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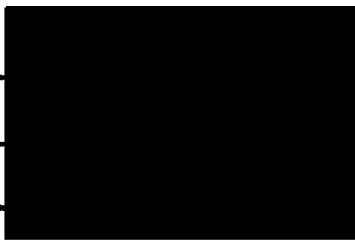
ONTOLOGICAL HEROICS:

MELVILLE'S DIALECTIC OF BEING AND CONSCIOUSNESS

by

James William Champion

B.A., Simon Fraser University, 1979

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF

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ABSTRACT

Melville's lifelong concern with 'diving' for truth takes on special significance when viewed from an historical perspective. We then find his art of diving to contain a range of implication that cannot be discerned fully either through biographical investigation of his authorship or through formal analysis of his texts. Because he is a creative interpreter of life in its eventfulness, Melville explores the depth dimension of human existence in the context of his historical moment. The experiential nature of those explorations bears disclosive power primarily in a dialectical movement fundamental to his thought.

Two interpenetrating impulses resonate throughout Melville's writings: on one side, a sacramental orientation to the question of the meaning of being and nonbeing, a question that, by turns, spurns and poses the possibility of an unambiguous ground; on the other side, a prophetic critique of what is taken as positively 'given' in the oppressive social, epistemological, and aesthetic forms of the prevailing culture. Especially evident in Moby-Dick, these two orientations may also be traced through other key works.

Examination of Pierre locates a dialectical movement in the novel's self-conscious point of view as it foments a peculiar

pattern of narrative disturbance. Concurrent, contrary narrations are found to entwine and disperse around an array of tragicomic issues. That those issues are, for Melville, rooted in ontological and socially critical concerns is equally apparent in "Bartleby, the Scrivener." The short story's paradoxical vision of life and death points to a dual approach to the problem of human nature. In a parallel way, Melville's dual struggle both to act upon the demands of critical consciousness and to encounter the incalculable margins of human being points, finally, to the problematic notion of the heroic.

To Ji Won Chung

In thankfulness

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Introduction

Although some literary historians approach Melville's stories as if to prove that Melville really lived at a particular time and in a particular place, the real value of stories like "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids" lies in their revealing what Melville thought about what he lived through--how his imagination transformed and connected disparate circumstances in a highly symbolic process that infused meaning into experience.

Marvin Fisher, Going Under[1]

Melville is fascinated above all with the contradictions and ambiguities which, as no one ever felt more keenly than he, inhere in the condition of being human and which confront and baffle the mind of man whenever he tries to go beyond the conventional evasions which the unthinking man is content to substitute for thought.

Richard Chase, Introduction to Melville[2]

To interpret a work is to experience an event of understanding through the fusion of the horizons of author and interpreter, and to express that understanding. The meaning of a text then can never be determinate, though it is by no means arbitrary. The experience of understanding a meaning can be validated, but the meaning can never be exhausted because every new interpretation is a new fusion of differing horizons.

Edwin Alexander, "Hermeneutical Violence"[3]

Near the end of one of his letters to Hawthorne, the "dollars damn me" letter, Melville brings up the subject of living in "the all"--the experience of oneness with, or submergence in, the totality of life. He attributes the admonition "live in the all" to Goethe whom he lampoons for offering such impracticable "nonsense." He then adds a Hawthornian "Amen" in a postscript to certify the judgement. Perhaps this "Amen" also playfully chides Hawthorne, for in the "N.B." that follows there is a fascinating turn of thought:

> This "all" feeling, though, there is some truth in. You must often have felt it, lying on the grass on a summer's day. Your legs seem to send out shoots into the earth. Your hair feels leaves upon your head. This is the all feeling. But what plays mischief with the truth is that men will insist upon the universal application of a temporary feeling or opinion.[4]

Like the humour in the second "P.S." with which he closes--"you must not fail to admire my discretion in paying the postage on this letter"--there is something in the mulling over of ideas here which is, as one sometimes hears it said, 'typical' of Melville. It is typical, however, not as just one more instance of his supposed incurable propensity for metaphysical digression. For one thing, the insistence on the momentariness and the contextual nature of the "all" feeling can be related to Melville's strategy in imbuing his symbols with ambiguity. In an even broader sense though, there is a movement of thought in this passage that constitutes a dialectic, one which appears again and again throughout the whole oeuvre.

