FAMILIAR AMBIGUITY: A STUDY OF HERMAN MELVILLE'S
BARTLEBY THE SCRIVENER, COCK-A-DOODLE-DOO!, AND
BENITO CERENO.

by

Thomas Ramon Kubicek

B.A., Sir George Williams University, 1970.

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS
in the Department
of
English

Thomas Ramon Kubicek 1979
SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
August 1979

All rights reserved. This thesis may not be reproduced in whole or in part, by photocopy or other means, without permission of the author.
APPROVAL

Name: Thomas Ramon Kubicek

Degree: Master of Arts


Examing Committee:

Chairperson: Jerald Zaslove

Robin Blaser
Senior Supervisor

Evan Alderson

Roy Miki

Warren Tallman
External Examiner
Associate Professor
Department of English
University of British Columbia

Date Approved: August 28, 1979
PARTIAL COPYRIGHT LICENSE

I hereby grant to Simon Fraser University the right to lend my thesis, project or extended essay (the title of which is shown below) to users of the Simon Fraser University Library, and to make partial or single copies only for such users or in response to a request from the library of any other university, or other educational institution, on its own behalf or for one of its users. I further agree that permission for multiple copying of this work for scholarly purposes may be granted by me or the Dean of Graduate Studies. It is understood that copying or publication of this work for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Title of Thesis/Project/Extended Essay

FAMILIAR AMBIGUITY: A STUDY OF HERMAN MELVILLE'S

BARTLEBY THE SCRIVENER, COCK-A-DOODLE-DOO!, AND BENITO CERENO

______________________________

Author:

(signature)

T. R. Kubicek

(name)

Nov. 10 1979

(date)
In exploring the nature of ambiguity in Melville's Bartleby The Scrivener, Cock-A-Doodle-Doo!, and Benito Cereno, this thesis proceeds on the assertion that there is a development of interrogative imagination after Moby Dick. By the use of the word "interrogative" I mean to emphasize not only the consistent metaphysical inquiry in Melville's works but also inquiry as compositional method. Thus, the interrogation of ambiguity that is subsumed in the symbolic complexities of the voyage and the Whale in Moby Dick becomes a direct narrative topic in Pierre. With Bartleby The Scrivener, the crucial question obsessing Melville -- what is the meaning of the world and its central mystery man -- is formulated, simply and briefly, as the ambiguous encounter of two men in an urban setting, narrated in recollection. The recollected encounter, with some qualifications, is the form of most of the tales of the 1850's, but these three tales have been chosen for study because each offers a singular perspective on the encounter with mystery.

Although the interrogation of appearances was a career-long interest of Melville, of special interest in these tales is the concern for the familiar surfaces of everyday life: faces, objects, common rituals, the processes of reason, ordinary settings. What I have termed familiar ambiguity is meant to designate the enigma of the familiar, as reported by a character who has experienced the enigma but failed to understand it. This ambiguity is analyzed with special attention
to three stages of apprehension: event, point-of-view, and performance. On the level of event, we find that through the sudden collapse of order in familiar appearances an unfamiliar region of moral darkness is disclosed. With point-of-view, we find that the narrator/observer is implicated through an ironic tone in the collapse of confidence, in the sense that the observer's ignorance and ordinariness prevents us from fully understanding what has happened. On the level of performance, we discover that because of a richly allusive style and symbolic complexity we are faced with a textual problem in each of the tales that corresponds to the narrative difficulty of the characters in trying to understand what is happening to them. This textual problem is analogous to the activity of mind in the struggle for resolution of meaning -- an activity that remains unsettled and incomplete in the text as it does in the narrative. Accordingly, as such findings demonstrate, I am arguing against the critical tradition that sees Melville's short fiction as parables of despair.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Approval Page</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bartleby The Scrivener</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Problem of the Narrator</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Comedy of Irresolution</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Mystery of Appearances</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cock-A-Doodle-Doo!</strong></td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Narrator: Polk-Poet and Ambivalent Witness</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Celebration of Performance</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Benito Cereno</strong></td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Nature of Difficulty in Benito Cereno</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amasa Delano as Ironic Hero</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Anarchy of Appearances</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enchantment and Death</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epilogue</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of References</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION
This thesis is a study of ambiguity in three tales written by Herman Melville in the 1850's. There has been a good deal of criticism on the probable literary influences informing Melville's tales and on his use of symbol, but comparatively little has been published on his narrative performance in the short prose works. The aim of this study is not merely to isolate the evident ambiguities in Melville's fiction but to demonstrate that ambiguity is a feature of the narrative method itself.

In general, the attitude of critics has been that after Moby Dick (1851), Melville's performance diminishes and his vision evinces a growing disillusionment with life. His startling autobiographical comment to Hawthorne, during the writing of Moby Dick, that he had come "to the inmost lead of the bulb, and that shortly the flower must fall to the mould," would seem to support a denigrating attitude. However, at least in terms of output, his work after the publication of Moby Dick matched what had gone before in both quantity and variety. Pierre was published in 1852; in four years (1853-1857), Melville wrote over a dozen tales beginning with Bartleby The Scrivener (1853) and finishing with The Piazza (1856), and the longer narratives Israel Potter (1855) and The Confidence-Man (1857). After 1857, and until Billy Budd in 1891, Melville devoted himself to poetry, publishing such works as Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War (1866), the immense religious epic Clarel (1876), John Marr and Other Sailors (1888), and Timoleon (1891). The body of this work demonstrates substantial imaginative vitality, particularly in that condensed period of work from 1852 to 1857. It is undoubtedly true that Melville never repeated the performance of
Moby Dick, although such a statement raises the question of whether or not repetition is necessary or valuable in creative work. What has never been generally acknowledged about Melville's work after 1851, is that it does reveal a constant interest in the world and a constant experimentation with form, style, and subject-matter. Thus, the critical task is to see what Melville is doing in his later work, and then to assess whether or not that work shows a progressive retreat of imagination.

In Pierre, Melville dropped the 'heroic mode' and moved to a much wider employment of irony and satire. More importantly, from the point-of-view of this discussion, he dropped the voyage to an external encounter with extraordinary forces and adopted inland settings and a microcosmic vision of man. His vision embraced the ordinary manifestations of life, but as Pierre discovers, it is "the common world of everydays" that is wholly mysterious, and that Melville chose to interrogate. How Melville wrote his work shows that he was grappling with the problems of articulating "The Ambiguities" of living and of trying to perceive the meaning of living in a complex world. In reading the novel, our process of discovery becomes, through the mediation of the narrator, a part of the character's struggle for illumination. It is a movement into and not out of ambiguity.

"Let the ambiguous procession of events reveal their own ambiguousness," Pierre's narrator tells us, in that phrase capturing the individual and combined complexities of event, apprehension, narrative disclosure, and signifying the preoccupation with the difficulties of trying to impart the fullness of even the most common experiences.
When we arrive at the tales written after *Pierre*, the question becomes whether or not diminished form signifies diminished vision. This question can be answered, in part, by seeing that the tales offer a variety of treatment of ambiguity. In essence, when we are reading *Bartleby The Scrivener* or *Benito Cereno*, we are looking at metaphysical interrogations of experience in narrative form -- and not at parables -- that develop a mystery rather than finally dispel it.

To comprehend Melville's notion of ambiguity is not an easy matter since it eludes discursive exercise. However, we can characterize it as a condition of contrariety that resists resolution. As F.O. Matthiessen has shown, Melville was very impressed by what he perceived as "contraries" in the visions of Shakespeare's tragedies. In Melville's hands, the contraries of experience became a condition that applied to everything: to Man, to Nature, to God. Such a vision of contrariety is, even on the face of the matter, not the same as a dualistic conception of reality, where clear distinctions can be made between opposites such as "good" and "evil". An example of the difference between contrariety and dualism can be found in *The Encantadas*, where Melville uses the tortoise to show that life is both "black and bright":

everyone knows that tortoises ... are of such a make, that if you but put them on their backs you thereby expose their bright sides without the possibility of their recovering themselves, and turning into view the other. But after you have done this, and because you have done this, you should not swear that the tortoise has no dark side. Enjoy the bright, keep it
The tortoise is a living synthesis of "black" and "bright", but one in which the two sides retain their appearance. As a symbol, the tortoise cannot be resolved into a vision of darkness or transcendence. In Melville's work, we find that wherever complex experience is being rendered there is apt to be unsettled meaning. Thus terms like "pessimism" or "optimism" become singularly inappropriate when used to describe Melville's vision in the tales. This understanding is particularly important when trying to read Billy Budd, which has often been argued to represent on the one hand a testament of Christian acceptance or on the other unrepentant cynicism. Analyzed in the manner this thesis suggests, this last of Melville's works is a vision of ambiguity, where Billy's transfiguration is both transcendent splendour and an ironic comment on the delusions of men who are satisfied with mere appearances.

The choice of tales for study is meant, for the most part, to represent the degree of their difficulty. Both Bartleby The Scrivener and Benito Cereno are generally acknowledged to be Melville's two strongest stories. The former represents his first story in print while the latter was published toward the end of his story-writing career. Despite their generally favourable reception, both stories have suffered a good deal of critical controversy. Since, in one sense, we are dealing with the beginning and ending of Melville's use of the tale form, it is hoped that a new reading of Bartleby The Scrivener and Benito Cereno can suggest a continuity of Melville's artistic control.
and imaginative vision. *Cock-A-Doodle-Doo!*, published immediately after "Bartleby", has been selected to demonstrate that even in a minor tale written in a period of intense activity, Melville's intentions are profound and his grasp of the material sure. Furthermore, this story has long been a puzzle to critics, who have been uncomfortable with its apparent blend of sarcasm and rapture. Yet it is singular among Melville's tales for its humorous examination of creative performance as an exercise of ambiguous power. Despite their superficial differences, all three tales share a preoccupation with the mystery of appearances and the mystery of death, both essential features of Melville's work from *Moby Dick* to *Billy Budd*.

Finally, it should be said that Melville was not alone in his century as an artist exploring the ambiguities of experience through literature. Hawthorne often shows in his work a similar awareness of the mystery of all things natural and moral. Indeed, it has been suggested that the significant feature of what is known as the Symbolist period in 19th century American Literature -- and of the work of Henry James, to a large extent -- is ambiguity. Melville's particular notion of contrariety also connects him to certain figures in the English Romantic tradition, especially to Coleridge, whose work he was familiar with in the 1850's, and to Blake, whom he read later in his career. Coleridge's notion of the synthetic nature of experience and Blake's use of contraries are not dissimilar to Melville's vision. What connects these artists, however, is not simply a correspondence of vision and technique; there is, beyond a shared uncommitted stance, a profundity of mind that, because it has already
seen too much and yet knows there is more to see, will not fall into judgment. Another figure, Andre Gide, in our own century, has called this attitude "neutrality", and his words, to some degree expressing the nature of the creative attitude in Melville, can also be used incidentally as a standard for critical responsibility:

I do not indeed claim that neutrality ... is the certain mark of a great mind; but I believe that many great minds have been very loath to ... conclude -- and that to state a problem clearly is not to suppose it solved in advance.
Bartleby The Scrivener, published in 1853, presents a departure in Melville’s work from the rich symbolical tones of Moby Dick and the mock-epic style of Pierre. We not only have brevity in form and a much simpler style, but a subject-matter that is radically different from the metaphysical trials of the "Soul-Pacific." The battle for self-knowledge on a cosmic scale has changed to a conflict of two city men in static circumstances. What such stasis is meant to signify in the development of Melville's thought is, on the face of the matter, puzzling. The tendency is to interpret the changes of theme and form biographically in the absence of much other documentary evidence about artistic intentions. Certainly the relative public failures of Moby Dick and Pierre prompted Melville to accept Putnam's offer to contribute to its pages. However, whether or not the bleak atmosphere of "Bartleby", his first story for Putnam's, is to be explained by Melville's personal difficulties can only be, at best, conjectural. There are too many important problems in the story related to its compelling power which much be primarily and finally understood in the context of the work.

At first the story offers us few clues to its own significance. The figure of Bartleby is presented at a distance, never quite in focus, and the loquacious narrator is always there to modulate our comprehension through his own reactions. Moreover, the story provides a stark landscape of commercial New York City and the narrator's law-offices, the inaccessibility of historical information about the title character, and, considering
Melville's previous work, the novelty of a pre-empted guest. Very little happens in terms of plot. Bartleby arrives in answer to an advertisement for scriveners, takes up an isolated post in the office, and proceeds to copy "silently, palely, mechanically" (p. 67). Suddenly, one day, he refuses to check copies with the rest of the staff. He "prefers not to." Hereafter the relationship between Bartleby and normal society progressively deteriorates. The narrator attempts, with a good deal of soul-searching, both to understand Bartleby and to compel him to follow office routine. Bartleby remains uncommunicative, often fixed in "dead-wall reveries" (p. 88), and after a while gives up copying altogether. When the narrator cannot be rid of him, he decides to move offices, abandoning Bartleby. The story ends with Bartleby having been arrested, brought to the Tombs, where the narrator finds him dead during a visit.

There is nothing in the story to explain Bartleby's strange behaviour, and, because his character is not described with much detail, we might suspect him to be a figure of parable. Indeed, Bartleby does call to mind the mad nobility of Don Quixote, or at times the saviour-figure of Christ, or the world-rejecting Buddhist monk, or the pathetic figure of a maligned and misunderstood artist -- perhaps Melville himself. Because Bartleby is certainly out of touch with common reality, each of these allusions does call to itself a particular anomaly between appearance and truth and the failure of society to merit individuality. Yet, paradoxically, each of these allusions also takes us away from Bartleby himself, from the crucial recognition that his pathetic figure seems to compel the narrator to make.
Some critics have tended to focus on the enigmatic Bartleby as a key to the meaning of the story, but this natural assumption is subverted by the performance of the story. Almost immediately we learn from the narrator that Bartleby "was one of those beings of whom nothing is ascertainable, except from the original sources, and, in his case, those are very small." Subsequently, the narrator spends much of his time trying to make Bartleby follow orders, trying to understand him, trying to discover who he is. That he is methodically frustrated in all his attempts should be for us an analogous warning that any critical method designed to interpret Bartleby will fail. This is of course a galling admission, especially since the movement of the tale invites speculation about this pale scrivener.

The critics of the story have tended to concentrate on the figure of Bartleby as a model of schizophrenia, or on the materialism of the narrator as the metaphor of a morally bankrupt society, or on the "dead letters" as evidence for Melville's supposed complaint of neglected artistry and criticism of those writers who work solely for money. Such readings have usually had something useful to say about the story, but unfortunately have also tended to neglect the achievement of ambiguity in the relationship between the representative narrator and the unusual Bartleby. Thus, in the discussions of a schizophrenia theme, the most notable critics, (Newton Arvin, Richard Chase, Mordecai Marcus), have focused too much attention on the associational qualities of the text, thereby giving the impression Melville created a model conflict of pathological types. In an extensive reading of the "walls" metaphor, Leo Marx took the lead of those
critics who see Melville's work as an attack on 19th century American capitalism, embodied in the narrator, and as an embattled and stoical support of the ordinary man's fight for individuality amidst alienating socio-economic forces. Such sociological criticism can illuminate some of the forces in the story, but does little to clarify the artistic achievement of a writer whose principal thrust from the beginning of his career had been metaphysical and symbolical rather than social and political. Extrapolative interpretations, on the other hand, have also sometimes erred, as in Maurice Friedman's modern reading of Bartleby as an existential hero, with spiritual links to Dostoevsky and Kafka. Such critical work again tends to obscure Melville's specific artistic strategies. One of the better readings of the story has been by Charles G. Hoffman, who, despite acknowledging the story's power, sees the ending as a failure. The ending, with its supposed transformed perception of Bartleby by the narrator, is a crucial matter. While this thesis argues with the view that Melville unreservedly assumed the voice of his narrator in the ending, it does recognize the value of Hoffman's work which engages itself seriously with what is occurring in the story. An equally worthwhile but contrary position is taken by Kingsley Widmer, who in his study sees the tale as an exercise in ironic nihilism with no redemption for the narrator. Although Widmer's work is one of the best published analyses of the narrator's role, this thesis also takes exception with the hypothesis of an unredeemed narrator. Such an interpretation has the effect of reducing the story to a dualism, of "us" and "them", of a manipulative but blind narrator versus a weak Bartleby, and Melville's work
never leaves us comfortably with such simple choices, however attenuated by circumstances. The curious result of all the aforementioned criticism is that its wide range does mirror one of the effects of the story: that of accommodating conflicting points-of-view while remaining elusively clear of them.

Such adaptability to generalized criticism is due, quite probably, to the narrative method. The formal problem of having the first person narrator be an accurate spokesman while yet indicating his limitations is a test of ironic achievement but does not have, in this sense, any innate relationship to the problem of certitude. But a biographical sketch which attempts to discover the meaning of a personal relationship, yet which is hampered by the bias of memory, does suggest that the process of knowing is as tentative and conditional as what can be known. Since the narrator tells us almost immediately that very little can be known of Bartleby, and since a solid physical impression of Bartleby is never created, one might expect that the reality of the narrator's experience is never quite conveyed by the description of its appearances. This minor qualification to any approach to the story is important because it at least maintains that the narrator, however sincere, can only offer us approximations to his experience and not its substance, and that his struggle to understand assumes various stances of reaction to difficulty rather than one consistent attitude. What this thesis proposes is a final ambiguity in the representation of the narrator's experience, from which we can infer only a tentative condition of truth. Bartleby's enigmatic "I prefer not to" is the key utterance in the story, for it equally involves the different levels of
intellect, imagination, and will in both narrator and reader while rejecting further cooperation and relationship. If the narrator must attempt to understand such a response of his scrivener's, as a test of his own humanity, then his changing impressions and developing bewilderment should be an important element in both the tale's achievement and the determination of its final position. Therefore, we shall start with the representation of the narrator in the story before attempting to understand what the story is trying to tell us.
THE PROBLEM OF THE NARRATOR

If the truth concerning Bartleby is hidden because of the nature of appearances, which can offer us only hints about character, and because of the imperfections of memory, then as readers we have the difficulty of assessing the significance of the narrator's revelations. Are we to take the narrator's story at face value? His suffering, and the tragic aspects of his experience are undeniable. However, the story is not presented in unrelieved seriousness. The several jokes and the exaggerated humour of many of the scenes work at the lawyer's expense. He is often exposed as pompous and sentimental. Fundamentally, the contradiction of a weak, unambitious man like Bartleby upsetting the performance of office routine by preferring not to comply with conventions for no apparent reason, is in itself a comically absurd situation. Yet the narrator finds nothing funny in his difficulties with Bartleby. In the light of the narrator's ironic ignorance and the ambiguous comedy of his plight, the transformation of his attitude at the death of Bartleby cannot be taken literally. If there is a gradual process of revelation the narrative conceals it well. Transformation is undercut by an ironic enigma: repeatedly Bartleby is shown to be both weak and the antithesis of socially accepted values, but somehow, by the story's end we are meant to acknowledge that this "bit of wreck" represents humanity.

To account for the discrepancies in the general serio-comic tone of the narrative, we must look to the narrator and the facades of his personality. The lawyer's normality is the most important consideration in this respect. There is a good deal of
diffuseness to his characterization, principally because there is no other character equally developed in the story. We have only voice to guide us to an appreciation of his personality. Within these limitations we can nonetheless make some useful observations. First of all, the lawyer takes pains to describe himself as representative -- of his class, his profession, his time -- by the mere fact that despite his disavowals of any celebrity he is sensitive to both public opinion and to the appearance of virtue and hard work. His conservatism, affability, humour, and reasonableness, may tend to individuate him slightly, but not enough to see him as deviating in any way from normal standards of decency and ordinariness. However, these qualities make up a persona which also conceals any self-critical evidence and, in fact, the larger philosophical issues of the story. The virtues which the narrator espouses -- sociability, fortitude, prudence, cooperativeness, philanthropy -- and which Bartleby will not or cannot practise, form a narrow code of conduct which cannot do justice to an "original" character such as Bartleby. Yet the narrative proceeds without awareness of this difficulty.

How the lawyer attempts to discovery the meaning of Bartleby's actions is articulated rhetorically. This feature fits well with the lawyer's profession, which must show a facility for discrimination and persuasion, and a consistent logic. Correspondingly the narrator tells his story by proceeding from an assumption of shared principles of behaviour and cognition to a carefully reasoned admission of guilt and unavoidable ignorance, and finally, to an implicit invitation to share in universal speculation. Such a pattern creates an appearance of determinism.
and suggests the inexorability of Fate. From the moment Bartleby comes to the lawyer's office, standing in the doorway like a "motionless young man" (p. 66), Bartleby's history seems complete, for his sudden appearance already contains within it all the variations of motionlessness in the story from his "dead-wall reveries" to his death in the Tombs. The appalling suggestions of Bartleby's stasis are often concealed by the narrator's protesting consciousness which must find "common sense" explanations. As the narrator grows more desperate, his blandness and early optimism are undercut, allowing us to perceive some of the frightening inadequacies of his world-view -- the illusion that however imperfect the workaday world is, it can save us from becoming human wrecks.

The lawyer's reasonableness is a rhetorical mask in several different senses. In the first instance, he attempts to tell his story reasonably. His "method" is to portray the background and setting to Bartleby's story, introduce this unusual scrivener in the context of every day office duties, and then show how he tried to deal with his difficult employee as fairly as possible, despite outrageous challenges to his good will. The narrator manages to convince us of his good intentions, yet there are inconsistencies and contradictions in his account that call into question both his self-awareness and his awareness of what happened. Later on, we shall see how the narrator's reasonableness also disguises desperation and fear at having his world-view threatened.

Contradictions appear in the story in the first few pages. The narrator tells us that "Bartleby was one of those
beings of whom nothing is ascertainable" (p. 59), effectively creating a sense of intrigue, and then paradoxically he tells us that a general description of his own world is "indispensable to an adequate understanding of the chief character about to be presented" (p. 59). Certainly the paradox is relative to the commonsense notion that, if there is a story to tell, it must be somehow told. However, the facility with which he passes over the first difficulty in the story -- Bartleby's unknowableness -- does suggest more of self-interest than an awareness of the subtle mysteries of personality and recollection. This distortion of characteristics is a feature of the narrator's "method", which professes to order reality but actually protects and aggrandizes his personality.24 We are given more information about this "method" in the first few pages of self-description following the statement of intentions. He is a man who prefers to be unambitious and does a "snug business among rich men's bonds" (p. 60), and believes that the "easiest way of life is the best" (p. 59). His forte is the letter of the law, the documentation of it, and not the human drama surrounding it. By deliberately avoiding "turbulence" and controversy, he has cut himself off from those elements of life which do not fit his idea of himself. He is eager to tell us of his respectability:

The late John Jacob Astor, a personage little given to poetic enthusiasm, had no hesitation in pronouncing my first grand point to be prudence; my next, method. I do not speak it in vanity, but simply record the fact, that I was not unemployed in my profession by the late John Jacob Astor; a name which, I admit, I love to repeat; for it hath a rounded and orbicular
sound to it, and rings like unto bullion. I will freely add, that I was not insensible to the late John Jacob Astor's good opinion. (p. 60)

The pride with which the lawyer recalls Astor, and the association of prudence and method with financial gain, readily identify the narrator's materialism. The frank admission that he loves the sound of Astor's name suggests that whatever sentiments the lawyer possesses are connected with money and success. This admission so qualifies the value of "prudence" and "method" (p. 60) that we must begin to look for other unconscious ironies. As these ironies come into being, we find that in each instance there is a contradiction between the narrator's assumed or professed ideals and his behaviour, indicating finally a disturbing lack of awareness.

Given that the narrator is soon involved in maintaining his world order against the upsetting presence of Bartleby, his method in doing so can be seen as an extension of his materialism. We soon learn that "method" for the narrator can be equated with expediency. In telling his story, what he first finds expedient is to interrupt the careful presentation of facts with a seemingly irrelevant statement about himself. When he complains, before we have been properly apprised of the setting, of the "sudden and violent abrogation of the Office of Master in Chancery," (p. 60) the digression is so incongruent to the intention of his narrative, that we are immediately struck by it. The hints of greed and violence are developed afterwards with devastating effect, but their inclusion at this point in the narrative suggests that we should suspect the quality of the narra-
tor's reason even before Bartleby arrives. Upon later discovering the lawyer's manner of examining his conscience -- of equating charity with self-interest -- the latent darker suggestions of the narrator's words come more clearly into focus. A subtext is revealed, not in the sense that a parallel dramatization of ideas takes place, but in the sense that crucial identifying notions about either the narrator or Bartleby carry a significance contrary to the professed one.

What makes such contrary significances a sub-text is their consistency of ironic effect. From the moment the narrator begins talking of his prudence to the discovery of Bartleby's dead body in the Tombs, each thought or action that actually develops the narrative to its conclusion can be satisfyingly apprehended both in its intentional and unintentional meanings. But this ironic pattern is not a simple antithetical structure, for at any juncture of contrary suggestions the final effect is one of tentativeness and ambiguity, preventing the reader from categorizing the narrator and allowing only for approximations about the essence of character. The specific irony is a subversion of expectations, allowing for exploration of meaning.

An immediate example is the digression on the loss of Chancery revenues. Because of later disclosures about the narrator's materialism, the initial hint of greed takes on new significance. Does "Office" have a quasi-ecclesiastical implication, and the revenue a suggestion of simony? We cannot be sure, even when we realize the lawyer controls his own office-world absolutely, that he thinks much and dubiously about charity, and that the symbolism of the story at times implies that the narrator
might represent the apostle Peter, 25 founder of the Church. On the one hand we are meant to understand his digression as normal human irritation at the vagaries of Fate, and on the other hand there is the lurking, never articulated, suggestion that his aside is a revelation of moral abuse.

After this ambiguous revelation, a good deal more is learned about the narrator through his relationship with the clerks. Turkey and Nippers are clearly not overly efficient in their duties; their comic idiosyncracies are such that the performance of work seems a delicately balanced state of affairs. The narrator's "prudence" and "method" in this respect is to maintain a status quo, however ludicrous at times, provided that certain minimum standards are kept. Such inconsistency on his part seems positive, for sympathy and humour are evidently present in his attitude. The hiring of a young apprentice, Ginger-Nut, as office boy, shows paternal consideration. The effect of the habitual carelessness of Turkey and the fiery temper of Nippers is to humanize the otherwise uncommon dullness of office routine. Their faults are inconveniences the lawyer is prepared to live with, even when Turkey mistakes a cake for a seal and wit-tily saves himself from dismissal by promising to pay for the soiled documents. Such indulgence, as reported by the narrator, shows us just how far the lawyer is prepared to go in excusing human eccentricity and error, thereby setting up the rationale for his exasperation with Bartleby. In this sense, the long description of his assistants is important to the narrator's story, for it carefully justifies his good will, the importance of office harmony to getting his work done, and the fact that he is not
without humour. However, buried within this norm, are indications that the lawyer's sympathy is also a kind of condescension, and that this condescension prevents him from experiencing feelings of depth. Certainly his three assistants are singularly hollow creatures, without evidence of private feeling or challenge to the narrator's authority. Furthermore, the very repetitiveness of office routine keeps life out and creates the spiritually unchanging circumstances to which the solitary Bartleby comes.

The narrator's psychological condition as Bartleby begins to reject activity shows us other inconsistencies within his reasonable picture of himself. The narrator is an "eminently safe man," who, when he is thwarted, as in the case of his loss of Chancery revenues and as in the memory of the infuriated Colt shooting Adams, is tempted to sudden violence. Perhaps, for this reason, he wishes to avoid confrontation, as is evidence by his indecisiveness with Bartleby, and so, early in the narrative, he tells us he has chosen the "cool tranquility of a snug retreat ... a snug business among rich men's bonds," (p. 60) as his characteristic style of life. For "snug retreat" we can read smug retreat as its psychological equivalent, for he does admit that he avoids the drama of the courtroom and he does report Astor's good opinion with some degree of self-satisfaction. The phrase "snug retreat" begins to assume importance on Bartleby's arrival. He is described as "pallidly neat, pitiabley respectable, incurably forlorn" (p. 66). The language contains as much self-comment as it does description of Bartleby, since there is a kind of patronizing and condescending attitude in "pitiably respectable," and most tellingly -- "incurably forlorn." Yet the lawyer's first act
upon hiring Bartleby is to isolate him from the other scriveners. This is done, according to the lawyer, "to have this quiet man within easy recall, in case any trifling thing was to be done." (p. 67). The patronizing air of "trifling" is difficult to ignore, but the isolation of Bartleby suggests more than wilful humour. Isolated from society, Bartleby's immediate setting looks out through a window onto a wall. It seems strange that the narrator, who has already identified Bartleby as "incurably forlorn," should exacerbate that apparent hopelessness by isolation and by the depressing suggestiveness of a wall affording no view. Of course, the narrator has already described the spectacle of walls as "deficient in what landscape painters call "life" (p. 60) so one would not expect him to be aware of the terrible irony of placing Bartleby by such a view. Nonetheless, although Bartleby seems to adapt to his new environment, the tragic events of the story have been set in motion by this one act of whimsy. Taken in its entirety, the irony of Bartleby's progressive retreat from activity is that it mirrors the narrator's own retreat from the more public responsibilities of his profession. Just as the narrator's "snug retreat" is a smug retreat from difficulty, so Bartleby's retreat from life is a reductio of the narrator's philosophy. As a copyist, Bartleby performs work which implies the absence of any creativity. The lawyer himself is not a creative personality. Symbolically, the "dead wall" which both see each day is the final reduction of the narrator's materialism: a separation from life, a blindness, an emptiness.

