THE CITY IN MELVILLE'S REDBURN, PIERRE AND ISRAEL POTTER

by

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The City in Melville's Redburn, Pierre and Israel Potter

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ABSTRACT

The city plays a significant role in Melville's novels. It is important as setting and as an essential element of the thematic structure of Redburn, Pierre and Israel Potter. Little attention has been given, however, to Melville's utilization of the urban environment in his novels. It is the aim of this study to fill this gap in Melville criticism.

This thesis focuses on these three novels and on the opening sequence of Moby-Dick. It examines the changes in Melville's treatment of urban episodes and attempts to uncover the narrative principles at work in them. The angle of vision from which the city is viewed in each of these novels is appraised. An important part of this study is devoted to the examination of the sources of the urban episodes and to Melville's increasingly allusive technique in his treatment of cityscapes.

Chapter I of this study examines the Liverpool chapters of Redburn. Description and not narration predominates as the narrative mode in this novel. No sustained attempt is made to stress the tonal qualities of the cityscape or to link it with the narrator's consciousness.

Chapter II shows Melville approaching the city in Moby-Dick and in Pierre from a more subjective point of view; the details of the urban landscape are now carefully selected and tend to image the consciousness of the narrator-hero (Moby-Dick) or the protagonist (Pierre). Melville's ironic use of the country-city convention and the psychological realism evident in the urban episodes.
of *Pierre* are explored.

The final chapter of this study analyzes the London section of *Israel Potter*. In this novel the city is treated as a metaphoric wasteland and as a vast prisonhouse which confines the protagonist. The narrator now approaches the city through a technique of indirection and sets it in a context of myth, history and allusion. Melville has moved away from the city described (*Redburn*) to the city given a symbolic meaning.
For my parents,  
whose dream it is, that I should someday complete this.
"Now first they tell
The human mind is free to range
Enlargement — ay: but where's the change
We're yet within the citadel —
May rove in bounds, and study out
The insuperable towers about."

(Clarel, II, xxi, 38-43)
I would like to thank Professor Robin Blaser, for introducing me to the Melville after *Moby-Dick* and for his time and advice. I would also like to thank my friend Aaly Rahman for his suggestions. Especially, I would like to thank my wife Nazma for her encouragement and for letting me have all the time I needed to complete this thesis.
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INTRODUCTION

The extent of Melville's involvement with the sea has tended to obscure the importance of other areas of human experience in his work. The city, for example, plays an important role in Melville's fiction. It is prominent in Redburn (1849) and Pierre (1852) and plays a significant part in Israel Potter (1855). Many of the short stories also have urban settings: "Bartleby the Scrivener" is a story of Wall Street; "Temple Second" (1854) vividly recreates a sojourner's experience in London; "The Tartarus of Maids" (1855) draws a bleak picture of the Industrial City; "Jimmy Rose" (1855) places the fluctuating fortunes of the central character in a fast-changing New York. Later, when Melville turned from fiction to verse after The Confidence-Man (1857), he created one of the most memorable poems about urban disorder in "The House-Top" (1866) and a complex, powerful portrait of Jerusalem in Clarel (1876).

Of the hundreds of critics who have analyzed Melville's works, only a few have discussed the importance of the city to his art. Most of them have done so en passant, or have concentrated on a particular novel or a story. The result, more often than not, has been a lack of perspective. For in his treatment of the city, as in his treatment of every other theme, Melville constantly altered his angle of vision. Yet only two critics have attempted to do justice to the complexity and the breadth of Melville's involvement with the city. James Polk has tried to trace the image of the city throughout the canon, while Janis Stout has described the function of the city as setting in the fiction. Their studies are percep-
tive and helpful; yet, because of limitations of space, both Polk and Stout focus only on a few urban images and episodes in the different works.

This study tries to avoid the limitations of these approaches — the tendency to generalize on Melville's treatment of the city on the basis of a particular work, or the tendency to trace the role of the city throughout the oeuvre in a few pages. Instead, I will concentrate on Melville's approach to different cities in *Redburn*, *Moby-Dick*, *Pierre* and *Israel Potter*. My intention has been to consider as fully as necessary the different aspects of the urban episodes as they appear in a particular novel; at the same time, I have tried to situate Melville's utilization of the urban environment in any one novel in the context of his art in other works. In particular, I have tried to answer the relevant questions about Melville's intention and technique in these episodes: From what viewpoint does Melville approach the city in these novels? Why and how does he use sources and allusions and what do they reveal about his attitude to the city? What is the function of the city in the thematic structure of the novels? In what ways did his attitude to the city change and how were they reflected in his art?

I have tried to trace the movement from the particular to the symbolic in Melville's treatment of the cityscape and have attributed the changes in his presentation of the city to the changes in his narrative perspective. For example, the narrator-hero of *Redburn* stresses the local, the topical and the merely sensational aspects of Liverpool because of his proximity to the cityscape. In *Israel Potter*, however, the omniscient narrator
views the city from a distance. He can see it in its totality and can thus reveal the essential significance of Israel's situation. From his vantage point, the city becomes a symbol of the human condition.

I have also disagreed with some prevailing notions about the function of the urban episodes in the novel. For example, the dominant critical opinion about the Liverpool chapters, the belief that they represent the hero's initiation into depravity and misery, appears to me to be only partially true. To overemphasize the fact that in Pierre Melville extols the country at the expense of the city also appears to me to be a reductive approach to the novel. And to find in the London chapters of Israel Potter signs of Melville's exhaustion, as some critics have done, is to me a perpetuation of the biographical fallacy in Melville criticism.

I have not, however, tried to be comprehensive in my approach to Melville's treatment of the city. I have ignored the ship-as-a-city metaphor and have concentrated only on three novels since any further extension of my focus would lengthen this study immeasurably. Indeed, I have not tried to discuss all the cities of the novels. For example, the London of Redburn has been ignored entirely. Melville himself had not visited London when he wrote about it in the novel; as a result, his description of it is vague and inconsequential and does not illuminate his attitude to the city in any significant way. Melville made his most sustained attempt at exploring the significance of the city in Clarel; though I have discussed it only in passing, I hope that this study will be a suitable prologue to any examination of the role of Jerusalem in that monumental poem.
Notes

The dominant critical opinion of *Redburn* is that it is a story of initiation. F.O. Matthiessen pioneered this view when he observed in 1941 that "the account of Redburn's first voyage is a study in disillusion, of innocence confronted with the world, of ideals shattered by facts."¹ The ideals in Redburn's case were the great expectations he had about voyages to distant lands and the facts were the hardships and evil he faced on land and at sea in the course of his first voyage. Successive critics have developed this observation and have created a formidable body of criticism to illustrate the naive Redburn's conversion into "a sadder and wiser boy."²

Central to this approach to *Redburn* are the chapters on Liverpool. As Newton Arvin puts it:

Jackson is easily among the personal embodiments of evil in this book, but in addition to him and to all the personages, and more overpowering than any of them, there is the infernal city of Liverpool, a near neighbour of the City of Destruction itself. That older allegory is bound to occur to one's mind in thinking of *Redburn* and Liverpool, but even so, it was not until the nineteenth century that the great city, any great city, the great city an sich, could become just the kind of symbol it did become of human iniquity. In imagining Liverpool as he did, Melville was wholly at one with the deepest sensibility of his age, and in the dark, begrimed, polluted streets, the great prison like warehouses, the squalid dwellings, the loathsome haunts of vice and crime and the beggars, the quacks, the crimps, the peddlers
who populated these infested purlieus like moral grotesques — in all these there is a power quite comparable to that with which Balzac's Parisian Inferno is rendered, or Baudelaire's fourmillante cité, the London of Bleak House and Our Mutual Friend, or the Dublin of Ulysses. Melville's Liverpool, too, like his Lima, is a City of the Plain.

To Arvin, Redburn's Liverpool is a version of Hell; a symbol of evil reverberating with mythical overtones; the typical nineteenth century urban environment which attracted the attention of the finest artists of the time. Arvin's evaluation of the role of Liverpool in Redburn has proved to be immensely influential and has been echoed by R.W.B. Lewis, Harry Levin and James Miller, to name only a few of the critics who have interpreted Redburn as a story of initiation, and Liverpool as essential in the hero's developing vision of the world. Even critics who have not confined their attention to the "initiation" theme have concluded that the Liverpool experience for Redburn was an unhappy one. To them, Melville's treatment of the English city is nothing less than an indictment of urban civilization. Thus William Gilman, the author of the only book-length study of Redburn, has observed:

...in Liverpool, Redburn finds a commercial and relatively new metropolis, blind to the past and interested only in profit, inhuman in itself and dehumanizing its swarming populace. It allows widows and children to starve, and except for its churches it thrusts Redburn out of doors. In Redburn's awareness of the way a large city crushes both body and spirit in man, Melville makes one of the earliest statements of the cleavage between the individual and his environment in the modern world.

Similar observations can easily be culled from other critics who approach the novel from different angles.
In recent years, a number of studies, concerned specifically with the role of the city in Redburn, have come to identical conclusions. Harold T. McCarthy's "Melville's Redburn and the City", for example, quotes Arvin approvingly and repeats some of his observations about Liverpool. In her essay on the function of the city in Melville's fiction, Janis Stout calls his Liverpool "a veritable City of Dis" and Christopher J. Hooson, in his detailed analysis of the Liverpool chapters in Redburn, feels that to the mature narrator of the novel "Liverpool is shown to be not merely worse than New York but an affront to humanity".

There is thus a critical consensus on the importance of the Liverpool scenes and their ultimate purpose in Redburn's voyage to maturity. It would seem that these episodes offer to Redburn shock after shock as he encounters suffering, poverty and decadence everywhere. Critical attention has focussed particularly on two episodes: Redburn's discovery that his father's guidebook is no longer reliable and his consequent realization of the evanescence of all things, and the extremely graphic and horrifying encounter with a mother and her three children doomed to death in a cellar by a narrow street named Launcelott's-Hey. The numerous beggars, the grimy warehouses, the labyrinthine streets have also attracted some attention. These scenes and all the evidence seemed to support their interpretation of the Liverpool chapters and the city's effect on Redburn's sensibility.

In 1969, in an essay titled "Redburn and the Failure of Mythic Criticism", James Schroeter made the first attack on the seemingly flawless "initiation" theory. Schroeter pointed out that the stress on a pervasive tragic pattern was misleading. In his opinion,
the "mythic" approach is "contradicted repeatedly by some of the most important tonal and structural features of the novel."

Schroeter proved conclusively that the "initiation" theory thrived on a failure to take note of the "ironically comic tone" of Melville's narrator and "the dignity and complexity of Melville's comedy." Schroeter acknowledged the importance of the hardships suffered by Redburn but insisted that the ironic comedy at work should also be accounted for. He then proved his point by an analysis of Redburn's life at sea; his essay does not deal with the Liverpool section of the novel but does provide an alternative approach to these episodes.

That such an approach to the Liverpool section in particular, and to Redburn in general, is long overdue, can be easily proved by a rereading of the novel. What, for example, are we to make of the following observation made by the mature narrator as he reflects on his sojourn in the city:

These Liverpool days, however, were a famous thing for me; who, thereby, was enabled after my day's work aboard the Highlander, to ramble about the town for several hours. After I had visited all the noted places I could discover, of those marked down upon my father's map; I began to extend my rovings indefinitely; forming myself into a committee of one, to investigate all accessible parts of the town, though so many years have elapsed, ere I thought of bringing in my report.

This was a great delight to me; for wherever I have been in the world, I have always taken a vast deal of lonely satisfaction in wandering about, up and down, among out-of-the-way streets and alleys, and speculating upon the strangers I have met. Thus, in Liverpool I used to pace along endless streets of dwelling-houses, looking at the names on the doors, admiring the pretty faces on the window, and invoking a passing blessing upon the chubby children on the door-steps.... In the words of the old song,
"I cared for nobody, no not I, and nobody cared for me." I stored my fill with impunity and took all staves myself in good part (pp. 200-201).

Where, we can ask, is the gloom and the doom in the passage? Far from finding Liverpool a hostile, crushing, infernal environment, Redburn is here seeking to get his fill of the city, and his obvious delight in its sights and sounds hardly needs to be commented upon. And if he is lonely, such loneliness is certainly not the feeling of alienation. Instead of remembering his Liverpool experience with bitterness, the older Redburn obviously rejoices in his memory of the city (Lest we have any doubts about the matter, when Redburn says that he had a "famous" time, he is using the word in a colloquial sense. The O.E.D. tells us that "famous" is then an "emphatic expression of approval; Excellent, grand, magnificent, capital."). Surely, his delight should also be considered as part of his experience of the city.

Unfortunately, this aspect of Redburn's stay has been almost entirely ignored. The one exception to this is Michael Cowan, who in a footnote observes: "American Romantics were intensely interested in what the modern city had to offer in the way of human life.... In Liverpool, Redburn is 'filled with wonder and delight' at the large docks, which are 'full of life and commotion'" (p. 161). There are numerous examples of this in the chapters on the Liverpool docks and Redburn remembers with pleasure his stay in the Liverpool boarding-house on more than one occasion. Again and again, we find Redburn "gazing" at something, or being "pleased and tickled" (p. 167) or "struck" (p. 201) by some of the sights which meet his eyes.
In fact, what impresses Redburn about Liverpool is the varied nature of the city, and his senses are fully alert to "the singular spectacle" presented by the city streets: "Hand-organs, fiddles and cymbals, plied by strolling musicians, mix with the songs of the seamen, the babble of women and children, and the groaning and whining of beggars" (p. 189). Redburn remembers the strangeness of the scene and the attractive and the grotesque mingle in his memory.

In concentrating on only one aspect of Redburn's Liverpool experience, critics have not done justice to Melville's attitude to the city in his fourth novel. Critical sins, we should remind ourselves, are not only those of commission but also of omission, for can critics afford to ignore passages and episodes which belie the neat pattern they want to impose on a work of art? And once we note the lopsided emphasis on the negative aspects of Redburn's experience, we feel that a thorough revaluation of the Liverpool episodes is necessary.

II

The first clear view that Redburn gets of Liverpool is from the Highlander, as his ship comes to anchor. This initial image is immensely disillusioning: "the lofty range of dingy warehouses, which seemed very deficient in the elements of the marvellous" (p. 127), reminded him of the New York harbours. He had for long entertained great expectations about the English city and his disappointment, therefore, is very considerable.

We should note, however, the care with which Melville sets the boy's reaction in perspective. Larry, a whaleman who has expressed his contempt for "snivelization" (p. 101) throughout the
voyage, is now delighted with the sight before him: "Why, them 'ere houses is considerable houses. It beats the coast of Afriky, all hollow...I'm damned boys, if Liverpool ain't a city!" The image he had formed of the city and his initial response to it is just the opposite of Redburn's. Then there are the other sailors; they had visited Liverpool before and now they "acted precisely as you or I would, if, after a morning's absence round the corner, we found ourselves returning home" (p. 128). There is, in addition, the view of Max the Dutchman. He has a wife in New York and another in Liverpool; he is thus equally at home in the two ports and is "sure of receiving a hearty domestic welcome on either side of the ocean" (p. 129). Much later in the novel, Melville offers a fresh perspective on Liverpool. Carlo, an Italian boy with the gift of music, observes on the return voyage, as the ship approaches America, a country which is as unfamiliar to him as Liverpool is to Redburn: "I find my Italy somewhere, wherever I go. I even found it in rainy Liverpool" (p. 299).

What we have here is an early and less dramatic version of the "Doubloon" episode in Moby-Dick, which climaxed with Pip's cryptic "I look, you look, he look, we look, ye look, they look", or of the brilliant cluster of cantos in the "Mar Saba" section of Clarel, which centred on the Palm and the extremely varied responses it evoked in the different pilgrims. In these episodes, Melville is insisting on the relativity of truth and the limitation of the individual's perception. But the commentators on Redburn have ignored Melville's hints and have concentrated only on the sordid and disenchanting qualities of Liverpool.

In fact, once we become conscious of the importance of per-
pective in Melville's works, some other instances, relevant to our present subject, offer themselves. For example, the grim warehouses which so disenchant Redburn now, were once part of his "young inland imagination" when as a boy he had eagerly scanned ship advertisements. Then, they mingled with "old-fashioned coffee-houses" and "sunburnt sea-captains" (p. 4) in an exotic image, despite their grimy nature. Their association with the memory of his prosperous businessman father made them very attractive.

Similarly, the New York which appears to be so hostile to the young Redburn at the beginning of the voyage becomes a delightful place to him when he returns home. It is not surprising, then, to find the young boy so disillusioned by his first view of the Liverpool docks and his initial encounter with big city crimes. To the young Redburn, the difference between his expectation and reality is certainly disturbing.

At this juncture, we have to pause and take a look at the problem of point of view in the Liverpool section of Redburn. In some of these episodes, for example, in Redburn's "prosy stroll" through the town or in the Launcelott's-Hey incident, Melville tries to capture the immediacy of a young boy's reactions, and the feelings of shock and disbelief are natural to him. In others, like the description of the guidebook or the "famous" Liverpool days, we have the kind of control which the distance of years can bring. In the later chapters of the Liverpool section, for instance, in Chapter 41, there is also the suggestion that after the initial shock and disappointment is overcome, Redburn can react to the city with greater equanimity. We should note also the fact that despite the disenchantment caused by the first encounter with
the city, Redburn is later "struck" or amazed, by many other parts of Liverpool. Melville's contemporary, Charles F. Briggs, had complimented him on noticing "precisely those objects that must first strike the eye of a sailor boy on arriving at that part, and none others."\(^{15}\) Because this freshness of response is missing in the later episodes, we tend to find them uninteresting, and consequently, not worth our attention. Perhaps this also explains the excessive concentration on the guidebook and Launcelott's-Hey chapters on the part of the critics; a concentration which has resulted in an one-sided view of Melville's attitude to Liverpool.

III

Critics have been unanimous in their views about the importance of the guidebook episode in *Redburn*. They have noted that the chapter is located in the structural centre of the novel and have observed that Redburn's moment of truth is the discovery of the fallibility of the guidebook and the ephemerality of all things. Or as Merlin Bowen puts it: "Wellingborough's existential discovery that every man is marooned in time and that he owes both his loneliness and his freedom to that isolation takes place in Chapter 31, the pivot of the novel..."\(^{16}\) To Gilman, in this "central incident, to which Melville after careful preparation, devotes an entire chapter" Redburn is so disenchanted that "his whole vision of life crumbles."\(^{17}\) James Polk feels that in his discovery of the inadequacy of the guidebook, Redburn "learns that time and change are the masters of the city, and that his guide (and, by implication), any man-made guide to life's complexities is now worthless."\(^{18}\) As these comments indicate, critics consider the guidebook episodes
to be entirely serious and even melancholy.

The guidebook in question is a volume entitled *The Picture of Liverpool*. It was once used by Redburn's father, and is now in the possession of the young boy who has carefully read all the information it has to offer, as part of his preparation for the trip to the city. Willard Thorp has discovered the original for the guidebook and has studied Melville's use of it in the novel. Thorp feels that Melville has utilized the guidebook (i) to give Redburn something to do during his stay in Liverpool; (ii) to "borrow" its descriptions of the cityscape; (iii) to satirize the pretensions of this and other guidebooks; (iv) to create "several mock-serious passages moralizing on the passage of time" and (v) to emphasize his isolation and poverty in Liverpool. Thorp's comments on the satiric intent of the guidebook episodes and Melville's ironic attitude to Redburn's meditations, and his discovery of the several changes introduced by Melville for humorous effects, have been ignored by subsequent commentators. Since Thorp does not discuss the comic aspects of the two guidebook chapters in detail, we need to pay more attention to them.

At this point, I would like to direct attention to another possible source for the guidebook episodes: Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*. Though it is not clear when Melville first read Sterne's masterpiece, his influence on Melville's work has not escaped notice. Melville's contemporary critics had discerned the influence of Sterne in *Mardi*; in *Moby-Dick* Sterne's influence is evident in the way Melville "borrows" from writers on whaling like William Scoresby while at the same time mocking their pedantry; and in "Cock-a-Doodle-Doo", 
the narrator confesses his delight in the chapter on Uncle Toby and the Widow Wadman. In the next few pages, I will try to show some parallels between *Tristram Shandy* and *Redburn*; in doing so, I hope to point out the pervasive comic irony at work in the guidebook episodes. Our appreciation of this irony should further discredit the stress on the gloomy qualities of Liverpool.

