A Shakespearean Critique of Emerson in Melville's *Pierre*: Metaphor as Smokescreen and Enthusiasm

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Abstract

This article is intended as a differential contribution to the study of Melville, still the central novelist of American literature in his complex, meditative negotiations of the various and often contradictory strands of the history of ideas that have impacted the United States since its founding generations: Calvinism, democratic ethics, Emersonian self-reliance, and even the skeptical mode of vision of American modernism (as characterized by writers of immigrant or Southern provenance such as O'Neill, or Faulkner), yet which Melville tellingly associates with Shakespeare and Hawthorne. Indeed, I take as a starting point Deleuze's assertion that Melville stands as the precursor to a crucial line of nihilistic thinking continuing in Nietzsche and culminating in literary modernism, and I explore the ramifications of this claim with reference to Melville's disastrous and often derided novel *Pierre* (1852), a bitter and digressive rumination on American life and letters following the critical and commercial failure of *Moby Dick*. A still controversial semi-narrative account of disavowed incest and class intolerance in the privileged, Northeastern milieu of Melville's early years, *Pierre* is also his most philosophical work up to that point, abundant in stylistic and structural experiment, most particularly in regard to what might connect fiction and literary language to contemporary philosophical discourses of idealism, metaphysics, and democratic ethics. Melville ultimately finds the crux of this connection in metaphor as that which links sensual, aesthetic, and cognitive experience to the abstract ideological commitments that govern our moral choices. Crucially, that link is neither simplistically causal nor necessarily positive.

I argue that Melville slyly associates the incongruent literary styles that he deploys in *Pierre* with the differing, contesting philosophical world-views that the novel explicitly evokes (most notably the so-called "Transcendentalism" of Emerson). The vehicle for this experiment appears to be a rather surface-oriented view of literary style characterized by an extravagance of metaphoric density. It is this quality that, I argue, seems to divide *Pierre* into two distinct conceptual and stylistic parts: the first is characterized by an exalted, ecstatic literary rhetoric

representing the confidence and self-reliance of the young hero, characterized by a rather Emersonian 'organic unity' of nature and the mind's creative and poetic faculties that is meant to transcend all questions of literary taste. The style here is 'enthusiastic,' as Melville characterizes his eponymous protagonist, thus relating *Pierre* to what cultural historians have noted as the chief quality of democratic optimism, Emersonian philosophy, and what Harold Bloom calls "The American Religion." The second, conveyed through what could be called a series of styles and variations whose only commonality is the critical reduction of and skepticism towards our "symbol-making capacity" (Sacvan Bercovitch), is associated with the novels' dark heroine Isabel, a spiritual seductress represented by uncanny, sensual imagery, and a lack of causal, narrative, temporal, or descriptive coherence. She represents all that is unutterable in human experience, up against which Pierre's impulsive self-reliance and self-defined moral absolutism crashes. This second half of the book is fitted with astonishing (and subsequently condemned) negativity towards received ethical and literary discourses of mid-century America: including a cryptic pseudo-philosophical tract on the incompatibility of time and (Christian) truth that parallels Deleuze's claims.

In view of this contrast, metaphor in *Pierre* acts as a kind of smokescreen, calling attention to its own palpable richness as a desirable, aesthetic mode of experience, and yet concealing much more than it reveals, essentially misdirecting all communicants of language from actuality, including that which our socially determined and hierarchical language does not wish us to acknowledge, from the social abject (Isabel and the prurient discipline of working class sexuality) to the Freudian abject—away from what we might generally call knowledge of the world (which for Melville is invariably negative and tragic) but also, more ambiguously, from practical wisdom.

Philosophically, the result is a sort of tragic reinterpretation (rather than rejection) of Emerson in a Shakespearean mode: for if a leisurely mode of satisfaction in reference to the spiritual authority of nature is initially satirized as the privilege of a landed gentry who neither know the world (in its material and social forces) nor themselves, nevertheless, the ultimate fruitlessness and irrelevancy of human endeavor in a fated and indifferent cosmos necessitates a tragic self-knowing, or emptying out of personal illusions, that paradoxically liberates the decisive individual action that Emerson prizes, even as such action (in Melville's novel) condemns the doer to social ostracism and extinction.

Keywords: *Melville, Emerson, metaphor,* **Pierre,** *Deleuze*

Part One: The Crystals of Nihilistic Modernism: *Melville, Nietzsche, Welles, Deleuze…Emerson?*

Gilles Deleuze (1989), in his *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, makes the surprising declaration that Herman Melville was the progenitor of Nietzsche, or more accurately, the progenitor

of a nihilistic and essentially materialist strain of aesthetics that stretched from Melville himself to Nietzsche onto Kafka and Welles.[1] This 'strain' as characterized by Deleuze is an aesthetic sign-practice dominated by what he calls 'crystal signs' (*hyalosigns*) and images. Perhaps the major interpretative paradigm to emerge from *Cinema 2*'s investigation of modern art and its relevance to cognitive/perceptual experience, the practice of crystal signs is tied to (though it perhaps does not necessitate) a nihilist reduction of both ethics and epistemology as they appear in philosophical literature.

It is strange that Deleuze does not mention the most direct conceptual link between Melville and Nietzsche, the philosophy of Emerson, who was an enormous influence on both.

But what is this "crystal sign" of modern art practice? Deleuze (1989) describes it as a mode (or deformation?) of semiotic representation that creates "the smallest circuit" between *the actual* and *the virtual*, the "formation of an image with two sides, actual and virtual" (p. 68). We should note that the term 'image', as Deleuze employs it, is sometimes literal, as in the cinematic image, but is elsewhere something 'virtual': a trope or mental construct of some sort. In any case, there is a "coalescence between the two" (p. 68): the 'virtual', for its part, can begin as a mirror-image, a reflection in water, an evocation of memory, an uncanny Double (e.g. Melville's "The Bell-Tower"), and undoubtedly various other kinds of tropes. This is the simultaneous doubling of appearances and perspectives that Deleuze sees at the heart of modernism (though he avoids that term): it grasps the 'doubleness' of "certain existing images" that belong to nature itself, through a strategy wherein the actual and virtual, though distinct, become indiscernible, reversible, and in a constant circuit of exchange, which Deleuze (1989) likens to exchanges between "limpid" (that is, transparent or representational) images and "opaque" images. The result is no longer an art of representation but of "description which absorbs and creates" and even "erases" its own object (p. 68).

Melville is Deleuze's foremost literary example:

> Melville…in his novels, fixed this structure for all time...the ship [*Pequod*] is caught between its two crystalline faces: a limpid face which is the ship from above, where everything should be visible, according to order; an opaque face which is the ship from below, the black face of the engine-room stokers [in *The Confidence Man*]. But it is as if the limpid face actualizes a kind of theatre or dramaturgy which takes hold of the passengers themselves, whilst the virtual passes into the opaque face, and is actualized…in the demonic perversity of a boatswain [*Billy Budd*], in a captain's obsession [*Moby-Dick*], in the secret revenge of insurgent blacks ["Benito Cereno"]. This is the circuit of two virtual images which continually become actual in relation to each other. (pp. 72-73)

Deleuze (1989) speaks of the grand metaphor of the sea which possesses "a visible face and an invisible face, a limpid face that for a moment the naive hero allows himself to be caught by; while the other face, the opaque one, the great dark stage of…monsters, rises

in silence and grows as the first one becomes vague" (p. 73). It this, perhaps, the force of *Moby-Dick*, turning on and overwhelming that of the hunter Ahab?

Evidently, from what Deleuze writes, the innovation of crystal signs has consequences for every aspect of the novel, from 'images' of nature and human subjectivity to philosophical questions of truth, knowledge, and ethics. Because of the descriptive worlds to which they belong, literary characters are no longer marked by fixed qualities: the character has an infinite capacity for change, variation, constant metamorphosis. Referencing Nietzsche, Deleuze calls this quintessential modern protagonist 'a forger' because he is always lying, either to himself or to others; Deleuze (1989, p. 134) cites Melville's *Confidence Man*, but we could equally cite the eponymous *Pierre* in his disavowal of his own incestuous motivations. Dishonesty scarcely matters, because narrative, in abandoning its ontological pretensions, no longer sets up "a structure of judgment" (pp. 133, 138-40), that is, a moral/ideological standpoint, embedded in the narrative, from which the characters are judged. The absence of judgment opens the door to nihilistic creativity: "The true world does not exist, and if it did…if it could be described…it would be useless, superfluous" (p. 137). The reader is urged to question whether a reality beyond our symbolic attempts at description is a necessary or desirable postulate at all. Again, this has consequences for the representation of character. In this Nietzschean paradigm, a 'truthful' man (like *Pierre*) is idealist, judgmental, constructionist (e.g. Melville, 1995, pp. 65-66, 111, 134). In place of such men who stand for law and 'higher values' over life itself, we have protagonists such as Ahab, who cannot be judged by conventional standards.

The examples from Melville, both above and below, are mostly my own, for although Deleuze (1989) makes numerous references to Melville, it is not at all clear where his version of Melville begins and his more extensive reading of Welles and Nietzsche ends. Certainly, he posits Melville's 'lineage' as culminating in a Nietzschean art presenting a rather materialist view of the world as "bodies which are forces, nothing but forces" (p. 139). Deleuze distinguishes between exhausted and spent forces (the literally piecemeal Ahab) which appeal to the will-to-dominate, and changeable, variable forces which are constantly reinventing themselves, thus symbolizing "the goodness of life itself" (p. 142). All these forces/personae are ultimately 'forgers', and a common link between them is the natural necessity of betrayal, as in Ahab's declared betrayal of God, or Pierre's unfaithfulness to his godlike mother. However, the 'changeable, variable' forces maintain a sort of link to artistic will, which alone can make a claim to truth, in only the pragmatic sense that "truth is not to be achieved, formed, or reproduced: it has to be created" (p. 147). This much recalls Stanley Cavell's (1989) necessarily pragmatic (and belated) reading of Emerson, by which, rather than constituting a Romantic vision of literature as philosophy and vice versa, "Emerson's work presents itself as the realization of that vision" (p. 20), i.e., creativity as practical, life-improving knowledge and 'adaptation', as extolled by subsequent American thinkers such as Dewey.

Let us put aside the question of truth for a moment, and observe that through his

use of Melville, Deleuze has no qualms about importing the imagistic crystal sign into *literary* theory proper, a practice of conflation of the verbal and visual that he elsewhere cautiously approaches (e.g. Deleuze, 1986, pp. 75-76). But this is no surprise considering that he views cinematic and other image practices as precise analogues (in different technical systems) of human experience, whether sensory-motor (classical representation) or as mentally and temporally-conditioned (modernism). For Deleuze, life itself (not to mention language) is constituted first and foremost by the images that constitute signs and appearances. That being so, a critic might still object that in literary language 'image' is only one of many complex modes or tools of figuration and/or rhetoric. Melville, for example, had his weakness for alliteration. But Deleuze clearly regards 'image' as so definitive of Melville's practice that it alone declares his proto-modernist stature. By contrast, Harold Bloom (2015, pp. 17, 25) has emphasized the primacy of voice over the concrete in Melville's aesthetic; and certainly there is a contest for primacy between image and voice in the first eight books of Melville's iconoclastic *Pierre* (1852).

