MELVILLE'S ALLEGORIC INTERPRETATIONS OF THE WHITE WHALE:

Study of the Empirical/A-priori Relationship between Method and Meaning
in Mardi, Moby Dick, The Confidence Man, and Billy Budd.

by

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PREFACE

The following pages are less a "Preface" than an extension designed to establish certain definitions introduced in Chapter 2. Consequently these pages may be rather more intelligible if read after that chapter. In the elaboration of this thesis, which is concerned with an almost mechanical principle which consciously and unconsciously determines the direction of Melville's work--the relationship between method and meaning--it became necessary to coin new terms or redefine old terms. However, the element of invention here I claim is not primarily mine but Melville's.

Melville believed that if a person is to approximate accuracy in his conclusions about the nature of existence he must base those conclusions empirically on perceptual fact. No one can question, except philosophically, an observation which can be supported by scientific evidence. If Melville's mentality was simply pragmatic one would have no difficulty in affixing to his name the term empiricist. But, as I indicate on pages 13 and 14, Melville's empirical opinions were based on an allegorical understanding of the

universe. Melville accepted as fact that the world constituted one vast allegory, that everything contained an inner significance. It may then be objected that his empirical philosophy was based on an a-priori assumption, the assumption of the existence of "linked analogies." The inconsistency appears to be on Melville's part, but it should be sufficient to acknowledge that Melville did hold this view.

Nevertheless it is possible, although perhaps not necessary, to defend Melville against this charge. Presumably he speaks of "linked analogies" because, in his experience, the evidence points to their existence. The good/evil ratio between the land and the sea is born out by the fact that the tortoise's dark side is uppermost. His cautious empirical conclusion is then that absolutes do not exist; all is ambivalent. If a large number of people can hold multiple and differing views about a subject it is a reasonable, and not an a-priori assumption, to decide that all the views are subjective simplifications--no single answer is correct, only a composite of such answers can approach the truth--which would make the subject in question ambivalent. It is upon evidence of this kind that Melville would justify his allegorical perception as empirical. It is important to realize that Melville does not deny the

possibility that an a-priorist view which transcends concrete reality may be correct. Nowhere, for instance, does he say that Ahab is wrong. Melville only says that, in his experience, a-priori philosophies often have disastrous effects, and whether they are correct cannot be known --it is a matter of belief.

The method by which Melville arrived at his allegorical but empirical thesis is clear from an examination of his four early novels of experience. As argued on pages 18 to 42 they present the evidence on which the thesis is based. Admittedly Melville's experience has, in certain places, undergone an imaginative transmutation. During the period of his life which he describes in Redburn Melville did not visit London. He spent four weeks, not four months, in the Taipi-Vai valley. But these elaborations may be justified as "true" in that they further illustrate ideas already empirically supported. Redburn's experience aboard the Highlander slowly brings to him the realization that this world is predominantly evil; and his sojourn in London, partly based possibly on Melville's subsequent knowledge of the place, is a legitimate image of the world's corruption. Melville stretched the time element in Typee and included the fear of cannibalism to point up his empirical understanding that the savages are not as innocent as he had originally

supposed. In the figure of Jackson (Redburn) Melville provides evidence for his belief that an a-priori understanding is dangerous. Jackson's power over the crew, as noted on page 38, is dependent not upon the man's physical strength (he is diminutive, weak and sickly), but upon the a-priori superstition of the men. Why did Melville depict a figure like Jackson unless he had observed such a situation in real life? From these four novels can be abstracted the thesis outlined in the section entitled "The Meaning of the Whale."

If Melville, in his other works, is not to undercut his empirical argument it is essential that his literary method be also basically empirical. He cannot embody his empirical conception of the universe as ambiguous if he writes as an a-priorist and applies an unsubstantiated thesis to an illustrative story--he cannot substantiate empiricism using a purely imaginative a-priori method--nor does he, in the main, attempt it. In order to convey his thesis in the imaginative (a-priori) fashion of literary allegory it is necessary that the thesis should be previously proven by empirical evidence. This, as argued, is the function of Typee, Omoo, Redburn, and White-Jacket. Thus, a true allegory is one in which the thesis involved is based on

factual evidence, as is the allegory of Media and Babbalanja in Mardi. Ipsso facto the thesis illustrated by a true allegory will be that roughed out in the section "The Meaning of the Whale," the thesis which can also be derived from the four novels of experience. In this sense Melville's method in Mardi is empirical. Since, as Edwin Honig notes, a successful allegory must be convincing on a literal level, there is much more likelihood of this happening if the allegory is true according to this particular definition.

Melville uses the device of an anti-allegory as an indirect means of endorsing his true allegory. An anti-allegory, as defined in Chapter 1, Section (ii), deviates from Melville's empirical thesis. Indeed the thesis which it contains is not grounded in external reality but in the mind of the anti-allegorist who is therefore an a-priorist. The fanciful allegory which is woven to illustrate this view will, most probably, be literally convincing only to a person who is similarly deluded.

I have elaborated on Chapter 2 in order to explain the apparent contradiction in the conception of Melville's empirical but allegorical mind, and in the nature of an empirical allegory. In the first case I have argued that in all probability Melville could have justified his allegorical understanding by a process of empiricism. In the second case,

the distinction which I make between a true empirical allegory and an a-priori anti-allegory is one of emphasis hinging on whether the thesis alone directs the literary allegory or whether "this allegory the world" first directs the thesis.

1. INTRODUCTION

Though the naked soul of man doth assuredly contain one latent element of intellectual productiveness; yet never was there a child born solely from one parent; the visible world of experience being that procreative thing which impregnates the muses; self-reciprocally efficient hermaphrodites being but a fable.

- Pierre

There would seem but one point in common between this sort of phenomenon [The doctrine of the 'original' character] in fiction and all other sorts: It cannot be born in the author's imagination--it being as true in literature as in zoology that all is from the egg.

- The Confidence Man

Throughout his life Herman Melville was searching for what he called "the Talismanic Secret" (Pierre, p. 290, Redburn, p. 111)¹ of the universe, and his critics for the past forty years have been searching for a similarly talismanic key to the understandings and conclusions which Melville implies in his writings. But so far as any final answer is concerned Melville failed and so too have the critics. However, the most diligent and minute analysis

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1 The Works of Herman Melville. Standard Edition, 16 vols. (London: Constable & Co., 1922-24). All paranthetical references to the text of Melville's writings are to this edition unless otherwise stated.

occasionally fails to reveal the obvious, and to my knowledge no one has examined the intimate connection between method and meaning in Melville's work as a whole. This connection centres on the close identification of the factors involved in his method and those involved in his meaning. As a writer Melville believed that only an empirical and not an a-priori approach to the process of composition can make for any kind of validity. In other words the basic material of his books ideally should be composed only from that which Melville had himself experienced. The rather more imaginative, more original, more creative method of forming a thesis and then illustrating it in story form, Melville believed highly dangerous.

As I shall demonstrate, this approach to literature Melville also made the very subject matter of his work. The one and consistent "message" which emerges from his entire canon is that only by approaching life empirically can a man hope to arrive at any sane conclusion. The contrary examples, the insane conclusions, of Taji, Ahab and Pierre, most strikingly, and the period of Melville's own life from 1851 and the completion of Moby Dick, to 1857 and the publication of The Confidence Man, indicate by indirection the truth of the above statement. For Melville himself did not always abide by his empirical insight; and

between the years 1851 and 1857 he himself took an a-priori approach to life and literature with the result that he devised a bitter but a-priori and inaccurate conception. Thus, for Melville the method is the meaning. Needless to say, this thesis attempts an empirical and not an a-priori interpretation of Melville.

(i) The Meaning of the Whale

The mass of scholarly erudition directed at the works of Melville has at the least established their essential ambiguity. It has been further demonstrated that this ambiguity, rather than being the outcome of willful perversity or artistic incompetence, is integral to Melville's meaning in that it reflects the ambivalence of man's existence. And the ambivalence of man's existence was the insight into the character of creation which Melville's empirical mode of reasoning afforded him. For Melville the absolutes of good and evil have no place in our fallen world where everything partakes of a grey and indistinct alloy. Merlin Bowen, in his study The Long Encounter,² has painstakingly assembled all the evidence for Melville's

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² Merlin Bowen, The Long Encounter; Self and Experience in the Writings of Herman Melville (Chicago, 1960), p. 13-123.

concern with this paradoxical duality; but in the symbol of the White Whale, Moby Dick, Melville discovered his most perfect vehicle for this perception.

D. H. Lawrence was the first critic to realize that the White Whale was an open-ended symbol incapable of being neatly itemized.³ But like the "hieroglyphical" (II, 31) scratches on the surface of the Sperm Whale, Moby Dick himself seems to beg for interpretation. In the chapter entitled "Moby Dick" Melville reviews some of the less formal interpretations:

Nor did wild rumours of all sorts fail to exaggerate, and still the more horrify the true histories of these deadly encounters. For not only do fabulous rumours naturally grow out of the very body of all surprising terrible events,--as the smitten tree gives birth to the fungi; but, in maritime life, far more than in that of terra firma, wild rumours abound, wherever there is any adequate reality for them to cling to. As the sea surpasses the land in this matter, so the whale-fishery surpasses every other sort of maritime life, in the wonderfulness and fearfulness of the rumours which sometimes circulate there (I, 223-4).

Among such rumours existed the belief that Moby Dick was "not only ubiquitous, but immortal." (I, 227). In a later chapter Melville provides the necessary qualification and declares "we account the whale immortal in his species,

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³ D. H. Lawrence, Studies in Classic American Literature, (New York: Doubleday & Co. Inc., 1951), p. 156.

however perishable in his individuality" (II, 228). A similar tendency towards exaggeration and distortion characterizes the paintings which Melville reviews in the chapter entitled "Of the Monstrous Pictures of Whales:"

True, one portrait may hit the mark much nearer than another, but none can hit it with any very considerable degree of exactness. So there is no earthly way of finding out precisely what the whale really looks like; and the only mode in which you can derive even a tolerable idea of his living contour, is by going a-whaling yourself; but by so doing, you run no small risk of being eternally stove and sunk by him. Wherefore, it seems to me you had best not be too fastidious in your curiosity touching this Leviathan (I, 336).

The clear implication that leviathan cannot be drawn out with a hook is made explicit in the chapter "The Whiteness of the Whale" in which it is demonstrated that whiteness has multiple associations, often completely contradictory.

Is it that by its indefiniteness it shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of the universe, and thus stabs us from behind with the thought of annihilation, when beholding the white depths of the Milky Way? Or is it, that as in essence whiteness is not so much a colour as the visible absence of colour, and at the same time the concrete of all colours; is it for these reasons that there is such a dumb blankness, full of meaning, in a wide landscape of snows--a colourless, all-colour of atheism from which we shrink? (I, 243-4)?

Melville clearly infers that any dogmatic insistence on a single meaning must be false because it ignores all the

other possibilities.

In the much discussed and extended "cetological centre" of the novel, having dismissed the a-priori interpretations outlined above, Melville now adopts a strictly scientific and empirical approach and perceives something of the truth:

Only in the heart of quickest perils; only
when within the eddyings of his angry flukes;
only on the profound unbounded sea, can the
fully invested whale be truly and livingly
found out (II, 218).

Along with the multiplicity of meaning "livingly found out," emerges a deliberately confused duality of good and evil. Because the whale's eyes are placed on diametrically opposite sides of his head he is forced to contemplate two contrasting pictures simultaneously. This fact is suggestive to Melville of the symbolic duality of the whale, a duality made perhaps rather more apparent in subsequent scenes. For instance, in "The Grand Armada" the orgiastic description of the whales being butchered on the surface serves as an ironic comment on the action below. A young cub has just been born and is still tethered to its mother by the umbilical cord. Again the contrasts of life and death are exhibited in "A Bower in the Arsacides" where lies a whale's skeleton:

Now, amid the green, life-restless loom
 of that Arsacidean wood, the great, white,
 worshipped skeleton lay lounging--a gigantic
 idler. . . . Life folded Death; Death trell-
 ised Life; the grim god wived with youthful
 Life, and begat him curly-headed glories
 (II, 213-4).

The sweet-smelling ambergris found in the bowels of a
 putrifying whale provides a contrast of a different kind.
 "Now that the incorruption of this most fragrant ambergris
 should be found in the heart of such decay; is this
 nothing" (II, 162), asks Melville? But even an empirical
 approach will not reveal the ultimate truth of the whale.
 Hence, the whale's forehead defies phrenology. The whale
 is "physiognomically a Sphinx," his brain "that geometrical
 circle which it is impossible to square" (II, 84). "The
 whale, like all things that are mighty, wears a false brow
 to the common world" (II, 85). Even the mystic gestures of
 the whale's tail are inexplicable:

Nor are there wanting other motions of the
 whale in his general body, full of strange-
 ness, and unaccountable to his most exper-
 ienced assailant. Dissect him how I may,
 then, I go but skin deep; I know him not,
 and never will. But if I know not even the
 tail of this whale, how understand his head?
 Much more, how comprehend his face, when
 face he has none?(II, 123)?

Whether the whale's fountain is composed of water or vapour
 ("The Fountain") has not been definitely established. And
 the whale's skeleton conveys nothing of the whale's

magnitude ("A Bower in the Arsacides"). The sea is the whale's element in more senses than one because for Melville the sea is the uncertain element:

Consider them both, the sea and the land;
and do you not find a strange analogy to
something in yourself? For as this appalling
ocean surrounds the verdant land, so in
the soul of man there lies one insular
Tahiti, full of peace and joy, but encompassed
by all the horrors of the half-known
life. God keep thee! Push not off from
that isle, thou canst never return!(I, 349)

Just as the oil in the hold, "Leviathan returns to his native profundities, sliding along beneath the surface as before" (II, 184). *Moby Dick* is a symbol of total ambivalence; only by picking on one side of the evidence, as does Lawrance Thompson,⁴ can the whale be seen as a symbol of an evil god, or on the other, as does Marius Bewely,⁵ can the whale be seen as a symbol of a benevolent god.

As most critics have noticed, there are a number of related symbols in Moby Dick which convey the same significance as the whale, particularly the golden doubloon Ahab nails to the mast. Each member of the crew sees

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⁴ Lawrance Thompson, Melville's Quarrel with God (Princeton, 1952), pp.

⁵ Marius Bewely, The Eccentric Design: Form in the Classic American Novel (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), pp. 192-205.

something different in the coin, but what he sees is basically a reflection of himself. Strangely enough it is Ahab who makes this perception: "this round gold is but the image of the rounder globe, which, like a magician's glass, to each and every man in turn but mirrors back his own mysterious self" (II, 190). Pip too has the same insight and repeats three times: "I look, you look, he looks; we look, ye look, they look" (II, 194). But the symbolic devices on the coin can also be interpreted in terms of Melville's vision, and Starbuck comes closest: "If we bend down our eyes, the dark vale shows her mouldy soil; but if we lift them, the bright sun meets our glance half-way, to cheer" (II, 190). The coin's origin [It was minted in Equador,, "a country planted in the middle of the world" (II, 189)] and the design of the three peaks suggest the same reconciliation of opposites embodied in the whale. No single interpretation is completely wrong; neither is it the whole truth. So too Queequeg's pipe is at one and the same time an instrument of peace and a battleaxe, and his canoe-coffin a lifebuoy. About the latter Ahab had mused:

Here now's the very symbol of grim death, by a mere hap, made the expressive sign of the help and hope of most endangered life. A lifebuoy of a coffin! Does it go further? Can it be that in some spiritual sense the coffin is, after all, but an immortality-preserver?(II, 310)?

Or is it rather an elaboration of Melville's opinions about the equivocality of truth applied not only to good and evil but also to life and death? Queequeg had transcribed the tatooing on his body, with which he had earlier found resemblances to the markings on the doubloon, upon the lid of the coffin-lifebuoy. The hieroglyphics, we are told, revealed "a complete theory of the heavens and the earth, and a mystical treatise on the art of attaining truth" (II, 251), the art or ability to learn from experience and appreciate the ambivalent quality of nature.

(ii) Melville's Allegorical Method

From the findings derived by an empirical process of perception Melville concluded the thesis spelled out above. The precise nature of this empirical process of perception must also be spelled out. An initial acceptance of the world of the senses, the historical world, is an essential pre-requisite to an understanding of it. This severely pragmatic attitude demands that no attempt should

be made to transcend concrete existence in the search for any absolute or possibly divine meaning. If a sense of God is to be at all useful it must be operational in this world. Melville makes his position clear on this point in a letter to Hawthorne:

By visible truth, we mean the apprehension of the absolute condition of present things as they strike the eye of the man who fears them not, though they do their worst to him, --the man who, like Russia or the British Empire, declares himself a sovereign nature (in himself) amid the powers of heaven, hell, and earth. He may perish; but so long as he exists he insists upon treating with all powers upon an equal basis. If any of those other Powers choose to withhold certain secrets, let them; that does not impair my sovereignty in myself; that does not make me tributary. And perhaps, after all, there is no secret. We incline to think that the Problem of the Universe is like the Freemason's mighty secret, so terrible to all children. It turns out, at last, to consist in a triangle, a mallet and an apron,-- nothing more! We incline to think that God can not explain His own secrets, and that He would like a little information upon certain points Himself. We mortals astonish Him as much as He us. But it is this Being of the matter; there lies the knot with which we choke ourselves. As soon as you say Me, a God, a Nature, so soon you jump off from your stool and hang from the beam. Yes, that word is the hangman. Take God out of the Dictionary, and you would have Him in the street.⁶

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⁶ Melville to Hawthorne. Pittsfield (March, 1851). Quoted by Eleanor Melville Metcalf in Herman Melville, Cycle and Epicycle (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), p. 105.

Here Melville is insisting upon a relentless empiricism. The only allowable "absolute" is a dependence on absolute reality, whereby man becomes his own God. Again, the same essential pragmatism informs the following remarks in a further letter to Hawthorne:

In reading some of Goethe's sayings, I came across this, "Live in the All." That is to say, your separate identity is but a wretched one,--good; but get out of yourself, spread and expand yourself, and bring to yourself the tinglings of life that are felt in the flowers and the woods, that are felt in the planets Saturn and Venus, and the Fixed Stars. What nonsense! Here is a fellow with a raging toothache. "My dear boy," Goethe says to him, "you are sorely afflicted with that tooth; but you must live in the all, and then you will be happy!" . . . That "all" feeling, though, there is some truth in. You must have often felt it, lying on the grass on a warm summer's day. Your legs seem to send out shoots into the earth. Your hair feels like leaves upon your head. This is the all feeling. But what plays the mischief with the truth is that man will insist upon a universal application of a temporary feeling or opinion.⁷

There is a blunt objectivity in these extended quotations from both letters, and this is a Melvillian characteristic which must not be lost sight of. A whaleship, be it remembered, was Ishmael's Yale College and Harvard. However, as any reader of Moby Dick is aware, Melville

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⁷ Pittsfield (Spring, 1851). Metcalfe, p. 110.

is certainly not as literally minded as these comments might imply.

From a direct understanding of the visible world Melville abstracted allegorical import. Hence, the light underside of the tortoise reminds Melville that the universe is not as malignant as the tortoise's dark upper-side and the desolation of the Encantadas might suggest. On the other hand, if the tortoise's light half is exposed to the sky the creature is rendered helpless and possibly dies. Melville concludes that evil and good exist in a two to one ratio which is analogous to the ratio between the sea and the land. It is clear then that Melville's perception was not only consistently pragmatic and empirical, but also consistently allegorical, allegorical in the style of the "doctrine of correspondence" as developed, for instance, by the writers of the Mediaeval Beastiaries. There existed in Melville's mind an almost perfect one to one relationship between the concrete surface matter and a subsurface significance. In Moby Dick, Melville writes,

O Nature, and O soul of Man! how far
beyond all utterances are your linked
analogies! not the smallest atom stirs
or lives on matter but has its cunning
duplicate in mind (II, 38).

Of the doubloon, a well-known instance of such "linked analogies," Melville writes,

And some certain significance lurks in all things, else all things are little worth, and the round world itself but an empty cipher, except to sell by the cartload, as they do hills about Boston, to fill up some morass in the Milky Way (II, 188).

But, with the exception of Pip, the onlookers misinterpret the doubloon because they lack Melville's empirical observation. They impose a meaning from within themselves instead of extracting the truth from a scientific examination of the coin. Possibly bearing in mind the difficulty of attaining a strict objectivity, Melville wrote Hawthorne: "Why, ever since Adam, who has got the meaning of this great allegory --the world?"⁸ Melville, however, did try, and he arrived at the thesis which, as argued above, he best embodied in the symbol of the White Whale.

A thesis is, in fact, best illustrated by the construction of an allegory because, in literary terms, an allegory is the most effective vehicle for conveying a philosophical conception. Hence, the movement is from a recognition of the literal but allegorical world and the subsequent formation of a thesis to the restatement of the same thesis in a literary allegory. In describing Melville's most characteristic works as allegories the term is used in the broadest sense to cover any attempt at a non-literal

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⁸ Melville to Hawthorne. Pittsfield (Nov. 1851). Metcalfe, p. 128.

understanding or interpretation of nature. In writing allegorically Melville was simply taking his natural bent one stage further. Because of Melville's insistence upon "truth," and because of his empirical method of perceiving it, he would have subscribed to the definition that a successful allegory must (1) succeed on a literal level, and (2) its message or moral must have an application and validity in the real world. Edwin Honig in his study, "Dark Conceit: The Making of Allegory," explains it thus: "The fictional scheme governing the hypothetical aspects of the literal sense must seem to be determining the story's figurative meanings all along the way."⁹ And: "Allegory, which is symbolic in method, is realistic in aim and in the content of its perception."¹⁰ Except for the years 1851-1857 Melville fulfilled these conditions.

An allegory which does not fulfill these requirements I shall call an anti-allegory, a device which is integral to an understanding of Melville. The anti-allegory, as opposed to the true allegory, is (1) not based on the real world and is therefore unconvincing on a literal level, and (2) its message or moral consequently

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⁹ Edwin Honig, Dark Conceit: The Making of Allegory (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1959), p. 114.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 180.

has no application or validity in the real world. Whereas the true allegory is based empirically, the anti-allegory has an a-priori and subjective base. The anti-allegorist is a Narcissus who imposes his own personality and system upon the external world. Such self-projections invariably involve crass simplifications of the true issues and a marked tendency to see moral questions in terms of absolute good and absolute evil because the anti-allegorist does not take account of the ambiguities and complexities of the perceptual world. To indicate the necessity of an empirically orientated allegorical understanding, Melville in his early allegorical writings posits the existence of an anti-allegorist and demonstrates the impossibility of his position. However, the pose adopted by the anti-allegorist is unavoidably more striking, more romantic, more heroic than the stand of the cautious empirical allegorist, and for a period--which began during the writing of Moby Dick--Melville became over-sympathetic towards his anti-allegorists, and finally with The Confidence Man found himself in the anti-allegorist camp.

This thesis will demonstrate that Melville's shifts in interpretation can be seen as engendered, generated and motivated within the nature of the work itself. That is to say, Melville's meanings and

interpretations, be they empirical or a-priori, depend on whether the method of perception which he is adopting in life and in the process of literary creation is similarly empirical or a-priori. In arguing this point I shall focus attention on what I consider to be Melville's four climactic works, Mardi, Moby Dick, The Confidence Man and Billy Budd. They are climactic aesthetically, in that each contains a culminating summary of other works, and also as spiritual biography. Melville's best or most interesting works appear at or near the turning points of intensity in Melville's career. Mardi, written at the time of Melville's marriage to Elizabeth Shaw, draws together the ideas implied in his other, more realistic, early works: Typee, Omoo, Redburn and White-Jacket. Moby Dick, at the very apex, translates with far superior effect what has gone before and anticipates much of what is to come. The Confidence Man stands at Melville's nadir of despair and sums up the writings of the previous years from Pierre onwards. And finally Billy Budd, the focal point of the final phase of Melville's life, uses the new thesis discernible in Melville's poetry and represents his nearest approach to a true optimism. These four novels, it should also be noticed, constitute Melville's most purely allegorical works.

2. MARDI: An Empirical Interpretation

Would that I could keep squeezing that sperm for ever! For now, since by many prolonged, repeated experiences, I have perceived that in all cases man must eventually lower or at least shift, his conceit of attainable felicity; not placing it anywhere in the intellect or the fancy; but in the wife, the heart, the bed, the table, the saddle, the fire-side, the country; now that I have perceived all this, I am ready to squeeze case eternally. In thoughts of the visions of the night, I saw long rows of angels in paradise, each with his hands in a jar of spermaceti.

- Ishmael

Mardi, the archipelago, and Moby Dick, the whale, are symbols of an equivocal world; but first one must consider briefly those novels of experience which form the soil of Melville's symbolism and which lead up to Mardi in terms of artistic development if not always chronology. Typee, Omoo, Redburn and White-Jacket are all largely based on Melville's own early experiences at sea. To what extent they are imaginatively and romantically reconceived is a moot point, and in the case of Redburn an intensive attempt has been made to distinguish between the fact and the fiction.¹ Such an analysis is inevitably inconclusive, and hence the years Melville spent before the mast, 1839 to 1844, comprise the best and least well documented period of

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¹ William Gilman, Melville's Early Life and Redburn (New York, 1951).

Melville's life. Melville, however, repeatedly insisted that these narratives be valued in so far as they were "true." Writing to Alexander W. Bradford, and referring to an article he had penned defending himself against the charge of one reviewer who claimed Typee was a tall story, Melville justified his reaction by claiming that otherwise "the success of the book here [in America] as a genuine narrative will be seriously impaired."² What Melville is so anxious to see accepted is the validity of the observations which he makes in these early works--even if they are occasionally given a certain colouring--because, at rock bottom, his observations are based on actual experience.

From these works can be abstracted the blueprint or thesis upon which Melville's more imaginative creations are erected. Normally these novels are treated in pairs, and it becomes possible in each case to discern a tenuous allegory. In Typee and Omoo we witness a frustrated search for primal innocence. This situation is rather more explicitly allegorized in Mardi, and like Taji, Melville appears to be seeking the elusive ideal, a Yillah who displays something like that lost quality of serenity

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² Melville to Alexander W. Bradford. Lansingburgh (May 23, 1846). Quoted by Jay Leyda in The Melville Log, Vol. I (New York, Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1951), p. 215.

which he had experienced in the first ten years of his life (Gilman has disposed of the popular assumption that Melville had a stern Calvinistic upbringing).³ It is perhaps not too far fetched to suggest also that the premium which Melville was to place upon a masculine relationship derived from such actual relationships in his childhood. However this may be, throughout his life Melville clung to the latent hope that there is an ultimate good, but it was not until he wrote Billy Budd that he indirectly perceived it.

But his initial failure served (in Redburn) as a means of discovering the omnipresence of evil, and of realizing (in White Jacket) the consequent necessity to disown any belief in an ultimate earthly good. This thematic thread is the sum of all those occasions where Melville halts his narrative in order to extract the significance of the most recent event. The method is thus cautious, empirical and convincing. Always the movement is from fact to observation. Melville's entire canon can be viewed in terms of a geometric proof. Facts are scientifically sifted and a theory is advanced. This theory is then applied to new situations. But Melville eventually became carried away and began literally

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³ Gilman, pp. 21-4.

"cooking the books;" and hence the experiment almost ended in disaster. Fortunately, Melville returned in time to the initial evidence now to be examined.

(i) Typee, Omoo, Redburn, White-Jacket

As stated, Melville's thesis is implicit in his first novel. The narrator in Typee arrives on the island with a set of black and white assumptions. In his own way he is as much a moral simpleton as Jack, the captain of the ship, the Dolly, who speaks about the carnivorous habits of the islanders:

if you'll take my advice, every mother's son of you will stay aboard, and keep out of the way of the bloody cannibals altogether. Ten to one, men, if you go ashore, you will get into some infernal row, and that will be the end of you; for if the tattooed scoundrels get you a little way back into their valleys, they'll nab you--that you may be certain of. Plenty of white men have gone ashore here and never been seen any more (44).

Melville, or Tommo, as he comes to be called, sees civilization, or more specifically the missionaries as the source of corruption. On the other hand, he likes to see the environment of the untouched savage as a primitive garden of Eden. Referring to the French warships floating in the beautiful bay of Nukuhiva, Melville comments: "To my eye, nothing could be more out of keeping than the

presence of these vessels" (14). He pities the native girls who are debauched by the white sailors:

Unsophisticated and confiding, they are easily led into every vice and humanity weeps over the ruin thus remorselessly inflicted upon them by their European civilisers. Thrice happy are they who, inhabiting some yet undiscovered island in the midst of the ocean, have never been brought into contaminating contact with the white man (18).

Who are we to call the natives "savages" who innocently greeting the whites "fold to their bosoms the vipers whose sting is destined to poison all their joys?" (33)? An equation between the island and the Garden of Eden is quickly established:

The whole landscape seemed one unbroken solitude, the interior of the island having apparently been untenanted since the morning of the Creation (57).

Had a glimpse of the gardens of Paradise been revealed to me, I could scarcely been more ravished with the sight (64).

Breaking into the Vally, Tommo and Toby discover two children, an Adam and Eve, which prompts the question "Typee or Happar, good or bad?" Thus, the civilization/savage duality is echoed in the opinions that Tommo and his companion Toby hold of the two native tribes. The Typees are bad and the Happers good. However, on finding themselves in the hands of the Typees it seems for a time that the reverse is probably the case. But more likely

still, both Typees and Happers are equally good and bad.

Likewise, during the course of the novel, Tommo's other naive assumptions are steadily undermined. With Tommo's return to civilization his initial attitudes have been reversed or radically altered. He realizes that Christianity has its good points; he has come across evidence of cannibalism among the Typees, and even the well nigh ethereal Fayaway eats raw fish. Thematically chapter XXIV is crucial. It is concerned with the strange religion of the islanders, particularly the Feast of Calabashes:

As a religious solemnity, however, it had not at all corresponded with the horrible descriptions of Polynesian worship which we have received in some published narratives, and especially in the accounts of the evangelised islands with which the missionaries have favoured us (22).

Melville, instead, admits his inability to explain the "mystery." Describing the effigy of a dead warrior paddling his canoe, Melville writes:

Glaring at him forever, and face to face, was a polished human skull which crowned the prow of the canoe. The spectral figure-head, reversed in its position, glancing backward, seemed to mock the impatient attitude of the warrior (231).

Paddling desperately towards a Typee heaven, but immobile, this figure is a perfect symbol of what Tommo was attempting. There are also three other incidental symbolic devices which Melville uses to undercut Tommo's original

ideal. By making it necessary for Tommo and Toby to make several rapid descents or even falls in order to reach the valley, Melville suggests the notion of regression. Secondly, the fruit of Paradise turns out to be "much decayed" (89). Thirdly, Tommo's injured leg fails to heal among the Typees.

