

Herman Melville and the Sentimental Novel: The Experiments of Writing a Romance in *Pierre; or The Ambiguities* (1852)

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Introduction

Herman Melville's (1819–1891) first and only romance, *Pierre; or The Ambiguities* (1852), was his most infamous book because of the incomprehensibility of the behavior of the main character, Pierre Glendinning. *Pierre* was criticized for its immorality of incestuous mother–son and sister–brother relationships. “The Ambiguities” here refers to the state of Pierre's indecisive attitude and psychology, and the complicated descriptions of his mind deviate from the simple plot development and approachable sensationalism that ordinary readers in the nineteenth century sought to read.

Melville had decided to write *Pierre* with the same characteristics as other best-sellers and had expected the high sales of his first romance. In order to attract female readers, after the disrepute of *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* (1851), he changed the setting of his novel from a closed, men-only stage in the sea to a country life, expressed as “a rural bowl of milk” (Melville, *Correspondence* 219). Melville was not only influenced by the plot of the romance but also was attracted to the prospect of the general sales record of the novels. In the 1850s, when Melville wrote *Pierre*, female writers' sentimental novels¹ were welcomed by mass readers.

This paper considers Melville's challenge in writing *Pierre* and its commercial failure due to his biggest policy change under the influence of female writers' sentimental novels. I will compare *Pierre* with best-sellers written by female writers of the U.S. in the first half of the 1850s and examine similarities and differences in the styles and plots.

Although Melville tried to write a female-aimed romance, at the same time, he could not abandon his writing philosophy, such as skepticism of God and universality, as well as his autobiographical method of writing that he used in his previous sea novels. These settled convictions for writing made *Pierre* deviate from the standard tactics of the sentimental novel like Susan Warner's (1819–1885) *The Wide, Wide World* (1850) and Harriet Beecher Stowe's (1811–1896) *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), such as a simple plot of punishing evil, accessible sensationalism to move to tears, and religious lesson

¹ At first, the sentimental novels of the 1760s and the 1770s presented “the close connections between virtue and sensibility, in repeatedly tearful scenes; a character's feeling for the beauties of nature and for the griefs of others is taken as a sign of a pure heart.” (Baldick 234)

that faith saves people.

Pierre's destruction is inevitable because he resists counterfeit virtue of people's love, faith, and poetic justice. However, his indignation at the social fraud covered with hypocrisy, such as cold attitude of Saddle Meadows, is a theme that is still applied today.

1. Socio-Historical Conditions behind Writing *Pierre*: The Rise of Female Writers and the Publishing Industry

In Chapter I, I will examine Melville's motivation for writing *Pierre* in terms of the fiction trend at the time by looking into his letters and sales of other works. Since *Moby Dick* did not sell well (*Correspondence* 618), it is natural to consider that Melville was conscious of commercial success by changing his subject and style in writing from *Moby Dick* to *Pierre*. When Melville persuaded Richard Bentley, his English publisher, to accept his new manuscript because Bentley was not willing to publish more of his books in 1852, he wrote that his next work would be "a regular romance, with a mysterious plot to it, & stirring passion to work, and withall, representing a new & elevated aspect of American life" (226). This shows Melville's recognition of romance as popular fiction and also his resignation that his sea novels reflecting his own experience were not favorably accepted by the public.

He was conscious that the sea novel was not well accepted by female readers. He sent a letter to his neighbor, Sarah Huyler Morewood, just after the publication of *Moby Dick*:

Concerning my own forthcoming book - it is off my hands, but must cross the sea before publication here. Dont you buy - it - dont you read it, when it does come out, because it is by no means the sort of book for you. It is not a piece of fine feminine Spitalfields silk - but is the horrible texture of a fabric that should be woven of ships' cables and hausers. A Polar wind blows through it, & birds of prey hover over it. Warn all gentle fastidious people from so much as peeping into book - on risk of lumbago & sciatics. (sic) (206)

In this way, he showed a vehement denial of reading it for its horrible aspects unsuitable to women. Moreover, he sent a letter to Hawthorn's wife, Sophia, explaining the difference between women's reading and men's reading in 1852; "It really amazed me that you should find any satisfaction in that book [*Moby Dick*]. It is true that some *men* have said they were pleased with it, but you are the only *woman* — for as a general thing, women have small taste for the sea." (218-219) Then, he declared his eagerness to write a domestic romance, saying, "I shall not again send you a bowl of salt water. The next chalice I shall commend, will be a rural bowl of milk." (219) The comparison between "a bowl of salt water" and "a rural bowl of milk" shows not only his shift of the subject matter from the sea novel to the domestic novel, but also the change in the tone from salty, harsh, and tempestuous situation among

men to mild, affectionate, considerate family or couple.

