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The problem of suffering: The questions of Job in “King Lear”, 
“Moby-Dick”, and “The Sound and the Fury”

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The Ohio State University, 1991
THE PROBLEM OF SUFFERING: THE QUESTIONS OF JOB
IN KING LEAR, MOBY-DICK, AND THE SOUND AND THE FURY

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the
Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By
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INTRODUCTION
THE BIBLICAL PORTRAIT OF JOB

The theological problems which arise from suffering are centuries old, and yet they are of current interest, as illustrated by the cover story in the June 10, 1991 issue of Time, which discusses the way that authors have struggled with reconciling the power and goodness of God with the fact that terrible things happen. This paper examines the problem of suffering and the development of the theological questions which it raises in three great works from different historical periods—King Lear, Moby-Dick, and The Sound and the Fury. These works represent different historical stages of wrestling with Job's questions. From Job to Faulkner suffering becomes increasingly meaningless, increasingly mental anguish, and increasingly focused on the human dilemma rather than the suffering of an individual. The natural world is increasingly portrayed as more hostile, and God becomes more distant and hidden. The questions about the nature of God become increasingly radical, and the relationship with God becomes increasingly antagonistic, until it becomes non-existent. The greater the estrangement from God, the more insignificant the place of humankind in the universe and the greater the sense of meaninglessness.

This paper uses Job as a model for the questions which are raised by undeserved suffering, since, as Richard Sewall writes, "More than
Prometheus or Oedipus, Job is the universal symbol for the western imagination of the mystery of undeserved suffering" (9). The term "undeserved suffering" implies a universe which has some kind of order or controlling power which insures a balance between deserts and rewards. The dilemma, of course, comes about when this expected balance is not apparent. When suffering cannot be explained as deserved, questions are raised about the nature of the universe, the power that controls the universe, the relationship of humankind to the controlling power, and the meaning of existence.

In the Book of Job a patient and accepting Job is portrayed only in the brief prologue (1:1-2:13) and epilogue (41:7-17), which are written in prose. In the main part of the Book of Job, which is poetry (3-42:6), Job curses the day of his birth and passionately protests the injustice of God. Not only the style and the portrait of Job differ in the narrative and poetic sections, but the narrative uses the name Yahweh, whereas the poems use general terms for deity, such as 'Eloah or Shaddai (Anderson 508). Most scholars conclude from these differences that the author of the Book of Job wrote the poetic sections and used the folktale of a patient Job as the framework for his work. The ancient Job story with its portrait of a righteous Job was only the occasion for the author of the Book of Job to explore in depth the question of undeserved suffering. Therefore, the poems rather than the prologue and epilogue present the viewpoint of the author of Job. In these poems Job despairs, rebels, and questions. This is the Biblical portrait of Job, and the one which will be used in this paper to examine the questions which are raised by undeserved suffering. It is opposed to the view of a "pious" Job
who does not question, which Archibald MacLeish dramatizes in his play, *J. B.* MacLeish's character, J. B., suffers a series of losses, which are parallel to Job's, and yet he continues to trust God and to think that God is just. As Samuel Terrien has pointed out, MacLeish has dramatized the folk tale of the "pious" Job as told in the prose chapters of the Old Testament: "the character of J. B. is completely foreign to that of the biblical hero" (284).

The prose narrative which serves as a framework for the Book of Job was an ancient folktale which circulated orally. Its tone is orthodox, which makes the heretical view of the poetic section more acceptable. The tale is divided into five scenes, which alternate between earth and heaven (Gordis 9). The story opens with a description of a man who was "blameless and upright, one who feared God, and turned away from evil" (1:1). He has long enjoyed prosperity, including seven sons and three daughters, as well as thousands of sheep, camels, oxen, and donkeys. The second scene takes place in heaven. When God boasts of Job's uprightness, Satan, an angel in the heavenly court, charges that Job's piety is motivated by the rewards he receives: "Does Job fear God for nought?" (1:9). Satan makes a wager that if God would take away all that Job has, he would curse God, and God gives Satan permission to take away from Job whatever he wants.

The third scene shifts back to earth. A series of four disasters, alternately man-made and natural, comes upon Job's family and possessions--Sabeans steal Job's cattle, fire from heaven burns up his sheep, the Chaldeans take his camels, and finally a terrible wind destroys the house where his children were feasting and kills them all (Gordis 10).
Each time only one servant survives to tell Job: "and I alone have escaped to tell you" (1:19). In spite of Job's grief, he does not lose faith. In his sorrow he says: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (1:21). In all of his grief "Job did not sin or charge God with wrong" (1:22).

The fourth scene is in heaven again. This time Satan claims that Job's integrity would be destroyed if Job himself had to suffer: "Skin for skin! All that a man has he will give for his life" (2:4). God gives Satan permission to inflict a disease on Job. The fifth and concluding scene takes place on earth. Job is afflicted with terrible sores from head to foot. As he sits among the ashes, his wife advises him to curse God and die, but Job refuses to say anything against God: "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" (2:10).

At this point Job's three friends--Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar--come to comfort him. They are so astonished by his appearance, that they sit with him for seven days without speaking to him. According to the epilogue, Yahweh rejects the words of the three friends but accepts Job's prayer: "my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has" (42:8). God not only restores Job's fortunes, but Job is more prosperous than before, with exactly twice his former wealth--fourteen thousand sheep instead of seven thousand, six thousand camels instead of three thousand, and a thousand yoke of oxen instead of
five hundred. Job again has seven sons and three daughters, who were the most beautiful women in the land, and Job lives a long and prosperous life.

In the poetic section Job challenges the conventional view about the relation between virtue and reward, which his friends defend. He cannot accept the opinion of his friends that he is suffering for some wrong that he has done. Since he is convinced that he is comparatively righteous, he questions the justice of God. But the dialogue is more than a discussion of theodicy or the meaning of suffering; it examines the whole human situation. Job's undeserved suffering raises questions about the nature of God and the meaning of life.

The poetic section follows a definite pattern. Job's lament (Job 3) is followed by three cycles of discussion between Job and his friends, with advice from Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, each followed by Job's answer. The order is interrupted by revisers who have tried to tone down Job's heretical responses. The order of the friends is mixed up in the third cycle, and a long section by Elihu (Job 32-37) was probably added by a later editor (Anderson 509). After a final monologue by Job (29-31), God answers him out of the whirlwind, and Job repents his self-sufficiency (38:1-42:6).

The poetic section begins with Job's lament. He begins by cursing the day of his birth and the night of his conception:

Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night which said, "A man-child is conceived." (3:3)

He repeats again and again his wish that the day of his birth be "darkness," without God seeking it, with no light shining on it, with "gloom and deep darkness," with clouds dwelling in it and with terrifying blackness (3:4-5).
Likewise, he wishes that the night of his conception would not exist: "let it not rejoice among the days of the year" or "come into the number of the months" (3:6). He curses it with "thick darkness," barrenness, and "no joyful cry." He wishes that "the stars of its dawn be dark" and that it would not "see the eyelids of the morning" (3:9).

Job's situation raises the question of whether life is meaningless: "Why is light given to him that is in misery, and life to the bitter in soul?" (3:20). The sense of meaninglessness results in a longing for death. Job longs for death, which he associates with ease, rest, and quiet (3:13). Like Job, those who suffer long for death as a hidden treasure (3:21) and rejoice when they find the grave (3:22). In his misery Job wishes that he had died at birth:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Why did I not die at birth,} \\
\text{come forth from the womb and expire?} \\
\text{Why did the knees receive me?} \\
\text{Or why the breasts, that I should suck? (3:11)}
\end{align*}
\]

Better yet, he could have been stillborn, "a hidden, untimely birth, as infants that never see the light" (3:16).

Job's lament is influenced by one of Jeremiah's confessions in which he also curses the day of his birth (Anderson 513):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Cursed be the day} \\
\text{on which I was born!} \\
\text{The day when my mother bore me,} \\
\text{let it not be blessed!} \\
\text{Cursed be the man} \\
\text{who brought the news to my father,} \\
\text{"A son is born to you,"} \\
\text{making him very glad. (Jer. 20:14)}
\end{align*}
\]
Jeremiah, like Job, suffers deeply in spite of his faithfulness and feels that he is innocent: "I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter" (11:19). Jeremiah, like Job, complains about his lot, cries out for vindication, and hurls defiance at God. He struggles against his call to be a prophet, since no one wants to hear his message of doom. Like Jeremiah, who asks, "Why does the way of the wicked prosper?" (12:1), Job asks, "Why do the the wicked live, reach old age, and grow mighty in power?" (21:7). Jeremiah feels the anguish of rejection and loneliness: "I sat alone, because thy hand was upon me" (Jer.14:10-21). Job also feels that God has caused his friends and relatives, servants, and wife to reject him: "All my intimate friends abhor me, and those whom I loved have turned against me" (19:19).

Jeremiah feels that he "has become a laughingstock all the day; every one mocks me" (20:7). Like Jeremiah, Job feels that the young men "make sport" of him (30:1) and that he is a laughingstock:

I am a laughingstock to my friends;  
I, who called upon God and he answered me,  
a just and blameless man, am a laughingstock. (12:4)

Yet, neither Jeremiah nor Job doubts the existence of God. Both hope for vindication. Jeremiah prays that God will heal him and save him: "thou art my refuge in the day of evil" (17:17). Job hopes that God will come to him. As God answers Jeremiah, so God appears to Job, and both Jeremiah and Job must repent their self-sufficiency. God says to Jeremiah that he will be with him if Jeremiah repents:

If you return, I will restore you,  
and you shall stand before me.
If you utter what is precious, and not what is worthless, you shall be as my mouth. (Jer.15:19)

When God appears to Job in the whirlwind, Job also repents: "I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (42:6).

Job's three friends--Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar--uphold the doctrine of reward and punishment. According to this view, "virtue was rewarded with prosperity, health, and long life, and sins were punished with poverty, sickness, and untimely death" (Anderson 513). This doctrine was applied to Israel's national history by the Deuteronomic historian. If Israel obeyed God's commands, they were rewarded with prosperity and success, whereas disobedience brought hardship and disaster. This doctrine was applied to the individual in Proverbs--the wise or righteous were rewarded and the foolish or wicked were punished.

Job's counselors take this orthodox view of suffering and apply it to Job's situation. They try in various ways to make the orthodox doctrine fit. Eliphaz begins by reminding Job of this orthodox doctrine, which suggests that Job's hope should be in "the integrity" of his ways (4:6). Eliphaz argues that prosperity comes to those who seek God, but affliction comes to the foolish:

Think now, who that was innocent ever perished? Or where were the upright cut off? As I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same. (4:7-8)

Although Job seems comparatively righteous, there is no mortal who is righteous before God, so Job must have sinned. Job's suffering, Eliphaz concludes, must be the chastening of the Almighty.
The second friend, Bildad, upholds the orthodox view by arguing that if Job himself has not sinned, then Job must be suffering for the sin of his children. Bildad, like Eliphaz, tries to understand Job's situation in light of the assumption that the godless will perish:

Such are the paths of all who forget God;
the hope of the godless man shall perish.
His confidence breaks in sunder,
and his trust is a spider's web.
He leans against his house, but it does not stand;
he lays hold of it, but it does not endure. (8:13-15)

Bildad accepts the orthodox doctrine that, not only will the ungodly perish, but the righteous will prosper: "Behold, God will not reject a blameless man, nor take the hand of evildoers" (8:20).

The third friend, Zophar, directly charges Job with wrong and implies that if he puts away his iniquity, his life will no longer be full of misery:

You will forget your misery;
you will remember it as waters that have passed away.
And your life will be brighter than the noonday;
its darkness will be like the morning. (11:16-17)

On the other hand, the suffering of the wicked will be so bitter that they will long for death:

But the eyes of the wicked will fail;
all way of escape will be lost to them,
and their hope is to breathe their last. (11:20)
Job responds to each counselor in turn, arguing that his situation does not fit the orthodox doctrine of reward and punishment, since his calamity exceeds all ordinary misfortunes (6:2-3). He is ready to understand how he has erred (6:24), but he cannot discern any wrong that he has done (7:30). Job claims that he is "innocent" (9:20) and "blameless" (9:21). Although he acknowledges the iniquities of his youth, he is convinced that the enormity of his fate is disproportionate (13:16), and even if it is true that he has sinned, his error has not hurt other people (19:4). In spite of the friends' badgering him to find some fault, Job continues to uphold his righteousness:

> Far be it from me to say that you are right;
> till I die I will not put away my integrity from me.
> I hold fast my righteousness, and will not let it go;
> my heart does not reproach me for any of my days. (27:5-6)

Because his suffering is undeserved, he concludes that God "destroys both the blameless and the wicked" (9:22) and "mocks at the calamity of the innocent" (9:23). He bitterly denies the doctrine of retribution which the counselors desperately try to uphold: "Why do the wicked live, reach old age, and grow mighty in power?" (21:7). Job sees that the wicked seldom suffer calamity:

> How often is it that the lamp of the wicked is put out?
> That their calamity comes upon them? (21:17)

Job in these passages raises the question about the meaning of life in general. Human life is difficult and short. Like a worker hired for wages, a human being has "hard service upon the earth" and his days are short,
"like the days of a hireling" (7:1). A human is subject to decay: "Man wastes away like a rotten thing, like a garment that is moth-eaten" (13:28).

Life is short and full of trouble. It is like a flower which blooms and withers, like a fleeting shadow:

Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble.
He comes forth like a flower, and withers; he flees like a shadow, and continues not. (14:1-2)

Life is filled with emptiness, misery, and hopelessness:

I am allotted months of emptiness, and nights of misery are apportioned to me . . .
My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and come to their end without hope. (7:3,6)

Since life is so short and bitter, Job increasingly wishes that he could escape from God, who seems responsible for human misery:

I loathe my life; I would not live for ever. Let me alone, for my days are a breath. (7:16)

He longs for death to escape from his pain and agony, and yet he dreads death because it brings nothingness. Since a person's days are numbered, Job wishes that God would leave him alone, so that he may enjoy the few days that he has:

Since his days are determined, and the number of his months is with thee, and thou has appointed his bounds that he cannot pass, look away from him, and desist, that he may enjoy, like a hireling, his day. (14:5-6)

At the same time that Job wishes that God would let him alone so that he would not have so much misery, he searches for God: "Then call, and I will answer; or let me speak, and do thou reply to me" (13:22). He
wishes that God would not hide his face: "Why dost thou hide thy face, and count me as thy enemy?" (13:24). Job cries out for justice, but God does not answer him:

God has put me in the wrong  
and closed his net about me.  
Behold, I cry out, "Violence!" but I am not answered;  
I call aloud, but there is no justice.  
He has walled up my way, so that I cannot pass,  
and he has set darkness upon my paths. (19:6-8)

Job longs for the presence of God and thinks that God would listen to his case:

"Oh, that I knew where I might find him,  
that I might come even to his seat!  
I would lay my case before him  
and fill my mouth with arguments. (23:3-4)

Although Job longs to find God, he has a deep sense of God's remoteness and hiddenness:

Behold, I go forward, but he is not there;  
and backward, but I cannot perceive him;  
on the left hand, but I cannot behold him;  
I turn to the right hand, but I cannot see him. (23:8-9)

Not only does Job feel abandoned by God, but he is isolated from other people as well. Job feels that the counselors have withheld kindness from a friend (6:14). He calls his friends "miserable comforters" (16:2) with "windy words" (16:3). If the situations were reversed, Job could "shake his head" at the counselors: "I also could speak as you do, if you were in my place" (16:4). Job makes a pathetic appeal to his friends not to persecute him: "Have pity on me . . . O you my friends . . . Why do you, like God, pursue me?" (19:21-22). Job replies to the advice of the counselors with sarcasm:
How you have helped him who has no power!
How you have saved the arm that has no strength!
How you have counseled him who has no wisdom,
and plentifully declared sound knowledge!
(Job 26:2-4).

Not only the counselors, but former friends and acquaintances, abandon Job. Job had formerly enjoyed respect from young and old (29:8). The people listened to his advice as authority: "After I spoke they did not speak again" (29:22). Job was formerly so respected that he "sat as chief" and "dwelt like a king among his troops" (28:25). The contrast between the respect he once enjoyed and the derision he now endures is painful for Job. Now younger men make fun of him, men whose fathers Job "would have disdained to set with the dogs" of his flock (30:1). He is despised by others: "I am one before whom men spit" (17:6). Those who have been close to him--his relatives and his friends--are estranged from him, and even his servant does not answer him when he calls (19:18), as Goneril's servant does not answer the call of Lear. Mocked and ostracized, Job's spirit is broken and he is ready for death (17:1-2).

Job accuses God of causing his suffering by shooting poisonous arrows: "For the arrows of the Almighty are in me . . . the terrors of God are arrayed against me" (6:4-5). Job wishes that "it would please God to crush" him (6:9), since, as a mortal, he has limits to his endurance and does not have "the strength of stones" (6:11). Job wishes that God would let him alone long enough to let him swallow his saliva:

What is man, that thou dost make so much of him,
and that thou dost set thy mind upon him,
dost visit him every morning,
and test him every moment?
How long wilt thou not look away form me,
nor let me alone till I swallow my spittle? (7:17-19)

In the contest between God and a mortal, God has the advantage. Job asks how a man can be just before God: "If one wished to contend with him, one could not answer him once in a thousand times" (9:3). Job raises the question of the justice of God, since God can inflict loss without anyone to question what he does. As Job says, God can snatch away, and no one will hinder him: "Who will say to him, 'What doest thou?'" (9:12). Although Job is innocent, he cannot argue his case against such a powerful adversary: "Though I am innocent, I cannot answer him" (9:14).

Job's accusations against God get stronger and stronger. He says that God crushes him and wounds him "without cause," filling him with bitterness (9:27-28). Job claims that God "destroyest the hope of man" (14:19). The language becomes stronger and stronger, as Job claims that God has "torn" him in his wrath and "gnashed" his teeth at him (16:9). Job claims that God gives him up to the ungodly, breaks him asunder, seizes him by the neck and dashes him to pieces, sets him up as his target, surrounds him with his archers, slashes open his kidneys, pours his gall on the ground, and runs on him like a warrior (16:11-14). God has treated Job like an enemy in battle:

He has kindled his wrath against me,
and counts me as his adversary.
His troops come on together;
they have cast up siegeworks against me,
and encamp round about my tent. (19:11-12)

Job makes very strong accusations against God—that he has been cruel to him, persecuting him, even casting him into the mud:
God has cast me into the mire,
and I have become like dust and ashes.
I cry to thee and thou dost not answer me;
I stand, and thou dost not heed me.
Thou hast turned cruel to me;
with the might of thy hand thou dost persecute
me. (30:19-21)

Job seeks justice between himself and God, like a person claiming
his rights with a neighbor (16:20-21). Job wishes that he could be judged as
an equal, but there is no one to judge fairly between Job and God:

For he is not a man, as I am, that I might answer
him,
that we should come to trial together.
There is no umpire between us,
who might lay his hand upon us both. (9:32-33)

Job is convinced that if he were judged with equity, his integrity would
emerge: "Let me be weighed in a just balance, and let God know my
integrity!" (31:6). Job continues to hope that some day a reconciliation will
take place between God and humankind:

For I know that my Redeemer lives,
and at last he will stand upon the earth;
and after my skin has been thus destroyed.
then from my flesh I shall see God. (19:25-26)

Although this passage is sometimes interpreted as the earliest reference in
the Old Testament to the resurrection of the body, the meaning of the
passage is more likely that a mediator will bring about Job's reunion with
God, which has been his deepest longing (Anderson 516).

The theme of wisdom, which is inaccessible to humankind and
belongs only to God, is sometimes expressed by Job's comforters, but
particularly in the hymn to wisdom found in Job 28:
But where shall wisdom be found?  
And where is the place of understanding?  
Man does not know the way to it,  
and it is not found in the land of the living. (28:12-13)

Although Job assumes that he "knows" about the injustice of God's ways, the Book of Job as a whole makes clear that there are limits to human knowledge and that the only true possessor of knowledge is God. A mortal can never "know" the divine purpose of the universe:

Whence then comes wisdom?  
And where is the place of understanding?  
It is hid from the eyes of all living,  
and concealed from the birds of the air.  
(28:20-21)

Finally, Yahweh answers Job out of the whirlwind, not to answer Job's cry for vindication but to show Job that he is a finite creature who cannot understand the mystery of creation. The word "knowledge" is used repeatedly in God's speech from the whirlwind (Glatzer 7). The first question which God addresses to Job challenges his claim to knowledge:

Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?  
Gird up you loins like a man,  
I will question you, and you shall declare to me. (38:2-3)

Through his questions God demonstrates the limits of human knowledge:

Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?  
Tell me, if you have understanding.  
Who determined its measurements--surely you know! (38:4-5)

God describes his mighty acts as creator, sustainer, and provider, and asks Job if he knows how to accomplish them. God asks Job where he was at the time of creation "when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of
God shouted for joy" (38:7). He challenges Job to try to execute justice, since he has accused God of injustice:

   Look on every one that is proud, and bring him low;
   and tread down the wicked where they stand.
   Hide them all in the dust together;
   bind their faces in the world below. (40:12-13)

At the end of his speech God tells Job to consider two powerful beasts, Behemoth and Leviathan, which illustrate the power of God and the limits of humankind. Behemoth is not merely a hippopotamus but a mythical symbol, and Leviathan not an ordinary crocodile but the sea-monster. They are beyond the power of humans to capture and subdue. God asks Job a series of questions about whether any human being can snare the Behemoth or "draw out Leviathan with a fishhook" (41:1). The theme of the inscrutability of God is so closely related to the theme of suffering that Melville develops it at great length and even uses the image of the Leviathan as a symbol of the unfathomable nature of God.

   After Job hears the voice from the whirlwind, Job acknowledges the limits of his knowledge:

   Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand,
   things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. (42:3)

He repents in dust and ashes, but not because he contended with God. In fact, in the epilogue Job, rather than the friends, receives God's approval: "for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has" (42:7). As Bernard Anderson expresses it, "They were too smug in their
orthodoxy, too sure of the answers to life's enigmas" (514). What Job repents is stated in God's answer:

Will you even put me in the wrong?
Will you condemn me that you may be justified? (40:8)

In order to justify himself, Job has judged God. Now he is silenced and repents of his presumption in assuming that he knew how God should run the world. He has presumed to understand the ways of creation, which are known only to God.

God finally appears to Job, but the mystery of suffering is left unanswered. Although Job does not receive an answer to why he suffered, he is "aware of God's presence in a new and profound way," and his "remaining unanswered questions become tolerable in the context of a restored relationship of trust in God" (Simundson 140). Job does not receive the answer to his questions about suffering and the meaning of life, but he does experience "God's coming near to him again . . . God's entering into dialogue with him" (Friedman 22).

Job becomes an image of the suffering of all humankind: "the Book of Job penetrates so deeply into the unique situation of one man that it offers an image for all men" (Friedman 22). Job's sense of the emptiness, misery, and hopelessness of life, his isolation from other people, his estrangement from God, and his longing for death are repeated in various forms in Shakespeare, Melville, and Faulkner. Job's suffering raises questions about the justice of God, whether God rewards the good and punishes the evil, the absence or hiddenness of God, the limits of human knowledge, and the meaning of life. Whenever there is undeserved suffering, these
questions surface in one form or another. This paper examines three works which consider the problem of suffering—*King Lear*, *Moby-Dick*, and *The Sound and the Fury*—to see how the Book of Job sheds light on each and how Job's questions, though raised in each, are developed in different ways.
CHAPTER I

KING LEAR: A SHAKESPEAREAN VERSION
OF THE BOOK OF JOB

This chapter examines King Lear in an attempt to show a parallel between the Book of Job, the archetypal work on undeserved suffering, and King Lear, which raises the problem of undeserved suffering in a way which is just as compelling. In examining this parallel, I will discuss first, the way in which King Lear is a Job story, secondly, how the theological questions raised in King Lear are the same as those in the Book of Job, thirdly, how King Lear comes to the same conclusion as the Book of Job--that life has meaning in spite of the fact that suffering is finally inexplicable--and finally, how the Job parallel sheds light on the attempts of the critics to explain suffering in the play.

