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Introduction

It is often suggested that Pierre, the protagonist of Herman Melville's *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities*, was destined to fail from the first because of his reckless pursuit of "absolute morality," regardless of "virtuous expediency" (214), which Glendinning Stanly, Reverend Mr. Falsgrave and Plotinus Plinlimmon judiciously and cunningly possess (Moorman, "In the City" 572-73; Makino 127-40). What I would like to stress, however, is that Pierre's infantile idealism is not the only fault for which he came to ruin. He is, instead, guiltier of wallowing in "ambiguities," or indecision about whom he really loves and wants to marry in the very act of pursuing his unattainable morality. For example, although Pierre has a girlfriend, Lucy, he comes to feel hesitant about marrying her once he met Isabel, his supposed sister, for the first time. Added to this, sexual relationships are slightly hinted at in his closeness with his mother, Mary, and with his cousin, Glen.

It is noteworthy that all of this ambiguous affection toward them is brought to the surface of the text through many kinds of false descriptions, or disguises. Richard Gray also points out that there are a lot of false matters in *Pierre*:

> [A] Chinese box aspect, [a] sense of an artifice that calls attention to its own artificiality is perhaps most obvious at the beginning of *Pierre*. . . . This, we infer, is a world of appearances, masks and mirrors: an intergerence justified not only by the frequent references to masquerades and reflections in subsequent pages but, more simply, by the narrator's preference for the word 'seems.' (119)

As Gray pointed out, there are a lot of disguises in *Pierre*, and the same thing can be said about characters' hidden intimacies as well. They (especially Pierre) try to hide their forbidden love by using "appellations," which are different from their real relationships[1].

What is lacking in Pierre is the knowledge of how to get on in the world; that is to say, sophistication, whose absence makes Pierre lapse into the indecisiveness mentioned above. In respect to sophistication, his cousin, Glen, is strikingly different from our protagonist. To examine their distinction will show us how Pierre is an ambiguous, innocent youngster, whose act is lacking in real intent as his cousin.

It is my intention in this essay to investigate how Pierre's eventual failure has been brought about through an examination of his crafty "naming" of other characters, and of his hostile relationship with Glen.

I. Appellation and Disguises

Although, in the opening scene, we see Pierre and his girl friend Lucy exchanging morning greetings in which "the two stood silently but ardently eying each other, beholding mutual reflections of a boundless admiration and love" (4), their meeting is limited to a quite short period of time, and is replaced by a long explanation of Pierre's birth and how he has had a close relationship with his mother, Mrs. Glendinning. She is "[i]n [her] mature age," but the narrator says, "the rose still miraculously clung to her cheek" and "had she chosen to encourage them, would have been followed by a train of infatuated suitors, little less young than her own son Pierre" (4-5). We recognize, hinted at in these extracts, how Mary is depicted as

[1] Richard Gray goes on to state that "The sense that we are being introduced to a sort of pseudo-reality, a counterfeit realm, is nurtured in a variety of ways, and not least by the characters' taste for theatricality. It is not just that Pierre and his mother, and Pierre and his beloved Lucy Tartan, address each other in heightened terms, although they certainly do this. . . . It is that both the protagonist and those around him actually call attention to the artificial nature of their conversations. . ." (119-20). Although Gray points out the fictitious aspects in *Pierre* which are observed in many ways, there is room for discussion in terms of the characters' "naming" of one another.

a woman who retains her womanly sexuality even in her middle years. Added to this, the narrator tells us that "a reverential and devoted son seemed lover enough" for Mrs. Glendinning, and also that Pierre feels jealousy by "the too ardent admiration [for Mary] of the handsome youths" (5). His mother gets jealous of Pierre's future wife, as well. She feels, for example, "How glad am I that Pierre loves [Lucy] so, and not some dark-eyed haughtiness, with whom I could never live in peace; but who would be ever setting her young married state before my elderly widowed one, and claiming all the homage of dear boy . . ." (20). When we see Melville's description of them, it seems as if he is showing us many possibilities of their being "lovers" rather than being "mother and son."

