THE UNITY OF MELVILLE'S PIAZZA TALES

by

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ABSTRACT

Herman Melville's Piazza Tales is a collection of short stories which first appeared individually in Putnam's Magazine; subsequently Melville re-edited them, wrote a title story, and had them published as a collection. Hitherto the stories have been analysed individually rather than collectively; this thesis, on the other hand, points out the numerous recurrent features in the tales, and it adduces evidence from the title story to support the view that the collection should be regarded as a unit. This supposition leads to a fresh critical view of the individual tales; it also helps to illuminate Melville's artistic development at a time which shortly precedes his transition from fiction-writing to poetry.

After discerning briefly the critical history of the Piazza Tales and the situation which led Melville to adopt the short story as a new medium of writing, this thesis analyses the title story both as a story in its own right and as an introduction to the collection. Since it is Melville's last quest story in prose and is written retrospectively, the nature of the questor's disappointment on the mountain throws a light on the meaning of the collected stories. Thus his retirement to the uninvolved viewpoint from the piazza and the theme of human isolation, captured in the figure of Marianna, emphasize salient features

common to the following stories. With these generic features in mind, each story is analysed; the last chapter evaluates these common characteristics from the viewpoint of Melville's development. Thus, the Piazza Tales not only show inner artistic consistency but appear as an important milestone in Melville's literary career, as an important link between Pierre and The Confidence Man, after which Melville gave up publishing fiction altogether.

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ABSTRACT

The Piazza Tales are a cycle of short stories which Melville had published anonymously in Putnam's between 1853 and 1856 and then collected in bookform, writing for this purpose a special introduction, "The Piazza," which gave this volume its name. Melville had initially rejected the idea of writing a "prefatory matter" to the collection of stories; the fact that he changed his mind and, together with the newly written "Piazza," amended the order of the stories strongly indicates that some unifying idea occurred to Melville. I therefore suggest that "The Piazza" contains important clues concerning the meaning of the stories, which, interpreted independently, have become very controversial issues among Melville's critics.

The Piazza Tales contain Melville's best and most widely acclaimed stories; they indicate that Melville was not creatively exhausted after Pierre. On the contrary, beginning with his interest in the Agatha story (in which he recognized a Hawthornean theme and which might have made him aware of the possibilities of Hawthorne's favourite genre), we notice a shift in Melville's writing in genre, technique, and theme, which was to prove very stimulating.

Like Hawthorne's prefaces, "The Piazza" as an introduction to the cycle emphasizes its unifying features. There is the title symbol of the piazza which, as the place from where the stories are told, contains important clues concerning the author's attitude. The introduction shows it to be a place of aesthetic retreat, signifying the author's detachment, from where he has learned to balance the dark view of life with a lighter "day" view. Corresponding to these "day" and "night" views we find

in each tale confrontations of contradictory attitudes; the author gives life to both but is identifiable with neither. Furthermore, Melville committed himself to something like a statement of thematic unity by invoking as a further link "Marianna's face, and many as real a story." Since her story is basically concerned with the narrator's unsuccessful search for the ideal of unity and understanding (suggested by the imagery of the journey and allusions to Una), Marianna--the reality found instead of the ideality sought--emphasizes that man is irredeemably alone. Against this background theme, Melville surveys in his stories various forms of disintegration, but always in relation to his own time. Thus, "The Piazza" strikes a chord which the stories modulate. Now Melville's concern is no longer with absolutes but with the human condition, this concern significantly framed by Agatha and Marianna as symbols of broken human relationships.

Lastly, the subject matter of the introduction has some bearing on the arrangement of the stories. Like the narrator's "voyage" towards a "spot of radiance" and his subsequent disappointment, the sequence of the stories follows a pattern of rising and then vanishing hope, the positive determinants (their "spot of radiance") in each being a variation of the value of sociality. However, while Melville might have seen in sociality and its variants a protection against the evil of disintegration, nevertheless the tragic ending of the cycle, analogous to the disappointment of the narrator in "The Piazza," emphasizes that the gleam of hope, as suggested by "The Piazza," is largely illusory. Thus, the Piazza Tales do not support the theory that Melville was moving in the direction of acceptance, but together with The Confidence Man they indicate

Melville's profound awareness of evil as a disintegrating force, presented in his work, however, with a new detachment which--in the case of his "late" stories and The Confidence Man--borders on moral nihilism.

Thus we can say that the Piazza Tales are an important milestone in Melville's development between Pierre and The Confidence Man, after which Melville ceased publishing fiction altogether. Seen as a cycle of recurrent themes and attitudes, they not only reveal an inner consistency in Melville's vision which helps to throw light on each individual tale, but they also give evidence of Melville's new artistic control which the turn to a new genre and to a new group of themes had given him.

CONTENTS

		PAGE
ABSTRACT		i.
CHAPTER		
I.	CRITICAL HISTORY OF THE PIAZZA TALES	1.
II.	THE PUBLICATION OF THE PIAZZA TALES	26.
III.	"THE PIAZZA"	59.
IV.	"BARTLEBY"	103.
V.	"BENITO CERENO"	142.
VI.	"THE LIGHTNING-ROD MAN"	197.
VII.	"THE ENCANTADAS"	222.
VIII.	"THE BELL-TOWER"	267.
IX.	CONCLUSION	290.
BIBLIOGRAPHY		326.

CHAPTER I

CRITICAL HISTORY OF THE PIAZZA TALES

I

The Piazza Tales are a collection of short stories which, after having previously appeared individually in Putnam's Monthly Magazine between 1853 and 1855, were re-edited by Melville and fitted out with a title story which he wrote specifically for this collection. Among them are some of Melville's best known stories, such as "Bartleby" and "Benito Cereno," which have lately attracted considerable attention, but little has been done so far to see, either in this group or in Melville's short stories as a whole, any consistent or related patterns of themes and methods. Melville wrote his short stories all within the three years which, framed by Pierre and The Confidence Man, are crucial in his development for the very fact that they end in his decision to give up fiction writing altogether and turn to a new medium, that of poetry. This, in itself, poses an interesting problem. If, as some recent books by Marius Bewley, Milton R. Stern, and Charles Feidelson[1] have pointed out, there is a significant change in Melville's work between Pierre and The Confidence Man, what does his intervening work, namely his short stories written in that time, reveal of this?

All references to Melville's works are to the Constable edition except in cases where a Hendricks House edition is available (see bibliography). In the text of the thesis, Piazza Tales refers to the complete collection of stories, while Piazza tale or Piazza tales refer to either one or more individual tales of the collection.

[1]Marius Bewley, The Eccentric Design (New York, 1959); Milton R. Stern, The Fine Hammered Steel of Herman Melville (Urbana, 1957); Charles Feidelson, Symbolism and American Literature (Chicago, 1953)

Unfortunately the only book devoted to Melville's short stories, Richard Harter Fogle's important Melville's Shorter Tales,[2] which is very rich in stimulating interpretations of individual tales, bypasses this issue and ignores the question of inner relationships either within a group of stories or between neighbouring works.

My thesis represents an attempt to fill this gap. To survey critically Melville's total achievement in the field of the short story would have been too ambitious a venture, so I restricted myself to that group of stories which was designated by Melville himself as a collection, bound together by a title story which he wrote in full view of all the stories he wanted to incorporate. It is the contention of my thesis that through this introduction Melville emphasizes unifying features and recurrent themes and patterns and thus underlines the inherent consistency of the seemingly random collection of tales. This, in turn, leads to the speculations that not only might the introduction with its emphasis on recurrent features help to throw light on the meaning of the individual stories, which have been lately subjected to widely conflicting readings, but that the cycle of stories, thus unified, might reveal significant features of Melville's development: here is the sustained expression of Melville over a number of years which are important in his writing career for the very fact that they lead towards his controversial "Silent Years," silent at least as far as fiction writing is concerned. Thus, this thesis hopes to throw light on Melville's achievement as an accomplished writer of short stories and, through it, on his development in those crucial years of his life.

[2]Richard Harter Fogle, Melville's Shorter Tales (Norman, 1960).

Before interpreting the individual stories of the cycle according to these suggested outlines, the first two chapters will cover some background material. Chapter One will give a short survey of the critical history of the Piazza Tales; Chapter Two will turn to the biographical and factual background, with particular reference to the question of why Melville turned to shorter fiction.

II

The critical reception of the Piazza Tales could be said to fall roughly into three periods: the initial contemporary reaction, followed by a long period of neglect; the beginnings of the so-called "Melville Revival"; and lastly the more recent wave of academic and scholarly research with its attention to detailed analysis. The following sections in this chapter will summarize the trends of each period and discuss important milestones.

According to Hugh Hetherington's detailed study of Melville's contemporary reviewers,[3] the reception of Melville's stories was generally warm. It is true that the stories appeared anonymously in Putnam's and Harper's, but quite early they were linked with Melville's name, in the case of "The Encantadas" even before actual publication.[4] The surprising fact, however, is that they were never detrimentally affected

[3]Hugh Hetherington, Melville's Reviewers: British and American, 1846-1891 (Chapel Hill, 1961), pp.249-53.

[4]See a preview notice in the New York Evening Post, the reviews in the Berkshire County Eagle and the American Phrenological Journal, and Evert Duyckinck's note in The Literary World, all quoted in Jay Leyda (ed.), The Melville Log: A Documentary Life of Herman Melville, (2 vols.; New York, 1951), I, 484-86, and 482.

by his waning literary reputation, and if Melville's suggestion to his publisher to re-issue his stories in the form of a collection can be taken as a guide, Melville himself must have found the warmth of the initial response very reassuring. Hetherington sums up the general trend in the following terms:

> What were the statistical results? "Bartleby" was the favorite, with three votes for first prize, besides the encomium it received when it was just a magazine item; and for one critic, it was worthy of Dickens (Traveller). Next was "The Encantadas," with two firsts. "The Piazza" got one "Oscar." "The Bell-Tower," three honorable mentions; and "The Lightning-Rod Man" two booby prizes. Of the fifteen notices only one was really negative (Godey's), two cool, and twelve completely positive. Thus, statistically, the book was a decided success with the press.[5]

In this connection it is interesting to note that "Benito Cereno," which by the sheer bulk of its recent critical treatment appears a special favourite of the twentieth century, was only casually mentioned three times by these early reviews, in The Criterion, The New York Tribune, and The Knickerbocker.[6]

Apart from the general warmth with which the stories were received, the most outstanding feature of these early reviews is their concurrence on Melville's return to "realism" or--as they call it--his "graphic quality" and his "vividness of description," which they generally welcomed as a happy return on Melville's part to his earlier way of writing.[7] In this, we not only get an interesting glimpse into the nature of the

[5]Hetherington, p.253.

[6]Ibid., pp.249, 251, and 252.

[7]Reviews which mention the descriptive, realistic quality of Melville's tales are listed ibid., pp.249-53.

prevailing literary tenets and the tastes of the time,[8] but this awareness of some important change of style in Melville's work is also significant from the viewpoint of Melville's overall development. Here Melville's contemporary critics seem to have been sensitively aware of a point which has been often overlooked by later critics, namely that these stories do reflect an inner change which might furnish an important clue to Melville's development in those years between "failure" and "silence."

It must be remembered, however, that these notices and reviews were meant primarily to keep readers informed about current literary events and did not delve deeply. Unfortunately we know little about the response of the more "professional" reader. There is a very warm review in the New Bedford Mercury which, according to Hetherington, "envisioned Melville as a writer of really permanent importance," but this review is anonymous and is only conjectured to have been written by William Ellery Channing, Jr.[9] The only other piece of evidence we have concerning the "professional" reaction to Melville's stories is the exchange of letters between J. A. Dix, the publisher of Putnam's and George William Curtis, one of his co-editors and advisors,[10] in

[8]Allen Hayman, "Herman Melville's Theory of Prose Fiction: in Contrast with Contemporary Theories" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Illinois, 1961), p.134, defines the critical aims of the periodicals and magazines of the time: "The critics' concern was with realism, and if the book under review contained scenes treated realistically, then it was praised .... The writer's apprehension of reality--Melville's 'vital Truth'--might be completely ignored or even violently condemned."

[9]Hetherington, pp.250, and 253.

[10]Published in Merton M. Sealts, Jr., "The Publication of Melville's Piazza Tales," Modern Language Notes, LIX (January, 1944), 56-59.

which we find, according to Egbert Oliver, the "pre-publication reaction of one of the more sensitive among Melville's readers."[11] But since Dix did not purchase Putnam's until March, 1855, these letters unfortunately do not cover any work which Melville wrote before that date and are restricted to short discussions of "Benito Cereno," "The Bell-Tower," and "I and My Chimney." Of these, Curtis praised only the last without reservations, while "Benito Cereno" and "The Bell-Tower" he rejected, primarily for technical reasons (there were the "dreary documents at the end" of "Benito Cereno," and the "pompously self-conscious style" of "The Bell-Tower"[12]). But although Curtis might have disliked some aspects of their technique, he still liked them as stories. He recognized "the touch of genius" in them,[13] yet when asked in January, 1856, about the advisability of a possible collection of Melville's stories, he forecast astutely that while he liked "the Encantadas, and Bartleby, very much," he was not quite so confident concerning their commercial value: "He has lost his prestige--and I don't believe the Putnam's stories will bring it up."[14]

Curtis was right. As an economic venture the book was a failure, and even the warmth of its initial reception was not strong enough to survive the debacle of The Confidence Man, published in March, 1857. The stories are mentioned once more in passing in an essay which Fitz-James O'Brien wrote for Putnam's in April of the same year (in which the major

[11] Egbert Oliver (ed.), Piazza Tales (New York, 1948), p. ix.

[12] Melville Log, II, 500-501, 502, and 504.

[13] Ibid., II, 502.

[14] Ibid., II, 510.

point of interest is a strange misreading of the "hazy golden atmosphere" of "The Encantadas," which echoes that of earlier reviews[15]); but his is the last mention for a long time to come. Of the Piazza Tales, only "The Bell-Tower" with its appended moral and "The Lightning-Rod Man," step-child of modern criticism, were re-edited in anthologies,[16] while Melville's uncollected stories were, for the rest of the century, completely forgotten. The Piazza Tales themselves were not re-issued until the Melville Revival was well under way.

III

The second period in the critical reception of the Piazza Tales, from the beginnings of the Melville Revival to the tide of academic research and detailed interpretations, is characterized by a slowly growing awareness of the importance of Melville's "late" work, Moby Dick here marking the turning point.[17] Initially it was Moby Dick which received the lion's share of appreciation, but due to the pioneering

[15] Ibid., I, 484-85, and 487.

[16] "The Bell-Tower" was reprinted in Rossiter Johnson (ed.), Little Classics (Boston, 1875), and in Stedman and Hutchinson (eds.), Library of American Literature (New York, 1899). "The Lightning-Rod Man" was included in a collection entitled Capital Stories by American Authors (1895).

[17] Between the year of Melville's death, in 1891, and the centennial of his birth, in 1919, Melville's reputation had been kept alive by H. S. Salt, Edward Carpenter, Theobald Watts, Louis Becke, and Robert Buchanan. In America he was primarily known as the author of South Sea stories, while in England there were early indications of a shift of emphasis towards Moby Dick which lasted well into the Melville Revival. See in this connection Willard Thorp, Herman Melville: Representative Selections (New York, 1938), p.cxxvii, and Q. W. Riegel, "The Anatomy of Melville's Fame," AL, III (1930), 195-203. Important articles by English critics during these years are listed in my bibliography under headings of Robert Buchanan, Archibald MacMechan, W. C. Russel, H. S. Salt, Arthur Stedman, and R. H. Stoddard.

work of Raymond Weaver and Michael Sadleir, interest began to focus on other post-Moby Dick works. The very first sign of a rediscovery of Melville's "late" work is an article which Weaver, in 1919, wrote in The Nation. In it he pointed out that "the Piazza Tales give proof that Melville has not yet buried his wand in a grave of metaphysical speculations to conjure no more," a temptation to which he--unfortunately, in Weaver's view--succumbed in The Confidence Man.[18] (In this latter view concerning a "break" between the Piazza Tales and The Confidence Man Weaver was followed by many later critics. It is, in my view, however, important to see in Melville's stories the necessary link between Pierre and The Confidence Man and to see the latter as a development of techniques and attitudes found in the stories immediately preceding it.) Weaver's article of 1919 did not remain an isolated effort. In 1921, in his Melville biography,[19] he repeated his praise of the Piazza Tales, while a few years later, in 1924 and 1928, he followed up his recommendations by editing Billy Budd and Other Prose Pieces and Shorter Novels of Herman Melville.[20]

Yet even Weaver's praise of Melville's stories in the early twenties was subdued. According to him they were only "the last glow of Melville's literary glamour, the final momentary brightening of the embers

[18]Raymond Weaver, "The Centennial of Herman Melville," The Nation (New York), CIX (August 2, 1919), 145-46.

[19]Weaver, Herman Melville, Mariner and Mystic (New York, 1921), p.348.

[20]Weaver (ed.), Billy Budd and Other Prose Pieces in The Works of Herman Melville, XIV and XV (London, 1924), and Weaver (ed.), Shorter Novels of Herman Melville (New York, 1928).

before they sank into blackness and ash,"[21] and anything written after Moby Dick seemed so diminutive that his final verdict concerning the result of Melville's short story career was: "not distinguished."[22] Moreover, other articles on Melville in these early years of the Melville Revival did not even mention the Piazza Tales and showed a complete unawareness of the existence of other uncollected short stories.[23] Even such a sympathetic critic as Middleton Murry referred to "the long silence" as "the only appropriate epilogue to Melville's masterpiece,"[24] while F. J. Mather, Jr., who according to Willard Thorp gave "the first comprehensive survey of the whole of Melville's literary work,"[25] did not single out any of Melville's short stories.

In this situation, the honour of rescuing Melville's late works and of pointing to their significance within Melville's canon must go to the English critic Michael Sadleir who, in 1921, in a letter

[21] Weaver, Herman Melville, p.348.

[22] Ibid., p.381.

[23] An important exception, although it was widely ignored, is Henry Chapin (ed.), Herman Melville: The Apple-Tree Table and Other Sketches (Princeton University Press, 1922).

[24] John Middleton Murry, "The End of Herman Melville," reprinted in John Clare and Other Studies (London, 1950), pp.208-12.

[25] Thorp, p.clvii, and F. J. Mather, Jr., "Herman Melville," Review, I (August 9, 1919), 276-78 and I (August 16, 1919), 298-301. While Mather admits that "the human interest of Melville's later and forgotten work is so great that I cannot follow my predecessors and betters in criticism who have agreed to ignore it as unreadable," he, nevertheless, believes that "in a sense Moby Dick exhausted Melville's vein .... The rest is aftermath, yet it, too, is considerable." This "aftermath" consisted for Mather, however, only of Pierre and Melville's poetry; his short stories are completely ignored.

in The Nation, contested the prevalent scholarly opinion that all Melville's work after Moby Dick should be considered inferior.[26] One year later he expanded his praise of Melville's shorter fiction in his preface to Excursions in Victorian Bibliography. In it, his attitude diverges so much from the general critical opinion of the time and approaches so nearly our own estimate of this particular period of Melville's work that it merits a longer quotation:

> One feature, nevertheless, of contemporary opinion challenges to protest my amateur temerity. Apart from Moby Dick, the neo-Melvillian has little beyond patronizing approval for the books of his hero; Typee (1846) and Omoo (1847) are interesting records of travel, remarkable mainly for the early date of their appearance and as forerunners of the South Sea School in letters and in painting. Mardi (1849), Redburn (1849), and White Jacket [sic] (1850) claim respect as autobiography and for passages that reveal their author's genius struggling towards a more complete expression. These are the rising steps to the crowning summit of Melville's work. There, unique and peerless, stands Moby Dick; beyond it the terraces fall away again, and even more steeply than they rose.
>
> Is this opinion a just one? I am a little uncertain. With no desire to denigrate Moby Dick or to deny it the first place in importance among Melville's books, I would venture that his genius is more perfectly and skilfully revealed in a volume of stories belonging to the so-called decadence. The Piazza Tales are liable to be dismissed by the critic of to-day with kindly condescension as "the best of the later work," a judgment as misleading as it is easily explained.[27]

Sadleir then ventured the opinion that Moby Dick "tickles the palate of contemporary enthusiasm" because it has "peculiar and noticeable tricks of matter and style," which Melville, however, dispensed with in the more technically perfect Piazza Tales:

> Moby Dick, for all that it is unmistakably Melville is far from flawless. What if Melville recognized its weaknesses? What if

[26] Michael Sadleir, Letter to The Nation (London), XXXIX (June, 1921), 369.

[27] Michael Sadleir, Excursions in Victorian Bibliography (London, 1922) p.219.

> he deplored those very characteristics that are to-day lauded as his priceless individuality and chief claim to fame? ....In years to come, when the glamour of oddity has paled a little, it will be admitted that the book labours under a sad weight of intolerable prolixity. Nor is this prolixity implicit in the greatness of Melville's writing. This is proved by the two chief stories in The Piazza Tales. Benito Cereno and The Encantadas hold in the small compass of their beauty the essence of their author's supreme artistry. They are profound and lovely and tenderly robust, but they are never tedious and never wilful. Surely it were generous to admit that Melville sought to improve on Moby Dick and that, in the matter of technical control, he succeeded? These two stories cannot as literary achievement compare with their vast and teeming predecessor. That is natural. But they may not be ignored as the last glimmer of a dying lamp. They mark the highest technical level of their author's work, and, had not within a year or two of their appearance the darkness of self-distrust descended on him, might well have proved a revelation of something yet to come from the brain of Herman Melville, something destined--but for the treacherous inhibition of human frailty--to excel in power everything to which that brain had previously given birth.[28]

But Sadleir's enthusiasm for Melville's later works was in those early years of the Melville Revival not widely shared. It was difficult to supplant the generally accepted idea of a bitterly frustrated Melville, who after Moby Dick and a "Great Refusal" had retired into his "Long Quietus," possibly mentally disturbed but willing to search for a creative outlet to his psychic disturbances.[29] Yet slowly and perceptibly critical opinion in this first decade of the

[28] Ibid., p.220.

[29] Both Weaver and Lewis Mumford considered anything written after Moby Dick an anticlimax. Mumford, in his Herman Melville (New York, 1929), p.218, while accounting for this retreat, speaks of the "hiatus in Melville's emotional and sexual development," and admits later on (p.235) that "like Shakespeare and Goethe and so many another artist, Melville found a benign and not a baneful outlet for his energies; and every evidence of Melville's work points to the restoration of his poise and health, intermittently, in the decade we are writing of, and steadily in the years that followed."

Melville Revival changed towards a greater appreciation of his post-Moby Dick works. In 1928 Weaver, in his introduction to The Shorter Novels of Herman Melville, acknowledged that the Piazza Tales were the most "totally amazing of all the surprises of Melville's career."[30]

Indicative of a similar gradual change towards a greater interest in Melville's later work are Carl Van Doren's recantation of his earlier lack of appreciation, in 1928, Carl Van Vechten's defence of Melville's later works (in particular of Pierre) in The Double Dealer of January, 1922,[31] and Lewis Mumford's praise of "Benito Cereno" as "the culmination of Melville's power as a short story writer, as Moby-Dick [sic] marked his triumph as an epic poet."[32] In particular, Mumford's statement that "one cannot call silence the reduced but steady output of short stories, novels, poems which marked the next forty years"[33] was to be an important correction of the

[30]Weaver, Shorter Novels, p.xxxv.

[31]Carl Van Doren, "A Note of Confession," The Nation (New York), CXXVII (December 5, 1928), 622; Carl Van Vechten, "The Later Work of Herman Melville," Double Dealer, III (January, 1922), 9-20.

[32]Mumford, p.244. Similar views concerning "Benito Cereno" were held by other critics. John Freeman, Herman Melville (London, 1926), who considered the rest of the Piazza Tales "comparatively insignificant," praised "Benito Cereno" as "superb"; in 1928, Edward O'Brien placed it first in his list of "The Fifteen Finest Short Stories," Forum, LXXIV (June, 1928), 906-14; ten years later, in 1938, Thorp saw in it "the culmination of Melville's art of the transmutation of sailors's yarns and travelers' tales into fiction" (Thorp, p.liii), while Yvor Winters, In Defense of Reason (Denver, 1947), pp.221-22, also proclaimed the "greatest works of Melville, aside from Moby Dick" to be "Benito Cereno," "The Encantadas," and Billy Budd. This list could be brought up to date by including nearly every one of Melville's critics, with the exception, perhaps, of Newton Arvin, who in Herman Melville (New York, 1950) considers the story to be grossly overrated.

[33]Mumford, p.224.

conventional theory of Melville's "Silent Years." Mumford might not agree with Sadleir about the artistic quality of Melville's short stories, but by seeing in them reflections of Melville's personal struggles in those years of crisis,[34] he assisted in directing the attention of later critics to this period of Melville's work.

Around the same time, we come to a first break-through towards more detailed analyses of Melville's short stories: in 1928 Harold H. Scudder had found "by chance" Captain Delano's account of his travels and had discovered in it the source of Melville's "Benito Cereno."[35] His article is important not so much for its exploitation of this interesting find but for the impetus it gave to Melville research in the following years. In the wake of Scudder's article followed further source studies which began to throw some light on Melville's creative process in adapting his source material to his purposes.[36] Thus Scudder's article can be called a milestone in the critical history of the Piazza Tales not so much for its actual contribution towards a new understanding of "Benito Cereno" but for its

[34]Mumford saw in "Bartleby" a statement of Melville's own position at the time, and in "Benito Cereno" "parallels between Benito Cereno's fate and Melville's own life" (p.246).

[35]Harold H. Scudder, "Melville's Benito Cereno and Captain Delano's Voyages," PMLA, XLIII (June, 1928), 502-32. The source is Amaso Delano's Narrative of Voyages and Travels in the Northern Hemisphere ... (Boston, 1817).

[36]Examples are Leon Howard's identification of the Spenser quotations in "Melville and Spenser--A Note on Criticism," MLN, XLVI (May, 1931), 291-92, and Russell Thomas' examination of "Melville's Use of Some Sources in The Encantadas," AL, III (January, 1932), 432-56.

stimulating effect on other scholars.

Twelve more years elapsed before a similar impetus was again given to scholarly research, this time in the field of interpretation. In 1940, E. H. Eby published his provocative study of the symbolism of "The Tartarus of Maids," in which he pointed to the sexual connotations of the paper-making process ("at a deeper level the sketch contrasts man exempt from the biological burdens of childbirth to women, victims of the gestation-process"[37]). Stimulated by this article, critics and readers now began to regard Melville's short stories as more than straightforward narratives. Was there perhaps hidden in them a double entendre, which evaded the hypersensitivities of social, religious, or family taboos?[38] Now the hunt was on, and there seemed to be no limitation as to what plot, image, or character might imply.

Eby's article, although novel in its application and direction, was not the only one which had dealt with the larger issue of the quality and nature of Melville's symbols.[39] In 1938, Thorp had emphasized

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

[38]Studies which pursue this argument are: Egbert S. Oliver, "A Second Look at 'Bartleby,'" College English, VI (May, 1945), 431-39, and "'Cock-a-doodle-doo!' and Transcendental Hocus Pocus," NEQ, XXI (June, 1948), 204-16, as well as an article by Sealts on "I and My Chimney," cited earlier. Similar views are to be found in Richard Chase, Herman Melville (New York, 1949), Newton Arvin, Herman Melville (New York, 1950), and Hoyle. Unfortunately, these attempts to tag rigidly the symbolic meaning of the stories were bound to lead into an impasse. The stories themselves, by the very nature of their symbolism, frustrate this search for the factual prototype of every character and event.

[39]By that time two theses had been finished on this subject: Vega Curl, Pasteboard Masks: Fact as Spiritual Symbol in the Novels of Hawthorne and Melville (Harvard, 1931), and Viola C. White, "Symbolism in Herman Melville's Writings" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, North Carolina, 1934).

Melville's apt handling of imagery and symbol and their function of elaborating his source material.[40] Unfortunately, he did not pursue this subject further and--with the exception of "Benito Cereno"--ignored Melville's stories and other later works both in his introduction and in the selections.[41]

If we take into consideration that the Melville Revival itself had hinged on the symbolic reading of Moby Dick, it seems quite consistent that critics should concern themselves with the whole question of Melville's artistic handling of symbol and imagery. In 1941 F. O. Matthiessen, in his American Renaissance, developed the indications of Thorp and other critics into a fuller study of Melville's use of symbol and allegory. His book contains revealing insights into Melville's symbolism and style with its richness of structure and its marks of Shakespearean and Biblical influence. But although this was valuable for Melville research in general, Matthiessen's greatest merit lies in his focus on the text itself, which to him is an artistic document and not primarily a spiritual autobiography.

[40] Thorp, p.lv.

[41] Thorp, p.lxxxiii: "Here in 1852 ended, for the moment, Melville's quest for the Ultimate.... If Melville could have continued to objectify his quest in books like Mardi, Moby Dick, and Pierre, he might have saved himself from the emotional collapse which darkened the next ten years of his life.... There was no further possibility of subliming [sic] it into another Moby-Dick, for the 'fullness' was gone. He abandoned himself in private conversation to continued wandering over the deserts of speculation." In his later work, Thorp appears to have changed his views. In his Melville chapter in the Literary History of the United States (New York, 1946; revised edition, 1953) he mentions the high level of some of his writing after Pierre but only singles out "Bartleby" for a short discussion (p.462).

Matthiessen is among the first to examine Melville's work not simply for what it reveals of his inner states of mind but for its artistic literary qualities.[42] Thus Melville scholarship owes to Matthiessen's study more than can be directly traced. Unfortunately, however, the general nature of his investigation demanded a focus on the most prominent stages in Melville's development (Moby Dick, Pierre, and Billy Budd), so that there is little on the Piazza Tales or the short stories as a whole, and of the individual stories we only get short glimpses.

With Matthiessen's book we have reached a third stage in the history of the critical reception of the Piazza Tales, if we accept contemporary criticism in the reviews of the time with their stress on "realistic description" as the first, and the beginnings of the Melville Revival in 1919 as initiating the second. What was the general verdict on the Piazza Tales in the years between 1919 and 1940? Apart from the lone voice of Sadleir, we find that in most studies of the early years Melville's stories are yet overshadowed by the fame of Moby Dick, which after all "made" Melville's reputation in the twentieth century. If any of the stories are praised at all, it is "The Encantadas" and "Benito Cereno." However, few of the arguments and observations are

[42] Winters had earlier treated problems of form in Maule's Curse (Norfolk, Conn., 1938), reprinted in In Defense of Reason, but he had little to say on the Piazza Tales. Matthiessen, in his foreword to American Renaissance (New York, 1941), states that he is "primarily concerned with what these books were as works of art, with evaluating their fusions of form and content" (p.vii). "My aim has been to follow these books through their implications, to observe them as the culmination of their author's talents ... to evaluate them in accordance with the enduring requirements for great art" (p.xi).

based on a close reading of the text. Most of the criticism is made en passant, in biographies or while attempting to outline Melville's spiritual development. Only towards the end of this period does critical interest begin to focus on his stories, not simply as supplementary reading to Moby Dick but as artistically finished works in their own right. The darkness which had fallen on Melville's literary reputation at the close of the first stage of his critical reception was slowly lifting.

IV

The third stage in the critical history of the Piazza Tales can be said to have begun, as already mentioned, with Matthiessen's book, since under his influence the individual stories were subjected to a closer textual analysis, helped, no doubt, by the publication of new texts of Melville's shorter fiction, which filled a long-felt need for definitive editions of Melville's stories. In 1948, there appeared Egbert Oliver's edition of the Piazza Tales, based on the text of their first edition of 1856 which Melville himself had prepared for the press from copies of the magazine versions, followed one year later by Jay Leyda's collection of The Complete Stories of Herman Melville, the text of which is a collation between the original magazine stories and the book version.[43] Both books have very useful notes and appendices. From the viewpoint of recurrent patterns, Leyda's introduction is particularly helpful, but unfortunately he had to leave his stimulating suggestions undeveloped. Of special significance are his remarks concerning the recurrence of certain symbols, the static

[43] Jay Leyda (ed.), The Complete Stories of Herman Melville (New York, 1949) p.xxxiii.

and pictorial quality of Melville's stories, the author's variable poses and disguises, and the camouflaged meaning of the stories.[44] His notes in the appendix are less comprehensive than Oliver's and are primarily restricted to information on sources and publication history. Yet it can be said that both books have performed the valuable service of arousing new interest in Melville's shorter fiction, which, due to the overemphasis on Moby Dick, was not widely known.

In the meantime, biographies by William E. Sedgwick, in 1944, and Geoffrey Stone, in 1949, had offered little new to the discussion of the short stories.[45] Carl Van Doren still seemed to regret his former lack of appreciation and gave further proof of remorse by editing Billy Budd, "Benito Cereno," and "The Enchanted Isles."[46] His insights in the foreword were perceptive but unfortunately very general, as for instance his remark concerning "the primitive deeps in mastery" in "Benito Cereno," and "the antediluvian nature" of "The Encantadas." In the short stories as a group, with possibly recurring

[44] Ibid., pp. xx-xxiv.

[45] William E. Sedgwick, Herman Melville: The Tragedy of Mind (Cambridge, Mass., 1944); Geoffrey Stone, Melville (New York, 1942).

[46] Carl Van Doren (ed.), Billy Budd, Benito Cereno, and The Enchanted Isles (New York, 1942).

patterns and themes, he showed little interest.[47]

Although the general studies of Melville which appeared in these years did not lay special stress on his stories, the reorientation of Melville criticism, which they affected, was bound to influence the response to his stories, even if only peripherally. Changing trends were visible not only in widely divergent interpretations--"Bartleby" and "Benito Cereno" were particular sources of controversy--but also in the new methods which were employed. An example of new thinking on this subject is a series of articles by R. E. Watters, who sees Melville not as identifiable with his lonely truth-seekers nor with any of his heroes and "isolatoes" but rather as a man essentially concerned with communal values.[48] Watters' observations will be found particularly pertinent to a new understanding of Melville's short stories.

It is primarily this last-mentioned aspect of Melville as a critic of his time which is stressed in Richard Chase's book on Melville, in 1949, which offers not only a new view of Melville but also a new critical method, namely the exploration of something like a

[47]Other studies of Melville which deal with the short stories only in passing are those listed in my bibliography under the following: Warner Berthoff, Merlin Bowen, William Braswell, Henry E. Pommer, Edward H. Rosenberry, Milton R. Stern, Lawrance Thompson, Walter Weber, and Nathalia Wright. Books containing chapters on Melville, which only notice the stories in passing are listed in my bibliography under the following: W. H. Auden, R. P. Blackmur, Van Wyck Brooks, Norman Foerster, D. H. Lawrence, V. L. Parrington, Constance Rourke, as well as in the studies of Winters and Feidelson already cited.

[48]R. E. Watters, "Melville's 'Isolatoes,'" PMLA, LX (1945), 1134-48; "Melville's Metaphysics of Evil," University of Toronto Quarterly, IX (January, 1940), 170-82; "Melville's Sociality," AL, XVII (1945), 33-49.

subconscious level, where for instance "the real theme of Billy Budd is castration and cannibalism, the ritual murder and eating of the Host," and where Melville's work is seen as centered on the quest for the father.[49] In his insistence on reading Melville's works as a subconscious self-expression and as the unburdening of complexes--as a kind of psychic autobiography--Chase's approach is one of the first in a series of similar ones.[50] Yet the fact which distinguishes this book from similar and often obsessed studies is Chase's stress on the social implications, in other words, on the problem of man's relationship with his own culture and civilisation; furthermore there is such a multitude of thought-provoking and stimulating ideas hidden in what Stanley T. Williams called "his extreme, unsubstantiated interpretations"[51] that one wishes he had dealt more intensively with Melville's short stories. One observation, in particular, needs mention as it touches on the subject under discussion: Chase sees Melville in the years after Moby Dick not as the bitterly frustrated man we have come to expect from earlier biographies but as a man "probing new areas of experience and seeking out new styles." According to Chase "the point to be stressed about these stories is that they

[49] Chase, p.269.

[50] Similar studies--besides that of Hoyle, cited earlier--are those listed in my bibliography under Laurence Barret and Leslie Fiedler. The writer and Melville critic E. L. Grant Watson should also be cited. Ronald Mason, in The Spirit Above the Dust: A Study of Herman Melville (London, 1951), says of Watson: "He believes 'Benito Cereno' to be about marriage ... 'symbolizing those phases of the married state where conscious motives and apprehensions are dominated by the chthonic and unsuspected, or only dimly suspected, motives of the Unconscious'" (p.187).

[51] Stanley T. Williams, "Herman Melville," in Floyd Stovall (ed.), Eight American Authors (New York, 1956) p.222.

show the author seeking out new kinds of wisdom, which involve an acceptance of some of the things of life Ahab and Pierre had too madly transcended."[52] Remarks like this throw an interesting new light on the short stories as a whole--but again his bias interferes:

> The short stories of this period of Melville's life are personal and introspective. Melville was thinking of himself as an artist and trying to understand the artist's relation to his society .... Melville was consciously writing a parable of the artist in "Bartleby."[53]

Related in nature to Chase's new understanding of Melville's short stories are two other general studies--by Newton Arvin, in 1950, and by Ronald Mason, one year later--which emphasize certain recurrent features in Melville's short stories, this time found in the common theme of failure. But while Mason sees this failure on one level as due to the nature of "the insoluble metaphysical problems" which Melville set himself, Arvin construes the theme of failure as the expression of Melville's haunted preoccupation with his own personal failure. Both studies overstress, to my mind, the significance of the theme of failure, but their contribution towards a more comprehensive estimation of Melville's shorter fiction is nonetheless very important. For the first time, a general theme was attributed to Melville's short stories, a significant step forward indeed, although the nature of this theme still remains debatable. Yet Arvin, in his general verdict on Melville's short stories, seems to echo the old view that "nothing Melville later did, was comparable to his one great book."[54]

[52] Chase, pp.143-44.

[53] Ibid., p.146.

[54] Arvin, pp.217-18.

Mason takes up another important issue which had been debated for some time, namely the question of whether Melville is in artistic control of his story material, in other words, whether his stories only express the theme of failure or are in themselves artistic failures. Sadleir had raised the issue thirty years earlier and had spoken for their artistic excellence; Mumford, with a little less gusto and verve, had agreed.[55] And now Mason, too, concurs, although he criticizes the unevenness of some of Melville's tales:

> There is a marked change in Melville after Pierre, a sufficient reason for much of his later work to be dismissed. But there cannot be much doubt that in fact that change is artistically for the better.... something imposed a discipline upon his writing that had never been able to control it so thoroughly before.[56]

With this latter view, Charles G. Hoffmann, would seem to agree. In the only article which is devoted to the whole of Melville's shorter fiction, he reaches the significant conclusion that through his stories Melville grew as a creative writer and, for the first time in his literary career, was in full control of his material:

> The "tragedy" of Melville's literary career ... is not at all that his creative powers declined; on the contrary, he grew as an artist through his shorter fiction. The tragedy is that he did not transpose the lesson learned and achieved in the shorter forms of fiction to the long form, the full-length novel.[57]

[55] Mumford, p.231.

[56] Mason, p.180.

[57] Charles G. Hoffmann, "The Shorter Fiction of Herman Melville," South Atlantic Quarterly, III (July, 1953), 430. His article is based in part on his unpublished Ph.D. thesis "The Development of the Short Novel in Hawthorne, Melville, and James" (Wisconsin, 1952).

Hoffmann's article is--apart from Fogle's book--the only attempt to survey critically Melville's short fiction as a whole. But while he stresses the artistic excellence of Melville's stories, his article is, unfortunately, too brief to give detailed interpretations or to trace recurring patterns and to relate them to Melville's work which went before and came after.[58] The same could be said about the flood of articles which has appeared in the last decade, insofar as each explores a particular story individually but disregards possible inter-relationships. Thus, new readings appear which often not only diverge widely from previous ones, but which also clash with those of other stories. This is helped, no doubt, by the fact that Melville's stories are "dark" and devoid of any clues.[59] But there is no reason why we should accept this lack of direct evidence without exploring the possibility of indirect evidence, that is, of seeing the stories in a certain context either of a frame story and a story collection, or the larger one of adjoining books. After all, Pierre, the short stories, and

[58]Mason already had hinted at such a connection when he stated: "But these stories gave shape and cogency to moods which the very careful narrative art proves not to have been transitory, which can be traced indeed back to his earliest work and forward to his latest, until his whole life's work is illuminated by an unusual consistency of purpose" (p.188). The theme which Mason finds consistently used is "deadly duplicity, fundamental to experience" (p.187).

[59]Concerning this "cluelessness," the question is whether it is intentional or not. Fogle maintains that "in these tales he wishes to conceal, however, his direct purposes, for artistic, personal, financial, and sometimes humorous reasons" (p.4). Others, like Chase, Eby, Oliver and Thompson suspect similar reasons. Yet it is debatable whether Melville was really intentionally misleading his public, or whether the "cluelessness" simply resulted from an all-pervading sense of ambiguity which would not admit any certainty or committedness. The question is an important one and will have to be taken up later.

The Confidence Man were all written within four years of each other, and in as profound a thinker as Melville was, some inner continuity of thought might be assumed. Inner relationships are unavoidable in works conceived so closely together. And nowadays, when the criticism of Melville's short stories seems to have become a "free-for-all" with as many interpretations as the stories will stand, a reference to a larger frame will assist and eliminate inconsistent or out-of-the-way interpretations. What is needed now in order to consolidate the recent advances is an overall estimate of techniques and methods employed, a study of recurrent patterns and images, which in turn will not only throw light on each individual story but will illuminate that period of change which, with a fair amount of unanimity, Melville is assumed to have undergone in the years after Pierre. It is surely as important to relate the individual stories to each other or to the cycle to which they belong, as to see in each story a link in an overall pattern which leads from Pierre to The Confidence Man and from there to Billy Budd. In 1956, Stanley T. Williams had demanded a full-length study of the Piazza Tales and of their place in the Melville canon.[60] Eight years later, this demand has not yet been fulfilled. To contribute something toward this goal will be the aim of this thesis.

[60] Williams, p.266. Only two theses deal with Melville's short stories as such. Hoyle, in his study of Melville as magazinist, cited earlier, states (p.iii) that his aim is "to provide a descriptive survey of Melville's magazine career. Emphasis has been placed upon the general characteristics of his magazine writing, the motivation behind it, and the conditions under which it was produced....My discussion of the stories is not intended to be a full critical study" [italics mine]. John Paul Runden, "Imagery in Melville's Shorter Fiction," (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Indiana, 1952), gives a listing of images occurring in all of Melville's short stories, again without an attempt to interpret.

V

The study of Melville's achievement in the Piazza Tales will proceed in the following manner. Chapter Two will continue the introduction with a survey of the biographical background and the possible reasons which might have induced Melville to adopt both a new technique and a new genre of writing. After this, the title story of the Piazza Tales will be analysed not only as an independent story but in its function as a frame story. Then each Piazza tale will be interpreted with the established pattern in mind, each individual interpretation being introduced by a summary of its generic features, followed by a survey of existing interpretations. A last chapter will finally summarize all those features which contribute towards the unity of the cycle and evaluate them for their significance in Melville's development.

CHAPTER II

THE PUBLICATION OF THE PIAZZA TALES

I

The Piazza Tales, as a collection of short stories, contains among others the most ambitious and best-known achievements of Melville in this genre, which give evidence of Melville's full control over the technical aspects of his craft. Yet in discussions of Melville's short story career, we often find the allegation that he wrote hastily, that he wrote primarily for money, or that the demands of his farm and of his growing family left him little time to concentrate on a book-length effort. Whatever the reasons, until more evidence has been found, any conclusions will have to be hypothetical, because extant letters to his family, his friends, and to his publishers are devoid of any definite clues. Yet the prevalent allegations that he "wrote for money" and that, in the face of his former hostility towards magazine fiction in general, he "compromised his integrity" by contributing to them, needs correction. After all, it was in his magazine contributions, such as "Bartleby," "Benito Cereno," and "The Encantadas," that Melville achieved that rare balance between content and form which was lacking in his earlier work, and it is hardly conceivable that this could have been engendered in a spirit of "compromise" or of primarily pecuniary considerations.

Concerning this latter issue, namely that Melville's turn towards magazine fiction was influenced primarily by financial considerations, there seem to be two camps of opinion. The one

emphasizes Melville's need for money, while the other stresses Melville's self-sufficiency as a farmer. From the biographies of the twenties we have come to accept as fact that Melville was badly in need of money and that magazine writing supplied the only means of support to him once the hopes of a consular appointment were buried. Both Weaver and Mumford see Melville harrassed in these years by financial anxieties as well as physical and mental ill-health.[1] However, against this accepted theory of a dwindling income and nagging debts, Howard was the first to protest. In his biography of Melville, he offers a different view of Melville in 1853:

> When he began writing again, it was apparently without any strain. He was not going to attempt anything ambitious, and, for the first time since his marriage, he was free from financial troubles .... He was certainly confident enough about the future to feel that he would be better off at Arrowhead than in a foreign consulate paying less than $ 2,500 a year.[2]

This view of a Melville not harrassed unduly by financial worries is supported by the valuation book for Pittsfield taxpayers, according to which he does not seem to have done too badly. Between July, 1852, and July, 1854, the changes in his estate were for the better, even if the five hundred dollars yearly can only be called a moderate improvement.[3] According to Howard, Melville was nearer to financial security in 1854

[1]Weaver, Shorter Novels, p.xxxiv; Mumford, pp.235 ff. See also Sedgwick, p.179, and Arvin, p.235.

[2]Leon Howard, Herman Melville: A Biography (Berkeley, 1951) p.208.

[3]Figures from the Pittsfield Valuation Book are quoted in Melville Log, I, 456, 477, and 490.

than he ever had been in his life.[4] But this was partly due, no doubt, to Melville's farming income, which seems to have made up for the decreasing income from writing ever since the unpopularity of Moby Dick and Pierre. William Charvat has estimated Melville's income in the five years before April 19, 1851 at $ 8,069.34, that is an average of over one thousand six hundred dollars a year. This was his income as a popular author, "the man who had lived among cannibals," and who had just published Moby Dick. But after this, his royalties dropped sharply, although, as Charvat points out, he had no rent to pay and supported himself in part by farming.[5]

If we accept, then, that Melville's financial situation was not as precarious as has often been suggested, the question arises whether his income from writing between 1853 and 1856 was either negligible enough to have discouraged him from serious and ambitious writing, or high enough to have warranted a compromise of his integrity. What actually was his income from magazine fiction?

The records we have of Melville's accounts with Harper's are incomplete. According to Hoyle, Melville was paid the standard rate of three dollars per printed page, so that the estimated fee for his four Harper's stories ("Cock-A-Doodle-Do!" "Happy Failure," "Jimmy Rose," and "Poor Man's Pudding and Rich Man's Crumbs") amounted to fifty-four dollars. If we add to this the three hundred dollars advance payment Melville received from Harper's for the never realized tortoise book, plus the

[4]Howard, Melville, p.217.

[5]William Charvat, "Melville's Income," AL, XV (November, 1943), 254, 255, and Hoyle, p.80.

hundred dollars he received in May, 1854, for the diptych "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids," we find that Melville was paid by Harper's approximately four hundred and fifty-four dollars.[6]

Besides these payments from Harper's (which might have been more, since their Publications Index lists other contributions under Melville's name[7]), there were more substantial payments from Putnam's, which paid him at the top rate of five dollars a printed page. According to records, he received from Putnam's for his first five stories $ 490.50 ("Bartleby" - $ 85; "The Encantadas" - $ 150; "The Lightning-Rod Man" - $ 18; "Benito Cereno" - $ 200; and "The Bell-Tower" - $ 37.50).[8]

[6]My estimates are all based on Hoyle, who uses the average of three dollars per printed page, listed in Frank Luther Mott, A History of American Magazines (Cambridge, Mass., 1930), II, 21. Hoyle quotes $ 16.50, $ 9.-, $ 12.-, and $ 16.50 respectively (pp.228-30). Records of the remaining verifiable payments are to be found in Merrel R. Davis and William H. Gilman (eds.), The Letters of Herman Melville (Yale, 1960), pp.165, 168.

[7]Even now the list of Melville's contributions to magazines and periodicals is neither complete nor definitive. Hayman (pp.241-44) raises the question of the authorship of "The Fiddler," which Weaver in his biography of Melville had attributed to Melville, and which Chapin included in his collection of Melville's stories. However, the Index to Harper's New Monthly Magazine...1850-1875 (New York, 1875) attributes "The Fiddler" in three entries to Fitz-James O'Brien, and the subsequent edition of the Index, while correcting other Melville entries, still listed O'Brien as the author of "The Fiddler."

[8]Putnam's gave no advance but made monthly payments at a rate of five dollars per printed page. See Letters, p.170. A record of Putnam's payments to Melville can be found in Melville Log, I, 481, 482, 485, 486, 487, 491 (for "Bartleby," "The Encantadas," and "The Lightning-Rod Man"), and in Letters, p.170 (for "The Bell-Tower"). The payment which Melville received for "Benito Cereno" is estimated.

In addition to these short stories, Melville wrote Israel Potter, which was published by Putnam's both in serial and in book form. For the nine instalments he received a total of $ 421.50, while the book version brought only $ 241.58. The last income to take into consideration is that from his two final Putnam's stories, "I and my Chimney" and "The Apple-Tree Table," which were both published after the Piazza Tales had gone through the press. For these two he received the estimated sum of $ 87.50.[9] There is no record of any payment for his other two Putnam's books, the Piazza Tales and The Confidence Man. Altogether he must have received from Putnam's approximately $ 1241.08.

Thus, Melville's combined income from Harper's and Putnam's probably came to approximately seventeen hundred dollars. This, spread over three years, could not be called substantial even in those days. In Melville's case, to be sure, it was supplemented by the income from his farm, but approximately six hundred dollars a year can hardly be considered an adequate incentive to compromise one's integrity, especially since, at five dollars per printed page, he could estimate the income from each story accurately. Melville's account of "how dollars damn me" had stated explicitly: "What I felt most moved to write, that is banned--it will not pay. Yet, altogether, write the other way I cannot." It is difficult to take this as a pose. Yet he did recognize in the same letter to Hawthorne that even Solomon had to manage the truth with a view to popular conservatism.[10] Does this,

[9]See Hoyle, pp.228-30.

[10]Letters, pp.128, 130.

however, mean that Melville felt ready to make certain compromises towards public taste and public opinion, especially where the issue of magazine fiction was concerned, which--it is generally admitted--he held in low esteem? In other words, do his contributions to Harper's and Putnam's really indicate a "turn of mind" or a "compromise of his integrity"?

First we have to consider that Melville's criticism of magazines was never directed at Harper's or Putnam's. In 1851 he had refused Duyckinck's solicitation to contribute to Holden's Magazine, of which Duyckinck had become the editor in April of the same year, just shortly before it went bankrupt. His refusal was couched in no uncertain terms: "I cannot write the thing you want .... I am not in the humor to write the kind of thing you need--and I am not in the humor to write for Holden's Magazine."[11] In a letter to the English publisher Bentley, we find his derision of the literary quality of the American magazines more outspoken than in the letter to his friend:

> This country & nearly all its affairs are governed by sturdy backwoodsmen--noble fellows enough, but not at all literary, & who care not a fig for any authors except those who write those most saleable of all books nowadays--i. e.--the newspaper, & magazines.[12]

So quite clearly, in the summer of 1851, his opinion of magazines in general and American ones in particular was not very high. In February, 1852, he even cancelled his subscription to Duyckinck's Literary World, to which he himself had formerly contributed several book reviews. Yet,

[11] Ibid., p.120.

[12] Ibid., p.134.

towards the end of the same year Putnam's appeared, and it published Melville's best short stories.

This brings us to a second consideration; that possibly Putnam's had something to offer which other American magazines until then had not. According to Frank Luther Mott's A History of American Magazines, Putnam's had started out in 1852 primarily as an American venture with a strong emphasis on an indigenous American content, and it stood for aims which, judging by the fervour of Melville's patriotism in the matter of an indigenous American literature, must have appealed to him. His militancy for a national literature is well documented in his Hawthorne essay in The Literary World, in 1850, and in Evert Duyckinck's account of "The New Yorkers' Picnic," and there is no indication that he changed his mind in the following years. According to Duyckinck, a party consisting, among others, of Hawthorne, O. W. Holmes, and Melville had climbed Monument Mountain in the Berkshires. In the afternoon, at dinner, which "was well moistened by the way," the conversation had turned to the relative merits of Englishmen and Americans. "Dr. Holmes said some of his best things and drew the whole company out by laying down various propositions of the superiority of Englishmen. Melville attacked him vigorously" [italics mine].[13] Unfortunately, the nature of Melville's argument has not been recorded, but it is generally assumed that his views on the subject found

[13]Letter of Evert Duyckinck to his brother George, August 7, 1850, quoted in Melville Log, I, 383-84. A more detailed account can be found in Luther S. Mansfield, "Glimpses of Herman Melville's Life in Pittsfield, 1850-1851: Some Unpublished Letters of Evert A. Duyckinck," AL, IX (March, 1937), 26-48.

expression in the militancy of his Hawthorne review[14]:

> While freely acknowledging all excellence everywhere, we should refrain unduly lauding foreign writers, and, at the same time, duly recognize meritorious writers that are our own;.... Let us boldly contemn all imitation, though it comes to us graceful and fragrant as the morning; and foster all originality, though at first it be crabbed and ugly as our own pine knots. And if any of our authors fail, or seem to fail, then ... let us clap him on the shoulder, and back him against all Europe for his second round. The truth is, that in one point of view, this matter of national literature has come to such a pass with us, that in some sense we must turn bullies, else the day is lost, or superiority so far beyond us, that we can hardly say it will ever be ours.[15]

Melville may have been in a similar mood concerning a national American literature when he received the form letter from George P. Putnam, in which the aspirations of the new magazine were described and contributions solicited:

> We take the liberty of informing you of our intention to publish an Original periodical of a character different from any now in existence, and, as it is our wish to have the best talent of the country to aid us in the undertaking, to solicit your assistance as a contributor [italics mine].[16]

Its "difference" lay, according to Mott, in its resolutely American character: "Its stand for original and American contributions was intended and received as a stinging rebuke to the disgracefully successful Harper's,

[14]There is still some disagreement on whether Melville wrote his essay on Hawthorne and the plight of American Literature before or after the picnic. See Hoyle, p.64, Melville Log, I, 380, and Howard, Melville, p.156.

[15]Melville, "Hawthorne and His Mosses: By a Virginian Spending July in Vermont," The Literary World, August 17 and 24, 1850. Reprinted in Thorp, pp.327-45.

[16]Melville Log, I, 461.

with its 'borrowed' English serials."[17] Under these circumstances it is highly probable that Melville was only too willing to contribute. The form letters, which Putnam sent out, were dated October 1, 1852. One month later, Melville asked Hawthorne to return to him his Agatha story outline, which for weeks he had urged Hawthorne to write. And one year later, in the issue of November, 1853, Putnam's published the first instalment of "Bartleby, the Scrivener," Melville's first magazine story.

Apart from these possible patriotic considerations, we must take into account that the reputations of Putnam's and Harper's were such that there may have been some added incentive in the form of literary prestige. Both magazines were indisputably the best in America at the time and had high ambitions. Within a short time, Harper's initial preference for the best of English fiction, which it pirated for serial publication, gave way to a noticeably higher "American content" with the introduction of Curtis' columns "Editor's Easy Chair" and "The Editor's Table" in 1851,[18] while Putnam's had won itself the reputation of being "a sort of American Blackwoods."[19] According to Mott, Putnam's in particular was the best literary magazine America had yet produced, its political articles and its

[17] Mott, II, 421.

[18] See Henry Harper, The House of Harper (New York, 1912), p.87, and Mott, II, 383-405.

[19] Mott, II, 420 (a quotation from Norton's Literary Gazette, III 1, January 15, 1852).

belles lettres being consistently of high quality.[20] Thus Melville was far from compromising his artistic integrity in contributing to Putnam's or Harper's. He was, on the contrary, accepted into high literary society and was in the select company of illustrious names of America's budding literary fame. According to Mott's list of contributors, he was with Longfellow, Thoreau, Lowell, Cooper, Bryant, Bayard Taylor, and John Pendleton Kennedy.[21] Furthermore, Melville was by now considered an established writer, entitled by Putnam's to their top pay of five dollars per printed page. He could write "thorough magazinish stories," as Curtis was willing to testify in the case of "I and My Chimney";[22] he could guarantee both to provide his publisher with "matter for at least ten printed pages in ample time for each issue," and to "engage that the story shall contain nothing of any sort to shock the fastidious,"[23] and--what is more--keep both promises--at least in the case of Israel Potter for which these promises had been made.

In summary, it cannot be accepted either that Melville's financial situation was precarious or that his contributions to Putnam's and Harper's amount to "a compromise of integrity." It seems more likely that patriotic considerations and the possible incentive of the

[20]Mott, II, 215. Leyda (Melville Log, II, 507) quotes a letter by Curtis to J. H. Dix, which shows that Putnam's fame had spread to England: "Sam. Ward (formerly of Wall St.) dined with Longfellow yesterday, and said that he dined just before leaving London in company with Thackerey, & that Thack asserted before the whole table that 'Putnam's' was much the best Mag. in the world,--and was better than Blackwood is or ever was! Hooray for our side."

[21]Mott, II, 215.

[22]Melville Log, II, 507.

[23]Letters, p.170.

literary prestige of being among the "accepted" can be held partly responsible for Melville's response to Putnam's solicitations.

In addition to these hypotheses, there is yet another one to consider, namely the possibility that Melville turned to the genre of the short story because it interested him as an art form. This view was first proposed by Hoyle and it seems to me a very important one. The most valuable piece of evidence available is Melville's Agatha-letter which he wrote to Hawthorne in August, 1852 (that is, between Pierre and "Bartleby"), in which he handed on to Hawthorne some story material which he considered to fall in Hawthorne's domain rather than in his own.[24] Yet in November of the same year, one month after Putnam's form letter had been mailed out to possible contributors, he asked for a return of the material, undertaking now to write the story himself. It seems to me that the beginnings of a new approach and a new technique are to be found in his Agatha letters, in the very fact that Melville got interested and actually worked on a theme which he had previously considered to be essentially "Hawthornean." In order to show why this concern should have been so stimulating, a short digression is necessary.