But Tommo does see through to the complex, paradoxical nature of truth:

Among the islands of Polynesia, no sooner are the images overturned, the temples demolished, and the idolators converted into nominal Christians, than disease, vice, and premature death make their appearance (263).

Against the cause of missions in the abstract No Christian can possibly be opposed; it is in truth a just and holy cause. But if the great end proposed by it be spiritual, the agency employed to accomplish that end is purely earthly; and although the object in view be the achievement of much good, that agency may nevertheless be productive of evil (266).

Civilization has everywhere "scattered her vices, and withheld her blessings" (268), but Melville does not condemn Christianity per se:

I am persuaded, however, that as these disclosures will by their very nature attract attention, so they will lead to something which will not be without ultimate benefit to the cause of Christianity in the Sandwich Islands (268).

In fact, as in the question of cannibalism,

Truth, who loves to be centrally located,
 is again found between the two extremes;
 for cannibalism . . . is practised . . .
 upon the bodies of slain enemies alone;
 and . . . I assert that those who indulge
 in it are in other respects humane and
 virtuous (276-7).

Here, then, we have the essentials of Melville's thesis; but there is as yet no real trace of allegory. Melville is simply establishing the realistic relevance of the vision that forms the bones of his allegories.

The title Omoo, Melville informs the reader in his Preface, derives from a local term which "signifies a rover, or rather, a person wandering from one island to another, like some of the natives known among their countrymen as 'Taboo kannakers,'" and as such recalls the resplendent and dignified personage of Marnoo in Typee. But this coincidence is misleading for Omoo is notable as perhaps the most undignified of Melville's works. The first part of the narrative holds together well enough around the mutiny on the Julia, but in the second part with the movement from Tahiti to Imeeo, to Tamai, and finally to Taloo, the narrative dissipates itself. Perhaps this is appropriate since vagabondage is Melville's subject. We are led to expect, as a climax, that Melville and Long Ghost will enjoy an audience with Queen Pomaree. Instead we have an anti-climax when the Queen dismisses both of them from her court. This incident indicates

the inconsequential nature of the entire book, but this quality also has its value in that it reveals a less familiar, less serious side of Melville's character. Melville chronicles one inelegant situation after another. A period in the stocks of an open-air calaboose in Tahiti is followed by slapstick expeditions in Captain Bob's "Pill Box" canoe (Chapters XII and XLI). Later, while pulling up a root, naturally enough "and most inelegantly, we all landed on the ground" (446). Also in Omoo we have the clearest description in Melville of a genuine sexual arousal. While in the stocks Melville is disconcerted by the teasing antics of a "mischievous young witch" (152):

And, to tell a secret, her beauty had something to do with this sort of feeling; and pinioned as I was to a log, and clad most unbecomingly, I began to grow sentimental . . . . Though my face was averted, I soon felt it flush, and knew that the glance was on me; deeper and deeper grew the flush, and not a sound of laughter.

Delicious thought! she was moved at the sight of me. I could stand it no longer, but started up. Lo! there she was; her great hazel eyes rounding and rounding in her head, like two stars, her whole frame in a merry quiver, and an expression about the mouth that was sudden and violent death to anything like sentiment (152).

Such relaxed moments are rare.

And of course the more familiar Melville is not absent. The blurring of the borders between black and white continues in Omoo. The Julia is a bad ship; her captain is weak; but as compensation there is the incongruous, and therefore Melvillean, figure of Doctor Long Ghost. Once again the French and the missionaries are heavily criticised, but Elephantiasis pre-dates the white man. The mosquitoes, however, apparently were introduced by a whaling captain. Even in idyllic Tamai "There was a little old man of a most hideous aspect" (288). In the tatooed figure of Lem Hardy, as a reverse image, we see what might have befallen Tommo in Typee.

Characteristically Melville frequently halts his narrative to elucidate somewhat pedantically upon various points with abundant footnotes beginning, for example, "Before we proceed further, a word or two concerning these wild cattle and the way they came to the island"(249). (In view of this talent for erudition it is surprising that Melville was not more successful as a lecturer, for on the occasions he took to lecturing it was before bored and dwindling audiences.) The most extended digressions of this kind in Omoo, the central philosophical chapters, are entitled "Tahiti as It is" and "Same Subject Continued." Melville relates the empirical "testimony of good and unbiased men, who have been upon the spot"

concerning the effects of the missions; this testimony conflicts sharply with the a-priori "impressions of others at home" (222). Since Tahiti has been under the influence of civilization longer than Typee the debilitating effects are more noticeable, but Melville still comes up with the same balanced conclusion:

In view of these things, who can remain blind to the fact, that so far as mere temporal felicity is concerned, the Tahitians are far worse off now than formerly; and although their circumstances, upon the whole are bettered by the presence of the missionaries, the benefits conferred by the latter become utterly insignificant when confronted with the vast preponderance of evil brought about by other means . . . . Years ago brought to a stand, where all that is corrupt in barbarism and civilization unite to the exclusion of the virtues of either state; like other uncivilized beings brought into contact with Europeans, they must here remain stationary until utterly extinct (228-9).

It was of course the overt incongruity of Polynesia which attracted Melville. A more symbol-conscious Melville might have made Polynesia a symbol of ambivalence, but this technique was to wait until Mardi. On the whole, whatever symbolism may exist in Omoo is unrealized. The symbolic potential of the decaying war-canoe, "Mosquitoes," and the cow and calf who are caught up in the hunt, the later Melville would have grasped at.

But, as indicated above, factual truth was Melville's immediate concern. In the Prefaces to Typee and Omoo Melville does not balk at repetition in stressing the accuracy of his account. Referring to criticism of the missionaries in Typee, Melville claims:

Such passages will be found, however, to be based upon facts admitting of no contradiction, and which have come immediately under the writer's cognisance.

Referring to criticism of the missionaries in Omoo, Melville claims:

In every statement connected with missionary operations, a strict adherence to facts has, of course, been scrupulously observed.

Both Prefaces conclude with the assertion that the author "has merely described what he has seen." That is to say, as suggested in my "Introduction," that by viewing life empirically Melville arrives at an understanding of the true ambivalent nature of things. The initial attitude of Tommo, the false reports of the missionaries, and the opinions of people who have never been to Polynesia represent various a-priori and false approaches which Melville condemns. This dichotomy between the empirical and the a-priori is the key to Melville, and this key in Typee and Omoo is delivered to the reader on a platter.

Still drawing on his experiences--in Redburn that of his first voyage, a trip to Liverpool and back

aboard the merchant ship the St. Lawrence in 1839, and in White-Jacket the rather more gruelling return from the South Seas as a fore-top man on the American frigate, United States--Melville demonstrates the necessity of personal alignment with the experiential world discovered in Typee and Omoo. And naturally the only way to become acquainted effectively with the experiential world is to travel. Both stories describe the impact of the world on the retreating innocence of the young hero. In the first book we are given the reactions of the young Wellingborough Redburn (his name is suggestive of a pretentious immaturity) on a merchant marine, The Highlander, and his increasing awareness, particularly in Liverpool and London, of the prevalence of evil. In the second we read of White-Jacket's attitude toward life on a man-of-war, the Neversink. But throughout both books Melville's main concern is the growing maturity of his hero. Redburn and White-Jacket are the same person. The symbolic act of donning the hunting-jacket at the opening of the first-novel is not resolved until the loss of the white-jacket at the close of the next. This is biography romantically reconceived. In Redburn occur the following lines which best describe this genre:

Divine imaginings, like gods, come down to the groves of our Thessalies, and there, in the embrace of wild dryad reminiscences, beget the beings that astonish the world (326).

Nevertheless, in Melville's specialized sense, these narratives are "true" to the extent that, in White-Jacket, Melville has sufficient confidence in his thesis to lay claim to universality. In the Preface he writes,

As the object of this work is not to portray the particular man-of-war in which the author sailed, and its officers and crew, but, by illustrative scenes, to paint general life in the Navy, the true name of the frigate is not given. Nor is it here asserted that any of the persons introduced in the following chapters are real individuals. Wherever statements are made in any way concerning the established laws and usages of the Navy, facts have been strictly adhered to.

Clearly, reality here is dependent on its exemplification of Melville's "truth." But the ambiguity of life aboard the Neversink is not representative of the Navy alone. "The World in a Man-of-War" is emblematic of the ambiguity of the world. At least twelve times Melville uses the suggestive phrase, "our man-of-war world," but the relationship between the Neversink and the world is made explicit in the last chapter:

As a man-of-war that sails through the sea, so this earth that sails through the air. We mortals are all on board a fast sailing, never-sinking, world

frigate, of which God was the shipwright; and she is but one craft in a Milky Way fleet, of which God is the Lord High Admiral. The port we sail from is forever astern. And though far out of sight of land, for ages and ages we continue to sail with sealed orders, and our last destination remains a secret to ourselves and our officers; yet our final haven was predestined ere we slipped from the stocks at Creation (502).

To complete the equation, "the people" or crew represent common man the world over, the officers stand for unjust authority, and the Articles of War symbolize those laws and rules which create artificial barriers between men, and which are largely responsible for much of the brutality and tyranny in our world.

There is also a further equation between Redburn and White-Jacket, one of structure. Both fall into three sections. The first section of Redburn ends with the ship's arrival at Liverpool, the second with Redburn's mysterious night in London, and the third--the voyage back -- with the death of Jackson and the arrival home. The first section of White-Jacket culminates in the brutal flogging scene and the second in the macabre amputation which is performed by the grotesque Cuticle, one of the incidents which surely, may we hope, derived from Melville's imagination? Is it likely that Melville would have been present on such an occasion? The incident is so horrible

as to be hilarious:

'To-morrow, at ten, the limb will be upon the table, and I shall be happy to see you all upon the occasion. Who's there?' turning to curtain which then rustled.
'Please, sir,' said the steward, entering, 'the patient is dead.'
'The body, also, gentlemen, at ten precisely,' said Cuticle, once more turning around upon his guests. 'I predicted that the operation might prove fatal; he was very much run-down' (333).

The third section culminates in White-Jacket's fall. However, taking the two narratives together, one can trace the progress of the hero from an a-priori stand to an empirical stand.

Although Redburn disclaims the charge of innocence--"I had learned to think much and bitterly before my time; all my young mounting dreams of glory had left me; and at that early age I was as unambitious as a man of sixty" (10)--the identification Melville asks us to make, between the delicate glass ship and his hero, tells us otherwise. Redburn is living in a romantic dream world which feeds on recollections of his father. But Redburn is telling his story in retrospect and the glass ship La Reine is not all she was:

We have her yet in the house, but many of her glass spars and ropes are now sadly shattered and broken--but I will not have her mended; and her figure-head, a gallant warrior in a cocked hat, lies pitching

head-foremost down into the trough of a calamitous sea under the bows,--but I will not have him put on his legs again, till I get on my own; for between him and me there is a secret sympathy; and my sisters tell me, even yet, that he fell from his perch the very day I left home to go to sea on this, my first voyage (9).

Such is the fragility of an a-priori interpretation of the world. Naivete of this kind can be disastrous, as Melville indicates in the chapter of White-Jacket entitled "Introductory to Cape Horn:"

Cape Horn it is that takes the conceit
out of fresh-water sailors, and steepes
in a still salter brine the saltiest.
Woe betide the tyro! the foolhardy,
Heaven preserve!(120)

In Redburn several passages point to the dangers of futility of acting or adopting attitudes without prior experience. Smith's Wealth of Nations does not supply Redburn with the "the philosopher's stone, a secret talisman, which would transmute even pitch and tar to silver and gold" (111). The "Balm of Paradise" hair oil applied hopefully by the prematurely graying Blunt is contained in a bottle on which there is an engraving showing a young man rubbing the elixir into his hair in the middle of the night. Melville, the puzzled empiricist, comments,

It seemed from the text that this gray-headed young man was so smitten with his hair oil, and was so thoroughly persuaded of its virtues, that he had got out of bed, even in his sleep,

groped into his closet, seized the precious bottle, applied its contents, and then to bed again, getting up in the morning without knowing anything about it. Which, indeed, was a most mysterious occurrence; and it was still more mysterious, how the engraver came to know an event, of which the actor himself was ignorant, and where there were no bystanders (114).

Blunt's faith, we may assume, is misplaced. Blunt has an equal reverence for his "Boneparte Dream Book," an equally misplaced faith if the Day of Judgment forecast is typical. "An Unaccountable Cabin Passenger, and a Mysterious Young Lady" encourage the a-priori guesswork of the crew. Of the Gentleman,

One of the crew said he was a mysterious bearer of secret dispatches to the English court; others opined that he was a travelling surgeon and bone-setter, but for what reason they thought so I never could learn (137).

Blunt, the Dream Book tar, swore he was a magician; and took an extra dose of salts, by way of precaution against his spells (138).

It is significant that Redburn does not hypothesize about the mysterious excursion of Harry Bolton in London. He has matured and is learning to control his wild imagination and base his opinions only on direct evidence. The case against the a-priori is climaxed in the description of the famine and disease aboard the Highlander which occurred simply because the emigrant passengers, lacking experience, listened to "all manner of fables concerning the short

space of time in which their ships made the run across the ocean" (311-12), and consequently supplied themselves with insufficient provisions. Melville strongly condemns the official encouragement given this unrealistic fiction.

In the figure of the handsome but effeminate Harry Bolton Melville represents an a-priorist. Like the Floating Chapel moored among Dutch galliots and the piratical brig from the Coast of Guinea, Harry is out of place wherever he happens to be, either Liverpool or aboard the Highlander. The last we hear of him he is crushed between a ship and a whale. "Mixed with a thousand strange forms, the centaurs of fancy" (326), as Redburn earlier recollected Harry, he could not survive in the real world:

But yet, I, Wellingbrough Redburn, chance
to survive, after having passed through
far more perilous scenes than any narrated
in this, My First Voyage--which here I end
(403).

The implication is that Redburn survives because he is unlike Harry. Harry is destroyed because he tried to escape from reality. Redburn comes to adopt a more empirical frame of mind and learns from reality. It is an unfortunate necessity that the imaginary world--for example, the world which the music of Carlo's organ can animate--must eventually give way to the actual. There is a strong sympathy between Carlo and Harry, who has a voice like a

bird, but both characters are also in sympathy with the glass ship. The "matchless and unmatchable" Jack Chase, the idealized Captain of the Maintop and White-Jacket's idol, lives by an empirical philosophy.

He had a high conceit of his profession as a seaman; and being deeply versed in all things pertaining to a man-of-war, was universally regarded as an oracle. The main-top, over which he presided, was a sort of oracle of Delphi to which many pilgrims ascended to have their perplexities or differences settled (13).

The true empiricist must acknowledge the existence of evil, and Redburn and White-Jacket can be read as an exploration of the world's evil. Redburn's sojourn in Liverpool serves this function and he speaks of "haunts in which cursing, gambling pick-pocketing, and common iniquities are virtues too lofty for the infected gorgons and hydras to practice" (245-6). This process reaches its nadir for Redburn in the appalling story of the old woman and her children who are without food. White-Jacket completes this initiation among the horrors of life aboard a man-of-war. In the earlier novel the world's evil is personified in the repellant Jackson. But unlike Claggart in Billy Budd Jackson is a human being. Bodily frail and syphilitic, Jackson anticipates Ahab as a creature of

"more woe than wickedness" (134). The source of Jackson's power lies not in himself but in the crew who, from an a-priori position, see in him the embodiment of a terrible authority. This fiction Jackson, naturally, encourages. He dies spattering the crew with his blood but, writes Melville, "his death was their deliverance" (383).

Jackson's counterpart in White-Jacket is the soulless but less obviously degenerate character of Bland, master-at-arms. Evil as an absolute, however, does not exist.

In both books, the hero, something of a holier-than-thou Pharasee, finds himself isolated from his companions through his a-priori pose of innocence symbolized by the white-jacket. In Redburn the hero appreciates the need to divorce himself from the a-priori attitude after his experience with his father's "prosy old guide book," the central symbol of the novel. There is some evidence to link this guide-book with the Bible, as Lawrance Thompson suggests.⁴ With the intention of performing a "filial pilgrimage" Redburn displays an excessive "reverence" for the guide-book which is described as "sacred" (196). But Melville is simply implying that Redburn treats his guide-book as gospel not that the Bible is misleading. However this may be, the guide-book is out of date:

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⁴ Thompson, p.

Then, indeed, a new light broke in upon me concerning my guide-book, and all my previous dim suspicions were almost confirmed. It was nearly half a century behind the age! and no more fit to guide me about the town than the map of Pompeii (200).

That is to say, the a-priori must give way to the empirical. But still, Redburn resolves, "No, no, I'll not give you up yet" (203). It is not until the conclusion of White-Jacket that the separation is forced upon the hero when White-Jacket having fallen into the sea from the weather-top-gallant-yardarm, cuts himself from the cursed white-jacket which is threatening to drag him under, a fate which would have linked him with Jackson who drowned in the previous novel. This symbolic episode is analogous to the symbolism of the guide-book. The jacket is homemade and does not conform to the regulation type. Consequently, it isolates the hero and is seen by the crew as a jinx in that they associate it with various accidents. All the evidence therefore points to its being a symbol not of innocence per se but of an a-priori coating of innocence or youthful idealism.

It is unfortunate that the symbolism of the white-jacket negates utterly the propagandist intention of the work, a fact which no critic appears to have noticed. The propaganda material, in addition, considerably weakens

the thematic integrity of White-Jacket and is over-long anyway. Melville opposes the rough justice of the Articles-of War (the a-priori legislation) against the American Constitution and the Bible (the empirical standards). Hence, White-Jacket is Melville's most orthodox Christian book. He decries the casual brutalization of anyone, a Bland or a Cuticle, who is devoted to the fulfillment of form. Melville takes flogging as his central issue, but his argument would extend to the hair massacre, the most humorous example of naval discipline:

Join hands with me, then; and, in the name of that Being in whose image the flogged sailor is made, let us demand of legislators, by what right they dare profane what God Himself accounts sacred (177).

Flogging is opposed to the essential dignity of man and is unequal in its operation. "It is not a dollar-and-cent question of expediency; it is a matter of right and wrong" (182). Admiral Collingwood and Lord Nelson were able to dispense with it even in times of emergency. Hence, Melville must have changed his opinions between White-Jacket and Billy Budd. Melville goes on to criticise the ambiguous position of the chaplain: "How can it be expected that the religion of peace should flourish in an oaken castle of war"? (186) Melville wants to have his

cake and eat it too. He has just been advocating Christian principles with regard to flogging. Later Melville argues that war is inexcusable because Christ has "enjoined us to turn the left cheek if the right be smitten" (403). After demonstrating that fate "sustains and an armed neutrality," Melville rationalizes his position:

Yet though all this be so, nevertheless,
in our own hearts, we mould the whole
world's hereafters; and in our own hearts
we fashion our own gods. Each mortal
casts his vote for whom he will to rule
the worlds; I have a voice that helps to
shape eternity; and my volitions stir the
orbits of the furthest suns. In two
senses, we are precisely what we worship.
Ourselves are Fate (404).

This sounds very much like an a-priori approach, and the hero's eventual forced rejection of the white-jacket of idealism invalidates the arguments he proposed while in his deluded a-priori state. The change of attitude which appears in Billy Budd reveals that Melville was perhaps aware of this inconsistency.

In the four novels just examined, Melville presents the evidence on which his thesis is based, the thesis upon which his allegorical writings are erected. Good and evil, we have seen, in this world exist only in inextricable involvement. To insist on an ideal good or innocence, as Tommo and Onnoo would like to, or even to

claim to embody such a thing, as Redburn and White-Jacket do, is an act of self-destruction. Melville is now ready to attempt his experiment in allegory, Mardi, to vindicate empiricism in a more imaginative manner. Since the "thesis" is "proved" the imaginative manner of allegory is not in conflict with it.

(ii) Mardi

As a fictitious archipelago somewhere in the Pacific, Mardi represents the world; but, as "some new constellation in the sea" (I, 186), more worlds than one are clearly implied. Both Merrel R. Davis and Bruce Franklin have noticed this astronomical relationship.⁵ Describing the group of islands corresponding to the known geographical world, Melville writes:

Part and parcel of the Mardian isles, they formed a cluster by themselves; like the Pleiades that shine in Taurus, and are eclipsed by the red splendour of his fiery eye, and the thick clusterings of the constellations round.

And, as the sun, by influence divine, wheels through the Ecliptic; threading Cancer, Leo, Pisces and Aquarius; so,

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⁵ Merrel R. Davis, Melville's Mardi: A Chartless Voyage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952), pp. 67-70. H. Bruce Franklin, In the Wake of the Gods: Melville's Mythology (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1963), p. 39-50.

by some mystic impulse am I moved, to
this fleet progress, through the groups
in white-reefed Mardi's zone (II, 276).

Taji, the name assumed by Melville's narrator in his role as a demigod emissary from the Sun, is like a comet in the course he describes. In accordance with this stellar framework the ship, which the narrator deserts, was named the Arcturion instead of the Leviathan.

Davis, in his study, Melville's Mardi: A Chartless Voyage, has shown that structurally there are three worlds in Mardi, which reflect changes in Melville's intention.⁶ Before January, 1848, Melville wrote the first thirty-eight chapters in the realistic vein, although somewhat poetically heightened, of Typee and Omoo. Between January and June, 1848, with the twenty-six chapters describing the rescue and loss of the beautiful maid Yillah, the element of romance dominated. Melville's Preface would seem to refer specifically to this new development:

Not long ago, having published two narratives of voyages in the Pacific, which, in many quarters, were received with incredulity, the thought occurred to me of indeed writing a romance of Polynesian adventure, and publishing it as such; to see whether the fiction might not, possibly, be received for a verity: in some degree the reverse of my previous experience.

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⁶ Davis, pp. 45-99.

And Melville, as we have seen, was acutely conscious of preserving the distinction between fact and fiction. To judge from a letter to Murray, his publisher in London, Melville apparently expected his book to be complete by July, 1848.⁷ But Mardi was not ready until January of the next year. During this period new possibilities suggested themselves to Melville and resulted in the addition of the more particular passages of satire, most notably, as Davis demonstrates, the complete section of twenty-five chapters surveying the contemporary situation.⁸ It is also possible that the chapter on Lombardo's poem, the "Koztanza" defending the episodic nature of that work and Melville's own, was written about the same time because the criticism best applies to the latest redirection. However, Davis, in dismembering the book, as outlined above, possibly ignores an essential unity which, admitting its mongrel form, Mardi does contain. I would suggest that throughout, but especially after June, 1848, Melville would have revised his entire book to make the hodgepodge of realistic, romantic and satiric styles serve an overall dramatic function. No final

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⁷ Herman Melville to John Murray, New York (March 25, 1848), the private collection of Melville letters owned by Sir John Murray. Cited by Davis.

⁸ Davis, pp. 81-9.

conclusions are being presented. Instead, using as a basis the thesis which can be abstracted from Typee, Omoo, Redburn and White-Jacket, Melville is experimenting in allegory and writing a vindication of the empirical approach towards an understanding of the world. Looked at in this way the various worlds in the constellation of Mardi coalesce strikingly into one universe.

Melville illustrates his case by contrasting the allegory which has validity because it contains a truth which applies to the real world, and the allegory which does not because it lacks such a truth. Mardi begins like a truthful narrative of the South Seas, in much the same manner as his earlier works, until with the sudden appearance of Yillah the reader finds himself in a twilight world of allegorical romance. The abrupt break at chapter thirty-six seems intentional. A true allegory should emerge from the world of facts and experience. This one pointedly does not. The first thirty-six chapters, therefore, constitute the rod by which the narrator-hero, who calls himself Taji, should measure what happens to him and what he sees among the islands of Mardi. In fact, what happens in these chapters has direct bearing on the events to come, and consequently they deserve rather more attention than they have hitherto received.

The hero is presented with two relationships: that which he enjoys with Jarl, a Viking type, with whom he escaped from the Arcturion; and that which he witnesses in the marital relationship of the grotesque pagan Samoa and his jackdaw of a wife Annatoo, aboard the spectral ship, the Parki. Clearly Taji and Jarl form the ideal masculine alliance which Melville had previously celebrated most perfectly as existing between White-Jacket and Jack Chase:

for Jarl I had a wonderful liking; for he loved me; from the first had cleaved to me.

It is sometimes the case, that an old mariner like him will conceive a very strong attachment for some young sailor, his shipmate; . . . . But however it was, my Viking, thy unbidden affection was the noblest homage ever paid me (I, 15-16).

Marriage however is something different, and no doubt the biographical fact of Melville's own recent marriage is here relevant. After unravelling as far as possible the mystery of the Parki (which is somewhat similar to that in Benito Cereno) Melville pauses to pour ironic scorn on Samoa and Annatoo:

And here must be related, what has hitherto remained unsaid. Very often this husband and wife were no Darby and Joan. Their married life was one long campaign whereof the truces were only night. They billed and they cooed in their arms, rising fresh in the morning to battle, and often Samoa got more

than a hen-pecking. To be short,
 Annatoo was a Tartar, a regular
 Calmuc, and Samoa--heaven help him
 --her husband (I, 86).

Taji, however, chooses to ignore all that he might have learned about the advantages of bachelor life in these early chapters and abandons himself to the pursuit of Yillah. That Melville is quite definitely making this contrast is borne out by the fact that it recurs just before Taji's final abdication of his soul to hell. At King Abrazza's supper occurs the following speech:

"Aye," continued Babbakanja, "bachelors are a noble fraternity: I'm a bachelor myself. One of ye, in that matter, my lord demi-gods. And if unlike the patriarchs of the world, we father not our brigades and battalions; and send not out into the battles of our country whole regiments of our own individual raising;--yet we do oftentimes leave behind us goodly houses and lands; rare old brandies and mountain Malagas, and more especially, warm doublets and togas, and spatterdashes, wherewithal to keep comfortable those who survive us;--casing the legs and arms, which others beget" (II, 342).

The inclusion of this material just before the climax amounts to a plea, on a perfectly ordinary level, to Taji to give up Yillah. Ahab's relationship with Pip at about the same point in Moby Dick serves the same function. For both Ahab and Taji these sections offer the last opportunity for recantation.

But unlike Ahab, at no point does Taji have any real doubt. His story almost completely lacks the interest of an internal conflict--almost, because after rescuing Yillah from sacrifice off the shores of Mardi, in the process killing the high priest Aleema, Taji experiences feelings of guilt:

By this hand the dead man had died.
Remorse smote me hard; and like
lightning I asked myself, whether
the death deed I had done was
sprung of a virtuous motive, the
rescuing of a captive from thrall;
or whether beneath that pretense, I
had engaged in this fatal affray for
some other, and selfish purpose; the
companionship of a beautiful maid
[whom, incidentally, he has not yet
seen]. But throttling the thought,
I swore to be gay. Am I not rescuing
a maiden? Let them go down who with-
stand me (I, 157).

In other words his attraction was sexual and becomes more so until, triumphantly, he declares: "Sunk the ghost of Aleema: Sweet Yillah was mine!" (I, 166) As Lawrance Thompson points out:

The priest has held the chaste and
innocent Yillah captive and has
deceived her in order to subvert her
to his own diabolical ritual; the
hero also holds Yillah captive and
deceives her in order to subvert her
to his own fleshly ritual of love-
making.⁹

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⁹ Thompson, p.

Also ironically, although Taji replaces Yillah's own fantastic story of her origins with something more credible, he comes to insist that she embody some abstract and absolute quality of goodness and purity. In fact Taji does learn the truth about Yillah's origin when the avengers of Aleema catch up with him at Mondoldo. She is an orphan, whose parents, white, like the narrator, were long before massacred by the natives of the island of Amma. She had been carried by the priest of these natives to the "Valley of Ardair" and there "set apart as a sacred offering for Apo." When a "tumult" had arisen "hostile" to Aleema's "longer holding custody of Yillah," the priest embarked with the maiden in his canoe "to accelerate her sacrifice at the great shrine of Apo, in Tedaidee" (I, 358). To the whirlpool in Tedaidee Aleema was carrying her when the narrator stopped his sacred canoe. Thus informed, Taji laments, "Oh, Yillah, too late, too late, have I learned what thou art" (I, 358). Too late, because he will not now accept it. The story she originally told Taji is very different and is composed of the "wild conceits" (I, 184) which have been "instilled into her mind" (I, 185) by Aleema. She is more than a mortal, a maiden from Oroolia, the Island of Delights, who returned to her birth-place Amma as a blossom, until discovered by Aleema. In order to resign her to impending sacrifice Aleema told her:

the spirits of Oroolia had recalled her home by the way of Tedaidee, on whose coast gurgled up in the sea an enchanted spring; which streaming over upon the brine, flowed on between blue watery banks; and plunging into a vortex, went round and round, descending into depths unknown. Into this whirlpool Yillah was to descend in a canoe, at last to well up in an island fountain of Oroolia (I, 160).

This account has been given in detail because it marks the first fully developed instance in Melville's works of a recurrent and increasingly important technique which I have called the anti-allegory. The main theme of this thesis is an examination of Melville's shifting attitude towards his anti-allegories. To reiterate, an anti or false allegory, as opposed to a true allegory, bears no relation to the literal world and either ignores any basis of facts and experience or is a crass simplification of them. It should then be apparent that the myth which Yillah relates is an anti-allegory, a deliberately contrived invention of the high priest, Aleema, for his own perverse purposes. Believing this story Yillah would submit cheerfully to her own death. However, taking the suggestions of purity in the version which Yillah tells--the vine blossom, the water, and the pearl--Taji constructs an anti-allegory of his own which turns out to be no less diabolical. Yillah for Taji becomes an ideal; but paradoxically, his real desire is physical. He wishes presumably

to marry her, and this in spite of what he has learned about the truth of the institution from Samoa and Annatoo.

In effect, Taji jilts Jarl for a non-existent ideal, an anti-allegory of his own making, which is opposed to the nature of things. In chapter forty-seven, "Yillah, Jarl, and Samoa," the issues are quite clear. In speaking of Jarl's attitude to Yillah, Taji says,

But what of my Viking? Why, of good Jarl I grieve to say, that the old fashioned interest he took in my affairs led him to look upon Yillah as sort of an intruder, an Ammonite siren, who might lead me astray. This would now and then provoke a philippic; but he would only turn toward my resentment his devotion; and then I was silent (I, 171).

Significantly, Jarl ~~has~~ tattooed on his arm a representation of the crucifixion, and appropriately he is soon to become a sacrifice to Taji's blind devotion to a phantom, just as the little fish, of the next chapter, followed the Chamois, often to their destruction. A little later Taji arranges to leave Jarl on one of the islands, Moncoldo:

Apprised, hereof, my follower was loath to acquiesce. His guiltless spirit feared not the strangers: less selfish considerations prevailed. He was willing to remain on the island for a time, but not without me (I, 360).