What Melville must have relished in Sterne is his richly comic attitude towards his sources. Sterne would borrow extensively from them but would also mock their pretensions. He would pad his text with pages from his sources; often he did this with a "catch-me-if-you-can" challenge to his readers. One of his favourite tricks was to forestall any accusations of plagiarism with loud disclaimers; he would usually follow this up with some more raids on his sources. He would also retouch his source with a satiric intent and would change a word or two to introduce a comic effect. Often, he tried to give the impression that he was writing to the moment with the sourcebook in front of him; somehow he could also convey the feeling that he was winking at us because of its oddity. Finally, Sterne has the rare ability to move from a ludicrous context to an extremely serious one; or as he puts it in the epigraph to Volume III: "I do not fear the judgments of the ignorant populace, yet I ask that they spare my humble works — in which it has always been my intention to pass from jests to serious matters and from the serious back again to jests."²²

In the two guidebook chapters in *Redburn* and in subsequent passages, we can see Melville adopting a similar comic attitude to his source. Thus throughout Chapter 30, he quotes from his source or "borrows" from it liberally; yet he never misses an
opportunity to mock its affected and obsequious style. After he had filled the chapter with quotations from the guidebook, he decides to relinquish it, "for your antiquities would only be skipped and dishonored by shallow-minded readers, and for me, I should be charged with swelling out my volume by plagiarizing from a guidebook — the most vulgar and ignominious of thefts!" (p. 150). As Thorp has shown, the resolution is of no account, since in successive episodes he will again resort to his "old Morocco". Thorp has also demonstrated the "malicious" intent with which Melville often changes the words of the original. Recurring references like "But let us open the volume" (p. 145) or "as I now fix my gaze...Upon this faded and dilapidated old guide-book" (p. 148) remind us of its presence, but despite his reverential tone to it, we feel that Melville is always laughing at it. Sudden transitions, for example, from a mocking reference to the practice of guidebooks to fill their pages with history to a solemn reflection on "the vanity of all human exaltations" (p. 149), are also evident.

In addition to these general debts to Sterne, however, it is likely that in the guidebook episodes, Melville is using as his model a specific part of Tristram Shandy. This is Volume VII, which narrates Tristram's trip to France. In composing this volume Sterne made extensive use of an obscure guidebook by a Frenchman: Jean Aimar Piganiol de la Force's Nouveau Voyage de France. Van R. Baker has examined Sterne's use of this guidebook and has concluded: "It provided the entire narrative framework for Volume VII of Tristram Shandy; it gave some travel writing to parody; and it furnished subjects for some humorous and sentimental episodes." Melville probably did not know that Sterne was using a
specific guidebook, but the satire on guidebooks and travellers is apparent in any reading of Volume VII, and Melville's treatment of The Pictures of Liverpool suggests his familiarity with Sterne's attitude to his sources.

For instance, in Volume VII of Tristram Shandy, Sterne mocks guidebooks for spending pages on the exact size, history and antiquity of a town, as in this description of Calais:

Calais, Calatium, Calusium, Calesium.
This town, if we may trust its archives, the authority of which I see no reason to call in question in this place — was no more than a small village belonging to one of the first Count de Guines; and as it boasts at present of no less than fourteen thousands inhabitants, exclusive of four hundred and twenty distinct families in the basse ville, or suburbs — it must have grown up little by little, I suppose, to it's present size (p. 368).

Compare this to Melville's description of the content of The Pictures of Liverpool:

The first chapter begins in a methodical, business-like way, by informing the impatient reader of the precise latitude and longitude of Liverpool; so that, at the outset, there may be no misunderstanding on that head. It then goes on to give an account of the history and antiquities of the town, beginning with a record in the Doomsday-Book of William the Conqueror.
Here, it must be sincerely confessed, however, that notwithstanding his numerous other merits, my favorite author betrays a want of the utmost antiquarian and penetrating spirit, which could have scorned to stop in its researches at the reign of the Norman monarch, but would have pushed on resolutely through the dark ages, up to Moses, the man of Uz and Adam... (p. 148)

According to Melville's narrator, the second chapter describes the increase of population and prestige of Liverpool. This leads
Melville to some serious reflection on human vanity; yet the basic similarity between his method and Sterne's is obvious.

A little later, Melville's narrator decides to stop summarizing the contents of the guidebook since "it is far better to quote my old friend verbatim, than to mince his baron-of-beef information into a flimsy ragout of my own, and so pass it off as original" (p. 149). Melville is here using a double-edged sword — on the one hand, he is satirizing the attempt of guidebooks to pad their pages, while on the other, he is trying to distract attention from his already extensive "borrowing" from the original. The chapter on Calais in Tristram Shandy ends with a similar resolution by Sterne's narrator; he is going to give an account of a famous battle in the history of the city, but "as it will not take up above fifty pages, it would be injustice to the reader, not to give a minute account of that romantic transaction, as well as of the siege itself, in Rapin's own words" (p. 370). Sterne's satire here, is perhaps even more subtle than Melville's; not only is he mocking the attempt of guidebooks to fill their pages while at the same time concealing his source; but also he is hiding his real source (Piganiol) by a reference to the French historian Rapin.

Melville's resolution to quote directly from his source is as short-lived as Sterne's; he will not carry it out because it will abuse its "sacred privacies of fond family reminiscences" (p. 150) and because of fear of calumny, Sterne will desist since he does not want to debase the sacred relationship he has created between himself and his reader. Having made this "final" resolution, both Melville and Sterne continue to play their game with their sources, for as Thorp and Parker have pointed out, the two novelists will
not cease to rely on their guidebooks for further information.

The parallels between Melville's use of *The Picture of Liverpool* in *Redburn* and Sterne's utilization of *Nouveau Voyage de France* in Book VII of *Tristram Shandy* are also evident in Melville's thirty-first chapter. It is built on one theme: the young Redburn has studied diligently Liverpool's history, antiquities, population increase and public buildings and is confident that he has acquired "an unerring knowledge of Liverpool" (p. 152); but when he visits the places recorded in the guidebook—a fort, Riddough's Hotel (where his father had stayed), some statues, the Old Dock and the Abbey of Birkenhead—he discovers that these places are no longer the same. Frustration is also the keynote of Tristram's trip to France; he discovers again and again that the places he had longed to see and had read so much about were very different in reality from the images suggested by the guidebooks.

The climax of Redburn's frustration in the guide-book episode is the trip to Riddough's Hotel:

> My intention was in the first place, to visit Riddough's Hotel, where my father had stopped, more than thirty years before...For thus would I be performing a filial pilgrimage to spots which would be hallowed in my eyes....

> At last, when I found myself going down Old Hall-Street toward Lord Street, where the hotel was situated, according to my authority; and when taking out my map, I found that Old Hall-Street was marked there, with my father's pen; a thousand fond, affectionate emotions rushed round my heart.

> Arrived at the foot of the latter street, I in vain looked round for the hotel. How serious a disappointment was this may well be imagined....

> It was a sad, a solemn, and a most melancholy thought. The book on which I had so much relied...Yes, the thing that had guided the
father could not guide the son. And I sat down on a shop-step, and gave loose to meditations (p. 154-157).

Tristram's pilgrimage and the climax of his journey has a more comic climax; his sentimental journey is to the Tomb of Lovers about which he has felt so much:

As I knew the geography of the Tomb of the Lovers, as well as if I had lived twenty years in Lyons, namely, that it was upon the turning of my right hand, just without the gate, leading to the Fauxborg de Vaise....I walk'd with all imaginable joy towards the place — when I saw the gate which intercepted the tomb, my heart glowed within me —

— Tender and faithful spirits! cried I, addressing myself to Amandus and Amanda — long — long have I tarried to drop this tear upon your tomb — I come — I come —

When I came — there was no tomb to drop it upon.

What would I have given for my uncle Toby to have whistled, Lillobullero! (p. 406)

While Tristram's frustrations give rise to no profound meditation on morality, here and in earlier trips to Montreiul ("There is not a town in all France, which in my opinion, looks better on the map, than Montreiul....but when you come to see it — to be sure it looks most pitifully" [p. 373]), Paris ("And this is Paris! .... The first, the finest, the most brilliant — The streets however are nasty [p. 379]), and Lyons (where he goes to see a clock about which he had read in Piganiol but which sadly proves to be out of order [p. 405]), Tristram's vexations remind us of Redburn's many disappointments in Liverpool.

Nor are the resemblances between Sterne's Volume VII and Melville's thirtyfirst chapter confined to the discovery of the distance between expectations and reality. For instance, when
Redburn's reflections on his father's sojourn in Liverpool lead him to the unhappy thought that his father had not known him then, since he was not yet born, we have the celebrated Shandeyan logic in action. To take this passage seriously, as some commentators have done, is to miss the absurdity of such reasoning. Similarly, when after the Riddough Hotel incident, Redburn "tenderly" strokes the back of his guidebook and smooths "the dog-ears with reverence" (p. 157) instead of dismissing it, we have another of those sentimental effusions for which Tristram was so famous.

In addition to the mock-serious treatment of the guidebook and the young boy's feeling, Melville uses numerous other devices to put the youthful Redburn's "serious" reflections in an ironic perspective — devices which are in keeping with the "ironic comedy" which Schroeter had found in the earlier sections of the novel. An example is Redburn's "curious combination of clothing" (p. 153). He wears them with a great deal of seriousness and considers them as part of the rituals of his "filial pilgrimage". His actions here recall an earlier scene on shipboard when he had dressed fastidiously to meet the Captain of the Highlander. Our recognition of the comedy in both these scenes depend on our ability to distinguish between the naive, sentimental and self-conscious Redburn and the older, ironic narrator who can see the humour in the situation. Also, the fact that his shipmates, a drunken sailor, a passerby and the dock-police find his appearance singular, is further proof of Melville's ironic attitude to his hero.

In fact, it is Melville's strategy throughout Chapter 31 deliberately to undercut the solemn reflections of young Redburn. It is the failure to see this that has led to the excessively "gloomy"
interpretations of the guidebook episodes. The "mythic" critics have been confounded by the ambiguity in Melville's stance, an ambiguity which had not escaped the attention of one of his earliest reviewers:

Herman Melville and Redburn are two distinct personages, thus when Redburn does a silly action, which he does frequently, though he knows better afterwards, we find him enveloping it with rich thoughts and keen observations. How can we admit the fool in action with "the wit in mind?"

To notice Melville's fine irony is, however, not to deny that there are moments of genuine melancholy in this chapter—as in the contrasts between the young boy's poverty and his father's state; or in the reflections of his father's "trials and troubles" (p. 155). But the solemn thoughts are balanced by the ironic comedy at work in the guidebook episodes and we should recognize the complexity of Melville's stance.

Other comic incidents are recorded in the rest of the Liverpool chapters. There is, for example, Redburn's encounter with the bibulous skipper of a salt-drogher; the headstone he discovers under the arm of a drunk reads: "Here lyeth ye body of Tobias Drinker" (p. 178). His portrait of a petulant trickster is also laughable. The descriptions of tobacco smuggling by sailors and of the truck-horses in the docks are also in the comic vein.

In fact, the two pages on the truck-horses are noteworthy because they show Melville making use of the wit of another great eighteenth-century satirist, none other than Jonathan Swift.
horses...so full of calm intelligence and sagacity, that often I endeavored to get into conversation with them... (p. 197), we are reminded of the Houyhnhnms, and Gulliver's attempt to converse with the horses in his stables after his return from his final voyage. Our suspicions are increased by Redburn's observation: "No philosophers so thoroughly comprehend us as dogs and horses. They see through us at a glance." A few lines later, when Melville shifts his attention to the truckmen, we are reminded once again of Gulliver's state after his return from Houyhnhnmland. Redburn feels that "spending so much of their lives in the highbred company of their horses" had "mended their manners and improved their taste, besides imparting to them something of the dignity of their animals", though he is also aware that this had "given to them a sort of refined and uncomplaining aversion to human society" (p. 198). They resemble the Gulliver who found society repulsive after his return and who felt ennobled by his contact with the horses.

These likely allusions to Swift and the debts to Sterne indicate Melville's attitude to the Liverpool sections of Redburn. There is fine irony at work in his portrait of the young Redburn and a sense of comedy is always present in these chapters. To ignore this element and to concentrate only on the evil aspects of the city is to build a mythical Liverpool which is remote from Melville's conception.

IV

There is one important structural implication of Melville's use of the guidebook which we have yet to notice. However ironic
his intentions, the guidebook was a direct link between the city-
scape and the consciousness of the hero. Once Melville has done
with it, it becomes increasingly difficult for him to connect his
description of Liverpool with his hero's mental state. Another
consequence of the abandonment of the guidebook is the relative
absence of comic irony in the rest of the Liverpool sections. At
moments when the young Redburn is reacting to extreme suffering
or when he is delighting in the sights and sounds of the city,
Melville is able to recapture the immediacy of the young boy's
responses; but the feeling of discontinuity and the slackening of
the ironic tone in the rest of the Liverpool episodes indicate a
basic structural problem.

A few critics have recognized the unsatisfactory nature of
the remainder of the Liverpool chapters (though everybody has
excepted the Launcelott's-Hey episode) and have attempted to ex-
plain Melville's intention in including them. Thus Merlin Bowen
acknowledges a basic structural flaw but feels that Melville was
trying to relieve the tension arising from the guidebook chapters
by directing Redburn's attention to "the misfortune of others."²⁹
Gilman notices a number of repetitions in the Liverpool chapters
but attributes them to Melville's desire to toy with the reader's
sympathies.³⁰ Rowland A. Sherrill offers a very sophisticated
explanation for the diffused nature of this section of the novel
— he feels that in it Redburn is trying to develop "a democratic
attitude toward experience."³¹ And Hooson sees these chapters as
the outcome of Melville's intention to make "the city itself....
the subject.of the novel."³²

These explanations, however, are less than adequate because
they see in the section a formal pattern which is simply not there. They do not depend on a close examination of the text and fail to acknowledge a real weakness in it. For it is the very absence of any formal pattern in these episodes which is striking.

Melville himself acknowledges the random nature of these chapters in various parts of his narrative. At the beginning of Chapter 29, he declares that he has no intention of presenting a diary of his stay. Instead, he is going to "simply record the general tenor of the life led by our crew during that interval, and....then proceed to note down, at random, my own wanderings about town, and impressions of things as they are recalled to me now, after the lapse of so many years" (p. 136). At the beginning of Chapter 32, he introduces a series of chapters on the docks by merely adding that "besides making observations upon things immediately around me, I made sundry incursions to the neighbouring docks" (p. 161). In Chapter 40, he declares his intention to "throw" into it "various minor things that I recall" (p. 192). The title of the next chapter betrays its true nature: "Redburn Roves About Hither and Thither". And perhaps the weakest chapter in the whole book is Chapter 42, where he decides to insert an experience of humiliation similar to that he had recorded in Chapter 31, since he has suddenly remembered the incident "which may as well be put down here, before I forget it" (p. 207).

A closer look reveals even more clearly the very loose organization of the Liverpool section of Redburn. Chapter 27 and Chapter 28 are arranged in a chronological sequence but the next chapter is an extremely generalized, out of context, reflection on the lot of sailors. The two guidebook chapters which follow
and the seven on the objects of interest in and around the docks are arranged in groups but after this there is no further attempt to organize chapters according to any chronological or thematic sequence. In fact, the title of Chapter 40, "Placards, Brass-Jewelers, Truck-Horses, and Steamers" is a fairly good example of the miscellaneous nature of the information contained in these chapters of the novel. Within them, arbitrary transitions between disparate observations are frequent and are often introduced by phrases like "the floating chapel recalls to mind..." (p. 177) or "speaking of negroes, recalls..." (p. 202). And unlike in Moby-Dick, where the chapters on cetology and whaling are interwoven with the main theme in an intricate pattern, no real effort is made to give the Liverpool section a structure which will consistently carry forward the story of young Redburn's encounter with the world outside his village. To explain the absence of any order in these episodes by theories about Redburn's newly discovered attitude to experience or his awakened sympathies are perhaps valid till Chapter 39, but after this, such theories fail to fit the extremely varied and often irrelevant nature of the information assembled.

We know that Melville spent only two months in the composition of Redburn and—as his letter to his publisher, Richard Bentley, suggests—had enlarged it somewhat for publication in two volumes. After an examination of the text, Hershel Parker observes: "The external and internal evidence indicates that the parts written after July 5—namely the English section and the return voyage—were not planned in detail before he wrote them and were not composed in exactly the order in which they now stand,
and that in the last days of June important insertions were made at various places in the book, especially in the second half."\textsuperscript{34} The exact nature of these insertions is not clear, but Parker suggests that most of the dockyard scenes were written before the guidebook episodes. Because of the miscellaneous nature of the information in them, it is reasonable to argue that Chapter 40, 41 and 42 are later insertions also. Melville probably included them to fill his volume, for they fail to contribute to the main theme. At any rate, the Liverpool chapters do not make a structural whole, although at least one student of the novel has thought otherwise.\textsuperscript{35} On the contrary, they are fragmentary, loose and episodic.

V

Perhaps another clue to the unsatisfactory nature of the majority of the Liverpool chapters can be found in Melville's letter to his former publisher John Murray. In this important document, Melville explains what happened to him in the process of composing \textit{Mardi}:

Well, proceeding in my narrative of facts, I began to feel an incurable distaste for the same; & a longing to plume my opinion for a flight, & felt irked, cramped & fettered by plodding along with dull common places—So suddenly standing (abandoning?) the thing altogether, I went to work heart & soul at a romance which is now in fair progress.\textsuperscript{36}

Unlike in \textit{Mardi}, where he had let his imagination loose, in \textit{Redburn} Melville had stuck to "facts" and "Dull common places", since his romance had attracted fire and since he was now deter-
mined to write a bestseller. This, and our knowledge of the haste with which the novel was composed and our discovery of several instances of padding in the text, no doubt account for Melville's consistently contemptuous attitude towards his fourth book. On various occasions he called it one of his two "jobs", "a little nursery tale", "trash", "the thing", and "beggarly Redburn"; his dissatisfaction was caused at least in part by the excess of details untouched by his shaping vision. Consequently, as Gilman has observed: "much of Melville's art in the middle portion of the book consists of heightened journalism." To be fair to Melville, some of the descriptions are of a high order, and reveal a sharp eye for detail. For example, Redburn's evocation of the interior of the boarding house is the consequence of Melville's acuteness of observation:

I examined the place attentively; it was a long, narrow little room, with one small arched window with red curtains, looking out upon a smoky, untidy yard, bounded by a dingy brick-wall, the top of which was horrible with pieces of broken old bottles, stuck into mortar. A dull lamp swung overhead, placed in a wooden ship suspended from the ceiling. The walls were covered with a paper, representing an endless succession of vessels of all nations continually circumnavigating the apartment. By way of a pictorial mainsail to one of these ships, a map was hung against it, representing in faded colors the flags of all nations. From the streets came a confused uproar of ballad-singers, bawling women, babies and drunken sailors.

And this is England? (p. 133)

The details here are entirely relevant as Melville attempts to capture the feelings of an inexperienced boy in his first night in a big foreign city. Redburn is very alert to the sights and sounds of his environment and is striving to locate the strange-
ness which he feels should be there. The way the interior of the boarding room and the noise from the streets lead to the question, has, in the context, an inevitability that distinguishes this passage from mere journalism.

In the Launcelott's-Hey episode, the writing is very graphic and memorable. In the following excerpt, Redburn returns to the almost lifeless mother and her starving children with some water in his hat:

...with considerable difficulty, like getting down into a well, I continued to descend with it into the vault, where there was hardly space enough left to stand. The two girls drank out of the hat together, looking up at me with an unalterable, idiotic expression, that almost made me faint. The woman spoke not a word, and did not stir. While the girls were breaking and eating the bread, I tried to lift the woman's head, but feeble as she was, she seemed bent upon holding it down. Observing her arms still clasped upon her bosom, and that something seemed hidden under the rags there, a thought crossed my mind, which impelled me forcibly to withdraw her hands for a moment, when I caught a glimpse of a meager little babe; the lower part of its body thrust into an old bonnet. Its face was dazzlingly white, even in its squalor; but the closed eyes looked like balls of indigo. It must have been dead some hours (p. 183).

Here Melville tries not to concentrate on Redburn's reaction to the sordid scene (the exception, of course, is the expression that "almost made me feel faint"); instead, he attempts to reproduce the scene with an objectivity which can barely conceal the horror Redburn is feeling. Melville's stress on the claustrophobic setting ("there was hardly space enough left to let me stand"), Redburn's involuntary reaction ("a thought...which impelled me"), the almost mechanical narration of the scene, and
Redburn's description of the colour of the dead baby's face and eyes give a powerful charge to the flat, matter-of-fact concluding sentence.

In fact, when Redburn was published, most of the contemporary reviewers were quick to notice the vivid realism with which Melville had managed to convey the Liverpool scene. The reviewer of the Literary Gazette felt that "the minute local revelations of an American visitor" would surprise even the inhabitants of Liverpool; the London Daily News commented on "the elaborate account" of the city and the docks and the "Daguerreotype fidelity and freshness" with which it was rendered; Evert Duyckinck found the Liverpool scenes "reeking with life" and George Ripley thought of them as "depicted with a minute fidelity of touch". In addition to the Launcelott's-Hey episode and the boarding house passage, a few others transcend the level of journalese; these are the descriptions of the Church-yard at St. Nicholas, Nelson's Monument and the dockside beggars.

But these scenes are definitely in the minority and stand out at least in part because they are surrounded by pages of generalized descriptions where the writing lacks the comic irony of the guidebook chapters or the particularity of the boarding house passages or the compelling realism of the Launcelott's-Hey episode; nor do we have in them the freshness of response of a young boy observing the world around him. Typical of these passages is the description of Prince's Dock:

The area of the dock itself, exclusive of the enclosed quays surrounding it, may best be estimated at, say ten acres — access to the interior from the streets it had through several
gateways, so that, upon their being closed, the whole dock is shut up like a house. From the river, the entrance is through a wate
gate, and ingress to ships is only to be had, when the level of the docks coincides with that of the river... (p. 163).