II

Melville's writing in the early 1850's gives strong evidence that his mind was in ferment, that he had exhausted certain avenues of thought, and needed a vitally new principle of writing to come to new terms with reality. In Moby Dick and Pierre, one of Melville's

[24]Melville's Agatha letters are reprinted in Letters, pp.153-61, 161-62, and 162-63.

primary concerns had been man's relation with the absolute, but there are indications that Melville's attitude towards the "quest" was changing. In Moby Dick--called by Watters his "itinerary of a quest for absolute knowledge of the ethical structure of the universe"[25]--Ahab's pursuit is truly heroic and Promethean, but it draws not only Ahab but his entire ship and crew into the vortex of destruction. In Pierre, this same sceptical attitude towards the quest has taken on a more pronouncedly acrid flavour. Pierre's pursuit has lost most of its heroic stature, and Pierre himself is more the "fool of truth" than its champion. Furthermore, while to Ahab's mind the whale had only seemed an imprisoning wall, and his heroic attempt had been to strike through the "pasteboard masks" of appearances in order to reach some kind of certainty, in Pierre the wall of ambiguity is real and impenetrable. Thus, Pierre as a book seems to answer Melville's question of 1851, "perhaps there is no secret?" with an emphatic NO. In the terms of Pierre, even if we penetrate to the inner heart of the pyramid, the holy sarcophagus is found empty, so that "each step towards truth may thus become a step away from meaning."[26] Therefore Pierre, as a repository of Melville's metaphysical speculations, points to the impasse he had reached. He had begun his writing career as a "romancer," writing with the traditional figures of the Byronic hero and the blond, victimized woman, until his acute moral vision and his honesty in seeking for a significance behind each experience revealed

[25]Watters, "Metaphysics," p.173.

[26]Merlin Bowen, The Long Encounter (University of Chicago Press, 1960), p.119. See also Pierre, p.335.

to him the ambiguity of each facet of life around him. But since his moral perception and his mode of thinking depended on the traditional concept of metaphysical sanction and hence on a prime mover behind the confusing maze of appearances, his concepts of an absolute became blurred and obliterated to the same extent that his vision of a moral universe disappeared with the insight into the ambiguity and incongruity of human life. Thus the recognition of a total ambiguity of the moral system went hand in hand with the recognition of the "emptiness" of the holy sarcophagus:

> By vast pains we mine into the pyramid; by horrible gropings we come to the central room; with joy we espy the sarcophagus; but we lift the lid--and no body is there![27]

At this point a vitally new principle of writing and a new range of experience were needed in order to come to terms with reality, and Melville's turn to a new group of themes and a new genre suggests, I believe, such a beginning--a beginning which shows itself in his preoccupation with the Agatha story. It is here that the seed of his later stories can be found. Here there are important indications not

[27] Ibid. Howard C. Key, "The Influence of Travel Literature upon Melville's Fictional Techniques" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Stanford, 1953) p.59, makes a similar observation when he states that "the exact nature of Melville's problem can never be known. It no doubt had more than one side, but the chances are that it was from the first predominantly religious and spiritual rather than sexual and physical as has been postulated by Arvin, Chase and others upon very small evidence indeed." With these views, Watters likewise seems to agree when he states ("Metaphysics," p.170): "Melville, then, was a confirmed speculator in metaphysical problems, and even a cursory reading in his books will convince one that he fought out his mental struggles upon paper, placing in an imaginative cosmos protagonists which symbolized in concrete form his abstract questions."

only of Melville's sensitive understanding of the artistic demands of the short story but also of his deepening interest in a theme which he had considered to fall specifically into Hawthorne's domain, and which opened to his speculative mind a much needed new range of experience.

Before discussing these famous Agatha letters, a short mention has to be made of the fact that Melville's interest in the short story in 1852-1853 was not completely new. Hoffmann, observing that Melville's novels often break down into shorter units of narrative structure,[28] asserts that his techniques and methods tended naturally towards the shorter form. Leyda, likewise, points out that Melville had always wanted to write short stories and cites in evidence several tentative story sketches which even before 1852 are found among some surviving scraps of notes and often in the blank pages of books.[29] It is particularly interesting that Melville sketched such a tentative outline of a symbolic story--it was to employ the properties of Masonic symbolism--in the back of his copy of Hawthorne's Mosses. For this suggests that Melville's ideas concerning this new medium were deeply influenced by his reading of Hawthorne's stories. It is therefore understandable that when Melville came across what seemed to him perfect short story material, his first reaction was to hand it over to Hawthorne so that he could try his hand at it. But together with the outline of the story, he also sent along some "suggestions" concerning some key moments and key motives which seemed to him "legitimately to

[28]Hoffmann, "Short Novel," p.129.

[29]Leyda, Complete Stories, p.x.

belong to the story, in its rounded & beautified & thoroughly developed state."[30] It is in this "Agatha letter" that an insight is gained not only into Melville's method of composition but also into a change of interest which foreshadows themes or groups of themes in his later short stories.[31]

Melville found the source material to the Agatha story on a visit to Nantucket, some time in July, 1852. While talking with a new acquaintance, a lawyer from New Bedford, about "the great patience, & endurance, & resignedness of the women of the island," the lawyer told him of a real case. An English sailor with the name of Robertson had been shipwrecked on the coast of Pembroke, where he was cared for and so well looked after by a Miss Agatha Hatch that within a year he married her. He stayed with her for another two years, and then left his pregnant wife in order to look for work. He found it, and was financially successful. But he also married again, bigamously, while his first wife, who had given birth to a daughter, lived alone for seventeen years. Only after the death of his other wife did Robertson return to her. "He excused himself as well as he could for his long absence and silence, appeared very affectionate, refused to tell her where he was living, and persuaded them not to make any inquiries, gave them a handsome sum of money, promised to return for

[30] Letters, p.155.

[31] Articles dealing specifically with Melville's Agatha letters are listed in my bibliography under the following: Harrison Hayford, Patricia Lacy, and S. E. Morison.

good and left the next day."[32] Yet, once away, he married a third time, this time, however, actually with the consent of his first wife. Complications did not arise until his death because the case had to be brought before law for the settlement of an estate of about twenty thousand dollars. "The business was settled in a few weeks afterward, in a most amicable & honorable manner, by a division of the property. --I think Mrs. Robinson [sic] & her family refused to claim or recieve [sic] anything that really belonged to Mrs. Irvin [the third wife], or which Robinson had derived through her."[33] When asked why she had kept silent and not informed Mrs. Irvin of Robertson's previous marriage she "stated the causes with a simplicity & pathos which carried that conviction [that her motives were high and pure] irresistibly to my mind."

> "I had no wish" said the wife "to make either of them unhappy, notwithstanding all I had suffered on his account"--It was to me a most striking instance of long continued & uncomplaining submission to wrong and anguish on the part of a wife, w^ch made her in my eyes a heroine.[34]

II

This, in short, is the outline of the source material, which Melville sent to Hawthorne together with suggestions concerning some key moments which he considered worth stressing. Each one renders in a striking image a specific meaning which--in Melville's terms--"belongs"

[32]Quoted from the lawyer's account, enclosed in Melville's letter to Hawthorne (Letters, pp.158-61).

[33]Note Melville's interesting substitution of Robinson for Robertson. See Letters, p.154, n.6.

[34]Ibid., p.160.

to the story. Here we have a most valuable guide into what aspects of Agatha's story appealed most to Melville's imagination.

The first item, which Melville elaborates imaginatively, is a description of the opening scene:

> Supposing the story to open with a wreck ... it were well if some faint shadow of the preceding calm were thrown forth to lead the whole.[35]

This calm he proposes to portray by a picture of young Agatha who, reclining near the edge of a cliff by the lighthouse of an isolated island, gazes out over the sea which not only brings her lover to her, but which also will take him away. Here Melville uses the image of the sheep, "placidly eyeing the malignity of the sea."

The next picture is that of the wreck which had brought Robertson to the island as sole survivor, and which after several years is slowly buried in the sand:

> Now this wrecked ship was driven over the shoals, & driven upon the beach where she goes to pieces, all but her stem-part. This in course of time becomes embedded in the sand--after the lapse of some years showing nothing but the sturdy stem (or, prow-bone) projecting some two feet at low water. All the rest is filled & packed down with the sand.--So that after her husband has disappeared the sad Agatha every day sees this melancholy monument, with all its remindings.[36]

The final image, which captures Agatha's acute loneliness and suffering, is the picture of the mail-box to which Agatha had daily

[35] Ibid., p.155.

[36] Ibid., p.156.

gone for seventeen years, yet never with any success:

> As her hopes gradually decay in her, so does the post itself & the little box decay. The post rots in the ground at last. Owing to its being little used--hardly used at all--grass grows rankly about it. At last a little bird nests in it. At last the post falls.[37]

Apart from the fact that in these suggestions by Melville the images used are made the carriers of mood and theme in the manner of Hawthorne's style, it is significant that the imaginative elaboration of the "Hawthornean" subject matter is concerned with broken communication, sterility, and helpless innocence. This, together with the fact that Melville, in a further letter to Hawthorne, emphasized that no moral taint should fall on Robertson for having deserted his wife, indicates in which direction Melville's imagination was moving. Important from the viewpoint of theme is that Melville was here working with a Hawthornean subject, as he himself readily admitted:

> I confess, however, that since then I have a little turned the subject over in my mind with a view to a regular story to be founded on these striking incidents. But, thinking again, it has occurred to me that this thing lies very much in a vein, with which you are peculiarly familiar. To be plump, I think that in this matter you would make a better hand at it than I would.--Besides the thing seems naturally to gravitate towards you (to spea[k] ... [half a line torn] should of right belong to you.[38]

But still more important is that Melville used this "Hawthornean subject" in a manner which foreshadows much of his work to come. In this connection

[37] Ibid., p.157

[38] Ibid., p.154.

it is worth mentioning that attention has been drawn to the similarity between the Agatha story and Hawthorne's "Wakefield." But despite the plot similarity between these two stories, there are, it seems to me, important differences which give a special Melvillean flavour to this Hawthornean subject. Above all, the emphasis in Melville's Agatha sketch lies not on the psychological motivations of Robertson in the vein of "Wakefield" but on the portrayal of disturbed human relationships as caused by some inscrutable malice outside man (note the opening image of the sheep "placidly eyeing the malignity of the sea," followed by images which convey the loss of communication, such as the ship-wreck, buried in sand, and the rotting mail-box). Like Pierre before it, the Agatha sketch is a "land" story, but gone is the sky-assaulting mood of the hero, and the focus has now shifted to the victim rather than to the rebel. Agatha is not at all rebellious nor articulate, but in her aloneness and helplessness against some mysterious malignity, which shows itself as isolation and a loss of meaningful human relationships, she clearly foreshadows Bartleby, Don Benito, Hunilla, and Marianna.[39] She is

[39] A similar point was raised by Patricia Lacy, "The Agatha Theme in Melville's Stories," University of Texas Studies in English, XXXV (1956), 96-105. According to her, the connecting link lies in the theme of endurance which she finds reiterated in "Bartleby," the Hunilla sketch, and Billy Budd. Yet whether this endurance can be called, in her words, "the essential plank in the bridge" towards "the beautifully controlled acceptance of necessity" (p.104) is a debatable question. It is definitely not true in the case of Bartleby, whose endurance is not acceptance, and it can only be adopted with reservations in the case of Billy. Historically Billy died for the cause of upholding the Old World against the New Napoleonic Age; yet--as the preface points out--"during those years not the wisest could have foreseen that the outcome of all would be what for some thinkers apparently it has since turned out to be--a political advance along nearly the whole line for Europeans."

Melville's first woman protagonist, and if we accept Bowen's thesis that Melville's "heroes" indicate a certain type of "encounter with the opposing other"--by which is meant either truth, absolute reality, or destiny--then Agatha and the line of protagonists she introduces become important clues to Melville's attitude towards the Inscrutable. Here, there is no longer an Enceladus to hurl himself against Mount Olympus, as in Pierre. The mountain is now shrouded in utter darkness, and the quest, for which Taji in Mardi threw himself into the ocean, is ended. Now the emphasis shifts away from active revolt to the static portrayal of the disruptive effect which the same inscrutable destiny has on personal relationships. Pierre suffered not from loneliness on a human, personal level (after all, one of his problems was his "menage a trois") but from a sense of abandonment on a metaphysical level. Thus, if Pierre emphasizes man's separation from a metaphysical bond, the Agatha sketch introduces a group of stories which focus on the alienation of man from his own kind. We now meet the lonely, the outcast, the orphaned, and the widowed; we meet protagonists like Bartleby, Don Benito, Hunilla, Oberlus, the Dog-King, and Marianna. To Patricia Lacy, the link between the Agatha sketch and Melville's later stories lies in the common theme of endurance. I would rather say that it lies in the theme of disturbed human relationships and in the theme of man's unmitigable loneliness in a sea of inscrutable malignity.

Thus, while Melville was conscious of the Hawthornean quality of the Agatha theme, we can see that he molds it to his own directions. Ignored are any possible moral overtones, as the previously cited letter to Hawthorne emphasizes, nor are there any indications that Melville, under the influence of Hawthorne, developed "the psychological

aspects of this study of patience," as Lacy maintains.[40] Little is said about the reasons behind the behaviour of either Robertson or Agatha. Instead, Melville's images and his commentary focus on a meaning which seems essentially his own, insofar as it foreshadows works to come: they focus on the tragic disintegrating effect which some supra-human malignity has on the human scene.

If one surveys finally in retrospect, from the viewpoint of Melville's development as a writer, the total impact which the preoccupation with the Agatha story had on him, two features in particular predominate. First, his imagination seems to have received a new stimulus from his interest in a "Hawthornean" theme which involved personal human relationships and a turn to the human scene, and which demanded a different kind of emotional experience from that of his former books; and secondly, his experiments with what he considered a typically Hawthornean story must have made him aware of the exigencies as well as the possibilities of a genre which was essentially new to him. This latter point will be taken up in greater detail in the following section, but in anticipation of this it can be stated that the preoccupation with both a new theme and a new genre seems to have given Melville's imagination a new range and a new direction and opened a way out of the impasse he had reached with Pierre. In the following years he wrote stories which not only reveal his complete control over his story material and which are

[40] Lacy, p.104. Nowhere in Melville's outline of the story is there any evidence that he was interested in the psychological aspects of Agatha's suffering. If his draft reveals any interest in the workings of the human mind, it is in his emphasis on Robertson's trepidations: "Ponder the conduct of this Robinson throughout.--Mark his trepidation & suspicion when any one called upon him" (Letters, pp.157-58).

in themselves accomplished works of art, but which also give evidence of Melville's imaginative adaptation of the Hawthornean short story. Expressed in his stories is so much that points forward to the twentieth century that it seems one of the unfortunate incidents in the history of the American short story that Melville's tales and sketches should have been ignored in those years of growth when a dynamic severance from European models was greatly needed.

III

Melville's interest in the Agatha story is adequately demonstrated in his letters to Hawthorne. Why then, after he had asked Hawthorne to return the story material, did he not finish and publish it? There are indications that Melville seriously attempted to bring the story into literary shape during the winter of 1852/53. In a letter to Peter Gansevoort on April 20, 1853, his mother Maria Melville mentioned that he "became so completely absorbed by his new work, now nearly ready for the press, that he has not taken the proper & necessary measures to procure this earnestly wished for [consular] office."[41] Yet the theory that this "new work" is Melville's version of the Agatha story is not generally accepted. Howard believes that Melville actually failed in his attempt to shape the story, and that this work "nearly ready for press" is not it. According to him, Melville appreciated the poetic and psychological possibilities of the story but realized that the narrative was not suited to his customary way of writing, referring in this respect to Melville's position as a spectator rather than a participant: "He was surely external to the patience and endurance which

[41] Melville Log, I, 468.

fascinated him in Agatha."[42]

Yet this interpretation ignores the evidence of another letter which Melville sent to Harper's, and in which he refers specifically to some work which he took to New York in the spring of 1853, "but which I was prevented from printing at that time,"[43] and which can be taken to refer to the now finished Agatha story since, to our knowledge, Melville worked on no other material. Yet the story did not appear in print, and we can only conjecture that one of the reasons why it was rejected was its experimental nature. After all, Melville was here trying out a new theme and--as Howard implies--might well have found it unsuited to his customary way of writing. There is, however, sufficient evidence in Melville's subsequent short stories, beginning with "Bartleby," to suggest that he might have recognized an inconsistency between the new theme and his usual way of presentation, and that he consequently adopted a new style of writing, which his contemporary reviewers greeted as a return to the simplicity of Typee and Omoo. After

[42]Howard, Melville, pp.202-3. He repeats his stand in his introductory study of Melville in "Pamphlets on American Writers" series no.13 (Minneapolis, 1961), p.32: "There is no evidence that Melville ever wrote or even made a fair beginning of the Agatha story, but his interest in it and his unproductive winter are both significant in view of his preoccupation with the theme of patience when he did begin to write again." Hoffmann ("Shorter Fiction," p.418) basically agrees with this when he states that "the significance of the Agatha letter is that though he did not write the story [italics mine], Melville had learned the lesson of method and form which the letter implies. That Melville could master these lessons and transfer them to other materials is evident in his first short novel 'Bartleby.'"

[43]Letters, p.164. For the original suggestion that Melville actually wrote and finished the Agatha story, see Hayford, "The Significance of Melville's 'Agatha' Letters," ELH, XIII (December, 1946), 299-310.

all, the very stress on the unmitigable loneliness of Agatha, and Melville's avoidance of moral or psychological implications make this theme unsuited for the long form, which demands more dynamic action. Yet the use of a similar theme in "Bartleby" and its successful elaboration there suggest that a static theme might well be suited to the short form. Whether Melville had sensed the suitability of the short form to his new themes, or whether he had accidentally stumbled on it by means of Putnam's solicitation, is a hypothetical question which, like so many others, must remain unanswered. The fact remains, however, that while the strain of writing the Agatha story had been too much for Melville, in the summer of the same year, despite his failure to sell the book or to procure a consulship, he again was full of health and vigour. "Herman is very well," his wife wrote in a letter to her father on August 10, 1853, and his mother, too, commented that "Herman is looking remarkably well."[44] Shortly after this, in November of the same year, his first short story "Bartleby, the Scrivener" was published in Putnam's, and it proved that he had mastered the new medium.

If we assess, in summary, the importance of the Agatha letters in Melville's artistic development in the years between Pierre and his short stories, it can be said that their importance lies in the indications they give us of a change in Melville, which shows itself both in his style of writing--the expression of theme and mood through symbol without editorial interference--and in his preoccupation with a theme which, as essentially Hawthornean, opened new vistas and gave

[44] Melville Log, I, 478, 480.

new stimulus to Melville's imagination, as his following short stories, conceived around similar themes, testify. Thus, Hawthorne's influence on Melville's turn to shorter fiction is considerable. It was due to him that Melville's interest in the short story was first aroused, while in the Agatha letters he again appeared as catalyst in Melville's preoccupation with a new theme which--as Melville possibly realised--was more suitable to the form of the short story than to that of the novel. As mentioned previously this fairly drastic change in Melville's work both in genre and style did not go unnoticed. To his contemporary reviewers it was a turn for the better, a return to his former simplicity, while some of the modern critics seem less appreciative of it. Only a few point out that not until after Pierre did Melville appear in full control of his writing. To suggest, as Hoyle did, that "his general good fortune throughout 1853 and 1854 quite likely was responsible for the lack of distinction which characterizes much of his work of these years,"[45] is to overlook the depth to which some of these seemingly "simple" stories reach. Like Hawthorne, Melville had learned to clothe his meanings, and the words which he used to describe Hawthorne's tales could equally well apply to his own:

> The world is mistaken in this Nathaniel Hawthorne .... He is immeasurably deeper than the plummet of the mere critic .... there is no glimpse to be caught of it, except by intuition.[46]

A few of Melville's short stories still show the obvious strain of experimentation, but in the best of them we find every indication that

[45] Hoyle, p.115.

[46] "Hawthorne and His Mosses," in Thorp, p.333.

he had become fully independent and was as original in his themes as in his mastery of technique.[47]

IV

With the publication of "Bartleby, the Scrivener" in the November, 1853, issue of Putnam's, Melville was launched on his career as a writer of magazine stories. Between November, 1853, and May, 1856, he contributed to Putnam's and Harper's altogether a dozen stories, plus the title story of the Piazza Tales collection and the rejected story "The Two Temples." His publications appeared in the following order:

	Putnam's	Harper's
1853 (Nov.)	"Bartleby" I	
(Dec.)	"Bartleby" II	"Cock-A-Doodle-Do!"
1854 (March)	"The Encantadas" I	
(April)	"The Encantadas" II	
(May)	"The Encantadas" III	
	("Two Temples" rejected)	
(June)		"Poor Man's Pudding and Rich Man's Crumb"
(July)		"The Happy Failure"
(Aug.)	"The Lightning-Rod Man"	
1855 (April)		"Paradise of Bachelors and Tartarus of Maids"
(Aug.)	"The Bell-Tower"	
(Oct.)	"Benito Cereno" I	
(Nov.)	"Benito Cereno" II	"Jimmy Rose"
(Dec.)	"Benito Cereno" III	
1856 (Feb.)	("The Piazza")	

[47]Hoffmann comes to a similar conclusion when he states that "Hawthorne's influence on Melville as a writer was not in the direction of imitation, but rather in the stimulation and example he provided" ("Short Novel," pp.140-41).

	Putnam's	Harper's
1856 (March)	"I and My Chimney"	
(May)	"The Apple-Tree Table"	

(In addition "Israel Potter" appeared in Putnam's in nine instalments, between June, 1854, and March, 1855).

If we consider that at the same time Melville kept a big farm of about one hundred and fifty acres, he must have been anything but physically or mentally sick. His activities, especially in 1854, were quite astounding, if we take into consideration that according to his correspondence with Harper's he offered them in four instances works which have not yet been identified or found,[48] and that he had finished, besides his published stories, two diptychs, "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids," which was not published until 1855, and the rejected "The Two Temples," which did not appear until the Melville Revival. At the same time he seems to have been engaged in some other project, the so-called "Tortoise Book," for which he had received from Harper's an advance of three hundred dollars in December, 1853. It is usually assumed that this tortoise book is nothing else but "The Encantadas,"[49] but this is not very likely if we consider that Melville offered the tortoise book once more to Harper's on May 25, 1854, that is after Putnam's had published "The Encantadas" in its March, April, and May, 1854 issues. Again, on June 22, 1854, Melville reminded Harper's once more of the extracts from the Tortoise Hunters, which he had sent: "Though it would be difficult, if not impossible, for me to get the entire

[48] Letters, pp.170, 171, 172 (June 22, July 25, August 13, and September 18, 1854).

[49] Letters, p.164, n.7.

Tortoise Book ready for publication before Spring, yet I can pick out & finish parts, here & there, for prior use."[50] It cannot but be assumed that the Tortoise Book differed from "The Encantadas" sufficiently to warrant this renewed offer on Melville's part.

The reaction to Melville's stories was favourable enough to have suggested to Melville their collection into a book. A similar venture with Israel Potter had paid him quite well, and he seemed willing to try his luck once more, at very little extra labour and no expense to him. Late in December, 1855, Dix wrote to Curtis, asking his advice on the wisdom of publishing a volume of Melville's stories, to which Curtis gave the accurate forecast, "I don't think Melville's book will sell a great deal, but he is a good name upon your list."[51] On January 7, 1856, Melville pressed for a written agreement which would allow him, as in the case of Israel Potter, twelve and a half percent royalties, and one week later, on January 16, 1856, he sent in his corrected magazine proof sheets. In the same letter he made an interesting statement concerning "some sort of prefatory matter" which would give some inner coherence to the medley of short stories to be collected. It seems that Melville had volunteered such a preface at the time when the idea of the collection had matured, but now, "upon less immature consideration," he held it "unnecessary."[52] The collection itself was to be entitled Benito Cereno and Other Sketches and was to contain his Putnam's stories in the following order: "Benito Cereno," "Bartleby," "Bell-Tower," "Encantadas," and

[50] Ibid., p.170.

[51] Melville Log, II, 510.

[52] Letters, p.177.

"Lightning-Rod Man" (the title sheet had dropped all articles and sub-titles, possibly for typographical reasons). The arrangement itself throws some light on Melville's own appraisal of "Benito Cereno." If the legal depositions at the end were nothing but the hurried outcome of pirating and carelessness, as Curtis and a host of critics after him suggested, then it is difficult to believe that Melville would have used a "botched" story as the title piece to the planned book. Melville's adherence to the legal style will have to be explained differently.

Concerning the "prefatory matter," Melville most significantly changed his mind again. By February 16, he had finished an introductory sketch, "The Piazza," and proposed now as the new title for the volume The Piazza Tales:

> The new title selected for the proposed volume is "The Piazza Tales" and the accompanying piece ("The Piazza") as giving that name to the book, is intended to come first in order.[53]

Moreover, while substituting his new introductory sketch, Melville also amended the order in which the stories themselves were to appear, the table of contents now reading "The Piazza," "Bartleby," "Benito Cereno," "The Lightning-Rod Man," "The Encantadas; or, Enchanted Islands," and "The Bell-Tower." These facts are, I think, highly significant for the collection. Both the new introduction as well as the rearrangement of the stories suggest that a common theme might have proposed itself to Melville, which would impose some sort of order on the medley of stories. In this he probably followed the examples of other story collections, especially those of Hawthorne, to whose "The Old Manse" and "The Wayside"

[53] Ibid., p.179.

his "The Piazza" shows some resemblance. It is highly significant that "The Piazza" was written as an afterthought, in full knowledge of all the stories it was to "introduce," thus providing a frame of reference, or common denominator, to the five stories, which, by themselves, seem to diverge so widely in theme. After all, "The Piazza" was written as "prefatory matter," and as such it performs the valuable service of furnishing us with the sole external clue from Melville to a correct understanding of the stories it introduces. Considering the multifarious and often contradictory interpretations they received, it is surprising that nothing so far has been made of "The Piazza" as introducing a general theme and outlining a general attitude.

In conclusion one further issue must be mentioned, namely the question of Melville's revision of the stories. On March 24, 1856, Melville sent a letter to his publisher which refers to some punctuation corrections made. We know that Melville sent in the corrected magazine sheets, but even then it is impossible to tell to what extent the magazine version which Melville used had been previously "corrected" by the editors. Certainly, Charles F. Briggs, one of the editors of Putnam's, seems to have had no scruples about "improving" Melville's text in the magazine version.[54] As far as the book version is concerned, Melville in his letter of March 24, expressed some justified confusion about the lavish distribution of commas.[55]

[54]On May 12, 1854, Briggs admitted to Melville in a letter: "I will take this opportunity to apologise to you for making a slight alteration in the Encantadas, in the last paragraph of the Chola Widow," and on July 31, 1855, Curtis advised Dix to "alter all the dreadful statistics at the end" (of "Benito Cereno"). Melville Log, I, 487, and II, 504.

[55]Letters, p.180.

As for Melville's own corrections of the magazine proofs, his description in his letter to Putnam's on January 19, 1856, is fairly accurate: "Aside from ordinary corrections, some few other improvements have been made, and a desirable note or two added." The changes, which are listed--apart from punctuation changes--in Oliver's edition of the Piazza Tales,[56] are indeed few and do not indicate a shift in artistic purpose. Apart from the profusion of commas already mentioned, which can be taken as the work of the printer or editor, I see three types of corrections and emendations:

1. Correction of obvious misreadings and of spelling and typographical errors. These are quite numerous and account for the greatest number of changes.
2. Stylistic changes, usually for the sake of clarity (as the substitution of the terms "host" and "guest" for "Benito" and "Delano" respectively), or for the sake of greater compactness of style (as for instance the reference to the construction of the bell-tower, changed to "snail-like in pace, but torch or rocket in its pride" from "...but like torch or mountain rocket in its pride.")
3. Changes of content. These are the least numerous and in no case do they change the meaning of the story.[57]

[56]Oliver, Piazza Tales, pp.251-56.

[57]Into this category belong changes like the substitution of "on Olympus" for "on Old Greylock" in "The Lightning-Rod Man," discussed in Chapter Four; in "Benito Cereno," in the description of the mate who leads the boarding party, the omission of "and as his enemies whispered, a pirate"; and in the same story the change in the assigned value of the San Dominick from "upwards of ten thousand" to "worth more than a thousand." In both instances the gain motif in the capture of the San Dominick is de-emphasized.

With the book version of the Piazza Tales Melville ended his short story career. At the same time, he was engaged in getting The Confidence Man ready for press, and since his health was deteriorating again, he was preparing for a trip abroad, to the Holy Land and the Near East. The reports on his physical condition are reminiscent of the ones given four years earlier while he was struggling with the problems of the Agatha letter.[58] Had Melville reached another impasse, both in his spiritual outlook and his work? And since after The Confidence Man Melville stopped writing fiction for many years to come, turning to poetry after his trip to the Holy Land, was this later spiritual and creative impasse more hopeless than the former?

The only evidence we have lies in the writing of these years, in his short stories and in The Confidence Man. This study of the Piazza Tales is meant to contribute towards a new understanding of Melville's dilemma, and through it towards a new appraisal of his writing in those years. Ultimately it might shed light on the question of Melville's "acceptance" and "neutrality," which, in connection with his later works, has become the subject of much recent controversy. Ambiguity is so implicit in Melville's late works that possibly the controversy can never be settled except by outside evidence. If this is the case, the elucidation of Melville's technique of short story writing and the prevalent attitude expressed by it might well help to provide such an external frame of reference, against which the various and

[58] On September 1, 1856, Lemuel Shaw wrote to his son, Samuel: "I suppose you have been informed by some of the family, how very ill Herman has been .... He has been advised strongly to break off his labour for some time, & take a voyage or a journey, & endeavour to recruit." (Melville Log, II, 521.)

often contradictory interpretations of The Confidence Man and Billy Budd can be assessed and re-evaluated.

CHAPTER III

"THE PIAZZA"

I

The previous chapter pointed out that the Agatha letters reveal early indications of a new focus of interest on Melville's part, a concern with disturbed human relationships with an emphasis on the isolated and lonely. This new theme was to occupy his mind for the next four years and to stimulate his imagination in new directions. It seems that the new theme demanded a drastic break with his former style and technique, but "Bartleby," "Benito Cereno," and, to go outside the scope of the Piazza Tales, "Paradise of Bachelors and Tartarus of Maids" show that he had "learned the lesson of method and form," as Hoffmann calls it,[1] and that he made use of conciseness and compression much more subtly than is usually supposed in discussions of this craftsmanship.

The Piazza Tales themselves give evidence of this new artistic awareness. While each of the tales was written independently and published separately, Melville was able to give his medley of stories some inner coherence by emphasizing certain guiding ideas which are common to all the tales in an introduction which he wrote specifically for this collection. Some critics, such as Chase, Arvin, and Mason, did trace some recurrent themes, such as those of isolation, withdrawal, and frustration, through all of Melville's stories, but so far no overall pattern has been applied to the one group of Melville's stories which he himself unified by means of a title story, and to which this

[1]Hoffmann, "Shorter Fiction," p.418.

story, as this thesis will show, serves as a key.[2] Therefore, the significance of "The Piazza" is twofold: it stands as a story completely on its own--in fact, behind its deceptively pastoral appearance it is one of Melville's richest and most complex stories--and at the same time it serves to introduce a group of stories which apparently diverge in subject matter. In neither capacity has it received much attention, and what little it has attracted has been directed primarily to its descriptive quality or to the rather commonplace surface moral. Recently, however, there are signs of a change in attitude whereby "The Piazza" is considered almost "inordinately complex";[3] yet so far there have been only two full-length discussions of it, one by Fogle and the other by William B. Stein.[4] Fogle's interpretation is primarily descriptive, but Stein attempts to decipher

[2]The only article which deals exlusively with the Piazza Tales, by Nobuyuki Hayashi, "Herman Melville's Piazza Tales," Studies in English Language and Literature (Tokyo), I (Fall, 1953), 77-89 (translation courtesy of Dr. Miriam Batts, U.B.C.) does not give any close textual interpretations. According to Hayashi, the tales reflect Melville's dark condition in life, such as lack of money, an uncongenial wife, and loss of Hawthorne's friendship--views largely invalidated by recent biographical research, such as Howard's.

[3]Robin Magowan, "Masque and Symbol in Melville's 'Benito Cereno,'" College English, XXIII (1960), 347. Also William B. Stein, "Melville's 'Comedy of Faith,'" ELH, XXVII(1960), 315-33, Laurence N. Barret, "Fiery Hunt: A Study of Melville's Theory of the Artist" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Princeton, 1949) p.98, as well as Fogle, p.89, and Sealts, p.58.

[4]Fogle, pp.85-91, and Stein, pp.315-33. Apart from these interpretations, the list of "honourable mentions" is short. There are brief discussions of the story in Howard, Melville, p.230, Mason, pp.182-84, and a tentative interpretation in Barret, pp.103-06, in which Marianna is interpreted as Melville as he found himself after his plunge into truth and which sees evidence in the story that Melville's quest for truth is still continuing. In the meantime, a further article appeared, which I have not yet been able to consult: Darwin F. Turner, "A View of Melville's 'Piazza,'" CLA Jour., VII (September, 1963), 193-97.

the symbolistic pattern, which to him is a "Comedy of Faith" and a "burlesque of contemporary religious values." While I do not agree with this interpretation of "The Piazza," I should like to draw attention to the fact that Stein in this article is the first to perceive something like a consistent attitude in all Piazza tales, a consistency which, according to him, lies in the use of recurrent ironies and an attitude of ambivalence, which "reflects Melville's baffled attempts to resolve the enigma of contingent evil in the world."[5] And, like Hoffmann before him, he comes to the conclusion that the stories give evidence of a craftsmanship far superior to Hawthorne's. Unfortunately, however, Stein's remarks concerning the Piazza Tales as a whole are only incidental; he is still primarily concerned with "The Piazza" as a story in its own right rather than as an introduction. But one remark deserves our full attention for its suggestion of an interrelationship between "The Piazza" and the other Piazza tales:

> It ["The Piazza"] can stand on its own not so much as a suggestive reflection of Melville's burdensome melancholy at the time, but rather as a work with a "solidity of specification"...that may well help to clarify the narrative method of the other tales.[6]

Following this suggestion by Stein, this chapter will first offer an interpretation of the story itself and then examine what light this introduction will throw on the Piazza Tales as a whole. Subsequent chapters will then analyse each individual story with the established pattern in mind. Special emphasis will be placed on the

[5] Stein, p.322.

[6] Ibid., p.315. Hoyle, likewise, sees reflected in the Piazza Tales a common theme which, according to him, lies in Melville's yearning to "return to society" (p.224).

symbol of the piazza as signifying an attitude which is applicable to all the Piazza tales.

II

The use of a title story or some other kind of introductory matter in story collections is not at all new, and Melville does not deviate in any important extent from the established tradition, which, as early as Boccaccio's Decameron and Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, brought frame and stories into an inner relationship.[7] In more modern times, with the appearance of magazines and newspapers, stories began to be published individually, but even then authors could not resist compiling their individual stories into collections, often by fitting them out with a framing introduction. In the best known of these cycles the frame story either introduces a certain occasion for the telling of stories--such as the flight from the plague in the Decameron or the escape from the French Revolution in Goethe's Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderter--or it strikes a certain key theme, as the theme of artistic inspiration or insanity is struck in Hoffmann's Serapionsbrüder. In other instances, as in some of Hawthorne's and Washington Irving's collections where the diversity of the stories seems to have eluded a unifying theme, a different solution offered itself in the form of an autobiographical setting. Both Bracebridge Hall and Mosses from an Old Manse use such an autobiographical introduction, but Hawthorne, by elaborating the descriptive sketch of "The Old Manse," welds it intrinsically to the stories and their meaning, so that the general

[7] See Joseph Kunz, Geschichte der deutschen Novelle (Berlin, 1955), pp.1-8. Relevant bibliography, pp.99-100.

mood of the introduction anticipates the spiritual, reflective nature of most of the stories. It is to be expected that Melville, who had studied Hawthorne's short stories, particularly his Mosses, very closely, should be influenced, to some extent at least, by Hawthorne's technique. And certainly, similarities in the general lay-out and the specific function of the introduction are striking: both "The Old Manse" and "The Piazza" are built around an autobiographical framework; in both the atmosphere which is evoked foreshadows that of the following stories, and like the "old Manse," the "piazza" becomes a central symbol which is representative of the attitude and spirit with which the stories are told.

But here similarities end. The general tenor of the sketch differs from Hawthorne's, just as the open, northern piazza facing Mount Greylock differs from the gentle cultivated retreat of the old parsonage. Instead of the detached survey of time and history through the three study windows, "with little old fashioned panes of glass, each with a crack across it," we find in "The Piazza" traces of Melville's old defiance and, in his journey in search of the ever elusive fairyland, traces of the old "quest." The first person narrator, dressed in the outfit of Melville's South Sea travels, leaves his piazza and follows the elusive light of hope: thus action is initiated and a conflict introduced. He leaves cankerous reality in search of some ideal "spot of radiance"--but instead he finds Marianna. And since the Piazza Tales are ostensibly, in Melville's own words, about Marianna "and many as real a story," we can assume that the story of Marianna and his meeting with her has a special significance for the cycle as a whole. After all, she represents the "reality" which the narrator found instead of the "ideality" he

sought.

It is important to note at this point that the story action involves a narrator who is clearly Melville himself. In this respect, "The Piazza" is unique among the Piazza tales. If in the course of this chapter we interpret the symbol of the piazza and what it indicates about Melville's own attitude correctly, the narrator in the other stories is in no instance Melville himself, at least not at this time of his life. In the other Piazza tales the narrators are: an elderly lawyer in "Bartleby," a cottager in "The Lightning-Rod Man," a young sailor in "The Encantadas," and third-person narrators in "Benito Cereno" and "The Bell-Tower." Yet in "The Piazza," possibly owing to the influence of Hawthorne's introductory "The Old Manse," the narrator is definitely the author himself; we see him in his own home surroundings as they were described in Pierre and J. E. A. Smith's History of Pittsfield,[8] and there are other verifiable biographical details like his attacks of rheumatism and sciatica in 1855, in which his "neighbor in Pittsfield Dr. O. W. Holmes attended and prescribed for him."[9] This all means that behind the rich symbolic complexity of the story the basic theme deeply concerns Melville himself. It is a "voyage," which in Melville's symbology means a "quest," but this time the questor

[8] J. E. A. Smith, The History of Pittsfield (2 vols.; Boston, 1876), II, 7-8, describes the Van Schaak mansion which Melville purchased in 1850: "[He] made it a house of many stories; writing in it, besides Moby Dick, and other romances of the sea, the Piazza tales, which took their name from a piazza built by the author upon the north end of the house, which commands a bold and striking view of Greylock and the intervening valley."

[9] Melville Log, I, 502.

is not a fictional character like Taji, Ishmael, or Ahab but Melville undisguised in the years towards the end of his short story career. The fact that this was to be Melville's last short story[10]--apart from the late and posthumous Billy Budd--gives its autobiographical theme a special importance. It is more than a descriptive evocation of place and thereby of mood, in the Hawthornean style of introduction; it is a story in its own right, which due to its autobiographical nature has something significant to say about Melville the author throughout the period he surveys by means of the symbolic action of the "inland voyage."

III

The story itself opens with a biographically verifiable incident: Melville's purchase of an "old-fashioned farmhouse which had no piazza." Right away, a contrast is established between the old-fashioned house and the modern, fashionable piazza, the one a place of activity, the other described as a place of contemplation. On this contrast the opening paragraphs hinge. There is first of all the description of the house and its construction, which set it significantly off against the modern piazza: its location was chosen by a strange mixture of assorted mythology, such as Orion with his Damocles sword; next, Troglodytes had to be fought "in those subterranean parts," and

[10]All existing evidence points to this conclusion. "I and My Chimney," published after the Piazza Tales, had been submitted to Putnam's in July, 1855. The only other story published after "The Piazza" is "The Apple-Tree Table" of May, 1856, but judging by the usual time lapse between submission and publication, it is highly probable that it was finished before January, 1856, the month in which Melville wrote "The Piazza."

finally, the "Holy Stone," with which the house was built, had to be quarried from the "Hearth Stone Hills." In this manner, the old-fashioned farmhouse is made to stand for an age which was active and involved, a Golden Age of interrelationship between the divine and the earthly, and which furthermore was "built" on those values of the hearth which play an important part in the Piazza Tales as a whole and which seem to be the only beacon of hope left in an overall dark picture.

> The house is old. Seventy years since, from the heart of the Hearth Stone Hills, they quarried the Kaaba, or Holy Stone, to which, each Thanksgiving, the social pilgrims used to come.[11]

Here, in the images of the Hearth Stones--of domesticity or "humanizing domestic associations," as Melville calls it in "Bartleby"--and of the social pilgrims--indicating friendship and sociality--two values are singled out, which in the Piazza tales are sacred values indeed, but which often have little force against the impact of dark and destructive powers. Already here, in "The Piazza," they have lost some of their stature. After all, the house is the emblem of the past (social pilgrims used to come, life was a fight against troglodytes and other spirits of the dark), while the piazza, as symbol of the modern age, isolates neighbour from neighbour, and offers contemplation rather than active involvement, and smug comfort, compared to the devout reverence of an older age. This is the narrator's choice when he builds his piazza, a fact which is qualified by the narrator himself as a sign of modern enervation

[11]Herman Melville, Piazza Tales, ed. Egbert S. Oliver (New York, 1948), p.1. All further references to the Piazza Tales are inserted in the text.

and feebleness:

> For though, of old, when reverence was in vogue, and indolence was not, the devotees of Nature, doubtless, used to stand and adore--just as, in the cathedrals of those ages, the worshipers of a higher Power did--yet, in these times of failing faith and feeble knees, we have the piazza and the pew. (P.2.)

Past and present are thus seen as antipodal states of spiritual health. The house and the piazza, the past and the present, set each other off, the former a symbol of a healthy past against which the piazza appears as a symbol of modern decadence and enervation. Yet we must take note that the narrator, for all his mocking pose, is identified with the piazza and with the associated spiritual attitude. Thus, the exposure of this attitude by attendant imagery as moral feebleness creates a situation in which imagery runs counter to the surface theme of this opening section, which is the desirability of building a piazza. Imagery is thus used to supply a critical comment on a major theme.

This, in itself, is not a new technique of Melville's, but, as Nathalia Wright points out in her study of the functional use Melville made of Biblical imagery, Melville often suggests "an older, a weightier, and often a supernatural theme" in order to evoke "the presence of yet another, unseen world beyond the vast scene which meets the eye."[12] But this time, in his short stories, this technique of Melville's of projecting his modern themes against the backdrop of a different past is used for a specific ironic effect. By "manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity" (an observation of T. S. Eliot's in

[12]Nathalia Wright, Melville's Use of the Bible (Durham, N. C. 1949), pp.42 and 174.

reference to James Joyce's technique in Ulysses[13]), he draws attention to a particular shortcoming of the modern age, thus making use of an extra time dimension, the implications of which are often in direct contrast to the established attitude of the surface story. There is for instance the implied contrast between the historic Templar Knights and the modern bachelor-lawyers in "Paradise of Bachelors"; the implied contrast between modern religion and that of the Greeks in "The Lightning-Rod Man"; the evocation of Spenser's unequivocal moral world in "The Encantadas"; and the Ascension imagery in Billy Budd's ironic sacrifice to a dubious cause: in all of these, the implied contrast places the surface theme in a dubious light. Here, in the opening pages of "The Piazza," likewise, a double image arises: on the one hand, the piazza is desirable as a place of comfortable observation, while, on the other hand, this desire is shown to be a sign of decadence. Viewed against the backdrop of a different, fuller past, the second image of the piazza represents an essentially modern attitude towards life, which, instead of the panoramic vision which activity and movement affords, has substituted a view which is restricted to one direction: "To build a panoramic piazza, one round and round, it could not be" (p.2).

This restriction of the view to one direction brings us to another aspect of the piazza: its position towards the north. Fogle in his essay on "The Piazza" states that Melville sought "the best, the

[13]T. S. Eliot, "'Ulysses,' Order, and Myth," reprinted in Mark Schorer et al, Criticism: The Foundation of Modern Literary Judgment (New York, 1948), p.270.

widest, the noblest, truest view,"[14] but he overlooks the fact that the piazza's northern view is explained in the story as a conscious renunciation of the fulness of vision, as the above quotation shows. Furthermore, by building the piazza to the north, the narrator has openly renounced the eastern, southern, and western views, which by means of their attendant images awaken associations of rebirth, fertility, and healthy change: in the east, there is "the season's new-dropped lamb, its earliest fleece; and then Christmas dawn"; to the south, the white-budded orchard, changing into a "green arsenal yard"; and to the west, the green pasture--images which to the narrator are "goodly," "pleasant," and "sweet."[15] From this changing scene of nature, significantly described through images with Christian overtones ("lamb," "Christmas dawn"), the narrator turns away and instead faces a mountain view, which in its bleakness, barrenness, and loneliness recalls the sea:

> In summer, too, Canute-like, sitting here, one is often reminded of the sea .... and the purple of the mountains is just the purple of the billows .... but the vastness and the lonesomeness are so oceanic, and the silence and sameness, too, that the first peep of a strange house ... is for all the world like spying ... an unknown sail. (Pp.3-4.)

It is thus in facing the eternity of the mountain (in Mardi and Pierre the symbol of the eternal) that the narrator is misled into expecting something ideal and permanent in a world which is subject to change and

[14] Fogle, pp.85-86.

[15] Stein (p.320) sees in the "quartering of the universe" a ritualistic procedure, and interprets each quarter to "adumbrate the scheme of Christian salvation: the Fall, the Incarnation, the Redemption, and the Resurrection."

ambiguity, and that he becomes vulnerable to the bewitching charm and the deception of a "spot of radiance" high up on the mountain. So far, the northern position of the piazza recalls other Melvillean quests for the absolute, yet the fact that this questing takes place on and from a piazza (with sea- and voyage terminology only used metaphorically) indicates that what spirit of questing is left is but a feeble echo of Bulkington's daring and Ahab's defiance. At this time of his life, Melville's former intense preoccupation with "the absolute condition of things as they strike the human eye" has become less all-absorbing and obsessive, or in the words of the narrator, he now loves to watch distant showers "instead of thunderstorms, as I used to" (p.5).

If we can thus take the piazza's northern position as a reflection on former "quests," it is important to note that in this story the quest does not end fatally but, viewed with ironic detachment, ends in resigned disillusionment: "I'll launch my yawl no more." It ends in the narrator's final retirement to the protection from involvement which the piazza offers.

Thus, between the piazza attitude at the beginning of the story and that of the end, between optimism and disillusionment, an important initiation has taken place, which compresses the inner development of the narrator (or of Melville, if we can assume identity between the narrator and Melville) into the duration of an autumn day's outing. What this development means and what this final piazza attitude fully symbolizes can, however, only be discussed after the analysis of the actual voyage of initiation, which is framed by these two piazza attitudes. The story itself, set into this frame of the piazza, can then

be said to provide the motivation behind the narrator's emotional retreat. It is, in the narrator's own words, another "voyage" and as such, in Melville's terms of reference, meant to drive off "the spleen--a substitute for pistol and ball." In reminiscence of other Melvillean voyages of rebirth, an Ishmael-like weariness makes the narrator "launch his yawl." But instead of Bulkington's outward-bound quest after truth, this time it is an "inland voyage to fairy-land" in search of a "spot of radiance," in other words, in search of hope and happiness, associated throughout the story with the romantic love motif. References to Titania, Dulcinea, fairies, and finally Una remind us of the similar search for Yillah; but a look at the underlying image pattern will show that the ideal of "The Piazza" is far removed from the ideal which Yillah represents. A different kind of ideality is sought which, as the introductory theme of the cycle, has a special significance for the whole collection.

IV

The actual story of the "inland voyage" (that is, the symbolic action of the quest) is divided into three parts. In the first section, the journey is represented realistically from the first elusive glimpses of a tantalizing gleam from the mountain until that gleam is identified as coming from a newly shingled cottage; the second section deals with the actual setting-out and the ascent; and the third and longest describes anti-climactically the arrival and the meeting with Marianna. However, over and above this realistically observed journey, imagery evokes deeper levels of meaning, which will show that this story is anything but exhausted by the surface theme observed by Fogle: "Illusion

must yield to hard fact."[16]

The first section of the story, which prepares us for the actual "inland voyage," is concerned primarily with the "spot of radiance" which the narrator has observed from his piazza on a far-away mountain and which by means of a superb handling of perspective is brought visually nearer to the reader as by a zoom lens. Here Melville is in full control of his technique. As in some parts of "Benito Cereno" (for example in the description of the approach to the San Dominick) or in "The Encantadas" (the view of Rock Rodondo), Melville is intrigued to follow the visual effects of deception. Not only do appearances belie the underlying reality, but appearances themselves are elusive and forever changing. Only slowly, therefore, do we become aware of the nature of the object which has aroused the narrator's attention. Due to some "witching conditions of light and shadow," this object keeps changing its appearance until we finally recognize it as a mountain cottage, in which, after some further delay, a fair maiden--a fairy?--is taken to dwell. Here is a favourite Melvillean theme, the theme of visual deception, which is deepened in this first section into a metaphysical significance through some allusions which evoke behind the changing pattern of light and dark something like "the old wars of Lucifer and Michael" (p.6), the struggle between evil and good. References to witchcraft emphasize this theme: there are the "witching conditions of light and shadow," "the wizard afternoon," and a sky "ominous as Hecate's cauldron." However, the allusion to David's Adullan cave in

[16]Fogle, p.91.

which the "hermit-sun," the herald of light, is imprisoned, reveals that in this cosmic struggle between light and dark the Miltonic assurance in the victory of light has given way to the uneasy feeling that the outcome might no longer be a foregone conclusion. Restrained by a witchlike malignant force, the sun itself seems to have lost its power, except at one small "spot of radiance."

It is at this point that the symbolic significance of the "spot of radiance" and the hopes which it promises to hold out to the narrator fully emerge. It is a symbol of hope of some ulterior ideality somewhere up on the mountain, which after having dazzled the narrator for several years is pursued at a moment when, weakened by sickness, he has become acutely aware of the presence of decay and corruption in the very heart of creation:

> I could not bear to look upon a Chinese creeper of my adoption and which, to my delight, climbing a post of the piazza, had burst out in starry bloom, but now, if you removed the leaves a little, showed millions of strange, cankerous worms, which, feeding upon those blossoms, so shared their blessed hue, as to make it unblessed evermore --worms, whose germs had doubtless lurked in the very bulb which, so hopefully, I had planted. (P.6.)

What this implies can be explained by a look at the colour "white" which is highly suggestive, if we see it against the background of the chapter "The Whiteness of the Whale" in Moby Dick (XLII), where it becomes the symbol not only of a "palsied universe" and "spiritual wonderment" but of sterility and death. According to George R. Creeger, white in Melville's symbology is not only the "symbol of God, it is also the symbol of death, and the conclusion towards which Melville was moving is that God himself

is dead."[17] In a similar fashion, in the image of the Chinese creeper both polar values of white are apparent, insofar as blossoms and worms share alike the "blessed hue," so that the blessed and unblessed are inseparably united in the colour white. Yet corruption reaches still deeper levels. Not only the white, starry flower but also the bulb, the very origin of life, is corroded by the cankerous worms of unblessedness, evil, and decay. Decay thus has penetrated to the innermost centre of creation. It is at this point that the search for a "fairyland" suggests itself to the narrator as a remedy: "It will do me good, it will cure this weariness." In other words, at the point of a deep malaise at the nature of reality, the spot of radiance on the mountain holds out a special promise. What it signifies is, however, never expressed directly but solely by imagery and allusions and, finally, by the symbolic action of the journey itself.

The pastoral journey, on which the narrator as Spenserian Knight sets out on his horse, might use as its foundation the immediately observed landscape, but as the journey is described, it becomes evocatively transformed: the Berkshire "golden-rods" are "guide-posts"; the drowsy cattle by the wayside are "the enchanted which never eat"; the innocent little mountain flowers "Jacks-in-the-pulpit, like their Baptist namesake, preached but to the wilderness"; the red apples in the orchard become "Eve's apples; seek-no-furthers"; and the old ram of the pasture turns into Aries, the solar ram, who would have him stray towards his

[17] George R. Creeger, "The Symbolism of Whiteness in Melville's Prose Fiction," Jahrbuch für Amerikastudien, V (Heidelberg, 1960), 147-63.

"astral path" and the constellations of the far beyond. But in true knightly fashion he cannot be misled. He follows the golden birds and the lure of the deep forest and pursues his upward journey.

It has often been pointed out by critics that this journey is highly suggestive, but only William B. Stein has attempted to explain its meaning, and as pointed out earlier, he understands it to be a religious satire.[18] I see the meaning of this section differently. Since the journey describes the way towards the place where "fairies dance," that is, some ideal goal the nature of which has at this stage not yet become fully clear, each stage in the journey contributes towards the meaning of this goal. (Apart from this function of the journey, it could also be considered to have some autobiographical significance, if we accept that the narrator is Melville and his "voyage" symbolic of his own dilemmas. In this latter case, each stage in the outer journey could be said to correspond to something like an inner journey through the regions of mind. But I would not like to build any hypothesis on what the rejection of Aries' path and the lure of the green forest might signify in Melville's personal development apart from their function within the story.)

In the journey, two paths are open to the narrator. The first

[18] Stein's analysis can be considered the first attempt to penetrate to the deeper levels of the story. According to him, each stage in the journey illustrates the protagonist's desperate search for religious faith, each image representing aspects of faith (Aries, "the redemption of Christ," the dark forest road, "a sort of via negativa," the orchard and the "crescent moon, from morning," "temptation ... the Virgin Mary and her risen Son.") See Stein, pp.324-28.

is the path of Aries, who had led on "along a milky-way of white-weed, past dim-clustering Pleiades and Hyades ... and would have led me further still his astral path, but for golden flights of yellow birds--pilots, surely, to the golden window, to one side flying before me, from bush to bush, towards deep woods ..." (p.7). This, the dark road through the luring forest, is the second path which the narrator chooses. What do these paths signify?

Helpful first of all is the colour symbolism in the choice between the "milky-way of white-weed" and the "winter-green forest." Green in Melville's symbology usually implies health and fertility, while the meaning of white at this time of Melville's life, according to Creeger, not only suggests the awesome but also the sterile.[19] This interpretation is valuable in understanding the implications of the "white-weed" and the white astral path which the narrator rejects. Furthermore, there is a scene in Pierre, where Melville actually comments on what the "white-weed" represents to him. From the mansion in Pierre, one can see the fields of amaranth (or white-weed), which on "the terraced pastures grow glittering white, and in warm June still show like banks of snow:-fit token of the sterileness the amaranth begets!" In Pierre, this sterile amaranth, called "the celestial flower," fights the catnip or "household herb" in a deadly struggle which is emblematic perhaps of what Thompson calls "Melville's Quarrel with God."[20] If we bear this

[19]Concerning the connotation of green, see Wright, pp.33-34; of white, see Creeger, pp.147-63, Matthiessen, p.502, Runden, pp. 18 ff., and James R. Baird, Ishmael: A Study of the Symbolic Mode in Primitivism (Baltimore, 1956), pp.256 ff.

[20]Pierre, pp.403-05.

connotation of white-weed in mind and further consider that the whole Aries passage bears connotations of the unearthy and spiritual ("astral path," "milky-way," "dim-clustering Pleiades and Hyades"), the white path which the narrator rejects could then be interpreted as a sterile path which would lead away from earthly goals and an earthy path, namely the "green" path which significantly leads towards "Eve's apples; seek-no-furthers," which "tasted of the ground" (p.8).

This "green" path the narrator chooses, and with his choice an antithesis develops: compared to the sterile whiteness of the "astral path," the road through the green forest teems with allusions to the fertility of nature which seems rapacious in its victory over man's attempts to tame it, as the relics of the old saw-mill, the wedges, and the flints testify. At the same time, however, the ascent in the forest becomes a descent into time--from the saw-mill to the axe, and from there to the flint--until the narrator reaches the apple-tree in the hanging orchard which with its connotations of paradise suggests that he has reached the heart of creation. At this point we meet a puzzling image, the "crescent moon" which "maidenly looked down upon me ... from morning" (p.8). Stein, in accordance with his interpretation of "The Piazza" as a religious allegory, sees in this image an icon of Mary and her son.[21] However, even in the medieval usage of this icon, the moon was not associated with Mary primarily but was used as a fertility symbol in emblems of the immaculate conception. I suggest therefore that the crescent moon in "The Piazza" is used here with the same traditional overtones of fertility. Furthermore, the image of the crescent moon

[21]See above, p.75, n.18.

contains a strong Oriental flavour, and judging by Melville's earliest story, an Oriental tale, Fragments from a Writing Desk, Fragment Two (1839),[22] which hinges on the revelation that physical beauty is deaf and mute, he might well have used this Oriental flavour with similar connotations: after all, every image connected with the green forest road suggests the earthiness and unspirituality of this inner centre of the fertile and green forest, in contrast to the unearthy spirituality of the "astral" path. Ultimately, the dark-green path with its lack of any sustaining values for the soul is but the antithesis of the "astral path." To the extent that the white path was unearthy, the meaningless fertility of nature with its "Eve's apples; seek-no-furthers" which "tasted of the ground," with its "empty chapels in the living rock," and its "wilderness" to which "Jacks-in-the-pulpits" preach in vain is unspiritual and equally limited. Thus, the journey could be said to describe the "either--or" through which the narrator has to pass on the way to what seems to him a higher ideality. In this part of the story the dichotomy of life, which was reflected in the first section by the visual delusion of changing light conditions as a struggle between light and dark, good and evil, is now projected onto a different level. It is now

[22] Reprinted in William H. Gilman, Melville's Early Life and Redburn (New York, 1951), Appendix B, pp.265-71. Fragment 2 is an amorous adventure story in an Oriental setting, obviously influenced by Melville's knowledge of the Arabian Nights, and ends in an interesting anticlimax: the hero discovers that the beautiful stranger he visits is deaf and mute, and he flees in horror. According to Dorothee M. Finkelstein, Melville's Orienda (Yale, 1961), p.31, "Melville's extraordinary dénouement has been appropriately called the first of his variations on the theme of a frustrated quest. The final anticlimax is the earliest demonstration of his irresistible impulse to prick the rosy bubble of romance and to reveal its terrible core of tragic reality." Thus, a romantic love story both introduces and ends Melville's "quest." The romantic pose is still pricked, but this time it does not end in flight but in the acceptance of illusion as the only possible way to endure reality.

a dichotomy within man, the "either" of barren spirituality and the "or" of a love which "tasted of the ground." At the same time, however, this dichotomy between the spiritual and the physical and their mutual exclusiveness,[23] as illustrated by the description of the journey, prepare structurally for the ideal which is sought on the mountain and help to explain its nature.

