

Beyond the Resentful Sibling Strife: Melville's *Pierre*

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And the angel of the LORD said unto her [Hagar], Behold, thou art with child, and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name Ishmael; because the LORD hath heard thy affliction. (Gen. 16:11)

But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. (Gal. 2:11)

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Introduction

Who is the leading character in *Pierre; or, the Ambiguities*, written by Herman Melville (1819–91) in 1852? Is the title character Pierre or his putative half-sister Isabel? This question might strike a reader as rather ridiculous when the reader sees this seemingly mono-layered story break down into two

Keywords: Melville, *Pierre*, Isabel, Sibling, Ishmael

different tiers, an intelligible plot focused upon Pierre and an unintelligible sub-plot focused upon Isabel¹⁾. Isabel, it appears, makes full use of her peculiar features of indefinable otherness. Isabel, a completely mysterious figure with un-European features, a “dark, olive cheek” (46) and “immense soft tresses of the jettiest hair” (118), leads Pierre (and readers as well) into the realm of Myth and Gothic. Anne Williams defines the mythos of Gothic as a genre that “moves from background to foreground the rejected other,” or “the supposed irrational, the ambiguous, the unenlightened, the chaotic, the dark, the hidden, the secret” (8). Thus, *Pierre* has a potential to be categorized as a Gothic novel unfolded by Isabel, a “half unearthly” other being (118). Pierre sees Isabel as an unknowable ambiguous other being. Her mysteriousness unfolds so far, that even “the whole story of Isabel” in the penultimate chapter “seems an enigma, a mystery, an imaginative delirium” (353–54).

Isabel does not content herself to stay an innocent simpleton, merely begging for protection from Pierre. Nor does she stand in as an affectionate elder sister, giving emotional solace to her younger brother in distress. Yet judging from her reaction to the word she “by chance overhear[s] them whispering,” “the word beautiful, spoken of my hair, and beautiful, spoken of myself” (123), we may suspect Isabel of holding hidden designs. Isabel strategically uses her own exotic physical beauty, her only resource for survival, putting into practice what postgenderist Donna Jeanne Haraway calls “politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims” (195). To use Ken Eagan’s phraseology, Isabel dares to become a “quintessential Gothic ‘monster’” (149), “truly other, truly uncanny, precisely because she is ‘outside of [homogeneous] culture’” (155). She probably does

so intentionally, but for what purpose? In this paper, I intend to clarify three problems, i.e., Isabel's hidden motive in appearing before Pierre and consequently ruining his life, the ethico-psychological problem lying beyond Isabel's apparent resentment and anger at her sibling, and how Melville involved himself through Isabel in this story of sibling strife²⁾.

I. Isabel with a Non-Innocuous Mask

Isabel, the symbol of an outsider of society or excluded other being, simultaneously impersonates unworldliness and sacredness and gothicizes the story. In confronting her putative half-brother Pierre for the first time, Isabel gives off "rapt silence and unearthliness" (143) with her hair "slantingly fall[ing] over her as though a curtain were half drawn from before some saint enshrined" (118). To Pierre, the benumbed and overwhelmed onlooker, "Isabel wholly soared out of the realms of mortalness, and...became transfigured in the highest heaven of uncorrupted Love" (142). When Isabel tells Pierre how she became convinced of the existence of her own biological father, she kneels before "the deep oaken recess of the double casement" (149). The recess in question "seem[s] now the immediate vestibule of some awful shrine, mystically revealed through the obscurely open window, which ever and anon was still softly illumined by the mild heat-lightnings and ground-lightnings" (149-150). "[W]ith the heat-lightnings and the ground-lightnings," "the physical electricalness of Isabel seemed reciprocal" (151). Isabel epiphanizes herself in a rather otherworldly way. Isabel apotheosizes herself with the proud declaration, "I see God's indignant ambassador to me, saying—Up, up, Isabel, and take no terms from the common world, but do thou make terms to it, and grind thy fierce rights out of it!" (160). Thus

“[t]ransformed she stood before him, and Pierre, bowing low over to her, owed that irrespective, darting majesty of humanity...” (160).

According to William B. Dillingham, Isabel clearly demonstrates that “the Gnostic context is apparent” (201) in Isabel’s life story when she utters, “God called thee Pierre, not poor Bell” (89). Elsewhere, the implied narrator of *Pierre* notes that “[t]he deep voice of the being of Isabel called to him from out the immense distances of sky and air, and there seemed no veto of the earth that could forbid her heavenly claim” (173). Isabel pretends to be a medium through which gnosis (knowledge) of the highest God calls Pierre. From another perspective, one may argue that Isabel goes so far as to misuse Emersonian Transcendentalism and compare herself with a godlike being. Inhabiting both positive and negative domains, Isabel assumes the roles of a messenger of divine tidings and a “necromancer” (128). To borrow the words from Gnosis, she sees herself as a Demiurge-like being, an evil/imperfect god. This explains Isabel’s motive in calling herself Bell, as I will show in the next section.

She also makes use of the guitar, a memento of her mother, giving forth “the myriad serpentinings of the...melody.”

Instantly the room was populous with sounds of melodiousness, and mournfulness, and wonderfulness; the room swarmed with the unintelligible but delicious sounds. The sounds seemed waltzing in the room; the sounds hung pendulous like glittering icicles from the corners of the room; and fell upon him with a ringing silveryness; and were drawn up again to the ceiling, and hung pendulous again, and dropped down upon him again with the ringing silveryness. Fire-flies seemed buzzing in the

sounds; summer-lightnings seemed vividly yet softly audible in the sounds. (126)