When next we hear of him we learn he has been killed by the three sons of the murdered Aleema who pursue Taji during the course of the novel. Taji's grief is perfunctory: "Slain for me! My soul sobbed out" (II, 50). Davis

suggests that Jarl and Samoa disappear from the story because neither is sufficiently articulate to be of use during the tour of the islands.¹⁰ (Annatoo, it should be noted, is forgotten at an earlier stage.) But unquestionably, Mardi gains greatly in unity if the interpretation outlined above is accepted. Samoa and Annatoo disappear because Taji prefers to disregard the facts of marriage, while Jarl and Yillah are simply self-exclusive.

Once Taji has made an ideal out of Yillah, it should be noticed, she disappears for good, because in the role now ascribed to her she has no existence. Instead, Hautia, a symbol diametrically opposed to all that Taji would make Yillah stand for, takes her place and now in turn pursues Taji. The logic should be clear. Taji's insistence upon an absolute good and the methods he has used to attain it are, in context, sinful. He is committing himself to a pure evil. Indeed it becomes plain at the end that Taji's Yillah and Hautia are one and the same thing. Arriving on Hautia's island, Flozella (compared with Spenser a rather poor-man's Bower of Bliss), Mohi tells Taji:

Listen; and in his own words will I
recount the adventure of the youth
Ozonna. It will show thee, Taji,
that the maidens of Hautia are all
Yillahs held captive, unknown to

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¹⁰ Davis, p. 77.

themselves; and that Hautia, their enchantress, is the most treacherous of queens (II, 392).

The vortex in which Yillah was to sink applies to Hautia and takes on obvious sexual connotation when she cries, "I, the vortex that draws all in" (II, 395). It is, then, the height of irony that Taji's ideal allegory of good should transform its object into absolute evil.

As Lawrance Thompson indicates, the allegorical frame of Mardi is almost exactly parallel to that in the first two books of The Faerie Queens.¹¹ Like Taji, the knight of Book One begins his adventures blindly as a pilgrim soul in the company of the lady Una (Truth). He is separated from her by the hermit Archimago (Hypocrisy) just as Taji loses Yillah because of the hypocrisy of his motives. Spenser's hero then enters upon a succession of adventures representing spiritual states of temptation and growth, while Una is held captive. After he has triumphed over the world, the flesh and the devil, the hero is at least wed to Una. The hero of Book Two, Sir Guyon, passes through an analogous series of adventures. He is further educated when he visits the Castle of Alma, which represents the soul in perfect command of the body. He explores the castle tower, containing Alma's three advisers (allegorically,

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¹¹ Thompson, p.

the head with its three psychological entities personified). "For purposes of comparison with Mardi," writes Thompson, "the three advisers may be represented roughly as a Philosopher, a Historian, and a Poet."¹² Finally, Sir Guyon faces and triumphs over his ultimate temptation when he arrives at Acrasia's "Bower of Bliss," throws to the ground the three emblematic cups of wine offered him, destroys the bower, and departs, thus triumphing also over the world, the flesh, and the devil. So Taji also resists

the death-threatening values represented by three wordly pretenses of religious beliefs: the three devilish sons of the priest who offered Yillah (and Taji) death instead of life; his three psychological companions who offer him Christian serenity and idealism as an unacceptable substitute for his spiritual craving for atonement with Yillah (divine Beauty, Truth, Wisdom); the three messengers of Queen Hautia, who offer him physical and sexual serenity in a Bower of Bliss. Like Spenser's heroes, the mature and penitent Taji resists the devil, the world, the flesh, and in the final tableau he turns his back on all things temporal.¹³

The point which Thompson does not make, although it would have advanced his general argument considerably, is that Melville's story is a complete inversion of Spenser's.

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¹² Ibid., p.

¹³ Ibid., p.

Taji's Yillah is a false Una. For Melville Una does not exist, certainly not on earth. Spenser's heroes are marked by their humility, Taji by his pride. From the beginning the narrator of Mardi has an exaggerated opinion of his own self-importance. He enjoys lording it over his fellows.

Aboard the Parki the narrator informs us,

My own curiosity satisfied with respect to the brigantine, Samoa himself turned inquisitor. He desired to know who we were; and whence we came in our marvelous boat. But on these heads I thought best to withhold from him the truth; among other things, fancying that if disclosed, it would lessen his deference for us, as men superior to himself. I therefore spoke vaguely of our adventures, and assumed the decided air of a master; which I perceived was not lost upon the rude islander (I, 101-2).

But Taji is in reality withholding the truth from himself. Yillah too he wins, through deception, in claiming that he also originated in Oroolia. Before reaching Odo, the narrator is warned by Samoa that he is thought to be the returned sun god, Taji, and thus is provided with an identity corresponding to his paranoia. Taji simply will not face facts. He creates and lives by a false picture of Yillah. Unlike Spenser's two knights, Taji, to use a modern term, is an anti-hero. And Melville, to use the term I have coined, has made an anti-allegory out of Spenser's original allegory. The story line just examined, although providing a frame for the rest of the novel,

occupies only a fraction of it, but it is by far the most successful section. And it is this device of an anti-allegory that Melville was soon to use with much greater effect in Moby Dick.

Taji's search throughout Mardi, ostensibly for the missing Yillah, gives Melville a dramatically motivated opportunity for surveying the world and providing an answer to the question of how the world should be considered. This problem is the central concern of Mardi. As companions on his quest Taji has Media, the authoritarian King of Odo who, like Taji, claims to be a demigod, Mohi, or Braid Beard a historian, Babbalanja, a philosopher, and Yoomy, a poet. The three latter characters act as interpreters and embody different mental attitudes. Perhaps, as Thompson suggests, they also allegorize Taji's disillusionment, following the loss of Yillah, as a form of psychological fragmentation.¹⁴ But this line can be taken too far, as does William Braswell when he argues that the seven major personae are all aspects of the four-soul theory of Paracelsus.¹⁵ It is safer to agree with Davis

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¹⁴ Ibid., p.

¹⁵ William Braswell, Melville's Religious Thought (Durham, 1943), pp. 86-93.

and call them "humour" characters.¹⁶

Mohi's version of the truth is limited because it is based solely and without real understanding, on facts and authority. As a historian he is called upon throughout the tour, to expound upon the ancient history and legends of the Mardians. Completely lacking any kind of imagination he is marked by his literal mindedness which enables him to explain, with a completely straight face, that a reef is a slain giant's "remains petrified into white ribs of coral" (I, 247), and also accept the religious faith of Maranna. This blind piety contrasts strongly with Babbalanja's skepticism. But Mohi differs even more radically from Yoomy who is all imagination. They are, however, alike in that both are extremes and both are constructors of and believers in various anti-allegories whether historical or poetic. The word allegory is here used as previously defined in the broadest sense making any attempt at an explanation of the world an attempt at allegory. As we shall see, in examining the islands, wherever evil and misery exist it is invariably the result of an uncritical acceptance of some form of anti-allegory, anti-allegories such as those dealt in by Mohi and Yoomy.

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¹⁶ Davis, p. 160.

As Bruce Franklin notes, most of these anti-allegories are of a mythological nature and Mohi, Yoomy, and Babbalanja are creators of myth, historical, poetical or philosophical.¹⁷ But only the form of myth based upon an understanding of empirical evidence, such as that arrived at by Babbalanja, constitutes a valid allegory. The weakness of the respective processes of Mohi and Yoomy is best illustrated in the chapter entitled "Babbalanja steps in between Mohi and Yoomy, and Yoomy relates a legend." Mohi dismisses poets as being too full of silly imaginings to tell a plain tale, to which Yoomy replies;

I honour your calling; but with submission,
your chronicles are more wild than my can-
tos. I deal in pure conceits of my own;
which have a shapeliness and a unity, howev-
er insubstantial; but you, Braid Beard, deal
in mangled realities. In all your chapters,
you yourself grope in the dark. Much truth
is not in thee, historian (I, 324).

After Yoomy has told the fanciful story of Tupia, Mohi objects that "Yoomy has invented." "But perhaps he has entertained, old Mohi," replies Babbalanja (I, 328-9). Nevertheless, Mohi's criticism is valid. As the result of a cast of mind similar to Yoomy's Taji has erected his anti-allegory of Yillah. It should be noted that the majority of Yoomy's songs serve to characterize the lost maiden,

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¹⁷ Franklin, pp. 24-36.

Yillah. Davis writes in a footnote:

Before singing his song about Yillah, composed when she was 'yet bowered in Odo,' Yoomy observes that 'Ere now, some fragments have been heard.' These fragments refer to the earlier songs about a beautiful maiden and they are all associated by Yoomy with his song about Yillah.¹⁸

Yoomy also acts as interpreter of the floral language employed by Hautia. It is significant that identifying the "Ultimate" with "her," Babbalanja turns to Yoomy at one point and says: "I may have come to the Penultimate but where, sweet Yoomy, is the Ultimate . . . Something--nothing--riddles--does Mardi hold Her?" (II, 81)? Put another way, the dichotomy between Mohi and Yoomy is that between the head and the heart, a characteristic Melvillian distinction. (As Nathalia Wright demonstrates, the faulty set-ups on the Mardian islands stem from an imbalance of the two faculties.)¹⁹ Only with the two in some form of balance can a man arrive at a true appreciation of experience as does Babbalanja.

Babbalanja alone arrives at the discerning empirical approach for which Melville is arguing in Mardi.

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¹⁸ Davis, p. 185.

¹⁹ Nathalia Wright, "The Head and the Heart in Melville's Moral," PMLA, LX (June, 1951), 351-62.

Introduced in between Mohi and Yoomy he combines the valuable elements of both by drawing upon the empirical maxims of the sage of antiquity, Bardianna, who reveals the wisdom of authority as when Babbalanja says, "Mohi . . . truth is in things and not in words: truth is voiceless; so at least saith old Bardianna" (I, 329), and secondly, by giving full rein to the voice of his devil, Azzageddi, who, speaking with cutting poetic but a-priori insight, sees through to the essentials of things, as in the following remark:

Be it enough for us to know that Ora indubitably is. My Lord! My Lord! Sick with the spectacle of the madness of men, and broken with spontaneous doubts, I sometimes see but two things in all Mardi to believe:--that I myself exist, and that I can most happily, or least miserably exist by the practice of righteousness (II, 125-6).

But Azzageddi, who is the anti-allegorizing principle, must be kept under control lest Babbalanja also become a Taji. Fortunately, this does not happen, and Bardianna prevails. Head and heart in equilibrium, Babbalanja realizes that Serenia is the only practical ideal attainable on earth. Perfection is impossible for, as is inscribed on the scroll in Vivenza, "evil is the chronic malady of the universe; and checked in one place, breaks forth in another" (II, 244). From the prophet of Serenia he discovers that,

Some things there are we must not think of. Beyond one obvious mark, all human lore is vain. . . . Reason no longer domineers; but still doth speak. All I have said ere this, that wars with, Alma's precepts, I here recant (II, 371).

Media, Yoomy, and Mohi are also persuaded to accept the necessary situation of compromise. Only Taji rejects it.

But it is Media rather than Babbalanja who represents the positive attitude which Melville is opposing to Taji. Babbalanja interprets for the benefit of the two supposed demigods. Only King Media, however, is sufficiently open-minded to profit from this experience, to appreciate the true allegory, and to separate himself from the anti-allegory to which, as a demigod, he was previously committed. When we first met Media he is a callous ruler who speaks disdainfully of trial by jury. In the course of the journey he sees many bad rulers and their unhappy kingdoms. Of Vivenza (the United States) Yoomy says, "No kings are in Vivenza; yet, spite her thralls, in that land seems more of good than elsewhere. Our hopes are not wild dreams: Vivenza cheers our hearts" (II, 260). He becomes increasingly attentive to the criticisms of Babbalanja, but the turning point comes in the island of Abrazzi. On this same island, as noted above, Taji also might have been stimulated to recant. King Abrazzi, refusing to listen to grievances, is a cruder version of Media's earlier self; but when

Abrazzi threatens Babbalanja, "Back, curs!" cried Media. 'Harm not a hair of his head'"(II, 345). By the time the journey is over Media is ready to listen to Babbalanja's wisest words:

Before thy people act the things thou
here last heard /they are in Serenia/.
Let no man weep, that thou mayst laugh;
no man toil too hard that thou mayst
idle be. Abdicate thy throne: but still
retain the sceptre. None need a king;
but many need a ruler (II, 380).

Throughout the bulk of the book Media is in the spotlight to indicate that, in Mardi, Melville wishes to emphasize the true allegory, the positive response. Nevertheless, Media still has to face the consequences of his previous actions. When he returns to Odo a rebellion is in progress.

The actual tour of the islands, which owes something to Gulliver's Travels and rather more to Rabelais, need not be rehearsed in detail. With its repetitive literal frame, it becomes undeniably prolix and tedious. But that is not to say it is unrelated to the story line as given above. There is also some ordering principle although it could be argued that the rambling nature of the tour is dramatically justified because the characters are lost and looking for their bearings. However, the

first four islands visited, to the end of Book One, provide a form of frame backdrop as does the initial realistic narrative for Taji. The situations on these islands are rather more general and abstract than on those visited subsequently; and, taken in order, we are presented with four ages of kingship from childhood to old age. Each of the four islands isolates a fault which can be taken objectively, or else subjectively as relating to some personality defect: the irresponsible tyranny of King Peepi, the dissipation of King Donjalolo, the rapaciousness of King Uhia, and the excess of King Borabolla. All the other imperfect islands visited are imperfect because of one or more of these faults. Thus, there is some connection between Donjalolo and the affected Taparians, between Uhia and King Bello (of England) between Borabolla and Abrazzi and King Peepi and the Lords Piko and Hello. Maramma and Serenia, of course, bracket Book Two as lands of false and true Christianity. The overlong section which satirizes the known geographical world was, as mentioned earlier, an addition; but it serves a purpose in demonstrating that the factual allegory is no less fantastic than the fictional. The two islands visited immediately prior to that of King Abrazzi and Serenia, namely that of Doxodox and Hooloomooloo, the Isle of Cripples, sum up, mentally and

physically, all that is against reason and nature.

A further point, already anticipated, which demonstrates Melville's consistent intention should also be mentioned. Wherever corruption is discovered there is inevitably a false myth or allegory (as Honig points out, the two words are related),²⁰ be it historical or poetical, to justify it. Examples abound, but let us look again at the first four islands visited. On the island of Valapee we meet King Peepi whose irresponsible autocracy is made emblematic in that he is a child but his power is so great because of the ridiculous belief that he inherits the souls of his subjects. On Juan King Donjalolo is confined to his glen, which is again emblematic, this time of dissipation. But he is thus imprisoned because of a nonsensical tradition. (On the same island, by the way, Melville justifies his belief in the necessity of gaining first hand evidence. Donjalolo sends reporters outside the glen to report to him on what lies beyond. Each comes back with a different story.) King Uhia's territorial designs centre on the following ambition:

Nothing less than bodily to remove Ohanoo
 /his island/ to the centre of the lagoon,
 in fulfillment of an old prophecy running
 thus--When a certain island shall stir
 from its foundations and stand in the

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²⁰ Honig, p.24.

middle of the still water, then shall the ruler of that island be ruler of all Mardi (I, 319).

The indulgent fat King Borabolla of Mondoldo justifies his existence with the ruling maxim expressed by "the good stranger" (I, 255), ("In rotundity, he was another Borabolla" [I, 256]), that "The wise and good Oro hath placed us in Mardi to be glad" (I, 257). The false allegory at the basis of Moramma is quite obvious. In other words, belief in an anti-allegory, be it historical like those of Mohi or poetic and romantic like Yoomy's or Taji's, is self-destructive. Ironically, while from one point of view, Yillah, as a symbol of perfection, serves to set off the imperfections of the world because she is nowhere to be found, she herself is the result of an a-priori process of allegorizing which is identical to that which produces the world's evils.

If the principles of allegory and ante-allegory--the one a system based on experience and other divorced from experience--be accepted, Mardi displays a far tighter construction than is normally supposed. Taji, in spite of his experience in the real world, commits himself to his own anti-allegory and--in spite of the tour through Mardi which constitutes the true allegory and shows that

absolutes do not exist, and reveals various anti-allegories along the way as productive of evil--remains deluded. King Media, on the other hand, through the agency of Babbalanja, who has the correct empirical frame of mind to recognize the true allegory, unlike Mohi and Yoomy, dissociates himself from the false allegory by which he has lived previously. But Serenia is less a solution than a means of arriving at a solution. The whole society is based on assumptions too simple and naive to stand for Melville's final vision of the ideal. Instead it serves as a vindication of Babbalanja's point of view. It is simply a matter of right reason, as employed by Babbalanja, for "Right reason and Alma [Christ] are the same." That is, only by the application of reason to the world of facts and experience can the truth be even vaguely apprehended. In the chapter entitled "Dreams" Melville explains his method of composition in the same terms. Having attempted to embrace the world, its oceans, its continents and its writers, Melville writes,

Yet not I, but another: God is my Lord;
and though many satellites revolve around
me, I and all mine revolve round the great
central Truth, sun-like, fixed and luminous
forever in the foundationless firmament"
(II, 54).

Hence, Melville points to Babbalanja in attempting to prove the truth of his own philosophical allegory. It is well

to keep Mardi in mind as, with the possible exception of Billy Budd, Melville's sanest and most valid answer to the ambiguous character of the universe. Over the next forty years Melville himself was to drift increasingly away from it. But it is surely no coincidence that when Melville recovered his original vision in the long poem Clarel he used a structure markedly similar to that of Mardi.

3, MOBY DICK or the WHALE: WHICH?

He looked like a man cut away from the stake, when the fire has overrunningly wasted all the limbs without consuming them, or taking away one particle from their compacted aged robustness. His whole high, broad form, seemed made of solid bronze, and shaped in an unalterable mould, like Cellinis cast Perseus. Threading its way out from among his grey hairs, and continuing right down one side of his tawny scorched face and neck, till it disappeared in his clothing, you saw a slender rod-like mark, horridly whitish. It resembled that perpendicular seam sometimes made in the straight, lofty trunk of a great tree, when the upper lightning tearingly darts down it, and without wrenching a single twig, peels and grooves out the bark from top to bottom, ere running off into the soil, leaving the tree still greenly alive, but branded.

- Moby Dick

With the publication, in October 1851, of Moby Dick Melville had reached the apex of his career, although there was little recognition of this fact among contemporary reviewers. Nevertheless Sophia Hawthorne, in a letter to her mother, voiced the suspicion, "I am not sure that he is not a very great man."¹ To-day Melville's greatness is the one aspect of the man which is not

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¹ Sophia Hawthorne to her mother, Elizabeth Peabody, (Sept. 4, 1850). Metcalf, p. 92.

questioned. At one point in Moby Dick Melville writes: "To produce a mighty book, you must choose a mighty theme. No great and enduring volume can ever be written on the flea, though many there be who have tried it" (II, 220). Melville has succeeded on both counts, but exactly what kind of mighty book has he produced and with what kind of theme? As with James Joyce's Ulysees, it seems to be impossible to light upon any one genre which adequately characterizes the work. Is it a romance, a prose epic, or merely a preternatural travel story like The Ancient Mariner? Much of the difficulty undoubtedly results from the fact that, like Mardi, Moby Dick underwent a change in intention.

In the alternative title, as with his next novel, Pierre, or the Ambiguities, Melville presents the reader with two ways of looking at the world, a right empirical way and a wrong a-priori way. The basic design of Moby Dick is similar to that of Mardi. On the one hand we have the positive Ishmael attitude which corresponds to that of King Media, and on the other that of Ahab, corresponding to that of Taji. However, as a result of Melville's friendship with Nathaniel Hawthorne, the novel took a new direction. Having read Hawthorne's Mosses from an Old Manse Melville penned a pseudonymous review of impassioned

admiration in the Literary World. Feeling a sense of kinship he wrote: "Now it is that blackness in Hawthorne . . . that so fixes and fascinates me."² He had just begun on Moby Dick and this quality in Hawthorne must have seemed like an endorsement, a confirmation of the Ahab world.³

The review continues with the sexual image:

Already I feel that this Hawthorne has dropped germinous seeds into my soul. He expands and deepens down, the more I contemplate him; and further and further, shoots his strong New England roots in the hot soil of my Southern soul.⁴

Because of the basic structural similarity between Moby Dick and Mardi one can reject Howard P. Vincent's conclusion that "The Town-Ho's Story" represents Melville's original conception,⁵ and one can likewise disagree with George R. Stewart's banal hypothesis which makes Queequeg

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² Herman Melville, "Hawthorne and His Mosses," in Billy Budd and Other Prose Pieces, p.130.

³ According to Hubert H. Hoeltje in "Hawthorne, Melville, and Blackness," AL, XXXVII (March, 1965), 41-51, the blackness Melville found so characteristic of Hawthorne stemmed from a misreading of Mosses from an Old Manse based on Melville's desire to see his own inclination sympathetically endorsed by someone else.

⁴ Hawthorne and His Mosses, p. 139.

⁵ Howard P. Vincent, The Trying Out of Moby Dick (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1949), 46.

the hero.⁶ Instead I would suggest that the influence of Hawthorne outweighed that of Melville's earlier experience, and that any alterations would have enhanced the "blackness" of existence by emphasizing the tragic dimensions of Ahab and providing some form of justification for his assault upon the White Whale which he makes a scapegoat for evil.⁷

Some traces of this metamorphosis can perhaps be discerned in certain defects of structure. Three characters are given build ups out of proportion to their subsequent role in the action. Ishmael, the centre of interest in the novel's early chapters, suddenly disappears when Ahab takes the stage. Presumably it was originally intended that he, like King Media, should have dominated the book. Queequeg is likewise suppressed. Bulkington, the only character who, it seems, might have stood up against Ahab, is introduced and never heard of again. I would agree roughly with George R. Stewart's findings that chapters I to XV comprise the original narrative, chapters XVI to XXII incorporate important revisions, and that from chapter XXIII

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⁶ George R. Stewart, "The Two Moby-Dicks," AL, XXV (Jan., 1954), 445.

⁷ James E. Miller, Jr., "Hawthorne and Melville: The Unpardonable Sin," PMLA, LXX (1955), 91-111. Miller explores the motives and steps of Hawthorne's characters, Ethan Brand, Chillingworth, Oylmer and Rappacini, in committing the "unpardonable sin" and demonstrates identical motives and steps in Ahab.

to the Epilogue the story has been largely reconceived.⁸
 One quite definite transition point occurs in chapter XVI
 where Melville tries to justify the heightened speech he is
 to use. Speaking of Quakers Melville writes:

So that there are instances among them of men, who, named with Scripture names--a singularly common fashion on the island--and in ~~the~~ childhood naturally imbibing the stately dramatic thee and thou of the Quaker idiom: still, from the audacious, daring, and boundless adventure of their subsequent lives, strangely blend with these unoutgrown peculiarities a thousand bold dashes of character, not unworthy a Scandinavian sea-king, or a poetical pagan Roman. And when these things unite in a man of greatly superior natural force, with a globular brain and a ponderous heart; who has also by the stillness and seclusion of many long night-watches in the remotest waters, and beneath constellations never seen here at the north, been led to think untraditionally and independently; receiving all nature's sweet or savage impressions fresh from her own virgin voluntary and confiding breast, and thereby chiefly, but with some help from accidental advantages, to learn a bold and nervous lofty language --that man makes one in a whole nation's census--a mighty pageant creature, formed for noble tragedies (I, 91-2).

However this may be, because of the shift in focus we have a new tension between the positive and negative attitudes in Moby Dick which never existed in Mardi. This tension accounts largely for the power of the book. Melville is torn between the Ishmaelite acceptance he wishes to advocate

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⁸ Stewart, 417-448.

and the admiration he feels for the pose of Ahab. In addition, of course, Moby Dick has a much stronger literal frame than Mardi.

It might appear from the above account of Melville's change of intention that the work is jagged and formless. On the contrary, as James E. Miller has demonstrated, Moby Dick has a definite five-act dramatic structure.⁹ In fact, in attempting to define the genre of Moby Dick, it is perhaps helpful to think in dramatic rather than novelistic terms. The first act, chapters I to XXII, centres on Ishmael and Queequeg. The second, chapters XXIII to XLV, introduces Ahab and his obsession with Moby Dick. Chapters XLVI to LXXII, act three, deal mainly with the business of the Pequod. In chapters LXXIII to CV the narrative stream is largely abandoned and we become acquainted with a great deal of cetological detail. This section is apparently remotest from the central action. The final act, chapters CVI to the end, is concerned with the search and the chase. James Dean Young's analysis, "The Nine Gams of the Pequod," supports Miller's structural breakdown. Young points out that the nine gams fall into groups of three:

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⁹ James E. Miller, A Reader's Guide to Herman Melville (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1962). pp. 80-6.

The first group of three gams means very little as a warning but it clearly pre-figures the tragedy, and ends in the climactic meeting with the Jeroboam. The second group of three gams defines the alternative attitudes and is climaxed in the gam with the Enderby. The final group of three gams presents the alternative actions, which are also warnings, and is climaxed in the gam with the Delight. The series of gams is a stable reference for understanding the structure and action of the narrative; no other group of chapters forms such an integrated series.¹⁰

Happily, the first three gams occur in Miller's third act, the next three in his fourth act and the remaining three in his fifth act.

(i) Ahab: the intolerable and a-priori allegorist

Even the most dogmatic critics have not been so narrow minded as to suppose that Moby Dick is simply an account of an obsessed man's pursuit of an unusually large albino whale. A familiar Melvillian symbol, the ship, the Pequod, represents humanity itself with its barriers of colour and class. At the head of this stratified society is Captain Ahab, next is Starbuck, then the three mates followed by the three harpooners, and so on through the rest of the crew right down to little Pip. This strictly

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¹⁰ James Dean Young, "The Nine Gams of the Pequod," AL, XXV (Jan., 1954), 462-3.

hierarchical nature of affairs is anticipated when Captain Peleg and Bildad discuss the proportion of Ishmael's lay, and re-emphasized in "The Cabin Table" where the conventions of formal meals are described. But in reality,

They were nearly all Islanders in the Pequod, 'Isolatoos' too, I call ~~such~~ such, not acknowledging the common continent of men, but each Isolato living on a separate continent of his own. Yet now, federated along one keel, what a set these Isolatoes were! An Anacharsis Clootz deputation from all the isles of the sea, and all the ends of the earth, accompanying Old Ahab in the Pequod to lay the world's grievances before that bar from which not very many of them ever came back (I, 149-50).

Because the Pequod carries such a variety, "an Anacharsis Clootz deputation," a phrase later used in both The Confidence Man and Billy Budd, in a sense the ship becomes one with Moby Dick, the doubloon and the coffin which, as demonstrated in the "Introduction," are symbols of ambivalence. The other nine ships, or worlds, met serve a similar symbolic function in that, like the men before the doubloon, each presents a different interpretation of, or attitude towards, the White Whale.¹¹ The sea, the cradle of creation through which the Pequod sails, is life itself in all its mystery. Before Father Mapple's sermon, Melville notes: "Yes, the world's a ship on its passage out, and not a

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¹¹ Ibid., 449-63.

voyage complete (I, 48). On several occasions Melville deliberately points out the wider associations. For instance when Queequeg is linked to Ishmael by the monkey rope, Ishmael ponders:

I saw that this situation of mine was the precise situation of every mortal that breathes; only in most cases, he, one way or another, has this Siamese connection with a plurality of other mortals. If your banker breaks, you snap; if your apothecary by mistake sends you poison in your pills, you die (II, 48-9).

It is precisely by denying this interdependence and setting himself up as a god, that Ahab condemns himself to death. Again, in the chapter "Fast-Fish and Loose-Fish," Melville explains how these terms apply to every aspect of life. It is only with a mind attentive to such "linked analogies" (II, 38) that a reader may hope to understand Melville.

In the "Introduction" it is argued that the White Whale is a symbol of ambivalence, of the non-existence of absolutes, that nothing is entirely black or white, good or evil, that life is an enigma. This view Ahab challenges to his cost. In branding Moby Dick totally malignant, and attempting to harpoon him, Ahab in his arrogance causes his own death. His sin is that of Lucifer, pride; and his fate should be a warning to the over-dogmatic critics. In other words, Ahab, like Taji and Pierre is "a fool of truth" (499),

an anti-allegorizer. In place of life's mystery and complexity he substitutes an a-priori over-simplification, or self projection. Ahab is a monomaniac because of the one-ness of his vision. After Moby Dick in an early encounter "had reaped away Ahab's leg" with "his sickle-shaped lower jaw,"

the White Whale swam before him as the monomaniac incarnation of all those malicious agencies which some deep men feel eating in them, till they are left living on with half a heart and half a lung. That intangible malignity which has been from the beginning; to whose dominion even the modern Christians ascribe one-half of the worlds; which the ancient Ophites of the east revered in their statute devil;--Ahab did not fall down and worship it like them; but deliriously transferring its idea to the abhorred white whale, he pitted himself, all mutilated, against it. . . . All the subtle demonisms of life and thought; all evil, to crazy Ahab, were visibly personified, and made practically assailable in Moby Dick. He piled upon the whale's white hump the sum of all the general rage and hate felt by his whole race from Adam down; and then, as if his chest had been a mortar, he burst his hot heart's shell upon it (I, 229-30).

Much of the misguided criticism of Moby Dick arises from disregarding Melville's warning and attempting to label and categorize the book's various elements, as Ahab tries to pigeon-hole the whale.

Perhaps we should be careful even about branding Ahab. When Ishmael questions Peleg about the rumours he

has heard, Peleg tells him,

wrong not Captain Ahab, because he happens to have a wicked name. Besides, my boy, he has a wife--not three voyages wedded--a sweet, resigned girl. Think of that; by that sweet girl that old man has a child; hold ye then there can be any utter, hopeless harm in Ahab? No, no, by lad; stricken, blasted, if he be, Ahab has his humanities!(I, 100)!

Hence, given this paradox, Peleg can say "he's a grand, ungodly, god-like man, Captain Ahab" (I, 99). "Vengeance is mine," said the Lord, and by inference judgment also. Yet Ahab does set himself up as a judge, prejudiced most obviously because of the loss of his leg. The evil he attributes to the whale is largely his own, and a certain identification is formed between Ahab and Moby Dick. Both, with their wrinkled brows, are apart from their fellows. Starbuck is right when he says, "let Ahab beware Ahab; beware of thyself, old man" (II, 244). It is Starbuck who taxes Ahab about the justice of condemning the whale: 'Vengeance on a dumb brute!' cried Starbuck, 'that simply smote from blindest instinct! Madness! To be enraged with a dumb thing, Captain Ahab, seems blasphemous' (I, 204). To Ahab, however, Moby Dick is not "a dumb thing:"

All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks. But in each event --in the living act, the undoubted deed--there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the

mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask. If man will strike, strike through the mask! How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall? To me, the White Whale is that wall, shoved near to me. Sometimes I think there's naught beyond. But 'tis enough. He tasks me; he heaps me; I see in him outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing it. That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate; and be the White Whale agent, or be the White Whale principal, I will wreck that hate upon him (I, 204).

