



‘Symbol in Moby Dick’

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Abstract: Moby Dick is an epitome of great creative genius and characterized by tremendous force, reveals the author’s concern with the metaphysical enquiry. It is a monumental work of sperm-whale-fishery. The novel with its realistic account of whaling and with its preoccupation with the problem of the predominance of evil in this universe and quest of truth, has symbolic overtones. “Mobi Dick is the really two stories, an astensible story that treats of material; and another story, hidden in parables, allegories, and symbolism, which treat of abstract things. These two stories are parallel analogous to each other.

William S. Gliem

Herman Melville creates an epic out of his knowledge of the whalefishery. In the beginning of the novel, extracts from Genesis Job, Jonab, Jsaish, Holland’s Plutarch’s Moral’s, Holland’s Pliny, Tooke’s Lucian Darwvin and the other work journalism have been given to show what information was available about a whale; Melville not only amasses details about the whaling, but also glorifies the flourishing American enterprise of the sperm- whalefishery of the nineteenth century. His association with Acushnet and the personal experiences of the whalefisheny enabled him to create a great tragedy in which the Leviathan appears as a formidable force. The work is not only “practical manual for whalemens” in which “there is hardly a detail of a whale ship’s gear and tackle and hardly a point of usage among whalers which Melville does not describe from the practical point of view.” It is a book in which a mythology has been created out of the spirit for the conquest of nature, science and exploration of the mysteries. Melville groups the most primitive things “to have one’s hand among unspeakable foundations, ribs and very pelvis of the world”

In Melville’s novel, Moby Dick representing evil and mysterious nature, symbolises terror. It is not only the enormous nature, symbolises terror. It is not only the enormous size or the deformity of the law that made him terrible, but his intelligent malignity heightened the sense of the

fear. “Nor was it his unwanted magnitude, nor his remarkable hue: nor yet his deformed lower jaw that so much invested the whale with natural terror, as that unexampled malignity which according to specific accounts, he had over and over again evinced in his assaults. More than all, his treacherous retreats struck more of dismay than perhaps ought else.” There is some what remarkable that the white whale had infernal before thoughts of ferocity. The death add the disaster caused so the hunters by white whale aroused the distracting furies of the pursuers. He has crunched one leg of Ahab and disabled him. For Ahab, it is the sign of the intellectual and spiritual dxasperation. “The white whale swam before him as the monomaniac incarnation of all those malicious agencies, which some deep men feel eating in them, till they are left living on with half a heart and half along.” Ahab transferred the intangible to the abhorred whale. “Allevil to crazy Ahab were visibly personified and made practically assailable in Moby Dick”.

The white whale has been regarded differently by different writers. It is a symbol of evil, and of Christ and God also. It represents inscrutable mysteries of nature has become a symbol of the stern Calvinistic Doctrines. It is a force of evil to Ahab the white whale has white colour which is not only a symbol of purity, but of terror also. Moby Dick is the mysterious nature and truth Dr. Ahab seeks truth which has eluded him and Ahab loses his life in its quest. The Nature and its forces are impregnable. Like Santiago in Old Man and the Sea, Ahab has transgressed his limits.

Thomson traces in the white whale a symbol of evil and stresses that Melville is a God hater. He remarks that- The white whale is essentially a symbol of evil... though not abstract, but very specific, theological kind of evil that corrupts the universe.” In Melville Thompson has pointed an element of sarcasm. Star buck has killed a whale and a sense of pity has been aroused. “Mr Thompson has revealed the similarity between the image of the suffering whale and fourty first chapter of job, in which Jehovah describes the impregnable attributes of Leviathan there by as it were, taunting the afflicted man.”

It is easy to see in the white whale the Image of God. In the chapter ‘The whale as a dish’, the Neegro cook has prepared the whale steak for Stubb who eats it in the light of the candle prepared from the whale oil. Melville has observed –“That mortal man should feed upon that feeds his lamb and, like Stubb, eat him by his own light as you may say .” Melville describes the history of the whale as a delicacy. Eating whale by its own light is not a sarcasm of God’s expense, but at the expense of a hypocritical and the savage world that like the four hundred prophets of the king Ahab uses the light of God for its profit. “Further Stubb asks the negro cook to teach the sharks who

are eating the dead whale outside while Stubb eats in his own cabin, a lesson. The negro cook preaches in the light of the whale they are devouring”.

Later when they Pequod enters China after crossing the circles, Melville in a most poetical language depicts the mother whales, pregnant ones, and the nursing whales. The infants are suckling, The picturesque account of the whales has been compared with the beatific vasion which Beatrice explains to Dante. Moby Dick comes to symbolize good. Ishmail does not see any evil in the hugefish and goes to see to gain spiritual health.

The whale is a symbol of benevolent nature which becomes malevolent at times. It is a blend of the good and evil both. Just as nature is destructive and savage, similarly the whale also become evil incarnate. Just as nature like mother feeds her infants, similarly the whale also serves as a food to the crew. Like its paradoxical white colour which is absence as well as the concrete of all colours, the whale is a symbol of the two opposite qualities of good and evil epitomized in nature.

The symbol of the white whale has been studied and applied to Melville’s life also. The fish also represents the sermonizing yarents of Melville, “Also and most specifically he symbolizes the zealous patents whose righteous sermonising and corrections done the prohibitions is so hard that a serious young man could hardly reach outside the barrier except possibly for away among some tolerant gracious Polynesian people. The emphasis should be placed on that un conscious (and hence inscrutable) well of inhibition which imprisoned the “Puritan’s thrusting passion.”

The whale has been treated as the symbol of Jehavah the God of old testament The God of Hebrew is stern and exacting Melville studied Milton’s Paradise Lost in 1850, and it is the same God in Melvills “Moby Dick “who brought qeremiah into darkness, hedged him about, and made his path crooked: the God adopted by the fire and brimstone. Purittan who said “with fury poured out I will rule over you.” “The sword without and the terror within shall destroy both the young man and the vergin”. “I will also send the teeth of bests upon them.” “I will heap mischiefs upon them.” To me belongeth venglance and recompense.”

The Moby Dick became a symbol of Good, Evil, Christ, God Calvinism and the contemporary institutions which smothered the creative power, and stood in the way of the self realisation. The white whale interpreted differently by critics is an immortal symbol and it is not correct to confine its meaning to one thing or the other. The beauty lies in the vagueness which extends the frontiers of meaning in a symbol. It is the absence of the precise and the fixed meaning associated with a symbol that enriches a work of art, and makes it profound and deep.

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