Melville's idea to get female readers by "a regular romance" is reasonable because, in the nineteenth century, female writers were supported widely by female readers and succeeded commercially. Frank Luther Mott defines five sentimental novels written by women as best sellers by the U.S. writers in the first half of the 1850s, for example, *The Wide, Wide World*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and Maria S. Cummins (1827–1866)'s *The Lamplighter* (1854), although male writers' best sellers are only three. (Mott 307–308) By the mid-nineteenth century, literature was no longer exclusively for men.

In writing *Pierre*, Melville was conscious of female readers and writers, and did not have negative feelings toward them. In *Love and Death in the American Novel, Revised Edition*, Leslie A. Fidler introduces *Pierre* as "Melville's solo attempt at a sentimental novel" (Fidler 241). The theme is "the fatal Consequences of Seduction" (242) and like *Lucy Temple* (1828) written by Susanna Rowson (1762–1824) and *The Power of Sympathy: or, The Triumph of Nature* (1789) written by William Hill Brown (1765–1793), Isabel is "the standard bastard daughter of the father — revelation of secret sin and bait in the trap of retributory incest." (242) Not only incest, but the binary opposition between Lucy and Isabel, suicide², seduction, and description of sensibility were the subjects that female readers liked in the nineteenth century. Melville positively imported these characteristics into *Pierre* without feeling antipathy to the high sales of these conventional works.

The book which he read before writing *Pierre* also shows his interest in women: he read Harriet Martineau's (1802–1876) *The Hour and the Man: An Historical Romance* (1841) and thought highly of it. (*Correspondence* 206) Martineau was said to be the first female sociologist, and Melville must have got influenced by her advanced gender view for his writing womanly novel. Not only that, he read many European female writers' works of the nineteenth century, such as Germaine de Staël (1766–1817). (Avallone 51) Especially, Charlene Avallone suggests that *Pierre* has multiple parallels with Germaine de Staël's *Corinne, ou l'Italie* (1807), for example, its structure divided into books and chapters, and its plot incorporating romance, *Künstlerroman*³, and psychological fiction, as well as the binary opposition between the dark (Corrine / Isabel) and the "celestial," light (Lucile / Lucy) ladies. (52) Another similar work with *Pierre* written by female authors of the U.S. is Catharine Maria Sedgwick (1789–1867)'s "The Country Cousin" (1830). Avallone maintains the possibility that Melville read Sedgwick, whose romances already had built a steadfast position in international literature reviews. Avallone finds a binary opposition of two women in "The Country Cousin," pointing out that "Melville's characterizations echo Sedgwick's attribution

² Herbert Ross Brown defines the sentimental novel has "Suicide," "Seduction," and "Sensibility" (Brown 166).

³ *Künstlerroman* is "a novel in which the central character is an artist" (Baldick 135).

of American associations, meekness, and rural simplicity to her Lucy and Isabel, by contrast, Old World identification, pride, and cosmopolitanism.” (54) The other character looks like Pierre: an enthusiastic, ambitious young hero, who is opposed to a widowed mother. Avallone also points out the similarities in their plots between *Pierre* and Sedgwick’s *The Linwoods*. Through comparing two women, both texts “dismiss romantic idealizing of the country while yet exhibiting a Jeffersonian distrust of the city.” (54) Then, Sedgwick and Melville did not follow conventional narrative forms and romance plots, transcending the melodrama and digressive episodes, and Avallone evaluates them as a challenge to romance readers with coy narrative poses, by both of them objecting to “the romances’ rejection of proprieties, particularly to their sympathetic representation of crazed characters, as a violation of conventional mores.” (54–55)

