Chapter - IV

Moby-Dick and Pierre
Moby-Dick

Though in form and substance both Redburn and White-Jacket were an improvement on Typee and Omoo, they were only in a small way, a preparation for Moby-Dick which followed them in 1851. If at all any of his works may be considered a spring-board from which Melville dived into the depths of Moby-Dick, it was Mardi. For Taji is Ahab prefigured and all the metaphysical ponderings of Babballanja, clumsily expressed as they are, point towards the profound yet artistically expressed musings of Moby-Dick. Even from the point of view of the problem of Evil, one sees the same difference between the earlier works and Moby-Dick. As early as when he wrote Typee and Omoo, Evil preoccupied Melville and the characters of Jackson and Bland in Redburn and White-Jacket respectively, are sufficient proof of the depths Melville could strike in his study of the problem. But in all these books Melville seems to be more preoccupied with the study of Evil in the heart and mind of man and therefore in the human world. In Moby-Dick the problem acquires a colossal magnitude. It becomes predominantly a study of Evil in the Universe and man's futile attempt to fight it and subdue it. And it is in Mardi once again that one finds Melville fumbling
with thoughts and ideas which he appears to have so effort­lessly expressed in Moby-Dick. Of all the works of Melville, Moby-Dick is the most representative, where the problem of Evil is concerned, for all the threads of Evil converge in it. Even where his approach to Evil is concerned, Moby-Dick projects completely that 'double vision' which emerges as Melville's answer to the irreconcilable contraries that beset mankind.

By 1850 Melville had arrived at a stage in his maturity when as an imaginative writer, he found the mere reporting of superficial experience unsatisfactory. He wanted his imagination to work on the deeper meanings of the experience he had undergone during his different voyages as also on the innumerable books he had read since he began writing Mardi. The books he read during this period are a good indication of the direction of his thoughts. But the two most important events responsible for making Moby-Dick what it is, were his re-reading of Shakespeare - specially his tragedies - and his contact with Hawthorne and his works. The latter's Mosses gave him a shock of recogni­tion of that 'blackness of darkness' which he had so admired in Shakespeare and which had kept haunting him till it found expression in Moby-Dick. Reviewing Hawthorne's Mosses From An Old Manse in 'The Literary
World Melville wrote:

...it is that blackness in Hawthorne... that so fixes and fascinates me... this blackness it is that furnishes the infinite obscure of his back-ground, - that back-ground, against which Shakespeare plays his grandest conceits, the things that have made for Shakespeare his loftiest but most circumscribed renown, as the profoundest of thinkers.1

Newton Arvin rightly says:

'It (blackness) fixed and fascinated him because it mirrored a blackness that lay within himself, and moreover it fortified him in his resolve to let that dark hue have full expression in his work.2

Like his earlier works Moby-Dick recounts the experiences of a whaleman, Ishmael, on board the 'Pequod' which sails from Nantucket to the far Pacific where white whales abound. The ship is captained by an old Nantucketer named Ahab, who on his previous journey home, has had one of his legs sheared off by a white whale named Moby Dick. Ahab undertakes this voyage with the express purpose of destroying his assailant whom he has come to recognize as the embodiment of Evil, since he has also been guilty

2 Newton Arvin, Herman Melville, p.138.
of other acts of destruction. Ahab has under his command an assorted crew belonging to all parts of the world. Though they have shipped for the purpose of harpooning as many whales as they can, the captain succeeds in bringing them all under his mad sway and enlisting their support in destroying Moby Dick even if it took them to the end of the globe and got the 'Pequod' completely destroyed.

There are two levels of meaning in Moby-Dick. At one level is the credible realistic narrative of the physical facts of whaling. Melville has devoted a major part of the book to a detailed account of the whale's anatomy and its harpooning, cutting, trying-out and the barrelling of its oil. Yet these chapters do not encumber the action but form an integral part of the work. They even enrich its symbolism; for Melville moves in and out of this cetological centre on to the main action with great ease and artistry. These chapters serve to heighten the magnitude and the formidableness of the whale. They also augment the sense of man's incapacity to subdue the forces of Nature. Howard Vincent's The Trying-Out Of Moby-Dick provides an illuminating study of this 'Cetological Centre' of the book. But Moby-Dick has a deeper level, and there one finds an obsessive preoccupation on the part of the author, with questions of existence itself.
What is the absolute reality behind the appearance of things? Is it pure Evil, pure Good or just Indifference? Should man defy that reality with hate and vengeance and in so doing destroy himself and all around him or should he confront it with love and humility and accept it with resignation? Does man have the freedom to make his own choices or is he a helpless creature guided by blind necessity?

These are a few questions which Melville poses through *Moby-Dick*. But the uniqueness of the book lies in the fact that it does not give a definite answer to any of them. Rather it focuses the reader's attention on the different ways in which man reacts to that reality. There is a changing, ever-shifting point of view in *Moby-Dick* and it is representative of the ever-shifting and ever-changing attitude of man towards the reality that confronts him. This variation in point of view is brought about by the fact that Melville at times seems to identify himself with Captain Ahab and at times with Ishmael. Ahab sees Moby Dick from one fixed standpoint only, namely as an embodiment of evil. Ishmael sets before us every aspect of the white whale.

Right from the first chapter we become aware of the fact that Ishmael's motive in undertaking the whaling
voyage is not, as he says, merely, "an everlasting itch for things remote" or a satisfaction of his "love to sail forbidden seas and land on barbarous coasts", but to undertake a voyage which is a spiritual and intellectual quest. Words like,

whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin ware houses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet; and especially whenever my hypos get such an upper hand of me, that it requires a strong moral principle to prevent me from deliberately stepping into the street, and methodically knocking people's hats off - then, I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can,  

prove that Ishmael considers the sea to be a fit place where one can find relief from despair. The presentation of the whole of the first chapter with its ominous beginning "Call me Ishmael" and its ending "...two and two there floated into my inmost soul, endless processions of the whale, and, mid most of them all, one grand hooded phantom, like a snow hill in the air", is far from the straightforward and matter-of-fact presentation of first chapters in his previous books. This speculative and meditative

---

\[ Moby-Dick, \text{(San Francisco: Rinehart Press, 1957), ch.1, p.1. } \text{All references hereafter to the text, will be to this edition}. \]
tone continues till chapter seven. Specially, the chapters entitled 'The Carpet-Bag' and 'The Chapel' are pervaded with that brooding darkness which had become Melville's obsession and which contributes to the chiaroscuro effect of *Moby-Dick*. A few examples will prove the point. In 'The Carpet-Bag', describing the night, Ishmael says,

> It was a very dubious-looking, nay, a very dark and dismal night, bitingly cold and cheerless. I knew no one in the place.\(^4\)

His description of the streets in New Bedford is equally dismal.

> Such dreary streets! blocks of blackness, not houses, on either hand, and here and there a candle, like a candle moving about in a tomb. At this hour of the night, of the last day of the week, that quarter of the town proved all but deserted.\(^5\)

Further in the chapter, describing 'The Trap', he says,

> It seemed the great Black Parliament sitting in Tophet. A hundred black faces turned round in their rows to peer; and beyond, a black Angel of Doom was beating a book in a pulpit. It was a negro church; and the preacher's text was about the blackness of darkness, and the weeping and wailing and teeth-gnashing there.\(^6\)

\(^4\) Ibid., ch.2, p.7.
\(^5\) Ibid., p.8.
\(^6\) Ibid.
Even the description of the beggar so fitly named Lazarus evokes a picture of gloom and misery, a human being not only undergoing the injustice of the inequality of man against man but a human being fighting helplessly against the elements of Nature. In the chapter entitled 'The Chapel', Melville strikes the same note. Ishmael enters the whaleman's chapel when a storm is raging outside. Although it is in the morning that he visits the place, the description he gives of the chapel and the worshippers, evokes a sense of gloom as it did in the earlier chapter.

A muffled silence reigned, only broken at times by the shrieks of the storm. Each silent worshipper seemed purposely sitting apart from the other, as if each silent grief were insular and incommunicable.

As early as the seventh chapter Melville instils a sense of the mysteriousness of the Unknown, an uncertainty of life beyond the grave and of foreboding evil, when standing before the marble tablets he muses:

> here before me were assembled those, in whose unhealing hearts the sight of those bleak tablets sympathetically caused the old wounds to bleed afresh. Oh! ye whose dead lie buried beneath the grass; who standing among flowers can say - here,

7: Ibid., ch.7, pp.33-34.
here lies my beloved; ye know not the desolation that broods in bosoms like these. What bitter blanks in those black-bordered marbles which cover no ashes! What despair in those immovable inscriptions! That deadly voids and unbidden infidelities in the lines that seem to gnaw upon all Faith, and refuse resurrections to the beings who have placelessly perished without a grave.  

As early as Typee, Melville had shown the tendency of transforming into symbolic form the actual matter of his story. In Moby-Dick Melville has employed this technique to such an extent that the book has been described as an example of "symbolist realism". Everything on the vessel and every activity that takes place on it and outside it symbolizes some larger idea or thought. Like Emerson and Thoreau, Melville also believed that "objects gross" are only provisionally real and that the eventual reality is the "unseen soul" they embody. Thus Ishmael says,

O Nature, and O soul of man! how far beyond all utterance are your linked analogies: not the smallest atom stirs or lives on matter, but has its cunning duplicate in mind.  

