Chapter X

Conclusion
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The study of Melville's works shows that the theme of evil runs through all of them and gives them a greater coherence. In all of them, Melville's preoccupation with the dualities and contrarieties inherent in life is evident. Though a single work does not examine one particular facet of evil, yet each work is predominantly concerned with a single aspect. His first two works Typee and Omoo examine the evils of missionary activities mainly in the South Sea Islands. This Eden of the primitives gets contaminated by the mere presence of the white men who have gone there to evangelize or civilize the people. Typee also touches on the problem of savagery in primitive man. In Mardi the focus of examination shifts from one facet of evil to another. In this work Melville examines the inequities and injustices that result from a nation's economic and political policies. Mardi also provides an illuminating study of the shams and hypocrisies practised in the name of religion, more specially organized religion. But more important than this, Mardi marks Melville's first plunge into metaphysical evil. For the first time he voices the doubt which was to torment him throughout his life: If God is in all things and Himself is all things, how can one account for the evil in the world? Mardi
anticipates Moby-Dick in this respect. In Redburn, Melville's chief concern is with the evil effects of capitalism. One feels that in projecting the study of innate depravity in Jackson, Melville is trying to correlate the social and metaphysical aspects of evil. In other words, he seems to be examining whether the innate depravity of a man receives an impetus under unjust social conditions of living. White-Jacket is mainly concerned with examining the evil effects of militarism. The voyage on the 'Neversink' becomes a metaphor of man's destiny in the world. The evils on the ship which are a microcosm of the evils in the world, are a consequence of the rigid and cruel man-made laws. Moby-Dick is predominantly devoted to the study of metaphysical evil, although other facets of evil figure in different degrees. It gains pre-eminence among Melville's works because in it the conflict between Good and Evil acquires Manichaean proportions. Ahab hunts the White Whale because he views it as a symbol of the malignity of the Universe which since time immemorial has played havoc with man's life. From the point of view of the study of Evil, Ahab's heroic but destructive struggle against the White Whale engages the greater part of the reader's interest though the evils incident to whaling and life in general are equally thought-provoking. In Pierre, Melville shows that it is as
hazardous for man to probe the centre of his unconscious self as it is for him to fathom the mystery of Truth. In his prose-works after Pierre, Melville's focus of examination shifts from the realm of metaphysics to more mundane matters. The American social scene acquires a predominant place in these works. Greatly as Melville believed in the promise of his nation there was much in it, at the time he wrote these works, that inspired him with feelings of repugnance and disillusionment. Most of all he deplored the fact that human sympathy and integrity were being sacrificed at the altar of American industry and commerce. Human values were being subordinated to the acquisitive spirit. Works like Bartleby, The Tartarus of Maids, The Bell-Tower, Israel Potter and The Confidence-Man are an honest portrayal of the ills that characterized American society during the second half of the nineteenth century. Among the other prose works of this period, The Encantadas shows Melville's preoccupation with primal evil. Thus the metaphysical aspect of evil continued to fascinate him even after the publication of Moby-Dick and Pierre. Melville's poems too show how deeply the various factors shaping his nation's destiny were engaging his attention. Battle-Pieces is devoted to the study of the misery and misfortune that war brings to the participants and non-participants alike. Clarel deals with the spiritual crisis of the nineteenth-
century Western world. It is the picture of a world torn between the needs of Religion and the demands of Science. The wilderness of the Holy Land becomes an appropriate symbol of the spirit of man, stripped of faith and disillusioned with the progress of mankind. Even as late as when he wrote the poems under the titles *John Marr and Other Sailors* and *Timoleon*, the ills that beset his countrymen continued to engage his attention. *The Ravaged Villa*, *The Age of the Antonines*, *The American Aloe on Exhibition*, *In the Hall of Marbles*, *Angel O' the Age*, *Gold in the Mountain* etc. reflect Melville's response to contemporary American society, its worship of Mammon and its indifference to art, philosophy and religion. *Billy Budd*, his last unpublished prose work, once again examines the struggle between Good and Evil but under martial conditions which call for the sacrifice of natural justice for the preservation of social expediency. Thus, the theme of evil can be traced through all the works of Melville.