In "The Masthead" chapter of Moby-Dick, for example,

Ishmael reflects on the magical reveries which may befall one while on lookout amid the "skysail poles." A young sailor on duty there may be prone to lose his identity and take "the mystic ocean at his feet for that deep blue bottomless soul pervading mankind and nature." But soon, we are told, there is a fall from "this enchanted mood" and "your identity comes back in horror."[5] Ishmael ends the chapter with a warning to "ye Pantheists" that is remindful of Melville's letter to Hawthorne.

The same basic pattern of ideas can often be found operating in less overt ways. In the 1855 diptych, "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids," two stories work in tandem and in contrast to carry the reader through to a kindred realization. In spite of a current of irony running through it, "The Paradise" offers a festive world submerged into abundance: "it was the very perfection of quiet absorption of good living, good drinking, good feeling, and good talk."[6] "The Tartarus," on the other hand, exposes such contentment as an insulated illusion by displacing it with the barrenness and dehumanization of an industrialized hell. Although it is certainly only one aspect of the story, the movement from tranquil satisfaction to distressful alienation, and from celebration to indictment, is also reflective of an underlying dialectic fundamental to Melville's imaginative task.

The following study attempts to outline the presence of this dialectic, to draw out its crucial terms, and to examine its workings in specific texts. The proposal of such a dialectic is undertaken as an exploratory venture seeking an interpretive

entrance to Melville's writings, and not as an attempt to find a
systematic, a conceptual grid which may be harnessed to the works.
By 'dialectic' is not meant a logical mechanism, but rather a
dynamic movement of thoughtful imagination fully engaged with
living as a process. It crystallizes in the works of this author,
who said (in the above letter) "I stand for the heart," not as
mere debate, but as encounter, and as conflict, and in the
deepest implications of living it out, as paradox.

In tracing the contours of this dialectic--which, I argue,
moves between the horizons of being and consciousness--I will
refer to philosophical and historical contexts which are appro-
priate to its complexity. The intention is not to make Melville's
literary works speak a version of history or a philosophy. His
fiction is philosophical, but in the sense that it "answers a
question with a story that only expands the dimensions of the
question."[7] If it is possible to adumbrate a theory of fiction
from the review "Hawthorne and His Mosses" and from chapters 14,
33, and 44 of The Confidence-Man, then, above all, it is clear
Melville is not interested in dressing up propositions and
messages in literary format. On the contrary, he wants a
disclosive fiction offering "more reality, than real life itself
can show,"[8] and if there is any proposition behind the 'theory'
it is that only through artistic expression can some conditions
be reenacted and some truths be told. But this does not dis-
qualify the interpretative use of philosophical terms which may
illuminate those reenactments and tellings. If the 'otherness'
of texts is respected, and if the imaginative task in criticism

is taken to be as important as the analytical task, such terms need in no way be reductive.

A desire to avoid reduction and foreclosures of meaning has led to the overriding concern of this study: to understand Melville in his historical context. And that has meant finding an historical approach that could begin to account for his peculiar relevance to our own time, a relevance occasioned by the surprising modernism that Charles Olson and others have pointed to. Hence, an interpretation of history--especially of the conflicts that have surfaced in Western civilization since the Enlightenment--runs through the study. Knowledge of history, I am assuming along the way, is what R. G. Collingwood calls, in The Idea of History, "that special case of memory where the object of present thought is past thought, the gap between present and past being bridged not only by the power of present thought to think of the past, but also by the power of past thought to reawaken itself in the present."[9] For those suspicious of this bridging power, and who would therefore question the place of historical interpretation in the work of literary criticism, one response is to point out that every critical approach is rooted in assumptions about history (the origins of the literary analytical enterprize not least of all) whether these are acknowledged or not. Although decisions about the direction(s) of human thought and the meaning of history always entail intuition and risk, it does not follow that they are arbitrary. Rather, such decisions must themselves be understood through historical interpretation, and through the experiential, as

distinct from the purely experimental, means of verification that belongs to it.[10]