Despite such deficiencies in his awareness the narrator has capably represented himself as a man of reason and order. By
the time Bartleby refuses to copy documents, we are prepared to accept that the narrator is a man of normal disposition, that he is not lacking in reasonableness, cooperation, and philanthropy, that he prizes the accepted decent standards of life and the good opinion of others, and that Bartleby is a deeply disturbed individual whom no layman can expect to handle well. We can accept such a view because the narrator has prepared us for it. Just as he has assumed all along that Bartleby would depart when ordered, he has earlier assumed the reader would share in the understanding of prudence, comfort, reason, parsimony, as credible standards of behaviour.

What begins to emerge about the narrator as the story unfolds is that he is as much interested in telling his own story as he is interested in the story of Bartleby. Harmless in itself, this self-interest is, unfortunately, also allied with moral values whose essence become distorted in the lawyer's personality by a subtle disregard of anything unconventional or unreasonable. When Bartleby refuses to check copies, the narrator shows his displeasure by exaggerating the effect of Bartleby's unconventional and unreasonable preferences:

It is not seldom the case that, when a man has been browbeaten in some unprecedented and violently unreasonable way, he begins to stagger in his own plainest faith. (p. 70)

The narrator has hardly been "browbeaten" and certainly not with any violence. Bartleby's mildness, by the lawyer's own admission, contradicts such a possibility. We begin to see that words like "unprecedented", "violently", "unreasonable", "faith", are being used rhetorically, to convey more of a general impression
than a specific observation. While the narrator's words ostensibly deal with Bartleby's sudden uncooperativeness, there is a subtler sense in which they describe the narrator's own state of mind. His reaction has superceded the event, for it is his solipsism which distinguishes the passage rather than any concern with accuracy or reason. Such a discrepancy becomes keener when the situation worsens and it becomes clear that Bartleby will not only do no copying but will also refuse to leave the premises. In two heavily ironic passages, we find the narrator attempting to meet this challenge by uniting practical considerations with religious ideals:

If I turn him away, the chances are that he will fall in with some less indulgent employer, and then he will be rudely treated, and perhaps driven forth miserably to starve. Yes. Here I can cheaply purchase a delicious self-approval. To befriend Bartleby; to humour him in his strange wilfulness, will cost me little or nothing, while I lay up in my soul what will eventually prove a sweet morsel for my conscience. (p. 72)

Later the narrator turns to the Christian commandment of charity to over-rule his quickening resentment:

Aside from higher considerations, charity often operates as a vastly wise and prudent principle -- a great safeguard to its possessor. Men have committed murder for jealousy's sake, and anger's sake, and selfishness' sake, and spiritual pride's sake; but no man, that ever I heard of, ever committed a diabolical murder for sweet charity's sake. Mere self-interest, then, if no better motive can be enlisted, should especially with high-tempered men, prompt all beings to charity and philanthropy. (p. 88)
Both these passages offer unconscious ironies on the narrator's justification of charity. Although the passages are argued well, as one might expect from a lawyer before a jury of readers, both contain distortions of the intended spirit of charity, now made expedient by circumstances. In the first, the crass reduction of charity to a safe and cheap "purchase" of nobility mocks the Christian notion of attaining heaven by loving one's neighbour. The argument for helping Bartleby should at this point be influenced by the well-being of the scrivener, since this passage follows an observation that the scrivener lives only on "ginger-nuts". Yet the narrator's argument is instead based on self-congratulation ("some less indulgent employer"), sentimentality ("driven forth miserably to starve"), self-concern ("purchase a delicious self-approval"), condescension ("to humour him in his strange wilfulness"), materialism ("cost me little or nothing"), and self-gratification ("a sweet morsel for my conscience"). The second passage elaborates the argument of the first by linking self-gratification with self-preservation. The narrator must resolve his feelings of violence toward Bartleby and the safest means appear to be a submission to charity. The irony of the argument, persuading by reductive analogy that murder can be prevented by charity, and that therefore charity is a "prudent principle", is a terrible anti-climax to the dilemma of how Bartleby can be helped. "Mere self-interest" becomes not just the basis for charity but its very form. Such an understanding of the lawyer's motives, however attenuated by the genuine problem of Bartleby's psychological debility, makes it easier to accept the scrivener's refusal of any help from the
lawyer.

As we read more of the story we begin to realize that the narrator's reasonableness and bravado conceal fear and desperation. Bartleby's strangeness and the "scandalizing [of the narrator's ]reputation" (p. 90) contribute to the fear of the narrator but do not quite explain his feeling of desperation. A look at the lawyer's reactions to Bartleby's refusals shows a progressive intensification of bewilderment. It is as if the lawyer were being victimized by his scrivener. After Bartleby's first "I would prefer not to" the lawyer is "stunned" (p. 68), then in separate episodes: "touched and disconcerted" (p. 70), "staggered" (p. 73), "unmanned" (p. 76), "mortified" (p. 80), "thunderstruck" (p. 86), the last being equated to the sudden death of a man by lightning. Throughout this deteriorating relationship with Bartleby, the narrator fights as if his preservation were at stake, and his efforts ironically pervert the real difficulties of Bartleby. When Bartleby announces: "I have given up copying" (p. 83), the narrator ponders the uselessness of his scrivener. He regrets that Bartleby does not have any relatives who might take him away to some "convenient retreat" (p. 83), and with this phrase, unconsciously signalizes the tension between his own "snug retreat" and Bartleby's retreat from community of any sort. The narrator resents the intrusion, understandably so, but the concommitant implications of "retreat" also suggest a clash between two different kinds of inwardness. Bartleby's inwardness may be lunacy or it may be deliberate withdrawal, but it is characterized by impotence. The narrator's inwardness is a cogent maintenance of a chosen privacy. The narrator has power
of decision. Thus, in such an opposition, Bartleby's withdrawal demonstrates the shortcomings of the narrator's own, since in the face of the disintegration of a human being, the narrator anxiously ponders how appearances can still be maintained. One example of the narrator's unfortunate exercise of moral choice follows his observation that Bartleby seems "absolutely alone in the universe" (p. 83). Immediately afterwards, he decides that Bartleby must leave, for "necessities connected with my business tyrannized over all other considerations" (p. 83). Such tyranny of the utilitarian, however, cannot explain away the outrageous juxtaposition of perceiving Bartleby's complete aloneness and then banishing him. Only fear can provide an intelligible motive for the narrator refusing to understand what he has seen.

If we examine the narrator's reactions to Bartleby rather than to his preferences, we find that the narrator is victimized by his own nature, even at those moments when some genuine feeling seems to be developing. When Bartleby prefers not to check copies, the lawyer's initial response is conciliatory:

But there was something about Bartleby that not only strangely disarmed me, but, in a wonderful manner, touched and disconcerted me. (p. 69-70)

As Bartleby's behaviour becomes stranger the narrator grows more thoughtful. Discovering that the scrivener is living in his offices he contemplates the barren spectacle that is revealed on a Sunday on Wall Street: "And here Bartleby makes his home; sole spectator of a solitude which he has seen all populous." (p. 77) This thought in turn leads to depression for the lawyer realizes:
"The bond of a common humanity drew me irresistibly to gloom. A fraternal melancholy! For both I and Bartleby were sons of Adam." (p. 77)

The lawyer has been brought to the point of recognition, where the scrivener's humanity assumes more importance than his eccentricity. Although he again becomes exasperated with Bartleby and loses his new perception of him, the lawyer has been made to feel something of the terrible human waste in his scrivener. The language of his perceptions has none of the self-assurance and pomposity of the opening pages:

... happiness courts the light, so we deem the world is gay; but misery hides aloof, so we deem that misery there is none. (p. 77)

Yet practical considerations are such that the narrator cannot hold onto this perception. His materialism over-rides problems without immediate or clear solutions. The narrator is bound to the notion that suffering can be redeemed. Reasonably he assumes that he can help Bartleby, and, if not, reasonably he assumes the scrivener will depart. When the narrator is persuaded that the scrivener is the victim of "innate and incurable disorder" (p. 79), that he can provide "alms to his body; but his body did not pain him" (p. 79), then the narrator is helpless and must begin to consider an irrational principle of life.

Later, in a more hopeful frame of mind, but nonetheless unrealistic, the lawyer decides to devote his life to Bartleby:

At last I see it; I feel it; I penetrate to the predestined 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. 89)
Although the narrator's feeling is sincere, the irony of his words are that he cannot possibly commit himself to the care of Bartleby so long as he maintains allegiance to the values and conduct of a successful lawyer. Moreover, his hasty analysis of Bartleby's troubles and the proposed solution, demonstrates once more that he is considering his own welfare rather than the welfare of Bartleby. As it happens, this resolution collapses when society begins to gossip and the lawyer realizes his business will suffer. What the lawyer finds difficult to accept is that good intentions cannot redeem suffering. For him, Bartleby illustrates the pointlessness of existence -- an intolerable conclusion to a man whose very profession implies a belief in a rational and ordered world-view. Bartleby's refusals to participate in the ordinary rituals of work and society, his mysterious silences and self-neglect, and his appearance of profound apathy, finally become an hiatus in the narrator's own thinking. Against the arguments of charity and practical necessity, he can in neither case find any just solution. There remains only a literal retreat from the problem:

Since he will not quit me, I must quit him. (p. 91)

Thus, through the mere accumulation of entreaty and absurd conflict, the narrator is able to justify his abandonment of Bartleby, as the inexorable conclusion to a progressively deteriorating and threatening situation.

Looking more closely at the narrator's abandonment of Bartleby, one learns that his fear is a fear of the irrational. When he discovers that Bartleby has been using his offices as a dwelling, the narrator experiences a complex range of feelings.
Examining Bartleby's few possessions and the feeling of desertedness in Wall Street, the narrator notes the impression of "emptiness" (p. 77) and "sheer vacancy" (p. 77). What has been ordinarily experienced as "populous" (p. 77) is now a "solitude" (p. 77). But the "melancholy" (p. 77) that seizes him is not simply the sadness of seeing another human being deprived of society. Because we have been already apprised of the narrator's love of comfort, security, material gain, there is a suggestion here that what is equally disturbing to the narrator is that reality is other than what he has always assumed. In the course of day changing to night, the transformation of "industry and life" (p. 77) to "sheer vacancy" and of the impressive Wall Street to a kind of "ruined Carthage" (p. 77), suggests that the bustle of humanity conceals what is eternally present: emptiness, misery, death. Because these latter qualities are presented analogically, they have a tentative existence, as much dependent on the narrator's particular consciousness as upon objective phenomena. Yet the important consideration is the element of surprise and uncertainty, that the narrator has worked all his life in Wall Street and is not aware that the natural dark half of his world could reveal the sterility and insubstantiality of his surroundings. Petra and Carthage are not merely exotic bygone examples of death and destruction, but are present, even to the lawyer's own unpoetic mind, within the ordinariness of his familiar, everyday world.

Such associations with Bartleby lead to an "overpowering ... melancholy" (p. 77), as the lawyer realizes that behind the scrivener's mediocrity exists the common suffering of
neglected, deprived humanity. Furthermore, the realization that both he and Bartleby are "sons of Adam" implies a responsibility for an unredeemable condition. The triviality of "bright silks and sparkling faces" (p. 77) observed on Broadway is compared to the morbid seriousness of the "pallid" copyist, but the ensuing deduction that we do not acknowledge misery is somewhat qualified by the superficially festive notion of life as a Broadway parade, for it suggests that Bartleby lacks only material benefits. Indeed, even such a qualified perception of the narrator's is almost dismissed as "chimeras ... of a sick and silly brain" (p. 77).

He then undertakes a close introspective analysis of Bartleby and his strange behaviour. The effect of the analysis increases the sense of mystery, for, despite the scrivener's hermetic self-neglect and pathetic captivation with the blank wall, he manages to impart a sense of "pallid haughtiness". Unfortunately, however, the value of the narrator's perception has been compromised by its manner:

Suddenly I was attracted by Bartleby's closed desk, the key in open sight left in the lock.

... Everything was methodically arranged, the papers smoothly placed. The pigeon-holes were deep, and removing the files of documents, I groped into their recesses. Presently I felt something there, and dragged it out. It was an old bandanna handkerchief, heavy and knotted. I opened it, and saw it was a saving's bank. (p. 78)

Since it is the "saving's bank" which engenders the pondering of Bartleby's condition, we are left with the ironic implication that it has taken the sight of confirmed poverty -- the sight of the
worth of Bartleby portrayed by a handkerchief of money -- to prompt the narrator first to sympathetic mystification and then, after further thought, to a heavily ironic "prudential feeling" (p. 79) of "repulsion" (p. 79). The above passage is also a kind of parody of the thought processes with which the narrator arrives at a manageable vision of Bartleby. "Bartleby's closed desk" (p. 78) is metaphorically the problem of Bartleby, as seen by the narrator. Everything is "methodically arranged", by which we can recognize the narrator's own conception and arrangement of things. By prying deeply enough into Bartleby's personality, the narrator feels he can find a sensible truth. But since his intellectual method is materialistic rather than spiritual, the sensible truth he finds is a poor man's fortune. Correspondingly, the more depth the narrator's intuitions and feelings acquire, ironically the more his attitude to Bartleby changes from "pity" (p. 79) to "repulsion" (p. 79). The narrator explains the change as the "hopelessness of remedying excessive and organic ill" (p. 79). However accurate this diagnosis is, it does not alter the fact that the narrator's "common sense" approach to Bartleby is, given the circumstances, completely misplaced.

Melville connects such a delicate question of conscience with the fate of Bartleby, therefore enabling this scene, and others like it, to have an ambiguous sense of power. Melville portrays the narrator's quandary at a level of experience where there is no clear-cut, tenable distinction between appropriate self-concern and selfishness, between helping the unfortunate Bartleby and being manipulated by him, between believing in the efficacy of intellectual discrimination and being deceived by its...
sophistication. The narrator's compromise -- to attempt to dismiss Bartleby while also extending financial help -- would seem the only viable means of maintaining social credibility, and yet, because of such a moral stance, the narrator loses spiritual credibility. Nevertheless, the narrative never allows us such clear moral alternatives. We do know that Bartleby's presence clearly signifies an extraordinary difficulty, and we also know that the narrator consistently misses an opportunity of perceiving the significance of Bartleby by maintaining his ordinary, materially-bound attitudes. However, each particular episode partly exonerates the narrator, first, as we have seen, by being deliberately told in a defensive manner, and secondly, because despite the narrator's limitations he does attempt sincerely to feel Bartleby's plight. When, in the latter episode, the narrator tells us he has felt "a fraternal melancholy" (p. 77), personally stronger than ever before experienced, we can only accept his statement, even if he later spoils the sentiment by trying to dismiss it as a "sick" chimera. He regains his composure by justifying a "repulsion" to Bartleby's hopeless case; he also says: "it was his soul that suffered, and his soul I could not reach" (p. 79), and even acknowledging the irony of the utterance, we should not easily denigrate its felt truth. Some critics, in this respect, have unfairly interpreted the narrator's reactions as being deficient or hypocritical in all cases.30

As this episode demonstrates, the narrator fears Bartleby, although there is no mention of definite cause. He fears the irresistible "gloom" (p. 77) of Bartleby's presence, the sense of "solitude" (p. 77) and "emptiness" (p. 77) engendered by
Bartleby's hermit-like existence, the scrivener's air of "pallid haughtiness" (p. 78) and "austere reserve" (p. 78) within an otherwise general impression of dementedness, and finally the untold suspicion that Bartleby's hopelessness will soon infect him and perhaps likewise transform him into a universally beheld victim. There is no obvious basis for these fears, for they are the irrational substance of his experience of Bartleby. The effect of this fear of the irrational is not only to awe at times the narrator into "tame compliance" (p. 78) before his scrivener, but also to drive him more and more into inwardness, where the uncertainties of his position seem magnified. He is "thunder-struck" (p. 86) that Bartleby does not leave despite being dismissed from employment. He reads "Edwards on the Will" and "Priestley on Necessity" (p. 88), looking for spiritual guidance to what now seems to him a divinely ordered state of affairs. Finally he must flee Bartleby because he feels himself irretrievably drawn into Bartleby's "moon-struck" world. He is found and brought back by the new tenant of his former offices to persuade Bartleby to leave. He then offers Bartleby a place in his own home, and when Bartleby unaccountably refuses, he flees a second time. The narrator does not see him again until Bartleby has been incarcerated in prison, where indeed there is no more reason to fear Bartleby or to fear for his safety.

As the story discloses the ironic deficiencies of the narrator, it also raises questions that are larger than his personal difficulties. We have the responsibility, as readers, to be aware of how the narrator controls the manner of the story while seeing that the crucial questions escape his censorship.
The truth of Bartleby is irrational and because the narrator is committed to reason and method for revealing his experience that truth mostly escapes the narrator's awareness. To arrive at an understanding of the larger questions we should now look at how comic vision allows for a movement from particular difficulty to universal problems.
Comedy in *Bartleby The Scrivener* is used by Melville to indicate the impersonal absurdity of the universe. The Judeo-Christian picture of a God-centred cosmos, divinely ordered, with Man's purpose in this plan being the recovery of a benign God's favour, through faith, hope, charity, had been exposed as largely wish-fulfillment and anachronistic mythology in both *Moby Dick* and *Pierre*. The ambiguous demonism and equal treatment of different religions and myths in *Moby Dick* suggested a relativity of all values and ignorance of divine reason. In *Pierre*, the plinlimmon pamphlet ironically surmised there was no hope of discovering the Will of God because God-created carnal and material forces prevented the ideal life. In *Bartleby The Scrivener* there is no longer any debate on the value of spiritual search and no attempt to imagine the ideal. We are instead supposedly presented with the spiritually "real" condition of man's place in the cosmos: as either the deluded materialist or as the helpless, abandoned seer. Yet such is the nature of Melville's art, that this dismal perspective is proposed tentatively rather than definitively, as if the narrative itself were a means of spiritual search and assessment. Comedy, as an ideal mode of comparing moral alternatives, is the effective counter-balance to the tragic elements of Bartleby's fate.

The appearance of the comic in "Bartleby" can be presented in its shortest form as the scrivener's response, "I prefer not to." That a mere clerk, described for us as "pitiably respectable" and "incurably forlorn" should suddenly assume an air of haughtiness and disrupt the work of the office is undoubtedly
strange, and it is comic from different perspectives. There is the comic incongruity of a thoroughly unlikely rebel. There is also the repetitiveness of the response "I prefer not to," which gives the impression of a resolve otherwise lacking in the scrivener's character. The contradiction of a meek, indecisive man, without ambition or apparent social needs, upsetting the performance of office routine for no discernible reason seems of itself to be more fantastic than humorous, and yet the sheer extravagance of the response, given the unimaginative surroundings, is humorous.

Bartleby's "I prefer not to" is the essential expression of contradiction in the story. Its mere recurrence allows for the different revelations of character and theme to be presented coherently and suspensefully. Repeated in the lawyer's office, where eccentricity is indulged only insofar as it does not breach either the lawyer's authority or his method of doing things, Bartleby's enigmatic response seems to call into question even the common everyday rituals of work and social relationships and show them up as fundamentally shallow and purposeless. There is also a correspondence between Bartleby's utterance and the various levels of significance from form to symbol. First of all, his response is as succinct and straightforward as the story's external manner is, but also as bizarre and ambiguous as its internal workings. Because of its recurrence, we are able to see the phrase itself as "pallidly neat", "pitiably respectable", "incurably forlorn".

The various expressions of comedy in the story can be classified as exaggeration, jokes or innuendoes, and metaphysical
wit. Exaggeration, by stretching behaviours, ideas, situations, becomes comic when distortion occurs. Certainly, Bartleby's relentless staring at the wall is an example of comic exaggeration, whatever else it may be. However, there are so many seemingly disparate examples of comic exaggeration in the story that it may be useful to take Bartleby's "I prefer not to" as an organizing principle. The response itself is an exaggeration of both the etiquette of refusal and the rights of the individual over society. Furthermore, by implying more than it overtly states, the utterance has a metaphorical value which increases in direct proportion to the allusive significance of the narrator's own psychological state.

The narrator's lack of awareness is a good example of this relationship. We have seen how his self-centredness, materialism, and fear prevent him from truly appreciating or assisting the condition of Bartleby's helplessness. He is enraged by Bartleby's seeming lack of awareness of business responsibility. The more Bartleby refuses to perform his duties, the more the narrator becomes concerned with aspects of survival: food, reputation, freedom, and necessity. Such topics are entertained in the course of reaction to Bartleby's refusals, (expanding as well our attention to wider issues), and yet the narrator does not take responsibility for action himself. In his way he is as paralyzed as Bartleby. Hence, we have the comic situation of the spiritually blind narrator attempting to take responsibility for a spiritually paralyzed employee. Furthermore, the narrator's responsibilities are consistently associated with food imagery, and the effect of this borders on the grotesque.
When Bartleby is first hired, he works as if "famishing for something to copy" (p. 67) and he appears to "gorge himself on my documents" (p. 67). The narrator then confesses that checking copies is "a very dull, wearisome, lethargic affair" (p. 67). The juxtaposition of the two comments is such that when Bartleby shortly afterwards announces he will not check copies, the strangeness of his behaviour is somewhat obviated. Indeed, Bartleby is the perfect guest in all ways but one. He partakes of the "food" of copying documents till satiety; he then politely refuses to examine his efforts, and later, to partake of any more. Lest this seem an extravagant reading of the situation, we should remind ourselves of how often food is mentioned in the narrative. Turkey and Nippers seem to be dependent for their psychological condition on food alone. Almost as if they were merely complementary solar symbols, (to borrow the story's mixed metaphors), lunch-hour marks the change in their brightness and effectiveness. Turkey, reinforced by drink, displays "his fullest beams from his red and radiant countenance" (p. 61) in the afternoons, when he is apt to scatter blots of ink, or mistake a ginger cake for a seal. The narrator complains that Turkey's clothes smell of "eating-houses" (p. 64). Nippers, usually sallow and bad-tempered in the mornings and pacified by drink in the afternoons, is said to suffer from "indigestion" (p. 65). The office boy is named after a ginger cake and his principal activity seems to be to fetch snacks for the clerks. The narrator himself is controlled by thoughts of food. After Bartleby refuses to check copies, "according to common usage and common sense" (p. 70), the narrator begins to observe Bartleby's habits and notes "that
he never went to dinner" (p. 71). Then in a grotesque parody of symbolic association the narrator attempts to arrive at a recognition of Bartleby by flippantly employing the principle of correspondences:

He lives, then, on ginger-nuts, thought I; never eats a dinner, properly speaking; he must be a vegetarian, then, but no; he never eats even vegetables, he eats nothing but ginger-nuts. My mind then ran on in reveries concerning the probable effects upon the human constitution of living entirely on ginger-nuts. Ginger-nuts are so called, because they contain ginger as one of their peculiar constituents and final flavouring one. Now, what is ginger? A hot, spicy thing. Was Bartleby hot and spicy? Not at all. Ginger, then, had no effect upon Bartleby. Probably he preferred it should have none. (p. 71-72)

If we were to rely on this passage alone, we might believe the narrator is speaking tongue-in-cheek. However, when he seriously begins examining his conscience and pondering the meaning of charity shortly afterwards, he speaks of "a delicious self-approval" (p. 72) and "a sweet morsel for ... conscience" (p. 72), disclosing that even religious questions are matters of appetite for him. Later, after a direct confrontation with Bartleby:

You _will_ not?

I _prefer_ not. (p. 73)

during which the narrator tries to intimate "the unalterable purpose of some terrible retribution very close at hand" (p. 74), he suddenly decides to postpone a decision because "it was drawing towards ... dinner-hour" (p. 78). His attempt at a physiognomic understanding of Bartleby becomes the perception that "his
Bartleby's pale face clearly indicated that he never drank beer like Turkey, or tea and coffee even, like other men" (p. 78). We may say all of these examples disclose that the narrator is a creature of habit, who seeks to comprehend the extraordinary by ordinary means, and that his appetite, closely allied to money, is akin to spiritual avarice. Yet there is a sense, as well, in which the food imagery reveals something more in the nature of symbolic truth. Bartleby eats virtually no food, because food is inextricably associated in this tale with the ordinariness of life, its maintenance and aggrandizement. For reasons of his own, Bartleby has rejected even the literal forms of life, since eating as well as working leads to a continuation of the past, a repetition of sterility, (not the circularity of the food-driven impulses of Nippers and Turkey, described as solar emblems) (p. 61-62). He will do no more copying. The comic device of exaggeration has prepared us for the concurrence of natural and symbolic truths, since everything in the story now suggests more than its mere appearance.

After he has been taken to prison, Bartleby rejects food altogether. With respect to food imagery, the prison episode is crucial. In this hell, there is even less need to eat, following the logic of Bartleby's refusals, yet the grub-man's role is to see that prisoners who have gentleman friends pay for better food. The fact that the grub-man is described as "meat-like" (p. 96) and that he is rather a buffoon-like character, suggests that he has symbolic significance. He is a reminder that even in the most profound spiritual suffering, carnality has an equal voice. The intimated horror of Bartleby's experience and the emptiness
of the narrator's existence are brought to an ironic climax in the Tombs, as the grub-man is introduced to Bartleby. But Bartleby is "unused to" (p. 97) dining; indeed, the fact that the narrator can think only of food (especially after Bartleby has tellingly said: "I know where I am" (p. 96)), shows the true extent of both his bewilderment in the face of tragedy and his entrenchment in habit. But it is the grub-man's presence that offers a comic release on an otherwise unrelievedly dark encounter, for our attention is drawn from the physical pathos to the metaphysical dimensions of suffering, by the sheer coincidental incredibility of what he is (the grub-man's heavy meat-like quality contrasted to Bartleby's ginger-nut eccentric delicacy is not the least of the joke).

Throughout the tale, it has only been the presence of the mundane, the ordinary, the sometimes petty elements of the narrator's world that has made visible by contrast the spiritual despair of Bartleby. The lawyer's obsession with food shows us Bartleby's disinterest in it. Whether we talk of physical or spiritual nutrition, Bartleby cannot participate in its available forms. The value of the grub-man's inclusion in the story is also to emphasize the incomprehension of the world before Bartleby -- that it is not only the privileged class who are unable to help Bartleby but that even an institutionalized outcast like the grub-man cannot comprehend the outcast Bartleby's disinterest in survival. Bartleby's isolation in the eternally-sounding significance of the Tombs is complete. Thus we find that the simple motif of food as individual and social survival has been exaggerated throughout the tale to indicate the exclusivity (isolation and
otherness) of Bartleby; furthermore, as a supporting line to the central pattern of disintegration, the food imagery and the episode with the grub-man interrupt the narrative flow to create other, more detached, perspectives, which in themselves have an ambiguous impact.

If we now take the substance of this discussion on food and relate it to Bartleby's statement of preference, we find that the alienating implications of the former are similar to the effect engendered by the scrivener's repeated "I prefer not to." For, while his response is defiantly personal, it is also absurdly impersonal, since it rejects sharing, relationship, and further disclosure. His responses are momentarily funny because the effect is a juxtaposition of human and non-human suggestiveness impeccably delivered. But the implication that Bartleby is as silent, motionless, and unyielding as a wall or as the "bust of Cicero" (p. 69) mixes terror into the comedy. That someone should be so obviously gentle and yet so recognizably inhuman is a mystery too involved or too alien for the narrator.

The text provides us with one suggestive clue for the opaqueness and magnetism of Bartleby's remarks. When Bartleby first announces he would "prefer not to" check copies, the narrator vents his disbelief by exclaiming: "Are you moon-struck?" (p. 68) A while later, when Bartleby again disinclines to respond favourably, Ginger Nut says: "I think, sir, he's a little luny." (p. 71). The symbol of the moon, with its associations of death and of reflection rather than true creation, accurately characterizes one aspect of Bartleby's behaviour. Bartleby mimics the symbolic reality of his environment. The narrator had
called his office landscape "deficient in what landscape painters call "life"," (p. 60) and to this office comes a "cadaverous" looking man. Bartleby is also like the walls he stares at; he prevents the narrator from knowing anything more about him. The narrator's first act when Bartleby arrives is to hide him behind a screen, as if he were a thing, and Bartleby remains hidden, at least symbolically, evermore. He is hired as a copyist and he copies not only documents, but, in a subtler sense, the narrator's own retreat from life, and if not his beliefs then those of his class -- in politeness, decency, propriety. Indeed, the narrator is confident that Bartleby is not only honest but "an eminently decorous person" (p. 76) who would be the "last man to sit down to his desk in any state approaching to nudity" (p. 76). This ridiculous concern for Bartleby's dressed appearance on a Sunday identifies the complete conventionality of the narrator as well as his timidity at transgressing such rules of conduct. Thus we have a comic identification between Bartleby and the unacknowledged content of the narrator's life. The disturbance in Bartleby is in some way related to the hypocritical and lifeless quality of the narrator's world: hence the repellent and attractive nature of Bartleby's remarks.