The nature of the ideality sought is explained, or rather evoked, by imagery and allusion in the passage where the narrator approaches his goal--the mountain hut in which he hopes to find Una or "oneness," in Spenser man's highest prize on earth. Taking into consideration the description of the journey and the nature of the two paths, it is evident that in the description of the hut the previously antipodal imagery of the journey is now entwined, which suggests that from a structural point of view the synthesis of the spiritual and earthy, of the fertile and sterile, of life and death, is immanent. There is the "grayish cottage, capped, nun-like, with a peaked roof," with its eaves-trough of "mossy priories" for the "snail-monks," which has its base "rimmed about with shaded streaks of richest soil," "the shaded streaks ... richest in its front and about its entrance" [italics mine; p.9]. Next to it, the "sequestered grave" of a low cross-pile of silver-birch is overgrown by "vagrant raspberry bushes--willful assertors of their right of way" (p.9). Here, in this passage, the nature of the ideal for which the narrator strives is revealed as the old romantic dream of a synthesis, in which the separateness and dichotomy of life become resolved. It is

[23]To Aries the forest is "forbidding and forbidden ground"(p.8).

an ideal which would correct that state of fragmentation which is the subject of one of Melville's better known poems, "After the Pleasure Party":

> Why hast thou made us but in halves--
> Co-relatives? This makes us slaves.
> If these co-relatives never meet
> Self-hood itself seems incomplete.
> And such the dicing of blind fate
> Few matching halves here meet and mate.
> What Cosmic jest or Anarch blunder
> The human integral clove asunder
> And shied the fractions through life's gate ?[24]

Obviously, the awareness reached in this poem is a post-"Piazza" experience, which the narrator in this story reaches only after his disappointment on top of the mountain. As yet, he is still hopeful of a meeting with Una, although, since the story is told in retrospect, this hope is doomed as a "chase after fairies."

To sum up: imagery so far is used functionally to circumscribe the nature of the ideal sought, and structurally, in the description of the hut, to prepare for the climax of the meeting. Against the background of an anticipated union, the final disappointment of the narrator is doubly acute. Instead of Una, he finds Marianna; instead of an all-comprehensive ideal unity, the embodiment of emotional frustration and intense loneliness and isolation. The anticipated climax thus presents itself as an anticlimax and turns into a reversal similar to the image of the hop-plants before Marianna's window, which at the near-point of entwining "would have then joined over in an upward clasp, but the baffled shoots, groping awhile in empty air, trailed back whence they

[24] Poems, p.219.

sprung" (p.14). Imagery thus adds a dynamic tension which the story material lacks by itself.

While the pattern of imagery reinforces the basic theme of romantic love, some literary allusions illustrate it further, in particular those to Don Quixote's Dulcinea and Shakespeare's Fidele in Cymbeline, the latter used to supply the motto to this story. I mentioned earlier that, by using Una, the romantic love theme is interpreted as the resolution of human separateness and life's dichotomy into an all-comprehensive union. However, with the reference to Dulcinea a different emphasis appears, insofar as Dulcinea is primarily a figment of Don Quixote's imagination created by his need to relieve the stolidity of reality. Thus, further connotations are superimposed on those awakened by the reference to Una. If there is no higher ideal, no Dulcinea to render service to and reward him, then imagination has to create her, because, as Melville adds to an underlined passage in his edition of Don Quixote, "a knight-errant without a mistress is ... like a god-like mind without a God."[25] In other words, love and religion both pursue an ideal, and the way they are linked in this marginal note suggests that the romantic love theme is seen as but another expression for man's search and yearning for some ideal reality and an all-encompassing union. Thus the narrator's disappointment on the mountain is more than emotional frustration; it is the outward sign of a deep disturbance of one who, after having opened the holy sarcophagus and found it empty, has lost his last faith in a fulfilment in the human

[25]See Harry Levin, "Don Quixote and Moby Dick," in Contexts of Criticism ("Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature," 1957), pp. 97-109.

sphere. From this point of view, the motto of the story is significant. It is the dirge on the death of Fidele from Shakespeare's Cymbeline: Fidelity, or faith, is dead. But as will be noticed later in the discussion of "The Encantadas," the motto not only establishes a common surface link, here in the death motif, but it also suggests an important contrast, by means of which the modern world is projected against the background of the more meaningful world of the past. In "The Encantadas" it is the morally unambiguous world of Spenser, while here in "The Piazza" the contrast lies in the final reawakening of Fidele in the context of Shakespeare's play. Here in "The Piazza" the "death" of faith is final and conclusive. The ideal cannot become reality. The reference to Don Quixote emphasizes this point: "The enchanted never eat. At least so says Don Quixote, that sagest sage that ever lived" (p.7). The withdrawal into a world of conscious make-believe is for the narrator the only way out.

V

After the anticipation of the middle section, the narrator's meeting with Marianna in the last section is a significant anticlimax, significant for the very fact that it leads to his decision to "launch his yawl no more." However, Mason's interpretation that here, as in Pierre, "the subject of each is the death of illusion"[26] cannot be supported, as both the narrator and Marianna persist in a state of illusion which, however deceptive, is their only means of sustaining life. Marianna goes on believing in her Prince Charming, while the

[26]Mason, p.184.

narrator retires to the ivory tower of his piazza, where he enjoys knowingly "the illusion so complete"; in other words, he withdraws into a world of conscious make-believe, which is his response to the frustration of his search. Thus, both Marianna and the narrator need illusion, however with one important difference: the narrator knows it for a deception while Marianna does not. By refraining from enlightening her he performs the only service he was able to render. Fogle's interpretation that "illusion must yield to hard fact, fancy to observation.... The deeper answer is probably no answer at all, but a profession of enlightened ignorance, Montaigne's 'Que-sais-je?'"[27] fails to take these points into consideration.

The meeting with Marianna deserves all our attention, because here an initiation takes place which leads the narrator to his decision to stick to his piazza and to launch "his yawl no more." Oliver, in his textual notes, points out that Melville's Marianna is no one else but Tennyson's and Shakespeare's Marianna.[28] This fact alone raises her to a symbol of frustration and hopeless loneliness. But Melville, in choosing a girl associated already through Tennyson's poem with frustrated love and loneliness, emphasizes the anticlimactic nature of the cottage meeting by making her isolation and frustration even more acute than in his source. Melville's Marianna is neither expectant and faithful love as in Shakespeare's Measure for Measure, nor frustrated love as in Tennyson's poem, but love has been denied to her altogether.

[27]Fogle, p.91.

[28]Oliver, Piazza Tales, p.229.

Seen against the other Mariannas, Melville's is utterly alone. She is one of Melville's orphaned; she never knew love, and even the shadowy companionship of the birch tree, which Tennyson in his poem allows to fall "upon her bed, across her brow," is denied her. It was felled by a lightning, and its "sequestered grave" is outside her hut. Not even the shadow of a living thing befriends Melville's Marianna.

But Marianna is not only a symbol of utter loneliness; she also exhibits an attitude towards life which could be said to be diametrically opposed to that of the narrator. To the narrator's romantic imagination, the world around him often seems magically transformed, yet to Marianna the same world is prosaically simple:

> The sun is a good sun, but it never gilds this house. Why should it? This old house is rotting. That makes it so mossy. In the morning, the sun comes in at this old window,... and half burns, and nearly blinds me at my sewing, besides setting the flies and wasps astir.... Sun gild this house? not that ever Marianna saw. (P.11.)

Here is Marianna's unadorned statement of fact, which contrasts strangely with the narrator's previous imaginative description. Both see different aspects of reality, but their views do not invalidate each other. While the narrator sometimes sees what is not there, Marianna fails to see what is there; after all, the sun had gilded the house. But there is no implication that one is right and the other wrong. Melville is using here a contrast similar to the kind which Cervantes caricatured. In both cases the protagonists view each other with some measure of incomprehension, and the areas over which they can communicate turn out to be limited. In Cervantes this incomprehension was a source of humour; in Melville it becomes a source of incisive speculation. Since the panoramic view is impossible, each one is limited to seeing one

aspect of life. But not only is it impossible to see life whole; since each man's vantage point-or piazza--faces in a different direction, a further consequence of this limitation of viewpoint is the mutual lack of comprehension. Thus, each one is separated from the other not so much by outer circumstances which might be overcome but by the inner obstacle of mutual incomprehension--an idea which "Bartleby" develops more fully. Thus, while the narrator's romantic mind sees the world of appearances as translucent, to Marianna's prosaic view it is opaque. While the narrator's imaginative mind peoples the world with his fancies, Marianna knows the outside world only second-hand, by the shadow it casts. But common in both is the inner need for some "fairy" or "Prince Charming" which in both remains unfulfilled. For want of living companionship Marianna can only befriend the shadow of hostile and inanimate reality (such as the shadow "Tray"). To her, prayers are not the answer (p.14), neither the knowledge of a Divine being, nor the expectation of post-mortem hopes. To her, as to the narrator, fulfilment would lie in the human sphere of the here and now. And since this cannot be, she goes on waiting, "sitting, sitting, restless sitting."

This is the reality which the narrator finds on the mountain instead of Una and instead of fairies. And it is interesting to observe how Melville emphasizes the anticlimactic nature of the meeting through a change of style. The tone of narration in the previous sections, which deal with the narrator's expectations, is connotative and allusive and rich in symbolic overtones. But in this last section the richly associative style of the narrator, the expression of his romantic temper in the first half, gives way to an objective rendering of

dialogue in the latter half. While the first section gives full scope to the narrator's roaming mind, this last section stays strictly within the bounds of the factual and the observed, and the dialogue is rendered without much interference by the narrator. It is Marianna's life, described in these terms, which makes the change in tone, language, and choice of technique significant. Here is the reality found instead of the ideality sought, while furthermore the employment of dialogue emphasizes that the two have little in common. Marianna's straightforward account is the very opposite to the narrator's unruly fancy which roams from the Barbary Coast to Paradise Lost and fairyland.

In a situation like this it is wrong to say that the narrator failed in his mission and betrayed himself and Marianna.[29] Rather, the treatment of the anticlimactic third section indicates that inherent in each one's character and condition is the curse of separation. In this, "The Piazza" foreshadows other Piazza tales. There is no bridge or link between the narrator's romantic longing and Marianna's emotional frustration, a fact all the more tragic in that it is viewed against the background of Spenser's more successful quests. The "reality," to which this futile search for an ideal unitas leads, is the recognition of man's loneliness, the only common bond between them supplied by their mutual need for human love and companionship, which has to remain unfulfilled. Imagery emphasizes this theme: it stresses the either-or during the voyage and prepares--in the description of the hut--for the

[29]Stein (p.332) sees in the "ordeal in fairy cottage" an attempt to "recapitulate the trial of the Marvellous Castle," this time, however, ending in the betrayal of both hero and heroine.

climax by fusion, which is then negated by the surface plot. In this, the anticlimax of the third section recalls, as already mentioned, the image of the two hop-vines before Marianna's window:

> Through the fairy window, she pointed down the steep to a small garden patch near by--mere pot of rifled loam, half rounded in by sheltering rocks--where, side by side, some feet apart, nipped and puny, two hop-vines climbed two poles, and, gaining their tip-ends, would have then joined over in an upward clasp, but the baffled shoots, groping awhile in empty air, trailed back whence they sprung. (P.14.)

It is on this image of the two hop-vines that the structure of this, as of other stories, and--as will be shown later--of the whole cycle seems to be patterned.

In a situation like this, no development is possible. Each one recoils into his own being, into his own point of view. Marianna continues unredeemed her loveless life of frustration, "sitting, sitting, restless sitting," while the narrator withdraws back to his piazza, from which he tells Marianna's "and many as real a story," which are his Piazza tales. At this point we are coming to the important question of what the piazza, after the initiation on the mountain, means to the narrator and thus to Melville. What is the nature of his disillusionment and what is his solution?

The goal sought on the mountain differs from former goals of Melville's "questors." This time, it is not absolute truth nor the reality behind the "pasteboard masks" of appearances but rather the fulfilment of a human need here in life which would remedy the curse of man's loneliness. Cut off from any certitude from above, man's need for sociality and love is stronger than ever. These are man's "Hearth Stone"

values--his last hopes in a situation where the shadows, "condor-like," are invading. But at the end of this story--and of the Piazza tales, since they are all told in retrospect--this last hope is shown as unrealizable. In the night when truth comes in, "no light shows from the mountain." This is a significant development which provides the basic pattern of thought in all the Piazza tales. In situations where man seems to be at the mercy of dark forces, his only hope lies in these hearth values of friendship and love, but, as the introduction and the following preponderantly tragic stories indicate, these values have little force left to resist the general disintegration. This is the basic chord, which "The Piazza" strikes, and which the Piazza tales modulate.

Yet it is important to note that "The Piazza" does not end tragically. It might be true that as far as one can penetrate reality is dark and pervasively ambiguous, but the narrator has found something like a solution, a dichotomy of self, which enables him to survive where others of Melville's questors had failed. His solution is to relegate the dark knowledge of man's isolation and the frustration of all higher hopes into a "night" experience, while during the day he learns to accept the deceptive spot of radiance on the mountain for what it is--an illusion--and enjoys it aesthetically, since this is all it will yield towards man's inner peace of mind.

> Enough. Launching my yawl no more for fairy-land, I stick to the piazza. It is my box-royal; and this amphitheatre, my theatre of San Carlo. Yes, the scenery is magical--the illusion so complete. And Madam Meadow Lark, my prima donna, plays her grand engagement here; and, drinking in her sunrise note, which, Memnon-like, seems struck from the golden window, how far from me the weary face behind it. (Pp.14-15.)

One way to insure against the experience of further disillusionment is the narrator's vow "to launch my yawl no more." Thus, in the final scene, the piazza becomes the symbol of an aesthetic retreat and a sanctuary, from which he may make-believe that reality is but a theatrical performance, from which he may derive pleasure without involvement. This is not stoicism, as Mason implies[30]; it is the life of a detached aesthetic observer, one who is determined that his enjoyment shall never again suffer the jolt of disillusionment. Here, in his ivory tower, he can imagine the kind of ideality he could not find in real life. Here he can read the triumphant notes of immortality into the lark's morning song, which "Memnon-like" seems struck from Marianna's "golden" window.[31]

Yet despite the narrator's determination simply to enjoy, the story ends significantly with the obtrusion of dark reality. Even the force of his imagination cannot keep at bay the shadow and the dark truth which come in at night:

> But, every night, when the curtain falls, truth comes in with darkness. No light shows from the mountain. To and fro I walk the piazza deck, haunted by Marianna's face, and many as real a story. (P.15.)

Thus, the bright and colourful imagery of the opening sections has in

[30]Mason, p.184.

[31]The reference to Memnon is another example of Melville's new way of using images in a short-hand fashion. In Pierre, p.159, "Memnon" is more fully circumscribed as a symbol of highest idealism and immortality, but already in Pierre, the melodious sound of "Memnon's sculptured woes" is mute. Other examples of this technique, whereby Melville relies on previously established symbols, but now without any explanatory comment, are the amaranth in "The Piazza," the wall in "Bartleby," and thunder in "The Lightning-Rod Man." Magowan speaks in this connection of Melville's "emblematic way of

the course of the story more and more given way to darkness,[32] and in the final sentence, darkness has the last say. "Condor-like" the shadows have invaded. Shortly after writing "The Piazza," Melville chose a similar ending to a book, the image of the extinguished light in The Confidence Man. "Truth comes in with darkness": this statement implies more than, as Fogle suggests, an enlightened "Que-sais-je?" or, in Mason's words, stoic agnosticism. Darkness and blackness have in Melville's work the recurrent connotations of implacable evil,[33] so that the symbolic movement from light to dark announces the sway of evil. From the days of Moby Dick there is thus little qualitative change in the basis of Melville's ethical cosmos; now as then there is "blind demonic energy rampant...unchecked by any beneficent deity."[34] But there has been a marked change in the attitude of Melville's protagonist towards this dark empirical truth. In a situation where, symbolically speaking, "the mountain is shrouded," (that is, the eternal is elusive and unknowable), and where the only certainties are man's aloneness and

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writing" through a "set of fixed symbols" (p.348). See also Barret, pp. 140, 145; Hoffmann, "Shorter Fiction," p.417; and Rosalie Feltenstein, "Melville's 'Benito Cereno,'" AL, XIX (November, 1947), 251.

[32]See Runden, p.59: "From the moment of the narrator's meeting Marianna the imagery of color is replaced almost wholly by imagery of darkness." Unfortunately Runden does not use this fact for an interpretation.

[33]For treatments of Melville's use of blackness and darkness, see Jesse D. Green, "Diabolism, Pessimism, and Democracy: Notes on Melville and Conrad," MFS, VIII(Autumn, 1962), 289; Sidney Kaplan, "Herman Melville and the American National Sin," Journal of Negro History, XLII (1957), 37; Matthiessen, p.507; and Joseph Schiffman, "Critical Problems in Melville's 'Benito Cereno,'" MLQ, XI (September, 1950), 320-31.

[34]Watters, "Metaphysics," p.177.

the inevitability of invading "condor-like" shadows, neither revolt, however Promethean, nor quest after some unambiguous spiritual truth are possible solutions. What traces of absolutism are left in this story are therefore viewed by the narrator with sceptical irony; after all, the quest is described as a quixotic venture in search of "fairies" in a Spenserian Never-Never Land. With subtle irony the narrator has detached himself from his own previous quest, and he withdraws to the ivory tower of the piazza, this withdrawal caused by the profound disillusionment which he as "questor" has suffered in the course of this, his last, "voyage." From this point of view, the change from the tableau metaphors at the beginning of the story to the theatre imagery in the last paragraph (pp. 1-2, and p.15), both devoted to the scenic beauty of the surrounding landscape, is significant. The narrator might have returned to the same place, but in the course of his journey an initiation has taken place which could be summed up in the following way: the aesthetically pleasing picturesque beauty of the scenic setting has been revealed as an illusion which, although still pleasing to the senses, will not allow any meaningful conclusion. It can only be enjoyed as an illusion, as a theatrical performance.

So ends Melville's short story period, with the story of "The Piazza," written in 1856, <u>after</u> he had surveyed in his Piazza tales the human scene and found it wanting in love and understanding and thus open and vulnerable to the destructive influence of dark and demonic forces.

VI

After this survey of "The Piazza" as a story in its own right,

it is once more appropriate to see it as an introduction to the collection. And it is here that unifying features can be established. I pointed out earlier that in general outline Melville seems to follow the pattern of Hawthorne's "The Old Manse" by using an autobiographical setting; but more than that: like Hawthorne he, too, uses this setting to strike certain guiding themes and issues which bind the medley of stories together.

The two major links which Melville himself singles out are the title symbol, the piazza, and the haunting figure of lonely and frustrated Marianna. After all, the stories are "Piazza" tales, and Marianna's face is placed like an emblem at the head of the collection: "No light shows from the mountain. To and fro I walk the piazza deck, haunted by Marianna's face, and many as real a story"--with these words, the narrator leads into the text proper.

To consider first the piazza, which is the very place from where the following stories are told and which therefore is an important clue as to the viewpoint from which these stories are narrated. It is very often assumed that Melville is identifiable with the protagonists of his stories, but I do not think that this can be corroborated by the introductory "The Piazza," which was written in full view of all the stories to be incorporated in the volume. It is important to note that in the introduction the piazza is shown in the end to be a place of aesthetic withdrawal, from where the author can, without any personal involvement, during the day enjoy "the illusion so complete," while during the night "truth comes in with darkness." The piazza is thus a vantage point from which he may survey various aspects of reality, but

always without any actual participation:

> I stick to the piazza. It is my box-royal; and this amphi-theatre, my theatre of San Carlo. Yes, the scenery is magical --the illusion so complete. And Madam Meadow Lark, my prima donna, plays her grand engagement here; and, drinking in her sunrise note, which, Memnon-like, seems struck from the golden window, how far from me the weary face behind it. (P.15.)

The piazza, thus, becomes a kind of ivory tower, from which he, at least part of the time, has learned to enjoy life purely aesthetically, for what it will yield to his imagination. As he says earlier "to have no piazza ... [is] as if a picture gallery should have no bench" (pp.1-2). It is here that the importance of the piazza lies as a cue to the viewpoint from which the following stories are told. It is a viewpoint which is primarily uninvolved and external to the subject presented. This, above all, discredits (in my mind) any strictly autobiographical interpretation of the following tales. It might be argued with Howard that the position of an external observer was unnatural to Melville and that, if at all, he only slowly adjusted to it, so that the "piazza attitude" of withdrawal would not come into operation in his early short stories. This argument can, however, be countered by the fact that Melville chose the piazza as title symbol in full view of all the short stories to be collected, and that already in his first published tale, "Bartleby, the Scrivener," he had fully mastered the role of the narrator in disguise.

Apart from this function of the piazza as a clue to the narrator's attitude of observation and withdrawal, the piazza is important in a different sense. In "The Piazza," the ivory tower attitude was engendered by the oppressive awareness of an encroaching

duplicity in all aspects of life and reality, and in the end, after the futile quest, this ambiguity still persists in the narrator's "day" and "night" view from his piazza. This implies that not only is the issue of duplicity still haunting Melville, but since the days of Pierre it could be said to have reached deeper levels. It now extends to the human mind and to human sensibility. Interesting, however, is the way in which Melville now copes with this ambiguity artistically. In Pierre we find evidence that the author himself is deeply disturbed and participates in Pierre's growing awareness of ambiguity. Here in the Piazza Tales his reaction seems different. It is as if he attempted to objectify this disturbing experience in the realm of art, insofar as his tales recreate the ambiguity of the outside world by a structural pattern, in which two dialectically opposed attitudes or issues are confronted with little commitment on the author's part. There is a "day" view and a "night" view, but Melville as author has disappeared behind the confrontation of these two contradictory aspects to any one issue. Examples of this technique, patterned on the "day" and "night" view from the piazza, can be found in each of the Piazza tales in the mutually exclusive attitudes of each group of protagonists--towards existential problems as in "Bartleby," towards issues like authority and the negro in "Benito Cereno," towards religion in "The Lightning-Rod Man," towards trust in "The Encantadas," and towards the robot and technology in "The Bell-Tower."

However, this structural device of dialectic confrontation or artistic ambivalence is not limited to Melville's short stories but is perfected in The Confidence Man, which was written at roughly the same time as "Benito Cereno." Here, in the long form of The Confidence Man it is judged by Marius Bewley in the following terms--however without

reference to Melville's short stories:

> moral action...became an impossibility.... [Melville's heroes] became the passive victims of their situation in life, trapped in the endless unfolding of moral ambiguities whose total significance was to drain all possible meaning from life. Reality which is conceived as endlessly ambiguous, never coming to rest in any certainty, is the negation of form.... It is, at most, a commotion that must sooner or later collapse into stasis through sheer exhaustion.[35]

In other words, Bewley finds that Melville's experience of being cut adrift on the sea of duplicity without directing compass is reflected artistically in the form and structure of his fiction. Bewley is right in observing this underlying structural pattern of polarity, but, as he points out in his short observation on "Bartleby," this dialectic structure need not necessarily lead into complete stasis or what he calls "negation of form." What is inappropriate for the long form may well be suitable for the short, where it could be compressed into an inner tension of the nature of a dramatic conflict. The important question to consider is whether Melville's short stories gain or lose by this ambivalent dialectic structure or, as Bewley calls it, "moral nihilism," which seems to have become a recurrent method of composition in these years.[36] The fact remains that Melville's best achievements, by an almost unanimous vote, are "Bartleby" and "Benito Cereno," and that these works show the quality of ambivalence to the point of mystification. Is Bartleby merely a burden on society, or is he the victim whom society wronged? Should we condemn Delano's trust and

[35] Bewley, pp.191-92.

[36] Ibid., p.214.

imperceptiveness of evil, and how should we view Benito's overwhelming vision of blackness? Melville's artistic control over his subject matter seems much better maintained in these cryptic stories where meaning is veiled to the point of equivocalness than in the ones which present an obvious moral. Yet when it comes to interpreting their meaning, the confusion of interpretations is primarily caused by the fact that this attitude of ambivalence is overlooked by critics, and that Melville is identified haphazardly with his fictionally projected characters.

The unity between title story and collection is established on another level if we consider that, beyond this statement on point of view, Melville committed himself to something like a statement of thematic unity, by invoking as a further link the "face of Marianna, and many as real a story" against the background of the dark mountain. If the piazza symbolizes Melville's abandonment of an active quest for truth in favour of observation, then the haunting quality of Marianna's face together with corroborating evidence in the Agatha letter implies a change in interest: a change away from questions concerning the Eternal, towards the more immediate problems of man's existence in a hostile and dark world. The northern outlook of the piazza might still reflect former quests, but the romantic love motif places the voyage of search more into the human sphere than into the metaphysical. If Marianna's face is the emblem of a collection of stories which are concerned with this human sphere and human relationships, it is important to state once more what Marianna suggests: she is the reality found, instead of the ideality sought. She is frustration and unredeemable loneliness, and orphaned and unbefriended by any living

object, she symbolizes the meaninglessness of an existence which is deprived of contact with other human beings. The meeting with Marianna on the mountain is thus to the narrator a disillusionment which goes one step further than, five years earlier, Pierre's spiritual chills at the sight of the emptiness of the holy sarcophagus. Now man is seen separated not only from some ulterior purpose and meaning from above (p.14) but from his fellow-men. Whether horological and chronometrical time clash, does not seem to matter so much now: after all "no light shows from the mountain"; but what matters in this story as well as in all other Piazza tales is that "the human integral is clove asunder," in other words, that each man seems an island to himself and is unable to bridge the gulf which separates him from others. Contrasted with the spirit of sociality, associated with the "old-fashioned farmhouse," and contrasted with allusions to happier, former quests for Una, this is seen as a typically modern development. This issue of "separation" and man's inability to "reach out," interpreted in "The Piazza" as an aspect of modern life, is then the common background against which each of the following Piazza tales is projected, each one covering significant aspects of disintegration of Melville's contemporary, then "modern," life. Behind each personal fate in each individual tale appears as a shadow the destiny of the age with its lack of communication, its disturbed human relationships, and through it its inherent vulnerability towards calamities of a terrifying nature. Isolated from others, man has little to set against the encroaching "condor-like" shadows and against the jeopardy from forces outside his rational control, such as the irrationality of Bartleby's behaviour, the malignity of Babo, the frightening obedience of the robot, or the demon-like spirits of the

Encantadas. The answer of Captain Vere to the threat of a general disintegration of order is, "with mankind...forms, measured forms, are everything," and to some extent this attitude is anticipated in the Piazza Tales. Yet here, the "measured forms," that is, the social and cultural establishments of the modern age, are hardly healthy enough to protect man. When Melville in his survey of modern life presents Wall Street in "Bartleby," an outmoded political order in "Benito Cereno," religion as an institution in "The Lightning-Rod Man," a community's cultural achievement in "The Bell-Tower," and in "The Encantadas" a picture of life devoid of any of these basically restraining "measured forms," we find that through using, as in "The Piazza," the past as a counterfoil, each story shows up some aspect of modern decadence, moral feebleness, and disintegration. In each tale modern "forms" and establishments are shown to have come down a long way from an evoked past age. Have they then lost their power to protect, to exorcize and to restrict the power of evil? Have they lost with it their raison d'être? Melville touches here upon an old theme in the European "Novelle" or short story, when he shows the establishments, or "Ordnungen" as German literary criticism calls them, incapable of controlling human destiny, and man hovering on the abyss of chaos.[37]

Apart from these two unifying features concerning narrator's point of view and theme, which are singled out by Melville himself, there

[37] See Kunz, p.3 (concerning Boccaccio and Goethe): "Um den Konflikt des Gesetzlichen und Unbändigen geht es jedenfalls in der Rahmenhandlung hier wie dort." This situation, however, changes with the beginning romantic period and the modern short story: "Sie alle umspielen in irgendeiner Weise die Krise der Bürgerlichkeit und der menschlichen Selbstmächtigkeit" (p.17).

is one further link to consider between the introduction and the tales, namely the role which the structural pattern of "The Piazza," with its countermovement of expectation and frustration, plays in the unification of the cycle. I mentioned before that the structure of the introduction adopts a movement which seems to be patterned on the image of the hop-plants which, at the point of joining, groped in empty air and then "trailed back whence they sprung." This structural pattern is important for two reasons; first, this anticlimactic structural movement is common to all other Piazza tales with the exception of "The Lightning-Rod Man." We find it in "Bartleby," in the possibility of an approach between the two protagonists in the Sunday scene ("Presentiments of strange discoveries hovered around me") and its frustration ("a prudential feeling began to steal over me"); in "Benito Cereno," where the promise of the hand-clasp scene remains unfulfilled, insofar as Don Benito and Delano still cannot comprehend each other in the end; in "The Encantadas," in the general arrangement whereby two central, more light-hearted sketches are flanked at either side by gloomy pictures of the island curse; and finally in "The Bell-Tower," where instead of the anticipated bell-stroke of success we hear the "dull, mangled sound" of failure.

This same anticlimactic movement is, however, not restricted to the individual tales, but the cycle as a whole seems to adopt this pattern of rising and then vanishing hope. "The Piazza" as introduction outlines a situation where the immanent values of love and unity appear as a light of hope, which in the sequence of the story is revealed as an illusion. It seems that when Melville after the composition of "The Piazza" changed the sequence of the stories, he arranged them in a pattern which follows this outline of "The Piazza." There is noticeable

in the cycle as a whole an upward movement of hope, climaxing in the central story, which is then reversed in the last two tales. More explicitly, central in the cycle is "The Lightning-Rod Man" (moved there from last position in the contemplated "'Benito Cereno' volume") with its successful expulsion of the devil and its strong emphasis on sociality and brotherhood, values which could remedy the curse under which Marianna, Bartleby, Benito Cereno, Bannadonna, and the isolatoes of the Encantadas are bound. Leading up to this central story are "Bartleby" and "Benito Cereno," which both exchanged places under the new arrangement. And we might conjecture here that considerations for the inner coherence of the cycle led Melville to this exchange, because, from the viewpoint of plot, "Benito Cereno" is a less gloomy story than "Bartleby." After all, the revolt is quelled and order restored due primarily to Don Benito's sacrifical leap for the sake of friendship. This upward movement, however, is reversed in the last two stories. In "The Encantadas" sociality enters once more marginally in the two central sketches, where group commitment becomes a protection against the island curse; but in the case of the buccaneers, this commitment is a very dubious one, and as far as the Essex is concerned, her escape is only short-lived (she "valiantly gave up the ghost fighting two English frigates in the harbor of Valparaiso"). "The Bell-Tower," last tale of the cycle, continues this trend of vanishing hope; it is a "dark" story and presents a picture of unrelieved failure and collapse, failure this time widened to include that of a whole community. Thus, I believe, a distinct pattern can be discerned in the new arrangement of the tales which follows that of "The Piazza." This time the "spot of radiance" or gleam of hope are the Hearth Stone values of sociality and

brotherhood. Yet, as the cycle as a whole emphasizes, they are more a wish than a reality. In this, cycle and introduction are in unison.

In summary, then, it can be said that there are three major links between "The Piazza" and the Piazza tales proper. There is, first of all, the hint as to the viewpoint from which the tales are narrated. As we hear, the stories are told from the piazza or conceived there, and the piazza, after the narrator's disillusionment on the mountain, is described as a place of emotional withdrawal where the dark "night" truth can be balanced--or neutralized--by the aesthetic enjoyment of the "day" view. Thus, the "piazza attitude" is one of noncommitment which hides behind the presentation of dialectic patterns, of "day" and "night" views. Furthermore, as a symbol of an essentially modern attitude ("yet, in these times of failing faith and feeble knees, we have the piazza and the pew"), the piazza foreshadows that each story told there lights up some particular feature of Melville's contemporary, then "modern," life, which is then set against the background of the "dark mountain," that is, against the background of a metaphysical void. Modern life, as "The Piazza" shows, is bereft of any absolute criteria, and the only ascertainable truth to be found on the mountain is man's loneliness and futility of existence: instead of Una and the fairies, there is Marianna.

This brings us to the second link, the thematic one of "Marianna, and many as real a story." As figurehead of the cycle, she evokes in the introduction the frustration, futility, and loneliness to be found in the other Piazza tales, each story modulating the key theme of alienation and separation, either as personal or collective failure.

Lastly, it appears that the structural pattern of "The Piazza"

foreshadows that of most Piazza tales as well as the structural movement of the whole cycle. Thus, by anticipating and preparing and by striking a basic chord which the other stories take up and modulate (as the following chapters will show), the introduction helps to unify the medley of seemingly unconnected stories and instils in them some inner coherence.

CHAPTER IV

"BARTLEBY"

I

"Bartleby" is the first Piazza tale proper, and it also happens to have been Melville's first published short story. According to the arrangement of the so-called "'Benito Cereno' volume" (before "The Piazza" was written as an introduction), it was to have followed "Benito Cereno," the title story. But while the arrangement of this tentative collection (which had no introduction and no overt linking theme) might have been determined by Melville's appraisal of the relative artistic merits of each story, the rearrangement of the stories after the composition of "The Piazza" can be assumed to have followed the demands of a central theme which proposed itself to Melville at this later stage. This central theme, shown in "The Piazza" by the symbolic action of the futile quest after Una, is the irremediable condition of man's isolation and alienation, which is seen partly as inherent in the human situation itself and partly as a modern decay of the old-fashioned values of the hearth. After having viewed in "The Piazza" this principle of alienation primarily as a fundamental and personal issue, Melville then, in his following tales, focuses on aspects of the contemporary scene which demonstrate it. In this first story of the cycle proper, it seems as if the general nature of Melville's contemporary world was seen from a philosophical point of view: there is the description of a walled-in world which allows no vision of meaning or purpose, a fact of which

Bartleby--as Bowen points out[1]--is oppressively aware. Thus, the theme of man's situation in a walled-in world without exit into meaning, and Bartleby's inner despair at the vacuity of life are a significant opening to the cycle, which then surveys more specific facts of the contemporary scene, such as slavery, technology, and false religion.[2]

My own interpretation will proceed from this assumption. I shall further apply the "piazza attitude," which signifies Melville's critical detachment, to the interpretation of both protagonists, the lawyer and Bartleby. So far, criticism has overstressed the inadequacy and guilt of the lawyer's Wall-street world in arguing Bartleby's victimisation. Yet a close look at the story with the piazza in mind will implicate Bartleby in the indictment. What destroys him spiritually as well as physically is not so much society's pressures but two conditions, the one within him, the other implicit in his environment: his own absolutist obsession with the "dead wall" of life, on the one hand, and the lack of

[1]Bowen, p.134.

[2]It might be argued that the omission of the subtitle "A Story of Wall-Street" de-emphasizes the issue of contemporary society in favour of Bartleby's personal destiny. But it seems to me that this omission can be explained differently. Not only the subtitle is omitted but also the term "the Scrivener." Both omissions can be explained by a look at the proof sheet of the table of contents of Melville's "'Benito Cereno' volume" which Melville sent to Putnam's on January 19, 1856, and in which all titles were brought in line and lost all additions including their articles, so that "Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall-Street" was listed as "Bartleby," and "The Encantadas, or Enchanted Isles" became "Encantadas." According to Davis and Gilman (Letters, p.179, n.6), it was the publisher and not Melville who altered the title of the fifth story from "Encantadas" to "The Encantadas; or Enchanted Islands." Thus the omission of the subtitle has most likely no deeper reason than a typographical consideration.

positive values and commitments in the society in which he lives, on the other. Story action thus places the responsibility for the tragic outcome on both, and there is little indication that the author identifies himself with either.

II

"Bartleby" has always been a favourite among Melville's short stories. The bulk of its critical literature is rivalled only by that of "Benito Cereno" and is equally open to contentions and contradictions, which are to a great part due to Melville's new way of presentation without commentary or explanation. The usual approach is by way of Bartleby himself, and from there it branches out into various theories of what this strange scrivener might stand for. In the earliest reviews, in the Berkshire County Eagle and The Criterion, Bartleby was taken to be a "portrait from life" and "based upon living characters."[3] Later critics searched for actual identities and suggested men like Thoreau, Adler, and Eli James Murdoch Fly (an intimate friend from Melville's early maturity),[4] whereas the more persistent reading is autobiographical and sees in Bartleby "a glimpse of Melville's own drift of mind in this miserable year: the point of the story plainly indicates Melville's present dilemma,"[5] a dilemma which was later associated by others with Melville's artistic crisis as a writer-"there are excellent reasons for reading 'Bartleby' as a parable having to do with Melville's own fate as a

[3] Melville Log, II, 515, 516.

[4] Oliver, "A Second Look at 'Bartleby,'" College English, VI (May, 1945), 431-39, and Fogle, p.20 (Thoreau); Howard, Melville, p.208 (Adler); and Leyda, Complete Stories, p.455 (Fly).

[5] Mumford, p.238.

writer."[6] Only recently has there been a general drift away from these biographical or semi-biographical readings hinging on the character of Bartleby to the exclusion of other story elements towards readings which focus on the narrator and the nature of his society. After all, the story is as much the lawyer's as Bartleby's, and the bulk of the narrative is concerned with their interrelationship. Of the many discussions, however, only a few are based on a systematic analysis of text. Of these, those by Marvin Felheim, Mordecai Marcus, Leo Marx, and Kingsley Widmer deserve special mention, since in them the emphasis has perceptively shifted to those other aspects of the story which until recently had been considered only incidental.[7]

Summing up the major critical trends, it can be said that the most generally accepted interpretations of "Bartleby" still focus on the figure of the protagonist and see in him a "victim of his environment,"[8]

[6]Leo Marx, "Melville's Parable of the Walls," Sewanee Review, LXI (October, 1953), 603. The story is also read autobiographically by Weaver, Freeman, Chase (pp.146-47), Hetherington (p.276), and Thorp (in his chapter on Melville in LHUS). See also Alexander Eliot, "Melville and Bartleby," Furioso, III (Fall, 1947), 11-21; and Harry Levin, The Power of Blackness (New York, 1958), p.144. Barret and Hoyle, in their theses, follow these trends. It is easily understandable that with such support the autobiographical reading became the accepted one, though it produces a critical deadlock, which Hoffmann ("Short Novel," p.144) criticizes thus: "The story is used as internal evidence of biography, and biography is used as external evidence in the interpretation of the story."

[7]Marvin Felheim, "Meaning and Structure in 'Bartleby,'" College English, XXIII (February, 1962), 365-68; and Kingsley Widmer, "The Negative Affirmation: Melville's 'Bartleby,'" MFS, VIII (Autmun, 1962) 276-86.

[8]Fogle, p.21.

environment suggesting either society at large with its "middle-brow culture"[9] or, in a more limited sense, Melville's literary public[10] or his critics.[11] This view, however, does not allow for the fact that the narration itself does not focus on that part of Bartleby's life history in which his strange disorder might have developed but on the effect which his strong resistance has on his employer, the other scriveners, and--later--on the immediate outside world. The few allusions which Melville provides for an understanding of Bartleby's "disorder" all point to a source which is spiritual rather than social or autobiographical.

In the 1950's, in interpretations by Chase, Mason, and Marx, this overemphasis on Bartleby was questioned, and another group of interpretations began to focus on different functional elements in the story, primarily on society and its guilt. Adherents of this approach see in "Bartleby" not primarily a document of autobiographical import but an accusation of contemporary Wall-street society. "Bartleby's death damns society, not himself" is Mason's verdict, which is re-echoed in Felheim's assertion that "society must be responsible."[12] This reading, however useful in indicating that there is in the story another interest apart from Bartleby, overlooks the disruptive effect which Bartleby's passive tyranny exerts over the office. The sober and realistic narration hides an indictment not only of the emptiness of commercialized society

[9]Chase, p.147.

[10]Eliot, pp.11-21, and Marx, p.621. Also Hetherington and Hoyle.

[11]Hetherington, pp.272-73.

[12]Mason, p.192, and Felheim, p.376.

but also of Bartleby's sterile and nihilistic attitude of what Fogle calls "absolutism,"[13] in which the metaphysical quest after truth has degenerated into a paralysing and life-less "dead-wall revery." Melville here seems to have gained a degree of detachment from his recurrent type of "seeker" which shows that the piazza attitude of emotional withdrawal was not a fictional pose.

Recently another group of interpretations has approached the story by way of the narrator, whose significance in the story Chase as early as 1949 had emphasized.[14] These new interpretations, however, overstress the importance of the narrator by raising him to the role of main protagonist. Stein, in 1960, had suggested Bartleby as "alter ego" of the narrator, and two years later, in 1962, Marcus developed this thought into a full analysis of Bartleby as a "psychological double" of the narrator: "Bartleby appears to the lawyer chiefly to remind him of the inadequacies, the sterile routine, of his world."[15] While I consider it very important to include the narrator in any analysis of "Bartleby" as another and very important protagonist, I disagree with the attempt to limit the meaning of the story to the narrator's awareness and to see, as Marcus does, in Bartleby primarily a protest, however stifled, within the lawyer's mind

[13]Fogle, p.19: "Bartleby is an absolutist, an all-or-nothing man .... This absolutism is the mainspring of his character and the cause of his spiritual isolation, his great affliction." See also Mary E. Dichman, "Absolutism in Melville's Pierre," PMLA, LXVII (September, 1952), 702-15.

[14]Chase, p.148: "Melville identifies himself partly with the lawyer."

[15]Stein, p.319; and Marcus, p.366.

against his way of life.[16] To see in the narrator the main protagonist of the story and in his growing awareness of the inadequacies of his world the major theme, is to overlook one of the major points of the story, namely that the narrator never does become aware either of Bartleby's mysterious dilemma or of the shortcomings of his own "safe" world. The narrator's attempt to penetrate the wall of Bartleby's isolation is as doomed to fail as Bartleby's perverse preoccupation with the "dead, blind wall" which, as in Moby Dick, "butts all inquiring heads at last."[17] Their attitude towards each other, as an analysis of the structure will show, follows a pattern similar to that of "The Piazza" and the symbol of the two hop-vines: the narrator's attempt to reach Bartleby's soul is foredoomed despite his benevolence and good will; their attitudes are incompatible, and each, to adopt the image of the piazza, is restricted to the vantage point he has chosen.

Another small but important group of studies approaches "Bartleby" from a viewpoint which I should like to call existentialist, this term here used in the Sartrean sense of l'être et le néant, i.e. implying a sensibility which contemplates human existence against the experience of nothing. Interpretations which see in Bartleby's "dead wall revery" this timeless existential experience are for instance Matthiessen's discussion of "Bartleby" as a "tragedy of utter negation"[18] and Bowen's description of Bartleby as "vainly searching the blank for some hint of

[16] Ibid., p.368.

[17] CXXV, p.513. Other images of the wall are in XXXVI, p.162, and LXXVI, p.336.

[18] Matthiessen, p.493.

meaning,"[19] while others which express similar views emphasize more the Kafkaesque features of this experience.[20] But while I believe that these references to a Kafka-like situation will have to be taken very seriously, I consider it equally important to point to a very essential difference between Kafka's stories and Melville's "Bartleby," which lies not, as Chase suggests, in Melville's attempt to "beatify his hero"[21] but in the choice of viewpoint from which the story is told: in "Bartleby" from the viewpoint not of the outcast or social misfit but of the member of society who "belongs."

Until Hoffmann's article on Melville's shorter fiction in 1953, not one interpretation had approached the story from a primarily aesthetic point of view. Hoffmann's thesis that in his shorter fiction Melville had his material under artistic control and that he had achieved "complexity through simplicity and economy"[22] is a challenging statement considering the low estimation in which Melville's actual craftsmanship stood and still stands. In his stress on elements of form and technique, such as setting, narrator's attitude, and symbolism, Hoffmann is one of

[19]Bowen, p.134.

[20]To this group belong interpretations by Max Bense, "Metaphysische Betrachtungen in Bartleby und Kafka," Aesthetica (Stuttgart, 1954), pp.123-45; E. H. Rosenberry, Melville and the Comic Spirit (Harvard, 1955), p.145; Robert D. Spector," Melville's 'Bartleby' and the Absurd," NCF, XVI (September, 1961), 175-77; as well as Chase, p.144, Mason, p.191, and Neider, p.8.

[21]Chase, p.144.

[22]Hoffmann, "Shorter Fiction," p.419.

the first to see in Melville's stories their artistic merit.[23] In the same year, Marx in his stimulating article likewise emphasizes aspects of structure and of symbolism, but not until Felheim's "Meaning and Structure in 'Bartleby'" in 1960 did another detailed structural analysis appear. In Felheim, however, the delicate balance which Marx had set up between the involvement of Bartleby and society is tipped towards an indictment of society.

In summary it can be said that despite the great interest expressed in "Bartleby," only a few of the thirty-odd discussions are detailed analyses rather than conjectural readings. Among those, interpretations by Arvin, Chase, Felheim, Fogle, Marcus, Marx, and Mason have uncovered important aspects of the story, such as the nature and function of society, the significance of the wall as a symbol, and the function of the narrator. But in nearly all interpretations, the blame is largely placed on society, with a strong emphasis on its inadequacy.

III

As a criterion by which these various interpretations may be assessed, I suggest that seeing "Bartleby" as a Piazza tale will provide a needed frame of reference in allotting to theme and character in the story their proper place and perspective. If the piazza has any significance for the collected stories, it is in revealing the author's personal detachment from the themes and attitudes presented. Chase, who questioned the validity of the autobiographical approach which identifies Melville with Bartleby, argued that Melville was both

[23] Ibid., p.430.

Bartleby and the lawyer:

> Melville is as much the lawyer, the man of action, agression, and authority, as he is Bartleby. This is to say, Melville is as much the father as the son.[24]

I suggest that Melville is neither. I should therefore like to interpret "Bartleby" neither as a personal document of autobiographical or confessional import nor as a purely social allegory but--following Melville's suggestions in "The Piazza"--as a parable of the modern world, in which two attitudes, the madly seeking one of Bartleby and the expedient, materialistic one of the narrator, are both critically viewed as two aspects of modern life. After all, "The Piazza" indicates Melville's suspended judgment and his attempt to recreate objectively the ambiguity of appearances by means of a dialectic mode of presentation, similar to Conrad's "ambivalance embodied in controlled scepticism"[25] --and "Bartleby," too, is a Piazza tale. Following Melville's suggestions in "The Piazza," we may therefore assume that Melville, in this story, is not identifiable with Bartleby, that he is not identifiable with the narrator, and that neither is he identifiable with both. As the introduction explicitly shows, the author surveys from his piazza with critical detachment various aspects of the human scene around him, which are presented as a "day" view and a "night" view. In his stories, this confrontation is recurrently embodied by two central characters who are in complete contrast to each other. Here in "Bartleby," there is the expedient lawyer with his "day" view and absolutist Bartleby with his

[24] Chase, p.148.

[25] See Alan Hollingsworth, "The Destructive Element: A Study of Conrad's Tragic Vision" (unpublished Ph.D.thesis, Berkeley, 1956) p.10.

"night" view; in "Benito Cereno," there is the "bachelor" Delano and the "monkish" Don; in "The Lightning-Rod Man," the self-reliant cottager and the fear-ridden salesman; and in "The Bell-Tower," fearless Bannadonna and the superstitious magistrates: in all these stories we thus find a dialectic pattern similar to that of "The Piazza" with its confrontation of "day" and "night" view. But in none of these stories is the author identifiable with any one of these views. Bartleby's perverse obsession with the meaninglessness of the world and the narrator's smug concentration on expediency and self-interest are both critically exposed by the action of the story as two aspects of a moral wasteland, with little evidence of author identification. Sympathy there is, pity and alarm at the pathos of Bartleby's tragic destiny, but it is wrong to mistake this for identification. "Bartleby" is, after all, a Piazza tale, and Bartleby's fate seems comparable to Marianna's; both are haunting reminders of the "dark" truth of man's severance from metaphysical as well as human bonds, the latter point emphasized by the central feature of "Bartleby" which determines its action, namely the intrinsic inability of both protagonists to understand one another. Each one views life from such different perspectives that no real approach is possible. Mutual incomprehension is the key to this story, not only to its structural framework, as I shall show later, but to the evaluation of the two perspectives which Bartleby and the lawyer represent. In order to show this, I consider it necessary to isolate the two central characters, first Bartleby and then the narrator.

The strange disorder of Bartleby, one of Melville's most cryptic and mysterious characters, has aroused considerable controversy. However, one possibility has been overlooked so far, namely that the enigma of his

character is but another aspect of the theme of mutual incomprehension on which the action of this story hinges. It is the lawyer who tells this story about Bartleby, not a neutral or objective third-person narrator, and the fact that in the end we know the narrator but not Bartleby suggests that the narrator is not only unwilling but unable to understand the enigma of Bartleby's refusal. After all, the inner climax of the story is the moment when "presentiments of strange discoveries hovered round" the narrator, which are, however, suppressed by "a prudential feeling" which "began to steal over me."

Yet we, as readers, are not completely excluded from understanding Bartleby, as it is only between him and the narrator that the wall of incomprehension has been erected. We, as readers, are made aware of the nature of Bartleby's incurable disorder by three technical tricks which by-pass the narrator's consciousness: first there is the incidental information given by the narrator that Bartleby had previously worked as a subordinate clerk in the Dead-Letter office; secondly there is the central symbol of Bartleby's "dead-wall reveries"; and thirdly there are three allusions to the religious sphere which reveal the specific nature of Bartleby's "innate disorder" which, to the narrator, was only broadly spiritual in origin: "It was his soul that suffered, and his soul I could not reach."

The major clue to Bartleby's dilemma is the narrator's allusion to the Dead-Letter office, which has often perturbed critics and is one of the most cryptic and contentious passages of the story. Most follow Alexander Eliot who sees in this episode evidence for his autobiographical interpretation, by taking the burning of the "dead letters" to refer to

Melville's own books which had been destroyed in Harper's fire.[26] Unfortunately for this reading however, the fire did not occur until December 10, 1853, the final instalment of "Bartleby" having been published in the December 1 issue of Putnam's.[27] Watters, in 1945, offered a more plausible explanation, which I should like to develop from its primarily social implications to moral-ethical ones. Watters explains the Dead Letter episode in the following way:

> After years as a clerk in the Dead Letter office, where he had sorted for the flames the unsuccessful attempts of men to communicate with one another--where he had, in short, witnessed the breakdown of social fellowship--he would not and could not adapt himself to the necessary usages of society.[28]

The letters which are sorted for the flames are, however, not only communications gone wrong or astray, but what is burned are messages of love, charity, and hope, the trinity of human virtues, on which the Christian moral universe rests:

[26]Eliot's autobiographical reading has been maintained by Hetherington, Hoyle, and Marx. Chase makes no direct reference to the fire, but he, too, sees an analogy between the "dead letters" and Melville's own books. Marcus considers the last paragraph a "concession to popular taste" (p.368), while to Felheim it adds "a specific political dimension to the social one" (p.376). To Hoffmann, who otherwise commends Melville's artistic control, "the final long paragraph is the flaw that mars the perfection of the whole. Melville did not let well enough alone" (p.420).

[27]Hetherington (pp.274-75) suggests that the last two paragraphs, separated from the main body of the tale by a row of asterisks, were added as an afterthought. It is, however, highly unlikely that the publication of the December issue of Putnam's should have been delayed long enough for any item to be inserted after December 11. Taking postal delay between New York and Pittsfield into consideration, the publication of Putnam's would have to be moved well into December, 1853.

[28]Watters, "Melville's 'Isolatoes,'" p.1144.

> Sometimes from out the folded paper the pale clerk takes a ring--the finger it was meant for, perhaps, moulders in the grave; a bank-note sent in swiftest charity--he whom it would relieve, nor eats nor hungers any more; pardon for those who died despairing; hope for those who died unhoping; good tidings for those who died stifled by unrelieved calamities. On errands of life, these letters speed to death. (P.54.)

In order to explain the significance of this passage for the understanding of Bartleby's dilemma, a short digression is required which will involve a Kantian approach. Henry Pochmann in his book on German Culture in America points out that Melville was well-acquainted with the major tenets of Kant's philosophy, and his interpretation of Melville's major works as a "parallel" to Kant's enquiries can help explain why Bartleby's experience with these "dead letters" had such a paralysing effect on him.

The basic thought of Kant was that the world of noumena is closed to the human mind. The proof of its existence lies solely in the validity of those moral laws which are the only absolutes not subjected to the same antinomies as the purely "regulative" ideas of God, freedom of will, and immortality. In Pierre, according to Pochmann, Melville let Pierre "test the adequacy and validity of moral laws," but contrary to Kant's affirmative belief in their validity, Pierre finds them inapplicable, and virtue and vice reveal themselves as two shadows of the same nothing.[29] Bartleby could be considered to be one step beyond Pierre. He no longer tests the validity of the absolute moral laws but has to accept the fact that they have failed. The trinity of immanent moral absolutes--love,

[29]Henry A. Pochmann, German Culture in America (Madison, 1957), pp.438, 439.

hope, and charity--are now dead letters and have lost their efficacy. With this awareness, more than the moral world collapses; the meaning of life itself which is based on these foundations is questioned, so that Bartleby's pallid hopelessness is but an effect of his absolutist assumption that the world as such is meaningless. The fact that Howard suggested Melville's Kantian friend Adler as the prototype of Bartleby might well have been based on a similar argument. Kant's philosophy had brought others before Bartleby to the depth of existential despair.

The use of the wall symbolism supports this interpretation of Bartleby's hopelessness as "existential despair." We must note, however, that the walls in the story are used with varying connotations and seem to act as symbols on more levels than one. Of the many rings of walls which shut man in only the "dead wall" in front of Bartleby's window is used recurrently as emblem in connection with Bartleby, while the three outer rings which wall man in, all seem to refer more to Wall-street than to Bartleby (these are: the outer circle of Wall-street itself, which suggests the vacuity of the modern world at large and of a secularized society in its business aspects, "entirely unhallowed by humanizing domestic associations"; the next circle of walls seals off the office against outer reality and substitutes the black-and-white view of the walls for a comprehensive and "panoramic" view of life; and the third circle of walls, the folding doors which can be removed, separates man from man, or class from class, the scrivener from the boss). Bartleby is not concerned with these, but the wall associated exclusively with him throughout the story is a blank brick wall, "within three feet of the panes," so that "the light came down from far above, between two lofty

buildings, as from a very small opening in a dome" (p.23). This is Bartleby's "hermitage," as it is repeatedly called, he himself "the last column of some ruined temple" (p.40). These references from the religious sphere clearly indicate the true nature of Bartleby's dilemma. Bartleby is surrounded by walls on all sides and isolated by them from the company of his fellow workers and from the outside world; but his gaze is directed with nearly perverse obsession not against those walls which separate him from the others but against the "dead wall" before his window. His "innate disorder" is not primarily caused by his isolation from other human beings, and to interpret it as purely social is to overlook the significance of the description of Bartleby's cubicle in religious terms. The origin of his "dead-wall revery" is spiritual and not, as Fogle states, "more immediately social than it is theological or metaphysical."[30] Thus, in "Bartleby," the dead-wall is used with connotations reminiscent of Moby Dick, where Ahab had attempted in vain to strike through the walls or the pasteboard masks of appearances. But while Ahab asserts with Promethean defiance his own interpretation of what is behind the wall, Bartleby withdraws feebly into his "dead-wall revery." As Bowen says, "measured against Ahab's, his is a mild and undramatic answer, but it is defiance nonetheless";[31]--yet what a tragic development in the quest for

[30]Fogle, p.21. Also Mason, p.191, who speaks of "the insidious webs that the complexity of Society was spinning round the individual." Yet as early as 1947, Eliot had suggested that "perhaps Bartleby's silence, or rather the silence with which Melville speaks through Bartlebly, is somewhat similar: the answering silence of a man who has questioned God and found him--silent" (p.18). This thought is repeated by Bowen (p.134), who ranks Bartleby among the seekers: "Bartleby in his 'dead-wall reveries' vainly searches the blank for some hint of meaning."

[31]Bowen, p.134.

certainty and truth ! Bartleby is truly "the last column of some ruined temple," the traditional Melvillean "seeker" in a pathetic evolutionary form. In "The Piazza" we found that the northern view makes the narrator vulnerable to the deception of some gleam of hope which in the end leads not to fulfilment but to a complete disillusionment; here in Bartleby's obsessive engrossment with meaning where no meaning can be found, the quest ends in spiritual and physical death. The curve of Melville's spiritual quest for truth, as represented in his work, has reversed its direction: story-action reveals it to be ultimately negative.

Obsessed with his "dead-wall reveries" or, in Bowen's words, "vainly searching the blank for some hint of meaning,"[32] Bartleby cannot accept the narrator's world as a way out. The descriptions of the lawyer, of his office, and of the surrounding Wall-street show that they have little that is positive to offer and that the suicidal seeker and the prudent, safe lawyer are worlds apart. Part of the meaning of the story lies in this incompatibility of their different attitudes, a theme which the story-action itself develops by focusing on the growing deterioration of their relationship. The story of Bartleby's private fate is thus widened into a parable of the modern world in which both Bartleby's paralysing obsession with the wall and the materialism of acquisitive society are but two contrasting aspects of the loss of a meaningful existence. It is, therefore, important to see the narrator's world as antipodal to Bartleby's and their respective shortcomings disclosed through their mutual interaction in the course of the development of the story.

[32] Ibid.

IV

While Bartleby's dead-wall reveries are directed at the meaninglessness of the world in an existentialist metaphysical sense, the lawyer and his world emphasize that the business world, too, seriously lacks commitment and purpose. Since Bartleby's despair is aggravated by his stay in Wall-street, we can assume that it had something special to contribute to deepen his despair. After all, the significance of the surrounding Wall-street world in understanding Bartleby and his dilemma is stressed by the narrator himself:

> Ere introducing the scrivener, as he first appeared to me, it is fit I make some mention of myself, my employés, my business, my chambers, and general surroundings; because some such description is indispensable to an adequate understanding of the chief character about to be presented. (P.16.)

Accordingly, the general surroundings, which we have to take into consideration, are: the city of New York, the office, the narrator's business, his own character, and lastly, the description of Bartleby's fellow-workers.

