MELVILLE'S

MARDI, MOBY DICK AND PIERRE

IMAGE, SYMBOL AND THEME
IN MELVILLE'S
MARDI, MOBY DICK AND PIERRE

By

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INTRODUCTION

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Melville in his "Hawthorne and His Mosses" urged the reader who wants to "hear the far roar of [Hawthorne's] Niagara" to "travel away inland into his deep and noble nature." And in his penetrating review, Melville himself unveiled to us much of the "Puritan gloom" of Hawthorne, "the seeker" of "Truth". The "shock of recognition"[1] Melville experienced on reading the elder writer's work led to an immediate flowering of friendship when the two met on August 5, 1850. To Hawthorne Melville bared his soul, and we have the most direct and authentic account of the inner state of Melville's mind in the former's journal. The Salem writer little knew what a great service he had done us by recording that visit Melville paid him in 1856 at his house outside Liverpool. Hawthorne recalled:

> . . . Melville, as he always does, began to reason of Providence and futurity, and of everything that lies beyond human ken, and informed me that he had 'pretty much made up his mind to be annihilated'; but 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 he 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 sandhills amid which we were sitting. He can neither believe, nor be comfortable in his unbelief; and he is too honest and courageous not to try to do one or the other.[2]

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[1] Jay Leyda, The Portable Melville (New York, 1961), pp. 400-421, passim.

[2] Raymond Weaver, Herman Melville, Mariner and Mystic (New York, 1961), pp. 335-336.

Like Hawthorne then, Melville in 1856 and actually for the rest of his life, was "a seeker, not a finder yet". Despite the fact that he was fully indoctrinated in the Calvinistic belief of Innate Depravity and Original Sin, he still could not help questioning the ubiquity of evil and man's overwhelming share of suffering. The conflict of doubts as recorded by Hawthorne is more explicitly dilated upon in a powerful outburst in Mardi:

> Yet vain our surmises. Still vainer to say, that all Mardi[3] is but a means to an end; that this life is a state of probation; that evil is but permitted for a term . . . . Nay, nay. Oro[4] delegates his sceptre to none; in his everlasting reign there are no interregnums; and Time is Eternity; and we live in Eternity now. Yet, some tell of a hereafter, where all the mysteries of life will be over; and the sufferings of the virtuous recompensed. Oro is just, they say. — Then always, — now and evermore. But to make restitution implies a wrong; and Oro can do no wrong. Yet what seems evil to us may be good to him. If he fears not, nor hopes, — he has no other passion; no ends, no purposes . . . and things that are, — have been, — will be.[5]

The obsession with the inexplicable existence of evil is evident in this passage. Like all youths, Melville must have started life with hopeful ideals. His initiation into evil shocked him into a kind of awakening, and later encounters with hardship and cruelty only enhanced his awareness of the preponderance of evil in the universe. Unlike the Transcendentalists, he could not accept evil as a form of good nor could he believe that evil

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[3] Mardi symbolically represents the world in the book.

[4] Oro is the God in Mardi.

[5] Mardi, II, p. 359. All references to Melville's work, unless otherwise stated, are to the Standard Edition (16 volumes, re-issued in 1963, by Russell & Russell, Inc., New York). Volume numbers are omitted where they refer to the set. When a particular book appears in two volumes, like Mardi and Moby Dick, I have used capital Roman numerals to indicate the individual volume, since pagination is not continuous.

would eventually be absorbed into good. At the same time, he was not oblivious of the good, the touch of divine in man. The kindness and goodness in human nature seem the manifestation of a benevolent God in whom he dearly wanted to believe. Yet the evil pervading the universe, the human society, and the human soul, giving rise to underserved suffering, points to a malignant God, or at most, an indifferent God. Melville shrank from that thought. He saw how the divine principle was always tripped by the unexpected emergence of the demonic principle. All seemed blind Fate. But he could not deny that he also had full possession of his will. It is the age-old question of Fixed Fate and Free Will. Though "mysteries ever open into mysteries beyond"[6], Melville would not stop brooding over them.

His books reveal to us the troubled state of his mind and open to us the infinite cliffs and gulfs of human mystery and misery. Yet by these unceasing speculations about life and the universe, he sharpens our sensibility and brings us closer to the meaning and essence of life. This is the kind of intellectual satisfaction, if it can be called "satisfaction" at all, that we can extract from a reading of Melville's writings. It would be futile for any reader to look for the ultimate meaning of human life or a solution for these tormenting problems in his books.

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[6] Ibid., II, p. 375.

I agree with both Homans[7] and Watters[8] that Mardi, Moby Dick, and Pierre can be read as a trilogy. There is a noticeable similarity of theme in all three -- the quest for the Ultimate. The various stages in an intellectual quest can be traced in them. The three questers, Taji in Mardi, Ahab in Moby Dick, and Pierre in Pierre, scorning to stoop to stupid necessity and buoyed up by their visions, run with a will to utter ruin. To the general gender, they are mere fools -- fool of Truth, fool of Fate, and fool of Virtue.[9] Yet it is the very "foolishness' that raises them to a heroic stature. Their daring undertaking is the realization of the latent spark of aspiration in every man. We all, one time or other in our life, yearn to leap all human bounds and limitations, to attain the Ultimate -- to grasp Truth, to destroy all evil, and to practise all virtue.

The three books are then the records of ceaseless intellectual quests: whether it is for the attainment of the Ideal, as in the case of the young mariner, Taji, or for the annihilation of all malice and evil in the universe as in the case of the experience-laden whaling captain, Ahab, or for the realization of the ultimate virtue as in the case of the "innocent", inexperienced idealist, Pierre. The careers of these questers form a kind of downward decline until it culminates in a negation of all values and hopes in Pierre.

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7 George C. Homans, "The Dark Angel: The Tragedy of Herman Melville", NEQ, V (1932), 699-730.

8 R. E. Watters, "Melville's Metaphysics of Evil", UTQ, IX (1939-40), 170-182.

9 Pierre, p. 499.

In Mardi, Melville is the narrator as well as the quester. There is the young, hopeful note at the beginning, which turns into a persistent, reckless yet defiantly exultant tone at the end. The whole is balanced by the change in the philosopher, Babbalanja, a fellow quester, who starts off with an aim similar to Taji's. Babbalanja states:

> "I am intent upon the essence of things . . . that which is beneath the seeming . . . . I probe the centre; I seek to solve the inscrutable."[10]

But after the visits to the various isles where he has witnessed the evil that human beings inflict on each other, he realizes the impossibility of attaining the Ultimate and compromises by accepting the Penultimate. However, even the Penultimate that he accepts -- the society on the island of Serenia -- is only a utopia and it is unconvincing.

Moby Dick is the most satisfying book among the three for we have Ishmael's penetrating metaphysical speculation serving as a kind of commentary on Ahab's demonic yet defiantly heroic effort to destroy what he considers the embodiment of all evil -- the White Whale. It is Ishmael's wisdom acquired in the voyage of the Pequod that lightens the blackness of the "wicked" book. His wisdom of armed neutrality[11] gives balance to the theme, and the reader's terrifying experience of Ahab's fearful end is purged by Ishmael's calm acceptance of the duality of good and evil in the universe as well as in the human world.

The peace of mind that Ishmael acquires in Moby Dick is entirely shattered by the nihilistic note in Pierre. Pierre's determination to

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[10] Mardi, II, p. 36.

[11] Cf. p. 72 in the present dissertation.

champion Virtue to the utmost ends in his discovery of the non-existence of either virtue or vice:

> Look: a nothing is the substance, it casts one shadow one way, and another the other way; and these two shadows cast from one nothing; these, seemsto me, are Virtue and Vice. . . .[12]

It is the darkest book among all of Melville's. Even the worldly wisdom advanced by Plinlimmon[13] is redolent of cold, sarcastic comments from the narrator. His pamphlet can scarcely serve as a sort of balance to offset the hopeless futility of human effort.

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[12] Pierre, p. 312.

[13] Cf. pp. 109-110 in the present dissertation.

- ii -

As the central theme of the trilogy rests in the invisible, unembodied realm of the soul, Melville inevitably has to rely heavily on symbolism as a means of communication. Besides, symbolism is a principal function of the mind and symbol-making is a basic process in creative writing. To facilitate my later discussion of the relationship between Melville's theme and symbols, I shall briefly survey his method of creating symbolism and imagery.

What is a symbol? The simplest definition is that it is an outward sign of an inward state.[14] How is an outward sign made to embody an idea in the writer's mind? By depicting it with images; and an image is the creation of a sense impression -- not necessarily but frequently visual. In Melville images are predominately visual depictions. Symbolism and imagery are then intricately merged to carry a specific meaning desired by the writer, though some symbols possess a meaning of their own and some images are mainly used for descriptive purposes.

In the creation of a symbol, a writer falls back on traditional associations to establish communication with the reader. First, there are the "primordial images" that seem to lie dormant in the memory of most people.[15]

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[14] William York Tindall, The Literary Symbol (Bloomington, 1962) p. 14.

[15] Carl Gustav Jung, Psychological Types, translated by H. Godwin Brynes (New York, 1926) pp. 601-610. Jung's theory is discussed in Genevieve W. Foster's "The Archetypal Imagery of T. S. Eliot", PMLA, 60 (1945), p. 567: "The collective unconscious is only a possibility, that possibility in fact which from primordial times has been handed down to us in the definite form of mnemic images, or expressed in anatomical formations in the very structure of the brain. It does not yield innate ideas, but inborn possibilities of ideas, which also set definite bounds to the most daring phantasy. It provides categories of phantasy activity, ideas a priori, as it were, the existence of which cannot be ascertained by experiences."

It takes the creative imagination of a writer to conjure them up and, when put down on paper, the reader can easily recognize these adumbrations of their unconscious. Then there are the commoner associations currently used in literary writing, such as colour symbolism and symbolic figures like the fair and dark ladies. Another source that a writer depends upon for symbol-making is his own past experiences. This process of abstraction from personal experiences enables a writer to turn the traditional symbols into his own. Melville also expands a symbol by surrounding it with minor ones. Thus, the meaning of his symbols often becomes complex.

What is his way of converting an image into a symbol? Generally there are three processes involved. First, by the more repetition of an image, the writer may already be charging it with a meaning existing in his mind. For example, in "Bartleby the Scrivener", Melville goes to excessive length to describe the environment of the office on "Wall Street". At one end the chambers look upon the white wall of the interior of a spacious sky-light shaft, penetrating the building from top to bottom. At the other end, the windows command an unobstructed view of a lofty brick wall, which is pushed up within ten feet of the window panes. When Bartleby joins the staff, he is placed in a corner of the room, and screened off from the rest of the office. The symbolic meaning of the wall -- mental emclosure and isolation -- is explicit to the most obtuse reader.

The second method is by emphasizing certain characteristics of an image. One prominent example is the white colour of the jacket in the book the title of which is derived from this particular image. Its singular colour distinguishes it from the monkey-jackets of the other sailors.

The great pain the narrator takes to sew in the numerous pockets to store away his properties intensifies its symbolic implications.

> I proposed, that not only should my jacket keep me warm, but that it should also be so constructed as to contain a shirt or two, a pair of trousers, and divers knick-knacks -- sewing utensils, books, biscuits, and the like. With this object, I had accordingly provided it with a great variety of pockets, pantries, cloth-presses, and cupboards.
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> The principal apartments, two in number, were placed in the skirts, with a wide, hospitable entrance from the inside; two more, of smaller capacity, were planted in each breast, with folding-doors communicating, so that in case of emergency, to accommodate any bulky articles, the two pockets in each breast could be thrown into one.[16]

From the white colour of the jacket emerges the idea of the wearer's "innocence" and lack of experience; and its unique structure and usage indicate his desire for isolation.

The third way is to place the image in a situation charged with symbolic meaning. The "Spirit Spout" appearing after a long fruitless pursuit of the whale confirms in a way Ahab's accusation of Moby Dick's deliberate malice. It acts as a lure for the already demonic Ahab. Besides, its being first sighted by Fedallah, himself a symbol of the embodiment of the evil in Ahab, illustrates one of Melville's symbolic intensions in respect of Moby Dick, that he is an agent of evil that sometimes entraps titanic natures like Ahab and makes him a fool of Fate.

This analysis of symbol-making has reduced a creative process into a mechanical one, and unfortunately I have to resort to this device in my

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[16] White Jacket, p. 44.

present dissertation. It is culpable, yet also unavoidable, as I have to show how Melville's symbols are outward signs of his inward state. However, this does not mean that he was a deliberate symbolist; far from that he was often not conscious of having projected a special significance onto a figure, an object, or an incident.[17] His use of symbolism is only a means to an end, not the end itself.

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17 In a letter to Mrs. Hawthorne, Melville stated: "....your allusion for example to the 'Spirit Spout' first showed to me that there was a subtle significance in that thing -- but I did not, in that case, mean it. I had some vague idea while writing it, that the whole book was susceptible of an allegoric construction, and also that parts of it were -- but the speciality of many of the particular subordinate allegories, were first revealed to me, after reading Mr. Hawthorne's letter, which, without citing any particular examples, yet intimated the part-and-parcel allegoricalness of the whole." (Jay Leyda, The Portable Melville, pp 455-456.)

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My principal purpose is to demonstrate how the quest theme starts off in Mardi, with Taji whose goal has no definiteness except that it is a vision of the Ideal, by the attainment of which he thinks he can have complete Happiness, and then is divided into two diametrically opposite pursuits. From Taji's confrontation with evil in the society and his vague awareness of it in himself there emerges an Ahab who is obsessed with evil and turns evil. He attempts to attain his Ideal, which has become a monomania, by pursuing Moby Dick, who to him is both the principle and agent of evil. His is a negative way of achieving the Ideal, the Ultimate. Pierre takes on a positive measure by championing Virtue. The quests all end in futility with the annihilation of the questers.

Throughout this trilogy, Melville's interpretation of the universe -- a dualistic concept of good and evil -- is patent in the adumbrations of the quest theme and in the sets of symbols. His expositions as well as conclusions point to the fact that evil is an integral part of the cosmos. He shows how all natural events, all human relationships, and all dissensions within the human soul, spring from the warring of the divine and the demonic principle.

I propose to deal with character typology as the major focus for this dualistic symbolism. These characters are either representative types from society or both alive and allegorical figures, serving as projections of the dualism in the nature of the hero. The patterns of symbol, simple but nascent in Mardi become complex in Moby Dick and ambiguous in Pierre. The complexity in Moby Dick arises from Melville's awareness of the ambiguity and irreconciliability of the apparent good-

and-evil. In pursuing the ambiguity further in Pierre, he creates confusingly fluctuating symbolic characters.

His symbols are either distinctive sets with polar values or contain dualistic meanings in themselves. I shall deal lengthily with the unique Melvillean symbol with self-contained positive and negative values -- the white colour symbolism.

I

MARDI

-i-

Though diverse in their interpretations of the symbolism and allegory in Mardi, critics have been unanimous in their condemnation of its structure. R. P. Blackmur accuses Melville of writing sermons rather then novels and states that he "made only the loosest efforts to tie his sermons into his novels; he was quite content if he could see that his novels illustrated his sermons and was reasonably content if they did not."[1] Newton Arvin sees it as "a whaling story gone wrong."[2] F. O. Matthiessen[3] blames the disorganized structure on the artificial symbols, for he believes that they killed the allegory, forgetting that Melville paid little attention to the difference between symbolism and allegory anyway. Milton R. Stern feels that "the whole mass sinks out of sight in a sea of botched construction, hashed action and artificially

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1 "The Craft of Herman Melville", VQR, XIV(1938), p.281.

2 "Melville's Mardi", AQ, II(1950),pp. 71-81.

3 American Renaissance (New York, 1941), pp. 377-390.

shifting islands of narration."[4] Moreover, they all feel fully justified in discrediting Mardi, by citing proofs of Melville's own dissatisfaction with the work. When asked to give his opinion of Jean Paul Richter's Titan, A Romance, he replied: "The worst thing I can say about it is that it is a little better than Mardi."[5] He entertained little hope of its being read when he presented to Evert Duyckinck a three-volume British first edition with the leaves uncut. Accompanying the gift was a letter revealing Melville's gloomy view of the book's future in which he likened it to a "wild, mystic Mormon" driven forth into "the shelterless exile."[6] He compared it to an aloe, which, if it flowered by some miracle, would only do so a hundred years later. However half-hearted the prediction had been, it was carried out by Merrell Davis[7] around a hundred years later. Davis achieved an enormous piece of work by marshalling all the possible source materials and brought order out of chaos by dividing the book into three sections: (1) The Narrative Beginning; (2) The Romantic Interlude; (3) The Travelogue Satire. Unfortunately, he only briefly hinted at the symbolic meaning of place, person, action and speech. Disorganized and inconsistent as the symbolism is in this long work, it is still extremely revealing as far as Melville's mind is concerned and forms the first of the trilogy -- Mardi, Moby Dick, and Pierre.

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[4] The Fine Hammered Steel of Herman Melville, (Urbana, 1957), p. 68.

[5] Eleanor Melville Metcalf, Herman Melville, Cycle and Epicycle (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), p. 75, as quoted in Milton R. Stern, The Fine Hammered Steel, p. 66.

[6] Ibid., p. 66.

[7] Melville's Mardi: A Chartless Voyage (New Haven, 1952).

No matter what condemning judgment Melville himself had heaped on the work, the failure of which had caused immense pain to his sensitive mind and worry to his financial position, we must not neglect the fact that he had darkly hinted at "its higher purposes".[8] He was also aware of the wildness of the whole structure; he tried to explain it away by confessing: ". . . some of us scribblers . . . always have a certain something unmanageable in us that bids us to do this or that, and be done it must -- hit or miss."[9] This he stressed again in his letter to Hawthorne after having completed Moby Dick: "What I feel moved to write, that is banned, -- it will not pay. Yet, altogether, write the other way I cannot."[10] So like Lombardo writing Koztanza, Melville went right on; "and so doing, got deeper and deeper into himself; and like a resolute traveller, plunging through baffling woods, at last was rewarded for his touch," joyously proclaiming, "I've created the creative!"[11] It is the voyaging of his speculative mind that we are following when reading Mardi. Now viewed in the perspective of all his works, it is illustrative of Melville's intellectual and spiritual life with all its restless conflicts, unceasing questionings and relentless searchings. Artistically speaking, its blatantly artificial and fluctuating symbolism and incessant bursts of philosophical discourses are admittedly unpardonable blemishes; yet it is a prelude to Moby-Dick's faultless blending of the

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[8] Ibid., p. 225, letter to Richard Bertley, June 15, 1849.

[9] Ibid., p. 215, letter to John Murray, March 25, 1848.

[10] Jay Leyda, The Melville Log (New York, 1951), I, p. 412, Melville to Hawthorne, June 1?, 1851.

[11] Mardi, II, p. 326.

narrative of natural experience with metaphysical speculations. There the "ballast" of cetological material only intensifies the symbolic meanings.

As this work enters the "shadowy realms" of unconsciousness -- and Mardi's "world of mind" is neither simple nor unified — it would be most difficult to draw the themes from its present structural disorganization. However, once the various levels are separated from each other and the individual tales are traced through, we can find the same pattern of themes that runs through his other works. In my study of Mardi, I have followed Stern's division of the book. It was derived, I believe, from Davis's; but it has the merit of directing our attention to the symbolic quest of Taji. Stern found three parallel tales: (1) the introductory "factual" stories that take place in the "real" worlds of Arcturion, the Chamois, and the Parki; (2) Taji's story, the Taji-Hautia-Yillah quest, which takes place in the symbolic world of Mardi; and (3) Babbalanja's and Media's story, which is symbolic and allegorical, and which takes place everywhere and nowhere.[12]

As my present aim is to show the recurrent theme in Melville's trilogy — the human mind in its quest for Truth, the Ideal, the Ultimate — I shall only seek to stress the symbolic figures and actions that unveil the vista of the quester's mind and his inner self. The narrative section about the visits to the geographical and allegorical islands is merely used as an excuse for philosophical discourses or political and social satire. It need not be gone into. Neither should we be detained by the puzzling problem of what actual countries the geographical islands represent; suffice to say that

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[12] Milton R. Stern, The Fine Hammered Steel, p. 68.

they were inserted after the completion of the general construction of the book. The islands, taken from a recognisable world, only satirically illustrate the man-of-war behaviour patterns which preclude Yillah. The repetition with which Melville says that Yillah is not here is the method by which he ties the geographical islands to the symbolic quest. Admittedly, his confusion of realistic and allegorical techniques causes structural disruption and makes the narrative "chartless". However, if we analyze the book with Stern's division of the tales in mind and trace the quest accordingly, we can work out a consistent voyage, which illuminates the restless mind of any intellect seeking to understand the complexity of life and the whole enigma of human existence.

- ii -

Before commencing with the detailed analysis of the theme and symbolism in Mardi, I shall give a resumé of the story in order to facilitate later references.

