

THE THEME OF VIOLENCE IN THE
LATER FICTION OF HERMAN MELVILLE

by

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B.A., University of British Columbia, 1969

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Arts

in the Department

of

ENGLISH

We accept this thesis as conforming to the
required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

August, 1970

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Date September 4, 1970.

ABSTRACT

Incidents of violence abound in most of the novels and short stories of Herman Melville, and in several of them, especially Billy Budd, the protagonist is characterized in terms of his attitude towards violence. The central contention of my thesis is that in the development of Melville's fiction from Moby-Dick to Billy Budd the thematic role of violence changes from that of a destructive to a more redemptive force. This change parallels another change that takes place in his fiction, from a focus on the individual who is destroyed by his commitment to violence, to the society which is temporarily purged of evil through the violent act of an individual.

In my first two chapters I discuss Moby-Dick and Pierre as representing Melville's early attitude to violence. In Moby-Dick violence is associated primarily with Ahab, whose characterization takes up about half of the novel. In Pierre violence becomes a more central motif, simply because Pierre is the only major character in the novel, and consequently his involvement with violence reflects the focus of the novel as a whole. Both of these novels employ the theme of violence mainly to dramatize the separation of the self from society.

In chapters three and four I discuss the ways in which "Bartleby the Scrivener" and "Benito Cereno" prefigure the role of violence in Billy Budd. The fact that even the timid lawyer is capable of feeling the faint stirrings of anger within him anticipates the concern of Billy Budd with the

universality of human emotion, and its important role in helping to redeem an excessively rationalistic society.

"Benito Cereno" also looks toward Billy Budd, in that Cereno's magnanimous concern for Delano's safety, which gives him the strength to break away from Babo's influence and jump into the boat, prefigures Billy's magnanimity at his execution.

In my final chapter I discuss the way in which the destructive violence and a focus on the fate of the individual in Moby-Dick has been replaced by the socially redemptive violence and a focus on the fate of society in Billy Budd. Melville's development in this respect may be measured by his transformation of murder into a socially desirable act. Billy destroys evil and is in turn destroyed by the society which he protects, yet his influence lives in the hearts of the sailors who have known him.

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INTRODUCTION

Incidents of violence abound in most of the novels and short stories of Herman Melville, and in several of them, especially Billy Budd, the protagonist is characterized in terms of his attitude towards violence. Critics have generally given their attention only to the more spectacular acts of violence in Melville's fiction, but a few have studied the development of his fiction with reference to its consistent theme of violence against social and spiritual injustices.¹ No critic, however, has discussed the chronological development of Melville's fiction in terms of the increasingly important thematic role of violence in it; I believe that such a study will do much to indicate the precise nature of the development of Melville's mind and art. My central contention is that in the development of Melville's fiction from Moby-Dick to Billy Budd the thematic role of violence changes from that of a destructive to a more redemptive force. This change parallels another change that takes place in his fiction, from a focus on the individual who is destroyed by his commitment to violence, to the society which is temporarily purged of evil through the violent act of an individual.

In my first two chapters I discuss Moby-Dick and Pierre as representing Melville's early attitude to violence. In Moby-Dick violence is associated almost exclusively with Ahab; Ishmael and the rest of the crew are not nearly so intimately involved with it, and thus it is less important thematically to the novel as a whole than it is in "Benito Cereno" or

Billy Budd, for example. In Pierre, violence becomes a more central motif, as Pierre progresses from a romantic, idealized association with violence to a practical knowledge of its most terrific aspects. Finally, it seems to him the only means by which he can express the full depth of his disillusionment with life. Here violence has lost the positive connotations for the individual which it has for Ahab, for while Ahab sees his ability to harpoon Moby Dick as a personal achievement, Pierre cannot find the will to believe in the efficacy of either murder or suicide. Pierre is no more closely associated than Ahab with acts of violence, but violence has a more central role in Pierre than Moby-Dick because Pierre is a more central figure in his novel than Ahab is in his. Leslie Fiedler has noted that both Ahab and Pierre represent Melville's most compelling characterizations in their pathological obsession with death and their immensely attractive vitality, and has contrasted their vitality with Billy Budd's "submissive" death-speech, which he interprets as an indication of the decline of Melville's creative genius.² My contention, on the contrary, is that Billy Budd's acts of violence and his death differ from those of Ahab and Pierre in that his fate is conceived as more noble than that of either of the earlier two heroes.

Whereas Moby-Dick and Pierre, then, indicate an early stage of Melville's attitude to violence, in which an individual's violence destroys the society around him, "Bartleby the Scrivener" and "Benito Cereno" prefigure the role of violence in Billy Budd more directly, in that, taken together, they dramatize

man's need to channel his violence in the effective manner which becomes the dominant theme in Billy Budd. The lawyer in "Bartleby" is as much a "male nurse" figure as Dowell in The Good Soldier, and as little capable of the "righteous indignation" which would prompt him to express the life force within him. Yet he too feels the feeble stirrings of anger at Bartleby's passive wilfulness, a sure indication that Melville felt the springs of violence to be based deeper in man than Emerson or Rousseau had supposed. "Benito Cereno" looks toward Billy Budd in that Cereno learns through his own enslavement to Babo and the Negroes that all men are susceptible to physical intimidation and mental coercion. This realization of man's universal Achilles' heel prompts him to shake off the paralytic fear which envelops him and jump into Amasa Delano's boat out of concern for the American's safety, and thus anticipates Billy's selfless submission to his own execution for the sake of Captain Vere.

In my final chapter I discuss the ways in which violence in Billy Budd is more thematically central than in any other of Melville's works of fiction. Since the role of violence in this novel demonstrates so great a change from Melville's earlier attitude, it will be useful here to consider briefly the events which may have influenced Melville's conception of violence from the time he left off writing fiction in 1857 until he began again with Billy Budd, which was written during the years 1888-91. As John Bernstein has pointed out, Melville published "Benito Cereno" in Putnam's Monthly Magazine in the winter of 1855, "a time at which the slavery controversy was

at its zenith."³ Six years later the Civil War erupted as the logical outcome of this heated controversy. Melville recorded his emotions regarding the conflict and published a volume of poetry entitled Battle-Pieces, and Aspects of the War in 1866, after the cessation of hostilities. A study of these poems reveals Melville as a firm believer in the justice of the Union cause who supported the war on the grounds that it was a necessary evil, the only way of ensuring the continuance of a system of democracy based on the equality of man. At the same time, however, Melville in this volume shows his political wisdom by urging the North to show great leniency to her defeated opponent for the good of the whole nation, a sentiment which he develops in poems such as "Lee in the Capitol." In the note appended to "A Conflict of Convictions" five years after this poem was written, Melville gives a clear indication of his attitude towards the war lately fought in the name and spirit of democracy. He thinks of the Civil War in the same way as he does the French Revolution now that it is over; that is, as a terrible conflict out of which might nevertheless emerge "a political advance along nearly the whole line for Europeans."⁴

The gloomy lull of the early part of the winter of 1860-1, seeming big with final disaster to our institutions, affected some minds that believed them to constitute one of the great hopes of mankind, much as the eclipse which came over the promise of the first French Revolution affected kindred natures, throwing them for the time into doubts and misgivings universal.⁵

This optimism is likely to seem hopelessly naive to

contemporary man, who lives in the orange shade of the nuclear bomb and is all too often exposed to the patently false argument that democracy can best be maintained by the liberal application of napalm to bodies in Viet Nam. But the critical dangers of attributing the lessons of modern experience to Melville are obvious, and should make us wary of interpreting the theme of Billy Budd too readily as an ironic, bitter commentary on mankind's destruction of goodness in the name of democracy and social order.

The strong probability arises, then, that the Civil War and its aftermath convinced Melville of the value which a democratic society should have to each individual who lives in it, and that this new conviction had a strong influence on his writing of Billy Budd. This explains why the destructive violence and a focus on the fate of the individual in Moby-Dick has been replaced by the socially redemptive violence and a focus on the fate of society in Billy Budd, and in my discussion of the last of Melville's works of fiction I try to show the nature of this change in Melville's attitude towards violence, especially how Billy has attained the self-mastery which Ahab seeks without success, by virtue of his love for his fellow man. I feel that Billy Budd represents the summit of Melville's attempt throughout his fiction to reconcile the needs of the individual with the needs of society, and that the measure of his success is his ability to represent Billy's violence as a socially redemptive act. Billy destroys evil and is in turn destroyed by the society which he has protected; yet his influence is not entirely

removed from society, but lives on in the form of a myth.

In my conclusion I compare aspects of Melville's use of violence with that of several other writers, both contemporary and modern. I conclude that Melville's attitude to violence is very individual; not only does it differ, for example, from that of Emerson, who felt that in the realm of the transcendental "those who shoot and those who are shot prove to be identical,"⁶ but it also differs from that of modern writers, such as Hemingway and Heller, for whom violence is more likely to represent either a test of absolute manhood or the ultimate obscenity.

CHAPTER I

Whatever else it may be, Moby-Dick is certainly a book concerned with violence. It begins with Ishmael's suicidal tendencies--"With a philosophical flourish Cato throws himself upon his sword; I quietly take to the ship"7 --and ends with the destruction of the whole social world, symbolized by the Pequod sliding under the waves. In between these two events the book is filled with descriptions of whales tortured by harpoons, violent disputes between members of the Pequod's crew, destruction visited upon the Pequod by the ocean and the life which it contains, and all the routine kinds of near-disaster common to the whale-fishery. Above all else, violence in Moby-Dick is associated with Captain Ahab. He goes far beyond even the well-stretched limits of the whale-fishery in his willingness to encounter violence and to defeat it. He is blasphemous, as Captain Bildad might say, in his willingness to court self-destruction; prudence has no place in his arsenal of virtues. In this chapter I will attempt to show that Ahab's excessive involvement with violence is depicted ambiguously by Melville, in that Ahab is portrayed heroically insofar as he embodies heroic resistance to elemental violence, but as morally reprehensible insofar as he implicates the other members of his society in his personal vendetta.

The most admirable feature of Ahab's character in the eyes of his crew is his ability to endure the violent blows of nature without flinching. Like Prometheus, his ability

to endure punishment which he is powerless to lessen earns him respect. As the Pequod rounds the Cape of Good Hope in pursuit of the Spirit-Spout, her crew is exposed to vicious and prolonged attacks by the violent seas. Through it all, Ahab himself refused to take shelter:

With his ivory leg inserted into its accustomed hole, and with one hand firmly grasping a shroud, Ahab for hours and hours would stand gazing dead to windward, while an occasional squall of sleet or snow would all but congeal his very eyelashes together. Meantime, the crew driven from the forward part of the ship by the perilous seas that burstingly broke over its bows, stood in a line along the bulwarks in the waist; and the better to guard against the leaping waves, each man had slipped himself into a sort of bowline secured to the rail, in which he swung as in a loosened belt. Few or no words were spoken; and the silent ship, as if manned by painted sailors in wax, day after day tore on through all the swift madness and gladness of the demoniac waves. By night the same muteness of humanity before the shrieks of the ocean prevailed; still in silence the men swung in the bowlines; still wordless Ahab stood up to the blast. Even when wearied nature seemed demanding repose he would not seek that repose in his hammock. (p.202)

This dogged kind of endurance against the violence of the natural elements is one of Ahab's most admirable characteristics.

As Ahab eagerly seeks to thrust himself into prominent exposure to the violence of the waves, so he relishes the opportunity of testing his flesh and blood against the violence of elemental fire in "The Candles." While the rest of the crew looks in awe at the mast-heads ominously lit up with lightning, Ahab moves effectively to demonstrate his fearlessness:

"Aye, aye, men!" cried Ahab. "Look up at it; mark

it well; the white flame but lights the way to the White Whale! Hand me those main-mast links there; I would fain feel this pulse, and let mine beat against it; blood against fire! So."

Then turning--the last link held fast in his left hand, he put his foot upon the Parsee; and with fixed upward eye, and high-flung right arm, he stood erect before the lofty tri-pointed trinity of flames. (p.416)

Ahab looks on his willingness to match blood against fire as a God-like characteristic. He believes that by enduring all the torments that the fire is capable of inflicting he displays his individuality and self-mastery:

"Thou canst blind; but I can then grope. Thou canst consume; but I can then be ashes. Take the homage of these poor eyes, and shutter-hands. I would not take it. The lightning flashes through my skull; mine eye-balls ache and ache; my whole beaten brain seems as beheaded, and rolling on some stunning ground. Oh, oh! Yet blindfold, yet will I talk to thee." (p.417)

But the fire spirit too has its superior against which it revolts, and Ahab thus feels a violent kinship with it:

"'Here again with haughty agony, I read my sire. Leap! leap up, and lick the sky! I leap with thee; I burn with thee; would fain be welded with thee; defyingly I worship thee!'"

(p.417) As the mere agent of the "unsuffusing thing" beyond it the fire is not the most worthy object of Ahab's rebellion. His capacity to absorb its violent intimidation is absolute; short of killing him, it cannot deter him from his plan of revenge. He even uses the fear which it inspires in the rest of his crew to enhance himself in their eyes, as when he picks up the fiery harpoon and warns the crew:

"All your oaths to hunt the White Whale are as binding

as mine; and heart, soul, and body, lungs and life, old Ahab is bound. And that ye may know to what tune this heart beats; look ye here; thus I blow out the last fear!" And with one blast of his breath he extinguished the flame. (p.418)

But although he endures it, there can be no doubt that Ahab truly suffers under his exposure to the corposants.

Ahab's attempt to prove his hardihood against the forces of elemental violence goes beyond merely exposing himself to them as they thrust themselves upon him; he also uses his intelligence to overcome nature's attempts to deflect him from his purpose. In "The Needle," Ahab discovers that the Pequod's compasses have reversed themselves during the magnetic storm, and now indicate that the Pequod is sailing East rather than West. The seas against which the Pequod had been fighting furiously now help thrust her on her way home. Ahab will not tolerate this once he becomes aware of the mistake, even though the Pequod is sailing the easiest course:

Deliberately standing before the binnacle, and eyeing the transpointed compasses, the old man, with the sharp of his extended hand, now took the precise bearing of the sun, and satisfied that the needles were exactly inverted, shouted out his orders for the ship's course to be changed accordingly. The yards were braced hard up; and once more the Pequod thrust her undaunted bows into the opposing wind, for the supposed fair one had only been juggling her. (p.424)

It is clear that Ahab welcomes exposure to violence from the elements; such danger is a price he is willing and prepared to pay for exercising revenge on the white whale. Even the destruction of his log and line by the "rolling billows" is not enough to deter him. He continues to embrace every

opportunity to prove to his crew his capability as their leader: "'I crush the quadrant, the thunder turns the needles, and now the mad sea parts the log-line. But Ahab can mend all'" (p.427).

If Ahab is called upon to use all of his powers of resistance against the violence of the elements, even greater fortitude is necessitated by the violent attacks mounted against him by animated life. All the savage creatures of the sea seem to be against Ahab's search for revenge on the white whale. On his first ascent to the mast-head, for example, from which vantage point he hopes to descry Moby Dick, Ahab is attacked by a savage sea-hawk which removes his hat and drops it ominously into the ocean far ahead of the Pequod (p.440).⁸ Later, another sea-hawk removes the Pequod's flag (p.463), while still another is killed by Tashtego when it tries to prevent Ahab's flag from being placed at the sinking Pequod's main-mast. Similarly, during Ahab's pursuit of Moby Dick the sharks follow his boat "without molesting the others" (p.463), and chew the blades of the oars in an apparent attempt to hinder Ahab's progress:

As Ahab glided over the waves the unpitying sharks accompanied him; and so pertinaciously stuck to the boat; and so continually bit at the plying oars, that the blades became jagged and crunched, and left small splinters in the sea, at almost every dip.

"Heed them not! those teeth but give new rowlocks to your oars. Pull on! 'tis the better rest, the shark's jaw than the yielding water."

"But at every bite, sir, the thin blades grow smaller and smaller!"

"They will last long enough! pull on!--But who can tell"--he muttered--"whether these sharks swim to feast on the whale or on Ahab?--But pull on! Aye, all alive, now--we near him. (pp.465-66)

On passing through the Straits of Sundra the Pequod is spurred on in much the same manner by human sharks--the Malay pirates. Like their counterparts of the animal world their intention is to put an end to Ahab's quest, but their attempt is likewise misinterpreted by Ahab, who sees them as "whips and rowels" to the Pequod. He sees himself as "now both chasing and being chased to his deadly end; and not only that, but a herd of remorseless wild pirates and inhuman atheistical devils . . . infernally cheering him on with their curses" (p.321).

And as the savage sharks, pirates, and sea-hawks violently oppose Ahab's voyage, so the harmless denizens of the deep instinctively avoid his company. When the Pequod passes the Albatross and Ahab shouts out his intention to chase Moby Dick, there is an ominous occurrence of this kind.

At that moment the two wakes were fairly crossed, and instantly, then, in accordance with their singular ways, shoals of small harmless fish, that for some days before had been placidly swimming by our side, darted away with what seemed shuddering fins, and ranged themselves fore and aft with the stranger's flanks. . . .

"Swim away from me, do ye?" murmured Ahab, gazing over into the water. There seemed but little in the words, but the tone conveyed more of deep helpless sadness than the insane old man had ever before evinced. (pp.203-204)

Deserted by the harmless aspects of nature, Ahab is drawn ever further into the exclusive vortex of violence and destruction.

At the center of this vortex Ahab meets with Moby Dick. No other creature of the sea had been able to harm him over forty years of active whaling, but with one sweep of his jaws, Moby Dick had "dismasted him." This was Ahab's

first defeat, an insufferable affront to his egomania. The physical violence perpetrated on him by Moby Dick was not the most painful aspect of Ahab's suffering, however:

Then, in darting at the monster, knife in hand, he had but given loose to a sudden, passionate, corporal animosity; and when he received the stroke that tore him, he probably but felt the agonizing bodily laceration, but nothing more. Yet, when by this collision forced to turn towards home, and for long months of days and weeks, Ahab and anguish lay stretched together in one hammock, rounding in mid winter that dreary, howling Patagonian Cape; then it was, that his torn body and gashed soul bled into one another; and so interfusing, made him mad. (p.160)

The pain of Moby Dick's violent assault on him is increased for Ahab as he broods on his injury while ashore. And during the actual voyage Ahab can never completely trust his ivory leg; it wrenches him on his return to the Pequod from the Samuel Enderby, causing great pain, and is bit off by Moby Dick on the second day of the chase, leaving only a painful splinter: "Oh, oh, oh! how this splinter gores me now! Accursed fate! that the unconquerable captain in the soul should have such a craven mate!" (p.458). Because the ivory leg is the same colour as Moby Dick, and because it is made of whalebone, the violent pain which it causes Ahab becomes easily attributable in his own mind to the white whale. It serves as a constant indication of the violence which he must endure if his mission of revenge is to be successful.

