

HERMAN MELVILLE'S TRAGIC HEROES

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Henry Budd

"Cortley the Scrivener"

Harry Finestone
Director

Pierre, or the Ambiguities

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illustrative of certain principles of Freudian psychology. E. B. Matthews is one of the few who investigate Melville as a writer.⁶ Works about various aspects of Melville may have great significance because of the insights they offer into his work, much of which is concerned with philosophical and religious problems. The trouble with such studies is that they often neglect Melville as an important artist. For this reason it seems to me valid to study Melville as a novelist. Most of his major works are concerned with serious problems, such as evil, the discrepancy between appearance

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Herman Melville is one of the most important of the nineteenth century American authors, and his masterpiece, Moby Dick, is generally considered one of the great works of literature. Melville is often, however, considered only partially as a writer of fiction in critical studies. In recent years many important critical studies of Melville have been published, but most of these works consider Melville partially rather than totally. His symbolism is considered by Harry Levin;¹ his religious thought by William Braswell and Nathalia Wright;² his primitivism by James Baird;³ his transcendentalism by Milton Stern;⁴ his philosophy by Lawrence Thompson;⁵ his accuracy as a writer of travel literature by Charles Anderson;⁶ or his life, by Newton Arvin, not a study of his works, but of Melville as illustrative of certain principles of Freudian psychology.⁷ F. O. Matthiessen is one of the few who investigates Melville as a writer.⁸ Works about various aspects of Melville may have great significance because of the insights they offer into his work, much of which is concerned with philosophical and religious problems. The trouble with such studies is that they often neglect Melville as an important artist. For this reason it seems to me valid to study Melville as a novelist. Most of his major works are concerned with serious problems, such as evil, the discrepancy between appearance

and reality and the question of social, as opposed to individual morality. But these problems Melville always considers within an artistic framework, whether it be the novel, the story or the poem. Because Melville is important as a philosophical, religious and symbolic writer, these aspects of his work deserve detailed investigation, and because he is also important as an artist, a study of his work as art is also valid.

Having accepted the premise that much of Melville's fiction attains the stature of art, I have chosen to study Melville's tragic heroes because it seems to me that his tragic heroes are the best examples of his mastery of the art of characterization. Although much of his fiction is taken up with rhetorical philosophical statements, certain really fictional characters emerge who are characters and not merely philosophical illustrations. Moby Dick, for example, is full of philosophical speculation, such as the discrepancy between appearance and reality, the nature and extent of evil in the world, the dangers of Platonism, and the risks involved in searching too deeply into reality. It is also full of technical discussions of whaling, but it is fundamentally a work of action, suspense and character. Melville, through the use of description, allusion, symbol and dramatic techniques, invests Ahab with a reality and an intensity which cannot be denied. Regardless of his monomania and his separation from humanity--the crew of the

Pequod--he is a character with whom the reader can identify and from whom the reader can learn, as the narrator of the novel, Ishmael, learns.

Ahab is Melville's greatest tragic hero, but there are others: Starry Vere in Billy Budd, the Spanish sea-captain in "Benito Cereno," and the young idealist in Pierre. This paper proposes to examine each of them, and the protagonist of "Bartleby the Scrivener," to discover the kinds of heroes Melville creates, the devices used for their development, and their relationship to the traditional concept of the tragic hero.

Melville establishes Billy as uncorrupted innocence and goodness defeated by evil and convention rather than as a character who attains tragic vision. It is Vere, rather than Billy, who possesses the will, the awareness and ability and achieves the reconciliation of a tragic hero.

To accept the view of Vere as the hero of Billy Budd, we must investigate his character and his relationship with Billy Budd. In Vere Melville combines the man of action--the responsible captain of a warship during a great crisis in English history--and the man of contemplation--one who has a well-selected library, reads history and biography, and does not join readily into superficial conversations. His subordinates and equals, who admit his abilities, even find him rather stuffy. He is, however, unquestionably noble. His nobility is in large part established by the portrayal of his singular fineness of character and by re-

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Billy Budd, a short novel, was the last work Melville wrote before his death in 1891.⁹ It is, next to Moby Dick, Melville's most successful effort at tragedy. The story, like many of the author's works, poses certain problems of interpretation. Among these the most important is the question of the tragic hero. Many critics have tended to agree that Billy is the hero and focus of awareness in the story.¹⁰ This view neglects, however, certain aspects of the treatment of Billy and of Starry Vere, captain of the man-of-war Indomitable. Melville establishes Billy as uncorrupted innocence and goodness defeated by evil and convention rather than as a character who attains tragic vision. It is Vere, rather than Billy, who possesses the will, the awareness and nobility and achieves the reconciliation of a tragic hero.

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ferences to his family, members of the English nobility.

Vere has two very important qualities. In regard to his position as a captain, he recognizes his responsibilities to his country and to naval discipline irrespective of personal convictions. He has accepted the fact that military laws sometimes differ from the laws of humanity; and he has recognized the necessity, in view of his position, of loyalty to naval practices when they conflict with human, or moral, law. Thus he is aware of the inconsistencies and ambiguities in the situation in which he becomes trapped. Vere's other important quality is his feeling for humanity, manifested most clearly in his relationship to Billy Budd. Vere feels toward Billy as toward a child; he wants to protect Billy, and he sees in him the beauty and innocence of a child. Melville portrays Vere's paternal feeling for Billy by comparing him to Abraham and Billy to Isaac; and this attitude also appears in the cabin scene in which Vere, with the gentleness of a father, urges Billy to speak in his own defense. Then, after Billy has killed Claggart, Melville says of Vere that "the father in him, manifested toward Billy thus far in the scene, was replaced by the military disciplinarian." 843 Vere maintains this attitude in the ensuing events, but he achieves this objectivity only by a conscious and sustained effort of that will which helps to make him a tragic hero. Vere is therefore described from the first as a character eminently suited for the role of a tragic

hero; and it is he, rather than Billy, who attains this stature and its accompanying awareness.

Billy Budd is a young orphan in the service of a merchant ship, the Rights of Man, during the wars of the French Revolution. The action takes place shortly after the Nore Mutiny, an event which had posed a great threat to the security of the English navy and which had had repercussions in that English naval officers were still sensitive about the actions of enlisted men. The story opens with Billy's impressment into the service of the Indomitable. Through analogy and comparison Billy is established as a young man of great innocence and beauty. His fellow sailors call him "Baby Budd;" his captain values him because he alone can keep peace among the rough sailors; and he is described as a man "who in the nude might have posed for a statue of young Adam before the Fall." [840] This is the characterization of Billy maintained throughout the work. He is good, pure, totally unaware of evil, trusting and lacking in self-consciousness. Although he is an orphan, Melville suggests that Billy's ancestry is noble. This suggestion that he is the bastard son of a nobleman is one way in which Melville invests Billy's background with the aura of mysteriousness often characteristic of tragic heroes. His intelligence is innate and animalistic in the sense that, like animals, he is not conscious of himself, he is illiterate and he understands little more than the elementary requirements of life;

he is "one to whom not yet has been proffered the questionable apple of knowledge." [311]

Billy's only flaw is a speech impediment that manifests itself in stuttering or inability to speak when he is emotionally agitated. This is the defect which results in Billy's inevitable destruction; and it is for this reason that the author can say of Billy that

The avowal of such an imperfection in the Handsome Sailor should be evidence not alone that he is not presented as a conventional hero, but also that the story in which he is the main figure is no romance. [313]

Melville offers Billy as an unconventional tragic hero, but because the story also provides a conventional tragic hero in Captain Vere, one must assume that it is Vere and not Billy who attains the stature of a tragic hero. Billy's flaw, although it prevents him from being perfect, cannot in itself make him a tragic hero. Although it is in large part this flaw that causes the catastrophe of the tragedy, this action is accompanied neither by the struggle of a tragic hero nor by the realization and awareness that generally result from an action of this sort. After stating the flaw Melville continues to invest Billy with an innocence that is reminiscent of Adam, and therefore the flaw is sufficient neither to establish Billy as hero nor to detract materially from the portrayal of his innocence. W. H.

Auden supports this view when he states that Billy's flaw is insufficient in that it forces his actions to be contrary to, rather than in accordance with, his will in the climactic cabin scene with Vere and Claggart, the Master-at-arms.¹¹ He murders Claggart, but it is a physical deficiency rather than a mistake in judgment usually characteristic of classical heroes that necessitates Billy's action.

In order to understand Melville's use of Billy in the story, one must also look at Claggart, the Master-at-arms who stands at the opposite pole from Billy. Claggart is a totally evil, Iago-like character. Although there is a suggestion that his specific actions against Billy are inspired by homosexual feelings and by envy of Billy's innocence and beauty, Claggart suffers "a depravity according to nature," 827 and his Satanism is motiveless. Claggart's evil nature is not, however, immediately obvious, because it is not noticeably reflected in his appearance. Melville says of him that

The face was a notable one; the features all except the chin clearly cut as those on a Greek medallion...His brow was of the sort phrenologically associated with more than average intellect; silken jet curls partly clustering over it, making a foil to the pallor below...This complexion...tho' it was not exactly displeasing, nevertheless seemed to hint of something defective or abnormal in the constitution and blood. [820]

This passage hints at Claggart's homosexuality as well as

at the mysteriousness which makes men suspicious of him. Although no one aboard the Indomitable knows anything specific about Claggart's background, the men make conjectures not totally flattering about him. Although he looks English, his accent suggests that he was born a foreigner. The sailors think that he enlisted in the navy to avoid punishment for some mysterious crime, and he is suspicious, sly and unduly obsequious to his superiors. Although his background is mysterious, his envious nature is definitely established; and his envy and the resulting malignity are directed against Billy, whose innocence and purity Claggart cannot bear because he cannot corrupt it. Although the homosexuality suggestion is not made explicit in the story, it is certain that Claggart is so envious of Billy that he must destroy the young sailor. Melville does, however, suggest Claggart's evil nature, and in this way he establishes Claggart as the antithesis of Billy Budd. Although Billy's perfection is flawed, in viewing Claggart as Billy's foil, it becomes apparent that Melville intends for the reader to retain his view of Billy as symbolic of total innocence and purity despite the flaw. He goes beyond this, however.