Obviously, scenes like these, only provide information and make no attempt to contribute to the narrative or to focus on any particular detail. Such scenes tend to dominate in the later chapters of the novel (Chapters 32, 34, 35, 37, 38, 39 and 40) and consequently, Melville's style in them rarely rises above mere journalese. They remind us of a remark Melville made about the lot of sailors in the beginning of the section— the fact that they "only go round the world, without going into it" (p. 137). In other words, Melville is here writing at a certain distance from his object of description and there is no significant interaction between the object of description and his narrator's consciousness; nor is there an attempt to penetrate below the surface into the essence of the Liverpool scene.

In "Narrate or Describe?", Georg Lukács makes an important distinction between narration and description. To narrate, Lukács has shown, is to participate, while to describe is to take the standpoint of the observer. Thoroughness of description is not enough; the objects described must be truly relevant and must be integrated with characters and events. Because it does this, narration is the superior mode of representing reality. The Melville who had linked the objects described to the consciousness of a young boy in the early sections of the novel and in the exceptional episodes in the Liverpool chapters, had abandoned this narrative principle for simple description. As a result, there is
no drama and no action in these chapters; what we have instead is mere documentation. Or as Lukács would have put it: "With the loss of the art of narration, details cease to be transmitters of concrete aspects of the action and attain significance independent of the action and the lives of the characters. Any artistic relationship to the composition as a whole is lost. The false contemporaneity in description brings a disintegration of the composition into disconnected and autonomous details."  

VI

One implication of the discursive and descriptive style which Melville adopts for most of the Liverpool section in Redburn is that the city fails to become a metaphor and remains a particular place at a particular moment in history. In The City as Metaphor, David Weimer discusses the artistic approach to the city. The task of the artist, Weimer points out, can never be "reportorial", though undoubtedly the artist will build on facts. What matters is "the shape of his encounter" with the city and the imaginative transformation of it. To Weimer, the City in literature is essentially different from the cities of history or philosophy, for what we have in the fictional version is not the city "described" but the city "perceived". If we adopt Weimer's distinction, we can say that in Redburn Melville describes Liverpool; his perception of it is only rarely conveyed. Melville's emphasis on the literal reality of the city, his inability to see it as a whole, and the absence of any symbolical device which could have expressed his mixture of horror and fascination, prove this assertion.

We have to contend, however, with some opposing viewpoints
in refusing to see in Melville's Liverpool the city of nineteenth century symbolist literature. Arvin's attempt to see it as such and his comparison of it with Baudelaire's fourmillante cité ignores the daylight clarity with which Melville views Liverpool. Perhaps, the only occasion when the city appears to be unreal to Redburn is when he tries to "summon up some image" of it from the Highlander just before they reach the port. Then, it is shrouded with "the fog and mist and gray dawn" and this mingles with the mournful music of a buoy. But the image clears and Redburn is able to see Liverpool clearly after this. It never becomes a surrealistic entity like Eliot's London; nor does it become the City of Destruction or the City of Dis. In associating it with "the mythic city of sin and death", Stout supplies a context for Liverpool never suggested by the text.

In fact, an examination of the four or five allusions to mythical cities indicate that Melville did not want to associate Liverpool solely with sin and death. When he lists as one of the perils facing sailors in the city, "the notorious Corinthian haunts in the vicinity of the docks...in depravity...not to be matched by any thing this side of the pit that is bottomless", his allusion is set in perspective by the next unambiguous assertion: "And yet, sailors love this Liverpool...For in Liverpool they find Paradise" (p. 138). When Redburn discovers that the Old Dock he was looking for had once been a pool and was now the site of the Custom-House he is amazed; "for here the doom of Gomorrah seemed reversed, and a lake had been converted into substantial stone and mortar" (p. 158-159). Perhaps Melville's most elaborate attempt to link Liverpool with the mythical cities of sin and
destruction occurs in this passage:

This passing allusion to the murder will convey some idea of the events which take place in the lowest and most abandoned neighbourhoods frequented by sailors in Liverpool. The pestilent lanes and alleys which, in their vocabulary, go by the names of Rotten-row, Gibralter-place and Booble-alley, are putrid with vice and crime; to which, perhaps, the round globe does not furnish a parallel. The sooty and begrimed bricks of the very houses have a reeking, Sodom-like and murderous look, and well may the shrouds of coal-smoke, which hangs over this part of the town, more than any other, attempt to hide the enormities here practiced.... These are the haunts in which cursing, gambling, pickpocketing, and common iniquities, are virtues too lofty for the infected gorgons and hydras to practice.... They seem leagued together, a company of miscreant misanthropes, bent upon doing all the malice to mankind in their power. With sulphur and brimstone they ought to be burned out of their arches like vermin (p. 191).

Here, if anywhere, there would appear to be ample evidence for the critic in search of Liverpool's affinities with the archetypal Evil City. The explicit reference to Sodom; the hints of unnatural crimes for which the Cities of the Plains were destroyed and the apocalyptic imagery would appear to make such an interpretation inevitable. But Melville makes it quite clear that Redburn is reacting to a specific part of the town and his prophetic anger is aimed not at the entire population of Liverpool. Only the denizens of the worst area of the town are under attack. And, as I have tried to show above, Redburn has very mixed feelings about the rest of the city and its inhabitants.

Significantly, Melville does not compare Liverpool with mythical cities as he does in his later works, nor does he adopt a mythical framework even when he has the occasion to do so. We know
that he had acquired a copy of *The Divine Comedy* before he wrote *Redburn*, and as we shall see, he was to make the City of Dis the type of the Evil City in his subsequent works.\(^4\) The Launcelott's-Hey passage could be easily touched by his knowledge of Dante. The atmospheric details of the episode — the "dingy, prison-like cotton warehouses", the "solitary old warehouse-keeper, haunting his smoky den like a ghost", "the feeble wail" and the "dismal sound" which arise from the cellar and Redburn's descent into the vault — could easily be reinforced by allusions to Dante's version of Hell.\(^4\)

Finally, the absence of any allusion to the underworld of classical mythology indicates Melville's disinclination to treat Liverpool as a version of Hades. His criticism in this novel has a social and not a metaphysical intent.

The Launcelott-Hey's episode, however, acquires a more than local significance, by the very power of the description. A few other scenes also manage to transcend the level of sociological observation: the drowned sailor stretched out in a Dead House, "with the sleeve of his frock rolled up, and showing his name and date of birth tattooed upon his arm" is infinitely suggestive, for "he seemed his own head-stone" (p. 178); the dockyard beggars "who thronged the docks as the Hebrew cripples did the Pool of Bethsaida" (p. 188) typify a world of suffering and suggest the distance the world has travelled after the fall. These images tend to remind us of the "linked analogies" of the later novels. Their sparsity and Melville's disinterest in fitting them into a symbolic pattern, however, limit their force. At best, these images and the occasional movement from the object to an insight into the human condition — an example is the transition from the boast of the guidebook to
a reflection on the vanity of our exaltations — represent tentative attempts at a symbolic treatment. But they are not enough to make Liverpool a symbol of the city.

VII

The Liverpool chapters in Redburn were the fruits of Melville's first effort to capture in his fiction an urban environment. He was to make two more attempts in his novels to deal with the Cities of Man; but the city of Pierre and the London of Israel Potter were to be handled with greater art than the Liverpool of Redburn. The stress on the local, the topical and the merely sensational ceases to be important in these later works. Instead, in them Melville tries to experiment with the symbolic possibilities of the city. In these novels, the city becomes a metaphor and not just a place where their heroes happen to be. Some of these differences will become obvious in the next two chapters; for the moment, I want to explore the distance between the Liverpool of Redburn and the cities of the later novels by an examination of a few passages in the earlier work.

When Redburn sets out in his first excursion into the city with his guidebook and fails to see the sights delineated in it, his first reaction is to attribute the discrepancy to his "taking the horizontal view instead of a bird's eye survey" (p. 152). As elsewhere in this chapter the tone is ironic; yet the remark suggests the difference between the manner in which Melville's narrator approaches the city in Redburn and in the later novels. Redburn mostly looks at the city from a horizontal view; consequently his vision is limited since he is on a level with the
objects to be described. In *Israel Potter*, the narrator will look at London from an elevation which is on a level with the bird's eye view; as a result he has a totality of vision missing in the fourth novel.

Near the end of this episode, when he has had enough of the guidebook, Redburn asks rhetorically: "Is there nothing in all the British empire but these smoky ranges of old shops and warehouses? Is Liverpool but a brick-kiln?" (p. 159). The comparison of Liverpool with a brick-kiln is left undeveloped here; later in *Israel Potter*, Melville devotes two chapters to Israel's work in a brick-yard outside London, and makes the brick-kiln a symbol of the oppression of industrial civilization.

In "*Israel Potter* as a Source for *Redburn*", Harold McCarthy has compared the Launcelott-Hey's episode with the horrifying description of London poverty in Melville's source-book for his eighth novel. McCarthy's proposal is not very convincing but it does suggest an important critical point: in *Israel Potter* Melville makes no attempt to follow his source's sensational account of the urban poor, but in *Redburn* he had devoted many episodes to Liverpool's poverty-stricken populace. In the earlier novel his approach is almost naturalistic; in *Israel Potter* Melville develops the symbolic possibilities of the city.

Finally, the older Redburn's confession that he took "a vast deal of lonely satisfaction in wandering about, up and down, among out-of-the-way streets and alleys" (p. 200), looks forward to Pierre's compulsive night-walks through the city. But in the later novel, Pierre, is the alienated man in the crowd while Redburn, even though he notes the terrors, delights in his excursions into the
city.

These differences suggest the distance Melville will cover in his treatment of the city. It is the distance between the city as a place and the city as a symbol. The aim of the rest of this study will be to trace Melville's journey into a more metaphorical and metaphysical treatment of the city.
CHAPTER I

Notes


The University of Georgia Press, 1972), p. 50.


10 Dillingham, for example, has called the guidebook episode "the intellectual center" and the Launcelott-Hey's episode "the emotional center" of Redburn. See his An Artist in the Rigging, p. 54.


12 Despite the cogency with which Schroeter proves his point, his position has been mostly ignored. Subsequent critics have returned to the "mythic" approach, for example, Stout, in the article cited above and Edward H. Rosenberry in Melville (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), p. 69.

The question of point of view has been second only to the "initiation" theme in critical discussions of the novel. The theory which is now most widely accepted is that of Merlin Bowen who in "Redburn and the Angles of Vision," Modern Philology, 42 (1954), pp. 100-109, argues that the controlling consciousness is the older Redburn's. He is the narrator and moves freely between the past and the present and comments on his youthful expectation and adventures. Bowen feels that the balance between the mature narrator and the young Redburn is maintained in the first half of the book but in the later chapters, the retrospective narrator dominates. For an useful summary of the discussions on point of view, see the "Historical Note" by Hershel Parker in the Northwestern-Newberry edition, pp. 347-349.


16 Bowen, Introd., p. xxvii.

17 Gilman, p. 230.

18 Polk, p. 283.


20 In Melville's Reading: A Check-List of Books Owned and Borrowed, (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1966), Merton M. Seals quotes from Melville's journal an entry made in 16 December, 1849, during his trip to England: "Last night (read)
...a few chapters in Tristram Shandy, which I never yet read"
(p. 96). This would seem to indicate that Melville had not read
Sterne at the time of the composition of Redburn; however, it may
also indicate that he had not read a particular volume, since
Tristram Shandy was then circulating in editions of several
volumes.


22 Laurence Sterne, The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy,
Gentleman, ed. Ian Watt (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965),
p. 117. Subsequent references in the text are to this edition.

23 Thorp, p. 1150, 1155.

of Volume VII of Tristram Shandy," Comparative Literature Studies,

25 Gilman, for example, sees in this passage an "orgy of self-
pity" which spoils the effect, since Melville is thus exaggerating
"true sentiments into pathological extremes." See Gilman, p. 232.


27 Thorp has pointed out that this is another comic reworking
of the information in the sourcebook. In The Pictures of Liverpool,
the inscription read: "Here lyeth the Body of Timothy Horsefield..."
p. 1155.

28 Melville's Reading does not indicate whether Melville had
read Swift at the time of the composition of Redburn. But
contemporary reviewers of *Mardi* found in the novel the influence of the English satirist. Melville's acquaintance with both Swift and Sterne is suggested also by this passage in *Israel Potter*: "...a good-natured English clergyman translated *Lucian*, another, equally good-natured, wrote *Tristram Shandy*, and a third, an ill-natured appreciator of good-natured Rabelais, died a dean, not to speak of others." *Israel Potter* (New York: Russel & Russel, 1963), p. 109.


30 Gilman, p. 233.


32 Hooson, p. 98.


34 Parker, "Historical Note," p. 329.

35 Hooson, p. 110.


37 The quotations are from Parker's "Historical Note," pp. 321-332, where they have been very conveniently collected.

38 Gilman; p. 187.
There was at least one critic, however, who felt that the episode perverted the truth. See, *Heritage*, p. 199.


42 Stout, p. 123.

43 Sealts, p. 55.

44 Conrad would rely on Dante to give his story a mythic dimension in an episode of *Heart of Darkness* which resembles the scene in Launcelott's-Hey. This is the scene in which Marlow strays into a grove where emaciated blacks were wasting away and emitting feeble sounds.

CHAPTER II
Pierre and the City

I

After Redburn, Melville wrote two novels of major relevance to our study: Pierre and Israel Potter. But before we evaluate the treatment of the city in Pierre, we should consider the brief but important appearances of New York and New Bedford in Moby-Dick. For in his sixth novel Melville was already approaching the city from a significantly altered angle of vision: he was no longer interested in describing the cityscape but was concentrating on Ishmael's perception of the urban environment.

Ishmael's exordium to his voyage is unforgettable: it is a "damp drizzly November" in his soul; the state of mind when he finds himself "involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses"; when he feels that the only way to escape from the impulse to suicide and the "hypos" is to board ship; when he sees everywhere and in everyone the symptoms of his own malaise:

There now is your insular city of the Manhattoes, belted round by wharves as Indian isles by coral reefs — commerce surrounds it with her surf. Right and left, the streets take you waterward. Its extreme down-town is the Battery, where that noble mole is washed by waves, and cooled by breezes, which a few hours previous were out of sight of land. Look at the crowds of water-gazers there.

Circumambulate the city of a dreamy Sabbath
afternoon. Go from Corlears Hook to Coenties Slip, and from thence, by Whitehall, northward. What do you see? — Posted like silent sentinels all around the town, stand thousands upon thousands of mortal men fixed in ocean reveries. Some leaning against the spiles; some seated upon the pier-heads; some looking over the bulwarks of ships from China; some high aloft in the rigging, as if striving to get a still better seaward peep. But these are all landsmen; of week days pent up in lath and plaster — tied to counters, nailed to benches, clinched to desks. How then is this? Are the green fields gone? What do they here?

Ishmael's vision is a highly selective one; we realize that his New York is a state of the mind. Everything in him impels him towards the ocean and away from the land. The city is therefore insular and surrounded by commerce; the citizens the slaves of a monotonous and dehumanizing routine from which the only escape is to turn to the sea. Melville gives us sufficient information about the physical landmarks of the city and its harbour — the Battery, Corlears Hook, Coenties Slip, and Whitehall — but they are secondary to Ishmael's perception of the city and the necessity of voyaging. To him, the city is no longer a vigorous, livable environment: "what exists is the Trivial Unhappy Unjust City, the desert of the average from which the only escape is to the wild, lonely, but still vital sea."  

By the time Ishmael leaves "the good city of Old Manhatto"
and arrives in New Bedford, November has changed imperceptibly to December; the afternoon to "a very dark and dismal night" (p. 99). As before, Melville gives us the relevant information about New Bedford, but what really matters is Ishmael's state of mind; his anxieties colour the description of the urban environment. The street, therefore, is "dreary"; "congealed frosts lay ten inches thick in a hard, asphaltic pavement"; the houses are "blocks of blackness" and a candle is to be seen only at intervals, "like a candle moving about in a tomb"; it is the time of the night when the city-streets are "deserted" (p. 100).

What is really new in this chapter on New Bedford is not the desolation of the city but Melville's attempt to heighten Ishmael's end-of-the-world feeling about it by a number of biblical allusions. Thus when Ishmael stumbles over an ashbox while entering a door which stands "invitingly open", "the flying particles" of the box remind him of the "ashes from the destroyed city, Gomorrah". Unknowingly, he has wandered into a "great Black Parliament sitting in Tophet", being preached to by a "black angel of Doom" whose text has to do with "the blackness of darkness" (p. 101). The phrase is taken from another biblical passage which refers to the doom which overtook the Cities of the Plain (Jude 6-13). Ishmael moves on and comes next to an inn owned by a Peter Coffin. This inn is exposed to "the tempestuous Euroclydon" (p. 102) — the wind which had shipwrecked Paul in the Acts. Finally, when Ishmael sees (or imagines - the context does not specify) a beggar exposed to the wind, he thinks of the biblical parable of Lazarus and Dives. Through these series of allusions, Melville emphasizes Ishmael's feeling of doom and gloom in a strange and inhospitable
environment.

In the first two chapters of *Moby-Dick*, then, Melville is approaching the city from a very different perspective: (i) he is now carefully selecting his detail; (ii) these details image the mental attitude of his narrator and (iii) he is reinforcing the effect of these images by a series of allusions to biblical cities and situations. In *Pierre*, Melville further develops this perspective and we must now examine the role of the city in this novel.

II

*Pierre* is a very complex and very ambiguous work of art. It is also extremely carefully plotted and relies on a structure which uses conventions and comparisons and contrasts with impressive virtuosity. For these reasons, though the city is the setting of the last third of the novel, it is necessary to make some preliminary observations about Melville's intentions and his technique in the work as a whole.

Though *Pierre* is about many things, perhaps Melville's major intention in writing this novel was to portray the genesis, growth and consequence of a psychotic disorder in its central character. In the beginning we see a Pierre without any "interior development"; later he is acquainted with the darker side of the world, but throughout the novel he is tormented by sexual longings which he can never acknowledge or confront. In Book I, where Pierre is "barely emerging from his teens", we are aware of a scarcely concealed sexual interplay between him and his rather young and beautiful mother (pp. 4-5, 14-16); they call each other brother and sister
and sublimate their feelings in this and many other fictions. She tolerates his courtship to the angelic Lucy because of her "docility" (p. 20) and he idealizes the relationship into an ethereal routine. The artificiality and insubstantiality of the arrangement is exposed, however, when he confronts a mysterious face. Then, he feels that his "solid land of veritable reality, was...being audaciously encroached upon by bannered armies of hooded phantoms" (p. 49). He becomes aware of forces beyond his control but shrinks "abhorringly from the infernal catacombs of thought down into which, this foetal fancy beckoned him" (p. 51).

A letter from Isabel, the girl with the mysterious face, overwhelms Pierre. The narrator explains that "the strongest and fiercest emotions of life deny all analytical insight" (p. 67) and descends even further into Pierre's mind to account for his extraordinary reaction. Despite some signs to the contrary, Pierre had idealized his father; now, the discovery that his father had an illegitimate daughter changes his view of his parents and the world. He gets intimations of the "ineffable hints and ambiguities, and undefined half-suggestions, which now and then people the soul's atmosphere" (p. 84). He pledges to redress the wrong done to Isabel. But as the narrator plunges even deeper into "the endless winding way — the flowing river in the cave of man" (p. 107), still other motives appear which complicate Pierre's "unprecedented resolution" to forsake everything — his mother, Lucy, the Saddle-Meadows world — for Isabel. We realize that Pierre is attracted sexually to Isabel, but once more, is forced to suppress his feelings for a woman (pp. 112-113, 142, 145, 149-150) and is driven to subterfuge with himself and with others. He will protect his
father's reputation and yet do justice to Isabel by pretending marriage to her. But with a perspicacity wonderful for someone writing before Freud, the narrator explains:

his proposed extraordinary resolve — namely, the nominal conversion of a sister into a wife — might have been found in the previous conversational conversion of a mother into a sister; for hereby he had habituated his voice and manner to a certain fictitiousness in one of the closest domestic relations of life; and since man's moral texture is porous, and things assumed upon the surface, at last strikes in — hence, this outward habituation to the above-named fictitiousness had insensibly disposed his mind to it as it were....in sport he learnt the terms of woe (p. 177).

So Pierre departs for the city with Isabel and in it, his incestuous feeling for her intensifies. There is even a suggestion that the relationship is consummated (p. 272-274). But from his entry into the city to the end, Pierre is tormented by guilt and horrified by what he feels. We see him slowly loosing control over himself (for example, in p. 318) and finally, in sheer desperation, he commits murder and then suicide.

The focus of Pierre, then, is on Pierre's mind and his painful and confused sexual consciousness. Everything in the novel—Melville's narrative technique; his use of allusions; setting; of romance, gothic and melodramatic conventions; such stereotypes as the contrast of the country and the city—are explicable in this light. But because Melville was not writing a psychological case-history and because he was dealing with subjects which were too delicate for his contemporaries, he was forced in this novel to experiment with point of view and the possibilities of what one critic has called "duplicitious communication".
Though *Pierre* represents Melville's first attempt at using an omniscient narrator, he is closer in this novel to his hero's consciousness than in any other of his works. Most of the story is presented from Pierre's point of view, but Melville is careful to make a distinction between his way of viewing events and the narrator's consciousness at certain critical instances. One example of this will have to suffice: after following Pierre's thoughts about his midnight call to Reverend Falsgrave, the narrator comments: "But the thoughts we here indite as Pierre's are to be very carefully discriminated from those we indite concerning him" (p. 167).

