Introduction

Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville are both distinguished writers in classical American literature. It is the purpose of this paper to compare the two in their personal lives and literary activities.

It is well known that they had been concerned with the problem of evil even before they met each other. What were their attitudes towards this problem and how they influenced each other after their personal acquaintance are very interesting to know.

Their Personal Relationship

Julian Hawthorne visited Melville in the spring of 1883, nineteen years after his father Nathaniel Hawthorne had died. He writes:

.... I met him, looking pale, sombre, nervous, but little touched by age... He conceived the highest admiration for my father's genius, and a deep affection for him personally; but he told me, during our talk, that he was convinced that there was some secret in my father's life which had never been revealed, and which accounted for the gloomy passages in his books. It was characteristic in him to imagine so; there were many secrets untold in his own career. (Hawthorne and His Circle)

He seems to have pondered much over his brief intercourse with Hawthorne, conjecturing some baffling problem in his life .... When I visited him in 1883 to ask whether he had letters from my father, in reply to those he had written him, he said, with a melancholy gesture, that they had all been destroyed long since, as if implying that the less said or pre-
served, the better! ("When Herman Melville Was ‘Mrs. Omoo’", Literary Digest International Book Review, Aug., 1926)  

These passages somehow reveal the after thoughts of Melville on his friendship with Hawthorne. Their association was not long, but the impression of Hawthorne on Melville’s part seems to have been strong enough to make Melville wander over the memory of Hawthorne and the companionship he had with him. Julian Hawthorne also pointed out the fact that obviously Melville still meditated often on the source of Hawthorne’s insight into the human soul, and Melville “seemed partly to shrink from the idea that obsessed him, and partly to reach out for companionship in the dark region into which his mind was sinking”.  

Needless to say their friendship was based more upon enthusiastic admiration of Hawthorne on Melville’s part. Also it is a general belief that Melville played an active role in their intercourse, which is reasonably accounted for by the difference of their ages and natures themselves. This view on the whole outlook of their friendship can be likely endorsed by the relatively cool attitude of Hawthorne towards Melville after they were separated. Several years later, when Hawthorne met Melville again, he wrote down his impression on his former friend that he found no indication of a morbid state of mind, which he seemed to have esteemed highly, in Melville anymore, and it took a long while to go back to their old terms of sociability and confidence.  

Many years before he met Melville, Hawthorne was already reading Melville’s works. What caught his eyes was the deep reality in them which compelled a man to face his real life. Hawthorne could not overlook a freedom of view in Melville, which rendered Melville somewhat tolerant of savage codes of morals. Such morals, however, as treated in Typee were considered by Hawthorne to be little in accordance with his own, even though he did not disregard the literary value of the work.  

Melville’s discovery of Hawthorne was marked when he read his Mosses From an Old Manse. While Melville’s excitement about Hawthorne was still fresh, he had an opportunity to meet the now famous Nathaniel Hawthorne. It was in August, 1850, shortly after Melville settled in the Berkshires, on the outskirts of Pittsfield, and Hawthorne moved to Lenox, six miles away.  

Right after this meeting Melville began a critical essay, “Hawthorne and His Mosses”, being inspired by love and duty towards a  

2. Ibid., 783.  
3. Ibid., 531.
man of a deep and noble nature. The praise was extreme. To Melville, Hawthorne was the ‘greatest brain with the largest heart’ that America had produced in literature up to that time. Of course, Melville hardly knew any other contemporaries in the literary world.

Hawthorne’s blackness apparently stimulated Melville’s imagination. Also “he liked Hawthorne’s ‘flavor and body’, for he had a taste for what he called ‘oldness in things’.” In relation to this darkness Melville saw a sustained maturity of thought and style. Thus he was stirred for the first time by the sense of living at a moment of ripeness and the great culmination of powers, which satisfied him deeply.

Melville’s letters to Hawthorne contain many passages to express his bold, passionate, and almost mystic feeling toward Hawthorne resulting from such inspiration and wonder he received from him.

Would the Gin were here! If ever, my dear Hawthorne, in the eternal times that are to come, you and I shall sit down in Paradise, in some little shady corner by ourselves; and if we shall by any means be able to smuggle a basket of Champagne there (I won’t believe in a Temperance Heaven), and if we shall then cross our celestial legs in the celestial grass that is forever tropical, and strike our glasses and our heads together, till both musically ring in concert,—then, O my dear fellow-mortal, how shall we pleasantly discourse of all the things manifold which now so distress us,—when all the earth shall be but a reminiscence, yea, its final dissolution an antiquity.

But we do not know how the reserved Hawthorne responded to such a manifestation of Melville’s attachment to him, since most of Hawthorne’s letters were destroyed by Melville.

On the contrary, the first meeting of the two does not seem to have changed Hawthorne’s opinion of Melville so much, but he mentioned that he liked Melville very well. Sophia Hawthorne also praised Melville wholeheartedly. She observed how for one usually silent and uncommunicative, Melville “poured out the rich floods of his mind and experience to Hawthorne, so sure of apprehension so sure of a large and generous interpretation, and of the most delicate and fine judgement.” Moreover, when we think of Hawthorne being stimulated towards another period of great productivity by finding, with the publication of The Scarlet Letter, that he had at least a sufficient audience to serve as a challenge to his fullest energies, certainly Melville comes into the picture. The mind and style of the elder Hawthorne might have been formed too firm to be influenced directly by such a person as Melville, but still it is impossible

1. Leyda, I, 387.
3. Leyda, I, 412–413.
4. Ibid., 459.
to overlook the admiration from a man like Melville as a contributing factor to the more abundant activity of Hawthorne's talent in these years. After all Melville was a close friend of Hawthorne with whom he talked "about time and eternity, things of this world and of the next, and books, and publishers, and all possible and impossible matters, that lasted pretty deep into the night."¹

