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MELVILLE'S TURN TO POETRY: A GENRE APPROACH TO "CLAREL"

City University of New York PH.D. 1981

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"Melville's Turn to Poetry: A Genre Approach to *Clarel*"

by

Warren Rosenberg

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

1981

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Introduction

This study seeks to prove that Melville's abandonment of prose and turn to poetry after 1857 is a significant personal statement in itself and a logical development from his earlier writing career. Melville's prose works, letters, marginalia, and the poems themselves provide evidence for explaining why he so singularly changed modes. These materials are used as conduits to the most compelling piece of evidence, the six hundred page poem _Clarel: A Poem and a Pilgrimage to the Holy Land_ (1876), to which Melville devoted almost a decade of effort. So different in form and subject from _Moby Dick_ (1851), his prose masterpiece, _Clarel_ is the embodiment of Melville's mature artistic vision. To study it closely, therefore, is a prerequisite for understanding the evolution of his thought as well as the significance of the poetry as a mode of inquiry and as a vitally important symbol.

The unfortunately persistent critical myth this dissertation attempts to disprove has its roots in an apparent historical truth, that Melville abandoned professional authorship after 1857. But to conclude from this, as do biographers and critics like Raymond Weaver, F.O. Matthiessen, Newton Arvin, Leon Howard, and Edgar Dryden that he abandoned serious authorship would be an error.

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The strongest recent statement of this view occurs in Alan Lebowitz's significantly titled Progress Into Silence (1970). He writes of the years after The Confidence Man (1856): "and then, as everyone concerned with American literature knows, until Billy Budd, written sporadically in 1888-91 at the very end of his long life, there is not a drama of effort but of silence."[1] Since Melville's published poetic output in these years exceeded that of T.S. Eliot, Lebowitz's statement is, of course, literally not true. More recent critical works, Richard Brodhead's Hawthorne, Melville, and the Novel (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1976) and Nina Baym's "Melville's Quarrel with Fiction" (PMLA, Oct. 1979), contain excellent discussions of the prose career but are de facto members of the "progress into silence" camp because they do not consider the logic of the turn to poetry even though their respective theses support it. Although Baym concedes that in turning his back "on the troublesome genre of fiction" Melville "did not subside into a long silence after The Confidence Man," her conclusion that he did abandon "the stance of the poet-bard searching out and saying the truth"[2] is based more on her belief that the poetry is not major literature than on what Melville really intended. If Melville were escaping into privacy after 1857 he could have turned to the diary, journal or pure lyric poetry. The fact that he laboriously taught himself to be a poet, developed a unique style, and attempted to publish almost everything he wrote would indicate that

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he had a continuing desire to reach an audience, but possibly a different audience, and communicate with it in a new way.

Baym's widely shared view of the poetry as second rate has, I believe, hindered the consideration of the ways the turn to poetry reveals Melville's growth as an artist. The growing number of sympathetic evaluations of the poetry, however, have increased its accessibility and our appreciation. Beginning with Arvin's sensitive stylistic analysis in 1950, the studies by Walter Bezanson, Laurence Barrett, Robert Penn Warren, William B. Stein, William Schurr, Richard H. Fogle, Bryan Short, and others, have directly or indirectly made a place for the poetry _within_ the oeuvre and have not considered it as an avocation or afterthought. Warren's changing view is representative. In a much anthologized essay, "Melville the Poet," written in 1945, he tentatively states that "perhaps" the distorted, violent poetry is not a result of "ineptitude" but "of a conscious effort." Although in 1945 he still calls Melville "a poet of shreds and patches,"[3] in a fifty page article, "Melville's Poems," published in 1967, Warren comes out strongly in support of Melville's artistry. He sees him as consciously working against "the prevailing practice" of poetry in trying to create a new style, and holds him up as different from but as important as Whitman in nineteenth century American poetry.[4]

Even among critics who ultimately accept Melville's poetic program there is resistance to _Clarel_. William

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Bysshe Stein, for example, takes for granted that Melville had a "strategy of prosody" and states that its object was "to de-romanticize the idealistic view of human destiny that colors the traditions of English and American poetry during the Nineteenth Century."[5] Stein accepts the "ugly discordance and incongruity" of much of the shorter poetry, referring to the verse as "revolutionary." But what he sees as intentional in the shorter verse, is seen as lack of control in Clarel. There he finds "countless infelicities of execution: grotesque inversions, tortured ellipses, banal rimes, expedient archaism, distorted word forms, and limping rhythms. These flaws," he concludes, "unite to convey the effect of a bewildering prosiness that defies categorization." The style is thus out of key with the subject.[6] In this way Stein justifies his not studying Clarel and only dealing with Melville's later, more aesthetically conventional poetry. Acknowledging that there are flaws in Clarel, due mostly to the constrictions of the iambic tetrameter couplets, I cannot see in what way the style does not match the content. If, as Stein says, the theme of the poem is the realization of the stultifying, subjective nature of ideas, then the style fits perfectly. The problem reduces itself to the fact that the poem does seem to defy categorization, as the inadequate phrase "bewildering prosiness" indicates. Consequently, chapter four below is an attempt at a more inclusive description of the poem. Overall, my analysis of Clarel proceeds from the same assumption that Walter

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Bezanson brings to the poem, "that it is not possible for bad poetry to communicate a significant, ordered world of imaginative values."[7]

That Clarel must be the focus of any study of Melville's poetry and of his mature thought is evident from the time and effort he devoted to it and from its intrinsic merits. In the past twenty years, since the publication of Bezanson's excellent edition, scholars have devoted the time necessary for a fuller appreciation of this challenging work. Vincent Kenny in his book length study of the poem believes it "stands among the best poems ever written in the U.S."[8] In his book The Long Encounter (U. of Chicago Press, 1960) Merlin Bowen places its importance above that of Billy Budd. He calls it

> a complex, deeply considered, and carefully elaborated work of art, the fruit of its author's ripest maturity, enriched by reading and meditation, chastened by the experience of national and domestic tragedy. Billy Budd, however we may choose to interpret it, is not on the same scale and does not address itself to the same large questions; it is a slighter and, one must admit, a less perfect work. Art has no final answers, but if it is Melville's last fully considered judgment that we want, we must turn to Clarel.[9]

But in their search for this judgment, for the poem's deeper thematic continuities with Melville's prose, most critics have avoided its sometimes perplexing surface. It is the intention of this study to examine that surface, to approach Clarel first as poem. Emphasizing the poem's formal differences from Melville's prose reveals thematic development as well. In fact, the meaning of the poem

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can be found in the interaction between the diverse modes of poetry which are juxtaposed on almost every page. This insight first suggested itself to me while I pondered Robert Penn Warren's astute observation about Clarel that its "chief critic... is the hovering and haunting spirit of the poem it so violently strives to be."[10] Although he meant this negatively, believing that Melville could not write the poem he wanted to, I feel he would not write that poem because his theme was that poetry only exists in the world as a "hovering and haunting spirit." Pure poetry was a form of belief for Melville which, like his religious beliefs, was always under attack from external as well as from internal forces. He therefore uses a spectrum of modes (much as he does in his prose) ranging from the most poetic (lyric) to the most anti-poetic (dialogue and analysis) to critically observe his work, himself, and his age.

The previous paragraph should make clear why an approach through genre is particularly suited for this study. If poetry is considered as a particular type of utterance, distinguishable in purpose and effect from prose, one can make certain hypotheses about why Melville turned to it. The fact that he did, in conjunction with a close examination of his unique poetic strategy, can lead to new conclusions about his aesthetic and intellectual development. Finally, a genre approach places Melville's decision to become a poet in an historical context. From this perspective the struggle between poetry and prose in his

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work and in the work of nineteenth century writers in general is seen to be related to the central religious debate of the period between belief (poetry) and scepticism (science).

The dissertation begins by following the chronology of Melville's career, with Clarel as the focus of the final three chapters. The poem is so rich, complex, imposing, and enigmatic, that like Ahab's doubloon it necessarily must be seen in oblique glances from a variety of directions. Chapter one, "'The Endless Contest': Poetry Versus Prose in Melville's Fiction" centers the turn to poetry on Melville's rebellion against the demands of the novel. The short stories are discussed and the chapter ends with The Confidence Man, the last prose work Melville published in his lifetime. Chapter two, "Quitting the Quarry: Melville Turns to Poetry," uses marginalia, lectures, and the poetry written before Clarel to analyze his reasons, conscious and unconscious, for changing forms. In chapter three, "Poetry and Belief: Clarel as a Response to the Higher Critics, "Melville's turn to poetry is placed within the contexts of literary history and the history of ideas. Clarel is shown, in its treatment of character and in the relation of character to myth, as a battleground for the poetry versus science struggle. Chapter four, "'Frames of Thought and Feeling': Clarel's Poetic Structure" applies the methods of modern genre theory to Clarel, specifically Paul Hernadi's "polycentric classification" system, to more precisely

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describe Melville's poetic strategy within the poem. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the poem as epic or anti-epic. The final chapter, "'To Terminus Build Fanes': Clarel, Poetry, and the Organic," attempts to synthesize the psychological, aesthetic, and religious motives behind Melville's turn to poetry into one essential motive, his need to come to terms with the organic as metaphor and as reality. Melville's treatment of sexuality in his works is used to illustrate the fact that only through poetry was he able to resolve the struggle between nature and art.

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Acknowledgments

Anyone who has ever undertaken the writing of an extended work knows that in many ways the experience is analagous to a traditional quest. There are monsters and seemingly uncrossable ravines at every bend in the road; doubts and fears are almost as prevalent as external obstacles. Without the intercession of some magically helpful individuals at key points along the way _this_ quest could never have been completed. I would like to thank Prof. Charles Child Walcutt in whose seminar on nineteenth century American literature I first became aware that Melville wrote poetry. His guidance and encouragement helped me write a paper which led to my dissertation topic. At a particularly bleak and unproductive period, Prof. Robert Richardson happened on the scene and inspired me with his knowledge of intellectual history and American literature's place in it. But without the support of Prof. Alfred Kazin, my advisor, this entire experience would have been more traumatic and less rewarding. A forceful, brilliant, and eloquent critic, he provided an example of the kind of reader and writer I wanted to be. As an advisor, however, he had the sensitivity and patience to let me discover my own strengths and weaknesses. He made many helpful suggestions,

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Notes

[1]Alan Lebowitz, Progress Into Silence (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970), p. 4.

[2]Nina Baym. "Melville's Quarrel with Fiction," PMLA, Vol. 94, no. 5, (Oct., 1979), p. 921.

[3]Robert Penn Warren, "Melville The Poet" in Selected Essays (New York: Random House, 1958), p. 185.

[4]Robert Penn Warren, "Melville's Poems," Southern Review, III (Oct., 1967), p. 807.

[5]William Bysshe Stein, The Poetry of Melville's Late Years, (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1970), p. 9.

[6]Stein, p. 11.

[7]Walter Bezanson in Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land (New York: Hendrick's House, 1960), p. L.

[8]Vincent Kenny, Herman Melville's Clarel: A Spiritual Autobiography (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1973), p. 96.

[9]Merlin Bowen, The Long Encounter: Self and Experience in The Writings of Herman Melville (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 280.

[10]Warren, "Melville's Poems," p. 831.

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Chapter One

"The Endless Contest": Poetry Versus Prose in Melville's Fiction

> The grand power of poetry is its interpretative power, by which I mean, not a power of a drawing out in black and white an explanation of the mystery of the universe, but <u>the power of so dealing with things as to awaken in us a wonderfully full, new and intimate sense of them, and of our relations with them</u>.
>
> Marked by Melville in his copy of Matthew Arnold's essay "Maurice de Guerin."

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That Herman Melville wrote only poetry between the publication of The Confidence Man in 1857 and the writing of Billy Budd near the end of his life in 1891 is an accepted biographical fact. Whether the poetry is considered in Newton Arvin's phrase "a kind of afterthought"[1] or a logical extension of and development from his earlier work is a matter of critical controversy. Nina Baym has argued that by the time Melville was writing Pierre in 1852, "he was convinced that whatever the truth might be, it could not be expressed in works of literature." She goes on to say that in his discovery of the limits of literature Melville realized "that no literature could be serious, because limitation precluded the discovery of truth."[2] By the time he was writing Pierre Melville was frustrated by literature, but by the demands of a particular genre he had been struggling with since he began writing seriously, the prose novel. That form, with its conventional narrative, and linguistic expectations, fettered his intellectual curiosity and forced what he considered a false vision of reality upon him. He consistently violated the norms of the genre, yet his failure to work successfully within it does not necessarily point to a rejection of all literature. An examination of the circumstances leading to Melville's turn to poetry reveals that there was a literary form whose limitations he could accept, a form which would facilitate rather than preclude the discovery of truth.

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Although it is true, as Howard Vincent points out in his introduction of the Collected Poems, that "Poetry was a lifelong interest of Melville's" and that he probably wrote poems before those included in Mardi,[3] his attitudes about poetry and his commitment to it changed dramatically over time. Like other nineteenth-century writers and critics, he often used the label "poet" to describe any writer of fiction, including the prose writer. In addition, as numerous critics have noted, his prose, in its frequent use of metaphor, flights of Shakespearean diction, rhythmic sentences, and most importantly in its symbolizing vision, is often poetic. But Melville had a clear appreciation of the difference between having a "poetical" temperament and being a poet writing poetry. Of Pierre he writes that he was "...naturally poetic, and therefore piercing." Yet Pierre does not have the maturity and discipline necessary to be a poet. Melville's turn to poetry was a manifestation of his growing discipline as an artist, a development from and deliberate break with his artistic past.[4] As Edward Rosenberry writes in a recent study of Melville, "In Melville there was always a poet waiting for encouragement."[5] The emergence of that poet, although attended by the pangs of creation and of critical rejection, constituted a re-birth for Melville as artist.

The reasons for Melville's entering into what Harold Bloom has called "the fearsome process by which a person is re-born as a poet" have not been fully examined.[6]

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Certainly, a writer's choice of a particular genre or mode is based on a complex interaction of conscious and unconscious, internal and external forces. To complicate matters further, Melville did not explain the change in journals, letters, or essays. Unfortunately, he wrote no "Biographia Literaria." But, characteristically, explanations are provided, in varying degrees of concealment, in the novels, short stories, and poems themselves. As one looks closely at Melville's writing and reading, his reasons for turning to poetry emerge. Conversely, studying his works from the perspective of his turn to poetry places them in a new and illuminating context.

The aesthetic, cultural, and psychological reasons for Melville's turn to poetry were, of course, not distinct during the actual process of genre choice. It is necessary, however, artificially to isolate and discuss each, so that the entire process can be more clearly understood. The aesthetic reasons are the most identifiable, because evidence for Melville's struggle with matters of form and the proper representation of reality appears in the works themselves. A line Melville marked in Madame de Stael's Germany, a book he extensively annotated, provides a useful context for a discussion of the aesthetic dimension of his genre change. "In this world," de Stael writes, "there is an endless contest between poetry and prose."[7] To Melville, poetry represented the instinctual, personal, digressive, ineffable, and illusory, and prose, the factual, narrative, logical, and realistic.

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These contradictory visions of reality strongly affected the structure of his prose works and eventually led him to abandon prose itself.

Melville's contest between poetry and prose began with his first serious attempt at professional writing, Typee. The style and structure of the work, humorous, self-referential, and episodic, reflect Melville's initial resistance to the hermetic narrative mode. From the first page of this narrative, he is clearly doing more than presenting an incident-by-incident report of his travels. From his delightful apostrophe, "Oh! ye state-room sailors," which satirizes the wealthy passengers, to his reflections on "civilized barbarity" and the hypocrisies of the missionaries, his personal voice interferes with and transforms the narrative every step of the way. The very facts of the Marquesas were poetical, but Melville embellished, exaggerated, and orchestrated them until he had a work that was thoroughly literary.

Omoo reveals the same resistance to the unmediated reporting of facts with, perhaps, a greater focus on incident. But in Mardi, written largely during 1848, Melville makes his first dramatic break with the conventions of prose narrative. That it is a poetic impulse which underlies the break is reflected in a revealing letter Melville wrote to his publisher John Murray during the book's composition. After explaining that the annoyance of being labeled a "romancer" in Typee and Omoo motivated

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him to try a real romance, Melville writes: "I have long thought that Polynesia furnished a great deal of rich poetical material that has never been employed hitherto in works of fancy; and which to bring out suitably, required only that play of freedom & invention accorded to the Romancer & poet.... Well: proceeding in my narrative of facts I began to feel an incurable distaste for the same' & a longing to plume my pinions for a flight, & felt irked, cramped & fettered by plodding along with dull common places."[8] This desire for 'poetical material' and the need to break from the direct presentation of narrative facts is a critical step in Melville's development as a poet. The idea of the romance, which here he clearly distinguishes from poetry, liberated him from those novelistic restrictions strongly associated with the factual. To follow Richard Chase's loose categorization, "the main difference between the novel and the romance is in the way in which they view reality." The novel examines reality closely, is most concerned with character, and contains action which follows logically from a coherently developed set of circumstances. The romance "feels free" to present reality less faithfully, its characters are more important for their ideal value, and plot is not constrained by the plausible.[9] Thus, the romance, in Melville's terminology, is simply more free and poetical.

Melville's rebellion against the novel in Mardi is not yet a full-fledged war against prose, but it reveals the growing discomfort in a mind which sees aesthetic and

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epistemological questions as necessarily linked. Had Melville continued the rather exciting narrative which begins Mardi beyond chapter 40, he might have, as Tyrus Hillway hypothesizes, "satisfied most of the readers of his time." Even "The Romantic Interlude" which follows, introducing new characters and Yillah, the love interest, might have been accepted by a reading public used to the popular French and German romances of the time. But the major allegorical section of the book, begun with no warning to the reader, was "incongruous" to the public and "another genre entirely."[10] Once the conventional expectations of the novel were broken, Melville was free to explore his political and metaphysical interests.[11] Reality, as manifested in a logical plot and rounded characters, was left behind. The looser form of Mardi is better able to support the search for truth which increasingly became Melville's concern as he continued to write. In fact, the search for truth and the act of writing become one in Mardi, and the "chartless" voyage is not aimed at any real place but burrows deeper into "the world of mind." (p.459)

Within the freer form of the romance Melville's subject became form itself. Through the discussions of Media, the practical King of Odo, Yoomy, the poet, and Babbalanja, the philosopher, one can trace Melville's quest for the best methods of finding and rendering the truth, with poetry becoming a major focus of that quest. "Poetry is truth," Yoomy exhorts, echoing Shelley's "De-

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fense of Poetry."[12] The context of the remark is the discovery of Alma (Christ), when truth is identified with love and poetry with both. At other points in the book poetry is seen as sensual diversion, or as an optimistic unifier. This last sense reflects Emerson's view in "The Poet." In his copy of the essay Melville marked and annotated the passage that sees the poet as correcting dislocations between the human sphere and the natural. He underlined Emerson's belief that in such unification the poet "disposes very easily of the most disagreeable facts" and sarcastically notes in the margin: "So it would seem. In this sense Mr. E. is a great poet." (Cowen, Vol.5, p.25)[13] In Mardi Babbalanja often voices Melville's criticism of the Emersonian poet who is capable of turning the most serious subject into "sun-music in the air!" After singing an antic song about Yillah, which sounds much like a parody of an Elizabethan lyric, Yoomy is attacked by Babbalanja:

> 'What, minstrel; must nothing ultimate come of all that melody? no final and inexhaustible meaning? nothing that strikes down into the soul's depths till, intent upon itself, it pierces in upon its own essence and is resolved into its pervading original, becoming a thing constituent of the all embracing deific, whereby we mortals become part and parcel of the gods, our souls to them as thoughts and we privy to all things occult, ineffable, and sublime? Then, Yoomy, is thy song nothing worth.... I mistrust thee minstrel! That thou hast not yet been impregnated by the arcane mysteries....' (p.462)

If this typical Babbalanja effusion sounds Emersonian in its postulation of a transcendental aesthetic, perhaps

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the downward direction of its focus should be emphasized. Yoomy's poem soars; its imagery is that of the morning, the sun, stars, shooting rays, and upward looks. But Babbalanja realizes, and Yoomy admits, that this is only half of the song, and so he asks Yoomy to proceed. The other half of the song must plunge into the darkness of the self where it can come into contact with the "ineffable" or else it will be too light and detached to have meaning. Ultimately, in Mardi, Melville concludes that the poet and the philosopher are linked to each other, but separated from "prosy" daily life. "They comprehend us not," Yoomy sighs. And Babbalanja replies, "Yoomy, poets both, we differ but in seeming; thy airiest conceits are as the shadows of my deepest ponderings; though Yoomy soars and Babbalanja dives, both meet at last. Not a song you sing, but I have thought its thought; and where dull Mardi sees but your rose, I unfold its petals and disclose a pearl." (p.365) Poetry is seen here as an escape from the dullness of life and as the only form adequate for enclosing the pearl of truth. For Melville at this point, however, prose is still the preferred medium. The interpolated poems are subordinate in the work, functioning as a running critical gloss of the action in the prose text. But that Melville was aware of the language and structure of the entire work moving toward a poetic vision of reality is established near the end of Mardi in chapter CXCI. As the wanderers approach Hautia's island, Melville compares Mardi to a poem with "every

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island a canto." Hautia's island, "Flozella-a-Nina" is the last island in the circuit and appropriately named "The Last-Verse-of the Song." (p.530)

After the negative reception of Melville's first romance he quickly retreated into "a thing of a widely different cast." The new book, Redburn, like White Jacket which followed, would be the antithesis of Mardi, "- a plain, straight-forward, amusing narrative of personal experience ... no metaphysics, no conic-sections, nothing but cakes & ale."[14] Certainly, in these prose narratives poetry as vision and genre is subordinated to the presentation of factual places and events. But in Redburn and White Jacket, as in Typee, the poetic comes to represent any intrusion into the narrative of personal thought or feeling. The narrator spends much time "mediating profoundly upon the fact,"[15] and expresses his opinions about all that he experiences. In these works poetry also represents the romantic, standing for those inherited myths about the world which are destroyed when exposed to the unpleasant facts of reality. In Redburn, for example, the poetry of the sea, "this glorius ocean life, this salt-sea life, this briny, foamy life," is quickly dissipated as Wellingborough is ordered to clean out the chicken coop and submit to Captain Riga's discipline. One poetic illusion of life is punctured by oppressive, prosaic detail.

On the other hand, Melville's first person narration works here, as it does in White Jacket and Moby Dick, to

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subvert novelistic convention by intruding on the factual. The narrative voice consistently interrupts with typical Melvillean digressions. The defensively ironic title for chapter 30, "Redburn Grows Intolerably Flat and Stupid over Some Outlandish Old Guide-Books," is a mask for one of the most personally revealing sections of the book. It is a chapter in which poetry is frequently mentioned, thus strengthening the identification of poetry with the private and the emotional. The guide book, which had been his father's, contains Redburn's scrawled childhood verse. Redburn is touched by the anonymity of the guide book's author and by its "quaint poetical quotations." He gently satirizes the fact that the author probably included "nine thickly printed pages of a neglected poem by a neglected Liverpool poet" because _he_ was the poet. The guide, then, is precious to Redburn because of its association with his father, with his own childhood, and because he is drawn to its mixture of fact and poetry. But Redburn becomes disenchanted with the old book as he comes to realize that the Liverpool it describes no longer exists. The romantic castle, the old dock, and his father's hotel are all supposed to be there but are all gone; "the thing that had guided the father, could not guide the son." Associating the "useless" guide book with "nearly all literature" Melville seems to take another step towards disillusionment with literature itself. But as Redburn realizes, "Every age makes its own guide-books." (p.157)

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The process of writing is the only instrument we have to mediate between past myth and present experience. Thus Melville reaffirms the need for literature, arguing that we must create our own version of the truth in "a moving world."

In White Jacket poetry is again associated with the personal. But in the context of the regimented and crowded life on a man-of-war that identification leads Melville to elevate the personal to the level of the heroic. A poetic elite is established aboard ship. As in Redburn, however, poetry is subordinated to the depiction of day-to-day concerns of life, to "cakes and ale." In a chapter with the reduced, utilitarian title "Breakfast, Dinner, and Supper," the narrator explains, "For, after all, though, 'Paradise Lost' be a noble poem, and we man-of-war's men, no doubt, largely partake in the immortality of the immortals; yet, let us candidly confess it, shipmates, that, upon the whole, our dinners are the most momentous affairs of these lives we lead beneath the moon."[16] Melville did take great pleasure in the sensual activities of life, and here feels at one with the reading public-his "shipmates."

Perhaps his desire to placate his public explains Melville's treating poetry in White Jacket with occasional defensive humor. The poet Lemsford, who is viewed with "deadly hostility" by almost the entire crew, is mocked by the narrator for his Shellylike transports. But at other times there is an unmistakably admiring tone. The

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poet's religious devotion to his art even under the press of his ship's duties is praiseworthy, and foreshadows Melville's commitment to poetry writing while working as a customs inspector. The "whole epics, sonnets, ballads, and acrostics" which Lemsford produced "had wit, imagination, feeling, and humour in abundance." Most significantly, by placing the Lemsford chapter directly after the chapter which describes the pockets of the white jacket as the only safe place on board ship, Melville is reinforcing poetry's role as a form of personal salvation. Lemsford's poetry preserves his individuality; his doomed quest for a hiding place for his verse underlines how threatened that individuality is. The narrator derides the poet's solipsistic concern for his lost verses: "The world is undone, he must have thought; no such calamity has befallen it since the Deluge;- my verses are perished." (p.53) Yet ten years after White Jacket, in a letter to his brother Allan containing detailed instructions for the publication of his own poetry, Melville shows a concern similar to Lemsford's. "Of all human events," he writes, "perhaps, the publication of a first volume of verses is the most insignificant; but though a matter of no moment to the world, it is still of some concern to the author."[17]

The strain on Melville of trying to write a book that the public would buy surfaces in chapter XLV, "Publishing Poetry in a Man-of-War." He preserves his

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democratic values by making a fine distinction between the "people," who are admirable, and the "public," a "monster . . . with the head of a jackass, the body of a baboon, and the tail of a scorpion." The public is not capable of appreciating poetry, so when Lemsford's poems are inadvertently fired from a cannon where he had hidden them, Jack Chase, one of the initiated, is ecstatic. "That's the way to publish," he cries, "fire it right into-em; every canto a twenty-four-pound shot; hull the blockheads whether they will or no." (p.188) Chase's violent glee indicates Melville's growing hostility toward the prosaic expectations of his audience. In a work he intended to keep factual, the poetic rebelled.

If in Redburn the weight of the factual world is finally victorious over the poetry of the sea, White Jacket reverses that outcome by seeing the struggle in different terms. Here poetry is not identified with romantic myth, but with the absence of all illusion; the rigors of sea life are responsible for the creation of 'true' poets who can see clearly. In a memorable passage, Jack Chase, inspired by the thought of the Portuguese poet Camoens and his Lusiad, expounds upon the seminal relationship between poets and the sea, evoking Shakespeare, Falconer, St. Paul, Shelley, and Byron. The speaker's excitement mounts as, like White Jacket earlier in the book, he realizes that as a maintop man he has a special perspective on the world.

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Finally, to White Jacket he exclaims: "there never was a very great man who spent all his life inland. A snuff of the sea, my boy, is inspiration; and having been once out of sight of land, has been the making of many a true poet and the blasting of many pretenders; for, d'ye see, there's no gammon about the ocean; it tells him just what he is, and makes him feel it too." (p.260) So the truth of the world makes and tests poetry. "True poets" are able to remain poets despite and, in part, because of the realities of sea life. This is why at the end of the voyage when around him sailors are swearing never to go to sea again, Lemsford can say "'Profane not the holy element.'" Melville's dual vision of poetry is presented here. It is both the myths we invent about the world and the spiritual element that lies behind visible objects, both illusion and essence.

Melville's concern with poetry and truth reaches its apex of activity during his writing of Moby Dick. His first reference to the book in a letter to Richard Henry Dana Jr., that writer of unalloyed facts about the sea, clearly indicates his struggle to write a book where the poetic is not submerged as in Redburn and White Jacket. "It will be a strange sort of a book, tho', I fear;" he writes, while revealing he is half done. "Blubber is blubber you know; tho' you may get oil out of it, the poetry runs as hard as sap from a frozen maple tree;--& to cook the thing up, one must needs throw in a little

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fancy, which from the nature of the thing, must be ungainly as the gambols of the whales themselves. Yet I mean to give the truth of the thing, spite of this."[18] The letter's imagery makes clear a commitment to the poetic dimension of the book. The "truth" alluded to in the last line is, no doubt, the real world of whaling which Melville is opposing to "fancy," perhaps apologetically for Dana's benefit. But the poetic truth, which this letter unselfconsciously places at the center of importance, can only be separated from the blubber of reality by utilizing "strange" means. The methodological confusion mirrored by the mixed operations of whaling and syrup gathering points directly to Melville's sense as he was finishing Moby Dick that all his books are "bothches." How does one get at the truth behind reality and still render the truth of reality?

In Hawthorne's stories, the subject of his 1850 essay "Hawthorne and His Mosses," Melville thought he saw an answer. But, significantly for his move to poetry, Melville is less concerned with the stories themselves- their plots and characters- than with the frames the tales provide for glimpses at truth. It is only shallow readers, "those mistaken souls," who think Shakespeare's greatness rests on his skillful use of melodramatic details. "But it is those deep far-away things in him," Melville writes, "those occasional flashings-forth of the intuitive Truth in him; those short, quick probings at the very axis of

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reality;--these are the things that make Shakespeare Shakespeare."[19] And one is led to say Hawthorne Hawthorne and Melville Melville. It is as though Hawthorne's example encouraged Melville to return to the daring experimentalism of Mardi, to break through the mask of incident and character and detail to embrace the poetic truth which lay behind. This romantic aesthetic which permeates the essay is linked, however, to a substructure of aesthetic realism. Melville escapes neo-Platonic idealism by realizing that truth, although not *in* things, can only be discovered through things. The critical factor in the quest for truth is our desire to look and our angle of vision. When he writes in the "Mosses" that in "this world of lies," truth, like a frightened white doe can only be revealed by "cunning glimpses," and that the "masters of the great Art of Telling the Truth" must render the truth "covertly" and by "snatches," Melville is making an implied criticism of the conventional novelist, dramatist, and short story writer. These forms, when handled conventionally to merely entertain and sell, necessitate the subordination of truth. Only great artists like Shakespeare and Hawthorne can manipulate their chosen genres so that truth can be revealed to a discerning reader.

In writing Moby Dick, under the influence of Shakespeare and Hawthorne, Melville radically transformed the mode of narrative prose fiction. Nowhere in his writings

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are facts so plentiful and realistically presented, yet so brimming with latent meaning. In the chapter "The Advocate" Ishmael confidently sets out to prove to the reader that, despite popular opinion, whaling is poetical. Ironically, in the following chapter he writes that in defense of whaling's poetry he "would fain advance naught but substantiated facts."[20] The brutal details of whaling are not, one must conclude, as obviously poetic as the facts of the Marquesas; however, it is Melville's penetrating yet oblique way of looking at them which elicits the poetry. In forcing the reader to see things through Ishmael's idiosyncratic eyes, Melville dashes our expectation of a fiction rooted in the direct representation of external facts as completely as Ahab dashes the crew's expectation of a conventional whaling voyage. Melville and Ahab, then, are both attempting to 'poeticize' reality, to make others see things their way.

Although there are no Yoomys or Lemsfords in _Moby Dick_, Ahab is Melville's greatest surrogate poet because he refuses to play the conventional captain's role much as Melville refuses to write the conventional narrative. The business of the novelist is to tell his story entertainingly, as the business of the whaling captain is to fill his hold. Digressions (gams) are expected and permitted, but the ultimate purpose of the voyage must not be forgotten. The romantic poet's purpose, diametrically opposed to the novelist's, is to make meanings by making

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connections. When the narrator says in the chapter "The Doubloon" that "some certain significance lurks in all things, else all things are little worth, and the round world itself but an empty cipher" (p.358), he is asking an implied question which Ahab must answer. And, like the true Romantic poet, Ahab answers by seeing all meaning as emanating from himself. The tower on the doubloon "is Ahab," the volcano, the bird, "all are Ahab." Whitman's voice can be heard in Ahab's cry: "In the midst of the personified impersonal, a personality stands here." This need of the poet to personify, to create meaning in nature by projecting himself into it, is central to the compositional method of Moby Dick. Both Ahab and Ishmael participate in it in varying degrees. If Ahab is destroyed as a result of the process, it is because he acted on projections which should have remained symbolic. Ishmael, a more moderate poet-quester, restricted himself, primarily, to the mode of language, and, thus, survived to tell the tale.[21]

In his desire to present the objective "truth" of whaling, as well as the subjective poetic visions of Ishmael and Ahab, Melville created a book which could not easily be classified among existing genres. Even his most intelligent and sympathetic critic (after Hawthorne) Everett Duyckinck was troubled. "In one light they are romantic fictions," he writes in his Literary World review, "in another statements of absolute fact. . . . It becomes

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quite impossible to submit such books to a distinct classification as fact, fiction, or essay."[22] George Ripley's positive review in Harper's notes that "these sudden and decided transitions [from fact to fancy] form a striking feature of the volume." But on the same issue of 'transitions' as they affected the style of the book, William Harrison Ainsworth must have been reflecting popular sentiment when he calls Melville "a Doppelganger--a dual number incarnate."

The war between poetry and fact permeates Moby Dick, but Melville maintains a balance between the two which partially accounts for whatever unity the book achieves. In Pierre, his next novel, all balance is lost, and poetic excess quite literally tears the book apart. As poetry and self became more identified in Melville's works, it became more difficult for him to maintain a coherent, externalized fictional world. This is mirrored in the action of the book as Pierre's discoveries about himself disrupt his life and the novel's narrative line. Isabel's entrance into his life transforms it much as Ahab's presence transforms the voyage of the Pequod. She, in fact, becomes the embodiment of poetry. "But the vague revelation was now in him," the narrator informs us, "that the visible world, some of which before had seemed but too common and prosaic to him; and but too intelligible; he now vaguely felt, that all the world, and every misconceivedly common and prosaic thing in it, was steeped

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a million fathoms in a mysteriousness wholly hopeless of solution."[23] Excited by her mystery and "bewitched" and "enchanted" by the "melodious" sound of her voice Pierre is transformed.