It is important to emphasize this point because a failure to appreciate the complexity of Melville's stance has led to numerous errors in interpretation. Thus, one of the persistent approaches to the role of the city in *Pierre* has been through the opening sequence where the city seems to be belittled at the expense of the country. One of the first critics to adopt this point of view was Harry Levin in *The Power of Blackness*: "His (Pierre's) nightmarish transference from the green sward of his mother's domain to the pavements of the bleak city has been a shift from 'Paradisiac beauty' to 'Tartarean misery'". But perhaps the most representative statement of this belief is to be found in Morton and Lucia White's *The Intellectual Versus the City*:

The theme of elbowing heartlessness in New York City was developed by Melville in *Pierre*..... There he more explicitly attacked commercialism, the city's greedy and grasping ways. Pierre was no match for this, for it was his "choice fate to have been born and nurtured in this country, surrounded by scenery whose uncommon loveliness was the perfect mould of a delicate and poetic
mind"....Poetical, philosophical, and aristocratic Pierre is out of place in the plebeian city....The city is represented in Pierre as the hard-hearted, paved home of intellect, and the novel is dotted with invidious comparisons between the metropolitan head and the rural heart.

The major problem with this interpretation is that it tends to approach the novel as a quotation book for sociological observation rather than treating it as a complex arrangement of imagery, symbols, verbal ironies and movements. To take just one instance of this, one of the quotations used by the Whites to illustrate their point appears at first to be unambiguous: If it was Pierre's "choice fate" (p. 5) to have been born in the country, it would appear to be his particular misfortune to have been exposed to the city. The phrase is repeated and italicized a few pages later: "it had been the choice fate of Pierre to have been born and bred in the country" (p. 13). The context, where the narrator calls the country "the most poetical...philosophical...aristocratic...venerable" part of the earth, in contrast to the "plebeian...dirty...unwashed...smoky" and stony city, reinforce the feeling that Melville is utilizing the contrasts of the pastoral convention. The next paragraph, however, hints ominously that Nature might finally prove "ambiguous" and indicates that the blessing might depart from this green world, but the point is made in an ambiguous way and almost en passant. A few episodes later, when Pierre is brooding over the contents of Isabel's letter, the word "choice" reappears in a different context: in a soliloquy, Pierre calls Fate "a palterer and cheat" who has lured him "through gay gardens to a gulf"; consequently, he has "a choice quarrel" with it (p. 65).
But all ambiguities disappear when the full implication of Pierre's "choice fate" is evident a few pages later:

So choicely, and in some degree, secludedly nurtured, Pierre, though now arrived at the age of nineteen, had never yet become so thoroughly initiated into that darker, though truer aspect of things, which an entire residence in the city from the earliest period of life, almost inevitably engravés upon the mind of any keenly observant and reflective youth of Pierre's present years (p. 69).

This sentence is crucial to our understanding of the numerous country-city contrasts made throughout the earlier section of the novel. The earlier view of the countryside as a "glorious benediction" (p. 14) is not true, because it depends on an artificial view which ignores the presence of evil. The celebration of the country and the denigration of the city now appear to be relevant to the narrative strategy only insofar as Melville is trying to capture Pierre's feelings of security and delight. Indeed, the apparently contradictory passage in the opening section of the novel which had celebrated the advantages of the ideal mixture of "the large and polished society" of the city and "the country's clarion air" (p. 61), now fits into this pattern: the country and the city were both once part of Pierre's golden world; in his adolescence the country appeared to be conventionally beautiful; but with his exposure to the darker side of the world, it is no longer possible for Pierre to view his universe as a terrestrial paradise. The terrors of the rural landscape begin to appear intermittently after his first exposure to the face (pp. 38, 40, 61); after he receives Isabel's letter, all glory vanishes from the countryside (pp. 92, 109-110, 136). In Isabel's haunting story of her early life, nature
appears to be almost horrifying with its "stunted pine woods", "ghastly pines" (p. 114); "hissing" cats, snapping pine-trees (p. 117), snakes and lightnings (p. 122). And in a second reading of the novel we find more proof of these "inhumanities" in the Saddle Meadows world. Thus Mary Glendinning's haughtiness; Pierre's distrust of solitary village streets (p. 23) and fear of village gossips (p. 52); the narrow and prudential morality of the populace exemplified in Reverend Falsgrave and the treatment of Delly now point toward a less than perfect world.

The important point to note in all these instances is that in Pierre setting is almost always tied to Pierre's mental state and our perception of this is crucial to any discussion of the roles the countryside and the cityscape play in the novel. It is also important to note the signs Melville plants in the course of the novel to show the solipsistic quality of Pierre's field of vision. To imagine that Melville could write without irony or any other motive in the cloying, reverential, exaggerated style of the opening section is to underestimate seriously Melville's intention. Much later in the novel, in a passage almost entirely ignored by his critics, Melville's narrator makes the severest indictment possible of the idealized picture of the countryside drawn in the opening episodes of the novel:

If the grown man of taste, possess not only some eye to detect the picturesque in the natural landscape, so also, has he as keen a perception of what may not unfitly be here styled, the povertiresque in the social landscape. To such an one, not more picturesquely conspicuous is the dismantled thatch in a painted cottage at Gainsborough, than the time-tangled and want-thinned locks of a beggar, povertiresquely diversifying those snug little
cabinet-pictures of the world, which, exquisitely varnished and framed, are hung up in the drawing-room minds of humane men of taste, and amiable philosophers of either the "Compensation" or "Optimist" school. They deny that any misery is in the world, except for the purpose of throwing the fine povertiresque element into its general picture....

Not that in equivocal reference to the povertiresque old farmer Millthorpe, Pierre is here intended to be hinted at. Still, man cannot wholly escape his surroundings. Unconsciously Mrs. Glendinning had always been one of these curious optimists; and in his boyish life Pierre had not wholly escaped the maternal contagion. Yet often, in calling at the old farmer's for Charles of some early winter mornings, and meeting the painfully embarrassed, thin, feeble creatures of Mrs. Millthorpe, and the sadly inquisitive and hopelessly half-envious glances of the three little girls, and standing on the threshold, Pierre would catch low, aged, life-weary groans from a recess out of sight from the door; then would Pierre have some boyish inklings of something else than the pure povertiresque in poverty... (pp. 276-277).

This passage is significant, not only as a statement of Melville's aesthetics but also as a hint that the point of view in the first few books is Pierre's. Pierre had ignored the darker side of life and his discovery of evil shades his view of the world in the rest of the novel.

The story of Charles Millthorpe and his family, in fact, functions as a foil to Pierre's. For Charlie and his family, life in the village was always hell; when he grew up, he abandoned this world because he knew that "he had nothing to leave behind him but his plow and his hoe; his mother was sickly, his sisters pale and delicate, and finally, life was a fact, and the winters in that part of the country exceedingly bitter and long" (p. 279). In the city, Charlie had managed to eke out a tolerable existence for himself and his family and had even succeeded in advancing towards
prosperity by hard work. Charles exists in the novel, not only as a somewhat fatuous Horatio to the Hamlet-like Pierre, but also as a reminder that the country-city contrast can cut both ways.

III

Melville's complex treatment of the country-city convention and his control of point of view emphasize the intricate structure of Pierre. Also contributing to the architectonics of the novel are the numerous allusions to Dante's Inferno. In Dante's poem, Melville discovered a useful metaphor for the city, and in his depiction of the urban environment in Pierre, Israel Potter and Clarel, he made frequent references to Dante's City of Dis. In this section of the study, we will try to see how Melville coloured the portrait of the city in Pierre with his knowledge of the Inferno.

Melville acquired a copy of Henry Francis Cary's translation of The Divine Comedy in June, 1848. While in London in 1849, he recorded this revealing passage in his journal:

Went down to the bridges to see the people crowding there. Crossed by Westminster, through the Parks to the Edgeware Road, & found the walk delightful — the sun coming out a little, & the air not cold. While on one of the Bridges, the thought struck me again that a fine thing might be written about a Blue Monday in November London — a city of Dis (Dante's) — clouds of smoke — the damned &c — its marks are left upon you, &c. &c. &c. 10

It was not until Israel Potter that Melville attempted to reproduce this visual image in his fiction; but the marks of the metaphorical City of Dis are evident in Pierre's entry into the territory of the
Damned in Melville's seventh novel. Also in November-December, 1848, Melville obtained a French edition of Flaxman's drawings for Dante's poem; in creating Pierre's Inferno, he made use of Flaxman's illustrations. 11

There are several significant and explicit allusions to Flaxman's Dante and the Inferno in the first half of the novel (pp. 42, 54, 85), but the first notable allusion relevant to our subject occurs after Pierre has pledged himself to the support of Isabel and Delly. He returns to his study, where Dante's poem and Hamlet are conspicuous among the many scattered books and papers. Almost without thinking, he opens the Inferno. There,

his eye met the following lines, allegorically overscribed within the arch of the outgoings of the wombs of human life:

"Through me you pass into the city of Woe;
Through me you pass into eternal pain;
Through me, among the people lost for aye.
* * * * * * * * * *
All hope abandon, ye who enter here."

He dropped the fatal volume from his hand; he dropped his fated head upon his chest (p. 168).

The City of Woe is Dante's City of Dis, and the lines from the Inferno are the inscription over the open gates of Hell which must be passed before the entry into the underworld can be made. These lines are relevant not only because they indicate Pierre's emotions at this time — he realizes that he has abandoned the world of felicity with his discovery of evil — but also because they hint at Pierre's resolution to depart for the city, though this event will not actually take place for six more Books. Also, Pierre's identification of the City of Woe with his deeper knowledge of the world,
remind us of the narrator's earlier observation: Pierre's "choice" fate had prevented him from discovering "the darker, though truer aspect of things" which life in the city instills (p. 69).

In describing the events of Pierre's first night in the city, Melville frequently alludes to Dante's poem. Book XVI of Pierre contains numerous parallels with Cantos VIII and IX of the Inferno, where Dante describes his descent into the City of Dis with his guide, Virgil. This is how Canto VIII begins:

My theme pursuing, I relate, that ere  
We reach'd the lofty turret's base, our eyes  
Its height ascended, where we mark's uphung  
Two cressets, and another saw from afar  
Return the signal, so remote that scarce  
The eye could catch its beams. I turning round  
To the deep source of knowledge, thus inquired,  
"Say what this means; and what, that other light  
In answer set: what agency doth this?"  
"There on the filthy waters", he replied  
"E'en now what next awaits us mayst thou see,  
If the marsh-gendered fog conceal it not."

In Book XVI, Pierre and his menage enter the city by a "Wide and winding street"; when their coach arrives at "the top of the long and very gradual slope running toward the obscure heart of the town" they see "the twinkling perspective of two long and parallel rows of lamps". These lamps do little "to dispel the general gloom", instead, they seem to lead "into some gloom still deeper beyond". From their vantage point, the town "seemed dimly and despondently to capitulate to the eye". Isabel and Delly turn to Pierre for information and encouragement, but unlike Virgil, he is not able to comfort his escorts; on the contrary, the narrator comments later on the dangers they had been exposed to, in their first night in the city (p. 235). Thus when Isabel questions Pierre about the street-lights: "What are these side-glooms, dear Pierre,
whither lead they?" (p. 230), Pierre further unnerves them with his reply: "They are thin tributaries, sweet Isabel, to the great Oronoco thoroughfare we are in; and like true tributaries, they come from far-hidden places; from under dark beetling secrecyes of mortar and stone; through the long marsh-grasses of villainy, and by many a transplanted bough-beam, where the wretched have hung." (p. 231).

Virgil and Dante meet on the shores of the Styx the irate boatman, Phylegus. His duty is to transport wrathful spirits to their proper destinations in the City of Dis. In Pierre, the cabman conducting them to the city incense Pierre by his "surliness" (p. 232). The narrator reflects on the notoriety of coachmen in general, and calls them "Charon ferry-man to corruption and death" (p. 233).

After some very galling situations Pierre returns to a watch-house of the city, where he had left Isabel and Delly behind. There, he encounters "indescribable disorder, frantic, diseased-looking men and women of all colors, and in all imaginable flaunting, immodest, grotesque, and shattered dresses.....leaping, yelling, and cursing him" (p. 240). The scene is like the one Dante and Virgil confront in Canto IX, when they are exposed to the menacing furies: "Their breast they each one clawing tore; themselves/ Smote with their palms, and such thrill clamor raised" (p. 34). In fact, scenes like the one Pierre witnesses in the watch-house are frequent in the Inferno. An earlier scene in Canto III, soon after the poet and his guide cross the entrance to the nether world, includes the following lines: "Various tongues,/ Horrible languages, outcries of woe,/ Accents of anger, voices deep and hoarse,/ With
hands together smote that swell'd the sounds, made up a tumult..." (p. 10). Again, in the Second Circle of Hell, the duo listen to the "shrieks", "lamentations", "moans" and "blasphemies 'gainst the good Power in Heaven" being emitted by the "carnal sinners" in whom "Reason by lust is sway'd" (p. 18). Indeed, the cacophony and the tumult in the watch-house, "the combined babel of persons and voices", "syllables obscure and accursed", are explicitly attributed to the inmates of the "infirmaries and infernos of hell" (p. 240).

(Dante's *Inferno* is not merely the story of a descent into the underworld.) It is more significantly a "journey of self-knowledge into the possibilities of depravity". It is also a journey which promises at the end eventual ascent into an Earthly Paradise through this knowledge of evil. Similarly, Pierre's descent into the City of Woe is not merely a literal journey to a hellish city. The hell in Pierre is in himself and he is condemned to this nether world, since in him ideals have been contaminated by desire, and his vow to look after Isabel has been mired by his incestuous longings. An earlier allusion to Paola and Francesca—sinners in the second circle who were condemned for their incestuous love—now becomes clearer: there is no escape for Pierre from his City of Dis. In the city, Pierre is sentenced to a "general inclusive hell" (p. 306) by his own acts. (Not surprisingly, the book written by a mind exposed to such forces, should be called another "Inferno") (pp. 317-319).

Throughout the novel, Pierre displays the sins of Pride, despondency, carnal desire and Wrath. These are some of the traits exhibited by the sinners in Dante's City of Dis. Some of these sins
are especially noticeable in Pierre's behaviour after his arrival in the city. In fact, Nathalia Wright argues that Pierre's residence in the Church of the Apostles and the sections of the novel devoted to his stay in the city, show parallels with the last three circles of Dante's Hell, particularly the twelve cantos about Maleboge, the eighth Circle of the nether world. This may very well be so—though it is difficult to believe that Melville was trying to adopt a "mythical method" which applies a Joyce-like continuous parallel between a mythical city and a contemporary one—but at any rate, the important point to keep in mind is this: in Pierre, Melville reinforced his portrait of a fictional city by a series of allusions to another fictional city.

IV

There are, then, at least two different levels from which the events in Pierre's first night in the city can be viewed. On the surface, Pierre's experience is yet another story of a provincial young man's exposure to the Evil City. This approach puts Pierre squarely in a well-established tradition—a tradition in English fiction going at least as far back as Joseph Andrews and in American Fiction to William Hill Brown's The Power of Sympathy (1789) or Sussana Rowson's Charlotte Temple (1791). But on the other, and more significant level, the city becomes a projection of the Inferno within Pierre, and the objects and the events in the city are really images of his inner turmoil.

On the superficial level, the urban landscape is delineated with considerable realism. Pierre and his companions enter the city at night, at a time when the shops are closing and the citizens
hurrying home. Isabel and Delly's feelings of unease and insecurity in their first night in the city are plausible — though Delly's comment on the city's pavement is ironic ("It feels not so soft as the green sward" [p. 230]), since she has been forced to flee from the hard-hearted rural community of Saddle Meadows. The sound of shop-shutters going down, the disquietening silence of deserted city streets at night, the gruff cab-driver, are recognizable urban images. The description of the police station — "a large, plain, and most forbidding-looking room, with hacked wooden benches and bunks ranged along the sides, and a railing before a desk at one corner" (p. 235) — is also realistic. The overdressed and solicitous prostitute and the cry of the hackmen calling passengers are familiar city sights and sounds. And if the chaos inside the police-station after Pierre returns from his meeting with Stanly appears to be exaggerated, the realistic tone is restored in the comic but convincing description of the desk-clerk in the hotel.

Indeed, we have the distinct feeling that in certain passages of Book XVI, Melville is deliberately stressing the conventionality of Pierre's experience. In the opening section of Pierre, Melville had utilized the romance for ambiguous reasons; in the concluding section he will exploit the conventions of romantic melodrama; in Book XVI Melville seems to be using the Evil City stereotype of popular fiction. Thus Pierre's reflection on the overtures of the prostitute — "My God...the town's first welcome to youth!" (p. 237) — echoes self-consciously the tone of numerous urban novels. Again, when Pierre "rescues" Isabel from the tumultuous scene in the police-station by delivering "an immense blow of his mailed fist to a half-clad whiskerando" (p. 241), he enacts the part of
innumerable dime-novel heroes, a fact noticed but not appreciated by Henry A. Murray. 16

What is really fascinating and original in Book XVI, however, is Melville's attempt at linking the cityscape with Pierre's consciousness and his application of a technique appropriate to this intention. We must remember that by the time Pierre enters the city, he is already harbouring very "dark" and "wild" thoughts (p. 205), and is torn between the feelings of guilt caused by his treatment of Lucy and his mother and the "nameless awfulness of his still imperfectly conscious, incipient, new-mingled emotion" towards Isabel (p. 206). In the coach he is strangely silent, though his emotions must have been further shaken by the knowing words of the Plinlimmon pamphlet: "almost invariably, with inferior beings, the absolute effort to live in this world according to the strict letter of the chronometricals is, somehow, apt to involve those inferior beings eventually in strange, unique follies and sins, unimagined before" (p. 213).

To someone in Pierre's state of mind, every bush is bound to conceal a bear and every closet a skeleton. Thus when he feels that the city-streets emerge "from under dark beetling seccrecies of mortar and stone" and that "brick and mortar have deeper secrets than wood or fell" (p. 231), we remember the secrets concealed by his father's ambiguous portrait and his own half-hidden, half-unconscious emotions. The narrator attributes Pierre's outburst against the cabdriver to the "unconscious transfer" to that particular driver, the notoriety of cab-drivers in general (p. 232). After his humiliating encounter with Glen Stanly, Pierre rushes out to the street and is exposed to the cries of the contending coachmen:
"Hack sir? Hack, sir? Hack, sir?"
"Cab, sir? Cab, sir? Cab, sir?"
"This way sir! This way, sir! This way, sir!"
"He's a rogue! Not him! he's a rogue!" (p. 239).

It is almost as if Stanly's jibes are still pursuing him. This feeling is accentuated by the sound of the cracking lashes of the cabmen around him. The narrator's comments broaden the perspective so that the taunts of Stanly and his friends, the cries of the coachmen and the crack of their whips, are seen to mingle with Pierre's doubts and problems: "Just bursting from a scene as goading as his interview with the scornful Glen in the dazzling drawing-room, to Pierre, the sudden tumultuous surroundings of him by whip-stalks and lashes, seemed like the onset of the chastising fiends upon Orestes" (pp. 239-240). The significance of this comment becomes clearer when we recall that Orestes was separated from his sister who passionately longed for him, was guilty of matricide and was pursued by the furies, till he was almost driven insane. In other words, Melville is projecting Pierre's fears and guilt-feelings into other people and places.

It is surely no accident that in the few hours of his exposure to the city, Pierre should encounter so many representatives of immoral and abnormal sexuality. In addition to the coachmen and the prostitute — "a figure all natural grace but unnatural vivacity" (p. 237) — Pierre meets in the watch-house negresses with torn handkerchiefs, yellow girls with their red gowns "hanging in tatters from their naked bosoms", "deep-rouged white women" with "rent dresses" and their lascivious mates (p. 240). There are also others who seem to have been arrested from "the midst of some crazy wanton dance". They foul the air with "syllables obscene and accursed".
These people are inmates from "thieves-quarters...brothels" and "Lock-and-Sin hospitals for incurables" (hospitals for V.D. patients).

Significantly, these repulsive creatures remind him of his companions and he visualizes their physical proximity: "all his consciousness at the time was absorbed by the one horrified thought of Isabel and Delly, forced to witness a sight hardly endurable for Pierre himself; or possibly, sucked into the tumult, and in close contact with its loathsomeness" (p. 241). His fears prove to be true and he sees Isabel and Delly surrounded by these obnoxious elements; Isabel is "struggling from the delirious reaching arms of a half-clad reeling whiskerando", while Delly is "seized on each hand by two bleared and half-bloody women, who with fiendish grimaces were ironically twitting her upon her close-necked dress, and had already stript her handkerchief from her". The entire scene is described from Pierre's point of view and it is only after Pierre's successful efforts at rescuing the girls, that the narrative returns to the more sedate pace characteristic of the omniscient narrator.

