

Melville's *Moby-Dick* and the Dawn of Industrial Capitalism

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[Abstract]

Herman Melville says, in a letter, that there are two kinds of labor wielded to produce his literary works: one from the “pocket” and the other from the “heart.” When he divides his labor into the two categories, he reminds us of the classical Marxist argument about the capitalist division of labor and the alienation of commodity fetishism. It was at the dawning of industrial capitalism that Melville created his major work *Moby-Dick*. That is why it may not be baseless to argue that this masterpiece should be a product of contradiction arising from the disturbing early stage of industrial capitalism. In a way, the novel reflects, into its textual entity, the uncharted dilemma of living under the dominant influences of the newly established market-economy of industrial capitalism. The whaling ship *Pequod* as a joint-stock company is also a pioneering outpost to spread industrial capitalism to many coasts around the world. Thus, as an authoritarian manager of the Joint-stock company, Ahab orchestrates the work of the crew into the systematic division of labor, which unwittingly amounts to the exploitation of natural resource. Unfortunately, the business of the joint-stock company *Pequod* ends in a devastating failure. The seed of tragedy lies in the object of Ahab’s quest, Moby Dick. Like what “the

doubloon” does to the crew of the *Pequod*, and then like what a commodity becomes to its producer in Marx’s theory of commodity fetishism, so does Moby Dick become “a mysterious thing” to Ahab. While Ahab turns the *Pequod* into his own private property in the spirit of industrial capitalism, he is also another victim to its inhumane contradiction.

Key Words: Herman Melville, Commodity, Fetishism, Alienation, Division of Labor

I. Introduction

In his 1849 letter to Lemuel Shaw, the Chief of Justice of the Massachusetts Supreme Court, and his father-in-law also, Herman Melville revealed inadvertently his view on the labor of production, while making a comment on his recently published books, *White-Jacket* (1850) and *Redburn* (1849):

No reputation that is gratifying to me, can possibly be achieved by either of these books. They[*Redburn and White-Jacket*] are two jobs, which I have done for money – being forced to it, as other men are to sawing wood. . . . Being books, then, written in this way, my only desire for their ‘success’ (as it is called) springs from my pocket, & not from my heart. (qtd. in Weinstein)

What Melville suggested here is that there were two kinds of labor wielded for the production of his literary works: the one from the “pocket” and the other from the “heart.” From this self-debasing remark on his own creative procedure, it could be inferred that the labor of the former kind was used to make his own living by means of producing commodities, not literary works of art. On the contrary, the labor

of the latter was applied to create his proud works of art including *Moby-Dick*.

This distinction of his labor of aesthetic creation into the labor of “pocket” and that of “heart” demonstrates Melville’s apprehension of his precarious status as an artist, who managed to live, virtually paycheck to paycheck, in the society that was undergoing the initial stage of industrial capitalism. Before and after the Civil War, America was in the midst of a transition from an agrarian society where economic activity was fairly limited to the boundary of domestic production to a modern industrial society where the world-wide market-dominant production controlled the most of main economic activity. Influenced by this transition of economic environment, the role of an artist in society also was to be changed according to the transitory development of the literary market.¹⁾ In other words, a professional writer like Melville had to produce his own works of literature with a consciousness of the market economy.

Production for the market, as Raymond Williams discussed in *The Sociology of Culture*, was inevitably accompanied by alteration to the conception of the work of art and its producer, the artist. Although the degrees of participation by every individual artists into the market-economy production were widely different, the work of art, in general, became a commodity and the artist also, “a particular kind of commodity producer” (44). In this sense, Melville’s letter to Shaw revealed us his conflicting view on the status of his profession as a writer; in other words, it was not simple and easy for him to define the professional authorship whether it is a creator of an art or a mere laboring worker trying to sell the products of labor for living.

II. Division of Labor and Alienation

Melville's agitating concern on the status of his professional authorship was not only his own individual dilemma, but it can be also applied to the status of all laboring workers living in the dawning age of modern industrial capitalism. Melville's distinction of labor into the two categories reminds of the classical Marxist argument about the capitalist division of labor. The division of labor, according to Karl Marx, is a fundamental system for commodity production in the society of industrial capitalism. For example, the factory system of industrial capitalism, such as Fordism and Taylorism, in which the workers are fulfilling only their partial roles assigned by the regulating relations of production is discussed to be a representative case for the division of labor.