In branding the whale Ahab sets himself up as a god and alienates himself from his kind. Apart from humanity, he is no longer able to enjoy creature comforts: his pipe no longer soothes him so he tosses it overboard. His independence grows, and later, he rejects the mechanical aid of the Quadrant. By committing himself to an ante-allegory of absolutes Ahab denies consequently the possibility of free-will, which is only fully operative when the natural world is seen empirically as ambivalent, and commits himself also to fate. The tension in Moby Dick is centred in Ahab. He becomes a horribly incongruous mixture of god and machine: "his torn body and gashed soul bled into one another; and so interfusing made him mad" (I, 230). Consequently, Ahab proclaims, "The path to my fixed purpose is laid with iron rails, whereon my soul is grooved to run" (I, 210). Later, speaking to the carpenter of blistered Perth, the blacksmith, Ahab outlines his blueprint for an iron man:

Hold; while Prometheus is about it,
 I'll order a complete man after a
 desirable pattern. Imprimis, fifty
 feet high in his socks; then, chest
 modelled after the Thames Tunnel;
 then, legs with roots to 'em, to stay
 in one place; then arms three feet
 through the wrist; no heart at all;
 brass forehead, and about a quarter
 of an acre of fine brains; and let
 me see--shall I order eyes to see
 outward? No, but put a skylight on
 top of his head to illuminate in-
 wards. There, take the order, and
 away (II, 238).

In symbolic fashion Ahab has characterized himself perfectly, and a few pages later he is likened to "an iron statue" (II, 253). But what of the god-like Ahab who would strike the sun if it insulted him? Seated in his cabin Ahab points at the nervous Starbuck, who has just told him the oil in the hold is leaking, and orders him out: "There is one God that is Lord over the earth, and one captain that is lord over the Pequod--On deck!" (II, 244). Ahab is an awesome figure, but his utter dependence upon himself and his opinions, and the crew's complete devotion to him, causes the final catastrophe.

But although Ahab dominates his crew, the sinister Fedallah dominates Ahab. Like Faustus, Ahab has turned to the powers of darkness for aid. That Ahab does believe in a God is clear from the numerous occasions on which he refers to one; but this God, as we learn in the

lyrical chapter, "The Symphony," is the origin of all inscrutable malice:

What is it, what nameless, inscrutable, unearthly thing is it; what cozening, hidden lord and master, and cruel, remorseless emperor commands me; that against all natural lovings and longings, I so keep pushing, and crowding, and jamming myself on all the time; recklessly making me ready to do what is my own proper, natural heart, I durst not so much as dare? Is Ahab, Ahab? Is it I, God, or who, that lifts this arm? But if the great sun move not of himself; but is an errand-boy in heaven; nor one single star can revolve, but by some invisible power; how then can this one small heart beat; this one small brain think thoughts; unless God does that beating, does that thinking, does that living and not I (II, 330).

This God is, to Ahab, a pantheistic one, as is clear from the lines, "let me look into a human eye; it is better than to gaze into sea, or sky; better than to gaze upon God" (II, 329). It is perhaps not irrelevant that, after Moby Dick, Melville wrote to Hawthorne of having temporary pantheistic feelings.¹² The typhoon over which Ahab enjoys a pyrrhic victory is at one with Moby Dick in that, to Ahab, it is also the instrument of some inscrutable malice, and Bruce H. Franklin has demonstrated that mythologically the typhoon and Moby Dick are identical.¹³

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¹² Melville to Hawthorne. Pittsfield (Nov. 1851). Metcalf, p. 128.

¹³ Franklin, pp. 78-80.

Ahab anti-allegorizes about the typhoon as he does about the whale:

Oh, thou dark Hindoo half of nature, who
of drowned bones has builded thy separate
throne somewhere in the heart of these
unverdured seas; thou art an infidel,
thou queen, and too truly speakest to me
in the wide-slaughtering typhoon, and the
hushed burial of its after calm. Nor has
this thy whale sunwards turned his dying
head, and then gone round again, without
a lesson to me (II, 270).

But Ahab has a further reason for disliking the typhoon. As a one-time Zoroastrian, a worshipper of fire, Ahab had adored the flame. When, during the ritual, a tongue of fire accidentally leaped out at him and branded him with the ghastly white cicatrice which scores him from crown to toe, he entirely reversed his former attitude and made of the flame a symbol of unmixed evil. Anti-allegorizing is a deeply ingrained trait of Ahab's character. The lightning reminds Ahab of this incident: "Oh, thou clear spirit, of thy fire thou madest me, and like a true child of fire, I breathe it back to thee" (II, 282). In saying that the fire in the lightning is his father, Ahab implies that the fire fathered his insight into the malicious nature of the universe:

I knew that of me, which thou knowest not
of thyself, oh, thou omniscient! There is
some unsuffering thing beyond thee, thou
clear spirit, to whom all thy eternity is
but time, all thy creativeness mechanical.
Through thee, thy flaming self, my scorched

eyes do dimly see it. . . . Here again
 with haughty agony, I read my sire. .
 . . I leap with thee; I burn with thee;
 would fain be welded with thee; defyingly
 I worship thee!(II, 282-3):

Much of this material is of course atmospherics, but it is important to realize that Melville has welded these elements consistently into the main theme.

Because the evil force Ahab sees embodied in the White Whale, the typhoon and fire, specifically springs from God, it is then natural that Ahab should turn to the devil, through his agent the Parsee, a descendant of the Zoroastrians, Fedallah. The consecration of the harpoon amounts to a black mass: "Ego non baptizo te in nomine partris, sed in nomine diaboli" (II, 261). Fedallah himself has attracted too much attention. He is an extremely melodramatic embellishment. On the other hand, it is fitting that Fedallah, as a Parsee, like the Zoroastrians, should go along with the Manichean belief that everything in the universe results from the warring principles of good and evil, because this is the oversimplification which Ahab adopts. There is some evidence that Fedallah is merely a projection of the evil within Ahab, a reading I would favour because, as both a supposedly concrete figure and the creation of an anti-allegory, the Parsee's melodramatic nature and unreality then become thematic.

Standing far apart they gaze at each other "as if in the Parsee Ahab saw his forethrown shadow, in Ahab the Parsee his abandoned substance" (II, 320). Later Ahab, gazing down into the water, "started at two reflected, fixed eyes; Fedallah was motionlessly leaning over the same rail" (II, 330). However this may be, Ahab uses the methods of primitive magic (as in making a compass when the typhoon had reversed the lodestone) and demonology to mesmerize his crew. The moral should be obvious. When a man attempts to stand alone and sit in judgment, he errs, loses his bearings and mistakes evil for good, Satan for God.

The narcissism motif in the book further reinforces the above interpretation of Ahab. At the very beginning of Moby Dick we are shown "crowds of water gazers" who are "posted like silent sentinels" around the shores of Manhattan and are "fixed in ocean reveries" (I, 2).

And still deeper the meaning of that story of Narcissus, who because he could not grasp the tormenting, mild image he saw in the fountain, plunged into it and was drowned. But that same image, we ourselves see in all rivers and oceans. It is the image of the ungraspable phantom of life; and this is the key to it all (I, 3-4).

And so it is. In constructing his anti-allegory, as Richard Chase observes, Ahab looks into the water and sees "an ungraspable phantom, a white whale which is only a

projection of self."¹⁴ Duty at "The Masthead" is likewise, conducive to narcissism. The absentminded youth loses his identity,

takes the mystic ocean at his feet for the visable image of that deep, blue, bottomless soul, pervading mankind and nature; and every strange, half-seen, gliding, beautiful thing that eludes him . . . seems to him the embodiment of those elusive thoughts that only people the soul by continually flitting through it. . . . But while this sleep, this dream is on ye, move your foot or hand an inch; slip your hold at all; and your identity comes back in horror. Over Descartian vortices you hover. And perhaps, at midday, in the fairest weather, with one half-throttled shriek you drop through that transparent air into the summer sea, no more to rise for ever. Heed it well, ye Pantheists! (I, 198)

It is surely no accident that this chapter precedes the one in which Ahab makes his first public appearance, and that just before the climactic three day chase, in a chapter entitled "The Lifebuoy," a man goes "from his hammock to his masthead" to fall, "a falling phantom in the air," screaming into the sea (II, 304).

Furthermore, the above interpretation of Ahab enables us to understand Melville's well-known admonition against scouting at the White Whale as a fable or an allegory:

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¹⁴ Richard Chase, The American Novel and Its Tradition, (New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1957), p.

So ignorant are most landsmen of some of the plainest and most palpable wonders of the world, that without some hints touching the plain facts, historical and otherwise, of the fishery, they might scout at *Moby Dick* as a monstrous fable, or still worse and more detestable, a hideous and intolerable allegory (I, 257).

This is not the blanket condemnation of allegorical literature it is often taken to be. As argued above in the "Introduction," Melville's whole mode of thought was allegorical and he was fully aware that he had written an allegory. Rather, this passage, as Charles H. Cook, Jr. argues, is a description of Ahab's action.¹⁵ It is he who makes an "intolerable allegory out of *Moby Dick*," intolerable because it is inaccurate. The intolerable allegory Taji imposes on Yillah and the one Pierre weaves around Isabel is similarly inaccurate. While Taji and Pierre insist upon an absolute good, Ahab insists on an absolute evil. Confronted with the whale's multiplicity of meanings, Ahab singles out only one. Melville has frequently been criticised for vagueness in *Moby Dick*, but this vagueness is a carefully cultivated effect. By this means the reader is made to feel the baffling complexity and incomprehensibility of the universe which confronts the characters in the novel. It is the reality of the

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¹⁵ Charles H. Cook, Jr., "Ahab's Intolerable Allegory," BUSE, I (Spring-Summer, 1955), 45-52.

whale, the only thing on which a true allegory can be based, that Melville is concentrating upon, and this is the reason that Melville introduces the great mass of "plain facts, historical and otherwise," of the fishery. Certainly there are additional justifications for the cetological material --it serves a myth-making function and by delaying the catastrophe creates suspense--but the thematic reason for its inclusion is most important. An allegory, as previously defined, only has validity in so far as it conveys a practical truth. Edwin Honig demonstrates in his The Dark Conceit that because of a failure to meet this requirement allegory, as used by the post Coleridgean Romantics, fell into disrepute.¹⁶ Romantic doctrine, in urging the dominance of a formalizing art over nature, dismisses the external world and so negates any allegorical value. Melville is above all else concerned with the empirical truth of the natural world, and so the cetology.

(ii) Ishmael: the empirical allegorist

Moby Dick has been interpreted inaccurately in terms of Father Mapple's sermon or the Town Ho's story;¹⁷

¹⁶ Honig, p.51.

¹⁷ See Sophie Hollis, "Moby Dick: A Religious Interpretation," Catholic World, CLXIII (May, 1946), 158-62. For a monolithic misuse of The Town-Ho's Story see Lawrance Thompson, Melville's Quarrel with God.

however, it is Ishmael and Queequeg who, as Melville's human ideal, are opposed to Ahab. Father Mapple's sermon ironically seems to endorse the Ahab stand. Father Mapple concludes that

Delight is to him, who gives no quarter
in the truth, and kills, burns, and
destroys all sin though he pluck it out
from under the robes of Senators and
judges (I, 59).

With the voice of Azzageddi who, as we have seen, is the anti-allegorizing principle in Mardi, Babbalanja cries: "I cut right and left; I probe, tear, and wrench; kill, burn, and destroy; and whats left after that the jackals are welcome to" (II, 331). The hero of Israel Potter reflects that he, "as soldier and sailor, had joined to kill, burn, and destroy both them and theirs" (209)--the English and their property. In each case the phrase "kill, burn, and destroy" occurs in a negative context. Father Mapple continues:

And eternal delight and deliciousness
will be his, who coming to lay him down,
can say with his final breath--O Father!
--chiefly known to me by Thy rod--mortal
or immortal, here I die (I, 59).

This is the Old Testament god of wrath. In the following chapter, "A Bosom Friend," we come across Queequeg whittling away at his phallic (if Feidler's view on this matter is accepted)¹⁸ idol, Yojo. Clearly we are presented with a

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¹⁸ Leslie O. Feidler, Love and Death in the American Novel, (New York: Criterion Book, 1960), pp. 532-3.

contrast between the stern inhuman doctrines available in Christianity and the genuine warmth of Queequeg's natural religion. Ishmael joins him: "I'll try a pagan friend, thought I, since Christian kindness has proved but hollow courtesy" (I, 62). The two Quakers, Peleg and Bildad, are fighting Quakers and materialistic. There can be little doubt that Lawrance Thompson is correct in seeing an anti-Christian tone in this novel.¹⁹ Melville perhaps expresses himself most irreverently and humourously in "The Cassock." The mincer dressed in the pelt of the whale's phallus causes Melville to exclaim, "what a candidate for an archbishoprick, what a lad for a Pope" (II, 176).

Like the sermon, the Town-Ho's story presents the whale as a vehicle of God's justice. It seems unwise to look for any analogies between Radney, Steerkilt and Ahab. Comparisons with Billy Budd are far more lucrative. The Town-Ho's story is in fact unduly lengthy and seems rather like an interpolation, but it does serve, like the sermon, to provide an additional meaning for the whale. In fact, as already stated, all the gams serve this function. The story of the Jeraboam is probably closest to Ahab's anti-allegory: in the ludicrous figure of Gabriel, who pronounces "the White Whale to be no less a being than the Shaker God incarnated" (II, 43), we are to see the

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¹⁹ Thompson, pp.

reality of Ahab's position.

Initially Ishmael made nearly the same mistake as Ahab when he prejudged Queequeg through racial bias. In the second chapter Ishmael had mistakenly stumbled into a Negro church:

A hundred black faces turned round in their rows to peer; and beyond, a Black Angel of Doom was beating a book in a pulpit. It was a negro church; and the preacher's text was about the blackness of darkness, and the weeping and wailing and teeth-gnashing there. 'Ha, Ishmael,' muttered I, backing out, 'Wretched entertainment at the sign of 'The Trap!'' (I, 10).

Queequeg is the instrument by which Ishmael's naive and subjective repugnance is broken down. To begin with, Ishmael is thoroughly opposed to sharing a bed with a stranger, but the bench is uncomfortable and "I begin to think that after all I might be cherishing unwarrantable prejudices against this unknown harpooner" (I, 20-1). Hence eventually Ishmael adjusts to the bizarre figure of Queequeg:

'What is all this fuss I have been making about,' thought I to myself--'the man's a human being just as I am: he has just as much reason to fear me, as I have to be afraid of him. Better sleep with a sober cannibal than a drunken Christian' (I, 30).

And, of course, they become the best of friends. Although this relationship seems homosexual, or at least homoerotic, in the symbolic context the union of black and white is

Melville's solution to the problem of the ambiguity of truth. On awakening, having spent the night in the same bed, Ishmael finds Queequeg's arm thrown over him "in the most loving and affectionate manner. You had almost thought I had been his wife" (I, 31). "For though I tried to move his arm--unlock his bridegroom clasp--yet, sleeping as he was, he still hugged me tightly, as though naught but death could part us twain" (I, 33). Interracial brotherhood, rather than the excessive and neurotic self-dependence of Ahab, is in Melville's view the correct way to approach life. Symbolically, this ideal union of black and white expresses Melville's belief that good and evil do not exist in pure form, as Ahab claims, but only as a mixture of grey ambivalence. This point is emphasized by the dominance of the feeding image, which Marius Bewley observes.²⁰ What is fed upon becomes assimilated into the body of the feeder. And at its extreme we witness the mutual devouring of the sharks who

viciously snapped, not only at each other's disbowelments, but like flexible bows, bent around, and bit their own; till those entrails seemed swallowed over and over again by the same mouth, to be oppositely voided by the gaping wound (II, 26).

Likewise, good and evil are inextricably confused.

For the same reason, each of the mates has a coloured harpooner. Starbuck has Queequeg, Stubb has the

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²⁰ Bewley, p. 200.

Gayhead Indian, Tashtego, and Flask the full-blooded African, Dagoo. There are also two shipkeepers:

In outer aspect, Pip and Dough-Boy made a match, like a black pony and a white one, of equal developments, though of dissimilar colour, driven by one eccentric span (II, 165).

For a time the same solution seems to be open to proud Ahab when he forms a relationship with the humble, and at that time mad, black Pip. Holding Ahab's hand, Pip says:

Ah, now, had poor Pip but felt so kind a thing as this, perhaps he had ne'er been lost. . . . Oh, sir, let old Perth now come and rivet these two hands together; the black one with the white, for I will not let this go (II, 302).

Ahab replies: "I feel prouder leading thee by thy black hand, than though I grasped an Emperor's" (II, 302):

Nevertheless, Ahab rejects Pip, his last hope of salvation.

While with Pip the opportunity may be taken to disprove Lawrance Thompson's ingenious hypothesis. Thompson claims that when Pip struggles in the sea he shares Ahab's vision that God is malignant although there is nothing in the mystical passage, which describes this experience, to suggest such an interpretation.²¹ As ever, the suggestion is one of total ambivalence: "He saw God's foot upon the treadle of the loom, and spoke it; and therefore his shipmates called him made. So man's insanity is heaven's

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²¹ Thompson, pp.

sense" (II, 169-70). Ishmael points out that the "like abandonment befell myself" (II, 170). Assuming Pip's experience to be the same as Ahab's, and Ishmael's identical to Pip's, Thompson concludes that at the end of the book Ahab has a second convert, Ishmael.²² This is nonsense. Pip, previous to his experience, had an overly bright, clearcut and therefore, limited, view of life.

Pip, though over tender-hearted, was at bottom very bright, with that pleasant genial, jolly brightness peculiar to his tribe . . . so that the panic-striking business in which he had somehow unaccountably become entrapped, had most sadly blurred his brightness (II, 165-6).

That is to say that Pip was in no way prepared for his vision of the enigmatic nature of reality and so goes mad. All is not as gay as he had supposed and, although it is not all black either, Pip cannot accept the paradox. Ishmael's experiences on the Pequod, however, do enable him to accept this paradox.

The chapter concerned with Pip's disintegration is followed by the chapter describing Ishmael's regeneration. The cetological material, because of the opportunity which it offers for the construction of a true allegory, marks the stages of Ishmael's new awareness. He gradually learns from experience. Everything comes to a climax in "A Squeeze

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²² Ibid.

of the Hand." He accepts the redemptive force of brotherhood, human solidarity, in squeezing the sperm; and this acceptance saves Ishmael:

I forgot all about our horrible oath. .
 . ; I found myself unwittingly squeezing
 my co-labourers hands. . . . Come; let
 us squeeze hands all round; nay, let us
 all squeeze ourselves into each other;
 let us squeeze ourselves universally into
 the very milk and sperm of kindness (II,
 172).

If "A Squeeze of the Hand" is Heaven ("I saw long rows of angels in paradise, each with his hands in a jar of spermaceti" [II, 172]), "The Try-Works" is a vision of Hell. Once again we have the ever present contraries. Ishmael watches the pagan harpooners:

As they narrated to each other their unholy adventures, their tales of terror told in words of mirth; as their uncivilized laughter forked upwards out of them, like the flames from the furnace; as to and fro, in their front, the harpooners wildly gesticulated with their huge pronged forks and dippers; as the wind howled on, and the sea leaped, and the ship groaned and dived, and yet steadfastly shot her red hell further and further into the blackness of the sea and the night, and scornfully champed the white bone in her mouth, and viciously spat round her on all sides; then the rushing Pequod freighted with savages, and laden with fire, and burning a corpse, and plunging into that blackness of darkness, seemed the material counterpart of her monomaniac commander's soul (II, 179-80).

Ishmael, having seen "the redness, the madness, the ghastliness of others" (II, 180), that night accepts the hint of

the hitching tiller and reverses his position. Then follows the truest statements in all Melville, and once more I quote at length:

The sun hides not the ocean, which is the dark side of this earth, and which is two-thirds of this earth. So, therefore, that mortal man who hath more of joy than sorrow in him, that mortal man cannot be true--not true, or undeveloped. With books the same. The truest of all men was the Man of Sorrows, and the truest of all books is Solomon's, and Ecclesiastes is the fine-hammered steel of woe (II, 181).

But:

Give not thyself up then, to fire, lest it invert thee, deaden thee; as for the time it did me. There is a wisdom that is woe; but there is a woe that is madness. And there is a Catskill eagle in some souls that can alike dive down into the blackest gorges, and soar out of them again and become invisible in the sunny spaces. And even if he for ever flies within the gorge, that gorge is in the mountains; so that even in his lowest swoop the mountain eagle is still higher than other birds upon the plain, even though they soar (II, 182).

Melville here seems to be claiming that he can maintain the necessary duality of vision; but he is less certain in this corresponding passage from Pierre:

It is the not impartially bestowed privilege of the more final insights that at the same moment they reveal the depths, they do sometimes, also reveal--though by no means so distinctly--some answering heights. But when only midway down the gulf, its crags wholly conceal the upper vaults, and the wanderer thinks it all one gulf of downward dark.

In this second image the wings of the "Catskill eagle" of final insight have become leaden and the wanderer forgets the superiority of the mountains to the plain.

Ishmael finally survives, not of his own account, but through the agency of Queequeg. The ultimate in Christian brotherhood is that one man should lay down his life for another. And this is what Queequeg does when his coffin buoys Ishmael up. The sacrifice motif runs throughout Melville. We have already met it in White-Jacket, in Yillah whom Taji should have left alone, and in Jarl. This device is later to embody Melville's most positive vision. The idea of sacrifice, that nothing good emerges without a corresponding loss, is also implicit in the final tableau. As the Pequod sinks, Tashtego at the masthead, nailing the flag home, catches the wing of a seahawk between his hammer and the wood. Melville comments,

and so the bird of heaven, with unearthly shrieks, and his imperial beak thrust upwards, and his whole captive form folded in the flag of Ahab, went down with his ship, which like Satan, would not sink to hell till she had dragged a living part of heaven along with her, and helmeted herself with it (II, 367).

The bird of heaven may well be the same one which earlier, similarly flying "incommodiously close" (II, 322) to the masthead, snatched Ahab's hat, but now it stands for Queequeg, Starbuck, Pip, Tashtego, Dagoo, Stubb, Flask, and the remaining crew and also for the "humanities" of Ahab:

Melville, as often quoted, said he had written a "wicked book"²³ presumably because of the sympathy which he felt for Ahab. With Moby Dick Melville stands poised on the brink. Because the positive allegory is less strong than in Mardi, Moby Dick both reiterates what has gone before and anticipates the really "hideous allegory" to come. Much has been made of the Shakesperean, biblical, and Miltonic tone of Moby Dick, but the stamp of Marlowe seems also strong. Like Marlowe, Melville is an "over-reacher"--to use Harry Levin's term.²⁴ And on my reading of Dr. Faustus Ahab's Moby Dick shares the quality of being a prophane work. Dr. Faustus is largely a protest against the inability to protest. Marlow goes through the motions of a Christian parable, but he slants the evidence by making Faustus a sympathetic character, by pointing to the injustice of Faustus' punishment through emphasizing the gap between Faustus aspirations and what he actually gets, and by making the interventions on behalf of the forces of good perfunctory. Faustus is damned from the beginning. Marlow's Faustus, Milton's Satan, and Melville's Ahab are all favoured in a similar fashion. Nevertheless, along with the fact that Moby Dick is anti-Christian, it is also among the greatest books ever written.

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²³ Melville to Hawthorne. Pittsfield (Nov. 1951).
Metcalf, p. 129.

²⁴ Harry Levin, The Overreacher. (Cambridge, 1952).

4. THE CONFIDENCE MAN: An A-priori Interpretation

Hark ye yet again--the little lower layer.
All visible objects, man, are but as paste-
board masks. But in each event--in the
living act, the undoubted deed--there, some
unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth
the moulding of its features from behind the
unreasoning mask. If man will strike, strike
through the mask!

- Ahab

In all the best dramas, as Aristotle would have it, there is a peripety; and in the five-act drama of Melville's life, this occurs, as it should, in the fourth act or the period 1851 to 1857. (The three previous acts I would distinguish as follows: (1) 1819 - 1830: the untroubled years of Melville's childhood; (2) 1830 - 1839: the painful years following his father's bankruptcy; (3) 1839 - 1851: the years of careful revision and exploration from his first voyage on the St. Lawrence to the appearance of Moby Dick.) Now that Melville had exhausted his stock of personal experience at sea he was left holding the abstract of his thesis with no personal data left to illustrate it. This abstract was already in a weakened state because, as demonstrated, Moby Dick left him poised between the Ishmaelite acceptance Melville wished to advocate and the admiration he felt for the pose of Ahab.

But beneficent as the acquaintance of Hawthorne, to whom I attribute this new tension, proved for Moby Dick, his attitude towards the process of literary creation was among the contributing factors which well-nigh wrecked Melville in the years to come. Influenced by the artistic method of Hawthorne and divorced from the experiences which gave Melville's own conceptions validity, his thesis is steadily warped into a shape which, though not unrecognizable, is more consistent with Ahab's philosophy.

Consequently, Melville's method now takes a new direction. Instead of working from fact to theory, he now takes his supposedly proven thesis and begins to apply it to unfamiliar situations, either imagined or borrowed. It is during this phase of Melville's development that the term "putative statement," coined by R. P. Blackmur to characterize the totality of Melville's craft, becomes applicable.¹ Clearly, as Blackmur indicates, "putative statement" is a weak and dangerous form of argument, and in fact it encouraged and made possible the distortion of Melville's thesis to the extent that it left him deranged and suicidal.

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¹ See "The Craft of Herman Melville: A Putative Statement," in The Lion and the Honeycomb, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1955), by R. P. Blackmur.

(i) Pierre, Israel Potter, Short Stories

Bereft of his experiences, the life force of Melville's writings, he turned to that genre most directly opposed to experiential reality, the melodramatic romance, and wrote Pierre. As in Mardi the basic thesis of Pierre is the danger of insisting upon an absolute good; but in this new context the emotional absolutism criticized by Ibsen in Ghosts and The Wild Duck concerns the thesis most immediately apparent. In fact the original Melvillean character is largely dissipated among the sources and analogues which Pierre calls to mind.

Shakespeare's Hamlet is Melville's clearest model. Hamlet demonstrates the convulsive progress of an evil force which, like a disease, works itself out. This progress towards a healthier world is ironically first set in motion by the murder of old Hamlet who was not quite the ideal figure that his son imagines him to be. During the course of the play Hamlet sees beyond the demand of his father's ghost for a family blood feud and through to the cankerous evil which grips Denmark, realizes that he too is tainted, and finally and inevitably commits himself to the designing Providence. Considered in this manner the similarity between Hamlet and Pierre is indeed striking. Like Hamlet, Pierre has the same name as his father and begins as "The

glass of fashion and the mould of form." Each receives a mysterious message requiring him to dedicate his life to another's quarrel, a message which discloses impurity on the part of an honoured parent. Melville draws the reader's attention to the legend of the Memnon Stone: "For in this plaintive fable we find embodied the Hamletism of the antique world; the Hamletism of three thousand years age: 'The flower of virtue cropped by a too rare mischance'" (191). Hamlet's lament, "The time is out of joint; Oh -cursed spite,/That ever I was born to set it right!" is applied by Pierre to his own case. Hamlet is directed to avenge his father but to avoid harming Gertrude whom he suspects of complicity. So too with Pierre:

Thy two great resolutions--the public acknowledgment of Isabel, and the charitable withholding of her existence from thy own mother, --these are impossible adjuncts.--Likewise, thy so magnanimous purpose to screen thy father's honourable memory from reproach, and thy other intention, the open vindication of thy fraternalness to Isabel,--these also are impossible adjuncts (239).

Later, "disordered in his person," (255) Pierre approaching Lucy's cottage parallels Hamlet's visit to Ophelia. Each then deserts the girl he loves through a mistaken conviction. Just as Hamlet erases from his memory "all trivial, fond records," so Pierre, holding "averted" from him the

smiling and ambiguous portrait of his father, determines:

It shall not live. Hitherto I have hoarded up mementoes and monuments of the past; been a worshipper of all heirlooms; a fond filer away of letters, locks of hair, bits of ribbon, flowers, and the thousand and one minutenesses which love and memory think they sanctify:-but it is forever over now! (275)

Thus, Pierre, like Hamlet, becomes involved in the evil he would eradicate; but unlike Hamlet, instead of procrastinating and reflecting upon the ambiguity of his position, Pierre simplifies the issues, constructs an anti-allegory and acts accordingly and disastrously. At one point Pierre speaks of "his own hereditary liability to madness," (400) a madness which in view of his actions is much less in doubt than Hamlet's feigned insanity. These similarities then indicate the extent of Melville's reliance upon an external source.

Judging from the number of references "the fiery floods" (239) of Dante's Inferno must also have played a part in the composition of Pierre.² The city where the action of the second half of the book takes place is seen as a kind of 'Inferno.' There is too a general debt to the stock ingredients of romantic fiction: the fair-haired

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² G. Giovannini, "Melville's Pierre and Dante's Inferno," PMLA, LXIV (March, 1949), 70-78.

heroine and the dark-haired temptress, the use of portraits, the incest motif which is normally shown to be fallacious, the atmospherics surrounding the arrival of Isabel (the strange deliverer of the letter, Isabel's shriek, the dying father's white hand), the ravishment which Isabel and Delly undergo in the watch-house, the device of talking hypothetically about one's own problem which Pierre uses in his conversation with Falsgrave, and of course the intensely melodramatic conclusion. In his eagerness to engender mystery Melville often overplays his hand. For example, the reason for Mary Glendinning's dislike of the portrait should be obvious to any intelligent reader as should the "mystery" of Isabel's origin, but Melville deals with both circumstances at inordinate length. Occasionally, however, Melville uses a stock element for purposes of irony, most notably in the two opening chapters in which a world of Romeo and Juliet is described in a heightened pastoral style. But the deliberate unreality of these scenes serves to set off the less deliberate unreality of the rest of the book.

However much of Pierre may have been appropriated from other writers, the central thesis remains Melville's own. Most obviously the symbolism of Lucy and Isabel, the one met by day, the other by night, Pierre's "Good Angel" and "Bad Angel," is Melville's own (503). The dichotomy is

rather similar to that between Yillah and Hautia in Mardi; and reversing the apparent correspondence, William Braswell has pointed out several similarities between Isabel and Yillah.³ Both are associated with water and music and, like Yillah, Isabel seduces Pierre to his death. As did Taji in the case of Yillah, Pierre builds around Isabel an intricate fabric of allegory and self-projection and, believing he is committing himself to an ultimate good, allies himself with an ultimate evil because, in attempting to effect heavenly righteousness upon earth and play Christ, his means include human subterfuge. Taji, Ahab and Pierre are all victims of a similar eccentricity of perception: they try to deny the inherent ambiguities of life by oversimplification, projection, and anti-allegorizing. The reasonable solution--openly to acknowledge his sister--is not sufficiently clear-cut for Pierre.