Of course Deleuze might have agreed, as a starting point for discussion, that the critical difference between 'crystal signs' in the visual arts and in the novel is not only linguistic determination, but the literary modes of practice by which 'images' in the novel are divided between the tropic/metaphoric and the representational (e.g. the novel's initial function).

But this article is not intended as a commentary on Deleuze's (1989) account of nihilism nor an evaluation of the compelling Leibnizean-metaphysical and Nietzschean-materialist responses to the problem of truth that Deleuze puts forward in his definition of crystal signs (pp. 130-31). My purpose, instead, is limited to consideration of Melville's aesthetic and conceptual practice, with a focus on the contrasting pairs of nihilism/idealism, creativity/truth or knowledge as they are dis-/associated within it. The centerpiece of this investigation is Melville's much-maligned *Pierre*, which, I contend, is a philosophical novel of this kind. Deleuze's somewhat renegade reading of Melville is only relevant insofar as we may adjust and expand his claims, by concentrating on precisely that area of literary signs that Deleuze sidelines in favor of 'image', namely, metaphor and related 'figures of thought.' I do this, firstly, by reference to Melville's stylistic provocation in the suitably protean and indiscernible *Pierre*, and secondly, by contextualizing Melville's treatment of these topics in light of mid-century American literary culture and its dominant conceptual preoccupations: idealism and democratic ethics (social and personal). I view *Pierre* as a more or less clearly delineated series of philosophical engagements with Emerson, Hawthorne, Poe, and Shakespeare, all self-reflexive in regards to Melville's chosen profession of novelist. Intuiting that the differing world-views of idealism, materialism and what would later be called nihilism are constituted in and by language, Melville's forward-looking semiotic exploration relates to and perhaps 'resolves' these philosophical abstractions as varieties of literary prose, in regards to narrative time and structure certainly, but mainly in relation to style and

metaphor.

Oscillating in Emerson's orbit

Melville seems an unlikely candidate for the begetter of nihilist materialism, more on account of the latter term than the former. It is likely that he was more philosophically ambivalent than Deleuze's (1993) major work on him recognizes.[2] Newton Arvin's masterpiece of New Criticism, *Melville* (1950), assigned him as a romantic idealist in Coleridge's wake, and that view, clearly inconsistent with that of Deleuze's, has held sway until recently. Others see him as a Christian who remained fearfully compelled to the Calvinism of Maria Melville, his mother. Since the 1960s we have had atheistic and subversive Melvilles (Lawrance Thompson, Michael Paul Rogin). These are all plausible, but I will settle for Bloom's (1986) description of Melville as one who "steeped like Carlyle and Ruskin in the bible, no more believed the bible than Carlyle or Ruskin" (pp. 1-2). The best observation on Melville was Hawthorne's: "He can neither believe nor be comfortable in his unbelief….and is too honest and courageous not to try one or the other….It is strange how he persists…in wandering to and fro these deserts…dismal and monotonous..." (quoted in Del Banco, 2005, p. 253). One notes the word "desert"; Hawthorne may have attributed to Melville Ahab's suspicion that "sometimes I think there's naught beyond" (*Moby-Dick*, ch. 28).[3] Melville could certainly entertain the fancy that our world could be "a palsied universe…like a leper" and the equivalent of a "charnel-house" (*Moby-Dick*, ch. 41): an appropriate metaphor for worldly appearances that mask an endless violent contestation of bodies, wills, and forces, a "universal cannibalism" (ch. 58).

Beyond the present consensus that Melville was an intellectual and probably spiritual dissenter from both Unitarianism and American Calvinism, all questions as regards to the idealism or skepticism of his thought seem to founder on the same problem: how do we define, with scant documentary evidence, Melville's attitude to the principal idealism of his day, that of Emerson? (I shall avoid the homogenizing label 'transcendentalism' since Emerson's emphasis on the fractured but recoverable unity of nature and man might as well be a philosophy of 'immanence'). It might be asked whether Emerson, as Nietzsche's spiritual and philosophical progenitor, complicates Deleuze's grand picture of a nihilist, materialist, and voluntarist American intellectual tradition? As the citation of Cavell above would suggest, the famously indirect and tropic Sage of Concord did indeed sideline moral judgment in favor of an aesthetic will through which "truth has to be created". When Cavell (1989) asks, "is knowing a thing something more than having justified true beliefs about it?" (p. 11), he appropriates Emerson as part of his affirmative answer: "The world, I think, is not presentable as the empirical content of a concept—it is not a piece of what is called knowledge (a Kantian assertion). Then what constitutes the search for it?" (p. 10). And as for nihilism, although Emerson's writing is always too broad and capacious to be labeled, he once declared, far beyond the provenance of an 'academic' skeptic like Bradley, that only two things ultimately existed: "I and the Abyss" (in Bloom, 1985, p.

96).[4]

My own assessment, more or less shared by Merton Sealts (1980) and some others, is that from 1849 onwards, when Melville attended Emerson's lecture on "Natural Aristocracy,"[5] Melville's philosophical views remained in the orbit of what I should like to call the 'elective idealism' of Emerson, that is, an Idealism of the Will. What is this? Coleridge's "Reason" and "Understanding," however expansive these terms may have been for the Romantics, are essentially replaced by Emerson's "intuition", which is not a route to any apodictic knowledge but expresses itself as the unconscious or barely conscious movement of the individual will (or as Emerson in "Self-Reliance" calls it, "whim" or "the darting to an aim").

I take *Pierre* as a proof of this philosophical lineage but also as proof that, Melville, perhaps in common with Hawthorne, suspected on both philosophical and psychological grounds that Emerson's writings contained "gross and astonishing errors" (in Sealts, 1980, p. 71).[6] In Melville's own darkest hours, this dissent evidently turned caustic, but only through the safely veiled portrait of the 'transcendentalist' Mark Winsome in *The Confidence Man*.

Ahab's description that "reality is but a pasteboard mask" (which can be struck through) echoes Emerson's more genial claim that "the magnitude of material things is relative, and all objects shrink and expand to serve the passion of the poet's mind" (*Nature*, 1836). But Melville, not exactly an Ahab at home, seems to have reserved a dissenting belief in some trenchant, persistent reality or, we might prefer, 'actuality' (whether understood in materialist terms, as for Second Mate Stubbs, we cannot say). Actuality is experienced primarily in *Moby-Dick* as appalling force and facticity (the whale itself) and in *Pierre* as Time, i.e., to borrow Bloom's (2015) phrase, "the overdeterminations that bind us all in time" (p. 19). As Melville later reacted to Emerson's *Conduct of Life* (1860), "To one who has weathered Cape Horn as a common sailor, what stuff this all is?" (in Sealts, 1980, p. 71). But we cannot expect to penetrate further this dark actuality of Melville, and its relation of resistance to the semiotic manipulations of the human mind, without a closer reading of Melville's language.

How could Melville consistently maintain, over a period of some years, these two opposing stances: the first, a variety of idealism by which the creative mind is exalted as capable of unfolding—in flashes of "intuitive truth" ("Hawthorne and His Mosses")— "some unknown reasoning" (Ahab) that is "more a reality than real life can show" (*The Confidence Man*, ch. 33), and which reduces objects to being, as Arvin (2002) puts it, "only provisionally real" (p. 166); and the second, a naturalistic skepticism that apprehends actuality as simply an irresistible, if dreadful, cosmic force? How far did Melville estimate our will and intuitive agency to prevail within and beyond the veil of appearances?

Our efforts to understand Melville's apparently conflicting beliefs may begin with Bloom's (2011) observation that "All metaphor is a mistaking in the name of life" (p. 41), and that for Emerson as for later American thinkers, our creative "symbol-

making capacity" (Bercovitch, 1986) constitutes its own pragmatic truth and its own 'pragmatic' reality. The still prevailing semiotic emphasis in philosophy and literary criticism (attributable to the three great lineages of Peirce, Saussure, and Wittgenstein) is remarkably continuous with the 'soft' Idealism that prevailed in the late 19th century in America as represented by Emerson and Royce, in England by F. H. Bradley, and in France by Bergson and the Vitalists. The general post-Kantian view of human belief systems as no more than sets of concepts somehow inspired by appearances whose external reality cannot be judged—as Emerson (2003) quite clearly advanced in *Nature* (pp. 197, 207, 209)—has survived, with many refinements, not only in structuralism and social constructionist thought, but even more broadly in the semiotic perspective, or what might be called the perspective of 'symbolic mediation.' Consequently, in the following sections of the paper we shall identify Melville, in relation to this intellectual genealogy, as a philosophical novelist first exemplifying, and then revising Emersonian idealism through the prism of his own chosen medium of fiction and, especially, poetic metaphor. Melville is a thinker in whom the old Idealism and the oncoming 'pragmaticism'—the Peircean turn to semiotics according to which reality in itself cannot be discovered but only elected by means of our choice among signs—meet, perhaps for the first time.

The sea of critical texts surrounding Melville (and *Moby-Dick*) is so capacious that it is neither possible nor desirable to read *everything* on Melville. Even criticism of *Pierre* has recently become a cottage industry for the Melville journal *Leviathan*. Given this situation, I shall be content merely to expand on some perspectives that have heretofore been only hinted at by major scholars such as Dryden, Bloom, and Bercovitch regarding the intersection of nature, metaphor, and the Emersonian spirit in Melville's *Pierre*, and to clarify it by means of the comparative address to Shakespeare's vision of life that Melville himself, in his moment of professional crisis, desperately resorts to in the latter sections of his novel. That Melville should attempt to evade the influence of Emerson, then America's foremost literary celebrity, by embracing the negativities of Shakespeare might also be regarded as an anxiety of influence. Having resigned himself, like Ahab—and not without the fear of emptiness that Pierre experiences in his role as an author—to a losing contest with Shakespeare-as-literary-leviathan, Melville appears determined not to lose a similar (and safer) philosophical contest with Emerson—a determination that must have hardened when patronizing reviews of *Moby-Dick* appeared in 1851, wrongly accusing him of perpetrating "transcendental nonsense" in what he himself believed to be his highest achievement.

Part Two: What Has He Lost?: Metaphor, Enthusiasm and Emerson in *Pierre* (Books I-III)

Pierre describes a young, privileged 19th century New Englander on a country estate with his proud, haughty mother whom he treats, affectionately, as a sister. Pierre is soon

contacted by a commoner, Isabel, who claims to be the illegitimate daughter of Pierre's deceased father, an unsubstantiated claim that Pierre, nevertheless, intuitively accepts. Determined to embody the heroism of truth, Pierre abandons his village and his angelic fiancée, Lucy, and flees to the great city with Isabel, whom he announces as his 'wife' in order to avoid speaking the truth of illegitimacy. Wounded by this marital 'impertinence', his mother dies in a fury and leaves Pierre's inheritance to the very cousin who had shunned Pierre upon the latter's entrance to the city. Confined in a cold intellectual ghetto, Pierre tries to make a living as a serious author, but finds that he cannot adequately express on the page his profound disillusionment with social hypocrisy and with life itself—nor can he interest the commercial publishers in his work. Physically debilitated by obsessive writing, poverty, and a frustrated life with his nominal wife, and despite the reappearance of Lucy who desires only to support him, Pierre kills his exploitative cousin in a rage. Both Isabel and Lucy end up dying at his side, in a New York prison.