Pierre senses the importance of Isabel's poetic presence to him for the first time as he lies beneath the "Terror Stone." Melville describes how in "the horrible interspace" under the rock Pierre progresses from speechlessness, to things "less and less unspeakable" until he actually speaks, asking the stone to crush him if giving himself to truth would be nothing more than a self-deceptive action. The unconscious becomes conscious, and the fitting "emblem" for the act of consciously giving oneself to truth, Melville tells us in the following section, is poetry. As a "poetic boy" Pierre had named the Terror Stone the "Memnon Stone," after a monument to an Egyptian who had sacrificed himself for another at Troy. Traditionally, the statue erected in his honor had given off a moaning sound every sunrise, but "now all is mute." In his willingness to sacrifice himself for Isabel, Pierre identifies with Memnon. But, as the narrator warns, "in a bantering, barren, and prosaic, heartless age," those who pursue truth and speak it are doomed.

One cannot be both popular _and_ devoted to truth Melville discovered after _Moby Dick_ was published, a realization which lies behind his blistering attack on

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the favorable critical reception of Pierre's early literary efforts. Although popular, those romantic lyrics were not grounded in experience and reflection; as a result, they were not true to poetry. As Pierre matures he seeks new forms to contain his newly acquired perceptions. But Melville's attack on the conventional novel and drama in the book reveals their inadequacy for Pierre, and provides clues for his own abandonment of prose. Thoughts of Isabel flow through Pierre's mind, her life like "an unravelled plot" which he feels will never be disentangled. Life was not at all like novels:

> Like all youths, Pierre had conned his novel-lessons; had read more novels than most persons of his years; but their false inverted attempts at systematizing eternally unsystemisable elements; their audacious, intermeddling impotency, in trying to unravel, and spread out, and classify, the more thin than gossamer threads which make up the complex web of life; these things over Pierre had no power now. Straight through their helpless miserableness he pierced. (pp.198-199)

Such diction as "false," "audacious," "impotency," and helpless miserableness" expose a hostility towards the novel which had previously been revealed only in Melville's subverting methodology. It is clearly not an appropriately "masculine" form; it is too orderly, too concerned with surfaces. As Ann Douglas concludes in her excellent chapter on Melville in The Feminization of American Culture, "In Pierre, Melville turned decisively and openly against the middle-class sentimental-minded feminized reading public he essentially tried to evade or educate

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in his previous work."[24] Douglas sees Pierre as Melville's attempt to use fiction to punish his fiction hungry readers.

All fictions, however, are not being attacked in Pierre, for only through certain kinds of fables and metaphors can truth be glimpsed. But the novel, and one might add light verse, by virtue of its orderliness and decorum, lies about reality. The sinuous and treacherous way to the truth requires an art form which will reflect the complexity of that path. Thus, Melville writes, "while the countless tribe of common novels laboriously spin veils of mystery; and while the countless tribe of common dramas do but repeat the same; yet the profounder emanations of the human mind, intended to illustrate all that can be humanly known of human life; these never unravel their own intricacies, and have no proper endings, but in imperfect, unanticipated, and disappointing sequels (as mutilated stumps), hurry to abrupt intermergings with the eternal tides of time and fate." (p.199) False mysteries need not be corrected and then solved if one sees life as the ambiguity it is.

The form which might encompass "the profounder emanations of the human mind" is not specified. While writing Pierre in 1851 Melville was no doubt aware on some level that he was burning his bridges beind him. But like White Jacket cutting himself free from the garment which was drowning him, Melville had to destroy the genre in

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which he felt trapped. One can be certain that he shared Pierre's realization that the more he wrote "and the deeper and deeper he dived," the more he saw "the everlasting elusiveness of Truth; the universal lurking insincerity of even the greatest and purist written thoughts." (p.472) But unlike the young Pierre who disguised his true feelings and "with the soul of an Athiest ... wrote down the godliest things," Melville tells all. He tried to make the novel an instrument of truth telling and failed. _Pierre's_ fluctuations in tone and excesses in language are evidence of that failure. As James Guetti correctly concludes, when such a state of "linguistic confusion becomes the most realistic expression" of a writer's perception "of language and experience, then the foundations of the novel begin to crumble."[25] Although Guetti goes on to argue that a writer who reaches such a point might lose his belief in mankind, and certainly his faith in art, Melville kept writing. If the extended prose "botches" of fact, romance, and meditation would not work, he would try a new form.

The mode Melville turned to next was short fiction, publishing stories in magazines between 1853 and 1856. His reasons for going in this direction were varied. _Pierre_'s critical and financial failure put him further into debt with his publisher, and cancelled any hopes he might have had of selling a popular novel or romance. An attempt by relatives and friends to obtain a consular

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post for him failed. Arrowhead, his Pittsfield farm, was beginning to turn a profit, but demanded more of his time. If he intended to make any living from his writing, then, it would have to be a type of writing which would not confine him to months in his study. Since Putnam's and Harper's Magazine showed an interest in his work, in spite of Pierre's reception, his course was clear. But if we are to follow the logic of Melville's career, there are more compelling aesthetic and psychological reasons for his turn to short fiction. His conflicting aims in Pierre turned it into, in Henry Murray's phrase, "a literary monster." Putnam's reviewer, seeing the book as evidence of Melville's pathology, warned him to "stay his step from the edge of the precipice over which he was tottering."[26] Although there is exaggeration here, Melville doubtlessly realized that he needed greater control over his materials.

One way to achieve that control was by limiting his scope. The chapter had always been Melville's most successful structural unit. What we remember in the novels are linked but self-contained episodes which have a high degree of inner coherence. There are numerous memorable set-pieces "Time and Temples" in Mardi, "What Redburn Saw in Launcelott's-Hey," and almost every chapter of Moby Dick- "The Sermon," "The Whiteness of the Whale," and "The Town-Ho's Story." Melville clearly felt liberated by the security of confinement. With the extended

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plot temporarily out of his mind, he could concentrate on wringing every bit of significance out of the material at hand. His growing preference for limitation would shortly attract him to verse; in the stories it would lead to a sharpening of technique as Melville used plot and characterization more efficiently.[27]

Many of Melville's stories give indications of his growth as an artist and point toward his turn to poetry, but several are particularly revealing when viewed in this context. In "Bartleby" Melville brilliantly uses action and inaction in the plot to attack the prosaic in life, something he had tried but failed to do in Pierre. Bartleby is the embodiment of "chronometrical" time in a "horological" world. In his growing refusal to participate in the day-to-day activities of life he achieves a degree of control over them, and transforms them, albeit temporarily. If we consider the routine, mechanical job of copying as the most bald representation of the prosaic in life, then Bartleby's preference not to participate, and the mystery shrouding his reasons, must represent the poetic. As the lawyer admits, he could not see how "the mettlesome poet, Byron, would have contentedly sat down with Bartleby to examine a law document of, say five hundred pages, closely written in a crimpy hand."[27] Bartleby's refusal to honor his contract to work for the lawyer parallels Melville's preference not to write the conventional narratives he feels the

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public is obliging him to write. From this perspective, "Bartleby" can be read as a story which is more directly about subverting plots than either Moby Dick or Pierre. This turning away from external action naturally results in a turning inward. The rational lawyer who had always been directed by external "oughts" now is forced to consider the more ineffable "shoulds." The power of poetry, as the lawyer learns, is that it resists the reasonable, and his irony is only partial as he exclaims: "At last I see it, I feel it; I penetrate to the predestinated purpose of my life." (p.89) The world crushes Bartleby as it crushes anything it cannot immediately classify, but his presence haunts the lawyer and the reader. In this he embodies the role the poetic plays in our lives-it intrudes, possesses us temporarily, and is destroyed by daily events. As Melville withdrew from the literary mainstream, he identified less with the overbearing Ahab "type" and more with the Bartleby "type," withdrawn, but willful. He would soon discover the appropriate voice for such a type.

Several other stories illustrate the strong and growing influence poetry had on Melville during this critical period. His reading of Spenser is apparent in the quotations from The Faerie Queen and Prosopopoia, or Mother Hubberd's Tale which serve as epigrams for each sketch of The Encantadas. The purpose of using Spenser was to reinforce the allegorical nature of each sketch.

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The quotation he chooses for the first, from Book II of The Faerie Queen, predisposes the reader to Melville's poeticizing of this real, yet unearthly place:

> For those same Islands, seeming now and than,
> Are not firme lande, nor any certein wonne,
> But straggling plots, which to and fro do ronne
> In the wide waters.[28]

Melville's frequent use of metaphor, of active description ("tumbled masses of blackish or greenish stuff," "a fury of foam"), and of biblical allusion personify the islands while making them emblematic of man's fallen state. The stories in The Encantadas, like "straggling plots," are only important as conveyors of meaning. A factual depiction of place takes precedence, but here the facts are so strange that it takes a minimal effort to transform them into enchanted poetry. At the end of Sketch One we see that process of transformation beginning in memory yet grounded in sensual detail. Sometimes when he is in the Adirondacks the narrator says:

> I sit me down in the mossy head of some deep-wooded gorge, surrounded by prostrate trunks of blasted pines and recall, as in a dream, my other and far distant rovings in the baked heart of the charmed isles: and remember the sudden glimpses of dusky shells, and long languid necks protruded from leafless thickets; and again have beheld the vitreous inland rocks worn down and grooved into deep ruts by ages and ages of the slow draggings of tortoises in quest of pools of scanty water; I can hardly resist the feeling that in my time I have indeed slept upon evilly enchanted ground. (p.136)

The poetry of place is remembered, created, in a dream. The islands may be bleak and hellish in reality, but in

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Melville's description they become provocatively beautiful.

The enchanting power of the poetic is positive in The Encantadas, working aesthetically to make the reader more receptive to the work's various levels of meaning. In "Poor Man's Pudding and Rich Man's Crumbs," however, this poeticizing process is viewed negatively, much as it would be later in Clarel. The poet Blandmour, his name indicating Melville's attitude toward him, represents the romantic esthete who distorts the hard realities of life. When Melville is concerned with the issue of social equality in a work, he often alters the equation of poetry and truth. Truth becomes the prosaic facts of life and poetry an obfuscating blur imposed from above. This perspective operates in the Liverpool section of Redburn, in White Jacket, "Jimmy Rose," and "The Piazza." Blandmour has a quaint label for each misery of the poor. A cup of cold rain water in a recipe is a "Poor Man's Egg; snow covering a field is 'Poor Man's Manure;'" and he promises the narrator of the story that when he eats "Poor Man's Pudding" at a poor man's table it will be "as relishable as a rich man's."[29] The pudding turns out to be an unpalatable mixture of rice, milk and salt boiled together, "mouldy" and "briny" to the taste. When the narrator refers to it as "Poor Man's Pudding" the poor wife flushes and says half resentfully, "we do not call it so, sir."

The poet Helmstone in "The Fiddler" begins, we are

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led to believe, as a "sublime" poet as isolated from the realities of life as Blandmour. But by the end of the story, after being exposed to a true artist, he rejects his previous effete role. In "The Fiddler" Melville gives us a glimpse of an ideal poet, perhaps the one he aspires to be. "Hautboy," again the name indicates Melville's attitude, "seemed intuitively to hit the exact line between enthusiasm and apathy.... Rejecting all solutions, he but acknowledged facts.... It was plain, then- so it seemed at that moment, at least- that his extraordinary cheerfulness did not arise either from deficiency of feeling or thought." (p.197) True as these insights of Helmstone's prove to be, it is in his misjudgments of Hautboy that he most fully reveals Melville's criteria for the ideal artist. Helmstone speculates that Hautboy could never be an example for either the average person or for "an ambitious dreamer like me" because his cheerfulness implies a lack of genius, because he has clear circumscribed opinions and docile passions, and because "nothing tempts him beyond common limit; in himself he has nothing to restrain." (p.198) If, like Melville himself, Hautboy had once been ambitious, heard applause, or "endured contempt" he would be a different man, or so Helmstone concludes. Of course, each negative is reversed when Helmstone learns that Hautboy had been the renowned English prodigy Master Betty. And when he hears how "something miraculously superior in the style" of his playing transforms even the commonest tunes, Helmstone

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agrees that Hautboy is "something of an Orpheus" and tears up his own manuscripts to take regular lessons of him. To summarize, Melville's criteria for the ideal artist are that he must have genius, acknowledge the realities of this world, be tempted beyond common limits yet exercise restraint, and forego worldly fame if the popular audience rejects him. Melville as poet would strive to fit these criteria.

Finally, in the short story "Cock-a-Doodle-Doo!" Melville presents his strongest case for the poet and the power of poetry, although the poet is represented by a rooster. The story offers further evidence of Melville's concern with poetry during the 1853-56 period, as it is, "in effect, a parody, or paradoxical commentary" on Wordsworth's poem "Resolution and Independence."[30] Melville's tone is initially mocking, as the depressed narrator becomes cheered by the cock's cry, "like a very laureate celebrating the glorious victory of New Orleans." (p.107) He predicts, substituting "cocks" for Wordsworth's "poets," that "we fine cocks begin our crows in gladness;/ But when eve does come we don't crow quite so much,/ For then cometh despondency and madness." (p.108) As the narrative progresses the humor is replaced by a growing commitment to the power of the cock's crow, and becomes a quest for its source. The narrator imagines that the cock is no innocent romantic, ignorant of the darker side of life. His cry reveals "the crow of a cock

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who had fought the world and got the better of it, and was now resolved to crow, though the earth should heave and the heavens should fall. It was a wise crow; an invincible crow; a philosophic crow; a crow of all crows." (p.111) Experience, wisdom, and resistant heroism, then, must be added to the attributes of the ideal poet presented in "The Fiddler." An understanding of Melville's attraction to the concepts of heroism and "manliness" will be seen as central to his turn to poetry.

At the end of "Cock-a-Doodle-Doo!" Melville rescinds his condemnation of the poet who will cover the realities of life in a romantic haze. The ideal poet transforms those realities into higher truths. After the narrator traces the cock to the home of the impoverished Merrymusk, the story itself enters the realm of poetic allegory. The entire family is ill, and the cock, prefiguring _Clarel's_ epilogue, seems to 'astound' each into heaven. First "one long, musical, triumphant, and final sort of crow" presides over the death of Merrymusk and his wife. Then the cock turns to the children:

> The pallor of the children was changed to radiance. Their faces shone celestially through grime and dirt. They seemed children of emperors and kings, disguised. The cock sprang upon their bed, shook himself and crowed, and crowed again, and still and still again. He seemed bent upon crowing the souls of the children out of their wasted bodies. He seemed bent upon rejoining _instanter_ this whole family in the upper air. The children seemed to second his endeavours. Far, deep, intense longings for release transfigured them into spirits before my eyes. I saw angels where they lay. (p.128)

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This certainly surpasses the conclusion of "Resolution and Independence" in intensity. Poetry is not merely the consolation it is for Wordsworth's speaker. In its purist, most noble sense, and Melville overemphasizes the cock's nobility, poetry can revivify our hidden humanity. The cock symbolizes the only positive human attribute Merrymusk's family had left, their pride. A phrase from Wordsworth's poem is applicable here, "By our own spirits are we deified." There is no external solution to the problems of poverty and disease, so none could be provided within the realistic narrative structure. Happy endings, Melville realized, were an invention of the popular novel. But poetry, not being bound by those conventions, can transform because it is, in a sense, an ideal genre, predicated on a convention of subjective acceptance. Here Melville is closest to Coleridge's concept of "poetic faith." We believe what happens at the end of the story because the characters believe, the narrator suddenly believes, and we are given sufficient warning that reality is being left behind. The ironic tone is dropped and even the impossible can occur. Although Melville is still writing in prose, the realistic narrative world is invaded and altered by the poetic as it is in Mardi, Moby Dick, Pierre and "Bartleby."

It is fitting, therefore, that Melville's last book before his turn to poetry was The Confidence Man, a work which in form and content thoroughly exposes the inadequacy

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of the conventional novel. As the central character or presence is metamorphosized into his various incarnations, meeting a changing assortment of people on a ship that moves perpetually, the reader enters a detached world. A sense of familiar, stable surroundings and consistent, believable character is missing. Melville is aware, of course, that readers of novels have expectations, and to those "to Whom it may Prove Worth Considering" he devotes two chapters to self-vindication. In the first he attacks the conventional novel and its readers in much the same way he did in Pierre. Readers who come to a work of fiction seeking consistent characterization and "transparency" of motivation are shallowly seeking neither good art nor a true rendering of reality. In reality, people are not consistent and their motives are often not clear. Melville, here, is seeking an art form which will be sufficiently detached from novelistic conventions to be inconsistent, ambiguous, and indirect. To see reality in this way, as it'really' is, is to see poetically.

What is particularly revealing in relation to Melville's turn to poetry is the language he uses to make this point. "That fiction," he writes, "where every character can, by reason of its consistency, be comprehended at a glance, either exhibits but sections of character, making them appear for wholes, or else is very untrue to reality; while, on the other hand, that author who draws a character, even though to common view incongruous in parts, as the flying-squirrel, and, at different periods, as much at variance

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with itself as the caterpillar is with the butterfly into which it changes, may yet, in so doing, be not false but faithful to facts."[31] Although striking metaphors are a constant feature of his writings, Melville's sudden use of the appropriate flying-squirrel and caterpillar similes in this context demonstrate that only metaphor can force the reader to see poetically and, thus, accurately. A startling new image or unconventional novel will destroy our hackneyed ways of seeing much as the existence of the platypus (another Melville simile) forced naturalists to alter their systems of classification.

Melville realized that the subversive The Confidence Man would not be a popular success. In chapter 33 he describes its ideal audience as being composed of "tolerant" readers who would "look not only for more entertainment, but at bottom even for more reality, than real life itself can show." (p.199) Such an audience did not materialize, but the reviews were not all negative and, in fact, were perceptive about the direction in which Melville's art was moving. The New York Evening Times was correct in concluding that "in The Confidence Man, there is no attempt at a novel, or a romance, for Melville has not the slightest qualifications for a novelist, and therefore he appears to much the better advantage here than in his attempts at story books." The Critic pointed out "that prosiness is the last crime of which Herman Melville can be accused.... On the contrary, there is a vividness and an intensity about his style which is almost painful for

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the constant strain upon the attention."[32] It was this intensity, more characteristic of poetry, which turned away the large population of novel readers who in addition could not tolerate the book's slow pace, satiric tone, and depressing theme.

Those modern critics who argue that Melville had insured the failure of his novel because he had finally grasped the absurdity and duplicity of fiction writing itself are certainly correct. But when this insight is taken as predictive of his abandonment of serious authorship, as it frequently is, the realities of Melville's artistic maturation are being ignored. Edgar Dryden in his perceptive Melville's Thematics of Form dovetails Melville's apparent loss of faith in his fictional world with his religious scepticism,[33] but the conclusion he draws from these accurate premises does not correspond with what happened in Melville's career:

> Since all of man's activities and institutions are the products of self-conscious creative acts, the literary artist is himself a part of the empty masquerade. Consequently, he is not able, as Ishmael is, to escape the human and material fictions and to reveal the horrible truth which lies behind their surfaces. The self-conscious gestures of the narrators of Pierre and The Confidence Man lift the veil of illusion only to replace it with a newer, more artificial one.... Like the Egyptian priests, Moses, who was schooled in their arts, and Christ himself, the artist is a confidence man. Writing too is a sham; the literary cosmos is as deceitful as the Christian one. "Truth is voiceless" (Mardi,xciii,248), and for thirty-four years after The Confidence Man, so was Herman Melville.[34]

Melville, in fact, never stopped trying to give a voice

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to truth. An artist's awareness that he is a "confidence man" does not make it impossible for him to reveal the truth. One might conclude that if the artist is _not_ aware of his relation to the facts of this world he will never learn or reveal anything of value. In this sense, such self-perception is a necessary fall. Unlike Bartleby, appealing as the comparison might be, Melville did not respond to his disillusionment with silence. Rather, for thirty years after the publication of _The Confidence Man_, Melville, with the plasticity and consciousness of the artist he had become, turned to poetry. In a new voice, one he would painstakingly develop, and in a new guise, as poet, he continued the masquerade.

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Notes

[1]Newton Arvin, Herman Melville, A Critical Biography (New York: The Viking Press, 1950), p.262.

[2]Nina Baym, "Melville's Quarrel with Fiction," PMLA, 94 (1979), p.909 and 920. In addition to Baym and Arvin, other critics who see the poetry as an afterthought and not as a logical extension of Melville's quarrel with fiction are Edgar Dryden in Melville's Thematics of Form (Hopkins, 1968), John Seelye, Melville: The Ironic Diagram (Northwestern U. Press, 1970), and Alan Lebowitz, Progress Into Silence: A Study of Melville's Heroes (Indiana U. Press, 1970).

[3]Howard P. Vincent, Collected Poems, (Chicago, Packard and Company, 1947), p.vii.

[4]Here I differ with Agnes Dicken Cannon's conclusion in her unpublished doctoral dissertation, "Melville's Concepts of The Poet and Poetry," U. of Penn. 1968. She argues that "to speak of Melville's turning to poetry in 1859, as is often done, is a misnomer" because since Mardi he saw himself as a poet, and in turning to verse he "merely" turned to a more disciplined form of poetry. (p.7) The fact that Melville began a rigorous self-education process in verse writing after 1857 indicates more than a shift toward greater discipline; it is a major shift in aesthetic perspective from prose. Cannon's view here, I believe, blurs the importance of what Melville may have been trying to say by changing genres.

[5]Edward Rosenberry, Melville (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), p.30.

[6]Leon Howard in Herman Melville (U. of Cal., 1951), considered the standard biography, does not speculate on the reasons for Melville's turn to poetry, nor do Arvin, Robert Penn Warren in his two major essays on the poetry cited below, or William H. Shurr in The Mystery of Iniquity: Melville as Poet, 1857-1891 (U. of Kentucky, 1972), the most important current study of the poetry. Only Laurence Barrett in his essay "The Differences in Melville's Poetry" (PMLA, 70, 1955) and Joseph G. Knapp in Tortured Synthesis: The Meaning of Melville's Clarel (N.Y.: Philosophical Library, 1971), p.4, attempt to enumerate some of the causes (pp. 615-616).

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[7]Walker Cowen, "Melville's Marginalia," Diss. Harvard 1965, Vol. XI, p.48. Because a number of Melville's personal volumes are scattered in several libraries and, in many cases, are becoming fragile, I have relied heavily on Cowen's transcriptions of Melville's markings. When I refer to a particular marking or annotation in the text, the page and volume numbers following the quotation will refer to its location in Cowen, unless another source is specified.

[8]Letter to John Murray, New York 25 March 1848, The Letters of Herman Melville, eds. Merrel R. Davis and William H. Gilman (New Haven: Yale U. Press, 1960), p.70.

[9]Richard Chase, The American Novel and Its Tradition (New York: Anchor Books, 1957), pp.12-13.

[10]Tyrus Hillway, Introduction to Mardi (New Haven: College & University Press, 1973), p.9.

[11]Melville was well aware of the problem this would create for the readers of his time. In an 1849 letter to Richard Bentley on the negative critical reception of Mardi in England he writes: "And I can not but think that its having been brought out in England in the ordinary novel form must have led to the disappointment of many readers, who would have been better pleased with it, perhaps, had they taken it up in the first place for what it really is." What it is, as Melville explains, is not intended "merely" to entertain.

[12]Mardi, p.459. This, and subsequent references to Mardi will be to the Hillway edition cited above.

[13]For a fuller discussion of Melville's ideas about the poet and poetry in Mardi and throughout Melville's writings see Cannon's unpublished dissertation cited in note 4 above. An excellent article on the subject is Bryan Short's "The Redness of the Rose': The Mardi Poems and Melville's Artistic Compromise," in Essays in Arts and Sciences, vol.v, no.2, July, 1976, pp.100-112.

[14]To Richard Bentley, New York 5 June 1849, Letters, pp.85-86.

[15]Herman Melville, Redburn: His First Voyage (Chicago: Northwestern U. Press, 1969), p.143. Subsequent references are to this edition.

[16]Herman Melville, White Jacket (New York: Grove Press, 1956), p.41. Subsequent references are to this edition.

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[17]To Allan Melville, Pittsfield 22 May 1860, Letters, p.199.

[18]To Richard Henry Dana, Jr., New York 1 May 1850, Letters, p.108.

[19]Herman Melville, "Hawthorne and His Mosses," in The Portable Melville, ed. Jay Leyda (New York: Viking, 1952), p.407.

[20]Herman Melville, Moby Dick (New York: Norton), eds. Harrison Hayford and Hershel Parker, 1967, p.102.

[21]In a sense, Melville in Moby Dick and Pierre is concerned with the problem of whether one must act on knowledge and what is the proper form for such action. Kenneth Burke's concept of "symbolic action" permits us to see how Melville solved this problem through writing. The discussion of Battle Pieces in chapter two relates this solution to the turn to poetry.

[22]All three contemporary reviews are reprinted in the Hayford and Parker Moby Dick, p.613, p.617, and p.619.

[23]Herman Melville, Pierre (New York: Grove, 1957), p.180. All subsequent references in the text are to this edition.

[24]Ann Douglas, The Feminization of American Culture (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1977), p.309. Another important discussion of this issue are the chapters "Melville," and "Melville and the Common Reader," in The Profession or Authorship in America, 1800-1870: The Papers of William Charvat, ed. Matthew J. Bruccoli (Ohio State U. Press, 1968).

[25]James Guetti, The Limits of Metaphor: A Study of Melville, Conrad, and Faulkner (Ithaca: Cornell, 1967), p.127.

[26]Howard, Herman Melville, p.202.

[27]See A. W. Plumstead, "Bartleby: Melville's Venture into a New Genre," Melville Annual 1965: A Symposium: Bartleby the Scrivener, ed. Howard P. Vincent (Ohio: Kent State U. Press, 1966), pp.82-93. Argues that the short story form forced Melville to exercise tighter control "on wordiness and lyricism not pertinent to a single effect" and moved him to a new artistic stance of indirection and suggestion. Plumstead does not link this step to Melville's turn to poetry.

[28]Herman Melville, "Bartleby the Scrivener," Herman

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Melville: Billy Budd, Sailor and Other Stories (England: Penguin, 1967) ed. Harold Beaver, p.67.

[29]Herman Melville, "The Encantadas," in Beaver, p.131.

[30]Herman Melville, "Poor Man's Pudding and Rich Man's Crumbs," Great Short Works of Herman Melville, ed. Warner Berthoff (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p.167. Subsequent references to stories in this chapter are from this collection.

[31]See Harold Beaver's notes pp.424-429, where he compares lines from the poem and the story. See also Thomas F. Heffernan, "Melville and Wordsworth," American Literature, vol. 49, no.3, Nov. 1977, pp.338-351, for a description of Melville's annotations in his recently recovered copy of Wordsworth's poems.

[32]Herman Melville, The Confidence Man, ed. Hennig Cohen (New York: Holt, Rinehard & Winston, 1964), p.72.

[33]The Melville Log, ed. Jay Leyda (New York: Gordian Press, 1969), p.570 and 572.

[34]A conjunction which will be discussed in chapter three below.

[35]Dryden, p.195.

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Chapter Two

Quitting the Quarry: Melville Turns to Poetry

"I was nigh taking my life with my own hands. But art held me back. I could not leave this world until I had revealed what lay within me."

Beethoven, marked by Melville in William Alger's *The Solitudes of Nature and of Man*.

There are heroes without armies, who hear martial music in their souls.
Mardi

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In the four prolific years between Mardi (1848) and Pierre (1852), during which he wrote five novels, Melville developed from an instinctively gifted writer into an artist who appreciated the value of controlling his materials.[1] In Mardi he interrupts the narrative to purportedly describe his own process of writing:

> My cheek blanches white while I write; I start at the scratch of my pen; my own mad brood of eagles devours me; fain would I unsay this audacity; but an iron-mailed hand clenches mine in a vise and prints down every letter in my spite. Fain would I hurl off this Dionysius that rides me; my thoughts crush me down till I groan; in far fields I hear the song of the reaper, while I slave and faint in my cell. The fever runs through me like lava; my hot brain burns like a coal; and like many a monarch I am less to be envied than the veriest hind in the land. (Mardi,chap.cxix,p.308)

The "iron-mailed hand," the "Dionysius" which is clearly in control within this passage, is impulse. Even though the carefully balanced lines and appropriate imagery unmistakably indicate artifice, the possessed writer depicted would only be able to create such effects intuitively. While Melville, in writing Mardi, was actually in greater artistic control than the above picture indicates, he was still strongly attracted to an impulsive, and thus a romantic, approach to writing.

The epic poet Lombardo is Melville's model for the mature artist in Mardi, but his creative mode is impulsive: "When Lombardo set about his work, he knew not what it would become. He did not build himself in with plans; he wrote right on, and so doing got deeper and deeper into

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himself, and like a resolute traveler plunging through baffling woods, at last was rewarded for his toils" (Mardi, p.491). Even as early as Mardi Melville knew that the result of this "toil" often included a tremendous amount of "trash" which had to be eliminated. But, at this time, he felt such pruning had to occur after the fact of writing. Instincts are to be trusted, and as he writes in a letter to Mardi's publisher, they are "prophetic, & better than acquired wisdom."[2]

By the time he was writing Pierre, just four years and two novels later, Melville had come to fear and distrust impulse. The pressure of having to write quickly for money, poor sales and reviews, and perhaps the "wisdom" acquired through intensive reading and writing, led Melville to seek more artistic control over that "certain something unmanageable in writers."[3] The "proper methodization" of writing, he reveals in Pierre, is not to allow impulse to control the writer, but for the writer to control impulse. The outcome would be a work of art which might, in fact, last. "Youth must wholly quit, then, the quarry, for a while," the narrator suggests, "and not only go forth, and get tools to use in the quarry, but must go and thoroughly study architecture" (Pierre, p.358). In Pierre he also states "I write precisely as I please," which perhaps accounts for the book's failings. This does not, however, negate the fact that here, for the first time, he consciously asserts that

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form is at least equivalent in importance to content. This greater restraint, the classicism which Melville's use of the word "architecture" implies, leads, as we have seen, toward the more severe style of the short fiction and of The Confidence Man. It will be more fully realized in the poetry.

We have already seen how poetry, as an embodiment or symbol of the personal, the spiritual, and the true, had invaded the world of Melville's prose narratives. Like instinct, it worked as a powerful romantic force to transform these narratives into unique artistic utterances. But without a sustaining external form, Melville could not control the outcome of his own vision. Poetry, and all it represents, can become more than the fleeting intrusion into our daily lives only if it is captured in the form of poem, is transmuted from 'romantic' force into 'classic' artifact.[4] In this realization Melville committed himself to going beyond a Bartleby-like gesture of renunciation to an art form which might articulate the motives behind that renunciation.

Melville's role as poet was forged out of a life crisis similar to Bartleby's. In October, 1856, in a state of mental and physical exhaustion resulting from getting The Piazza Tales through the press and completing The Confidence Man, Melville sailed (on borrowed money) to Europe and the Levant. Hawthorne noted on seeing him in Liverpool, "he certainly is much overshadowed since

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I saw him last," and in a well known journal entry reported that Melville had said "he had 'pretty much made up his mind to be annihilated.'"[5] Although suicide was a subject of great interest to Melville throughout his life and in his works, there is little doubt that the annihilation he referred to in 1856 was psychological and not physical. It was, in the twentieth century sense, a period of ego disintegration; to reestablish a sense of self Melville turned to writing as he had done in 1844 after his return from the sea and in 1852 after the failure of Pierre. The journey provided new perspectives and subjects for writing, since as he said in a lecture given on his return, "Travel to a large and generous nature is as a new birth."[6]

Melville's journey to Europe and the Levant in 1856-57 bears on his turn to poetry in a number of ways which will be explored later in this study. But it is significant that while his journal reveals that the Holy Land itself provided no cure for and probably exacerbated his depression, his return through Greece and Italy invigorated him. In its notational style, much like poetry itself, the journal reveals Melville warming to an environment that fuses nature and art. Here man is not dwarfed by nature, as he is in Palestine; his innate nobility is expressed. "Went to Baths of Caracalla," one entry notes. "--Wonderful. Massive. Ruins form, as it were, natural bridges of thousands of arches.

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There are glades, & thickets among the ruins--high up. --Thought of Shelley. Truly, he got his inspiration here. Corresponds with his drama & mind. Still majesty, & desolate grandeur."[7] That Melville too was inspired here is evidenced by "Shelley's Vision," a poem probably written shortly after his return. The speaker moves from a state of dejection and self-hatred ("I too would pelt the pelted one:/ At my shadow I cast a stone") to a sudden awareness of his potential divinity:

> When lo, upon that sun-lit ground
> I saw the quivering phantom take
> The likeness of St. Stephen crowned:
> Then did self-reverence awake.[8]

On February 25th, when he arrived in Rome, it was "flat" to Melville. He questioned whether this was due to his recently coming from the East or to his "chafed mood." But by March 1 he was completely caught up in the art of "Gigantic Rome." His entries show his usual concern with the deeper significance of the art he saw, but they also reveal a growing respect for the formal power of art. He found the Milan Cathedral "Glorious. More satisfactory to me than St. Peters." Its "wonderful grandeur" resulted not from its "conception" but from its "execution." Soon after his trip, in "Milan Cathedral," Melville would assert that art could transcend nature in service to religion. "The White Cathedral shows" over gardens and plain:

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> Of Art the miracles
> Its tribes of pinnacles
> Gleam like to ice-peaks snowed; and higher,
> Erect upon each airy spire
> In concourse without end,
> Statues of saints ascend
> Like multitudinous forks of fire.
> (Collected Poems, p.242.)

The artist who can actually erect spires topped by statues which seem to reach heaven almost rivals God, for whom conception and execution are the same.

For Melville as developing poet, the central lesson of Greek and Roman art was their mood of repose and restraint. From his first experience as a writer Melville had felt a gulf between the way he wrote and the way he felt he should write. Pierre's passionate effusions are evidence of youth and immaturity and could not possibly last, even though they might achieve a temporary popularity. Enduring art can only be created in a calm, self-controlled manner. In a lecture "Statuary in Rome," which he first delivered in November 1857, Melville sees statues as the embodiment of the ideal. The lecture, which Merton Sealts calls "the bridge between his fiction and poetry,"[9] is central to our understanding of Melville's aesthetic at the precise time he was becoming a poet. At the outset he makes the same case for poetry over science which Arnold makes in his essay on Maurice de Guerin, read and marked by Melville years later. Like Arnold, Melville feels the poet Burns understood the daisy on a deeper level than the naturalists, and his description

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of it, therefore, "wee, modest, crimson-tipped flower" should be set above "the technical definition" of Linnaeus. Melville's taking sides here represents his growing self-identification as an artist. "The world has taken a practical turn," he states at the end of his lecture, "and we boast much of our progress, of our energy, of our scientific achievements--though science is beneath art, just as the instinct is beneath reason" [italics mine]. Art, like reason, will rein in the instinct, molding it into something deserving of praise.

