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COMPARATIVE RELIGION IN HERMAN MELVILLE'S *CLAREL*

by

William B. Potter

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

1998

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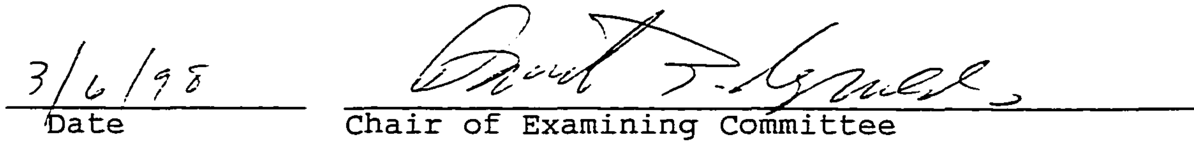

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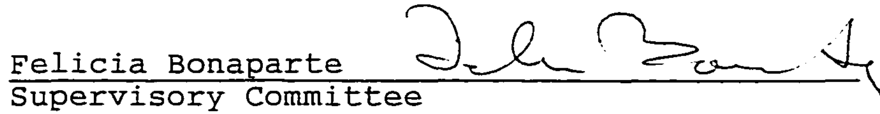

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Preface

Harold Bloom has written:

> Steeped, as were Carlyle and Ruskin, in the King James Bible, Melville no more believed in the Bible than did Carlyle and Ruskin.
> (Bloom. pp.1-2)

It would be misleading, however, to imagine that Melville's view of the Bible, or anything else for that matter, was quite so unequivocal; virtually everything Melville wrote, from his first novel to his last posthumously published novella, concerns issues of faith and doubt, belief and skepticism. His attitude toward these topics throughout his works, much like his attitude toward everything else, was quite ambiguous (a word one cannot help using when discussing Melville). Like Carlyle, whom he admired, he sought to "re-clothe" the older, worn-out forms; unlike Carlyle (a secularized Calvinist), he did not reject Christianity outright. Like his great Russian blood-brother Dostoevsky, of whom, sadly, he was apparently ignorant, he persistently challenged and subverted the dogma of established orthodoxies in his ceaseless search for what he regarded as the hidden metaphysical truths;

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unlike Dostoevsky, he did not embrace Christianity. For Melville, certain passages of scripture might prove far more profoundly "true" than any number of insignificant frustrations and mundane activities of "real" life. And yet, the proud sailor would also steadfastly assert the demands of the physical world against any orthodox or idealistic position, no matter how sacred. As such, it becomes a relatively moot point whether or not he "believed" in the literal truth of the Bible.

The so-called "Melville revival" occurred during the first generation influenced by "modernism"; the fiercely self-taught Melville's questing and often irreverent thought, vitalized throughout by wry humor and a delightfully healthy sense of the absurd, found a receptive image in the minds and hearts of many twentieth-century intellectuals and artists, who saw him (as they saw Blake, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Dostoevsky and many others) as an avatar of the concerns and doubts of the Modern Age of Anxiety, which, of course, he was in many ways. But Melville was first and foremost a man of his own century; out of his personal struggle to make sense of the complexity of his own time emerged the artist who could speak so forcefully to all time. Like so many who have changed the world that they inherited, his rebellion was not born out of a rejection of his time, but rather, from an overriding attempt to reconcile the contraries of his time. Such

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reconciliation demanded new forms, new conceptions, new language, much of which was, of course, incomprehesible to his peers.

He had always been an "omoo" (a word he borrowed from the dialect of the Marquesas Islanders for the title of his second book), a rover and wanderer, restless and lonely, both in his life and his thoughts. His correspondence and journals reveal a highly intelligent and intellectually vigorous but also fiercely private man whose not infrequent bouts of gregariousness (especially in his younger years) nonetheless merely punctuated the extended periods of serious and brooding contemplation. In the right company--a Hawthorne, or a German scholar on board a ship bound for Europe--he could be quite animated and full of conversation and brimming good humor. But even in such cases, the topic of discussion did not often stray from what he himself regarded as the "big" issues: "'Fixed Fate, Free-Will, foreknowledge absolute' &c." (Journals p. 4); always near at hand were the basic questions concerning human existence and meaning which have perplexed different cultures and religions since the beginning. As Charles Olson declared, "Melville wanted a God" (Olson p. 82).

Melville is the greatest example we have in our literature of what Blake would call a "tyger of wrath"; in his passionate intellectual search for meaning and coherence in a world which his reason told him possessed

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neither, he was led by his unerring instincts to those very thresholds of our experience (oceans and deserts, both literal and figurative) where the human will finally encounters and is dissolved away into the decidedly indifferent cosmos. He wrestled with these concerns on into old age, never for a moment resolving them, always probing, questing, thinking, recasting old ideas and formulating new ones, measuring all against what his life-experience and exceptionally keen mind told him to be true. Such a man does not simply believe or disbelieve the Bible.

Foreword

Herman Melville's long poem *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land* (1876) is, in many regards, the least typical work of his literary career. Meticulously crafted and tightly reigned, encoded with many personal or cryptic allusions and observations sprinkled throughout 500 pages of unrelenting iambic tetrameter, and surprisingly void of any of his characteristic humor, *Clarel* has, understandably, never found a large place with Melville's reading public. In contrast to the self-confidence, humor, and exhuberant energy of the earlier novels, *Clarel* often

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seems dour and withdrawn; it is episodic rather than dramatic and its only real "action" consists in the countless debates in which many of the characters engage, (debates that constitute, nonetheless, a kind of plot which significantly structures the poem, as I shall hereafter argue). Missing also from the poem is the sense of Melville as iconoclast, breaking down barriers of form and genre as he had in Mardi, Moby-Dick, and The Confidence Man--the stunning and defiant irreverence of an artist who could say, as he did of Moby-Dick, "I have written a wicked book, and feel spotless as the lamb" (Correspondence, 212). Instead, the verse is conspicuous in its lack of poetic invention or innovation, at least of the kind that characterized his prose; there is nothing anywhere in Clarel to indicate that Melville was remotely aware of the five editions of Leaves of Grass that had appeared in the two decades just before the poem's 1876 publication.[1]

In addition to all this, Clarel presents a difficult task for the reader in terms of placing it comfortably in the mind. Despite its conservative metric consistency which, as Helen Vendler observes, is taken "from Scott and Byron" (Vendler, p. 40), the poem is, strictly speaking, sui-generic; there is really nothing else like it in the nineteenth-century literay picture. The one work which it most easily recalls, and to which it even alludes (II. i, 14-18), is Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales. Both feature

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groups of religious pilgrims on horseback, journeying to or through a place of religious significance, and discussing themes or topics of importance to their respective times. But the similarities pretty much end there. The two poems differ radically in terms of their structure; moreover, Clarel is much narrower in its focus, concerned almost to a fault only with matters of faith and doubt; no Miller's Tale or Tale of Sir Topas relieve its serious tone. If anything, Melville's poem belongs to the "novel of ideas" genre, and in this regard, one modern literary piece that does share some similarities with it is Thomas Mann's novel The Magic Mountain.[2] In both works the characters, sequestered from "society at large," discuss and debate matters pertaining to the human condition in a world that is becoming increasingly complex. The main characters of each work pair up rather well: the humanist Settembrini=Derwent, the cynical Naphta=Mortmain/Ungar, and both groups battle for the young souls of Castorp/Clarel. Sometimes, the similarities are quite striking; Naphta's impassioned outcry

> What had been the net result of the vainglorious French Revolution--what but the capitalistic bourgeois State? A magnificent outcome truly! And one it was hoped to improve upon, forsooth by making the horroruniversal! A world-republic! Progress? It was the cry of the patient who constantly changes his position thinking each new one will bring relief.
>
> The Magic Mountain, p. 690

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could easily have been uttered by Mortmain or Ungar, the once idealistic and now disillusioned veterans of, respectively, the great 1848 revolution and the American Civil War. Obviously there are profound differences that separate the works, formally, stylistically, and philosophically, but the areas of resemblance are striking nonetheless.

And yet, in spite of all these reservations and others as well, Clarel is, in some very important ways, the most typical of Melville's works; the one which best summarizes and comprehends the common thread that extends through the disparate earlier writings, the one in which the fullest examination is given to the topic that had most concerned and driven him so throughout his career: the universal human need and quest for belief. In fact, Clarel is nothing less than a hugely conceived study of the very nature of belief itself; as such it succeeds in its task of breaking down traditional barriers of orthodoxy to discover what the poem calls "[t]he intersympathy of creeds" (I. v. 1.207).

From the Edenic descriptions of native life in the South Pacific in Typee (1846) and Omoo (1847), to the philosophic and metaphysical discussions of Mardi (1849), to the attacks on Christian hypocrisy in Redburn (1850) and White-Jacket (1850), to the religious ponderings of Moby-Dick (1851) and Pierre (1852) and the moral and ethical questions raised in The Confidence Man (1857), Melville

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had perpetually and compulsively wrestled with the conundrum of faith and doubt as it presented itself to him in his travels and in his readings of different cultures, past and present. In Clarel, this lifelong task reached full fruition: it is his final reading of history as the inexorable evolution of human thought and faith, what Oswald Spengler, another student of comparative cultures and religions, called "the actualization of something that is essentially spiritual, the translation of an idea into a living historical form" (Decline of the West, vol 2, p. 49). This evolution, the poem maintains, had now led to the spiritual crisis of the nineteenth century. The posthumous Billy-Budd explores some of the same material, but within a narrower spectrum and on a much smaller scale; it is dramatic rather than episodic, a chamber piece rather than a symphony, as Britten's opera demonstrates.

It is, moreover, a tacitly understood tenet of the poem that the Protestant Reformation, what the Dominican refers to as "This riot of reason quite set free/Sects--sects bisected-sects disbanded" (II xxv, l.), in dislocating the seat of authority from Rome and positing it in the individual, gave rise, in its most radical implications, to the momentum that had brought Western Europe to the brink of the modern world. In Clarel Melville explores for the last time the penalties and glories of the great American malady, the tyranny of the autonomous

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self; to use the words of Georg Lukacs (describing the modern hero), Clarel is "[c]onfined within the limits of his own experience" (cited in Rogin, p. 194). Tocqueville equated American culture with American religion:

> It must never be forgotten that religion gave birth to Anglo-American society. In the United States, religion is therefore mingled with all the habits of the nation and all the feelings of patriotism, whence it derives a peculiar force.
> Tocqueville, pp. 144-5

Melville would wholeheartedly agree; the critique of the excesses of American Protestantism in _Clarel_ is, in inevitable fact, also a critique of American capitalist culture, racial exploitation, imperialism, and so forth, a point curiously lost in recent studies of Melville such as Michael Paul Rogin's fine study _Subversive Geneology: The Politics and Art of Herman Melville_, which emphasizes Melville's political critique of America but omits this crucial point. Rogin even concedes this point, in effect, when he explains that "most of the discussion of the travelers [in _Clarel_] takes place in a spiritual realm tangential to our [i.e., Rogin's] concerns" (Rogin, p. 282-3). As I shall demonstrate in Chapter Two of this dissertation, the gulf between religious or metaphysical matters and those of a political or national nature is much narrower in Melville's writing than many recent critics

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seem aware.

In the chapters that follow, I shall explore Melville's great and neglected poem as a study in comparative religion. Far more than a mere Christian faith/doubt poem (a convention to which it is easily and routinely relegated), _Clarel_ stands as a massive, multi-layered investigation into the origins and nature of belief itself; a painstaking effort to recover the primordial religious moments, what William James called the "original experiences" (_The Varieties of Religious Experience_ p. 6). It is also a study in religious synthesis in which the themes and doctrines of the world's major religions are often brought into dialogue with each other.

My first task will thus be to provide a historical setting for the poem in terms of the burgeoning Western fascination with these matters in the mid-nineteenth century, thereby demonstrating Melville's interest and perticipation in the discussion surrounding this central concern of his time. Chapter One will be devoted to an overview of this period. I begin by examining some of the main theories and figures pertaining to comparative religion with which Melville was probably directly or indirectly familiar. I include discussions of such theorists as Giambattista Vico, Johann Gottfried von Herder, and Max Muller. I explore Vico's ideas pertaining to the relationship between the religion, language, and culture

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of different societies as enumerated in The New Science. I touch on Herder's concern with similar concepts in his "Essay on the Origin of Language." And I devote a considerable amount of space to discussing the ideas of the great German/English linguist and comparative religionist, Max Muller, one of the major figures in nineteenth-century comparative religion. The theories of all three form a major backdrop against which to play out my subsequent discussion of Clarel. I also discuss such comparative religionists as James Freeman Clarke, Frederic Denison Maurice, and Thomas Wentworth Higginson, who, in addition to Muller, sought to understand the inter-relationships between different religions, and, in particular, the relationship between Christianity and other religions of the world.

In Chapter Two I explore several important matters concerning Clarel itself which must precede my investigation of the poem. Specifically, I examine some of the leading structural ideas of the narrative, Melville's fondness of debate and his use of it as a dialectical tool in Clarel, and, finally, what I call the "Protestant dilemma," a condition of spiritual despair brought on and fostered by Protestantism's iconoclastic emphasis on reason and the autonomy of the individual conscience. I shall argue that Melville commences his comparative religious investigation in Clarel from this Protestant viewpoint,

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and that, moreover, it is an implicit precept of the poem that Protestantism, in concert with science and democracy, has helped engender the "modern" world of doubt.

In Chapter Three I commence my actual study of the poem itself. During the course of the next three chapters I shall explore the major comparative religious patterns that structure the poem, which I have identified as the pursuit of "the intersympathy of creeds", that aspect of suffering shared by all faiths in their respective practice, the decline or fragmentation of orthodoxies and the corresponding ascent of religious heterodoxy, what I call the "tempered heart" theme and its corallary, which is the means by which a specific creed equips its believers to survive in the world, and, finally, the respect for other religions and their teachings, even if these no longer possess metaphysical truth, as a bastion against the onslaught of chaos, which the poem rhetorically envisions as the culminating result of the modern, atheist world. In the process of discussing these religious patterns, I shall demonstrate that Melville's approach to the topic of comparative religion in Clarel conists of his use of many theories that were "in the air" at the time, as well as his own original contributions in the field, which consist, paradigmatically speaking, of the breaking down of older orthodoxies and mythological archetypes to fashion, out of the debris of broken or subverted symbols, a return

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to the fundamental sources of belief. This last is achieved by the rise of heterodoxical patterns of thinking as best articulated by Rolfe in I. xxxi. In this process Melville creates the resolution to the perplexing questions posed throughout the poem and prefigured in Celio's great cry on the Via Dolorosa in I. xiii; seen this way, Clarel's disappearance into the anonymity of Jerusalem at the end of the poem and the ambiguity of the subsequent "Epilogue," much debated by the poem's critics, actually constitute a redemption through suffering and withdrawal, a Schopenhauerian "change of being, 'metanoia,'...not brought about by straining and 'will power,' but by a long deep process of unselving." (Murdoch p 54). As we shall see, for American radical Protestantism, this process of "unselving" becomes the key to salvation in the world of the 'deus absconditus'. As Henry Drummond, the nineteenth-century Scottish theologian put it, "The spiritual world as it stands is full of perplexity. One can escape doubt only by escaping thought" (from Natural Law in the Spiritual World, quoted in Burroughs, p. 13).

Chapter Six consists of a brief discussion of some of the world's major religions in Clarel, specifically Melville's knowledge and use of Islam, Hindusim, Buddhism, and Christianity. I shall also explore his use of their cosmologies and teachings in light of the views of Muller, Clarke, Hegel, Maurice, and other nineteenth-century writers

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on religion.

My thesis comprises not one but two very large topics: Melville's 18,000 line poem and the nineteenth-century comparative religious scene. It is thus probably inevitable that two of the scholar's major banes should rear their ugly heads during the course of my discussion--I refer to repetition and omission. I can only say by way of explanation (to paraphrase Ishmael) that I've tried all things and achieved what I could. I apologize here for any such occurrences, and beg my reader's patience.

Forward Notes

1. The exact period of composition is not known. All critics agree that the poem owes much to the journal Melville kept during his 1856-7 tour of the Holy Land, but the evidence becomes murky after that. Walter E. Bezanson, still the poem's most important critic, devotes much time to discussing this problem, finally concluding that "The best hypothesis would seem to be that Melville began his poem about 1867" (Clarel, p. 531). But this view is not unanimous. Writing in the '30s, the French critic Jean Simon argued that Melville had worked out a general structure of the poem and composed much of the first section before Battle-Pieces (Clarel, p. 548).

Melville's apparent apathy toward Whitman's poetics (though not necessarily his poetry) is perhaps understand -able when we remember Bezanson's assertion that Melville "took [Matthew] Arnold to be his most serious poetic contemporary" (Clarel, p. 527). Nonetheless, he must have been aware of his fellow-American poet; it would be unimaginable that between his voracious reading and many literary friends he would not have known of him. Moreover, Whitman had given both Typee and Omoo positive reviews in The Brooklyn Eagle, which must surely have been known by Melville. In his last years, after the publication of

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Clarel, he certainly did know of him--see Correspondence, pp. 489, 509, and 741.

2. Newton Arvin reached this same conclusion; see Arvin, pp. 270, 272, and 273

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I have far too many people to thank to be able to properly acknowledge here. I would, nonetheless, like to try at least to provide a partial list of those whose friendship, support, and aid have enabled me to complete both the program and this dissertation.

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be forever etched in our minds. He has many progeny who have made it out of the tangled bank of graduate school and into the outside world largely through his efforts.

I also could not have written this dissertation without the immense aid of my adviser, Professor David S. Reynolds. Much of the period that I was writing this coincided with his own writing of _Walt Whitman's America_. Despite the scope and depth of that work and the effort that surely went into it, he was always prompt in returning sections of manuscript I'd sent, and always returned them with many helpful and thought-provoking comments and a lengthy cover-letter. He is a model both as a scholar--it was a reading of _Beneath the American Renaissance_ that convinced me I could do this project--and as a person; he combines a most thorough scholarship with a positive, gentle, and very helpful demeanor. I feel truly honored to have worked with him.

I'd like to thank my family, and most especially my dear mother, who has suffered through the years of widowhood and wayward sons with great stoic dignity and good-humor.

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Chapter One: Melville and Nineteenth-Century Comparative Religion

1. Background

Eric J. Sharpe writes in Comparative Religion: A History that "comparative religion, that is, the historical critical and comparative study of the religions of the world, first came widely to public attention in the sixties and seventies of the nineteenth century" (Sharpe p. 1). By mid-century, imperialistic Europe and America, caught up in the business of empire-making, found themselves in the grips of a seemingly insatiable appetite for anything pertaining to the newly described cultures and religions. On the heels of the ever-expanding scientific discoveries of the time, which seemed to seriously compromise traditionally held Christian beliefs, the rush was on to try to reexamine, or in some cases, reimagine, the very nature of religion itself. The result was a flood of books and articles concerning remote peoples and their beliefs. As H. Bruce Franklin writes in The Wake of the Gods: Melville's Mythology:

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> Poole's Index to Periodical Literature [a popular periodical of the time] lists hundreds of articles [on mythology] before 1860, a fair sign that there were thousands. The casual reader could now find mythology not only in the plays and poems of his favorite authors, in travel books, in the Bible, in Biblical encyclopedias (such as Kitto's Cyclopedia of Biblical Knowledge), and in the popular mythological dictionaries (such as Bell's New Pantheon) which explained to him literary references to pagan gods, but also in his weekly and monthly magazines.
>
> Franklin, p. 6

The list of important works to appear in the field of comparative religion in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is staggering. Of the primary or sacred texts, George Sale's translation of the Koran was published in 1734, a later translation by the Rev. I. M. Rodwell would appear in 1861; Charles Wilken's translation of the Bhagavad Gita was published in 1785; Sir William Jones, whom Melville claimed "read in thirty languages" (Moby-Dick, ch. 79, p, 273) and whom James Freeman Clarke called "one of the few first-rate scholars whom the world has produced" (Ten Great Religions, p. 78), translated the Shakuntala (The Fatal Ring, an Indian Drama) in 1789 and the Laws of Manu ("the most important work concerning 'dharma', i. e., the principles, laws, and rules governing both the cosmos and human society" in Hindu religion, Mircea Eliade Essential Sacred Writings From Around the World, p. 111) in 1792; Anquetil du Parron translated fifty Upanishads in 1802; Edward Fitzgerald's Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam was first published in 1859, the same year as Origin of Species;

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and a four-volume edition of the Rig Veda, supervised by the brilliant German/English scholar Max Muller, appeared in 1849, 1853, 1856, and 1862.

In addition, the wealth of scholarly works pertaining to comparative religion and mythology, as well as such related fields as anthropology, linguistics, and cultural history, can hardly be believed. Max Muller (1823-1900), for example, upon whom Eric Sharpe bestows the title "the father of comparative religion" (Sharpe p. 35), authored or edited countless scholarly works (including lengthy literary histories), translations from the religions of India and the South Pacific, and many other books including a study of science and religion, a Sanskrit grammar, a comparative mythology study (Arno, 1977), a German literary history, a treatise on Kantian philosophy, and still found time to write an autobiography. Thomas Hyde's Veterum Persarum et Parthorum et Modorum Religious Historia appeared in 1760; Thomas Maurice's Indian Antiques in 1800; John Malcolm's History of Persia in 1829; John Wilson's The Parsi Religion in 1843; and Simon Ockley's History of the Saracens in 1847. Such works as Jean-Francois Champollion's translation of the Rosetta Stone in 1822, Barthold Georg Niebuhr's Romische Geschichte (3 vol. 1811-320, which is alluded to by Melville in Clarel, Giovanni Belzoni's Narrative of the Operations and Recent Discoveries Within the Pyramids, Temples, Tomb, and Excavations, in Egypt and Nuba (2. vol. 1820), and Sir Austen Henry Layard's

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Discoveries in the Ruins of Nineveh and Babylon (1853) helped unlock the mysteries of the ancient worlds. Franz Bopp (1791-1867) established the relationship between Sanskrit, Persian, Latin, Greek, and German in his highly influential work in comparative linguistics. Thomas Carlyle included a section on Muhammad in _On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History_ (1841); Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman wrote poems inspired by their respective readings of Indian and Persian poetry; Emerson also translated several Indian poems from German translations. So intense was the output during the two decades cited by Sharpe that, despite the body of works just cited and countless others, the Rev. James Freeman Clarke, a family acquaintance of the Melvilles and himself the author of three comparative religious studies, could write in 1871 that

> Twenty-five years ago it was hardly possible to procure any adequate information concerning Brahmanism, Buddhism, or the religions of Confucius, Zoroaster, and Muhammad. Hardly any part of the Vedas had been translated into a European language. The works of Anquetil du Perron and Kleuker were still the highest authority on the Zendavesta. About the Buddhists scarcely anything was known. But now, though many important 'lacunae' remain to be filled, we have ample means of ascertaining the essential facts concerning most of these movements of the human soul. The time seems to have come to accomplish something which may have a lasting value.
>
> _Ten Great Religions_, p. 4

Further evidence of this is demonstrated by the fact that

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ninety-seven of the one-hundred ninety-six books listed in the bibliography of _Ten Great Religions_ were published in the years 1857-1870.

Melville's own substantial interest in these matters, evident from the very earliest of his writings, thus places him squarely within this vast historical movement on the part of Western thought to comprehend the significance of recent and sometimes troubling discoveries in the relatively new fields of organic science, biology, and anthropology. A voracious reader whose interests sprawled over an exceedingly wide range, the fiercely self-taught Melville pored over as much of the comparative religious, mythological, archeological, and travel literature of his time as he could buy or borrow, devouring the volumes in typically eclectic fashion.[1] Mingling in his mind as they did the works and their authors gradually assumed symbolic significance for him; thus, as Dorothee Metlitsky Finkelstein observes in _Melville's Orienda_, "The image of Belzoni 'worming himself' through the subterranean passages of Egyptian tombs is the apotheosis of the Melvillean hero" (p. 122); and,

> In Melville's imagery famous contemporary Orientalists--Belzoni, Champoillon, Layard, and Sir William Jones, who died a generation before---are as integral a part of the Near Eastern historical landscape as the pyramids, the hieroglyphs, Nineveh, Zoroaster, and the Persian poets.
>
> Finkelstein, p. 10

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But the seeds for this interest in new cultures--both Melville's and his century's--were sown much earlier in European history, dating back at least three centuries; as the anthropologist Talal Asad has recently written,

> Modern anthropology's theoretical focus on human diversity has its roots in Renaissance Europe's encounter with "the savage." That brutal encounter in Africa and the new world produced disturbing theological questions for reflective Christians: How to explain the variety of human beings given the Mosaic account of Creation.
> Asad, p. 19

One is even tempted to say that Asad doesn't "go back" far enough; Christian Europe's confrontation with Cultural Others predates even the Crusades, dating back at least as far as Charles Martel's defeat of 'Abd-ar-Rahman at Poitiers in 732.

Melville's own century would see the completion of Europe's exploration of the known world, an effort begun three hundred years before in the economically expedient race to find new routes to the East. These earlier explorers had been primarily in search of trade, booty, or glory, and had relatively little interest in the culture or customs of the aboriginal peoples they encountered, who were regarded instead as strange and even fearsome novelties. More often than not, they were dealt with in a most ruthless fashion, either slaughtered or forced to convert to

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Christianity. It was also routine for explorers to return to Europe with captives kidnapped for the purpose of exhibition.[2] Even the most humane and enlightened of this earlier period were not free of the habit of thinking of the newly discovered and described peoples in terms that amount to little less than patronizing cliches; thus Montaigne, attempting to sympathetically describe the people of Brazil in "Of cannibals," can hardly help himself from resorting to a kind of idealized depiction:

> This is a nation I should say...in which there is no sort of traffic, no knowledge of letters, no science of numbers, no name for a magistrate or for political superiority, no customs of servitude, no riches or poverty, no contracts, no successions, no partitions, no occupations but leisure ones, no care for any but common kinship, no clothes, no agriculture, no metal, no use of wine or wheat.
>
> Montaigne, p. 153

As described here, life for the Brazilian would appear to consist of nothing more that what it lacks in terms of the bourgeois European: there is not so much a sense here of an autonomous culture as there is of a people living in a "natural" state, free of the burdens of "civilization." We are not a far cry from the Romantic nostalgia for the "noble savage."

But this view tended to be the exception; more often than not, Christian Europe up to the nineteenth century maintained the reactionary attitudes it inherited from

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the early church, and looked upon the other religions it encountered as either belief systems, perhaps fostered by Satan himself, which had to be refuted outright, or else as lingering evidence of the pagan idolatry that had been so pervasive in Old Testament times (Sharpe, pp. 12-15). Perhaps most important was the fact that either choice served to confirm the veracity of the Christian doctrine; science had not yet become a such direct challenge to Christianity, and scripture, especially the Old Testament, abounded with examples of exotic religions and idols as well as the imperative that these be overcome and destroyed by the followers of the one true God.

The nineteenth-century comparative religionists, however, wrote from a much broader perspective: some still sought to demonstrate the ascendancy of Christianity and, by implication, Western culture; but others, immersed in and inspired by the new theories of science, either sought to undermine the authority of Christianity, figuring that by examining the nature and cultural context of other religions it could be demonstrated that all religions--Christianity not excepted--are equally fatuous, or else strove to assimilate the new beliefs into a more comprehensive picture or idea of human belief.

This last view grew out of theories that had evolved in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries and which consisted, according to Margaret Hogden, of the merging of two ideas: the chain of being and the genetic

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principle:

> A common human nature was thus accorded to all human beings...[and with it,] the assumption of a single human nature underlying cultural plurality.
>
> cited in Asad, pp. 20-1

It was out of a need to understand this "common human nature" that the germ of modern comparative religious study began to take shape. James Freeman Clarke would thus write in _Ten Great Religions_ (1871), "Comparative Theology is synthetical, and considers the adaptation of each system to every other, to determine its place, use, and value, _in reference to universal or absolute religion_" (Clarke p. 2, emphasis mine). Clarke's own comparative religious methodology is a binary system quite similar to that often used by Melville, both in _Clarel_ and elsewhere, and is therefore worth examining in brief. The first real task of the comparative theologist, Clarke says, is "analytical, being to distinguish each religion from the rest. We compare them to see wherein they agree and wherein they differ." The next step is the "synthetical" process described above, where each religion is analyzed in juxtaposition to the rest and also measured against the universal religion. In this step, religions are examined "to find wherein each is complete or defective, true or false; how each may supply the defect of the other or prepare the way for a better; how each religion acts on the race which receives it, is

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adapted to that race, and to the region of the earth which it inhabits." The last step "shows the relation of each partial religion to human civilization, and observes how each religion of the world is a step in the progress of humanity. It shows that both the positive and negative side of a religion make it a preparation for a higher religion, and that the universal religion must root itself in the decaying soil of partial religion" (Clarke, p. 2). As I shall subsequently explore, Clarke is somewhat coy in not naming his "universal religion" at this point of his discussion; only later will he acknowledge it to be Christianity.

For a philosophical and religious imagination as perceptive, heterogeneous, and naturally syncretic as Melville's, this last approach would be particularly attractive; in Clarel, we see it in the restless quest of the young eponymous protagonist to discover what the poem early on calls "The intersympathy of creeds/Alien or hostile though they seem" (I. v, ll. 207-8)

These paradigmatic attitudes of the nineteenth century were largely prefigured in the ancient world, both in the attitudes of the Classical writers to other peoples, and in the infant Christian church's confrontations with various pagan religions and with the Classical tradition itself. This is especially true of the dispute within the early Church between the relatively intolerant position of Rome, voiced by such figures as Tertullian and Jerome, and the

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more enlightened and open-minded view expressed by the Alexandrian school of Clement and Origen. I refer the reader to Appendix One of this dissertation ("Ancient Comparative Religion and the Early Christian Church") where I explore in more detail the ancient record.

2. Nineteenth-Century Comparative Religion: An Overview

What distinguished the comparative religionists of the nineteenth century most from their earlier counterparts was their not altogether successful use of scientific method; not unlike their contemporaries in other, related fields, they appropriated the theories and vocabulary of burgeoning science and applied it to a seemingly unlikely topic: religion. As E. E. Evans-Pritchard observes, nineteenth-century comparative religionists

> not only sought explanations of primitive religion in psychological origins, but also attempted to place it on an evolutionary gradation or as a stage in social development.
>
> Evans-Pritchard, p. 11

But many problems arose in the initial attempts to systematize religion and myth. To begin with, many of the nineteenth-century comparative religionists were theorists, which is to say they possessed virtually no firsthand knowledge of the cultures they were describing. Instead, they relied mostly on the writings of missionaries, traders,

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and explorers, whose accounts, Evans-Pritchard says, were "highly suspect" (Evans-Pritchard, p. 6). It is therefore not surprising that these "scrap-book treatment[s]," as he calls them (p. 10), contained very little that was of a true comparative religious nature, but were instead a "bringing together of items which appeared to have something in common"; thus:

> A large number of miscellaneous examples were brought together to illustrate some general idea and in support of the author's thesis about that idea.
>
> Evans-Pritchard, p. 10

Two things immediately distinguish Melville from most of the other nineteenth-century comparative religionists, and serve to distance him somewhat from the pale of Evans-Pritchard's dismissive critique. First, Melville was a writer of fiction; most of the other works of comparative religion in that century were non-fiction, usually composed in the forms of essays, travel books and journals, or scholarly treatments of the subject. As an amateur in the fields of comparative religion and anthropology, his task as he saw it was not so much to present an accurate depiction of other cultures and religions, though he often managed to do so well enough, but rather to provide an imaginative venue in which many of the implications of the new discoveries and ideas of his day could be dramatized and explored. Far from having a "thesis" predicated upon

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"evidence," Melville typically places his characters in deliberately ambiguous situations--a state of perpetual negative capability--where such concepts as "truth" and "meaning" become strictly relative. As I shall explore later, this is especially true in Clarel, where the dazzling array of narrative techniques and shifting points of view serve to underscore the fact that the poem is in the constant process of developing, subverting, and reinventing itself.

The other aspect that serves to distinguish Melville from so many of the comparative religionists and anthropologists of the nineteenth century was that he had actually traveled to the lands and met the peoples that his various works describe; the two major episodes of travel in his life--the sea-going adventures of the 1840s and the pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1856-7--served, in fact, as essential grist for his imaginative mill: they provided the palpable and sensual correlative to the furious musings of his always restless mind. So as he had literally dislocated himself from his homeland in the sea-going voyages of the 1840s and the trip to the Holy Land, so his writings were figuratively dislocated from any authoritative center or position, theological or political, of the kind alluded to by Evans-Pritchard, leaving him essentially free to explore the complex issues involving the mingling of different cultures from a very broad perspective. Finkelstein calls this quality Melville's

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"historical awareness" which

> compelled him to write not merely with his own generation in his bones but with a feeling that the whole of the history of mankind from its beginnings to nineteenth-century America had a simultaneous existence and composed a simultaneous order. Melville's historical sense, inseparable from his method, distinguishes him as a writer.
>
> Finkelstein, p. 9

As my discussion shall subsequently demonstrate, both the fact that he was a writer of fiction and that he had traveled about the world figure prominently in Melville's comparative religious thinking. Although structurally a very long poem of over 18,000 lines held in tight reign by a strict iambic tetremeter, Clarel nonetheless employs many of the techniques of the novel and may be considered an example of what Bakhtin calls a "novelized poem" (Bakhtin, p. 7). Moreover, the poem possesses two of Bakhtin's three "basic characteristics that fundamentally distinguish the novel in principle from other genres," these being a "stylistic three-dimensionality, which is linked with the multi-languaged consciousness realized in the novel" and "the new zone opened by the novel for structuring literary images, namely the zone of maximal contact with the present (with contemporary reality) in all its openendedness" (Bakhtin, p. 11). Not writing as a theologian or anthropologist, not struggling to uphold or promote a firm and unyielding doctrinal or patriarchal

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position, Melville composed _Clarel_ (in Bakhtinian terms) in a dialogical, rather than monological, format; this provided him an arena in which to freely examine issues of importance to him, to pose and sometimes even answer complex and troubling questions, to bring together an amazingly rich texture of disparate ideas, voices, and points-of-view, none of which is privileged but all of which are heard.

Melville was also able to draw heavily upon his own travels and the journals he kept of them when writing. The 1856-57 journal of his trip to the Holy Land was an indispensable aid during the long composition of _Clarel_. The poem's foremost critic, Walter E. Bezanson, calls it the

> prime source for _Clarel_...an extraordinary document, different from the essentially matter-of-fact record he had kept on his previous European tour...[full of] deeper explorations into the geography and events of his inner life than in his other journals.
>
> _Clarel_, p. 511

Not only did such experience "in the field" bring authentic color and truth to his writing, it also lent an air of compassion and understanding toward many of the diverse characters he created who were often based on persons he'd actually met. But in a deeper sense his travels allowed Melville to witness firsthand both the mingling of different cultures and religions and the ensuing destruction often

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brought about by Western cultural and religious hubris. From his earliest writings Melville saw this mingling of cultures as an ineluctable process in human evolution. But he regarded it with a scarcely veiled suspicion: at the very moment in American history when many of his most enlightened country- men and women were forming Utopian societies predicated upon the essential ideal of universal human equality, Melville frequently depicted intercultural contact in terms suggesting a kind of social Darwinism. The heterodoxically Christian narrators of _Typee_, _Omoo_, and _Mardi_ are thus unsparingly harsh on the practices of Western explorers and Christian missionaries, recognizing the cultural genocide that inevitably arose in the often related processes of conversion and colonialism:

> The Anglo-Saxon hive have extirpated Paganism from the greater part of the North American continent; but with it they have likewise extirpated the greater portion of the red race...Among the islands of Polynesia, no sooner are the images overturned, the temples demolished, and the idolators converted into _nominal_ Christians, then disease, vice, and premature death make their appearance. The depopulated land is then recruited from [sic] the rapacious hordes of enlightened individuals who settle themselves within its borders, and clamorously announce the progress of the Truth. Neat villas, trim gardens, shaven lawns, spires, and cupolas arise, while the poor savage soon finds himself an interloper in the country of his fathers, and that too on the very site of the hut where he was born. The spontaneous fruits of the earth, which God in his wisdom had ordained for the support of the indolent natives, remorselessly seized upon and appropriated by the stranger, are devoured before the eyes of the starving inhabitants or sent on board the numerous vessels

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which now touch at their shores.
Typee, chapter xxvi, p. 221

This is pretty strong stuff considering that *Typee* was published only one year after the Democratic leader John L. O'Sullivan had coined the phrase "manifest destiny" to describe America's inevitable move westward. (Melville had an uncanny knack for being at odds with his country's prevailing political mood. *Clarel*, which, as I shall demonstrate, is unflinchingly harsh on America and its pretensions, was published in the centennial year of 1876) In *Moby-Dick*, the Presbyterian Ishmael, forsaking his orthodox background, would find genuine spiritual fellowship with the "pagan" Queequeg amid the "Anacharsis Clootz deputation from all the isles of the sea" that made ups the crew of the *Pequod* (Chapter 27, p. 108). Clarel himself, to use Whitman's phrase, considers long and seriously of all the different religious viewpoints and backgrounds presented him during the course of the poem, finally finding himself at its conclusion literally and figuratively drawing up the rear of a huge multi-cultered caravan of humanity.

But leaving Melville aside (though not altogether) for the moment, I shall now focus on specific schools of nineteenth-century comparative religion, identifying and discussing some of the major themes, theories, and figures of the period, and their respective role in Melville's own understanding of the topic.

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In _Comparative Religion: Its Genesis and Growth_ (Edinburgh, 1905), Louis Jordan said of comparative religionists that "every instigator is a law to himself" (p. 208). Jordan's remark, concerning the diversity of comparative religionist methodologies in the nineteenth century, is not without truth. However, most nineteenth-century comparative religionists were well aware of the various schools that had recently evolved in the field, and where they each stood in respect to such.

Characteristically, these schools fell into two general groups. On the one hand, there were those who sought explanations as to how religions arise in the human imagination. Included in this group were Max Muller's Nature/Myth school, the psychological explanations of Herbert Spencer, Edward Burnett Tylor, and his pupil, Andrew Lang who was particularly hostile to the Nature/Myth school, and the sociological theories as articulated in Fustel de Coulanger's _The Ancient City_ and Robertson Smith's _The Religion of the Semites_, which greatly influenced Durkheim and modern comparative religionists in general. The other group comprised those whose interest focused on the actual doctrines, beliefs, and histories of the world's religions, scholars such as Frederick Denison Maurice, James Freeman Clarke, and Max Muller (who contained multitudes), who actually immersed themselves in the primary texts of each religion and often translated them into European languages. Broadly speaking, the interests of the first group were

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mythological, those of the second, theological. The former were frequently scientists and atheists, the latter philologists or theologians. As can be imagined, frequently underscoring the difference between these two schools was the fundamental antagonism between science and religion. Empirical and transcendental philosophy divided the nineteenth century; "every intellectual knew roughly where he stood in relation to the two movements" (Rorty, p. xv). Although the distinction between the two schools is somewhat tenuous, it can serve a useful purpose when regarding Melville's comparative religious methodology, which frequently employs strategies used by both.

a. Two Strains of Nineteenth-Century Comparative Religion

A further distinction must also be made concerning comparative religionists in general, and in the nineteenth century in particular, concerning what has to be called, for want of a better term, the 'motive' behind the methodology. For Example, Eric Sharpe postulates that, at its most basic level, comparative religion may originate in a compulsive "degree of dissatisfaction with inherited religious traditions" (Sharpe, p. 2; Sharpe adds that this tendency would become more pervasive "in later [i.e., nineteenth century] situations," p. 2). This position is elaborated upon by Evans-Pritchard in his fiercely argued

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book. For him, many nineteenth-century writers, such as Spencer, Tylor, and Lang,

> sought and found in primitive religion a weapon which could, they thought, be used with deadly effect against Christianity...If primitive religion could be explained away as an intellectual aberration...it was implied that the higher religions could be discredited and subdisposed of in the same way...The impressioned rationalism of the time has given their writings, as we read them today, a flavor of smugness which one may find either irritating or risible.
>
> Evans-Pritchard, p. 15

He adds, "Religious belief was to these anthropologists absurd" (Ibid. p. 15). Appropriating much of the scientific vocabulary of the time and asserting the primacy of their own "intellectualist theories," as Evans-Pritchard derisively calls them (Ibid. p, 29), in lieu of evidence, these theorists regarded religious experience as a specific evolutionary phase through which the human psyche historically and inevitably passes. Born in the ignorance of rational but intellectually limited early societies, religion becomes for them the primitive mind beholding the unexplained--natural phenomena, dreams, ghosts--and seeking to understand it. But, the theorists reasoned, as knowledge of the world around increases through investigation and scientific inquiry, these beliefs are gradually displaced by rational explanations, and religion fades into the realm of dead myth. According to this theory, the cultural history of the collective human race can be

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seen as one of a linear progress from a lower state (unenlightened, superstitious) state to a higher one (enlightened, civilized).

This evolutionary model, which Sharpe calls the idea of "patterns of progress," was prefigured in European thought dating back to the Renaissance (Sharpe, pp. 24-5). In The New Science (1744) for example, Giambattista Vico claimed that the history of the human race could be broken down "to three ages, the first that of the gods, the second that of the heroes, the third that of men," a concept he admits he borrowed from the Egyptians through Herodotus (Vico, p. 34, paragraph 52; also p. 69, paragraph 173). In the first stage, the people "believed they lived under divine governments, and everything was commanded them by auspices and oracles." In the age of heroes, an elite reigned in "aristocratic commonwealths, on account of a certain superiority of nature which they held themselves to have over the plebs." In the age of men, "all men recognized themselves as equal in human nature, and therefore were established first the popular commonwealths and then the monarchies, both of which are forms of human government" (Vico, p. 20, paragraph 31). As I shall demonstrate later, the religious and political implications of Vico's theories are often very much in accord with Melville's own in Clarel.

But whereas Vico never abandoned Christianity (nor did Hegel, another philosopher who saw history along

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evolutionary lines), other pre-nineteenth-century writers used the evolutionary model to attack religion more directly as an undesirable vestige of an unenlightened time. According to Eric Sharpe, both Charles De Brosses' Du Culte des dieux fetiches (1760) and N. S. Bergier's L'Origine des dieux de paganisme (1767) "agree...that paganism is characterized by infantile folly, and that whatever else they may or may not need, certainly the 'savages' need to grow up" (Sharpe, p. 19). David Hume's Natural History of Religion (1755) was another notable early example. For Hume, "[t]he primary religion of mankind" does not arise out of any augury of the sublime; rather it "arises chiefly from an anxious fear of future events" (Hume, p. 65), which he has elsewhere described as "the anxious concern for happiness, the dread of future misery, the terror of death, the thirst of revenge, the appetite for food, and other necessaries" (Hume, p. 28). These needs and fears coupled with the harshness of life at its most basic level form the primitive's conception of the divine:

> what ideas will naturally be entertained of invisible, unknown powers, while men lie under dismal apprehensions of any kind, may easily be conceived. Every image of vengeance, severity, cruelty, and malice must occur, and must augment the ghastliness and horror which oppresses the amazed religionist. A panic once seized the mind, the active fancy still farther multiplies the objects of terror;...And no idea of perverse wickedness can be framed, which those terrified devotees do not really, without scruple, apply

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to their deity.

Hume, p. 65

The evolutionary model would reach full flower in the nineteenth century when virtually every branch of European intellectual endeavor would adopt it, culminating in Darwin. Borrowing from Vico, Auguste Comte's Cours de philosophie positive (6 vol., 1830-42) presented the theory ("loi des trois etats") that human intellectual development had historically progressed from a theological stage, in which fate and the mysteries of the world were conceived of in terms of gods, spirits, and mythologies, to a metaphysical stage, wherein explanations were arrived at through essences and other abstractions, to the final positivistic stage of modern science, wherein the limitation of human knowledge is recognized and the pursuit of absolute answers is abandoned in favor of a more pragmatic approach to understanding the world. Sir James Frazier would later employ a similar linear-progression formula in The Golden Bough; A Study in Magic and Religion (1890):

> If then we consider, on the one hand, the essential similarity of man's chief wants everywhere and at all times, and on the other hand, the wide difference between the means he has adopted to satisfy them in different ages, we shall perhaps be disposed to conclude that the movement of the higher thought, so far as we can trace it, has on the whole been from magic through religion to science.
>
> The Golden Bough, p. 824

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Even religion itself was described as undergoing an evolutionary progression, usually moving from an initial state similar to those found in so-called "primitive" cultures to its final incarnation, where it resembled nothing so much as Protestant western Europe. Thus, for Hume, the lowest state of religion is polytheism, which he called "sick men's dreams". But this must gradually evolve into a higher and more cultivated state:

> The mind rises gradually, from inferior to superior: By abstracting from what is imperfect, it forms an idea of perfection: And slowly distinguishing the nobler parts of its own frame from the grosser, it learns only to transfer the former, much elevated and refined, to its divinity.
>
> Hume, p. 24

In The Philosophy of History (1831-2), Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, a devout Lutheran, argued that human history comprised a gradual evolution toward its inevitable conclusion, which was the freedom of the Universal Spirit--a kind of condensation of consciousness--as found in the subjectivity of nineteenth-century Protestant Europe. In detailed chronological discussions of the world's known religions and their respective histories, Hegel "proves" each to be fundamentally inhibiting of this total freedom, and therefore inferior to Lutheranism. However, each religion, he argues, builds in its turn upon what preceded it, so that there is a discernible ascent toward the final

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freedom of Spirit. "History in general," he says, "is therefore the development of Spirit in _Time_" (Hegel, p. 72), a notion partly-endorsed or at least acknowledged and partly-attacked in _Clarel_. In _The Origin of Civilisation and the primitive Condition of Man_ (1870), Sir John Lubbock combined the theories of Comte and Darwin to plot the evolution of religion through a cycle which he thought to be common among all cultures. The lowest stage was atheism (no regular system of belief or mythology), followed by, in ascending order, fetishism, nature-worship or totemism, shamanism, idolatry or anthropomorphism, and finally ethical monotheism (Sharpe, p. 52; Sharpe adds, "The scheme as a whole has little to recommend it"). F. P. Jevons's _Introduction to the History of Religion_ (1896), which Evans-Pritchard hastily dismisses as full of "absurd reconstructions, unsupportable hypotheses and conjectures," proposes an ascending course from totemism to polytheism to montheism (Evans-Pritchard, p. 5). Even such a figure as James Freeman Clarke, who argues throughout his magisterial _Ten Great Religions_ (1871) for a sympathetic and uncondescending view of other religions of the world, ultimately saw them nonetheless in terms of an evolutionary model:

> But else where we see progress, not recession. Geology shows us higher forms of life succeeding to the lower. Botony exhibits the lichens and mosses preparing a soil for more complex forms of vegetation. Civil history shows the savage

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> state giving way to the semi-civilized, and that to the civilized. If heathen religions are a step, a preparation for Christianity, then this law of degrees appears also on religion; then we see an order in the progress of the human soul...Then we can understand why Christ's coming was delayed till the fulness of the time had come. But otherwise all, in this most important sphere of human life, is in disorder, without unity, progress, meaning, or providence.
> Clarke, p. 9

Melville was well aware of the intellectual trends of his time, but he often understood their deeper significance. In the epilogue to Clarel he links Darwin and, by inference, evolutionary theory with Luther:

> If Luther's day expand to Darwin's year,
> Shall that exclude the hope--foreclose the fear?
> IV. xxxv. ll. 1-2

This association, suggesting an inevitable connection between the Protestant Reformation and nineteenth-century science, renders a series of paradoxical, though not necessarily original, questions, the implications of which have dominated the poem throughout: if by making religious belief increasingly impossible scientific materialism becomes the de facto "villain" in Clarel, a by no means absurd proposition given the constant negative overtones directed toward science in the poem as well as its thoroughly disagreeable personification in the character of Margoth, then to what degree has Protestantism specifically contributed to its (science's) historical

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ascent? What is the relationship between Protestantism and science? What hope is there for the Protestant characters in _Clarel_ whose faith, devoid of ritual, tradition, and, it would seem, reverence, must stand naked before the onslaught of positivism?

> But in her Protestant repose
> Snores faith toward her mortal close?

the poem asks (III. v. ll. 73-4). I shall treat these questions in much more detail in the third section of Chapter Two, but raise them here to demonstrate Melville's own understanding and use of this evolutionary paradigm.

But another powerful strain of comparative religious thinking emerged in the nineteenth century, this as a response against eighteenth-century rationalism. The theorists who embraced this view, perhaps influenced by German Romanticism, saw religion as an inward experience, one governed by emotion and awe rather than primitive reason and fear, and in their encounters with the different creeds of the world, they sought to uncover what Basil Willey has called "a common denominator for all religions" (Willey, p. 114). It had been the ancient Stoic philosophers (Chrysippus, Varro, Pausanius, Strabo) who first began to study the "cosmopolitan" (their word) nature of religions, seeking to distill what they called the "natural religion" which is found in "certain beliefs common to

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all cults" (Sharpe, p. 5). The Alexandrian branch of the early Christian church (Clement and Origen) borrowed this idea from the Stoics in their concept of the "logos spermatikos' (the "seminal word"), and there is scriptural authority for this view as well (I direct my reader to Appendix One, where I discuss this in greater detail). In the nineteenth century, Anquetil du Perron's 1802 translation of fifty Upanishads "advanced elaborate arguments to demonstrate that all true wisdom is one" (Sharpe, p. 23). The most powerful figure in nineteenth century comparative religion, Max Muller, echoed this idea in his frequently cited mantra (which he borrowed from Goethe) "he who knows one [religion], knows none," and confidently proclaimed "the true religion of the future will be the fulfillment of all the religions of the past" (Life and Letters, p. 135). It is in this spirit, one which deeply influenced American Transcendentalism, that Ralph Cudworth would write of "the sympathy of all religions" (from Cudworth's 2 vol. The True Intellectual System of the Universe, 1837; cited in Clarke, p. 187), that Thomas Wentworth Higginson would deliver a lecture in Boston in 1871 entitled "The Sympathy of Religions," in which he would state "[t]here is a sympathy in religions, and this sympathy is shown alike in their origin, their records, and their career" (Higginson, p. 6), and that Melville in Clarel would describe "the intersympathy of creeds" in 1876. All of this seemed to bear out Goethe's prophecy

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that "the eighteenth century tended to analysis, but the nineteenth will deal with synthesis" (cited in Clarke, p. 3).

Both of these "motives" were obviously a threat to religious orthodoxy, but for entirely different reasons: the former because it sought to destroy religion outright by declaring it and anachronistic phase through which the human modes of thinking have historically and sequentially evolved on the path to modern positivistic science (itself an orthodoxy); the latter because, in its effort to identify the underlying basis for all religions, it broke down the barriers erected by orthodox doctrine to discover the commonly held truths which were exposed in the process. However, a fundamental antagonism between the two positions arose out of their very different view of the nature and role of religion itself--the one condescending and dismissive, the other sympathetic and inclusive, the first concerned with the relationship between religion and society, the second with matters arising from the individual's need for spiritual fulfillment in pursuing the "truth." Both frequently employed scientific method on their behalf but for entirely contrary reasons. Most importantly, as I shall demonstrate in later chapters, in _Clarel_ Melville uses rhetorical strategies employed by both in his dialogical approach to the topic of comparative religion.

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b. Language and Religion: A Nineteenth-Century Discussion

One key means of finding a bridge between different religions was through the discoveries in the new field of philology. As with so many other positions of Christian orthodoxy, the explanation that language was a divine gift to humans through which God's will and ways could be understood was seriously challenged by the empiricism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In its stead arose new theories regarding the origins of language and its subsequent relation to religion. Theorists such as Condillac, Rosseau, and Maupertiuis, influenced by the eighteenth-century fascination with humans in the primitive state, tended to emphasize nature and animal sounds as the roots of language. But more sophisticated explanations were ventured which attempted to synthesize language, poetry, and religion and myth. Crucial to these new theorists was the syllogistic premise that religion and myth, on the one hand, and language, on the other, were ontologically related: if otherwise disparate languages have a common origin, and if, as the thesis went, all religion and myth consist of language, than these religions and myths must also posses some underlying relationship, some common origin. Thus, in 1786 Sir William Jones first observed that Sanskrit bore Latin and Greek "a strong affinity, both in the roots and verbs and in the forms of grammar, than could possibly have been produced by

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accident" (quoted in Renfrow, p. 9). In 1813 the English scholar Thomas Young first used the phrase "Indo-European" to describe the family of related languages that suddenly seemed to link otherwise unrelated cultures, past and present (Renfrow, p. 11).

A major breakthrough toward scientifically demonstrating the fundamental relationship of different languages originated in the work of Franz Bopp (1791-1867), whose _Uber das Conjugationssytem der Sanskritsprache_ (1816; _On the System of Conjugation in Sanskrit_) demonstrated the common origin of Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, Persian, and German. Bopp's achievement paved the way for later discoveries. Sir Henry Rawlinson (1810-1845), an officer of the British East India Company, deciphered the cuneiform inscription of King Darius on the cliff at Behistun (Bisitun) at the foot of the Zagros Mountains in Iran in 1837-9, a feat which "brought to light the first 'lost' Indo-European language [Old Persian]" (Renfrew, p. 47), an enormous accomplishment which, in turn, allowed access to other ancient languages.[3]

For some comparative religionists of the nineteenth century, these discoveries served to demonstrate an irrefutable relationship between the world's religions. Thus, for James Freeeman Clarke, the relationship between Judaism and Islam is as much a matter of linguistics as it is one of doctrine:

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> Their [Moslems'] claim of being descended from Abraham is confirmed by the unerring evidence of language, The Arabic roots are, nine tenths of the them, identical with the Hebrew; and a similarity of grammatical forms shows a plain glossological relation.
>
> Clarke, p. 452

But the idea that languages may have interrelationships with one another was actually much older than this and had served as the basis for much theorizing on the subject. Vico, for instance, who wrote that "[u]niform ideas origination among entire peoples unknown to each other must have a common ground of truth" (Vico, p. 63, paragraph 144), felt that all languages underwent a similar sequence to the three respective ages of human history (gods, heroes, men): "the first hieroglyphic, with sacred characters; the second symbolic, with heroic characters; the third epistolary, with characters agreed on by the people" (Vico, p. 54, paragraph 52). The hieroglyphic was "a mute language of signs and physical objects having natural relations to the ideas they wished to express" (p. 20, paragraph 32). The middle stage of language, "corresponding to the age of heroes, "was one of heroic emblems...[such as] metaphors, images, similitudes, or comparisons, which, having passed into articulate speech, supplied all the resources of poetic expression" (p. 144, paragraph 438). The last stage of language is one

> using words agreed upon by the people, a language

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> of which they are absolute lords...a language whereby the people may fix the meaning of the laws by which the nobles as well as the plebs are bound.
>
> p. 20, paragraph 32

Moreover, different languages shared certain similarities at each respective stage, despite being utterly unknown to each other. Thus, in the age of heroes, the heroic myths evolved; each language produced its own religious version of Jove, of Hercules (Vico says that "Varro counted a good forty Herculeses among the world's ancient nations, each of which had evolved on its own; p. 10, paragraph 14, also p. 290, paragraph 761), and so forth.