It has been a critical commonplace for more than 150 years that *Pierre*, especially in its first three books, houses a "problematic of stylistic extravagance" (Snediker, 2010, p. 220). It is partially this, and partially the familial-sexual subtext of the novel, that induced the *Boston Herald* to declare the book "utter trash" and *Putnam*'s to condemn its "inexcusable insanity" (quoted in Arvin, 2002, p. 201), whilst even in 1950 the sensitive Newton Arvin judged that its "not quite appropriate forms….mingled extravagance with flatness" (pp. 228-9) and produced its "so extreme…badness as an integral work of art….It would be charitable to attribute such mannerism to the intention of parody" (p. 219).

But I will not dwell on the literary disaster of *Pierre*, which destroyed Melville's career as a novelist and which the novel itself seems to predict, being either a proleptic announcement or preemptive enactment of artistic suicide. Rather, I am concerned with the meaning of this stylistic extravagance, which is chiefly a matter of intense clusters of metaphoric density, and it is precisely through this packing of metaphor that Melville evaluates his protagonist's youthful, enthusiastic states of being as Emersonian states of being. Attention to the appearance of metaphor (or its absence) enables a second-level reading of the novel as a philosophical example and critique through its very stylistic instability.

Such a reading escapes the old interpretative binaries that have dominated *Pierre*'s critical heritage, by which the author's style must be judged as either earnest badness (Arvin) or genre parody (Braswell), and by which Emerson's philosophy is either irrelevant to *Pierre* (viewed essentially as a precursor of the psychoanalytic paradigm in fiction) or is the target of wholesale rejection and scornful mockery. Bercovitch is only the most subtle of critics who endorse the latter view of both binaries, and defends Melville's style as merely social satire: the author means to deride the agrarian life of these privileged New Englanders, expose its corruption through and through. Everything from Pierre's enthusiasm for nature to the angelic Christianity of his beloved Lucy is to be torn down

as so much class pretension. Indeed, *Pierre* is as powerful a social satire as America had produced up to that time, with its hero the kind of splendid "traitor to his own class" that Deleuze (1989) appreciates in Kafka (p. 259). However, Bercovitch sidelines, without any justification, the constant recourse to pastoral metaphors in *Pierre*, and indeed the operative role of the sheer prominence of metaphorical expression, generally, throughout the text.

To view this metaphoric density as no more than a series of politicized rhetorical charades is untenable. For example, the metaphor of The Fall is the first of Melville's two great structuring metaphors in *Pierre*, amounting to the only constants in this ungainly work with multiple narrative voices, multiple digressions, multiple distinct styles. The second grand metaphor, argues Bercovitch, is that of stones and mountains: the mountain-as-titan, the mountain (or leviathan) as sublimely indifferent to human values and as tropic indication of a fated, incestuous pre-history of man: precisely the kind of history that Emerson denies, or wishes to overcome. But, again, Bercovitch does not consider any relation, either complementary or antagonistic, between the 'stone-nature' metaphor and the 'plant-nature' metaphors (constant references to blooms and growths) that are far more numerous and emphatic in *Pierre*'s first three books. Even Melville's satirical tribute to his local "Majesty" of the Berkshires, Mount Greylock (which Bercovitch analyzes at length), mentions the "bounteous fertilizations" that Greylock has given the author (Melville, 1995, p. vii). It is the connection between these grand metaphors—The Fall, the stone, and the pastoral—that should concern us.

Metaphors of The Fall

Melville (1995) makes it quite clear as to the exact moment when the hand of "Fate" (pp. 14, 62) places Pierre in a chain of direct causation leading unto his death. In this book about reading and writing it is a moment, tellingly, of literal textual reception: the nighttime moment at which Pierre, just outside of Lucy's house, receives the "Tell-Tale" letter of Isabel from an unidentified male stranger. Pierre wonders whether or not to read it: as soon as he does, Melville drops a series of extravagant metaphors of The Fall of man, the expulsion from Paradise:

> He hung half-lifeless in his chair….Ay Pierre, now indeed art though hurt with a wound, never to be completely healed but in heaven; for thee, the before undistrusted moral beauty of the world is forever fled; for thee thy sacred father is no more a Saint; all brightness hath gone from the hills, all peace from thy plains…
>
> "Myself am left, at least," he slowly and half-chokingly murmured. "…Fate, I have a choice quarrel with thee…. Thou hast led me through gay gardens to a gulf…Am I not struck?"
>
> …Idle would it be to show how to Pierre [that piece of intelligence] rolled down his soul like molten lava, and left so deep a deposit of desolation, that all his subsequent endeavors never restored the original temples to his soul, nor all his culture revived its buried bloom….

How all-desolating the blast that for Pierre, in one night…buried the mild statue of the saint beneath the prostrated ruins of the souls' temple itself. (p. 65)

Bercovitch and other commentators have not asked why Melville so earnestly insists on using the language of The Fall. What has Pierre lost? For there is no mistaking the series of tropic allusions to the Fall, albeit in the broadest terms by which that foundational myth is interpretable. Pierre, slunk to the bottom of his favorite chair, describes himself as *literally* fallen from the "gardens" into a deep "gulf"…While at the same time moral beauty, along with the natural beauty of Saddle Meadows, is now "fled" from Pierre's soul like Adam and Eve from Eden. His soul itself is either reduced to a gaping hole by the burning lava of 'intelligence', or falls with the lava into a "deep…deposit," an inward emptiness.

We can dispense with the moralistic interpretation of this allusion (favored by *Pierre*'s contemporary critics), wherein Pierre, by reason of his rapacious family dynasty, has *sinned* like Eve, and been thrown out in a parable of divine justice which, by some odd sleight of hand, can be replaced by the 'social justice' that concerns modern interpreters of literature. The only sin here is the aforesaid "intelligence", the unasked for knowledge of his father's uncontained sexuality. In Melville's metaphysical outlook, as early as *Mardi*, even the divine provides no recognizable justice on Earth: "Nature is not for us: it is enough to know that God is and that I exist" (in Arvin, 2002, p. 99).

There is not the slightest indication that we should take the high poetic diction with which the narrator describes Pierre's devastation as anything but earnest. Pierre's blithe ignorance of social (and sexual) reality is not even covertly mocked: instead, the receipt of 'truth' ("a black billow" for Melville) is described as a genuine disaster on the level of the shipwrecks of Melville's own past: "Ah miserable thou to whom truth, in her first tides, bears nothing but wrecks!" (1995, p. 65). The only bitter irony or satire here is Pierre's determination to embrace the 'truth' that has left his happiness in cinders. "Read it not, Pierre…and be happy," (p. 62) cautions the part of his mind that wants to preserve his fortunate state.

Yet even at the worst, Pierre is able to maintain that "myself at least am left," falling back into 'Self-Reliance' upon a self that is somehow distinct from the ruined temple of the soul and even distinct from that deep sense of identity formed by Pierre's family 'romance', the sexual past of our thoughts that Freud believed only a "great soul" could overcome (Bloom, 2011, p. 41). This is an Emersonian confidence in human nature that Pierre (and seemingly Melville) demonstrates, a prophetic, post-Christian, anti-psychological faith in one's own instincts, however misplaced; this is also the confidence of Ahab, the cosmological rebel against his own (universal) father.

Virtually the entire critical heritage has denied what Melville's narrator expressly states. For the critics, Pierre has lost nothing except an end to a cloistered, incestuous, ignorant existence at Saddle Meadows, a privileged 'illusion' disguising an immature, incestuous sexual development manifested in Pierre's sexualized relationship with his

mother and his more poetic, desexualized relationship with Lucy. What is there to mourn? Rogin (1985) likens Pierre's antediluvian existence to a "trap" (p. 85), while Arvin (2002) claims it "destroys his capacity for happy and normal relations with the opposite sex" (p. 223). And yet this is what Melville wrote, without any indication of irony, tonal, structural, or otherwise. Failure to acknowledge this amounts virtually to denying that *Pierre* has a tragic structure and tragic intentions, which it palpably does. To put the question in reverse, then, what has Pierre *gained* by the knowledge that ends his bucolic reverie?

Deleuze (1989), of course, would disagree with such critics, since in his Melville-Nietzsche lineage there is no true world or truthful man, but only "false", constructed worlds and human pretenders. Such a view is unquestionably relevant to *Pierre*, for "truth" in the sense of the most genuine register of one's own existence, as Melville most often uses the word, is conceived as a destroyer. Literary critics of the last few generations are more inclined to advance the equation of social consciousness and liberation than Melville was; however justified their contemporary reasons for that optimism, it is, nonetheless, a weak and decontextualized misreading of *Pierre*, in which Melville more pragmatically relies on first-hand experience, not ethical speculation, concerning the social conditions of oppression through the record of Pierre's descent into actual poverty and urban invisibility, a life change that can only be experienced as *a fall*.

If Pierre has manifestly not gained much by his exile for Isabel, what precisely has he lost? Abandoning the gardens of Saddle Meadows to wander through the wastelands of New York, Pierre has lost *something* that is as valuable as it is unrecoverable by any subsequent act of will or reason. That is Pierre's own sense of his situation after the death of his mother: he has "thrown away" the "felicity" of his "old joyous life" (pp. 286, 289).

In short, what Melville's contemporary critics have lost sight of—in their humanistic equation of truth=knowledge=liberation—is the basically romantic valuation of 'spiritual truth' that an Emersonian of the time, such as Whitman, would have understood perfectly. And Melville? The embittered author of *Pierre* had absorbed Emerson, yet conflated it with the mordant, Barnum-esque wisdom of Scott Fitzgerald's later remark, "There are no second acts in American life". This wisdom is prepared for in Shakespeare's Lear, Timon, Antony, even Prospero. This Shakespearean inflection is ironically less in accord with the Anglophone critical heritage than with Deleuze's (1989) invocation of nihilism, in that 'truth' is more wounding than (personally) liberating. I would not go so far as to describe the first three books of *Pierre* as nihilistic, but they do commend the wisdom of displacing 'truth' in favor of creative, linguistic representation. Pierre does not begin his life as the destructive and deluded "truthful man" whom Nietzsche mocks, but rather is an enthusiastic Nietzschean "forger," a poetic inventor of his own pastoral idyll, his own incestuous mother/sister, his own elective family history (including Native Americans), his own Angel/Muse (Lucy). Note, also, the virtual/actual exchanges of Deleuze's crystal images in these transformations, the polarity of each of which shall be reversed by the

novel's end (e.g. Lucy's angelic nature actualized as a martyrdom for Pierre's sake that disastrously exceeds his understanding or control).

The primacy of literary allusion and reading itself in *Pierre* and in Pierre's consciousness has been so frequently commented upon, ever since Dryden (in Bloom, 1986), that I shall not expand on it here. It is *through* this literary mediation that the antediluvian Pierre *invents*, rather than experiences, his quasi-Wordsworthian identity as a romantic unification with nature, much as Quixote invents *his* romantic, chivalric identity. Suffice it to observe that from the novel's opening pages, Melville's (1995) description of the natural beauty of Saddle Meadows and his description of Pierre's library are interchangeably pastoral: the library consists of "Spenserians nymphs…[in] a maze of all bewildering beauty" while the bucolic scenery is "uncommon loveliness…the perfect mould of a delicate and poetic mind" (pp. 5-6). No place for tragedy here!