In the Belvedere Apollo and the Venus de Medici, statues he would call "hero-marbles," Melville saw the "tranquility" which he felt represented the "noblest" in us. Although in his imagination he elaborated on the hidden personalities of the statues, he thought that in general they did "not present the startling features and attitudes of men, but are rather of a tranquil, subdued air such as men have when under the influence of no passion." For the creator of Ahab and Pierre to laud passionlessness may seem too total a transformation, but these characters failed because they tried to realize an ideal in the real world. The naked, unmediated personality, Melville had learned, can not succeed in such an attempt. Only through art's subjugation of the personality, in the statues for example, might the ideal be approached. Ironically, only then does the individual have any chance for immortality:

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> These marbles, the works of the dreamers and idealists of old, live on, leading and pointing to good. They are the works of visionaries and dreamers, but they are realizations of the soul, the representations of the ideal. They are grand, beautiful and true, and they speak with a voice that echoes through the ages. Governments have changed; empires have fallen; nations have passed away; but these mute marbles remain-- the oracles of time, the perfection of art. They were formed by those who had yearnings for something better, and strove to attain it by embodiments in cold stone.... Can art, not life, make the ideal?[10]

Characteristically, Melville ends with a question, but the internal and external events of his life had already led him to an answer. He would no longer try to accomplish the impossible--follow his own visions _and_ seek popularity at the same time; instead, he would strive for an enduring fame through a more severe and demanding art. The Crystal Palace which he saw in London was enormously popular, but in his journal Melville finds the Palace a "vast toy" when compared to the pyramids. It had "no substance," made of "Durable materials, but perishable structure... Cant [sic] exist 100 years hence." He also noticed it was "Overdone. If smaller would look larger."[11] Thus, matters of scale, structure, and proportion were on Melville's mind in 1857. The genre which was most architectural, compact, consciously crafted, poised, and responsive to both his skills and vision, was poetry.

The poems collected in "Fruit of Travel of Long Ago" and not published until 1891 in _Timoleon_ are based largely

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on the 1856-57 journal. Their connection to his lecture and their experimental nature indicate they were written between 1857 and 1859. They are, no doubt, among the poems Melville had ready for publication in 1860. Of the eighteen poems, fourteen deal in some way with architecture and form. In "Greek Architecture," Melville presents, in form and content, his new commitment to a disciplined poetry:

> Not magnitude, not lavishness,
> But Form-- the Site;
> Not innovating wilfulness,
> But reverence for the Archetype.
> (Collected Poems, p.248)

Again and again the poems praise the attributes of form: it joins art and nature, is subtle and can only be perceived by the philosopher, it resists "all elements unmoved," it may be our only hope for belief as it can "try," "shake," and "molest" the cynic. That Melville is relating architectural form to poetry is not made explicit; only the poems themselves in their formal structures reveal the connection. But the final poem, "L'Envoi," can perhaps be read as Melville's ode to poetic structure itself:

> My towers at last! These rovings end,
> Their thirst is slaked in larger dearth:
> The yearning infinite recoils,
>   For terrible is earth!
>
> Kaf thrusts his snouted crags through fog:
> Araxes swells beyond his span,
> And knowledge poured by pilgrimage
>   Overflows the banks of man.
>
> But thou, my stay, thy lasting love

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> One lonely good, let this but be!
> Weary to view the wide world's swarm,
> But blest to fold but thee. (CP, p.256)

In this rather unsatisfying poem, personified nature overwhelms the speaker, a knight. Too much worldly knowledge can send a man beyond his limits (cf. Ahab and Pip); a "stay" is needed. The "thou" in the final stanza referring to the knight's lady may also refer to Elizabeth Melville. Yet according to the Envoy tradition, it can also refer back to the poems themselves which, like the castle, protect by enclosing the self in limits and by encapsulating experience.

In addition to the evidence of the poetry itself, Melville's marginalia are helpful in revealing the interrelated psychological and aesthetic factors involved in his turn to poetry and must stand for his unwritten essay on the subject. As Walker Cowen notes in his study of the markings, "the marginalia is [sic] the private journal of his discoveries, the documented history of Melville's half-century struggle with himself and his art."[12] Here, strict chronology cannot be maintained, for Melville evidently read certain important works before he purchased or borrowed them (Coleridge, Shelley). Even knowledge of an exact purchase date does not insure that he read or marked the book at that time.[13] What needs to be emphasized is that the consistency of Melville's markings indicate that related ideas about art were in his mind from an early period. These consisted largely of

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Romantic concepts derived from reading Coleridge's prose and Byron's poetry, which were modified over time by his extensive reading of other poets and critics, among them Chaucer, Spenser, Johnson, Hazlitt, Tennyson, the Brownings, and Arnold. Schiller, as will be seen, was of particular importance. The pattern of his markings allows us to identify various themes which were central to his turn to poetry: the restraint necessary to create lasting poetry, the power of poetry to transform the individual and society, the heroism of the poet in a prosaic age.

One of the themes revealed in the marginalia has particular psychological importance for Melville--poetry's ability to protect the self. His style of writing had nakedly exposed many of his deepest feelings and thoughts to an often hostile audience. As he had written in Pierre, "It is impossible to talk or to write without apparently throwing oneself hopelessly open; the Invulnerable Knight wears his visor down" (p.361). In Sadi's The Gulistan, or Rose Garden, purchased by Melville in 1868, he heavily marked the following lines:

> Whosoever stretcheth out his neck claiming consequence, is beset by enemies from all quarters. Sady lies prostrate, freed from worldly desires; no man attempteth to combat with one who is down on the ground.
> (Cowen, 8, p.174)

In light of this recoil from public censure, it can be concluded that poetry served as a visor to protect

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Melville's vulnerability. The conventions of the genre make personal truths less directly accessible. In addition, if it is true poetry and not mere verse (a distinction Melville marked in an essay by Ben Jonson), then it must have a smaller, more discriminating audience than prose, consisting of the "tolerant" readers Melville sought in The Confidence Man.

It could be argued that Melville freed himself from the worldly desire for praise by abandoning professional authorship, withdrawal from the marketplace bringing instantaneous peace. But Melville could never be satisfied with passive retreat. The classical calm he sought must come from a deeper level than one of public/private interaction. His attempt to chasten himself through the restrictions imposed by writing verse ultimately did succeed in giving him greater control over his art. Many of his markings indicate his belief that only through the struggle between the self and restraining form can significant work be achieved. In Ben Jonson's prose he heavily marked the following: "Ready writing makes not good writing; but good writing brings on ready writing. Yet when we think we have got the faculty, it is even then good to resist it: as to give a horse a check sometimes with the bit, which doth not so much stop his course as stir his mettle" (Cowen,6,p.486). He checked a passage of Thomas Hood's: "Artists have been known to have used the left hand in hope of checking the fatal facility

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which practice has conferred on the right..." (Cowen,6, p.271). This is not to say that Melville sees merit in the total suppression of impulse in writing. No worthwhile art could be produced then. He marked in Joshua Reynold's Discourses that "something must be conceded to great and irresistible impulses." But in the next discourse he triple lines the following, which no doubt appealed to him because of Reynold's analogy: "To encourage a solid and vigorous course of study, it may not be amiss to suggest, that perhaps a confidence in the mechanic produces a boldness in the poetic. He that is sure of the goodness of his ship and tackle puts out fearlessly from the shore; and he who knows that his hand can execute whatever his fancy can suggest, sports with more freedom in embodying the visionary forms of his own creation" (Cowen,8,p.96-97). Such a prescription certainly was adopted by Melville as he taught himself the craft of poetry.

Melville's view of poetry, derived in part from his appreciation of classical statuary, was that it should seek a poised stance through a unification of opposing forces. In "The Life Poetic" by Sir Henry Taylor he marked Taylor's discussion of what "peculiar balance of the faculties" contributed to the making of a great poet: "the balance of reason with imagination, passion with self-possession, abundance with reserve, and inventive conception with executive ability" (Cowen,7,p.226). Melville

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certainly first encountered this aesthetic combining romantic impulsiveness with respect for form in Coleridge's Biographia Literaria, which he purchased in 1848.[14] Echoes of Coleridge's stricture that the poet must balance "opposite or discordant qualities" and combine "a more than usual state of emotion, with more than usual order"[15] can be found in Melville's superb poem "Art":

> In placid hours well-pleased we dream
> Of many a brave unbodied scheme.
> But form to lend, pulsed life create,
> What unlike things must meet and mate:
> A flame to melt--a wind to freeze;
> Sad patience--joyous energies;
> Humility-- yet pride and scorn;
> Instinct and study; love and hate;
> Audacity-- reverence. These must mate,
> And fuse with Jacob's mystic heart,
> To wrestle with the angel--Art.
> (CP, p.231)

In the first two lines we can see the immature Pierre and Helmstone who are more "poetic" than actual poets. The sardonic "brave" reveals the mature Melville's contempt for such sensibilities and establishes the true poet as heroic and defiant. What is most significant about "Art," however, is that it is so clearly a poem and not merely rhythmical prose. The contrapuntal movement, the pauses and compression are reminiscent of Coleridge's description of the way good poetry carries the reader forward: "at every step he pauses and half recedes, and from the retrogressive movement collects the force which again carries him onward."[16] It is a motion which in the broadest application describes the structure

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of Melville's romances; it, in fact, accounts for their negative reception as novels. But in poetry we expect to be halted; we expect to "wrestle" in the reading as well as in the writing. In short, Melville in writing poetry is no longer working against his genre. The duality of vision does not tear the work apart; it is contained by the poem which, if we follow the Coleridgean definition, is built on discordances.

Another advantage of poetry for Melville, as evidenced by "Art," is its convention of self-reference. Melville's longer prose pieces often suffered when he indulged his impulse to talk about the act of writing or the book itself. His chapters on Pierre as writer go well beyond the tolerable level of authorial intrusion. Melville was clearly always beset by these impulses, but only in poetry could he indulge them without fear of destroying the coherent fictional world he was supposedly trying to maintain. Thus, many of his poems are about art, or include references to the poem itself in working out their themes. "Dupont's Round Fight" and "A Utilitarian View of the Monitor's Fight" in Battle Pieces are two obvious examples of such self-referential poems.

Perhaps the most important reason for Melville's turn to poetry is psychological. Even as it protected him from emotional injury, poetry allowed him to maintain his identification with the heroic. Melville increasingly saw the poet as a reclusive hero, unable or unwilling

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to participate in the mercenary modern world yet capable of exercising a subtle power over it. For him, the sense of nobility which results from heroic deeds was a vital support for and contributor to his concept of self. This key element in his identity can be seen in his veneration for his paternal grandfather, Major Thomas Melville, who had fought in the Revolution, and in the pride he took in his mother's patrician relatives, the Gansevoorts. The depth of his feelings is revealed in the early chapters of Redburn, when Redburn suffers the indignities of class scorn. Subsequent works reiterate his attraction for the heroic and the noble, often seeing these qualities in conjunction with poetry. Jack Chase is idolized by White Jacket because he is both brave and a student of poetry. In Israel Potter, Benjamin Franklin is considered "everything but a poet." Melville displays a grudging respect for Franklin's wisdom and skill, but he is too prudent to be considered a hero (or a poet), who must be aware of limits and willing to transgress them. The brooding John Paul Jones is the type of the hero for Melville. Unlike Ethan Allen, whose courageous resistance contrasts with Franklin's diplomacy, Jones combines the strengths of each. "Seldom has regicidal daring been more strangely coupled with octogenarian prudence," Melville writes, "than in many of the predatory enterprises of Paul. It is this combination of apparent incompatibilities which ranks him among extraordinary warriors."[17] And, as we have seen, it is the

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same yoking of opposites which makes the poem and the poet.

In Billy Budd Melville makes his strongest connection between heroism and poetry. Indulging in the "literary sin" of digression, he describes Nelson's self-conscious preparations for death at Trafalgar. He refutes those utilitarian critics of Nelson's act by arguing that "if thus to have adorned himself for the altar and the sacrifice were indeed vainglory, 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, vitalizes into acts."[18] The poetic act is, consequently, a heroic act, and the heroic, a poetic. In Madame de Stael's Germany Melville boxed and checked the following: "Poetic genius is an internal disposition, of the same nature with that which renders us capable of a generous sacrifice. The composition of a fine ode is a heroic trance" (emphasis Melville's;Cowen,11,p.47). If Melville, rheumatic and growing older, no longer had the "opportunity" to engage in heroic acts of self-sacrifice, he would sacrifice himself to the demands of poetry.

At a time when he felt isolated and rejected, Melville compensated by seeing himself as the individual persisting, against all odds, in his quest to discover and speak the truth. That he consciously assumed this embattled position is evidenced by his annotations in

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Emerson's essay "Heroism." He underlines "Heroism feels and never reasons, and therefore is always right" and writes in the margin "Alas! the fool again." But when Emerson writes "Heroism is an obedience to a secret impulse of an individual's character" which must follow its own logic despite external censure, Melville writes in the margin "This is noble again." (It should be noticed that here and elsewhere Melville's notation of highest praise is "noble"). Melville continues to mark assent as Emerson writes: "Self-trust is the essence of heroism, It is the state of the soul at war, and its ultimate objects are the last defiance of falsehood and wrong, and the power to bear all that can be inflicted by evil agents. It speaks the truth, and it is just, generous, hospitable, temperate, scornful of petty calculations, and scornful of being scorned. It persists..." (Cowen, ,p.19-20). If the public could not tolerate Melville's vision of the truth, he would push on nonetheless, perhaps with a greater sense of self-righteousness. To be heroic, however, one needs a foe, a challenge, and the years 1859-1866 provided a challenging environment. The superficial expectations of the general reader had always been a trial to Melville, but now the deeper forces which had been seething beneath the surface of American life, those Melville had been exposing in Moby Dick, Benito Cereno, and The Confidence Man, were coming to the surface. The imminence of war aroused contradictory

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feelings in Melville: excitement at the potential for heroic deeds, horror at the possibility of so much death and destruction. But his role, at the age of 42, would be as poet.

Being a poet, then, provided Melville with a renewed sense of self worth while preserving his social function, a matter of continued importance to him despite his impulse to withdraw.[19] In the reading Melville did on his 1860 San Francisco voyage we can see the growing intensity of his commitment to poetry. Besides the Bible, The Marble Faun, and several other volumes, Melville took with him The Poems and Ballads of Schiller, translated by Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton, and Chapman's translations of the Iliad and the Odyssey. It is particularly significant that Melville was reading Homer, the quintessential singer of the heroic in war, immediately prior to his assuming a similar role. Battle-Pieces, or Aspects of The War (1866) is, as its name implies, a personal, diverse, and episodic collection of poems, not an epic song. Melville does not share Homer's coherent vision, although he sees an epic dimension to the Civil War and treats his subject with consistent seriousness. Here he goes beyond the lyrical nationalism of some of his earlier works. Homer, however, did provide a role model for the poet as hero. The defining combination of emotion and restraint is always present. In Richard Hooper's introduction to Chapman's Homer Melville bracketed the following, boxing the word "passion ":

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"...But passion (the all in all in poetry) is everywhere present, raising the low, dignifying the mean, and putting sense into the absurd."[20] In Book One of the Iliad he checked, "draw no sword; use words, [underlining Melville's] and such as may/Be bitter to his pride, but just" (Cowen, 6,p.29). Melville would "draw no sword" in the Civil War, but he was passionately involved.

In Schiller's poetry, which he had purchased in 1849 and reread and marked in 1860, Melville found much with which to identify. His markings in "The Maid of Orleans," where "wit" is seen as inferior to "true Poetry," presage the growing serious tone in his own work. Consequently, he marked the following lines which would be echoed in Clarel: "To ribald mirth let Momus rouse the mart,/ But forms more noble glad the noble heart" (Cowen, 8,p.248). Schiller's idealism was, no doubt, a tonic to Melville in 1860, and his views on art, straddling the neo-classic and the Romantic, were consonant with his own. "Schiller," Rene Wellek notes, "seems correctly to have understood both the apartness of the aesthetic realm and its relation to morality and civilization."[21] This is precisely Melville's position as artist after 1858, and the one he espoused. As a result of the artist's isolation, he can collect himself, gain creative strength, and ultimately make a stronger impact on society. Schiller elaborates these ideas in "The Ideal and the Actual Life," a poem Melville heavily marked. The ideal realm, "forever

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fair, for ever calm and bright" and "Actual Human Life" are irreconcilable; the only hope of unification is Art. "The Form, the Archetype," (note Melville's use of the same words in the same order in "Greek Architecture") must unite with dull matter in the artistic struggle if any transcendence is to be achieved. Melville's assent is implied as he bracketed, checked, and underlined the following section of stanza viii:

> For never, save to toil untiring, spoke
> The unwilling Truth from her mysterious well--
> The statue only to the chisel's stroke
> Wakes from its marble cell.

The moral power of art is asserted in stanza xii where Schiller refers to the Laocoon, a statue which intrigued Melville. He argues that if we could see in our lives the always present "serpent strife," "the writhing limbs, the livid cheek," humans would subdue the evil in themselves in an act of common sympathetic awareness. Melville would certainly agree that we must recognize evil, yet he would be sceptical about Schiller's optimistic prediction. But Melville was, no doubt, in total agreement with the next stanza, which concerns his personal goal, the achievement of calm through the discipline of art:

> But in the Ideal Realm, aloof and far,
> Where the calm Art's pure dwellers are,
> Lo, the Laocoon writhes, but does not groan.
> Here no sharp grief the high emotion knows--
> Here sufferings self is made divine, and shows
> The brave resolve of the firm soul alone.
> (Cowen,9,p.257)

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Here the themes of "Art" and "Shelley's Vision" are combined. The artist's struggle not only results in a work of art but transforms his self image. The social realm, though, is not ignored. Melville brackets stanza xii and stanza xiii separately, and then places a larger bracket around both stanzas. Thus he strongly implies that he views the social and personal spheres of art as equally important.

Aside from Schiller's ballad "The Diver" and "The Vailed Image at Sais"[22] the poem Melville read with greatest interest was "The Artists," which Bulwer-Lytton calls Schiller's "Defense of Art" or vindication of the "divine use" of poetry. Once again the repose of the artist is stressed, achieved through a balance between freedom and discipline. Art is superior to philosophy and to science; it is man's unique and noblest sphere. Melville's markings indicate that the poem must have sparked his enthusiasm for continuing as an artist, especially since Schiller places worldly success on the lowest level of importance. The final stanza, which Melville marks with increasing emphasis, brings together a number of his reasons for turning to poetry:

> Truth, when the age she would reform, expels;
> Flies for safe refuge to the Muse's cells.
> More fearful for the veil of charms she takes,
> From song the fullness of her splendour breaks,
> And o'er the Foe that persecutes and quails
> Her vengeance thunders, as the Bard prevails!
> (Cowen,9,p.257)

In this stanza we can see much that would have attracted

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Melville: the identification of poetry with truth, isolation and the sense of public persecution, the belief that poetry might protect one from that persecution, and, ultimately, the emergence of the poet as hero.

Melville was inspired by Schiller's idealism, but, characteristically, drew back from his Emersonian belief that man is progressing intellectually and spiritually. In the final stanza of "The Artists" Schiller argues, effectively using the newly discovered rainbow spectrum as a unifying image, that whatever science discovers only adds to art. In Clarel Melville will contend, in contrast, that science's light merely puts man in deeper shadow (Epilogue,IV,xxxv,19). Further, in the preface to Arnold's poems, Melville wrote, "Schiller was at once helped & hurt by Goethe." A later marking in Arnold's "Obermann" verifies that the way Goethe hurt Schiller was by reinforcing his unwillingness to see the dark side of life.

In Arnold's poems, first purchased and annotated in 1862, Melville found perhaps his most influential models. This influence is evident when we note how many of his markings (and of Arnold's poems) refer to the poet and poetry.[23] The poem in the 1862 edition which received his greatest attention, if we are to judge by the pattern of his markings, is "Resignation. To Faustia," and it is the only Arnold poem Melville evaluates. At the end he writes, "This whole peice [sic] is admirable." The poem

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is pertinent to this discussion in its unabashed elevation of the poet above common men, who "rub" through life seeing only their own everyday problems and awaiting "chance" to deliver them. Melville marked the section of the poem which presents the poet who "subdues that energy to scan/ Not his own course, but that of man." Although the poet has suffered pain and knows "action" he is detached, looking down on the world "from some high station." Yet he is not emotionally isolated. He sees everything that occurs in nature, but not clinically, for "tears are in his eyes." He is aware of this moment and of its place in history, and overcomes chance through his "sad lucidity of soul." The balance of engagement and detachment, of living in and out of the moment, and the escape from self through an involvement with an aim "nobler" than the self present a version of the poetic identity Melville sought. It is a stance both god-like and human.

Melville's reading gives us some indication of what was on his mind as he contemplated and began writing his Civil War poems. It is very likely that at this time he remembered, or reread, Thomas Carlyle's "The Hero as Poet" which he had borrowed from Evert Duyckinck in the summer of 1850 while writing Moby Dick. We do not have an annotated copy of On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and The Heroic in History, but a passage like the following would reinforce Melville's sense of participation in the war and perhaps

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explains his motivation for writing Battle-Pieces. Carlyle writes, "The poet who could merely sit on a chair, and compose stanzas, would never make a stanza worth much. He could not sing the Heroic warrior, unless he himself were at least a Heroic warrior too."[24] Melville saw himself as both a man of action and of thought; the heroic for him depended on a linking of these two qualities. The Civil War, although modern and mechanistic and consequently anti-heroic, provided enough examples of heroism for the poet to sing. "On Sherman's Men" reports that even though many say that great deeds are no longer done in war, thin uniforms are exposed to deadlier weapons than knights in mail were. The result is that "battle can heroes and bards restore."[25]

On one level the soldiers in the war replace Ahab and Pierre as Melvillean protagonists. The poet, Ishmael-like, is free to roam, observe, and commemorate their actions. In fact, the multiple perspectives the poems assume fully liberate Melville as observer for the first time. Many of the poems in the volume, like the sixteen "Verses Inscriptive and Memorial" near its conclusion, are Homeric in their self-conscious attempt to ennoble. "In the Turret," for example, praises the captain of the Monitor who is staunchly defending his ship, by evoking the myth of Alcides entering hell to retrieve King Admetus' bride. Melville, displaying his characteristic fascination with enclosure, lauds the sailor whose sense of duty

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"rivets" him to certain death in a "welded tomb." He asks:

> What poet shall uplift his charm,
> Bold sailor, to your height of daring,
> And interblend there with the calm,
> And build a goodly style upon your bearing.
> (BP,p.55)

Again Melville asserts that "Daring" and "calm" must be blended to achieve a finished work of art which will immortalize its subject. Here is Melville's new aesthetic of balance and control put to the same use as in the Greek and Roman statuary he praised in his lecture and earlier poems. Form has become a means for insuring permanence and beauty; in addition, its coherence reinforces moral certitude. Beauty becomes evidence for truth.

The poem which most fully realizes this view is "Dupont's Round Fight." Here art and nature join in a transcendental union:

> In time and measure perfect moves
> All Art whose aim is sure;
> Evolving rhyme and stars divine
> Have rules, and they endure.
>
> Nor less the Fleet that warred for Right,
> And, warring so, prevailed,
> In geometric beauty curved,
> And in an orbit sailed.
>
> The rebel at Port Royal felt
> The Unity overawe,
> And rued the spell. A type was here,
> And victory of Law.
> (BP,p.30)

The perfection of art connects the order of nature and the

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moral rules of men.[26] The "Right" in art and in human interaction will prevail. This tone of certitude, however, similar to the tone of Whitman's Drum-Taps, is not characteristic of Battle Pieces. Life is rarely as symmetrical and clearly delineated as art; there is too much diversity and imperfection, too many perspectives which can only be captured indirectly. More typically the poet in Battle Pieces is musing, meditating, gazing, or revealing some hidden significance. In "Ball's Bluff," subtitled "A Reverie," the speaker touchingly relates his sadness at seeing young soldiers marching "lustily" off to war. "At my window, leaving bed," he reports, "By night I mused, of easeful sleep bereft." Similarly, one of the finest poems in the volume, "The House-Top," begins, "No sleep. The sultriness pervades the air/ And binds the brain--a dense oppression, Such/ As tawny tigers feel in matted shades." The protagonist observes and reflects upon the bloody New York Draft riots of 1863, and the tone is far from one of certitude and confidence in the nobility of men.

Such relatively straightforward poems contrast with the Miltonic "The Conflict of Convictions" and "A Canticle."[27] In poems like these Melville takes a cosmic view of the war. The South is identified with Satan, "A disciplined captain, gray in skill," and the question is whether Northerners, who are now "Mammon's slaves," will fight to save the "Founders' dream." "The Conflict of

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Convictions," as its title predicts, is a complex poem reflecting the confusion of a people whose tarnished ideals are put to a violent test. Parenthetical, italicized stanzas provide an ironic criticism of the ambivalent central voice of the poem. The effect of ambivalence and ambiguity is successfully achieved; it is a performance which only the flexibility of poetry could allow. In this poem, as in "America," the "slimed foundations bare" underlying our superficial reality are glimpsed. In that poem, the speaker is watching a personified America who sleeps but is not dead. The poet assumes the role of seer who can literally see and reveal mysteries that the average citizen will ignore:

> 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 hidden place.
> (BP, p.161)

In its bleakness, "America" presents a vision which points toward Clarel. Although providing an opportunity for individual glory, the Civil War also led to mass disillusionment. The near destruction of the supporting structure of the Union and the unprecedented level of violence forced an entire nation to come of age. The effect on Melville was a reawakening of the unsettling doubts that had plagued him during his trip to the Holy Land ten years before and perhaps, in conjunction with personal tragedy, compelled him to begin writing Clarel.

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What he was certain of in 1866 was the choice of poetry as his mode of expression. Only poetry's flexibility of form, mood, and point of view permitted Melville to give any coherence to his complex response to the Civil War. As he writes of a particularly bloody fight in "The Armies of the Wilderness":

> None can narrate that strife in the pines,
>   A seal is on it--Sabaean Lore!
> Obscure as the wood, the entangled rhyme
>   But hints at the maze of war--
> (BP,p.103)

The closest we can come to solving the "riddle of death" which only the slain can solve is "vivid glimpses." Poetry's indirection, its acknowledgment of the ambiguous and the unknowable is, Melville believes, not only a viable avenue to the truth, but, as we shall see, a form of truth itself.

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Notes

[1]For a study that concentrates solely on Melville's development as an artist see Laurence Barrett, "Fiery Hunt: A Study of Melville's Theories of the Artist," Diss. Princeton 1949. I agree with Barrett when he writes that "it seems to have been in the writing of his poetry that Melville found his answers," but I cannot concur that "there is no charting the course by which he reached them," p.120.

[2]Letter to John Murray, New York 25 March 1848, quoted in Leyda, The Portable Melville, p.347.

[3]Letter to Richard Bentley, New York 5 June 1849, Letters, p.86.

[4]Thomas McFarland, "Poetry and Poem: The Structure of Content," in Literary Theory and Structure, eds. Frank Brady, John Palmer, and Martin Price,(New Haven, Yale Univ. Press, 1973), pp.81-113. McFarland argues that "the word "poetry" suggests something unbounded, a current of awareness and feeling only adventitiously caught in words, while "poem" suggests something closed and delimited, a verbal artifact." He sees poetry as essentially Platonic, the poem as Aristotelian.

[5]Leyda, Log, p.531 and p.529.

[6]Merton Sealts, Melville as Lecturer, (Cambridge, Harvard Univ. Press, 1957), p.184. Sealts provided a great service by reconstructing the missing texts of Melville's lectures from quotations and paraphrases in 54 reviews, and from references in letters and journals.

[7]Herman Melville, Journal of a Visit to Europe and and the Levant: Oct. 11, 1856 to May 6, 1857, ed. Howard C. Horsford (1955; rpt. Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1976) pp.192-193.

[8]Herman Melville, Collected Poems, ed. Howard P. Vincent (Chicago: Packard & Co., 1947), p.233. All subsequent references to the poems will be to this edition, and will be identified in the text unless otherwise noted.

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[9]Sealts, Lectures, p.vii. The other references to the lecture cited here will both be found on page 150.

[10]The irony here is, of course, that his enduring fame resulted from the books he wrote before this resolve, while the poetry, written afterwards, has remained obscure. Billy Budd, however, benefited from the discipline of the verse.

[11]Journal, p.258

[12]Cowen, Vol.I,p.xxxv,(see note 7, chapter one). In analyzing the markings I am following Walter Bezanson's interpretive key found in his article "Melville's Reading of Arnold's Poetry," PMLA, 69:365-91, (June, 1954). Melville's "six primary signs can be arranged in a sequence of decreasing frequency and increasing intensity." 1. the line-vertical pencilling beside a passage-indicates moderate interest. 2. Parenthesis or bracket-in margin they are variants on line. In text, they indicate greater interest. 3. the check-one check has intensity of a line; multiple checks indicate greater interest. 4. the underline-sometimes a high intensity sign, especially when doubled. 5. circling-an infrequent sign of high intensity. 6. annotation-usually keyed by an "x" to a particular passage. Ranges from point of information to a full commentary or analysis. Any combination of the above (plus other minor signs: wavy lines, asterisks, plus signs) allow us to read "the marginalia in relation to its context." But as Bezanson warns, "the results can be responsible but not final."

[13]See Merton M Sealts, Melville's Reading: A Check-list of Books Owned and Borrowed (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1966) for the relevant dates and locations.

[14]See Hennig Cohen's reference to this connection in his notes to the poem "Art" in Selected Poems (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1964), p.237. Passages in Mardi and in Clarel indicate Melville's familiarity with Coleridge's aesthetic. He purchased a copy of Biographia Literaria in 1848.

[15]S. T. Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, ed. George Watson, (New York: Dutton, 1975), p.174.

[16]Biographia Literaria, p.173.

[17]Herman Melville, Israel Potter, ed. Alfred Kazin (New York: Warner Books, 1974) p.134.

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[18]Herman Melville, Billy Budd, eds. Harrison Hayford and Merton M. Sealts, (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1962) p.58. Subsequent references to this book in the text will be to this edition.

[19]In their haste to see the post 1857 period as one of withdrawal and personal involvement, critics do not sufficiently consider Melville's didacticism. In Battle-Pieces, especially in its supplement, and in Clarel, Melville's personal need to write is at least equaled by a clear note of responsibility to his fellow citizens. As poet, he felt he had much to teach Americans about what they were not 'seeing.' In the tradition of the Old Testament prophets, and like Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, and Dickinson, Melville had a message and he was intent on delivering it.

[20]Quoted in Cannon dissertation, p.113.

[21]Rene Wellek, A History of Modern Criticism, 1750-1950, vol.I (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1955), p.254.

[22]See chapter five following for a discussion of these poems in relation to Melville.

[23]See Bezanson article cited in note 12 above. Bezanson emphasizes the way the markings reflect Melville's technical debt to Arnold. My discussion concentrates on the way the markings reflect Melville's view of the poet and poetry. Bezanson's conclusion that "Resignation: To Faustia" may have been one of Melville's models for Clarel's metrics and form is persuasive.

[24]Thomas Carlyle, Sartor Resartus and On Heroes and Hero Worship (New York: Dutton, Everyman's Library, 1975), p.312.

[25]Herman Melville, Battle-Pieces, and Aspects of the War, ed. Sidney Kaplan (Amherst: The Univ. of Mass. Press, 1972) p.174. A facsimile of the 1866 edition with Melville's corrections, notes, and supplement. Subsequent references to individual poems from Battle-Pieces will be identified in the text and will refer to this edition.

[26]See William H. Shurr, The Mystery of Iniquity: Melville as Poet, 1857-1891 (Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1972) for a discussion of the cycles of man's law and cosmic law which he argues give coherence to Battle-Pieces.

[27]See Henry F. Pommer, Milton and Melville (1950; rpt. New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1970) for a more complete discussion of Melville's use of Milton in Battle-Pieces and elsewhere. (When one considers the models Melville had for the active poet, Milton must be included.)

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Chapter Three

Poetry and Belief:
Clarel as a Response to the Higher Critics

> "Who will tell us where the myth begins, and the history ends?"
>
> Theodore Parker, 1839

> "Lafeu: They say, miracles are past; and we have our philosophical persons, to make modern and familiar things supernatural and causeless. Hence is it, that we make trifles of terrors; ensconcing ourselves into seeming knowledge, when we should submit our-selves to an unknown fear."
>
> Triple scored by Melville in his copy of *All's Well That Ends Well*

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On Approaching Patmos, the reputed sight of St. John's revelations, Melville was struck by its "peculiarly barren" look. As he reports in his journal, he "was here again afflicted with the great curse of modern travel-skepticism."[1] He could no more feel that St. John had had revelations there, he writes, than he could believe in Defoe's Robinson Crusoe when in 1843 he had passed the island that was supposed to have been Selkirk's home. Religious belief, then, is being reduced by Melville to a fiction because of his disappointed response to a place. "When my eye rested on arid heigth" [sic], he writes, "spirit partook of the barreness." Another traveller might see the barren Patmos as just the place for the fecund imagination of a poet-prophet stirred by religious fervor to deliver up its visions. But in 1856 Melville's own imaginative powers were drained and his beliefs sorely tested. Characteristically, he projected his internal mental state onto an external place which seemed to mirror it.

Yet Melville's bleak vision was not purely a result of personal vicissitudes. In fact, his journal almost never refers to his life's problems. Rather, he sees himself as part of a sceptical age and angrily blames two of its representative writers. "Heartily wish Niebuhr and Strauss to the dogs," he complains. "The deuce take their penetration and acumen. They have robbed us of the bloom. If they have undeceived anyone

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-- no thanks to them."[2] There is a marked duality of vision, almost a contradiction, in the associations revealed in the Patmos entry. It is a duality which permeates the intellectual and spiritual life of early nineteenth century Western culture, one to which Melville was particularly susceptible. William Brasswell writes that Melville "was profoundly troubled by his reading of Strauss's Life of Jesus."[3] But no doubt he saw much that attracted, as well as repelled, in that most influential book.