Isabel's use of the guitar embarrasses Pierre, and consequently prevents him from clearly defining her identity. This mystification also further deepens her childish way of speaking: calling herself "Poor Bell," she declares to Pierre that "I have always been, and feel that I must always continue to be a child, though I should grow to three score years and ten" (148). Isabel strategically resorts to what the feminist psychologist Julia Kristeva calls "semiotic," kind of a pre-language/pre-symbolic tool for self-assertion adopted by those in an infantile status or those in a pre-oedipal/non-adult status free both from the Word(/Logos/Law) of the Father or logic(/male)-centered patriarchy and from the binary gender system that supports patriarchy. On this point, I agree with Monika Mueller (111). Incidentally, the "semiotic" roughly corresponds to what the feminist critic *Hélène Cixous* terms "*écriture féminine* [women's writing]." Isabel discerns that the atavistic return to the "semiotic" is the only possible way for those other beings, herself included, to occupy their due places and make themselves known and intelligible to the members of society who would otherwise disregard their existence. These non-existent, invisible, excluded other beings, Isabel included, are likely to transmit their images through a channel different from the channel ordinary people rely on, one by which they can confirm their social position and make themselves intelligible to other society members. With this other mode of speech, Isabel induces Pierre to seek for her, and she does so effectively. For their first rendezvous, Isabel entrusts her letter to the "hooded and obscure-looking figure, whose half-averted countenance [Pierre] could but indistinctly discern" (61). Isabel

provokes Pierre to read it to the last by saying: “Read no further. If it suit thee, burn this letter; so shalt thou escape the certainty of that knowledge” (64).

The question here is this: how in the world can one remain genuinely childish and innocent while being fully aware of one’s own beauty and intending to fully use that beauty for one’s own interest? Isabel, having often “heard the word beautiful, spoken of my hair, and beautiful spoken of myself,” asserts that “[t]hey were wrong not to say it openly to me” (123). With help from her outstanding beauty, Isabel convinces Mary Glendinning [Pierre’s widowed mother] of her identity as the illegitimate daughter of Pierre Glendinning [whose namesake son is Isabel’s younger brother]. The vexed Mary blurts out, “[Isabel] must be both poor and vile—some chance-blow of a splendid, worthless rake, doomed to inherit both parts of her infecting portion—vileness and beauty” (131).

Isabel’s strategy proves compelling because Pierre implores Isabel, a “[g]irl of all-bewildering mystery” to “[s]peak to me; —sister, if thou indeed canst be a thing that’s mortal—speak to me, if thou be Isabel!” (126). To his solicitation, Isabel replies “Mystery! Mystery! Mystery of Isabel! Mystery! Mystery! Isabel and Mystery!” (126). Her person and words deeply disturb his mind: “all this had bewitched him, and enchanted him, till he had sat motionless and bending over, as a tree-transformed and mystery-laden visitant, caught and fast bound in some necromancer’s garden” (143).

Innocent and uneducated though she may appear, Isabel seems to be aware of and intent on misusing cultural circumstances of the day. The grip of Puritanism on New England slackened at the beginning of the nineteenth century. A boom of spiritualism burst upon the scene with the inflow of Swedenborgian

theology. The description of the “soft, slow, sad, to-and-fro, meditative stepping” (114) in *Pierre* evokes the *séance* of the day. By exploiting the spiritualist assertion that a spirit knocks on the door, Isabel can mystify her message more and more. As Isabel recounts her childhood memory at Ulver’s house, Pierre “hear[s] a soft, slow, sad, to-and-fro, meditative stepping on the floor above”—the stepping “again and again audible in the silent room” (114).

The sound in question is attributed to Delly Ulver, the housemaid who is terrified that Pierre’s haughty mother Mary will expel her for her extramarital affair. Embarrassed by the sudden appearance of his yet-unknown half-sister, Pierre is not, it seems, aware of Delly’s existence at this stage. Nor is he fully mindful of the harsh reality of how Mary as a landowner exploits and ruins the life of the tenant’s daughter Delly. Delly’s existence “on the floor above” (118), however, benefits Isabel in further stimulating and reinforcing Pierre’s radicalness. Isabel knows that Pierre’s radicalness makes him more gullible and susceptible to her manipulations.

One may argue that Pierre’s mind is radicalized by Ralph Waldo Emerson’s (1803–82) brand of Transcendentalism even before meeting Isabel, and that Isabel can fathom so. Emerson claimed for independence from the authorities, religious or political, and stressed the need to exclusively heed the voice from within. In emptying his mind of all worldly thoughts to catch the inner voice, Emerson appears, however, rather passive when set beside Pierre, the radical who exclaims “Oh, men are jailers; jailers of themselves; and in Opinion’s world ignorantly hold their noblest part a captive to their vilest... The heart! the heart! ’tis God’s anointed; let me pursue the heart!” (91). Having lived too long in adverse circumstances, and being keen to detect the personalities of the people around her, Isabel exploits this radical propensity of Pierre’s.

If, as suggested in this introduction, *Pierre* is double tiered, it follows that the second narrative is told by Isabel in a gothic manner that enables her to make her ghostlike-easily-ignored being (who happens to be Isabel) known to Pierre. If this reasoning is on the mark, Isabel is a narrator comparable to the dark side of Ishmael in *Moby-Dick*, and Isabel's life story parallels Ishmael's narrative of *Moby Dick* and Captain Ahab. In such an instance, it would follow that Isabel succeeds to the position of Ishmael, the illegitimate son born between Abraham and his Egyptian handmaid Hagar. By dint of his position as an illegitimate son born out of a slave mother, Ishmael is detested and ostracized from the community by Sarah, Abraham's long-barren wedded wife. To borrow from Adamson (69-70), "the Ishmael-Isaac myth gripped and dominated [Melville's] entire imagination."

Let us quickly browse the Ishmael-Isaac myth. Though long infertile, Sarah finally bears a child and names him Isaac. Frantic to secure her son's birth-right, she treats Hagar and Ishmael harshly [Fig.1]. Likewise, Mary Glendinning, Pierre's mother, detests Isabel, the illegitimate daughter born to her deceased husband before their marriage. She voices her contempt by exclaiming that Isabel "must be both poor and vile—some chance-blow of a splendid, worthless rake, doomed to inherit both parts of her infecting portion—vileness and beauty" (131).