Throughout the display of comic extravagance and bizarre humour, Melville places several jokes which have the effect of extending the narrative through analogy and of disrupting the impact of profundity. Central in this respect are the many references to writing as commercial work, as mere copying, or as forgery. Particularly when we learn that Bartleby once worked for the Dead Letters Office the temptation to allegorize the text be-
comes strong. Bartleby, as the image of the writer refusing to work according to society's dictates despite being reduced to poverty; Bartleby as the writer who will not copy what others have done, who politely but firmly desists from having anything to do with the phariseeism and symbolic blindness of materialist culture, who is slowly destroyed both by his commitment to "impossible" ideals and by the existential terrors he envisions in isolation: the apparent correspondences between Bartleby the mysterious scrivener and Melville the mysterious author are many. However, these correspondences are not crucial to the unfolding of the narrative; they tell us nothing of either the narrator or of Bartleby's suffering, and ultimately would trivialize the story into mere projective fantasy and superficial punning, if they were taken as the substance of Melville's theme. On the other hand, as analogies, the metaphors enrich the possibilities of universalizing the narrator's dilemma and Bartleby's suffering. When the grub-man makes reference to Monroe Edwards the forger, who "died of consumption in Sing-Sing" (p. 98), the reference to the neglected artist who forges art out of life but is outcast and criminalized by society is unmistakable. Furthermore, all such references in the story work as jokes which deliberately disrupt and momentarily make superficial a subtly poetic narrative. The joke about Monroe Edwards briefly suspends gloom and ironically makes us attentive to a sentimental notion of the fate of forgers and artists at precisely the moment that Bartleby is staring at a "dead-wall" of the prison, wherein, "all around, from the narrow slits of the jail windows," (p. 96) are "murderers and thieves" (p. 96) peering at him. Thus the horror of Bartleby's fate is
balanced by the comedy of the grub-man, which in context creates an ambiguity that tends to de-personalize an essentially abysmal vision and leave it in a state of existential uncertainty.

Comedy, in *Bartleby The Scrivener*, also has a philosophically subversive influence. When Bartleby maintains his stance of "I prefer not to" he is being elitist in the face of social position, practice, and the particular situation of approved automaton-like work. His exclusive stance, presented as lunacy, yet allows the reader to see the utter triviality, conditionality, and illusoriness of everyday life when set against fundamental questions of being and death. Melville's wit extends the basic reversal of a weak employee controlling his employer, to include the over-turning of assumptions about reality. Thus Bartleby's supposed weak eyesight as noted by the narrator:

I looked steadfastly at him, and perceived that his eyes looked dull and glazed. Instantly it occurred to me, that his unexampled diligence in copying by his dim window ... might have temporarily impaired his vision. (p. 82)

is set against Bartleby's previous accusation:

Do you not see the reason for yourself? (p. 82)

to indicate the complementarity of physical and spiritual blindness.

On a more abstruse level, the suggestions of Bartleby as an avatar or figure of higher consciousness, (as noted by Bruce Franklin 34), have the effect of mystifying our traditional assumptions about the appearance and behaviour of such a personage, and of upsetting beliefs about either the immanence of God or the possible transcendence of man. However we want to play the stakes of
interpreting Bartleby either as a religious hero or as a god, the undeniable condition of his presence is his unknowable figure staring at a wall and his eventual unmitigated death in the Tombs. But the comic touch, in this respect, is making the convention-bound lawyer our interpreter in metaphysical speculation, thereby ensuring that whatever the truth of Bartleby's identity we are left to our own imperfect devices in discrimination and imagination and must finally accept the narrator's own description of Bartleby as the most unusual of "an interesting and somewhat singular set of men" (p. 59). Such irony transcends what we normally mean by the term since it seems closer to a kind of cosmic laughter at our ineffectual attempts to know ourselves and each other. Indeed, the position taken by Melville seems anti-heroic, an unusual stance considering his previous work. Yet of the notable characters mentioned in the story, all are dead and in some manner debunked. John Jacob Astor is invoked for a character reference, which, even on its own terms of "prudence" and "method", is made to appear suspect by the narrator's sudden anger at the loss of his Chancery revenues. Cicero, representative of the narrator's profession, appears twice as a plaster-of-paris bust, once compared to Bartleby in its lifelessness (p. 69) and once to the narrator himself through an ironic reversal (p. 80). Byron is invoked as well (p. 67), ostensibly for the absurdity of having him check copies with Bartleby, to demonstrate the tiresome nature of the task; his mention also reinforces the motif of the writer compelled to be a mere copyist.

The other historical cases are those of Colt shooting Adams out of an aggravated frustration (p. 87), (and afterwards
dying himself in prison), and of the forger Monroe Edwards, eventually dying of consumption (p. 98). Both of these cases present extremes of misfortune, probably mentioned by the narrator to show the strangeness of his experience and how close he came to social ruin; nevertheless, their inclusion does more than he intends. The memory of Colt acts as a prophylactic of fear which rouses the narrator out of the contemplation of irrational being; indeed, the text suggests the narrator has too much fear ever to be caught outside the confines of prudence. Even the mild violence of the farcical scene in which Turkey attempts a fist-fight with Bartleby is quickly quashed by the narrator (p. 73). Monroe Edwards is mentioned by the grub-man, as an unconsciously ironic comparison to Bartleby, and the narrator's stiff response suggests both his conventional reserve on such topics and his fear of anything scandalous (p. 98). Yet this takes place in the Tombs!

Bartleby is described as "more a man of preferences than assumptions" (p. 85). In such a manner Melville crystallizes the divergence of intellectual and symbolic positions in the story. All the assumptions the narrator has about Bartleby -- that he will respond to anger, threats, kindness, understanding, frank dismissal -- correspond to the assumptions that are implicitly challenged by Bartleby's behaviour. The eminence of reason, the belief in universal justice, the belief that goodness equally matched in strength to despair will overcome it, the notion that material progress leads to happiness, the reliance on food as a spiritual vivifier and not just a sustainer, and finally the acceptance of, at one extreme, the value of common sense, and at
another extreme, the faith in an invisible and silent God, are all assumptions that are torn loose from the general order of experience and cognition by the still, unresponsive suffering of Bartleby and released to an ambiguity-ridden status as intangible factors of our existence.

Such subversion of reason and experience, the character ironies that disclose a somewhat hypocritical and fear-ridden narrator's personality, and the farcical humour of the social relations in the law-offices, combine to create an unsettled meaning of the text. Through such devices the presentation of the lawyer's experience becomes as much a topic of the story as the question of who Bartleby is.

In Pierre, an altogether different work in theme and accomplishment, Melville used a shifting tone of comedy and tragedy, of wonder and disbelief, so that finally the reader would have difficulty identifying the narrator, who might be either Melville or Pierre, and so that the content of Pierre's search became everything reported and intimated in the novel. In that point-of-view, the vision of Pierre became the trauma and deceptions of self-creation, the effective wonder of which is also the wonder of writing a novel that would mirror the uncertainty, largeness, comedy and despair, and inchoateness of life itself. It was clearly an ambitious undertaking that meant, at the end, popular, if not artistic, failure. The relevant distinction here is that with Bartleby The Scrivener, Melville undertook a similar complexity of tone to achieve the diverse impressions of experience, but succeeded in the popular mode of magazine fiction because of a radical change in characterization. The title charac-
Bartleby is the magnetic centre of the story's symbolic meaning, which resides almost wholly in silence. The narrator, on the other hand, is a man of the world who attempts the solution of a mystery. But the solution is so involved with his worldly being, that the unworldly Bartleby recedes from view. When the narrator begins reading Edwards and Priestley, in conjunction with his ruminations, Bartleby seems to withdraw more into his hermitage and offers less visible presence in the text. The narrator's eulogy over the dead Bartleby: "With kings and councilors" (p. 99) puts Bartleby in a noble hierarchy of the spirit, but because Bartleby has been concealed so well by the narrator's ignorance and selfishness, by his own silence, and by the narrator's method of achieving psychological equilibrium, we do not know whether the eulogy represents a moment of enlightened perception or a moment of romantic delusion.

This comic obfuscation in the transition from text to symbol is related to the lack of causes and origins in Bartleby's history. We begin by being told of the lack of available historical sources concerning Bartleby and are soon involved in the literal and symbolic searches for meaning. To ask who is Bartleby and why he is behaving in such a manner is to ask similarly unanswerable questions about ourselves and our purpose. When the narrator asks Bartleby whether he would like to take new employment and offers him several examples, one is struck with the absurdity of asking any questions of Bartleby. His rejection of the narrator's ideas confirms that society has nothing to offer Bartleby, and by such means we are brought to the point of contemplating whether truth is articulable.
Thus, the serio-comic texture of experience complicates the problem of reader attitude. We arrive at the denouement without knowing much about Bartleby and without easily knowing what moral stance towards the issues of suffering and responsibility Melville is taking. This very complexity itself, however, is demonstrably part of a larger thematic pattern whose vision incorporates the various mysteries of being from ordinary ritual to extraordinary metaphysical imagination.
THE MYSTERY OF APPEARANCES

A crucial problem in the tale is its ending. The narrator finds Bartleby dead in the Tombs and utters the poetic: "With kings and councilors" as an eulogy. In the postscript the narrator tells us how he learned that Bartleby once worked in the Dead Letters Office, sorting mail that was undeliverable and consigning it to be burned. The narrator feels that such work hastened the scrivener's despair:

Dead letters! does it not sound like dead men? Conceive a man by nature and misfortune prone to pallid hopelessness, can any business seem more fitted to heighten it than that of continually handling these dead letters, and assorting them for the flames. (p. 99)

These thoughts inspire the narrator to finish his story by proclaiming "Ah, Bartleby! Ah, humanity!" (p. 99). The critical problem is whether we can believe that the narrator is capable of such poetic perception and whether there is any evidence to support this.

Sudden conversion would not be inappropriate in principle to Melville's philosophical attitude, so long as openness of mind and courage were present in the seeker. In most of his work he affirmed the presence of mystery as an indisputable part of existence. Life, even in its manifested ordinariness, concealed a vast unknown. The slow decipherment of this vast unknown was the task of any seeker of truth. In Pierre, we find the following realization of the mystery of appearances:

But the vague revelation was now in him, that the visible world, some of which before had seemed but too common and prosaic to him; and but
too intelligible; he now vaguely felt, that all the world, and every misconceivedly common and prosaic thing in it, was steeped a million fathoms in a mysteriousness wholly hopeless of solution.36

Such a revelation returns the mind to the world while at the same time rendering the world suddenly into an unknown place. Certitude is replaced by a conviction of illusion. Ahab tells us: "All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks."37

Ishmael relates metaphysical mystery to the enigma of human countenance:

Champollion deciphered the wrinkled granite hieroglyphics. But there is no Champollion to decipher the Egypt of every man's and every being's face. Physiognomy, like every other human science, is but a passing fable. If then, Sir William Jones, who read in thirty languages could not read the simplest peasant's face in its profounder and more subtle meanings, how may unlettered Ishmael hope to read the awful Chaldee of the Sperm Whale's brow?38

The effect of such passages is to heighten the mystery of what we consider ordinary and comprehensible, for the appearances of a phenomenon do not necessarily reveal their internal reality.

In Bartleby The Scrivener, we do not even have the forms usually associated with the disclosure of marvels. We have no voyage, no exotic setting, no attempt to articulate or capture an ideal. We are confronted with the familiar surroundings of the mundane, commercial world. Yet as the story shows, the appearances of this world maintain their significance to the human drama as closely as the sea offered an ideal symbolic setting for Moby Dick. Moreover, Bartleby is, in the first instance, a very ordin-
ary man; if we are to derive metaphysical significance from his being, it must come modulated by the exact proportions and limitations of his character.

We have already learned how Bartleby remains incomprehensible to us, and how the narrator's ignorance and self-seeking complicates and virtually changes the potentiality of understanding the meaning of his experience. But rather than ceasing inquiry at this point and proposing symbolic conditions for the story's enigmas from such a critical distance, it is possible to continue the search by using the very facts of persona, concealment, and complexity as metaphors for the reality within the story. Through the process of uncovering what the narrator is saying intentionally and unintentionally, we learn that the apprehensible condition of reality is ambiguity. Thus, before we can appreciate what occurs in the story's ending, we must try to grasp the condition of appearances that lead up to it.

At the first level of revelation, we have to deal with persona. Persona, once we have established the degree of its credibility, establishes a comfortable relationship between the reader and the facts of the story. However in "Bartleby" the narrator uses his position to rationalize his involvement with his scrivener, to such an extent, that the rationalizations make up a rhetorical reality -- an appearance. This rhetorical reality works in two ways. First of all, because it is composed of unintentional ironies -- what I have called the sub-text -- this rhetorical appearance never allows us to make any substantive claim about either the narrator or Bartleby but does allow for the process of interrogation and for propositional meaning.
Secondly, the metaphorical implications of this rhetorical appearance suggest the symbolic use of law as a means of describing reality. Law is not only a metaphor for the arbitrary social control of behaviour and, by extension, of the status quo; law can also be seen as a symbol for the universal natural laws that control being and the religious laws that purportedly civilize man and offer him eternal salvation. In this sense the narrator's language limits and conceals what can be known of Bartleby, confirms Bartleby in his strangeness as a victim, and is confirmed in its own inhibitions by Bartleby's preferences. The law offices with their view of blank walls become every place—a symbolic condition that shows man is spiritually nowhere but under the control of Law which determines the imitativeness and unceasing repetitiveness of existence. The evidence for this is the symbolic equivalence of every locality in the story through the use of "walls", and by the simple fact that Bartleby's compelling refusals to copy law documents and his steadfast staring at walls of itself indicates a symbolic and metaphysical condition. Bartleby's arrival disrupts the pattern and introduces hazard—indefinable and uncontrolled—and hazard is not something the lawyer is prepared to accept. Such a vision declares a philosophical ambiguity: natural and spiritual laws protect man somewhat from hazard and yet these same laws are shown to be barriers to freedom.

Another level of appearance, which we might call a degree of literary complexity, is created through the use of allusions. Interspersed within the rhetorical movement of the lawyer's narration, the allusions function to escape from the fixed time-
and-space coordinates of the law-offices and therefore have a contrary and unsettling effect to any rhetorical intentions. Some allusions are the narrator's own, such as his mention of the following: Petra (p. 77), Marius and the ruins of Carthage (p. 77), Byron (p. 67), Colt and Adams (p. 87), the philosophers Edwards and Priestley (p. 88), the reference to Job in the narrator's eulogy (p. 99). In each case, the intentional and unintentional content of the reference widens the area of meaning and multiplies the number of possible routes to the enigma of Bartleby without ever proposing a solution or an overall symbolic unity to experience. Other allusions are strictly Melville's, such as the many jokes about forgery and copying and the biblical references to Bartleby as a possible avatar. These create a symbolic depth but also a pattern of ironic doubt. Is Bartleby a pathetic victim captivated by despair or a Christ figure abandoned by the narrator-god? Is the narrator a beleaguered and ineffectual philanthropist or a symbolic filicide? Such metaphorical questions are not capable of resolution and furthermore emphasize the separation between the discursive mind and the poetic imagination, which describes rather than polemicizes. Such patterns of allusion complicate the story's deeper ranges of meaning and affirm relativity and transience as the prominent symbolic truths.

Metaphorically, the various appearances in the story reveal contradictions. The narrator's persistent interrogation of Bartleby's demeanor fails to provide him with knowledge or satisfaction. As in Ishmael's "Champollion" quote, the narrator is stymied by the lack of any dramatic or obvious character indi-
cations in Bartleby's face. The initial diagnoses of "pallidly neat, pitifully respectable, incurably forlorn," is insufficient as character reference since the narrator does hire Bartleby, which, in hindsight, he would not have done. In fact, he follows this brief description by professing gladness at having an employee of so "singularly sedate an aspect" (p. 66). After Bartleby suddenly announces he "would prefer not to" check copies, the narrator pacifies his confused reactions by examining Bartleby's appearance:

I looked at him steadfastly. His face was leanly composed; his gray eye dimly calm. Not a wrinkle of agitation rippled him. Had there been the least uneasiness, anger, impatience, or impertinence in his manner; in other words, had there been anything ordinarily human about him doubtless I should have violently dismissed him from the premises. But as it was, I should have as soon thought of turning my pale plaster-of-paris bust of Cicero out of doors. (p. 68)

Physiognomy discloses that Bartleby has nothing "ordinarily human" about him, but any transcendental possibility is debunked by the narrator's analogy by the Cicero bust. Bartleby is later described as a "lean, penniless wight" (p. 73) during a moment of aggravation, combining the condition of materiality with ghostliness. This contradiction is made more ironic by the narrator's penchant for describing his scrivener in terms of praise that yet deny his humanity:

His steadiness, his freedom from dissipation, his incessant industry (except when he chose to throw himself into a standing revery behind his screen), his great stillness, his unalterableness of demeanor un-
Valuing Bartleby for his trustworthiness, the lawyer also speaks of him as an "acquisition". One critical problem is in knowing to what extent the narrator’s own materialism has distorted Bartleby's appearance in the text. Moreover, even if we accept the lawyer's description as accurate, we still have to face the difficulty of how the "great stillness" of Bartleby can on the one hand be interpreted as object-like and on the other hand have such a profound emasculating effect on the narrator. He describes himself as being "unmanned" by the "wonderful mildness" of the scrivener, but even this moral quality of mildness must be seen in context to a number of other varying perceptions. Bartleby is seen at different times as: a man of "cadaverously gentlemanly nonchalance" (p. 76), "a sort of innocent and transformed Marius" (p. 77), "a perpetual sentry" (p. 71), a figure of "pallid haughtiness" (p. 78), as something that "noiselessly slid into view" (p. 80), "a millstone" (p. 83), "useless as a necklace" (p. 83), "bit of wreck in the mid-Atlantic" (p. 83), "last column of some ruined temple" (p. 84), "intolerable incubus" (p. 90). Such descriptions suggest not only the narrator's confusion but a contradiction in the state of appearances as perceived by a man of supposedly normal disposition.

In Pierre, the title character has a moment of heightened perception in which he speculates on the possibility of the marvellous hidden within the ordinary:

Is it possible then, thought Pierre, that there lives a human creature in this common world of everydays, whose whole history may be told in
little less than two score words, and yet embody in that smallness a fathomless fountain of ever-welling mystery? Is it possible, after all, that spite of bricks and shaven faces, this world we live in is brimmed with wonders, and I and all mankind, beneath our garbs of commonplaceness, conceal enigmas that the stars themselves, and perhaps the highest seraphim can not resolve?42

Does this not sound, despite the difference in contexts, like Bartleby, especially considering the commonplace setting and his lack of personal history? But the question that Pierre poses is answered ironically in Bartleby The Scrivener, for the marvellous is both threatened and threatening in the narrator's world and the mystery of Bartleby a tortuous enigma. Moreover the struggle between the lawyer and Bartleby is of desperate significance to the lawyer, however absurd it seems in the framework of usual social relations, for the lawyer's peace of mind and livelihood depend on its outcome. On a symbolic level, it is a conflict between Wall Street culture and Bartleby's world-denying presence, and everything that Bartleby fails to do threatens the very faith the narrator has in the known appearances of his world. Thus we see the narrator in his "despondency" trying to understand Bartleby on the most fundamental and ordinary basis of appearance and activity, for it is appearances that frighten him and not for the most part a symbolic condition. It disturbs the narrator that Bartleby never drinks "tea and coffee even, like other men" (p. 78), that the scrivener "never went out for a walk" (p. 78), that "though so thin and pale, he never complained of ill-health" (p. 78). The narrator's attentiveness to particulars of physical appearance is noteworthy for the same reasons, as is evident in
the deliberate slow rhythm of adjectival word-choice in this passage:

"What is your answer, Bartleby?" said I, after waiting a considerable time for a reply, during which his countenance remained immovable, only there was the faintest conceivable tremor of the white attenuated mouth. (p. 80)

If Bartleby can be said to represent anything, it is the incomprehensible and unremediable qualities of life. His arrival, his presence, his very existence are tenuous. In a passage which combines the narrator's struggle with confidence in the effective processes of reason, together with an absurd impression of a man unable to act from natural assumptions, we also get a clear representation of the tenuousness that pervades the story:

What was to be done? or, if nothing could be done, was there anything further that I could assume in the matter? Yes, as before I had prospectively assumed that Bartleby would depart, so now I might retrospectively assume that departed he was. In the legitimate carrying out of this assumption, I might enter my office in a great hurry, and pretending not to see Bartleby at all, walk straight against him as if he were air. Such a proceeding would in a singular degree have the appearance of a home thrust. It was hardly possible that Bartleby could withstand such an application of the doctrine of assumptions. But upon second thoughts the success of this plan seemed rather dubious. (p. 86)

Yet this and other examples of tenuousness and transience are countered by images of immobility, petrifaction, irreversibility. Bartleby's decisions are irreversible, he is always there in his hermitage lost in dead-wall reveries, he does not seem to
move unless summoned, his visage is cadaverous. The mixture of stone-like qualities with an airy insubstantiality confuses and frightens the lawyer:

... the utterly unsurmised appearance of Bartleby, tenanted my law-chambers of a Sunday morning, with his cadaverously gentlemanly non-chalance, yet withal firm and self-possessed, had such a strange effect upon me, that incontinently I slunk away from my own door. (p. 76)

When we examine the story's setting we find a state of contradiction as well. The various descriptions of the office and the city have the effect of depersonalizing ambiguity and showing that ambiguity is equally an aspect of the environment as it is a problem of consciousness. The narrator's early description of his office demonstrates this quality:

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; which wall required no spy-glass to bring out its lurking beauties, but, for the benefit of all near-sighted spectators, was pushed up to within ten feet of my window panes. Owing to the great height of the surrounding buildings, and my chambers being on the second floor, the interval between this wall and mine not a little resembled a huge square cistern. (p. 60-61).

This depressing landscape is recognized as "deficient", but the
narrator believes that its lifelessness cannot affect anyone seriously, nor, does he believe that it points to a more seriously deficient symbolic condition. Indeed, he goes so far as to offer a wry comment on the "lurking beauties" of the brick wall facing his windows. But the passage does more than identify an utilitarian vision. It introduces the setting of the story and prepares the symbolic stage for the actors. Metaphorically, it is appropriate to have a setting that hinders vision carefully described for us before the commencement of a drama some of whose significant features are: a copyist who has failing eyesight and whose vision of the world is alien to the other characters; the continual attempts by the lawyer to perceive signs of comprehensions, agreement, compromise in Bartleby. Furthermore, as events shortly disclose, the landscape operates as a symbolic emptiness -- a "Petra" of the imagination. A suggestion of this emptiness occurs in the description of the space between one of the windows and the facing wall as "a huge square cistern." The references in Moby Dick and Pierre to the Egyptian pyramids, and the final resting place in this story within the Tombs, seem to suggest that we should consider the anagogous vastness and terror of cosmic solitude through the image of a drab and ominously comic cistern. The entire story bears witness to the fact that the narrator is unaware of the spiritual emptiness of his world. The exteriorizing of this emptiness suggests that we are to look at a condition greater than the habit-ridden ordinariness of the narrator, that the reality of the disturbing cistern image embraces not only the collective consciousness of men but the being of phenomena outside men. This important qualification would sug-
gest an explanation for Bartleby's affiliation with objects and walls: an explanation other than seeing Bartleby's consciousness as slowly petrifying. For if Bartleby exists at an extreme of human consciousness, almost beyond contact with men, then he is the likeliest witness to a mode of being that is a-human and inarticulable. In *Moby Dick* Ahab strains his very humanity to know the whale; in *Pierre* the title character unravels his mortal identity with a kind of misanthropic exaltation to become the chthonically immortal Enceladus. Both are symbolic expressions of a deep dissatisfaction with the accepted limits of humanity. In *Bartleby The Scrivener* Melville continues his philosophical investigation, but within the familiar confines of urban culture, perhaps to see what forms the extraordinary could take without forsaking apparent realism and ordinary minds.

Further examining the narrator's description of his offices we find the mention of the suggestive "black wall" and through the opposite window the facing "white wall". In a story which deals at some length with assumed concepts of right and wrong, and which silently voices a criticism of the narrator's dualist Puritanism, the appearance of white and black suggests a particularly ironic significance, captured in spirit by Bartleby who is trapped by the symbolic walls of dualism. Yet the walls might also suggest symbolic limits to consciousness, outside of any particular moral definition, and a precedent for such a vision can be found in *Moby Dick*.

In one of his letters, Melville had written that he loved all men who dove. As the speculative image of diving suggests there can be no foreknowledge of what is to be found in
a realm outside our ordinary, earth-bound consciousness. The vision Melville achieved in *Moby Dick* cannot be found in *Bartleby* the Scrivener; however, there are symbolic correspondences between the two works despite the fact that the former presented certain truths about the world of Nature while the latter deals exclusively with the world of man. Both works, for example, share in general a commitment to metaphysical inquiry. The spirit of metaphysical inquiry was also a part of the transcendentalism of Emerson and Thoreau, but for Melville their visions were unacceptable because they assumed the perfectability of man and did not account for the terrors of Nature. True inquiry, as Melville had learned from Shakespeare, faced natural and moral contradictions without prejudice and without predisposing a specific conclusion. This would require, according to Melville, a good deal of moral courage; such men of courage are sovereign natures "amid the powers of heaven, hell, and earth."^45

If we look at "The Whiteness of the Whale" chapter in *Moby Dick*, we find Melville's use of metaphysical interrogation at its best as well as an example of moral courage such a process demands. The chapter is an examination of the symbolic essence of whiteness and its effects on consciousness. His use of particular reference and observation, of both history and folklore, is an attempt to create universal validity, that will cut across cultural and doctrinal boundaries. It becomes clear in the course of the chapter that not only the phenomenon of whiteness is being discussed but that the problem of certitude in a largely unknown world is also at stake.

Before embarking on his evaluation, Ishmael tells us
what has inspired him to offer us this report. He observes that since the whale is both material and spiritual phenomenon, its effect is concrete and "mystical and well nigh ineffable."\textsuperscript{46} It is the white whale's appearance that prompts Ishmael's effort. His interrogation of whiteness includes religious symbols, animals, phantoms, superstitions, atmospheric phenomena, and finally becomes an interrogation of appearance and reality.

Throughout the process there is a recognition of the difficulty of discriminating between subjective bias and objective fact:

\[\ldots\text{symbolize whatever grand or gracious thing he will by whiteness, no man can deny that in its idealized significance it calls up a peculiar apparition to the soul. But though without dissent this point can be fixed, how is mortal man to account for it? Can we, then, by the citation of some of these instances wherein this thing of whiteness -- though for the time either wholly or in great part stripped of all direct associations calculated to impart to it aught fearful, but, nevertheless, is found to exert over us the same sorcery, however modified; -- can we thus hope to light upon some chance clue to conduct us to the hidden cause we seek?}^{47}\]

What one begins to discern in this and other passages is the consciousness of method. The discriminative intelligence is operative at every turn of image and phrase, qualifying speculations, anticipating objections, leading the reader's mind exactly where it is wanted. The repeated questions are also more than a rhetorical device, for they represent a stance towards reality, wherein the quest discloses greater vision rather than any ulti-
mate answer. We are meant to be reading the appearance of the world in this chapter and by its end are brought to existential urgency. We should also remember in this respect Ishmael's initial promise of putting the "ineffable" into "comprehensible form" and his fear: "how can I hope to explain myself here; and yet, ... explain myself I must." Later on, there is a reference to the "man of untutored ideality," as a warning against superstitious associations.

We can already discern, in an incidental manner, some relationships to Bartleby The Scrivener. The narrator is, despite his profession, a "man of untutored ideality," if we remember his vain optimism, his superstitious dread of Bartleby, and the attempts to idealize their relationships along the lines of pre-determination and charity. There is no greater quest to discover god-like truths, but there is a lesser quest in the lawyer's attempt to come to an understanding of Bartleby. More importantly, there is a shared consciousness of method between Ishmael's chapter and the narrator's tale, although the narrator in "Bartleby" distorts method to serve his own self-vindication. To learn more about the correspondence of method between the two works we must first see what specifically happens to Ishmael's questor.

Ishmael's thorough interrogation of appearances finally leads him to propose an "instinctive knowledge of the demonism in the world" as being the "hidden cause" for our mystical dread of whiteness. This unsettling discovery is proposed only as a possibility but which nevertheless allows the observer freedom of choice. Amid the wonders and terrors of existence, conscious of
the fullness of choices, Ishmael remains unchoosing. In dedication to truth, however, the demonic hypothesis is argued to its conclusion and brings about a state of existential unease. This state, following the disclosure of inherent ambiguity in appearances, is in evidence throughout Moby Dick, and as will soon be shown, is also present in Bartleby The Scrivener.

Ishmael articulates his unease as a metaphysical generalization: "Though in many of its aspects this visible world seems formed in love, the invisible spheres were formed in fright."53 This generalization implies a tragic separation within the soul and furthermore activates a crisis of confidence. If the world of nature or the world of men discloses contradictory appearances how is the questor to act? The pursuit of this question takes the questor into the realm of cosmic abstractions: in Ishmael's chapter, questions of time and space, of cosmogony, evolution, ultimate significance; in the Wall Street memoir, the lawyer reads "Edwards on The Will" and Priestley on Necessity and considers first the saving grace of charity and finally the universal significance of Bartleby. Ishmael ends his ruminations by asking whether "by its indefiniteness (whiteness) shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of the universe, and thus stabs us from behind with the thought of annihilation."54 In Bartleby The Scrivener we likewise end with a contemplation of death as the final mystery.

