

## The Influence of Gnosticism on *Moby-Dick*

Chun, Kook Suh

Dept. of English Language and Literature

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### <Abstract>

Herman Melville's masterpiece entitled *Moby-Dick* expresses many aspects of various religions. Gnosticism plays one of the most crucial roles in his works. Gnosticism which could explain the existence of evil in the world fascinated Melville. His contact with Gnosticism through Bayle's and Norton's writings led him to use Gnostic thinking and allusions in *Moby-Dick* and his ideas expressed in his numerous biographical data frequently reflects the ideas of the Gnostics. The examination of the influences of Bayle and Norton and discussion of Gnostic ideas and expression of them in Melville's biographical data and in Ahab's characterization in *Moby-Dick* can show that the influence of Gnosticism on Melville is very crucial in *Moby-Dick*.

### 「백경」에 끼친 영지주의의 영향

전 국 서

영 어 영 문 학 과

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### <적 요>

Herman Melville의 작품세계는 다양한 종교적 요소들이 주제면이나 작중인물들의 묘사면에서 나타나고 있는데 그 중에서도 영지주의의 역할은 관목할 만하다. Melville이 영지주의에 크게 배혹되었던 까닭은, 그가 그의 전 작품세계에서 즐기자세 다루고 있는, 세상에 존재하는 악의 문제를 영지주의가 설득력 있게 설명할수가 있었기 때문이다. 그가 영지주의와 접촉하게 되는 것은 여러 종류의 비교종교학 사전들-통해서 인데 그 중에서도 Norton과 Bayle의 사전이 그에게 가장 큰 영향을 끼쳤다. 이런 영지주의는 「백경」에 나오는 Ahab선장의 모습에 잘 나타나 있는데 이것은 영지주의가 「백경」에 중요한 영향을 끼쳤다는 것을 잘 나타내 준다.

### I

Herman Melville's masterpiece entitled *Moby-Dick* expresses many aspects of various religions in its theme and its description of characters. Among these religions Gnosticism plays one of the most crucial roles in his works.

Generally it is said that Gnosticism contains rebellious attitudes toward the deity and material world, and stress separation of its adherents from other people. In Gnosticism the deity who created this world is evil and the material world is designed for the imprisonment of the *Pneuma* (true self). So the adherents of Gnosticism have the duty to accuse the evil

deity and escape from his reign. Their escape from his rule consists in two seemingly contradictory ways: libertinism and asceticism. How, then, can these two different attitudes, as to serve the deity to the same extent? The reason for this baffling phenomenon is that both of these ways have a common denominator, that is, the hatred of the world where evils are rampant.

In this paper, I will examine Bayle's and Norton's influences on Melville as sources for his Gnosticism. Gnosticism's general view of the deity and universe and other men will also be examined, and Melville's view of the deity and evil will be examined through the biographical data and materials in *Moby-Dick*<sup>(1)</sup> and Ahab's characterization will be discussed in the light of Gnosticism.

## II

Melville's contact with Gnosticism was through the writings of Pierre Bayle and Andrew Norton. He directly mentioned Bayle's *Dictionary*. However, although Norton's writings are not mentioned by Melville, both Lawrence Thompson and Thomas Vargish pointed out that Melville could scarcely have escaped knowing Andrew Norton because Norton's writings were widely known and discussed and were scholarly landmarks of the period.<sup>(2)</sup>

Both Bayle and Norton influenced Melville, but differently. Norton gave him sufficient knowledge of Gnosticism, but Bayle influenced him more significantly because Bayle was a man who had the same state of mind tossing between a will to believe and a compulsion to doubt. Melville purchased the English version

of Pierre Bayle's *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique* early in 1849. He wrote to Duyckinck who had often lent many books.