When Pierre ignores Mary's pre-arrangements for his marriage to Lucy and insists upon Isabel over Lucy, Mary not insensibly reads his behavior as a sort of belated drift toward adolescent rebellion. Mary insinuates that she should evict "that infamous Ned and that miserable Delly" (103) from manor Saddle Meadows. Ned is one of her tenants, a married man who has borne an illegitimate baby with Delly. Rev. Falsgrave, whose salary, "nominally supplied



Fig. 1

“Hagar and Ishmael” (1880). Jean Charles Cazin (1841-1901).

Hagar and her son Ishmael were expelled by Abraham at the request of the jealous Sarah.

by the rental of the pews,” and largely from the “purse” of the “untiring benefactress [Glendinning Mary]” (97), readily sanctions the eviction when Mary requests it. Mary expects that the eviction of the two, especially Delly, would be a serious blow to Isabel, who lives in the house of Delly’s parents as their housemaid. Mary is convinced that the eviction would drive Isabel out of Glendinning Manor.

Isabel’s intense anger at Mary shows itself more clearly when Isabel requests “a hooded and obscure-looking figure” (61) to deliver her letter to Pi-

erre at the very moment Pierre lays his hand on the wicket-gate to Lucy's house to inform her of Mary's decision to hasten the marriage. Isabel intends to block the marriage Mary plans to arrange between Pierre and Lucy. In strategically directing the delivery of the letter, Isabel forces Pierre to see her [face] "mournfully and reproachfully looking out upon him" (60).

II. Isabel as an Envious Satan in a Sibling Rivalry for Father's/God's Love

Perhaps, Isabel's divine aura does not spontaneously shed as suggested in the above section. It may seem, rather, that Isabel sheds by choice to further her surreptitious intent. Here arises the question of whether her name, Isabel or Bell, is autonym or pseudonym. While narrating her life story, Isabel inadvertently tells Pierre, "from as early a time as I can remember, I have nearly always gone by the name of Bell" (148). Yet Pierre has no means to verify her name. Let us then probe into the symbolic connotation of her name, Isabel/Bell. The name "Bell" denotes her kinship with Baal pagan and antagonism to Jehovah. Bel(l) or Baal was fervently worshipped and allowed to run amok in the Northern Kingdom of Israel by the wife of King Ahab, i. e., Jezebel (whose name rhymes with Isabel). Bell, Ball, and Jezebel are merged together as embodiments of monstrous and sexual power in nineteenth century Euro-American society (Rogin 169).

From a psychological viewpoint, Isabel in *Pierre* is a woman who strategically embodies the "object" in Kristeva's terminology or the "repressed" [the cathected representation/the desired but feared image] in Freud's—the reverse side of self. The "object" corresponds, as explained later, to Isabel's hidden anger and resentment of Pierre. Purposefully, Isabel [/Queen Jezebel]

may stimulate and activate, in Pierre as well as King Ahab (or by extension Captain Ahab), “the unconscious, a dimension of self that is not formed according to the cultural structure of Law”...but is kind of a self, hidden in the dark, “an unknowable but nevertheless real ‘something’ that eventually comes to light in a way and at a time not under control” (Williams 158). If she succeeds in stimulating and activating, the selves of both Pierre and Ahab swell exorbitantly out from the norm, breaking the Law of Father: Pierre commits incest and Ahab kills Father (-God-equated-whale). If Isabel shares a secret desire with Jezebel, she succeeds in disrupting patriarchy or the order of law, the order represented by Father/God.

What if one could temporarily postulate as a working hypothesis that the Jezebel-analogized Isabel carries a revenge plan against Pierre, the plan of disrupting the patriarchy and ruining Pierre’s life? This is a complicated and aggravated problem. In some cases, paranoid victims are likely to perceive a distorted reality that is likely to be disproportionately magnified and further distorted. In other cases, victims are prone to forcefully suppress genuine feelings of envy against sibling(s), and by doing so activate painful emotions of self-contempt and self-disgust. A defensive psychological mechanism somehow enables them to carry out this process unwittingly³⁾. What are the implications if this first case corresponds to Isabel’s? And what would follow if one was allowed to take this hypothesis one step further? It would be unsurprising, when taking such a step, to find an analogy between Isabel and Satan in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, and for that matter the Satan-analogized Claggart in *Billy Budd*. A passage from *Paradise Lost* sheds crucial light on Isabel’s suppressed resentment towards Pierre.

Sight hateful, sight tormenting! thus these two,
Imparadised in one another's arms,
The happier Eden, shall enjoy their fill
Of bliss on bliss; while I to Hell am thrust,
Where neither joy nor love, but fierce desire,
Among our other torments not the least,
Still unfulfilled, with pain of longing pines....

Paradise Lost 4.505-11

Satan sees “the two [Adam and Eve]” basking in the love of God/Father, and covets their prelapsarian innocence, smugness, and prerogative position in Paradise to exclusively receive the love from God/Father. According to Joseph Adamson, Satan is comparable to Claggart, who sees that Billy, the new-comer to the warship, receives preferential treatment from Vere, the captain “old enough to have been Billy’s father” (115). Revealing the envy of the firstborn against the second, this pattern is reinforced and repeated again and again in *Paradise Lost*, *Pierre*, and *Billy Budd*. When the firstborn witnesses the self-satisfaction of the evictor with his or her evictor’s status “in the light of the [parent(s)]’ radiant smile and gleaming eye,” the firstborn cannot but feel “cheated out of that which one is entitled to, betrayed and abandoned by a loved one” (Adamson 154-55).

We will turn now to the scene where Isabel confesses to Pierre: “Pierre, the lips that do now speak to thee, never touched a woman’s breast” (114). On the way from the institution for the mentally disabled to her still unknown master, who is to hire her as a maid, Isabel happens to meet a toddler—an experience that foreshadows the existence of her then unrecognized younger

brother. She reminisces, “Oh, how I envied it, lying in its happy mother’s breast, and drawing life and gladness, and all its perpetual smilingness from that white and smiling breast” (122). Overhearing these remarks, we might surmise that Isabel venting her irrepressible envy and anger directly at Pierre for his favored position, for monopolizing parental love.