At the same time it is obvious to everyone's eye that Melville's Moby Dick reveals Hawthorne's influence to a great extent. Melville was always conscious of Hawthorne near him, and even tried to finish it before he left Lenox. Although he could not achieve his intention, the book was inscribed to Hawthorne. The underlying idea of despair which directs a man to his highest nature in Moby Dick seems to have been developed partly through Hawthorne, together with the skill of allegory, which is very noticeable as Hawthorne's influence. After reading Moby Dick, Hawthorne exclaimed to Evert Duyckinck in a letter, "What a book Melville has written. It gives me an idea of much greater power than his preceding ones";² and later wrote to Melville, "— I felt pantheistic then — your heart beat in my ribs, and mine in yours, and both in God's."³

As a matter of course Hawthorne's praise of Moby Dick pleased its author to the utmost, and led him to write an interesting letter as follows:

Whence come you, Hawthorne? By what right do you drink from my flagon of life? And when I put it to my lips — lo, they are yours and not mine. I feel that the Godhead is broken up like the bread at the Supper, and that we are the pieces. Hence this infinite fraternity of feeling .... You did not care a penny for the book. But, now then as you read, you understood the pervading thought that impelled the book — and that you praised. Was it not so? You were archangel enough to despise the imperfect body, and embrace the soul. Once you hugged the ugly Socrates because you saw the flame in the mouth, and heard the rushing of the demon, — the familiar, — and recognized the sound; for you have heard it in your own solitudes.⁴

When Hawthorne died, Melville immediately composed the first stanza of "Monody".

To have known him to have loved him,
  After loneness long;
And then to be estranged in life,
  And neither in the wrong;
And now for death to set his seal ——
  Ease me, a little ease, my song!

1. Leyda, I, 419.
2. Ibid., 438.
3. Ibid., 434.
4. Ibid., 435.
Their Major Concerns in Life

The era of the first half of the nineteenth century was generally dominated by Emerson's doctrine of the infinitude of man. In spite of his consciousness that evil existed, he chose as the true realm of the world, without little doubt, that "good is positive, evil is merely primitive, not absolute."  

Melville seems to have been attracted by Emerson and showed his understanding of Emersonian ideas, but at the same time, he tried to be free from their implications. In the course of his opposition to transcendentalism, Melville found Hawthorne on the same side of the path. Richard Chase calls Melville who rebelled against Emerson's idea a 'liberal' in the sense of freedom. If both Melville and Hawthorne stayed out of the now prevailing social ideology of Emerson, there must have been motivating reasons for it in their backgrounds.

The tragic sense of life crept into Melville's mind first when he experienced the miseries of Liverpool, which were also familiar to Hawthorne. The bestiality among sailors shocked the eager, romantic, sensitive boy, and he had to confront all possible evils alone as a result of the sudden change of his family life. Coming from an aristocratic environment, Melville seems to have had deep reserve and vulnerability. With his heartiness, he was even dissatisfied with Hawthorne because he did not disclose himself thoroughly. Melville's meditative humor and growing introversion, which he had side by side with his lively, agreeable, adventurous characters, are likely to indicate his sensitive response to the facts of the world. Thus "The actual sufferings of mankind had been so impressed upon his consciousness that none of the optimistic palliatives or compensations of his age could ever explain them away."  

He bitterly experienced the inequality among classes and ranks and the problem of poverty. Especially the potential economic factor in tragedy "remained part of Melville's vision at every subsequent stage of his writing."  

On the other hand, the circumstances of his biography mostly explain Hawthorne's tragic view of life. He was forced to live according to the secluded pattern of his family life. His extreme solitude fostered his sensibility and imagination more and more. Being acquainted with super-natural beliefs and puritan ideas, the young child thought of disappearing from this world many times. His phantasmic idea was extended to make him believe that there was something in his broodings that was so alien to nature that the grass and the shrubs shrank away as he passed them.

His relation to a particular phase of the decay of the puritan

2. Ibid., 396.
3. Ibid., p. 400.
tradition never failed to formulate his life, as he was aware of how "he was an example and representative of that great class of people whom an inexplicable providence is continually putting at cross-purposes with the world: breaking what seems its own promise in their nature: — and thus making their existence a strangeness, a solitude, and torment." ¹ Consequently, four rules of life came out: first, to break customs; second, to meditate on youth; third, to shake off ill-disposed spirits; and fourth, to do nothing against one's genius. The hardest of all for him was to shake off his ill-spirits, for he believed that he had been born with fate of a doomed man, which he must have gone over, as he often remarked to his friends.²

His understanding of life is, however, limited here, since he had a general strain of indolence and indifference to nearly everything that was not of direct concern to him. But also it is said that he had a double personality and another self was interested in his own self-preservation and matters of worldly wisdom. He seems to have been threatened with melancholia, and had a sense of having lost himself from human affairs. His shadowy existence resulted in scepticism to say that world should wish not to exist, while he conversed with his contemporaries about the American taste for innovation and the American habit of restless progress.

Melville thought that the great power of blackness in Hawthorne derived its force from the Calvinistic sense of Innate Depravity and Original Sin, from whose visitations no deedly thinking mind is always and wholly free. Truly, not only the gloominess, but also the complex observation of human existence and delicate revelation in human nature seem to be produced from Hawthorne's personal suffering in his religion. From many passages in his notebooks it is obvious that he had a reliance upon Providence. He was also "explicit that Divine Intelligence is not merely a reflection of human reason. No matter how much he criticized the cruel rigidity of Puritanism in its effect upon Hester Prynne, he possessed an insight that understood it. He saw the empirical truth behind the Calvinist symbols."³

A major theme was motivated in this initial religious conception that not sin, but its consequent form of human lives is most important. To him, sin was not in sudden violent disasters so much as in the prolonged disease of inner solitude. This sense of social isolation was united with his sense of innate depravity and developed even into the need for a new ethical and cultural community, reducing our reckless personal importance. This was his idea of man's nature. "Within Hawthorne's provincial limitations, there was a

¹. Matthiessen, p. 338.
³. Matthiessen, p. 199.
wholeness, a desire to record whatever he knew of human nature both from observation and from thought, and not to let himself be distracted by the transcendentalists' confusions between what life was and they hoped it to be."¹ He believed in the common man, and was deeply stirred by what he had actually recognized, comprehended and accepted, as the love of good and ill.