Vico places linguistic tropes in an earlier age--that of heroes--than his own; as Isaiah Berlin writes,

> Metaphor and simile, even allegory, are not... deliberate artifices. They are natural ways of expressing a vision of life different from ours. Men once thought, according to him [Vico], in images rather than concepts...What is for us a less or more conscious use of rhetorical devices, was their sole means of ordering, connecting and conveying what they sensed, observed, remembered, imagined, hoped, feared, worshipped, in short their entire experience.
>
> Berlin, p. 45

But this view--and I shall explore later how Melville in Clarel sometimes uses similar ideas as to linguistic tropes and the evolution of language--, wherein is reflected what Vico calls "poetic logic," is somewhat at odds with that held by other thinkers of the Enlightenment, who regarded

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such rhetorical devices as synthetic affectations designed to convince the emotions of the heart and not the logic of the mind. In Essay Concerning Human Understanding, John Locke asserts that

> But yet if we would speak of things as they are, we must allow that all the art of rhetoric...all the artificial and figurative application of words eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong ideas, move the passions, and thereby mislead the judgment; and so indeed are perfect cheats: and therefore... they are certainly...in all discourses that pretend to inform of instruct, wholly to be avoided.
>
> quoted in Soskice, p. 12

This reaction against the use of tropes became especially pervasive after the Protestant reformation, fueled to a great extent by Protestantism's distrust of forms. In the Sermon on the Mount Christ had strictly warned against embellishing the spoken word (Matthew 5.37) and in the "Age of Reason" this seemed perfectly sound advice; the truth, as expressed by reason and order, does not require such decoration. Milton's God (but not Milton's Satan!) speaks in a plain, unadorned diction, one which amply reveals the recognition that "the ultimate object of all false rhetoric is a visual image commanding obedience to something (Frye, Spiritus Mundi, p. 213). But Iris Murdoch warns

> If we destroy the idols in order to reach

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> something untainted and pure...we render the Divine ineffable, and as such in peril of being judged non-existent. Then the sense of the Divine vanishes in the attempt to preserve it.
> Murdoch, p. 56

But Romanticism, especially German mysticism, its most radical incarnation, drawing on another dearly-held Protestant principle, that of the sovereignty of the individual soul, broke through the barrier erected by eighteenth-century rationalism. A new poetic language gradually emerged, one suffused with both thought and feeling, reason and intuition, intellect and emotion. With it came a new vocabulary of poetic images, and as Edmund Wilson has remarked, "a revolution in the imagery of poetry is in reality a revolution in metaphysics" (Wilson, 1984, p. 12).

A major forerunner of this new wave was the German theologian and philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder (1744--1803). In "Abhandlung uber den Ursprung der Sprache" (1772; "Essay on the Origin of Language"), he both draws on and improves upon the theories of Rosseau and Condillac, locating the origin of language in both feeling and reflection, and concluding that there can be no real knowledge without language. Language may have had an original link with sentient nature (grunts, cries of pain, and so forth), as Rosseau and Condillac maintained, but it has clearly outstripped such a past:

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> A refined, late-invented metaphysical language, a variant--perhaps fourtimes removed--of the original wild mother of the human race, after thousands of years of variation again in its turn refined, civilized, and humanized for hundreds of years of society, cannot know much or anything of the childhood of its earliest forebear.
>
> Herder, p. 91

The original sounds of nature were merely "a language of feeling...a law of nature" (p. 88), "the sap that enlivens the roots of language" (p. 91). It is with the addition of "reason" (p. 100) that these primitive sounds become human language. This occurs, Herder argues, because human activity has expanded far beyond the "sphere" of the other animals, the sphere of an animal being the realm into which it has been born and in which it will spend its entire life (p. 104). The simpler a creature's sphere, the more intensely focused will be its senses, instincts, and artifact-making tendencies. A bee or a spider, for example, lives in a narrow sphere that determines its activity. Each respectively makes simple, specific artifacts (hives, webs) because "the sensitivity, the skills, and the artifactive drive of the animals increase in strength and intensity in inverse proportion to the multitude and multifariousness of their sphere of activity" (p. 105). Thus, "the narrower the sphere of an animal, the less its need for langauge" (p. 105). But, "Man has no such uniform and narrow sphere where only one performance is expected of him: a whole world of ventures and tasks is lying about

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him" (p. 105). In fact, man has wrestled free from instinct and now stands nakedly independent from nature:

> Since he [man] does not fall blindly in any particular spot and does not lie blind in it, he learns to stand free, to find for himself a sphere of self-reflection, and seek his reflection in himself. No longer an infallible machine in the hands of nature, he himself becomes a purpose and an objective of his efforts
> Herder, p. 109

In Herder's view, reason and instinct are fundamentally antithetical to each other's purpose:

> If man had the drives of the animals, he could not have what we now call reason in him; for such drives would pull his forces darkly toward a single point, in such a way that he would have no free sphere of awareness...If man had the senses of the animals, he would have no reason; for the keen alertness of his senses and the mass of perceptions flooding him through them would smother all cool reflection.
> Herder, p. 111

But reason is not a single power, "but an orientation of all the powers and as such a thing peculiar to his [man's] species" (p. 112). It is, moreover, ontologically a part of all humans: "in the first thought of the child this reflection must be apparent" (p. 112). To thus reason and reflect is to make distinctions, and it is in this process of making distinctions that language is born: "Man, placed in the state of reflection which is peculiar to him, with this reflection for the first time given full freedom of

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action, did invent language" (p. 115). Animals are "overcome by sensuousness" (p. 116), which leads to instinctual behavior; language, on the other hand, growing as it does out of the act of making distinctions, is thus intricately tied to signs, "for the difference between one and another can never be recognized through anything but a third...this third, this characteristic mark, becomes an inner characteristic word; so that language follows quite naturally from the initial act of reason" (p. 120). In fact, language and reason are interdependent upon one another: "without language man has no reason, and without reason no language" (p. 121).[4]

However, language for Herder, arising as it does from practical imperative, fails at what could be its most crucial function, for it is finally incapable of expressing "indispensable ideas, innermost feelings and abstractions, for which instead we must resort to metaphysics and...half nonsense" (p. 153); these most intimate yearnings and inarticulate notions and desires can only find expression in the end only with the aid of the sensual:

> Swedenborg, in piecing together his angels and spirits, could not but use snippets from all the senses, and the sublime Klopstock, the great antithesis of the former, could not but build his heaven and hell from sensuous materials.
> Herder, p. 157

The implication here of something so basic and vital

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at the core of the human psyche ("indispensable ideas, innermost feelings") unable to find its material correlative in language may, perhaps, be a part of the larger romantic revolt against eighteenth-century rationalism; but it also expresses a western metaphysical and linguistic principle that extends at least as far back as Plato's _Cratylus_, and which holds that "in the beginning, subject and object, man and nature, sensation and thought, were one; then a great catastrophe divided them; since when they everlastingly seek reunion" (Berlin, p. 14).[5]

Melville understood this concept and frequently had recourse to employ it in some form in his fiction. As early as _Mardi_ the Melvillean narrative voice warns that "words are but algebraic signs, conveying no meaning except what you please[,]" implying that language is nothing more than an unstable tissue behind which reality stands (Chapter 89, p. 269). Later in the novel, this concept is used to depict a platonic view of the soul: the philosopher Babbalanja describes a vision he's had wherein he is guided through heaven:

> Then strange things--soft, sad, and faint, I saw or heard; as when, in sunny, summer seas, down, down, you dive, starting at pensive phantoms, that you can not fix.
>
> "These," breathed my guide, "are spirits in their essences; sad, even in undevelopment. With these, all space is peopled;--all the air is vital with intelligence which seeks embodiment. This it is, that unbeknown to Mardians, causes them to strangely start in solitudes of night, and in the fixed flood of their enchanted noons.

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> From hence, are formed your mortal souls; and all those sad and shadowy dreams, and boundless thoughts man hath, are vague remembrances of the time when the soul's sad germ, wide wandered through these realms. And hence it is, that when ye Mardians feel most sad, then ye feel most immortal."
>
> Chapter 188, p. 636

In Moby-Dick, Ahab admonishes Starbuck in an oft-quoted passage, assuring him that

> All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks. But in each event--in the living act, the undoubted deed--there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask.
>
> Chapter 36, p. 139

Language might here be included among Ahab's "visible objects" insofar as it resembles for Melville nothing so much as a transient form attempting to conceptualize the abstract. Much later in the book, Ishmael will abandon his several-chapters-long attempt to summarize what a whale is, sadly admitting "[t]he more I consider this mighty tail [of the whale], the more do I deplore my inability to express it...Dissect him how I may, then, I but go skin deep; I know him not and never will" (Chapter 86, p. 295). Later still, he will discover that essentially the same thing is true of human beings: "[f]or whatever was woundrous and fearful in man, never yet was put into words" (Chapter 110, p. 365). In Chapter 93, after Pip jumps overboard and is subsequently rescued but only after being helplessly

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tossed about by the merciless ocean, he finds himself unable to relate to his fellows the view of the workings of the cosmos he's experienced; they lable him an "idiot" and "mad," so "man's insanity is heaven's sense; and wandering from all mortal reason, man comes at last to that celestial thought, which to reason is absurd and frantic" (pp. 321--2).[6]

In Pierre the idea is centered around Pierre's authorial ambitions; what he writes he finds to be a mere shadow of what he felt

> Isabel, in that chest are things which in the hour of composition, I thought the very heavens looked in from the windows in astonishment at their beauty and power. Then, afterward, when days cooled me down, and again I took them up and scanned them, some underlying suspicions intruded; but in the open air, I recalled the fresh, unwritten images of the bungling written things [what writer has not felt this?]; then I felt bouyant and triumphant again; as if by the act of ideal recalling, I had, forsooth, transferred the perfect ideal to the miserable written attempt at embodying it.
> Book 19, p. 309

Isabel's "mystic" guitar-playing is an inspiration to Pierre who "felt chapter after chapter [of his novels] born of its wondrous suggestiveness;" but the works Pierre feels so inspired to write are

> eternally incapable of being translated into words; for where the deepest words end, there music begins with its supersensuous and all-

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confounding intimations.
Book 21, p. 320

Shortly thereafter, the narrator observes that "all the great books in the world are but the mutilated shadowings-forth of invisible and eternally embodied images in the soul" (Book 21, p. 322).

Allan Mandelbaum writes, "[i]f it does nothing else, the problem of ineffability spans the sacred and the secular--and reminds us how theology, that strange discipline of analysis around a center that is unanalyzable, not only engendered contemporary structures, but points to terrain we have yet to encounter" (Hawkins and Schotter, p. vii). Within a few decades of the publication of _Clarel_, Western poetic language would make such an "encounter" and undergo a startling and radical change. Even as Melville toiled at his huge poem the Symbolist movement was already underway in France, a movement which had reimagined the poetic landscape by rescuing language (and imagery) from the implacable dead-end of reason, infusing it instead with a supple but potent emotional and sensual capability which allowed it to express much more of the hidden life of the unconscious. _Clarel_, therefore, stands right on the cusp of a revolutionary breakthrough. One likes to imagine that the iconoclastic creator of the startling _Mardi_, _Moby-Dick_, and _The Confidence-Man_, highly innovative works that greatly expanded the perimeters of the novelistic

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genre (The Confidence-Man reads like an early work by William Gaddis), would be equally compelled to "break down barriers" when he fixed his attentions on poetry, and especially to the one work to which he devoted more time and effort than any other in his career. However, on closer inspection, this does not appear to be the case. Matthew Arnold, whom Melville "took...to be his most serious poetic contemporary" (Bezanson, in Clarel, p. 527; Melville also greatly admired James Thomson, especially "The City of the Dreadful Night"), wrote

> It is comparatively a small matter to express one's self well, if one will be content with not expressing much, with expressing only trite ideas; the problem is to express new and profound ideas in a perfectly sound and classical style.
> Essays in Criticism, p. 59

In Melville's copy of this volume, he underlined, significantly enough, everything that followed the semi-colon (Bezanson, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, pp. 63-4). The "perfectly sound and classical style" is the style of Clarel, and indeed, it is the unreconstructed prose style of that last neoclassical masterpiece, Billy-Budd. Whether Melville was aware of the poetic revolution in France or not (and it would appear he was not), and despite what must have been his undoubted familiarity with Whitman and such wonderful works as Tennyson's Maud (he devoured Victorian poets), his evolution as an artist and as a man

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brought him, as it has for so many other young radicals through history, to finally seek his solace in more classical and formal venues (one thinks of Stravinsky).

Hence, we are back to the "problem" of language; whatever the specific reason, time and again language (or its absence) becomes a factor in _Clarel_; the poem seems somehow painfully "aware" of its inability to express what it desperately needs to at certain times. There are at least twenty-one "silences" or moments without words in _Clarel_, specific points where characters suddenly find themselves either transported into an extra-lingual experience with one another, where meaning is inferred from something other than--and implicitly "deeper" than--words, and understanding is thus attained through means other than mere rational cognition, or else moments where words fail altogether in their attempt to express the inner life, ideas, and feelings that lack, as yet, a commensurate outer form such as was evolving in France. As I shall demonstrate in Chapter Two, this is an especially prickly problem for the Protestant characters in _Clarel_. Tocqueville wrote of the American people, shaped as they are by Protestant habits of thinking, that

> they are constantly brought back to their own reason as the most obvious and proximate source of truth. It is not only confidence in this or that man which is destroyed, but the disposition for trusting the authority of any man [or any _thing_] whatsoever. Every one shuts himself up in his own breast, and affects from that point

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to judge the world.

Tocqueville, p. 144

So it is that Clarel, Rolfe, Vine, and the pre-conversion Nathan are trapped in this tyranny of self and of reason (which for Herder would also be a tyranny of language), incapable, as Rolfe observes, of harboring any kind of reverence toward anything (II. xxvi. ll. 151-3), imprisoned in what the narrator of the poem would call (when describing, significantly enough, Clarel observing the silent and stoic calm of Djalea smoking his pipe) the "waste of words, that waste of all" (III. v. l. 186).[7]

Before finally turning my attention to Clarel, I should first like to closely examine some of the figures of nineteenth-century comparative religion whose work in the field may be seen as contemporaneous with Melville's own. First I shall explore (with an admittedly immense sense of awe and respect) the ideas of Max Muller, for whom language and religion were inextricably bound, and then the school of "Theoretic Theology" (Muller's term), those who examine the doctrines, sacred texts, and histories of the world's religions, often in the hopes of determining underlying similarities. To this group belong such figures as Frederick Denison Maurice, James Freeman Clarke, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, and Max Muller himself.

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c. Max Muller: A Nineteenth-Century Proteus

According to The Encylcopedia of Religion, Max Muller (1823-1900) "wrote and edited more than one hundred books" (1987 ed., vol. 10, S. V. "Muller, E. Max"). A much beloved man, a precociously gifted linguist and scholar of immense erudition who lived most of his life away from his native land writing in a foreign tongue, he is the one figure most often recognized as the founder of the new science of comparative religion. Mircea Eliade, who had occasion to severely criticize some of Muller's theories, wrote "the history of religions first really entered into its own with Max Muller" (The Sacred and the Profane, p. 229); Jaoachim Wach begins The Complete Study of Religions (1955) with "There can be little doubt that the modern comparative study of religions began with Max Muller" (cited in Masuzawa, p. 58); and I have already noted that Eric Sharpe has referred to Muller as "the father of comparative religion." And yet, as Tomoko Masuzawa has recently observed in In Search of Dreamtime: The Quest for the Origin of Religion (1993), Muller's pioneering work has gone virtually ignored in this century, and "this long-departed founder of the discipline is placed securely in his venerable position because he is truly fossil" (Masuzawa, p. 59). Part of the reason for this, Masuzawa argues, emerges from the fact that there are, or were, in effect, 'two" Mullers: the popularizer of the new science who managed to reach

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a broad public through his lectures and occasional essays, and the less well-known linguist/scholar who wrote complex philogical works aimed at a strictly professional audience; Masuzawa calls these the "ultimately unreconciled aspects of his professional career" (p. 61). Muller was, and is, best known as the head of the so-called (and largely misunderstood) Nature/Myth school, one which was attacked even in his own lifetime and which has been largely eclipsed in the twentieth century by the work of such figures as Durkheim, Eliade, and Levi-Strauss. This is a pity. There's much to be learned from him and his basic concerns still possess a validity, for as Masuzawa observes in an insight Melville would have roundly seconded, despite vigorous twentieth-century criticisms,

> the fundamental "insight" of the myth-ritual school is still viable and continues to inform our sense of historicity, cultural diversity, and global plenitude--to the extent that we have not grown sufficiently suspicious of what is invested in these latter notions.
> Masuzawa, p. 3

In the larger picture, he belongs to what would become the psychological strain of comparative religion, which would include Frazer Freud, Jung, and his contemporary and critic, E. B. Tylor, in contrast to the sociological theorists such as Marx, Durkheim, Levy-Bruhl, and so forth.

The son of the German Romantic poet Wilhelm Muller (1794-1827), some of whose poems Schubert set to music

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as _Die schone Mullerin_ and _Winterreise_, Friedrich Max Muller was born in Germany on December 6, 1823. He studied philosophy and the classics at the University of Leipzig, and completed a doctoral dissertation on Spinoza's _Ethics_ in 1843. In 1846, Muller went to London to supervise the massive production of the Sanskrit text of the _Rig Veda_, which was being published there by the Oxford University Press; he never returned to his homeland except for brief trips. His multitudinous works were written and published in English, and he converted from his native Lutheranism to the Church of England, because, significantly enough, "I think its members enjoy greater freedom and more immunity from priestcraft than those of any other Church" (_Life and Letters_, I. p. 391).

Muller called comparative religion "the science of religion," and it was with a scientist's reverence for arriving at the heart of objective truth (which is, I take it, a somewhat outmoded concept!), amid a sea of baffling fact that he pursued his inquiry into the nature of religion. In his 1873 _Introduction to the Science of Religion_, a volume dedicated, significantly enough, to Emerson "...in acknowledgment of constant refreshment of head and heart derived from his writings during the past twenty-five years" (p. v), Muller states this position unapologetically:

> a comparison of all the religions of the world,

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> in which none can claim privileged position, will no doubt seem to many dangerous and reprehensible, because ignoring that peculiar reverence which everybody, down to the mere fetish worshipper, feels for his _own_ religion and for his _own_ God. Let me say then at once that I myself shared these misgivings, but that I have tried to overcome them, because I would not and could not allow myself to surrender wither what I hold to be the truth, _or what I hold still dearer than truth, the right of testing truth_ [emphasis mine in last sentence].
>
> _Ibid_. pp. 9-10

Muller would divide the science of religion into two respective disciplines, "Comparative Theology" and "Theoretic Theology." The former is concerned with the understanding of religion through the study of its historical aspect and forms; the latter seeks "to explain the conditions under which religion, whether in its highest or its lowest form, is possible" (_Ibid_. p. 22). The former assumes an objective, ecclesiastical posture, and seeks to understand religions by determining similarities and differences through classification; the latter, while also objective, is also more philosophical and dialectical, examining the teachings and claims of different religions in an effort to arrive at some overall view of religious "truth." Muller concedes that Theoretic Theology was, in his time, still in its incipient stage; he argues that it "ought not to be taken up till all the evidence that can possibly be gained from a comparative study of religions of the world has been fully collected, classified, and analysed," but suggests that such a time is not far off

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(Ibid. p, 22).

Like William James and Heidegger--and certainly Melville--, Muller makes the essentially existentialist distinction between the orthodox, doctrinal belief which, collectively taken, becomes the historical record of a religion, and the personal kind of experience which, in his view, emerges from the transaction between the human imagination and Nature;[8] in the latter is found the seed of the former:

> As there is a faculty of speech, independent of all the historical forms of language, so there is a faculty of faith in man, independent of all historical religions...we mean a mental faculty, that faculty which, independent of, nay in spite of sense and reason, enables man to apprehend the Infinite under different names, and under varying disguises. Without that faculty, no religion, not even the lowest worship of idols and fetishes, would be possible; and if we will but listen attentively, we can hear in all religions a groaning of the spirit, a struggle to conceive the inconceivable, to utter the unutterable, a longing after the Infinite, a love of God.
>
> Ibid., p. 17-18

However, Muller is not merely rehearsing the eighteenth-century's discussion of Deism; he in fact makes a strong argument against one of its fundamental principles when he states flatly that "[t]here has never been any real religion, consisting exclusively of the pure and simple tenets of Natural Religion" (Ibid., p. 127). Rather, he demonstrates a strong correlation between revealed religion

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and natural religion:

> ...no religion, though founded on revelation, can ever be entirely separated from natural religion. The tenets of natural religion, though they never constituted by themselves a real historical religion, supply the only ground on which revealed religions can stand...If we took away that soil...we should degrade revealed religion by changing it into a mere formula, to be accepted by a recipient incapable of questioning, weighing, and appreciating its truth; we should indeed have the germ, but we should have thrown away the congenial soil in which alone the germs of revealed truth can live and grow.
>
> Ibid., pp. 132-3

For Muller, who believed that "all higher knowledge is acquired by comparison, and rests on comparison" (Ibid., p. 12), the key to locating the workings of the innate religious faculty lay in the recovery of the essences of ancient languages. This became, in part, a rejection of orthodoxy; as Eric Sharpe observes, Muller "believed that religion was subject to inevitable decline under the dead hand of institutionalism" (Sharpe, p. 39); to render the original meaning and intensity of religion, we must "learn to speak, and not only to speak, but also to think the language of the ancient world" (Introduction to the Science of Religion, p. 63).

Like Vico, Muller envisages a very early point in the development of a language, a point where that language was essentially conceptual. It was at this point that the original religious meanings were conceived and articulated

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with no differentiation between the metaphysical and the physical:

> What with us is a heavenly message, or a godsend, was to them a winged messenger; what we call divine guidance, they speak of as a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way, and a pillar of light to give them light; a refuge from the storm, and a shadow from the heat.
>
> *Ibid*., p. 42-3

The problem occurred during the evolution of the language, when, according to Muller, an inevitable process transpired that "sanctioned a distinction between the concrete and the abstract, between the purely spiritual as opposed to the coarsely material" (*Ibid*., p. 43). Muller calls this the "infantine disease" of language (p. 44), and it is the task of the science of religion, using the tools of linguistics, to restore the original connection, and thus, the original and precise meanings, since "in the early history of the human intellect, there exists the most intimate relationship between language, religion, and nationality" (*Ibid*. p. 143).

Muller begins his actual study of religion by declaring that it was language and, more importantly, religion which first caused ancient peoples to band together. This is shortly augmented by law, with marriage being "the most important of civil acts, the very foundation of life" (*Ibid*., p. 153; Vico maintained that three conditions characterize all groups of peoples living in community:

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"all have some religion, all contract solemn marriages, all bury their dead," Vico, paragraph 333, p. 97). Examining early cultures, Muller determines "how at all events early religion and early language are most intimately connected" (Introduction to the Science of Religion, p. 154). This connection becomes especially important when Muller examines the origin of religion. He says that religion began with what he calls a "mental yearning" (Ibid., p. 277), which is a longing by the human imagination to express the infinite:

> There was in the heart of man, from the very first a feeling of incompleteness, of weakness, of dependence, whatever we like to call it in our [modern] abstract language...In addition to all the impressions which he received from the outer world, there was in the heart of man a stronger impulse from within--a sigh, a yearning, a call for something that should not come and go like everything else, that should be before, and after, and for ever, that should hold and support everything, that should make man feel at home in this strange world.
>
> Ibid., p. 270-1

Stirred by this feeling the imagination attempts to give it verbal form, since "it could not be fully grasped or clearly conceived except by naming it" (Ibid. p. 271). But as Muller points out, echoing Vico and Herder, the process is necessarily metaphoric because "[i]t is impossible to express abstract ideas [in the ancient languages] except by metaphor, and it is not too much to say that the whole dictionary of ancient religions is made

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up of metaphors" (Ibid., p. 267). Hence, what better to express this idea of the infinite than a word or phrase already in the language which seemed somehow analogous:

> The brilliant sky was, no doubt, the most exalted, it was the only unchanging and infinite being that had received a name, and that could lend its name to that yet unborn idea of the Infinite which disquieted the human mind.
> Ibid., p. 272

Indeed, Muller has already demonstrated that the respective words for "God" in the Aryan and Turanian Ur-languages (i.e., pre-separation languages) were "Dyaus [Dyaus Pitar]" and "Tien," both of which originally meant "sky" (Ibid., p. 171, 193. The corresponding word of the third great linguistic branch, the Semitic, was "El," which simply means "strong" [p. 177], but Muller has pointed out that the meaning of the Semitic gods' names "is more general" than their Aryan counterparts [p. 176]). It's most important to note, as Muller's point has been--and still is--often misunderstood, that it *isn't* the sky or any aspect of nature that is worshipped, nor was it at first mere nature-worship (Ibid., p. 172). Rather, the sky seemed to be the best physical correlative to the inward feeling for the Infinite. However, and this is Muller's key point, the distinction was soon blurred:

> it was impossible to preserve it from being misunderstood. The first step downwards would

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> be to look upon the sky as the abode of that Being which was called by the same name; the next step would be to forget altogether what was behind the name, and to implore the sky, the visible canopy over our heads, to send rain, to protect the fields, the cattle, and the corn, to give man his daily bread.
> Ibid., p. 273

Muller calls this "the 'dialectic growth and decay,' or, if you like, the 'dialectic life of religion'" (Ibid., p. 274); recover these original meanings, he suggests, and we can then study the religions in their pristine forms and in their relationships to one another.

When Muller somewhat tentatively turns his attention to Theoretic Theology (see page 48) he show himself to be a sensitive and sympathetic--if sometimes patronizing--student of the world's religions. As we'll see with James Freeman Clarke, Muller argues with great force and authority against those Christian apologists who were prone to view other religions as evil or idolatrous:

> If we believe that there is a God, and that He created heaven and earth, and that He ruleth the world by His unceasing providence, we cannot believe that millions of human beings, all created like ourselves in the image of God, were, in their time of ignorance, so utterly abandoned that their whole religion was a falsehood, their whole worship a farce, their whole life a mockery. An honest and independent study of the religions of the world will teach us that it is not so.
> Introduction to the Science of Religion, p. 226

Religion, he argues, must transcend dogma, and reflect

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the complexity of the human condition:

> If religion cannot accommodate itself on the one side to the capacity of children, or if on the other side it fails to satisfy the requirements of men, it has lost its vitality.
> Ibid. p. 275

For Muller, religion begins in something innate in human nature, something which possesses "[a]n intuition of God, a sense of human weakness and dependence, a belief in a Divine government of the world, a distinction between good and evil, and a hope of a better life" (Chips From a German Workshop, p. x); all religions, according to Muller, comprise these elements which pattern themselves in such a way as to reveal their underlying commonality. Thus,

> When Plato says that men ought to strive after likeness with God, do you think he thought of Jupiter, or Mars, or Mercury? When another poet exclaimed that the conscience is a god for all men, was he so very far from a knowledge of the true God?
> Introduction to The Science of Religion, p. 250

Not surprisingly, as we have seen, Muller finds many similarities between religions once their rigid doctrines are removed. We find, for example, that "between the language of Buddha and his disciples and the language of Christ and His apostles there are strange coincidences. Even some of the Buddhist legends and parables sound as

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if taken from the New Testament, though we know that many of them existed before the beginning of the Christian era" (*Ibid*., p. 243).

I shall have occasion to refer back to Muller with great frequency in the ensuing chapters; his work in the fields of Comparative and Theoretic Theology is of vast importance to my project, but I must now turn to a few exponents of the latter discipline to complete my overview of nineteenth-century comparative religious thinking.

d. "The intersympathy of creeds"

I have used, and will continue to use, Melville's term "the intersympathy of creeds" throughout this discussion. The phrase occurs quite early in the poem (I. v.), and, as such, provides a context for the poem's subsequent discourse. Not only is it an important theological idea to ponder when considering *Clarel*, it also serves to place Melville's thought in the midst of the nineteenth-century's liberal religious tradition, one exemplified in the works of such writers as Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Frederick Denison Maurice, James Freeman Clarke, and Max Muller, among many others. By juxtaposing Melville with these thinkers we can better understand both what their beliefs were, and what Melville's own position in the matter was.

James Freeman Clarke (1810-1888), the Unitarian

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minister, Harvard professor of religion, intimate of Emerson, Holmes, and Hawthorne, and a family friend of the Melville's, commences his 2 volume study _Ten Great Religions_ (1871) by stating that "[t]he work of Comparative Theology is to do equal justice to all the religious tendencies of mankind," a task it performs by pursuing an "impartial course" (Clarke, p. 3, 4). I've already discussed Clarke's methodology earlier, finding it to be one of a synthesis achieved through an analysis of both the differences _and_ similarities of the world's religions. Like Muller, Clarke is dismissive of those comparative religionists who would find similarities too quickly:

> There _is_ indeed what [Ralph] Cudworth has called "the sympathy of all religions," [in _The True Intellectual System of the Universe_, 2 vols, America edition 1837; Clarke gives no page number] but it cannot be demonstrated by the easy process of gathering a few similar texts from Confucius, the Vedas, and the Gospels, and then announcing that they all teach the same thing.
> Clarke, p. 187

Nonetheless, Clarke finds similarities between all kinds of religions throughout his discussion, arguing that Christianity's dismissal of the so-called "pagan" systems of belief, a dismissal based on the perception of unvirtuous and idolatrous behavior in these systems was, in fact, rooted in mistruth and misunderstanding. He states unequivocally:

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> We do not believe that they [nonChristian religions] originated in human fraud, that their essence is superstition, that there is more falsehood that truth in their doctrines, that their moral tendency is mainly injurious, or that they continually degenerate into greater evil...the following considerations may tend to show that all the religions of the earth are providential, and that all tend to benefit mankind.
>
> Clarke, p. 6

"Can it be," he asks rhetorically, "that God has left himself without a witness in the world, except among the Hebrews in ancient times and the Christians in modern?" (Ibid, p. 8). Rather, God "has caused some to be born in India, where that can only hear of him through Brahmanism; and some in China where they can know him only through Buddha and Confucius" (Ibid. p, 8).

And yet, for Clarke, the other religions of the world are ultimately stepping stones or Christianity. All contain substantial truths and at one time served a vital service in God's divine plan; but each is finally flawed in its own way, and can only find whatever it is it lacks in the doctrines of Christianity:

> For if we can make it appear, by a fair survey of the principal religions of the world, that, while they are ethnic or local, Christianity is catholic and universal; that, while they are defective, possessing some truths and wanting others, Christianity possesses all; and that, while they are stationary, Christianity is progressive; it will not then be necessary to discuss in what sense it is a supernatural religion.
>
> Clarke, p. 14

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Thus, Islam is "in reality a Judaizing Christian sect" and "Mohammad is a schoolmaster to bring men to Christ" (Ibid., p. 19). Judaism (the other Semitic religion) has failed in its effort to become universal because "it sought proselytes instead of making converts" (p. 19). Brahmanism "is complete on the side of spirit, defective on the side of matter; full as regards the infinite, empty of the finite...It is a vast system of spiritual pantheism, in which there is no reality but God, all else being Maya, or illusion" (p. 21). Buddhism displays precisely the opposite qualities: "[w]here Brahmanism is strong, it [Buddhism] is weak; where Brahmanism is weak, it is strong. It recognizes man, not God; the soul, not the all; the finite, not the infinite; morality, not piety" (pp. 21--2). Confucianism fails because of "the fearful ennui, the moral death, which falls on a people among whom there are no such things as hope, expectation, or the sense of progress" (p. 22). Zoroastrianism presents the opposite problem in its view of life as a fearsome war between good and evil forces: "[i]f the everlasting peace of China tends to moral stagnation and death, the perpetual struggle and conflict of Persia tends to exhaustion. The Persian empire rushed through a short career to its tomb; the Chinese empire vegetates, unchanged, through a myriad of years" (p. 23). Only Christianity "teaches the unity of God not merely as a supremacy of power and will [as does, say, Islam], but as a supremacy of love and wisdom" (p. 18):

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> Christianity, being not a system, but
> a life not a creed or a form, but a
> spirit; is able to meet all the changing
> wants of an advancing civilization by new
> developments and adaptations, constantly
> feeding the life of man at its roots by
> fresh supplies of faith in God and faith
> in man.
>
> Clarke, p. 31

It is in the understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of a religion that a true estimate of its character can be made. This, in turn, makes it possible for "a higher religion," since "the universal religion [of which Christianity, for Clarke, is the greatest avatar] must root itself in the decaying soil of partial [i.e., flawed] religions" (p. 2). As I shall explore in both Chapter Two and Chapter Six, these conclusions are not unlike some similar ideas Melville examines in Clarel, where various claims of different religions are, in effect, pitted against one another, and from the debris of their encounter, what I shall call the "breakdown of orthodoxies," a return to fundamental sources of belief is fashioned.

Despite his own warning against drawing conclusions too quickly, Clarke carefully notes throughout his long study the shared narratives, images, and close analogies in traditions, practices, and sacred texts of the world's religions, some of which are quite compelling. In his discussion of the ancient Egyptian religion, for example, he says that "[m]any of the virtues which we are apt to suppose a monopoly of Christian culture appear as the ideal

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of these old Egyptians" (p. 221). Thus, after describing several inscriptions on Egyptian tombs which celebrate the sinlessness of the interred, he remarks, "[s]ome of these declarations, in their 'self-pleasing pride' of virtue, remind one of the noble justification of himself by the Patriarch Job" (p. 221). An Egyptian papyrus, which Clarke suggests may be "the oldest book in the world," contains

> practical philosophy like that of Solomon in his proverbs. It glorifies, like the Proverbs, wisdom. It says that "man's heart rules the man," that "the bad man's life is what the wise know to be death," that "what we say in secret is known to him who made our interior nature," that "he who made us is present with us though we are alone."
>
> Clarke, p. 249

Clarke then asks, "Is not the human race one, when this Egyptian four thousand years ago, talks of life as Solomon spoke on thousand years after, in Judea; and as Benjamin Franklin spoke, three thousand years after Solomon, in America?" (p. 249).

In his discussion of Hinduism, a religion which, as we have seen, he feels is too deeply steeped in spiritualism to have any practical application in the material world, Clarke finds the nativity of Krishna to resemble Christ's "in the gospels in this, that the tyrant whom he [Krishna] came to destroy sought to kill him, but a heavenly voice told the father to fly with the child across the Jumna,

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and the tyrant, like Herod, killed the infants of the village" (p. 134). Clarke feels that Christianity "meets and accepts the truth of Brahmanism" (p. 136), and that it complements the older religion's omissions ("holding to eternity, it [Hinduism] omits time, and so loses history" [p. 136]) "by adding to eternity time, to the infinite the finite, to god as spirit God as nature and providence" (p. 137).

Of the Zoroastrian account of Ormuzd (also Ahura Mazda, the 'good' god of the religion) allowing Ahriman (also Angra Mainyu, its 'bad' god) to let loose a serpent into the Aryan homeland and thus effect a change in the climate, Clarke remarks "the serpent entering into the Iranic Eden is one of the curious coincidences of the Iranic and Hebrew traditions" (footnote, p. 186); but this is just the beginning. Clarke believes the highly moralistic doctrine of Zoroastrianism and its depiction of the dualist struggle between invisible forces of good and evil had a profound effect on the Hebrews (p. 187), and that

> Of this system we will say, in conclusion, that in some respects it comes nearer to Christianity than any other...Christianity has probably received from it, through Judaism, its doctrines of angels and evils, and its tendency to establish evil in the world as the permanent and equal adversary of good...It was after the return from Babylon that the Devil and demons, in conflict with man, became a part of the company of spiritual beings in the Jewish mythology...After the captivity the horizon of the Jewish mind enlarged, and it took in the conception of God as allowing freedom to man and angels...and a

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> resurrection for ultimate judgment. These doctrines have been supposed, with good reason, to have come to the Jews from the great system of Zoroaster.
>
> Clarke, pp. 204-5

As these are major tenets of Christianity, received through Judaism, Zoroastrianism is obviously an important player in the world's religious history, and no reader of Melville can fail to notice his great interest in the religion.

But it is in his discussions of Buddhism that Clarke makes his most interesting comparisons and conclusions. Buddhism was a relatively new addition to the nineteenth-century comparative religious scene (Clarke, p. 146), and one which posed some serious problems for the comparative religionist seeking to find analogies. A highly moral religion with an impeccably pure and untroubled history (unlike Christianity's violent and often uncharitable past), it was the one system of belief which seemed to present the greatest "threat" to even the most sympathetic comparative religionist. Here was a religion driven by at least as high a standard of ethics that Christianity claimed, moreover, one which, in practice, had proved far less hypocritical and more pious, and yet (its dirty little secret) which did not, in the final analysis, seem to have a deity of any kind! It perpetually perplexed and frustrated the annotators who held in high esteem its ethical teachings and practice while loathing its atheistic doctrine. Max Muller called it "purely atheistic," and yet says that

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it advocated "the highest morality that was ever taught before the rise of Christianity"; later he remarks "[i]n no religion are we so constantly reminded of our own as in Buddhism, and yet in no religion has man been drawn so far from the truth as in the religion of Buddhism" (Introduction to the Science of Religion, pp. 142, 143, 242). Muller seems finally somewhat confounded by the religion, even helpless:

> In one portion of the Buddhist canon the most extreme views of nihilism are put in his mouth. All we can say is that the canon is later than Buddha, and that in the same canon the founder of Buddhism, after having entered into Nirvana is still spoken of as living, nay, as showing himself to those who believe in him...we confess that we cannot bring ourselves to believe that the reformer of India, the teacher of so perfect a code of morality, the young prince who gave up all he had in order to help those whom he saw afflicted in mind, body, or estate...should have thrown away one of the most powerful weapons in the hands of every religious teacher,--the belief in a future life; and should not have seen, that if this life was sooner or later to end in nothing, it was hardly worth the trouble which he took himself, or the sacrifices which he imposed on his disciples.
> Chips From a German Workshop, pp. 230-31

Both Muller and Clarke recount the vicious attack against the religion by Barthelemy Saint-Hilaire in his 1860 study, Le Bouddha et sa Religion (Clarke, pp. 165-7; Muller, Chips From a German Workshop, p. 181); Muller defends Buddhism against the extremity of Saint-Hilaire's position, despite his own aforementioned reservations.

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Clarke sees Buddhism as having marked similarities with two of the three major strains of Christianity, Catholicism and Protestantism. So similar are the external resemblances to Catholicism "that the first Catholic missionaries who encountered the priests of Buddha were confounded, and thought that Satan had been mocking their sacred rites" (Ten Great Religions, p. 139); these include the sacred vows taken by the priests, many of the sacerdotal functions and ceremonies, and the rites and ornaments. Max Muller recounts that the Catholic Abbe Huc "pointed out the similarities between the Buddhist and Roman Catholic ceremonials with such 'naivete', that, to his surprise, he found his delightful Travels in Tibet placed on the index [expurgatorius]" (Chips From a German Workshop, vol. 1, p. 187). Christians had argued that the similarity between the practices of the two religions was due to the influence of the Nestorian missionaries, very early Protestant-like believers of the seventh century (diffusionism), but Clarke observes that Buddhism dates back 500 years before Christ, and that "[p]ossibly, therefore, the resemblances may be the result of common human tendencies working out, independently the same result... [but] the Buddhists may claim originality, on the ground of antiquity" (Clarke, p. 142).

But, as Clarke points out, the relationship between Buddhism and Protestantism is "deeper and more essential" (Clarke, p. 142), a view taken by other commentators as

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well;[9] this closeness is born out in the subtitle he chooses for his chapter on Buddhism, "The Protestantism of the East." Like Muller and, more recently, Huston Smith, Clarke sees Buddhism as essentially a corrective to the dead, frozen forms of the ossified Hindu rituals and beliefs. Acknowledging that he's speaking in most general terms, Clarke says that "the human mind in Asia went through the same course of experience, afterward repeated in Europe. It protested, in the interest of humanity, against the oppression of a priestly caste" (Clarke, pp. 142-3) and, one might add, the remoteness of the religion. Thus,

> Buddhism, like Protestantism, revolted and established a doctrine of individual salvation based on personal character...Brahmanism, like the Church of Rome, teaches an exclusive spiritualism, glorifying penances and martyrdom, and considers the body the enemy of the soul. But Buddhism and Protestantism accept nature and its laws, and make a religion of humanity as well as devotion...Buddhism in Asia, like Protestantism in Europe, is a revolt of nature against spirit, of humanity against caste, of individual freedom against the despotism of an order, of salvation by faith against salvation by sacraments.
>
> Clarke, p. 143

This much, in-and-of-itself, would pose little problem to the comparative religionist attempting to find God revealed through all religions. In fact, given the virtually unblemished history of Buddhism--its high ethical character and the devout morality of its adherents--it would seem to epitomize all the best qualities after which Christianity

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had so self-consciously striven for nearly two thousand years. However, to the frequent frustration or outrage of so many of the commentators, the comparison falls apart at its most crucial crux:

> as all revolts are apt to go too far, so it has been with Buddhism. In asserting the rights of nature against the tyranny of spirit, Buddhism has lost God. There is in Buddhism neither the creation nor Creator...While in Brahmanism absolute spirit is the only reality, and this world is an illusion [Maya], the Buddhists know only this world, and the eternal world is so entirely unknown as to be equivalent to nullity.
> Clarke, p. 143

Clarke's 'solution'--his attempt to demonstrate Christianity possesses more universal appeal and completeness than Buddhism--is to show, not altogether convincingly, that whereas Buddhism is finally driven by self-interest ("each man's object is to save his own soul" p. 165), the Protestant Christian is guided by a sense of altruistic benevolence derived from a knowledge of God's love, and that the latter is therefore also granted a sense of hope in the promise of eternal life (which seems to me the very thing Clarke accuses the Buddhist believer of being guilty of--concern for his own soul). Thus,

> [the] idea of the good does not appear in Buddhism...not a spark of the divine flame--that which to see and show has given immortal glory to Plato and Socrates--has descended on Sakya-Muni [another name by which Buddha was known, meaning "the hermit of the race of Sakya"]. The

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> notion of rewards, substituted for that of infinite beauty, has perverted everything in this system.
>
> Clarke, p. 166

It is quite sad--even painful--to see Clarke, who proves himself an intelligent, fair, and insightful commentator throughout _Ten Great Religions_, being so blissfully unaware or unwilling to acknowledge these same realities in his own Protestantism, to be blind to the multitude of ways in which it, too, had been secularized and perverted in the commercialism, materialism, and nationalism of nineteenth-century American culture, how it had also become--or always had been--a matter of self-interest. Max Weber was seven years old the year _Ten Great Religions_ was published; Thorstein Veblen was fourteen. The excoriation of the American social/religious fabric, much anticipated in _Democracy in America_, had not yet fully begun. But Melville could already lay claim to being something of a pioneer in this field; _Typee_, _Omoo_, _Mardi_, _Moby-Dick_, _Pierre_, and especially "Bartleby the Scrivener" and _The Confidence-Man_ all contained scathing attacks against the self-serving and often hypocritical nature of the uniquely American brand of Protestantism and its secularized offspring Transcendentalism. In these works is a deep understanding of the complex relationship between religion and American society, a topic which, as I shall explore in detail in Chapter Two, becomes of vital

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importance in Clarel.

A slightly different approach to comparative religion is taken by the liberal English theologian and Anglican minister, Frederick Denison Maurice, in his early work The World's Religions (London, 1846). This book is actually a compilation of lectures originally delivered as part of the Boyle Lecture series, a series established in 1691 by the chemist and natural philosopher Robert Boyle, to be delivered annually for the purpose, in Boyle's words, of "proving the Christian Religion against notorious Infidels, to wit, Atheists, Theists, Pagans, Jews, and Mahometans" quoted in Maurice, p. 1). Maurice is patient but dismissive of Boyle's militant evangelical exhortation, stating,

> A man who though lightly or contemptuously of any of these [Hinduism, Islam, Judaism], or of their arguments--who had not earnestly considered what they would have to say, and what he had to tell them--could not be expected to do them much good.
>
> Maurice, p. 3

Recognizing that he lived in an age of doubt, Maurice writes not so much to establish a sympathy of creeds, but rather to lead those in search of faith "to hope for an answer" (Maurice, p. xii). He argues that we can best understand our own faith and its problems by understanding other faiths and their problems:

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> If it is well for us to show what possibilities lurk in Buddhism [for example] because they lurk in us, still more ought we to consider its actual history, because it is the history of a process which may be passing in the minds of persons whom we are most ready to think of as having reached the last development of unbelief; because it may be going on in us when we are giving ourselves credit for the greatest amount of faith.
> Maurice, p. xix

For Maurice, religion holds an intangible power over the human imagination, even in time of doubt:

> Men are beginning to be convinced, that if Religion had had only the devices and tricks of statesmen or priests to rest upon, it could not have stood at all...If they [the world's religions] have lasted a single day, it must have been because they had something better, true...to sustain them.
> Maurice, p. 8

Far from dismissing the doubting questions of his time, Maurice finds them to be "often entertained by minds of deepest earnestness; they derive their plausibility from facts which cannot be questioned, and which a Christian should not wish to question" (Maurice, p. 10; Melville would be in utmost accord with this). Moreover, he suggests, those who ask the doubting questions are often those--like Melville--who _want_ to believe.

What Maurice finds is that those religions which have survived, and which hold sway over the imagination, have done so because they are capable of answering some essential human spiritual need; and in embracing the religion, the

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believer feels thus empowered. Islam's militant sense of mission, for example, stems from its believers' sense of being "helpless before...[the] proclamation of a living and eternal God" (Maurice, p. 25). This, in turn, leads to a "mighty conviction" that bears the Muslim soldiers along, not by the promise of an afterlife in Paradise (which _is_ promised in the Koran, nonetheless), but rather by the terrifying aura of an all-powerful Will, by a sense "that they [the believers...were]...at that moment, called by God to a work,--that they were His witnesses and were ministers of His vengeance" (Maurice, p. 27).

In contrast to Islam, where the emphasis is on the living, active, all-powerful Divine Will, the essence of Hinduism is to be one with Brahman: "He is the Absolute Intelligence; the Essential Light. Rest, contemplation: this is his glory, his perfection" (Maurice, p. 40). Brahman is "a thinking, not a commanding being--One from whose thoughts all the universe has flowed out, not one by whose will it has been created [such as the Semitic God of Islam, Judaism, and Christianity]" (Maurice, p. 69). As pure Intelligence, Brahman needs to have some object in which his image can be reflected (as one of the early Vedas suggests); "may not man himself be this partner of the Divinity?" (p. 60). Herein resides the essential theological concept of Hinduism: "the primary Idea of an Inconceivable, Absolute, Unseen Being, whom it is the highest glory of the holiest man to behold, and in whom he is to be lost"

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(Maurice, p. 51). It is thus a faith "of men in whose minds respect for learning has occupied all but the highest place." (Maurice, p. 52).

Much like Muller and Clarke, Maurice sees Buddhism, which he admits is scarcely known in the West at that time (1845), as a revolutionary religion, one that challenged the elitest caste system wherein only the highest caste (the Brahmas) could achieve enlightenment. A populist movement had gradually evolved in Hinduism, one characterized by the worship of other gods (Siva, Vishnu, Krishna), and whose adherents "demanded a being less abstract than Brahm; not a mere thinking being, but one who should exercise actual influence over the arrangements of Nature and the world" (Maurice, p. 69). The hereditary caste system, the voluminous holy books, and the elite pretension of Hinduism were rejected in favor of the enlightenment available to each person from within. This movement, he feels, culminated in Sayka Muni, the first Buddha. For Maurice, Buddhism is a "Theistic, Atheistic, Pantheistic, Human Doctrine" (p. 80), and he quotes a "Mr. Hodgson," an Englishman living in Tibet, to illustrate this: "'The one infallible diagnostic of Buddhism is a belief in the infinite capacity of the human intellect'" (p. 83). But this emphasis on the human and the intellect is, for Maurice, a dangerous one, and he is more openly antagonistic toward Buddhism then either Muller or Clarke:

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> It [Buddhism] has been working out its results for all these thousands of years--and what have they been? The worship of the intellect has not caused the intellect to grow--not even to grow to an ordinary human or earthly stature; I say nothing of that Divine stature which it feels that it may reach. The priest of Buddha, of the intelligence, is rarely an intelligent man.
>
> Maurice, p. 93-4

Like Clarke, Maurice ultimately finds each religion wanting in something substantial enough to render it subservient to Christianity. Thus, "Mahometanism...is the proclamation of a mere sovereign, who employs men to declare the fact that he is a sovereign, and to enforce it upon the world. It is not the proclamation of a great moral being who designs to raise his creatures out of their sensual and natural degradation" (Maurice, p. 28-9). Hinduism has become "utterly entangled in sensible, outward idolatry," and Maurice wonders "how the Brahmin came to suppose that the divers and manifold beings of whom the Hindoo pantheism consists could be helps [sic] to the discovery or the presentation of the One Being" (pp. 44, 45). The Buddhist idea of the self becoming absorbed into Nothing in the process of achieving Nirvana strikes Maurice as "the step toward Atheism, an easier jump than it is in Hinduism, where the existence of a continuous caste preserves the tradition of a Divinity, invests it with a reality in some sense independent of the mind and the beholder" (p. 76); moreover, in Buddhism, "there is no check to the conviction that a man has risen to the state of godhead--maybe a god"

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(p. 80). Maurice finds Christianity to be, finally, the highest and greatest of all the world's religions because it comprehends and surpasses them:

> Is it [Christianity] the adequate explanation of <u>any</u> system? Do not <u>all</u> demand another ground than the human one? Is not Christianity the consistent asserter of that higher ground? Does it not distinctly and consistently refer every human feeling and consciousness to that ground? Is it not <u>for this reason</u> able to interpret and reconcile the other religions of the earth? Does it not in this way prove itself to be <u>not</u> a human system, but <u>then</u> revelation, which human beings require?
>
> Maurice, p. 245

A much different and somewhat more fundamental view of comparative religion was taken by the anti-imperialist, militant human rights activist, abolitionist, defender of John Brown, lecturer, former Unitarian minister, and leader of the First South Carolina Volunteer regiment of ex-slaves, Thomas Wentworth Higginson (1823-1911), who is sadly best remembered as being the literary editor who found Emily Dickinson's poetry incomprehensible.

A devout radical, Higginson came to comparative religion from the American social reform movement. In his ferociously polemical tract, <u>The Sympathy of Religions</u> (1871), which had originally been intended as a chapter of an unfinished work entitled <u>The Return of Faith</u>, he argues vigorously for a deep interrelationship between all the world's religions, with each representing a means

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by which "the divine influence moves men" (Higginson, p. 6). For Higginson,

> There is a sympathy in religions, and this sympathy is shown alike in their origin, their records, and their career...They all show similar aims, symbols, forms, weaknesses, and aspirations. Looking at the points of unity, we might say that under many forms there is but one religion, whose essential creed is the Fatherhood of God, and the Brotherhood of man.
>
> Higginson, p. 6

Higginson sees the same God as source for all religions: "[t]o say that different races worship different Gods, is like saying that they are warmed by different suns. The names differ, but the sun is the same and so is God" (Higginson, p. 8). Like Muller, Higginson sees certain innate human characteristics as indispensable to all religions; he quotes Alexander Von Humboldt in an undocumented passage:

> all positive religions contain three distinct parts. First, a code of morals very fine, and nearly all the same. Second, a geological dream, and third, a myth or historical novelette which last becomes the most important of all.
>
> Higginson, p. 8

All orthodox religions are merely "Natural Religion plus an individual name" (Higginson, p. 9). Again and again, Higginson says, we encounter "the same leading features," be they doctrinal, institutional, ritualistic, or symbolic

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(p. 9).

With his background in the social reform movement, Higginson has little patience for Christian hubris; to the carelessly posed question of "an eminent American clergyman," who asks, "'If the truths of Christianity are intuitive and self-evident, how is it that they formed no part of any man's consciousness till the advent of Christ?" Higginson is forthright and devastating:

> But how can any one look history in the face, how can any man open even the dictionary of any ancient language, and say this? What sums up the highest Christian virtue if not _philanthropy_? And yet the word is a Greek word, and was used in the same sense before Christendom existed.
> Higginson, p. 20

Christianity, he argues in effect, must seek out the log in its own eye first, and only then can it judge the other religions; "What religion stands the highest in its moral results, if not Christianity? Yet Christendom has produced the slave-trade as well as the saint" (Higginson, p. 26). In fact, Higginson's emphasis throughout the tract is on religion as an active social force, capable of engendering change in the way people think and behave, and, in this sense, his view is not too far from Melville's own when Melville explores the failure of "Christians" to live according to the example of Christ. Time and again throughout his fiction, Melville mercilessly underscores the hypocrisy of the uncharitable Christian, whether it

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be the savage and inhuman excesses of the missionaries described in Typee and Omoo, the harsh, loveless, worldly materialism of the Quaker shipowners in Moby-Dick, the spiritual impotence of Reverend Falsgrave in Pierre, or the failure of virtually everyone to live up to the dictum stated in I Corinthians 13 in The Confidence-Man; in the "Supplement" to Battle-Pieces Melville seemed to call into question the professed beliefs of slavery's Christian apologists (there were many) when he declared it to be "an atheistical iniquity." But in Clarel, as we shall see, this attitude is tempered somewhat; having witnessed the self-inflicted disgrace of his country in the 1860s, Melville now seemed prepared to concede, to a limited degree, some of the more radical and socially active and redemptive aspects of religion in favor of a more austere and authoritative role for it, something I shall discuss in later chapters.

With such an emphasis on the socially active side of religion, it should come as no surprise that Buddhism does not pose for Higginson quite the same problems it had for other comparative religionists. His enthusiastic and gnostic-like belief that the "true religious life begins when we discover that there is an Inner Light" (Higginson, p. 6) renders such questions problematic:

> Every race has some conception of a Creator and Governor of the world, in whom devout souls recognize a Father also. Even where, as among

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> the Buddhists, the reported teachings of a founder seem to ignore the existence of a Deity, the popular instinct is too strong for the teacher, so that the Buddhist races are not atheistic.
> Higginson, p. 12

I shall frequently refer back to these nineteenth-century comparative religionists, and others as well, throughout my subsequent discussion; the four I've chosen to highlight here--Muller, Clarke, Maurice, and Higginson--represent, to a certain extent, the paradigmatic attitudes of most of the like-minded (i.e., non-atheistic) commentators of the time, including Melville. An understanding of their respective views of the world's religions can greatly enhance a reading of _Clarel_, a poem in which many of these same observations are represented.

3. Melville and Nineteenth-Century Comparative Religion

Dorothee Metlitsky Finkelstein in _Melville's Orienda_, H. Bruce Franklin in _The Wake of the Gods_, Merton Sealts in _Melville's Reading_, and Walter E. Bezanson in his "Introduction" to _Clarel_ have all admirably demonstrated the incredibly rich vein of comparative religious and mythological sources that Melville had at is disposal and which he used often in his work. Nonetheless, our understanding of Melville's precise knowledge of the comparative religious thinkers of his time remains woefully incomplete. To show that Simon Ockley's _History of the_

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Saracens was in the Albany Young Men's Library which the youthful Melville was known to have used, as Finkelstein does in her remarkable book (p. 43), is not to demonstrate that Melville had read it--and indeed, Finkelstein makes no such claim. To explicate a passage from one of Melville's works by showing that it refers to some obscure religious belief or practice is not always to indicate where he obtained this information. Much can be demonstrated, but much else can only be assumed based on intelligent conjecture.

The problem is further exacerbated by Melville himself. Although frequently outgoing and gregarious, he was, nonetheless, an exceptionally private man; excepting the euphoric and intoxicated letters to Hawthorne in 1851-2, where he presents an entirely different persona (one closer to his fictive voice), his correspondence, though polite, is cool and professionally remote. The three journals he kept during his life were strictly occasional, composed, respectively, during trips he took in 1849-50 (to England), 1856-7 (to the Holy Land), and 1859-60 (aboard the ship the Meteor bound from New York to San Francisco). Although they reflect a very sharp eye for detail and become, at times, introspective and thoughtful--especially the 1856-7 journal--they retain a degree of reserve and privacy which resists scrutiny. As he wrote his brother, Allan, from London at the outset of the 1856-7 trip to the Levant, "[c]oncerning my enjoyment of the thing [the journey through

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the Holy Land], it is a rather solitary business, poking about the world without a companion" (Correspondence, p. 303). We unfortunately learn little of his influences and sources from his personal writing.

These problems notwithstanding, Melville's understanding of the religious issues that were "in the air" and his corresponding knowledge (first-hand or otherwise) of the leading figures and theories of his day, and of the world's religions in general, cannot be questioned. Much of this knowledge was obtained in his verified readings of travel literature and romance epics, two major genres of his time, which, as we have seen, also deeply influenced many of the leading comparative religious writers of his time (Evans-Pritchard, p. 6). These readings, as well as his own travels, seemed to complement and add ballast to his religious thinking. Bezanson provides an extensive list of well over twenty such works which would have aided Melville in composing Clarel in his Introduction (Clarel pp. 532-34), and notes that in the two decades between his 1856-7 visit to the Holy Land and the 1876 publication of Clarel Melville bought or borrowed over seventy-five volumes (most being travel narratives or guidebooks), and that in many of these he scored passages with remarks which reflect an interest in "problems of self, civilization, art and God" (Ibid., pp. 525-6). In his unpublished Ph.D. dissertation (Yale, 1943), Bezanson devotes an entire 54-page chapter to Melville's probable

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sources for the poem. Finkelstein also provides a large number of titles including some Bezanson omits as possible sources for the poem (Finkelstein, pp. 40-42, 68). What T. S. Eliot said of Shakespeare in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," that he "acquired more essential history from Plutarch than most men could from the whole British Museum" (Eliot, p. 52), is no less true of Melville in his readings. From these books which he consumed at a staggering rate, and also from his wonderfully observant journal, Melville was able to greatly augment his already profound knowledge of the terrain, peoples, and customs of the Levant.