An historical approach to Melville notices him, first of all, as one of those men he himself describes in his essay on Hawthorne, those "geniuses" who are "parts of the times," moreover, "themselves are the times, and possess a correspondent coloring." When recognized as one who loved "men who dive," and who saw it as his lifelong task to dive for and be grasped by rudimentary truths, it becomes difficult for criticism to avoid relating his texts to the overarching and deepest running contexts of his century. This requirement has led some commentators to fixate on the depth element of his art, and others to wonder whether his own "probings at the very axis of reality"[11] are not made at the expense of less formidable concerns. For instance, Richard Brodhead has said that Melville's "vision impels him to be less interested in the actual processes of human experience, understood in its social, psychological, moral, or historical aspects, than in the meaning of experience seen in its largest conceivable dimensions."[12] Such an evaluation arises, I feel, out of the tendency of literary studies in general to expect an author to fall into one or the other of these camps. On the contrary, I think it can be argued that Melville is unusual in seeing both with an "equal eye." And, that there are implications for our own time in his rare capacity to deal with both the "actual processes" of life and "the largest conceivable dimensions," will be a constant edge of the study. In other words, a critical, historical approach is aimed at which, while attending

to Melville's social, psychological, ethical, and historical insights, can also speak to the broadest issues--to the urgent concerns of the religious and ontological dimensions that are ours no less than his.

Chapter One of the following study attempts to fashion such a perspective by way of a discussion of the fundamental dialectic in Melville's thought. I hope thereby to set the groundwork for readings in the subsequent two chapters of works from Melville's later period: Pierre; or, The Ambiguities and "Bartleby, the Scrivener." In part, these works have been chosen to counteract a still prevalent disposition to see the earlier texts as more imaginative because less riddled with a pessimism clouding the period after Moby-Dick. For example, with specific reference to The Confidence-Man, one critic claims the later period is marked by Melville's "growing preference for scientific realism as against imaginative romanticism."[13] Framed in these terms, the complexity of the changes in Melville's sensibility is misconstrued. Instead of leaving behind the dominant impulses in Moby-Dick and the earlier novels, a sustained symbolic realism enables them to emerge all the more intensely.

The theoretical bent of the opening section of the study examines those impulses, before turning to case studies in the second part. In structuring the thesis in this manner I must concur with Jean-Paul Sartre's statement that "a fictional technique always relates back to the novelist's metaphysics. The critic's task is to define the latter before evaluating the former."[14] Though I would reject Sartre's dogmatics in other

areas, his remarks are pertinent in regards to Melville. While I do not intend to "define" Melville's metaphysics--and one could do so only with an author for whom metaphysical interest means something removed from everyday life, or, whose symbolism is merely a metaphysics in disguise--I believe a focus on metaphysical, or better, ontological matters, can open up features of his narratives that otherwise remain hidden, particularly the ways in which the later narratives subvert traditional classifications and molds. The complaint that an author's metaphysics, and his or her probing of the human condition should not be dealt with at the expense of a mapping of symbolic structures and narrative devices, is justified. It is equally true that purely formal analysis, from new criticism to deconstruction, can be a sophisticated way of side-stepping the event of meaning--not simply the semiotic meaning that is based on social and linguistic conventions, but the semantic meaning that receives a real status during those textual moments when, in concourse, with the personal receptiveness of a reader, substance breaks through form.

Selecting from Melville's later period has meant excluding The Confidence-Man, Billy Budd, and Clarel. Since I am maintaining that a key dialectic can be perceived throughout the whole of Melville's work, one aim, then, is to make it apparent by the end of the study that these and other works could be explored in the same vein. I would also like to reiterate that the tracing of a dialectic through a text is not intended to be a complete reading, or to suggest that anything more than one facet of the

work has been dealt with.   But it is a facet which may contribute

to our comprehension of "what Melville thought about what he

lived through."   And if it slightly shifts any of the horizons

of a reader's reception and interpretation, hopefully it will do

so in two directions at once, amplifying the sense of the

ambiguities that inhere in being human, while at the same time

bringing complacency about them into question.   As my own inter-

pretative horizons have been moved and some of my favourite

conjectures shaken in reading Melville, I have begun to think of

my engagement with him as a kind of journey, a journey which

continues to include "the play of difference in the coming

together."[15]   Along the way, I have often found myself stopping

to ponder an observation made by Albert Camus in the middle of

our century about this nineteenth-century writer: "his works trace

a spiritual experience of unequalled intensity."[16]

NOTES to the INTRODUCTION

[1] Marvin Fisher, Going Under: Melville's Short Fiction and the American 1850's (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), p. 70.