Aside from this central thesis, Melville's touch reveals itself only in the subtle imagery, particularly the stone imagery which several critics have remarked upon. When Lucy asks Pierre to swear never to keep a secret from her he cries with prophetic intensity: "Something seizes me. Thy inexplicable tears, falling, falling on my heart, have now turned it to stone. I feel icy cold and hard; I will

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³ Braswell, pp. 97-8.

not swear!" (51) The idealistic recollection which Pierre has of his father is likened to a heavily ornamented temple supported precariously by "one central pillar" (93). The symbolism of the Memnon Stone is perhaps rather heavy handed as is the Enceladus trope towards the end. "Is my face Gorgon's?" Isabel asks Pierre and, a few pages later "there shot a terrible self-revelation" (268) over the face of Pierre: the fact of their incest? Arriving in a city of brick and mortar ("I like not the town," says Isabel. "Think'st thou, Pierre, the time will ever come when all the earth shall be paved?" [322]), Pierre retreats into the stone church of the Apostles and from there to the confined stone cell where the Memnon Stone finally tilts and Pierre dies. This finale is similarly melodramatic to that in Hardy's Tess of D'Urbervilles which figures monolithic Stonehenge. Following the dictates of the heart as opposed to those of the head, a characteristic distinction of Melville's, Pierre, as his name suggests, is petrified. Imagistic consistency is one of Melville's strong points and he uses the vine consistently as a figure of the tenacious hold of earthly reality. Upon part of the frame of her easel "Lucy has cunningly trained two slender vines, into whose earth-filled pots two of the three legs of the easel were inserted" (52). When Lucy takes the fatal step

of joining Pierre, thus duplicating Pierre's commitment towards Isabel, she sends her easel on ahead. When it arrives the vines have been uprooted. But escape is impossible and Pierre is caught in death. Isabel "fell upon Pierre's heart, and her long hair ran over him, and arbour'd him in ebon vines." The line "All's o'er, and ye knew him not!" comes "gasping from the wall" (505). Thus Melville unites the two threads of imagery in the final paragraph. There are other less extended figurative designs--the Christ role of Pierre, the characterization of Pierre's grandfather in whose soul "the lion and the lamb embraced" (39), Falsgrave's brooch showing "the allegorical union of the serpent and the dove" (143), and the bread and water re-enactment of the Last Supper between Isabel and Pierre--but, as in the examples above, what is typical of Melville serves, in the main, only as decoration. The usual mass of erudition is also lacking.

In the descriptions of Pierre as a writer Melville, perhaps unwittingly, points to the hollow core of his own novel. For the directions and methods which Melville lays down for the successful writer characterize precisely the empirical approach which Melville has now abandoned, but which he defended in Mardi. For example,

Pierre was not only a reader of the poets and other fine writers, but likewise--and what is a very different thing from the other--a thorough allegorical understander of them; a profound emotional sympathizer with them; in other words, Pierre himself possessed the poetic nature; in himself absolutely, though but latently and floatingly, possessed every whit of the imaginative wealth which he so admired, when by vast painstaking, and all manner of unrecompensed agonies, systematized on the printed page (341).

Later, discussing the question of originality, Melville concludes:

For though the naked soul of man doth assuredly contain one latent element of intellectual productiveness; yet never was there a child born solely from one parent; the visable world of experience being that procreative thing which impregnates the muses; self-reciprocally efficient hermaphrodites being but a fable" (361).

Melville comes to exactly the same conclusion at one point in The Confidence Man, but in this later novel, as in Pierre, it is "the visable world of experience" which is so conspicuously missing. Still later in Pierre, using a figure similar to one employed in Mardi books are seen

as atolls (i.e. the primitive coral islets which, raising themselves in the depths of profoundest seas, rise funnel-like to the surface, and present there a hoop of white rock, which though on the outside everywhere lashed by the ocean, yet excludes all tempests from the quiet lagoon within), digestively including the whole range of all that can be known or dreamed (394).

Pierre does not produce such a book because he had not "as yet procured for himself that enchanter's wand of the soul, which but touching the humblest experiences in one's life, straightway it starts up all eyes, in everyone of which are endless significances" (396). A few pages later Pierre is having rather more success and "seems to have directly plagiarised from his own experience" (21). But Melville in Pierre is certainly not doing this, and so he also fails on this occasion to produce an "atoll." Nevertheless, Melville stands by Pierre:

Against the breaking heart, and the bursting heat; against all the dismal lassitude, and the deathful faintness and sleeplessness, and whirlingness, and craziness, still he like a demi-god bore up. His soul's ship foresaw the inevitable rocks, but resolved to sail on, and make a courageous 'wreck' (471).

And wreck they did, both Melville and Pierre. Shades of Taji at this point may not be accidental when we recall the following passage from Mardi:

But fiery yearnings their own phantom-future make, and deem it present. So, if after all these fearful, fainting trances, the verdict be, the golden haven was not gained;--yet, in bold quest thereof, better to sink in boundless deeps, than float on vulgar shoals; and give me, ye gods, an utter wreck, if wreck I do (277).

The extract from Mardi contrasts with that from Pierre because in the earlier work Melville presented a degree of

objectivity now lacking. The quotation from Pierre continues: "Now he gave jeer for jeer, and taunted the apes that jibed him. With the soul of an Athiest, he wrote down the godliest things" (472). There can be little doubt that here Melville is with Pierre in a way that he was never with Taji.

Both Charles Feidelson⁴ and Marius Bewley⁵ have remarked the lack of an external order in Pierre, and this lack is clearly the result of too close an identification between the hero and Melville. In writing MobyDick Melville might have fallen into the same trap but he avoided it by using a character who is mainly an onlooker as narrator. The action of Pierre, on the other hand, largely comes to us through the drifting consciousness of the central character. Pierre, having lost his objective sense, says of his mother: "She loveth me, ay;--but why? Had I been cast in a cripple's mold, how then?" and then fails to consider how he himself might have responded had his brotherly acknowledgment and aid been invoked, not by the lovely Isabel, but by some "humped and crippled, hideous girl" (151). Melville, having lost his objective sense,

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⁴ Charles Feidelson, Jr., *Symbolism and American Literature*, (Chicago, 1953), pp. 186-207.

⁵ Marius Bewley, pp. 212-17.

sympathizes strongly with the anti-allegory of a totally un-moral world which Pierre comes to believe in:

It is the not impartially bestowed privilege of the more final insights, that at the same moment they reveal the depths, they do, sometimes, also reveal--though by no means so distinctly--some answering heights. But when only midway down the gulf, its crags wholly conceal the upper vaults and the wanderer thinks it all one gulf of downward dark (237).

All that Melville presents for a moral backdrop against which to set the dilemma of Pierre is the fragmentary pamphlet of Plotinus Plinlimmon entitled "Chronometricals and Horologicals." Hence, the true allegory represented by Babbalanja, Media, and the scroll of Vivenza in Mardi, and the story of Ishmael and Queequeg in Moby Dick, has been reduced to this. The philosophy of careful compromise which Plinlimmon advocates, the "talismanic secret, to reconcile this world with his own soul" (290), Melville would at one time have endorsed. But in the isolated and idealistic position of Pierre Melville satirizes the solution of virtuous expediency by showing its result in the meanest of disciples, Falsgrave, of whom Pierre says: "I think I begin to see how thy profession is unavoidably entangled by all fleshly alliances, and cannot move with goodly freedom in a world of benefices" (230). And when we finally meet Plinlimmon, apart in his tower at

the Apostles, he is merely "a face by itself" (408).

In effect, then, there is virtually no positive moral standard in Pierre, and hence no objective moral framework. Thus, a state of total ambiguity becomes also a state of total unreality. Isabel asks Pierre for a definition of Virtue and Vice and Pierre replies they are "two shadows from one nothing:"

'Then why torment thyself so, dearest Pierre?'
 'It is the law.'
 'What?'
 'That a nothing should torment a nothing, for
 I am a nothing. It is all a dream--we dream
 that we dreamed we dream.' (382)⁶

That is to say there is no answer to Isabel's question. The world consists "of nothing but surface stratified on surface."

By vast pains we mine into the pyramid;
 by horrible gropings we come to the
 central room; with joy we espy the
 sarcophagus; but we lift the lid--and
 no body is there!--appallingly vacant
 as vast is the soul of man (397).

Marius Bewley is correct when he writes of Pierre that

the mind does not correspond to, it
creates, its reality and we are left
 with almost no sense of an extramental
 world of things to corroborate the
 images formed in the mind.⁷

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⁶ Compare this passage with What is Man? and The Mysterious Stranger by Mark Twain.

⁷ Bewley, pp. 214.

Referring to Feidelson's analysis of Pierre, Bewley continues:

He [Feidelson] shows for example, how even the most physical facts and 'relationships' of Pierre's life are, for him at least, not grounded on any objective reality, that he is incapable of distinguishing between the external and the internal, and that for him 'the fiction is the thought and the fact' (192). The dream-like movement that this induces, and the insufficiently grounded relations between the characters defeat the physical action of Pierre almost as surely as the moral action is defeated by the pervading ambiguity that cancels all positive directions and motives.⁸

Truth becomes a statue "planted on a revolving pedestal" (469). Only lies never vary, and so:

Deep, deep, and still deep and deeper must we go, if we would find out the heart of a man; descending into which is as descending a spiral stair in a shaft, without any end and when that endlessness is only concealed by the spiralness of the stair, and the blackness of the shaft (402).

Again with Bewley, I see this as an image of "Melville's retreat from the real world."⁹ Viewing the book as spiritual autobiography, the cloying identification between Melville and Pierre seems unavoidable. But precisely because this autobiographical element is now entirely

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⁸ Ibid., p. 214.

⁹ Ibid., p. 216.

spiritual, divorced from experienced reality and embodied in an alien and unnatural form, Melville's thesis unrestrained by fact begins its grim mutation. In other words, for Melville an a-priori approach towards his craft leads him to an a-priori, invalid, anti-allegorical conception of the universe.

For a second time, in writing Israel Potter, Melville applies his thesis to an unfamiliar genre, this time that of biographical narrative. But because, on this occasion, Melville's aims are far less ambitious the characteristic trappings of his philosophy simply hang loosely and harmlessly to Israel Potter's story. Melville is being faithful not to his own experience but, as he claims in the "Dedication," to Henry Trumbull's account of Potter's history:¹⁰

Well aware that in your Highness' eyes the merit of the story must be in its general fidelity to the main drift of the original narrative, I forbore anywhere to mitigate the hard fortunes of my hero.

Instead, by subordinating his vision to that of a hack Melville produces an uneasy compromise. Israel Potter is like a picaresque novel of Defoe--Colonel Jacques for

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¹⁰ Roger P. McCutcheon, The Technique of Melville's Israel Potter, SAQ, XXVII (1928), 161-74.

instance--with pretensions towards profundity. The hero is a "plebeian Lear or Oedipus" (214). Consequently, just as the action of the story alternates between time spent in England and time spent elsewhere, so also it oscillates between picaresque incredibility and an absurd straining after effect. No doubt the misfortunes of Potter's life squared with Melville's own recent experience, but in failing to make the story entirely his own Melville found himself in a situation similar to that of his hero, who speaks of "the two horns of the constant dilemma of my life" (89).

The shallow characterization and the incongruous conversations which Potter enjoys with eminent people are consistent within the picaresque genre. But in any realistic context the successive interviews with George III, Benjamin Franklin, Paul Jones and Ethan Allen are little short of fantastic. Recognizing this inevitability Melville makes humorous capital out of these meetings, particularly that with Franklin. Potter, seeing that Franklin is removing all the little luxuries from his room, offers to help drag out the bedstead:

'My honest friend,' said the wise man,
pausing solemnly, with two bottles,
like swimmer's bladders, under his arm
pits; 'my honest friend, the bedstead
you will want; what I propose to remove
you will not want.'

Other far-fetched but consistent episodes would include

that in which Potter is taken for a ghost, and that in which he passes as a scarecrow. The humourously exaggerated description of Ethan Allen wrenching a sword from the hand of a private by catching it in his teeth, and the account of Potter's attempts to merge into the crew of the English ship the Serapis are similarly absurd.

But events become overtly incongruous when Melville adds his characteristic heightening metaphoric coating. For instance, the excessive comparisons in the chapters concerned with the fight between the Serapis and Richard indicate the actual paucity of the material Melville has borrowed. The following examples will suffice:

the gun-deck of the Serapis, at certain points, showed congealed for the instant in all attitudes of dauntlessness, a gallery of marble figures--fighting gladiators (168).

at the breech, crouched the wary captain of the gun, his keen eye, like the watching leopard's burning along the range; and behind all, tall and erect, the Egyptian symbol of death, stood the matchman. . . . They /the crew/ tended those rows of guns, as Lowell girls the rows of looms in a cotton factory. The Parcae were not more methodical; Atropos not more fatal; the automation chess player not more irresponsible (168).

Melville is apparently straining to give intensity to the climax of his book, and is failing because of a dependence on artistry rather than the force of personal experience. The final tacked-on aphorism can only be greeted with a

groan: "In view of this battle one may ask--What separates the enlightened man from the savage? Is civilization a thing distinct, or is it an advanced stage of barbarism?"

(173) A rather more successful Melvillian touch is the Greek relationship between Potter and Paul Jones. Jones himself, with his tatooed arm and civilized dress, would have appealed strongly to Melville's sense of the incongruous. Paul Jones's descent on Carrickfergus gives Melville an opportunity to indulge his weakness for extempore analogy:

So easily may the deadliest foe--so he be but dexterous--slide, undreamed of, into human harbours or hearts. . . . At daybreak no soul in Carrickfergus knew that the devil, in a Scotch bonnet, had passed close that way overnight (131).

However, occasionally Melville, in his eagerness to impress his own stamp on the borrowed material, involves himself in contradiction. Both Potter and Franklin, whom Melville appears to admire, combine "the apostolic serpent and dove" (19, 59). But Melville did not admire Falsgrave in Pierre who displayed the identical union. Franklin, in asking Potter, "do you repose confidence in my statements" (42), anticipates the Confidence Man. He later reprimands Potter:

An indiscriminate distrust of human nature is the worst consequence of a miserable condition, whether brought about by innocence or guilt. And though want of suspicion more than

want of sense, sometimes leads a man into harm, yet too much suspicion is as bad as too little sense. (52).

The Confidence Man (two years later) comes too "hard upon" this naive advocacy of trust to make the sentiment genuine. Melville is clearly in a state of unanchored flux.

Taking the hint from the Biblical connotations of the name Israel Potter, Melville, with little further justification, indicates a number of scriptural parallels. Chapter V is entitled "Israel in the Lion's Den," chapter XXI, "Samson Among the Philistines," chapter XXIII, "Israel in Egypt," chapter XXV, "In the City of Dis" (the now increasingly employed image of "the cursed Galapagos, over which the convict tortises crawl," (212) also helps to characterize London), and chapter XXVI is entitled "Forty-five Years" (in the Wilderness). But in attempting a comparison between Potter and Christ, presumably to gain elevation, Melville is surely going too far. Potter's confinement in a hiding-place in Squire Wordcock's house does not warrant the following extension:

In the blind tomb of the midnight he stretched his two arms sideways, and felt as if coffined at not being able to extend them straight out, on opposite sides, for the narrowness of the cell. He seated himself against one side of the wall, cross-wise with the cell, and pushed with his feet at the opposite wall [92, my italics].

Attention is drawn to Potter's "scars," "that slit upon the chest, which afterward, in the affair with the Serapis, being traversed by a cutlass wound, made him now the bescarred bearer of a cross" (222). Back in his native land, "less a return than a resurrection," Potter looks over the familiar countryside, the "true Potter's Field" (223). The most detailed and unconnected symbolic trope occurs in the description of the three graduated tiers of bricks, in the kilns. The bricks are graduated according to their exposure to the fires. Bricks equal people and the fires the heat of experience. Ironically Potter gains in stature only in the last section when such pretentious symbolism is dropped. Hence, the most effective part of the story is that with which Melville can most exactly identify himself and use empirically his own experience. Like Melville, Potter lives out the remnant of his life in the "depth of obscurity," "bewitched by the image of vapours." Things have changed on his return, so Potter retreats into himself and death.

Between 1853 and 1856 Melville turned to the short story form and turned further away from the real world. As a result, Melville's mode of composition involved an increasingly a-priori application of idea to fabricated illustrative story. In fact his short stories

may be best described as exemplar. In turn, Melville's thesis, lacking an empirical control, continued its process of distortion. Consequently, taking account of all the short stories, this thesis may be restated as follows: our existence is one of total misery; happiness, contentment, and sometimes even endurance is dependent on the preservation of illusion. Although Melville seems to be half aware of the paradox that this thesis is based on his own illusioning--illusioning which certainly does not help him to endure--he fails to perceive how this circumstance invalidates the logic of the same thesis. This double consequence, the causal connection between method and meaning, is demonstrated in the short stories.

The tales and sketches which appeared in Putnam's prior to January, 1856, Melville subsequently collected in a single volume which he entitled The Piazza Tales, having written an essay entitled "The Piazza" especially for the group. "The Piazza" is Melville's comment on the limitations of his method of composition at that time. From his new piazza Melville is able to look across to Greylock mountain, and dream. The surroundings give him a feeling of majesty, "so much so, that here, as with the reclining majesty of Denmark in his orchard, a sly earache invaded me" (438). Melville appears to be admitting that the a-priori world of illusion can lead to death. However, an

elusive "spot of radiance"* (442) among the mountain shade Melville interprets as evidence of fairies. A neighbour claims the light comes from a barn, but Melville retaliates, "though I had never been there, I knew better" (442). He becomes so enamoured of his rosy view that he cannot bear to look upon the Chinese creeper "climbing a post of the piazza" because of the "millions of strange, cankerous worms" among the blossoms (443). Eventually Melville's curiosity gets the better of him and, after a nautical journey in his "yawl-high-pommeled leather one," (442) he reached "a little low-storied, grayish cottage, capped, nunlike, with a peaked roof" (446), to discover from Marianna, the occupant, who is "like some Tahiti girl, secreted for a sacrifice" (447), the grim truth about her circumstances. In other words the places of the imagination are much pleasanter than reality. "Yours are strange fancies, Marianna," says Melville. She replies: "They but reflect the things" (449). However, she gains consolation by watching the shadows on the rocks. Her defiant stoicism in the face of adversity is displayed by other characters in Melville's other short stories, and distinguishes what

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* All paranthetical references to the short stories are to Selected Writings of Herman Melville (New York: The Modern Library, 1952).

Patricia Lacy calls the Agatha theme.¹¹

But although endurance is an admirable quality Melville can stand it no longer:

-Enough. Launching my yawl no more for fairyland, I stick to the piazza. It is my box-royal, and this amphitheatre, my theatre of San Carlo. Yes, the scenery is magical--the illusion so complete. And Madame Meadow Lark, my prima donna, plays her grand engagement here; and, drinking in her sunrise note, which, Memnon-like, seems struck from the golden window, how far from me the weary face behind it.

But every night when the curtain falls, truth comes in with darkness. No light shows from the mountain. To and fro, I walk the piazza deck, haunted by Marianna's face, and many as real a story [*my italics*] (453)7.

This appears to be Melville's comment on the latest turn in his career as a writer. He prefers an a-priori approach because he does not wish to face the harsh truth which an empirical method would force upon him. It is extremely difficult to establish connections between Melville and Hawthorne, but I would suggest that Hawthorne furnished Melville with the example of an a-priori mode of

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¹¹ Patricia Lacy, "The Agatha Theme in Melville's Stories," UTSE, XXXV (1956), 96-105. The "Agatha Theme" refers to a story outline which Melville sent to Hawthorne which embodies the idea of endurance evident also in "Cock-a Doodle-Do," "Poor Man's Pudding," "The Happy Failure," "The Fiddler," "Jimmy Rose," and Hunilla's story in "The Encantadas."

composition. In the introductory sketch, "The Custom House," Hawthorne describes how The Scarlet Letter took shape:

I sat in the deserted parlor, lighted only by the glimmering coal fire and the moon, striving to picture forth imaginary scenes, which, the next day, might flow out on the brightening page in many-hued description.

If the imaginative faculty refused to act at such an hour, it might well be deemed a hopeless case. Moonlight, in a familiar room . . . is a medium the most suitable for a romance writer to get acquainted with his illusive guests. . . whatever in a word, has been used or played with during the day is now invested with a quality of strangeness and remoteness, though still almost as vividly present as by daylight. Thus, therefore, the floor of our familiar room has become a neutral territory, somewhere between the real world and fairyland, where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet, and each imbue itself with the nature of the other.

The somewhat dim coal fire has an essential influence in producing the effect which I would describe. . . . This warmer light mingles itself with the cold spirituality of the moonbeams, and communicates, as it were, a heart and sensibilities of human tenderness to the forms which fancy summons up.¹²

The elements in the above account concur strikingly with those involved in Melville's "inland voyage to Fairyland" (440) in "The Piazza." Melville facing the mountains

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Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Scarlet Letter. (New York: The New American Library of World Literature, Inc., 1959), pp. 44-5.

parallels Hawthorne facing his fire; and like the flickering flames the ranges trick the imagination:

certain ranges, here and there double--
 filed, as in platoons, so shoulder and
 follow up upon one another, with their
 irregular shapes and heights, that,
 from the piazza, a higher and lower
 mountain will, in most states of the
 atmosphere, effacingly shade itself
 away into a higher and further one;
 that an object, bleak on the former's
 crest, will, for all that, appear
 nested in the latter's flank. These
 mountains, somehow, they play at hide-
 and-seek, and all before one's eyes
 (441).

Under certain witching conditions of light prevalent "late in autumn--a mad poet's afternoon; when the turned maple woods in the broad basin below me, having lost their first vermilion tint, dully smoked, like smouldering towns, when flames expire upon their prey" (441)--Melville noticed, "the spot in question." "The Piazza" then, which Melville uses to introduce his collection, is an admission of the a-priori basis of the stories included, and an indication that the example of Hawthorne, in this respect, must have influenced Melville stylistically. He may also have influenced Melville in other ways--his influence on Moby Dick has already been mentioned, and there are some connections between Pierre and the Blithedale Romance, between The Confidence Man and "The Celestial Railroad" and

"The Intelligence Office"¹³--but such obvious debts are superficial compared with the less obvious, less conscious, encouragement Melville received from the possibly unknowing Hawthorne to write from an a-priori instead of an empirical bias. The seated figure of Melville, lost in abstraction, gazing towards Greylock, is a fitting characterization of the a-priorist. Hence, it is surely not without significance that Melville dedicated Pierre to Greylock.

Almost all the short stories are contrived illustrations of related ideas. The career of Bartleby, engaged in "deadwall reveries" (24), can be read as a vindication of withdrawal, a prerequisite condition for the a-priorist. A world of walls closes in to form a prison; but as an assertion of individuality Bartleby performs a role analogous to that of Christ, a role which for the lawyer is presumably the means of salvation. If Franklin is correct, Bartleby is also a gloss on Matthew 25 where it is explained that "the least of men (particularly when he appears as a stranger), is the physical representative and representation of Christ."¹⁴ This evidence

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¹³ See Daniel Hoffman, Form and Fable in American Fiction, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 285-6, and E. G. Lueders, "The Melville-Hawthorne Relationship in Pierre and The Blithedale Romance," WHR, IV (August, 1950), 323-34.

¹⁴ Franklin, pp. 126-33.

substantiates Bartleby's Christ role. But the eccentric figures of Nippers and Turkey, which have almost no relevance except to establish the patience of the lawyer, seem to be a critique of Dickensian caricature. Perhaps, as clock-bound mechanisms rather than people, Nippers and Turkey also function as a contrast to Bartleby's demonstration of free-will. However, although Bartleby's career is one of the classic statements of a psychological condition, it is not literally convincing because it lacks an external empirical grounding.

The companion pieces "I and My Chimney," and "The Apple-Tree Table or Original Spiritual Manifestations," plus "The Lightning-Rod Man," likewise fail if they are read simply on a literal level. In all these stories Melville is again essentially concerned with his own psychology; and thus, by definition, his literary method is here that of an a-priorist. Like "The Lightning-Rod Man," "The Apple Tree Table," if we may believe Frank Davidson, is about Melville's attitude towards Calvinism.¹⁵ In both stories Calvinism emerges as an anti-allegory. Melville ejects the "pretended envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary to and from Jupiter Tonans" (220); and the

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¹⁵ Frank Davidson, "Melville, Thorcan, and 'The Apple-Tree Table,'" AL, XXV (January, 1954), 479-88.

ticking in the table, which symbolizes Calvinism, derives not from "original spiritual manifestations" but from bugs. Democritus, the pragmatist, defeats the supernatural ravings of Cotton Mather. The attic, given this interpretation, becomes a symbol of Melville's mind, but the illustrative story which Melville utilizes is based on a passage from Walden.¹⁶ In "I and My Chimney," if we agree with Merton M. Sealts, Melville is giving an account of a mental examination which he underwent at the instigation of his mother.¹⁷ The wife in the story has all the qualities of Melville's mother.

In the three parallel contrasts, "The Two Temples," "Rich Man's Pudding, and Poor Man's Crumbs," and "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids," Melville opposes the a-priori illusion with the grim empirical fact and appears to waver between the two attitudes. And it should be noticed that one part of each of these three paired contrasts is set in England and the other in the United States. The first of the two temples is a church, the second a theatre. The story concludes with Melville's considering "how that, a stranger in a

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¹⁶ Ibid., p. 487 and p. 483.

¹⁷ Merton M. Sealts, Jr., "Herman Melville's 'I and My Chimney,'" AL, XIII (1941), 142-54.

strange land, I found sterling charity in the one [the theatre]; and at home, in my own land, was thrust out from the other [the church]" (165). The representation of Cardinal Richelieu excels "the self-same, stately priest I saw irradiated by the glow-worm dyes of the pictures windows from my high tower-pew" (165). The a-priori illusion is better than the empirical truth. Here Melville seems to be advocating a world of imagination. But in "Rich Man's Pudding, and Poor Man's Crumbs" Melville is forced to reject the a-priori platitudes of Blandmour, the poet and "the honest fellow" (183), in the face of the true horror of poverty. To be happy it is necessary to be deluded. The same conclusion can be drawn from "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids." Melville juxtaposes the life of pleasant bachelor retreat against the responsibility, pain and pointlessness of a commitment to fertility. As E. H. Eby demonstrates, in "The Tartarus of Maids" "Melville's main intention is to represent through the medium of the story [and the factory system] the biological burdens imposed on women because they bear children."¹⁸ The operators are all maids, presumably, because in the agonized moment of child-birth the woman is

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¹⁸ E. H. Eby, "Herman Melville's 'Tartarus of Maids,'" MLQ, I (1940), 95-100.

on her own. On the other hand, the presumption of Bannadonno in "The Bell Tower" in attempting to create a mechanical man, Melville shows to be suicidal. Richard Chase shrewdly proclaims the tower with its two bells a phallic symbol¹⁹ and it is thus an appropriate image for the attempt Bannadonno is making at mechanical generation. But in "The Tartarus of Maids" and to a greater extent in "The Bell Tower" Melville is criticising the mechanical age which either reduces human beings to automatons or else encourages a man arrogantly to challenge God. The element of contrivance in all these stories should be readily apparent.

"Cock-A-Doodle-Do," "The Happy Failure: A Story of the River Hudson," "The Fiddler," and "Jimmy Rose" each illustrate that contentment involves replacing the real world with a world of illusion. The spirit of hope which the Cock in "Cock-A-Doodle-Do" imparts is in contradiction to the facts. To begin with, the narrator has only slight misgivings: "I was not wholly at rest concerning the soundness of Merrymusk's views of things, though full of admiration for him" (144). Perhaps his attitude changes when he hears the Cock crowing while Merrymusk and his family die. According to Egbert S. Oliver, the story is a

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¹⁹ Richard Chase, Herman Melville (New York, 1949), p. 125.

companion piece to "Bartleby" as a "satire on buoyant transcendental principles."²⁰ Both stories represent the antithetical extremes of transcendentalism. The illustrative story is again borrowed, this time from Thoreau's A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers.²¹ One cannot ignore the world, or can one? Melville's position is not clear. The "elderly uncle" (223) in "The Happy Failure," after the failure of the experiment, abandons his a-priori ambition which made him a miserable old man and advises, "never try to invent anything but happiness" (231). The boy acknowledges that "Example did for me the work of experience" (232). But as an invention happiness is also an illusion. "The Fiddler," Hautboy, although not the man he was, is happy. But his happiness seems to be dependent on his fiddle, the sound of which has the same effect as the Cock's crow. Hautboy enjoys the a-priori consolation of "the vine and the rose climbing the shattered shafts of his tumbled temple of Fame" (240). Jimmy Rose, the central character in the story of that title, had also fallen on hard times, but the roses in his cheeks indicate

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²⁰ Egbert S. Oliver, 'Cock-A-Doodle-Do' and 'Transcendental Hocus Pocus,' NEQ, XXI (June, 1948), 204-16.

²¹ Ibid., 207.

the saving illusion which, we may assume, preserved him from despair.

Without doubt, from his a-priori stance Melville now believed that to gaze upon reality (ironically, to see the world empirically) was to gaze upon blackness. References to Tartarus in "Cock-A-Doodle-Do!" ("I'd set them to stoking in Tartarus--I would" [1217]), "The Two Temples" ("The fiendish gas-lights, shooting their Tartarean rays across the muddy, sticky streets, lit up the pitiless and pitiable scene" [1597]) and, of course, "The Tartarus of Maids" make apparent that Melville considered this world an image of Hell. In the ten sketches included under the title "The Encantadas; or Enchanted Islands," where "the chief sound of life here is a hiss" (51), Melville fills in this picture of Hell. The Encantadas are "A group rather of extinct volcanoes than of isles; looking much as the world at large might, after a penal conflagration" (49). They present "a most Plutonian sight. In no world but a fallen one could such lands exist" (51). The Spaniards called them "The Encantada, or Enchanted Group," because of the "apparent fleetingness and unreality of the locality of the isles." Melville wonders if he too may not be "the occasional victim of optical delusion concerning the Galapagos" because they are so inhospitable. It is "Tartarus" (51). Too much has been made of the tortoise,

which is "both black and bright" (56). The narrative movement of the sketches which fall into five pairs is one of increasing pessimism climaxed by the unrelieved misery in the story of Hunilla:

Dire sight it is to see some silken
beast long dally with a golden lizard
ere she devour. More terrible, to see
how feline Fate will sometimes dally
with a human soul, and by a nameless
magic make it repulse a sane despair
with a hope which is but made. Unwitt-
ingly I imp this cat-like thing, sporting
with the heart of him who reads, for
if he feel not he reads in vain (93-4).