But _Clarel_, like Melville's other works, also demonstrates a deep understanding of religions and religious controversy, an understanding not always tracable to travel books or romances. As Bezanson has explained, "[t]he impossibility of trying to track down the involved theological speculations in _Clarel_ is obvious...Melville's random reading in contemporary theological writing must have been wide and discursive" (Bezanson, 1943, pp. 155, 156). But this "problem" for Melville's annotators goes back much further than _Clarel_. In an unpublished Ph.D. dissertation ("Melville and Islam," Florida State University, 1988), Jalaluddien Khuda Baksh traces Islamic allusions and references in every major prose work starting with _Typee_ (and excepting _Israel Potter_), and in some of the minor tales as well (pp. 40-64). Maunsell B. Field,

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in Memories of Many Men (New York: Harper, 1874) describes a discussion at Arrowhead sometime in the 1850s concerning "East India religions and mythologies...which was conducted with the most amazing skill and brilliancy on both sides" (quoted in Clarel, p. 750). In his fascinating book Wake of the Gods, H. Bruce Franklin argues, among other things, that the struggle between Ahab and Moby-Dick, often associated with elements of the Old Testament (which, of course is true), is also the reenactment of the more ancient conflict between the Egyptian god Osiris and an evil nature-force, Typhon, that The Confidence-Man uses many concepts associated with Hinduism, especially that of the "avatar," the incarnation of the god Vishnu in various forms as both defender and destroyer, and that Bartleby's passivity and withdrawal in "Bartleby, the Scrivener" has a kinship to aspects of both Hinduism and Buddhist Quietism. These by no-means exhaustive examples illustrate the depth and consistency of Melville's use of nonChristian religious material, but also demonstrate the attending difficulty in trying to determine specific sources and when and how he came across them.

This difficulty becomes all the more problematic when we come to consider Melville's relationship with the various comparative religionists of his time. I've already shown that he had occasion to employ some of the same strategies and approaches that were then current, and that he had a considerable familiarity with much that was before the

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public in terms of the flood of recently available publications in the burgeoning field. But once again, given his voracious and eclectic reading and the idiosyncratic fashion by which he employed this reading in his fiction, we are reduced to hypothesis when attempting to determine anything more specific than these general usages. Thus, to ask a topical question, had Melville read, say, Vico? We can say with almost total certainty that he did not. Did he know of him? Here the answer is less certain, but we can again venture an answer in the negative without feeling ourselves perjured. Could he have somehow been exposed to various aspects of Vico's thought and theories, even if in the process he didn't encounter Vico in name? Now the problem becomes delightfully complex. He could have acquired some idea of Vico through authors he did know to some degree, such as Comte, Goethe, Hegel, Chateaubriand, and Balzac (all but Balzac are directly alluded to or mentioned by name in _Clarel_). Balzac, who called Vico a famous thinker (Berlin, p. 93), seems to have been a favorite author of Melville's, whose personal library contained no less than sixteen titles by the Frenchman (Sealts, pp. 37-8). Chateaubriand, who was familiar with Vico's work (Berlin, p. 93), would have been known to Melville not only through his _Travels_, a book available to him through the library of Evert Duyckinck, and one which both Bezanson (1943, pp. 147-50) and Finkelstein (p. 89) have demonstrated to have been essential

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in the composition of _Clarel_, but also through the _Memoirs of Chateaubriand_, which he owned outright (Sealts, p. 49). Goethe held Vico in very high esteem, claiming that the _New Science_ contained "prophetic insights on the subject of the good and the just that we shall or must attain in the future, insights based on sober meditation about life and about the future" (_Encyclopaedia Brittannica_, 15th edition, vol. xii, p. 247). Melville owned Goethe's _Autobiography_ and _Iphigenia in Tauris_, and borrowed _Wilhelm Meister_ in 1850 from Duyckinck and volume 14 of the _Werke_ from his father-in-law, Lemuel Shaw, in 1854 (Sealts, p. 62). Moreover--and perhaps more to the point--he would have surely encountered so eminent a literary figure countless times in his readings, most notably in the German man of letters's great Scottish champion Carlyle, who was one of Melville's favorite contemporary authors. Melville's specific knowledge of Hegel is unclear and the allusion to him in _Clarel_ is unflattering if inaccurate (II. xix. ll. 53-4--Rolfe sees Hegel as advocating a materialist philosophy), but in the journal of his 1848 voyage to England he recounts a spirited discussion with a professor of German, George Adler, and Bayard Taylor's cousin, Dr. Franklin Taylor, that "did not break up till after two in the morning. We talked metaphysics continually, & Hegel, Schlegel, Kant &c were discussed..." (Journals, p. 8). It seems most clear that even if Melville had never actually encountered the name Vico or any reference to the _New_

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Science, it is by no means unfair to suggest that he could have been familiar with some of his views and theories, even if second- or third-hand. As I shall explore in later chapters, Melville uses Vichian ideas in Clarel regardless of whether he knew of the Italian thinker of not.

The probability for such influence becomes even greater when considering Herder, who was much better known and whose impact on European thought was far more substantial than Vico's. Isaiah Berlin has said, "the influence of Herder's writings, acknowledged and unacknowledged, direct or indirect, was wide and permanent" (Berlin, p. xxv), and later,

> [Herder's] vision of society has dominated Western thought; the extent of its influence has not always been recognized because it has entered too deeply into the texture of ordinary thinking. His immense impact, of which Goethe spoke and to which J. S. Mill bore witness, is due principally to his central thesis--his account of what it is to live and act together--from which the rest of his thought flows, and to which it constantly returns. This idea is at the heart of all populism, And it has entered every subsequent attempt to arrive at truth about society.
> Berlin, p. 199

It is unthinkable to imagine a nineteenth-century reader as acutely aware of the philosophical wars being fought about him as Melville certainly was not having encountered Herder in some degree. Berlin could well have been describing Melville when he makes the tempting assertion that

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> The progeny of Herder in, let us say, England or America are to be found principally among those amateurs who become absorbed in the antiquities and forms of life (ancient and modern) of cultures other than their own, in Asia and Africa or the 'backward' provinces of Europe or America, among professional amateurs and collectors of ancient song and poetry,...[among] nostalgic travelers and exiles like Richard Burton, Doughty, Lafcadio Hearn...as well as serious students of language and society.
> Berlin, pp. 184-5

The problem of Melville and his sources and influences becomes impossibly complex when exploring such contemporary figures as Muller, Clarke, Maurice, and Higginson. One wants to know, for example, whether it is more than mere coincidence that Cudworth, Higginson, and Melville all used a very similar phrase ("sympathy/intersympathy of religions/ creeds") in their discussions of religion, with Melville's coming chronologically last? But these questions, perhaps, will never be answered; again, it is not my task or desire here to delineate specific spheres of influence.

Melville's debt to his own age and to the ideas and assumptions it spawned is apparent and indisputable; but like any great author, he compulsively transformed everything he encountered and made it uniquely his own. In this chapter I have attemptedto give some sense of the theories and disputes that formed the intellectual scene in which he was, through his fiction, an active (if neglected or misunderstood) player, and which provide a vital background to my discussion of Clarel.

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Notes: Chapter One

1. Melville's eccentric reading habits might be inferred from the following extract, taken from an April 5, 1849 letter to Evert Duyckinck:

> I bought a set of Bayle's Dictionary the other day, & on my return to New York intend to lay the great folios side by side & go to sleep on them thro' the summer, with the Phaedon in one hand & Tom Brown [Sir Thomas Browne] in the other.
>
> Correspondence, pp. 128-9

2. Thus, Margaret Hodgen describes a festival in Bordeaux, France, held in the year 1565, in which "300 men at arms conducted a showing of captives from twelve nations, including Greece, Turkey, Arabia, Egypt, America, Tapbobane, the Canaries, and Ethiopia." Margaret Hodgen, Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century [sic] (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1964) p. 112.

3. Renfrew shows that many ancient inscriptions would often appear in two or three different (hieroglyph or cuneiform) languages on the same tablet, the Behistun inscription itself consisting of three such languages; part of the reason for this may have something to do with the different roles played by languages at that time. Thus, according to Renfrew, Babylonian (Akkadian) was "the language of diplomacy in the Ancient Near East" just as "Sumerian was a language of scholarship" (Renfrew, p. 49, 54). Obviously, scholarly knowledge of one ancient language would greatly ease the task of deciphering an unknown language that appears beside it.

4. At this point in his essay, Herder is attacking Sussmilch's view that language is a Divine gift. Herder's argument is that if language is equal to reason as he (Herder) supposes, then for God to have taught man language, man would had to have already possess reason in order to receive it; but if man already possessed reason, he would also had to have already possessed language, etc.

5. See Appendix Two: "On the Ineffable."

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6. So Emily Dickinson, a writer who shares so much with Melville, would say "Much madness is Divinest sense". Regarding Pip's adventures, one might also recall that it was observed that when of the survivors of the Titanic were being taken aboard the Carpathia in the early hours of April 15, 1912, they were all uniformly silent. Many present sensed that this silence bore an almost religious aspect. As Carpathia passenger Stanton Coit said of the Titanic survivors, they seemed "lifted into an atmosphere of vision where self-centered suffering merges into some mystic meaning...We were all one, not only with one another, but with the cosmic being that for the time had seemed so cruel." (Wyn Craig Wade, The Titanic: End of a Dream. [New York: Rawson Books, 1979; reprint by Penguin Books, 1980, 1987] p. 171). Walter Lord, in A Night To Remember (New York: Bantam, 1956) described the early-morning scene on the Carpathia's deck as follows:

> Strangest of all was the silence. Hardly a word was spoken. Everyone noticed it; everyone had a different explanation. The Reverend P. M. A. Hoques, a passenger on the Carpathia, thought people were too horror-stricken to speak. Captain Rostron [Captain of the Carpathia] thought everybody was just too busy. Lawrence Beesley felt they were neither too stunned nor too busy--they were simply in the presence of something too big to grasp.
>
> p. 125

Language/reason seemed thus incapable of comprehending or articulating what had just been experienced; a threshold had been reached. Or, as Primo Levi wrote of the efforts to try to depict the atrocities of the Second World War, "to understand the horror is to accept it."

7. Thus, in The Poetry of Melville's Later Years, William Bysshe Stein says that Clarel's despair is "the despair of a thinker undone by thinking."

8. Thus James would discriminate between the "ordinary religious believer, who follows the conventional observances of his country, whether it be Buddhist, Christian, or Mohammedan. His religion has been made for him by others, communicated to him by tradition, determined to fixed forms by imitation, and retained by habit" which he finds a "second-hand religious life", and "the original experiences which were the pattern-setters to all this mass of suggested feeling and imitated conduct. These experiences we can only find in individuals for whom religion exists not as a dull habit, but as an acute fever rather" (The Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 6). Similarly, during the late 1920s, Heidegger "makes a distinction between "Christian-

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ness," i.e., the life of faith testified to in the New Testament and still lived today, and "Christianity," the subsequent historical movement which, although based upon the original faith of Christianness, did not always remain faithful to the original conception" (Brian D. Ingraffia, Postmodern Theory and Biblical Theology, p. 140).

9. See Frederick Denison Muarice, The Religions of the World and Their Relations to Christianity (London: Macmillian and Co., 1877 [1845]), p. 211-212; and, more recently, Huston Smith, The World's Religions: Our Great Wisdom Traditions (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991), p. 92.

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Chapter Two: Clarel: Themes and Ideas

1. Background

Clarel has been called "an intricate documentation of a major crisis in Western civilization--the apparent smash-up of revealed religion in the age of Darwin" (Bezanson, in Clarel, p. 506), "the most complex theological exploration of God, doubt, and faith in nineteenth-century American literature" (Goldman, p. 3), "Melville's attempt to bring into focus the conflicting polarities that confronted the intelligent critic of nineteenth-century America" (Knapp, p. 4), "nothing less than the most sustained and significant attempt that Melville's considerable intellect was ever to make to rationalize and resolve the paradoxes which his intuition had bred in his imagination" (Mason, p. 224), "a sustained objective inquiry into the condition and causes of modern skepticism" (Kenny, p. 96), "a meditation on Christianity" (Rogin, p. 260), "a spiritual autobiography and a spiritual biography of Anglo-American man in the nineteenth century" (Robertson-Lorant, pp. 543-4), and a "magnificent poem"

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by Helen Vendler, who asks, in remarking on the poem's utter neglect, "How is it...that we prize our own best culture so little?" (Vendler, pp. 40, 42). Melville himself rather offhandedly and ambiguously described it to a young English admirer as

> a metrical affair, a pilgrimage or what not, of several thousand lines, eminently adapted for unpopularity.--The notification here is ambidexter, as it were: it may intimidate or allure.
>
> Correspondence, p. 483

Each of these views contains some degree of truth--in Clarel the proverbial "dark night of the soul" is enacted under the harsh, bright beam of nineteenth-century positivism. However, in the poem's vast quest to answer major questions for the nineteenth-century Christian believer confronted by scientific discoveries, it transcends the relatively narrow confines of the faith/doubt genre, and becomes instead an investigation into the fundamental nature of religious belief itself, both in terms of its historical/social function and in the moral and spiritual role it plays in the life of the individual conscience. Clarel does this largely by closely examining the interaction of representative examples of the world's religions as depicted in the rich array of characters who appear throughout it, and also in the countless narrative references, inferences, and allusions to things outside

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the poem.

This inclusiveness renders a dense narrative texture that has proved quite formidable to many readers. In The Civil War World of Herman Melville (1993), Stanton Garner observes that "the ambiguity of [Melville's] works is a commonplace of criticism," and suggests that it "stemmed from his understanding of the complexity of experience and of the conflicts of values" which, in turn, leads to "a literature of layered complexity" (Garner, pp. 34, 35). Like the Sperm whale's brain described in Moby-Dick ("so much more comprehensive, combining, and subtle than man's") which, because of the location of the eyes on either side of the huge, square head, "can at the same moment of time attentively examine two distinct prospects, one on one side o him, and the other in an exactly opposite direction" (Moby-Dick, Chapter 74, p. 261), Melville's fictive landscape holds many different perspectives in view simultaneously; this kind of 'openendedness' in Clarel requires a diligently careful reading.

Like most of Melville's earlier works, Clarel depicts various religions and sects (Indian, Middle Eastern mysticism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and so forth), offering both orthodox and heterodox examples of each; the cast of the poem is yet another variation of "[a]n Anarcharsis Clootz [sic] deputation" (Moby-Dick, Chapter 27, p. 108) which dominates so many of the settings in Melville's works.[1] This in turn allows Melville to represent

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the traditional or formal and also unorthodox and subversive claims and merits of each creed, finding in the contrast and synthesis a fully-rounded dynamic range for it. For example, Clarel, Rolfe, Vine, Derwent, Nehemiah, Nathan (before his conversion) and the Presbyterian elder are all of Protestant background, but of decidedly variegated aspect and belief. So it is with the Catholic characters Celio, Salvaterra, Ungar, Don Hannibal, and the Dominican, with the Jewish characters Abdon, the converted Nathan, Agar, Ruth, Margoth, and the Lyonese, with the Islamic characters Djalea and Belex, and so forth. The religions and sects thus represented do not therefore stand frozen in strict dogmatic pose but exist rather as fluid systems of belief, capable of attaining, in their more radical posture, an ecumenical freedom. As Joseph Knapp has described it in terms strongly recalling the Hegelian thesis-antithesis-synthesis formula, Melville's "method ...is to juxtapose contadictories and to note their reciprocal influences and then to balance contraries" (Knapp, p. 88).

These moments of doctrinal intermingling permit Melville to reveal and illuminate his view of an underlying ethos of all religions, the "intersympathy of creeds." The reader of Clarel is thus confronted throughout the poem with the ambiguous confluence of Christian and nonChristian material. For example, the sculpted frieze adorning the vestibule of the Sepulcher of Kings is

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described as a "Pocahontas-wedding/Of contraries in the old belief--/ Hellenic cheer, Hebraic grief" (I. xxviii. ll. 31-3). In a discussion regarding ancient religions, it is hinted that Christ may be an avatar--itself yet another religious borrowing--of an even older source:

> "Hint you," here asked Vine,
> "In Christ Osiris met decline
> Anew?"--[Rolfe replies "Nay, nay; and yet,
> past doubt,
> Strange is that text St. Matthew won
> From gray Hosea in sentence: 'Out
> Of Egypt have I called my son.'"
> I. xxxi. ll. 223-8

And in the stately and moving "Dirge," (IV. xxxi) mourning the premature death of Ruth at the end of the poem, Christian, Jewish, Islamic and classical images solemnly complement on another in offering solace.

Perhaps most significantly, this mingling of religious material allows the young American protagonist Clarel, a Protestant Christian, to achieve a kind of recognition early in the poem after a dream vision of four different religious pilgrimages, a recognition in which the orthodox confines of Christianity are dissolved and he begins to understand what he imagines to be "[t]he intersympathy of creeds,/Alien or hostile tho' they seem--" (I. v. ll. 207-8). This orthodox/heterodox idea is part of a larger dialectical pattern throughout Melville's fiction: one thinks of Plinlimmon's "Chronometricals and Horologicals"

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tract in Pierre where absolute (chronological) time is contrasted with local (horological) time, or of the ending of Billy-Budd, where the "official" account of Claggart's death is counterpoised by the legend of Billy that lives on with the common sailors in "Billy in the Darbies." (if, as it has been often suggested, Billy-Budd is a testament of acceptance, it is a most equivocal one.) In Clarel Melville constantly employs this dialectical process in an attempt to distill an autonomous and universal religious essence free from the constraints of dogma.

Clarel is also a kind of religious historiography; it beautifully exemplifies Goethe's assertion in the Autobiography, a book Melville owned (Sealts, p. 62), that "[d]eep minds are compelled to live in the past as well as in the future" (Goethe, seventh book, p. 228). In Clarel Melville repeatedly appropriates historical or religious and mythological places, events, and personages, and weaves them deeply into the narrative texture where they become an essential part of the rhetorical strategy.[2] As Hershel Parker has recently written,

> One of the characteristics of his mature style was Melville's powerful portrayal of images from different times and places which alternate rapidly in the mind, merge with each other, and (in later examples) disentangle again.
>
> Parker, p. 454

Parker goes on to say that Melville "made profound use

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of this psychological phenomenon" in Clarel and Pierre (Parker, p. 454). In a very real sense then the actual characters (and what each represents) must "compete" in the reader's mind, not only with one another but with these extratextual references and allusions as well. Thus it is that the 'action' of the poem--a trip to the Dead Sea, some debates about faith and doubt, visits to holy sites--is projected against a gigantic and implicitly comprehensive historical landscape which constantly resonates with voices and meanings from the past. As Wyn Kelley as described it, "Jerusalem seems made of living rock, volcanic with historical activity that erupts in daily contemporary life" (Kelley, p. 21). We find Clarel himself gradually coming to grips with this in his early wanderings about the city; watching women and children performing simple domestic tasks, he reflects that

> Under such scenes abysses be--
> Dark quarries where few care to pry,
> Whence came those many cities high--
> Great capitals successive reared,
> And which successive disappeared
> On the same site.
>
> I. xvi. ll. 33-37

This awareness of the past--both as "abysses.../Dark quarries" and as a rebuke of the irreverence of the present (Celio, Vine, Ungar)--, relentlessly rehearsed throughout the poem, allows Melville to render it always 'present' and thus able to lend significance (often ironical) to

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the actions of the characters or to undermine their credibility and claims. Some, such as Derwent, Djalea, and Rolfe, function well enough in the present and accept it more or less as it is. But others, such as Ungar and Vine, have not made their peace with the present and see the past as a repository for lost meaning and values. Ungar, a first-hand witness to the horrors of the Civil War, somewhat naively (if understandable) longs for the stability of the Middle Ages and the unquestioned authority of the Catholic Church; "Your sects do nowadays create/Churches as worldly as the state," he bitterly observes (IV. x. ll. 165-6). Vine, thought to be modeled on Hawthorne, also finds the present age to be riddled with mediocrity:

> For my part, I love the past--
> The further back the better; yes
> In the past is true blessedness;
> The future's ever overcast,
> The present aye plebian.
>
> III. xxvi. ll. 14-18

One of the chief comparative religious ideas of the poem, which I shall explore in particular depth in Chapters Four and Five, is that the present <u>must</u> be experienced and endured, and that those characters who cannot adjust to it do so at their own rather substantial peril.

Melville is able to bring about this sense of the contemporaneousness of the past in other ways as well. The idiosyncratic language of the poem, for example, has

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frequently been remarked upon and found to be, for many, a hindrance, a crabbed and unhappy mixture of old and new styles and words, which is a most inconsistent critique considering that these same qualities have often been cited with great approbation when discussing Melville's prose. Bezanson, for example, finds fault in the language, calling it "in part genteel and weakly traditional...[employing many] dusty old words the secondhand stock of a long run of English poets" (Clarel, p. 566), and can only give a final mixed review to Melville's poetics:

> One feels [in Clarel] a poet who sensed the violence with which at times language must be ripped and cut and jammed into place, but who was not always able, like the good poet, to make one feel the rightness of the result. If one margin of the verse is softened by the worn-out language of the contemporary genteel tradition, the opposite margin is hardened by crudeness.
> Clarel, p. 567

But this mingling of linguistic epochs actually serves Melville's purpose well, by (again) recalling the past and bringing it into active dialogue with the poem's present, a very contemporary present which, Bezanson says, is articulated in the poem through Melville's use of "modern words, modern idiom, and modern referents for metaphor" (Clarel, p. 567). In an unpublished Ph.D. dissertation ("Language, Repression, and Desire: Melville's Poetics of Ambivalence," University of Arkansas, 1993), Elaine Darilyn Smokewood answers some of Bezanson's earlier charges

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regarding the language of Clarel, arguing that

> Clarel presents a universe in which the smooth surface of the present is constantly rent by inexplicable [linguistic] extrusions of the past; the often baffling protrusion of archaic and obsolete words through the poem's stratum of contemporary diction mirrors the thematic and imagistic motifs of the wreck of time. These words are also highly significant in their function as stony blank spots, linguistic fossils that stud the textual surface and contribute to the sense of the poem as a massive accumulation of opaque particles.
>
> Smokewood, p. 155

In addition to the historical and linguistic landscapes, and perhaps even superseding them in terms of importance, the geological landscape of the poem, and in particular the city of Jerusalem, also serves to strongly recall the past. As the sea had been symbol in so many of Melville's earlier works, so the desert becomes symbolic in Clarel, but in a significantly different way. Clarel lacks the overriding heroic/tragic arc that had characterized so many of the earlier works: the human condition is not cast against the uncaring vastness of eternity, as it is in Moby-Dick, and to varying degrees, Mardi, Pierre, "Bartleby," and other works as well. The outcries (Celio's, Mortmain's, Ungar's) are not heroic, like Ahab's, but defeated; not answered by wrathful catastrophe (Moby-Dick, Pierre), but rather dissolved away into the apathetic void. In fact, Clarel is full of inarticulated thoughts, pregnant glances, choked, bitter

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emotions. If the lesson of Moby-Dick is that human effort ultimately means nothing in the universal vastness, then the lesson of Clarel is the newfound emptiness of that vastness. No "joyous, heartless, ever-juvenile eternities" (Moby-Dick, Chapter 93, p. 321) now oppose the human will, nothing does, and instead we are left with effete and silent oracles and sites robbed of their symbolic significance and the human soul grappling with the void amid the sterile landscape.

Melville demonstrates this often in Clarel through the inversion of a formula he had frequently used with great success in his earlier works. In those works, the mundane and commonplace are often transformed and lent new significance when veiled in metaphysical or religious language and meaning. Thus, Long Ghost and Tommo's flight in Omoo is given religious implication when called a "Hegira." In Moby-Dick, the simple manning of the masthead of a ship becomes the occasion for a critique of pantheism, a whaling ship's try-works is similarly and memorably used to show something of the tragic and woeful nature of the human lot, and the soaring of a Catskill eagle is used to meditate on stages of the human soul. In these cases, a threshold of sorts is broken through (Ahab's pasteboard masks) and reality suddenly spills upwards into a higher metaphysical realm. But in Clarel it is the mystical or metaphysical--momentarily glimpsed--that is transformed or reduced to the mundane. Thus, in I xxviii. ll. 103-23,

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Vine's still meditation at the holy Pool of Siloam, where Christ miraculously healed the blind man, is shattered when a pebble suddenly breaks the surface of the pool, the spell is ended, and "Siloam was [now but a rural well" (l. 123). In I. xxx., a quiet moment at Gethsemane garden, the scene of Christ's passion, is abruptly and--in one of the very few instances of humor in the whole poem--comically interrupted by the arrival of a spruced and dapper American tourist, guidebook in hand: "Paul Pry? and in Gethsemane?" (l. 112) where "Paul Pry," a colloquialism used to describe a meddlesome, inquisitive fellow, significantly represents the intrusion of the modern, bourgeois age. As the narrator observes, "lo,/Tourists replace the pilgrims so" (ll. 105-6).

This demystifying of sacred sites and locations is a critical and recurring tool for Melville in reimagining the claims of religions in general and Christianity in particular. As the external world is gradually robbed of its metaphysical mystique, the 'proof' of a religion becomes increasingly focused on the interior world of the mind and spirit and on the social interaction of human beings. It is at this point, in Clarel, that Melville will conduct his religious inquiry, often through the use of dialectical debate.

2. A Methodological Approach: Clarel as Dialectic

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Melville's fiction had always sought to reconcile the metaphysical and material worlds, even when it persistently and often impishly noted that such a reconciliation was impossible. The experience of the Civil War seemed to introduce a new imperative to his project, or rather, to refocus its energies toward a more urgent and achievable goal. In a letter to his editor and friend Evert Duyckinck on or near February 1, 1862--not a particularly bright period for the Federalist forces, with the disasters of First Bull Run and Ball's Bluff shortly behind and Shiloh but two months ahead--Melville invited Duyckinck and his brother, George, to pay a visit: "we will brew some whiskey punch and settle the affairs of the universe over it--which affairs sadly need it, some say" (Correspondence, p. 373). But if it nonetheless was becoming increasingly obvious that the metaphysical affairs of the universe could, perhaps, never be fixed, it was also becoming glaringly apparent that human affairs would have to be fixed if some kind of disaster were to be averted; Battle-Pieces, Clarel, and Billy-Budd all acknowledge both of these desperate truths, each in its own way.

This shift in Melville's intellectual focus from the metaphysical to the more worldly, and a corresponding change in his literary style toward a purer and less humorous colloquial, and idiosyncratic narrative form, comes as no surprise. His literary career had always been

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characterized by a most precipitous growth, book by book. Though principally a romancer, Melville the artist matured with his country; it was tacitly understood by all involved that no one in America but a fool could write a romance after 1865. Even Hawthorne recognized this; in a letter to Francis Bennoch on October 12, 1862, he prophetically noted

> I feel as if this great convulsion were going to make an epoch in our literature as in everything else (if it does not annihilate all,) [sic] and that when we emerge from the warcloud, there will be another and better (at least, a more national and seasonable) class of writers than the one I belong to.
> cited in Garner, p. 192

But as Hawthorne languished away in despair and died during the war, Melville, who was younger and more intellectually complex and supple, was able to adjust to the new demands the experience of the conflict would make on the native writers.[3] However, he did not, like the younger writers whom Hawthorne envisaged, turn to a more realistic (empirical) style in his later works, such as characterized Stephen Crane's _Maggie: A Girl of the Streets_ and _The Red Badge of Courage_, Frank Norris's _McTeague_, and Theodore Dreiser's _Sister Carrie_, all published less than a decade after Melville's death (Crane, Norris, and Dreiser were all born before _Clarel_ was published in 1876). Rather, in the quest to find resolution to the nagging

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questions that had so hounded his thought throughout his career, and also, perhaps, finding some solace in the ordered forms of the past after the debacle of the war and the chaos of laissez faire capitalism that flowered thereafter in the "Gilded Age," his artistic evolution finally brought him--especially in Clarel and Billy-Budd--to the frontier of a kind of neoclassical purity, both in style and in content, one characterized by a newfound respect for form and balance, and relatively free from the experimental iconoclasm that had so distinguished his earlier works.[4]

In Clarel this is demonstrated in his resurrection of the platonic dialogue, a device which he'd used to varying degree in Mardi and The Confidence-Man; Erich Segal describes it as "the use of dialogue as a vehicle for conveying philosophy" (in his Introduction to The Dialogues of Plato, p. xi). Actually, all of Melville's works had employed dialectical debate to some degree as an underlying thematic device. At various times in his literary career he had even experimented with a bipartite structure, such as in the short stories "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids," "The Two Temples," and "Poor Man's Pudding and Rich Man's Crumbs," and the later poetic pair "At the Hostelry" and "Naples in the Time of Bomba." In Melville and His Circle: The Later Years (1996), William B. Dillingham says that examples such as these "reveal two ways of dealing with the same basic subject, theme,

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or idea" (p. 4). However, except in Mardi and The Confidence-Man, never before Clarel had Melville used the dialectic debate so overtly as a formal narrative choice as well. The debates between the pilgrims in the poem cover much old Melvillean ground and introduce some new ideas as well. But more significantly, though often purposefully inconclusive they serve as the basic crucible in which the numerous religious issues presented in the poem can be tempered and proved.

Melville had always loved debate and as a young man in Albany he belonged to several clubs devoted to its pursuit, including the Philomathean Debating Society in 1835 (Parker, p. 97) and the Ciceronian Debating Society in 1836 (Robertson-Lorant, p. 63). He actually became president of the Philo Logos Society (another debate club in Albany) after an interesting and amusing power struggle with the former president, Charles Van Loon, conducted in part in the pages of the Albany Microscope (Parker, 110-13, 121-2; Robertson-Lorant, p. 64). In a letter to the Microscope printed on March 1, 1838, the eighteen-year--old Melville, now a veteran debater, wrote of the importance of debate and debating clubs:

> We ask no higher testimony in favor of its advantages, than the recorded opinions of all great men, Burke, the English orator and Statesman acknowledged that the first spring which moved him on a career of fame and honor, was the fostering encouraging effect of a literary club, our own Clay had revealed to him the latent powers

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> of a giant mind in a like institution, and Franklin the philosopher and sage attributed the early development of his natural resources to the same mind stirring soul animating cause, but why specify? The learned are as one man, in their opinion of the importance of debating societies in developing the mind, and promoting to greater and higher efforts.
>
> cited in Parker, p. 97

Melville's later journals and letters and those his friends and acquaintances demonstrate that such debate remained a lifelong passion for him. But his instinct for and interest in debate may have actually been a part of a more fundamental aspect of his intellectual and psychological makeup, one stemming from the essentially unresolved nature of his religious thought.

Throughout Melville's fiction, and less frequently in his letters and journals, we experience a mind ever in the grips of the task of trying to resolve contraries of all different kinds: wrathful or absent Gods or fathers and orphaned sons; hypocritical Christians and saintly pagans or atheists; rustic sailors/travelers/romancers and metaphysical ponderers; "democratic simplicity and knightly blazonry" (Garner, p. 327); "Jacksonian imperialism and Jacksonian individualism" (Dimock, p. 11); the past as locus of heroic acts and authoritative order (Vine and Ungar in _Clarel_) and the past as brutal and inhumane (_White-Jacket_); the Calvinistic imperative of Original Sin and the Unitarian belief in the fellowship of the human race; and so forth ("Melville bristled with contradictions,"

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Robertson-Lorant, p. xv). Like the warring gods of Zoroastrianism, Ahura Mazda (Ormuzd) and Angra Mainyu (Ahriman), these contraries perpetually vexed him and contributed to his celebrated ambiguity.[5]

Undoubtedly a great deal of this aspect of Melville's thought stems originally from his conflicting religious background. He was baptized into his mother Maria's South Reformed Dutch Church, and it would appear that this strict Calvinistic strain held considerable sway in the Melville household. Of this brand of Protestantism Newton Arvin wrote:

> Neither the humanitarian rationalism of the Enlightenment nor the transcendental, romantic ardors of the early nineteenth century had availed in any way to soften or emasculate the austere, earnest, pessimistic orthodoxy of the Reformed Church in America.
>
> Arvin, p. 31

From its stern doctrine and teachings Melville learned a sense of Original Sin, of which Hershel Parker notes:

> Original Sin had not become an outmoded theological conceit in Maria Melville's house, and till his death her second son [Herman] had to resort to that concept, at times, to make sense of the world.
>
> Parker, p. 212

The influence of his father's religious background--ancestral Scotch-Presbyterian--is fascinating, but also

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considerably more difficult to precisely demonstrate. Newton Arvin has shown that Melville's grandfather, Thomas Melville, "had succumbed to the liberalizing influences of late eighteenth-century Boston and turned Unitarian," and that the faith of Melville's father, Allan, "was a typically Unitarian fusion of reasonableness, optimism, "Arminianism," and trust in the rational beneficence of a paternal deity [in contrast to the intolerance and implacable anger of the Dutch Reformed deity]; a kind of pious Deism, in short, with belated overtone of the Essay on Man" (Arvin, pp. 30-1; see also Robertson-Lorant, p. 2). In addition, it would seem that the Episcopal Church could have exercised some influence on Melville's religious temperament; Parker speculates that he most probably attended services at St. Stephen's Episcopal in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, both as a young man while visiting his Uncle Thomas (p. 86) and as an adult while living there (p. 796). Thus, in September of 1853, his sister Kate married John Chapman Hoadly (who would later read Clarel with great intelligence and enthusiasm) in this same church "in a small family ceremony" (Robertson-Lorant, p. 336). In addition, Melville's niece, Maria Gansevoort Melville, was baptized by the Reverend Mr. Bedell at the Episcopal Church of the Ascension on June 28, 1849, in a service the rituals of which "so horrified Cousin Kate Van Vechten Hurlbut (a member in good standing of the Dutch Reformed Church) that she could not bring herself to go afterward

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to the Romish establishment at 103 Fourth Avenue [in New York City] for ice cream and brandy peaches" (Parker, pp. 646-7).

As an adult living in New York City, Herman Melville and his wife Elizabeth belonged, at different times, to the Reverend Henry Bellow's two Unitarian churches, the Church of the Divine Unity (before moving to Pittsield) and All Souls Church (after returning from Pittsfield). His attendance at these and other churches may have been sporadic, but the very spare data is not always easy to interpret. Thus, we learn that on at least two occasions in his life (in 1834 and 1863), Melville attended church services despite blizzards so severe that few others in the family dared venture forth (1834: Parker, p. 91; 1863: Garner, p. 227). Moreover, we learn both through his journals and correspondence and through his fiction (where an autobiographical reading seems plausible), that Melville frequently attended services of all different kinds of Protestant denominations throughout his life, both in his travels and while at home.[6] All in all, it is safe to conclude that Melville's experiences within the perimeters of Protestant belief and practice were rich and varied.

The two contrary views of the Divine Being presented respectively by the Dutch Reformed Church and the Unitarian (and Episcopalian) churches find themselves replicated again and again in Melville's fiction and, in the intricate network of subordinate contraries that evolved out of this

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fundamental conflict, we see the central recurring crisis of his thought emerge, one born in the recognition of the essential duality--and therefore unresolved relativity--of the world. In his late poem, "Art," quoted here in full, he raises this issue in an aesthetic context:

> 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.

Dialectical debate becomes, then, for Melville, a viable means of articulating the dynamics of this conundrum.

I have suggested that in Clarel Melville always leaves the debates unresolved. We are, at times, led to believe that the poem "favors" one side, but these occasions are by no means as clear as they may first appear. We may, for example, compulsively find ourselves siding against Derwent in his encounters with the others, forgetting that in his case it is the messenger and not the message that is shallow. Derwent's observations are often among the most clear-headed and compassionate of the poem; like Shakespeare's villains he is capable of very thoughtful utterances. Moreover, as the narrator makes clear in that remarkable canto III. V. ("The High Desert"), the debates

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and troubled ponderings are all futile anyway. It is, rather, the process of the debates which is significant: they serve an intellectual purpose somewhat analogous to that of the romantic quest or the 'Bildungsroman'--a genre to which Clarel could be said to belong--wherein the destination itself is not nearly as important as are the experiences of the journey to get there.

Typically, the religious debates in Clarel involve conflict between orthodox and heterodox points of view. The former is usually articulated in the anguished polemics and defeated outcries of the so-called "monomaniacs," Mortmain and Ungar, in the stoic examples of such characters as the Celibate, the Syrian Monk, and Salvaterra, in the unquestioning faith of Nehemiah and, to a lesser degree, the Dominican, and in the willfully blind positivism of Margoth and the purely sensual aesthetic of the young Lyonese. Other characters whose position or behavior in the poem might be construed as "orthodox" in this sense include Vine, Djalea, Belex, Abdon, Nathan, the Greek Banker, Don Hannibal, the Presbyterian elder, and, on rare occasions, Rolfe, Clarel himself, and even the narrator. Excepting the last three (I include the narrator as a character), each of the others has retreated, by the time the poem begins, into a position characterized by its adherence to some strictly delineated set of principles which cannot be questioned not empirically challenged in the mind of that character; each one's view of the world

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is thus absolute and conclusive. (They are hedgehogs rather than foxes). The reader is clearly encouraged to hold in high esteem the faith and resolve of many of these religious characters who implacable maintain their belief in the face of scientific discoveries, even when the specific doctrine held up by each is not presented for similar approval.

The antithetical perspective is presented by those who represent the heterodoxical point of view, one characterized by a more supple and, at times, pragmatic response to experience. The foremost proponent of this position in the poem is the Anglican minister Derwent, who is, as I've already hinted, the most problematic character in Clarel. He is constantly faulted in his debates with the others for holding religious views that seem so compromised as to mean practically nothing (i.e, Rolfe's "Things all diverse he would unite:/His idol's an hermaphrodite" [III. xvi. ll. 173-4]), and yet, as I shall explore in the next section, his genuinely kind and accepting nature places him unequivocally within the true religious paradigm of tolerance and understanding that Melville championed throughout his career and which is the final lesson of Clarel. It's almost as though the reader is intentionally led to feel simultaneous disgust for the former (Derwent's religious liberality) and respect for the latter (his compassion toward other religions and cultures). Aside from Derwent, Rolfe, Clarel, Don Hannibal

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(Derwent's great friend and foe), and, significantly, the narrator also frequently adopt positions which might be deemed "heterodox." In a not-quite paradigmatic description (since most of the debates in _Clarel_ are not, in actuality, abjudicated or balanced by a third party), Laurie Robertson-Lorant not only describes the orthodox/heterodox nature of the debates, but also outlines the degree to which Melville's approach is in keeping with an understanding of the larger intellectual ideas of his century:

> By juxtaposing characters [in _Clarel_] who voice contrasting attitudes toward life, then introducing a character who strikes a balance between them, Melville gives dramatic form to a kind of Hegelian thesis, antithesis, and synthesis.
>
> Robertson-Lorant, p. 547

It is in bringing together these two positions, the orthodox and the heterodox, that Melville achieves his dialectical aim in _Clarel_; either one alone, the poem rhetorically implies, will not suffice.

3. Beginnings: Science, Democracy and the "Protestant Dilemma" in _Clarel_

The essentially comparative religious nature of _Clarel_ is fully understood only when we recognize the theological promptings that engendered the need to explore and

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comprehend the world's religions and religious belief itself. Like most of the comparative religionists of the nineteenth century (Clarke, Maurice, Higginson, Muller, and so forth), Melville was of a Protestant background which, as we have seen, deeply affected his thought and fiction.[7] Moreover, Melville was an American Protestant, an important distinction certainly not lost on him. Like the French-Catholic aristocrat Tocqueville, he was keenly aware of the degree to which Protestant habits of thinking were disseminated throughout the American cultural, social, and intellectual character. Humanists democracy's emphasis on equality, freedom, and the natural rights of men and women seemed to mirror, in the political realm, Protestantism's assertion of the sovereignty of the individual conscience in the spiritual. The historical relationship between the two had always been close. As Vassilis Lambropoulos writes in The Rise of Eurocentricism: Anatomy of Interpretation (1993):

> Humanist educational reforms and Protestant religious reforms often assisted each other. Humanists were the first group to support the Reformation, which they saw as an ally in the struggle of their academic movement against scholasticism...the two trends together created what the Western university has known until today as Liberal Arts--the set of practices of Protestant interpretation.
>
> Lambropoulos, p. 27

As such, Protestantism was a revolt of the reason

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against Catholic mysticism. Removing the seat of authority from Papal Rome and relocating it in the individual, Protestantism required its adherents to regard the natural world according to the dictates of the intellect. In The Light of Day: Religious Discussions and Criticisms from the Naturalist's Point of View (1900), the naturalist John Burroughs delineated this idea:

> In religion, the process has been...from the arbitrary, the fantastic, to the simple and the natural; from the conception of the a universe the sport and tool of supernatural beings, to a world inexorably bound by a sequence of cause and effect...That the early religions were fantastic and unreal needs no proof. That the Christian mythology is equally fantastic and unreal is not so generally admitted. The teachings of Jesus himself were simple and natural in the extreme, but out of the notions which were formed about Jesus there grew up a religious organization which was equally the extreme of complexity and artificiality. For seventeen hundred years mankind were under its sway as under a nightmare. It perverted every natural fact and paralyzed every natural instinct of the heart. In the Catholic church this nightmare still rides mankind; in the Protestant churches its spell has been partially broken. Protestantism is more or less a compromise with reason, but Catholicism deliberately puts reason under foot.
> Burroughs, p. 8

Melville composed Clarel from this American Protestant perspective. The main characters in the poem are American Protestants like himself, and the intellectual and spiritual problems they face in the poem reflect specific aspects of this background and form the foundation for the poem's comparative religious investigation.

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The great threat to religious belief in the nineteenth century came obviously from the scientific discoveries of that period. But the modern scientific method was itself something of a step-child of the Protestant Reformation, evolving, in part, from the Reformation's insistence on the capacity of the individual conscience to interpret the world around it. As the British biochemist and historian of science, S. F. Mason, wrote in 1953, "[f]rom the inception of the scientific revolution and the Protestant Reformation during the sixteenth century, it has been noted by various authors that there were similarities between the new science and the new religion, and that Protestant beliefs have been more conducive than the Catholic faith to the promotion of scientific activity" (in Cohen, p. 182). This view had been famously voiced in the nineteenth century by the Swiss naturalist Alphonse de Condolle. In "The Influence of Religion on the Development of the Sciences" (1885), he argues, in part, that there is an undeniable relationship between Christianity and science, but that "[t]he more authoritarian a creed, the more there is a discouragement of curiosity, mother of the sciences, and the more an increase in intellectual timidity" (in Cohen, p. 148), and that "the Protestant church exerts less an authoritarian pressure on the mind than the Greek and Roman Catholic churches" (in Cohen, pp. 149-50). Such was the rift between authoritarian Catholicism and positivistic science that, as Bertrand Russell notes in

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Religion and Science (1935), all works teaching the Copernican system remained on the Vatican Index until 1835 (p. 41).

But the relationship between mainstream Protestantism and science was nonetheless complex. Melville repeatedly alludes to an alliance between the two in Clarel, an alliance which the overriding argument of the poem insists has brought about the chaos and uncertainty of the modern world. The Dominican monk, for example, whom the pilgrims encounter by the Jordan river, finds Protestantism a "riot of reason quite set free:/Sects--sects bisected--sects disbanded" (II. xxv. ll. 102-3), against which the Catholic church must now stand; "...but who may tell the end?/Relapse barbaric may impend,/Dismission into ages blind--/Moral dispersion of mankind" (II. xxv. ll. 109-12). Debating the merits of recent political turmoil with Derwent, Rolfe asks,

> Who's gained by all the sacrifice
> Of Europe's revolutions? who?
> The Protestant? the Liberal?
> I do not think it--not at all
> II. xxvi. ll. 136-9

In answering his own question, he clearly associates Protestantism with the modern, scientific age ("the Atheist", "Atheism"):

> Rome and the Atheist have gained:

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> Those two shall fight it out--these two;
> Protestantism being retained
> For base operations sly
> By Atheism
>
> II. xxvi. ll. 140-44

Later, in a confrontation between Derwent and the intense and ascetic young Franciscan monk, Salvaterra, in which the light, optimistic manner of the former contrasts poorly with the solemn and reverential bearing of the latter, the Anglican minister checks his impulse to make a "humorous comment," thinking to himself, "I'll curb _the Protestant/And modern_ in me" (IV. xiii, ll. 88, 90-1, my emphasis). This theme is summarized in the "Epilogue," where the two major figures of Protestantism and science, respectively, are yoked together to demonstrate their culpability in the loss of faith in the modern world: "If Luther's day expand to Darwin's year,/Shall that exclude the hope--foreclose the ear?" (IV. xxxv. ll. 1-2).

One way in which science made such inroads into the claims of religion in the nineteenth century was that it assumed a much greater legitimacy in intellectual circles than it often had in previous times. This was largely due to its ability to suddenly effect great practical change. In "Unbelief and Science," J. Bronowski writes "the Victorian Age was above all else an age of enquiry: of enquiry and decision" (in _Ideas and Beliefs of the Historians_, pp. 164-169, p. 164; hereafter _I.B.V._); science had become "experimental and empirical, the search for

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evidence as a basis for decision" (I.B.V., p. 165), reflecting Bertrand Russell's assertion that "the search for causal laws...is the essence of science" (Russell, p. 167). As science became more capable of providing concrete answers to difficult questions it also became increasingly a tool for action, and, consequently, for real power. For beyond the narrow realm encompassed in the theoretical disputes between the defenders of science and the apologists for religion, what Rolfe calls "the wars of Faith and Science" (III. xvi. l. 205), science was making palpable changes in the day-to-day lives of everyone in the nineteenth century:

> the man in the street saw a great deal of real science...: electro-magnetism, anaesthetics, the discovery of the causes of infection, the synthesis of organic product, the prediction of the whereabouts of undiscovered planets, the first studies in inheritance and in population statistics; and the brilliant work on sound and light and electricity and the behavior of fluids and many similar topics by the great English mathematicians...the scientist spoke with authority, and the authority was conferred not by the historical language [traditionally held beliefs and assumptions derived from scripture] but by the success of science visible in a hundred solid practical fields. Science was positive, science was decision and action, science was on the offensive. Science might become the god to displace a god [which was Melville's fear]
> Bronowski in I.B.V., p, 165, 166

Science thus represented nothing less than the beginning of a completely new epoch in human history, one in which human affairs could now be conducted according to empirical

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knowledge rather than abstract moral or metaphysical precepts. As the British philosopher and mathematician W. K. Clifford (1845-1879) noted, "scientific thought is not an accompaniment or condition of human progress, but human progress itself" (quoted by Bronowski in I.B.V., p. 165); or, as Derwent observes in Clarel, articulating a central premise of the poem, "No more can men be what they've been;/All's altered--earth's another scene" (II. xxvi. ll. 157-8).

The specific focus of much of the nineteenth-century's scientific effort also helped foster this transformation. Earlier scientific discoveries and theories, such as those of Newton and Locke, had dealt largely with the physical laws that governed inorganic matter and had suggested or affirmed for many of the eighteenth century, such as Jonathan Edwards, a divine shaping hand behind the perfect order of the universe. But science in the nineteenth century became increasingly preoccupied with the organic world ("geology and evolution," Bronowski, in I.B.V., p. 166), and the discoveries of Lyell, Darwin, and countless others told a distinctly different story, a secular history without meaning or purpose, one from which human beings have inelectably emerged.

The religious implications of the scientific discoveries of the nineteenth century were therefore quite troubling and manifold. In "Introducing the Ideas and Beliefs of the Victorians," Lord David Cecil states "[t]he

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ideal longings which glow in the hearts of men [now] seemed to have no counterpart or justification in the physical universe of which he [sic] is the inhabitant. Could he be sure that anything was good or bad, man began to ask himself; and if so, why?" (in I.B.V., p. 23). The decline of the metaphysical reality of religion shifted focus to the ethical and personal aspect of belief. Here, perhaps, the believer might still retain some degree of unmolested faith. "A purely personal religion," Bertrand Russell writes, "so long as it is content to avoid assertions which science can disprove, may survive undisturbed in the most scientific age" (Russell, p. 9); but this is small solace as it implicitly forbids the two aspects of religion that the believer would most cherish: divine justice and an afterlife.

A logical question thus arose in the minds of many concerning the fate of morality and ethics in the scientific age, a concern perhaps best summed up in Dostoevski's famous proposition repeated in different variations throughout The Brothers Karamazov, "If there is no God, all things are permitted." Although able apologists for the scientific community such as Thomas Huxley, Leslie Stephen, John Morley, and W. K. Clifford sought to demonstrate, in Huxley's words, that "a deep sense of religion was compatible with the entire absence of theology" (quoted by Noel Annan in "The Strands of Unbelief" in I.B.V., pp. 150-57, p. 154), many other intelligent and perceptive

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thinkers, including Melville--especially in Clarel--were nonetheless fearful or skeptical of a world where unbridled human nature might now beget change unsponsored. For such thinkers, science merely complicated the hopelessly flawed and eternally complex human condition. The events of the twentieth century would seem to justify some of these concerns. Writing in 1948, J. Bronowski stated "their [the Victorians] moral dilemma has now grown to be the great ethical problem of our own age" (in I.B.V., p. 168), and Lord David Cecil cynically remarked, "[t]here are still people, I am told, who believe that mankind can be saved by science or education or political action" (I.B.V., p. 26). Bertrand Russell would distinguish "the scientific temper of mind" from "scientific technique." The former being "cautious, tentative, and piecemeal; it does not imagine that it knows the whole truth, or even that its best knowledge is wholly true;" the latter, often manifested in the "practical experts" employed by governments and businesses, engenders "a sense of limitless power, of arrogant certainty, and pleasure in manipulation even of human material" (Russell, pp. 244, 245-6). "It cannot be denied," he adds, "that science has helped promote it [the irresponsibility of scientific technique]" (Russell, p. 246).

Melville voices these kinds of concerns throughout Clarel. Margoth, the character who symbolizes science in the poem, clearly anticipates Russell's "practical expert;"

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arrogant and scornful of the other pilgrims' religious quests and concerns, he carries out his program of scientifically demystifying sacred sites in the first half of the poem with a prideful glee and "punning mock and manner" (II. xix. l. 70). Mount Quarantania, where, according to Christian tradition, Satan tempted Christ during the latter's forty days in the desert, becomes for him mere "jura limestone" (II. xix, l. 65) from which he has gathered geological samples ("True Rock of Ages," he sarcastically tells Rolfe [II. xix, l. 86]) that he will now study and then write about. For him, the whole Holy Land is one big archeological dig:

> ...the plain--the vale--Lot's sea--
> It needs we scientists remand
> Back from old theologic myth
> To geologic hammers...
> Siddim shall likewise be set far
> From able.
>
> II. xx. ll. 46-9, 57-8

To Mortmain's impassioned inscription on the Slanted Cross (II. xxxi), bemoaning the transformation of Christianity (here symbolized in the constellation of the Southern Cross) into mere myth, Margoth adds with characteristic hubris, "I, Science, I whose gain's thy loss,/I slanted thee, thou Slanting Cross" (II. xxxi. ll. 99-100). Nowhere is Margoth more emblematic of Russell's "practical expert" than in his express desire for "Rails, wires, from Olivet to the sea,/With station in Gethsemane" (II. xx. ll. 934). Such

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are his outpourings that Derwent, thought by many critics to represent liberal Protestantism's compromise with science, says of him, in half-disgust:

> Intelligence veneers his mien
> Though rude: unprofitably keen:
> Sterile, and with sterility
> Self-satisfied.
>
> II. xx. ll. 7-3

It is Derwent, in fact, who proves Margoth's most vocal critic by far.

The concern over science is expressed elsewhere in Clarel as well, notably in Ungar's scornful dismissal of a future ushered in under the auspices of positivism, a diatribe that anticipates some of Ortega y Gasset's critique of Western civilization:

> Know
> Whatever happen in the end,
> Be sure 'twill yield to one and all
> New confirmation of the fall
> Of Adam. Sequel may ensue,
> Indeed, whose germs one now may view:
> Myriads playing pygmy parts--
> Debased into equality:
> In glut of all material arts
> A civic barbarism may be:
> Man disennobled--brutalized
> By popular science--Atheized
> Into a smatterer
>
> Iv. xxi. ll. 121-133

Throughout Clarel the emphasis is repeatedly placed upon the Carlylian idea that human beings are essentially

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spiritual, that the human condition in the abstract is constant and unchanging, and that science cannot profoundly alter it because it is powerless to effect human nature.

a. The Protestant Dilemma

In addition to its impact on the social fabric, and despite Russell's earlier assurances to the contrary, the inroads made by science _did_ put the individual Protestant believer on the defensive. In _Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries_, Mircea Eliade suggests that the impact of empirical science robbed human and natural history of its symbolic significance:

> No magic any longer illuminates the 'illud tempus' of the "beginnings: there was [now] no primordial "fall" or "break," but only an infinite series of events, _all_ of which have made us what we are today. There is no "qualitative" difference between these events; all deserve to be re-memorised and continually revalued by the historitoraphic 'anamnesis.' There are neither events nor persons that are privileged; in studying the epoch of Alexander the Great of the message of the Buddha, one is no nearer to God than in studying the history of a Montenegrin village or the biography of some forgotten pirate ...all historical events are equal.
>
> Eliade, 1975, pp. 55-6

It is against this dilemma, what Eliade calls "the tyranny of Time" (_Ibid_. p. 37), that the three main characters of _Clarel_, Clarel, Rolfe, and Vine, armed only with their reason, must struggle.

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Significantly, all three are American Protestants of a radical (nondenominational) nature. As Protestants, they tacitly believe in the sovereignty of the individual soul, and look away from formalism and ritual to the promise of revelation born of the perpetual transaction between the rational mind and the rest of creation, through which God speaks. What Alfred Kazin wrote of Melville, that in him "the Protestant habit of moralizing and the transcendental passion for symbolizing all things as examples of 'higher laws' combined," is fundamentally true of these characters as well--even though their respective faiths have been tested and even lost (Moby-Dick, p. vii). To this degree they stand apart from the icon-making traditions of belief and worship depicted throughout the poem, such as Judaism and the Greek or Catholic churches. These, in their turn, depend upon rites and observations that transcend secular history insofar as they constitute a remembrance of and return to a time of Creation. In A History of Religious Ideas Eliade describes these "immobilisms," as they are known, as

> The stability of hieratic forms, the repetition of gestures and exploits performed at the dawn of time, [which] are the logical consequence of a theology that considered the cosmic order to be supremely the divine work and saw in all change the danger of a regression to chaos and hence the triumph of demonic forces. [my emphasis]
> Eliade. 1978, vol. 1, p. 86

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The ritual act thus becomes a transcendent one in the sense that it abstracts the believer(s) from the chronology of the physical world (the "tyranny of Time"):

> In *imitating* the exemplary acts of a god or of a mythic hero, or simply by recounting their adventures...[the believer] detaches himself from profane time and magically re-enters the Great Time; the sacred time.
>
> Eliade, 1975, p. 23

In performing a rite, the individual is "rendered contemporary with the Creation...[living] again in the initial plenitude of being" (*Ibid*., p. 48). But iconoclastic nineteenth-century American Protestantism, through its distrust of icons and rituals and its corresponding lack of any such "immobilisms," becomes hostage to secular history; the individual is forever trapped in the prison of the self, as Tocqueville foresaw, and the Divine Being becomes either an expression merely of an inner feeling or of the inner self (as in Transcendentalism), or else remote and inscrutable. Describing his own break from Protestantism in the *Autobiography*, Goethe wrote,

> If Protestantism worship lacks a fullness in general, so let it be investigated in detail, and it will be found that the Protestant has too few sacraments,--nay, indeed, he has only one in which he himself is an actor,--the Lord's Supper...The sacraments are the highest part of religion, the symbols to our senses of an extraordinary divine favor and grace,
>
> Goethe, seventh book, pp. 239-40

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He goes on to lament that the "truly spiritual connection," one achieved through symbolic rites, is "shattered to pieces in Protestantism, by part of the..symbols being declared apocryphal, and only a few canonical!" (*Ibid*. p, 242).