[2] Richard Chase, Introduction to Melville: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Richard Chase (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962), p. 7.

[3] Edwin Alexander, "Hermeneutical Violence: Heidegger's Kant-Interpretation," Philosophy Today 25 (Winter 1981): 288.

[4] The Letters of Herman Melville, ed. Merrell R. Davis and William H. Gilman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), p. 131.

[5] Herman Melville, Moby-Dick, ed. Harrison Hayford and Hershel Parker (New York: W. W. Norton, 1967), p. 140.

[6] Great Short Works of Herman Melville, ed. Warner Berthoff (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 209.

[7] Frank Gado, "Towards a Definition of the Philosophical in Literature," Literary Criticism and Philosophy, ed. Joseph P. Strelka (London: Penn State University Press, 1983), p. 206.

[8] Herman Melville, The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade, ed. Hershel Parker (New York: W. W. Norton, 1971), p. 158. For an outline of Melville's ideas on fiction, see Allen Hayman, "The Real and the Original: Herman Melville's Theory of Prose Fiction," Modern Fiction Studies 8 (Autumn 1962): 211-32.

[9] R. G. Collingwood, "History as Re-enactment of Past Experience," The Idea of History (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 294.

[10] For a discussion of the nature of historical interpretation and its relation to literary criticism, see Hans-Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method, trans. G. Barden and J. Cumming (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), pp. 300-05, and p. 310.

[11]This and the preceding quotation from "Hawthorne and His Mosses" are taken from The Portable Melville, ed. Jay Leyda (New York: The Viking Press, 1952), pp. 410 and 407. The "men who dive" phrase is from a letter to Duyckinck discussing Emerson (3 March 1849), The Letters of Herman Melville, p. 79.

[12]Richard H. Brodhead, Hawthorne, Melville, and the Novel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 123.

[13]Tyrus Hillway, Herman Melville, revised edition (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1979), p. 121.

[14]Jean-Paul Sartre, "On The Sound and the Fury: Time in the Work of Faulkner," in Literary and Philosophical Essays, trans. A. Michelson (New York: Collier Books, 1962), p. 84.

[15]The phrase is used by Paul Ricoeur in "The Task of Hermeneutics," Philosophy Today 17 (Summer 1973): 128.

[16]Albert Camus, "Herman Melville," Lyrical and Critical Essays, ed. Philip Thody, trans. Ellen Conroy Kennedy (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), p. 298.

CHAPTER ONE: A Dynamic in the Works

Over and again there runs through [Clarel] the double
vision: the world of miracle and divine event on the one
hand, the world of broken monuments and scattered stone on
the other.

                    Walter E. Bezanson, Introduction to Clarel[1]

We never 'explain' a truly fundamental problem; we baptize
it.   The task in any era is to choose for baptism that
problem which is most fundamental to thought.

                              Dennis Lee, Savage Fields[2]

This foundation and this suggestion by things of "another
thing," which is still no other thing, but a depth in the
things, is not rational, i.e., demonstrable from the
interrelation of things with the world; and the "other,"
to which the things point, is nothing discoverable by a
rational process, but a quality of things which reveals--or
conceals--a view into its depths.   We say of this depth,
that it is the basis of the being of things, whereby "being"
is taken absolutely, transcendently as the expression of
the secret into which thinking cannot penetrate, because,
as something existing, it itself is based thereon.

              Paul Tillich, The Interpretation of History[3]

[Melville] sought on behalf of the culture to discover the
essential terms and conditions of the culture, but, even
with his recognition that his identity belonged to the
community, he assumed an adversary stance in relation to
it, thus distancing himself, like the prophet, in order to
preserve the detachment which would not compromise his
critique and to underscore the essential seriousness of his
concern.