The protagonist in Mardi, as in Typee-Omoo, is the Seeker, whose name is assumed after he is deeply involved in the adventures of his journey -- Taji, demi-god of one of the Mardian islands. However, he first appears as a common seaman aboard the whaler Arcturion, secretly choosing a comrade and making plans for deserting ship. The motive for doing so is his dissatisfaction with the stale life on board, his desire for attaining a vague visionary goal of happiness, and a grim determination not to sail north where the Arcturion is heading after the change of plan. He escapes with Jarl the Viking in one of the whaling boats. Thus begins a series of adventures. The first encounter is with two South Sea Islanders, Samoa and Annatoo, occupying a ship, Parki. This incident ends with the wrecking of Parki and the drowning of Annatoo.

The second adventure begins when the three survivors, Jarl, Taji, and Samoa, drifting on the ocean, meet a raft. On it is a beautiful maiden named Yillah, who is being carried as a sacrifice to a religious ceremony. Spurred by indignation, Taji slays the old priest, Aleema, who is standing guard over the tent sheltering Yillah. He saves the maiden from the islanders. With the possession of Yillah, Taji enjoys a brief period of bliss, a realization of his visionary happiness. However, after having installed Yillah in a bower in Odo, one of the isles in Mardi, Taji finds his ideal vision of perpetual perfect happiness shattered by the sudden disappearance of

Yillah. Unwilling to accept the loss, Taji sets out on an endless search for her.

Taji's quest begins in Odo, where he lost Yillah but gained the king, Media (also a demi-god), as companion in his search. They are accompanied by three attendants: Braid-Beard, the historian, Babbalanja, the philosopher, and Yoomy, the poet. The questing party makes a grand tour of Mardi. The narrative here gives away to philosophical discourses and satirical presentations of some contemporary situations.

The search for the elusive Yillah is only kept up by the recurring appearance of the three messengers from Hautia, a dark Lamia-like queen, who tries to lure Taji to her isle and a life of sensuality. At the same time he is pursued by the three sons of Aleema. Finally, in sheer despair, he turns to Hautia's isle, hoping to find Yillah there. Yet the visit to Flozella, Hautia's domain, only results in a dramatic struggle to resist the sensual allurements of Hautia. Taji emerges from it triumphant but he is also given a shocking revelation of the death of Yillah. Unwilling to accept this, he still turns his prow toward the open sea.

- iii -

> We are off! The courses and topsails are set: . . . .
> But whence and whither wend ye, mariners? On a cruise
> for the whale, whose brain enlightens the world.[13]

Significantly, Mardi opens symbolically with the archetypal image of a voyage, but embellished with Melville's singular mythic symbol — a whaling cruise. Whaling cruises, now that we have Melville's other writing to fall back upon for an elucidation of their symbolic meaning, are associated with quests for truth, for things remote. They are supposed to open the "flood-gates of the wonder world."[14] Though we cannot be sure whether Melville had Moby Dick in mind when he said "the whale" here, yet we can certainly have a better understanding of its significance when we consider Ahab's apostrophe to the black and hooded head of a sperm whale, hoisted against the ship's mast after it has been severed from the body:

> Speak, thou mighty head, and tell us the secret thing
> that is in thee. Of all divers, thou hast divest the
> deepest. The head upon which the setting sun now
> gleams, has moved amid this whole world's foundations.[15]

If this "Sphinx"[16] ever opens its mouth, it will enlighten our human mind. Taji as a quest figure for Truth is further emphasized when his other characteristics are displayed. He is an "isolato",[17] an intellectual isolato, for he finds the ship's company dull and that no soul is a magnet to his.

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[13] Mardi, I, p. 1 (underlining mine).

[14] Moby Dick, I, p. 7.

[15] Moby Dick, II, pp. 37-38.

[16] Moby Dick, II, Chapter LXX, 'The Sphynx'.

[17] Moby Dick, I, p. 149.

He even cannot "talk sentiment and philosophy" with the Captain. Despite the exuberant cant on "sociality",[18] his comradeship with Jarl does not satisfy the yearning of his mind: life for him must be more than a mere existence of daily work. Life, as it is, is a waste of time. He cannot endure the staleness and weariness, not when the hope of a more ideal state of being is taken away. When the ship changes its original plan of whaling, he immediately protests: "It's very hard to carry me off this way to purgatory. I shipped to go elsewhere."[19] The objection is curious, though in its very strangeness lies the significance.

Where was he shipped to go then? Certainly not to purgatory, as he had said. Then it must be heaven. In his vision at the masthead, he reveals his aspiration:

> The entire western horizon piled high with gold and crimson clouds; airy arches, domes and minarets; as if the yellow Moorish sun were setting behind some vast Alhambra. Vistas seemed leading to worlds beyond. To and fro, and all over the towers of this Nineveh in the sky, flew troops of birds. Watching them long, one crossed my sight, flew through a low arch, and was lost to view. My spirit must have sailed in with it; for directly, as in a trance, came upon me the cadence of mild billows laving a beach of shells, the waving of boughs, and the voices of maidens, and lulled beatings of my dissolved heart, all blending together.[20]

In this passage we have all the hints for the development of the whole quest. Firstly, there is the symbol of the West,[21] the direction

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[18] Mardi, I, p. 14.

[19] Ibid., I, p. 5.

[20] Ibid., I, pp. 7-8.

[21] For other references to the West, see also Mardi, I, pp. 3, 5, 12, 21, 44; Mardi, II, p. 355.

that Taji is so insistent that the Arcturion should take. It is connotative of the destination of every earthly sojourner. For the multiple meanings of the West we have Melville's own exaltation:

> West, West! West, West! Whitherward point Hope and prophet-fingers; whitherward, at sunset, kneel all worshippers of fire; whitherward, face all the Moslem dead in Persia; whitherward lie Heaven and Hell! — West, West! Whitherward mankind and empires -- flocks, caravans, armies, navies; worlds, suns, and stars all wend! -- West, West! -- Oh boundless boundary! Eternal goal! . . . Unattainable forever; but forever leading to great things this side of the reef.[22]

On the factual level of the story, he carefully locates his Kingsmill Isles in the West, and they become the symbolic centre of the destination for which Taji jumps ship and are kept persistently in front of the reader.

Secondly, in the references to Alhambra and Nineveh, Melville is actually preparing us for the identification that the narrator of the story is going to assume in the latter part of the story. Taji, according to Dorothee Finkelstein, is a name from a Persian source. It is derived from a Persian word for crown,"Taj".[23] The Mardians took him for the sun-god. Strangely enough, this has two "linked analogies" to the story. The sun is "our fellow voyager" to the west; it also has a creative as well as a destructive force. The creative lies in the Yillah vision, the destructive is manifested in the murder of Aleema as well as the death of Jarl and Samoa, and finally the vanishing of Yillah may be attributed to this annihilating trait.

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[22] Mardi, II, p. 270.

[23] Melville's Orienda, (New Haven, 1961), p. 192.

There is another recurrent symbol woven into this vision; the singling out of the bird that crosses Taji's sight and disappears from view. This is the milk-white bird that Aleema gives to Yillah as her companion and with its whiteness it becomes a projection of the divine in her.

Neither should we overlook the "impure" element in this otherwise supernal picture; Taji's sensual side is seen in the erotic elements of the scene. The celestial is mixed with the terrestrial, the spiritual with the sensual. It is a Polynesian touch of laving billows, waving boughs and the dissolving effect of maiden voices.

The quester believes, as a human being, he has signed for heaven and will gain it "by escalade"[24] if need be. So regardless of responsibilities or consequences, he will abandon the Arcturion. He acquits himself of any impeachment of the legalities by imputing the initial wrong to the Captain who would be detaining him unlawfully if he insisted on Taji's staying with the ship after the change of the plans. Nevertheless, Taji, scorning the conditions of human existence as symbolized by life on board the Arcturion, has to steal and pilfer from it to help him to achieve his ideal. He places his individual aspiration above his commitment to society and humanity. Though he waives any guilt resulting from this act of desertion, he still "cannot repress a shudder"[25] whenever he thinks of the ship's end. Taji is immature psychologically, as he never examines his motives, and more often than not he overrides any moral prompting by

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[24] Pierre, p. 483.

[25] Mardi, I, p. 29. Arcturion was later sunk in a storm.

insisting on his own "righteousness", or by appealing to appearances. No matter what excuses he has, it is evident that the real motivating force is his selfish will.

Jarl is a victim of Taji's will. On the pretext of "sociality", Taji exploits Jarl's loyalty with Machiavellian disinterestedness. Jarl is a representative of the common man. His other name, Skyeman, is an indication of his divine genealogy:

> Jarl hailed from the Isle of Skye, one of the constellated Hebrides, ... And though he was far from being piratical of soul, he was yet an old Norseman to behold . . . . Thy ancestors were Vikings. . . . are now quaffing mead in the halls of Valhalla.[26]

Neither has Jarl any idea of his age, "Man and boy, I have lived ever since I can remember."[27] His agelessness cuts another facet to his symbolic role, that of his being one of general humanity. So is his language, because he speaks "a world's language",

> Now in old Jarl's lingo there was never an idiom. Your aboriginal tar is too much of a cosmopolitan for that. Long companionship with seamen of all tribes; Manilla-men, Anglo-Saxons, Cholos, Lascars, and Danes, wear away in good time all your mother tongue stammerings. You sink your clan; down goes your nation . . . .[28]

Though his illiteracy, ignorance, and his hollow moody silence clearly indicate his mindlessness, there are other compensating virtues that endow him with a dignity of his own. He is like the "Leech Gatherer"

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[26] Ibid., I, p. 13.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid., I, p. 14.

in Wordsworth's poem; but unfortunately Taji is not a transcendentalist and his association with Jarl cannot enable him to see into "the life of things." The Skyeman's virtues of honesty, simplicity and industry only link him closer to the foolishly simple humanity of the workaday world. It is Jarl who is always concerned with the demands of human existence. He makes a secure hiding place for the compass to use on their chartless wandering, keeps track of time by cutting a daily notch in his oar handle, suggests that they row in case of a calm, foregoes chewing tobacco to lessen his thirst. He exhibits the common human trait of superstition when he thinks the pilot fish are a good omen and that the Parki is a ghost ship piloted by spectres. There is in him the materialistic instinct to ring a bag of coins to find out whether they are gold coins and also to store them away. In these instances, he is like old Jim in Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn.

Possessed of human virtues and practical instincts, Jarl cannot carry these into action for the good of Taji. In the company of a man of will, he becomes a mere tool. When Samoa was clamorous for a meeting with the raft, Jarl, as if he had a premonition of the ensuing catastrophe, "was averse" but made no active intervention. He is morally ineffectual and in relenting to Taji's will becomes a sharer of the latter's crime. However, his mindlessness absolves him from any guilt and his death is not a retributive act of justice but an illustration of Melville's grim awareness of man's inescapable complicity in the great act of human tragedy whether he is virtuous or villainous. Above all, Jarl's death marks the direction that Taji's monomaniacal quest is taking him. The latter's selfish

motive of leaving his "chummy" behind to prevent the sons of Aleema from stirring up the people of Borabolla against him turns Jarl into a substitute to shoulder his guilt temporarily.

Samoa is Jarl's primitive counterpart. He represents the other half of our "joint-stock"[29] humanity. He is all action and violent action too. If Jarl is Starbuck minus intellect, Samoa is Flask. He is entirely lacking in sensitivity. He can even be impervious to the excruciating pain of amputation. This physical insensitivity is symbolic of his moral deadness. He is as limited and incomplete as Jarl. Melville creates this figure without an arm to indicate Samoa's role. He poses a seemingly ridiculous question to drive the point home:

> Now, which was Samoa? The dead arm swinging high as Haman? Or the living trunk below? Was the arm severed from the body, or the body from the arm?"[30]

And as he is afraid that the reader would miss the implication, he answers by saying, "For myself, I ever regarded Samoa as but a large fragment of a man, not a man complete."[31] The Polynesian's incomplete tattoo is another symbolic device to amplify this view of Samoa the half-man.

> In his style of tattooing, for instance, which seemed rather incomplete; his marks embracing but a vertical half of his person, from crown to sole; the other side being free from the slightest stain. Thus clapped together, as it were, he looked like a union of the unmatched moieties of two distinct beings; . . . .[32]

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[29] Moby Dick, II, p. 48.

[30] Mardi, I, p. 89.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid., I, pp. 112-113.

Though Samoa is a primitive in his actions anc emotions, he is still linked to humanity by the possession of a soul. Taji makes special reference to it:

> But there was one feature in Samoa beyond the reach of the innovations of art: — his eye; which in civilized man or savage, ever shines in the head, just as it shone at birth . . . . my Islander had a soul in his eye; looking out upon you there, like somebody in him. What an eye, to be sure![33]

Jarl and Samoa, a European and a Polynesian, form the indispenable, healthy, common, working humanity to which questers like Taji can never belong. The Taji at the beginning of the story still realized the interrelationship of all humanity and the need of "sociality" even in a quest of the ideal. However, when he has attained the Ideal, at least temporarily, with the help of Samoa and Jarl, he finds little use for them. Taji secludes himself with Yillah on an island, away from the mainland, a symbol of humanity. Jarl still maintains his loyalty by building his wigwam on the shore, facing Taji's retreat. Later, despite Jarl's mute message to him, Taji went on to his second quest without him. The subsequent death of the Islander and the Skyeman symbolizes his severance from humanity and his deliberate renunciation of the conditions of human existence. The ultimate futility of his quest in this world is thus inevitable.

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[33] Ibid., I, p. 113.

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Now having shown how Taji as quester in his relationship with the outer world of creation first abandons responsibilities of the world and later cuts himself from all humanity, I wish to trace the story of his inner life, his delusory possession of the Ideal, its change and disappearance and his reckless pursuit to recover it. But I must hasten to add that there is no clear-cut division between the outer life and inner life as these form one entity in the full existence of man.

Taji's first view of the raft carrying Yillah is reminiscent of his vision from the Arcturion masthead, especially so when preluded by a nine days' calm and heralded by the appearance of a noddy upon the peak of Parki's sail. The whole incident of Samoa's attempt to capture it is an ominous rehearsal of Taji's seizure of Yillah. In snatching at the snow-white plumage of the noddy, Samoe only succeeds to secure three tail-feathers while the bird soars away with a scream. Taji's Yillah also leaves him with the white curses of the three sons of Aleema. The showers of plumage from the milk-white noddies intercepting their first view of the vessel creates the illusion of the appearance of a bird sailing towards them. Taji must have felt some inner promptings that urged him to find out, by craft and threat, the object of the voyage. Upon learning that a "beautiful" maiden is being carried to be offered as a sacrifice to the gods of Tedaidee, Taji's soul is immediately stirred towards the invisible victim and he is ready to drown for her. In actual fact he has to kill to release her. As the red blood of the slain priest taints the green sea water, Taji for a moment is smitten by remorse:

> . . . and like lightning I asked myself, whether, the death deed I had done was sprung of a virtuous motive, the rescuing of a captive from thrall; or whether beneath that pretence, I had engaged in this fatal affray for some other, and selfish purpose; the companionship of a beautiful maid.[34]

If he could be truthful to himself and realize the impossibility of a pure motive, he would not be such a reckless monomaniac in the pursuit of an attainment of the Absolute. Yet he refuses to examine his intention and to accept his own complicity of evil. So he assumes a mask of innocence to himself as well as to the world: "But throttling the thought, I swore to be gay, am I not rescuing the maiden?"[35]

Yillah as a symbol has "endless significances" and has incited countless interpretations, from a limp criticism of "an ill-defined symbol"[36] to the entirely biographical explanation of the "faded ecstasy"[37] of Melville's passion for Elizabeth Shaw. However, as a successful symbol should be fluid in meaning, I find in her the "link analogies" of romantic, mythological and even anthropological elements.

First, we must try to explore the name symbolism. According to Dorothee Finkelstein, it has an Arabic connotation as has Taji's. It is derived from the Mohammedan name of Allah. In their invocation of faith,

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34 Ibid., p. 157.

35 Ibid.

36 Gordon Hale Gerould, The Patterns of English and American Fiction (Boston, 1942), p. 355, as quoted in Tyrus Hillway, "Taji's Quest for Certainty", A L, XVIII (1946-k947), 29, footnote 13.

37 Raymond Weaver, Herman Melville: Mariner and Mystic, p. 279.

the Islamic devotees murmur "La-ilaha illa-llah"[38] and the way they place the different stresses renders the pronunciation "yil-lah". Besides, the maiden dwells in Ardair and the Arabic meaning for "Ard" is country.[39] Though we cannot go so far as to say that Yillah is God, with her many associations with symbols of divinity, she is nevertheless a symbol of the divine absolute. She is white and her whiteness is a sign of joyousness -- and other-worldliness. The white bird that Aleema gives to keep her company, like most of the birds that appear in Mardi and Melville's other works, has a touch of the divine. The only interest Yillah shows towards the Skyeman is the latter's unusual and meaningful tattoo:

> She betrayed much surprise at my Viking's appearance. But most of all was struck by a characteristic device upon the arm of the wonderful mariner -- our Saviour on the cross, in blue; with the crown of thorns, and three drops of blood in vermillion, falling one by one from each hand and foot.[40]

To substantiate all this, there is the story of her birth and origin:

> She declared herself more than mortal, a maiden from Oroolia, the Island of Delights, somewhere in the paradisiacal archipelago of the Polynesians. To this isle, while yet an infant, by some mystical power, she had been spirited from Amma, the place of her nativity. Her name was Yillah. And hardly had the waters of Oroolia washed white her olive skin, and tinged her hair with gold, when one day strolling in the woodlands, she was snared in the tendrils of a vine. Drawing her into one of its bowers, it gently transformed her into one of its blossoms, leaving her conscious soul folded up in the transparent petals.[41]

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[38] Melville's Orienda, pp. 203-212.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Mardi, I, p. 171.

[41] Ibid., I, pp. 159-160.

Oroolia is simply another version of heaven as the Mardian God is called Oro. The baptism is a removal of humanity. When Yillah is ensnared by the tendrils of a vine, it is her essential spirit, her conscious soul that is transformed into a blossom. It is her immortal and divine faculty, pure and unvitiated, minus her animal being.

Melville wants to create an absolute of innocent purity in her. That is why all kinds of myths are eclectically suggested. She is marked by the rose-pearl, pink and white. The hue of the heavenly flower which ensnared the essence of Yillah was rose; the shell which conducted the essence from the shores of heaven to the world was a "pearly casket". Her name is also an anagram of "lily"[42] and the meanings for rose are fully explained by Dante in his letter to Can Grande: "It is a figure of heaven, the body of Christ, the Virgin; suggests by quality and shape a vision of order and beatitude."[43] The pearl is a symbol of ideality, innocence and purity. So the rose is a symbol of "Yillah's disembodied spiritual state in heaven."[44] Yillah is an ethereal object, at once other-worldly, pure, ideal and absolute. Taji, in his quest of the Ideal, objectifies his motivating predisposition into her and seizes her as his own. She is the realization of his vision from the Arcturion masthead, the object of his quest. No wonder he says: "In rescuing the gentle Yillah from the hands of the Islanders, a design seemed accomplished."[45] He has yearned for

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[42] Merrell Davis, "The Flower Symbolism in Mardi", MLN, II (1942), p. 628.

[43] William York Tindall, The Literary Symbol, pp. 29-30.

[44] Milton R. Stern, The Fine Hammered Steel, p. 111.

[45] Mardi, I, p. 165.

this state of divine existence so much that he can even conjure up a former existence which they had shared:

> . . . shook we not the palm tree together, and chased we not the rolling nuts down the glen? Did we not dive into the grotto on the seashore, and come up together in the cool caves in the hill? . . . . Think of the time when we ran up and down in our arbour, where the green vines grew over the great ribs of the stranded whale . . . over the wide watery world have I sought thee; from isle to isle, from sea to sea.[46]

Though on the narrative level it is a lie that Taji used to quell Yillah's alarm and bewilderment, on the symbolic level it is a picture of his wishful dream of heaven before the Fall.