Claggart accuses Billy of treason, and in an interview in Vere's stateroom, Billy is confronted with this accusation. Because his speech difficulty prevents his refutation of the charge, he strikes out against Claggart, who dies from the blow. Vere has, immediately after the event, made

his irrevocable decision to maintain naval law in the matter rather than judge Billy on the basis of individual moral principles. Vere calls the surgeon; and as both watch the body, they see that "thick black blood is now oozing from nostril and ear." [344] This occurrence, which Vere compares to the judgment of God on Ananias, illustrates the evil of the murdered Claggart. Vere states the tragedy of the event regarding Billy's fate when he says that Claggart was "Struck dead by an angel of God! Yet the angel must hang." [344] Here Vere recognizes the guilt of Claggart, the innocence of Billy and the necessity of destroying that innocence.

Although Billy is not guilty of treason, he is guilty of striking an officer, a capital offense in itself. According to martial law, Vere has the authority either to try Billy on ship or wait until he has returned to the fleet for a regular military court. Vere, the officers of the court he assembles, Billy himself and even the men, realize that Billy is innocent of any crime at all, morally if not legally. When Vere calls the court, he accepts his responsibility as a naval officer, a responsibility which, according to protocol, he could have avoided. He goes beyond this, however. He forces the court, by imposing his will upon them, to convict Billy and to sentence him to death, a punishment which is to take place the following morning. Billy and the members of the court accept this decision because they realize that Vere is a greater man than they.

After the conviction, Vere has a private interview with Billy. This is the scene upon which many critics base their interpretation of Billy as hero of the story.¹² This view holds that in the interview Billy attains an awareness and a reconciliation to his fate which can be considered tragic. The final events of the story do not, however, seem to substantiate this view. When Billy hangs, he calls "God bless Captain Vere," [859] and by this statement he expresses his child-like faith in the man who is like his father. He has realized that he must die, but he views death and particularly his death as a natural occurrence for which an explanation is unnecessary. Therefore his acceptance of his fate and his faith are those of an innocent child and not a tragic hero. Melville compares Billy's death to Christ's, and his innocence is even further emphasized because he does not have the sexual spasm that generally accompanies hanging. Therefore in his interview with the chaplain and even in the hanging scene, Billy remains as unaware of the realities of the world and of his particular situation as he has been throughout the story. His only vague comprehensions of the evil in the world had come when he was approached by a fellow sailor about a mutiny and when Claggart had accused him of treason. Claggart had sent a sailor to tempt Billy, and Billy's reaction to this was so violent that he had been speechless. He understood that there was something wrong in what his fellow-sailor had suggested, but he did not understand what was wrong. Therefore he had rebuked the tempter

without really understanding the nature of the temptation or the fact that Claggart was attempting to corrupt him. The same is true of Claggart's accusation, because he realized that what the Master-at-arms was suggesting was evil, but he did not understand the subtle nature of that evil or his involvement in it. These occasions were not sufficient to provide Billy with tragic insight; and there is no appreciable change after the interview. The chaplain, after attempting to discuss death and Christianity with the condemned prisoner, felt that

innocence was even a better thing than religion wherewith to go to Judgment...

Billy was one who though on the confines of death he felt he could never convert to a dogma; nor for all that did he fear for his future. [857]

Here Billy is called "a martyr to martial discipline," [58] and this is essentially his function in the story. He is a pathetic character whom we pity, but he is not tragic. As previously stated, at the hanging he retains his purity and innocence, particularly because of the parallel Melville draws between Billy and Christ. Billy, although he is like the unfallen Adam and like the crucified Christ in his martyrdom, dies a child. Melville's use of symbolism here is not meant to be explicit. He does not make Billy a Christ symbol or an Adam symbol, but he uses symbol and analogy to the two Biblical figures in order to substantiate his treatment of Billy's innocence.

Vere, however, acquires tragic stature because of his exertion of will and because of the knowledge he gains from the situation. An example of the difference between Vere and Billy is the hanging scene, in which Vere, rather than Billy, experiences the conflict and emotions of a hero:

At the pronounced words and the spontaneous echo that voluminously rebounded them, Captain Vere, either through stoic self-control or a sort of momentary paralysis induced by emotional shock, stood erectly rigid as a musket in the ship-armorers' rack. [359]

Vere here sees the result of his affirmation, and he has the strength to endure it. Thus his exertion of will involves his rejection of individual and private humanity for the social order to which he has allied himself. Vere throughout recognizes Billy's innocence; he also has a particular feeling for Billy himself, which is exhibited throughout by his paternal treatment of the young sailor. Therefore in forcing Billy's death Vere must overcome not only his general respect for private moral law but also his particular emotional bias in the matter. The analogy Melville makes to the Abraham-Isaac story here is an apt illustration not only of Billy's blind and faithful acceptance of Vere's judgment but also of Vere's subjection of his feelings. Vere could have avoided the responsibility he assumes, but he chooses to exert his will in order to reject his personal sentiments and to make an affirmation in favor of the laws

of society and of military discipline.

Through this exertion Vere exhibits his awareness of the existence in the world of the evil of Claggart, the good of Billy Budd, and the necessity of an order which may destroy both of these and yet encompass the reality of social law and circumstance in which they exist. In this way also Vere is reconciled to the order that can kill Billy Budd, even though the affirmation and realization destroy him. He has acted and has become reconciled to the reality of the existence of good, evil and a superseding social order that necessitated his action, but he cannot survive his action in the world which made it necessary. It becomes a world which he has affirmed but in which he cannot live.

Therefore Billy Budd is the story of the tragedy of Captain Vere. Billy is of course essential to the tragedy, but as a precipitating character rather than as a hero. He is symbolic of innocent and unconscious goodness, and this symbol does not greatly alter. Claggart is Billy's foil-- he is Satan and Billy is at least partly Adam and Christ. Vere stands between these two. His knowledge of both good and evil makes him aware of the irony of the circumstances which can provide Satan with an honorable burial and can hang Adam-Christ. Through his will he makes an affirmation which involves him in the world of society and law. He is aware, but he cannot survive his act; and thus he dies a tragic hero. He has sacrificed Billy to the world of society

and of man-created law, and though his sacrifice kills him personally, he is able to accept the reality of this world. "Bartleby the Scrivener" appears at first sight to be a tragic story with Bartleby, a law copyist, as the central character. When the story is carefully investigated, however, it becomes apparent not only that Bartleby is not its central figure, but also that the story itself does not attain tragic proportions.¹³ It deals rather with an individual who personifies insane will and with a character who acquires a particular kind of knowledge because of his relationship with that personification. Although the story is not a tragedy and does not include a tragic hero, it has often been considered a tragedy. It is often thought an illustration of Melville's tragic view of life, particularly in regard to his literary life. Bartleby has also been considered a tragic character who is destroyed by society. Although neither interpretation seems to me accurate, the fact that it has been so viewed makes it useful in a discussion of Melville's tragic heroes, especially because it emphasizes through contrast the qualities that make Melville's tragic heroes great characters.¹⁴ Bartleby is a poverty-stricken scrivener who applies for a position in the law chambers of the narrator, a lawyer who works with wills and other legal documents rather than with court cases. Melville's description of Bartleby is reminiscent of the Elizabethan melancholy character. Elizabethan audiences

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were accustomed to the characteristics of melancholy humor characters, and therefore dramatists could give stock attitudes and reactions to their melancholy characters without developing them as individualized characters. This type of treatment is similar to the way Melville portrays Bartleby, because he does not develop him as a character. He is pale, meditative and inactive. Although he works well as a copyist, he soon begins to refuse to perform many of the tasks requested of him. Finally, he refuses even to copy legal documents; but at the same time, he will not leave the office where he has been secretly living as well as working. Bartleby never actually refuses to do anything; however, he always replies "I would prefer not to" [13] to any request. He never acts at all. His only occupation aside from sitting at his desk is looking out his window at the dead wall of another building. The narrator calls these Bartleby's "dead wall reveries." [24] Melville gives this wall symbolic value in the story. It symbolizes the blankness and blackness of Bartleby's nonactive existence; and this symbolism continues to the prison in which Bartleby dies, because his only activity in the prison is his practice of staring at the blank prison wall. But Bartleby never acts. The story has

As Bartleby's behavior becomes stranger, it becomes more apparent from his lack of action and from his strangeness that the narrator thinks him perverse and that the other clerks think him insane. He does not appear to be present

in reality, which in this story is the scriveners and legal documents which compose the world of Wall Street. Perhaps the best illustration of Bartleby's insanity is his refusal to leave the law offices even after the narrator and his clerks have vacated them in order to escape him. He is finally taken away to prison for trespassing and vagrancy, and there he continues to stare at "dead walls" and finally dies. He has refused to act or even to eat, and he must finally be destroyed because of his insane withdrawal from all activity.