However, it is hard to see the division of labor itself as a serious flaw since a primitive society could also have a division of labor for production, although its products were not commodities, goods for exchange. The real problem of the division of labor comes from its inhumane function of degrading workers into a status of commodities selling their labor. Moreover, in a very ironical and reversing way, their products have the power of dominating the lives of their own producers by controlling the human relations between the workers.²⁾ In this context, Marx urged in *The German Ideology*:

[T]he division of labor offers us the first example how . . . as long as a cleavage exists between the particular and the common interest, as long, therefore, as activity is not voluntarily, but naturally, divided, man's own deed becomes an alien power opposed to him, which enslaves him instead of being controlled by him. (Tucker 160)³⁾

Unfortunately, it is very hard for the workers working under the division of labor of industrial capitalism to realize the precious potential of their own individual humanities, because they are imprisoned into the “exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape”(Tucker 160). In this sense, if Melville did only the labor from his “pocket” in order to produce his works of literature as commodities for living, it is also very hard for him to realize his aesthetic vision and impulse as an artist, not as a commodity seller. In other words, the labor of pocket, separated from “heart,” does not seem to be the natural and inspirational fountain for creating the work of art that Melville wants to produce as a professional writer.

As a harmful influence of the division of labor to the market-dominant society of capitalism, Marx brings up a social phenomenon called "alienation," which is originated from Hegelian idealism but applied for Marx's dialectical thought of human interactions with the outer world (Ahearn 5). The alienation as a social phenomenon, according to Marx, is born by the “objectification” of labor in a product of the labor, a commodity: “the object which labour produces . . . confronts it as something alien, as a power independent of the producer” (Tucker 71). Due to this social alienation, the commodity as the product of a worker's labor becomes a transcendental thing alienated from the worker himself, and, more ironically, the transcendental thing controls the social relations of its own producer, that is, the worker himself. This alienation of the worker from the outcome of his production can be applied to the wide and all-around spheres of the market-dominant society, not only limited to the commodity production. That is to say, the alienation as an economic relation of industrial capitalism has permeated into all the spheres of social activities including religion, education, and culture, so that it becomes appear as the natural law to all of the people living in the society.

III. Labor Movements and *Moby-Dick*

The initial phase of the industrial capitalism, in which the division of labor and the alienation as a social phenomenon are beginning to occur, is briefly but effectively explained by C. B. Macpherson:

If a single criterion of the possessive market society is wanted it is that man's labour is a commodity, i.e., that a man's energy and skill are his own, yet are regarded not as integral parts of his personality, but as possessions, the use and disposal of which he is free to hand over to others for a price. It is to emphasize this characteristic of the fully market society that I have called it the possessive market society. Possessive market society also implies that where labour has become a market commodity, market relations so shape or permeate all social relations that it may properly be called a market society, not merely a market economy. (48)⁴⁾

In this stage of the possessive market society (or the society of industrial capitalism), the labor of human being is sold as a commodity, and the economic relations, like a final determinant in the Althusserian terms, begin to control other social relations such as politics, religion, and education. It was in this stage of American society where Melville lived and created his works of literature, especially in the region of New York.

During the 1850s, New York was the arena where radical debates and movements on the labor of industrial workers were actively taking place (Kuebrich 381-184). For example, on August 4 in 1850, one of the most "bloodiest and most divisive" strike was launched by the tailors under the name of the New York Industrial Congress, and, at least, two tailors were slain by the police(Wilentz 383). Like this case, many

working-class political organizations protested frequently against the unfair distribution and exploitive practice of the economic system of New York. In response to these working-class labor movements, some journalist like Horace Greeley advocated firmly the humane rights of working class people, attacking the hypocritical pretenses of many Christian factory and business owners, who approved with a tacit consent the aggravating contradictions of industrial capitalism (Kuebrich 383). Contrary to this favorable opinion, some right-wing and business-friendly newspapers, like James G. Bennet's *New York Herald*, denounced the radical politics of labor movements, attacking it for inviting an "infamous doctrine" of European Socialism into the American territory (Kuebrich 382).