This concentration on the sordid and the sensual in Book XVI suggests Pierre's repressed and chaotic feelings and his need to displace them by projecting them onto others. Indeed, the events in this book have a dream-like quality. Pierre's first night in the city is presented as a nightmare. We have already noted that they enter the city at a time when shops are closing; when he goes out to look for a cab which will take them from the watch-house, the narrator comments on the lateness of the hour (p. 236). At this point, there is a sudden heightening in the visual clarity of
the scene. As soon as Pierre turns out of "a narrow, and dark, and death-like bye street" he finds himself "suddenly precipitated into the not-yet-repressed noise and contention, and all the garish night life of a vast thoroughfare...brilliant with occasional illuminations, and echoing to very many swift wheels and footfalls".

There is a great deal of narrative discontinuity in the next few scenes as Pierre is surprised again and again by the objects and people around him. First, he is startled by the noise and lights in the street and then by the invitation of the prostitute. There is a surreal quality to this scene:

Pierre turned; and in the flashing, sinister, evil cross-lights of a druggist's window, his eye caught the person of a wonderfully beautifully-featured girl; scarlet-cheeked, glaringly-arrayed, and of a figure all natural grace but unnatural vivacity. Her whole form, however, was horribly lit by the green and yellow ray from the druggist's (p. 237).

Pierre finds himself next in front of Glen's apartment, and "yielding to a sudden impulse" goes in. After Glen snubs him, he rushes out and is again bewildered by the cries of the coachmen and the sound of whip-lashes. Their accusatory tones and punitive lashes are not unlike images from punishment-dreams.

From this point onwards till the rescue of the girls from the police-station, there is a sudden acceleration of the narrative pace in the description of the events inside the watch-house. Images follow each other in quick succession and the fantastic and the sordid mingle in the persons of the inmates of "some unmentionable cellar" (p. 290). As in the case of the description of the prostitute, there is a stress on bright colours; now the effect is
heightened by the confusion of voices and the extra-ordinary movement in Pierre's field of vision. Threatening, unreal, nightmarish figures run riot inside the watch-house: "frantic, diseased looking men and women of all colors"; the "half-clad reeling whiskerando" (p. 241) and the "bleared and half-bloody women...with fiendish grimaces" represent irrational, menacing figures from a terrifying dream. Throughout the sequence there is a feeling of intense dissociation between Pierre and the entire population of the city. Finally, we can note the elements of wish-fulfillment in the episode. Thus after he is repudiated by Glen Stanly, Pierre leaps at him "like Spartacus" (p. 239); in the watch-house, he rescues Isabel by "an immense blow of his mailed fist" (p. 241). This recalls Pierre's wish in the opening section of the novel: "'Oh, had my father but had a daughter!' cried Pierre; 'some one whom I might love, and protect and fight for, if need be. It must be a glorious thing to engage in a mortal quarrel on a secret sister's behalf!'" (p. 7). In fact, so close is the episode to a dream that when the narrator resumes his omniscient commentary and explains the happenings inside the police-station (p. 241), it is difficult not to treat him as a censor!

We should note, however, that though most of Book XVI is described from Pierre's viewpoint, the narrator steps in quietly again and again to present a broader and more objective view of the situation. One way of doing this is by pointedly attributing a thought to Pierre (p. 232) or a scene to Pierre's vision (p. 240). But the narrator is also ready to step in and criticize Pierre's action as when he comments on how little Isabel and Delly knew in "what
really untoward and wretched circumstances they first touched the flaggins of the city" (p. 235). Also, by making us look at Pierre from the point of view of "the really good-hearted officer" (p. 239), the contemptuous coachmen and the suspicious clerk (p. 242), he communicates to us the foolishness and impracticality of Pierre's actions.

But Melville's real achievement in Book XVI—as far as the treatment of urban themes is concerned—was to project successfully psychic states into the cityscape. In doing this, he represented the urban milieu in a fantastic light and stressed the chaotic, irrational aspects of city life. Book XVI of Pierre represents a significant departure from the rather conventional realism he had displayed throughout the Liverpool chapters of Redburn.

V

There is at least one other episode in Pierre which shows the change in Melville's treatment of the city. Towards the end of the novel, we come across an episode where Pierre's night-walks in the city are described. Pierre's excursions into obscure city streets reveal a taste for the bizarre and increasing desperation. The episode comes to a climax when Pierre faints and finds himself in the gutter and is placed before one of the most memorable sections of the novel—the Enceladus vision.

Melville's description of Pierre's nightwalks reveals the care with which he structured the novel. The first reference to Pierre's walks comes soon after he receives unpleasant "tidings" from Saddle Meadows—the news of the death of his mother, of the inheritance of Saddle Meadows by Glen and his overtures to Lucy. Then, Pierre
feels the need to hide his grief and anger from Isabel by taking "a long vagabond stroll in the suburbs of the town, to wear off his sharper grief, ere he should again return into her sight" (p. 289). As he hurries out of his chamber, he meets Plinlimmon. The encounter upsets him and the stress in this episode is on the meeting with the enigmatic author of the "Chronometrical and Horological" pamphlet and not on the walk. The second reference to Pierre's evening walks occurs in the next Book. He has been working very hard at his book when twilight approaches and Isabel "summons" him; like a "soul-shivering traveler" he stands for a few moments and then: "his hat, and his cane, and out he sallies for fresh air" (p. 305). But there is little relief for him outside: "A most comfortless staggering of a stroll!". He is obviously an "imprudent sick man"; at least, that is the impression of the passer-by. He is too obsessed with his thoughts now, to acknowledge the greetings of his acquaintance. They condemn him as "Bad-hearted"; as for him, he returns to his chamber and to Isabel, his book and a feeling very much like nausea.

The next two Books make no mention of his nightwalks. Despite the fact that Lucy has joined Isabel and Delly in his house, he feels increasingly isolated — "one in a city of hundreds of thousands of human beings; Pierre was solitary as at the Pole" (p. 338). His struggles with his book, his knowledge of "the universal lurking insecurity of even the greatest and purest written thought" (p. 339) and his physical exhaustion add to his problems till he is forced to go out into the streets again:

\[\text{In the earlier progress of his book, he}\]
had found some relief in making his regular evening walk through the greatest thoroughfare of the city; that so, the utter isolation of his soul, might feel itself the more from the incessant joggings of his body against the bodies of the hurrying thousands. Then he began to be sensible of more fancying stormy nights, than pleasant ones; for then, the great thoroughfares were less thronged, and the innumerable shop-awnings flapped and beat like schooners' broad sails in a gale, and the shutters banged like lashed bulwarks; and the slates fell hurtling like displaced ship's blocks from aloft. Stemming such tempests through the deserted streets, Pierre felt a dark, triumphant joy; that while others had crawled in fear to their kennels, he alone defied the storm-admiral....

By-and-by, of such howling, pelting nights, he began to bend his steps down the dark, narrow side-streets, in quest of the more secluded and mysterious tap-rooms. There he would feel a singular satisfaction, in sitting down all dripping in a chair, ordering his half-pint of ale before him, and drawing over his cap to protect his eyes from the light, eye the varied faces of the social castaways, who here had their haunts from the bitterest midnights.

But at last he began to feel a distaste for even these; and now nothing but the utter night-desolation of the obscurest warehousing lanes would content him, or be at all sufferable to him. Among these he had now been accustomed to wind in and out every evening; till one night as he paused a moment previous to turning about for his home, a sudden, unwonted, and all-pervading sensation seized him. He knew not where he was; he did not have any ordinary life-feeling at all. He could not see....When he came to himself he found that he was lying crosswise in the gutter, dabbled with mud and slime.... (pp. 340-341).

This remarkable episode has evoked surprisingly little response from the many critics of the novel and has been entirely ignored by those commenting specifically about the role of the city in the novel. Henry Murray instances it as one of the most "finely executed" scenes in the novel but does not analyze it; Leon Howard, in his "Historical Note" to the Northwestern-Newberry edition, thinks
that Pierre's wanderings are "lear-like" and Brodhead sees in the Pierre who braves storms in deserted city streets "an urban version of Ahab on the deck". These are accurate observations but there is certainly more to be said about this episode.

We can note, for example, the care with which Melville has planned these walks; at first, they seem to be mere excursions into city streets; later, they appear to be desperate attempts to relieve Pierre's numerous problems and anxieties. But it is clear that the streets offer no solution since the hell he wants to unburden is not to be expiated so easily. In the first instance, he is upset by what he thinks is the knowing leer in Plinlimmon's face; in his second excursion he is too indifferent to his surroundings and too preoccupied with his "soul-sickness"; his next project is to throw himself at the crowd, but his feelings have become too blase. Consequently, he tries the more violent stimuli of stormy nights. Then he finds a sedative in "mysterious tap-rooms". At this point, the shadowy section of the city and its cast-off inhabitants offer some relief, but soon he has reached the limit of city-sensation. By a curious paradox, the crowds and the storms have given way to these tap-rooms and finally to the heart of city-desolation: "the utter night-desolation of the obscurest warehousing lanes". It is a terrifying image of utter despair seeking correspondence in the cityscape. But the self can't endure such violence to itself for long and so Pierre's walks end in the gutter.

In an essay titled "Psychological Motifs in Pierre", John Logan has argued that Pierre's actions reveal a need for "self-damage, atonement". He points out, as examples, Pierre's fantasies about the dangers of the memnon Rock as he crawls under it;
his repudiation of his family and Lucy and his eventual suicide. It is difficult to accept Logan's contention that Pierre punishes himself because he wants to atone for his superior gifts as a writer, but certainly his walks are aimed at self-damage and self-abasement and fit in with Logan's examples. It is appropriate, therefore, that Pierre's walks should end in the gutter, where he finds himself "dabbled with mud and grime".

Pierre's night-walks are important, also, because they show Melville's affinity with the best of his contemporaries and his immediate predecessors and successors who were creating a radically new urban literature. Indeed, one of the archetypal situation in this new species of writing is the tormented, isolated man walking the city streets in sheer desperation. In The Country and the City, Raymond Williams has noted that "the perception of the new qualities of the modern city has been associated, from the beginning, with a man walking, as if alone, in its streets". Williams observes that the writer could use this situation in two ways: either to affirm the common humanity of the walker or to emphasize his isolation and mystery and even his feeling of terror in the urban environment. Clearly, Melville is utilizing the latter option, yet, in his treatment of Pierre's increasingly desperate and desolate excursions, he is surpassing the structure of feeling charted by Williams.

One possible source for Pierre's night-walks, or at least an illuminating parallel, is Edgar Allan Poe's "The Man of the Crowd" — a story first published in 1840 in Burton's Gentleman's Magazine. Poe's story has an enigmatic quality which defies an easy interpretation and there are some very important differences between it and the episode in Pierre — not least of which is the crucial nature of
the relationship of the narrator and the titular character—but there are notable similarities too. First of all, the man of the crowd exhibits like Pierre an "extreme despair" in his aspect and in his wanderings. He also wanders through different city streets. Poe's isolato has "a wide and vacant stare" and attempts to relieve his "intense agony" by throwing himself at the crowd. As he walks, he seems "lost in thought" and displays "every mark of agitation". He walks through the noisy quarters of London and through parts which "teemed with desolation". He enters a "huge suburban temple of Intemperance" and then rushes out, now with a look "even more intense than despair". At this point, the narrator, obviously perplexed, ceases to follow this mysterious man's movement for he has realized: "This old man...is the type and the genius of deep crime. He refuses to be alone. He is the man of the crowd."20

It is also interesting to note that Poe himself "was found in a Baltimore gutter and on Sunday, October 7 1849, died in his last delirum".21

Other fascinating analogues can be found between Pierre's night-walks and those of other nineteenth-century artists and their fictional creations. Dostoevsky, for example, loved to roam aimlessly around Petersburg, so intent on his own thoughts that passers-by thought him to be a madman.22 His tormented heroes resemble Pierre in their compulsive excursions into obscure saloons and crowded or deserted city streets. Pierre is thus somewhat like Raskilnikov, though he is also like the Svidrigaylov, who in his last memorable outing, wanders through obscure city streets, visits a seedy hotel and is tormented by his sexual depravity.

The episode in Pierre also reminds us of the haunted narrator of
James Thomson's *The City of Dreadful Night*, who wanders through a cityscape from which he cannot escape.  

VI

In *Pierre*, Melville stresses not the physical reality of the city but the mental landscape of the central character. Since the primary function of the cityscape is to image the state of Pierre's mind, there are very few generalized descriptions of urban landscapes or features. One of these landmarks in the novel is the Church of the Apostles, where Pierre and his companions finally settle. In *Pierre*, the section on the Church has almost the status of a set-piece and is described clearly by the narrator. Nevertheless, the portrait of the Church of the Apostle, the description of its structure, history and residents, is not irrelevant to Pierre's story. In *Pierre*, unlike in *Redburn*, Melville never abandons the principle of narration for mere description.

In *Dostoevesky and Romantic Realism*, Donald Fanger traces the efforts of the romantic realists to discover "a usable microcosm" for their art. The ultimate intention of these writers was to create a new poetics of the city. In their search they experimented with the fictional possibilities of a city building. One of them, a Frenchman named Jules Janin, took as his model a great Parisian building, and catalogued "the gradations between extreme luxury on the second floor and extreme poverty in the garrets". 

There are some significant similarities between Janin's building and the Church of the Apostles. The Church of the Apostles has seven stories; the ground floors are rented by "a few lingering, equivocal lawyers" while the upper stories are inhabited by "all
sorts of poets, painters, paupers and philosophers" (p. 269).

Charles Millthorpe rents a "small dusty law-office in the third floor of the older building of the Apostles" (p. 280); this is representative of Charlie's intermediate status; he has a modest practice but has also intellectual pretensions. His mother and sisters live in a chamber on the fourth floor; they support his efforts by doing some sewing. Plotinus Plinlimmon — the worldly-wise guru of a sect of the Apostles — occupies a post in "one of the loftiest windows of the old gray tower, which on the opposite side of the quadrangular space, rose prominently before his "own chamber" (p. 291). From this window, Plinlimmon's face seems to mock Pierre and hint that his secret was not impene-trable. Pierre has a quarter in the topmost floor and his immediate neighbours are, not inappropriately, misdirected, naive, inconse-quential, idealistic and impoverished artists. Some of them are members of secret societies "vaguely connected" with the "absolute overturning of Church and State" (p. 269). Like them, Pierre is a poverty-stricken and naive writer, trying to do battle with conventional morality and malignant cosmic agencies. The building is "a usable microcosm" in other ways too. There is a sense of com-munity in these idealists. Thus they are quick to come to Pierre's aid when he is struggling with Glen and Fredric (p. 326). Again, when Pierre needs weapons for his duel with Glen and Fredric he finds them in the room of one of these armchair revolutionaries (p. 358).

Melville also utilizes minor structural details, like the heating and the water-supply system of the Apostles and the furnishings in Pierre's room to comment on Pierre's situation and to
add to the story. For example, in describing the three chambers occupied by Pierre and his menage and in outlining the distribution of heat within these chambers, Melville advances the primary theme of the novel. Delly lives in the first of these chambers. Her room is also used as a dining room and is the only one with a fire. A horizontal pipe, originating in this room, manages to warm Isabel's chamber, but by the time it reaches Pierre's room, the heat is dissipated, and in any case, Pierre's study-table is too far away from the pipe. This preoccupation with pipes and heating would seem to be irrelevant but Melville ingeniously exploits them. Isabel offers her room to Pierre and when Pierre declines the offer, since "he would not deprive her of the comforts of a continually accessible privacy" (p. 297), she insists on "keeping her connecting door open while Pierre was employed at his desk, that so the heat of her room might bodily go into his" (emphasis added). Pierre declines this gesture also since "he must be religiously locked up while at work". The word "religiously" ambiguously hints at Pierre's frantic attempts to exclude her "bodily" exhalations while at work: "outer love and hate must alike be excluded then. In vain Isabel said she would make not the slightest noise ....All in vain. Pierre was inflexible here."

The question of the heating-system is raised again when Lucy joins the trio in the city. Pierre manages to secure a room adjacent to the dining-room for her. Now he stresses the carpeting of the room since "Lucy's delicate feet should not shiver on the naked floor" (p. 322). Isabel feels that this will not adequately protect Lucy against the cold and asks Pierre if the pipe could not be connected to her room. As she questions Pierre, she looks
"more intently at him, than the question seemed to warrant". Isabel is really trying to test Pierre's feelings for Lucy; he is, however, bent on showing his fidelity and replies: "It should not be done, Isabel. Doth not that pipe and the warmth go into thy room? Shall I rob my wife, good Delly, even to benefit my most devoted and true-hearted cousin?" (p. 323). Delly, who has now some understanding of the relationship between Isabel and Pierre, looks "hysterically" at Pierre; as for Isabel, a "triumphant fire flashed" in her eye, "her full bosom arched out; but she was silent" (p. 323).

Melville also uses the heating-system (or the lack of it) of the Apostles to satirize the faddistic tendencies of its residents. The absence of hot water in the Apostles is discussed in Book XXII, and this allows Melville to attack "the Transcendental Flesh-Brush Philosophy" (the practice of the inhabitants of the Apostles to refresh their "meager bones with crash-towel and cold water" [p. 298]) and "Apple-Paring Dialectics" (their habit of scattering refuse in the building [p. 300]). Pierre has joined their ranks in taking a cold-bath every morning. The detailed description of Pierre's meagrely furnished room (p. 276) and the frequently reiterated phrase, "the lofty window of the beggarly room" (pp. 270, 271), indicate Pierre's situation and his fall from affluence.

Melville devotes several paragraphs to the history of the Church of the Apostles. Richard Brodhead has summed up the significance of this history:

The mode of urban realism through which Melville describes the changing uses of a building in "The Church of the Apostles" shows the division of worldly and spiritual as a function
of social history. In a tableau worthy of James or Howells, Melville evokes, through a particular place, a vision of a congregation that, having grown prosperous, grows secular as well and moves uptown, leaving their desacralized Church to be subdivided into law offices. The concern for things of the spirit that society thus abandons becomes the legacy of crackpot intellectuals that the church slowly recruits as the tenants of its upper floors.

The transformation of the Church into a commercial concern parallels Pierre's fall from his noble resolution to right the wrongs done to Isabel into a more tangled relationship with her. In "The Cottage and the Temple: Melville's Symbolic Use of Architecture", Vicki H. Latman has noted the "ironic" relationship between structure and inhabitant in the Church of Apostles and has compared it to the Sketch of Temple Church in Melville's diptych.

We can also note that the Church of the Apostles is representative of a building in the modern metropolis in the sense that it represents a breakdown in traditional relationships. Charlie Millthorpe and his family can now live in the same house as Pierre Glendinning, though in the country the Millthorpe family was socially and economically reduced in contrast to the aristocratic and prosperous Glendinnings.

In addition to the detailed description of the history, the exterior and the interior of the Church of the Apostles, Melville also displays in Pierre a considerable interest in city streets. We have already observed the trio's reaction to the city streets in their first night in the city but it is important to note that not all the thoroughfares are painted in dismal colours; thus the hotel where the trio finally conclude their adventures is "a very respectable side-street" (p. 242). The Church of the Apostles is on a
"narrow street" and not far from "a very thoroughfare for merchants and their clerks, and their carmen and porters" (p. 265). Here, as in "Bartleby the Scrivener", Melville is fascinated by the contrast between the hustle and bustle of commercial streets on weekdays, and their silence at night and "surprising and startling quiscience" on Sundays; then, they show only "one long vista of six or seven stories of inexorable shutters on both sides of the way" (p. 269). Similarly, the "warehousing lane" next to the Apostles' lane, "hums" with activity during business hours, but "by night it was deserted of every occupant but the lamp-posts; and on Sunday, to walk through it, was like walking through an avenue of sphinxes". We have also noted Pierre's evening walks through the central avenue of the city full of its "hurrying thousands" and his subsequent excursions through "deserted streets" (p. 340) during storms, "narrow side streets" and the "obscurest warehousing lanes" of the city. In fact, warehouses are ubiquitous in this city; the cabman finds them in the street where Stanly's house is supposed to be (p. 232); the flutest who plays from the top of the tower of the Apostles is said to be warbling "forth over the roofs of ten thousand warehouses around him" (p. 270).

These references to the commercial nature of the city serve as indirect comments on Pierre's isolation in a business-oriented world. The silence of city streets and their desolation and the obscure warehouse-street in Pierre's final nightwalk image his desolation. Pierre's last walk in the city, however, has a very different function. After receiving proof of the veracity of Isabel's story — a proof which confirms him in his incestuousness — and two slanderous letters — one from his publishers and the other from
despondently to capitulate to the eye" (p. 229). Then there is the strange image of the flutist playing from the top of the tower of the Apostles "to the roofs of ten thousand warehouses around him" (p. 270). And there is this view — also from a window of the Apostles — which meets Pierre's eyes as he gazes out of his window:

But except the donjon form of the old gray tower, seemingly there is nothing to see but a wilderness of tiles, slate, shingles, and tin; — the desolate hanging wildernesses of tile, slate, shingles and tins, wherewith we modern Babylonians replace the fair hanging gardens of the fine old Asiatic times when the excellent Nebuchadnezzar was king (p. 271).

In contrast to this solemn image is the striking simile of the city on a New Year's day, when its mood differs from Pierre's gloom and isolation:..."like a great flagon, the vast city overbrims at all curbstones, wharves, and piers, with bubbling jubilation" (p. 303). Finally, there is the view of the city from the sea; then it is a "great wedged city" with "domes of free-stone and marble"; "a pent city" from which the trio, like Ishmael, seek momentary relief, by sailing into the sea (p. 354). In all these instances, Melville tries to capture the tonal quality of the city when looked at from a distance or a certain angle of vision. Mostly, it is Pierre's way of looking at the city, though the narrator also notes its commercial nature and its desolation.