Bartleby's refusal to act has often been related to Thoreau's passive resistance about paying taxes, and the story has even been called an illustration of Thoreau's actions.¹⁵ Melville, however, does not seem to concern himself in "Bartleby" with the type of actions Thoreau committed or with the type of convictions Thoreau held. Thoreau based his passive resistance upon his conviction that even a single member of a democratic society has the right to refuse to adhere to any of that society's institutions which seem unjust, and therefore his passivity took on the nature of a positive declaration of principle. Thoreau in this sense acts, but Bartleby never acts. The story has also often been related to Melville's reaction to unfavorable critics.¹⁶ Melville is not concerned with such events as Thoreau's passive resistance or his own problems with critics in the story. He considers rather the effect of an inward

directed and irrational will upon itself and upon others, and for this reason these two interpretations are inaccurate. He treats the insanity that can result from gratuitous exertion of the will. Therefore Bartleby cannot be considered a tragic hero because he does not act, because he learns nothing in the story, because through his insane will he pointlessly drives himself even to death. His exercise of will does not even constitute passive resistance, because, although he is resisting the petty chores of his position, it is a position he chose himself. He is essentially a nihilist who negates everything in life, including social and material necessities as well as spiritual and emotional communication. He has perhaps been victimized by society, but this part of his problem is not shown in the story. He does not appear until his reliance upon negative will has made him totally insane, and throughout he refuses to choose anything at all of life and society.¹⁷

Melville's lawyer-narrator is similar to Charlie in Pierre and to the narrators of such stories as "Paradise of Bachelors," "Tartarus of Maids," "Cock-a-Doodle-Do!" and "Rich Man's Crumbs." He is an undeniably good man, who condones all sorts of irregularities on the part of his clerks.¹⁸ He is eminently proper--he prides himself on his connections with John Jacob Astor and upon his success in his profession. He is primarily a man who sees none of the mystery of life until his inadvertent relationship with Bartleby teaches

him about irrationality. It is his unwillingness to admit the existence of the mysterious aspects of human nature that has made him deal with the documentary aspects of his profession rather than with court procedure. He is not a tragic hero because he lacks nobility and the ability to deal with irrationality in others. Melville accentuates these failures throughout by showing the narrator's continual involvement with minor details and his inability to act in the situation with Bartleby.

The narrator, who has throughout his life been convinced of the essential sanity of human nature, comes to recognize through his experience with Bartleby the existence of irrationality and disorder in the world. He further learns that he cannot act to alleviate this disorder. That he has discovered and accepted irrationality is apparent because he relates his experience with Bartleby and because at the end of the experience he can express his knowledge when he says, "Ah, Bartleby! Ah, humanity!" [47] He has previously been an individual who could exist only by refusing to admit any mystery or irregularity in life, as is shown by his relationship to his clerks, in whom he overlooks striking irregularities. He therefore gains an awareness, but it becomes evident when the construction of the story is considered that he must repress this new awareness to a certain extent in order to continue his existence. He has learned, but he has not changed, because the story of Bartleby is told in

a flashback; and previous to this flashback the narrator characterizes himself:

"I am a man who, from his youth upwards, has been filled with a profound conviction that the easiest way of life is the best. Hence, though I belong to a profession proverbially energetic and nervous, even to turbulence, at times, yet nothing of that sort have I ever suffered to invade my peace...All who know me, consider me an eminently safe man. [4]"

He has not permitted Bartleby to change his way of life, but he has altered to the extent that he feels compelled to tell Bartleby's story. He retains his serenity, and the awareness he has acquired does not appreciably affect his actions. This, along with his lack of nobility, prevents his attainment of the stature of a tragic hero. He does, as previously stated, reach a universal conclusion about the human situation; he also attempts to understand and to help Bartleby, and for these reasons he becomes the central figure in a story which concerns, more than anything else, his reaction to Bartleby. In contrast, when Bartleby is destroyed he has reached no conclusions, but then does teach the narrator the existence of irrationality in the world; and in this way he is important to the development of the story's main figure.

in order to view Benito Cereno as a tragic hero, it is necessary to consider the evil which destroys him. The "Benito Cereno"¹⁹ has been the subject of much critical controversy. This controversy includes the problem of whether the work is tragic or merely pathetic. Newton Arvin, for example, views the central figure as the "pathetic Benito Cereno, the so untragic Spanish sea-captain...."²⁰ Others, however, consider the hero comparable to Hamlet.²¹

Like most of Melville's work, "Benito Cereno" is concerned with the problem of good and evil. The problem in this work is somewhat similar to that of Billy Budd in the concern with the ambiguity of appearances; but the theme of ambiguity is here extended to the point that it provides the basis for the irony and suspense that pervade the story. Don Benito is a Spaniard, captain of the San Dominick which sails one morning into the harbor of St. Maria Island in South America. The ship seems in severe difficulty; and Amasa Delano, captain of the Yankee sealing vessel Bachelor's Delight anchored in the harbor, decides to offer assistance to the Spanish ship. From this point on the action of the story involves the discrepancy between the actual situation aboard the San Dominick and Delano's conception of the situation until, at the end of the day, he is enlightened about the evil he has been unable to see. Don Benito is the hero of the story; and he is, "like all the Melville heroes... destroyed by evil."²²

In order to view Benito as a tragic hero, it is necessary to consider the evil which destroys him. The evil on the San Dominick is symbolized by the negro Babo who leads a mutiny of the slaves aboard the ship and directs the commission of the atrocities done to the white passengers and crew. Because here, as with most of Melville's ships, the San Dominick symbolizes the world, one must assume that Melville intends that the evil pervading the ship also pervades symbolically the world of the story. Babo, the black, is evil, and Benito, the white, is good; but Babo, unlike Claggart in Billy Budd, is motivated by his desire to destroy all the whites. He saves Don Benito and a few others only because they are necessary to sail the ship. Perhaps the greatest horror of his evil is that it is intelligent as well as total. He becomes a master of duplicity when he devises a tale to prevent Delano's discovery of the real situation on the ship. Thus he seems to Delano and for a time to the reader, a clever, devoted and solicitous servant to Don Benito rather than a murderer and sadist totally devoid of conscience. The extent of his evil is seen and symbolized by his treatment of his master, Don Aranda, who had convinced Cereno that the slaves did not need to be chained on the voyage. Aranda, at the direction of Babo, is murdered; his skeleton is stripped of its flesh; and he is attached to the prow of the ship as a figurehead with the accompanying message, "Follow your leader." Babo uses this as an example

and as a threat to the surviving Spaniards, and his actions represent the consummate horror to Benito.

Perhaps the best illustration of Babo's evil is his action when Benito escapes the ship by jumping into Delano's whale boat as the Yankee captain is leaving. Babo jumps after his master, and Delano thinks that the dagger in Babo's hand is intended for him rather than for Benito. After both Babo and Benito have been subdued, however, Delano suddenly sees the reality of the situation:

Glancing down at his feet, Captain Delano saw the freed hand of the servant aiming with a second dagger--a small one, before concealed in his wool--with this he was snakishly writhing up from the boat's bottom, at the heart of his master, his countenance lividly vindictive, expressing the centered purpose of his soul; while the Spaniard, half-choked, was vainly shrinking away, with husky words incoherent to all but the Portuguese [789]

Babo is restrained, and after this he never again speaks. He in no way resists his captivity. In his non-resistance he attains a nobility that corresponds to his position as the leader of his race, and the problem of the story becomes even more ambiguous here. Although Babo is evil, evil has been done to him by his white masters. This, along with his nobility, complicates the story because although Babo has committed horrible atrocities, he has accepted the responsibilities of his position as leader of his people. Melville therefore piles ambiguity upon ambiguity to create a story

in which ambiguity and irony are major elements.

Amasa Delano, the Yankee sea-captain from Duxbury, Massachusetts, is Don Benito's foil in the story. He is a practical, middle class man of action who believes himself protected by Providence. He is another of Melville's bachelors, an individual who is happy and successful in the world because he sees only one side of it. In Moby Dick Melville makes a comment about the man who cannot see the dark side of the world:

The sun hides not the ocean, which is the dark side of this earth, and which is two thirds of this earth. So, therefore, that mortal man who hath more of joy than sorrow in him, that mortal man cannot be true --not true, or undeveloped.²³

Delano is one of those who is undeveloped, and even the experience with the San Dominick and Don Benito is not enough to convince him of the extent of evil in the world. At the climax of the story he realizes, after forcing himself to disregard all his misgivings during his day aboard the ship, that there had actually been great evil present. He had thought, however, that any possible evil was attributable in some way to Benito rather than to the slaves; and throughout he had been successful in dismissing the possibility of evil. Even after he sees and recognizes the evil of the situation, he cannot admit that depravity and sorrow are dominant in the world in which Providence

Bachelor's Delight. The San Dominick has sailed

In his attempt to help Benito recover from the experience, Delano has a conversation with the Spaniard which well illustrates the two attitudes toward evil. In the conversation Amasa admits his mistake made at the climax of the story when he thought that Benito, not Babo, was the agent of evil on the ship, and the Spaniard comments,

"So far may even the best men err, in judging the conduct of one with the recesses of whose condition he is not acquainted. But you were in time undeceived. Would that, in both respects, it was so ever, and with all men."

"You generalize, Don Benito; and mournfully enough. But the past is passed; why moralize upon it? Forget it. See you bright sun has forgotten it all, and the blue sea, and the blue sky; these have turned over new leaves."

