

The ‘Mob’ in Herman Melville’s Moby Dick: A Retrospection

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Abstract

There may be controversy whether Moby Dick is an epic or not but there is no doubt that it represents the patriarchal or paternal mindset which has been dominating the global world from the time immemorial. History, the mother of both ill and well thoughts and ideologies, has ample and innumerable instances that females have been exploited, tortured, subjugated, and reduced to subservient roles, deprived of all human and fundamental rights.

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Controversy is a necessary evil. It helps in revealing what is under surface and invisible to the naked eyes. It brings out the best and the worst from the dark world of ignorance. It stems out when something quoted by somebody is unintelligible to anybody. There may be controversy whether Moby Dick is an epic or not but there is no doubt that it represents the patriarchal or paternal mindset which has been dominating the global world from the time immemorial. History, the mother of both ill and well thoughts and ideologies, has ample and innumerable instances that females have been exploited, tortured, subjugated, and reduced to subservient roles, deprived of all human and fundamental rights. The atrocities of male societies against the females have compelled me to think if we’ve coined the term- ‘fee+male’ to let them feel they are being paid for all the services extended to their so called “better halves!!!”

Male by nature is ‘domineering.’ He wants to dominate, govern, and win over whatever falls before his eyes and his insatiable heart and mind yearns for it. But one should know the reality of double edged and extremely steep words “need

and desire.” One may desire what one does not need but need is never desired, it is always fulfilled. Also, one must know both his crest and fall i.e. weakness and strength. Besides, he should have the serenity and sanctity to differentiate between good and bad, right and wrong, just and unjust, fair and foul and most importantly, Satan and God. Devil and Deity are always at fight. Someone has said, “Man is born free but everywhere he is in chains.” Doesn’t it sound like discriminating? To me, it appears that, “Female is in chains right from cradle to grave.” She is unwanted even before her birth and remains so until she dies.

Time and ties never goes evenly. Many a times, females have tried to crack the cuffs and shackles of tradition and culture which dawned or imposed upon them unwontedly, to free themselves from the savage cannibals who pretend to be their savior and god. Moby Dick symbolizes that female power which is both destructive and constructive. Female is the creator, preserver and nourisher of all human races in all living forms. In fact, in Hindu mythology, female is “Mother Nature.” All the natural forces are double-

faced---cruel and sober, kind and unkind, wicked and caressing, loving and hateful. For instance, all mortal and immortal forms are formed out of the same five elements- air, water, fire, earth, and sky. All of these are indispensable for creation and survival but, these also destroy their own siblings when they feel cheated, humiliated, and ill-treated at their hands.

We dream of conquering nature but the question is- how? How long? Is it possible? The answer is a flat "No." 'He' feels himself victorious as long as 'she' does not respond, react, or retaliate and when it happens, there is no rescue except, to surrender or be eliminated. Female power can exist without male power but male power.....Moreover, female power never tries to dominate or overpower the male energy but wants to co-exist, and when she does not, conflict, struggle and competition to subdue the other brings absolute destruction and disaster. Even the "whiteness" of Moby Dick holds much of this truth in itself. "White" symbolizes "Peace." Nonetheless, White is the mother of all colors. The struggle between Ahab and Moby Dick is not a new phenomenon. Aboard Pequod, We get a glimpse of the whole world- motley characters and their varied opinions against Moby Dick reopens the same age old question-whether females should be given equal status or not? Ahab is the male ego, which stands for conservative mindset that is not ready to change. But, Ahab should know only change is permanent and only flexibility helps survival in adverse circumstances. Confinement, dejection, humiliation, exploitation, discrimination, and segregation are inhuman and detestable by both human and animal alike.

When irrational and illogical creatures with less sophisticated brains cannot surrender under such conditions, how can one expect from a woman who has not been regarded as a companion but, an object of pleasure as most of the history books state it, from times immemorial. It is really very strange that when cattle give birth to a "she", people celebrate and enjoy but, when a woman conceives a girl child.....The 'mob' in Moby Dick stands for myriad order of beliefs. Variety is the spice of life but, respect, honor and harmonious approach towards one another make it go smoothly and fruitfully. Let me illustrate this with some examples from Hindu scriptures. Sita-Ram, Radha-Krishna, Mata-Pita etc, what do convey to us? We, in our speech and writing, have given top floor to women but, truth is stranger than fiction. What we preach, we do not practice, and what we practice, we do not preach. You cannot eat your cake and have it, too. This double standard thinking is breeding all the problems, troubles, and woes.