Protestantism, then, has in effect destroyed the divine by both demystifying the natural world through scientific method and by locating the seat of authority in a rational self that claims sovereignty by virtue of its innate right to interpret that world.

But if Protestantism made a profound impact in the intellectual world through its nurturing relationship with the scientific movement, it made equally great inroads into the American social fabric through its other great stepchild, democracy. No one better understood this than Tocqueville. "It must never be forgotten," he writes in *Democracy in America*, "that [Protestant] religion gave birth to Anglo-American society. In the United States, religion is therefore mingled with all the habits of the nation..." (Tocqueville, p. 144-5). The dangers herein can be profound and troubling:

> Thus, not only does democracy make every man forget his ancestors, but it hides his descendants and separates his contemporaries from him; *it throws him back forever upon himself alone and threatens in the end to confine him entirely within the solitude of his heart*. [my emphasis]
> *Ibid*., p. 194

Like Protestantism, democracy ideally creates a race of

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autonomous individuals, proud, perhaps, of their equality with one another, but also driven by a sense of freedom (from the dogma of others), liberty, and individualism, and herein is found the seed of the modern dilemma, what I call the Protestant dilemma. "Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heav'n" declares Milton's Satan, the first great Protestant (anti-) hero (whatever "party" Milton may have belonged to; Paradise Lost, I. l. 263). But as Octavio Paz has beautifully written, "Milton's Satan plunges interminably, and what is more terrible still, as he falls into the endless void, he falls into himself; Modernity begins with the discovery of this double infinite: the cosmic and the psychic" (Paz, p. 19, my emphasis). Georg Lukacs states that the modern hero is "Confined within the limits of his own experience" (quoted in Rogin, p. 194).

The three main characters in Clarel persistently reflect this dilemma in their actions and words, and each bears the consequences of it in the condition of his individual suffering, much like the congregation of the Whaleman's Chapel in Moby-Dick, where "Each silent worshipper seemed purposely sitting apart from the other, as if each silent grief were insular and incommunicable" (Chapter vii, p. 47). So constrained are the three that any effort to transcend the bonds of self only result in awkward silences and glances or clumsy attempts at intimacy. In Clarel, God (the cosmic) and human nature (the psychic)

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are alike discovered to be infinite and thus inscrutable:

> But if in vain
> One tries to comprehend a man,
> How think to sound God's deeper heart!
> II. xxxii. ll. 109-11

Melville no doubt harbored ambivalent feelings toward his native country and its Protestant heritage. While it may be true, as Stanton Garner writes, that Melville "belie[ved] that the salvation of the world lay in its Americanization" (Garner, p. 26), it also cannot be questioned, as Michael Paul Rogin has shown, that in his fiction Melville is often a severe critic of certain aspects of his country. Certainly in _Clarel_ the suffering of the American characters (Clarel, Rolfe, Vine, but also Nathan, Agar, Ruth, Ungar, and Nehemiah) is to understood as significantly related to such traits of the American character as Tocqueville is describing.

Melville illustrates the perils of this American Protestant dilemma in the very first two Cantos of _Clarel_, where Clarel's sterile Protestantism, which has trapped him, as it were, within the twin tyrannies of self and time, is contrasted with the richness of the Jewish tradition of the hostel-owner Abdon, a tradition based in part on ritual and observation which allows its practitioners access to the "Great Time."

In the First Canto Melville depicts Clarel in his

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hostel room in Jerusalem. Here and elsewhere in the poem, the detritus of the Holy Land (which is itself now apparently trapped in secular time and therefore subject to its forces) reflect the spiritual emptiness of the young protagonist. Thus, Clarel's room is "scored by time,/Masonry old, late washed with lime--/Much like a tomb" (ll. 1-3); dust, that great twentieth-century symbol for spiritual decline, is everywhere (ll. 13-14); the surrounding landscape, through which Clarel had passed the night before from the poet city of Jaffa, is described as harsh, unyielding, and filled with thieves (ll. 49-58); and the sterility of the sacred city itself is evoked in "Like the ice- bastions round the Pole,/Thy blank, blank towers Jerusalem" (ll. 6-1). Clarel himself, with no biographical or personal past (just like Rolfe and Vine), becomes a beautiful if highly ironic depiction of the American Adamic figure, which R. W. B. Lewis describes in *The American Adam* as

> an individual emancipated from history, happily bereft of ancestry, untouched and undefiled by the usual inheritances of family and race; an individual standing alone, self-reliance and self-propelling, ready to confront whatever waited him with the aid of his own unique and inherent resources.
>
> Lewis, p. 5

(As we shall see later, this description of the archetypal figure can also be legitimately applied to the Druze guide

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Djalea.) Clarel is first found in a pensive posture, "Elbow on knee, and brow sustained/All motionless on sidelong hand" (ll. 4-5). He is, we discover, brooding alone (l. 6). He thinks of himself as "the learner" (l. 21) and is also described as "a student" (l. 6) and "collegiate" (l.. 109), and the topics of his deep thoughts are his own inability to believe and the spiritual void of the Holy Land. We learn that he has not recently prayed (l. 118--120) and that when he now tries to do so, "His lips he parted; but the word/Against the utterance demurred/And failed him" (ll. 122-4). He remembers the words of a fellow-American traveler he met in Jaffa:

> Our New World's worldly wit so shrewd
> Lacks the Semitic reverent mood,
> Unworldly--hardly may confer
> Fitness for just interpreter
> Of Palestine
>
> ll. 92-6

This view of American pragmatism, later to be echoed in Rolfe's "'Tis the New World that mannered me,/Yes, gave me this vile liberty/To reverence naught, not even herself" (II. xxvi. ll. 151-3), resurrects in the poem the ancient debate between belief and skepticism: how does one reconcile faith and mysticism with the dictates of rational thought and common sense, which seem to everywhere challenge the grounds for that faith? To even dwell on this idea is to invite disaster, as Burroughs observes: "Indeed, the

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question which it is not safe to ask of any religion is just the one we are prone to ask first, namely, Is it true?" (Burroughs, p. 16). Knowledge, insofar as it constitutes an empirical awareness of the world, becomes thus an oppressive tyrant, as the Scottish theologian Henry Drummond wrote in Natural Law in the Spiritual World (1883), "The Spiritual World as it stands is full of perplexity. One can escape doubt only by escaping thought" (Drummond, p. 45). "Thought's burden!" Clarel will exclaim in the Second Canto (l. 130), and later in the first section of the poem the narrator will describe Clarel, Rolfe, and Vine as entrapped by "the ball of thought/And chain yet dragging" (I. xxi. ll. 285-6); indeed, as American Protestants trapped in the rational self yet longing for faith and companionship (I. ii. ll. 11-12), this is all they can fall back on. Schopenhauer, yet another refugee from Protestantism, whom Melville read with great interest and approval after 1871 (Leyda, pp. 720-1, and throughout Mathiessen and Dillingham), also believed that knowledge exacerbated suffering. Greatly influenced by the Eastern religions (which also fascinated Melville), he finally reached the conclusion that relief from such torment can only occur when the self (Will) is denied and ultimately annihilated. As we shall see in Chapter Five, this idea is not far from the fate awaiting Clarel at the end of the poem, and it will constitute, as such, as near as Melville would come to proposing a "solution" to the problems of faith raised

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throughout Clarel.

How different is the world of Abdon, the Jewish host of the inn in Jerusalem where Clarel is staying! The first seven lines of the Second Canto describe the tube containing the mezuzah at the door of Abdon's abode (as is ordained in Deuteronomy 6.9 and 11.20). The Mezuzah is inscribed with God's Law, so that the believer will never forget, and is rolled in such a way so that the word "Shaddai" ("Almighty") shows through the hole in the vial. The sensual description of Abdon with "reverend beard of saffron hue/Sweeping his robe of Indian blue" (ll. 9-10) is in striking contrast to the indistinct blankness and dust of the First Canto. Unlike Clarel (and Rolfe and Vine, for that matter), whose past remains a mystery throughout the poem, Abdon can trace his ancestry straight back to the Old Testament (ll. 22-7) and, by implication, the very origin itself. In relating his own past to Clarel, Abdon emphasizes that his kin keep "Moses' law" to this day (ll. 333-35), causing Clarel to marvel "How Judah, Benjamin, live on--/Unmixed into time's swamping sea/So far can urge their Amazon" (ll. 48-50). It is interesting to note that this metaphor of a river carrying its fresh waters miles out to sea before becoming diluted is used twice and in precisely the same way by Vico in The New Science (p. 132, paragraph 412, and p. 234, paragraph 629). On both occasions he uses the image to suggest the maintenance of some social or religious form in the face of historical change. In

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Vichian terms, characters in <u>Clarel</u> such as Abdon, who maintain their faith through rites and observances, are carryovers from an earlier period, maintaining their customs, rituals, and beliefs despite social evolution, whereas Clarel, Rolfe, Vine (and the preconversion Nathan) dwell in the Vichian third, and last (modern), period, one characterized by a move away from the metaphoric and metaphysical toward the rational, the political, the technical, and the popular or vulgar. Overall, the contrast between Clarel and Abdon is thus striking.

For Melville, the sovereignty of the individual conscience, that central tenet of Protestantism, is not sufficient by itself to maintain a realistic faith in the face of nineteenth-century positivism; in fact, it becomes a kind of hell. In <u>Clarel</u>, Protestantism is depicted as inevitably leading to two alternatives for the would-be believer, neither being satisfactory. The first is found in the kind of fundamentalism exemplified in the aged Rhode Island millennialist, Nehemiah; the second is the kind of bland, nondoctrinal "faith" reflected in the Anglican minister, Derwent. Nehemiah's fundamentalism, orthodox in the extreme, is characterized by a simple if unyielding faith in the literal truth of the Bible and a willful indifference to virtually everything else. The results of his blind faith are frequently embarrassing--even given the respect bestowed upon him by the other pilgrims--and finally catastrophic, much as Melville had explored in

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such earlier works as Moby-Dick, The Confidence-Man, and especially in Pierre, where the impracticality of following Christ's teachings to their literal end is powerfully delineated. Like a living exemplar of Plinlimmon's "Chronologicals and Horologicals" tract, Nehemiah's faith has led him to focus so exclusively on the chronological affairs of his beloved Heaven that he literally cannot keep track of the horological time on Earth:

> Deep read he [Nehemiah] was in seers devout,
> The which forcast Christ's second prime,
> And on his slate would cipher out
> The mystic days and dates sublime,
> And "Time and times and half a time"
> Expound he could; and more reveal;
> Yet frequent would he feebly steal
> Close to one's side, asking, in way
> Of weary age--the hour of the day.
> I. viii. ll. 44-5

The scriptural tracts he hands out in languages he cannot speak or read are blown away with the desert sands of eaten by camels. The circumstances of his death, wherein, drawn by a dream, he imagines the New Jerusalem to be rising from the Dead Sea and sleepwalks into its waters and drowns, merely reinforce both the pathetic and dangerous ramifications of embracing this kind of fundamentalism.

A much more significant--but hardly less satisfactory--alternative is offered in the person of Derwent. The Anglican minister, who as representative of an "official" church becomes emblematic for a kind of Protestant

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orthodoxy, is constantly found to be lacking in the religious and ethical debates he conducts with the other pilgrims. Ever-cheerful and serene, he begins the journey to the Dead Sea "with morning zest/In sound digestion uoppressed," recalling at once Ishmael's assertion in Moby-Dick that "hell is an idea first born on an undigested apple-dumpling" (Chapter 17, pp. 84-5), Emerson's bold claim in "Nature": "Give me health and a day, and I will make the pomp of emperors ridiculous," and Carlyle's derisive observation "With Stupidity and sound Digestion man may front much" (Sartor Resartus, p. 176). Rolfe will later good-naturedly wonder how Derwent can be so perpetually happy "[w]hile all the depths of Being moan" (II. xxi. l. 93), pointedly recalling the Buddha's lament "How can there be laughter, how can there be pleasure, when the whole world is burning?" (The Dhammapada, v. 146, p. 56). Clarel, after considering the many different qualities of the various pilgrims, can only conclude of Derwent that his "easy skim/Never had satisfied throughout" (III. xxi. ll. 58-9).

However, in Nehemiah and Derwent Melville has not merely presented two fools for ridicule; both actually possess subtle qualities which, when considered in light of the rhetorical significance attached in the poem to "the interympathy of creeds," demand great respect. Nehemiah's simple persona born of his child-like faith, for example, speaks volumes more than the orthodox tracts

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he's so intent on distributing:

> Latin, Armenian, Greek and Jew
> Full well the harmless vagrant kenned,
> The small meek face, the habit gray:
> In him they owned our human clay.
> The Turk went further: let him wend;
> Him Allah cares for, holy one:
> A Santon [Islamic Holy man] held him:
> and was none
> Bigot enough scorn's shaft to send.
> For, say what cynic will or can,
> Man sinless is revered by man
> Thro' all the forms which creeds may lend.
> I. viii. ll. 65-75 (emphasis mine)

His true virtue is thus transdoctrinal and heterodoxical, despite his orthodox belief. His essential spirituality is readily recognizable, so much so that the Muslims would speak of him as one of their holy men. None of this is lost on Clarel, Vine, or Rolfe, who, like their Islamic counterparts, respect the depth of his faith while rejecting the doctrine.

Similarly, Derwent's heterodoxical nature, hidden behind his Anglican heterodoxy, often places him in concert with the poem's underlying search for the "interympathy of creeds." For example, in the grim and determined figure of Belex, the Turkish Islamic leader of the guards of the pilgrimage, he sees "The inherent vigor of man's life/ Transmitted from strong Adam down," which "takes no infirmity that's won/By institutions.../God bless the marrow in the bone!" (II. vii. ll. 9-12, 14). In section four of the poem, engaged in debate with Ungar, he suddenly

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points out two Islamic shepherds, praying toward Mecca. When Rolfe points out that they stand with "their backs on Bethlehem turned" (IV. x. l. 65), Derwent replies,

> ....Yes, for they pray
> To Allah. Well, and what of that?
> Christ listens, standing in heaven's gate--
> Benignant listens, nor doth stay
> Upon a syllable in creed:
> Vowels and consonants indeed!
> IV. x. ll. 67-72

Derwent's compassion for these Islamic shepherds, typical of his attitude throughout the poem, significantly recalls the earlier example of the Muslims regarding Nehemiah.

Derwent has often been regarded with contempt by the critics of the poem, who find his "easy skim" repellent. Thus, Bezanson states that Derwent's response to Clarel's religious inquiries--"Alas, too deep you dive" (III. xxi. l. 307)--puts him (Derwent)

> low in the hierarchy of the poem, recalling, as it does, Melville's memorable comment in a letter to Evert Duyckinck (March 3, 1849): "I love all men who _dive_."
> _Clarel_, p. 621

(In this letter to Hawthorne, Melville is describing Emerson, a figure for whom he had decidedly ambivalent feelings) But he forgets that Derwent's statement "rid me of pride's part/And let me live but by the heart" (III. vi. ll. 68-9) recalls an equally memorable comment by

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Melville in a letter to Hawthorne (June 1851): "I stand for the heart. To the dogs with the head! I had rather be a fool with a heart, than Jupiter Olympus with his head" (Correspondence, p. 192). Mortmain's retort to this, "Hast proved thy heart? first prove it" (III. vi. l. 70), is immediately followed by a question for Derwent involving the veracity of the Bible, and thus remains unanswered--but it ought not be thought to be rhetorical. This debate between Mortmain and Derwent, instigated by the former, occurs immediately following II. v., where the narrator explicitly states that the kinds of questions Mortmain asks in II. vi. are futile (ll. 164-7). Derwent's response to Mortmain's attempts to get him to deny outright the metaphysical truth of the Bible, implying that works such as the Iliad and the Ramayana (which had been used by the narrator in I. xxxii to state a "truth") may possess truths beyond their metaphysical reality (ll. 83-9), is much more in keeping with the poem's theme of the "intersympathy of creeds." Derwent's emphasis on the heart is echoed in the narrator's advice to Clarel in the "Epilogue," in a voice that sounds most like Rolfe's and Derwent's: "Then keep thy heart, though yet but ill-resigned--/Clarel, thy heart, the issues there but mind" (IV. xxxv. ll. 27-8).

Derwent's fault within the poem's rhetorical strategy is not in his apparently shallow ecclesiastical stance, but rather in his seeming indifference to the suffering experienced by all in the world and, perhaps more

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importantly, in his unwavering belief that the technological advances brought about by science will change for the better the human condition, a premise the poem constantly questions. Repeatedly in Clarel, science is made to appear impotent or even irrelevant in dealing with what are regarded as essential and eternal human longings and desires. Thus, the Dominican rhetorically asks Derwent

> ....Shall Science then
> Which soley dealeth with this thing
> Named Nature, shall she ever bring
> One solitary hope to men?
> II. xxv, ll. 154-7

Earlier in the poem, Rolfe expresses this idea when he tells Clarel

> ....This ignorant state [the human condition]
> Science doth but elucidate--
> Deepen, enlarge. But though 'twere made
> Demonstratable that God is not--
> What then? it would not change this lot:
> The ghost would haunt, nor could be laid.
> I. xxxi, ll. 191-6

When Margoth, the scientist, tells the pilgrims that "The agitating influence/Of knowledge never will dispense/With teasing faith, do what ye may" (II. xxix. ll. 104-6), it is, ironically enough, Derwent himself who answers him, expressing a view heartily endorsed in the poem's rhetorical strategy:

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Such perturbations do but give
Proof that faith's vital: sensitive
Is faith, my friend
II. xix, ll. 108-10)

And in the "Epilogue" of the poem, the narrator explains,

Yea, ape and angel, strife and old debate--
The harps of heaven and dreary gongs of hell;
Science the feud can only aggravate--
No umpire she betwixt the chimes and knell:
The running battle of the star and clod
Shall run forever--if there be no God.
IV. xxxv. ll. 12-17

In Derwent, Melville depicts a growing tendency of liberal Protestantism in the nineteenth century, one characterized by an increasing attempt among mainstream theologians to demystify the miracles of the Christian religion in order to accommodate the discoveries of science. Conservative religious thinkers, schooled in the tradition of the Bible as historical truth, tended to reject outright the conclusions reached by science (and still do), usually finding a theological explanation for the phenomenon science described. When, for example, the geologist and lay theologian Hugh Miller (1802-1856), a serious and deeply religious man, wondered in _Testimony of the Rocks_ how the Creator could allow the prehistoric animals to inflict such pain on one another before human beings were created (i.e., before sin and the Fall--animals were usually thought to have existed at peace prior to the Fall), he was boldly

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answered by the Scottish theologian William Gillespie in _The Necessary Existence of God_ (1859), who confidently explained that the dinosaurs had originally been innocent creatures in whom Satan had wrought great mischief, or else that, like the Gadarene swine, they had been animals possessed by devils (Russell, p. 67-9). In _Omphalos_ (1857), Philip Henry Gosse, the exceedingly conservative naturalist and father to the literary historian and translator Edmund Gosse, argued that fossils are easily understood when we realize that God created everything as though it had a past. As Russell observes, "[t]here is no logical possibility of _proving_ that this theory is untrue...The rocks could have been filled with fossils, and have been made just as they would have become if they had been due to volcanic action or to sedimentary deposits" (Russell, pp. 69-70). For such unyielding religious apologists, the question became, in W. G. Ward's famous phrase, "Shall I deny the fact or defend the principle?"

But the disputes between science and religion were by no means as cut and dried as those voicing these more radical viewpoints would liked to have thought. Certainly few in the scientific community actually wished to destroy religion--that was more the stated aim of the kind of comparative religionists I described early in Chapter One. Russell observes that

> In the nineteenth century, most British men of

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> science still thought that there was no essential conflict between their science and those parts of the Christian faith which liberal Christians still regarded as essential--for it had been found possible to sacrifice the literal truth of the Flood, and even of Adam and Eve.
>
> Russell, p. 172

The less literal-minded theologians were thus seeking to bridge a gap between the two disciplines. Drummond elaborates on this in _Natural Law in the Supernatural World_:

> No man who knows the splendor of scientific achievement or cares for it, no man who feels the solidity of its method or works with it [sic], can remain neutral with regard to Religion. He must either extend his method into it, or, if that is impossible, oppose it to the knife. On the other hand, no one who knows the content of Christianity, or feels the universal need for Religion, can stand idly by while the intellect of his age is slowly divorcing itself from it. What is required, therefore, to draw Science and Religion together again--for they began the centuries hand in hand--is the disclosure of the naturalness of the supernatural.
>
> Drummond, p. 20

Burroughs discusses this also at length in _The Light of Day_:

> One of the latest phases of the religious thought of the times seems to be a desire to get rid of, or to explain away the supernatural,--at least to reclaim and domesticate it and convince mankind that it is not the irresponsible outlaw we have so long been led to suppose.
>
> Burroughs, p. 9

According to Burroughs, in "Reign of Law" the Duke of Argyll

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argues that "the natural may reach far enough to include all that we have commonly called the supernatural" (Ibid., pp. 9-10). In "Relations between Religion and Science," the Bishop of Exeter suggests that a miracle "may be only some phase of the natural not yet understood; the turning of water into wine by word of command, or the miracle of the loaves and the fishes, may have been accomplished by the exercise of some power over nature which is perfectly scientific, but of which man as yet has imperfect control" (Ibid., p 9). For Butler, in his "Analogy," Christianity is "little more than a question of experimental science; the conversion of Paul is as natural and explicable a process...as the hatching of an egg or the sprouting of a kernel of corn." He quotes Butler as saying that "there is no more mystery in religion as to its process than in biology," and then adds, "[t]he question of a future life is only a biological problem to him" (Ibid., p. 10).

But it was largely understood by all that these concessions constituted a general retreat by orthodox religion, an acknowledgment of the immanent authority of empirical science in interpreting the natural world. Despite some significant differences on important issues, many twentieth-century Protestant apologists for religion would emphasize the philosophical and ethical aspects of Christianity, often at the expense of the metaphysical and doctrinal questions; "as men grow more reflective," Russell writes, "there is a tendency to lay less stress

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on rules and more on states of mind" (Russell, p. 224). This shift from doctrinal orthodoxy toward a more flexible, heterodoxical approach to the problem of faith in the modern world is prefigured in the basic dynamic of Protestantism, what Keith Stavely calls (while speaking of Puritans) in Puritan Legacies: "Paradise Lost" and the New England Tradition, 1630-1890 (1987), "Puritan polarities--elitism and egalitarianism, restraint and liberation, order and enthusiasm" (Stavely, p. 101). What Stavely says of Puritan ideology, that it "contained within itself the seeds of sharp ideological conflict" (Stavely, p. 106), may be easily applied to Protestantism in general. We have already seen how this dynamic played itself out constantly in Melville's mind, and many of the questions raised in Clarel, a poem of sad recognition where orthodoxy, though admired for its own sake, is recognized as untenable when its doctrines come in conflict with science, keenly reflects an awareness of it.

The critique of Derwent as seemingly indifferent to the suffering around him stands; as Bezanson observes, "[f]or Derwent there is no crisis simply because he refused to see any; a rainbow-catcher from way back, he does not propose to have either his digestion or his professional equilibrium upset" (Clarel, pp. 573-4). But the sincerity of Derwent's regard for his fellow human beings cannot be questioned; as Rolfe states in III. xvi., "I cannot dream he simulates" (l. 188). As the rhetorical strategy

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of the poem consists, in part, in the move beyond orthodoxy toward an "intersympathy of creeds," as I shall demonstrate in the next chapter, Derwent's suppleness of nature and compassion for others points the way to a major theme, which Bezanson calls "the study of personalities" (Clarel, p. 571). Clarel, he says, goes increasingly from asking whose beliefs are right [orthodoxy] to asking who is the right kind of man [heterodoxy]" (Ibid. p. 571). This, as we have seen, was the starting point for so many of the comparative religionists of the nineteenth century who aspired to find the true religious essence, the underlying character, not the doctrine.

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Notes: Chapter Two

1. The German-born radical democrat of the French Revolution Jean-Baptiste du Val-de-Grace Cloots (1755-1794) was a figure of some significance in Melville's symbolic imagination, appearing three times in three different works. Cloots headed a delegation of 36 foreigners (which he called the "embassy of the human race") to the French National Assembly, which he addressed on June 17, 1791. Thereafter he adopted the pseudonym "Anarcharsis" and called himself "The Orator of Mankind". In the ensuing chaos of the revolution Cloots was guillotined. In addition to the citation I've quoted from Moby-Dick, Cloots is alluded to in The Confidence-Man and Billy Budd. Thus, the eclectic cast of characters on board the Fidele is described as "an Anarcharsis Cloots congress of all kinds of that multiform pilgrim species, man" (The Confidence-Man, Chapter Two, p. 14), while a group of exuberant and joyful sailors in Liverpool is described as being "made up of such an assortment of tribes and complexions as would have well fitted them to be marched up by Anacharsis Cloots before the bar of the first French Assmbly as Representatives of the Human Race" (Billy-Budd, Sailor, Chapter One, p. 292). Cloots clearly represents a kind of radical democratic view of humanity, one in which ethnic and religious differences are ignored. It is significant that Cloots is used in two of these cases to describe sailors, who, in their essentially savage but honest way, often exemplify what comes to represent for Melville what is best and even heroic in the human race.

2. A somewhat abbreviated list of such historical religious figures, places, and events and ideas mentioned or directly alluded to in Clarel would include, from the realm of history, myth, and religion: Allah and Islam, Anak, atheism, Attis (the Phrygian God), Baal, Bacchus, Baldwin and Godfrey (Crusaders; the latter is hero of Tasso's Jerusalem Delivered), Bel and Nebo (Babylonian gods), St. Bernard, St Basil, Brahma, Buddha, Caesar, Calvin, Cheops, El Cid, communism, Confucious, Druids, St. Francis (who is something of a hero in Clarel), Hildebrand (St Gregory VII, Pope from 1073-1085), Hinduism, the Koran, Manicheism, Montezuma, Nero, Orcus, Osiris, pantheism, Parsees, Pericles, Pizarro, Pluto, Quakerism, Rama and the Ramayana, St. Theresa, stocism, the Talmud, Thor, thuggism, Zoroasterism, and Ormuzd and Ahriman (the respective good and evil gods of Zoroasterism); from the realm of philosophy and literature: Anselm, Thomas A' Becket, Boccaccio, Cicero, Chateaubriand,

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Dante, Duns Scotus, Goethe, Hamlet, Heine, Homer, Machiavelli, Moses Mendelssohn, Thomas Paine, Plato, Sappho, Spinosa, Tasso, and Voltaire; and from the realm of science: Johann Ludwig Burkhardt (1784-1817; the Swiss explorer and travel writer who was able to gain access to Islamic holy places never seen by Europeans before), Comte, Darwin, Newton, Niebuhr, and Renan.

By no means do I claim this to be a comprehensive list; in an appendix to his unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, "A Concordance to Herman Melville's _Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land_" (University of Nebraska, 1978), Larry E. Wegener lists over 1,800 capitalized words and phrases that appear in _Clarel_. I have here selected some of the more important in order to emphasize the historical ballast such allusions provide.

3. Robertson-Lorant argues that "to the modern reader, Melville seems more Shakespearean than Hawthorne because his range of subjects and locales is wider and his characters more varied, and because he is more comical and free-spirited" (p. 250).

4. Robertson-Lorant says that in Melville's concept of the novel (derived in large part from his readings of "the King James Bible, Shakespeare, Rabelais, Cervantes, Dante, Milton, Sterne, Burton, and Browne") "no subject matter was off limits, and traditional literary forms were straitjackets. He much preferred to write organic, mixed-genre works that gave a sense of the narrator's mind probing, questioning, reflecting, shaping, and composing, but that meant challenging conventional notions of narrative" (p. 240).

That Melville was not a harbinger of the new empirical realists is perhaps best evinced from this exerpt from a contemporary review of _Battle-Pieces_ in _Atlantic Monthly_ by William Dean Howells, the critic most responsible for discovering and advocating their work:

> Is it possible...that there has really been a great war, with battles fought by men and bewailed by women? Or is it only that Mr. Melville's inner consciousness has been perturbed, and filled with the phantasms of enlistments, marches, fights in the air, parenthetical bulletin-boards, and tortured humanity shedding, not words and blood, but words alone?
>
> cited in Garner, p. 441

5. Sophia Hawthorne acutely perceived this aspect in Melville's great essay, "Hawthorne and His Mosses", even when she didn't know the identity if its author. Thus, in a letter to her sister, Elizabeth Peabody, she described the then unbeknownst-to-her author (Melville) as being

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one in which "Great Heart & Great Intellect [are] combined" (Robertson- Lorant, p. 252).

6. Thus, for example, we find Melville attending services while traveling alone in Europe in 1849. At Cologne, he attends Sunday service at the catherdral (Robertson-Lorant, p. 229), while in London he attends a service at Westminster Abbey (Robertson-Lorant, p. 224) as well as one conducted by "my famed namesake (almost) The Reverend H Melvill" of St. Thomas, Goswell Street (Robertson-Lorant, p. 231). Parker argues throughout his gigantic biography that Melville was quite indifferent to church attendance; but he certainly didn't abstain altogether and while his attendance certainly indicates nothing specific, it should also not be dismissed outright.

7. Obviously, Protestantism has historically comprised an exceedingly broad spectrum of views, as we have just seen in Melville's own case. Moreover, any system that can accomodate within its fold such diverse theological concepts as those articulated in the beliefs and doctrines of Calvinists, Anglicans, Quakers, Millennialists, Puritans, Lutherans, Baptists, Levellers, Diggers, and Ranters would seem itself to defy definition. Therefore, throughout this section I shall be using Protestantism in its most abstract or radical meaning, namely, the location of authority and the power of interpretation in the individual self (or conscience). The implications inherent in this shift of authority are immense, as the poem argues.

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Chapter Three: Comparative Religious Patterns in *Clarel*: "Jerusalem"

The nineteenth-century dialogue between science and religion served to greatly redefine the latter. No longer could it declare authority in its interpretation of the physical world, nor could it afford to assert its metaphysical claims to be valid when scientific explanations were demonstrating that these "truths" were, in fact, often based on misconception, error, exaggeration, and sometimes even deception. And yet, excepting the exceedingly orthodox on either side, both parties of the dialogue would acknowledge that some form of belief was still possible and even desirable. In "The Place of our Age in the History of Civilization" (1863), Charles S. Peirce wrote that "[h]uman learning must fail somewhere. Materialism fails on the side of incompleteness. Idealism always presents a systematic totality, but it must always have some vagueness and thus leads to error...if materialism without idealism is blind, idealism without materialism is void" (Peirce, p. 11). The moral dangers of a worldview purely material were coming to be recognized just as were the

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impracticalities of one purely idealistic.

Despite the strident tenor of some of its more radical apologists, science in general sought no quarrel with the religious community except where their respective claims came in conflict, much the same as we've seen how liberal religious thinkers sought to reach out to science. Burroughs, for example, while arguing that when Christianity "attempts to play the role of interpreter of the visible order of the universe, or to satisfy our rational faculties, its failure is pathetic" (Burroughs, p. 93), also finds great need for "purely religious utterances" such as the Sermon on the Mount, which "stimulate and exalt our religious sense" (Burroughs, p. 89). He goes on to make a further distinction:

> Science deals with and can only deal with the objective, the rigid, inexorable world of law. With the subjective, the world within us, the world of personality, whence comes all we call literature, art, religion, philosophy, etc., it cannot deal. Here exact demonstration is not possible; all is plastic, growing, conflicting, aspiring, indeterminate.
>
> Burroughs, p. 96

"Theology passes;" he writes, "religion, as a sentiment or feeling of awe and reverence in the presence of the vastness and mystery of the universe, remains" (Burroughs, p. viii).

For Bertrand Russell, the personal religious experience remains inviolate even in the face of science:

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> There is, however, one aspect of religious life, and that perhaps the most desirable, which is independent of the discoveries of science, and may survive whatever we may come to believe as to the nature of the universe. Religion has been associated, not only with creeds and churches, but with the personal life of those who felt its importance..Insofar as religion consists in a way of feeling, rather than in a set of beliefs, science cannot touch it.
>
> Russell, p. 17

Both scientists describe an inner urge or feeling, quite dissociated from metaphysical reality, that was recognized by nineteenth-century theologians and scientists alike, who believed there to be some kind of innate religious disposition in human beings that extended beyond the realm of science, what Max Muller had called "a faculty of faith in man, independent of all historical religions" (*Introduction to the Science of Religion*, p. 17).

This concept of an innate religious faculty or sense, the bedrock of nineteenth-century comparative religious studies, is depicted throughout *Clarel* and, in fact, reflects Melville's own view of belief and its origins. The most prominent character in the poem, Rolfe, who is thought by many critics to be an autobiographical portrait, articulates this idea in poetic terms that could easily have been culled from Muller's Nature/Myth theories, adding, like Russell, that science cannot affect this basic constituent of the human psyche:

> Yea, long as children feel affright

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> In darkness, men shall fear a God;
> And long as daisies yield delight
> Shall see His footprints in the sod.
> Is't ignorance? This ignorant state
> Science doth elucidate--
> Deepen, enlarge. But though 'twere made
> Demonstrable that God is not--
> What then? it would not change this lot.
> I. xxxi. ll. 187-95

In this same canto, Rolfe, addressing Clarel, Vine, and Nehemiah, elaborates his view that while specific religions and systems of belief--orthodoxies--have risen and fallen throughout history (even without science), the human need for faith has remained a historical constant, one perpetually reborn and refashioned in each new epoch. Thus, the Egyptian Osiris, "a god how good, whose good proved vain" (l. 210), gave way before Greek philosophy (the "bullying Python" of l. 211) and also to Christ, whom Rolfe implies, he (Osiris) prefigured and in whom he was subsumed (l. 221-2). Christ, too, has now met a similar fate (l. 216); however, Rolfe's argument goes, the human faculty for faith will find a new avatar or incarnation of the sublime, a new correlative upon which to fasten its devotions. This pattern, he says, has been repeated again and again throughout history. Ancient Rome, for example, underwent a materialistic bourgeois period

> ...much like ours: doubt ran,
> Faith flagged; negations which sufficed
> Lawyer, priest, statesman, gentleman,
> Not yet being popularly prized,
> The augers hence retained some state--

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> Which served for the illiterate.
> Still, the decline so swiftly ran
> From stage to stage, that To Believe,
> Except for slave or artisan,
> Seemed heresy. Even doubts which met
> Horror at first, grew obsolete,
> And in a decade.
> ll. 237-248

Roman civilization, consumed by materialism and empire-making, had drifted into a bloated state of atheism among the moneyed classes: "Caesar his atheism avowed/Before the Senate.../...the gods were gone" (ll. 253-4, 255); but then,

> ...Christ came.
> And, in due hour, that impious Rome,
> Emerging from vast wreck and shame,
> Held the fore front of Christendom.
> ll. 259-262

The claims and concerns of science are thus of small significance for Rolfe: "Let fools count on faith's closing knell--/Time, God, are inexhaustible--" (ll. 264-5). In a debate much later in the poem, after Rolfe has called Margoth "a kangaroo of science" (II. xxi. l. 10), Derwent forces him to admit that "science has her eagles too" (II. xxi. l. 12) and proceeds to say "Time runs on/And much that's useful, grant is won [by science]" (II. xxi, ll. 35-6). But Rolfe suggests that science only retreads older theories (rather than "winning" new ones); in the field of physics, for example,

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> ......much late lore
> But drudges after Plato's theme;
> Or supplements--but little more--
> Some Hindoo's speculative dream
> of thousand years ago.
> II. xxi, ll. 19-23

When Derwent argues that science is breaking new ground, Rolfe quickly adds,

> Yes; but more's claimed. Now first they tell
> The human mind is free to range.
> Enlargement--ay; but where's the change?
> We're yet within the citadel--
> May rove in bounds, and study out
> The insuperable towers about[.]
> II. xxi, ll. 37-42

Rolfe's argument, that human history is essentially a cycle of repeating patterns, does not finally allow science any genuine originality; it's his position that science merely refashions what has already been conceived and it therefore does not make any significant impact on the basic human condition.[1] But when he applies this same model to religion a whole spectrum of comparative religious ideas suddenly arises. If religions reshape what has come before (or what was always there), which is the implication of his argument, then there must be an underlying connecting thread between the different religions, originating deep in the aforementioned religious faculty. In this sense, Melville makes Rolfe the voice of a position similar to those

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expressed by Thomas Wentworth Higginson and Max Muller. In "The Sympathy of Religions," Higginson, it will be recalled, argued that each orthodox religion "is Natural Religion _plus_ an individual name" (Higginson, p. 9):

> To say that different races worship different Gods is like saying that they are warmed by the same suns. The names differ, but the sun is the same, and so is God. As there is one source of light and warmth, so there is one source of religion.
>
> Higginson, p. 8

Rolfe's view differs from Higginson's on one significant point, that of the issue of natural religion. For Higginson, whose unflagging radicalism sought to break down barriers wherever he found them, "there is not a single maxim, or idea, or application, or triumph, that any one religion can claim as exclusively its own" (Higginson, p. 25); we must recover, he argues, our unmediated relationship with "the Religion of the Ages, Natural Religion" (Higginson, p. 34). Rolfe's view here is actually closer to that of Max Muller, who denied the existence of a specific "natural religion," and argued instead for a natural religious _faculty_; "[t]here is in all religions," he writes in _Chips From a German Workshop_, "a secret yearning after the true, though unknown God" (p. xxx). In ancient times this faculty found in nature specific images and essences that corresponded to its sense of the divine: the sky approximated the innate sense of the infinite, thunder

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and lightning approximated divine power, and so forth. As I discussed in Chapter One, it was Muller's view that these approximations were quickly blurred through "the disease of language" and that the sky itself would soon be perceived as divine, or the abode of the divine, thunder and lightning as divine wrath, and so forth, a view which Rolfe does not specifically voice. But the main thread of Muller's argument is otherwise remarkable similar to Rolfe's. He, too, sees religious belief in terms of a repeating pattern of archetypal material present from the very beginning of human thought:

> Of religion...it may be said that in it everything new is old, and everything old is new, and that there has been no entirely new religion since the beginning of the world. The elements and roots of religion were thus as far back as we can trace the history of man; and the history of religion...shows us throughout a succession of new combinations of the same radical elements. An intuition of God, a sense of human weakness and dependence, a belief in a Divine government of the world, a distinction between good and evil, and a hope of a better life,--these are some of the radical elements of all religions.
> *Chips From a German Workshop*, p. x

Thus, in a later section, after describing a Fijian custom wherein an otherwise healthy mother is ceremoniously strangled with her own consent by her sons as the rest of the family looks on approvingly, Muller writes:

> No doubt these are revolting rites; but the phase of human thought which they disclose is far from

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> being simply revolting. There is in these immolations, even in their most degraded form, a grain of that superhuman faith which we admire in the temptation of Abraham.
>
> Chips From a German Workshop, p. 59

The semantic issues raised in Muller's "disease of language" theory may perhaps pose more questions than they answer, but it's clear that Muller, Higginson, and Melville (through Rolfe) are advocating similar positions regarding the origins of and relationships between religions.

Rolfe's views on religion in this important canto (I. xxxi) constitute the culmination of the first section of Clarel, "Jerusalem," articulating as they do a conclusion toward which the discourse of the poem has been working from the very beginning. "Jerusalem" is dominated by Clarel's wanderings about Jerusalem, his encounters with the American Protestants Nehemiah (Canto vii), Vine (Cantos xxviii-xix), and Rolfe (Canto xxxi), and the American Jews Nathan (whose conversion from Protestantism is documented in detail in Canto xvii), his wife Agar (Canto xvii), and most important of all, his daughter Ruth (Canto xvi). In addition to these, he meets Abdon and has his important encounter with Celio (Cantos xii-xiii). But the "big" religious debates of Clarel do not actually begin until the second section of the poem, "The Wilderness," where most of the rest of the major characters (Derwent, Mortmain, Djalea, and Margoth--though he's spotted briefly from afar in I. xxiv) and minor ones (the Greek Banker, Glaucon,

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the Presbyterian elder, Belex, the Dominican, and so forth) are introduced. "Jerusalem," then, establishes the essential framework wherein the subsequent intellectual action of the poem is to be enacted: the inertia of this first section carries Clarel from his own sterile despair and the rigid orthodoxies of Abdon and Nehemiah, whom he encounters quite early on, to his interreligious relationship with Ruth and Rolfe's heterodoxical declarations, both of which occur toward the end.

In employing this method, Melville reverses the evolutionary model for religions which, as I discussed in Chapter One, proposed that religions evolved from primitive rites and polytheism into higher and more sophisticated systems, culminating in (Protestant) Christianity. Melville <u>begins</u> with the American Protestant, the very latest edition of Christianity's evolved forms (Hegel's concluding form), and breaks down the enveloping crusts of dogma and civilization to recover the essential religious experience. In no other work was Melville so concerned with the doctrines of the world's religions, but he would also no doubt agree with Muller when the latter wrote,

> [i]f there is one thing which a comparative study of religions places in the clearest light, it is the inevitable decay to which every religion is exposed. It may seem almost like a truism, that no religion can continue to be what it was during the lifetime of its founders and its first apostle...Whenever we can trace back a religion

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> to its first beginnings, we find it free from many of the blemishes that offend us in later phases.
>
> _Chips From a German Workshop_, pp. xxii-xxiii

The human and political arena serve to obscure what Muller calls "the simplicity and purity of the plan which the founder had conceived in his own heart, and matured in his communings with his God" (_Chips From a German Workshop_, p xxiii), a theme Melville had dealt with earlier in his career, notable in _Pierre_ and _The Confidence-Man_, and which, indeed, Rolfe will explicitly voice later in the poem (II. xxi, ll. 61-103). But in these earlier works, Melville had been concerned almost exclusively with Christianity and its role in American society, and in other earlier works such as _Typee_, _Omoo_, and _Moby-Dick_, the primary focus is on the relationship between Christianity and what must be termed local religions, wherein the latter are often used to contrast the positive and negative aspects of the former. _Clarel_ resumes the ambitious endeavor begun in _Mardi_, the one work of all Melville's which it most closely resembles in many ways. But whereas _Mardi_ dealt abstractly and allegorically with religion, myth, and philosophy, _Clarel_ deals specifically and realistically with the major religions of the world. Only by first depicting these religions active in the nineteenth century can Melville then commence the paring away of doctrinal differences and find their underlying points of intersection. This

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breakdown of religious orthodoxies becomes a continuing aspect of Melville's rhetorical strategy throughout _Clarel_, finally leading to the scene on the Via Dolorosa at the very end of the poem (IV. xxxiv), at which point the site of Christ's Calvary has become a Darwinian entangled bank of suffering human and, significantly enough, animal forms:

> ....behold the train!
> Bowed water-carriers; Jews with staves;
> Infirm gray monks; over-loaded slaves;
> Turk soldiers--young, with home-sick eyes;
> A Bey, bereaved through luxuries;
> Strangers and exiles; Moslem dames
> Long-veiled in monumental white,
> Dumb from the mounds which memory claims;
> A half-starved vagrant Edomite;
> Sure-footed Arab girls, which toil
> Depressed under heap of garden-spoil;
> The patient ass with panniered urn;
> Sour camels humped by heaven and man,
> Whose languid necks through habit turn
> For ease--for ease they hardly gain.
> In varied forms of fate they wend--
> Or man or animal, 'tis one:
> Cross-bearers all, alike they tend
> And follow, slowly follow on.
> ll. 26-44

Bringing up the rear of this sad but grimly determined group (who collectively recall Robinson Jeffers's "Boats in a Fog") is Clarel himself, who'd gone to the holy land to recover his faith, and now finds himself ironically reenacting Christ's Passion.

Early in "Jerusalem" we see several alternatives presented to Clarel's doubt. One could retreat from the world into the kind of strict orthodoxy represented by

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Abdon and Nathan or the blind fundamentalism of Nehemiah. One could dare the religious controversies of the time and venture into one of the "bickering family" of mainline sects (I. vi. l. 40) which the Reformation has unleashed ("Was feud the heritage He left?" the narrator wonders in I. vi, l. 41). Or one could simply cast aside all aspirations for any kind of faith at all and submit to the uncertainty of "Nature's reign" (I. vi. l. 26), a particularly unsatisfactory choice from the poem's faith/doubt perspective ("...crouch thee with the jackall [sic] down--/Crave solace of the scorpion[,]" thunders Clarel's lacerating superego, contemptuous of his doubt [I. vi. ll. 30-1]). I have already discussed the impracticality the first possibility presents in the face of positivism. The second is scarcely better; its deficiencies are tacitly expressed in the poem's overall critique of Protestantism. And clearly "Nature's reign" does not present any solace to the doubt and despair Clarel faces, though he does find intense reward in the "natural" relationship with Ruth. The inadequacies of these respective choices are elaborated upon in many of the scenes of "Jerusalem," so that by the time Rolfe appears they have been sufficiently discredited and his radical position can thus establish the tone for the coming comparative religious investigation conducted in the last three sections in Clarel. In "Jerusalem" Clarel has not yet been exposed to the series of comparative religious patterns that will

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enable him to endure--if unhappily--at the conclusion of the poem.

Rolfe's pronouncements in Canto xxxi and Clarel's relationship with Ruth have been prepared for by three significant episodes in "Jerusalem," wherein Melville begins to explore the relationships between religious orthodoxies, thereby commencing the poem's pursuit of the shared essences of religious belief. These episodes also establish the complementary rhythms or patterns of "Jerusalem," which are the breakdown of orthodoxies and the corresponding ascendancy of heterodoxy. The first of these episodes is Clarel's dream vision (Canto v. ll. 132-209), the second is Clarel's brief but very important encounter with Celio (especially Cantos xi-xiii), and the third is Nathan's conversion (Canto xvii).

Clarel's dream vision is prompted by a disappointing visit he makes to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre the day after his meeting with Abdon (his second full day in Jerusalem). This Church, which is described in great detail in Canto iii ("The Sepulchre"), was originally built in the fourth century AD on the reputed site of the Crucifixion and burial of Jesus, and had been destroyed and rebuilt many times thereafter until the twelfth century when crusaders carried out a general renovation. It was thus regarded by Christians as a most holy site and in the nineteenth century was visited by throngs of pilgrims from all over the world. According to the narrator, one must

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"rove" through the crowded, "peopled town" (iii. l. 3) to arrive at the Church, in stark contrast, it is suggested, to Jove's reputed tomb on Crete, which is situated "[i]n [a] glen over which his eagles soar" (l. 2), a contrast which distinguishes Christ's humanity and Jove's mythological origins (ll. 5-16). This contrast also reflects a Vichian view of religion in the sense that the late arrival (Christ) is "of the plebs" and that Christianity reflects a basis in human authority, in contrast to the earlier myths which emphasized divine authority (Vico, pp. 121-3). The Church itself has grown through centuries of expansion and additions, until if has now "[a]bsorbed the sites all roundabout--/Onnivorous, and a world of maze" (ll. 25-6). Melville paints an especially somber picture of the Church in this canto: "[t]radition, not device and fraud/Here rules--tradition old and broad" (ll. 84-5). So dark and silent are its halls and walkways that "[n]ot possible seems levity/Or aught that may approach thereto" (ll. 96-7), pointedly recalling the earlier allusion to the fact that Christ "[s]hared all of man except sin and mirth" (l. 11). Musing on the countless hordes who have visited it through the centuries, the narrator observes "such ties, go deep,/Endear the spot, or false or true/As an historic site" (ll. 112-14). The expansive description of the Church and its interior, conducted in a deliberately solemn pace and tone--much like Salvaterra's in IV. xiii-xvi, where he guides the pilgrims through the Latin Church

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of the Star in Bethlehem--suspends the action of the poem and immerses the reader temporarily into what Yeats called "the artifice of eternity." (One likes to think that Melville would have greatly approved of "Sailing to Byzantium.") But time and progress have made their inroads too. The courtyards of the Church are full of "pedlars versed in wonted tricks,/Vendors of charm and crucifix" (ll. 123-4), and on saint-days the grounds are alive with the

> ...polyglot of Asian tongues
> And island ones, in interchange
> Buzzed out by crowds in costumes strange
> Of nations diverse.
> ll. 127-30

But all of this is to be accepted; "It is but simple nature, see;/None mean irreverence," the narrator intones, in a voice later echoed in many of Derwent's observations (ll. 133-4). In fact, he goes on to suggest (in a somewhat patronizing tone) that any attempt to construe this behavior otherwise may smack of cultural bias:

> Unvexed by Europe's grieving doubt
> Which asks, "And can the Father be?"
> Those children of the climes devout,
> On festival in fane installed,
> Happily ignorant, make glee
> Like orphans in the play-ground walled.
> ll. 135-40

Clarel's actual visit to the Church in I. v. ("Clarel")

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finds it full of pilgrims, notably "husbands with wives and children," whose worshipful presence figuratively reenacts that of "Joseph, Mary, and the BOY" nineteen-hundred years before (v. l. 23, 19). We see here articulated again an often misunderstood or underrated aspect of the poem, namely, that faith itself is not dead in the nineteenth century. Faith, in fact, thrives in many different guises throughout the poem. It is Clarel's faith, and that of the western Protestant civilization given over to materialism which he represents, that is dead, destroyed, as was explored earlier, by the very agents it helped initially to foster. Thus it is, in viewing the twelve apostolic lamps that are kept burning in the Church day and night, he can only recoil: "[i]n smoke/Befogged they shed no vivid ray,/But heat the cell and seem to choke" (ll. 29-31). The lamps here synecdochely symbolize the impotence of religion in the age of science in an equation later to be complemented in Mortmain's inscription on the slanted cross: "Science lights but cannot warm" (II. xxxi, l. 52). Viewing the lamps, Clarel realizes that, as outer forms of faith, they are but weak witness to the original experience, to use William James's phrase, that begot them, an idea which, as we've seen, constitutes a significant aspect of Max Muller's religious thinking:

> These burn not like those aspects bright
> Of starry watchers when they kept
> Vigil at napkined feet and head

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Of Him their Lord.
ll. 33-36

Predisposed to doubt from the outset, Clarel now begins to muse on the nature of the 'deus abscontitus,' mixing Christian, classical, and pantheistic themes in the process:

..................is He fled?
Or tranced lies, tranced nor unbewept
With Dorian gods? or, fresh and clear,
A charm diffused throughout the sphere,
Screams in the ray [of sunlight] through
yonder dome?
Not hearsed He is. But hath ghost home
Dispersed in soil, in sea, in air?
False Pantheism, false though fair!
ll. 36-43

The narrator dismisses the idea that Clarel has undergone

............that shock of novelty
Which makes Protestants unglad
First viewing the mysterious cheer
In Peter's fane[.]
ll. 55-8

"Nay," the narrator asserts, "'twas no novelty at all./... Another influence made swerve/And touched him in profounder nerve" (ll. 64, 67-8).

Clarel's doubting questions here and elsewhere in the early sections of "Jerusalem," questions which begin both the breakdown of orthodoxy and the subsequent investigation into the nature of religious belief, are

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of the kind that frequently commenced comparative religious studies in the nineteenth century. As we have seen, in _Religions of the World_, Maurice said of such questions that they were "often entertained by minds of deepest earnestness," and that they "derive their plausibility from facts which cannot be questioned, and which a Christian should not wish to question" (Maurice, p. 10), an idea also found in Muller (_Chips From a German Workshop_, p. 9-10). Writing of the chemist and natural philosopher Robert Boyle, Maurice states, in terms that recall Hawthorne's famous 1856 Journal description of Melville in Liverpool,

> The very [spiritual] anguish of his mind made it essential that he should ask for a real standing-ground [on which to believe]; and that he should not therefore strain facts for the sake of arriving at an agreeable condition.
> Maurice, p. 6

Boyle himself had memorably depicted this dilemma in his autobiographical account of a European tour that ended in spiritual anguish for him at the First Carthusian Abbey:

> He [Philaretus, Boyle's autobiographical persona] said, speaking of those persons who want not means to inquire and abilities to judge, that it was not a greater happiness to inherit a good religion, than it was a fault to have it only by inheritance, and think it the best because it is so generally embraced, rather than embrace it because we know it to be the best.
> quoted in Maurice, p. 5

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Wandering further into the Church, Clarel comes to the spot where, according to John 19. 41-2 and 20. 15, Jesus was buried and then later appeared, resurrected, to Mary, who thought him at first to be a gardener. A group of exhausted and disappointed Greek tourists catch his eye, and he mutters to himself Jesus's words to Mary: "Why weep'st thou?/Whom seekest?" (ll. 100-1).

Inspired by the example of the Greeks, Clarel now experiences a dream vision. Although he'd had a moment of interreligious fellowship with Abdon in Canto ii, this dream vision is his first real comparative religious experience in the poem. The dream vision consists of depictions of four specific groups of religious pilgrims: Greek Christians returning home from a journey to the holy land, Moslems making a pilgrimage to Mecca, Indian Hindus en route to Brahman, and Chinese Buddhists making a trek to a Buddhist holy site. Each group is depicted in its turn undergoing severe hardships in the course of its pilgrimage, yet each somehow maintains its faith. Thus, Clarel imagines the Greeks possibly losing their way in a storm on the Mediterranean Sea and being washed up dead on the coast of Tyre, "a coast of wrecks" (l. 118), itself a city with a history of tribulation. Yet, he also imagines them returning home safely "after toils" (l. 122),

> ....and tho' distressed,
> Grieved not, for Zion had been seen
> Each wearing next the heart for charm

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Some priestly scrip in leaf of palm.
ll. 123-6

The Moslem train, hailing forth from Damascus and Cairo, consists of a huge cross-section of Islamic society:

Then crowds pell-mell, a concourse wild,
Converging from Levantine shores;
On foot, on donkeys; litters rare:
Whole families; twin panniers piled;
Rich men and beggars--all beguiled
To cheerful trust in Allah's care[.]
ll. 151-6

But their route, too, is filled with dangers; their journey takes them through desolate desert terrain,

Where baskets of the white-ribbed dead
Sift the fine sand, while dim ahead
In long, long line, their way to tell,
The bones of camels bleaching dwell,
With skeletons but part interred--
Relics of men which friendless fell[.]
ll. 168-173

The Hindu faithful, "tawny peasants--human wave/Which rolls over India year by year" (ll. 186-7), also, loses many, who

...plague-struck, faint and sore,
Drop livid on the flowery shore--
Arrested, with the locusts sleep,
Or pass to muster where no man may peep.
ll. 193-6

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Similarly, the Chinese Buddhists must make their difficult way through the Himalayas, no doubt losing countless of their numbers in the process.

This dream vision presents the first and most basic comparative religious theme elaborated in Clarel: the imperative of suffering shared by all religious believers who maintain their faith in the face of worldly hardship. There is no privileging of one viewpoint, no evolutionary paradigm culminating in Christianity here. Writing of Melville's reading of the Odyssey in The American Adam, R. W. B. Lewis suggests that Melville's annotations emphatically emphasized "his own tragic and truncated design--the departure, the journey of inquiry, the suffering, the secretiveness," in contrast to "the grand pattern which the poem nonetheless maintains of homecoming, reunion, and resounding victory." Lewis goes on to say "[w]hat I have said about [Melville's reading of] the Odyssey myth can be matched by his response to the Christian myth (if that is the right phrase for it)" (Lewis, p. 143), to which I would add, "and all religious myths as well." Melville, Lewis is saying, was compulsively drawn to the more troubling side of any question, particularly when it dealt with religious and ethical questions--ignorance was never bliss for him. He says elsewhere that Melville "believed with Hawthorne that, in order to achieve moral maturity, the individual had to engage evil and suffer the consequences" (Lewis, p. 140). This idea, voiced so

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memorably by Milton in the _Areopagitica_, can also be applied to Melville's concept of spiritual maturity. For Melville, the spiritual can only finally have value when it has met and engaged evil, and for him, evil was the experience of the world. This idea will be elaborated upon in detail in the next chapter.