This subjective element consistently distinguishes the treatment of the city in Pierre from Redburn. Only in his portraits of minor characters does Melville achieve the kind of objectivity which is characteristic of most city novelists. There are several fine sketches of urban types throughout the last third of the novel.
last third of the novel is New York's Broadway, the Church of the Apostles the South Baptist Church in Nassau Street, the habour from where the trio sail New York harbour, and the "triangular space" where the "shootout" takes place New York's City Hall Park.\(^{28}\) It is also generally assumed that Melville was satirizing the New York literati and its grub-street in the concluding sections of the novel.\(^{29}\) Most critics have stated confidently that the city in the novel is New York.

It is important to note, however, that Melville himself does not directly identify the city in *Pierre* with New York.\(^{30}\) This fact is surely relevant to any evaluation of the role of the city in the novel. If Melville did not name the city of the novel he must have had good reasons for not doing so. In fact, by not differentiating the city in which the action of a third of the novel takes place, by identifying it with Dante's City of Dis, and by linking it with Pierre's consciousness, Melville was moving away from the kind of particularity which characterized *Redburn*. In *Pierre*, he was creating a symbolic city and evolving new techniques for his depiction of the urban environment. If, despite this, places in the cityscape have a recognizable quality, it is because, as elsewhere in his work, his symbols are rooted in the everyday world.

On different occasions in *Pierre*, Melville attempts to look at the city from a certain height or distance, so that it is seen as a totality. Thus, when Pierre and his companions approach the city, their coach climbs to the top of a "long and very gradual slope"; from this point, the town "for a moment seemed dimly and
Stanly and Fredric Tartan — Pierre rushes out into "the grand central thoroughfare of the city" (p. 359) with murder in his heart and two pistols in his pocket. He has been inflamed by his recent discoveries in the art-exhibition and the boat-trip and has been insulted by the letters; no wonder then that "the great glaring avenue" should now be "thronged with haughty-rolling carriages, and proud-rustling promenaders". Pierre is now the avenging hero of a romantic melodrama. He "stalked midway" between two pavements — one nearly deserted, the other peopled "For three long miles, with two streams of glossy, shawled, or broadcloth life". Everyone shrinks away from "his wild and fatal aspect, one way the people took the wall, the other way they took the curb". Like the archetypal gunfighter in a Western showdown, "unentangledly Pierre threaded all their host"; he was "on a straight-forward, mathematical intent", and was not going to be deceived by the emptiness of the pavement opposite him. Soon he approached "a large, open, triangular space, built round with the stateliest public erections" and descried Fred and Glen. Glen and Pierre leap into action — Fred's sense of honour refrains him from making it an uneven duel — and though Glen smites him first, Pierre kills him: "Spatterings of his own kindred blood were upon the pavements...and Pierre was seized by a hundred contending hands" (p. 360).

VII

In his Introduction to the Hendricks House edition of Pierre, Henry Murray has tried to track down the originals of all the natural objects and landmarks in the novel. He has suggested that the main thoroughfare of the city which appears throughout the
In Book XVI, we come across the surly and cynical cabmen, the worldly and suspicious hotel-clerk, the kind-hearted, but overworked and therefore ultimately ineffectual, policeman and the "nodding three"—policemen who act in comic concert inside the watch-house and who in their facelessness and gestures remind us of the three boarders in Kafka's "The Metamorphosis". Also notable are the "limping half-deaf old book-stall man" (p. 292), the porter who brings in Lucy's easel and trunks ("Stout's the word; 2151 is my number; any jobs, call on me"; p. 319), and the "squat-framed, asthmatic turnkey" with a strange sense of humour and a fondness for puns and similitudes (p. 361). These minor characters pre-figure the urban eccentrics of "Bartleby the Scrivener", especially Turkey and Nippers, and serve as the comic background to the tragic story of the central character.

In Redburn, the emphasis was on the varied nature of Liverpool; in Pierre the chaotic, irrational, commercial aspects of the city are stressed. We should note, however, that Melville was not writing a naturalistic novel but a psychological one and the roots of Pierre's tragic end are in his emotional history. If the negative elements of the city are emphasized in this novel it is because setting in it is always a function of Pierre's psychological state. It was only in Israel Potter that Melville could treat the city as one of the Armageddons that slew his protagonist, and it is to this novel that we must now turn.
CHAPTER II

Notes

1 Herman Melville, Moby-Dick or the Whale, ed. Harold Beaver (Harmondworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1972), pp. 94-95. All further references to this work appear in the text.


3 Herman Melville, Pierre or the Ambiguities (Evanston: Northwestern University and the Newberry Library, 1971), p. 4. Subsequent references to this work appear in the text.

4 There is a possibility that in trying to follow "the endless, winding way — the flowing river in the cave of men" Melville was echoing Coleridge's descent into the subconscious in "Kubla Khan". The possibility is strengthened by the description of the landscape through which Pierre passes two pages later, while on his way to the crucial encounter with Isabel. Then he notices "long, mysterious mountain masses"; the air is dim and black with "dread and gloom"; "profoundest forests lay entranced", and out of the forests came "a mourning, muttering, roaring, intermittent, changeful sound: rain-shakings of the palsied trees, slidings of rocks undermined, final crashings of long-riven boughs, and devilish gibberish of the forest ghosts" (pp. 109-110). Compare this landscape with these lines from "kubla Khan":

But oh! that deep romantic chasm which startled
Down the green hills athwart a cedarn cover!
A *savage place! as holy and enchanted
As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted
By woman wailing for her demon lover!
And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething,
As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,
A mighty fountain momentarily was forced:
Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst
Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,
Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail:
And 'mid these dancing rocks at once and ever
It flung up momentarily the sacred river.
Five miles meandering with a mazy motion
Through wood and dale the sacred river ran;
Then reached the caverns measureless to man
And sank in tumult to a lifeless ocean:


Could it also be that the description of Isabel with the guitar was inspired by the vision of "the damsels with the dulcimer"?

The critic is Richard Brodhead and the phrase is from his Hawthorne, Melville and the Novel (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 165. Brodhead's analysis of the novel is the best to have come out so far and I would like to acknowledge my debt to his reading of the novel. In stressing the experimental nature of the novel and the "fictional" nature of the narrative, I am reversing Henry A. Murray's contention in his Introduction to the Hendricks House edition of the novel. According to Murray: "Melville's compelling intention in writing Pierre is better defined by saying that he proposed to write his spiritual biography in the form of a novel, than to say that he was experimenting with the novel and incidentally making use of some personal experiences". Murray, Introd.; Pierre (New York: Hendricks House, 1949), p. xxiv.
6 In a provocative essay titled "The Art of Herman Melville: The Author of Pierre," Yale Review n.s. 59 (Winter, 1970), pp. 197-214, Raymond J. Nelson argues that the real author of the novel is Pierre. Nelson's contention, however, is ultimately unconvincing because the premise of his argument is the badness and incoherence of the novel if accepted as the work of an omniscient author. This is something which I am unwilling to concede. Significantly, Nelson has very little to say about the strengths of the book, for example, the very perceptive central chapters on Pierre and Isabel's emotional history. The best answer to Nelson's essay and the most thorough and illuminating discussion of point of view and authorial intentions is Richard Brodhead's chapter on Pierre in his Hawthorne, Melville and the Novel.


A number of studies have traced the numerous allusions to the *Inferno* in *Pierre* and have tried to show the similarities and differences between the two works: G. Giovannini, "Melville's *Pierre* and Dante's *Inferno,*" *PMLA,* LXIV (March, 1949), pp. 70-78; Howard H. Schless, "Flaxman, Dante, and Melville's *Pierre*," *Bulletin of the New York Public Library,* LXIV (February, 1960), pp. 65-82; Nathalia Wright, "*Pierre, Herman Melville's Inferno,*" *American Literature,* XXXIX (January, 1968), pp. 542-545. I have benefitted from these studies though I should add that they do not specifically develop the relationship between Dante's City of Dis and the city in *Pierre.*


11 See Schless, p. 66.


14 Wright, pp. 173-179.


16 Murray, p. lxviii.


24 Compare this view with that of Brian Higgins and Herschel Parker's, who are, in general, critical of the second half of the novel and who feel that the description of the Church and its

25 Fanger, p. 23.

26 Brodhead, p. 182.


28 Murray, pp. xxii.

29 See, for example, Miller, pp. 306-309.

30 There are two specific references to New York localities in Pierre but they have no connection with the placement of the city of the novel. In "Young America in Literature", Pierre remembers a visit to the city, where he had attended a lecture delivered by a precocious author titled "A Week at Coney Island" (p. 252). In the concluding Book, Pierre claims that the pistols "will outnumber the thousand pipes of Harlem" (p. 358). Both these comments seem incidental to the identification of the city of the novel.
CHAPTER III

Israel Potter and London

In his ironic dedication to *Israel Potter: His Fifty Years of Exile*, Melville, appearing in the role of the editor, declares that he has left Potter's "autobiographical story" almost untouched. Melville claims that his contribution was limited to "some exceptions, and additions of historic and personal details, and one or two shiftings of scene." He takes particular care to point out that he has resisted the temptation to "mitigate the hard fortunes" of his protagonist, especially towards the end: "...so that no one can complain of the gloom of my closing chapters more profoundly than myself."

Despite these disclaimers, however, Melville's contribution to *Israel Potter* amounts to a complete rewriting of the original story. As an editor, Melville selects only the essential details from Potter's narrative. He is also ready to make the necessary additions to the original story. As an omniscient narrator, he follows Israel Potter's career closely but makes no attempt to reproduce his emotions. Instead, he tries to reveal the futility of Israel Potter's life and wanderings. There is an ironic detachment in the narrator's stance, but at the same time, he is ready to uncover the real significance of events and settings in Israel Potter's life.

The extent of Melville's contribution to *Israel Potter* is especially noticeable in a study of the concluding chapters which are devoted to Israel's forty years of wandering in and around London. In fact, Chapters XXIII and XXIV are set in a brickyard
"some ten or fifteen miles of London" (p. 204). Chapter XXV is about Israel's entry into London and Chapter XXVI is a terse account of Israel's life in the city. Only the last chapter of the final section of the novel—a section which has been aptly titled the "wasteland block" of the novel by one critic—is about Israel's return to America and his death.

Even a superficial comparison of the London of Israel Potter and the city of the Life and the Remarkable Adventures of Israel Potter will bring out the extent of Melville's contribution to the novel. In Potter's narrative, fifty out of one hundred and seven pages are given to his stay in London. Melville spends only seventeen out of his two hundred and twenty five pages to describe his hero's experience in the English city. But the Life and Remarkable Adventures is not the only source of the London chapters of Israel Potter; in describing the city Melville also relied on his Journal of a Visit to London and the Continent, 1849-1850. Also useful as a source was London, a contemporary collection of essays on the city, which Melville had purchased during his trip to the city. A study of Melville's utilization of his sources is important because, as always, what he chooses to include and omit are important clues to his intention and technique. This section of the study will thus compare the London of Israel Potter with the London of his sources and will try to account for his additions and omissions.

In The Life and Remarkable Adventures, Potter is advised to retreat to London to avoid detection; in Melville's narrative, he heads toward London "prompted by the same instinct which impels the hunted fox to the wilderness; for solitudes befriend the endangered wild beast, but crowds are the security, because the true
desert, of persecuted man" (p. 203). The antitheses are indicative of Melville's attitude: the city is now the wilderness; the crowds the true desert. Despite his status as editor, the narrator's ability to make these paradoxical connections, reveals the romantic imagination at work.

In the source, Potter is furnished with some money for his initial expenses; Melville's Israel is not only on his own but also out of funds. He is forced to put on the "mouldy old rags" abandoned by a "pauper suicide...on the banks of a stagnant pool nigh a rickety building, which looked like a poorhouse". In Melville's narrative, unlike in the source, every change of dress in Israel Potter is stressed and adds to the theme; here Israel's assumption of the suicide's clothes prefigures his derelict and hopeless condition in London.

Because Melville's Israel is impoverished, he is made to work in a "great brickyard" in a London suburb (p. 204). Melville devotes two chapters to Israel's labour in the factory and uses them to paint a bleak picture of industrial civilization. The Life and Remarkable Adventures merely states that after different occupations in London, Potter's "next business...was that of brickmaking", which together with that of gardening, he "pursued in the summer seasons almost exclusively for five years" (Life, p. 56). Potter repeats the information without any comments a few pages later (Life, p. 68); this is indicative of the disorganized nature of his work. Melville's Israel works for "thirteen weary weeks" (p. 200) in the brickyard; at the end of this debilitating period, he is ready for the final assault on his personality by the city.

At the centre of Chapter XXV is a description of London Bridge.
Israel stands on this bridge and looks at the crowd around him and then enters the city. This chapter concludes with a brief account of his wanderings and the effect of the city on him. Only two sentences of the Life and Remarkable Adventures are echoed in this chapter. On both occasions, the difference in emphasis and phrasing is significant. Thus after he has described the London scene in some detail, Potter observes: "When I first entered the city of London, I was almost stunned, while my curiosity was not a little excited by what is termed the 'cries of London'" (Life, p. 68). The first part of this sentence seems to suggest the powerful effect of the city; the second part, however, disappoints since Israel dwells on a commonplace. In Melville's novel, the effect of the city on Israel is described with great care:

On his route from Brentford to Paris, Israel had passed through the capital, but only as a courier, so that now, for the first time, he had time to linger, and loiter and lounge - slowly absorb what he saw — meditate himself into boundless amazement. For forty years he never recovered from that surprise — never, till dead, had done with his wanderings (p. 211).

Melville never tells us specifically what it was in the city which so overwhelmed Israel but in this chapter, he conveys the life-negating, overpowering qualities of the city through images, symbols, and the cadences of his prose.

This sentence from the Life and Remarkable Adventures is also echoed in Chapter XXV: "For four or five days, after I reached London, I did very little more than walk about the city viewing such curiosities as met my eye... (Life, p. 55). This nondescript sentence is the basis of the concluding paragraph of Chapter XXV:
For five days he wandered and wandered. Without leaving statelier haunts unvisited, he did not overlook those broader areas—hereditary parks and manors of vice and misery. Not by constitution disposed to gloom, there was a mysteriousness in those impulses which led him at this time to rovings like these. But hereby stoic influences were at work, to fit him at a soon-coming day for enacting a part in the last extremities here seen... (p. 214).

We have already noted his instinctive flight to the city; here, he has crossed the bridge and has given in to another mysterious impulse—not unlike that which propels the lemming to the sea—in joining the crowds of the city into an aimless, obscure and penurious existence.

Chapter XXVI of *Israel Potter* follows the *Life and Remarkable Adventures* somewhat more closely. The description of Israel's slow but steady descent into misery and the details of his struggles to survive are mostly summarized from the original. But what is really significant is not what Melville retains—for they serve merely to outline the major events of his life in London—but what Melville omits from Potter's narrative. The *Life and Remarkable Adventures* is a very unremarkable rendering of the life of the ex-soldier, written with the express intention of securing a pension for Potter. Thus the stress on his patriotic actions and the hardships he has to endure because of his dedication to the American cause. A secondary cause of the existence of the book was probably the hope that the book would make some money for himself (and the hack who wrote it for him). Potter (and the ghostwriter) probably felt that the best thing to do to attract attention was to dwell on the enormity of his sufferings and on the sensational and seamy sides of London life. Most of the time, the sordid aspects of the
city and its inhabitants are treated in detail but they have no relevance to his own experience. In fact, no attempt is made to convey the tonal quality of the city and its influence on Potter's sensibility.

Indeed, at times, Potter's London is like a badly-written and overdrawn version of the more inferior sections of Redburn's city. Redburn's descriptions of innumerable beggars, extreme suffering, fraudulent and criminal practices and the variety of the Liverpool scene; the loose, episodic quality of the Liverpool section in general; and the plethora of irrelevant or unrelated details, are not unlike Potter's descriptions of London. We also remember that except in the guide-book and the Launcelott's-Hey episode, Redburn's perception of the city is rarely conveyed; this is, without exception, true of the city in Potter's autobiography.

Though we should not overemphasize the similarities between these two books — for even the inferior sections of Redburn are stylistically immeasurably superior to the clumsily written Life and Remarkable Adventures — the fact that they should even remotely resemble each other is significant. For in writing Israel Potter, Melville felt that he could turn away from the type of incidents which contributed to so much of the atmosphere of Redburn; obviously his attitude towards the city has changed. Instead, Melville concentrates on a metaphoric rendering of the cityscape. In his version of Israel Potter's story, Melville offers this explanation for overlooking the sordid details of Israel's stay in London:

But these experiences, both from their intensity, and his solitude, were necessarily squalid. Best not enlarge upon them. For just as extreme suffering, without hope, is intoler-
able to the victim, so, to others, is its depiction without some corresponding delusive mitigation (p. 214).

In other words, Melville is nodding ironically at his readers telling them that he will not describe the whole story because it will not be acceptable to the readers. But this is not exactly true, for, as Melville had claimed in the dedication, he has not tried to "mitigate" the hard fortunes of his hero. It is probably more accurate to say that Melville felt that he could make a more convincing statement of Israel's situation by ignoring the superficial aspects of city-life and by concentrating on the meaning of Israel's existence in London. For this reason, the chaos of Israel's urban experience had to be replaced by the clarifying overview of the narrator who could use a technique of indirection to convey the essence of city-experience. Consequently, the narrator can "cross over and skim events to the end" and condense the endless pages on Israel's unrelieved suffering in the city into one long sentence containing incidents nowhere suggested in the source, events which convey the unreal and fantastic aspects of the life of the derelicts of the city:

From this turning point, then, we too cross over and skim events to the end; omitting the particulars of the starveling's wrangling with rats for prizes in the sewers; or his crawling into an abandoned doorless house in St. Giles; where his hosts were three dead men, one pendant, into another of an alley nigh Houndsditch, where the crazy hovel, in phosphoric rottenness, fell sparkling on him one pitchy midnight, and he received that injury, which, excluding activity for no small part of the future, was an added cause of his prolongation of exile, besides not leaving his faculties unaffected by the concussion of one of the rafters on his brain. (pp. 214-215).
Critics who have declared that the real reason Melville chose to ignore Israel's urban experience was that it was too painful, have surely overlooked this passage. It discredits their contention, and the "wasteland block" of the novel, *in toto*, conveys the moral and intellectual toughness which Melville was to display in *The Confidence-Man*. An even more persuasive objection to their observation would be to point out that Melville decided to portray the negative aspects of city life through myths and allusion and through the symbolic structure of the novel. I intend to prove this assertion in the next two sections of this chapter; for the moment, we can return to our examination of Melville's treatment of his sources.

Rivalling the *Life and Remarkable Adventures* as a source for *Israel Potter* is Melville's *Journal of a Visit to London and the Continent 1849-1850*. Though Melville visited London ostensibly to find a publisher for *White-Jacket*, his *Journal* suggests that he was also acquiring material for his future literary efforts. Thus out of this trip he managed to procure matter not only for the London and Parisian sections of *Israel Potter* but also for some of his shorter fiction. "Temple Second", "Rich Man's Crumbs" and "The Paradise of Bachelors", all have their origin in his London experience which he recorded in the *Journal*.

A comparison of the *Journal* with *Israel Potter* shows the extent of Melville's dependence on his own visit for the treatment of Israel's stay in London. We have already noted in Chapter 2 of this study, Melville's identification of London with the City of Dis in one of the journal entries. Because it is the source of some of the most impressive images of Chapter XXV of *Israel Potter*,
the entry is worth repeating:

Went down to the Bridges to see the people crowding there. Crossed by Westminster, through the Parks to the Edgeware Road & found the walk delightful — the sun coming out a little, & the air not cold. While on one of the Bridges, the thought struck me again that a fine thing might be written about a Blue Monday in November London — a city of Dis (Dante's) — clouds of smoke — the damned &c — coal barges — coaly waters, cast-iron Duke &c — its marks are left upon you, &c. &c. &c.

Five years later, Melville expanded this entry into a full-scale description of London Bridge and its surroundings, as seen on the fifth of November: "It was late on a Monday morning, in November — a Blue Monday — Guy Fawkes' Day! — very blue, foggy, doleful and gunpowdery..." (p. 210). On such an inauspicious day, Israel is soon "wedged in among the greatest everyday crowd which grimy London presents to the curious stranger". The Bridge is "black; besmoked"; underneath it, "like awaiting hearses, the coal-scows drifted along, poled broadside, pell-mell to the current" (p. 211). In the polluted water, "the jetty colliers lay moored, side by side", like "fleets of black swans". There is, however, no trace of the delight which Melville had found in his walk over the Bridge and the sun is now entirely hidden so that the "air darkened" and everything looked "dull" and "dismayed" (p. 212). The clouds of smoke are now compared to that arising from volcanoes which engulfed mythical and historical cities. The soot leaves its mark on everything. The chapter is titled "In the City of Dis" and the narrator concludes near its end that nothing could in "this cindery City of Dis abide white". Obviously, Melville has expanded the
terse journal entry into an extended portrait of an urban hell which will soon claim Israel Potter in its pits.