Such controversies on the problem of working-class labor and the market economy were not unfamiliar to Melville, who lived in New York from the end of 1844 to late July of 1850. Even when he moved to Pittsfield, Massachusetts, M. Sealts argues, Melville still maintained his interest in the ongoing tension of labor movements by subscribing the *New York Herald*, and he also read Greeley's *New York Daily Tribune* (88). From these biographical facts, we can infer that Melville knew well of the heated tensions and worsening contradictions in the industrial capitalism of America as shown by labor strikes, political bickering, and ideological clashes. Moreover, as his letter to Lemuel Shaw implies, he seemed to be very conscious of the fact that the writing profession also was to be inevitably degraded into a kind of commodity-producing labor by the market-dominant society, as well as the writer himself into a commodity seller. It is also very meaningful coincidence that the period in which labor debates of New York was at high point was overlapped with the period when he wrote one of his major work *Moby-Dick* (1851). Therefore, it may not be a baseless argument to say that the masterpiece should be a product of the controversy surrounding the disturbing rise of industrial capitalism in

Antebellum America. The novel reflected, in part, into its textual entity, the uncharted dilemma of human beings living under the dominant influences of the newly established market-economy of industrial capitalism. In this respect, the rest of this essay is to deal with how *Moby-Dick* responds to these disquieting economic situations.

IV. Joint Stock Company and The Whaling Ship

In “Loomings” of *Moby-Dick*, Ishmael explains his motive for boarding the whaling ship to the reader that he is heading toward the sea because he felt severe disillusionment with the earthly life, so he has been inflicted with a suicidal impulse: “whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet . . . I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can.”⁵⁾ To escape from his despairing sentiment, he decides to get aboard a whaling ship since the sea is his “substitute for pistol and ball” (1). As his name Ishmael insinuates, it might be easy to regard him as an exiled wanderer just enjoying the scenery of the sea without the everyday burden of earning his living by hard labor. However, from the first chapter of *Moby-Dick*, Ishmael emphasizes his intention of going to sea as a sailor, not as a leisurely passenger or someone like an artist who wants to draw a painting of seaside scenery.

Ishmael’s emphasis on his status as a laboring hard-working sailor has been repeated several times in the first chapter: “I go as a simple sailor,” “I always go to sea as a sailor.” Ishmael reveals one of his motives for being a sailor that he has missed the “wholesome exercise and pure air of the forecandle deck,” and “the royal mast-head” (4-5). These somewhat romantic attractions of being a sailor, however,

are not enough to explain his whole reason to be a sailor. From an economic point of view, Ishmael has to go to sea as a sailor, simply because he has no money to be a passenger: "For to go as a passenger you must needs have a purse, and a purse is but a rag unless you have something in it" (3). Therefore, for being a sailor, he can reduce his financial troubles, "because they make a point of paying me for my trouble" (5). Besides of his vaguely romantic but suicidal depression, it is the lack of money that forces Ishmael to be a sailor. Considering this situation, it is worth noticing that Ishmael begins his journey as a laboring hard worker of the sea, the sailor, as well as a participant in an economic activity of fishing industry.

New Bedford, the place in which Ishmael has taken refuge from his grim spleen, is ironically not so much a peaceful small-town port of seaside as a central harbor of international commerce and trade, hectically crowded by foreign sailors. New Bedford has been internationally known for an expanding hub of global exploration and sea commerce:

In thoroughfares nigh the docks . . . offer to view the queerest looking nondescripts from foreign parts. Even in Broadway and Chestnut streets, Mediterranean mariners will sometimes jostle the affrighted ladies. Regent Street is not unknown to Lascars and Malays; and at Bombay, in the Apollo Green, live Yankees have often scared the natives. But New Bedford beats all Water Street and Wapping. In these last-mentioned haunts you see only sailors; but in New Bedford, actual cannibals stand chatting at street corners; savages outright; many of whom yet carry on their bones unholy flesh. It makes a stranger stare. (32)

Truly, this description about the multinational and polyethnic opulency of New Bedford implies that the whaling industry has emerged as a spearhead of the globally-stretching economic system, that is, the market-dominant industrial

capitalism. Consequently, there are widely international ranges of heterogenous sea laborers roaming around the street of New Bedford. Though Nantucket, from which Ahab's *Pequod* actually starts its whaling exploration, is much smaller than Bedford, the old island, as "her[Bedford] great original," offered Bedford a great chance to be a center of "the business of whaling" (7).