If “the person’s mere [seeming] independence or difference is experienced as an attack on the self” of the narcissistically injured (Adamson 150), if Isabel is a precursor to Claggart, and if Satan’s position is comparable to Isabel’s and Claggart’s, these configurations arguably reveal that Isabel, Satan, and Claggart feel humiliated, dethroned, and expelled from paradise by the newcomers, Pierre, Adam and Eve, and Billy, respectively. Let us verify and reinforce the schema of Ishmael-Isabel-Satan-Claggart versus Isaac-Pierre-Billy by recounting and discussing the biblical story of Isaac and his descendants in the Bible. We will begin the discussion by referring to the biblical Isaac.

Isaac successfully receives his birthright from his father Abraham through the crafty design of his mother Sarah to expel her husband’s unlawful wife Hagar and Hagar’s illegitimate son Ishmael. In his turn, Isaac in his declining years favors Esau, one of the twin sons begotten by Rebekah. Despite his preference for the elder son Esau, Isaac is deceived into passing down his birthright to the younger Jacob, the favorite of his wife Rebekah. Taking advantage of Isaac’s blindness, Rebekah fools him into taking Jacob for Esau. The deception stirs Esau’s resentment and anger at Jacob for usurping patrimony.

Jacob has his so-called ladder during his escape from his elder brother Esau, asleep in the desert with a stone pillow — the Pillow-Pillar Stone suggestive of church, the earthly abode of God, and Jesus Christ. The symbolical meaning

of the dream is God's promise that Jacob will become a patriarch whose descendants come to rule Israel. We see here the sarcastic lineage that connects Jacob to Pierre, neither of whom are firstborns, both of whom are associated with stones. Jacob is inseparable from the Pillow Pillar Stone. Pierre, whose name means "rock" or "stone" in French, is also related to the stone. While Jacob sleeps with his head on the stone, Pierre slides into the "horrible interspace" (134) between the earth and the Memnon Stone and lies there. Jacob hears a divine message, God's promise to make Jacob a sire of Israel, transmitted through the power of the stone. Pierre meanwhile, hears an oracle-like voice beneath the Memnon Stone as if it were the real Memnon Stone. Interestingly, what Pierre hears is not God's message, but his own blasphemies: "[D]o thou, Mute Massiveness, fall on me!.... [F]or whom better canst thou crash than him who now lies here invoking thee?" (134). Pierre boldly analogizes himself to Christ, as the implied narrator reports: "in the Enthusiast to Duty, the heaven-begotten Christ is born; and will not own a mortal parent, and spurns and rends all mortal bonds" (106).

Pierre, moreover, never becomes a sire like Jacob. Isabel, it seems, succeeds in disturbing the prearranged plan of the second born to be a patriarch. In the final moments before his own suicide, after snatching poison from Isabel's bosom, the drug that kills her, Pierre gasps: "in thy breasts, life for infants lodgeth not, but death-milk for thee and me! — The drug!" (360). Thus, Isabel fulfills her desire for revenge on the Glendinning Family by inducing its last genuine male member Pierre to run away from and become disinherited by his mother, and by letting both the mother and son die. By extension, Isabel's fulfilled desire symbolizes her anger against the (upper-)middle-class Anglo-Saxon society by upsetting the biblical prophecy.

Beyond the Resentful Sibling Strife

These cases, biblical and Melvillean, demonstrate the common theme of sibling rivalry. Here I must hasten to add that the frustration may not necessarily weigh heaviest on the firstborn son, but rather the second born. This is most strikingly exemplified by Melville's own bitter resentment against his elder brother, the firstborn Gansevoort. Referring to the Isaac-Ishmael myth, Adamson designates Gansevoort as "the beloved Isaac" and Herman as "the rejected Ishmael" (61-70). With his physical beauty and high academic achievements, Gansevoort outshone Herman, monopolized the love of their mother and father, and undertook the role of paterfamilias after the death of their father until his own death at the age of thirty-one. The author's own experience of being wronged, of receiving a disproportionately low distribution of parental love, must have boosted his empathy with Isabel in *Pierre*, Claggart in *Billy Budd*, and, lastly, Satan in *Paradise Lost*, a being possibly analogous, in a symbolic sense, with "the brother" of Christ, the loved one whom God the Father places at his right hand. If it is not entirely beside the mark that Satanic features, as Adamson implies (46), are "not so much in innate evil, as in the frustrations that follow upon the failure of love," then it follows that the problem afflicting Milton's Satan, Melville's Isabel, and Claggart lies rooted in a much more basic problem of how domestic love should be distributed, of which rivalrous sibling the parents should favor.

If we extend this view, we may even designate Captain Ahab as another Ishmaelian/Isabelian figure. Captain Ahab and the biblical Ishmael are out from their affectionate homes to sea and desert, vast outlands akin to where Claggart and Isabel go. Isabel, like Ahab, Ishmael, and Claggart, has been in a ship; to be specific, an immigrant ship. Etiologically, the name Ahab in Hebrew means brother of the father, with a connotation that Ahab symbolically

fighters against his own brother(s) and father (the Father/God) at the same time, vying for paternal authority. Put differently, the name Ahab fits a son who suffers not simply from the oedipal problem, but from sibling conflict as well. Recognizing himself as the biblical Ishmael expelled in the desert, and imagining the pain of Ishmael, Ahab bestows kindness upon a little African boy named Pip. The terrified Pip jumps into the sea during the whale chase, floats alone for half an hour, and is rescued too late to escape insanity. Pip invokes in the mind of Ahab the image of Ishmael wandering in the desert.

Reference to paradise in Milton's poem may turn out to be appropriate as well as sarcastic in a historical context where, in the middle class Euro-American society of the nineteenth century, established two so-called separate spheres, an outside society and a patriarchic yet virtually mother-centered "Domestic Eden." Isabel is shunned from the Glendinning manor (Saddle Meadows) by Pierre's mother, the widow of the sacrosanct Glendinning family.