To return to "Bartleby", we find that the narrator's law offices represent the symbolic spiritual condition of mid 19th century America. The walls seen from the law offices have in this respect a number of different meanings. They suggest
that, rather than simply an opportunity to live communally, a
city is also its walls, its formalized separations. Wall Street,
eminent in its reputation for commercial power, is shown to be
cut off from the natural sources of life by "walls" of self-
interest, avarice, spiritual blindness. But as "black" and
"white" the walls are also the symbolic limits to the spectrum
of ordinary experience. White repels light while black absorbs
it; in either case we are dealing with both totality and void,
to which several meanings can be attached, (as Ishmael demon-
strated in his meditation on whiteness), without essential change
to its appearance. White and black each allow for contraries of
experience, thought, and metaphor within their own identities;
in opposition to each other they can still maintain equivalence.
Thus in moral terms, the "white" side to the narrator's world
is respectability and justice which provide moral order; nega-
tively, respectability is horrified by Bartleby's behaviour and
suffering, and justice is unable to assist Bartleby and ultima-
tely condemns him. The "black side" to the narrator's world is
the night side: the rejected, unknown half of reality which con-
tains violence, dereliction, sterility, emptiness, but which also
has the elements of dream and poetry. The narrator's contempla-
tion of the barren spectacle of Sundays on Wall Street, of
Bartleby's almost unimaginable existence in the offices, his fear
of becoming a suddenly violent Colt: all are moments of "irra-
tional" poetry. In terms of appearance, both "white" and "black"
sides are quite different; in terms of effect, both are "walls"
which separate Bartleby from life within his own limitations, and
both are shown to have, in the proper circumstances, destructive
and death-like qualities. These contradictions in the appearance of reality are beyond the understanding of the lawyer, but even such intimations that he does receive are enough to debilitate his morale.

The narrator's crisis of confidence occurs when he visits his offices on a Sunday and discovers that Bartleby has been living there. Till then Bartleby's unreasonableness in office responsibilities has been noted as "strange peculiarities, privileges, and unheard-of exemptions" (p. 75). But the breach in convention caused by Bartleby's habitation of the offices is a rude awakening for the lawyer. He learns of his scrivener's true poverty, of the loneliness of such an existence, and for the first time suspects that Bartleby's behaviour might be something more than a temporary aberration. The "certain hopelessness of remedying excessive and organic ill" (p. 79) is, of course, unbearable to the narrator, for he realizes that both he "... and Bartleby were sons of Adam" (p. 77). He has an intimation of death: "The scrivener's pale form appeared to me laid out, among uncaring strangers, in its shivering winding-sheet" (p. 78). The narrator's confidence in the familiarity and goodness of appearances has broken down, and just as in Ishmael's interrogation of whiteness, (though we must be mindful of the differences in awareness), the process of discovery leads to a memento mori.

Death has an unusual presence in the story. Its literal manifestation is only an instance of a much wider influence. In its most subtle form, death is presaged by uncertainty and hazard, as if uncertainty and hazard were its continual reminders. When the narrator ponders anxiously what Bartleby will do next, the
inquiry seems surrounded by a death-like silence. Hazard is manifested through a number of images which occur as sudden transformation. When Bartleby refuses to check copies, the narrator is at one time momentarily "turned into a pillar of salt" (p. 69). The reference to Lot's wife deepens the mystery of the image without clarifying it, but what is unmistakable is the ease of passage from life to non-life. When the narrator finds Bartleby in his offices on the Sunday, he sees him as a "transformed Marius brooding among the ruins of Carthage" (p. 77), capturing a moment of dereliction that seems neither quite in life nor in death. Finding Bartleby a second time in the offices, despite having dismissed him, he is struck by lightning:

For an instant I stood like the man who, 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 someone touched him, when he fell. (p. 86)

This striking image of instantaneous death on an otherwise peaceful day seems to point to the "invisible spheres formed in fright" of Ishmael's meditations, which in this case manifest themselves not in some strange and dangerous area of experience but in the most ordinary of settings, at home so to speak, in what we might almost call on one level a domestic squabble.

The climax of the story -- the narrator's sudden recognition in the Tombs -- fulfills an accession of awareness that has been steadily built up throughout the story. We cannot know the degree of the narrator's awareness, although the several ironies suggest he is only imperfectly aware of what has happened.
Nevertheless, the process of revelation is there for the reader to acknowledge: that appearances disclose contradictory evidence about the nature of reality; that such a perception has moral significance since it involves the admission of human weakness and failure, of self-deception, and of each other's ultimate inscrutability; and that finally death has an ambiguous presence even in the most innocent of circumstances. Death is the final layer of appearance that conceals the ever-elusive nature of Bartleby. The various images the narrator uses in speaking of Bartleby are laden with death. Bartleby is a "bust of Cicero" (p. 69), "a penniless wight" (p. 73), "like a very ghost" (p. 74), a figure of "great stillness" (p. 74-75), of "unalterableness of demeanor" (p. 75), of a "cadaverously gentlemanly nonchalance" (p. 76), a "last column of some ruined temple" (p. 84), he gives a "mildly cadaverous reply" (p. 81) and is thought to have a "cadaverous triumph" (p. 86), is an "intolerable incubus" (p. 90). The narrator's world itself has been a kind of spiritual death, devoid of real consciousness and feeling, with its bleak offices and a "wall black by age and everlasting shade" (p. 60).

However, such consciousness of death is made more complex by the ironic fact that it has been Bartleby's degeneration which has awakened the narrator's conscience, even to a small degree, and it is the death of Bartleby which momentarily enlivens the narrator's imagination. Thus we get a complex metaphysical thought of life and death feeding off each other in a transpersonal process, while what remains unanswered is the terrible simplicity of human loss. The postscripted speculation on Bartleby's
Dead letters! does it not sound like dead men? Conceive a man by nature and misfortune prone to a pallid hopelessness, can any business seem more fitted to heighten it than that of continually handling these dead letters, and assorting them for the flames? For by the cart-load they are annually burned. 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.

Ah, Bartleby! Ah, humanity! (p. 99)

I have quoted the final passage at length to indicate the quality of the change in the narrator's attitude to life. Some critics have seen the postscript as a modified continuation of the story's ironic method, debunking the supposed change of heart. Other critics have seen it as an artistic mistake, spoiling the ironic subtleties of the story for an overt, sentimental statement of theme. In the view of this thesis, both positions subtly miss the point. It is difficult to deny the comparatively sentimental nuance of the language, especially since we know the narrator is capable of often pompous and self-righteous tone. However, the true test of a change of attitude is to examine the degree to which the narrator is able to forget his own interests in his perception of experience. These final words are, for the narrator, unusually selfless, and they attempt a coherent interpretation of an experience that cannot be of any com-
fort to himself. In this sense, the narrator has changed; the awakening may have been modest and transient but it should not be judged. Furthermore, if we are assessing the artistic quality of this ending, we should remember Melville's ability in *Moby Dick* and *Pierre* to relate contradictory and ambiguous material from an uncommitted stance. When Ishmael speaks of the "heartless voids" behind appearances, he speaks from a revelatory stance that nevertheless keeps him free of any implication of negativity or despair, and we are not bothered by the fact that he speaks with Melville's authority. In *Pierre*, the problem is more complex because the title character is both a dupe of the narrative method and a sympathetic victim of society's contradictions, as well as at times the instrument for Melville's ironic observations on the fate of those who quest for truth. The final effect in both books of such complexity of tone, metaphor, and event, is to render experience as inextricably ambiguous. Similarly, in *Bartleby The Scrivener*, there is nothing to indicate that the narrator will become other than what he has always been -- caught in ordinariness and fear of the irrational -- and yet we can say that he has had a glimpse of the tragic mode of experience inhabited by Bartleby and by the night-side other half of reality. Thus the final: "Ah, Bartleby! Ah, humanity!" is multivalent: indicating the narrator's awareness of tragic experience not as an eccentric but as a common human experience; implying, outside the narrator's awareness, the narrator's sentimentality in too easily transforming suffering into literary expression; and further implying that Bartleby's experience is ultimately outside the range of explanation, and can only be alluded to through the means of
poetic utterance.

Metaphorically, there is other evidence to support the narrator's sudden change of attitude. At the Tombs Bartleby's death is accompanied by natural silence. The description of the silence is striking for its suggestion of a universal response to Bartleby's death:

The yard was entirely quiet. It was not accessible to the common prisoners. The surrounding walls, of amazing thickness, kept off all sounds behind them. The Egyptian character of the masonry weighed upon me with its gloom. But a soft imprisoned turf grew under foot. The heart of the eternal pyramids, it seemed, wherein, by some strange magic, through the clefts, grass-seed, dropped by birds, had sprung. (p. 98)

This renewal of Nature, so ironically placed at a scene of waste and despair, is sensed and reported by the narrator. Yet that very fact shows a sensitivity which had been previously lacking. His initial comments on his offices demonstrated an unconcern for aesthetic qualities in landscape. This is perhaps the first instance in the narrative that the lawyer has shown sensitivity to alternations of atmosphere -- a quality of imagination -- rather than simply a subjective response, as in his offices on the Sunday walk, to drabness and sterility.

The lawyer's world, it is fair to say, has been a "petra" of the imagination. Since Bartleby is brought to the "Tombs" we must include in that world all of society. The petrifaction of life is not, the story shows, a peculiarity of the narrator alone, but the very condition of the ordinary world, lacking vitality, sensitivity, moral sensibility. The coincidence of Bartleby's
arrival in the narrator's life is a lesson the narrator tries repeatedly to decipher — perhaps to the extent of writing this memoir. There is an unreachable quality in Bartleby that touches the feelings of the narrator and mysteriously commands his respect, a quality the narrator tries to express in his comment: "With kings and councilors." At that moment of discovering Bartleby's death, and with or without the narrator's awareness, the symbolic force of Bartleby's life is manifested. The phrase, taken from the Book of Job, suggests that ambiguity is of the very order of the universe, and is thus mirrored in the enigmatic utterance. Job is delivered into the devil's power on account of a wager to test his faith and character. The terrible sufferings that Job incurs are never satisfyingly explained in the biblical text; symbolically the implication is the control of the world by demonic agencies and the irrationality of God's purpose.

Something of the poetic force of the Book of Job can be felt in the petrifaction of the imaginative life described in Bartleby The Scrivener. As in the Book of Job, there can be no satisfying answer to Bartleby's suffering.

The narrator, sentimental and self-pitying, transmits the only truth he is capable of understanding from his memory of Bartleby. He has undeniably suffered a loss and had a tragic experience. Bartleby The Scrivener is, symbolically, an implosion of violence that includes all the falseness, alienation, and deadness of that world, that reaches stasis only in the heart of the Tombs, symbolically the heart of the story; even as it is, paradoxically, its denouement. The pursuit by the narrator of Bartleby's significance has in a sense created the tale, for
without his introspective search there is only disjointed experience. The creation of the story has been, to some degree, a process of symbolization, in the sense that the felt tragedy of Bartleby's suffering is understood only to the degree that the narrator manages to remember his own experience. Thus, given the narrator's limitations, incompleteness must be the final condition of Bartleby's story, and incompleteness is as well the appropriate analogy for the forms of knowledge available to men.
Published shortly after *Bartleby The Scrivener*, in December 1853, *Cock-A-Doodle-Doo!* presents an interesting contrast to it. Both stories deal in some measure with extraordinary men within ordinary appearances and familiar settings. However, when we look at the specific performance of the stories, such similarities lose particular value. Setting has changed from the Wall Street of New York City to the New England countryside; the considered premise of a world of comfort, progress, and material well-being in "Bartleby" has become here a world of hazard, disease, and suspicion of technological change; from a prosperous lawyer specialising in mortgages we are moved to the sight of an indolent farmer complaining of poverty, who has to raise a second mortgage on his property. Furthermore, although both stories are told from the first-person point-of-view, the differences in narrative form are substantial. In "Bartleby", the narrator tries to tell a story, whose development and interest depend on the narrator's understanding of the story's central, mysterious figure and of his experience with him. In *Cock-A-Doodle-Doo!*, the narrative development depends neither on recollection nor on understanding but on the narrator's ability to communicate a change-of-being, a conversion from fatalism to optimism, and both Merrymusk and his remarkable rooster have a supportive rather than dominant role in the accomplishment.

Perhaps because of its use of an extravagant and jocular conceit like the crowing of a cock to achieve complex artistic purposes, the story has had a difficult time with its critics. It
certainly suffers in comparison with *Bartleby* The Scrivener, *Benito Cereno*, and *Billy Budd*, which have a tragic dignity to offset ironic humour. Because of its lack of incidental development, strong characterization, and symbolic resonance, the critics have either tended to see it as an embarrassing failure or as a specific satire on one or another set of figures. Thus, for example, Lewis Mumford and Newton Arvin, were among the earliest of the notable modern critics to dismiss it out of hand; William Bysshe Stein, among others, has seen the story as an attack on Transcendentalism, while Leon Howard has interpreted it as a parody of Wordsworth's *Resolution and Independence*. Recently, William Dillingham has argued well that the story is a symbolic rendering and analysis of the relationship between sexuality and poetic genius. However, most criticism has had difficulty seeing the story as an accomplished piece and has treated it as an amalgam, or singular development, of satire, sexual comedy, and ecstatic fervour. Yet what is precisely memorable about the story is, as the title suggests, its voice. If we are to assess the story properly we should consider how event, metaphor, and voice work together to produce meaning.

Even a brief, superficial look at the story shows that appearances are discontinuous. The narrative is interspersed with reaction and commentary to an extent that these easily outweigh what little plot-line there is. Yet if we are to analyze such events as the crowing of the cock and the visit of the dun we must have some means of indicating the difference in degree between these events; moreover, if because of discontinuity we cannot proceed linearly with plot analysis then the quality of
events can be our access to understanding reported experience. The quality of events can be discerned by discriminating between what we can call **high event** and **low event**. As will soon be shown, high event is meant to indicate unusual experience, of special, imaginative significance to the narrator, and which has corresponding appropriateness to the activity of metaphor and irony. Low event describes the occurrences of the everyday, ordinary world, which tend to promote repetitiveness, dullness, and fatalism.

High event in the story is limited to hearing the crowing of the cock, to discovering its whereabouts, and to witnessing the deaths of Merrymusk and his family. If we examine these events closely, however, we find that their significant features happen almost solely within the narrator's consciousness. The actual, concrete events in this qualification, are, paradoxically, impalpable and transitory occurrences. Low events, on the other hand, describe the narrator's business, particularly his dealings with the dun. The narrator's first auditory encounter with the cock, as a high event, is described in this way:

"Hark! By Jone, what's that? See! the very hair-trunks prick their ears at it, and stand and gaze away down into the rolling country yonder. Hark again; How clear! how musical! how prolonged! What a triumphant thanksgiving of a cock-crow! "Glory be to God in the highest!" It says those very words as plain as ever cock did in this world. Why, why, I begin to feel a little in sorts again. It ain't so very misty, after all. The sun yonder is beginning to show himself; I feel warmer. (p. 106)

There is no attempt to objectify the episode through impartial
description. What we have, instead, is a sudden change in mood from melancholia to exuberance. The cock's song is experienced as enlivening Nature itself; the sun shines through the mist and the calves, soon afterwards, show more activity than they had done for six months. Nevertheless, what has changed for this farmer is somewhat unclear if we look for indications externally. Before the song, he had arisen from bed, "too full of hypos to sleep" (p. 103), and had gone for a walk on his "hillside pasture" (p. 103). He was despondent about "dreadful casualties" (p. 103), both locally and worldwide and all of Nature seemed to evince a kind of dyspepsia, looking "underdone, its raw juices squirting all round" (p. 103). But the crucial point of these descriptions is that the narrator is not only our interpreter of events, but, as the anthropomorphized descriptions of melancholic Nature imply, that his changing consciousness is the only intelligible evidence of what is happening. His consciousness is the mirror into which we must look for signs of significant activity in the world. Now this is altogether different from following the discourse of a first-person narrator in a story like Bartleby The Scrivener, where external events are clearly described and only the attitude to them is suspect, permitting the reader to distinguish between narrative development and internal commentary. Here the significant event of the crowing cock is related conversationally. The cock itself is invisible and we have no indications that it exists other than the narrator's reactions.

This method of disclosure creates, as has been mentioned, an impalpability and transience of experience that itself suggests the nature of appearances. Suddenness, surprise, a sense of the
mysteriousness of life, are all elements of the marvellous beyond appearances, and are manifested in various ways through the symbol of the cock, whose crowing tells the narrator "Never say die!" (p. 107). The narrator's continued exposure to the crowing invigorates him, exalts his imaginative appreciation of life, but for most of the story is not described in terms other than subjective. In speaking of the cock, his words only find expression in the superlative range of meaning: "so self-possessed in its very rapture of exaltation -- so vast, mounting, swelling, soaring, as if spurted out from a golden throat, thrown far back" (p. 110), "like Xerxes from the East" (p. 111), "my imperial Shanghai! my bird of the Emperor of China! Brother of the Sun!" (p. 112), "like a jolly bolt of thunder with bells to it" (p. 117). In this way, the high event of such experiences is shown to be an internal appreciation and expansion of meaning rather than an occurrence separable and distinct in the natural setting from elements of narrative voice and plot, even though the tone is in part ironic and mocking.

When we compare the narrator's experience of the rooster with the visit of the dun, the differences in treatment are immediately evident. High event becomes low event:

I felt in rare spirits the whole morning. The dun called about eleven. I had the boy Jake send the dun up. I was reading Tristram Shandy, and could not go down under the circumstances. The lean rascal (a lean farmer, too -- think of that!) entered, and found me seated in an armchair, with my feet on the table, and the second bottle of brown-stout handy, and the book under eye. (p. 108-109)
The commonplace circumstances -- the serving of a bill -- the jocular tone and broad humour of this and the rest of the episode, in which the narrator tries to engage the dun in hearing a sexual joke about "Uncle Toby and the Widow Waxman" (p. 109), and the more or less realistic approach to relating the episode, all serve to identify the ordinariness of the event. What has changed, of course, is the narrator's attitude in dealing with the problem of unpaid debts. Thanks to his new found vigour and optimism, he is rid of the dun easily. The entire event is somewhat farcical, but what is relevant in terms of this discussion is its clear exposition and its familiar, earthy, bantering manner. We are not in the presence of highmindedness nor amidst impalpability, transience, and mystery.

Intrigued by the repeated song, the narrator feels he must learn who owns the marvellous bird. He undertakes a journey, "resolved to walk the entire country" (p. 113) to learn which rich farmer owns such a creature. He visits several farms but does not discover the bird. However, the journey itself is fantastical, a mixture of "high" and "low" intentions. On the one hand, we have the caustic humour of the episode with the dun repeated in the narrator's encounters with two old farmers. The first is unable to tell him anything useful for he has never heard the "Emperor of China's chanticleer" (p. 113). The mention of "Widow Crowfoot" and "Squire Squaretoes" exhibits Melville's humour in its satiric and farcical vein, as the names are suggestive of *Tristram Shandy* in its sexual joking and of a kind of nonsensical debunking of the conversational ability of farmers. The other old man, "mending a tumble-down old rail-fence" (p. 113)
with rotten timbers, is a picture of "idiocy" (p. 114) and of the absurd, mindless agrarian routine that often leads to it. The narrator also visits a wealthy farmer who shows him ten Shanghai roosters, but the sight of the ten "carrot-coloured monsters, without the smallest pretension to effulgence of plumage" (p. 115) is enough to indicate that the narrator's noble rooster cannot be one of these. Indeed, the three episodes on the journey demonstrate that the narrator is the only being thus far to have heard the remarkable rooster. Once again, the homely, pedestrian impression of the events implies the low scale of meaning; the specific ironies concerning the intellectual capacity of some farmers and the doubles entendres reinforce the debunking attitude.

The journey is also, on the other hand, a metaphor for the pilgrim's progress. The urge to find the transcendental bird is, in this view, the urge for salvation on this earth. The high tone of such an analogy is, of course, immediately deflated by the encounter with the three farmers, who have only idle chat, idiocy, and mere material acquisitions to offer. He must proceed on faith alone, for the only evidence of the bird's existence, (the alchemical gold of self-realization), is his own experience and invigorated spirits.

The journey operates, in a sense, as a synecdoche for the whole story. The narrator begins alone and ends alone. He is as impoverished as ever at the story's close but he has won faith in the possibility of spiritual regeneration through his encounter with Merrymusk and the bird. He has learned how to be heroic amidst the catastrophes of the world. The early description of the
hated train as an "old dragon" (p. 105) and its identification with the dun, ("a lantern-jawed rascal" (p. 105)), introduces the theme of the mythic battle with the dragon. Graced by the cock's crowing, the narrator temporarily wins a reprieve from the dun, a momentary victory. But material necessity finally intrudes and a second mortgage is taken out on the farm. The narrator continues optimistically but the contradictions of maintaining hope and joy in a world of "dreadful casualties" and material uncertainty are not resolved. The crucial point in this development is the credibility of faith. Is there enough evidence to support irrational belief? As in the journey to find the cock, what is disclosed is the external reality of poverty, disease, tedium, and the internal reality of conviction based on rapture. As an attack on Transcendentalism, the contradictions already mentioned are enough to convince a reader of the story's rebuttal of -- for example -- Thoreau's attempt to find prelapsarian innocence at Walden Pond. However, such a satiric portrayal is only incidental and not the measure of the story's achievement. To find the evidence for this view, we have only to re-examine how the story uses contradiction to create a suspension of judgment.

I have used the hypothetical terms "high event" and "low event" not to impose a structure but to attempt to show the disappearance of structure. Transcendence, quest, faith -- all of high tone -- have in themselves no sure basis in the narrative. We have already seen how the transcendent song of the rooster suggests an evolving pattern of experience and meaning, yet until he discovers that Merrymusk is the owner of the bird the narrator is alone in appreciating its beauty. Indeed, the reader is kept from
the experience as well, for it is reported and not rendered until the closing scenes. Faith is shown to be irrational, and the sheer weight of farce, irony, and satiric humour so isolates it from an acceptable vision of reality that it remains private and incommunicable. The narrator's journey, of noble purpose, suggests a spiritual quest, but what he finds is mundane and ridiculous, and nothing on the quest even indicates the existence of such a bird of marvels. The visionary stance is introduced with wit and enthusiasm and then debunked, and yet the visionary purpose continues despite calamity and death, in the face of poverty, to finish with a re-affirmation of "crowing" in all circumstances (p. 128). Noble purpose and broad humour, sublime thought and mundane complications, the forward-reaching, formative power of transcendental experience and the regressive, falling-into-formlessness of tedium and debility, all come together to create an ambiguous flux of experience that cannot easily be characterised as one or another ironic structure.

A comparison of two passages will make this iconoclastic tendency more clear. In an early section of the story, the narrator vents his anger at the railroads for disturbing rural peace and being subject to horrific accidents:

Great improvements of the age! What! to call the facilitation of death and murder an improvement! Who wants to travel so fast? My grandfather did not, and he was no fool. Hark! here comes that old dragon again -- that gigantic gadfly of a Moloch -- snort! puff! scream! -- here he comes straight-bent through these vernal woods, like the Asiatic cholera cantering on a camel. Stand aside! here he comes, the chartered murderer! the
death monopolizer! judge, jury, and hangman all together, whose victims die always without benefit of clergy. For two hundred and fifty miles that iron fiend goes yelling through the land, crying "more! more! more!" Would that fifty conspiring mountains would fall atop of him! And, while they were about it, would they would also fall atop of that smaller dunning fiend, my creditor ...

(p. 105)

The passage is an effective piece of diatribe. But the intensity of feeling and the outlandish imagery ("gigantic gadfly of a Moloch", "cholera cantering on a camel"), call attention to themselves rather than to the alleged injustices of the railroads. When the narrator changes in mid-stream to an attack on his creditor, the criticism is more interesting for its expressiveness than for its content. When the narrator relies on the kinetic ability of his language to re-create the frightful power of the train moving through the countryside at that moment, the result is a dislocation, for we are further distanced from available reality, ironically in the midst of an attack on the all-too-real conditions of mechanical slavery and suffering. This dislocation, both in effect and intensity, is similar to the dislocation that occurs in the narrator's entranced experience in hearing the "noble cock", since, in that case too, the external world disappears in favour of an intense, internal experience.

These dislocations occur throughout the text, confounding our sense of external appearances and increasing our attention to and reliance on the variations of mood and consciousness in the narrator. The first five paragraphs place us in the setting; the next dozen or so paragraphs dislocate us from the set-
ting by an attack on mechanistic civilization and the enrapured
audition of the rooster's song; thereafter, with the visit of
the dun and the search for the rooster's home, we are moved in
and out of the natural setting by repeated auditions and digres-
sions on the superlative qualities of the cock. The effect of
such dislocations is to suggest illusoriness of appearances and
the unreality of structures.

The second of the passages worth looking at from the
point-of-view of iconoclastic tendency occurs when the narrator
is served with a writ during lunch at a pub:

When I unrolled the cigar, I unrol-
led the civil-process, and the con-
stable standing by rolled out, with
a thick tongue, "Take notice!" and
added, in a whisper, "Put that in
your pipe and smoke it!"

I turned short round upon the gen-
tlemen then and there present in
that bar-room. Said I, "Gentlemen,
is this an honourable -- nay, is
this a lawful way of serving a
civil process? Behold!"

One and all they were of opinion,
that it was a highly inelegant act
in the constable to take advantage
of a gentleman's lunching on cheese
and porter, to be so uncivil as to
slip a civil-process into his hat.
It was ungenerous; it was cruel;
for the sudden shock of the thing
coming instanter upon the lunch,
would impair the proper digestion
of the cheese, which is proverbia-
not so easy of digestion as blanc-
mange. (p. 116-117)

At first glance, this episode reads as a fairly realistic portray-
al, with some humour, of a simple misfortune. It is the kind of
low event, already discussed, that disrupts the narrator's high-
minded interest in searching for the source of his transcendental
experiences. Moreover, it is related in an ironic fashion to the first of these two passages by indicating the victory of the materialistic dragon forces, (here in the shape of a dun's civil writ), and thus implying the improbability of successful questing in such an uncertain world. However, a closer look casts doubt on the appropriateness of a realistic reading. What are we to make of the narrator's attitude to his misfortune? He has been served with a summons for a bill that he cannot pay. It will mean a second mortgage on his property. Yet perhaps because of the combination of a new-found optimism and porter, all that strikes him as worthy of comment is the incivility of being notified in such a manner. The narrator's glibness seems puzzling unless we read the entire scene as a farcical episode. The three elements of the episode -- finding the writ wrapped around the cigar in front of the wiseacring constable, the narrator turning in a cavalier manner to address the other drinkers, and the unanimously favourable response of the drinkers to the narrator -- are a wonderfully improbable and comic treatment of what is, finally, a mundane issue. What we are made to witness is the creation of sudden comedy for no other purpose than irreverence. Momentarily, we lose sight of noble ideals as we respond to the absurd picture of a civil-process impairing "the digestion of the cheese, which is proverbially not so easy of digestion as blancmange." Such irreverence is very difficult to classify, (since it would denounce classification), and thus acts as a dislocating factor in the continuity of tone. Of course, continuity of tone is a hopeless term for such a story, since, as we shall see later, tone has a variety of differing manifestations
What is important for us to consider at this point is the ambiguous role of irreverence in the latter passage. If we are to say that it simply has the function of showing the narrator to be a cheerful fool, willing to ignore material facts in pursuit of his noble aims, then how are we to interpret the delicate relationship between the narrator as character and the narrator as creator of the comedy? If the narrator is Melville's dupe, then we must face the contradiction of the narrator's awareness in the evidently comic tone of his introspections:

"But, my dear and glorious cock," mused I, upon second thought, "one can't so easily send this world to pot; one can't so easily be jolly with civil-processes in his hat or hand." (p. 117)

This is only one of many examples of his often extravagant humour, but it serves to indicate that we cannot easily dismiss the narrator as a naive idealist or misled stoic. The paragraphs immediately following the tavern episode show a series of dislocations of attitude and tone. The adjoining paragraph discloses the melancholy and self-pity we might have expected in the tavern, but it does so with a kind of posturing that conceals the "abused", "unappreciated", "miserable" feelings of the narrator (p. 117). In the next, the narrator suddenly hears the "all-glorious and defiant crow" (p. 117) of the cock which once more uplifts him. Then we are moved in the succeeding paragraphs into an introspective debate, conducted humourously but with the serious aim of resolving an attitude towards material hardship. Neither by point-of-view nor by description, neither by attitude nor by analogy, is
it easy to make the transition in these few paragraphs to external reality. If the tone is humourous, ironical, or farcical, and the content is introspective, then we have no sure basis for assessing events other than the variations of consciousness. Location is internalized, and as such, can disappear or re-create itself to suit the particular intentions of feeling in the moment.

We should also beware of falling back on the view of a dialectical structure, albeit philosophical rather than experiential. There is no evidence to suppose that Melville is proposing an examination of the relationships between immediacy and the unconditional necessity of natural laws, as pertaining to a state-of-being. If, throughout the story, tone is changing and location is continually unsettled, then consistency of argument is also suspect. The narrator does respond to an affirmative call despite being aware of the everpresence of hardship and suffering, and he makes no serious attempt to resolve such a discrepancy. Thus, an ironic portrayal of Transcendentalism or an examination of the destructive aspects of sexuality, as possible themes of the story, should be seen as elements rather than determinants of the narrative.