While New Bedford and Nantucket are homes for the global industry, the whaling ship *Pequod* is also an pioneering outpost to spread industrial capitalism to many coasts around the whole world. Like a major cooperation of today, the capital of the ship has been invested in a form of Joint-Stock company by numerous contributors. So, the readers are informed by Ishmael that the *Pequod* is first of all navigated not by a personal desire of revenge but by the economic rationale of the market-capitalism: "People in Nantucket invest their money in whaling vessels, the same way that you do yours in approved state stocks bringing in good interest" (75). Being a sailor in that ship, Ishmael becomes a stock-holder participating in an economic enterprise, rather than a romantic distracted adventurer. In this respect, the *Pequod*'s voyage to the ocean is first and foremost a financial project.

It is therefore inevitable to see Ahab as one of such major stock-holder as Captain Bildad and Captain Peleg, before to see him as a tyrannical mystic captain of the whaling ship. In fact, Ahab is one of "the largest owners of the vessel" like Biliad and Peleg (75), which means that Ahab is responsible to increase those stockholders' benefit by the industrial exploitation of natural resources including the whales in our planet by means of using efficiently the *Pequod* and its international crews. In this sense, his private ambition of having his revenge on a white-headed whale should essentially be treated as a violation to the economic laws of the joint-stock company.

One of the significant aspects in the joint-stock company of Nantucket lies in its international character: not only the crews of the *Pequod* consist of foreign tribes

such as Quequeg, Thashtego, and Fedallah, the territorial range of its commodity-searching exploration covers all over the global spheres including the shores of Africa, Asia, and the southern Pacific oceans. The ship's exploitation takes her, in a crisscross fashion, around the entire globe until the endmost point like Asia, which is described in a passage that reads like a geographic explanation: "The long and narrow peninsula of Malacca, extending south-eastward from the territories of Birmah, forms the most southernly point of all Asia" (389). As this passage implies, almost all places of the world has been seized under "the all-grasping western world" (389). Thus, in "The Advocate," Ishmael presents the whaling industry as a key to the international exchange system of the world-market led by the industrial capitalism of the West.

In this sense, the whaling industry could be thought as a harbinger of the postmodern world system of globalized capitalism. For postmodern globalization, Fredric James asserts in *The Cultures of Globalization* that "the concept of globalization reflects the sense of an immense enlargement of world communication, as well as of the horizon of a world market" (XI). Like the postmodern enlargement of the world market, by the whaling industry, the western capitalism in the 19th century can expand its influence to some small islands of Pacific where primitive cannibals are supposed to live. Moreover, like the recent situations of these days, alienated and unique cultures of the world could achieve mutual communication with outside world by way of the whaling industry. As a representative example of the inter-cultural communication in *Moby-Dick*, Ishmael is able to access, through being part of the whaling industry, to an alien culture of his bosom friend Quequeg, whose culture seems to represent the noble innocence of exotic non-Western tribes and the mystic religions of non-Christian communities symbolized by Yojo.

However, this expansion of the world economy is presided dominantly by the

industrial capitalism of the Western market-society, so that Ishmael deplors the greed of Nactucketers who represent, in a way, the greedy imperialism of the Western capitalism:

And thus have these naked Natucketers . . . overrun from and conquered the watery world like so many Alexanders; parcelling out among them the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian oceans, as the three pirate powers did Poland. . . . let the English overswarm all India, and hang out their blazing banner from the sun; two thirds of this terraqueous globe are the Nantucketer's. (65)

As his last sentence implies, Ishmael relates the West's dominance over the whaling industry to the international politics, especially the imperialism of the West to other non-Western nations: "America add Mexico to Texas, and pile Cuba upon Canada; let the English overswarm all India, and hang out there blazing banner from the sun." Presenting this greed aspect of the whaling fishery manufacture, Melville warns the ominous beginning of the Western imperialism under the commodity logic of industrial capitalism.