The action is set in New York, and what this city itself meant to Melville is well known by his reference to it in Pierre, of whose title-hero Baird in his book on Melville's cultural symbols says: "He is more nearly a Kafkan man of the city whose pursuit of truth is meaningless since truth itself, in this idiotic center of Western civilisation, has no meaning."[33] Wall-street in "Bartleby" is not viewed any differently. Here is a walled-in world, and its vacuity is a sign of a meaningless

[33]Baird, p.394. The episode referred to describes Pierre's and Isabel's depressing entry to the city, the cobblestones under their carriagewheels having become the hearts of the dead. Pierre, p.270.

culture and an exhausted civilisation. It is a "Petra" which, as Melville elaborates more clearly in Clarel, is to him the petrified symbol of man's heavenly city, now dead and sterile and encircled on all sides by the encroaching desert.[34] With this, "Bartleby" agrees:

> Of a Sunday, Wall Street is deserted as Petra; and every night of every day it is an emptiness. This building, too, which of week-days hums with industry and life, at nightfall echoes with sheer vacancy, and all through Sunday is forlorn. (P.33.)

In other words, during the week's rat-race, Wall-Street's hectic activities might hide the vacuity underneath, but on Sunday, the Lord's day, and at night, "when truth comes in with darkness," it is glaringly revealed.

In this Wall-street world, the lawyer has his office which, like Wall-Street, has its walls and is denied an outlook into meaningful reality:

> My chambers were up stairs, at No.--Wall Street. At one end, they looked upon the white wall of the interior of a spacious sky-light shaft, penetrating the building from top to bottom.
>
> This view might have been considered rather tame than otherwise, deficient in what landscape painters call "life." But, if so, the view from the other end of my chambers offered, at least, a contrast, if nothing more. In that direction, my windows commanded an unobstructed view of a lofty brick wall, black by age and everlasting shade. (P.17.)

But not only is the building deprived of any outside view of life, it is also "unhallowed by humanizing domestic associations"(p.43). It is a world indifferent to human relationships unless they are based on business associations, and its goal and commitment is the conveyance of title-deeds and mortgages, true symbols of an acquisitive world.

[34]Concerning the use of this image, see Finkelstein, p.75.

In these surroundings the lawyer carries on his business. What the term "lawyer" signifies, a reference again to an outside source (to Pierre) will clarify, since in the story itself the term is used in Melville's new manner of symbolic "short-hand" without specific explanation.[35] In Pierre the lawyer could be said to signify a certain stage of secularization. In the description of the Church of the Apostles, in the Apostle chapter, the church itself has become the symbol of modern secularized society which eschews the "primitive purpose" of the church and subdivides it into offices:

> The building could no longer be efficiently devoted to its primitive purpose. It must be divided into stores; cut into offices; and given for a roost to the gregarious lawyers.[36]

Yet Melville's parable in Pierre is more explicit still. The upper stories of the old church, with their "forlorn echoes of their vacuities," are gradually filled by artists and "lofty idealists," while the lower stories are rented by lawyers. Thus, the old sacred order is now subdivided into the maintainers of the law below and the airy idealists above: the lawyers are separated from ideals, and the idealists from laws. The term "apostle" ironically points out the contrast between the old order and the new, between the obedience to God's laws and the law which is administered now.

In "Bartleby" the term "lawyer" represents a further stage in this process of secularization. The "apostle" in Pierre is still the representative of at least a form of order, but the lawyer in "Bartleby" is completely uncommitted. He is a man who "from youth upwards, has been

[35] See above, p.89, n.31.

[36] Pierre, p.312

filled with a profound conviction that the easiest way of life is the best" (p.16). He is one of Melville's "bachelors," one who, according to Fogle, overlooks all disconcerting and upsetting facts of life[37] and is uncommitted to anything except his own peace of mind and personal well-being. Here are his reasons for taking over the "hallowed" good old office of a Master in Chancery, who formerly was the upholder of the ancient laws of "equity" and civil justice, "now extinct":

> It was not a very arduous office, but very pleasantly remunerative. 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. But this is by the way. (P.17.)

This paragraph alone, in its subtle, ironic character revelation, shows why "Bartleby," even from a purely technical viewpoint, has received high praise from its first appearance onwards. By means of the narrator's ironic self-revelation Melville creates a distance both from the fictional world he describes and from his first person narrator. For the first time in Melville's fiction the narrator as the personal mouthpiece of the

[37]Fogle, p.14, defines Melville's "bachelor" in the following way: "A 'bachelor' in Melville's fiction is a man who has not wedded reality, a man who sees half of life but not the whole." Fogle sees primarily the "merry bachelor, who shuts his eyes to evil and pain" (such as the bachelors in "The Paradise of Bachelors," the supervisor Old Bach in "The Tartarus of Maids," and Captain Delano of the Bachelor's Delight in "Benito Cereno"), but it is important to point out that there are also other "bachelors," those who see only evil and pain (such as the Missouri Bachelor in The Confidence Man and the Don in "Benito Cereno"). The important quality of the bachelor is therefore not his gaiety and uncommittedness but the limitation of his views. See also Fogle, "The Monk and The Bachelor: Melville's 'Benito Cereno,'" Tulane Studies in English, III (1952), 155-78, reprinted in Shorter Tales, pp.116-47.

author has disappeared or, in the words of Robert Farnsworth in his Ph.D. thesis on "Melville's Use of Point of View," "'Bartleby' signalizes a radical change in Melville's use of point of view." Now the authority of the first person narrator is sharply limited by his fictional role, and Melville "assumes a sceptical attitude towards the fictional world he describes. He presents more problems than solutions."[38] As "The Piazza" indicates, Melville as author is retreating behind ambivalent attitudes, and the narrator, who fully explains the significance of the events, has disappeared. Instead, the themes are elliptically presented.

The narrator, as he ironically reveals himself, is one of Melville's prudent utilitarian people to whom virtue is important for its reward. Moral questions do not seem to matter too much to him, because one must not "indulge in dangerous indignation at wrongs and outrages." He and the world he represents have lost their moral direction. This is the world into which Bartleby enters, "pallidly neat, pitiably respectable, incurably forlorn" (p.23), a world which in contrast to the religious allusions surrounding Bartleby is characterized by metaphors of expediency and acquisition. The figureheads of this world are Cicero, the epitome of expediency, and Astor, the symbol of success, affluence, and commercialisation. Basically a utilitarian, the lawyer's relationship with others, employees and colleagues, is based on principles of value

[38] Robert Farnsworth, "Melville's Use of Point of View" (unpublished Ph.D.thesis, Tulane, 1957), pp.150, 155. See also Green, who in discussing Delano as a "recorder" states: "It remains to be noted that Delano's status differs sharply from that of Melville's own earlier 'recorders'; Ishmael and Pierre, to name only two, are figures whose consciousness and behavior do reflect identity, however unstable, with the author of the tale as a whole" (p.290).

and usefulness, revealed in his very choice of words like "the most valuable person to me," "useful man," "proprietor of the face," "valuing his service," "reflected credit on my Chambers"---all terms which reflect on his attitude not only to people but also to the world at large. Even Bartleby at the beginning was "useful" and a "valuable acquisition," and at a time when the lawyer is most disturbed about Bartleby's tragic existence he still hopes that

> here I can cheaply purchase a delicious self-approval. To befriend Bartleby ... will cost me little or nothing, while I lay up in my soul what will eventually prove a sweet morsel for my conscience [italics mine]. (P.28.)

It is only when Bartleby stops copying and thus ceases to be useful to him that he decides to dismiss him:

> In plain fact, he had now become a millstone to me, not only useless as a necklace, but afflictive to bear .... At length, necessities connected with my business tyrannized over all other considerations. (P.39.)

Into this world Bartleby enters, and from this world he withdraws completely into his walled-in "hermitage" and his "dead-wall reveries" or, in other words, into the contemplation of the meaninglessness of existence out of which the futile occupation in this Wall-Street world offers no exit. What he copies, frantically at first, then stopping altogether,[39] are mortgages and title-deeds, fit tokens of the acquisitive world.

[39]Many hypotheses have been put forward to explain Bartleby's eye-trouble which is the direct cause for his "strike." It seems to me, however, that another instance of blindness, ignored so far, can be helpful in explaining the spiritual origin of Bartleby's trouble; in Moby Dick, XLII, p.194, the blindness of the "wilful travellers in Lapland, who refuse to wear colored and coloring glasses upon their eyes, so the wretched infidel gazes himself blind at the monumental white shroud that wraps all the prospects around him."

> And here Bartleby makes his home; sole spectator of a solitude which he has seen all populous--a sort of innocent and transformed Marius brooding among the ruins of Carthage! (P.33.)

The modern city world ("a ruined Carthage") and the seeker who can find no meaning ("the last column of some ruined temple"): these two present a bleak picture of Melville's contemporary world which, despite its humorous relief, gives evidence of his deep cultural pessimism.

Yet even this bleak picture is not without its notes of hope, and it is here that something like a condemnation can be found, a condemnation, however, not of society as has often been maintained but of Bartleby, insofar as his exclusive concern with the "dead-wall" excludes him from those redeeming features of the office community and the other scriveners which alone make its walled-in situation bearable, namely their redeeming feature of sociality and compromise. It is important to interpret the office atmosphere correctly, because it will help to determine how to evaluate Bartleby's withdrawal. Melville, after all, spent a fair portion of his introduction on the description of the individual scriveners and their office routine, and he developed specifically their peculiar trait of fitting in with each other. Thus Turkey and Nippers might be another example of contrasting pairs of characters,[40] but it is important to note that their individual characteristics are not mutually exclusive but complementary: one is

[40]Hetherington, p.273, suggests that Turkey and Nippers are representative of English and American criticism respectively ("Nippers is America"), ignoring the fact that Melville himself makes Nippers English. The only significance I can see in the nationality of the two clerks is that Melville seems to have enjoyed his ironic portraits of the two accepted types of Englishman, one lean and lank, the other portly and stout, this time both working for an American boss. Another revealing glimpse of Melville's "militant nationalism"?

"on duty" while the other is emotionally "off." Thus, they are part of a world which, despite its shortcomings and its lack of purposeful guidance from beyond the walls, can still operate provided each member of the group is willing to fit in. In this miniature world there is contrast, colour, change, and some complexity--health, in other words--compared to Bartleby's pallid and suicidal hopelessness, significantly described in the latter half of the story in terms of sickness and death. Thus the colourful liveliness of the compromising office community sets off the sterility of Bartleby's "dead-wall reveries" and condemns his withdrawal, which from an absolutist philosophical point of view might be justifiable. The other scriveners, too, show every sign of dissatisfaction with their way of life, as their erratic bursts of temper reveal, but their rebellion, unlike Bartleby's, is kept within the bounds of the permissible. They might be "half-men," according to Marx,[41] but their aggressions never happen at the same time; their day is neatly divided into periods of rebellion and periods of useful work, and the lawyer, by allowing repressed rebellion and dissatisfaction an outlet for part of the day, has obtained the otherwise useful cooperation of his clerks. In other words, if society is to go on functioning at all, it needs compromise, rebellion mitigated by diligence, individuality and conformity. Thus, contrary to some views that "this is the most devastating criticism of society that could conceivably be made,"[42] it must be accepted that however meaningless from a metaphysical point of view this society is, it is at least shown by

[41]Marx, p.620.

[42]Mason, p.192. Similar views are expressed by Felheim and Marcus.

Melville to be workable, and it is throughout favourably contrasted to the sterility of Bartleby's complete withdrawal. It is not Bartleby's view of the world as senseless which is challenged but rather his reaction to this senselessness.

Having introduced the two protagonists, the scene for their meeting is set.

V

The major part of the story is concerned with the relationship between the narrator and Bartleby, and the structure of the story follows the pattern of their mutual interaction or rather the degree of their mutual incomprehension. Bartleby's action is the incomprehensible and irrational event, against which the narrator's weapons of rational argument and liberal benevolence are helpless. The lawyer is "disarmed" and "unmanned" by the "wondrous ascendency" which the scrivener has over him. His snug retreat is shattered by this embodiment of passive and yet victorious irrationality, "irrational" to him because it does not fall within the precincts of his expedient and rationalistic world. Thus Bartleby is more than a "melancholic Thoreau,"[43] His is a different level of being, as Bense emphasizes in his comparison of "Bartleby" with stories of Kafka, a level of being which eludes completely the rationale of the narrator's world.[44] Yet this world of the narrator is equally incomprehensible to

[43] See above, p.105, n.4.

[44] Bense, pp.131-32: "Für einen kurzen Augenblick gewährt uns die Geschichte Bartlebys einen Einblick in einen anderen als den realen Horizont des Seins, dem sich der Angestellte durch sein beständiges 'Ich möchte nicht!' entzieht. Die Ordnung innerhalb der Kanzlei, die üblichen Kategorien, sind nicht die Seinen."

Bartleby. If Bartleby is already deeply aware of the meaninglessness of the "dead wall" of general existence, then his entry into the Wall-street world without commitment and goal seems to enhance his despair. From a philosophical viewpoint his despair might be justified; but when he exceeds the bounds of the permissible and withdraws from the sociality of his fellow-workers, then his despair turns into an obsession which is described in terms of sickness; it is then that obsession not only destroys him but also threatens the existence of the office community, which, although walled-in, can claim the merit of compromise and sociality. With this mutual interrelationship between Bartleby and the office community the story itself is basically concerned, and the strange and bizarre humour of the story is derived from the curious incompatibility of Bartleby's provocations and the narrator's unavailing rational responses. Throughout, the narrator's world is on the defensive, disarmed and unmanned by the "mild effrontery" of Bartleby's unaccountable refusal, his monotonous "I would prefer not to."[45] There are few affirmative values which the narrator can set against the "ascendancy" of Bartleby's irrational negation. His world, deprived of positive moral values, is strangely vulnerable even to the most harmless gentle impacts by forces of existence which lie outside his particular frame of reference.

As mentioned before, the structure of the story follows the pattern of mutual incomprehension between Bartleby and the narrator. But so far

[45]According to Bense, ibid., the repetitive "I would prefer not to" becomes a linguistic emblem ("eine Formel"), signifying a different ontological reality from that of the narrator ("eine existentielle Situation: Das 'möchte' ist dem 'müssen' entgegengestellt").

only two interpretations, one by Marx and the other by Felheim, have concerned themselves with this structural pattern. Marx sees four movements: first the introduction, then three consecutive sections concerned with Bartleby's struggle with Wall-street--(Bartleby's stiffening resistance to the Wall-street routine, then a series of attempts by the lawyer to enforce the scrivener's conformity, and finally society's punishment of the recalcitrant copyist). Felheim, on the other hand, accepts the basic pattern of a triad, with the introductory scene as first section, the meeting between the narrator and Bartleby--the bulk of the story--as second, and as last the one in which society enters. However, this pattern suffers from two shortcomings: first, the unwieldy middle section cannot account for any structural movement within this important part of the story, and secondly, it ignores the significance which the central Sunday scene between narrator and Bartleby has within the general lay-out of the story. It is a climactic scene and occupies a central position. In order to emphasize this, I suggest a division into five parts, with the Sunday morning scene as the tragic climax. The narrative divides then into the following structural pattern: the first section and the last section each are devoted to the protagonists individually, the first to the narrator, and the last to Bartleby. Sections two and four describe their inter-relationship which becomes increasingly strained, while the third middle section hints at the possibility of a genuine "meeting" and understanding which is then frustrated. Thus the story seems to follow the structure of "approach, near-meeting, and recoil," a pattern which we found not only in "The Piazza," but which was there transmuted into the form of the hop-vine image, and which leaves a strong imprint on the whole cycle. It is interesting to observe that Melville used first as a structural pattern

what he was later to transfer into an image of comprehensive import, symbolizing alienation and estrangement instead of unitas. Sixty years later, Kafka recast the same modern situation into symbols of similar connotations; walls and doors lock man from meaningful communications.

The first section introduces the narrator and his office. It is important for primarily two reasons, described previously in greater detail. On the one hand the emphasis on the uncommittedness and selfish acquisitiveness of the narrator's world makes Bartleby's dissociation partly understandable; on the other hand, by giving us a picture of the healthy compromise and the sociality of the office staff, Bartleby's voluntary withdrawal is made to appear as "cadaverous" and "perverse." Thus his dissociation is condoned, but his withdrawal is condemned. In this first section, therefore, not only is the seed for later development sown, but also Melville's ambivalent attitude becomes apparent.

In the second section Bartleby enters the office, so that from here on, this and the subsequent sections focus on the developing relationship between the two central characters. The second section presents us with Bartleby's first refusal to do anything but copy, and it stresses throughout the "disconcerting" and "staggering" effect which this refusal--not rationally explainable--has on his employer, whose attempts to deal with the incomprehensible in terms to which he is accustomed are futile. Their modes of existence are so totally different from each other that neither can reach the other. The lawyer might "forget the matter," he might "reason" or even fortify his argument by a referendum among his staff, a referral to a majority decision--but he cannot fathom the significance of Bartleby's "I would prefer not to," the formula with which Bartleby

passively withdraws from the Wall-street world. Yet as long as Bartleby copies, i.e. as long as he performs a useful function, his refusal can be accepted on the same terms as the eccentricities of the other scriveners. As long as Bartleby's refusal remains within the rational bounds of the determinably useful, it can be tolerated as just another whim, for the sake of prudence, expedience, and the narrator's peace of mind.

While all other sections are set on weekdays, the third section --the central scene--opens on a Sunday morning. Instead of coming to terms with the incomprehensible in Church, the narrator meets it in the form of Bartleby in his office, and what he finds there "disqualified" him "for the time from church-going." What he finds is Bartleby living in his office, installed as a permanent resident: with the same absolutist abandon with which Bartleby faces the blankness of the wall, he has surrendered himself to the vacuity of the Wall-street world, a world "without humanizing domestic associations." His eccentricity is thus of a different nature from Turkey's or Nippers' emotional frustrations. It is all-absorbing and all-devouring, coming from regions of the soul which elude rationalisation. For the first time the narrator has presentiments of a world beyond his rational understanding. For the first time he is confronted with a solitude which is incomprehensible because it is so absolute. It is more than personal loneliness but an existential solitude surrounded by the echoes of "sheer vacancy," empty, deserted, and forlorn. It is at this point that the narrator is close to a tragic intuitive insight into the deeper nature of things and at the verge of a significant discovery concerning the meaning of Bartleby's "innate disorder," which in turn could have revealed his own world to

him as Bartleby sees it:

> These sad fancyings--chimeras, doubtless, of a sick and silly brain--led on to other and more special thoughts, concerning the eccentricities of Bartleby. Presentiments of strange discoveries hovered round me [italics mine].(P.33.)

Here is the inner climax of the story. Yet are the narrator's power of perception and his willingness strong enough to break through the walls that surround his world of meaningless activity, and to capture that awareness which could serve as a bridge to Bartleby's isolation and solitude? In answer, the story proceeds on its inexorable way. Action is anchored in the very character of the protagonists, so that despite the narrator's willingness to help, prudence and expedience will not allow him to cross the gulf which separates his own safe world from Bartleby's obsessive insight into the vacuity of life in general and of Wallstreet in particular:

> A prudential feeling began to steal over me .... To a sensitive being, pity is not seldom pain. And when at last it is perceived that such pity cannot lead to effectual succor, common sense bids the soul be rid of it.(Pp.34-35.)

On the verge of an insight into a truth which would shatter his safe world, the mechanism of self-protection demands an emotional retreat, and the attempt to understand and perhaps to alleviate Bartleby's "excessive and organic ill" is frustrated.

After the possibility of a meeting has arisen in section three, the next section emphasizes its impossibility by showing the narrator and Bartleby further apart than before. Here again, we have an anticlimactic structure similar to that of "The Piazza." In general lay-out, this fourth section follows the second one, yet this time the staggering and disconcerting effect of Bartleby's "I would prefer not to" is increased by his refusal to accept any help and, finally, to do any work at all.

While in the second section he simply posed an enigma to the office world, he now poses a threat. Now that he has severed even the last bond with this world, namely that of usefulness, the consequences of this act not only affect him but have reverberations in the group of which he is a member. He is now truly cut off from any help or sustenance which his association with others might have given him (his last action which seals his doom is his rejection of the narrator's offer of friendship), but more than this, the office community itself feels threatened in a serious way by Bartleby's passive abnegation of the very principles on which it rests --that of utility, expedience, and compromise.

> And I trembled to think that my contact with the scrivener had already and seriously affected me in a mental way. And what further and deeper aberration might it not yet produce? (P.37.)

It is primarily with this latter issue, with the effect of Bartleby's passive aggression on the office community and their counter-measures, that this fourth section is concerned. Bartleby's influence is now described in terms which emphasize its menacing and disrupting nature: his "triumph" is "cadaverous," he is "afflictive" to bear and he is an "intolerable incubus," who not only casts "a general gloom over the premises" but could produce--as already quoted--"further and deeper aberrations" among his fellow-workers.

The means with which the narrator attempts to counter Bartleby's surreptitious aggression are of two kinds, both equally ineffectual. First he uses the traditional protections which Wall-street has against miscreants, such as dismissal, bribe, and argument. Yet these usual means of terminating an unwanted bond do not apply to Bartleby; he prefers them not to. Next the narrator tries the Christian values of charity and

submission to a preordained fate.[46] But this time opposition comes not only from Bartleby but from his own world: the demands of his profession force him to ignore the traditional Christian answer to the problem of the irrational in human life, because the ideas of charity and predestination are irreconcilable with the utilitarian interests of the modern age. Chronometrical time still clashes with horological time, the clash softened, however, into ironic humour when applied to the horologically-minded narrator:

> At last I see it, I feel it; I penetrate to the predestinated purpose of my life. I am content. Others may have loftier parts to enact; but my mission in this world, Bartleby, is to furnish you with office-room for such period as you may see fit to remain.(P.44.)

After both the Wall-street answer and the traditional Christian solution of charity and submission have proved their inefficacy, the narrator can see only one way out: "Since he will not quit me, I must quit him" (p.46). He changes his "chambers" and leaves Bartleby behind. Thus, the final answer of the narrator to the insoluble problem which Bartleby came to present to him is--flight, a fact which confirms the uselessness of his safeguards and protections against the encroachments

[46] At this point, two books are mentioned, Edwards on the Will and Priestley on Necessity, both of which Leyda calls "a hint for the hunter," unfortunately without suggesting how he would have us take this hint. Widmer, p.280, interprets it as an ironic clue insofar as "Predestinarianism is but one of a series of the narrator's expedient and decent rationalisations of metaphysical negation." I should like to explain this passage differently. The books referred to are two classical attempts to subject the irrational to rational scrutiny; Edwards does this by referring the irrational back to a "predestinated purpose," while Priestley in a more scientific manner refers it back to a first cause. The two books thus serve as an analogy to the narrator's equally rationalistic attempt to cope with the irrational after all other means have failed.

of what to his world appears as the "irrational." It confirms both the vulnerability of a world which has lost its moral guidance and the ineffectualness of the traditional answers to the problem of an "innate and incurable disorder" in a world which is built, like Wall-street, on business associations alone. And it finally condemns the Wall-street world for ignoring aspects of existence of which Bartleby is too obsessively aware. With his flight the narrator has revealed the inherent weakness of his world, and his active role in the story is ended. From now on, apart from one little scene in which he tries to persuade Bartleby once more to conform to the Wall-street way of life, he is a mere spectator. Before his uncomprehending eyes Bartleby is relentlessly racked between two forces, neither of which can release him: his own despair and the demands of the world in which he lives. In these circumstances the narrator's "free will" to help and understand is blocked by the impenetrable wall of pre-existing conditions, which determine both his own attitude and that of Bartleby. It is from this point of view that Fogle speaks of this story in terms of "Absolutism, Predestination, and Free Will" and comes to the conclusion that "predestination undoubtedly predominates."[47]

The fifth and last section focuses on Bartleby as the first section had focused on the narrator.[48] Now Bartleby is completely alone, separated

[47]Fogle, p.26. His essay on "Bartleby" in Shorter Tales is a reprint of his earlier article, significantly entitled "Melville's 'Bartleby': Absolutism, Predestination, and Free Will," Tulane Studies in English, IV(1954), 124-35.

[48]Marx and Felheim, who alone have analysed the structure of the story, overemphasize, in my opinion, the function and role of society in this last section. The focus is not on society and its reprisal but on Bartleby and the consequences of his withdrawal.

by walls of "Egyptian masonry" from the society of men which he had rejected. After his final refusal not only of the narrator's kindly offer of friendship but also of any kind of work for Wall-street, the last doors have been closed. Friendship might have bridged the gulf where all other rational means had failed, and activity and work might have kept at least one last line of communication open. With other violators of social laws, Bartleby is now imprisoned by a society which cannot afford to have its very mode of existence challenged. In an image of strong visual appeal, Bartleby's double plight as a seeker and as a social being is captured: his obsession with the "wall" has made him into a social outcast:

> And so I found him there, standing all alone in the quietest of the yards, his face towards a high wall, while all around, from the narrow slits of the jail windows, I thought I saw peering out upon him the eyes of murders [sic] and thieves.(P.51.)

Bartleby's obsessive questioning of the blankness of existence is no longer purely a private matter; he has violated those laws of moderation and compromise which society needs in order to exist, and he has sacrificed his social self to his all-consuming despair. His tragic fault was not that he perceived the existential void, but rather that he failed to perceive life's healthier side, symbolized in the story by the sociality of the office community and, in the last scene, by the symbol of recurrent life, the turf of grass:

> A soft imprisoned turf grew underfoot. The heart of the eternal pyramids, it seemed, wherein, by some strange magic, through the clefts, grass-seed, dropped by birds, had sprung. (P.53.)

Here, in this passage, the idea of recurrent life is definitely connected with the image of the pyramid which, according to Dorothee Finkelstein, occurs repeatedly in Melville's works with such variations as to suggest changes in his spiritual development. After its early connotations of

grandeur, antiquity, and human vanity in Typee and Redburn, the image of the pyramid from Moby Dick onwards is used to suggest, under the idea of the ritual of the buried corn, the mystery of human existence and the eternal recurrence of life and death.[49] It is used with these connotations here in "Bartleby," but three years later, in "I and My Chimney," which is built around an extended pyramid metaphor (the chimney as truncated pyramid), this idea is replaced by the awareness of the solidity of corporeality which does not allow any hidden secret inner chamber or closet. A few months later, on his trip to Egypt, Melville was to see the pyramids in reality, but his notes in his journal express a disappointment which is typical of the spiritual dejection which haunts "The Piazza" of the same year (1856). Instead of hope, symbolized by green life sprouting, the pyramid itself is barren and devoid of any life:

> Color of pyramid same as desert ... no vestiges of moss upon them. Not the least. Other ruins ivied. Dry as cinder. No speck of green ... grass near the pyramids, but will not touch them--as if in fear or awe of them.[50]

But in 1853, the year of "Bartleby," Melville had not yet seen the pyramids in reality, and in the "Egyptian masonry" the idea of life in death is still contained in the "soft imprisoned grass." Bartleby, however, ignores the healthy greenness of the turf. His gaze even in death is still directed against the walls which surround him, the solid physical walls which do not yield meaning to his searching. In this, his obsession with the wall recalls Pierre's attempt to reach certitude. Pierre, upon

[49] Finkelstein, pp.121-44, in particular pp.135 ff.

[50] Howard C. Horsford (ed.), H. M.: Journal of a Visit to Europe and the Levant, ... (Princeton, 1955), Entry of December 31, 1856.

penetrating to the innermost centre, had found the holy sarcophagus empty. But beginning with "Bartleby" a subtle shift occurs. Now it is no longer possible to penetrate to any inner sanctum, empty or not, and the attempt itself is condemned as senseless and possibly fatal. In "I and My Chimney," where the motif again reappears, the "secret closet" is only "supposed" and the narrator resists all attempts to tear his chimney apart in an effort to find it.[51] "Bartleby" could be said to begin this development. Bartleby's search for meaning is doomed to failure because nothing can penetrate the blankness of the wall. The only result of his perverse obsession is his exclusion from an easy-going society which feels itself to be as gravely threatened by his absolutism as it is by violators of the criminal code. He has put himself beyond the reach of healthy human relationships, and he dies as he had lived: obsessed with the wall, lonely and isolated. Thus his death seals his protest against having to live a life which was unacceptable to him, and it confirms the tragic paradox which underlies this story, a paradox which could be expressed in the following manner: sanity can be preserved only by corporate social effort, and this remains true even if the effort is directed towards a seemingly senseless purpose. Bartleby's despair might

[51]This motif offers an interesting clue as to the direction in which Melville's mind was moving in those critical years between Pierre and The Confidence Man. While in "Bartleby" the emphasis lies on the seeker's nearly insane preoccupation with the impenetrableness of the outer walls, in "I and My Chimney" the narrator derives comfort from the very fact which drove Bartleby mad. Can we take this as an indication that Melville himself was moving away from his former intense preoccupation with nihilistic spiritual despair towards a more healthful emphasis on more dependable secular values, which are symbolized in his short stories by the images of the hearth and the chimney?

have been justified, but his withdrawal becomes unhealthy from the moment that he ignores life's vital promise: sociality with others and the eternal recurrence of life and death, symbolized in the image of the turf of grass. Thus, not the search itself is evil but the corroding effect which its obsessiveness has on human relationships.

Criticism of "Bartleby" has for so long accepted an identification of Melville with Bartleby that it must be stated once more that in this development of the "seeker" Melville's critical detachment is clearly apparent, insofar as the action of the story reveals Bartleby's attitude as sterile and life-destroying. Bowen in his analysis of the major types of "encounter" observes that in Bartleby there are still overtones of defiance:

> What more, in essence, did Prometheus say in refusing the demands of Zeus for his surrender than that he 'would prefer not to'"?[52]

What must not be overlooked, however, is that this defiance is now completely negative and is terrifying for the very reason that it has lost its Promethean redemptive overtones. The perverse obsessiveness of Bartleby's "dead-wall revery" not only destroys himself, but it seriously threatens society which is made vulnerable by the bankruptcy of its moral values. Melville's outlook in these years seems to have reached a point where the seeker's persistence becomes not only monomaniac obsession but, to the same extent that it is accompanied by the moral collapse of society, a curse and a threat. Bartleby's withdrawal is fatal only in combination with the lack of positive moral values around him.

[52]Bowen, p.134.

The "measured forms" of Wall-street society could offer no remedy for his "innate disorder," nor could they protect the community against the threat of some irrational power which, in this case, stemmed from some deep recesses of the soul, caused by an obsessive awareness of an existential void and enhanced by the emptiness of the surrounding moral values. The origin of some evil is thus placed in the human soul itself and in the human condition and shows its effects in the disintegration of human bonds.

From "Bartleby" onwards (chronologically speaking), the spiritual quest recedes still further into the background. Instead, there is a fuller development of the theme of disturbed human relationships, framed by Agatha and Marianna as embodiments of man's alienation and frustration. At the same time, however, these "unfortunates" and other isolatoes they resemble (such as Bartleby, Don Benito, and, to some extent, the lightning-rod man) are counterbalanced by exponents of a contrasting attitude, easy-going and sociable, who are in all cases the narrator himself or, in Delano's case, the consciousness through which we largely perceive. This way, the isolato protagonist is always counterbalanced. What this implies for the Piazza Tales as a whole, will be discussed in a final chapter.

CHAPTER V

"BENITO CERENO"

I

With "Benito Cereno" we come to the most "violent" of Melville's stories, but a close look at the story structure will reveal that the savage revolt is only the background, told in retrospect, and that the primary concern of the story is not so much violent action but the problem of the perception of and response to this underlying "dark" reality. After all, the story does not deal centrally with the revolt itself but rather with the contrast of appearance and reality that results from it--an outward calm enforced by a latent threat of violence. Thus, the background reality with which Delano is confronted is evil and dark; in this, "Benito Cereno" is in no way different from "The Lightning-Rod Man," "The Encantadas," or "The Bell-Tower," where thunderstorm, drought, and earthquake play a similar role; and against this primarily dark reality the responses of both protagonists, Don Benito and Delano, are inadequate and even wrong, the one erring on the side of trust, the other on the side of fear. In this pattern of contrasted responses, we find the familiar Piazza tale pattern in which two attitudes towards a primarily "dark" reality are presented with no signs of author identification. Benito (who sees in the revolt and the "negro" the existence of some evil which seems so all-pervasive as to have obliterated life's lighter side) and Delano (who will not and cannot penetrate beneath the surface) are both unaware of the deeper implications of the revolt, which, by means of imagery and allusion are seen as the

inevitable outgrowth of something like a historical crime. It is not a temporary and isolated outbreak of primitive cruelty with no deeper significance as Delano would have it nor the evidence of some dark absolute power which can only be countered by a passive retreat into a Monastery on "Mount Agonia" (i.e. by atonement through suffering) as Don Benito seems to understand it; but it is the legacy of a specific crime committed in the past, which imagery shows to have been the institution of slavery and the oppression of human beings. Here again we have the piazza situation of disturbed human relationships as a result of some evil, through which, as the tales themselves show, new destructive forces are released. This time the disturbed relationships are a legacy from the past and expressed by the central image of the dark satyr of oppression who holds a human being under foot.

At this point we come across another issue which also plays a part in other Piazza tales, namely the function of establishments and social orders which, when corrupted and decayed, are the very breaches through which destructive forces enter. I mentioned earlier that in most Piazza tales the modern decay of these institutions is projected against a healthier past (as in the contrast between the house and the piazza in "The Piazza," the sinecure status and final abrogation of the hallowed office of "Master of Chancery" in "Bartleby," or the false mediatorship of the lightning-rod man contrasted with a healthier attitude towards the Eternal by the Greeks[1]). Here in "Benito Cereno," however, this pattern seems reversed inasmuch as this time the picture of the decay of the old

[1]See Chapter III, pp.65-67, Chapter IV, p.123, and Chapter VI, p.123.

feudal order is contrasted with a healthier new one, namely the idea of authority as understood and practised by Delano. It seems to me that here a significant light is thrown on what aspects of modern life seem hopeful to Melville. Since the question of the right kind of government and authority is again taken up in the Dog-King sketch of "The Encantadas," it should be stated at this stage what Delano's idea of authority is. It could be expressed in the simple formula: authority equals sociality plus discipline.[2] Or a little more elaborately: while having regard to a man's basic rights, authority must subject him fully to the rigour of discipline; only thus can order on a "well-appointed vessel" be lastingly assured.

Although the reality which the story presents is as dark as in any of the Piazza tales, there are a few more notes and symbols of hope: Delano is saved by Don Benito's leap for the sake of friendship and the revolt is prevented from spreading to his own ship. We have to bear this in mind when we look at the underlying structure of the cycle as a whole. Each story carries along overtones and possibilities of salvation although the salvation itself might be thwarted, and it is here, in these notes of hope, that a pattern becomes apparent according to which the sequence of stories is arranged. The first half of the cycle presents a gradual crescendo of hope (the compromise of the office community in "Bartleby,"

[2]See Piazza Tales, pp.63-64, and pp.64-65: "If so, then here was evinced the unhealthy climax of that icy though conscientious policy ... which ... obliterates alike the manifestation of sway with every trace of sociality; transforming the man into a block, or rather into a loaded cannon, which, until there is call for thunder, has nothing to say." And further: "What the San Dominick wanted was, what the emigrant ship has, stern superior officers. But on these decks not so much as a fourth-mate was to be seen." (Italics mine.)

the curbing of the revolt in "Benito Cereno," and the expulsion of the devil in "The Lightning-Rod Man")--a movement only to be reversed by the gloomy picture of the last two stories.

II

"Benito Cereno" was first published in Putnam's in three instalments, in October, November, and December, 1855. Melville had submitted the story about the beginning of April, but although it was, according to Curtis, "in the best style of subject," Curtis had initially rejected it on account of the "dreary documents at the end." It is, however, questionable whether Curtis' accusation that Melville "does everything too hurriedly now," echoed and varied by more recent criticism,[3] can be upheld in the face of Melville's decision to make "Benito Cereno" the title story of the tentative "'Benito Cereno' volume." It is hardly conceivable that Melville should have chosen a marred or incomplete story to head the tentative collection. Besides, nearly two years had elapsed between "Bartleby" and "Benito Cereno," two years in which Melville had ample opportunity through published stories to perfect his craft, and "Benito Cereno" presents proof that he had learned to use the new medium competently and imaginatively. We can say that in richness of texture and symbolic allusiveness "Benito Cereno" not only equals his best achievements in the field of long fiction, but that it has gained by the precision which the genre of the short story seems to demand, a view with which critics such

[3]The adherence to the legal documents is explained either as an artistic flaw or as evidence of Melville's flagging inventiveness or lagging health. See Arvin, p.244; Farnsworth, p.161; Hoffmann, "Shorter Fiction," p.428; Howard, Melville, p.222; and Stone, p.220. Other explanations, see below, p.159, n.29.

as Freeman, O'Brien, Carl Van Doren, and Weaver in the twenties, and Feltenstein, Matthiessen, and Williams in the forties fully agree.[4] Furthermore, the technique of a sustained point of view had been effectively used already in his first published short story, so that the subtle shift of point of view in this later story is unlikely to be the effect of hurry or, as Howard thinks, evidence of sickness and psychological difficulty.[5] The evidence of the story, its careful structure, and rich suggestiveness all lead to the conclusion that Melville was here in full control of his material and that he used language and style for a specific purpose.

Apart from this major disagreement concerning the documents in the latter half of the story, criticism of the story focuses primarily on three issues: its autobiographical content; the nature of evil as presented through Babo and his mutineers; and lastly, the problem of ambiguity and the delusion of human perception.

As pointed out earlier, Melville's work was often interpreted autobiographically in the 1920's as a reflection of Melville's own dilemmas, and "Benito Cereno" was no exception to this tradition. Mumford saw behind the central theme Melville's "own bowed and wounded

[4]See Freeman, p.61; Matthiessen, pp.476-77; Van Doren, p.vii; Edward O'Brien (ed.), The Twenty-Five Finest Short Stories (New York, 1931), p.507; Rosalie Feltenstein, "Melville's 'Benito Cereno,'" AL, XIX (November, 1947), 254-55; and Stanley T. Williams, "Follow Your Leader: Melville's 'Benito Cereno,'" Virginia Quarterly Review, XXIII (Winter, 1947), 65-67.

[5]Howard, Melville, p.222.

spirit,"[6] and Scudder, who in 1928 had announced his find of Melville's source in Captain Delano's Narrative, capped his short comparison of source and story with the statement that "Melville himself is Benito Cereno, and Babo is the personification of malicious criticism."[7] This identification of Melville with his protagonist is later changed to include identification with Delano. Both Chase and Fogle maintain that "Melville is Delano as well as Cereno," or, in Chase's words, "in Bartleby and Benito Cereno we find Melville identifying himself with two figures. The first is the upper-middle-class Anglo-Saxon American, sound in moral principle, mediocre in spiritual development. ... The second figure, the spiritual man, is Bartleby and Benito Cereno."[8]

With the discovery of Melville's source, however, interest was soon aroused in the artistic qualities of the story and in the question to what extent the story was plagiarized and to what extent the skeleton of action which he had found ready-made in Delano's Narrative was "built about" and changed by his creative imagination. Rosalie Feltenstein, the first to examine the story at length and to compare it in detail with its source, speaks highly of Melville's originality in adapting Delano's material and attests to his technical accomplishments. Her article is influential primarily for two reasons: she is among the first to point to the rich allusiveness of his style and to note the dominant image patterns (such as the ecclesiastical images and the

[6] Mumford, p.246.

[7] Scudder, p.531.

[8] Chase, p.148, and Fogle, p.144.

"bachelor" allusions, both of which were in 1953 fully contrasted in a study by Fogle suggestively called, "The Monk and the Bachelor"[9]); while secondly, in discussing Babo and the problem of evil, she set the conventional pattern of interpretation. To her, Babo is the "manifestation of pure evil" which is freed to act "because Don Aranda has confidence; he trusts the Negroes and allows them liberty aboard ship," so that Don Benito himself finally emerges as belonging to that group of wronged, innocent victims who are "placed at cross-purposes in a world of snakes and lightnings, in a world of horrible and inscrutable inhumanities."[10] With this, later critics agree. Nathalia Wright alludes to Pip, Bartleby, and Benito in tracing a parallel between Billy Budd's nonresistance and the "passivity of Christ's resistance";[11] Stein interprets the story "in the framework of the traditional redeemer myth of Christianity"--a myth, however, which is shown in an ironic light by the "triumph of physical evil over the eternal values of the spirit";[12]

[9]Fogle, "The Monk and the Bachelor: Melville's 'Benito Cereno,'" Tulane Studies in English, III (1952), 155-78, reprinted in his Shorter Tales, pp.116-47.

[10]Feltenstein, p.252.

[11]Wright, p.128. It is interesting to note that a similar interpretation appears in pre-war Germany, where "Benito Cereno" was understood as a re-enactment of the Grail-legend, with Delano as Parcival and Don Benito as Anfortas (see Herman Stresau, "Herman Melville," Europäische Revue, XVI [1938] , 331). Under the impact of the war, however, emphasis changed, and "Benito Cereno" became a "symbol for the individual's inability to self-determination in the face of an overpowering and unavoidable destructive force" (see Leland R. Phelps, "The Reaction to 'Benito Cereno' and Billy Budd in Germany," Symposium, XX [1959] , 299).

[12]William B. Stein, "The Moral Axis of 'Benito Cereno,'" Accent, XV (Summer, 1955), 225.

while Williams, in a very good analysis of text which stresses the elements of visual and tragic darkness, also sees the problem of evil as "motiveless malignity" and "hatred for hatred's sake."[13]

Against these black-and-white interpretations, which focus on the Babo-Don relationship, two major reactions can be recorded: under the first it is held that since Babo was a slave and had therefore been wronged, his malignity could not fairly be described as "motiveless"; under the second reaction, attention is turned away from the evil--innocence contrast and focused on Delano as the "perceiving mind" who is caught in the maze of appearances and oscillates between confidence and mistrust; interpretations belonging to this group stress the delusion of perception and the duplicity of appearances.

Among the first to react to the "pure malignity" theory is Matthiessen, who in 1941 pointed out that Babo was after all a slave and that evil had been done to him. However, according to Matthiessen, Melville did not include this issue in the story, a fact which makes it "comparatively superficial."[14] Matthiessen is not the only one to deplore Melville's ostensible failure to reckon with the fact of slavery within the limits of his narrative. Winters, too, in 1938, had stated that "the morality of slavery is not an issue in this story" and had spoken of Babo's action as "fundamental evil."[15] Thus, while basically coming to

[13]Williams, "Follow Your Leader," p.75.

[14]Matthiessen, p.508.

[15]Winters, p.122.

results similar to Feltenstein's, both discussions draw attention to the issue of slavery on which so much was to hinge in later interpretations. After all, not everyone agreed that the issue of slavery was ignored in the story.

There are, for instance, the arguments which Sterling Brown, Joseph Schiffman, Charles Glicksberg, and Sidney Kaplan present and which are meant to show that the slavery question, if not openly discussed, is at least implicit in the story.[16] Brown had been the first to take up this view and, with the slavery issue in mind, had emphasized that the cruelty of Babo and his mutineers is only the outcome of previous injustice done to them. Although they were cruel, Melville did not make them villains; they revolted as mankind has always revolted. Therefore the fierceness with which they fought was not motiveless but the spirit of revolt for the sake of freedom. Schiffman elaborated this point of Brown's but based his argument primarily on external evidence, on other statements by Melville in Mardi and Redburn. He concluded that "in treating Babo and his fellow slaves as able disciplined people," Melville had meant to establish "Babo's moral victory at the end."[17] This view

[16]Sterling Brown, The Negro in American Fiction (Washington, 1937), pp.11-13; Charles I. Glicksberg, "Melville and the Negro Problem," Phylon, II (Autumn, 1950), 207-15; Sidney Kaplan, "Herman Melville and the American National Sin: Meaning of 'Benito Cereno,'" Journal of Negro History, XLI (1956), 311-38, and XLII (1957), 11-37; and Joseph Schiffman, "Critical Problems in Melville's 'Benito Cereno,'" MLQ, XI (September, 1950), 317-24.

[17]Schiffman, p.323. Another similar view can be found in C. L. R. James, Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways: The Story of Herman Melville and the World We Live In (New York, 1953), p.134. According to James, "Babo is the most heroic character in Melville's fiction .... It is a propaganda story, written to prove a particular social or political point."

certainly stood the interpretation of Babo's villainous malignity on its head. Kaplan attempted to bring the issue back into proper perspective. According to him, Melville in this story is neither an abolitionist, nor is he a humanitarian, and Babo is touched with neither "tragic grace" nor "ethereal light."[18] Thus Kaplan neither agrees with the Brown-Schiffman thesis which sees in Babo the hero fighting for a noble cause, nor with Rosalie Feltenstein et al for whom "Benito Cereno" is an artistic tour de force. To Kaplan it represents an artistic and intellectual anticlimax or, in Kaplan's own words, "an 'artistic sublimation' ... of notions of black primitivism dear to the hearts of slavery's apologists, a sublimation, in fact, of all that was sleazy, patronizing, backward, and fearful in the works that preceded it."[19]

In an article of the same year, Warren D'Azevedo approached the same issue from a different aspect. He, too, saw in "Benito Cereno" reflections on the slavery question, and again he argued primarily from outside evidence, this time from the literary atmosphere of the mid-1800's which was swept by a tide of abolitionist literature, against which Melville's Delano becomes the ironic embodiment of the contemporary "stock evaluations of the negro." Thus, the emphasis is shifted subtly away from the central issue of the cruelty of the negroes to Delano and through him to the attitude of the white towards the negro. According to D'Azevedo, "Benito Cereno" as a story of the relationship between negroes

[18] Kaplan, XLII, 37.

[19] Ibid., p.26.

and whites is far in advance of Melville's time.[20]

It is evident that all these arguments, supported primarily by outside evidence, are not sufficient to settle the slavery issue as presented in this story. If settled at all, it must come from the text and from the clues which Melville himself provided.

Another group of interpretations focuses on Delano and through him on the issue of ambiguity as he experienced it. As far as the slavery question is concerned, critics have tended to lose themselves in moral pronouncements and to focus on the social context of the story at the expense of detailed structural analysis. Beginning, however, with Fogle's stimulating textual interpretation of structure and theme in 1952, a new interest makes itself noticed in what the text reveals. Since Delano is the intermediary through whose eyes we are informed and through whose mind we are led into, rather than out of, the mystery, it is Delano who now moves into the foreground of critical attention. To these new critics, the primary theme of the story is no longer simply the struggle between evil and innocence but, as Fogle puts it, "Delano's struggle to comprehend the action," a struggle which leads to two conclusions, namely that reality is a mystery hard to read, and secondly that evil is real and must be reckoned with. To Fogle, "'Benito Cereno' is a story of delusion, of a mind wandering in a maze, struggling but failing to find the essential clue."[21] Apart from this issue of ambiguity, Fogle finds

[20]Warren D'Azevedo, "Revolt on the San Dominick," Phylon, XVII (1956), 140.

[21]Fogle, Shorter Tales, pp.121-22.

reflections on a contemporary issue, an "international theme," and suggests, like Chase before him, that Don Benito and Delano stand for the old and new world respectively. Since this is quite a prevalent view, it must be argued that Don Benito and Delano are both equally representatives of the Americas. The contrast is not between American and non-American but between two branches of American development. Europe enters the picture only insofar as it was from there that the train of events was set in motion, the consequences of which lead to both Babo's and Don Benito's death.

From Fogle's analysis onwards, more and more closely textural interpretations take up and develop his suggestions, at the same time exploring new avenues. Guy Cardwell, in 1959, in an excellent discussion of "Benito Cereno" as a "gray story," sees ambiguity pervading all the main aspects of the story,[22] a view which is further developed in an interpretation by Barry Phillips, in 1962, who attributes what he calls "the failure" of the critics to the fact that they "place the problem of the story in the realm of concepts when all the concepts of the story point to the primary problem of perception .... They assign absolute values when the only values are relative." Phillips himself interprets the story as a satire on the optimism of the American idealist, so that Don Benito himself and his relationship with Babo become of secondary importance.[23]

[22]Guy Cardwell, "Melville's Gray Story: Symbols and Meaning in 'Benito Cereno,'" Bucknell Review, VIII (May, 1959), p.167.

[23]Barry Phillips, "'The Good Captain': A Reading of 'Benito Cereno,'" Texas Studies in Literature and Language, IV (Summer, 1962), 189.

The last few years have brought a tremendous interest in Melville's short stories, and "Benito Cereno" appears by the sheer number of articles to be the favourite still. To sum up the most important trends: the emphasis seems to lie on Delano and on the theme of delusion and ambiguity which is suggested through him, and the question of evil, which had absorbed the forties, has moved into the background. In a comparative study of source and story, Max Putzel in 1962 agrees with others before him that the major theme of the story is "the pattern of oscillation between trust and mistrust." What establishes for him the greatness of the work is that "Melville sees a universe like Shakespeare's or Sophocles', where seeming and being interreflect in an endless series, where suggestive ambiguities are as close as man can come to truth." He, too, agrees with Phillips that the hero of the story is Delano, who this time, however, becomes a "tragic" hero who catches a glint of reality.[24] In a similar interpretation, Allen Guttmann, likewise, focuses on Delano and his innocence, which never fathoms the moral complexities with which he is confronted. According to Guttmann, "his failure is to understand that all men are involved in evil, that all men are subject to the ambiguous 'power of blackness' which Harry Levin sees most vividly embodied in this tale."[25]

Apart from these interpretations which focus on Delano as central

[24]Max Putzel, "The Source and The Symbols of Melville's 'Benito Cereno,'" AL, XXXIV (May, 1962), 193.

[25]Allen Guttmann, "The Enduring Innocence of Captain Amaso Delano," Boston University Studies in English, V (Spring, 1961) 35-45.

character and on his innocence or insufficiency, another interesting issue is raised by Nicholas Canady in 1960, namely that of authority, which he finds to be the organising principle of the story: "The power vacuum aboard the ship is temporarily filled, not by law but by the naked force employed by the mutineers to command obedience. When the power of the mutineers has in turn been overcome, the Spanish courts are in a position to restore legal power and authority to the San Dominick in the person of a new captain."[26] To this it must be answered that the question of authority and of the function of traditional establishments is certainly raised in the story, but Canady's explanation of the legal court records as restoring legal power and authority on board ship cannot be accepted, because the depositions are solely concerned with Don Benito's evidence and not with the problem of power restoration. However, from the point of view of the consequences which collapsing authority and decaying establishments have in the course of the story, Canady's conclusion is significant and therefore quoted in full:

> Melville demonstrates two things: first, the result of Don Benito's status as a ship captain without the power to enforce his commands; and, secondly, the misuse of power by usurping negroes who rule without authority. The American captain, combining both authority and power, illustrates the ease with which command can be exercised under normal conditions. Chaos and disorder are the inevitable results of authority functioning without power and of power exercised without authority.[27]

Lastly, one further name deserves mention, Bruce Franklin, who in

[26]Nicholas Canady, Jr., "A New Reading of Melville's 'Benito Cereno,'" in Waldo McNeir and Leo B. Levy (eds.), Studies in American Literature (Baton Rouge, 1960), p.57.

[27]Ibid.

1961 overcame the odds against finding a new source for this most worked-over story, namely William Stirling's Cloister Life of the Emperor Charles the Fifth, used both for the actual description of the San Dominick and also, according to him, for the development of the main theme. As Charles the Fifth's worldly power was usurped and overthrown by religion and the Church, so Don Benito's power is now blighted by the negro: "Not only does the shadow of the negro represent the shadow of the church, but it is the heeding of church teaching, the confidence of Christianity, which destroys Cereno."[28] Here is a rewarding article to consult when considering the importance of the historical background which is evoked constantly by means of imagery and metaphor.

In surveying the achievement of criticism, it seems easier to say what "Benito Cereno" is not than what it is. It is not just a suspense story with some Gothic machinery, which ends happily with the dénouement; neither is it a tragedy in which innocence is in the toils of pure and motiveless evil; Babo is not hatred for hatred's sake, but neither is he the heroic moral victor; Don Benito is not only victimized but is also implicitly condemned; and Delano is not a man of enlightenment and intelligence who unfolds the mystery before us, because his perceptiveness is vitiated by spells of obtuseness. Other issues in the story are even more contentious, such as the question of slavery: is it ignored,

[28]Bruce Franklin, "'Apparent Symbol of Despotic Command': Melville's 'Benito Cereno,'" NEQ, XXXIV (December, 1961), 476. The sources he suggests are William Stirling, The Cloister Life of the Emperor Charles the Fifth, 3rd ed. (London, 1853), and its magazine variant, "The Cloister Life of the Emperor Charles V," Fraser Magazine, XLIII (1851), 372.

condemned, or condoned ? The opinions vary. This is one of the situations where it can be helpful to see the story as a member of a group, and to observe what light the group as such throws on the meaning of the story. To find a new angle from which to survey the story in all its complexity can be an important guide through the maze of contradictory interpretations.

There are, however, some points which have been established safely and beyond dispute by past criticism, and it is important to bear these in mind. The most significant is the mutual agreement on the theme of ambiguity, and recent articles seem to find more and more levels to which this theme is found to apply. This issue of ambiguity together with the themes of evil and of authority can be now safely assumed to constitute the three central concerns of the story, although the nature and function especially of the latter two are still very much debated. Another significant point of agreement concerns Melville's technique of elaborating action by means of allusion and imagery. Most interpretations agree that through them Melville extended the meaning of action to various levels--thus their function is generally recognized but the actual meaning of these symbolic extensions is still very much open to discussion.

It is from the basis of these relatively safe assumptions that an interpretation will be attempted which sees "Benito Cereno" as a Piazza tale, i.e. as a tale in which another facet of contemporary reality is viewed from the uninvolved retreat of the piazza. As in "Bartleby," the "measured forms" of establishments are vulnerable to the point of being destroyed by disruptive forces. In "Bartleby" the

cause of the disturbance was found to be in the innermost part of man's soul, in his existential despair about his walled-in situation; in "Benito Cereno," the image patterns point to a different source, equally intractable and beyond control: in the culpability of certain earlier actions, to which the emblem in the San Dominick's stern-piece points. It will further be my purpose to show that the ambiguity pervades not only, as past criticism established, human perception and moral judgment but every facet of the structural pattern. In its very repetition of positing and negating it goes far beyond the dialectic confrontation in "Bartleby" and "The Piazza"; it is a continuous riddle which ends in a final questionmark. As such, it is related very closely to The Confidence Man which was written at roughly the same time, at most a few months later.

III

In order to elaborate what I mean by the structure of the story presenting something like a "continuous riddle," I would like to begin the interpretation by discussing the overall dialectic structural pattern as it reveals itself on various levels. There is indeed an elaborate system of alternations and reversals characterizing each episode, each character, and each symbol, the alternation being reflected in the choice of language and the very sentence structure, a point which will be taken up again, once the major theme has been discussed and established.

In general outline, the story is presented in three movements, following roughly the pattern of syllogism. Section one presents us with the mystery viewed through Delano's eyes. It comprises the action of a

full day, begins with the sighting of the strange ship "not long after dawn" and ends with the capture of the ship "in the horizontal moon light." Throughout most of this section we participate in Delano's oscillation between suspicion and confidence and in his mystification concerning the true nature of the ship; but in the end suspense is vented in the action of the fight.

Section two comprises the legal deposition by Don Benito, one of the most debated issues in the story from a technical point of view. From Curtis' deprecation onwards, critics have found it difficult to explain the dry statistical, factual report, anticlimaxing the actual suspense story, and the usual verdict is that Melville should have left well enough alone.[29] The use of this technique of presenting the facts in legal form is, however, a highly effective way of recording the events of the mutiny: it establishes the cruelties of the negroes as a fact and not as a figment of Don Benito's disturbed mind. This is the surface intention as explained by Melville himself:

> The tribunal inclined to the opinion that the deponent, not undisturbed in his mind by recent events, raved of some things which could never have happened. But subsequent depositions of the surviving sailors, bearing out the revelations of their captain in several of the strangest particulars, gave credence to the rest. (P.123.)

The fact remains, however, that the depositions are rather drawn-out and seem excessive for the mere surface function of revealing the history

[29]Only a few critics have attempted to account for Melville's verbal adherence to his source. Among those, see Canady, pp.56-57; Cardwell, p.165; Fogle, Shorter Tales, p.146; Hoyle, pp.173 ff.; Putzel, p.199; and Warner Berthoff, The Example of Melville (New York, 1959), pp.153-57. See also above, p.145, n.3.

of the San Dominick before Delano boarded. They can therefore be taken to serve an added function, which, I suggest, is to review each episode and each character which appeared in Delano's account and to re-present each in a different light. Not only the past history is thus recorded, but each event of Delano's day on board the San Dominick is reviewed and restated from a second point of view, this time from Don Benito's. Thus the whole section assumes the character of a counter-statement in which Delano's views are contrasted with Don Benito's. The adherence to the dry and prosaic court-room language of his source only emphasizes the contrapuntal function of this section and in itself establishes a subtle ironic counterpoint by making the matter-of-fact Yankee the transmitter of elusiveness, symbolic suggestiveness, and sinister forebodings while the actual horrors of the revolt are reported in terse, dry, and legalistic style. Section two then could be described as the antithesis of section one, a situation which seems to demand a synthesis in section three.

The final scene of only a couple of pages seems to suggest such a synthesis or thematic resolution in bringing Don Benito and Delano to a better understanding ("their fraternal unreserve in singular contrast with former withdrawments") and in taking up once more in the form of a dialogue the key motifs of evil, confidence, and deception. But similar to Melville's other Piazza tales, a comprehensive panoramic view--or a synthesis--is not possible. Neither can leave his vantage point or, in the image of the introductory sketch, his "piazza" to see more than his limited section of reality. Delano is still the unabashed optimist who sees evil only as a temporary lapse which does no more than ripple the surface of beneficent nature, while to the "absolutist"

Benito the cruel outbreak of primitive passion and destructive vigour on board his ship has become a demonism which is all-consuming and absolute. The view of the bachelor and the view of the monk are in the end mutually exclusive.[30] Their piazzas face different directions, and Duxbury, Massachusetts, and Mount Agonia in Lima are worlds apart.