In his idyllic state Taji luxuriates, unintentionally staining this spiritual essence with the sensual desires of the animality in him. However, he is still oblivious of the fact that the actualization of ideality is impossible in this natural world. Once it is humanized and actualized, it loses its pure spiritual essence. The tragedy with Taji's suicidal quest for the Ultimate is his immature understanding of life and the ambiguity of human motives. The crime he committed to obtain Yillah, though unavoidable, is just like a reminder of our common human heritage — the Original Sin. As our inheritance in the natural existence, our tainted state makes it impossible for us to regain the perfect innocent happiness of man's prelapsarian state. It is this complicity in evil that we have to recognize. Likewise, we have to acknowledge the selfish motive that intrudes every human, virtuous act. The death of Aleema is going to poison any idyllic happiness Taji thinks he will have. That is why the dead body is compared

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[46] Ibid., I, p. 116.

to a "brown hemlock". Taji can never be freed from the haunting sense of guilt and remorse and this is symbolized by the green colour of the corpse, an ironic paradox as green is always associated with life. However, Taji has to learn that death and evil are part of the make-up of our naturalistic and moral world. Yet, in the mean time, in the supposedly blissful state Taji dwells in, he seems to have hardly grasped all the implications:

> . . . what cared I now for the green groves and bright shore? Was not Yillah my shore and my grove? my meadow, my mead, my soft shady vine, and my arbour? Of all things desirable and delightful, the full-plumed sheaf, and my own right arm the band? Enough: no shore for me yet. One sweep of the helm, and our light prow headed round toward the vague land of song, sun, and vine: the fabled South.
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> As we glided along, strange Yillah gazed down in the sea, and would fain have had me plunge into it with her, to rove through its depths. But I started dismayed; in fancy, I saw the stark body of the priest drifting by. Again that phantom obtruded; again guilt laid his red hand on my soul. But I laughed. Was not Yillah my own? by my own arm rescued from ill? To do her a good, I had perilled myself. So down, down, Aleema.[47]

Yillah, as I have suggested, is a symbolic objectification of Taji's own ideal. So the gradual changes in her are an indication of the despoliation of the ideality. Notwithstanding the initial crimecommitted in achieving her, in order to keep her, Taji has to raise himself to the stature of a demi-god and at the same time, has to bring her to an earthly existence. His basic self-contradiction and inability to realize the impossibility of his idealistic position is summed up in Chapter LI, "The Dream Begins to Fade". It is far too lengthy to quote in full, though the entire chapter forecasts later development. I shall be content by quoting the significant lines and passages:

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[47] Ibid., I, p. 168.

> Yet as our intimacy grew closer and closer, these fancies seemed to be losing their hold. And often she questioned me concerning my own reminiscences of her shadowy isle. . . . Oh Yillah; were you not the earthly semblance of that sweet vision, that haunted my earliest thoughts? But if it was with many regrets, that in the sight of Yillah I perceived myself thus dwarfing down to a mortal, it was with quite contrary emotions that I contemplated the extinguishment in her heart of the notion of her own spirituality.[48]

With disillusionment setting in to spoil the blissful world of the lovers, Hautia begins to appear, first in the guise of the Incognito. The fact that she is introduced in a direct relationship to Taji and Yillah even before Taji knows her existence is symbolic of the subtle change of the Ideal, and how unawaredly the despoliation of Yillah is taking place. If we take Yillah as part of Taji's own self, then we shall understand how Hautia is Yillah's death and that Hautia is actually somehow a form of Yillah. Both are the projections of the duality in Taji — the demi-god.

Nathalia Wright thinks that the Yillah-Hautia relationship is essentially a deity-demon feud, in which the deity principle -- symbolized by light -- is passive and the dark demon principle is enviously aggressive.[49] Her appearance after the death of Yillah then is like Ahab's "darkness leaping out of light."[50] Only in this instance it is the unconscious emergence of the demon principle in a "seemingly Virtuous" relationship. When pure love, mixed with man's baser sexual love, is on the verge of being changed to lust and degenerating into sexuality, then ethereal love vanishes; and the voyager

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[48] Ibid., I, p. 184

[49] "The Head and the Heart in Melville's Mardi", PMLA, LXVI (1951) pp. 351-362.

[50] Moby Dick, II, p. 282.

after Happiness in Ideal Love is confronted with his own baser self; in this case the immature Taji runs away from it in horror and revulsion. In this sense, for one of her symbolic meanings, Yillah can be, as Weaver suggested, "the faded ecstasy". The writing of Mardi was started shortly before Melville's marriage in 1847 and completed in the following year — May 4, 1848.[51] The abrupt change at the end of Chapter XXXVIII could well be the point where the disillusion set in when married life changed the idealized pure love of courtship to the sensual and the carnal. However, this is as far as I would go with Raymond Weaver and to pursue the symbol further by relating Melville's love for his mother and Elizabethan Shaw to the experience Taji undergoes with Yillah and Hautia is applying Freudian analysis to the extreme.

Hautia is another symbolic figure that encompasses diverse elements of romantic and mythological sources, even with a Biblical undertone. The story of Hautia's ancestry explains the connotative origin of her name — haughtiness:

> In the beginning, there were beings in Mardi besides Mardians; winged beings, of purer minds, and cast in gentler moulds, who would fain to have dwelt forever with mankind. But the hearts of the Mardians were bitter against them, because of their superior goodness. . . . in the end, all Mardi rose against them, and hunted them from isle to isle; till, at last, they rose from the woodlands like a flight of birds and disappeared in the skies. Thereafter, abandoned of such sweet influences, the Mardians fell into all manner of sins and sufferings, becoming the erring things their descendants were now.[52]

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[51] Leon Howard, Herman Melville; A Biography (Berkeley, 1951), p. 122.

[52] Mardi, II, p. 385.

This parable is like a retelling of Genesis, analogous to the Fall of the angels and the origin of the demon principle in the world. The original beings were all Yillahs who were the divine aspects of existence, the ideal which could live with man in the paradise of prehistory even before the expulsion of angels. It was Hautia's ancestor who led the revolt, so Hautia is pride personified. This pride is an innate part of human nature and in the case of aspiring youths it is given full room to grow. Taji the quester who rejects life-as-is and thinks that he has a legitimate right to the Golden Age paradise, is not aware of the general human complicity in the burden of guilt.

Yet because Hautia is also a symbol of the sensual, the carnal, and the engrossingly sexual aspect of human love, the images created for her are of a composite nature, embracing both the serpent phantasm and the beautiful, sensuous enchantress of an island paradise.[53] With her glittering eye and her seductive charms she belongs to the many characterizations of the goddess Venus in the outpourings of romantic fiction and poetry. There she appears as a phantom queen, establishing herself in a palace of sensual delights and surrounded by other spirits in loveliest shapes. By the use of supernatural music or other seductive means she entices youths and drugs them into a complete surrender to a life of sensuality. Such is La Femme Fatale in medieval and romantic literature.

Hautia with her flowery island bowers on Flozella-a-Ni a gives us an exact image of La Femme Fatale. She even offers Taji a potion in a "nautilus shell" which casts a spell on him so that he is unable to leave

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[53] Merrell Davis, Mardi: A Chartless Voyage, p. 138.

with the others: "Look on me, Media, Mohi, Yoomy. Here I stand, my own monument, till Hautia breaks the spell."[54]

The flower images used by Melville are another amplification of the general concept of the enchantress. When she appears to Taji for the first time in her real person, Hautia "moves with artful steps: the very snares of love," with a dahlia which is connotative of heartless beauty and a gorgeous amaryllis in her hand, Circæn flowers in her ears; her girdle tied with vervain. These symbolize pride, fascination and enchantment.[55] They have already been used as allurements by the messengers, "three damsels, dark-eyed brunettes", who in their twelve appearances, try to lure Taji to the isle of Flozella-a-Nina by promises of the attainment of love, though not the Love he had experienced with Yillah. They have conveyed to him the message of Yillah's death, with a hope to fill him with despair for his quest.

Hautia, like Yillah, never emerges as a full character and the last chapters describing her enticing isle and her seductive exhortations to a life of sensuality only have a shadowy, dreamy and romantic effect. Not so the struggle in the mind of the monomaniacal Taji. There we have the full dramatization of the quester's persistent determination to pursue Yillah, who has now become for him a symbol of the Ultimate Truth. For Taji, in his voyage around Mardi, has gradually come to a faint recognition of the unity of these two, Yillah and Hautia, though as usual, he never dives into his unconsciousness or inner self to find out the truth. The first occurrence of this thought is hinted at after he learned the story

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54 Mardi, II, p. 394.

55 Merrell Davis, Mardi: A Chartless Voyage, p. 139.

of Yillah's human origin:

> As these canoes now glided across the lagoon, I gave up to revery; and revolving over all that the men of Amma had rehearsed of the history of Yillah, I one by one unriddled the mysteries, before so baffling. Now, all was made plain; no secret remaining, but the subsequent event of her disappearance. Yes, Hautia! enlightened I had been -- but where was Yillah?
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> Then I recalled the last interview with Hautia's messengers, so full of enigmas; and wondered, whether Yoomy had interpreted right. Unseen, and unsolicited; still pursuing me with omens, with taunts, and with wooings, mysterious Hautia appalled me. Vaguely I began to fear her. And the thought, that perhaps again and again, her heralds would haunt me, filled me with a nameless dread, which I almost shrank from acknowledging.[56] Inwardly I prayed, that never more they might appear.

On the narrative level, this merely means Taji's unwillingness to accept the death of Yillah; on the symbolic level, he is shocked to learn that the Yillah of his dream is also an earthly woman, another Hautia. However, he does not realize the ideality that he has captured is corrupted by his human nature and submerged by the demon principle in him. Though he, at the revelation of the three sons of Aleema, exclaims: "Oh Yillah! Too late, too late have I learnt what thou art!";[57] he still keeps on. At this stage, Taji has become a prototype "false Prometheus" who "betrays his humanity with some monstrous pride, some titanic quest for moral purity, some obsessed abdication from the natural ambiguities of life in quest of the absolute and the inviolable or some moral treachery which involves his companions as well

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[56] Mardi, I, p. 362.

[57] Ibid., I, p. 358.

as himself in a final catastrophe."[58] Taji will not accept the natural ambiguities of life. The Yillah he is after now is still the idealized one. It is at this point that he leaves Jarl, the "guiltless" soul, to shoulder his guilt, to be a scapegoat for the crime he has committed. From now on, no matter how "innocent" he wants to appear to the world, the "barbed arrows" of the "white curses" of the "pale", "wan", "ghostly" avengers will in turn bleach the soul of "white" Taji. The monomaniac pursuit of the white Yillah is going to annihilate the quester. He also has to dissemble to the other voyagers about the inexplicable hatred of the avengers.

From this point on, the avengers and the lurers always appear together, as if to remind him of the realities of life -- evil in the form of guilt and lust. Taji, in his titanic pride, disclaims both and when further assailed, his heart only grows hard and defiant of the very Good he is after: "My heart grew hard, like flint; and black like night; and sounded hollow to the hand I clenched. Hyenas filled me with their laughs; death-damps chilled my brow; I prayed not, but blasphemed."[59] The whole tone is redolent of Ahab's curses. In his desperation, he even lands on Hautia's isle with the hope of seeking the news of Yillah. Besides he has "dire presentiments" that in some mysterious way, Hautia and Yillah are connected. There he confirms his fear of the death of Yillah when he looks into the fathomless eyes of Hautia:

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[58] Richard Chase, Herman Melville: A Critical Study (New York, 1949), p. 3.

[59] Mardi, II, p. 382.

> The same mysterious, evil-boding gaze was there which long before had haunted me in Odo ere Yillah fled. Queen Hautia the incognitio! Then two wild currents met and dashed me into foam.[60]

The tragic greatness of Taji lies in his determined unwillingness to accept the temptation, and turn completely to a life of sensuality. Even the pearls that Hautia offers he spurns. The modified forms of "health, wealth, long life and the long lost hope of man" are his if he would only renounce his aspiration. But he seeks only one pearl and that is Yillah:

> ". . . show me that which I seek, and I will dive with thee straight through the world, till we come up in oceans unknown."[61]

When induced to succumb to the earthly joys of a shallow life, he shows scorn for such animal existence:

> ". . . better to me, Hautia, all the bitterness of my buried dead than all the sweets of the life thou canst bestow, even were it eternal."[62]

Directed to seek Yillah in a cavern, Taji hurls himself into a whirlpool in which circles "the white and vaguely"[63] Yillah. The vortex symbol here signifies the ultimate unattainability of Truth. That is why the revolving shadow darts out of sight and goes ocean-ward. When Taji makes another suicidal plunge for it, he would only find himself on an endless sea.

It is true that Taji becomes too much like the terrifying terrible Ahab or the completely nihilistic Pierre. His defiant cry at the end catalogues him in the same group of these two titanic heroes:

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60 Ibid., II, p. 389.

61 Ibid., II, p. 396.

62 Ibid.

63 Ibid., II, p. 398.

> "Now, I am my own soul's emperor; and my first act is abdication! Hail, realm of shades! and turning my prow into the racing tide, which seized me like a hand omnipotent, I darted through."[64]

Yet I still find him different from these two. Taji is immature compared to them. In him there lives the inextinguishable yearning for the fulfilment of man's possibility in ideality. His "realm of shades" surely does not mean his allegiance to Satan as Miller suggested.[65] It is more his picture of death. He has not yet turned wilfully demonic as Ahab, nor nihilistic as Pierre. Melville's tragic vision is taking shape here. But he still exalts the tenacious, though also futile, chase. For this view, I submit his own words in the chapter, "Sailing On". There is a general danger of closely identifying the narrator with Melville throughout the book. Yet definitely in this chapter, this is the voyage of Melville-narrator-Taji:

> That voyager steered his bark through seas untracked before; ploughed his own path mid jeers; though with a heart that oft was heavy with the thought that he might only be too bold, and grope where land was none.
>
> But fiery yearnings their own phantom-future make, and deem it present. So, if after all these fearful, fainting trances, the verdict be, the golden haven was not gained; -- yet, in bold quest thereof, better to sink in boundless deeps, than float on vulgar shoals; and give me, ye gods, an utter wreck, if wreck I do.[66]

So the book ends with Taji still voyaging for his ideal:

> And thus, pursuers and pursued flew on, over an endless sea.[67]

Though he has announced his abdication, the never-dying questing spirit lives on in men like him and Melville.

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[64] Ibid., II, p. 400.

[65] James E. Miller, Jr., A Reader's Guide to Herman Melville (New York, 1962), p. 53.

[66] Ibid., II, pp. 276-277.

[67] Ibid., II, p. 400.

II

MOBY DICK

- i -

The disintegration of the factual and allegorical, or symbolic, levels in Mardi decidedly mars the book. Its fragmented structure renders easy the task of dividing the book into three sections and treating one particular tale. It is a simple matter to single out the Taji-Yillah-Hautia tale and trace the symbolic quest of Taji. Moby Dick, though as voluminous as Mardi, is a complete piece of literary art. It also contains several levels. There is the adventure at sea, depicting the hunt for a white whale by a sea captain from Nantucket. On another level it is a reliable treatise on whales and the whaling industry. These cetological chapters have often been considered irrelevant and superfluous; they perform, however, a function of their own. I agree with Tyrus Hillway's defence of their validity. He says that they "add a sense to the story: they contribute character and individuality to one of the principal characters in the drama, the White whale."[1] Lastly, apart from the narrative and factual account, there is the important level — man's moral nature and his relationship to his universe.

Unlike Mardi, where allegory is merely imposed on the story and the characters often become simply allegorical figures or symbolic projections,

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[1] Herman Melville(New Haven, 1963), p. 87.

Moby Dick has its symbolism well integrated with narration. The various levels of sea adventure, scientific discourse, and metaphysical speculation merge and consequently strengthen each other. The final result is that symbolism is explored at each level. One good example is the different effects resulting from the gams in Moby Dick and the visits to the isles in Mardi. In Mardi the visits to the Mardian isles are disjointed and unrelated and often weakly linked to the main quest of Taji by a general statement such as "In Willamilla, no Yillah being found",[2] or "In vain we wandered up and down in this isle, and peered into its innermost recesses; no Yillah was there in Uhia and Monolova",[3] or "We wandered among these southern isles; but as in Dominora, so throughout Vivenza, north or south, -- Yillah harboured not."[4] But the gams in Moby Dick are defined by Ahab's quest at the same time as they define Ahab's quest. No particular gam makes an allegorical definition of any particular character whose own story is divorced from Ahab's and Ishmael's. The integration of symbolism and narration is complete and faultless.

My fragmented treatment of Mardi is excusable on the ground of the book's essentially disorganized structure. To consider Moby Dick in the same way (that is, if I simply concentrated on Ahab's quest with no reference to Ishmael's or overlooked the account of Moby Dick on the physical level) would be a lop-sided treatment. It would certainly mean that I would be plunging with Ahab and the rest of the crew of the Pequod into the maelstrom, never to emerge again. It would result in a jaundiced view of the whole

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[2] Mardi, I, p. 291.

[3] Ibid., I, p. 291.

[4] Ibid., II, 252.

book -- for no matter how "wicked" it is, it still endeavours to show us a world with its one-third of light and two-thirds of darkness.

In order to obtain a balanced view, I propose in this chapter to deal with Ahab's quest as well as Ishmael's. The whaling captain's voyage is baptized and ends "in nomine diaboli", whereas the mariner's starts off in bitterness of heart and anger with the world, ends in a tone of "calmness" and tragic surrender.

The characters in Mardi are often too allegorical to be alive. Yillah and Hautia are too blatantly symbolic to take on any human flesh. In Moby Dick, however, the characters adequately serve the double function of being the crew members of the Pequod and adumbrations of Ahab's passions, his humanities and inhumanities, the demonic and divine principles in him.

Then there is Moby Dick the White Whale, which stands out as the master symbol in the book. He gathers unto himself other symbols. These help to widen the image and thus consolidate Moby Dick's role as a mythic symbol in the book. I shall allow ample space for a discussion of him.

- ii -[5]

"Moby Dick is the spiritual sequel of Mardi."[6] In his persistent search for the lost Yillah, Taji, the young visionary, has exhibited the demonic side of his nature by killing the Polynesian high priest, Aleema, by assuming the deceptive pose of a demi-god, and by resorting to lies to ward off suspicion. He ignores any pangs of remorse and guilt and at times even becomes defiant enough to be ready to kill again to obtain his Ideal, Yillah. He is last seen dashing out to sea, deserted by his companions. So too Ahab is discovered alone at sea, not pursuing the white Yillah, but hunting Moby Dick, the White Whale.

If the various connotations of the sea-image are recalled, it is easily understood why Ahab, like Taji, is introduced to us at sea. The sea, fluid, shifting, largely uncharted, vast, full of dangers and terrors, is impregnated with symbolistic potentiality. Baird, in his study of primitivism[7] in Melville's work and other literature, suggests that the sea provides writers with a cosmic image of Urishness. The word is derived from the German term, "Urwelt" — the original world shaped from the original universe.[8] It contains all the original mysteries of timelessness. Stern, in his book

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[5] The story of Moby Dick is too familiar to need retelling.

[6] George C. Homans, "The Tragedy of Herman Melville", p. 716.

[7] Baird's definition of primitivism is: "The mode of feeling which exchanges for traditional Christian symbols a new symbolic idiom referring to Oriental cultures of both Oceania and Asia is admitted as genuine primitivism, with the even closer qualifications that most of the authors involved, certainly the majored ones, should have travelled in the Orient and that they should direct physical experience as a medium of feeling to inform the symbols which their art presents." Ishmael (Baltimore, 1956), p. 6.

[8] Ibid., p. 341.

on Melville, reads the sea as "the realm of natural and human mystery, the realm into which man must continually push the bowsprit of his pioneering exploration, mystery of natural existence as well as the mystery of iniquity."[9] Melville himself must have both consciously and subconsciously intended the sea image to embrace these various meanings, for we have Ishmael-Melville's own words. Talking about man's desire to go on a voyage, he says:

> Glimpses do you seem to see of that mortally intolerable truth; that deep, earnest thinking is but the intrepid effort of the soul to keep the open independence for her sea; while the wildest winds of heaven and earth conspire to cast her into the treacherous, slavish shore. . . .[10]
>
> But . . . <u>in landlessness alone resides the highest truth</u>, shoreless, indefinite as God. . . .

As I have already stated, since <u>Moby Dick</u> is not simply a whaling adventure, but a quest to unravel the ultimate mystery of the universe, it is fitting that the crucial drama of this captain's life should take place at sea instead of on land. Besides Ahab's, there is also Ishmael's quest.

To recall the statement I made about Ahab -- "Ahab is discovered <u>alone</u> at sea", I think I have to explain why I said "alone". Though Ahab is commissioned by the <u>Pequod</u>'s owners, Captains Bildad and Peleg, to command the ship's company and to hunt whales for oil, he cares little for his duties. Thus, even though living among the sailors, he is still isolated from humanity. He says to Starbuck and Stubb, <u>Pequod</u>'s first and second mates: "Ye two are all mankind and Ahab stands alone among the millions of the peopled earth, nor gods nor men his neighbours."[11]

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[9] Milton Stern, <u>The Fine Hammered Steel</u>, p. 18.

[10] <u>Moby Dick</u>, I, pp. 132-133 (underlining mine).

[11] <u>Ibid.</u>, II, p. 341.