Melville's predominant tendency in all his ponderings automatically discloses his religion. Also his tragedies are more concerned with spiritual and metaphysical issues than with the social and economic at the bottom. Through these issues he tried to answer some imperative questions for him, which were at the same time fundamental in Puritan theology: what constitutes original sin?, to what extent could man's will be free? His background of Presbyterian orthodoxy had apparently compelled him to meditate on innate depravity. He himself once said that being brought up in a Calvinistic circle, he was predisposed to "grind away at the nut of the universe"² concerning the problems of predestination and original sin, of moral responsibility, evil and good. Despite all these religious elements, however, the "concentration on the brutal energies in nature placed him in the developing trend of scientific perception"³ later.

The double discovery of his inner self and of the social and intellectual world in which 'the contrast between aristocratic pretensions and the actual state of masses of people' was too clear, together with a skeptical attitude towards religious and philosophical bias, led him to drive further into speculation on the nature of good and evil than any of his contemporaries had gone. He described himself as neither optimist nor pessimist, but he was only "intent upon the essence of things, the mystery that lieth beyond — that which is beneath the seeming."⁴

Their Attitudes Towards the Problem of Good and Evil

Hawthorne never hesitated to remark that man had been dumb at the Creation so that when he arrived at his highest perfection he would again be dumb going round an entire circle in order to return to that blessed state. Also he made a mysterious statement that "The spells of witches have the power of producing meats and viands that have the appearance of a sumptuous taste, which the Devil furnishes. But Divine Providence seldom permits the meat to be good,

¹. Matthiessen, p. 231.
². Ibid., p. 407.
but it has generally some bad taste or smell, — .”

If, as most of us believe, Melville's efflorescence came as an immediate response of his imagination to what Hawthorne had opened before him, putting his emphasis upon such ideas as above, it is quite natural to suppose that Melville also started at his awakening and meditation with the traditional Calvinistic thoughts. In fact, when Emerson said in his essay that "the good, compared to the evil which man sees, is as his own good to his own evil," Melville answered that "a perfectly good being, therefore, would see no evil. — But what did Christ see? — He saw what made him weep." When Emerson went on by saying that "Also, we use defects and deformities to a sacred purpose, so expressing our sense that the evil of the world are such only to the evil eye," Melville responded patiently "what does the man mean? If Mr. Emerson travelling in Egypt should find the plague-spot come out on him — would he consider that an evil sight or not? And if evil, would his eye be evil because it seemed evil to his eye, or rather to his sense using the eye for instrument?" These statements by Hawthorne and Melville encourage us to think that once both of them had similar ideas somewhere along the line of the basic religious attitude.

Hawthorne is well known for his deep concern with the Unpardonable Sin. As an answer to this problem he meditates that ‘The Unpardonable Sin might consist in a want of love and reverence for the Human Soul'. Melville, too, was concerned with the problem of heart and intellect. Needless to say, he found a satisfactory solution in Hawthorne, in whose eyes ‘had glowed such a warm light as never illuminates the earth save when a great heart burns as the household fire of a grand intellect’. Melville declared in his letter about “Ethan Brand” that ‘I stand for the heart. To the Dogs with the head!' and the worst thing he found in Emerson was ‘a defect in the region of the heart'. This fact disagrees with the opinion of Lewis Mumford that Hawthorne committed ‘the unpardonable sin of friendship' by portraying Ethan Brand as a warning of what Melville himself must avoid becoming. Besides, the story had already been written several months before the two first met. Although Melville would say that Hawthorne's existence became real only through the suffering of his mind and intellect, his 'depth of tenderness', his 'boundless sympathy with all forms of being', and his 'omnipresent love' could not fail to draw Melville's attention as the very token of the balance between mind and heart. To both of them when the heart was touched one was born into life. Thus they believed unbalance between the two to be the chief source of tragedy.

1. Nathaniel Hawthorne, Passages From the American Note-Books (Boston, 1878), II, 178.
2. Leyda, II, 648.
3. Ibid., 649.
There is another notion of sin developed in Hawthorne, which is relatively alien to any in Melville, simply because of the difference in their biographical backgrounds. That is the sin of solitude. This led Hawthorne into a particular conception of social life.

He broke through the individualism of his day to a reassertion not of man's idiosyncrasies, but of his elemental traits. It is no exaggeration to say that his recognition of the general bond of sin brought him closest of universality. He believed that 'man must not to disclaim his brotherhood, even with the guiltiest, since though his hand be clean, his heart has surely been polluted by the flitting phantoms of iniquity'. He possessed it in consequence of the sense of personal guilt that sprang from his dread that such a detached observer as himself was failing to participate adequately in life.¹

Matthiessen states about tragedy:

Tragedy does not pose the situation of a faultless individual overwhelmed by an evil world, for it is built on the experienced realization that man is radically imperfect. Confronting this fact, tragedy must likewise contain a recognition that man is still capable of apprehending perfection. The author must also possess the power to envisage some reconciliation between such opposites, and the control to hold an inexorable balance. He must be as far from the chaos of despair as he is from ill-founded optimism.²

Man's ability to apprehend perfection is certainly interwoven in the tragedies of both Hawthorne and Melville. It is the interpretation of man which differentiates them from each other, because the ultimate image of man could be largely drawn from peculiar life experiences of an individual. The study of characters in their works will reveal this later.

At any rate they both seem to have understood the mixed nature of life, the fact that even the most perfect man cannot be wholly good. At Melville's awakening to the meaning of reality, of sin, of suffering, and of the 'boundless sympathy with all forms of being', his sense of Innate Depravity and Original Sin did not remain. While Hawthorne interpreted this reality through religion, he moved away from any existing theology such as that of the Puritan's. Disillusioned, Melville accepted the inexplicability of the facts of the world, feeling compelled to search out the truth for himself. Lack of formal education, a far more passionate temperament than Hawthorne's, and his tendency for metaphysics rather than moral and psychological observation are pointed out as the motivating factors for this course he took.