His approach to Evil kept fluctuating from work to work and from period to period. It kept oscillating between the most exuberant optimism and the darkest pessimism, according to his development both as a man and writer and also according to the general currents of his country's progress. Roughly, during the period he wrote his first
five works, he appears to have been optimistic about the possibility of the eradication of evil under Christian conditions of living. Occasionally, in these works one gets a glimpse of his later pessimism. But the overall impression is one of youthful confidence. Beginning with Mardi and more specially in Moby-Dick and Pierre this faith vanishes. In these works, one finds Melville acquiring a kind of a split personality. A part of him seems to be actively opposing evil in a spirit of anger, timonism and defiance. The other part appears to see the insanity of this destructive approach. This less intense but balanced approach remains unobtrusive in these works but it characterizes the mature Melville. The Melville-Ahab and the Melville-Ishmael halves of a single personality that one sees in Moby-Dick illustrates this point. Much as Melville admired the approach of an Ahab or a Pierre or a Taji, he knew its consequences. The destruction of these three titans, indirectly shows which of the two approaches Melville was moving towards. This is the approach that Ishmael takes. Experience teaches him that evil is an inexorable fact of life but it also teaches him that evil has to be faced in a spirit of understanding, not in a spirit of defiance. It is an approach that, as Merlin Bowen says,
neither denies the existence of evil nor attempts to force it into a subordinate role as part of a benevolent general design. It frankly acknowledges that evil is more than the mere absence of good: it is a positive and active force working against the good. The two strands must be kept at all times distinct, yet neither is to be seen in isolation from the other.1

This in general is the attitude that characterizes Melville's works after *Pierre*. In his earlier works he deals with characters who are actively engaged in confronting evil, while in his later works he is concerned with portraying the effects of evil on various persons, all of whom have mellowed down or matured because of their bitter experiences. Their approach to life's vicissitudes is not as active as that of the earlier heroes. But it is neither apathetic or merely submissive. The protagonists of the later works face evil without flinching, but more in the spirit of 'acceptance' or 'resignation' than 'defiance'. Except Bartleby and Benito Cereno, not one of them gets so overwhelmed by the impact of evil as to be destroyed ultimately. Other evidences of Melville's mature approach are the remarks and notes he inserted in the books he read during these years as also his letters to relatives and friends. All of these show, his continual preoccupation with man's struggle to subsist in the midst of adverse surroundings, without the timonism

of the earlier works. Where the study of the various approaches to evil is concerned, Clarel becomes more interesting than Moby-Dick. For in it we find a variety of attitudes or responses to Experience. We have the despair of Clarel, the timonism of Mortmain and Ungar, the complete other-worldliness of Nehemiah, the atheistical indifference of Margoth, the optimistic evasion of Derwent, the stoic resignation of the Timoneer, the epicurean sensual approach of the Lyonese, the reserved elusiveness of Vine, the serenity and poise of Djalea and finally the mature and balanced approach of Rolfe. Melville's own approach is expressed in the 'Epilogue' to the poem which affirms a faith in life's persistent flow in the face of all odds.

Yet, it would be wrong to compartmentalize Melville's works under the approaches of 'defiance' and 'acceptance'. Evidences of a 'double vision' which is the hallmark of Melville's approach to Evil, are to be found in his less philosophical early works also. This 'double vision' sees the paradoxical mixture of Good and Evil as a tightly braided cord. It sees reality as the inextricable mingling of the benign and the malign, of divinity and depravity, of the beautiful and the ugly. But whereas in the earlier works remarks to this effect seem to be thrown in unconsciously and are not frequent, in the later works, they
recur often and are marked by greater conviction. Once again it is in Moby-Dick that Melville holds this 'double vision' in perfect balance. This artistic balance is lost in Pierre and The Confidence-Man.

Although Melville accepts the fact of Evil as an irremovable element of life, the Christian solution to evil found little favour with him. All through his works, one finds him either rejecting the various tenets of Christianity or inverting them or distorting them. But though he could not accept Christian teaching in its literalness, he believed that such Christian virtues as honesty, justice, integrity, charity and brotherhood would help man to survive in a wolfish world. His early acquired belief in a stern and inflexible Adversary continued to find expression in his works till the end. But as an artist and moralist, as also a humanist, he also continued to express his belief in man's capacity to stand up against his adversaries both celestial and terrestrial. Man's defence against Evil, Melville seems to suggest, lies within his own self, not as an isolated monomaniac but as an active member of his social community. Reason alone proves insufficient in tackling the ambiguities and mysteries of life. It has to work in conjunction with Intuition. Moby-Dick expresses this belief indirectly. Clarel does it directly. Science,
though it has ameliorated man's life, has left the mys-
teries of the Universe unsolved. Therefore, Faith alone
helps man to survive in a brutal and meaningless Universe.
Though Melville's belief in the nobility of man was not
consistently optimistic and though the theory of the innate
depravity of man fascinated him in its symbolical implica-
tions, his last great work Clarel expresses his faith in
the heroism of fallen, finite man. Melville shows through
his works, that Truth is neither positively nor negatively
theocentric. It is dialectic and rests upon a conflict
between Good and Evil.

