It was in the course of a discussion with Dr. Amina Amin, about Melville's works, with special reference to his use of the split-heroine motif, in his novel PIERRE, that the idea first dawned on me that this motif could be located in the novels of James Fenimore Cooper and Nathaniel Hawthorne too. The heroine is portrayed by Melville as a combination of the 'fair' and the 'dark' aspects to symbolize man's inner conflict between good and evil.

When I attended a Summer course on American Civilization at the A S R C, Hyderabad, the picture became clear enough for me to begin my research into the ambivalence towards women, in the writings of Cooper, Hawthorne and Melville. This study brings into focus, the origin of the socio-religious traditions of the Puritan 'Dissenters', the very first colonists from England and Holland, after the Spanish, their notions about women, and the subsequent changes in their social attitudes and outlook. Nineteenth-century America offered itself as the crossroads between the earlier conservative era and the evolving democracy-oriented one. It also provided an opportunity for sensitive minds to introspect on various events of the past and weigh them against what could be desired as necessary for a truly democratic society. In the course of the introspection,
would figure events, like the suppression of the American Indians, the introduction and subsequent attempt at the abolition of slavery, Puritan excesses, the need for a break from the European past, to establish an independent American society, and a pioneering trend westward. Thus it proved to be a fascinating study as well as an ever-widening one, which ultimately had to be narrowed to the study of women in American society and then to the ambivalence towards them in nineteenth century American Novels. The literary trend, called American Gothic, dealt with extensively by Leslie A. Fiedler, finally provided the link between the dual portrayal of women as 'fair' and 'dark' and the subconscious contradictions that possibly went on as mental under-currents in Cooper, Hawthorne and Melville.

I have chosen the five Leatherstocking Tales of Cooper, the four major novels of Hawthorne, viz., The Scarlet Letter, The House of the Seven Gables, The Blithedale Romance and The Marble Faun, and Melville's two novels, Mardi, and - A Voyage Thither and Pierre or, the Ambiguities for my study. In these novels, I have tried to examine the ambivalence towards their respective heroines through the authors' projection of them as 'fair' and 'dark' to project certain polarities all three of them were preoccupied with. While consulting the prime sources, I have tried to go through various editions so that there could be greater authenticity with regard to the material in them.
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