                 Rowland Sherrill, The Prophetic Melville[4]

There is a sense in which an author's works constitute one
lifelong work: this is a suggestion sometimes made when the books
of a literary career seem to fall into place as something like
"chapters" in a great opus. In the interests of continuity,
threads of development are pointed out and often catalogued as
themes. More useful in Melville's case is the delineation of
central concerns of the life/work, rather than themes, for then
any tendency to separate an existential element, and the
discontinuities that go with it, from the nexus of aesthetic
motifs, can be avoided. Such a separation is foreign to Melville;
it remains so throughout his life in spite of his own half-
hearted attempts, in for instance, Redburn and White-Jacket, to
appease readers' artistic tastes with "tolerable entertainment."[5]
His own awareness of his inability to fabricate works having
little or no stake in the meaning of human experience finds voice
in a well-known lament to Hawthorne: "What I feel most moved to
write, that is banned,--it will not pay. Yet, altogether, write
the other way I cannot."[6] The "other way" refers to the morali-
zing nature of the popular fiction of the time,[7] and perhaps
also includes the attendant literary criticism with its implicit
calls for calmly decorative themes of sentimentality and recon-
ciliation, themes that could safely be found running without
disruption just below the surface of an ordinary realism--realism,
in other words, that presents the reality to which everyone is
accustomed.

In the extra-ordinary realism of Melville's works one can

discern two central, seminal concerns that are rooted in a double
movement basic to his thought: an orientation to the problem of
being, on the one hand, and an orientation to the demands of
consciousness on the other. Until some of the coordinates of
these concerns and the ramifications of their centrality are
outlined, such a statement may sound customary enough. It may
also sound innocuously abstract until these orientations are
shown to be embedded in his writings--not as the cognitive
apparatus of a concealed philosophy, but as the driving impulses
of a concrete, ongoing interrogation. Melville's lifelong
questioning of the meaning of being and nonbeing takes shape out
of the direct experience of the inextricable interweaving of
presence and absence, an admixture which, by turns, spurns and
poses the possibility of an unambiguous ground. And his
incessant critique of what is taken as the positively 'given' in
his time stems from a prophetic stance, rather than rational
detachment, as it focusses in on oppressive social,
epistemological, and aesthetic forms of the prevailing culture.
These two overall tendencies propel Melville's interrogation.
To concentrate on one at the expense of the other is to forfeit a
creative tension intrinsic to the condition of the heart, which,
from beginning to end, is the locus of their living expression.

"The issues" of the "heart," as it is put in the "Epilogue"
to Clarel--those are the issues I intend to mind in fleshing out
some of the strands and interstices of this dialectical tension.
I would like to begin the discussion by expanding on the terms
that have been touched on here. First of all, Melville's two

fundamental concerns will be considered in a general way, and in isolation. The separation is made not for the sake of categorization, but in the hope that they may be more illuminating when brought back together in adherence to their textual commingling. In many writers such concerns would be mutually exclusive before the writing even started. In Melville's writing their simultaneity points beyond itself to still further issues. That those issues are of history as well as of the heart, is the suggestion behind the wide-ranging discussion which concludes the present chapter, as it tries to set a ground-work for commentary on specific texts.

(1) This Being of the Matter

> We incline to think that the Problem of the Universe is like the Freemason's mighty secret, so terrible to all children. It turns out, at last, to consist in a triangle, a mallet, and an apron,--nothing more! We incline to think that God cannot explain His own secrets, and that He would like a little information upon certain points Himself. We mortals astonish Him as much as He us. But it is this Being of the matter; there lies the knot with which we choke ourselves. As soon as you say Me, a God, a Nature, so soon you jump off from your stool and hang from the beam. Yes, that word is the hangman. Take God out of the dictionary, and you would have Him in the street.[8]

The above passage appears in Melville's April 16 letter to Hawthorne. Before this digression to "the Problem of the

Universe," the letter offers, along with a parody of contemporary reviews, a warm response to The House of the Seven Gables. According to the editors of Melville's Letters, Julian Hawthorne possibly mistranscribed the "Being" clause of the passage; it may also be read as "this Being that matters," or "this Being that maddens."[9] There is something slightly comical about this editorial difficulty since, given the author's sensibility, all three meanings are suitable, and each could readily be the intended one. Melville's usage of the word 'being' is various, and it combines with the diversity of his philosophical sources[10] to make for a labyrinthine scrutiny of "the secret into which thinking cannot penetrate." In this particular letter the scrutiny doubles back on itself to the point of wondering if "perhaps, after all, there is no secret."[11]