These painful but non-lethal assaults on Ahab by Moby Dick are only foreshadowings of the violence which he is to undergo during his final chase of the white whale. It is one of the greatneses of Moby-Dick that Ahab's assertion of the violent intentions of Moby Dick towards him is borne out

in the physical events of the three day's chase. On the first day his boat is destroyed and Ahab himself is physically and mentally exhausted: "Far inland, nameless wails came from him, as desolate sounds from out ravines" (p.451). On the second day Ahab's boat is stove in again and his ivory leg is snapped off. As he tells the crew, he has reached a point beyond which he can no longer feel bodily pain:

"Even with a broken bone, old Ahab is untouched; and I account no living bone of mine one jot more me, than this dead one that's lost. Nor white whale, nor man, nor fiend, can so much as graze old Ahab in his own proper and inaccessible being. Can any lead touch yonder floor, any mast scrape yonder roof?" (p.458)

The third day's chase sees the sinking of Ahab's ship by Moby Dick. In a gesture of final defiance, Ahab hurls his harpoon into the white whale, refusing to submit to the intimidation of violence:

The harpoon was darted; the stricken whale flew forward; with igniting velocity the line ran through the groove; --ran foul. Ahab stooped to clear it; he did clear it; but the flying turn caught him round the neck, and voicelessly as Turkish mutes bowstring their victim, he was shot out of the boat, ere the crew knew he was gone. Next instant, the heavy eye-splice in the rope's final end flew out of the stark-empty tub, knocked down an oarsman, and smiting the sea, disappeared in its depths. (p.468)

Because of his refusal to submit to the bullying violence of the gods, Ahab's final integrity and his stature as a tragic hero are undeniable; as Richard Sewall points out,

In the end, Ahab goes down 'death-glorious' like his

ship, 'ungodly' yet 'godlike,' demonic in his own hate and vengeance, yet noble in his sense of the community of all unjust suffering. The book does not pronounce him good or evil . . . but carrying him through his fatal action in all its tensions, paradoxes, and ambiguities, the book, like a true tragedy, goes deeply into the mysteries of all moral judgements.⁹

Ahab's tragic stature as the object of violence directed against him by a malignant power is only one side of his characterization, however. He is also the perpetrator of unjust violence against his crew. Starbuck realizes this paradox; in chapter 38 ("Dusk") he formulates a reply to Ahab's quarter-deck speech: "Who's over him, he cries;--aye, he would be a democrat to all above; look, how he lords it over all below!" (p.148) This inconsistency in Ahab's philosophy is well-developed throughout the novel as Ahab uses his position to tyrannize over the crew.

The first indication of Ahab's willingness to use the violent tactics he deplores in his omnipotent adversary himself comes in the chapter immediately following Ishmael's description of his captain's first appearance above decks "with a crucifixion in his face; in all the nameless regal overbearing dignity of some mighty woe" (p.111). In the next chapter, Stubb suggests that the noise of Ahab's nocturnal paces might be lessened if his ivory leg were somehow muffled:

"Am I a cannon-ball, Stubb," said Ahab, "that thou wouldst use me that fashion? But go thy ways; I had forgot. Below to thy nightly grave; where such as ye sleep between shrouds, to use ye to the filling one at last.--Down, dog, and kennel!"

Starting at the unforeseen concluding exclamation of the so suddenly scornful old man, Stubb was speechless a moment; then said excitedly, "I am not used to be spoken to that way, sir; I do but less than half like it, sir." . . .

"Then be called ten times a donkey, and a mule, and an ass, and begone, or I'll clear the world of thee!"

As he said this, Ahab advanced upon him with such overbearing terrors in his aspect, that Stubb involuntarily retreated. (pp.112-113)

As the chapter preceding this described Ahab's "cruxifixion" --his susceptibility to violence--so this one indicates his willingness to employ violent means himself in order to enforce his will. It is more than anything else the gratuitous nature of the violence he uses to subjugate Stubb that indicates the callousness to which his humanity has been reduced in the course of his own suffering.

Ahab is too intelligent to prejudice his control of the crew by overly blatant use of violence, however--at least during the early part of the Pequod's cruise. His speech to them in "The Quarter-Deck" is a masterful attempt to persuade them to join him in his search for revenge of their own free wills. Ahab's appeal is couched in terms that he feels will be effective in winning them over to his hunt; in turn, he appeals to their love of excitement, their avarice, and their pity for the painful injury inflicted on him by the white whale. As a reward for their agreement, he gives them liquor. When Starbuck remonstrates with him, on the grounds that to be "enraged with a dumb thing, Captain Ahab, seems blasphemous," Ahab silences him with a torrent of reasons for his hatred of the white whale, and the hint that if he refuses to help he will lay himself open to the

charge of cowardice. On the surface, at least, there is no discernible violence in Ahab's appeal to the men; he attempts to persuade them into helping him rather than intimidating them. However, he does challenge the mates to witness the intensity of his desire for revenge by meeting his eyes, and clearly intimates that their inability to do so safeguards them from instant destruction:

"Advance, ye mates! Cross your lances full before me. Well done! Let me touch the axis." So saying, with extended arm, he grasped the three level, radiating lances at their crossed centre; while so doing, suddenly and nervously twitched them; meanwhile, glancing intently from Starbuck to Stubb; from Stubb to Flask. It seemed as though, by some nameless, interior volition, he would fain have shocked into them the same fiery emotion accumulated within the Leyden jar of his own magnetic life. The three mates quailed before his strong, sustained, and mystic aspect. Stubb and Flask looked sideways from him; the honest eye of Starbuck fell downright.

"In vain!" cried Ahab; "but, maybe, 'tis well. For did ye three but once take the full-forced shock, then mine own electric thing, that had perhaps expired from out me. Perchance, too, it would have dropped ye dead." (p.146)

The violence which is implicit in "The Quarter-Deck" comes to the surface in the following chapter, as the crew celebrate their issue of grog with festivities in the fore-castle. As the winds and the waves rise, their dancing changes imperceptibly into a quarrel between Daggoo and the Spanish sailor. The crew gather excitedly into a circle around the two combatants, urging them on, while the old Manx sailor reflects on man's characteristically violent nature: "Ready formed. There! the ringed horizon. In that

ring Cain struck Abel. Sweet work, right work! No? Why then, God, mad'st thou the ring?" (p.154) The horizon of man's potential, then, includes a crippling tendency to enter into conflict with his fellow man. This is the only instance in the novel of physical conflict within the crew, and coming as it does immediately after Ahab's reward of liquor to the crew, it clearly implicates him as in part responsible for this violence. Not only does he himself resort to violence, then, but he also causes strife among the crew, and this is the most serious drawback to the philosophy of violence which he advocates.

As the cruise of the Pequod continues, Ahab becomes less able than before to conceal his violent behaviour from the crew. When Starbuck reports a leak among the casks of whale oil in the hold and suggests that the ship be halted until the leak can be located, Ahab's reaction is insistently negative. When Starbuck continues to recommend the repairs, and questions Ahab's judgement, his captain's reaction is swift and violent:

Ahab seized a loaded musket from the rack (forming part of most South-Sea-men's cabin furniture), and pointing it towards Starbuck, exclaimed: "There is one God that is Lord over the earth, and one Captain that is lord over the Pequod.-- On deck!" (p.394)

This scene recalls Ahab's earlier contemptuous behavior towards Stubb; in both cases Ahab's mates have received unjustifiably harsh treatment from their captain. But Ahab's evident willingness to resort to violence serves its purpose

in breaking their resistance to his supreme authority. No longer do they believe that Ahab can be deflected from his quest by either logic or consideration for the crew; and as the search for Moby Dick continues, this fact becomes increasingly evident.

In "The Candles," for instance, Starbuck makes another attempt to persuade Ahab to respect the evil omens and to sail for home, to terminate his voyage "ill begun, ill continued." His plea to Ahab is made within the hearing of the superstitious crew.

Overhearing Starbuck, the panic-stricken crew instantly ran to the braces--though not a sail was left aloft. For the moment all the aghast mate's thoughts seemed theirs; they raised a half mutinous cry. But dashing the rattling lightning links to the deck, and snatching the burning harpoon, Ahab waved it like a torch among them; swearing to transfix with it the first sailor that but cast loose a rope's end. Petrified by his aspect, and still more shrinking from the fiery dart that he held, the men fell back in dismay, . . . (p.418)

Ahab now makes no attempt to reason with the crew; he relies on naked terror to enforce his will, and the crew is intimidated by his indiscriminate threats of violence.

As the hunt for Moby Dick approaches its climax Ahab's tolerance wears thin. In "The Needle," he discovers the helmsman steering the wrong course and strikes him, thinking that he has mutinously attempted to return to Nantucket. His attitude towards Pip changes, also, from one of protectiveness and tolerance to one of impatience. When he notices that Pip's madness may wean him from his purpose, he has no hesitation in ordering him to stop his pleading for the abandonment of

the quest: "Weep so, and I will murder thee! have a care, for Ahab too is mad" (p.436).

By the second day of the chase, when Ahab's oriental crew shrink fearfully from pursuing Moby Dick, Ahab is no longer willing to conceal his monomania behind a mask of reason: "Down, men! the first thing that but offers to jump from this boat I stand in, that thing I harpoon. Ye are not other men, but my arms and legs; and so obey me" (p.465). As Ahab nears the completion of his quest his superficial tolerance and human concern fall from him, and he stands revealed as a totally egocentric monstrosity capable only of violence.

When Ahab's suffering and consequent use of violence to enforce his will is looked at in the narrowest perspective it may well appear that his inhumanity to his crew is eminently justifiable; but when looked at more broadly, it becomes evident that his philosophy of violence is far inferior to Ishmael's humanism. For Ahab's moral responsibilities are not only to himself, but also to the crew which he captains --officially and intellectually. He is able to obtain the chance for his revenge only by false pretences, both towards the ship's owners and the crew; and as a consequence his Promethean self-sacrifice is marred by his willingness to expend the lives of others in his own assertion of greatness.

There is no doubt, however, that Ahab is in himself a great and representatively tragic figure. However mad his philosophy of violent defiance appears, it has the one great

virtue of taking into account the full force of human suffering. Ahab does not ignore the violent aspect of the universe, as does Starbuck, and he is more capable than his less intelligent crew of discerning the pervasiveness of evil in human life. As a consequence, he is more suited to take onto his own shoulders the burden of human indignation against transcendental evil. In his prescription to the carpenter for the kind of man ideally suited to the burden he carries he shows himself fully aware of man's weakness:

"I'll order a complete man after a desirable pattern. Imprimis, fifty feet high in his socks; then, chest modelled after the Thames Tunnel; then, legs with roots to 'em, to stay in one place; then, arms three feet through the wrist; no heart at all, brass forehead, and about a quarter of an acre of fine brains; and let me see--shall I order eyes to see outwards? No, but put a sky-light on top of his head to illuminate inwards." (p.390)

In his specification that this perfect specimen should have no heart, Ahab shows himself to be aware that the ability to feel violence is mankind's greatest burden.

And of all the sufferings that can afflict man, the worst, in Ahab's opinion, is for him to find himself attacked unjustly. This is the worst suffering because man is unable to rationalize or intellectualize it, or to deal with it in any orderly manner. This is insufferable to any intellectual, but especially so to a whaling captain like Ahab, whose occupation consists in the methodical processing of extremely powerful creatures. He is accustomed to subduing the hazards of the whale fishery through method, and as his careful manipulation of his crew's emotions shows, he is equally capable

of applying his method to the control of humanity. When he comes up against a whale which disrupts this method, like Moby Dick, he is more than normally discomfited. His meditation on the insufferably illogical effects of naturalistic violence is clearly enunciated in "The Sphynx," where he addresses the head of a Sperm Whale attached to the Pequod:

"Speak, mighty head, and tell us the secret thing that is in thee, Of all divers, thou has dived the deepest. That head upon which the upper sun now gleams, has moved amid this world's foundations. Where unrecorded names and navies rust, and untold hopes and anchors rot; where in her murderous hold this frigate earth is ballasted with bones of millions of the drowned; there, in that awful water-land, there was thy most familiar home. Thou hast been where bell or diver never went; hast slept by many a sailor's side, where sleepless mothers would give their lives to lay them down. Thou saw'st the locked lovers when leaping from their flaming ship; heart to heart they sank beneath the exulting wave; true to each other, when heaven seemed false to them. Thou saw'st the murdered mate when tossed by pirates from the midnight deck; for hours he fell into the deeper midnight of the insatiate maw; and his murderers still sailed on unharmed--while swift lightnings shivered the neighboring ship that would have borne a righteous husband to outstretched, longing arms. O head! thou hast seen enough to split the planets and make an infidel of Abraham, and not one syllable is thine!" (p.264)

The paradoxical fact that righteousness provides no immunity from violence is the source of Ahab's greatest woe, and leads him to abandon his attempt to conciliate the heartless gods in favour of a philosophy of defiance and retributive violence.

As I mentioned in my discussion of the chapter titled "Midnight, Forecastle," perhaps Ahab's most sinister aspect is his misuse of his position at the head of the crew--both intellectually and socially--to manipulate their various wills into agreement with his philosophy of violent defiance. The only incident of physical violence among the crew members, it

will be remembered, occurs as a result of Ahab's gift of extra rations of grog. Melville elaborates Ahab's success in twisting the crew into his diabolical frame of mind in "The Chase--Second Day" in order to emphasize Ahab's moral responsibility for their deaths and undoubted damnation. Yet it is important to observe that, just as his gift of liquor only brought to the surface his crew's inherent liability to commit violence, and did not instill the impulse to violence in them, so he is only partially responsible for their participation in the climactic struggle with Moby Dick. Melville is careful to point out that they themselves derive excitement from the chase, and welcome the opportunity of throwing off all restraint in the emotion of the moment:

The frenzies of the chase had by this time worked them bubbling up, like old wine worked anew. Whatever pale fears and forebodings some of them might have felt before; these were not only now kept out of sight through the growing awe of Ahab, but they were broken up, and on all sides routed, as timid prairie hares that scatter before the bounding bison. The hand of Fate had snatched all their souls; and by the stirring perils of the previous day; the rack of the past night's suspense; the fixed, unfearing, blind, reckless way in which their wild craft went plunging towards its flying mark; by all these things, their hearts were bowled along. The wind that made great bellies of their sails, and rushed the vessel on by arms invisible as irresistible; this seemed the symbol of that unseen agency which so enslaved them to the race.

They were one man, not thirty . . . and were all directed to that fatal goal which Ahab their one lord and keel did point to. (pp. 454-455)

The limitations of Ahab's philosophy of violence become especially apparent when it is balanced against Ishmael's broad humanism. Ishmael is no less aware than Ahab of the

preponderance of violence in a "cannibalistic universe," but he is able to see and appreciate its misleading but nevertheless real beauty. Perhaps the most impressive instance of this ability is Ishmael's description of the innocently beautiful activities of the whales which mate in the midst of a circle of slaughter, in "The Grand Armada":

Some of the subtlest secrets of the seas seemed divulged to us in this enchanted pond. We saw young Leviathan amours in the deep.

And thus, though surrounded by circle upon circle of consternation and affrights, did these inscrutable creatures at the center freely and fearlessly indulge in all peaceful concernments; yea, serenely revelled in dalliance and delight. But even so, amid the tornadoed Atlantic of my being, do I myself still for ever centrally disport in mute calm; and while ponderous planets of unwaning woe revolve round me, deep down and deep inland there I still bathe me in eternal mildness of joy. (p.326)¹⁰

Unlike Ahab, Ishmael accepts the temporal nature of happiness;

since by many prolonged, repeated experiences, I have perceived that in all cases man must eventually lower, or at least shift, his conceit of attainable felicity; not placing it anywhere in the intellect or the fancy; but in the wife, the heart, the bed, the table, the saddle, the fire-side, the country; . . . (p.349)

He readily accepts the fact that he is part of a cannibalistic universe--"I myself am a savage, owning no allegiance but to the King of the Cannibals; and ready at any moment to rebel against him" (p.232)--but at the same time, through this knowledge he matures into the "wisdom that is woe," while Ahab falls into the error of the "woe that is madness" (p.355). As Ahab elsewhere says of his position: "Gifted with the high perception, I lack the low, enjoying power; damned, most

subtly and most malignantly! damned in the midst of Paradise!" (p.147) That is to say, Ahab has allowed his perception of the pervasiveness of violence to deaden him, to cut him off from all ordinary human pleasures. Only in acts of pure violence can he redeem the meaninglessness of his life.

Ahab is therefore treated in two basic ways in Moby-Dick. His philosophy of violent defiance against the unjust gods is defended by Melville, implicitly, by making him a heroic figure on the grounds that he thinks himself to have suffered greatly at their hands. On this view, he is not to be blamed for any of his actions, including his implication of the crew in his own destruction. The other view of Ahab's violent philosophy is more critical of the old captain. Its basis is the humanitarian one that any violence done to a human being is reprehensible and evil--however justified in terms of cosmic provocation. Because Ahab is gratuitously violent in his dealings with his crew, and because as the plot progresses he becomes less concerned with their welfare than formerly, his actions are reprehensible. Ahab's madness is the device used by Melville to allow these two attitudes towards the old captain to co-exist. However reprehensible the captain's violence towards his crew appears to be the fact remains that he has been driven mad by the violence of circumstances.

As I have tried to show in this chapter, Moby-Dick deals with man's relationship to violence. Ahab is shown to be a morally magnificent figure insofar as his ability to construct a meaningful life and death out of the materials

of suffering is concerned, through his philosophy of violent defiance, but he also is morally reprehensible, ultimately, insofar as he makes unscrupulous use of his social position and his intellectual preeminence to guide his unsuspecting crew into the vortex of violence and blasphemy. This irreconcilable ambivalence of Melville's attitude towards Ahab, then, demonstrates a first stage of Melville's changing attitude towards the problem of violence. The next stage involves an examination of the role of violence in the life of a virtuous man, a man of compassion, which Ahab is not.

CHAPTER II

To contrast the nature of the violence in Moby-Dick with that in Pierre; or, the Ambiguities is to immediately become aware of the bitterness associated with the violence in the latter novel. Whereas Ahab attains grandeur through his intellectual perception of a malignantly violent universe and his decision to defy it, Pierre's commitment to violence has much less of a positive connotation. Ahab sees the evil of the world clearly from the very beginning; Pierre is the victim of false optimism and only gradually becomes aware that reality is amoral and dangerously violent, not virtuous and romantically violent. Pierre's death is essentially individual; Ahab's is significantly representative of the strength of human will. And lastly, Ahab always remains a representative spokesman while Pierre is reduced both figuratively and actually to speaking for himself alone. In this chapter, then, we shall look at the relationship between violence and the departure from social and human ties of the ethical isolato.

