

# METAPHYSICAL QUEST IN HERMAN MELVILLE'S NOVELS

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## Abstract

*The world is full of ambition and thirsty fullness. But it is not even fulfilled by any individual. Writers like Melville, it has been glittered by their own writings. The present research paper has shown the metaphysical elements are to abound in Typee, Moby Dick, and Billy Budd. In the present study from the selected novels, metaphysical elements are picturised. Usually, man versus nature is common. But Melville has differently thought that Man's quest is to be for God's congregation is shown.*

**Keywords:** ambition, glittered, metaphysical, abound, a congregation

Most novels of Herman Melville have been about man's quest for everything surrounding the world. But this present study edifies the quest for metaphysical elements, in the sense that has to be connected with religious affairs. In Moby Dick, the author has stapled the protagonist every activity connected with God. Though it is an adventurous novel, he has been submerged by his own way to God. He took a voyage to overcome nature, so there would be a conflict between man and nature. So automatically nature is indirectly connected with celestial themes.

Hence Melville is proud to be a metaphysical man, so each and every chapter of Typee, Moby Dick, and Billy Budd. In Typee the cannibalism is being shown according to the Bible a barbarian would be defeated by a common man (layman) like Goliath. Knowingly or Unknowingly Melville has connected metaphysical elements on bearing all the characters coherently. In Billy Budd, he is sailor and anti-hero in the sense, he himself acting as hero and villain. Nevertheless, he bounded with metaphysical surrounding because he had faith in God. So he was very reliable to his co-characters. From the beginning into the end the author has plaited the story into metaphysical elements.

The outcome of the novel Typee is to bring out the archives of cannibalism in the Island where our narrator and his friend Toby has faced and caught by them. By means of this novel, the narrator has been stimulating the minds of every reader of the same novel. The central idea has blossomed through the navigator.

At the beginning of the novel, Tommo and Toby thought to travel through the ocean to the island of Pacific Ocean named Marquesas Island, south pacific. They used ‘the dolly’ to travel the ocean.

When they reached the island nobody was to receive them. They got fear to be on that island their after. Because they knew that the island was filled with cannibals. (One who eats human) after that, they happened to meet a fellow on that island. In the beginning, they did not even speak to him in a single word. Then Toby started to speak and asked him that I am from the native place we desire to know and live for a short period of time. After a long conversation, the island fellow conveyed that being a good atmosphere. So they both lived on that island

They were fed by servants. Afterwards, they could understand that these peoples were cannibalists. So the narrator planned to escape from that island. Unexpectedly Tommo had lost his friend Toby. Then they realise that from the beginning they ate human flesh here the author has stamped the inner ideas of the typical novel, Typee. He implies that the sentimental situation of a human being is exposed the psychological aspects have gone through throughout the novel. The mental agony of the characters is visualized by inserting natural goods like flood, ocean, ship, and whales.

In the middle of the novel, Tommo lost his friend Toby. He realised that he would be eaten by the Typee because of his separation. After knowing this Tommo decided to mingle with Typees. He encarved his skin and body with tattoos like Typees because he realized that those Typees were cannibals. Even if he decide to move away from that place it was difficult for him to escape. So he took bathe and sleep with half-dressed maidens and after a chat with Mehevi at the Ti, religious location. It symbolises that types are being captivised by religions bias. So Tommo planned to mingle with the Typees for executing his escape to plan. Finally, he escaped from the dangerous island. The author (reasercher) concludes that this novel is an apt example for summing up the characters and irrespective of natural things. It is an example of knowing one’s surrounding and its dangerous things. This shows the cannibalism in the Island and there the narrator was caught. The tragedy started from those events to move away from the character.

Moby Dick is a narrative novel. But it deals with the passionate mind absorbed in metaphysical questionings. In fact, this novel of Herman Melville has been interpreted variously by various critics. Several aspects of the novel have been highlighted, one of which is its metaphysical aspect which cannot certainly be ignored. There are at least two major characters whose minds are seen preoccupied with metaphysical questionings. These characters are Captain Ahab and Ishmael.