What has goaded Ahab to a quest of the mystery of the universe and to such an isolated life? For an answer to this question we have to study the character and to retrace the past history of this Nantucket captain before he appears on the scene. Unfortunately little of Ahab's life is revealed to us. But we know that "endowed with a globular brain and a ponderous heart",[12] he was born to greatness, even a tragic greatness; and this, Melville says, always implies a certain morbidity of character. His morbidity stems from his "globular brain", and, as if fated for a tragic end, his career as a whaling captain only serves to develop his "globular brain" and smother his "ponderous heart". Forty years of continual whaling brings privation, peril and storm. It is a desolate and solitary life. The soul is given little nourishment in the "masoned, walled-town of a Captain's exclusiveness. The "madness, the frenzy, the boiling blood and the smoking brow, with which for a thousand lowerings old Ahab has furiously, foamingly chased his prey" have made him "more a demon than a man."[13]

This demonic principle in him, so nurtured by the hardships of life, achieves full growth after the first fatal encounter with Moby Dick. During this episode, the White Whale, after having eluded the attempt to capture him, is swimming serenely away from the chips of chewed boats and the sinking limbs of torn comrades, when Ahab, with oars and men both whirling in the eddies,

> . . . seizing the line-knife from his broken prow, had dashed at the whale, as an Arkansas duellist at his foe, blindly seeking with a six-inch blade to reach the

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[12] Ibid., I, p. 91.

[13] Ibid., II, p. 328.

> fathom-deep life of the whale. And then it was, that suddenly sweeping his sickle-shaped lower jaw beneath him, Moby Dick had reaped away Ahab's leg, as a mower a blade of grass in the field.[14]

His intolerable pride is injured by such a humiliating stroke of dismemberment. Yet in the encounter, Ahab has only shown his demonic side -- "In distracted fury, he had but given loose to a sudden passionate, corporal animosity."[15] This is the unleashing of the demonism in himself.

His supreme intellect broods over the wrong done him and breeds in him a wild vindictiveness against the whale. All the evils he has suffered in life and witnessed in the universe now loom before him and he sets out to accomplish the superhuman task -- to destroy evil, now made assailable in Moby Dick. The White Whale

> swam before him as the monomaniac incarnation of all those malicious agencies which some deep men feel eating in them, till they are left living on with half a heart and half a lung. That intangible malignity which has been from the beginning; to whose dominion even the modern Christians ascribe one-half of the worlds; which the ancient Ophites of the East reverenced in their statue devil; -- Ahab did not fall down and worship it like them; but deliriously transferring its idea to the abhorred White Whale, he pitted himself, all mutilated, against it. All that most maddens and torments; all that stirs up the lees of things; all truth with malice in it; all that cracks the sinews and cakes the brain, all the subtle demonism of life and thought; all evil to crazy Ahab, were visibly personified . . . in Moby Dick.[16]

He tells Starbuck that the White Whale is a "pasteboard mask"[17] which he is determined to strike through. Though he is unsure whether Moby Dick

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[14] Ibid., I, p. 229.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid., I, pp. 229-230.

[17] Ibid., I, p. 204.

is the agent or principle, most of the time he is thinking of it as the principle. His attempt to capture Moby Dick is an attempt to capture God and question him about the ubiquity of evil. He is piqued by an apprehension of some unknown but still reasoning thing putting forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask. This blank wall shoved near to him exasperates him beyond reason. He is determined to unmask it. However, at times, as if aware of the futility of it all, he says: "Sometimes I think there is naught beyond."[18] Yet there is still the yearning in him to prove that behind the mask is Truth -- even if it is the Truth of an all-pervading evil. So, wilfully heedless of the limitations of man's power to know God through his intellect, Ahab hopes to transcen all by sheer defiance. His relentless determination to pierce the mystery, to accomplish the impossible, is precisely that of Taji in Mardi. The purpose of his pursuit of Truth is to find whether there is anything behind the mask; and if there is, it must be a God of evil and malice. Ahab is to be a Prometheus to avenge "the general rage and hate felt by his whole race from Adam down."[19]

In this way, he is deluding himself, either consciously or unconsciously, by turning his motive, which originated in a private pride -- the pride shown in his inability to suffer humiliation and to accept defeat -- to one of public vengeance. His obsession with this humiliating blow against his person aggravates his morbidity and maddens him. His frenzied mind and fixed will have crowded out his heart and the truth he seeks to find is

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[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid., I, p. 230.

transformed into something narrower than he claimed it to be. The vision of universal demonism in the inscrutable and intangible malignity of the whale only calls forth the demonism in him -- the pride and the capacity for hate. He starts off by attempting to assert man's humanity against Nature's and God's inhumanity. Yet he ends by losing his own humanity. The latent evil in him emerges and rules his conscious self. As Lewis Mumford says: "Ahab becomes the image of the things he hates; he has lost his humanity in the very act of vindicating it."[20]

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[20] Herman Melville (New York, 1929), p. 165.

- iii -

We must remember that Ahab is still a man with a ponderous heart, a man with humanities in him, a man capable of love. The final emergence of demonism does not take place without a struggle. During the long search over the seas for Moby Dick, we witness the war of the two principles — the demonic and the divine — in the soul of Ahab. This inward drama is externalized by the pagan harpooners, Fedallah, Starbuck, and Pip; and each one of them plays a symbolic role in the spiritual conflict of this titanic hero. This will be dealth with accordingly in the following sections.

This "ungodly, godlike" man possesses an external, physical symbol of dualism. There is a slender, rod-like mark, lividly whitish, drawn down one side of his tawny scorched face and neck. There are two versions of the origin of this scar. The wise old Manxman seems to think that it is a birthmark that runs down from crown to toe. Another crew member, an old Gay-Head Indian, asserts that Ahab has become branded in elemental strife at sea. Ahab himself seems to have darkly alluded to the history of this mark in the corposant scene when, holding the main-mast links in his left hand and flinging his right arm at the lofty "tri-pointed trinity of flame"[21] (this is a plain symbol of God), he hurls forth these words:

> "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 fire, and I new know that thy right worship is defiance."[22]

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[21] Moby Dick, II, p. 281.

[22] Ibid.

This is a revelation of Ahab's former spiritual state. The reference to fire-worshipping is taken by many critics to indicate that Ahab was a Zoroastrian. Zoroastrianism teaches that the universe is divided between Ahmazd, the god of light, who is good, and Ahriman, the god of darkness, who is evil. The two forces are equal and thus in ceaseless conflict.[23] However, I think this actually refers to the fact that Ahab had been a god-fearing and god-loving Puritan, who believed in a good universe menaced by evil. The repeated experience of the evil in life has so embittered him that he can see only evil at the heart of reality and embodied in God. But, whatever the story, the mark is an outward sign of his sundered soul.

The mention of Zoroastrianism and Ahab's sundered soul takes us directly to Fedallah, the Parsee, the Zoroastrian fire-worshipper. He is such an interesting figure that all studies of Moby Dick have to give some space to a discussion of him. To M. O. Percival,[24] Fedallah is "a creation of Ahab's own self-seducing mind." Arvin sees in him "a principle of pure negation, of hatred instead of love, vindictiveness instead of charity, destruction instead of creativeness." His fire-worshipping, Arvin continues, is not a worship of light and truth, but of raging and destructive Evil.[25] James Baird gives us a most penetrating study of Fedallah. He echoes Arvin:

> /Fedallah/ is the force of destruction through which Ahab is confirmed in his insane hatred. Fedallah's fire is of hell itself, the fires of destruction existing in the universe of God.[26]

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[23] Charles Child Walcutt, "The Fire Symbolism in Moby Dick", MLN, LIX (1944)

[24] A Reading of Moby Dick (Chicago, 1964), p. 129

[25] Herman Melville (New York, 1961), p. 129.

[26] Ishmael, p. 280.

But he probes deeper into the subconscious of Ahab and Melville:

> The quality of Fedallah which fascinates is his indefiniteness; and it is the same quality which informs all of Melville's shadowy symbols of primal mind. The aboriginalness of Fedallah is archetypal; it eludes the power of reason.[27]

In short, all critics agree on the point that Fedallah is a symbolic representation of the inexplicable evil in human nature, an externalization of the demonic in Ahab.

The description of Fedallah's stature and attire suggests his devilish nature: a tall, swart figure clothed in Chinese black but crowned as it were with a glistening white turban formed by living hair braided and coiled round and round his head. The duality of Fedallah's attire indicates the Parsee mind, and to Melville, the combination of white and black has powerful association with pure evil. This image of evil is intensified by his "one white tooth evilly protruding from its steel-like lips."[28] His eyes too are of a terrible paleness: they "wane", Melville says, and in the chase, are lit up by "a pale death glimmer".[29]

Baird's suggestion of Fedallah as a symbol of the primal mind is substantiated by Melville's own words.

> He was such a creature as civilized, domestic people in the temperate zone only see in their dreams, and that but dimly; but the like of whom now and then glide among the unchanging Asiatic communities, especially the oriental isles to the east of the continent -- those insulated, immemorial, unalterable countries, which even in these modern days still preserve much of the ghostly

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[27] Ibid., p. 281.

[28] Moby Dick, I, p. 273.

[29] Ibid., II, p. 333.

> aboriginalness of earth's primal generation, when the memory of the first man was a distinct recollection, and all men his descendants, unknowing whence he came, eyed each other as real phantoms, and asked of the moon why they were created and to what end; when though, according to Genesis, the angels indeed consorted with the daughters of men, the devils also, add the uncanonical Rabbins, indulged in mundane amours.[30]

This primal mind is a mind that raises all the primal questions of whence and why and whither.[31] The Parsee is one who is known for this kind of doubting mind. Fedallah as a symbol depicts to us Ahab's subtly maddened mind that is wilfully and passionately concerned with the moral problems of a dual world. It is obsessed with the evil in the world because his reasoning power is now divorced from faith.

These inner qualities of Ahab's mind exert a gradual possession over him and finally assert their domination when he secludes himself to brood over the bodily injury from Moby Dick. This brooding can take a person in two directions: despair or defiance. In Ahab's case it is defiance. In the long nocturnal sessions with Fedallah, Ahab undergoes severe mental conflict. Despite his "globular brain", his human intellect is limited and he finds the mystery of evil inexplicable. With his torn body as a living reminder of the "inscrutable malice" in the universe, his morbid broodings deepen into madness. It is a madness of hate and desire for vengeance. These are the attributes of the devil. Fedallah as a symbol of the incarnation of the devil in Ahab, is at first only darkly hinted at by Elijah and vaguely seen by Queequeg, but he later emerges in full and shows his identity with Ahab.

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[30] Moby Dick, I, pp. 291-292.

[31] Percival, A Reading, p. 42.

The crucial scene in which Ahab displays his demonic purpose takes place on the quarter-deck. It is a public flaunting of his diabolical allegiance. By sheer power of mesmerization, he is able to stir the mariners to excitement and league them together in a mighty oath to chase down " a certain white-headed whale with a wrinkled brow and a crooked jaw".[32] To impress them of the solemnity of the oath, he administers a ritual closely resembling a diabolical communion. As Percival has suggested, it is full of overtones from the Black Mass. He explains it thus: "Of this particular form of Satanism the ritual is said to include black candles and black blood, the cross upside down, prayers and ceremonies backward, invocation of the devil, and ceremonies at night with poisonous brews and oaths of sin and hate."[33]

We remember that Ahab's ministration of the oath takes place at the "close of day".[34] The three pagan harpooners, Queequeg, Tashtego and Daggoo, provide it with the outward blackness. They stand symbolically for Ahab's emotions and passions. It is they who immediately show a recognition of Moby Dick as the White Whale that Ahab is after. They are the ones who have seen Moby Dick. This common knowledge and experience links Ahab to the three harpooners as he hilariously answers their questions and echoes their words:

> "Cork-screw! ay, Queequeg, the harpoons lie all twisted and wrenched in him; ay, Daggoo, his spout is a big one, like a whole shock of wheat, and white as a pile of our Nantucket wool after the great annual sheep-shearing; ay, Tashtego, and he fan-tails like a split jib in a squall. Death and devils! men, it is Moby Dick ye have seen -- Moby Dick -- Moby Dick!"[35]

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32 Moby Dick, I, p. 201.

33 Percival, A Reading, p. 10.

34 Moby Dick, I, p. 200.

35 Ibid., I, p. 202.

Their complete submission to Ahab's will further illustrates their role as the externalizations of his emotions and passions. At Ahab's command: "cut your seizings and draw the poles, ye harpooners!"

> Silently obeying the order, the three harpooners now stood with the detached iron part of their harpoons, some three feet long, held, barbs up, before him.[36]

Then the cup of grog, described by Ahab as hot as "Satan's hoof" is passed around and the pagan harpooners, served by the three mates as cup-bearers, drink the fiery waters from their long, barbed steel goblets amid "cries and maledictions against the White Whale".[37] The spirits are quaffed down with a hiss. The league is indissoluble.

Before I continue with this diabolical scene, I would like to pause for a little while with these pagan harpooners who, with their blackness, serve as a symbolic extension of the Dark Ahab -- the Ahab who despite his white colour is darkened by his hatred and fixed purpose of vengeance.

The one noticeable characteristic of these three, as I have said, is their dark colour. Queequeg, we learn even before we see him, is dark -- devilish dark at that; at least such is the impression the crudely jocular landlord of the Spouter Inn gives Ishmael who is to have the savage for a bedfellow. Then he is called by Bildad a "son of darkness".[38]

Tashtego is also a "son of darkness"; he has "long, lean, and sable hair" and "black rounding eyes" which, he says, are "oriental in their

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[36] Ibid., I, p. 207.

[37] Ibid., I, p. 208.

[38] Ibid., I, pp. 110, 113.

largeness, but antarctic in their glittering expression."[39] It is this son of Satan who stands at the main-mast when the Pequod is smitten full on the starboard bow by the white buttresses of Moby Dick's humped brow; it is the same Tashtego, who, even as the Pequod sinks, nails Ahab's red flag of vengeance to the main-mast. His is the final human act in the catastrophe; but there is something diabolic about it too.

Daggoo, a gigantic, coal-black negro-slave, with a lion-like tread, is an "Ahasuerus to behold".[40] His "white-shark teeth" and golden hoops in the ears are the only things that relieve his blackness.

Their colour helps to build the image of Satanism in Ahab's wilful actions. This symbolic function is more explicit in the scene at the forge. There Ahab, instead of using water to temper his harpoon, cries out in sheer hatred:

> "I want it of the true death-temper. Ahoy, there! Tashtego, Queequeg, Daggoo! What say ye pagans! Will ye give me as much blood as will cover this barb?" . . . A cluster of dark nods replied, Yes. There punctures were made in the heathen flesh, and the White Whale's barbs were then tempered.
>
> "Ego non baptizo te in nomine patris, sed in nomine diaboli!" deliriously howled Ahab, as the malignant iron scorchingly devoured the baptismal blood.[41]

Now to return to the scene of the oath upon the quarter-deck. The struggle Ahab has with Starbuck, the first mate, is an external enactment of the inner battle in the soul of Ahab. As I have already stated, Ahab's globular brain and ponderous heart are often at strife. Though he is now

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39 Ibid., I, p. 148.

40 Ibid., I, p. 149.

41 Ibid., II, p. 261.

nearly engulfed by the demonic, there is still the deity principle in him -- his warm humanity -- or, to put it in the crudest form, his conscience. Starbuck, the first mate, has two functions. Apart from the character role as the officer forming with Stubb and Flask as with all mankind on the Pequod a microcosm, he often stands as a symbol of the humanity in Ahab. Whereas Fedallah is a dramatic embodiment of Ahab's monomania, Starbuck stands for the conscience, the heart principle moderated by reason.

There are two crucial incidents when these two symbolic characters come into conflict, each struggling for Ahab's soul. These occur in the quarter-deck scene and in the chapter entitled "Symphony". In the quarter-deck scene, the Parsee has not yet made his appearance. However, his lurking presence is felt throughout. Ahab, in rounding the crew into a league against the White Whale, shows a mesmerizing power, as if he is aided by the devil. Seeing the old man's deliriously mad vengeance, Starbuck accuses him of blasphemy. The Fedallah in him immediately prompts Ahab to rant at the first mate. The fury-laden, hate-laden speech reveals the earlier conflict of the good and evil in him:

> "Who's over me? Truth hath no confines. Take off thine eye! more intolerable than fiends' glarings is a doltish stare! So, so; thou reddenest and palest; my heat has melted thee to anger-glow."[42]

Then the demonic principle gains precedence:

> "Something shot from my dilated nostrils, he has inhaled it in his lungs. Starbuck now is mine; cannot oppose me now, without rebellion."[43]

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[42] Ibid., I, p. 204.

[43] Ibid., I, p. 205.

To be more explicit, Melville goes on to comment on the fact that a man's determined allegiance to evil would render futile any pang of conscience or any portentous warning from Nature:

> But in his joy at the enchanted, tacit acquiescence of the mate, Ahab did not hear his forebodings invocations, nor yet the low laugh from the hold; nor yet the presaging vibrations of the winds in the cordage; nor yet the hollow flap of the sails against the masts, as for a moment their hearts sank in. For again Starbuck's downcast eyes lighted up with the stubbornness of life; the subterranean laugh died away; the winds blew on; the sails filled out; the ship heaved up and rolled as before. Ah, ye admonitions and warnings! why stay ye not whence come? But rather are ye predictions than warnings, ye shadows! Yet not so much predictions from without, as verifications of the foregoing things within. For with little external to constrain us, the innermost necessities in our being, these still drive us on.[44]

This passage clearly denotes that the quarter-deck scene is a symbolic external projection of the "foregoing things within the mind." Fedallah has made an undoubted conquest of Starbuck.

Another similar scene takes place the day before the sighting of Moby Dick and the three-days' chase. It is a clear steel-blue day. Nature is suffused with an air of benignity. The lovely aromas in that enchanted air at last seem to dispel for a moment the cankerous thing in Ahab's soul. Ahab's hardened heart yields temporarily to the caressing influence of nature and from the haggardly firm and coal-glowing eyes there drops a tear into the sea. Starbuck's role is again symbolic of Ahab's humanity, his land sense. At the sight of the relenting Ahab, Starbuck seems "to hear in his own heart the measureless sobbing that stole out of the centre of the serenity around."[45]

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[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid., II, p. 327.

Reviewing his past life, the old man, still retaining some "goodness", a touch of humanity in him, now realizes how he has been "more a demon than a man." In his pertinacious pursuit of the whale, he has let pride isolate him from the rest of humanity, and his callous heart has spurned all mankind. Now he feels the resulting desolation, and in despair, he cries:

> "Close! stand close to me, Starbuck; let me look into a human eye; it is better than to gaze into sea or sky; better than to gaze upon God. By the green land; by the bright hearthstone! this is the magic glass, man; I see my wife and child in thine eye."[46]

Yet in spite of the urge of conscience to stop the chase, to fly from those deadly waters, Ahab has been enslaved by maddened hate. The deity principle in him is no match for the demonic. He feels the clutching grip of the Satanic power:

> "What is it, what nameless, inscrutable, unearthly thing is it; what cozzening, hidden lord and master, and cruel, remorseless emperor commands me; that against all my natural lovings and longings, I so keep pushing, and crowding, and jamming myself on all the time."[47]

The bond with the devil is complete when Starbuck steals away in silent despair and Ahab crosses the deck to gaze at the water over the other side. The eyes he sees staring at him are those of Fedallah. The demon that he nurtured has now taken full possession of him, quelling any revival of its opponent.

I have forestalled the end by treating together these two symbolic scenes, one at the beginning, the other at the end. Now let me retrace my steps and see how Fedallah is shown as the outward manifestation of Ahab's

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[46] Ibid., II, p. 329.

[47] Ibid., II, p. 330.

"worser spirit". After the scene of oath-taking, a public demonstration of Ahab's monomania, the Parsee and the yellow crew suddenly but unobtrusively emerge from their subterranean habitation at Pequod's first lowering for a whale. From that moment on, Fedallah and Ahab are inseparable. Fedallah either looms in the foreground, or lurks in the background, and at times, replaces the presence of Ahab.

When Ahab is welding his own harpoon in the intense straight flame,

> the Parsee passed silently, and bowing over his head toward the fire, seemed invoking some curse or some blessing on the toil.[48]

Observing this, Stubb identifies him with the devil and remarks:

> "The Parsee smells fire like a fusee; and smells of it himself; like a hot musket's powder-pan."[49]

Again in the corposant scene, the Parsee forms a tableau with Ahab while the latter is hurling defiance and insolence at the trinity of flames -- the burning finger of God. He also hovers in the background so that whenever Ahab turns, he finds the Parsee passively awaiting him.

> And Ahab chanced so to stand, that the Parsee occupied his shadow; while, if the Parsee's shadow was there at all it seemed only blend with, and lengthen Ahab's.[50]

Sometimes he keeps vigils for Ahab. When the old man's tired body goes down to rest in the cabin, the Parsee, a symbolic projection of his mind, watches for the White Whale at the main-mast. It is he who first sights the spirit-spout on the calm moonlight night "when all the waves rolled by like scrolls

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[48] Ibid., II, p. 260.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid., II, p. 59.

of silver . . . and a silvery jet was seen far in advance of the white bubbles at the bow."[51] However, whenever Ahab orders a lowering, the spout disappears. Thereafter it is seen again, a jetting "into the clear moonlight, or starlight." That this apparition should be understood only by the spectral Fedallah is explained by Baird thus: "The element of the miraculous in the spirit-spout of Moby Dick, as this phantom watches from his look-out, complements the element of the immeasurable of Fedallah."[52] In other words, the immeasurable fumbling mind of Ahab's seeks so tenaciously to understand all and is defiant when he fails to fathom the secret of God and the universe. All these symbolic incidents create the image of a complete identification between Ahab and Fedallah. The Parsee shares Ahab's thought, participates in every crisis in Ahab's life and goes before the old man as a pilot to the latter's death.