There is an empirical basis for these sketches, but Melville relied heavily on the writings of others--particularly on Captain David Porter's Journal of A Cruise Made to the Pacific Ocean (1822).²² Nevertheless, the final horror could only have been arrived at from an a-priori understanding.

In "Benito Cereno" Melville repudiates Captain Amasa Delano, the man who cannot see the ugly truth because of the bright world of illusion to which he holds. Melville is focusing attention on the obtuseness of the naive Delano. Delano eagerly grasps at anything which might suggest a favourable interpretation of events. For example:

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Russell Thomas, "Melville's Use of Some Sources in 'The Encantadas,'" AL, III (1932), 432-56.

His attention had been drawn to a slumbering negress, partly disclosed through the lacework of some rigging, lying, with youthful limbs carelessly disposed, under the lee of the bulwarks, like a doe in the shade of a woodland rock. Sprawling at her lapped breasts, was her wide-awake fawn. . . .

The uncommon vigour of the child at length roused the mother. She started up, at a distance facing Captain Delano. But as if not at all concerned at the attitude in which she had been caught delightedly she caught her child up, with maternal transports, covering it with kisses.

There's naked nature, now; pure tenderness and love, thought Captain Delano, well pleased (292).

It later emerges,

that the negresses of age, were knowing to the revolt, and testified themselves satisfied at the death of their master, Don Alexandro; that had the negroes not restrained them, they would have tortured to death, instead of simply killing, the Spaniards slain by command of the Negro Babo (346).

But Delano prefers to believe in an easy anti-allegory. Even at the end, he cannot understand what has cast such a shadow upon Don Benito. "The Negro," (352) is the reply. Delano simply will not take account of the fact that the world is basically evil. However, Melville is also deluded. As in the other short stories, events are mechanically manipulated to an increasingly warped argument. "Benito Cereno," read on a realistic level, makes no sense. As Matthiessen notes, the tragedy in "Benito Cereno" is "for all its prolonged

suspense, comparatively superficial" because Melville appears to forget the fact that the Negroes are the victims of social injustice in the first place.²³ The work is a contrived exercise which illustrates not experience but Chapter XVIII of Amasa Delano's A Narrative of Voyages of Travels in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres (1817)²⁴ and, according to Franklin, Stirling's life of Charles V.²⁵ By means of consistent imagery Cereno is characterized as the sickly King of Spain, in his cloister, and the Blacks are described as monks in a monastery. Melville, therefore, is arguing that Spain declined because of the excessive power of the Catholic church.²⁶ But this interpretation does not bear directly on the central theme; it simply illustrates Melville's imagistic virtuosity in wrenching details, in an a-priori fashion, to fit a thesis.

Melville's allegory at this point no longer fulfills the two basic requirements. It does not develop from a realistic sense of occurrences, and as a result its moral has become so distorted that it has no application in the

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23 F. O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance, (New York, 1941), p. 508.

24 H. H. Sædder, "Melville's 'Benito Cereno' and Captain Delano's Voyages," PMLA, XLIII (1928), 502-32.

25 Franklin, p. 137.

26 Ibid., 138-50.

outside world. This progression reaches its artistic climax in The Confidence Man, and its human climax in the virtual breakdown of Melville.

(ii) The Confidence Man: His Masquerade

With the exception of a number of niggling difficulties The Confidence Man has proved the least tricky of the four novels with which this study is concerned. The Confidence Man's masquerade has been seen through, under critical scrutiny, for the transparent thing that it is. For here Melville has perpetrated a simplification of the external universe in much the same style as Ahab's intolerable anti-allegory. During the previous ten years Melville's connections with his early experience had become increasingly tenuous. Within the narrow confines of "Arrow-head" Farm, near Pittsfield, Massachusetts, he was able to forget his original intuition that ambivalence is the true character of creation. In its now perverted form, Melville's thesis coincides with that of Ahab who claims:

All visible objects, man, are but as paste-board masks. But in each event--in the living act, the undoubted deed--there, some unknown, but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask. If a man will strike, strike through the mask! (I, 204)

And upon striking through, Melville finds the Confidence

Man. In other words, Melville's allegory in The Confidence Man corresponds to the a-priori anti-allegories in Mardi and Moby Dick. With Ahab he has come to insist upon an absolute evil.

At this point Lawrance Thompson's argument applies.²⁷ Seeing the Christian doctrines of faith, hope, and charity as the means by which Satan gains a purchase on the world, Melville cannot but conclude, and take as his new thesis, that God is Satan, or works through Satan, or at the very least embodies both good and evil. As an illustration of this syllogism Melville devised The Confidence Man. Because Melville is now taking an utterly a-priori approach, as opposed to the empirical approach he had employed through to Moby Dick, The Confidence Man lacks all validity on a literal level. In fact, it reads as something of a cross between a Satanic Medaeval morality play and one of Ben Jonson's comedy of humours. However, if

In drama Expressionism objectifies a state of mind by exploiting the resources of modern stage design and lighting, and by stylized acting, as well as by means of the non-realistic structure, symbolic characters, and specially patterned style of the play itself,²⁸

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²⁷ See the chapter entitled "Swindler as God's Agent."

²⁸ M. H. Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms, (New York: Rinehart & Company, Inc., 1957), p. 35.

then The Confidence Man may, perhaps, be best described as an Expressionist novel. The action consists of a series of permutations, variations on a fiddle, which make increasingly apparent the helplessness of man and the complete impossibility of any positive alternative.

Any resemblance to a trip which Melville took to Galena, by way of the Mississippi in June, 1840, is entirely accidental, although the enticements of lucrative employment must indeed have then seemed like a confidence trick. It is also unlikely that there was anyone aboard the ship Melville took like the "man in cream-colours" who boarded "the favourite steamer Fidele" anchored at St. Louis on April Fool's Day:

His cheek was fair, his chin downy, his hair flaxen, his hat a white fur one, with a long fleecy nap, He had neither trunk, valise, carpet-bag, nor parcel. No porter followed him. He was unaccompanied by friends. From the shrugged shoulders, titters, whispers, wonderings of the crowd, it was plain that he was, in the extremist sense of the word, a stranger (1).

But is he also a Confidence Man? As Elizabeth Foster argues, this "lamb-like figure" either represents or is an incarnation of Christ.²⁹ There is also little doubt that the

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²⁹ Elizabeth Foster, "Introduction" to The Confidence Man, (New York: Henrick's House, 1954), pp. 11

various avatars of the Confidence Man, often defined by snakelike analogy, should all be understood as avatars of Satan. What is not so certain is whether the hermaphrodite Christ is intended to be a white contrast to Black Guinea, the first avatar of the Confidence Man, or whether the lamb-like man is himself the first avatar. The latter explanation seems most probable if one bears in mind the "eight pieces of circumstantial evidence" which H. Bruce Franklin notes, here summarized and reduced to six:³⁰

- (1) The mysterious description of the lamb-like man's "advent" (1) and the fact that he forms the centre of interest in the first two chapters encourages the reader to think that he may be the title character of The Confidence Man. Otherwise the advent of the Confidence Man is never described.
- (2) Immediately after the lamb-like man with his white fleece hat vanishes, we learn of the "black fleece" and "bushy wool" of Black Guinea (10). Later the word "fleece" becomes one of the puns associated with the Confidence Man.
- (3) The first of the typically complicated sentences in The Confidence Man begins by describing the lamb-like man and ends by pointedly not repeating the "careful

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³⁰ Franklin, p. 155-57.

description" which a reward poster gives of "a mysterious, imposter, supposed to have recently arrived from the East" (1). Then we learn that the lamb-like man looks as if he had been "travelling night and day from some far country beyond the prairies" (5).

- (4) The lamb-like man introduces the text by which the Confidence Man is able to operate.
- (5) Black Guinea, the first undisputed avatar of The Confidence Man, appears in the very place where the lamb-like man falls asleep, a retired spot on the forecastle.
- (6) The last character to be introduced in the book, the mysterious boy, embodies the unity of the lamb-like man and Black Guinea. Like Black Guinea he has a black face and both are likened to "a Caffre" (330), and "a steer" (330, 10). Like the lamb-like man he has no place to sleep and he is dressed in the "fragment of an old linen coat, bedraggled and yellow" (325) which seems to be all that is left of the lamb-like man's cream coloured clothes.

An additional point, although Franklin does not make it, would be the various hints throughout, to be noted below, that God is the Confidence Man. The lamb-like mute is a contrast not to the Confidence Man but to the barber. In opposition to his messages of charity the barber nails to his door the sign: "NO TRUST" (4). Indeed all the

characters on board, which Melville lists in opposing pairs, "In short, a piebald parliament, an Anarcharsis Cloots congress of all kinds of the multi-form pilgrim species man" (9), can be divided into two groups, according to whether they have or have not trust.

But, structural elements, as shall be seen, break down into threes to form a triangular cul-de-sac. Hence, the various Confidence Men to follow fall into three groups, according to whether their appeal is primarily one of faith, hope, or charity. The first three active Confidence Men use the lever of charity to prise the money away from their victims. Clearly the success of the Confidence Man depends upon his ability to conceal his identity; thus, almost as an exhibition of virtuosity, having just appeared as the lamb-like man in cream colours, he immediately assumes the shape of a Negro beggar, Black Guinea, who shuffles around on stunted legs and partakes at different times of the qualities of a steer, a dog, a black sheep and an elephant. This shifting animal imagery which Melville uses to characterize both supposed Confidence Man and supposed victim comes finally into focus with the accumulation of snake metaphor and consequent association with Satan.

Such imagery provides additional evidence for the interpretation which Franklin gives of Black Guinea's controversial list of "ge'mmen" (14).³¹ After the "gimlet-eyed, sour-faced person" (12) with a wooden leg has questioned, in no uncertain terms, the honesty of his fellow cripple, Black Guinea responds by describing a number of gentlemen who can vouch for him, and thus lists all the Confidence Man's avatars in order--that is, in order except for "a ge'mmen in a yaller west," "a ge'mmen in a wiolet robe and a ge'mman as is a sodjer" (14). These discrepancies Elizabeth Foster and other critics have been unable to explain satisfactorily.³² However, Franklin demonstrates that all the descriptions can be seen as ambivalent. The ninth and last listing, "and ever so many good, kind, honest ge'mmen, more aboard what knows me and will speak for me, God bress 'em; yes, and what knows me as well as dis poor old darkie knows hissself, God bress him,"⁽¹⁴⁾ implies, as Franklin has it, "that there are considerably more than eight shapes of the Confidence Man in the world."³³ Franklin next shows how the various descriptions

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³¹ Ibid., 157-65.

³² Foster, pp. IXX-XXXI. J. W. Schroeder in "Sources and Symbols for Melville's Confidence Man," PMLA, LXVI (1951), 363-80, admits his inability to explain important parts of Black Guinea's list.

³³ Franklin, p. 160.

can have more than the obvious application. I quote two of his examples:

(1) 'A wery nice, good ge'mmen wid a weed.' John Ringman, the 'man with the weed' in the title of chapter 5, apparently seems to be behind this mask. But if we take 'weed' to mean tobacco, then the cigar scene of Charles Arnold Noble, the riverboat operator and Frank Goodman the Cosmopolitan, assumes added significance. And if we take 'weed' to mean what Richardson's Dictionary (1844) says it means, 'A covering; that which covers, spreads over, vest or vestment, clothing or garment,' then the first of Black Guinea's listings becomes as full of equivocal meanings as the last.

(2) 'A ge'mman in a gray coat and a white tie' 'A man in a grey coat and a white tie,' the agent for the Seminole Widow and Orphan Society, is the obvious appearance. But by no means unsuspect is the Methodist Minister who champions Black Guinea a few sentences after Black Guinea calls off his list. When he assaults the cynical cripple a voice cries out,³⁴ 'The white cravat against the world.'

Hence, the ambivalence is by no means restricted to the three discrepancies quoted above. And so, too, the pervasive but slippery animal imagery indicates that the Confidence Man may not be so easily identified as the list--and all critics previous to Franklin--apparently suggest.

Argument concerning the true nature of Black Guinea, meanwhile, enables Melville to present a tableau

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³⁴ Ibid., p. 161.

of the three types of character we are to meet in the novel: the apparent Confidence Man himself, the apparent skeptic (in this situation the man with the wooden leg who cries, "you flock of fools, under this captain of fools, in this ship of fools!" [17]), and thirdly the apparent gulls who constitute the majority, (in this situation the Episcopal clergyman who goes off in search of Black Guinea's references, and the Methodist who, pointing to the departing man with the wooden leg, says: "There he shambles off on his one lone leg, emblematic of his one-sided view of humanity." [17]) Without exception, those whom the Confidence Man cannot dupe are unpleasant characters. In other words, for Melville the "one sided view of humanity" is now probably the correct one.

John Ringman, the Man with the Weed, is the only avatar of the Confidence Man with a completely unblemished record. He succeeds in fooling both his victims. He accosts the first of these, Mr. Roberts, "the country merchant" (21), and claims familiarity:

'It is possible, my dear sir,' resumed he with the weed, 'that you do not recall my countenance? Why yours I recall distinctly as if but half an hour, instead of an age had passed since I saw you. Don't you recall me, now? Look harder' (21).

Presumably the merchant should remember because he was among the crowd gathered around Black Guinea. Having

convinced Mr. Roberts that he possesses "a faithless memory" (23), John Ringman relates his sad life story (a story which the reader does not hear for another six chapters) while the merchant, powerfully affected, presses bank notes into the stranger's hands. Before leaving, the Man with the Weed sets Henry Roberts up for the transfer-agent of the Black Rapids Coal Company, a further avatar of the Confidence Man who is shortly to appear. As the lamb-like man marks out the field for all the Confidence Men, so each in turn prepares the way for his successor. Mr. Robert's successor, however, is the young college student with the "swan-neck" (31) whom the Man with the Weed dissuades, we may assume, from reading "the ugly view" (33) of life as revealed by Tacitus. Hence, Tacitus is here the gagged representative of the opinion first voiced by the man with the wooden leg.

The charity approach reaches its apotheosis in the figure of the "man in a gray coat and white tie" (36), the agent for "a Widow and Orphan Asylum, recently founded among the Semmoles" (36). Although we are not yet aware of the meaning Melville is to ascribe to the Indian, clearly we are here confronted with the fourth avatar of the Confidence Man. After initial rebuttals from "a well-to-do gentleman in a ruby-coloured velvet vest" (36) and a

"hard-hearted old gentleman" (37), the man in a gray coat finally obtains donations from a young Episcopal clergyman, the one who in chapter three had gone in search of Black Guinea's references. The reappearance of characters already introduced is one of the methods by which Melville binds together the episodic structure of his work. But on this occasion, the reappearance of this clergyman serves to furnish H. Bruce Franklin with evidence sufficient to unmask another Confidence Man, one of the "ever so many good kind honest ge'mmen" mentioned by Black Guinea:

when the herb doctor says 'I took yonder clergyman' [134] for the President of the Black Rapids Coal Company, he points to a more subtle and complicated disguise of a confidence man.

. . . . .
The Episcopal clergyman--apparently a contrast to the Methodist minister just as the lamb-like man is apparently a contrast to Black Guinea--is defined obscurely but carefully, as another shape of the Methodist minister . . . three chapters later someone identified only as 'the young clergyman, before introduced' returns we then think that we discover that this is the Episcopal clergyman when, in highly suspicious rhetoric, he tells the man in gray of what Professor Foster calls his steadfast kindness and charity . . . when he is asked who was the cynical cripple, the clergyman betrays himself.

'He who I mentioned to you as having boasted his suspicion of the negro,' replied the young clergyman, recovering from disturbance, 'in short, the person to whom I ascribe the origin of my own distrust; he maintained that Guinea was some white scoundrel, betwisted and painted up for a decoy. Yes these were his very words, I think' [40].

'Impossible!' is the next word, and impossible it is that the young Episcopal clergyman could know the cripple's very words, the very words to which he ascribes the origin of his distrust.³⁵

When the cynical cripple spoke the "very words" in question the Episcopal clergyman had already left in search of Black Guinea's references. The Methodist minister, on the other hand, had just arrived at that point. It thus becomes impossible to say unequivocally of any character in The Confidence Man that he is not a Confidence Man. In fact, the insight demonstrated by the man with a wooden leg--who joins the Man in a Grey Coat and the clergyman to reiterate and close his case against the confidence of charity--points to an incriminating and peculiar understanding of the nature of the Confidence Man: "You two green-horns! Money, you think is the sole motive to pains and hazard, deception and devilry, in this world. How much money did the devil make by gulling Eve?" (42)

But a Gentleman with Gold Sleeve-Buttons, the Man in a Grey Coat's next victim, is a more clearly ambiguous case. As a "man of more than winsome aspect" (45), "like the Hebrew governor" (47), Pontius Pilate or perhaps God, he keeps his hands clean by acting through a negro

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³⁵ Ibid., pp. 166-7.

surrogate, and thus anticipates Mark Winsome's relationship with Egbert. Also, since Melville appears to imply a similar understanding between God and Satan, it may be worth remarking the evidence which links the Man with Gold Sleeve-Buttons with God. The Confidence Man quits the clergyman with the explanation, "yonder is one who I know will contribute, and largely" (45). Like the lamb-like man, the Gentleman with Gold Sleeve-Buttons both wears a garb emblematic of purity and is a stranger:

But, considering that goodness is no such rare thing among men--the world familiarly know the noun; a common one in every language--it was curious that what so signalized the stranger, and made him look like a kind of foreigner, among the crowd (as to some it may make him appear more or less unreal in this portraiture), was but the expression of so prevalent a quality (45).

Increasing the tone of equivocation, this same paragraph ends as follows:

But if with the same undefiledness of consequences to himself, a gentleman could also sin by deputy, how shocking would that be! But it is not permitted to be; and even if it were, no judicious moralist would make proclamation of it (46).

And especially would he not mention it if the accused in question happened to be God. After distinguishing between goodness and the more exalted quality of righteousness--although in the case of the Man with Gold Sleeve-Buttons, "it is still to be hoped that his goodness will not at

least be considered criminal in him" (47)--these values are completely reversed in the following paragraph:

It was pleasant to mark the good man's reception of the salute of the righteous man, that is, the man in gray; his inferior, apparently, not more in the social scale than in stature. Like the benign elm again, the good man seemed to wave the canopy of his goodness over that suitor, not in conceited condescension, but with that even amenity of true majesty, which can be kind to any one without stooping to it (48).

That is to say that although the Man in a Grey Coat embodies the superior quality of righteousness he is inferior to the man who embodies the lesser quality of goodness--or is Satan above God? The Man with the Gold Sleeve-Buttons willingly hands over his crisp new notes; he is, in fact, all in favour of charities. His attitude starts the Man in Grey off on a description of his Protean easy-chair, in context a symbol of the comfortable doctrines of Christianity, and his grandiloquent plans for the World's Charity in which he assumes the role of the Redeemer: "A not unsilvery tongue, too, was his, with gestures that were a Pentecost of added ones, and persuasiveness before which granite hearts might crumble into gravel" (55). As a final easy touch, the Confidence Man extorts twenty dollars for the Seminole Widows from "a charitable lady" who is herself a widow.

The next three Confidence Men play, rather more specifically, on the possibility of hope--hope of financial reward, hope of a return to health, and the hope that man is not completely bad, or at least now bad all the time. The enticement is then that of investment. John Truman, president and transfer agent of the Black Rapids Coal Company, is the fifth shape of the Confidence Man. The Black Rapids Coal Company is highly suggestive of Hell, and the New Jerusalem, another pie in which Truman has a finger, is clearly Heaven; hence, this is one of Melville's many hints that God and Satan are either one and the same person, or else are in collusion. Anything doubtful about the success which an earlier Confidence Man enjoyed with the student is dispelled in the encounter between Truman and the same student, his first victim, who is this time completely taken in. In the cabin a number of copies of a poem with the Wordsworthian title, "Ode on the Intimations of Distrust in Man, Unwillingly Inferred from Repeated Repulses, in Disinterested Endeavours to Procure his Confidence," have been scattered around, but their presence does not prevent Mr. Truman doing business with Henry Roberts, the merchant met earlier. So eager is Mr. Roberts that the Confidence Man is even able to suggest that his transfer book may be bogus as, Melville seems to be intimating, is the Bible.

The transaction concluded, Mr. Roberts in the chapter entitled "Story of the Unfortunate Man" relates to Truman the tale of woe originally told to him by the Man with a Weed and apparently endorsed by the Man in a Gray Coat. "But," remarks Melville, "as the good merchant could, perhaps, do better justice to the man than the story, we shall venture to tell it in other words than his, though not to any other effect" (76). The repetitive pattern in The Confidence Man, although a positive quality, is broken up by a number of digressions such as the "Story of the Unfortunate Man," and almost all of them are prefaced by a comment similar to the one just quoted. These stories are introduced as illustrations of various points of view, but inevitably they are told from second or third hand; they are never based on personal experience. When we remember that at one time only an opinion based on empirical evidence or personal experience had any kind of validity where Melville was concerned, is Melville implying that the reader should not accept as absolute any one of these stories or is he simply stating the fact without inference? For the fundamental weakness of these stories and of The Confidence Man as a whole is that they are not grounded in experienced reality, and in this instance as well as in three complete chapters Melville draws attention to the sand on which his edifice is constructed.

The story in this instance is that of a man brought low by his shrew of a wife, Goneril, who is described significantly as an Indian:

Her Indian figure was not without its impairing effect on her bust, while her mouth would have been pretty but for a trace of moustache. . . . Withal she had hard, steady health like a squaw's, with as firm a spirit and resolution (77-8).

The portrait is supposedly based, according to Egbert S. Oliver, on a Mrs. Fanny Kemble,³⁶ but this does not make the unfortunate man's story Melville's own experience. Goneril is in fact a Confidence Woman because Indians and Confidence Men come to be synonymous; however, because the merchant cannot defend the story as his own experience, Mr. Truman is able to equivocate its meaning, whitewash Goneril, and transfer the blame to the unfortunate man. Ironically he uses the balanced view-point which Melville once held: "In brief, there were probably small faults on both sides, more than balanced by large virtues; and one should not be hasty in judging" (84). One may question why Melville should divorce this story from its original teller by seven chapters, but the title--"Story of the Unfortunate Man" instead of "Story of the Unfortunate Man with a Weed"--provides a clue to the answer. Obviously because Mr.

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³⁶ Egbert S. Oliver, "Melville's Goneril and Fanny Kemble," NEQ, XVII (1945), 489-500.

Ringman, the Man with the Weed, was a Confidence Man, the unfortunate man's experience could never have been his, and we are soon to meet a character from whom he could have appropriated it.

However, to return to the present Confidence Man, John Truman, before relinquishing the stage to his successor, leaves on a high note by swindling a senile miser who is dying, extended on a "procrustean" (94) bed. Since this uncomfortable piece of furniture appears to be a direct contrast to the Protean Easy-chair of Christianity the miser should have known better; he is portrayed as being to some extent familiar with the uncomfortable philosophy which Melville is now expounding. In this connection it should be noticed again that none of the characters who express Melville's view-point in The Confidence Man leads a happy, contented, whole and comfortable life.

When the Confidence Man next appears he is a quack herb-doctor and bonesetter dressed in a snuff-coloured surtout. After extolling the virtues of Nature to a sick man, a book entitled "Nature in Disease" is raised as an objection, to which the quack replies:

A title I cannot approve; it is suspiciously scientific. . . . As if nature, divince nature, were aught but health; as if through nature disease is decreed! But did I not before hint of the tendency of science, that forbidden tree? (106)

But the herb-doctor fails to mention that the forbidden tree was part of nature after all. Nevertheless, the sick man takes the fruit and buys the medicine, acts which become equivalent to swallowing the doctrines of Christianity. Assuming a Christ pose, the herb-doctor reassures the sick man:

forgive that imprudent phrase 'never see you again.' . . . I repeat, then, that it may be that we shall not soon have a second interview, so that hereafter, should another of my boxes be needed, you may not be able to replace it except by purchase at the shops; and, in so doing, you may run more or less risk of taking some not salutary mixture (108).

The reference here is, most probably, to the Second Coming, but the final couplet from Virgil is unequivocal: "This is no mortal work, no cure of mine,/Nor art's effect, but done by power divine" (109). This is perhaps Melville's clearest statement that God is the arch Confidence Man.

However, when next attempting to sell his "Samaritan Pain Discover" the herb-doctor is interrupted by the arrival of the "invalid Titan in homespun" (112):

In one hand he carried a heavy walking-stick of swamp-oak; with the other led a puny girl, walking in moccasins, not improbably his child, but evidently of alien maternity, perhaps Creole, or even Camanche (112).

When we recall the connotations of the Indian type the invalid Titan's aggressive attitude does not make sense, that is, unless we can apply the story of the unfortunate

man. Surely this is the man who married the Indian Goneril. She had a child, "a little girl of seven, her father's consolation and pet" (80). Clearly the 'invalid Titan' knows all about the Indian mentality and presumably hopes that, away from her mother, his daughter may not go the same way. Consequently, the advances of the Confidence Man

drew no responsive playfulness from the child, nor appeared to gladden or conciliate the father; but rather, if anything, to dash the dead weight of his heavy-hearted expression with a smile hypochondriacally scornful (112).

The claims which the herb-doctor makes for his panacea enrage the Titan: "You lie! Some pains cannot be eased but by producing insensibility, and cannot be cured but by producing death" (115). When the herb-doctor tells of a "Louisiana widow" who was cured "of neuralgic sorrow for the loss of husband and child" (115) the Titan can restrain himself no longer and a fist lashes out: "It was the giant, who with a countenance lividly epileptic with hypochondriac mania exclaimed--'Profane fiddler on heart-strings! Snake! (116) This is not hypochondria in the normal sense, but rather only where Indians are concerned.

After this outburst, in order to regain his lost confidence, the herb-doctor leaves the room for awhile and returns to ask, "Is the agent for the Seminole Widow and Orphan Asylum within here" (118) to receive half of the

herb-doctor's proceeds? When no one responds he offers the money to any needy person, and reluctantly a "wounded hussar" (120) shuffles up to receive it. A discussion then ensues, "which now became a sort of triangular duel and ended, at last, with but a triangular result" (121), as does The Confidence Man. Like many of the chapters in this book, the next begins in the middle of a conversation and the reader spends the rest of the chapter puzzling over the precise relationship between the conversationalists. So at the end of the discussion between the soldier of fortune with paralyzed legs and the herb-doctor, although the soldier is gulled, we are reasonably certain that he is a Confidence Man in his own right, if only on a temporal level. The autobiographical story which he tells, paralleling in some ways that of the unfortunate man, in that both are the victims of injustice and evil, does not convince the herb-doctor. But the soldier is not surprised: "Hardly anyone believes my story, and so to most I tell a different one" (127). In other words, just like the Man with a Weed, the soldier of fortune is cashing in on his hard-luck stories. Next returns the senile miser to be fooled a second time although he pays for the "Omni-Balsamic Reinvigorator" with "clipped and sweated" (138) coins. But the herb-doctor can in no way deceive Pitch, a Missouri

backwoodsman, who seems like a reincarnation of the man with a wooden leg and the invalid Titan. As apart from the Confidence Man there are only two basic types in the work, character interest is almost nil. There are in fact three masquerades in progress concurrently, differentiation being limited largely to external dress.

Nevertheless, if the herb-doctor cannot fool Pitch, then the man from the Philosophical Intelligence Office, the Confidence Man in his seventh avatar, can. In the chapter entitled "In the Polite Spirit of the Tusculan Disputations," Pitch as Diogenes is persuaded to the view of the P.I.O. man who represents Socrates, against his better judgment, "derived from an immense hereditary experience" (154), "that boy or man, the human animal is, for most work-purposes a losing animal." "Yes, sir, yes. My name is Pitch; I stick to what I say. I speak from fifteen year's experience; five and thirty boys" (155). And of course, as Melville once agreed, his experience did not mislead him. In reply to the Confidence Man's question that mankind "domestically viewed" "present as pure a moral spectacle as the purest angel could wish" (158-9), Pitch exclaims, "Gammon! You don't mean what you say. Else you are like a landsman at sea: don't know the ropes, the very things everlastingly pulled before your eyes" (159). Undeterred, the P.I.O. Man takes another approach and

claims that even Satan did not know the kind of man Adam would turn into, but again Pitch has the answer: "I don't know about that. The Devil is very sagacious. To judge by the event, he appears to have understood man better even than the Being who made him" (162). Nevertheless, at the end of sixteen pages of tediously convoluted argument Pitch agrees to try one more boy instead of a labour-saving machine. However, when the Confidence Man at Cairo leaves Pitch by himself in chapter 23, the exact centre of the book, his suspicions return:

Analogically, he couples the slanting cut of the equivocator's coat-tails with the sinister cast of his eye; he weighs slyboot's sleek speech in the light imparted by the oblique import of the smooth slope of his worn boot-heels; the insinuator's undulating flunkeyisms dovetail into those of the flunkey beast that windeth his way on his belly (174).

Because of the position of this chapter several critics, most recently Hennig Cohen,³⁷ have taken Pitch to represent Melville's positive answer; but although he strikes the most romantic pose and sees the truth there is no positive attitude in The Confidence Man, only alternative possibilities. And in the second half of the book these alternative possibilities are isolated.

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³⁷ Hennig Cohen, "Introduction" to The Confidence Man (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1964), p. XVII.

Turning to face the character who had slapped him on the shoulder, Pitch confronts "the parti-hued, and rather plumagy aspect" (175) of the Cosmopolitan. He is probably the eighth avatar of the Confidence Man but he is unlike his predecessors in that he seems positively virtuous in comparison with the people he comes up against. However, his name, Frank Goodman, links him with John Ringman and John Truman, and as a composite figure he seems to embrace all the previous confidence men, just as faith embraces the notions of hope and charity. For it is this general belief on faith or confidence in man that the Cosmopolitan is hawking around, a belief, according to Melville, at the root of all evil. At no point does the Cosmopolitan attempt to extort money. But he fails completely with the new wiser Pitch. Turning a phrase from Hamlet, the Cosmopolitan tells him "man, still delights me" (177) and provokes a tirade from Pitch to which he objects: "Ah, now," depreciating with his pipe, "irony is so unjust; never could abide irony; some thing Satanic about irony. God defend me from Irony, and Satire his bosom friend" (183). As Lawrance Thompson observes, there is a deliberate ambiguity here as to whether "his" relates back to God or Satan.³⁸ Pitch identifies the Cosmopolitan for

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³⁸ Thompson, p.

what he is--"Diogenes masquerading as a cosmopolitan" (184). Hence, the Cosmopolitan leaves Pitch whom he considers "an Ishmael" (185), and who is also the most extended characterization in the book.