Captain Ahab can be considered a transcendentalist. Melville has made him a symbolist, who sees in his adversary “that intangible malignity which has been from the beginning.” Ahab’s quest of the monster Moby Dick takes on a metaphysical quality. In fact, the novelist has portrayed the character of Ahab on the lives of a classical tragic hero. Captain Ahab establishes his superiority by virtue of his confidence, nobility, and importance. He appears ‘god-like’ with his ‘humanities’. Ishmael goes to the extent of his own bloody nails in his palms. Ahab is consumed with one unachieved revengeful desire. He has surrendered all his

thoughts and fancies to his sole supreme purpose. Forcing itself against gods and devils, his purpose has assumed an independent being of its own. According to Ishmael. Ahab's intense thinking has made him a 'Prometheus, and a vulture feeding constantly upon his heart. This vulture is of Ahab's own creation.

Ahab's pursuit of Moby Dick is a metaphysical quest after truth. It is a probe into the reality that lies hidden in the universe. In this aspect, Ahab has been represented as a different sort of Captain from those of from that of other whaling ships. Ahab is quite different from the jovial Captain Boomer who treats the loss of his arms as a mere accident. Likewise, before Ahab, Captain Derick appears to be a novice in the job of the whale. While other Captains are shallow in their thoughts. Ahab is quite profound. Then, Ahab's faith in Fedallah's prophecies also shows his metaphysical learnings. He utters these metaphysical thoughts, "Oh imponderable thoughts?" Ahab has come to conclude that grief has a longer ancestry and posterity than joy. Thus Ahab's thoughts have a metaphysical touch.

Herman Melville creates an epic out of his knowledge of the whale-fishery. By this activity, he tries to staple the quality of metaphysical attainments. At the beginning of the novel, extracts from Genesis, Job, Lucian, Darwin and the other works of Journalism have been given to show what information was available about a whale. Melville not only amasses details about whaling but also glorifies the flourishing American enterprise of the sperm-whale fishery of the nineteenth century. His association with Acushnet and the personal experiences of the whale fishery enabled him to create a great tragedy in which the Leviathan appears as a formidable force.

Moby Dick representing evil and mysterious nature symbolizes terror. It is not only the enormous size or the deformity of the jaw that made him terrible, but his intelligent malignity heightened the sense of fear. Nor was it his unwonted 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 aught else. This is somewhat remarkable that the White Whale had infernal afore thoughts of ferocity.

The death and the disaster caused to the hunters by the White Whale aroused the distracting furies of the pursuers. Birth and death are common. But according to Melville, it is commonly connected with God. Beside the attempts of the characters are also like that. He has crunched one leg of Ahab and disabled him. For Ahab, it is a sign of intellectual and spiritual exasperation. "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." Ahab transferred the intangible to the abhorred whale. "All evil to Crazy Ahab was visibly personified, and made practically assailable in Moby Dick."

It is easy to see in the White Whale the image of God. In the chapter "The Whale as a Dish", the Negro 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 that feeds him a lamp, and, like Stubb, eat him

by his own light, as you may say.” Melville describes the history of the whale as a delicacy. Though the Whale is a creature, it symbolism to God.

Eating whale by its own light is not a touch of sarcasm at 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 whale they are devouring.”

Moby Dick, different psychological meanings and the Jungian interpretations have been discovered. Henry A. Murray in his chapter on Moby Dick, ‘In Nomine Diabole has studied a psychological symbol. Freud divided the psyche into Id, Ego, and Super-ego. It represents the dark unconscious of man. Ego is the portrayal of the ideal. The White Whale has been treated as the symbol of Jehovah, the God of the 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 Melville’s Moby Dis “Who brought qeremiah into darkness, hedged him about, and made his path crooked; the God adopted by the fire and brimstone.” Puritan 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 virgin. “I will also send the teeth of beasts upon them.” “It will heap mischiefs upon them.” To me belongeth vengeance and recompense.