First, King Lear is a Job story. Most critics who mention a connection between Lear and Job do so only briefly, mentioning only a couple of elements which bring Job to mind as they read King Lear. Yet King Lear has been called "a Shakespearean version of the Book of Job, raising the problem of undeserved suffering with a similar insistence, power, and intensity" (Nevo 261). Eugene Goodheart in his essay "Job and the Modern World" writes: "The only modern writer who has affinities with Job is Shakespeare and particularly the Shakespeare of King Lear" (98). Jan Kott
calls King Lear a "new Book of Job" (104), and Kenneth Muir writes: "There is no doubt that Job was much in Shakespeare's mind when he was writing King Lear" (King Lear: Critical Essays 289-90).

Why does King Lear bring the Book of Job to mind for so many readers? I think it is because, as James Driscoll observes, Shakespeare and his audience "would have been conscious of important similarities between the Lear who has lost everything and the Biblical Job and hence alive to the concern with the problem of evil and divine justice which King Lear shares with the Book of Job" (162). As Kenneth Muir writes, "At times Lear's voice seems to blend with that of Job in demanding of the gods why the righteous man is smitten" (King Lear lxi). Lloyd Sears observes that "Shakespeare . . . faces the act of cruelty and evil, both in humanity and in nature, with a fearlessness unequalled outside the Book of Job. And his answer is ultimately similar" (273).

Unlike the legendary Job, who is "blameless and upright," Lear has faults. Not only does the play begin with his mistake, but he is self-indulgent and capricious throughout the play, as when he demands, "Let me stay not a jot for dinner" (I.iv.8), and he is also vengeful, cursing Goneril with sterility and wishing for terrible things to happen to all who have wronged him. Yet, like the Job of the poems, Lear is, as he claims, a man "more sinned against than sinning" (III.ii.60). Lear makes a mistake which precipitates his suffering, but it is not out of some deep malice or villainy, but rather the pride and foolishness of an old man who is attempting to unburden himself of the cares of state. He is deceived by flattery, and he gives away his power and wealth. Although Lear makes a
mistake which precipitates his suffering, the depth and extent of his suffering are spectacularly disproportionate to the mistake which he has made. He has been merely foolish, but his daughters are cruel. He has been blind, but his daughters are malicious. He makes mistakes, whereas his daughters commit atrocities. In many tragedies an error in judgment sets in motion a series of events which brings undeserved misfortune disproportionate to what set it in motion, but the suffering in *King Lear* is intense enough and prolonged enough to go beyond ordinary tragic waste.

Lear, like Job, is stripped of everything. At the beginning Lear is king, attended with ceremony and with absolute power and authority. But then he becomes just a foolish old man. Goneril's servant does not show the usual ceremony and respect to Lear, failing to come when Lear summons him and calling Lear "My lady's father" instead of "my king." Later Cornwall and Regan show disrespect to Lear by putting his messenger in the stocks, and when Lear demands to speak with them, he is told that the "fiery Duke" is unmovable and fixed. What formerly would have been received as a royal demand is treated as merely a request. Finally Goneril and Regan eliminate any remnants of royal ceremony by denying Lear followers. Lear has become powerless. He claims that he will have revenges on them that will be the "terrors of the earth" (II.iv.278), but since he does not know what these things will be, he appears foolish. He has lost the ceremony and respect given a king, and finally he loses even the physical necessities ordinary people enjoy--shelter, comfort, and safety--as Goneril and Regan cast him out into the storm and even seek his death.
When Lear is "bareheaded" on the heath, he is as vulnerable to the elements as the next person. In the face of the wind and rain, Lear is just a distraught old man who "tears his white hair" (III.i.7). He is merely a "poor, infirm, weak, and despised old man" (III.ii.20). This is when he talks about being "the pattern of all patience," as the legendary Job is (III.ii.36). Where he had formerly enjoyed the luxuries of royalty, now a hovel made of straw is precious to him, because he is reduced to the bare necessities. He is human and just as vulnerable to the elements as anyone else.

Later when Lear appears mad, dressed in wild flowers, it is a "side-piercing sight" (IV.vi.85), because, although he speaks "reason in madness," it is heartbreaking to see a person of such great stature so greatly reduced. He is, as Gloucester calls him, a "ruined piece of nature" (IV.vi.133). Lear appears ludicrous when he, who is now powerless, claims that he is "every inch a king": "When I do stare, see how the subject quakes" (IV.vi.106). Without the power and ceremony of a king, Lear is merely human, as when he says in response to Gloucester's offer to kiss his hand, that "it smells of mortality" (IV.vi.132). Not only has Lear lost the respect and authority of a king, and the physical comforts of ordinary people, but he has lost his senses, which makes him pitiful. When Lear runs off stage, it is "A sight most pitiful in the meanest wretch,/ Past speaking of in a king" (IV.vi.200-201).

Characters in the subplot--Edgar and Gloucester--are also stripped of everything. When Lear first sees Tom o' Bedlam, he identifies with him, as having given everything away and been reduced to the lowest human state.
Edgar also identifies with Lear: "that which makes me bend makes the King bow. He childed as I fathered" (III.vi.107-08). Edgar's suffering, even more clearly than Lear's, is undeserved, brought on by Edmund's villainy and Edgar's trusting nature. The doubling of Lear with Edgar universalizes the suffering. As Lear is reduced to the lowest condition of man, Edgar is an image of man stripped of everything--his name, his title, his social position, his clothing, and even his mental and physical well-being. He changes his name to poor Tom, because, as he says, as Edgar he is nothing. His title is given away to Edmund, and he is hunted as a traitor by his own father to be put to death. He assumes nakedness and feigns madness just to stay alive. He assumes a form which is "the basest and most poorest shape" and is "near to beast" (II.iii.9). Not only is he filthy, with tangled hair, and barely covered, but, physically maimed, sticking pins, skewers, nails, and rosemary into his arms. Edgar's condition mirrors that of Lear. As Edgar is mad, gashed, and naked, so Lear goes mad, is tormented by his daughters, and is bareheaded in the storm. Edgar's nakedness symbolizes what a human is when stripped of everything. Stripped of one's clothing, or everything that is superfluous to existence, nothing is left, as Job says, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return" (1.20-21), or as Edgar says, "Tom's acold."

Gloucester's suffering, like Edgar's, parallels Lear's. As Lear's daughters seek his death, so Gloucester thinks that his son, whom he loved dearly, sought his life. As Lear grows mad, so Gloucester's grief has "crazed" his "wits" (III.iv.160). The subplot is so parallel to the main plot that it impossible to think of suffering as limited to Lear and his mistake.
Gloucester, like Lear, has his faults. Like Lear, he has made a mistake in casting out the good child and rewarding the evil one, and, like Lear, his suffering is out of all proportion to anything he has done. The gouging out of his eyes is an image of the unnatural cruelty Lear suffers. Gloucester's eyes are literally plucked out, as Lear's are figuratively: "Because I would not see thy cruel nails/ Pluck out his poor old eyes" (III.vii.56-57). When the mad Lear and the blind Gloucester meet, the suffering is compounded. When Gloucester asks Lear if he recognizes him, Lear replies, "I remember thine eyes well enough" (IV.vi.135), which intensifies the tragedy of Gloucester's sightlessness. In fact, the scene is so painful that Edgar says, "I would not take this from report--it is,/ And my heart breaks at it" (IV.vi.139-40).

The suffering of Lear, like that of Job, presents a universal image of human suffering. In the storm scene the vagueness of the setting and the picture of one person against the elements give it a universal and cosmic significance. Lear in the storm is a picture of humankind alone in the universe, abandoned by the gods. Nature is indifferent to human suffering: "Here's a night pities neither wise men nor fools" (III.ii.10). The focus in this scene is not on what Lear has done wrong but on what he suffers, and how the storm is indifferent to how he has been wronged. The suffering is not only Lear's but universal suffering: "This cold night will turn us all to fools and madmen" (III.iv.75). The cold night represents the uncaring elements, and, in a broader sense, the uncaring universe. As in the Book of Job, the indifference of the controlling powers gives a sense of the absence of God.
In *King Lear*, as in the Job story, beyond the apparent worst, there is always a still worse. Edgar has been disinherited and hunted for his death. His body has been exposed to the elements, and he even appears to have lost his sanity. The pain of witnessing how distraught and mad Lear is almost prevents his continuing to feign madness. Edgar expresses the idea that fellowship in suffering makes the pain more bearable, and then he sees the suffering of his father, and his own pain becomes more unbearable. When Edgar thinks that things are at the worst for him--that he is the "worst," the "lowest and most dejected thing of fortune" (IV.i.2-3)--he is hopeful that what follows will be better, as he says, the "worst returns to laughter" (IV.i.6). Then he sees his blinded father being led by an old servant and realizes that there can always be a worse misfortune. He is worse than ever, and may be worse yet:

O gods! Who isn't can say "I am at the worst?"
I am worse than e'er I was . . . 
And worse I may be yet. The worst is not
So long as we can say "This is the worst." (IV.i.25-28)

Not only is this what Edgar says, but this is a pattern of the play, as Rene Fortin observes: "a conspicuous feature of the structure of *King Lear* is its irony, the rhythm of expectation and frustration to which the characters are subjected" ("Hermeneutical Circularity" 116). When things seem to be at their worst, expectations are raised that things will be better, only to be followed by a worse disaster. For instance, Lear is driven to madness by the cruelty of Goneril and Regan. Then hopes are raised as Cordelia's army enters Britain that Lear will be restored to his senses and his wrongs redressed, only to be followed by the defeat of Cordelia's army
and the taking of Lear and Cordelia as prisoners. When Lear and Cordelia are taken prisoners, it seems that the worst has befallen them. Then expectations are raised that in prison they will share love and laughter "like birds i' th' cage" (V.iii.9), but as soon as they are taken to prison, Edmund gives an order for Cordelia's death. Toward the end of the play hope is again raised, as Edmund makes a last-minute attempt to save Cordelia, but this is immediately followed by Lear's entering with Cordelia dead in his arms.

As in the Book of Job, misfortune is prolonged by a series of unexpected disasters. The action of King Lear is prolonged by this "constant intensifying of disaster at the moment when disaster seems to be over" (Holloway 90). By the middle of Act IV, an ordinary tragic action has been completed. Lear has fallen in fortune and has come to self-knowledge, and yet, like Job, his misfortunes are re-doubled. Holloway writes, "The materials exist for a more conventional and less protracted tragedy which could have ended well before the beginning of Act V. If we ask what extends the play further, the Book of Job reveals the answer" (88). Nicholas Brooke and Stephen Booth, while not mentioning the Job parallel, comment on the refusal-to-end characteristic of the play. Brooke writes: "Act V goes like a series of codas--at several points this we feel could be the end; but there is always one more" (82). Stephen Booth's thesis is that not ending is a primary characteristic of King Lear. Booth quotes Kermode: "In King Lear everything tends toward a conclusion that does not occur; even personal death, for Lear, is terribly delayed. Beyond the apparent worst
there is a worse suffering . . . when the end comes it is not an end, and both suffering and the need for patience are perpetual" (4).

Not only is Lear stretched upon "the rack of this tough world," enduring suffering past all probability, but the play makes its audience suffer: "Shakespeare uses great demonstrable technical skill to stretch his audience out upon the rack of this tough play" (Booth 16). Michael Goldman talks about the "pain of watching" the play and "the punishing aspect of the play--the indignities, tortures, and violations the actors' bodies suffer" (94). According to Goldman, "The method of the play is to expose us to more than we thought we could take" (100). The physical indignities and the mental anguish which the characters suffer, as well as the prolonging of disastrous events, makes the play painful to watch.

Secondly, King Lear struggles with the same questions as the Book of Job--Why is there such suffering and pain in the world? What accounts for human cruelty or nature's indifference? Is there justice in the universe? Are there gods, and if so, why does there seem to be an inequity of reward and punishment on earth? If there are no gods, is there any meaning in life? Lear asks, "Is there any cause in nature that makes these hard hearts?" (III.vi.75-76). There is no answer forthcoming in the play, as in the Book of Job there is finally no answer to why humankind suffers, why the good are not rewarded and the evil punished. There are many contradictory explanations for suffering in the play, including fate, punishment for sin, divine providence, the indifference of the gods, and meaninglessness. As in the Book of Job, in King Lear finally none of the answers offered as an explanation for suffering is adequate.
In *King Lear* suffering is brought about in large part by human cruelty which is so shocking and unnatural that it leads the characters to try to explain what causes such unkindness. Bestial imagery is used to convey the idea of human cruelty. Goneril and Regan are called "dog-hearted daughters" (IV.iii.45) and "she-foxes" (II.vi.22). Albany is so shocked by the cruelty of Goneril and Regan that he calls them tigers, not daughters. It is unnatural and "barbarous" for daughters to be so unkind to their aged father. In fact, Albany says that even a wild animal, such as a bear, would show affection to the old king, whereas they coldly shut their father out in the storm in the night, driving him to madness. Their inhuman cruelty makes Lear suffer an "unnatural and bemadding sorrow" (III.i.38).

Edmund's cruelty also violates natural bonds. He deceives his father into seeking his brother's death, and he exposes his father's treason, allowing Cornwall and Regan to do with him as they please. Cornwall and Regan also demonstrate unnatural and chilling cruelty, particularly in the scene of Gloucester's blinding. Maiming a person by poking out his eyes is cruel and painful, but what makes it more so is the detached and unfeeling attitude of Cornwall and Regan. When Gloucester says, "O cruel!", Regan says, "One side will mock another. Th' other too" (III.vii.71). This unnatural cruelty is so baffling that it raises the Job question, "Why is there such evil in the world?"

Suffering is caused, not only by human cruelty, but also by the cruel indifference of nature, as demonstrated by the storm. As Kent says, "Such sheets of fire, such bursts of horrid thunder,/ Such groans of roaring wind and rain" (III.ii.46-47) are more than men or animals can bear. Lear talks
about the cruelty of the storm: "the wrathful skies" (III.42) and the "piteless storm" (III.iv.29). Such terrible acts of nature raise the question, "why?" In fact, Lear addresses the elements—the wind, rain, thunder, and lightning—as transcendent, as though they are gods. He expects the elements to be indifferent, with no obligation to any human: "I never gave you kingdom, called you children" (III.ii.17). Yet, as Job questions the justice of God, so Lear questions the justice of the heavens, which slavishly join with his "two pernicious daughters" in their cruelty against "a head/So old and white as this" (III.ii.21-24).

Although Lear calls for patience, he is the opposite of resignation. Although he claims that he will be like the traditional Job—"the pattern of all patience" (III.ii.37)—he is like the Job of the vast portion of the Book of Job—indignant and protesting. The theme of patience is repeated throughout the play, as, for example, when Kent reminds Lear: "Where is the patience now/That you so oft have boasted to retain?" (III.vi.57-58).

Edgar teaches Gloucester patience: "Men must endure/Their going hence, even as their coming hither/Ripeness is all" (V.i.9-11). Like Job, Lear is characterized more by rebellion than patience: "The Elizabethans saw Job as the pattern of all patience which Lear invokes on the heath; but in the rebellion which is a constitutive part of that ancient contest with God the imagination reared upon the Scriptures could hardly have failed to find the paradigm of what Harbage has so perceptively isolated for comment: 'Lear's molten indignation, his huge invective, his capacity for feeling pain'" (Nevo 261). In spite of the call for patience throughout the play, what is dramatized is a passionate protest against injustice.
Like Job, Lear in his initial prosperity assumes that the world is ordered by the gods, but when he is afflicted, he sees a lack of justice on earth. The mock trial of Goneril and Regan ends with Lear's shouting that the false judge has let Regan escape. Later when the mad Lear meets Gloucester, Lear talks about how legal justice is topsy-turvy: "change places and, handy-dandy, which is the justice, which is the thief?" (IV.vi.150-52). The judge, he says, is guilty of greater wrong-doing than the accused. Justice cannot touch the wealthy but finds small sins in the poor:

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Plate sin with gold,
And the strong lance of justice hurtless breaks;
Arm it in rags, a pygmy's straw does pierce it.
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(IV.vi.162-64)

The question of legal justice raises the larger question of justice in the world. Robert Ornstein writes: "Lear takes his place beside Job as a man who was confident of the nature of the universe and who knew that measure for measure was the law of God's creation. Like Job he was driven by misery and calamity to question his own beliefs and at last the meaning of life" (272). Lear's values and beliefs are shaken. According to Sewall, this is the "tragic moment," when "traditional values begin to lose their power to comfort and sustain, and man finds himself once more groping in the dark" (Sewall 9).

The pagan setting serves to heighten the questions of the play--why is there cruelty, are there ruling powers and what are they like, and is there any meaning? The removal of Christian elements from Shakespeare's source, King Lear, creates a savage world in which there is no established religious faith to offer explanations. Muir writes: "We are asked to imagine
a world in which there is no knowledge of Christian teaching, in which there is a savage struggle for survival, in which men like ravenous fishes feed on one another; and we are driven to realise that man needs neither wealth, nor power, but patience, fortitude, love and mutual forgiveness" (Shakespeare's Tragic Sequence 139). As William Elton argues, Shakespeare's audience would have made the transfer from the pagan setting and references to "the gods" to a Christian concept of God: "the Shakespearean spectator analogically transformed the characters and situations in Lear into Christian terms" (337), raising the question of the ways of God with humankind.

One explanation offered for undeserved suffering in King Lear is that it is fate. This is the explanation of Kent, who, though not a philosophical character, feels a need to explain how Cordelia could have such a different nature from those sisters born to the same parents:

It is the stars,
The stars above us govern our conditions;
Else one self mate and make could not beget
Such different issues. (IV.iii.32-35)

According to astrology, human events unavoidably befall people. Human events are seen as predetermined and inescapable, controlled by an impersonal force, not divine providence. This explanation is not given much weight in the play. It is mentioned only briefly--one more attempt to explain why--and it is undercut by one of Edmund's speeches, in which he expresses how foolish it is that "we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon, and stars; as if we were villains on necessity" and that it is an
evasion of one's own responsibility for a person "to lay his goatish disposition on the charge of a star" (I.ii.117-24).

Another explanation for suffering is that it is punishment for sin. This is the explanation Edgar offers toward the end of the play. As Job's comforters--Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar--argue that Job is being punished for his sins, Edgar suggests that Gloucester's blinding is the result of his illegitimate begetting of Edmund:

The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
Make instruments to plague us
The dark and vicious place where thee he got
Cost him his eyes. (V.iii.171-72)

Gloucester's suffering, like Lear's, is greatly disproportionate to his mistake, and the events of the play contradict the idea that Gloucester's suffering is punishment for sin, particularly since it follows an act of charity.

The understanding of Job's comforters that suffering is punishment for sin is part of a larger idea--that divine providence controls human events, rewarding the good and punishing the wicked. In the Deuteronomic books of the Old Testament it was assumed that the righteous were rewarded and the wicked were punished. Job's dilemma is that he is comparatively righteous, and yet he suffers. The old formula does not fit. Likewise, in King Lear the traditional explanation for suffering--that God intervenes in human affairs to defend the righteous and punish the wicked--is expressed by various characters, but this formula does not fit the events of the play.
In *King Lear* this idea is frequently expressed by Albany, but the events of the play undercut his statements of faith in a divine providence which rewards the good and punishes the wicked. In the final scene, for example, Albany's "The gods defend her!" (V.iii.257) is followed and undercut by Lear's entering with Cordelia dead in his arms. Earlier in the play when Albany hears that Cornwall is slain, he concludes that his death is the result of the swift vengeance of divine providence:

This shows you are above,  
You justicers, that these our nether crimes  
So speedily can venge. (IV.ii.78-80)

Albany's assurance of divine providence is undercut at the very moment which he makes it by the line which immediately follows: "But, O poor Gloucester,/ Lost he his other eye?" (IV.ii.80-81). Although Cornwall is killed by his outraged servant, the servant is also killed, and his act of courage does not prevent Gloucester's losing his other eye. Instead of demonstrating the swift justice of the heavens, the scene shows that misfortune comes to good and evil alike.

In a similar way the servants who witness Cornwall and Regan's blinding of Gloucester expect that people who commit such cruel acts will not prosper or live a long life. One servant says: "I'll never care what wickedness I do,/ If this man come to good" (III.vii.98-99), and the other servant replies: "If she live long,/ And in the end meet the old course of death,/ Women will all turn monsters" (III.vii.98-102). Since the evil characters--Cornwall, Regan, Goneril, and Edmund--all die, it may seem that the play demonstrates a measure of cosmic justice. However, the deaths of the evil characters demonstrate, not divine justice, but the self-
destructive nature of evil. Just as the philosophy of the evil characters justifies them in their villainy toward the good characters, it carries over into their relations with each other and themselves. The viciousness of Goneril and Regan, which they have perpetrated on other characters, is turned on themselves as well. Goneril and Regan are jealous of each other's love for Edmund, and finally Goneril poisons Regan and then commits suicide. Although Albany may call the deaths of Goneril and Regan the "judgment of the heavens" (V.iii.232), their deaths are naturalistic—the logical result of their own activity rather than the work of an external principle.

In the Book of Job the reality of the situation contradicts the theological formula that the righteous are rewarded and the wicked punished. Likewise, in *King Lear* the hard facts of the play contradict the idea that God intervenes to reward the righteous and punish the wicked. As Samuel Johnson realized, *King Lear* is a "play in which the wicked prosper, and the virtuous miscarry" (Brooke 72). The evil characters—Cornwall, Goneril, and Regan—suffer hardly at all before they die. As Harriett Hawkins writes, "To the very end they remain comfortably smug in their evil" (161). The eventual death of the evil characters does not demonstrate cosmic justice, because the good characters meet death and suffering as well. As John D. Rosenberg says, "The selfsame holocaust that has destroyed Goneril and Regan destroys with equal finality Cordelia, and then cracks Lear's heart" (37). In fact, the good characters suffer more than the evil characters. It is consistently shown to be more dangerous and less rewarding to help someone else than to follow one's own self-interest.
The actions of the good characters frequently miscarry. For example, Gloucester's act of charity toward Lear results in his blinding, and Cordelia's attempt to rescue her father results in their imprisonment and death. The good characters are not rewarded, but rather "with best meaning have incurred the worst" (V.i.4).

The death of Cordelia is the final and most tragic disaster of the play, and it raises more poignantly than anything else in the play the questions of innocent suffering and poetic justice. It is both unreasonable and unexpected, like the disasters which befall Job. Why should Cordelia, the wronged innocent, who is kind and forgiving, be hanged? Her death, like the disasters which befall Job, is unreasonable and unexpected, and makes the ending of the play tragic and shocking. Like Job, Cordelia is a good person who has already suffered several misfortunes--she has been unjustly disinherited by her father, defeated by her sisters' armies, and been sent to prison. Lear's grief as he enters with Cordelia in his arms is almost unbearable, and his last speech, which raises the question of innocent suffering, is full of despair:

    Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life,
    And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more,
    Never, never, never, never, never. (V.iii.307-09)

Samuel Johnson's well-known reaction to the play associates Cordelia's death with Shakespeare's rejection of poetic justice: "I was many years ago so shocked by Cordelia's death, that I know not whether I ever endured to read again the last scenes of the play till I undertook to revise them as an editor" (Brooke 72). As Brooke has observed, the pain of the ending should
not be circumvented: "if the ending of King Lear is to be accepted, it must be as the shocking thing Johnson knew it to be" (72).