However, there is a significant difference in the endings of these novels. Sedgwick, as well as other popular female sentimental novelists, chose to keep domestic stability, giving up supernaturalism and romantic idealism, which were pursued in the middle of the text. On the contrary, Melville, denying the possibility of the viability of domestic or romantic idealism, presented a longing for the transcendent. (54) Further, Sedgwick put back her romance to middle-class conventionalism, but Melville kept up the deviance because of Pierre’s defiance, only to result in personal dissatisfaction, outlawry, and obscure death for Lucy, Isabel, and Pierre himself. (55)

2. The Agency of Female Characters: The Similarity and Difference between *Pierre* and the Female Writers’ Best Sellers

In this Chapter, I will analyze the similarities and differences between these sentimental novels and *Pierre*. First, we should grasp the characteristics of sentimental novels that were followed by women at that time. For example, Susan Warner’s *The Wide, Wide World* is a typical sentimental novel that includes so many religious lessons that the clergymen decided to recommend this book for children’s education. (Sato 61–63) This is a simple story; a young girl Ellen Montgomery, who lost her parents, overcomes many hardships depending on her Christian faith and eventually marries a man whom she loves. Her virtue of charity and modesty is the Christian ideal of good neighborliness. She does not only overcome the difficulty of the harsh attitude of people around her but also gives others back their religious faith again by serving faithfully or telling others about the importance of faith. *The Lamplighter*, which was said to be influenced by *The Wide, Wide World*, is now famous for Nathaniel Hawthorne’s infamous remark to female writers and *The Lamplighter* in his letter. (Hawthorne 75) He singled out its author, Maria Susanna Cummins, for criticism because he was suffering from the gap between the artistic quality of the book and the public’s evaluation of its contents. As Hawthorne said, female sentimental novels often had a similar plot for commercialism and entertainment, and

most of them were melodramatic romances of punishing evil and giving success to religious people. In these novels, the emotions of the characters fluctuate intensely and attempt to make readers cry, and they have been criticized for their lack of art.

Although these works cited above share a similar plot that an unhappy, lonely girl finally gets a happy home with the help of religious faith, there is a big difference in the method of portraying heroines. According to Sato, in *The Wide, Wide World*, a traditional lady of a conservative manner, Ellen is kept controlled by men until the story ends, but in contrast, in *The Lamplighter*, an abused, ugly orphan of violent temper, Gerty is a new type of heroine. Gerty has changed herself from a forceless child to a sensible woman. Moreover, the people who have given her parental guidance have changed their minds so that they, regardless of their sex, should look up to Gerty as their mentor, and Gerty interacts mercifully with them. Sato finds her female positive power to protect men and to promote good points to them. (Sato 74-75) Such a heroine who resisted patriarchal society was enthusiastically supported by female readers.

Not only the religious aspect but also the domestic problem was the key to attracting readers in the nineteenth century. Stowe wrote some New England Local Color literature in addition to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and she emphasized the female characters' living style as they acted with solid agencies. Here I refer to the term 'agency' as a determinant will of a person in carrying out a certain activity with a sense of purpose on one's own, referring to the OED's definition of agency as the "ability or capacity to act or exert power." Sato thinks highly of Stowe's skill in writing regional literature because she grasped heroines in her works as sensible, competent, full of individuality, and people who express themselves freely, not submissive women. (122-123) For example, in *The Minister's Wooing* (1859), she described several female characters trying to shift the situation to significant phases. In this novel, male characters are usually unreliable and are encouraged by brave, thoughtful women. Female characters notice others' suppressed pain, although male characters pay no attention to the feelings of others. For example, a slave woman, Cadence, plays a significant role and tells the Word of God to encourage her master.

These female writers succeeded in writing heroines who have agencies. They act to achieve happiness by living correctly from a religious point of view and from a view of domestic competence. However, they do not mean to overturn the patriarchal situation. Women typically acted "within the hegemonic paradigm of patriarchal authority" (Kane and Williamson 1), and agency here is "not conceptualized strictly in terms of resistance to male authority or patriarchal patterns, but arose from the variety of everyday interactions in which women accommodated, negotiated or manipulated social rules and gender roles." (Simonton and Montenach 11) These female characters act independently. Still, they do not escape from the hierarchal gender system. Agency is affected by "social rank, marital status, chronological and

geographical location” (Howell 22). They act the expected role of good wives or mothers to keep their social rights and live happily in the time. Thus, these novels written by women end in preestablished harmony: The agencies of these women are not fulfilled in the end, and they remain in the conventional domain of patriarchy through marriage.