Strange to say, however, although they have so close a relationship as to be lovers, Pierre on the other hand frequently calls his loverly mother "sister" and she calls him "brother." That being the case, it is not far from the truth to say that, by referring to one another as "siblings," they are (or Melville is) unconsciously trying to turn their eyes away from sexual elements in their too-intense intimacy (for siblings), although they feel that their closeness is more than is appropriate for a mother and son and that, in reality, they could be "lovers." That is to say, they try to hide their own guilty feelings by calling each other by the name of siblings.

Added to Pierre's intimate relationship with his mother, mentioned above, we cannot overlook the fact that Pierre and Isabel also use the disguise of naming each other. Pierre, as in the case of his mother, also calls Isabel sister. As for Pierre's lustful desire toward Isabel, Warren Rosenberg states as follows:

> Both Taji, in *Mardi*, and Pierre think they are saving young "maidens in distress" (Yillah and Isabel) out of the purest of reasons, but both are also conscious of a lurking sexual motive. . . . [I]n *Pierre*, the narrator reveals (and Pierre is aware) that behind Pierre's self-sacrifice for Isabel "womanly beauty and not womanly ugliness invited him to champion the right." The awareness of a double motive haunts both books and ultimately destroys their protagonists who would not fully acknowledge

the dark underside of their idealism. (70-71)

As Rosenberg remarks, it is quite apparent that Pierre's quest is "sullied by the erotic" (Rosenberg 71). What is more important is that, when we see his choosing "sister" as the name he calls Isabel, we also find his unwillingness to acknowledge his sexual desire for her. His hope for hiding their undesirable relation requires he use the disguise of naming, as in the case of his mother. One might assume that it is quite natural for Pierre to call his half-sister "sister"; yet, Pierre, in the case of Isabel, clearly and deliberately chooses this appellation, depending on various circumstances. This question is taken up later, when we compare Isabel with Lucy.

Just after recognizing the existence of his half-sister, Pierre begins to think about his mother's flaw, namely, her "immense pride" (89)[2]. He thinks that "in me she thinks she seeth her own curled and haughty beauty . . . and to her mirrored image, not to me, she offers up her offerings of kisses" (90). It seems as if Pierre decides to leave his mother just because she will not accept Isabel and because he thinks her affection for him is not true love but derived from her narcissism. We may say that, between his two "sisters," Pierre chooses Isabel at the cost of his mother. He tries to continue calling Mary "sister" even after choosing Isabel; yet his mother never accepts it, and says, "Sister me not, now . . . I am thy mother" (95). Her changed attitude toward Pierre not only indicates her requiring his respect (toward his "mother"), but also her refusal of their extreme, lover-like intimacy, which needs to be hidden by the use of the word, "sister."

As we have seen concerning his relation with Mary Glendinning and Isabel, therefore, the appellation of "sister" is, in this work, quite craftily used as a disguise to hide the protagonist's carnal passion for his relatives and actual excessive intimacy with them.

In the case of Glen, Pierre bears both bitter hatred and passionate affection

[2] Charles Moorman observes that "If [Pierre] can be said to possess a 'tragic fault' at all, it is that of pride in his world" ("Fortunate Fall" 17). Pierre, regardless of his own fault, blames Mary for having pride. It seems as if he is looking for a reason to hate her in order to abandon her.

toward him. In spite of their being rivals now, they had intimacy in childhood:

> In their boyhood and earlier adolescence, Pierre and Glen had cherished a much more than cousinly attachment. At the age of ten, they had furnished an example of the truth, that the friendship of fine-hearted, generous boys, nurtured amid the romance-engendering comforts and elegancies of life, sometimes transcends the bounds of mere boyishness, and revels for a while in the empyrean of a love. (216)