The lack of justice raises the question of the indifference of the gods. At first Lear expects that the gods operate on a principle of retribution. He expects that the gods will find and punish those who have committed crimes. The violence of the storm makes him think of the retributive power of the gods:

Let the great gods
That keep this dreadful pudder o'er our heads
Find out their enemies now. Tremble, thou wretch,
That hast within thee undivulged crimes
Unwhipped of justice. (III.ii.49-53)

Lear expects that the gods will defend those who suffer undeservedly. When Lear finds that his servant has been put in the stocks and that Goneril and Regan are in league against him, he calls upon the "heavens" to take the part of an old man who is wronged by his ungrateful daughters, but the heavens seem indifferent:

O heavens!
If you do love old men, if your sweet sway
Allow obedience, if you yourselves are old,
Make it your cause. Send down, and take my part.
(II.iv.184-87)

At the end of Act II when Goneril and Regan tell him that he has need for no followers, Lear again calls upon the gods. This time, however, Lear raises the question of whether the gods themselves have stirred his daughters' hearts against him. In fact, his call for patience--"You heavens, give me that patience, patience I need!" (iv.266-69)--is immediately
followed by a thought which brings indignation rather than patience—the gods themselves may be responsible:

You see me here, you gods, a poor old man,
As full of grief as age, wretched in both.
If it be you that stirs these daughters' hearts
Against their father, fool me not so much
To bear it tamely; touch me with noble anger . . .

(II.iv.267-71)

As Job calls upon God to vindicate him, in *King Lear* the gods are often invoked, but they do not intervene to help the good characters or to punish the evil characters. When Gloucester risks his life to help Lear by finding him shelter and warning him to escape, Kent says, "The gods reward your kindness" (III.vi.5), but in the very next scene the only "reward" for Gloucester's kindness is his blinding. Gloucester calls upon the gods several times, but since his statements are placed in the midst of the excruciatingly painful scene of his blinding, the gods, if they exist, must be indifferent or uncaring. When Regan plucks him by the beard, he says, "By the kind gods, 'tis most ignobly done" (III.vii.33-34), and when Gloucester realizes Edgar was wronged, he says: "Kind gods, forgive me that, and prosper him" (III.vii.92). The irony of his calling the gods kind is demonstrated by the cruelty which the gods allow. Gloucester, like Albany, believes that divine justice will swiftly punish evil acts, and that with regard to Goneril and Regan's cruelty, he "shall see/ The winged vengeance overtake such children" (III.vii.66). Gloucester's faith that he shall see vengeance is painfully ironic, since he is blinded, and what he "sees feelingly" is, as Lear says, "how this world goes," and that is that life
is full of injustice and suffering. As Cornwall is gouging out his eye, Gloucester cries:

He that will think to live till he be old,  
Give me some help.--O cruel! O you gods! (III.vii.69-70)

The powerlessness of the gods is dramatized by the fact that, although the servant does try to help Gloucester, he loses his other eye as well.

In *King Lear*, as in the Book of Job, when it seems that God is absent, or that the gods do not care, it brings thoughts of meaninglessness. At various points throughout the play Lear and Gloucester express despair. Just as Job wonders why he was born, so Lear associates birth with suffering and meaninglessness:

We came crying hither;  
Thou know'st, the first time that we smell the air  
We wawl and cry . . .  
When we are born, we cry that we are come  
To this great stage of fools. (IV.vi.175-80)

This passage immediately follows Lear's thoughts about the lack of justice in the world. After his blinding Gloucester no longer sees the gods as kind, and he sinks into despair. It seems to him as though not only do the gods not care, but they willfully impose suffering on humanity for their own sport:

As flies to wanton boys are we to th' gods  
They kill us for their sport. (IV.i.36-37)

The audience also feels the weight of the despair, yet it is a mistake to misread these lines as a summary of the play--that all is despair and meaninglessness. The play as a whole, by focusing on what is worthy in
life, contradicts the statements of despair by Gloucester and Lear, as well as the glib assertions of divine providence.

When a person has lost everything—stripped to nothing—as Job, Lear, Edgar, and Gloucester are, it raises questions about meaninglessness. Job asks, "What is man?" and, Lear, seeing poor Tom without any clothes, asks, "Is man no more than this? . . . unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art" (III.iv.97-102). Lear threatens to strip off his own clothes, because he sees the connection between himself, who now is stripped of everything, and this naked beggar, who is nothing. Likewise, when Gloucester is reduced to nothing, not only stripped of title, position, and respect, but maimed physically as well, he, as Lear had done, associates poor Tom with man's nothingness: "I' th' last night's storm I such a fellow saw,/ Which made me think a man a worm" (IV.i.32-33). When one is reduced to the most wretched condition, as Lear in the storm, Edgar in his nakedness, Gloucester in his blindness, and Job on the ash-heap, the same questions are raised—what is a person and what is the meaning of life?

Thirdly, although questions of meaninglessness are raised in the play, the play as a whole, just as the Book of Job, does not convey the idea that life is meaningless. Since the gods do not intervene to defend the good characters, it may seem that there are no gods in the play and, therefore, there is no meaning and all is despair. But the fact that the gods do not intervene may also be understood in the context of a humanistic Christianity, which focuses on life in this world and mirrors life as it is. This viewpoint sees that misfortune comes to good and bad alike and that
contemplating the tragic vicissitudes of life can lead one to discard the vanities and falsities of the world and seek what has ultimate value—love, faithfulness, and forgiveness. In fact, the theme of King Lear—the grief brought on the aged by their children—was frequently used in sayings and sermons of the time to illustrate the uncertainties of life (Montano 248). This view of Christian humanism would conclude, not that there is no God, but simply that God does not intervene in human affairs to punish the evil and reward the good. Within the context of the historical there is suffering which is not resolved.

Shakespeare's "this-worldly" focus can be understood as the manifestation of a Christianity which focuses on life in the present order. According to Fortin, "the remoteness of God in the tragedies," which critics have noticed, "seems rather the result of this humanistic conception of the Christian experience than of a secular purpose" ("Shakespeare Tragedy" 323). The Renaissance, "is, most significantly, an age uncomfortable with myth and miracle" ("Shakespeare Tragedy" 308). This attitude does not claim to understand the ways of God or to think that misfortunes are sent by God as punishment for sin. In fact, the play may be viewed "as an attempt . . . to reassert the hiddenness of God against the presumptuous pieties and shallow rationalism of the Edgars and Albanys of the world. In the death of Cordelia the viewers are once more confronted with the Judaeo-Christian God who, from the Book of Job on, has chosen to remain hidden and refuses to render account of His 'darker purposes' to man" ("Hermeneutical Circularity" 121). Leggatt writes: "There is no place here for a naive optimism about virtue rewarded, or for a simple trust in the
benevolence of God. But Christianity can be tougher and darker than that: it knows, indeed insists, that the world is wicked and unfair; and it also insists that God is finally unfathomable" (29).

In the Book of Job the meaning of life comes from Job's relationship to God. In King Lear the meaning of life comes from the value of acting worthily. Finally, as Maynard Mack puts it, "it is better to have been Cordelia than to have been her sisters" (117). When Goneril and Regan die, the audience feels no emotion, and, in fact, Albany calls Edmund's death "a mere trifle here." In contrast to the factual announcement of the deaths of the evil characters is the painful and shocking moment when Lear enters with Cordelia dead in his arms. The audience cares about what happens to Cordelia, who is faithful, loving, and forgiving.

Meaning in the play, then, can be found in the moral values reflected in the lives of the good characters--Kent, the Fool, and Cordelia--who exemplify faithfulness, loyalty, and forgiveness. Kent is a full and complete human being, as indicated by the fact that he describes himself several times as simply a man. In the first scene he is more concerned about Lear's blindness than his own security. He continues to show his love for Lear, even after he is banished, by serving him in disguise, by his outrage at another servant's disrespect for the king, and by sending a message to Cordelia about the injustice Lear has suffered. He shows his concern for Lear by encouraging him to take shelter and to rest. In the final scene Kent tries to reveal that he has served Lear in disguise, but Lear does not completely understand and never fully recognizes Kent's loyalty. Kent is
not rewarded for his faithfulness, but the audience sees that the way he lived was worthwhile.

Like Kent, the Fool is loyal to Lear. He stays with Lear in the storm and encourages him to come out of the storm. The Fool knows that it is against one's own self-interest to take the part of one who is out of favor: "Let go thy hold when a great wheel runs down a hill, lest it break thy neck with following" (II.iv.69-70). He does not follow his own advice, however, but shows his love for Cordelia after she is banished and his faithfulness to Lear after his loss of power. As the Fool explains it, a person who is loyal to someone who has fallen from power is a fool, because he does not follow his own self-interest, but not a knave, since he is not unscrupulous or unkind:

That sir which serves and seeks for gain,
   And follows but for form,
Will pack when it begins to rain
   And leave thee in the storm,
But I will tarry; the fool will stay,
   And let the wise man fly,
The knave turns fool that runs away;
   The fool no knave, perdy. (II.iv.74-81)

Even in his bitter satire of Lear, the Fool shows his concern for Lear by helping Lear to see his foolishness.

Cordelia's goodness is shown by her efforts to restore Lear, even after he has banished her. She returns to England to rescue him from the hard-heartedness of her sisters. She sends someone to search for him, mad and wondering in the fields, and she hires a doctor to restore his senses. She rejoices when he recognizes her and forgives him wholeheartedly. When Lear acknowledges that she has cause for anger and resentment, she replies: "No cause, no cause" (IV.vii.75). In contrast to the older sisters,
who have wronged Lear, Cordelia, who has been wronged, is kind and forgiving.

The moral values in the play can be seen, not only in the good characters, but in the simple acts of compassion, such as the servants helping the blinded Gloucester. One of the servants gets some flax and egg whites to apply to his bleeding face. The old man who follows Gloucester and offers to lead him states matter-of-factly, "You cannot see your way" (IV.i.17), as though since he needs help, it only makes sense to give it to him. When Gloucester requests only some clothing for the madman who will lead him, the servant responds that he will bring the best apparel that he can find, even if it brings harm to himself.

Another source of hope in the play is Lear's transformation. He comes to realize that he has wronged Cordelia and that he has a bond with humanity. He begins to show compassion for others. He shows concern for the fool: "Art cold?/ I am cold myself" (III.ii.68-69). In the midst of his own distress, he is sorry for the Fool: "Poor fool and knave, I have one part in my heart/ That's sorry yet for thee" (III.ii.72-73). He insists that the Fool go in out of the storm: "In, boy; go first. You houseless poverty--/ Nay, get thee in" (III.iv.26-27). Bareheaded and without shelter, he realizes his bond with and responsibility toward the naked and homeless:

Poor naked wretches, whereso'er you are,
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
Your looped and windowed raggedness, defend you
From seasons such as these? O, I have tak'en
Too little care of this! Take physic, pomp;
Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
That thou mayst shake the superflux to them.
And show the heavens more just. (III.iv.28-36)

In his madness Lear realizes that he is only human: "They told me I was everything. 'Tis a lie--I am not ague-proof" (IV.vi.103-04). When Lear tells Cordelia that they will hear the court news in prison, he realizes that it is not important "who's in" and "who's out" (V.ii.15). What is important is Cordelia's forgiveness: "When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down/And ask of thee forgiveness" (V.iii.10-11). What will make the time meaningful is the love they share--together they will "pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh" (V.iii.12). He comes to realize the importance of the love that he shares with Cordelia.

The importance of Lear's transformation is for the audience to see what is really worthy in life, not to insure the salvation of the protagonist. By simply mirroring life, the play encourages the audience to perceive what is good and durable and what is blind. Shakespeare portrays a world in which innocent people suffer, and wicked, ambitious people prevail. Looking at this spectacle of life causes the spectators to side with the good, with Cordelia and not with Regan; it encourages the audience to contemplate the brevity of life and what has ultimate value.

Although the Job of the epilogue is rewarded and his fortunes are doubly restored, this easy solution is not shared by the main part of the Book of Job. At the end of the poetic section God appears to Job out of the whirlwind, and Job repents his self-sufficiency. The question of why there is innocent suffering is never answered, but Job's relationship with God is restored, which gives meaning to his life. Of course, no god appears to Lear out of a whirlwind, and although Lear has gained in insight, in the final
scene he is not the image of a repentant person, as he hurls invectives at all around him and gloats in his murder of Cordelia's hangman. But the audience can see from the play as a whole those things which have ultimate value—compassion, faithfulness, kindness, and forgiveness. In the Book of Job, the meaning of life comes from the presence of God. In King Lear the meaning of life comes from an awareness that in the midst of life’s uncertainties what is important is whether or not one acts worthily.

Finally, this interpretation of King Lear, which sees a parallel between the play and the Book of Job, sheds light on the attempts of the critics to explain suffering in the play. On the one hand are critics who deny the pain of the suffering or try to find some good in suffering, and on the other hand are critics who, acknowledging that suffering is not a good, see only meaninglessness in the play. The first group of critics, like Job’s comforters, deny the pain and evil or make them into goods—redemptive or deserved. The second group of critics see the pain and unanswered questions in suffering but conclude too hastily that life is therefore portrayed as meaningless.

Lear refuses to deny the pain of his suffering or see it as a good. Nevo writes: "Like Job, he (Lear) . . . refuses to surrender to the plot of optimistic quietism whereby pain and evil are denied, are made into goods, disciplinary or deserved or redemptive; are made nonexistent" (261). Some critics deny the pain of Lear’s suffering by searching for something in the play which makes it all worthwhile. G. Wilson Knight, for example, calls the scene in which Lear awakens to see Cordelia a "transcendent scene," which denies or transforms all the suffering and pain: "The naturalism of
King Lear pales before this blinding shaft of transcendent light. This is the justification of the agony, the sufferance, the gloom" (203).

Some critics deny the pain of the suffering by asserting what the events of the play deny—that cosmic justice is portrayed in the play. They see in King Lear "a natural justice that exacts inexorable punishment for every wrong and confers lasting reward on those who have merited its favor" (Sears 277). They fail to see the troublesome questions about the order of the universe, "turning Shakespeare's enigmatic scrutiny of the cosmos into a triumphant vindication of justice" (Rosenberg 135). Irving Ribner writes: "King Lear asserts the perfection of God's harmonious order and the inevitable triumph of justice" (136). Paul Siegel writes that "Shakespearean tragedy conveys a sense of divine providence" and that "this divine providence visits a poetically appropriate retribution upon the guilty" (82). A. C. Bradley observes that all of the evil characters "are dead a few weeks after we see them first" and that in the face of these facts "it seems odd to describe King Lear as 'a play in which the wicked prosper,'" as Samuel Johnson did (304). Helen Gardner writes that "There is justice on the wicked: swift justice, not the slow movement of Fate. We do not feel as Cornwall falls that he was destined to die by his servant's hand, but that Gloucester's cry for 'winged vengeance' has been answered, swiftly and unexpectedly" (11). Such an easy view of poetic justice overlooks the questions in the play about why there is such cruelty and evil in the world and the various attempts to explain undeserved suffering.

These critics see a benevolent providence in the play. In an essay entitled "Heavenly Justice in the Tragedies of Shakespeare," Carmen
Rogers "sees God's love and mercy manifest throughout the tragedies, and asserts that Shakespeare's tragic heroes live in the most friendly of universes, for they act 'within the boundaries of a beneficent and divine order,' where 'the wheels of retribution move irrevocably, quickly, impartially, but compassionately'" (Barnet 199). Irving Ribner says that King Lear "affirms justice in the world, which it sees as a harmonious system ruled by a benevolent God" (Hibbard 9). G. I. Duthie "finds a just and merciful, though, he adds, inscrutable, God behind the entire action" (Hibbard 9). Although Kenneth Myrick perceives that Shakespeare saw "one of the most terrible facts of human experience: that the virtuous may suffer untold agony through no fault or 'tragic flaw' of their own," (61) he goes on to see in the ironic turn of events a just and merciful providence: "In the sudden turns of events, which to so many modern readers of King Lear suggest the rule of blind chance or blind fate, or even of a cosmic 'malevolence which is invincible and unassailable,' Elizabethan Christians of every faith were trained to see the inscrutable but deeply reassuring ways of a wise, just, and merciful providence" (70).

Like Job's critics, some critics of King Lear see faults in the characters which bring about the disasters which befall them. Roy Battenhouse sees the root cause of tragedy in Lear a basic flaw. He discusses other flaws to which other critics have attributed Lear's downfall, but he thinks it is "a coveting of honor and glory, which is parallel to Gloucester's coveting of sensible and sensory goods" (278). Battenhouse responds to Leech's claim that the evil to which characters in King Lear are subject is "either disproportionate to their minor faults or in no way
related to any fault." Battenhouse contends that there are "faults he has not named or faults at a level deeper than he has named, which contribute at least indirectly to the disasters which ensue. An initial self-righteousness in Cordelia, a mad wilfulness in Lear, a superstitiousness in Gloucester . . ." (138). Lloyd Sears also sees Lear, Gloucester, and even Cordelia as overcoming pride and stubbornness (277). Alvin Kernan contends that "the play, while it does not explain evil, does . . . see the straight line that leads from Edmund's begetting out of wedlock to the blinding of Gloucester" (423). Edgar's speech, in which he sees Gloucester's blinding as punishment for his sin, also claims that "the gods are just," and is contradicted by the events of the play. To insist on faults in the characters is to play the role of Job's comforters and to overlook the fact that, as Leech claims, the suffering which the characters endure is disproportionate to their faults or unrelated to any fault.

If, however, a character's suffering is seen as related to a fault, then the suffering may be viewed as redemptive. Some critics see suffering as redemptive, although in King Lear, as in the Book of Job, suffering is not the result of sin or inflicted for a good purpose. A. C. Bradley suggests that King Lear might be called The Redemption of King Lear because Lear becomes a better person for his suffering (Barnet 200). Bradley makes this suggestion within the overall framework of his conviction that the play is "the most terrible picture that Shakespeare painted of the world" and does not contain "a revelation of righteous omnipotence or heavenly harmony, or even a promise of the reconciliation of mystery and justice" (Hibbard 6), but other critics emphasize more fully the religious meaning of Lear's
redemption. G. Wilson Knight, E. M. W. Tillyard, S. L. Bethell, G. L. Bickersteth, and John Danby, all agree "that Lear becomes a better man for his sufferings, and that the tragedy is, to quote J. C. Maxwell, 'a Christian play about a pagan world'" (Hibbard 6-7). These critics think redemption makes all the suffering worthwhile. Whitaker, for example, writes: "Lear stretched long enough on the rack of this tough world not so much because he can endure no more as because he has become patient and resigned, perfected in the 'ripeness' that is all. He is a higher kind of man for the stretching" (227). Lear has been stretched long enough on the rack of this tough world simply because, like Job, he has endured so much. Some of these interpretations, as for example Virgil Whitaker's description of King Lear as "a genuinely Christian tragedy of redemption," pass over "the really disquieting demonstration of human cruelty somewhat too lightly" and present "Lear's terrifying experience in a rather too orthodox light" (Mehl 103). Susan Synder describes the redemptive pattern which many critics see in the play: "the sequence of pride, fall, recognition of guilt, forgiveness, and reconciliation" (150).

Lear does go through a transformation, but his suffering, as Job's, is not the result of his sin, is not inflicted on him for a good purpose, and does not bring about his salvation. He does become a wiser, humbler person, becomes aware of his bond with all humanity, and acts kindly toward the Fool, although he continues to have huge faults. His transformation is not redemption in a religious sense. The final scene does not portray hope for salvation for Lear or Cordelia. The focus of the play is not on the salvation of the protagonist, but on what is worthy in life--compassion, forgiveness,
loyalty. The parallel of *King Lear* with the Book of Job tells us that suffering is not a good. It brings pain and evil which cannot be explained.

Rene Fortin sees Lear's suffering as disciplinary and necessary for his redemption: "the suffering of Lear may be construed as the activity of a loving, albeit stern, God" ("Hermeneutical Circularity" 120). However, the suffering of Lear is similar to the suffering of Job—a mystery, unexplainable. Fortin writes that the "lesson that Lear learns in his suffering is that he has been morally callous . . . The suffering of Lear, seen against this background is at once punitive and propaedeutic, a necessary condition to his redemption" ("Hermeneutical Circularity" 119). If Lear's suffering is necessary for his redemption, then why does he continue to suffer after his moral transformation? Is the death of Cordelia punitive? How could the death of Cordelia be necessary for Lear's redemption, since it comes after his repentance?

Critics also examine the final scene for hope of salvation, which, they think, would "redeem all human suffering." Rene Fortin looks at the death of Cordelia and asks, "Is Lear's final 'Look there, look there--' (V.iii.312) then to be read as an intuition of human immortality which would redeem all human suffering, or should we construe it as a final desperate lament?" ("Problem of Transcendence" 321). If there is no hope for salvation offered in the last scene, does that mean that the play ends in despair? Many scholars "insist that the dramas do not end with the heroes' death, but should be acted out to Judgment Day and for eternity" (Barnet 205). Bethell writes that Lear is "fit for heaven," and Campbell in an article entitled "The Salvation of Lear" writes that "Lear has discovered" in Cordelia's
"unselfish God-like love the one companion who is willing to go with him through Death up to the throne of the Everlasting Judge" (Barnet 207). Paul Siegel . . . writes that Lear and Cordelia "become reunited in eternal bliss" (Hibbard 3). As seen through the parallel with the Book of Job, the suffering in *King Lear* is enigmatic, not redemptive.

Some critics think that the good characters in the play suffer in atonement for the sins of others and that, consequently, Cordelia is a Christ figure. Peter Milward explains the suffering of the characters by "the view of Old Testament prophecy and its fulfillment in Christ, according to which the good also have to suffer not in punishment for their sins but in atonement for the sins of others . . . It is perhaps for this reason that Cordelia is so consistently characterized in terms of Christ" (17). Milward sees "the theological aspect of Cordelia as a figure of Christ" (20). He goes so far as to see the final scene with the dead Cordelia in Lear's arms as a dramatic enactment of the Pieta, that is, Mary's holding the dead body of her son from the cross. Milward writes that "this final moment of *King Lear* may be seen as a dramatic and allegorical interpretation of the Pieta, and the climax of the depiction of Cordelia in terms of Christ" (25). Cordelia's suffering is precipitated by Lear's mistake, but her death is so enigmatic, and raises so many "why" questions, that it is a distortion of the play to see Cordelia's death as atonement for Lear's sins.

Other critics also see Cordelia as a Christ figure. Siegel also sees the "suffering and death of such comparatively innocent Shakespearean heroes" as bearing "some general resemblance to the passion of Christ: the heroes seem to take on the burden of the world's suffering" (97). Cordelia
becomes a Christ figure, with Lear redeemed for heaven: "This miracle of the redemption of Lear for heaven, a redemption analogous to the redemption of mankind, for which the Son of God had come down to earth. The analogy between Cordelia and Christ, who redeemed human nature from the curse brought on it by Adam and Eve, is made unmistakable . . . " (Siegel 186). The final scene offers no hope for the redemption of Lear. Cordelia's death, instead of atoning for Lear's sin, only raises questions about why the innocent have to suffer.

Just as the Book of Job is sometimes understood as a lesson on patience in suffering, so King Lear is sometimes thought to be a sermon on patience. Milward claims that "we may well regard the play as a whole as a homily on patience preached by the dramatist to his audience" (19). J. C. Maxwell's thesis is that Lear moves from paganism to "the specifically Christian virtue of patience" (143). John Danby sees the play as a study in Christian patience: "Cordelia is the perfection of Christian patience that suffereth long and is kind. Her father is an instance of extreme falling off--first into rage and then into madness. Gloucester and Edgar occupy a middle region between these two limits. The son is sturdily patient. The father wavers on the edge of grace and despair and is only saved in the end by the ministrations of his son" (Raphael 52). Kenneth Muir also calls Lear "suffering man, homo patiens" (King Lear lxix), and Lear certainly is "suffering man," but never "patient man." There are various degrees of patience portrayed in the play and there are many passages that call for patience, but the focus of the play is on questions of impatience--why is there suffering and a need for patience? What is dramatized in King Lear
is passionate protest rather than patience. As Nevo writes, "What is dramatized in the action of Lear is the opposite of resignation. It is the way in which an erring man's passionate protest against injustice and humiliation affirms human dignity despite the most relentless pressure of cruelty, cynicism, and degradation that can be brought to bear on it" (261).