For Melville the problem of being is not a manageable one, subject at the appropriate times to the competency of vocabulary and the controlling powers of compositional technique. His works show it as enigmatic, as repeatedly expanding beyond the limits set by conscious categories and by the mental gymnastics of rationalization and self-certainty. In other words, his interrogation does not contain the problem nor collapse an inherent multi-layeredness. The feeling of 'oneness' with being, the "all" feeling over which he changes his mind in the later letter to Hawthorne previously mentioned, is but one layer; and there, as elsewhere along the spectrum of the problem, just when an ordering of ontological experience seems to occur, a plethora of doubts rebounds and unsettles familiarity, and sometimes very

harshly. For example, White-Jacket tells the story of mounting the upper yards at night in quest of the "feeling that fuses us into the universe of things and makes us a part of the All"; the feeling does come when "consciousness" has "glided away,"[12] but it also disenables him to suppose that he has been taken for a ghost and the yard is about to be dropped from under him. In a converse way, Ishmael's warning about the dangers of pantheistic submergence does not dispel his recognition of a rapture and a strange power of perception which can come with a fragmentary melting into an enlarged sense of being, a yielding quintessential to the revelatory experiences of "the spirit spout" and "the grand armada" in later chapters of Moby-Dick. If there is an undercutting in these instances of an idolatrous identification with pure being, there is also an unceasing awareness, though it takes on a myriad of shades, of the problematic of our relation to a ground of being and nonbeing.

One must speak of "our relation" since for Melville the concern with a ground cannot be extricated from the predicament of a human community, nor even from the need for human community. It is everyone's concern or it is no one's. Not merely the obsession of a few deep-diving or monomaniacal individuals here and there, it may nevertheless become most visible in such types. Hence, Melville's characterization usually involves the portrayal of people who, within the shaping powers of the cultural setting, are distinguished by what they posit as a ground. This positing may be best described as a relation between a self and an otherness, an otherness varying infinitely in its qualities, and

often striking in its distortions. The 'other' may be mysterious, yet strangely benevolent in its capacity to reveal a "wonder-world" (as for Ishmael), or it may be not at all interested in increasing human happiness: Ahab's White Whale, Pierre's moral perfection, Captain Vere's god of war, or Col. Moredock's Indian Hating. The relation to something of ultimate concern may be known and actively sought after; or it may be effectively repressed, in which case people devote themselves to dominant ideologies. An enlarged otherness may be half-consciously awakened, as with the narrator of "Bartleby"--before, that is, he pulls back into a standardized sentimentality. Whatever part it may play though, this relation is never not a feature of character, and it is never forged outside the realm of the language and the aspirations (however contradictory) of a por-trayed human group. Only through the determinants of a social and spiritual matrix, the narratives show, does a person's re-lation to an otherness find expression. And in turn, if this principle in the works is carried over into the life, it might also be suggested that only through the values and symbols of the community of which Melville was a part, can his ultimate concern with a ground of being be understood.

Melville deals with this enigma over the course of a life-time, but without approaching it along the assured, reasoning lines of some of his fellow New Englanders. Emerson, in his 1836 essay "Nature," can turn back to Plato for guidance and confirmation: "'The problem of philosophy,' according to Plato, 'is for all that exists conditionally to find a ground

unconditional and absolute.'"[13] And in <u>Representative Men</u> (1850)

Emerson can postulate a human essence, [14] thereby making arguable

the comprehensive contours of a reciprocity between human being

and its divine ground. What becomes the Transcendentalist pro-

posal of a wholeness of vision remains a real possibility for

writers such as Emerson and Thoreau. It is an impossibility,

however, for Melville and Hawthorne who experience their era's

displacement of the theologically complete Puritan vision as a

deep-seated historical rupture. For these latter authors, ties

to the traditional formulation of such problems as essence and

ground have been broken. Their satirical attacks on Transcen-

dentalism in <u>The Confidence-Man</u> and "The Celestial Railroad,"