It is this self-creation (however clichéd) in relation to the garden of Saddle Meadows that helps us to understand exactly what Pierre stands to lose, apart from mundane material comforts. Our recognition of this depends not only on literary allusion but on the general "symbol-making capacity" that produces the elective metaphors by which Pierre lives his life. These metaphors work chiefly through the vehicle of the natural or pastoral: "In the country then Nature planted our Pierre; because Nature intended a rare and original development" (p. 12).

To repeat Bloom (2011): "All metaphor is a mistaking in the name of life." And this is crucial not only to understanding *Pierre*, but to Bloom's well-known defense of Emerson as not a philosopher but an aphorist of the art of life, a spiritual prophet committed to the use of tropes, as all prophets must be. Emerson (1875) himself declared, "Nature itself is a vast trope, and all particular natures are tropes...all thinking is analogizing...[the] endless passing of one element into new forms" (in Bloom, 2015, p. 167).

What Pierre has lost is this very "symbol-making capacity" that Bercovitch, persuasively, thinks Melville has emphasized here, if only to exorcise the anxious influence of Emerson. In order for Melville to recognize the profound importance of Emerson's "intuition" or "truth of the will" and yet also recognize its natural limits via the constraints imposed by some inscrutable, anterior reality, he must drive a wedge between truth and metaphor, reopening the gap that the early Emerson had attempted to close up by relegating any causal forces outside the grasp of our symbol-making capacity as basically irrelevant. The cheerful, antediluvian Pierre papers over this gap, as it were, through an elective "mistaking" that is signposted by the metaphoric density of the narrator's reports of his state of mind.

But before we examine this density of the text, let me cite one further example of the elective nature of Pierre's creative Utopia:

There's the book of Flemish prints—that first we must look over; then, ...Flaxman's Dante;— Dante! Night's and Hell's poet he. No, we will not open Dante….No, we will not open Flaxman's Dante… Francesca's mournful face is now ideal to me…No!....Damned be the hour

I read in Dante! more damned than that wherein Paolo and Francesca read in fatal Launcelot. (p. 42)

Alberto Gabriele (2013) has centered an entire article around this allusion, but oddly does not emphasize Pierre's rejection of Dante. Considering Emerson's own paradoxical fondness for Dante, Pierre's spontaneous and willful rejection might well have reminded knowledgeable readers of the *New York Tribune*'s famous description (1850) of Emerson as one who "like a little child…goes into the garden and pulls up a whole bed of violets, laughs at their beauty and lets them down again" (in Sealts, 1980, p. 55). So Pierre, frolicking through the garden of literature, observes Dante's dark beauty but tosses it down again. Only the face of Francesca-as-Isabel (the shadow of the coming Fall) occasions anxiety here. The rejection of Dante's *Inferno* is a rejection of all tragic literature as having, quite logically, no place in Pierre's Eden, which is why Melville's narrator assures us that Pierre can no more understand Dante than *Hamlet* (pp. 169-70); Pierre "could not greet the grim bard fairly" because he is "shallow but fine-spun" (Melville, 1995, p. 54).

Freedom from the burden of proper textual analysis (and the reality principle) is justly condemned by academic critics, but not by Emerson: the only deficit in Pierre's mode of living is his own mediocrity as a reader/poet. Even sweet Lucy, on Pierre's horse-drawn cart, is moved to joke: "Come! They are neighing at your lyrics" (p. 23).

Is it any wonder then, that the metaphoric density of style that represents and parallels Pierre's mindset should come off to Melville's critics as sometimes trite, clichéd, or toothless?[7] For it is surely Melville's insight that in The Garden, just as social knowledge is excluded, so is Dante and, by extension, all *literary taste*. Can sublime art exist in an 'unfallen' state or is it rendered unnecessary by the immediacy and lack of spiritual distance between man, appearance, and environment that Pierre's life exemplifies? The sublimely alienated Ahab (no longer even a Parsee) stands as evidence of the reverse, which is why these two protagonists can never sustain comparison. Melville (1995) implies that taste is irrelevant to happiness: "Oh those love-pauses that they know— how ominous of their future; for pauses precede the earthquake and every other terrible commotion! But blue be their sky awhile, and lightsome all their chat" (p. 25). No earthquakes, no sublimity, no art in Pierre's garden: he has expelled it with Dante. As a reader, Pierre reads only the surface.[8]

Enthusiasm and metaphoric density

If Pierre's romantic idyll in Saddle Meadows is somewhat conditioned by the pleasure he takes in the estate's rich but whitewashed family history, nevertheless Melville (1995) is very careful to distinguish between past and present, history and ecstasy in Pierre's virtual Eden. Unlike mother Mary, Pierre is not yet stuck in the pride of the past, for "love has more to do with his own possible and probable posterities than with the once living but now impossible ancestries of the past" (p. 32). As we see below, the Emersonian focus

on the 'now' as affective unity of nature, Eros, and a creative symbology of selfhood has not been forgotten. Melville has cleared a space for it: though he duly notes love's anticipatory nature, the narrator's exaltation of love in tandem with Pierre's intoxicated speech overwhelmingly stresses its immediacy.

Pierre's love for Lucy and his love for the countryside are interchangeable, and the country is the supervening factor: Lucy in her "angelhood" was "drawn to the country like a linnet...longing for the verdure" (p. 26). And indeed "it was among the Pure and soft incitements of the country that Pierre had first felt towards Lucy [that] dear passion..." Pierre evaluates that passion tropically: "I am entirely willing to be caught when the bait is set in Paradise…" (p. 28).

What concerns us in this section is that, beginning in Book II, Section IV, Melville depicts Pierre's bucolic existence, or more precisely Pierre's linguistic 'sensibility' and rendering of that existence, in the ecstatic cascades of metaphor-within-metaphor for which Melville was criticized roundly. These figurations in themselves exemplify "so rich a zone of torrid verdure", as the author writes. "Love is both Creator and Saviour's Gospel of mankind; a volume bound in rose leaves, clasped in violet, and by the beak of hummingbirds printed with peach juice on the leaves of lilies" (p. 35). Since hummingbirds cannot write books, this passage ought to stand out in 19th century American prose as a rare and deliriously excessive metaphor for a metaphor for a metaphor for a metaphor. Nor are such extravagant tropes limited to the strictly pastoral:

> No Cornwall miner ever sunk so deep a shaft beneath the sea, as Love will sink beneath the floatings of the eyes. Love sees ten million fathoms down, till dazzled by the floor of pearls. The eye is Love's own magic glass, where all things that are not of Earth, glide in supernatural light…In those miraculous translucencies swim the strange eye-fish with wings that sometimes leap out, instinct with joy: moist fish-wings wet the lover's cheek. (p. 36)

Here we seem to have two tracks of metaphoric accumulation, sometimes conflated and sometimes parallel, the first being the trope of Love going deep as the sea, and the second the eye as love's mirror, itself having been likened to a virtual sea. All of this leaves a conventional metaphoric vehicle such as 'pearls' in a rather curious limbo: what exactly it is meant to modify? And even this does not prepare us for the baroque, even proto-surreal, troping of eyelids (presumably) as "leaping" fish wings.

Such writing, if overripe, is too elaborate to be explained by the popularity of sentimental romance in magazines of the era. Whether it is meant as a critical *satire* of certain popular genres is only tangentially relevant to my present purposes. What *must* be regarded as sincere, I think, is Pierre's satisfaction in the romantic closeness of nature and the symbol-making mind by which each fruitfully actualizes the other. A Bryan C. Short (1986) agrees, "lyric embodies the ability to make subjective feelings and alluring symbols into the bases for a satisfying faith" (p. 185). After all, what is chiefly notable in these metaphoric clusters is, first, the aforementioned "connexion between nature and the

affections of the soul" (in Robinson, 1999, p. 19) that is essential to Emersonian idealism, a correspondence of mind and world that renders mental life as a virtual metonymy: "'Tis the use of life to learn metonymy...endless passing of one element into new forms" (in Bloom, 2015, p. 167). Second, one notes the breathless enthusiasm of both Pierre and the narrator in the space of their created garden. The many critics who assert that Melville has depicted Saddle Meadows as simply white class privilege, and nothing more, cannot account for this. Enthusiasm is as characteristic of Emerson's philosophy of 'gusto' as is natural inspiration: "Nothing great was ever done without enthusiasm" ("Circles", in Simmons, 1987, p. 149).

Such emotional fervor is Pierre's chief attribute: "Am I raving?" (Melville, 1995, p. 36) he must stop to ask Lucy during their ride through the fields, as he all but froths in romantic excitement that quickly turns from waxing pastoral to palpably erotic: "With kisses I will suck thy secret from thy cheeks" (p. 37). Lucy understates the case: "Thou art too ardent and impetuous." Pierre's ecstasy takes a form that surely constitutes an allusion to religious experience, as "he turns round and menaces the air and talks to it, as if deified by the air!" (p. 38) Deification by the air is of course a Shelleyan trope, but the convulsive body and its absorption in an invisible, 'virtual' activity alludes, inevitably, to the history of religious revivalism in upper New York State, an area with which Melville was thoroughly familiar. Nancy Craig Simmons (1987) attempts to understand Pierre's enthusiasm in terms of the natural history texts that Melville might have known (p. 149), but surely a more pertinent context for both Melville and Emerson was that of the local revivalist movements and their aftermath. Harold Bloom is not alone in viewing Emerson as the primary *intellectual* exponent of what was most lasting and influential about the beliefs and practices of the original and revisionist sects of Christian (or, like Emerson, post-Christian) spirituality that flourished in the great wooded region intervening between Boston and Buffalo: namely, enthusiasm, Orphism, and a spiritual form of 'knowing' that supplants faith, that is to say (as Emerson argued in 1838) 'nature-oriented' rather than 'miracle-oriented' (Bloom, 1990, pp. 23, 25-7, 30-31, 65, 260). Religious enthusiasm, as Bloom (1990) understands in analyzing the ecstasies at Cane Ridge, Kentucky in 1801, is always and at once both spiritual and sexual, carnal and transcendent (pp. 59-64), and its significance as a rapturous form of being-as-truth certainly transcended the theological and eschatological assumptions of the Perfectionists, Shakers, Millerites, etc. of New York (see Bloom, 1990, pp. 64-73).

At any rate, Pierre's enthusiasm, disquieting as it may be to Lucy, is only positively experienced by Pierre and his narrator within their created garden. It reaches toward ecstasy, the spiritual joy which Emerson had also appropriated, "the joy which I also feel to be my right as man," explains Pierre (Melville, 1995, p. 40). This *jouissance* is metonymic with, rather than simply displacing, his (limited) sexual intimacy with Lucy. Enthusiasm is the only possible sublimity within Pierre's little spiritual kingdom, but its more profound relations to ethics, psychology and the American character are not to be trivialized. Pierre's ecstasy of vague metaphorizing should remind us of what, in

Deleuze's (1993) view, Melville, Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman have in common: "To think a new world and a new man insofar as they create themselves" (p. 86). Specifically, Deleuze (1993) sees a radical attempt to conceptualize an ideal, spiritual rendering of American democracy as a "community of brothers" and sisters (p. 78), safely outside the realm of the patriarchal (from which Pierre in his garden, with memories of his absent milquetoast father, is shielded).[9] Evading the Law of the Father, this non-hierarchical brotherhood is necessarily symbolized in mythic/literary tropes of incest and the androgyne (pp. 78, 84-85, 88). Pierre is indeed described by Melville (1995) and by his own mother as having a "femininess" (p. 94) that is "sweet and docile" (p. 20).