One might say that, to see their intimacy, which can be inferred by the above quotation, we may well wonder whether they cherish homosexual desire. Although they come to have extreme hostility after becoming adults, we should not overlook the fact that they are (especially Pierre is) trying to pretend to be indifferent to each other and even expect devotion from their counterparts. Pierre, for instance, is excessively sensitive about what Glen "calls" him at the beginning of his letters. When his cousin returns from abroad, Pierre sends him a letter "which . . . breathed a spirit of cousinly consideration and kindness." To Pierre's anger, however, "the less earnest and now Europeanized Glen had replied in a letter all sudden suavity" (219). Pierre at that time notices that "'My very dear Pierre,'" which is the opening salutation of the letter, "had originally been written 'Dear Pierre'" (219). Due to anger at his cousin's coldness in each letter (Pierre keeps on paying attention to Glen's cooling down in opening salutations), Pierre responds to him scornfully, and Glen wisely fights back at him by adopting an indifferent attitude. All of this amounts to saying that, although they feel hostile toward each other and do not frequently call the other "cousin," they are nevertheless obsessed with each other, even to the extent of showing abhorrence. Pierre's disgust toward his cousin seems rather to come from his affection for him, and between Pierre and Glen, there is a disguise using "naming" as well.

As mentioned above, *Pierre* is full of disguised appellations, by which the characters intend to conceal their real intimacy and guilty feelings. As Wyn Kelley

notes, Melville's domesticity in *Pierre* is "founded not on marriage and family but on the riskier relations of fraternity" (91). Pierre's affection tends to be devoted to his family, and it involves him in a further difficult predicament.

II. Lucy and Isabel—Pierre's Capriciousness

Let us now focus on Pierre's names for Isabel and Lucy, and the manner in which he disguises his relationship with them. Pierre is attracted to his supposed sister, Isabel, and he falls from innocence and grace by choosing her and deserting his fiancée, Lucy. As we have noted before, Pierre frequently calls Isabel "sister" and Isabel calls him "brother," as if they are trying to underline their plausible pretext for marrying each other that Pierre has to save his father's honor and also has to acknowledge Isabel as a member of Glendinning in society. Pierre and Isabel's ambiguous relationship is, however, not the end of the story. Although Pierre once abandoned Lucy, as well as all his fortune, in order to marry Isabel, it seems that he nevertheless comes to be fascinated with Lucy at the close of the narrative. Pierre admits Lucy to stay at the "Church of the Apostles" under the pretense of her being his "cousin," but if he had not been interested in her at all, he would have dismissed her. Moorman states that Lucy is transfigured after her separation from Pierre at Saddle Meadows, and that "[the] transfigured, saint-like Lucy re-enters the scene":

> Like Pierre and Isabel in the tower, Lucy has made a temporary withdrawal from the world (the illness which she refers to), but unlike Pierre and Isabel, she re-emerges into the world bringing with her a new and transcendent world vision. . . . She is no longer the simple child of Saddle Meadows. Her power is now greater than that of Isabel . . . . (575)

Although Pierre is obviously attracted to Isabel's sexuality and a sexual relationship is alluded to between them, as we have seen, he comes to be fascinated by Lucy again when he finds in Lucy a mysteriousness. He conceals from Isabel his guilty

conscience about it by telling her that Lucy is one of his relatives, though Isabel knows that it is not the truth. It is noteworthy that he calls Isabel "wife" after deciding to welcome Lucy to the Apostles' Church. This is nothing but the opposite impulse from calling Isabel "sister," by which he once intended to soften his self-reproach for his incest with her. We are told that "[Delly had] been occasionally struck with the infrequency of his using [the term, 'wife']" (321), but when he tells Delly to give Isabel better treatment than Lucy and calls Isabel "wife," Delly acutely notices that "they are not married" (321). Calling Isabel "wife" and pretending that he cares about only her, he had ironically emphasized that Isabel is not his wife and that he is still interested in Lucy. Because he cannot face the fact or does not want it to be realized, he calls Isabel "wife" here.

To sum up, Pierre at one time had called Isabel "sister" to conceal his guilty feeling that they are in fact committing incest, and to emphasize the pretext that they have no option but to pretend to marry each other in order to save Isabel out of her difficulty without her guardian. His ex-fiancée, Lucy, however, reappears in front of him, and he is now fascinated with her again. In this time, he has to call Isabel "wife" and call Lucy "cousin" to conceal his change of mind.