I bought a set of Bayle's Dictionary the other day, and on my return to New York I intend to lay the great folios side by side and go to sleep on them thro' the summer with *Phaedon* in one hand and *Tom Brown* in the other.<sup>(3)</sup>

The book which was purchased when Melville was most sensitive and creative, of course, exerted a great influence on him. How Melville used what he had read is always a very complicated problem because it is difficult to distinguish secondary sources from the original among his vast allusions in his works. The question is partly answered by his massive use of secondary sources to give the impression of his familiarity with whaling authorities in his cetology chapters in *Moby-Dick*. The allusions are from a few basic books by Scoresby, Beale, Bennet, and Brown. This sort of using what he has read seems to apply to his knowledge of philosophy. Though Melville barely finished high school, he had a speculative mind which synthesized what he read and which abstracted the ideas. However, he did not even have a command of the languages of modern philosophy such as French and German. The language barrier made him use the encyclopedic works to get philosophical ideas of those who interested him such as Locke, Descartes and Kant. Just as he used the secondary source for the original in the cetology chapters, he used the "encyclopedic works"<sup>(4)</sup> for his religious and philosophical ideas expressed in his works.

Melville probably obtained his information

(1) *Moby-Dick*, ed. Harrison Hayford and Hershel Parker (New York; W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1967). Subsequent reference to *Moby-Dick* will be (unless otherwise indicated) to this edition and identified simply by the page number in parentheses, as: (p.109).

(2) Lawrence Thompson, *Melville's Quarrel with God* (Princeton Univ. Press, 1962), pp.430-431. Thomas Vargish, pp.272-277.

(3) Millicent Bell, "Pierre Bayle and *Moby-Dick*" in *PMLA*, (V. 66, 1951), p.627.

(4) *Ibid.*, p.626.

about Gnosticism from several such sources. Comparative religion was being studied extensively on both sides of the Atlantic. Melville was familiar with John Kitto's *Cyclopedia of Biblical Literature* which contained some information about Gnosticism. Gibbon's masterpiece of Roman history, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, also dealt with Gnosticism. Among these encyclopedic works the most important two works are Andrew Norton's *The Evidence of the Genuineness of the Gospels* and Bayle's *Dictionary*. As Thomas Vargish indicated, Bayle's *Dictionary* did not give all the information about Gnosticism that is expressed in *Moby-Dick*. As Vargish insisted, *Moby-Dick* is full of allusions to Gnosticism which are not attainable in Bayle's *Dictionary* such as the Ophite sect of Gnosticism (p.417). The Ophite worshiped the serpent for having impeded the evil deity's narrow purposes to imprison the man in the world by inducing him to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, and thus thought him the Knowledge of the Power which is over All. The dark hints concerning what Ahab calls "sweet mother" came from the Gnostic mythos (p.417). In spite of this information Melville did not express his debt for the knowledge of Gnosticism to Norton. However, Bayle's *Dictionary* is mentioned explicitly by Melville, partly because Melville's estimation of the book is higher than that of Norton. It is in Bayle's *Dictionary* where Melville discovered exactly the same kind of mind as his. What Hawthorne said of Melville was applicable to Bayle: "He can neither believe nor be comfortable in his unbelief."<sup>(5)</sup>

What Bayle grappled with was the problem of evil in this world; "Why had a benevolent God wrought evil in the world?"<sup>(6)</sup> He struggled with his question throughout his *Dictionary*. Like Melville, he despised the Platonists and his contemporary Spinoza who insisted on the One being and on One nature. He criticized this hypotheses as monstrous and absurd. Melville scoffed at Goethe by asking how we could tell a fellow who has a raging toothache to live in the all; and he also blamed Emerson for his transcendental denial of evil. In Emerson the dualistic sense of good and evil is lacking. Both Bayle and Melville thought that the problem of evil could not be ignored by a thoughtful man. In *Moby-Dick*, Ishmael says that "the truest of all men was the Man of sorrows, and the truest of all books is *Solomon's*, and *Ecclesiastes* is the fine hammered steel of Woe. 'All is vanity.' All."<sup>(7)</sup> (p.355) Bayle used every occasion to speculate on his favorite theme, that is, on the dualism of good and evil in his *Dictionary* from the beginning to the end through item by item. Spinoza and Descartes were two philosophers whom Melville never read in the original. Most of his knowledge about them came from Bayle's *Dictionary*. Bayle thought Spinoza was a dangerous idealist and Descartes a more dangerous empiric.<sup>(8)</sup> This fact is very important in the characterizations in *Moby-Dick*.<sup>(9)</sup>