On the level of the theme this lack of resolution makes the question of confidence versus distrust the final riddle which remains unsolved. Aranda's trust leads to death and revolt, while in Delano's case it is life-saving: "Those feelings I spoke of enabled me to get the better of momentary distrust, at times when acuteness might have cost me my life, without saving another's" (p.139). As later in The Confidence Man, there is here a positing and negating which allows no conclusion and no resolution. Ambiguity pervades not only man's vision but the very basis of his actions. Is confidence obtuseness, or is it the only positive attitude in situations which are beyond our limited perception? The last paragraphs record the deaths of Babo and Don Benito, both deaths resulting from a situation of trust which allowed the slaves comparative freedom on the ship. But does this fact invalidate the trust and confidence of Delano? There is no answer in this story, just as there is no final answer to the similar questions of The Confidence Man. The general structure in both stories is based on a pervasive system of reversals, of statements and negations, which leave the reader with an enigma. In neither case does the author offer

[30] See Fogle's Shorter Tales, pp.131 ff.; also Feltenstein, p.248, and Williams, p.70.

any help towards a solution. He has learned to retire behind the veil of structural ambiguity, and with an objectivity which foreshadows twentieth century techniques, lets action alone speak. If the action bespeaks a contradiction, so does life. In order to present a truthful picture of life, ambiguity has to be transferred into the realm of artistic statement.

Compared with Melville's previous romantic technique of omnipotently interfering by means of commentary, this is definitely a new compositional method. Yet Melville's new "realism" is basically and essentially different from what is commonly understood by this name in the nineteenth century.[31] It does not aim at photographic accuracy in the presentation of material and is not directed at capturing the surface actualities of life; but his fiction, as Melville himself asserts in Chapter XXXIII of The Confidence Man, is primarily concerned with "Reality" capitalized, with "more reality, than real life itself can show." This means that Melville is still interested in "those short, quick probings at the very axis of reality," but his attempt is now directed at recreating this deeper reality on a structural level. In this he appears a conscious artist and accomplished craftsman, decades ahead of his time, a fact which is not commonly accepted in discussions of his technique.[32] Significant in this connection are the philosophic

[31]Concerning this problem, see Allen Hayman, "The Real and the Original: Herman Melville's Theory of Prose Fiction," MFS, VIII (Autmun, 1962), 211-32.

[32]Concerning Melville's technical excellence, see Berthoff, pp.133-58, who disagrees with R. P. Blackmur, "The Craft of Herman Melville," Virginia Quarterly Review, XIV (1948), 266-82 (reprinted in The Lion and the Honeycomb [New York, 1955]), that "Melville's work nowhere showed conspicuous mastery of the formal devices of fiction

and literary digressions in The Confidence Man, which reveal that Melville was not only acutely conscious of the inconsistencies of life and resolved to portray them in art but that he attempted to crystallize his experiments into something like a literary theory. Two chapters of The Confidence Man, XIV and XXXIII, are in this respect important. In Chapter XIV, Melville condemns those so-called "phychological novelists" who by "sallies of ingenuity" reduce life's inconsistency and contradiction to a solvable riddle:

> They challenge astonishment at the tangled web of some character, and then raise admiration still greater at their satisfactory unraveling of it; in this way throwing open, sometimes to the understanding even of school misses, the last complications of that spirit which is affirmed by its Creator to be fearfully and wonderfully made.[33]

Instead, he asserts, a serious writer of fiction should reproduce as faithfully as possible life's inconsistencies in order to "furnish a true delineation," because art, as he outlines further in Chapter XXXIII, should present "even more reality than real life itself can show"; "it is with fiction as with religion; it should present another world, and yet one to which we feel the tie."[34] Thus it seems to me that the two

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which he used." According to Berthoff, Melville was a conscious craftsman in his short stories, so that any radical shifts in narrative pace or perspective must be taken "as they come, for the serious virtue that may be in them" (p.150). Other discussions of Melville's art can be found in John G. Cawelti, "Some Notes on the Structure of The Confidence Man," AL, XXIX (November, 1957), 278-88; Glauco Cambon, "Ishmael and the Problem of Formal Discontinuities in Moby Dick," MLN, LXXVI (1961), 516-23; Walter Dubler, "Theme and Structure in Melville's The Confidence Man," AL, XXXIII (November, 1961), 307-19; and Hoffmann, "Shorter Fiction," p.430.

[33] The Confidence Man, p.78.

[34] Ibid., p.207.

digressions in these chapters do not form a contradiction as John Cawelti, in his article on The Confidence Man, supposes[35] but do in fact belong to a consistent artistic theory which could be summarized thus: since every important aspect of life abounds in inconsistencies, these inconsistencies must be reflected in the realm of art, for without them art has neither validity nor relevance to life. As I mentioned earlier, "Benito Cereno" and The Confidence Man were conceived within a few weeks or months of each other, so that the latter could be considered a continuation of the technique with which Melville had experimented in "Benito Cereno" and in his earlier short stories. It is in this respect that Cawelti's description of the structure of The Confidence Man could equally apply to "Benito Cereno":

> Something is presented, a character, an incident, an idea, anything which might give the reader some clue to the interpretation of the represented reality; then a counter incident or idea appears, powerful enough to destroy the usefulness of the first clue, but insufficient to provide a foundation for a new interpretation of what has been presented. We are left in the air with no way of resolving the mutually exclusive possibilities.[36]

This technique of a dialectic presentation is, I think, highly successful in his stories, in particular in "Benito Cereno," but in the long form of The Confidence Man where plot has not the same tension and suspense, it leads towards confusion and repetition.[37]

IV

Before following in closer detail the refractions of the theme

[35] Cawelti, p.280.

[36] Ibid., pp.282-83.

[37] Concerning this point, see below, Chapter IX, p.324.

of trust it is important to establish the nature of the main theme. In a situation where oblique presentation tends to distort this attempt will meet with difficulties, as the survey of critical opinion shows. Since the story is, however, a Piazza tale where the piazza and Marianna's countenance stand emblematic of a contemporary situation, it can be assumed that the theme itself will give another haunting glimpse of modern reality in which isolation and fragmentation have become major contributing factors to man's victimization and suffering. The action itself, after all, involves an issue which in the ante-bellum years must have been of burning interest. Don Benito did not innocently get into the predicament where he finds himself kept hostage by a group of vindictive negro rebels, and it is hardly feasible to imagine that Melville who had expressed very clear views on slavery in Mardi[38] and again in the Oberlus sketch of "The Encantadas" should have been oblivious of the historical and political connotations of the story. Slavery was, after all, one of the major political and humanitarian concerns of the time, and the hysteria about slave mutinies, which since the end of the eighteenth century had increasingly erupted on land and sea, had mounted, so that, as Kaplan points out, "one modern historian, Harvey Wish, looking back on the period, has written about what he calls 'the slave insurrection panic of 1856.'"[39] It is furthermore difficult to ignore

[38]In Chapter LVIII slavery is condemned in the following terms: "But sin it is, no less;- a blot, foul as the crater-pool of hell; it puts out the sun at noon; it parches all fertility; and conscience or no conscience--ere he die--let every master who wrenches bond-babe from mother that the nipple tear ... let that master thrice shrive his soul; take every sacrament; on his bended knees give up the ghost;--yet shall he die despairing; and live again, to die forever damned" (p.252).

[39]Kaplan, XLI, 13.

as background for this story those slave rebellions which achieved notoriety and probably alerted the American public to the issue. There was the negro rebellion in the Spanish colony of Santo Domingo--or by its French name Saint Dominique--between 1791 and 1801, in the course of which the year 1799 of our story witnessed a cruel rebellion by the mulatto leader Rigaud; and there were also two slave-ship revolts which had made a great impression at that time: the famous Amistad revolt of 1839, in which fifty-four slaves murdered the captain of that Spanish ship, sailed the ship north and surrendered to the authorities on Montauk Point after ascertaining that they were in a free country; the second revolt occurred on the brig Creole in 1841 and received even wider publicity. The revolt was led by a fugitive who on returning to rescue his wife had been recaptured. In the uprising the slave dealer was killed, the captain wounded, and the crew forced to sail to a free port.[40] Taking into consideration these notorious cases, the general atmosphere of slave insurrection panic, and Melville's own outspoken views on slavery, it can be assumed that Melville was aware of the implications of the story action. A different question, however, and less easily determined is whether slavery is made an issue in the story or whether Melville consciously ignored it. The perplexity among the critics concerning this question indicates that no direct answer is to be found in either the drift of the action or in sympathies expressed by the narrator. But one important source has been ignored so far, the light which ancillary imagery throws on the action. We have noticed in "The Piazza" and in

[40]For information concerning the slave-ship rebellions, ibid., p.21, and Margaret Jackson, "Melville's Use of a Real Slave Mutiny in 'Benito Cereno,'" CLA Journal, IV (December, 1960), 79-93.

"Bartleby" that imagery is used to express a hidden comment on the surface action, and it seems to me that "Benito Cereno," which is likewise lavishly rich in imagery and allusions, could be unlocked with this key which is supplied by the author himself.

The patterns of imagery found in the story are those belonging to the sphere of "death and decay," the "church" (in particular the monastery and monks), the "grandeur of Spain," the "animal world," and lastly colour. Of these, however, only the last two have been used in arguing the slavery issue.[41] The usual argument followed is this: the negroes are described by animal metaphors and are furthermore "black," a colour which in Melville usually connotes evil; therefore the negroes are seen by Melville to be ferocious and wicked. The counter-argument is that, beginning with Moby Dick, a colour-reversal has taken place in Melville's writings so that white and black have exchanged places; the negroes therefore are seen to emerge as the moral victors. Against both these arguments it must be established that animal metaphors and the symbolic colour black in the story refer to negroes and whites alike and are therefore debarred from applying to one group only. The key to the issue lies, I suggest, in all those images which refer the action to a different past. They establish a frame of reference against which the action on board ship becomes meaningful as a parable of modern involvement in the crime of the past,

[41] See Schiffmann, pp. 317-24, who accepts a reversal in the connotations of black and white. Against this, see Kaplan, XLII, 22-25: "The traditional equation is merely transposed so that black may equal blacker, while white may equal whiter." For other treatments of this problem see Green, where this problem is extensively discussed, as well as Levin, p.189; Matthiessen, pp.507-8; and Charles Neider, Short Novels of the Masters (New York, 1948), pp.9-11.

now ramblingly grown out of control: "No misery born of crime, but spreads and poisons wide."

Among the many interpretations only those of Stein and Franklin have attempted to collate the historical parallel with the story proper, but with differing results. Stein sees in it a contrast with the time of Ferdinand the First, the "legendary soldier of Christ" who subdued the Moors. But although I agree that the action should be referred back to Spanish history, I see little justification for going back as far as the eleventh century. Franklin also refers to Spanish history, but unlike Stein he finds a parallel rather than a contrast. He sees the story as a reenactment of the predicament of Charles the Fifth, under whom worldly power had been usurped by the church, a situation in which the apparent and the real holders of power uneasily maintained a façade of amity. Neither interpretation, however, accounts for the evil of Babo, which in view of its importance in the story should be a principal concern of every interpretation. The masked satyr symbolising this evil, together with the supplanted figurehead of Christopher Columbus and the references to the Inquisition are all left unexplained.

I should like to interpret the historical background differently. It seems to me that the point in Spanish history where the allusions to Castile and Leon, the inquisition, Columbus, and slavery meet is in the reign of Ferdinand the Fifth. This view is supported by the fact that Melville can be assumed to have been familiar with this part of Spanish history through William H. Prescott's History of the Reign of Ferdinand and Isabella the Catholic, which according to Anderson was available in the ship library of the Frigate United States, on which Melville had

enlisted from August, 1843, until October, 1844.[42] Prescott deals in detail with the inquisition and slavery as evils which were introduced in the reign of Ferdinand the Fifth. In Volume One he describes the horrors of the Spanish Inquisition which "was exclusively committed to the hands of the Dominican friars," after which he concludes with a verdict significant for his moral assessment of the principle of human oppression behind it:

> [The sufferings] were still more deeply avenged in the moral influence of this tribunal, which, eating like a pestilent canker into the heart of the monarchy, at the very time when it was exhibiting a most goodly promise, left it at length a bare and sapless trunk.[43]

And a little further:

> Many a bloody page of history attests the fact that fanaticism armed with power is the sorest evil which can befall a nation.[44]

In his third volume he discusses the introduction of slavery to the New World in 1501, under the auspices again of Ferdinand the Fifth, ostensibly carried out to alleviate the suffering of the indigenous Indians , in the following terms:

> To this false principle of economizing human suffering we are indebted for that foul stain on the New World, which has grown deeper and darker with the lapse of years."[45]

It seems that the Spain evoked by Melville's description follows this pattern set by Prescott's interpretation. It is to this Spain, powerful,

[42]Charles R. Anderson, Melville in the South Seas (New York, 1939), pp.358 and 484.

[43]William Hickling Prescott, History of the Reign of Ferdinand and Isabell the Catholic, ed. Wilfrid Harold Munro (London, 1904 [1st ed., 1837]), I, 372.

[44]Ibid., I, 376.

[45]Ibid., III, 253.

but already carrying the seed of its destruction (a "pestilent canker") in it, that the allusions refer, and of which the ship in its decayed grandeur becomes the symbol. Here as elsewhere in Melville's writing, the ship stands for a social order, this time the order of Spain which, with its empty gunholes and the rusty iron fixtures, is "all now in sad disrepair." But what this old order represents to Melville is explained again not through commentary but solely through imagery: in the emblems of the ship, its striking stern-piece and its masked figurehead. It is here that the key to the origin of evil is to be found.

The stern-piece is described in the following way:

> The principal relic of faded grandeur was the ample oval of the shield-like stern-piece, intricately carved with the arms of Castile and Leon, medallioned about by groups of mythological and symbolical devices; uppermost and central of which was a dark satyr in a mask, holding his foot on the prostrate neck of a writhing figure, likewise masked [italics mine]. (P.58.)

As to the figurehead of the ship, it is as yet masked, but it is later revealed to be the skeleton of the slave-owner which had been substituted for the "ship's proper figure-head--the image of Cristobal Colon, the Discoverer of the New World." As on a tableau the action and theme of the story with their historical implications seem to be transfixed into these two emblems of the past (stern-piece) and of its legacy for the New World (figurehead). The historical facts are that under Ferdinand the Fifth Castile and Leon were reunited; he tried to enforce religious and political unity by the establishment of the Spanish Inquisition; under his auspices Columbus sailed to the New World; and under him the first consignment of Negro slaves was sent to work in the mines of the oldest Spanish colony in America, in Santo Domingo. Therefore whatever is evoked by the stern-piece and the figurehead, it is not Spain under Ferdinand

the First, "the soldier of Christ" as Stein sees it, because "uppermost" and "central" to the stern-piece is the figure of the "dark satyr," "holding his foot on the prostrate neck of a writhing figure," which, I suggest, is the image of human oppression. The dark satyr is more than just Babo, in Kaplan's words, "Babo trampling on Don Benito; Babo is the satyr, a lecherous sylvan deity, sensual, part beast";[46] it is a leitmotif which occurs three times in the course of the story, once as emblem and twice in action. But each time it occurs, the figures involved have exchanged places. If Babo is in one instance the incorporation of the dark satyr, then in the second instance it is Delano whose "right foot ... ground the prostrate negro." The remarkable thing about the emblem is that oppressor and oppressed are masked, i.e. they can, as the story indicates, exchange places, because oppression breeds oppression. The demonism of power--as embodied in the figure of the satyr--will always oppress and be uppermost, but the identities of oppressor and oppressed are interchangeable. Thus the emblem of oppression as a demonic power in the stern-piece of the ship, pointing towards the past, anchors Babo's satyr-like hold over Don Benito in a situation where their roles had been, factually speaking, reversed. It is further significant that the first importation of negro slaves to the American continent occurred in Santo Domingo, also under Ferdinand the Fifth; here Columbus had established his first colony, sponsored by the same house of Leon and Castile in whose oval shield, "uppermost and central," stands the dark satyr of human oppression. The seed of destruction is thus carried over into the New World, a fact which is made symbolic by the substitution of the skeleton

[46]Kaplan, XLII, 21.

(of the slave-owner) for the figurehead of Columbus. As already mentioned, both Delano and Don Benito are Americans, so that their involvement in the issue, although involuntary, is inescapable. Don Benito is crushed by it, yet the victory of Delano becomes ambiguous when we see it against the background of the key emblem of the satyr. He, too, ground under foot "the prostrate negro" (p.118).[47] In the circumstances it can hardly be maintained that the contemporary issue of slavery was ignored in "Benito Cereno."

It is interesting at this stage to pursue the question of why Melville changed the names of the ships from his source and what he meant to indicate by it. On one level the names "Bachelor's Delight" and "San Dominick" point to the contrast of character and attitude which is elaborated in Fogle's article on "The Bachelor and the Monk." Delano is one of Melville's "merry bachelors" to whom, as to the Templars in London in "Paradise of Bachelors," "the thing called pain, the bugbear styled trouble ... seemed preposterous to their bachelor imaginations." To Delano, the world is basically good, and he cannot fathom the implications of demonic evil which to Don Benito is all-pervasive and absolute to a degree that forces him into anchoritish retirement. But Fogle's explanation of the name "San Dominick" as defining the monkish attitude of Don Benito does not take into account the transference of the monk metaphors to the negroes who are likened to a "shipload of monks," "throngs of dark cowls," and

[47]For other examples of Melville's ability to present pictorially, in the form of a key emblem, the meaning of action and plot, see his use of imagery in the Agatha story, the image of the hop-vines in "The Piazza," Bartleby's "dead-wall reveries," the lightning-rod, the fallen tower in "The Bell-Tower," and the haunting picture of the Encantadas wasteland.

"black friars pacing the cloisters." Again, history as presented by Prescott can help. The "black friars" are none other than the Dominican monks who played a very active part in the inquisition, which, too, was introduced to Spain by Ferdinand the Fifth in 1472. Thus, the name San Dominick could be understood to evoke the same principle of oppression which the satyr on the stern-piece betokens, only this time in the religious sphere. But while the latter suggests the open political oppression of sixteenth century Spain, the ecclesiastical name on the other hand suggests the more subtle oppression of that age which, while professing Christian ideals, gave vent to a barbarism similar to that displayed by the negroes. The relevance of this to the outwardly tranquil situation aboard the San Dominick should not be overlooked. It is now the negroes who, having risen in revolt, stand in oppressive judgment over the whites, under the cloak of false appearances. They, the formerly oppressed, are now applying the same principle of oppression to their former masters; they are now the inquisitors, a point which the shaving scene clearly establishes. There are the settees which look like "inquisitor's racks," Don Benito's armchair, "furnished with a rude barber's crotch at the back, working with a screw, seemed some grotesque engine of torment," and even the inquisition's symbols of religious sanction for their rule of terror, like the "thumbed missal" and a "small, meagre crucifix," are included in the scene. In this situation "master and man, for some unknown purpose, were acting out ... to the very tremor of Don Benito's limbs, some juggling play." In this scene, the formerly oppressed and the oppressor have exchanged places, and the "man" has become "the master." The avenging of evil and oppression begets more evil and worse oppression so that there is a vicious chain-reaction which was

already implicit in the original establishment of the inquisition and of slavery. In both inquisition and slavery the principle of action is human oppression and the reaction, which both create, is like a spark which smoulders while subdued but breaks out into open conflagration when former restrictions are lifted, or in other words, when power loses its hold. In turn it then becomes a wrong which destroys innocent and guilty alike, a new satyr who grinds another prostrate figure under foot.

Seen in these terms it is hardly possible to maintain that slavery is not an issue in the story. But due to the refractions of the theme, it is not apparent as a surface theme but implied in the evocation of historical analogies and in the anchoring of the action in a specific situation of the past. On the surface Melville seems simply concerned with the problem of perception and whether it might serve as a basis for action, but while questioning this he seems to suggest by means of imagery that we have to supplement faulty and delusive perception with a historical awareness which both Delano and Don Benito lack. On the surface Melville seems only concerned with a modern incident, another slave-ship rebellion, but by means of imagery and metaphor this modern incident is seen as the outcome of something like a "historical sin" in the past. Evil, as it appears in his own time, is thus not abstractly viewed; Babo is not "motiveless malignity" or pure evil, but all three protagonists--Babo, Don Benito, and Delano--are the heirs of a fateful historical legacy which with "satyric" power threatens to overthrow not only decayed forms of order but even the modern ones. Once authority or "despotic command" cannot support oppression by power (as is implied by the empty gun-holes, the rusty chains and the empty scabbard), explosive energies are released which might be beyond man's control: "Might not the San Dominick, like a slumbering volcano, suddenly let loose

energies now hid?" (P.82.) As we understand towards the end, such an eruption had already taken place ("every inch of ground [was] mined into honeycombs"[p.138]), but it is not until "the mask [is] torn away," that it reveals its full savage energy:

> For a few breaths' space, there was a vague, muffled, inner sound, as of submerged sword-fish, rushing hither and thither through shoals of black-fish .... Exhausted, the blacks now fought in despair. Their red tongues lolled, wolf-like, from their black mouths. But the pale sailors' teeth were set. (P.122.)

Here in the description of the fight both the negroes and the whites are described in animal metaphors. It is not only the black primitive man who evinces brutal ferocity but all mankind is basically primitive. Even the yellow race is included in this savage primitivism, in the reference to "a hundred spears with yellow arms ready to upthrust them through mats" (p.81), an image which occurs to Delano's mind as a sign of latent dangers and explosive energies waiting to erupt. Thus, basically, all mankind is part of a primitive urwelt which is amoral, animalistic, and which abounds in blind ferocious energy.[48] According to Klaus Lanzinger, this thought is evident in all of Melville's books but it seems to me that there are subtle, interesting changes. Already in Mardi, Melville had begun "im Raubtierhaften ein universelles Seinsprinzip zu sehen, das nicht nur die Natur sondern auch den Menschen beherrscht."[49] In other words, at the very core of creation is this destructive primitivistic energy which shows itself in animals and humans alike. There is for instance the reference to the

[48] In this connection, see Baird's study of primitivism in Melville, and Klaus Lanzinger, Primitivismus und Naturalismus im Prosaschaffen Herman Melvilles (Innsbruck, 1959). Baird approaches the subject from the viewpoint of symbolism, while Lanzinger sees in Melville's "primitivism" primarily a "zivilisations- und sozialkritische Haltung."

[49] Lanzinger, p.42.

Indian swordfish in Mardi:

> [It] will fight you to the hilt, for his bony blade has never a scabbard. He himself sprang from it at birth; yea, at the very moment he leapt into the Battle of Life; as we mortals ourselves spring all naked and scabbardless into the world.[50]

In Moby Dick this thought is further developed, and primitive ferociousness is now seen as a universal principle which includes inanimate nature as well:

> But not only is the sea such a foe to man who is an alien to it, but it is also a fiend to its own offspring; worse than the Persian host who murdered his own guests; sparing not the creatures which itself hath spawned. Like a savage tigress that tossing in the jungle overlays her own cubs, so the sea dashes even the mightiest whale against the rocks, and leaves them there side by side with the split wrecks of ships. No mercy, no power but its own controls it. Panting and snorting like a mad battle steed that has lost its rider, the masterless ocean overruns the globe.... Consider, once more, the universal cannibalism of the sea; all whose creatures prey upon each other, carrying on eternal war since the world began.[51]

In "Benito Cereno" we find a similar understanding of the primitive. As the animal metaphors indicate, bestiality and cannibalism underlie all human nature. "Primitivism, originally the source of Melville's most optimistic symbols, is completely inverted in relation to Babo and the slaves"; this is Feltenstein's observation[52] which must, however, be supplemented. Not only Babo and the other negroes but also the whites evince primitive "cannibalistic" energies. Both are part of an elemental force of nature which is present not only in one race but throughout nature and throughout time. This force can be restrained and tamed--imagery in the story evokes this possibility--but the change is most likely only

[50] Mardi, XXXII, p.91.

[51] Moby Dick, LVIII, p.274.

[52] Feltenstein, p.254.

superficial and temporary. Notice, for instance, that all animal metaphors which refer to this basic primitive core of man's nature are taken from two groups, the wild and ferocious animals and the domesticated ones. The blacks are both "leopard" and "dove," the white sailor is "ursine" and "sheep," Babo is "shepherd-dog" and "snake." Thus, the metaphors serve to illustrate the composite nature of man, but they also are used to reflect the theme of ambiguity and delusion by appearing in contrasting pairs, at least until the open outbreak of hostilities. But once the mask is torn away, the quality of tameness and domestication disappears and it is ferocious animal energy which prevails. Civilisation and former authority --"measured forms"--have not extinguished basic "universal cannibalism" but only temporarily suppressed it.

One of the forces with which man can guard himself against "Primitivismus als Dämonie"[53] is, even if only temporary, authority, i.e. the kind of authority which Delano possesses on his own ship ("the quiet orderliness of the sealer's comfortable family of crew") and which consists of discipline mitigated by sociality. But even this kind of authority is helpless in the emergency situation on board the San Dominick where "noisy confusion" covers up the lack of any sustaining system of order. Against Don Benito's illusory and Babo's hidden despotism none of the traditional conventional establishments offer protection. Not only that, but the very decay of the old orders of church and government have actually made possible the fatal outbreak. A large part of the imagery in this story is concerned with this very decay of former orders, as for instance the images implying lost power, such as the empty scabbard and

[53]Lanzinger, p.61.

the useless key which the Don carries as well as those images which describe the delapidated condition of the ship, such as the caulked, empty, and coffinlike state-cabin and the crumbling balustrade of the quarter-deck from which formerly orders and commands had been issued. Yet not only imagery elaborates this point, but the two central scenes in the Delano section of the story, which Melville added to his source, develop this theme of the inadequacy and complete corruption of the two traditional orders on which this Empire was built, Royalty and Church. There is, first, the important shaving scene which, besides carrying overtones of inquisition and torment, could be interpreted, as Stein suggests, as a mock investiture in which the political god-given power of the king is caricatured and satirized by Babo by means of the Spanish flag and the gesture of anointing. And there is, secondly, the luncheon scene which could be taken to suggest a parody of the "communal meal."[54] There are other instances which show that the restrictive powers of government and the redemptive ones of religion have decayed, thus not only becoming ineffectual but also taking on sinister connotations by themselves. The monkish appearance, which in Don Benito's case is a sign of spiritual enervation, is as far as the negroes are concerned an ominous delusion, and traditional religious emblems like the crucifix, the missal, and the font are not only meaningless empty forms but are used in the inquisition-shaving scene to suggest, at best, a condonement of torture. Likewise the mounting of the skeleton of the former slave-owner could be interpreted, as by Stein, as a mock crucifixion,[55] again with sinister

[54] Stein, "Moral Axis," pp.228, 230.

[55] Ibid., p.232.

overtones: what the victims swear allegiance to is not a symbol of Life Everlasting but of death.

If establishments have thus decayed and through their decadence opened the way to anarchy and chaos, there are also indications in the imagery of the story to suggest why these former powers have lost their control. Very important in this connection are images of decadence and death which interpret the relaxation of vigilance as an outcome of spiritual enervation. After all, the now commercial slaveship had been formerly a Man-of-War, but its iron fixtures which held the guns are now rusted. Moreover, Don Benito himself, the "true off-shoot of a true Hidalgo Cereno," belongs to one of the most "enterprising and extensive mercantile families in all thos provinces; ... a sort of Castilian Rothschild, with a noble brother or cousin, in every trading town of South America" (p.77). In other words, what is given here as reasons for the decadence and subsequent vulnerability of former establishments is the same as in "Bartleby": selfishness and commercialisation have corroded the political and the social framework so that little can be offered to stave off the ascendancy of destructive energy. The fact that Melville retained the name Cereno as suggesting, not the "serene" as has been maintained,[56] but according to the Spanish dictionary the "waxlike" might indicate that it suited his purpose of presenting in the Don a figure in whom decay and decadence had a paralysing and benumbing effect. This would

[56]See Thomas E. Connolly, "A Note on Name-Symbolism in Melville," AL, XXV (January, 1954), 489-90. However, John Bernstein, "'Benito Cereno' and the Spanish Inquisition," NCF, XVI (March, 1962), 345-50, suggests as analogue the Spanish "san benito" which is the name given to the garment worn by the autodafé victims of the Spanish inquisition. See also Hoyle, p.164.

agree with the description of decay which throughout is not romantically viewed but surrounded with the waxen, bleached connotations of death. The state-cabin is likened to a coffin with its "dead-lights hermetically closed and caulked" and all closed "like coppered eyes of the coffined"; its door is caulked fast like a "sarcophagus lid," and the ship's flawed bell has a "dreary grave-yard toll." Don Benito is physically worn down "to a skeleton"; the four oakum pickers are "droning and drooling away like so many gray-headed bag pipers, playing a funeral march," and the ship rolled "hearse-like" in the swell. Here imagery suggests the true theme underneath the deception of appearances, namely that death itself is the master of this ship[57] and clearly announces its supremacy in the last scene of this first section, when the skeleton as figurehead is unmasked with its caption "Follow your leader" and grotesquely magnified in the slanting moonlight (p.122). It is through decay, decadence, and the decline of a former system of authority that "suppressed energies now hid" are let loose, spreading death in their explosive eruption.

This story is thus another example of Melville's special technique of seeing contemporaneity closely interwoven with the past and modern man intricately involved in dilemmas for which he is not primarily responsible. "For the past he saw was not a separate segment of time but an inextricable part of the present, of which the ruins strewn upon the earth are but the most obvious evidence."[58] Thus, the question of evil in

[57]In this connection another interpretation must at least be mentioned, which sees in "Benito Cereno" overtones of Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner": George Ross Ridge and David S. Ridge, "A Bird and a Motto: Source for 'Benito Cereno,'" Mississippi Quarterly, XII (Winter, 1959-60), 22-29.

[58]Wright, p.181.

"Benito Cereno" is not viewed in a timeless situation, but one of the basic issues of the story is the problem of what changes an amoral primitive force[59] into a demonically destructive power and of what unleashes it in a certain modern situation. Evil is thus viewed as something which develops, grows, and is constantly created in the process of history. Similar thoughts appear in the other Piazza tales: in "Bartleby" the corroding energy originates in the combined effect of Bartleby's obsession and the meaninglessness of commercialized society; here in "Benito Cereno" evil is shown as a development from slavery, the dark satyr of human oppression freed by the decay of authority; in "The Encantadas" evil enhances its enchantment through man's severance from human bonds and commitments; in "The Bell-Tower" destruction is caused by the inhumanity of man's scientific spirit and society's failure to act with responsibility; and in "The Lightning-Rod Man" evil disguises itself as religion which through excessive fear threatens man's last values of the hearth, i.e. the human bonds of sociality and of "domestic associations." Evil, in the Piazza Tales, is thus recurrently viewed as a violation of the principle of human brotherhood, but always with specific reference to Melville's own contemporary society. If tragedy strikes in any of the tales, it is either through some specific social decay or through some specific inability of man to "leave his piazza" and bridge the gulf which separates him from the others. Love,

[59]This energy is in the story symbolized by the vigour of the negro child: "Sprawling at her lapped breasts, was her wide-awake fawn, stark naked, its black little body half lifted from the deck, crosswise with its dam's; its hands, like two paws, clambering upon her; its mouth and nose ineffectually rooting to get at the mark; and meantime giving a vexatious half-grunt, blending with the composed snore of the negress" (p.87).

as "The Piazza" suggests, is a prime human virtue, and even though it does not exist in ideal form--as Una, or "unity"--the fact that each little tragedy revolves around the theme of man's isolation proves the relevance of the need for love and understanding. Thus, in "The Piazza," Melville outlines in the form of a preview the modern situation in which each man is an island to himself, without ability to communicate, while in each Piazza tale he shows the tragic results of this basic disturbance in relation to his own time and society. I believe that Watters' observation concerning Melville's "Isolatoes" is also valid for the Piazza Tales as a whole:

> Throughout his works, then, Melville displayed his belief that happiness is not obtainable by the individual in isolation, but may be found in shared experiences--in a community of thought and action and purpose.[60]

How is this important motif handled here in "Benito Cereno" which, after all, does not end in complete failure since the revolt is quashed and the rebels are prevented from seizing Delano's ship ? The basic situation in this story as in other Piazza tales is that communication is impossible, this time through force: under Babo's vigilant eyes Delano and Don Benito cannot communicate. Thus, the first part of the story raises the question whether Delano can see through the delusion of appearances, and whether any action based on an incomplete understanding of reality can be efficacious. But Delano, unaided, is not able to perceive the true nature of things, and in the end his oscillations between suspicion and trust are resolved not by a growing inner awareness on his part but by the external act of Don Benito's redeeming leap.

[60]Watters, "Melville's 'Isolatoes,'" p.1148.

Delano's understanding is insufficient and would have led to his death had not Don Benito finally and for once acted. It is from this point of view understandable that the story has been called a "satire" directed against the trust and optimism of the "American Idealist."[61] The question, however, is whether this interpretation is justified after taking the whole of the action into account. Is trust vindicated or criticized by it?

Central to this first part is, as in "Bartleby," the struggle of a benevolent, rational mind to grasp an irrational concept--malign evil in man--but it is not so much Delano's rational mind itself which leads him away from truth as his very trust and confidence. Throughout this first part the alternation of suspicion and trust follows the same pattern: suspicion is evoked by instinct, like "the apprehensive twitch in the calves of his legs," and then again dispersed by a belief in an all-comprehensive benevolence. To quote an example: Delano's "qualmish sort of emotion" which he experiences in the dark corridors of the ship is blown away in the open sunny air by the sight of his familiar houseboat which "evoked a thousand trustful associations, which filled him ... with lightsome confidence." Thus his suspicions are allayed by "the benign aspect of nature," so that he "felt something like a tinge of remorse, that ... he should ... have betrayed an atheist doubt of the ever-watchful Providence above." Reason in his situation can only supply an ambiguous and contradictory answer ("in short, scarce any suspicion or uneasiness,

[61] Phillips, p.192. Others, like Putzel, p.196, and Arvin, p.240, agree ("Delano is moral simplicity in a form that borders upon weak-wittedness, as his perversely misdirected suspicions end by indicating").

however apparently reasonable at the time, which was not now, with equally apparent reason dismissed"),[62] and only by instinct can Delano surmise something like the truth--the existence of a plot to seize his ship and to kill him. The scene in which Delano's fears reach their acme is set in the "subterranean vault" of the ship, where he comes closest to the mystery by something like a descent into the darker regions of the soul. This "subterranean vault" is reminiscent of those depths to which Pierre had penetrated in his search, but while there it had led to the experience of truth as vacuity, here it leads to the instinctive awareness of the latent threat of evil, a different kind of truth but truth all the same: "Was the negro now lying in wait? The Spaniard behind--the creature before: to rush from darkness to light was the involuntary chcice" (p.115). Thus, like the narrator-lawyer in "Bartleby," Delano escapes from a discovery which would shatter his "safe" world, and, as in "Bartleby," the "presentiments of strange discoveries" are dispersed, this time by the reassuring sight of benign nature:

> 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, 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.(Pp.115-16.)

So far, the drift of the story seems to accuse Delano of a nearly criminal slow-wittedness and obtuseness. His trust would have certainly

[62] A further example of this is given in another section (p.94), in the "four curious points" which Delano turns over in his mind "in a purely speculative sort of way," and which are completely contradictory.

ultimately led to the same slaughter which befell Aranda and his crew at the beginning of the uprising. But the second alternative must also be considered. If Delano's suspicions had led him to see through the mask, death would undoubtedly have ensued: "Acuteness might have cost me my life, without saving another's" (p.139). What saves him in the end is Don Benito's leap. If the story had been intended primarily as a satire on benevolence and idealism, a different ending would have been needed, because as it stands Don Benito is roused into action only in response to Delano's goodwill and friendship:

> I know not whether desire for my own safety alone could have nerved me to that leap into your boat, had it not been for the thought that, did you, unenlightened, return to your ship, you, my best friend, with all who might be with you, stolen upon, that night, in your hammocks, would never in this world have wakened again. (P.138.)

It is for friendship's sake, then, awakened by Delano's pleasant nature and goodwill that Don Benito acts, so that Delano's "good-nature, compassion, and charity, happily interweaving the three" have "charmed his life" and saved him. Thus, good will has established a bond between Delano and the Don when all other communications were impossible, a bond which alone is able to overcome the ruses of "malign machinations." Symbolically, this bond between the two is expressed by the image of the extended hand-clasp:

> The Spaniard again fervently took the hand of the American, at the same time casting an earnest glance into his eyes, but, as before, too much overcome to speak ....
>
> Meantime, as if fearful that the continuance of the scene might too much unstring his master, the servant seemed anxious to terminate it. And so, still presenting himself as a crutch, and walking between the two captains, he advanced with them towards the gangway; while still, as if full of kindly contrition, Don Benito would not let go the hand of Captain Delano, but retained it in his, across the black's body. (P.116.)

Only combined are the two able to thwart Babo's intentions. Thus it is not so much Delano's different concept of order and authority which saves him,

as Canady sees it,[63] but friendship created by Delano's goodwill and charity. It is because of his innocent unawareness of the true nature of things, and because of the fraternal bond established between him and Don Benito that the latter is freed and the revolt is stopped from spreading to Delano's ship.

V

If the story had ended here as some critics suggest it should have, the impact of the story would have been that the optimism of Delano can be accepted as a never-failing basis for moral action, and the story would have lost much of its impact. Yet it is important to observe that the second part of the story establishes a kind of counter-point to the optimistic views of Delano. Each character and incident is accounted for twice, once from the point of view of the unsceptical mind of Delano and the second time from the point of view of the initiated Don Benito. For each glib Rousseau-like statement concerning the harmlessness and noble nature of the negroes, there is on record a gruesome atrocity committed by them in Don Benito's account, which is in every sense of the word a "deposition," i.e. a dethronement or invalidation. The sunny surface is a deceptive calm underneath which are "God's creatures fighting, fin for fin."[64] - Yet apart from juxtaposing Delano's optimistic opinions with a darker view, the deposition has the further function of casting doubt on the qualities of confidence and trust which according to the final conversation between Delano and Benito seem to have been the cause of their salvation. Delano's part of the story which stresses the value of

[63] Canady, p.56

[64] Mardi, XIII, p.36.

confidence is invalidated by Don Benito's report that the carnage was traceable to an act of misplaced confidence. The negroes did not wear fetters "because the owner, his friend Aranda, told him that they were all tractable" (p.125). In other words, confidence may protect; it may also betray. There is no absolute on which to base moral action.

This leads to the important question of whether Don Benito's views can be taken to be nearer the truth than Delano's. I pointed out earlier that the surface function of the legalistic prose is to lend the flavour of objectivity to Don Benito's implausible account, but this alone would not justify its lengthy and leisurely exposition. Instead I suggest that the use of the legal depositions is but another example of Melville's technique of author detachment by means of dialectically juxtaposed themes or attitudes. Through them each incident and character is viewed twice, this time from the point of view of Don Benito. Moreover the use of a different type of language emphasizes the function of this section as counter-statement. By itself it presents a "truth" which the obtuse Yankee captain was unable to perceive, and we cannot but concede that the factual account presents the <u>true</u> picture of a reality which is as in other Piazza tales "dark" and sinister. Fortified by the legalistic style and its deposition character it cannot be explained away as a delusion of Don Benito's possibly diseased mind. But this does not mean that the story leaves us with the "truth" of Don Benito's view of reality and all its aspects. I should like to explain this by applying to this story Cawelti's previously mentioned analysis of <u>The Confidence Man</u>, where he points out that the counter-idea, which in itself might be strong enough to destroy the usefulness of the first clue, is insufficient to provide the basis for a new interpretation. In other

words, the facts might be true insofar as they describe the dark background reality of the revolt, but as a factual account throwing light on "the negro" they penetrate as little below the surface as Delano's imperceptive adherence to surface appearances. Both skim the surface --the one of facts, the other of appearances--but in order to understand the issue of "the negro" and his nature and with it the significance of the revolt one must probe more deeply. In particular one should seek the significance of those images and metaphors which reveal the true situation, where negroes are neither innocent "natural valets and hair-dressers" nor the personification of unadulterated evil. If the negroes' primitive vigour has been changed into a destructive force of evil, it is not primarily their own doing but the outcome of a historical situation in which the satyr of human oppression ruled "central and uppermost." As the story shows, we are inextricably involved through some crime in the past with forces we can neither understand nor control, a fact which places in doubt the existence of any safe basis for action. If perception is open to gross illusions, how much more so is human action which is based on these perceptions. In The Confidence Man, written at roughly the same time, this thought becomes the central frame around which the episodes weave their dialectic pattern of positing and negating.

The physical description of Don Benito supports the view that his interpretation of and response to reality are as limited and one-sided as Delano's. In the first section he is described as physically broken by his suffering, while the last section emphasizes even his spiritual collapse. With his liberating leap he has expended his last energy, but he lacks the inner vitality to be liberated more than physically from his nightmare experience. The blackness of the negro has cast such a shadow

over his soul that his retirement to Mount Agonia becomes his retreat from a reality which by his "absolutist" assumptions is all-pervasively evil. It has been pointed out that Don Benito is of all the characters in the story the most drastically changed from Melville's source, because instead of the deceitful and vindictive Spanish captain of the original Narrative Melville created a "congenitally weakened and diseased heir of empty and horrific grandeur."[65] In such a person, related in nature to Bartleby ("the last column of some ruined temple"), his insight becomes a traumatic experience in which the whole world appears contaminated and "wafts him to his tomb." He is the embodiment of the total collapse of a former culture, and as such his pathetic response to the challenge of the situation is as inadequate as Delano's. Delano's superficial belief in benevolence denies him any deeper insights, while Don Benito's enervation and absolutism have paralysed his will to live and to act. In a case where the primitive is in ascendance, both responses are hopelessly inadequate. Evil can be curbed only if "knowledge" acts as in the symbolic leap of Don Benito or to use another symbol of the story: only if insight and action unite with "clasped hands" against it, "across the black's body."

But the approach between Delano and Don Benito is only temporary. Spiritually Delano cannot reach Benito's soul, a situation which is reminiscent of "Bartleby." Their worlds are, as the last section emphasizes, mutually exclusive. The final scene which begins with their "fraternal unreserve" ends, after the statement of their conflicting views, in the withdrawn silence of incomprehension:

[65]Putzel, p.201.

> There was silence, while the moody man sat, slowly and unconsciously gathering his mantle about him, as if it were a pall.
>
> There was no more conversation that day. (P. 140.)

Thus, the legal depositions and the final scene, in which the incompatibility of their two views is emphasized, belong essentially to the story. They do not destroy the unity of the work as Putzel alleges,[66] but they emphasize the theme of complete and all-pervasive ambiguity by transferring the riddle of the plot to the structure of the story. There is no thematic resolution in the end, and the riddle is still unsolved. Melville was not so much interested in the suspense of the plot, or he would have stopped with the dénouement or built up the interest of suspense in the revolt. Instead, the plot becomes a symbol in itself of man's inability to see reality whole and unadulterated. It is through the lengthy second and the short third section that the issues are held in balance and left undecided and, as in The Confidence Man, provide no safe guide to action. In 1851, in Melville's own words, "the knot with which we choke ourselves" had been the quest for some absolute truth, namely "the apprehension of the absolute condition of present things as they strike the eye";[67] now, in "Benito Cereno" and The Confidence Man, the hangman's noose is the doubting of all certitude on which to base our actions. Reality shows itself in ever-changing fluidity so that everything becomes finally inconclusive. There is a noticeable crescendo in the treatment of the theme of ambiguity from its beginnings in Pierre through the Piazza Tales, until in The Confidence Man it has pervaded

[66] Ibid., p. 199.

[67] Letters, pp. 124-25.

all levels. As the theme of ambiguity is transferred to structural levels, dynamic action yields to an increasingly more static alternation of descriptions (most fully developed in his diptychs and "The Encantadas" but already here in "Benito Cereno"), characters become more passive and subjected to the iron law of necessity to the extent that references have been made to Melville's "naturalism,"[68] and instead of thematic resolution we find the dialectic confrontation of attitudes and themes. Thus, the duplicity of experience and perception which makes moral action impossible is reflected in the unresolved duality of Melville's writing in these crucial years. In his short stories this suspension of thematic resolution is an effective positive feature, but it leaves an impression of redundancy and confusion when used in the longer form of The Confidence Man.

VI

"Benito Cereno" is a Piazza tale and like other Piazza tales elaborates the basic theme which "The Piazza" as introduction adumbrates, namely the reality of disturbed human relationships and the loss of belonging, a theme which German literary criticism calls by the one name Trennung, i.e. separation, a concept embodied by Marianna. In "The Piazza" this process of disintegration was rendered symbolic by the love motif and its anticlimactic frustration, while the following tales show that disintegration extends further into the cultural level where through the decay of former authoritative and redemptive forces new and uncontrollable energies have gained ascendancy. These disruptive forces are not derived from any abstract or prelapsarian evil in a timeless situation but are

[68] See Lanzinger and Stern.

seen to have their origin in time and history. Each story is thus widened into implications far beyond the personal destiny of the protagonist insofar as each offers insights into pressing cultural issues of the time and as in each the decay of "measured forms" has left man as well as society dangerously vulnerable. To this extent Melville could be considered a "Kulturpessimist."[69] But it is significant that most stories carry along overtones and possibilities of salvation although the salvation itself, as each story unfolds, can be thwarted. It is present in "The Piazza" in the key motif of love, in "Bartleby" in the compromise of the employés, and here in "Benito Cereno" in the image of the clasped hands. Thus we can say that while Melville might be pessimistic concerning the contemporary stage of cultural disintegration, he still allows man a casting vote in his own destiny.

Another important link between the frame story and each tale is the idea of the piazza. I mentioned earlier that the piazza in the title story stands both for Melville's withdrawal from personal involvement and for his realisation of the limitations of each man's vision. In the Piazza Tales as a whole each major character is presented with a critical detachment which is unusual for Melville until this period of his life. Jesse D. Green, in comparing Conrad and Melville, speaks of the dominant characteristic of the former as "ambivalence embodied in a controlled scepticism" and argues that in Melville this scepticism is lacking: "Central to the story ['Benito Cereno'] ... is precisely the 'recorder's' unsceptical mind."[70] This is, however, only true as far as

[69]See Henry Lüdecke, "Neuhumanismus und Demokratie im Amerikanischen Geistesleben," Germanisch Romanische Monatsschrift, XXI (1933), 220-33.

[70]Green, p.290.

the first part of the story is concerned and not of the general impact of the whole of the story. Melville's sceptical attitude might not be presented by means of one central figure as in Conrad's Marlow, but it is nevertheless expressed through a mode of expression which was described above as "dialectic structure," by which is meant the ambivalent presentation of contradictory points of view under the withheld judgment by the author. It is a misunderstanding of Melville's short stories to say that "from Pierre through The Confidence Man all the feelings of restless quest seem gone; for the most part the tone of these works is one of patly answered questions."[71] Melville's stories are not answers but questions, and his critical detachment from each character and attitude presented stresses this attempt at objectivity. What comment he makes is indirect, through imagery, allusion, and the previously observed counter-movement of image patterns, and they all give evidence of a fully matured craftsmanship.

In summary it must be stated once more that a master theme of the story as elaborated by imagery is the problem of evil and of what set it free in a particular modern situation. It is not a timeless motiveless malignity but a specific condition created by man which imagery anchors in a historical situation so that the modern situation of a slave-ship revolt is deepened and widened in its connotations to represent and symbolize something like the death of a culture. The contemporary, the historical, and the religious all coexist so that the failure of the present is seen as the cultural legacy of the past. In this connection it is interesting to consult Baird who outlines the basic situation of

[71]Kaplan, XLII, 35.

cultural failure and shows that even after the cultural symbols of the past have lost their validity and integrating function they still continue to appear in art until they are replaced by new symbols, representing new values. Melville, according to Baird, was one of "the great symbolistic originators of history" and the "chief redactor" of a different set of symbols which derive from primitivism. According to him, "recent primitivism presents an achievement of a most complex artistic act, a new reformation of belief, artistically described."[72] It is, however, difficult to find this positive element in the story with which we are concerned. On the contrary, it seems to me that the texture of this story is still deeply interwoven with the traditional cultural and religious symbols of the past. However, the important question to consider as far as "Benito Cereno" is concerned is whether these symbols still retain their sacramental authority and binding power or whether they are on the way to becoming a display of dead cultural symbols, similar to those in T. S. Eliot's Wasteland. It must be emphatically stated that in "Benito Cereno" the crucifix, the crucifixion, the missal, the font, the communal meal, the state-cabin, the lock and key, the silver-mounted scabbard, the gesture of anointing, and the flag have lost what overtones of redemption, salvation, or authority were implicit in them; they have become decayed and empty tokens, and they protect neither against the actual physical assault nor against inner spiritual anxiety. The action of the story, the revolt and its disguise, is thus the outer expression of a state of cultural failure which the imagery evokes. Here Melville's greatness lies, in his ability to make narrative translucent and

[72] Baird, p.74.

connotative of implications which link the present inextricably to the past and the surface narrative to a more universal situation. How widely relevant the surface action can become, is shown by the post-war and post-Hitler reception of "Benito Cereno" in Germany. In a popular radio adaption of Melville's story by radio Frankfurt, in July, 1954, Don Benito was taken to stand for the European intellectual, oppressed by the tremendous burden of the past and unequal to the task of coping with a revolt of the masses.[73] In this adaptation the same element of "cultural failure," which was partly responsible for the overthrow of power on the San Dominick, is seen to apply to the prewar situation in Germany, a fact which stresses Melville's extraordinary power to make one action representative of a recurrent pattern in history.

If on one level "Benito Cereno" could be considered to represent the "death of a culture," the nature of the disruptive force which gave this particular culture its death-blow must be clarified once more. It is a "black force," but it is not motiveless malignity nor is it "the negro" as a racial entity. Black here is symbolic of a destructive force which had its origin in the past, as the "dark satyr" symbolising human oppression shows. Thus it is not the negro alone who is held responsible for the atrocities committed but indicted with him are the past and the present. Not only the negro is "black" but so are some "whites," the Dominicans, the "black friars," Don Benito himself, "the dark Spaniard, the central hobgoblin of all," and most important, the dark satyr, "central and uppermost" in the shield of Spain. The connotations of black

[73]Radiostation Frankfurt am Main, Juli, 1954, "'Benito Cereno' oder der Mythos Europas," quoted in Phelps, p.299.

thus extend far into other situations so that black is not used as a racial epithet but rather to connote some uncontrollable force which was generated at some point in the past by the forces of oppression; the decay of former authority is the fuse which finally touches off the explosion.

In "Bartleby" the enfeebled Wall street society has no inherent health and vitality to resist the impact of some disruptive force. Here in "Benito Cereno," written nearly two years after "Bartleby," the basic situation is still the same. Again we find the impact of dark, demonic forces against the enfeebled ramparts of a modern society. But now the basic situation has been deepened and widened to include, through imagery, overtones that suggest the death of a culture. It is evident that Melville must have become fully aware of the possibilities which imagery offered to condense his meaning into the conciseness of the short story. Where he had formerly achieved complexity by diffusion and deviation, he has now learned to compress his meaning into the concentrated form required of shorter fiction.

CHAPTER VI

"THE LIGHTNING-ROD MAN"

I

With "The Lightning-Rod Man" we come to one of Melville's more neglected stories. It might not be a very complex tale, but within the framework of the Piazza Tales it is nonetheless and interesting one. After all, it occupies now after the composition of "The Piazza" a central position (it came last in the tentative "'Benito Cereno' volume"), which leads us to suppose that through it the rearrangement of the collection supports some thought which "The Piazza" as prefatory matter suggests.

In addition, the story contains significant Piazza tale features. There is above all the dialectic pattern of two juxtaposed antipodal viewpoints--in other words, the so-called "piazza attitude" which creates its effects not by author identification but solely by contrast. We have found this pattern in "The Piazza" in the confrontation of the "day" and "night" view, in "Bartleby" in the contrast between Delano and the Don, and we also find it here in the juxtaposition of the cottager's trust with the salesman's fear. Thus, contrasted again are two attitudes towards a common issue, this time ostensibly the phenomenon of lightning which through imagery and allusion is widened to connote, as in Moby Dick and Clarel, the destructive force of some supernal power.[1]

There are other features which make this story distinctly a Piazza tale. There is for instance the presentation of the underlying outside

[1]See Oliver, Piazza Tales, p.240, n.146.3

reality as dark and threatening. We are never allowed to forget that the story action takes place during a savage thunderstorm, which is described in metaphors taken from warfare. And against this undeniable aggressive threat by what is understood to be some supernal power, the responses of both protagonists are, like those in other Piazza tales, inadequate, both that which attempts to "mediate between clay and sky" through advocating man's "abject submission" and "self-insulation"[2] and that which trusts so implicitly as to reject a genuine safety device. However, while the author's critical detachment from either view is throughout apparent, his sympathies are nonetheless decidedly with the cottager, while the lightning-rod man himself, as the target of an acerbic and acrid satire, is unredeemed by even the slightest notes of sympathy. He is, after all, Satan himself. This suggests that Melville felt even more intensely concerned with that issue which the salesman as "devil" represents than with those other contemporary issues which are made the butt of satiric attack in his other Piazza tales. This time, the allegorical extensions of the story indicate that the real object of the satire is that institution which through special laws and incantations attempts to mediate between "clay and sky" and to "avert the supernal bolt," i.e. the Church. On this the bulk of interpretations agree.[3] There is every indication to suppose that Melville's critical attitude towards the Church as an

[2]See Fogle, Shorter Tales, p.56.

[3]Supporting this view are Bowen, p.28; Ben D. Kimpel, "Melville's 'The Lightning-Rod Man,'" AL, XVI (March, 1944), 30-32; Leyda, Complete Stories, p.xxvii; Oliver, "Melville's 'Lightning-Rod Man,'" Philadelphia Forum, XXXV (June, 1956), 4-5, 17; and Eric Stockton, "A Commentary on Melville's 'The Lightning-Rod Man,'" Papers Michigan Academy, Science, Arts, Letters, XL (1955), 321-28.

institution had not abated.

Thus, we find again a familiar "Piazza" pattern insofar as another facet of Melville's contemporary society is ironically and critically exposed through a juxtaposition of two alternative attitudes, one which advocates man's self-insulation, the other his need for sociality. Like in other Piazza tales it is the latter value which determines the action of the story positively; however, this time, in this central sketch, the hearth values triumph and the devil is expelled.

II

Although there is general agreement that the tale is a religious satire, opinions differ on the question at whom in particular it was directed. Ben Kimpel, in his interpretation of the story in 1944, held that the whole of organized religion was under attack,[4] while Egbert Oliver advanced the view that the tale was directed solely against one cleric, the Reverend Mr. Todd of Pittsfield, a well-known hell-fire preacher. This preacher, known as the "Thunderer," had organized a fund-drive in 1851 for the construction of a new church, and it is probable that Melville was "assessed" for this in the usual fashion. Oliver's evidence for this reading is primarily external, apart from one incident in the story where the narrator refers to the lightning-rod man as "Jupiter Tonans" which Oliver deems aimed expressly at the Reverend Mr. Todd.[5] It must be noticed, however, that in the context of the story

[4] Kimpel, p.31.

[5] Oliver, "'Lightning-Rod Man,'" pp.4-5, and Piazza Tales, pp.238-39, n.142.2.

the reference to "Jupiter Tonans" is one among several which are not used to circumscribe the lightning-rod salesman but which evoke a different attitude towards the Eternal with which the lightning-rod man's attitude is critically juxtaposed. Rather than defining the salesman himself, allusions to "Jupiter Tonans," "Olympus" and "Acroceraunian Hills"[6] call to mind a different religion which is marked by neither trust nor fear, one which the lightning-rod man openly rejects as "pagan" (p.143). References to Greek mythology thus supply a critical backdrop to the lightning-rod man's solicitation by fear and evoke, as in "The Piazza" and "Bartleby," a different past with a healthier relationship with the Eternal.

Richard Chase's interpretation in his Melville monograph, while maintaining broadly the religious nature of the satire, introduces a new note. He sees in the story reflections of Melville's old Promethean quarrel with the Eternal or Zeus, but since the stress in his interpretation is Freudian the Promethean theme turns into a father-son conflict in which the lightning-rod itself is not a religious symbol but a sexual one, "a monstrous idol of paternity" which the narrator rejects.[7] Apart from this Freudian bias, an interesting point in Chase's interpretation is that he

[6]According to Oliver, Piazza Tales, p.238, n.141.2, the term "Acroceraunian" refers to "a section of Ancient Greece on the Adriatic Sea famous for its frequent and violent thunderstorms. It is not far from the seat of Jupiter; hence it is a suitable name for use in his story, with a Berkshire locale." Leyda, Complete Stories, p.xxvii, on the other hand sees in it a closer relationship with Mather's Magnalia, while Stockton, p.322, n.4, points out that the word simply means "thunder-heights" in Greek.

[7]Chase, pp.169-70. This Freudian interpretation is maintained by Hoyle, pp.149-51, who attributes autobiographical significance to it.

supports a statement which had been made by Kimpel and was again repeated by Eric Stockton, in 1955, namely that the story seems to signify a re-affirmation "with a positive explicitness hardly attempted in Redburn or White-Jacket."[8] Or in Kimpel's words: "Unless the story was written several years before its publication, it shows that Melville had moments of return to an uncertain and unorthodox but still firm and tranquil faith in a beneficent God."[9] This is a highly provocative statement since it ostensibly contradicts the usual evidence of Melville's religious scepticism in the years between Moby Dick and his pilgrimage to the Holy Land and is primarily due to the fact that Kimpel, Chase, and Stockton transfer unhesitatingly this religiously affirmative belief of the narrator to Melville himself. Yet I see little evidence that the first-person narrator is identifiable with the author. In Delano and in the narrator of "Bartleby" we had met before with an optimistic pose which was not the author's own but was structurally used as a relief or contrast. Stein comes as close as anyone in defining this problem of the I-narrators in Melville's stories when he speaks of them as "incorrigible tricksters" whose own optimistic commentaries run counter to the final effect which Melville communicates solely by means of imagery.[10] Since "The Lightning-Rod Man" is considered by the above-mentioned critics as an important "ray of light" during the "dark decade that witnessed the pessimism of Pierre ... and the misanthropy of The Confidence Man"[11] and a significant

[8] Chase, pp.169-70.

[9] Kimpel, p.32.

[10] Stein, "Comedy of Faith," p.323.

[11] See Stockton, p.321.

link in the development of Melville's religious thought as reflected in his works, the question must be answered whether Melville himself is behind the narrator as a believer in a beneficent Deity, or whether the total effect of the story, by action or imagery, does not subtly and ironically negate and contradict this optimism.

In 1955 Eric Stockton further varied the religious interpretation of "The Lightning-Rod Man" by suggesting that the salesman is Satan with his trident[12] who "stands for false, hidebound, unbenevolent Christianity in opposition to Christ's loving, non-dogmatic Gospel, represented by the cottager."[13] I agree that the lightning-rod man is Satan in disguise, as imagery in the sketch clearly suggests, and that the narrator shows himself to be an enemy of dogmatism, but this cannot be taken as proof that he upholds a "non-dogmatic Gospel." There is little mention of any Gospel, but in its stead a different set of values is put forward which, as will be shown later, is purely secular.