Recent scholarship has shown how the insights of those Biblical scholars collectively known as the "Higher Critics" profoundly affected the work of writers and thinkers in the nineteenth century, and one might even conclude that in their "scientific" approach to criticism they prepared the way for Modernism. In revolutionizing the way we look at the Bible, these critics instituted an intellectual and religious upheaval that touched consciously and unconsciously on every thinking person. As E. S. Shaffer observes in her ground breaking study of the effects of the Higher Criticism on nineteenth-century literature, Kubla Khan and the Fall of Jerusalem : "The collapse of the ontological foundations of religion' (Lukacs's phrase) and the consequent reinterpretation of the major religious text of the West is a communal event. It is, of course, also a private event, and proceeds through the inner struggle of individual conscience."[4]

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Melville's inner struggle for faith has already become a scholarly cliché, but a closer look at the movement that helped exacerbate his scepticism might help us more precisely to delineate his intellectual and spiritual temper. It might also help us to see how the external critical atmosphere, in conjunction with the personal literary development discussed above, moved him towards poetry. Finally, seeing Clarel as a product of the Higher Critical environment may reveal more fully how the poem brilliantly captures the atmosphere of its time. For it is out of the nexus of Melville's response to the reality of the Holy Land, the new environment created by the Biblical critics, the pressure of personal isolation, and the revivifying turn to poetry, that Clarel emerged.

Rationalist scepticism affected American culture through two strains during the nineteenth century. One, a more popular deistic strain, was reflected in the works of Paine, Priestly, Jefferson, John Adams, and Ethan Allen.[5] We know through references in his works and annotations in his reading that Melville was strongly influenced by these writers and by their predecessors like Bayle and Volney. What is less frequently considered is the effect of a second more scholarly line which began with Robert Lowth's Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews (1787), and moved through J. G. Herder to other German scholars like Eichhorn, Paulus, Gabler, De Wette, and culminated in D. F. Strauss. Recent scholarship has

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shown how these writers changed the face of American religion.[6] Edward Everett's translation of Eichorn, William Ellery Channing's Baltimore sermon, Edward Robinson's _Biblical Researches in Palestine_ (to which Melville refers in _Clarel_), and Theodore Parker's response to Strauss's _Life of Jesus_ all served to liberalize first Calvinism and then Unitarianism. By 1847 the _Life of Jesus_ was so well known in America, that the Unitarian clergyman and writer George S. Ellis felt he had to tell his readers that it was originally a German and not an American work.[7] Brought up partly under the strong influence of his mother's Dutch Reformed brand of Calvinism, with almost a natal regard for the unity and truth of scripture, Melville would quite naturally join the chorus of contempt for Strauss's demythologyzing of the Bible. But, like Parker, the critic of Strauss who seems most like Melville in his ambivalence towards the Higher Critics, "Melville was equally well aware of the affirmative and skeptical views of myth."[8]

Parker's long 1840 review of the _Life of Jesus_ saw the book as unfortunately representative of the times, as not "the work of a single man, ... but as the production of the age."[9] Referring to Strauss as "the Iscariot of the nineteenth century," Parker respects his learning but attacks what he sees as Strauss's narrow historicism. "Men do not make myths out of the air, but out of historical materials," he argues, turning Strauss's historical argument into an argument _for_ religion. "If there was not an historical Christ to idealize," he concludes,

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"there could be no ideal Christ to seek in history."[10] Strauss, in fact, does not doubt the historical Christ, but Parker's blurring simplification presents the view shared by Melville and many of his contemporaries.

Parker writes that the Reformation "made the first breach" in the solid wall of faith in the Bible. The implication that follows is that Strauss and the Higher Critics who preceded him widened that breach and, in fact, toppled the wall for many who had been wavering in their faith. In Clarel, on one level, Melville agrees with this view. The Higher Critics are seen as equivalent to "Science," and are thus destroyers of faith, order, and beauty. In the canto "On the Wall" (I,xli), Clarel finds an enigmatic poem written on the wall of his room. The poet writes that he has "Turned from a world that dare renounce Him so" which evokes the guilty sympathy of the divinity student who has begun to doubt. He asks the innkeeper to tell him who had occupied his room before and discovers it was a "fair young Englishman" who had left two books behind. One supports a return to the confessions, fasts, and saint-days of high church Anglicanism. After thus establishing the Englishman's conservatism, the narrator reports:

> The second work had other cheer --
> Started from Strauss, disdained Renan--
> By striding paces up to Pan;
> Nor rested, but the goat-god here
> Capped with the red cap in the twist
> Of Proudhom and the Communist. (134-139)

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The narrator points out that the reader had covered the margins with "fervid" markings containing "More dole than e'en dissent." Clarel then tries to elucidate the poem on the wall based on these books and marginalia.

If we are meant to sympathize with the English poet, and it seems clear we are, then his displeasure in reading a book that traces a line from Strauss to Pantheism to Communism becomes significant. Strauss, given the powerful initial position by Melville, can be seen as the prime mover towards the disintegration of faith. Since neither the narrator nor any character has anything positive to say about atheists, Communists, or revolution in the poem, we can conclude that Melville sees Strauss in an unremittingly negative light.

But Melville's response to Strauss and the Higher Critics in the poem is much more problematic. In fact, we can read his religious ambiguities, his yearning for historical truth, and his ambivalence about himself as artist as due, in part, to his complex confrontation with these thinkers. The Higher Criticism had wide-reaching positive as well as negative effects. Questionning the divinity of the Bible by exposing every passage, especially of the New Testament, to the test of Enlightenment rationalism, made the school "an intermediary between philosophy and literary criticism."[11] As a result, the Bible was 'humanized' in that each reader could approach it from a more critically independent

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position. But at the same time, of course, the reader is separated from the Bible as a source of solid truth and from a connection to an historical tradition of belief. Melville, and many of his contemporaries, was trapped between his inheritance of an Enlightenment consciousness and his desire for a reunification with the belief system undermined by that consciousness. The Higher Critics themselves had a solution, the mythological. "The new conception of history," as Shaffer describes it, "bridged precisely that epic gap between 'fact' and 'sacred story' that so plagued the Enlightenment. History itself was neither fact nor revelation, but the mythological milieu enabling events of a particular society to take place."[12]

This harmonizing intellectual solution to the problem of belief that Melville is reacting to in _Clarel_ would ultimately be embraced by Parker:

> Criticism--which the thinking character of the age demands--asks men to do consciously, and thoroughly what they have always done imperfectly and with no science but that of a pious heart; that is, to divide the word rightly; separate mythology from history, fact from fiction, what is religious and of God, from what is earthly and not of God: to take the Bible for what it is worth.[13]

Melville rejected a purely "thinking" age, and could not accept, with the full and open consciousness of Parker, such a divided universe. Myth and religion were too fused in his mind for him to merely "take the Bible for what it is worth." Consequently, and as has been mentioned above, his initial reaction to Strauss as consciously

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expressed in his journal and in the poem is hostility. Although we do not have his copy of Strauss's <u>Life of Jesus</u>[14] we can imagine the passionate Melville, who to paraphrase Hawthorne could be comfortable neither in belief or unbelief, recoiling from Strauss's detachment. In his preface Strauss explains his suitability for undertaking a critical reading of the Bible as based on "the internal liberation of the feelings and intellect from certain religious and dogmatical suppositions."[15] In a rather transparent attempt to head off potential critics, Strauss presents another intellectual fiat which would doubtlessly have irked Melville. "The author is aware that the essence of the Christian faith is perfectly independent of his criticism," he states. "The supernatural birth of Christ, his miracles, his resurrection and ascension, remain eternal truths, whatever doubts may be cast on their reality as historical facts." Strauss is perhaps stating the obvious--that religious belief is always independent of empirical proof. But precisely because he could not so coolly separate the "supernatural" from the historically "true," Melville balked at the Higher Critics. Of course, Strauss's composure is, in part, a pose. The motivation behind his work, and that of the other Higher Critics, was the discovery of a meliorating truth they <u>could</u> believe in. But Strauss's pose of "scientific" scrutiny is so consistently maintained that it smothers any hint of a yearning for belief to which Melville could respond.

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At the end of his introduction, under the heading "Criteria By Which to Distinguish The Unhistorical in The Gospel Narrative," Strauss's style becomes quintessentially analytic, schematic, and distant. In determining that any reference in the Biblical texts to actions directly taken by God are unhistorical, he writes the following which is stylistically typical:

> First. When the narration is irreconcilable with the known and universal laws which govern the course of events. Now according to these laws, agreeing with all just philosophical conceptions and all credible experience, the absolute cause never disturbs the chain of secondary causes by single arbitrary acts of interposition, but rather manifests itself in the production of the aggregate of finite causalities, and of their reciprocal action. When therefore we meet with an account of certain phenomena or events of which it is either expressly stated or implied that they were produced immediately by God himself (divine apparitions-voices from heaven and the like), or by human beings possessed of supernatural powers (miracles, prophecies), such an account is in so far to be considered as not historical. And inasmuch as, in general, the intermingling of the spiritual world with the human is found only in unauthentic records, and is irreconcilable with all just conceptions; so narratives of angels and of devils, of their appearing in human shape and interfering with human concerns, cannot possibly be received as historical.[16]

Strauss's stated concern is to separate "the spiritual world" from the "human," to find what is authentic and thereby determine what is mythical. But masked by the scientific tone is the pervasive literary nature of the enterprise. The only way he can establish what is historically true is to discover inconsistencies between

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and in texts, and then scrutinize these inconsistencies logically and psychologically. Read at this level, the Life of Jesus becomes a work of personal, almost idiosyncratic, interpretation. In trying to disprove the Annunciation, he analyzes Mary's behavior according to the psychological and social probabilities of his time. The result is quaintly humorous rather than scientific: "Had Mary been visited by an angel, who had made known to her an approaching supernatural pregnancy," he writes, "would not the first impulse of a delicate woman have been, to hasten to impart to her betrothed the import of the divine message, and by this means to anticipate the humiliating discovery of her situation, and an injurious suspicion on the part of her affianced husband?"[17]

This use of psychological interpretation of Biblical texts as a measure of their truth is precisely what Melville is concerned with in Clarel. It is a truth that should transcend the historical and have emotional validity for people in the nineteenth century. By creating characters in Clarel who are constantly trying to reconcile their feelings and experiences in Palestine with the Bible they have so completely internalized, Melville is artistically echoing, and humanizing, the work of the Higher Critics.

Walter Bezanson points out that the poem moves "away from theology towards a kind of pragmatic humanism, or speculative psychology."[18] In fact, from the very first canto of the poem theology is being challenged and

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subverted by psychology. It is this subversion which constitutes the "action" of the poem. In Canto i, as Clarel sits brooding in his tomb-like chamber in Jerusalem, he begins to realize that the source of his depression is the disjunction between what his Biblical studies prepared him to expect there and what is actually there (although Clarel had "inklings" even in earlier travels through "Latin lands"). Echoing Melville's short story "The Piazza," Clarel muses: "Romance of mountains! But in end/ What change the near approach could lend" (I,i,47-48). But Clarel seems to go beyond superficial disenchantment to a deeper "unlearning" experience. Melville skillfully uses sea imagery to represent how the unconscious, if unacknowledged, can mentally destroy us:

> These under-formings in the mind.
> Banked corals which ascend from far,
> But little heed men that they wind
> Unseen, unheard- till lo, the reef-
> The reef and breaker, wreck and grief.
> (75-79)

This is how Clarel felt before coming to the Holy Land when the struggle over belief was largely unconscious and completely relegated to the interplay of mind and books. "But here," in Palestine, Clarel realizes that "unlearning.../Opes the expanse of time's vast sea!" By moving from the mind-coral reef image to one of open sea, Melville gives Clarel, and the reader, a momentary sense of transcendence. Surely in the actual birthplace of religion one can separate "true" religious feeling from

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false legend. Confronted by the "open sea" of reality all doubt must cease.

But as so often occurs elsewhere in Melville's works this ledge of security gives way. Clarel's moment of intellectual freedom dissipates when he goes onto the roof of the inn and ponders the actual Jerusalem "In silent gaze." Because the poem reveals that religious feeling, if it exists at all, is not centered in places but in people, Clarel's first view of Jerusalem can not be very propitious: "No play/Of life; no smoke went up, no sound/Except low hum, and that half drowned." As he looks down into the "silence and seclusion" of Hezekiah's pool, at "Blind arches," "sealed windows" and "portals masoned fast," he realizes this is not the place to undo his "spell" of depression. Here, in the first canto of the poem, the poet's eye for meaningful detail determines that this legendary city does not, on first view, measure up to its mythical promise.

Perhaps Melville's relation to the Higher Critics can be most usefully revealed in his treatment of myth. As Robert Richardson points out in Myth and Literature in the American Renaissance, Melville was aware of myth both as "imaginative philosophical or religious truth" and negatively as "fraud, illusion, and falsehood." More importantly, "his sharp awareness of both sides of the question led him to look beneath the surface arguments for and against myth to concentrate on the processes by

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which myth arises and by which it comes to be believed."[19] A close reading of Clarel bears out Melville's familiarity with both sides of the controversy, but the tone of the work indicates a much more emotionally complex involvement. The narrator and the characters have a wide range of responses to myth, or to "fable," "lore," and "legend" since Melville uses the terms interchangeably. The most positive view of myths sees them as containing important human truths, as linking past and present, East and West, as restoring us to the clear perceptions of childhood, and as providing a basis for all religions. This position is most strongly held by Rolfe and the narrator (although, significantly, Rolfe fluctuates), and thus merits our attention due to the identification of these voices with Melville. The negative view of myth in the poem holds that the weight of past myths oppresses us, deludes us with vain hopes, and ultimately separates us from reality. The passionately articulate and Ahab-like characters Celio and Mortmain are the major proponents of this view, and strongly attract the reader. The Elder and Margoth, who approach the myths of the Holy Land with "A pruning-knife...a measuring tape...and field glass" are Melville's unflattering portraits of the most coldly scientific Biblical archeologists. But Melville's ambivalence towards myth is revealed in the ambivalence of his characters. When Rolfe says he came to the Holy Land to "slip quite behind the parrot-lore/

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Conventional, and--what attain?" (I,xxxi,37-38), he seems confident that some myths are false but is less sure of what he will find behind these myths. The vulnerability of his "--what attain?" following so closely after the assuredness of his doubt reflects the ebb and flo of the poem as a whole, which alternatively narrows to a position of scepticism and then opens as some new object of belief is contemplated.

An early canto, "The Sepulcher," uses the narrator's voice to praise the mythic. Here Melville analyzes the "bloom" removed for us by Strauss and Neibuhr. After Clarel's first lonely, depressed view of Jerusalem, his visit to the Holy Sepulcher is a surprisingly positive experience. The church, which encloses the sites of Christ's Passion, whether historically accurate or not, connects us to the deeper truth of that event:

> Where now enroofed the whole coheres-
> Where now through influence of years
> And spells by many a legend lent,
> A sort of nature reappears-
> Somber or sad, and much in tone
> Perhaps with that which here was known
> Of yore.
>
> (I,iii,31-37)

In the early cantos Melville identifies myth with a romanticized nature, seeking to emphasize that myths, particularly in the Holy Land where many developed, can return us to our "sylvan" and "primeval" past. He uses references to American forests, mountains, and rivers to reinforce this mood, and to connect the old and the new

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worlds.[20] The shadowy imprecision of ancient myths is here seen as appropriate to the Christ story in that it creates "a haze of mystery:/The blur is spread of thousand years,/And Calvary's seen as through one's tears." The vision may not be telescopically clear, but there is an emotional connection between then and now which the legend maintains. The friars who tend the site and the pilgrams who crowd it create an atmosphere "Tingling with kinship through and through-." Here is found "A miracle-play of haunted stone" where tradition rules, "not device and fraud." In this extremely positive view of myth, later strongly identified with Rolfe, the poet applies Coleridge's distinction between 'fancy' and 'imagination.' The "less sensitive" yet well educated skim lightly, mocking the power of myth. (The Elder, Margoth, and, to a certain extent, Derwent). Another group shares the Higher Critic's doubt, but also sees the ability of myth to allow us to imaginatively relive the crucifixion, the Passion and share "the three pale Marys' frame." This group, importantly for the poem's tone, is always "earnest."

This positive view is pervasive throughout the poem. Later in Book I Rolfe attacks the historical critics and their scientific attraction to <u>things</u> for extending the sway of "King Common-Place" who affirms Diana's moon "a clinkered blot" and derides "pale Endymion." If they succeed in demythologyzing Palestine as well as Greece, these critics will leave us vulnerable

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to chaos. "Who brake love's fast/With Christ-" Rolfe warns, "with what strange lords may sup?" It is essentially a conservative position which, while fearing change, asserts the power of the imagination to transcend it. In the interpolated story "Arculf and Adamnan," Arculf is such a skilled story teller that his medieval listeners are converted to belief just by partaking of his imagination. The closing octave asserts this transcendent power of myth:

> The abbot and the palmer rest:
> The legends follow them and die-
> Those legends which be it confessed,
> Did nearer bring to them the sky-
> Did nearer woo it to their hope
> Of all that seers and saints avow-
> Than Galileo's telescope
> Can bid it unto prosing Science now.
> (I,xxxv,111-118)

The scientific view, Strauss's analysis, cannot match the synthesizing power of imagination. In the canto "Prelusive," the narrator presents the poem's strongest pro-myth, pro-imagination statement as he directs the reader's attention to Piranesi's prints. Even though the view in the prints is of dark dungeons, "Bastiles drear," the artist was not embodying some "goblin fantasy." The prints are actually an elaborate depiction of the human heart, or, in other words, of the unconscious. Only imagination can unify our external and internal selves:

> Thy wings, Imagination, span
> Ideal truth in fable's seat:

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> The thing implied is one with man,
> His penetralia of retreat-
> The heart, with labyrinths replete:
> In freaks of intimation see
> Paul's 'mystery of iniquity:'
> (II,xxxv,18-24)

The work of an artist, then, comes closest to revealing what the "inventor" had "obscured...with prudential haze." Only indirection can give us any insight into the "blur of dream" which surrounds the truth about ourselves.

If here Melville is expressing his deep awareness of the power of myth, fable and imagination, the poem more frequently sees that power as deleterious. For those characters who cannot like Nehemiah live and die wrapped in the blissful security myths can offer, legends can be torturous. For Celio, Mortmain, and Clarel, the previously positive words "haze," "dream," "blur," and "fable" become betrayers. In the dramatic canto "The Arch," Celio, a handsome youth with a humped back to whom Clarel is attracted, cries out against Christ for beginning a legend which is not borne out in the real world. Coming close to calling Christ a confidence man, Celio argues that mankind was better off before Christ brought hope into the world; then men were "content with life's own discontent." Where previously Melville used nature imagery to reinforce the way myth united the natural and supernatural worlds, here Celio is saying that myth emphasizes and even creates a rift. "Behold

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him-yea-behold the Man," he laments, echoing Pilate's reference to Christ, "Who warranted if not began/The dream that drags out its repulse." Sensitive people are drawn to Christ's promises of love, but his vision of love seems only to exist in the story. If our "heads" reject any of the story our "hearts" wish to accept, we lose that dreamy, imaginative state that allows us to believe. "Thy love is so locked with thy lore/," Celio says addressing Christ, that those of us who seek love in this world "may not rend them and go free." Where, Celio is asking, is the reality behind this myth? Is belief only a function of imagination? Such questions, and the questioning substructure of the entire poem, mirror the concerns of the Higher Critics. The passionate tone may not recall Strauss, but Celio's desire to separate Christ's "love" form his "lore," to connect it to the natural world, is certainly reminiscent of that writer.

Human love, between men and women and between men and men, is considered throughout the poem as one way of connecting Christ's teachings and the natural world. But even here myth can interfere. If at times, as in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, legend can hold people together, more frequently it tends to separate them. In the canto "The Site of The Passion," the narrator states that memory can link Eden and Gethsemane. This admission that legend can unify is followed by its coming between Clarel and Vine. Clarel becoming "wistful" at the site,

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"turned toward Vine,/And would have spoken; but as well/ Hail Dathan swallowed in the mine[21]-/Tradition, legend, lent such spell/And rapt him [Vine] in remoteness so" (I,xxx,28-32). Full belief in legends and myths might make the dreamer content, but it isolates him from others. People like Nehemiah become "mastered by the awful myth/...And leaving a shrewd world behind-/To trances open-eyed resigned-/As visionaries of the Word/ Walk like somnambulists abroad" (I,xxi,42,44-47). Clarel does daydream that his struggle to find belief might be rendered unnecessary if he marries Ruth. With references to Eden, the narrator has him muse that if they marry "tales abtruse/Of Christ, the crucified, Pain's Lord,/ Seem foreign-forged-incongruous" (I,xxviii,9-11). But the dream is never realized because of Ruth's death, which occasions a final questioning of the Christ myth and an implicit denial of the value of myth in our lives. "Christ is arisen:" the believing crowd cries, "But Ruth," the narrator adds, "may Ruth so burst the prison?"

This pattern of affirming myth and then questioning it continues throughout the poem, becoming dependent to a large extent on where the pilgrims are in their journey. The myths in the nineteenth century traveler's mind were charged by contact with the Holy Land. The brutal and barren physicality of Palestine, however, sorely tested even devout believers. In the second book of the poem, appropriately entitled "The Wilderness," the pilgrims are so assaulted by the desert that several turn back. Melville

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does not miss the opportunity to satirize the Higher Critics again as he has The Elder, who was content to verify the sites in Jerusalem, turn his horse and without dismounting flee this "land of Eblis." In explanation for his retreat Rolfe speculates that "He can't provoke a quarrel here/With blank indifference so drear:/ Ever the desert waives dispute" (II,x,139-141). In fact, the desert's power may force a truce in the war between poetry and science:

> Darwin quotes
> From Shelley, that forever floats
> Over all desert places known,
> Mysterious doubt- an awful one.
> He quotes, adopts it. Is it true?
> Let instinct vouch; let poetry
> Science and instinct here agree,
> For truth requires strong retinue.
> (II,xi,13-20)

It is perhaps significant that Melville mentions Shelley, the quintessential Romantic poet. Melville associates the beauties of nature with these poets in whose writings even the deserts can attain "A charm, a beauty from the heaven/Above them, and clear air divine-." His use of religiously charged diction, "heaven," "divine," contributes to the sense that given the right place, conditions, and mythologizing eye, the desert can "Put on illusion of a guise/Which Tantalus might tantalize/Afresh." But the diction also reveals the poet's belief that there can never be an <u>actual</u> link between nature and myth. Any link must necessarily be an "illusion" created by romantic poets or by priests like Derwent who are in the Emersonian

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mold. As Rolfe says later in the poem, criticizing Derwent's attempt "to mediate/'Tween faith and science:

> But none
> Exceed in flushed repute the one
> Who bold can harmonize for all
> Moses and Comte, Renan and Paul:
> 'Tis the robustious circus-man:
> With legs astride the dappled span
> Elate he drives white, black, before:
> The small apprentices adore.
> (III,xvi,199-206)

In Clarel, Melville certainly can not be accused of being 'the robustious circus-man' who sees complex issues in black and white. His ambivalent attitude toward myth is evidence of that. Further, he consistently resists the security of a unified poetic vision, and accepts no overriding myth, even a self-created one. But the poem Melville spent almost twenty years preparing himself for and writing indicates a strong commitment to aesthetic order if not a belief in harmony. As Elizabeth Melville's letters reveal, the writing of Clarel, crammed into evenings and other free hours, pushed her husband almost beyond his limits and put a tremendous strain on the family. What was motivating him in this effort? It is not likely that it was a desire to reestablish his fame, since he was perfectly aware that he was writing a work that he described in his own words as "eminently adapted for unpopularity." The desire to make money, then, was no additional motivation. The explanation we are left with is Melville's overwhelming need to impose some order on the mass of experiences, thoughts, and feelings with

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which the Holy Land confronted him. That Melville chose poetry to attempt to "span" the gap between his preconceptions and the harsh external realities of Palestine is evidence that that genre provided an ordering process which came closest to his complex and disturbing vision of truth.

Throughout Clarel Melville uses the word "poetry" interchangeably with "myth," "fable," "lore," "fantasy," and even "faith" in a loose nexus of meaning which corresponds to the way humans have tried to come to terms with the unknown or the unbearable. But the post-Enlightenment rationalism he absorbed through Bayle, Paine and the Higher Critics, in connection with a propensity for alternating states of emotional involvement and detachment, made it impossible for him to believe in myth. He could not be, like the Apostles or like Coleridge, both a believer and a creator. For Melville, creation often implied a kind of false manipulation which was inconsistent with the innocence belief requires. Yet because he had a passionate need to believe and create, Melville developed a special kind of poetry as a compromise between creating prose narratives which would make him doubly false (as creator and as creator of "false" worlds), and artistic silence. Poetry, which Melville used flexibly and self-consciously, does not itself make the claims for literal belief myths do. In fact, in his hands it is used to question myth.

In order to distinguish between poetry and myth one

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must define myth restrictively. Phillip Wheelwright defines myth "as a story or a complex of story elements taken as expressing, and therefore as implicitly symbolizing, certain deep-lying aspects of human and transhuman existence."[22] Wheelwright's definition, with its emphasis on narrative and partial consciousness, avoids the extreme positions of Ernst Cassirer, who sees myth as an instantaneous synthesizing activity of the mind (mythopoeisis), and of Richard Chase who defines myths as consciously created false tales. The Judeo-Christian myths Melville was responding to are narratives written by primitive believers who primarly represent the world in mythic terms. Clarel, although loosely held together by a narrative line, continuously resists the time-bound expectations of its story. In Moby Dick, Melville taunts the reader with digressions as the story slowly gains climactic speed. (Certainly the climax is heightened by these digressions). The powerful clash of Ahab and the whale at the conclusion is carefully prepared for yet so explosive that the reader becomes fully involved in an action of mythic proportions. Moby Dick moves, however grudgingly, toward the linear and external; but Clarel, with its journey from Jerusalem and back, is circular and internal. The constricted rhymed tetrameter lines, the preference for talk, speculation and psychological analysis over external action, and the refusal to allow any object its accepted traditional associations, make the poem anti-mythic in effect.[23] Although the poem

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is studded with myths, it is so digressive, so analytic, so stylistically varied, that it undercuts the momentum needed to raise itself to the level of myth. As a result of continuous self-reference, the poem is left with itself as the main field and concern of the action.

An example of this subordination of myth to the poem is the canto "Of Rama" which, according to Bezanson's note, refers to either Vine or Rolfe, although neither is directly indentified. The narrator first cryptically presents the hero of the Indian epic Ramayana as a god who was not aware of his divinity, and then asks if anyone so innocent yet so discredited can be living today. "May life and fable so agree?-"the narrator asks. The rest of the canto puts forth the qualities of naturalness, directness, and probing awareness ("they tell of riddles in the prosiest lot,") possessed by the Rama-type. Significantly, Rama as warrior is not mentioned, diminishing the mythic level and enforcing the poem's more psychological, internal scope. The question of whether such a god-like type can exist in reality is answered in the last eight lines of the canto. There may be individuals who contain the qualities of a Rama, but because they lack craft and the consciousness of their own "divinity," "the riches in them" are "unmerchantable in the ore." A speaker, a didactic voice not the narrator's, seems to advise the poet directly that only the artist can take advantage of these types who are "an open mine." "The shrewder knack hast thou,

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the gift:" the voice suggests, "Smelt then, and mold, and good go with thy thrift" (I,xxxii,53-54). We are given here a very practical, almost cynical view of how myths can be made. The canto concludes: "Was ever earth-born wight like this?/Ay-in the verse, may be, he is." In a tone that Bezanson characterizes as coy, Melville is saying that not only do mythic heroes not exist in any living, independent form, but they only exist at the sufferance of the poet. The fact that Rolfe and Vine share some of Rama's heroic traits but never emerge as heroes in the poem (they are at times strongly criticized by Clarel), is further evidence of mythic diminishment.

Myths, then, both religious as well as personal, are useful to Melville, but not sufficient sources of belief in themselves. They cannot stand the empirical tests he is compelled to impose on them by his partially acknowledged 'scientific' orientation. Unlike Coleridge, he cannot suspend disbelief, or integrate his artistic and religious consciousness; unlike Strauss he cannot keep the realms of myth and reality so neatly separated. When he writes in Clarel that a heroic figure may exist only in the verse, however, he is making a rather unequivocal claim for art, here specifically for poetry, as being a transmitter of important human truths. In making this claim, Melville is taking his place in the nineteenth century controversy between poetry and science.[24] Although Clarel is usually seen as embodying Melville's struggle between religious faith and scientific doubt, the poem's

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concern with all major religions, with myths from various cultures, and with romantic and sexual love indicates that he is more broadly interested in analyzing belief itself. That he chose poetry after 1857 as the tool for his analysis was an extremely personal choice (as indicated in chapters one and two above), which also partook of the growing tendency at this time to raise poetry to the level of religion. If, as a result of the Higher Critics, the Bible was seen in the nineteenth century as merely poetry and not the revealed truth of God, then poetry was increasingly seen as something "holy" in itself. "Poetry, and the principle of self of which money is the visible incarnation," Shelley writes in "A Defense of Poetry" which Melville read in the 1852 edition, "are the God and Mammon of the world." Later Shelley writes, "Poetry is indeed something divine." If we follow the evidence of Melville's reading and practice we can see how, over time, he came closer to Shelley's view.

Melville chose poetry partly because it has an imposing tradition and is elevated from the prosaic details of daily life. As a result it can, like religion, inspire commitment and personal identification. Further, in contrast with science, poetry deals with human emotion. Myth also fits these criteria of tradition, elevation and emotion, but one advantage of poetry for Melville was that it is also a <u>process</u>, rooted in factual observation. It is part of, not separated from, its engendering context

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and is thus capable of verification. Science, as Murray Krieger points out, offered the nineteenth century "cold, natural truth rather than the warm human myth" of religion which had "soothing power" but was "blessed falsehoods." "What is needed, then" and he is paraphrasing Arnold's "The Study of Poetry" here, published four years after _Clarel_, "is something [poetry] which will do religion's job while not, like religion, depending upon a falsification of facts to get the job done...."26

But ultimately Melville realizes that even if we are true to facts, _they_ change:

> That stable proof which man would fold,
> How may it be derived from things
> Subject to change and vanishings?
> (I,xxxiv,15-17)

This theme of the natural world's instability undermining belief is raised throughout _Clarel_. In practice, at least, Melville substitutes the relative constancy of poetry, and his reason for doing so is given its most succinct explanation in Arnold's essay which shares many of _Clarel_'s concerns. "Our religion has materialized itself in the fact, in the supposed fact," he writes. "It has attached its emotion to the fact, and now the fact is failing it. But for poetry the idea is everything; the rest is a world of illusion, of divine illusion. Poetry attaches its emotion to the idea; the idea _is_ the fact."[27] This is not to say that Melville chooses idea over fact (the sensual, if not the scientific, actually grows in importance as the poem progresses). But poetry, the poem itself, becomes

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the one given, the stable arena in which the volatile struggle between idea and fact takes place.

An identification between poetry and religion is evident in several of Melville's letters, and its deep importance for him can also be seen in his revealing annotations. In an 1849 letter his enthusiasm over reading Shakespeare closely for the first time pushes him to an identification of the poet and Christ: "...the divine William. Ah, he's full of sermons-on-the-mount, and gentle, aye almost as Jesus. I take such men to be inspired... if another Messiah ever comes twill be in Shakespeare's person."[28] In an 1862 letter to his brother Thomas in which he refers to his own verse as "doggerel" he says, "you remember what the Bible says" and then quotes from Byron's Don Juan.[29] Perhaps the most telling evidence that the "spiritual" power of poetry was becoming more attractive to Melville is the numerous markings he made in Emerson's essay "The Poet," which he read in 1860 and marked more than any other of the essays. Melville marked an entire paragraph where Emerson presents the powerful, soul-transforming effects of poetry. "We are like persons who come out of a cave or cellar into the open air," he writes. "This is the effect on us of tropes, fables, oracles and all poetic forms. Poets are thus liberating gods. [Melville checked this line.] Men have really got a new sense, and found within their world another world, or nest of worlds; for, the metamorphosis once seen, we divine that it does not stop."[30]

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Melville turned to poetry in his life at times of emotional need. While courting Mary Parmelee in 1840, he read Tennyson's poems to her. Shelley, Keats and Byron inspired some pleasant thoughts during his lonely 1856-57 journey. Reading Bryant consoled him after his son Malcolm's death. And he was always noting lines in poems, especially after his popularity waned, that agreed with his feelings of isolation and anonymity.

We know that after 1857 Melville began an intensive study of the craft of poetry. But what is equally significant is his interest in the theory and idea of poetry. Always a reader of periodicals, Melville was aware of Continental, British and American critical thinking, and we have evidence of his having read essays relating to poetry by Hazlitt, Lamb, Joshua Reynolds, Wordsworth and many others. Referring again to Emerson's "The Poet," we see Melville annotating a passage in which Emerson writes that the poet comes closest to things because he names them. Before attacking the writer for his "self-conceit," Melville writes in the margin: "This is admirable, as many other thoughts of Mr. Emerson's are."[31] In Madame de Stael's Germany Melville marked and checked several passages on whether the effects of poetry depend on "the melody of words" or on the ideas expressed in the poem. His comment, revealing for Clarel, is that melody is of primary importance in all forms of poetry, with the exception of "dramatic poetry, and perhaps

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narrative verse." Later he scored a passage which concludes that the effects of repetition of the same words by the ancient and medieval poets was "to awaken the sentiment of inflexible necessity." Unity of style and content in poetry was of particular concern to Melville as he prepared to write Clarel. In Arnold's essay "On Translating Homer," which he heavily marked and annotated while writing the poem, Melville marked Arnold's definition of the "grand style" which "arises in poetry, when a noble nature, poetically gifted, treats with simplicity or with severity a serious subject."[32] There is little doubt that Melville aspired to such a style in Clarel, and saw poetry as the only genre appropriate to his "serious subject."