Elsewhere Ahab says to Starbuck,

All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks. But in each event - in the

8. Ibid., p. 35.
9. Ibid., ch. 70, p. 309.
living act, the undoubted deed—there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask. 10

But whereas Emerson and the other transcendentalists saw everything symbolized as beneficent, Melville with his characteristic bent of mind dared to question this traditional view of the beneficence of nature and asserted unequivocally the presence of evil both in the human and natural worlds.

The generations Emerson and Melville grew up with found Hume's theory of knowledge thought-provoking. Hume had argued that nothing can be discovered by reasoning on the subjects with which metaphysics was concerned. According to him, custom alone stood warrant for our ideas of cause and effect. He stated that belief was not knowledge but was more properly an act of the sensitive than of the cogitative part of our natures. Both Emerson and Melville could understand the terrible implications of Hume's ideas. Since time immemorial, Western religious consciousness had been conditioned by the belief that Nature was invested with symbolic significance and that proof of the Creator was evident in His Creation. Or to state the

10. Ibid., ch.36, p.161.
belief in Carlyle's words, the Universe was one vast Symbol of God. Hence the beneficence of Nature was urged as a corollary to the beneficence of God. The nineteenth-century western world was no longer ready to accept this age-old certainty. The impact of science and new ideas brought the intellectual disintegration of faith. Emerson, though deeply shaken by Hume's contention was eventually able to proclaim a transcendental belief in the world being a symbol of benign Providence. But what appeared challenging to a mind like Melville's, who also by religious training was taught to see such analogies, was the possibility of this knowledge of the universe being a subjectively created illusion, merely delusory as Hume's philosophy implied. Melville, unlike the others was not carried away by their blind optimism. With far more experience than most of them he was not ready to accept their facile generalizations. Moby-Dick represents the response of a writer who had made it his life-long concern to find a synthesis between belief and knowledge.

Even the Calvinistic approach, as expressed by its foremost exponent, Jonathan Edwards, which connected the beautiful and the awe-inspiring with Divine Providence and the repellent with Corrupted Man, did not convince Melville. For he had seen and experienced enough during
his life both at home and on sea to falsify Edwards' view.
The words Ahab speaks to Pip after he rescues him from the
Manxman and escorts him down to his cabin can be taken to
reflect Melville's conviction that corruption is not necessarily confined to the human world.

"Come, then, to my cabin. Lo! Ye believers in
gods all goodness, and in man all ill, lo
you! see the omniscient gods oblivious of
suffering man; and man, though idiotic,
and knowing not what he does, yet full of
the sweet things of love and gratitude."

At another place in the chapter 'The Shark Massacre' describing the ferocity of the sharks, one of whom almost took his hand off, Queequeg says:

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

This is another example of what Melville thought about
Nature being the reflection of the Divine and the Beneficent. It also serves to show that the traditional belief in the benevolence of Creation could be reversed to the other extreme. Thus Melville's metaphysical probings pursue the same questions of the nature of reality and of the nature and existence of God, but from a different

---

11 Ibid., ch.125, p.514.
12 Ibid., ch.66, p.300.
vantage-ground and from a terrifying new angle.

In *Moby-Dick* Melville uses the same kind of 'linked analogies' that Emerson would have approved of, to project an experience whose credibility Emerson and the others had all along refused to accept. Ishmael's voyage on the 'Pequod' is not an attempt to dispose of the disagreeable facts of life but an attempt to face them and ponder over them.

To grope down into the bottom of the sea ...; to have one's hands among the unspeakable foundations, ribs, and very pelvis of the world; this is a fearful thing, 13

confesses Ishmael. But he realizes that although the search is going to be terrifying, he will achieve manhood only by his dauntless effort to face the hideous facts of life. Hence Ishmael says very aptly:

...all deep, earnest thinking is but the intrepid effort of the soul to keep the open independence of her sea; ...as in landlessness alone resides the highest truth, shoreless, indefinite as God-so, better is it to perish in that howling infinite, than be ingloriously dashed upon the lee, even if that were safety. 14

---

13 Ibid., ch.32, pp.130-131.
14 Ibid., ch.23, p.105.
Hence Melville commends whole-heartedly, deep divers like Bulkington in whose honour the chapter 'The Lee Shore' is written. But what does this 'going to sea' or 'diving deep' show? It makes man aware of the fact that however he may brag of his power, achieved through his science and skill, to the crack of doom, the sea will insult and murder him, and pulverize the stateliest, stiffest frigate he can make. It also brings him face to face with the universal cannibalism and remorseless ferocity in which both sharks and men indulge. But this transcendental mode of apprehending reality is not used merely to project Ahab's conclusion. There is a juxtaposition of images of harmony and tranquillity against the hidden dreadfulness of the sea. Such images are scattered over the whole of Moby-Dick specially after the Pequod enters the Pacific. The description of Japanese cruising grounds in chapter 114 entitled 'The Gilder' will serve as an example. To quote a part of it:

At such times, under an abated sun; afloat all day upon smooth, slow heaving swells; seated in his boat, light as a birch canoe; and, so sociably mixing with the soft waves themselves, that like hearth-stone cats they purr against the gunwale; these are the times of dreamy quietude, when beholding the tranquil beauty and brilliancy of the ocean's skin, one forgets the tiger heart that pants beneath it; and would not willingly remember, that this velvet paw but
conceals a remorseless fang. 15

The harmony and quietude of the sea evokes pictures of rolling prairies, virgin vales and vernal landscapes. But the narrator exhorts the reader not to be misled by this apparent calm for benignity is inextricably mixed with malignity. Therefore, Ahab's vision of reality is as one-sided and false as that which sees it as All Good. *Moby-Dick* is an attempt to show how either kind of transcendental perception is incomplete, even dangerous.

In the chapter entitled "Moby-Dick" Melville shows what had prompted Ahab to reverse the traditional image of benevolence in the universe. Moby Dick had reaped away Ahab's leg, as a mower, a blade of grass in the field. Ever since that fatal encounter Ahab had cherished thoughts of vengeance against the whale and had come to identify with him, not only all his bodily woes, but all his intellectual and spiritual exasperations.

The White Whale swam before him as the mono-maniac incarnation of all those malicious agencies which some deep men feel eating in them... all the subtle demonisms of life and thought; all evil, to crazy Ahab, were visibly personified, and made practically assailable in Moby Dick. He piled upon the

---

15 Ibid., ch.114, p.484.
whale's white hump the sum of all the general rage and hate felt by his whole race from Adam down;...16

Harry Levin in *The Power of Blackness* calls the rage of Ahab,

the challenge of a disillusioned transcendentalism, which is impatient with material surfaces, eager to probe as far beyond them as possible, and doubtful as to the results of such an exploration.17

But however disillusioned Ahab may be, what one can conclude about his 'linked analogies' is that it is as one-sided and false as Emerson's. When in the 'Quarter-Deck' scene, his first mate Starbuck expresses his shock at Ahab's seeking vengeance on a dumb brute, the latter retorts:

All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks... If man will strike, strike through the mask! How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall? To me, the white whale is that wall, shoved near to me. Sometimes I think there's naught beyond. But 'tis enough. He tasks me; he heaps me; I see in him outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing it. That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate; and be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal, I will

16 Ibid., ch.41, p.180.

wreak that hate upon him. Talk not to me of blasphemy, man; I'd strike the sun if it insulted me.18

Thus brooding over his own wrongs as well as the wrongs of the world, he came to doubt the existence of the God of love. At best, Ahab thought, if there was a God, He represented the principle of Evil. His continual contemplation of the duality of good and evil and his own sense of injury caused him finally to cling to evil and eventually become a devil-worshipper.

Milton O. Percival in A Reading of Moby-Dick has very aptly analysed Ahab's character in terms associated with Kierkegaard. The monomaniac Ahab feels he has been singled out for suffering by some malevolent deity. His initial reaction to this is despair. According to Kierkegaard such a person will eventually become either religious or demonic. Christian faith in the believer or infinite resignation in the unbeliever will help ease and erase the sore of the sufferer. But Ahab is too self-willed and passionate to resign himself to his lot either the Christian way or the Stoic way. The alternative to this is defiance. But defiance does not kill despair. It only

increases the consciousness of one's self which in its turn brings more despair until finally the sufferer becomes demonic. Percival shows how Ahab's monomania follows this same cycle right from the time of his losing his leg to his ultimate destruction.

From the day Ahab was maimed he was confined to his cabin for days together.

...Ahab and anguish lay stretched together in one hammock, rounding in mid winter that dreary, howling Patagonian Cape; then it was, that his torn body and gashed soul bled into one another; and so interfusing, made him mad.\(^9\)

It was on his homeward voyage that the final monomania had seized him and at intervals during the passage he was a raving lunatic. Such was his vital strength that his mates were forced to lace him fast. And even after he seemed to have come out of his delirium and even when he bore that firm, collected front, Ahab in his hidden self raved on. An important event which intensified Ahab's rage and despair was the displacement of his ivory leg in a street in Bedford before the 'Pequod' sailed on its voyage. Ahab imagined that Moby Dick present in the ivory leg, had bitten into the very centre of his being, leaving

\(^{19}\)Ibid., ch.41, p.180.
an incurable wound. This further humiliated him and enraged him adding to his mental agony and despair.