In this manner, Pierre's affection is never fixed on one character. Although his love for other characters is passionate, it does not have the consistency to be maintained to the last. For example, we have noted that there are suspicions about Pierre's incest with his mother, his "sister" Mary, and homosexuality with his cousin Glen, but he comes to have difficulty with both of them. Choosing Lucy, he falls on bad terms with Glen, and choosing Isabel, he is forsaken by Mary. Although he deserted Lucy to stay with Isabel, he does not truly love her to the last. We may say that Isabel's fascination for Pierre is obviously her "mystery." Yet when he encounters the mystery of Lucy, which even overwhelms Isabel's, he comes to be attracted to her again. "[T]hough Pierre knew," we are told, "more of Lucy than any one else, did this most singular behavior in her fail to amaze him. Seldom even had the mystery of Isabel fascinated him more, with a fascination partaking of the terrible" (327).

Thus, Pierre's love for other characters is capricious, and is apt to be influenced by momentary emotions. He cannot restrict his object of affection. For this reason, he takes advantage of calling each of them by names which are usually used to call relatives and which are, for Pierre, used to make pretext for their own unusual intimacy and emphasize their superficial "kinship." Stated another way, however, Pierre in a sense has a pure and intense affection for all other characters and just wants to establish deep and solid connections with all of them. His view on love is different from the expedient, monogamous way of love, and this is why he cannot adapt to society out of Saddle Meadows. In regard to this sense of value, Glen is totally different from our protagonist. We will look at for Pierre's peculiarity in comparison with Glen in the next section.

III. Glen as a Reflection of Pierre

At the end of the narrative, Pierre kills his own cousin and "extinguish[es] his house in slaughtering the only unoutlawed human being by the name of Glendinning" (360). Why does he shoot only Glen in spite of his having two pistols and having two enemies, who try to punish him?

Pierre bears a strange, peculiar feeling against his cousin, Glen—a passionate affection and a bitter hatred, which contradicts it. Bred in the same family line, it can be said that Pierre sees himself in his cousin. Relevant to this point is the following citation. When he hears of Glen's approach to Lucy, Pierre's feeling is depicted as below:

> . . . [S]o it did not seem wholly out of reason to suppose, that the great manly beauty of Glen, *possessing a strong related similitude to Pierre's*, might raise in Lucy's heart associations, which would lead her at least to seek—if she could not find—solace for one now regarded as dead and gone to her forever, in the devotedness of another, who would notwithstanding almost seem as that dead one brought back to life. . . . *Pierre conjured up this phantom of Glen transformed into the seeming*

> *semblance of himself*. . . . (288-89, emphasis added)

Thus Pierre evidently comes to recognize Glen as his other self[3]. To observe Pierre's impatience with Glen, the following quotation is also useful. "[I]t is not natural for a man, never mind who he may be, to see a noble patrimony, rightfully his, go over to a soul-alien, and that alien once his rival in love, and now his heartless, sneering foe . . ; it is not natural for a man to see this without singular emotions of discomfort and hate" (287). Thus, Pierre feels as if all his fortune is dispossessed by Glen. More important may be the following citation:

> Indeed, situated now as he was Glen would seem *all the finest part of Pierre, without any of Pierre's shame*; would almost seem Pierre himself. . . . (288, emphasis added)

What has to be noticed here is not only that Glen seems Pierre himself, but also that Glen does not have any of Pierre's "shame." Glen is absorbing only the best of Pierre's fate, and he comes to be much finer than Pierre.

Although they had been close friends and had many things in common with each other in childhood, Glen comes to have all the superiority Pierre once had. What makes such a huge difference in their destiny? The key to understand this might be Pierre's "moody ways," "capriciousness" and "passion for mystery," which we have seen in the preceding chapter. Unlike Pierre, Glen seems to be characterized by his "coolness," though he exhibits vengeful behavior. When furious Pierre bursts into the party, which is held in his cousin's residence, Glen takes the matter philosophically. When he says "I think I see him," his voice is depicted as "a singularly cool, deliberate, and rather drawling voice, yet a very silvery one, and at bottom perhaps a very resolute one" (238). He is "carelessly lounging in a half-long