Even the friendship between the crew of *Pequod*, like that of Queequeg and Ishmael, is described in terms of the profit-pursuing motive of industrial capitalism: "It's a mutual, joint-stock world, in all meridians. We cannibals must help these Christians" (63). This analogy between friendship and membership of a capitalist company would imply that the overall psyche of the crews on the *Pequod* be controlled by the logic of industrial capitalism. In this sense, the *Pequod* is a Joint-stock company, and all of the crew are participating in the economic activity as a stock-holder; even the savages like Queequeg and Daggoo are part of the company as the major stockholders. Therefore, as a money-grabbing enterprise, the crew society of the *Pequod* is strictly manipulated by the capitalist principle of the division of the

labor, which is operated by the hierarchical order of the working-versus-ruling class division. In this context, Ahab can be seen as an authoritarian manager of the Joint-stock company, while his Christian assistant-managers like Starbuck, Stubb, and Flask oversee common sailors and deckhands of almost every race and nationality by following the command of Ahab. Thus the labor of the crew in the whaling ship is systematically divided according to the hierarchical order of industrial capitalism; in other words, the division of labor has been orchestrated effectively for the exploitation of the natural resource like a conveyor belt system of a modern factory. Even the procedure of serving a meal to the crew is done by a strict hierarchical order. In this sense, *Pequod* represent one of the typical money-hunting factory sailing through the ocean of industrial capitalism.

V. Tragic Irony of Commodity Fetishism

Unfortunately, the business of the joint-stock company *Pequod* ends in a devastating failure. It is very apparent that the cause of failure should be attributed to Ahab himself, the executive head of the enterprise. His schizophrenic madness for pursuing the white whale, Moby Dick, frustrates the financial project of *Pequod* and its international members of the crew. However, the deeper and essential cause of the failure lies in the inhumane contradiction of industrial capitalism. Moreover, Ahab's authoritative charisma, which is powerful enough to turn the capitalist joint-stock enterprise into his own private one, has been, in fact, nurtured by the malicious contradiction innate in the industrial capitalism itself.

To alter the voyage of the *Pequod* into that of his private purpose, for example, Ahab uses the power of money that he has saved for all his life as a whaling sailor,

which is symbolized by “the doubloon.” The fact that Ahab uses money to motivate his crew for going after his quest for Moby Dick is very ironical in the sense that his quest for Moby Dick offers a cause of failure in the money-making enterprise of the *Pequod*. Nonetheless Ahab knows very well the influence of money to the crew, so that he uses the doubloon, in a shadow of satanic, magnetic, and magical motif, to incite the crew to his private hunt for the whale, leading to the “infernal orgies.” He hammered the “Spanish ounce of gold,” the sixteen dollar piece that is to reward the man who spots Moby Dick first (164). By the eye-blinding luster of the golden coin, the crews fall prey eventually to the hand of Ahab’s madness, being stirred the desire to get the gold and to revenge Moby Dick while forgotten their real business of the whaling industry. In this scene, the value of the money is heightened up to the realm of God: “the doubloon” indeed has the fascination and prestige of the precious metal-money fetish.

This sort of money and commodity fetishism is not unfamiliar to people who live in the market society of industrial capitalism. By the middle of the 19th century, the manufacturing industry produced commodities on an unprecedentedly large scale. Thus, the division of the labor for production and the exchange of commodities in the market society are so highly systematized that it is difficult for workers to find any connection between their own labor and its products. As a result of this social phenomenon, the connection between the producer and the produced is mystified as Karl Marx discusses in *Capital: The Critique of Political Economy*:

A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men’s labor appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labor; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labor. . . . To them, their

own social action takes the form of the action of objects, which rule the producers instead of being ruled by them. (Tucker 320, 323)

As Marx points out, by the highly systematized division of labor in the economic system of industrial capitalism, the labor of the worker is objectified into the product itself and, then, alienated to the worker himself: the worker's labor becomes the alienated labor. The alienation of the labor from the worker is occurred in this way; thus, the produced object, that is, the commodity, into which the worker's labor is congealed, becomes "something alien, as a power independent of the producer."