"Because they have no memory," he dejectedly replied; "because they are not human."

"But these mild trades that now fan your cheek, Don Benito, do they not come with a human-like healing to you? Warm friends, steadfast friends are the trades."

"With their steadfastness they but waft me to my tomb, Senor," was the foreboding response.

"You are saved," cried Captain Delano, more and more astonished and pained; "you are saved: what has cast such a shadow upon you?"

"The negro." [803] ²⁴

Delano has seen evil, but he can forget it in the goodness and beauty which he feels are dominant in the world. He must forget it in order to continue his existence; and for this reason evil is not a real problem in his world, the world of the Bachelor's Delight. The San Dominick has sailed

into his world, but it sails away and is forgotten.

Benito Cereno is not so great a tragic hero as Starry Vere because he lacks Vere's will and because his actions are not of the magnitude of Vere's, but he does attain tragic proportions in the story. His endurance during the experience with the negroes is heroic, but he is ultimately overcome by the evil he has witnessed and experienced. Benito also can be said to have a type of tragic flaw. His own action precipitates the atrocities that occur because it is his unrealistic trust in the goodness of human nature that caused the slaves to be unfettered on the voyage. He is therefore responsible for the mutiny and the murders in somewhat the same way that Vere is responsible for Billy's hanging. Vere is more directly responsible because he personally forces the hanging, but Benito Cereno shares, at least in part, this type of responsibility for his actions. He learns from his experience that his trust was a mistake, and, unlike Delano, he cannot dismiss this knowledge.

From the first of the story Melville establishes Benito's nobility and dignity. He is a member of an old family of Spanish nobility; and Delano can see this nobility in his appearance, even while suspecting him of being a pirate and of having assumed the name of a noble family:

Glancing over once again towards his host--whose side-face, revealed above the skylight, was now turned towards him--he was struck by the profile, whose clearness of cut was refined by

the thinness incident to ill-health, as well as ennobled about the chin by the beard. Away with suspicion. He was a true off-shoot of a true hidalgo Cereno. [760]

Throughout the play enacted on the San Dominick for the benefit of Delano, Benito exhibits both his heroism and his dignity. He is heroic because he participates in the deception so contrary to his nature, not to save himself--he no longer cares to live--but to save what is left of his crew and Captain Delano. Partly because of his heroism, but also because of his appearance, Benito further exhibits the dignity of a tragic hero. Although he frequently seems distant, rude, and even terrified--particularly in the shaving scene--he retains his dignity by exerting his reserve and his strength in order to endure the horror of the deceptions and in order to save himself, Captain Delano, and Delano's ship. He jumps into Delano's boat at the last possible moment, and this is his final act. After this he can do nothing more, and he succumbs to the evil of which he has been a victim. But it is this act which ends the evil, and in this way he himself provides for the destruction of the actual situation on the ship. Although he has been too immersed in the evil to survive it, he enables others to escape it.

Don Benito cannot survive the experience because he is overcome by the evil with which he has become acquainted. After the capture of Babo, Don Benito never again looks at the negro; when he is requested by the court of inquiry to

look at the slave and identify him, Benito faints. He retires to a monastery where he is attended constantly by a monk whom Melville characteristically names Infelez. The monastery is

...on Mount Agonia...where, three months after being dismissed by the court, Benito Cereno, borne on the bier, did, indeed, follow his leader. [304]

He is, in the aftermath of the experience rather than during the experience itself, destroyed by the evil that he has come to believe pervades the world. He became acquainted with that evil because of the unrealistic trust he placed in the negroes; and he cannot, as Delano can, look at evil and retain his faith in the power of good to overcome it. In this way his destruction is self-precipitated: he enables the evil to exist, he eventually destroys it, and yet he is destroyed by it. He cannot live in the world in which he has been subjected to such horrors.

because of certain factors in the novel generally and in characterization especially, the treatment of Pierre as a tragic figure is not as powerful as that of Ahab or Vere.

Pierre is the last male descendant of the Glendinning family, a family of rural aristocracy presumably in New York. Melville carefully establishes the nobility of the family by comparisons with European aristocracy and by showing the difference between the fluid society in the city and the more stable society of the countryside in

Democratic America. He also IV considers Pierre's ancestry,

In Pierre, or the Ambiguities,²⁵ Melville again deals with the theme of good and evil. To this he adds the problem of appearance versus reality, involving not only mistaken idealism, but also incest and illegitimacy. Melville's first novel after Moby Dick, Pierre was not accepted by critics or readers in the 1850's, and it is not today considered one of his great works.²⁶ One problem results from Melville's forced attempt to create in Pierre an "American Hamlet."²⁷ In his attempt to parallel the story of Pierre to that of Hamlet, Melville becomes involved in certain difficulties which tend to detract from Pierre's stature as a tragic hero. Another fault of the novel lies in Melville's inclusion of criticism of the state of American literature in the mid-nineteenth century. Pierre does, however, attain tragic proportions; but in a consideration of Pierre as hero, it becomes clear that because of certain faults in the novel generally and in characterization specifically, the treatment of Pierre as a tragic figure is not so successful as that of Ahab or Vere.

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democratic America. He also considers Pierre's ancestry, describing specifically his paternal grandfather, a heroic general in the Revolutionary War. His mother as well is descended from a Revolutionary general, and Pierre has inherited all the nobility of his family. Tall, handsome, muscular and yet delicate and gentlemanly, he has acquired all the heritage of his family: their social position, their Protestantism, and his late father's "fastidiously picked and decorous library," [5] along with its accompanying intellectual and aesthetic interests.

Pierre lives with his mother on the manorial estate, Saddle Meadows. His existence there is idyllic and correspondingly Melville describes the countryside as a kind of Eden. His relationship to his mother is unusual, more like a brother-sister than a mother-son relationship:

In the playfulness of their unclouded love, and with that strange license which a perfect confidence and mutual understanding at all points, had long bred between them, they were wont to call each other brother and sister. Both in public and private was this their usage.... [4]

Pierre's bond to his mother is strengthened by their mutual adoration of his father, whom they view as a departed saint. The relationship also contains some of the elements of a lover-mistress situation:

"First Lady in waiting to the Dowager

Duchess Glendinning," laughed Pierre, as bowing over before his mother, he gracefully passed the ribbon round her neck, simply crossing the ends in front.

"Well, what is to be told it there, Pierre?"

"I am going to try and tack it with a kiss, sister--there!--oh, what a pity that sort of fastening won't always hold!....but stop--here's a ringlet gone romping--so now, dear sister, give that Assyrian toss to your head." [17-18]

This relationship is not destroyed by Pierre's betrothal to Lucy Tartan, a blond, angelic girl whose position is equal to Pierre's and toward whom he first feels spiritual love. Pierre's mother does not fear that she will lose Pierre, because she feels that in fair beauty there is a docility and sweetness that cannot destroy her singular relationship with him. She expresses relief that Pierre has not chosen a dark beauty, because in that she visualizes a pride and consuming passion that might have alienated him from her. In this way Melville foreshadows the events that eventually lead to the destruction of all the major characters in the novel.

Eden is destroyed when Pierre receives a letter from a strange girl who claims to be his illegitimate half-sister. When Pierre reads the note, he connects it with two incidents in his past which are sufficient to convince him of the validity of the claim. When he had been a boy his aunt had recounted a legend surrounding a portrait of his father which had suggested that Pierre's father had had a youthful beauty by night! Like a thief he had

love affair with an exiled aristocratic French woman. The other incident had occurred at the time of Mr. Glendinning's delirium and insanity on his death-bed. He had continually called for his daughter and had apparently become insane because of his guilt and grief. Therefore even before he meets Isabel Banford, Pierre has impetuously accepted her as his sister; and her strange, wild story seems to support this conviction.²⁸

Pierre immediately vows not only to protect Isabel but also to take her to live with him. This decision involves him in the problems that eventually destroy him. He realizes that he cannot ask his mother to acknowledge Isabel because of her great pride and because it would destroy her saintly image of her husband without helping Isabel's situation. He realizes that his image of his father has been destroyed, but he thinks that he is better able to bear this destruction than is his mother. Thus Pierre, like Hamlet, is forced to make an extremely painful decision, not so much whether to help but how to help Isabel; and in a soliloquy reminiscent of Shakespeare's drama he agonizingly states his problem:

Eight-and-forty hours and more had passed. Was Isabel acknowledged? Had she yet hung on his public arm? Who knew yet of Isabel but Pierre? Like a skulking coward he had gone prowling in the woods by day, and like a skulking coward he had stolen to her haunt by night! Like a thief he had

sat and stammered and turned pale before his mother, and in the cause of Holy Right, permitted a woman to grow tall and hector over him! Ah! Easy for man to think like a hero; but hard for man to act like one. All imaginable audacities readily enter into the soul; few come boldly forth from it.

Did he, or did he not vitally mean to do this thing? Was the immense stuff to do it his, or was it not his? Why defer? Why put off? What was there to be gained by deferring and putting off? His resolution had been taken, why was it not executed? What more was there to learn? What more which was essential to the public acknowledgment of Isabel, had remained to be learned, after his first glance at her first letter? Had doubts of her identity come over him to stay him?--None at all. [238]

Pierre must act. He therefore decides that in order to spare his mother's pride he must claim Isabel as his wife in order to live with her as her brother. So he tells his mother and Lucy that he is married and takes Isabel, presumably as his wife, away to the city where he plans to support them by writing novels. Pierre has rejected his heritage, his mother and his love to act in a way which he feels is heroic and in accord with the ideals he holds. That his action severs him from all he has ever known of life does not concern him; he has achieved what he considers a kind of nobility which he feels will sustain him regardless of material reverses.