All of these various attempts to explain the good purpose for the suffering in the play illustrate how problematic suffering is in the play, and how insistently the play raises the questions about undeserved suffering. To interpret the events of the play as showing a benevolent providence which insures poetic justice is to overlook these perplexities. The parallel with the Book of Job enables us to see that the reasons for suffering remain unanswered in the play, as they do in the Book of Job, and that critics distort the play by imposing their own reasons--becoming a better person, salvation, or atonement. Paul J. Alpers responds to the tendency to claim that Lear's suffering is a good: "It seems to me that we must say that Lear's suffering is shocking and heartbreaking" (Hibbard 10).

The second group of critics do not gloss over the pain. These critics, such as Harriett Hawkins, Richard Sewall, and Kenneth Muir see the essential dilemma in King Lear--that there is no justice. Sewall writes that Lear "is plunged into the middle of Job's problem: effect is out of all proportion to cause; justice has lost its meaning" (75). Muir argues that Shakespeare "rejected the simple notions of poetic justice": "The evil characters all come to a violent end, but so do most of the good characters. Shakespeare is not showing a particular Providence 'protecting the Good and chastising the Bad'" (Shakespeare's Tragic Sequence 138). Hawkins
concludes that since the evil characters suffer very little and the good characters receive no reward that Shakespeare is portraying an "indifferent universe (168) and "a world without any divine order" (171): "Certainly no gods in this tragedy will intervene to prevent the rejection of all human values, nor will they intervene to punish those who reject these values" (164).

Critics such as John D. Rosenberg, William Elton, Jan Kott, Wylie Sypher, and Nicholas Brooke also stress the absence of cosmic justice, but they conclude too hastily that because there is no justice, there is no meaning. Rosenberg stresses "the play's resolute rejection of justice on earth" (144) and criticizes those critics who find cosmic justice in the play: "The more the critics attempt to justify the ways of the gods in King Lear, the more appalling the gods and the play become . . . Like Job's pharisaical comforters, those critics who find 'poetic justice' in King Lear are guilty of a morally shocking reading of the play" (139). Although Rosenberg is correct in his analysis of the play's rejection of poetic justice and the redemption of Lear, he goes one step too far in claiming that King Lear suggests nothingness: "King Lear asserts nothing; though it questions everything. It poses for our staggered imaginations the possibility that the cosmos is amoral, perhaps malevolent, more likely a vast nothing" (137). He calls "Lear's dying in the deluded hope that Cordelia lives . . . the last and cruelest of the play's mockeries" (144). Rosenberg softens this interpretation somewhat by suggesting that Shakespeare does not reject "a possible world beyond horror and tragedy" (144), citing the recognition scene between Lear and Cordelia and Lear's speech to Cordelia, 'Come,
let's away to prison . . ."

William Elton also sees in the play "a bewildered sense of injustice" (261). Like Rosenberg, he criticizes those who have underestimated the complexity of the play, and he particularly questions two assertions of optimistic Christian interpretations of King Lear: 1) that the protagonist moves toward redemption, and 2) that presiding over the human action is a benevolent or personal providence. However, Christian interpretations do not need to be optimistic or to assert either that the protagonist is redeemed or that the play shows a benevolent, just providence. The play may be understood in the light of a Christian humanism which does not expect that good is rewarded or evil punished in this life. In concluding that Lear is "Un-Joblike," Elton is departing from the many critics who see a parallel between King Lear and the Book of Job (263), but perhaps this is because he associates Job with humility and patience. I agree with Elton that the play probes the mystery of human suffering in all its complexity: "the double plot is an instrument of complexity, the assurance of a multifaceted ambivalence which, contrary to the salvation hypothesis, probes and tests, without finally resolving, its argument of mysterious human suffering" (Hibbard 9-10). Elton sees no justice and concludes there is no meaning. Elton fails to see that it is possible not only for a sceptic, but for a fundamentally religious person, such as Job, to see suffering as mysterious and to raise questions about the justice of God.

According to Battenhouse, critics like Elton are "presupposing that a Christian world order must involve a divine justice like that of eighteenth-century 'poetic justice'; and hence, that if a dramatist presents us a less
'reasonable' and more mysterious kind of order, his vision is un-Christian" (138). As Fortin writes, "if the absence of visible supernatural intervention is to be the cudgel to beat down Christian interpretations--or Christian interpreters--one had better take a second look at the traditional beliefs of Christianity, for it is not at all presumed in the mainstream of Christian orthodoxy that God will intervene on call for his faithful" ("Hermeneutical Circularity" 118).

Jan Kott calls King Lear a Beckettian Endgame. He sees a parallel between King Lear and the Book of Job in the theme of downfall: "all the characters must be uprooted from their social positions and pulled down, to final degradation. They must reach rock-bottom" (110). In Gloucester's attempted suicide, as in the Book of Job, he sees "a protest against undeserved suffering and the world's injustice" (107). According to Kott, what distinguishes the Book of Job from King Lear is that in King Lear the gods do not exist: "the gods do not intervene . . . Gradually the tone becomes more and more ironical. The ruin of a man invoking God is ever more ridiculous" (115). According to Kott, it is because the gods do not exist that Lear and Gloucester become absurd. Wylie Sypher also concludes that there are no gods and therefore no meaning: "Lear suffers the afflictions of Job, but this drama has no Jehovah" (170). According to Sypher, the play is an expression of nihilism: "Lear's question why a rat should have life and Cordelia none confirms that there is no operative justice. Lear has passed across the border of meaning into a frightening, inscrutable nihilism in drama" (57).
Nicholas Brooke emphasizes the pain of the ending and its rejection of poetic justice, particularly in the death of Cordelia. He focuses on the last scene and asks that critics not look "harder at the fourth act than the fifth" (75). He sees the record of criticism on King Lear as "a long series of strenuous efforts to circumvent the pain; and it is accompanied by a will to release large and encouraging affirmations once the pain is evaded" (77). Brooke is correct in showing that the ending is painful and that some critics gloss over this pain; however, he assumes that lack of poetic justice in this life means, as Kott claims, that there are no gods and no ultimate order. He writes that the "ultimate order implied in poetic justice" is rejected in the death of Cordelia (77). According to Brooke, King Lear fails "to justify God's ways to man, to make the mysterious less inscrutable," since the play shows "no hint of the ultimate benignity of the gods" (74). The Job parallel makes it evident that suffering and the ways of God remain inscrutable in the play, but Brooke goes further, concluding that there is no ultimate order and therefore no hope: "Johnson was surely right to find this one unbearable . . . We are driven to see . . .the absolute negation of all forms of hope" (86). He claims that "The greatness of King Lear is in the perfect completeness of its negation" (86). He thinks that the end of the play is "its only final statement: that provides an emblem which sums up all, Lear dying with the dead Cordelia in his arms" (78), but the final scene does not sum up the entire play or negate the affirmations which have come before. Although Brooke says that it is "hard to justify a view of the play that finds in it a final affirmation of positive values" (74), he himself acknowledges that "while there is no order . . . there are values, good as
well as evil" (87). Lear's grief and the unexpected shock of this final disaster do not negate the hope which comes from the lives of the good characters, acts of compassion, and Lear's realization that love and forgiveness are more important than power and that everyone has human limits and a bond with other human beings.

King Lear, then, is a Job story which raises the same questions as the Book of Job. Ultimately the answers in the play are similar to those in the Book of Job—that although suffering and cruelty are inexplicable and the gods do not intervene to reward the good and punish the evil, life is not meaningless. Interpretations of King Lear which try to show suffering as having a good purpose overlook the enigmatic nature of the suffering, whereas interpretations which conclude that the entire play conveys meaninglessness and despair overlook the fact that, as in the Book of Job, although suffering is problematic, life is not viewed as meaningless.
CHAPTER II
MOBY DICK: A JOB'S WHALE

As in King Lear and the Book of Job, the problem of undeserved suffering is a central issue in Moby-Dick. Unlike King Lear, the Job parallel in Moby-Dick is explicit. Ishmael puts the whole chase of the whale in the context of the Book of Job: "Here, then, was this grey-headed, ungodly old man, chasing with curses a Job's whale round the world" (162). Moby Dick is a Job's whale because he represents to Ahab all the evil and suffering of humankind: "all the subtle demonisms of life and thought; all evil, to crazy Ahab, were visibly personified, and made practically assailable in Moby Dick. He piled upon the whale's white hump the sum of all the general rage and hate felt by his whole race from Adam down" (160). Ahab, like Job and Lear, sees the injustice of undeserved suffering--that life is full of sorrow, that misfortunes strike unfairly, and that nature is hostile--and Moby Dick becomes for him the symbol of the evil and suffering in the world.

Not only is the Job parallel explicit, but Melville was also deeply influenced by Shakespeare and particularly King Lear. He reread Shakespeare while he was transforming Moby-Dick from an adventure story to "a vast adventure of the human soul" (Holman 478). He was fascinated by the glimpses of truth which he found in Shakespeare, "short,
quick probings at the very axis of reality" ("Hawthorne" 541-42). Melville uses Lear as an example of Shakespeare's ability to insinuate "the things we feel to be so terrifically true":

Tormented into desperation, Lear the frantic King tears off the mask, and speaks the sane madness of vital truth. ("Hawthorne" 541-42)

Charles Olson writes that Melville looks for truth in characters "who suffered as Job suffered--Lear and Edgar and Gloucester" (49). The chapter, "The Cabin," is a Shakespearean scene in which Ahab and Pip parallel King Lear and the Fool. Ahab and Lear are both driven mad by suffering. Ahab is a fool, as Lear is: "what a forty years' fool--fool--old fool, has old Ahab been" (444). As the Fool has a curing effect on Lear's foolishness, Pip has a curing effect on Ahab's madness, and Ahab, like the mad Lear, speaks truth in snatches: "There is that in thee, poor lad, which I feel too curing to my malady. Like cures like; and for this hunt, my malady becomes my most desired health . . . " (436).

This chapter will explore the ways in which the Joban theme is developed further in Moby-Dick. First, in Moby-Dick suffering becomes, not just the undeserved suffering of one individual, but the suffering of all humanity. Secondly, suffering is portrayed as more random and meaningless than in the Book of Job or King Lear. Thirdly, the hostile nature of the world is portrayed, not as an aberration, but as the way nature is, and fourthly, Ahab as Job figure goes beyond Job and Lear in that he is not just questioning but defying God. His relationship with God is more antagonistic than theirs.
Next, this chapter will examine how the theological questions raised by Melville's development of the Joban theme are similar to those in the Book of Job and *King Lear* but more radical. First, *Moby-Dick* questions not only whether God is just but whether God is malicious. Secondly, it questions more directly than *King Lear* the existence of God. Thirdly, it extends the theme of Wisdom literature that the ways of God are inscrutable, so that God is here even more distant and hidden than in the Book of Job or *King Lear*. Fourthly, it questions the meaning of life, although it concludes, as do the Book of Job and *King Lear*, that life is not meaningless. These questions follow each other logically because undeserved suffering raises questions about the nature of God and even the possibility that God does not exist. If God does exist and allows evil, then God is inscrutable, and the thought that God is so unknowable that he might as well not exist leads to the question of whether life has meaning.

First of all, in exploring the problem of undeserved suffering Melville focuses more on the human dilemma in general and less on the suffering of one individual. Ahab's feud with the White Whale is intensely personal, leading Starbuck to say that he doesn't want to follow his "commander's vengeance" (143), yet Ahab's feud is so intense precisely because his grievance against the White Whale includes more than his own personal suffering. In *Moby-Dick* Job's protest against the injustice of his personal suffering broadens to include all the evil and suffering experienced by humankind, as Maurice Friedman has observed: "Job's protest against the injustice of his innocent suffering here becomes the outrageous suffering and evil experienced by mankind and piled by Captain Ahab on the hump of
the White Whale, and it is this which makes Moby Dick a 'Job's whale'' (143). This development of the Joban theme begins in the Book of Job itself, as Elioise Behnken writes: "In the later chapters of the poetic discourse Job stretches his personal case to include all humanity, and the scope of the questions moves from innocent suffering to the broad one of the rationale for why things happen in the world" (40). Job's personal suffering becomes representative of the way things happen in a world where human life is full of suffering. Job sees the radical temporality and finitude of human life: "Man that is born of a woman is of a few days, and full of trouble. He comes forth like a flower, and withers; he flees like a shadow, and continues not" (14:1-2). Ahab echoes Job when he says, "From storm to storm! . . . Born in throes, 'tis fit that man should live in pains and die in pangs! (359-60). On the last day of the chase Ahab says: "Were I the wind, I'd blow no more on such a wicked, miserable world" (460). Ahab sees that there is more grief than joy and that grief multiplies itself more than joy: "he too plainly seemed to see, that equally with every felicity, all miserable events do naturally beget their like. Yea, more than equally, thought Ahab; since both the ancestry and posterity of Grief go further than the ancestry and posterity of Joy" (385). Moreover, felicities have a certain pettiness about them, while sorrows have a grandness, since they come from the gods: "The gods themselves are not for ever glad. The ineffaceable, sad birthmark in the brow of man, is but the stamp of sorrow in the signers" (386). The innocent suffering of Job becomes the human dilemma--a life of sorrow.
Secondly, although the Book of Job and King Lear are stories of unpredictable tragedies and sorrows, suffering in Moby-Dick is even more random and meaningless. In "The Sphynx" chapter, Ahab questions the whale's head attached to the side of the ship, since this whale would have dived into the depths (both literally and figuratively) and would have seen the arbitrary way in which suffering strikes. It would have seen dead sailors who were so young that "sleepless mothers" grieved over their deaths, dead lovers who jumped from a flaming ship, locked in an embrace, "true to each other when heaven seemed false to them," and a murdered mate tossed overboard by pirates (264). It would also have seen that suffering strikes as randomly as lightning--that the murderers sailed on unharmed, while lightning sank a "neighboring ship that would have borne a righteous husband to outstretched, longing arms" (264). Such random and meaningless suffering, Melville seems to say, is enough to make an unbeliever of the most faithful follower of God; or, as Ahab says: "O head! thou hast seen enough to split the planets and make an infidel of Abraham" (264).

The story of the blacksmith, now the ship's carpenter, is another example of the unfairness of events in life. It is a miniature Job story, in which a man has a rich life with many blessings. He was "an artisan of famed excellence, and with plenty to do; owned a house and garden; embraced a youthful, daughter-like, loving wife; and three blithe, ruddy children; every Sunday went to a cheerful-looking church, planted in a grove" (401). In the midst of this cheerful life misfortune struck:
But one night . . . a desperate burglar slid into his happy home, and robbed them all of everything. And darker yet to tell, the blacksmith himself did ignorantly conduct this burglar into his family's heart. It was the Bottle Conjuror! Upon the opening of that fatal cork, forth flew the fiend, and shrivelled up his home. (401)

As in the Job story and King Lear, each disaster is followed by a worse one: "the house was sold; the mother dived down into the long church-yard grass, her children twice followed her thither; and the houseless, familyless old man staggered off a vagabond" (402). Finally, as Job not only loses his goods and his children, but suffers from bodily afflictions, so the blacksmith one bitter winter night on a road between two country towns feels a numbness in his feet and seeks refuge in a dilapidated barn, but frostbite causes the loss of his feet. His life is composed of "four acts of the gladness, and the one long . . . fifth act of the grief of his life's drama" (401). The unfairness of events is shown in that, while the ruined blacksmith, unable to support his family, continues to live, his elder brother, who worked cheerfully and diligently to support his family, died:

Oh, Death, why canst thou not sometimes be timely? Hadst thou taken this old blacksmith to thyself ere his full ruin came upon him, then had the young widow a delicious grief, and her orphans a truly venerable, legendary sire to dream of in their after years . . . But Death plucked down some virtuous elder brother, on whose whistling daily toil solely hung the responsibilities of some other family, and left the worse than useless old man standing, 'til the hideous rot of life should make him easier to harvest." (401)

In Moby-Dick suffering is portrayed through unexpected perils and disasters, and Melville often uses humor and exaggeration to describe these perils. The humor of a tall tale fits with viewing life's disasters as part of a vast practical joke. If God is indifferent or malicious, then human
tragedies are just "part of the general joke": "There are certain queer times and occasions in this strange mixed affair we call life when a man takes this whole universe for a vast practical joke, though the wit thereof he but dimly discerns, and more than suspects that the joke is at nobody's expense but his own . . . And as for small difficulties and worryings, prospects of sudden disaster, peril of life and limb; all these, and death itself, seem to him only sly, good-natured hits, and jolly punches in the side bestowed by the unseen and unaccountable old joker" (195).

If Moby-Dick is in some ways a tall tale, then a whaling voyage, with its exaggerated perils, is a perfect metaphor for the disasters of life. Ishmael's first experience of lowering for a whale uses the techniques of the tale tall. He belongs to the boat of Starbuck, who was supposed to be "uncommonly prudent" and was "famous for his great heedfulness in the fishery." Yet Starbuck insists on trying to harpoon the whale even though a storm is imminent (196). The boat is swamped, and the men are not found until dawn, when they have to jump into the sea to avoid being hit by the ship. As a tall tale exaggerates--"it was a skimpy lunch for Paul Bunyan"--so this wild chase of the whale is claimed to have taken place under the leadership of one of the more prudent mates. After this close brush with death Ishmael makes out his will and, aware of the perils of whaling, is ready for "a cool, collective dive at death and destruction" (197). Melville makes it clear that a whaling voyage is only a metaphor for the unexpected disasters of life. Even a person who seems to be secure, as, for example, someone sitting in front of the fireplace, is really in as much danger and uncertainty as a person who is seated in a whale boat in imminent danger
of becoming entangled in the whale line and pulled out of the boat to their death:

All men live enveloped in whale-lines. All are born with halters round their necks; but it is only when caught in the swift, sudden turn of death, that mortals realize the silent, subtle, ever-present perils of life, and if you be a philosopher, though seated in the whale boat, you would not at heart feel one whit more of terror, than though seated before your evening fire with a poker, and not a harpoon, by your side. (241)

Life is full of misfortune and tragedy, which happens randomly, so that a person is in a kind of precarious situation which can be seen as humorous. For example, Ishmael is attached by a rope to Queequeg, who is working on a slippery whale beside the ship. The rope is supposed to prevent Queequeg from drowning, but if Queequeg were to sink, then Ishmael would also be dragged down, so that, as Ishmael says, "another's mistake or misfortune might plunge innocent me into unmerited disaster and death" (271). Melville sees this as part of the injustice of life. Melville is writing with tongue in cheek when Ishmael calls this "a sort of interregnum in Providence; for its even-handed equity never could have sanctioned so gross an injustice" (271). In fact, Ishmael himself goes on to say that upon "further pondering," he realizes that this is "the precise situation of every mortal that breathes"--what happens to him is dependent on the mistakes of others and the "evil chances of life" (271). Not only is Ishmael's situation an image of life's perils, but Queequeg's situation on the slippery whale is a humorous image of a person in life. He is surrounded by sharks which he tries to fend off with his feet while almost being hit by spears from above. The other harpooneers dart spades at the
sharks from above in an attempt to protect Queequeg from the sharks, but they "come nearer amputating a leg than a tail" (272). Queequeg, in his perilous situation, presents an "image of each and all of us men in this whaling world . . . That unsounded ocean you gasp in, is Life; those sharks, your foes; those spades, your friends; and what between sharks and spades you are in a sad pickle and peril, poor lad" (272).

Thirdly, in Moby-Dick the natural state of the world is cannibalistic. In the Old Testament tradition in which Job was written it was assumed that the natural world which God created was good and thus that innocent suffering did not fit into the scheme of things. In King Lear the divisions between son and father and father and child were seen as unnatural, an aberration of nature, of which Gloucester could say that "the King falls from bias of nature" (I.ii.108). In Moby-Dick, however, nature is hostile and shark-like. In one scene the sharks eat their own entrails. In another scene Stubb has a supper of a whale which he has killed, while sharks tear away huge mouthfuls of the whale beside the ship. The sight of so many sharks taking huge mouthfuls of a dead whale is a reflection of the evil in nature: "If you have never seen that sight, then suspend your decision about the propriety of devil-worship, and the expediency of conciliating the devil" (250). Melville calls it "a part of the universal problem of all things" (249). When Melville writes, "Nor was Stubb the only banqueter on whale's flesh that night," (249) it recalls the language of God about the Leviathan in Job 41:6: "Shall thy companions make a banquet of him?" This is one of the ways in which the claims of God at the end of the Book of Job have been unfulfilled, since Stubb has made a banquet of the whale.
In *Moby-Dick* the imagery of animals heartlessly devouring their prey is used to portray the voraciousness of humans as well as nature. As bestial imagery is used to convey human cruelty in *King Lear*, the way the sharks devour their prey is a reflection of the way the people on board the Pequod act: "were you to turn the whole affair upside down, it would still be pretty much the same thing, that is to say, a shocking sharkish business enough for all parties" (249). Human unkindness is similar to the sharkishness in nature. As the cook says, Stubb is "more of shark dan Massa Shark hisself" (254). The sermon which Stubb makes the cook preach to the sharks applies to humans, who "is sharks, sartin" (251):

"Your woraciousness, fellow-critters, I don't blame ye so much for; dat is natur, and can't be helped; but to gobern dat wicked natur, dat is de pint. You is sharks, sartin" (251). It is ridiculous to preach to sharks and just as useless to preach to humans in such a sharkish world. When Melville describes the whale's "funeral," in which the sharks and the vultures feast on the dead carcass, he is commenting again, not only on the vulturism of nature, but on the cruelty of humanity:

The sea-vultures all in pious mourning, the air-sharks all punctiliously in black or speckled. In life but few of them would have helped the whale, I ween, if peradventure he had needed it; but upon the banquet of his funeral they most piously do pounce. Oh, horrible vulturism of earth! from which not the mightiest whale is free. (262)

Fourthly, Ahab, like Lear, is a Job figure, but Ahab's relationship with God is more antagonistic than that of Job or Lear. Like Job and Lear, Ahab's physical suffering triggers spiritual and intellectual anguish. Ahab's leg is cut off by Moby Dick, and he comes to identify Moby Dick, not
only with "all his bodily woes, but all his intellectual and spiritual
exasperations" (160). Like the blacksmith, Ahab is marked with a misery
that can't be mended. When he asks the blacksmith why the flying sparks
do not burn his flesh, the blacksmith replies: "I am past scorching; not
easily can'st thou scorch a scar" (402-03). Ahab is also marked or scarred
and asks the blacksmith if he can smooth out the seams of misery in his
brow: "if thou could'st, blacksmith, glad enough would I lay my head upon
thy anvil, and feel thy heaviest hammer between my eyes" (403). But that is
the one dent that the blacksmith cannot mend, since it is not only in Ahab's
flesh but in his very being: "aye, man it is unsmoothable; for though thou
only see'st it here in my flesh, it has worked down into the bone of my
skull— that is all wrinkles!" (403). Ahab's physical wound has created a
spiritual one, and it is impossible to heal Ahab's wound in the midst of the
onslaughts of life:

Let it [the ship] leak! I'm all aleak myself. Aye!
leaks in leaks! not only full of leaky casks, but those
leaky casks are in a leaky ship; and that's a far worse
plight than the Pequod's, man. Yet I don't stop to plug
my leak; for who can find it in the deep-loaded hull; or
how hope to plug it, even if found, in this life's howling
gale? (393)

Like Job and Lear, Ahab is stricken, but it is implied that his
suffering is not just allowed by God but more directly caused by God--"so
burned by thee" (416). He is a person who has been marked, as though
burned at the stake: "cut away from the stake, when the fire has
overrunningly wasted all the limbs without consuming them" (109-110) or
as though struck by lightning, which implies an act of God. In fact, he has
"a slender rod-like mark, lividly whitish," like the mark made in a tree
when "the upper lightning tearingly darts down it . . . leaving the tree still greenly alive, but branded" (110).