With "[h]er stately beauty...ever somewhat martial in it" (20), Mary, the "daughter of a General" (20), is compared to the "high-up, and towering, and all-forbidding...edifice of [Pierre's] mother's immense pride;—her pride of birth, her pride of affluence, her pride of purity, and all the pride of high-born, refined, and wealthy Life, and all the Semiramanian pride of woman" (89). War-like and cruel (sort of like Mary Glendinning), Semiramis was a legendary queen of Assyria who restored the city of Babylon, the symbolic city of evil. In the tacit understanding of the day, "[t]he view of innocence had become...enshrined in the [middle-class domestic] ideology of 'separate spheres' as the whole nature of women" (Ferguson 122). Yet Isabel exposes the deceptiveness of the domestic ideology supposedly represented by Pierre's widowed

mother Mary, or the Virgin-Mary-invoking mother. Meanwhile, Isabel misuses her own false innocence and feigned childishness by making a sly dig at Mary to depict her, in the eye's of Pierre, as *an anti-Angel in the domestic garden*. By divesting Mary of Pierre's love, Isabel successfully turns the tables and makes it easier to wrest from Pierre domestic sympathy and affection, emotions the orphan Isabel has not been allowed to enjoy. The affection from her brother, the namesake of his/her dead father, is a substitute for paternal love.

III. The Opportune Conditions for Isabel's Retaliation

In the mind of American Puritans, providence had already decided their future. The prophecy/God's promise/founding vision was awaiting to be fulfilled. In an Emersonian vein, Melville deplores the following in *Mardi*:

We are full of ghosts and spirits; we are as grave-yards full of buried dead, that start to life before us. And all our dead sires, verily, are in us; that is their immortality. From sire to son, we go on multiplying corpses in ourselves.... (593)

"In the familiar refrain," writes Myra Jehlen, "Americans would have 'no sense of history,' precisely because they had already done with history at the beginning" (198). "By presenting itself as the fulfillment of the past, [America] left its children no future but the fulfillment of the founding vision" (197). "[Pierre] is himself, and also a corporate person (father, grandfather, and great-grand-father) with one name.... He has absorbed time, is himself both history and its transcendence, in himself both founding father and son, as

Pierre with his father” (206-7).

By the mid-nineteenth century, greed for possession combined with desire for economic growth put fundamental Puritanism at the brink of extinction and disqualified the Puritans from inheriting the dream of their ancestors or Pilgrim Fathers, i.e., the dream of building the city of God/Father. The Puritans of the day were aware of this and fought against their extinction by imitating their fathers. Pierre sarcastically represents these religiously stunted Puritans. Neal L. Tolchin indicates that Pierre indirectly repeats the life of his father, a character partly modeled after Melville's own father Allan Melvill(e).

According to Philip Young, Allan begot an illegitimate daughter before marrying. Allan Melvill(e) actually went bankrupt and passed away when the author was merely twelve. A link between Melville's father and Pierre's father seems likely. The close link between the Melvilles' circumstances and those of the characters in *Pierre* reveals the author's emotional attachment toward the latter and alerts us to the peculiar instantiation of what Jehlen describes: Pierre repeats his father's amoral life instead of trying to fulfill the moral/democratic, though suspicious, vision of his glorious grandfather, the Independent War General also named Pierre Glendinning. Hence, the author's father Allan imports French goods while the fictional character Pierre takes up a French import, Isabel. Thus, via Pierre, the author sarcastically performs his filial duty to “assume his father's world, and with it, his father's identity” (Jehlen 194).

From the very beginning, the vision of the early settlers was impossible to fulfill in a rigorous sense. As for Pierre, even a mere imitation of his most recent forbears was fated to fail. Pierre Glendinning, the namesake of both his father and grandfather, owes a duty to his forbears yet appears to be inferior

to them even physically. He himself laments:

[W]hen thou goest to that bed [the camp-bedstead that his Grandfather slept in the field during the American War of Independence], how humbling the thought, that thy most extended length measures not the proud six feet four of thy grand John of Gaunt sire! The stature of the warrior is cut down to the dwindled glory of the fight. For Pierre is a warrior too; Life his campaign, and three fierce allies, Woe and Scorn and Want, his foes. (270)

What is worse to Pierre, “[a] powerful and populous family had by degrees run off into the female branches; so that Pierre found himself surrounded by numerous kinsmen and kinswomen, yet companioned by no surnamed male Glendinning” (7-8). This implies the collapse of the patriarchic Glendinning family and, by extension, the patriarchic middle-class society of mid-nineteenth-century America. Isabel intends to accelerate the extinction of the male lineage in the Glendinning by seducing and ruining the only remaining descendant, Pierre. This literally vindicates Jean-François Lyotard, one of the representative of postmodern literary theorists. Lyotard argues that postmodernity brought about the collapse and loss of credibility of the “Grand Narrative [Meta-Narrative],” because “Grand Narrative” corresponds to various discourses of modernism that emphasize scientism, progress, and freedom from thralldom. In the case of Pierre’s Grandfather, the master narrative corresponds to the possibility of American democracy. Feminists may extend Lyotard’s argument by adding that these modernistic discourses hide the deceptive patriarchy Isabel exposes.

Unlike Pierre's Grandfather, General Glendinning, a fighter for the cause of the nation against the Tories, Regulars, and Indians who side with England during the Revolutionary War, Pierre struggles for mere subsistence against "the wide world...banded against him" (270). This market economy society is comically supported and personified by the ardent appreciator of "The Tear [Pierre's sentimental poem]," who, "finding a small fragment of the original manuscript containing a dot (tear), over an i (eye)," "begged the distinguished favor of being permitted to have it for a brooch" (263). The pronoun "He" in the next sentence suggests that this admirer of the best-selling poet Pierre Glendinning is a homosexual male. Begging a "brooch," "he" is an effeminized male who over-assimilates himself into the feminized/sentimentalized American culture during the period of emerging capitalism. This gender-ambiguous man earnestly begs for Pierre's hand-written draft of his sentimental poem, "The Tear," in exchange for "a cameo-head of Homer" (263). To the feminized consumer society, both Pierre the sentimental poet in feminized America and Homer the greatest epic poet in Western Civilization are equally fetishized into (fe)male accessories. Before seeing Isabel, Pierre was deeply immersed in this mass-produced kitschy culture where "the world worships Mediocrity and Common-Place" (264) and was pleased to hear the flattery: "certain speculators came to the Meadows to survey its water-power, if any, with a view to start a paper-mill expressly for the great author [Pierre Glendinning], and so monopolize his stationery dealings" (263-64)⁴⁾.