Pierre's act is heroic in nature, if somewhat impetuous, because he has made a sacrifice that involved giving

up everything he had ever known. There is, however, a complication which prevents one's view of it as the supreme, noble act of self-sacrifice in favor of an ideal. This complication is the suggestion of emotional, if not physical, incest in the novel. The idea of incest is suggested from the very first meeting of Pierre and Isabel, when Melville says that Isabel's beauty had something to do with Pierre's willingness to sacrifice himself in order to compensate for his father's supposed evil action. The situation becomes clear when the two exiles have reached the city:

"Say, are not thy torments now gone,
my brother?"

"But replaced by--by--by--Oh God,
Isabel, unhand me!" cried Pierre,
starting up.

"Ye Heavens, that have hidden yourselves in the black hood of the night,
I call to ye! If to follow Virtue to
her uttermost vista, where common souls
never go; if by that I take hold on hell,
and the uttermost virtue, after all,
prove but a betraying pander to the monstrous
vice,--then close in and crush
me, ye stony walls, and into one gulf
let all things tumble together." [380-381]

Thus Pierre's heroism is complicated for him and for the reader by his feeling for Isabel.

Pierre does, however, after the original decision, exhibit an endurance and acceptance of his fate that is heroic. It is Melville's treatment of the exile in the city in which most of the parallels to Hamlet can be found. Like

Hamlet, Pierre, in the novel he writes and in his meditations, is vitally concerned with the discrepancy between appearance and reality, particularly regarding the ideals he has embraced and acted upon. Like other Melville heroes, Pierre at last comes to see the emptiness of life, of convention and even of the soul. In a conversation with Isabel, he discusses this view:

"Thou, Pierre, speakest of Virtue and Vice; life-secluded Isabel knows neither the one nor the other, but by hearsay. What are they, in their real selves, Pierre? Tell me first what is Virtue: --begin!"

"If on that point the gods are dumb, shall a pigmy speak? Ask the air!"

"Then Virtue is nothing."

"Not that!"

"Then Vice?"

"Look: a nothing is the substance, it casts one shadow one way, and another the other way; and these two shadows cast from one nothing; these, seems to me, are Virtue and Vice."

"Then why torment thyself so, dearest Pierre?"

"It is the law."

"What?"

"That a nothing should torment a nothing; for I am a nothing. It is all a dream-- we dream that we dreamed we dream." [381-382]

Pierre sees beyond appearance into reality, a reality which he finds without meaning, and this view does not appreciably alter in the rest of the novel. Even here, however, Pierre has seen reality only on an idealistic plane and not as it pertains to himself and to his actions. He has seen into reality abstractly, but he does not yet realize that Isabel

may not really be his sister and that he has perhaps given up everything needlessly.

At the end of the novel Pierre comes to realize the tragic irony of his situation. Lucy's brother and Pierre's cousin challenge him because they think him a depraved character who has corrupted Lucy, he is goaded into action against these enemies shortly after he has realized the fallacy of his original action and the emptiness of his ideal, and he becomes mad. In the final scenes of the novel, there is much of the comic relief and comedy that is found in Shakespeare's play when Hamlet feigns madness:

"Well, my boy;" exclaimed Millthorpe to Pierre; "you are in the Inferno dream yet. Look; that's what people call an easel, my boy. An easel, an easel--not a weasel....Come, wake up, wake up! Going to paint and illustrate the Inferno, as you go along, I suppose...."

"Is it for Mr. Glendinning you inquire?" said Pierre now, in a slow, icy tone, to the porter.

"Mr. Glendinning, sir; all right, ain't it?"

"Perfectly," said Pierre mechanically...."But something seems strangely wanting here. Ay, now I see, I see it:--Villain!--the vines! Thou hast torn the green heart-strings!....Prepaid;--what's that? Go, go, and jabber to apes!"

"And what shall I do with this, sir?" said the porter, staring.

"Drink a health; but not mine; that were mockery!" [442-444]

Pierre also makes a speech to Lucy and Isabel which is much like Hamlet's rejection speech to Ophelia in senti-

ment and general intent if not in specific content:

"For ye two, my most undiluted prayer
is now, that from your here unseen and
frozen chairs ye may never stir alive;
--the Fool of Truth, the fool of Virtue,
the fool of Fate, now quits ye forever." [499]

Pierre, insanely angered, then murders his cousin Glen. When Lucy and Isabel visit him in prison, Lucy discovers the relationship between Pierre and Isabel and is destroyed by the knowledge. Pierre and Isabel then commit double suicide. Thus the novel ends with yet another parallel to Hamlet, the destruction of nearly all the main characters in the drama.

The end of the novel is important not only because of its similarity to Hamlet but also because it is essential to the view of Pierre as a tragic hero. Pierre has, throughout the novel, survived because of his belief in the essential virtue of his actions. Even after he has come to recognize the vacancy and meaninglessness of the ideals that had inspired his action, he still has his feeling for his sister and his belief that he has done something good to sustain him in the misery his sacrifice has caused. He finally, however, realizes, and again through a portrait, that what he had previously thought incontrovertible proof of the relationship was not this at all. He takes Isabel and Lucy to a gallery, and there they see a portrait by an unknown European artist of someone who looks very like

the ambiguous figure of Pierre's father in the youthful portrait and also very like Isabel. Isabel becomes very excited, but Pierre realizes that this coincidence means that Isabel's resemblance to his father in the early portrait may also be mere coincidence. Isabel may be his sister, but she may not be; and if this is the case, he has destroyed his mother, his relationship to Lucy and even Lucy and himself by precipitous action. His actions have not really benefited anyone, and it is this irony which drives him mad and which actually destroys him. The irony of the novel operates on two levers: on the level of Pierre's realization and on the level of Lucy's illumination that Pierre was never married to Isabel and that, therefore, her suffering, the self-denial of her position and particularly her self-abasement before Isabel and Pierre could have been avoided. As Pierre's knowledge kills him, so Lucy's destroys her; and it is Pierre who has been the unintentional agent of all the destruction that occurs.

Pierre is the tragic hero because of his nobility, his ability to act, however mistakenly, his ability to endure, and most of all because of the tragic vision he acquires as a result of his experiences. He is not so great a hero as Ahab or Vere because he lacks their maturity and strength and because his self-denial is clouded by his consciously incestuous feelings for his sister. His flaw is his unrealistic impulse to good caused by his mistaken judgment--

he is impetuous and impractically idealistic in this respect; and after his original action he exhibits as afterthought much of the indecision and contemplative melancholy characteristic of Hamlet. The parallel here is not complete because Hamlet's melancholy precedes his action, but the similarities in treatment suggest that Melville had Hamlet in mind. As a part of Pierre's idealism, he, like Hamlet, attempts to reject the physical in favor of the spiritual; and part of his tragedy is involved with the impossibility of this attempt. Although Pierre does succeed as a tragic hero, the characterization lacks the force and certainty of Melville's treatment of Ahab.

Certain other faults in the novel also tend to disfigure the creation of Pierre. The sections on American literature, on young authors and on the trials of writing fiction, though partly justifiable because Pierre is a novelist, are unnecessary to the development of plot and character. Melville's rhetorical digressions on philosophy and society also at times become laborious. One example of this type of digression is Melville's rather lengthy discussion of love which, although it can be partly related to the plot by an application to Pierre's love-relationships, is not really essential to the novel. Another example is found in Book XIV, in which Melville includes religious speculations and a religious pamphlet entitled "Chronometricals and Horologicals." Like Trollope or Thackeray he

V

uses a first person narrator who converses with the reader, but he lacks the finish which enables Trollope to convince the reader that the digressions are acceptable. In these ways the novel, and by extension the characterization of Captain Ahab, the monomaniacal captain of the whaling vessel Pierre, suffers.

Everything in the work supports or enlarges the view of Ahab as a tragic protagonist: Ahab's solitary position and almost insane determination; his relationships with other characters, particularly Ishmael, Pip and Starbuck; the endless analogies and parallels to well-known Biblical or Shakespearean heroes Melville sets up; the factual treatment of the whaling trade; and the dramatic use of lofty soliloquy and philosophical statements.

Perhaps more than anything else, it is the intense drama sustained throughout the book that forces the reader to look on Ahab as a great hero; and therefore it is important to consider the way Melville uses dramatic techniques in his story of the white whale. Because Ahab does not possess certain of the traits of the conventional tragic hero, critics have said that he is not a tragic figure.³⁰

This view of Ahab is illustrative of widely divergent critical opinions of the novel itself. There have been more critical investigations and therefore more opinions about the meaning of Moby Dick than all of Melville's other works combined and perhaps than on any other single novel in nine-

Moby Dick is Melville's masterpiece and the novel on which his reputation is most securely based.²⁹ It is in this book that Melville creates his greatest tragic hero, Captain Ahab, the monomaniacal captain of the whaling vessel Pequod. Everything in the work supports or enlarges the view of Ahab as a tragic protagonist: Ahab's solitary position and almost insane determination; his relationships with other characters, particularly Ishmael, Pip and Starbuck; the endless analogies and parallels to well-known Biblical or Shakespearean heroes Melville sets up; the factual treatment of the whaling trade; and the dramatic use of lofty soliloquy and philosophical statements.

