s many visitations by animals, such as the mouse who nibbled cheese from his hand, and a sparrow that alighted “upon [his] shoulder for a moment” (184, 225). Thoreau felt “more distinguished by that circumstance than I should have been by any epaulet I could have worn” (225).

Lastly, a quick overview of Walt Whitman will show us these same beliefs. Whitman, an expert on free verse and a Transcendentalist, wrote poetry over a variety topics, some controversial, but he is still well-known for his inclusion of Nature in his poems. Whitman realizes the significance of creatures: “How beautiful and perfect are the animals! How perfect the earth, and the minutest thing upon it! What is called good is perfect, and what is called bad is just as perfect” (337). He also reveals a shared union

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between human beings and creatures; when observing a “noiseless patient spider,” Whitman compares himself to the silent arachnid:

> And you O my soul where you stand,
>
> Surrounded, detached, in measureless oceans of space,
>
> Ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing, seeking the spheres to
>
> connect them,
>
> Till the bridge you will need be form’d, till the ductile anchor
>
> hold,
>
> Till the gossamer thread you fling catch somewhere, O my soul. (343).

Just like Dickinson, Bryant, and Thoreau, Whitman sees in animals a life of simplicity and a shared journey between human beings and creatures within the presence of the Divine. Whitman is reminded of this through the song of a bird:

> Wandering at morn,
>
> Emerging from the night from gloomy thoughts, thee in my
>
> thoughts,
>
> Yearning for thee harmonious Union! Thee, singing bird divine!
>
> Thee coil’d in evil times my country, with craft and black dismay,
>
> with every meanness, treason thrust upon thee,
>
> This common marvel I beheld—the parent thrush I watch’d feed-
>
> ing its young,
>
> The singing thrush whose tones of joy and faith ecstatic,
>
> Fail not to certify and cheer my soul. (308)

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Similar to Dickinson's "Hope is the thing with feathers," Whitman emphasizes that even when "evil times" have befallen the world, the bird's song remains in the midst of the storm. This continuance is hopeful and reminds human beings to keep faith.

Whitman, like Dickinson, often compares human beings to animals, in a plea to remember our close connection. In his section titled "Memories of President Lincoln," Whitman writes:

> Sing on, sing on you gray-brown bird,
> Sing from the swamps, the recesses, pour your chant from the bushes,
> Limitless out of the dusk, out of the cedars and pines.
> Sing on dearest brother, warble your reedy song,
> Loud human song, with voice of uttermost woe.
> O liquid and free and tender!
> O wild and loose to my soul—O wondrous singer!
> You only I hear—yet the star holds me, (but will soon depart,)
> Yet the lilac with mastering odor holds me. (259)

A Romantic in thought, Whitman encapsulates this hope for a paradise on earth, and he sees it as achievable through a restoration of a kinship between human beings and creatures, who are all part and parcel of the Divine.

The hope of this study is to show that American-Romantic authors assert that human beings and creatures are much more alike than maybe what has been presumed. They are alike in their shared connection to the Divine, who may be

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accessed in Nature by all of God's creatures. Because we are part and parcel of the Divine, we have a closeness to one another and should uphold that relationship. If that relationship is severed, typically because of the hubris of mankind, then animals may serve as God's avatars to restore the balance between human beings and creatures. This may be accomplished by an old, broken-down horse, an ominous black cat, or a portentous, albino whale, with differing degrees of results; however, animals do not have to be terrifying examples of the Divine's closeness, they can also serve as joyful reminders of hope and an illustration of how human beings could live in harmony with all living things. Maybe if we were able to see ourselves more as birds, then we could really learn to fly.

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