These new tropes of ideal democracy work, for Deleuze (1993), according to a "a new logic, definitely a logic, but one that grasps the innermost depths of life without leading back to reason….the artist that has the eye of the prophet, not the psychologist" (p. 82). These words hone in on Pierre's own literary/symbolic process, blithely in denial of anything that could be scientifically considered as 'actual' (which may, *pace* Nietzsche, be ethically and spiritually useless to us), yet succeeding in the creation of worlds according to its own regularized yet non-rational procedure. The antediluvian Pierre is neither exemplary of, nor a parody of, this process—the creation of the new Adam—but a sort of tryout, a Melvillean experiment.

Pierre's facility with metaphor contrasts to the 'other' tendency of Melville's style: the foregrounding of intense imagery, often hallucinatory, that Pierre and Lucy experience as their crisis approaches: images which lend themselves to Deleuze's regime of the crystalline, for such virtual images, experienced before Pierre's fall, invariably foreshadow and in some cases actualize it, as when Pierre enters Lucy's bedroom:

> He caught the snow-white bed reflected in the toilet glass...the two separate beds—the real one and the reflected one—and…a most miserable presentiment stole upon him...his glance fixed upon the tender, snow white, ruffled roll…Never trembling scholar longed more to unroll that mystic vellum than Pierre longed to unroll snow white secrets of that ruffled thing. But his hands touched not any object… (p. 39)

Whereas metaphor is synthetic, immediate, replete with possibility, the actual/virtual image circuit of the two beds is dissociative, prophetic, and paralyzing. Pierre is made "miserably" conscious of the unreality of one of the two bed-images: he longs to "unroll" Lucy sexually, but dreads the aftermath. Does he fear losing an angel/muse to mere carnality? Is the very passion for Lucy's "snow white" pillow to be irretrievably lost in its attainment? Or is the bifurcated image in itself enough to cause Pierre to lose faith in the greater, imaginative project on which his need for Lucy depends? All we know is that the actualization of the bed-image either spells disaster in itself, or is disastrous because it is somehow unattainable.

The romance of incest

It remains now to integrate my central interpretative theme of loss, the notion that Pierre has fallen from unreflective, untroubled natural grace that is best understood via Emerson, to Melville's theme of incest, which seems to garner the attention of most contemporary critics.

In this case, the New Critics and our contemporary ideological and psychoanalytic critics join together in being unnecessarily judgmental about Pierre's so-called 'arrested development.' Psychoanalysis is not moral evaluation. Displacement and even disavowal are not necessarily pathological, and may be acted on without harm to self and others. Many men function well enough under the influence of an (objectively) overbearing mother and even under the aegis of Žižek's maternal superego,[10] especially when the mother figure, like Mary Glendinning, is more doting than critical. Mary's possessiveness, though clearly a fault in her, certainly does not automatically translate to psychic suffering for Pierre.

Arvin notoriously interpreted Pierre's fall as an unconscious impulse to matricide, but this seems a typical overreach of early Freudian criticism. What Melville does make clear is that Pierre possesses a pure and simple terror of what he calls Mary's "pride" (her phallic possession of the grandfather's overbearing legacy), which must be avoided at all costs, and thus motivates his flight. And it is notable that this source of tension, lurking in the otherwise rather canny, friendly, and unashamedly sensual love between mother and son, only becomes uncanny once Pierre has 'fallen up' into the tree of knowledge (i.e. knowledge of his father's adultery). The result leaves Mrs. Glendinning with only one emotional resort: an intense sexual jealousy masquerading as social propriety.

From Melville's description of the relationship, there is little marked disavowal in Pierre's eroticized, physical affection for his mother, nor in her acceptance of it. Why do the critics not take note of Pierre's "I am going to try and tack it with a kiss", as he fastens a ribbon to Mary's breast? This kiss, which no doubt infuriated *Pierre's* reviewers, is hardly a sign of repression. What must be disavowed, purely on the plane of the internalized social ideology that conflates Pierre's guilt with Mary's social pride, is the *name* of incest, not the practice of it; for the name, and perhaps a practice without *any* limits, entails the purely social disgrace that will light on Pierre anyway, for the impertinence of choosing a lower class wife.

Pierre's way of functioning at Saddle Meadows, particularly in a world of class protocol that effectively prevents him from sexual intercourse, is indeed *functional* for both Pierre and his mother, resulting in a mutual satisfaction that may well have continued, so far as the author lets us know, after the marriage to Lucy. Their incestuous play (absent the post-exilic attachment to Isabel) is neither the cause nor the reason for Pierre's expulsion; and its termination ends in grief and death.

Melville's romantic apology for incest, its fantasization as a "sweet dream", is carefully crafted. Mary is extremely careful of her dress and appearance before Pierre:

> That…infinitely delicate aroma of inexpressible tenderness and attentiveness which… precedes the final banns…but which, like the bouquet of the costliest German wines, too often evaporates upon pouring love out to drink, in the disenchanting glasses of the matrimonial days and nights; this highest and airiest thing in the whole compass of the experience of our mortal life; this heavenly evanescence…was for Mary Glendinning, now not very far from her grand climacteric, miraculously revived in the courteous lover-like adoration of Pierre… not to be limited in duration by that climax which is so fatal to ordinary love; this softened spell which still wheeled the mother and son in one orbit of joy...seemed almost to realize here below the sweet dreams of those religious enthusiasts, who paint to us a Paradise to come, when etherealized from all drosses and stains, the holiest passion of man shall unite all kindreds and climes in one circle of pure and unimpairable delight. (Melville, 1995, p. 16)

Melville, who in his person was then at the height of his own marital unhappiness, shrewdly idealizes the erotic momentum before marriage, a fully sensual "orbiting" of male and female bodies in mutual attraction, a perpetual and cyclical 'becoming' that Emerson celebrates in other terms in "Self-Reliance." It is an (auto-)erotic "climacteric" for Mary and probably for Pierre (who only lacks for more of the same in a wished-for sister). Having written a "wicked book" prior, it should be no surprise that Melville describes incest as part and parcel of a paradise "almost" as blessed as that to come. Saddle Meadows is a reverse Eden without direct patriarchy, since Pierre-as-Eve submits to Mary-as-Adam. Here only, just as one enjoys incest without the name, there is orgasmic joy without penetration ("a circle of..unimpairable delight") akin to religious enthusiasm without an end-time, and to poetry without knowledge, all because of the deeper 'truth' of the self-creation of spirit.

My ruminations here, and Deleuze's, are not likely to sway those determined to disapprove of Pierre's psychosexual environment, nor is the necessarily condensed observation that the desire to weld *eros* to a state of being that is "childlike", rather than "childish",[11] seems to be a regular preoccupation with the romantics. But what Melville actually has written in *Pierre* suggests an attitude far from critical, probably because it works *outside*, as it were, the interests of a psychoanalytic reading as a complex symbol of Emersonian truth (that is, of life's truth) as the active and joyful motions of whim.

Natural aristocracy
I return one final time to the guiding question: What has Pierre lost? Pierre has lost the living of his life in the manner he desires, characterized as an organic unity in terms of the series: nature=metaphor=spirit=ecstasy=idealized eros (Lucy)=sensual eros (Mary, transferable to Lucy). Since all this certainly rests on a foundation of class privilege, we perhaps should be reminded here of Emerson's own attachment to a concept of "natural aristocracy" and the belief that a meritocratic elite might be formed by the industrial revolution, despite its inequalities and corruptions: "Though tender people may object to the aristocracy of wealth...if you think what it means...bringing all the powers to the

surface...it is *what we all aim at*" (in Bercovitch, 1990, p. 646).[12] Yet at the very same time, as Bercovitch (1990) notes, Emerson exhorts American capitalism to "open the doors of opportunity…to talent and virtue and [then] property will not be in bad hands" (p. 646). Further, "every child…must have a just chance for his bread" (p. 641). While Emerson deplored the "methods" of the socialists at home and abroad (since they denied radical individualism), he also offered, "truly I honor the generous *ideals* of the socialists…they are the unconscious prophets of a true state of society…which the tendencies of nature lead to" (in Bercovitch, 1990, p. 652).

Clearly, Emerson saw the life of wealth as a baseline comfort upon which we have the leisure to cultivate our individual souls. "We honor the rich because they have the freedom, the power, the grace we feel to be proper to man, proper to us" (in Cavell, 1984, p. 5), or as Cavell (1984) puts it pragmatically, Emersonian contemplations apply "only in contexts in which there is satisfaction enough, something like…leisure...beyond bare necessities" (p. 5). This is therefore *"what all men aim at"*, so long as "no one should take more than his share" (Emerson in Bercovitch, 1990, p. 641). As long as American capitalism remains meritocratic, with each man theoretically able to obtain a share of wealth according to his individual genius, then an aristocracy of those who have achieved and deserve that wealth is not only acceptable, but estimable (Bercovitch, 1990, p. 641). Of course it would hardly have been necessary to point out, even to Emerson, that American capitalism does not work that way. But his more compelling, and influential position is that the enjoyments and satisfactions of a 'natural aristocrat' (material comfort as a condition of spiritual or active attainment) are indeed aspirational *as long as no one in society is excluded from them except by virtue of their own life choices*. Emerson's idea of meritocracy is certainly not socialism, but his demand for absolutely equal opportunity and the means of survival and education required to assure that is an unattained American gesture in that direction.

Losing his position in society, Pierre loses access to the garden both literally and figuratively. Knowledge of what he has lost and why (e.g. the self-policing, brute force of his own class) is certainly no comfort, even when Pierre tries to return that knowledge to his imaginary readers in a book of exposé that, far from being a socialist manifesto, turns to the inward abyss of nihilism, which only later will develop its own explicit forms of social critique, perhaps beginning with *The Confidence Man* and culminating in the work of Nietzsche and Kafka.

Pierre's privileged existence may be an 'illusion' in terms of theory's attempt to reconcile property and democratic ethics (with Emerson poised enigmatically between radical democracy and natural aristocracy), but it is also a social fact, and Pierre's Emersonian spirit has sought to cultivate these given advantages in order to symbolically create something 'more', something enviable, out of what in other hands (like the Reverend Falsgrave's) would simply be abused as complacent consumption, social tyranny, or gross indulgence.[13] Pierre's *jouissance* in the synthesis of perception and metaphor is only an 'illusion' from the perspective of those who cannot attain it, those who demand something

better than what they have been apportioned. Only Isabel—a 'dark' character constituted by a series of signs of nihilism, absence, deprivation—introduces this demand into Pierre's head. Though childhood must end, though paradise must fall, this does not mean that the perfectly genuine comforts, even joys, arising from Pierre's pastoral ecstasy is only an 'illusion' fostered by privilege. It is also what a "true" democratic equality might aspire to, in Emerson's somewhat peculiar formulation, and there is nothing in *Pierre* to suggest that such aspirations, if attainable, are not to be desired.

Part Three: The Critique of Metaphor

Metaphor as smokescreen: The gap between language and appearance

Insofar as the novel can be read as a reaction to Emersonian themes, Melville represents Emerson's philosophy of experience not so much in terms of the powerful impact of immanent, natural signs on our consciousness (though the Sage of Concord writes eloquently about such), but as an account of the mind's elective, intuitive mediation of percepts through processes of metaphor that we associate with the use of language and aesthetic creation. Indeed, in Saddle Meadows, such metaphors to live by work exclusively through language. Is *Pierre*, then, a gross simplification, or an acute example, of Emerson's thought?