While Bayle's influence on *Moby-Dick* is found in the similarity of Bayle and Melville in questioning evil in the world, the influence of Norton is only found in more specific knowledges of Gnosticism than Bayle's *Dictionary*

(5) *Ibid.*, p.629.

(6) *Ibid.*, p.627.

(7) What Ishmael said sounds similar to what Ahab said, thought and acted throughout *Moby-Dick*. But there are differences between Ahab and Ishmael in their attitudes toward the evil. Ishmael said later that "there is a wisdom that is woe; but there is a woe that is madness" on the same page. It is clear that Ahab's woe is madness. My point is that Melville thought the problem of evil shouldn't be ignored as it had been by Goethe and Emerson.

(8) Millicent Bell, p.629.

(9) There are interesting characterizations in *Moby-Dick*. Ahab is an idealist who is very dangerous. And Flask is the materialist. Both of them are not ideal types for Melville. Ishmael is balanced between them.

provided. The Ophite sect of Gnosticism and Ahab's invocation of "sweet mother" can be discovered in Norton's *The Evidence of the Genuineness of the Gospels*. It is a secondary source for Melville's knowledge of Gnosticism and is very different from that of Bayle's. Andrew Norton himself may be a member of that class of divines whom Melville satirizes with the following portrait of a ship's chaplain in *White-Jacket*:<sup>(10)</sup>

He was particularly hard upon the Gnostics and Marcionites of the second century of the christian era; but he never, in the remotest manner, attacked the every day vices of the nineteenth century, as eminently illustrated in our man-of-war world (ch. XXXVIII).

### III

The Gnosticism which appealed so strongly to Melville flourished in the second century after Christ. Its adherents held that creation was the work of an evil deity. Hans Jonas pointed out the importance of the evil deity in the theology of Gnosticism.

The world is the work of lower powers which, though they may mediate from Him, do not know the true God and obstruct the knowledge of Him in the cosmos over which they rule.<sup>(11)</sup>

This God trapped sparks of light from the spiritual world above and cast them into flesh and thus gave life to the Kingdom of Darkness without the cooperation of the Sparks of Light. Jonas also pointed out the cosmology and anthropology of Gnosticism.

The universe, the domain of the Archons (rulers), is like a vast prison whose inner-

most dungeon is the earth, the scene of man's life... In its physical aspect of this rule is the law of the nature.<sup>(12)</sup>

The cosmology explains the attitude of the Gnostics toward matter which is an evil for Gnostics. The anthropology of Gnosticism regards the flesh as a prison for the spark of the light from the spiritual world above. There is a dualism in the anthropology of Gnosticism between the spirit and the flesh. Gnostics regarded the flesh as an evil thing. This anthropology of Gnosticism is explained further by Jonas:

Man, the main object of these vast dispositions, is composed of flesh, soul, and spirit. But reduced to ultimate principles, his origin is two-fold: mundane and transmudane... Through his body and his soul man is a part of the world and subjected to the heimarmene(world-rule). Enclosed in soul is the spirit, or "pneuma"(called also the "spark"), a portion of divine substance from beyond which has fallen into the world.<sup>(13)</sup>

Since man is considered by the Gnostics to be composed of two different origins: One is mundane; the other is transmudane; they hold the mundane as evil and the transmudane as good. It is no wonder that they try to keep the *pneuma* and dispose the flesh. Both the matter and the flesh are supposed to be disposed. All those who received the doctrines know that they have an obligation to hasten the destruction of the matter. Jonas goes on to explain the destruction of the matter with the morality of Gnosticism.