Defiant and proud though Ahab is, he still has the ponderous heart which yearns for love. Without that, like Milton's Satan, Ahab would be pure hate and vengeance. If Starbuck represents Ahab's conscience, his heart moderated by reason, Pip is an allegorical figure representing that part of Ahab's personality which Ahab has repressed, the part which longs to be with the Divine Inert. He is the principle of love and forgiveness that, fully developed, would link Ahab with God; Starbuck is the principle of humanity that links Ahab to his fellow men.

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51 Ibid., I, p. 293.

52 Ishmael, p. 281.

In the midst of asserting his "queenly personality",[53] Ahab lets slip the weariness of a life of rebellious defiance:

> "But war is pain, and hate is woe. Come in thy lowest form of love, and I will kneel and kiss thee; but at thy highest, come as mere supernal power; and though thou launchest navies of full-freighted worlds, there's that in here that still remains indifferent."[54]

Though this revelation of the need for love is only momentary, it is a glimpse of Ahab's soul, parched by the dry fire of hate. That is why he could form such a touching relationship with Pip, the black negro boy, who comes, in answer to his prayer, as the "lowest form of love".

This negro boy is a complete foil to the white titanic Ahab. For Ahab is whiteness darkened, darkened by his hate and desire for vengeance, while Pip is blackness made light. Ishmael, the narrator, stresses this bright aspect in the black boy:

> Pip, though over-tendered, was at bottom very bright, with that pleasant, genial, jolly brightness peculiar to his tribe; . . . this little black was brilliant, for even blackness has its brilliancy; behold yon lustrous ebony, panelled in king's cabinets. But Pip loved life, and all life's peaceable securities; . . . .[55]

However, lacking the courage and frenzy necessary in such a "panic-striking business"[56] as whaling, his brightness is sadly blurred by this kind of life, until one terrible experience of a castaway at sea releases this "brightness" in him, for Melville says:

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[53] Moby Dick, II, p. 282.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid., II, pp. 165-166.

[56] Ibid., II, p. 165.

> . . . ere long will be seen, what was temporarily subdued in him, in the end was destined to be luridly illumined by strange wild fires.[57]

When we learn that it is from this hallowing experience that the touching relationship between Ahab and Pip springs, and that it is then that Pip assumes a symbolic role of the love and forgiveness existing in human nature, then we understand that Melville is equating "love" with "brightness". The dark negro boy is illumined by love while the white Ahab is darkened by hate.

Abandoned on the wide ocean, Pip is "carried down alive to"

> wonderous depths, where strange shapes of the unwarped primal world glided to and fro before his passive eyes; and the miser-merman, Wisdom, revealed his hoarded heaps; and among the joyous, heartless, ever-juvenile eternities, Pip saw the multitudinous, God-omnipresent, coral insects, that out of the firmament of water heaved the colossal orbs. He saw God's foot upon the treadle of the loom . . . .[58]

It is a vision of evil -- the void and nothingness of life. The timid Pip's reason and mind are lost in this mishap, and what is left is his heart. It is true that he is insane, but his insanity is the wisdom of heaven. He questions not, puzzles not, he only loves. Paradoxically, it is the sight of his madness that elicits pity from Ahab's hardened heart: "Thou touchest my inmost centre, boy; thou art tied to me by cords woven of my heart-strings."[59] Unfortunately, he does not let this compassion release the love there. He still lacks the humility to give in, to submit. He will not let Pip's philosophy of love cure "his malady", because, "for this hunt," he says, " my malady

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[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid., II, pp. 169-170.

[59] Ibid., II, p. 302.

becomes my most desired health."[60] Yet he wants to keep both -- vengeance and love. So he plays, double-mindedly, with the idea of Pip's being captain, captain in Ahab's chair below, while Ahab is in command on deck. But even the devoted Pip sees this delusion:

> "No, no, no! ye have not a whole body, sir; do ye but use poor me for your lost leg; only tread upon me, sir; I ask no more, so I remain a part of ye. "They tell me, sir, that Stubb did once desert poor little Pip, whose drowned bones now show white, for all the blackness of his living skin. But I will never desert ye, sir, as Stubb did him. Sir, I must go with ye."
> "If thou speakest thus to me more, Ahab's purpose keels up in him. I tell thee no; it cannot be."
> "Oh good master, master, master!"
> "Weep so, and I will murder thee! have a care, for Ahab too is mad."[61]

So he clings to his "queenly personality" and refuses to accept this "lowest form of love" offered to him in the person of Pip.

Thus Ahab, who starts off on the Promethean task of striking through the pasteboard mask to find Truth, to find an explanation for the inscrutable and intangible malignity in the universe, to destroy evil, is attempting something beyond human power. It is an understandably human quest when we realize his suffering and his humiliation. Yet in it he becomes inhuman and mad. He ignores the other side of the universe -- the deity principle, manifested in the goodness and love and compassion in the human heart. His fixed intent of hunting down the demonic principle

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[60] Ibid., II, p. 316.

[61] Ibid.

only induces the demon to grow in his own soul, thus dehumanizing him. However, his tragic sense of fighting against a "speechless, placeless power", a "personified impersonality"[62] gives him a heroic stature. There is heroism in this demonic defiance, there is tragedy in this woeful madness. Melville, in creating such a figure, is able to arouse in us awe, pity, and fear and also at times, admiration for Ahab. His own judgment can best be seen in what he wrote Hawthorne concerning such a man as Ahab:

> By visible truth, we mean the apprehension of the absolute condition of present things as they strike the eye of the man who fears them not, though they do their worst to him; — the man who, like Russia or the British Empire, declares himself a sovereign nature [in himself] amid the powers of heaven, hell, and earth. He may perish; but so long as he exists he insists upon treating with all powers upon an equal basis. If any of the other powers choose to withstand the secrets, let them; that does not impair my sovereignity in myself; that does not make me tributary.

As far as this part of the letter stands, we would think that Melville entirely approves of an absolutism such as that of Ahab who declares his "sovereign nature" amid the powers of heaven, hell and earth. However, the second half of the letter amends the "idealism" of Ahab and offers the disenchanted view of a calm observer, Ishmael, who learns a compromised truth based on empiricism. Melville continues the letter thus:

> And perhaps, after all, there is <u>no</u> secret. We incline to think that the Problem of the Universe is like the Freemason's secret, so terrible to all children. It turns out, at last, to consist in a triangle, a mallet, and an apron, — nothing more! We incline to think that God cannot explain His own secrets, and that He would like a little information upon certain points Himself. We mortals astonish Him as much as He us. But it is this <u>Being</u> of the matter; there lies the knot with which we choke ourselves. As soon as you say <u>Me</u>, a <u>God</u>

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62 <u>Ibid.</u>, II, p. 281

> a Nature, so soon you jump off from your stool and hang from the beam. Yes, that word is the hangman. Take God out of the dictionary, and you would have Him in the street.[63]

As I have said both in the introduction and at the beginning of this chapter I would do serious injustice to Melville and the impact of Moby Dick if I should leave out any treatment of Ishmael's quest. To Ishmael, the voyage on the Pequod is an education which partly fulfills his original design for embarking on a quest. His wisdom of woe and his realization and acceptance of human interdependence serve to counter-balance Ahab's madness and rejection of humanity.

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[63] Jay Leyda, The Portable Melville, pp. 427-428, April 16 (?), 1851.

- iv -

Let me then trace the maturing process of Ishmael by examining a few passages in which he evaluates his own experiences.

The Ishmael who first sets out on the journey also cherishes a feud, for his "splintered heart and maddened hands were turned against the wolfish world";[64] he is an isolated and lonely man, without friend or kin, who is emotionally and morally unbalanced. The purpose of his intended journey is "peace of mind". He sets out for the sea because it is there he can contemplate the state of man, "meditation and water being wedded for ever."[65] The first step toward his restoration to the human world is the comradeship he forms with the cannibal Queequeg (this is reminiscent of the chummying between Taji and Jarl in Mardi). Ironically, what Ishmael has not found in the Christian world, he now finds in this simple savage. After a ritual ceremony that binds them to brotherhood, a healing process is already taking place in his heart: he begins to be sensitive of strange things and he feels a melting within him. Yet this change takes place with Ishmael's full understanding of the cannibalism in Queequeg. He is ready to perceive the redeeming qualities in his "bosom friend" as he says:

> You cannot hide the soul. Through all his unearthly tattooings, I thought I saw the traces of a simple honest heart; and in his large, deep eyes, fiery black and bold, there seemed tokens of a spirit that would dare a thousand devils.[66]

A development in the heart has its corresponding broadening effect on the

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[64] Moby Dick, I, p. 62.

[65] Ibid., I, p. 3.

[66] Ibid., I, p. 61.

mind. Ishmael is ready to accept the bright and dark as two principles existing in Queequeg. This is further seen on the boat from New Bedford to Nantucket where Queequeg shows the intensity of his instinctive love and hostility in his treatment of one of the passengers.

In the monkey-rope scene, Ishmael reaches a realization of the interdependence and interrelationship among human beings. To prepare for the stripping of the blubber, Queequeg is sent overboard to work on the slippery half-submerged surface of the dead whale; and as a means of insuring his safety, he is tied to one end of a rope and Ishmael on deck is attached to the other end. Any accidental slip on Queequeg's part, if unchecked, would cause the death of both men. Ishmael, the thinker, immediately sees this situation as symbolic of the human condition:

> So strongly and metaphysically did I conceive of my situation then, that while earnestly watching his motions, I seemed distinctly to perceive that my own individuality was now merged in a joint stock company of two; that my free will had received a mortal wound; and that another's mistake or misfortune might plunge innocent me into unmerited disaster and death. Therefore, I saw that here was a sort of interregnum in Providence; for its even-handed equity never could have sanctioned so gross an injustice. And yet still further pondering -- while I jerked him now and then from between the whale and the ship, which would threaten to jam him -- still further pondering, I say, I saw that this situation of mine was the precise situation of every mortal that breathes only, in most cases, he, one way or other, has this Siamese connection with a plurality of other mortals.[67]

The final experience of the merging of his individuality in humanity takes place in the spermacetti-squeezing scene. Sitting cross-legged on the deck with the other crew members, Ishmael is engaged in squeezing the solid lumps of sperm into fluid. Here we see that the event is symbolic of the necessary

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[67] Ibid., II, pp. 48-49.

thawing of the hardened heart into one overflowing with melting affection. And in the process of bathing his hands in those soft, gentle globules of sperm, he is transported to a musky meadow, forgetting all about the horrible oath, free from all ill-will, or petulance, or malice. He only wants to keep on squeezing, mistaking his co-labourers' hands for the gentle globules. "An abounding, affectionate, friendly, loving feeling"[68] pervades his heart. The narrator, the new Ishmael, looks back on this experience and realizes that man must not look to nature or the intellect for felicity. The only happiness is found in surrendering ourselves to Hawthorne's "magnetic chain of humanity",[69] in placing our love in the human world.

However, the mere healing of his "splintered heart" would turn him into a sentimental Starbuck. There is the tougher wisdom that has to be achieved "in the heart of deepest perils and within the angry eddyings of a whale's angry flukes."[70] In the mat-making scene, he watches the rhythmic interplay of the fixed warp, his own shuttling hand placing the woof, and Queequeg's "impulsive, indifferent sword" absently hitting the woof "slantingly or crookedly, or strongly, or weakly." He sees it as an image of human life:

> this savage's sword, which thus finally shapes and fashions both warp and wood; this easy, indifferent sword must be chance, aye, chance, free will, and necessity -- no wise incompatible -- all interweaving working together. The straight warp of necessity not to be swerved from its ultimate course -- its every alternating vibration, indeed, only tending to that, free will still free to ply her shuttle between given threads; and chance, though restrained in its play within the right lines

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[68] Ibid., II, p. 171.

[69] "Ethan Brand", in Howard Mumford Jones and others, eds., Major American Writers (New York, 1952), p. 574.

[70] Moby Dick, II, p. 218.

> of necessity, and sideways in its motions directed by free will, though thus prescribed to by both, chance by turns rules either, and has the last featuring blow at events.[71]

This metaphysical speculation is substantiated by practical education. In the midst of his thinking, chance or fate steps in when the appearance of a whale and the necessity of lowering for it force Ishmael to drop the "ball of free will". Moreover, in this perilous first hunt, Ishmael nearly meets his death. The lesson of the limitation of free will is complete. The making of his will illustrates his acceptance of chance or Fate and his way of encountering it. This is his wisdom, but a wisdom leaning more to woe.

In the try-works episode, he gives a direct account of his achievement of this wisdom of woe. One evening as he stands at the helm of the Pequod and gazes into the blazing fires in the oven, he becomes fascinated by the dancing flames and is lost in a trance. He is only waked by a swing of the tiller and discovers that in his desire to study the flames he has turned around to the oven with his back to the prow and compass. He could have caused the Pequod's destruction. This horrifying experience makes him cry out in warning:

> 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; accept the first hint of the hitching tiller, believe not the artificial fire, when its redness makes all things look ghastly. To-morrow, in the natural sun, the skies will be bright; those glared like devils in the forking flames, the morn will show in far other, at least gentler, relief; the glorious, golden, glad sun, the only true lamp — all others but liars![72]

This seems to argue for an optimistic acceptance of life and the

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[71] Ibid., I, p. 270.

[72] Ibid., II, p. 181.

assurance of joy, Yet Melville firmly believes in the ambiguities of life and so he hurries on to another correction, the existence of darkness and evil:

> Nevertheless the sun hides not Virginia's Dismal Swamp, nor Rome's accursed Campagna, nor wide Sahara, nor all the millions of miles of deserts and of griefs beneath the moon. The sun hides not the ocean, which is the dark side of this earth, and which is two-thirds of this earth. So, therefore, that mortal man who hath more of joy than sorrow in him, that mortal man cannot be true -- not true, or undeveloped.[73]

So the true wisdom, as Solomon said, is the recognition of more woe than joy in this life. However, the great obsession with woe such as Ahab's is can be turned into madness. Neither does Melville advise us against philosophical speculation. A certain amount of thinking must be done by each man in order to meet the bewildering puzzles in life.

Ishmael achieves an acceptance of a natural order and a human order whose very natures are fearfully ambiguous. The truth he attains in the end is the duality of good and evil, exemplified by the very whiteness of the whale. It is no use to try to strike through the blank, frontless pasteboard mask. He decides to accept the ambiguities of life and the necessity of the interrelationship of human beings. He must resist evil without trying to destroy it, to accept its existence without surrendering to its dominance. He will respond to the "magnetic chain of humanity" without losing his own individuality. His way of wisdom, as Bowen terms it, is "armed neutrality".[74]

Ishmael's wisdom, acquired through this voyage, renders him the only

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[73] Ibid.

[74] Merlin Bowen, The Long Incounter (Chicago, 1960), p. 235.

one who can be saved in the end. He went to sea in order to meditate upon the world and its occupants and he has attained "peace of mind" by this passive submission. This wisdom that is woe is exemplified in the very means of his survival, a life-buoy made out of a coffin. It is through the purging of his anger and grimness, through the death of his former life, that life comes. This means of survival is provided by the cannibal who first restored him to humanity. And on the coffin is carved a version of the "hieroglyphical" tattoos on Queequeg, containing the Truth of the universe and life; however, undecipherable to either Queequeg or Ishmael. The whole is symbolic of the ambiguities in and the mystery of life. It is Ahab's unwillingness to accept these ambiguities and mysteries that leads him to be drawn into the vortex, a symbol of ever-eluding Truth, and it is Ishmael's resignation to such ambivalence in life that saves him.

- v -

With Ishmael's view of the universe and life in mind, I shall in this section attempt to show how the White Whale, the master symbol, gives us the summation of the theme of the book. I do not propose to study Moby Dick in isolation as it would only tease me out of mind. Since the novel is told in the person of Melville-Ishmael, I think it is valid to try to explain Moby Dick with Ishmael's attitude as a guide. That is, the White Whale is a symbol of the mystery of the universe and life, a mystery that is beyond human comprehension. He symbolizes the ubiquity of evil; yet at the same time, he contains in himself the deity principle to relieve this dark vision of iniquity. If he symbolizes God, it is neither a Christian God of love, nor a God of Evil as some critics think, but an indifferent God, whose existence Melville suspects but refuses to accept. In short, Moby Dick is a symbol of the ambiguity of God.

This image of the whale's mysteriousness and ambiguousness is built up on several levels: the physical (the chapters on the physiognomy and physiology of the Sperm Whale); the mythical (Chapter 41, in which the history and legend of the great White Whale is narrated), and the religious or philosophical, in Ahab's single-minded and unwavering pursuit of him. I shall deal with these three levels and show how each enhances Moby Dick's symbolic value.

The great White Whale who rises from among "the unspeakable foundations, ribs, and very pelvis of the world", "the largest inhabitant of the globe",[75]

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[75] Ibid., I, p. 169.

is an archetypal Sperm Whale. Though Moby Dick himself only appears on the last three days, Ishmael tries to create an image of him in the various chapters on the physiognomy and physiology of the Sperm Whale. In all these chapters, description is interwoven with metaphysical speculation and often, owing to the Sperm Whale's bulk and complexity, Ishmael-Melville despairs of his ability to understand the fish. He concludes then by calling him a "profound and ponderous"[76] creature -- too profound for the human mind. This is of course deliberate, as Melville intends the Leviathan to be a symbol of the mystery of the universe. His inability to arrive at a complete, true picture of the Sperm Whale is an indication of the impossibility of unravelling Truth -- "Unless you own the whale, you are but a provincial and sentimentalist in Truth. But clear Truth is a thing for salamander giants only to encounter; how small the chances for the provincials then?"[77]

Every feature of the Sperm Whale presents an insoluble riddle. The front of the head is a "dead, bland," "impregnable, uninjurable" wall of a boneless, tough elastic envelope. However, behind it, lies a mass of tremendous life -- "the mystical, lung-celled honeycombs"[78] of oil. Below the head, there is no face

> for you see no point precisely; not one distinct feature is revealed, no nose, eyes, ears, or mouth; no face; he has none, proper, nothing but the one broad firmament of a forehead.[79]

To intensify the symbolic meaning of the whale's mysteriousness, the brow

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[76] Ibid., II, p. 116.

[77] Ibid., II, p. 71.

[78] Ibid., II, p. 70.

[79] Ibid., II, pp. 82-83.

is "pleated with riddles." The monster's body is also "obliquely crossed and re-crossed with numberless straight marks in thick array." Both pleats and crossings are described as "hieroglyphical". So even if the whale, "the mightest animated mass that has survived the flood", coming from the very bottom of the seas of time, may have contained in itself the knowledge of the mystery of the universe, it still maintains a "pyramidical silence."[80]

Among the subsidiary symbols Melville delineates to reinforce the master symbol are the fountain and the tail. In describing the spout of the Sperm Whale, he deliberately plays on the riddling question of "whether it is the mere vapour of the exhaled breath, or whether that exhaled breath is mixed with water taken in at the mouth, and discharged through the spiracle."[81] After citing many examples to prove that it can be one or the other, Melville concludes in a mock-hyperbolical and half-serious tone, by calling it "mist" and compares it to the "semi-visible steam" that is said to rise from Plato, Pyrrho, the Devil, Jupiter, Dante when these are in the act of thinking deep thoughts.[82] The symbolic meaning of the fountain then is part and parcel of the major symbol -- the White Whale -- the mystery of the universe.

The tail of the Sperm Whale is also an example of the ambivalence that lies in the nature of things. It possesses immense beauty and harmony-- "In no living thing are the lines of beauty more exquisitely defined than in the crescentic borders of these flukes."[83] Its amazing strength paradoxically

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[80] Ibid., II, p. 83, passim.

[81] Ibid., II, p. 114.

[82] Ibid., II, p. 116.

[83] Ibid., II, p. 118.

endows its flexions with exceeding grace. However, the maidenly gentleness of the immense flukes can be a measureless crush and crash that shatter both men and boats.

In all descriptions of these physical parts of the Sperm Whale, Melville often stresses its "dignity" and "sublimity", its divine qualities, and in the same breath, states its demonic aspects, its ferociousness, its destructiveness. These two principles of the universe are described as one entity in the Sperm Whale: "For in the great Sperm Whale, this high and mighty god-like dignity inherent in the brow so immensely amplified, that gazing on it, in that full front view, you feel the Deity and the dread powers more forcibly than in beholding any other object in living nature."[84]

As Moby Dick is an archetypal Sperm Whale, what is true of the Sperm Whale is also true of the White Whale. The image of the indivisibility of good and evil, of the demonic and the deity principles, is again reinforced by the legendary history and in particular, the colour of Moby Dick.