The narrator's meeting with Merrymusk clarifies the deeper ranges of meaning. There is a concrete and homely quality in the description of Merrymusk sawing logs in the snow, and a sobriety that has been missing from the narrative. The low tone of the activity is mediated by the high tone of a mysterious presence in the sawyer -- "a certain singular man" (p. 118) who has a "latently joyous eye" (p. 118). Merrymusk is a former sailor-
questor, who has given up the world and now contents himself with inland existence. His life has been hardship and suffering, and he can barely meet the needs of his invalid wife and four sickly children. Yet despite such misfortune, he has a resilience in his character that allows him to continue uncompaining and to work with "wondrous intensity of application" (p. 118). He is a silent man and his silence is such that it strikes the narrator as "of the mind of Solomon" (p. 119). Yet Merrymusk remains an ambiguous figure, for although he inspires respect, the narrator is also appalled by Merrymusk's "views of things" (p. 126) concerning the stoical acceptance of misery and death. Merrymusk's silence is not easily interpreted, although it surely signifies a certain profundity of being. How we can accommodate this new seriousness with the general irreverence that has preceded it is not at first clear. But if we recall Melville's treatment of silence in previous works we do get the possibility of a new perspective.

Silence, for Melville, usually connotes the extraordinary, whether in natural or sacred forms. In Moby Dick, there is the silence of the Pacific, as large, as mysterious, as numinous as Life itself; there are also the brooding silences of Ahab, the sagacious silence of Bulkington, the daimonic silences of Queequeg, Tashtego, Daggoo. In each of the men, silence signifies, as well as conceals, an inner life of the mind and spirit, that is ambivalent in its potential manifestations.67 This kind of human silence is neither of good nor of evil though it can lend itself to both. In Pierre, Melville tells us:
All profound things, and emotions of things are preceded and attended by Silence. What a silence is that with which the pale bride precedes the responsive I will... Silence is the general consecration of the universe. Silence is the invisible laying on of the Divine Pontiff's hands upon the world. Silence is at once the most harmless and the most awful thing in all nature. It speaks of the reserved forces of Fate. Silence is the only voice of our God.

Nor is this so august Silence confined to things simply touching or grand. Like the air, Silence permeates all things...

If silence is universal and profound, containing all things within it, then any value can be attached to it at a particular instant of time in the absence of definitive indications. Bartleby's silence is at different times and cumulatively, pathetic, frightening, touching and profound. In Cock-A-Doodle-Doo!, Merrymusk's silence is as natural as the inclination to self-possession and as problematic as the marvellous crowing of the rooster. His silence cannot be reduced to a theoretical basis, by the simple fact that it precedes and supercedes language. Thus, the jolly and loquacious narrator cannot possibly understand the silence of Merrymusk. The narrator conjectures that Merrymusk is "of the mind of Solomon" (p. 119), but follows that by supposing jocularly that Merrymusk might make an "excellent man for President of the United States" (p. 119).

The silence of Merrymusk presages the greater silence of death encompassing the apocalyptic blast of the cock at the end of the story. Its ambivalence corresponds to other, moral ambivalencies in the story, at which we shall have a close look
later. Furthermore, its precise place in the narrative, following the narrator's suspicion that his hearing of the cock's song may be a deception, is a significant turning-point towards the revelations of the ending. The narrator's remembrance of Merrymusk's silent labours, itself touching upon the notion of the extraordinary residing within the ordinary, is also noteworthy because it creates a human mystery out of what has been only a natural mystery. In this way, the moral considerations of responsibility, beauty at the expense of vitality, the credibility of faith, and the plausibility of survival after death are exercised without spoiling the comic irreverence of the narrator. He becomes aware of the deeper range of significance of his experiences in relationship to Merrymusk, and thus is compelled, at least momentarily, to drop his irreverent tone.

At Merrymusk's, the narrator finally sees his marvelous cock: "the most resplendent creature that ever blessed the sight of man." To describe the cock, the narrator can only think of mythic heroes, as if the rapture of seeing the cock were beyond the normal reaches of language. Rapture changes to misgiving as the narrator sees the ailing family. Yet the carefully described detail of the rooster's glorifying crow suggests an ambiguity in the relationship between beauty and suffering:

I looked at the cock ... There was a strange supernatural look of contrast about him. He irradiated the shanty; he glorified its meanness. He glorified the battered chest, and tattered gray coat, and the bunged hat. He glorified the very voices which came in ailing tones from behind the screen. (p. 123-124)

The fact that the very objects in the shanty seem glorified is
undeniable; on the other hand, when the intensity passes, the poverty and suffering remain, and what is more disturbing, self-delusion is a risk under the enchantment of the bird. Merrymusk is not bothered by any such risk. He bears the outward marks of denial and the inward light of joy. Embodied as it is, the contradiction cannot resolve itself until the death of the body. The narrator responds to the evidence of hardship by saying:

> It must be a doleful life, then, for all concerned. This lonely solitude -- this shanty -- hard work -- hard times. (p. 125)

But Merrymusk answers:

> Haven't I Trumpet? He's the cheerer. He crows through all; crows at the darkest; Glory to God in the highest! continually he crows it. (p. 125)

This penultimate episode in the story reveals a crisis of confidence in the narrator. He must acquiesce when Merrymusk speaks of the cheering properties of Trumpet; but it is the threat of "the darkest" (p. 125) that frightens him. The narrator does not share Merrymusk's faith. When he tells us: "The cock frightened me, like some overpowering angel in the Apocalypse" (p. 124), the suggestion seems to be that the marvellous crowing may also be a bringer of death. The tenuousness of Merrymusk's hold on life is not something the narrator could easily ascribe to. He leaves for home "in a deep mood" (p. 125). However, the power of the death of the Merrymusks is so compelling that ordinary fears seem hardly to pertain:

> The pallor of the children changed to radiance. Their faces shone celestially through grime and dirt. They seemed children of emperors
and kings, disguised. The cock sprang upon their bed, shook himself, and crowed, and crowed again, and still and still again. He seemed bent upon crowing the souls of the children out of their wasted bodies. He seemed bent upon rejoicing instanter this whole family in the upper air. The children seemed to second his endeavours. Far, deep, intense longings for release transfigured them into spirits before my eyes. I saw angels where they lay. (p. 127)

The joy and suffering, the beauty and terror of life seem transfixed in this transcendental experience. One hardly remembers that death is being described. Yet with the demise of the cock, a grimmer reality reasserts itself. The narrator has been witness to a transient moment of great beauty and terror, yet what he learns from it is ambiguous. There is no conviction of an afterlife and the present life is unaltered in its precariousness. Ironically, the Merrymusks' graves are located "nigh the railroad track" (p. 128), implying the unchanging conditions of death-dealing "improvements of the age" (p. 105).

How we are to interpret the narrator's change-of-being, his new-found fortitude, is a problem that cannot be solved by comparing how he is after he has heard Signor Beneventano with how he was at the beginning, during his "doleful dumps" (p. 128). To do that would mean that we were ascribing to a certain historical realism, even within the limits of the narrator's awareness, and the evidence of the story points otherwise. The narrator's hearing of the wonderful crowing, his meeting with Merrymusk, and his witnessing of the death of the Merrymusks, are described in a manner that is closer to reverie that it is to biographical sketch.
To understand this distinction properly, we should now look more closely at the narrator's role.
The Narrator: Folk-Poet and Ambivalent Witness

We have seen how Cock-A-Doodle-Doo! moves easily from external event to internal experience, (dislocating our sense of time and place), from irreverence to fervour, (creating unresolved problems of tone), from life-enhancing cock-crowing to an implied death-inducing cock-crowing, and all of these polarities are contained, and find their being in, the narrator's manner of relating his experience. Who is the narrator? We know that he is a bachelor farmer, prone to melancholia, with an avid dislike of industrial progress. He is a comparatively poor man, compelled to farm for a living and yet who has a dim view of the intelligence of farmers. He respects hard work and has the time and inclination to read Wordsworth, Sterne, Burton, and Solomon of the Bible. He visits the opera, loves jolliness, and yet until he encounters the preternatural crowing of the cock, seems mired in dejection. The contradictions of his personality are such that we can make no sense of them if we adhere to the literal truth of a gentleman farmer who happens to be well-read.

The narrator is a comic boaster, a teller of tall tales who is entertaining us with his most remarkable experience. As Daniel Hoffman has shown in a study of the fable-forms in American Literature, early America had a strong tradition of the wonder-tale and the trickster hero. Many wonder-tales concerned themselves with the curious forms of Nature's largesse: uncanny and over-sized animals, huge vegetables and fruits, the exploits of frontiersmen. Others were concerned with supernatural influences, especially those of witchcraft. The typical frontier hero was often characterized as a naive bachelor and fortune-
seeker. His principal mode of expression, after suitable experience, was the tall-tale, whose function "is often to serve as an initiatory rite" for outsiders wishing to become part of the community. The narrator is not a frontiersman but his very worldliness does fit the role of the travelled pundit who was often a "confidence-man". He is not a confidence-man in its immoral connotation but simply in the sense of being a boaster and hoaxer, a teller of tall tales.

How closely does Cock-A-Doodle-Doo! fit this folkloric antecedent? Its very title suggests the note of high bravura, and thereby an attempt to achieve its artistic ends by indirect and through entertainment. The figure of the marvellous cock matches, in one sense, the natural wonder-tale, and in another sense, the supernatural mystery with dark under-tones. The story is also an attempt to initiate the reader into the mysteries of rapture and spiritual fortitude, while the sexual motifs that run through the tale act as irreverent reminders that what is valuable about increased vitality is its ability to enjoy the world rather than to leave it. The irreverent tone of much of the narrative and the easy shifts from irony to rapture suggest the non-representational and a-moral features of the folk-tale. The narrator's fanciful language and easy use of superlatives correspond to the manner of heroic, mock-heroic, and extravagant features of the folk-tale.

As a teller of tall tales, the narrator has the freedom to create a complex web of entertainment. He is not bound by the ordinary limits of verisimilitude nor by the rigid forms of parable and fable. His iconoclasm, related to all forms of dreari-
ness from dangerous mechanization to the impoverishment of farming, is acted out in the freedom of style. Let us, in passing, merely note the command over rhythm and sentence variety, the range of diction from educated poesy to vernacular, the facile transitions from humour to sudden invigoration, in the following passage:

Hark! there again! Whose cock is that? Who in this region can afford to buy such an extraordinary Shanghia? Bless me -- it makes my blood bound -- I feel wild. What? jumping on this rotten old log here, to flap my elbows and crow too? And just now in the doleful dumps. And all this from the simple crow of a cock. Marvellous cock! But soft -- this fellow now crows more lustily; but it's only morning; let's see how he'll crow about noon, and toward nightfall. Come to think of it, cocks crow mostly in the beginning of the day. Their pluck ain't lasting, after all. Yes, yes; even cocks have to succumb to the universal spell of tribulation: jubilant in the beginning, but down in the mouth at the end. (p. 107)

One is tempted to wonder whether those critics who have dismissed this tale out of hand have not been mesmerized by the stately seriousness of themes in Melville's earlier works. Surely the above passage is also evidence of more than sexual punning, for the very energy of the writing is a comic energy, enjoying its breadth of licence, expression, and analogy. The serious import of the passage is masked here, as elsewhere, and may be formulated as an undercurrent of fatality and of a sense of the ambiguity of pagan feeling -- the sudden transformation of physical energy into non-human, and consequently, precarious forms.
This passage immediately precedes a quotation from Wordsworth's *Resolution and Independence*, indicating a movement to a statement of theme, which might be put as the loss of creative potency after maturity, unless -- and this the story conjectures -- there is a means of continual revitalization. Yet even this formulation of serious intention can be seen as a comic gambit. For in this story all high purposes are reduced to the exercises of survival, complicating but not annihilating the high scale of meaning. The narrator uses his new-found invigoration, following the Wordsworth quote, to help himself to a meal of "brown-stout and a beef-steak" (p. 108). Later, when the dun comes visiting, the narrator promises to show him "stout of superior brand to Barclay and Perkins" (p. 109), combining food and drink, sex, bravado, and commerce in a conceit of physical and spiritual survival in a hostile world. Merrymusk, privy to the secrets of the marvellous rooster, yet has rickety children and an invalid wife, ironically suggesting the lack of substance in his vision. The narrator is served with a writ just after a dinner of cheese and porter. The attention paid to the enjoyment of food or to the scarcity of it, emphasizes at one and the same time, the conditioning of thought through man's necessitous relationship to food, and that, in the final analysis, man's highest aspirations and experiences can be effectively expressed by food in its nutritional and celebratory aspects.

The narrator, it should be made clear, is not the traditional tale-teller just as the story is not the traditional folk-tale. Melville has used the folk-lore tradition for its comic possibilities and for its rich diversity of mythic and supernatural
themes. Probably modelled on the traditional teller of tall tales, Melville's narrator is also a re-created figure, one who can express the vitality, humour, and bawdiness of the old form with the sophisticated wit, antiquarian learning, and linguistic ability of the man-of-letters. The narrator is a folk-poet -- one who is consciously part of a community while yet standing alone. The synthesis of old and new does not obviate any of the moral issues of the story, nor does it conceal the duplicitous nature of the narrator, who is now permitted an extraordinary range for his powers. He is a new brand of hero, after the failed quests of Moby Dick and Pierre, one who spins yarns for social and metaphysical enjoyment, but who will not achieve wide recognition for precisely the reason that he will not be believed. For he is a jokester, who behind his mask has realized the truth of limitations: the Orphic voice must pay the penalty for its genius.

If such is the ideal form of the narrator-figure, what is his specific appearance in the text? Textually, an immediate problem is created by trying to ascertain the extent of his limitations. How much does Melville assume his narrator's mask? There are occasions in the story when it might seem valuable to speak of two narrators: the narrator as farmer and as a concealed actor who can feign full awareness of the performance. However, such separation of narrative responsibility is ponderous and difficult to prove. It is more satisfactory to speak of one narrator, but to distinguish different voices in the text. This would mean, in principle, an intrinsically split persona, each with an antithetical awareness. On the one hand, we can easily interpret
the narrator as a reasonably worldly and well-read man, but with a fundamentally naive and suggestible nature -- a man of "untutored ideality" to use Ishmael's phrase. Such a view would promote the notion that, for example, the narrator's enraptured acceptance of the cock's crowing, to the extent that he takes out a second mortgage and promises at the story's end to "under all circumstances crow late and early with a continual crow", is an escape from reality and its responsibilities. On the other hand, we can accept the narrator's folkloric roots, and see his story as an affirmation of his experience, despite his apparent and hidden follies. Any naivete would simply be the first level of persona, a part of the total personality of the text.

When we examine the story, we find a good deal of evidence to support the theory of complex personality. The dislocations in the story, we have already seen, create a sense of internal reality and an ambiguous tone; we may also say that the dislocations create a continuous present, by which we can identify the presence of a narrator in an ambiguous way separate from his story. The strong correspondence between the tradition of the tall tale, with its trickster storyteller, and Cock-A-Doodle-Doo!, with its posturing, wiseacring, irreverence and bawdy humour, also suggests something of a duplicitous narrator. Another kind of evidence is to be found in the way the story manipulates time.

The story opens by attempting to place us securely in a setting (however fancifully transformed by melancholic projection). If we examine the first few paragraphs, by representing them with their first sentences, we find a traditional pattern of reminiscence and commentary properly rendered in the past tense:
In all parts of the world many high-spirited revolts from rascally despotisms had of late been knocked on the head; (p. 103)

It was a cool and misty, damp, disagreeable air. (p. 103)

All round me were tokens of a divided empire. (p. 103)

I sat down for a moment on a great rotting log nigh the top of the hill ... (p. 103)

My eye ranged over the capacious rolling country ... (p. 104)

Through this simple device of narrative time, we are placed in the past and proceed to attempt an understanding of the narrator's experience as it happened then. However, suddenly in the fifth paragraph, the narrator switches tense and begins addressing us directly: "Yet what's the use of complaining? What justice of the peace will right this matter?" (p. 104) Lest we think this is simply narrative licence, the next few paragraphs continue the address in the present tense:

A miserable world! Who would take the trouble to make a fortune in it ... (p. 105)

Great improvements of the age! What! to call the facilitation of death and murder an improvement! (p. 105)

I can't pay this horrid man; (p. 105)

"Hallo! here come the calves ... (p. 106)

"Hark! By Jove, what's that? (p. 106)

This transition of tense is a subtle indication of the presence of the narrator. It is difficult to find any other explanation for the change from past to present tense, when the significant experience being reported is certainly in the Past. This indication is strengthened by the fact that upon the dun's visit, the present
tense is dropped, and thereafter the past tense is generally used to report thoughts and events. There are, however, some exceptions. After the dun's visit, the narrator hears the cock once more:

Hark! there goes the cock! How shall I describe the crow of the Shanghai at noon-tide? His sun-rise crow was a whisper to it. It was the loudest, longest, and most strangely musical crow that ever amazed mortal man. (p. 110)

The transition from present to past, in the time of a breath, tells us once more that this narrator is more than a device, that he has a present life of mind and memory, humour and feeling, and that these faculties just mentioned are not just to be distinguished by their quality in the Past but by the fact that they re-create the Past. The narrator once heard a marvellous rooster. He still hears it as he is telling us of it, and it is noteworthy, by way of digression, to mention the hyperbolic tone of the reminiscence -- itself a feature of so many folk-tales.

There are other such instances of narrative intrusion, some extremely brief: "Now this was the way ..." (p. 87), "He was a singular man, I say" (p. 118), "Now, as I said before ..." (p. 120). Each reminds us of artifice, (the active creation of a story), of a present narrator, and of the fact that we are being entertained (on high and low scales). When the story is at an end, the narrator addresses us in the tone of a conditional future: "If now you visit that hilly region, you will see ..." (p. 128). This, if nothing else does, confirms the relationship between narrator and reader, for there is a promise of shared experience as well as a shared link to the Past.
We must still see, however, how this complex persona relates to the treatment of themes in the story. Of these we may say that the three principal themes are sexuality, transcendence, and the relationship between creativity and death. The first two have been widely commented upon by critics, but there has been comparatively little treatment of their relationship to the problem of the narrator.

Sexuality seems to sound a great laudamus in the story. Given the hyperbolic tendencies of the narrator this is hardly surprising. At the beginning of the tale he is dispirited; his hatred of technology may be a fear that mechanical contrivances rob man of his virility and independence. Then the crowing of the marvellous rooster is introduced and suddenly the train no longer perturbs him: "How cheerfully the steam-pipe chirps!" (p. 109). Symbolically the narrator discovers the revitalizing properties of sexuality and seemingly answers Wordsworth's fear that creativity must eventually end in "despondency" and "madness". Descriptions such as the following seem not far removed from phallic worship:

> I had heard plenty of cock-crows before, and many fine ones; -- but this one! so smooth and flute-like, in its very clamor -- so self-possessed in its very rapture of exultation -- so vast, mounting, swelling, soaring, as if spurted out from a golden throat, thrown far back. (p. 110)

The equation of song with seminal discharge accentuates the natural and physical basis of creativity, that creation is as much a phenomenon of the body and its chemistry as it is spiritual in essence. Thus the loss of creativity would indicate fundamental
impotence.

As elements of the tall tale, potency, fertility, and sexual prowess are ritually important for acceptance into male society. It is the sense of power and dominance over Nature that is important in the shared fantasy of the exploit. However, in *Cock-A-Doodle-Doo!*, the choice of imagery emphasizes man's dependence on Nature; the cock, if a vernacular word for man's pride in his prowess, is also a natural emblem of creative energy that remains uncontrolled by man. Signor Beneventano sounds his call and men respond, just as the rest of Nature responds. The continual sexual punning is, in this respect, an equivalent to the sexual theme of transformative energy -- first by exhibiting a Protean changeability and the consequent sense of constant surprise, and secondly by demonstrating the pleasure of performance. Yet this is only one side of it -- an unmediated positive side. The entry of Merrymusk into the tale demonstrates a problematic articulation of sexuality. One would expect that Merrymusk, as owner of the marvellous cock, would more than anyone else be a living example of creativity and power. But even his name, which is suggestive of music, sexuality, and frenzy, seems unfitting for so "unjolly a wight" (p. 119). Merrymusk is a silent man, when from the narrator's own example, one would expect poetry, song, or at least a pleasure in language. He is a poor man, surrounded by ill-health, when it would seem more fitting that he would have a bounty of well-being. He and his family die when it would be reasonable to assume continued vitality. To such paradoxes, the narrator is an unwilling witness. The final song of the cock terrifies as well as awes him; the minor death of org-
asm becomes the literal acting out of the one absolute death.

Through the use of its sexual imagery the story implies that sexuality and death are mysteriously connected, not merely in the poetic sense of a loss of self through love but in the vital sense that the pleasure of sex may be Nature's lure to ensure its continuation whatever the individual cost, and that man's captivation by sex is both a loss of freedom and the inability to see the oft-times deplorable nature of conditions around him. Hence, sexuality is not exclusively and intrinsically an opposite phenomenon to death, but actively participates with it in creation.

To the degree of his awareness, the narrator is not only an ambivalent witness because he is unwilling but because he appears to ignore the evidence of his own physical and intuitive senses. In the final paragraph, he tells us that he has buried the Merrymusks and the rooster, and yet proceeds to affirm the nature of his experience. The legend that he inscribes on their tomb:

\[
0 \text{ death, where is thy sting?}
0 \text{ grave, where is thy victory?}
(p. 128)
\]

is a message of hope and defiance. After the ironic suggestiveness of the Merrymusks' death, and particularly the death of the cock itself -- an instrument of power and transformation -- the narrator's attitude is not easily understood. However, we should not immediately assume that his final words are an example of ironic ignorance. Rather, it is possible to preserve the irony and believe in the narrator's change-of-being at the same time. The narrator's final utterance: "Cock-A-Doodle-Doo! -- oo! -- oo!"
"oo! -- oo!" (p. 128) is a complex symbolic act of intrinsically contradictory meanings. He cannot deny mortality and yet he remains defiantly free of its mental influence; he recognizes the transience of sexuality, and indeed of creativity, but to preserve his own humanity, affirms sexuality and creativity as the only imperfect, but passingly splendid, means of self-expression. The continuance of the crowing sound ("oo! -- oo!") also suggests the willing acceptance of folly as the only available means of keeping equilibrium in an ambiguous universe. That such an exclamation comes perilously close to Wordsworth's notion of "madness" after the loss of effective creativity, does not countermand a more positive reading, since the cock's crowing has been all along a kind of madness of defiant self-expression. All that is affronted by the inclusion of madness in the great organic plenum of natural and suprasensible experience is "reason", and reason has a very small place in the story. The choices seem to be rather among the madness of melancholia, the madness of unbridled mechanistic progress (Reason's child), the madness of smallminded commerce (the dun) that is symbolically equated with the relentless, death-dealing railways, the madness of agrarian idiocy, and the madness of crowing. If all is madness and folly, then the more creatively valuable forms would seem to be a kind of wisdom.

However, this interpretation is not meant to pass lightly over what is an experiential mystery. The ambiguity of the relationships between sexuality and death is expressed in the problem of survival. It is, after all, the quality of survival that matters and this remains an intensely personal experience.
Thus in attempting to transmit the experience of what it has meant to be oneself in the face of the contradictory and ambiguous forces of the world, the uses of clarity and straightforwardness seem arbitrarily limiting, and the narrator must at times resort to the fabulous to preserve the ordinary.

Transcendence follows a fabulous pattern similar to the theme of sexuality. Indeed, Melville shows the organic form of transcendence -- its indebtedness to sexuality -- in his treatment of transpersonal joy and beauty. Since the story does not indicate one way or another the probabilities of survival after death, the only observable activity of transcendence is in its momentary mastery over material form, and in this respect, freedom is a key notion. 79

The world of Cock-A-Doodle-Doo! is on one level as fixed as the hierarchy of Wall Street in Bartleby The Scrivener. The sodden, depressing landscape of the opening pages, the narrator's musings on the "many dreadful casualties" (p. 103) worldwide, a kind of existential nausea that the narrator sees about him with "fever-and-agueish" (p. 104) river, "chimney smoke ... too heavy and lifeless to mount of itself" (p. 104), and "... hiding many a man with the mumps, and many a queasy child" (p. 104) -- all these are suggestive of an immutable condition. Freedom has no reality in such a world; fatality seems dominant. The narrator's climbing of a hill shortly after making his first morning observations is an ironic ascent to transcendent perception:

I ... bent my blue form to the steep ascent of the hill. This toiling posture brought my head pretty well earthward, as if I were in the act of butting it against the world. (p. 103)
His ironic transcendent perceptions are the very observations of disease and lifelessness that he'd observed upon first waking below. Life seen from above is little different from life experienced below.

When the cock regenerates the narrator, and seemingly all of Nature around him, the narrator finds a new sense of freedom. He regains his appetite, finds new pleasure in reading, deals easily with his dun, and resolves to quest for the source of this mystery. Yet the narrator's failure to include his observations on the idiot farmer and his rejection of material responsibilities within his vision of optimism suggests that this freedom is at best transient and at worst a total illusion of self-suggestion. The poverty of the Merrymusk family, and their eventual death, confirms that freedom is only a conditional element in the natural cycle of birth, suffering, and death.

The narrator chooses to ignore this evidence, as if sublimely free of its responsibility. Yet, as has been seen from the analysis of persona manipulations, this ignorance can only be one side of the complex narrator's being. Such sublimity is also a comic ruse, plausibly meant to indicate both the invincible quality of the jester while in his role and at the same time an acceptance of folly. Such comic sublimity, for example, allows Sterne in *Tristram Shandy*, in the role of narrator, to speak of events before his own birth, indeed to speak of his own conception. Ordinary laws of time, space, and causality can be interrupted without justification when the author takes on the role of a god in his own creation.

The literal transformation of the Merrymusks from matter
into spirit suggests a darker truth than comedy can appropriate. For what is precisely disturbing in their glorified passing, is the force of that passing. From an inarticulable range of meaning, their deaths suggest the merciless presence of fatality and the utterly precarious position of man, who seemingly in his moment of power and glory, can be instantaneously plucked by death.

Such an awareness of death can rightly command awe and silence, similar to the condition of the narrator in Bartleby The Scrivener at Bartleby's death. The crowing which ends the tale is also, finally and ambiguously, the crowing of death -- the memento mori.
The Celebration of Performance

If the story is a re-creation of certain sexual and transcendental experiences in the life of a man and also an example of comic bravura and fabulous tale-telling, then one means of seeing its accomplishment is by looking at the story as an imaginative exercise. The story's indebtedness to the traditional tall tale, its manipulations of narrative persona to suggest a sense of narrative presence and continual creation, point to a rendition of the poet's imagination experienced as performance. The transitions of tense in the narrative, the many digressions and jokes, are a reverie-like indication that the act of creation and the act of performing the creation before a readership are mysteriously similar. Certainly, Cock-A-Doodle-Doo!'s folkloric roots point to an oral tradition. We also know from biographical sources that Melville enjoyed reading aloud some of his stories and indeed wrote them with their oral possibilities in mind. In a story entitled by the song of a rooster, enhanced by the author's jesting playfulness with sexual puns and transformative energies, it is not fanciful to suppose that performance is the primary experience and final accomplishment. To the degree that performance extends the present moment, that it transcends the ordinary, that it re-creates the past and amuses its audience, that it remains self-aware in the presence of finality and death, to such a degree is performance the accomplishment of content in Cock-A-Doodle-Doo!'
It is perhaps one indication of the difficulty of Melville's art that so much of his work has been interpreted in divergent fashion. The complexity of *Moby Dick* and *Pierre* is due not only to complexity of thought and symbol but to a rich textuality, derived from an eclecticism of literary and historical materials and a self-conscious narrative persona. The complexity of these and other works has sometimes made it difficult for critics to identify Melville's attitude to philosophical and moral problems of being, of evil, of responsibility. Thus it has been that some critics have seen Melville's performance after *Moby Dick* as showing a decline of creative powers, and his short fiction has very often been treated as autobiography rather than art. One exception to this critical neglect is *Benito Cereno*, which because of its accomplished tragic manner and historical background, has been widely praised "for its perfection of form" and "the weight of its drama."Ironically, its apparent objective manner has also stirred up critical controversy. No less a critic than F.O. Matthiessen has deplored its "raising unanswered questions." Because of the story's circumstances, slavery is the contentious issue. Does the story reveal Melville to have been a sympathetic abolitionist or discriminatory against the blacks? This is the question, baldly posed, that has engendered the critical debate. The principle at stake, it would seem, is whether a race that has suffered the indignities and horrors of slavery should be characterized as evil for attempting to secure their freedom through violent revolution. Put in this way, the
question is unanswerable for it sets the evidence of history against the purposes of Art.

Nevertheless there is an artistic difficulty if we see the revelation of the story as being an equivalence of evil and blackness. When, at the story's end, Captain Delano asks Don Benito:

"you are saved: what has cast such a shadow upon you?" (p. 306)

and Don Benito replies:

"The negro." (p. 306)

the question is whether or not we believe that the story's essential symbolic depth is characterised by Don Benito's response. Yet Benito Cereno is as much about Amasa Delano's naive perception of events as it is about Don Benito's captivity and the slaves' revolt. These three positions are kept experientially separate until the rescue and the trial deposition, when the facts of the case are put forward "publicly". What is important to keep in mind is that the three positions, though only apparently separate, are nevertheless disclosed as separate to the reader until the facts come to light. What difficulty is thereby created by this narrative procedure is thus embodied in the text and not the result of historical circumstance.