In another journal entry, Melville describes the view from Primrose Hill:

The view was curious. Towards Hampstead the open country looked green, & the air was pretty clear, but cityward it was like a view of hell from Abraham's bosom. Clouds of smoke, as though you looked down from Mt. Washington in a mist (Journal, p. 32).

Israel's London, where "no speck of any green thing seen" (p. 212) is full of smoke and cinders. A number of allusions image this unhealthy world into an urban inferno.

The mist and the fog are ubiquitous in both the Journal and the novel. In the city, Israel is always confronted by "the ever-present cloud" (p. 214) and is at times engulfed by the London fog (pp. 214, 219). On one occasion, the fog is "so dense that the dimmed and massed blocks of houses, exaggerated by the loom, seemed shadowy ranges on ranges of midnight hills" (p. 219). His mind begins to wander at this sight and he loses his way. Several entries in the Journal describe the London fog (Journal, pp. 45, 47, 49) and in one of these foggy days, Melville records how he momentarily lost his way. At the end of his wanderings that day, he notes: "And thus closes a most foggy, melancholy, sepulchral day" (Journal, p. 49). In all probability, the gloomy, death-like and carceral city of the novel owes its existence to such an experience.

In the Journal, Melville described his bouts of home-sickness. In one of the entries, he wrote:
One of Melville's most effective additions to his source is the nostalgia which overtakes Israel with increasing frequency during his later years of exile. Two such instances occur at Covent Garden Market and at St. James Park. In them Melville stresses the regressive mood induced by Israel's homesickness in an alien city. But in developing them, Melville emphasizes their delusive quality. Israel makes no attempt to rally from such a state; for him, they represent the only escape from the hardships of exile.

As in the case of the Life and Remarkable Adventures, it is important to note not only Melville's borrowings but also his omissions. Unlike Israel's experience of London, Melville mostly enjoyed his stay in the English capital. In narrating the story of Israel Potter, Melville naturally chose the darker memories recorded in the Journal. But in addition to this obvious fact, we must note the difference between the type of London he wanted to write about and the city he eventually described in his eighth novel. Originally, Melville appears to have conceived of a London whose locales were to enter into the narrative in some detail. This is suggested by the following journal entry about his trip to a London bookstore: "Looked over a lot of ancient maps of London. Bought one (A.D. 1766) for 3 & 6 pence. I want to use it in case I serve up the Revolutionary narrative of the beggar (Journal, p. 75). Melville's frequent attempts to thread the urban labyrinth during his visit
fortify this hypothesis (Journal, p. 26, 36, 49). His numerous excursions into various parts of the city remind us of Redburn's wanderings in Liverpool and Pierre's forays into obscure streets. London streets and places are only once described in any detail in Israel Potter (the major exception, of course, is the portrait of London Bridge). By the time Melville wrote this novel, he probably felt that descriptions of specific localities were only occasionally necessary. Israel Potter's London, therefore, has an indefinite, impressionistic quality, nowhere present in either the Life and Remarkable Adventures or the Journal.

It was Melville's usual technique to supplement his own knowledge of a place with information culled from travelogues. Israel Potter is no exception to this practice, and though this fact has gone almost unnoticed, the London of the novel is also drawn from a quite well known contemporary book on the city. Melville had bought a copy of Charles Knight's London during his trip and had dined with Knight on one occasion. In his description of the history and the view of and from London Bridge, Melville utilized the essay on the Bridge in volume I of London by G.L. Craik. A comparison of this essay with Melville's description of the Bridge shows how closely he followed this source:

Forthwith, to seek his fortune, he preceded on foot to the capital, entering like the king, from Windsor, from the Surrey side (p. 210).

Over London Bridge, on the 29th of August, 1392, king Richard, having come from Windsor, by the way of Richmond and Wandsworth, passed in joyous procession....

At the period here written of, the bridge, specifically known by that name, was

Now the first London Bridge of stone was begun to be built in the year 1176, and
a singular and sombre pile, built by a cowled monk—Peter of Colechurch—some five hundred years before (p. 210).

Its arches had long been crowded at the sides with strange old rookeries, of disproportioned and toppling height, converting the bridge at once into the most densely occupied ward and most jammed thoroughfare of the town....(p. 210).

...as the skulls of bullocks are hung out for signs to the gateways of shambles, so the withered head and smoked quarters of traitors, stuck on pikes, long crowned the Southwark entrance.

Though these rookeries, with their grisly heraldry, had been pulled down some twenty years prior to the present visit, still enough of grotesque and antiquity clung to the structure at large to render it the most striking of objects (p. 210-211).

And as that tide in the water swept all crafts on, a like tide seemed hurrying all men, all was not finished till the year 1209. The architect was the same who had built the last wooden fabric, Peter, Curate of St. Mary Colechurch. (London, p. 79)

In a patent role of the 9th year of Edward I, A.D. 1280, mention is made of "innumerable people dwelling upon" the bridge; and as this was only seventy years after it had been finished, it seems most probable that there were some houses upon it from the first. In course of time it became a continued street built on both sides.... (London, pp. 80-81).

On the top of the front of this tower at the Southwark end the heads of persons executed for high treason used to be stuck.... the exposed heads were removed to the tower over the gates at the Southwark end or the foot of the bridge, as it was commonly called, and that gate now received the name of Traitor's gate.... The most illustrious memories associated with the old bridge are not of persons who ever lived there, but of some of those whose ghostly heads, stuck upon poles or spikes, were set up to pinnacle its towers after the executioner had made them trunkless. (London, pp. 81, 82, 87)

At the widest part, the street on the Bridge was no more than twenty feet broad, and on some
horses, all vehicles on the land. As ant-hills, the bridge arches crowded with procession of carts, coaches, drays, every sort of wheeled, rumbling thing. ...(p. 211).

The comparison with the king's entry in the first of these parallels is obviously ironic; Israel enters the city in the worst possible situation — "a tolerable suit of clothes — somewhat darned — in his back, several blood-blisters in his palms, and some verdigris coppers in his pocket" (p. 210) — in total contrast to the triumphant entry of King Richard. Melville's reason for including the historical note on Colechurch, however, is not clear; it seems to add nothing to the narrative, though his addition of "the singular and sombre pile" certainly adds to the tonal quality of the scene. The reference to the heads hung on pikes is relevant because Israel has been working against the English state and is soon going to be sentenced to oblivion for his dedication to the American cause. This horrifying spectacle is also a suitable introduction to his entry into the urban heart of darkness.

Israel is soon going to be swept along by the ceaseless flow of people on the bridge and thus the reference to the crowded bridge and the image of the tide are pertinent.

Though Melville has relied on the essay on London Bridge for these scenes, in every instance, he has transformed the original with a striking image (for example, to say that the heads "crowned" the Southwark entrance is more economical and more effective than
to state that they were "set up to pinnacle" the towers) or a more appropriate metaphor (thus, to talk about a "torrent" of wheeled things in an extremely crowded street is not exactly accurate; Melville's "tide" is more relevant not only because it unifies the movement of the traffic on the river with the human procession on the bridge but also because it is more appropriate to the slow moving vehicles on it).

It is also possible that in drawing the picture of London Bridge, Melville was drawing on the illustrations of the Bridge, collected in Knight's *London*. On page 80 of this collection, there is an illustration of "London Bridge just before the Houses were pulled down in 1760". The "strange old rookeries of disproportionate and toppling height", which Melville had no opportunity to behold, are vividly drawn in this illustration. A gloomy cloud hangs over the bridge and most of the picture is drawn in dark shades so prominent in Melville's description. In the illustration on page 82, captioned, "approaches to London Bridge on the Southwark side", Melville probably found clues for his account of the bridge before and after it was pulled down: "...enough of grotesque and antiquity clung to the structure at large to render it the most striking of objects" (p. 211).10

Melville thus constructed the chapters on London in *Israel Potter* from the *Life and Remarkable Adventures*, his own observations as recorded in the *Journal* and Knight's *London*. He carefully condensed, selected and combined the information and images from such disparate sources and embellished them with numerous allusions. These allusions account for the dense texture of the "wasteland block" of the novel and it is to this aspect of the
concluding chapters that we must now turn.

II

The number of allusions in the concluding chapters of *Israel Potter* is remarkable. A set of biblical allusions, for example, ironically fulfills the promise implicit in Israel's name. In the first chapter of *Israel Potter*, Melville had drawn attention to Israel's "prophetically styled" name, "since, for more than forty years, poor Potter wandered in the wild wilderness of the world's extremest hardships and ills" (p. 5). After his many adventures, Israel, as the title of Chapter XXVIII informs us, arrives in Egypt (p. 204). His work in the brickyard symbolizes his bondage to industrial civilization. Israel, and the workers of the brickyard, survive the degrading routine of the brickyard by adapting the lesson of *Ecclesiastes*: "To these muddy philosophers, men and bricks were equally of clay. 'What signifies who we be—dukes or ditchers?' thought the moulders, 'all is vanity and clay'" (p. 206). It is surely no accident that Melville would use in this scene, the allusions which had climax ed the try-works chapter of *Moby-Dick*: "The truest of all men was the Man of Sorrows, and the truest of all book is Solomon's and Ecclesiastes is the fine hammered steel of woe. 'All is vanity.' ALL". In *Moby-Dick*, this biblical reference is followed by another from *Proverbs*: "But even Solomon, he says, 'the man that wandereth out of the way of understanding shall remain' (i.e. even while living) 'in the congregation of the dead.'" And from his experience with the try-works, Ishmael concludes: "Give not thyself up, then, to fire, lest it invert thee, deaden thee, as for the time it did me."
Unlike Ishmael, Israel gives himself up to the fire of the brickyard and the Inferno of the city; he thus wanders out of the way of all understanding into a death-in-life, which all but extinguishes his flame of life. In the huge assembly plant of the brickyard, Israel fails to achieve even the status of a brick, for despite the bitter weather he can't take refuge in the sheds, since they were meant for the bricks. Unless, as the narrator bitingly observes, "each man was a 'brick' which, in sober scripture, was the case; brick is no bad name for any son of Adam; Eden was but a brickyard; what is a mortal but a few luckless shovelfuls of clay, moulded in a mould, laid out in a sheet to dry, and ere long quickened into his queer caprices by the sun?" (p. 206). There is a further irony in Israel's work in the brickyard, which the narrator is quick to point out. For he who has fought so valiantly against the English is now reduced to making the bricks to build the citadel which will soon confine him: "Poor Israel! well named-bondsman in the English Egypt" (p. 209).

Another set of allusions ironically compares Israel to Christ and to other biblical figures. Israel enters the city with "several blood-blisters in his palms" (p. 210); in the last chapter, when he has finally reached America, he is referred to as "the bescarred bearer of a cross" (p. 223). His wanderings in the London deserts "surpassed the forty years in the natural wilderness of the outcast Hebrews under Moses", though it is so aimless (p. 215). He confronts "the ever-present cloud by day" but there is "no pillar of fire by the night" to guide him through the urban wilderness. Another allusion compares Israel to the Wandering Jew (p. 220). The full force of this comparison becomes evident
when we think of Melville's full scale portrait of the Wandering Jew in the Mar Saba section of *Clarel*. There the Jew looks at the towers of Jerusalem and cries out:

O city yonder,
Exposed in penalty and wonder,
Again thou seest me! Hither I
Still drawn am by the guilty tie
Between us; all the load I bear
Only thou know'st, for thou dost share,
As round my heart the phantoms throng
Of tribe and era punished long.
So thou art haunted, sister in wrong!

(Clarel, III, xix, 19-27).

Though Israel is never allowed to articulate his thought in this impassioned manner, and though he has no specific burden of guilt to carry, he is drawn to a haunted and condemned London by a mysterious instinct. In working in the brickyard and in entering this urban nightmare, he shares in the crimes against man committed by civilization.

It is true that Israel has always nurtured his dreams of returning to "the promised land" (p. 221); in this respect he is like the biblical Israel or Moses. He inspires his surviving son — "the spared Benjamin of his old age" — with the images "of the far Canaan beyond the sea" — but when he finally returns, he finds his only hope shattered. Unlike the biblical heroes he is never rewarded for his years of exile.

Like the Jerusalem of the Wandering Jew, the London of *Israel Potter* is a fallen world. A complex of allusions and similes conjure up a living hell which sucks in Israel. Foremost among these are the allusions to Dante's *City of Dis*. The Thames, for example, is like Acheron: "Fretted by the ill-built piers, awhile it crested
and hissed, then shot balefully through the Erebus arches, desperate as the lost souls of the harlots, who every night, took the same plunge" (p. 211). In Canto III of the **Inferno**, Acheron is that "livid lake" around whose eyes glared "wheeling flames" and into which demoniac elements plunge: "As full of the light autumnal leaves,/one still another following till the bough/Strews all its honors on the earth beneath;/E'en in like manner Adan's evil brood/Cast themselves...." In Dante's poem, the rest of this condemned lot crosses Acheron in Charon's boat. In **Israel Potter**, Israel joins the crowd in crossing over the bridge to the City of Dis. The Thames is also explicitly called the Phlegethon: "It seemed as if some squadrons of centaurs, on the thither side of Phlegethon, with charge on charge, was driving tormented humanity, with all its chattels, across" (P. 212). In the **Inferno**, Phlegethon is another underground river of Hell, especially important in the lower circles. Melville seems to have in mine Canto XII, where Virgil sees "the river of blood/....on the which all those who are steep'd,/Who have by violence injured." Dante beholds "an ample foss" and "Between it and the rampart's base,/On trail ran Centaurs, with keen arrows arm'd,/As to the chase they on the earth were wont." It is the duty of these centaurs to keep the tormented souls in their proper places.

As Israel stands on the bridge and looks at the faces of the people around him he is frightened by what he sees. He does not know them, perhaps he will never meet them again: "one after the other, they drifted by, uninvoked ghosts in Hades. Some of the wayfarers wore a less serious look; some seemed hysterically merry; but the mournful faces had an earnestness not seen in the others".
As he crosses the bridge, Israel's heart "was prophetically heavy, foreknowing, that being of this race, felicity could never be his lot" (p. 213). It is almost as if Israel had read and understood the message inscribed on the entry to Dante's city in Canto III of the Inferno: "All hope abandon, ye who enter here". And as for the hopeless throng which passes him by, they are like the multitude who are "so overcome with woe" and who "lament so loud" that Dante is moved to exclaim: "Such a long train of spirits, I should n'er/Have thought that death so many had despoil'd". 13

It is perhaps because of their common roots in Dante's Inferno that Melville's vision of London Bridge should so resemble T.S. Eliot's version of the urban wasteland. 14 Eliot's "Unreal City", with its "brown fog" in "a winter dawn"; his description of the London crowd "flowing" over the Bridge: "so many,/I had not thought death had undone so many/Sighs, short and frequent were exhaled" (The Waste Land, I, 60-64); his lines on the polluted Thames: "The river sweats/Oil and tar/The barges drift/With the turning tide" (The Waste Land, III, 266-270); and his final apocalyptic vision of the doomed city: "Falling towers/Jerusalem Athens Alexandra/Vienna London/Unreal" (The Waste Land, V, 374-377) are prefigured in Melville's London. It is as if they had captured the city in a timeless zone or had penetrated it to its eternal essence.

If anything, Melville's vision of the city is even more apocalyptic than that of Eliot's:

Whichever way the eye turned, no speck of any green thing was seen—no more than in smithies. All labourers, of whatsoever sort, were hued like the men in foundries. The black vistas of streets were as the galleries in coal mines; the flagging, as flat tombstones, minus
the consecration of moss, and worn heavily
down, by sorrowful tramping, as the vitreous
rocks in the cursed Gallipagos, over which
the convict tortoises crawl.

As in eclipses, the sun was hidden; the
air darkened; the whole dull, dismayed aspect
of things, as if some neighbouring volcano,
belching its premonitory smoke, were about to
whelm the great town, as Herculaneum and
Pompeii, or the Cities of the Plain. And as
they had been upturned in terror toward the
mountain, all faces were more or less snowed
or spotted with soot. Nor marble, nor flesh,
nor the sad spirit of man, may in this cindery
City of Dis abide white. (p. 212)

The allusions here to biblical, historical and literary cities, the
association of the London scene with the Galapagos wasteland, vol-
canic eruptions, a landscape of death, penal institutions and
factories and mines suggest that Melville is trying to create a
mythical landscape. No longer interested in citysights or the city
as seen through the life of his protagonist, Melville now presents
a cityscape which encompasses the history of human civilization.
As with Eliot, a religious sensibility is at work and to it setting
indicates timeless truths.

In a very suggestive study of Melville's mythic imagination,
Gerard M. Sweeney observes that in his later years "history, its
clashes, events, characters, sites — contained for Melville the
scenes of a profound and highly personal significance, awaiting the
fecundation that his myth-making intellect could supply". Sweeney
goes on to note:

Melville's private mythologization of
history peaked at roughly the period when
Melville the artist was portraying the non-
Promethean anti-Promethean anti-heroes whose
depiction required no intensive mythic allu-
siveness. And certainly by the 1860's Melville
found he could glean myth not only from the
biographies of historical persons, but also from actual — and contemporaneous — events and places. It is evident from the Hadean imagery of "The Encantadas" and Clarel that the real places described in these works, the Galapagos Islands and the Holy Land, served Melville's mythic imagination precisely as various literary infernos (Homer's, Virgil's, Dante's) had done earlier in his life. His consciousness knew such places as realities, in other words, but his imagination bathed them in moonlight (to use one of Hawthorne's favorite images) and so visualized them mythically.

Though Sweeney does not discuss Israel Potter in his study of Melville's use of myths, and though the concluding sections of Israel Potter show Melville at the height — and not the ebb-tide — of allusiveness, his essential point about Melville's mythical imagination operating in the later works is applicable to the London of the eighth novel. History to Melville now is the history of the common man's victimization by politics, by industrialization, by urbanization. Melville's actual setting is London, but in the mythical imagination it is contemporaneous with the volcanic wasteland of the "Encantadas" or the desert wasteland of Palestine in Clarel.

To the mythopoeist, the crowded city is like the desert or the wilderness. If London is compared to the Galapagos in Israel Potter, Melville's sketches on the Enchanted Isles can also begin with an urban image: "Take five-and-twenty heaps of cinders dumped here and there in an outside city lot; imagine some of them magnified into mountains, and the vacant lot the sea; and you will have a fit idea of the general aspect of the Encantadas". In Israel Potter everything seems, to be covered by the cinders from an active volcano; "The Encantadas" represent the same landscape the morning after,
"looking much as the world at large might, after a penal conflagration". Just as "no speck of any green" can be seen in the novel's London, these islands have little or no vegetation either. In an earlier chapter, Melville had noted the "secret clefts, gulfs and caves and dens of London" with their "depths of horror" (p. 203); the Encantadas are similarly full of "dark clefts and caves" where men can easily lose themselves. The only inhabitants of these Enchanted Isles are the tortoises; these look "self-condemned" and show signs of "lasting sorrow and penal hopelessness".16 In Israel Potter, the citizens of the English capital are explicitly compared to these tortoises. Finally, like the Galapagos, Israel's London appears to be condemned to an eternity of death-in-life.

Another Melvillean wasteland is described by Rolfe in his meditation on the city in Clarel. As he looks at Jerusalem and its environs, Rolfe wonders:

'Is yon the city Dis aloof?'
Said Rolfe, "Nay, liker 'tis some point,
Old blurred, bewrinkled mezzotint.
And distant, look, what lifeless hills!
Dead long for them the hymn of rills
And birds. Nor trees, nor ferns they know;
Nor lichen there hath leave to grow....
(Clarel, I, xxvii, 29-34).

Rolfe's allusion to Dante's Hell, his comparison of the city to a worn-out print, its lifeless surroundings, and the triple negatives are all prefigured in the two paragraphs on London which we have quoted above. Much later in Clarel, Melville devotes one entire canto (IV,iii) to Agath's comparison of the Judaic landscape to the Galapagos, complete with cinders, volcanoes, wastelands and tortoises. The canto is perhaps the conclusive proof of the unity of
Melville's mythic imagination about which Sweeney has been so eloquent. Agath's island, Rolfe's vision of Jerusalem and its environs as seen from the tower, the narrator's meditations on the Encantadas and the editor's reflection on the city to which Israel Potter is condemned, echo each other and perhaps account for the endless reverberations emanating from Chapter XXV of Israel Potter.

III

Many of the allusions in the "wasteland block" of the novel have to do with confinement. Thus London is said to be worse than "the German forest" or "Tasso's enchanted one" because it entraps Israel for forty years (p. 203). Israel slaves for thirteen weeks in the "English Egypt" of the brickyard (p. 209). He is then incarcerated in the City of Dis. He enters the city on Guy Fawkes day — named after the notorious prisoner whose fate it was to be burnt in an effigy for endless years. The heads of other captives stuck on pikes hint at the many who were imprisoned and impaled by the citizens. They are themselves like "convict tortoises" (p. 212). In a very bitter reference, Israel is shown with other ex-soldiers in the London underground, comparing notes on "sea prisoners in hulks" and the "Black Holes of Calcutta" (p. 216). He is then compared to the "trespassing Pequod Indian, impounded on the shores of Narragansett Bay, long ago" (p. 218). In his exile, America appears to the deluded Israel as "the Fortunate Isles of the Free" (p. 221).