This is a heinous crime against not only women, but divinity also, who created and divided this world, with its all pleasures and pains, between two races- man and woman or male and female. Moby's reaction and response against Ahab was not sudden. It was the voice of all womankind of the Earth; they are not ready to accept anything for granted now. Enough is enough now. The attack by Ahab was a kind of domestic violence inflicted upon Moby to show superiority and belittle its dignity, respect, honor, and confidence. No nation of the world can claim to be honest and fair in their treatment towards their woman citizens. Melville tries to bring home this gender bias through the struggle between Ahab

and Moby. One can envision the concern of Melville for women in his other novels, too.

The list of Melville's women is short but most (except the first one, Fayaway) have this sadness surrounding them. From the impossible Yillah in *Mardi*, Isabel in *Pierre*, to Marianna of "The Piazza," who envies the writer his home in the sunlight while she, unrecognized, must struggle alone in obscurity, there is a poignant yearning and deep despair surrounding them. This is because Melville's women are born out of their author's feeling of being imprisoned by his masculine gender role and the enforced heterosexuality of his time. It is an eternal imprisonment, of a less gothic and horrific cast perhaps, but of the same kind his contemporary Edgar Allan Poe portrays in *The Fall of the House of Usher*, *The Tell-Tale Heart* and *The Cask of Amantillado*, as well as in the "never more" of the lost Lenore in *The Raven*. While he strove mightily to write her into the world and into the house, the dilemma for Melville is that his woman ends up imprisoned by the very same art that yearns to emancipate her. Melville seeks to write her out of the social incarceration she suffers but succeeds only in further isolating her and in memorializing her sorrow at being left behind. An inner truth so at odds with external reality and the codes and

Works Cited:

1. William V. Spanos, *The Errant Art of Moby-Dick: The Canon, the Cold War and the Struggle for American Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), pp. 277–278.
2. See David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest* (New York: Random House, 1972). These included Robert McNamara, McGeorge Bundy, Dean Rusk, and Walt Rostow, all managerial types, who planned and executed the murderous war in Vietnam in terms of a preconceived end (a "scenario") that could be accomplished statistically.
3. Ron Suskind, "Without a Doubt," *New York Times Magazine* (October 17, 2004).

conventions of his time forces him into allusive manoeuvres, talking about his females in oblique ways at the expense of what his contemporary readers most wanted, a frank and realistic portrayal of life as they understood it.

Absence of a female character on Pequot is not accidental but, intentional. Although, Ahab is married and has a family but there is not much mention of his wife. Well, the time has changed and so we should reconsider over it. A female plays many roles- mother, daughter, wife and so on but, she is always under the shadow of a male. Now, the masculinity class will have to think and rethink that when various beliefs come across each-other, two conditions are possible- (i) Conflict and, (ii) Co-existence through mutual understanding. The later, is constructive and the former, is destructive. This must be acknowledged, understood, followed, preached and practiced that for any new invention or creation, both feminine and masculine energy is necessary. Feeling of peaceful co-existence, mutual respect and a deep desire to step together and move hands in hands to make each-other, even not, odd; complete not subservient; beautiful and compatible, not ugly and exploited can balance both these energies to let this world go on and on and on.....

4. Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick; or The Whale*, ed. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1988), p. 184.
5. Bill Ayers, *Fugitive Days: A Memoir*, new ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), pp. 120–121; first published by Beacon Press, 2001.
6. Perry Miller, *The Raven and the Whale: The War of Words and Wits in the Era of Poe and Melville* (New York: Harvest Books, 1956).
7. See Martin Heidegger, “What Is Metaphysics?” in *Basic Writings*, rev. and expanded ed., ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), p. 101.
8. Evert Duykinck, “Melville’s *Moby-Dick*, or, *The Whale*,” in *Literary World*, 9 November 22, 1851, pp. 403–404.
9. Review of *Pierre*, *New York Herald*, September 18, 1852, in *Herman Melville: The Contemporary Reviews*, ed. Brian Higgins and Hershel Parker (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 438.