Melville, through Ahab, experienced the aggressive role of the society and the imperious Calvinistic religion epitomized in the Whale. It stifled the gratification of his legitimate urges and the Eros. The Whale is also the parental conscience. Melville had spent some time in the primitive unconventional life of Polynesia and on his return to America encountered hurdles in the gratification of Eros. Through Ahab, he delineated his predicament.

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-realization. The White Whale interpreted differently by critics is an immortal symbol, and it is nor 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 the the fixed meaning associated with a symbol that enriched a work of art and makes it profound and deep.

In this connection, it may be noted that the very names of characters have symbolic implications. The name of Billy Budd gives rise to a feeling of youthful happiness in us because of its association with a rose-bud the name Claggart has a jarring sound which, therefore, implies discard and disharmony. The name Vere is derived from the Latin word “verite” which means truth. And, indeed, Captain Vere embodies the truth of a particular kind, though not absolute or ideal truth. It has also been pointed out that Billy Budd, because of his goodness, represents the heart; and the Claggart, whose brow is large enough to suggest a more than average intellect, symbolizes the head as distinguished from the heart. Melville by the time he was writing this novel, has begun to put his faith largely in the dictates of the heart and had repudiated the claims of the head.

Captain Vere, according to his interpretation, symbolizes the will, the head and the heart in this novel come into conflict with each other, though the heart symbolised by Billy is not conscious of the conflict. The conflict leads to a catastrophe, and captain Vere takes charge of the affair, taking a decision which itself proves to be controversial through many people would approve of this decision because it was the only sensible decision under the circumstances. The names of the ships in this novel, like the names of the major characters, also have symbolic implications. The merchant ship the *Rights-of-Man* has been named after the title of a book of political philosophy written by an author called Thomas Plaine. The warship *Bellipotent* has a name which, literally, means a ship which is powerful in a war. At one point in the story, the *Bellipotent* chases a French warship by the name of the *Athee* which means “atheist”. Some of the other French warships are called the *Devastation* and the *Erebus* (meaning Hell). The names of the ships are therefore in themselves significant.

Viewed in symbolic terms, Billy is a personification of simplicity, goodness, and innocence. There is not the least touch of evil or wickedness in the character of Billy, and he is even unaware of the fact that evil exists. There is no malice in him, and he cannot conceive of there being any malice in the heart of anybody else. Being entirely and wholly good himself, he does not in the least suspect anybody else of any evil intentions. That is why he is totally unaware of Claggart’s secret hostility towards him; and, even when the old Dansker tells him that jemmy legs are “down on him”, Billy Budd pays no heed to the old Dansker’s warning. Billy aspects Claggart’s ironic remark about his handsome action in spilling the soup on its face value. In fact, this remark by Claggart is received by Billy as a compliment which, in his opinion, gives the lie to the old Danskar’s view that Claggart is inwardly antagonistic towards Billy. Billy’s simplicity, innocence, and goodness can thus be compared to those of Adam before the fall. These qualities of Bill make of him an entirely exceptional kind of man. Being human Billy suffers from a defect also. This is a vocal defect. This is a defect which, in a moment of crisis or at a time of emotional stress, renders stammer or stutter; and sometimes he can only produce a gurgling sound from his throat and is unable to speak coherently at all. It is precisely this defect which becomes responsible for Billy’s inability to defend himself when accused falsely of mutinous intentions by Claggart, and which leads Billy impulsively to give Claggart a severe blow that proves fatal. It has particularly to be noted that Billy had no prior intention to kill Claggart or even to do the least harm, bodily or otherwise, to that man. Billy’s action in hitting Claggart is totally unpremeditated.

In the selected novels of Melville, the basic elements of creature are being treated as God. Elements of metaphysical have been shown. Underlying attitudes about God are planned. All the events and characters of *Typee*, *Moby Dick*, and *Billy Budd*, have been about their own destiny towards God. He himself is an omniscient, Omni potent and Omni present.



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