Ahab's madness resulted not merely from his injury but from his attributing that injury to an agent or principal whom he considers to be an embodiment of evil. Thus Ahab's struggle against the White Whale gives the impression of a struggle between two opposite forces. This approach comes close to the Manichaean approach which sees Reality as two distinct and independent divisions of Good and Evil. Milton Percival puts the same idea in these words:

...the light in Ahab's soul regressed to fire on the voyage home. The moral world, under his fiery apprehension of it, split asunder into a principle of light and a principle of darkness, a principle of light and a principle of fire. 20

Ahab's struggle against the White Whale as the Manichaean struggle between Good and Evil will be discussed in a later chapter.

Ahab is guilty of yet another perversion. He has identified the whale not only with his bodily woes and with his intellectual and spiritual exasperations but

the exasperations of all mankind. So he feels that in avenging himself, he is avenging the whole world and therefore, falsely comes to believe that he is a martyr. And as a result of this belief his egoism gets inflated. He ceases to be a human being. Newton Arvin rightly says:

He has ceased to be anything but an Ego; a noble Ego, to be sure; a heroic one; but that rather than a Self. He is no longer a free mind; his thought has become the slave of his insane purpose. He is no longer emotionally free; his heart has become the slave of his consuming hate. Nor is he any longer morally free; his conscience too has allowed itself to be deadened and stupefied by the compulsive quest for Moby Dick.21

That Ahab's mind is no longer free can be seen by his magnetic attachment to the Parsee Fedallah, whom along with four others Ahab has smuggled into the 'Pequod'. In fact, it would not be wrong to say that Ahab's maddened mind is represented by the Parsee. Ahab's mind signifies Doubt. It sees the world as a place of war between good and evil without any faith in its outcome. The figure of the Parsee stands for the reasoning power devoid of faith and for a mind that denies all the virtues of the life of imagination. The Parsee embodies that part of Ahab's personality which rationalizes his projected vengeance and is in

21 Newton Arvin, Herman Melville, p.177.
constant conflict with the other part which is personified by his 'humanities'. Fedallah's presence is felt on the 'Pequod' by the low laugh from the hold, right from the time Ahab extracts an oath of vengeance from his crew against Moby Dick. From the day of the first lowering he becomes Ahab's shadow, both physically and mentally. Ahab's tired body may go below but the Parsee is forever awake. Whenever Ahab is silently meditating or is in an anxious mood the Parsee is there to share his thoughts and mood. Even in his dramatic moments he remains hovering in the background, a silent participant. In short in the Parsee, Ahab sees his forethrown shadow, in Ahab the Parsee his abandoned substance.

Though the Parsee's influence on Ahab is permanent, it is in the last chapters that it becomes most potent, specially from chapter 117 onwards, when Fedallah predicts that he will be Ahab's pilot when death strikes them both. From that event onwards, it is the Parsee more than anybody else who remains nearest to Ahab. This is in the fitness of things for it is during the last few days before the final chase of Moby Dick that Ahab's defiance of all things natural and supernatural reaches its zenith. This is the stage when the diabolism of Ahab's purpose is established. He has become a complete slave to his mind
which recognizes no power but the power of Evil. His defiance of the elements on the night of the Typhoon in the Pacific is the climax of everything that has followed from the chapter entitled 'The Sunset'. This is what he says defying the burning corporants:

''Oh, thou clear spirit of clear fire,...
I now know that thy right worship is defiance,...I own thy speechless, placeless power; but to the last gasp of my earthquake life will dispute its unconditional, unintegral mastery in me. In the midst of the personified impersonal, a personality stands here.''

He has cursed and destroyed the Quadrant calling it a 'foolish toy' and 'babies' plaything': He cries out:

Curse thee, thou quadrant!...
no longer will I guide my earthly way by thee; the level ship's compass, and the level dead-reckoning, by log and by line; these shall conduct me, and show me my place on the sea.... thus I trample on thee, thou paltry thing that feebly pointest on high; thus I split and destroy thee.''

He even manipulates his own compass when the ship's compass loses its magnetism due to the storm and lightning.

But defiance is not the only sin Ahab commits. He

23. Ibid., ch.118, p.493.
actually accepts the devil and proclaims his power. "Ego non baptizo te in nomine patris, sed in nomine diaboli."

Ahab cries out deliriously as he baptizes his new harpoon in the blood of the three pagan harpooneers. Charles Olson, in his book *Call me Ishmael* makes an illuminating study of the Latin words Ahab uses. According to him, the words spoken by Ahab do not include the full Latin sentence that Melville is supposed to have written on the last fly-leaf of one of his volumes of Shakespeare: 'Ego non baptizo te in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti - sed in nomine Diaboli'. The change in the wording in *Moby-Dick* is full of significance. The removal of 'Filii et Spiritus Sancti' (Christ and the Holy Ghost) emphasizes the fact that both Christ and the Holy Ghost are absent from Ahab's world. Ahab exists in a world to which They and what They signify are hostile. It also emphasizes the fact that the name of Christ is spoken but once in the book and that too by Starbuck, the only possible man to use it. (On the night of the last day of the chase).

By using the words 'in nomine diaboli' Ahab invokes an evil world and uses black magic to achieve his vengeful ends. His world is a wicked world - No wonder Melville was prompted to write to Hawthorne when *Moby-Dick* was completed that he had written a wicked book. The notes Melville wrote on the last page of his 'Shakespeare' also include
the following words:

madness is indefinable - It and right reason extremes of one, - not the (black art) Goetic but theurgic magic - seeks converse with the Intelligence, Power, the Angel.

Melville took 'Goetic' for 'black art'. 'Theurgic' is a term for a kind of occult art of the Neoplatonists in which, through self-purification and sacred rites, the aid of the divine was evoked. In opposing 'Goetic' and 'Theurgic' Melville is using a distinction between white and black magic, the one that seeks saints and angels, the other the devil. In Ahab's world which is the devil's world communication with Intelligence or Power or the Angel is impossible for Ahab, and Fedallah, who stands for the Evil principle, have made a pact as binding as Faust's with Mephistopheles. Though Ahab and Faust are seekers after Truth, their league with the devil closes the door to Truth. Ahab's art, because of his hate, is black and he cannot hope to converse with God.

Another facet that one notices in the development of Ahab's character, which has been pointed out earlier in Kierkegaard's analysis, is Ahab's extreme self-consciousness - his self-centredness. So completely obsessed is he with the injury he has undergone and with the vengeance he has to wreak that he embraces total isolation. He
takes refuge under a morbid seclusion and encloses himself within a wall of incommunication. He becomes completely dehumanized and treats everyone on the 'Pequod', not as human beings but as mere instruments for his mad purpose; so much so that his idea of a human being takes the form of one "with no heart at all, brass forehead and about a quarter of an acre of fine brains". He recognizes no comradeship and curses all mortal indebtedness. He rarely speaks to any one and if at all he opens his mouth it is to issue orders to his crew. During his spare time he sits all alone in his cabin reading and re-reading his charts and maps, with a view to the more certain accomplishment of that monomaniac thought of his soul. In the chapter entitled 'The Chart', at two places Ishmael laments this condition of Ahab.

Ah, God! what trances of torments does that man endure who is consumed with one unachieved revengeful desire. He sleeps with clenched hands; and wakes with his own bloody nails in his palms.

At another place in the same chapter he says:

God help thee, old man, thy thoughts have created a creature in thee; and he whose intense thinking thus makes him a Prometheus; a vulture feeds upon that heart for ever; that vulture the very creature he creates.24

24 Ibid., ch. 44, pp. 198-99.
Thus Ahab emerges as the loneliest and the most isolated of American literary heroes.

But there is still another side to Ahab's character which one must recognize for as Peleg says "stricken, blasted if he be, Ahab has his humanities." This description of Ahab reveals that part of his personality - his "humanities" - which is still alive and with which he has to struggle throughout the voyage, only to subdue it completely during the days of the chase. And it is this side of Ahab's personality which makes him a tragic, even noble figure. This side stands for his feelings and sentiments his regrets and remorse aroused mostly by the heart-breaking pleas of his first mate Starbuck and the mad Pip, to give up the mad hunt. The first glimpse of Ahab as a man of feelings comes in Chapter 30, (The Pipe). He has been smoking for some time but suddenly he tosses his pipe into the sea saying,

How now, this smoking no longer soothes. Oh, my pipe! hard must it go with me if thy charm be gone! Here have I been unconsciously toiling, not pleasing, - aye, and ignorantly smoking to windward all the while; to windward, and with such nervous whiffs, as if, like the dying whale, my final jets were the strongest and fullest of trouble. What business have I with this pipe? This thing that is meant for sereneness, to send up mild white vapours among mild white hairs,
not among torn iron-grey locks like mine.
I'll smoke no more—25

Sitting alone one day and gazing out of his cabin window
he watches the beautiful sunset which makes him once more
conscious of his own suffering and the heavy burden he is
carrying:

Oh! time was, when as the sunrise nobly
spurred me, so the sunset soothed. No
more. This lovely light, it lights not
me; all loveliness is anguish to me,
since I can ne'er enjoy. Gifted with
the high perception, I lack the low,
enjoying power; damned, most subtly
and most malignantly! damned in the
midst of Paradise! 26

Such passages could be multiplied but with reference to
the intensity of grief and remorse depicted, none of them
matches the chapter entitled 'The Symphony'. (Chapter 132).
Ahab has never before bared his heart to anyone and one is
surprised to find that he is capable of such depths of
feeling.