The Higher Critics and their demythologizing spirit exacerbated Melville's sense of personal alienation. To reestablish a sense of himself he journeyed to the Near East where one of his "objects" he noted was "the saturation of my mind with the atmosphere of Jerusalem, offering myself up a passive subject, and no unwilling one, to its weird impressions."[33] The undeveloped jottings in his journal indicate that he did just that, but it was only during the arduous task of writing that Melville was able to actively articulate and fully personalize his experience. If Neibuhr and Strauss prevented him from believing Patmos was the site of St. John's revelations or that Mt. Olivet was the site of the Ascension, earlier

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Biblical critics benefited Melville by offering poetry as a link between past and present. Such eighteenth century writers as Robert Lowth and J. G. Herder felt that if modern peoples could reestablish the close connection primitives had with the world around them, they would feel closer to each other, to themselves, and to God. One way to do this would be for moderns to read primitive poetry (in this case, the Bible), with such a degree of identification that we would regain the ability to make the world ours again. In his The Spirit of Hebrew Poetry, which had an important influence on the Transcendentalists, Herder writes of this central identifying principle as "personification":

> ...This sympathy, this transfer of one's self into the objects around us, and ascription, as it were, of our own feelings to those objects with which we hold converse, has formed not only the inspiring principle of language, of speech, but to a certain extent also the first development and existence of moral principle.[34]

Melville's journey to the Holy Land and the poem he made from it, the pilgrimage and poem in the subtitle of Clarel, were his attempt to avoid self-annihilation by forging a new relationship, a "synthesis and exposition,"[35] with the world around him. The conjunction in the subtitle baffled at least one contemporary critic (should it not be a poem of he argued), but it graphically illustrates the separation Melville felt between the disillusioned hopes of his pilgrimage and the "reality" he forged in his poem: a bleak vision, but one in which he could actually believe.

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Notes

[1]Herman Melville, Journal of a Visit to Europe and Levant, October 11, 1856 - May 6, 1857, ed. Howard C. Horsford (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1955), p.166.

[2]Journal. p.167.

[3]William Brasswell, Melville's Religious Thought (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1943), p.12.

[4]E. S. Shaffer, 'Kubla Khan' And The Fall of Jerusalem: The Mythological School in Biblical Criticism and Secular Literature 1770-1880 (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1975), p.6.

[5]Robert Richardson, Myth and Literature in The American Renaissance (Bloomington: Univ. of Indiana Press, 1978), p.22.

[6]Jerry Wayne Brown, The Rise of Biblical Criticism in America, 1800-1870 (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1969).

[7]Brown, p.140.

[8]Richardson, p.6.

[9]Theodore Parker, "Strauss's Life of Jesus" in The Critical and Miscellaneous Writings of Theodore Parker (Boston: Little Brown & Co., 1856), p.338.

[10]Parker, p.331-332.

[11]Shaffer, p.7.

[12]Shaffer, p.53.

[13]Parker, A Discourse of Matters Pertaining to Religion (1877) in Brown, p.162.

[14]We do not know the source of Melville's knowledge of The Life of Jesus before his 1856 trip, although if he did not read Marian Evan's 1846 translation he would be aware of Strauss's ideas from periodicals. We do know that in Madame de Stael's essay "Recent German Theology," which he

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obtained in 1862, Melville marked and underlined a quotation from Strauss: "For science, there is no holy, but only the true."

[15]David F. Strauss, The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined, 2 vols. Trans. Marian Evans (New York, 1860; rpt. Scholarly Press, Mich., 1970), p.4.

[16]Strauss, p.71.

[17]Strauss, p.109.

[18]Walter Bezanson, Intro., Clarel, by Herman Melville (New York: Hendricks House, 1960), p.lxix.

[19]Richardson, p.7.

[20]Melville's comparison of America and Palestine early in the poem also serves to underscore America's shallow, self-centeredness and ignorance of the past. See I,xxi and Ungar's arguments in Book IV.

[21]An example of Melville using myth to criticize myth.

[22]Philip Wheelwright, "Myth," Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, 1974 ed., p.538.

[23]This is not to say that the poem is not open to mythic analysis on various levels. The pilgrims' descent into the desert to the Dead Sea and reemergence at Mar Saba can be seen mythically as a descent into Hell. Women in the poem are depicted as standard mythical types, e.g. Earth Mother or idealized virgin.

[24]For an introduction to the poetry versus science controversy see M. H. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1958), chap.xi. On poetry as transformed religion in nineteenth century see Abrams' Natural Supernaturalism (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1971).

[25]Percy Bysshe Shelley, "A Defense of Poetry," in Critical Theory Since Plato, ed. Hazard Adams (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1971), p.510-511.

[26]Murray Krieger, "Poetry and Belief," Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, 1974 ed., p.75.

[27]Matthew Arnold, "The Study of Poetry" in English Literature Irish Politics, ed. R. H. Super, Vol. IX of The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1973), p.161.

[28]"To Evert A. Duyckinck," 24 February 1849, Boston, The Letters of Herman Melville, ed. Merrel R. Davis and

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William H. Gilman (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1960), p.77.

[29]"To Thomas Melville," 25 May 1862, Pittsfield, Davis and Gilman, p.214. (Melville was certainly inspired by Childe Harold's Pilgrimage during his writing of Clarel)

[30]Agnes Dicken Cannon, "Melville's Concepts of the Poet and Poetry," Diss. Univ. of Penn. 1968, p.120.

[31]Jay Leyda, The Melville Log (New York: Gordian Press, 1969), Vol. II, p.649.

[32]Agnes Dicken Cannon, "On Translating Clarel" in Essays in Arts and Sciences, eds. T. Katsaros, B. Tyndall, D. Robillard, Vol. V, no.2 (1976), p.177.

[33]Leon Howard, Herman Melville (Berkeley: Univ. of Calif. Press, rpt. 1967), p.246.

[34]J. G. Herder, The Spirit of Hebrew Poetry, trans. James Marsh (Burlington: Edward Smith, 1833), p.12.

[35]Cannon, Diss. p.112. Underlined by Melville in his copy of Arnold's "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time."

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Chapter Four

"Frames of Thought and Feeling": *Clarel*'s Poetic Structure

> But Clarel, bantered by the song,
> Sad questioned, if in frames of thought
> And feeling, there be right and wrong;
> Whether the lesson Joel taught
> Confute what from the marble's caught
> In sylvan sculpture--Bacchant, Faun,
> Or shapes more lax by Titian drawn.
> Such counter natures in mankind--
> Mole, bird, not more unlike we find:
> Instincts adverse, nor less how true
> Each to itself. What clew, what clew?
>
> Melville, *Clarel*
> (III,xx)

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Since Clarel's publication in 1876, the critics who have responded negatively have shared one or both of the following conclusions: Melville erred in choosing to treat his subject in verse, and Clarel's verse is uneven at best, or, at worst, a grotesque failure. A contemporary reviewer in the New York Times wrote, "Here and there we have delicate and vigorous pieces of description. But of the poem as a whole we do not think we can be far wrong when we say that it should have been written in prose."[1] Although this reviewer's comments are based on the opinion that Melville could not write technically accomplished verse, when Lippincott's critic writes "there is nothing in it which could not have been said as well or better in prose..."[2] the outlines of a prejudice for prose typical of the turn to literary realism in the 1860's and 1870's become visible. While many twentieth century critics have continued to dismiss Melville's poetry as inferior in quality and secondary in importance to his prose,[3] the publication of Howard P. Vincent's Collected Poems (1947) and Walter Bezanson's edition of Clarel (1960) has led to greater, if not always more appreciative, attention. In addition, Melville's turn to poetry is finally being considered a serious statement in itself, an indication of development, not decline. Since "criticism of technique is tacitly a criticism of vision," as Edgar Dryden observes in Melville's Thematics of Form, then "the critic who asks a writer to tell his story in a different way is requiring

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of him a total renunciation of his experience."[4] In considering Clarel, for example, rather than question Melville's use of verse, it would be more productive to ask what aesthetic advantages are gained by the choice of that form of expression over prose. If technique is indistinguishable from vision, then this is certainly a question which goes to the heart of Melville's intentions in writing his monumental poem.

The first two chapters of this study analyze the aesthetic and psychological reasons for Melville's turn to poetry. In Mardi, Moby Dick, and most explicitly in Pierre, he revolted against what he considered the novel's slavish adherence to conventional plot and to "realities" of characterization which were themselves paste-board conventions. The unwritten generic rules prohibited long philosophical digressions, the presentation of multiple perspectives, and references to the writing process itself, devices Melville felt were necessary for achieving his artistic goal, the discovery of truth. For a four year period, short fiction, with its more disciplined form and flexible use of realistic and romantic elements, served Melville's purposes but did not earn him a living wage. After finally accepting that he would never be able to support himself and his family through writing, he sought other employemnt. Thus, in turning to poetry, he was for the first time writing what he felt moved to write without the burden of dollars damning him.[6] Further, the

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spiritual void poetry helped fill in Melville's life, discussed in chapter three, was an important motive in his genre change. It is precisely the qualities that drew him to poetry, particularly those which had been subverting his narratives from the beginning of his writing career, which, when realized in Clarel, represent Melville's mature artistic intentions.

To understand these qualities, and why, therefore, Melville chose to write Clarel in poetry, it is necessary to reduce prose and poetry to their most abstract definitions. In the broadest, most schematic sense, prose can be identified with the mimetic portrayal of external action and poetry with the presentation of internal subjective states. Such a schema does initially classify all types of poetry as lyric and denies to prose such subgenres as meditation and allegorical tale, but this need not be so if we see these medial types as falling at various points along a continuum between the poles of poetry and prose. The distinct opposition of prose and poetry was a critical commonplace in the nineteenth century, and one familiar to Melville from his extensive reading. In contemporary literature the lines of demarcation are often blurred, as in the prose-poem, but poetry and prose are still considered separate aesthetic perspectives with distinct associations. David Daiches in A Study of Literature (1948) is much concerned with these distinctions. He argues that prose and poetry do share common resources

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of language, but poetry

> is distinguished from prose literature in that, whereas in prose the aspects of language employed reinforce each other as gestures emphasize speech, in poetry the aspects of language employed, being as a rule more various, are employed in a more complex and paradoxical way--one set of qualities providing instructions for interpreting the meaning that emerges from another set, not simply emphasizing, but modifying, specifying, enriching, reminding, disciplining, liberating, restraining, urging on--doing any or all of these things (even distorting and contradicting) in the service of the final totality of meaning.[7]

For Daiches, all of the significant action in poetry occurs in the interaction of language. Similarly, Melville was much more interested in experimenting with the myriad possibilities of language in his work than in using language for mimetic or purely communicative purposes. Words, he realizes, are intermediaries between our private selves and the world; in a sense, they are all there is between one person and another, or between people and their perception of a transcendent reality. Clarel embodies Melville's explicit understanding and partial despair over this fact. Because words may be all we have, they become more important than character and plot in the poem, and thus the poem is on its deepest level about its own generation. Seen in this way, a quest for belief must ultimately go beyond the search for a god to the testing and acceptance of the right words, as the Higher Critics had demonstrated. But after those writers had helped invalidate the Holy Word of the Bible, the only option for belief remaining to a nineteenth century writer, as Melville realized in

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Redburn, was to create his own sacred text. It would be a text, of course, whose truth could not be delivered, but must be forged from the Coleridgean dialectic of opposites. Only poetry, according to Daiches' dynamic definition, would be the appropriate medium, because it does not represent something outside itself but _is_ itself. Thus, "the real core of poetry," Northrop Frye writes, "is a subtle and elusive verbal pattern that avoids, and does not lead to... bald statements" of description.[8] We have already discussed Melville's belief that truth must be sought indirectly, that it exists for us only in our attempts to approach it. This is the lesson of _Moby Dick_ and is embodied in the structure of _Clarel_.

The appropriateness of poetry to a work which attempts to trace the complex pattern of emotion working on intellect to create belief and intellect working on emotion to destroy it can be seen if we compare Frye's description of the verbal imitation of thought to _Clarel_'s structure. "For it is clear," he writes, "that all verbal structures with meaning are verbal imitations of that elusive psychological and physiological process known as thought, a process stumbling through emotional entanglements, sudden irrational convictions, involuntary gleams of insight, rationalized prejudices, and blocks of panic and inertia, finally to reach complete incommunicable intuition."[9] _Clarel_, perhaps more dramatically than Wordsworth's _Prelude_, presents this quest for understanding in all its emotional,

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philosophical, and religious complexity. As the characters interact with each other and with the tradition saturated landscape the intricate human process Frye describes is repeatedly enacted.

That for Melville it was poetry which could best present this process is made indisputable by his practice. As has been indicated, his contemporaries faulted his choice. Current readers, however, are somewhat less prescriptive. Richard Harter Fogle in a recent book of essays suggests that verse is appropriate to Clarel's theme, even though like Arvin he compares the poem to Huxley's and Douglas' novels of ideas. He goes on to say that the "verse form is capable of lending a richness of feeling, aesthetic distance, and universality that no novel can provide."[10] One reason Melville had turned to the romance was to increase his work's universality by injecting more of himself into it, but in the process he had lost aesthetic control, especially in Mardi and Pierre. The problem facing him afterward, then, became one of how to create a work which would be responsive to his shifting thoughts and feelings yet remain under his control. His solution was to combine the loose structure of the extended verse narrative with a fairly regular rhyme and meter scheme, thus closely following the formal idea of Byron's Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, and to a lesser extent, Chaucer's Canterbury Tales. Following this tradition allows Melville, through an omniscient narrator and shifting perspective,

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to see everywhere, direct his reader's attention exactly where he pleases without the restriction of plot, enter the consciousness of his characters, and engage in frequent digressions. Consequently, in its freedom of spatial movement and rapid montage-like cuts between character, place, and narrator, Clarel is almost cinematic. Yet its structure of interacting sub-genres or modes, which will be discussed below, keep it a decidedly literary work.

Although the poetic tradition of Chaucer, Dante, and Spenser most fully support this form, Melville was also influenced by the picaresque novel and by the styles of Browne and Smollet. Mardi is certainly strongly influenced by these prose writers and is the work most similar to Clarel in its loosely structured and digressive form. The fact that Clarel is in verse, however, makes it significantly different from Mardi, even when the books treat the same subject. The all-important decision to write in verse must change the reader's expectations of what is read. In Validity in Interpretation E. D. Hirsch explores why this is so by showing the alterations in emphasis, tone, and thus understanding which result from typographically changing a sentence of prose into verse.[11] A similar experiment can be performed by comparing related passages in Mardi and Clarel. With amazing foresight, Melville anticipated his trip to the Holy Land in chapters 105-119 of Mardi when the questers after Yillah visit

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Maramma, an allegorical representation of Palestine and, to a certain extent, of Rome. Their responses of disappointment and doubt foreshadow the feelings Melville would have almost ten years later. Of Alma (Christ), Babbalanja says the following in the romance:

> 'The prophet came to dissipate errors, you say; but superadded to many that have survived the past, ten thousand others have originated in various constructions of the principles of Alma himself. The prophet came to do away all gods but one; but since the days of Alma the idols of Maramma have more than quadrupled. The prophet came to make us Mardians more virtuous and happy; but along with all previous good, the same wars, crimes, and miseries which existed in Alma's day under various modifications are yet extent.... For one, then, I wholly reject your Alma, not so much because of all that is hard to be understood in his histories as because of obvious and undeniable things all round us, which to me seem at war with an unreserved faith in his doctrines as promulgated here in Maramma. Besides, everything in this isle strengthens my incredulity; I never was so thorough a disbeliever as now.[12]

Celio, in Book I of Clarel, stands before the Ecce Homo arch and speaks to Christ, whom he imaginatively envisions:

> But thou- ah, see, in rack How pale
> Who did the world with throes convulse;
> Behold him- yea- behold the Man
> Who warranted if not began
> The dream that drags out its repulse.
> Nor less some cannot break from thee;
> Thy love so locked is with thy lore,
> They may not rend them and go free:
> The head rejects; so much the more
> The heart embraces- what? the love?
> If true what priests avouch of thee,
> The shark thou mad'st, yet claim'st the dove?
> Nature and thee in vain we search:
> Well urged the Jews within the porch-
> 'How long wilt make us still to doubt"'
> How long?- 'Tis eighteen cycles now-
> Enigma and evasion grow;

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And shall we never find thee out?
What isolation lones thy state
That all we else know cannot mate
With what thou teachest? Nearing thee
All footing fails us; history
Shows there a gulf where bridge is none!
In lapse of unrecorded time,
Just after the apostle's prime,
What chance or craft might break it down?
Served this a purpose? By what art
Of conjuration might the heart
Of heavenly love, so sweet, so good,
Corrupt into the creeds malign,
Begetting strife's pernicious brood,
Which claimed for patron thee divine?
(I,xiii,60-91)

It is true that one would expect Celio, a romantic character, to be more effusively poetic and Babbalanja, the rationalist, more prosaic. There are also more poetically rendered passages in Mardi, for example the prose-poetry of chapter 87,"Nora-Bamma." But for the purpose of comparing the differences in reader expectation and writer intention in prose and poetry, these passages are appropriate. The prose passage has a rhetorically logical structure. Three sentences begin "The prophet came to..." and conclude with a "but" clause in refutation. Diction like "principles," "modifications," "doctrines," "promulgated," and "superadded" create a legalistic, emotionally detached tone. When we learn in the following paragraph that Babbalanja's father had been burned on Maramma because of his religious beliefs, his rejection of Alma becomes more understandable. In the past, however, Melville had treated the legal mind ironically because it ignores emotional truth (and he would again in his portrayal of Captain Vere); when Babbalanja later embraces Alma and

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decides to remain on Serenia, Melville's ironic intent in the speech quoted above becomes apparent. In a sense, he is parodying the functional essence of prose. We cannot talk about matters like belief where nothing is "obvious" in a mode of affected certainty. This, in fact, had been the basis for his criticism of Strauss.

Celio makes the same traditional criticisms as Babbalanja: how can the goodness of Christ be considered real in an almost totally evil world/("That all we else know cannot mate/With what thou teachest"), and how can one accept an original belief that has led to the murderous strife of creeds? The tone of the passage, however, is one of yearning uncertainty. It is doubt which wishes not to doubt.[13] Through the structure of a fixed meter and rhyme scheme, Melville is able to use sentences, words, and punctuation to evoke this complex mood more precisely than he could in prose. Melville had marked in Arnold's Essays in Criticism, "Rhyme certainly, by intensifying antithesis, can intensify separation." In rhyming "malign" and "divine" in the above passage, Melville is obviously trying to emphasize the corruption creeds cause and show how separated they have become from Christ's original teachings. In addition, the sonorous cadence of the tetrameter lines transmits a sense of authentic feeling. For example, if written as one continuous prose sentence, "Behold him- yea- behold the Man who warranted if not began the dream that drags out its repulse," loses the

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dramatic pause which follows "Man" in the verse line.

There are further advantages to verse. A more plastic and responsive rhythm can be established as Melville carefully uses endstop and enjambment. The jabbing effect of the six end-stopped lines which begin "Nature and thee in vain we search," culminate in the momentary release of the run-on "What isolation lones they state/ That all we know cannot mate/ With what thou teachest?" In verse, punctuation can be isolated and more forcefully used. The semi-colon has greater effect at the end of a line, or can be used as a caesura as in line sixty-eight above. The dash is used seven times in the thirty quoted lines, not merely to fill out the meter but for thematic emphasis. Most important for Clarel's theme of doubt, the verse line allows Melville to use the question mark either serially ("what? the love?"), without concern for established prose syntax, or to unify a series of lines which seem excessively drawn out into a distinct unit. An example of the last use is the final six lines of the quoted passage. Here a segment which begins as a question is allowed to expand into a defiant statement until it is curtailed somewhat by the final question mark.[14] Finally, the verse line allows Melville to concentrate reader attention on his language. For example, one of his favorite prose devices, parallelism, can be shown to greater advantage:

> The head rejects; so much the more
> The heart embraces- what? the love?

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Head and heart are diagrammatically seen here in opposition. As a result, the verse forces reader attention to images and meanings which otherwise might be missed while it maintains an emphasis on the language itself. It is not, then, merely a vehicle for meaning. This is felt most strongly in its rhythmical dimension, where the emotion which was lacking in the prose is continuously operative but controlled. Only through the greater responsiveness and flexibility of poetry was Melville able to successfully unify the "head" and the "heart."

That Melville found poetry a congenial medium is no reason a reader should find his poetry congenial. Clarel especially is not a work that will be universally appreciated; but because Melville lavished upon it all of his experience and energy, it does, like any fine work of art, yield new pleasures with each reading. Several recent critics have argued that Clarel is America'a greatest Victorian poem.[15] Whether one agrees or disagrees with that appraisal, a careful reading of the poem should place it higher in the pantheon than Hyatt H. Waggoner places it in his American Poets From the Puritans to the Present (1968). Waggoner writes that "Melville never found a voice for his poetry. Or rather, the voice that speaks is not the voice of anyone alive, and it is not speaking to anyone in particular, not even to itself. It is a voice neither colloquial nor literary, a voice such as we have never heard, even with the mind's ear."[16] This overwhelmingly negative assessment stresses what Melville's verse

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is _not_. Yet, if the voice in _Clarel_ is neither colloquial nor literary, if it is a voice we have never heard, what is it actually like?

Other commentators on the poem have agreed that the constrictions of the verse, the archaic and sometimes grotesque diction, its frequent density, are appropriate to Melville's vision of a "circumscribed universe which hems man in" and relegates transcendence to a dream.[17] Robert Penn Warren's shift to this position in his 1967 reevaluation of Melville's poetry is significantly representative. Warren defines Melville's poetic style as "metaphysical": "rich and yet shot through with realism and prosaism, sometimes casual and open and sometimes dense and intellectually weighted, fluid and various because following the contours of his subject, or rather the contours of his complex feelings about his subject."[18] Clearly, then, any description of _Clarel_'s verse must do justice to the poem's variety of mood and complexity of vision. There is not one style, but an interplay of styles which are barely unified by the variable rhyme and meter. Newton Arvin was perhaps the first to perceive this in his 1950 study of Melville. He saw that _Clarel_'s verse form lent itself "at need to other kinds of expressiveness: to a novelistic nicety of touch in characterization, to a strong and often grim rendering of scene, and again and again to a bitter eloquence in speech. A verse style that can adapt itself to purposes so various as these,

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and adapt itself energetically," he concludes, "is hardly a failure."[19]

The most recent analyses of Clarel's poetic structure have understandably proceeded from an appreciation of its diversity. Building on Walter Bezanson's characterization of Clarel's verse as "contracted discourse," Sister Lucy Marie Freibert defines the verse, in general, as "meditative." The mode has been part of the English poetic tradition since its beginnings, dominating the metaphysical and romantic periods. Melville no doubt absorbed it in his earliest reading of Cowper, Johnson, Pope, Thompson, and Marvell in his school reader (Murray's The English Reader). Its method is "retrospective, introspective, and affective," and, as Freibert observes, Melville employs each of these practices in Clarel "to some extent." Her study explains how each contributes to the poem: retrospection directs and distances by empowering the narrator with an authoritative air; scenic composition, dramatization, and affective response add immediacy; analysis tends to objectify. "Meditative voice in Melville's verse," she concludes, "is that synthesis of language, emotional involvement, and cast of mind which both reveals the speaker's personality and externalizes the enigmas inherent in the human condition as they are reenacted and analyzed in the vision of the artist."[20] Freibert's meditative label is most helpful in explaining the narrator's stance in the poem as disembodied mind contemplating the past and interpreting each character's thoughts and feelings. It does not,

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however, explain the narrator as presenter or organizer of events, nor does it subsume under its heading the interpolated riddles, inscriptions, songs, narratives, and dialogues. These are meditated upon, but are not meditative in themselves. Most important, perhaps, is the assumption in the study that these practices are synthesized in the poem when the evidence reveals more of an uneasy coexistence of modes--analytic versus dramatic, didactic interrupting lyric.

In "Form as Vision in Herman Melville's Clarel," Bryan Short does study the confrontational nature of Clarel's verse, seeing a struggle between the "disciplined plainness" of the octosyllabic line and the freedom and beauty represented by the interpolated lyrics. In Short's view the lyric voice ultimately wins in the poem. "The lesson of Melville's changing art in Clarel," he concludes, "is that truth-seeking, whether transcendental or objective, too easily produces a truth which is useless while ignoring opportunity after opportunity for beauty and satisfaction."[21] This is certainly a major stance taken in the poem, but whether it is the final stance is debatable. Melville's later verse, particularly Weeds and Wildings, With a Rose or Two, indicates that the struggle continues between the clarity of lyric belief and a more gnarled, sinewy verse which presents the mind struggling against belief.

The debate is explicitly fought in the long poem which concludes part two "The Rose Farmer," significantly written in Clarel's rhyme and meter. Here the poet is trying

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to decide what form his poetry should take, either "heaps of posies" made up of "gesture breezy" and guaranteed to be popular, or "some crystal drops of Attar," more difficult to cull, unpopular now, but likely to live long, "outlive indeed/ The rightful sceptre of the rose [lyric]/ And coronations of the weed" (CP, p.305). After consulting an old, Persian rose farmer (the poet Sady?) whose strongest argument in favor of the lyric is that it was the beauty of flowers, their "fleeting charms," which first aroused belief in God, the speaker of the poem reconsiders his choice. He leans toward the Persian who (unlike Melville himself) "seemed in life rewarded/ For sapient prudence not amiss,/ Nor transcendental essence hoarded/ In hope of quintessential bliss:/No, never with painstaking throes/ Essays to crystalize the rose" (CP, p.309). The ironic solution to the debate in the final stanza is that the persona does not choose either rose or attar. The poem just stops with the admonition that it should not be spun out too "superfine: The flower of a subject is enough." The "L' Envoi" lyric which follows urges the aged to come to roses late, for youth lies deep within even as the "masque" of age covers the outside. But even this cannot be trusted as Melville's final stance, for an earlier poem in the volume, "The Vial of Attar" is much closer in theme and mood to his last work, Billy Budd. Here the attar serves as a testament to a bloom which once existed but does not exist for the poet in reality now. The rose is seen for what it is, a

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fragile, temporary visitation which cannot last through the dark winter just as Christ in Clarel and Billy cannot last in a hostile world:

> Rose! I dally with thy doom:
> The solace will not stay!
> There *is* nothing like the bloom;
> And the Attar poignant minds me
> Of the bloom that's passed away.
> (*CP*, p.298)

From this perspective, Melville's return to prose in *Billy Budd* can be interpreted as a rejection of the lyric stance he was tentatively assuming in the poetry which followed *Clarel*. In *Clarel* itself we can see the seeds sown for Melville's final return to prose, as the belief-unbelief debate is couched in aesthetic terms.

The search for belief, then, which is the central problem the characters face in *Clarel*, operates on the level of poetic structure as a search for an acceptable form. The poem, like Taji, Ahab, and Hawthorne's view of Melville as happy neither in belief or unbelief, can never rest in one mode. As Short points out, the lyric *is* the most seductive mode to the narrator of the poem. In the ritualistic singing of a hymn, for example, (Ave Maris Stella in the canto "The River Rite") Rolfe joins Clarel in the song, and even the reclusive Vine is finally "Ravished from his reserve supine" and joins in "impulsively." The result is one of the epiphanic moments in the poem:

> The triple voices blending glide,
> Assimilating more and more,

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> Till in the last ascriptive line
> Which thrones the Father, lauds the Son,
> Came concord full, completion fine-
> Rapport of souls in harmony of tone.
> (II,xxiv,49-53)

But a slight shift in perspective in the succeeding lines exposes the lyric, like the existing myth of Christ, as nothing more than an aesthetic construct. Nehemiah is eager to sing the hymn with the others but he checks himself, caught in a "mixed mood." As the narrator explains, Nehemiah's feelings are true. The others "at best do but fulfill/ A transient, an esthetic glow." Could he possibly be aware, the narrator asks, that this was an alien rite to him:

> That no form
> Approved was his, which here might warm
> Meet channel for emotion's tide?
> Apart he went, scarce satisfied.
> (65-70)

No one form, then, can fully involve everyone. The lyric may come closest, yet is still an exercise in self-delusion.

If no one literary form predominates in Clarel, the closest one can come to understanding its poetic structure and vision is to describe its surface of conflicting forms. This may seem a frustrating task for readers who seek an ultimate meaning as a reward for studying a particularly difficult text. But one of the lessons Clarel learns is that there is no ultimate truth. In the poem each stance or new perspective is presented as a unique mode, with the action of the poem consisting of the rapid alteration of modes in and between cantos. As an aid

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in isolating these modes for discussion, Paul Hernadi's diagram, reprinted on page 130, will be useful.[22] In this chart Hernadi attempts to collate the insights and practical critical discoveries of recent genre criticism. The purpose of applying these categories is, of course, not to reduce Clarel to a schema, but to more precisely understand and describe Melville's poetic strategy. As Hernadi points out, a "polycentric classification" which goes beyond the "monistic" principle of classification (prose narrative, lyric), comes much closer to encompassing complex literary works. Even his sixteen subclassifications mark only the "cornerstones"; there are potential intermediate categories which would theoretically cover every conceivable mode of discourse. For example, the didactic voice heard in the cantos "Of Rama" and "Prelusive" is a particular form of "direct appeal to reader" which indicates that in those cantos "vision" replaces "action" and the "authorial" perspective dominates.

Hernadi's compass of perspectives provides immediate access to the poem if we apply it to the sequence of canto titles. At this point any categorization is purely conjectural because one cannot know the complex structure of each canto until it is examined internally, but some tentative observations can be made. The first six titles, for example, "The Hostel," "Abdon," "The Sepulcher," "Of the Crusaders," "Clarel," and "Tribes and Sects," indicate a concentration on a place, a person, then a place, then

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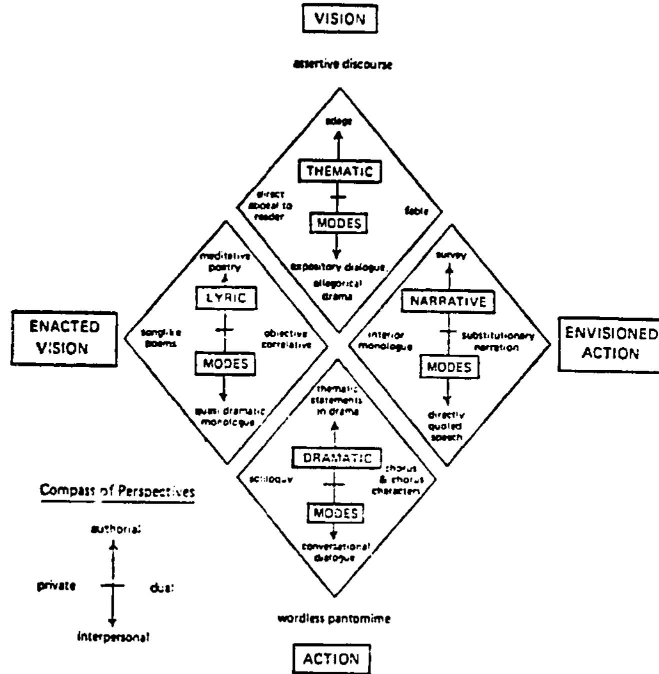

Reprinted from Paul Hernadi's Beyond Genre: New Directions in Literary Classification (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1972), p.166.

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on an historical abstraction, on a person again, and finally on a cultural abstraction. The movement according to Hernadi's chart would probably be from an externalized narrative mode like "survey," where a scene is described by the narrator, to directly quoted speech in the Abdon canto (still in the narrative mode), to perhaps "conversational dialogue" if Abdon interacts with another character. "The Sepulcher" title implies a return to the narrative mode, but cantos like "Of the Crusaders" and "Tribes and Sects" sound like they will contain thematic modes, or possibly lyric modes as the narrator either speaks directly to the reader or through the consciousness of one of the characters. The purpose of this initial analysis is to demonstrate how the poem in a relatively brief number of pages fluctuates between varied modes of presentation. This pattern holds throughout the poem, acting to relieve its apparent metrical oppressiveness. As a result, the reading experience is surprisingly active as the reader must reorient himself amidst the shifting modes.

Only a close examination of several cantos, using Hernadi's categories to standardize terminology, will reveal the variety of modes which emerge from _Clarel_'s confining metrics. Rather than choose isolated cantos, it is probably best to look at three successive ones. In this way Melville's careful juxtaposition of modes can be observed and the actual reading experience more closely simulated. Three cantos in Book III, "Of The Many Mansions" (iii), "The Cypriote"(iv), and "The High Desert"(v) bring

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together a number of different modes in a thematically unified manner, a characteristic situation throughout the poem. These three cantos are preceded by the first two cantos of Book III which explore the implications of Nehemiah's death (Clarel's first spiritual guide in Palestine and the only true believer in the group). An unattributed, speculative lyric opens canto one, questioning whether poets and questers like Leopardi and Obermann will find peace after death and whether all the mysteries of life will be solved. After Nehemiah's burial the remaining travelers, Clarel, Rolfe, Vine, Mortmain, and Derwent begin the journey back to Jerusalem by way of the monastery at Mar Saba and Bethlehem. Mortmain, overcome by a view of the desert waste of Siddim, invokes the coming of the Old Testament God and links this with the rebellion of 1848, in which he took part. In contrast to Mortmain's despair over the harshness of that God and his disillusionment with revolution, the second canto recalls peaceful Nehemiah. Clarel relates a story told him by Nehemiah of an isolated carpenter who sought a friendship which flourished for a while but ended in blows. The carpenter then became a hermit devoted to God. The story is clearly Nehemiah's own, as Rolfe guesses. Mortmain, who had mocked Nehemiah's belief from the first, looks on, still embittered.

Canto three, "Of The Many Mansions," begins with a directly quoted monologue whose speaker is not identified as Rolfe until the narrator informs us in line 19. Melville

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often begins cantos without orienting the reader in any way. An interpolated lyric, an historical digression, a long section of unidentified dialogue, an extended simile, each serves to inhibit the narrative flow from canto to canto, forcing the reader to wait for an explanation or make his own connections. In this case the canto's title gives a clue to its content. "Of the Many Mansions" refers to John xiv.2, a chapter in which Jesus assures his disciples that a place will be prepared for them after death where they will join with the Father. This allusion along with the first two lines of the canto: "'The Elysium of the Greek was given/ By haughty bards, a hero-heaven'" indicate that Melville is still exploring, now through Rolfe, the question of an afterlife. Although the opening stanza is in the narrative mode in that it is directly quoted speech, in relation to its speaker it leans towards the lyric mode, being closer to meditation or quasi-dramatic monologue. As he often does, Rolfe seems to be talking aloud to himself and, as we see in line 34, being overheard. (One is reminded of Mill's definition of lyric as the poet being overheard while talking aloud to himself). The verse is <u>both</u> lyrical and thematic, a symbol that Rolfe combines the heart and the head, Melville's ideal. Here he moves from a disparagement of the Greek conception of the afterlife, which accepted only heroes and not victims, to an encomium on the Christian idea of heaven:

> But oh! 'twas rare,
> In world like this, the world we know

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(Sole know, and reason from) to dare
To pledge indemnifying good
In worlds not known; boldly avow
Against experience, the brood
Of Christian hopes.'
(12-18)

Initially, then, Rolfe is praising the imagination of the Christian conception of heaven, but this effusive mood is halted immediately in the following line which begins a new verse paragraph: "So Rolfe, and sat/ Clouded. But, changing, up he gat:/ 'Whence sprang the vision?'" Bryan Short has observed that generally when Melville indents or breaks a line he is changing modes,[23] and the canto under examination has five such breaks. As Melville shifts here to a position of greater authorial presence (toward "survey" in the narrative mode), the reader is finally made aware of who had been speaking, just in time to perceive Rolfe's radical change of mood. In the next thirteen lines he attacks the Christian heaven for exactly the same reasons he had just praised it; it is so different from the real world we know that it is really "worse than Circe's fooling spell." He bitterly questions how the poor who "freeze" in this world and are "enslaved" and "degraded" by "atheists' crafty power" can possibly believe in the message of the Sermon on the Mount. The lyric tone is still present, although more strident, in the metaphors, diction, and cumulative yearning effect ("Or bounds are hers, that Python mars/ Your gentler influence, ye stars?'").