It is important to notice, first, that in the early chapters of Pierre violence is treated in a conventionally romantic manner, with Pierre's conception of violence shown to be fashioned along chivalric lines. He is aware of his great-grandfather's "soldierly fate" earned in the Indian Wars around Saddle Meadows, and has been educated by his doting and prideful mother to venerate his warlike antecedents. For his grandfather had been a fighter of renown also,

and now serves as an inexhaustible source of family pride. When Pierre hears the peculiar tap of a British kettle-drum playing in the band of the military company of the village he is forced to remember that it was once "captured by his grandfather in fair fight, and afterwards suitably inscribed on the brass and bestowed upon the Saddle Meadows Artillery Corps." These reminders of his brave forefathers cannot but have an influence on Pierre, who is "rather high-blooded; and sometimes read the History of the Revolutionary War, and possessed a mother who very frequently made allusions to the epaulettes of the Major-General his grandfather."¹¹

With these glorious military antecedents and encouragement from such a mother Pierre's imagination naturally enough constructs glorious military roles for himself. And not surprisingly--in Freudian terms especially--the first of these roles assumed by Pierre involves the protection of his widowed mother from suitors who would take her away from her son:

Pierre when namelessly annoyed, and sometimes even jealously transported by the too ardent admiration of the handsome youths, who now and then, caught in unintended snares, seemed to entertain some insane hopes of wedding this unattainable being; Pierre had more than once, with a playful malice, openly sworn, that the man--gray-beard, or beardless--who should dare to propose marriage to his mother, that man would by some peremptory unrevealed agency immediately disappear from the earth. (p.25)

But in the rashness of his military enthusiasm, Pierre is not satisfied to protect one family member from imaginary threats: he wishes also for a sister to protect from insult and injury:

"Oh, had my father but had a daughter!" cried Pierre;

"some one whom I might love, and protect, and fight for, if need be. It must be a glorious thing to engage in a mortal quarrel on a sweet sister's behalf! Now, of all things, would to heaven, I had a sister!" (p.27)

That Pierre is forced to fight against a brother defending Lucy Tartan is perhaps one of the most telling ironies in the novel; for Pierre is never in the position of having to defend Isabel, his own half-sister, from insult or injury in the way he romantically anticipated.

Throughout his innocently naive life at Saddle Meadows Pierre remains in a state of blissful ignorance as far as the realities of life and violence are concerned. Protected from all material wants by his social position, he comes to believe he is personally invulnerable to the exigencies of fate and chance. He looks upon himself as under the special protection of Providence, and is willing to risk his life in mere stunts by way of impressing his equally naive fiancée, Lucy Tartan. As proof of his confidence in his own invulnerability, he walks without the slightest trace of fear among the legs of the colts which draw his carriage:

With a low, long, almost unaudible whistle, Pierre got between the colts, among the harness. Whereat Lucy started, and uttered a faint cry, but Pierre told her to keep perfectly quiet, for there was not the least danger in the world. . . .

Pierre, still between the horses, now stepped upon the pole of the phaeton; then stepping down, indefinitely disappeared, or became partially obscured among the living colonnade of the horses' eight slender and glossy legs. He entered the colonnade one way, and after a variety of meanderings, came out another way; during all of which equestrian performance, the two colts kept gayly neighing, and good-humoredly moving their heads perpendicularly up and down; and sometimes turning them sideways toward Lucy as much as to say--

We understand young master; we understand him, Miss; never fear, pretty lady; why, bless your delicious little heart, we played with Pierre before you ever did. (p.44)

The ignorance of the real danger of violence in his stunt is characteristic of Pierre's early attitude toward life. Later, in his visit to the Terror Stone, Pierre is to grow into a greater awareness of the potentiality for violence which inheres in the superficially reassuring world. At the moment, however, his attitude to potential violence stems less from confidence than ignorance.

Up to this point, Pierre's life has not given him cause for any kind of fear. But as he walks along the road to Lucy's house to propose marriage he is intercepted by a mysterious stranger who hands him a letter which is to effect the destruction of his previously happy and uncomplicated life. In the letter, a woman named Isabel Banford informs him that she is his abandoned sister. The implication of the letter is that Pierre's father, whom he had been taught to idealize as both a perfect gentleman and a perfect Christian, had fathered a child out of wedlock and then abandoned her. Pierre had long cherished an image of a marble shrine in his heart, in which

"stood the perfect marble form of his departed father; without blemish, unclouded, snow-white, and serene; Pierre's fond personification of perfect human goodness and virtue. . . . Not to God had Pierre ever gone in his heart, unless by ascending the steps of that shrine, and so making it the vestibule of his abstractest religion" (p.93).

The effect wrought by Isabel's communication is vividly described;

This amazing letter, deprived Pierre for the time of all lucid and definite thought or feeling. He hung half-lifeless in his chair; his hand, clutching the letter was pressed against his heart, as if some assassin had stabbed him and fled; and Pierre was now holding the dagger in the wound, to staunch the outgushing of the blood. (p.90)

The violent nature of the metaphor is perfectly appropriate to Pierre's introduction to the world of experience and disappointment. It signals the end of his state of blissful ignorance and the beginning of his many encounters with the violence that accompanies truth and virtue in Pierre.

Part of the anguish experienced by Pierre is a result of his immediate intuition of the extent to which his father had been able to conceal his heartless abandonment of his daughter under the appearance of sobriety and Christian charity. The pain experienced by his father's victim is clearly brought home to Pierre in Isabel's letter:

Oh, my brother, my dear, dear Pierre,--help me, fly to me; see, I perish without thee;--pity, pity,--here I freeze in the wide, wide world;--no father, no mother, no sister, no brother, no living thing in the fair form of humanity, that holds me dear. No more, oh no more, dear Pierre, can I endure to be an outcast in the world, for which the dear Saviour died. (p.89)

If his father can conceal such inhumanity to his own flesh and blood, Pierre reasons, then what enormities may be committed daily in a society which bases its moral judgements on superficial appearances alone?

Ay, Pierre, now indeed art thou hurt with a wound, never to be completely healed but in heaven; for thee, the before undistrusted moral beauty of the world is forever fled; . . . and now, now for the first time, Pierre, Truth rolls a black billow through thy soul! Ah, miserable thou,

to whom Truth, in her first tides, bears nothing but wrecks!
(p.90)

Pierre is indignant at Isabel's enforced social isolation and wishes to rectify this penalty by recognizing her as his sister before the world. He realizes that his mother will do all in her power to prevent this, however, when he sees her determination, as the representative of the "best" society in Saddle Meadows, to persecute a local woman, Delly Ulver, and her illegitimate child. Mary Glendinning informs the local clergyman, Mr. Falsgrave, that such a woman is not to be tolerated in the community. Pierre is upset at the vindictively violent attitude of his mother towards Delly and her infant; it is his first exposure to active social violence. He is particularly upset at the words from Scripture which his mother draws out of the Rev. Falsgrave: "The sins of the father shall be visited upon the children to the third generation" (p.127). Such sentiments are particularly abhorrent to him because they clearly indicate that Mary would not be willing to accept Isabel into the Glendinning family. Thinking of his own position, he insistently pursues the matter further:

"Should the legitimate child shun the illegitimate, when one father is father to both?" . . .

"Ask the world, Pierre"--said Mrs. Glendinning warmly--
"and ask your own heart."

"My own heart? I will, Madam"--said Pierre, now looking up steadfastly; "but what do you think, Mr. Falsgrave?" letting his glance drop again--"should the one shun the other? should the one refuse his highest sympathy and perfect love for the other, especially if that other be deserted by all the rest of the world? What think you would have been our blessed Saviour's thoughts on such a matter? And what was that he so mildly said to the adulteress?"

A swift color passed over the clergyman's countenance, suffusing even his expanded brow; he slightly moved in his chair, and looked uncertainly from Pierre to his mother.
(pp.128-9)

Clearly, the society represented by Mary Glendinning and the Rev. Falsgrave betrays the doctrine of forgiveness preached in the New Testament which Pierre values so highly. He is especially alarmed by his discovery that society is vindictive because he himself is moved by the contradictory motive of charity to help Isabel. He is hindered considerably in this desire by Mary's threat of opposing him if he acts in anything against her wishes:

"Tempt me no more, Pierre. I will ask no secret from thee; all shall be voluntary between us, as it ever has been, until very lately, or all shall be nothing between us. Beware of me, Pierre. There lives not that being in the world of whom thou hast more reason to beware, so you continue but a little longer to act thus with me." (p.158)

Placed between the threatened violence of his mother and his desire to act virtuously towards his sister Pierre is in dire need of (oracular) advice.

He decides to go out into the countryside in order to ponder his decision, and finds himself in the vicinity of a huge antediluvian rock which he has named the Terror Stone. In his uncertainty as to what course of action he should follow Pierre is prompted to crawl into a "horrible interspace" underneath the rock. Like his foolish prank beneath the horses' legs, Pierre's urge to expose himself to potential violence in this way appears almost masochistic. Especially since "it seemed as if the dropping of one seed from the beak

of the smallest flying bird would topple the immense mass over, crashing against the trees" (p.162). Unlike the earlier time, however, he now takes into account the possibility of his being destroyed. He foresees that in helping Isabel he may be laying himself open to violent retribution from both his mother and society at large. By putting himself at the mercy of the Terror Stone Pierre hopes to find out what fate the gods have in store for him one way or the other. If it is to be a painful and unnecessary death he asks the Terror Stone to exact its price in suffering now, by crushing him:

A down-darting bird, all song, swiftly lighted on the unmoved and eternally immovable balancings of the Terror Stone, and cheerfully chirped to Pierre. The tree-boughs bent and waved to the rushes of a sudden, balmy wind; and slowly Pierre crawled forth, and stood haughtily upon his feet, as if he owed thanks to none, and went his moody way. (p.163)

Pierre here for the first time experiences the essential ambiguity of human life; his survival may be taken as a sign that fate endorses his resolution to commit himself to truth and virtue, but it may also be interpreted as a refusal of the gods to answer his question at this time, preferring to lull him into a false sense of security with the song of the bird so that his final suffering may be that much more painful. Like the equivocal answers given by the Delphic oracles to their questioners, the Terror Stone's message to Pierre does not provide any guarantee as to which course of action is the best for him to take.

The Terror Stone contains another message for Pierre as well. It is known to him alternatively as the Memnon Stone,

after the son of Aurora who was killed by his "overmatch" while fighting in a rightful quarrel on another's behalf. Upon his death Memnon's bereaved subjects erected a memorial to him. Pierre is all too aware that in his day virtuous action is not looked upon so highly. No longer does society band together to erect memorials to its noblest personages; no longer can the virtuous man expect to be mourned by a god:

Now as the Memnon Statue survives down to this present day, so does that nobly-striving but ever-shipwrecked character in some royal youths (for both Memnon and Hamlet were the sons of kings), of which that statue is the melancholy type. But Memnon's sculptured woes did once melodiously resound; now all is mute. Fit emblem that of old, poetry was a consecration and an obsequy to all hapless modes of human life; but in a bantering, barren, and prosaic, heartless age, Aurora's music-moan is lost among our drifting sands, which whelm alike the monument and the dirge. (p.164)

The man of integrity now has neither public acclaim nor divine mourning to look for as compensation for his death; Pierre realizes that if he decides to help Isabel he can expect no assistance from society or god.

Cast on his own resources, he looks to the deepest thinkers for guidance, and begins to read again Hamlet and Dante's Inferno. But this advice is equivocal also, like that of the Terror Stone. "Dante had taught him that he had bitter cause of quarrel; Hamlet taunted him with faltering in the fight" (p.200); yet neither could provide him with specific advice as to his best course of action; their only counsel was to act decisively and without delay. He begins to see that his dual intentions of screening his father's honourable

memory from reproach and openly recognizing Isabel before the world are mutually exclusive. For a moment he entertains the idea of renouncing his attempt to recognize Isabel and remaining obedient to his mother's wishes; the violent reaction of his body to this thought testifies to Pierre's reluctance to do this, however:

Impossible would it be now to tell all the confusion and confoundings in the soul of Pierre, so soon as the above absurdities in his mind presented themselves first to his combining consciousness. He would fain have disowned the very memory and mind which produced to him such an immense scandal upon his common sanity. Now indeed did all the fiery floods in the Inferno, and all the rolling gloom in Hamlet suffocate him at once in flame and smoke. The cheeks of his soul collapsed in him: he dashed himself in blind fury and swift madness against the wall, and fell dabbling in the vomit of his loathed identity. (pp.201-202)

Forced to make his own choice between equally unacceptable actions, Pierre inflicts violence on himself. Significantly, violence against the self occurs again at the end of the novel as a means of escape from the iron grip of physical and psychological reality.

The symbol of the wall in the above passage proves interesting when compared with other uses of the wall image in Melville. In Moby-Dick, for instance, the whale's forehead is the wall which all blind inquiring heads butt up against at last. That is to say, it symbolizes the final limits of man's capacity for knowledge about himself and about the world. Ahab recognizes this and attacks the wall in an attempt to break through the "pasteboard mask." Bartleby, on the other hand, reacts passively to the walls which surround him; although conscious of their presence ("I know where I am") he

contemplates them non-violently. Pierre reacts differently than either Ahab or Bartleby; he exercises his violent reaction not against the wall so much as against himself. His is Ahab's violent aggression turned inwards against his inherent indecisiveness. He is unsure whether it is rational prudence or unworthy cowardice which holds him back from recognizing Isabel. The result is a self-destructive kind of violence that reflects his psychological state.

Unsure as he is whether or not to renounce his engagement to Lucy, Pierre suffers additional pain. For, having all but made up his mind that he should renounce her, he once more becomes aware of her attractiveness: "Then, for the time, all minor things were whelmed in him; his mother, Isabel, the whole wise world; and one only thing remained to him;--this all-including query--Lucy or God? (p.213)

After much indecisiveness, he opts for God. With this choice made, Pierre, "by a certain sort of charity of cruelty," hurries to inform Lucy that he is already married. On hearing this lie Lucy falls into a death-like swoon, and is immediately assisted by Martha, her maid. After a few moments she regains a semblance of consciousness:

"Is she herself again, Martha?"

"Thou hast somehow murdered her; how then be herself again? My sweet mistress! on, my young mistress! Tell me! tell me!" and she bent low over her.

Pierre now advanced toward the bed, making a gesture for the maid to leave them; but soon as Lucy re-caught his haggard form, she whisperingly wailed again, "Martha! Martha! drive it away!--there--there! him!" and shut her

eyes convulsively, with arms abhorrently outstretched.
 "Monster! incomprehensible fiend!" cried the anew
 terror-smitten maid--"depart! See! she dies away at the
 sight of thee--begone! Wouldst thou murder her afresh?
 Begone!" (p.216)

From the moment of this decision to aid Isabel Pierre is involved in an increasingly accelerating relationship with disaster and violence. Having chosen what he takes to be the path of virtue, recognition of Isabel's claims on him as her brother, every part of the social universe joins together to enforce his expulsion from the world. His metaphoric "murder" of Lucy is the symbolic act by which he asserts and confirms his status as an isolato or social outcast.

The immediate reward for his first virtuous action is his disinheritance and expulsion from Saddle Meadows. Mary reacts without delay to Pierre's assertion that he has married someone other than Lucy by ordering him from her house:

He stared about him with an idiot eye; staggered to the floor below, to dumbly quit the house; but as he crossed its threshold, his foot tripped upon its raised ledge; he pitched forward upon the stone portico, and fell. He seemed as jeeringly hurled from beneath his own ancestral roof. (p.217)

The fact that Pierre trips over the threshold on his way out appropriately foreshadows the reception he is to be given by the social world extrinsic to Saddle Meadows. Hitherto Pierre has only experienced a mild form of violence directed against his ideals, particularly his love of virtue; but from this point on he is also to be exposed to physical violence. No longer will his insulated social position as heir to a fortune

protect him from penury and its accompanying evils.

But however inauspicious Pierre's entrance to his new life, he is determined once and for all to cast off all reminders of that past life he had lived in illusion. Disinherited by his only living parent, he decides to reject all remembrances of his father by burning his portrait and letters:

"Henceforth, cast-out Pierre hath no paternity, and no past; and since the Future is one blank to all; therefore, twice-disinherited Pierre stands untrammelledly his ever-present self!--free to do his own self-will and present fancy to whatever end!" (p.232)

Just as Lucy appeared to have been murdered on hearing Pierre's lie that he was already married, the portrait of his father is described as apparently suffering real pain at being burned. More than any of Melville's other books, Pierre employs metaphors of violence to suggest the agony inflicted by its hero on those around him.

Following Pierre's rejection of his paternity comes his attempt to set up a private protectorate over Isabel and the weak Delly Ulver. He soon finds, however, that such a task calls for constant vigilance against the normative hostility of a world run on the principles of inhumanity and impatience.

As he enters New York, in search of the lodgings promised him by his cousin Glendinning Stanley, he is amazed at the downright hostility shown towards him by his coachman. Pierre assumes on his entry to New York that the house promised him by Glen will still be available to him, although he has

"married" Isabel instead of Lucy. He is soon disillusioned. When he is unable to locate a house with its lights on in anticipation of his arrival, his coachman takes him for an indigent imposter assuming the appearance of a gentleman and refuses to let him out of the cab. Frustrated by the man's insolence and his inability to locate the promised house, Pierre allows himself to react rashly:

Ere Isabel could prevent him, he burst open the door, and leaping to the pavement, sprang ahead of the horses, and violently reined back the leaders by their heads. The driver seized his four-in-hand ship, and with a volley of oaths was about striking out its long, coil lash at Pierre, when his arm was arrested by a policeman, who suddenly leaping on the stayed coach, commanded him to keep the peace. (pp.267-8)

The intervention of the policeman on his behalf soon changes into an attitude of suspicion towards Pierre when it appears that he has little money or influence, and needs to store his baggage at the Watch-house. Pierre receives his first hint here that without money or social position he is almost helpless to ward off the blows of a violent society.

Police protection of the indigent Pierre from Glen and Fred is conspicuous by its absence from the subsequent action of the novel. He is forced to assert and defend himself in a way his upbringing had not prepared him for. Leaving Isabel and Delly at the police station, Pierre sets off on foot to find Glen and demand an explanation for his remissness in providing the promised honeymoon house. He finds him giving an aristocratic party. When Glen refuses to admit to recognizing Pierre, the latter denounces Glen for his inhumanity:

"Glendinning Stanley, thou disown'st Pierre not so abhorrently as Pierre does thee. By Heaven, had I a knife, Glen, I could prick thee on the spot; let out all thy Glendinning blood, and then sew up the vile remainder. Hound, and base blot upon the general humanity!"

"This is very extraordinary:--remarkable case of combined imposture and insanity; but where are the servants? why don't that black advance? Lead him out, my good Doc, lead him out. Carefully, carefully! stay"--putting his hand in his pocket--"there, take that, and have the poor fellow driven off somewhere."

Bolting his rage in him, as impossible to be sated by any conduct, in such a place, Pierre now turned, sprang down the stairs, and fled the house. (pp.274-75)

Glen's insulation behind the strength of his hired servants is especially provoking to Pierre, who realizes that Glen is thus almost impregnable from attack at such a time and "in such a place." Pierre's dilemma is much more frustrating than Ahab's, for the latter did not have to break through insurmountable social forms to accomplish his revenge in the way Pierre does. For as captain of his ship Ahab holds absolute authority, while Pierre does not have the economic resources with which to establish himself as Glen's equal.