What is worth noting however, about such display of
feelings is that it is immediately followed by an expres-
sion of the stubbornness of his resolve. His "humanities"
instead of swerving him away from his lunatic
purpose end by making him more defiant and demonic.

25. Ibid., ch.30, p.126.
26. Ibid., ch.37, p.165.
An example will prove the point. In the chapter entitled 'Sunset' as already mentioned, Ahab laments his inability to enjoy the beauty of the sunset but hardly has he finished the last word of his remorseful sentence when he explodes furiously:

Oh, hard! that to fire others, the match itself must needs be wasting! What I've dared, I've willed; and what I've willed, I'll do! They think me mad - Starbuck does; but I'm demoniac, I am madness maddened! That wild madness that's only calm to comprehend itself! The prophecy was that I should be dismembered; and - Aye! I lost this leg. I now prophesy that I will dismember my dismemberer. Now, then, be the prophet and the fulfills one... The path to my fixed purpose is laid with iron rails, whereon my soul is grooved to run. Over unsounded gorges, through the rifled hearts of mountains, under torrents' beds, unerringly I rush! Naught's an obstacle, naught's an angle to the iron way!27

This is the pattern of Ahab's behaviour till his defiance reaches its zenith in the chapter entitled 'The Candles'.

Alan Lebowitz in his work Progress Into Silence says,

...Like Waltman's epic Self, he (Ahab) is large and he contains symbolic multitudes as contradictory as Christ and Satan.28

27 Ibid., pp.165-66.

Ahab resembles Christ in so far as he chooses to shoulder the burden of the suffering of the human race. The imagery of crucifixion used to describe Ahab's torment further supports this resemblance. That Ahab's hunt for the white whale is Satanic has been shown already. Three other important figures come to mind in connection with the above remark. They are Job, Jonah and Prometheus. Like the references to Christ, there are direct or indirect references to these figures too. As mentioned earlier, Ahab rationalizes his demonic purpose by pretending to carry the burden of all human suffering on his shoulders. He therefore feels that he is more a champion than an avenger. Similarly he thinks that he is protesting against God's injustice in just the same way as Job had done. But Ahab does not realize that in aligning himself with Evil against Good, he has become self-righteous, unlike Job who accepts the supremacy and wisdom of God with humility. In his wilful disobedience to God, Ahab resembles Jonah too. Once again, unlike Jonah, who repented eventually, and submitted his will to God, Ahab turns away from God. For he has come to the conclusion that defiance alone is the right worship of the Unknown Powers.

Ahab's resemblance to Prometheus is no less evident. His struggle against the white whale symbolizes Prome-
theus' struggle against Zeus. But instead of liberating mankind from the tyranny of a Zeus, Ahab himself becomes a tyrant like his adversary. He scarcely recognizes this delusion on his part and continues his mad hunt till the day of his destruction. Melville's direct or indirect references to these figures, while describing Ahab or his struggle against an unconquerable adversary, show that he has fused the characteristics of many heroes of Western mythological or religious literature.

A few words spoken in the midst of Ahab's defiance merit attention, towards that part of Ahab's self which has been termed his 'humanities'. He says:

But war is pain, and hate is woe. Come in thy lowest form of love, and I will kneel and kiss thee; ...29

This means Ahab will not yield to any supernal power. But this yearning for love which Ahab shows is more an expression of anger than sorrow. For love did come to him in its lowest form in the person of Pip who touched his inmost centre and who seemed to be tied to him by cords woven out of his heart-strings. Yet he realized very soon that Pip's love weakens and keels the reven-
geful purpose within him. One more loving word from Pip and Ahab threatens to kill him. Thus the fire of love awakened by Pip is extinguished no sooner than it is rekindled. In his encounter with Pip, Ahab's mind is still coloured with pride and passion. As such he cannot be expected to make a reasoned judgment. But when he is with Starbuck (Symphony) his mind is clear and his reason can distinguish between right and wrong. Yet when Starbuck urges the adoption of the right course, Ahab refuses to give heed to his plea. The only way in which he can at this moment justify his course is to shift the blame on Fate.

Is Ahab, Ahab? Is it I, God, or who, that lifts this arm? But if the great sun move not of himself; but is as an errand-boy in heaven; nor one single star can revolve, but by some invisible power; how then can this one small heart beat; this one small brain think thoughts; unless God does that beating, does that thinking, does that living, and not I. By heaven, man, we are turned round and round in this world like yonder windlass, and Fate is the handspike.30

Blanched to a corpse's hue with despair, Starbuck steals away from Ahab. He crosses the deck to gaze over on the other side, but starts at two reflected fixed eyes in the water. He finds Fedallah motionlessly leaning over

30 Ibid., ch.132, p.535.
the same rail. This describes Ahab's final communion with Fedallah and what he signifies. Ahab's insistence on Fate's decree does not weaken the drama of the action as some critics feel. On the contrary it intensifies the tension since one knows, as Ahab does, that he is fighting against an invincible adversary and that he is trying vainly to reverse the cycle of Necessity.

If Ahab is the mad avenger who is out to destroy the reality which to him is the personification of evil, Ishmael is the contemplator who from the very beginning of his voyage expresses the fear that the reality or truth which man is out to seek is an 'ungraspable phantom' and has to be accepted as such. In the very first chapter he says: "Not ignoring what is good, I am quick to perceive a horror, and could still be social with it." He therefore starts on his voyage or his quest with a mind attuned to the fact that horror and wonder are for ever united. The juxtaposition of the chapters entitled 'Moby-Dick' and 'The Whiteness of the Whale' draws the reader's attention to what the White Whale symbolizes both to Ahab and Ishmael. The latter feels that though the white colour is associated with things most innocent, honourable and sublime,

there yet lurks an elusive something in the innermost idea of this hue, which strikes
more of panic to the soul than that redness which affrights in blood.31

In other words, "though in many of its aspects this visible world seems formed in love, the invisible spheres were formed in fright," Why is this so asks Ishmael and suggests an answer, though he does not assert that it is the only one.

Is it that by its indefiniteness it shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of the universe, and thus stabs us from behind with the thought of annihilation, when beholding the white depths of the milky way? Or is it, that as in essence whiteness is not so much a color as the visible absence of color, and at the same time the concrete of all colors; ...a colorless, all-color of atheism from which we shrink?32

This implies, in the words of Maurice Friedman,

that purely quantitative infinite of sheer nonlimitation that has no respect for human limitations.33

Thus here we have evil in another form - in the form of indifference which is as terrible as evil in its

31 Ibid., ch.42, p. 185.
32 Ibid., p. 192.
33 Maurice Friedman, Problematic Rebel (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970) ch.4, p.69.
form of intelligible malignity. In the end these two forms of evil fuse together. The inscrutability of the malignant whale mingle with the indifference of the infinite universe. The whale stoves in the 'Pequod' and destroys it but the sea and the sun smile on indifferently. While Ahab is convinced that the White Whale is evil and therefore hates it and is bent on destroying it, Ishmael cannot stand up against, much less hate, the indifferent evil that oppresses him. Ishmael thus becomes the moral centre of the book.

In the chapter entitled, 'The Fossil Whale', Ishmael expresses the same horror as he does in the chapter, 'The Whiteness of the Whale'. He obtains "dim shuddering glimpses into those Polar eternities," when he stands among those mighty Leviathan skeletons. He is horror-struck by the antemosaic, unsourced existence of the unspeakable terrors of the whale, which having been before all time, must needs exist after all humane ages are over. Thoughts such as these are expressed throughout the book and find an important place in the Cetological chapters where we get a detailed idea of the whale's anatomy. But Ishmael also confesses what an impossible task it is to know what the White Whale really is.
Dissect him how I may, then, I but go skin deep; I know him not, and newer will. But if I know not even the tail of this whale, how understand his head? much more, how comprehend his face, when face he has none? Thou shalt see my back parts, my tail, he seems to say, but my face shall not be seen. But I cannot completely make out his back parts; and hint what he will about his face, I say again he has no face. 34

These words could very well be applied to the mysterious forces working in the whole of the Universe. If an infinitesimal part of Creation is so difficult to comprehend, how much more the whole? Indirectly, Melville also seems to be stressing the inadequacy of empirical knowledge as a means of unravelling the mystery of the Universe.

Convincing as is the argument that the White Whale or the Universe it symbolizes is inscrutable and so it inspires terror and a sense of evil, it is not the only alternative that Melville-Ishmael poses as against Ahab’s idea of Reality. A third current also runs through Moby-Dick which suggests that Nature or Reality is a combination of the benign and the malign. Before he gets an opportunity of witnessing this in the natural world, he finds it in the human world through no less a person than the savage Queequeg. To Ishmael, at the

34. Moby-Dick, ch.86, p.375.
Spouter-Inn, the savage's name brings all kinds of evil associations. But the description of Queequeg that Ishmael gives a few chapters later shows that all his preconceived notions of a savage, being inferior both physically and spiritually, to a civilized person, are false.

Savage though he was, and hideously marred about the face...his countenance yet had a something in it which was by no means disagreeable. You cannot hide the soul. Through all his unearthly tattooings, I thought I saw the traces of a simple honest heart;...there was a certain lofty bearing about the Pagan, which even his uncouthness could not altogether maim.35

The spiritual strength that Queequeg inspires in Ishmael can be gauged from these words in the same chapter.