Generally speaking, the pneumatic morality is determined by hostility toward the world and contempt for all mundane ties. From this principle, however, two contrary conclusions could be drawn, and both found

(10) Thomas Vargish, p.272. The difference between Bayle and Norton lies in the fact that while Norton is concerned with the spiritual, Bayle wavers between the spiritual and material.

(11) Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*(Boston: Beacon Press, 1963) p.42. The theology of Gnosticism could explain the origin of the evil in the universe.

(12) *Ibid.*, p.44.

(13) *Ibid.*, p.46.

their extreme representatives: the ascetic and the libertine.<sup>(14)</sup>

The Gnostics are free to deny the flesh or engross themselves in worldly joy. The two ways are the methods to oppose the Demiurge who tries to keep creation in existence and under his control. To explain the existence of evil, they held that the creator of this world is an evil deity and since the flesh and matter is used to imprison our true self (pneuma) by the evil deity, they regarded the matter and the flesh as evil things. They denied the world and mundane ties and became ascetics and libertines. All of their doctrines came into being to explain the problem of evil in the world.

#### IV

Like the Gnostics, Melville's overriding concern from *Typee* to *Billy Budd*, *The Sailor* was the problem of evil. His concern for evil changed from the concrete to the abstract.<sup>(15)</sup> The concern for deity<sup>(16)</sup> was Melville's last stage.

Melville would question God, as when he wrote to Hawthorne:

The reason the mass of men fear God, and at bottom dislike Him, is because they rather distrust His heart, and fancy Him all brain like a watch. (you perceive I employ a capital initial in the pronoun referring to the Deity; don't you think there is a slight dash of flunkeyism in tha usage?)<sup>(17)</sup>

This excerpt from Melville's letter clearly shows how he felt toward the deity. The

deity lacks love. The same notion of deity is revealed in Ahab's words to corposants:

Come in thy lowest form of love, and I will kneel and kiss thee; but at thy highest, come as mere supernal power; and thou launchiest naives of fullfreighted worlds, there's that in there that still remains indifferent (p. 417).

This exactly echoes what Melville wrote to Hawthorne: "I had rather be a fool with a heart, than Jupiter Olympus with his head."<sup>(18)</sup>

Emerson who maintained that evil is merely the privation of good, as darkness is the privation of light and all tends toward ultimate good<sup>(19)</sup> was considered by Melville to be intellectually arrogant, and he particularly objected to his "disposal of the problem of evil."<sup>(20)</sup> Melville wrote to Duyckinck after his first expression of enthusiasm at hearing Emerson's lecture. "Nay I do not oscillate in Emerson's rainbow but prefer rather to hang myself in mine own halter than swing in any other man's swing."<sup>(21)</sup> This excerpt shows Melville's dissatisfaction with Emerson's lecture. Melville obviously felt Emerson's inadequacy in explaining evil.

As he grew more dissatisfied with Emerson's inadequacy, "he seized Shakespeare and Hawthorne as allies."<sup>(22)</sup> Here what Melville means by the "Truth" which is forced to fly like a scared "white doe" includes the evil which ordinary people had been ignoring intentionally or unintentionally. These words exactly reflect the cosmology of the Gnostics. Melville said "Truth" could be revealed by snatches and only covertly "in this world of

(14) *Ibid.*, p. 46.

(15) Melville's interest changed from the concrete sociological aspects such as cannibalism, missionary work, and tyrannical cruelty of captains, to the metaphysical aspects such as philosophy and religion.

(16) Here the word deity is not used in ordinary meaning. It means an evil god.

(17) The excerpts from Melville's letter are taken from *Moby-Dick* edited by Hayford and Hershel Parker. p. 559.

(18) *Ibid.*, p. 559.