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teenth century American literature. This preoccupation with Moby Dick is founded not only on the richness of the book generally but also on the portrayal of the central figure in the work. In a work of the magnitude of Moby Dick, the tragic hero is central to an evaluation of that magnitude.

To view Ahab in the proper perspective, one must first consider the most important of the characters which surround him. Ishmael, the sailor-narrator, is one of Melville's "isolatoes" who goes to sea to cure "the November in his soul" in preference to committing suicide, and who survives the tragedy of the Pequod because he is able to restore his relation to humanity. It is he from the very first who describes the strangeness of the ship, of Ahab, and of the crew. He says of the crew that

They were nearly all Islanders in the Pequod, Isolatoos, too, I call such, not acknowledging the common continent of men, but each Isolato living on a separate continent of his own. Yet now, federated along one keel, what a set these Isolatoos were...accompanying old Ahab in the Pequod to lay the world's grievances before the bar from which not very many of them ever came back. [119]

Ahab, of course, is the supreme "isolato" of them all, and Ishmael early begins to illuminate his character for us by relating his conversations and conjectures about the strange sea-captain. Ishmael hears of the Pequod's captain from the

ship's owners, two retired captains, and from a strange old character named Elijah, who utters a prophecy of doom. He also early begins to establish Ahab's noble character in a discussion of seafaring Quakers:

Ishmael is important in the contrast he provides to Ahab. The [the Nantucket Quakers] of men, who, names with Scripture names...and in childhood naturally imbibing the stately dramatic thee and thou of the Quaker idiom; still, from the audacious, daring and boundless adventure of their subsequent lives, strangely blend with these unoutgrown peculiarities, a thousand bold dashes of character, not unworthy a Scandinavian sea-king, or a poetical Pagan Roman. And when these things unite in a man of greatly superior natural force... who has also...been led to think untraditionally and independently; receiving all nature's sweet or savage impressions fresh from her own virgin voluntary and confiding breast, and thereby chiefly, but with some help from accidental advantages, to learn a bold and nervous lofty language--that man makes one in a whole nation's census--a mighty pageant creature, formed for noble tragedies. Nor will it at all detract from him, dramatically regarded, if either by birth or other circumstances, he have what seems a half wilful over-ruling morbidness at the bottom of his nature. For all men tragically great are made so through a certain morbidness. [74-75]

The kind of hero described here, in Ishmael's view, is Ahab, and as Ishmael is the recording consciousness, our first view of Ahab is important in establishing him as heroic. This view, although it enlarges and extends for Ishmael as the quest of the Pequod takes him further and further from the sane and orderly reality of the land into the strange and

disordered world of the sea, does not change in any important way. For him Ahab is a tragic figure, although he looks on him as insane and although his quest is evil and almost incomprehensible.

Ishmael is important in the contrast he provides to Ahab. The contrast is set up by Ishmael's observations of Ahab and by his comments upon himself, because never in the book does he actually speak to the captain. Ishmael is not so great as Ahab, but he shares at first much of Ahab's melancholy separation from humanity. From the very first, however, in his relationship with the savage Queequeg, Ishmael begins a process of recovery and reentry into humanity that saves him when everything else, ship, captain and crew, is lost. While Ahab paces the quarterdeck, makes a pact with the devil and forces his crew to make it also, and becomes involved in magic, prophecies and madness that are very like those in Macbeth, Ishmael is regaining his perspective and his soul. The climax of this process comes in "A Squeeze of the Hand," where in the processing of whale sperm Ishmael in effect repents of his oath that has pledged him to serve Ahab, evil and madness rather than God and humanity:

"Ego non baptiza te in nomine patris, sed in nomine diaboli!" deliriously
I forgot all about our horrible oath; in that inexpressible sperm, I washed my hands and my heart of it; I almost began to credit the old Paracelsan superstition that sperm is of rare virtue in allaying the heat of anger; while bathing in that bath, I felt divinely free from all ill-will, or

petulance, or malice, or any sort whatsoever.

Squeeze! Squeeze! squeeze! all the morning long; I squeezed that sperm till I myself almost melted into it; I squeezed that sperm till a strange sort of insanity came over me; and I found myself unwittingly squeezing my co-laborers' hands in it, mistaking their hands for the gentle globules. Such an abounding, affectionate, friendly, loving feeling did this avocation beget; that at last I was continually squeezing their hands, and looking up into their eyes sentimentally; as much as to say,--Oh! my dear fellow beings, why should we longer cherish any social acerbities, or know the slightest ill-humor or envy! Come; let us squeeze hands all round; nay, let us all squeeze ourselves into each other; let us squeeze ourselves universally into the very milk and sperm of kindness. [414-415]

Ishmael is saved, in contrast to Ahab, who soon further swears his oath of vengeance against the enigmatic Moby Dick, who is either omnipotent, ubiquitous evil, the wall which prevents Ahab from delving into reality, or a non-human animal who as a part of nature without intelligence cannot be evil. And Ahab, while Ishmael reenters humanity, baptizes the harpoon that is to be his weapon against the whale with the blood of the savage and innocent harpooners:

"Ego non baptiza te in nomine patris, sed in nomine diaboli!" deliriously howled Ahab, as the malignant iron scorchingly devoured the baptismal blood. [484]

Further, while Ishmael is making his obsequies to the symbol of universal kindness, Ahab is offering his allegiance, his

prayer and even his soul to fire: vestiges of his humanity,

but eventually Ahab rejects even them in favor of his insane
"Light though thou be, thou leapest out
of darkness; but I am darkness leaping
out of light, leaping out of thee! The
javelins cease; open eyes; see, or not?
There burn the flames! Oh, thou magna-
nimous! now I do glory in my genealogy.
But thou art but my fiery father; my
sweet mother [humanity], I know not. It
Oh, cruel! what hast thou done with her?
There lies my puzzle; but thine is
greater. Thou knowest not how ye came,
hence callest thyself unbegotten; cer-
tainly knowest not thy beginning, hence
callest thyself unbegun. I know that of
me, which thou knowest not of thyself, oh
thou omnipotent.... Here again with haughty
agony, I read my sire. Leap! leap up,
and lick the sky! I leap up with thee; I
burn with thee; would fain be welded with
thee; defyingly I worship thee!" [500]

This, then, is the difference between Ishmael and Ahab.
At the beginning of the voyage he calls Ahab a tragic
hero, and on the voyage he substantiates, for himself and
for the reader, this view.

Another character important to the conception of Ahab
as tragic hero is Starbuck, first mate of the Pequod. Star-
buck is a Nantucketer, and he symbolizes in the novel con-
ventional goodness and intelligence. Like Ahab, he has a
young wife and child, but unlike Ahab he cannot comprehend
an obsession that can cause a man to renounce home, family,
profession, country and even humanity. It is he to whom
Ahab most frequently talks, to whom Ahab attempts to explain
his quest and its necessity, and who along with Pip attempts
to draw Ahab back into the realm of humanity. Both Starbuck

and Pip elicit from Ahab the last vestiges of his humanity, but eventually Ahab rejects even them in favor of his insane search to destroy Moby Dick. Ahab attempts to tell Starbuck why he must hunt the whale; Starbuck attempts to understand; but ultimately they have no common ground on which to meet, and Starbuck despairs of dissuading his captain. It is important to notice, however, that although Starbuck is convinced that the quest is evil, he retains his conception of Ahab's greatness and nobility. He represents throughout the novel the conventional man who attempts ineffectually to divert monomania from its object in that he holds the conventional view that man should not delve too deeply into reality and that the whale, an animal, cannot be intelligent or evil; but even so, he sees, at times almost unwillingly, the greatness and heroism that can inspire such a quest and such intensity.

From the very first and throughout the voyage Ahab attempts to explain himself to Starbuck. When Ahab consecrates the voyage to the quest in order to destroy Moby Dick, all the crew except Starbuck are carried away by the drama of the scene and second Ahab's vow. Starbuck, however, disapproves, and Ahab must explain further to him his reasons for pursuing the white whale:

"Vengeance on a dumb brute!" cried Starbuck, "that simply smote thee from blindest instinct! Madness! To be enraged with a dumb thing, Captain Ahab, seems blasphemous."
"Hark ye yet again--the little lower layer.

All visible objects, man, are but as paste-board masks. But in each event--in the living act, the undoubted deed--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! 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 break that hate upon him. Talk not to me of blasphemy, man; I'd strike the sun if it insulted me. For could the sun do that, then could I do the other; since there is ever a sort of fair play herein, jealousy presiding over all creations. But not my master, man, is even that fair play. Who's over me? Truth hath no confines. [162]

Starbuck's reaction is "God keep me!--keep us all!" [163]

This prayer is all that he can say at this point, and it symbolizes his weakness and the inability of any ordinary man to stop Ahab. Ishmael as narrator makes a comment on Starbuck's inability to act in the face of insane greatness when he says that,

Here, then, was this grey-headed, ungodly old man, chasing with curses a Job's whale round the world, at the head of a crew, too, chiefly made up of mongrel renegades, and castaways, and cannibals--morally enfeebled also, by the incompetence of mere unaided virtue or right-mindedness in Starbuck, the invulnerable jollity of indifference in Stubb [the second mate], and the pervading mediocrity in Flask [the third mate].