Line 34 begins a new verse paragraph and a new mode,

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the dramatic, as Mortmain responds to Rolfe. Mortmain, the narrator tells us, is "in glow," for what Rolfe is bemoaning has been his position from the first. In the next nine lines he reasserts his belief that the world is evil and Christ totally out of place in it. He blasphemously takes the side of the wandering Jew who mocks Christ's suffering. In doing this, he takes Rolfe's political theme one step further, associating Christ with royalty and, thus, separating him further from the problems of this world. At this point the narrator interjects to tell us the reactions of the other travelers (Derwent is jarred but masks his feelings, and even Vine is "kindled"). Mortmain then goes on in what is now clearly not a conversational dialogue but more of a monologue. In interchanges like these Melville's form reveals his belief that dialogue is a symbol of man's doomed attempt to come closer to his fellow man. There is a fatalistic parallelism in the conversational passages, and a sense that what one says publically is too often an expression of the "head" and not the "heart." This cyncial point is dramatized (and operates literally in the contrapuntal verse) in the canto "Vine and Clarel" where Clarel seeks a spiritual and physical closeness with Vine which goes beyond words. His internal program, however, is thwarted by the usually taciturn Vine's unwillingness to shut-up. Similarly, in the present canto, rather than respond with a sense of emotional fellow-feeling to Rolfe's remarks, Mortmain's

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discourse withdraws into greater abstraction. "We've touched a theme/ From which the club and lyceum swerve" he realizes. This theme, the unremitting darkness of the world, is so bleak that it cannot be the subject of mere social conversation.

We are all saved from this oppressive theme by the narrator who, beginning a new paragraph, stands back and observes the group sitting "In lifted waste, on ashy ground/ Like Job's pale group, without a sound." The last lines of the canto alert us to a song of some sort being sung in the crags above, out of view.

Canto four, "The Cypriote," begins with a three verse interpolated lyric, obviously the words of the song to which the narrator had referred:

> 'Noble gods at the board
> Where lord unto lord
> Light pushes the care-killing wine:
> Urbane in their pleasure,
> Superb in their leisure-
> Lax ease
> Lax ease after labor divine!
>
> 'Golden ages eternal,
> Autumnal, supernal,
> Deep mellow their temper serene:
> The rose by their gate
> Shall it yield unto fate?
> They are gods-
> They are gods and their garlands keep green.
>
> 'Ever blandly adore them;
> But spare to implore them:
> They rest, they discharge them from time;
> Yet believe, light believe
> They would succor, reprieve-
> Nay, retrieve-
> Might but revelers pause in the prime!'
> (1-21)

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As he had done in Mardi, Melville here uses a lyric as a break from and a commentary on the action. As an alternative mode, it also introduces into the poem a new option for belief. The lyric, which the Cypriote identifies in line 69 as a "hymn" of Aristippus," makes essentially the same criticism of the pagan gods as Rolfe's monologue did in the previous canto. Their heaven is one of eternal pleasure for themselves. The final stanza is even more biting than Rolfe's complaint because its cynical content clashes with the apparent openness and acceptance characteristic of the lyric form. "Blandly" and "light believe" are particularly subversive, as is the irony of the concluding line. (Rolfe shows he is aware of the irony when he later tells the Cypriote he was "bold" to sing such a song [line 118]). If we can all stay young forever, the last line implies, we will be saved. This is the illusion lyric presents, and the function of this canto is to debate whether this stance has any validity for the pilgrims.

Rolfe is the first to respond with a surprised, ironic tone of his own: "'Fine song o'er funeral Siddim here:/ So, mindless of the undertaker,/ In cage above her mistress' bier/ The gold canary chirps.'" Derwent, on the other hand, is obviously ecstatic, thinking he has finally found an ally, a "rescuer" from the cynical intellectuals who surround him. While Rolfe and Derwent welcome the singer openly in direct speech, Mortmain's response is

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rendered as an interior monologue. Even he is charmed by the singer, comparing him to Orpheus who made hell bloom with his song. When the narrator refers to Mortmain as a "ghost" ressurected by the Cypriote and describes the singer as descending "against the dolorous mountain-side/ His Phrygian cap in scarlet pride/ Burned like a cardinal-flower in glen" one must conclude that Melville is consciously comparing the lyric poet to the Christ of the previous canto. Both are concerned with immortality, one religious, the other aesthetic. But unlike the "man of Sorrows," the Cypriote represents "Hellene light-heartedness," a pagan culture which was able to link death and life in a "vintage holiday divine." This world view is closest to Derwent's, but no other traveler can accept it.

From line 60 to 84 the canto's mode is dramatic as Rolfe and Derwent ask the Cypriote for his story and he tells it. When the young and handsome traveler reveals that he is carrying his mother's shroud to dip in the Jordan Derwent is shocked: "'Shroud, shroud?.... You do not mean you carry there/ A- a- .'" In response the Cypriote sings another lyric:

> 'My shroud is saintly linen,
> In lavender 'tis laid;
> I have chosen a bed by the marigold
> And supplied me a silver spade!'

The lyric is reminiscent of how Keats and Dickinson domesticate and beautify death, but its meaning is lost on Derwent. Rolfe must explain that it is an old custom he

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had observed that at some point in life the Greeks dip their shrouds in the Jordan and then put them away until "the day." At this point Rolfe questions the Cypriote's boldness, but soon realizes that argument is futile with one whose defense is that his song is "fluent" and sung unconsciously: "I do but trill it for the air;/ 'Tis any-thing as down we fare." The Cypriote's "argument," if one can call it that, is in the lyric itself. For "l'envoi" after they had parted amicably the pilgrims hear him sing:

> With a rose in thy mouth
> Through the world lightly veer:
> Rose in the mouth
> Makes a rose of the year!

Here Melville uses the rose symbol, which as was mentioned above dominated his later lyrics, to symbolize the ephem-eral beauty of lyric poetry. The Cypriote's words seem to say that art can transmute life into its own beautiful image. Finally, at a distance, the travelers hear a final verse:

> 'With the Prince of the South
> O'er the Styx bravely steer:
> Rose in the mouth
> And a wreath on the bier!'

Art can not only beautify life but it can conquer death. The pilgrims realize that here the Cypriote touches upon a theme that has deeply affected all of them. While listening they look at each other, and this gesture is evidence that art can serve as a potential means of unifi-cation. In the narrative mode now, the speaker reports

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their collective unconscious thoughts:

> Some charitable hope they brook,
> Yes, vague belief they fondly win
> That heaven would brim his happy years
> Nor time mature him into tears.

"Charitable" and "vague," however, reveal the lack of confidence which underlies their hopes. Significantly, because in his silence and seriousness he is the opposite of the Cypriote, Vine's thoughts are the last presented in the canto. Again Melville presents his thoughts not in the third but in the first person, thus greatly enhancing the emotional immediacy of the poem. From the heart of his revery he cannot believe, for he feels the Cypriote, in his unconscious warbling, is no different from a flute which must play whatever the musician wishes.[24] If his songs are "scarce self-derived" Vine concludes, then to go down "singing toward Death's Sea" is a function not of a mature, experiential awareness of death but of untested youth. He concludes, "Ah, young to be"; a belief in lyric is as plausible as a return to youth. We are meant to see the Cypriote and his stance in relation to the Timoneer, Agath, who tells his story of suffering during the revels at Mar Saba, and in relation to the Druze guide whose "passive self-control" impress Clarel and Rolfe during their midnight rambles. These men, although semi-articulate and laconic, are more compelling models than the Cypriote, for through hard won experience they have gained a level of self-knowledge and self-possession which all of the pilgrims respect.

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The opening fourteen lines of the next canto, "The High Desert," typically consist of an extended simile. Again, we do not know until line 16 that the object of the comparison is the Cypriote. The mode is closest to a thematic statement in a drama, a shift from the interior monologue at the end of the preceding canto to a more purely authorial perspective. The narrator tells us of a cleft in Mount Sinai through which a ray of sunlight darts once a year, illuminating St. Catherine's Chapel of the Burning Bush. "It makes no lasting covenant:/ It brings, but cannot leave, the ray," we are told; the effect of the Cypriote on the pilgrims was similar. Understandably, Derwent took his leaving the hardest and urged the others to move on to avoid a recurrence of the depressing conversation which preceded his arrival. But Rolfe and Derwent will not be denied. They are the implied speakers in the following hundred line section which is presented in the substitutionary narrative mode. This is an important and frequently employed mode in the poem which allows Melville to synthesize a complex dialogue into one narrative voice. The effect is to make the reader forget that characters are speaking, bringing us closer to Melville as narrator. (This is reminiscent of Ismael's disappearing persona in Moby Dick). The illusion exists that we are hearing Melville's thoughts directly, but later in the canto the narrator's voice separates itself from the characters' in order to comment on the incoherence of the

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discussion and report on the individual responses of Clarel and Vine. This section is also important because in it are raised the central questions of the poem.

In the first thirteen lines the narrator once again synthesizes the thoughts and conversation of the pilgrims as they look down over Siddim. A contrast is made, familiar by now in the poem, between the desert they see before them and the vernal homes they have left behind. In this contrast they see "the spleen of nature and her love:/ At variance, yet entangled too-/ Like wrestlers." The wrestlers image calls to mind Abel and Cain, and Ormuzd and Ahriman, the last two in Zoroastrian myth representing faith and doubt respectively. Melville is able to effectively capture the ebb and flow of conversation in his indirect presentation, establishing at the same time its free associational nature. The Gnostic idea that Jehovah was the author of evil and Christ divine, "A god was held against a god," follows from the preceding ideas and leads to the assertion that current sects continue that initial split and lead to doubt. The sects are less frank than the Gnostics; they do not say Jehovah is evil, but Jesus, to them, is still "the indulgent God."

The verse paragraph ends in line 63, like every other paragraph or stanza in the discussion, with a question mark. The arguers can come to no conclusion:

> This change, this dusking change that slips
> (Like the penumbra o'er the sun),
> Over the faith transmitted down;
> Foreshadows it complete eclipse?

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The conservative bent of Melville's mature thought, reminiscent of Adams and Lowell, is clearly revealed in this canto. Faith, like myth, is dependent on the illusion that it is exterior to time; change, in contrast, is temporal, and once begun, is unstoppable and unpredictable. Melville, or the characters the narrator here speaks for, is deeply afraid of change ultimately leading to chaos, which would disconnect the present from the "truth at core" of the past. Time, then, because it supports change, becomes the betrayer of faith. From this perspective the Cypriote's lyrics, innocent of time, can be seen as expressions of faith.

In the following two verses, the pilgrims question how inimical to faith are the two major opponents of traditional Christianity, science and Protestantism. Was the Church right in suppressing Galileo? Should it attempt today to destroy "those potent solvents" (which will presumably melt faith) now being developed in the laboratories? Given the negative view of science (Margoth) presented in the rest of the poem, it would be safe to conclude that Melville would answer "yes" to these questions. Turning to Protestantism, if it is no more than "snoring" faith, a petrified sachem, "mere stone," the travelers ask, "then what's in store? What shapeless birth?/ Reveal the doom reserved for earth?/ How far may seas retiring go?" "Shapeless birth" evokes again a deep fear of formless, unchecked proliferation--a fear we have already seen move Melville

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toward the greater formal control of poetry. In the following two verses unchecked growth, "the fever of advance," is identified with the West, unchanging tradition and truth with the East. One of the deepest purposes of the pilgrimage, and of the poem, is to shift perspective and see through the eyes of

> Far Noahs of India old-
> Earth's first spectators, the clear eyed
> Unvitiated, unfalsified
> Seer at first hand-

But have things gotten too far out of hand for such a return, they ask? From where will "a check" come to "the teeming Prairie-Land? There shall plentitude expand/ Unthinned, unawed?" Or must men breed so that locusts can finally come in the bloom? Question follows question here, unchecked, as the tone of the passage reflects its content, becoming more manic and inconclusive.

In the next verse stanza the narrator, by briefly moving further toward the authorial perspective to the survey mode, checks the discussion himself. "Thus they swept," he says describing the talk, "Nor sequence held, consistent tone-/ Imagination wildering on/ Through vacant halls which faith once kept." But then for thirty-five more lines the verse returns to the substitutionary mode as the conversation continues. It is again full of questions. Using a precisely appropriate metaphor, the narrator asks if the age, like a strutting king carrying the Christian name, will be so awed by its past conquests that it will be defeated by the league of "Mammon and Democracy."

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(Melville's discontent with democracy, further evidence of his growing conservatism, is embodied in Ungar, the ex-Confederate soldier who dominates Part IV of the poem). The discussion finally ends in a question which asks whether time merely increases enigmas rather than solves them.

Even though problems of central interest have been discussed, Melville, through the use of shifting modes, never becomes so immersed that perspective is lost. He is still more interested in finding an adequate form which will put an end to unresolved debate. Of the preceding discussion the narrator concludes:

> So they; and in the vain appeal
> Persisted yet, as ever still
> Blown back in sleet that blinds the eyes,
> Not less the fervid Geysers rise.

Persistent questioning is as inevitable to man as any natural phenomenon. But in the final two verse paragraphs of the canto, through the consciousnesses of Clarel and Vine, the narrator critically presents alternative visions. Clarel had remained silent but intent throughout the discussion, we are told. Now his eye falls on the Druze guide, Djalea, who is reclining and smoking his pipe in complete peace. The image Clarel describes parallels Melville's "Statuary in Rome" lecture and his poems on Greek architecture:

> The man and pipe in peace as one.
> How clear the profile, clear and true;
> And he so tawny. Bust ye view,
> Antique, in alabaster brown,
> Might show like that.

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Clarel is impressed with how the guide, "passionless," takes calm as his bride. He would not "waste" words as Rolfe and Mortmain had.

In the final verse paragraph the mode shifts to survey as we are shown Vine not talking or even thinking, but acting out his sense of the preceding argument's futility. The image is the same one Melville used in the short poem "Shelley's Vision" discussed in chapter two above; Vine picks up stones and throws them "through the dull void of desert air," or pelts his own shadow. Stones in the poem are a symbol of the mute barrenness of the Holy Land. We learn in canto seven that after the debate Vine had built a cairn of stones "in whim of silence" which Clarel comes upon and interprets as "a monument to barrenness." The talk for Vine, the narrator tells us in canto five, was "like tale interminable told/ In Hades by some gossip old/ To while the never-ending night." Thus, more than any other character in the poem, Vine grasps the absurdity of trying to solve existential problems with words.

Two more perspectives are presented in the last lines of the canto. First the Arab Bethlehemites who accompany them and presumably are in closer touch with the _genii loci_ "slant peered on them from lateral height." And still higher, overall, "unperturbed," "stretched the clear vault of hollow heaven," as unaffected by humanity and its dilemmas as the sea that envelops the Pequod and Billy Budd.

According to Stanley Brodwin, _Clarel_'s major theme,

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the quest for faith, "arises out of the central phenomenon of annihilation." Indeed, we have seen how in three cantos following the death of Nehemiah, each character has sought to come to terms with that event in his own way: Rolfe and Mortmain through philosophical dialogue, Derwent, through the denial of death inherent in the Cypriote's lyrics, Vine through withdrawal into self, and Clarel through detached observation of all that transpires, being temporarily drawn to Djalea's image of apparent calm. Yet, as Brodwin also points out, for Melville, as for other existential thinkers, "the striving is all."[25] Realizing that the attainment and maintenance of faith in the modern era is a virtual impossibility, Melville concentrates on how his characters confront this overwhelming fact. The artistic techniques he employs to do this, the continuous shifting from mode to mode, the inclusion of various kinds of poetry (dirge, masque, riddle, lyric), and his decision to use poetry itself brilliantly render the individual mind at war with itself, with others, and with a godless universe.

II

This chapter has been primarily concerned with describing and analyzing Clarel intrinsically. Because its multiple perspectives reflect Melville's multicentered vision, the work demands to be viewed in this way. But the role of an artist, especially in a universe that seems to deny transcendent unity, is to create holistic worlds, to, as

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James says, draw the circle around experience. One way Clarel demands to be viewed holistically, because of its size and scope, is as epic. Analyzing to what extent the poem employs epic motifs, or perhaps subverts them, will bring us closer to the meanings inherent in Melville's decision to write an epic length poem.

He almost certainly chose it because in 1876 it was a form contrary to what was popular or critically accepted. As Jay Martin observes, in the postwar period the demand for the Great American Novel supplanted the call for the American Epic which had dominated the earlier half of the century.[26] In fact, J. W. DeForest wrote the following in The Nation in 1868, the year Melville probably began writing Clarel: "To write a great American poem is at present impossible, for the reason that the nation has not yet lived a great poem.... We may be confident that the Great American Poem will not be written, no matter what genius attempts it, until democracy, the idea of our day and nation and race, has agonized and conquered through centuries, and made its work secure."[27]

DeForest was calling for realistic prose fiction which would present America as it was then. Melville, no longer expecting to write for profit, was finally able to write exactly as he pleased, and he had never been pleased with pure realism. He did, in a sense, agree with DeForest that democracy had not been adequately tested, and that Americans did not have a sufficient sense of the past. As

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a peripheral member of the Young America movement he had helped create the antipathy for the past which DeForest was acknowledging.[28] But like the poets closer to his own age (with the exception of Whitman), he did not throw up his hands and accept the situation. Longfellow, Bryant, and Bayard Taylor plunged into the past, translating Dante, the Iliad, and Faust respectively. But Melville faced the issue directly. Through his contemporary characters in Clarel he confronts the past and rigorously seeks its validity for the present. Anyone who bothered to read his poem was not only forced to consider the insignificance of America in relation to the antiquity of the human race, but was exposed to a withering attack on the hitherto untested idea of democracy. Melville would not wait for some future "secure" time to enshrine democracy in an epic, he would use his poem to begin the period of testing immediately.

Although recent critics have referred to Clarel as an epic,[29] the poem gives many indications that it is questioning the very concept of epic and its applicability to the nineteenth century. With a writer like Melville, who is ever conscious of the conflict between organic and conventional forms, one must be wary of too quickly categorizing. Just as Amasa Delano must learn to stop relying on assumptions based on conventional experience when he boards the San Dominick, Melville wants us when we read Clarel to question the exact nature of our textual environment.

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At over 18,000 lines and 150 cantos, Clarel is certainly epic in length. But its expansiveness is undercut by the constrictions of its irregularly rhymed couplets, by its digressive style, and by its shifting modes. In each of these ways it subverts the narrative flow characteristic of Homeric, Virgilian, and Miltonic epics. A recent critic has argued on the basis of Melville's markings in Arnold's essay "On Translating Homer" that Melville carried his admiration for Homer into the writing of Clarel. The result is that like the Homeric epics, "on the whole, Clarel is plain; Clarel is natural; Clarel is rapid, and above all, Clarel is noble."[30] It would be more accurate to say, however, that because of the frequent modal shifts discussed above, Clarel abruptly alternates between rapidity and slowness, plainness and complexity, naturalness and artificiality. If the narrative flow of epic verse is an appropriate vehicle for the great actions which epics depict, then Clarel's mutable, self-inhibiting style befits the limited scope of its external action.

Compared to traditional epic, the action is infrequent. There are no wars, either on earth or in heaven, no quests for grails or maidens, no dramatic acts of self-sacrifice. The title character is the antithesis of the man of action, a young divinity student. The poem opens depicting our hero in the throes of inaction, "elbow on knee, and brow sustained/ All motionless," as he sits brooding, his face pale "and all but feminine." (A far cry from the ominous

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energy of Ahab). Clarel's movements seem aimless and conventional, his motivation as unclear to the reader as to himself. He comes to Palestine not as a pilgrim with the fixed object of visiting revered sites, but with a vague sense of doubt, "underformings in the mind." He only leaves Jerusalem to take the traditional ten day trip to the Dead Sea and back because Ruth, a young Jewess he has fallen in love with, is isolated in mourning for her father. Thus, unlike Taji who seeks Yillah, Clarel is led away from Ruth, the traditional quest object.[31] Although other characters are much more strongly presented in the poem than Clarel, Rolfe and Vine especially, none ever clearly emerges as dominant. When we consider this vacuum at the center of the poem in comparison to the centrality of Ahab, Pierre, Bartleby, and Billy Budd to their respective works, we can see how Clarel is more representative of a post-heroic, post-romantic age. The strong undercurrent of sadness in the poem is partially the result of Melville's growing belief that personal force of will cannot change the world.

But the writer who in old age would keep the phrase "Be true to the dreams of thy youth" pinned to his desk would never totally abandon the search for a hero. Melville merely shifted the field of action from the external world to the individual mind, and like James, sought transcendence in the relations between individuals and their world. There is, however, an ideal hero who haunts the poem as a model

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against which the heroism of others is to be judged. Renan, Emerson, Carlyle, and the nineteenth century generally, saw Christ as such a hero. He was wise, strong, isolated, suffering, a poet, and one who fought to overcome wrong. In short, he embodied the romantic ideal. Vine in Clarel is associated through imagery to Christ, but if the connection is conscious, then his mysterious silence and apathetic behavior establish a clear antitype. In this way Melville is simultaneously questioning the validity of Christ's heroism and his own age's capacity for Christ-like deeds.[32]

An example of the way Melville uses epic criteria to test each character's heroic capacity occurs when Derwent is tested in Book III. Derwent is in many ways the typical post-Civil War American, optimistic, worldly, future oriented, and materialistic, despite the fact that he is an Anglican priest. Melville's treatment of him throughout the poem is Chaucerian in its satiric tone, but in cantos xxi and xxii Clarel turns to him as a serious model. Clarel and Derwent wake early on the morning after the revels at Mar Saba to watch the sun rise from the highest monastery tower. In accordance with Melville's phenomenological motif, this elevated height signals an important subject of discussion.[33] Clarel has become disturbed by Mortmain's scepticism, but his observations of Derwent's brand of faith have made him doubt even more. Since they are alone, he decides to "put that soul to proof."

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In the first canto called "In Confidence," Clarel reveals his deepest religious doubts; he is adrift and seeking a "secure retreat." Derwent admits that he partially agrees with Clarel's doubts, but Clarel finds this solace "vague." Derwent, he realizes, is also embarrassed by his openness and "fervid earnestness." The diction Melville uses to describe their rapid interchange, "rallied," "advanced," "changing trim," gives the impression that a battle is taking place, not a mere conversation. First Clarel attacks with doubt; Derwent "bit the lip" and withdraws, then senses something he has said momentarily shakes Clarel's scepticism and pushes on. It is the "impassioned novice" versus the "kind proficient." When Derwent feels he has won a point he rushes to seize Clarel's hand, but Clarel "shrinks incredulous," in an ironic reversal of his rejection by Vine in Book II. In a long speech which follows, Derwent fully reveals his conventionality and, consequently, his inadequacy for heroic status:

> Have Faith, which even from the myth,
> Draws something to be useful with:
> In any forms some truths will hold;
> Employ the present-sanctioned mold.
> (185-189)

Although Melville's growing appreciation for form has been noted, words like "useful" and "employ" are clearly negative for him, and recall his attack on anti-heroic utilitarianism in Battle-Pieces. When Derwent suggests one of the "active forms" which should be employed is "popular verse" because it charms and warms, we can be certain from

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what we know is Melville's attitude towards that genre that he intends to expose him to ridicule.

Attacking Clarel's youthful passion and identifying it with the Romantics he argues that "midway is best.... Your way/ Of giving to your self the goad/ Is obsolete, no more the mode.... Byron's storm-cloud away has rolled-/ Joined Werther's; Shelley's drowned;" and now even Hamlet's wailings are "indecorous." But Derwent loses the battle when Clarel turns with "speed of passion" and invokes Job, "In whom these Hamlet's conglobe," challenging Derwent to refute the lesson of the Bible story which is that faith is dependent on pain and suffering. "Derwent averted here his face-/ With his own heart he seemed to strive;/ Then said:'Alas, too deep you dive," thus surrendering the field.

Derwent is ultimately vanquished, as the next canto "The Medallion" dramatizes, by his naive approach to art and by his inability to apply the heroic lessons of the past to the present. After Clarel and Derwent separate, the narrator follows Derwent who "lightly" strolls away toward an inner porch of the monastery called "Galilee." It is "a place for discipline and grief," and the narrator satirically ends the couplet with "and here his tarry had been brief," except he is attracted by a marble relief of a man in armour with visor down who is lifting up a crown. The figure is clearly a foil for Derwent and a symbol of the true Christian hero who has come through trial a victor

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"without pride of victory, or joy in fame." (The fact that the one indisputable hero in the poem is relegated to the world of art is an important reinforcement of Melville's theme here). Characteristically, Derwent is charmed by the statue's beauty rather than by its earnestness. Under the statue is the following inscribed verse which, perhaps, Derwent would never have read without the initial attraction of the relief:

> 'O fair and friendly manifested spirit!
> Before thine altar dear
> Let me recount the marvel of the story
> Fulfilled in tribute here.
>
> In battle waged where all was fraudful silence,
> Foul battle against odds,
> Disarmed, I, fall'n and trampled, prayed: Death, succo
> Come, Death: thy hand is God's!
>
> A pale hand noiseless from the turf responded,
> Riving the turf and stone:
> It raised, rearmed me, sword and golden armor,
> And waved me warring on.
>
> O fairest, friendliest, and even holy-
> O Love, dissuading fate-
> To thee, to thee the rescuer, thee sainted,
> The crown I dedicate:
>
> To thee I dedicate the crown, a guerdon
> The winner may not wear;
> His wound re-opens, and he goes to haven:
> Spirit! befriend him there.'

Derwent's response to this allegorical portrait of the Christian hero who seems to unify elements of the classical and medieval epic traditions is simplistically: "A hero, and shall he repine?/ 'Tis not Achilles." Derwent's preconception of the traditional epic hero, wrathful, physically strong, unreflective, and concerned with fame and honor,

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prevents him from seeing those qualities which Melville feels are prerequisites for the nineteenth-century hero who must fight an internal, anonymous struggle against the forces of chaos and doubt. (This shift is symbolized by the Knight who is depicted in the relief having relinquished his position as count to become a monk). In an empty, spiritless age, the hero must rise, like Lazarus, but from an emotional death, and without the assistance of a Christ. The "pale hand" which saves the knight comes from below ground, not from above, a resurrection image which originates from inside the individual as a rekindled feeling of love. The canto further teaches the reader, if not Derwent, that the only possible objectification of the internal battle for faith, the only evidence we have that it exists as an isolated phenomenon, is art. As one of the Mar Saba brothers tells Derwent, "Yon slab tells all or nothing, see." The epic diction of the interpolated poem is reminiscent of Schiller's "The Ideal and The Real" which presents the poet as the type of embattled humanity, and implicitly compares him to Christ. Even though the knight had lived "long centuries" ago, the poem has preserved (recreated?) that poem and statue. Clearly, then, Melville is not abandoning the principles of heroic epic; he is forcing us to modify and apply them to our own seemingly unheroic age.

If _Clarel_ lacks the narrative dimensions of epic, it compensates in the magnitude of its allusiveness. Setting the poem in the Holy Land complicates each page with

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layers of Old and New Testament references, allusions to early Church history, the Crusades, previous travelers, and other religions. When this is combined with literary and political references and the symbolic rendering of character and place, the myth of action is superseded by a myth of vision. The closest analogous form becomes the Bible itself, which permeates the entire poem. Northrop Frye's categorization of the Bible as an "encyclopaedic epic" is useful in seeing Clarel from what he considers a true "higher" critical perspective, that is, as a work whose unified diversity makes a coherent thematic statement. As Frye writes:

> In proportion as the continuous fictional myth begins to look illusory, as the text breaks down into smaller and smaller fragments, it takes on the appearance of a sequence of epiphanies, a discontinuous but rightly ordered series of significant moments of apprehension or vision.[34]

Such a description is applicable to Clarel and shows how it is a precursor to formally similar twentieth century long poems like Eliot's "The Waste Land" and Four Quartets and Pound's Cantos. The writing of Clarel, as of these works, represents an epic struggle by the poet to forge his own object of belief. Great anxiety must necessarily attend such an enterprise; consequently, the final chapter of this study will examine Melville's ambivalent feelings about his role as creator.

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Notes

[1]From an unsigned review, New York Times, 10 July 1876, reprinted in Melville: The Critical Heritage, ed. Watson G. Branch (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), p.404.

[2]Jay Leyda, The Melville Log (New York: Gordian Press, 1969), vol.II, p.756.

[3]Among the well known critics who have tended to dismiss the poetry are F. O. Matthiessen, Charles Fiedelson, Hyatt Waggoner.

[4]Edgar Dryden, Melville's Thematics of Form (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1968), p.7.

[5]Until the Fogle collection (note 10 below) no critic has tried to analyze why Melville decided to write Clarel in verse. They have commented on the appropriateness of his poetic style to the poem's theme, but not on the aesthetic rationale for choosing verse over prose.

[6]As early as 1847 Melville would write in a "Letter from the Author of 'Typee'" in The Saturday Evening Post: "Poets are not properly esteemed and recompensed in our country...." (In Leyda, Log, p.263).

[7]David Daiches, A Study of Literature (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1948), p.140.

[8]Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957), p.81.

[9]Frye, p.83.

[10]Richard Harter Fogle, The Permanent Pleasure: Essays on Classics of Romanticism (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1974), p.166. It is significant for the reputation of Melville as poet, and for Clarel, that Fogle devotes three chapters to the poem.

[11]E. D. Hirsch, Jr., Validity in Interpretation (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1967), p.96-98.

[12]Herman Melville, Mardi (New Haven: College & University Press, 1973), pp.292-293).

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[13]See Pani's speech in Mardi (Chap. cix, last paragraph) for Melville's attempt to render this mood in prose; it is a tour de force, but without the structure of rhyme and meter it rambles, all tension and power diffused.

[14]An informal count of Melville's use of the question mark indicates that almost thirty per cent of the lines in the poem are controlled by the interrogative voice. This should have a pronounced effect on the reader's sense of the whole poem, bringing home viscerally its theme of doubt. The many questions tend to raise the aural pitch of reading what a number of critics have considered the poem's dreary, lock-step metrics. The result is a sense of intermitent transcendence.

[15]Vincent Kenny, Joseph Knapp, Bryan Short.

[16]Hyatt Waggoner, American Poets from the Puritans to the Present (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968), pp.227-228.

[17]See Vincent Kenny, Herman Melville's Clarel: A Spiritual Autobiography (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1973), p.103, and William Bysshe Stein, The Poetry of Melville's Late Years, who writes: "Since the disharmonies of form and style [in the late poetry] are apparently programmatic, the critic cannot simply condemn Melville for artistic ineptitude" [pp.15-16]. Unfortunately, Stein's tolerance does not extend to Clarel's poetic style which he finds "stiff, stuffy, and stultifying,...out of key with the theme of the poem." [p.11] In his book, however, he sees Clarel's subject as the realization of the stultifying, subjective nature of ideas. Melville's form in Clarel, through a greater flexibility than Stein perceives, embodies both stultification and the momentary transcendence which comes from the realization of our subjectivity.

[18]Robert Penn Warren, "Melville's Poems," Southern Review, III, New Series, Oct. 1967, p.807.

[19]Newton Arvin, Herman Melville (N.Y.: William Sloan Assoc.,1950), pp.270-272.

[20]Sister Lucy Marie Freibert, "Meditative Voice in the Poetry of Herman Melville," Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Univ. of Wisconsin, June 1970, pp.25-26. In the following chapter I will impose an inclusive label of my own, the "contemplative vision."

[21]Bryan C. Short, "Form and Vision in Herman Melville's Clarel," American Literature, vol. 50, no. 4, Jan. 1979, p.568. In his desire to see lyric triumph in the epilogue, Short, I believe, overlooks one of Melville's language tricks. When the narrator says, "Clarel, thy heart, the issues there but mind" (italics mine), he is not excluding

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the head and extolling only emotion. He is, rather, paraphrasing Plato's "know thyself." The intellect should be applied not only to theological and political issues, but to emotional ones as well.

[22] Paul Hernadi, Beyond Genre: New Directions in Literary Classification (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1972), p.166.

[23] Short, "Form as Vision...." p.560. Short parenthetically labels the modes "conversation," "song," "thought," "commentary," "description." Since the modes are the focus of my study I sought a more inclusive labeling system in Hernadi's.

[24] If Melville's attitude is Vine's here, a valid assumption if we just consider the kind of verse Melville himself writes, his assertion at the beginning of Battle-Pieces that in composing those poems he merely held a harp up to the wind can be seen along with his other self-deprecating remarks, i.e. as defensive about his role as poet.

[25] Stanley Brodwin, "Herman Melville's Clarel: An Existential Gospel," PMLA,86(1971), p.380.

[26] Jay Martin, Harvests of Change: American Literature 1865-1914 (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.:Prentice Hall, 1967), p.29.

[27] Reprinted in A Storied Land: Theories of American Literature, ed. Richard Ruland (N.Y.: Dutton, 1976), vol. II,p.25.

[28] In White-Jacket(1850) Melville wrote: "The past is dead, and has no resurrection; but the future is endowed with such a life, it lives to us even in anticipation.... The past is the text-book of tyrants; the Future the Bible of the Free. Those who are solely governed by the past stand like Lot's wife, crystallised in the act of looking backward, and forever incapable of looking before" (p.150). Significantly for the subject of Clarel, Melville could not look forward, even in 1850, without employing images of the Biblical past.

[29] Bryan Short, for example, in his American Literature essay twice refers to Clarel as epic without questioning the classification, although he implicitly does so when he writes: "The lesson of civil war fatalism permits Melville to build into Clarel his misgivings about the nobility of both pilgrims and pilgrimage, vivid adventure gives way to desultory wandering and endless talk" (p.557). Schurr in Mystery of Iniquity also refers to the poem as an epic.