As I sat there in that now lonely room;...I began to be sensible of strange feelings. I felt a melting in me. No more my splintered heart and maddened hand were turned against the wolfish world. This soothing savage had redeemed it.36

The "civilized hypocrisies" and "bland deceits" which characterized Ishmael's superior Christian world are absent in the pagan's world. His civilized overtures

35. Ibid., ch.10, p.49.
36. Ibid., p.50.
and his sense of delicacy towards Ishmael, his acceptance of Ishmael as a friend in the real sense of the term, his sharing of his belongings with Ishmael, all go to show that it is the savage who must civilize the Christian rather than the other way round. On the 'Pequod' itself, Queequeg teaches him, through the symbolism of the Monkey-Rope, the mature wisdom that all human beings, irrespective of race, colour or religion, are indebted to one another. And through the life-buoy-turned-coffin he teaches Ishmael that death and rebirth are two aspects of the same thing. Yet what is noteworthy about Queequeg's demonstration of comradeship and solidarity is its total unconsciousness. His magnanimous yet spontaneous dive into the sea to save the very bumpkin who had dared to insult him prompts Melville to ask, 'Was there ever such unconsciousness?' What strikes the narrator about Queequeg is his poise, his spontaneity and his straightforwardness, and also the absence of a desire for appreciation of his magnanimity. Howard Vincent (The Trying-out of Moby-Dick) suggests that Melville has paired the chapters entitled 'The Sermon' with 'A Bosom Friend' with a specific purpose. He feels that Melville wants to show the contrast between 'the extreme intensity of spiritual consciousness' of Father Mapple and Queequeg's 'instinctual and unconscious self'. This also provides a general
criticism of civilized, sophisticated man who has lost his instinctual poise. To use Vincent's words,

Queequeg's poise is implicitly a criticism of the neurotic divagations of "civilized man". 37

The open-mindedness and sanity with which Ishmael appreciates the strength and shortcomings of Queequeg also help him to appreciate Moby Dick. He has both deific and demonic attributes. There is something god-like in the mere crude fact of his 'majestic bulk'. In proportion to his vast magnitude is his potency. His terrific speed and the great strength of his jaw and the dreadful power of his head and tail are proverbial. There is in his whole being a great inherent "dignity and sublimity". Ishmael is inspired with thoughts of awe and wonder when he sees it dissected and has a peep into its various parts. His description of Moby Dick, spotted on the first day of the chase reflects his feelings of wonder and reverence.

A gentle joyousness - a mighty mildness of repose in swiftness, invested the gliding whale. Not the white bull Jupiter ... not Jove, not that great majesty Supreme! did surpass the glorified White Whale as he so divinely swam. 38

38 Moby-Dick, ch.133, p.538.
The feelings that this passage reflects stand in bold contrast to those expressed by Ahab in the chapter entitled 'Moby Dick', "All that most maddens and torments; all that stirs up the lees of things; all truth with malice in it; all that stirs up the lees of things; ... all that cracks the sinews and cakes the brain". One and the same creature inspires two kinds of opposite feelings in two persons. In this connection the chapter entitled 'The Doubloon' serves an important purpose. The Doubloon or the gold coin which Ahab has promised the person who first spots Moby Dick, becomes a medium through which one gets a glimpse of the attitude of the important members of the crew towards the whale. At a deeper level the chapter also serves to show that Experience is tentative so that one and the same object or event can evoke a number of responses in different people. Melville uses a similar technique in Clarel where he makes St. Saba's palm the centre through which one can judge the characters' approach to reality. In the 'Doubloon' chapter, Ahab emerges as the proud Lucifer who is out to achieve the gold coin by defiant means. Starbuck, who is otherwise pious, appears to have no abiding faith. He retreats before the Doubloon (Truth) because he is afraid of losing his 'righteousness'. Stubb's approach shows his
reckless indifference or his unconscious fearlessness. Flask's material stupidity stands in contrast to the 'spiritual' in man. The Manxman is superstitious plain and simple. Queequeg shows his primitive curiosity. Fedallah, the Parsee, worships the flame on the coin in an evil manner. However it is Pip, the idiot negro boy, who strikes at Truth when he mutters:

I look, you look, he looks; we look, ye look, they look....And I, you; and he; and we, ye, and they, are all bats;...

Which means, however much one tries, Truth remains unfathomable. Truth is what Life is, a mixture of the good and the evil.

With regard to the White Whale Ishmael does feel that there is something mysterious and terrible in the ferocity and intelligent malignity of his attacks, even in his ubiquity and immortality, so that for some time Ahab's quenchless feud seems his own. But at the same time he does not fail to observe, as Ahab does, that Moby Dick has dealt ruin only when he has been provoked by his pursuers. To use the words of Dr. Bunger, the friend of Captain Boomer (ch.100), 'the White Whale's malice is only his

39 Ibid., ch.99, p.430.
awkwardness'. He may have been the cause of much evil and suffering but he has also been the cause of much benefit. His flesh and spermaceti serve as food. Because of his ambergris he is the giver of the sweetness of perfume. The best candles can be made out of his spermaceti. His oil has illuminated innumerable lamps. To Ishmael therefore, Moby Dick is not a symbol of evil but a magnificent symbol of Creation itself. The words of Marius Bewley come to mind in this connection.

Leviathan, especially in his greatest role of the White Whale, is the affirmation of all that Ahab denies. The impact of this recognition on the imagination is the greater because, if Melville leads one towards it irresistibly, we yet make the discovery in the midst of all the gargantuan suffering of the whaling ground. We learn the triumph of life that the White Whale represents only because we come to it through such seas of death. This is the most deeply Christian note that Melville ever strikes.40

To his appreciation of the life at sea, Ishmael brings the same wide perspective when he says:

Warmest climes but nurse the cruellest fangs;
the tiger of Bengal crouches in spiced groves of ceaseless verdure. Skies the most effulgent but basket the deadliest thunders: gorgeous

Cuba knows tornadoes that never swept tame northern lands.  

Reality is thus a duality. It is neither total malignity as Ahab feels, nor the evil of the heartless immensities and voids, as part of Ishmael's understanding suggests. It is the inextricable fusion of the principles of good and evil, the benign and malign.

What path then does Moby-Dick suggest for reaching Truth? As already mentioned the book does not give any easy solution. But if Ishmael's resurrection from the vortex of destruction at the end of the book is any indication, it is that in whatever predicament man finds himself, he has a chance of survival provided he retains a balanced approach to things which he aspires to understand but which he knows he is incapable of understanding completely. Ishmael has tried his utmost to keep this balance. And because he succeeds in maintaining this calm, sane and rational approach in the midst of the most turbulent situations, he survives to tell the tale of the destruction. Evil to him is a reality, "fully alive, universal and all-encompassing". It has to be accepted, Either extreme of the two approaches that Melville sets

41 Moby-Dick, ch.119, p.494.
forth in the chapters 'The Mast-Head' and 'The Try-Works' is false, one-sided and dangerous. In the chapter 'The Mast-Head', Ishmael while keeping watch on the mast-head falls into a reverie, lulled by the motion of the ship on the mystic ocean when

...every strange, half-seen, gliding, beautiful thing that eludes him; every dimly-discovered, uprising fin of some undiscernible form, seems to him the embodiment of those elusive thoughts that only people the soul by continually flitting through it. In this enchanted mood, thy spirit ebbs away to whence it came; becomes diffused through time and space; like Crammer's sprinkled Pantheistic ashes, forming at last a part of every shore the round globe over. 42

To these Pantheists Ishmael gives a warning in these words: "While this sleep, this dream is on ye, move your foot or hand an inch; slip your hold at all; and your identity comes back in horror. Over Descartian vortices you hover". This is the approach of those idealists who refuse to see anything but beneficence in the Universe. Similarly the approach that Ishmael points out in the chapter 'The Try-Works' is equally dangerous. Gazing too long in the fire on which the blubber is being boiled, Ishmael falls into a reverie, but far different from the one in 'The Mast-Head'. The glare of the red fire makes all the things

42. Ibid., ch. 35, p. 156.
on the ship look ghastly and out of proportion.

the rushing 'Pequod' freighted with savages, and laden with fire, and burning a corpse, and plunging into that blackness of darkness, seemed the material counterpart of her monomaniac commander's soul. 43

This is the other extreme of the pantheistic reverie of the mast-head which is as dangerous.

The best approach is one of 'unprejudiced objectivity' as Dr. Jung terms it which not only prevents a person from being repelled by illness and corruption but prompts him to accept them for what they are. What is noteworthy about Ishmael is that he has limitless understanding and compassion. Even a person like Starbuck who had enough moral virtue could not survive the wreck for his was mere unaided virtue. Unlike Ishmael, his mind was not capable of comprehending Ahab's problem and his will was too weak to take any decisive action in an emergency. His was not an earthbound faith like Ishmael's but a faith that had little practical value. He was not ready to face the 'teeth-tiered sharks' of life and their cannibal ways. But he wanted his faith to oust fact and his fancy to oust memory. The kind of faith

43 Ibid., ch. 96, p. 419.
that works in the human world is Ishmael's which not only accepts the reality of Evil but recognizes the need of love and affection among human beings and their interindebtedness.