In *Nature*, Emerson (2003) firmly asserts (in a surprisingly Lockean fashion) that all language is firmly and inextricably rooted in perceptual experience, that is, in appearances: "Words are signs of natural facts" (p. 193). For man has taken his most basic and constituent signs of language and thought from his sense experience of the natural environment—for example, "right means straight;…spirit means…wind" (p. 193)—and afterwards has built up, largely through metaphor, a complex web of concepts and categories that describe all life, even mental life. So there is, in Emerson's words, a "radical" and "necessary" correspondence between language and experience, insofar as its most meaningful and paradigmatic terms are anchored in a relation of more or less direct reference to objects of sensation.

This argument is not often discussed by scholars, for although Emerson goes on to say that "natural facts" in themselves are but the "pictures" of human states of mind and spirit (that is, presumably, percepts and attitudes of feeling), still his claims about the origin of language are not entirely commensurate to his assertion that "all nature is a vast trope", nor certainly as intriguing. When developing his argument in the fourth chapter of *Nature*, Emerson (2003) writes that "all words that convey a spiritual import" are indebted for their primary meaning contents to a "radical correspondence between visible things and human thoughts" (pp. 194-5). His argument about the terms that we use to describe human spiritual (i.e. emotional, intentional) realities, so far from being naïve, is a remarkable anticipation of present day theories of the cognitive role and importance of metaphorical processes of human thinking.[14]

These later and oft-repeated arguments may well have been among the things that

Melville admired about Emerson's teaching. Nevertheless, is not Emerson's initial, more naïve position concerning the origin of linguistic meaning a necessary postulate for his confident teaching that metaphors of the mind (equivalent to the metaphors of language so far as Emerson tells us) empower us through their intuition of primary realities? For above all, Emerson must avoid the possibility that natural appearances and the language with which we describe them, are fundamentally or largely independent of one another, for any kind of ontological divide between 'mind' and 'world' would rob Emerson of the rational, argumentative basis for the claim of a spiritual unity of mind and matter that bestows upon the will a creative power and 'natural authority' over man's environment. Although it may be possible for Emerson's most able interpreters to escape from the unsatisfactory theory of linguistic meaning upon which he bases his "radical correspondence" between language and experience, they must at least concede that the text of *Nature* does not make it easy to do so.

It is on these grounds, I think, that we can locate a major intellectual 'disconnect' between Emerson and Melville on the subject of the nature and value of metaphor. For although it is impossible, in the exemplary rather than explanatory mode of *Pierre*,[15] to know exactly what Melville means by his speculations about the "unknown reasoning" and the "reality" beyond "what real life can show", we can, at least, observe that *Pierre* posits a less direct relation between sensory and affective experience and language use, that is, the metaphoric process.

John G. Ellis (1993, pp. 34-42), in his noted critique of so-called formalist approaches to linguistic theory, argues that the core of language is not external 'reference' or 'correspondence' with facts, nor the combinatorial properties of discourse emphasized by studies of syntax, but linguistic *categorization*, understood not as the categorization of like things, but of *unlike* things.[16] If Ellis is correct on this point, then ordinary language is indeed divorced from and indifferent to the bewildering richness and variety of sense experience in the world (not to mention the scientific aim of 'testing' those experiences). Language, in brief, *must* distort experience to function at all, but this leaves a permanent gap between the two sign systems, with affections and stimuli often suspended awkwardly in the middle (Ellis, 1993, pp. 36-37, 49-52).[17]

Pierre achieves a very similar insight, I suggest, as he meditates upon the conventional trope of sadness attached to a lone pine-tree, observing that 'sadness' therefore seems older and stronger than pleasant flowers. Pierre again has his vision of Isabel's face: "Oh, tree, the face, the face!" (Melville, 1995, p. 41). This vision, as a sense-memory and in its virtual aspect as uncanny phantom, is called up without Pierre's entirely willing it, for he is beginning to sense that there is a form of sexual willing distinct from what he has understood as will. "Is grief a self-willed guest that *will* come in?" (p. 40). So far, however, this is no real challenge to Emersonian doctrine. Pierre's mentality still operates through the regime of predictable metaphoric associations: lowering pine, dark face, mournful face, etc. He is only entertaining the thought that his aestheticized cosmos must be seasoned with grief to remain pleasurable at all: "Is grief a pendant to pleasure?" (p.

40).

This leads, however, to further skepticism: Pierre begins to speculate that although he knows 'grief' as an idea, through poetic associations, he has certainly never felt it. "Grief;—thou art a legend to me…art still a ghost story to me. I know thee not,--do half disbelieve in thee" (p. 41). He finds he can only speak about grief analogically, and intuits an Other and deeper grief, a "ghostly" and affective "knowing" that perhaps belongs to people with different experiences (such as Isabel), but which has not revealed itself in Pierre's environment. 'Grief' for Pierre is a mere label without content. That is why Pierre cannot experience it.

This begins the severing of what Emerson has tied. Pierre knows something of the 'grief' he has never felt, but his ability to use the word fails to cover the lack of affective experience. One might transform and even create affection through the labeling of language; but are there not experiences that one *cannot* create without the influence and external force of appearances? Melville's Charlie Noble develops something like this critique in *The Confidence Man* (1971, p. 191): "There is no bent of heart or turn of thought which any man holds by virtue of an unalterable nature or will." Melville's interest in experience without will, will without language, and language without real experience (e.g. 'grief') all escape the linguistic determination of experience and therefore anticipates the radical separation entailed by theories such as that of Ellis. Is Emerson's philosophy of metaphor trapped in a linguistic determination that cannot withstand such an analysis? For if impulse can be experienced and acted upon in some pre-linguistic form, then where is the centrality of language, and metaphor, to sensory and affective experience? If, contra Freud, our 'unnamable' and indescribable impulses and reactions to stimuli do not necessarily operate analogically, then how is the language of metaphor empowered to put us in contact with some more ultimate reality?

For Pierre, the concept 'grief' amounts to a half-empty place-holder, a surface screen which, at the very least, reveals a virtual absence of what Pierre senses could or *should* be present: an emotion that he genuinely cannot remember having. In Isabel's face, metaphor suddenly invokes the phantom of what is not, or may not be. Deleuze has written of crystalline images (and tropes) that replace their objects, both destroying and creating them, but at the precipice of Pierre's fall, Melville's literary metaphors, whether viewed as modernistic crystal signs or as an extravagant growth of conventional literary language, seem to be inadequate to the task of replacement. A phantom is left behind where Emerson demands a tight correspondence of linguistic sign and referent (to the benefit of the sign and its creative mastery). There should be no significant sense of anything 'left out' or behind.

But here, metaphor becomes a kind of smokescreen, to cite a practice associated with Native Americans (a population of whom inhabited Saddle Meadows before Pierre). Smokescreen ought to communicate what Deleuze (1986), following Peirce, agrees to call a "natural" relation between signs: the presence of smoke indicates the presence of fire, and so forth (pp. 197-8). However, smokescreen carries the sense of a more abstract, self-

abnegating relation: it conceals whatever may be hidden behind it. Smokescreen signifies a relation that is unknown and is in principle unknowable. Looking backwards, we can see that even Pierre's foaming enthusiasm for love, nature, and Lucy in the garden may itself fulfill the function of (temporarily) concealing the image of Isabel's face, which becomes manifest at that very climax of Pierre's ecstasy. The face, intriguingly, appears not to Pierre at that moment, but to Lucy, an uncanny metonymy that allows Melville to reinforce his point about language and not simply about Pierre's unconscious (with its facile, romantic longings for a 'safe' experience of grief).

Does the sense of metaphor as a smokescreen necessitate that Pierre's enthusiasm is a hollow sham, as many critics have argued? That would be to go against the grain of the author's intentions. If language is made fragile by what escapes its net, this does not render it impotent, just as metaphor is no less intense and desirable for being short-lived. Pierre's time at Saddle Meadows is evidently fulfilling; Melville's point is that it is simply not sustainable.

Why is it thus? What Melville's experiment with the Emersonian "Adam early in the morning" (Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*) seems to have finally taught him is that Emerson describes the best of all possible modes of living—if you can keep it![18] Emerson sees his own writing as truth in action, a mode of living through creative synthesis, while every other mode of living is more or less a pernicious distraction. For Melville, however, it remains only a privileged mode of living for certain individuals in certain situations. The inevitable social implications of such a contention, however, would seem to rest, for Melville, on the deeper linguistic implications we have suggested. It seems a dreadful 'fact' to Melville that although our symbol-making capacity at its best can provide some pragmatic and optimal *truths* to live by, it *does not* furnish a correspondingly complete and inviolably 'optimal' *reality* to live *in*. If truth, according to Emerson is a matter of the will's troping of nature in order to actualize our powers of mind, Melville's use of 'truth' in *Pierre* is constantly associated with unwanted knowledge and experience (e.g. Isabel's letter): images and texts occasioning the 'actual' experience of grief. Therefore, there must always be a double standard for 'truth,' as Plinlimmon argues in the discourse of 19th century metaphysics rather than that of signification. Nor can language and other symbols bring and hold these two 'truths' together: and this is tantamount to saying, as Pierre later does, that the very notion of truth is inherently misleading and inherently unfulfilling. Melville's mature understanding of truth remains an actuality that is inscrutable, *un*representable even at the height of our symbolic powers; it remains radically 'elsewhere', like the phantom image of the face. "I own thy speechless, nameless power" cries the Emersonian quester, Ahab, at the crucial moment: is this not what he is taking a stab at?

What constitutes this evidently dreadful reality, this "palsied universe" that Melville is literally unable to name? The symbolic may assist us in our attempts to *try* and survive a threatening universe, but it scarcely *represents* that universe. Actuality, experienced as the gap between trope and being-in-the-world, always evades such attempts at capture. In

this sense, *Pierre* expresses indiscernibility, or the very critique of the linguistic signifier that Deleuze finds at the heart of modernism. Indeed, contra John Taggart's (1989) view, language itself may be inseparable from the very "threat" and "inscrutability" that Melville so often invokes (p. 258).[19]

Nevertheless, we may glean from *Pierre*, that this brute actuality that challenges idealism is not rightly understood as purely 'transcendental', but, far from being beyond experience, is something that, like grief, is commonly manifested within experience, and is discovered in its more specific effects as that which accompanies and embraces the downfall of a Melville protagonist, whether linked to temporal passage (*Pierre*) or to the force and contingency of events (*Moby-Dick*). The alterity of this elemental reality consists only in the fact that it denies representation; this is no doubt why any truth that remains discernible after Pierre's fall is in the form of the non-verbal, silent, gestural powers of Isabel, whose erotically compelling guitar manifests "the utter unintelligibleness, but infinite significances of the sounds…" (Melville, 1995, p. 26).

After The Fall: The revision of Emerson
How can Melville (1995) paint Pierre's naïve aristocratic life as an Emersonian organic unity, a closeness of man and nature, and yet insist that the actions by which Pierre literally destroys his life, and jumps into the abyss, are definitively Emersonian actions? For the author insists on the language of impulses, 'intuitions,' guiding spirits and non-rational choices in his account of Pierre's embrace of Isabel at the expense of his own family: "…Memory and Prophecy, and Intuition tell him, 'Pierre, have no reserves; no minutest possible doubt; this being is thy sister' " (p. 112).