In the process of the capitalist alienation, the product of a worker's labor becomes an abstract and transcendental thing, the worth of which is only determined by the exchange value of the market, not by the use value or the existential value. Moreover, this exchange value of a commodity as a transcendental thing rules over the social relations of the worker, its producer. Money, like "the doubloon" of Ahab, represent this transcendental and abstract exchange value in the monetary system of industrial capitalism. The coin, therefore, succeeds in dominating the relations of the sailors in the *Pequod* as a fetish God. Although the value of money is, in fact, coming from the labor of the crew, it is very ironical and contradictory that the members of the crew, as well as their inter-relationships, are controlled by the results of their labor. It is clear that this is caused by the fundamental contradictions of industrial capitalism. Moreover, the fact that this fetishism of Ahab's doubloon, which is based on the market-principle of industrial capitalism, actually violates the capitalist principle itself suggests the innate contradictions of the market society.

It is in part due to the working condition that the labor of a worker becomes alienated. In other words, under the hierarchical order of the market society, the means of production have been monopolized by a few capitalists, so most labor workers have no other way of living but of selling his labor as a commodity. Under

these circumstances, the labor of a worker becomes an alienated commodity; therefore, it is real hard for the worker to find any genuine pleasure of self-realization in his labor, thereby being a mere machine of selling his labor. This alienated working condition has not been unfamiliar to the most workers in America. In relation to this, in his famous *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville discusses one of the problems in American democracy and its economical activity; in short, he warns of the threat that the manufacturing industry poses to the ideal of equality in American democracy. For him, the very dynamics of democracy in the nation intensify the discrepancy between the rich manufacturer, the capitalist, and the poor worker who sells his labor to them. Moreover, by the strict division of labor, the labor workers are more dependent upon a small number of wealthy manufacturers. Consequently, this circumstance makes some capitalist aristocrats of industrial capitalism, while it degrading some labor workers into the state of slavery.

One of Melville's brilliant short stories, "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids," directly describes the inhumane status of labor workers in the male-against-female story where the bachelors' legal profession and their art of fiction are wholly dependent upon the corporeal and psychic exploitation of working women in the paper factory. By using a metaphor of man against woman, Melville accuses the capitalist owning class' exploitation of labor workers. In the story, we witness that the paper machine drains the rosy tone of the girls' cheeks, the symbol of innocent and vital life, in order to produce a "rose-hued note paper" (277). In this paper factory, the female workers are exploited as "the slave serves the Sultan" and as a "mere cog to the wheels" (278). The alienated labor of the market society makes the girls in Tartarus mere accessories to the big machine of industrial capitalism.

The slavery condition of working class, like those girls of Tartarus, could be also

seen as another central issue in *Moby-Dick*. In fact, Ahab treats his crew as if they are his own slaves, enforcing them to be his own private machine by manipulating the power of money, the Spanish golden coin, and his diabolic charisma. As a result, all the members of the crew boarded on the *Pequod* have lost their idiosyncratic personalities by the private scheme of Ahab. The fatal combination between Ahab's private willpower and his charismatic individuality is "the long central keel" that holds the crew together as an integral machine: "all the individualities of the crew . . . all varieties were welded into oneness, and were all directed to that fatal goal which Ahab their one lord and keel did point to" (564). Ahab becomes a lord, transforming the crew as his own slavery machine for fulfilling the private desire of vengeance.