The next ten chapters cover the conversation of the Cosmopolitan and Charles Noble, who like the Soldier of Fortune, is a confidence man of this world. They also include two of the three stories which form pivotal points in this second half of the book because they illustrate the three main attitudes which may be adopted in a universe, the God of which is a Confidence Man. Charles Noble tells the first of these, the story of Colonel John Moredock, the Indian hater. Once again the point to be emphasized is that the story is second hand. All three stories are contrived illustrations. On the one occasion Noble tried to catch a glimpse of Colonel Moredock he was unsuccessful. As an introduction to the subject Noble explains "The Metaphysics of Indian Hating," not in his own words, but in those of a judge named James Hall. Once again Melville is acknowledging the a-priori base of the story but this story conveys Melville's 'truth' and it is maintained within the story that the opinions expressed have validity because they are based on personal experience, on empiricism. Either Melville is subtly undercutting Moredock's attitude (which

makes the entire book contradictory) or, more likely he has failed to make the logical extension, and perceive the invalidating contradiction. But naturally enough Melville could not find material in the external world to substantiate his inner vision, so he substituted an a-priori approach and came up with a distorted story like that of the Indian-hater, and like The Confidence Man as a whole, which is neither convincing on a literal level, nor does it contain a truth which can be applied to the real world. As mentioned earlier and as almost every critic has noticed, the Indian is in this novel a symbol of pure evil, or of the Confidence Man.³⁹ The source of the account of the Indian-hater is James Hall's Sketches of History, Life and Manners, in the West, (1835); but, as Hennig Cohen observes, Melville leaves out the material which Hall incorporates to justify the behaviour of the Indian.⁴⁰ Given that the Indian is evil, Moredock's response of pure hate and aggression is a legitimate attitude to adopt, whether it be a "Pagan" attitude, as the Cosmopolitan suggests or not. But Moredock is not, as Mr. Schroeder

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³⁹ See Schroeder and Roy Harvey Pearce, "Melville's Indian Hater: A Note on the Meaning of The Confidence Man," PMLA, LXVII (Dec., 1952), 942-48.

⁴⁰ Cohen, p. XVI.

maintains, the "ultimate hero" of the book,⁴¹ because given an immoral universe there can be no hero in any accepted sense. It must, however, be admitted, that his response, and that of the other backwoodsmen, the Titan and Pitch, although ultimately pointless is based on an "empirical" perception of reality and as such would be endorsed by Melville. But Melville, of course, is deluding himself in thinking this perception empirical.

Meanwhile, Frank and Charlie, as they now call each other, have become the best of friends, a mood abetted by the wine they are consuming, and they express opinions of universal trust and brotherhood. Frank claims that "if truth don't speak through the people it never speaks at all," which leads Charlie to recite a "Poetical Eulogy of the Press." But Charlie's less trusting feelings are evident in the following remark:

And so, what wonder that he who loves not wine, that sober wretch has a lean heart-- a heart like a wrung-out old blueing-bag, and loves not his own kind? Out upon him, to the rag-house with him, hang him--the ungenial soul! (234)

However, what is merely implied stands fully revealed when the Cosmopolitan declares his want of money. There occurs "A Metamorphosis more Surprising Than Any in Ovid," and

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⁴¹ Schroeder, p. 379.

Charlie cries "go to the devil, sir!" (240) Master of the situation, the Cosmopolitan explains that he was joking and relates the story of Charlemont, the gentleman-madman, which adds little to Melville's theme. Reading between the lines it seems we are being presented with an alternative attitude to that of Moredock, one of self-imposed illusion. Charlemont has presumably seen the malignant reality of God but chooses for the most part to disregard it and go on living as before. The Cosmopolitan freely admits the story is not true.

Over the next six chapters the Cosmopolitan disputes with Mark Winsome, a mystic, and his disciple Egbert. These two portraits have been identified by Egbert S. Oliver as Emerson and, rather more doubtfully, Thoreau.⁴² "A haggard, inspired-looking man" "peddling a rhapsodical tract" (258) who wanders in, Harrison Hayford has identified as Poe.⁴³ These characters, then, are part of an additional masquerade, some examples of which have already been pointed out, in which Melville characterizes his contemporaries. Melville hits hard at Transcendentalism

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⁴² Egbert S. Oliver, "Melville's Picture of Emerson and Thoreau in The Confidence Man," CE, VIII (Nov., 1946), 61-72.

⁴³ Harrison Hayford, "Poe in The Confidence Man," NCF, XIV (1959), 207-18.

through Winsome and Egbert, the Mystical master and his practical disciple. The Cosmopolitan almost becomes a measuring rod by which we measure the depth of the inhumanity of Winsome and Egbert.

Re-enacting the scene with Charles Noble, the Cosmopolitan asks Egbert his opinion and once again declares his want of money. The situation is insoluble Egbert explains:

Because my rule forbids it. I give away money, but never loan it, and of course the man who calls himself my friend is above receiving alms. The negotiation of a loan is a business transaction. And I will transact no business with a friend (268).

If he were to lend money to a friend he would be doing him a disservice and to illustrate this point, between the chapter entitled "The Hypothetical Friends" and that entitled "A Rupture of the Hypothesis," Egbert relates "The story of China Aster," and as with the previous stories it is told "at second hand." Egbert points out

I wish I could do so in my own words, but unhappily, the original storyteller here Winsome has so tyrannized over me, that it is quite impossible for me to repeat his incidents without sliding into his style (275).

China Aster (the name of a common field flower), a candle maker, was ruined by confidence, and a friendly loan from

his friend Orchis (the name is suggestive of the tropical plant). As Daniel G. Hoffman notes:

Orchis is the confidence man in yet another masquerade. For he is a shoemaker; one whose calling is to defend the understandings of men from naked contact with the substance of things.⁴⁴

As China Aster's epitaph has it, he was ruined because he was persuaded into "an ardently bright view of life, to the exclusion of that counsel which comes by heeding the opposite view" (292).

Like the two previous stories, we are presented with another possible attitude to the world as revealed by Melville, that of the dupe. A fourth alternative is presented by the complete book; and that, of course, is to ape the Confidence Man. The important point to realize is that, in an immoral universe, or rather a universe in which the morality of Satan operates, no single one of the four possible alternative attitudes mentioned is necessarily any better than the other. Except that there is the possibility that Melville admits the a-priori foundations of the accounts of Moredock, Charlemont and China Aster to insinuate that only by aping the Confidence Man is a person accepting reality. No wonder Melville had given Hawthorne

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⁴⁴ Hoffman, pp. 305-6.

the impression that he had "pretty much made up his mind to be annihilated." But Melville was not being honest with himself. The story of China Aster, even more so than the two previous stories, is completely unrealistic, precisely because it is manufactured to embody a thesis and does not arise from Melville's experience of the world. Even the Cosmopolitan is appalled, and tells Egbert,

Pray, leave me, and with you take the last dregs of your inhuman philosophy. And here, take this shilling, and at the first wood-landing buy yourself a few chips to warm the frozen natures of you and your philosopher by (297).

Apparently the confidence men of this world, especially those of the philosophical type, are even more despicable than the divine Confidence Man. But what Melville does not seem to realize is that his own philosophy as presented in The Confidence Man is equally inhuman. Half consciously, Melville in committing himself to an a-priori line of reasoning and constructing his own anti-allegory, has ironically gulled himself. Melville has become a doubting Thomas who will not place his hands in the wounds--perform an empirical test.

In the concluding section Melville rounds the masquerade off by having the Cosmopolitan dupe William Cream, the barber who hung up the "No Trust" sign. Hinting at his supernatural origin, the Cosmopolitan denies that he

is "only a man. . . . You can conclude nothing absolute from the human form, barber" (299-300). The fact that the Cosmopolitan sits on the central chair of the "three thrones of the dais" (307) suggests once more that God and Satan are the same person. In thinking the Cosmopolitan "QUITE AN ORIGINAL" (316), the barber draws a connection with the lamb-like man who was described as "quite an original genius" (1).

The barber having drawn his attention to a distrusting passage in the Book of Proverbs, the Cosmopolitan enters a gentleman's cabin where he remembers seeing a Bible in order to check. Daniel G. Hoffman is helpful at this point:

That cabin is curiously described. Many men sleep in berths ranged on the walls; a 'solar lamp' swings from the centre ceiling. Other lamps hang nearby, 'barren planets which had either gone out from exhaustion, or been extinguished by such occupants of berths as the light annoyed, or who wanted to sleep, not see.' The setting is clearly an emblem of the end of a universe in which man is too tired to grope any longer toward moral choices.⁴⁵

On the lamp's ground glass shade are the figure of a man with a halo, which is emblematic of St. John and the New Testament, and the altar of the Old Testament, the horns of which signified sanctuary. In other words, the Bible

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⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 307.

which the "clean, comely, old man" (321) is reading underneath the lamp is equated with the lamp which gives an artificial, not to say a false light. Therefore the Bible relates an anti-allegory. The old man has a countenance like "good Simon" (321), and his long vigil is rewarded by the arrival of the unpleasant boy. Given the points of resemblance already noted between the lamb-like man and this boy, this boy is the reality of Christ. This is the occasion of the Second Coming, the Judgment Day. In place of salvation, this Christ sells the old man a door lock and a money belt and throws in a "Counterfeit Detector" which is too complicated to understand. Hopelessly confused, the old man whimpers for a life-preserver, like Queequeg's coffin, but accepts the tin chamber pot which the Cosmopolitan hands him. All these articles involve distrust but because this is the end of the world it is perfectly right that the boy Christ should now encourage a lack of confidence. The sham is over and so, leading the old man away, the Cosmopolitan, who is God or Satan, extinguishes the lamp. That is, he rubs out the Bible and the Universe since it has been discovered at last that the only truth which the Bible offers is that listed under the Apocrypha. Now we are literally in the dark.

The above commentary has deliberately sidestepped three important chapters in which Melville, after the manner of Fielding, comments on his art. In these chapters Melville acknowledges, and tries to make excuses for, the lack of realism in The Confidence Man, and consequently they reveal how we should regard the work. As already noted, the various stories, or digressions, are contrived illustrations of various attitudes, and they consequently fail to meet the double standard of the successful allegory: (1) they are not literally convincing, (2) they do not contain a truth which has validity in the real world. The same limitations apply to the complete work. It is an ironic, bitter, even agonized formula, but a formula no more because, as explained in the introduction, it was arrived at during Melville's period of retreat from the world. Melville attempts to answer this criticism. Basically he argues that the lack of realism is only apparent. The first authorial intrusion comprises chapter 14 in which Melville feels he has to explain an inconsistency in the character of the merchant, namely his loss of confidence. Reasonably enough Melville claims "that in real life a consistent character is a rara avis" (89). "Experience is the only guide here" (90). A book should furnish the reader with a "true delineation of the world;"

it ought to fare with him something as with a stranger entering, map in hand, Boston town; the streets may be very crooked, he may often pause; but thanks to his true map [the true allegory], he does not hopelessly lose his way (92).

Very true, but Melville's present map is like that which Redburn tried to use to find his way around Liverpool. It is an anti-allegory. Again, what he says about depth characterization is fine, but the figures in The Confidence Man fall into the "transparent" class which Melville mentions (90). In chapter 33, another authorial intrusion, Melville contradicts all that he has just said. To anyone who wishes to object to the unreality of the *Cosmopolitan*, Melville answers that a novel should be a "work of amusement" (243), an escape from the real dull life. In the third of these authorial intrusion, chapter 44, Melville formulates the doctrine of the "original" character and remarks:

There would seem but one point in common between this sort of phenomenon in fiction and all other sorts: It cannot be born in the author's imagination--it being as true in literature as in zoology that all is from the egg (319).

So out of a thesis and an anti-thesis Melville has desperately constructed a makeshift synthesis. These three chapters are attempts to prove that, although The Confidence Man might seem fantastic, it is true. For the reasons I have outlined the attempt fails.

Some critics have thought that The Confidence Man was left uncompleted.⁴⁶ The truth is that the work could have been completed almost anywhere after the first hundred pages or so. Simple permutation of an originally contrived situation does not constitute proof. Consequently, although The Confidence Man is the shortest of Melville's major novels and frequently brilliant, we may be glad that, Melville chose not to write about whatever "may follow of this Masquerade."

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⁴⁶ Howard Horsford, "Evidence of Melville's Plan's for a Sequel to The Confidence Man," AL, XXIV (March, 1952), 85-8.

5. BILLY BUDD: An Empirical Re-interpretation

Here now's the very symbol of grim death,
by a mere hap, made the expressive sign of
the help and hope of most endangered life.
A life-buoy of a coffin! Does it go further?
Can it be that in some spiritual sense
the coffin is, after all, but an immortality
preserver! I'll think of that.

- Ahab

If Typee, Omoo, Redburn, and White-Jacket describe Melville's realization that our world is no paradise, his poetry and Billy Budd describe his discovery that our world is not one of total hell either. Before setting out to sea Melville held to an untried faith in the existence of an absolute good. Now, with the publication of The Confidence Man, it seems quite possible that he believed in the operation of an absolute evil. In terms of the distinction between a true allegory and an anti-allegory, Melville over the years has regressed to a limited a-priori stand. After The Confidence Man, the final phase of Melville's career records his slow return to sanity through his rediscovery of the real world as perceived in his early novels.

This progressive regeneration was assisted by three events. (1) In 1856, at the urging of his family in

despair over his health (he was suffering from eyestrain, neuralgia and sciatica, as well as bitter depression), Melville undertook a journey to Palestine. At the time the days spent in Jerusalem were a further mockery of disappointments. "Is the desolation of the land the result of the fatal embrace of the Deity?" he wrote in his "Journal of a visit to Europe and the Levant." But this experience did furnish Melville with the material he needed to write Clarel, in 1876, in which a rather less hopeless attitude emerges. (2) After 1860, an estrangement occurred between Melville and Hawthorne. Melville clearly felt an acute sense of rejection. The perfect masculine relationship that he craved had failed. Initially, again, this estrangement naturally deepened Melville's depression; but if Hawthorne's philosophy and literary method had a detrimental influence on Melville's, the estrangement helped to free him from Hawthorne's influence. (3) However, the outbreak of Civil War in America in 1860, more than anything else, aroused Melville from his lassitude and dejection. Each of these events, it should be noticed, was unfortunate, but each had a beneficial result. And each empirically illustrates precisely the kind of paradoxical possibility which Melville was to turn to.

This chapter, therefore, will demonstrate that Melville re-established his empirical method of literary creation, and consequently regained his original conception of the ambiguous duality of life. But there is also an advance during this final phase of his career because Melville came to realize that the tension between good and evil can be creative and hence purposeful. Hence Melville, having attained this positive equilibrium, did not shoot himself as his son Malcolm did in 1867, but died peacefully in bed on September 28, 1891.

(i) Battle-Pieces, and Aspects of the War, Clarel

It is surprising that although Melville's prose is often lyrical his poetry is unnatural and, in general, banally prosaic. Clearly this poetry was more important for, and served better, Melville, the man, than his literary reputation. It helped to nurse and reintegrate a shattered psyche, and it is this function of the poetry which needs to be examined. Hence, this chapter will neither defend whatever merits the poetry displays, nor present an embarrassing list of defects. Melville's verse, apart from the poems published in the novels, includes Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War (1866), Clarel (1876), John Man and Other

Sailors (1881), Timoleon (1891), Weeds and Wildings, Marquis De Grandvin, and miscellaneous and uncollected poems.

Battle-Pieces and Clarel seem the most important because of both their pre-eminence and their obvious empirical basis.

The first of these volumes, Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War, was occasioned by the outbreak of Civil War. Melville was a good Northerner and this upheaval drew Melville out of his retreat and forced him to renew his acquaintance with the world of experience. An examination of these poems reveals three stages in Melville's attitude towards the war. To begin with, he viewed the conflict in terms of absolutes. Good and evil appeared in simple terms. The Union cause was right and Southern cause was wrong. In "The Conflict of Convictions," the protagonists are equated with Michael and Satan:

In the cloud a sword is girded on,
I mark a twinkling in the tent
Of Michael the warrior one (9).

The same comparison is made in "Apathy and Enthusiam:"

And Michael seemed gigantical,
The Arch-fiend but a dwarf;
And at the Towers of Erebus
Out striplings flung the scoff (12).

Although Melville gives Stonewall Jackson his due, in the poem of that title, there is no doubt that Stonewall fought on the wrong side:

estimate the war in the context of human cost. Nor does Melville overlook the fact that many admirable men fought for the Confederate army. His recognition of Stonewall Jackson is stated in this final stanza:

O, much of doubt in after days
 Shall cling, as now, to the war;
 Of the right and the wrong they'll still debate,
 Puzzled by Stonewall's star:
 'Fortune went with the North elate'
 'Aye, but the South had Stonewall's weight,
 And he fell in the South's vain war' (61).

In the "Scout toward Aldie" and "Lee in the Capitol" Melville pays respect to Mosby and General Lee. The War must be seen in its full complexity; otherwise, as "The Conflict of Convictions" indicates, because of insularity, the "gulfs" may bare "their shined foundations." This phrase, Robert Penn Warren notes, is repeated in "America." The allegorical female figure, America, is sleeping:

But in that sleep contortion showed
 The terror of the vision there--
 A silent vision unavowed,
 Revealing earth's foundation bare,
 And Gorgon in her hiding place.
 It was a thing of fear to see
 So foul a dream upon so fair a face
 And the dreamer lying in that starry shroud (120).

Truth in "Commemorative of a Naval Victory" must go beyond "festal fame."

But seldom the laurel wreath is seen
Unmixed with pensive pansies dark;
There's a light and a shadow on every man
Who at last attains his lifted mark--
Nursing through night the ethereal spark.
Elate he never can be;
He feels that spirits which glad had hailed
his worth,
Sleep in oblivion.--The shark
Glides white through the phosphorous sea (130).

As Robert Penn Warren comments,

The white shark belongs to the world of the 'slimed foundations' which are exposed by the convulsion. . . . He is the Maldivian shark, which appears in the poem by that name, the 'Gorgonian head' (The 'Gorgon in her hiding place' appears too in the bared foundations of earth glimpsed in the dream of 'America'), the 'pale ravener of horrible meat,' the Fate symbol.¹

There is, however, little doubt that, in this case, for Melville the ends justify the means. Like God who "KEEPS THE MIDDLE WAY" ("The Conflict of Convictions" 107), man must compromise.

Finally, a definite advance, or good eventually emerges from this boiling moral confusion. To quote once more from "The Conflict of Convictions," it is possible that the "throes of ages" may rear the "final empire and the happier world" (10). Referring to the portrait of a Negro woman in "Formerly a Slave," Melville rejoices that,

1 Robert Penn Warren, Melville the Poet, reprinted in
Melville: A Collection of Critical Essays, edited by
Richard Chase (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall,
Inc.), p. 151.

Her children's children they shall know
 The good withheld from her;
 And so her reverie takes prophetic cheer--
 In spirit she sees the stir

Far down the depth of thousand years,
 And marks the revel shine;
 Her dusky face is lit with sober light,
 Sibylline, yet benign (114).

In "America," the last poem of Battle-Pieces, the initial phases of war and revolution are reviewed, but the sleeping woman wakes from her troubled dream with a "clear calm look:"

. . . It spake of pain,
 But such as purifies from stain--
 Sharp pangs that never came again--
 And triumph repressed by knowledge meet,
 Power dedicate, and hope grown wise,
 And youth matured for age's seat--
 Law on her brow and empire in her eyes.
 So she, with graver air and lifted flag;
 While the shadow, chased by light,
 Gled along the far-drawn height,
 And left her on the crag (120).

The war has proved cathartic, or should prove so. "Let us pray," writes Melville in the "Supplement," "that the terrible historic tragedy of our time may not have been enacted without instructing our whole beloved country through terror and pity" (190). Not least among the positive results, war also furnishes material for poetry--the poetry in which, for a second time, Melville has turned to the real world and formed an empirically based thesis. This thematic thread untangled from Battle-Pieces forms the thesis implicit in Billy Budd.

In the late sixties and early seventies Melville composed the long meditative poem Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land, based on his actual and spiritual experience. Like Tennyson in In Memoriam, Melville is engaging in the battle between faith and doubt. If Melville, as argued, made a second start after 1857, and retraced as far as possible his earlier steps, Clarel can be considered the counterpart of Mardi. Both works could be described in Auden's words as "moral landscapes."² There are also obvious structural similarities. Clarel, the lapsed divinity student, recalls Taji, if only because of the vapidness of his character. Nevertheless, the student seems to be a wishful projection of Melville's desire to relearn from experience. Once again the hero is surrounded by a number of companions who represent different philosophical viewpoints and debate upon them at length. But in Clarel, there is the additional difficulty of determining who exactly is the Babbalanja of the group, although we are still required to use the same empirical standard. The sole reason for Clarel's, and Melville's pilgrimage was to settle as far as possible by empirical observation and experience the debate between faith and doubt. What Clarel

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² W. H. Auden, The Enchafed Flood, (New York, 1950), p.

chooses to ignore, however, is that faith, by definition, transcends the empirical. As his name suggests, Clarel demands clarity, and he is the only character in Melville's writings in whom the a-priorist and the empiricist come together. His desire that life be clear-cut is a trait of the a-priorist, but his action in exploring the "scene of the crime" is that of the empiricist. This conflict is finally resolved in favour of the empiricist when Clarel accepts the mystery of existence.

During the exposition in Part I the combatants, faith and doubt, are presented most clearly by means of a succession of contrasting characters. Clarel's doddering guide around Jerusalem, Nehemiah, represents blind faith. Nehemiah tells Clarel the story of the disillusioned Celio, who represents doubt, and with whom Clarel sympathizes. Repeatedly in Part I characters exchange understanding looks and consequently reveal their bias toward either faith or doubt:

Twas then when Celio was lanced
By novel doubt, the encounter chanced
In Gihon, as recited late,
And at a time when Clarel too,
On his part, felt the grievous weight
Of those demoniacs in view;
So that when Celio advanced
No wonder that the meeting eyes
Betrayed reciprocal surmise
And interest (I, 51).

In the canto entitled "Under the Minaret," Clarel and Celio have a second recognition:

But what's evoked in Clarel's mien--
 What look, responsive look is seen
 In Celio, as together there
 They pause? Can these a climax share? (I, 61)

Ruth, the girl Clarel comes to love, seems to stand for faith. She shares a certain rapport with Nehemiah:

Anon by chance the damsel's eye
 Fell on Nehemiah, and the look
 A friendly recognition spoke,
 Returned in kind (I, 68).

Later Nehemiah introduces her as "God's messenger" (I, 91), but on first seeing her Clarel considered that

She looked a legate to insure
 That Paradise is possible
 Now as hereafter. Twas the grace
 Of Nature's dawn: an Eve-like face
 And Nereid eyes with virgin spell
 Candid as day, yet baffling quite
 Like day, through unreserve of light (I, 67).

The same dichotomy between faith and doubt, Nehemiah and Clarel, Ruth and Celio, characterizes Ruth's parents. Nathan, her American father, had become a convert to Judaism and brought his family to Jerusalem to share in the ancient promise. He stands for faith; but the mother, Agar, stands for doubt. It is she who encourages Clarel's advances towards Ruth:

The waste of Judah made her lorn.
 The student, sharing not her blood,
 Nearer in tie of spirit stood
 Than he she called Rabboni. So
 In Agar's liking did he grow--
 Deeper in heart of Ruth (I, 106).

In other words, they share a common doubt. But for Clarel the conflict focuses on Ruth and Celio:

But every thought
 Of Ruth was strangely underrun
 By Celio's image. Celio--sought
 Vainly in body--now appeared
 As in the spiritual part,
 Haunting the air, and in the heart (I, 81).

Soon Celio will have no alternative but to appear in the spiritual part, because a few pages later he is dead. As Clarel stands above Celio's grave he fancies he hears a "poor petition from the ground" exhorting, like Old Hamlet, "Remember me!" (I, 154) Nathan also dies, killed by raiding Arabs. Death has no favorites.

In so far as the Holy Land itself is a symbol, it symbolizes death, the final reality. Any debate concerning faith and doubt must come to terms with death, and thus the Holy Land is a third protagonist and as such needs some introduction. It assumes the same kind of importance as Egdon Heath in Hardy's Return of the Native. Clarel is looking for direct evidence of Christ to support an empirical faith:

But of the reign
Of Christ did no momento live
Save soil and ruin? (I, 39)

Apparently the answer is in the negative. Jerusalem, the cradle of Christianity, is described as the place

where long ago
Dull fires of refuse, shot below,
The city's litter, smouldering burned,
Clouding the glen with smoke impure,
And griming the foul shapes obscure
Of dismal chain-gangs in their shame
Raking the garbage thither spurned:
Tophet the place--transferred, in name,
to penal Hell (I, 104).

The greatest part of Clarel is set against the dry and sterile desert where the pilgrim's path is strewn with stones, and where the protection of a guard is imperative. This bleak landscape is the touchstone of empiricism by which the philosophies of Clarel's various companions must be valued. It is essential to take account of the fact that life is predominantly grim.

The "saintly" Nehemiah and the English parson Darwent, pointedly fail to do this. Both, in terms of the definitions used in this study, are a-priorists. Nehemiah is usually described on the verge of going to sleep. Instead of the leper huts of the present, he sees the glory of Solomon's temple and King David's court. In his attempt to remove the stones from the path of the pilgrims, Nehemiah reveals only more stones. Nehemiah dies early

in the poem after seeing a vision of heaven. The merrily optimistic Derwent survives the course of the poem, but he is likewise divorced from reality. A creature of fashion, his outlook is superficial:

Be not extreme. Midway is best.
 Herein 'tis never as by Nile--
 From waste to garden but a stile.
 Betwixt rejection and belief,
 Shadings there are--degrees, in brief (II, 108).

Heaven, Derwent claims, keeps the surface green. Clarel quickly finds this attitude unacceptable.

There still remain the alternative positions of Vine--a character thought by Newton Arvin to be based on Hawthorne³--Rolfe, and the bitter, illegitimate Swede, Mortmain. All three characters have been forged to a greater or lesser extent on life's anvil, and they are all empiricists. Consequently it is difficult to decide who of the three is Melville's intellectual hero. However, Merlin Bowen appears to have solved the difficulty. He writes:

The total action of the poem may be said to turn upon a sequence of cantos (XXV-XXXII) at the end of Part III in which Melville, by means of a device like that of "The Doubloon" in Moby Dick, leads each of these characters to declare his essential nature and so to take up a position, relative to the others on a scale of value. The device is that of

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³ Newton Arvin, Herman Melville (New York, 1950), p. 206.

St. Saba's palm, symbolizing the promise of life beyond death; and the qualities by which each man is judged are the comprehensiveness of his vision of reality and the degree of his detachment from life.⁴

Derwent has the tourist's wandering eye, and is soon distracted from the palm. Melville describes Vine's reaction next. From the beginning there is that certain sympathy between Vine and Clarel:

The stranger, just ascending, stood;
And as the votary laved his eyes,
He marked, looked up, and Clarel viewed,
And they exchanged quick sympathies
Though but in glance, moved by that act
Of one whose faith transfigured face (I, 114).

Like the frieze of vegetation around the tomb, Vine displays a mixture of "Hellenic cheer, Hebraic grief" (I, 111). Outwardly passionless, he burns inside. Now confronting the palm, Vine realizes that although it intimates a Paradise, like everything mortal it is subject to the ravages of time and change; Nevertheless, at present the palm is an affirmation of life in the midst of death. Mortmain's entire outlook is changed by the palm. After bitter experiences as the leader of a revolutionary society in Paris, Mortmain can see only the dark side of life. Derwent describes him as a "poor realist" (I, 237). But the palm destroys his monomania:

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⁴ Merlin Bowen, The Long Encounter: Self and Experience in the Writings of Herman Melville (Chicago, 1960), pp. 265-6.

But what--the Tree? O holy Palm,
 If 'tis a world where hearts wax warm
 Oftener through hate than love, and chief
 The bland thing be the adder's charm,
 And the true thing virtues ancient grief--
 Thee yet it nourishes--even thee! (II, 136)

He wonders if "toward me can such a symbol sway" (II, 137), and falls into a dream of heavenly peace and certitude. The following morning he is found in the same place, looking at the tree, but dead, to make way for a character called Ungar, who voices a similarly misanthropic stand in Part IV.

Finally Rolfe bares his soul. Most critics have assumed that Rolfe is Melville's hero. He is both a man of action, a sailor, and a thinker:

One read this superscription clear--
 A genial heart, a brain austere--
 And further, deemed that such a man
 Though given to study, as might seem,
 Was no scholastic partisan
 Or euhonist of Academe,
 But supplemented Plato's theme
 With daedal life in boats and tents,
 A messmate of the elements;
 And yet, more bronzed in face than mind,
 Sensitive still and frankly kind--
 Too frank, too unreserved, may be,
 And indiscreet in honesty (I, 121).

Surely Rolfe is the true empiricist? He claims:

Yea, long as children feel affright,
 In darkness, men shall fear a God;
 And long as daisies yield delight
 Shall see His footprints in the sod.
 Is't ignorance? This ignorant state
 Science doth but eludidate--
 Deepen, enlarge, but though 'twere made
 Demonstrable that God is not--
 What then? it would not change this lot:
 The ghost would haunt, nor could be laid (I, 126).

The sea is often equated by Melville with an intense reality which the land lacks, and nautical imagery pervades Clarel. Perhaps, then, Rolfe's connection with the sea is significant. And most of the time Rolfe, who reveals a "gleam of oneness" (I, 239), seems to be winning. Speaking of the Greek Elysium, Rolfe comments:

But oh! 'twas rare,
In world like this, the world we know
(Sole know, and reason from) to dare
To pledge indemnifying good
In worlds not known; boldly avow,
Against experience, the brood
Of Christian hopes (II, 12).

But the palm reveals another Rolfe. It encourages "sylvan reveries" (II, 140) of a lost Eden, nostalgic despair, not consolation. Clarel, on the balcony where the tree grows, looks across the gulf and sees the upturned faces of his companions, each hidden from the other. Vine is on the highest of the rock-hewn steps, Mortmain is under him, and Rolfe is below Mortmain. There is no sign of Derwent. Rolfe's view, although empirical, is limited because he has not yet passed through the gateway of despair. This same gateway is about to open for Clarel, and only by renouncing the easy but deceptive faith of Rolfe, which appeals to his a-priori inclinations, and embracing the ultimate doubt, like Vine, can Clarel pass through.

The death of Ruth hits Clarel with the same intensity that Cordelia's death has for Lear. "All swims, and I but blackness see" (II, 284), cries Clarel. A period of despair is followed by the resolve to endure:

Spurn--I'll endure; all spirit's fled
When one fears nothing.--Bear with me,
Yet bear! Conviction is not gone
Though faith's gone: that which shall not be
Still ought to be (II, 285).