Upon his return to the Watch-house Pierre is confronted by a scene that fills him "with inexpressible horror and fury":

The before, decent, drowsy place, now fairly reeked with all things unseemly. . . . In indescribable disorder, frantic, diseased-looking men and women of all colors, and in all imaginable flauntings, immodest, grotesque, and shattered dresses, were leaping, yelling, and cursing round him. . . . On all sides, were heard drunken male and female voices, in English, French, Spanish, and Portugese, interlarded now and then, with the foulest of all human lingoos, the dialect of sin and death, known as the Cant language, or the Flash. (pp.275-76)

For the first time Pierre is exposed to debased humanity.

Nevertheless, he is able to deal with this immediate violence

more successfully than Glen's insults:

Rushing into the crowd, regardless of the random blows and curses he encountered, he wildly sought for Isabel, and soon descried her struggling from the delirious reaching arms of a half-clad, reeling whiskerando. With an immense blow of his mailed fist, he sent the wretch humming, and seizing Isabel, cried out to two officers near, to clear a path for him to the door. (p.276)

He then returns and rescues Delly as well. But Pierre's success in rescuing the two women from their immediate source of danger is only a temporary victory. As he found at Glen's party, violence is only successful in certain situations; far more frequently the victim of the world's abuse has absolutely no effective recourse. The gradual realization that this is so results in Pierre's rejection of any attempt to act in a rational manner and, ultimately, his murder of Glen and his own suicide.

For the moment, however, Pierre is not aware of the inherent hopelessness of his position and sets about trying to earn a living by his writing. Of all the inconsistencies in the formal structure of the novel this is the worst, for the reader has not yet been in any way prepared for Pierre's ability to write the Truth--his naivete would seem to preclude the necessary preparation for such a task. But it seems that Pierre was previously a writer of romances, which he now renounces in horror. His new aim in writing is much more noble:

Renouncing all his foregone self, Pierre was now engaged in a comprehensive compacted work, to whose speedy completion two tremendous motives unitedly impelled;--the burning

desire to deliver what he thought to be a new, or at least miserably neglected Truth to the world; and the prospective menace of being absolutely penniless, unless by the sale of his book, he could realize money. (pp.320-21)

Disappointment in both these aims later provides the reason for Pierre's commitment to violence. But the immediate effect of Pierre's optimism is to give some substance to his belief that through his writing he will be able to support Isabel, Delly, and Lucy Tartan, who now joins Pierre's household.

Pierre is aware that Lucy's decision to join this household will not be unopposed by Fred and Glen, but he is flattered by her faith in him. When he returns to his rooms in the old converted church, the Apostles, and sees Lucy prevented by Fred and Glen from continuing up the stairs, he rushes in to free her:

"Villain!--Damn thee!" cried Frederic; and letting go the hand of his sister, he struck fiercely at Pierre.

But the blow was intercepted by Pierre.

"Thou hast bewitched, thou damned juggler, the sweetest angel! Defend thyself!"

"Nay, nay," cried Glen, catching the drawn rapier of the frantic brother, and holding him in his powerful grasp; "he is unarmed; this is no time or place to settle our feud with him. Thy sister,--sweet Lucy--let us save her first, and then what thou wilt." (p.366)

The situation in which he finds himself is ironic, since his earliest mention of violence in the novel was his wish for a sister to fight for: "It must be a glorious thing to engage in a mortal quarrel on a sweet sister's behalf!" (p.27) Here he opposes a man who is fighting for his sister, and who continues to do so until her death. The violence with which he

now opposes Fred is ignoble under his own earlier definition, and thus indicates the extent to which Pierre's fondest hopes have been debased by the exigencies of reality.

In his belief that he can protect and care for Lucy as well as Isabel and Delly Pierre finds the strength to oppose Fred and Glen. When several of the Apostles (as the residents are called), approach, Pierre has them throw the two intruders out of the building as trespassers. He is still able to defend himself against incursions on his sense of self-respect; the positive nature of his self-defense expresses his belief that the philosophies of virtue and truth are worth defending. To Glen's accusation that he is a sordid or demented lecher, Pierre replies: "I render no accounts: I am what I am" (p.366). He is not yet prepared to totally abandon his self-esteem.

Following his successful defense of Lucy, Pierre falls into a melancholy reflection on the likely form that the vengeance promised by Glen and Fred will take. He feels that they will probably fall on him "in the most public way" "and cover him from all decent recognition beneath heaps on heaps of hate and insult" (p.377). The fact that such a disgrace will take place in public provides the basis for Pierre's fears: from the beginning of the novel he has been depicted as concerned above all else to attain public acclaim, either as the perfect gentleman, or, more recently, as the author of a much-needed book revealing the Truth to a grateful public. Therefore the thought of public humiliation is especially bitter to him:

Not the gibbering of ghosts in any old haunted house; no sulphurous and portentous sign at night beheld in heaven, will so make the hair to stand, as when a proud and honorable man is revolving in his soul the possibilities of some gross public and corporal disgrace. It is not fear; it is a pride-horror, which is more terrible than any fear. Then, by tremendous imagery, the murderer's mark of Cain is felt burning on the brow, and the already acquitted knife blood-rusts in the clutch of the anticipating hand. (p.377)

The "already acquitted knife" here stands for an attitude towards violence which is almost identical to Ahab's conviction that violence of any sort is justifiable if it occurs as a reaction to persecution that is felt by the object of it to be unfair. Like Ahab, Pierre asserts his guiltlessness before plunging into the vortex of violence. But unlike Ahab, Pierre has a human being as the corporal target of his violence, which fact casts over his revenge the stigma of murder. Thus the nobility of Ahab's defiance of all the powers of a malignant universe is muted in Pierre. Not until Billy Budd does Melville succeed in making a murderer completely admirable.

Pierre is characterized as an isolato even more than Ahab, largely because of his economic inferiority to Glen, and his own feeling of having lost what social prominence he once had. His position is particularly bitter because he realizes that as the apparent seducer of Lucy, every man's hand is turned against him and allied with her angry brother:

Thoroughly alive to the supernaturalism of that mad frothing hate which a spirited brother forks forth at the insulter of a sister's honor--beyond doubt the most unpromising of all the social passions known to man--and not blind to the anomalous fact, that if such a brother stab his foe at his own mother's table, all people and all juries would

bear him out, accounting every thing allowable to a noble soul made mad by a sweet sister's shame caused by a damned seducer; --imagining himself his own feelings, if he were actually in the position which Frederic so vividly fancied to be his; remembering that in love matters jealousy is as an adder, and that the jealousy of Glen was double-added by the extraordinary malice of the apparent circumstances under which Lucy had spurned Glen's arms, and fled to his always successful and now married rival, as if wantonly and shamelessly to nestle there;--remembering all these intense incitements of both those foes of his, Pierre could not but look forward to wild work very soon to come. (pp.377-78)

Proud as he himself is, Pierre is able to imagine the anger of his two foes, and is fully aware of the likelihood that they will succeed in demeaning him. This knowledge does not permit him to forestall their attacks on his self-respect, however; his position is one of a man impotently dreading an inevitable disaster:

In tremendous extremities human souls are like drowning men; well enough they know that they are in peril;-- nevertheless, the sea is the sea, and these drowning men do drown. (p.343)

Melville goes on to distinguish between Pierre's ability to think of murdering Glen and Fred in order to avoid the loss of his own honor and the action itself:

Murders are done by maniacs; but the earnest thoughts of murder, these are the collected desperadoes. Pierre was such; fate, or what you will, had made him such. But such he was. And when these things now swam before him; when he thought of all the ambiguities which hemmed him in; the stony walls all round that he could not overleap . . . and his one only prospect a black, bottomless gulf of guilt, upon whose verge he imminently teetered every hour;--then the utmost hate of Glen and Frederic were jubilantly welcome to him; and murder, done in the act of warding off their ignominious public blow, seemed the one only congenial sequel to such a desperate career. (p.378)

The fact that Pierre does eventually commit murder suggests a close and dangerous affiliation between the thought and the action which poses a constant threat to society.

Melville's justification of Pierre's urge to murder Glen and Fred marks an important turning point in the novel's treatment of violence. Previously, Pierre has in large part been on the receiving end of the violence, but from this point on Pierre is described as being responsible for more and more of the violence which occurs. This pattern repeats that found in Moby-Dick, where Ahab is first described as the object and later pre-eminently as the perpetrator of violence. In both novels the fact that violence begets violence is stressed.

As he continues to work doggedly at his book, Pierre is filled with a sudden presentiment that his intention to enunciate the Truth is a hopeless endeavor. He becomes increasingly aware of "the universal lurking insincerity of even the greatest and purest written thoughts" (p.380). To this mental disillusionment is added a physical strain; his overtaxed eyes refuse to allow him to continue proof-reading. Unable to work and in the grip of overwhelming despair, Pierre falls into an uneasy sleep-like trance, and has a vision. Familiar places become distorted, and seem to mirror the hopelessness and impotency of his position:

You paused; fixed by a form defiant, a form of awfulness. You saw Enceladus the Titan, the most potent of all giants, writhing from out the imprisoning earth;--turbaned with upborne moss he writhed; still, though armless, resisting with his whole striving trunk, the Pelion and the

Ossa hurled back at him;--turbaned with upborne moss he writhed; still turning his unconquerable front toward that majestic mount eternally in vain assailed by him, and which, when it had stormed him off; had heaved his undoffable incubus upon him, and deridingly left him there to bay out his ineffectual howl. (pp.386-87)

The huge rock near Saddle Meadows which suggests this imprisoned Titan to Pierre had been discovered by him when still a young boy. Unlike the Terror Stone, which he had also discovered, this stone is not associated with the capacity for unjustified violence. It is symbolic of Pierre's physically impotent but mentally rebellious situation. As the conclusion of his dream shows, Pierre realizes that his own position is hopeless:

Such was the wild scenery, which now to Pierre, in his strange vision, displaced the four blank walls, the desk, and camp-bed, and domineered upon his trance. But no longer petrified in all their ignominious attitudes, the herded Titans now sprang to their feet; flung themselves up the slope; and anew battered at the precipice's unresounding wall. Foremost among them all, he saw a moss-turbaned, armless giant, who despairing of any other mode of wreaking his immitigable hate, turned his vast trunk into a battering-ram, and hurled his own arched-out ribs again and yet again against the invulnerable steep.

"Enceladus; it is Enceladus!"--Pierre cried out in his sleep. That moment the phantom faced him; and Pierre saw Enceladus no more; but on the Titan's armless trunk, his own duplicate face and features magnifiedly gleamed upon him with prophetic discomfiture and woe. With trembling frame he started from his chair, and woke from the ideal horror to all his actual grief. (p.388)

Pierre's identification with Enceladus leaves him only the consolation of suffering unjust violence heroically. As John Bernstein puts it: "Pierre's fight is hopeless. He can never defeat the forces which humiliate man, but so long as he rebels, he is saved from completely sinking into the slime from which he is trying to escape."¹²

The catalysts which precipitate Pierre into committing murder and suicide are two letters which he receives not long after awakening from his trance; one from his publishers and one signed jointly by Frederic and Glen. The first, from the publishing firm of Steel, Flint and Asbestos, rejects his monumental treatise on Truth as "a blasphemous rhapsody, filched from the vile Atheists, Lucian and Voltaire" (p.398). This signals the literary world's rejection of Pierre, and the disappointment of his only hopes for earning money and acclaim. The second letter attacks Pierre on a point of honor, by calling him a liar, an accusation which does not sit well with the "Fool of truth." And the letter attacks him in rather less measured terms than those employed by his publishers:

Separately, and together, we brand thee, in thy every lung-cell, a liar;--liar, because that is the scornfullest and loathsomest title for a man; which in itself is the compound of all infamous things." (p.399)

Together the two letters combine to push Pierre beyond the limits of his endurance. Again, as in his earlier confrontation with Glen at the party, Pierre feels the pressures of time and space: "These are most small circumstances; but happening just now to me, become indices to all immensities" (p.399).

Pierre, who throughout the novel has appeared as one confirmed in the policies of conciliation, now sees virtue in violently protesting against his untenable position:

World's bread of life, and world's breath of honor, both are snatched from me; but I defy all world's bread and

breath. Here I step out before the drawn-up worlds in widest space, and challenge one and all of them to battle! Oh, Glen! oh, Fred! most fraternally do I leap to your rib-crushing hugs! Oh, how I love ye two, that yet can make me lively hate, in a world which otherwise only merits stagnant scorn! (p.399)

Pierre's decision to commit himself to violence arises out of a sense of injustice done to him, as does Ahab's, but the nature of the injustice in each case is what differentiates the two novels. In Moby-Dick Ahab is angered by a transcendently evil impulse which he sees sinewing the white whale, while Pierre is frustrated more by social and personal considerations than by transcendental ones. He is angered by the fact that he can neither make a living by writing the truth nor convince the world that he is deserving of his forefathers' reputations as "men of honor."

With the feeling that his life has been a total failure--incidentally, a feeling which Ahab never experiences --Pierre decides to kill Frederic and Glen. He leaves his rooms at the Apostles' with the parting prayer that Isabel and Lucy may die as quickly as possible--"the fool of Truth, the fool of Virtue, the fool of Fate, now quits ye forever!" (p.400) Pierre has at this point totally rejected the relevance of life, and to symbolize his status as social isolato he walks between the two streams of humanity on the sidewalks, "mixing with neither," to meet Glen and Fred. "From his wild and fatal aspect, one way the people took the wall, the other way they took the curb" (p.401). His encounter with Glen and Fred occurs in "the very proscenium of the town," and as the result of a first blow struck by Glen:

Suddenly running ahead of Fred, who now chafingly stood still (because Fred would not make two, in the direct personal assault upon one), and shouting "Liar! Villain!" Glen leaped toward Pierre from front, and with such lightning-like ferocity that the simultaneous blow of his cowhide smote Pierre across the cheek, and left a half-livid and half-bloody brand.

For that one moment, the people fell back on all sides from them; and left them--momentarily recoiled from each other--in a ring of panics.

But clapping both hands to his two breasts, Pierre, on both sides shaking off the sudden white grasp of two rushing girls, tore out both pistols, and rushed headlong upon Glen.

"For thy one blow, take here twodeaths! 'Tis speechless sweet to murder thee!"

Splatterings of his own kindred blood were upon the pavement; his own hand had extinguished his house in slaughtering the only unoutlawed human being by the name of Glendinning;--and Pierre was seized by a hundred contending hands. (p.402)

This "ring of panics" recalls "the ringed horizon" in which Cain slew Abel, mentioned by the old Manx sailor in Moby-Dick (p.154). Here again we have man's potential for violence against his fellow man seen as enclosed within the human horizon. But the individuals making up the circle are more "civilized" than the sailors aboard the Pequod, and are therefore unwilling to allow the breaking of their "unnatural" taboos against violence within society. The image of "a hundred contending hands" ironically suggests that the society which rejected Pierre when he attempted to lead a virtuous life, both at Saddle Meadows and in the city, is eager to recognize him and take him to itself for the purpose of punishment. It knows how to deal with those who commit physical violence, but is unable to provide for the physical and spiritual needs of its disaffected constituents.

The fact that Pierre has "extinguished his house" by murdering Glen also appears ironic when Pierre's pride in

his ancestors at the beginning of the novel is remembered, for from a revenge for his lineage he has come to hate and destroy it.

From the time Pierre tells Lucy that he is already married to Isabel, violence accompanies his attempt to live virtuously: his news seems to effect the "murder" of Lucy, his determination to "marry" Isabels causes his mother to die of grief, and he finds himself violently spurned by Glen. In addition, he himself has committed murder. As he sits in his cell awaiting the hangman, he meditates on the violence which has followed his decision to correct his father's injustice and recognize Isabel before the world:

Had I been heartless now, disowned, and spurningly portioned off the girl at Saddle Meadows, then had I been happy through a long eternity in heaven! Now, 'tis merely hell in both worlds. Well, be it hell. I will mold a trumpet of the flames, and, with my breath of flame, breathe back my defiance! But give me first another body! I long and long to die, to be rid of this dishonored cheek. (p.403)

Unlike Ahab, who at his death retains his integrity and honour although damned, Pierre loses his honour along with his life. He no longer believes in either virtue or truth as absolutes, and he has none of Ahab's positive belief in the validity of his philosophy of defiance. As W.E. Sedgwick says:

"Unlike Ahab, Pierre can feel no topmost greatness. Like Ahab he dies defiant, but unlike Ahab he does not thrust his spirit beyond the goring vexations of the questions of good and evil. He dies in the belief that he is damned, the only shred of his Christianity that still clings to him, and Melville is not at any pains to correct his impression.¹³

For these reasons, Pierre decides to take his own life. He is visited in jail by Lucy and Isabel, and when Isabel forgetfully addresses him as her brother rather than her husband, Lucy shrinks "up like a scroll" and dies. In complete despair, Pierre seizes the poison carried by Isabel:

"Girl! wife or sister, saint or fiend!!--seizing Isabel in his grasp--"in thy breasts, life for infants lodgeth not, but death-milk for thee and me!--the drug!" and tearing her bosom loose, he seized the secret vial nestling there. (p.403)

John Bernstein offers a valuable comparison of the effect of the death-scene in Pierre with that in Moby-Dick:

Pierre's rebellion, which initially seems to be anti-thetical to that of the Captain of the Pequod in that Pierre attempts to follow God and to right social injustice, eventually--as seen in his dream of Enceladus--leads him to Ahab's position, to a war against heaven itself. Unfortunately for Pierre, there is no Moby Dick, a symbol of all that is wrong with the cosmos, for him to harpoon. The best available substitute is his cousin Glen, whom Pierre shoots.¹⁴

Other critics have offered various reasons for this scene's relative unsuccess.¹⁵ While it is true that Ahab's glorious affirmation of his individuality may be more appealing than Pierre's negation of his self through suicide, however, it is well to reflect that Pierre's death-scene as well as Ahab's is true to its context. We have seen that Pierre's gradual disillusionment with philosophies of life founded on the absolutes of truth and virtue is closely tied to his growing awareness of the presence of violence in the world. For the most part, Pierre's role has not been the nobly romantic and heroic one he envisaged while living at Saddle Meadows--"It

must be a glorious thing to engage in a mortal quarrel on a sweet sister's behalf! Now, of all things, would to heaven, I had a sister!" (p.27) On the contrary, he himself has been disinherited and cast off by the "best" society in both the country and the city, caused the death of his grieving mother, had his book rejected by the publishers, and become both a murderer and a suicide. In addition, he has committed an even greater moral sin than his father's adultery--incest. Looked at in the light of Pierre's pervading sense of his failure to live up to his absolute standards of virtue and truth, then, his final violent actions appear absolutely plausible. As Moby-Dick marks the ultimate futility of man's attempt to destroy transcendental violence, so Pierre marks the self-destructive violence which overtakes the man who would consciously pursue the paths of virtue and truth in a world of deceptive surfaces and ambiguous motives. Moby-Dick and Pierre represent the last of Melville's extended dramatizations of the individual character's exercise of unrestrained and gratuitous violence. After his publication of the latter novel in 1852, Melville tended to deal with ways in which violence could be inflicted on the individual by society: "Bartleby the Scrivener," "Benito Cereno," Israel Potter, The Confidence-Man, and Billy Budd explore various aspects of man's suffering within the existing social order.