However, it is tragically ironical that Ahab himself also has to be a machine. In "Sunset," Ahab feels that he wears an iron crown; moreover, he realizes that he is devoid of "the low, enjoying power" of ordinary human beings. He goes on to say that "I thought to find one stubborn, at least; but my one cogged circle fits into all their various wheels, and they revolve" (171). This machine-like psyche of Ahab suggests the dilemma that even if he appropriates the system of industrial capitalism for his private and mysterious purpose, he also cannot escape from the capitalist principle of industrial capitalism, that is, the alienation of his own labor. In other words, to fulfill his own desire of revenge, he has to give up his humanity and, at the same time, to transform himself as a part of the capitalist machine.

Those machine imageries used frequently in *Moby-Dick* emphasize inhumane aspects of the alienated labor under the commodity production of industrial capitalism. Among many of the machine imageries, the carpenter of the *Pequod* ominously represent the fatal influence of the alienated labor to the nature of a human being. The carpenter could be interpreted as a caricature of the mechanically

inventive and industrious man, that is, the jack-of-all-trades who manipulates all the gadgets and machinery devices. The carpenter's superb technical skill makes the great contribution to the whaling business of the *Pequod*. However, Ishmael warns about the danger of the inhumane machine-likeness that, for such a "pure manipulator," in order to work on with equal indifference, everything can be degraded into lifeless cold objects. For example, the individual sailors of the *Pequod* have no personal idiosyncratic qualities for the carpenter except their values of machine-like usefulness. The carpenter sees men as objects, and his superiors treat him also as a commodity-producing machine; thus, he is more than willing to be used, mindlessly: "his brain, if he had ever had one, must have early oozed along into the muscles of his fingers. He was like one of those unreasoning but still highly useful . . . Sheffield contrivances (478). The carpenter is a suggestive symbol of the alienated labor that the man who follows mechanically the commodity-production of industrial capitalism may well become a machine himself to serve, as a slave, the alienated labor to his owner, the wealthy capitalist.

VI. Conclusion

In "Fast-Fish and Loose-Fish," as many critics points out, Ishmael attacks the human greediness for private property, specially in the Western civilization, saying that "Possession is half of the law: that is, regardless of how the thing came into possession? But often possession is the whole of the law" (408). Using an outrageous phallic joke, Ishmael shows that the possession of private property, like the basic law of ownership in the whaling industry, depends on an arbitrary legal system, which is basically operated by the endless and uncontrollable desire for private property, like

the way that sharks pursue their preys in the ocean.

One of the diabolical characters that Ahab has is his greedy and unquenchable desire for the possession of something unpossessable. Consequently, he exploits in an infatuating but cruel way his crew and the ship for his private goal of possessing the mysterious White Whale, disregarding the precious lives of the sailors. Ahab also becomes an inhumane machine-like despot to the crew. The reason why Ahab cannot help but be a merciless and egoistic dictator could be found out in his last conversation with Starbuck. He tells Starbuck about his forty years of living as a whaling fisherman:

Forty years of continual whaling! forty years of privation, and peril, and storm-time! . . . Starbuck, out of those forty years I have not spent three ashore. When I think of this life I have led; the desolation of solitude it has been; the masoned, walled-town of a Captain's exclusiveness, which admit but small entrance to any sympathy from the green country without-oh, weariness! heaviness! (549)

As Ahab deplored to Starbuck, he spent forty years in offering his alienated labor to pursue the monetary profit under the market principle of industrial capitalism. He deeply resents his forty years of selling his labor as a commodity: "aye, aye! What a forty years'-fool-fool-old fool, has old Ahab been!"(549). After the long years of his life as a laborer, he possesses virtually nothing but "the desolation of solitude" with one leg lost by the White Whale. Even more tragically, the hollowness of his life sometimes threatens his sense of identity: "Is Ahab, Ahab? It is I" (551).

For Ahab, the vengeance on Moby Dick means that he need something mysterious and transcendental in order to overcome the hollowness of his life. In other words, facing his desolate reality, he is eager to possess something to fill up the hollowness

of his life. The seed of tragedy, however, lies in the object of his quest, Moby Dick. It is clear that Moby Dick is just not only one of the mysteries of nature but also one of the commodities, like other whales, that he has produced for his own life time as a worker in a factory of the whaling industry. However, like the relation of "the doubloon" to the crew of Pequod, the product itself, which is Moby Dick, becomes "a mysterious thing" to Ahab, like the way that a commodity becomes to its producer as Marx points out in his theory of commodity fetishism, even though his alienated labor has been spent for more than forty years to produce it. Shortly said, it is tragically ironical that the product as a commodity has controlled the course of Ahab's entire life as a human being.