The result was Melville's morbid state of mind, which Hawthorne called 'overshadowed'. When they met each other after five years absence in November, 1856, Hawthorne wrote an impression on Mel-

2. Ibid., p. 180.
ville in his journal as follows:

.... On the intervening day, we took a pretty long walk together, and sat down in a hollow among the sand hills and smoked a cigar. Melville, as he always does, began to reason of Providence and futurity, and of everything that lies beyond human ken, and informed me that he had "pretty much made up his mind to be annihilated"; but still he does not seem to rest in that anticipation; and, I think, will never rest until he gets hold of a definite belief. It is strange how he persists — and has persisted ever since I knew him, and probably long before — in wandering to and fro over these deserts, as dismal and monotonous as the sand hills amid which we were sitting. He can neither believe, nor be comfortable in his unbelief; and he is too honest and courageous not to try to do one or the other. If he were a religious man, he would be one of the most truly religious and reverential; he has a very high and noble nature, and better worth immortality than most of us.¹

Hawthorne, believing himself as one of the fatally doomed in the Puritan's conception, was never dissatisfied with finding the answer in the source of the question itself. As he did not make a special effort to search for the more complex causes of the problem of good and evil in relation to society, the whole purpose of his work is achieved merely by emphasizing the nature of the man and the consequences of evil in life. His characters all reveal their double nature from the beginning to the end. To the contrary Melville was not concerned with individuals themselves so much as Hawthorne was. His men were always challenged by strong opposing powers such as society, nature, or other men, responding to them with their nature of good or evil. He seems to have had a mature understanding of the relation of the individual to society, and the fact that human evil existed there. Richard Chase thus concludes that "Melville had great qualities which Hawthorne lacked, qualities of pathos and lyricism and pity, of range and acceptance and courage."²

The Scarlet Letter and Moby Dick

The Scarlet Letter and Moby Dick are considered as the major works of Hawthorne and Melville. Besides, there seem to be certain similarities between them in the sense that they both offered the problem of evil and that the authors were more or less terrified by what they presented in their works. Melville even said that he had written a wicked book of a man who went beyond human boundaries. Needless to say, there is a profound level of wonder and terror common to all humanity of all times in these works, which has rais-

1. Leyda, II, 529.
ed the novels to the rank of the great books.

It is the purpose of this particular section to dwell on the more specific kinds of sin and the conclusion drawn by the authors in their two masterpieces, and to make some comparisons of the two writers.

A. Sin in *The Scarlet Letter*

There are some passages in Hawthorne’s *American Note-books* which suggest the central idea of *The Scarlet Letter*: “To point out the moral slavery of one who deems himself a freeman.”, “To symbolize moral or spiritual disease by disease of the body; and thus, when a person committed any sin, it might appear in some form on the body.”

Although each of the three main characters in *The Scarlet Letter* is occupied with good and evil as the opposing elements within themselves, there is a linked intermingling of sin among them starting from Hester. It is, however, her guilty lover and the injured and retributive husband the author pursues, for Hester grows healthier by her confession and is, at the same time, cleansed through the discovery of her offense. Meanwhile the sin of Dimmesdale and Chillingworth expands as they become the victims of self-love, antipathy, and unnatural repression.

It is not difficult to find Hawthorne’s skillful art of building different stages of sin in these characters. The first presupposition for this development is that “Hester was more sinned against than sinning.” Her husband Roger Chillingworth is considered to be the prime offender against Hester here. He married her before she was mature enough to know the needs of her nature; as he admits: “Mine was the first wrong, when I betrayed thy budding youth into a false and unnatural relation with my decay.” Furthermore, he absented himself from her after their marriage. When these resulted in Hester’s disgrace, he refused to share any responsibility and for the odium brought upon her in consequence of the situation he had created. The physician’s special insight into the human soul, being unsupported by any moral sympathies, left him open to the degradation of himself. This attitude and the means he took for revenge and compensation seem to be the most original elements which Hawthorne treated so ingeniously and seriously. Having committed triple sin, he was never given any chance in the story to atone for his deeds, while Dimmesdale was finally led to confession and death.

The minister’s conduct toward Hester may be less blameworthy than her husband’s because both Hester’s conduct and Dimmesdale’s were apparently due to the passion and impulsion: “This had been a sin of passion, not of principle, nor even purpose.”

ous, however, that a distinction should be made between the two as to their moral responsibilities.

....her sin was contingent upon his, and her conduct is therefore more deserving of palliation than his. Besides, he had moral defenses and moral duties which she did not have. He had a pastoral duty toward her and professional duties which she did not have. Also, according to Hawthorne's view of the distinctive endowments of the sexes, Hester depended upon her womanly feeling, but he had the guidance of masculine intellect and moral erudition. Above all, he was free to marry to satisfy the strong animal nature in him, but Hester met her happiest choice too late, when she was already linked and wedlock bound to a fell adversary.”

Adding to this, he had the more abominable fault of unwillingness to confess his error, of hypocrisy. For him pride in his reputation was more important than truth, and he left Hester alone to bear the punishment of the very sin in which he took the initiative.

Society also comes into the light of Hawthorne's irony because of its attitude toward Hester. Hawthorne distinguished between society under its instinctively human aspect and under its institutional aspect. Both started with harsh prejudices but only the larger and warmer heart of the multitude understood and sympathized with the nature of a woman, which was actually proved in her gradual adjustment to the community in which she was forced to live as an outcast. But their institutions pursued unreality under the name of the general good. “Her punishment shows how society had set aside the human injunction that men should love one another, to make a religion of the office of vengeance, which in the Scriptures is exclusively appropriated to God.”

B. The moral situation in the long years that were to follow

What appealed to Hawthorne most was always the consequence of sin. There are some points to be considered in the lives of the three characters, especially in Hester's after her sin was disclosed.