Looking upon the emergence of mass-produced culture from an ironic perspective, it may follow that the Founding Father's vision of democracy at the time of American independence was partially and satirically realized. What was previously unapproachable and incomprehensible, for example, the high-

brow canonical artwork best represented by Homer, was replaced by what is sentimental and therefore well-sold, not at all unlike “The Tear,” a poem that even the unsophisticated-albeit-educated middle class could understand. For the Marxism-minded or self-proclaimed Marxists, this was a breeding ground for a conceit like this: “If the transformation of capitalism requires the redistribution of property, then transformation of the family might involve a redistribution of affect” (Cvetkovitch 2).

As (one of those who pretends to be) a domestic Marxist demanding equal distribution of family affection, Isabel seizes the initiative from Pierre at the very beginning of her confession by saying, “Pierre, the lips that do now speak to thee, never touched a woman’s breast; I seem not of woman born” (114). Isabel is too distant from the middle-class close-knit affectionate family to know what family life is like. Isabel is unaware that “father” is a “word of kindness and of kisses” until she meets her father and he whispers the word into her ear (124).

The domestic ideology rampant in mid-nineteenth century Euro-American society further and further deepened family intimacy within the middle-class home, configuring the close-knit family into a breeding ground for psychological tensions such as Oedipal conflict and sibling strife. The close-knit middle-class patriarchic nuclear family was the smallest unit of, and an ideal model for, modern capitalistic society. This homogeneous society grew inward-looking as a consequence. Its culture was sentimentalized and its religion [Puritanism] was secularized, as represented by Rev. Falsgrave, a figure not able or allowed to oppose his patroness, Mary Glendinning. In this modern society, Puritanism was replaced by what Lévinas describes as love or the sentimental love in the context of the mid-nineteenth century feminized culture

of America. The love in question, according to Lévinas (21), was promoted up to the superlative level of religion.

Gillian Brown holds that Melville and his contemporaries were aware of this power of domestic love (166). This power would not merely blind Pierre and Mary to the tough realities outside of upper-middle-class homogeneous society, but would bring about their own destruction. Relying on this domestic love, Mary expects her son to be “a fine, proud, loving, docile, vigorous boy,” both “sweetly docile” to herself and “a haughty hero to the world” (20). Pierre goes on uncritically accepting his mother’s tacit request until he becomes half convinced of the identity of his half-sister. This was a sentimentalized kitschy love, the sort of love applauded in the best-selling pamphlet novels for female readerships, novels usually written by female writers but sometimes by male writers like the Pierre from the early stages of the story, the Pierre who has yet to meet Isabel in person. In circumstances such as this with feminine virtues upheld and paterfamilias’ power weakened, several problems concerning love in the domestic realm, i. e., sibling rivalry for parental love, and envy and resentment in the losing sibling against the winning one, come to the fore. Isabel exemplifies these problems.

To turn the tables on Pierre, the legitimate child on whom his parents have exclusively lavished their love, Isabel induces him to dismiss his accustomed ways of living or perceiving. Isabel endows Pierre with a Gnostic/heretical mode of perception so that she may force him to confront her reality as a half-sister deserted by his father.

IV. The Invisible Ethico-Psychological Problem

To the eye of a Feminist or Postcolonialist, Isabel might be seen as praise-

worthy for her role as the Gnostic mentor in correcting Pierre's mode of thinking and perceiving — the mode based on European Metaphysics and Logocentrism. Tranquility and equilibrium have both been upheld as the two basic virtues and goals of Western society since its very beginnings. There has been a tacit assumption that these ideals are realized only by those who can enjoy their subject positions of self-sufficiency as independent beings. On the contrary, no such tranquility or equilibrium can be realized by those dispossessed of the self-sufficient subject position, and Isabel is just such a person. In circumstances that render her "propertyless, deprived of lineage, divested of a coherent life story," argues Weinauer (149–50), "the 'dispossessed' Isabel comes to possess one thing: Pierre." Isabel bears away Pierre from Mary almost by force and subsequently forces Mary to disinherit her son. This conduct enables Isabel to avenge herself on Mary and Pierre: the former consequently loses her son and the latter is demoted to the same level of destitution occupied by Isabel herself. Isabel thus prepares conditions for Pierre's awakening to the ethico-psychological problem.

Not until his chance encounter with Isabel does Pierre realize *Lévinassian* ethics, a system of thought that Melville intuitively knew. Pierre begins to recognize why, in *Lévinassian* mode, one should be critical of the Western way of reasoning, the philosophical system that lays the foundation for thinking upon the establishment of the self as a subject. In this context, Pierre recognizes the reason for Isabel's opaque-faced appearance. Pierre's *ex-fiancée* Lucy delineates the face in question thus: "that mysterious, haunting face, which...thou thrice didst vainly try to shun...the dark-eyed, lustrous, imploring, mournful face, that so mystically paled, and shrunk at thine" (37). Isabel's enigmatic face persistently and annoyingly looms up before him, not disap-

pearing until Isabel satisfies her initial aim of procuring his promise to meet her and he acknowledges her as his half-brother. Pierre soothes Isabel as “thy protecting and all-acknowledging brother,” committing himself with “vows immutable, to be to thee, in all respects, and to the uttermost bounds and possibilities of Fate” (113). With her opaque face symbolizing her adversity as a being of too little significance in society to be noticed, Isabel reveals to Pierre her status as an excluded and wounded third party who is forced to permit herself to listen to “the amorous dialogue” of “the closed society” of “the couple” (Lévinas 32). *The closed society of the couple* implies the homogenous society by and for the upper-middle class or the intimate domestic circle, represented by Pierre and his mother Mary, or by Pierre and his fiancée Lucy. To the eye of Isabel, this “closed society” invalidates the binary concept of both Jürgen Habermas’ theory, private realm vs. public realm, and the notion of a separate sphere in the nineteenth-century domestic ideology, i. e., the domestic sphere vs. public sphere. To a third party like Isabel, both spheres are off-limits.