The a-priori simplicity Clarel yearned for has gone, and he is left with a tortured but empirical paradox:

Then keep thy heart, though yet but ill-
resigned--
Clarel, thy heart, the issues there but mind;
That like the crocus budding through the snow--
That like a swimmer rising from the deep--
That like a burning secret which doth go
Even from the bosom that would hoard and keep;
Emerge thou mayst from the last whelming sea,
And prove that death but routs life into victory
(II, 298).

Granted that on balance everything points towards doubt, there is still the "thing of heaven" (I, 331), the rainbow arching over the cities of the plain, and there is still the palm. Agath's account of the desolate islands, presumably the Encantadas, makes note of the tortoises, and Rolfe exclaims,

Evil and good they braided play
Into one cord (II, 174).

Because all is not black it becomes as much an act of faith to doubt as to believe. An empirical perception

tells us simply that we cannot know for certain. The direction of the Via Crucis is determined by

A hint, or dictate, Nature's own
By man, as by the brute, obeyed (II, 295).

But it leads, by way of sacrifice, to redemption. The resolution is similar to that in Battle-Pieces. By returning to the real world Melville has recovered his understanding of the ambivalence of good and evil, but he has also formulated the possibility that an ultimate good may emerge sacrificially from this interaction. This, again, is the thesis which Melville illustrated in Billy-Budd to prove indeed "that death but routs life into victory" (II, 298).

(ii) Billy Budd

It is perhaps not just coincidence that for the setting of Billy Budd, the short novel in which Melville finally returned to empiricism, he also returned to the man-of-war setting of White-Jacket, the last narrative he wrote before the lure of Ahab, the a-priorist, became irresistible. In addition Billy Budd is dedicated to the hero of White-Jacket, Jack Chase. But there is also an important difference. If a reader attempts to understand Billy Budd in the light of the opinions expressed in

White-Jacket he will fail. When writing Billy Budd Melville disowned the opinion expressed in the earlier work: "It is not a dollar-and-cent question of expediency; it is a matter of right and wrong" (182). Admiral Collingwood may have been able to dispense with naval discipline even at

a period when the uttermost resources of England were taxed to the quick; . . . when British pressgangs not only boarded foreign ships on the high seas, and boarded foreign pier-heads, but boarded their own merchantmen at the mouth of the Thames (185).

In spite of strong resemblances this fact is irrelevant to Billy Budd. Given a man-of-war in a time of emergency, Melville had come to the realization that discipline must be administered according to the Articles of War and not some absolute morality. Consistency is the stumbling block of petty minds, and so it has proved with several critics of Billy Budd.

At one point in White-Jacket Melville refers to the historical event on which the action in Billy Budd is empirically based, but in the same misleading context described above:

The well known case of a United States brig furnishes a memorable example /of the enforcement of the Articles during peace-time⁷, which at any moment may be repeated. Three men, in a time of peace, were then hung at the same yard arm, merely because, in the captain's judgment, it became necessary to hang them. To this day the question of their complete guilt is socially discussed (380).

The frigate in question was the Somers. In 1842 an alleged mutiny aboard that vessel resulted in the convening of a drumhead court during which Melville's cousin, Lieutenant Guert Gansevoort, played an accusatory role somewhat like Claggart's. The shifting nature of these events seems over the years to have assumed an archetypal significance for Melville because, to some extent, Billy Budd is also a reworking of elements present in chapter 54 in Moby Dick, "The Town-Ho's Story." The Christ/Satan parallel between Steelkilt and Radney prefigures that between Billy Budd and Claggart. But the captain in this earlier version differs markedly from Captain Vere, and is an anonymous peripheral figure. He does, however, respond to "the inaudible words" of Steelkilt, an implication of a secret understanding or relationship similar, possibly, to that between Billy and Vere.

Nevertheless, it is clear that in choosing a situation infringing closely upon his own experience Melville is displaying once again his concern with the empirical truth of existence. Consequently, Billy Budd is characterized as "An inside narrative" to distinguish it from the a-priori falsehoods of the official report in News from the Mediterranean. And the reader must likewise pay attention to the facts for "the might-have-been is but

boggy ground to build on." Melville defends the lack of sympathy in the conclusion of his narrative with the argument that "truth uncompromisingly told will always have its ragged edges." On the other hand, in Billy Budd cold facts are no longer a denial of hope. Jay Leyda has noted that "glued on the inside of the writing box on which Billy Budd and the last poems were composed was found a tiny clipping--Melville's own note--'Keep true to the dreams of thy youth.'"⁵ In his youth Melville had dreams of an absolute good, and in Billy Budd there is the possibility that a process of historical gestation might bring such dreams to realization.

As always, but most bitterly in The Confidence Man, in Billy Budd Melville is concerned with the vulnerability of virtue in a corrupt world. If the Confidence Man is a symbol of evil, the evil man being a creature of limited experience, Billy Budd is a symbol of total "good," the "good" man being a creature of no experience, a primeval innocent. At first glance it might seem that in the figures of Billy Budd and Claggart Melville is

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⁵ Jay Leyda (ed.), The Viking Portable Melville (New York, 1952), pp. 739-40.

affirming a belief in the absolutes of good and evil which he had denied in his early works, but it is soon clear that neither character should be seen in realistic terms. At first glance, again, it might appear from the strain of Biblical imagery that Melville is retelling the story of the fall and salvation of man. Instead, this imagery, like the mythological metaphor which Franklin explores,⁶ serves to define certain areas of meaning in Melville's own story. Its function is severely secondary, and it should be observed that many of the comparisons are not biblical but classical. And both the biblical and classical imagery fulfills an additional purpose in establishing the appropriate tone of elevation.

Three types of image, to be noted as they bear on the action, are associated with Billy Budd. Melville, having drawn the reader's attention to the Handsome Sailor's immediate superiority to his fellows, catches him in a classical pose:

Close-reefing topsails in a gale, there he was, astride the weather yard-arm-end, foot in the Flemish horse as 'stirrup,' both hands tugging at the 'ear-ring' as at a bridle, in very much the attitude of young Alexander curbing the fiery Bucepholus. A superb figure, tossed up as by the horns of Taurus

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⁶ Franklin, *passim*.

against the thunderous sky, cheerily
hallooing to the strenuous file
along the spar (6).

This is an example of the image which is designed simply to secure the correct tone. Similarly Budd is described as "Apollo with his portmanteau" (11), a Greek sculpture of Hercules, and as Achilles.

A second series of images, rather more thematically important, characterize Budd's essential innocence. Incapable of "double meanings and insinuations of any sort," "Like the animals, though no philosopher, he was without knowing it, practically a fatalist" (12). Of self-consciousness he seemed to have little or none, or about as much as we may reasonably impute to a dog of Saint Bernard's breed" (16). At the drumhead court Billy gives Vere

a look in its dumb expressiveness not
unlike that which a dog of generous
breed might turn upon his master,
seeking in his face some elucidation
of a previous gesture ambiguous to the
canine intelligence (13).

Because Billy is completely devoid of experience he has much in common with a child. Consequently, the Dansker, a prophetic Conradian figure complete with esoteric scar, having recognized this resemblance, always called him "Baby Budd" (39). A few pages on Melville explains the connection in detail:

But a young seafarer of the disposition of our athletic foretopman, is much of a child-man. And yet a child's utter innocence is but its blank ignorance, and the innocence more or less wanes as intelligence waxes. But in Billy Budd intelligence, such as it was, had advanced, while yet his simple-mindedness remained for the most part unaffected. Experience is a teacher indeed; yet did Billy's years make his experience small. Besides, he had none of that intuitive knowledge of the bad which in natures not good or incompletely so, foreruns experience, and therefore may pertain, as in some instances it too clearly does pertain, even to youth (58).

For the same reason Billy is also compared with a barbarian:

And, as elsewhere said, a barbarian Billy radically was; quite as much so (for all the costume) as his countrymen the British captives, living trophies made to march in the Roman triumph of Germanicus (97).

He reacts towards the chaplain with the polite indifference of "a Tahitian, say, of Captain Cook's time or shortly after that time" (99). The "black pagod of a fellow" (6), who in Melville recalls as being similar to Billy Budd, and who "beamed with barbaric good humour," (5) presumably was also a savage.

Naturally enough, the images of innocence culminate with the Adam metaphor:

By his original constitution, aided by the co-operating influences of his lot, Billy in many aspects was little more than a sort of upright barbarian, much such perhaps as Adam presumably might have been ere the urbane Serpent wriggled himself into his company (16-7).

Intuitively realizing that Budd had "not yet been proffered the questionable apple of knowledge" (16), Captain Vere

had congratulated Lieutenant Ratcliffe upon his good fortune in lighting on such a fine specimen of the genus homo, who in the nude might have posed for a statue of young Adam before the Fall (68).

In the everyday world, however, the rough world of the Bellipotent, this lack of experience and ignorance of evil amounts to a defect which Melville makes emblematic in Billy's stutter which developed "under sudden provocation of strong heart-feeling" (17):

In this particular Billy was a striking instance that the arch interferer, the envious marplot of Eden, still has more or less to do with every human consignment to this planet of earth (18).

However, aboard the theoretical world of The Rights of Man ("The hard-headed Dundee owner was a staunch admirer of Thomas Paine whose book in rejoinder to Burke's arraignment of the French Revolution had then been published for some time, and had gone everywhere" [117]) Budd was a potent influence as a "peacemaker" (10), a fighting peacemaker. Captain Graveling, in an ineffectual effort to dissuade Lieutenant Ratcliffe from impressing his best man, explains that when Budd joined his crew "it was like a Catholic priest striking peace in an Irish Shindy" (9), an event which should be recalled when in a later chapter one is told

that Nelson similarly pacified the crew of the Theseus by force of his mere presence. Graveling's description of the blow Budd dealt the imitating buffoon, the Red Whiskers, anticipates what is to be the crucial scene in the story. From the bow of the cutter Billy shouts with more meaning that he is aware of: "And good-bye to you, too, old Rights of Man" (12). Aboard the actual man-of-war world of the Bellipotent, where the offices of a chaplain are empty and incongruous forms, Billy's situation will be radically changed. Hence, the Dansker has cause to wonder

what might eventually befall a nature like that, dropped into a world not without some men-traps and against whose subtleties simple courage lacking experience and address and without any touch of defensive ugliness, is of little avail; and where such innocence as man is capable of does yet in a moral emergency not always sharpen the faculties or enlighten the will (38).

Once again, these words also find an inverted echo when Claggart, attempting to incriminate Budd, cautions Captain Vere: "You have but noted his fair cheek. A man-trap may be under his ruddy-tipped daisies" (68). In actual fact Billy has become utterly defenseless like the hermaphrodite lamb-like man in The Confidence Man.

To Billy's role as Adam, Claggart plays the serpent. While Billy represents absolute good devoid of

experience, Claggart, given his past experience in the city, represents absolute evil. About thirty-five years old, Claggart had delicate hands, and but for his heavy chin a fine head: "His brow was of the sort phrenologically associated with more than average intellect; silken jet curls partly clustering over it, making a foil to the pallor below"(31-2). As in the case of Budd, Claggart's origins are shrouded in mystery. But what is known is that Claggart is an accomplished hypocrite, a type of confidence man, and that he had risen to his position by "ingratiating deference to superiors" (35). It is therefore not surprising that to a nature as naive as Billy Budd's, the Dansker's warning should appear ridiculous and Claggart's pleasant smile and friendly manner no more than such. Just as Melville devotes one chapter to the mysterious lack of spasm at Budd's execution, he devotes three to a consideration of the inexplicable nature of the master-at-arms. Plato, it seems, provides the answer in his description of "natural depravity" as "a depravity according to nature" (45). Like Budd, Claggart belongs among those "certain phenomenal men" (45) which the "honest scholar" typifies as beyond "normal nature" (44), and the hostility he displays towards the foretopman is the result of the inevitable opposition of good and evil.

But Melville does supply an alternative explanation, suggested in the words which Claggart utters upon seeing the soup which Billy had accidentally spilt across his path: "Handsomely done, my lad! And handsome is as handsome did it, too!" (41) The implication is that what "had first moved him against Billy" was "his significant personal beauty" (48). When Claggart happened to glance at Budd,

his eyes strangely suffused with incipient feverish tears. Then would Claggart look like the man of sorrows. Yes, and sometimes the melancholy expression would have in it a touch of soft yearning, as if Claggart could even have loved Billy but for fate and ban (60).

However, Melville plants the idea of homosexual jealousy only to uproot it:

If askance he eyed the good looks, cheery health, and frank enjoyment of young life in Billy Budd, it was because these went along with a nature that, as Claggart magnetically felt, had in its simplicity never willed malice, or experienced the reactionary bite of that serpent (49).

Any merely naturalistic explanation is certain to be deficient. Yet an additional motive is suggested. Melville surmises that, after taking the spilt soup as "the sly escape of a spontaneous feeling on Billy's part more or

less answering to the antipathy on his own" (50), Claggart set about implicating Budd in a mutiny just as he had arranged Budd's earlier troubles. But it should be noted that the soup incident is only "one of the external provocations" [(50) *italics mine*]. When Budd is approached with the suggestion of mutiny by an after-guard, his stutter prevents him from making an adequate reply. Budd's failure to report this plot to his superiors could perhaps be seen as his hamartia in the sense that this failure stems from his incapacity to understand evil, but again the story needs no such realistic explanation. Nevertheless, Melville had a reason for including this material, a reason which will be made apparent below.

In the figures of Billy Budd and Claggart Melville is positing the existence of absolutes in order to demonstrate that they cannot in reality exist. Melville has set the principles of his old anti-allegory in motion and invited the reader to watch them destroy themselves. Having made his accusations before Captain Vere, Claggart looks at Billy Budd with "the alien eyes of uncatalogued creatures of the deep. The first mesmeric glance was one of serpent fascination; the last was as the hungry lurch of the torpedo fish" (72-3). The associations of Budd's role with that of Christ rather than that of Adam now predominate.

His face "was as a crucifixion to behold" (73). Unable to speak, Billy answers with a blow to the forehead and Claggart drops to the deck. Claggart's role as Satan is also over. Handling the body was "like handling a dead snake" (74). Melville does not dwell on the matter, but Claggart's death is every bit as phenomenal as Budd's is to be. The reason should be clear enough: Budd does not exhibit the usual muscular spasm because he is not human; Claggart also dies because, as an absolute, he does not really exist. If this scene is subjected to the usual motivation analysis there is a danger that Billy Budd may be misinterpreted. Captain Vere, for example, will appear in an extremely dubious light. Hence, this scene should be viewed as a symbolic presentation of what happens when the absolutes of an anti-allegory come up against the world of empirical fact represented by Captain Vere.

Captain Vere's is the true allegory. Criticism of Billy Budd has undergone a complete cycle which turns on Vere. Is he to be believed or not? Richard Chase, Lawrance Thompson, Warner Berthoff, Merlin Bowen and John Bernstein believe not.⁷ They all find deep equivocation

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⁷ Richard Chase, Herman Melville (New York, 1949). Lawrance Thompson, Melville's Quarrel with God (Princeton, 1952). Warren Berthoff, The Example of Melville (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1962). Merlin Bowen The Long Encounter: Self and Experience in the Writings of Herman Melville (Chicago, 1960). John Bernstein, Pacifism and Rebellion in the Writings of Herman Melville (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1964).

in his motives and actions, and conclude that Vere, who compares unfavourably with Nelson, is the object of Melville's attacks. Merlin Bowen, as a result of the pigeon-holing arrangement of his book, falls into the easy error of assuming no development in Melville's thought. Consequently he interprets Vere's action as an illustration of the easy compromise advocated by Plinlimmon, which Melville did not seem too enthusiastic about even as early as Pierre.⁸ These critics fail to realize that it was precisely this sense of ambivalent equivocation which Melville lost between the years 1851 and 1857. Captain Vere is the true empiricist and hero of Billy Budd. Like Claggart, Vere, a bachelor of about forty, was an untypical sailor; but unlike Claggart, Vere, in his unobtrusive manner, had distinguished himself in the field.

He had seen much service, been in various engagements, always acquitting himself as an officer mindful of the welfare of his men, but never tolerating an infraction of discipline; thoroughly versed in the science of his profession, and intrepid to the verge of temerity, though never injudiciously so (26).

He had a deceptive tendency upon occasions towards "a certain dreaminess of mood," and was popularly known as

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⁸ Bowen, pp. 216-33.

"Starry Vere" (27). He loved books, but,

With nothing of that literary taste which less heeds the thing conveyed than the vehicle, his bias was toward those books to which every serious mind of superior order occupying any active post of authority in the world naturally inclines; books treating of actual men and events, no matter of what era--history, biography, and unconventional writers, who, free from cant and convention, like Montaigne, honestly, and in the spirit of common sense, philosophize upon realities [*italics mine*]. (29)

Such a man is particularly suited to steer a course between ideal justice and that of this world; and consequently, if the reader would gain his own bearings in this novel, he must look to Captain Vere whose name means truth.

In relation to Captain Vere, Budd can now be seen as predominantly a Christ figure. Christ is clearly the most important of the sacrifice images, the third train of imagery which Melville associates with Billy Budd. When Billy was asked who his father was, he replied, "God knows, sir" (15). But there are several suggestions that Budd may, in a sympathetic sense, be Vere's "son," and if Budd's role is similar to Christ's, then Vere's is similar to God. After the drumhead court we learn of Vere that,

He was old enough to have been Billy's father. The austere devotee of military duty letting himself melt back into what remains primeval in our formalized humanity, may in the end have caught Billy to his heart, even as Abraham may have caught

young Isaac on the brink of resolutely
 offering him up in obedience to the
 exacting behest of a further sacrifice
 image (91-2)7.

We learn later that the "senior officer of marines who as the most reluctant to condemn of the members of the drumhead court, too well knew, though here he kept the knowledge to himself, who Billy Budd was" (110). Given this relationship between Budd and Vere it is clear why Vere, instead of waiting to hand his "son" over to the shore authorities, called a drumhead court as the terrible but most human alternative. Although Billy's blow sets off a chain of questioning, Captain Vere can entertain no doubts: "It is the divine judgment on Ananias! Look! . . . Struck dead by an angel of God! Yet the angel must hang" (75). The judgment from a court on shore would be exactly the same. The only difference would be that Budd would not receive the understanding with which Vere can console him.

In making a decision Vere draws on his personal experience, books about actual men, and his intuitive perception of truth. For example, although Claggart had done nothing to antagonize his Captain, he immediately "provokes a vaguely repellent distaste" (64) in Vere. Although Vere was unaware of Billy's vocal impediment previous to witnessing his reaction to Claggart's

accusations, he "now immediately devined it" (73). There is "something exceptional in the moral quality of Captain Vere [which] made him, in earnest encounter with a fellow-man, a veritable touchstone of that man's essential nature" (69). Consequently, Vere would have seen what was "crucial in the case" (78):

In the juggling of circumstances preceding and attending the event on board the Bellipotent, and in the light of that martial code whereby it was formally to be judged, innocence and guilt, personified in Claggart and Budd, in effect changed places (78).

The long chapter describing the drumhead court which is held in the carefully particularized commander's cabin makes clear this ambiguity. Vere paces the boards in a direction contrary to that of the sea and the winds, and thus indicates his resolution to surmount natural instincts. The following day Billy hangs. At the penultimate moment he cries, "God bless Captain Vere" (102), a cry which recalls the earlier salutation, "And good-bye to you too, old Rights of Man" (12). Then the signal is given:

At the same moment it chanced that the vapory fleece hanging low in the East was shot through with a soft glory as of the fleece of the Lamb of God seen in mystical vision, and simultaneously therewith, watched by the wedged mass of upturned faces, Billy ascended; and, ascending, took the full rose of the dawn (103).

Now, as in all tragedy, most particularly Oedipus Rex, the reader has the problem of reconciling himself to apparent injustice.

Milton R. Stern, in his excellent chapter on Billy Budd, argues at one point that the action should be read subjectively.⁹ Billy Budd and Claggart are projections of rival forces within Vere. As has been suggested Budd is thus Vere's son in a psychological rather than a physical sense. Like Claggart, Vere must ultimately reject Budd. According to Stern,

The sorrowful man whose wisdom was tutored by experience is also within Vere, so that Claggart in his initial being, is Vere. It is history that has formed Vere's being. It is Claggart who represents the history which Vere recognizes in order to destroy it. . . . Claggart is the reason presented by the evils of history which he finally comes to represent, the gun which Vere uses because he hates the gun.¹⁰

The fact that both Claggart and Vere are untypical seamen has already been noted. Stern continues: "The war between Claggart and Billy is the internal war between heart and

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⁹ Milton R. Stern, The Fine Hammered Steel of Herman Melville (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1957).

¹⁰ Ibid., 232.

mind which constantly tears Vere apart in his merger of the two."¹¹ At the moment of the execution Vere identifies completely with Budd. While Billy hung motionless, Vere, "either through stoic self control or a sort of momentary paralysis induced by emotional shock, stood erectly rigid as a musket in the ship armourer's rack" ([102] Vere can hardly be experiencing the sexual erection which Budd fails to display, as Chase believes). Melville, as in White-Jacket, is arguing that if a man is actively to come to grips with the evil in this world he must at the same time disown his own idealism. This is Melville's definition of maturity.

If this level of meaning is accepted, the otherwise disconcerting emphasis Melville gives at the opening of his story to Nelson, "the greatest sailor since the world began" (24), can be understood. Several critics, including Merlin Bowen, have concluded that Melville is comparing Vere with Nelson in order to point up Vere's deficiencies.¹² But although there are similarities between Vere and Nelson (they are both commanders dedicated to the preservation of forms and both die in action), there are also similarities between Budd and Nelson. As already noted, Budd like Nelson had a reputation as a peacemaker.

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¹¹ Ibid., 233.

¹² Bowen, pp. 229-30.

As in the case of Budd, Nelson's death is described as a sacrifice:

If under the presentiment of the most magnificent of all victories, to be crowned by his own glorious death, a sort of priestly motive led him to dress his person in the jeweled vouchers of his own shining deeds; if thus to have adorned himself for the altar and the sacrifice were indeed vain-glory, then affectation and fustian is each more heroic line in the great epics and dramas, since in such lines the poet but embodies in verse those exaltations of sentiment that a nature like Nelson, the opportunity being given, vitalises into acts (24).

There is, however, a difference: Nelson is both priest and victim. In other words, Nelson's action is the same as Vere's. He makes a personal sacrifice in order to defeat the evils of history. Melville has separated and personified the three factors involved in Nelson's decision. Appearances to the contrary, Vere's heroism is every bit as impressive as Nelson's. In the portrait of Nelson, then, Melville demonstrates how we should evaluate Vere.

This same process works not only subjectively, within the individual, but also objectively, through the course of human history. A still deeper comment upon the nature of evolution also emerges, the clue to which is provided by the background of the story. Repeatedly Melville emphasizes the date of the action, 1797, as in

the reference at the beginning of the first section:

That signal object [of interest] was the 'Handsome Sailor' of the less prosaic time alike of the military and merchant navies . . . the Handsome Sailor of the period in question . . . Billy Budd . . . a foretopman of the British fleet toward the close of the last decade in the eighteenth century (5-7).

The general background in the story is that of the French Revolution which Melville characterizes as follows:¹³

The opening proposition made by the Spirit of that Age, involved rectification of the Old World's hereditary wrongs. In France, to some extent, this was bloodily effected. But what then? Straightway the Revolution itself became a wrongdoer, one more oppressive than the kings, and initiated that prolonged agony of continual war whose final throe was Waterloo. During those years not ~~the~~ wisest could have foreseen that the outcome of all would be what to some thinkers apparently it has since turned out to be, a political advance along nearly the whole line for Europeans (3).

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¹³ Harrison Hayford and Merton M. Sealts, Jr., in preparing their definitive edition of Billy Budd (Chicago, 1962), discovered that the two passages to be quoted above, assumed, on the basis of Mrs. Melville's notation, to constitute a Preface, in fact constitute a discarded fragment of Chapter 19. Accordingly they do not include it in their text. However since it does apply to Billy Budd and was at one time a part of the climatic chapter describing Billy's blow, Melville must have had a reason for originally including it. I would suggest that he excised it because it is too bold a statement of one of his major themes. All the more reason therefore that these paragraphs should be preserved.

Three features of the French Revolution are singled out: (1) it began as a reaction against injustice; (2) it became entangled in the very evil which it would destroy; (3) ultimately good results. This development is precisely the same as that which Melville observed in the course of the Civil War, as should be clear from the previous analysis of Battle-Pieces. The same three elements are evident in Melville's account of the "Great Mutiny:"

Now, as elsewhere hinted, it was something caught from the Revolutionary Spirit that as Spithead emboldened the man-of-war's men to rise against real abuses, long-standing ones, and afterwards at the Nore to make inordinate and aggressive demands, successful resistance to which was confirmed only when the ringleaders were hung for an admonitory spectacle to the anchored fleet. Yet, in a way analogous to the operation of the Revolution at large, the Great Mutiny, though by Englishmen naturally deemed monstrous at the time, doubtless gave the first latent prompting to most important reforms in the British Navy (3-4).

And we learn in chapter 3 that the very same mutineers "helped to win a coronet for Nelson at the Nile, and the naval crown of crowns for him was a Trafalgar" (21). Billy Budd begins and ends with the French Revolution, and the atmosphere of the Great Mutiny is emphasized throughout, particularly in sections 3 and 5. Obviously, these

conditions of suspicion and evil should prevent us from seeing Captain Vere as a monster, but there is a second more important reason for the revolutionary background.

Although Melville tells us his story is restricted "to the inner life of one particular ship and the career of an individual sailor" (19), its implications are much wider. In this short novel Melville is justifying revolution as a necessary part of the process of evolution. In an imperfect world the progress of good is only possible through upheaval; hence Billy's stutter "under sudden provocation of strong heart-feeling" (17), that is, the necessary disturbance which accompanies the spirit of good in this world. The stages in the progress of revolution are reflected in the careers of Billy Budd and Claggart. Revolutions invariably begin as a matter of white against black; thus, the impossibly ideal, or Billy Budd, is faced by the impossibly evil, or Claggart. Both Budd and Claggart are primeval qualities rather than real persons. Their origins are indefinite, and although they die in the course of action they will rise again in different shapes as eternally opposed qualities. Hence, the quality displayed by Billy Budd was previously present in "the Black pagodo of a fellow" (6). The Handsome Sailor can be both black and white. As Warner Berthoff notes, the words "phenomenal" and

"phenomenon" are frequently associated with Billy Budd and Claggart to indicate that they are natural forces, not human beings.¹⁴ Milton R. Stern documents the evidence which links Claggart with the oppressive forces of the French Revolution:

The very circumstances of mutiny and the French Revolution . . . are allied to Claggart in the rumours about his foreign birth and the reintroduction of those circumstances in Chapter VIII, which is devoted to an introduction of Claggart. Thus subtly Claggart, like the Directory, is associated with 'an aspect like that of Cameon's Spirit of the Cape, an eclipsing menace mysterious and prodigious . . . ' and with 'this French portentous upstart from the revolutionary chaos, who seemed in act of fulfilling judgment prefigured in the Apocalypse' (34).¹⁵

Budd's revolutionary tendency is apparent in that he is not merely a peacemaker, he is a fighting peacemaker and also in that he is linked by name with the Bellipotent. The fabrication of motivation previously mentioned (the spilt soup and homosexual jealousy) parallels the unconnected but apparently causal events of war and revolutions. But the real issues lie much deeper. Invariably revolutions get out of hand and the rebels become tainted with the corruptions of their oppressors and commit acts of unwarranted

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¹⁴ Berthoff, p. 190.

¹⁵ Stern, p. 231.

violence which lead to equally violent recriminations. Likewise Billy Budd, in lashing out at Claggart, becomes involved with the evil he wanted to eradicate. The ideal is dead and the following morning Billy is hanging from the yard-arm. The absolute evil now no longer has even its presumed existence. Budd and Claggart are a-priori illusions, but their invention does serve a purpose in that after the course of action (the empirical, true allegory of Vere) has proved their non-existence, an ultimate good emerges. This is Melville's third stage of revolution. And sure enough, inspired by Billy's death, the crew of the Bellipotent overcomes the French ship, the Athée. Vere dies as a result of the engagement with the words, "Billy Budd, Billy Budd" on his lips. "That these were not the accents of remorse, would seem clear from what the attendant said to the Bellipotent's senior officer of marines" (110). And in spite of the official report, Budd's shipmates continue to worship him as an example of innocence: "To them a chip of it [the spar from which Billy was hanged] was as a piece of the cross" (113). Not only does Budd's story explain the French revolution and the Great Mutiny, but it also seeks to explain the entire pattern of human aspiration.

The above "objective" interpretation of Billy Budd is further supported by a recent discovery of H. Bruce Franklin. Apparently the name Billy Budd is based on the Druidic god known both as Beli and Budd whose name meant "victorious death!"¹⁶ However this may be, Billy Budd represents Melville's final elaboration of the sacrifice motif discernible in Mardi (the thwarted sacrifice of Yillah), White-Jacket (the loss of the jacket), and Moby Dick (the lifebuoy-coffin). It would seem that not until Battle-Pieces and Clarel did Melville fully understand that an ultimate good only emerges as a result of some corresponding loss. Perhaps this is analogous to the withdrawal advance movement which Chase sees in Melville's work.¹⁷ There are, it would seem, then, three related themes in Billy Budd: (1) Melville is finally disowning any sympathy he might once have felt for the anti-allegorical a-priori mode of perception by supposing the existence of absolutes and letting them destroy each other; (2) taken subjectively, the idea of sacrifice refers to the loss of innocence which a man must accept if he is to be effective in the real world; and (3) taken objectively, the

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¹⁶ Franklin, pp. 192-9.

¹⁷ Chase, *passim*.

idea of sacrifice refers to the inevitable distortion of idealism which occurs in war and revolution, but not without ultimate gain. In so far as Melville was the a-priorist, Ahab, he opposed this ambivalent condition; but in so far as he became the empiricist, Vere, he accepted it. Hence, perhaps the years 1851 to 1857 can be seen as the sacrifice necessary to produce Billy Budd.

My thesis throughout has been that Melville's method constantly determines his meaning. An a-priori meaning is dependent upon an a-priori method, and an empirical meaning upon an empirical method. The course of Melville's artistic career which this interaction governed I have represented diagrammatically on the preceding page, but the same movement is evident in the action of Moby Dick. Consequently, I have attempted to draw attention to this fact by prefacing the last four chapters with quotations from Moby Dick. The empirical "loomings" of Ishmael (Typee to Moby Dick) gives way to the intolerable a-priori allegory of Ahab (Moby Dick to the Confidence Man). Finally, up bobs the coffin which is also the life-preserver of empiricism (Poetry and Billy Budd). The story is thus surprisingly complete.

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