(19) William Braswell, *Melville's Religious Thought* (New York: Octagon Books, 1977), p. 25.

(20) *Ibid.*, p. 16.

(21) F. O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1962), p. 435.

(22) *Ibid.*, p. 435.

lies" which ignored the existence of evil.

A similar idea is revealed in Melville's "secret" review of *The House of Seven Gables*. Melville dealt with the problem of evil in that review.

But it is this Being of the matter; there lies the knot with which we choke ourselves. As soon as you say Me, a God, a Nature, so soon you jump from your stool and hang from the beam. Yes, that word is the hangman. Take God out of the dictionary, and you would have Him in the street. There is the grand truth about Nathaniel Hawthorne. He says No! in thunder; but the Devil himself cannot make him say yes. For all men who say yes, lie (p.555).

These quotations from Melville's writings clearly show his conception of the truth which includes the evil which ordinary people disregarded. He didn't hesitate to say that there is the grand truth in saying No! in the thunder. And Melville's notion is clear when he says that the word "God" is the hangman and that we should take the word out of the dictionary. God is the "this Being of the Matter"<sup>(23)</sup> which imprisons the man in the world.

## V

Melville's Gnostic ideas can be substantiated by Ahab's characterization. Like Gnostics, Ahab's is an accuser of the deity in terms of the deity's malignity and his indifference toward human suffering. Ever since the combat in which the white whale bit off one of his legs, Ahab has wanted to avenge Moby-Dick. His desire to avenge Moby-Dick does not merely mean assault on evil: "For

evil is but an effect, and Ahab is interested in the primary cause."<sup>(24)</sup> Ahab regards the whale as an agent of the malignant deity.

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 (p.160).

The malignant deity as a primary cause of the evil in the world appears in many chapters in Ahab's words. Ahab asks his blacksmith:

Thou should'st go mad, blacksmith; say, why dost thou not go mad? How can'st thou endure without being mad? Do the heavens yet hate thee, that thou can'st not go mad? (p.403)

In these words, Ahab's idea of the malignant deity is obviously expressed. Ahab's words can be interpreted that since the evil deity hates the blacksmith, he keeps the blacksmith sane in this evil world. Ahab says further on: "Ego non baptizo te in nomine patris, sed in nomine diaboli" in the same chapter (p.404). Worship of the devil was practised by one sect of Gnosticism, called Ophites which is mentioned specially in the "Moby-Dick" chapter (p.160). The idea of worshipping the devil comes from the thought that the creator of this world is evil and devil is good. When Ahab says 'nomine diaboli,' Ahab's thought is exactly the same as that of the Ophites. While the deity's malignity is one of the reasons that Ahab accuses the deity, the other reason is the indifference of deity to human suffering. Ahab blames the indifference of the deity,

(23) The Editors of the text give the footnote that reads as follows;

Is this a mistaken reading of Melville? Perhaps Julian Hawthorne's transcription is in error for Melville's "Being that matters" or "Being that maddens." This would suppose that Julian read Melville's "that" as "of the" and that he did not recognise Melville's final "s," both of which are possible and understandable mistranscriptions of Melville's hand. Either of the two readings proposed here would be more appropriate in the context. (The original letter is not available; it is printed by Davis and Gilman from Julian Hawthorne's Transcription, hence their above conjectures.—Editors.)

But I think the word "matter" may mean the material. Though I am not sure of this, I think it is possible. It will be worthwhile to check his meaning of the word.