These allusions and images of imprisonment are supplemented by the many references in these concluding chapters where Israel is shown to be held in a pit or an underground vault. He is thus
exposed to the horrors of "the secret clefts, gulfs, caves and dens of London" (p. 203). The grimy aspects of the workers in the brickyard are compared to the fate of a man drowned "at the bottom of the lake in the Dismal Swamp" (p. 203). In the brickyard, Israel is assigned a task in the pit: "Half buried there in the pit, all the time, handling those desolate trays, poor Israel seemed some gravedigger, or churchyard man" (p. 216). In London, Israel's career is a steady decline: "From the gutter he slid to the sewer.... But many a poor soldier had sloped down there into the boggy canal of Avernus before him" (p. 216). Still later, he spends a great deal of his time in the "subterranean society of his friends" (p. 216), at "the more public corners, and intersections of sewers—the Charing Crosses below" (p. 217).

These allusions to prisons and pits and the reference to London as one of the three Armageddons which consigned Israel to the "depth of obscurity" (p. 09) point to the major function of the city in the thematic structure of the novel. Israel Potter is primarily a novel about confinement and flight, and it is the carceral city which finally imprisons Israel and seriously impairs his capacity for further flight. London, in other words, is not only a wasteland for condemned humanity, but also a vast and pulverizing prisonhouse for the Israel Potters of the world.

The city as a prison and the prison in the city are familiar images in Melville's fiction. In Moby-Dick, the city is presented as the great enclosure—"belted round by wharves as Indian isles by coral reefs"—while the citizens are on week days "pent up in lath and plaster—tied to counters, nailed to benches, clinched to desks." But Ishmael can escape to the sea; in Israel Potter
the sea is the barrier between Israel and the "Promised Land". In *Pierre*, the hero condemns himself to his own private City of Dis, and when he finds no escape from this hell, he provokes an incident which leads to his imprisonment inside a city prison.

"Bartleby, the Scrivener" is, of course, the story of Wall Street, and confining, constricting walls, as well as the pervasive commercial spirit of New York, drive Bartleby to his last existential gesture. Bartleby ends his life in the prison not because of the torments of his personal hell but as a protest against the claustral, self-seeking urban world of New York. This movement away from the subjective prison of *Pierre* to the objective prisonhouse of urban civilisation is continued in *Israel Potter* and climaxes in Rolfe's assertion in *Clarel*:

Now first they tell
The human mind is free to range
Enlargement — ay; but where's the change
We're yet within the citadel —
May rove in bounds, and study out
The insuperable towers about.

(Clarel, II, xxi, 38-43)

In Rolfe's words we can catch clearly what is stated indirectly through imagery and allusions in the London chapters of *Israel Potter*.

For Israel, London is the last of a number of literal and metaphorical prisons. Israel's initial attempts to escape from these house of confinement show a great deal of ingenuity. Later they become increasingly frantic; in the end he simply capitulates to the awesome confines of the brickyard and the city. The last sentence of the opening chapter foretells it all: "This little boy of the hills, born in the sight of the sparkling Housatonic, was to
linger out the best part of his life a prisoner or a pauper upon the grimy banks of the Thames" (p. 6). But the apparently idyllic Housatonic valley can be a prison too — in the winter this beautiful region becomes immured with "dense masses of fog" and is "blocked up with snow" (p. 5). "Inaccessible and impassable" then, it prevents "inter-communication" between man and man.

Israel flees this land while still in his teens; he has thus "emancipated himself from his sire" (p. 7). He works at different occupations; for some time he becomes an assistant chain-bearer, "little thinking that the day was to come when he should clink the king's chains in a dungeon" (p. 9). During the American war for independence, he enlists in the American army, is eventually captured, and then confined in the "black bowels of the ship...like Jonah in the belly of a whale" (p. 17). He escapes but is recaptured; this pattern is repeated several times in the first chapter (pp. 17, 18, 19, 27, 28). During this time he shows the "wisdom of the serpent" (p. 19) but also displays "helpless despair" (p. 28). He finds temporary refuge, first at Sir John Millet's garden and then in the King's garden at Kew, where he is said to be like Daniel in the Lion's den. But he is pursued again and then suddenly finds himself transformed into a courier, and dispatched to Paris to visit Benjamin Franklin.

Though he is supposed to be a free man in Paris, the good Doctor confines him too. As Israel ruefully observes, he has become "a prisoner in Paris" (p. 69). A more serious confinement begins when he is concealed in a secret chamber in Squire Woodcock's house. While he lies concealed, the Squire dies. In the cell, Israel experiences the nightmarish sensation of being "buried alive"
with no hopes of "resurrection" (p. 88). In the first hours of his captivity, he reflects: "Poverty and liberty, or plenty and a prison, seems to be the horns of the constant dilemma of my life" (p. 89). The sense of being "coffined", the "delirium" induced by the darkness and the "contraction of space" in a secret chamber (designed by a religious order to confine "inmates convicted of contumacy" till they became penitent), and no signs of release, force him to find his way out (pp. 92-93). But he is "impressed" again (p. 111) aboard an English warship. He is rescued by an American warship and for some time is in full control of his destiny. Another freakish incident, however, finds him in an enemy ship. With great ingenuity, he manages to talk himself to freedom. When the ship reaches Falmouth he visits some captured American prisoners and then deserts the ship and heads for London.

Israel's visit to the American prisoners in a Falmouth tower is significant. In the Life and Remarkable Adventures, where there is no attempt made to develop the pattern of escape and confinement which we have traced above, Potter visits some American prisoners in a London jail soon after his entry into the city (Life, p. 53). Potter records another visit to a London prison to meet an influential figure in the American cause who is now in fetters (Life, p. 60) and is himself jailed for four months because of his inability to pay his debts (Life, pp. 70-71). In Israel Potter, however, Melville transfers Israel's first visit to the prison from London to Falmouth, ignores the second visit and the story of Israel's captivity. Why did Melville, who has so deliberately developed the theme of confinement and flight, make these changes? In all probability, Melville felt that literal prisons were no
longer relevant in his account of Israel's experience of the city. Instead, Melville concentrated all his art into creating through allusions and images a London which became a vast, overwhelming, metaphoric prison which cripples Israel and damages his capacity for further flight.

During Israel's bondage in the brickyard, the image of the prison is suggested in several ways. Israel is subject in the brickyard to "one of the many surly overseers, or taskmasters of the yard" (p. 204). Inside the mill of this yard, "a spavined old horse" (p. 204), which is tied to a "clumsy machine", circles it "wearily" (p. 205). Its situation becomes paradigmatic of the human condition inside this factory, for "spavined-looking old men" serve wearily other machines. An entire paragraph completes this image of enslavement and fatigue:

For thirteen weary weeks, lorded over by the task-master. Israel toiled in his pit. Though this condemned him to a sort of earthy dungeon, or gravedigger's hole, which he worked, yet even when liberated to his meals, naught of a cheery nature greeted him. The yard was encamped, with all its endless rows of tented sheds, and kilns, and mills, upon a wild waste moor, belted round by bogs and fens. The blank horizon, like a rope, coiled round the whole (p. 206).

The imagery of imprisonment, entombment, weariness and isolation accumulate in this paragraph and in the next — as in the opening chapter, the incident in the secret chamber at Squire Woodcock's, and in the description of the City of Dis — to create a powerful symbol of his solitary confinement in a vast, crowded penitentiary.

Melville used the brick-kiln as a symbol of urban and industrial civilization throughout his work. After his discovery of
the inadequacy of the guide-book and the transformations in the English cityscape, Redburn asks rhetorically: "Is Liverpool but a brick-kiln?" (Redburn, p. 159). Melville himself in a letter could complain about "the heat and dust of the babylonish brick-kiln of New York". While Pierre is at work on his Inferno, we are told that "the long rooms of cooled brick-kilns around him" were indifferent to the changes in his situation (Pierre, p. 245). In Israel Potter, the brick-kiln becomes a symbol of industrial oppression and the workers enact the debasement of life and the obliteration of individuality under the factory system. Like the bricks closest to the fire, they become "distorted" and "haggard" due to their proximity to the heat blasts.

When Israel moves from the brickyard, he has merely left one inferno for another. He has little energy left to fight back after the debilitating experience in the brickyard. Against the huge, carceral city, he has no chance of success. To understand why Israel, who has displayed his courage and strength in previous confinements, is so overwhelmed by the city, and to comprehend his forty years of wandering in the city consequent to his initial "surprise", we can perhaps turn to F.S. Schwarzbach's reflection on the experience of the nineteenth century city:

It is, I believe, by no means inappropriate to compare the experience of entering a life in the early nineteenth century city in England to that of inmates of concentration camps in Germany... The effects on the personality of such extreme circumstances are similar. The events surrounding the experience are perceived as arbitrary and meaningless. In addition, one's own sense of identity is shattered, and the sense of self becomes uncertain.
Certainly, something very much like the effects that Schwarzbach describes has happened to Israel. By crossing the bridge he has entered a vast concentration camp and has surrendered to a faceless and aimless existence, controlled by forces beyond his control or understanding: "sickness, destitution" (p. 213), wars and peace, "Malthusian enigma(s) in human affairs" (p. 216), and even such unpredictables as "a crazy hovel which in phosphoric rottenness, fell sparkling on him one pitchy midnight" (p. 213).

Into Israel's shattered life, Melville inserts two incidents, nowhere suggested in the source. Once in Covent Garden Market, and again in St. James Park, Israel is overcome by hallucination. To the prisoner, fantasy is one mode of escape; though his body is cramped, his shaken mind can still find refuge in withdrawal and nostalgia. So it is that while in the market he has the first of "his strange alleviations" (p. 217) from his miserable existence. Surrounded by garden produce, "In want and bitterness, pent in, perforce, between dingy walls, he had rural returns of his boyhood's sweeter days among them, and the hardest stones of his solitary heart (made hard by bare endurance alone) would feel the stir of tender but quenchless memories, like the grass of deserted flagging, upsprouting through its closest seams". Again, while working in "an oval enclosure" of St. James' Park — "fenced in with iron palings, between whose bars the imprisoned verdure peered forth, as some wild captive creatures of the wood" — Israel's mind wanders back to the memories of childhood.

"The second alleviation" which finally rescues Israel and returns him home occurs when he inspires his son, "the poor en-
slaved boy of Moorfields" with the stories of the American Utopia (p. 221). For the boy also feels the "longing to escape his entailed misery" and succeeds in getting a passage for himself and his father to the "Promised Land". But the old man with "the shattered mind" (p. 223)—the price he paid for his years in London—returns back to nothing; his remaining hopes are quickly smashed and he himself soon fades into oblivion.

Arnold Rampersad has pointed out that the most unconvincing part of Potter’s narrative was his inability to explain his forty years of residence in London. What Melville has done is to make a virtue out of his source’s weakness. By making London a prison-house and an awesome presence, which "slay(s) and secretes" (p. 213) Israel Potter, he has accounted for Israel’s stay. The remarkable thing is that he has done this not through direct statement but through a technique of indirection.

IV

Or as Harry Levin puts it, Melville approaches the city in Israel Potter, not "through myriads of lives", as does Dickens in Hard Times, but "from a distance and out of the open air, with an overwhelming accumulation of similes." Israel Potter’s London is seen nearly always from the narrator’s angle of vision. He views the London scene and Israel’s life in the city from a great height. This is especially noticeable in Chapter XXV, where the London scene and Israel’s entry into the city is described. It is almost as if the narrator stands above this world to see things in their totality. He now sees people and places through their general
condition. From this viewpoint, Israel is soon seen to merge with the crowds of this fallen world. Instead of the variety of sights and sounds which characterized the Liverpool of Redburn, we get uniform gestures or a depressingly homogenous landscape. For the greater part of this chapter, setting becomes more important than character; Israel can thus fade into the insignificance which is now the essence of his situation.

Because the narrator sees the city in the context of universal human history, the setting is overloaded with allusions to literary, mythical and historical cities and situations. The apocalyptic tone of Chapter XXV is due to the narrator's vision; to him the materially dominant city is unimportant. What matters is the unreality of London as seen through his intensely personal vision of the common man's fate in urban civilization.

It is only towards the end of this chapter that Melville returns to Israel, and then, and in Chapter XXVI, he readopts the ironic tone which has so characterized the narrator's tone in the novel. But the meditation on the city in Chapter XXV is by the omniscient narrator and the similarities of the narratorial stance in his novel and in "The Encantadas" account for the parallels between them. In Chapter XXV of Israel Potter Melville has clearly moved away from the city described to the city given a symbolic meaning.
CHAPTER III

Notes

1 Herman Melville, *Israel Potter: His Fifty Years of Exile* (New York: Russell & Russell Inc., 1963), p.v. Subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text. The "autobiographical story" which is the primary source of Melville's novel is the *Life and Remarkable Adventures of Israel R. Potter* (Providence, Printed by J. Howard, 1824). References to this edition will also appear in the text but will be cited as *Life*.


3 The critic is Edward H. Rosenberry and the observation appears in his *Melville*, p. 104. As Rosenberry's label indicates, the brickyard scene is emotionally and thematically linked in the novel with the chapters on the city. I have, therefore, considered them as one unit in this study.

4 For a discussion on the importance of Israel's disguises and clothes, see Rampersad, pp. 91-92. Rampersad notes that Israel changes dress at least eight times in the novel. Among these changes, his assumption of an old man's clothes (Chapter II) and of the clothes of the dead Squire and the scarecrow (Chapter XIII) also prefigure his dismal condition in London.
Thus F.O. Matthiessen, arguing from biographical evidence, concludes: "his ["Melville's"] own sense of suffering was so great that he could not bear to dwell on Potter's, and slurred over what was to have been his main subject in a couple of short chapters". American Renaissance, p. 491. His observation is echoed by Leonard Kriegel, in his Introduction to the Corinth Books reprint of the Life and Remarkable Adventures (New York, 1962), p. viii.

In "London and Melville's Israel Potter," Emerson Society Quarterly, 47 (1967), pp. 79-81, Raymona Hull has noted some of the parallels between Melville's Journal and the novel.


Only Hull has conjectured that "for the description of Peter Colechuch's London Bridge Melville must have drawn upon Knight's London". She does not make any further comments, however, and makes no attempt to prove her hypothesis. See Hull, p. 80.

In Melville's Reading, Merton M. Sealts notes: "no edition of Knight's London published in 3v. prior to 1851 has been located. Melville may have purchased an incomplete or rebound set." My references are to Volume I of the six volume edition published in 1851 (London, Henry G. Bohn) and will be cited as London.

The two illustrations are reproduced in the appendix, p.


13 The quotations from the *Inferno* are from Henry Francis Cary’s translation of *The Divine Comedy*, pp. 11-12, 47, 9-10.

14 Both F.O. Matthiessen and Harry Levin have noted the similarity between Melville’s London and Eliot’s. See, Matthiessen, n. p. 400 and Levin, p. 191.


17 Though they sound like something from Bunyan, the Dismal Swamps were actually a stretch of swampy land in the Eastern United States. Melville referred to them also in "the Try-Works" chapter of *Melville*, which, as we have noted above, resemble the brick-yard section of *Israel Potter*.

the motifs of confinement, escape and changing clothing in the novel. Keyssar observes that Israel's actions show "human life as a random series of escapades and actions that form a futile defence against entombment or death". (Keyssar, p. 20). Fredrick's essay and Keyssar's brief monograph are very perceptive, but their scope does not allow them to develop the importance of any one section. I have accepted their reading of the novel and have developed some of their observations and have concentrated on the concluding chapters of *Israel Potter*.

19 *Moby-Dick*, p. 44.


22 Rampersad, pp. 30-31.

23 Harry Levin, p. 191.
CONCLUSION

Melville's Changing Angles of Vision and the City

And some certain significance lurks in all things. 

Moby-Dick

In "On Point of View of the Arts," Jose Ortega y Gasset distinguishes "two distinct ways of seeing." The first of these, which according to Ortega is the more "feudal" (p. 831), is proximate vision. In this mode of vision our attention is centred on the object in front of us. The object is apparently "perfectly defined in details" (p. 823), but everything around it is "blurred, hardly identifiable, without accented form, reduced to confused masses of color" (p. 824). In contrast, in distant vision the field of vision approximates the "limit of the visual field". Though there is an absence of particularity, there is "a perfect unity of the visual field". In the movement from proximate to distant vision, especially when we look at "the confines of a remote horizon", things "acquire the half-unreal aspect of ghostly apparitions" (p. 825). But paradoxically, "the object of sight is not further off in distant than in proximate vision, since it begins at our cornea". Distant vision, therefore, is the more comprehensive mode of seeing and of uncovering significance. Ortega's thesis in the rest of the essay is that in European painting there has been a change in the point of view from the proximate to the distant so that "the evolution of Western painting.../consists in a retraction from the object toward the subject, the painter" (p. 826).

Ortega's distinctions and elaborations of the two modes of
vision are useful in summarizing the changes in Melville's visualization of the city in his novels. In this context, Redburn's rueful admission that he had perhaps missed the many landmarks in his father's guidebook because he had adopted the "horizontal" and not the "bird's eye survey" (Redburn, p. 152) is relevant. Though there is irony in Redburn's admission and though strictly speaking, "proximate" and "distant" are not the equivalents of "horizontal" and "bird's eye survey", we can apply Ortega's insights in discussing the changing angles of vision in Melville's presentation of different cities and the consequences of such changes.

In Redburn, the first-person narrator images the city mostly from the horizontal level; his proximity to the objects results in an inability to integrate the details of the cityscape. Though we often get vivid pictures of different sections of the city, its form remains unclear and there is no sustained attempt to exploit its symbolic aspects. Instead, we have a glut of details as Redburn describes one object after another. Structurally, the Liverpool chapters of the novel fail to become a whole and no real link is established between the narrator and the cityscape.

Though Pierre has an omniscient narrator, most of the events of the novel are seen by the central character. Pierre's eyes, to adapt what Ortega has noted in a somewhat different context in his essay, are no longer "absorbing" things, instead, they have become "projectors of private flora and fauna". While "the real world drained off" into Redburn's visual organs, now, Pierre's eyes have become "reservoirs of irreality" (p. 834). Consequently, the chaotic, irrational and hellish aspects of the city are stressed. There is a movement away from the object to the subject, making
setting in this novel predominantly a function of Pierre's psychological state.

The movement from the objective to the subjective, from the particular to the symbolic and from the proximate to the distant is continued in Israel Potter. In this novel, however, the city is seen almost entirely by the omniscient narrator. And what he sees, especially in the extended meditation on the London scene in Chapter XXV of the novel, is a perfectly unified visual field. Indeed, the narrator's eye roams to the confines of the remote horizon so that, in Ortega's words, "all acquire the half-unreal aspect of ghostly apparitions". From his vantage point he can see the form of the city and its significance as the repository of fallen condemned, confined humanity. It is because of the unity imposed by the narrator's point of view that we can see in the crowded city the same significance as we can discover in the barren wastelands of "The Encantadas".

The perspective of the Melvillean narrator in Israel Potter and "The Encantadas" remind us of the Melville who, when lost in the streets of Constantinople, could record: "Perfect labyrinth ["labyrinth"]. Narrow. Close, shut in. If one could but get up aloft, it would be easy to see one's way out. If you could but get up into tree. Soar out of the maze." Melville was to write this a year after the publication of Israel Potter; by this time his passion for climbing towers, domes and hilltops to get a good view—a passion demonstrated occasionally in the first trip to Europe (Journal of a Visit to London, pp. 22, 32, 41, 42, 64)—had become "an almost compulsive fascination". Perhaps he had come to realize that to transcend the limitations of proximate vision he had to see to the horizon.
The movement in Melville's treatment of the cityscape is therefore away from the city described to the city given a visionary quality. This study has tried to plot this movement from *Redburn* to *Israel Potter* and has attempted to link it to Melville's narrative perspective. In the last novel to be published in his lifetime, *The Confidence-Man*, the literal city disappears altogether. Instead, we have a masquerade in which the central player is a "cosmopolitan".

It was in his verse and not in his fiction that Melville would return to a city which was both a physical presence and a symbol. *Clarel*'s Jerusalem represents Melville's most extended treatment of, and sustained meditation on, an earthly city. The Jerusalem of this poem is a complex entity, seen from many angles, perceived variously by the different pilgrims, presented as an assortment of crowds, labyrinthine streets, beggars, sacred and historical sites and a landscape where the Void reigns. The poem also broods on the New Jerusalem, on ruined and abandoned cities. It would take another full-length study to evaluate the role of the city in *Clarel* and it is, in any case, outside the scope of this study. But by way of conclusion, I would like to quote a passage from the poem, which represents *Clarel*'s thoughts on Jerusalem and its environs. Together with Rolfe's reflections, which I have used as an epigraph to this thesis, these lines perhaps indicate the complexity of Melville's final attitude to the City of Man:

'Twas yellow waste within as out,
The student mused. The desert, see,
It parts not here, but silently,
Even like a leopard by our side,
It seems to enter in within us—
At home and amid men's homes would glide.

(*Clarel*, I, xxv, 81-86)
Notes


PRIMARY SOURCES


SECONDARY SOURCES


Giovannini, G. "Melville's Pierre and Dante's Inferno", *PMLA*, LXIV (March, 1949), 70-78.