Some critics think Moby Dick's immortality and ubiquity make him a deity symbol because these attributes are usually associated with God; others who see him as a demon symbol suggest that these qualities represent the reality of evil. The very fact that both schools of critics are right indicates that Moby Dick is actually a symbol of the mystery of the universe. For as a symbol he has two levels of meaning — that of a beneficent force, and that of a malignant, death-dealing one. This dualistic role is strongly manifested in his whiteness, the one distinguishing mark.

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[84] Ibid., II, p. 82.

Whiteness as a colour containing polar-values of good and evil is entirely Melville's own creation. There are two methods of using colour symbolism. One is by taking its traditional meaning as most colours have their own symbolic associations. The second method is by joining a colour to a particular object and making it take on the meaning of that object. Melville in creating his individual white colour symbolism resorts to both methods. This is seen in Mardi where the whiteness of Yillah is the first symbol that endows her with divinity — a traditional association of white. Then in a different incident Melville turns white into a symbol of death and sterility. The three sons of Aleema hurl such words at Taji: "Oh murderer! white curses upon thee! Bleached by thy soul with our hate! . . ."[85] However, because the two meanings are projected onto different objects, the dualism in white does not make an impact on the reader. In Moby Dick, Melville intentionally brings these two meanings together and projects them onto one object, thus making it contain the polar-values of good and evil. This dualistic symbol is built up in the chapter on "The whiteness of the Whale". He keeps the traditional association of white with divinity and then ransacks nature and the human world for the negative values. He begins by unexpectedly stating that there is a "mystical and well-high ineffable horror"[86] that the whiteness of the whale awakens in his soul. He knows it is unusual and so proceeds to explain himself. The whole tone of the chapter is unbalanced as he stresses more the negative aspects of white. One reason I offer for this is that the "dark" vision of white is a private image Melville wants to create.

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[85] Mardi, I, p. 356.

[86] Ibid., I, p. 234.

Most of us are inclined to associate white with the traditional positive values of royal preëminence, gladness, innocence, benignity, majesty, divine spotlessness, and sacredness.[87] So he sees little need to go into that aspect though he uses two examples from nature -- the albatross and the white steed -- to reinforce the association of whiteness with divinity. The albatross, he says, "sails into our imagination accompanied by clouds of spiritual wonderment and pale dread."[88] Then in the footnote he relates a personal experience whereby the whiteness of the first albatross he saw arouses in him a sense of worship:

> As Abraham before the angels, I bowed myself; the white thing was so white, its wings so wide, and in those for ever exiled waters, I had lost the miserable warping memories of traditions and towns.[89]

The white steed of the prairies possesses the dignity of a thousand monarchs; he is an "imperial", "archangelic" apparition of an "unfallen world". Because of his "spiritual whiteness", Melville adds, he is "clothed with divineness" and to the Indians is consequently an object of "worship", "reverence and awe".[90] He commands worship and at the same time "a certain nameless terror." However, in both instances, the "pale dread" and "awe" alluded to are not to be equated with the demonic principle. It is the awe and dread aroused by the feeling of the mightiness and the mysterious grandeur of the divinity.

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[87] Ibid., I, pp. 235-236, passim.

[88] Ibid., I, p. 236.

[89] Ibid., I, p. 237, footnote.

[90] Ibid., I, pp. 237-278, passim.

Having thus strengthened the power of white's association with divinity, he returns again to analyze the colour's negative appeal, pointing out that there are other instances "where this whiteness loses all that accessory and strange glory which invests it in the white steed and albatross."[91] He cites many examples from the human world; the Albino is so repulsive to normal man, he agrees, because of his unnatural "all-pervading whiteness." Nature invests whiteness with "the crowning attribute of the terrible" in the case of the "gauntleted ghost of the Southern Seas", the White Squall. Another symbolic association for the colour is with death, implicitly in the last two examples quoted and explicitly when Melville mentions the pallor of the dead, the colour of the shroud, ghosts riding in "a milk-white fog", and death himself, the king of terrors, riding on a pallid horse.

In all these examples, the symbolic value of the colour is derived from association with the object; Melville then gives instances where the negative appeal remains although the object is now not terrible. He supports this theory by citing the Whitsuntide pilgrims, White Friar, and White Nun; all these things are capable of rousing in man fear and awe because of their whiteness alone. This negative appeal he finally attributes to the instinct of the knowledge of demonism in the world.

As he continues to explore the meaning of the colour white, he becomes more aware of its indefiniteness. So he can only inconclusively admit its essential duality:

> But not yet have we resolved the incantation of this whiteness, and learned why it appeals with such power to the soul; and more strange and far more portentous --

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91 Ibid., I, p. 238.

> why, as we have seen, it is at once the most meaning symbol of spiritual things, nay, the very veil of the Christian's Deity; and yet should be as it is, the intensifying agent in things and the most appalling to mankind.[92]

Then he lets slip a tragic doubt -- which he is going to confirm in Pierre -- that perhaps there is no meaning at all; for the white colour is in essence not so much a colour as the visible absence of colour. He even goes further to reveal a suspicion that the whole palsied universe has been formed in fright. However, Melville-Ishmael forewarns any seeker of the Ultimate. He calls such a one a "wilful", "wretched infidel", refusing to wear coloured or colouring glasses, who would only gaze himself blind at the dazzling shroud of whiteness. If we recall Ishmael's later acceptance of the ambiguity in the natural and human world, and his acquisition of a wisdom of woe, we realize that his "philosophical" outlook is the "coloured or colouring glasses" that he advocates for life in this world with its two-thirds of darkness and one-third of light.

Moby Dick the White Whale naturally takes on the symbolic meaning of its own colour. His inherent dualism is immediately made apparent in the passage describing his features. He is said to have "a peculiar snow-white wrinkled forehead, and a high, pyramidical white hump."

> The rest of his body was so streaked, and spotted, and marbled with the same shrouded hue, that, in the end, he had gained his distinctive appellation of the White Whale, a name, indeed, literally justified by its livid aspect, when seen gliding at high noon, through a dark blue sea, leaving a milky-way wake of creamy foam, all spangled with golden gleamings.[93]

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[92] Ibid., I, p. 243.

[93] Ibid., I, p. 228.

The beauty of the scene as the great White Whale glides through a dark blue sea at noon", leaving a "milky-way wake of creamy foam, all spangled with golden gleamings" is undeniable. It is a heavenly, deific sight; yet Melville also says that the whole body is "marbled", and his whiteness is a "shrouded hue".

The same ambivalence occurs in Ishmael's first sight of Moby Dick.

> A gentle joyousness -- a mighty mildness of repose in swiftness -- invested the gliding whale. Not the white bull Jupiter swimming away with ravished Europa clinging to his graceful horns; . . . did surpass the glorified White Whale as he so divinely swam.[94]

and

> . . . through the serene tranquillities of the tropical sea, among waves whose hand-clappings were suspended by exceeding rapture, Moby Dick moved on, still withholding from sight the full terrors of his submerged trunk, entirely hiding the wrenched hideousness of his jaw.[95]

This juxtaposition of its graceful motions and "wrenched" hideous, deformed jaw affirms its dualism. Melville continues to emphasize the apparent and enticing serenity, but again not without qualification, for he says this serenity is but the "vesture of tornadoes". The whole pattern of symbolism suggests a promise of life; but it suggests as well that there is always the lurking presence of death. Ahab is obsessed with the negative qualification and wilfully ignores the implication of the positive value. Ishmael is able to see both, though sorrowfully aware of the preponderance of the negative values. Embracing the divine and demonic aspects of the universe and forever eluding the effort of whalers, Moby Dick stands as a symbol of the reality of the natural and human world: a reality that is beyond mortal comprehension.

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[94] Ibid., II, p. 334.

[95] Ibid.

III

PIERRE; OR, THE AMBIGUITIES

- i -

After Moby Dick, Melville turned to the kraken[1] -- a monster of profounder habitation than any Leviathan: he wrote Pierre, which he subtitled The Ambiguities. Most critics and readers have suggested and agreed that Ishmael-Melville had captured the Moby Dick of his mind, for he had arrived at an objective equilibrium at the end of the voyage. Both Melville and Pierre, however, failed to capture the kraken. Pierre, the book, (to use Melville's own comment on the nature of the Plotinus Plinlimmon pamphlet, "Chronometricals and Horologicals"[2]) is an excellent illustration of a problem without giving a solution of the problem. When it appeared in 1852, Melville was swamped with devastating criticism. The contemporary reviews of Moby Dick had already shown the critics' dislike of "the moralizing and the extravagant, daring speculation"[3] in the book. Evert Duyckinck had called it "the piractical running down of creeds and opinions" and had warned Melville thus: "We do not like to see what, under my view, must be to the world the

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[1] In a letter to Hawthorne, written shortly after the publication of Moby Dick, Melville wrote: "As long as we have anything more to do, we have done nothing. So now let us add Moby Dick to our blessings, and step from that. Leviathan is not the biggest fish; -- I have heard of Krakens." (Metcalf, Cycle and Epicycle, p. 129, quoted in Stern, The Fine Hammered Steel, p. 151.)

[2] Cf. to p. 109 of this chapter.

[3] Jay Leyda, The Melville Log, I, p. 437.

most sacred associations of life violated and defaced."[4] Melville seems to have taken no heed of such warning and to have gone on writing precisely as he pleased. He even discarded the structural machinery -- the sea -- that made Moby Dick acceptable, for in Pierre, he turned his back upon the sea and produced a nearly landlocked book. And in subject matter, he violated further the creeds and opinions of the contemporary world.

In the light of the conventional literary fashion and the novelty of the theme as well as the ambiguous tone of the narrator, I find the contemporary reviewers, though unduly severe in most cases, were not wholly unjustified in their condemnation of Pierre. The reviewer of the Boston Post called it the "craziest fiction extant" and continued in the same deprecatory tone by saying "The amount of utter trash in the volume is almost infinite -- trash of conception, execution, dialogue and sentiment. . . ."[5] The Southern Quarterly Review said that Herman Melville had gone "clean daft"[6]. George Duyckinck gave a more penetrating critique of the book:

> The most immoral moral of the story, if it has any moral at all, seems to be the impracticability of virtue; a leering demonical spectre of an idea seems to be peering at us through the dim obscure of this book, and mocking us with this dismal falsehood. Mr. Melville's chapter on "Chronometricals and Horologicals," if it has any meaning at all, simply means that virtue and religion are only for gods and not to be attempted by man, but ordinary novel readers will never unkennel this loathsome suggestion. The stagnant pool at the bottom of which it lies, is not too deep for their penetration, but too muddy, foul, and corrupt. . . .

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4 Ibid.

5 Jay Leyda, The Melville Log, I, p. 455.

6 Ibid., p. 462.

> Why, . . . , does he allow his mind to run riot amid remote analogies, where the chain of association is invisible to mortal minds? Why does he give us incoherences of thought, in infelicities of language?[7]

These questions that puzzled the readers and critics of Melville's time are now partly answerable when we approach Pierre with a knowledge of modern psychology. Melville, writing two generations before psychologists like Jung and Freud, forestalled them by his delineation, often very confused though it was, of the subtle working of the unconscious in the human mind. If we take some of the characters as shadowy projections of Pierre's conflicting mind, we can at least understand or be reconciled to their illusiveness and to their fluctuating natures. Besides, we have amassed many facts about Melville the man, the writer and the thinker and these facts help us to read the trilogy, Mardi, Moby Dick, and Pierre as a record of a questing mind which was obsessed with philosophical questions of the universe, the human world and the individual mind. His native habit of brooding and his essentially "dark" mind inevitably led to revelations of darker truths that repel most readers who seek solely for entertainment in fiction. Moreover, without a deep insight into the "tragic vision" of Melville as portrayed in Mardi and Moby Dick, it is difficult to take Pierre, with all its ambiguities, in isolation, and to attempt to penetrate the "dim obscure of this dark book." It is understandable that, in the absence of psychological knowledge and biographical information, the contemporary reviewers should direct crushing attacks at the book.

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[7] Ibid., p. 458.

Even in modern criticism, that is, the criticism written after the Melville revival in the 1920's, Pierre, by most critical standards, is a "botched book",[8] the most painfully ill-conditioned book ever to be produced by a first-rate mind",[9] "an artistic failure".[10] However, all the critics find that it has other redeeming merits: it is a most penetrating presentation of the mind of an idealist, it reveals the deep-seated problems in Melville's mind, and in the context of Melville's other writing, we see Melville's patterns of recurrent symbols used with deliberation in Pierre. In this sense, he is a forerunner of the Symbolist School.

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[8] Richard Chase, Herman Melville, p. 5.

[9] Arvin, Herman Melville, p. 219.

[10] Ronald Mason, The Spirit Above the Dust (London, 1951), p. 158.

- ii -

As far as its theme is concerned, Pierre has been, as Watson had predicted,[11] a happy hunting ground for psychoanalysts. Its textural richness has given rise to numerous differing explications: it has been treated as an autobiographical document;[12] it has been analyzed as the "record of a mind in the act of withdrawal";[13] it has been explored as the history of the disillusionment of a youthful idealist and the resulting changes in his personality;[14] it has been examined as a study in the "tragic, or sometimes tragic-comic, but in any case the ironic, ambiguity of idealist absolutism."[15] The existence of the autobiographical elements is irrefutable, though I can hardly condone the painstaking effort expended in matching every character, incident, and setting in the book with corresponding ones in Melville's life -- his family, his relatives, his friends, and the surrounding areas of the places he lived. I am more inclined to take Sedgwick and Arvin's approach to the theme: the tragic disillusionment of an idealistic absolutist, as a result of the ambiguities met in his absolutism; but, I would make this addition: Pierre is a continuation of the search prosecuted in Moby Dick -- this time not for an enemy, but rather for an ideal, not the vague Ideal of Taji, but a definite espousal of Virtue. In theme, Pierre is an expansion of Mardi, and an extension of Moby Dick.

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[11] E. L. Grant Watson, "Melville's Pierre", NSQ, III (1930) 195-234.

[12] Raymond Weaver, Herman Melville, pp. 342-344; Henry A. Murray, ed., Pierre; or The Ambiguities (New York, 1949), pp. xxi-xx

[13] Richard Chase, Herman Melville, pp. 103-141.

[14] Sedgwick, The Tragedy of Mind (Cambridge, 1944), pp. 137-172.

[15] Newton Arvin, Herman Melville, pp. 219-225.

In the present chapter, I shall explore Melville's treatment of this quest theme -- his diving into the stratum of the quester's subconscious and his emphasis on the ambiguities in human actions. The concept of life arrived at in the end by the hero is a denial of any ultimate reality. That is, Pierre sees the futility of moral differentiation between Virtue and Vice because he has found, in his actions, that Virtue and Vice are interchangeable. Thus he is inevitably led to a negation of all moral values. Virtue and Vice are two shadows of a Nothing. Melville, as the narrator, wants to insist on the concept that Virtue and Vice are inseparable and that they form the reality. Yet owing to his failure to keep consistently to the distance between himself and the narrator and Pierre, the main character, the distinction between them gradually disappears and he is trapped by his own creation. The order-destroying despair of Pierre engulfs the narrator when the commentaries become ambiguous and irresolute in tone.[16]

The ambiguity is fully embodied in the two fluctuating symbols -- Lucy and Isabel. These two women figures -- the bright blonde and the dark lady -- are not static symbols as their colour, by traditional association, would seem to suggest. They are not consistently equated with Good and Evil.

There are also two patterns of imagery -- darkness-in-light, and light-in-darkness -- that Melville uses to illustrate his concept of the oneness of Good and Evil, Virtue and Vice.

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[16] I am indebted to Murray Krieger, /The Tragic Vision (New York, 1960), pp. 195-196/ for this idea which I have expanded with an additional critical impression of my own after repeated readings of Pierre.

- iii -

Now briefly for the story before I proceed with any detailed explication of the theme and symbolism.

Pierre Glendinning, a sensitive and intelligent youth of nineteen, is the son and heir of a haughty, wealthy widow living in feudal comfort on an ancestral country estate. He is also engaged to the angelic Lucy Tartan. The story opens in June, and the world of Saddle Meadows is fresh and green. By chance Pierre attends one evening a sewing party with his mother; when his name is announced, there is a scream, and a girl faints. Later Pierre has a chance to observe the girl, who is lovely and dark. Mrs. Glendinning decides, as symptoms of unrest grow in Pierre, that his marriage to Lucy shall be no longer delayed. She announces her decision to him. As Pierre goes to Lucy's house in the evening to tell her, he is suddenly accosted by a stranger bearing a letter for him. After a significant debate whether to read this mysterious epistle or to destroy it, Pierre returns to his room and opens it. It is from the dark girl, who says her name is Isabel and that she is his half-sister, the illegitimate daughter of Pierre's father.

Pierre, stunned by the news, rushes forth into the night. When he again returns to his chamber, he has resolved not only to see Isabel but also to take her forever under his protection. On the following nights he has interviews with Isabel, during which she tells him the mysterious tale of her life. Believing her, Pierre realizes that to reveal her true identity would be too severe a blow for his proud mother, who, "fashioned by an infinite haughtiness, moulded by a haughty world, and further finished by a haughty Ritual!"[17] would never acknowledge Isabel.

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[17] Pierre, p. 125.

He decides to do the "honourable thing" by her -- by pretending that he and Isabel have already been married. To this plan Isabel agrees. So Pierre goes to tell Lucy, who immediately collapses, and then to his mother, who orders him out of her sight. Cast off, but feeling himself the champion of absolute Virtue, Pierre takes Isabel (along with an unfortunate young girl named Delly who has borne an illegitimate child and has been ordered to leave Saddle Meadows) and sets out for the city.

After a dark and frightening reception in the city, Pierre finds rooms for himself and the two girls in a building called the Apostles, on the lower part of the island. Here Pierre, who during his former golden days in the country had written sentimental verses, decides to write now in earnest and out of the profundity of his experiences to "gospelize the world anew." He also hopes by means of writing to support his household, now in conditions of pinching poverty.

Cut off from Saddle Meadows, he nevertheless hears the news of his mother's death and of the estate's passing into the hands of his cousin, Glen Stanley. Then in the midst of misery, he is more than elated to learn that Lucy, divining some untold reason behind his actions, is coming to join his household. However, it is not without a struggle with her family that she takes up residence at the Apostles. Pierre, whose mental balance has in the meantime become precarious, is called a cheat by his cousin and Lucy's brother. Tortured by growing doubts as to the truth of Isabel's origin, Pierre finally meets Glen one day on the street and murders him. He is imprisoned in a dungeon-like cell, where Lucy and Isabel visit him. Lucy suddenly dies there on hearing Isabel call Pierre brother, and Isabel and Pierre commit suicide with poison.

Since ambiguities and mysteries abound in Pierre, it is easier to trace the theme by dividing the plot into three phases.[18] In the first phase Pierre's ideas about virtue are definite and noble(though Melville, by means of an exuberantly satirical style, impresses the reader with the falsity of Pierre's naïvety and lack of any experience or even awareness of grief and woe); he is absolutely clear in his mind about the plan he must follow. This phase ends when he is disowned by his mother and leaves with Isabel for the city. The second phase opens when Pierre accidentally finds and reads the dilapidated Plotinus Plinlimmon pamphlet, "Chronometricals and Horologicals", in which pure virtue is declared inappropriate for human society and a practical compromise of "virtuous expediency" is recommended. By studying the pamphlet and by applying it to his own moral standards, Pierre Becomes doubtful of his conduct. The final phase comes when Pierre discovers that an incestuous passion lies behind the high-principled virtue that he thinks has motivated his championship of Isabel. Moreover, it is now gradually dominating him. Then he also starts to question the truth of Isabel's story. His doubt is augmented by a visit ot the gallery where he examines an ambiguous portrait of a foreign young man that reminds him of his father's. Pierre realizes that he may have caused a lot of unnecessary suffering to himself and others by believing in his father's guilt. His virtuous act,prompted by a false story and evidently by a dubious "evil" passion, is after all not so virtuous. What is virtue? there is still no answer after all the woe and grief Pierre has suffered.

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[18] Both Tyrus Hillway(Herman Melville, p. 110) and Merlin Bowen(The Long Encounter, p. 161) have divided the story into three sections.

- iv -

In Mardi and Moby Dick the story starts with the questers already embarked on their pursuit, giving us no detailed account of the process of disillusionment which led these titanic heroes to a rejection of life as it is. We are not told what Taji had seen in life that makes him rail at the Arcturion's leaden hours and adamantly refuse to go north when the ship changes its course. Neither are we explicitly told the evils that Ahab had experienced in the forty years of whaling life. In Pierre, however, we are given a most detailed portrait of the hero, before he is even a quester.