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[30]Agnes Dicken Cannon, "On Translating Clarel," in Essays in Arts and Sciences (New Haven: Univ. of New Haven), vol.v,no.2, July 1976, p.177.

[31]From another perspective Clarel is always moving toward Ruth in two ways--the trip is circular, and on it he decides to marry her after he has experientially learned the importance of human connection.

[32]See Kenny's and Schurr's books for the most thorough discussions of Christ in the poem.

[33]Because the circular pilgrimage with its literal ups and downs is the central event of the poem, there is a working out of the 'diminished epic' motif as the pilgrims "win" each place they seek. Larry Wegener's helpful A Concordance to Herman Melville's Clarel (Ann Arbor: Univ. Microfilms, 1979), 3 vols., reveals how frequently the word is used in lines like "The tower they win some Greeks at hand." It is used as well in connection with winning belief, yet it also must be admitted that it is frequently found at the end of a line because it is a convenient rhyming word.

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Chapter Five

"'To Terminus Build Fanes'": *Clarel*, Poetry, and the Organic

For never passion peace shall bring
Nor Art inanimate for long
Inspire, Nothing may help or heal
While Amor incensed remembers wrong.

Melville,
"After the Pleasure Party"

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In a rambling, ecstatic letter to Hawthorne written during June of 1851 Melville registered the following, now well known, autobiographical insight: "Until I was twenty-five, I had no development at all. From my twenty-fifth year I date my life. Three weeks have scarcely passed, at any time between then and now, that I have not unfolded within myself. But I feel that I am now come to the in-most leaf of the bulb, and that shortly the flower must fall to the mould."[1] Of particular interest in this excerpt is the organic metaphor Melville uses to describe an internal development which is dependent on and indis-tinguishable from the writing career he began during 1844, his twenty-fifth year. It is perhaps significant that Melville began this letter after having come directly from his fields at Arrowhead where he had been harvesting the corn and potato crops, but, of course, referring to writing in natural terms is habitual for Melville and his Romantic contemporaries. Even earlier in this letter he refers to the "silent grass-growing mood in which a man _ought_ always to compose." For Melville, however, unlike Goethe, Schiller, Emerson, and Whitman, the perception of writing as a natural process was frought with negative associations which he struggled to understand throughout his career.

Through the organic perception of art which associates writing with self discovery and which appears to place process above product, the Romantic artist created the illusion that the writer and his work were one. In addition,

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these writers so idealized art that for them it is always associated with the growing, creative side of the natural process and never with the destructive. Evil, sexuality and death are absorbed and neutralized in their works. Death in Whitman's poetry, for example, is more often than not treated ecstatically, and Walden ends in the fecundity of spring rather than in the grip of winter. Melville began his writing career as a critical believer in the organic metaphor, but his aesthetic growth, manifested in his turn to poetry, can be seen as resulting from a conscious and unconscious attempt to escape his view of himself as organic artist.

Fueling this escape was anxiety rooted in a cluster of causes. First, Melville felt mentally and physically consumed in the act of writing. No doubt this was partly due to the tremendous amount of writing he produced between 1844 and 1852. But it certainly had as much to do with his perception of what he was doing. As the letter to Hawthorne quoted above implies, if writing is natural, the writer is part of a process of continual transformation not fully under his control. At the same time, he and his creations are subject to the same process of deterioration and death as all organic matter. Melville was anxious about both aspects of the process: the everchanging flux ("Lord, when shall we be done growing") and the prospect of death. Related to this first source of anxiety is the closeness of the organic mode of writing to the

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female biological procreative role. Not only did this identification blur his masculine identity, but it exacerbated his inherited Calvinistic misogyny which saw woman as the source of evil. Therefore, changes in Melville's attitude toward and treatment of the sensual and the sexual are critical gauges of his growth as an artist. Finally, these conflicts over the use of the organic as metaphor are intimately connected with the problem of religious belief. Melville wanted to believe that, as in nature, humanity transcends death through a cycle of rebirth, but his empirical strain resisted such acceptance. In writing Clarel, however, Melville achieves a new relation with the organic and in doing so in part resolves his life-long spiritual conflict.

Chapter one of this study cites the passage in Mardi in which the author intrudes into the narrative to present a view of himself writing. It is the apotheosis of the Romantic writer in thrall to his liberated unconscious. "Fain would I hurl off this Dionysius that rides me," he writes half in exultation, half in terror, as his "own mad brood of eagles devours" him.[2] Melville's turn to poetry, it was argued above, was an attempt to gain some control over a process which he had begun increasingly to fear and mistrust. The deepest sources of that fear, however, remain to be examined. In Pierre, written almost four years later, the reader observes Melville observing

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Pierre writing just such a book as Mardi. In the later book he explicitly analyzes those ambivalences about writitng which the Mardi passage raises only implicitly. In book twenty-two of Pierre, "The Flower-Curtain Lifted From Before A Tropical Author, With Some Remarks on The Transcendental Flesh-Brush Philosophy," Melville jokingly rejects the trappings of the romantic view of the artist put on by Pierre's neighbors, but at the same time he recognizes how seductive the organic analogy is. Early in the chapter, the book Pierre is writing is compared to fruit which must be forced to ripen before the winter destroys it. In the succeeding paragraph, Melville compares a toddler learning how to stand by itself to the emerging soul. "In its germ on all sides it is closely folded by the world, as the husk folds the tenderest fruit," he says of the soul which is clearly a name for the emerging self. "Then it is born from the world-husk, but still now outwardly clings to it;--still clamours for the support of its mother the world and its father the Deity."[3] The completion of a book is here identified with the ripening of fruit which is identified with self maturation. Writing for Pierre, then, is not merely an aesthetic exercise or a youthful bid for fame, but is rather the very means by which he will grow. (It is significant in this regard that Pierre never finishes his book).

So Melville may joke at Pierre's "almost" being deluded by the writers whose "Apple-Parings Dialectics"

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and "Kantian Categories" make them believe that by seeming to live more closely to nature, by denigrating their bodies, they can come closer to their souls; yet on a deeper level, the organic metaphor is operating as Pierre writes. For Pierre forces upon himself an unnecessary ascetic existence so that by intentionally crippling his youth, his form, his eyesight, he can force the growth of his soul. Melville's tone here is sympathetically detached. He is drawn to Pierre's passionate intensity, but must separate himself from it. As he tells us, Pierre is "quite conscious of much that is so anomalously hard and bitter in his lot;" however, such knowledge does not necessarily change that lot. Pierre cannot control his book because the self that is writing it is changing as it is being written. Consequently, the book itself becomes important only as a metaphor for this process. The writer who does not appreciate the separation which must exist between the artist and his materials is doomed to be cannibalized by his own work. By 1852, in writing Pierre, Melville indicates his awareness of this problem. "Is it creation, or destruction?" the narrator asks when considering Pierre's writing, "builds Pierre the noble world of a new book? or does the Pale Haggardness unbuild the lungs and the life in him?" The narrator realizes that a "noble" book cannot be created when more important psychic changes are occurring:

> That which now absorbs the time and the life of Pierre, is not the book, but the primitive

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> elementalising of the strange stuff, which in the act of attempting that book, has upheaved and upgushed in his soul. Two books are being writ; of which the world shall only see one, and that the bungled one. The larger book, and infinitely the better, is for Pierre's own private shelf. That it is, whose unfathomable cravings drink his blood; the other only demands his ink.... Thus Pierre is fastened on by two leeches;-- how then can the life of Pierre last? Lo! he is fitting himself for the highest life by thinning his blood and collapsing his heart. He is learning how to live, by rehearsing the part of death.(pp.424-425)

When earlier in the book Pierre boasts that with his writing he would "gospelize the world anew, and show them deeper secrets than the Apocalypse," he could not anticipate that his book of the self would surpass and obliterate any external work he hoped to create. Pierre, like Nathan in Clarel (and, of course, like Melville himself) changes form too rapidly, even before he can fix his changes in print, and, as a result, goes mad. His suicide symbolizes a victory for the Romantic aesthetic--for the transforming ego over the containing intellect, for process over product, for life over art. Melville's need to write about this in Pierre indicates a desire to control the organic process of self transformation which so radically altered Mardi. The problem of shifting tone in Pierre, however, reveals that he could not yet successfully maintain the necessary separation between self and artifact. The next step had to be a change of form, for the loose structure of the romance certainly contributed to the intrusive dominance of self in his works and the blurring of the line between life and art.

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Melville's subsequent turn to writing poetry and his assumption of the role of poet was his mature response to Pierre's crisis of identity.[4] It provided two psychologically necessary solutions. First, the technical demands of verse short circuited the organic connection between writing and self-development. Discoveries could still be made in the heat of creation, but the necessity of working those discoveries into a particular verse form led to greater control and detachment. Second, Melville's more secure identity as an artist resulting from and in a firmer control over the intrusive "I"led to the creation of works which were, at least, not "botches." Although the scraps of evidence we have indicate that writing _Clarel_ was for Melville as self-consuming as his writing of _Mardi_, _Moby Dick_, or _Pierre_, no doubt his struggle with the verse absorbed much of his energy. As a result, he did not unintentionally expose himself in the work through stylistic excesses or confusion between writer, narrator, and character. The narrative voice seems always in tonal control. Interest, therefore, is directed where it was intended to be directed--at the experiences and impressions of Clarel and the other distinctive characters. In fact, _Clarel_ is unique among Melville's works in that there is no single monopolizing voice and in that there are fewer one-dimensional characters. Celio, Rolfe, Vine, Mortmain, the Celibate, Ungar, Agath, Nehemiah, Djalea, the Lyonese, and others all have legitimate things to teach Clarel.

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A clear example of Melville's continued interest in but greater detachmcnt from the process of self-transformation is the "Nathan" canto (xvii) in book one of Clarel. In this masterpiece of compression, Melville traces Ruth's father's entire life beginning with his Pilgrim roots and ending just before his murder in Palestine. While the canto presents the development of an individual it is also an allegorical history of America's birth, westward growth, and a prophesy of its turning back toward the east at some future time.[5] The canto is full of images of birth, flux, the search for form, and the transgression of limits--all central concerns in the poem as a whole. In contrast to the involuted, hermetic streets of Jerusalem which had been the subject of much of book one, America as depicted in the poem offers "a heart more large, an ampler shore... warm plains as of Esdraleon/ 'Tis nature in her best benign" (I,xvii,14,18-19). In short, it is an ideal "mother" land where the "primal settlers" spawned "new emigrants which inland bore;/ From these too, emigrants again/ Westward pressed further; more bred more" (11,9-12). This is Melville's positive, prelapsarian view of American growth. Here, on the Illinois prarie, "a turf divine," Nathan is born. Like other Melville protagonists he is "a stripling, but of manful ways." The "power/ Of vast space" which he sees daily from his cabin encourages the first doubts of his inherited religion; the rest of the canto depicts his search for a secure foundation to erect over

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the abyss of scepticism which has opened. He is alternatively attracted to Deism, Atheism, and Pantheism, but the death of his mother completely destroys his sense of self. In a passage reminiscent of the poem "Art," Melville presents Nathan at the critical stage of amorphous disorientation which Pierre glimpses while bound to his writing desk. Even the temperature is the same:

> Alone, and at Doubt's freezing pole
> He wrestled with the pristine forms
> Like the first man. By inner storms
> Held in solution, so his soul
> Ripened for hour of such control
> As shapes, concretes. (11, 194-199)

The form of control Nathan is now ripe for (and Melville is projected here as well) is not the concrete written word, but an identity, a stance toward the world and God. At this point Nathan meets the Jewess Agar, and in a confusion of sexual and religious need embraces Judaism, seeing it as the secure "rear-wall" behind the crumbling Christian faith. But as with Ahab, his Puritan earnestness and zeal push him beyond mere belief to fanaticism. He exceeds the "due" limits of faith, sells everything and takes his wife and child to Palestine to fulfill the dream of "Next year in Jerusalem." Not content to remain within the relatively safe confines of the city, he leaves his family behind and exiles himself to a farm in the desert where he is killed, sharing the fate of other Melvillean overreachers. Here we can perhaps partially understand why Melville felt the need to come to the

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Holy Land in 1856. In Pierre, the narrator says of Pierre's desire to isolate himself in his writing chamber, "if a man must wrestle, perhaps it is well that it should be on the nakedest possible plain" (p.413). In the deserts of the Holy Land Melville found an appropriately barren setting where he could wrestle "with the pristine forms," and in the process rebuild his shattered sense of self. But while the desert was a compelling idea for Melville and a central image in Clarel, it was not an integral part of his formative experience (he spent less than a month there). When we consider this in conjunction with the fact that he began Clarel at least ten years after his trip we can understand his ability to render Nathan's transformation with detachment. In his youth Melville would perhaps have devoted an entire book to such a character; at fifty, he would not.

As Melville became more secure as an artist he began to critically scrutinize the partially concealed assumptions and unexpected side effects of the Romantic aesthetic. One of these, the organic metaphor, which defined his earliest perceptions of himself as artist, led him to identify with the female as natural creator. This identification was attractive to him to the extent that it satisfied his desire to dive deep and sound the mysteries of the universe; it was repulsive to him in that it seemed to make him a part of a completely physicalized process whose disturbing particulars were more than the Puritan and romantic in him wished to face. Although Melville does

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not confront this problem directly until _Clarel_, we can begin to trace his treatment of it after his turn to the short story form in two extraordinary linked stories, "The Paradise of Bachelors" and "The Tartarus of Maids."

It is probably likely that with four children of his own Melville did not romanticize childbirth or child rearing. Clearly, then, the desire of the bachelors in the first story to get as far away as possible from "thinking upon rise of bread and fall of babies"[6] can be taken as autobiographical. Although the story's tone is light, with a hint of sarcasm, there is no question that Melville shared in the narrator's yearning for the decorum, the quiet, the fraternal feeling, and the absence of guilt which only the "Brethren of the Order of Celibacy" could attain.[7] When the memory of his time with the bachelors overcomes the narrator he can only find utterance for his feeling through the "poetry" of the song "Carry me back to Old Virginny" (p.205). The pun is an important link to the connecting story, "The Tartarus of Maids," which is the polar opposite of the first story. While the "Paradise of Bachelors" is located in a snug retreat in the heart of London, "Tartarus" is set in the frigid New England mountains. Quiet comaraderie and civilized entertainment is contrasted with noise, isolation, and drudgery. "'This is the very counterpart of the Paradise of Bachelors,'" the narrator realizes, "'but snowed upon, and frostpainted to a sepulcher'"(p.214). The narrator's wild ride through

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the dripping passes and notches of Woedolor Mountain and across the Blood River in search of the Devil's Dungeon paper-mill, drawn by his horse, Black, "flaked all over with frozen sweat, white as a milky ram," establishes the symbolic landscape of sexual conquest and contrasts again with the decorum of the bachelor's world. The object of this quest, the paper mill, is a surrealistic, thinly veiled allegorical representation of the female reproductive system, passively served by an array of pathetic "maids" (virgins). Taken on a tour through the mill by a boy named Cupid, the narrator first stops in the rag room where girls are tearing rags on a row of "erected" swords. He notices their consumptive pallors and thinks: "their own executioners; themselves whetting the very swords that slay them" (p.218). Thus, sex and death are strongly linked here.

There is another component, however, which must be added to the sex-procreation- death cycle revealed in the imagery of the mill's product. The narrator, it seems, is a purveyor of seeds, and so extensive is his business "that at length," he says, "my seeds were distributed through all the Eastern and Northern states, and even fell into the far soil of Missouri and the Carolinas." He has come to the mill to purchase paper for envelopes in which to distribute his seeds. When Melville's references to Hawthorne's stories as "germinous seeds" is recalled, shooting their "strong New England roots into the hot soil"

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of his soul,[8] the analogy of seedsman and writer is made manifest. With this in mind, one can read Melville's detailed description of and fascination with the paper making machine as simultaneously an exploration of the mysteries of human and artistic creation. As the narrator is led into the room where the machine is operating, a room "stifling with a strange, blood-like, abdominal heat" where the "germinous particles" of pulpy rag would develop, he is awed by the sight: "Before me, rolled out like some long Eastern manuscript, lay stretched one continuous length of iron frame-work -- multitudinous and mystical, with all sorts of rollers, wheels, and cylinders, in slowly measured and unceasing motion" (p.219). The "Eastern manuscript" simile reinforces the idea that on one level the story is a quest for the sources of all creativity; but as the narrator observes the pulp moving through the machine until "it puts on something of a real look, as if it might turn out to be something you might handle in the end," (like a baby or a book), he becomes dismayed by the realization that this is a mere machine. The unvaryingly punctual nine minute process which turns out mostly foolscap is the antithesis of romanticized creation. Yet the narrator is still in awe as he gazes upon "this inflexible iron animal." Here we see Melville observing the organic process of creation. It is as uncontrolled by the will of the ostensible creator as was the writing of Mardi. The sight now strikes dread into the narrator's

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heart as seeing "some living, panting Behemouth [sic] might." What makes it so particularly "terrible" is:

> the metallic necessity, the unbudging fatality which governed it. Though, here and there, I could follow the thin, gauzy vail of pulp in the course of its more mysterious or entirely invisible advance, yet it was indubitable that, at those points where it eluded me, it still marched on in unvarying docility to the autocratic cunning of the machine. A fascination fastened on me. I stood spell-bound and wandering in my soul. (p.221)

This is clearly a type of "vision" scene found at various points in Melville's works, (Pip's vision of God's foot on the treadle of the loom, for example, in Moby Dick), when a character perceives the essence of things, the reality behind the mask. The narrator here, limited by trade and intelligence, can only stand amazed at this "miracle of inscrutable intricacy," feel pity for the virgins who sacrifice themselves to it, and escape the place "wrapped in furs and meditations." But why has Melville taken such great pains to present to us this paradoxically meditative seedman merely registering the great differences between two worlds he has experienced? As at the end of "Bartleby," the final apostrophe "oh! Paradise of Bachelors! and oh! Tartarus of Maids!" is designed to force the reader to place the two worlds side by side and draw his own conclusions. Both worlds are "attractive" to the narrator, but both are untenable as ways of living or as postures for the artist.[9] The bachelors in their paradise, which offers a Platonic ideal of

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masculine union, are blind to what is real and painful in the world, and, thus, are superficial and sterile. The tartarus of maids, which allows the narrator a glimpse at the secret sources of creation, is a frightening, lonely, hellish place. In his rejection of these opposing stances, Melville as writer realizes that nothing profound can be created out of the bachelor's aloof diletantism, and nothing lasting can be created out of the organic, yet mechanistic, "female" mode of creation. His turn to poetry can be seen as an attempt to utilize a new mode of creation which employs the bachelor's detachment to harness, but not obliterate, the artist's deepest creative impulses.

The need to seek the source of creativity within himself which Melville associated with the feminine resulted in feelings of guilt, largely religious in origin, because of the physical basis of female creation. The artistic act thus became confused with the sexual. As William B. Stein observes, Melville's "Protestant ethos" forced him to react "against the taboo of the sensual." But as a result, his work acquired "passionate vitality from the unconscious effort made to disburden itself of a sense of inherited guilt directly related to the repression of the feminine in its religious psychology."[10] This sense of guilt is not explicitly named in "The Tartarus of Maids," but certainly the "strange emotion" which fills the narrator as he observes the pale virgins who are sacrificed to the machine indicates a vague awareness of his complicity

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in their situation. The factory _is_ run by a bachelor, and a dalliance for the bachelor may result in physical enslavement for the maid. By juxtaposing these archtypal male and female worlds Melville is exposing the degree of repression and self-delusion necessary to maintain the bachelor's paradise. If male guilt is only hinted at in these stories, it is prominent in _Mardi_ and _Pierre_. Both Taji and Pierre think they are saving young maidens in distress (Yillah and Isabel) out of the purist of motives, but both are also conscious of a lurking sexual motive. The resulting guilt undercuts (and fuels) their respective quests. The moment Taji kills Aleema, the old priest who held Yillah captive, he reports: "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 the pretense I had engaged in this fatal affray for some other and selfish purpose, the companionship of a beautiful maid" (p.132). This awareness of a double motive haunts the rest of the book as it does _Moby Dick_ and _Pierre_. The overwhelming urge shared by Taji, Ahab, and Pierre to break through the mask of visible reality and possess the mystery of existence is, then, linked to the sexual impulse. The romantic epistemological quest, and the transcendental quest for love and belief are, consequently, sullied by the organic. Similarly, in Melville's aesthetic quest, in his use of writing as a means to plunge for hidden truths,

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it is only logical that he would be plagued with the same feelings of guilt as his characters.

Circumstantial evidence for the existence of these feelings may be found in Melville's turn to the more idealized and restrained mode of poetry, along with his desire to keep the change a secret. Further evidence that the connection between seeking the truth and sexual guilt was at least exposed to him when he was turning to poetry in 1860 can be found in his marking of Schiller's "The Veiled Image at Sais," which he read on his voyage to San Francisco. The poem weaves together a web of images that recur throughout Melville's art. The poem opens:

> A youth, whom wisdom's warm desire had lured
> To learn the secret lore of Egypt's priests,
> To Sais came.[11]

The first thing to notice about these lines is that they present truth as arcane, distant, and located in some foreign place--here, the East. This is a central Melvillean conception. In fact, Egypt is often used in Melville's writings as a metaphorical source for the truth.[12] The second important observation to be made is that the youth's interest in truth is strongly sensual. "Wisdom's warm desire" lures him, he "panted and struggled with a lonely soul" for the truth, and "the sharp fever of the wish to know" keeps him awake at night. Truth itself is a divinity embodied in the image of a woman. Her oracular prescription, as interpreted for the youth by a priest, is simultaneously forbidding and seductive. "'Til I this veil/ Lift--

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may no mortal-born presume to raise;'" she warns, "'And who with guilty and unhallow'd hand/ Too soon profanes the Holy and Forbidden--/ He...SHALL SEE THE TRUTH!'" This warning obviously inflames the curious youth more than it deflects him. He is overwhelmed by the fact that only a "thin barrier" stands between him and the truth. After returning in the solitude of night, the youth, extending his "violating hand," draws back the veil. The sinful act, however, is not seeing what it is forbidden to see, it is aggressively trying to expose what should be revealed. The narrator, of course, never tells us what "the sacrilegious gaze lay bare," but the last lines of the poem reveal all that the youth would ever say about his experience: "'Woe-woe to him who treads through Guilt to Truth!'" The face of truth will "charm him never more." The romance of the quest for truth resides in the separation of the spiritual from the grosser needs of the quester, according to Schiller. Here, as in Mardi, Moby Dick, and Pierre, the quester is not sufficiently aware that his impetuosity, his need to physically possess the truth, makes its apprehension dangerous, possibly fatal.

In Melville's most successful pre-1857 prose works, Moby Dick, "Bartleby, the Scrivener," "Benito Cereno," and The Confidence Man, the sexual component of the quest is almost completely submerged.[13] In Mardi and Pierre, his less successfully controlled works, sexuality strongly interferes. In his poetry Melville neither repressed the sexual, nor did he allow it to control and distort. In the

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new genre he was able to confront sexuality more directly than any of his contemporaries. And, of course, he would have to if he was ever going to transcend the organic in his writing. Melville's development from Mardi to Clarel, from prose to poetry, then, may be traced in his increasing ability to integrate the sexual and sensual into his work.

In Mardi, Taji's attempts to romanticize and thus avoid the erotic implications of his feelings for Yillah initiate his futile quest. His guilt over his impetuous slaying of Aleema, and over his consequent sexual possession of Yillah plagues him, for he correctly senses that Yillah's disappearance is a direct result of her loss of virginity. In a book that is itself transformed from realism to the level of allegorical dream, the fact that a character literally disappears from that dream world because sex has doomed her seems plausible. In chapter fifty-one, "The Dream Begins to Fade," Taji struggles to keep the illusion of their "etherealized" love alive. "Yet as our intimacy grew closer and closer," he admits, "these fancies seemed to be losing their hold" (p.150). When he had saved her, Taji seemed a God to Yillah, but now before her he perceives himself "dwarfing down to a mortal." And although he attempts to prop his "failing divinity" he realizes: "it was I myself who had undermined it." That sex had been the undermining factor is explained by Yillah's foreboding in the next paragraph that the whirlpool on the coast of Tedaidee "prefigured her fate."[14] In the last chapters of

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the book the whirlpool is identified as the dwelling place of Hautia, the seduction figure with whom Taji senses Yillah is mysteriously connected. Hautia, then, becomes the object of the quest as Yillah's identity merges with hers. "'Away! thy Yillah is behind thee, not before,'" Media tells Taji as he approaches Hautia's vortex. Yillah only existed before their sexual initimacy, and thus, she would always be beyond Taji's reach. In the final chapter Hautia invites Taji to "sin and be merry," but although he dives down into her sparkling pool he comes up without the "pearls" which represent the human aspirations she promised would be satisfied there. Babbalanja, the philosopher who had accompanied Taji, finds peace by discontinuing his quest and accepting Alma. But because Taji literally dives for the truth in an attempt to possess it physically as he possessed Yillah, he is doomed never to achieve the transcendence he desires.

If one can accept the characterization presented in _Pierre_ as a representation of Melville writing _Mardi_, a connection can be drawn between Yillah's fall, Taji's guilt, and Melville's need to alter the form of his narrative. The impulsive act of writing, like the sexual act, can provoke guilt because it exposes one's repressed emotions and drives. When, as in Melville's case, what had been repressed was suddenly brought out on the page before his cultural inhibitors could act, the form of the work had to be altered as a defense. It is clear that

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Mardi changes from a semi-realistic sea narrative to a romance (chapters xl-xliii) when Taji slays Aleema and, like the youth in Schiller's poem, parts the lacing covering Yillah's tent with his cutlass and gazes on the face of the divine. Having made explicit Taji's sexual motive, Melville, like Taji, sees he must cover the truth "with gracious pretense, concealing myself from myself" (p.136), must repress the incident behind romantic symbols and layers of allegory. The result is that the sexual theme is not adequately integrated into the work or resolved satisfactorily. Taji's quest for Yillah is not related to the philosophical, political, and religious controversies which are the major concerns of the romance. Melville's artistic powers were not yet capable of containing and rendering such a volatile issue, volatile perhaps because he was for the first time consciously facing, as he wrote, the confusion of the organic and the ideal.

In Pierre, the same pattern of sexual guilt and prolix, romantic defensiveness obtains. Only in his poetry, within the protective confines of a defined and cryptic form, could Melville successfully integrate the erotic theme and overcome the guilt and confusion which marred his prose works. This integration can be seen most strikingly in Clarel, but two shorter poems, "In a Bye-Canal" and "After the Pleasure Party" published in Timoleon (1891) and written perhaps as early as 1859,[15] document Melville's initial poetic attempts to treat the sexual theme. "In a

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Bye-Canal" presents the first person narrator drifting down a Venetian canal in the "hushed" almost mystical atmosphere of siesta time. Although it is "dumb noon," the atmosphere is "haunted like the night/ When Jael the wiled one slew" (CP, p.239). The reference to Jael, who drove a spike through the head of Sisera as he slept (Judges, 417-422, 524-527), establishes the view of woman as seducer/ destroyer which is reinforced in the siren allusion in the final six lines of the poem. The persona's indolent gondolier "tinkles" an oar against the side of a palace and a response is heard:

> A lattice clicks; and lo, I see
> Between the slats, mute summoning me,
> What loveliest eyes of scintillation,
> What baselisk glance of conjuration![16]

The parallelism and end rhyme in the last lines impart a light tone to the seduction, but the grave importance to the speaker is reflected in the next ten lines. Here Melville uses the allusive and compressive power of poetry to present a capsule view of his personal struggles with nature and man:

> I have swum-- I have been
> Twixt the whale's back flukes
>   and the white shark's fin;
> The enemy's desert have wandered in,
> And there have turned, have turned and scanned,
> Following me how noiselessly,
> Envy and Slander, lepers hand and hand.
> All this. But at the latticed eye--

The two anapests linked by a caesura in the first line quoted above break dramatically with the rhymed

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trimeter couplets which immediately precede them. The effect is a tonal shift which underlines Melville's point that although the speaker had come up against the strongest natural and man-made evils, had faced death on sea and land, the challenge he now faces from this "latticed eye" is his most threatening. (Like Dickinson, Melville employs a dash to evoke a sense of portentous consequences). The speaker (and the poem) freeze as he considers the magnitude of the occasion; it is the moment of potential moral destruction. Taji and Pierre, deluding themselves, acted impulsively in similar situations, but the maturer persona here knows he is facing a Hautia, not a romanticized Yillah. "'Hey! Gondolier, you sleep, my man;/ Wake up!'" he orders, and the boat glides by. In fleeing these "deadly misses" the speaker realizes his courage and manhood may be impugned, and we have seen how important these qualities are to Melville. Yet in alluding to the Siren he is able to turn this escape into a heroic act by association, for "divine Ulysses/ Brave, wise, and Venus' son" also fled the Sirens. Thus, both as man and artist, Melville is able to use the diminished scope of poetry to symbolically enact a kind of mature heroism which is based on <u>not</u> transgressing limits. The Schillerean hero, like Ahab and Pierre, must strike through the mask, see behind the veil. The "hero" of "In a Bye-Canal," as a result of his life experiences, needs only to glance between the slats to know that he is confronting pure sensuality. His

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victory consists of his breaking through the seductive, romantic trance to this realistic perception.

Although "In a Bye-Canal" deals with sexuality, it certainly does not present a fully integrated thematic treatment of the subject. Like "The Paradise of Bachelors and The Tartarus of Maids" it must be seen rather as an important step toward Melville's achieving control of the sexual theme in his writing. In this respect the poem lays the groundwork for the more ambitious "After The Pleasure Party," probably composed closer to the composition of Clarel with which it shares an iambic tetrameter line, intermittently rhymed couplets, and a number of thematic concerns. Here, finally, Melville creates a persona who is able to directly confront the sexual. Urania, a mature, reflective woman, obviously avoids the defensive masculine poses of Taji, Pierre, and the speaker in "In a Bye-Canal." Through her Melville can safely explore the conflict between passion and repression because as an older woman and as a scientist (astronomer) out of touch with her own sensuality, she is forced to assume a passive role vis-a-vis the object of her desire in the poem. It is difficult to do justice through paraphrase or intermittent quotation to this complex poem whose difficulties Hennig Cohen attributes to "its rich texture, its sometimes elliptical style, its private symbolism, its pattern of oppositions, its occasional ambiguities, and its shifts in place, time, and point of view."[17] But the

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effort is necessary because the poem is a powerful, intriguing work as well as a clear preparation for Clarel in technique and theme.

In the first two stanzas the poet's voice sets the scene, a Mediterranean villa in lush surroundings. "'Tis Paradise,'" yet ironically it is this peaceful, eroticized setting which, muse-like, arouses the sexual feelings in the persona:

> From whom the passionate words invent
> After long revery's discontent? (CP,p.216)

These lines hint at a reading of the poem which would include Melville's awareness of the role repressed sexuality plays in his creative life.[18] From this perspective the poem can be seen as Melville's attempt to acknowledge the power of eros (Amor in the poem) and assimilate it into his work. The "me" in stanza four indicates that now the persona is speaking in her own voice. She wishes to "forget," repress the sudden awakening of erotic love which "fate" has "sprung" upon her in "ambuscade." "This sensuous strife" which occurs after years of "cloistral" intellectual pursuit almost drives her to suicide. The imagery Melville employs to depict the outbreak of eros is reminiscent of the imagery he uses in Mardi and Pierre to describe the obsessed writer:

> Desire,
> The dear desire through love to sway,
> Is like the Geysers that aspire--
> Through cold obstruction win their fervid way.

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When this desire, having been repressed for so long, is rejected by the loved object, it becomes completely uncontrollable:

> Hence the winged blaze that sweeps my soul
> Like Prairie fires that spurn control,
> Where withering weeds incense the flame.

Accompanying this loss of control is a sense of humiliation which, in turn, leads to revelation. Urania, who has spent her life studying the heavens, is especially shattered by the discovery of her feet of clay: "In dream I throned me, nor I saw/ In cell the idiot crowned with straw." So this fall, like all falls in Melville, leads to a new vision of self, albeit a diminished vision. It is a "gain" but a barren one since now Urania is prey to all the human faults she had previously avoided. In the eighth stanza she attacks the peasant girl who is clearly more appealing to the man Urania desires. Again the view of woman as seductress is presented. "The cheat!" Urania thinks to herself, "On briars her buds were strung;/ And wiles peeped forth from mien how meak." But unlike "In a Bye-Canal" which seems to accept this image of woman, in the dramatic context of this poem the Siren image is used merely as a device to embody Urania's spite. In fact, at the end of the following stanza Urania admits that she would give away all of her knowledge to attract the man:

> How glad with all my starry lore,
> I'd buy the veriest wanton's rose
> Would but my bee therein repose.

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This frank admission of sexual desire opens the floodgates in the following stanza. It is important to quote it in full since it brings together and explicitly states concepts which previously have been implicit and scattered throughout Melville's writings:

> Could I remake me! or set free
> This sexless bound in sex, then plunge
> Deeper than Sappho, in a lunge
> Piercing Pan's paramount mystery!
> For, Nature, in no shallow surge
> Against thee either sex may urge,
> Why hast thou made us but in halves--
> Co-relatives? This makes us slaves.
> If these co-relatives never meet
> Self-hood itself seems incomplete.
> And such the dicing of blind fate
> Few matching halves here meet and mate.
> What Cosmic jest or Anarch blunder
> The human integral clove asunder
> And shied the fractions through life's gate.

Here Melville is finally acknowledging the sexual component in the epistemological quest. What had been a barely conscious factor in _Typee_ and _Omoo_,[19] a conscious but resisted factor in _Mardi_ and _Pierre_, and a submerged factor in _Moby Dick_, can now be looked at, within the protective confines of poetry and through the eyes of a female persona, as a force to be reckoned with. Only by transcending the boundaries of sex, by going deeper than Sappho whose concern was limited to desire which is a function of those boundaries, can an individual liberate the "sexless" essence within. It is only this purified self, pure because it is complete and beyond sexual differences, that can pierce the "paramount mystery" of Nature. Urania wishes to return to an Edenic, pre-natal existence

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("life's gate"), so that she can intuitively gain knowledge of the origin of existence without having to "fall" into the passions of adult life. But the "urge" for sexual completion and the urge to know cannot be separated, nor can desire be repressed indefinitely, as Urania comes to realize. The tragedy is that she realizes this too late, and has thus limited her chances to find a "matching" half who will complete her in a world where perfect matches are rare, actually impossible.