Another group of interpretations sees in the lightning-rod a symbol of man's progress against nature by scientific means.[14] This is no doubt the true nature of any lightning-rod, but to see therefore in Melville's lightning-rod <u>man</u> the caricature of a scientist would be equivalent to disregarding all the deliberate extensions of the central symbol in the story, and would furthermore disagree with other treatments of the scientist in Melville's fiction which deviate considerably in

[12] Stockton, p.322.

[13] Stockton, p.327.

[14] Hoffmann, "<u>Shorter Fiction</u>," pp.423-24, and Hoyle, p.149.

characteristics from the protagonist in this story. The scientist as a literary type is endowed--as one look at Bannadonna in "The Bell-Tower" will show--with fearlessness and reason and would hardly stoop to the emotional appeal to people's fears in the manner of the lightning-rod man. The confusion lies, I think, in Melville's use of an ambiguous symbol to be the carrier of his satire; such a symbol carries with it such strongly technological connotations that it cannot unequivocally be used to carry an allegorical meaning of a different nature. The important question of what the lightning-rod represents is only answered by the extensions of the central image within the framework of the story. And here pointers in the direction of religious use are unmistakable. "You pretended envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary to and from Jupiter Tonans, ... you mere man who come [sic] here to put you and your pipe-stem between clay and sky"--this points clearly to a religious allegory, in which the rod stands representative of orthodox religion which promises to "avert the supernal bolt" by belonging to the right kind of establishment, preferably by baptism: "I am better here and better wet ... it is the safest thing you can do" (p.146).

The basically religious nature of the allegory has been argued so convincingly by Kimpel, Oliver, and Stockton that in the following interpretation I shall focus on aspects ignored so far, in particular on the form and technique used, the general structure of the story, as well as on the important questions of what values the narrator has to set against those of the lightning-rod man and whether this story can be considered an affirmation of Melville's Christian belief in a benevolent Deity.

III

One of the reasons which might have impelled Kimpel, Chase, and Stockton to assume that the narrator of this story is Melville himself is probably the fact that Melville uses as frame of the story an autobiographical incident. According to his great-niece, Mrs. Helen Morewood, a lightning-rod salesman who chose times of storm for his visits did call on Melville in 1853, a fact verified by Leyda, who also points out that the Berkshires at that time were the target of an extensive sales campaign for lightning-rods, "with advertisements and warnings and editorials on the subject in all the Berkshire papers."[15] Leyda, furthermore, suggests an answer to the question of what might have stimulated the transference of the factual visit into a religious allegory by pointing out that at roughly the same time the Pittsfield Library Association had purchased Cotton Mather's Magnalia Christi Americana, with which Melville was most likely familiar and which later was also available in his own Arrowhead library.[16] The particular passage which, according to Leyda, establishes the inner link between the Magnalia and "The Lightning-Rod Man" is to be found in Book Six, Chapter Three, headed "Ceraunius. Relating remarkables done by thunder," which contains the following admonition:

> IV. A fourth voice of the glorious God in the thunder, is make your peace with God immediately, lest by the stroke of his thunder he take you away in his wrath.

This is a position which the lightning-rod man himself seems to represent, his particular brand of Puritanism specified by his rejection of bells

[15] Leyda, Complete Stories, pp.xxvi-xxvii.

[16] Ibid.

(p.145) and his exploitation of fear which appear reminiscent of Jonathan Edward's "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God":

> You hang by a slender thread, with the flames of divine wrath flashing about it, and ready every moment to singe it and burn it asunder; and you have no interest in any Mediator, and nothing to lay hold of to save yourself.[17]

So far, all that can be claimed is that Melville in this story made use of some personal experience. But in all other respects, it seems as if Melville had deliberately dispelled the notion that he and the cottager were one and the same person. In "The Piazza" Melville had used his own house and his own piazza with its view of Mount Greylock as the setting of his story; here, in "The Lightning-Rod Man" the setting is deliberately changed. Not only is the name of Mount Greylock, which appeared in the magazine version, in the book version replaced by "Mount Olympus," but also the house itself, one-storied and low, with a shingled roof, up in the mountains, is certainly not Arrowhead in the outskirts of Pittsfield, which Melville used as "mansion" in Pierre, in "I and My Chimney" and "The Apple-Tree Table" as a two-storied, expansive house, and which we find similarly described in Smith's History of Pittsfield. After all, the cottage in "The Lightning-Rod Man" is so small that "one rod will answer for it"; yet, within the framework of the story the diminution of the house is artistically a happy choice, because it enhances the theme of the wilful arbitrariness of a destructive elemental force against which man is helpless and minute. Melville's own experience and background thus are only the raw-material which is converted and transformed to fulfil a

[17]Clarence H. Faust and Thomas H. Johnson (eds.), Jonathan Edwards: Representative Selections ... (New York, 1935), p.165.

function in the inner order of the story, and house, setting, the lightning-rod campaign, and the salesman himself (as will be seen shortly) are artistically transformed into carriers of symbolic meanings. Against the violence of the storm, the diminutive cottage among the "Acroceraunian Hills" focuses the reader's mind on the universal question of what safeguards man has against the encroachments of some superior, here destructive, force. After all, the framing event which gives the story unity is the thunderstorm; with it the story begins and ends. Thunder is thus the thematic leitmotif which provides not only the outer setting of the storm but the inner link in the allegory, as it is against the thunder as emanation of a supernal power that each speaker's attitude becomes significant. Throughout the story, thunder is a constant reminder of an outer force which despite all protestations to the contrary cannot be averted by man. As such the function of thunder is similar to the rhythmic sounds of the hatchet-polishers in "Benito Cereno," because both provide a background of sinister foreboding and an atmosphere of danger. Against this background of a destructive and arbitrary force the dialogue between salesman and narrator gains an added meaning, the one the representative of "mediation," the other the representative of "self-reliance."

The story thus opens with a triangular relationship. The important inner point of reference for both the salesman's and the cottager's attitudes is the undeniable existence of an outer destructive force, a fact with which both attempt to cope in different ways. The one confronts fatalistically, from what he considers the safety of his hearth, the attack of outer forces which comes "like a charge of spear-points", while the other claims to be able with his rod to avert the supernal bolt altogether. This is the situation with which the story, or rather the conversation,

opens, so that already in the first few paragraphs the central theme of the allegory is introduced: thunder as the emanation of a supernal power, and hearth and lightning-rod as representing alternative attitudes towards it. Trust or fear; self-reliance and comradeship or the mediation of an outside agent: this is the choice which the subsequent conversation elaborates. This basic situation of man against forces of destiny recalls Ahab's defiance in a similar situation in a thunderstorm, in "The Candles" chapter in Moby Dick, where Ahab seizes defiantly the rod's "tapering white flames" and challenges the Deity or power behind the lightning and thunder with "I own thy speechless, placeless power; but to the last gasp of my earthquake life will dispute its unconditional, unintegral mastery in me."[18] Here, in "The Lightning-Rod Man," this note of defiance has disappeared while an even more significant development lies in the change of viewpoint as reflected by the form: instead of Ahab's monologue hurled in defiance against the "mere supernal power" which remains unanswered, the story of the lightning-rod man is presented in the form of a dialogue which is not addressed to the power in question but develops two alternative attitudes towards it. Thus we can say that while the decisive relationship in "The Candles" chapter is a vertical one, symbolized visually by Ahab's seizing the rod-links which connect with the burning masts, the highest elevation of the ship, in "The Lightning-Rod Man" the important dimension is the horizontal one.[19] The "speechless power" is no longer addressed, and the monologue hurled in

[18] Moby Dick, CXIX, p.500.

[19] This horizontal emphasis of the house is in a later story, in "I and My Chimney," considered a distinct advantage and a source of pride. See Complete Stories, p.380.

defiance against it is replaced by a dialogue in which thunder is only the actual and thematic background which gives meaning to it.

This brings us to the observation that Melville uses in this story a form which is not a conventional one in the history of the short story of his time insofar as the story itself relies to a considerable extent on dialogue, with very few narrative interpolations. As pointed out earlier, Melville's skilful use of language and technical devices has generally not been appreciated until recent times so that it deserves mention more than once that Melville did not slavishly imitate the Hawthornean type of short story but was keen to experiment.[20] In "The Piazza" we noticed the sudden but functional shift of narrative pace from the descriptive, symbolic style in the first half to the terse and prosaic dialogue in the latter half, which there emphasizes the anticlimactic nature of the meeting; in "Benito Cereno" there is a similar change in style and pace in Delano's and Don Benito's version of the events on board ship--all changes of narrative pace and techniques which contribute towards the final impact and meaning of the stories. Here in "The Lightning-Rod Man," too, Melville seems to experiment with form by deviating considerably from the established pattern of the short story. He condenses a dialectic structural pattern into a dramatic dialogue which he

[20]Hoffmann, "Short Novel," pp.140-41, comes to the conclusion that "Hawthorne's influence on Melville as a writer was not in the direction of imitation but rather in the stimulation and example provided." He emphasizes in particular Melville's struggle to achieve a consistent point of view, a problem with which Hawthorne was not particularly concerned but which was to absorb James and Conrad. Hoffmann's conclusion is that the narrator of "Bartleby" anticipates the central observer in James' novels as well as Conrad's Marlow.

uses with few narrative links and which he compresses into the short duration of a thunderstorm. In this, Melville clearly moved away from the accepted type of short story towards techniques which were later perfected by writers such as Maupassant, Otto Ludwig, and Henry James. In particular, we ought to note that in "The Lightning-Rod Man" Melville was experimenting with a technique which in the twentieth century was to become an accepted short story device for the objective presentation of character, the "dialogue story," of which Hemingway's "The Killers" is one of the most famous examples. Already in Melville's dialogue story the emphasis lies on the objective rendering of attitudes towards destruction and death, which are as unavoidable as in Hemingway's story. But while Melville's attempt at objectivity might foreshadow the twentieth century, the attitudes which are thus presented are still important primarily for their representative qualities and not for their deeply personal responses. Like Hawthorne, Melville is not so much interested in the characters themselves as in the ideas for which they stand. As in other Piazza tales, these ideas are diametrically opposed, but in "The Lightning-Rod Man" the protagonists which represent them act out their essential difference without the mediatorship of a neutral recording mind. Inner tension, without which no narrative form can exist, is thus shifted away from its conventional carrier, plot and action, to other functional elements in the story; the story loses its traditional "tale" character and begins to evolve into that indescribable elusive genre, the "short story," which so far has defied all critical definitions or genre theories. In this connection it will be interesting to observe in the next chapter by what means Melville introduces tension into the motionless descriptive sketches of "The Encantadas."

As mentioned earlier, the narrative core in this dialogue story is very small and is mostly contained in the first three and the last three paragraphs, which are important primarily in setting the tone. Here we find the references to Greek mythology which, as mentioned earlier, evoke a timeless landscape which is famous for its exposure to thunderbolts hurled by Jupiter. And here we find the description of the salesman who likewise has lost all individual characteristics for the sake of allegorical extension:

> The stranger still stood in the exact middle of the cottage, where he had first planted himself. His singularity impelled a closer scrutiny. A lean, gloomy figure. Hair dark and lank, mattedly streaked over his brow. His sunken pitfalls of eyes were ringed by indigo halos, and played with an innocuous sort of lighting: the gleam without the bolt. (P.141.)

It is important to note that in this description individual qualities are completely lacking and that in the salesman two conventional figures of folk literature fuse, the typically Yankee pedlar, lean, the solitary traveller who shuns company except for gain, and the devil with his trident who tricks or tempts the unsuspecting to surrender to him their souls. Constance Rourke, who in her book on American Humor points to Melville's indebtedness to recurrent folk themes and characters,[21] ignores this further instance of obligation which Melville has used here with artistic purpose. By using established types he widens the scope of his satire without need of explicit elaboration,[22] and furthermore, by using

[21] Constance Rourke, American Humor (New York, 1931), pp.191-200.

[22] There is another interesting note connected with this Yankee salesman. By describing him in the conventional pedlar terms and by making him warn in his last speech against the "lonely Kentuckian plowing his land," Melville contrasts two conventional types of the American as they appear in the comic literature of his day with the evident intention of disparaging the American as salesman. Here is another instance where the

this combination of Yankee peddlar and devil as the mouthpiece of views representative of an established church, in particular that of the Calvinists, he changes the satiric sketch into a scathing attack so that it seems strange that it passed the censorship of Putnam's careful editorial staff. Either the satire was not fully understood, or the issue of Calvinism was not felt to be as sacrosanct as that of the socialite Unitarian Grace Church in New York, which had been the target of Melville's satiric attack in "Temple First," which had not "passed muster" only three months previously.

With the first few introductory narrative paragraphs, the allegorical intent is implied, the satire launched and then fully developed by the ensuing conversation. Visually, the basic disagreement between narrator and salesman in their attitudes towards thunder and lightning is expressed by their positions in the room which each maintains without compromise: the cottager will not budge from his hearth nor can the salesman be induced to leave the middle of the room. In this story there is no approach--a fact which is emphasized by the drift of conversation which shows a steady transition from alienation to vituperation, ending in the physical violence of "he sprang upon me; his tri-forked thing at my heart!"[23]

Western frontiersman is favourably portrayed by Melville and this time set off in ironic contrast against the Eastern Yankee peddlar, the slick salesman. The Kentuckian is nearly as gigantic as the "tall tale" made him, but the lank salesman, Sam Slick, has lost all lovable qualities and, by fusing with the image of Satan, has turned into a warning foreboding of America's Wall-street culture. He is one of the first critically satiric portraits of the American salesman, symbol of modern America.

[23]Concerning the significance of the devil's attack aimed at the heart, see Oliver, Piazza Tales, p.238, n.141.2

Thus, in the structural pattern of "The Lightning-Rod Man" the little notes of compromise and approach which in "The Piazza," "Bartleby," and "Benito Cereno" give tension to the plot are completely lacking, while the lightning-rod man himself is not touched by the softness which redeems other defaulters in Melville's Piazza tales, such as the lawyer or Delano.

If the salesman as devil can be taken to represent certain aspects of the Church, then his salestalk reveals at which of these aspects the satire is directed. There is, first of all, the fact that the mediator "between clay and sky" has adopted a genuine article, a security device as the lightning-rod essentially is, but uses it now for his own personal gain. Furthermore, he bargains for the narrator's soul and money not, as in the conventional devil story, with the promise of knowledge or riches but with the promise of personal security--a twist which throws an interesting sidelight on the shift of values satirized. As mediator between God and man, he offers security and life by means of a rod which only he sells. In this he follows the ways of established religions which assume and preach that only their method of salvation is right. Thus, sanctimonious intolerance for the sake of profit is the attitude satirized through the salesman's disparagement of other rods and other techniques of affixing them.[24]

[24]At this stage we encounter a curious passage (referring to the foolish Canadians who "knob the rod at the top, which risks a deadly explosion"[p.144]), which so far has been explained only as a wry dig at Catholicism (see Oliver, Piazza Tales, p.240, n.143.39). It seems to me, however, that this "knob" could also be taken to contain a reference to the "knob controversy" which at one time rocked the Royal Society. In 1772, Franklin, with other members of the Royal Society, served on a committee which recommended his pointed rods for the powder magazine at Purfleet. One member, Benjamin Wilson, however, dissented and carried on a paper war

Another barb of the satire is directed at the pedlar's method of snatching up a sale by the evocation of fear, which recalls the hell-fire preaching of Edwards and the Revivalists with which Melville no doubt was familiar.

> Only twenty dollars, sir--a dollar a foot. Hark!--Dreadful!--Will you order? Will you buy? Shall I put down your name? Think of being a heap of charred offal, like a haltered horse burnt in his stall; and all in one flash! (P.147.)

This passage is clearly reminiscent of arguments used by Edwards in, for instance, the above quoted passage from "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God."

Up to this point the conversation is marked by a growing hostility. But that part of the sales program which most arouses the cottager's ire is not so much connected with the sale of the lightning-rod itself but with the salesman's admonition that man should avoid man, in particular "tall men," in other words, all those of independent spirit such as the lonely Kentuckians, the mountaineers, and truthseekers who are particularly exposed. This recalls Melville's bitter satire in Mardi of the priest Aleema who, in a similar fashion, was willing to sacrifice Yillah or "truth,"[25] and it seems that Melville's criticism of religion as an intellectually restrictive establishment has little abated, indeed. However, this time in "The

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advocating blunt rods instead. With the outbreak of the American War, George the Third ordered Franklin's "points" replaced by "Wilson's knobs." (See Verner W. Crane, Benjamin Franklin and a Rising People [Boston, 1954]). Interpreted in this way, the barb could also be political: Canada's political loyalty to the British Crown would indeed, if carried over into the scientific field, risk a "deadly explosion." As noticed previously, Melville's patriotism appears in most unsuspected places.

[25] Mardi, XII, p.161. See also Braswell, pp.91-92.

Lightning-Rod Man" the emphasis has shifted, and the narrator's horror of the "man avoid man" policy reveals that the emphasis lies now on the theme of self-insulation versus "sociality." "'Do I dream? Man avoid man? and in danger-time, too!'" Here is the inner climax of the story, since from here onwards the salesman begins to reveal to the cottager his true nature. It is at a point where he advocates isolation coupled with fear and intellectual restrictions that the narrator sees him for what he is, both a "pretended envoy extraordinary ... to and from Jupiter Tonans" and Satan:

> The scowl grew blacker on his face; the indigo-circles enlarged round his eyes as the storm-rings round the midnight moon. He sprang upon me; his tri-forked thing at my heart. (P.148.)

Thus, if the lawyer in "Bartleby" represents decadence in the moral sphere, then the lightning-rod man in his fraudulence reveals a similar decline in the sphere of religion which not only has lost all sacramental function of averting "the supernal bolt" but magnifies man's vulnerability by burdening him with restrictions which threaten his very humanity, his last stronghold, in particular his thirst for truth and his bonds with others. As a protective institution, religion as presented by the lightning-rod man has not only failed but is in itself destructive, i.e. evil. As the narrator comes to realize, the salesman is Satan.

IV

Since from the viewpoint of form the structure of the story is an extended dialogue, in which two attitudes are juxtaposed without interference by a third mediating agent, we come to the important question of what values the cottager has to set against those of the lightning-rod man.

It has been maintained by Stockton that the cottager adheres to "Christ's non-dogmatic, loving gospel,"[26] but this does not explain the narrator's recurrent reference to Greek mythology nor his rejection of the rod with the man, in other words, his rejection of any mediation between clay and sky, man and God. I would rather say that in the narrator's attitude and in particular in his position on the hearth a different set of humanitarian values is used which appear as positive determinants of action in other Piazza tales, namely man's sociality and his bonds with his fellow-men. In a world which has been proven transcendentally opaque, these are the only values on which man can depend, despite the repeated warnings by the salesman, i.e. the Church. I therefore do not agree with Stockton's conclusion that this story is an "affirmation of New Testament Christianity";[27] after all, the cottager refuses to buy the rod, in other words, any mediation between God and man. Rather the emphasis lies on those humanitarian values which are also found in other Piazza tales, brotherhood, sociality, and friendship, which are summarized in the introduction in the love-quest for Una, and which in this story are ultimately responsible for the expulsion of the devil.

Once again, as in the Don's sacrificial leap for the sake of friendship, a "hearth" value[28] has thus become a positive determinant of action. But this time there is no reversal as in "Benito Cereno," and the story ends happily, confirming that here in the central sketch the notes

[26] Stockton, p.327.

[27] Ibid., p.322.

[28] According to Oliver, Piazza Tales, p.238, n.141.2, "the hearthstone, the fireplace, and the rush-bottomed arm-chair are symbols of home-like comfort and domesticity contrasting with the uneasy fear of the Lightning-Rod man." See also Sealts, "Herman Melville's 'I and My Chimney,'" AL, XIII (May, 1941), 142-54.

of hope of the cycle climax. Here the devil is unmasked and expelled for his very "man-avoid-man" policy through the narrator's firm belief in men's brotherhood, recurrently presented in all Piazza tales as man's last mainstay. If, as suggested earlier, the arrangement of the tales follows the indications of "The Piazza," then the transference of "The Lightning-Rod Man" from last to central position has a significance. I suggest, it lies in the fact that here the hearth values, which are important positive determinants in all Piazza tales, are truly successful (although the last paragraph shows that the "success" is with the cottager alone. His neighbours remain unconverted). Thus, the central sketch is equivalent to the "spot of radiance" in "The Piazza"--a ray of hope which, however, similar to the introduction is in the sequence of the cycle followed by the gloomy pictures of a different reality.

Apart from its significance as the climax story of the cycle "The Lightning-Rod Man" also seems to mark an important turning point in Melville's short story career if we bear the chronology of composition in mind. "Bartleby," Melville's earliest short story, was still written under the shadow of the seeker and had little that is positive to offer; "The Encantadas," the next in chronological sequence, are primarily bleak and negative despite the overly optimistic tone of the narrator (and the possibility of an escape into a mixed world or into doubtful commitments); but with "The Lightning-Rod Man," written probably in the spring of 1854, a new set of values begins to emerge which is finally gathered into the key theme of the introductory sketch itself, into the search for love, unity, and understanding, unfortunately (and this again two years later) ending in frustration. It seems as if Melville's symbolic journey in "The Piazza" followed this pattern of hope and disillusionment.

V

To return to the important issue, raised at the beginning of this chapter, of whether there is apparent in the story a "tranquil faith in a beneficent God," not as far as the narrator is concerned since this is indisputably so, but as far as the author himself is concerned. It is true that the narrator avows that he stands "at ease in the hands of my God," but there is little evidence which might suggest that the cottager is here the mouthpiece of the author. It seems to me rather that in this tale, too, we can find a dialectic structure, reminiscent of other Piazza tales, whereby the narrator's attitude is but the antithesis of the protagonist's and fails to see reality whole. The author gives life to both but is identifiable with neither.

There is, above all, the fact that the narrator is a cottager, and that his hut up in the mountains is not Melville's own expansive house. Next, there is the evidence of the background theme of arbitrary destruction which devalues the cottager's trust. After all, the accompanying background pattern is the thunderstorm, and we are continually reminded of its arbitrary destructiveness; it strikes the steeple, the big elm, the assembly-room cupola, and the praying servant-girl. This is the reality of the story against which the affirmative belief of the cottager in a benevolent Deity jars, reminiscent of Delano's belief in benevolence in a similar situation where underneath the deceptively blue skies the reality described is honeycombed by destructive evil. Even if "the scroll of the storm is rolled back; the house is unharmed; and in the blue heavens I read in the rainbow, that the Deity will not, of purpose, make war on man's earth" (p.148). Blue skies,

too, can kill as we understand from "Bartleby," where a man "pipe in mouth, was killed one cloudless afternoon long ago in Virginia, by summer lightning; at his own warm open window he was killed, and remained leaning out there upon the dreamy afternoon, till some one touched him, when he fell" (p.41).

Further to consider is the imagery, which refers the situation of the story back to an antique setting where the thunderer is "Jupiter Tonans" and the landscape the "Acroceraunian Hills." This means that against the salesman's advocacy of "mediation" between God and man, a relationship is evoked which has a different understanding of God, not as a morally purposeful agent but as an embodiment of natural forces towards which neither trust nor fear are appropriate. With this interpretation of the "thunderer" the impact of the story agrees. Thunder, as the story indicates, is a force of nature, destructive, yes, but behind it there is neither the salesman's angry God nor the cottager's benevolent Deity in whose hands man rests secure. The wall of appearances is blank, and it is misleading to conclude from natural occurrences and phenomena to the existence of a personal, purposeful God, whether angry or benevolent. As Melville stated in Pierre:

> Say what some poets will, Nature is not so much her own ever-sweet interpreter, as the mere supplier of that cunning alphabet, whereby selecting and combining as he pleases, each man reads his own peculiar lesson according to his own peculiar mind and mood.[29]

Interpreted in this way, "The Lightning-Rod Man" seems to agree with the general trend of Melville's religious thought. Melville, after all, has a "quarrel with God," although it is probably not as systematic as

[29] Pierre, p.402.

Lawrance Thompson sees it, and he is an "accuser of Deity," as Braswell has convincingly shown. In Moby Dick he rebels against the doctrine of a benevolent Deity,[30] and in Pierre there is a passage which seems like an ironic extension of the cottager's "I stand at ease in the hands of my God":

> But it is not merely the Finger, it is the whole outspread Hand of God; for doth not Scripture intimate that He holdeth all of us in the hollow of His hand? - a Hollow, truly! [italics mine].[31]

With this acerbic note The Confidence Man still agrees, by ending with a Swiftian joke on the theme of the very Providence in which the cottager so trustingly believes. There, instead of the lightning-rod, a "brown stool with a curved tin compartment underneath" is used as "life-preserver," recommended to the frightened old man by the Cosmopolitan in the following words:

> "I think that in case of a wreck, barring sharp-pointed timbers, you could have confidence in that stool for a special providence."
>
> "Then, good-night, good-night; and Providence have both of us in its good keeping."[32]

However, a final question remains to be asked: if there is evidence of detachment from the cottager's belief in a benevolent Deity, does this also apply to the other views of the cottager, in particular those symbolized by his position near the hearth? In this respect it is important that the Satanic qualities of the salesman are revealed at a moment when he advocates man's self-insulation ("but of all things, I avoid

[30] See Braswell, p.76.

[31] Pierre, p.164.

[32] The Confidence Man, p.285.

tall men"), so that, by contrast, the views which make the cottager expel the "devil" become salutary. Thus, while the cottager, like other optimists in the Piazza Tales, might not be fully aware of the comprehensive existence of evil, nevertheless his belief in the brotherhood of men is more salutary than the opposite attitude of distrust and fear. And since the hearth is associated throughout with this positive attitude of the narrator, it suggests distinctly a hope; a hope, however, not of being able to "avert the supernal bolt" but of enduring and sustaining it. With this thought, the other Piazza tales agree. In "The Piazza" there are the Hearth Stones with their associations of sociality and the love motif connected with the "spot of radiance," while each positive symbol of the following tales seems but a variation on this theme, such as the sociality of the clerks in "Bartleby," and the image of the handclasp in "Benito Cereno." Furthermore it can be observed that the development of these positive symbols is accompanied by a growing disapprobation of any absolutist isolato attitude, beginning with the description of Bartleby's disruptive effect and ending with the unsympathetic portraits of Oberlus, the "hermit," and of Bannadonna. It is true that both "types" have their shortcomings--the commonplace and friendly might be capable of action but lack the necessary insight, while the absolutist isolato, who might rightly be aware of a "dark" reality, is hopelessly inadequate to cope with it--but it is nonetheless important to note that in all Piazza tales approval is meted out to Melville's protagonists in proportion to their sociality. Thus, we can say that although the cottager's trusting belief in a beneficent Deity evinces an obtuseness similar to Delano's equally optimistic belief, and by the drift of the story it is revealed as such, his position on the hearth, i.e. his adherence to the principle of

sociality is not touched with any criticism or scepticism. Full approval is still given to those values which develop man's humanity, the immanent values of the hearth rather than the transcendent religious ones of the lightning-rod man.

CHAPTER VII

"THE ENCANTADAS"

I

Within the unit of the Piazza Tales the series of sketches called "The Encantadas" seems to fit less easily into any pattern than the other tales. It does not have the concise structure of other Piazza tales with their antipodal juxtaposition but seems on the surface a loosely assembled collection of sketches, which have little in common with each other but their subject matter and little in common with other Piazza tales. Yet this apparent lack of cohesion is deceptive, and underneath the variety of stories from island lore, travelogues, and sailor-yarns a pattern can be observed which shows that "The Encantadas" are marked by significant "piazza" features. It must, however, be noted that due to the nature of the Piazza Tales as a collection of all of Melville's Putnam's stories published up to the issue of the collection not all stories can be expected to fit the general pattern without exception. Thus, the fact that "The Encantadas" deviates to some extent from the general pattern does not necessarily detract from those unifying features which "The Piazza" emphasizes. The collection, after all, was an afterthought, but although "The Encantadas" seems to stand apart, the place it was given within the cycle shows that Melville attempted to incorporate it fully in his overall plan. Coming after "The Lightning-Rod Man," it suggests an anticlimax like that of "The Piazza," where Melville adopted a similar pattern of excited, then disappointed, hope. After the notes of cautious optimism with which "The Lightning-Rod Man" leaves us, the impact which the arid Encantadas make is all the stronger. In "The Encantadas," and

more so in "The Bell-Tower," there are few notes of hope left.

The main feature which links "The Encantadas" to the cycle is the presentation of a dark and evil reality which, like the image of the Chinese creeper in "The Piazza," reveals that evil is to be found in the very heart of creation. According to Melville, the Encantadas are "Tartarus," but this time hell is a real place, its own centre situated on the Equator, which in Melville's symbology as explained in Moby Dick signifies "the middle of the world."[1] This time, evil and hostile reality, which in other Piazza tales furnishes an important background theme, has moved into the foreground. But while in other Piazza tales evil is seen as the outcome of a particular modern or historical situation, here in "The Encantadas" Melville's picture of evil is rounded out by the inclusion of evil as a primal supra-human force, which does not seem attributable to any human action but is accounted for in religion and folklore in the figures of the witch, the sorcerer, or the demon, all terms which are used in "The Encantadas" in connection with the landscape's evil enchantment.

Another feature which establishes links with other Piazza tales is the projection of the island world against a different healthier past, which helps to create the impression of the Encantadas as a modern wasteland. As in "The Piazza," this is done through introductory mottoes and literary allusions from Spenser, Milton, and Dante, which give each realistically observed detail a moral significance, because against their morally unequivocal worlds with the final victory of good, the Encantadas

[1] Moby Dick, XCIX, p.428.

seem all the more hopeless and lost. As in other instances in the Piazza Tales (in "Bartleby," in the hallowed, now decaying office of Master of Chancery; in "The Lightning-Rod Man," in the different relationship towards the Eternal as symbolized by Greek mythology; and in "The Piazza," in Spenser's successful quest for Una and Fidele's resurrection in Cymbeline), this projection against a healthier past emphasizes a situation of modern failure.

Another feature to consider is the "piazza attitude" of Melville's artistic detachment from the fictional world he presents. Again we find a first-person narrator, this time a young sailor,[2] whose optimistic comments jar with the description of the place and its imaginative extensions, similar to those of Delano and the cottager.[3] There is, for instance, the narrator's widely discussed comment that "the tortoise is both black and bright," which is usually interpreted as an indication of Melville's own basic optimism. Yet, as Stein notices, there is here, as in other Piazza tales, an ironic incongruity between the narrator's commentary and the essence of the narrative. Only by "turning the tortoise from its natural position, so as to hide the darker and expose the livelier aspects," i.e. only by a forced reversal of the natural order

[2]If the sailor-narrator is Melville at all, then it is the young Melville who did visit the Galapagos on his first South Sea cruise on the Acushnet.

[3]Melville must have experienced here a particular difficulty, because his first-person narrator had to play two roles. He was not only the optimistic young man but also the wise transmitter of all symbolic extensions in the descriptions. Thus, when we say that there is a noticeable discrepancy between the narrator's response and the purport of reality, we must be aware (a particular difficulty here) that this reality with all its symbolic extensions is after all described to us by the same man.

--which, by the way, would kill the tortoises since they lack the "possibility of their recovering themselves" (p.154)--can the bright side be made visible. Stein, in this context, accuses Melville of ironically tricking his readers.[4] However, while I basically agree with Stein about the ironic incongruity between description and narrator's response, I see the function of the narrator differently. He seems less a "deliberate trickster" than a means of introducing tension into the inner dynamics of the cycle. Here, too, Melville seems to have employed the basic device of his other Piazza tales of introducing tension by incongruity of viewpoint rather than by action. Again the narrator is the myopic optimist, who is disinclined to draw conclusions from what he sees and prefers to treat it in the manner described: "I sat down with my shipmates, and made a merry repast from tortoise steaks and tortoise stews" (p.157). Clearly to the narrator the tortoise is neither the embodiment of wicked sea-officers in penal metamorphosis, nor a sacred avatar of Vishnu, on which, according to Hindoo mythology, man's "total sphere" is planted (p.155). Thus here, as in other Piazza tales, humour is derived from the incongruity between the narrator's response (of making a "merry repast" from the mythopoeic tortoises) and the impregnations of reality which, in the fictional context of each story and sketch, is presented as predominantly dark. Melville's technique could be described in the following manner: as in "The Piazza," the dark view is the true one, rendered here in descriptions rich in imagery which widens their scope and application; but in the manner of other Piazza tales, this dark view is contrasted with a "brighter" one, that of the narrator, whose interspersed

[4] Stein, "Comedy of Faith," pp.322-23.

commentary is not always in keeping with the impact the descriptions make and sometimes, as in the tortoise commentary, in direct opposition to it. Juxtaposed are thus the gloomy portrayal of a real Hell and the optimistic reaction of the sailor-narrator who is external to the curse and enchantment of the Encantadas and who has therefore the important function of introducing relief and contrast into the basically static pictures of unmitigated gloom and desolation. Again, as in "The Lightning-Rod Man," tension is introduced through internal contrast rather than through action or plot.

II

Although "The Encantadas" series has always appealed to its readers, it seems to have baffled critics, and although it ranks highly in general accounts for its "graphic" descriptive power and its haunting atmosphere,[5] few interpretations have been attempted. In general it can be said that the critical issues discussed fall into three groups: there is the concern with Melville's sources; there is the issue of Melville's approximation to a basically "naturalist" attitude; and there is last the question of unity in the cycle.

Thanks to the studies by Russell Thomas, Howard, and Victor von Hagen the immediate sources of all sketches (except that of the Chola widow) and of all mottoes (except the second epigraph of Sketch Six) have been identified.[6] All except three mottoes are taken from Spenser, while

[5]For early reviews, see Hetherington, pp.248-55. Other general or casual mentioned in Chase, pp.210-13; Hoffmann, "Shorter Fiction," pp. 422-23; Howard, Melville, pp.209-13; Lacy, pp.102-3; Mason, pp.188-90; Mumford, pp.239-40; and Winters, pp.222-23.

[6]Howard, "Melville and Spenser--A Note on Criticism," MLN, XLVI

extensive textual borrowings are made (and admitted by Melville) from the travelogues by Cowley the buccaneer, Colnett the whaling-ground explorer, and Captain Porter the American Post Captain.[7] Yet while passages have been identified and in the case of the textual sources been assessed by Thomas from the viewpoint of Melville's artistry in converting his factual source material,[8] nothing has been done to investigate the thematic implications of these borrowings. What exactly is their function?

Basically, I suggest, they achieve two purposes. While the literary allusions to Spenser (as well as to Milton and Dante) help to make it clear that the desolation of the Encantadas connotes the spiritual-moral desolation of a modern inferno, the factual borrowings with open reference to other travellers emphasize that this Hell is a real place, which Melville takes trouble to place within the framework of time and space. The islands, we are made to understand, are some six hundred miles off the South American continent ("this Rock being just about on the parallel of Quito"), and their history is one of a continuous relationship with the outside world: they were discovered at a time when the human mind was freed from the trammels of superstition, and through the buccaneers and the U. S.

(May, 1931), 291-92; Russell Thomas, "Melville's Use of Some Sources in 'The Encantadas,'" AL, III (January, 1932), 432-56; and Victor W. von Hagen (ed.), The Encantadas; or Enchanted Isles (Burlingame, Calif., 1940) pp. 101-13.

[7] Cowley's account can be found in vol.IV of Dampier's Collection of Voyages (4 vols.; London, 1729). See also James Colnett, A Voyage to the South Atlantic and Round Cape Horn ... (London, 1798), and David Porter, Journal of a Cruise Made to the Pacific Ocean ... (New York, 1822).

[8] Thomas, p.456: "He has touched most of them with a magic wand. For such artistry one can condone somewhat his failure to indicate all his sources."

Frigate Essex they are linked with important events in human history (wars against the two old "established" Empires of Spain and Britain). At the same time, however, these sketches are imaginatively transformed to symbolize a spiritual fact. At the same time as the Encantadas are seen in relation to the real outside world, they are, on a symbolic level, placed in perspective by references, in descending order, to literature (Milton, Spenser, and Dante), mythology (the Hindoo tortoise as an avatar of Vishnu), and an urwelt (its ante-diluvian creatures and the volcano), each of these levels proclaiming the existence and victory of a primal evil force. Thus, the function of "The Encantadas" is twofold: it recreates a real world by means of descriptions, geographical data, historical facts, references to other travellers' accounts, and a collection of legends connected with the islands; but it also translates these realistic facts into spiritual ones by emphasizing the leitmotif of the cycle "enchantment," which, in the context of the sketches, signifies the omnipotence of evil. Hell is thus placed in the real world, in its centre to be exact, and is a real world itself, one which we cannot dismiss as superstition. It was, after all, discovered "by boldly venturing the experiment ... of standing broad out from land" and by ignoring "superstitious conceits" (p.164). It is not a hell which can be neatly stacked away into the underworld, but it belongs to the real world. Like the white worms in the centre of the Chinese creeper in "The Piazza," it is found in its very centre.

Apart from this general function of the literary allusions and borrowings from factual narratives, the Spenser quotations merit closer attention for their role in the development of the theme of evil. This, however, will be discussed at a later stage.

The second issue in the criticism of "The Encantadas" is the claim that Melville's intellectual development leads towards naturalism, of which "The Encantadas" give evidence. This issue was raised by Lanzinger in his study of Melville's primitivism, and Stern, in his massive book on elements of philosophic naturalism in Melville's work, would seem to concur, although he does not include any of Melville's short stories in his analysis. Seeing that the development of indigenous forms in American fiction is a subject which has lately risen into prominence,[9] this claim of Melville's naturalism is important and deserves clarification, especially in the case of "The Encantadas," because here the setting has, after all, assumed a leading role, so that in one sense the allegation seems justified. There are here important correlatives between man and nature captured in the term "enchantment," which direct man's life and not simply his moods or states of mind as in the romantic Gothic novel, which by one critic is seen responsible for the atmosphere of the Encantadas landscape.[10] It must be admitted that in the case of the Dog-King and Oberlus environment is a massive determinant over which the individual has little control, similar to the concept of destiny embodied in Hardy's Egdon Heath. Thus, the strange tragic events in the second half of the cycle can all be imputed to the "enchantment" of man's environment, so that the relationship between character and setting seems to approach what Erich Auerbach in his Mimesis (in reference to French literature of the latter half of the century) calls

[9]See Bewley, as well as Edwin T. Bowden, The Dungeon of the Heart: Human Isolation and the American Novel (New York, 1961); Chase, The American Novel and Its Tradition (London, 1958); Leslie A. Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel (New York, 1960); and Harry Levin, The Power of Blackness (New York, 1958).

[10]Heinz Kosok, "Die Bedeutung der Gothic Novel für das Erzählwerk Herman Melvilles," Britannica et Americana, XII (1963), 51-2.

atmosphärischer Realismus, i.e. the presentation of man and his milieu as a close-knit demonic unity with complete loss of self-determination.[11] Admittedly, it would be an exaggeration to apply this same term fully to Melville's technique, to see in him a literary Naturalist proper and claim the two orthodox determinants of naturalism, heredity and environment, to be fully developed in his fiction. Yet in showing environment as endowed with deterministic force, he could be said to use a technique which approaches that of the Naturalists. After all, the background from which he wrote seems to have been conducive to this kind of thinking, a background which was defined by John McCormick as "the American readiness for the philosophic-literary tenets of Naturalism" in the following terms:

> A country, long and intimately familiar with theological determinism in the systems of Calvin and Luther was not to be startled by determinism as a literary creed .... Americans ... had long known determinism in its theological and political contexts, even while they shaped a contrary philosophy, individual, pragmatic, idealistic, and democratic.[12]

In this transition from a belief in Divine Predestination to a belief in social and biological determinism, Melville could be said to occupy an intermediate position. When we consider that he experimented with the idea of environmental determinism in "Bartleby" (note the effect on everyone of the office building "entirely unhallowed by humanizing domestic associations"), and if we further consider that he used the same idea as a central device in "The Encantadas," we could say that he is among the first

[11]Erich Auerbach, Mimesis: Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen Literatur (Bern, 1946), p.419.

[12]John McCormick, Catastrophe and Innocence: An Interpretation of the Recent English and American Novel (London, 1957), p.104. See also Lars Ahnebrink, The Beginnings of Naturalism in American Fiction (Upsala, 1957), Chapters II and IX.

to translate determinism by Divine Injunction into environmental terms. Here in "The Encantadas," landscape definitely exerts an evil enchantment and becomes a determinant similar to what Philip Rahv emphasizes as the essential difference between realism and naturalism. According to Rahv, the difference between these two lies in the "treatment of the relation of character to background," so that naturalism is but a "type of realism, in which the environment displaces its inhabitants in the role of the hero."[13] Judging by this criterion, Melville could, I think, be considered to have approached, in rudimentary form, some of the later tenets of literary naturalism. Yet it must be emphatically denied that for this reason Melville can be considered a literary Naturalist as such. There are important differences which place him well outside this movement. Perhaps the most significant among these is that even in "The Encantadas," where the influence of setting and environment on man is most marked, and where landscape itself is raised to the rank of a major determinant, man is not yet that neutral nonentity which succumbs completely to outside forces. There is still some self-determination and, with it, moral responsibility. There is yet something in man, which either augments the environmental curse by adding his own special brand of evil, as in the cases of Oberlus and the Dog-King, or some inner strength which can resist its soul-destroying effect through spiritual integrity: Hunilla remains unbroken in spirit.

This leads to an interesting result: while Melville can be seen experimenting with ideas which are essentially modern and with techniques

[13]Philip Rahv, Image and Idea: Twenty Essays on Literary Themes (London, 1957), p.146.

which were fully developed only in the twentieth century, he is held back, as though by some residual belief in man's inner independence, from embracing a completely deterministic attitude. The question of whether indigenous American Naturalism could have developed more fully and independently if Melville's stories had not been relegated to oblivion for almost seventy years, is an interesting but idle speculation.

The third issue which has baffled critics for some time is the question of the cycle's inner coherence, in other words, its "unity," and so far little has been done towards interpreting the sequence of sketches as revealing something like a unified vision. Hoyle deplores the "lack of unifying thread,"[14] which others, however, find only in the subject matter, in mood, or, in Fogle's interpretation, in theme. Fogle, in the only existing full-length interpretation, sees the link supplied by "meaning," as he calls it, "the one abstract and explicit, the other, which grows out of the first, concrete and indirect"; the former, according to him, is the theme of the "Fall of Man," while the latter is that principle of complexity which makes the islands into what Fogle calls a "microcosm of reality": "They are not literally the world, but a part of the world: their few human inhabitants are not literally mankind, although they stand for mankind, but a particular kind of men."[15]

With both statements I cannot quite agree. It seems to me important that Melville stresses the fact that this world was created evil and that it remains basically unchanged from the moment it "exploded into sight"

[14]Hoyle, p.113.

[15]Fogle, Shorter Tales, pp.92 and 97.

and is therefore closer to urwelt than to our civilized world. Evil, thus, did not enter as an afterthought or "fall" but was there from the beginning. As to the second issue raised by Fogle, namely the representative character of the islands for the macrocosm of the world at large, we must answer that Melville takes great trouble to separate these islands in character from the outside world. If it is a "microcosm of reality," then it is one of a world in which the only ascertainable influence is evil. There is, as Fogle states, "complex reality," but this reality cannot be taken as a "symbol for the world,"[16] i.e. the outside world at large, since this outside world is by the narrator deliberately separated from the island world. The outer world, we hear, is a world of change and of "associations with humanity," in other words, health compared to the dead and sterile world of the Encantadas.

The central theme which binds the cycle together and connects it with other Piazza tales is, I suggest, the effect of evil on life. Here is Melville's Inferno, ringed like Dante's into various circles of damnation. This time evil is a supra-human, semi-environmental force, and the life affected includes all forms, inorganic and organic, landscape, animal world, and human life, the arrangement of the sketches following this pattern. (The first half of the cycle is descriptive in nature and shows how evil affects the landscape and animal world, while the latter half switches to those outcasts among men who seek refuge here, unsupported by the outer world and its protective establishments, thrown on their own resources and on what inner integrity they possess.) Furthermore, behind

[16] Ibid., p.97.

the medley of seemingly unconnected sketches we can discern the Piazza tale pattern of rising and then vanishing hope, which works here in the following way: the first section, comprising the first four sketches, delineates the nature of evil, which reigns supreme, and traces its impact on landscape and animals. While this section is a gloomy succession of pictures of eternal and unchanging evil, the second section, comprising the central sketches Five and Six, provides a more lighthearted relief and a more optimistic note by focusing on outside visitors who, like the narrator, are members of the outside world rather than of the Encantadas and who resist the islands' evil enchantment. This optimistic trend, however, is reversed in the four sketches of the last section, which deal with the disintegrating corrupting effect which some "diabolical enchantress" has on human life and which is in this last section augmented by a special brand of man-created evil. It is appropriate that the whole cycle should end with images of death and an epitaph from which the conventional expressions of hope have been deleted.

Thus, the cycle itself has a definite structure, although this is denied by Mason and Hoyle.[17] It resembles the structural pattern found in "The Piazza," in "Bartleby," and even in the Piazza Tales as a whole, which in all instances consists of an up and down movement which leads towards a climax and the promise of hope, with the anticlimax or nonfulfilment of hope leaving a picture of augmented gloom. My own discussion will follow this pattern. Before doing so, however, one further issue must be mentioned which is closely connected with the theme of evil in this cycle, namely the use which Melville made of the numerous Spenser

[17]Hoyle, p.113, and Mason, p.188.

quotations. As I mentioned earlier, these were identified as early as 1931-32 by Thomas and Howard, but they have not yet been evaluated for their significance within the cycle itself.[18]

III

Lengthy quotations, sometimes two or three at a time, preface each sketch. There are twenty-two quotations, nineteen of which are from Spenser; of the remaining three, one is from William Collins (last stanza of Dirge in Cymbeline), one is from Chatterton (modification of stanza II of The Mynstrelle Songe from Aella), and the other is unidentified and possibly Melville's own. Numerically, therefore, the Spenser quotations far outnumber any other, and we can assume that Spenser has a special significance in this cycle. This significance shows itself in two ways: the quotations from his books in the manner of other Piazza tales, evoke by way of contrast the morally unequivocal world of the past, but they also reinforce and elaborate the structural pattern of the cycle with its slight upward movement in the central sketches. In this connection, it is significant that the quotations from Spenser are taken from two sources, from Spenser's Faerie Queene with its allegorical treatment of cardinal virtues and vices, and from his satires, Mother Hubberd's Tale and "Visions of the World's Vanities," which have as their subject knavery and paradox rather than cardinal and absolute evil. Quotations from the Faerie Queene preface all sketches of the first and last section of the cycle, while excerpts from Spenser's satires introduce the

[18] Hoyle, p.113, speaks of ten (!) introductory quotations which, according to him, are mostly "dealing with Patience," while Fogle, who has written the only full-length interpretation I know of, does not mention the quotations at all.

central two sketches, which describe a fringe world rather than the Encantadas proper. It is here that the Spenser mottoes could be said to reinforce the structural pattern by hinting at differing modes of evil. This I should like to explain in the following way: excerpts from the Faerie Queene, which introduce all but the two central sketches Five and Six, are taken from two episodes, each representing the final temptation of the protagonist, the meeting between the Red Cross Knight and Despair in Book One and the voyage of the Temperance Knight across the Gulf of Greediness in search of Acrasia's Bower of Bliss in Book Two. Concerning the meaning of these two books, Pauline Parker, admitting indebtedness to Professor Tillyard, points out that whereas the action of the first book moves on the plane of grace, that of the other develops on the plane of nature. In other words, in the hierarchy of Christian virtues the Red Cross Knight represents the supernatural group of virtues which lead into holiness and Divine Revealed Truth, while the Temperance Knight stands for one of the secular cardinal virtues exercised in relation to men.[19] Thus, the meeting with Despair in Book One could be seen as a disturbance of man's vertical relationship with God, as an apostasy from the belief in God's Divine Plan, while the Gulf of Greediness episode in Book Two would relate to a basic disturbance of man's balance within himself or in relation with other men. Both these aspects of cardinal evil the mottoes transfer into the doomed island world, evil as it affects man's vertical and horizontal relationships, both with God and with men.

As far as the distribution of the Spenser quotations is concerned,

[19]Pauline Parker, The Allegory of the Faerie Queene (Oxford, 1960), pp.114-15, and 147.

excerpts from the Despair episode from Book One preface the important opening and closing sketches One and Ten, as well as the one devoted to Oberlus. Thus, through being framed by excerpts from the Despair episode, the cycle seems to stand under the leitmotif of despair. Note how Sketch One equates the general atmosphere of the "Isles at Large" with the gloomy haunt of Despair with its death imagery ("dark, doleful, dreary, like a greedy grave, / That still for carrion carcases doth crave"), while the motto of Sketch Nine ("that darksome glen they enter, where they find / That cursed man low sitting on the ground") introduces Despair himself in the figure of Oberlus, who brings "into this savage region qualities more diabolical than are to be found among any of the surrounding cannibals" (p.194). Thus, the hopelessness of the Encantadas is through the Spenser quotations deepened into a despair in God's mercy and in his Divine Plan and Providence, and it is artistically consistent that a cycle with such a leitmotif should end, in Sketch Ten, with images of sterility and death, analogous to Spenser's haunt of Despair which is used in the introductory motto:

> And all about old stockes and stubs of trees,
> Whereon nor fruit nor leaf was ever seen,
> Did hang upon ragged rocky knees;
> On which had many wretches hanged been. (P.204.)

So far, the Spenser quotations create an analogy between the two settings, through which a thematic analogy is evoked. Apart from this analogy, however, the drift of the sketches emphasizes a contrast, provided we consider the context of each quotation. Whereas in Spenser the forces for good were entrenched but ultimately victorious, in "The Encantadas" evil reigns supreme, unchallengeable, and therefore irremediable. While in the Faerie Queene the spell of Despair was finally

broken with the help of Una and the belief in Heavenly Mercy and God's Divine Providence, there is no such relief in the world of the Encantadas (nor, as "The Piazza" emphasizes, in the outside world of civilisation to which "The Encantadas" narrator belongs). Thus, by way of contrast, the Spenser quotations heighten the desolation of the island's "Plutonian" sight and set off the hopelessness of the island curse most poignantly. In Melville's "The Encantadas" the curse is eternal and "change never comes; neither the change of seasons nor of sorrows" (p.150).

A good example of how this contrast is further employed is found in the short excerpts from another episode from Faerie Queene, Book One, in which the Red Cross Knight is granted a glimpse of the Heavenly City. This excerpt introduces Sketch Four, subtitled "A Pisgah View From the Rock," in which a general survey over the whole area of clinkers and lava is given. But instead of the anticipated Heavenly City--or the Promised Land, as the subtitle suggests--we see an "archipelago of aridities," which proclaim the omnipotence of "demons of fire," of a "diabolical enchantress," or "sorceress," as the ruling evil spirit of this area is variably called. Instead of the promise of good, we see "a land not of cakes but of clinkers--not of streams of sparkling water, but arrested torrents of tormented lava" (p.167). Here in this image the contrast is quite openly developed.

Excerpts from Book Two of the Faerie Queene, taken from the voyage of the Temperance Knight to Acrasia's Bower of Bliss, are used like those from Book One for analogy as well as contrast. This time the visual analogy is raised between the life on the islands and those features and monsters which, charmed by an evil spell, surround Acrasia's Bower. These

are the "Wandring Islands" (Sketch One), some huge monsters, "most ugly shapes and horrible aspects, / Such as Dame Nature self mote feare to see" (Sketch Two); there is the Rock of Vile Reproach with its vicious currents and ill-omened birds (Sketch Three); and there is lastly the "seemly maiden" of Sketch Eight: in all instances the visual analogy suggests that, as in Spenser, life is under the spell of an evil force; and it is here that the second leitmotif of "enchantment" is suggested. With these two leitmotifs, with "despair" and "enchantment" as the fixed threads of the warp, Melville plies his shuttle of imagination to weave his tapestry of a gloomy and god-forsaken world.

Apart from this analogy between the motif of enchantment in Spenser and in "The Encantadas," we find again a contrast, if we take the context of the quotations into consideration, a contrast which again emphasizes the hopelessness of the island world. While Spenser's Knight is able to destroy "all those pleasant bowres and Pallace brave," namely that delusive centre of calm and beauty where Acrasia reigns supreme, and to break Acrasia's evil spell, in Melville's "The Encantadas" such a victory does not even lie in the realm of possibility. What remains of Spenser's story are the spells of an evil power, which cannot be broken, and the resulting despair. An interesting side-issue lies in the fact that Melville's centre of evil is not, as in Spenser, perverted beauty and pleasure but the eternity of barren desert and scorching drought, which, as noted by W. H. Auden and William Tindall, have become master themes of modern literature.[20] The real danger which modern man experiences

[20] W. H. Auden, The Enchafed Flood (New York, 1950) pp. 14-39, and W. Y. Tindall, The Literary Symbol (New York, 1955), p.132.

lies not in emotional surfeit but in deprivation, spiritual sterility, and the lack of moral guiding values, i.e. in "despair," which, after all, is the dominant motif of "The Encantadas." It is in Auden's terms a "paysage moralisé," the Spenser quotations admonishing us to take the geographical and landscape features in a symbolical and moral sense.

In addition to these quotations from Faerie Queene, which all circumscribe cardinal evil and its nature, excerpts from a different source, from Spenser's social and moral satires, introduce those two central sketches which describe not the Encantadas proper but a fringe world. A quotation from "Visions of the World's Vanities" prefaces Sketch Five, while two short sections from Prosopoia: Or Mother Hubberd's Tale introduce Sketch Six. Here a different concept of evil enters in which is surveyed not the allegorical abstract struggle between the forces of good and evil but the contemporary world with its vanities and vices. Thus, these latter quotations set the two central sketches apart and reinforce the structural pattern of the cycle, whereby the central sketches describe a fringe world in which evil has lost its absolute power and in which are presented hints at least of hope and promise. After all, the Buccaneers and the Essex crew are visitors and as such escape the curse which is inflicted on all those who dwell here, a fact which indicates that the evil power of enchantment weakens on the periphery and that there may be the possibility of escape. Such an escape, however, would only be into a mixed world--a world of social and physical evil. (Note the deceitfulness of the captain and the savagery of the visiting crew in the Hunilla sketch, the mention of the persecution and adversity which had driven the Buccaneers "from Christian society," as well as the references to wars in Peru, against England, and against Spain.) But this world is

nonetheless tempered by being "associated with humanity" and subjected to climatic variations and therefore basically healthy. In this connection it will be significant to observe whether and under what conditions the island curse can be broken.

Thus, in accordance with the Spenser quotations, it can be said that each section of the cycle is devoted to a different aspect of evil: the first section, describing the landscape features and the animal world, envisages evil as a primal force, which seems to dispel the possibility of God's Providence or a Divine Plan; the second section, devoted to outside visitors, shows that evil can be meliorated in certain conditions and suggests possibilities of at least a temporary escape from evil; and the last section, describing the life of those who attempt to "colonize" these barren islands, deals with evil as a force which affects man's relationship with others.

IV

The first section describes the effect of enchantment on landscape features and the animal world and consists of sketches which are extended descriptions, not dynamic but pictorial in nature. The whole fictional world, which usually comprises other narrative elements like action and character, is thus relatively limited, and it is remarkable that Melville was able to achieve the comprehensive effect he did in these primarily descriptive sketches. The method by which Melville creates this complexity is not so much by breadth as by depth of vision, i.e. by seeing each object not only as part of the real world but as endowed with qualities which suffuse it with a different symbolic reality. There are at least three levels on which the descriptions move. There is first of all the

realistic level (the visual and acoustic detail and the historically and geographically factual account), which establishes the Encantadas as a real island group, some six hundred miles off the South American coast; there is secondly the moral-spiritual level, evoked by quotations and allusions from Spenser and the Bible, which sees in this real place the home of a force which is not only destructive but--through analogy with Spenser--evil; and there is a third level which Newton Arvin in connection with Moby Dick has called the "oneiric" one, which contains those realms which are open to the human mind only by conjecture, by mythology, or by dreams; on this level the Encantadas are as close to urwelt as man can get, and the animal island emblem, the tortoises, are "newly crawled forth from beneath the foundations of the world. Yea, they seemed the identical tortoises whereon the Hindoo plants this total sphere" (p.155). Inner tension, without which no narrative fictional presentation can exist, is thus achieved by the transference of each element of reality onto other levels.

The first sketch moves on two levels, as through the world of visual impressions a universal metaphysical significance looms. Within the first few pages, the tropical singularity of the place becomes "Plutonian" and a "Tartarus," which, together with the term "fallen world," proclaim the victory of an evil force: it is "an evilly enchanted ground." There are the little minutely observed details like "the multitudinous dead shells, with here and there decayed bits of sugar-cane, bamboos, and coconuts, washed upon this other and darker world from the charming palm isles to the westward and southward,"[21] but within the same clause the

[21]It is interesting in this connection to follow Melville's

symbolic significance of this description is made clear; it continues with "all the way from Paradise to Tartarus." Emblems of fertility and the life-force of nature, i.e. of "Paradise," reach these islands only as insignia of death.

With the description of the tortoise, in Sketch Two, a third level is evoked, that of urwelt and antiquity, through which the picture of the Encantadas becomes deepened into mythic significance. To these tortoises Melville's imagination has given connotations which stretch far beyond their present state of victimisation into times which are open to the human mind only by conjecture, dreams, and mythic legends. They are among the most praised features of "The Encantadas" and have received more attention than, for instance, the Dog-King or even Oberlus, but this primarily for their quality of endurance, which is often taken to be indicative of Melville's new attitude towards the Inscrutable. Yet it is important to see that the feature which is imaginatively developed in this sketch is not that the tortoises endure but that they are the emissaries of a past age and are now grandeur and power in decay. Through

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adaptation of his source. The passage quoted is taken from Colnett, but appears in Melville in more condensed form, stripped of its superfluities. Here is Colnett's passage, quoted in Thomas, pp.447-48: "The rocks are covered with crabs, and there are also a few small wilks and winkles. A large quantity of dead shells, of various kinds, were washed upon the beach; all of which were familiar to me; among the rest, were the shells of large cray-fish, but we never caught any of them alive. On several parts of the shore, there was driftwood, of a larger size, than any of the trees, that grow on the island: also bamboos and wild sugar canes, with few small cocoa nuts at full growth, though not larger than a pigeon's egg. We observed also some burnt wood, but that might have drifted from the continent, been thrown overboard from a ship, or fired by lightning on the spot."

their proverbial longevity these "oldest inhabitants of this, or any other isle" provide Melville's imagination with an occasion for descending into mythological ages, thus evoking a level where the very beginnings of emerging life already proclaim a battle (note the imagery of warfare) and a dualistic universe of irreconcilable forces. I should like to follow this in greater detail.