By expressing the need for the third party to have his or her say, Melville, it seems, tells us that the third party could have the potential power to change. The French film director Leon Carax (1960–), who cinematized *Pierre* into *Pola X* (1999), aptly thematized the issue of the third party. If Carax intended to suggest St. Paul from the sound of Pola [the feminine form of Paul], and if Pola corresponds to Isabelle/Isabel, then Isabel’s/Pola’s letter to Pierre and the life story Isabel narrates to Pierre form apt parallels of St. Paul’s epistles. Yet Paul, positioned uniquely as a third party, the position shared by Pola X/Isabel(le), is excluded from the status of the twelve apostles. Paul, who has never met Christ in person, by extension should be symbolically similar to his

feminine version Pola X/Isabelle in the Carax film, or to Isabel in Melville's fiction, who does not know her biological father.

Here one recognizes another justifiable analogy by recalling that St. Peter [Pierre in French] in the New Testament is regarded as Christ's top disciple among the Twelve, and that Pierre in Melville's work is supposed to be the only inheritor of the Glendinning Manor. If Pierre and Isabel(le) respectively correspond to St. Peter and St. Paul [Fig. 2], then what does the "X" in the film title signify? Carax suggests the sibblingship between Pierre and Isabel by using "X" to remind us of St. Peter's brother St. Andrew, who was crucified on an X-shaped cross [Fig. 3].



Fig. 2
"St. Peter and St. Paul" (1605).
Guido Reni (1575-1642).



Fig. 3
The Crucifixion of St. Andrew (1651).
Mattia Preti (1613-1699).

As already mentioned, in the New Testament, the dividing factor between St. Peter and St. Paul is experience with Christ [Father]: the former witnesses Christ directly while the latter witnesses him only indirectly. In Melville's *Pierre* and Carax's *Pola X*, Pierre has witnessed his licit father, the homonymously named Pierre Glendinning, while the latter has witnessed her illicit father only very rarely. Unlike St. Peter the Apostle, who is rather timid in accepting gentile Christians and enlarging the Christian community, St. Paul the Apostle of Gentiles is thought to be more radical and engaged in the propagation and contribution to the globalization of Christianity, as attested by the dispute between Peter and Paul in the Incident at Antioch. Paul remonstrates with Peter on his hesitancy in accepting Gentile Christians, by saying, "when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed" (Gal. 2: 11). From this analogy, St. Peter to Pierre, and St. Paul to Pola X/Isabel(le), Carax/Melville entrusts Isabel(le) as the third party to potentially change the ethnocentricity in Euro-American society.

Conclusion

In analyzing *Pierre* from the pre-oedipally rooted sibling "rivalries in the nursery, in which the child fights his fellow for the favor of the primal mother [—in the case of Isabel, for the favor of the father]," Joseph Adamson has been helpful. Adamson quotes the theory of narcissistic personality disorder by researchers such as Schiffer and Kohut, the theory that one is likely to again and again confront situations that force the mind back to traumatically defeating experiences of childhood. This phenomenon resembles what is suppressed in the realm of unconscious in Freud's theory of suppressed trauma resurfacing over and over again. Adamson aptly conjectures that "[t]he sib-

ling rivalry or struggling brothers theme in Melville's work...comes to mind" (196). Some of the Melville biographies, such as those written by E. H. Miller, Hennig Cohen, and Donald Yannella, examine Melville's own personal emotional conflict with his elder brother Gansevoort and his parents, who loved the firstborn Gansevoort exclusively. More to the point, Miller suggests that "Melville saw himself as a wounded Narcissus, an Ishmael" (105). Adamson agrees with Miller and goes on to point out the "many references to the Ishmael figure throughout Melville's work" (69-70). If Miller's/Adamson's statement is correct, this will reinforce our hypothesis that the Ishmaelian lineage stretches to Isabel rather than Pierre, with Isabel as a hidden narrator comparable to the dark side of Ishmael in *Moby-Dick*. Yet this hypothesis, it turns out, must be slightly modified. Ishmael the seaman narrator in *Moby-Dick* is rescued by a whaler named *Rachel*. To take a rather bold leap of logic, we can conjecture that Ishmael in *Moby-Dick* revives in the domestic realm [the Saddle Meadows] as a man comparable to Joseph, Rachel's son and Isaac's grandson, who angers his elder brothers of different mothers, Leah and Bilhah. The anger of Joseph's brothers towards him stems partly from their father's [Jacob's] favoritism and partly from his mother's superior position to the two other mothers: Rachel's homely elder sister Leah, whom their father Lavan married to Jacob seven years before Jacob married Rachel, the attractive sister; and Bilhah, Rachel's handmaid, the fertile slave given to Jacob by Rachel, who is impatient to have children to prevail in her rivalry with her sister. In *Billy Budd*, Melville alludes to the anger directed against Joseph by his elder brothers, suggesting that a similar anger is directed at Billy by Claggart. In this logic, Ishmael in *Moby-Dick* revives again in the person of Pierre, while the Ishmael mentioned in the Old Testament as

Hagar's son reappears in the person of Isabel.

As a race-wise and class-wise ambiguous orphan, Isabel is excluded from the mainstream of mid-nineteenth-century New England society and seems to be invisible to those who stay snug and uncritical of that society. Lévinas promulgates that “[m]y being-in-the-world or my ‘place in the sun’, my being at home, have these not also been the usurpation of spaces belonging to the other man [sic] whom I have already oppressed or starved, or driven out into a third world; are they not acts of repulsing, excluding, exiling, stripping, killing?” (Lévinas, “Ethics,” 82). If one's mere existence is unbeknownst to oneself, one is likely to commit violence against the others. In the context of *Pierre*, Pierre has been unaware of offending his half-sister Isabel, and Isabel finally lets him know. Though there remains a possibility that Isabel abuses Lévinassian ethics, Isabel is successful in exposing the deceptive patriarchy in the sentimentally portrayed blissful domestic life of the (upper-)middle-class family. Though Isabel's positive effect on Pierre may not last long, as I suggested in my previous paper, “Quo Vadis, Pierre, a Failed Messiah-Seeker in Melville's Delphic Oracle?” Isabel is successful in enabling or forcing Pierre to see what has been invisible, i. e., the third party, or what belongs to neither the domestic realm nor outside world.