Hester's adulterous passion could be noble only as she wished she might bear her partner's shame and anguish as well as her own. Then she takes the path of purgatorical movement to arrive at a state of penitence. There is a strong acceptance of her suffering and retribution in her attitude. The crisis that brings the wavering minister to confess his guilt and beg for mercy, and Chillingworth's desperate recognition that he has become a fiend for Dimmesdale's torment, all contribute to direct Hester to a particular moral situation in the story. She is not the worst of all any more, while

1. Abel, 305.
2. Ibid., 306.
Hawthorne and Melville - a Comparative Study of Their Approach to the Problem of Good and Evil

Dimmesdale dies as the penalty for the secondarily serious sin after deep remorse, sorrow, and despair, and Chillingworth becomes “so depraved, so remote from divine grace that he can only feel a revulsion of horror from the dark necessity that he can not escape.”

It is true, however, that in consequence Hester lost her sense of belonging to society. Also her passion and feeling vanished into the deep thought of her lonely life. Both Hester's and Dimmesdale's life were tragic enough for Hawthorne, for:

Hawthorne's prescription for the happiest regulation of society was man's intellect, moderated by woman's tenderness and moral sense. Dimmesdale's history shows that corruption of the masculine virtues of reason and authority in a sinner who has cut himself off from the divine source of those virtues; Hester's history shows the corruption of the feminine virtue of passion and submission in a sinner who has been thrust out from the human community on which those virtues depend for their reality and function.

Hester found no speculative answer to such a life of negative fate, and so she turned to play her necessary part and devoted herself to her child.

Another thing noticeable is the fact that Dimmesdale and Chillingworth held absolute positions of authority and control in the community. It seems to be that the special power and honor they had among the public were trials for their truthfulness and reverence for the sanctity of the human heart, ultimately of God. Chillingworth looked as if he was the most spiritually free man when he finally brought Dimmesdale to submission, but it was also the time for him to become a moral slave.

Pearl is the only token of reality of a broken law in the story. She has freedom as well as the darkness of human frailty and sorrow. She was the only object on which Hester could let out her emotions in her long solitude, and she sustained her and directed her constantly toward pious resignation, “thus serving as a means of positive redemption.” This does not deny, however, Hawthorne’s intention to establish a kind of spiritual gulf between the mother and daughter as symbolized in the scene in the wood by putting the brook between them.

C. Moral judgment on the heroine

When a man in the crowd in the opening chapter says “Is there no virtue in woman, save what springs from a wholesome fear of the gallows?”, there is the true voice of Hawthorne which teaches

3. Ibid., 308.
us that virtue is worthless unless it is voluntary and an expression of character. But even at the price of public dishonor the sin was committed. Hester apparently feels the ignominy of her deed and accepts her fate as the reward of evil, but she does not seem to understand it because she would not wish uncommitted the act which her society calls a sin. The fact is particularly manifested as Hester states that “what we did had a consecration of its own”, in agreement with Dimmesdale. Whether Hawthorne insisted on this view of love or not, at least the Puritan seventeenth century was not able to understand such a notion of love as we actually see the development of the story into an unfolding tragedy. With the incisive contrasts among the three characters, however, Hawthorne is presenting the sin of Hester and the minister as no worse than Chillingworth’s in the world, even in their miserable sufferings. Soon the minister comes to the conclusion that at least they have never violated, in cold blood, the sanctity of a human heart. They are definitely “distinguished from the wronged husband in accordance with the theological doctrine that excessive love for things which should take only a secondary place in the affections, though leading to the sin of lust, is less grave than love distorted, love turned from God and from his creatures, into self-consuming envy and vengeful pride.”¹

And yet Hawthorne is very careful not to make the romantic simplification that love is all, because it was one of his main beliefs that only the balance between heart and mind can prevent disaster. There is moral compassion for Hester in the story; nevertheless he did not forget to give an ample chance to Hester to teach that persons who indulge their moral compassion may not necessarily allow moral censure. The romantic individualist affirms the sole authority of nature, rejecting both the authority of God sanctioned in a pietistic ethic and the authority of society sanctioned in a utilitarian ethic. At this point, although she lived a life of solitude and independence and attempted to rationalize her romantic self-indulgence after she broke the laws of God and man, it is doubtful whether she secured the natural satisfaction which she sought, according to Hawthorne’s treatment of her.

Professor Darrel Abel brings up the Puritan heritage in Hawthorne here to explain the error for which Hester suffered. He interprets the author’s underlying idea to be that “the proper pursuit of man was not happiness but a virtuous life”, thus attributing the cause of Hester’s tragedy to her “too-obstinate supposition that human beings had a right to happiness.”² There seemed to be, however, always a feeling of a sequence of accidents in the story

2. Abel, p. 308.
which somehow weakens the above opinion, as their sin was considered to be a sin of passion and impulse. Hester was prevented from surrendering her soul to mere nature in fright from her unhappiness by Dimmesdale's dramatic death after his confession. "The rescue of her soul is as much a matter of accident as the shipwreck of her happiness had been." 1

Hawthorne's truest and most delicate implication about Hester's moral situation remains here in two facts: her conversion to piety was rather motivated in her persistence in her error than in a perception of Dimmesdale's death in the Lord; she was allowed until the last to insist on her hope of happiness through personal reunion with him even if it was to come in heaven.

Puritanism is evident in the whole story, being embodied through the very vision of the author, in the tone of the preformances, and in a certain coldness and exclusiveness of treatment. Above all the basic Puritan idea is stern enough to achieve a total effect that the consequences of deeds live forever. This is revealed in the peculiar characteristics of Pearl and Dimmesdale's definite attitude not to encourage Hester to hope for a compensating future life.

It seems to be obvious that Hawthorne consciously condemned Hester who was already a mother and an outlaw when she first appeared. But Professor Carpenter feels that "subconsciously he created so sympathetic a character that the modern reader admires her and often disagrees with her creator in his moralistic condemnations of her." 2, because actually "in the midst of austere Salem she has such radiance of beauty and magnificence of nature that she grows there till she cracks the stiff frame of the age's code." 3

After the overall considerations, the following passage seems to conclude the problem most properly.