Job and Lear suffer a personal grievance which becomes representative of universal suffering, and they question the justice of God. Ahab's "feud, like Job's . . . and Lear's, is not entirely his own . . . Like Job and Lear, he saw his own misfortunes as a sign of the common lot; and like them he struck back" (Sewall 102). But Ahab goes beyond Job and Lear in taking upon himself "the universal sorrow of life as personal grievance" (Sedgwick 124). Since Moby Dick has disfigured him, Ahab comes to see the whale as the source, not only of all his personal suffering, but the suffering of all humankind. Ahab transfers the idea of evil "to the abhorred white whale" and then pits himself, "all mutilated, against it" (160). Ahab is not only striking out against Moby Dick for his personal grievance, but since Moby Dick represents for him all the evil in the world, Ahab is also taking upon himself the burden of the suffering of all humanity: "I feel deadly faint, bowed, and humped, as though I were Adam, staggering beneath the piled centuries since Paradise" (444). It is this burden of taking upon himself the suffering of all humankind which causes Ahab's "mighty woe": "moody stricken Ahab stood before them with a crucifixion in his face; in all the nameless regal overbearing dignity of some mighty woe" (111). Starbuck sees in Ahab's eyes a woe so great that Starbuck thinks he could not endure it: "For in his eyes I read some lurid woe would shrivel me up, had I it" (148).

Like Job and Lear, Ahab seeks justice. Ahab seeks truth and justice, and that means to him that, if God is not just, he has to uphold truth and
strike out at God: "Who's over me? Truth hath no confines" (144). Ahab is serving truth, even if that means he has to oppose God. In his sermon about Jonah Father Mapple says, "Woe to him who would not be true, even though to be false were salvation" (50). This suggests that truth transcends even one's relationship to God and that one must be true even at the cost of salvation. Ahab strikes out against the White Whale because Ahab sees the White Whale as representing a divinity which is inscrutable, powerful, and malicious: "I see in him outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing it" (144) The White Whale represents to Ahab the unfathomable nature of God, and it is this inscrutable quality which infuriates Ahab: "That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate" (144). What Moby Dick has done to Ahab represents to him the unfairness of the gods, who, like bullies, have knocked down someone smaller and then disappeared. Like Job and Lear, Ahab questions the justice of God, but the tone of Ahab's questioning is more mocking and defiant: "ye great gods . . . I laugh and hoot at ye, ye cricket-players, ye pugilists . . . I will not say as schoolboys do to bullies,—Take someone of your own size; don't pommel me! No, ye've knocked me down, and I am up again; but ye have run and hidden" (147). Ahab seeks not only justice, as Job does, but revenge: "I now prophesy that I will dismember my dismemberer" (147). He vows to kill Moby Dick, who took off his leg: "it was Moby Dick that dismasted me; Moby Dick that brought me to this dead stump I stand on now. . . it was that accursed white whale that razed me; made a poor pegging lubber of me for ever and a day . . . Aye, aye! and I'll chase him round Good Hope, and round the Horn, and round the
Norway Maelstrom, and round perdition's flames before I give him up"
(143).

In his defiance Ahab goes beyond Job and Lear. Job contends with
God, and Lear questions the justice of God, but Ahab's attitude toward the
gods is defiance: "Oh! thou clear spirit of clear fire, whom on these seas I
as Persian once did worship, till in the sacramental act so burned by thee,
that to this hour I bear the scar; I now know thee, thou clear spirit, and I
now know that thy right worship is defiance" (416). Although Ahab
acknowledges the power of God, he rebels against it: "I own thy speechless,
placeless power; but to the last gasp of my earthquake life will dispute its
unconditional, unintegral mastery in me" (417). He is rebelling against a
divine principle which he sees as malevolent, which he experienced when
he lost his leg in hunting Moby Dick. Ahab blames God for his loss and his
response to this injustice is defiance: "with haughty agony . . . defyingly I
worship thee" (417). In other words, Ahab acknowledges divine power but
rebels against it because of its injustice. This is similar to the attitude of
Ivan Karamazov in The Brothers Karamazov. In Dostoevsky's novel Ivan
accepts God but rebels against him because of injustice. He rejects
salvation because he cannot accept the suffering of humankind. Unlike
Job, whose self-sufficiency is finally converted into a relationship of trust,
Ahab remains defiant and self-sufficient. As Ahab is dying, he looks
toward Moby Dick, defiant: "Towards thee I roll, thou all-destroying but
unconquering whale; to the last I grapple with thee" (468).

Ahab is striking out against God because of injustice. Since the
White Whale represents divinity, Ahab's determination to hunt him is
going against God, which Gabriel, the madman from the Jeroboam, and Starbuck, the first mate, call blasphemy. Gabriel claims that Moby Dick is the Shaker God incarnated and that to try to kill him is blasphemy. Macey, who was intent on hunting Moby Dick in spite of Gabriel's warnings, was sunk by Moby Dick, and Gabriel warns that the same fate awaits Ahab if he hunts Moby Dick. Although Ishmael makes the usual disclaimer that Gabriel is a fanatic with the "power of deceiving and bedeviling" others (267), there is a shadow of truth in his prophecy, which is reminiscent of Elijah's prophecy to Ahab: "Think, think of the blasphemer--dead, and down there!--beware of the blasphemer's end!" (269). To Starbuck seeking vengeance on the White Whale is blasphemy because the whale is unintelligent, with no malice toward Ahab: "Vengeance on a dumb brute!". . . that simply smote thee from blindest instinct! Madness! To be enraged with a dumb thing, Captain Ahab, seems blasphemous" (144). Although Starbuck's perspective is limited because he represents "mere unaided virtue and right mindedness," Ahab's response suggests that there is some validity in Starbuck's claim. Ahab replies that he would seek vengeance, no matter how elevated the thing that wronged him, including, he implies, even God: "Talk not to me of blasphemy, man; I'd strike the sun if it insulted me . . . Who's over me?" (144).

Both Job and Ahab are Promethean in their defiance. Ahab is a "grand, ungodly godlike man" (76)--"ungodly" because he opposes the gods, "godlike" because, like Prometheus, he is grandly defying. He stands up to the gods as an equal. In the words from Father Mapple's sermon, he "stands forth his own inexorable self" against "the proud gods and
commodores of this earth" (51). As Friedman writes, the self is "enthroned in the highest place, identified with truth or the serving of truth. This is Prometheus, enduring endless agonies, yet standing forth his own inexorable self, against Zeus--the proud god of this world" (98), and it is this stance which gives Ahab a certain grandeur and nobility, a "regal dignity." In trying to destroy Moby Dick, which represents to him a divinity responsible for evil, Ahab is serving truth even if it means he has to oppose God. Job sets himself up as the judge of God, and wishes that he could meet God in a fair debate, but in the level of his defiance, and certainly in its dramatic intensity, Ahab goes beyond Job. For example, in "The Candles," Ahab is ready to engage in a fair contest with the gods. In the storm he refuses to drop the lightning rods overboard for the sake of fair play: "let's have fair play here, though we be the weaker side . . . out on privileges!" (415). Ahab's defiance makes him "a mark for thunderbolts," because he is defying God: "As in the hurricane that sweeps the plain, men fly the neighborhood of some lone, gigantic elm, whose very height and strength but render it so much the more unsafe, because so much the more a mark for thunderbolts; so at those last words of Ahab's many of the mariners did run from him in a terror of dismay" (418).

Ahab's monomania is an extension of Job's obsession and Lear's madness. He blames everything, including an injury from his ivory leg, on the original loss of his leg: "Nor, at the time, had it failed to enter his monomaniac mind, that all the anguish of that then present suffering was but the direct issue of a former woe" (385). As a result, his one fixed purpose or monomania is to hunt Moby Dick: "The path to my fixed purpose
is laid with iron rails, whereon my soul is grooved to run" (147). Not only is Ahab obsessed by the one idea of hunting Moby Dick, but he takes madness one step further to the demonic: "They think me mad--Starbuck does; but I'm demoniac, I am madness maddened!" (147). In following his obsession to chase Moby Dick, Ahab turns away from heaven: "Job's answer the world knows; but Ahab, like his spiritual ancestor King Ahab, when confronted with Elijah, hardened his heart by turning from the Lord" (Percival 88). Ahab refuses to be guided by heaven, as when he dashes the quadrant to the deck: "cursed be all the things that cast man's eyes aloft to that heaven . . . Curse thee, thou quadrant! . . . no longer will I guide my earthly way by thee" (412). The Parsee has a look of "sneering triumph" when Ahab says: "I trample on thee, thou paltry thing that feebly pointest on high" (412). The Parsee represents the demonic influence on Ahab. Stubb thinks that the Parsee is the devil in disguise, driving Ahab on against all natural longings in his chase of Moby Dick: "the old man is hard bent after that White Whale, and the devil there is trying to come round him, and get him to swap away his silver watch, or his soul, or something of that sort, and then he'll surrender Moby Dick" (275). Fedallah is Satan-Mephistopheles and Ahab is Job-Faust. In his defiance against the trinity of flames, Ahab's foot is on the Parsee, indicating that his defiance is demonic: "he put his foot upon the Parsee; and with fixed upward eyes, and high-flung right arm, he stood erect before the lofty tri-pointed trinity of flames" (416). Ahab baptizes his harpoon with blood in the name of the devil. The monomaniac passion with which he has chased the
white whale is demonic, as Ahab himself says: "Ahab has furiously, foamingly chased his prey--more a demon than a man!" (444).

**Moby-Dick**, then, represents a further development of the Joban theme in that it focuses more on the human dilemma and less on the suffering of an individual, portrays suffering as random and meaningless, nature as hostile, and the relationship of the Job figure with God as more antagonistic. Now we will examine the ways in which the theological questions which arise from Melville's development of the Joban theme are more radical than those in the Book of Job or **King Lear**.

First, Melville's novel questions the nature of God in a more radical way than either the Book of Job or **King Lear**. The question which is raised in **Moby-Dick** is the same as that in **King Lear**—what kind of God would allow evil?—but **Moby-Dick** uses stronger language and does not just question the nature of God but is an indictment of God, suggesting that evil is the result of God's malicious intent. In his confusion in trying to explain the cruelty of his daughters, Lear questions whether God is somehow involved. Lear looks to nature to find a cause for his daughters' cruelty—"Is there any cause in nature that makes these hard hearts?" (III.vi.75-76). But whereas Lear merely wonders, Ahab looks at the cannibalism of nature as an indictment of God:

Look! see yon Albicore! who put it into him to chase and fang that flying-fish? Where do murderers go, man! Who's to doom, when the judge himself is dragged to the bar? (445)

Lear raises the question whether it is the gods that are responsible for evil—"if it be you that stirs these daughters' hearts" (II.iv.267-71)—whereas in
Moby-Dick Queequeg does not just raise the question of whether God is responsible for evil, but looks at the sharkish nature of the world and concludes that the God who created it must be "one dam Ingin":

Queequeg no care what god made him shark . . . wedder Fejee god or Nantucket god; but de god wat made shark must be one dam Ingin. (257)

It is an understatement when Melville writes that Queequeg cherished his idol, Yojo, "with considerable esteem, as a rather good sort of god, who perhaps meant well enough upon the whole, but in all cases did not succeed in his benevolent designs" (66).

God is portrayed as indifferent to humankind's fate, even assisting the devil. To explain why Fedallah, a devil figure, has such an influence on Ahab, Stubb tells a version of the story of Job in which God, the old governor, easily gives--not Job--but John to the swaggering devil:

Well, they say as how he went a sauntering into the old flag-ship once, switching his tail about devilish easy and gentlemanlike, and inquiring if the old governor was at home. Well, he was at home, and asked the devil what he wanted. The devil, switching his hoofs, up and says, 'I want John.' 'What for?' says the old governor. 'What business is that of yours,' says the devil, getting mad,--'I want to use him.' 'Take him,' says the governor--and by the Lord, Flask, if the devil didn't give John the Asiatic cholera before he got through with him." (276)

In Stubb's version of the Job story God is intimidated by the devil and lets the devil do whatever he wants. Stubb claims that he would stand up to the devil, even give him "a pair of black eyes," while God, who is afraid of the devil, not only doesn't control evil, but even does what he can to assist the
devil in his plans to make people suffer, agreeing to roast for the devil all
the people that he kidnaps:

Damn the devil, Flask; do you suppose I'm afraid of the devil? Who's afraid of him, except the old governor
who daresn't catch him and put him in double-darbies, as he deserves, but lets him go about kidnapping people;
aye, and signed a bond with him, that all the people the devil kidnapped, he'd roast for him? There's a
governor! (277)

The indifference of God is also portrayed by Pip's abandonment in the
ocean. Pip, a simple ship's boy, jumped from Stubb's boat in the midst of a
whale chase, and was left alone in the ocean. The image of Pip abandoned
in the vast ocean is similar to the image of Lear in the storm. Both are
images of humankind alone in the universe, abandoned by God:

Out from the centre of the sea, poor Pip turned his crisp, curling, black head to the sun, another lonely
castaway, though the loftiest and the brightest. Now, in calm weather, to swim in the open ocean is as easy to the
practised swimmer as to ride in a spring-carriage ashore. But the awful lonesomeness is intolerable. The intense concentration of self in the middle of such a heartless immensity, my God! who can tell it? (347)

Both Pip and Lear are lonely castaways, and the vast ocean, "a heartless immensity," is indifferent to Pip, as the storm was indifferent to Lear.

What Pip experienced in the ocean is similar to what Lear experienced in the storm—a sense of being abandoned by a God who seems indifferent. Overwhelmed by being abandoned in an uncaring universe, Pip becomes an idiot: "The sea had jeeringly kept his finite body up, but drowned the infinite of his soul" (347). His madness is a result of encountering the mysteries of God's creation: "He saw God's foot upon the treadle of the loom, and spoke it; and therefore his shipmates called him
mad" (347). Pip had seen the Wisdom of God: "The miser man, Wisdom, revealed his hoarded heaps" (347). What he learned abandoned in the ocean made him sad, as he says later: "Seek out one Pip, who's now been missing long . . . if ye find him, then comfort him; for he must be very sad; for look! he's left his tambourine behind;--I found it" (397). What he had learned was the indifference of God, and he becomes "indifferent as his God" to good luck or misfortune (347).

The image of Pip in the ocean is similar to the image of Lear in the storm, both suggesting abandonment by the gods. In Shakespeare the image stands by itself, but Melville explores the image in language which indicts the gods for their indifference as creators who abandon their creation. Pip demonstrates that the omniscient gods are oblivious of the suffering of humankind, as Ahab says: "Lo! ye believers in gods all goodness, and in man all ill, lo you! see the omniscient gods oblivious of suffering man; and man, though idiotic, and knowing not what he does, yet full of the sweet things of love and gratitude" (428). Ahab feels the heavens abandoned Pip: "Oh, ye frozen heavens! look down here. Ye did beget this luckless child, and have abandoned him, ye creative libertines" (428). Ahab feels a bond with Pip, since he also feels abandoned by the gods: "Thou touchest my inmost centre, boy; thou art tied to me by cords woven of my heart-strings" (428).

The ship's carpenter, a jack-of-all-trades, also portrays the way the gods are ready to abandon their creation. Ahab calls the carpenter unprincipled, one day creating life, and another day, abandoning his creation. Ahab asks the ship's carpenter: "art thou not an arrant, all-
grasping, inter-meddling, monopolizing, heathenish old scamp, to be one
day making legs, and the next day coffins to clap them in, and yet again
life-buoys out of those same coffins? Thou art as unprincipled as the gods,
and as much of a jack-of-all-trades" (432). The carpenter replies: "But I do
not mean anything, sir. I do as I do," and Ahab replies: "The gods again"
(432). In other words, the gods don't mean any harm--they just do whatever
they want without regard for humankind. When Ahab sees a dying sperm
whale turn his head to the sun, as though he is invoking God, his thought
is that God, a jack-of-all-trades, creates life, but allows death and disaster:
"In vain, oh whale, dost thou seek intercedings with yon all-quickening
sun, that only calls forth life, but gives it not again" (409).

Although the idea that the gods maliciously impose suffering on
humanity is expressed in King Lear--"As flies to wanton boys are we to th'
gods/ They kill us for their sport" (IV.i.36-37)--it is more pervasive in Moby-
Dick, which explores the idea that God is "one dam Injin"--creating a
hostile world, indifferent, even oblivious, to the suffering of humankind,
and ready to abandon his creation. Moby Dick is a symbol of the divinity
which Ahab associates with malevolence, "that intangible malignity which
has been from the beginning" (160), but as Friedman writes, "It was not to
Ahab alone that the White Whale seemed malicious, but to everyone. When
Ishmael tells us what Moby Dick symbolizes to Ahab, we cannot dismiss it
as merely the aberration of a distracted, inflamed mind" (105). Not only
Ahab's perspective, but more objective accounts, using phrases such as "No
wonder, then" (156), "according to specific accounts" (159), "Judge, then"
(159) and "Small reason was there to doubt then" (160), suggest that the
White Whale is associated, not only with divinity, but with malignity. Moby Dick seems to have an "intelligent malignity": "such seemed the White Whale's infernal aforethought of ferocity, that every dismembering or death that he caused, was not wholly regarded as having been inflicted by an unintelligent agent" (159). Moby Dick assaults Ahab with as little regard as a mower for a blade of grass, in an apparently malicious way: "Moby Dick had reaped away Ahab's leg, as a mower a blade of grass in the field. No turbaned Turk, no hired Venetian or Malay, could have smote him with more seeming malice" (160).

Sometimes Melville uses the sperm whale as a vehicle to prove the power, intelligence, and maliciousness of divinity. In one story, for example, an incident proves that a sperm whale is "sufficiently powerful, knowing, and judiciously malicious, as with direct aforethought to stave it, utterly destroy, and sink a large ship" (178). In this story a commodore of an American war ship, dining with some whaling captains, denied that any whale "could so smite his ship as to cause her to leak so much as a thimbleful" (179). Some weeks later his ship was hit by a sperm whale, as though to deliberately make him acknowledge the power of the whale. This incident is compared to that of Saul's conversion, implying that the whale is a divinity:

the Commodore . . . was stopped on the way by a portly sperm whale, that begged a few moments' confidential business with him. That business consisted in fetching the Commodore's craft such a thwack, that with all his pumps going he made straight for the nearest port to heave down and repair . . . I consider the Commodore's interview with that whale as providential.
Was not Saul of Tarsus converted from unbelief by a similar fright? (179)

The White Whale is a powerful and malicious divinity which brings retribution in a sudden and violent way. The death of Macey is described as though Moby Dick's action is retribution for Macey's determination to kill him, since the mate is knocked out of the boat into the sea, but nothing else is harmed:

lo! a broad white shadow rose from the sea . . . the luckless mate . . . was smitten bodily into the air, and making a long arc in his descent, fell into the sea at the distance of about fifty yards. Not a chip of the boat was harmed, nor a hair of any oarsman's head; but the mate for ever sank. (268)

In another instance, Radney, a brutal and overbearing mate, had insulted Steelkilt, a man who was the head of one of the pump gangs, by insisting that he sweep the deck--a menial task--and get a shovel to "remove some offensive matters consequent upon allowing a pig to run at large" (212). When Steelkilt refused, it started a mutiny. When the mutiny was over, the captain planned to punish Steelkilt, but Steelkilt hissed: "if you flog me, I murder you!" (219). Although the captain did not dare to flog Steelkilt, Radney did. Steelkilt was planning his revenge on Radney, when Moby Dick was spied, and in the chase Radney was thrown out of his boat. Radney was "wildly seeking to remove himself from the eye of Moby Dick. But the whale rushed round in a sudden maelstrom; seized the swimmer between the jaws" (222). This account suggests that Moby Dick saw the brutal mate and deliberately seized him between his jaws in retribution for the brutality that Radney had perpetrated on Steelkilt.
At times it appears that Moby Dick does not evince his maliciousness or ferocity except when attacked, but he is actually bent on destruction. For example, the first appearance of Moby Dick is described as beautiful and calm: "A gentle joyousness—a mighty mildness of repose in swiftness, invested the gliding whale" (447). Yet Melville says that this first impression of calmness and loveliness is deceiving and that many sailors had found "that quietude but the vesture of tornadoes": "Yet calm, enticing calm, oh whale! thou glidest on, to all who for the first time eye thee, no matter how many in that same way thou may'st have bejuggled and destroyed before" (447-48). Moby Dick had been known when swimming away from his pursuers "to turn around suddenly" and "either stave their boats to splinters, or drive them back in consternation to their ship" (159). In Ahab's first encounter with Moby Dick, he strikes at Moby Dick before the whale cuts off his leg, but this was after Moby Dick had already smashed the boats of Ahab and his men. When Ahab strikes at the whale "blindly seeking with a six inch blade to reach the fathom-deep life of the whale," it is a blind and helpless attempt to fight back at an overwhelmingly powerful opponent (159).

In Ahab's final encounter with Moby Dick the whale is described as a powerful and malicious deity. When the ship finally encounters Moby Dick, the White Whale is portrayed as a deity: "not Jove, not that great majesty Supreme! did surpass the glorified White Whale as he so divinely swam" (447). As Moby Dick rises from the water, Melville writes: "the grand god revealed himself" (448). Not only is Moby Dick divine, but he is malicious. He cuts the boat in two as though he possesses a "malicious intelligence"
"both jaws, like an enormous shears . . . bit the craft completely in twain" (449). Moby Dick's final act of destroying the ship is described as retribution and malice: "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 forehead smote the ship's starboard bow, till men and timbers reeled" (468). The sinking ship is described as "god-bullied" (468).

In a letter to Hawthorne just after Moby-Dick was published, Melville says: "I have written a wicked book, and feel spotless as the lamb" (Young 397). This refers to the fact that, as Braswell writes, "Melville's inability to account for evil had made him conclude that the Christian conception of a wholly benevolent Deity is wrong, and he had arrived at the point where he could give full artistic expression to his heretical view without suffering pangs of conscience" (73).

Secondly, Moby-Dick questions, not only the nature of God, but whether God exists at all. Although Job contends with God, he does not question his existence. The question of the existence of the gods is implicit in King Lear because the gods do not intervene to prevent the undeserved suffering of the righteous. In Moby-Dick the questioning of the existence of God is more direct. Ahab, using the transcendental idea of correspondences, thinks that all visible objects are "pasteboard masks," symbols of something transcendent (144). Essentially this is Emerson's argument that all natural facts are symbols of spiritual truths (Bluestein 111), although Melville is no Transcendentalist, because for him there is always an epistemological gap between the human and the transcendent (Sherrill 102). Ahab suggests that Moby Dick is a mask or wall for the
transcendent, either a visible symbol of an invisible God or divinity itself--agent or principal. But Ahab also raises the possibility that God may not exist at all: "Sometimes I think there's naught beyond" (144). For Ishmael the whiteness of the whale is associated with divinity, "a symbol of the divine spotlessness and power," but also with the possibility of nothingness: "it shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of the universe, and thus stabs us from behind with the thought of annihilation" (169). It is associated with the blankness of atheism: "a colorless, all-color of atheism from which we shrink" (169). The whiteness of the whale is an elusive quality, associated with divinity but also with "the possibility--not the certainty--that behind the immensities of the universe there is a blank void of nothingness, of No-God" (Friedman 69).