(24) William Braswell, p.126.

when he sees the mad cabin boy Pip:

there can be no hearts above the snow-line. Oh, ye frozen heaven! Look down here, Ye did beget this luckless child, and had abandoned him, Ye creative libertines. (p.428)

Ahab's thought the deity's malignity and indifference toward human suffering makes him accuse the deity and chase Moby-Dick relentlessly until his own death. Ahab cannot allow what he thinks evil. Therefore, he struggles with the evil. But the preoccupation with the evil cause him to fail to appreciate the good. Sometimes there are moments when he almost feels the benevolence of the deity:

That glad, happy air, that winsome sky, did at last strike 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 willful and erring, she could yet find it in her heart to save and to bless. (p.443)

But Ahab cannot escape from his obsession with an evil deity. There is no change in Ahab's attitude toward the deity. Soon he blames the deity again:

Look! See yon Albicore! who put it into him to chase and tang that flying-fish! where do the murderers go, man! who's to doom when the judge himself is dragged to the bar?(p.445)

Ahab regards the deity as creator of this evil world, and he wants to destroy the world. He regards the material world as the prison which expresses the evil deity's intention to keep men's *pneuma*(true self) in his realm. Therefore, Ahab wants to destroy the material world and searches for the spiritual. He explains his idea of this material world to his crew saying that "All visible objects are but as pasteboard masks," and he further explains that man should "strike the wall." (p.144) To Ahab, the white whale is the wall, shoved

near to him. Ahab's idea of the material aesthetically is depicted when Ahab watches the sunset(pp.146-147) with "the same loss of correspondance with 'visible objects' of the physical world."<sup>(25)</sup> As Ahab watches the beauty of the natural world in the sunset, he sees pure sensual beauty without finding any underlying significance of it. Ahab thinks about the sunset and about himself:

Oh! time was, when as the sunrise nobly spurred me, so the sunset soothed. No more. This lovely light, it lights not me; all loveliness is anguish to me, since I can never enjoy. Gifted with high perception, I lack the low enjoying power. (p.147)

He is deprived of the satisfaction and comfort of the "low enjoying power" of the senses. Ahab has only his gift of "high perception," the metaphysical faculty. He lives in a world of metaphysical truths, divorced from the normal sources of joy around him. He feels "damned in the midst of Paradise." (p.147) Ahab thinks that he wears the "Iron Crown of Lombardy" and he considers that it is too heavy. His partial identification with Christ, who died so that mankind could be saved comes from the idea of Christ in Gnosticism. Ahab as an idealist does not stop at just denying the material world as a prison holding the *pneuma*, he goes further in converting the material white whale into the source of "not only all his bodily woes, but all his intellectual and spiritual exasperations." (p.160)

Ahab is an *isolato* which frequently appears in Melville's world. Another representative is Bartleby. The common fate for an *isolato* is defeat and Ahab is not an exception. Ahab's independence leads neither to private contentment nor to public constructiveness. Ahab sometimes feels the destructive sterility of his life. Just before his final three-day battle with Moby-Dick he is temporarily overwhelmed by

(25) Robert M. Greenberg, *Chasing the Leviathan: Religions and Philosophic Uncertainty.*, DAI 1566A p.54.

a feeling of emptiness and fatigue, which closely resembles Macbeth's terrible world-weariness as he awaits the onset of Malcom and Macduff:<sup>(26)</sup>

Forty years of continual whaling! Forty years of privation, and peril, and stormtime! Forty years on the pitiless sea! For forty years has Ahab forsaken the peaceful land, for forty years to make war on the horrors of deep...Out of those years I have not spent three ashore. When I think of this life I have led; the desolation of solitude it has been;... Guinea cost slavery of the solitary command!(p.443)

As we know, by urging his will on his crew he destroyed all of them at last. "Exiled by his refusal to share man's common fate, he suffers both morally and spiritually."<sup>(27)</sup> Ahab does not greet the other captain when he gets a negative answer to the question he put. "He cared not to consort even for five minutes, with any stranger captain, except he could contribute some of that information he so absorbingly sought."<sup>(p.204)</sup> His self-reliance makes the whaling voyage continue.