Following her disillusionment Urania reports that in a "poor nerveless hour" after being touched by Mary's picture in a convent she half resolved "to kneel and believe,/ Believe and submit, the veil take on." But putting on the veil would clearly be a defeat for a seeker with a "turbulent heart and rebel brain." The poet reports that Urania was saved from defeat by her discovery of "an antique pagan stone/ Colossal carved" which she comes across in Rome. Although not Christian art, this work emits a religious aura, and its serene power transforms Urania.[20] The "armed Virgin" combines the male and female element providing that completeness she has sought. What is more, a rebirth through art can be achieved without the interference of the sexual:

> Helmeted woman-- if such term
> Befit thee, far from strife
> Of that which makes the sexual feud
> And clogs the aspirant life--

But to stop here would be to deny the message of the poem,

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that the sexual must be integrated into one's life, not repressed and not transcended. Melville ends the poem in his own voice, warning Urania and "virgins everywhere" to "have care":

> For never passion peace shall bring,
> Nor art inanimate for long
> Inspire. Nothing may help or heal
> While Amor incensed remembers wrong.

The personification of Amor remembering that which the Victorian mind wishes to repress stands as a warning that eros must be acknowledged in art as well as in life. "As in a mutually fulfilling union of love," William B. Stein observes, "the creative act presupposes the harmonius fusion of instinctual and intellectual impulses; only then are the tensions of unconscious sexuality eased."[21] Melville's view of the union of instinct and intellect in art, however, was far from "harmonious." In order to create "pulsed life" he tells us in "Art," unlike things must "mate" "to wrestle with the angel-- Art." Yet the critical process of fusion must occur.

If we accept George Santayana's conclusion that "to understand oneself is the classic form of consolation; to elude oneself is the romantic,"[22] then we can say that in his career Melville moved toward the classic. For in the opening canto of Clarel the title character establishes that the purpose of his journey to the Holy Land is to escape the illusions he has about himself, the world, and

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God. Earlier Melville portagonists have inadvertently come to enlightenment by having their preconception about the world destroyed either by external reality or by unconscious forces. Despite his youth (and benefiting no doubt from Melville's maturity) Clarel begins his pilgrimage with an acceptance of the "under-formings" in his mind which might later destroy him as well as with an awareness that "Salem... be no Samarcant," no land of romance. As he does with Urania in "After the Pleasure Party" Melville compares Clarel to Vesta, a virginal "collegiate" who is finally allowed to roam freely in the real world of experience and become part of it. Unlike Urania, however, Clarel is unselfconsciously ready to consider love, erotic and/or spiritual, as a part of his quest for philosophical understanding and religious belief. "Unlike either Pierre or Mardi," Nina Baym observes, "Clarel carries the erotic theme all the way through to the conclusion of the poem; and, moreover, it attempts to answer the question of why the erotic and the metaphysical should be related in the first place."[23]

It is ironic, but understandable, that only after repudiating the organic mode of writing through the restraining mechanics of poetry could Melville successfully treat sexuality. It is important as well that for this epic of his maturity he should choose the desert as his setting. Both form and setting, in fact, are interrelated, and together are responsible for Melville's success in

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finally integrating the sexual into his work. Place in Melville's works is never background. A particular location provides an object of meditation and a locus of meaning for either character (Typee, Liverpool, New Bedford, New York) or narrator (Galapogos, Mississippi River boat, New York law office). In a phenomenological sense, however, the distinction between sea and land as a setting is of major significance, as Ishmael's observations in Moby Dick make apparent. There, in "The Lee Shore," Bulkington is seen as heroic for escaping the safety of the land and seeking the dangerous and deep mysteries of the sea. "In landlessness alone resides the highest truth," the narrator tells us, "shoreless" and "indefinite as God." In a frenzied, impetuous tone we are told that it is better to die in "that howling infinite, than be ingloriously dashed upon the lee, even if that were safety!"[24] Although in Clarel Melville often uses sea imagery as a metaphor for the desert to indicate its elemental vastness,[25] his later work reveals a changed attitude toward the land. Paralleling his movement away from the organic and effusive, in Clarel Melville sees the land as the hard foundation against which the romantic quester can regain his equilibrium. It may be heroic to transcend limits, to strike through the mask, but the price paid is often the sanity of the hero. (In Clarel Melville clearly puts a higher value on sanity than he does in his earlier works; this is especially noticeable

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in his presentation of Mortmain). In Book II, canto xvi, "Night in Jericho," Melville makes his clearest statement of the importance of the desert as a balancing force. Significantly, Rolfe, the most "balanced" character, is the speaker:

> "Man sprang from deserts: at the touch
> Of grief or trial overmuch,
> On deserts he falls back at need;
> Yes, 'tis the bare abandoned home
> Recalleth then. See how the Swede [Mortmain]
> Like any rustic crazy Tom,
> Bursting through every code and ward
> Of civilization, masque and fraud,
> Takes the wild plunge. Who so secure,
> Except his clay be sodden loam,
> As never to dream the day may come
> When he may take it, foul or pure?" (ll. 109-120)

The return to the "bare abandoned home" was obviously as central to Melville's mental well being in 1856 as it is to Mortmain in the poem. In a sense, the poem is a quest, in Melville's words, for a "perilous outpost of the sane," a point at which an individual like Clarel, Rolfe, Vine, Mortmain, and Melville can continue to seek the truth but without falling into the abyss of madness. Consequently, the anxiety of the artist is seen here in closest relation to its primary cause-- the need of the artist to face the conflicting, chaotic elements within, balance them, and in the process form them into the work of art. In Clarel we can observe Melville's attempts to achieve such a balance between his need to transcend and his fear of self-annihilation and madness, between his attraction for the organic and his awareness of the dangers of unchecked growth, and between the undeniable

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sexual urge and its seeming irreconcilability with spiritual love. In Clarel, Melville's Calvinism reasserts itself. Chaos, identified with Satan and linked to the organic, must be checked by order, a function of the all-unifying eye of God, but whose only certain manifestation in the poem happens to be the poet himself. That it was Melville's purpose in writing Clarel to show that chaos must be faced, assimilated, and transformed if the individual is to fully assume his humanity is evident in the broadest movement of the poem-- the pilgrims' Dantean descent from Jerusalem into the wilderness and Dead Sea, and return through the heights of Mar Saba, and Bethlehem, to Jerusalem again. It is also evident in the struggle of images on almost every page. The poem is studded with references to walls, boundaries, margins, and enclosures. These are juxtaposed with images of flow, drowning, and engulfment.[26] Paralleling these patterns, each character seeks a distinctive form or stance which outlines him against the flux of the poem.

As the least formed of all the pilgrims, Clarel needs to create a distinctive self through interaction with others and with place. In the canto "On the Wall" (Book I,xli), he stands on the wall of Jerusalem observing the flow of humanity passing in and out of the city. His location is presented without any apparent symbolic reference until almost half way through the canto. When the traffic has stopped Clarel remains on the wall thinking

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of the religious doubts he has been experiencing since his arrival. But suddenly the narrator compares him to a bird which upon seeing winter coming hesitates before migrating:

> Upon a brink and poise he hung.
> The bird in end must needs migrate
> Over the sea: shall Clarel too
> Launch o'er _his_ gulf, e'en Doubt, and woo
> Remote conclusions? (ll. 74-78)

But the thoughtful seeker, the _pilgrim_ as opposed to the Ahab-like _hunter_, cannot leap over the gulf to seek the certainty of conclusions. It is necessary that he descend into the gulf and encounter the periods of foggy incoherence so that he may emerge into clarity. Clarel, as his name implies, seeks the clarity and peace that result from the resolution of all confusion. But such a resolution can come, if at all, only after suffering. If Clarel is to achieve his full humanity, then, he must confront and overcome what Nina Baym describes as the "enormous, complicated, entwined mass of feeling and doctrine"[27] which inhibits his ability to love Ruth, the Jewess he meets and is drawn to in Book I of the poem. One of the central aims of the pilgrimage and the poem is to clarify these chaotic feelings, feelings which were present but unexamined in Melville's prose works. The clarification is necessary before Clarel can participate in the ritualistic order marriage represents.

In the course of the poem Clarel considers every form of sexual stance-- celibacy, homosexuality, hedonism,

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and heterosexuality. But central to all of these, including the celibate and homosexual, is his need to recognize the conflicting attitudes toward women he absorbed from the Judeo-Christian tradition. If he is to marry, Clarel must find a balance between two radically opposed views which are developed in the poem: woman as source of ultimate evil and woman as embodiment of ideal virtue. The former view is the most deeply entrenched, and thus, the most important for him to overcome. The organic is under attack again, for woman as child bearer brings sin and death into the world. It is structurally and thematically appropriate that the pilgrims descend to the lowest geographical point in their journey, the Dead Sea, in the central cantos of the poem, for at this point, the locus of deepest knowledge, the most negative view of woman is presented.

As the characters confront the vapory, hellish place a rainbow incongruously appears over the sea. But just as Clarel's positive thoughts of Ruth become forebodings of her death, the rainbow disappears and the atmosphere again dies "down to glazed monotomy." Each other pilgrim, as usual, responds to the place in his own way. Derwent, for example, escapes into a book, a "page refined/ And appetizing, which threw ope/ New parks, fresh walks for Signor Hope/ To saunter in" (II,xxxiii,54-57). Rolfe can hardly believe that Derwent can read in such a spot where nature's secrets seem to him so open to view: "Escaped from forms, enlarged at last,/ Pupils we

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be of wave and waste--/ Not books; nay, nay!" But Derwent refuses to see Siddim as the whole world (there's Naples too). Mortmain, as expected, sees the Dead Sea as the geographical type for his view of humanity, and tastes its waters. Melville himself imbues the spot with extraordinary importance as is evidenced by a two canto sequence, "Prelusive" and "Sodom," which in essence reduces the vision of absolute evil to a vision of woman. Although Mortmain is the speaker in the key section of the "Sodom" canto, the narrator speaks in "Prelusive."

"Prelusive" is a vitally important canto for this study as a whole because its involuted form and the message a reader must wrench from it present an implicit explanation for Melville's turn to poetry. The very fact that an entire canto is used to prepare the reader for the revelation of a subsequent canto (and warn unprepared readers away) indicates how far Melville had come from a concern with narrative movementand popularity. Here his intention is to teach the reader how to "read aright." (Clarel, like The Confidence Man, demands a trained reader). The difficulties of the verse force the reader to study the poem as meticulously and as imaginatively as the narrator studies the Piranezi print which is described in the canto. The terrible truth that lies deep within the human heart, symbolized by the Dead Sea, can only be grasped "in freaks of intimation" as one contemplates an object, in this case the print and

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the poem itself. This contemplative vision, enacted on every page of the poem by the narrator or by a particular character, is a radically poetic vision. That is, it is essentially hermeneutic. The reader does not read to get from line A to line B, but rather gazes first at line A, then at B, and as often as not, moves back to A until the meaning which has been intentionally obscured by the poet becomes clearer. Here the difficulty of the text mirrors the "prudential haze" with which "the inventor" [God] cloaks reality. Paul's "'mystery of iniquity,'" the truth lying behind the repressive conventions of society and the mask put over it by God, can only be approached by the initiated:

> Dwell on those etchings in the night
> Those touches bitten in the steel
> By aqua-fortis till ye feel
> The Pauline text in gray of light;
>
> For ye who green or gray retain
> Childhood's illusion, or but feign;
> As bride and suite let pass a bier--
> So pass the coming canto here.
> (II,xxxv,33-41)

The "mystery of iniquity," the vision of chaotic evil which Clarel must face in the next canto is centered in the female--the source of life, and, consequently, of deception and death. It is the "Tartarus of Maids" stript of allegory, a direct attack on organic creation. Mortmain, wizened after his drink of Dead Sea brine, which he labels "Wormwood," speaks to the other pilgrims as they sit in "full night." There is no moon, only one

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solitary star can be seen through the vapors rising from the sea. As he lists the kinds of sins enacted to invoke God's wrath on Sodom he stresses that they were not "all carnal harlotry." He minimizes the petty sinners, drunks, gamblers, sluggards, emphasizing the deceivers: "decorum's wile,/ Malice discreet, judicious guile;/ Good done with ill intent--reversed: Best deeds designed to serve the worst." In a wonderful and typically Melvillean image Mortmain condemns the greedy who use holy forms and the "Black slaver steering by a star" as evil doers "Who knew the world, yet vanished it;/ who traded on the coast of crime/ Though landing not." This black picture of humanity is completed by those ultimate deceivers, women, who betray their roles as mothers and wives or use their beauty as a lure. Mortmain looks into the Dead Sea and imagines:

> "--O fair Medea--
> O soft man-eater, furry-fine:
> Oh, be thou Jael, be thou Leah--
> Unfathomably shallow!--

The oxymoron in the final line reveals an enormous moral condemnation. Yet Mortmain realizes that although the actions of these women were evil (he interestingly ignores the patriotic interpretation of Jael's act), the source of their evil is not moral but biological. Women are <u>not</u> shallow, but their deepness is not of the intellect:

> "Nearer the core than man can go
> Or Science get-- nearer the slime
> Of nature's rudiments and lime
> In chyle before the bone. Thee, thee,

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In thee the filmy cell is spun--
The mould thou art of what men be:
Events are all in thee begun--
By thee, through thee!-- Undo, undo,
Prithee, undo, and still renew
The Fall forever!" (II,xxxvi,96-105)

No other passage in Melville's oeuvre approaches the depth of this view of evil. His Calvinistic distaste for those "rudiments" of nature in which the spiritual must be housed is combined with an aversion to the inflexible, compulsive organic process of creation presented in "The Tartarus of Maids." Repulsion drips from words like "slime," "filmy," and "mould." Mortmain blames women for evil in the world because of their role in the birth process and futilely begs them to stop and undo what has been done. But in the last line he accepts the inevitability of the Fall. If in Moby Dick Melville used the vastness of the sea to investigate the interrelated existence of good and evil, in Clarel he narrows his search to an inward source of evil (and of good), exploring a much reduced sea. "It is here in this compressed sea," William H. Shurr writes, "that the evil of the universe is most concentrated. The evil is associated with the personal, the destructive, death-in-life, the feminine."[28] Melville's identification with Mortmain's words is indicated by the explanation he gives for the fact that all the other pilgrims have abandoned him: "Was it because he open threw/ The inmost to the outward view?"

What gives Melville the courage to throw open the inward to the outward view besides the protection of

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character is the protection of poetry. He had come so far from the organic mode of creation himself that he could now fully explore his attitudes toward it. Ironically, or perhaps appropriately, the most passionate characters in the poem, Mortmain and Ungar, are the most conservative politically. Like Melville, whose inhibiting, end rhymed verse can control any emotional outburst, Ungar, who Bezanson sees as "very close to Melville's own sensibility"[29] cries--"'To Terminus build fanes!'" (IV,xxi,167). The need to erect boundaries in order to stop unchecked proliferation and restore order is of central importance to this character who dominates the final book of the poem. Ungar, a Confederate veteran, is particularly concerned with the damage the levelling surge of democracy has done to America. Significantly, his diction links democracy with uncontrolled female sexuality:

> "Behold her whom the panders crown,
> Harlot on horseback, riding down
> The very Ephesians who acclaim
> This great Diana of ill fame!
> Arch Strumpet of an impious age,
> Upstart from ranker villanage,
> 'Tis well she must restriction taste
> Nor lay the world's broad manor waste:
> Asia shall stop her at the least,
> That old inertness of the East."
> (IV,xix,141-150)

Melville has come a long way from the patriotic effusions of the Young America movement. Democracy, like Protestantism and Communism, runs roughshod over established distinctions, beliefs, and conventions. It is dependent

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on the kind of continuous change which is too uncomfortably close to the organic for the mature Melville. He foresees only chaos in America's future, as the couplet concluding the canto introducing Ungar implies: "'Stand by, stand by the great stampede!'/ 'House your cattle and stall your steed.'"[30]

But unlike his creator, Clarel is not old. He is unformed and ready to assume one of the myriad options presented to him in the poem, ranging from the sensuality of the Cypriote to the passionate detachment of the Celibate. As might be expected, however, Melville's conservative temperament moves Clarel toward marriage in order to effect "love's nice balance" as the narrator describes it. To bring Clarel to a crisis which will force this decision, Melville introduces a prodigal, the Lyonese. He warns the reader that although in him "the satyr's chord is strung," the introduction of this passionately lyrical character is "not wantonly designed." In fact, he will help "fulfill the piece/ Which in these cantos finds release/ Appealing to the museful mind" (IV,xxv,58-60). Again we are warned to read carefully.

Although he is Clarel's age, the prodigal, who is also a "casual" pilgrim, enjoys a relaxed sensuality tempered by experience. He is a native of France, and, as Clarel learns with surprise after he has left, a Jew. He thus unites Mediterranean paganism with Old Testament imagery, which he insists on interpreting with sensual literalness. He is clearly representative of poetry to

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Clarel's prose, often breaking into song to interrupt a particularly "priggish inroad" from the lapsed divinity student. He even attacks Clarel for his pedantry and too curious mind; "You can't enjoy" he says at one point, and in an argument over whether the "Song of Solomon" is to be taken as love song or religious allegory, he urges Clarel: "come, look at straight things more in line,/ Blue eyes or black, which like you best?/ Your Bella Donna, how's she dressed?" It must be emphasized that while the Lyonese makes an extensive case of the surpassing charms of Hebrew women, thus rekindling Clarel's sexual interest in Ruth, he is himself physically appealing to Clarel. He notices the Lyonese's hair, a "rich, tumbled, chestnut hood of curls,/ Like to a Polynesian girl's (a reference Bezanson points out is more likely to come from Rolfe than Clarel), and Melville makes a veiled reference to Clarel's sexual interest, writing: "What wind was this? And yet it swayed/ Even Clarel's cypress."

Thus, in the canto, Clarel is aroused and confronted by two major sexual possibilities, hetero- and homosexuality, and, understandably, they overwhelm his rational ability to choose between them. As a result, the resolution to this conflict, and to the broader conflict between celibacy (spirituality) and sexuality (the organic) in the poem can only be achieved on the unconscious level. Before they go to sleep, the Lyonese, who is sharing

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Clarel's room for the night, sings an enigmatic lyric set in Shushan, the ancient capital of Persia, which rejects the fleeting, romantic vision of love for the sensual reality enjoyed "unabashed" in broad daylight. Spurred by this song and by the sensual stimulation of the evening Clarel sleeps and dreams:

> And seemed to stand
> Betwixt a Shushan and a sand;
> The Lyonese was lord of one,
> The desert did the Tuscan[31] own,
> The pale pure monk. A zephyr fanned;
> It vanished, and he felt the strain
> Of clasping arms which would detain
> His heart from each ascetic range.
> (IV,xxvi,310-317)

Caught between celibacy, pure spirtuality, on the one hand, and complete sensuality on the other, Clarel is saved by what must be interpreted as Ruth's "clasping arms" which would "detain" his extreme emotions within the acceptable limits of marriage. Only through the sanctioned confinement of marriage can the physical and spiritual be joined. It is significant that only after order is achieved on the unconscious level, the sphere that Melville had been trying to control throughout his career, could he allow Clarel to undergo a truly organic change: "Vital he knew organic change/ Or felt, at least, that change was working--/ <u>A subtle innovator lurking</u>" [italics mine]. The change involves a shift toward the mature acceptance of sexuality in the human sphere. The italicized, Satanic description of that change indicates Melville's view that it is a fall, but a necessary one when Urania's lesson in "After

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the Pleasure Party" is considered.

In an earlier canto Clarel seeks to strip woman of her carnal associations. After the "Sodom" canto he asks:

> "Can Eve be riven
> From sex?...
> ...and disengaged retain
> Its charm? Think this-- then may ye feign
> The perfumed rose shall keep its bloom,
> Cut off from sustenance of loam.
> But if Eve's charm be not supernal,
> Enduring not divine transplanting--
> Love kindled thence, is that eternal?
> Here, here's the hollow-- here the haunting!
> Ah, love, ah wherefore thus unsure?
> Linked art thou-- locked, with self impure?
> (III,xxxi,38-48)

This passage implies that Eve cannot be separated from her earthly, organic roots. Clarel still struggles with this fact after his Shushan dream. Yet this realization is balanced by a new attitude toward women gained through the pilgrims' visit to Bethlehem. In a scene that is designed to contrast with Mortmain's Dead Sea vision, Mary is seen as the mother of all that is transcendentally good in humanity.[32] The manger thus becomes a symbolic womb to which all can return. It is the opposite of a grave, for belief in it means belief in eternal life. If the Dead Sea represents doubt in the poem, the manger represents hope:

> As all began from these small bounds,
> So, by all avenues and gates,
> All here returns, here to redounds:
> In this one cave all terminates:
> In honor of the manger sole
> Saints, Kings, knights, prelates reared the whole.

Whether or not Clarel has fully reconciled the earthly and

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spiritual views of woman, in a move of "abrupt resolve," according to an impulse perhaps "wiser than wisdom's self might teach," he decides to marry Ruth: "Now his hand would boldly reach/ And pluck the nodding fruit to him,/ Fruit of the tree of life" (IV,xxix,55-59). The natural imagery suggests an awareness of the need to live in and seize the moment: "Stays not the prime of June or youth:/ At flood that tide makes haste to ebb!" For the first time Clarel understands an injunction Ruth had made of him not to follow the "evil spirit" of change which led her father to Palestine and death. After making this decision, however, Clarel has one more "relapse" into a fear that even marriage will not contain and render harmless the sensual evil lurking inside every woman:

> Are the sphered breasts full of mysteries
> Which not the maiden's self may know?
> May love's nice balance, finely slight,
> Take tremor from fulfilled delight?
> Can nature such a doom dispense
> As, after ardor's tender glow,
> To make the rapture more than pall
> With evil secrets in the sense,
> And guile whose bud is innocence--
> Sweet blossom of the flower of gall?
> (IV,xxix,92-102)

After the romantic glow of sexual love has faded, will evil secrets forboding doom reveal themselves? In short, Clarel asks, is the eternity love promises as illusory and temporary as Christ's love has proven to be? But for the last time Clarel puts such thoughts out of his mind. He calls to God to keep him from this incessant struggle and finally decides that in the earthly sphere

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"life proclaims the law:/ Unto embraces myriads draw/ Through sacred impulse."

Marriage, like religion, requires a leap of faith over the abyss, the Dead Sea of reality, which lies beneath. But Nathan's death forces Clarel on his pilgrimage _into_ the abyss. The knowledge he gains as a result is that death establishes the limit of human life. On the shore of the Dead Sea he is exposed to the truth that Ahab sought to defeat in _Moby Dick_. Marriage, like human life itself, is transient. It should be no surprise, then, that Clarel is confronted with the death of Ruth at the end of his journey. But as he rushes from Bethlehem to Jerusalem after his decision to marry, he neither heeds the spot of Rachel's wailing nor the wider geographical significance of his direction, which parallels Christ's journey toward death. The importance of noticing such signs is not lost on Melville, however, who as poet can stand back and view the valley sleeping under an oppressive sky "whose stars like silver nail-heads gleam/ Which stud some lid over lifeless eyes" (IV,xxix,154-155).

In _Clarel_, as in life, on the level of imagery and plot, death triumphs. Even in the "Epilogue," which some readers argue indicates Melville's faith in ressurection, the mood is decidedly subjunctive. The organic process of life, as far as we can see, terminates in death. A transcendent reality may or may not exist; the poet can never be certain:

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> But through such strange illusions have they passed
> Who in life's pilgrimage have baffled striven--
> Even death may prove real at the last,
> And stoics be astounded into heaven.
> (IV,xxxv,23-26)

But unlike the scientist or higher critic, the poet is not solely concerned with questions of empirical validity. Throughout his career Melville had been equally concerned with subjective validity, i.e., with the perceiver's belief in his own vision. In Ahab and Pierre he created characters who became insane because they too completely believed in the objective and absolute reality of their private visions. In poetry Melville found a "sane" mode of vision *he* could believe in because it fully accepted and embodied the relativity of a subjective vision. Unlike the prose narrative's mimetic intent to capture the flux of life, poetry elevates the observer. Melville's anxiety over the act of creation ceased when he embraced the radical of poetry--the contemplative vision--which halts the flow of life to stare at its components. In this way the flux is seen as illusion and the vision itself becomes the only reality.

From this perspective, poetry becomes a synonym for consciousness; through it Melville could transcend, at least during the creative act, the limitations imposed by his material existence. Henri Bergson, in a book published less than twenty years after Melville's death, eloquently explains this process of liberation through contemplative observation. "Consciousness," he writes,

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"in shaping itself into intelligence, that is to say in concentrating itself first on matter, seems to externalize itself in relation to itself; but, just because it adapts thereby to objects from without, it succeeds in moving among them and in evading the barriers they oppose to it, thus opening to itself an unlimited field. Once freed, moreover, it can turn inwards on itself, and awaken the potentialities of intuition which still slumber within it."[33] Bergson's view of the liberation gained from the interaction between subject and object perfectly describes the poetic vision with which Melville informs Clarel. As the characters fix their attention on the objective reality of the Holy Land, and on each other, they are able to open themselves to a wider field of insight and emotion. Clarel, as the most detached and malleable character, observes more and is therefore able to avoid most of the barriers hindering his complete freedom of choice. But only the detached narrator/poet, god-like in his ability to observe everything and, therefore, limited by nothing but the restrictive form of his verse, escapes the limit death imposes. Melville's lesson to Clarel, and to the reader who has endured to the end of his poem, is that death "may" only be defeated through a radically altered mode of perception in which the organic world is contemplated from a critical distance, that is, poetically. In the last stanza of the poem he emphasizes that rebirth in the natural world, as it pertains to humans,

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is a metaphor: "That like the crocus budding through the snow--/ That like a swimmer rising from the deep.... Emerge thou mayst from the last whelming sea" [Italics mine]. Melville can use the organic metaphor here because he has become certain, as he was not in his earlier prose works, that in relation to his own created world it is only a metaphor. Life after death is still a question; poetry is not.

Poetry, or the poetic vision, is the link between the physical and spiritual Melville had always been seeking, as Mortmain's death illustrates. In his personal war with death, which he personifies, almost as if it were the Devil, as "a dangerous dissembler" who "in multiform of life's disguises knows no check.../ And in his license thinks no bound--" Mortmain turns to the palm at Mar Saba, planted according to tradition by St. Saba himself, as an external object of contemplation and a stay against life (and death's) flux:

> In rounded turn of craggy way,
> Across the interposed abyss,
> He had encountered it. [The palm] Submiss,
> He dropped upon the under stone,
> And soon in such a dream was thrown
> He felt as floated up in cheer
> Of saint borne heavenward from the bier.
> Indeed, each wakeful night, and fast
> (That feeds and keeps what clay would clutch)
> With thrills which he did still outlast,
> His fibres made so fine in end
> That though in trials fate can lend
> Firm to withstand, strong to contend,
> Sensitive he to a spirit's touch.
>
> A wind awakened him-- a breath.
> He lay like light upon the heath,
> Alive though still.
> (III,xxviii,66-82)

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Mortmain here achieves a balance, a state of grace that Melville considers the highest humanly possible: "Alive though still," both living _and_ dead, a stasis strong enough to withstand fate's trials yet "sensitive ... to a spirit's touch," partaking of both the physical and spiritual worlds. Mortmain dies with his "filmed orbs fixed upon the trees," alone but finally at peace. It is the supreme moment of poetic vision, as close to individual transcendence as a Melville character can come.

But it would be an error to overlook the necessarily subjective nature of Mortmain's final state. In a "dream" brought on by fasting and the overwhelming desire to see beyond human limits, Mortmain "felt" as if he ascended. His vision must be seen, as it is in the poem, as one among others. The structure of the poem, in conjunction with its self-consciously restricted verse form, continually makes the reader aware of the limits of human aspiration. Melville's turn to poetry reflects his mature acknowledgment of such limitation. His massive effort to make this new mode precisely render the workings of his active consciousness proves that if we cannot literally transcend our human state (by overcoming death and restoring Eden) we can elevate it through the symbolic action of the artist.

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Notes

[1]Letter to Nathaniel Hawthorne, Pittsfield 1(?) June 1851, The Letters of Herman Melville, eds. Merrel R. Davis and William H. Gilman (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1960), p.130.

[2]Herman Melville, Mardi, ed. Tyrus Hillway (New Haven: College and Univ. Press, 1973), p.308. Subsequent references will be to this edition and noted in the text.

[3]Herman Melville, Pierre (New York: Grove Press, 1957), p.412. Subsequent references will be to this edition and noted in the text.

[4]We perhaps should not forget that Melville's increasing self-identification as artist and poet is, in part, an idealized self which had to have been founded on the relative financial security derived from his more mundane role as custom's inspector.

[5]Henry Wells's comment quoted in Bezanson's edition of Clarel is apt here: "This section of only ten pages constitutes a really remarkable epitome of no small part of America's social and intellectual history" (Notes, p.569).

[6]Herman Melville, "The Paradise of Bachelors and The Tartarus of Maids" in Great Short Works of Herman Melville, ed. Warner Berthoff (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p.202. Subsequent references to this story will be to this edition and will be noted in the text.

[7]Here I differ with William Bysshe Stein's conclusion in "Melville's Eros," Texas Studies in Literature and Language, v.3,1961, pp.297-308. Stein sees the narrator as a "deliberately contrived scapegoat, a fool" (p.297) whom Melville uses to mock the bachelors. I agree that Melville is satirizing their total separation from and ignorance of pain in life. But despite their trivialities, there is not sufficient internal evidence, even if one accepts Stein's elaborate argument that they are rejecting Christ's lesson of love, to indicate that Melville totally rejects them. Letters, journal entries, and the works themselves show how appealing many of their values are to him. It is important to see attractions and repulsions in each half of the linked stories.

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[8]Herman Melville, "Hawthorne and His Mosses," in The Portable Melville, ed. Jay Leyda (New York: Viking, 1952), p.417.

[9]In Clarel Melville will refine the number of potential stances toward life offered to Clarel by dividing the options offered in "The Paradise of Bachelors and The Tartarus of Maids" among a number of characters arranged in a spectrum from the ideal Celibate to the sensual Lyonese.

[10]William Bysshe Stein, "Melville and the Creative Eros," The Lock Haven Review,2(1960), p.14.

[11]Walker Cowen, "Melville's Marginalia," Diss. Harvard 1965, p.239.

[12]See Dorothee M. Finklestein, Melville's Orienda, (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1961).

[13]The sexual component is symbolically present in Moby Dick. Ahab's pursuit of the whale, which can be associated with the "feminine" in its shape, mystery, and in its naturalness, is the ultimate fusion of the epistemological and sexual quest. Ahab seeks to solve the riddle of life and death by impaling Moby Dick with his harpoon, thus fusing death with the physical possession of truth.

[14]The link between sex and death, reminiscent of the fate of the pale virgins in "The Tartarus of Maids," is reinforced in Chapter 193 in the complicated allegorical tale of Ozonna in which sex and loss of virginity literally lead to the death of the loved one.

[15]In dating "In a Bye-Canal" this early I am in agreement with Horsford (Journal pp.36-37) and Vincent (Collected Poems, p.476) who feel that the poems in "Fruit of Travel Long Ago" were written close to the 1856-57 trip and not after 1885 as William B. Stein argues in his book The Poetry of Melville's Late Years (Albany: SUNY Press, 1970), p.112. Stein believes the poems reveal "a touch of cynical humor" which indicates a distance from the serious mood of his 1856 trip. I see the humor in the poems as subordinated to a greater seriousness; the emotional immediacy and confusion within the poems also argues for their being written closer to those more turbulent middle years.

[16]The image of venetian blinds as standing between two potential lovers is found again, significantly, in Clarel, II,xxvii, in the "Vine and Clarel" canto: "As were Venetian slats between/ He espied him [Vine] through a leafy screen." If any reader doubts the sexual component in Clarel's attraction to Vine this connecting image should confirm its existence.

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[17]Hennig Cohen, note to "After the Pleasure Party" in Selected Poems of Herman Melville (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1964), p.228.

[18]This is the major thrust of Stein's discussion of the poem in The Poetry of Melville's Late Years. In confusing Melville with the poem's persona, however, Stein gives the impression that Melville is not in control of the work--repressing "his" sexuality throughout the poem until he accepts "his" sexuality at the end. Ignoring Urania in this way leads to a reductive reading. My discussion of Urania's attack on her competitor shows Melville using the Siren view of woman within the dramatic context of the poem, not falling prey to it himself.

[19]Tommo's mysterious leg ailment may be seen as a symbolic rendering of his ambivalence about his sexual freedom in Typee. He cannot consciously acknowledge that he might want to stay, yet he also needs to punish himself for that illicit desire.

[20]Greek art had the same effect on Melville when he returned from the Holy Land. This may be another factor in dating the poem.

[21]Stein, Poetry of Melville's Late Years, p.107.

[22]George Santayana, "The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy" in America in Literature, Vol.II, eds. A. Trachtenberg, B. DeMott (New York: John Wiley, 1978), p.781.

[23]Nina Baym, "The Erotic Motif in Melville's Clarel," Texas Studies in Literature and Language,XVI.2 (Summer, 1974), p.315. Bezanson, as usual, points the way to the importance of the sexual motif in the poem, seeing it as "interwoven" with the problem of religious doubt. (Clarel, notes, p.640).

[24]Herman Melville, Moby Dick, eds. Parker and Hayford (New York: Norton, 1967), p.97.

[25]See N. A. Ault, "The Sea Imagery in Herman Melville's Clarel," Research Studies of the State College of Washington, 1959 and Shurr's Mystery of Iniquity, pp.65-70.

[26]See Wegener's Concordance to Clarel for frequency of use for such words as "form" "formed," and "forms" (45), "rein" (13), "bound" (30).

[27]Baym, "Erotic Motif," p.325.

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[28]William H. Shurr, The Mystery of Iniquity (Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1972), p.75.

[29]Bezanson, Clarel, p.548.

[30]Melville's cynicism concerning democracy actually goes back to, at least, the latter part of the Civil War. His poem "The House Top" attacks the enlightened view of the human race on which the system is based, reasserting the Calvinistic view of human depravity.

[31]"The Tuscan" is the Franciscan monk Salvaterra, an ardent celibate, who guides the pilgrims around the Church of the Star in Bethlehem (IV,xiii-xvi).

[32]I am indebted to Baym's article on the erotic motif for this insight, pp.324-325.

[33]Henri Bergson, Creative Evolution, trans. Arthur Mitchell (New York: The Modern Library, 1944), pp.199-200.

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