From this vision Clarel thus begins to understand "[t]he intersympathy of creeds,/Alien or hostile tho' they seem" (ll. 207-8). Moreover, the dream vision initiates the process of breaking down the barriers erected by religious orthodoxy; it is the similarity of the different faiths--in this case the suffering endured by their respective followers while making pilgrimage--that is emphasized, rather than their doctrinal differences. The impact of this dream vision on Clarel is quite powerful, and it forces him to reflect on his own (Protestant) disbelief. In the next canto (I. vi., "Tribes and Sects") he will imagine he hears, in the "rival liturgies" (l. 4) that reverberate about the Church, a rebuke of his failure to believe: "O heart profane,/O pilgrim-infidel, begone!/Nor here the sites of Faith pollute" (ll. 18-20).

The second important episode in "Jerusalem" which prepares the way for Rolfe in Canto xxxi is Clarel's encounter with Celio. Earlier I had emphasized the symbolic significance of the latter's raging outcry against Christ on the Via Dolorosa (I. xiii), a rage Bezanson calls "pure and childlike" (_Clarel_, p. 590). In addition, in Celio

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Clarel discovers

> A second self.............
> But stronger--with the heart to brave
> All questions on that primal ground
> Laid bare by faith's receding wave.
> I. xix. ll. 26-9

But Celio's appearance also serves to promote the poem's move toward heterodoxy. We've already seen in Maurice that such seemingly blasphemous questions and pronouncements as Celio utters may actually originate in a deeply religious sensibility. In _Melville's Protest Theism: The Hidden and Silent God in Melville's "Clarel"_ (1993), Stan Goldman argues that such heretical outcries actually reflect a deep faith of the kind found in Old Testament types such as Job, whose questioning of God's ways constituted a kind of faith:

> What is most striking about the human response to the hidden God or the fled Christ in _Clarel_ is that characters, such as Rolfe [or Celio] address God or Christ at all. Why even cry to a hidden God?...To declare the hiddenness of God, with His accompanying silence, is paradoxically a confession of hope in the face of hiddenness. Melvillean hiddenness is not the notion of divine absence or the Nietzschean perception that God is dead. By crying to God, the human acknowledges the divine; by lamenting God's hiddenness, the human remembers the divine presence.
> Goldman, p. 23

But Melville's conceptualization of Celio may also

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be seen in light of the example of the historical figure Faizi, described by Max Muller in An Introduction to the Science of Religion. Faizi belonged to the inner circle of the brilliant court of King Akbar (1542-1605), the greatest of the Mughal rulers of India. According to Muller, Akbar "may be considered the first who ventured on a comparative study of the religions of the world" (Muller, 1873, p. 68). Akbar's study of the world's religions caused him to finally abandon the strict observance of his own Islamic faith and encourage religious discourse between Muslims, Christians Parsis, Jews, and Hindus in the 'Ibadat-Khana' ("House of Worship") which he'd created for the purpose, acts which offended many in the orthodox communities in those respective religions. In 1581 he founded a new religion of his own, the 'Din-i Ilahi' ("Divine Faith"), which was based on solar monotheism and freely drew from Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, and Muslim Sufism. This religion was intended for his small, elite circle of fellow enthusiasts, to which Faizi belonged. Faizi's own religious thought, Muller feels, is exemplary of "those who no longer hold to any positive form of faith" (Muller, 1873, p. 256). According to Muller, Faizi (which means "heart")

> was one of those men whom their contemporaries call heretics and blasphemers, but whom posterity often calls Saints and Martyrs, the salt of the earth, the light of the world; a man of real devotion, real love for his fellow-creatures,

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> real faith in God, the Unknown God, whom we ignorantly worship, whom no human thought and no human language can declare, and whose altar,--the same that St. Paul saw at Athens--will remain standing for ever in the hearts of all true believers.
>
> *Ibid*. p. 256

Muller quotes extensively from the writings of Faizi, which reflect a religious temperament utterly awash in the inscrutable nature of the Divine Being; thus:

> O thou who existest from eternity and abidest forever, sight cannot bear thy light, praise cannot express thy perfection. Thy light melts the understanding, and Thy glory baffles wisdom; to think of Thee destroys reason, Thy essence confounds thought. Thy holiness pronounces that the blooddrops of human meditation are shed in vain in search of Thy knowledge: human understanding is but an atom of dust...Science is like a blinding sand in the desert on the road to Thy perfection...Each brain is full of thought of grasping Thee; the brow of Plato even burned of fever-heat of this hopeless thought. How shall a thoughtless man like me succeed when Thy jealousy strikes a dagger into the liver of saints? O that Thy grace would cleanse my brain; for if not, my restlessness will end in madness.
>
> quoted in *Ibid*., pp. 257-9

Faizi, like Celio, finds his God inscrutable and remote; both are driven nearly mad in contemplation of the divine spirit. But a key difference between the two resides in the fact that Faizi's conception of God has been attained only after a thorough study of the different religions of the world; his God is that most fundamental and mysterious essence distilled from the collective religious experience. Celio, on the other hand, deals

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exclusively with the Christian God, and, more, specifically, the promise of Christ. His thinking (and protest) is shaped soley by his relationship to Christian orthodoxy, which he finds inescapably oppressive even as he defies it:

> Yea, thou [Christ] through the ages to accrue,
> Shalt the Medusa shield replace:
> In beauty and in terror too
> Shalt paralyze the nobler race--
> Smite or suspend, perplex, deter--
> Tortured, shalt prove a torturer.
> Whatever ribald Future be,
> Thee shalt these heed, amaze their hearts with thee---
> Thy white, thy red, thy fairness and thy tragedy.
> I. xiii, ll. 94-102

(where the meter swells to pentameter in the final couplet, as though pushed to overflow by the sheer inertia of Celio's pronouncement. This is one of the very few moments where Melville deviates from the tetrameter). If Celio represents "the COST OF REBELLION: the killing pain and loneliness of dissent" (Bezanson, in _Clarel_, p. 618), he also embodies the gripping power of orthodoxy over even those who would rebel against it. Celio cannot escape its influence; he insists on finding his answers in Christian terms alone--when it (Christianity) fails, he is defeated. His position is essentially a dualistic one, later to be echoed in the rigid--if often heroic--outcries of Mortmain who, like Celio, cannot disengage himself from the constraint of a kind of orthodoxy (his almost pathological obsession with human depravity) and who, also like Celio, dies

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tormented by the anguish of Christ's promise unfulfilled. Faizi's syncretic position is reflected in the "intersympathy of creeds" counter-pattern of "Jerusalem," which culminates, as we've seen, in Rolfe's pronouncements in I. xxxi.

The third significant episode that prepares the way for Rolfe in I. xxxi is Nathan's conversion to Judaism. Of the poem's American Protestant characters, Nathan is the only one given any biographical treatment; he's presented in a fashion deliberately suggestive of a test case. As such he is a portrait of the American Adamic archetype, which R. W. B. Lewis suggests was "a figure of heroic innocence and vast potentialities, poised at the start of a new history" (Lewis, p. 1). But as Lewis immediately proceeds to explain, "[i]t was an image crowded with illusion, and the moral posture it seemed to indorse was vulnerable in the extreme" (Ibid. p. 1). In Nathan, Melville will exploit this vulnerability and thus provide a sad commentary on the inherent dangers of this hubristic cultural icon, which, as Lewis demonstrates, was self-consciously promoted in mid-nineteenth-century America.

Nathan's conversion is related in Canto xvii, which is the longest canto (by 15 lines) of the 150 cantos in Clarel.[2] In this canto Melville weaves together several of the major thematic threads of the poem, including the principle of the innate religious faculty, the failure of ascetic American Protestantism to satisfy spiritual

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yearning, and the complex relationship between orthodoxy and the heterodoxical religious experience.

Nathan's conversion to Judaism reflects a sensibility intuitively in accord with Celio's "This world clean fails me: still I yearn" and "the Past is half of time,/The proven half" (I. xii. ll. 95, 112-3). Driven by a spiritual hunger that neither his dry and solipsistic Protestant background nor his country's secular materialism can satiate, Nathan plunges himself into the ancient religion with all the zealous determination and self-assurance of the American frontiersman that he is. In effect, his embracing Judaism is yet another phase of his autonomous (Protestant) religious development. But Melville well understood the foolish impracticality of trying to recover the past--each character in Clarel who attempts to do so (Vine, Celio, Ungar, Nathan) is doomed to suffer for it--, and he would no doubt agree (if reluctantly) with Horace Bushnell's warning:

> No man was ever inspired through his memory. The eye of genius is not behind. Nor was there ever a truly great man, whose ideal was in the past. The offal of history is good enough for worms and monks, but it will not feed a living man.
>
> quoted in Lewis, p. 68

Like so many other characters in Clarel, Nathan's retreat into orthodoxy becomes a means to escape the overwhelming complexities of the contemporary world; as I shall explore

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in the Chapter Four, the next great comparative religious pattern I identify in the poem--what I shall call "the tempered heart"--requires of its adherents to both face and endure the hardships of the world. Nathan's turn to Judaism is challenged by Nehemiah, who, in I. xxii, sadly exclaims,

> Poor Nathan, did man ever stray
> As thou? to Judaize to-day!
> To deem the crook of Christ shall yield
> To Aaron's staff! to till thy field
> In hope that harvest time shall see
> Solomon's hook in golden glee
> Reaping the ears. Well, well! meseems--
> Heaven help him; dreams, but dreams--dreams, dreams!
> ll. 77-84

That Clarel, to whom Nehemiah is speaking, tacitly agrees with this is reflected in his recognition of the irony involved, for he is left "[c]onjuring that Nathan too/Must needs hold Nehemiah in view/The same" (ll. 91-3). The orthodox in Clarel fall roughly into two groups: the traditionally orthodox, who look to ancient tradition and ritual (Nathan), and the radically orthodox, who look ahead to some apocalyptic future (Nehemiah); neither is able to dwell completely (or comfortably) in the present and both points-of-view often lead to disaster. Thus, in Canto xxvi ("The Gate of Zion"), as Clarel and Nehemiah make their way through a group of lepers, the former does so "in affright,/Fain would his eyes renounce the light" (ll. 15-6), whereas Nehemiah

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................held his path
Mild and unmoved--scarce seemed to heed
The suitors, or deplore the scath--
His soul pre-occupied and freed
From actual objects thro' the sway
Of visionary scenes intense.
ll. 17-22

Nathan's experiences before and during his conversion serve to dramatize the fundamental conflict between revealed religions and Muller's innate religious faculty. Muller, it will be remembered, felt the former obscured the latter as they became more involved in issues of dogma, human interest, and politics (_Chips From a German Workshop_, p. xxiii). In Nathan's case, his ancestral Protestantism, which he maintains apparently only to please his mother despite his frequent bouts of doubt (I. xvii, ll. 50-1, 52-3), is gradually displaced by powerful spiritual urgings that found the genteel materialism of nineteenth-century American Protestantism hopelessly inadequate. His ancestral religion is alluded to in the first four lines of Canto xvii, which are set off as a verse paragraph as though to locate their subject in a distant past, and which are clearly patterned to recall a stanza from some old New England church hymn:

Nathan had sprung from worthy stock--
Austere, ascetical, but free,
Which hewed their way from sea-beat rock
Wherever woods and winter be.
ll. 1-4

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In the lines that follow, Melville describes the move westward by successive generations to the fertile farmlands of the Midwest, and also alludes to the softening of the Puritanical doctrine that logically ensued as the old image of the stern and wrathful God gave way before the abundance of God's blessings on the arrogant but ineluctable young country which had taken to heart John L. O'Sullivan's imperative of "manifest destiny," which he had promoted in the _Democratic Review_:

> Westward pressed further; more bred more;
> At each remove a goodlier wain,
> A heart more large, an ampler shore,
> ....
> Until in years the wagons wind
> Through parks and pastures of the sun,
> Warm plains as of Esdraleon.
> ll. 12-14, 16-18

The move westward literally and symbolically distanced the settlers from their Puritanical past; the new landscape, full of "groves like isles in Grecian seas" (. 26) and described as "vast serene--/The prairie in her swimming swell/Of undulation" (ll. 29-31), seemed a new Eden, far removed from the "gloom" of the Hawthornean New England terrain and its "grim hemlock woods/Breeding the witchcraft-spell malign" (ll. 24-5). Indeed--and here Melville bears an especially strong resemblance to Muller--it is the unmediated experience of nature that first awakens in Nathan the true religious feeling of awe; the sprawling Illinois

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plains on which he is raised, "a turf divine/Of promise" (ll. 35-6), spotted with native burial mounds, and the huge western sky above which suggests to him the "power/Of vast space" (ll. 54-5) bring him, in F. Scott Fitzgerald's famous phrase, "face to face...with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder" (The Great Gatsby, p. 182).

However, "et in Arcadia ego;" such a crude pantheism as Nathan felt can also serve to render the immensity of human insignificance against the cosmic backdrop of "vast space," as Melville had explored in earlier fiction (and as any viewer of Caspar David Friedrich's great paintings can attest). However much the abundance of the Illinois landscape may have initially inspired Nathan's innate religious sensibility, it was also capable of provoking in him feelings of fear, and his mixed feelings of wonder and dread anticipate Rolfe's formulaic dictum (I. xxxi. ll. 187-90, quoted above) in which the origin of religious experience is closely related to the emotional response to nature. Thus, while wandering the Edenic plains one day, Nathan discovers a skull "vined round and beautiful with flowers" (ll. 67-70). Other such sights serve to dispel any misconceptions he may have harbored regarding nature. He finds lambs ("Innocents--and the type of Christ" l. 74) killed by lightening and thus "[b]etrayed" (l. 75) and he carries with him always the vivid memory of his uncle's death in a landslide during a ferocious storm in the White Mountains of New Hampshire, a brutal scene which

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is pointedly contrasted with the pastoral midwestern scenes in which Nathan often recalls it (ll. 78-80).

Nathan would find this ambiguous view of nature elaborated in his discovery and reading of "a dusty book" (l. 103), usually thought to be Thomas Paine's _The Age of Reason_ (1794-5). This book--and I'm proceeding with the assumption that it is Paine's--, a kind of handbook for the newly enlightened of the late-nineteenth century, was written as a response to the French Revolution "lest in the general wreck of superstitions of false systems of government and false theology, we lose sight of morality, of humanity and of theology that is true" (Paine, p. 50). A major Deist tract, it was a sustained attack on conventional Christian belief, and argues for empirical, historical, and rational grounds for authentic religious experience: "it is only by the exercise of reason that man can discover God. Take away that reason, and he would be incapable of understanding anything" (Paine, p. 70). God is to be discovered through the transaction between the human mind and nature, rather than through revelation and scripture (both of which are attacked in detail in elaborated sections of the book). Thus,

> That which is now called natural philosophy, embracing the whole circle of science, of which astronomy occupies the chief place, is the study of the works of God, and of the power and wisdom of God in His works, and is the true theology.
>
> As to the theology that is now studied in its place, it is the study of human opinions

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> and of human fancies <u>concerning</u> God.
> Paine, p. 73

This leads to the heart of the matter, Paine's description of Deism:

> The true Deist has but one Deity, and his religion consists in contemplating the power, wisdom and benignity of the Deity in His works, and in endeavoring to imitate Him in everything moral, scientifical and mechanical.
> Paine, p. 84

It is the duty of the Deist to "vindicate the moral justice of God against the calumnies of the Bible" (Paine, p. 109). Nathan is deeply moved by the "hearty unbelief sincere" of the book (l. 118), and is somehow able to find in it an uneasy peace between the antithetical aspects of nature he held. God, for him, was now "expelled from given form" (l. 151) and was to be found instead in the "calm and storm" of nature (l. 152). From this, the narrator hints, the drift toward a more mature pantheism was inevitable, a pantheism "whose influence, not always drear,/Tenants our maiden hemisphere" (ll. 159-60). With his embrace of pantheism, Nathan's religious evolution is held in an unremarkable abeyance for a period of years; his cosmological view at this point recalls James Freeman Clarke's description of what he feels Buddhism's hell ("the thousand hells of Buddhism") to be:

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> God is nothing; man is nothing; life is nothing; death is nothing; eternity is nothing....God has disappeared from the universe, and in his place is only the inexorable law, which grinds on forever. It punishes and rewards, but it has no love in it. It is only dead, cold, hard, cruel, unrelenting law.
>
> Ten Great Religions, p. 166

It is finally the death of his mother that reawakens his earlier spiritual yearning which remain every bit as unfulfilled as before. A neighboring religious group, yet another recent Protestant sect ("the latest shame of time" [l. 190]) he finds unacceptable; many of its members lead immoral lives and its fanatical iconoclasm "quite repelled" him (l. 191). He's finally left (much like Pierre Glendinning in Book ix of that novel):

> Alone, and at Doubt's freezing pole [where]
> He wrestled with the pristine forms
> Like the first man. By inner storms
> Held in solution, so his soul
> Ripened for the hour of such control
> As shapes, concrete.[3]
>
> ll. 193-8

It is at this critical point in his life that he meets Agar, an American Jewess at a "new" Midwestern lake-port (l. 200--Chicago?). The two are powerfully attracted to one another, but Agar insists that he convert prior to their marriage. In weighing in his mind the ramifications of this move, Nathan is able to forcefully affirm it through the rationalization that Judaism's ancient tradition speaks

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with more genuine authority than does Christianity's more recent (and checkered) history:

> ...turn Hebrew? But why not?
> If backward still the inquirer goes
> To get behind man's present lot
> Of crumbling faith; for rear-ward shows
> Far behind Rome and Luther--what?
> The crag of Sinai. Here then plant
> Thyself secure; 'tis adamant.
> ll. 212-18

Nathan's embrace of Judaism is, in fact, born of the same "earnestness" of character (l. 232) which had caused him to doubt in the first place. His new-found faith becomes an especially virulent orthodoxy, derived from the grafting of ancient Jewish tradition upon tough, American Protestant single-mindedness. Agar and he marry and have two children, and he leaves farmlife to become wealthy as a trader. But his "northern nature, full of pith,/Vigor and enterprise and will" (ll. 252-3) cannot remain suppressed; his Anglo-Saxon insistence on original experience, finding even Judaism's rites now "empty," must "[n]eeds utilize the mystic glow--/For nervous energies find vent" (ll. 256--8). Much to Agar's distress, he embraces Zionism and transplants his family to Palestine, an exceedingly dangerous move. In a lawless land, he quickly comes in conflict with Arabs, and now, with a small band of heavily-armed fellow-Zionist farmers, he ironically repeats the pattern of his Puritan forebearers "in Pequod wilds

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immersed,"

> Hittites--foes pestilent to God
> His fathers old those Indians deemed:
> Nathan the Arabs here esteemed
> The same--slaves meriting the rod;
> And out he spake it; which bred hate
> The more imperiling his state.
> ll. 304-10

Driven by the same rugged and fanatical vision of the divine will that had guided those ancestors, Nathan disregards Agar's pleas and lives in a perpetual state of religious war with the which will eventually cost him his life, and, sadly, that of his wife and daughter as well.

Melville's 1856-7 journal provide a fascinating background commentary on Nathan's example. To begin with, the whole Zionist enterprise seemed to him futile--in a rather graphic entry he wrote "In the emptiness of the lifeless antiquity of Jerusalem the emigrant Jews are like flies that have taken up their abode in a skull" (Journals, p. 91). He finds the effort to make Zionists into farmers (Nathan's preoccupation) "vain":

> In the first place, Judea is a desert with few exceptions. In the second place, the Jews hate farming. All who cultivate the soil in Palestine are Arabs. The Jews dare not live outside walled towns or villages for fear of the malicious persecution of the Arabs & Turks.--Besides, the number of Jews in Palestine is comparatively small. And how are the hosts of them scattered in other lands to be brought here? Only by a miracle.
> Journals, p. 94

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In his description of a "Mr. Dickson," a Puritan Yankee convert to Judaism who may have served as a model for Nathan, Melville is unable to mask his sad disgust:

> Old Dickson seems a man of Puritanic energy, and being inoculated with this preposterous Jew mania, is resolved to carry his Quixotism through to the end. Mrs. D. don't seem to like it, but submits.--The whole thing is half melancholy, half farcical--like the rest of the world.
> Journals, p. 94

Nathan's conversion also affords Melville a means to explore the dynamic capability of a specific religion, here Judaism. The reader has already seen Abdon, whose quiet observation of the rituals of his religion, born of his sense of the ancient tradition to which he belongs, now contrasts markedly with Nathan's visionary fervor, saturated as it is in the American Protestant sense of autonomy, self-reliance, and mission (The Puritans, it will be remembered, identified strongly with the Hebrews of the Old Testament). These, in turn, contrast with the views of Ruth and Agar, whose sense of their Jewishness stands virtually antipodal to Abdon's. In contrast to his reverential respect for his religion and its tradition, Ruth and Agar, who significantly enough see themselves as Americans first, remain indifferent to their ancestral faith, regarding it as a mere external form, a kind of family heirloom handed down through the generations,

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Like plate inherited. In fine
It graced, in seemly way benign
That family feeling of the Jew.
I. xxvii. ll. 46-8

In their indifference to Judaism, and in the doubt or disbelief of other American characters such as Clarel, Vine, and Rolfe, we see an illustration of Tocqueville's dictum that "nothing is more repugnant to the human mind, in the age of equality, than the idea of subjection to forms" (Tocqueville, p. 152).

Agar and Ruth had not cherished the move to Palestine, and in the young American Protestant Clarel they forge a strong natural relationship based on their common biographical past ("With Clarel seemed to come/A waftage from the fields of home" I. xxvii, ll. 99-100). This natural, interreligious bond will be shattered in the inevitable clash with the strict dictates of orthodoxy: Clarel is forbidden by Jewish custom to see Ruth after Nathan's death; he thus embarks on the trip to the Dead Sea, and in his absence, Agar and Ruth both die broken-hearted, presumably from the overwhelming series of events that have recently transpired in their lives. This intrusion of orthodoxy, a major thematic idea in Clarel, had been symbolically suggested earlier in the poem when what seemed like an inevitable meeting between Clarel and Celio is suddenly prevented by a "muezzin's cry" (I. xv. l. 23) which floods the streets of Jerusalem with Islamic

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believers, causing the two to become lost in the crowds.

It is important to note that Melville's breakdown of orthodoxies in Clarel is not destructive, but rather constructive; in fact, as I shall explore in Chapter Five, the poem often demonstrates a deep respect for orthodoxies as a means of cultivating selflessness and thereby containing the chaos that Protestantism has unleashed upon the modern world. In this breakdown he is able to gather together the original threads of a specific belief in juxtaposition with others, thereby demonstrating their similarities and differences. This was actually a common practice in nineteenth-century comparative religion, and it often consisted in demonstrating outside influences that helped shape a specific orthodoxy. We've seen, in Chapter One, how Clarke elaborated upon the debt the Semitic religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) owed to both the Zoroastrian and Egyptian religions. Their relationship with the Egyptian, discussed by Rolfe and Vine in I. xxxi (quoted, in part, above), is in fact, openly acknowledged in scripture; Acts 7.22, for example says that "Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in his words and deeds." Clarke cites numerous examples of Jewish and Christian appropriations from Egyptian religious customs, including circumcision, the tradition of cherubim, and the practice of scapegoating, and directs his readers to Samuel Sharpe's Egyptian Mythology and Egyptian Christianity (1863) for a thorough discussion

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of the topic (Clarke, pp. 251-2). Many commentators such as Clarke (p. 231, 239-42) and Hegel (p. 198) speculated on the influence of both Zoroastrianism and Hinduism on the Egyptian religion. The omnipotent Max Muller constantly dealt with these kinds of issues throughout his work (see, for example, "Christ and Other Masters" and "Genesis and the Zend Avesta" in _Chips From a German Workshop_). Schopenhauer, discussing the Christian doctrine of the Trinity being perceived as polytheistic by Islamic commentators, assures his reader that "whatever anyone may say Christianity has Indian blood in its veins" (_On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason_, p. 187). In the twentieth century, Arnold Toynbee suggests that the fact that the New Testament was written in Greek

> implicated Christianity in Greek philosophy, because, by the first century of the Christian Era, the Greek language was long since imbued with a Greek philosophical vocabulary, conveying Greek philosophical ideas..as soon as the Epistles and Gospels were written, and written in Greek, Christianity was committed to expressing itself in terms of Greek philosophy [which itself was influenced by Egyptian, Persian, and Indian sources!]
>
> _Christianity Among the Religions of the World_, p. 6

an argument which was anticipated by Thomas Wentworth Higginson, as I discussed in Chapter One.[4]

These examples constitute but a random sampling of this concept. The more nineteenth-century comparative

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religionists knew about the world's religions, the more the autonomous sanctity of specific orthodoxies would necessarily be challenged. Christianity--that most hubristic of religions--was especially effected in this process which seriously compromised its claim of being the one true religion. Although such thinkers as Hegel, Maurice, and Clarke continued to believe Protestant Christianity to be the final phase of God's divine plan, none could now afford to question the veracity of the earlier religions, which they treated, instead, with a respect not known before.

Nehemiah, Celio, and Nathan are, respectively, the first three characters in Clarel besides Clarel himself who are presented in any significant detail (Abdon is given much less description, and he virtually disappears after Canto ii). Their function is clearly symbolic; the converted Nathan demonstrates yet again the dangers of an unyielding orthodoxy which, in emphasizing the past (Nathan, Celio) or the future (Nehemiah), remains utterly at odds with the present. Celio and Nathan both die before the end of "Jerusalem," and Nehemiah's death will occur at the end of the second section of the poem, "The Wilderness." In fact, death in Clarel is, more often than not, the result of just such a willful disregard for the demands of the present. This issue will become increasingly important in the next sections of the poem where Melville begins to explore in detail the complex relationship between

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religious belief and human society. These early exemplars document the narrative pattern of the decline of orthodoxies, which is contrasted in the counterpattern of the rise of heterodoxy, culminating, in "Jerusalem." in Rolfe's religious declarations in Canto xxxi and which ultimately lead to the final scene on the Via Dolorosa at the end of the poem.

Chapter Three: Notes

1. The footnote in the Northwestern-Newberry edition of _Clarel_ says that, in terms of science, "Rolfe offers the very modern view that physics...is conceptual, like Platonism or Hinduism" (p. 775).

2. III. xxvi ("The Prodigal") at 331 lines and III. xxi ("In Confidence") at 326 lines are the only other cantos in the poem to exceed 300 lines. The average canto length should be a little over 120 lines, which makes the length of I. xvii all the more significant.

3. The passage I allude to from _Pierre_ is:

> But the example of many minds [seeking truth] forever lost, like undiscoverable Arctic explorers, amid those treacherous regions, warns us entirely away from them; and we learn that it is not for man to follow the trail of truth too far, since by so doing he entirely loses the directing compass of his mind; for arrived at the Pole, to whose barrenness only it points, there, the needle indifferently respects all points of the horizon alike.
>
> _Pierre_, Book ix, p. 195

Later, in Book ix, the narrator speaks of "those barbarous hordes which Truth ever nourishes in the loins of her frozen, yet teeming North" (_Ibid_. p. 197).

4. Max Muller also makes this same argument in _Theosophy or Psychological Religion,_ pp. x-xiv.

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Chapter Four: Comparative Religious Patterns in Clarel: "The Wilderness" and "Mar Saba"

Section two of Clarel, "The Wilderness," commences the next stage of comparative religious study in the poem. What had heretofore been an examination largely limited to the spiritual crisis of the young (American Protestant) protagonist as he wanders about the wastes of Jerusalem now becomes a much more complex discussion dealing with the problem of religion itself in the modern world. Having established in the first section the orthodox/heterodox issue confronting the individual believer, Melville now expands his focus of concern from the personal into the political realm. A score of new characters suddenly appear who serve as vehicles for competing points of view. These are skillfully played off one another in the dialectical debates that embellish the pilgrims' treacherous trek from Jerusalem to the Dead Sea and back again, via Bethlehem. From these debates, and from the other experiences of the pilgrims and of the many people they meet during their journey, gradually emerges the second great comparative religious theme of the poem, what I would call "the tempered

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heart," and its subsequent corollary, which is the imperative incumbent upon any religion to empower its followers in their dealings with the physical world, what might be called its ethical structure. Like the theme of suffering endured for faith's sake in "Jerusalem," to which it is intimately related, the tempered heart theme--a variation of the archetypal progress of the soul motif---looks ahead to the final scene on the Via Dolorosa and is the germ of the narrator's exhortation to Clarel in the "Epilogue" as well. In addition, the tempered heart theme, coupled with the symbolic journey of the pilgrims and also with the dialectical methodology employed by Melville in "The Wilderness" and "Mar Saba," implicitly places _Clarel_ within the tradition of such works as Dante's _Divine Comedy_, Bunyan's _The Pilgrim's Progress_ and, if only superficially, Chaucer's _The Canterbury Tales_, which is explicitly alluded to in II. i. ll. 7-13, where the narrator assures the reader that Chaucer's frequently humorous band of pilgrims belong to "Another age, and other men,/And life an unfulfilled romance" (ll. 12-3). But these works also reflect a strictly Christian bias, written, as they were in "another age" (obviously an important motif in _Clarel_); Melville, writing in the fervor of nineteenth-century comparative religious activity and with the materialism of the industrial age erupting all about him, enlarges his discussion, establishing a much broader context in which to conduct his examination of spiritual crisis.

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This conception of the tempered heart, wherein the soul achieves a kind of devout patience through its experience of the world's tribulations, is a leading theme in many of the world's religions; as James Freeman Clarke wrote, "for in all systems [of belief] the heart often redeems the errors of the head" (Clarke, p. 166). The Koran, for example, is full of exhortation to its followers to persevere in the face of adversity. Granting that impatience is the common lot of humanity (17.11, 21.36, 70.20), it unequivocally advises: "Therefore have patience. God's promise is true. Let not those who disbelieve drive you to despair" (30.60), and "Endure with fortitude whatever befalls you. That is a duty incumbent on all" (31.17). The world, in fact, is spoken of as a kind of cosmic testing-ground: "We have decked the earth with all manner of ornaments to test mankind and to see who would acquit himself best" (18.7), and "He created death and life that he might put you to the proof and find out which of you acquitted himself best" (67.2; see also 22.50, 29.3, 29.64, 47.31, and 47.35).

This aspect of Islam was not lost on many of the nineteenth-century writers who considered the religion. In "The Hero as Prophet" from On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Hero in History, a book Melville borrowed from Evert Duyckinck in 1850 (Sealts, p. 48), Thomas Carlyle chooses to downplay the orthodox aspects of Islam in favor of the living, spiritual force of its founder; thus,

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Muhammad "has actually an eye for the world...with a certain directness and rugged vigour" (Carlyle, 1966, p. 68). In this "rugged vigour" resides the seed of the tempered heart:

> I make but little of his [Muhammad's] praises of Allah which many praise; they are borrowed I suppose mainly from the Hebrew, at least they are far surpassed there. But the eye that flashes into the heart of things, and <u>sees</u> the truth of them; this is to me a highly interesting object. Great Nature's own gift; which she bestows on all; but which only one in the thousand does not cast sorrowfully away; it is what I call sincerity of vision; the test of a sincere heart.
>
> Carlyle, 1966, p. 68

For Frederick Denison Maurice, the "mighty conviction" that sustains the Islamic believer stems not from the promise of an afterlife in paradise (which is promised), but rather from the fact "that they [Islamic believers] were then, at that very moment, called by God to a work,---that they were His witnesses" (Maurice, p. 27), and thus,

> The belief of a living, acting Will [Allah] passes into the acknowledgment of a dead necessity, a fate, against which there is no struggling, which drives the soul not to energy for some great object, but to indifference, languor, and... submission...Oftentimes indeed the patience of a Turk must even yet awaken our homage and our shame.
>
> Maurice, p. 30

Clarke quotes the Episcopal missionary, Bishop Southgate, who wrote, "I have never known a Mussulman, sincere in his faith and devout and punctilious in his religious

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duties, in whom moral rectitude did not seem an active quality and a living principle" (Clarke, p. 474). These aspects of both the religion and its founder are summed up by Karen Armstrong in Holy War: The Crusades and Their Impact on Today's World (1988, 1991), where she writes that "realism is a hallmark of Islam...What made Islam a successful and strong faith was its realism and practicality" (p. 33). Melville, as we shall see in the case of Djalea, was highly respectful of Islam's capability of contending with the trials of the physical world.

Other religions demonstrate similar capabilities; Maurice wrote that in Hinduism

> the primary Idea of an Inconceivable, Absolute, Unseen Being, whom it is the highest glory of the holiest man to behold, and in whom he is to be lost, has survived--survived not as a theory of some learned Brahmin, but as so deep and essential an article of popular faith, that all other habitual convictions...must give place to it...[hence] The woman who gives up herself to death on her husband's funeral pile is exhibiting the same sense of the necessity of self-abandonment, self-sacrifice [both essential aspects of the tempered heart], which is implied in the desire of the contemplative man to be absorbed into the Divine Essence.
>
> Maurice, p. 51-2

The Hindu believer must be, like Rama, an active participant in the surrounding world; the Bhagavad Gita states, "He who withdraws himself from actions, but ponders on their pleasures in his heart, he is under a delusion and is a false follower of the Path" (3.6). Clarke, after a prolonged

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discussion highlighting the contrast between Hinduism and Buddhism (in which the former has been likened to Catholicism and the latter to Protestantism), states nonetheless "Buddhism has the same <u>aim</u> as Brahmanism, namely, to escape the vicissitudes of time into the absolute rest of eternity," which is achieved, in the case of both religions, through a tempering process wherein the worldly state of desire is gradually overcome (Clarke, p. 144). Clarke also says of the Buddha (Siddhartha Gautama) that his "indisputable glory" was "the boundless charity to man with which his soul was filled," and thus, "in his view of man's sorrowful life, all distinctions of rank and class fall away; all are poor and needy together," a outlook, Clarke says, which this religion shares with Christianity (Clarke, p. 164). Discussing the religions of China, Clarke quotes Confucius's saying "The good man is serene, the bad always in fear," the pointed corollary of which is that such a state of serenity is only achieved through willed endurance (p. 49). As might be expected, the dualism of Zoroastrianism, a particularly important religion to Melville, avidly asserts the theme of the tempered heart; as Clarke wrote of its believers, "life to the good man was not sleep, but battle" (Clarke, p. 187). Here, the duties and rites of the religion are not merely gestures performed for the sake of worship; the believer's acts actually help the gods in their divine struggle (Zend Avesta, vol. 1, p. lxviii). Thus, in the

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Tir Yast of volume two of the Zend Avesta, Tristrya, a good god, initially loses his battle with Apaosha, a bad god, because, he says, humans didn't worship him properly, a fate later to be shared by Mithra, another good god in his struggle with an evil foe. Throughout the Venidad (the first book of the Zend Avesta; the Venidad is divided into twenty-two Fargards or chapters) the divine force of good, Ahura Mazda, exhorts Zarathustra, emphasizing the fact that acts are only good or evil by virtue of their being consciously performed, an idea shared by Hegel, Thoreau, and Henry James, among others, and that therefore, "Purity is,...next to life, the greatest good, that purity that is procured by the law of Mazda to him who cleanses his own self with good thoughts, words, _deeds_" (Fargard v, v. 21, my emphasis). In volume two of the Zend Avesta the distinction is made between two kinds of knowledge: Asnya Khratu, which is intuitive or revelatory, and Gaosho, which is that acquired through experience, both being equally important (Sirozah i, v. 2), a concept quite similar to Hinduism's Paravidya and Aparavidya. And certainly such figures as Abraham and Job in the Old Testament and Christ and Paul in the New serve to exemplify the virtues of the tempered heart for the Jewish or Christian believer.

With the tempered heart theme such an important tenet of the world's religions it should come as no surprise to see it symbolically replicated in many of the characters in _Clarel_. For Melville, as for Milton in the _Areopagitica_

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no virtue is of any real value until it has been tested in the crucible of experience. In essence, therefore, the tempered heart theme is the antithesis of Nehemiah's blind faith, Margoth's dogmatism. Mortmain's defeated resignation, and Derwent's "easy skim." In fact, after Rolfe, it is most often found in _Clarel_ in relatively minor characters: the young Syrian Monk whom the pilgrims encounter near Quarantania, the noble and durable Druze escort Djalea, the intense Franciscan guide Salvaterra, and even in Nehemiah's ass. Like Bulkington in _Moby-Dick_, these are characters who quietly but powerfully endure the hardships of the world, hardships which they do not knowingly avoid, steeled only by their own suppleness and unshakable stability. It is this last quality that distinguishes the tempered heart cluster of characters from the monomaniacs who, as we shall shortly see in the case of Mortmain, allow experience to overwhelm rather than to modify them. Whereas the monomaniacs are bitter and cynical, those of the tempered heart are patient and seem to exemplify Rolfe's observation that

> Breaking habit's tether,
> Sincerest minds will yet diverge
> Like chance-clouds scattered by mere weather;
> Nor less at one point still they meet:
> The self-hood keep they pure and sweet.
> II. xxii. ll. 99-103

The tempered heart theme is also exhibited in _Clarel_ in

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many of the historical figures cited by the pilgrims and the narrator, such as Rama, St. Francis, Obermann, and Spinoza. Finally, it is the quality that the narrator attributes to Clarel himself in the final scene on the Via Dolorosa and in the "Epilogue"; it is by Clarel's grim perseverance in the face of the indifference of the world and of God, and by this alone, that he will survive, the narrator suggests.

But the tempered heart theme has a very important corollary, one very dear to Melville. If it is demanded of the believer of a specific religion to persevere in the face of tribulations--which we've just seen is an aspect of most of the world's major religions--then there is also a reciprocal responsibility on the part of that religion's doctrine to provide a realistic means of functioning against these hardships; a religion must therefore possess a creed or ethical code, or a conceptualization of the real world whereby the believer is armed against the tribulations of that world. Again, many of the world's religions address this issue. The Koran, while advocating nonaggression, is explicit in its recognition of the dangers of the real world. For example, guarded prayer is taught: while in the desert, let one group pray first while the other watches for enemies, and then switch roles (4.102). Violence in the form of self-defense is an acceptable act: "Permission to take up arms is hereby given to those who are attacked because they have been wronged...Had God not defended some

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men by the might of others, the monasteries and churches, the synagogues and mosques in which his praise is daily celebrated, would be utterly destroyed" (22.39-40). Similarly, Rama, the great Hindu hero and also subject of I. xxxii ("Of Rama") in _Clarel_, where his capability to endure the world is celebrated, is described in the epic _Ramayana_ as being simultaneously "benevolent to all beings, learned, eloquent...wise, conversant with the ethical code...famed for his good deeds, pure, devout, and one who ever meditates on his own essence" and "slayer of his foes...protector of those who take refuge in him...adept in the science of warfare...[and] when stirred to anger, he resembles all-consuming death...that ever-resplendent destroyer of his foes" (_Ramayana_, I. 3-6). These contrasting qualities, the narrator assures us in one of the more enigmatic passages of the poem, are present in a major character of the poem--usually thought to be Rolfe (I. xxxii, ll. 55-6). And certainly the Old Testament provides sufficient examples of warrior-kings and heroes to abet the Hebrews in their hardships. But Christianity, with its emphasis on martyrdom and turning the other cheek, makes very little provision for the way of the world which often leads to catastrophe. As Edmund Wilson remarks in _A Piece of My Mind_,

> If there really is a Christian ethics, it is the kind of thing preached by Tolstoy and of which, by his own behavior, he illustrated the

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> impractability. There are people, a very few people--Tolstoy was conspicuously not one of them--whose temperament has some affinity with this version of the Christian ideal; but this ideal is, even for them, incompatible with the conditions of human life.
>
> p. 4

It is this very incompatibility with the condition of human life to which Rolfe implicitly alludes while commenting on the difference between the Christian heaven and that of other religions:

> But oh! 'twas rare,
> In world like this, the world we know
> (Sole know, and reason from) to dare
> To pledge indemnifying good
> In worlds not known; boldly avow,
> Against experience, the brood
> Of Christian hopes.
>
> III. iii. ll. 12-18

Where, Rolfe wonders, does the Christian vision of a heaven of "indemnifying good" originate in a world so obviously overrun by evil, and how can the life prescribed by Christ hope to survive in such a world? This dilemma, which Melville had explored in depth in *Pierre* and *The Confidence-Man* (and which his blood-brother, Dostoevsky, gave full voice to in *The Brothers Karamazov*), is also of great significance in *Clarel*. We see symbolically depicted in Celio's bitter outcry, in Nehemiah's simple faith, in Nathan's confused spiritual odyssey, and in Derwent's "easy skim" not only untempered hearts, but also the imperfect

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and impractical issues of Christ's teachings in their encounter with the real world. The Christian believer, it would seem, is either doomed to being annihilated by the real world--which is, paradoxically, what Christ appears to advocate at times in the gospels--or else must so strive to accommodate the ways of the world as to be left with nothing more than a severely compromised, and therefore useless faith. One of the reasons Melville seems to demonstrate what is, for him, a new-found respect for Catholicism in _Clarel_ may well be that in its tradition and rites it both complements and empowers the faith of its believers, and thus provides a means against the tribulations of the world. Thus, in answering Derwent's charges against the Catholic church, the Dominican priest whom the pilgrims encounter at the Jordan river argues,

> Crafty is Rome, you deem? Her art
> Is simple, quarried from the heart.
> ...fervors as obscure in birth--
> Precious, though fleeting in their dates--
> Rome culls, adapts, perpetuates
> In ordered rites. 'Tis these supply
> Means to the mass to beautify
> The rude emotions; lend meet voice
> To organs which would fain rejoice
> But lack the song; and oft present
> To sorrow bound, an instrument
> which liberates. Each hope, each fear
> Between the christening and the bier
> Still Rome provides for[.]
>
> II. xxv, ll. 36-7, 42-53

This corollary to the tempered heart theme is especially conspicuous in "The Wilderness" in the contrast

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between the respective faiths of Nehemiah and Djalea. Thus, the former's blind faith has not taught him to recognize the futility of trying to clear the terrain of its countless rocks in order to prepare "[f]or the second coming of Our Lord" (II. x. l. 228); or worse still, it is his perception that this obviously impossible task has been demanded of him by his faith. Nehemiah's tasting of the waters of the Jordan river, which he pronounces "As sugar sweet" (II. xxiv l. 70) even though the narrator assures that they are, in fact, bitter (ll. 71-2), further demonstrates how poorly his faith has equipped him to function in the physical world. His death by sleep-walking into the Dead Sea can therefore be construed as the culminating event of a long established pattern of behavior. Djalea's strength, on the other hand, originates in the potent transaction between his faith and the real world. As we have seen from the Koran, his Islamic beliefs make provision for the ways of the world and allow him to act forcefully should the occasion demand it. Rumored to be of noble birth, Djalea, like Mortmain (as we shall see shortly), has suffered an undisclosed reversal of fortune through the vicissitudes of politics, something the narrator suggests is endemic to this part of the world: "Abrupt reverse/The princes of the East may know:/Lawgivers are outlaws at a blow" (II. vii. ll. 17-9). Having been deprived of his rightful inheritance, he must now live, like Queequeg in _Moby-Dick_ (whom he resembles in some ways), "[e]xiled,

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cut off, in friendless state" (II. vii. l. 21), working as a mere tour guide for European and American pilgrims, a role in which he nonetheless maintains "an air sedate;/ Without sacrifice of pride" (II. vii. ll. 22-3). His dress is simple and practical, and in everything he does there is an intense yet economical vitality and authority. His weapons--a rifle and a revolver--and his beloved pipe, always an important accoutrement in Melville, both complete the picture and symbolize, respectively, a realistic view of the dangers present in the world and the understandable desire for unpretentious pleasure. That he is in perfect accord with his environment is reflected in his relationship with his mare, Zar. A spirited horse who, like Djalea, is very simply adorned, she has "full eye of flame/Tempered in softness" (II. vii. ll. 37-8), ears that "catch a hint/As tinder takes the spark from flint/And steel" (II. vii. ll. 41-3), and is capable, when necessary, of great demonstrations of strength: "at need, what power she'd don,/Clothed with the thunderbolt would run" (II. vii. ll. 48-9). Yet, such is the relationship between the two that Djalea is able to control her without spurs, lash, or harsh words; "[m]uch like a child/The Druze [Djalea] she'd follow, more than mild./...Courteous her treatment" (II. vii. ll. 46-7, 53). As subsequent scenes in "The Wilderness" and "Mar Saba" will demonstrate, Djalea's is a truly tempered heart, one deeply spiritual yet thoroughly capable of contending promptly and forcefully with both

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the natural and the human world; as such, he stands in sharp contrast to the naively devout Nehemiah.

The tempered heart theme and its corollary are further underscored in the pilgrims' encounter with the rugged and dangerous terrain outside of Jerusalem. Their journey through the Old Testament landscape to the Dead Sea renders the original relationship between human beings and nature. To enter the desert is to recover something of the unadulterated, primal experience from which so many ancient religions had sprung; as Rolfe says,

> Man sprang from the deserts: at the touch
> Of grief or trial overmuch,
> On deserts he falls back at need;
> Yes, 'tis the bare abandoned home
> Recalleth then.
>
> II. xvi. ll. 106-10

Rolfe here is expressing a view widely held in nineteenth-century comparative religious theory, one that would ultimately see a relationship between geography and religion. Hegel, for example, held that in the desert, "nothing can be brought into a firm consistent shape," and that, as a product of this desert, Islam was thus "abstract and therefore all-comprehensive enthusiasm--restrained by nothing, finding its limits nowhere, and absolutely indifferent to all beside" (Hegel, pp. 357, 359). Clarke frequently makes use of the fact that "comparative geography...has pointed out so many relations

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between the terrestrial conditions of nations and their moral attainments" (Clarke, p. 259). He therefore sees the dualism of Zoroastrianism, for example, arising directly from Zarathustra's apprehension of "these terrible convulsions of the air and ground, these antagonisms of outward good and evil" of the harsh, desert-like conditions in which he lived (Clarke, p. 187). Just as the synthetic world of commerce, politics, and materialism, which Vico held to be the only knowable world, will often destroy those inclined toward a simple idealism or faith, as Emerson and Henry James both knew, so the severe and indifferent world of the desert in Clarel, which Rolfe describes as "Calvinistic if devout/In all her aspect" (II. xiv. ll. 48-9), offers a judgment both swift and harsh upon those who seek only for material comfort. It is, it seems, as Carlyle wrote in Sartor Resartus, a book Melville knew well, that "with or without visible Devil, whether in the natural Deserts of rock and sands, or in the populous moral Desert of selfishness and baseness,--to such Temptation are we all called" (Carlyle, 1896, p. 198). Thus in Clarel it is the worldly Greek Banker, whose fear of death is so pronounced that he will not even allow the word or its approximation to be uttered in his presence (II. iii. ll. 49-54, 61; he even couches the idea in material terms, calling it the "Last bankruptcy without redress" l. 49), and his equally secular future son-in-law Glaucon, who has never heard of Homer though he lives in Smyrna, which

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claimed to be the birthplace of the poet, who both quickly wilt in the unyielding terrain and must turn back to Jerusalem (II. xiii). Even Derwent's eternal cheerfulness is put to the test by the desert's monotonous oppression; in response to Rolfe's inquiry as to his well-being after the train has encountered a particularly harsh stretch of the desert,

> ...He [Derwent], with altered air,
> Made vague rejoinder, not serene:
> His soul, if not cast down, was vexed
> By Nature in this dubious scene:
> His theory she harsh perplexed.
> II. xii. ll. 45-9

On the other hand, Mortmain, a bitterly disillusioned refugee from the world of politics, discovers in the desert a rugged and implacable honesty. Though quite aware of its dangers and by no means inured to its enervating powers (II. xii. l. 50), he nonetheless often rides out into it alone, and finds sleeping in the dangerous night wilderness "[s]afer than in the cut-throat town/Though on the church-steps" (II. xv. ll. 77-8). This contrast in <u>Clarel</u> between the existential experience of the desert and the socially-evolved, Vichian world of the city, each destructive of the human spirit in its own way, underscores a central tenet of the tempered heart theme and its corollary: neither a simply achieved and untested faith nor a material or cynical aestheticism--the aesthete being the unique product

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of "civilization"--can be sufficient by itself in offering a solution to the troubling questions rhetorically posed throughout the poem. The one is blind to reality, the other cloaked in denial and given over to pure sensuality, and both are therefore incomplete and thus vulnerable. Neither possesses the Djalean tempered heart in-and-of itself, and each teeters precariously close to disaster should there be any change in "Fate, that realist how grim" (II. xvi. l. 53).

The tempered heart theme and its corollary address one of the oldest and most important of all religious paradoxes, namely, that religious doubt is often born directly from the experience of the real world, and yet such experience and, indeed, such doubt are necessary aspects of a true faith; thus, writing of Hinduism, Muller refers to "that doubt, that true skepticism, if we may call it, which is meant to give faith its real strength" (Chips From a German Workshop, p. 42), or, as the Devil tells Ivan in The Brothers Karamazov, "The hosannah must be tried in the crucible of doubt" (p. 582). As the events of "The Wilderness" unfold, the tempered heart theme and its corollary will drift in and out of narrative focus, creating dramatic tension in the juxtaposition of characters with each other and with nature, and providing a standard against which to measure their actions.

"The Wilderness" commences the real religious debates that make up so much of the poem and which serve as a kind

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of intellectual correlative to the tempered heart theme. Early on in the section these debates stem largely from the confluence of three specific ideological positions. The first of these, emblematic for materialism, sensuality, and worldly comfort, is represented by the Greek Banker, Glaucon, to a lesser degree Derwent and sometimes Rolfe, and later in the poem, the Lesbian purveyor, the young Cypriote, and, most notably, the sensual Lyonese. Margoth and the Presbyterian elder represent the second position, which is characterized by an almost gleeful atheism and desire to disprove all religious claims. It should be noted that the paucity of characters voicing this position is counterbalanced by the fact that the position is powerfully represented in other, less literal ways--e.g., in the doubt that torments most of the main characters, in the rhetorical emphasis on the impact science has made in the nineteenth century, and so forth. The third position--a most complicated one--is that represented by the monomanics Mortmain and Ungar. I have already discussed aspects of the first two positions in some detail, but Mortmain is of such signal importance, serving to voice, along with Celio and Ungar, some of the most profound and dire utterances in all of Melville, and also illustrating the perils encountered in the pursuit of the tempered heart, as to require a rather close examination here.

Mortmain is one of the last of Melville's much-discussed monomaniacal characters, whose lineage

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includes Jackson, Ahab, Pierre, Claggart, and so forth. This character-type is often heroic in stature, tragic, inspiring, usually deeply-wounded (physically or psychologically), bitter, and ultimately doomed; Captain Peleg's description of Ahab in Moby-Dick, that "He's a grand, ungodly, god-like man" could easily be applied to any of them (Chapter 16, p. 80). Each avatar is finally brought low by his own unyielding will which has been scarred through experience and, as such, demonstrate a decidedly untempered heart. It is significant that Bezanson suggests that there are four such monomaniacs in Clarel: Celio, Mortmain, Agath, and Ungar (Clarel, p. 626). His inclusion of Agath--who is quite a minor character compared to the other three--is particularly interesting because that character is prone to none of the contemptuous insolence that clearly distinguishes the other exemplars, both in Clarel and in Melville's other works. In many ways Agath is much closer to Bartleby in "Bartleby, the Scrivener" or Pip in Moby-Dick; all three have been left broken and empty rather than implacably vengeful by their respective scarring experiences. Bezanson's expanded definition of this type to include Agath--and, implicitly, Pip, Bartleby, and Don Hannibal (whom he calls "an interesting experiment by Melville in attempting a JOLLY MONOMANIAC" [Clarel, p. 623])--is therefore quite significant as it highlights the scarring wound of experience as much as the defiant but single-minded

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(orthodox) will that often results. From the example presented by Mortmain we observe that this scarring from experience _and_ the manner in which the individual copes with it are _both_ critical aspects in the tempering of the heart.

Mortmain's life has been exceedingly difficult. He is the illegitimate son of Swedish parents, and thus represents, as critics have observed, "natural man" (Knapp, p. 67). His father's interest in him was specious and perfunctory; his mother hated him. On the eve of the Revolution of 1848, and guided only by some general notion of "the vague bond of human kind" (II. iv. l. 25), he makes his way to Paris, "the nurse of many a flame/Evil and good" (ll. 27-8). Here, he gets caught up in the optimistic idealism and political intrigue of the times and ends up espousing "warm desires and schemes for man":

> _Peace and good will_ was his acclaim--
> If not in words, yet in the aim:
> _Peace, peace on earth_[.]
> ll. 30, 32-4

Melville is quite specific in showing Mortmain's mission at this point to be distinctly secular; thus, Mortmain harps on his humanitarian "note" "scarce in way the cherub trilled/To Bethlehem and the shepherd band" (ll. 35-6), since rather, in the true spirit of the times, it was

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> ...That uncreated Good
> He [Mortmain] sought, whose absence is the cause
> Of creeds and Atheists, mobs and laws.
> ll. 49-51

So skilled was Mortmain at espousing these principles in Paris that he quickly attracted disciples and became a figure of some importance in the events before and during the Revolution.

Mortmain's views at this point, like Derwent's, must actually be regarded against the backdrop of contemporary utilitarian and melioristic doctrines which held that, in the modern, secularized world, human beings could improve their essential condition through the application of reason and compassion. Such idealistic doctrines, however useful and noble in spirit, were often blindly embraced with evangelical fervor, and even whole nations could (and still do) imagine themselves fated to promote their progressive ideals. Thus, in _1848: The Revolution of the Intellectuals_, Lewis Namier describes the political atmosphere of Paris in 1848 as one full of "political passions devoid of real contents" (p. 40). Alphonse de Circourt, an eyewitness to the Revolution, later wrote that "France at that time seemed invested with the privilege, great and dangerous, to feel, to think, to speak, and to act in the name of humanity" (quoted in Namier, p. 41). This view found popular as well as political favor. As early as 1840 _Le Temps_ was stridently proclaiming it France's heroic duty to carry

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"once more the tricolour from capital to capital...in a way which would not arouse the hostility of nations but...set them free" (quoted in Namier, p. 48). As Circourt would aphoristically write, "La religioon active de nos jours, c'est la politique" (quoted in Namier, p. 5).

But despite such well-intentioned idealism, the Revolution of 1848, "born at least as much of hopes as of discontents" (Namier, p. 2), quickly became, Namier argues, more about nationalism and the rise of the modern nation-state than about political liberation. Opportunism and duplicity abounded, and the original aims of the Revolution were quickly displaced by the more reactionary and cynical goals of professional politicians; thus,

> ...the ultimate control of the state machine [during and after the Revolution], and still more of the armies of the Great Powers on the European Continent, remained with the Conservatives;...The "Revolution" of the Intellectuals" exhausted itself without achieving concrete results: it left its imprint only in the realm of ideas.
>
> Namier, p. 37

So Mortmain soon discovered that even the seemingly inviolate cause of liberty was capable of attracting to its fold all manner of political and idealistic types: "[t]he vain, foolhardy, worthless, blind,/With Judases" (ll. 55-6). He found his ideals subsumed in the struggles of politics and personalities, and beholding them so sullied, he suddenly realized the ultimate futility of

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the enterprise: "Experience with her sharper touch/Stung Mortmain" (ll. 60-1).