Next, I will investigate the elements of the sentimental novel observed in *Pierre* and analyze what part of *Pierre* follows the typical style of the sentimental novel and what does not. Pierre’s perverted relations with three women, his mother Mary Glendinning, Isabel Banford, and Lucy Tartan, were criticized as “unnatural” and “unhealthy” (Higgins and Parker 433) after its publication. However, nowadays, some critics give these three female characters favorable evaluations. For example, Wai-Chee Dimock expresses that these women try to become his “co-conspirator.” (Dimock 397) As his “co-conspirators,” they willingly play different roles in each situation, such as a mother, sister, cousin, or lover. Pierre’s inexplicable behaviors do not toss them about, but they choose each different role independently. They sometimes refuse the roles that are given initially; His mother, Mrs. Glendinning, changes herself into playing the role of his sister, his sister Isabel changes herself into his wife, and his lover Lucy, who should have been his wife, changes into his cousin. While these three women transform consciously according to their wills, Pierre’s behavior is rather erratic and ambiguous.

Lucy looks like one of the most incomprehensive people in *Pierre*, who decides to live with a married couple of her ex-fiancé, but we can see her change of character as a positive transformation, like Gerty of *The Lamplighter*. Lucy transforms from a typical, submissive girl into a lady who acts independently. She says to Pierre in her letter after she refuses Glen’s marriage proposal. Her words “with no declaration” (*Pierre* 213) are her self reply to her asking Pierre in the opening, “[W]hy should ye youths always swear when ye love!” (7) When she asks the question, she has no conscious thought of love, but after separating from Pierre, she notices by herself, what their love should be. She had been just a chessman that is exchanged between two men, following a homosocial situation, as a man who gets Lucy would become the next head of the Glendinning family. After she realizes her feeling of love, she decides to act with her own will and helps Pierre for love, although her love is different from the above-mentioned female characters whose aim is marriage. Then, Lucy demonstrates her agency like female characters in female sentimental novels, but unlike them, her living together with the couple is out of the hegemonic paradigm of patriarchal authority and social norms. Her change is written as a positive one and she is not punished in the book. Melville did not write an exemplary woman in comparison with the domestic, religious ladies in female sentimental novels; instead, he showed a person who achieved emotional autonomy.

Mrs. Glendinning is an affectionate ‘sister’ as long as she keeps Pierre under her

control, but once he has doubts about his family, she turns into a horrible, explosive woman. Critics such as Mumford and Fiedler have maintained that she is such a selfish mother that she loves him as the exact copy of herself, recognizing “a striking personal resemblance” (*Pierre* 8). (Fiedler 329–330) (Mumford 138–139)

Now, do I remember that in her most caressing love, there ever gleamed some scaly, glittering folds of pride. Me she loveth with pride’s love; in me she thinks she seeth her own curled and haughty beauty; before my glass she stands, — pride’s priestess — and to her mirrored image, not to me, she offers up her offerings of kisses. (*Pierre* 67)

He notices his mother’s nature, in addition to the disillusionment with his father, and then decides to lay down his home and the fame of Glendinning.

However, I would like to point out her conscious change of roles and her sense of responsibility. She acts as his mother when she scolds him, even though she always acts like his sister. For example, she questions Pierre severely when he is confused about Isabel, emphasizing her position as his mother; “My dear sister,” began Pierre. “Sister me not, now, Pierre; — I am thy mother.” (70) This fact shows that she changes her roles as the occasion may require, coming at it from the opposite angle; she carries through her playing as a sister to fulfill her plan. Mrs. Glendinning, who lost her husband, has a strong will to continue the status of the Glendinning family in Saddle Meadows, but she does not have property rights. She may want Pierre to be under her control to maintain the Glendinning family and has her agency as a legal wife of the Glendinning family, as Pierre’s mother, and as his imitated sister.