Melville's greatness lies in the fact that at a time
when his nation was being swept in a surge of optimism, he
dared to maintain a consistent stance that was the very
opposite of the general mood. No other American writer has
examined evil in such a comprehensive way as to encompass
Life itself. Few writers have shown that the evil which
pervades the human world far outstrips that of the natural
world. Melville has shown that evil abides in the noblest
as it does in the most depraved of human beings and that
it can spring up in various forms. It can assume the garb
of a hideous Jackson or an Oberlus. It can also assume
the garb of a sleek and polished Bland or a confidence-man.
It can take the form of the sophisticated intellectuality
of a Claggart. It can cover itself in the altruism of a
Pierre. It can take the form of resoluteness and valour as Melville found reflected in Shakespeare's infernal Edmund. It can spring up in the savagery of the most docile Typees or the Negroes or the Indians. It can even appear in the instinctive sting of a rattle-snake. Similarly, Melville offers variety and comprehensiveness even in his portrayal of the approaches to Evil. As shown earlier a single work like *Clarel* is so rich in this respect. Other noteworthy approaches which Melville portrays are: the approach which characterized the majority of his countrymen who because of their blind confidence and optimism refused to believe in the power of Evil; the approach of the transcendentalists with their belief in the absolute goodness of man and the beneficence of the universe; or that of a Starbuck who recognizing the Evil in the world tried to evade it under the garb of religious faith; or that of a Bartleby or a Benito Cereno who allowed Evil to so overwhelm them as to destroy them completely; or the ignorant unconscious fearlessness of a Stubb; or the non-aggressive but unshakable patience of a Hunilla. Few of his contemporaries dared to be as bold and outspoken as Melville was. The comparative study of Hawthorne and Melville has shown how in spite of a similar preoccupation on his part, Hawthorne emerges as a lesser writer. In fact, it was
partly because of this trait of Melville's works that his
countrymen refused to accord him the recognition he deserved.
They termed him either blasphemous or perverted or morbid.
Fitz-James O'Brien's opinion in an essay on Melville and
Curtis, published in 'Putnam's Monthly' (April, 1857), may well
represent in general his countrymen's opinion about Melville.

The sum and substance of our fault-finding with
Herman Melville is this. He has indulged him­
self in a trick of metaphysical and morbid medi­
tations until he has perverted his fine mind
from its healthy productive tendencies. A
singularly truthful person - as all his sym­
pathies show him to be - he has succeeded in
vitiating both his thought and his style into
an appearance of the wildest affectation and
untruth. 2

But all his life Melville continued to express his thoughts
fearlessly and to write the kind of books that he was most;
urged to write. Little wonder he resented the lack of this
trait in three thinkers and writers whom he admired the
most viz. Solomon, Shakespeare and Matthew Arnold. Solomon,
according to Melville, was the truest man who ever spoke
and yet he 'a little managed the truth with a view to
popular conservatism'. Similarly, Shakespeare 'dived deep
into the very axis of reality', but he was restricted by
the demands of his age in uttering frankly and boldly all

that he would have uttered had he had the benefit of the 'Declaration of Independence'. Melville felt that Arnold too had diluted his writing with 'that prudential worldly element with which he conciliated the conventionalists'. Next to his bold approach, it is the democratic setting of his works that appeals most to modern readers. His involvement with his characters though it mars the artistic effect sometimes, succeeds in eliciting a sympathetic response from his readers to the most depraved of his characters. His metaphysical probings are undertaken within the realm of actuality. They are not mere airy abstractions. The profoundest utterances in Moby-Dick occur in the midst of the most ordinary whaling activity.

Moby-Dick alone places Melville among the greatest writers of the world. Because of its profound depth and its epic breadth it has become a classic of the world. Hawthorne may claim the depth of Melville and Whitman his breadth but neither can claim both together. The book is universal in its appeal because the philosophies of both the East and the West have gone into its making. As far as the search for Truth is concerned Ahab and Ishmael do not belong to a particular age or country. They represent 'Everyman' who, since time immemorial has struggled to understand the nature of Reality. The book leaves enough freedom
for the reader to interpret it in the way he likes. Two opinions of what the White Whale signifies, one by an Indian and the other by a Western writer, show how susceptible *Moby-Dick* is to different interpretations.

In *Moby Dick* we see the combined avatar of the Trimurthi. Brahma the creator is depicted in the demiurgic creative power of the sperm whale; Vishnu the preserver is manifested in the beneficent, nourishing and preserving qualities; and Siva the destroyer is seen in the whale's power of destruction.\(^3\)

remarks Sister Cleopatra. To Conrad Aiken *Moby Dick* represents,

...the Puritan's central dream of delight and terror, the all-hating and all-loving, all-creating and all-destroying implacable god, whose magnetism none can escape, and who must be faced and fought with on the frontier of awareness with the last shred of one's moral courage and one's moral despair.\(^4\)

What is remarkable about these two views is that, in spite of their belonging to such culturally divergent countries, they are common in so far as they touch upon the deepest

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yearning of man viz. his desire to find some meaning or form in the meaninglessness and inscrutability of the Universe. This speaks much about the universality of appeal of the work. The book does not offer any solution. It ends in a state of tension between the meaninglessness of the Universe and man's destructive search for a meaning in it. However, through the example of Ishmael, the moral centre of the book, Melville suggests that love and comradeship are the only defence against the faceless terrors of life.