My discussion in the next chapter of the residue of violence to be found in the nominally contemplative "Bartleby" then, is especially important to a study of Melville's maturing attitude towards the thematic role of violence, in that the role

of violence in this short story represents so vast a break from Melville's earlier treatment of the theme in Moby-Dick and Pierre.

CHAPTER III

Pierre is the last of Melville's longer fictions to dramatize physical violence as a way of escape for an individual from philosophical and psychological dilemmas. After its publication he became increasingly interested in the effect or lack of effect which the life and/or death of an individual could have on his society. This concern can be seen in "Bartleby the Scrivener," "Benito Cereno," and Billy Budd especially, where Melville deals with individual attitudes to and embodiments of violence, and then places these attitudes in their social contexts, in order to point out the discrepancy which exists between a single person's experience of violence and the failure of society to take fully into account the meaning of such an experience. As James E. Miller, Jr. has rightly noted, the heroes of two of these fictions resemble each other in one important way:

Benito Cereno, Bartleby, and Bannadonna, have in common the fact that they designed their own deaths, Don Benito and Bartleby by their withdrawal from life, Bannadonna by his attempt to triumph over life.¹⁶

Unlike Ahab and Pierre, who die violent deaths, Don Benito and Bartleby "pass on" quietly, with no one but themselves aware of the cause of their deaths. Yet Bartleby's defiant stoicism and Don Benito's unaccountable terror at the sight of Babo leave questions in the minds of the lawyer and Amasa Delano which continue to intrigue them after the two heroes are dead. Amasa Delano learns little from Don Benito's

terror--it remains inexplicable to him--but the lawyer is at least made momentarily aware of his own susceptibility to anger. It is not until Billy Budd, however, that the human capacity for violence is seen as a positive virtue, capable when allied with essential innocence of protecting natural virtue from natural depravity.

Although "Bartleby the Scrivener" contains no physical violence, it is perhaps as profound a commentary on the origins of violence as Moby-Dick or Pierre. The difference is that whereas the novels explore man's metaphysical frustrations as a source of his violence, "Bartleby" explores man's deeply-rooted tendency to become violent when confronted by passive resistance.¹⁷ I will deal in this chapter with the lawyer's violent anger towards the insufferably wilful Bartleby as an indication of the universality of the urge to violence which Melville discerned in humanity.

The lawyer's description of himself at the beginning of the story is hardly suggestive of an habitually violent man. From the time of his youth, he tells us, he has been filled with the "profound" conviction that "the easiest way of life is the best." For this reason, although he belongs to a profession "proverbially energetic and nervous, even to turbulence, at times, yet nothing of that sort have I ever suffered to invade my peace." But, habitually mild-natured as he is, he does bristle at the remembrance that a lucrative position once obtained by him was cancelled a few years later by a new administration:

I seldom lose my temper; much more seldom indulge in dangerous indignation at wrongs and outrages; but, I must be permitted to be rash here, and declare, that I consider the sudden and violent abrogation of the office of Master in Chancery, by the new Constitution, as a--premature act; inasmuch as I had counted upon a life-lease of the profits, whereas I only received those of a few short years.¹⁸

Insofar as the lawyer is capable of an emotion approaching anger, his ire is aroused by loss of money. The progress of the story details a change in the object of the lawyer's enervated anger from the new Constitution to Bartleby.

The lawyer shows that he is a man of method by the form which his narration takes. (We remember that his patron, John Jacob Astor, had pronounced his "first grand point to be prudence," and his next, "method"). Before entering upon his story proper, he carefully describes his general surroundings and the characteristics of his staff other than Bartleby. The nickname of the oldest of his employees is Turkey; he is habitually a careful worker in the morning, but after his liquid lunch becomes obstreperous and careless in copying. Nippers, the next oldest clerk, tends to suffer in the mornings from "two evil powers--ambition and indigestion" (p.119), but in the afternoons becomes a model of deportment. Ginger Nut is the office boy. His duties consist mainly in running errands for the two older clerks, who represent the schizophrenia which affects the mature constituents of the lawyer's society.

In its portrayal of these two characters "Bartleby" is an almost Dickensian denunciation of perverted social values. Turkey is able to work only by injecting himself daily with

doses of alcohol, while Nippers has come to believe in the capitalistic system enough to want to succeed in it, and has thus attained a chronic state of indigestion. The man currently at the top, whose position Nippers covets, is of course the lawyer. A blander, less attractive ideal is hard to imagine.

Into this superficially non-violent society is suddenly precipitated the catalyst that will make evident the lawyer's hypocrisy in denying his deeper emotions:

In answer to my advertisement, a motionless young man one morning stood upon my office threshold, the door being open, for it was summer. I can see that figure now--pallidly neat, pitiably respectable, incurably forlorn! It was Bartleby. (p.122)

Bartleby's sedate temper and efficiency at copying earn the lawyer's admiration until one day he calls Bartleby to come out from the screen behind which he is working and assist in reading a brief document. Bartleby's delayed reply is that he "would prefer not to" assist at this task. The lawyer looks at him with unbelief:

Not a wrinkle of agitation rippled him. Had there been the least uneasiness, anger, impatience or impertinence in his manner; in other words, had there been anything ordinarily human about him, doubtless I should have violently dismissed him from the premises. But as it was, I should have as soon thought of turning my pale plaster-of-paris bust of Cicero out of doors.

The lawyer's explanation is that he is no more able to relate to Bartleby than he is to his bust of Cicero; there is nothing "ordinarily human" about his clerk's behavior. Yet as the story continues we come to feel that the lawyer is not

the kind of man who could "have violently dismissed him from the premises." He is nonplussed and even intimidated by Bartleby's unaccountable behavior.

A few days after the incident related above, Bartleby again refuses the lawyer's order--this time to join the other three clerks at proof-reading. The effect on the lawyer of this challenge to his authority is predictable:

"Why do you refuse?"

"I would prefer not to."

With any other man I should have flown outright into a dreadful passion, scorned all further words, and thrust him ignominiously from my presence. But there was something about Bartleby that not only strangely disarmed me, but, in a wonderful manner, touched and disconcerted me. I began to reason with him. (p.125)

The lawyer here again offers as a reason for his passivity Bartleby's disconcerting obstinacy. He attempts to "reason" with Bartleby as to why he should assist the others in their work, but finds that although Bartleby seems to understand the lawyer's process of reasoning, "some paramount consideration prevailed with him to reply as he did" (p.125). It is clear by now that the lawyer is incapable of flying "outright into a dreadful passion;" he is a man of the intellect without emotions.

Faced with a human being who acts in accord with his own whims, without adhering to principles of "reason" based on economic considerations, the lawyer feels threatened:

It is not seldom the case that, when a man is browbeaten in some unprecedented and violently unreasonable way, he begins to stagger in his own plainest faith. He begins, as it were, vaguely to surmise that, wonderful as it may be, all the

justice and all the reason is on the other side. Accordingly, if any disinterested persons are present, he turns to them for some reinforcement for his own faltering mind. (pp.125-26)

But although Nippers and Turkey loyally assert that his orders are reasonable, the lawyer is unable to secure Bartleby's all-important agreement. For a second time he puts off actually firing Bartleby: "Once more business hurried me. I determined again to postpone the consideration of this dilemma to my future leisure" (p.126). The fact is that the lawyer is more capable of carrying on a "snug business among rich men's bonds, and mortgages, and title-deeds" (p. 116), than dealing with human beings. He puts off Bartleby's challenge to his rationality as long as possible, in the hope that events will return to normal without him having to act decisively. In the meantime, he decides to allow Bartleby to do any work he chooses.

The lawyer develops this line of thought further in the next few days, with an important difference; he admits that in spite of his good intentions he is becoming "angry":

Nothing so aggravates an earnest person as a passive resistance. If the individual so resisted be of a not inhumane temper, and the resisting one perfectly harmless in his passivity, then, in the better moods of the former, he will endeavor charitably to construe to his imagination what proves impossible to be solved by his judgement. Even so, for the most part, I regarded Bartleby and his ways. Poor fellow! thought I, he means no mischief; it is plain he intends no insolence; his aspect sufficiently evinces that his eccentricities are involuntary. He is useful to me. I can get along without him. If I turn him away, the chances are he will fall in with some less-indulgent employer, and then he will be rudely treated, and perhaps driven forth miserably to starve. Yes. Here I can cheaply purchase a delicious

self-approval. To befriend Bartleby; to humor him in his strange willfulness, will cost me little or nothing, while I lay up in my soul what will eventually prove a sweet morsel for my conscience. But this mood was not invariable with me. The passiveness of Bartleby sometimes irritated me. I felt strangely goaded on to encounter him in new opposition--to elicit some angry spark from him answerable to my own. But, indeed, I might as well have essayed to strike fire with my knuckles against a bit of Windsor soap. (pp.127-28)

That spiritual greed provides the basis for the lawyer's reasoning is demonstrated by his commercial diction: by tolerating Bartleby's presence, he feels he can "cheaply purchase" self-approval at a "cost" of "little or nothing."

Yet even with this reason to befriend him, the lawyer admits that at times he is "strangely goaded" to provoke further resistance in Bartleby, rather than humour him. This irrational anger demonstrates that he has not learned how to repress his primitive impulses entirely.

The lawyer's "evil impulse" to raise an anger in Bartleby answerable to his own grows as Bartleby's mildness continues unruffled. Knowing beforehand that he will be refused, he asks Bartleby to assist him in collating some papers. Bartleby answers that he would prefer not to. The lawyer refuses Turkey's offer to fight Bartleby, but continues his attempt to raise in Bartleby some spark of reciprocal anger:

I closed the doors, and again advanced toward Bartleby. I felt additional incentives tempting me to my fate. I burned to be rebelled against again. I remembered that Bartleby never left the office.

"Bartleby," said I, "Ginger Nut is away; just step round to the Post Office, won't you? (it was but a three minute's walk), and see if there is anything for me."

"I would prefer not to." (pp.128-29)

The effect of Bartleby's mild resistance is stunning; as if under a spell the lawyer tries again to make Bartleby rebel:

Was there any other thing in which I could procure myself to be ignominiously repulsed by this lean penniless wight?--my hired clerk? What added thing is there, perfectly reasonable, that he will be sure to refuse to do? (p.129)

He asks Bartleby to summon Nippers from the next room, with the predictable result. The supremely comic resolution to this crescendo of defiance illuminates again the lawyer's inability to face the problem with which Bartleby confronts him, as he answers Bartleby's firm resistance by leaving the office. He is totally unable to provoke any kind of violent reaction from Bartleby, and is distressed to find that he has no way of overcoming the passive resistance with which Bartleby meets his thinly-disguised attempts to integrate him into the values and obligations of his society of rationality and common sense.

What the lawyer would like to do is force Bartleby to obey his orders, but his acquired prudence forbids this rash kind of behavior. At times, however, his impatience surfaces in outbursts of violence:

Sometimes, to be sure, I could not, for the very soul of me, avoid falling into sudden spasmodic passions with him. For it was exceeding difficult to bear in mind all the time those strange peculiarities, privileges, and unheard of exemptions, forming the tacit stipulations on Bartleby's part under which he remained in my office. (p.130)

When the lawyer forgets these privileges and asks Bartleby to help him at, say, some minor task, the inevitable refusal becomes unbearable. Especially since Bartleby does not allow

the lawyer to continue to sublimate his anger; he presents a continuous challenge to the lawyer's moderation. After every concession is granted he provokes the lawyer's dormant anger in another way.

When the lawyer drops by his office one Sunday and finds himself locked out by the ever-present Bartleby, he feels "sundry twinges of impotent rebellion" against his hired clerk. Yet he feels powerless to become angry:

It was his wonderful mildness chiefly, which not only disarmed me, but unmanned me as it were. For I consider that one, for the time, is of a sort unmanned when he tranquilly permits his hired clerk to dictate to him, and order him away from his own premises. (p.131)

The restrictive clauses here: "as it were," "for the time," "of a sort," indicate the extent of the lawyer's prudence; he is unwilling to admit that of course he has been unmanned by "tranquilly" permitting himself to be dictated to.

When he returns to his office the lawyer is struck by the thought that Bartleby had been living there alone: "His poverty is great; but his solitude, how horrible!" (p.132) And for the first time he experiences an emotion approaching the unpleasant:

A feeling of overpowering stinging melancholy seized me. Before, I had never experienced aught but a not unpleasing sadness. The bond of a common humanity drew me irresistibly to gloom. (p.131)

This mood does not last long, for the lawyer's pity is soon overcome by his fear of becoming involved. He wants to physically throw Bartleby out but is afraid to; for this reason

all his charity and seeming benevolence is merely self-deception, since it is designed to arouse a thankfulness in Bartleby which will cause him to leave the lawyer of his own free will. This is the basic fact which the lawyer is unable to face up to throughout the story.

The lawyer's non-aggressiveness is not only habitual with him but is also a source of pride. Thus, after Bartleby has escalated his refusal to cooperate by asserting that he will no longer even copy the lawyer's documents, the lawyer devises a plan which will rid him of his clerk without violence: he will assume that Bartleby will depart. But his pride in this plan is short-lived, for Bartleby appears as usual the next morning. The lawyer is therefore forced into the realization that to get rid of Bartleby is impossible without taking some unpleasant action or other:

"Turn the man out by actual thrusting I could not; to drive him away by calling him hard names would not do; calling in the police was an unpleasant idea; and yet, permit him to enjoy his cadaverous triumph over me--this, too, I could not think of. What was to be done? (p.141)

By this time the lawyer is so exasperated that his mind begins to entertain thoughts of violence which he is immediately at pains to suppress:

I was now in such a state of nervous resentment that I thought it but prudent to check myself, at present from further demonstrations. Bartleby and I were alone. I remembered the tragedy of the unfortunate Adams and the still more unfortunate Colt in the solitary office of the latter; and how poor Colt, being dreadfully incensed by Adams, and imprudently permitting himself to get wildly excited, was at unawares hurried into his fatal act--an act which certainly no man could possibly deplore more than the actor himself. (p.142)

In his usual manner, the lawyer suppresses his anger because he feels it to be potentially dangerous to himself, and twists words of Scripture accordingly:

But when this old Adam of resentment rose in me and tempted me concerning Bartleby, I grappled him and threw him. How? Why simply by recalling the divine injunction: "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another." Yes, this it was that saved me. Aside from higher considerations, charity often operates as a vastly wise and prudent principle --a great safeguard to its possessor. (p.142)

Now it becomes evident that the lawyer is not avoiding violence because he wishes to respect the divine commandment, but because he wishes to avoid the lawful consequences of such violent action. He asserts that his charity is virtuous because it prevents him from facing the consequences of violent action:

Men have committed murder for jealousy's sake, and anger's sake, and selfishness' sake, and spiritual pride's sake; but no man, that ever I heard of, ever committed a diabolical murder for sweet charity's sake. Mere self-interest, then, if no better motive can be enlisted, should, especially with high-tempered men, prompt all beings to charity and philanthropy. (p.142)

This conflict between the lawyer's prudence and his inclination to become violent under the extreme provocation of Bartleby's frustratingly irrational behavior is especially interesting in relation to the unmitigated wrath--once they have been fairly aroused--of Ahab and Pierre. The lawyer is by contrast an extremely "civilized" and self-disciplined individual. However, his discipline is imposed by a distasteful and cowardly prudence--we see him slinking away from his

own door and reluctant to become angry because of the potential consequences of such a confrontation. As Kingsley Widmer says of the lawyer's moral character: "Goodness as 'mere self-interest' reveals the obtuseness of such rationality and the brutality of such decency."¹⁹

Having "drowned" his feelings of violence, the lawyer lights on another acceptable reason for tolerating Bartleby: since his troubles with the scrivener have undoubtedly been "predestinated from eternity" he has obviously been chosen to protect Bartleby "for some mysterious purpose of an all-wise Providence, which it was not for a mere mortal like me to fathom" (p.143). But because the lawyer's love for Bartleby is not genuine, he is soon persuaded by the comments of his fellow attorneys to change his charitable attitude:

I believe that this wise and blessed frame of mind would have continued with me, had it not been for the unsolicited and uncharitable remarks obtruded upon me by my professional friends who visited the rooms. But thus it often is, that the constant friction of illiberal minds wears out at last the best resolves of the more generous. (p.143)

With this determination in mind the lawyer once more asks his scrivener to leave the office, and when he refuses, the lawyer informs Bartleby that he himself is going to vacate his office space and move closer to city hall.

After establishing himself in his new quarters the lawyer is visited by another lawyer who has inherited both the old office space and Bartleby. The problem is that although Bartleby has been turned out of the office he has persisted in haunting the building. The effect of his mild

persistence on the tenants of the building is, significantly, ~~similar~~ to the lawyer's own anger: "Everybody is concerned; clients are leaving the offices; some fears are entertained of a mob" (p.147). The lawyer is held accountable by these people and, in spite of his denials that he knows anything of Bartleby, is threatened with exposure in the public papers as a public menace. Under this pressure he agrees to try to convince Bartleby to leave the premises. But when he tries, offering Bartleby a number of different kinds of jobs, and finds his final offer refused by Bartleby on the grounds that it is too stationary a position, he is prompted into his first violent outburst against Bartleby's thanklessness:

"Stationary you shall be, then," I cried, now losing all patience, and, for the first time in all my exasperating connection with him, fairly flying into a passion. "If you do not go away from these premises before night, I shall feel bound--indeed, I am bound--to-to-to quit the premises myself!" I rather absurdly concluded, knowing not with what possible threat to try to frighten his immobility into compliance. (p.148)

The lawyer is at last forced by Bartleby into the realization that his threats are only superficial; that he has no desire or willingness to enforce them.

The lawyer makes one final offer to Bartleby, offering to take him into his home, but again Bartleby refuses. The lawyer is precipitated into outright retreat before Bartleby's strange unaccountable wilfulness.

He is afraid that the landlord and his tenants will find him and force him to continue to deal in some way with Bartleby. His solution is to take a trip out of town. When

he returns, he finds a note from the landlord which states that Bartleby has been removed to prison as a vagrant.

After perfunctory objections the lawyer admits this to have been the only satisfactory course of action:

At first I was indignant; but, at last, almost approved. The landlord's energetic, summary disposition, had led him to adopt a procedure which I do not think I would have decided upon myself; and yet, as a last resort, under such peculiar circumstances, it seemed the only plan. (p.149)

Here he lets slip his mask of benevolence and shows himself to be glad that Bartleby has at last been satisfactorily dealt with, by a more "energetic" disposition.