Like Mrs. Glendinning, Isabel is not just easily swayed by Pierre’s desire but has a desire for herself. Her single-mindedness for the name of Glendinning is not common; for example, she says, “[O]h, sweetest of words [Glendinning], which so often I have thought to myself, and almost deemed it profanity for an outcast like me to speak or think.” (49) Her strong feeling for the name Glendinning is also explained when she struggles to learn the alphabet imagining of the similarity of the spellings between *gentleman* and Glendinning. (105) Two calculating reasons may cause Isabel’s longing for the name Glendinning: her need for extensive support for her poor life and her desire for recognition that she is descended from the most notable celebrity of Saddle Meadows. She is oppressed for her humble birth by neighbors, including Mrs. Glendinning, being said, “the strange girl,” “she thinks herself ‘mazing pretty,” and “she’s some other ruined Delly, run away; — minx!” (112) She is grieved of illegitimate children and their mother and repeatedly emphasizes “the inhumanities” (89) (113) of people in Saddle Meadows. In her letter which is her first contact to Pierre, her calling him “Dearest Pierre” (49) again and again may show her attention not to Pierre himself as a man but to a brother who has Glendinning’s blood relative. Therefore, their marriage is not a romantic relationship, but her best choice to an illegitimate child to get back her dignity and live in a closed country town. Even though she is a strong-

willed heroine for her effort to get knowledge to live in Saddle Meadows, she is out of the ordinary action expected for a heroine in the eighteenth romance. Both Lucy and Isabel are not stereotypical model characters, but they act with their agencies to achieve their actual feeling; Lucy becomes aware of the ideal state of love, and Isabel thinks illegitimate children should be treated as well as legitimate children.

In conclusion, in *Pierre*, some characteristics related to the sentimental novel appear. Suicide, seduction, incest, and the binary opposition of the Snow Maiden and the Dark Lady are the subjects written in the sentimental novel of the nineteenth century. Furthermore, he wrote about a woman's growth through Lucy's change after realizing her love. Mrs. Glendinning, Isabel, and Lucy's agencies to achieve their desire appear in their occasionally changing roles and had possibilities to attract female readers who had never read Melville's previous novels. However, *Pierre* gradually deviates from the familiar tactics of the sentimental novel because of insufficient romantic situation and erratic behavior, far from the social norm in the patriarchal society.

3. Melville's Writing Philosophy and His Artistic Motivation for Romance

Finally, I would like to clarify the bottom cause to make the gap between what Melville thought would sell well and what audiences of the sentimental novel wanted to read by referring to his letters. He has unique ideas about abstract concepts such as love and morality and his philosophy for writing fiction novels. I will analyze how these ideas appear in *Pierre*. His beliefs that he continuously had from when he wrote the sea novels created these gaps, even though he tried to write a completely different novel from previous works, using the new pseudonymous "a Vermonter" or "Guy Winthrop" (*Correspondence* 227–228) for writing *Pierre*.

First, his lack of consideration of right and wrong between the binary opposition of the Dark Lady and the Snow Maiden (Fiedler 296) derails *Pierre* from a simple melodrama. In general, the Dark Lady seduces a man by profusing her full magic of sex, but Isabel does not try to have a sexual relationship with Pierre. Isabel is a victim of the darkness of the Glendinning family, which Pierre notices and escapes from; as Fiedler suggests, "her darkness is the shadow of the incest taboo, cast by the sins of the father on the generation which follows." (299) Neither Lucy nor Isabel symbolizes evil, so readers who expected that simple political justice would cause sensationalism were not ready to accept this ambiguous contrast. Secondly, Pierre marries neither Isabel nor Lucy, and there is no tragic romance. He is just wondering what he should do "to hold to him at once the White Maiden and the Dark" (299). As referred to in the previous chapter, sentimental novels often come to an end in a happy marriage or tragic love of a couple, but *Pierre* does not come to such a melodramatic denouement. There is a possibility that Melville set an idyllic situation referring to female novels, but he expressed his originality, as opposed to the social norm and simple

entertainment.