The 'anagnorisis' is always a critical moment for any character in Melville's fiction; often it will occur before the reader first encounters that character. In the case of Mortmain it proves his undoing. His vague idealism, buttressed only by abstract humanitarian notions, collapses quickly before the crushing disappointment in Paris. His noble but vulnerable heart is not tempered by experience, only hardened. He begins to see all such idealistic causes-in fact, all causes--as foredoomed before the corrupting onslaught of human nature and, like Young Goodman Brown, he becomes permanently embittered against humanity. "Man's vicious: snaffle him with kings;/Or, if kings cease to curb, devise/Severer bit" he scornfully snarls at Derwent (II. iii. l. 180-2). The human condition becomes for him an unendurable repetition of moral stupidity and suffering, unrelieved by hope, except Derwent's shallow kind for which he has complete disgust; against the latter's progressive meliorism he holds that

> The world is portioned out, believe:
> The good have but a patch at best,
> The wise their corner; for the rest--
> Malice divides with ignorance.
> And what is stable? find one boon
> That is not lackey to the moon
> Of fate. The flood ebbs out--the ebb
> Floods back; the incessant shuttle shifts
> And flies, and weaves and tears the web.
> ll. 90-7

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Melville had always been hard on idealistic doctrines, particularly those which he felt failed to properly account for the vicissitudes of reality and the caprice of human nature. Emerson's transcendentalism, which mildly suffuses Derwent's outlook, was a succulent target, and he maintained a qualified antagonism toward the philosopher throughout his writing. "I was agreeably disappointed in Mr. Emerson," he wrote Evert Duyckinck on March 3, 1849, after hearing Emerson lecture at James Freeman Clarke's Freeman Chapel sometime in February of that year,. "I could readily see in Emerson, notwithstanding his merit, a gaping flaw. It was, the insinuation, that had he lived in those days when the world was made, he might have offered some valuable suggestions" (Correspondence, p. 121). Melville often lampooned the solipsistic presumption of Emerson's transcendentalist ideas in his fiction, and Mardi, Moby-Dick, and The Confidence-Man contain episodes or characters which place these ideas in an unfavorable light. Melville's reading further afforded him occasion to critique Emerson. The marginalia in his copy of Emerson's Essays, which he acquired in 1862, frequently consist of terse and impatient outbursts aimed at the sunny optimism he found therein. To Emerson's advice in "Prudence," "Trust men, and they will be true to you; treat them greatly, and they will show themselves great, though they make an exception in your favor to all their rules of trade," he sadly appends, "God help the poor fellow who squares his life according

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to this" (Leyda, p. 648). To Emerson's observation in the same essay that "The drover, the sailor, buffets it [the storm] all day, and his health renews itself as vigorous a pulse under the sleet, as under the sun of June," the ever-pragmatic Melville wearily adds, "To one who has weathered Cape Horn as a common sailor what stuff is all this is" (Leyda, p. 648).

Yet Melville recognized Emerson's greatness, and perhaps his most insightful observation on the philosopher was his comment following a passage from Emerson's essay "The Poet," in which it is stated, quite in the spirit of Max Muller (who, it will be recalled, dedicated _Introduction to the Science of Religion_ to Emerson), that the original images and tropes of language have been lost through time and usage, but that the poet brings us closer to their origins. To this, Melville added:

> This is admirable, as many other thoughts of Mr. Emerson are. His gross and astonishing errors & illusions spring from a self-conceit so intensely intellectual and calm that at first one hesitates to call it by its right name. Another species of Mr. Emerson's errors, _or rather blindness_, proceeds from _a defect in the region of the heart_. [my emphasis]
> Leyda, p. 649

Such a defect ("of the [underdeveloped] heart") is, for Melville, a fatal character flaw, as the tempered heart theme in _Clarel_ makes clear. Moreover, none are exempt; as he memorably wrote Hawthorne in June of 1851, "The reason

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the mass of men fear God, and _at bottom dislike_ Him, is because they rather distrust His heart, and fancy Him all brain like a watch" (_Correspondence_, p. 192; even Hawthorne was guilty to some degree: "Still there is something lacking--a good deal lacking--to the plump sphericity of the man [Hawthorne]," Melville wrote Evert Duyckinck on February 15, 1851, "He does'nt [sic] patronise the butcher--he needs roast beef, done rare." [_Correspondence_, p. 181]).

But if the flaw in Emerson's idealism--and God's, for that matter--is one of dispassionate intellect, the flaw in Mortmain's (before his "fall") is one of simple immaturity. In Paris, his "[p]recocities of heart outran/The immaturities of brain" (ll. 52-3). So powerless had he been to deal with the events in Paris and so correspondingly disillusioned does he afterward become, that he is left with little recourse but to judge the world, like Ahab, according to his own bitter--if heroic--standards, a condition of which he seems sadly well aware. "Cling to His tree, and there find hope:/Me it but makes a misanthrope," he cries out to the palm at Mar Saba shortly before his death (III. xxviii, ll. 13-4). Such outcries (or, impassioned incries) merely elicit an uncomfortable pity from the other pilgrims (II. xxxiv-xxxvi), much as Ungar's similar diatribes will in "Bethlehem."

Believing that "[b]ehind all this still works some power/Unknowable.../_That_ steers the world, not man" (II. iv. ll. 106-8), and driven now by the overwhelming

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apprehension of original sin, Mortmain sets about on a self-imposed exile to "the gray places of the earth" (l. 130), which has finally brought him to Jerusalem. Here, he wears a somber black skullcap which frightens the more aesthete pilgrims, and his "wannish eyes" (II. iii. l. 95), the result of chronic insomnia, contrast with Derwent's "morning zest,/In sound digestion unoppressed" (ll. 734).[1] Although a mouthpiece for some of the loftiest and most anguished thoughts in all of Melville's works, Mortmain nonetheless dies, like Celio, broken and defeated, and like Pierre, he becomes emblematic for innocent and well-intentioned idealism led astray by its own inflated and unrealistic sense of purpose.

Many of the scenes and debates in "The Wilderness" and "Mar Saba" demonstrate aspects of the tempered heart theme and its corollary. The first of the major debates, for example, which occurs in "In the Garden" (II. iii.) where the pilgrims' train has temporarily stopped just outside the gates of Jerusalem to prepare for their final departure to the Dead Sea, articulates it through the contrast of the three major theoretical positions outlined earlier in this chapter. As in so many of the debates in Clarel, the action here transpires in a symbolically important location, in this case, Gethsemane garden, which thus contextualizes the discussion and behavior of the pilgrims. Predictably enough, the Greek Banker and Glaucon, whom we'd learned earlier had come to the holy land "[t]o

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further schemes of finance" (II. i. l. 168), set about gathering olive branches of the kind from which rosary beads are carved, and also buy "those gems the nuns revere" from venders "[f]or travel-gifts" (II. iii. ll. 22-33). Much like the tying-out sections of Moby-Dick, we see here the transformation of something essentially mysterious and sacred into a mere commodity meant to generate capital and entice bourgeois tastes. These objects have been, in effect, dislocated from what Walter Benjamin calls their "cult value," and are now regarded by the modern age for their "exhibition value": "[w]ith the emancipation of the various art practices from ritual go increasing opportunities for the exhibition of their products" (Benjamin, pp. 224-5).

This apparent irreverence at the historical site of Christ's passion, later mirrored in the deliberately antagonistic actions of Margoth, establishes the context for the ensuing confrontation between Derwent and Mortmain. The latter is repulsed by the former's indifferent good cheer at such a reverential site, feeling that he fails to acknowledge the significance of what had transpired there. Their debate quickly centers around their respective views of Christian doctrine and human nature. For Derwent, it is a rosy one, full of tolerance and the enjoyment of worldly pleasures. He unsuccessfully attempts to engage Clarel, who is thinking only of Ruth, in a discussion of the virtues of morning horseback rides around Jerusalem.

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Gethsemane garden itself is of little interest to him; the railed off spot where Judas betrayed Christ thus reminds him merely of "a vacant pound" (l. 112). As for Christian doctrine, he feels it offers "hope to man, a cheerful hope" (l. 126). Mortmain, on the other hand, sees a very different picture: Christ's sacrifice, whatever it may promise in terms of eternal happiness, has no power in a world where human nature is both evil and pervasive, and human beings are therefore doomed to suffer:

> The Christian plea--
> What basis has it, but that here
> Man is not happy, nor can be?
> There it confirms philosophy:
> The compensation of its cheer
> Is reason why the grass survives
> Of verdurous Christianity,
> Ay, trampled, lives, tho' hardly thrives
> In these mad days.
>
> ll. 127-135

Moreover, their evil nature makes human beings unworthy of Christ's sacrifice; after all, "'twas _human_, that unanimous cry,/'We're fixed to hate him--crucify'" (ll. 145-6). Mortmain fashions this view into a specific critique of America, "that vain-glorious land/Where human nature they enthrone/Replacing the divine" (ll. 168-70). The lesson to be learned from Christ's sacrifice (and betrayal, which is what Mortmain wishes to emphasize) is not charity and tolerance, but rather,

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Man's vicious: snaffle him with kings,
Or, if kings cease to curb, devise
Severer bit. This garden brings
Such lesson. Heed it, and be wise
In thoughts not new.
ll. 180-4

Typically, this debate ends unresolved. As such, it is not even a true debate--neither character really addresses the other's points. Mortmain, in fact, frequently doesn't even address Derwent--two of his four main speeches in this exchange are apostrophes, directed to the "abyss" (ll. 141-51) and to the ancient olive trees of Gethsemane (ll. 158-71); this last entails, significantly enough, the attack on America, thus rhetorically underscoring Benjamin's "cult" and "exhibition" value distinction in the contrast between the mysterious trees of antiquity and the material New World. The confrontation ends with Mortmain uttering his above-quoted warning and the uncomprehending Derwent fumbling about in an effort to placate the Swede's unmediated wrath ("Thou'rt strong; yield then the weak some room./Too earnest art thou" [ll. 175-6] and "Thou'rt ill to-day" [l. 184]).

It is these polar opposite views of Christian doctrine and human nature that are of comparative religious interest. Neither character's mostly-orthodox position fully encompasses the essence of true religion which the poem is attempting to discern. Mortmain's emphasis on human suffering is, as we've seen, a major comparative religious

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theme in Clarel, but his misanthropic account of that suffering is most decidedly not. Derwent's more heterodoxical tolerance is also, as we've seen, a very important comparative religious theme in the poem, but this is seriously compromised by his shallow indifference to suffering and to his self-preoccupation, which are major character flaws. Neither position can be said to reflect a tempered heart, though each possesses important aspects of it. Each position is deeply concerned with the problems arising from religious belief in the modern world (the corollary to the tempered heart), but neither posits an acceptable solution.

In this lack of resolution between contrary positions Melville seems to be emphasizing (here and throughout the poem) the specifically heterodoxical state of an acquired *un*resolution as the ideal to be learned from the tempered heart. In the *Areopagitica,* Milton wrote "that which purifies us is trial, and trial is by what is contrary," and Blake, Milton's diabolical disciple, wrote "Without Contraries is no progression" in "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell" (both authors, it should be noted, were admired by Melville). The experience of the real world breeds religious doubt, but the believer *must* subject his faith to just this test to authenticate it. The resulting tempered heart becomes something not unlike what T. S. Eliot describes in "Little Gidding" as "A condition of complete simplicity/(Costing not less than everything)."

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In actively seeking this unresolved state in _Clarel_ (and it must be sought--it is not innate), Melville must frequently cast out philosophical babies with their bathwater. In III. v. ("The High Desert"), one of the most remarkable cantos in the entire poem which consists of nothing less than a meditative summary of most of the religious ideas and questions raised in the poem (as presented in the daydreaming of the various pilgrims), the narrator dismisses outright near the conclusion all of these ponderings as futile, even those which would seem to reflect pet Melvillean themes (ll. 164-7, 181-2), reflecting what Walter Donald Kring has recently described as "the utter skepticism of _Clarel_ about finding _rational_ answers to all to the problems of existence" (Kring, p. 108; my emphasis). And as if to underscore this and refute all the philosophical ponderings, Melville concludes the canto with Clarel--and the reader--with a stunning image of the tempered heart; casting his eyes about in despair (l. 168), Clarel suddenly apprehends Djalea quietly and peacefully smoking his pipe:

> The man and pipe in peace as on
> ...There, all aside,
> How passionless he took for bride
> The calm--the calm, but not the dearth--
> The dearth or waste; nor would he fall
> In waste of words, that waste of all
>
> III. v. ll. 174, 178-82

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an image that will be memorably repeated in III. xv. at the conclusion of the revels at Mar Saba.

These last images of Djalea are particularly significant, for in portraying him as an enduring survivor over the fray, Melville parts company with many of the other nineteenth-century comparative religionists who felt Islam to be a religion doomed to die out. For Hegel, Islam was merely a phase through which the World-Spirit passed en route to its final, liberate state in modern Europe. "Islam," he states solemnly, "has long vanished from the stage of history at large, and retreated into Oriental ease and repose" (Hegel, p. 360). Maurice felt that unless the gulf could be bridged between the Islamic idea of God as absolute will and the moral and spiritual needs of the believers, what he calls the "mighty chasm in the Mahometan Doctrine," then Islam must "wither day by day--wither for all the purposes of utility to mankind; it can leave nothing behind but a wretched carcase, filling the air with the infection of rottonness" (Maurice, p. 29). For Clarke, Islam is a step backward, a "relapse...from the complex idea [Christianity] to the simple idea" (p. 483). To further make his case, he appropriates Darwinian images and vocabulary from physical science:

> The seed-germ, and the germ-cell, out of which organic life comes, is lower than the organizations which are developed out of it [sic]. The Mollusks are more complex and so are higher than the Radiata, the Vertebrata are more complex

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> than the Mollusks. Man is the most complex of all, in soul as well s body. The complex idea of God, including will, thought, and love, in the perfect unity, is higher than the simplistic unity of will Mohammad teaches.
>
> Clarke, p. 482

Clarke concludes his discussion of the religion with uncharacteristic harshness: "Time is that it [Islam] came to an end. Its work is done. It is a hard, cold, cruel, empty faith, which should give way to the purer forms of a higher civilization" (Clarke, p. 484). But these writers tend to emphasize the orthodox, the doctrinal, the historical, and as we've seen, the attempt to recover the "intersympathy of creeds" entails, in part, a transcendence of these. Moreover, Melville was not one to cast aspersions on any religious doctrine capable of instilling in its believers such a powerful example; in depicting Djalea as steadfastly maintaining against the hardships of the world, Melville is assuredly suggesting that Islam is a faith quite capable of survival in the modern world, something events of the twentieth century have certainly verified.

Other episodes in "The Wilderness" illustrate the tempered heart theme and its corollary as well. In II. ix ("Through Adomnin"), a central idea of the Christian ethical code is reimagined when juxtaposed with the practical dangers of the desert. In this canto, the pilgrims' train has come to the place traditionally ascribed

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as the scene of Christ's Good Samaritan parable. As at Gethsemane, Glaucon fails to recognize the religious significance of the site; in fact, he is unfamiliar with the parable (ll. 19-20). Instead, he grows apprehensive at the fact that the guard Belex, sensing danger, has drawn his sword. As Belex and his man suddenly bolt away, Nehemiah, as ignorant of the danger about them as Glaucon was of the site's connection with the parable, proceeds to recount the details of the parable to Djalea, who listens while all the while intently scanning the horizon. Nehemiah then asks Djalea whether he believes that someone in need today would find such succor. Djalea only bows and then "resumed his purpose" (l. 75), the narrator suggesting it is the habit of the Arabs to offer "a liberal, fair reverence/...to men demented" (ll. 77-80). In the distance, just above a ridge are suddenly seen the points and tufts of the spears of five bandits being driven away by Belex and his men, the description recalling Melville's late poem "The Maldive Shark" which emphasizes the predatory power of the shark:

> Like dorsal fins of sharks they show
> When upright these divide the wave
> And peer above, while down in grave
> Of waters, slide the body lean
> And charnal mouth.
>
> ll. 98-102

The irony of all of this is not lost on Clarel, who regards

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it "with thoughtful mien" (l. 102). The implications of this episode are far-reaching in terms of the encounter between a religion's ethics and the legitimate demands of the real world. The most fundamental tenets of Christianity--love, charity, and nonviolence, aspects of the religion which Melville clearly held in high esteem--must here give way before the plain but urgent exigencies of reality. Glaucon's extreme aestheticism, a byproduct of "civilization," is likewise threatened and equally powerless; here it is the Islamic characters, Djalea and Belex and his guards, whose swift actions save the train.

The tempered heart theme is given an especially vivid depiction in the episode involving the Syrian Monk, which is related in "The Syrian Monk" (II. xviii.). Once again, this episode transpires at a traditionally significant religious site, and also once again, it involves the confluence of several of the poem's ideological positions. The pilgrims' train has stopped near Jericho, and Rolfe, Vine, and Clarel set out toward the nearby peak, Quarantania, the mountain often associated with Christ's temptation by Satan, a fact which, again, will contextualize the episode, in this case, by recalling the archetypal paradigm of the tempered heart. The telescoping of the past is further emphasized in the description of the Syrian Monk whom the three encounter; despite his wild, gaunt appearance, "strange" (l. 9) and ragged" (l. 12), he is nonetheless "[p]ure...as mountain leaf/By brook, or coral

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washed in reef" (ll. 13-4), so that "[h]e looked like a later Baptist John" (l. 19). At the request of the three Americans, he reluctantly relates his story. He's just returned from spending forty days on Quarantania. Although he'd encountered death and hardship while ascending the mountain, only on the summit did he first feel fear, for "there first I saw this world;/And scarce man's place it seemed to be" (ll. 59-60). Encountering a wrecked chapel at the top, he sat down,

> my heart
> Unwaveringly to set apart
> On meditation of Him
> Who here endured the evil whim
> Of Satan.
> ll. 69-73

In his meditation, he's addressed by a demonic voice from within, which mocks him for his sad condition and impotent faith, not unlike the voice that had similarly taunted Clarel:

> Why strife?
> Dost hunger for the bread of life?
> Thou lackest faith: faith would be fed;
> True faith could turn that stone to bread,
> That stone thou hold'st.
> ll. 87-91

The voice relentlessly torments him, tauntingly asking him where God has gone and scornfully wondering how he even dare maintain faith in an evil world. When, after

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a long and losing discussion with the voice on the topic of death, the monk desperately protests "...He, He _is_, though doubt attend/Peace will He give ere come the end" (l. 124-5), the voice savagely retorts,

> Ha, _thou_ at peace? Nay, peace were best--
> Could the unselfish yearner rest!
> At peace to be, here, here on earth,
> Where peace, _heart-peace_ [my emphasis], how few may claim,
> And each pure nature pines in dearth--
> Fie, fie, thy soul might well take shame.
> ll. 126-31

In despair, the monk cries out to God "take me back again/ To nothing, or make clear my view" (ll. 135-6), reflecting, in the desire for annihilation, the burden consciousness presents to many in this poem. But at this moment of spiritual crisis, succor is somehow at hand; his plea is answered by another voice, a mere whisper, whose utterance succinctly summarizes, in a sentiment to be later echoed later by the narrator in the "Epilogue," the tempered heart theme:

> Content thee: in conclusion caught
> Thou'lt find how thought's extremes agree,--
> the forethought clinched by afterthought,
> The firstling by finality.
> ll. 140-3

The monk ceases his narrative here; when Rolfe attempts to extract more information from him he abruptly leaves

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the three to reclimb the mountain. As such, the monk's story is an excellent microcosm of the poem's recurring theme of religious faith suffering in its struggle with doubt and hardship. The poem itself reflects this idea structurally, as Joseph Knapp has observed:

> ...the overall impression that _Clarel_ first makes on the reader is that of a continued dissonance which is struggling toward a harmony that is latent in the very discord that first meets the eye and ear.
>
> Knapp, p. 23

As I have pointed out, this dissonance and the unresolution of contraries are necessary functions of the poem's striving toward the heterodoxical posture reflected in the final scene on the Via Dolorosa. But Melville has no intention of letting the scene stand as it is. Just as Celio's heroic outburst was immediately punctuated, in true dialectical fashion, by the tour-guide's comments regarding the Wandering Jew (I. xiii. ll. 110-16) which renders Celio both saint and blasphemer, so the monk's narrative here is followed directly by the appearance of the scientist Margoth, who thusfar in the poem has been only briefly viewed from afar (I. xxiv). His own short narrative in "An Apostate" (II. xix.) serves to counterbalance the purely spiritual aspect of the monk's narrative, thus completing the cycle of the tempered heart theme and its corollary. Margoth has also spent a night on Quarantania. Far from

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regarding it for its religious significance, he is interested in the peak for geological purposes. He's "taken strict account" of the mountain, he gleefully tells the three, believing himself to be its "first geologist," and has come to the conclusion that it is composed of "Jura limestone, every spur" (ll. 62-5). He delights in telling the three that

> ...tho' signs the rocks imprint
> Which of Plutonic nature hint,
> No track is found, I plump aver,
> Of Pluto's footings--Lucifer
> ll. 66-9

In "punning mock and manner" (which stirs repugnance in Vine) he tells them that he has gathered together rock samples, "True Rock of Ages," with which he will now write a "monograph" on the peak (ll. 70, 86, 89).

The juxtaposition of the respective episodes of the Syrian Monk and Margoth maintain and exemplify the basic tension, reiterated throughout Clarel, between the claims of objective truth (science) and subjective meaning (faith). Margoth's demystification of sacred sites serves an important rhetorical purpose in the poem's articulation of the tempered heart theme and its corollary. Just as Ishmael's attempts to describe what a whale comprises through chapter after chapter of physical description end, by his own admission, in failure, so Margoth's similarly intended program with Quarantania and other sacred sites

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will ultimately fail, the poem implies, because it won't penetrate to the very source of belief, the mysterious human psyche. A major religious idea expressed in Clarel --a very Protestant one--is that destroying the mystery of sacred sites and relics, something the pragmatic side of Melville would certainly understand if not condone outright, will not destroy true religious belief itself because the source of that belief lies inward, within the imagination and within the tempered heart. This idea is actually aired out in the last section of the poem, "Bethlehem," in a discussion between Rolfe and Derwent in Canto vii ("At Table"). Rolfe has complained that of all the sacred places in Palestine, "Not one we Protestants hold dear/Enough to tend and care for," which he finds especially strange since "Shakespeare's house in Stratford town/Ye keep with loving tendance true" (ll. 49-50, 53--4). Derwent's response echoes the sentiments of both Shakespeare's 55th sonnet and Milton's "On Shakespeare":

> Your drift I catch. And yet I think
> That they who must and deepest drink
> At Shakespeare's fountain, scarce incline
> To idolize the local shrine:
> What's in mere place that can bestead?
> ll. 61-5

Rolfe responds that site and belief are nonetheless intertwined, that "'tis the heart here, not the head" which brings pilgrims to the holy land with their offerings and

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that "in sad hour [even]/The Lutheran widow lays her flower/Before the picture of the dead" (ll. 66, 71-2). The discussion typically ends on an unresolved note when Derwent observes that all the holy sites have always been controlled by the "Greek and Latin" churches anyway, and that "[n]o sites for Protestants remain" (ll. 82, 85). But both parties in this discussion clearly find the spiritual to transcend the physical; as Marcel Proust would simply write in _Remembrance of Things Past_, "the facts of life do not penetrate to the sphere in which our beliefs are cherished; they did not engender those beliefs, and they are powerless to destroy them" (I. p. 162).

This move toward interiority is reflected in the fact that the collective effort of the comparative religious patterns in _Clarel_--the tempered heart and its corollary, the decline of orthodoxies and the ascent of heterodoxy, the suffering of faith--is one that substantially enlarges the sphere of influence for the self/internal/heterodox aspect of religion while proportionally shrinking that of the God/external/orthodox aspect. While not specifically a religious "pattern," this ascendancy of the self is, nonetheless, a major element in the religious development of the poem, as I discussed in the "Protestant dilemma" section. Thus it is that on the eve of Freud and Jung, both of whom were alive when _Clarel_ was published (Freud was twenty, Jung one), Melville locates the seat of true religious experience in the human psyche, a concept

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beautifully realized in that most remarkable canto, "Prelusive" (II. xxxv.), where the prints of the Italian draftsman and printmaker Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720-1778) are discussed. In this abrupt intrusion into the narrative, Melville demonstrates an intuitive and secure grasp of psychology and its relationship to religion. Piranesi's engravings of prison interiors, "measurelessly strange" (l. 2), are described by the narrator as depicting

> Stairs upon stairs which dim ascend
> In series from plunged Batiles drear--
> Pit under pit; long tier on tier
> Of shadowed galleries which impend
> Over cloisters, cloisters without end;
> The hight [sic], the depth--the far, the near;
> Ring-bolts to pillars in vaulted lanes,
> And dragging Rhadamanthine chains;
> These less of wizard influence lend
> Than some allusive chambers closed.
> ll. 5-14

Far from describing the fantastical or magical--neither wizard influence" nor "goblin fantasy" (l. 16) are incorporated in the artistic design of the prints--the narrator states that the prints present analogical depictions of the labyrinth of the human psyche and, perhaps more significant, he suggests, as did Max Muller, that here is the locus for the true religious experience:

> The thing implied is one with man,
> His penetralia of retreat--
> The heart, with labyrinths replete:

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In freaks of intimation see
Paul's "mystery of iniquity"
ll. 20-4

The subject-matter of the prints, the narrator suggests, offers clues by which to render (Christian) religious mystery comprehensible:

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;
Turn hither then and read aright.
ll. 33-7

The comparative brevity of this canto--its forty-one lines place it among the four or five shortest of the poem--makes it serve roughly similar purpose in _Clarel_ to that of the Bulkington chapter in _Moby-Dick_ (Chapter 23, "The Lee Shore"); each constitutes a digressive intrusion on its respective narrative in which a major theme of the work is paradigmatically and metaphorically elaborated. Falling as it does, right after Mortmain's reappearance after an absence in the desert (II. xxxiv) and, as its title suggests, just before Nehemiah's death (II, xxxviii), this canto would seem to underscore that precept of the tempered heart theme which implies that the truly tempered heart, matured through both experience and introspection, is one which does not accept facile explanations of the kind that lead to the rigid positions exemplified in Mortmain and Nehemiah. This idea had been hinted at earlier

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in the poem in I. xxxii. ("Of Rama"), where certain Rama-like natures are described as "surviving hard experience/As grass the winter" (ll. 23-4) and are thereby empowered by "thoughts that dive and skim" (l. 35), and now tempered by experience, they "have got/Familiar with strange things that dwell/Repressed in mortals" (ll. 39-41).

The importance of "Prelusive" cannot be overestimated, both in terms of its immediate function in the poem and also in a larger sense when its implications are projected against the backdrop of nineteenth-century religious thinking. Melville's always impeccable instincts enabled him to anticipate the importance of psychology in religious experience. In his Lyceum lecture "Statues in Rome" for example, he cites a statue displayed at the Vatican of Laocoon wrestling with the serpent. He describes it as depicting

> the very semblance of a great and powerful man writhing with the inevitable destiny which he cannot throw off. Throes and pangs and struggles are given with a meaning that is not withheld... The Laocoon is grand and impressive. gaining half its significance from its symbolism--the fable it represents;...Thus the ideal statuary of Rome expresses the doubt and the dark groping of speculation in that age when the old mythology was passing away and men's minds had not yet reposed in the new faith [Christianity].
>
> *The Piazza Tales*, pp. 403-4

This Arnoldian sense of being caught between two worlds is present throughout *Clarel*; Bezanson says that Melville

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"took Arnold to be his most serious poetic contemporary, and his reading of the _Poems_ in 1862, and of _New Poems_ in 1871, turned out to be a major resource for _Clarel_" (_Clarel_, p. 527). _Clarel_, like the Roman statue, also "expresses the doubt and dark groping of speculation" of a time when old ways of thinking were passing on. But even as the older forms of belief are challenged and overturned, the source of all belief--the human psyche--remains inviolate.

Melville's position, which hardly seems novel now, is, when properly understood, actually quite radical and progressive for its time. To be sure, there had been many attempts to elaborate the relationship between religion and the human psyche before. Hume, as we saw in Chapter One, used a kind of simple psychology to account for the rise of religion; thus, the human mind in its infancy was still, according to him, subject to the fears arising from unexplained natural phenomena. In the nineteenth century, such thinkers as Herbert Spencer (1820-1904), Edward Burnett Tylor (1832-1917), and, to a lesser degree, Max Muller's great enemy Andrew Lang (1844-1912) often employed similar techniques, wherein the mind of the "savage" would be typically entered and analyzed. This methodology resulted in theories involving the worship of dead ancestors, totemism and animism, and later, magic and ritual, which the always prickly Evans-Pritchard (who praises Max Muller) dismisses as often being "a priori speculations, sprinkled

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with illustrations...specious" (Evans-Pritchard, p. 24). For Evans-Pritchard, these theories fail largely through the hubris of the theorist; thus in criticizing the approach of Tylor:

> In the absence of any possible means of knowing how the idea of soul and spirit originated and how they might have developed, a logical construction of the scholar's mind is posited on primitive man, and put forward as the explanation of his beliefs.
> Evans-Pritchard, p. 25

These theories all adopt the evolutionary paradigm as their guiding principle. But as we've seen, in Clarel Melville frequently subverts this principle; in the poem, and particularly in "Prelusive," he is dealing with the mature human psyche and all its complexities. He chooses to regard the human mind in an ontological sense, springing fully developed and mysterious into the world from the outset, and capable of profound interaction with its environment. Like Poe, his only nineteenth-century American rival in this respect, Melville had always instinctively gravitated toward specific themes and metaphors later associated with psychology: the ocean as symbol of the human unconscious or of origin (Redburn, White-Jacket, Moby-Dick), issues of taboo and sexuality, including incest (Typee, Omoo, and Pierre), claustrophobia ("Bartleby, the Scrivener" and the pyramid sections of the Journals), homoeroticism (Billy-Budd), and so forth. Moreover, countless scenes

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and episodes in his fiction present classical psychological situations and correspondingly reverberate with deep psychological meaning. But unlike in Poe, such themes and images in Melville are almost always infused with some religious significance.

But an even more important claim can be made. The field of religious studies dealing specifically in the relationship between psychology and religion, an area characterized by the work of such figures as William James (1842-1910), Edwin Diller Starbuck (1866-1947), James H. Leuba (1868-1846), and James Bisset Pratt (1875-1944), all of whom Sharpe describes as being the "earliest 'psychologists of religion'" (Sharpe, p. 195), and which culminated in Freud and Jung, first evolved several decades _after_ Melville's poem. Moreover, this field of the psychology of religion is regarded as "a _distinctly American_ contribution to the comparative study of religion" (Sharpe, p. 98, his emphasis). In addition, these American psychologists of religion (Leuba was born in Switzerland) were concerned with the "belief that in matters of religion, the believer must whenever possible be permitted to speak for himself; religion, in other words, rests in the _conscious_ mind, and can be produced for examination by a straightforward effort of will" (Sharpe, p. 195, his emphasis). But in "Prelusive" Melville is clearly interested in the role of the _un_conscious mind in religion, and it wouldn't be until the work of Freud and Jung--well into

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the twentieth century--that this connection would become firmly established in psychological circles.

Melville even anticipates aspects of his compatriots' work in some uncanny ways: in the ideological clash between Derwent's "easy skim" and the sorrowful ruminations of Clarel and the wounded monomaniacs Melville has provided a very similar model for what William James would later characterize in The Varieties of Religious Experience (1902) as, respectively, "The Religion of Healthy-Mindedness"--Emerson being James's outstanding example--and "The Sick Soul."

In essence, then, Melville in Clarel depicts religious belief, both orthodox and heterodox, not unlike spokes on a wheel that all lead back to the axis, which is the mature human unconscious. In this sense he has anticipated much important work that would be done "in the years around the turn of the century" (Sharpe) and into the twentieth century in the fields of religious studies, psychology, and anthropology, and he has, moreover, anticipated a distinctly American area of concentration in the process. This is quite a distinction for a work usually dismissed as the tedious and incoherent grumblings of a disenchanted old man living tired, anonymous, and defeated in New York City.

Through the examples of such characters as Djalea and the Syrian monk and the allusions to figures such as Rama we see that the truly tempered heart is one which

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has achieved an accord with its environment through the conspiring efforts of both head and heart. It is characterized, as we have seen in the example of Rama, by "thoughts that dive and skim," and demonstrates a capacity for both "spiced tears that overbrim" and "the dimple and the lightsome whim" (I. xxxii. ll. 35, 36, 37, my emphasis). It suffers, but it also endures and thereby achieves redemption. It accepts because it understands not natural facts, but mysteries and the "strange things that dwell/Repressed in mortals" (I. xxxii. ll. 39-40).

Chapter Four: Notes

1. Not withstanding some obvious differences, it is interesting--even fascinating--to compare Mortmain with T. S. Eliot's description of Baudelaire, another disillusioned refugee from the Revolution of 1848 whose rejection of the modern world comprised the commencement of a spiritual quest. According to Eliot, Baudelaire

> was one of those who have great strength, but strength merely to suffer...But, such suffering as Baudelaire's implies the possibility of a positive state of beatitude. Indeed, in his way of suffering is already a kind of presence of the supernatural and of the superhumen. He rejects always the purely natural and the purely human; in other words, he is neither 'naturalist' nor 'humanist'. Either because he cannot adjust himself to the actual world he has to reject it in favor of Heaven and Hell, or because he has the perception of Heaven and Hell he rejects the present world...In the middle of the nineteenth century...an age of bustle, programmes,

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platforms, scientific progress, humanitarianism and revolutions which improved nothing, an age of progressive degradation, Baudelaire perceived that what really matters is Sin and Redemption... To a mind [such as Baudelaire's] the recognition of the reality of Sin is a New Life; and the possibility of damnation is so immense a relief in a world of electoral reform, plebiscites, sex reform and dress reform, that damnation itself is an immediate form of salvation--of salvation from the ennui of modern life, because it at least gives some significance to living.

Eliot (1975), pp. 232-5

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Chapter Five: Comparative Religious Patterns in *Clarel*: "Bethlehem"

The corollary to the tempered heart theme flowers in the final section of *Clarel*, "Bethlehem." This is achieved to a great degree through a conspicuous move away from the metaphysical ponderings that had characterized the events and discussions of the first three sections into the realm of politics that the poem now takes. In "Bethlehem" the debates between the pilgrims concern themselves with what the nineteenth-century positivist Auguste Comte, described as the modern task of "reconciling Order and Progress" (Comte, p. 78).

The appearance in "Bethlehem" of Ungar, the last and most sociable of the monomaniacs, and of the happily bitter Don Hannibal, both scarred refugees from the world of politics, underscores this evolution into the political realm. In fact, the whole narrative motion of *Clarel* carries the reader from Clarel's suffering alone in what he calls "[m]y cultivated narrowness" in the very first canto (I. i. l. 103) to the final scene on the Via Dolorosa where each suffers alone, yet all suffer together. This narrative motion is further emphasized by the poem's being structured

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along an almost Vichian or Hegelian evolutionary pattern which is reflected in the nature of the presiding monomaniac at any given point. Like Satan in Paradise Lost, Melville's monomaniacs throughout his fiction distort the narrative texture, towering over the other characters and easily beguiling the unwary reader into being blinded to their faults. In Clarel, their respective powerful personalities serve to organize the poem's progress along this Vichian evolutionary line. Thus, Celio's outburst, which is actually his unspoken thoughts articulated by the narrator, is directed soley to the divine; it is unsophisticated--Bezanson calls it "pure and childlike" (Clarel, p. 590)--and he might easily be thought of as one of the "theological poets" (Vico, p. 336, paragraph 916) who inhabit the earliest stage of Vichian development. Despite his apparent blasphemy, he is "tinged with religion and piety" as is the custom of that Vichian period (Vico, p. 337, paragraph 919), and his passionate cry concerns strictly theological matters. Mortmain dwells comfortably in Vico's middle period; he is of a "heroic nature" (Vico, p. 336, paragraph 917) and his declarations--equally divided between metaphysically-tinged apostrophes and discussions with the pilgrims--are full of the "heroic blazonings" of that period (Vico, p. 340, paragraph 930). Ungar, who fights bitterly with the other pilgrims and rarely indulges in apostrophes, would clearly belong in the final Vichian phase, the modern world of politics, law, popular liberty

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(all of which he despises), which also corresponds to Hegel's final phase of Universal History, the total freedom of the World Spirit as reflected in the modern Protestant State. I shall have recourse to return to Ungar and Don Hannibal as I move deeper into my discussion of "Bethlehem," but for now I turn to the next major comparative religious pattern in Clarel, which is the spirit of reverence accorded other religious beliefs and traditions, even if they no longer carry metaphysical truth.

This pattern arises immediately out of this new realm of the political which naturally engenders a climate wherein different religions and traditions encounter one another. At first, this pattern of reverence would seem contradictory to the poem's depiction of the decline of orthodoxies which I discussed in "Jerusalem." In actuality, it is a part of the same process. A theme stressed throughout Clarel, and one also championed by Max Muller (Chips From a German Workshop, p. xxiii) and implicitly understood in Carlyle (Sartor Resartus, pp. 230-1), is that a religion changes drastically from its original, pure form when exposed to the human world of politics. In seeking the "intersympathy of creeds," the poem pares away the accrued worldy crust of orthodoxy (Carlyle's "Church-Clothes," Sartor Resartus, p 230) to locate the first religious meanings and experiences of a creed. And it is at this point, shorn of their worldly forms, that religions, while still maintaining certain fundamental cosmological differences,

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cultivate a correspondence of values. The respect for other religions becomes, then, a recognition and respect for the truth that dwells beneath the surface of them all, one's own included. In "The Priest and Rolfe" (II. xxi) Rolfe expresses many of these ideas in a spirited but good-natured exchange with Derwent. In an apostrophe to Christ during the debate, he manages to convey both Christianity in its unadulterated infancy and its correspondence of values with other religions through Christ's role as last of the divine incarnations:

> Wither hast fled, thou deity
> So genial? In thy last and best,
> Best avatar [Christ]--so ripe in form--
> Pure as the sleet--as roses warm--
> Our earth's unmerited fair guest--
> A god with peasants went abreast:
> ....
> Him following through the wilding flowers
> By lake and hill, or glad detailed
> In Cana--ever out of doors--
> <u>Ere yet the disenchantment gained</u>
> <u>What dream they knew, that primal band</u>
> <u>Of gipsy Christians</u>.
>
> ll. 63-8, 72-7 (my emphasis)

This view of Christ as a last avatar is consonant with Rolfe's view of history as a cycle of repeating patterns, which I discussed in Chapter Three, and is, in fact, an idea expressed in different ways elsewhere in the poem. In "The High Desert" (III. v.) for example, the pilgrims muse on "Ormuzd involved with Ahriman/In deadly lock. Were those gods gone?/Or under other names lived on?" (ll. 36-8);

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and in III. xiii. ("Song and Recitative") during the revels at Mar Saba, Rolfe debates with himself whether to take the purveyor to task for his ribald song, but finally decides that it is pointless, as the purveyor is

> A true child of the lax Levant,
> ....
> In such variety he's lived
> Where creeds dovetail into each other;
> Such influences he's received:
> Thrown among them all--Medes, Elamites,
> Egyptians, Jews and proselytes,
> Strangers from Rome, and men of Crete--
> And parts of Lybia round Cyrene--
> Arabians, and the throngs ye meet
> On Smyna's quays, and all between
> Stamboul and Fez[.]
> ll. 24, 26-35

It is precisely this exposure to such a multiplicity of influences, religious and political, that renders any specific creed impure and which even robs it of its originality. Instead, it becomes corrupted, and often ends up serving a purpose counter to that of its original conception, which is, Rolfe tells Derwent, precisely what happened to the religion of the "gipsy Christians":

> Oh men
> Made earth inhuman; yes, a den
> Worse for Christ's coming, since his love
> (Perverted) did but venom prove
> In part that's passed.
> ll. 83-7

This sentiment echoes Clarel's earlier "O bickering family

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bereft,/Was feud the heritage He left?" (I. vi. ll. 40-1). It is the same lament that Ungar, like Mortmain, will seize upon as evidence to buttress his view that human nature is too inherently evil to deserve salvation.

Melville employs two recurring tropes in Clarel to emphasize the corrupting influences of the world upon the original conception of a religion. The first is found in the constant emphasis on the encroachment of civilization upon the Holy Land. The streets of modern Jerusalem and Bethlehem choked with peddlers, thieves, beggars, and pilgrims; the holy sites built upon by invaders and liberators and now flooded with tourists or else studied as relics by disinterested scientists; the centuries of detritus through neglect and natural decay; all serve to stress the chronological and psychological distance between the secular present and the holy past. It is against this crush of human and natural generations that we must strive, Salvaterra advises the pilgrims in the chamber of Christ's nativity, if we are to recover original religious meanings:

> Though o'er this cave,
> Where Christ...had birth,
> Constantine's mother reared the Nave
> Whose Greek mosaics fade in bloom,
> No older Church in Christendom;
> And generations, with the girth
> Of domes and walls, have still enlarged
> And built about; yet convents, shrines,
> Cloisters and towers, take not for signs,
> Entreat ye, of meek faith submerged
> Under proud masses. Be it urged
> As all began from these small bounds,
> So, by all avenues and gates,

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All here returns, hereto redounds:
In this one Cave all terminates:
In honor of the Manger sole
Saints, kings, knights, prelates reared the whole
IV. xiii. ll. 142-58

The other trope Melville employs to emphasize the vitiating aspect of the world upon the original experiences of a religion is similar to Vico's idea that language undergoes an evolution from its initial mental state through the metaphoric state of "poetic wisdom" to its culmination in the language of the plebs, the "vulgar" language of everyday speech relatively free of metaphor and other affectation. For Vico, it will be recalled, history, religion, and language are all intertwined by virtue of their being synthetic; the final state of human evolution he thus characterizes as a move from the poetic and heroic to the utilitarian and pragmatic. He elaborates as follows:

> ...by a necessity of human nature, poetic style arose before prose style; just as, by the same necessity, the fables, or imaginative universals, arose before the rational or philosophic universals, which were formed through the medium of prose speech.
>
> Vico, p. 154, paragraph 460

He illustrates this progression later in a succinct example: "out of the heroic phrase 'The blood boils in my heart' they [the plebs in their prose speech] made the word [sic] 'I am angry'" (Vico, p. 341, paragraph 935). The poetic, then, is necessarily supplanted by commonplace prose;

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heroes, "poetic wisdom," and religion give way before bureaucrats, civic duty, and reason. Melville uses a similar idea throughout _Clarel_. In "Arculf and Adamnan" (I. xxxv.), the story of Arculf, the eighth-century French bishop shipwrecked on the Scottish Hebrides on his return from a pilgrimage to the Levant, and Adamnan, the abbot of the monastery of St. Columbia where Arculf stayed before returning home, is related by the narrator. Their simple faith, the narrator assures,

> 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.
> ll. 111-15 (my emphasis)

In "Of Mortmain" (II. iv.), Mortmain's disgust with the events in France during the Revolution of 1848 is based, in part, on his recognition that both the cause and its success or failure will most likely be misunderstood since "Prose overtakes the victor's song" (l. 79). In "The Church of the Star" (IV. xiii.), the pilgrims are led by Salvaterra through the Church of the Star, reputedly built on the site of Christ's nativity. At one point, he takes them deep underground into a chamber "Unsearched by that _prose critic keen_,/The daylight" (ll. 104-5, emphasis mine), a metaphor which recalls the recurring theme of the poem that scientific elucidation will light, but cannot warm.

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Significantly enough, this chamber marks the exact spot of the nativity, which further underscores the idea that progress in terms of human knowledge of the world cannot penetrate the deepest religious mysteries. And in "A Tradition" (IV. xvii.), Rolfe, describing Arab Catholics to Derwent, says,

> _They like not prosing_--turn the lip
> From Luther's jug--prefer to sip
> From that tall chalice brimmed with wine
> Which Rome hath graved, and made to shine
> For haughty West and barbarous East,
> To win all people to her feast
> ll. 16-21 (my emphasis)

The poetic "chalice" contrasts with the prosaic "jug," and the proximity of "prosing" and "Luther's" strongly suggests a link between the two in Rolfe's mind.

As I shall explore more fully in Chapter Six, in expressing a reverence for different religious traditions with the understanding that beneath their formal differences they are related, the poem is then free to appropriate aspects of them: the hero of Hinduism is held up as an exemplar of great piety and strength in I. xxxii. ("Of Rama"); Islam's practicality and emphasis on the power of the divine will are exhibited in Djalea and in other examples as well; Buddhism's emphasis on pure spirit is cited approvingly by Mortmain in III. iii. ("Of the Many Mansions"); Vine has deep respect for "Old Asia's dreaming mind" in II. xxvii. ("Vine and Clarel") and expresses

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throughout an admiration for the tough Arab people, and so forth.

But the real function of a religious orthodoxy and the reason it must be held in such high esteem, the poem argues strongly in "Bethlehem," resides in its capacity to structure social behavior and thus forestall what is rhetorically regarded as the fearful and inevitable result of the Protestant/Democratic age: the descent into chaos. As death had been a main concern in the earlier sections of the poem which dealt more with religion as a personal experience, so chaos--the absence of social order as well as the ontological state of creation--becomes the major antagonistic concept for the pilgrims to consider in the last section. This idea had been expressed earlier in the poem, significantly enough, right before Rolfe's first appearance:

> Bonds sympathetic bind these three--
> Faith, Reverence, and Charity.
> If Faith once fail, the faltering mood
> Affects--needs must--the sisterhood.
> I. xxv. ll. 91-5

Like Darwin's entangled bank, the new age as depicted in <u>Clarel</u> is one of ungovernable individual autonomy with no purpose or aim save for self-interest. It is an age of the narcissistic worship of human nature which will ultimately lead to a willful disregard for the past and the future as well. As Ungar taunts Derwent in IV. xx.

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("Derwent and Ungar"), attacking one of the underpinnings of utilitarian materialism,

> your word <u>reform</u>:
> What meaning' to that word assigned?
> From Luther's great initial down,
> Through all the series following on,
> The impetus augment--the blind
> Precipitation: blind, for tell
> Witherward does the surge impel?
> The end, the aim? 'Tis mystery.
> ll. 19-26

When Derwent replies that the aim is "Men liberated--equalized/In happiness" (ll. 28-9), Ungar quickly retorts that the means of achieving this end "are of the world" and "the world cannot save the world" (ll. 33-4). Ungar regards with disgust the prospect of human nature pursuing its own ends, and, as a veteran of the Civil War, he is especially scornful of this idea in its guise of American self-reliance. "The future," he argues in "A New-Comer" (Iv. xix.), "what is that to her/Who vaunts she's no inheritor?" (ll. 128-9) thus anticipating Santayana's famous dictum.

The big debate concerning religion and politics in "Bethlehem"--the last and biggest debate in the poem--spans cantos xviii-xxiii. It is important to note again the unresolved nature of this debate. At first glance it would seem that Melville has worked himself into a theoretical corner from which there is no escape: the debate quickly polarizes into the two extreme positions that have more

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or less informed most of the debates--a facile humanism (Derwent, Rolfe) versus a wrathful misanthropy (Ungar, and to a lesser degree, Don Hannibal)-- both of which the poem has long-since subverted, and it gradually disintegrates to the point that, at its conclusion, we find Rolfe arguing a position which seems without conviction and Ungar so offended by this as to feel personally affronted. But this dialectical stalemate is precisely the narrative plan Melville has in mind. The warring parties (Derwent, Rolfe, Ungar, and Don Hannibal) hammer away at one another in the sprawling exchange until they literally exhaust their topic and themselves; "Nothing might [now] disarm/The other," the narrator wearily intones in the midst of the fray (IV. xx. ll. 18-9), reflecting on the futility of such discourse, a sentiment the narrator had also expressed much earlier in the poem (III. v. ll. 164-8). The final standoff actually serves to prepare the way for the appearance of the young Lyonese, who bursts on the scene like Peeperkorn in Thomas Mann's _The Magic Mountain_. His unapologetic sensuality, emblematic for the chaos the pilgrims fear, has been implicitly prefigured in the great debate; as such, the Lyonese will present Clarel with his last option and, through his rejection of it, with a "solution" of sorts to his spiritual despair.

The big exchange is precipitated by a visit in "The Hill-Side" (IV. xviii.) to the Milk Grotto near Helena's Basilica, which, according to legend, derives its "milky

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chalkiness" (l. 13) from the "drippings of Madonna's breast" (l. 15). The narrator unequivocally dismisses the veracity of this mythical account; However, in keeping with the "reverence for orthodoxies" theme, he is careful not to violate the spirit that engendered it, linking the Christian myth with examples taken from other mythologies, with the implicit insistence that they all must be respected for the same reason:

> A fairy tale [the Milk Grotto myth]:
> yet, grant it, due
> To that creative love alone
> Wherefrom the faun and cherub grew,
> With genii good and Oberon.
> ll. 16-9

The same idea is expressed shortly thereafter by Derwent in an exchange with Rolfe. The latter had suggested, echoing a recurring theme of the poem, that just as sites once thought of as sacred to the religion of ancient Greece are no longer regarded as such, so Christianity's sites will now become discredited. Derwent concedes the point, but argues that the essence of religion--its heterodoxical nature--will live on nonetheless:

> Well then, Madonna's but a dream,
> The manger and the Crib. So deem;
> So be it; but undo it! Nay
> Little avails what sages say[.]
> ll. 94-7

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He follows this by stating another of the poem's themes, which by this point has been expressed by characters of otherwise very different viewpoints, to the effect that science cannot rob religion of its essential mystery and, therefore, essential value for human beings:

> Tell Romeo that Juliet's eyes
> Are chemical; e'en analyse
> The iris; show 'tis albumen--
> Gluten--jelly-fish mere. What then?
> To Romeo is still love's sky:
> He loves: enough! Though Faith no doubt
> Seem insubstantial as a sigh,
> Never ween that 'tis a water-spout
> Dissolving, dropping into the dew
> At pistol-shot.
> ll. 98-107

His concluding sentiment, "scarce insincere" (l. 116), which is precisely echoed in Clarke and Maurice, argues that Christianity is the one religion of the world that "is full all around...a fullness of truth...not a system but a life, not a creed or a form, but a spirit; [thus] able to meet all the changing wants of an advancing civilization" (Clarke, pp. 29, 31):

> ....Besides, review
> The comprehensive Christian scheme:
> It catches man at each extreme:
> Simple--august; strange as a dream,
> Yet practical as plodding life:
> Not use and sentiment at strife.
> ll. 107-12

Ungar, who has overheard this, responds harshly, saying

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(and he says little else) that there "is a callousness in clay" (l. 121), and that Christ's "pastoral parables divine" (l. 122) are therefore lost on the self-serving wickedness of human nature. In elaborating his theme, he reiterates his view that true religious faith cannot exist in a world so deeply mired in its own evil ways, and is therefore impractical. Thus,

> The world turned Christian, need confess,
> But the world remained the world, no less:
> The world turned Christian: where's the odds?
> Hearts change not in the change of gods.
> ll. 138-41

Not only Christ's message, but those of Buddha ("Pierced with the sense of all we bear," l. 149), Confucius, and Moses are likewise wasted on an uncaring human race:

> Buddha but in name survives--
> A name, a rite. Confucius, too:
> Does China take his honest hue?
> Some forms they keep, some forms of his;
> But well we know them, the Chinese.
> Ah, Moses, thy deterring dart!--
> Etherial visitants of earth,
> Foiled benefactors, proves your worth
> But sundry texts, disowned in mart,
> Light scratched, not graved on man's hard heart?
> 'Tis penalty makes sinners start.
> ll. 154-64

These remarks conclude Canto IV. xviii. It is at this point in the narrative that Don Hannibal Rohon del Aquaviva enters the discussion, a passerby drawn in upon overhearing

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with approval Ungar's last line. Derwent and he, it turns out, are old friends, and the two embrace warmly, symbolically underscoring this section's theme of respect for other beliefs and also commencing the poem's gradual move toward reconciling contraries. But beneath his jovial veneer and genuinely deep feeling for Derwent (which is entirely mutual), he is every bit as cynical as Ungar, having lost an arm and a leg fighting for Mexican liberty. He has subsequently moved about Europe but has found that he cannot escape the influence of "cursed Progress" (l. 41), and he has now come to the Holy Land to seek "[s]ome blessed asylum from the New [World]" (l. 43).

As such, Don Hannibal offers little in the way of new ideas or insights to the ongoing discussion. Rather, his importance to the poem's overall narrative scheme, which is quite substantial given the brevity of his appearance, resides in the conciliatory nature of his relationship with Derwent. In maintaining a cheerful antagonism, these two old adversaries epitomize the balance between thought's poles which must be maintained, the poem argues, if chaos is to be avoided. As we have seen, in Clarel, extremism of any kind often leads to isolation and catastrophe. It is noteworthy that Ungar, who otherwise shares Don Hannibal's view of the world and human nature, does not care at all for Don Hannibal's joviality, being himself "Too serious far to take a jest,/Or rather, who no sense possessed/Of humor" (IV. xix. ll. 74-6); as such,

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the genuine fondness of Don Hannibal and Derwent for each other is yet another case of an episode looking forward to the final scene on the Via Dolorosa, where contraries are reconciled in the suffering all share. As Harry Levin wrote in _The Power of Blackness_, in _Clarel_, "Melville did not overtake the absolute; but he does achieve the perspective of relativity" (Levin, p. 199). This "perspective of relativity," yet another aspect of the tempered heart theme, is the beginning of the "solution" the poem offers its young protagonist.

As the debate rages on, Ungar fires off some of his most scathing salvos. The social reform of the modern liberal state is all head and no heart, treating the needy and impoverished in a patronizing way; poverty, he says, once "sacred through the Savior's claim,/Professed by saints, by sages prized" (IV. xx. ll. 92-3) has become "[a] pariah now, and bastardized" (l. 94). The meliorists, confident in the powers of the unaided human mind to overcome adversity, forego

> All recognition
> Of evil; Supercilious [they] skim
> With spurious wing of seraphim
> The last abyss.
> ll. 100-3

The hubris of the reformers especially infuriates Ungar, as he makes clear to Rolfe who has, by now, taken up Derwent's cause:

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> What say these [reformers], in effect, to God?
> "How profits it? And who art Thou
> That we should serve Thee? Of Thy ways
> No knowledge we desire; new ways
> We have found out, and better. Go--
> Depart from us; we do erase
> Thy sinecure: behold, the sun
> Stands still no more in Ajalon:
> Depart from us!
> IV. xxi. ll. 29-37

It is this dismissal of God (in language clearly meant to recall scriptural accounts of judgment day as Matthew 25.41: "Depart from me."), born of human pride, that is, for Ungar, the fatal mistake of the modern age. Should God depart, he asks Rolfe, "Is aught betwixt ye and the hells?" (l. 39); "Where He is not," he states unequivocally, "corruption dwells,/And man and chaos are without restraint" (ll. 43-4), faintly recalling Dostoevsky's "if there is no god, then all things are permitted." As Ungar had intoned in the previous canto, "Woe/To us without a God, tis woe" (IV. xx. ll. 132-3).

Ungar's exhaustive tirade is finally reined in when Rolfe tells him "you do but generalize/In void abstractions" (IV. xxi. ll. 45-6). In an effort to focus his argument, Ungar hypothetically envisions a country, clearly meant to be America, "which began/Without impediment" (ll. 47-8) and which strove "all things to forget/But this--the excellence of man" (ll. 50-1); for such a country he prophesies a dire ending: "If such a people be--well,

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well/One hears the kettle drums of hell!" (ll. 58-9). Rolfe now counters with an utterly unconvincing and rather uncharacteristic (for him) argument to the effect that the sheer size of America is such to absorb and forestall the chaos Ungar foresees:

> Those waste-weirs which the New World yields
> To inland freshets--the free vents
> Supplied to turbid elements;
> The vast reserves--the untried fields;
> These long shall keep off and delay
> The class-war, rich-and-poor-man fray
> Of history.
>
> ll. 87-93[2]

Ungar is insulted, incredulously asking Rolfe "True heart do ye bear/In this discussion? or but trim/To draw my monomania out?" (ll. 99-100). His answer for Rolfe, which predicts a huge New World war (ll. 117-8), is immediately appended by a Calvinistic outburst that both recalls and subverts the comforting message heard earlier by the Syrian Monk on Quarantania (II. xviii. ll. 14043, quoted above):

> Know
> Whatever happen in the end,
> Be sure, 'twill yield to one and all
> New confirmation of the fall
> Of Adam.
>
> ll. 121-5

His outburst completed, Rolfe, Vine and Clarel can only regard their countryman with pity, "nor one of them found heart/To upbraid the crochet of his smart" (ll. 144-5).