Although we are expected to love and pity Hester, we are not invited to condone her fault or to construe it as a virtue. More a victim of circumstances than a willful wrongdoer, she is nevertheless to be held morally responsible. In her story Hawthorne intimates that, tangled as human relationships are and must be, no sin ever issues solely from the intent and deed of the individual sinner, but that it issues instead from a complicated interplay of motives of which he is the more or less willing instrument. Even so, however strong, insidious, and unforeseeable the influences and compulsions which prompted his sin, in any practicable system of ethics the sinner must be held individually accountable for it. This is harsh doctrine, but there is no escape from it short of unflinching repudiation of the moral ideas which give man his tragic and lonely dignity in a world in which all things except himself seem insensate and all actions except his own seem mechanical. The Puritans were no more illogical in coupling the assumption of moral determinism with the doctrine of individual responsibility to

1. Abel, p. 308.
God than is our own age in conjoining theories of biological and economic determinism with the doctrine of individual responsibility to society. The Puritan escaped from his inconsistency by remarking that God moves in a mysterious way; we justify ours by the plea of expediency. Hawthorne, however, was content merely to pose the problem forcibly in the history of Hester Prynne.

Before we part from the discussion on The Scarlet Letter, it may be well worth while to touch upon symbolism in the story. Hawthorne is renowned for his symbols and allegories. There are numerous symbols used skillfully especially in The Scarlet Letter, but among them I am particularly interested in its symbolical design built around the three scenes on the scaffold of the pillory because it is unmistakably connected with the whole development of the story of sin.

The scaffold is the place where Hester endures her public shaming with her dignity of native beauty in the opening chapter, and the story begins. The minister ascends on the same place next in the middle of the book being stricken by his guilty conscience and self-torture. He is joined by Hester there and they are overseen by Chillingworth. At the end, after his great election sermon assisted now by the realization of knowledge of suffering, the exhausted minister is led to confess his sin and dies in Hester's arms on the same high place. Aside from all other dramatic elements in the story, this progress of the scenes on the scaffold seems to point to the central theme of the plot in which Hawthorne lays more emphasis on sin and retribution than on reformation through divine grace. His symbolism has contributed very well to the sombre mood of painful hopelessness, which he created as a result of his absorption in the story, and, at the same time, of the circumstances under which he produced the work.

* * *

Was it poverty, environment, or accidental circumstances that caused evil and good, or their peculiar ambivalent manifestation? Melville fought with this profound problem in his Moby Dick as much as Ahab did with the White Whale.

Interestingly enough Moby Dick, which we are about to compare with Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter, was gratefully dedicated to Hawthorne by Melville "In token of my admiration for his genius." Previously Hawthorne had stimulated him by showing that at least there was an American who was expressively aware of the evil at the core of life, a perception which Melville had vaguely and not realized completely nor dared to disclose. Specific encouragement

1. Abel, 309.
came to Melville from Mosses:

Thus it is that ideas, which grow up within the imagination and appear so lively to it and of a value beyond whatever men call valuable, are exposed to be shattered and annihilated by contact with the practical. It is requisite for the ideal artist to possess a force of character that seems hardly compatible with its delicacy; he must keep his faith in himself while the incredulous world assails him with its utter disbelief; he must stand up against mankind and be his own sole disciple, both as respects his genius and the objects to which it is directed.¹

Mosses resulted in an entire rewriting of Moby Dick, though Melville undertook the task quite willingly with a feeling of exultation.²

Moby Dick is a myth which expresses by an ingenious method mankind’s deepest terrors and longings. We are almost expected to consider Ahab, doomed by his dark destiny to hunt for the White Whale, an unusual but felicitous emblem of Melville and his hunt for the meaning of life. Melville’s vivid sense of an invisible dimension in all things made it possible for him to develop a vital drama out of a deep problem. And yet, it is also a good example of the brute fact that at bottom we still have no better way of portraying the storms of the soul than by means of physical action and personification.

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 a lung. 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 reverenced 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. All that most maddens and torments; all that stirs up the lees of things; all truth with malice in it; all that cracks the sinews and cakes the brain; all the subtle demonisms of life and thoughts; all evil, to crazy Ahab, were visibly personified, and made practically assailable in Moby Dick. 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.³

Melville seems to have apprehended the tragedy of extreme individualism, the disasters of the selfish will, which prevented salvation of souls in any possible way. It is this theme of the isolated individual which develops throughout Moby Dick. For instance, the Pequod seems a crowded world. But it is also a small floating world of lonely and grief-touched souls, whose solitudes are gathered

2. Ibid.
up and made manifest in the figure of Ahab. Moreover, the author underlines this perception in the very life of the community itself, in the Whaleman's Chapel, where "each silent worshipper seemed purposefully sitting apart from the other, as if each silent grief were insular and incommunicable." To see Moby Dick as a study of aloneness and isolation is to place the book directly in the main cultural current of modern times", Howard Vincent states. Richard Chase finds the unreasoned rage of Ahab against Moby Dick a counterpart in the reckless destruction of the wilderness and its creatures which had been carried too far. "There is a profounder similarity between Ahab and folk heroes, a similarity with crucial implications in any estimate of American art and culture." Undoubtedly Melville had a keen insight instinctively and intellectually in this deep flaw rooted in American culture and in the unconditioned, imperfectly human American personality. In the course of the story, for example, all other ships represent only the vulgar errors of American culture.

Though dangerous and ill fated, they are the passing daydreams of our experience. The Town-Ho is a dream of the sheer, brutal exploitation of nature and man, the dream of big business, the frontier, and the pragmatic present. The Bachelor is a dream of comfort, opulence, bachelorhood, flags, progress, dancing girls, and a safe home-coming, the dream of little business, the city, and one's lost childhood. The Jeroboam is a dream of utopia, a society uncultured and unhistoried, of a female Christ and a hermaphrodite god, of spiritualism, celibacy, old age, and bonuses for all, the dream of the wayward reformer, the small town, and the world of tomorrow.