One of the reasons why *Pierre* does not get melodramatic denouement is Pierre's persistence in pursuing 'love' that excludes any sexual relationship. For example, Pierre's relationship with Mrs. Glendinning is described as a pseudo-sister-brother relationship. It is the first love written in *Pierre* as "so delicious a feeling as fraternal love" (*Pierre* 9-10). It is also described as something "[i]n the playfulness of their unclouded love, and with that strange license which a perfect confidence and mutual understanding at all points" (8). His second love is for Lucy, but he hates sexual relationships, declaring, "By heaven, but marriage is an impious thing!" (45) Pierre equates marriage with sexual intercourse and fears marriage as a sexual reunion, and his attitude toward women does not follow the standard tactics of romance. Also, in the relationship with Isabel, he urgently needs a sister to love, serve, and protect who has a blood relationship with him and does not need any sexual intercourse. He thinks blood relationships are important for his 'love.'

In addition, from Lucy's letter talking about love, it is clear that Melville thought of love as unconditional brotherly feelings. When she and Pierre are engaged, she "had no conscious thought of love" (213), but after she is separated from Pierre, she notices what love needs, "no declaration; no bridal" (213). She maintains that marriage is not a goal, but unselfish service is necessary for love. Then, she says that she can love him as if they have a blood relationship; "But thou art my mother and my brothers, and all the world, and all heaven, and all the universe to me" (214). Melville considered love as an unconditional and affectionate feeling toward blood relatives, not romantic relationships. His attitude of having a blood relationship in high regard makes him express the complicated situation of Pierre, Lucy, and Isabel. Lucy desires to be his cousin or blood relative, and his sister, Isabel, tries to stay with him intimately, thinking that blood-related siblings should give unselfish, unconditional help each other and that it is more important than any romantic relationship.

Pierre's fear of sexual relations with Lucy is repeatedly emphasized throughout the novel. It is based on Melville's association of sex with vice. According to Lewis Mumford, young Melville compounded sex and sexual diseases. It is not only particular about Melville, but generally, in the U. S., there was a tendency for 'respectable' people to avoid sexual relationships. His wife, Elizabeth, was not sexually positive, so his understanding of sex was kept premature. (Mumford 149-150) Further, Fiedler says American male writers tend to be "experts on indignity and assault, on loneliness and terror, tend to avoid treating the passionate encounter of a man and woman, which we expect at the center of a novel." (Fiedler 24) Not only Pierre but also Lucy keeps away from marriage because of Melville's fear of sexual acts related to marriage.

Since this novel is proceeded for the most part with the narrator's free indirect discourse of identification with Pierre, being similar to a pioneer of stream of

consciousness and the interior monologue, as now *Pierre* is said to be a “psychological novel — a study of the moods, thought processes, and perceptions of his hero” (Murray xxiv), *Pierre* just keeps being distressed. The sensational situation about love does not happen to the end. The sentimental novel needs mood-changes that depend on the events to induce sensibility, but while focusing on *Pierre*’s unstable psychological state of mind, other descriptions, such as an explanation of the circumstances and feelings of other characters, are neglected. After all, he does not have an immoral relationship with Isabel or Lucy and just keeps wondering about his guilt. Therefore, Melville’s bold challenge for seduction does not succeed because whether Isabel is his real sister or not is not disclosed.

Next, the characters in *Pierre* are not saved by their religious belief, unlike these sentimental novels. *Pierre* is a Puritan who has taken over the pious faith that “the primeval gentleness and golden humanities of religion had been so thoroughly wrought into the complete texture of the character, that he who pronounced himself gentleman, could also rightfully assume the meek, but kingly style of Christian.” (*Pierre* 9) He, who values blood relationships and takes pride in his grandfather and father, is grown by his father’s religious teaching, and the narrator clarifies *Pierre*’s ambition; “For in the ruddiness, and flushfulness, and vain-gloriousness of his youthful soul, he fondly hoped to have a monopoly of glory in capping the fame-column, whose tall shaft had been erected by his noble sires.” (10) That is, his religious belief and respect for his ancestors had been tied up together, and had caused his much pride of “the only surnamed male Glendinning extant.” (10) His implicit trust in his father’s devoutness causes his disappointment for the whole Glendinning family and withdrawal from Saddle Meadows “as a most bitter presence there” (139). Isabel’s absence of a religious view also shows Melville’s idea toward God: “I thanked — not God, for I had been taught no God — I thanked the bright human summer, and the joyful human sun in the sky” (89). Isabel’s animistic respect for the mighty sun calls to mind the greater power of the sea described in *Moby Dick* and Melville’s respect for nature rather than God seems Melville’s unchanging philosophy even in different setting from the sea to the suburb.