Yet what looks to be an inconsistency in Melville's thought actually constitutes the heart of what must be seen as his critical and revisionary relationship to the Sage of Concord, as if the whole work is an experiment in 'saving' Emerson from his many critics by essentially transforming him (*via* Isabel) into a composite of Shakespeare, Hawthorne, and Melville himself. For anyone disposed to defend Emerson against Melville's initial critique made in Books I-IV might easily object that the young Pierre, a spoiled, if cheerful, Yankee aristocrat, is such a fragile and limited embodiment of Emerson's creative spirit that the author has accomplished little more than a crude caricature. Melville must have sensed this critique, for he defensively anticipates it by giving the Emersonian a broad and clear route of escape from Melville's own proposals about the limits of language and will: to wit, that Pierre is only a half-baked and not a *true* image of Emerson's ideal man. The protagonist's exile from 'natural aristocracy' might therefore be understood as caused not by any flaw in Emerson's world-view, but rather by Pierre not having the courage of his convictions.

Melville's narrative, indeed, leaves the reader in no doubt about the chinks in Pierre's armor. For what is the principal and most proximate cause of Pierre's self-exile? It is his declaration of 'marriage' to his sister Isabel, designed to prevent his mother from knowing the truth of her husband's adultery. Although clothed in the sanctimony of a sacrifice for

his mother's sake and for his father's reputation, this is not quite the act of heroism that Pierre thinks it to be. For one thing, the 'sham marriage', as no reader has failed to see, is simply another of Pierre's flirtations with the incest taboo. For another, there is a refusal to confront his mother out of pure terror; running away from Mary and her stifling village seems preferable. Most importantly, it is an act by which Pierre, in effect, collaborates in Mary's class pride, that is, in her obsession with the status of the family name.

Is this rebellion, then, an act of Emersonian "whim" or simply a predetermined 'acting out' of the Glendinning family romance? "The doctrine of hatred must be preached when the doctrine of love pules and whines. I shun father and mother and wife and brother, when my genius calls me" (Emerson, 2003, p. 270). Pierre shuns his mother only to reify her rotten ideology and his father's sexual hypocrisy: it is indeed an act of "puling" and "whining" love. His pride places him not in Emerson's "party of the future" but in the "party of the past" that is symbolized by the family mausoleum, the kind of monument that Emerson had insisted must be overturned. *Unmerited* class privilege is, finally, the one true snake in the garden. Had he read *Pierre*, Emerson probably would have regarded the protagonist's resolution as a wolf in sheep's clothing, a class and sexual dependency masquerading as a protestation of free will. Nor is it difficult to determine what, for an Emersonian, would have been a more honest course of action: confronting Pierre's mother with the 'truth' of Isabel and dealing with the consequences. Alternately, if we are obliged to see incest, rather than ethics, at the heart of Pierre's dilemma, he might have more actively pursued his sexual interest in Isabel *in spite* of his inner (and dubious) intuition that such would be 'incest.' Emerson cared somewhat less for social propriety than even did Poe, and if this rather Poe-esque course of action would have exiled Pierre, anyway it would nevertheless have spared him the maddening frustration that marks his downward spiral from this point in the story onwards.

Where, then, does all this leave Melville's critique of Emerson's teachings? If we view Pierre's decisions, as Melville often seems to do, as being inescapably psychologically determined—in the manner, more or less, of Shakespeare's tragic protagonists—than we return, by another route, to the divorce of language and the "overdeterminations of time", i.e. our sexual past. But if we view Pierre as reserving some freedom of choice (as more evident in classical tragedy),[20] then Melville has simply entered a new phase of his investigation of the Emersonian spirit, one that tests Pierre in the wider and harsher environment of life outside Saddle Meadows and class privilege: as if Melville again asks the question, "Does Emerson depend on language as able to make contact with reality, or can he embrace a force that is anterior to all efforts of linguistic representation?" In this new world, as accompanied by Isabel, Pierre's intuitions seem to be less grounded in linguistic analogy and metaphoric association, and more in a sensation-based, embodied form of knowing that is genuinely sublime, yet precarious in its consequences. If, at the outset, Pierre's 'heroism' is as much a sham as his marriage, it becomes more genuine at the expense of becoming tragic.

Silencing metaphor: Isabel's story

Gabriele (2013) observed that "the face of Isabel frees [Pierre] from a literary existence" (p. 49), but Isabel fulfills a more important function even than this, for it is her *voice*—and body—that frees Pierre from language itself. Melville's (1995) prose style is altered completely when he takes on the broken, repetitive, paratactic voice of Isabel in Books VI and VII, to relate her (barely comprehended) history. Gone, almost completely, are even the most conventional literary tropes, for Isabel has never learned them: "I have no tongue to speak with thee" (p. 113). Further:

> Now I began to feel strange differences. When I saw a snake trailing through the grass...I said to myself, that thing is not human, but I am human...And so with all things...I cannot speak coherently here...All my thoughts well up in me...I cannot alter them...speech being sometimes before the thought...There I was; just as I found myself in the world; there I was...The farmer scarcely ever spoke to me...the young girls began to stare at me; the bewilderings of the old starings of the…solitary old man and woman by the cracked hearth-stone...in the desolate, round, open space...now returned to me; and the green starings and the serpent hissings of the old cat. (pp. 122-3)

Isabel's speech is functionally equivalent to 'image'; whereas young Pierre's voice has been mediated by poetic associations. Isabel reduces language to only its barest essentials; and this directness and minimalism is sublime in contrast to Pierre's cheerful mediocrity.[21] There is metaphor here, but derived entirely from the physical and natural relations that Isabel surmises from sense experience (e.g. the snake-like cat) and the few labels, such as "human," that she has half-learned from adults. Isabel's sublime, because "so entirely artless" language tries, doubtfully, to represent the world directly through recollection-images and some semblance of logic, but only reopens the fissures in which representation fails to attain its subject and the temporal gaps that render narration impossible. This does not matter, for her incantatory speech, like her music, gestures, and body, has a communicative power of a different kind, a power outside of language, akin to the majestic power which Emerson (2003) attributed to "savages" whom, he believed (p. 195),[22] had only rudimentary language (which Melville captured so effectively in the tattooed Queequeg). Isabel's analogous 'fullness' of being derives from sounds without settled meanings, yet full of affective power—including that conveyed by her memorable shriek (Melville, 1995, p. 45).[23] The degree to which that power is outside of the linguistic deformation that results from the imposition of general categories and the acquisition of vast webs of culturally-acquired symbolic associations is the degree to which it seems to be able to capture the actual, the true, and consequently the limits of 'truth'. But is this a 'truth' worth having? Does it belong, properly, to civilized life?

Conclusion: Shakespearean Nothingness and Suicidal Confidence

Pierre's seduction by Isabel—much as a paragon of the Emersonian spirit she herself may be in striving powerfully for her own betterment in a world she barely understands—constitutes not an 'awakening' for Pierre, but, at this point in his story, a radical diminishment of his powers.

Bercovitch joins most of the critics of *Pierre* in seeing the novel as progressing from falsehood and illusion to bitter truth. But this is not precisely correct, since to be consistent, Bercovitch would have to admit that *Pierre*'s final Shakespearean truth is the negation of truth in any global form. "Nothing will come from nothing," as Melville marked in his copy of *Lear* (I. i). The question now becomes whether meaningless, unintelligible force is to be granted the status of 'substance,' or, as the Platonic tradition holds, is merely a privation, a nameless sort of non-being that has no place in any cosmos brought to order by any superior mind? That seems to be what is at stake in the final phase of the novel (Books XXII-XXVI), and it implicitly overwrites our apparent understanding of the first phase: if one is fortunate enough to be born in paradise, hadn't one better stay there? Ishmael repeatedly insists that a glorious wreck is better than an uneventful life: "…better it is to perish in [the] howling infinite, than be ingloriously dashed upon the lee, even if that were safety!" (*Moby-Dick*, ch. 23),[24] but the fates of both Ahab and Pierre suggest that Melville acknowledged the unwisdom of humanity's perennial adventurism, as Kafka later did: "…human nature,…unstable as the dust, can endure no restraint: …it soon begins to tear at its bonds until it rends everything asunder."[25]

Emerson (2003) writes, of the world of appearances, that "any distrust of the permanence of laws would paralyze the faculties of man" (*Nature*, p. 207). Emerson must consider such a paralysis as avoidable; Melville, by contrast, regards it as inevitable. This is the revelation of the random portrait which Pierre famously encounters in a Manhattan gallery (Book XXVI), and which, to Pierre and Isabel, resembles their father. The episode addresses the inevitability of doubt: Pierre feels the powerful need for *confirmation*, for knowledge, or else his trusted intuition and therefore his resolution—now suspected of being basely self-serving—fail. But, as so often in life, there is no confirmation forthcoming; and so the will and its "native hue of resolution" is "puzzled".

Shakespeare's tragedies are tragedies of knowledge in just such a manner as this, a manner that is distinct from the Greek mode. In *Hamlet*, it is demonstrable that secular forms of knowing, even when possessed by the most keen, quick, and reductive of intelligences, are pragmatically useless either in love or war. Whereas Macbeth's fate demonstrates, conversely, that *transcendental* knowledge, on the rare occasion when it is discoverable, is not only useless, but in fact disastrous. Prospero, therefore, the only successful actor of all Shakespeare's great protagonists, must mysteriously drown his magic book (and wither on the vine) in order to rejoin society.

Thusly, the lack of confirmation of our most important intuitions, and therefore the pragmatic uselessness of any truth beyond the truth of nothingness is the key to Pierre's grand

"climacteric", at once Shakespearean and Emersonian. Only once Pierre has renounced his role as a Christ-like martyr to 'truth', and with it all claim to be able to act upon *certainty*, does he begin to be able to determine, indeed to will, his own future. Realization of the "everlasting elusiveness" of all truth (Melville, 1995, p. 339) entails the abandonment of all those illusions that Pierre has been able to live by: "[his] mind, by becoming profound in itself, grew skeptical of all tendered profundities" (p. 354); and "there was nothing he more spurned than his own aspirations" (p. 339). First, Pierre acknowledges the folly of believing that his "bungled" writing can accomplish anything of intellectual, social, or personal significance (p. 304); then, he confesses to himself that he has no idea who Isabel is (pp. 273, 353, 358, 360), and that his championing of her had been propelled by attraction (pp. 273, 321, 347, 358). Only after this purgation, once his great (and negative) soul has freed thinking from its sexual past (*pace* Freud), can Pierre re-enter the world with effective will. Disillusionment, in the final analysis, is empowering.

Critics from Arvin to Del Banco point out that Pierre's last act, the killing of the vile Glen, is tantamount to self-willed death and cannot be identified as any form of wisdom; but such critics miss the point, because neither is it unwisdom, and it is certainly not paralysis. Melville's constant reference is *Hamlet*, and it is only through a 'Hamletian' apotheosis that Pierre returns to the Emersonian spirit. Emerson adored both Hamlet and Shakespeare as great-souled poets of nature, but Melville more likely fastened onto the fact that none of Shakespeare's souls are free. Hamlet, notoriously, is incapable of decisive action by virtue of commandment, conscious will, or even sexual jealousy. Only when he gives up the urge to control his circumstances and to manipulate, like the dramatist, the language of others, is he free *to act*, that is to say *react* to the corrupt plots of others:[26] "…if it be not now, yet it will come…The readiness is all…Let be" (V. ii). Thusly, when Pierre takes up arms against a sea of troubles, he ends them in a violent retaliation against his enemies that is at once willful, heroic, egoistic, just, selfish, irresponsible, socially rebellious and as truthful as any act or process of decision can be. It is only a corrupt society—Pierre's society as he never comprehended it—that punishes this impulsive, Emersonian heroism, and perhaps Emerson and Melville differ most of all as to the potential of the real, as opposed to the ideal, mid-century America to welcome individual genius.