He visits Bartleby at the Tombs twice. The first time Bartleby refuses to speak with him. The second time the lawyer comes upon the strangely pathetic sight of Bartleby "huddled at the base of the wall." To the grub-man's query: "Eh!--He's asleep, ain't he?" he answers, "with kings and counselors." Even in death Bartleby is not spared the lawyer's prudent, emotionless sentimentalizing. The death of Bartleby means a return to the status quo for the lawyer; he is no longer to be provoked into the realization that violent emotions and unaccountable wilfulness are a more integral part of human nature than prudence and method.

"Bartleby the Scrivener" contains no physical violence, but to say this is far different from saying that it is not a story concerned with violence. The root of the lawyer's frustration is his conscious repression of his violent instincts. Instead of throwing Bartleby out of his office

forcibly, nor calling the police at once to take the bothersome clerk away, he acts counter to his own deepest wishes and makes a half-hearted attempt to befriend Bartleby. He has followed the course of what Melville terms in Pierre "virtuous expediency." It is not in following this course that he is "wrong," but in representing it as the path of absolute perfection, or the chronometric ideal. For Melville, there is no more fundamental an error than failure to recognize one's limitations; the lawyer too readily arrogates to himself the heavenly ability of adhering to the chronometric ideal, although he possesses the common human weaknesses of greed, pride, lack of charity, and unprovoked anger. The lawyer's ability to suppress his violent instincts towards Bartleby appears as less admirable than Ahab's destruction of the crew of the Pequod or Pierre's suicide, simply because he deceives himself so completely as to his motives, and because of the totality with which he has shut himself off from the potentially invigorating world of unadulterated emotion. The lawyer is surrounded by "forms, measured forms," as Captain Vere says of the common sailors in Billy Budd, which prevent him from giving expression to his feelings, and which lead him to interpret murder as merely an "imprudent" action.

As a leading member of the society which survives Bartleby, the lawyer represents a hypocritical attitude to life and passion that is as deadly as outright violence. He is not alone responsible for Bartleby's death; "the unsolicited and uncharitable remarks obtruded" upon him by his lawyer friends regarding Bartleby's insolence played their part in

his decision to get rid of the scrivener. And once he has abandoned his rooms Bartleby's continued presence there causes feelings generally to run so high that "some fears are entertained of a mob" (p.147). The lawyer's intolerance is merely symptomatic of a social malaise. The public's anger against Bartleby results in his being taken peacefully to jail, thus disposing of a threat to the public's acquired passivity, tolerance, and "civilization," but the fact remains that these qualities have shown themselves to be merely skin-deep and capable at any moment of exploding under the pressure of human intolerance and anger. The public, like the lawyer, avoids, as long as possible, the inevitable recognition that violence is a primary human emotion which no civilizing process can entirely efface. It chooses to ignore the violence in humanity that it should be attempting to recognize and deal with effectively. In "Benito Cereno" Melville explores further the way in which social institutions reflect the violent characteristics of their constituents; as the lawyer refuses to admit his absolute responsibility for Bartleby's well-being, so Amasa Delano is guilty of a failure to achieve Cereno's vision of the violence contained in all social institutions as stemming from individual human nature.

CHAPTER IV

"Benito Cereno" is concerned more with the effects of physical violence than any other of Melville's short stories; and yet it, like "Bartleby the Scrivener," exudes a superficial quietness that belies its volcanic interior. Richard Chase has noted of it: "Heroic actions, such as those in Moby-Dick, are absent; in Benito Cereno all is muted and somnambulant. . . . The whole action of the story takes place almost silently."²⁰ As "Bartleby" depicts civilized man's internal struggle to suppress his violent instincts, "Benito Cereno" suggests the illusory peacefulness and order that can mask the most horrendous atrocities. Benito Cereno is initiated against his will into the mysteries of human violence over a period of three months. During this time he comes to see that violence is a ubiquitous problem in human society, and that the re-establishment of white supremacy aboard the San Dominick is no real solution to the moral dilemma. He becomes aware of the two-edged nature of the violence which holds the slaves in subjection. He also comes to understand that a society ordered by violence and repression is ultimately destructive of all human values, and is as detrimental to the spiritual health of the oppressors as to the physical health of the oppressed. In this chapter I will discuss the genesis of Cereno's final perception that even "civilized" life is maintained through barbaric violence, and compare this insight with Amasa Delano's self-protective insensitivity, which prevents him from perceiving with Cereno

the foundations of violence on which his society is built.

"Benito Cereno" is told in the third person but we see almost every event other than the strictly descriptive passages and Cereno's deposition through the eyes of Captain Amasa Delano, a brave and kindly but spiritually obtuse American. This technique enables Melville to create a feeling of suspense in this story which would be otherwise unobtainable.²¹ Delano's misinterpretation of the facts, and his unshakable belief that the appearance of order aboard the San Dominick represents the reality, implicates the reader, on a first reading, in his obtuseness. But on a second reading, with the knowledge that the slaves have mutinied aboard Don Benito's ship, the reader is able to perceive multiple indications of the violence which threatens the American captain at every step.²²

Delano's exposure to Cereno's experience begins when he sees a strange ship entering the harbour of St. Maria. Thinking from the San Dominick's erratic course and dilapidated appearance that she is very much in need of assistance, Delano very charitably takes a whale-boat and boards her with fresh supplies. One of the first sights to greet him is the spectacle of a motley crew and numerous slaves milling aimlessly about the decks, while above them sit four ancient Negroes picking oakum and six other blacks polishing hatchets. There is something sinister about the energy of these latter slaves for Delano:

Though occasionally the four oakum-pickers would briefly address some person or persons in the crowd below, yet the six hatchet-polishers neither spoke to others, nor breathed a whisper among themselves, but sat intent upon their task, except at intervals, when, with the peculiar love in negroes of uniting industry with pastime, two and two, they sideways clashed their hatchets together, like cymbals, with a barbarous din.²³

In spite of this alarming situation Delano is re-assured by the apparent lack of concern evidenced by the white crew, and takes the general disorderliness as a sign that the ship has passed through hard times, for "In armies, navies, cities, or families, in nature herself, nothing more relaxes good order than misery" (p.160).

He is further assured by the affectionate zeal with which Captain Cereno's body-servant, the negro Babo, attends to his master, whose "mind appeared unstrung, if not still more seriously affected," (p.161) by his discourteous attitude to his guest. Delano revolves in his mind the possibility that Don Benito is a "hypochondriac" (p.161), but abandons this supposition for the more likely one that Cereno appears excessively reserved in order to preserve discipline. Delano acknowledges that such reserve might be appropriate to a well-appointed vessel, but maintains that it "was anything but judicious now" (p.163), when discipline is so obviously lacking. He looks with disfavor on Cereno's habit of delegating the delivery of his orders to his body-servant, thinking that by doing so Cereno is abetting the laxness of discipline aboard his ship.

After Don Benito has thawed slightly towards his guest he relates a tale of suffering at the hands of the elements,

during which time, he says, all of his officers, most of his crew, and half of his slaves, were killed, and commends Babo to Delano as the preserver of peace among the remaining blacks aboard the San Dominick. Certain details concerning the ship's progress do not ring true to Delano, however, and he becomes aware in himself of a suspicion that Cereno is lying to him for some inexplicable purpose, and that Delano's life may be in danger. Thus, when it is necessary for Delano to answer Cereno's invitation to move to the poop-deck by walking close between two hatchet-polishers, he is apprehensive of danger:

One on each side of the last step, sat for armorial supporters and sentries two of the ominous file. Gingerly enough stepped Captain Delano between them, and in the instant of leaving them behind, like one running the gauntlet, he felt an apprehensive twitch in the calves of his legs. (p.169)

Again, while gazing down at the deck below him Delano sees an alarming incident which, however, fails to confirm his suspicions:

Three black boys, with two Spanish boys, were sitting together on the hatches, scraping a rude wooden platter, in which some scanty mess had recently been cooked. Suddenly, one of the black boys, enraged at a word dropped by one of his white companions, seized a knife, and, though called to forbear by one of the oakum-pickers, struck the lad over the head, inflicting a gash from which blood flowed.

In amazement, Captain Delano inquired what this meant. To which the pale Don Benito dully muttered, that it was merely the sport of the lad.

"Pretty serious sport, truly," rejoined Captain Delano. "Had such a thing happened on board the Bachelor's Delight, instant punishment would have followed."

At these words the Spaniard turned upon the American one of his sudden staring, half-lunatic looks; then, relapsing into his torpor, answered, "Doubtless, doubtless, Senor." (pp.169-70)

Delano is astonished by Cereno's laxity of discipline, but is unwilling to tell a fellow captain how to run his ship. Cereno, on the other hand, is astonished by Delano's inability to discern the true state of affairs aboard the San Dominick.

Delano does become suspicious at the many "impolite" conferences held within his sight between Cereno and Babo, but ascribes to the Spaniard the role of plotter. He interprets Cereno's obvious sickness as trickery at one point, only to have his suspicions melt away in the light of his natural reluctance to think badly of anyone: "To think that, under the aspect of infantile weakness, the most savage energies might be couched--these velvets of the Spaniard but the silky paws to his fangs" (p.176). His suspicions are partly allayed, however, by his inability to surmise why, if Cereno has a murderous intent, he has not been killed already. Then, when Cereno questions him closely and at great length on the nature of his cargo and the defensive posture of his crew, he becomes aware that his ship may be the target of Cereno's machinations. He begins to reflect that pirates are notorious for their ability to disguise themselves as harmless until the time for action:

Among the Malay pirates, it was no unusual thing to lure ships after them into their treacherous harbors, or entice boarders from a declared enemy at sea, by the spectacle of thinly manned or vacant decks, beneath which prowled a hundred spears with yellow arms ready to upthrust them through the mats. Not that Captain Delano had entirely credited such things. He had heard of them--and now, as stories, they recurred. The present destination of the ship was the anchorage. There she would be near his own vessel. Upon gaining that vicinity, might not the San Dominick, like a slumbering volcano, suddenly let loose energies now hid? (pp.180-81)

But Delano has the kind of mind that can entertain distasteful possibilities for only a moment. Although he feels the violence lying dormant aboard the San Dominick, he cannot bring himself to think of the enervated Cereno as a pirate.

He retains this imaginative innocence while being exposed to the most obvious clues as to the state of affairs aboard the Spaniard's ship. While waiting for his whale-boat to return with more supplies, for example, Delano's

attention was drawn to something passing on the deck below: among the crowd climbing the landward bulwarks, anxiously watching the coming boat, two blacks, to all appearances accidentally incommode by one of the sailors, violently pushed him aside, which the sailor somewhat resenting, they dashed him to the deck, despite the earnest cries of the oakum-pickers.

"Don Benito," said Captain Delano quickly, "do you see what is going on there? Look!" (pp.182-183)

These periodic outbursts of violence on the Negroes' part are Melville's way of subtly suggesting the ever-present danger which the whites are exposed to for the duration of the slaves' revolt. It is Delano's peculiar blindness that, unlike Cereno, he cannot credit the slaves with the cleverness necessary to plan and execute a mutiny.

Indeed, "Benito Cereno" is devoted in large measure to the exposure of this blindness and to the assertion that the white and the black races cannot be distinguished by standards of morality based on the violence of their actions. Both are equally ruthless. The mutiny appears to Delano to be morally outrageous, but as John Bernstein points out, in humanitarian terms it is nothing of the kind:

If one ignores the fact that on its simplest level "Benito Cereno" portrays an uprising of slaves, the story can easily be misunderstood. Many critics speak of Babo in terms of "motiveless malignity" and compare him to Iago. But to do this is to forget that Babo is the leader of a group of slaves who are seeking their freedom through the only possible way. To further the cause of the uprising aboard the San Dominick, Babo does some evil things, but this evil is motivated solely by a desire for freedom.²⁴

While I agree that the mutiny is justified in this larger social sense for Melville, I do not agree that Babo is as representative of the Negroes as Bernstein implies. Babo is depicted as an intellectual, in marked contrast to the rest of the blacks, while his insignificant physical form is explicitly contrasted to that of the magnificent Atufal. And as he informs Delano, he has been a slave of the black man as well as the white: "those slits in Atufal's ears once held wedges of gold; but poor Babo here, in his own land, was only a poor slave; a black man's slave was Babo, who now is the white's" (p.174). Enslaved by both races without regard to his color, Babo seeks freedom for himself more than freedom for his race. In this desire he embodies for Melville a universal rather than a specifically Negro need to achieve personal freedom.

One of the clearest indications of Babo's intellectual superiority over the rest of the blacks occurs in the marvelous scene in which he shaves Cereno. The assured way in which he terrorizes Benito Cereno into answering Delano's questions so as not to give rise to any suspicions in the American ironically provides the occasion for Delano's observation that "there is something in the negro which, in a

peculiar way, fits him for avocations about one's person" (p.198). Every motion which Babo makes is misinterpreted by Delano, who believes that Babo possesses "the docility arising from the unaspiring contentment of a limited mind, and that susceptibility of blind attachment sometimes inhering in indisputable inferiors" (p.199), which for Delano distinguishes the Negro from the white man. Yet it is this "unaspiring" slave who has plotted the mutiny and controls the lives of both Cereno and Delano. He is not stupid, and is capable of taking great intellectual satisfaction from his ruse, as he dramatizes his powerful position in front of the unsuspecting Delano:

Setting down his basin, the negro searched among the razors, as for the sharpest, and having found it, gave it an additional edge by expertly stropping it on the firm, smooth, oily skin of his open palm; he then made a gesture as if to begin, but midway stood suspended for an instant, one hand elevating the razor, the other professionally dabbling among the bubbling suds on the Spaniard's lank neck. Not unaffected by the close sight of the gleaming steel, Don Benito nervously shuddered; his usual ghastliness was intensified in its hue by the contrasting sootiness of the negro's body. Altogether the scene was somewhat peculiar, at least to Captain Delano, nor, as he saw the two thus postured, could he resist the vagary, that in the black he saw a headsman, and in the white a man at the block. But this was one of those antic conceits, appearing and vanishing in a breath, from which, perhaps, the best regulated mind is not always free. (p.200)

Babo chooses this method to terrorize Cereno because the Spaniard is becoming inconsistent in his answers to Delano regarding his ship's dilapidated condition. When Cereno makes another error in his tale, Babo's razor "accidentally" draws blood:

No sword drawn before James the First of England, no assassination in that timid King's presence, could have produced a more terrified aspect than was now presented by Don Benito. (p.201)

Babo's intellectual cleverness is shown as well by an injury he inflicts on himself. As Delano returns from the main-mast area of the ship to the cuddy he sees Babo holding his hand to his bleeding cheek, and hears him complain:

"Ah, when will master get better from his sickness; only the sour heart that sour sickness breeds made him serve Babo so; cutting Babo with the razor, because, only by accident, Babo had given master one little scratch; and for the first time in so many a day, too. Ah, ah, ah," holding his hand to his face. (p.204)

Delano is shocked at Cereno's mistreatment of such a fine slave; it is only when he sees the two emerging from the cuddy arm in arm that his feelings are assuaged: "But a sort of a love-quarrel, after all, thought Captain Delano" (p.204). He is completely fooled.²⁵

As Don Benito and Delano proceed to lunch, the latter remarks on the European features of the mulatto steward who precedes them, and asks Cereno whether he has always proved a good fellow. Upon Cereno's affirmative answer, Delano asserts his satisfaction at thus having refuted the pernicious rumour which holds that a measure of European blood renders a Negro even more brutal than normal:

For it were strange indeed, and not very creditable to us white-skins, if a little of our blood mixed with the African's, should, far from improving the latter's quality, have the sad effect of pouring vitriolic acid into black broth; improving the hue, perhaps, but not the wholesomeness." (p.205)

Melville's characteristic contempt for the white man's claim to belong to the most highly civilized race, while enforcing his rule through the perfection of all the barbaric arts of war, comes through clearly here. It is underlined by the deposition of Cereno given near the end of the story, where it is stated that this steward, Francesco, was indeed one of the most malevolent of the Negroes. Ironically, it was he, who had "proposed to the negro Babo, poisoning a dish for the generous Captain Amasa Delano" (p.233). Clearly, the violence which Delano associates with the Negroes is not contrasted unfavorably with the white man's "civilized" behavior, but rather demonstrates the similarity of the impulse to violence which exists in all races.

As the wind picks up enough for Delano to begin to pilot the San Dominick towards his own ship, the Bachelor's Delight, Don Benito's spirits fall markedly. This odd behavior in one approaching apparent security and conviviality gives rise once more to Delano's latent suspicions. He is perturbed by Cereno's renewed inhospitality and discourtesy, and begins again to think that the Spaniard is hatching some wicked plot against him and his ship. As he prepares to go on deck, he sees the unrepentant Atufal standing in chains by the hatch, and feels a sudden fear at the thought of passing within his reach. But behind him is Don Benito; Delano is surrounded;

The Spaniard behind--his creature before: to rush from darkness to light was the involuntary choice.

The next moment, with clenched jaw and hand, he passed Atufal, and stood unharmed in the light. As he saw his trim

ship lying peacefully at anchor, and almost within ordinary call; as he saw his household boat, with familiar faces in it, patiently rising and falling on the short waves by the San Dominick's side . . . and heard the low buzzing whistle and industrious hum of the hatchet-polishers, still bestirring themselves over their endless occupation; and more than all, as he saw the benign aspect of nature, taking her innocent repose in the evening; the screened sun in the quiet camp of the west shining out like the mild light from Abraham's tent; as charmed eye and ear took in all these, with the chained figure of the black, the clenched jaw and hand relaxed. Once again he smiled at the phantoms which had mocked him, and felt something like a tinge of remorse, that, by harboring them even for a moment, he should, by implication, have betrayed an atheist doubt of the ever-watchful Providence above. (p.214)

The paradoxical fact that Delano is in reality no safer in the light above decks than in the darkness below is blocked from his vision by his sense of security in the sunlight, surrounded by familiar faces, and by his faith in the Providence watching from above. His naive faith saves him from alarming the slaves on many occasions, but it is totally unwarranted by the true circumstances of his situation.

As Delano prepares to leave the San Dominick for the Bachelor's Delight he remains utterly ignorant of the deception practiced upon him by the slaves. His suspicions extend only to the eccentric behavior of Don Benito. He climbs down into his boat and orders his crew to push off:

The instant that was done, Don Benito sprang over the bulwarks, falling at the feet of Captain Delano; at the same time calling towards his ship, but in tones so frenzied, that none in the boat could understand him." (p.216)

Delano still believes Cereno to be intent on murdering him, and his suspicions are for the time confirmed when he sees Babo leap--as he thinks--to his master's assistance. Delano

dashes both Babo and Cereno into the bottom of the boat, and orders it to speed away from the San Dominick. It is not until Babo makes a murderous attempt on his master's life that Delano becomes aware that his suspicions have thus far widely missed the mark:

He smote Babo's hand down, but his heart smote him harder. Within infinite pity he withdrew his hold from Don Benito. Not Captain Delano, but Don Benito, the black, in leaping from the boat, had intended to stab.