The questions Melville raises in Moby-Dick are part of his personal religious struggles. He was filled with scepticism and religious perplexity. Five years after the publication of Moby-Dick Hawthorne wrote that Melville "can neither believe, nor be comfortable in his unbelief":

Melville, as he always does, began to reason of Providence and futurity, and of everything else that lies beyond human ken, and informed me that he had "pretty much made up his mind to be annihilated"; but still he does not seem to rest in that anticipation; and, I think, will never rest until he gets hold of a definite belief. It is strange how he persists--and has persisted ever since I knew him, and probably long before--in wandering to-and-fro over these deserts, as dismal and monotonous as the sand hills amid which we were sitting. (432-33)

In Moby-Dick Melville's questions about the existence of God are explored as a logical next step in trying to explain what kind of God would allow
such suffering in the world. God may be indifferent or malicious or perhaps even nonexistent. But the idea that God may not exist is raised briefly and as only a possibility.

Thirdly, if God does exist and the world is full of evil, then God is inscrutable, and *Moby-Dick* explores this possibility at great length. The novel shares with Wisdom literature of the Old Testament the concept of the unfathomable nature of God, but in *Moby-Dick* God is more distant and hidden than in the Book of Job or *Moby-Dick*. Job 28 is about the inaccessibility of wisdom:

> But where shall wisdom be found?  
> And where is the place of understanding?  
> Man does not know the way to it,  
> and it is not found in the land of the living.  
> The deep says, "It is not in me,"  
> and the sea says, "It is not with me" (12-14).

In writing *Moby-Dick* Melville was influenced by the Book of Job and by Ecclesiastes, which are both examples of Wisdom literature and have a similar tone and message: "a universe which . . . is not only amoral but inscrutable . . . is essentially the view of the universe expressed by Hebrew Wisdom writers" (Wright 192). In Melville's 1850 Bible, the Book of Job has forty-seven verses marked or annotated, almost all of them dealing with "the darkness of life" or "the inscrutability of God" (Holman 479). The Leviathan passage in Job 41 is marked several times (Wright 10-11). Melville was also influenced by Ecclesiastes, which is closely related to the Book of Job. Melville wrote to Hawthorne: "I read Solomon more and more and every time see deeper and deeper unspeakable meanings in him" (Herbert 19). In *Moby-Dick* Melville reveals how important Ecclesiastes is
to his thoughts about suffering and meaning in life: "All is vanity. ALL. This wilful world hath not got hold of unchristian Solomon's wisdom yet" (355). The theme of Ecclesiastes is the inscrutability of the ways of God: "God's wisdom is so inscrutable that, from the human angle of vision, life has no rhyme or reason" (Anderson 503). Life seems to turn in a circle of futility. Although a person longs to understand the ways of God, human wisdom cannot fathom the purposes of God: "he has put eternity into man's mind, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end" (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Ecclesiastes concludes that since the righteous suffer and the wicked are rewarded, God seems hidden and life seems meaningless. Since human beings "cannot peer beyond the veil that hides the purpose of the Eternal God from human understanding," they are "overwhelmed with the ultimate meaninglessness of human existence" (Anderson 504).

The Leviathan of the Book of Job was associated with the unfathomable nature of God: "In Protestant thought, particularly in Melville's day, the Leviathan reference in the Forty-first chapter of Job was considered . . . as symbolic of God, and of God's inscrutable power" (Thompson 171). The Leviathan was originally thought to be a whale, and although this assumption had been challenged in Melville's time, Melville used it to link the whale in Moby-Dick with the Leviathan of the Book of Job, and, consequently, with the unfathomable nature of God (Young 389). Melville explicitly makes this association of the Leviathan with the unfathomable when he writes that "the great Leviathan is that one creature in the world which must remain unpainted to the last" (228). As Job's questioning of
God is answered by God's reminding him that he cannot capture the Leviathan, so Ishmael realizes that his task in trying to classify the various species of whales is difficult:

What am I that I should essay to hook the nose of this leviathan! The awful tauntings in Job might well appal me. "Will he" [the leviathan] "make a covenant with thee? Behold the hope of him is vain!" (118)

The Leviathan in the book of Job is a fearful creature which the Lord says that only he can control. Ahab is "a great lord of Leviathans" (114) because in hunting Moby Dick, he dares to confront the unfathomable. Ahab is playing God in assuming that he can "draw out Leviathan with a fishhook" (Job 41:1). When the three boats of the Pequod have a whale captured beneath the water, it reminds Ishmael of the unfulfillment of God's statement that the Leviathan could not be captured. Since the Leviathan represents God's great power, capturing it with such ease brings into question the claims of God from the whirlwind that he is powerful and that humankind should recognize his authority in the universe:

Seems it credible that by three such thin threads the great Leviathan was suspended like the big weight to an eight day clock. Suspended? and to what? To three bits of board. Is this the creature of whom it was once so triumphantly said--"Canst thou fill his skin with barbed irons? or his head with fish-spears? The sword of him that layeth at him cannot hold, the spear, the dart, nor the habergeon: he esteemeth iron as straw; the arrow cannot make him flee; darts are counted as stubble; he laugheth at the shaking of a spear!" This the creature? this he? Oh! that unfulfilments should follow the prophets. (300)
Although the whaling industry had undercut the claims about the Leviathan in the speeches of God which Melville quoted from Job 41:4 and 26-29, the White Whale remains uncaptured and mysterious to the end.

Moby-Dick shares the theme of Wisdom literature that the ways of God are inscrutable, but in Moby-Dick God is conceived as more powerful and inscrutable than in the Book of Job or King Lear. Ishmael encounters "unfathomable waters" in trying to classify whales, since the whale represents divinity and there is an "impenetrable veil covering our knowledge" of whales (117). The nature of God is mysterious, and there is no way of finding out exactly what the whale, or God, looks like—he is inscrutable. What's more, if one gets too close in trying to find out about him, it is dangerous: "there is no earthly way of finding out precisely what the whale really looks like. And the only mode in which you can derive even a tolerable idea of his living contour, is by going a whaling yourself; but by so doing, you run no small risk of being eternally stove and sunk by him. Wherefore, it seems to me you had best not be too fastidious in your curiosity touching this Leviathan" (228).

The mystery about the nature of the whale suggests the mystery about the nature of God. It is even a mystery whether the whale spout is water or vapor, and it is not wise to come too close to find out, since if one comes too close, the spout will burn the skin: "Nor is it at all prudent for the hunter to be over curious touching the precise nature of the whale spout" (313). Paralleling the idea that if you see God, it will blind you, Ishmael says, "if the jet is fairly spouted into your eyes, it will blind you. The wisest thing the investigator can do then, it seems to me, is to let this deadly spout
alone" (313). Ishmael himself concludes that "the spout is nothing but mist" because of "the great inherent dignity and sublimity of the Sperm Whale" (313), suggesting that the sperm whale is divine. The sperm whale is portrayed as the Diety with god-like dignity and dread powers: "But in the great Sperm Whale, this high and mighty god-like dignity inherent in the brow is so immensely amplified, that gazing on it, in that full front view, you feel the Diety and the dread powers more forcibly than in beholding any other object in living nature" (292).

Ishmael, after all his analysis of whales, finally cannot comprehend the whale, as God cannot be comprehended: "Dissect him how I may, then, I but go skin deep; I know him not, and never will" (318). Ishmael says that he can only see the back of the whale, not his face: "Thou shalt see my back parts, my tail, he seems to say, but my face shall not be seen" (318). This parallels the revelation to Moses at Sinai in Exodus 18-34:8. Moses was sheltered in a cleft of the rock while Yahweh "passed by," showing his glory, and God put his hand over the cleft until he had passed by, so that Moses would see his back but not his face. Ishmael goes beyond the Biblical account, because not only can he not see the face of the whale, but he thinks that the whale has no face: "But I cannot completely make out his back parts; and hint what he will about his face, I say again he has no face" (318). There remains mystery about the nature of God. Is God benevolent or malicious? Moreover, if God "has no face," perhaps there isn't a God at all.

In concluding that it is impossible to grasp the truth about the ways of God, Melville is opposing the view of liberal theology that the ways of God
could be understood through human reason and the design of the universe. No matter how much Ishmael tries to classify the whale scientifically, it is finally inscrutable. Even though the nineteenth-century whaling industry succeeded in capturing and selling the whale, Moby Dick remained invincible, just as the meaning of the whale could not be captured. When Ishmael observes nature, what he finds is not, as the liberal theologians insisted, examples of the benevolence of God, but examples of the cannibalism of the universe. Melville is also opposing the view of Calvinism, which used the concept of God's inscrutability to show that God is actually just. The inscrutability of God in Moby-Dick is associated with indifference, caprice, injustice, and even malevolence. Melville is rejecting the Calvinistic concept that God, though all-powerful, is benevolent. In fact, when Ahab identifies the whale as powerful, malicious, and inscrutable, Melville is using the view of Calvin's critics that Calvin's doctrine makes God a monster who is responsible for evil.

Melville, in concluding that the ways of God are inscrutable, opposed the theologies of his day—both Calvinism and liberal theology. Some critics, such as Lawrance Thompson, see Moby-Dick as anti-Christian. Thompson concludes that Melville's goal was to tell a story which would illuminate "his personal declaration of independence not only from the tyranny of Christian dogma but also from the sovereign tyranny of God Almighty" (147). Thompson was the first critic to notice the Joban theme with his claim that Melville identified with the suffering Job and joined Job in "blaming God for all the sorrows, woes, evils which distressed and perplexed him" (147). Thompson thinks that Melville is taunting God when
he shows the inadequacy of God's claim that no one can "draw out Leviathan with a hook," but he fails to see that in spite of Ishmael's categorizing of the whale and in spite of the fact that the whaling industry has captured the whale, the Leviathan still remains inscrutable and Moby Dick remains uncaptured. As William A. Young writes, 'Mankind may have succeeded in 'hooking the nose of Leviathan,' but the mystery remains nonetheless, beyond the most sophisticated grasp of human science and whaling technology" (Young 396).

Rather than understand Melville's struggle as anti-Christian or anti-God, it is more helpful to understand it as anti-Calvinist. This is opposed to the view of some critics, such as C. Hugh Holman, that although Melville rebelled against Calvinistic beliefs, he "found them finally inescapable" (480). T. Walter Herbert has shown that Melville was reacting against the Calvinistic emphasis on the sovereignty of God, which inevitably raises the question of the justice of God. Calvin's explanation was that what may seem like "the caprice of a tyrant" is actually just, since the truths of God transcend human reason: "The will of God is the highest rule of justice; so that what he wills must be considered just, for this very reason, because he wills it. When it is inquired, therefore, why the Lord did so, the answer must be, Because he would" (Thompson 16). Calvinism used the term "inscrutable" to explain what seemed arbitrary and defend God from injustice.

Calvin used the Old Testament story of Ahab to illustrate God's control of Satan. As God permitted Satan to test Job, so also God sent a "lying spirit" to mislead Ahab. Calvin writes: "God sends Satan to Ahab,
with his own Divine command that he should be 'a lying spirit in the mouth of all the king's prophets.' Thus the imposter spirit becomes the minister of the wrath of God, to blind the wicked" (Herbert, "Calvinist Earthquake" 129). In Calvinist tradition, God was seen as a just God who does not share the evil of the errand on which he sends Satan. Similarly, Melville portrays Fedallah as a devil who has a mysterious tie to Ahab, which "might have been even authority over him" (199), but he is clearly opposing the Calvinistic interpretation of God's benevolent intentions when he writes that Fedallah was an agent of "an unseen tyrant" (439).

Melville employed dualistic philosophies such as Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, and Gnosticism, to explore the Calvinist dilemma that if God is all-powerful, he is responsible for evil. Melville read Pierre Bayle's Dictionary and was influenced by many of Bayle's discussions in which he tries to account for evil in the universe. Ahab had been a Zoroastrian, or fire-worshipper, as Fedallah is. Zoroastrianism believes in two co-eternal causes, one of good and the other of evil things (Bell 641). In Bayle's essay on the Manichees there is a debate between Zoraster and a philosopher who maintains that the universe is created by a single principle. Zoroaster's reply captures the dilemma of reconciling suffering and evil with one all-powerful God:

> If man is the creature of one principle perfectly good, most holy and omnipotent, can he be exposed to heat and cold, hunger and thirst, pain and grief? Can he have so many bad inclinations? (Bell 641)

Ahab's conclusion that "There is one God that is Lord over the earth" destroys the comfort of the Manichean separation of the sources of good and
evil (Isani 395) and explains why he reverses the usual Zoroastrian association of the light with good in the chapter on "The Candles" (Walcutt 305). Melville also used Gnostic mythos. In order to explain the existence of evil, Gnosticism, a second century Christian heresy, taught that the Creator was an inferior and imperfect being and that matter was evil (Vargish 277). Ahab sees evil at the heart of reality and the imperfection and malice of the Creator.

Melville was influenced by the attack on Calvin's doctrine by liberal theology. One of the first dissenters was Jacob Arminius, who asserted that the doctrine denied human freedom and made God the "author of sin" (Herbert, "Calvinist Earthquake" 111). Liberal theologians claimed that the Calvinistic "doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty makes him responsible for all misery and evil, and implies that he created the majority of men for no other destiny than to suffer" (Herbert 123). John Taylor's Scripture Doctrine of Original Sin (1740) which Melville read during the composition of Moby-Dick, stated that Calvinist teachings "represent the Divine Dispersations as unjust, cruel and tyrannical (Herbert 123). William Ellery Channing, a spokesman for Unitarianism, thought that people have an inherent right to question the justice of the divine power. He saw human beings as "rational and moral beings, who are authorized to expect from their Creator the most benevolent and equitable government" (Herbert 41).

While Melville was influenced by the liberal view that Calvinistic theology made God a monster (Young 393), he could not accept the view of liberal theology that God was benevolent, as shown by the design of the
created world. William Paley was among those who tried to argue the existence of a benevolent God from design. He argued that as a watch proves the existence of a watchmaker, nature proves the existence of a creator. According to this view, the more one explores nature, the more one will see the existence of a benevolent Creator. But as Ishmael explores nature further, he comes also to see not only the beauty of creation but the cannibalistic nature of the world and how disasters are unpredictable. Paley's view of God sees God's intelligence but not his morality. As Melville wrote to Hawthorne, "The reason the mass of men fear God, and at bottom dislike Him, is because they rather distrust His heart, and fancy Him all brain like a watch" (Herbert 139). Liberal theology turned to reason for authority, but "Melville understood that reason turned into madness when the facts of evil were fully recognized" (Herbert 89-90). Melville rejected the idea that God was wholly benevolent, whether supported by Calvinism or liberal theology. He came to "doubt the principle the liberal and orthodox controversialists agreed on, namely their implicit belief that a morally compelling scheme of truth could be organized around the concept of God" (Herbert 90).

Finally, as in King Lear and the Book of Job, the questions about undeserved suffering and the nature of God raise the questions about the meaning of life, but finally conclude that life is not meaningless. Herbert writes: "Melville thus draws us into a religious struggle . . . a discourse concerning final questions, the meaning or unmeaning of life and death" ("Calvinist Earthquake" 114). If life is the way that Ahab sees it--full of suffering with God either indifferent or malicious--then life is
meaningless, but the novel as a whole suggests a more balanced view of life than Ahab's. Although life is filled with sorrow, it is also possible to experience joy. Ishmael seems to be speaking for Melville when he claims that there is wisdom in being able to see that life has more sorrow than joy: "that mortal man who hath more of joy than sorrow in him, that mortal man cannot be true--not true, or undeveloped. With books the same. The truest of all men was the Man of Sorrows, and the truest of all books is Solomon's, and Ecclesiastes is the fine hammered steel of woe" (355). But to be obsessed with the sorrow of life, as Ahab is, is madness: "There is a wisdom that is woe; but there is a woe that is madness" (355). In "The Try-Works" chapter, when Ishmael is steering the ship and staring into the fire in the try-pots, he gets turned around, with his back to the compass and nothing before him but a jet gloom: "Uppermost was the impression, that whatever swift, rushing thing I stood on was not so much bound to any haven ahead as rushing from all havens astern" (354). Ishmael's momentary impression parallels Ahab's situation in chasing Moby Dick--obsessed with the sorrow of life, he is plunging into the darkness, rushing from all havens astern. Ishmael knows that this is the woe that is madness, and advises:

    Look not too long in the face of the fire, O man! 
Never dream with thy hand on the helm! Turn not thy back to the compass . . . believe not the artificial fire, when its redness makes all things look ghastly. To­mor­row, in the natural sun, the skies will be bright; those who glared like devils in the forking flames, the morn will show in far other, at least gentler, relief. (354)

Ishmael warns the reader not to focus too long on the dark side of life, as represented by the fire on the ship at night, yet even the sun does not hide
the "miles of deserts and of griefs beneath the moon" (355). Life is full of
grief, and there are a few people who can see this dark side of life and not go
mad: "And there is a Catskill eagle in some souls that can alike dive down
into the blackest gorges, and soar out of them again and become invisible in
the sunny spaces" (355).

Some people see the suffering in life but ignore it, like the captain of the
Bachelor, who had only heard of the White Whale, but didn't believe in him.
Ahab thinks that he and his ship, which is rejoicing at a full load and
looking forward to going home, are "too dammed jolly" (408). Likewise,
Stubb is jolly. He sees life as suffering but goes through it and ignores the
punches, or takes them as a joke. When Stubb sees the markings on the
doubloon, he sees in the signs of the Zodiac the story of life as suffering,
and yet, like the sun which goes through the signs of the Zodiac shining, so
Stubb ignores the sorrow. As the sun jollily "wheels through toil and
trouble," so "jolly Stubb" goes through life's toils and troubles with a
carefree attitude (361). Stubb sees in the signs of the Zodiac on the coin a
sermon on human life, with jabs and punches as difficult and sudden as
those of Job. Stubb's view of what happens to a person in life is similar to a
Job story. For each of the signs in the Zodiac, something happens in a
person's life. Happiness and virtue are fleeting, and life is filled with
sudden and unrelenting assaults--stings, arrows, ramplings, drownings,
and death:

we marry and think to be happy for aye, when pop
comes Libra, or the Scales--happiness weighed and
found wanting; and while we are very sad about that,
Lord! how we suddenly jump, as Scorpio, or the
Scorpion, stings us in rear; we are curing the wound,
when whang come the arrows all round; Sagittarius, or the Archer, is amusing himself. As we pluck out the shafts, stand aside! here's the battering-ram, Capricornus, or the Goat; full tilt, he comes rushing, and headlong we are tossed; when Aquarius, or the Waterbearer, pours out his whole deluge and drowns us; and, to wind up, with Pisces, or the Fishes, we sleep.

Since, as Stubb realizes, there is more sorrow than joy in life, a jolly attitude is unrealistic. Starbuck, though not jolly, wants to deny the evil and suffering in life. On a day of peace and calm, gazing down into the sea from the side of his boat, Starbuck wants to believe that life is full of loveliness and not maliciousness: "loveliness unfathomable . . . Tell me not of thy teeth-tiered sharks, and thy kidnapping cannibal ways. Let faith oust fact; let fancy oust memory; I look deep down and do believe" (406). Not only does Starbuck want to believe that life is calm and peaceful, but in order to have faith in God, whom Starbuck sees as benevolent, he has to deny fact—that life is full of sharks. Even Ahab is temporarily soothed by the calm and peaceful sea, and people may for a few fleeting moments enjoy "grassy glades" of "ever vernal endless landscapes in the soul," but these calms do not last: "But the mingled, mingling threads of life are woven by warp and woof: calms crossed by storms, a storm for every calm" (406).

Ishmael survives. He has seen the darkness and sorrow in life and yet he emerges to tell the story. He is like the "eagle in some souls," which Melville says are capable of diving down into the "blackest gorges" and soaring out of them again. In fact, his survival at the end is a resurrection image—the coffin which was built for Queequeg is drawn into the whirlpool of the sinking ship and then bursts upward and serves as a life buoy for Ishmael. Ishmael can see the sorrow in life but he also sees the loving and
joyous parts of life. The figures and drawings on the coffin-life buoy were carved by Queequeg to copy the tattoo marks on his body. These were intended to be "a complete theory of the heavens and the earth, and a mystical treatise on the art of attaining truth," but even Queequeg did not understand their meaning (399). Ishmael survives to tell the story, but the ways of God, as the markings on the coffin-life buoy, are undecipherable. As Ahab says, "devilish tantalization of the gods!" (399). As in the Book of Job, a witness survives to tell the story, but the ways of God remain inscrutable. Melville himself draws the parallel by using a quotation from the Book of Job for the epilogue: "And I only am escaped alone to tell thee" (470).

In *King Lear* and the Book of Job, events worsen and suffering is compounded, but in *Moby-Dick* there is an even stronger sense that events happen by chance without any rhyme or reason. Although suffering is inexplicable in the Book of Job and *King Lear*, the inscrutability of the ways of God is more deeply felt in *Moby-Dick*. God, whose justice is questioned, seems absent in the Book of Job and *King Lear*, but the sense of the God's hiddenness and the questioning of God's benevolence is deeper in *Moby-Dick*. In the Book of Job although there is never an answer to why there is innocent suffering, God appears to Job out of the whirlwind, but in *Moby-Dick* God remains hidden. As Starbuck says, "Great God! but for one single instant show thyself" (459). Yet *Moby-Dick*, like *King Lear*, does not convey a sense that life is meaningless. Although Ahab, unlike Job, remains defiant and unrepentant to the end, Ishmael, though he cannot grasp Truth, survives and is able to see both the sorrow and joy in life.
CHAPTER III
THE ANGUISH OF JOB: THE SOUND AND THE FURY

Faulkner's novel demonstrates what happens to the questions of Job in the twentieth century. Although The Sound and the Fury is not a Job story, like King Lear, and does not have explicit references to Job, like Moby-Dick, there is a link between the Book of Job and the Sound and the Fury. Job's anguish is similar to what Richard Sewall thinks is "most striking" in Faulkner's fiction--"a brooding, anxious, 'tragic' search for meaning" (133). Quentin's anguish in particular links Faulkner's novel with Job. As Edmond L. Volpe writes, Quentin's section is "a heartfelt cry of despair, one of the most moving expressions of disillusionment and suffering in literature" (118). The Sound and the Fury has the anguish of Job without the presence of a Jehovah.

There is also a link between Faulkner and Shakespeare. Faulkner uses Macbeth's speech upon hearing of the death of Lady Macbeth, for the title, and for much of the imagery of The Sound and the Fury. Faulkner explores in great depth the anguish of time, which Macbeth expresses:

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time,
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
Quentin's section uses the imagery of time, shadows, and dust to convey a view of life which is similar to Macbeth's, and Benjy's narration actually is "a tale told by an idiot."

Faulkner was also influenced by Melville. In fact, he wrote in The Chicago Tribune that the book which he put down with the unqualified thought "I wish I had written that" was Moby-Dick (109). Faulkner was fascinated by the "Greek-like simplicity of it." Some of the characteristics which Faulkner saw in Ahab also describe Quentin—a man "driven by his sombre nature and his bleak heritage, bent on his own destruction . . . with a foreknowledge of unalterable doom" (109). Moreover, Faulkner took what Melville explored as a possibility—that behind the immensities of the universe is a blank void of nothingness, of No-God—and made it a probability. The Sound and the Fury is a confrontation with nothingness. Benjy's section portrays life as full of chaos and disorder without any meaning. Quentin's section is full of existential Angst, the confrontation with death and nothingness. Quentin's attempt to deny the nothingness ends in his suicide. Although Jason does not suffer the anguish that Benjy and Quentin do, Jason's section portrays the emptiness of no-meaning.