Ishmael's emergence from the vortex of destruction at the end of Moby-Dick has given rise to the controversy whether he emerges spiritually transformed or whether he remains the 'orphaned Ishmael' he was, at the beginning of his voyage. There are critics in the 'salvation' camp who argue that Ishmael achieves salvation or undergoes a resurrection on his voyage and that he moves from a state of estrangement to a life of commitment. On the other hand, there are those in the 'anti-salvation' camp who feel that Ishmael remains the same unredeemed outcast that he was at the beginning of his voyage. The main argument of this chapter has been in favour of the former interpretation hence it does not need further elaboration. However, a quotation from an article written by one belonging to the latter camp will prove illuminating.

There can be no 'rebirth' for Ishmael, the Ironist whom fate has spared. He has in the end, abstained from belief, commitment, or judgment. Although his quest for the Unknowable is doomed, he is fated to continue in his vain attempt to transcend earthly existence and discover the impenetrable essence of the Cosmos. He does not find salvation, but returns to tell his story, neither 'believer' or
The 'anti-salvation' interpretation may appear valid if *Moby-Dick* is read independently of the other works of Melville, for there is no definite indication on the narrator's part to warrant an interpretation that Ishmael undergoes a 'rebirth'. On the contrary Ishmael's survival pales beside the impressive and terrifying destruction of Ahab and his crew. But if the work is read as part of Melville's total message, the 'anti-salvation' interpretation goes against the philosophy of Melville and his general approach to Reality. All through his works Melville has projected the frightening loneliness of man in a hostile universe but at the same time he has also shown that man can survive in such an environment if he faces its inherent hostility in a spirit of brotherhood and comradeship. In the light of this philosophy the meaning of Ishmael's survival becomes clear.

---

Pierre

**Pierre Or, The Ambiguities** (1852) is different from *Moby-Dick* in many ways. The most conspicuous difference is in the background of the action. This is Melville's first work in which he turned from man fighting against the elements to man fighting against the limitations of his own human nature. The vast and terrifying sea which in different degrees formed the background of all Melville's works up to *Moby-Dick*, has given place to land and to Melville's contemporary society. Perhaps it is this factor more than any other that makes *Moby-Dick* so universal in its appeal. Ahab, old but heroic, comes from the stock of ordinary whalers. The young Pierre belongs to one of the highest aristocratic families of America. Ahab wants to destroy the White Whale because he sees in it an embodiment of all personal and universal woes. Pierre has no tangible, impressive foe to fight against. To use Merlin Bowen's words, Melville's concern in *Pierre*

is with the ambiguous underworld of man's moral nature.¹

Thus Ahab's struggle is centrifugal; whereas Pierre's is

centripetal. Ahab's defiance of the forces of the Universe and his complete dedication to hatred are offset by the sanity and sobriety of Ishmael and the principle of solidarity as evinced by Queequeg. Lucy and Charlie Millthorpe in Pierre, though they stand for the principle of love or the heart, prove inadequate as foils to the defiant Pierre. They fail to swerve him from his mad pursuit even temporarily. In Moby-Dick Melville's poetic or religious consciousness dominated. In Pierre it is his moral, psychological and social consciousness that is predominant. One more important difference, as Harry Levin suggests, is that Moby-Dick succeeded in fusing perfectly, Melville's practical observation with his speculative imagination. Blackness was counterbalanced there by whiteness in such dazzling radiance that its successor was bound to be an anticlimax. For,

'Blackness advances her banner' in Pierre, beyond all previous limits;... 2

By any standard Pierre is an artistic failure, 'an abortive complement to Moby-Dick', as Mumford says. Coming in the wake of Moby-Dick, its flaws become all the more conspicuous. However, as a document of Melville's mental and spiritual condition, as also his approach to reality, at

this stage of his life, it is as important as Moby-Dick. In its penetrating study of the hidden recesses of a man's personality and the unimaginable confusion of motives that resides there, it stands much in advance of modern psychology. Not even Hawthorne, whose works are well known for their psychological probings, has studied, this side of a man's mental make-up as frankly as Melville has. If he had been able to command the artistic skill displayed in Moby-Dick, for the composition of Pierre, it would have been as great a work, for it deals with an equally important theme. Man's struggle against his external environment is as hazardous as his struggle against his sub-conscious self. He has to face both with sobriety and sanity, not with the anger and defiance of an Ahab or a Pierre.

Like many of his earlier works, Pierre is the story of the transition of the hero from innocence to experience. Pierre Glendinning is an affluent young man, healthy, handsome, devout and idealistic. He is heir to 'Saddle Meadows', his family estate, which since his father's death is in the charge of his beautiful but haughty mother, Mary Glendinning. There is perfect confidence and mutual understanding at all points between the mother and son. All associations of 'Saddle Meadows' inspire Pierre with pride. He is engaged to be married to Lucy Tartan, a beautiful girl of the
neighbourhood with fitting social connections. The first complication in his simple life occurs when Pierre discovers that his father whom he has held as a model of virtue, has in the past abandoned his illegitimate child, Isabel, who now lives in 'Saddle Meadows' in a state of servitude. His lofty idealism urges Pierre to protect her. Because of his mother's callous treatment of Delly Ulver, another girl of the neighbourhood, with an illegitimate child, Pierre is sure she will not acknowledge Isabel as a 'Glendinning'. So he plans to redeem the sin of his father by announcing to the world that he has secretly married Isabel. He takes both Isabel and Delly Ulver with him to New York where he decides to earn his living by writing. Difficulties pile on Pierre in the city. His cousin Glen refuses to help him. He finds it difficult to write and sell his book to the publishers. And his health is totally ruined due to overwork. His mother dies of shock after disinheriting him of his estate. Lucy, after her initial shock, recovers and joins him in the city to help him tide over his difficulties. The enmity between Pierre and Glen takes such a turn that Pierre kills him in a fit of rage. Pierre is taken to prison where Lucy discovers that Pierre and Isabel are actually brother and sister and hence dies of shock. Pierre and Isabel too end their lives with poison.
The whole of Book I and a great part of Book II are devoted to portraying the idyllic life of 'Saddle Meadows'. The satirical tone and the extravagance in language make Melville's aim clear. He wants to describe a society that is insular and traditional. Mrs. Glendinning is haughty, self-complacent and rigid. Her way of life reflects all the social hypocrisies and superficialities which an inland community like the one at 'Saddle Meadows' cherishes. Melville describes her as,

a lady who externally furnished a singular example of the preservative and beautifying influences of unfluctuating rank, health, and wealth, when joined to a fine mind of medium culture, uncankered by any inconsolable grief, and never worn by sordid cares.3

Her relations with her son are marked by artificiality and immaturity. Pierre himself comes to realize the shallowness of his mother's love for him after he receives Isabel's letter and is forced to presume that she will not acknowledge Isabel. For Mrs. Glendinning's love for Pierre is not genuine but based on pride. She loved him because in him she saw her own curled and haughty beauty and it was to this mirrored

image that she offered her homage. People at 'Saddle Meadows' lead a devout life under the guidance of the Rev. Mr. Falsgrave who is an example of a person whose profession

is unavoidably entangled by all fleshly alliances, and cannot move with godly freedom in a world of benefices.4

The uncharitable way in which he orders Delly Ulver to leave 'Saddle Meadows' shows that he is a mere hypocrite, a puppet in the hands of Mrs. Glendinning on whom he depends for his bread. Chapter IV of Book V wherein Mrs. Glendinning, Pierre and Falsgrave discuss Delly's sin, brings out fully the hypocrisy of Falsgrave. Melville's criticism of these beacons of religion, who in the name of Christ have brought misery and woe to countless people, is evident all through his works since he wrote Typee. Falsgrave's answer to Pierre's questions, while he is championing Delly's cause, is worth noting for its evasiveness and moral irresponsibility.

Millions of circumstances modify all moral questions; so that though conscience may possibly dictate freely in any known special case; yet, by one universal maxim, to embrace all moral contingencies, - this is not only impossible, but the attempt, to me, seems foolish.5

4 Ibid., Bk,VIII, ch.7, p.194.
5 Ibid., Bk,V, ch.4, p.129.
Pierre and Lucy too are typical products of 'Saddle Meadows' bound by a romantic love as yet untested by experience. Pierre's heritage, virtues and accomplishments have been described in great detail perhaps because Melville wanted to show how unfit such near-perfect boys prove to be for the woes of the world. Right from his childhood Pierre has yearned to engage in a mortal quarrel on a sweet sister's behalf, yet when he actually has to champion Isabel, his half-sister, he fails miserably. Melville's aim in relating in great detail the family history of 'Saddle Meadows' could have been to refute the charge levelled by the 'monarchial world' that in demagogical America the sacred Past has no fixed statues erected to it, and that all things irreverently seethe and boil in the vulgar cauldron of an everlasting uncrystallizing Present. Melville believed that in matters of pedigree America could claim equality with England. Melville may also have wanted to stress the vanity inherent in claiming a peerage or nobility as a mark of one's greatness. To quote Melville's words:

... Perishable as stubble, and fungous as the fungi, those grafted families successively live and die on the eternal soil of a name. ... So that the empty air of a name is more endurable than a man...