The first phase depicts a privileged society of three persons living in the "paradise" of Saddle Meadows. It opens on a strange summer morning

> when he who is but a sojourner from the city shall early walk forth into the fields, and be wonder-smitten with the trance-like aspect of the green and golden world. Not a flower stirs; the trees forget to wave; the grass itself seems to have ceased to grow; and all Nature, as if suddenly become conscious of her own profound mystery, and feeling no refuge from it but silence, sinks into this wonderful and indescribable repose.[19]

The first paragraph of the book is already permeated with a double mood or tone: it is, on the one hand, an idyllic, fertile world, a world of growth and prosperity; on the other hand, Melville points to the profound mystery of the Natural world, symbolized by silence, and "silence", in Melvillean terminology, is synonymous with "ambiguity". Here, it seems to hint that the tranquillity in the natural world is deceptive and transitory. But Pierre, in the "ruddiness, and flushness, and vaingloriousness of his

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[19] Pierre, p. 1.

youthful soul",[20] little foresees "that this world hath a secret deeper than beauty",[21] and is too innocent to perceive or grasp through the appearance of the natural world or life the reality of evil and darkness. The country is another Eden and Pierre, an "untouched Adam".[22] Life in the country is a glorious benediction because Nature seems to have especially favoured him:

> She blew her wild-clarion from the blue hills, and Pierre neighed out lyrical thoughts, as at the trumpet-blast, a war-horse paws himself into a lyric of foam, She whispered through her deep groves at eve and gentle whispers of humanness, and sweet whispers of love, ran through Pierre's thought-veins, musical as water over pebbles.[23]

Yet this idealized reading of Nature is only a reflection of Pierre the idealist, whose life so far has been "an illuminated scroll".[24] He has not undergone the trials or sufferings of life. Rank, health, and wealth have made him immensely aware of himself. His world has been an unchanging summer morning, brilliantly illuminated by the divine principle of Love, and Love, the narrator satirically remarks, "was first begot by Mirth and Peace, in Eden, when the world was young."[25] So to Pierre, the young lover, all the country about him is a "love-token",[26] and he feels, as a man, that joy is

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[20] Ibid., p. 8.

[21] Ibid., p. 43.

[22] Merlin Bowen, The Long Encounter, p. 159.

[23] Pierre, p. 16.

[24] Ibid., p. 7.

[25] Ibid., p. 44.

[26] Ibid., pp. 8-9.

his by right. So implicit is his trust in the sovereign powers (to whom he renders "leal worshippings"), that he can jubilantly exclaim: "Pierre's Joy's!"[27]

Not yet initiated into the evils of the world, oblivious of the existence of the villains, Want and Woe, whose sire is the Demon Principle, the bright-cheeked Pierre feels he is all pure and good. This prelapsarian state is symbolized by his relationship with Lucy, the blue-eyed, bright blonde. Lucy is a symbol of "those conscious elements of Pierre's soul that appear as yet all purity and goodness."[28] To establish Lucy as such a symbolic figure, Melville uses light and colour imagery. Her very name, Lucy, suggests light, Lucifer, the bright angel (before the Fall!). The visual effect of brightness is achieved by Melville's use of selected time images. Lucy first appears in the "bright hush of the morning."[29] When she bids Pierre "good morning", the sentimental youth can only reply in such a eulogy:

> I would return thee thy manifold good mornings, Lucy, did not that presume thou hadst lived through a night; and by heaven, thou belong'st to the regions of an infinite day![30]

She is even taken to an outing in the morning, "the choicest drop that Time has in his verse", when the countryside is wafted with "an ineffable distillation of a soft delight."[31] When she does appear in the evening, she is seen

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[27] Ibid., p. 57.

[28] Grant Watson, "Melville's Pierre", p. 200.

[29] Pierre, p. 2.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid., p. 43.

bathed in the "golden loveliness and light of the setting sun."[32]

The copious use of light imagery is to endow Lucy with "angelicalness". This divine quality of Lucy affirms her function in the first phase of the book as an externalization of the conscious being of Pierre for Pierre is eminently conscious of his kinship with the Deity. He feels deep in him there lurks "a divine unidentifisbleness that owns no earthly kith or kin."[33] Immature and untried, he at present associates God with Truth, and sees only light and joy in Truth. Therefore he always sees Lucy as an "invoking holy angel", a "heavenly fleece". This symbolic function is achieved not only by her association with light but also by her association with colours. Blue is a minor colour image used for Lucy. By the azure counsel of her mother, Lucy is always arrayed in colours harmonious with the heavens -- light blue or white. In the visit she pays to the Glendinnings, she comes in, "fleecily invested" "in a flowing white, blue-ribboned dress."[34]

White, Melville's special colour, naturally dominates the description of Lucy. And before Pierre's initiation into dark Truth, he can see only the positive values of white -- divinity, purity, and gladness. To strengthen this white colour symbol, Melville makes everything connected with Lucy white. We are told that the first thing that attracts Pierre's eyes on the morning visit to Lucy is a "snow-white glossy pillow reposing upon the sill of the casement."[35] Lucy's cottage has a white door.[36] When Pierre goes up to Lucy's

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[32] Ibid., p. 80.

[33] Ibid., p. 125.

[34] Ibid., p. 80.

[35] Ibid., p. 2.

[36] Ibid., p. 27.

room to fetch her blue portfolio, he is mysteriously aroused by the sight of a snow-white roll upon the spotless bed.

Lucy is a symbol of the world of ideality Pierre lives in. It is a world of "indescribable gaiety, buoyancy, fragility and an unearthly evanescence."[37] He has so far led a life of the heart alone -- all impulse, trust, and enthusiasm. He adores his mother and treats her like a lover, addressing her as sister and attending to her like a lady-in-waiting. He is all docility to her commands. Pierre also holds sacred the memory of his father by building a shrine of his father in his heart. There he makes successive votive offerings to this personification of perfect human goodness and virtue. His cherished vision of "heroicness" is to defend "some insulted good cause"[38] and he trains himself vigorously "to champion the delicate Lucy against the physical world."[39] Little does he know he will be called forth to fight the moral world. Deficient in the knowledge and experience of evil, he is not prepared to confront the world of reality. Being impetuous and enthusiastic by nature, he acts rashly and takes the extreme course when disillusionment sets in. So far he has known only the bright aspect of life -- love and joy; now he is shown its dark aspect -- sin and grief. He cannot affirm and hold in view both of these aspects. Happiness having been proved false, Truth must lie with sorrow: "Oh! falsely guided in the days of Joy, am I now truly led in this night of my grief?"[40] So he abjures Lucy, whose whiteness now is disease, sterility and

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[37] Ibid., p. 80.

[38] Ibid., p. 17.

[39] Ibid., p. 68.

[40] Ibid., p. 90.

death to him: "Decked in snow-white, and pale of cheek, thou indeed art fitted for the altar; but not that one of which thy fond heart didst dream -- so fair a victim!"[41] Here he is making a farewell speech to his conscious self -- the shallow, innocent Pierre who builds dreams of happiness in a world of ideality . Now he is going to assume the life of the subconscious. He realizes he must martyr this side of himself in order to make room for the dark subconsciousness in his soul that will replace innocence with experience, ideality with reality.

Isabel, the dark-eyed, imploring, mournful-faced half-sister, is a symbol of the subconscious in Pierre's soul. She is a soul-image.[42] She has been lying dormant beneath Pierre's conscious self, struggling to be released. Pierre's soul can only attain complete spiritual function with the full awakening of this subconscious self. Melville, untutored in modern psychology, succeeds in describing this gradual growth of the subconscious, the struggle of the soul to fulfill itself. It must be an experience that he himself, being extremely introspective by nature, had undergone. The various stages of Pierre's vague awareness, inexplicable attraction and full recognition of this dark aspect of his soul are externalized by the presentation of a series of incidents, some of which are merely common occurrences in life, but all of which are impregnated with symbolic significance.

Strangely enough, the first one takes place in a joyous chamber, bright with candles, and ringing with women's gayest voices. Pierre has accompanied his mother to a sewing meeting of the neighbouring farmers' wives

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[41] Ibid., p. 255.

[42] Grant Watson, "Melville's Pierre", p. 201.

and daughters. On entering the room, where Pierre and his mother's presence is immediately announced, Pierre suddenly hears "a long-drawn, unearthly, girlish shriek" which seems to split its way clean through his heart, leaving a yawning gap.[43] Natural curiosity urges him to look for the source of the shriek and when he does meet the girl's eyes -- full of wonderful loneliness and inexplicable implorings -- he is intrigued by the feeling of a half-conscious recognition. This mysterious face, ever hovering between Tartarean misery and Paradisiac beauty, compounded of hell and heaven,[44] stirs up in Pierre memories of the past and visions of the future, hinting of some irrevocable sin and pointing to some inevitable ill. It haunts him day and night and for two days he wrestles with his own spirit. It throws him into the most surprising and preternatural ponderings that baffle all the introspective cunning of his mind:

> He seemed to feel that it begat in him a certain condition of his being, which was most painful, and every way uncongenial to his natural, wonted self.[45]

The mystical sadness of the face is what Pierre, who hitherto had only known Joy, shrinks from, though at the same time he longs for the unknown. Yet for the moment he is not ready to give up "that delicious life" that his mother has planned for him.

Yet this first encounter has awakened his apprehension of the deep stratum in his soul. Even before he discovers the blood tie between them, he feels there exists between this girl and himself a nameless affinity:

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[43] Ibid., p. 61.

[44] Ibid., p. 58.

[45] Ibid., p. 73.

> But /Pierre's/ profound curiosity and interest in the matter — . . . — did not so much appear to be embodied in the mournful girl, as by some radiations from her, embodied in the vague conceits which agitated his own soul. There lurked the subtler secret; that Pierre had striven to tear away. From without, no wonderful effect is wrought within ourselves, unless some interior, responding wonder meets it. That the starry vault shall surcharge the heart with all rapturous marvellings, is only because we ourselves are greater miracles, and superber trophies than all the stars in universal space. Wonder interlocks with wonder; and then the confounding feeling comes,

and Pierre, turning upon the fancied face, cries:

> "Explain thou this strange integral feeling in me myself, and I will then renounce all other wonders, to gaze wonderingly at thee. But thou hast evoked in me profounder spells than the evoking one, thou face! For me thou hast uncovered one infinite, dumb, beseeching countenance of mystery, underlying all the surfaces of visible time and space.[46]

Thus begins Pierre's initiation into the other aspect of his soul— the dark half.

Isabel, the dark lady, naturally forms the opposing principle to Lucy, the bright blond. However, unlike the two comparatively simple symbolic projections in Mardi, Yillah and Hautia, who stand for the dualism in Taji — his spiritual aspiration and physical desire — Lucy and Isabel do not have fixed symbolic values. Lucy in the beginning is a symbol of every thing that is good, bright and beautiful in Pierre's green and golden paradise of Saddle Meadows; but when the superficial world of ideality is disrupted by the intrusion of Isabel, Pierre begins to question his former evaluation of Lucy. He realizes the limitation of a mere existence of innocence and thus spurns Lucy. So if Lucy is Pierre's angel of innocence, Isabel is his angel of

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[46] Ibid., p. 70.

experience. Murray applies a Jungian term to her, calling her "a dark, tragic animal".[47] She is an externalization of the dark passions in Pierre's soul. Watson suggests that she is a symbol of the consciousness of the tragic aspect of life.[48] Sedgwick interprets her as a symbol of the "same dark mystery of life that includes the necessity for sin and suffering."[49] These interpretations of the symbolic function of Isabel complement each other and taken together, help us to understand better Melville's most fluctuating and elusive symbol.

The conflict of Lucy and Isabel might be described in general terms as the opposing forces of the conscious and subconscious minds. After Pierre's glimpse of Isabel at the sewing meeting, a dark shadow creeps into the bright world of Saddle Meadows. Melville uses the darkness-in-light imagery to symbolize the preliminary awakening of the subconscious mind. At the picnic on a bright, joyous summer morning, when Joy should abound, Lucy has a sudden presentiment of future "evil"; she remembers the mysterious face of which Pierre has told her, and imagines its dark mournfulness against the blueness and blandness of the sky. However, her mood soon passes and the fearful foreboding is temporarily forgotten.

Later in the "glorious, softly glorious, and most gracious evening"[50] when Lucy floats in in her fleecy white dress, Pierre is enthralled by the bright etherealness enveloping her. The bright picture is, however, dimmed

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[47] Henry Murray, Pierre, p. xlviii.

[48] Watson, "Melville's Pierre," p. 201

[49] Sedgwick, The Tragedy of Mind, p. 153.

[50] Pierre, p. 83.

by the dark face sliding into view, "mournfully and reproachfully looking out upon him from the effulgent sunset's heart."[51] It is only with a wilful determination to maintain his soul's joy that Pierre succeeds in banishing the mysterious face for the moment.

The full awakening of the subconscious mind is symbolized by a change in the imagery, from darkness-in-light to light-in-darkness. The traumatic experience -- the discovery of the dark secret in his father's youthful life -- is that which brings about the full releasing of the dark aspect in his soul. Melville reverses the patterns of imagery in the course of revelation.

On that warm, dark night as Pierre goes to tell Lucy the joyous news of the approaching marriage, he is surrounded by an almost impenetrable blackness. We are told that this darkness enters not "the gently illuminated halls of his heart."[52] Soon, however, it will engulf him — heart and mind -- and somewhat paradoxically, through the power of light: for the letter is thrust into his hand by a hooded and obscure-looking figure who flashes the light of a lantern upon his face. The symbol of light out of darkness has qualities of fear and foreboding. There is a slight debate as to whether he should visit Lucy as he has intended or return home to read the letter. The moment Pierre decides on the latter, Melville remarks: "The gloom of the air had now burst into his heart, and extinguished its light."[53] Isabel's association with darkness is complete by such a symbolic action.

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[51] Ibid.

[52] Ibid., p. 84.

[53] Ibid., p. 85.

Arriving home, he locks himself in his chamber and undergoes another dramatic conflict -- to read or to destroy the letter. Melville describes the struggle in terms of a combat between the good and bad angels, reversing the symbolic role of Lucy to that of the bad angel and thereby adding one more ambiguity to the book. Melville terms the urge to puruse the letter "an imcomprehensible power" possessing Pierre, which may admit him "into the vestibule of the spiritual worlds." The account of the contest renders explicit the symbolic function of Lucy and Isabel:

> Pierre now seemed distinctly to feel two antagonistic agencies within him; one of which was just struggling into his consciousness, and each of which was striving for the mastery; and between whose respective final ascendencies, he thought he could perceive, though but shadowly, that he himself was to be the only umpire. One bade him finish the selfish destruction of the note; for in some dark way the reading of it would irretrievably entangle his fate. The other bade him dismiss all misgivings; not because to dismiss them was the manlier part, never mind what might betide. This good angel seemed mildly to say -- Read, Pierre, though by reading thou may'st entangle thyself, yet may'st thou disentangle others. . . . The bad angel insinuatingly breathed -- Read it not, dearest Pierre; but destroy it, ...[54]

The heavenly quality of Lucy is transferred to Isabel. It is obvious that Lucy is the bad angel, the symbol of his conscious self; the good angel is Isabel, the dark half of his soul that is struggling into his consciousness. Lucy is the bad angel who counsels him to be selfish and happy; Isabel, the good angel, offers him sadness, but it is a sadness that will give him a blessedness and a feeling of "divine heroicness". The conflict results in the bad angel's shrinking up into nothingness "at the blast of Pierre's noble heart."

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[54] Ibid., p. 87.

The perusal of the letter brings to Pierre the bitter experience of grief as the revelation of his father's evil dark nature destroys entirely the "unclouded, snow-white and serene" picture of his father. His pain is intensified by his inexperience. All brightness flees from his hills and all peace from his plains: Pierre feels "Truth rolling a black billow through his soul."[55] The image used is unusual as Truth is often associated with the brilliant light of white. Here Melville is describing the disillusioning effect that Truth has on the human mind, especially in the untained mind of Pierre. The knowledge of evil and the experience of grief are the dark aspects of life. So Truth takes on an image of darkness. The symbolic level of this episode depicts the awakening of the unconscious lying in the dark regions of the mind. That is why the image of darkness -- dark night and dark Truth -- is consistently employed.

The second section of the story is suffused with darkness. Isabel's injunction is: "To-morrow at night fall, not before -- not by day, not by day, Pierre."[56] So Pierre after a long night of suffering, followed by a day of mist and rain drizzling upon his heart, makes the momentous visit to Isabel, whom he finds in the heart of darkness. During the two interviews Isabel tells the story of her life. It is a mysterious and supernatural story, designed to portray symbolically "the birth and gradual growth of the enlarged consciousness which come to life's initiates."[57] However, the narration is too broken up and the symbolism is imprecise. I shall attempt

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55 Ibid., p. 90 (underlining mine).

56 Ibid., p. 89.

57 Grant Watson, "Melville's Pierre", p. 206.

to trace briefly the various stages and explicate the symbolic meaning. The first house where Isabel spends the earliest part of her life is an old ruinous one in the midst of a wood. Her companions are mute or speak in a language that is unintelligible to her. This is symbolic of the primordial images that lie in the very depth of the soul. Then she is carried over the ocean -- a symbolic representation of the birth of her consciousness. The stay at the asylum is symbolic of the enlargement of her tragic consciousness and it is also here that she acquires the consciousness of death. This dark aspect of life, coupled with other experiences of the inhumanities she has undergone, makes Isabel the "dark, tragic anima"[58] of Pierre.

The mystery and ambiguities created by Isabel's past history are reinforced by other images and subsidiary symbols. The three images associated with her are the image of night, the image of silence, and the image of lightning. The image of night I have touched upon, but I wish to review it briefly to bring out its symbolic significance. Isabel is a creature of the night. The letter is delivered at night; she must be visited at night; later in the book when Pierre and Isabel are at the Apostles, she expresses repeated yearning for twilight and stops Pierre from lighting the candles. The image of night has a definite symbolic meaning of fear and mystery.

The mysteriousness is intensified by her long periods of silence in the two interviews that Pierre has with her:

> Isabel fixed her wonderful eyes upon him with a gaze of long impassionment; then rose suddenly to her feet, and advanced swiftly towards him; but more suddenly passed, and reseated herself in silence, and continued so for a

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[58] Henry Murray, Pierre, p. xlviii.

> time, with her head averted from him, and mutely resting on her hand, gazing out of the open casement. . . .[59]

The lightning that punctuates Isabel's story, briefly and flickeringly illuminating the dark room, serves as a light-in-darkness image. The mysteriousness of the story and atmosphere would otherwise be a complete darkness to Pierre without the illuminating lightning, which, as a symbol of his intuitive knowledge, gives him the perception to pierce through the dark Truth. However, it is not a complete view, and he seems to catch only hell-glimpses of the evil of the world and in other human beings, and even that view is only preliminary compared to the later embracement of grief and want in the city. He does not yet see the demon principle in himself.

Besides the visual images, Melville also uses an auditory one -- the melodious, mournful, significant yet unintelligible sounds of the guitar. The guitar is just a symbolic extension of Isabel herself. The supernaturalness inherent in the origin of the guitar augments the supernaturalness of Isabel. It is obtained from a passing pedlar, and feeling a natural sympathy with the instrument, Isabel murmurs and sings to it. After a while, the guitar, of its own self and without being touched, answers her with a sweet and sudden sound. She sings and murmurs to it in a different modulation, and once more it answers her with a different string. She feels there is an inexplicable affinity between herself and the guitar:

> The guitar was human; the guitar taught me the secret of the guitar; the guitar learned me to play on the guitar. . . . I made a loving friend of it; a heart friend of it. It sings to me as I to it. All the wonders that are unimaginable and unspeakable, all these wonders are translated in the mysterious melodiousness

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[59] Ibid., p. 204.

> of the guitar. It knows all my past history. . . . sometimes it strikes up rapturous pulsations of legendary delights eternally unexperienced and unknown to me.[60]

Listening to Isabel playing to him on the guitar, Pierre, enthralled by the swarming sweetness of the music, is lost in a maze and can only exclaim:

> "Mystery! Mystery!
> Mystery of Isabel!
> Mystery! Mystery!
> Isabel and Mystery!"[61]

Later at the Apostles, where Pierre takes up a career of writing, after a day's work at the desk he sits listening to the sounds from the guitar, which stir up in him wild imaginings and sudden perceptions; but Pierre is unable to convey them in writing. To unravel the symbolic meaning of the guitar is as impossible as to apprehend fully the mysterious and ambiguous Isabel. Watson dissuades readers from searching for a definite or exact formula for the symbolism of the guitar. He himself, however, offers a tentative explication: "The guitar is the immanent manifestation withing the individual soul of the transcendental reality of life."[62] It is as ambiguous as ever.

A second subsidiary symbol is Isabel's "long dark shower of curls." It envelops Isabel in "funerealness" and thus makes her more mysterious than ever. Because of its luxuriance and glossy darkness, the coil of hair calls up the image of a serpent, and associated with the image is the dreadful fear of fatal entanglement by lust. The ebony tresses are a symbol of the dark passions in Isabel, and thus also in Pierre, who harbours an incestuous desire

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[60] Ibid., pp. 176-177.

[61] Ibid., p. 178.