The story as found in Amasa Delano's A Narrative of Voyages and Travels is quite simple. Melville kept the basic dramatic events, only changing the names and characteristics of the ships and secondary personages, adding a few details, like the shaving scene, and the intellectual and symbolic range that transforms history into Art. According to Delano's account, he came across a South American slave ship off the coast of Chile in
1805. Its captain, Benito Cereno, was compelled to deceive Delano from realizing that the slaves had mutinied and now controlled the ship. Delano did not learn the true situation till Cereno leaped into Delano's departing boat. The problematic conception of Cereno's character and of the negroes' evil is Melville's creation. The very fact of Melville's re-creation of Amasa Delano's narrative suggests that Melville was on the trail of symbolic rather than literal, historical truth.

If we keep in mind Melville's symbolic intentions, the charges of racial insensitivity are unfounded primarily because they are inappropriate. Benito Cereno is only incidentally about the historical phenomenon of slavery. The story uses history as a perspective on tragedy rather than as an ideal standard. Moreover, as a symbolic excursion to the published documents on the actual slave revolt, the story suggests a more universal condition of slavery. First of all, the whites are shown to be enslaved, spiritually and culturally, by their heritage; secondly, a profound inter-relatedness of symbol, thought, and event, suggests that we cannot extrapolate one form of injustice for purposes of discussion without damaging the coherence of reported experience; thirdly, the ambiguous captor-slave relationship between Don Benito and the negro Babo implies both a shared culpability and a shared, if unwilling, consciousness of evil. These three distinctions tell us that even if we were to narrow our focus of attention to only the treatment of slavery, Melville's performance has ensured we could not isolate a definitive understanding.
One of the first impressions of the story is its complexity of detail. General features of the surroundings, small particulars of people and things, and exotic allusions are combined to form a density of experience that includes the reader in the immediacy of events and separates him from the simultaneous perception of their significance. An examination of the first few pages of the story reveals how such a paradox is achieved.

The narrative begins with a historical perspective, telling us in a few words of the person (Delano), the time (1799), the place (the island Santa Maria off the coast of Chile), and the purpose of the ship's presence (the re-supply of water) (p. 217). This "long view" sets the tone of detachment and introduces historical perspective as the first but also the most removed of the possible approaches to understanding events. When a strange ship is sighted, Captain Delano goes on deck and the historical view is suddenly supplanted by the view of personal witness, combining Delano's limited vision of the surroundings with authorial discretion. Externals are recorded faithfully yet modified by the new factor of individual apprehension. Thus the indistinctness of the gray sea and sky suggests a foreboding quality. Things are other than their mere appearance, and this quality of "other" is represented by similitude:

The sea ... seemed fixed ... The sky seemed a gray surtout. Flights of troubled gray fowl ... skinned low and fitfully over the waters, as swallows over meadows before storms. Shadows present, foreshadowing deeper shadows to come. (p. 217)
The final line of the above passage is a condensed statement of the story's symbolic intentions, suggesting first that the vagueness of appearances points to a deeper ambiguity and then that the articulation of this ambiguity will be in terms of light and darkness. The thrice-repeated "shadow" indicates that the sentence is achieving poetically in symbol what it states in intention. Therefore, to summarize the narrative effects of the first few paragraphs, we have: in terms of performance, a movement from the factual statement and literal perception of the story's opening line to the symbolic statement and poetic perception of "foreshadowing deeper shadows to come"; in terms of view-point, a movement from historical perspective to, in the third paragraph, a third-person perspective that includes within it the wider perception of the author; a metaphorical stasis (soon, with the commencement of the drama, to become a symbolic stasis), indicated in the anchored ship, the muted calm, the seemingly "fixed" (p. 217) sea whose surface is like "waved lead that has cooled" (p. 217).

With the setting and the range of perception (from literal to symbolic) indicated, the next several paragraphs demonstrate and comment upon Delano's reactions to the strange ship. The psychological mode of anticipation, analysis, and discovery is introduced by such language as: "But whatever misgivings might have obtruded ..." (p. 218), "It might have been a deception of the vapors ..." (p. 218), "Surmising" (p. 218), "But it was no purely fanciful resemblance which ... almost led Captain Delano to think ..." (p. 219), "Upon a still nigher approach, ... the true character of the vessel was plain ..." (p. 219). We are
allowed to study Delano as he studies the approaching vessel, but the process of identification is so drawn out that certainty of meaning is lost in favour of a disquieting illusoriness. The realization that the stranger is a "Spanish merchantman ... carrying negro slaves" (p. 219) does not dispel the cumulative effect of the misperceptions during the stages of apprehension, which is, as the story later discloses, one of "enchantment" (p. 221). By being able to study both Delano and the approaching boat, the reader is made aware that such "enchantment" cannot be exclusively a product of Delano's consciousness, but is also somehow part of the very conditions of the place. The strange muted calm of the sea, the presence of "Vapors" (p. 217) partly concealing the ship "through which the far matin light from her cabin streamed equivocally enough" (p. 218), an uncertain breeze which seems "baffling" (p. 218), all suggest a conspiracy of Nature in the events about to unfold.

The narrator tells us, as the strange vessel approaches, that Delano is a man of "a singularly undistrustful good nature" (p. 217), "who lacks the sense of evil". This information so undermines the trustworthiness of his perceptions in the suspicious circumstances, that uncertainty ironically becomes the only safe assumption about what is being revealed. Later, as Delano becomes more involved with the events on board the San Dominick, his myopic perception of appearances will take on more seriously moral considerations.

The prolonged description of Delano's sighting of the San Dominick is also interesting in the manner in which it corresponds to gradations of apprehension. This is not to say that
Melville wishes to enumerate varieties of knowing but that their mere existence signifies the difficulty of attaining any absolute knowledge of a phenomenon. In *Pierre*, so concerned -- with self-conscious irony -- about the probabilities of attaining absolute ideals, the narrator tells us that it is folly to think one can ever attain "the Ultimate of Human Speculative Knowledge." In *Benito Cereno*, we are for the most part confronted only with the concern for attaining relative knowledge, the truth of events of the moment, and yet the task is not less tortuous. The paragraphs in question are organized as speculations on the nature of the strange vessel. The interrogation by Delano of the slowly clarifying image of the ship alternates between perceived vagueness and sudden, strong images of startling import, between "personal alarms" (p. 218) at the possible intention of the vessel and self-appeasement. These alternations of perception and mood, experienced from the safe distance of his own ship, are no different from the speculations exercised by Delano on board the San Dominick. The only change is in intensity but not in kind, it would seem, and thus Melville is able to suggest through repetition that illusoriness of appearances is not momentary and freakish but part of the condition of man and of the world.

Furthermore, the unusual images that come to Delano's mind as he watches the San Dominick complicate that experience. Just as the shadowed gray of the sea and sky is the intermediate tone between light and darkness, suggesting a disturbing ambiguity, so the sudden images of the ship have a symbolic resonance that resists the merging duality of anticipation and fear. At first the ship suggests "a Lima intriguante's one sinister eye" (p. 218),
itself a romantic image of passion and intrigue, that seems little else than a striking picture until the end of the story when Babo's head is fixed on a pole in Lima's Plaza and meets "unabashed, the gaze of the whites" (p. 307). The clear, but mysterious, correspondence between the two images is at first concealed when we are told of the suggested "Lima intriguante's one sinister eye" (p. 218), yet the disturbing resonance is nonetheless there. The next image is of a "whitewashed monastery after a thunder-storm, seen perched upon some dun cliff among the Pyrenees" (p. 219). Here the startling quality of the similitude is a profound dislocation of time and space, frightening in itself but also at a deeper level introducing the religious motifs that play a large part in the symbolic process of the story. In consonance with that image, Delano next sees what appears to him to be "throngs of dark cowls ... as of Black Friars pacing the cloisters" (p. 219). With this image, the religious implications, the suggestion of ritual, and the somewhat sinister connotation of "Black Friars" all work together to produce a fateful significance.

The resonance of these images is to be found in their fatefulness, in their ability to portend a future of profound disturbance and personal deception. The images also manifest a quality, present throughout the narrative, of particularity, that re-creates the experiential paradox of heightened awareness and vague illusoriness on a textual level. The very particularity of the imagery, seemingly fixing with precision the nature of Delano's experiences, also tends to deflect the reader's attention away from the continuity of those experiences. When, for example, we
read of the San Dominick appearing like "a whitewashed monastery after a thunderstorm, seen perched upon some dun cliff among the Pyrenees" (p. 219), we are momentarily caught in the transitional appreciation of a Pyrenees setting that does not exist and yet has been made to exist. Such interruptions of time and space are fleeting, but compelling enough to have re-created the imaginative geography of the text. Hence, during the unfolding of the narrative, we are also simultaneously involved in the task of interpreting the significance of images that can only deepen the ambiguity of the complete experience. Such an interpretive approach as this might seem to further distance the reader from the substantive experience of Benito Cereno, yet, as has been already shown, narrative and textual complexity are correspondingly matched to illustrate the very real complexity of apparently simple events, compounded by the little-known subtleties of perception and analysis. More pointedly, the distance between perceiver (here meant to include, on different levels, both Delano and the reader) and the perceived is itself an important topic of the story, as will soon be demonstrated.

It should be noted at this point, that what we can call the psychic materiality of the text is not an inventional feature of Benito Cereno alone. It is evident in Moby Dick, in Pierre, comically in Cock-A-Doodle-Doo! and in I and My Chimney, in The Confidence-Man, in Billy Budd, among his prose works. What some critics have complained of as the ponderous style of Benito Cereno is due in part to the conjunction of narrative form with poetic density of meaning, and as such, Benito Cereno's achievement is not much different in proportionate scale to the
acknowledged mastery of symbolic imagination in *Moby Dick*.

How *Benito Cereno* introduces the problem of distance can be found in the early passages on Delano's sighting of the San Dominick. The gradations in apprehension are metaphorically described in separate paragraphs, here represented by their opening sentences: "It might have been but a deception of the vapors, but, the longer the stranger was watched the more singular appeared her manoevres" (p. 218); "Surmising, at last, that it might be a ship in distress, Captain Delano ordered his whale-boat to be dropped ..." (p. 218); "Upon gaining a less remote view, the ship ... appeared like a white-washed monastery ..." (p. 219); "Upon a still higher approach, this appearance was modified, and the true character of the vessel was plain -- a Spanish merchantman of the first class, carrying negro slaves ..." (p. 219); "As the whale-boat drew more and more nigh, the cause of the peculiar pipe-clayed aspect of the stranger was seen in the slovenly neglect pervading her" (p. 219). As the whale-boat draws alongside the San Dominick several features of the ship are described, but ironically in the midst of such precise detail the final impression of Delano's before boarding is of adhering barnacles calling to mind "baffling airs" (p. 221). This impression brings us full circle to the initial cloudy perceptions of the ship perceived from a distance, disclosing that what has been learned is still uncertain. As future events show, and here foreshadowed in the symbolic approach of Delano to knowledge of the stranger, the good captain is satisfied with the superficial identification of the San Dominick. Ironically, at Captain Delano's expense, it is only with the identification of the San Dominick that the more
subtle mysteries begin to show themselves, as indicated in the increasingly symbolic character of the ship's features -- features which Delano perceives but whose significance he does not appreciate. Thus, we discover that the ship "seemed laid, her ribs put together, and she launched, from Ezekial's Valley of Dry Bones" (p. 220), imparting a vision of death to the already plentiful impressions of corruption. We learn that the stern-piece shows an emblem of "a dark satyr in a mask, holding his foot on the prostrate neck of a writhing figure, likewise masked" (p. 220), and with this image there is a portent of the ambiguous condition of slavery on board. Both of these images symbolize areas of experience that correspond to conditions on the ship, but because Delano is limited by his ordinariness and moral myopia and because Cereno is never able to communicate the full depth of his ordeal, we are prevented from ever fully deciphering the emblematic meaning of the images. Furthermore, the separation between the American and Spanish ships symbolizes the separation between Amasa Delano and Benito Cereno, never to be spanned despite the best intentions of the two men, and the approach of Delano's whale-boat to a position close enough to see the stern-piece emblem corresponds to Delano's later reiterations of the periphery of the facts and thus to the elusive distance of the truth.

Therefore, the first few pages of *Benito Cereno*, before Captain Delano's boarding of the San Dominick, introduce the range of themes and devices used in the story: a complex point-of-view, combining historical perspective and a concealed narrator; symbolic imagination; textuality; the indefatigable optimism of Captain Delano; a pervading ambiguity; an emphasis on
sight, both literal and psychological; varieties of knowing without the certainty of knowledge; a sense of foreboding evil, decay, and death in the Spanish vessel; the presence of religious and secular mystery. We have looked rather closely at the opening pages to demonstrate that Benito Cereno expands not just in breadth but cumulatively, by degree, and that in such density of experience the controlling activity has been what Captain Delano sees and what he fails to see. Such emphasis on seeing is maintained throughout, and thus the questions of slavery and evil must be subordinated to the nature of Delano's experience.
Amasa Delano as Ironic Hero

How Amasa Delano understands his experience is evidently crucial to the story, but its importance is heightened by the fact that there are several indications of a pervasive ambiguity that even a clear-seeing mariner would have difficulty with. On many occasions, the sea and sky are described as "baffling" (p. 218), as enhancing "a deception of ... vapors" (p. 218) as dream-like. The narrator tells us that a ship often manifests "something of the effect of enchantment" (p. 221), and the San Dominick, irrespective of its terrible mysteries, is described as having "lain tranced without wind" (p. 221) in the vicinity of Cape Horn. These few of many such examples suggest a much wider context of ambiguity than mere personal confusion or ignorance.

Delano is exasperated by such strange sensations and his ignorance, revealed in reaction to the mysteries, further complicates them. When he first sights the Spanish vessel, his reactions are noted in the following manner:

Considering the lawlessness and loneliness of the spot, and the sort of stories, at that day, associated with those seas, Captain Delano's surprise might have deepened into some uneasiness had he not been a person of a singularly undistrustful good-nature, not liable, except on extraordinary and repeated incentives, and hardly then, to indulge in personal alarms, any way involving the imputation of malign evil in man. Whether, in view of what humanity is capable, such a trait implies, along with a benevolent heart, more than ordinary quickness and accuracy of intellectual perception, may be left to the
At this point in the narrative, such an observation may only hint of irony, but later Delano's "good-nature" is more closely defined and the ironic tone is inescapable. During a conversation with Don Benito concerning the curious ritual of the chained Atufal being brought to the Spanish captain supposedly to ask for forgiveness for some undisclosed offence, Delano is described by the author as "a man of such native simplicity as to be incapable of satire or irony" (p. 238). The inability to use or to see irony reveals a singular lack of insight in the man, and his opinions are therefore not only suspect, but the elaborate metaphors of his perceptions are thereby proven to be not of his own conception but strictly the author's creation. Delano is a "blunt-thinking" (p. 231) man, and as such, would seem to be the unlikeliest person to unravel the mysteries of the stern-piece emblem.

Amasa Delano is one of Melville's many naive, ordinary-minded characters, belonging in a spiritual community with the narrator of Bartleby The Scrivener and William Ford of Jimmy Rose. Delano may have experienced more of a variety of life, may be more of an adventurer, but his ordinarieness and, in the circumstances, rather stupid optimism, prevent him from learning from his experience. On the San Dominick, his superficiality is exposed by his almost inordinate attention to matters of dress and decorum. It does not seem to be enough for Delano's satisfaction to observe that Cereno has a "splenetic disrelish of his place" (p. 226), and seems "the involuntary victim of mental disorder" (p. 226). Repeatedly he returns his observation to some
point of misconduct on Cereno's part; Don Benito seems "rude" (p. 234), "hapless" (p. 234), "a paper captain" (p. 234), and such suppositions go no further than the speculation that the Spanish captain's infelicity might conceal "the most savage energies" (p. 240). Moreover, Delano's repeated observations of the ship's dereliction do not include any deeper significance as is shown in the comparative superficiality of the following passage:

However unsuitable for the time and place, at least in the blunt-thinking American's eyes, and however strangely surviving in the midst of all his afflictions, the toilette of Don Benito might not, in fashion at least, have gone beyond the style of the day among South Americans of his class. Though on the present voyage sailing from Buenos Ayres, he had avowed himself a native and resident of Chile, whose inhabitants had not so generally adopted the plain coat and once plebeian pantaloons; but, with a becoming modification, adhered to their provincial costume, picturesque as any in the world. Still, relatively to the pale history of the voyage, and his own pale face, there seemed something so incongruous in the Spaniard's apparel, as almost to suggest the image of an invalid courtier tottering about London streets in the time of the plague. (p. 231-232)

Passages such as the above indicate to what extent Delano is unable to read appearances. On many occasions the American captain attempts a physiognomic analysis of Cereno and the rest of the ship's inhabitants and yet fails to discern the real situation. His belief in the apparent childish devotion of Babo to Don Benito, his characterization of the negresses as "pure tenderness and
love" (p. 251), his inability to comprehend the old sailor's demeanor as he is handed a knot, all signify his ineptness.

Such deficiencies may not be serious in another man, since the appearance of everything on board the San Dominick is mysteriously equivocal; in Delano's case however, his myopia is aggravated by a generally condescending, and sometimes dehumanizing, view of the negroes which prevents him from appreciating the true character of events. Babo, the ring-leader of the plot, is described by Delano as having a "rude face, [in which], as occasionally, like a shepherd's dog, ... sorrow and affection were equally blended" (p. 223). In the shaving scene, Delano ponders on the supposed talents of the negro and upon his own attitude to the race:

There is something in the negro which, in a peculiar way, fits him for avocations about one's person. Most negroes are natural valets and hair-dressers; taking to the comb and brush congenially as to the castanets, and flourishing them apparently with almost equal satisfaction. There is, too, a smooth tact about them in this employment, with a marvellous, noiseless, gliding briskness, not ungraceful in its way, singularly pleasing to behold, and still more so to be the manipulated subject of. And above all is the great gift of good-humour. Not the mere grin or laugh is here meant. Those were unsuitable. But a certain easy cheerfulness, harmonious in every glance and gesture; as though God had set the whole negro to some pleasant tune. (p. 264)

The list of the negro's perfections continues with, for example, the following choice phrases:
When to this is added the docility arising from the unaspiring contentment of a limited mind, and that susceptibility of blind attachment sometimes inhering in indisputable inferiors... When at ease with respect to exterior things, Captain Delano's nature was not only benign, but familiarly and humorously so. At home, he had often taken rare satisfaction in sitting in his door, watching some free man of color at his work or play. If on a voyage he chanced to have a black sailor, invariably he was on chatty and half-gamesome terms with him. In fact, like most men of a good, blithe heart, Captain Delano took to negroes, not philanthropically, but genially, just as other men to Newfoundland dogs. (p. 264-265)

The attitude in these passages is so outrageous and yet put forward so sincerely and genially, that the words become almost inoffensive. The devastating irony and satire in these passages is worth a closer look, given the weight of embarrassments uttered by Captain Delano. In the first instance, the passages are evidently ironic in the light of future disclosures. The fact that Babo is not only shaving Don Benito but performing some sadistic ritual of torture, mocks the thought that the negro's natural talents make him suitable "for avocations about one's person" (p. 264). The condescending remarks about the negro's supposed lack of intelligence, are disproven by the presence of the quick-witted Babo, whose consummate acting and ability to command demonstrate Delano's own lack of intelligence. The passages also satirize the popular notion of the natural servitude and geniality of the negro. The sentimentality of God creating "the whole negro to some pleasant tune" (p. 264) becomes suddenly grim in the context of the entire story, especially considering the information
from the deposition that the negresses "sang melancholy songs to
the negroes, and that this melancholy tone was more inflaming than
a different one would have been, and was intended" (p. 301).

These passages illustrate, to the degree of conviction,
the psychological blindness of Captain Delano. He appears to be
describing negroes not from what he sees but from a mental pic-
ture of them. When the story tells us that Delano "was amused
with an odd instance of the African love of bright colors and
fine shows," when Babo takes a flag from the locker for use as an
apron, Delano is in fact describing his own fondness for pretty
colours. For, as it turns out, the flag is the Spanish one, and
its use as an apron is a deliberate insult to Don Benito as well
as a symbolic gesture of mastery. Yet Delano, still absorbed in
his mental picture of jolly negroes, can only say:

"why, Don Benito, this is the flag
of Spain you use here. It's well
it's only I and not the King, that
sees this," he added, with a smile,
"but" -- turning towards the black
-- "it's all one, I suppose, so
the colors be gay," which playful
remark did not fail somewhat to
tickle the negro. (p. 266)

The irony of the situation is, of course, that Delano thinks he
has caught Babo in an error and generously turned it into a joke;
in actuality, Babo's use of the flag has been deliberate. More-
over, the incident follows a strange moment when Delano fancies
that he is witnessing an execution: "nor, as he saw the two thus
postured, could he resist the vagary, that in the black he saw a
headsman and in the white a man at the block" (p. 266). Delano
dismisses the impression, but its suggestiveness puts a dark and
ironic meaning to his words: "it's all one, I suppose, so the col-
ors be gay" (p. 266). For, in the latter phrase, the American captain seems unconsciously to give his assent to the sadistic nuances of the shaving.

But while in this and other instances Captain Delano insists in seeing a cheerful demeanor where none exists, this is only one side of his alternating moods. Much of the time he is fearful that Don Benito is plotting to murder him. Indeed, his fears, misplaced as they are, still strike the reader as being contradictory, as the man himself is. For the first part of his stay on board he is largely sympathetic to Don Benito's clear debility despite the bizarre conditions on the ship. Eventually, Ceneno's odd behaviour proves to be too much even for Delano's credulity:

The singular alternations of courtesy and ill-breeding in the Spanish captain were unaccountable, except on one of two suppositions -- innocent lunacy, or wicked imposture. (p. 239)

The irony, of course, is that the "wicked imposture" is taking place under the control of the blacks, but for the purpose of this discussion, let us note that the captain as easily regrets his "ungenerous surmises" (p. 241), and soon begins "to laugh at his former forebodings" (p. 246). The various disturbing mysteries on board become "those old scissors'grinders, the Ashantees; and those bed-ridden old knitting women, the oakum-pickers; and ... the dark Spaniard himself, the central hobgoblin of all" (p. 246). Much of his self-pacification is due to rationalization, to what he calls "good sense" (p. 257), to the "exerting [of] his good nature to the utmost" (p. 257), to thoughts that are "tranquilizing" (p. 246), thereby suggesting the avoidance of any pos-
sible unpleasant truths.

If Delano does not perceive the true character of the situation, what does he pacify himself against? Many of his fears are vague. He alternates to such a degree between compassion and suspicion, between constant analysis of actions and the reluctance to think too deeply, that no distinct impression is formed of the source of his terror. The enigmas prompt Delano to say to himself:

What, I, Amasa Delano -- Jack of the Beach, as they called me when a lad ... Who would murder Amasa Delano? His conscience is clean. There is someone above. Fie, fie, Jack of the Beach! You are a child indeed ... (p. 256)

Just at this point, when his confidence is wavering in his own sanity and in the supposed benevolent order of reality, Delano re-affirms for himself what he considers to be his identity. He is a good fellow, a man of right conduct -- the stuff of which, in his own eyes, heroes are made -- and he chides himself for childish fears. Yet he is child-like, in his moral innocence, and it is his innocence which allows him to impute only clear-cut moral distinctions to appearances. Benito Cereno is a ship's captain, a leader of men, and therefore to Delano's "blunt-thinking" (p. 231) mind must be responsible for the mysteries on the San Dominick; especially since negroes are, in his estimation, "indisputable inferiors" (p. 264).

Amasa Delano lists four occurrences as being especially mysterious to him:

First, the affair of the Spanish lad assailed with a knife by the slave boy ... Second, the tyranny in Don
Benito's treatment of Atufal, the black; as if a child should lead a bull of the Nile by the ring in his nose. Third, the trampling of the sailor by the two negroes ... Fourth, the cringing submission to their master, of all the ship's underlings, mostly blacks. (p. 258)

Passing over, for the moment, that Delano's understanding of these happenings is the reversal of the true situation, let us instead look at the potential for fear in them. The first of these incidents is described by the author in a clear, straightforward manner. Three blacks and two crewmen are cleaning a platter, when "one of the black boys, enraged at a word dropped by one of his white companions, seized a knife, and ... struck the lad over the head, inflicting a gash from which blood flowed" (p. 233). The sudden violence is described by Don Benito as mere "sport" (p. 233), to Delano's disbelief; but the entire incident, including Delano's reaction, is conveyed in a literal manner, devoid of any manifest psychic currents. There is no hint of fear here. But what is interesting is that immediately preceding the incident, we find Captain Delano "started at the occasional cymballing of the hatchet-polishers" (p. 233), causing him to accept only with reluctance and "even with shrinking" (p. 233) Cerenos's invitation to go up to the poop. Stepping between two of the hatchet-polishers, Delano feels "an apprehensive twitch in the calves of his legs" (p. 233).

The ritual with the chained Atufal and Don Benito is likewise free of any fear-inducing significance for Delano. Atufal stands "mute" (p. 236) before the Spanish captain and refuses to ask for pardon, while Delano looks on in "admiration" (p. 236) at the "colossal form of the negro" (p. 237). But a little while
later, Delano's attention is inadvertently drawn towards Don Benito and Babo, who have withdrawn to one side to converse, and facing the "two whisperers" (p. 239) Delano has a "slight start" (p. 239), for he believes that "it seemed as if the visitor had, at least partly, been the subject of the withdrawn consultation going on ..." (p. 239).

The sailor mobbed by the blacks is one of those occurrences that happen so suddenly they are almost lost in the general pattern of events. Because of some accidental pushing, one of the sailors is "dashed ... to the deck, despite the earnest cries of the oakum-pickers" (p. 247). Yet after an expression of alarm, Delano is easily distracted by the "pleasing" (p. 247) spectacle of Babo ministering to a fainting Don Benito. He jokingly offers money to Don Benito for Babo's ownership. But, once more, the moment of fear is removed from the selected mystery. The moment of fear occurs, rather, during a long introspection preceding the violence. As Delano analyzes the strange behaviour that has been occurring, Delano fancies that "as each point was recalled, the black wizards of Ashantee would strike up with their hatchets, as in ominous comment on the white stranger's thoughts" (p. 244). In conjunction with the momentary concealment of his ship by a projecting land-mass, the sound of the clashing steel engenders "a ghostly dread of Don Benito" (p. 244).

In each of these three incidences, specially noted by Amasa Delano as puzzling mysteries, there is self-contradiction and ironic comment. Not only do these incidents provoke no fear in Delano, the selection of these particular examples indicates more of an uneasiness through the collapse of decorum than a fear
based on instinctive self-preservation. There is a good deal of irony in the fact that in the evident total degeneration of command, based at the very least in Don Benito's extreme physical distress, the American captain should select three particular examples as either the proof of conspiracy or the practice of a "very capricious commander" (p. 258). In the face of violence, moreover, Delano shows no fear and, at one time, shows admiration for the massive bulk of Atufal. What does inspire fear in him are closely related experiences that hold no overt threat. In each case, fear is induced because of an imagined communication, of undisclosed but seemingly disturbing meaning. Delano's eyes cannot perceive any key to the mysteries and these leave him unafraid, though somewhat perplexed; but what he imagines he hears fills him with dread, precisely because such an experience is not of a material order and can signify any of several possible conclusions. "A very capricious commander" (p. 258) he can deal with, as he can with a "victim of mental disorder" (p. 226), or an overt act of treachery as he believes is happening when Don Benito leaps into his departing boat (p. 282); what he cannot manage is ambivalence, multiple ambiguity, the condition-of-being where several contradictory points-of-view may be equally true and yet remain unrevealed. We have only to remember, in this respect, the mood of enchantment that accompanies Delano on his tours of the ship, of his trying "to break one charm" and being "becharmed anew" (p. 252), to accept the terrifying vagueness of his experience. In this sense, the fourth mystery, ("the cringing submission to their master, of all the ship's underlings" (p. 258)), cannot be fixed to one incident, true or
imagined, of a total misapprehension of the respective roles of Cereno and the blacks; the mystery is due rather to a misapplied sense of decorum, to a rigid belief that the positions of master and slave, even when reversed, should be obvious, and to Delano's inability to perceive "satire or irony" (p. 238), and hence, to fail to notice acting. Appearances on the ship tell him nothing, other than their own neglect and saddened state. When he observes a sailor tarring a clock-strap, he notes that the sailor's is a face:

which would have been a very fine one but for its haggardness. Whether this haggardness had aught to do with criminality, could not be determined; since, as intense heat and cold, though unlike, produce like sensations, so innocence and guilt, when, through casual association with mental pain, stamping any visible impress, use one seal -- a hacked one. (p. 249)

In the above passage we are told quite clearly of the mystery of appearances. The tone used is impersonal and the message is generally applicable, implying the presence of difficulty for all men. Such a generalization puts Delano's predicament into a more human perspective, for on board this ship, he is spiritually alone, can rely on no one, and yet his, and the Spaniard's, very existence depends on how he solves the enigmas. This uncertainty, closely allied to dread, is portrayed by Melville through the use of hints, suppositions, the sudden manifestation of images whose meaning is unclear, and a general interrogative pattern:

What meant this? Something the man had sought to communicate, unknown to any one, even to his captain. Did the secret involve aught unfavourable to his captain? Were
those previous misgivings of Captain Delano's about to be verified? Or, in his haunted mood at the moment, had some random, unintentional motion of the man, while busy with the stay, as if repairing it, been mistaken for a significant beckoning? (p. 253)

A Spaniard has made some undetermined movement with a marling-spike and suddenly left. As will be shown later, such incidents point to an illusoriness of experience that makes decisive action precarious. Moreover, the intensity of fear in the general atmosphere can be effectively felt, as in the above passage, by its influence on Amasa Delano, who, as a benevolent man of action, as an admirer of Newfoundland dogs, negro servants, the strength and tenderness of savages, the proprieties of smart naval dress -- such a man finds himself momentarily on the edge of paranoid madness. 92

Goodness, in Melville's fiction, is a virtue replete with ambiguity. Since it cannot be said to exist uninfluenced by men's baser feelings, its use is almost always enigmatic and ironical. The narrator in Bartleby The Scrivener is a good man who sincerely wishes to help his scrivener. Yet his intentions are so qualified by his materialism and self-seeking that his goodness becomes ineffective and even valueless. In Benito Cereno, Amasa Delano is a man close in the spirit of ordinariness to the narrator of "Bartleby". By the time we have followed Delano through a few of the incidents on the San Dominick we can see that his goodness is also limited by his lack of spiritual depth.