Such a crew, so officered, seemed specially picked and packed by some infernal fatality to help him to his monomaniac revenge. [186]

Toward the end of the novel two important things happen to Starbuck. He makes one attempt to prevent the pursuit of the whale, and he sees the grandeur and the humanity that is as much a part of Ahab as the evil and insanity. In the scene in which Ahab worships fire ("The Candles"), Starbuck makes a speech to Ahab in the presence of the crew and almost stirs them to mutiny against Ahab and his obsession:

As the silent harpoon burned there like a serpent's tongue, Starbuck grasped Ahab by the arm--"God, God is against thee, old man; forbear! 't is an ill voyage! ill begun, ill continued; let me square the year, while we may, old man, and make a fair wind of it homewards, to go on a better voyage than this." [50]

But Ahab replies to Starbuck's speech and to the crew's answering response of fearful agreement,

"All your oaths to hunt the White Whale are as binding as mine; and heart, soul, and body, lungs and life, old Ahab is bound. And that ye may know to what tune this heart beats: look ye here; thus I blow out the last fear!" And with one blast of his breath he extinguished the flame. [50]

Starbuck, good though he is, and humane and conscientious, can do nothing before the force of Ahab's intent. He does,

however, have the distinction of being "almost the one only man who had ever ventured to oppose him with anything in the slightest degree approaching to decision...." [529] For this reason it is Starbuck whom Ahab trusts, relies upon in matters of navigation and to some extent confides in and gives glimpses of his soul.

It is this trust which enables Starbuck to see into Ahab:

That glad, happy air, that winsome sky, did at last stroke and caress him; the step-mother world, so long cruel--forbidding--now threw affectionate arms round his stubborn neck, and did seem to joyously sob over him, as if over one, that however wilful and erring, she could yet find it in her heart to save and to bless. From beneath his slouched hat Ahab dropped a tear into the sea; nor did all the Pacific contain such wealth as that one wee drop.

Starbuck saw the old man.... [532]

There follows here a conversation in which Ahab explores himself and permits Starbuck to see this exploration:

"...the madness, the frenzy, the boiling blood and the smoking brow, with which for a thousand lowerings old Ahab has furiously, foamingly chased his prey--more a demon than a man!--aye, aye! What a forty years' fool--fool--old fool, has old Ahab been!--But do I look very old, so very, very old, Starbuck? I feel deadly faint, bowed, and humped, as though I were Adam, staggering beneath the piled centuries since

Paradise. God! God! God!--crack
my heart!--stave my brain!--mockery
....stand close to me Starbuck; let
me look into a human eye; it is
better than to gaze into sea or sky;
better than to gaze upon God....
No, no! stay on board, on board!--
lower not when I do; when branded
Ahab gives chase to Moby Dick.
That hazard shall not be thine.
No, no! not with the far away home I
see in that eye!"
"Oh, my Captain! my Captain!
noble soul! grand old heart, after
all! why should any one give chase
to that hated fish!" [532-534]

But Ahab must chase the fish, and in so doing he must reject this humanity which Starbuck has seen. Starbuck then, like Ishmael, contributes to the image of Ahab as a tragic hero. He despairs for himself and for Ahab, but admires almost to the point of reverence the man who has the strength to pursue what he considers the quest for truth, reality and the destruction of evil. Starbuck sees the evil inherent in the quest, but he is forced by Ahab's grandeur to bow before that evil.

Pip, the young negro cabin boy who goes on the voyage, is also important to the total view of the protagonist. He is important because he has an experience through which he comes to know the truth and infinity for which Ahab searches, because he is the recipient of the only real human tenderness expressed by Ahab, and because he provokes a conflict in Ahab just before the final three-day chase for the whale. Pip is first seen as a carefree, happy boy who delights most in

playing his tambourine. Then one day he accompanies Stubb's whale boat on a chase after a whale. The first time the harpoon is thrown Pip, frightened, jumps from the boat and becomes entangled in the line, which has to be cut. After Pip is rescued Stubb explains to him the necessity, for the sake of catching the whale and for personal safety, of always remaining in the boat. The second time they strike the whale, however, Pip again jumps from the boat. Because of the whale's strength, they cannot stop to pick him up, and he remains in the ocean until the ship rescues him. His fear and the vision he sees drive him mad, and he becomes a kind of holy idiot. While he was in the sea, he was

...carried down alive to wondrous depths, where strange shapes of the unwarped primal world glided to and fro before his passive eyes; and the miser-merman, Wisdom, revealed his hoarded heaps....He saw God's foot upon the treadle of the loom, and spoke it; and therefore his shipmates called him mad. [413]

Pip's knowledge is the knowledge Ahab seeks and never finds, although he senses that Pip has acquired that knowledge. In this way one can know something more of the reason for Ahab's search, and this aspect of that search is as important as its evil aspects.

Pip also becomes the object of Ahab's tenderness and perhaps even love. Shortly before the final chase Ahab

becomes Pip's protector and permits him to live in the captain's cabin. Pip does not, as Starbuck does, attempt to dissuade Ahab, and he wants to be with Ahab always. This in itself is a threat to the captain; for, as he says,

"There is that in thee, poor lad, which
I feel too curing to my malady...."

"But I will never desert ye, sir...."

"If thou speakest thus to me much more,
Ahab's purpose keels up in him. I tell
thee no; it cannot be." [524]

And on the last day of the chase, when Pip calls "The sharks! The sharks! O master, my master, come back!" Ahab does not hear him. Although Ahab has shown in his relationship with Pip that he can still feel and express love and tenderness, he ultimately rejects this last tie with what is left in him of humanity to pursue Moby Dick. It is a conscious rejection, and he realizes that he has now given up all in hope of succeeding in his fight against the whale. Therefore, although Ahab rejects Pip and what he symbolizes, the relationship is important in that it shows Ahab in conflict with the human elements in his character; and his choice emphasizes the heroic strength he can call up to sustain him in his search. This is another aspect of his heroism; and without Pip, it would not have been so clearly discernible.

The white whale, particularly because of what he means for Ahab, contributes to Melville's creation of the tragic hero. Although, as Harry Levin says,

...in sober fact, there is no such animal as an albino whale, Moby Dick is utterly unique by definition. Since he is an irreducible symbol, an archetype of archetypes, there is no cogency in the varying labels with which his interpreters have attempted to tag him. To evade reduction into categories is the essence of his character.³¹

certain inferences about what Moby Dick symbolizes for Ahab and therefore what he means as the object of Ahab's quest can be made. He is either agent or principle of the evil the captain is trying to destroy. He is the "wall shoved near" that prevents Ahab from seeing through appearance into reality. He is the agent of elemental, savage nature which has wounded not only Ahab's body, but also his soul and pride; and in the quest to destroy him, Ahab is equating himself with the gods and defying them. He is everything in the world that is more powerful than man; he is omnipresent, unknown, omnipotent, the ultimate, absolute reality which no man can ever comprehend and which Melville suggests it is blasphemy to attempt to understand. The attempt involves more than blasphemy, because, as all aboard the Pequod learn, it inevitably results in destruction. Although it is evil and blasphemous of Ahab even to presume, in his pride, that he can discover the unknowable and, as Starbuck says, to war against a dumb brute which is part of nature, Ahab's attempt is also heroic, and he alone dares to make this attempt.

Melville also establishes Ahab as a tragic hero by his use of dramatic techniques. Although the use of such techniques cannot by themselves make Ahab a tragic hero, Melville's use of them contributes to the tragic atmosphere in the novel and is thus reminiscent of great tragic dramas, particularly Shakespeare's. For example, he even manages to invest the technical sections on whaling with a dramatic function, because they contribute to the suspense of the novel. He makes of Moby Dick a tragedy in which the main character becomes a great tragic hero. He uses dialogue, stage directions and soliloquies in ways that are reminiscent of Shakespeare. Although Ahab is not the only character in the novel who speaks soliloquies in blank verse, he is the one who speaks them most frequently. This technique contributes much to the creation of Ahab as a dramatic character. An example of the technique is Chapter XXXVII, in which are found stage directions as well as a soliloquy:

The cabin; by the stern windows; Ahab sitting alone, and gazing out.

I leave a white and turbid wake; pale waters, paler cheeks, where'er I sail. The envious billows sidelong swell to whelm my track; let them; but first I pass. [166]

Although Ahab's speeches are not always in blank verse, they are always in a language which has the formality, dignity and nobility appropriate to a tragic hero.

Melville also uses scenes of comic relief involving the crew. These scenes are generally interludes between scenes of great dramatic intensity. One such scene is in Chapter XL, in which the sailors on deck sing, dance and make jokes. Their gaiety leads to a fight, however, and here Melville uses the weather to reflect actions and tensions similar to Shakespeare's use of weather in King Lear. In the present scene, for example, when the sailors begin to quarrel, lightning begins to flash; and when they begin fighting, a squall comes up to disperse them. In every intensely dramatic scene in the novel, the weather corresponds to the tension.

In his use of foreboding, suspense and prophecy Melville is again very similar to Shakespeare. Ishmael, Starbuck and Stubb are particularly important in that their speeches frequently foreshadow the catastrophic destruction that is the inevitable result of the Pequod's voyage. They can all see the evil of the quest, but none can stop it. Suspense is accomplished in the novel by alternating chapters of intense action with ones which deal with the history and practical aspects of the whaling trade. This alternation is fairly consistent in the novel until the very end, when everything is given up to the final chase for Moby Dick. In this way the action of the chase becomes the most sustained dramatic event in the novel, because everything preceding has prepared the reader for the final drama of the

fight between Ahab and the whale. Thus Melville uses suspense to build tension for the final scene in much the same manner that it is frequently used in drama. Prophecy, the other technique Melville uses in his novel, is reminiscent of Macbeth. The prophecies about Ahab's final destruction seem as unlikely as those made about Macbeth, but they are finally explained logically and prove true. Melville piles allusion on allusion and analogy on analogy--to Shakespeare's heroes, to the Bible, to mythology--in order to create his tragedy and its central figure. Although Moby Dick is a novel and not a play, its similarities to drama are important facets of its success as a tragedy. It is in this way that Melville achieves the tone and the atmosphere of a great tragic story.