In other words, Ahab's alienated labor has been congealed into the product itself he has manufactured; however, as a consequence of the alienation of his labor, this commodity, that is Moby Dick, becomes a transcendental thing to Ahab. In this respect, his quest for the White Whale should be seen as a symptom of commodity fetishism, which is not an unusual social syndrome in the market-dominant society of industrial capitalism as I discussed before. In light of this ironical circumstance, it is very significant that, whereas Ahab turns the *Pequod* into his own private property, taking advantage of the commodity principle of industrial capitalism, such as commodity fetishism and the division of labor, he is also another victim to the inhumane contradiction of industrial capitalism. Therefore, Melville's *Moby-Dick* could be seen as one of the darkest portraits prefiguring the dawn of modern industrial capitalism in the history of literature.

Notes

- 1) My argument on the rise of the market-dominant capitalism is indebted to following works: Michael Gilmore's *American Romanticism and the Marketplace*, 1-17, and Ronald J. Zboray's *A Fictive People: Antebellum Economic Development and the American Reading Public*.
- 2) This reversing irony of the division of labor is discussed in detail in the works of Karl Marx, especially from *The German Ideology (Part I. A.) and Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* ("Estranged Labour").
- 3) For easy access to some references on Marx's works including those of Engels, I will refer to the Robert C. Tucker's anthology, *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: Norton, 1978).
- 4) By the term "possessive market society," Macpherson indicates the industrial capitalism that was beginning from the late-seventeenth century England. However, this situation also could be applied to the American economy around the 1850s.
- 5) Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* (New York: Oxford UP, 1988), 1. Hereafter the quotations from the text will be documented by page numbers only.

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국문초록

멜빌의 『모비 딕』과 산업자본주의의 여명

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허먼 멜빌은 한 편지에서 말하길, 그가 문학작품을 집필하는 데에는 두 가지 종류의 노동이 있다. 하나는 주머니에서 온 것이고, 또 다른 것은 마음에서 온 것이라고 밝혔다. 그가 노동을 두 가지로 나눌 때 고전적인 마르크스주의에서 논한 노동의 분업과 상품 폐타시즘의 소외 개념을 상기시킨다. 멜빌이 그의 대표작인 『모비 딕』을 집필할 당시는 산업자본주의가 동틀 무렵이었다. 따라서 『모비 딕』을 당대 산업자본주의 혼란스러운 태동기의 산물이라는 분석은 그리 근거 없는 억측은 아닐 것이다. 이 작품은 일면 그 당시 새롭게 펼쳐지는 산업자본주의 시장의 주도적인 역할이 초래하는 당대까지 경험해 보지 못했던 문제들을 반영한다. 여기서 고래잡이 배인 피쿼드호는 하나의 주식회사로서 전 세계의 여러 연안에 산업자본주의를 퍼트리는 침범 역할은 한다. 따라서 주식회사를 운영하는 독선적인 경영자인 에이허브는 천연자원을 개발하기 위해 선원들을 체계적인 노동 분업으로 착취한다. 하지만 불행하게도, 주식회사 피쿼드호의 사업은 재앙으로 끝나게 된다. 그 비극의 씨앗은 에이허브의 광기어린 집념의 대상인 모비 딕에 있다. 마치 스페인 금화가 선원들에게 그랬던 것처럼, 그리고 마르크스가 주장한 상품 폐타시즘에서 상품이 노동자에게 그런 것처럼, 모비 딕은 에이허브에게 신비로운 존재가 된다. 에이허브는 산업자본주의 덕분에 피쿼드호를 자신의 사적인 소유로 이용했지만, 끝내 그는 산업자본주의의 비인간적인 모순으로 인해 파멸에 이르게 되는 것이다.

주제어 : 허먼 멜빌, 상품, 페티시즘, 소외, 노동의 분업

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