The Sound and the Fury, like the Book of Job, King Lear, and Moby-Dick, portrays life as full of pain and suffering. The novel begins and ends with Benjy's moaning and crying, which is "sound and fury." When Luster drives the wrong way, Benjy "bellows":

Then he bellowed. Bellow on bellow, his voice mounted, with scarce interval for breath. There
was more than astonishment in it, it was horror; shock; agony eyeless, tongueless; just sound. (190)

Benjy's bellowing is the voice of suffering humanity: "the grave hopeless sound of all voiceless misery under the sun" (188). Benjy represents the misery and chaos of life for all humankind. As Faulkner himself said: "The only emotion I can have for Benjy is grief and pity for all mankind" (241).

This view that life is full of suffering--"a man is the sum of his misfortunes," as Mr. Compson says (64)--is similar to that in the Book of Job, King Lear, and Moby-Dick. Job, like Lear, Ahab, and Quentin, sees human life as short and full of trouble:

Man that is born of a woman is of few days,
and full of trouble.
He comes forth like a flower, and withers;
he flees like a shadow, and continues not. (14:1-2)

Like Job, who associates birth with sorrow, Lear thinks of the sorrow of being born:

When we are born, we cry that we are come
To this great stage of fools. (IV.vi.179-80)

Ahab likewise thinks that life is full of suffering: "tis fit that man should live in pains and die in pangs!" (359-60). When Faulkner writes about the "voiceless misery under the sun" (188), he echoes Melville's description of the "miles of deserts and of griefs beneath the moon" (355). In The Sound and the Fury, as in the Book of Job, King Lear, and Moby-Dick, the sorrow of life "shadows every mans brow even benjys" (108).

As in the Book of Job, there is a tremendous sense of loss throughout Faulkner's novel. Benjy bellows whenever one of the golfers yells "caddy"
because it reminds him of his loss of his sister Caddy, who loved him. He also moans whenever he is undressed because he has been castrated to protect the little girls in the neighborhood. Caddy's loss of her virginity upsets the whole family. Benjy cries whenever Caddy does not "smell like trees," Quentin tries to deny the reality of Caddy's promiscuity by claiming that they have committed incest, Mr. Compson drinks himself into the grave after Caddy's loss of virginity, and Mrs. Compson thinks it is a judgment on her. Mrs. Compson, self-centered and full of self-pity, was not able to be a mother to Benjy, Quentin, or Caddy. As Quentin says, "If I could say Mother. Mother" (105). All of these losses accumulate to create a tremendous sense of grief over something greater than these individual losses--the loss of meaning in modern existence.

The suffering which is portrayed in these works has become increasingly meaningless. In the Book of Job a righteous person suffers a series of disasters, and questions are raised about why a righteous person should suffer. In King Lear a terrible disaster is followed by a worse one, and it is hard to explain why the gods allow atrocities, such as the blinding of Gloucester. In Moby-Dick the suffering becomes even more random and senseless than in the Book of Job or King Lear, as in the unexpected perils and disasters of a whaling voyage. In The Sound and the Fury suffering becomes, not just undeserved or random, but completely meaningless. Benjy's bellowing is based on a disruption of the familiar rather than anything of ultimate significance. Quentin comes to realize that what he has suffered has no significance: "all I had felt suffered taking visible form
antic and perverse mocking without relevance inherent themselves with the denial of the significance they should have affirmed" (103).

Not only has the suffering become meaningless, but it has increasingly become mental anguish. In the Book of Job, King Lear, and Moby-Dick physical suffering precipitates mental anguish, and in each work the mental anguish increasingly overshadows the physical loss which precipitated it. Job is afflicted by losses and the bodily torment of boils, which precipitates his questions about the justice of God and the meaning of existence. Lear's physical suffering in enduring the pelting storm is not as important in raising painful and anguished questions as the emotional torment he suffers in being rejected by his daughters. In Moby-Dick Ahab's physical suffering from the loss of his leg sets in motion all of his mental and emotional anguish, which is also fed by the sorrows of all humankind and which becomes far more obsessive than his initial physical pain. In The Sound and the Fury, however, Quentin's suffering is not even precipitated by physical suffering--it is entirely mental anguish. Benjy's suffering is also mental torment. Although he has been physically castrated, his agony comes from a sense of loss rather than any physical suffering.

From Job to Faulkner suffering focuses more on the human dilemma in general and less on the suffering of one individual. The scope of the questions changes from why an individual suffers undeservedly to the broad one of the rationale for why things happen in the world. In the Book of Job and King Lear an individual is representative of humanity. Individuals are reduced to the most wretched condition, as Job on the ash-
heap, Lear in the storm, Edgar in his nakedness, and Gloucester in his blindness, and their experience raises questions which apply to the human experience in general—why is there undeserved suffering and what is the meaning of life? In *Moby-Dick* Ahab suffers his own personal losses—the loss of his leg and his mental and spiritual anguish—but he also takes the evil and suffering experienced by the whole human race as his personal grievance. In *The Sound and the Fury* the suffering of Benjy, Quentin, and Jason is symbolic of the anguish of life itself. It is not just Benjy who suffers, but life itself is a "tale told by an idiot." The hopeless sound of Ben's wailing symbolizes "all time and injustice and sorrow become vocal for an instant" (172). It is not just Quentin who suffers, but time itself is sheer anguish, and it is not just Jason whose life is empty, but modern existence after religious and moral values have been negated is meaningless.

The natural world is increasingly portrayed as less congenial. In the Book of Job it is assumed that creation is good; in fact, Job's dilemma is that innocent suffering conflicts with his assumptions about the goodness of creation. In *King Lear* it is also assumed that the natural world is good, since cruelty is an aberration. Gloucester sees the unnatural cruelty between parents and children as a reflection of "late eclipses in the sun and moon" which "portend no good to us" (I.ii.101-02). Such upheavals in nature change the normal state of things:

Love cools, friendship falls off; brothers divide. In cities, mutinies; in countries, discord; in palaces, treason; and the bond cracked 'twixt son and father. (I.ii.104-07)
In *Moby-Dick* the created world is not good, but cannibalistic--full of sharks and vultures. What is an aberration in *King Lear* is the normal state of the natural world in *Moby-Dick*: "Oh, horrible vulturism of earth! from which not the mightiest whale is free" (262). The Darwinian concept of nature, with one animal devouring another, is also reflected in human relations, and it is "a shocking sharkish business enough" on board, as well as in the sea.

*The Sound and the Fury*, however, portrays a world in which the natural state of things is not only hostile but chaotic. The environment in which the Compson children have been raised is very destructive. Their alcoholic father is a nihilist who has no permanent values to transfer to his children. Their neurotic mother offers no love, caring, and acceptance. She isolates Jason from the other children by accepting only him, and he grows up to be mean and selfish. As an adult, Jason's life is chaotic. He is always hurrying. He rushes back and forth--chasing his niece, swindling and hoarding money, and protecting his investments--but his activity is futile. Because of her loveless upbringing, Caddy becomes promiscuous, as does her daughter Quentin, who is raised by Jason. When faced by Caddy's promiscuity and Quentin's suicide, Mrs. Compson only thinks of the embarrassment to herself. She thinks of Caddy's behavior as inconsideration: "for her to have no more regard for me her own mother" (63). She thinks of Quentin's suicide as selfish: "I didn't believe that he could have been so selfish as to--" (157). She wonders if Quentin could have committed suicide "simply to flout and hurt" her, but concludes that "Whoever God is, He would not permit that," since she's a lady (179).
Religious values are distorted and confused with personal pride, as when Mrs. Compson considers her idiot son a judgment on her for the sin of marrying a man above her social status, thinks of Caddy's promiscuity as causing her to go "down into the valley" (63), and thinks of Jason, rather than God, as "my joy and my salvation" (63).

God has become more distant and hidden in each work. Job is tortured by the remoteness and hiddenness of God, who "hides his face" (13:14), but finally God appears in the whirlwind. In King Lear God seems absent because he does not intervene in history, as when Gloucester calls upon the gods in the scene of his blinding or Albany expresses his faith in how the gods will defend Cordelia, but, since Shakespeare focuses only on life in this world, the possibility still exists that God may control eternity. In Moby-Dick God is so inscrutable that he remains hidden. As Starbuck says, "Great God! but for one single instant show thyself" (459). The divinity, as represented by the whale, is so unfathomable that there is no way of finding out the nature of God: "there is no earthly way of finding out precisely what the whale really looks like" (228). As Ishmael says, "I know him not, and never will" (318). God is so inscrutable that nobody can see his face; in fact, perhaps God has no face: "But I cannot completely make out his back parts; and hint what he will about his face, I say again he has no face" (318). In The Sound and the Fury God is not only hidden but absent. Benjy has only impressions of the naturalistic world and is incapable of thinking about any higher reality. Quentin thinks about God but he cannot believe that God, if he exists, has any power. Jason thinks "nothing whatever of God, one way or the other" (233). Although Dilsey has a simple
faith, her ideas about a saving and caring God do not impinge upon the Compson world.

As in the Book of Job, the nature of God is questioned. Questions of theodicy, reconciling the power and goodness of God, are raised in the Book of Job and become increasingly radical in King Lear and Moby-Dick. Job questions God's justice: "God has put me in the wrong . . . Behold, I cry out, 'Violence!' but . . . there is no justice" (19:6-8). Lear wonders about the source of his daughters' cruelty--"Is there any cause in nature that makes these hard hearts?" (III.vi.75-76)--and has the passing thought that it may be the gods which "stir these daughters' hearts/ Against their father" (II.iv.269). Moby-Dick goes beyond King Lear in suggesting that evil is the result of God's malicious intent. Since God is all-powerful, he is responsible for evil: "Who's to doom, when the judge himself is dragged to the bar?" (445). The god who made the shark, as Queequeg says, "must be one dam Ingin" (257).

In The Sound and the Fury the questions are no longer about whether a powerful God is just, as in Job, King Lear, and Moby-Dick, but about whether God is a powerful or meaningful reality at all. If God exists, he is not powerful. As Quentin says when he contemplates the resurrection of his drowned body, "on the Day when he says rise only the flat-iron would come floating up" (49). The reality of God is worn away by the meaninglessness of time: "Christ was not crucified: he was worn away by a minute clicking of little wheels" (47). God is not a forceful enough reality for salvation to have any meaning. In fact, Quentin imagines that flowing from some unidentified wound is not blood but sawdust--"sawdust
flowing from what wound in what side that not for me died not"
(107). There is also no possibility for damnation, as Quentin explains: "It's not when you realize that nothing can help you--religion, pride, anything--it's when you realize that you don't need any aid" (49). As T. S. Eliot writes, if damnation were a possibility, it would be an immense relief: "damnation itself is an immediate form of salvation--of salvation from the ennui of modern life, because it at least gives some significance to living" (379). Quentin himself realizes that the possibility of damnation would be a form of salvation. When he contemplates incest with Caddy, he wishes that there "could just be a hell beyond that" (71). The questions of theodicy, how absolute goodness and absolute power are reconciled in the nature of God, are no longer raised, since God is not powerful, and neither salvation nor damnation are realities.

The relationship with God has become increasingly antagonistic, until it becomes non-existent. Job contends with God. He insists on his own righteousness and challenges God to appear so that he may be vindicated, but his rebellion in in the context of a relationship with God. Lear questions the gods and protests the lack of justice on earth which would allow daughters to turn their aged father out into the stormy night and allow a dog, a horse, or a rat to have life and Cordelia none at all (V.iii.307-08). Ahab goes beyond Lear in not just questioning but defying. He acknowledges divine power but rebels against it because of its injustice: "I own thy speechless, placeless power; but to the last gasp of my earthquake life will dispute its unconditional, unintegral mastery in me" (417). Quentin has no dialogue with God at all. Although Quentin thinks
about the Day of Judgment and about whether Christ died for him, his thoughts are outside of a relationship with God, which Job has. The difference is between Job's demanding why God does not show himself and Quentin's thinking that Christ did not die for him.

From Job to Faulkner the existence of God is increasingly doubted. Job contends with God but does not doubt God's existence. In *King Lear*, since the gods do not intervene to prevent evil, their existence is implicitly questioned, although the play leaves open the possibility that there is a God and that ultimate justice takes place in eternity. *Moby-Dick* explores more explicitly the possibility that God does not exist, the possibility of an "atheism from which we shrink" (169). Ahab thinks of the White Whale as a "pasteboard mask" or wall, a visible symbol of the transcendental, which he wants to strike through, but sometimes he also thinks "there's naught beyond" (144), that there is no God behind the symbol. In *The Sound and the Fury* God does not exist or, if he does, he is powerless.

The greater the estrangement from God, the greater the sense of Nothingness. Until the end of the Book of Job when God appears in the whirlwind, God seems hidden, and life seems meaningless: "Job does not question God's sovereignty; rather, he laments that his sovereignty is so completely eclipsed that life has no meaning" (Anderson 513). Although the Book of Job has a positive resolution, it shares with *The Sound and the Fury* "the journey which takes the protagonist to the edge of the abyss" (Spanos 12-13). It has been suggested that The Book of Job is based on the archetypal myth of the Furies--the flight from a dark, threatening agent who pursues the fugitive protagonist into an isolated corner, where he
must confront his relentless pursuer, whereupon, in a blinding moment of illumination he discovers the paradoxically benevolent aspect of his persecutor (Spanos 12-13). The Sound and the Fury, like T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land," is based on the myth of Hell, which embodies the theme of Nothingness, the disintegration of meaning in the modern world (Scott 76). Although the myth of the Furies includes a positive resolution, it shares with the myth of Hell the confrontation with Nothingness. As Spanos writes, "In the middle of the nineteenth century . . . God--at least the traditional image of God--expired and man was left naked to confront, in T. S. Eliot's great existential metaphor, 'a heap of broken images'" (1). The Book of Job shares with modern existential literature "an encounter with Nothingness and the effort to transcend the threat it poses to man's existence as man" (2). Although God's existence is not doubted, God is hidden and does not fulfill the traditional Hebraic image of God as one who rewards the righteous and punishes the evil.

King Lear also confronts the possibility of nothingness. As William Elton writes, "Having been deluded in the belief that man was 'something,' that the gods were 'something,' in the storm and afterward Lear discovers the 'nothingness' of man and the protecting gods" (180). When Lear says, "Nothing can be made out of nothing" (I.iv.126), he is rejecting the accepted belief that God created the world out of nothing, which implies that perhaps there is no God (Elton 181). In King Lear the gods seem absent because they do not intervene, and questions are raised about whether life is meaningless. These questions are mostly implied, but there are a few moments of despair in which they are expressed, as when Gloucester
thinks of the gods sporting with the fates of men—"As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods" (IV.i.36)—or when Lear associates birth with meaninglessness and sorrow: "When we are born, we cry that we are come/ To this great stage of fools" (IV.vi.175-80).

In Moby-Dick both Ahab and Ishmael have thoughts of nothingness. For Ishmael the whiteness of the whale "shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of the universe, and thus stabs us from behind with the thought of annihilation" (169). It is "a colorless, all-color of atheism from which we shrink" (169). Death may bring nothingness, and behind the universe there may be no God. In Moby Dick God is so distant and inscrutable that the novel raises, as Maurice Friedman says, "the possibility—not the certainty—that behind the immensities of the universe there is a blank void of nothingness, of No-God" (69). In Moby-Dick these thoughts of nothingness are overshadowed by the more predominant thought that there is a God, but he is hidden and inscrutable.

While nothingness is a possibility in Moby-Dick, in The Sound and the Fury it is a probability. God is absent, and life is meaningless. In Benjy's section life is portrayed as "a tale told by an idiot," not only full of suffering—"sound and fury"—but "signifying nothing"—meaningless. Benjy is important as a picture of the suffering and meaninglessness of life. Faulkner admitted, "He was a prologue like the gravedigger in the Elizabethan dramas. He serves his purpose and is gone" (241). In this section life is full of chaos without any order or meaning. The idiot Benjy perceives only natural occurrences, and he is unaware of their meaning. His section lacks any ordering of time or sequence. He is unable to
distinguish memories from observations of the present. Although he associates images in the present with images in the past, he simply records events and past memories without understanding their significance. As Faulkner himself said, he is "capable only of knowing what happened, but not why" (240).

The nothingness of the first section is conveyed by the fact that Benjy observes events but does not understand their meaning, and the reader must impose meaning and order upon Benjy's limited sensibility. For example, in the branch scene on the day of Damuddy's funeral, Caddy takes off her dress, Quentin slaps her, and she falls down in the water and gets her drawers muddy, while Jason is playing by himself further down the branch. The reader can discern, particularly as the same events are retold by other narrators, that Caddy's muddy drawers suggest her later sexual promiscuity, that Quentin is already sensitive about Caddy's behavior and partly responsible for it, and that Jason is isolated from the other children. Benjy observes that Jason always has his hands in his pockets, and the reader can surmise that this suggests his materialism. At other times characters are revealed by the way they treat Benjy. Jason shows his potential for cruelty when he deliberately cuts up Benjy's paperdolls "just for meanness" (40). Caddy, on the other hand, is kind to Benjy, carrying him, bringing him his cushion, and taking him outside. Mrs. Compson is not willing to even have Benjy sit on her lap, while Dilsey wipes his face with a warm cloth. Although Benjy gives enough information so that the reader may discern the significant characteristics of each person, Benjy himself does not understand their significance.
The meaninglessness of Benjy's point of view is also portrayed by the fact that Benjy's distress about the disorder around him is based on naturalistic deviations rather than an awareness of the moral dimension. For example, in the branch scene when Benjy sees that Caddy has a muddy behind, he begins to cry. Later when Caddy uses perfume or has been sexually promiscuous, Benjy is able to sense the deviation through the sensuous impression that Caddy no longer smells like trees. Nevertheless, since Benjy is an idiot, his observations of the deviations of the Compson household do little more than heighten their poignancy. His distress is caused by any threat to the purely natural ordering of his world. His peace of mind comes from familiar scenery--"post and tree, window and doorway and signboard each in its ordered place"--an ordering which is shallow (191). Although when Luster drives the buggy the normal way again, Ben's eyes become "serene" and peaceful, they are also described as "empty" (191). When his world becomes disordered, he is powerless to do anything but moan with a "slow bellowing sound, meaningless and sustained" (170).

The most moving expression of nothingness in The Sound and the Fury is Quentin's vision--that time itself is sheer anguish: "Time is the mausoleum of all hope and desire, a tomb entrapping the evil and folly of human experience" (47). Quentin is constantly trying to escape time in an attempt to negate his father's contention that no battle with time is ever won. His father gives him his grandfather's watch:

I give it to you not that you may remember time, but that you might forget it now and then for a moment and not spend all your breath trying to conquer it. Because no battle is ever won he said.
They are not even fought. The field only reveals to man his own folly and despair, and victory is an illusion of philosophers and fools. (47)

He twists off the hands of his watch, but the wheels keep clicking, "not knowing any better." The clocks in the jeweler's window all have a different time, and in his desire to escape time Quentin finds the contradictory, incorrect times just as satisfying as a watch with no hands:

There were about a dozen watches in the window, a dozen different hours and each with the same assertive and contradictory assurance that mine had, without any hands at all. (52)

Quentin is also reminded of time by the chimes and the shadow which the sun casts before him, but he tries to "trick his shadow" by losing it. Mr. Compson thinks that time is a person's misfortune:

One day you'd think misfortune would get tired, but then time is your misfortune Father said. A gull on an invisible wire attached through space dragged. You carry the symbol of your frustration into eternity. (64)

In Quentin's section Faulkner uses the imagery of time, shadows, and dust from the Macbeth passage in association with the meaninglessness of temporality and death. As Quentin walks on the morning that he commits suicide, the image of his "walking shadow" appears again and again: "trampling my shadow's bones into the concrete with hard heels" (59) and "treading my shadow into pavement" (62). The phrase, "walked upon the belly of my shadow" (59), recalls "the valley of the shadow of death" and the shadow merges with the chimes, another reminder of time: "the chimes began as I stepped on my shadow" (59). In fact, shadows themselves tell time: "There was a clock, high up in the sun"
The shadow imagery is associated, not only with death and the passing of time, but with a vision of the loss of meaning in modern experience. Quentin feels that all the things he has done are only shadows without significance:

I seemed to be lying neither asleep nor awake looking down a long corridor of gray half-light where all stable things had become shadowy paradoxical all I had done shadows. (103)

As Quentin mounts the steps to his room for the last time before his death, the imagery of dust not only reminds us of the Macbeth passage—going the "way to dusty death"—but also suggests an emptiness:

Our windows were dark. The entrance was empty. I walked close to the left wall when I entered, but it was empty: just the stairs curving up into shadows echoes of feet in the sad generations like light dust upon the shadows, my feet waking them like dust, lightly to settle again. (104)

Life for Quentin is "full of sound and fury," which signifies nothing. He repeatedly remembers that his father had talked to him about the "reducto absurdum of all human experience" (52). Yet, according to Mr. Compson, it is not despair which causes a person to commit suicide, but rather the realization that even despair is of no significance—the realization, not only that life is full of sound and fury, but that this sound and fury signifies nothing. Mr. Compson is speaking of suicide:

no man ever does that under the first fury of despair or remorse or bereavement he does it only when he has realized that even the despair or remorse or bereavement is not particularly important to the dark diceman. (108)
Quentin tries to stop time to deny his father's contention that what causes him grief and anguish now will not even seem important to him later, that people can only experience tragedy "second-hand" (71) and "cannot even remember tomorrow what seemed dreadful today" (49). As Mr. Compson says to Quentin, "you cannot bear to think that someday it will no longer hurt you like this" (108). When Mr. Compson says to Quentin that he will not do anything desperate until he comes to believe that "even she was not quite worth despair perhaps," Quentin replies that he "will never do that" (108).

In the absence of a greater sense of order and meaning in life, Quentin is obsessed with the order of insignificant details. In the face of the chaos around him, Quentin is obsessed with the minute details of grooming and civility. Although life seems so meaningless that he plans to commit suicide, when his clothes get blood on them in his fight with Gerald Bland, he returns to his room for the sole purpose of changing his shirt and tie and cleaning his vest. Before he leaves his dorm room, he brushes his teeth and his hat. His search for a greater order has degenerated into keeping his possessions in order, cleaning his clothes, and brushing his teeth.

Jason, unlike Quentin, is not searching for meaning. His section is representative of modern existence after religious and moral values have been negated. Jason simply does not concern himself with the question of ultimate reality. His goals in life are based entirely upon natural, selfish desires. He simply exists in a world absent of meaning without becoming disturbed about that absence. As a naturalist, he is surprised if something happens which is contrary to "nature" and the "whole rhythm of events"
For him the supernatural is nonexistent, as reflected in his comment on a man who, having made a lot of money dishonestly, became frighteningly ill and afterwards started giving five thousand dollars a year for missionary work: "how mad he'll be if he was to die and find out there's not any heaven, when he thinks about that five thousand a year" (117).

Although Jason, unlike Quentin, does not consider whether or not life is significant, his section reveals to the reader that his existence is, in fact, meaningless. The final section of the novel describes Jason after he has unsuccessfully chased his niece Quentin and the man with the red tie as "the man sitting quietly behind the wheel of a small car, with his invisible life ravelled out about him like a wornout sock" (186).

In each of these works there is the anxiety or dread of death, although it is greatest in the Book of Job and The Sound and the Fury. Death opens up the possibility that life ends meaninglessly and is absorbed into the void of nothingness. Job has tremendous anguish about death because he sees it as the end of life:

For there is hope for a tree,
    if it be cut down, that it will sprout again,
    and that its shoots will not cease . . .

But man dies, and is laid low;
    man breathes his last, and where is he? . . .

