

Postgraduate Student Conference 2014, Literature & Culture Colloquium
Tuesday, 6 May 2014, “Kostis Palamas” Building

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“Specter and Testimony in Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick*: The anthropologos of modernity and the Humanimality to come”

Ishmael’s puzzling remark that “Nothing exists in itself” can be read in two ways. We may either read it as “*Nothing* exists in itself,” denoting the necessity of an agency to affirm and validate through reason the existence of nothing; in other words of a logocentric apparatus that will materialize this “nothing” into a visible and practically assailable “something.” Or we may read it as “Nothing *exists* in itself.” In this case “nothingness” seems to act independently, almost erratically, implying the existence of a being which remains undecipherable and unanswerable to the logocentric mandates. This presentation aims at interrogating both itineraries by discussing Ahab’s monomaniac hunt of the elusive White Whale known as Moby-Dick. Why do Pequod’s captain and Ishmael persistently attempt to anthropomorphise the whale? How do we understand this obsession with cetological taxonomies and anatomical stratifications? Most importantly, how do naming and questioning correlate to the concept of democracy as it is discussed in Jacques Derrida’s work *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*?