Ahab is compared to the sun. "The circus-running sun has raced within his fiery ring, and needs no substance but what's in himself. So Ahab."<sup>(p.319)</sup> He is also compared to a "gigantic elm" from which every body escapes (p.418). Ahab is aloof from his crew. He stands apart(p.423). He gains the freedom he has craved. And "this freedom ultimately prompts him toward conduct beneficial neither to himself nor society."<sup>(28)</sup> Further, the terrible loneliness of the isolated self may lead to insanity. Ahab may be said to have experienced an "intense concentration of self" like Pip when Moby-Dick took off his leg: "then it was that his torn body and gashed

soul into one another, and so interfusing, made him mad."<sup>(p.160)</sup>

He is the person who allows his private values to override all other considerations. He is eventually defeated by the world he has renounced. Either rebelling against his social obligations—he ignores the duty of the captain of the whaling ship; he doesn't care about catching the whales, rather he is engrossed in revenging Moby-Dick—or cutting himself off from other people, he is only concerned about mad Pip. This sympathy for Pip dues to his conviction that Pip is the same sort of person. Being aloof, Ahab forsakes his changes of earthly salvation and condemns himself to a life of discontent and unhappiness. Ahab has a special reason—he considers himself as a Gnostic—for acting as he does, but basically he prefers not to participate in the common human fate and such preference operates to make him, in the end, merely the "fool of fate."<sup>(29)</sup> Ahab does not communicate with other persons. There are some occasions when he seems to communicate with mad Pip. But this sympathy for Pip means for Ahab that he is the same kind of a mad man. When Ahab speaks of his forty years whaling to Starbuck, he seems to try to communicate with Starbuck. He says, "Close! 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—I see my wife and my child in thine eye."<sup>(p.444)</sup> However, this attitude doesn't continue for long. He tries to communicate with other persons, but it is too late for him to change his attitude. Ahab's being an *isolato* is another reason why he can be considered a Gnostic. He tries to be an ascetic by being aloof from his fellow human beings.

(26) Brian Way, *Herman Melville: Moby-Dick*(Southampton: The Camelot Press Ltd., 1977), p. 44.

(27) Leon F. Seltzer, *The Vision of Melville and Conrad* (Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 1970), p. 97.

(28) *Ibid.*, p. 97.

(29) *Ibid.*, p. 100.



Ahab regards the deity as evil, and concentrates on attacking that evil deity in every possible way. By limiting himself to attack the evil, he doesn't allow himself to appreciate the goodness of life.

Since Ahab regards the material world as evil, he concentrates on denouncing the material without considering the meaning of the material as it is. He only considers the spiritual significance of the material. He is an idealist. He regards the world as a prison and *Moby-Dick* is a wall. He wants to destroy the material world. According to gnostic cosmology, the material world is the evil deity's creation. To escape the design of the evil deity, man should be an idealist. In this sense Ahab is gnostic.

Ahab is an *isolato*. He denounces human relationships. Ahab's denial of human relationships is due to his conviction that he alone has grappled with the evil world and other people do not know about this. He considers himself as a Gnostic who has the Gnosis. Ahab's being an *isolato* can be considered as gnostic because he does not want to have relations with the world.

## VI

Melville's contact with Gnosticism through Bayle's and Norton's writings led him to use Gnostic thinking and allusions in *Moby-Dick*. Gnosticism which could explain the existence of evil in the world fascinated Melville. The Gnostics held creation as the work of an evil deity and the true self (pneuma) was imprisoned in the flesh and in matter. Therefore, they regarded the flesh and the matter as the designs of the Demiurge and tries to destroy the matter and the flesh. Since they regarded the creator of this world as evil, they oppose

the Demiurge in two ways: libertinism and asceticism. Both ways are seemingly contradictory but came from the same deep hostility toward the world, the flesh and the creator of this world. They tried to keep the true self from the Demiurge. They are mostly concerned with evil.

Therefore, the examination of the influence of Bayle and Norton and discussion of Gnostic ideas and expression of them in Melville's biographical data and in Ahab's characterization in *Moby-Dick* can show that the influence of Gnosticism on Melville is very crucial in *Moby-Dick*.

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