Melville's descent into time starts from a real event and a realistic description, a tortoise hunt by the crew in order to replenish their diminishing supplies. Three gigantic tortoises are brought on deck:

> They seemed hardly of the seed of earth .... behold these really wondrous tortoises ... black as widower's weeds, heavy as chests of plate, with vast shells medallioned and orbed like shields, ... with dark green moss, and slimy with the spray of the sea. These mystic creatures, suddenly translated by night from unutterable solitudes to our peopled deck, affected me in a manner not easy to unfold. They seemed newly crawled forth from beneath the foundations of the world. Yea, they seemed the identical tortoises whereon the Hindoo plants this total sphere .... They expanded--became transfigured. I seemed to see three Roman Coliseums in magnificent decay. (Pp.155-56.)

The effect which Melville creates by heaping successive images on top of each other has been called by Runden, in his study of Melville's imagery, the "montage effect."[22] In the case of the tortoises, the impact of the consecutive images stimulates a descent into time, which leads to an antiquity evoked by the analogy with the Roman Coliseum and the allusion to Hindoo mythology. Yet we are led past these ages, to a lower level still, to prehistoric times: the tortoises are "ante-diluvian-looking" and on examining them the narrator feels like "an antiquary of a geologist, studying the bird-tracks and ciphers upon the exhumed slates trod by incredible creatures whose very ghosts are now defunct." In the tortoise

[22]Runden, p.130.

sketch itself we stop at this prehistoric level and return to the present and a merry tortoise dinner, and not until the last sketch of this section are we led further still, to the period of the creation of the earth itself, or rather to the creation of the Encantadas.

What does this descent into time, Melville's Gang zu den Müttern, bring to light? We know that Melville was familiar with recent geological theories,[23] that he had read Darwin, and was most likely familiar with his account of the Beagle expedition to the Galapagos in 1836.[24] There are even several surface similarities between the two accounts (both recognize in these islands an urwelt), but the basic nature of both reveals, as is to be expected, a striking contrast. Unlike Darwin's neutrally scientific preoccupation with collecting evidence for his theory of evolution, Melville's vision is primarily ethical. The forces which created this world are to him "demons of fire," they are evil and even the "ante-diluvian" tortoises with their cuts and bruises and their armour, "heavy as chests of plate, with vast shells medallioned and orbed like shields," bespeak a primal struggle which dates back to times immemorial and which presupposes the existence of dualistic moral forces. Note in this connection the reference to the "Hindoo tortoise" which, according to Hindoo mythology is an avatar of Vishnu the Preserver, who dived into the sea to recover lost virtues in order to help mankind in

[23] See Elizabeth Foster, "Melville and Geology," AL, XVII (March, 1945), 50-65, and "Another Note on Melville and Geology," AL, XXII (January, 1951), 479-87, and Tyrus Hillway, "Melville's Geological Knowledge," AL, XXI (May, 1949), 232-37.

[24] Foster, "Another Note," p.487; Anderson (pp.50-51), lists Darwin's Journal of the Beagle expedition as in possession of the ship library of the United States on which Melville was enlisted from 1843 to 1844.

their struggle against evil;[25] this implies that already in an atemporal mythological time there had been a primal conflict between the forces of good and evil, between order and chaos. This thought of a basically dualistic universe is not a new one in Melville's work[26] and has given rise, in another connection, to the allegation that Melville was a "Manichean heretic."[27] Yet the significant fact in "The Encantadas" is that, as far as the recorded history of the archipelago is concerned, this primal struggle has been decided in favour of evil. Order or the forces of good might have won in those mythic ages--either by Divine interference, as in the case of Vishnu's helpful avatars, or by man's civilising achievements, as indicated by the allusion to the Roman Coliseum (p.156). But both were only shortlived victories, so that now, in the present world of the Encantadas, the avatar of Vishnu is condemned to a meaningless existence of "hopeless toil." The tortoise is grandeur "in decay," and its last reminiscence of former "chronometrical" stature --its "impulse towards straightforwardness"--has in a "horologically" "belittered world" turned into its "crowning curse." The outlook for its future or--if, like the Hindoos, we can take the tortoise as symbol of God's incarnation, "whereon the Hindoo plants this total sphere"--the outlook for God is gloomy. In the modern age which the narrator represents, God's Trinity is doomed to extinction or at best to be made immortal by

[25] John Dawson, "Avatar," A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology and Religion (London, 1950), p.36.

[26] Already in Moby Dick the world appears insolubly dualistic. See in this connection Chase, American Novel, p.91, and Watters, "Metaphysics," p.174.

[27] C. J. Oates, "Melville and the Manichean Illusion," Texas Studies in Literature and Language, IV (Spring, 1962), 117-29.

art, i.e. to serve as ornamental soup-tureens:

> I sat down with my shipmates, and made a merry repast from tortoise steaks and tortoise stews; and supper over, out knife, and helped convert the three mighty concave shells into three fanciful soup-tureens, and polished the three flat yellowish calipees into three gorgeous salvers. (P.157.)

The tortoises are interesting in one further respect, because they are a good example of Melville's technique of "dual illumination," which he uses as basic structural pattern in other, chronologically later, Piazza tales, a technique whereby an image, object, or symbol is viewed from two diametrically opposed angles. If we look at the tortoises as they are described in sketches One and Two, we find that they are treated in a similar fashion: to the superstitious sailors, the tortoises are the embodiments of evil ("wicked sea-officers"), while to the Hindoos they are an avatar of Vishnu, the embodiment of good. What they are to the practical-minded narrator, has been described above.

While the tortoises lead us to a prehistoric mythological age, Sketch Four penetrates, as already mentioned, to a still lower level, to the very origin of this world. This world was not, like Paradise, created in the Genesis spirit of "it was good" but by forces which, still active in its volcano in the heart of Narborough, are described as "demons of fire." In a scene reminiscent of the chapter "The Try-works" in Moby Dick, Melville penetrates to the heart of this world, but this time the portentous feeling of Ishmael that something was "fatally wrong" cannot be abrogated in the light of day. This time the "ghastly glow" is not artificial but caused by the activity of the very demons which "exploded into sight" in the islands. There is certainly nothing novel in this theory of creation by volcanic eruption which Melville had used previously

in Mardi.[28] But this time there is a significantly different emphasis. Note the imagery with which this volcanic centre is described:

> Volcanic Narborough lies in the black jaws of Albemarle like a wolf's red tongue in his open mouth. (P.166.)

Here, the primal energy is described as a predatory force similar to that "cannibalistic energy" of Moby Dick which I mentioned in connection with "Benito Cereno." But unlike its amoral nature in Moby Dick, it is here further circumscribed as an evil force; the ruling spirit is variably referred to as "evil enchantment," "sorceress," and "diabolical enchanter" and its evil nature further emphasized by allusions to Spenser, Milton and Dante. Thus, the Encantadas by their very being prove the existence of evil as a primal force.

To sum up this point: in viewing evolution, Melville has not the detached neutrality of a scientific observer. To him every development seems an ethical one and is viewed, as Watters states in connection with Melville's treatment of evil, "through the lenses of human values."[29] In "The Encantadas," the original state is not order. This is a later development, an achievement so to speak and a continuous "becoming," provided the forces of order can maintain themselves against the threat of chaos. This ethical struggle between chaos and order, anarchy and authority, was there from the beginning and still continues. However, here in the world of the Encantadas (in Melville's symbology, the heart of the

[28]Foster, "Melville and Geology," pp.52-53, points out that Melville in Mardi made use of two prevalent theories concerning the origin of the earth, the "Plutonian" theory, which suggested creation by volcanic eruption, and the "Neptunian," which assumed a slower process of unfolding by layers.

[29]Watters, "Metaphysics," p.179.

world), the struggle is already decided, and the primal force which holds the islands in its sway is, unlike the sea-force of Moby Dick, now described as downright diabolical. It seems as if the sea-force, once transferred to the land, had gained in malignancy. It is no longer pure primitivistic energy symbolized in the "mad battle steed" but a diabolical demonic power which "feline-like" plays with human destiny. This cycle does indeed introduce Melville's "desert-phase," as Mason calls it, in which the "potency of sea-symbolism deserted him and gave place to the cracked parched imageries of waste and desolation that were with him in strong force until Clarel helped him exorcize them."[30] "The Encantadas" are born of Melville's deepened vision of a cosmic force which is basically destructive and evil, one which does not even cleanly destroy but which dallies and plays, depraves and corrodes. Against this full impact of evil man has little protection, a thought which the latter half of the sketches develops. Thus, "The Encantadas" series with its focus on evil and its various effects on man emphasizes what is evident in the Piazza Tales as a collection, namely that Melville becomes intensely interested in the question of evil and in the impact of evil on life. The Piazza Tales are all land stories. Man's establishments become the battle-ground and his moral integrity the prize.

V

The second section, Sketches Five and Six, differs from the rest in mood as well as in subject matter. It deals not with the islands proper but with visitors who appear only at their fringes. What does this mean in terms of the geography of the islands?

[30]Mason, p.189.

The world as surveyed from Rock Rodondo in Sketch Four is zoned into various circles, reminiscent of Dante's Inferno, according to the influence and sway of evil.[31] There are clearly three circles: there is the innermost heart of the island group, Albemarle and Narborough; next, an outer ring, semi-inhabitable, comprising Barrington, Charles, Norfolk, and Hood's isles; and lastly the outside world, Quito, the Polynesian chain, Kingsmill, and the Antarctic Pole. These factual geographical features, however, are adapted to the moral vision apparent throughout "The Encantadas." Thus, in the very centre of the Encantadas is a volcano, where "demons of fire toil" and "throw their spectral illumination for miles and miles around." From here the immutable evil curse originates. But although, according to Melville, the crowning curse of this centre is the fact that no change will ever come to it--a fact which would have cut the cycle rather short--an element of movement is introduced into the sequence of sketches by showing the power of evil diminishing in the fringe areas. To return to the image of the various rings, around the "fixed, glued embodiment of cadaverous death," which cannot support any life except that of reptiles or visiting sea-birds, a ring of diminishing suzerainty spreads, surrounding the first and separated from it by malicious currents and strange delusions (the second meaning of "enchantment"). This is the second ring, where the life-destroying forces of Narborough have lost some of their power, so that the islands are beginning to be semi-inhabitable. Yet with the entry of

[31]Note, for instance, Melville's relocation of Hunilla's Norfolk island from the centre to the outer rims. According to von Hagen (p.108), Norfolk island is situated in the centre of the archipelago, so that Melville, by setting it apart, took "considerable geographical ... license, yet since the Encantadas is not a Baedecker the matter is of no great importance."

man in this only semi-bewitched world, another even more diabolical curse becomes effective. Evil circumstances and human corruption now weave a destiny which make the inhospitable islands into a new hell, in which man's efforts to establish a society (Dog-King), a family (Hunilla), and finally a "hermitage" (Oberlus) are doomed to failure.

Around these two rings of evil enchantment, there is yet a third circle, the outer world, which, however, we never see except through its emissaries, so that the advice from Rock Rodondo ("never heed for the present yonder Burnt District of the Enchanted Isles") ironically emphasizes that the only world we actually see in this cycle is evil, "burnt," and diabolical. Yet we are to understand that, unseen from Rock Rodondo, lies the world of complexity and contrast: to the south, there is the vast sea "unscrolling itself to the antarctic pole"; to the north, there is the equivalent solitude of an uninhabited "no-man's land"; to the east, there are the South American islands and the continent with Quito; and towards the west, there is the Polynesian island chain, which Melville, only eight years previously, had celebrated as man's paradise. Thus, if there is any movement away from the curse of the Encantadas, it is not a movement upwards towards the certitude of Divine Grace but only towards the outer regions of variegated reality. This outside world is neither all white nor all black but contains all elements in it (although it, too, shows a bias towards black). If we see in "The Encantadas" Melville's most extensive treatment of evil, this inner movement towards some sort of mitigation is important.

What then, in the cases of the Essex crew and the buccaneers, is the decisive factor which saves them from the curse of the islands? It

is the simple reason that, bound by an ulterior commitment to the organisation to which they belong, the crews do not surrender themselves to the influence of the islands but live on board ship. Whether their business is concerned with crime or punishment, the fact remains that both the Essex crew and the buccaneers belong to organisations which strongly link them with the outside world. Therefore they are clearly set apart from the outcasts and outlaws who have severed themselves from the outside world and its establishments and are dwelling on the islands. Note for instance that of the two crews, the buccaneers, who are the more closely related to the evil world of the Encantadas, "sometimes tarried here for months," while the Essex, a "valiant ship," only "hovers in the charmed vicinity of the enchanted group." But although the buccaneers are somewhat more violent than the Essex crew, they are nevertheless not devoid of finer feelings as indicated by the Spenser motto "let us all base subjection scorn." As buccaneers they are pirates with a cause, similar in nature to that of the Essex. In both cases, war was waged against old and outmoded political orders, and both heralded a new age. To some extent, their commitment to a political cause could be said to foreshadow Captain Vere's. But while he, a creation of Melville's septuagenarian imagination, is the upholder of the established order of the Old World, the Essex crew and even the buccaneers reveal Melville's younger enthusiasm for a new order which is willing and committed to assert its rights against the decayed or decaying forms of older orders, here the Spanish and British Empire respectively. This might be in Spenser's terms "vanity" (Essex) or "knavery" (buccaneers), but their very commitment saves them from being sucked into the maelstrom influence

of the Encantadas.[32] It thus appears (at least as far as these two central sketches are concerned) that if there is any way to avoid the evil spell of the islands, it is through some ulterior group commitment. This thought, we must note, agrees with the evidence of other Piazza tales. What protection man possesses against the impact of evil lies in the purely human sphere, in the principle of sociality and its variants.

VI

The third and last section of "The Encantadas" deals with some of those who lack the protection of "belonging." Like the first section, it comprises four sketches, in which Melville presents an assortment of island legends, which he either found in journals or knew from hearsay from his own visit.[33] But as with other textual borrowings in the cycle, he makes these legends subservient to his overall plan of following the effect of evil on life. This last section is devoted to human destiny but, as in other Piazza tales, not solely to human destiny as personal destiny but linked up with larger more comprehensive issues. There is the Dog-King with his attempt to establish an absolute monarchy on Charles Island; Hunilla and her family trying to strike it rich on Norfolk island; and Oberlus in his hermitage on Hood's island: as Creole, Indian, and European they are representative of mankind, and their attempts to colonize this uncivilized world reflect the three sources of civilisation

[32]A similar thought is expressed in Moby Dick, LVII, p.270: "Long exile from Christendom and civilisation inevitably restores a man to that condition in which God placed him, i.e. what is called savagery."

[33]Sketch Eight is the only one for which no source has yet been located. The story of Oberlus is recorded in various journals, in Porter, John Coulter, Adventures in the Pacific (Dublin, 1845), and in Delano's Voyages. The Dog-King of Sketch Seven was identified by von Hagen (p.104), but no actual source has been found. Von Hagen assumes that "this material came from sailor yarns" (p.107).

insofar as there is a rudimentary society in Sketch Seven, a family group in Sketch Eight, and the "self-sufficient individual" in Sketch Nine. Yet on these islands, each of these attempts fails. The Dog-King's colony is broken up, Hunilla's family meets death, while Oberlus the "Emperor," after having left his "royal state of solitude," ends his days in Payta's jail. It is appropriate that this section should end with the "Potter's field" in Sketch Ten, where Melville finally used the image of the rotting letter post from his Agatha letter.[34] Human communication even on a pure business level has no place in this doomed world. Again we come to a thought, the break-down of communication as the effect of some evil, which is important in other Piazza tales.

The first sketch of this section, "Charles Isle and the Dog-King," gives in narrative form the history of the private monarchy of José Villamil, one-time general in Ecuador's war of Independence. Concerning the political history of Charles Isle, Melville was either ignorant of the fact that Villamil had only taken over the island as agent of Ecuador, or he changed this incident to suit his theme. In Melville's version, Villamil is the absolute ruler of his island, so that the story about him reveals the inherent evil in a political system which seems particularly unsuited to "colonize barren islands with unprincipled pilgrims." Thus, the resultant anarchy is not only the product of hostile conditions but of a perverted system of government which ignores the important principle of sociality and maintains its authority over its subjects by a "cavalry guard of dogs." But even the revolution of his subjects does little to right the wrong, and despotism is replaced by anarchy:

[34]See Chapter II, p.43.

> The insurgents had confederated themselves into a democracy neither Grecian, Roman, nor American. Nay, it was no democracy at all, but a permanent Riotocracy, which gloried in having no law but lawlessness. (P.178.)

This, in turn, attracts all the desperadoes and outlaws of the region so that the island becomes "Anathema--a sea Alsatia--the unassailed lurking-place of all sorts of desperadoes, who in the name of liberty did just what they pleased."

The importance of this sketch has not been adequately appreciated. Behind its unpretentious form we can detect something like Melville's new orientation towards contemporary issues, as indicated by the inclusion of political issues in his picture of Hell. A central feature of this sketch is the degeneration of a one-man tyranny into anarchy, so that the picture includes two extremes which society must avoid in order to exist. In "Benito Cereno" a similar development from oppression to revolt and anarchy is traceable, and in Billy Budd, likewise, the injustice of "the Old World's hereditary wrongs" is followed by the conflagration of the Nore and Spithead Mutinies and the French Revolution. Thus, a thought appears in these stories which could be phrased this way: political stability requires some measure of authority, the forcible imposition of a will; it also requires some measure of companionship, the voluntary reorientation of wills. An improper balance between these two relations is exemplified by the Dog-King's despotism and by the ensuing "riotocracy." In "Benito Cereno" we expressed the same thought in a simple formula: authority equals sociality plus discipline.

This question of political stability is an important issue in Melville's work, which has been widely ignored in favour of his deep-diving metaphysical speculations. Especially in his short stories, his "land"

stories, this issue of social and political stability begins to replace that of truth, until in Billy Budd it becomes the master-theme which, as Vere's dilemma, overshadows the very conflict between absolute good and cardinal evil, embodied in Billy and Claggart. To Vere, political stability or "measured forms" are everything, so that even Billy's sacrificial death is for no other but this secular purpose of maintaining order and authority. In the Piazza Tales, admittedly, the issue has not yet reached this prominence, but the seeds of later thoughts can be found here, insofar as the right kind of authority and order is an issue linked with the land and each community. In "Bartleby" it appears in the compromise of the office community; in "Benito Cereno" in the various forms of "authority," as exercized by Don Benito and Delano respectively, and in the emblem of the dark satyr; in "The Encantadas" in the sketches of the Dog-King and Oberlus (in whose attempt to institute slavery man is shown to have sunk to his lowest level of moral depravity); and in "The Bell-Tower," to anticipate the following chapter, in the failure of leader and community to cooperate. Melville's political creed is still a relatively unexplored subject,[35] but it reflects an important expansion of Melville's creative consciousness. While in Mardi the political theme and the metaphysical quest are as yet separate issues and involve abrupt changes from one level to the next, in later works Melville achieves greater cohesion. In "Bartleby" the issues of the isolated

[35]It is conventional to stress Melville's democracy and his faithful adherence to republican principles. However, among the ones who dissent, Mumford points out that "his own outlook was emotionally patrician and aristocratic; but his years in the forecastle had modified those feelings, and one needs some such compound word as aristodemocracy to describe his dominant political attitude" (p.296). Similar views are found in Wright, p.23, and Runden, pp.193 ff.

truth-seeker and of the community--or, in other words, the "existentialist" issue and the "social" one--are held in perfect balance. But as the metaphysical questioning gives way to the exploration of the human scene, these secular issues move into the foreground, among them the question of social and political stability. It seems to me that in the Piazza Tales the issue of order and social establishments is indeed an important one; how important can be seen by the inclusion of forms of political instability in Melville's survey of modern Hell.[36]

The Oberlus sketch continues to some extent this social-political train of thought, supplemented, however, by another issue. That trait in Oberlus which brings out his depravity and moral corruption most vividly is his institution of slavery, this time of whites, they "becoming his humble slaves, and Oberlus the most incredible of tyrants" (p.199). In the course of the narrative Oberlus becomes their master not only physically, but his evil influence "dissolved within them the whole moral man, so that they were ready to concrete into the first offered mould of baseness now; rotted down from manhood by their hopeless misery on the isle; wonted to cringe in all things to their lord, himself the worst of slaves; these wretches were now wholly corrupted to his hands" (p.199). In Oberlus the corruptive influence of environment and man's own depravity come together in a crescendo of evil, which provides a fitting conclusion to the sketches of individual island destinies. In Melville's impressive list of "villains"

[36]Melville's emphasis on authority as a directive force is further documented by a passage from one of his poems, "The House-Top" from Battlepieces, which grew out of the New York Draft Riots in 1863, when mobs roamed the city plundering and looting in protest to the Conscription Act, designed to increase the Union Army. The poem uses in an interesting manner imagery found also in "The Encantadas."

he is one of the most "despairing," to stay with the analogy raised by the Spenser motto, this dubious excellence primarily due to his dual nature: he is described both as an evil spirit by virtue of Sycorax his mother and a European with an "intelligent will" to degradation, a quality which helps him to make full use of his maternal legacy. In these respects Oberlus resembles other Melvillean villains, whose strange inclination towards depravity is similarly described. What in Oberlus is his "maternal legacy" is, in others, defined as "mystery of iniquity" or, as in Billy Budd in the description of Claggart, as "Natural Depravity: a depravity according to nature." Bowen explains this in the following way:

> In the actions of certain men we catch glimpses of a kind of malice so refined, so entirely gratuitous and unprovoked, as to defy explanation on grounds either of animal savagery or of the ordinary human love of self.[37]

Oberlus' depravity, likewise, is not the consequence of a "fall" or even solely of a special vice (although his tyranny over others comes close to it) but referred back to a supra-human origin, here to the sorceress Sycorax (he "acted out of mere delight in tyranny and cruelty, by virtue of a quality in him inherited from Sycorax his mother"). Thus, his evil is as primal as the island curse, atemporal in origin, and wrought by the same force which created the lava world of the Encantadas. This is Melville's figure of "Despair," who combines in him a radical and innate evil of supra-human origin with its human derivative, intelligent malignancy, his special brand of evil thus as irremediable as the island curse.

Between these two pictures of man-created Hell is inserted the

[37]Bowen, p.86.

sketch of Hunilla the Chola widow, which serves as a contrast in theme and mood. Instead of depravity and vice, here is innocence and confidence, and instead of an atmosphere of corrosive evil, the narrator's tone shows emotional participation with Hunilla's suffering, which occasionally borders on the sentimental. It is one of the most highly praised sketches of the cycle and among the most abused--for its sentimental touches and its tendency to fall into blank verse. Yet it is best known for Hunilla's endurance, a quality which to some seems to be a distinguishing feature of all of Melville's stories, while to others, like Mason, it indicates "a way out of the dilemma postulated in Pierre and Benito Cereno."[38] This is an important claim and deserves investigation. Does Hunilla truly embody a "way out"?

Basically, I agree with Mason that Hunilla is elevated into a universal symbol in whom "suffering and dignity combine to ennoble humanity, which without her detached stoicism would be degraded as well as destroyed."[39] But I do not agree that she represents a positive religious symbol, a view which is based on the last paragraph of the sketch:

> The last seen of lone Hunilla she was passing into Payta town, riding upon a small gray ass; and before her on the ass's shoulders, she eyed the jointed workings of the beast's armorial cross. (P.193.)

The content of Christian comfort in this passage, which reputedly brought tears into Lowells' eyes,[40] is practically nil. What is left of Christ is his Passion but not his victory, and what the cross symbolizes is not

[38] Mason, p.188.

[39] Ibid., p.190

[40] Melville Log, I, 487-88.

redemption but a community of suffering in which even the animal world is included. Indeed, in the same sketch the cross is once degraded into a symbol of foolish hope and a hollow promise:

> Her hands extended to the cross-foot, with a little brass crucifix clasped between them; a crucifix worn featureless, like an ancient graven knocker long plied in vain. (Pp.191-92.)

Thus, what comfort she derives in her suffering is not due to the crucifix; instead, we understand that she "leaned upon a reed, a real one; ... a real Eastern reed" (p.187).

This image of the reed calls forth basically three associations. There is first the reed's proverbial weakness, which makes its support of Hunilla of dubious value. Next we find it described as a real reed from some fertile island, which brings into this scorched desert memories of a different life. This time, the "support" which the real reed brings to Hunilla could be interpreted as a reminder of nature's fertility and abundance (and not a belief in a posthumous rectification of present ills). Lastly, the reed is described as an Eastern reed, and the associations aroused through it might well refer to the Oriental understanding of suffering as an unalterable condition of life rather than as a punitive prelude to life hereafter. That Melville was familiar with Eastern religion cannot be doubted. There is the conversation he had with O. W. Holmes in late August, 1855, on "East India religions and mythologies ... which was conducted with the most amazing skill and brilliancy on both sides."[41] But the extent to which Melville was personally influenced by this knowledge is less easily determined, since

[41]This account is from M. B. Field, Memoirs of Many Men, quoted in Melville Log, II, 506.

we know as yet little about this aspect of Melville's personal convictions. He had not yet come in contact with the works of Schopenhauer, one of the mediators between Eastern and Western thought, but he could have been easily influenced by the Oriental revival, which was under way in the transcendentalist circles around Emerson and Thoreau.[42] Little has been done to connect Melville with this movement, although Baird in his study emphasizes that the nature of Melville's symbols is inclined towards the Orient.[43] This means, according to Baird, that to the same extent his Christian symbols lose authority and are depleted of redemptive overtones, Oriental symbols emerge in their stead. In "Benito Cereno" I drew attention to the lack of Christian comfort in the emblem of the crucifix; there are his heretical views concerning dualism--his "manichean heresy"; and if we further bear in mind that in Clarel he draws a clear parallel between Palestine and the Encantadas, between the Holy Land and the realm of demons,[44] it is tempting to conclude that he did not and could not find consolation in a system of religious thought which had been developed there. This conclusion is reinforced by his journal, written during his "pilgrimage" to Palestine and Egypt, where he put down some of his most outspoken comments on what the "Holy Land" had come to mean to him. Palestine--"a long billow of desert (forever) hovers as in act of breaking upon the verdure of Egypt"--is the place which gave birth to a religion

[42] See Frederic Carpenter, Emerson and Asia (Harvard, 1930), and Arthur E. Christy, The Orient in American Transcendentalism (New York, 1932).

[43] Baird, p.80.

[44] See Clarel, p.414: "Some chance comparison I've made / In mind between this stricken land / And one far isle forever banned / I camped on in life's early days."

which, in 1856, Melville finds strangely in keeping with its stony character: "The diabolical landscape [of the] great[er] part of Judea must have suggested to the Jewish prophets, their ghastly theology."[45]

Taking all this into consideration, I do not think that Hunilla's symbolic stature is Christian. Her greatness lies elsewhere. That quality of Hunilla's character which gives rise to the well-known eulogy by the narrator, "Humanity, thou strong thing, I worship thee, not in the laureled victor, but in this vanquished one," is not her stoic endurance or her Christ-like suffering but her positive action "out of treachery, invoking trust" (p.187). This is her crowning spiritual achievement, which elevates her above the curse of her environment. Thus, one of the few positive forces of good which appear in "The Encantadas" is not due to Divine Providence or instigated by a belief in it but to the human action of spiritual self-conquest and self-overcoming. We might be tempted to conclude that the only hope for good depends on humanity and man's spirit.

Yet we must note that this achievement of "invoking trust" is not unambiguously accepted. To the fairy fish of Rodondo, in an earlier sketch, the same "victimised confidence" and "inconsiderate trust" bring death. We come here to a thought and pattern of expression which, as mentioned previously, resembles the dialectic pattern of positing and negating found in other Piazza tales. It recurs several times in Melville's stories over this whole period with which we are concerned and reveals a significant development of thought. Note for instance that in the chronologically early "The Encantadas" the theme of trust is raised

[45] Journal of a Visit to Europe and the Levant, p.119.

to its importance solely by the narrator's emphasis and commentary and is not yet fully incorporated in the narrative structure or the symbolic pattern. But as far as meaning is concerned, it is apparent that Melville already had misgivings about the positiveness of that virtue which is Hunilla's unique contribution to the otherwise despairing picture of Hell; after all, the "inconsiderate trust" passage, quoted above, negates to some extent the validity of Hunilla's trust. In "Benito Cereno," written nearly two years later, this thought is further developed. This time the theme of trust is truly integrated in the structure of the story and the ambiguity now dialectically presented in story action: trust leads to Aranda's death, but it saves Delano. A further evolution of this pattern we find in The Confidence Man, where, however, the ambiguity inherent in the theme leads to a complete disintegration, so that its meaning becomes blurred. The very message "Charity thinketh no evil," i.e. the commandment of trust given by a Christ-like figure, could be the catch-phrase of, perhaps, Satan. There is no certitude anymore, and "Charity" and "No Trust" have become so ambiguous as to be useless as principles of action. Moral action, which in "The Encantadas" was a distinct though scarcely attainable possibility, has, two and a half years later in The Confidence Man, become completely dissolved in the nihilism of Melville's moral vision.

The last sketch is a fitting conclusion to the whole cycle. After the various failures of the Dog-King, Hunilla, and Oberlus who came voluntarily here, the cycle ends with a picture of those unfortunates whom circumstances exiled on these islands, and of whom only a few survive. The sketch, and with it the whole cycle, ends with a picture of the islands as a cemetery, the final image being that of a grave, headed

by an epitaph which, taken from the journal of Captain Porter, is significantly changed in the following manner:

Porter	Melville
Gentle reader, as you pass by As you are now, so wonce was I; As now my body is in the dust, I hope in heaven my soul to rest [italics mine].[46]	Oh, Brother Jack, as you pass by, As you are now, so once was I. Just so game, and just so gay, But now, alack, they've stopped my pay. No more I peep out of my blinkers, Here I bee--tucked in with clinkers.

Apart from the fact that the whole tenor of the epitaph is changed by the coarser and more colloquial language and the irregularity of the metrics, the important change is the omission of the orthodox hope of a resurrection.[47] Thus, by closing with an image of death which allows no hope from beyond and which confirms the despair-mottoes from Spenser, "The Encantadas" take on a meaning which could be described as "Melville's inverted Theodicee," one in which the ways of God in relation to evil cannot be justified anymore. The only ascertainable reality--apart from man's humanizing and ordering achievements--is evil.

This brings us to a last question to be answered: is the island curse truly irremediable, or is there a possibility of melioration? As far as the very centre of the archipelago is concerned, this possibility is denied. Here "change never comes," and Hell is so firmly established that any life-symbol from the outside world, in particular from the Polynesian island chain where Melville has once seen Paradise, is already dead when it

[46] See Thomas, pp.442-43.

[47] This epitaph foreshadows to some extent "Billy in the Darbies," which likewise ends with only the certainty of physical death without any hope of resurrection. Death is described with similar connotations in the picture of the grave of Hunilla's husband, "a bare heap of finest sand, like that unverdured heap found at the bottom of an hour-glass run out" (p.191).

touches the shore of the Encantadas. The regenerative life-force of nature is here either dead ("decayed bits of sugar-cane, bamboos and coconuts") or perverted and cankered ("parched growth of distorted cactus trees"; see also the image of the malformed birds of Rock Rodondo). Hell is thus a special form of alienation from the regenerative forces of nature, a thought which is confirmed by Hunilla's support, however weak, by a real reed and the recurrent analogy between desert, city, and Inferno. I refer again to the "vacuity" of Wall-street resembling Petra, and draw attention to the opening paragraph of "The Encantadas" where the islands are compared to a heap of cinders, "dumped here and there in an outside city lot," a thought repeated in reversed form in Israel Potter, where London's slums are compared to the "vitreous rocks in the cursed Gallipagos, over which the convict tortoises crawl."[48]

Furthermore, however, the evil curse of the islands shows itself in another form, similar to the effect of evil in other Piazza tales as perversion of human relationship. Note in this connection the Dog-King's perverted authority upheld by "canine janizaries" (p.177); Hunilla's separation from her love ("Felipe's body floated to the marge, with one arm encirclingly outstretched. Lock-jawed in grim death, the lover-husband softly clasped his bride" [p.184]); and the vicious cruelty of Oberlus. But here, in this realm, there is a distinct possibility of melioration if we consider the emphasis on Hunilla's unique achievement, "out of treachery, invoking trust," as well as the actual escape of the buccaneers and the Essex as members of a comprehensive order. Thus, what hope there

[48] Israel Potter, p.212.

is in this gloomy picture of the Encantadas lies not in a belief in Divine Providence (after all, the cry of the "wailing spirit of the Encantadas" for mercy remains unheard, just as Hunilla's crucifix was long plied in vain[49]) nor, as Mason asserts, in a stoic acceptance. To escape the evil spell, man's only hope lies in those immanent values which are built on positive action, one aspect of it embodied in Hunilla's moral-spiritual victory, the other in the ulterior commitments and bonds of the Essex crew and the buccaneers. It must not be forgotten, however, that these positive notes appear only in the outer fringes of the island world, do not affect its centre, and have only a short-lived effect. In the end, the Essex sinks, and we lose sight of lonely Hunilla in Payta town. Moral integrity and man's imposition of order do no more than maintain an unseasy status quo against the forever threatening aggressive forces of evil.

Thus, the notes of hope in this overall dark vision are scanty indeed. But what hope there is lies with this world and not with a beyond. Chronologically speaking, after Bartleby's fatal glimpse into the Nothing, these are small beginnings of a new vista which is strictly earthbound. In the months of "Bartleby" and "The Encantadas," in 1853, Melville is only just beginning to come to terms with a new set of values, and it is not until towards the end of 1855, the days of "Benito Cereno," "The Piazza," "The Bell-Tower," and The Confidence Man, that he shows signs of having exhausted their potentiality artistically as well as spiritually.

[49] In this connection, note also the passage: "Ah, Heaven, when man thus keeps his faith, wilt thou be faithless who created the faithful one ? But they cannot break faith who never plighted it" (p.184).

CHAPTER VIII

"THE BELL-TOWER"

I

With "The Bell-Tower" we come to the last of the Piazza tales. There is again the death of an absolutist and connected with it the issue of cultural failure; and, as in other Piazza tales, this failure results partly from external causes, partly from causes inherent in man. But in this last story, there are important shifts of emphasis. Above all, the issue of cultural failure has moved into the foreground and become the main subject of the story. After all, the major issue is "the bell-tower," its construction and collapse, and personal failure is subordinate to it. Secondly, while the cycle of the Piazza Tales opens and closes with the death of an absolutist, between Bartleby and Bannadonna there are significant differences. This time, the absolutist, who in "Bartleby" is still viewed with a certain amount of pity and sympathy, has turned criminal, while the accompanying figures in the story have lost all those qualities which in other Piazza tales endear the obtuse to the reader. This time the dark is not offset by the bright, and the final impression is one of futile lichened ruin. And even those vague notes of hope which appeared as promise of salvation in the fringe areas of the Encantadas are missing; this time there are no symbols of hope. Thus, by exchanging the position of the more cautiously optimistic "Lighting-Rod Man" with the overall dark "Bell-Tower," Melville seems to have imposed the structural pattern of most of his Piazza tales on the cycle as a whole. Patterned on the image of the hop-vines in "The Piazza," there

is implicit in the cycle as a whole a movement of fluctuation found in other Piazza tales, a movement which after the hopeful climax of "The Lightning-Rod Man" "recoils" (in the language of "The Piazza") in the last two preponderantly dark stories. As Melville states in his introduction, written in full view of all the stories to be incorporated:

> Every night, when the curtain falls, truth comes in with darkness. No light shows from the mountain. To and fro I walk the piazza deck, haunted by Marianna's face, and many as real a story.

A further link with other Piazza tales lies in the theme of the story. As previously suggested, all the Piazza tales refer broadly to contemporary issues, so that on the surface this last story with its setting in a distant past might seem strangely out of place. Yet the subject and the theme of the story are not as distant as the setting suggests, and the issue of technology and of the cooperative achievement and failure of a community is as applicable to the 1850's as to the Italian community at the advent of a new age. The historical setting only disguises an essentially modern problem. Thus, "The Bell-Tower" as the tragic story of community failure widens the circle of failures. While in "Bartleby" and "Benito Cereno" the social institutions, symbolized by the office community and the ship, were seriously threatened, the last two stories witness their disintegration: in the evil world of the Encantadas not even a remnant of social or political order can survive, while in "The Bell-Tower" man's cultural achievement is seen to disintegrate. Furthermore, by reintroducing Una and using the symbolic pattern of "one" and "unite," this last story of the cycle seems but to echo the failure of the narrator's quest in the introductory "Piazza."

My own interpretation will follow these lines and attempt to trace the various types of "failure" in the story. Before doing this, however, one further feature of the story must be mentioned which connects it with other Piazza tales, namely the dialectic confrontation of attitudes as found in "Bartleby," "Benito Cereno," "The Lightning-Rod Man," and, marginally, in the tortoise section of "The Encantadas." In "The Bell-Tower" a similar pattern can be discerned, insofar as the collapse of the bell-tower is directly attributable both to Bannadonna's excessive trust in his own robot as well as to the magistrate's excessive superstitious fear of it. Thus, that section of the story which develops the theme of superstitious fear, and which in most interpretations is either unaccounted for or attributed to residual Gothic influences, belongs functionally to the story. (I shall return to this later.)

II

Of all the Piazza tales, "The Bell-Tower" is the most conventional in style. It is a straightforward third-person narrative with little ambiguity in the narrator's tone; it has a narrative core of tragic-dramatic action and concludes in a neat moral. Critics are more likely than with Melville's other stories to attribute "influences" for the very fact that it seems so untypical of Melville's usually original approach. It has been called "Poe-like" as well as "Hawthornean in style"[1] and seems for its very conventionality not to have offended any sensibilities,

[1]Fogle, Shorter Tales, p.63, and Hoyle, p.178. See also Oliver, Piazza Tales, pp.248-49, who compares Bannadonna's pride "in egotistical intellect and human achievement" with Hawthorne's Ethan Brand.

except perhaps those of Curtis, who found the verbal style "painfully artificial and pompously self-conscious."[2] But even he was reconciled by its "profound morality," a morality which must also have appealed greatly to the general reading public in the nineteenth century: "The Bell-Tower" is Melville's only story to be reprinted twice in the nineteenth century.[3]

Possibly on account of its facile surface moral and its conventionality, the story has appealed less to twentieth century readers and critics. The story was forgotten and ignored, and even appealed little to the imagination of Melville's usually appreciative biographer critics, so that Charles Fenton's article on "The Bell-Tower" in 1951, almost one hundred years after its composition, and Hubert Greifeneder's interpretation in Vienna's Wort und Wahrheit of the same year could be said to mark its resurrection.[4] We are only now beginning to realize that even a facile surface moral in Melville's stories need not preclude deeper layers of meaning. Both "The Piazza" and "The Bell-Tower," ignored until recently, reveal beneath their surface theme and moral a wealth of symbolism which carries each story beyond the parable. The great artistic achievement of Melville's short stories is that they exist on several layers of meaning, sometimes to the point of being inordinately complex.

[2]Melville Log, II, 502.

[3]Rossiter Johnson (ed.), Little Classics (Boston, 1874), and E. C. Stedman and E. M. Hutchinson (eds.), A Library of American Literature from the Earliest Settlements to the Present Time (New York, 1889).

[4]Charles A. Fenton, "'The Bell-Tower': Melville and Technology," AL, XXIII (May, 1951) 219-32, and Hugo Greifeneder, "Melville und der Sturz der Titanen," Wort und Wahrheit (Wien), VI (Mai, 1951), 363-74, 399-400.

"The Bell-Tower" is, as I see it, one of Melville's underrated stories, which despite obtrusiveness of Biblical analogies reveals a tight structural control and a complexity of meaning which transforms the story of the tower into a symbol of man's cultural process.

Since the revival of "The Bell-Tower," interpreters have begun to explore the story, to probe beneath its surface and to see in it Melville's comment on technology,[5] an extended Freudian symbol,[6] or, finally, reflections on Melville's own creative problems.[7] As usual, most interpretations proceed from the character of the protagonist, here Bannadonna the "mechanician," and then branch out into various themes. The most important issue raised so far is undoubtedly that of science and technology, the story being interpreted as a critical comment on technology and the spirit of the age, here the United States of the 1850's, as Fenton points out. With this interpretation of "The Bell-Tower," Harro Kühnelt would seem to agree. He approaches the story itself from the tradition of robot literature and sees reflected in it a new attitude towards the machine. In Melville's story, the robot, which in the convention of robot literature helped his master-builder to succeed, can now no longer be controlled. The very energies which man creates and releases turn now to destroy him, reminiscent of the parable of the sorcerer's apprentice, "die Kräfte die ich rief, die werd' ich nun nicht los."

[5]Fenton, p.219, and Harro H. Kühnelt, "'The Bell-Tower': Herman Melvilles Beitrag zur Roboterliteratur," Wiener Beiträge zur Englischen Philologie, LXVI (1958), 1939-57.

[6]Chase, Melville, pp.122-25.

[7]Howard, Melville, pp.222-23.

Greifeneder's interpretation likewise hinges on man's inability to cope with semi-demonic forces which he created. According to him the tower is a symbol of "Dämonie der Höhe" (by which is meant something like the inherent demonism of man's aspiration to go beyond the safety of the medial sphere), which leads man from "Übermenschen zum Unmenschen," from "super-humanity" to "in-humanity":

> Wie in Moby Dick die Waljagd hinausführt aus den Bereichen der Sicherheit, aus der Geborgenheit in das Abenteuer,... so führen auch Turmbau und Glockenguß in gefährdete, von Dämonen bedrohte Bereiche. Höhe und Tiefe, die Glockenstube und der Schmelzofen, müssen hier als dämonische Räume betrachtet werden, in denen Bannadonna als der "babylonische Arbeiter" verbotene Gebiete betritt. Der Volksglaube schreibt der Glocke und dem Glockengeläut bekanntlich dämonenbannende Macht zu. Sie macht Raum und Zeit, innerhalb welcher sie hörbar wird, frei von dunklen, menschenfeindlichen Mächten.[8]

Another theme mentioned in connection with Bannadonna is that of the artist, which hinges on the fact that Bannadonna dies "because he is not only a mechanician but an artist."[9] However, I should like to reverse this and say that Bannadonna dies because he is not only an artist but a mechanician, who insists on making Una uniform with all the other figures on the clock. While as artist he respects the law "forbidding duplicates" (p.215), the mechanician is him cannot tolerate random lack of uniformity. He dies while "striving to abate that strange look of Una; which, though, before others, he had treated with such unconcern, might not, in secret, have been without its thorn" (pp.221-22).

The fact that Bannadonna is an artist has also given rise to the conventional autobiographical speculation that here Melville uses

[8]Greifeneder, p.400.

[9]Fogle, Shorter Tales, p.66. See also Barret, p.91, and Kühnelt, p.140.

Bannadonna as another disguise for his own personal and creative problems. As Howard points out:

> "The Bell-Tower" was, more probably than any of his other stories, Melville's commentary upon his own career. As an author, he had created such Frankenstein monsters as Captain Ahab and Pierre, who had seriously damaged his reputation even though they had not slain him as the architect Bannadonna had been slain by his mechanical creature who seemed alive.[10]

Chase, as usual, is refreshingly different, although still obsessed by his Freudian bias. He starts from the two central images, the tower and the bell, and concludes that "in the dreamlike conclusion of Melville's story the imagery is more startling. It is a dream of castration."[11] While I do agree with Chase that any interpretation of this story should start from the central symbol of the tower rather than with Bannadonna, I do not agree with reading the story simply as a transcript of traumatic states of sexuality. This story with its Italian Renaissance setting is detached from personal considerations and deals with broader cultural issues. The tower was, after all, built by the cooperative effort of a community at a period of cultural transition, "when the waters of the Dark Ages had dried up, and once more the green appeared" (p.208), so that the tower's final collapse is indicative of significant cultural failures. Seen in this way, the collapse of the bell-tower could be said to symbolize the first tottering steps of a scientific culture which was destined to grow into the colossus which governs our lives to-day.[12] This aspect of the tower as a symbol of

[10]Howard, Melville, p.223. Hoyle, p.183, agrees: "Bannadonna's law may in fact be Melville's."

[11]Chase, Melville, p.124.

[12]See in this connection Baird, pp.398-400, who interprets the tower as archetype, "describing cultural failure, in which the tower

collective achievement and collective failure is important, and any interpretation will have to bear it in mind.

III

The structural movement of "The Bell-Tower" is built around the title symbol of the story and in two symmetrical movements follows its construction and collapse. Each movement proceeds in three stages, which are parallel in both sections. There is first the erection of the tower by Bannadonna, acclaimed and supported by the common people; secondly, there is the casting of the big state-bell, with the aid of the nobles; and thirdly, there is the celebration of the tower's completion, at which point, however, instead of the clear ringing sound of success, we hear the "dull mangled sound" of failure. Thus, in the manner of other Piazza tales, the climax scene of the first half becomes the starting point of the anticlimactic movement, which likewise proceeds in three stages. Instead of Bannadonna's victory, there is his failure and his death; at his funeral, the bell, which was cast in the second stage of the upward movement, collapses; and lastly, an earthquake answers man's presumptuous determination to erect another tower of Babel.

This last issue, Melville's reference to the "Shinar aspiration" of this second tower of Babel is important. Here is a clue which not only explains the nature of Bannadonna's ambition, but which links it with other Piazza tale motifs. According to Genesis XI, "the whole earth was of one language and of one speech," a fact which in the Biblical

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itself is the embracing form containing the multifarious meanings of the infernal city."

circumstances promised success: "And the Lord said, Behold, the people is one and they have all one language ... and now nothing will be restrained from them which they have imagined to do" (XI, 6). They would have been successful, if God, for inexplicable reasons which surpass human understanding, had not "confounded their language" and caused diversity and fragmentation where before there had been unity. Diversity and fragmentation as consequence of God's wrath is the inheritance after man's first community effort in the Biblical land of Shinar.

In Bannadonna's Promethean undertaking, this process seems reversed, as the verbal pattern of "one," "Una," or "to unite" emphasizes. His aspiration is to undo the curse of diversity and to create a new unity which this time is man-created. The supreme revolutionary idea of Bannadonna is to unite the bell-tower and clock-tower, "though before that period, such structures had commonly been built distinct" (p.209) and to invent a robot who should "combine" all the excellence of God's creatures" (p.219) "in one." After he has achieved both these ideals, his final and fatal effort is with Una, the same Una for whom the narrator in "The Piazza" quests in vain, this time one of the mythological figures on the clock which represent the hours. As the magistrate has observed, "Una looks unlike her sisters" and wears a strange look which resembles that of Deborah the prophetess. This her fatal and prophetic smile proclaims her a different being from a realm which eludes man's rational classification, which in itself is a challenge to the mechanician's rational mind. Absorbed in "abating that strange look of Una," i.e. in forcing destiny to his own will and in imposing uniformity on it, thus violating that law in art which "bars the possibilities of

duplicates," and which as an artist he "likes," Bannadonna is killed by his own robot. "He lay at the feet of the hour Una; his head coinciding in a vertical line, with her left hand clasped by the hour Dua." His death pose in front of Una is revealing. He has violated Una's sanctity by attempting to superimpose uniformity where there should have been unity. In "The Piazza" Una embodies that ideal which consists in a true union of opposites and not their eradication, and it is this ideal, a law in art and nature, which Bannadonna as an artist acknowledges but as a mechanician violates. As the narrator says in connection with the robot, "what seemed his fancifulness was but his utilitarian ambition collaterally extended" (p.220). It is as a mechanician, endowed with the artist's intense power of absorption that he dies, while attempting to alter Una's face, in other words, while imposing the rational categories of his mind upon a realm which falls outside the precincts of reason and rational regularity. By imposing uniformity with others upon her, his truly Promethean undertaking has been corrupted and has turned into a crime against Una herself, a crime which could be defined as "uniformity instead of union" or "mechanical regularity instead of integrated multiplicity." This idea is further developed by the image of the clasped hands, which we have seen in "Benito Cereno." Bannadonna's scheme is that the robot's stroke should fall on the bell at a point "where the hand of Una clasps Dua's. The stroke of one shall sever that loved clasp" (p.213). Not union but separation into uniform identities, controlled by the robot, the offspring of man's cold reason--this is Bannadonna's dream which dooms his Promethean attempt to overcome diversity, as the action of the story shows. Not by the power of intellect and technology can the curse of diversity be lifted, which has lain on the world since Babel. More

than this even: man's noblest aspiration--his quest for Una--becomes, in ironic reversal, the seedground of new demonic destructive forces. Thus, the last of the Piazza tales takes up a theme suggested by "The Piazza." Again, the quest for Una is doomed to fail, this time, however, not due to the implicit nature of reality as in "The Piazza"; this time there is human error involved and there are certain shortcomings both in Bannadonna and the people, which contribute to the final collapse of the tower. If we bear in mind the Biblical analogy, this time destruction is not blamed on a supernatural being, although to some extent there are still residues of a supernal power in the form of the earthquake, but it is due to man, both as an individual and as a social being. This latter thought concerning the collective failure of society will be considered shortly.

It must be borne in mind that Bannadonna's crime against Una, while causing his own death, does not in any way affect the fate of the tower, which was built by the efforts of the whole community. During its construction, the workers and peasants had given full support to Bannadonna's work--"like cannonballs came up to him the people's combustions of applause"--and even the nobility had contributed freely, both by offering "much plate" from which the state-bell was cast and by acquitting Bannadonna on the charge of murdering a workman, who had instinctively recoiled in the foundry when the red-hot metal was released into the mold. It is thus by collective efforts that the tower is built, but it is also by collective failures that the tower collapses. To blame only Bannadonna is to disregard the incidents of the narrative and to be misled by Melville's neat concluding moral. If we look at the situation at Bannadonna's death, everything in his grandiose design is

still intact and the robot presumably in working order, so that other forces must have caused the collapse of the belfry and the tower. It is at this point that the story gains a breadth of vision which transforms the story of the tower into a symbolic picture of the cultural failure of a whole community, which by its position at the border between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance is like the modern era at a stage of transition. It is as pertinent now as it was in Melville's day to ask whether either community possessed, or possesses, the spiritual maturity to cope with new and strange forces.

In order to examine the assignment of individual and collective responsibilities, we must turn to the plot, which has been little considered elsewhere.

Bannadonna's revolutionary plan was to construct the bell-tower and clock-tower as one unit, while at the same time the sound of the bell was to carry further than ever before, an effect which was achieved both by increasing the size of the bell and by raising the height of the tower. This was Bannadonna's "Shinar aspiration."

> In vain did some of the less elated magistrates here caution him; saying that though truly the tower was Titanic, yet limit should be set to the dependent weight of its swaying masses. (P.209.)

In order to carry out this design in agreement with the laws of statics, Bannadonna invented a new system of sounding the bell, which eliminated the "dependent weight of its swaying masses." Conventionally the bells were either rung or struck, the latter by "stalwart watchmen." Obviously the bell was too heavy for the former, but the latter method, that of "percussion from without," gave Bannadonna his revolutionary scheme of inventing a gigantic locomotive figure for the belfry, "a sort

of elephantine Helot" which "should strike the hour with its mechanic hand, with even greater precision than the vital one" (p.219). He was to be "swifter than the ape, for industry an ant, more fiery than the serpents, and yet, in patience, another ass." In short, "all excellence of all God-made creatures, which served man, were here to receive advancement, and then to be combined in one" (p.219). In Spenser's terms, the robot was to be "Talus," the servant of truth, "who in his hand an yron blade did hould,/ With which he thresht out falshood, and did truth unfould."[13]

In order to make the whole design completely automatic, the bell was to turn on its vertical axis, in rotary motion, "so as to present, to the descending mace, the clasped hands of the next two figures, when it would strike two, three, and so on, to the end" (p.221). This is Bannadonna's grand plan which is determined, like himself, by the vertical dimension. Note, for instance, that in his death his head coincides, as earlier mentioned, in a vertical line with Una's left hand, while in life the vertical is stressed in his lonely elevation on the tower, three hundred feet in the air, upon an unrailed perch, "erect, alone, with folded arms, gazing upon the white summits of blue inland Alps, and whiter crests of bluer Alps off shore, sights invisible from the plain" (p.209). It is here, in his rejection of the medial sphere, of sociality, and what in connection with "The Lightning-Rod Man" appears as the safety of the horizontal (note in this connection the comfort derived from the "truncated chimney" in "I and My Chimney"), that one important cause for later destruction lies and not in his revolutionary design itself. Severed from

[13] Faerie Queene, V, i, 12.

the common people by the elevation of his tower and from the nobles by the barred doors of his workshop, he keeps everyone in ignorance of his actual intentions, so that once he is dead they cannot be carried out in the spirit in which they were designed.

With the casting of the great state-bell we reach that crime in Bannadonna's career which is singled out by Melville in his concluding moral, the murder of a workman, who at the sight of the molten metal shrunk back in fear. Bannadonna, we understand, is arraigned for this murder but acquitted, "remitted by the judge, absolution given him by the priest," primarily for the sake of the successful and triumphant casting of the gigantic bell, in the honour of which the state as a whole shares. Yet from the smitten part of the victim, "a splinter was dashed into the seething mass and at once was melted in," this splinter causing a strange flaw in the bell, concealed by Bannadonna with some secret preparation. This flaw is the bell's "main weakness," indicating that the work of art is flawed by the monomaniac obsession of its creator, who, in Greifeneder's terms, in a super-human effort turned inhuman. This act of inhumanity, condoned by the people, the judges, and the priest for the sake of national glory, has enfeebled the bell "somewhere at its top," so that finally, under the forceful hands of a rope-swaying peasant, it "loosed from its fastening, tore sideways down, and ... buried itself inverted and half out of sight" (p.222).

Apart from these two crimes of isolation and inhumanity, Bannadonna's great violation is of the laws of nature and of art. In his clockwork mechanism and the creation of the robot, he sacrificed not only reverence for human life but reverence for the very life-principle in

nature. His aim is the following:

> A practical materialist, what Bannadonna had aimed at was to have been reached, not by logic, not by crucible, not by conjuration, not by altars; but by plain vice-bench and hammer. In short, to solve nature, to steal into her, to intrigue beyond her, to procure some one else to bind her to his hand;--these, one and all, had not been his objects; but, asking no favors from any element or any being, of himself, to rival her, outstrip her, and rule her. He stooped to conquer [italics mine]. With him, common sense was theurgy; machinery, miracle, Prometheus, the heroic name for machinist; man, the true God. (P.220.)

Everything great, surpassing, and heroic he thus wishes to reduce to human stature, so that man and his mind become the measure of all. The true adversary of Bannadonna in this part of the story is nature herself, whose bounds he aims at transcending. He succeeds in creating his robot, his own addition to the Divine Creation, but he underestimates the power of the forces with which he is dealing, in particular the inherent dynamics of the machine's unswerving reliability. Its mechanical energy becomes uncontrollable and destructive because, once set in motion, it cannot react independently to anything unforeseen. Thus the robot's mechanical regularity and the basic principle of life and nature "which bars the possibility of duplicates" are basically incompatible, a fact emphasized by Bannadonna's tragic death. Significantly, while absorbed in imposing the same mechanical regularity on Una's enigmatic smile, i.e. while attempting to make her uniform with all the other figures on the clock, the robot, "true to its heedful winding up, left its post precisely at the given moment; ... and, ... dully smote the intervening brain of Bannadonna" (p.222). Bannadonna has underestimated the latent power of the force which he created, which through its inherent regularity can grow beyond human control. It is here that, as the narrator suggests, "between the finer mechanic forces and the ruder animal vitality some germ of correspondence might prove discoverable" (p.220). Bannadonna,

in creating his machine, has introduced a new source of energy without fully understanding its implications, thus releasing new demonic forces which, although they originate at an hour of spiritual liberation, only bind man anew. In this respect, by raising the issue of modern vulnerability, "The Bell-Tower" is a true Piazza tale. In this story, disintegration (or collapse) is attributable to primarily two causes: to the individual and his intellectual obsession and to the community at large and its unwillingness to cope with an essentially modern problem in a modern spirit. To anticipate in this connection a point developed later, it is worth noting that while the people are rightly aware of the demonic nature of the robot, their complete surrender to their superstitious fears partly causes the collapse of the belfry. Once machinery has been invented and has demanded human sacrifice, it will not do to shoot and bury it, as the magistrates do, in other words, to succumb to the spirit of the Dark Ages and apply outdated modes of thinking to a modern problem. The story proves that it is exactly this action of attempting to turn the wheel of time back, which is directly responsible for the collapse of the belfry and the fall of the state-bell, both of which symbolize society's glorious superstructures.

But to return to Bannadonna's share of the narrative. His death proves that man cannot control the creation of his own mind, which becomes the more independent the more perfect it is. Thus, Bannadonna becomes the victim of his own ingenuity, and the manacled hands of Haman, instead of severing the "loving clasp" of the hands of Una and Dua (the principle of unity in multiplicity) "dully smote the <u>intervening brain of</u> Bannadonna" [italics mine]. His crime against Una and the cohesion of nature is avenged, and the "clasped hands" triumph over the "brain,"

paralleled by the larger triumph of nature over man's creation of "stone-pines" and "metallic aviaries."

These, then, are Bannadonna's three crimes: his anti-sociality, his inhumanity, and his violation of one of nature's basic laws. It must nevertheless be emphasized that Bannadonna, while responsible for his own death, cannot be held solely responsible for the collapse of the belfry or the tower. Why does the state-bell fall at his funeral? Is it solely due to the blood-flaw, as the neat concluding moral indicates, or due to cultural failure, of a religious nature, as Baird suggests, so that the collapse of the bell-tower "symbolizes the collapse of culture as religion"?[14] I agree with Baird that the tower is a symbol of man's cultural achievement, but the bell clearly does not signify "religion." Melville explicitly states that the gigantic bell was a state-bell, which means that in this Renaissance community the traditional symbol of religion has already been secularized. The centre of this community is the state, not the church.