Furthermore, Melville’s identification with *Pierre* as a writer may spoil the consistency of the story and make it complicated. In Books XVII, the narrator suddenly introduces *Pierre* as a writer, but he fails to gain fame through his writing;

[T]he wiser and the profounder he should grow, the more and the more he lessened the chances for bread; that could he now hurl his deep book out of the window, and fall to on some shallow nothing of a novel, composable in a month at the longest, then could he reasonably hope for both appreciation and cash. (210)

Pierre’s struggle with writing parallels Melville’s problem in the 1850s. Melville complained about the gap to Hawthorn in 1851, saying, “What I feel most moved to

write, that is banned, — it will not pay. Yet, altogether, write the *other* way is I cannot. So the product is a final hash, and all my books are botches.” (*Correspondence* 191) There is a possibility that Melville inserted his autobiographical elements into the novel after he finished writing *Pierre*’s first draft because the part gives off an erratic impression of the overall structure of romance. Hershel Parker infers that Melville added the part of Pierre’s challenge and failure of writing literature out of revenge for a publisher, Evert Duyckinck, who refused his first manuscript of *Pierre*. (Parker xxxi–xxxvi) Pierre feels repulsion toward editors, as “the primitive verdict pronounced by the editors was irreversible, except in the highly improbable event of the near approach of the Millennium, which might establish a different dynasty of taste” (*Pierre* 171). At the same time, Pierre feels disgusted with literary criticism, saying, “[W]hy, sir, they are all criticisms! I am the idol of the critics!” (171) Melville had Pierre speak for his despair toward the bad reputation of *Moby Dick* and commercialism of publishers that disallowed novel writers to express what they wanted.

He recognized the characteristics of books that are widely accepted by people: “a plain, straightforward, amusing narrative of personal experience . . . no metaphysics, no conic-sections, nothing but cakes & ale.” (*Correspondence* 132) Melville noticed the detachment between what he wanted to write and what the public wanted to read, but his writing philosophy that writers should show new and diverse value did not allow him to write a frequent sad romantic situation between a good boy and a beautiful, modest girl. The narrator also has an attitude that remains a vague inner secret; for example, when he is troubled about Lucy after deciding to help Isabel, the narrator does not tell readers his final decision, saying, “But here we draw a veil. Some nameless struggles of the soul cannot be painted, and some woes will not be told. Let the ambiguous procession of events reveal their ambiguousness.” (*Pierre* 128) Compared with his letter to Hawthorne in 1851, he presented his skepticism toward universal truth, saying, “But Truth is the silliest thing under the sun.” (*Correspondence* 191) and “Truth is ridiculous to men.” (191) As he said in his letters, Pierre does not have settled convictions nor finds one truth about his father’s guilty to the last.

Melville tried to show new idea for life, which is different from the usual, expected one as the model in the Christian society; as he said, *Pierre* would be “representing a new & elevated aspect of American life” (226), he described characters’ wavering condition that faces ambiguous self. As I analyzed in the previous two chapters, people in the nineteenth century were used to simple melodrama, and most of the sentimental novels had similar plots and characters. A devout Christian girl gets over difficulty and has a very happy married life. People believed that this was a ‘right,’ honorable life. On the contrary, *Pierre* showed other ways of living. For example, Lucy decides to become celibate to support Pierre, whom she loves. The lack of consideration of right and wrong between Lucy and Isabel also proves his skepticism for one ‘right’

way. Although Pierre and two women dies in the end, they are not written as punished for their impiousness and immorality. Pierre's death is described plainly and romantically, just written as "he seized the secret vial nesting there." (*Pierre* 249) Melville may be skeptical about a single absolute correct answer like God and a religious, modest hero/heroine who appears in most sentimental novels of the nineteenth century.