Captain Ahab is undisputably a tragic hero. Although he does not achieve a classical recognition of his flaw or a conventional reconciliation, he does come to realize that he is going to be destroyed, and he does defiantly accept this fate:

"I turn my body from the sun....Oh!
ye three unsundered spires of mine
...death-glorious ship! must ye then
perish, and without me? Am I cut off
from the last fond pride of meanest
shipwrecked captains? Oh, lonely death
on lonely life! Oh, now I feel my top-
most greatness lies in my topmost grief
...Towards thee I roll, thou all-des-
troying but unconquering whale; to the
last I grapple with thee; for hate's
sake I spit my last breath at thee.

Sink all coffins and all hearses to
one common pool! and since neither
can be mine, let me then tow to
pieces, while still chasing thee, though
tied to thee, thou damned whale!
Thus, I give up the spear!" [564]

Ahab knows already the horror of his search, but he continues to believe not only his ability, but also his essential right to make that quest. In this respect his greatness and his flaw, pride, are inextricably combined. Ishmael differentiates Ahab from humanity in general when he says,

That intangible malignity which has been from the beginning; to whose dominion even the modern Christians ascribe one-half of the worlds; which the ancient Ophites of the east revered in their statue devil;-- Ahab did not fall down and worship it like them; but deliriously transferring its idea to the abhorred white whale, he pitted himself, all mutilated, against it...He piled upon the whale's white hump the sum of all the general rage and hate felt by his whole race from Adam down; and then, as if his chest had been a mortar, he burst his hot heart's shell upon it [183]

He is mad, and his quest illustrates his monomania; but he is also, because of his nobility, dignity and strength, more than most men. His tragic flaw is the pride which drives him to defy everything, even himself, in his search. He is mad in that he attributes to Moby Dick the evil he considers inherent in the world, and for this reason he is

also evil. His is an ostensibly evil quest which precipitates great destruction in order that he may wreak his revenge, as Starbuck says, on a dumb beast who accidentally wounded him. (Melville's view of the whale, unlike Starbuck's, is ambiguous. Although he never says that Moby Dick is evil, through such chapters as "The Whiteness of the Whale," he suggests the mysterious quality, if not the evil, of the whale.) But Ahab is, above all, in his pride and in his self-willed separation from humanity, in his solitude and in his intense determination, a great hero. There is nothing pathetic about Ahab, even when he speaks frankly to Starbuck or is tender toward Pip, because he is always able to summon up his strength in order to reassert his monomaniacal purpose. He is for this reason Prometheus, attempting to destroy evil for the benefit of humanity; Titan, setting himself up as equal to the gods and warring against them; Ahab, the evil king of the Biblical story; and Macbeth, entangled in a web of magic, prophecy, and evil ambition. But most of all he is the sultan-like captain of the Nantucket whaling ship Pequod, an "ungodly, Godlike" man and a great tragic hero.

Footnotes

As we have seen in our examination of Vere, Benito Cereno, Pierre and Ahab, Melville has created four major tragic heroes. Some of these are greater than others. None of them is a conventional classical or Shakespearean tragic hero; yet they all possess some of the requirements of a tragic hero and they all attain tragic proportions. Each of the heroes, through a tragic flaw, moves from good to bad fortune; and each, even Ahab in his madness, is responsible for his own actions. They all possess the nobility and strength of classical tragic heroes, as well as the necessary awareness of their fates. They also all reach some sort of reconciliation to and acceptance of their fates. They are all involved with serious problems, and through their involvement they become characters with whom the reader can identify. Melville has created these characters, and one must look at them not only as mouthpieces for the author's philosophical and religious doubts and speculations but also as important literary creations.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 147; Arvin, p. 189.

¹³ The text used for "Bartleby the Scrivener" is from Melville, *Selected Writings* (New York: The Modern Library, 1941), pp. 3-47.

Footnotes

- ¹Harry Levin, The Power of Blackness (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1958).
- ²William Braswell, Melville Religious Thought (Durham: Duke University Press, 1943); Nathalia Wright, Melville's Use of the Bible (Durham: Duke University Press, 1949).
- ³James Baird, Ishmael (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1956).
- ⁴Milton R. Stern, The Fine Hammered Steel of Herman Melville (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1957).
- ⁵Lawrance Thompson, Melville's Quarrel with God (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952).
- ⁶Charles R. Anderson, Melville in the South Seas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939).
- ⁷Newton Arvin, Herman Melville ("American Men of Letters"; New York: William Sloane Associates, 1950).
- ⁸F. O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941).
- ⁹The text of Billy Budd used is Gordon N. Ray (ed.), Masters of American Literature (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1959), pp. 804-864.
- ¹⁰Critics who accept this interpretation are W. H. Auden, The Enchafèd Flood (New York: Random House, 1950); R. W. B. Lewis, The American Adam (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955); Leon Howard, Herman Melville (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951). Howard has certain reservations about Billy's position of hero, but he does accept this interpretation.
- ¹¹Auden, p. 147.
- ¹²Ibid., p. 147; Arvin, p. 299.
- ¹³The text used for "Bartleby the Scrivener" is Herman Melville, Selected Writings (New York: The Modern Library, 1952), pp. 3-47.

¹⁴Matthiessen, p. 493; Edward H. Rosenberry, Melville and the Comic Spirit (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955), p. 145; W. E. Sedgwick, Herman Melville. The Tragedy of Mind (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1944), p. 181.

¹⁵Egbert S. Oliver, "A Second Look at 'Bartleby,'" College English VI (May, 1945), pp. 431-439.

¹⁶Sedgwick, pp. 184-185.

¹⁷Bartleby's nihilism and perverted will are treated in Richard Harter Fogle, Melville's Shorter Tales (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960), pp. 14-25.

¹⁸Fogle discusses the narrator's position as a God-like character who tolerantly overlooks the faults of his eccentric clerks, p. 19.

¹⁹The text used for "Benito Cereno" is Ray, pp. 743-804.

²⁰Newton Arvin, "Melville and the Gothic Novel," New England Quarterly XXII (March, 1949), p. 45.

²¹Stanley T. Williams, "Follow Your Leader. Melville's 'Benito Cereno,'" Virginia Quarterly Review XXIII (Winter, 1947), p. 73.

²²Rosalie Feltenstein, "Melville's 'Benito Cereno,'" American Literature, XIX (November, 1947), p. 252.

²³Herman Melville, Moby Dick (New York: The Modern Library, 1950), p. 420.

²⁴El negro means both the negro and the black, and it seems here that Benity is naturally, because of his bitter experience with negroes, connecting the race with blackness and with evil. In his discussion of "Benito Cereno" in American Renaissance, Matthiessen discusses what he considers the major problem of the work:

...the embodiment of good in the pale Spanish captain and of evil in the mutinied African crew, though pictorially and theatrically effective, was unfortunate in raising unanswered questions.... Melville's failure to reckon with this fact within the limits of his narrative makes its tragedy, for all its prolonged suspense, comparatively superficial [508]. The unanswered questions Matthiessen alludes to are the problems resulting from the master-slave relationship. The slaves have been victimized by their white master, even though

he was comparatively kind, and therefore their evil actions against the whites are understandable, if not justifiable. Although Matthiessen charges that Melville ignores this problem, a case can be made for an interpretation of the story in which the problem is considered. Benito is trapped in an evil situation for which, although he did not create it, he shares responsibility. The negroes, although they are evil, have been corrupted by the evil originally done to them, and therefore the tragedy operates on the racial level.

²⁵The text used is Herman Melville, Pierre, or the Ambiguities (New York: Grove Press, 1957).

²⁶Jay Leyda, The Melville Log (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1951), Vol. I, p. 462. Leyda records some of the contemporary reviews of Pierre, among which is one from Godey's Lady's Book:

We really have nothing to add to the severity of the critical notices which have already appeared in respect to this elegantly printed volume; for in all truth, all the notices which we have seen have been severe enough to satisfy the author, as well as the public, that he has strangely mistaken his own powers....

A similar modern view of Pierre is found in Lewis, pp. 148-149.

²⁷This phrase is a chapter heading for Matthiessen's discussion of the novel in American Renaissance, pp. 467-487.

²⁸Matthiessen says that "Pierre's tragedy is caused by the shattering of the spotless image that he had preserved of his father," p. 478. Although this is an element of the tragedy, it does not seem to me the major precipitating factor.

²⁹The text used is Herman Melville, Moby Dick (New York: The Modern Library, 1950).

³⁰Stern, pp. 15, 26. Stern says that Captain Vere is the only real Melville hero.

³¹Levin, p. 223. Levin follows this statement by suggestions about the meaning of Moby Dick. Although his statement is essentially accurate--the whale cannot be reduced to any tangible categories--in order to understand the nature of Ahab's quest one must make certain tentative inferences about the meaning of the whale. These inferences about Moby Dick are not categorical, but they are relatively valid because they are some of the suggestions Melville makes throughout the novel.

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