If Isabel is partially successful, was the same true of Melville, who shared a similar fate? In Genesis (16: 11), the angel soothes Hagar: “the LORD hath heard thy affliction” and “thou shalt call his name Ishmael.” Then the angel forewarns Hagar of her fatherless son Ishmael's fate: “he will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren” (16: 12). If Ishmael is compared to Isabel, the biblical prophecy comes true. Just as Ishmael has to

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wander in the desert, so Isabel is thrown into a homogeneous society hostile to third parties like her. Moreover, just as God is attentive to Ishmael, so Pierre is to Isabel. What if Ishmael represents Melville's own self-image? The biblical prophecy also came true when Melville was harshly criticized for publishing *Pierre*, the novel fraught with incestuous images, but unlike Ishmael/Isabel, Melville had the ears of no one.

Notes

- 1) All subsequent references to this story will be parenthetically included in this paper. Herman Melville, *Pierre: or, the Ambiguities*. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern UP; Chicago: The Newberry Library, 1971.
- 2) In my previous paper, "Quo Vadis, Pierre, a Failed Messiah-Seeker in Melville's Delphic Oracle? — *Pierre: or, the Ambiguities*," I dealt exclusively with Pierre as a young man unsuccessful and frustrated in his trial of perception change.
- 3) In *Billy Budd* Melville attests that this defensive psychological mechanism is true: "Is Envy [triggered by unfair distribution of parental love] then such a monster? Well, though many an arraigned mortal has in hopes of mitigated penalty pleaded guilty to horrible actions, did ever anybody seriously confess to envy?" (77)
- 4) Hence come the commodity fetishism and Marx's effort to get behind what makes it possible to maintain the mechanism that circulates mass-produced commodities in the market and hides labor exploitation and class conflicts.

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Beyond the Resentful Sibling Strife: Melville's Pierre

SASAKI Eitetsu

Is the protagonist Pierre or his illicit half-sister Isabel? Either, it seems, can take the leading role in *Pierre; or, the Ambiguities* written by Herman Melville (1819–91) in 1852, a story that seems mono-layered but is actually composed of two different tiers. This paper analyzes the sub-plot in which Isabel comes to dominate Pierre's psyche. The analysis clarifies three problems: what is Isabel's hidden motive in appearing before Pierre and consequently ruining his life; what ethico-psychological problem lies beyond Isabel's apparent resentment and anger at her sibling; and how did Melville involved himself through Isabel in the story of sibling strife?

Isabel, with her name suggestive of Jezebel, the evil queen of Ahab, ruins the sentimentally portrayed kitschy relationship of her half-brother with his mother Mary and forces him to break the engagement with Lucy, the docile girl submissive to Mary. As an illicit daughter betrayed and abandoned by her father, Pierre's licit father, Isabel retaliates against Pierre for having exclusively enjoyed parental love. Excluded from the mainstream society of mid-nineteenth-century New England as an orphan with an ambiguous identity race-wise and class-wise, Isabel augments her anger at Pierre, her half-brother who stays snug in his socially privileged position and uncritical of his environment. Isabel's rivalrous envy at her younger brother reminds us of the (mock-) sibling strife in the Biblical episodes, in Melville's other works, and also in Melville's own personal history: the strife of Ishmael with Isaac, of Joseph with his elder brothers, of Billy with Claggart, and of Melville with his elder brother.

Isabel keenly detects Pierre's immersion in the social and therefore patriarchal tendency of the nineteenth-century secularized Puritans to imitate their own fathers, and she allows him to imitate their mutual father. In this atmosphere she may find a father-substitute in Pierre and acquire a kind of love that she should have acquired from her biological father. Luckily for Isabel, Puritanism was replaced by what *Lévinas* describes as love, or the sentimental love in the context of the mid-nineteenth century feminized culture of America. The love in question, *Lévinas* holds, was promoted up to the superlative level of religion. Though an outsider to these social circumstances, Isabel gains advantage from them as a domestic Marxist demanding equal distribution of family affection.

To force Pierre to confront a reality akin to what she faces herself, the reality of an excluded and wounded third party who has no choice but to permit herself to listen to the affectionate dialogue of the close-knit upper-middle-class (Glendinning) family, Isabel shakes the problematical foundation of Western philosophy upon which Pierre's prerogative status of subject is established as a propertied white male self. Isabel forces Pierre to switch from his Western/Logical mode of perception into the Gnostic/heretical and to suspect the Western way of reasoning or the philosophical system that has laid the thinking foundation upon the establishment of self as the prerogative subject. Isabel misuses *Lévinas*' ethics and demands that the subject [Pierre] interrogate himself: "[m]y being-in-the-world or my 'place in the sun', my being at home, have these not also been the usurpation of spaces belonging to the other man [sic] whom I have already oppressed or starved, or driven out into a third world; are they not acts of repulsing, excluding, exiling, stripping, killing?"

The biblical Ishmael, the illegitimate child born between Abraham and his Egyptian handmaid Hagar, is expelled by Abraham's wife Sarah, just as Isabel is expelled by Pierre's mother Mary. Ishmael's doom is to have "his hand... against every man, and every man's hand against him...in the presence of all his brethren," and Isabel acts out as Ishmael. Like the biblical Ishmael, whose "affliction" "the LORD hath heard," Isabel has her brother Pierre hear her affliction. The author, like Isabel, was deprived of parental love by a preferred

brother who claimed it exclusively. Just as the whole world is against Isabel and Ishmael, so it was against Melville after publishing *Pierre*, the novel fraught with incestuous images. Yet unlike Isabel, Melville had no one to listen to him.