It is possible that Melville noticed that the views of people in the upper and middle classes were limited, and there were many more views through his own experience as a seaman. As Hawthorne expressed, Melville had a gap between popularity and his values of art. Even though he noticed that people wanted "a plain, straightforward" (*Correspondence* 132) novel, to "write the *other* way I [Melville] cannot." (191) While readers at that time desired entertainment through simple melodrama, some writers struggled to express new sense in their books. For Melville, the challenge for artistic quality in writing may be the psychological expression which is based on his own experience because he thought that novel should narrate personal experiences. In the letter to Hawthorne in 1851, he said, "I talk all about myself, and this is selfishness and egotism. . . but [I know] something about myself. So I write about myself." (192) Melville made a brilliant debut as a writer of sea novel, such as *Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life* (1846) and *Omoo: A Narrative of Adventures in the South Seas* (1847), and it attracted much attention for its vivid narration talking about fantastic adventure that most people did not know. However, in *Pierre*, he tried to write not an experience but psychology. People always vacillate and cannot know the one right way by intuition in this novel. Pierre's ambiguous attitude and the mysterious, unclear narrator are opposed to female writers' melodramatic sentimental novels that presuppose universal value system.

In brief, the architecture of the novel and the expression of text is not suitable for readers of sentimental novel. Between two women, there is no way to tell right or wrong, and both of them do not marry happily nor continue to tragic love. Moreover, since his pessimistic view on religion and his resentment of the publisher were integrated, people who called for a religious style that God saves people and a logical plot to a certain degree did not accept his writing style. Such a writing style makes it difficult for readers to respect Pierre nor to empathize with him. However, Melville wrote in this way in a purposeful manner, at least after Pierre meets Isabel, as the narrator says, "I am more frank with Pierre than the best men are with themselves. I am all unguarded and magnanimous with Pierre; therefore you see his weakness, and therefore only." (*Pierre* 79) This story ends with three deaths in disastrous mood because Pierre is an unusual hero who strays from the path that is stipulated as 'right' in Christian society. Nevertheless, he consistently clarifies some deception in the story; love, which is an emotional connection, transforms into filthy physical relationship after marriage; a devout worshiper has an illegitimate child and makes her

unhappy; literature is commerce of entertainment rather than art. There is always a difference between dream and reality, but people pretend not to see, as Mrs. Glendinning turns a blind eye to the presence of Mr. Glendinning's lover. *Pierre* shows Melville's idea that there is no universal truth and that it is difficult to make things clear whether it is right or wrong. Although Melville initially had commercial motivation for *Pierre*, as it happens, he got a perfect situation to describe distorted Christian society by putting home and family, which is more common than sea at the center of this story, and then, Pierre derails from the normative way of life for the Lord of the manor. Moreover, Pierre himself doubts that Isabel is his half-sister, even though he carries out his mutiny based on the premise. Pierre, who fights against the society, leaning on uncertain foundation, looks sorrowful and in some way, looks comical. Pierre is so to speak, Captain Ahab of the land; Both of them show the suicidal rebellion to the mighty presence.

Conclusion

In writing *Pierre*, Melville followed some plots peculiar to the sentimental novel. He tried to describe three female characters as women who act with their agencies. They have their own will, not just serving men, and actually, there was a tendency for such active women to be welcomed by female readers at the time. Especially, Lucy's change from a powerless, stereotypical, tractable girl into a strong-willed woman should call attention because the movements for women's rights increased during the 1840s and the 1850s, and in response to these social changes among women, female readers wanted to read about the growth of weak girls into tough, rational women. He had objective views toward female writers and evaluated them.

However, *Pierre* gradually deviates from the familiar plot of the sentimental novel. While the female writers could not give up writing about domestic stability under the social norm of patriarchy, Melville did not write any happy marriage or simple, tragic love of Pierre between Isabel and Lucy because Pierre's fear of sexual relationships prevents such relationships. In addition, Melville did not show any consideration of right and wrong between Isabel and Lucy. The narrator avoids being judgmental and keeps describing him as an ambiguous person, and this ambiguity is strictly opposed to the writing style of melodrama, which requires simplicity. The absence of religious lessons is also different from the standard tactics of the sentimental novel. Melville's skepticism of God and one simple solution to living causes this ambiguous mood in *Pierre*.

Nevertheless, Melville's deep-laid plot is succeed in the unintended way. Readers were led by the unsympathetic narrator and criticized *Pierre* as immoral just after its publication. They were similar to the people who turn blind eyes to the hypocrisy of the society and whom Pierre hates in the story. Melville ironically obtained proof of the people's deceitful life at that time by the bad reputation of *Pierre*.

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