Both the black's hands were held, as glancing up towards the San Dominick, Captain Delano, now with the scales dropped from his eyes, saw the negroes, not in misrule, not in tumult, not as if frantically concerned for Don Benito, but with mask torn away, flourishing hatchets and knives, in ferocious piratical revolt. (p.217)

Delano's practical competence is demonstrated by the efficiency with which he arranges for the re-taking of the San Dominick by his white sailors. The Negroes are subdued after a ferocious battle and white supremacy is re-established. For Delano, this victory ends all his uncertainties and suspicions; for Cereno peace of mind is forever lost. Some reasons for Cereno's instability of mind are suggested by his sworn declaration giving the factual details of the mutiny aboard his ship, particularly those which relate to his exposure to various kinds of violence. The declaration makes it evident that there is no useful distinction to be made between the violence of the negroes and that of the whites. Don Benito's slaveowner friend, Don Alexandro Aranda, as well as thirty white crew members were killed during and after the mutiny. Some of these were tortured, some were thrown tied up but alive into the sea. And as a warning to the remaining

whites, Don Alexandro's skeleton was placed as a figurehead on the San Dominick with the words "follow your leader" printed underneath it by Babo. But the whites act quite as viciously after the meeting is quelled. Cereno recounts of their behavior after re-taking the slave-ship that

beside the negroes killed in the action, some were killed after the capture and re-anchoring at night, when shackled to the ring-bolts on deck; that these deaths were committed by the sailors, ere they could be prevented. That so soon as informed of it, Captain Amasa Delano used all his authority, and in particular with his own hand, struck down Martinez Gola, who, having found a razor in the pocket of an old jacket of his, which one of the negroes had on, was aiming it at the Negro's throat; that the noble Captain Amasa Delano also wrenched from the hand of Bartholomew Barlo a dagger, secreted at the time of the massacre of the whites, with which he was in the act of stabbing a shackled negro, who, the same day, with another negro, had thrown him down and jumped upon him; (pp.235-36)

It is important to notice that these attempted acts of violence by the whites are motivated by a desire to revenge the outrages done to them by individual Negroes. For such outrages were the daily lot of Negro slaves. This kind of anger arises from the same human feeling of loss of dignity which provided the impetus for the slaves' revolt, and is another indication that white and black man belong to the same violent species.

This kind of personal antagonism for suffering incurred at the hands of a known source parallels Ahab's hatred of Moby Dick and Pierre's hatred of Glen. It is a very understandable form of man's urge to violence. But underlying this level of violence and counter-violence there is the social fact of slavery, and a warning from Melville to his American readers that such an inhumane situation can lead only to the furthest

extremes of violence on a society-wide scale. As John Bernstein points out:

..... If we remember that "Benito Cereno" appeared serially in Putnam's Monthly Magazine in October, November, and December of 1855, a time at which the slavery controversy was at its zenith, it is perhaps not too extreme to suggest that Melville's tale is a warning to America to either "Keep faith with the blacks" (as each of the Spaniards aboard the San Dominick is warned to do in front of the skeleton on Don Aranda, which hangs from the bowsprit of the ship) or to be prepared to follow the leadership of Alexandro Aranda to ultimate destruction.²⁶

Cereno's perception of the meaning of enslavement through his subjection to Babo and the Negro mutineers renders him unable to function in a society which accepts the dominance of one race by another through violence. He has been exposed to the reality of such subjection, and any reminder of such inhumanity is abhorrent to him.

Delano is less moved. His insensitivity is reflected not only by his ignorance of the physical danger he is exposed to while aboard the San Dominick but also by his inability to realize the suffering which Don Benito has undergone spiritually. Having discovered and dealt with the only threat he can appreciate--the physical one--he is once more at ease; he simply cannot understand Cereno's continued depression. "The past is passed; why moralize upon it? Forget it. See, yon bright sun has forgotten it all, and the blue sea, and the blue sky; these have turned over new leaves" (p.238). The meaning of Cereno's reply is lost upon Delano: "'Because they have no memory,' he dejectedly replied, 'Because they are not human.'" (p.238). Delano is unable to fathom Cereno's darker knowledge that Babo

has made an indelible scar on the Spaniard's soul, forcing him to recognize the meaning of slavery in its psychic and emotional as well as physical aspects:

"You are saved," cried Captain Delano, more and more astonished and pained; "you are saved: what has cast such a shadow upon you?"

"The negro." (p.238)

A main contributor to the ennui which envelopes Cereno toward the end of the story is Delano's obtuseness to the violent intimidation which surrounds him. He realizes that even a good-hearted, well-intentioned individual may be screened from the reality of the situation in which he is involved, simply because he is unacquainted with the subtleties of such a situation. As he says to Delano:

"You were with me all day; stood with me, sat with me, talked with me, looked at me, ate with me, drank with me; and yet, your last act was to clutch for a monster, not only an innocent man, but the most pitiable of all men. To such degree may malign machinations and deceptions impose. So far may even the best man err, in judging the conduct of one with the recesses of whose condition he is not acquainted. But you were forced to it; and you were in time undeceived. Would that, in both respects, it was so ever, and with all men." (p.238)

This last sentence is indicative of Cereno's belated understanding of man's capacity to screen from himself the reprehensible aspects of slavery, or other social evils. Also impressed on him is the knowledge that man can live unknowingly in a world of surfaces and deception, as Delano has done, and take it for reality. In this perceptivity Cereno is to be compared with Ishmael, Pierre, Ahab, and Captain Vere, who also

meditate on the illusory nature of experience, and are finally unable to reconcile their beliefs in a rational guiding spirit of the universe with their perception of injustice and irrational violence in the world.

Cereno is an aristocrat who has no reason to question the society of which he is a part until he is forced through personal subjugation to violence to the realization that it is established and can only be maintained through pure physical force; if there is any leniency shown to slaves they will "thanklessly" revolt, as Don Aranda's have done. Only because the repression of slaves has hitherto been so complete as to appear normative has a sensitive individual like Cereno been screened from this truth. With the coming of this new perception Cereno is stunned to find that he has always unquestioningly accepted such a situation as just.

Whereas Moby-Dick and Pierre deal primarily with epistemological problems, "Benito Cereno" conveys an individual's insight into the dark recesses of social organization. As we have seen, Cereno's indoctrination into the realities of social and individual violence over a period of three months has impressed upon him the fact that "civilized" life is maintained only through barbaric violence. Yet he has also come to know something of the power which love for a fellow human being can give to a man in danger of his life, for as he tells Delano it was concern for the American's life that enabled him to make his final jump to freedom: "As God lives, Don Amasa, I know not whether desire for my own safety alone could have

nerved me to that leap into your boat" (p.237). But Melville rejects the possibility that such an insight can prove socially redemptive, for Cereno dies as a result of his ordeal, while Babo is executed in the most cruel way imaginable and the rest of the blacks are re-enslaved. And Captain Amasa Delano, the only representative of white society left alive, is satisfied to re-establish the status quo and to carry on as if nothing had changed. Not until he wrote Billy Budd, some thirty-five years later, did Melville allow in his fiction for the possibility that out of human suffering might emerge some hope for human redemption.

CHAPTER V

As I stated in my "Introduction" I believe that Melville's use of violence in Billy Budd differs substantially from his treatment of the theme in his earlier works. Critics have noted the apparent inconsistency in development between the cynicism of The Confidence-Man (1857) and the undeniable aura of saintliness which surrounds Billy Budd and have explored almost every reason for this intriguing progress.²⁷ With a few important exceptions,²⁸ they have divided themselves into two camps: those who look on the work as ironic, and those who look on it as an indication that Melville has, in one critic's words, "come to respect necessity."²⁹ Of those who view the novel as ironic, Phil Withim discusses it as a "testament of resistance."³⁰ Murray Kreiger differs from Withim's satisfaction with the formal structure of the novel, although he too believes it to be somewhat ironic, and has forcefully argued that the novel should be judged as an artistic failure, in that by his "evil" act of violence Billy has rendered his description as the second Adam, Jesus Christ, "aesthetically" unbelievable.³¹ Among the critics of the second camp, W.E. Sedgwick has asserted that Melville's last novel displays an enchantment with life which is a mature development of that found originally in Typee, but which is missing from the novels of his middle period, and concludes that "in Billy's life there is more promise of salvation for the world than there is of damnation in his death."³² And R.W.B. Lewis concurs in this view, interpreting the novel as

demonstrative of Melville's new conviction of "the saving strength of the Adamic personality" in its clash with evil.³³

My feeling about Billy Budd coincides with neither of these two camps as closely as it does with a third position, represented by Warner Berthoff; that in his last novel Melville's primary interest is not in ideologies but in "the phenomenal quality of character in his two heroes." For Berthoff, Melville's intention is less to portray the conflict of goodness with evil than "to show Vere and Billy as bound to one another in complementary greatness of soul" in the midst of a man-of-war world.³⁴ On this view Billy's violent execution is not to be thought of as the defeat of goodness but rather as receiving its ratification from a pact confirmed between two "magnanimous" hearts. In this chapter I discuss the role of violence in elucidating the nature of this relationship between Vere and Billy, and between Billy and the rest of society, in order to show the extent to which Melville's thematic use of violence has developed from Moby-Dick.

The violence in Billy Budd is of two sorts: Billy's murder of Claggart is fully as passionate an action as Ahab's attack on Moby Dick, or Pierre's murder of Glen, or, in another sense, Delano's battle with the Negro slaves; while Billy's execution is ordered as dispassionately as the death of Bartleby. What is oddly missing from Billy Budd is the gratuitous violence that marks the behavior of Ahab, Pierre, and the whites and blacks in "Benito Cereno." Both the passionate murder committed by Billy and Vere's dispassionate

execution of him are untainted by the excesses of Ahab's anger, Pierre's frustration, the lawyer's hypocrisy, or Delano's stupidity; Billy and Vere are motivated less by personal considerations than divine or social ones. Billy says of his murder of Claggart: "I am sorry that he is dead. I did not mean to kill him", while Vere insists to the court that he acts against his own desire in demanding the death penalty for Billy: "The exceptional in the matter moves the hearts within you. Even so too is mine moved. But let not warm hearts betray heads that should be cool." Billy is made to kill Claggart by a will greater than his own which controls him; Vere is moved to execute Billy by his sense of allegiance to the letter of the law, and by his sense of the pressures of circumstance.

When a merchant ship, the Rights of Man, is boarded by a lieutenant of H.M.S. Bellipotent, in search of men to impress into the navy, Billy Budd is the only man taken. The lieutenant's choice upsets the merchant captain considerably. He complains that in Billy he is losing a sailor who brought peace to his ship by calming the crew: "Not that he preached to them or said or did anything in particular, but a virtue went out of him, sugaring the sour ones."³⁵ The interesting thing about Captain Gravelling's comments on Billy is his modification of this ability of Billy's to bring peace. He says that "the buffer of the gang" was insensible to Billy's virtue, unlike the rest of the crew, and insulted Billy in a way that could not be mistaken. Billy's reaction is swift and violent: "Quick as lightning Billy let fly his arm" (p.16).

Red Whiskers is converted by the drubbing he receives to love Billy. This suggests that Billy's ability to react to unwarranted aggression violently is a potentially redemptive quality, for it results in the re-integration of Red Whiskers into a society based on love. When Billy's murder of Claggart under similar conditions is considered this positive connotation of Billy's capacity for violence should be kept in mind. It is an early and unmistakable indication that the violence expressed by Billy is not meant by Melville to be considered in a neutral light; it is presented as a socially redemptive force.

Billy's first introduction to the dispassionate violence by which the man-of-war's men are trained to obey orders occurs when a novice afterguardsman is flogged shortly after Billy has come aboard:

When Billy saw the culprit's naked back under the scourge, grid-ironed with red welts and worse . . . [he] was horrified. He resolved that never through remissness would he make himself liable to such a visitation or do or omit aught that might merit even verbal reproof. (pp.30-31)

Billy's attitude toward the violence occurring here is an important clue to his character. He does not renounce the institution of flogging in the manner of White-Jacket or the young Melville. He does not interfere with the punishment which is taking place; he does not even question whether or not such a harsh punishment is deserved by the young sailor. He accepts discipline absolutely as a condition of the society in which he finds himself, and resolves to avoid such punishment at all costs. This acceptance of forms must be taken

into account when Billy's acceptance of his own death sentence is under consideration.

Billy's naturally amiable nature and his desire to please have the same effect on the crew of the Bellipotent as they did on the crew of the Rights. Almost everyone loves him. However, the ship's master-at-arms takes an instant dislike to Billy. While hiding his antipathy behind ironic jests at Billy's expense, John Claggart marshals all the tools at his command against the young sailor. With characteristic thoroughness he arranges for a henchman to disarrange Billy's gear in order to give him an undeserved reputation for disorderliness, and then has an afterguardsman attempt to bribe Billy into taking part in a non-existent mutiny. Billy is now in a more cosmopolitan society than that aboard the Rights, one which includes men who are irremediably evil by nature, and consequently one which more truly represents the nature of this world. Melville says that Claggart's mysterious antipathy for Billy is inexplicable; it is "not engendered by vicious training or corrupting books or licentious living, but born with him and innate, in short 'a depravity according to nature'" (p.36) And Claggart is intellectually clever in a way that Billy is not; he understands that his natural depravity cannot conquer Billy's natural goodness without the assistance of man-made forms.

The source of Claggart's antipathy is merely Billy's pristine innocence and goodness, just as the lawyer's anger is aroused by Bartleby's unassuming mildness. Claggart is envious because Billy's good looks went with a nature that,

"as Claggart magnetically felt, had in its simplicity never willed malice or experienced the reactionary bite" of the serpent (p.37). Unlike the lawyer, however, Claggart allows his hate to overcome his normal prudence, and willingly risks his own life to achieve Billy's destruction. Although he is unable to obtain any factual proof with which to incriminate Billy, one day Claggart appears before Captain Vere and accuses the young sailor of spreading sedition among members of the crew. He cleverly plays upon Vere's fear of a recurrence of the lately suppressed Great Mutiny at the Nore to lend credibility to his otherwise unthinkable charge, and does not show any trace of fear at Vere's warning that "Just now, and in a case like this, there is that yardarm-end for the false witness." A less impatient man than Captain Vere might insist on satisfying himself of the validity of Claggart's "substantiating proof" before summoning Billy to answer the charges laid against him; a less prudent man might heed his intuitive disbelief of Claggart and dismiss his allegations out of hand. But Vere strongly feels the necessity of settling the charge "in a quiet undemonstrative way" (p.50), before it can become an issue among the crew. He calls Billy to his cabin to answer the charges against him.

Unlike Ahab, who when at last confronted with the embodiment of universal malignity is fully prepared for the conflict, Billy is not. He goes to the cabin in the hope that he is about to be promoted: "Wonder if he is going to make me coxswain. I should like that." Billy is rocked to his foundations when Claggart accuses him to his face of fomenting

mutiny: "He stood like one impaled and gagged," while Claggart is fully absorbed in Billy's confusion: "The first mesmeristic glance was one of serpent fascination; the last was as the paralyzing lurch of the torpedo fish" (p.51). The quickness of Billy's exposure to evil is unlike the slower indoctrination of Pierre into the realities of life, and admits of no escape. He must answer the accusation, but he is filled with a righteous indignation that paralyzes him and renders him for the moment incapable of speech. As a result, he relies on his natural defense against enemies, as he did in his thrashing of Red Whiskers, and hits Claggart with stunning force full on the forehead.

The immediate cause of the blow is Vere's kindness upon perceiving Billy's struggle to overcome his speech impediment. This kindness ironically causes Billy to strike out with more violence than otherwise he may have done, for Billy is touched by Vere's concern for him:

Going close up to the young sailor, and laying a soothing hand on his shoulder, he said, "There is no hurry, my boy. Take your time, take your time." Contrary to the effect intended, these words so fatherly in tone, doubtless touching Billy's heart to the quick, prompted yet more violent efforts at utterance--efforts soon ending for the time in confirming the paralysis, and bringing to his face an expression which was as a crucifixion to behold. The next instant, quick as the flame of a discharged cannon at night, his right arm shot out, and Claggart dropped to the deck. (pp.51-52)

Alone among Melville's great protagonists, Billy is not thinking of himself at the height of his violent action. Ahab's last words are by contrast magnificently egotistical: "'Thus, I give up the spear!"; Pierre's express terrible satisfaction:

"'Tis speechless sweet to murder thee!"; and Taji's are joyfully self-assertive: "'Now, I am my own soul's emperor; and my first act is abdication!'" Billy only thinks how much like a son Vere is treating him, and how reprehensible Claggart's accusation must make him appear to his captain.

Unfortunately for Billy, however, this selflessness is out of place in a man-of-war world. To compare the warlike metaphor describing the speed of Billy's blow at Claggart-- "quick as the flame of a discharged cannon at night"--with the naturalistic one which describes the speed of his thrashing of Red Whiskers--"quick as lightning"--is to become aware of the tragic change in context of Billy's action. Billy has fallen unawares from the world of natural violence into the world of legal responsibility. As Hannah Arendt shows, Billy himself is not responsible for this change; it occurs as a social reaction to his violent act quite independently of him:

The story unfolds after "nature" has run its course, with the result that the wicked man is dead and the good man has prevailed. The trouble now is that the good man, because he encountered evil, has become a wrong-doer too, and this even if we assume that Billy Budd did not lose his innocence, that he remained "an angel of God."³⁶

Society is forced to define Billy's action as a "crime" because of the context in which it occurs; Billy is serving aboard a man-of-war in dangerous times, and has murdered a superior officer. As a result Billy is subject to a military punishment which is less concerned with absolute justice than maintaining a measure of stability in society, which aim can be achieved only through an impartially "just" adherence to appearances and

measured forms.

The chief interpreter of society's will in this regard is Captain Vere. As Hannah Arendt points out, he embodies the tragic role of virtue in the conflict between good and evil:

Virtue--which perhaps is less than goodness but still alone is capable "of embodiment in lasting institutions"--must prevail at the expense of the good man as well; absolute, natural innocence, because it can only act violently, is "at war with the peace of the world and the true welfare of mankind," so that virtue finally interferes not to prevent the crime of evil but to punish the violence of absolute innocence. . . . The tragedy is that the law is made for men, and neither for angels nor for devils.³⁷

Vere says of the murder: "'It is the divine judgement on Anasias! . . . Struck dead by an angel of God! Yet the angel must hang!'" (p.53). This reference is to the fifth chapter of "The Acts of the Apostles," which relates the death of a man struck down by God's angel of vengeance for lying to Peter. But that angel, unlike Billy, was invisible and thus not subject to human punishment. Vere's analogy points up the discrepancy between the divine justice attending Ananias' death and Billy's act of murder, which alone is subject to the retributory punishment sanctioned by a fallen society.