[3] James Kissane also describes Glen Stanly as Pierre's "*alter ego*" (original emphasis, 570). That Pierre comes to recognize Glen as his other self may also be one of the reasons why Pierre hates and adores him.

attitude upon a large sofa, and appear[s] as if but just interrupted in some very agreeable chat with a diminutive but vivacious brunette, occupying the other end" (238). While Pierre is "bolting his rage in him," Glen is "still reclining, and apparently unmoved" (239). As we have seen before, added to this, when Pierre sent a letter to Glen, who had just come back from Europe, Glen takes a cold manner as well. Pierre supposes that "[Glen] himself would go on to celebrate the general relation, by many a sugared sentence of miscellaneous devotion" (219).

From all these citations, it is reasonable to suppose that, compared with Pierre, now Glen does not have a kind of enthusiasm for his surroundings or obsession about familiar people. He is calculating and clever in terms of knowing how to get along with people and how to manage in society, because of his experiences of staying abroad. When he falls out of love with Lucy, he does not try to chase her any more, and later, taking advantage of Pierre's turning her down, he begins to approach her again and partner up with her brother, who has a grudge against Pierre. He also inherits property by remaining on good terms with Mary. In this manner, Glen cleverly makes use of his surroundings without having an excessive fixation on and passion toward them. It can be said that Pierre is lacking in an ability to get along with people, as is seen from the fact that he cannot abandon his passion for each beloved person, even if he comes to miserable circumstances (because of being disinherited by Mary, for instance). His cousin is not the total reflection of his own self. Having inheriting his aunt's property and been regarded as a suitable fiancé of Lucy by his relatives, Glen is the very figure which Pierre himself should have been, had he not had his fatal flaw. Pierre may not be able to accept his own "semblance," and murdered him. "Two deaths" by the "two pistols" to which Pierre himself refers might mean not only the death of Glen, but also his suicide.

Pierre's failure is attributed to his innocence and lack of "sophistication,"[4]

[4] As for the issue of Pierre's sophistication, Charles Moorman has this to say: "Pierre begins to understand that the world is a mass of inexplicable ambiguity and that his life at Saddle Meadows, his noble sacrifice, and his hope of a 'fortunate' Fall are all delusions. Yet because it is impossible for him to assimilate and make use of this knowledge, save in his highly introspective and unpublishable book, he must sink deeper and deeper into the bitterness of his

without which he was not able to choose one person who brings earthly advantages for him, and which Glen shrewdly gained during his stay in Europe. Pierre is too straightforward in his passion and temporary emotion to avoid the risk of the world. Without sophistication, he was not able to recognize the dangerousness of his "Bad Angel," Isabel, who tempts him into his own fall.

The issue of Pierre's naming, in fact, develops into the theme of "lack of sophistication." Using from his youth the disguise of naming with his only parent in his peaceful Saddle Meadow and refusing to acknowledge the reality as such, he did not have the opportunity to acquire sophistication. In this manner, Pierre's perverted love for each character, fostered by his using the disguise of naming, contributed to the protagonist's later problem of innocence, which has long been a much-discussed subject in American Literature.

Conclusion

Pierre's problem is that, brought up in the countryside and fussed over by his mother and surrounding people, he is not sophisticated enough to know how to cope with the outer world which he is supposed to live in. His childish innocence allows him to give priority to pursuing temporal love over his social success in the future. Pierre has a passionate emotion for love, but he is lacking in an absolute purpose for his career, although he has the aim of compensating for his father's sinful behavior of having and abandoning an illegitimate child.

In contrast to Pierre, his cousin, Glen, knows how to deal with society, which enables him to make choices about what is really needed and what is not, for his own future prosperity. It can be said that Pierre only wanted to nurture loving relationships with the people around him, which needed disguised appellation to hide its inappropriateness, instead of thinking how to take advantage of them for his own success, like Glen. As Millthorpe says at the very end of the narrative, "I would have rallied thee, and banteringly warned thee from thy too moody ways, but thou

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own narcissism" (574).

wouldst never heed!" (362), Pierre's capriciousness and innocence result in his own downfall.

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