6 Ibid., Bk.1, ch.3, p.30.
'Saddle Meadows' may or may not be an exact picture of the community in which the Melvilles or the Gansewoorts lived. But coming from a landed, genteel family himself, Melville must have been aware of the shortcomings of such families. Stressing the importance of the portrayal of the contemporary society of Melville, Ronald Mason says,

The aristocratic demesne at 'Saddle Meadows' emphasizes both the virile traditionalism and the secluded innocence of sentient young America. Just as the relation between the 'Pequod' and America considerably broaden the application of Moby-Dick, Pierre loses much of its effect if its national significance is ignored. From now on Melville's awareness of contemporary society and its development will colour decisively the selection of his theme and treatment.  

Once Pierre leaves 'Saddle Meadows' with Isabel and Delly, it disappears from the background of the action and the city and its dehumanized life come into focus. Satirical as Melville is in describing the vanities of the people of the countryside, we have in Pierre some of the best descriptions of the peace and tranquillity that pervade the countryside. From this stage of the novel i.e. from Book XVI, chapter I, what comes into focus is the squalor and the filth and the callousness which characterize life in a city. Redburn and Israel Potter also

---

show that Melville had a deep insight into the evils of urban life. The first contact with the city seems to knock Pierre and his companions out of their countryside naivety. The very touch of the wheels of the coach on the pavement makes the inmates conscious of a change. It is as if the buried hearts of some dead citizens have come to the surface. Pierre's opinion about the city exaggerated and unwarranted though it is, shows his utter disillusionment and this in turn shows how secluded and sheltered, life at 'Saddle Meadows' was.

Pierre is Melville's third titanic hero out to unearth the mystery of the universe and fight its tyranny. From the moment Isabel's face starts haunting him, he finds reality crumbling around him. He feels that what he had always before considered the solid land of veritable reality, was now being audaciously encroached upon by banded armies of hooded phantoms. The face of Isabel becomes symbolic of the mystery of Truth itself and stirs his deepest thoughts. This is his first inkling of feelings of woe too. For conjuring up Isabel's face as he sits near the pine-tree, one evening, he wonders if Grief is a pendant to pleasantness. For till he meets Isabel his life has been one long stretch of pleasantness. On receiving Isabel's letter, revealing her identity, his
pride in his parents and his heritage turns into loathing. Not even his lovely, immaculate mother, remains entirely untouched or unaltered by the shock. And the long-cherished image of his father is now transfigured before him from a green-foliaged tree into a blasted trunk. The loss of faith in his mother gives rise to a feeling of exile, an 'Ishmael' feeling which Melville gives expression to in many of his works. Instead of a loving mother, Pierre sees in Mary Glendinning an edifice of pride,

her pride of birth, her pride of affluence, her pride of purity, and all the pride of high-born, refined, and wealthy Life, and all the Semiramian pride of woman.  

Pierre feels lonely and discarded and is forced to seek support in himself.

Pain, then, for one moment, would he have recalled the thousand sweet illusions of Life; tho' purchased at the price of Life's Truth; so that once more he might not feel himself driven out an infant Ishmael into the desert, with no maternal Hagar to accompany and comfort him.  

Henceforward Pierre stands alone to fight the tyranny of the world. He feels that he has no paternity and no past and therefore he is free to indulge his self-will. This

9 Ibid., pp.115-16.
is the turning point in his development. He becomes defiant and arrogant towards everybody. Like Taji and Ahab he recognizes no human bonds, no interindebtedness for

in the Enthusiast to Duty, the heaven-begotten Christ is born; and will not own a mortal parent, and spurns and rends all mortal bonds.  

This assumption of total independence is the hallmark of all the titans in Melville as far as their search for Truth is concerned. And even at the verge of destruction, they accept no earthly or heavenly bonds. Pierre's plight can be judged from these words:

On either hand clung to by a girl who would have laid down her life for him; Pierre, nevertheless, in his deepest, highest part, was utterly without sympathy from anything divine, human, brute, or vegetable. One in a city of hundreds of thousands of human beings, Pierre was solitary as at the Pole.

Besides this, Taji, Ahab and Pierre become defiant towards the forces of the Universe because these forces are inscrutable. Behind this inscrutability, Ahab and Pierre see an Evil force ready to destroy mankind. Yet Ahab's monomania is directed towards a single object viz. the White Whale. His pursuit takes a single unified course. And so, the readers can identify themselves with Ahab to a certain

11 Ibid., Bk.XXV, ch.3, p.380.
extent at least. With Pierre the search becomes confused. One is not sure what he is fighting against. The dark mystery of Isabel's face prompts him to question the mystery of Truth. The search for Truth makes him conscious of Grief and the consciousness of Grief prompts him to hurl abuses at Fate whom he sees as the author of all his woes. Hence he vows to know the ultimate Truth and the method he employs is defiance. Chapter VI of Book III of Pierre reads very much like chapter XXXVI of Moby-Dick. Specially words like:

...Thou Black Knight, that with visor down, thus confrontest me, and mockest at me; lo! I strike through thy helm, and will see thy face, be it Gorgon! ...From all idols, I tear all veils; henceforth I will see the hidden things; and live right out in my own hidden life:12

spoken by Pierre, remind one of Ahab's words:

All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks. ...there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask. If man will strike, strike through the mask!

But Pierre finds the mystery of the human soul as unravellable as the mystery of the universe. Melville expresses the sense of Pierre's frustration by using an apt

12 Ibid., Bk.III, ch.6,p.91.
The old mummy lies buried in cloth on cloth; it takes time to unwrap this Egyptian king. Yet now, forsooth, because Pierre began to see through the first superficiality of the world, he fondly weens he has come to the unlayered substance. But, far as any geologist has yet gone down into the world, it is found to consist of nothing but surface stratified on surface. To its axis, the world being nothing but superinduced superficies. 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 nobody is there! - appallingly vacant as vast is the soul of a man!  

It is very difficult to find out what is happening in the hidden recesses of a man's personality. He may be acting out of the loftiest motives, yet lurking behind he finds motives not entirely altruistic. This is exactly what happens to Pierre's relationship to Isabel. Although she has been the cause of his loftiest ideals on one side, on the other, she has aroused his basest instincts. Hence he is not sure whether the person for whom he has sacrificed everything is a 'saint' or a 'fiend'. This is the plight of all enthusiastic natures. Human values are so ambiguous that one cannot champion a cause without the fear of its being linked to some evil consequence. Hence Melville is right when he says,

13 Ibid., Bk.XXI, ch.1, p.323.
In those Hyperborean regions, to which enthusiastic Truth, and Earnestness, and Independence, will invariably 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 inverted. ...  

But it is Pierre's feeling that the very heavens are guilty of producing this confounding effect, since it is mostly in the heavens themselves that these wonderful mirages are exhibited. Hence he argues that if Heaven itself is guilty of such fluctuations what can one expect from man? If the source of creation is polluted, how can one pass a censorious word against mankind? And if man is wholly made in heaven, why do we catch hell-glimpses? Melville once again touches upon his pet theme that the fallibility of mankind reflects the fallibility of God, since man is made in the image of God. Pierre becomes aware of the fallibility of his own motives when he realizes with a shock that his feelings towards his half-sister, are in part physical. Hence he concludes that the uttermost ideal of moral perfection in man is wide of the mark, and that Virtue and Vice are trash. Pierre becomes so confused by these ambiguities between Virtue and Vice that he feels that they are like two shadows cast from one thing which is a 'nothing'. The tragedy of Pierre results from his mixing up.

14 Ibid., Bk.IX, ch.1, p.195.
the moral and metaphysical aspects of reality.

He experiences the same disillusionment where his writing is concerned. He has resolved to give the world a book, some thoughtful thing of absolute Truth, which the world would hail with surprise and delight. He is confident that he will be able to do so because of that bottomless spring of original thought which the occasion and time has caused to burst out in himself. But he soon realizes how impossible it is to write such a book for all the great books in the world are but the mutilated shadowings-forth of invisible and eternally unembodied images in the soul; so that they are but the mirrors, distortedly reflecting to us our own things; and never mind what the mirror may be, if we would see the object, we must look at the object itself, and not at its reflection.15

Hence the more he wrote and the deeper he dived, he saw the everlasting elusiveness of Truth and the universal lurking insincerity of even the greatest and the purest written thoughts. He felt that like knavish cards the leaves of all great books were covertly packed. Pierre's failure to write the kind of book he wanted to, reflects Melville's own doubt about the great function of literature, to tell the truth. Needless to say this feeling on Melville's

15 Ibid., Bk.XXI, ch.1,p.322.
part was due to the failure of his own books specially the kind of books he desired most to write. So, as Charles Watson says,

he began to suspect - with an ultimate kind of epistemological nihilism - that truth either cannot be known or does not even exist.16

No wonder, in Pierre, Melville denounces philosophers like Plato, Spinoza and Goethe and 'the rabble of Muggletonian Scots and Yankees', as self-imposters, for, their so-called efforts and success to fathom the mystery of the universe are as hopeless as it is to extract Voice out of Silence.

Disappointed on all sides he begins to spurn his own aspirations and abhor the loftiest part of himself. He dies realizing too late that had he been heartless towards Isabel he would have been happy through a long life on earth, and perchance through a long eternity in heaven.

Now, 'tis merely hell in both worlds, he says.