We are in a position now to recognize the function of the great structuring figures of *Pierre* which supervene even the tropes of pastoral, of monuments, and of exile. These are figures of unities and doublings. Metaphors unify, at the cost of concealing or exiling Freud's reality principle, and perhaps, also, the Enlightenment ideal of objectivity. Images (like Deleuze's *hyalosigns*) are divisive, an emergence of the Gothic uncanny. Saddle Meadows is a paradise as a place of unity of nature, affect, and metaphor, adding up to a human self. The Fall into social knowledge and oppression is a loss of identity through an incessant doubling: the doubling of language by more embodied forms of symbolic apprehension, the doubling of Pierre's book into a profound book of the soul and a compromised piece of writing.

Similarly, Melville splits with Emerson (including Emerson's Shakespeare) in order only to unify Emerson's intuitive truth to Melville's sense of Shakespearean truth-as-negation. The result, predictably, is that the true Emersonian spirit is tragic, since he or she is not acceptable in any America yet attained, with its class coercion and it commercial oligarchies. The empowerment that Pierre achieves through a paradoxical (and fatal) renunciation of the will-to-power unbinds all the social and sexual ties and allows him to act on something like Emerson's (1875) "organic motion of the soul". At its core, this is enabled by realization of the unknowable, casting doubt, like the portrait, on the mind's most fundamental symbolic capacities.

"…Had he lived in those days when the world was made," wrote Melville of Emerson, "he might have offered some valuable suggestions" (in Sampson, 1970, p. 795). Since, however, Emerson had no hand in that creation, our symbolic powers are effectively limited, not least by the social and, hence, ideological determinations of language whose influence Emerson could not fully appreciate. Emersonian confidence, in ideal circumstances, is blessed. Outside of those circumstances, the 'pure good' of self-reliance is necessarily tragic. Emerson evaded this conclusion, waiting for an ideal democracy and a wealthy nation in which genuine self-expression could be unhindered; and doubtlessly judging that to recognize the tragic sense of Western man and his literature would be to sap our spiritual potential prematurely and foreclose on the open future.[27] But Melville, in his own way a democratic hopeful, sees no such evasion possible. Joy, of the creative and even of the sensual kind, may scarcely be separated from Emerson's symbolic capacities; and the true world, for Melville, may indeed be as superfluous and useless to the spirit as Nietzsche later claimed; but even if reduced to naught but bodies and forces, reality is unavoidable for all that. If this seems, after modernism, to be only a variety of common sense, Melville had to work through romantic idealism, and through Emerson, to justify it.

Notes

1   The inclusion of Orson Welles in this "minor" tradition, to use a frequent idiom of Deleuze, should not surprise us. The great theater and film impresario, considered an American Nietzsche by Deleuze, harbored a lifelong obsession with the triad Shakespeare, Melville, and Kafka which culminated in the 'Voodoo' Macbeth (1936) on stage, the 'Pagan' *Macbeth* (1948) on film, *Falstaff* (1965), The *Trial* (1962), and Welles' strangely neglected play, *Moby-Dick Rehearsed* (1955), still regularly performed today in Nantucket, MA.

2   A textually-oriented critic and philosopher, Deleuze does not, to my knowledge, generally recognize the critical concept of authorial ambivalence.

3   In what follows, I shall reserve judgment on Bloom's oft-repeated claim that both Melville and Emerson were continuators of the ancient Gnostic tradition, according to which God (a Demiurge) is neither a creator nor omnipotent, and in which Creation and Fall were the same event that relegated our human reality to a sort of cosmic emptiness in which truth (*pace* Nietzsche) is rather irrelevant. Melville certainly took an interest in this view in his "Fragments

of a Lost Gnostic Poem" (1891).

4   See also Bloom (1985, pp. 106-7).

5   Sealts, in his invaluable article, hypothesizes, largely on the basis of the daily records of his activities, that Melville had not read *Nature* (1836), but admits that there is really no evidence one way or the other. I see no reason to assume that its contents were totally unknown to Melville, as he had ample opportunity to read and *to hear* more about Emerson than the daily records could possibly specify, and (as Sealts has shown indirectly) was clearly motivated to do so; see Sealts (1980, pp. 56, 57-58, 64-65, 67).

6   Melville famously declared "I do not oscillate in Emerson's rainbow" in a letter to Duyckinck, but the phrase itself is allusive and so carefully ambiguous that it only serves to demonstrate the breadth of Melville's interest in Emerson.

7   cf. Deleuze in his "Bartleby, or the Formula" (p. 72), who argues the importance of "outlandish" language in Melville as a "certain treatment" of ordinary language intended to "constitute" or at least invoke or "set free a sort of skeleton of some "superhuman, originary language" that would depart from English stylistics as radically as American democracy would depart from European cultural tradition.

8   It is notable that, in the narrator's presentation of events, Pierre's encounter with Dante (as well as Homer) is only a *virtual* one, since it is limited to Flaxman's famous illustrations, presumably from his English edition of 1807.

9   As Rogin (1985, p. 47), quite separately, makes the same point about *Omoo*, we can no doubt regard this as a major *topos* of Melville's political thought.

10 see Žižek (2010), pp. 130-133. Deleuze (1993, p. 88) argues in passing that fears regarding the disappearance of the paternal function are greatly exaggerated.

11 This phrase is from Bloom's characterization of Falstaff (the sympathetic persona of one of Melville's best poems) in *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1998, pp. 296-300).

12 Italics mine.

13 The novel's few readers may well object, here, that Pierre's appetite alone, not to mention his glib usage of a private library, may constitute wasted privilege, although the actual history of America's landed gentry makes such indulgences trivial by comparison. If indeed Melville is gently satirical here, my point is that, nevertheless, Pierre's sensual and erotic enjoyments are part and parcel of what we might now call a 'holistic' lifestyle in which those benefits are 'joys' by virtue of a childlike spiritual delight in nature-as-garden; a less canny version of what Bloom defined as Falstaff's world-view, the "order of play" (see note 11). If this distinction matters not at all to the modern critic, it matters very much to Melville, insofar as none of his readers would liken the genial Pierre (or the imperious Ahab) to the Pecksniffian hypocrite Falsgrave. Note the implication of antinomy between 'Falsgrave' and 'Falstaff'.

14 I am referring here to what is also known as conceptual metaphor theory, the seminal text of which is Lakoff and Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By* (1980). The central argument of these theorists is to the effect that, so far from metaphors being only one class of literary and rhetorical tropes, as surface features of so-called figurative discourse, they are a major clue to

the underlying presence of certain structures of thought, generally known as "image schemas", that are the chief enablers of our human ability to form general concepts (and hence of the very linguistic categories that Ellis and other theorists emphasize the crucial importance of). Image schemas are, in turn, according to this current hypothesis, derived from the most familiar and universal, so-called "embodied" perceptual experiences.

15 Melville (1993, pp. 252, 255) uses Shakespeare's only 'exemplary' play, *Timon of Athens*, as a way of tracing Pierre's psychological development and social awareness *in relation* to his chosen craft as a writer, and therefore, I think, also invokes it as a model for *Pierre* as an experiment novel. Tellingly, however, the climactic dialogue between Timon and the philosopher Apemantus (IV: iii), far from clarifying the example that Shakespeare purports to illustrate, opens an abyss of interpretation into which falls Timon's peculiar ethical choice: his refusal to restore his fortunes and consequent, self-willed death.

16 Ellis is not the first or only thinker to make the general point that the schemes that language puts in place by means of its sorting and classifying of features of empirical reality (in a phrase, linguistic *categorizatio*n) create a system and resulting hierarchical structure that relies first and foremost on the making of generalizations and abstractions, beginning with the marking out of only certain, distinct *kinds* of things which are said to undergo only certain *kinds* of changes. Thus its founding charter, so to speak, necessitates the radical distortion of our actual experience that I claim Melville to have intuited, and that frustrated *ab initio* all of our attempts to capture in form of words and share with others all that which in our conscious awareness is most concrete, particular, and unlikely to ever occur again in the same way. Of course, theorists like Ellis point out that our discursive signs and symbols operate this way only in order to function effectively in the tasks of practical communication for which they have been established.

17 Ellis (1993) avoids identifying the problem in the terms I have used, but, on my reading, acknowledgment of a sometimes awkward gap must follow from his greater argument.

18 On this point, I would generalize that the countless psychoanalytic readings of the novel have suggested, consistently, that Pierre's frustrating experience of sexual maturation, through the encounter with Isabel, ought to be interpreted as governing any allegory concerning the fall from paradise, and thus, in effect, equating the satisfaction that Pierre experiences in his garden with the fleeting nature of adolescence. But as far as authorial intentions are concerned, such a simple schema, and the implications it is meant to carry, is complicated by, among other things, Melville's seemingly deliberate obscurity about the nature of Pierre's sexual relationship with Isabel, as Hayford and Parker have rightly pointed out in their "Historical Note" to the Northwestern edition (pp. 374-5), and thus I can only reserve judgment on the issue.

19 Taggart, in an article published in *boundary 2* (vol. 16, nos. 2-3, 1989), observed that "Shakespeare, Spenser, and Hawthorne are made 'correspondents' in providing Melville with models of how the threatening universe may be represented and survived through the symbolic capabilities of language" (p. 258). I would criticize Taggart on two points: firstly, the coopting of Shakespeare and Hawthorne rather than Emerson in this scheme, since the former

two are, on the contrary, precisely avatars of what is *in*expressible about reality for Melville ("Hawthorne says 'NO!'…for all men who say 'Yes,' lie…"), and secondly, the optimism with which Taggart associates our 'symbolic capabilities' even in the context of Melville's overwhelmingly negative art from *Moby-Dick* onwards.

20 see Jan Kott (1974, pp. 136-8). I remain enamored of Kott's formula of Sophoclean tragedy as akin to playing a game of chess with a computer, where the machine stands for fate.

21 see also Taggart, *boundary 2* (Vol. 16, nos. 2-3, 1989, p. 265).

22 see also Emerson in Bloom (2015, p. 192).

23 The despairing cry, obliterating representation, that Deleuze and Guattari (1986, pp. 6-9) found in Kafka is so similar to this that one suspects the influence of Isabel on their concept of a "minor literature".

24 *Moby-Dick*, ch. 23, "The Lee Shore"; see also ch. 7, "The Chapel".

25 from Kafka's "The Great Wall and the Tower of Babel," as translated in Bloom (1986, p. 4).

26 It is in the service of this deeper observation, I believe, that Melville's narrator puts forward what, by his own admission, is a superficial and commonplace interpretation of *Hamlet*, to wit, that too much thought hinders effective action (1995, pp. 169-70). His trenchant point, I think, is the relinquishing of control.

27 see Bloom (1982): "The way of evasion for the Gnostics meant freedom, and this was freedom from the God, this world, from time, from text, from the soul and body of the universe" (p. 120).

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