The daydreams — pure, meaningless, inhuman, violent — were Ahab's. Here the White Whale appears as divine purity, "the purity of an inviolable spiritual rectitude which, since it cannot be discovered among the imperfections of life, must be sought in death. Ahab's purpose is to die in one final heraldic gesture of righteousness." To Melville's eyes, however, these dreams were met by blind chance as a rule of the universe. And it came from nothing else than the activity of the evil. Moby Dick sprang out of such a notion of diabolism in Melville, and Ahab was certainly an opportunity to project a drama with which he could thoroughly sympathize. There is a profound tone of pessimism, not a spark of humor in Moby Dick.

1. Fadiman, p. 90.
2. Vincent, p. 58.
4. Ibid., pp. 61-62.
5. Ibid., p. 62.
A. Tragedy of Moby Dick

The myth of evil and tragedy was created with Ahab's underlying idea that "both the ancestry and posterity of Grief go further than the ancestry and posterity of Joy."  

Moby Dick is a machine out of human control. In his violent emotions all human intelligence and feeling lose their power and dignity. And in order to combat Moby Dick, which was a symbol of the mechanism of the universe, Ahab himself had to become a machine.  "The path to my fixed purpose is laid with iron rails, whereon my soul is grooved to run", cries Ahab without anticipating the possibility of failure of his fixed purpose.  "All the creative human emotions, joy and sorrow, hope and fear, seemed ground to finest dust, and powdered... in the clamped mortar of Ahab's iron soul. The crew, too, is frozen into inflexibility. Ahab sees clearly the cumulative unmanning of himself and his crew."  

No longer does he possess the very weapon with which he can defeat the divine Tyrant of Moby Dick; for now he himself became a Tyrant.  "Here we have come close to Melville's central idea of tragedy, which is the self-defeat of leadership. In the chapter called 'The Specksnyster', he tells us that 'Captain Ahab was by no means unobservant of the paramount forms and usages of the sea'". Richard Chase summarizes thus: "God attempts to defeat the heroic defender of man by forcing him into the pattern of the beast or the machine. The hero attempts to escape this fate and to preserve the human intelligence, creativeness, and adaptability. Human élan is the one weapon which can defeat the tyrant God; it is the one attribute God Himself needs if He is to keep His throne."  

This leads us to think that Moby Dick is nearly un-Christian and that it is the product of unfaith. Truly Ahab knew that Good existed in the world, he even had his own moments of softening of the heart, but basically he was entranced with what was negative and disastrous.

B. Captain Ahab, a tragic hero

Ahab's tragic voyage begins when he vows to know the cause of his misfortune and to pay back blow for blow. He is in absolute rebellion against all existence and implication of life.

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 behind. But 'tis enough. He tasks me; he heaps me; I see in him outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing

1. Fadiman, p. 90.
2. Chase, p. 53.
3. Ibid., p. 54.
4. Ibid., p. 51.
it. That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate; and be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal, I will wreak 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, jealously presiding over all creations. The prophecy was that I should be dismembered; and-ay! I lost this leg. I now prophesy that I will dismember my dismemberer. Now, then, be the prophet and the fulfilling one. That's more than ye, great gods, ever were.¹

Nothing could reconcile the loss of his leg; consequently he cherishes mad hatred, a most cunning and feline human madness. The White Whale was raised to a dignity which alone could justify this rage of the monomaniac Ahab.

Thus Ahab, like Jonah, goes on his long hunt to achieve his fatal purpose being lifted by his fury to a sense of equality with the gods. The passion which created Ahab might indicate, to a great extent, a possibility in Melville to have become another Ahab as Carl van Doren observes.²

There is, however, something in Ahab which is very comprehensible and common to all of us. Isn't Ishmael also Ahab? Or are we so completely different from Ahab at the bottom of our very nature? Ahab is the tragic center of Moby Dick, but he is a noble person and a kingly commander. He is identified with us because of his "supreme quality of life, the courage which leads him to reach out for life itself. . . . In Ahab we see life clarified, directed towards a sharply defined goal, life made purposive."³ Besides the impressiveness of his personality and the nobility of his mind, he had high rank as a captain of the ship, an absolute autocrat; but he was close enough to normal human life. We recall Captain Peleg telling Ishmael that "Ahab has humanities", and Ishmael himself, too, acknowledged a feeling of "sympathy and sorrow" for his captain. These elements all contribute to Captain Ahab's existence as a tragic hero. His blindness, which drives him and all who follow him to their ultimate damnation, was after all his weakness making him lose his soul in this search for truth against all advice and direction.

In the course of Ahab's doomed voyage three crew members oppose him symbolically. They are: Starbuck who made Ahab feel the strongest potential enemy aboard the Pequod; Pip, the little Negro cabin boy, who alone definitively seceded from the destructive enterprise; and mysterious Bulkington who would have done what Starbuck only tried to do, that is, to save the ship if he had not

¹. Van Doren, p. 93.
². Ibid., p. 94.
disappeared from the scene so soon.

We see a disintegrating personality in Ahab as in Hawthorne's 'Ethan Brand'. His mind has cut itself off from the heart. His will is strong, and yet, it is a divided man's will, which cannot win over his mortality, all the grief in the world, and his incapacity to participate in the drama of life. He coerced man, but he had to insult and castigate his God at the same time. He commanded a little world, men of all races and colors who had been possessed by despair common to everybody at times, and ruthlessly employed them to achieve his false goal. As the ship withdraws from the land, all creatures on her become united into one under Ahab's horrible will of insane quest.

"Tragedy, then, is the degeneration of the potential hero, mystically illumined by his withdrawal from the world and by his spiritual ordeal, into the sultan who leads his followers to destruction instead of leading them along the path of civilization." 1 Such goal of man as Ahab's was to be defeated by triumphant evil. Suicide was the true end of Moby Dick.