Well, be it hell. I will mold a trumpet of the flames, and, with my breath of flame, breathe back my defiance!17

17 Pierre, Bk. XXVI, ch. 6, p. 403.
What is noteworthy about Pierre's defiance is that it is not offset like Ahab's by recurrent glimpses into his 'humanities' or his sentiments. Even as late as the second day of the chase of Moby Dick, Ahab wanted to lean for support on somebody. This factor in Ahab's personality makes it possible for readers to admire him even if they do not fully sympathize with his approach. With Pierre, this is not so. Though it is his heart that has prompted him to renounce the shallow world of 'Saddle Meadows' and to commit himself to Isabel and life's dark mystery, he realizes that the heart is no infallible guide. He therefore decides to devote himself, without reservation to the life of the mind and in the process completely represses his heart, so much so that he loses all his sympathy for Lucy and Isabel also and hurls curses on them before he dies. Once again this stands in contrast to Ahab's behaviour for it is during the last days of his life that he most remembers his family and his home with feelings of remorse.

Plotinus Plinlimmon and his pamphlet which Pierre finds in the coach bound for New York, have caught the attention of many critics. Most of these seem to agree with the opinion that Plinlimmon and his pamphlet are a satire on Emerson and the principles of transcendentalism.
At least, if not this, some of these critics believe that Melville's intention with regard to the main theme of the pamphlet viz. 'virtuous expediency' is satirical. And one agrees with Willard Thorp's thesis that if one accepts the pamphlet as Melville's sincere propagation of the principle of 'virtuous expediency', the book offers many contradictions. The whole action of Pierre and Melville's description of Plotinus as he sees him at the Apostles' would show that Melville wrote the Plinlimmon chapter (Book XIV, chapter III), with his tongue in his cheek. Yet if one examines the pamphlet, not in isolation, but within the range of the whole of Melville's works one feels that much as he was fascinated by the Absolute or Ideal in everything, he showed in Mardi, Moby-Dick and Pierre, how its pursuit ended in destruction. In Mardi he posed 'Serenia' as the alternative to Taji's obsession. In Moby-Dick the unobtrusive but ever-present Ishmael was posed against the aggressive Ahab. In Pierre, although the Plinlimmon pamphlet does not stand as powerfully against the mad ravings of Pierre, it nevertheless shows that Melville was not unaware of the evils of an uncompromising approach to Reality even at this stage in his life when he was undergoing the most unnerving mental torture. The Plinlimmon pamphlet also shows another important development in American literature. John J. Gross has examined how writers, who in the
thirties and forties had upheld the Rousseauistic and Jeffersonian concepts of liberty and individualism, were in the fifties re-examining man's relationship to his community.

For isolated though he may have been, says Gross,

Melville was not alone in his concern for the cultural problem of the individual in a community largely dominated by selfish interest.18

The general trend of Melville's works after Pierre strengthens this view. The protagonists of his works after Pierre have abandoned the extreme course of independence, self-assertion, isolation and defiance that was characteristic of the earlier heroes and have accepted the moderate path that is expounded in the Plinlimmon pamphlet. The key passage of the pamphlet is worth noting.

A virtuous expediency, ... seems the highest desirable or attainable earthly excellence for the mass of men, and is the only earthly excellence that their Creator intended for them. ...A due appreciation of this matter will do good to man. For, hitherto, being authoritatively taught by his dogmatical teachers that he

must, while on earth, aim at heaven, and
attain it, too, in all his earthly acts,
on pain of eternal wrath; and finding by
experience that this is utterly impossible;
in his despair, he is too apt to run clean
away into all manner of moral abandonment,
self-deceit, and hypocrisy; or else he openly
runs, like a mad dog, into atheism.19

The title of the pamphlet is "Chronometricals and Horolo-
gicals". The former stands for heavenly or ideal values,
the latter for earthly or practical values. What the pam-
phlet propounds is that a mortal cannot abide by heavenly
virtues alone; neither can his god-like half be satisfied
with the merely earthly. Hence instead of following one
course or the other in its entirety, it is more advisable
to make a compromise between the two. Yet through Pierre's
example Melville shows how difficult it is for idealists
like him to curb their ever-encroaching appetite for God.
The 'Enceladus' chapter (Bk.XXV; ch.5), although it shows
Pierre in a dream, an Enceladus hurling his immitigable
hate against 'the invulnerable steep', is proof of Mel-
ville's belief in the blend in man of earth and heaven.
Hence he is prompted to say:

...whoso storms the sky gives best proof
he came from thither! But whatso crawls
contented in the moat before that crystal
fort, shows it was born within that slime,
and there forever will abide.20

20 Ibid., Bk.XXV, ch.5,p.389.
Melville also knew the dangers of a 'virtuous expediency' carried too far. For in the pamphlet itself he warns:

This chronometrical conceit does by no means involve the justification of all the acts which wicked men may perform. For in their wickedness downright wicked men sin as much against their own horologies, as against the heavenly chronometer.21

And in The Confidence-Man he shows to what extent this principle could be stretched by man to fleece his fellow-men. Thus one can conclude that Melville would neither advocate an uncommitted idealism like Pierre's nor an equivocal compromise like Palsgrave's. For Melville had increasingly come to admire an attitude that Merlin Bowen so aptly describes as

one of resistance without defiance and acceptance without surrender, of an indifference that is not apathy and an affirmation free of an illusion.22

Pierre's search for Truth ends in disaster because he undertakes it outside the human context. It lacks the all-comprehending oneness', that 'calm representativeness' by which a steady philosophic mind reaches forth and draws to itself the objects of its contemplations in their

21 Ibid., Bk.XIV, ch.3, p.247.
collective entirety. Because of his eagerness, all objects to Pierre seem deceptively foreshortened. The intensity of his idealism prompts him to view each object as detached from the larger perspective of life. His downfall results because of his inability to see both the bright and dark aspects of life. And it is in this connection that Lucy and Isabel gain significance. Broadly speaking Lucy embodies the brighter aspects of life while Isabel stands for the darker. Lucy represents the known; the familiar. She stands for the principle of the heart. She belongs to the earth and is an emblem of man's earthly felicity. Isabel represents the Unknown and the strange. She stands for the head; the sea and all that it signifies. She represents man's ideals, his ever-encroaching appetite for God. In his search for Truth, Pierre clings totally to Isabel and what she stands for. He forgets that man's aspirations, however noble, cannot be realized in a realm where human values are absent. His aspiration becomes so perverted that he refuses to acknowledge the reawakening of his heart caused by Lucy's arrival. He ultimately cleaves to Isabel due to the compulsion of his vow and destroys himself and all around him.

The secondary theme of Pierre is the incestuous relationship between Pierre and Isabel. It projects the havoc a man's subconscious motives causes, if they are
not understood in their proper perspective or if they are not channelized in the right direction. Since this dissertation aims at studying the different facets of Evil in Melville's works, this aspect too viz. the division of sexes and the evil which, according to Melville, results from such a division, could be appropriately mentioned here. Critics and biographers with a psychological bias, Arvin, Mumford, Chase and Murray, to mention a few, have made much of Melville's stunted sexuality. They have cited as proof, the absence of any real women characters in most of his major works. Fayaway, Yillah, Hautia, Lucy, Isabel and Mrs. Glendinning are merely insubstantial portraits. According to Chase, Melville

in his books loved men better than women and signified this fact with his homoerotic fantasies - fantasies that surpassed life in their poignant tenderness and in their titanic primeval surging.23

Melville's relationship with his mother, sisters and his wife, is understood by these critics to have remained an ideal, adolescent relationship and that as a result he felt repelled when he tried to confront it as an adult. Mumford feels that Melville's sexual impulses and his intellectual career were closely bound up and therefore

the failure of *Pierre* as a work of art is proof of the havoc Melville's own instinct played as a result of his fixation. The symbol of incest, he feels, is perhaps the symbol of his shrinkage, his defeat and the ultimate blackness of the mood that resulted from it. Because of such an interpretation, Pierre's relationship with Mrs. Glendinning, Lucy and with Isabel prompts one to look for autobiographical hints in the work. However, such an analysis will have to be only conjectural. Even Melville's portrayal of the turmoil 'Amor' causes in Urania in the poem *After The Pleasure Party* cannot be taken to imply his own predicament. Urania, a Virgin has devoted her youth to intellectual pursuits. She has avoided all sensual pleasures during this period. But she finds to her dismay that her contempt for and evasion of 'Amor' is revenged and that as a result she remains unfulfilled in life. She feels it is some interfering god or 'anarch' who has divided mankind into two beings of opposite sexes and hence she rebukes him thus:

```
Why hast thou made us but in halves—
Co-relatives? This makes us slaves,
If these co-relatives never meet
Self-hood itself seems incomplete,
And such the dicing of blind fate
Few matching halves here meet and mate.
```
What cosmic jest or Anarch blunder
The human integral clove asunder
And shied the fractions through life's gate?24

If these lines are kept in mind, then Chase's contention, that Melville writes of the division of the sexes in this poem, as an obstacle placed by an anarch, in the path of man, appears valid. And it also agrees with the basic argument of this dissertation that Melville viewed Evil, till he wrote Pierre at least, as part of a world governed by a God of Righteousness or inflexible justice. Hence he may have viewed the division of the sexes as an act of God meant to prevent mankind from achieving self-hood or deflect them from their aspirations. The reference, in the last verse of the poem, about the artist's art remaining 'inanimate', seems to have prompted critics to find autobiographical hints in the poem.