This degradation of true moral justice is heightened by the fact that Billy's violent blow is not calculated; it is the instinctive expression of his emotional indignation, and therefore cannot justly be termed malicious. As he tells the court: "'No, there was no malice between us. I never bore malice against the master-at-arms . . . But he foully lied to my face and in presence of my captain, and I had to

say something, and I could only say it with a blow, God help me!" (p.56) Yet in spite of the fact that he is morally innocent, Billy is sentenced to death by the court because Vere feels the pressures of circumstance leave him no ~~other~~ alternative.

Vere's decision in this regard does not derive from an ignorant loyalty to the established social order. On the contrary, it is based on a disinterested conviction, ratified by an extensive examination of historical precedents, that none better is humanly possible, or at the least that the British social system, although certainly not perfect, is better than the social chaos fomented by the ideals of the French Revolution. It is for this reason, we remember, that Vere opposed the policies of equality among men spread by the Revolution.

While other members of that aristocracy to which by birth he belonged were incensed at the innovators mainly because their theories were inimical to the privileged classes, Captain Vere disinterestedly opposed them not alone because they seemed to him insusceptible of embodiment in lasting institutions, but at war with the peace of the world and the true welfare of mankind. (p.27)

Such an exalted disinterestedness does not suit Vere's conception of his role as a naval captain, however, and is even less evident in the specious logic by which he attempts to convince the court members that it is necessary to obtain Billy's conviction. As critics have rightly noted, Vere's arguments fall on unreceptive ears when he attempts to persuade the court to disregard the natural promptings of their hearts and their consciences: "'Tell me whether or not,

occupying the position we do, private conscience should not yield to that imperial one formulated in the code under which alone we officially proceed?" (p.60) It is only when he suggests that they themselves may become targets for the crew's insubordination if they act with clemency towards Billy that they put aside their moral scruples: "Your clement sentence they would account pusillanimous" (p.61). Vere finally obtains the conviction he wants by playing on the fears of the members of the court, and not by reasoning with them. Because of his unscrupulous methods, then, he lays himself open to the charge of hanging Billy unfairly, even by legalistic standards. And in the description of Vere's death there is a hint that perhaps he was interested in obtaining a summary conviction in order to convince his superiors in the navy that he should be promoted: "'The spirit that 'spite its philosophic austerity may yet have indulged in the most secret of all passions, ambition, never attained to the fullness of fame.'" (p.72)

But even though Vere may have been partially influenced to hang Billy by his personal ambition, his cold-heartedness only emphasizes the redemptive forgiveness embodied in Billy. Vere conveys the death sentence which he has obtained to Billy in person, and visits him while he is waiting to be hung. He is aware of Billy's love for him, which was intensified by his kind words to Billy while he tried to answer Claggart, and in a private interview presumably explains his position to Billy's satisfaction. The following morning Billy is hung:

At the penultimate moment, his words, his only ones, words wholly unobstructed in the utterance, were these: "God bless Captain Vere!" Syllables so unanticipated coming from one with the ignominious hemp about his neck--a conventional felon's benediction directed aft towards the quarters of honor; syllables too delivered in the clear melody of a singing bird on the point of launching from the twig--had a phenomenal effect, not unenhanced by the rare personal beauty of the young sailor, spiritualized now through late experiences so poignantly profound.

Without volition, as it were, as if indeed the ship's populace were but the vehicles of some vocal current electric, with one voice from aloft and aloft came a resonant sympathetic echo: "God bless Captain Vere!" And yet at that instant Billy alone must have been in their hearts, even as in their eyes. (p.68)

Taking into account the wholly appropriate metaphor of a singing bird, it is hard to agree with critics like Marcus Cunliffe, who sees this scene as mournful or ironic.³⁸(p.119). The love evinced by Billy at the moment of death is unlike the emotions of Ahab, Pierre, Bartleby, Benito Cereno--indeed any other of Melville's characters. He does not stutter, as he did before Claggart; nor is he unaware of the significance of his death. He dies secure in his love for Vere, although the reader may feel that the captain is entirely undeserving of it.

Indeed the crew realize that Vere is less deserving of their love than is Billy, for "at that moment Billy alone must have been in their hearts, as in their eyes" (p.68), while Vere dies alone and forgotten, "cut off from the Nile and Trafalgar." (p.72) Even his last words are "'Billy Budd, Billy Budd.'" We are told that these words were not spoken in "the accents of remorse;" it seems clear that Billy's name is spoken contemplatively by Vere, as though he has received an insight into the nature of goodness and come to appreciate the meaning of Billy's ability to forgive him.

The official naval chronicle mentions Billy as a "ringleader" of an attempted mutiny who treacherously stabs Claggart with his sheath knife when arraigned before the captain of the Bellipotent, and who is consequently executed. "The promptitude of the punishment has proved salutary. Nothing amiss is now apprehended aboard H.M.S. Bellipotent." This chronicle, we are told, appeared "in a publication now long ago superannuated and forgotten" (p.73).

The only living memory of Billy Budd is in the hearts of the common sailors. They value a chip of the spar from which he was hung "as a piece of the Cross." And although they are ignorant of the secret facts of the tragedy,

"they instinctively felt that Billy was a sort of man as incapable of mutiny as of wilful murder. They recalled the fresh young image of the Handsome Sailor, that face never deformed by a sneer or subtler vile freak of the heart within" (p.74).

Although some critics have felt that the emphasis of Billy Budd is on the uselessness of his death, these memories of the crew members do not seem entirely without a positive connotation. It is good as well to remember Vere's comparison of Claggart's death to the just fate of Ananias, for in "Acts" V: 14 we are told that the example of Ananias' death led to a reinvigorated society: "Believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and woman." This analogy seems to indicate that Billy's murder has temporarily purged the surviving society of the evil represented by Claggart.³⁹

A final indication of the redemptive effect of Billy's

death is the poem written about him by "another foretopman, one of his own watch, gifted, as some sailors are, with an artless poetic temperament" (p.74). This Jack Chase-like figure writes of Billy as wistfully awaiting execution:

Fathoms down, fathoms down, how I'll dream fast asleep.
I feel it stealing now. Sentry, are you there.
Just ease these darbies at the wrist,
And roll me over fair!
I am sleepy and the weeds about me twist. (p.75)

The translation of Billy's life and death into a myth is an indication that he has shown himself to be a living force in the heart of the members of society who survive him. As H. Bruce Franklin notes of the forms which decree Billy's death: "These forms and the myth which accepts them mirror a society dependent both on forms and on their mythological statement. Myth, destructive in the worlds of Mardi, Moby-Dick, and Pierre, preserves the world of Billy Budd."⁴⁰ And, as other critics have variously affirmed, the final, socially redemptive lesson of the novel, is what Captain Vere can never see, "that good has the power to maintain itself, if never wholly to prevail, in a world where it seems always at the point of extinction."⁴¹ The Adamic personality of Billy Budd has demonstrated itself to be free of any sordidness or compromise in its test with elemental evil, and the common sailors have responded to this indication of the natural strength of moral beauty by joining together in admiration and love for the Handsome Sailor.

Billy Budd, as we have seen, contains two main types of violence: that of goodness aroused by evil to righteous indignation, and institutionalized violence. The role of institu-

tionalized violence is to protect society against the breaking of its laws, and thus serves in some sense to maintain human society. But the violence of natural goodness is seen as a socially redemptive force, which precisely because it takes no account of the legal consequences to itself in its conflict with evil, is able to purge that evil from society.

As we have seen, then, Billy Budd appears to be a new development in Melville's fiction. For the first time an individual transcends the limits of his mortality and speaks to society through the vehicle of myth. Billy Budd has the effect on society which Ahab, Pierre, Bartleby, and Benito Cereno did not. And we notice that the level on which this communication takes place is not an intellectual one, but that of the emotions, particularly the emotion of magnanimity. The violence which in Moby-Dick is an expression of intellectual frustration is in Billy Budd at its most profound a transcendent indication of the emotional strength of goodness in its conflict with evil for a dominant place in the hearts of men.

CONCLUSION

This study of Melville's use of violence in his fiction has indicated, I hope, how different his use of the theme is from that of other writers, both contemporary and modern. Unlike Poe, for example, Melville rarely emphasizes the aspect of terror in his fiction. "Benito Cereno" is probably his most Poe-like longer fiction, and yet the tone of its narration is remarkably tame compared to that of "The Tell-Tale Heart" or "The Pit and the Pendulum," for example. Nor is Melville's use of violence characteristically very similar to that of Hawthorne, who in tales such as "Roger Malvin's Burial" and "Young Goodman Brown" renders nightmarish effects which are far different from those achieved by Melville's characteristically realistic technique. Nevertheless, these three men can be naturally grouped together among their more optimistic contemporaries because of their common recognition of "the power of blackness," as Harry Levin has shown.⁴²

This basic recognition of the evil in humanity more than any other characteristic helps to set Melville apart from his time. Unlike Emerson and the popularizers of his cult, Melville could not ignore the violence and injustice which he saw around him. As I noted in my "Introduction," Melville was passionately interested in the Civil War as an attempt to end political injustices; and as we have seen in his fiction, particularly in "Benito Cereno," his art was inevitably affected by his person beliefs. He attempted always to give the violent and evil aspects of life full recognition, and then

tried to construct a fictional context in which their effect could be, if not neutralized, at least balanced, as is the case in Billy Budd.

Two other important writers who at times treat violence in a way similar to Melville are Dickens and Conrad. Violence in Dickens' novels, just as in Melville's, is often used to symbolize the purgation of evil from society. Carker's death under the train in Dombey and Son is a clear example of this, for with his death all obstacles to Dombey's repentance and the re-establishment of a society based on family loyalty and mutual love are removed. The deaths of Riderhood and Bradley Headstone in Our Mutual Friend perform the similar function of clearing the way for an improved society. But in this last novel one important way in which Dickens differs from Melville in his treatment of violence may be discerned. For Bradley and Riderhood are both evil, and consequently neither of their deaths is seen, like Billy's, as a loss to society. Nor are they killed, as is Claggart, by a man depicted as a saint. This transformation of murder into a virtue is the unique aspect of Melville's treatment of violence. Conrad comes closer than Dickens to Melville's depiction of the violence exercised on an innocent man as socially redemptive. The death of the protagonist in Lord Jim is described, like Billy's execution, in terms of a blood-tax; Jim's voluntary acceptance of his execution by his friend Doramin is seen--like Billy's--as a final indication of his personal salvation, as an affirmation of his belief in the values of his adopted society. But Conrad's attitude to evil is usually less calm than that of the Melville

of Billy Budd. In Heart of Darkness, particularly, this attitude is reflected by Kurtz's final horrific insight into "The horror, the horror." The agony informing these words as Kurtz reflects on the destruction he has caused differs immensely from Vere's contemplative acceptance of his guilt in hanging "Billy Budd, Billy Budd."

Melville's spiritualized treatment of Billy Budd's execution also sets him far apart from such modern writers as Hemingway and Heller. The narrator of A Farewell to Arms does not willingly sacrifice his life in the way Billy does when called upon to do so by the military authorities. When they arrest him and are about to execute him on the charge of abandoning his troops he dives into the nearest river in order to escape, although he is innocent of the charge. For Hemingway the individual who puts his trust in the justice of institutions, particularly military institutions, is nothing more or less than a fool, especially if his life is at stake. And Heller's Catch-22 is a parody of Billy Budd, as the number of missions Yossarian is required to fly is constantly raised at the whim of his glory-hungry commander, and Yossarian finds himself sacrificed again and again for the sake of another man's relentless search for glory.

Perhaps the faith in humanity's ability to continue to exist evidenced by Melville's treatment of violence in Billy Budd has been forever destroyed by the recent history fictionalized in the works of writers like Hemingway and Heller. In any event, however, as this thesis has shown, we have reassuring evidence in the nature of Melville's development of the

theme of violence that to at least one profound and timeless mind the problem of making man's destructive potential work for the social good did not seem totally insoluble.

NOTES

¹See John Bernstein, Pacifism and Rebellion in the Writings of Herman Melville (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1964); Lawrence Thompson, Melville's Quarrel With God (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1963).

²Leslie A. Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel (New York: World Publishing Co., 1964), p.435.

³Bernstein, p.173.

⁴Herman Melville, "Preface" to Billy Budd, in Melville's Billy Budd and the Critics, ed. William T. Stafford, 2nd ed. (Belmont, Cal.: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1968), p.76.

⁵Herman Melville, Works, Standard Edition (New York: Russell and Russell, 1963), XVI, 173.

⁶Perry Miller, "From Edwards to Emerson," in Interpretations of American Literature, ed. Charles Feidelson, Jr., and Paul Brodtkorb, Jr. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1959), p.115.

⁷Herman Melville, Moby-Dick, ed. Harrison Hayford and Hershel Parker (New York: W.W. Norton, 1967), p.12. All subsequent references to Moby-Dick are to this edition.

⁸As Merlin Bowen points out, it is quite clear that in this event we are meant to read "the god's disdain for human reason." See Merlin Bowen, The Long Encounter: Self and Experience in the Writings of Herman Melville (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1960), p.83.

⁹Richard B. Sewall, The Vision of Tragedy (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1965), p.102.

¹⁰Melville's description of this charmed, churned circle should be compared with the "ringed horizon" in which Cain killed Abel, spoken of in "Midnight, Forecastle." For Ishmael, the horizon of man's potentiality does include the ability to commit violence against his fellow man, but unlike Ahab his recognition of this fact does not render him incapable of enjoying other activities. In this scene he shows that man's potential includes the capacity to enjoy "dalliance and delight" even while encircled by death and violence. For Ishmael violence and evil rarely seem to make up the sum total of life, as they do for Ahab.

¹¹Herman Melville, Pierre: Or, The Ambiguities (Toronto: The New American Library of Canada, 1965), p.33. All subsequent references to Pierre are to this edition.

¹²Bernstein, p.143.

¹³William Ellery Sedgwick, Herman Melville: The Tragedy of Mind (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1945), p.146.

¹⁴Bernstein, p.144.

¹⁵See Richard Chase, Herman Melville: A Critical Study (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1949), p.139; Marcus Cunliffe, The Literature of the United States (Harmondsworth Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1964), p.116; Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel, p.405; F.O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966), p.470; Perry Miller, The Raven and the Whale (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1956), p.305.

¹⁶James E. Miller, Jr., A Reader's Guide to Herman Melville (New York: The Noonday Press, 1962), p.165.

¹⁷As Reinhold Niebuhr has pointed out, true passive resistance always involves a willingness of the individual who resists to forfeit his life, as Bartleby does. Niebuhr distinguishes this absolute pacifism from that of pseudo-pacifists who "declare that the ethic of Jesus is not an ethic of non-resistance, but one of non-violent resistance; that it allows one to resist evil provided the resistance does not involve the destruction of life or property." The lawyer feels threatened by Bartleby simply because of the absolute pacifism of the scrivener's character; an apt analogy would be the initial reaction of the British against Gandhi and his followers. See Reinhold Niebuhr, "Why the Christian is Not Pacifist," in Man and Warfare ed. William F. Irscher (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown, & Co., 1964), p.95. For a fine discussion of the paradox that although "no rational accusation of guilt could be brought against the employer for setting a limit to Bartleby's absolute demand. . . . a residue of existential guilt inevitably remains," see Maurice Friedman, Problematic Rebel, rev. ed. (Chicago and London: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1970), p.91.

¹⁸Herman Melville, Billy Budd and the Piazza Tales (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., 1961), p.116. All subsequent references to "Bartleby the Scrivener" are to this edition.

¹⁹Kingsley Widmer, "Melville's Radical Resistance: The Method and Meaning of 'Bartleby,'" Studies in the Novel, I (Winter, 1969), 455.

²⁰Chase, Herman Melville, p.151.

²¹For the contention that the development of the story is "centered around Delano's gradual movement toward illumination," see Edgar A. Dryden, Melville's Thematics of Form (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1968), p.200. Dryden also perceives another theme of development in Cereno's gradual insight into the realities of violence: "The slave-owning businessman Aranda and Captain Cereno, representatives of the world of established social forms, are introduced by Babo to the fictitiousness of their world and are brought face to face with the ambiguous but

ineluctable facts of a shadow world full of hate and violence where slave is master and master slave, a world of death in life." (p.207).

²²Warner Berthoff argues convincingly that interpretations of "Benito Cereno" as a "parable" describing the exposure of "innocence" to "evil," such as those by Richard Chase and Newton Arvin, are based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the importance of uncertainty and suspense to the story. See The Example of Melville (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1962), pp. 150 ff.

²³Herman Melville, Billy Budd and the Piazza Tales (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., 1961), p.159. All subsequent references to "Benito Cereno" are to this edition.

²⁴Bernstein, p.106.

²⁵As Merlin Bowen points out, the fact that even after Delano realizes the true nature of Babo's character he "cannot learn from experience but persists in regarding such manifestations of evil as rare and isolated incidents" shows him to be an optimist, who like Aranda is likely to pay dearly for his optimism. For Bowen, Delano is one of Melville's "bachelors," who are "not only free of family responsibilities" but also "have ascended no higher than the first degree of knowledge and perceive as yet only the semblance of truth." Surely Delano's blindness to the realities of violence is his most marked trait. See Bowen, The Long Encounter, p.67.

²⁶Bernstein, pp.173-74.

²⁷For a good up-to-date survey of criticism on Billy Budd see The Merrill Studies in Billy Budd, comp. Haskell S. Springer (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co., 1970).

²⁸The studies of Edgar A. Dryden, Melville's Thematics of Form, and Warner Berthoff, The Example of Melville, are particularly perceptive and individualistic in their approach.

²⁹Matthiessen, American Renaissance, p.510.

³⁰"Billy Budd: Testament of Resistance," in Melville's Billy Budd and the Critics, 2nd ed. William T. Stafford (Belmont, Cal.: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1968), pp.140-152.

³¹The Tragic Vision (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1966), p.264.

³²Herman Melville: The Tragedy of Mind, p.249.

³³The American Adam (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1967), p.130.

³⁴Berthoff, p.199.

³⁵Melville's Billy Budd and the Critics, 2nd ed. William T. Stafford (Belmont, Cal.: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1968). pp.15-16. All subsequent references to this novel are to this edition.

³⁶On Revolution (New York: The Viking Press, 1963), pp.78-79.

³⁷Ibid., p.79.

³⁸The Literature of the United States, p.119.

³⁹The only two extensive discussions of Melville's reference to Ananias are those by Nathalia Wright, Melville's Use of the Bible (Durham, North Carolina: Duke Univ. Press, 1949), p.183; and Lawrence Thompson, Melville's Quarrel With God (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1952), p.386. Neither discusses the social implications of Ananias' death.

⁴⁰H. Bruce Franklin, The Wake of the Gods: Melville's Mythology (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford Univ. Press, 1963), p.202.

⁴¹Bowen, pp.232-233. See also Matthiessen, p.510; Lewis, pp.130, 151-152. For complementary views see Bernstein, pp.212-213; Arendt, p.83.

⁴²The Power of Blackness (New York: Vintage Books, 1958).

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