to mention two of many examples, stem, in part, from their

rejection of its tendency to cover up the darkness of the pre-

dicament of cultural loss. Of course, Emerson and Thoreau also

begin their work in the midst of this sense of loss; Emerson's

awareness of the stultified spiritual orthodoxies around him

leads to his call for "an original relation to the universe," a

relation qualifying for cultural embodiment in "a poetry and

philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by

revelation to us."[15] But the Transcendentalist way of meeting

the cultural emergency idealistically by-passes a full survey of

emptiness. If it overthrows the dead eighteenth-century struc-

tures of pure logic, it competently fills the idea gap with a

"dynamic organicism."[16] It does not feel itself faced with

unanswerable questions given what Emerson can confidently call,

also in "Nature," the "order of things."[17] Melville and

Hawthorne; on the other hand, find themselves facing an absent order and unfamiliar questions. After the caving in of established reference points, including the 'whereabouts' of essences, their primary resource for a new beginning becomes the imagination, and their foremost task the injunction bound to the imagination--namely, to peer into the cavern at the heart of the historical moment.

Their scrutinizing uncovers the collapsed condition of an underlying cultural agreement about values and purposes in nineteenth century America, a condition that necessitates a reposing and reopening of the problem of an unconditional ground of being. They see that the progressive ethical and ontological order formerly apprehensible through the transparency of a collectively agreed upon language, has become, like Redburn's father's guidebook, defunct. Except in the day-dreaming affirmations of popular kitsch, the maps and directions of the traditional order are no longer applicable, and their false authority can be spiritually debilitating when not conceded to be lifeless. As Hawthorne says in his essay "The Old Manse" (1846): "Thought grows mouldy. What was good and nourishing food for the spirits of one generation affords no sustenance for the next."[18] At the same time, he understands that the problem of the sacred--more specifically, the questions of what it might mean, and how that meaning might take shape, for a community of creatures whose previously determined essence had now to be found or created--remains prevalent even with the demise of theological authority. Facing the questions central to that

spiritual problem means looking fully at what the official edicts and popular consolations refuse to notice: the very medium of language and the locality of the imagination have become urgently problematic in themselves. For Hawthorne and Melville, entailed in these perceptions is the need to reopen literary structures and the actual condition of language and thought. The need is intuitively grasped as a demand for new modes of discovery, a demand that is met and consolidated over the course of both lives in the practice of an investigative, imaginative literature.

Starting with Typee (1846) Melville's earliest works reflect the manifold quality of his response to this demand. The criticism in his first novel of the theological and economic imperialism of south-sea missionaries, and the subtle under-cutting of the eighteenth-century format of a make-believe voyage, a genre predisposed to diverting idealizations of primitive man, show an impulse at work not present in contempor-aneous novels. By the time he finds what is more surely his own creative stride in Mardi (1849), his fictive endeavors are increasingly patterned by the making of unorthodox disclosures, by his push, in other words, towards "the great Art of Telling the Truth." That formulation of the aim of great writing appears in "Hawthorne and His Mosses" (1850), a review calling for a disturbing, original literature, while at the same time proffer-ing, as one critic has put it, a "sacramental conception of literary creativity."[19] We are also told in "Mosses" such an Art "must have plenty of sea-room to tell the Truth in; especially when it seems to have an aspect of newness."[20] And especially,

it might be added, when the new cultural situation requires
taking god out of the dictionary and finding the meaning of the
term somewhere--some unmapped place where being itself can be
sensed as some 'thing' more life-giving than a projected tyrant
(the remnant of legalistic Calvinism) and more substantial than
a harmless accessory of man's self-interpretation (the civic
virtue of liberalized Calvinism). In refutation of the optional
god-images of a counterfeit culture, Melville opts for "sea-
room," the largeness called for by the problem of genuine theos.
The basic recognition is epistemological: in order for that
largeness to be approached, writing must be tied to a searching
process yielding knowledge that is particular and experiential,
and at the level of gnosis or sapientia, open to a sense of
ultimate reality as mysteriously residing both inside and outside
the constraints of human knowledge.