[62] Grant Watson, "Melville's Pierre", pp. 211-212.

for his half-sister. Melville makes explicit the symbolic meaning of the long sweep of hair by having it coil around Isabel and Pierre in their moments of insurgent passions. The dark cascade of hair then is a symbol of Evil, and its being a part of Isabel makes her take on this negative value. Here we find another ambiguity in the book; for Good and Evil are merged in Isabel and can even be operative at the same moment.

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As a symbol Isabel is complex, multiple and bewilderingly imprecise. She stands for the subconscious, as well as for the mysterious and the unknown; she stands for death; yet paradoxically she also stands for life, a new life for the mind. In deciding to champion her, therefore, Pierre has taken on a great deal. However, he does not realize the "negative" values and destructive force contained in Isabel. Fired by zeal to do the right thing, he decides to repair the wrongs done to Isabel by his father. He has to protect Isabel and to proclaim her existence to the world. But fully aware of the injustice and cruelty and the scorn of the conventional world for an illegitimate child, and seeing all these embodied in his haughty mother, he realizes the necessity of breaking all ties of affection with the world of Saddle Meadows. This sacrifice he is ready to make because he is now a champion of absolute Virtue, an enthusiast for "the highest and most glorious duty in the world."[63] As to all the pains and grief he is going to cause others and himself, he thinks these are unavoidable in the necessity following dark Truth. He is the "grand victim" that the family of Glendinning is imperiously called upon to offer up to the gods of woe.[64] Seen in this way it is no wonder that Pierre can be suffused with a Christ-like feeling at his decision to sacrifice himself for Duty's sake.

So, still young and inexperienced, Pierre, "charged with the fire of divineness", sets out on a pilgrimage, believing that he is protected by the

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[63] Ibid., p. 243.

[64] Ibid., p. 249.

hand of God. Full of trust in his Creator he is going "to follow Virtue to her uttermost vista." He has or thinks he has severed all ties with the past when he commits the picture of his father and all family letters to the flames and exultantly declares:

> "Henceforth, cast-out Pierre hath no paternity, and no past; and since the Future is one black to all; therefore, twice-disinherited Pierre stands untrammelledly his ever-present self! -- free to do his own self-will and present fancy to whatever end!"[65]

But the past weighs heavily upon him; when he journeys to the city with Isabel and Delly, he recalls his mother's words of banishment, Lucy's "agonizing shriek" on hearing of his supposed marriage to Isabel and his own vaguely disquieting feeling toward Isabel. He has the horrifying fear of "the possibility of the mere moonshine of all his self-renouncing enthusiasm." Already then he sees the complexity of his "virtuous" action. A wave of doubt sweeps over him:

> Lo! I leave corpses wherever I go! Can then my conduct be right? Lo! by my conduct I seem threatened by the possibility of a sin anomalous and accursed, so anomalous, it may well be the one for which Scripture says, there is never forgiveness. Corpses behind me, and the last sin before, how then can my conduct be right?" [66]

To deepen his doubt, he finds a tattered fragment of paper in the coach. It is an incomplete lecture by one Plotinus Plinlimmon, entitled: "Chronometricals and Horologicals". Chronometrical is Greenwich time and horological is local time. Plinlimmon argues that the same relation exists between chronometrical and horological time as exists between the heavenly wisdom and earthly wisdom. That the two are not always the same does not

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[65] Ibid., p. 277.

[66] Ibid., p. 285.

mean that one must be wrong or that they are even opposed: ". . . it follows not from this, that God's truth is one thing and man's truth another; . . . but -- by their very contradictions they are made to correspond."[67] As men are not God and are less perfect, they may best adapt their lives to the earthly wisdom, -- one moderated by common sense. If they attempt to live solely by heavenly time, that is, to live according to the strict letter of the Sermon on the Mount, they will find themselves eventually "involved in strange unique follies and sins, unimagined before."[68]

Pierre's reaction to the pamphlet, we are told by the narrator, is mixed. The circuitous way Melville attempts to analyze Pierre's reaction is again an exasperating ambiguity in the book. Pierre seems to be deeply interested in the topic, but its central point he continues to find puzzling. Whether this is because he wishes not to understand something which may expose "the intrinsic incorrectness and non-excellence of both the theory and the practice of his life",[69] or because his limited experience makes the pamphlet's principal idea incomprehensible to him, Melville does not attempt to settle. However, I suggest that the whole episode of ambiguous irresolution is symbolic of Pierre's idealistic nature. The earthly wisdom of "virtuous expediency" and the heavenly aspiration to heroic action are both in him. At that moment, Pierre is not yet beset with the evils in life and of passions. He is still an enthusiast and "the ever-encroaching appetite for God"[70] dominates him and spurs him to the titanic task. He is able to dismiss the voice of the worldly instinct -- "virtuous expediency" -- in him.

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67 Ibid., p. 296.

68 Ibid.

69 Ibid., p. 291.

70 Ibid., p. 480.

Soon the doubt is verified when he is confronted with the evils in life. These take the form of the heartless refusal of his cousin and boyhood friend, Glen Stanley, to help him, the cruel reception of the city and the poverty and want at the Apostles. On receiving news of his mother's death by insanity, he is further overwhelmed by the guilt of being the cause of it. Then the second life of illusions is shattered for he sees himself, a professed champion of Virtue, as "a heartless villain and an idiot fool -- heartless villain, as the murderer of his mother -- idiot fool, because he has thrown away all his felicity."[71]

The disillusionment is turned to despair and self-hatred when he discovers that in the very virtue he espouses, he has been motivated by Vice -- an incestuous desire for his sister. This revelation of the dark passions in his own nature comes like a death-blow. Actually the dark passions were already there when he decided on the choice of means to champion Isabel -- to establish her, not as his sister, but as his wife. Though, to do him justice, Pierre at that stage of his ordeal, had no thought of an incestuous relationship, and when the suspicion flitted into his mind, he was too blinded by the divine righteousness of his action to inquire into the lurking evil desire. This is explicit in the scene where Pierre whispered his plan to Isabel:

> The girl moved not; was done with all tremblings; leaned closer to him, with an inexpressible strangeness of an intense love, new and inexplicable. Over the face of Pierre there shot a terrible self-revelation; he imprinted burning kisses upon her; pressed hard her hand; would not let go her sweet and awful passiveness.

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[71] Ibid., p. 403.

> Then the two changed; they coiled together, and entangledly stood mute.[72]

But the revelation has been simply understood only momentarily by the innocent Pierre, and the next day he retains nothing more than a sense of "the nameless awfulness of his still imperfectly conscious, incipient, new-mingled emotion toward this mysterious being."[73]

However, when he secludes himself and Isabel at the Apostles and turns to a life of introspection and delves into his soul, he is shocked to discover that his noblest aspirations are tainted with is own darker passions. The discovery that "to follow virtue to her uttermost vista proves but a betraying pander to the monstrouest vice" makes him repudiate the whole of moral reality. In the heat of passion, he cries hysterically:

> "Now I catch glimpses, and seem to half see, somehow, that the uttermost ideal of moral perfection in man is wide of the mark. The demi-gods trample on trash, and Virtue and Vice are trash! . . . I will write such things -- I will gospelize the world anew, and show them deeper secrets than the Apocalypse! -- I will write it, I will write it!"[74]

When asked by Isabel to explain Virtue and Vice, he replies:

> "Look, a nothing is the substance, it casts one shadow one way, and another the other way; and these two shadows cast from one nothing; these, seems to me, are Virtue and Vice."
> "Then why torment thyself so, dearest Pierre?"
> "It is the law."
> "What?"
> "That a nothing should torment a nothing; for I am nothing. It is all a dream -- we dream that we dreamed we dream."[75]

Such is the Truth -- the negation of all moral values and the denial of any

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[72] Ibid., p. 268.

[73] Ibid., p. 286.

[74] Ibid., p. 381.

[75] Ibid., p. 382.

ultimate reality (though he still has a consciousness of a law which he calls a nothing, Melville and Pierre are both being ambiguous here) -- that Pierre now seeks to gospelize to the new world. It is no wonder that before long such a pursuit drowns him in the sea of ambiguities.

At this point he is like Ahab, cut off from anything divine and human, brute or vegetable. Even when Lucy comes as an example of human love and sympathy, he finds this manifestation of divine principle ineffectual because he has committed himself too far in the pursuit of Virtue, which turns out to be Vice, and his gospelizing of Truth, which turns out to be a Nothing. From the dream of Enceladus Pierre can only draw the inferences of incestuous passions in man and the tragic consequences of the sky-assaulting Titan. The former deepens his feeling of innate evil and the latter drives him further into despair.

Before I draw to a close, I must stop to explain further this dream which Melville uses to symbolize the history of Pierre's superhuman effort -- to realize the divineness in his soul, not knowing that he is going to be tied down by "his containing body of clay." The myth of Enceladus symbolizes the state of man. Expelled from Heaven, the giant Titan whose mother is terrestrial attempts to regain his paternal right by fierce escalade; but his repeated storming at heavenly heights is futile for he is overthrown by the gods themselves, and with a mountain heaved upon his back, he is pinned down to the earth. The whole myth is externalized in a two-thousand-foot precipice, some few miles from Saddle Meadows. Pierre must have seen this in his earlier days but he did not understand it then. Now in his tormented vision, the Mount of Titans stand before him, reflecting his own tragedy:

> Enceladus the Titan, the most potent of all the giants, writhing from out the imprisoning earth; -- turbaned with upborne moss he writhed; still, although armless, resisting with his whole striving trunk, the Pelion and the Ossa hurled back at him; -- turbaned with upborne moss he writhed; still turning his unconquerable front toward that majestic mount eternally in vain assailed by him, and which, when it had stormed him off, had heaved his undoffable incubus upon him, and deridingly left him there to bay out his ineffectual howl.[76]

Pierre sees himself as Enceladus battering the steeps of heaven with his bare, armless torso. His despair is complete. But Melville attempts to balance this dark vision with an explanation which he says Pierre has failed to gather from the dream. Pierre, Melville says, "did not wilfully wrest some comfort from the fable; did not flog this stubborn rock as Moses did, and force even aridity itself to quench his painful thirst."

> Thus smitten, / Melville states / the Mount of Titan seems to yield this following stream: —
>
> Old Titan's self was the son of incestuous Coelus and Terra, the son of incestuous Heaven and Earth. And Titan married his mother Terra, another and accumulatively incestuous match. And thereof Enceladus was one issue. So Enceladus was both the son and grandson of an incest; and even thus, there had been born from the organic blended heavenliness and earthliness of Pierre, another mixed, uncertain, heaven-aspiring, but still not wholly earth-emancipated mood; which again, by its terrestrial taint held down to its terrestrial mother, generated there the present doubly incestuous Enceladus within him; so that the present mood of Pierre — that reckless sky-assaulting mood of his, was nevertheless on one side the grandson of the sky.[77]

Nevertheless there is still no solution to this eternal incompatibility of the dual human nature, compounded of heavenly and earthly substance. Melville

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[76] Ibid., p. 480.

[77] Ibid., p. 483.

is trapped by the problem he has raised and his effort as the narrator to maintain an attitude of resignation to the impossibility of resolving the problem is unsuccessful.

Melville's attempt to balance the tone of tragic despair created by Pierre's violent suicidal actions is further upset by letting more ambiguities hem Pierre in. This happens in a visit to the picture gallery where Pierre discovers a portrait of a foreign gentleman that bears close resemblance to his father. Isabel's immediate recognition of the portrait rouses the doubt in Pierre: Is Isabel really his sister? This vacillation is just his desire to deny the incestuous passion in himself. Yet the evil side of his nature is confirmed by the innocent Lucy's attraction to a copy of Guido's Cenci, which is hung directly opposite to that of the young foreign gentleman. Lucy is still a symbol of Pierre's former conscious self, now pushed back by Isabel, Pierre's subconscious, which has taken precedence in Pierre's mind and soul. That is why Lucy can feel an inexplicable affinity with this girl, "sweetly and seraphically blonde...though double-hooded, as it were, by the black crape of ...two most horrible crimes"[78] — incest and patricide. Pierre's effort to deny any complicity in incest and guilt is futile. The symbolic functions of Lucy and Isabel are merged in Cenci.

Overwhelmed by guilt and despair, he becomes reckless and insane. The murder of Glen is just a prelude to his final suicide. The ambiguous procession of events has trapped him with their ambiguousness.[79] he finds himself

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[78] Ibid., p. 489.

[79] Ibid., p. 253.

"the fool of Truth" and "the fool of Virtue";[80] for there is no Truth and no Virtue. Good and Bad Angel are now no more; he is neuter. The final ambiguity is the look of "scornful innocence"(a contradiction in terms) that rests on his lips while he is dying.

Despite Melville's persistent attempt to maintain a resigned tone by his commentaries, they are too ambiguous and equivocating. The book of Pierre closes with the anguished conviction that

> there is no faith, and no stoicism, and no philosophy, that a mortal man can possibly evoke, which will stand the final test of a real impassioned onset of Life and Passion upon him. Then all the fair philosophic or faith-phantoms that he raised from the mist, slide away and disappear as ghosts at cock-crow....[81]

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[80] Ibid., p. 499.

[81] Ibid., p. 403.

CONCLUSION

Within a period of four years, Melville published five books -- Mardi and Redburn in 1849, White Jacket in 1850, Moby Dick in 1851, and Pierre in 1852. Of Redburn and White Jacket, Melville said:

> But no reputation that is gratifying to me, can possibly achieved by either of these books. They are two jobs, which I have done for money -- being forced to it, as other men are to sawing wood. . . . -- Being books, then, written in this way, my only desire for their "success"(as it is called) springs from my pocket, not from my heart. So far as I am individually concerned, and independent of my pocket, it is my earnest desire to write those sort of books which are said to "fail."[1]

That Mardi, Moby Dick and Pierre are books that "fail" is evident in the adverse criticism that the contemporary reviewers showered upon them.Yet taken in the perspective of Melville's work, they form a trilogy,,revealing a remarkably full picture of Melville's metaphysical thinking at the most productive period of his life. The validity of such a categorization is borne out, by the detailed examination of the quest theme in each book in my foregoing chapters. Moreover, the fundamental similarities of the three books give full justification to this kind of treatment.

First of all, we have the repeated characteristics of the questers. They are all absolutists who demand the Ultimate. Taji's search for Yillah is representative of man's yearning for a transcendent ideal, for the absolute

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[1] Jay Leyda, The Melville Log, I, p. 316.

perfection, for total happiness, for a good unalloyed with evil. Ahab's determination to strike through the pasteboard mask is to prove that Evil lies in the centre of the universe. His exclusive demonism is shown in his dark violent denials of Good. Pierre's championing of Isabel in face of all oppositions is his complete dedication to the practice of absolute Virtue.

Another common characteristic is the attribute of the quester's demi-divinity. Taji's very name indicates his paternal origin for it is the name given by the Mardians to the sun-god -- " a half-and-half deity". Ahab's is that of a king and kings are often taken as God's vicars on earth. Pierre's father is the Deity at whose altar he has made successive votive offerings; besides, he quite often feels a "divine indefinableness" suffusing his whole being. The tragedy of these heroes lies in the fact that, in face of the incompatibility between the celestial and terrestrial in their nature, they desperately strive for full divinity and sovereignity. Mardi ends with Taji still unwilling to relinquish his quest of Yillah, the heavenly ideal he thinks is his by right. Ahab dies a blasphemer, turning his body from the sun and spitting his last breath at the "all-destroying but unconquering whale" -- who is God to him, especially at this moment. Pierre, despite repeated warnings -- attacks of vertigo and temporary blindness -- to hold off from his unnatural struggle, will not give up:

> He began to feel that in him, the thews of a Titan were forestallingly cutby the scissors of Fate.... . . All things ...seemed as created to mock and torment him. He seemed gifted with loftiness, merely that it might be dragged down to the mud.... Against the breaking heart, and the bursting head, ... still he like a demi-god bore up. His soul's ship foresaw

> the inevitable rocks, but resolved to sail on, and makes a courageous wreck.[2]

The eternal contest between the dualistic aspects in man is the theme of the trilogy. It occurs, of course, entirely in the inner, invisible world of the mind. To put the conflict on paper, Melville employs symbols and images. This dualism in human nature is recurrently represented by the white-dark tension in the trilogy. In Mardi, the white Yillah is a symbolic projection of the celestial in Taji and the dark Hautia that of the terrestrial. In Taji's mind, these two symbolic figures by their distinguishing colours are reduced to a simple equation of good and evil and, to the very end he persists in the pursuit of an idealistic reality symbolized by the white Yillah.

The white-dark tension is expanded on a vast and complex scale in Moby Dick for here it is impossible to reduce that dualism into a simple good-evil dichotomy. Queequeg, the dark cannibal, is the one who redeems life for Ishmael, the embittered white man, by his demonstration of brotherliness. The black negro boy, Pip, is the "lowest form of love" sent by the"big white God" to turn Ahab from his "sky-assaulting" desire to assert his sovereignity -- to avenge all his suffering by capturing the God of Evil. The reality he pursues is a reality of all evil. Ishmael-Melville, a quester as well as an observer, is able, however, to point out Ahab's perversion and states the necessity of accepting the "problematic, the inconclusive, and the contradictory"[3] as the true and only face of life. Moby Dick, the White Whale, embraces

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[2] Pierre, pp. 471-472(underlining mine).

[3] Charles Feidelson, Jr., Symbolism and American Literature(Chicago, 1953), p. 212.

in himself the white-dark dichotomy where the tension is dissolved, for he is representative both of good and evil. The whiteness of the whale is a symbol of the incomprehensible mystery of God and the universe.

In Pierre the white-dark tension again dominates the book. However, the symbolic meaning of the two colours has become ambiguous and confused. The white Lucy at first seems to be another Yillah because of the joy and love she brings to Pierre. Saddle Meadows is another isle of Odo where Taji enjoys a brief idyllic life with Yillah. But with the appearance of Isabel, the dark lady, the paradisiac existence is disrupted as it has been in Mardi with the intrusion of Hautia. Yet in Pierre, Isabel is not equated with evil whereas Hautia is definitely a projection of the demonic principle. Instead, as a symbolic extension of Pierre, Isabel takes on a more clearly defined Yillah-role. It is she who gives Pierre a life of deeper consciousness and urges him to a pursuit of a higher reality. She would be the good angel as far as Pierre's intellectual life is concerned. At this point, Melville is also poignantly aware of the unsolvable conflict posed by the duality in a man's soul -- the godlike and the merely human, the faculty of speculative reason and the need of natural affections. If Isabel is symbolic of man's "ever-encroaching appetite for God", Lucy stands for his desire for the "domestic felicities". Neither is bad. Yet to great intellects and heroic natures, it is ignoble to be merely satisfied with man's "household peace". It would be like "crawling contented in the moat before that crystal fort," and consequently the man will abide forever within that slime.[4] When faced with the choice, a Melvillean hero will unquestionably follow the sky-assaulting

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[4] Pierre, p. 483.

mood in himself. In Pierre Melville creates a hero whose quest is neither to attain the idealistic happiness of Taji nor to conquer Evil like Ahab. Pierre's life with Isabel is symbolic of his deep probing into the secrets of the universe and his own soul. He vows to seize Truth -- whether it is sad Truth or glad Truth. However, after he embarks on his quest, he finds that he has entered

> . . . those Hyperborean regions, to which enthusiastic Truth, and Earnestness, and independence will inevitably lead a mind fitted by nature for profound and fearless thought, all objects are seen in a dubious, uncertain, and refracting light. Viewed through that rarefied atmosphere the most immemorially admitted maxims of men begin to slide and fluctuate, and finally become wholly inverted.[5]

The unexpected results of his actions invert Pierre's virtuous intention. He realizes how impossible it is to draw a line of distinction between Virtue and Vice. The disastrous consequences of his "virtuous acts" make him abjure any moral reality. He resolves that Virtue and Vice, Good and Evil are mere pale ghosts created by the human mind. So the white Lucy and the dark Isabel are "Good Angel and Bad Angel both". The tension between the two no longer exists as they are shadows of a nothing.

Viewed as a trilogy and taken in the order as they were written, the three books delineate the tragic destruction of an intensely introspective mind. If Melville had stopped at Moby Dick, one could understand and accept the complexities of his attitude towards life. Despite the terror and even the validity of Ahab's perverted vision, one is still able to obtain aesthetic and thematic satisfaction from Ishmael's reconciliation to an inconclusive cosmic and moral order owing to his resting his hope in a human order.

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[5] Ibid., p. 231 (underlining mine).

In Pierre Melville goes beyond Moby Dick and brings the hero as well as the reader to a complete wreck by pointing to a void underlying the cosmic, moral and human order that has been so long established in the mind of man. He asserts that the world is "nothing but superinduced superficies." As to the soul of man, Melville discloses to us a shattering thought which must have obsessed him during the writing of Pierre:

> By vast pains we mine into the pyramid; by horrible gropings we come to the central room; with joy we espy the sarcophagus; but we lift the lid -- and no body is there! -- appalling vacant as vast is the soul of a man![6]

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[6] Ibid., p. 397.

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