There are, I suggest, different forces at work. The state-bell falls, as previously suggested, for two reasons, one of which is the obvious one, singled out by Melville in his moral and often referred to by critics, namely the inherent weakness in the bell "where man's blood has flawed it." Yet this does not account for the whole belfry "crashing sidewise in." Here Melville's neat moral fails to mention that his narrative raises other responsibilities:

> It afterwards appeared that the powerful peasant, who had the bell-rope in charge, wishing to test at once the full glory of

[14]Baird, pp. 399, 402.

> the bell, had swayed down [italics mine] upon the rope with one concentrate jerk. The mass of quaking metal, too ponderous for its frame, ... loosed from its fastening, tore sidewise down. (P.222.)

As this passage shows, what accounts for the "groining" of the belfry is the wrong use made of Bannadonna's revolutionary invention which, due to its delicate supporting structure, depended on a new way of striking rather than swaying the bell or its clapper. However, once the magistrate and the people, succumbing to their superstitious fears, sink the robot far out in the sea, there is no force strong enough to strike the mighty bell. When they revert to the traditional mode of ringing or rather swaying, and when "the most robust man of the country was assigned the office of bell-ringer," the blood-flaw accounts for little, and the collapse of the belfry is a simple matter of statics. The delicate intellectual mechanism of Bannadonna, once he was dead, was thus misused by the superstitious fears of the magistrate and the onslaught of primitive unthinking energy, and the collapse of the belfry is not only due to Bannadonna's daring design but also to the failure of the magistrate and people to understand and support it.

This interpretation makes allowance for those passages which develop the theme of superstition which have remained unaccounted for in most interpretations and sometimes are explained as residual Gothic features.[15] It is important to note that the "assertion of the marvellous" in the robot's character, as Fogle calls it,[16] is not

[15] Kosok, p.126, and Fogle, Shorter Tales, p.69.

[16] Ibid., p.70. Fogle explains the use of alternative explanations as "a way of eating one's cake and having it, too," but he fails to answer whether in this case this is a mere technical trick or whether this ambiguity is functionally employed in the story.

ornamental but is functionally embedded in the structure of the narrative in a special "Piazza tale" technique, insofar as Bannadonna's fearlessness is through it contrasted with the people's superstitious fear. Kühnelt suggests that this atmosphere of the uncanny and supernatural simply indicates "das Unheimliche und Frevelhafte dieser Schöpfung,"[17] but here we see the usual mistake of overemphasizing the importance of one point of view. The robot is uncanny and blasphemously malicious only in the eyes of the people and the magistrates, and the third person narrator clearly detaches himself by suggesting alternative natural explanations for the occurrences on the tower.[18] On the other hand we can notice that he does not share Bannadonna's fearless enthusiasm for the robot. There is again in this story the well-known pattern of two contradictory viewpoints, neither of which is capable of fully grasping the complexity of the issue. The ambiguity lies here between Bannadonna's viewpoint and that of the people,[19] and it is wrong to suggest that the "correct conclusion" is the people's,[20] because the impact of the narrative condemns it as insufficient and destructive. The question of whether the robot is impious or a mere feat of mechanics is futile. It is both, as the story suggests. But either attitude, if it is pursued to

[17]Kühnelt, p.153.

[18]This technique of evoking supernatural connotations while suggesting natural explanations is one of Hawthorne's favourite devices, called by Winters "the Formula of Alternate Possibilities," and by Matthiessen "Multiple Choice."

[19]This point is raised in Fogle's interpretation (pp.71-72) and interpreted as another instance of ambiguity. But he infers, wrongly I think, that the people's attitude towards the robot is essentially the right one.

[20]Ibid., p.72.

the extreme, is wrong. Bannadonna's fearlessness, which becomes carelessness, and the people's superstitious fear, which becomes criminal negligence, both lead towards disaster.

Although the superstructure is repaired quickly, the "metallic aviary" sings for only one year--again the symbolic number one. On its first anniversary, "an earthquake came; one loud crash was heard. The stone pine, with all its bower of songsters, lay overthrown upon the plain" (p.223). Thus nature takes its final vengeance, and man's cultural achievements disintegrate not only because of man's own failure but also because of hostile nature. Thus, one of the background themes of this story is the underlying struggle between man's cultural achievement and the uncontrollable energies of nature. Tower and earthquake, man's cultural achievement and nature's primitive energy, are not easily reconciled, and man's cultural achievements, once they transgress against nature, are jeopardized by nature's vengeance. After all, the tale opens and closes with the image of nature's final victory, the image of the "stone-pine" overthrown upon the plain. Man's achievement, compared to nature's elemental power, is but "lichened ruin," its dissolution leaving but a "mossy mound--last flung shadow of the perished trunk" (p.208).

To conclude this inquiry into the various causes of the collapse of the bell-tower by a verdict: the responsibility must be shared between Bannadonna, the people, and the retributive forces of nature. The story thus does not deal solely with the problem of technology or inhumanity, but through it with the issue of culture and civilisation. Bannadonna's violations of the laws of sociality, humanity, and nature

are not solely responsible, but a fair share of responsibility rests with the people. They hail Bannadonna on his lonely perch and condone his murder of the workman for the sake of national honour and glory; they attempt neither to understand his design nor to break his absolutist rule, so that after his death they are helplessly inadequate to cope with his revolutionary invention. Furthermore, they succumb to their superstitions and are unable to cope with the design in the spirit in which it was invented. And lastly, by letting primitive and uncouth strength take over where subtlety and ingenuity are required, they themselves cause the belfry to "groin." Hero-worship, superstition, and brute unthinking strength are their substantial contributions to the collapse of the tower.

Finally the tower falls for no human reasons. An earthquake overthrows not only the rebuilt superstructure but its whole length, thus performing a function similar to the thunder in "The Lightning-Rod Man" and the drought in "The Encantadas." Nature is hostile to man and to his civic and cultural achievements, which are thus threatened not only from within but also from without. There is, as "The Encantadas" suggest, some outside hostile force against which man, by himself, has little protection. What help there is, comes from man's bonds with his fellowmen (the tower was built by the cooperation of the whole community), but even these, as all the Piazza tales show, are disintegrating. In these stories Melville seems to have been sensitively aware of the issue of disintegration and cultural decline, of which each story gives evidence. A civilisation which like the utilitarian Wall-street society has lost touch with "humanizing associations" ("Bartleby"); which is built on oppression ("Benito Cereno"); which prays to a God who seems to demand

that "man avoid man" ("The Lightning-Rod Man"); and which is built on the excessive power of man's intellect, unsupported by the common people, such a society carries the seed of destruction within itself and is unable to protect man in his struggle for order. In all these stories there is evidence of Melville's deep historical sense and his critical awareness of the shortcomings of his time. Evil is always viewed not as a metaphysical question but as a "land" issue, in relation to a particular contemporary situation. Here, into the miniature scope of a story about the collapse of a bell-tower, Melville has compressed a historical awareness which fits the modern situation as neatly as it describes the collapse of the civilisation of a small Italian township at the end of the Middle Ages.

There still remains one last issue of how to interpret nature's final victory. Terms from the organic process of nature, birth and decay, are used by Melville in this story to describe the cultural process, so that it appears that Melville's concept of culture foreshadows that of Spengler and Toynbee, insofar as each culture is understood by them to be subject to the organic process of birth and decay. Yet this is not, as Baird suggests, hopeful in itself.[21] It is true that in Melville's chronologically early stories, the process of nature carries a promise of health and rebirth (as in the appearance of the green turf in "Bartleby," and, in reversed form, in the equation of desert with Inferno in "The Encantadas"), but here, in "The Bell-Tower," written two years

[21]Baird, p.397. In the context of Melville's books, the return of the ruins of the tower to the form of a primitive tree, from the state of civilisation to original nature, is seen as hopeful, because "original nature," according to Baird (p.366), suggests the "timelessness of the elemental earth."

later, this element has disappeared, and emphasized instead are those notes which imply death and decomposition, rather than birth and growth. The story opens with the memorable image of nature's victory, which is significantly described as "dark mould cankering" the bloom of a "once frescoed capital," as "dissolution," and "lichened ruin," and it ends with the fact of the earthquake. There are no hopeful signs and images in this overall dark story with which the Piazza Tales end. It appears that Melville had exhausted artistically as well as spiritually those new values which appeared as a "spot of radiance" in his chronologically early short stories, a fact verified by Melville's own survey of these crucial Arrowhead years in his "The Piazza," which documents his complete disillusionment. Yet his great stories breathe with the spirit and life which this turn to the human scene and secular values has given them. With his disillusionment in the efficacy of these values and with the growing disintegration of his moral vision, his fiction writing comes to an end.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

I

The major part of this thesis has proceeded under the assumption that "The Piazza" gives important clues to the interpretation of individual tales, and from these clues a new reading for each tale was found. It now remains to summarize once more what these unifying features are, and furthermore to pursue the question of what these recurrent unifying features reveal about Melville's artistic development at this crucial stage in his career. We must realize that the recurrence of significant features allows us to see in the Piazza Tales the sustained expression of three years of writing, which are important for the very fact that they immediately precede Melville's controversial period of "silence." This last chapter will therefore proceed in two parts, first a summary of the unifying features of the cycle, followed by a discussion of the major recurrent devices found in the tales, such as the "piazza attitude" of author detachment, the use and choice of imagery, and the use of dialectic contrast in the structural pattern of the tales.

II

At first sight it might appear that the Piazza Tales have little in common, and that their subject matter, atmosphere, and settings differ widely. This, coupled with the fact that Melville withdrew his "immature" proposal about supplying "some sort of prefatory matter" to the collection, may help to explain why the inherent unity of the Piazza tales has not been argued before. Yet Melville did change his mind again, and one month

later sent in his new outline for the collection, which contained a new title, The Piazza Tales, an introductory story "The Piazza," and a revised order of the tales. This strongly suggests that while initially Melville himself was not strongly aware of any unity of the tales to be collected, either a suggestion by the publisher or the convention of other story collections caused him to think on these lines. The reversal of his decision gives grounds for believing that Melville later consciously recognized the Piazza Tales as an artistic unit and that he wrote "The Piazza" with this in mind.

Even without the title story, several unifying features may be established. All Piazza tales are "land" stories which deal with issues pertaining to Melville's contemporary society. They all deal with evil, as a man-created force, born out of a certain historical situation, as well as primeval general hostility surrounding man. There is furthermore the recurrent awareness of a dichotomy pervading significant aspects of life, which extends to such basic issues as man's perception and his capacity for moral judgment and action; there is a consistent aloofness and detachment on the part of the author, his refusal to identify himself with either one of the conflicting views which he presents; there are important consistencies in the choice and use of imagery; and there is further the significant fact that the climax of each story's action is made to hinge on the issue of mutual understanding and help. In "Bartleby" and "The Bell-Tower," lack of understanding, friendship, and sociality lead to tragic results, while adherence to them provides for the happier climax in the Don's leap in "Benito Cereno," in the escape of the Essex and the buccaneers from the doom of the Encantadas, and the expulsion of the devil in "The Lightning-Rod Man."

The title story underscores these features, thus establishing links not only between the individual tales but between the stories and the introduction. A significant feature of the whole collection is the symbol of the piazza, which expresses the author's detachment. Failure to take cognizance of it has, in my view, led to many needless misinterpretations of the tales. In particular, any interpretation which purports to equate the author with one of the protagonists must be viewed with suspicion, because any such interpretation conflicts with the clues given by "The Piazza." For instance, in "Bartleby" Melville has been identified with Bartleby himself in some interpretations and with the lawyer in others; Melville was seen to be behind Don Benito, but he was also identified with the completely different nature of the cottager in "The Lightning-Rod Man." Obviously all of these views cannot be correct, and I have given my reasons for thinking that none is.

There is furthermore the important thematic link of "Marianna's face, and many as real a story," which I discussed in greater detail previously. The fact that, according to "The Piazza," truth is found in the dark "night view" and not in the bright but illusory "day view" emphasizes that Melville is far from being "reconciled" and on the way towards the calm acceptance often alleged in connection with Clarel and Billy Budd. Although "the tortoise is both black and bright," the white underside, when exposed, makes it vulnerable and ultimately causes its death, the "bright" thus only emphasizing another "dark" truth. It is with this dark side of truth that Melville is concerned in his Piazza Tales, evil, caused either by some human failure or by a primeval hostility and affecting not only the individual but also the society of which he is a member. These issues of the Piazza tales proper are

then, by means of "The Piazza," set against the background of the "dark mountain," that is, against the background of a metaphysical void. Modern life is bereft of absolute criteria, and the only ascertainable truth to be found on the "mountain" is man's loneliness and the futility of his existence.

Another important feature of the cycle is the inner consistency between the arrangement of the stories and the theme of the introduction. The subject of "The Piazza" is, as previously outlined, the author's involvement in a "spot of radiance" which, clothed in the romantic love-motif in search of Una, differs from former Melvillean quests. Instead of the pursuit of pale blonde Yillah, which must avoid dark Hautia with her vine-waving maidens, Una herself can only be reached through the dark-green forest road of involvement with the earthy, for she represents, as previously suggested, the ideal of unity and of integration in a situation where "the human integral [is] clove asunder." Yet this "spot of radiance" is proven in the sequence of the story to be an optical illusion, and what is found on the mountain instead is Marianna and with her the recognition of man's loneliness and alienation.

The sequence of the stories, as arranged after the composition of "The Piazza," follows in outline this pattern of rising and then vanishing hope, the transfer of "The Lightning-Rod Man" from last to third position emphasizing this pattern. This position of each tale in the sequence of the cycle is, I think, important, because in the context of the cycle those features of affirmation and cautious optimism which have given rise to speculations concerning Melville's general "acceptance" or optimism are thrown into an ambiguous light. It is as if Melville in

"The Piazza" passed a critical comment on those notes of sociality, friendship, and love, on which the climax of the early stories is made to hinge. As indicated in "The Piazza," which can be considered Melville's last short story for many years to come, even these last values, which appear as a kind of beacon on the mountain, are illusory, and what remains as unalterable truth is man's loneliness. As Melville repeats several years later, in his poem "The Pleasure Party":

> What cosmic jest or anarch blunder
> The human integral clove asunder
> And shied the fractions through life's gate? (Poems, p.219.)

Thus, certain conclusions can be reached. Above all, the cycle as a whole constitutes an important milestone in Melville's development. This role, which the Piazza Tales play in Melville's personal and artistic development, had been recognized as early as 1928 by Weaver and Sadleir, but neither they nor later critics have stated explicitly what this specific role is. Do the stories confirm Arvin's allegation that Melville's imagination was flagging in those years and that he was overly concerned--to a morbid extent--with his own personal failure? Or do they indicate as a group, in Mason's words, "a change for the better," "better" implying "insistence upon stoicism, the silent acceptance of suffering"?[1]

Seen against Pierre, the stories certainly evince signs of a reorientation. There is, above all, the important turn away from metaphysical problems towards "land" issues or what Mason calls "a new preoccupation with contemporary values," in other words, towards a

[1]Mason, pp.180, 184.

preoccupation with evil as it affects the world around him. After man has realized his aloneness in a universe of amoral, blind elemental forces in the manner of Pierre, Melville's Piazza Tales switch to the more immediate problem of what safeguards are left to man against evil in all its various forms. Of these, two appear in the Piazza Tales, the "measured forms" of social and political establishment and the "hearth" values of sociality, friendship, and love. But while these two appear in some stories as positive determinants of action, in the cycle as such, as emphasized by "The Piazza," they have lost their efficacy, due to the disillusioning unalterable condition of man's inability to "reach out." As "The Piazza" emphasizes, instead of Una, there is Marianna, isolated in her mountain hut, "sitting, sitting, restless sitting." The fact that the cycle ends in tragic and dark pictures of utter failure emphasizes this. Man's isolation is irremediable, and the gleam of hope, in the terms of "The Piazza," is largely illusory. At this point the closeness of the Piazza Tales to The Confidence Man is quite apparent, the latter going one step beyond this recognition. In The Confidence Man man's last values--confidence, trust and sociality--are not only illusory but totally ambiguous: they are the very means through which evil achieves its purpose. With this gloomy presentation of total ambiguity, Melville gives up his career of writing fiction.

In these circumstances I think it is wrong to attribute Melville's "retirement" to flagging imagination or even to see him moving in the direction of stoic acceptance. The general impact which the Piazza Tales make is of the dark reality of invading evil, together with the experience of pervasive ambiguity which foils every attempt of man to "know" and to act "morally." From here to the total ambiguity of The

Confidence Man it is hardly a step, and it seems that after its portrayal of total ambiguity in the human sphere and human relationships, Melville needed again a new principle of writing which, however, he could not find in the form of fiction writing available to him. Certainly from an artistic viewpoint there is no reason to think of him as "written out." On the contrary the balance and technical mastery of his stories are superior to anything he wrote before. There is his new mastery of point of view, which gives his stories a new dimension of expression (structural ambiguity through author effacement), and which has been recognized as an important original contribution to the development of the American short story;[2] there is his control of imagery; and very important, there is the balance achieved in the portrayal of the two basic themes of isolation and sociality, the latter often ignored in discussions of individual stories. It is going too far to say with Hoyle that in Melville's stories we find expressed his "yearning to return to society,"[3] but no general assessment can ignore the fact that most of the tales are told from the viewpoint of the sociable man (although this is heavily qualified, as pointed out earlier), and that sociality and personal understanding are important positive determinants in each story.

Finally, in order to evaluate the cycle as a whole from the viewpoint of Melville's development, three of the most important recurring features will be discussed: the narrator's attitude, the use and choice of imagery, and the use of a quasi-dialectic structural pattern;

[2]See Hoffmann, "Short Novel," pp.140-41, and Farnsworth, p.144.

[3]Hoyle, p.224.

these three will reveal not only his new artistic mastery but also the impasse into which he was heading.

III

The most important of the recurrent devices used in the tales and raised by Melville himself to the rank of title symbol is the one which was previously described as the "piazza attitude." By this we understand the disappearance of the author behind the oblique presentation of contradictory attitudes and his critical detachment from both. This attitude is frequently achieved by the employment of a separate consciousness which functions either as narrator or as the narrator's substitute (Delano). The author shows his critical detachment either by creating a fictitious personality which differs distinctly from the author, such as the lawyer-narrator in "Bartleby" and the cottager in "The Lightning-Rod Man," or he may maintain his detachment by juxtaposing the narrator's superficial observations with the protagonists' deeper knowledge or with the impact of the story, this juxtaposition ironically displaying the imperceptiveness of the narrator. Delano, the lawyer, the cottager, and the sailor-narrator in "The Encantadas" are examples of this device. In all cases, except in the clearly autobiographical "Piazza," Melville as author has disappeared behind the establishment of different points of view, a fact which could be considered both an advance from the viewpoint of Melville's artistic development and an advance in the technique of the genre, as Hoffmann and Farnsworth have pointed out. Hoffmann sees in Melville's handling of the narrator's attitude a significant development away from the prototype of the Hawthornean story, while Farnsworth looks at it from the viewpoint of Melville's development:

> Following Pierre, Melville characteristically uses a more limited point of view than in his early novels. He never again merges the roles of protagonist and narrator without making the reader clearly aware of the limitations of the protagonist's point of view. When he adopts an omniscient third person narrator, he does not expose his personal values and sympathies as openly as in his early novels .... Melville no longer speaks his mind openly and fully from the point of view of a single character. His criticism, his theme, usually remains implicit in the story.[4]

This statement seems to define admirably Melville's attitude as outlined in "The Piazza." If there is withdrawal, it is, from an artistic viewpoint, the withdrawal into critical observation and ironic detachment. The narrator thus is no longer the mouthpiece of the author but a figure of irony, stripped of his prerogative of omniscience and even of perceptiveness. In Leo Marx' words, applied to "Bartleby":

> For his narrator he therefore chose, as he did in "Benito Cereno," which belongs to the same period, a man of middling stature with a propensity for getting along with people, but a man of distinctly limited perception.[5]

Marx here points to another important recurrent feature in Melville's use of narrators in his stories, namely that the transmitting consciousness always belongs to the group of the sociable and genial, which is usually contrasted to an isolato protagonist. But although this optimistic man of "middling stature" might be on the obtuse side, it is nevertheless important that, if any sympathies are allotted, they are usually given to him rather than to the withdrawn or withdrawing absolutist protagonist. This device not only reveals Melville's growing critical detachment from the obsessed "seeker" but, as far as the structure of each story is concerned, results in a happy balance which Melville had lost in Pierre

[4] Farnsworth, p.9.

[5] Marx, p.605.

through his often uncritical identification with his hero.

What this means from the viewpoint of Melville's development is important. The adoption of a sustained point of view might be a "radical change" from the lack of technical control shown in his novels; however, this new attitude of detachment and choice of focus from which the story is told should not be regarded purely as a technical device. It reflects a change in the nature and extent of Melville's involvement in the spiritual quest, and this change is already apparent in some of the preceding novels. It is quite usual to see the line of Melville's artistic development as governed by extreme fluctuations,[6] but as far as the issue of spiritual quest is concerned, there is instead evidence of a consistent and gradual change which from identification with the "seeker" in Melville's early books leads through the cautious acceptance of the values of moderation, friendship, and sociality to the complete effacement of the author behind the dialectic positing of ambiguous attitudes, themes, and characters; the latter state is typified by The Confidence Man, Melville's last published prose work, where there is total absence of thematic resolution and point of reference. The Piazza Tales are an important step in this development, for their balanced exposition and their critical detachment from both the absolutist seeker and the expedient, sociable mediocrity. In order to see this "new attitude" in

[6]James E. Miller, Jr., in A Reader's Guide to Herman Melville (New York, 1962), p.4, outlines these fluctuations: "Melville, at the beginning of his career, identified himself with Taji's ultimately suicidal search in Mardi, and hovered between Ishmael's purgation and Ahab's cosmic defiance in Moby Dick; in mid-career Melville's extreme bitterness burst forth in The Confidence Man's vicious misanthropy; and, finally, at the end of his career, Melville achieved a calm Christian acceptance with Billy Budd."

the perspective of Melville's general development, a cursory look at the "curve of Melville's spiritual quest" is necessary.[7]

The absolutist seeker and the sociable man of compromise are by no means new "types" in Melville's writing, but we find them in his earlier books, for instance in Mardi--as Taji and Babbalanja--and in Moby Dick--as Ahab and Ishmael. However, from the viewpoint of Melville's spiritual development it is interesting that while Mardi is told from the perspective of the seeker, Moby Dick is told from the perspective of Ishmael, who begins to dissociate himself from Ahab's mad quest, matures through his experience, and is symbolically reborn from the waters on the coffin of his friend.[8] This same pattern of detachment from the seeker is still apparent in the Piazza Tales, with the difference that Melville shows ironic detachment from both the sociable optimistic man of middling stature (who, unlike Ishmael, is unable to learn from his experience and is on the shallow, if not obtuse, side) and from the seeker or isolato (who has now, as in Pierre, lost his heroic stature and is crippled and defeated). Thus, Melville uses the Moby Dick pattern in a lower key, so to speak. Both sides have now lost in stature, but the balance lost in Pierre, due to Melville's often uncritical identification with his hero, has in most of his Piazza tales been regained. What

[7]The following survey is based on two dissertations which deal with the problem of point of view, the one by Farnsworth, the other by Barbara Morehead, "Melville's Use of the Narrator in Moby Dick" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Chicago, 1957).

[8]This is one of the major points of Morehead's thesis, which challenges the repeated allegation that Melville was a bad craftsman. See in this connection also Jean Jacques Mayoux, "Mythe et symbole chez Herman Melville," Inventario, XV (1960), 49.

Melville achieves by this method of establishing and contrasting two opposite viewpoints is a gain in all respects. Through it, the tension of contrast can take over where formerly action had to serve, and with this a new range of short story material opens up to him (as his diptychs show). Furthermore the effacement of the author demands that whatever comment the author wants to make must remain implicit in the story and has to be expressed indirectly, as for instance through imagery,[9] which could be considered a gain as far as Melville's own craftsmanship is concerned. It has even lately been claimed that in the best of his stories, Melville approaches the symbolistic short story as well as techniques later developed by James and Conrad.[10]

Apart from the matter of author effacement, Melville's method of making the sociable middling man the focus of narration reflects his critical detachment from the seeker which corresponds to the narrator's "I'll launch my yawl no more" in "The Piazza." This, together with the fact that the sociable man is not only the focus of narration but also the recipient of what few signs of sympathy are betrayed, all indicate Melville's new preoccupation with the human scene and "contemporary values."[11] This represents an important reorientation towards a range

[9]See Melville's use of the image patterns in the journey of "The Piazza," the use of the satyr in "Benito Cereno," and the wall in "Bartleby."

[10]On Melville as "symbolist writer," see William York Tindall, The Literary Symbol (New York, 1955), pp.69 ff. and Edmund Wilson, Axel's Castle (New York, 1939), p.12, as well as Feidelson, pp.27-35, and Matthiessen, p.291.

[11]Mason, p.184, Hoyle, p.224, and Mayoux, p.48: "C'est le passage vers la sympathie vraie, la démocratie, la fraternité, que l'on trouve dans maint conte ou nouvelle, dans Bartleby, comme dans Cocorico, dans le Pudding du pauvre, dans Israel Potter surtout."

of experience which is more concerned with cultural and social issues of the human scene around him than with the obsessive questing after "truth." Now, his observations are directed at the immediate contemporary scene and are presented in a way which indicates that Melville had gained control of the media of fictional presentation to a fuller extent than ever before.

IV

One of the story features over which Melville seems to have gained control--possibly through the influence of Hawthorne--is his use and choice of imagery. In the Agatha letter we noticed that images seem to occur to Melville very early in the draft stage and that they are used functionally in elaborating and condensing meaning. In his Piazza Tales, images are used in a similar fashion, with indications of considerable control. They are centrally employed in each story and greatly help to create the rich complexity of each story. They are never purely ornamental but serve significant functions in the stories, not only by elaborating on the theme but also by providing us with one of the few clues to Melville's own attitude towards each theme (such as the use of fertility-sterility imagery in "The Piazza," death and sickness in the description of Bartleby, the colour black to denote the evil of oppression in "Benito Cereno," the analogy of lightning-rod man with the devil, the death images in "The Encantadas," and the use of mould and decay in "The Bell-Tower"). A look at the texture of imagery in the Piazza Tales refutes the allegation that Melville's imagination was flagging in these years;[12] on the contrary, the use of imagery in his chronologically

[12]Arvin, pp.231-33.

"late" stories, such as "Benito Cereno," "The Bell-Tower," and "The Piazza," reinforces the impression that Melville's short stories "live" by the organic patterns of symbolic expression. They are, in Tindall's sense of the word, "symbolistic short stories," insofar as "images, allusions, hints, changes of rhythm, and tone--in short, all the devices of suggestion--support and sometimes carry the principal burden."[13] In a few cases the stories have dispensed with dynamic action altogether and are built around central symbols, such as the lightning-rod or the drought-ridden Encantadas.

According to Philip Wheelright, imagery may confirm, amplify, or contradict plot,[14] and a survey of Melville's usage shows that he uses imaginatively both confirmatory and contradictory image patterns. Sometimes they are used to clarify and elaborate themes, as for instance the fertility-sterility imagery of the journey in "The Piazza," the beast analogy in the fight between negroes and sailors in "Benito Cereno," the waxen pallor of Bartleby and Don Benito, the employment of the shield of Castile and Leon; while at other times they are used as an ironic comment, as for instance the religious imagery, the anointment analogy, and the knight and armour imagery in "Benito Cereno," the use of Spenser and Una, allusions to the Biblical Pisgah view in "The Encantadas," and the "silence as of Shiloh" in "The Bell-Tower." In this manner, imagery is used as a functional means of communication. In "Benito Cereno" for instance, the drama which on one level seems the internal one of Delano's

[13] Tindall, p.68.

[14] Philip E. Wheelright, The Burning Fountain: A Study in the Language of Symbolism (Bloomington, Indiana, 1954), p.204.

perception is "externalized" rather than "internalized" by the employment of imagery (inquisition, references to Castile and Leon, the dark satyr) which sets the internal problem of perception into a wider cultural context. Ecclesiastical imagery and those images expressing feudal decay have cultural connotations, and they thus widen the action of the violent revolt and the internal drama of human perception into the suggestive complexity of cultural death through society's implication with the crimes of the past.

Furthermore, we noticed in our interpretations instances where Melville uses imagery as a structural device, to anticipate action, as in the opening image of the collapsed tower in "The Bell-Tower," or to suggest a climax which then, on the plot level, never takes place, as in "The Piazza." Thus images not only "explain" but present subtly woven strands, which provide an interesting counterpoint or parallel to the story action. Something is present "beyond narrative and discourse," a feature which Tindall selects as a main characteristic of the symbolist novel: "Devoted less to description of external realities than to 'visions,' this kind of novel or story must borrow from poems not meter and rhyme ... but 'concise energy' of language," by which Tindall means a concert of elements which are primarily devices of suggestion, such as imagery, tone, and change of rhythm.[15] It is this very complex "conciseness" which distinguishes Melville's late stories, such as "Benito Cereno" and "The Piazza."

As suggested earlier, Melville's stories are often built around a

[15]Tindall, pp.68-9.

central symbol, and even a story with a violent background action such as "Benito Cereno" has as its symbolic centre the recurring emblem of the masked satyr. Admittedly this technique of composition is not new in Melville's writing; Moby Dick is conceived around the central symbol of the white whale, but new and different is Melville's habit of using this central symbol (and minor ones as well) with more of a permanent "fixed" connotation than was formerly the case. Critics are in agreement that in Moby Dick one of the major distinguishing features of Melville's symbols is their characteristic of what Wheelright calls plurisignation, which refers to the complexity of certain symbols which "on any given occasion of its realisation" can "carry more than one legitimate reference."[16] Matthiessen defines the use of symbolism in Moby Dick in the following manner:

> The fact that Melville's most effective symbols expand thus from indicated analogies into the closely wrought experience of whole chapters, and that such a quality as whiteness can hold different contents at different times, or indeed at the same time, should emphasize the futility of the game which was so popular a decade ago, of trying to "spot" in a paragraph exactly what the white whale stands for.[17]

In discussions of Melville's symbolism, this "plurisignation" of symbols is often considered an important feature, which sets Melville's technique off against that of Hawthorne, whose formula of "alternative possibilities" (Yvor Winter's term) or "multiple choice" (Matthiessen's)

[16] Wheelright, p.61.

[17] Matthiessen, p.290. Also R. W. Short, "Melville as Symbolist," UKCR, XV (Autumn, 1948), 44: "These images, then, formed a frame in which he gradually made out his picture. As the picture grew, the images themselves began to reveal their essential (symbolic) meanings .... Melville's method, then, allows his symbols to accumulate meanings in the course of their use."

makes use of a similar diversity which, however, applies not to the underlying idea, as in Melville's case, but to its embodiment. Winters defines Hawthorne's method in the following way: "The idea conveyed is clear enough, but the embodiment of the idea appears far-fetched."[18] Thus, we are never quite sure whether there was an A in the sky, whether Donatello had pointed ears, or whether the wolf did come and smell of Pearl's robe.

On the other hand, Melville's technique of symbolism seems exactly the reverse. There is Moby Dick. But what does he mean? There is the doubloon. But what does it imply? Thus, while in Melville's technique--at least as far as Moby Dick is concerned--the concrete representation is clear, its meaning is uncertain and variegated.

This technique is accepted as a principal one in Moby Dick. Yet can we say that it is a distinguishing feature of the Piazza Tales as well? In a few instances, it is true, we still find images which seem to carry more than one legitimate meaning, such as the piazza and the tortoise; but in general it can be said that the instances in which the context or situation of the image allows only one legitimate connotation are more numerous than those in which multiple meanings can be carried by one and the same image. It is quite usual to find one primary connotation of any symbol sustained through the course of one tale (such as the satyr, the lightning-rod, or Bartleby's dead-wall), and sometimes even through a succession of several, or all, tales (such as the hearth, the handclasp, or Una). This does not mean that subsidiary associations cannot or do not arise, but in his short stories Melville

[18] Winters, p.171.

seems much more conscious of the need to tighten and compress rather than to expand, and he uses his images accordingly. Barret, who in his Ph.D. thesis on Melville's symbols of truth makes a similar observation concerning the change away from plurisignation, sees here indications of flagging imagination and of a development towards logical control, which he attributes to Hawthorne's influence:

> This doubt of the symbolism of life, so inescapable in the face of growing doubt that any truth can be attained, is evident in the manner in which Melville handles symbols in his writing from Pierre on. They tend to become less poetic and more logical; sometimes they appear to be forced; sometimes they are melodramatic.[19]

I agree with Barret that there is evidence of logical control which might be due to Hawthorne's influence; but I cannot agree with him that this logical control is in any way forced or unpoetic. Rather it seems to express a sensitive awareness of the requirements of the genre of the short story, the slender frame of which could not have stood the weight of Melville's previous method of multiple connotations. That Melville limits the range of reference which his symbols carry and makes symbols, theme, and action correspond to one another in an accord of elements is by no means an impoverishment in texture but a sign of control. Melville's best short stories have what Tindall demands of the symbolistic short story, namely the "concise energy of poems."

Apart from these recurrences in the use of imagery, another feature merits attention, namely the choice of sphere from which the

[19] Barret, p.145. Also p.140: "Much of Melville's later writing closely approaches allegory. A number of the Piazza Tales can be read with a closeness of interpretation which could never be justified in Moby Dick or Pierre." In this connection, Magowan, p.348, speaks of Melville's "emblematic way of writing," which, as Hoffmann ("Shorter Fiction," p.417) agrees, approaches Hawthorne's method.

images are drawn. The images used are primarily "land" images, and Melville's former sea imagery has, if not quite disappeared, at least receded into the background. From the point of view of Melville's general development, this is significant. From Mardi onwards, the sea carries suggestions of the Eternal, and images connected with it, such as the diver, the sea-farer, and the voyage, bear connotations of "truth-seeking."[20] But the Piazza Tales are "land" stories, and only in a few instances do sea images occur with these former connotations, such as the "voyage" in "The Piazza" and the "ship-wrecked" Bartleby. In "Benito Cereno," which on the surface is a sea story, Melville consistently uses images and metaphors which suggest the land rather than the sea (the subterranean vaults, the balconies, the grass, the grottoes, the moss, the charred ruin of some summer-house, the hempen forest); and even in "The Piazza," in the only instance where the image of the voyage with its usual connotation of quest is used, it is, in the form of a figure of speech, an inland voyage, describing a mountain climb. In this particular instance, Melville's shift to land images is quite noticeable. If reference to the Eternal is made at all, then it is in land terms, recurrently in the image of the mountain.[21] More important, however, than this change in the choice of imagery is the fact that this shift is accompanied by a different understanding of the Eternal. Whenever the image of the mountain in the Piazza Tales occurs, it is at once shrouded or dark (as in "The Piazza" and "The Encantadas"), while at the same time

[20]Barret, pp.156 ff.

[21]In Mardi and Pierre the mountain is used with similar connotations. In the former, it is the site of man's most direct communication with Oro (God), while in the latter it is the very site of the Eternal, against which Enceladus hurls himself in vain.

it is understood to be a place where "demons toil" and from where Jupiter Tonans hurls his arbitrarily destructive thunderbolts. Thus, Melville's statements concerning the Eternal in the Piazza Tales indicate a significant change. By switching from sea to mountain, the elements of variety and health which are tied up with the use of the image of the sea have disappeared, and instead two features are emphasized which foreshadow Kafka's image of God: the Eternal is elusive and unknowable (the mountains are shrouded and the walls of physical reality opaque), while its only ascertainable effect is hostile to man and destructive.

After the introductory "Piazza," symbols connoting the Eternal play no longer any functional role in the stories, and the concern shifts to other issues. Mountain and sea are still used as background, usually indicating hostile reality (such as the cruel sea in the Hunilla sketch, the malicious currents surrounding the Encantadas, and the exposure of the mountain huts in "The Piazza" and "The Lightning-Rod Man"), but in general it can be said that the choice of imagery, setting, and action all indicate a shift in Melville's concern. It is no longer primarily a concern with the Eternal and with man's metaphysical condition but with a more "empirical truth,"[22] namely with the forces of evil in a particular contemporary situation.

The setting itself, which is given symbolic significance in each story, emphasizes this different concern: there is the office as symbol of Wall-street society; the delapidated slaveship as a symbol of decaying civilisation; the mountain cottage, exposed and low, with its

[22]Braswell, p.21.

important hearth area; the scorched desert islands which afflict everything that comes in contact with them with the contagion of corruption and death; and finally the collapsing bell-tower as a symbol of the cooperative effort of a group of people: they all point to a preoccupation with "land" issues in which man's relationship with others figures predominantly, in the business world, in the body politic, in religion, among hostile nature, and in man's cultural achievement. Thus, the change of setting from the sea to the land supports the evidence of the Agatha letter, namely that a new range of subjects suggested itself to Melville, which stimulated his imagination to create works, some of which are in no way inferior to Moby Dick although they might lack the latter's spontaneity and exuberance. This time Melville's imagination is driven by a deep malaise at the situation of disintegration in his own time and country. It begins, in 1852, with the theme of disturbed human relations and ends, in 1856, in the river-voyage survey of contemporary mores in The Confidence Man, yet only in some of the Piazza Tales does Melville achieve a balance comparable to that of Moby Dick.

Melville's new concern with a more "empirical" truth on the human scene is also apparent in his choice of central symbols: there is the piazza with its triple suggestion of mutual incomprehension, modern feebleness, and the author's aesthetic withdrawal; the walls, suggestive of life's vacuity and the separation existing between man and man; the emblem of the masked satyr, pointing to a similar disturbance between men due to political oppression; the lightning-rod which destroys man's confidence not only in God but also in mankind; the drought imagery, indicating not only a physical but also a moral wasteland; and lastly the

fallen tower, symbolizing the collapse of man's cultural achievement: these central symbols support the idea which the setting emphasizes, namely that Melville is deeply concerned with contemporary issues, which through the frame of "The Piazza" are projected against the backdrop of his awareness that the mountain is dark and that "there is no secret."[23]

In a situation like this it is interesting to observe what role traditional religious symbols play. Wright, in her book on Melville and the Bible, points out that allusions to the Scriptures are very numerous in Melville's writings, and that two facts about their use are significant: first that he uses them only infrequently to embody his metaphysical abstractions, so that most Biblical allusions occur in a non-speculative context; and secondly, that in general the Biblical incidents referred to are either events of violence and destruction or events of vision and revelation.[24] Wright bases this observation on a general survey of all of Melville's work, but when we survey the Biblical allusions in the Piazza Tales, we find that while the former observation is still applicable, there are important deviations from the latter. The Scriptures are now primarily used to evoke parallel situations of failure and desolation. There are allusions to Shinar, Sisera, Jael and Deborah in "The Bell-Tower"; to the deserts of Idumea and "the weedy wastes of Babylon" in "The Encantadas"; to Ezekiel's Valley of Dry Bones in "Benito Cereno"; and to David's Adullan cave of exile in "The Piazza."

[23] In this connection, Herbert Wallace Schneider, History of American Philosophy (New York, 1946), p.295, n.5: "I cite this passage ['there is no secret'] for the particular benefit of our German friends who may wish to find an American representative of Existenzphilosophie and a disciple of Kierkegaard."

[24] Wright, p.25.

If any events of vision and revelation are referred to at all, it is only with ironic overtones (as in the "Pisgah View from the Rock" in "The Encantadas," and the expectant silence "of some Shiloh" in "The Bell-Tower," where instead of God death reveals itself in "a dull mangled sound"). The only figure which bears some vague connotations of salvation is --strangely--Lazarus; in the one case in "The Encantadas," however, this takes more the form of a wish, while in "The Piazza" the allusion to him is associated with a certain amount of ironic mockery (p.3).

Besides these references to the Scriptures, only a few sacramental symbols are used, such as the cross and the crucifix, but as previously shown, they have lost their redemptive overtones. The cross in "The Encantadas" is used only to connote a suffering in which humans and beast share alike, while the crucifix itself has become a valueless sign, "a knocker long plied in vain"; in "Benito Cereno" it even gains overtones of condoning torture and death in the inquisition scene.

Lastly should be mentioned a fairly large group of church images. Central in this group is the lightning-rod, which as a genuine safety device is exploited by the salesman for gain. Religion is now "sold," but there is as little indication as ever that the particular rod--or system of rods--is the best and only one. On the contrary, it has lost in merit by the sales technique and the "dogma" connected with it. Another instance of modern decadence in religious matters, this time not so much connected with the church as with the feeble spirit of the worshippers, is in "The Piazza" the image of the cathedral fitted out with pews. A further instance of derogatory use of the church is found in "Benito Cereno," where it is displayed as a symbol of medieval oppression and brutality.

Not all references to the church, however, are purely disparaging. Monks and imagery connected with them are used in contexts in which a sensitive awareness to evil is to be portrayed, an awareness, however, which "contemplates" rather than fights (Bartleby's retirement to his "hermitage" and Don Benito's to the monastery on Mount Agonia, in the company of the monk Infelez).

In general it can be said that there is a certain amount of correspondence between symbols referring to the absolute and those either referring to or taken from the sphere of religion. The latter reinforce the loss of metaphysical certainty, symbolized by the dark mountain and the impenetrable walls of physical reality. Emblems of religion are drained of their meaning and survive either as empty forms (as in the case of Hunilla's crucifix) or with connotations hostile to their original meaning. This confirms Baird's observation concerning a general situation in art:

> When formulated religion loses its sovereignty in a total culture, the manifestations of religious intent still continue to appear in art, no matter how antithetical and anarchic its abstractions may be.[25]

This situation will have to be borne in mind in any interpretation of the "crucifixion" imagery in Billy Budd, on which the "Testament of Acceptance" school has based its central argument.

If man has little hope from a religious source, the sphere of culture and society in the Piazza Tales is likewise not very conducive to optimism. All central cultural images exhibit a thoroughly secularized society, which shows telling signs of sickness and disintegration. The

[25]Baird, p.23.

majority of images referring to this cultural sphere indicate decay (slaveship), collapse (the tower), and vacuity (Wall-street). It might be argued that only the latter symbol is clearly taken from a context which can be taken to refer to Melville's contemporary society as "city" culture, but the others only hide their satiric portraiture of different facets of the same society (such as technology and slavery) behind the guise of a different setting. Thus they all have something specific to say about Melville's contemporary American society. There is the city, which is clearly associated with wasteland (see the references in "Bartleby" and "The Encantadas"); there is the collapsing tower of man's community achievement; and there are the flawed bells. Note that the latter are dissociated in both instances where the image occurs ("Benito Cereno" and "The Bell-Tower") from their former religious function and represent, as ship-bell and as state-bell, the voices of a group of people. In these, as in other images, we gain the impression that society suffers from a serious ailment which shows itself in various forms, of which the most important ones are firstly society's uncommittedness and inner vacuity, and secondly the violation of the almost sacred principle of human brotherhood through oppression or isolationism, these latter features symbolized by the masked satyr, Don Benito's chain and key, the Dog-King's "janizaries" of vicious dogs, the blood-flawed bell, and lastly the walls, the screen, and the locked door which separate Bartleby and Bannadonna from the company of others: they all reinforce the verdict of each story action that society is seriously threatened.

Yet the cycle is not solely concerned with this process of disintegration. There are, as already mentioned, significant symbols of hope, the most important of which are Una, the handclasp, and the hearth,

which express union, friendship, and sociality. These emerge as the positive images of the whole cycle, as "the spot of radiance" referred to in the introductory tale. But just as hope is frustrated in the course of the symbolic journey of "The Piazza," the cycle as a whole likewise confirms that these positive forces are seriously threatened: the "hearth" attitude by fear and spiritual feebleness ("The Lightning-Rod Man" and "The Piazza"), union and friendship by mutual incomprehension ("Bartleby" and "Benito Cereno"), and in "The Bell-Tower," by the blow of the robot, that is, by the substitution of machinery for man. Thus, while the overall impact of the Piazza Tales is not unrelievedly black, it is black enough to allow us to question any interpretation which purports to represent the Tales as a token of Melville's acceptance. After the comprehensive spiritual disillusionment expressed in Pierre, there is evidence in the Piazza Tales of an equally pervasive disillusionment as regards the spheres of cultural and human relationships.

In referring to those symbols expressing the Eternal, I mentioned that the only ascertainable effect of some supernal power is hostile to man. This applies also to the sphere of nature forces which in the spirit of the day could be considered its emanation. Nature, too, is basically hostile: there is the desolation of the parched Encantadas, the thunderstorm in "The Lightning-Rod Man," and the earthquake in "The Bell-Tower." Blue and sunny skies are deceptive (in "Benito Cereno" and in the reference to summerlightning in "Bartleby") and give little indication of nature's beneficence. Throughout, we find in Melville's nature-description, in Moby Dick, indications of some inherent demonism, which due to his mode of thinking is closely associated with his understanding of God, insofar as it is through nature that God reveals

himself. His understanding of nature and God, then, differs drastically from the typically transcendentalist attitude which Thoreau expresses so well: "I love nature, I love the landscape, because it is so sincere. It never cheats me. It never jests. It is cheerfully, musically earnest."[26]

Yet the general hostility to be found in the sphere of elemental natural forces does not apply to all other aspects of nature, and not to the vegetable and animal world. Here there is evidence of a balance which sets off the worm-eaten white Chinese creeper and the ubiquitous whiteweed against the vitality of the green forest ("The Piazza"), the health of climactic changes ("The Encantadas"), and the promise of life's eternal recurrence in the turf of grass ("Bartleby"). These latter images make up another small but important group of positive images which represent the eternal process of rebirth in nature as a token of health. Yet not too much can be made of this, as nature in the raw is seen as an arbitrary force which expresses its vitality in the form of rapaciousness (see the image of nature devouring the remnants of man's civilisation in "The Bell-Tower" and "The Piazza," and those images from the wild animal sphere which have raised rapaciousness to a general life-principle in "Benito Cereno" and "The Encantadas"). Only tamed nature is useful to man and can help support him in his continuous struggle for survival in the basically hostile situation of life (see those images taken from the sphere of the domesticated animal in "Benito Cereno"). Yet the extent to which nature can be truly "tamed" is seriously questioned, again in "Benito Cereno," where underneath the appearance of domestication savagery

[26]Quoted in Norman Foerster, Nature in American Literature (New York, 1958), p.100.

bares its teeth.

This latter point of the falseness of appearances brings us to a last but very important group of images which express the deceptiveness and ambiguity of all appearances, as for instance the play of light and shadow ("The Piazza"), the blending of white and black in the colour grey ("Benito Cereno" as a "gray" story[28]), and the employment of perspective which causes objects to "change" on approach (the spot of radiance in "The Piazza," the appearance of Rock Rodondo in "The Encantadas," and the San Dominick in "Benito Cereno"). Apart from this direct expression of duplicity in the form of images, we find that the use Melville makes of certain symbols tends to create a similar effect of ambiguity, for instance his technique of dual illumination, in which one object, or symbol, is seen from two contrasting points of view. As an example of this technique, I should like to point to the tortoise which to one group of people (the sailors) is the embodiment of evil, while to others (Hindoo mythology) it is the incarnation of good. But with this point we have left the realm of imagery proper, and come to what I called before Melville's use of contrast in the structural pattern of his tales.

V

The effect which Melville produces with his technique of dual illumination is primarily one of ambiguity. Various images such as the lightning-rod and the robot are viewed each from opposite angles, so that each viewer is able only to see that aspect of reality which he faces, and on this one-sided impression he then bases his action. Thus,

[28]See Cardwell, "Melville's Gray Story."

the lightning-rod man, who is aware of the arbitrary destruction by lightning despite the use of his rod, blames other more or less intangible circumstances for its failure to protect and lives in a state of continuous fear, while the cottager who trusts fearlessly in a Heavenly benevolence against all evidence to the contrary rejects even what little security the rod might grant him. Similarly Bannadonna's fearless disregard of the robot's independence once set in motion leads to his death, while the magistrates' over-fearfulness of the robot's demonic qualities is equally destructive. There are two opposing sides to every issue: the robot is both a machine controllable by man and a semi-demonic device, the negro is both harmless and an instrument of the white man's destruction or, as Melville states in "The Encantadas": "The tortoise is both black and white." This is the world of Melville's Piazza Tales, ambiguous, and--as the end of "The Piazza" states it--a world of contrasting "day" and "night" views. If we ask what was the view towards which Melville himself tended, we have to conclude that, as in "The Piazza," it was not the "sweet, goodly, and pleasant" view but a view directed at the no-man's land of the mountains, at Marianna's lonely cottage, and, in the tales themselves, at the gloomy picture of his contemporary civilisation. But, as the end of "The Piazza" shows, this dark view is supplemented by the aesthetic enjoyment of the "day" view, which, although recognized as illusory, can still provide a balance which Bartleby and Don Benito with their excessive "night" views lacked for survival. Thus, Bartleby and Don Benito are unable to live, while the narrator in "The Piazza" is the only Melville questor who survives. Although man cannot view reality "panoramically," he can make up for this by combining the two opposing views into the synthesis of a balanced view. It is on this balance alone

that health and sanity depend, a fact which is emphasized by the tragic excessiveness of Bartleby's and the Don's "night" views.

Similar to this balance of a "night" and "day" view, in most stories a balance is presented in the form of two antipodal characters or a counter-movement, and a short look at the Piazza Tales in their chronological sequence will reveal that this method of working by means of contrast was considerably developed by Melville in the course of his short story career. Note in this connection that contrast is certainly present in "Bartleby," but the attitudes contrasted are not as mutually exclusive as in Melville's "late" stories, such as "Benito Cereno," "The Bell-Tower," and "The Piazza," which were all written shortly before The Confidence Man. As an example of this development, I should like to refer back to the short survey of the theme of trust in my discussion of "The Encantadas" and look at this theme once more, this time, however, from the technical viewpoint of the use Melville made of it in the structure of his stories. It occurs twice in "The Encantadas," one of Melville's "early" stories, in one instance praised in the highest terms as Hunilla's great achievement "out of treachery, invoking trust," while in the other instance, in a short passage in sketch Three, trust kills the fairy fish of Rodondo (p.162). Thus, in "The Encantadas," a central motif in one sketch recurs at a different place in the same cycle with opposite connotations. Antithesis shows itself, but it is not yet used for the purpose of structural and internal tension. It is only after "The Lightning-Rod Man" and the diptychs, all written in 1854, that antipodal polar values are incorporated in the structural movement. In "The Lightning-Rod Man" confidence in God's benevolence is contrasted with another man's fear; thus, contrast is used dramatically, based on

antithetical attitudes towards the same phenomenon. In "Benito Cereno" polarity extends more deeply to the structural level, insofar as its internal dynamics are governed by the dual motion of thesis and antithesis, as previously outlined. Here, the polarity exists actually between two strands of action, the Delano strand and the Benito strand, the latter forcing us to reconsider the moral situation of the Delano narrative: Delano's salvation was due to trust and confidence, while in the case of Aranda and the actual slave mutiny the very same attitude of trust had started the carnage aboard ship.

This dialectic pattern in the treatment of a major theme in "Benito Cereno" is further emphasized by stylistic changes between the two strands, the Delano section with its rich suggestiveness of style being followed by the dry legalistic prose of Don Benito's deposition. A similar antithetical movement, supported by stylistic changes, exists in "The Piazza," in which the imaginative romantic attitude of the narrator, presented in a style extremely rich in symbolic allusiveness, is in the latter part contrasted with Marianna's prosaic view, this time recorded in a different language altogether, through direct speech which is as matter-of-fact and free from imaginative allusiveness as Melville could make it. Even "The Bell-Tower" employs a similar antithetical movement on the level of theme, insofar as the two tragic incidents of the plot, Bannadonna's death and the collapse of the belfry, are both attributable to opposite motivations. Note in this connection that the former is due to excessive <u>fearlessness</u>, while the latter is caused by excessive <u>fearfulness</u>. In all these cases we could say that an imperfect dialectic is established which lacks the presentation of any synthesis. However, in the single movement of thesis and antithesis this synthesis is

nonetheless obvious to the reader: the right attitude lies somewhere in between these two extremes.

From the treatment of trust in "Benito Cereno" it is only a short step to The Confidence Man, which is built on the similar antithesis between "No Trust" and "Charity thinketh no evil," i.e. between excessive suspiciousness and excessive confidence. The action takes place on April's Fool's day on the riverboat Fidèle, and consists of a series of reversals which all demonstrate that neither position is in itself tenable, because the unqualified belief that "Charity never faileth" is as dangerous and pernicious as the extreme denial of charity: "No Trust." Recent interpretations by Dubler and Cawelti emphasize this. According to Dubler, who develops more fully Cawelti's suggestions of 1957, the overall structure consists of a "dialectic movement, or more precisely, two thirds of a dialectic: a thesis and an antithesis are presented, but no synthesis is developed."[29] It is on this dialectic movement that the structure of the book is based, the theme developed by a reiteration of dialectic movements in a "gradually increasing intensity."[30] The subject which is developed by these repetitions is briefly "a commentary on American life."

> In objectively examining American life, he has come to the conclusion that it is ridden with excesses, and these he proceeds to depict in a series of theses and antitheses. As a literary observer rather than a purveyor of easy panaceas, Melville properly refrains from drawing a synthesis, from suggesting a remedy, or arriving at a conclusion.[31]

The dialectic movement itself is initiated in the first chapters

[29] Dubler, p.308.

[30] Ibid., p.311.

[31] Ibid., p.310.

by the two opposing signs of "Charity thinketh no evil" and "No Trust," and by the two antithetical figures of the deaf-mute, characterized by whiteness, and the negro cripple, Black-Guinea, who exploits the admonition of the white, lamb-like man by begging for a few pennies. In the various reactions to his and other requests for charity, faith, and confidence, the major theme of the novel appears which is treated in the form of repeated antitheses: there are those who carry the Gospel into their acts, who help and who are--possibly--duped, and there are those to whom every appeal appears false and suspicious and who consequently refrain from giving at all. Both these attitudes are represented in the extreme by two of the inserted stories about the Indian-hater par excellence and China Aster, the man who was ruined by his over-trustfulness. Important, however, is that in none of the described cases of solicitation do we find any conclusive evidence that any genuine swindling does go on. If there are confidence men on board, they are not primarily after money but use it as a means of undermining men's confidence: in Providence, in nature, and in each other. After all, "Confidence" is the main theme of the book, its action taking place on a river-boat called Fidèle. Seen in this way, the con-men are a development of the lightning-rod man, who also wanted to destroy man's trust in man. As the thirteenth chapter from First Corinthians concludes with which The Confidence Man opens: "And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity." At these "last values" the soliciting is directed, as if by evoking false trust despair could be bred. According to Foster, Melville jotted down in the draft of his book the tentative sub-title "dedicated to the

victims of Auto da Fe,"[32] which seems to suggest that the very theme of the book is the paradox that by "acts of faith" faith is destroyed.

Yet the book is not just a sceptical warning against trust and confidence; it clearly shows that the alternative of extreme suspiciousness is equally pernicious. "Indian-hating" is no alternative since the Indian-hater destroys indiscriminately the innocent with the guilty. Thus, both views, that of "No Trust" and of "Charity thinketh no evil," are wrong because they assume too much knowledge about the object of trust or suspicion respectively. As mentioned previously, Melville is very careful to leave the issue of swindling in complete balance and does not commit himself on the correctness of either view. In our dealings with others we just have to "assume" more than we can actually "know," and our assumptions are as likely to be wrong as right. Again the book ends in an enigma as the opposites are developed to the form of paradox, in which any certainty or guiding focus is completely lost. The result is a devastating moral nihilism which frustrates action.

Thus, antithesis is used in The Confidence Man on a thematic as well as structural level to portray life's moral confusion. Cawelti judges Melville's intent in The Confidence Man in the following words:

> The Confidence Man is not a random collection of episodes; it is not the bitter polemic of a despairing man; it is not merely a philosophic leg-pull but a serious, carefully planned attempt to represent one man's vision of reality. As the vision sees ambiguity at the heart of things, so the basic structural principle is one that leaves the reader alone with an enigma. One cannot deny, I think, that Melville prepared for this result painstakingly and skilfully.[33]

[32] Foster, The Confidence Man, p.lxxxvi.

[33] Cawelti, p.287.

And yet one cannot but agree with Bewley that despite this interesting plan the book is a failure. As Bewley sees it, the book has completely dissolved reality into ambiguity; it creates a general impression of motionlessness, and results in a relaxation of form which he calls "form of death."[34] These accusations I consider more or less justified. There is undoubtedly confusion, primarily due to the accumulation of antithetical movements and the disappearance of any kind of focal point which the reader could use as guidance. The narrator is "thoroughly effaced; for the reader he barely exists,"[35] and we are not even sure that what appear to be con-men are so in truth, as it is through conflicting innuendoes only that we are made to believe, and again to disbelieve, in their existence on board ship. Why is it then, that a technique which is basically the same as those of "Benito Cereno" and other late stories (and very successfully employed there) is a failure in the case of The Confidence Man? The answer lies, I think, in the excessive accumulation of dialectic movements over the full length of a rather long book. As readers we tend to lose sight of a possible synthesis which, as far as the short form is concerned, always looms behind the single dialectic movement of each story. Each story may contain a pair of mutually exclusive views, typified by the "day" and "night" views of the introduction; nevertheless, the conflict is always clear enough to at least suggest a resolution. That there is at least the possibility of a synthesis is emphasized by "The Piazza" itself, in which the narrator's answer to the impossibility of a panoramic vision lies in the combination

[34]Bewley, p.219. See also in this connection pp.217-18, in which he gives a summary of the antitheses employed.

[35]Dubler, p.308.

of "day" and "night" views. The dark truth of man's isolation and the hostility of his surroundings is relegated to a "night-experience," which for the sake of sanity, health, and mental balance is supplemented by the brightness of the "day-experience," which is recognized, however, as purely illusory. As illusion it cannot serve as any basis for moral judgment; it can only be enjoyed aesthetically. Thus, "The Piazza" ends with the narrator's retirement to the ivory tower of withdrawal, a conclusion which is also reflected in the cycle as a whole which affirms that moral judgment rests largely on an illusory basis.

VI

In the circumstances it is understandable that Melville might have felt deprived of any basis on which to continue fiction writing. He had reached further than any of his American contemporaries towards that dissolution of sensibility which only the twentieth century began to portray successfully in fiction. That he was unable to project himself that much further cannot, I think, be debited against his genius. A man's capacity to rise above his environment and training is, after all, limited. It was up to a new generation to reach similar conclusions and to proceed from there.

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