C. Implication and symbolism in Moby Dick

There is no doubt in Melville's intention that Father Mapple's sermon given from the prow pulpit of the Seaman's Bethel should be the vehicle for the central theme of Moby Dick. According to Father Mapple, the story of Jonah has two meanings: it is a story of sin, punishment, and repentance; and it is also the account of Jonah's deliberate defiance of God's will. "And if we obey God we must disobey ourselves; and it is in this disobeying ourselves, wherein the hardness of obeying God consists," he says. He is trying to justify the ways of God to man, the relationship of the individual soul to God in this sermon. The problems of self-realization and understanding of the deepest meaning of selfhood by spiritual maturation are main concerns here. Through these questions Melville searches for a cultural ideal, a great man in a great culture.

The value of Moby Dick is greatly attributed to its symbolism. We first notice the rope ladder at the Seaman's Bethel somehow a similar symbol to the veil in Hawthorne's 'The Minister's Black Veil'. What Melville implied here is that everyman is most alone in his relation to his God.

Moby Dick may be interpreted to be a symbol of universe or practical life, 2 however, it was more than that to Captain Ahab. To the crazy Ahab "Moby Dick is the personification of Evil. Ahab's reaction is not the normal sort of response. It is monomania of the paranoid. To mankind in general, the White Whale in Moby

Dick must symbolize something else. And the representative man in Moby Dick is Ishmael. Ishmael wondered at the evil magic which was able to seize their souls so securely. Ishmael can’t explain the spell; to do so would be to dive deeper than Ishmael can go. He gave himself up to the abandonment of the time and the space.”

It is a shifting symbol as white can be many things.

Melville seems to have taken the ocean for “the visible image of deep, blue, bottomless soul, pervading mankind, and nature”, giving Moby Dick his shelter. Fighting with this grand object in the ocean is Ahab who represents the unconquerable soul of man. He was a man self-dedicated to disaster; his end was to become one with his enemy, Moby Dick.

There is another person to consider — the only survivor in the great tragedy, Ishmael. Melville was successful in leaving him entirely out of the entity on the Pequod literarily and symbolically, thus giving him a reason to survive. Who was Ishmael?

The Ishmael of Moby Dick is a profound symbol of the shelterless person in the face of almost absolute nothingness, when the supports and solaces of family, education, and habit have been suddenly removed, and the world has been revealed in its instability and unreliability. Ishmael is the man to whom the problem of the One has become the problem of the Many.

Ishmael is Everyman. Ishmael is Melville; Ishmael is any man, anywhere, confronted with the flux of circumstance and with the chaos of his own being. But Everyman comprehends the particular natures of all men, and since each of us contains, potentially, the good and evil of all men, and since each of us is nothing more than our special, idiosyncratic self.

When he started for the South Seas he was alone and angered at life. But “he learned the law of aloneness and the law of companionship, the psychological duality. He also learned the law of acceptance, to accept what Fate has in store for him, not to fight it in the manner of Ahab.” We must recognize the mind of the author who has sent a great message of life through Ishmael.

Moby Dick is a story in which “a great man allowed himself to be unmanned by the lure of God. The White Whale is for Ahab, (and for everybody) the mask which affirms, because of its horror and beauty, that all human, natural, and divine reality is concealed behind the masks of appearance.” A profound truth Melville reached through this great work was that “men, hating too much, become what they hate. In the end it is Ahab that is evil, not the

1. Vincent, p. 179.
2. Van Doren, p. 90.
3. Vincent, p. 58.
4. Ibid., p. 56.
White Whale going about his business in the order of nature."

So does the long voyage of struggle come to an end. It was sin itself and the origin of evil that concerned Melville here. In that sense he may not have come to the final conclusion, and yet we cannot overlook the great religious achievement in the story which was considered most un-Christian.

**Conclusion**

In the course of the study of Hawthorne and Melville we easily recognize likenesses in their concern with the problem of good and evil which seems to be closely connected with their Calvinistic religious backgrounds. Beyond this basic fact, however, they had entirely different temperaments and attitudes in dealing with this problem. In the history of American literature Hawthorne calmly keeps his classical position with cold intellectual smiles of reserve and pessimism, while Melville has left an unique token of constant passion for the energetic search for truth in the universe. Hawthorne was born deep in the spell of a Puritanic decade with the sense of darkness which he could never explain; on the contrary, the dark tone was found by Melville as he grew as a social being. Numerous malevolent contradictions in this world, blind chance, and heedlessness of the interests of men caused young Melville to doubt about the meaning of the cosmos, and transcendental thinking of the time fired his mind to seek the answer to these facts of life.

Let us try to draw conclusions about the attitudes of the two towards this very problem here. To Hawthorne's eye any idealism was at odds with the world since good and evil were intertwined so inseparably. As a consequence of human evil we still see his persistent bitterness toward human fate as the characters in The Scarlet Letter demonstrate. The realization that there are different degrees of evil which human beings can create further in addition to the original sin seems to have been the only conclusion Hawthorne could reach. More doubt of the existence of good in our minds could become such a corrosive force as to eat out the life of the heart and that was the most condemned of all by him, since human nature could be more truly represented in the wishes of its heart.

On the other hand, Melville came to believe in the principle of Natural Evil and Natural Goodness after a long struggle. And representing mankind he interprets the dilemma of the two forces that though man must seek good, he must face the fact that some evil is inevitable, even necessary, in preserving the stability of human institutions and he must accept the world's conditions in the interest

---

1. Van Doren, p. 96.
of general human welfare. Cruel as the world may seem to man, he is not to fight against it at the price of breaking the kind of virtue that civilization teaches because it will result in nothing but self defeat, degradation of himself in the eye of God. Here Melville casts a spark of hope into the hearts of those who are wicked, unhappy, and inefficient because of the oppression by illiberal laws, saying that the worst of our evils is what we inflict on ourselves. We must know ourselves first before we try to analyze God's Will. He did not end up as merely a fatalist as Hawthorne did, because his search went further to establish in his mind the ideal of man who is a noble, sparkling, and grand creature with a reconciliation in accepting God's Will as a necessity of the world.

Bibliography