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The huge debate is over. A minor flare-up occurs in "Of Wickedness the Word" (IV. xxii), when Ungar emphasizes that his definition of "wickedness" is understood to have a decidedly Calvinistic bent (ll. 32-41), which provokes a minor protest from Derwent; but, thereafter, "[i]n fine all seemed to yield/With one consent a truce to talk" (ll. 54-5).[1]

Clarel is now left to contemplate the wreckage. He "[l]ess relished Derwent's pleasant walk/Of Myrtle" (ll. 58-9), one with which he is by now quite familiar, having found it unacceptable since his private meeting with the priest earlier in the poem. However, Ungar's position will offer him, by default, an option--a culminating option--that he's not yet fully considered, but which will be presented to him with the appearance of the sensual Lyonese:

> If man in truth be what you [Ungar] say,
> And such the prospects for the clay,
> And outlook of the future--cease!
> What's left us but the senses' sway?
> Sinner, sin out life's petty lease;
> We are not worth the saving.
>
> ll. 61-6 (my emphasis)

The Lyonese first appears in "Twilight" (IV. xxiv) and is the last character of major significance to appear in Clarel. He is only heard by the pilgrims returning to their rooms after the great debate. He sings a song, taught him by a Peruvian friend, celebrating the passionate song of the dove, asking it to teach him "Thy cadence, that

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Inez may thrill/With the bliss of the sadness,/And love have his will!" (ll. 10-12). Clarel, still in a fog of indecision from listening to the debate, is captivated (ll. 24-6). The Lyonese is next seen in IV. xxvi. ("The Prodigal") when he shares a room at the inn with Clarel for a night. That Melville intends this Canto to be the culmination of the whole process begun with the great debate in IV. xviii. is made clear in the closing lines of the previous Canto (IV. xxv. "The Invitation"):

> And now--not wantonly designed
> Like lays in grove of Daphne sung,
> _But helping to fulfill the piece_
> _Which in these cantoes_ [sic] _finds release_,
> Appealing to the museful mind--
> A chord, the satyr's chord is sung.
> ll. 54-59 (emphasis mine)

Moreover, as we shall shortly see, the episode of the Lyonese represents Clarel's final "lesson," the last alternative offered him in the poem. After his scene with Clarel and his instantaneous departure, the poem moves very quickly to its conclusion as Clarel races back to Jerusalem only to discover that Ruth and Agar have died, which is immediately followed by the final scene on the Via Dolorosa and the "Epilogue."

The Lyonese is the logical embodiment of Ungar's dire prophecies; he has turned his back on his ancestral faith (Judaism) and is now given over entirely to a life of sensual pleasure. But unlike the poem's earlier sensualists

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such as the Greek Banker and Glaucon, who also epitomize Ungar's fears but do so merely as the conspicuous products of a "civilization" given over to material luxury, or the young Cypriote whom the pilgrims encounter in III. iv-v., who is merely a carefree naif, the Lyonese dwells in a purer and more rarefied state. He is sensuality idealized and, as such, belongs in the same archetypal lineage as such figures as Bacchus, as the poem will go on to explicate. He also exemplifies Andre Malraux's contention that "he who seeks the absolute with such uncompromising zeal can find it only in sensation" (Man's Fate, p. 147). What he offers Clarel in terms of an alternative is therefore not trivial, a point of which Clarel himself is keenly aware.

Time and again in his encounter with the Lyonese Clarel attempts to engage him in serious discussion regarding the religious questions that so plague him, but he is quickly rebuffed: "My friend, it is just naught to me!/Why, why so pertinacious be?/...Amigo, how you persecute!" (IV. xxvi. ll. 109-10, 142). Instead, the Lyonese sings the praises of beautiful women or speaks cryptically about his past adventures. Nor is he in any sense a naif; he well understands the choice he's made in his pursuit of sensual pleasure:

> Amigo! favored lads there are,
> Born under such a lucky star,
> They weigh not things too curious, see,

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> Albeit conforming to their time
> And usages thereof and clime:
> Well, mine's that happy family[.]
> ll. 60-65

When Clarel relentlessly persists, the Lyonese faults him for being too serious, a trait he attributes to American idealism: "You of the West,/What devil has your hearts possessed,/You can't enjoy" (ll. 145-7), a critique which could be leveled at virtually any of the New World characters in Clarel save Nehemiah and Don Hannibal. Demonstrating a deep knowledge of scripture--only later will Clarel discover that he is a refugee from Judaism--he summarily dismisses Clarel's reading of the Song of Solomon as allegorical, explaining that the "Bonzes" (Chinese or Japanese Buddhist monks, l. 194) had similarly read the fourteenth-century Persian poet Hafiz's sensual works:

> They cant that in his frolic fire
> Some bed-rid fakir would aspire
> In foggy symbols. Me, oh me--
> What stuff of Levite and Divine!
> ll. 196-9

Having destroyed Clarel's argument, he mockingly encourages the serious young American to indulge his sensual nature: "Come, look at straight things more in line,/Blue eyes or black, which like you best?/Your Bella Donna, how's she dressed?" (ll. 200-2).

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In the course of his encounter with the Lyonese Clarel is led both to introspective doubt ("Am _I_ too curious in my mind;/And, baffled in the vain employ,/Foregoing many an easy joy?" [ll. 68-70]) and to an acknowledgment of the unquestionable personal attraction of the Lyonese and what he represents ("So young (thought Clarel) yet so knowing;/With much of dubious at the heart,/Yet winsome in the outward showing" [ll. 254-6]). He is left finally to ponder whether his religious concerns are even valid in the modern world. His sad conclusion, that they are somehow valid and that he must therefore persevere even when doubt flourishes, another tenet of the tempered heart theme, one which is emphasized in the "Epilogue", is itself inconclusive, but it nonetheless serves as the spiritual lesson of a poem that has rhetorically stressed throughout the basic human need for faith in the modern world of machine and capital. But only in fully grasping the implications of the Lyonese's sensuality can he understand this.

The sensual nature of the Lyonese is reflected in his appearance. Frequently during his brief scenes his youth and physical beauty are alluded to in androgynous descriptions which serve to recall classical models of sensuality. The "voluptuous air" (l. 21) of his face

> No Northern origin declare,
> But Southern--where the nations bright,
> The costumed nations, circled be

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In garland round a tideless sea
Eternal in its fresh delight.
IV. xxvi. ll. 23-7

The Lyonese's androgynous features emphasize his link to other types of idealized sensuality as well; later in the canto, Clarel will note his

clustering hair
Which on the bright and shapely brow
At middle part grew slantly low:
Rich, tumbled, chestnut hood of curls,
Like to a Polynesian girl's,
Who, inland eloping with her lover,
The deacon-magistrates recover--
With sermon and black bread reprove
Who fed on berries and on love.
ll. 245-53

And in the succeeding canto, IV. xvii. ("By Parapet"), Derwent, speaking with Clarel the next morning, tells him of an encounter he'd had with the Lyonese:

My thoughts were wandering away,
Though never once mine eyes did stray,
He did so pleasingly beguile
To keep them fixed upon his form:
Such harmony pervades his warm
Soft outline.
ll. 8-13

Derwent then proceeds to make a comparison which, in his blurring of Greek and Latin figures, suggests the Lyonese to be connected with classical mythological archetypes:

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> it was some such fair
> Young sinner in the time antique
> Suggested to the happy Greek
> His form of Bacchus--the sweet shape!
> Young Bacchus, mind ye, not the old.
> ll. 20-4

Such is Derwent's genuine pleasure in describing the beauty of the Lyonese that Clarel is led to wonder "This man [Derwent]--/May Christian true such temper wish?/His happiness seems paganish" (ll. 33-5), a concern which is, by this point in the poem, moot.

In his descriptions of the Lyonese, Derwent emphasizes his youth, an aspect both Clarel and the narrator had similarly observed. And it is precisely in this connection that Clarel understands that he must reject what the Lyonese represents. If the extreme positions of Ungar and Mortmain seem somehow fixed on a remote and reactionary past, the Lyonese seems to be outside of time altogether--his is the timelessness of a sensual Greek god or beautiful Polynesian girl, unfallen and thus unenlightened; his is the chaotic procreative realm of "joyous, heartless, ever-juvenile eternities" that Pip encounters when he jumps overboard in _Moby-Dick_. Writing of the narrator's desire to finally leave the Marquesas tribe in _Typee_, R. W. B. Lewis observes:

> Melville realized...that there had been a much greater danger of permanently arrested development. "That mortal man," Ishmael would say for him, "who hath more of joy than sorrow

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> in him, that mortal man cannot be true--not true or developed." All he [Tommo] could say at the time was that Polynesian life never advanced into the realm of the spirit; its buoyancy, though extreme, came entirely from a "sense of mere physical existence."
>
> The American Adam, p. 136

Like the narrator of Typee who also recognized the attractions of the physical, Clarel realizes that the example of sensuality offered by the Lyonese is one he cannot pursue because it has never risen above the purely physical level.[3] He comes to understand that such a world was fundamentally forbidden him by virtue of his reason and his cultivated sense of spirituality, and that, like Carlyle's Teufelsdrockh, "he was no Adamite, in any sense, and could not, like Rousseau, recommend either bodily or intellectual Nudity" (Sartor Resartus, p. 223). As he will later tell the attendants preparing the earth for the bodies of Ruth and Agar, "Conviction is not gone/Though faith's gone: that which shall not be/It ought to be" (IV. xxx. ll. 11517).

When their discussion concludes at the abrupt insistence of the Lyonese and they go to sleep, Clarel has a dream in which he's standing between "a Shushan [capital of kingdom of Darius I in Iran, here obviously meant to represent a city in the Levant] and a sand" (IV. xvi. l. 304). Beckoning him from the desert is the ascetic monk Salvaterra, while the Lyonese does likewise from the city. Like the debates in the poem, the dream ends

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unresolved:

> A zephyr fanned;
> It vanished, and he felt the strain
> Of clasping arms which would detain
> His heart from such ascetic range.
> He woke; 'twas day; he was alone,
> The Lyonese being up and gone[.]
> ll. 307-12

Yet, it serves a fundamental purpose in Clarel's spiritual crisis, and it is its very inconclusiveness that prepares the way for Clarel to finally arrive at a solution; upon awakening, "Vital he knew organic change,/Or felt, at least, that change was working--/A subtle innovator working" (ll. 313-15).

Clarel has now been exposed to all of the poem's different viewpoints; he has observed them in conflict with one another, weighed their respective strengths and weaknesses, and he therefore no longer has need of any single one of them. Out of the contrast of these warring contraries in his mind will now come an almost Hegelian synthesis and Schopenhauerian acceptance and withdrawal--Hegel and Schopenhauer themselves reflecting philosophically antagonistic positions--which is the true hallmark of the tempered heart theme. This is symbolically underscored in "David's Well" (IV. xxviii), when Ungar and the Lyonese depart from the group early in the morning; they even leave together in the same train (ll. 1-2)--one can only imagine with relish the debates that enlivened _that_ group's

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journey!--and Clarel is left to somehow reconcile their opposing positions. This conciliatorial idea is further highlighted in the moving departure between Derwent and Don Hannibal which occurs immediately after Ungar and the Lyonese have gone. "Come to me," Don Hannibal calls to the priest emotionally, "Embrace me, my dear friend.../ Farewell, Don Derwent; Placido,/Farewell; and God bless all and keep!" (ll. 27-8, 37-8).

While it is unclear whose "clasping arms" appear in Clarel's dream, the evidence would strongly suggest that they belong to Ruth. In IV. xxviii. Clarel weighs the various alternatives presented to him, deciding finally against the world and its ways, despite what it may cost him in the end:

> But wither now, my heart? wouldst fly
> Each thing that keepeth not the pace
> Of common uninquiring life?
> What! fall back on clay commonplace?
> Yearnest for peace so? sick of strife?
> Yet how content thee with routine
> Worldly? how mix with tempers keen
> And narrow like the knife? how live
> At all, if once a fugitive
> From thy own nobler part, though pain
> Be portion inwrought with the grain?
> ll. 75-84

He begins to understand the futility of his theological questions--questions which nonetheless _had_ to be asked if for no other reason than to discover that they had no answer. He remembers that it had been Ruth who had warned

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him not to follow the extreme orthodoxy of her father, "'In whom this evil spirit wrought/And dragged us hither [the Holy Land] where we die!'" (IV. xxix. ll. 68-9). His course of action suddenly becomes clear:

> Alertly now and eager hie
> To dame and daughter, where they trod
> The Dolorosa--quick depart
> With them and seek a happier sky.
> ll. 71-4

Like the speaker in Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach," a poem whose influence is felt throughout Clarel, Clarel will find solace and salvation from the world in the woman he loves: "Take thy wife;/Venture and prove the soul of life,/And let fate drive" ((ll. 104-6).

Sadly, this is not to be. Racing back to Jerusalem he comes upon a burial party preparing to inter the bodies of Ruth and Agar, who, we are led to believe, died in part of broken hearts due to his absence. Much earlier in the poem the narrator described in great detail and with deep feeling the developing relationship between Clarel and Ruth. He concluded by asking, almost rhetorically, "Could heaven two loyal hearts abuse?" (I. xxxix. l. 49). Were there a rational and loving God, the poem has suggested in the interim, the answer to this question would be negative. But without God, the poem has argued, humans are left vulnerable in the chaotic and amoral realm of nature--both their own and that of the natural world which

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Vico taught we cannot know because we did not make it. Earlier in the poem, Mortmain answers Rolfe's inquiry as to why those who seek faith must suffer so by replying that the life of true faith is necessarily opposed by "The scoff of Nature and the World,/Those monstrous twins" (III. iii. ll. 42-3). With Ruth's death, nature and the human world, the orthodoxy of the latter having prevented Clarel's being with Ruth after Nathan's death (I. xlii, "Tidings"), have conspired against their (heterodoxical) relationship, much as earlier in the poem the orthodoxy of the friars had not allowed the illegitimate Mortmain burial within the grounds of the monastery, but rather outside in unconsecrated ground where "beak and claw contend,/There the hyena's cub be fed" (III. xxxii. ll. 73-4), an act the narrator criticizes as "Bigotry" (l. 68).

Three brief cantos occur before the final scene on the Via Dolorosa. In the deeply moving IV. xxxi. ("Dirge"), figures and images from Christian, Jewish, Islamic, and classical traditions solemnly complement one another in offering solace for Ruth's death. In IV. xxxii. ("Passion Week"), the colorful public celebrations of the Easter week in Jerusalem are contrasted with Clarel's private grief. In a vision which further emphasizes this contrast, he sees the dead characters of the poem pass before him like figures from the classical underworld, utterly beyond the power of resurrection, with Ruth bringing up the rear: "But Ruth--ah, how estranged in face!/He knew her by no

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earthly grace:/Nor might he reach to her in place" (ll. 98-100). At the canto's conclusion, Clarel asks Erebus, the son of Chaos, where is "He who helpeth us,/The Comforter?" (ll. 103-4). In "Easter" (IV. xxiii.), Melville further blurs the distinctions between different religious beliefs. Neither the modern spring festival of death and rebirth associated with Christ's ascension nor the ancient festivals of the earth's awakening held in honor of the Mesopotamian fertility god Thammuz (l. 57) can offer succor for Clarel; nor even can Old Testament prophecies (l. 58). "Christ is arisen," is the cry heard throughout, "But Ruth, may Ruth so burst the prison?" (ll. 65-6).

On the Via Dolorosa (IV. xxxiv. "Via Crucis") all the poem's comparative religious patterns achieve a powerful synthesis: harboring no specific doctrine (orthodoxy) himself but having instead some sense of the "intersympathy of creeds," Clarel now suffers along with his fellow creatures, human and animal, each of which must bear its own cross, so that to live now is to suffer. Moreover, he is scarred and his heart has been tempered, both by his exposure to the views of the different pilgrims and in the harsh crucible of experience, and in the common suffering of all there is an implicit shared respect for the beliefs of others. Melville closes the canto with an explicit image of annihilation as Clarel turns up a narrow alley at dusk and "Vanishes in the obscurer town" (l. 56).

In this final emphasis on the collective suffering

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of all living things and on Clarel's withdrawal into nothingness, two concepts toward which the poem had been working from the beginning, there is more than a hint of ideas very much in vogue in the nineteenth century, found in such varied places as Sartor Resartus, Eastern religion, and Schopenhauer's philosophy, itself greatly influenced by Eastern religious thought. Melville was familiar with all three. Carlyle's influence on him is well known--one otherwise very positive review of Mardi even criticized his style in that book as "a too habitual inversion, an overstraining after anti-thesis and Carlyleisms, with a not unfrequent sacrifice of the natural to the quaint" (Melville Log, p. 299). Thus, in Sartor Resartus we learn that "The first preliminary moral Act [is] Annihilation of Self"; having achieved this, Teufelsdrockh can "now look upon my fellow man; with an infinite Love, an infinite Pity. Poor, wandering, wayward man! Art thou not tried, and beaten with stripes, even as I am?" Teufelsdrockh's "whole energy of existence" has, in fact, been "directed, through long years, on one task: that of enduring pain, if he cannot cure it" (Sartor Resartus pp. 200, 202, 220).

In the next chapter I shall discuss Melville's use of Hinduism and Buddhism in Clarel, but I would like to briefly explore here the fascinating relationship between Melville and Schopenhauer before proceeding to the "Epilogue" of the poem.

Melville's attitude toward philosophy itself, like

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his attitude toward religion, was one of a great but ultimately unsatisfied interest; like religions, all philosophic theories were potentially interesting to him but none was found to be eminently embracable. In addition, he would expect of a philosophy some recognition of the vicissitudes of reality; he would demand to find mirrored in its discourse some tangible account of reality, much as he did with religion. He could be ruthless when dealing with matters of a merely theoretic nature. Thus, in *Moby-Dick* the *Pequod*, which had been sailing with a sperm whale's head hoisted up one side causing the ship to lean severely, now has a right whale's head hoisted on its other side, so that "she regained even keel; though sorely strained, you may well believe" (p. 259). As so often in that book, an occurrence from the real world becomes an occasion for Ishmael to make a philosophical point:

> So, when on one side you hoist in Locke's head, you go over that way; but now, on the other side, hoist in Kant's and you come back again; but in very poor plight. O ye foolish! throw all these thunder-heads overboard, and then you will float light and right.
>
> p. 259

Some philosophers, such as Spinoza and Pascal, did win Melville's approval, as evidenced by favorable allusions in his work, *Clarel* included. But it would appear that in Schopenhauer's pessimistic message, one which exerted a powerful attraction for such figures as Tolstoy, Wagner,

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Hardy, Conrad, Proust, Freud, Jung, and Thomas Mann, Melville encountered a philosophic system which interested him enough to actually be worthy of a thorough study. In Melville and His Circle, William B. Dillingham argues quite persuasively that such a study is exactly what Melville undertook in the last year of his life. He'd already encountered the German philosopher in William Rounseville Alger's The Solitude of Nature and of Man (1867), which he acquired in sometime 1871 and in which he marked several quotations taken from Schopenhauer (Melville Log, pp. 720-1, 832-3). But late in life he began to purchase Schopenhauer's books, which, as Dillingham observes, marked the beginning of his arduous study of the man:

> By the time he actually began to purchase copies of Schopenhauer's works, he certainly knew, and had known for a good while, what the German philosopher stood for. No one sent him copies of Schopenhauer's works...The motivation seems to have been entirely his own.
> p. 58

Dillingham goes on to observe that Melville checked out a copy of Schopenhauer's Counsels and Maxims in February of 1891, and was impressed enough that he shortly thereafter "bought a copy of it along with four of Schopenhauer's other works, all of which he read and in varying degree marked" (p. 59). Dillingham conjectures reasonably "Since his own copy of Counsels and Maims is marked, he presumably read the work at least twice--the library copy and then

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his own" (p. 59). But Dillingham make a particularly strong case for Melville's intense interest in Schopenhauer:

> Considering the fact that he was in the final year of his life, when his health was failing, the attraction of Schopenhauer must have been extremely powerful for him to engage in such an extensive and systematic program of reading. Schopenhauer's most acclaimed work, The World as Will and Idea, is a three-volume giant that would itself constitute a substantial challenge even to a much younger and healthier person than was Melville at the time.
> p. 59

What did Melville find in Schopenhauer's work that struck such a sympathetic note? First and foremost may be that in the German philosopher's pessimistic vision, which argued for the primacy of a blind Will in the universe, rather than reason, and thus for a tragic view of life, he found a philosophic system that could account for the world as he (Melville) had perceived it and depicted it in his fiction and poetry. The image of the collective suffering of all living things at the conclusion of Clarel is mirrored in Schopenhauer's essay "On the Suffering of the World," which begins "If the immediate and direct purpose of our life is not suffering then our existence is the most ill-adapted to its purpose in the world" (Essays and Aphorisims) and concludes:

> one might indeed consider that the appropriate form of address between man and man ought to be, not 'monsieur,' sir, but fellow sufferer,

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> 'compagnon de miseres'. However strange this may sound it corresponds to the nature of the case, makes us see other men in a true light and reminds us of what are the most necessary of all things: tolerance, patience, forbearance and charity, which each of us needs and which each of us therefore owes.
>
> Ibid. p. 50

Schopenhauer also stressed the view that the world is but illusion, and that our suffering comes from our misapprehension of it as such, another pet Melville theme. In The Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason he argued that our concept of reality originates in our understanding, not our reason, which itself is predisposed 'a priori' (independent from experience) to shape what it perceives according to causality, time, and space. The world, as such, becomes a "representation" created by our understanding. "But for this very reason we are not justified in setting forth, as the absolute external order of the world and of all that exists, such a principle [that the world exists as we perceive it], outside and independent of the mechanism of our cognitive faculty from which it has sprung" (p. 134). To do so, he argues, is to invite catastrophe; to do so is to be blind to the indifferent Will that is the true driving power behind all that exists, and to thus invite a clash between the human and the cosmic wills, something Melville had depicted again and again in his fiction. Thus, Newton Arvin would write that Moby-Dick "is a nature myth such as only a nineteenth-

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century imagination obsessed with the spectacle of impersonal force and ceaseless physical change, could have created...It is a myth such as other minds of the nineteenth century were groping toward, and one can see dim analogies to Moby-Dick in Schopenhauer's blind will, in Herbert Spencer's Unkowable, and still more truly in Hardy's Immanent Will or Urging Immanence [Hardy himself having been greatly impressed with Schopenhauer]" (Arvin, p. 189-90).

Melville did not commence his study of Schopenhauer until fifteen years after the publication of Clarel, and though he was certainly familiar with him during the period in which he composed the poem (Melville Log, p. 720-1), it is uncertain to what degree he may have specifically been influenced by him. My point here is to show that in Schopenhauer Melville found a thinker whose views often overlapped with his own, and that Clarel's withdrawal at the end of the poem--regarded by some critics as a defeatist act born of desperation--actually receives a new and potent meaning when we read it in a Schopenhauerian light.

This conclusion is further borne out in the "Epilogue" that concludes the poem. Were Clarel's disappearance into the streets of Jerusalem merely an act of defeated despair then the relatively optimistic voice of the "Epilogue" would be either strangely incongruous or, worse still, schizophrenic. But when his final act is understood as a kind of proto-Schopenhauerian withdrawal the "Epilogue"

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becomes an entirely appropriate closing to the poem. Joseph Knapp has observed that "the wisdom he [Melville] states explicitly in the "Epilogue" he had tentatively explored in his short story 'The Fiddler,'" and that this wisdom "is not a passive acceptance nor is it an intellectual conclusion; it is, rather, the fruit of endurance" (Knapp, p. 109). In "The Fiddler," which Melville wrote in 1853 (*Piazza Tales*, p. 692), the narrator, a serious and intense young poet whose idealism places him in the same class as Clarel, socially encounters a man named Hautboy, whose extroverted exuberance is not without a "certain serene expression of leisurely, deep good sense. Good sense and good humor in him joined hands" (*Ibid.*, p. 264). The narrator, Helmstone, further meditates upon Hautboy's qualities:

> It was pretty plain that Hautboy saw the world pretty much as it was, yet he did not theoretically espouse its bright side nor its dark side. Rejecting all solutions, he but acknowledged facts. What was sad in the world he did not superficially gloss; what was glad in it he did not cynically slur; and all which was to him personally enjoyable, he gratefully took to his heart.
>
> *Ibid.*, p. 264

Helmstone is attracted to Hautboy and envies his carefree aspect, but feels that these qualities are probably evidence that Hautboy is probably "without sublime endowments...[his] good sense is simply owing to the absence of those" (*Ibid.*,

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pp. 264-5). Hautboy, he feels, dwells in a relatively simple state--his life is unsophisticated:

> Nothing tempts him beyond common limit; in himself he has nothing to restrain. By constitution he is exempted from all moral harm. Could ambition but prick him; had he but once heard applause, or endured contempt, a very different man would your Hautboy be. Acquiescent and calm from the cradle to the grave, he obviously slides through the crowd.
>
> *Ibid.*, p. 265

It is only when it is revealed to him that Hautboy had once been a violin child-prodigy named Master Betty who had willingly turned his back on fame and fortune to lead the simple life he does now giving violin lessons that Helmstone recognizes how deeply scarred by experience Hautboy's been. He concludes the story by telling the reader "Next day I tore all my manuscripts, bought me a fiddle, and went to take regular lessons of Hautboy" (*Ibid.*, p. 267).

The story does present a kind of secularized tempered heart theme which is reflected in the narrator's final farewell to Clarel in the final eight lines of the poem:

> Then keep thy heart, though yet but ill-resigned--
> Clarel, thy heart, the issues there but mind;
> That like the crocus budding through the snow--
> That like a swimmer rising from the deep--
> That like a burning secret which doth go
> Even from the bosom that would hoard and keep;
> Emerge thou mayst from that last whelming sea,
> And prove that death but routs life into victory.
>
> IV. xxxv. ll. 27-34

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Notes: Chapter Five

1. In arguing for the essentially unresolved nature of this debate I find myself at odds with some of the poem's critics. Thus, in *Shadow over the Promised Land: Slavery, Race, and Violence in Melville's America* (1980), Carolyn Karcher (who is otherwise excellent on the poem) risks a monologic reading when she says of Ungar that he is

> the most articulate of the disillusioned democrats and defeated rebels Melville portrays in *Clarel*...who is given the last word in a debate with the other pilgrims about the nature of man, the fate of the New World, and the end result of democracy...Although Ungar speaks only for one side of Melville..it is clearly the side that is uppermost in *Clarel*.
>
> Karcher, pp. 289, 290

But much of Ungar's position has already been most effectively "deconstructed" in the reader's mind earlier in the poem by some of the narrator's devastating attacks on the hypocrisy and barbarity of the Christian Middle Ages, a period which Ungar seems to feel epitomized true (unhypocritical) Christian virtue:

> Religion then was the good guest,
> First served, and last in every gate:
> What mottoes upon wall and plate!
> ....
> Men were not lettered, but had sense
> Beyond the mean intelligence
> That knows to read, and but to read--
> Not think. 'Twas harder to mislead
> The people then, whose smattering now
> Does but the more their ignorance show--
> ....
> Men owned true masters; kings owned God--
> *Their* master;
>
> IV. x. ll. 89-91, 100-105, 110-111

When Derwent pushed him in an earlier debate about the merits of Christianity in the Middle Ages, Ungar actually backs off ("Your counterbuff,/However holds. Yes, frankly, yes,/Another side there is, [I] admit." IV, x. ll. 149-151). Moreover, this huge debate is by no means so one-sided as Karcher implies. Rolfe, who is, significantly enough, arguing against Ungar, eventually turns on him, saying,

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"Oh, oh, you do but generalize/In void abstractions" (IV. xxi. ll. 45-6) and conducting the ensuing argument with him with such relentless force and skill that Ungar believes his purpose is "to draw my monomania out" (IV, xxi. l. 101). As I show in my discussion, even the narrator feels no new ground has been gained in the lengthy exchange.

Bezanson also seems to feel that this exchange ends heavily in Ungar's favor. In his analysis of the poem's characters, he says "After Mortmain's death Ungar takes up the running battle so vehemently that Derwent is all but demolished (4.20)," which seems a somewhat facile generalization: Rolfe picks up Derwent's argument in IV. xxi. and prosecutes it with great energy, while Derwent cheerfully survives and even goes to visit his friendly antagonist, Don Hannibal, in IV. xxv. hardly the less for wear. Bezanson then goes on to say that "in the showdown of allegiances that follows, Rolfe stands by Ungar against Derwent (4.21-23)" which seems utterly untrue. Rolfe argues Derwent's position _against_ Ungar in IV. xxi. to the point that Ungar feels personally affronted, his brief statement at the beginning of IV. xii. hardly shows him to be taking sides--let alone against Derwent, and although he is not particularly pleased with Derwent's comments about Ungar in IV. xxiv. his position there seems driven at least as much by pity for Ungar as by conviction, as the text has made abundantly clear (IV. xxi. ll. 144-48; IV. xxii. ll. 13).

2. Hegel makes the same argument in _The Philosophy of History_; thus:

> a real State and a real Government arise only after a distinction of classes has arisen, when wealth and poverty become extreme, and when such a condition of things presents itself that a large portion of the people can no longer satisfy its necessities in the way in which it has been accustomed to do. But America is hitherto exempt from this pressure, for it has the outlet of colonization constantly and widely open, and multitudes are continually streaming into the plains of the Mississippi. By this means the chief source of discontent is removed and the continuation of the existing civil condition is guaranteed. A comparison of the United States of North America with European lands is therefore impossible; for Europe, such a natural outlet for population, notwithstanding all the emigrations that take place, does not exist.
> pp. 85-6

3. D. H. Lawrence makes the same argument as Lewis regarding the narrator of _Typee_'s need to leave the Marquesas (e.g., they have not evolved beyond the purely physical) in _Studies in Classic American Literature_, pp. 145-6.

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Chapter Six: The World's Religions in *Clarel*

In the last three chapters I have sought to distinguish various heterodoxical religious patterns in *Clarel* in an effort to account for Melville's conceptualization of those basic principles or essences that dwell beneath the doctrinal surface of all religions, a conceptualization which is made manifest through the poem's dialectical structure. But Melville was also deeply fascinated by religious orthodoxy. His wide reading in travel and religious texts acquainted him with religions not only in practice but also in theory. Like so many of the comparative religionists of the nineteenth-century who were sympathetic to religion, Melville intuitively understood that a study of the teachings of other religions served to nourish his own spiritual life. In *Clarel* this is demonstrated in the depiction of the world's religions, both as they emerge in contrast with each other in the philosophical debates between the pilgrims and as they are symbolically presented through characters and historical figures and allusions. These are respectively presented in such a way as to not only depict each individual religion

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"in action," but also to demonstrate the relationships between the various doctrines and cosmologies of the world's religions.

Melville no doubt would have agreed with Pierre Bayle's assertion in his Dictionary, a book which he read with great enthusiasm, that "every [religious] theory has need of two things in order to be considered a good one: first, its ideas must be distinct; and second, it must account for experience" (Bayle, p. 145). As I've shown, Melville was quite interested in finding in a religion or philosophy an explanation for the world as it presented itself to him; hence, his distrust of theories which neglected to acknowledge the suffering of the world (Derwent's great sin), and also, perhaps, some divine culpability for it. This interest was an important factor in the cultivation of his distinctively iconoclastic fictive voice. It often led him to appropriate cosmologies from nonChristian religions as the need suited him. Thus, the storming of the gods by the titans in Greek mythology must have seemed an appropriate image for him of Pierre's predicament in Pierre. And when Pip jumps overboard in Moby-Dick he is washed down into the depths of the Pacific ocean

> where strange shapes of the unwarped primal world glided to and fro before his passive eyes; and the miser-merman, Wisdom, revealed his hoarded heaps; and among the joyous, heartless, ever-juvenile eternities, Pip saw the multitudinous, God-omnipresent coral insect, that out of the firmament of waters, heaved the

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colossal orbs.

Chapter xciii

Here, the world he encounters is not the closed, deterministic system of Christian Calvinism we might have expected from Melville. Rather, in its portrait of creation as the ceaseless and mysterious enterprise of "joyous, heartless, ever-juvenile eternities," the passage wonderfully recalls the cosmology of Hinduism, a religion Melville knew well, and it even strongly alludes to that religion's doctrine of "lila," ("God's play" or "Gods' play" would be the best approximation in English), wherein cosmic creation is an ongoing game "that is its own point and reward. It is fun in itself [for the gods], in a spontaneous overflow of creative, imaginative energy" that is "untiring, unending, resistless" (Huston Smith, pp. 71, 72). What Alfred Kazin has written in _God and the American Writer_ (1997), describing a passage in a letter Melville wrote Hawthorne in March of 1851, can actually be applied to a great deal of Melville's fiction:

> What he [Melville] finally comes out with is that God is not a single entity to be taken seriously. It is not in "God" that we are immersed, but _being_, the actual flux and storm. We kill ourselves when we try to turn "God" from a word into an absolute separate power and then try to figure Him out.
>
> Kazin, 1997, p. 255

In _Clarel_ the interaction between the world's religions

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is played out before two major nineteenth-century religious concepts. The first, an essentially Hegelian idea, holds that history is a gradual liberation of the human spirit (which for Hegel is also the Universal Spirit), and that it is finally Christianity--especially Protestantism--which is capable of speaking most comprehensively to the fully evolved human spiritual condition. As I discussed in Chapter One, this view underlies the work of Clarke, Maurice, and Muller, and in _Clarel_ it is voiced perhaps most explicitly in Derwent's

> review
> That comprehensive Christian scheme:
> It catches man at each extreme:
> Simple--august; strange as a dream,
> Yet practical as plodding life:
> Not use and sentiment at strife.
> IV. xviii, ll. 107-12

But the very claims made by Christianity in this regard were now being made with more authority by science itself. Thus, in _A General View of Positivism_, Auguste Comte (who invented the term "positivism"), emphatically states

> the whole effect of Postivist worship will be to make men feel clearly how far superior in every respect is the synthesis founded on the Love of Humanity to that founded on the Love of God...Christianity satisfied no part of our nature fully, except the affections. It rejected Imagination, it shrank from reason; and therefore its power was always contested, and could not last...The aim which it [Christianity] set before men, being unreal and personal, was ill-suited to a life of reality and of social sympathy...

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> [Christianity's moral value] consisted soley in the discipline which it established; discipline of whatever kind being preferable to anarchy.
> Comte, pp. 388-9

Clearly, as I discussed in Chapter Two, the Christian apologists who adopted this position were left little room in which to negotiate.

The other idea is that expressed in the more radical view which, as Dorothee Metlitsky Finkelstein described it (in speaking of Emerson's Concord literary group), sought "historical evidence to establish an organic link between Christianity and the mystic creeds of the Orient and to confirm the Transcendentalist concept of the unity of the world, man, and God" (p. 13). This view is expressed in _Clarel_ in the search for the "intersympathy of creeds." Both ideas, then, are expressed in _Clarel_, and both serve an important comparative religious role in the poem. In the remainder of this dissertation I intend to examine how the world's religions are depicted in _Clarel_, and how Melville's conceptualization of these religions compares with that of some other nineteenth-century comparative religionists.

1. Islam in _Clarel_

I have already dealt in considerable detail with Melville's depiction of Islam in _Clarel_ and how his portrait

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of the religion through Djalea differs from that of many of his contemporaries. However, in Clarel Melville presents a view of the religion which is also quite different from his own earlier depictions of it. In the earlier works, Melville often emphasized the same perception of Islam he found in much of the popular romantic, travel, and comparative religious literature of his time, a perception which presented Islam as a religion of voluptuous indulgence and sensuality. According to Jaluddien Khuda Bakhsh in his unpublished Ph. D. dissertation "Melville and Islam," Melville's rather one-dimensional portrait of Islam in these earlier works--starting with Typee--stemmed from "his uncritical acceptance of whatever information he found on Islam," which was often of a fantastic nature (Bakhsh, p. 39). Thus in Redburn, the visit by Redburn to London in the company of Harry Bolton (Chapter 46, "A Mysterious Night in London") is tinged with imagery that suggests the alluring and forbidding mystery of the Islamic East. The two boys visit a "semi-public place of opulent entertainment," with floors "tesselated with snow-white and russet-hued marbles," and walls "painted so as to deceive the eye with interminable colonnades." "Through all the East of this foliage," filled with sculptures and variegated marble of green and gold beneath "a resplendent fresco ceiling," and all of this bathed in the gentle silver of gas lights in cream-colored spheres, one saw "numerous Moorish looking tables, supported by Caryatides of turbaned

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slaves" amid which "ran obsequious waiters, with spotless napkins thrown over their arms, and making a profound salaam[.]" Later, Redburn describes ascending a winding aristocratic staircase in the same building "covered with Turkey rugs [that] looked gorgeous" and entering a room where "methought I was slowly sinking in some reluctant sedgy sea; so thick and elastic [was] the Persian carpeting, mimicking parterres of tulips, and roses, and jonquils, like a bower in Babylon." In the room are "oriental ottomans, whose cunning warp and woof were wrought into plaited serpents, undulating beneath beds of leaves, from which, here and there, they flashed out sudden splendors of green scales and gold." Redburn, enchanted by it all, asks Harry, "And pray, do you live here, Harry, in this Palace of Aladdin?" To this, Bolton replies,

> Upon my soul..you have hit it:--you must have been here before! Aladdin's Palace! Why Wellingborough, it goes by that very name.
> Redburn, pp. 306-311

This lush and sensual perception of Islam appears in several other works as well. In Chapter 65 ("A Man-of-war Race") of White-Jacket, for example, we learn that

> The land-breeze at Rio...comes from gardens of citrons and cloves, spiced with all the spices of the Tropic of Capricorn. And like that old exquisite, Mohammed, who so much loved to snuff perfumes and essences, and used to lounge out of the conservatories of Khadija, his wife to

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> give battle to the robust sons of Koriesh; even so this Rio land-breeze comes jaded with sweet-smelling savours, to wrestle with the wild Tartar breezes of the sea.
>
> White-Jacket, p. 272

This sybaritic image of Mohammed as aesthete would later be echoed in Pierre, where we learn that it is one of Pierre's "little femininenesses--of the sort sometimes curiously observable in very robust-bodied and big-souled men, as Mohammed, for example--to be very partial to all pleasant essences" (Pierre, p. 111). And in Moby-Dick, the Islamic custom of polygamy is metaphorically alluded to when a school of Sperm whales consisting of a bull and several females is described as "a luxurious Ottoman...and his concubines" (Moby-Dick, p. 305).

This view of Islam (and Mohammed) would change drastically by the time of Clarel, where the religion is held in much higher esteem and the craving for aesthetic luxury as represented in such characters as the Greek Banker, Glaucon, and the Lyonese is associated with the rank materialism of the West. A good measure for this change probably stems from Melville's 1856-7 visit to the Holy Land where he actually witnessed for the first time the religion in practice; his Journal entries from that trip, which often stress the practical aspects of the religion amid the harsh elements of nature and politics, would seem to indicate this. Thus, while in Constantinople, a city which seems to have had a particularly depressing and even

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frightening effect on him, he visits the "Mosque of Sultan Sulyman" and is favorably struck by the Islamic custom of removing the shoes before entering for worship: "Off shoes & went in. This custom more sensible than [Western habit of] taking off hat. Muddy shoes; but never muddy heads" (Journal, p. 60). He is also impressed with the self-control he finds in the Islamic people: "Perfect decorum between the sexes. No ogling. No pertness. No looking for admiration...No drunkards. Saw not a single one, though liquor is sold" (Journal, pp. 67-8). Melville was also able to witness first-hand how far removed Islam actually was from the romanticized western view of it as basking indifferently in sensual haze. The stoic fervor of a people who believed themselves guided by the power of the divine will left a deep impression on him. Thus, in describing the Mosque of Omar, which is built on the site of Solomon's Temple, he observes,

> Here the wall of Omar rises upon the foundation stones of Solomon, triumphing over that which sustains it, an emblem of the Moslem religion, which at once spurns that deeper [i.e., more ancient] faith which fathered it and preceded it.
>
> Journal p. 85

While in Palestine, Melville made the same treacherous journey from Jerusalem to the Dead Sea and back that his characters undertake in Clarel. Here he was able to observe the rugged toughness of the people. At one point, with

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an ominous band of strangers seen ahead, the group's guide "galloped on to learn something--salutes [the strangers]--every man understands it--shows native dignity--worthy of salute" (Journal, p. 83), an incident he replicates in Clarel using Djalea. What is perhaps most telling of all regarding Melville's observations of Islam in these journal entries is the constant descriptions of mosques and of the Islamic believers dutifully attending to their worshipful obligations in them in the midst of the decay and poverty of the oppressive terrain. "It is against the will of God that the East should be Christianized," he wrote after witnessing the Islamic believers firsthand (Journals, p. 81). In Clarel, Melville frequently presents such scenes of the faith of the Arabs amid such hardships in contrast to the skepticism of the American characters and the repeated descriptions of the lush, edenic New World.

In addition to the characterization of Djalea, who, as a Druze, is not actually a true Muslim but rather part of a late-coming, mystical sect, Islam is depicted throughout Clarel in many different guises which reflect different facets of it. The description of a minaret, for example, reveals several important aspects of the religion in contrast to Christianity. It is Rolfe who first draws attention to it, noting its close proximity to the belfry of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (I. xxxi. ll. 66-7). In keeping with his view that the human necessity for religion will never abate, and that each new generation

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will answer its spiritual needs in the refashioning of certain fundamental truths, he proceeds to describe the two structures in such a way as to suggest Islam's now-vital role as caretaker of human faith in the modern age of doubt and fading Christianity:

> The tower [of the Holy Sepulchre] looks
> lopped; it shows forlorn--
> A stunted oak whose crown is shorn;
> But see, palm-like the minaret stands
> Superior, and the tower commands.
> ll. 76-9

When Clarel protests that the minaret's closeness to the Christian church "seems ill-placed" (i.e., too close, l. 80), Rolfe replies by explaining that though it indeed "seems" so, an understanding of its history will justify its being so located (l. 81). Omar I (A.D. c.586-644), he explains, had forced the surrender of Jerusalem in 636. Recognizing that it was a city "Hallowed to him [as a Moslem], as dear to Greek [Christian]" (l. 84), he strove to protect the interests of both religions, Christians (and Jews as well) having special status in Islam as fellow "people of the book." He therefore refused to worship in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, as he had been invited to do by the Christian elders, for fear of having it then regarded as Muslim property by his followers according to Islamic law (ll. 82-97). Instead, he worshipped as close to it as the sanctity of both religions would allow; the

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minaret is, according to tradition, erected on that site. As Rolfe explains, Omar's actions, performed somewhat in defiance of Islamic law but still in the interest of the religion, contrast markedly with the barbaric example of later Christian crusaders:

> So the church he saved
> Of purpose from that law engraved
> Which prompt transferred to Allah sole
> Each fane where once his rite might roll.
> Long afterward, the town being stormed
> By Christian knights, how ill conformed
> The butchery then to Omar's prayer
> And heart magnanimous.
> ll. 97-104

The minaret, Rolfe seems to imply, thus stands as a symbol of the "intersympathy of creeds" and is also emblematic for the ever-renewing pattern of human faith, rising, as it were, out of the decay of the Christian Church. This view had been ventured earlier by the narrator. After describing the Jerusalem landscape as consisting of "serial wrecks on wrecks," he contrasts Islam's rise with Christianity's decline:

> Amid the waste from joy debarred,
> How few the islets fresh and green;
> Yet on Moriah, tree and sward
> In Allah's courts park-like were seen[;]
> ...But of the reign
> Of Christ did no memento live
> Save soil and ruin? Negative
> Seemed yielded in that crumbling fane,
> Erst gem to Baldwin's sacred fief,
> The chapel of our Dame of grief.
> I. x. ll. 3, 19-22, 24-9

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He adds that the "Garden of King Solomon" is "now a cauliflower-bed/To serve the kitchens of the town" (ll. 33-5).

Omar himself is one of the powerful avatar's of the "intersympathy of creeds" virtues the poem condones. Though a devout Muslim and one, moreover, of signal importance in the religion's history--Mohammed married his daughter Hafsa in 626, and he was vitally important in transforming the religion into a world power--he is nonetheless highly esteemed in the poem for his reverential view of other religions and thus of religious belief itself. Moreover, he is seen as one who never loses his essential humanity; in I. xxxv. ll. 37-39, he is depicted as initiating a period of peace between the three Semitic religions that would last two centuries.

The Arab people--and it is understood that they are Muslims in the poem unless otherwise specified--also elicit admiration from the Westerners in Clarel, especially Vine, for whom they are a model of dignity and power now largely lost in the modern world. In II. xxvii., the much remarked-on canto in which Clarel encounters Vine on the banks of the Jordan river and attempts to "penetrate" his mystery (l. 10), Vine espouses at length (for him) on the Arab people (ll. 39-57, 74-101). Having just seen Djalea ride by on Zar and leap ("Shot," l. 44) over a stream, he marvels at the raw magnetism: "Clan of outcast Hagar,/Well do ye come by spear and dagger!" (ll. 44-5). He sees the Arab

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people as "Nimrods" who possess "The natural language of the eye,/Burning or liquid, flame or dew" (ll. 49, 50-1). Yet, he tells Clarel, one may perceive in their eyes "for all the wildness, thoughts refined/By the old Asia's dreamful mind" (ll. 56-7). In a later description of a band of tribesmen whom he had seen recently, he elaborates on this aspect of refined wildness:

> Disowning law,
> Not lawless lived they; no, indeed;
> Their chief--why one of [Sir Philip] Sidney's clan,
> A slayer, but chivalric man;
> And chivalry, with all that breed
> Was Arabic or Saracen
> In source they tell.
> ll. 83-9

It is Vine's view that humans have gradually evolved away from this original and noble state, having lost "carriage, manners, and the rest" in the process, and now dwell in the mediocrity of the "bland amenities far West!" (ll. 92, 94).

The contrast between Islamic piety and Christian hypocrisy, already alluded to above, is given several other depictions in the poem. Rolfe, after describing the often bloody and even fatal Easter celebrations in Jerusalem, where thousands of Christians ("Christian fakirs" in Rolfe's pun, l. 72) hurl and leap about and into one another, trampling scores of their fellows, then tells Clarel,

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admit that for these Turks
There's nothing that can so entice
To disbelieve, nay, Atheize--
Nothing so baneful unto them
As shrined El Cods [el Kuds, "Holy"], Jerusalem.
For look now how it operates:
To Christ the Turk as much as Frank
Concedes supernatural rank;
Our Holy Places too he mates
All but with Mecca's own. But then
If chance he mark the Cross profaned
By violence of Christian men
So called--<u>his</u> faith then needs be strained[.]
III. xvi. ll. 25-37

Later in the poem, Ungar, angry at Rolfe for avoiding an earlier question, suddenly turns on Derwent and rhetorically demands to know the origin of the phrase "As cruel as a Turk." In answering his own question, he suggests the deadly connection between religion and commerce ("Christ and Trade") which has been a major theme of the poem:

<u>As cruel as a Turk</u>: Whence came
That proverb old as the crusades?
From Anglo-Saxons...
The Anglo-Saxons--lacking grace
To win the love of any race;
Hated by myriads dispossessed
Of rights--the Indians East and West.
These pirates of the sphere! grave looters--
Grave, canting, Mammonite freebooters,
Who in the name of Christ and Trade
(Oh, bucklered forehead of the brass!)
Deflower the world's last sylvan glade!
IV. ix. ll. 112-125

And in IV. xii., Rolfe overhears part of a discussion between two unidentified men concerning contemporary political events in which Islam and Christianity are once

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again contrasted. The first speaker, who endorses a tolerant and humane position toward other religions, begins by contrasting Islamic and Christian business practices, suggesting, as Ungar did above, that the latter has become corrupted through its involvement with Western materialism:

> Late it was told to me,
> And by the man himself concerned,
> A merchant Frank on Syria's coast,
> That in a fire which traveled post,
> His books and records being burned,
> His Christian debtors held their peace;
> The Islam ones disclaimed release,
> And came with purse and accounts.
> ll. 6-13

When the second speaker, who is essentially an apologist for Western imperialism, then suggests that local Islamic sovereigns "oppress the throng" (l. 17), the first is quick to point out that this is due entirely to the nature of the individual sovereign and it is not "Law-sanctioned" as it is in the West (l. 21);

> No: the Turk, admit,
> In scheme of state, the scheme of it,
> Upon the civil arm confers
> A sway above the scimeter's [sic]--
> The civil power itself subjects
> Unto the Koran which respects
> Nor place nor person.
> ll. 21-7

Where, he asks, was the Christian protest when Poland was ruthlessly divided into three sections by outside powers in 1795, or during its subsequent insurrection of 1831 when it turned to Western Europe for aid? It was, he says, "the Sultan" who stood alone in protest in the first case,

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and "the Turk" and "The Pope" who did so in the second, "And in the protest both avowed/'Twas made for justice's sake and God" (ll. 36, 46, 48, 49-50). When the second speaker suggested that "all this.../Savors of Urquhart's vanity" (ll. 37-8), and that (David) Urquhart (1805-77), who "argued for Turkish autonomy" (_Clarel_, p. 827), is a "very inexact/ Eccentric ideologist/Now obsolete" (ll. 40-2), the first speaker firmly asserts "He stands for God" (l. 43). The second speaker sees in the prosperity of the West clear signs of God's hand, and correspondingly regards the poverty of the East as evidence that the Islamic people are not God's chosen:

> Very strange
> Heaven's favor does not choicely range
> Upon these Islam people good:
> Bed-rid they are, behindhand all,
> While Europe flowers in plenitude
> Of wealth and commerce.
> ll. 60-5

The discussion concludes with the first speaker's sarcastic retort to the second speaker's faith in materialism:

> I recall
> Nothing in Testament which saith
> That worldliness shall not succeed
> In that which it laboreth.
> ...[Therefore] preach and work
> You'll civilize the barbarous Turk--
> Nay, all the East may reconcile:
> That done, let Mammon take the wings of even,
> And mount and civilize the saints in heaven.
> ll. 65-8, 77-81

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Melville leaves us no indication as to Rolfe's response --or anyone else's, for that matter--to overhearing this discussion. The segment serves to reiterate some of the comparative religious themes of the poem, and moreover does so in what might be termed an "objective" fashion through the anonymity of the two speakers. Coming as late as it does in the poem, and especially right on the heels of Ungar's outburst in IV. ix-x, where he makes several points that are similar to the first speaker's, this episode serves to reinforce the poem's rhetorical affirmation of the intersympathy of creeds through the first speaker and the corrupting aspects of materialism upon religious belief through the second. It also underscores again the high esteem in which Islam is held in Clarel.

Melville's views on Islam in Clarel both converge with and diverge from those of many nineteenth-century comparative religionists. He might have agreed, for example, with Maurice when the latter states that Islam is God's scourge on a world fallen into sin (Maurice, p. 24), and that the power of the religion over the believer resides in its declaration of God as a living will. Moreover, in the steadfastly enduring nature of Djalea, Melville seems to have captured something of what Maurice describes as Islam's recognition that "all mere maxims, all mere ideas about the nature of man, have proved weak and hopeless before the proclamation of a living and Eternal God" (Maurice, p. 25). The Islamic believer, Maurice says, has

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recovered the Old Testament sense that God "is, and He is doing" (p. 135). But for Maurice, this is a regression; the Christian view of history as the evolution of God's plan is now replaced with

> the one principle of God's sovereignty; [Islam] cares nothing for the gradual unfolding of a Name through a history of living acts; assumes that the book is given to the prophet as a complete scheme of life...In the seventh century after Christ, Mahomet taught that the world was to begin its history again; but to begin it with no hope of progress...in seeming to add a new revelation, [Mahomet] destroyed the vital, historical, progressive character of the old; in publishing newer and later notions, [he] set mankind at a more hopeless distance from Him to whom these notions related.
>
> Maurice, p. 152

This leads to a further dilemma; by denying the divinity of Christ, who triumphed over the material world, the Islamic believer "cannot really assert the victory of man over visible things when he tries most to do so. He glorifies the might of arms when he most talks of the might of submission" (Maurice, p. 152). But it is this very aspect of the religion that becomes key for Melville in Clarel; if the material world can no longer be transcended--something the poem argues from the first canto--then it must be endured. The depiction of Djalea at equilibrium with his harsh environment and maintaining his faith with the simple partial Islamic 'shahada' "No God there is but God..../Allah preserve ye, Allah great!" (III. xvi., ll.

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115, 123), is the most powerful such image of endurance in the poem, and one which fully exemplifies the narrator's exhortation in the "Epilogue."

Clarke's views on Islam do not differ significantly from Maurice's. Arguing that the religion is "a kind of modified Judaism," he repeats Maurice's assertion that the essential doctrine of Islam "is the absolute unity and supremacy of God...a new assertion of the simple unity of God, against polytheism and against idolatry" (Clarke, pp. 463, 472, 483). Like Maurice, he believes the religion to be a "relapse...it is returning from the complex idea [Christianity] to the simple" (Clarke, p. 483), and also like Maurice, he feels that Islam leads to an absolute separation between the believer and God and that Christianity, in contrast, stresses a living and ever-present force of love. In fact, for the Islamic believer, "God is pure will, not justice, not reason, not love. Christianity says 'God is love'; Mohammedanism says, 'God is will.' Christianity says 'trust in God'; Mohammedanism says 'submit to God'. Hence, the hardness, coldness, and cruelty of the system" (Clarke, p. 477).

In elaborating on some of the social implications of Islam upon the Arabic people, Clarke observes that the Arab "is, in Asia, what the North American Indian is upon the western continent. As the Indian's [sic], his chief virtues are courage in war, cunning, wild justice, hospitality, and fortitude. He is, however, of a better

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race,--more reflective, more religious, and with a thirst for knowledge" (Clarke, p. 453). Melville makes a similar comparison twice in Clarel. I have discussed in Chapter Three that in I. xvii. Nathan and his fellow-Zionist settlers at war with the Arab tribes are likened to his Puritan ancestors and their encounters with the Native Americans. In both cases, the occupying power regarded the natives as "foes pestilent to God" (l. 306) who should be exterminated, exemplifying what Lucy Maddox has described in Removals: Nineteenth-Century American Literature & the Politics of Indian Affairs as

> The plot that seems to have fascinated Melville most, the one he kept rewriting and revising[:]... an account of the confident white American's unsettling encounter with the silent other, the representative of a world that lies beyond the limits of the American's discourse. In Melville's plot, the American must work to turn this other into a "beautiful blank" for the inscription of his particular discourse...when the other resists, then he must be removed or exterminated.
> Maddox, p. 53

Nathan's subsequent fate reveals the price paid for such intolerance born of orthodoxy; clearly, as is demonstrated later in the appearance of Ungar, a refugee from the Civil War who also happens to be part-Native American, the fate of America is similarly depicted as entwined in its legacy of sanctimonious intolerance. An even more striking similarity to Clarke is found in II. xxvii. where, as we've seen, Vine praises the qualities of the Arab people. Having

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just remarked on their warrior-like abilities, he suddenly exclaims "in your bearing ye [the Arabs] outvie/Our western Red Man, chiefs that stalk/In mud paint--whirl the tomahawk" (l. 46-8). It is not clear how Vine or Clarke arrive at their respective conclusions. What, for example, does Clarke mean by "more reflective, more religious, and with a thirst for knowledge"? Vine, for his part, does not elaborate any further than the three lines quoted. Late-twentieth-century hindsight might make it easy to critique both; what could better exemplify nineteenth-century imperialism than the latent racism such condescending attitudes project? However, it is not my desire here to examine such issues--that is perhaps for another occasion. It is sufficient to note that the text itself frequently engages such questions; in IV. ix., for example, Ungar pointedly speaks of the dispossessed rights of "Indians East and West" (l. 120). Moreover, as I hope I've shown, the poem's striving toward heterodoxy and the "intersympathy of creeds" rhetorically renders such issues problematic.

In Clarel, then, Melville demonstrates a respect for those aspects of Islam that stress endurance, piety, and self-denial. He also holds in high esteem the religion's emphasis on practicality, which is born of its recognition of the harsh realities of the physical world that mirrored his own. As I explored in Chapter Four (pp. 229-30), this view of Islam is not consonant with that of many other nineteenth-century comparative religionists, who felt the

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religion to be either a regression that would die out of its own accord or else, in some extreme cases, a fraud.[1] And while it may be true, as Dorothee Metlitsky Finkelstein says in Melville's Orienda, that "[o]n the whole, Melville's concern with the rise of Islam and of Mohammed as a propagator of a new religion strikes one as comparatively slight," and that in his religious landscape, Islam and Mohammed, unlike Zoroaster and Fire Worship, "do not reach into the deepest levels of meaning but remain on the surface as decoration," (Finkelstein, p. 174-5), it is also true that the Melville who wrote Clarel had come to recognize that metaphysical speculation "into the deepest levels" would remain forever futile, and that the pragmatic utility of a religion such as Islam might now be all one could legitimately ask.

2. Hinduism and Buddhism in Clarel

Melville's interest in Hinduism and Buddhism is well-known and has been well-documented. Both religions appear throughout his work and are handled with considerable skill and knowledge.[2] In Clarel their respective appearances consist of allusion or digressive commentary ("Of Rama") rather than characterization; as such, they are used as a critical means to greatly broaden the poem's religious discussion.