So man lies down and rises not again;
    till the heavens are no more he will not awake,
    or be roused out of his sleep. (14:6-12)

Lear also has thoughts about death as the end of life, although these are limited to certain moments in the play, such as the death of Cordelia, when Lear says:
Thou'lt come no more,  
Never, never, never, never, never. (V.iii.308-09)

Melville writes that if we are aware of the "ever-present perils of life," we will feel terror that we may at any moment be caught in "a swift, sudden turn of death" (241). The thought that death may bring personal annihilation occurs occasionally in *Moby-Dick*, but in *The Sound and the Fury* the fear of death is an anxiety which is always present. Death is an emptiness that is too terrible to be spoken about—an "it." It is something no one can escape, as Frony says to Caddy: "'White folks dies too. Your grandmammy dead as any nigger can get, I reckon'" (21). Benjy can smell death. Although the children are not told that their grandmother has died, Benjy senses it: "Benjy knew it when Damuddy died. He cried. He smell hit. He smell hit." (55). Death occurs repeatedly throughout the novel, and because of the disjunctive chronology, the deaths of Damuddy, Quentin, Mr. Compson, and Roskus all merge into a fear of "it." On the last day of the novel Benjy is crying because of the impending death of Mrs. Compson, as Dilsey says: "'He stop when we git off de place . . . He smellin hit. Dat's whut hit is'" (172). Benjy's crying, like Job's lament, represents the anguish of humankind in the face of death and nothingness.

The anxiety of meaninglessness results in a longing for death, and each work reflects a stronger death-wish. Job's lament expresses the aching misery of existence and his longing for death:

Why is light given to him that is in misery,  
and life to the bitter in soul?  
who long for death, but it comes not,  
and dig for it more than for hid treasures;  
who rejoice exceedingly, and are glad,
when they find the grave? (3:20-22)

Job curses the day of his birth and the night of his conception:

Let the day perish wherein I was born,
and the night which said,
"a man-child is conceived." (Job 3:3)

In *King Lear* Gloucester contemplates suicide after his maiming because it seems that the gods are indifferent:

As flies to wanton boys are we to th' gods;
They kill us for their sport. (IV.i.36-37)

*Moby-Dick* begins with thoughts of suicide. Going to sea is a substitute for suicide for Ishmael, the blacksmith, and others, since one must have a "devil-may-care" attitude to assume the risks of a whaling voyage. In the opening lines of the novel, Ishmael says that he has had thoughts of suicide, with "a damp, drizzly November" in his soul and has found himself "involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet" (1). As a substitute for suicide and an antidote for his "hypos," Ishmael goes to sea:

This is my substitute for pistol and ball. With a philosophical flourish Cato throws himself upon his sword; I quietly take to the ship. (12)

Quentin goes beyond Job's longing for death and the suicidal thoughts of Gloucester and Ishmael. His whole narration is at the point of death, since he has assumed his suicide to be a fixed fact (Hunt 12). As Jean-Paul Sartre writes, "Quentin's monologues and his last walk are already his suicide" (258). Quentin is a "walking shadow" because he is already dead. He longs for death when he thinks of water, a "symbol of oblivion" for him (Vickery 42). The water is associated with peace--"the
sense of water peaceful and swift beyond" (103)--and images of the womb, such as caverns and grottoes: "That's where the water would be, healing out to the sea and the peaceful grottoes" (69). Like Job, he associates death with ease and rest. Quentin's death-wish is also reflected in his suicide pact with Caddy. In order to escape the loss of values, as symbolized by Caddy's loss of virginity, he suggests that he kill them both: "it wont take but a second just a second then I can do mine" (92). He holds his knife at Caddy's throat, and she is willing--"push it are you going to" (92)--but he cannot do it. Since the knife is a phallic symbol, it also symbolizes a desire to commit incest with the hope that it would negate the other relationships which Caddy has had. Caddy, who has lost everything, does not care if she lives. In fact, when Jason says to Caddy at Mr. Compson's grave site that she'd be better off if she were "down there with him and Quentin," Caddy replies: "I know it" (123). Caddy's daughter Quentin also wishes that she were dead. When Jason says to Quentin that he'll make her sorry she "ever drew breath," she replies: "I'm sorry now . . . I dont see why I was ever born" (114). Her wish echoes that of Job. Having been raised by the cold and selfish Jason, she finds life empty and without values: "I wish I was dead. I wish we were all dead" (156).

The place of humankind in the universe becomes more and more insignificant. In the Book of Job humankind has a preeminent place in creation. When Job asks, "What is man"?" (7:17), he is parodying Psalm 8, which praises the creator for giving humankind dominion over the rest of creation. Although Job ironically wishes that God would not give him so much attention, since it brings him misery, it is assumed that a person has
an important place in creation. In *King Lear* a human being has value, as shown by the importance of loyalty and acts of compassion, but in those moments when a character has lost everything, like Job, humankind seems like nothing. Lear, seeing Edgar in his nakedness, asks, "Is man no more than this? . . . unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art" (III.iv.97-102). Gloucester, after his blinding, also associates Edgar with man's nothingness: "I' th' last night's storm I such a fellow saw,/ Which made me think a man a worm" (IV.32-33).

Although a human being has value in *Moby-Dick*, as illustrated by joys and friendships, the place of humankind in the universe is insignificant. The idea that humankind is a speck in a vast universe, abandoned by God, is conveyed by the image of Pip alone in the ocean: "The intense concentration of self in the middle of such a heartless immensity, my God! who can tell it?" (347). In *The Sound and the Fury* human beings become even more insignificant. Quentin tries to affirm the significance of human life, but finally cannot escape what he had been taught by his father, that "no live or dead man is very much better than any other live or dead man" (62) and that "all men are just accumulations dolls stuffed with sawdust swept up from the trash heaps where all previous dolls had been thrown away" (107).

The morality of human actions becomes progressively less important with each work. In the Book of Job the major dilemma is that a good person suffers, since such suffering contradicts the assumption that a person who is good will prosper. *King Lear* shows that the righteous suffer and the evil prosper but that acting worthily is still important. In *Moby-Dick* Melville is interested in the moral values reflected in the actions of individual
characters. Bildad, for example, is shown to be selfish and penny-pinning, since he would hire men at unreasonably low wages, while his partner, Peleg, is fair. However, the divinity is totally indifferent to human morality as seen by the random way that misfortune strikes. To the narrators of the first three sections of *The Sound and the Fury* morality does not make any difference at all. In Freudian terms Benjy represents the id, which "knows no values, no good and evil, no morality" (Freud 561). According to Faulkner, "Benjy is incapable of good and evil because he had no knowledge of good and evil" (241).

Quentin tries to affirm morality by valuing Caddy's virginity to the point of obsession, valuing "above all not her but the virginity of which she was custodian" (229). Caddy's violated chastity becomes for Quentin a symbol of the moral chaos of humanity. To Mr. Compson, virginity is just words. He thinks chastity must be judged in terms of what is natural, and purity seems to him "a negative state and therefore contrary to nature" (71). Mrs. Compson is upset about Caddy's promiscuity, not because it is sin, but because it is a violation of morality in the Puritan sense: "your Mother is thinking of morality whether it be sin or not has not occurred to her" (62). Dalton Ames is also unconcerned with virginity. When Quentin asks him if he has ever had a sister, Dalton replies: "No, but they're all bitches" (56).

In order to escape the conclusions of his father and to assert moral values, Quentin acquires a perverse desire to prove morality by violating it. He contemplates incest with Caddy, hoping that he could prove chastity by violating it, as he says to his father, "If we could have just done something so dreadful" (49). Caddy's violated chastity becomes for Quentin a symbol of
the moral chaos of humanity. Quentin nurtures a hope that others would be shocked by a terrible violation of morality, and that Caddy and he would have to go away "amid the pointing and the horror the clean flame" (90). But the people around Quentin do not value morality. Caddy places no value whatever upon her virginity--"the frail physical stricture which to her was no more than a hangnail would have been" (229). According to Mr. Compson, "people cannot do anything very dreadful at all" (49). For him moral values are not a reality: "no live or dead man is very much better than any other live or dead man" (62). Herbert Head is dishonest and unscrupulous, and when Quentin accuses him of having cheated at Harvard, Herbert replies that when a man is young he thinks a thing like that is a lot more serious than he does a few years later:

young man gets these ideas and I'm all for them does him good while he's in school . . . but when he gets out into the world he'll have to get his the best way he can because he'll find that everybody else is doing the same thing . . . . (67)

Unlike Quentin, who attempts to affirm moral values, Jason has no sense of morality but bases his actions on his own ambitions and desires: "I'm glad I haven't got the sort of conscience I've got to nurse like a sick puppy all the time" (137). He is materialistic, swindling from Caddy the money she sends for her child, suggesting that the family rent Ben out to a sideshow to make money, and measuring his manhood in terms of his ability to "keep the flour barrel full" (125). When he plays his cruel trick on Caddy, allowing her only a glimpse of her child after she has given him a hundred dollars to see her, he does not feel any sense of moral wrong, but rather considers it recompense for the failure of Caddy's husband to give
him the job he was promised: "And so I counted the money that night and put it away, and I didn't feel so bad" (124). Time for Jason is money, and he is always harried and never has enough time: "Dam little time to do anything in" (141). His self-centered orientation is typically revealed when after his father's death his mother says that Jason and Maury are all she has left, and Jason replies, "well I could spare Uncle Maury myself" (119). He does not respect anyone. Unlike Quentin, who is upset by Dalton Ames' comment that women are all bitches, Jason thinks "once a bitch always a bitch" (158). He values other human lives only in terms of whether they are useful or an obstacle to him. His niece Quentin does not have individuality for him but "merely symbolized the job in the bank of which he had been deprived before he ever got it" (182). In criticizing her promiscuous escapades, Jason is not considering morality, but merely his own reputation:

I don't care what you do, myself . . . . But I've got a position in this town, and I'm not going to have any member of my family going on like a nigger wench. (114)

He wants to send Benjy to Jackson because he doesn't want people to see a "thirty year old man playing around the yard with a nigger boy" (133). Sometimes Jason treats others maliciously, as when he burns two free passes before Luster, knowing that the young boy would desperately like to see the show. His cruel attitude toward other people is reflected in the names he gives them, calling Caddy a "bitch," Quentin a "damn little slut," his mother an "old fool," Benjy "the Great American Gelding," and Dilsey
"an old half dead nigger." Jason is "sane" in the sense that he is more logical and coherent than Benjy or Quentin, but he is also inhuman (331).

In the first three sections of The Sound and the Fury, it appears that the theme of the novel supports the title, The Sound and the Fury. Sartre, for example, thinks that Faulkner has decapitated time and deprived it of its future (257). However, in the final section of the novel Dilsey presents an alternative to the meaninglessness of The Sound and the Fury. Dilsey is able to order the chaotic world in which she lives. Unlike Quentin, who finds time sheer anxiety, Dilsey finds meaning in time. When the clock in the kitchen strikes five times, she knows that it is eight o'clock, or when it strikes ten times, she says, "One o'clock" (179). She accepts death and her own temporality: "Show me the man what aint going to die, bless Jesus" (18). For Dilsey time moves in a slow and deliberate way, which is reflected by her telling the children, "You'll know in the Lawd's own time" (16) or "I let you know bout dat when de time come" (171). Dilsey finds meaning in the temporal--time in nature--because for her the temporal is ordered by the eternal. Her vision of the world is profoundly influenced by a belief in judgment and life after death. She believes there will be a judgment day and that her name will be written in the Book and "All I got to do is say Ise here" (36). She is the only character who is aware of the supernatural ordering--the days of Holy Week--in which the natural events have their significance. Benjy's section is told on the Saturday of Holy Week, and Jason's section is told on Good Friday, but both of these characters are too concerned with the natural events of their own world to be aware of the religious significance of the time which structures their narratives.
Quentin's section is told on June 1, 1910, a date which is only in the context of secular time, suggesting that Quentin is the most time-bound and nature-bound of the characters. In the final section Dilsey is aware that it is Easter, a day of hope.

She finds meaning in time through simple acts of love and compassion. Unlike those around her, her life is based on "agape." She willingly gives the Compson family dedicated, self-sacrificing, and loving care. She is constantly caring for Benjy--giving him a flower for the carriage ride, asking Caddy to snuggle in bed with him until he falls asleep, or making him a birthday cake with thirty-three candles. She has demonstrated her love for the Compsons by serving as their cook, nurse, and guardian for more than a generation. Dilsey enables us to judge the Compson world by presenting a contrast to it. Her ability to care for others contrasts with the helplessness and self-centeredness of the mother. In the final section, for example, Mrs. Compson helplessly calls Dilsey's name from the head of the stairs with "machine-like regularity," demanding her hot-water bottle and fretful that Benjy needs to be dressed. Dilsey climbs up the stairs laboriously, only to learn that Benjy has not yet awakened.

Dilsey acts as an alternative to the moral chaos around her. Quentin defines the role of the black people, particularly Dilsey, as moral reflectors, that "come into white people's lives like that in sudden sharp black trickles that isolate white facts for an instant in unarguable truth like under a microscope" (105). He knows what Dilsey's judgment would be if she knew of his suicide plans:
Reducto absurdum of all human experience, and two six-pound flat-irons weigh more than one tailor's goose. What a sinful waste Dilsey would say. (55)

Dilsey is able to make order out of the amorality of the Compson world. Jason fears Dilsey, who represents conscience for him. He thinks nothing whatever of God, "fearing and respecting only the Negro woman, his sworn enemy since his birth and his mortal one since that day in 1911 when she too divined by simple clairvoyance that he was somehow using his infant niece's illegitimacy to blackmail its mother" (233). When Jason prepares to whip his niece, Dilsey reprimands him: "'You Jason! Aint you shamed of yourself" (112). Dilsey knows that Jason might even hit her, as she says: "I don't put no devilment beyond you" (112). When Jason scolds Dilsey for letting Caddy see her daughter and Benjy, Dilsey pronounces the following judgment on him: "'You's a cold man, Jason, if man you is . . . . I thank de Lawd I got mo heart dan dat, even ef hit is black'" (125). When Jason teases Luster by burning the free passes, Dilsey says that he should be ashamed of himself: "'A big grewed man like you . . . . Git on outen my kitchen'" (153). Jason assumes the financial burden of the family simply because he is afraid of the cook. After his mother's death he is able to free himself from responsibility for his idiot brother and the house, because he can simultaneously free himself from the judgment of Dilsey: "'In 1865,' he would say, 'Abe Lincoln freed the niggers from the Compsons. In 1933, Jason Compson freed the Compsons from the niggers'" (234). Yet, Faulkner is not intending in any sense that the blacks represent an historical alternative to the world of the Compsons. Although the black people sometimes act as moral reflectors, Dilsey recognizes that they not
exempt from moral deviation themselves, as seen in her firm reprimands of Luster. When Luster says he is glad he isn't one of the Compsons, Dilsey says: "Lemme tell you somethin, nigger boy, you got jes es much Compson devilment in you as any of em" (165).

Through Dilsey's eyes we see the disintegration of the Compson family, not as "the reducto absurdum of all human experience," but as a human tragedy. Dilsey's expression upon witnessing the disintegration of the family is "fatalistic and of a child's astonished dissapointment" (159). On Easter Sunday morning, as Jason is chasing after his niece, Dilsey is in church, weeping over the human failure of the family to which she had ministered all her life: "Two tears slid down her fallen cheeks, in and out of the myriad coruscations of immolation and abnegation and time" (176). Time for Dilsey is linear, with a beginning and an ending. As she returns from church, she says, "I've seed de first en de last" and "I seed de beginning, en now I sees de endin'" (177). Her words have Biblical overtones of Alpha and Omega and the beginning and the end of creation, but she is also mourning the disintegration of the family for which she has cared for more than a generation.

Although Dilsey gives the reader a glimpse of an alternative way of life based on "agape" and an awareness of one's own temporality, the dominant tone of the novel remains chaos and meaninglessness. The novel ends, as it began, with Benjy's bellowing. In fact, if one examines the structure, it is clear that Dilsey is not the focal figure throughout the fourth section. Although Dilsey goes to church and hears the Easter sermon, other sequences show Luster driving Benjy in the carriage and Jason
chasing his niece. In fact, the Easter service is juxtaposed with Jason's futile pursuit of his niece. As Dilsey and her friends walk to church "with slow sabbath deliberation" (174), Jason is driving to the carnival with increasingly frantic haste (Bleikasten 183). The sense of community, as Dilsey and her friends exchange greetings, is contrasted with Jason's extreme isolation. The imagery and atmosphere of the last section also conveys a vision which is just as bleak as the second section. Although the section takes place on Easter Sunday, the "day dawned bleak and chill, a moving wall of grey light out of the northeast" (158). When Dilsey opens the door of the cabin, the "minute and venomous particles" of rain needle her skin. When Dilsey and her family start off for church, the rain has stopped, but the sun is "random and tentative" and the wind is "chill and raw" (173). As they walk to church, the countryside around them is desolate. The yards of the small cabins with "weathered roofs" are set in "small grassless plots littered with broken things, brick, planks, crockery" (173). It is a wasteland: "What growth there was consisted of rank weeds" (173). Like T. S. Eliot's "Wasteland," the spring brings decay instead of rebirth. The trees "partook also of the foul desiccation which surrounded the houses; trees whose very burgeoning seemed to be the sad and stubborn remnant of September, as if even spring had passed them by" (173). The Compson house is also decaying: "the square, paintless house with its rotting portico" (178). The house and the landscape simply mirror the disintegration of the family: "the rotting family in the rotting house" (233).

Each of these literary works questions more deeply whether life is meaningless, and although each work offers some alternative of meaning,
it is less certain and less pervasive in each. In the Book of Job God's presence at the end counters the sense of anxiety and meaninglessness throughout the book. In King Lear, although the gods do not intervene to reward the righteous and punish the evil, the meaning of life comes from the value of acting worthily. As Maynard Mack puts it, "it is better to have been Cordelia than to have been her sisters" (117). In Moby-Dick Ishmael presents an alternative to Ahab's view of life as exclusively sorrow, since he is able to see both joys and sorrows. There is a woe that is madness, as illustrated by Ahab's obsession with the sorrows of life, but it is also possible to be a Catskill eagle, to see the sorrows of life and yet to emerge, as Ishmael does at the end of the novel. In The Sound and the Fury, although Dilsey is able to find order in the chaos around her, the vision at the end of the novel remains bleak. The Compson family has disintegrated and their lives are full of meaninglessness and despair.
Job is an image of suffering humanity. When Job suffers and questions, his situation is universal. Job's questions give us a pattern of the questions which are raised by undeserved suffering. First of all, Job's suffering raises the question of "why" there is suffering. What causes undeserved suffering, tragedy, and disaster? Secondly, what is the nature of the universe? Is it based on principles of justice and order? Is there a principle of retribution according to which the good are rewarded and the evil punished? Thirdly, what is the nature of the power that controls the universe? Does God exist? Is God powerful? If God is in control, then what is the nature of God? Is God unjust, cruel, or indifferent? Is God hidden, absent, or inscrutable? Fourthly, does life have meaning? What is the place of humankind in the universe?

Although he is comparatively righteous, Job suffers a series of disasters and loses everything. Although he admits that he may have sinned, he insists that the punishment does not fit the crime. Job asks "why" he has to suffer. His personal experience tells him that the principle of retribution does not always work in this life, that God does not always reward the good and punish the evil. Job directs his questions to God. He assumes that God is in control and questions whether God is unjust or even
cruel. He never doubts God's existence, but he has an overwhelming sense of being abandoned by God. Because God is hidden, life seems meaningless and Job longs for death. God finally appears to Job. He shows Job that he has been presumptuous in assuming that he could know the ways of creation which are known only to God. Although God answers Job's longings by his presence, the answer to "why" there is suffering is not explained.

In King Lear three of the main characters--Lear, Edgar, and Gloucester--lose everything and are reduced to nothing. Edgar in his nakedness reminds us of Job when he has lost everything: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return" (1:21). Even if characters have some faults, their suffering is undeserved. Lear, for example, is "more sinned against than sinning" (III.ii.60). In spite of Albany's expectations that the gods will protect the good characters and take revenge on the wicked, the events of the play demonstrate that there is no principle of retribution. In fact, the wicked prosper and the good suffer. Whereas the Book of Job assumes that only God is responsible for what happens, King Lear has more of a sense of puzzlement over exactly what does cause such tragedy. Questions are raised about whether it is the gods and whether there are gods. Like Job on the ash-heap, Lear in the storm is an image of a human alone in the universe, abandoned by God. As in the Book of Job, the estrangement from God brings a sense of meaninglessness, and there is a longing for death, as in Gloucester's suicide attempts. In the play as a whole, however, there is hope demonstrated in the acts of compassion, faithfulness, and forgiveness. Throughout the play there are
various attempts to explain why there is suffering, but finally no explanation for suffering is adequate, and, as in the Book of Job, suffering remains inexplicable. Although God does not appear, as in the Book of Job, there is the hope that justice may take place in the next world.

In *Moby-Dick* Ahab suffers the loss of his leg by Moby Dick, and he is outraged not only about his own personal suffering but about the suffering of all humankind. Disasters happen randomly. There is no principle of justice in the universe. In fact, the natural world is hostile. God is very powerful and distant, perhaps even cruel and malicious. As Queequeg says, the God who made the shark must be "one dam Injin." Ahab strikes back at God. He does not just question, as Job does, but he defies and blasphemes. As in the Book of Job and *King Lear*, there is a sense of being abandoned by God, as illustrated by the image of Pip alone in the vast ocean. God creates and then abandons his creation. God is more inscrutable than in the Book of Job or *King Lear*. In fact, the ways of God are so inscrutable that human existence seems meaningless. Life is filled with sorrow, although, unlike Ahab, Ishmael is able to see the joys as well.

In *The Sound and the Fury* life is full of suffering--"sound and fury"--which has no meaning--"signifying nothing." Quentin particularly is full of anguish. The universe is full of chaos. The questions about the nature of God are whether God is powerful. God is absent or nonexistent. Life is full of meaninglessness, and, finding time itself sheer anguish, Quentin's suicide is an assumed fact. Although Dilsey offers a glimpse of an alternative by her ability to find meaning in time, the overall vision of the novel is very bleak. The novel ends, as it begins, with Benjy's bellowing--the
hopeless sound of suffering humanity. Life is a "tale told by an idiot," full of meaningless suffering.

There is a progression from Job to Faulkner in the development of the questions which are raised by the problem of suffering. In all of these works suffering raises questions about the nature of the universe, the power that controls the universe, the relationship of humankind to the controlling power, and the meaning of existence. The questions and their answers become increasingly radical. The nature of the universe shifts from creation which is good to a hostile or chaotic world. The power that controls the universe changes from a God who controls the universe to no God at all. The relationship of humankind to the controlling power changes from a questioning in the context of a relationship with God to no relationship at all, and questions about the meaning of existence change from thoughts about the misery and fleetingness of life to a sense that existence is absurd. The question of "why" there is suffering is not answered, but, as in the Book of Job, the problem of suffering provides occasion "for probing a much deeper question, namely the character of man’s relationship to God" (Anderson 513).

When questions about justice in the universe are raised in the context of a relationship with God, there may be questioning, rebelling, and even defiance, but when these questions are outside a relationship with God, there is only despair. As Samuel Terrien writes, "Job knew grief as any man, but he did not enter into a final partnership with what Melville called 'the heartless voids and immensities of the universe'" (21). Quentin enters into that partnership with nothingness by committing suicide. As the
estrangement from God becomes greater, the sense of meaninglessness becomes more pervasive. Each of these literary works offers an alternative to meaninglessness--the voice from the whirlwind, human compassion and faithfulness, the ability to experience joy as well as sorrow, and the ability to find meaning and order in the chaos--but it is less certain and less pervasive in each.
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