An examination of several of the events discloses that Captain Delano is not only generally self-serving but at times
curiously callous. The most dramatic evidence is the telling scene in the boat as it is about to leave the San Dominick. Don Benito leaps into the boat and Delano, convinced he is about to be murdered, seizes the Spanish captain "by the throat" (p. 282). As Don Benito later recalls it:

you were with me all day; stood with me, sat with me, talked with me, looked at me, ate with me, drank with me; and yet, your last act was to clutch for a monster, not only an innocent man, but the most pitiable of all men. (p. 305-306)

Delano's self-esteem is such that only his survival seems to be at stake. The four mysteries particularly bothersome to Delano, and already mentioned here, are good examples of a self-esteem that is exercised at some cost to others. In the first, when the Spanish boy is struck with a knife, Delano reflects on Don Benito's importence and then proceeds to advise him on how best to employ the blacks, a terrible irony considering the circumstances. He tells Don Benito what he himself has done in the past:

Why, even with my little band, I find such a course indispensable. I once kept a crew on my quarter-deck thrumming mats for my cabin, when, for three days, I had given up my ship ... (p. 234)

There seems little else than conversational value here unless we consider that it reveals the smallmindedness of someone who assumes his reasonable advice fits all occasions. The minor egotism then becomes a major stumbling-block to understanding.

Later, when a sailor is "dashed ... to the deck" (p. 247) Delano is distracted by one of Cereno's coughing fits. Delano's reaction to this is superficially proper, but on deeper reading, is somewhat curious:
Such discretion was here evinced as quite wiped away, in the visitor's eyes, any blemish of impropriety which might have attached to the attendant, from the indecorous conferences before mentioned ... (p. 247)

There is no mention in Delano's ruminations of the sailor's injury nor of Don Benito's condition; no feeling for them is evident. Instead, Delano is thinking of what might have been said about him. His readiness to forgive impropriety shows his concern with it. Such sensitivity to decorum also calls to mind the earlier scene with the chained Atufal, where, in listening to an explanation of the supposed meaning of the ritual, Delano is suddenly "annoyed by the conversational familiarities" (p. 238) of Babo, an inappropriate feeling in the light of the numerous examples of the general confusion and muted violence on the ship.

After receiving a knot from an old sailor some time later, and not knowing what to do with it, Delano begins to worry that such perplexing incidents may mean his life is in danger. From this anxiety, he tries to pacify himself:

What, I, Amasa Delano -- Jack of the Beach, as they called me when a lad -- I, Amasa; the same that, duck-satchel in hand, used to paddle along the water-side to the school-house made from the old hulk -- I, little Jack of the Beach, that used to go berrying with cousin Nat and the rest; I to be murdered here at the ends of the earth, on board a haunted pirate-ship by a horrible Spaniard? Too nonsensical to think of! Who would murder Amasa Delano? His conscience is clean. (p. 256)

The egoism here is quite complex. On the one hand it seems a normal reaction of self-concern in a threatening situation and a re-
affirmation of identity; on the other hand, the repeated "I" set apart, in each case, from the rest of the sentence, distinguishes a kind of arrogance that is mixed with a childish sense of importance.\textsuperscript{93} What there is of logic in the passage also points to a revealing fallacy of thinking. Because he is a good man, with a clean conscience, he is immune from violence; history is the final refutation of such a belief, and Don Benito is the most immediate example of the idea's unreality. Furthermore, his sense of "clean" conscience is surely an instance of unconscious irony, for it apparently fails to account for ignorance and stupidity -- as if we could be saved from moral responsibility because of good intentions and because of what we did not know. The clean conscience of blacks did not save them from slavery; it cannot save Delano from the responsibility of his mission.

As if it might be passed over by a casual reader, the irony of the passage is emphasized by Delano's thoughts immediately afterwards, when Babo brings an invitation from Don Benito. This courtesy is enough to allay Delano's fears, indicating his superficiality and his sense of self-importance. The comparative profundity of his analyses of events are also somewhat ridiculed by the sentimentality he evinces when he sights his boat:

Ha! glancing towards the boat; there's Rover; good dog; a white bone in her mouth. A pretty big bone though, seems to me -- What? Yes, she has fallen afoul of the bubbling tide-rip there. It sets her the other way, too, for the time. Patience. (p. 256-257)

Patience, recognizably the correct attitude in the circumstances, is also a devastatingly ironic reminder of the terrible suffering
of Don Benito taking place as Delano is indulging in his homely, Duxbury-like sentiments. This irony is not so much an indictment of Delano as it is a symbolic expression of the extraordinary and abysmal experiences that surround us as we are engaged in the ordinary thoughts and tasks of everyday life.

Amasa Delano's bravery and goodness should not be dismissed, even if they are rendered ineffective and shown to be ambiguous in the totality of his limited character. He is a representative man, as many critics have pointed out, and his reactions are not meant to be much different from those of his generation, if they were to find themselves in his situation. His characterization shows something of the complexity of Melville's art, for he is neither hero nor villain, yet in his ordinariness contains the potentialities of both. His very common-ness makes his experience all the more frightening and profound, since it implies the experience could happen, in appropriate disguise, to any ordinary man.

If Amasa Delano represents ordinary, familiar life, then Don Benito represents the extraordinary, not by virtue of any gifts but through misfortune. A comparative treatment of their characters is not possible because Don Benito's simulated behaviour prevents the expression of his true feelings. His character can only be inferred from the metaphorical and symbolic patterns of experience on the San Dominick, a subject which we shall examine later. Don Benito is the object of narrative disclosure and not its instrument, and because Delano cannot comprehend clearly the events being disclosed, much concerning Don Benito remains unclear. In general, we may say he appears to be a good and sen-
itive man, but his sensitivity is so qualified by the terrors of his experience that the word seems inadequate to the situation. What, for example, are we to make of his horror of the black Babo, so pronounced, that he cannot bear to look him in the face? His generally consumptive appearance and his eventual death from the stresses of his ordeal, makes of his sensitivity a quality mixed with cowardice, impotence, and a revulsion of life. Furthermore, his symbolic equivalence to Charles V, to monasticism in general, and, by virtue of being a Spaniard, his symbolic responsibility for Spanish cruelties in South America and during the Inquisition, make him a complex character that cannot be glibly interpreted as a mere victim.

Amasa Delano, however, remains the key to the experience on the San Dominick. Merely by virtue of Melville having appropriated the facts of the story from the historical Amasa Delano's narrative, it can be safely said that Delano's perception of events is crucial. Since his perception is shown to be limited both by his own nature and by the inherently mysterious nature of appearances in the story, uncertainty and ambiguity must be acknowledged as the controlling factors of experience. It does no good to distinguish between his experience and the complete experience in this respect, for all literal experience is filtered through his mind and the deeper truths of the story, unknown to Delano, are of themselves complexly ambiguous. The implications of accepting uncertainty and ambiguity as the chief features mean, for example, that the slavery issue cannot be settled. We can identify Delano's hidden prejudice against the blacks, but the characters of Don Benito, Babo, and the rest of
the blacks, are irretrievably locked within a much greater mystery. It is to the nature of this mystery that we must now turn.
When the narrator in *Pierre* tells us that "man's life seems but an acting upon mysterious hints", he could be commenting upon the problem Delano faces on the San Dominick. Delano imagines he is receiving threatening communications of a subliminal nature from a variety of sources: whisperings, sudden movements, the sounds of the Ashantees sharpening blades, furtive or seemingly guilty expressions on Don Benito's face. What the American captain worries about is that "every soul on board" is Don Benito's "carefully drilled recruit in the plot" (p. 245). Of course, in a sense, Delano is correct in his "incredible inference" (p. 245); the true state-of-affairs is being concealed. But it is not only what is being disguised that eludes Delano's detection, it is the fact of disguise itself, in all its variegated, multilevelled forms.

The full range of disguised appearances in *Benito Cereno* prefigures the use of similar concealment in *The Confidence-Man*. Disguise on the San Dominick is so varied and without interruption that it points to a symbolic flux in the nature of appearances, an anarchy that is itself seemingly without cause. Melville uses reversals, displacements and transpositions, and metaphorical masking to convey a vision of reality that in *Pierre* is called: "surface stratified on surface. To its axis, the world being nothing but superinduced superficies."96

Setting is portrayed in unusual fashion. Instead of having a sense of place deepened by concrete imagery, Melville often superimposes descriptions of other places onto the images of ship and sea. In the beginning of the story, when Delano can-
not quite discern the identity of the Spanish vessel, the vessel is described as: "a Lima intriguante's one sinister eye peering across the Plaza" (p. 218); "a whitewashed monastery after a thunder-storm, seen perched upon some dun cliff among the Pyrenees" (p. 219). Both of these images are evident illusions, but as the first two in a series of foreign settings, they set the tone of illusoriness. The "Lima" image already indicates the future Lima of Babo's execution, of Babo's pole-fixed head staring across the Plaza, of Benito Cereno's death. The "whitewashed monastery" introduces the religious imagery that plays a disturbing role in the story. The white hue is an ironic reversal of the black ascendancy within, but as the white is an illusion of the spray and clouds so is the position of the blacks suggested to be finally undetermined. The monastery is a place of seclusion on top a mountain and grimly suggests Don Benito's seclusion and eventual death on Mount Agonia. Such mirroring of metaphors disrupts the continuity of place and implies a circularity of time that mocks efforts at certainty and freedom.

When the vessel is finally identified as a Spanish slaver, the first image that comes to mind, as if in rejection of its material identity, is a "super-annuated" Italian palace which "still, under a decline of masters, preserved signs of former state" (p. 219). The sense of former glory and present decay, here introduced, is maintained throughout the tale in such details as the particulars of Don Benito's "South American" gentleman's dress" (p. 231) contrasted by his physical debility. Decay is further emphasized in the careful description of the ship's features:
The tops were large and were railed about with what had once been octagonal network, all now in sad disrepair. These tops hung overhead like three ruinous aviaries...
Battered and mouldy, the castellated forecastle seemed some ancient turret, long ago taken by assault, and then left to decay. Toward the stern, two high-raised quarter galleries -- the balustrades here and there covered with dry, tindery sea-moss -- opening out from the unoccupied state-cabin, whose dead-lights, for all the mild weather, were hermetically closed and calked -- these tenantless balconies hung over the sea as if it were the grand Venetian canal. (p. 220)

Words like "disrepair", "ruinous", "battered", "mouldy", "tindery", "tenantless", all communicate decay; the careful attention to detail paradoxically restores a sense of material reality to the ship, even though this reality attests to the ravages of Nature and Time. However, this description ends with the image of the Italian palace and thus a sudden transposition of both ship and sea to a "Venetian canal". This sense of the Past mysteriously coterminous with the Present, is not confined to a particular period. Different locations and different times are evoked by the San Dominick, seen from different perspectives. Earlier, the ship is compared to "Ezekial's Valley of Dry Bones" (p. 220), simultaneously evoking ancient history, myth, sacred vision, and the timelessness of death. This image alone, combining transcendental time, biblical history, and timelessness, effectively destroys any notion of ordinary time and familiar space in favour of the symbolic realm of revelation. The ship, in its different aspects, reveals itself suddenly to the author as whatever may best signify its symbolic essence. Since the revelations are
various, the San Dominick's symbolic significance remains ultimately ambiguous.

Revelations in terms of setting continue after Captain Delano has boarded the ship. The sensation of coming aboard a strange ship is compared to entering a strange house:

Both house and ship -- the one by its walls and blinds, the other by its high bulwarks like ramparts -- hoard from view their interiors till the last moment; but in the case of the ship there is this addition: that the living spectacle it contains upon its sudden and complete disclosure, has, in contrast with the blank ocean which zones it, something of the effect of enchantment. The ship seems unreal; these strange costumes, gestures, and faces, but a shadowy tableau just emerged from the deep, which directly must receive back what it gave. (p. 221)

The device of using the familiar to disclose the unfamiliar is here especially effective because it incidentally manages to convey the transition from a familiar world (the Bachelor's Delight) to the undoubtedly strange world of the San Dominick, the polarity of house and ship as well looking forward to the antithesis of Delano's Duxbury-conditioned sense of neighbourliness and homely comforts and Benito Cereno's Old World sense of loss and of evil. The "unreal" quality of a ship is self-explanatory if mysterious, but the ghostly and death-like quality of its strange relation to the "deep" transforms "unreal" to a symbolic condition that is more than just a contrast to the familiar novelties of houses. The passage signifies this unreality as enchantment and it is an enchantment that does not only result from a commonwealth of whites and blacks but also from the oceanic mysteries of Nature
that are an echo of *Moby Dick* and *The Encantadas*.

In *The Encantadas*, Melville explored the effects of enchantment in terms of landscape. In these sketches, enchantment is a condition of man's subjugation by Nature, experienced as delusion and often as waking dream. The Encantadas are an island group, known for their "air of spell-bound desertness"; to them "change never comes; neither the change of seasons nor of sorrows". They seem cursed by the Almighty as if they were a living material reminder of the spiritual torments of hell. The sea surrounding the islands is called by some sailors "the Enchanted Ground", to signify the capricious currents and variable winds that can mean sudden disaster against the rocks or in the least a helpless drifting by these "hot aridities".

The significant point, in terms of our discussion, is that Melville portrayed, in these sketches, an extremity of consciousness wherein man touches the unknown. The unknown for Melville could not be simply a scientific unknown, measuring the limits of man's knowledge of the familiar world; in these sketches he shows that the unknown is unimaginable except in extreme manifestations of moral and metaphysical phenomena. Thus the islands are described as a "wailing spirit" crying out for Lazarus to "dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame". Symbolically, they correspond to a human condition of solitude and incommunicable suffering, as in the ordeals of Hunilla, marooned, and then raped and abandoned by passing sailors, or as in the case of the Hermit Oberlus, a misanthropist more bestial than human. Nature plays a part in such human experiences, but the part She plays is seen
as mysterious. The savagery of Nature and the savagery of man are in this way compared and left to the reader to decide upon their precise relationship and upon the probabilities of man's ever escaping his carnal inheritance.

In *Benito Cereno*, the events are located "toward the southern extremity of the long coast of Chile" (p. 217), an area that, in relation to the civilized regions of Europe and the Americas, is close to the Tartarus-like islands of The Encantadas. Santa Maria, "a small, desert, uninhabited island" (p. 217) found in an "extremity", suggests to a reader of *The Encantadas* an imaginative geography superimposed on the literal one. It is a geography where changing currents, vapors, long calms, imply a state of precariousness, of illusion and enchantment, of man's imprisonment by forces of Fate. It is small wonder, then, that in this condition of enchantment the San Dominick can appear to be many things. Why such enchantment should exist is not given, leading the reader to suppose that it is a symbolic state of enduring impact and not simply an eccentric, accidental phenomenon of Nature.

The house and ship correspondence is used intermittently to further the effects of illusory experience. At times, Delano feels lost, as if he were in a strange chateau in a "far inland country" (p. 252); once he describes himself as "alone on the prairie" (p. 257). The ocean swells momentarily become "terraces" (p. 252). Don Benito's temporary cabin is a "cluttered hall of some eccentric bachelor-squire in the country" (p. 262). Don Benito's clothing resembles that "of an invalid courtier tottering about London in the time of the plague" (p. 232). A balustrade
becomes "the charred ruin of some summer-house" (p. 252). An old upturned boat is a "subterraneous sort of cave" (p. 261). A sailor, dimly seen behind some rigging, disappears suddenly "into the recesses of the hempen forest, like a poacher" (p. 253). The reversals of land and sea in these images effectively suggest the disorientation of Captain Delano. By continually pointing elsewhere, the setting imagery also universalizes Delano's experience, freeing it on a symbolic level from the limitations of the time and place. However, this is not to suggest that Melville is generalizing the experience on the San Dominick in the manner of parable by employing antithetical imagery. The density of detail is its own argument against a simple metaphorical correspondence, for such density keeps us attentive to the particularity of the experience and to the continual creation of a unique Present. The sudden transpositions of setting instead emphasize a mood of uncertainty and precariousness. The augmentation of the Present by other dimensions heightens awareness not of increased possibilities but of the perpetuity of diminished possibilities. Just as the various settings show either a decline of power or natural isolation, so the San Dominick demonstrates that decay and solitude are constants of human experience and not its exceptions.

Other physical imagery reinforces the impression of illusion and decay created by the discontinuity of time and place. Delano's repeated observations of Cereno's clothing do more than suggest Delano's superficiality. In each case, a rich concreteness of appearances is created that is at once contradicted by the greater illusoriness of mood and setting, by the situational
duplicities, and by Benito Cereno's spiritual and physical decay. An example of this state of contradiction can be found in the first description of Don Benito's dress:

As master and man stood before him, the black upholding the white, Captain Delano could not but bethink him of the beauty of that relationship which could present such a spectacle of fidelity on the one hand and confidence on the other. The scene was heightened by the contrast in dress, denoting their relative positions. The Spaniard wore a loose Chile jacket of dark velvet; white small-clothers and stockings, with silver buckles at the knee and instep; a high-crowned sombrero, of fine grass; a slender sword, silver mounted, hung from a knot in his sash -- the last being an almost invariable adjunct, more for utility than ornament, of a South American gentleman's dress to this hour. Excepting when his occasional nervous contortions brought about disarray, there was a certain precision in his attire curiously at variance with the unsightly disorder around ...

(p. 231)

In the above passage, the reversals created by the ironic misapprehension of appearances are almost dizzying. The first sentence alone is subtly complex. As future disclosures indicate, "master and man" is a hollow phrase; Don Benito is now the slave of the black holding him. Even the word "upholding" has its ironic significance, since in reality Babo is holding Benito down, in the manner of the stern-piece emblem. Yet by the time we learn the facts of the situation, in the court-deposition, the roles have once more reversed themselves, and Babo is again a slave, although it would be correct to say in qualification that Don Benito is no longer a master. Likewise, "fidelity" and "con-
idence" are similar misrepresentations of the relationship between Benito and Babo. The confidence is in reality Babo's, who has organized the uprising and the charade. Fidelity is a quality that characterizes Don Benito's love of the murdered Aranda and evokes a terror in him that he may have to follow his leader. Moreover, fidelity and confidence are the very virtues that might describe Delano himself, with his benevolence, simple trust, and repeated allusions to dogs. Thus, before we even arrive at the description of Don Benito's dress, the situational duplicity has fractured any sense of the solidity of appearances and undermined Amasa Delano's capacity to see things as they are. The stylized quality of Don Benito's uniform becomes a grotesque costume of pretence, emphasizing the distance between the office and its effective power. As we learn at the end of the story, Don Benito's scabbard has been artifically stiffened, signifying natural and metaphorical impotence. The "unsightly disorder" on the ship, as noted by Delano, is a highly inadequate means of describing the profound degeneration on the San Dominick. It is Delano's cosmetic view of appearances that here ironically controls what values are to be imparted to appearances.

If clothing imagery in this and other instances reveals a disguised reality, then physical appearances indicate nothing of the man within. Don Benito has a "cadaverous aspect" (p. 233); he is sickly; his eyes are often described as shifting or averted from Delano's presence. Captain Delano interprets such manifestations as evidence of Don Benito's plotting, of the possibility that "under the aspect of infantile weakness, the most savage energies might be couched -- those velvets of the Spaniard but
the silky paw to his fangs" (p. 240). This complete misreading of Don Benito's terrified state is only matched by Delano's inability to interpret Babo. He begins his misapprehension by calling Babo:

"Faithful fellow!" cried Captain Delano. "Don Benito, I envy you such a friend; slave I cannot call him." (p. 231)

and continues it by insisting on seeing Babo as particularly docile and genial. It is only in the boat, after Babo has leaped in with a dagger, that Delano finally comprehends something of Babo's malice in his "countenance lividly vindictive, expressing the centred purpose of his soul ... " (p. 283). It is only because the disguise has been dropped that Delano can see Babo's intentions, but in general Delano's attention to physical appearances only discloses a disturbing ambivalence. Observing a sailor doing some tarring work, Delano feels that criminality cannot be determined from haggardness, since "innocence and guilt, when, through casual association with mental pain, stamping any visible impress, use one seal -- a hacked one" (p. 249). Later, when Delano and Don Benito are served lunch, Delano demonstrates once more his inability to probe beyond surface attractiveness, as he is struck with the mulatto steward's apparent "extreme desire to please" (p. 270). We learn later from the deposition that it is this same steward who proposed "poisoning a dish for the generous Captain Amasa Delano ... " (p. 300). Delano compounds the irony of his misperception by attempting to engage Don Benito in conversation about the mysteries of physiognomy:

"Don Benito," whispered he, "I am glad to see this usher-of-the-golden-rod of yours; the sight refutes an
ugly remark once made to me by a Barbados planter; that when a mulatto has a regular European face, look out for him; he is a devil. But see, your steward here has features more regular than King George's of England; and yet there he nods, and bows, and smiles; a king, indeed — the king of kind hearts and polite fellows. What a pleasant voice he has, too." (p. 270)

The remark of the "Barbados planter" is not proven true by the steward's treachery for the simple reason that Don Benito has a "regular European face" and is not only misjudged by Delano as a "monster" but even after the San Dominick has been recaptured and his ordeal narrated, he manages to shock Delano with the depth of his feelings against the blacks. Neither white nor black are free of guilt and misjudgment. Indeed, the above passage is a condemnation of facile interpretations and simple resolutions, if seen in the context of the story's range of symbolically achieved irresolutions.

Roles are also used in a way that shows their ultimate insignificance related to problems of being, certitude, and freedom. The reversals of master and slave only signify some of the role manipulation. Benito Cereno is compared to Charles V, in the similar degree of their "contemptuous aversion" to other men "just previous to the anchoritish retirement of that monarch from the throne" (p. 226). As one critic has brilliantly shown, the use of Charles V in the story connects together the various religious metaphors and symbols in a vision of the temporal and spiritual decay of the Church. Such allusiveness, while clear on the level of parable, creates textual problems. To the degree that
we become aware of the relationship between Don Benito and the blacks as enacting the history of the Church's misappropriation of temporal power from Charles V, so do we lose sight of the American Captain Delano's immediate experience. Such a reading of religious metaphor can only be valid (as it probably is) as one of many perspectives on the chiaroscuro of illusions on the San Dominick. Babo, for example, while described as a "begging friar of St. Francis" (p. 231), is also "like a shepherd's dog" (p. 223). The minor characters are described as momentarily inhabiting various roles. The steward is compared to King George of England. The hatchet-polishers are like "tailors"; one of the negroes assumes the personality of an "attorney" (p. 255); when Delano's men storm the San Dominick they become like "troopers in the saddle" (p. 287). Animal imagery, as well, is used to convey the more carnal mysteries of the characters' roles. Babo, as has been mentioned, is likened to a "dog" and negroes in general are described by Delano as Newfoundland dogs. Messenger boys are called "pilot fish" (p. 226); a Barcelona "tar" is described as a "grizzly bear" casting "sheep's eyes" (p. 250); a sleeping negress is "like a doe in the shade of a woodland rock" (p. 251) and her sprawling baby like a "wideawake fawn" (p. 251); a group of women and children are "like a social circle of bats" (p. 261); Babo is described as writhing "snakishly" (p. 283) on the boat's bottom as Delano is preparing to cast off from the San Dominick. In all of these cases, the easy transience of human characteristics is a subtle indication of the precariousness of human values.

If Don Benito is both master and slave, if Babo is both slave and master, if such roles are so easily interchangeable,
then human identity cannot be determined by a man's actions. The complex state-of-appearances which allow an old sailor to be "an Egyptian priest, making Gordian knots for the temple of Ammon" (p. 254), which withhold the significance of the knots from Delano, is equally responsible for the simultaneous perceptions of the characters as victims of circumstances and as actors in a ritual of evil. It does not matter that we may not be able to determine precisely the identity of the ritual, since so many of the activities on board have a ritual character, and yet may be only loosely related. Neither can we say that the story is a study of freedom, nor of slavery, nor of a failed rebellion, nor of a symbolic battle between good and evil. In each case, too much is left undetermined, too much contradicted, too much qualified by the primary importance of Amasa Delano's limited perception of events. We have seen such a separation between characters before, in Bartleby The Scrivener. There, the narrator's rendition of events, limited by his personality, prevents us from ever knowing the truth about Bartleby. In Benito Cereno, we are not so limited by point-of-view, having the author's voice indicating meanings outside the range of Delano's perceptions. The difficulty is that authorial tone is clearly evident in symbol and metaphor, which in themselves have almost a hieroglyphic obscurity. The stern-piece emblem, the scene with Atufal standing before Don Benito, the scene with the "Gordian" knot, the shaving scene -- all appear to have a ritual significance, and yet even after we have learned of the sham, we can only surmise about their meanings.

The use of a deposition to clarify the mystery of events
is only superficially successful. We learn how the slaves revolted and how they murdered the whites, how they controlled the Spaniards and how they deceived Amasa Delano. Yet little is resolved by the document, for the new evidence complicates the enigmas rather than solving them. Benito Cereno has difficulty convincing the court of the veracity of his story. The cycle of uncertainty is repeated: just as Delano was only convinced of the apparent truth of events related by Cereno because the blacks supported it "as with one voice" relating "a common tale of suffering" (p. 221), so the court is convinced of what Don Benito now says is the truth because it is supported by the whites:

Some disclosures therein were, at the time, held dubious for both learned and natural reasons. 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. 289)

Such a qualification hints at the unavailability of the "truth". Moreover, other interesting correspondences can be found in the deposition which reveal that evil is not limited to the blacks. When the negroes revolt they kill several of the whites in vengeance for their captivity; we learn from the deposition that after the capture of the San Dominick by Delano's men several of the blacks are killed:

beside the negroes killed in the action, some were killed after the capture and re-anchoring at night, when shackled to the ring-bolts on deck; that these deaths were
We also learn that just as Babo cut Don Benito with a razor in the shaving scene, so a sailor tries to cut a shackled negro with a razor, "aiming it at the negro's throat" (p. 303). Delano is put in the position of disarming a sailor named Barlo who is trying to kill a shackled black with a dagger, just as earlier in the boat he had disarmed Babo of his dagger (p. 303). These and other correspondences between the narrative and the deposition demonstrate that despite the restoration of order the enigmas remain. Indeed, such correspondences answer, in part, Matthiessen's criticism of Benito Cereno's method of "raising unanswered questions", for the deposition implies that unanswered questions are the very nature of the experiences in the story.

Some critics have found that the inclusion of the deposition was an artistic error, giving an uneven and unfinished quality to the tale. Such an attitude shows an unwillingness to follow the imagistic patterns in the story, for they indicate an ambiguity of appearances that cannot be resolved; without the deposition there could be no point of objectivity from which a literal comprehension of events could be achieved. However, the deposition is important for other reasons as well. As an historical document, the deposition suggests that the cruelties inflicted by blacks and whites on each other is a recurring phenomenon. As the correspondences mentioned above indicate, such recurrence is given historical validity, even though the final irony in this respect is that history cannot answer any of the mysteries that
need explanation but can merely perpetuate the myth of violence, of man against man, enacted on the San Dominick. Since the story does not end with the deposition, we have further evidence that the human significance of suffering cannot be validly communicated by any other means that Art.