Some critics have seen Clarel as Melville's response

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to the manifest destiny zeitgeist of nineteenth-century America. This response has been characterized as a figurative turn eastward in an effort to reclaim the original sources of religious belief lost in the materialism of the time. In _Tortured Synthesis_, Joseph Knapp writes that "_Clarel_ is a rejection of the American dream, a rejection of the westward movement in general, and an important step in a contrary eastward movement" (Knapp, p. 3). In _Herman Melville: The Tragedy of Mind_, William Ellery Sedgewick says an idea "which keeps recurring in _Clarel_, is the further east one goes the further he gropes his way back to the mysterious sources of faith" (Sedgewick, p. 199). This turn eastward has obvious symbolic significance as well. According to Jean Danielou in _The Bible and the Liturgy_, "facing the East is connected with the ideas of Paradise. For does not Genesis say that 'Paradise was planted toward the east' (Gen. 2.8), and so to turn to the East seems to be an expression of longing for Paradise" (Danielou, p. 32).

In _Clarel_, the two religions of India are often associated with this idea of the East as the repository of a sacred past which must be recovered, the source of a vast and mysterious wisdom from which the religious student may learn much in the time of doubt. In the very first canto of the poem Clarel acknowledges that now "[n]eeds be my soul,/Purged by the desert's subtle air/From bookish vapors" (ll. 66-8), and

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> here unlearning, how to me
> Opes the expanse of time's vast sea!
> Yes, I am young, but Asia old.
> The books, the books not all have told.
> ll. 81-4

The idea of India as spiritual source is emphasized in its relationship with other religions in Clarel. Abdon, though Jewish, has come to the Levant from "ancient India's clime" which "[h]arbored the remnant of Tribes [of Israel]" (I. ii. l. 29-30), and, as such, he suggests a kind mingling of the Semitic and Indian traditions. This mingling is also apparent in Clarel's dream vision in I. v., where, of the four religions depicted in order to represent the "intersympathy of creeds," two are of the Semitic branch (Greek Christians and Levantine Moslems) and two are of the Indian (Indian Hindus and Chinese Buddhists).

In this mingling of Semitic and Indian religious traditions, the poem strongly suggests the older lineage of the latter. In III. v., for example, the pilgrims, through their collectively thoughts, ask

> Shall endless time no more unfold
> Of truth at core? Some things discerned
> By the far Noahs of India old--
> Earth's first spectators, the clear eyed,
> Unvitiated, unfalsified
> Seers at first hand--shall these be learned
> Though late, even by the New World, say,
> Which now contemns?
> ll. 104-11 (my emphasis)

Here, the Indian Noahs are depicted as being older than

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their biblical namesake, indicating Melville's grasp of the principles of the diffusionist and anti-diffusionist theories which "crisscross[ed] in complicated patterns throughout the nineteenth century" (Franklin, p. 11). Moreover, the Indian Noahs are seen as possessing certain fundamental religious truths which have probably been lost to the modern, western world. And what are these truths? More often than not, they are, apropos of Danielou's comment, associated with a vision of paradise that has now become lost, a vision which is also, by the way, of great significance throughout Melville's fiction. In "Rolfe and the Palm" (III. xxix), for example, Rolfe addresses the palm at Mar Saba, perceiving it as a symbol of this lost paradise, which is described in terms that mingle Indian, classical, Semitic, and Polynesian religious imagery:

> Whom weave ye in,
> Ye vines, ye palms? Whom now Soolee?
> Lives yet your Indian Arcady?
> His sunburned face what Saxon shows--
> His limbs all white as lilies be--
> Where Eden, isled, impurpled glows
> In old Mendanna's sea?
> ll. 41-7

The association of an Indian paradise with Eden is expressed again by Rolfe in "The Shepherds' Dale" where, trying to placate Ungar after a particularly vicious outburst concerning the Civil War, he remarks of the desert,

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This calm...
How fitly hereabout is shed:
The site of Eden's placed not far;
In bond 'tween man and animal
Survives yet under Asia's star
A link with years before the Fall.
IV. ix. ll. 84-9

The passage makes the connection between the two visions of paradise in their shared picture of a bond between humanity and nature, one which will be subversely replicated later in the vision of paradise lost on the Via Dolorosa. But coming as it does, right after Ungar's bitter comments, it also serves to emphasize the decidedly unEdenic nature of the New World which, in its hubristic nationalist rhetoric, had often been quite fond of depicting itself as a new Eden.

Melville borrows other ideas from the Indian religions in Clarel. Rolfe's view of history as a series of repeating patterns bears comparison with the Hindu concept of the avatar, especially when applied to religions themselves, as it is in "Rolfe" (I. xxxi.), where each successive religion is depicted as being yet another incarnation of the archetypal religious essence. More striking is the canto "Of Rama" (I. xxxii), where the narrator raises the issue of the avatar, suggesting that someone in the poem, usually thought to be Rolfe, is yet another incarnation of the spirit exemplified by Rama. Here, Rama is described as being a god, "but [he] knew it not" (l. 2). Tested by

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the world, "[h]e never the Holy spirit grieved,/Nor the divine in him bereaved/Though what that was he might not guess" (ll. 9-11). The narrator wonders if any now could live like Rama, "[m]ay life and fable so agree?" (l. 16). He concludes that, rare as they are, such do exist, "[t]he riches in them be a store/Unmerchant-able in the ore" (ll. 49-50), and that one exists, in fact "in the verse" (l. 56).

Perhaps the most interesting of all is Clarel's withdrawal into anonymity at the end of the poem, which is similar in some ways to Buddhism's attainment of nirvana through annihilation of self. For a radical Christian such as Melville who possessed such powerful instincts for comparative religion, the idea of self-denial and annihilation as a means of achieving spiritual freedom and enlightenment would be recognized as analogous to a fundamental message of the New Testament, such as Christ expresses in Matthew 10.39, for example. This fact is all the more relevant when we consider Melville's late poem "Buddha," printed here in full, which specifically concerns nirvana:

> Swooning swim to less and less
>   Aspirant to nothingness!
> Sobs of the worlds, and dole of kinds
>   That dumb endurers be--
> Nirvana! absorb us in your skies,
>   Annul us in thee.

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Melville prefaced this poem with an epigraph taken from James 4.14 which concerns a similar idea: "For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away." For the Melville who had much earlier told Hawthorne in a famous phrase that he had "pretty much made up his mind to be annihilated," this similar strain in both religions may have seemed a kind of relief. Moreover, as one caught in the Protestant dilemma of the twin tyrannies of self and reason, such relief would be a welcome escape. This is not to suggest that Melville seriously entertained the notion of becoming a Buddhist; as I hope my study has made clear, a conversion to any orthodoxy would be virtually impossible for him. In fact, as William B. Dillingham has argued, although "Melville seemed to find most aspects of Buddhism attractive," the transcendental state its followers achieve through meditation is "dangerous to the artistic impulse," and Melville's "creative imagination remained too commanding to permit its [own] demise" (Dillingham, p. 116, 117). He characterizes the attraction this aspect of the religion may have had for Melville as being one of "hypnotic indolence," and suggests that it is in this regard quite similar to the exotic temptations faced by the narrators of _Typee_ and _Omoo_ which, if embraced, would finally lead to a state of lassitude and nothingness (_Ibid_. p. 117).

This connection between Christianity, Buddhism, and Polynesia is further emphasized by the fact that "Buddha"

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shares a central image with the three images that conclude the "Epilogue" to Clarel, that of a swimmer rising upward from the depths. For Laurie Robertson-Lorant, this image in "Buddha" is "reminiscent of Tommo swimming with shoals of naked 'whihinees' in Typee, and the poem ends "with the speaker imagining Nirvana as a kind of cosmic orgasm leading to annihilation of the Self" (Robertson-Lorant, p. 604). In discussing the swimmer image in the "Epilogue" to Clarel in "From Bethlehem to Tahiti: Transcultural 'Hope' in Clarel," James Duban argues that the "varying critical responses" to the narrator's exhortation to Clarel could be resolved if we take into account Melville's probable knowledge of "the Hawaiian concept of 'manaolana,' the 'swimming thought'" (Duban, p. 475, 476). Duban suggests that this idea, one of hope, is associated both with "faith floating and keeping its head aloft above water," a definition he quotes from a July 14, 1860 Christian Inquirer article, and also with what he calls "the probable rehabilitative place of eroticism in Clarel" attained through the vision of Ruth (Duban, p. 476, 479). In both "Buddha" and the "Epilogue" from Clarel, the image of the swimmer has been intricately linked with Christianity and Buddhism, as well as the kind of primal sensuality Melville found in his travels to the South Pacific as a young man.

No specific branch of comparative religion in the nineteenth century generated as much controversy as that dealing with the study of Indian religions. For one thing,

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unlike Islam, with which Christian Europe had conducted perpetual war for centuries, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, and especially Buddhism were great mysteries before the nineteenth century. Max Muller only slightly exaggerated when he observed in 1865 that

> Fifty years ago, these three collections of sacred writings [the various sacred books of Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, and Buddhism] were all but unknown, their very existence was doubted, and there was not a single scholar who could have translated a line of the Veda, a line of the Zend-Avesta, or a line of the Buddhist Tripitaka.
> Chips From a German Workshop, p. 23

Much of the work of comparative religionists such as Muller was dedicated to a recovery of the shared Aryan past of the European and Indian religions which was largely a linguistic endeavor. As Muller beautifully wrote, sounding remarkably contemporary,

> Whatever the blood may be that runs through our veins, the blood that runs through our thoughts, I mean our language, is the same as the Aryas of India, and that language has more to do with ourselves than the blood that feeds our body and keeps us alive for a time.
> Theosophy, p. 71

From this linguistic connection, Muller adduces a "common Aryan atmosphere pervading the philosophy of the Greeks and the Hindus," despite the fact that "we cannot claim it [Indian philosophy] any historical relationship with

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the earliest Greek philosophy" (*Ibid*. p. 79). For Muller,

> Both philosophies, that of the East and that of the West, start from a common point, namely from the conviction that our ordinary knowledge is uncertain, if not altogether wrong. The result of the human mind against itself is the first step in all philosophy.
> *Ibid*. p. 102

Muller finds that "in most of the religions of the ancient world, the relation between the soul and God has been represented as a return of the soul to God. A yearning for God, a kind of divine home-sickness" (*Ibid*. p. 92), and he elsewhere criticizes the modern world, much as Melville does in *Clarel*, for it corresponding lack of reverence for the divine:

> With the life we are leading now, with telegrams, letters, newspapers, reviews, pamphlets, and books ever breaking in upon us, it has become impossible, or almost impossible, ever to arrive at that intensity of thought which the Hindus meant by 'ekagrata' [the drawing away of thought from all but of the divine, often achieved through the ritualistic repetition of the holy syllable 'om'], and the attainment of which was to them the indispensable condition of all philosophies and religious speculation.
> *Sacred Books of the East* vol. 1, p. xxiv

The attempt to demonstrate the common origin of Indian and European thought caused great controversy, and battle lines were soon drawn up along theological, anthropological, and racial lines.[3] In America, a particularly spirited

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exchange erupted in the pages of *The Radical* in the years 1865-6 between Samuel Johnson and James Freeman Clarke, with the former championing a true universal religion, and the latter claiming Christianity to be the supreme religion. This exchange, documented by Arthur Versluis in *American Transcendentalism and Asian Religion* (1993), was conducted amid great ignorance of the subject; Versluis says that "Clarke tended to misconstrue Buddhism and Hinduism, [while] Johnson tended to be a fuzzy thinker" (Versluis, p. 204). Nonetheless, the core issue of this debate, which consisted in whether or not Christianity could make exclusive religious claims, was one that informed much of the religious debate of the nineteenth century, and one which Melville always has close at hand in *Clarel*. The relentless search for "the intersympathy of creeds" place him in the camp of those who believe, as Max Muller said of Samuel Johnson after his death, that "there is *a religion behind all religions*, and happy is the man who knows it in these days of materialism and atheism" (quoted in Versluis, p. 204).

3. Christianity and Comparative Religion in *Clarel*

As I have indicated, Christianity is the religion with which Melville most thoroughly explores his theme in *Clarel* of religious belief in the nineteenth century. But it also serves as the stepping-stone into the realm

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of comparative religious study; the poem commences with Clarel's personal (Christian) religious crisis, but it quickly opens into a much larger discussion that implicitly concerns all religious belief. But Christianity remains, nonetheless, the central vehicle for this discussion and, as such, must therefore be regarded as the most important of the religions the poem portrays. Indeed, virtually the entire critical reception of the poem has focused on the problems faced specifically by Christianity in the modern age, a view of the poem my study is attempting to enlarge. Much of the material pertinent to this section has been implicitly addressed earlier in my discussion. I shall therefore restrict my comments to some general observations.

Melville depicts Christianity in Clarel through all three of its major branches--Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant--and many minor sects as well. Christianity is also depicted over a very broad spectrum of historical characters, allusions, and sacred sites, which serve to endow it with a chronological perspective. Moreover, in Nathan and the Presbyterian Elder, a grim and unrelenting atheist who pursues his task of disproving Christianity with a Calvinistic zeal, Melville even shows the religion (in its Protestant branch) in what might be termed its secularized state. Christianity is thus given the greatest latitude of any religion in the poem and is therefore that which best allows Melville to examine the crisis

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faced by revealed religion in the nineteenth century.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of Melville's depiction of orthodox Christianity in Clarel is the fact that it is presented as being already metaphysically dead; in the contesting claims of science and Christianity the former has emerged clearly victorious. The religion is portrayed as being either hopelessly compromised through its encounter with the world (the Protestant Derwent, the Catholic Dominican), as Rolfe and Max Muller would argue, as obstinately indifferent to the world, as in the case of the Greek Orthodox monks at Mar Saba whose creed is described by Rolfe as "[a]n orthodoxy petrified" (III. xvi. l. 95) and whose abbot traces his pastorate so far back that "Rome's Pope he deemed but Protestant--/A Rationalist, A bigger Paine--/Heretic, worse than Arian" (III. xxiii. ll. 36-8), or else, perhaps worst of all, as a benign fairy tale (Nehemiah). In any case, from a strictly orthodox point of view the religion is conceived as having entered the realm of pure mythology. In this respect it is often compared with ancient Greek mythology. In "The Inscription," for example, Mortmain's message, inscribed in chalk near the Dead Sea, addresses the constellation of the Southern Cross and asks,

> When, ages hence, they lift their eyes,
> Tell, what shall they retain of thee?
> But class thee with Orion's sword?
> In constellations unadored,

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Christ and the Giant equal prize?
II. xxxi. ll. 64-8

And in "Vine and the Palm," Vine, musing that the palm at Mar Saba "Intimates a Paradise," wistfully ponders whether the tree could possibly "win the desert here/To dreams of Eden" and if it felt, in that regard, kinship "with the tree/Worshipped on Delos in the sea--/ Apollo's Palm[;]" but he sadly concludes "it [the hope of a paradise regained] ended;/Nor dear divinities [Christ and Apollo] befriended" (III. xxvi. ll. 35, 33-4, 40-2, 42-3).

This connection of Christian and Greek religious material is further elaborated in the poem's frequent use of Matthew Arnold's Hellenic/Hebraic antinomy. Writing primarily of Melville's aesthetics, Shirley M. Dettlaff suggests that Arnold provided "Melville with the terms 'Hebraic' and 'Hellenic' for a dichotomy in Melville's thought" (Dettlaff, p. 215). But Melville, like Arnold, also perceived the Hellenic/Hebraic dichotomy in terms of its religious implications as well. For Arnold, the two were different means to the same end, and thus constituted a kind of platonic dialectic. In the "Hebraism and Hellenism" section of _Culture and Anarchy_, he states,

> The final aim of both Hellenism and Hebraism, as of all great spiritual disciplines, is no doubt the same: man's perfection or salvation. The very language which they both of them use in schooling us to reach this aim is often identical. Even when their language indicates

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> by variation...the different courses of thought which are uppermost in each discipline, even then the unity of the final end and aim is still apparent. To employ the actual words of that discipline with which we ourselves are all of us most familiar, and the words of which, therefore, come most home to us, that final end and aim is "that we might be partakers of the divine nature." These words are the words of a Hebrew apostle, but of Hellinism and Hebraism alike this is, I say, the aim.
>
> Prose of the Victorian Period p. 477

Similarly for Melville in Clarel, the yoking together of the Hellenic and Hebraic material illustrates

> the familiar Melvillean concern that opposites make up the whole of life, even if their juxtaposition raises philosophical questions. What interests Melville here is the perception that these opposites may, in fact, harmonize, that beauty and cheer can co-exist with barrenness and grief, that what puzzles intellectually may please aesthetically.
>
> Dettlaff, p. 217

Melville's use of this antinomy constitutes, as it did for Arnold, a means out of the stagnant state of nineteenth-century thought, frozen in rational doubt. In the spirit of the tempered heart theme, it proposes a dynamic progress through the conflict of contraries.

As I have endeavored to show, this dichotomy need not--must not--be limited to strictly the Hellenic and Hebraic constituents; these are rather to be understood as approximations of archetypal ascetic/aesthetic patterns originating in the human psyche. Indeed, Hellenism itself

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comprises two such polarities in its respective cults of Apollo and Dionysus. Nineteenth-century comparative religionists noted similar such occurrences of these complementary parts-of-the-whole throughout the world's religions. Maurice, for example, marveled at Hinduism's seemingly contradictory cults of Vishnu and Shiva. Why, he asks, if "the Brahmin is seeking after One Divine unseen object...should [the religion] have become so utterly entangled in sensible, outward idolatry as the modern Hindoo seems to be?" (Maurice, p. 44). Chinese religion, and especially its concept of the Yin and the Yang, reflects a similar complementary pairing. Writing of section forty-two of the Tao Te Ching in his 1910 translation, Richard Wilhem suggests it "sets forth and develops the complementarity of opposites," and suggests that the Neoplatonism of early Christianity, where "progression to the Four produces Lucifer" is "closely related to this thinking." He proceeds to remark in a vein quite analogous to Rolfe's in I. xxxi. that

> Similar ideas can even be found in more recent philosophy: Hegel's dialectic, with its thesis, antithesis and synthesis, where synthesis then becomes the thesis for the next series, the departure point for all that follows--is based on an approach very much like Lao Zi's [Lao Tzu, the putative author of the Tao Te Ching]
> Tao Te Ching p. 73

Certainly the eternally battling gods of Zoroastrianism,

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Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu, and the dualistic religious movement of Manichaeism, which Bayle said was actually "much older" than its supposed founder Manes (Bayle, p. 144), encapsulate this dialectical concept as well. And as I have argued throughout, it is both a major aspect of Melville's (Protestant) thought and also a structuring element in Clarel, especially through the contrasting orthodox/heterodox patterns and the theme of the tempered heart.

In this context, Christianity in Clarel may be viewed, as indeed Rolfe views it, as yet another analogue in the vast human religious matrix. If its metaphysical truths can no longer be asserted, its essential message, that humans are spiritual beings and that the material world can and must be transcended by the spiritual, which it shares with the rest of the world's major religions, can. Thus it is that Christ and Christ-like figures such as St. Francis who overcame the material world through spiritual striving are revered even as "Christianity" is regarded as dead. It is also in this regard that nonChristian examples may be added to the hierarchy of the poem's spiritual "heroes" as well. In III. i. the narrator wonders if "[u]nworldly yearners" such as Leopardi and Obermann are any less worthy of the rewards of heaven than St. Theresa. The poem's three major monomaniacs, Celio, Mortmain, and Ungar, who, significantly enough, collectively voice the harshest criticism of Christian orthodoxy in

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the poem (and in all of Melville, for that matter), are likewise rhetorically held in very high esteem, as is the Druze Muslim Djalea. And Rolfe, the true hero of the poem, openly confesses his doubt even as he relentlessly pursues answers to questions which he knows are hopeless, never for a moment settling into complaisance.

In Did the Greeks Believe in Their Myths? (1983) Paul Veyne writes that Greek mythology "was basically nothing but a very popular literary genre, a vast realm of literature" (Veyne, p. 17). In Clarel, the seekers, the yearners, the prophets, and the sufferers are not presented with an eye to historical or metaphysical fact, subject to what Veyne calls "the truth of anonymous reason" (Veyne, p. 11), but rather as mythological figures themselves, literary creations existing in a timeless pattern of archetypal behavior. Veyne's remark, that "[n]o positivist criticism can adequately deal with mythology and the supernatural" (Veyne, p. 2), recalls the poem's own frequent invocation that the human mind, the true source for all belief, cannot be understood according to the narrow strictures of science and reason, but remains, much like the white whale in Moby-Dick, an eternal mystery. Thus, in Clarel, Melville uses myth to examine myth.

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Chapter Six: Notes

1. For example, the standard American "life" of Mohammed during the period 1830-1850 was the Rev. George Bush's Life of Muhammad (1830), of which Dorothee Metlitsky Finkelstein says "In the tradition of earlier biographies [such as Humphrey Prideaux's] Bush treated Muhammad as an impostor." She then says that Gibbon (in The Decline of the Roman Empire, chapter fifty) and Boulainvilliers (in The Life of Mahomet [English translation 1731]) attacked this point of view. She might have added Carlyle to the list. In "The Hero as Prophet" he wrote,

> Our current hypothesis about Mahomet, that he was a scheming Impostor, a Falsehood incarnate, that his religion is a mere mass of quackery and fatuity, begins really to be now untenable to any one. The lies, which well-meaning zeal has heaped round this man, are disgraceful to ourselves only.
>
> pp. 43-4

The view that Islam was a fraud was just the latest in a long line of slanders and lies leveled against the religion by Christian Europe. The Song of Roland, for example, took the battle of Rencesvals (A.D. 778), where a group of Basque soldiers ambushed and slaughtered the backguard of Charlemagne's army in a narrow pass in the Pyrenees, and replaced the Basques with Muslims who are depicted as having deceived the French. The epic thus becomes emblematic for the Christian victory over Islam. A slightly different view--one which extends to other nonChristian religions as well, is found in Cervantes's Don Quixote of La Mancha. For example, in Chapter XLVII of Part One, Zoroastrianism is described as being the enemy of virtue (p. 472); later in the same chapter, Don Quixote pledges to achieve immortality in his pursuit of (Christian) knight-errantry "despite and in defiance of envy itself and of all the magicians of Persia, all the Brahmans of India, all the gymnosophists of Ethiopia" (p. 475). Throughout the novel, Moors are depicted as lawless enemies to the principles of Christianity, an uncouth and socially degenerate people (Miguel de Cervantes, Don Quixote, translated and with an introduction by Walter Starkie. New York: Penguin, 1979). In Holy War; The Crusades and Their Impact on Today's World (New York: Anchor Books, 1991), Karen Armstrong makes a powerful argument that such attitudes survive today and have shaped Western policy regarding the Middle East.

2. Finkelstein's Melville's Orienda, Franklin's Wake of

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the Gods, and Versluis's American Transcendentalism and Asian Religions are but three works that treat Melville's knowledge and use of Hinduism and Buddhism in considerable detail. There are many others as well.

3. This is all fully explored in Thomas Trautmann's recent Aryans and British India (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

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Conclusion

The twentieth century would see the flowering of the worst of the horrors envisaged by Mortmain and Ungar. The major issues discussed and debated in Clarel--science, religion, ethnicity, nationalism--are the major headlines of our day as well. How truly sad it is, then, that the poem still languishes in neglect.

Melville, like Carlyle, believed humans to be, first and foremost, spiritual beings. Throughout his fiction he depicted the encounter between the spiritual and the material, as many writers have noted. But Melville would also have agreed with Max Muller when he wrote,

> our concept of God depends to a great extent on our concept of the soul...Psychological Religion presupposes both Physical and Anthrological Religion, and before the soul and God can be brought into relation with each other, both the concept of God and the concept of soul had to be elaborated.
>
> Theosophy, pp. 90-1

Such things, as always, are easier said then done, and it is Clarel himself who articulates the difficulty of

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this endeavor: "But if in vain/One tries to comprehend a man,/How think to sound God's deeper heart!" (II. xxxii. ll. 109-11).

Melville's fiction, studded as it is with orphans and Ishmaels, is a search for soul (self) and a search for God (meaning). His Protestant background's emphasis on reason as a means of interpreting the world sprung from the assumption that its Creator had conceived and imbued the creation with such. But experience of that world had left Meville with a decidedly different conception of its creator, one which was ultimately mysterious and impenetrable.

I conclude with a quotation from Simone Weil, a beautiful and tragic figure who would have fascinated Melville--one easily imagines her appearing in the verses of Clarel had she lived before its composition, conjured, perhaps, in the heat of debate by a Rolfe or a Mortmain in order to exemplify the true spiritual essence. In "Chance," she wrote:

> We want everything which has value to be eternal. Now everything which has a value is the product of a meeting, lasts throughout this meeting and ceases when those things which met are separated. This is the central idea of Buddhism (the thought of Heraclitus). It leads straight to God.
>
> Weil, p. 277

Melville would no doubt agree.

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Appendix One: Ancient Comparative Religion and the Early Christian Church

1. Comparative Religion in the Classical Age

The encounter with new cultures and the attempt to describe and account for their beliefs and customs was not the sole intellectual property of post-Renaissance Europe. Thus Eric Sharpe begins his study of comparative religion in the classical period, noting that "[o]n the whole the methods employed for the study of religion in the ancient world were not as different from our own as might be supposed" (Sharpe, p. 2). He then presents a paradigmatic methodology of the ancient Greeks that could well apply not only to many nineteenth-century comparative religionists in general, but specifically to Melville as well:

> There was an underlying current of criticism of accepted forms of religion at home; there was an attempt to record and describe what was

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> seen and read and experienced; and there was an attempt to compare and contrast this material with familiar traditions and accepted ideas.
> Sharpe, pp. 2-3

In showing how the works of such Ionic philosophers as Thales, Anaximander, and Xenophanes undercut the popular Greek beliefs by virtue of their fostering a broader and more supple worldview, Sharpe etablishes the paradigm for all future such comparative religious encounters: the more rigidly formed and locally specific the dogma, the less capable it will be to synchronize with new discoveries and theories; the more supple (and less locally specific) the belief, the greater its capability to adjust and function in the ever-enlargening context.[1] Seen from another perspective, this illustrates an essential duality of all religions, one which later manifests itself in the delineation of the orthodox and the heterodox, a separation that was of great interest to Melville.

If the Ionian Greek Philosophers were the first to displace their local gods, as Sharpe maintains, it was the Stoics (Chrysippus, Varro, Pausanias, Strabo) who first began the study of the "cosmopolitan" nature of religions and cultures.[2] In the Stoics' approach to the study of other cultures and religions can be seen the first vague questing after what Basil Willey would later call "a common denominator for all religions" (Willey 114). Sharpe describes it thusly:

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> As well as classifying cults in accordance with their place of origin, the Stoics also referred to certain beliefs common to all cultures...these constituted what they called natural religion- thus originating a well known phrase.
> Sharpe, p. 5

Moreover, the Stoics excelled at reading myths as allegories, a hermeneutic Theagenes had pioneered in the 6th century B.C. (de Vries pp. 5-6). This approach to myth would later assume a much larger importance among the nineteenth-century psychological comparative religionists, and, in particular, it would be appropriated by the mostly Germanic "Nature-Myth" school of the highly influential Max Muller and others.

Another figure of the Classical period of great interest and significance was the historian Herodotus (484-425). Like Melville, but unlike virtually all of the major comparative religionist of the nineteenth century who relied on the works of explorers and missionaries rather than their own first-hand field-study (Evans-Pritchard, p. 6), Herodotus traveled widely and could therefore (like Melville) base his conclusions on first-hand observation. Speaking with Egyptian priests, he became convinced that the Egyptian religion was much older than the Greek. He therefore concluded that

> the Greeks, as latecomers, must have borrowed much from the Egyptians. Among other things, those priests told him that the Greek Proteus was really Pheron, who at one time resided in

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> Memphis. In Pheron's sanctuary a "foreign" Aphrodite was also venerated, who was identified by Herodotus with Aphrodite Helena,...Further, Herodotus was convinced that Poseidon wasoriginally a Libyan and Bacchus an Egyptian god. He continually compared Greek and Egyptian deities: Zeus is Ammon; Athena is Neith; Apollo is Horus. Moreover, the father of historical scholarship surprises us with remarkable rationalistic explanations: Europa was the daughter of a king who was abducted from Tyrus by some Greeks--Cretans, in his opinion.
> de Vries, p. 6

Herodotus also traveled among the Babylonians and the Persians. Not only was he fascinated by the practices and beliefs he encountered, but he also actively participated in some of them, becoming, according to Sharpe, "an initiate into the mysteries of Osiris" (Sharpe p. 4). His approach to other religions and cultures has caused him to be called one of the earliest syncretists (Decharme p. 77; cited by Sharpe, p. 4), a methodolgy not unlike Melville's own, all the more important as Melville was known to have owned a copy of Herodotus (Journals pp. 538-9).

2. Comparative Religion in the Early Christian Church

The early Christians confronted a myriad of problems in their spiritually authorized task of converting the fallen world (Matthew 28:19-20, Mark 16:15). Aside from the difficulties involved in trying to establish an autonimous credibility[3], they were faced with scornful

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Classical polemicists who disputed the extravagant claims of the new religion, various other locally entrenched religions and cults, and the strength and might of the pagan Roman empire, which had quickly found it refreshing entertainment to subject the converts of the new religion to all kinds of horrible deaths in the arena.

To combat such obstacles, a whole array of Christian scholars arose, who, perhaps taking their lead from Moses (Acts 7:22) and Paul (Romans 1:14, I Corinthians 9:19-22, etc.), formidably schooled themselves in the ways and beliefs of the very world they now sought to change; such would be the later practice of Christian missionaries upon encountering new cultures and religions. As Kenneth and Helen Ballhatchet write, the strategy employed would fall under three general categories:

> [either] to condemn other religions as the work of the Devil, to approach them tolerantly as merely the result of human error, or to grant them limited approval as imperfect expressions of religious truth, as God's way of preparing humanity for Christianity.
> Oxford History of Christianity, p. 489

But the early Christian disputants did not limit their theoretical skirmishes to encounters with nonChristians; some of their bitterest fighting they reserved for themselves, especially during the pre-canonical period, when the dimensions and limitations of their new faith were gradually eked out. In the theological struggles

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between the Church fathers of Rome and Alexandria, two main hermeneutical branches of Christian comparative religion gradually emerge. Reflecting different but complementary attitudes, both served as models for generations of European theological scholars and writers right into the nineteenth century. The first was more or less based in Rome and is associated with such figures as Tertullian, Tatian, Ignatius, Stephen, and Jerome, whose famous and bitter quarrel with his erstwhile friend, the scholar and translator Rufinus, revolved around the teachings of the Alexandrian Origen. Stressing the supremacy and jealousy of Yahweh and the sinful idolatry of worshipping other, evil, gods, this branch emphasized an orthodoxy that looked with intolerance and hostility on other religions, which were thought to be the work of the Devil. This essentially orthodox posture would find its way into the writings of many later Christian-European explorers and missionaries; it would account for the often devasting inhumanity doled out upon indigenous peoples by newly-arrived Christians (the Puritan attitude toward Native Americans), and it survives into the present day in various forms among the three major branches of Christianity.[4]

The Alexandrian school of Clement and Origen, by contrast, demonstrated a more tolerant and enlightened attitude toward pagan religions. As Sharpe observes, this was largely due to

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> an interpretation of truth as the operation of the 'logos spermatikos', 'the seminal word' (a concept borrowed from the Stoics); this led to a more favorable interpretation of at least the more ethically respectable among the non-Christian philosophers.
>
> Sharpe, p. 9

Aside from drawing on the 'cosmopolitan'/'natural religion' idea of the Stoics, the 'logos Spermatikos' has scriptural basis as well. Paul would write in the most painstaking epistle of the New Testament, "[f]or the invisible things of him [God] from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, <u>even</u> his eternal power and Godhead; so that they [pagan idolators] are without excuse" (Romans 1:20, KJV), and, perhaps more specifically,

> For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another.
>
> Romans 2:14-15, KJV

The idea that God has revealed himself to different peoples in different ways obviously has serious implications for the more orthodox and literal-minded Christians. What <u>were</u>/<u>are</u> these ways, and by what means can their authenticity be demonstrated? For the heterodox and less literal-minded, equally serious, but perhaps less troubling,

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questions arose. One area where these questions and implications bore particular importance was in the encounter between the Early Church and the Classical tradition that it was gradually displacing. In the section that follows, I shall examine how this question was dealt with by the orthodox and heterodox church fathers.

3. The Christian and Classical Traditions: An Encounter

From the beginning, the Roman branch of the early Christian church was thrust prominently onto the world-stage; in the period between the Neronian persecution (c. 64 A.D.) and the conversion of Constantine (c. 313 A.D.), its frequently tough-minded and polemically aggressive apologists, more pragmatic and less tolerant than their Alexandrian counterparts, fought Paul's "good fight" at the vital center of the Pagan world with unrelenting vigour and resource. Their evangelical task was not an easy one, as the Christian message of salvation through the one true God presented "by contrast [to the Classical beliefs]...ideas that demanded a choice, not tolerance" (Macmullen p. 17) Survival and winning converts in a hostile world became the Church's chief concern; thus, in the Clement of Rome's First Epistle to the Corinthians (c. 100 A.D.), a document important "in the picture it presents of the Roman Church at the end of the first

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century" (The Early Christian Fathers p. 2),

> we find no ecstasies, no miraculous 'gifts of the Spirit', no demonology, no preoccupation with an imminent 'Second Coming'. The Church has settled down in the world, and is going about its task soberly, discreetly and advisedly; Christians pray for their secular rulers and for a spirit of submission to authority, even in times of persecution...One would assume that he [Clement] had small interest in theological speculation; rather he is concerned with the organization of the Christian community, its ministry,and its liturgy [.]
> The Early Christian Fathers, pp. 2-3

The Roman church quickly recognized its unique power and authority in the early Christian world, and it knew well the political reality that Christianity's prospects of survival in a harsh and persecuting world would depend, in large part, on the church's own capability to organize and grow stronger. It was, therefore, not long before the appeal was made to scripture (Matthew 16:18) in order to justify and formally consolidate its position of ascendancy. Thus, in the second century, Irenaeus, embroiled in a dispute with the heretical Gnostics,

> appealed to the 'public' doctrine taught in the churches of apostolic foundation by the successive bishops, and especially cited the succession-list of Rome, 'the very large, ancient, and universally known church founded by the two glorious apostles Peter [Matthew 16:18] and Paul'
> Oxford History of Christianity, p.35

Although in its infancy, the Roman Church was already

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actively cultivating a sense of authority bestowed by tradition: in a dispute with churches in Asia Minor over the specific date on which to celebrate Easter, Victor, the Bishop of Rome in the 190s, threatened to excommunicate all those who did not adopt the Roman date, and in the mid-third-century, Bishop Stephen of Rome provoked a major dispute with Cyprian of Carthage when he asserted that all should observe the tradition of Peter and Paul regarding baptism by schismatic clergy, arguing, in fact, that Rome must now be regarded as the center of the Christian world (Ibid. p. 36).

This somewhat hubristic attitude would become a part of the intellectual make-up of the Roman Church, and it would come to characterize its position in disputes not only with other Christian churches, but with pagan and Classical polemicists as well. Thus, Tertullian (c 155/160-220), that most pugnacious and fiery of Apologists,

> would resist to the uttermost any attempt to contaminate the faith by asociation with pagan thought. Was not philosophy the parent of Gnostic error?
>
> The Early Christian Fathers, p. 14

"What has Athens to do with Jerusalem, the Academy with the Church, the heretics with the Christians?" he thunders in De praescriptione haereticorum ("Concerning the Prescription of Heretics"). "For my part they may, if it so please them, develop a Stoic, a Platonic or a dialectic

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Christianity. Since Jesus Christ we have no need of any further investigation, nor of any research since the Gospel has been proclaimed" (quoted in Rudolph p. 15). In this work, which Tertullian desribed as a "plea for the prosecution against the heretics" (Ibid. p. 14), an extreme orthodox position is assumed: heretics, gnostic and Classical alike, stand in stark opposition to the true Christian doctrine of Christ and his disciples. Perhaps taking a cue from Matthew 12:30 ("He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad." KJV), Tertullian summarly dismisses the positions of his opponents without even bothering to enter into any detailed argument or discussion with them (Ibid. p. 15).

The author of the Didascalia Apostolorum also felt that the Classical world could not offer the Christian believer anything of value:

> But avoid all books of the heathen. For what hast thou to do with strange sayings or laws or lying prophecies which also turn away from the faith them that are young? What is lacking to thee in the word of God, that thou shouldst cast thyself upon these fables of the heathen?
> Laistner, p. 50

This attitude would prevail for centuries until the end of the Classical tradition: Jerome (c.347-419/420) would later rid himself of the contents of his Classical library after his famous dream where a Heavenly Judge sternly told him that the Christian and the Classical were not

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compatible, and as late as the sixth century Pope Gregory the Great severely corrected the Bishop of Vienna for teaching grammar: "one mouth cannot contain the praises of Christ with the praises of Jupiter" (Momigliano p. 20). As M. L. W. Laistner concluded, "[s]uch sentiments [thus] became a commonplace" (p. 50).

Not all the early Church fathers rejected the Classical tradition in such an abrupt manner. According to Henry Bettenson, Justin Martyr (c.100-c.165) claimed that "Christianity is the fulfilment of the philosophic quest; Christ did not come to destroy the Academy, the Lyceum, and the Stoa" (The Early Christian Fathers p. 9). Justin, Bettenson says, "is one of the first to strive to reconcile Christianity and Hellenic thought, by asserting that while the Church has the complete truth there are truths of philosophy as well" (Ibid. p. 10). The truths of philosophy are due to the appropriated Stoic conception of the 'logos spermatikos':

> Before the coming of Christ men had been enabled to attain to bits and pieces of the truth through the progression of 'seeds' of the Divine Reason; at Christ's coming the whole 'Logos' took shape and was made man.
>
> Ibid., p 10

But it with was the Alexandrian school, consisting mainly of Clement of Alexandria (not to be confused with the aforementioned Clement of Rome, author of the First

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Epistle to the Corinthians) and his pupil Origen, that this theologically liberal position found its fullest and most focused voice.

According to Clement (Titus Flavius Clemens, c.150-211/15),

> Philosophy was necessary to the Greeks for righteousness, until the coming of the Lord: and even now it is useful for the development of true religion, as a kind of prepatory discipline for those who arrive by faith by way of demonstration...For God is the source of all good; either directly, as in the Old and New Testaments, or indirectly, as in the case of philosophy. But it may even be that philosophy was given to the Greeks directly; for it was "a schoolmaster" [quoting Gal. 3:24, where the "schoolmaster" is the Old Testament law], to bring Hellenism to Christ as the Law was for the Hebrews.
>
> quoted in _Early Church Fathers_ pp. 168-9

Looking past the letter of the law and seeking instead its spirit, Clement waded into the most vitriolic controversy of his day and emerged with a remarkably openminded interpretation:

> The 'Gnostic' is saved, we may suppose, owing to his apprehension of the good and bad life, for as well in knowledge as in activity he "exceeds the Scribes and the Pharisees" [quoting Christ's words from Matthew 5:20].
>
> _Ibid_. p. 178

Clement could also use the Stoics' method of interpreting religious teachings allegorically, as in his reading of

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the scriptural passages concerning the Lord's Supper:

> Put it this way, "My flesh" is an allegory for the Holy Spirit, for the flesh is his handiwork. "Blood", by analogy, stands for the Word, for the Word is like rich blood poured into our life.
> Ibid. p. 181

Clement's pupil Origen was likewise more openminded toward nonChristian beliefs than were the Roman church leaders. According to Rowan A. Geer, "In principle, he [Origen] argued, the truth discovered by Plato and the other philosophers is the same truth revealed in the Scriptures" (from Geer's Introduction to Origen, p. 6). Origen's "basic premise," Geer says, is that "there need be no contradiction between Greek and Biblical thought" (Ibid. pp. 32-3). As one who "strenuously attacked determinists" (Ibid. p. 34), he often found himself arguing from a heterodoxical point of view:

> It is certain that when "the Gentiles who have not the law" are said to "do by nature the things of the law" [Romans 2.14] this does not refer to the sabbath and new moons and sacrifices which are prescribed in the law. For this law is not "written in their hearts". What is there written is what they are able to perceive by nature; as, for example, the prohibition of murder, adultry, theft, false witness, the duty of honouring father and mother, and the like...these things which are said to be written in the heart seem to me to correspond more to the laws of the gospel, where all things are referred to natural equity.
> Early Church Fathers p. 199

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Thus it is that many of the strategies employed by nineteenth-century Christian missionaries as well as some branches of the comparative religious community (as when confronting a religion such as Buddhism) were prefigured in these contrasting attitudes of the early Christian leaders. Max Muller, for example, recounts the radically different conclusions regarding Chinese religion brought back by different groups of Catholic missionaries which ended in a dispute of such magnitude that Rome finally had to abjudicate (Chips From a German Workshop, pp. xv-xvi). As my ensuing discusion will show, many of these issues are clearly in Melville's mind as he composes Clarel.

Appendix One Notes

1. Sharpe argues that the Ionic philosphers were "attempting to explain the world as the manifestation of one indestructible principle" (p. 3) which, in turn, caused them to "criticise the inadequacy of Greek popular religion." (p. 3). It is significant that by his own admission Sharpe is using Decharme's La Critique des traditions religieuses chez les Grecs (Paris 1904) as his guide, a book which, it might seem, projects much of its own period's interests and anxieties back to the Classical period. Thus, at a time when syncretism was a major methodology for comparative religionists--Melville included--Decharme could refer to Herodotus as the first syncretist (Decharme p. 77).

2. Sharpe, p. 4. Sharpe points out that "cosmopolitan" is, in fact, a Stoic word.

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3. As M. L. W. Laistner writes in Christianity and Pagan Culture in the Later Roman Empire (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1951), one problem of the new religion was that of creating an autonomous identity: "although the Roman authorities very soon had learned to distinguish Christians from Jews, and the very name 'Christianus' may have had for them almost from the beginning a political rather than a religious connotation, the generality of pagans continued to regard the Christians as a dissident Jewish sect." (p. 25); worse still, perhaps, is the atitude exemplified by Pliny in a letter to his emperor, Trajan, c. 110, where he contemptuously refers to the pervasiveness of the Christian "superstition" (Fox p. 287).

4. One need only consider the "ethnic cleansing" program of the Eastern Orthodox Serbs in Bosnia or the endless inflammatory and hatefully intolerant rhetoric from the Catholic and Protestant fundamentalist right in American politics, for two quick examples of this "Christian" attitude toward others in the present day. If I do nothing else in this dissertation, I hope to show that this essentially Old Testament or Pauline doctrine is actually often at odds with Christ's own position, and that Melville was well aware of of these two antithetical positions, and that he sided squarely with the latter.

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Appendix Two: On the Ineffable

The idea of the ineffable, one that is admittedly quite problematic, has found a rich diversity of incarnations in many different literay works. Thus, the Gilgamesh epic hints of something ineffable within the human psyche: "As when one comes upon a path in woods/Unvisited by men, one is drawn near/The lost and undiscovered in himself" (Gilgamesh. A verse narrative by Herbert Mason with an Afterward by John H. Marks. New York: Mentor, 1972. p. 35); in "I Came Into the Unknown" St John of the Cross speaks of "a knowledge of unknowing"; Keats's "unheard melodies" could be construed as articulating a similar idea. Milton frequently made use of this principle in his poetry. Thus, the speaker in his Third Elegy, describing a vision of heaven, laments "Alas, I have not the power to relate what I saw"; in "The Death of the Bishop Ely" the speaker asks "For who that is son of a mortal father can describe the beauties of that place?"; the singing of Leonora in "To Leonora "generously teaches mortal hearts how they can insensibly become accustomed to immortal sounds"; in "Ad Patrem" the fiery

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spirit sings "an immortal melody, an unutterable song"; the angels' chorus serenades the infant Christ "with unexpressive notes" in the "Nativity Ode," while in "Lycidas" the resurrected Lycidas "hears the unexpressive nuptial song"; and in Book Five of _Paradise Lost_ we have Raphael telling Adam that human understanding is "Discursive" (literally, "running to and fro") whereas spiritual understanding is "Intuitive" (ll. 486-490), and, when further beseeched by Adam to tell of Heaven and Hell, he can only lament

> High matter thou injoin'st me, O prime of men,
> Sad task and hard, for how shall I relate
> To human sense th' invisible exploits
> Of warring Spirits [?]
> ll. 563-566

This principle has been expressed in the twentieth century as well. In "East Coker" T. S. Eliot writes:

> So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years--
> Twenty years largely wasted, the years of 'l'entre deux guerres'--
> Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt
> Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure
> _Because one has only learnt to get the better of words_
> _For the thing one no longer has to say_, or in the way in which
> One is no longer disposed to say it. And so each venture
> Is a new beginning, _a raid on the inarticulate_
> With shabby equipment always deteriorating
> In the general mess of imprecision of feeling,

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Undisciplined squads of emotion.
[emphasis mine]

Wallace Stevens's late poem "Of Mere Being" (1955?), quoted here in its entirety, also engages this idea of the limits of language/reason:

> The palm at the end of the mind,
> Beyond the last thought, rises
> In the bronze decor,
>
> A gold-feathered bird
> Sings in the palm, without human meaning,
> Without human feeling, a foreign song.
>
> <u>You know then that it is not the reason</u>
> <u>That makes us happy or unhappy</u>.
> The bird sings, Its feathers shine.
>
> The palm stands on the edge of space.
> The wind moves slowly in the branches.
> The bird's fire-fangled feathers dangle down.
> [emphasis mine]

In <u>Sister Carrie</u> (New York: Signet Classic, 1961) Theodore Dreiser writes:

> People in general attach too much importance to words. They are under the illusion that talking effects great results. As a matter of fact, words are, as a rule, the shallowest portion of all the argument. They but dimly represent the great surging feelings and desires which lie behind. When the distraction of the tongue is removed, the heart listens.
> p. 115

In "New Refutation of Time," Jorge Luis Borges writes "All language is of a successive nature; it is not an

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effective tool for reasoning the eternal, the intemporal" (*Borges: A Reader*, edited by Emir Rodriguez Monegal and Alastair Reid. [New York: E. P. Dutton, 1981; p. 184]). And in *A Lifetime Burning in Every Moment: From the Journals of Alfred Kazin* (New York, HarperCollins, 1996), Alfred Kazin writes of language that it "is always failing and stumbling, breaking the writer's heart with its mere approximateness to the thing in mind" (p. 340).

But a concept quite similar to this is also to be found at the core of many of the world's religions. The *Tao Te Ching*, for example, begins with the statement that "The DAO that can be expressed/is not the eternal DAO" (Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*. Translation and commentary by Richard Wilhelm; translated into English by H. G. Oswald. London: Arkana, a division of Penguin Books, 1985, reprint 1990, section one, p. 27), and goes on to say

> DAO brings about all things
> so chaotically, so darkly.
> Chaotic and dark
> its images.
> *Unfathomable and obscure in it* [the DAO]
> *is the seed.*
> This seed is wholly true.
> In it dwells reliability.
> *From ancient times to this day*
> *we cannot make do without names*
> *in order to view all things.*
> (section twenty-one, p. 35, my emphasis)

Hinduism, too, embraces this aspect of the uneffable and of thefutility of the material/rational world in trying

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to grasp it. The Katha Upanishad, for example, states "sacred knowledge is not attained by reasoning" (The Upanishads. Translated with an Introduction by Juan Mascaro. New York: Penguin, 1965, reprint 1981. p. 58), and goes on to say "[b]eyond the senses are their objects, and beyond the objects is the mind. Beyond the mind is pure reason, and beyond reason is the Spirit in man." (p. 61), which is echoed shortly by "[b]eyond the senses is the mind, and beyond mind is reason, its essence. Beyond reason is the Spirit in man, and beyond this is the Spirit of the universe, the evolver of all. And beyond is Purusha [the ultimate or eternal reality of soul; Prakriti is the ultimate or eternal reality of matter], all-pervading, beyond definitions" (p. 65). The Mandaka Upanishad differentiates between "lower wisdom" which it associates with the faculties needed to know and interpret the four Vedas (included here are "definition and grammar, pronunciation and poetry, ritual and the signs of heaven") and "the higher wisdom...which leads to the Eternal." (p. 75); and the Taittiriya Upanishad says "if a man finds the support of the Invisible and Ineffable, he is free from fear" (p. 110). In the Bhagavad Gita (translated with an Introduction by Juan Mascaro. New York: Penguin, 1962, reprint 1988), Krishna tells Arjuna "[t]he visible forms of my nature are eight: earth, water, fire, air, ether; the mind, reason, and the sense of 'I'. But beyond my visible nature is my invisible Spirit. This is the fountain

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of life whereby this universe has its being" (7:4-5, p. 74), and shortly thereafter intones "[b]ut beyond this creation, visible and invisible, there is an invisible, higher, Eternal; and when all things pass away this remains for ever and ever" (8:20, p. 79).

The Koran (translated with notes by N. J. Dawood. New York: Penguin, 1956, reprint 1990), while having nothing specific to offer on this subject does, however, say of itself that "[s]ome of its verses are precise in meaning...and others ambiguous... But no one knows its meaning except God" (3:7, p. 43).

In the Bible Paul speaks of "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding "(Phil. 4:7, KJV), and says that with God's covenant through Christ's blood we now "serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter" (Romans 7:6 KJV; compare with II Corinthians 3:6 "[God] also made us able ministers of the new testament: not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life." (KJV).

Finally, the idea of the ineffable, and the corresponding tenet of the limits of language/reason, has been a philosophical concern at least since the time of Plato, whose theory of Forms, based as it is on the concept that reality consists of universal ideals and principles which are rendered imperfectly into matter (Forms), established the paradigm on which the linguistic theory is clearly based. Thus, Emerson, in a July 21, 1831

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entry to his journal, wrote "God cannot be intellectually discerned"; Miguel de Unamuno wrote "[n]ot by the way of reason, but only by the way of love and of suffering, do we come to the living God, the human God. Reason rather separates us from Him" (The Tragic Sense of Life. translated by J. E. Crawford Flitch. New York: Dover, 1954. p. 167); these are but two examples. (Dante, it will be remembered, could be guided through the Inferno and Purgatorio by Virgil [reason/language], whereas he must rely on the beatific Beatrice to finally lead him through Paradisio).

In this obviously oversimplified and rather tautological and elliptical footnote I've used a deliberately wide and eclectic cross-section of sources; in doing so I've attempted to demonstrate not a specific or precise meaning for the concept of the ineffable, but rather the presence of this concept in a variety of quite different human perspectives. As Peter S. Hawkins and Anne Howland Schotter say in Ineffability: Naming the Unnamable From Dante to Beckett (New York: AMS Press, 1984),

> the limits of language has...been the subject of the most sophisticated reflection, whether...it be the confession of St. Augustine that he can say nothing adequate about God or Beckett's acknowledgement that there is, quite simply, nothing to express... Furthermore, if the juxtaposition of two figures as distant from one another as Augustine and Beckett indicates the abiding nature of the problem of language and ineffability, it also demonstrates its persistence in the face of vastly different

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assumptions about reality.
p. 1

For my purposes, the obvious analogy I'm trying to draw is between a linguistic principle (implicit in the literary examples I've cited) which conveys the limits of language when confronted with the task of trying to express that which, it seems, cannot be expressed, and a larger religious principle wherein a delineation is made between the physical and the metaphysical, where reason and language are placed decidedly within the realm of the former (implicit in the religious and philosophical examples I've cited). This analogy is crucial to that part of my discussion concerning religious orthodoxy (literally "right or correct opinion"), grounded as it is in form ("logos", repetitition and ritual, observation), and religious heterodoxy ("other or different opinion"), which transcends form.

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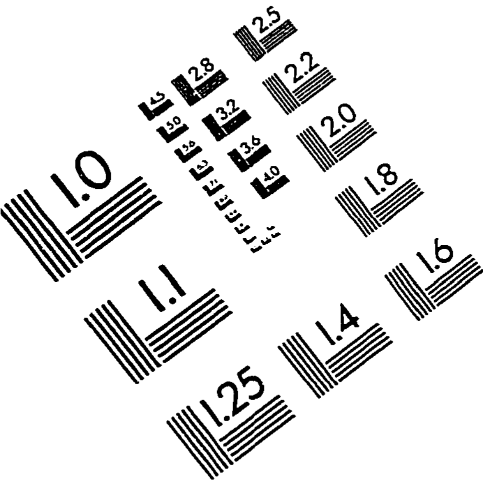

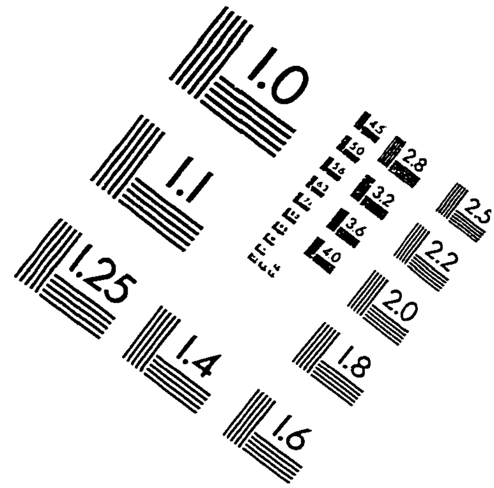

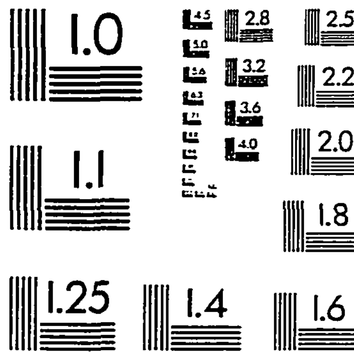

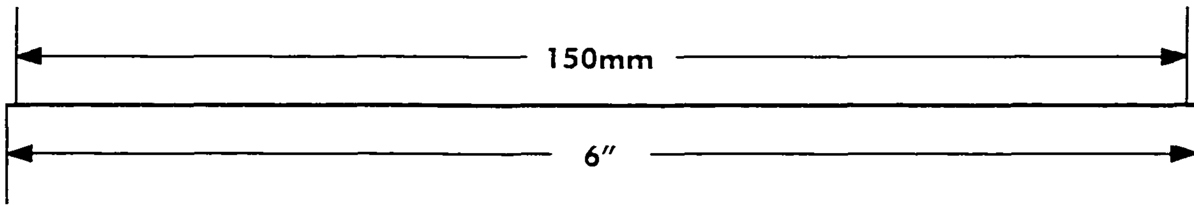

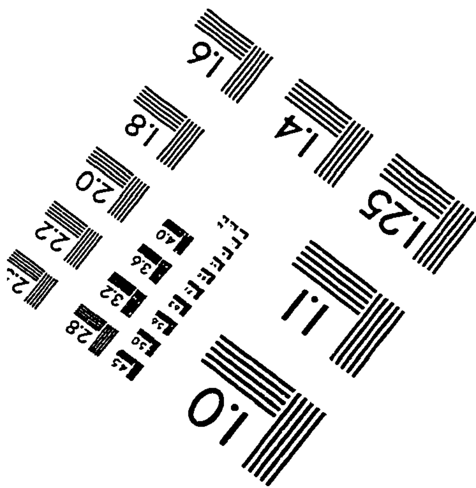

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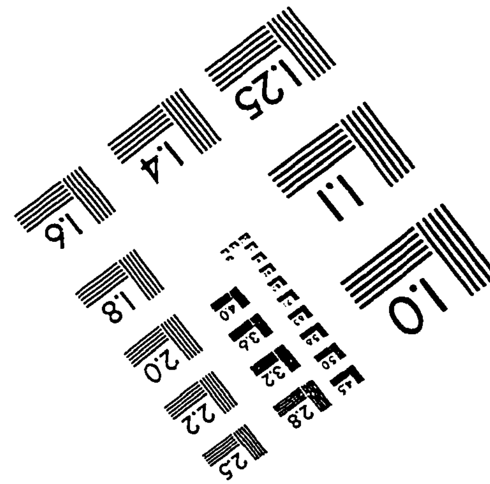

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