The deposition also brings up a question of the narrative structure. To answer this question we must briefly examine the narrator's role. In general, we are willing to accept as readers the co-existence of Amasa Delano the perceiver of events and the author as narrator. It is usually clear where Delano's comprehension of events ends and where the author-narrator's begins in the communication of images. However, when we come to the deposition there is a sudden aesthetic collision of surfaces, apparently indicating the author's hand more clearly than might be desired. The inelegance is only apparent. The collision between the language of document and the language of Art, between fact and symbol, emphasizes the textual experience of the story. As was shown in the analysis of the story's first few pages, textuality effectively re-creates a meditative experience in the midst of complex appearances while also suggesting by its own mediation the distance of "truth". Truth is a constant creation, ever out of reach of the understanding, as is suggested by the accumulation of images, each providing a different and problematic perspective on the suffering of the ship's inhabitants. The deposition illustrates by antithesis what historical testimony can do and what it cannot do, and thereby creates a fuller appreciation in the reader of the symbolic imagination. The narrator-author uses the deposition to show the unfinished condition of
truth, for the deposition is itself a re-creation of the actual events, yet further removed from experience. Neither historical testimony nor symbol satisfies the demand for completeness of information, but incompleteness is crucial to the story's achievement. Since everything disclosed in the story indicates that in life man is captive to one force or another, whether it be Society, Nature, or Metaphysical Law, then incompleteness of understanding at least suggests that a certain mental freedom is possible in pursuance of the elusive truth. In attempting to render the life of a mind capable of interrogating ambiguities of the order found in *Benito Cereno*, symbolization is the textual process that occurs. This is by no means a private experience, since symbolization is an ongoing process in the mind carried on by the reader.¹⁰⁹
In *Benito Cereno*, the encounter with appearances discloses a principle of relativity. Images of setting, of physical appearance, of roles and activities, the ironic significance of words spoken, the misperception of conditions by Amasa Delano, all suggest a state-of-contradiction so total that we can only understand things relative to one another, and as such a bewildering anarchy becomes the dominant experience on the San Dominick. For example, we can speak of Amasa Delano as a hero relative to the fact that he recaptures the Spanish ship and not for any moral or intellectual virtues, which indeed would contradict his heroism. Don Benito is the master of the San Dominick relative to the charade controlled by Babo. Babo is an evil genius relative to the suffering of the whites but a hero of the oppressed blacks. The names Melville has chosen for his characters reinforce the ambivalence of their roles and the indeterminacy of their final positions. Delano himself provides a clue to the significance of names by attempting to understand what might be indicated by Don Benito's name: "Benito Cereno -- Don Benito Cereno -- a sounding name" (p. 240). The names do "sound", but what they signify is unclear. As one critic has shown, Amasa is the name of a treacherous biblical commander of King David; Benito Cereno may suggest serenity and goodness but Cereno apparently has a secondary meaning of "shameless fellow"; Babo may derive its roots from the Tuscan "Babbo" meaning "Daddy" or it may come from the West African Hausa language and mean "No". In each case, the hidden root-meanings of the names support the line of imagery which stresses the characters'
ambivalence. Delano is not treacherous, but he is prejudiced, smallminded, and comparatively egotistical. Don Benito's extreme sensitivity and costume of "singular richness" (p. 223) may imply weak moral character and a decadent intellectual inheritance. Since Babo is never allowed full human expression by the whites it is not possible to deny his heroism conclusively. But the important consideration, at this point in our discussion, is to see that such name-play merely strengthens the view that no distinct moral position in the story can be argued for Melville. The presence of historical perspective suggests by its long view the repetition of cycles of dominance and subjugation, with white and black intermittently reversing roles. Such an interpretation is borne out by the imagistic correspondences in the deposition where whites kill blacks in the manner that their mates have been killed. If we adopt such a perspective, there is no problem with the "slavery" issue. Blacks are enslaved by whites who are themselves enslaved. Don Benito's cultural inheritance includes the Inquisition, and in the shaving scene, where Babo conducts a cruel mimicry of castration and murder, this inheritance is ironically suggested.

The floor of the cuddy was matted... On one side was a claw-footed old table... a thumbed missal on it, and over it a small, meagre crucifix attached to the bulk-head. Under the table lay a dented cutlass or two, with a hacked harpoon, among some melancholy old rigging, like a heap of poor friars's girdles. There were also two long, sharp-ribbed settees of Malacca cane, black with age, and uncomfortable to look at as inquisitors' racks, with a large, misshapen arm-chair, which, furnished with a rude
barber's crotch at the back. Working with a screw, seemed some grotesque engine of torment. (p. 263)

The Inquisitors murdered thousands to preserve their dogma; now, Babo, in his symbolic role as a Franciscan friar, re-enacts the tortures psychologically on Don Benito. The Past has returned to inhabit the Present before the unseeing eyes of Amasa Delano, who has no Past, metaphorically, other than "berrying with cousin Nat" as "Jack of the Beach" (p. 256). For Amasa Delano, at the end of the story, "the past is passed" (p. 306), because he has no memory of evil personally suffered, and hence no sense of a Present created by the Past. For Don Benito, on the other hand, the "negro" has "cast such a shadow" (p. 306) that the Spaniard feels driven to his "tomb" (p. 306).

Don Benito's dramatic statement only proves to be a difficulty if we insist on a moral hierarchy in the story and see him as a kind of Christ-figure. But if we understand Cereno as a victim of circumstances, who has been so marked by evil that he can never forget it, his antipathy to the blacks is at least consistent. The argument that he utters the story's symbolic meaning as an experience of evil is contradicted by almost everything in the story. For him, individually, the meaning of the San Dominick experience resides in evil. For Delano it resides in the ultimate beneficence of "Providence" overcoming the evils of a "strange history" on a "strange craft" (p. 257). For the reader, who must reconcile these two positions with the undetermined one of Babo, the symbolic meaning of "negro" should properly only be ambiguity.

Babo is the only one of the three major characters who
is never unmasked. He dies silent and unrepentant. Considering his role in the murder of the whites there can be no doubt of his characterization as evil -- relative to the incidents on the San Dominick. To attempt to generalize his punishment as an unnecessary stigmatization of the negro is to deny the symbolic truth of the stern-piece emblem: "a dark satyr in a mask, holding his foot on the prostrate neck of a writhing figure, likewise masked" (p. 220). There are two figures in the emblem, but as masked beings they can represent a number of possible meanings, none of which are necessarily an indication of absolute significance. In one sense, the emblem can represent the Christian victory over powers of darkness; ironically, (as an emblem of a Spanish ship compared to an "Acapulco" treasure-ship), the Christian forces massacred the Aztecs and the Incas. In another sense, the emblem can signify the opposite -- the victory of evil; but given the reversals of the story does black or white occupy the role of evil? There can be no satisfying answer to such a direct question since the emblem itself offers us a masked vision. 116

There is one symbolic certainty in the story. Death is the only proffered form of completeness. The entire atmosphere of Benito Cereno is imbued with death. The opening images of the Spanish ship as an "intriguante's one eye" (p. 278) and as a "whitewashed monastery" (p. 219) are themselves disturbing portents of what is to come. The San Dominick is a ship of death: "her keel ... laid, her ribs put together, and she launched, from Ezekiál's Valley of Dry Bones" (p. 220). Aranda's skeleton is nailed to the bow, and shrouded, below which are sketched the darkly ironic words: "follow your leader" (p. 220). Various imag-
ery of enchantment strangely emphasizes death-like experience: the sea seems "laid out and leaded up, its course finished, soul gone, defunct" (p. 257); the ship's bell rings "a grave-yard toll" (p. 236); clinging to the ship is vegetable matter "Like mourning weeds, dark festoons of sea-grass slimily swept to and fro over the name, with every hearse-like roll" (p. 220); the chants of the oakum-pickers are described as a "funeral march" (p. 222); the dead-lights of the ship are "all closed like coppered eyes of the coffined" (p. 252); at one time a cabin-door is seen as "calked fast like a sarcophagus lid" (p. 252).

In The Encantadas, death and enchantment are closely related. The narrator of the sketches is haunted by a vision of a "gigantic tortoise", the islands' principal form of animal life, which has the letters "Memento*****" burning on its back. Throughout the sketches, images of delusion, precariousness, and death are articulated either as everpresent dangers for unwary sailors or as defining metaphors in the accounts of the islands' occasional inhabitants. The principle elaborated is that nothing is what it appears to be; Rock Rodondo gives the appearance of being a sailing ship to approaching mariners until, if they are inexperienced, it is too late to turn aside.

In Benito Cereno, we find a corresponding use of enchantment. When Captain Delano sees his ship fall victim to an unpredictable current "with enchanted sails" (p. 244), he begins "to feel a ghostly dread of Don Benito" (p. 244). Under this influence, he imagines that he might be trapped in the manner of Malay priates who entice guests onto "vacant decks, beneath which prowled a hundred spears with yellow arms ready to upthrust them
through the mats" (p. 245). Ironically, Don Benito informs him at the story's end that in the cabin "every inch of ground (was) mined into honey combs under you" (p. 305). The delusion first suffered under the influence of the enchanted setting turns out to have been clairvoyant perception. The particular use of "honey combs" to describe the death trap relates an enchanting sweetness with death. The point to be made here is that opposites are brought together suddenly for the ironic purpose of revealing ever-new forms of enchantment. The process of reason that Delano tries to employ to solve the enigmas on the ship is continually befuddled by vagueness: "Trying to break one charm, he was but becharmed anew" (p. 252); "But these enchantments were a little disenchanted as his eye fell on the corroded main-chains" (p. 252); "He rubbed his eyes and looked hard" (p. 253); trying to analyze the relationship of the whites and blacks Delano feels lost in "mazes". But it is the process of reason itself which is dangerously undermining in the struggle for survival, for as we learn at the end of the story through the description of Babo's head as "that hive of subtlety" (p. 307), reason may prove to be sweet to itself but a dangerous enchantment in the attempted perception of reality. The extraordinary subtlety of such imagistic involvement bears witness to the complexity of self-deception. Amongst the religious patterns of the story, transcendental truths and metaphysical terrors are brought together under the guise of one or another image to suggest the thought that with every life-inducing experience death is the unrevealed, shadowed half. In the shaving scene, is an inconspicuous-looking pedestal "like a font" (p. 263), on its own possibly suggesting
the sacrament of baptism. In conjunction with Babo's subtle employment of terror on the helpless Don Benito, the font takes on a darker significance. When Babo anoints Don Benito's head "with a small bottle of scented waters" (p. 268), the presence of the font in the text implies a symbolic anointing in the manner of the sacrament of Extreme Unction -- the last sacrament before death. Since death to the living is a cessation and a nothingness, and yet demands a continuous struggle for self-assertion, the unrelieved presence of death in Benito Cereno indicates, paradoxically, an enduring courage of the mind, fed by the uncontrollable tensions of seeing its own future degeneration.

Babo, the consciousness of evil, the intelligent manipulator of similitude and of contrariness, the blackness that seems impenetrable, is a symbol of the mind. His head, fixed on a pole, is an ambivalent presence in the public Plaza; symbolically unvanquished it meets the "gaze of the whites" and is "unabashed" (p. 307), and it looks beyond them towards the place of interment of Benito Cereno, whose moral imagination could not survive its baptism of evil.

Such an interpretation is not meant to summarize the story's symbolic meaning. Rather, it proposes itself as a possible interpretation of symbols that must finally elude our ability to explain them for the very reason that equivocation and masking play such an important role in the story. Benito Cereno is an interrogation of mystery, of ambiguous appearances that conceal the everpresence of death. Like its title character, its ultimate significance is interred in the recesses of its symbolic depths.
EPILOGUE
In a letter to Hawthorne of 1851, Melville described what he considered to be the quality of Hawthorne's mind. It is a description that could suit Melville himself:

There is a certain tragic phase of humanity which, in our opinion, was never more powerfully embodied than by Hawthorne. We mean the tragic-alness of human thought in its own unbiased, native, and profounder workings ... By visable sic. truth, we mean the apprehension of the absolute condition of present things as they strike the eye of the man who fears them not, though they do their worst to him, -- the man who ... declares himself a sovereign nature (in himself) amid the powers of heaven, hell, and earth. He may perish; but so long as he exists he insists upon treating with all powers upon an equal basis.

This kind of courage -- an assumption of the responsibilities of being witness to the truth no matter what the cost -- seems more evident in Moby Dick and Pierre than in the tales of the 1850's. Yet, despite the fact that Melville had moved from the grand scale, (till the poetry of Clarel), to the comparatively minor scale of individual struggle, the courage is still present in its refusal to be shaken from the task of reading the "absolute condition of present things". In their vitality and variety of subject-matter, the tales demonstrate a perseverance of creative expression. But, in Bartleby The Scrivener, Cock-A-Doodle-Doo!, and Benito Cereno, there is one important imaginative difference from the performance of Moby Dick. The vital truths of character in the three tales are withheld from scrutiny, whereas, correspondingly, we learn a good deal about Ahab and Pierre from reported experience. Bartleby, Merrymusk, and Benito Cereno, largely reside in Silence, and the respective narrators of the stories
fail to penetrate to the core of the silent characters' experiences. In each case the silence is ambiguous; it may signify everything, (an "absolute condition of present things"), or it may signify nothing (an emptiness). Bartleby is associated with walls, and so his silence might represent the impenetrability of individual suffering or it might represent the emptiness at the heart of what we usually call daily life. Merrymusk's silence prevents us from knowing with certainty whether the transcendental song of the cock is life-enhancing or death-inducing, or -- in some curious and unresolved fashion -- both. Benito Cereno's silence is like a "pall" concealing any further explanation of his experience of the "negro". On the other hand, we find that the strange silence of these three figures prompts the narrative exercise of intelligence and imagination. Within their limitations, the lawyer in "Bartleby", the farmer in Cock-A-Doodle-Doo!, Amasa Delano in Benito Cereno, use their powers to unravel the mysteries before them; for the period of the story, the active search for understanding becomes the dominant feature of their lives. Through this activity, the ordinariness of men, (of, for example, both Bartleby and the lawyer-narrator), is shown to be mysterious, for such ordinariness includes the contradictions of personality, the helpless good intentions of the heart, and the metaphysical enigmas of the individual's relationship to questions of Fate and Eternity, Being and Death. Silence, therefore, symbolizes in these three stories the inscrutability of men. Through the organized experience of this inscrutability, we also apprehend, without losing focus of the immediate events, the inscrutability of God and Nature.
Another feature of these tales is the everpresence of death. Death is not simply the literal event at the ending of the tale; symbolically, it inhabits the significant experience throughout. Yet, against what would seem a gradual disintegration of vitality through such a presence, there is a counter-movement of hope, fear, anger, discrimination, attempted love, that seeks to halt the inevitable cessation of being. The desperation in these stories to discover the truth is correspondingly matched by the urgency of Time. In "Bartleby", the narrator feels he must act immediately or else lose his reputation and his very sanity. In Cock-A-Doodle-Doo!, the atmosphere is imbued with impressions of disease and death, concealed momentarily by the invigorating crowing of the cock, and the threat of the dun -- which the narrator tries to put off -- is another manifestation of the subtle devitalizing influence of death. In Benito Cereno, Amasa Delano's mental peregrinations hold the fate of all on board the San Dominick; his very hesitancy to act on his suspicions ironically saves the life of Benito Cereno. In the life-and-death struggles of these stories, both the temporary reprieve and the eventual death are ambiguously related in the larger effort to denominate the inexpressible, the edge of which is always just beyond the grasp of the intelligence. How close Amasa Delano comes at times in his paranoid introspections to the truth of events and yet, when the "past is passed", how far he shows himself to be from an appreciation of Don Benito's suffering! In one sense, such an ironic paradox transcends literary manipulation. Its character we can describe in this way: consciousness expands and is felt as truth to the degree that it
confronts its own end. Perhaps this is one explanation for the strange magnetism of such figures as Bartleby, Merrymusk, Benito Cereno, that in their awareness of death, their utterances evince a degree of conviction that is otherwise lacking in anything else in the narratives. This paradox may also suggest one reason for the failures of the lawyer, the farmer, and Amasa Delano in their respective circumstances. They are unwilling to confront their own end, perhaps unable to confront it, and so, are for the time being "saved" from the consciousness of it.

As readers, we are put in a unique position by Melville. We are placed somewhere in between "Amasa Delano" and "Benito Cereno" and in the midst of the total ambiguity of their experiences we must work out our own proper relationship to the text. The uniqueness of our position is due to the fact that the totality of narration, commentary, and symbolization creates a meditative level of involvement. We move into the time of the text and share with Melville creative speculation about the evolving destinies of his characters. The claustrophobic tension of the psychological impasse in which Bartleby and Don Benito respectively find themselves is transformed by the text into a largeness of intellectual experience. This experience, predicated by the extremes of behaviour and metaphysical speculation in the stories, becomes for us a process of discovering what it means to be human, irrespective of time and place. We, as readers, are included in the poetic activity of challenging an unknown future through literary creation by witnessing the transformation of eccentric incidences into memorable and unanswerable performances.
Such a level of involvement has been described in this thesis as a feature of the stories' textuality. In Melville's hands textuality creates through its own artifice the condition of visible truth ("visable truth"); the difficulty of the visible truth is meant, possibly, to correspond to the difficulty of the appearances of reality. Thus, *Bartleby The Scrivener* itself becomes the exercise of the "apprehension of the absolute condition of present things". In such a perspective, achieved apprehension corresponds to revelation, but a revelation that is unique to being a witness to the inscrutable ordinariness of everyday existence.

Where the unusual, the bizarre, or the malign manifestly occurs as an accidental incident in ordinary lives, Melville places himself in such intersections as a familiar voice. How he does so has been the subject of this thesis through three particular examples. Why he does so can perhaps be expressed by using Hannah Arendt's words in her discussion of some contemporary problems of moral experience:

Whatever cannot become the object of discourse -- the truly sublime, the truly horrible or the uncanny -- may find a human voice through which to sound into the world, but it is not exactly human. We humanize what is going on in the world and in ourselves only by speaking of it, and in the course of speaking of it we learn to be human.120

...
LIST OF REFERENCES


3. Ibid., p. 181.


6. Robin Blaser (Dept. of English, Simon Fraser University, 1979), during tutorial conferences.


8. Herman Melville, Bartleby The Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street in Billy Budd, Sailor & Other Stories, ed. Harold Beaver (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967). All references are to this edition of the work, which is based on the first edition of The Piazza Tales (May 1856), and are included in the text of the thesis.

9. This refers to Melville's mythologizing of space in Moby Dick, especially as argued by Charles Olson in his Call Me Ishmael (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967).

10. Despite the excellent efforts of such biographers as Leon Howard and Jay Leyda, Melville's feelings about his own work remain largely unknown. We know that he was fascinated with the "Agatha story" and wanted Hawthorne to use it in a fiction. But neither men did re-work the story, and speculation that the Agatha theme of silent and patient suffering informs Melville's subsequent tales is risky if such speculation replaces the discovery of narrative experience. For biographical material on the "Agatha story see Leon Howard, Herman Melville: A Biography (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), pp. 197-203.
11 Ibid., pp. 201-208.


13 Melville acquired a copy of Don Quixote in 1855 but may have read the novel earlier. See Howard, p. 227.


15 Walter Sutton, cited in Franklin, pp. 133-134.

16 Harry Levin, The Power of Blackness: Hawthorne, Poe, Melville (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958), pp. 187-188. The possible similarity between Melville and Bartleby can only be useful as a minor perspective on the tale, if we want to avoid the reduction of art. Jay Leyda mentions that a friend of Melville's, Eli Fly, worked in a law-office and was institutionalized in a mental hospital -- information that gives some basis for the 'touch of madness' in Bartleby, [The Complete Stories of Herman Melville (New York: Random House, 1949), p. 455].


20 Maurice Friedman, "Bartleby and the Modern Exile", in A Symposium, pp. 64-81.


As for original characters in fiction, a grateful reader will on meeting one, keep the anniversary of that day... the original character... is like a revolving Drummond light, raying away from itself all around it -- everything is lit by it, everything starts up to it (mark how it is with Hamlet), so that in certain minds there follows upon the adequate conception of such a character, an effect, in its way, akin to that which Genesis attends upon the beginning of things.

24 Widmer, pp. 91-125. Widmer is good when he analyzes the personality of the narrator in its self-interests, although his analysis tends to polarize the figures of Bartleby and the narrator, a relationship which does not do justice to the efforts of the narrator to get to understand Bartleby.

25 Franklin, p. 132.

26 Fogle, pp. 17-19.
There is an interesting parallel to the narrator's exaggerated fear of Bartleby in a contemporary study of social psychology: The Manipulation of Human Behaviour, ed. A.E. Biderman and H. Zimmer (New York: Wiley, 1961), p. 4:

the inability to make others fulfill one's wishes; and the reverse, the fear of being controlled by others, with the consequent loss of the autonomy that is believed to be fundamental to the conception of the self. These opposites are incongruously exaggerated in paranoid thinking, one of the most prevalent mental symptoms of Western Man.

Franklin, pp. 126-133.

William B. Dillingham, Melville's Short Fiction (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1977), pp. 18-55. Dillingham sees the narrator as motivated principally by fear. However, Dillingham's analysis fails to account for the mysterious bond between lawyer and scrivener.


Lawrence Thompson, Melville's Quarrel With God (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), pp. 147-294. While Thompson was one of the earliest critics to note the subtleties of Melville's ironic tone in Moby Dick and Pierre, he weakens his position by insisting that Melville's motives were almost wholly cynical and satiric, thereby ignoring the ambiguity of the work.

If Melville's intentions are symbolic, they can only be so in a Swiftian sense, recalling the Irish satirist's vision of carnality as both unmitigated original sin and comic excess. Such a vision is close to the contemporary notion of 'black humour'.


Franklin, pp. 126-136.

36Pierre, p. 128.


38Ibid., pp. 454-455.

39See Matthiessen, pp. 445-466, for a good discussion of the metaphysics in Moby Dick.

40Franklin, pp. 132-133.

41Ibid., pp. 132-133.

42Pierre, pp. 138-139.

43Letter to Evert A. Duyckinck, 3 March 1849, in Davis and Gilman, p. 79.

44Matthiessen, pp. 431-445.

45"Letter to Hawthorne", April 1851, in Davis and Gilman, p. 124.

46Moby Dick, p. 287.


48Ibid., p. 287.

49Ibid., p. 287.

50Ibid., p. 292.

51Ibid., p. 295.

52Ibid., p. 292.

53Ibid., p. 295.

54Ibid., p. 295.

55Widmer, pp. 119-120.

56Hoffman, p. 420.
For now should I have lain still and been quiet, I should have slept; then had I been at rest,

With kings and counsellors of the earth, which built desolate places for themselves;


Mumford, p. 236.

Arvin, p. 235.


Howard, p. 210

Dillingham, pp. 56-74.


Bickley, pp. 62-66, summarizes some of the evidence of Melville's possible attack on Thoreau and Transcendentalism. Feidelson, p. 32, characterizes the difference between Melville and the Transcendentalists as:

The diversity that Emerson and Whitman easily accepted as new frontiers of exploration presents itself to Melville as a network of paradox.

Melville's irreverence at what he considered to be the superficialities of life may owe some influence to Rabelais. He had already read some of Rabelais in 1848, according to Howard, p. 115. Edward Rosenberry, Melville and the Comic Spirit (New York: Octagon, 1969), p. 65, quoting from a French study on Rabelais, relates:

What principally attracted Melville to Rabelais, beyond the rowdiness of his humor, was a spirit which he profoundly
shared with the Frenchman -- "the spirit which has the wish and resolution at any cost to maintain itself inviolate, free, superior to chance and circumstance, immune to every debilitating contagion of the mass-mind and mass-temper."

Maurita Willett, "The Silences of Herman Melville" in *Studies in the Minor and Later Works of Melville*, pp. 85-92. Willett provides a good general survey of the meaning of silence in Melville's fiction. The ironic significance of Merrymusk's name makes his silence ambiguous. Is his name merry music? According to William Bysshe Stein, the name means "sweet or pleasant testicle" (p. 5): "Melville's Cock and the Bell of Saint Paul", *Emerson Society Quarterly*, 27 (second quarter, 1962), pp. 5-10. The different possible root-meanings of Merrymusk informing the quality of the character's silence are an example of how complex Melville makes his images.


Ibid., pp. 16-23.

Ibid., pp. 23-32.

Ibid., p. 20.

Rosenberry's treatment of comedy in Melville's work illustrates many of Melville's devices, although Rosenberry does not pay special attention to the tales.

Melville's use of Wordsworth is not so much a parody as it is an ironic excursus, extended for altogether different purposes. Melville's interrogation of the ambiguity of creative power is not particularly a theme of Resolution and Independence. But Melville's thought is at times close to the vision of Wordsworth. In *Moby Dick*, ch. 70, "The Sphynx", p. 418, Ahab says:

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

Howard, pp. 208-210, tells us of Melville's fascination with the theme of "patient endurance" (p. 210). What gave tension to the endurance is possibly revealed in Melville's statement to Hawthorne:

What I feel most moved to write, that is banned, -- it will not pay. Yet, altogether, write the other way I cannot.

"Letter to Hawthorne", June 1851, in Davis and Gilman, p. 128. Melville was compelled to write in a kind of secrecy in his fic-
tion after Moby Dick, suggestions of which can be found throughout Pierre, to balance the demands of art and of the marketplace.

Olson, pp. 85-102, interprets Melville's comparative disinterest in the epic form, (other than Clarel) as a crucifixion of the spirit, perhaps due to his inability to rest comfortably in religious belief or unbelief. But although Melville wrote no more sea-epics, he did write more or less in the manner that he wanted, since Pierre, the magazine stories, and The Confidence-Man were not great popular successes and there is no evidence that Melville expected they would be.


Neumann gives a good account of the 'hero's' trials in myth and literature, albeit with a Jungian bias.

The relationship of freedom to transcendence, as a problem of consciousness, is symbolically characterized by Melville in the quotation prefacing his The Bell-Tower:

'Seeking to conquer a larger liberty, man but extends the empire of necessity.'

Rosenberry, p. 200, notes:

I am indebted to Walter Blair for the suggestion that Melville's style and narrative methods were influenced by oral "rehearsals" of his stories, particularly in Typee and Omoo, which he describes in his prefaces as having been "spun as a yarn" many times before being written down ... See also Julian Hawthorne's comments on Melville as a storyteller in Metcalf, Herman Melville, p. 100.

Herman Melville, Benito Cereno, in Herman Melville: Billy Budd, Sailor & Other Stories, ed. Harold Beaver (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1967). Beaver's text is based on the first edition of The Piazza Tales. All further references to the story are from Beaver's edition and are included in the body of the thesis.


85 Matthiessen, p. 508.


87 Fogle, p. 121.

88 *Pierre*, p. 167.


90 A good deal has been written about Babo's cruelty in this and other scenes, but the deliberate vagueness and ambiguity of the literal and metaphorical levels in the story make it unwise to insist on a strict white-black polarity. See Charles Glicksberg, "Melville and the Negro Problem", Phylon II (1950), pp. 207-215, for an interpretation of Babo as black revolutionary hero.

91 See Widmer, pp. 60-63, for an interpretation of Benito Cereno as existential dread. Dillingham, p. 259, sees the origin of this dread not in divided being but in the horrors of cannibalism, suggested by the manner of Aranda's death.

92 The sudden and momentary access of irrational fear is a feature of all of Melville's tales. Melville understood how close even the sanest of men could be to madness given the appropriate circumstances:

For in all of us lodges the same fuel to light the same fire. And he who has never felt, momentarily, what madness is has
but a mouthful of brains.


93 Widmer, pp. 82-83, shows a perceptive understanding of the narrator, though this thesis argues against Widmer's analysis of the story as an unresolved attack on the blacks.

94 For two contrasting views see Widmer, p. 78, who finds Delano to be a subtle portrayal of the "good American" and Barry Phillips, "The Good Captain": A Reading of 'Benito Cereno', Texas Studies in Literature and Language IV (Summer 1962), who envisions Delano as "priggish" and "treacherously stupid" (p. 191).

95 Pierre, p. 176.

96 Ibid., p. 285.

97 The Bachelor's Delight recalls, in its name, both the haven of The Paradise of Bachelors, wherein unmarried men find refuge from reality, and the "glad ship" Bachelor in Moby Dick (ch. 115). Both references stress the naive and fortunate as acts of moral innocence, a quality of being that is rendered ambiguous in the midst of evil.

98 The Encantadas, p. 134

99 Ibid., p. 132.

100 Ibid., p. 134.

101 Ibid., p. 135.

102 Ibid., p. 132.

103 Ibid., p. 132

104 Franklin, pp. 136-150.

105 Robin Magowan, "Masque and Symbol in Melville's 'Benito Cereno'", College English 23 (1962), pp. 346-351. Magowan provides an excellent treatment of ritual, but I cannot agree that the story is primarily an indictment of slavery.

106 Matthiessen, p. 508.
107 Arvin, pp. 238-240.


109 A good example of reader participation in the process of symbolization is Melville's reaction to Hawthorne's work. "Letter to Hawthorne", April 1851, Davis and Gilman, pp. 123-125.

110 For one of many analyses arguing Babo's heroism see Richard E. Ray, "'Benito Cereno': Babo as Leader", Studies in the Minor and Later Works of Melville, pp. 31-37.


113 Magowan, p. 348.

114 Nnolim, p. 40.


116 There are numerous allusions in the text to dramatic performance, as if a masque were taking place whose purpose is only dimly perceived by Delano. See Magowan, pp. 346-351, for a treatment of theatre imagery. The prevalence of mask imagery emphasizes the hiddenness of truth, and is mirrored in the language by what Richard Chase has called the "mood of withdrawal" (p. 152) in Herman Melville: A Critical Study (New York: MacMillan, 1950).

117 The Encantadas, p. 136.

118 Ibid., p. 136.

119 "Letter to Hawthorne" April 1851, Davis and Gilman, p. 124.


Weaver, Raymond. Herman Melville, Mariner and Mystic. New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1921.