If "Hawthorne and His Mosses" signals the theoretical call
for "sea-room," the practical embodiment appears quite literally
with Moby-Dick (1851). For when "the flood-gates of the wonder-
world"[21] swing open for Ishmael, the event also marks Melville's
dislodgement of established boundaries of genre and his movement
past entrenched precepts of fiction writing. The nature and
scope of this achievement have been summarized by Rowland Sherrill
in a discussion of " the generic question of Moby-Dick":

> With Moby-Dick . . . Melville worked from the
> assumption that literature could "be put in the service
> of" investigations which traditionally belong to the
> offices of the theological intelligence, and, in this,
> he worked toward the possibility of defining the
> meaning of human experience in relation to what he
> understood to be its ultimate ground. Although

> Melville did not use his masterwork to derive any
> theological system or, like Emerson, to plead an
> ontology, <u>Moby-Dick</u> seems to locate and possess its
> final coherence in a complex of religious drive and
> fictive form; it wants "revelation to us," as Emerson
> put it, refracted through the language of the
> imagination. . . . The confluence of literary mode and
> religious motive . . . was, first, a problem of craft
> for Herman Melville, who knew that the radically
> original relation to the universe he sought in a
> fictive world would require his effort both to outstrip
> the orthodox sense of the perimeters of reality and to
> push the resources of fiction to their outer limits.[22]

When Ishmael discusses the conundrum of "whiteness" in chapter 42

of <u>Moby-Dick</u> he claims that "to analyse it, would seem

impossible"; in order to be conducted to "the hidden cause we

seek," a special reflective procedure is needed: "without

imagination no man can follow another into these halls" (167).

The imaginative concern of the book is rooted in a "religious

drive" seeking a path into the profounder levels of life,

astonishing levels not available to the objective detachment of

natural science or social science, and not expressible through a

logical arrangement of fact. Approaching the alpha and omega of

all things through these levels entails relinquishing the urge to

turn 'it' into a mere object of calculation and control, whether

the urge be theological or aesthetic or whatever. And to explore

what man is in relation to such a ground, the approach stipulates

an intuitive, inductive attentiveness attune to the question of

the meaning of the vicissitudes and stillnesses of one's own

creatureliness, and beyond oneself, an apprehension receptive to

"portents of the transcendent"[23]--those ordinary moments which,

by way of the materiality of everyday life, become <u>kairoi</u> and

thus bear witness to the divine, but always through the

"refraction" of symbol, and without circumnavigating the full significance of what is felt as unconditional. Ishmael's telling of his fluctuating responsiveness to these moments, and his growing recognition of their lasting import as fullnesses of qualitative time, irrespective of the transitoriness of quantitative time, constitute the deep-structure of <u>Moby-Dick</u>, a narrative unfolding that amounts to nothing less than a creative interpretation of existence, thus placing the novel on the radical edge of fictional thinking.

The "craft" at the core of that thinking is a symbolic proceeding which operates in the novel, not as an ornamental contrivance for the transmission of a codified version of reality to decoding readers, nor as a projection of Ishmael's interior emotions, but as the indirect language of the disclosure of being itself. Amid the tale's piling up of the material details of the whaling labour and the toil of chronological time, numinous moments break through and, fragmentarily, reveal the grounding depth dimension beneath the surface of things. A mundane activity like weaving the "sword-mat" with Queequeg becomes, in an unusual evening atmosphere lurking with "an incantation of revery," (185) the vehicle for Ishmael's relevatory meditation on the intermingling of fate and chance in the Loom of Time. An event such as "the first lowering" suddenly transforms into "a sight full of quick wonder and awe" (193). An object like the dubloon turns into a densely equivocal emblem strangely connected to the opaquely glimpsed realities to which it points. An image such as "the spirit spout" becomes a vision, an alluring yet

dreadful "apparition" (201). The Sperm Whale, in its "preeminent tremendousness," (157) turns into a symbol signifying "God: done this day by my hand," some astonishing cosmogonic thing through which "you feel the Deity and the dread powers more forcibly than in beholding any other object in living nature" (292).

The "dread" that often accompanies the insight given with these and other numinous moments in Moby-Dick is not simply a narrational device for building up fear, a trepidation of epical proportions that is to be tastefully expiated in a denouement. Unlike fear, the dread or anxiety Ishmael relates has no definite object. Rather, it is a state belonging to an encounter with the radically nonhuman that is simultaneously revealed and concealed when the infinite seems suddenly to break into the finite. And in the midst of such an encounter dread is the surmising of an innately nonrational element ushering the full significance of the event outside the domain of calculability. As an experience of the "wholly other" momentarily present in and through the concreteness of the world, such an instant is guided by, what Rudolf Otto has described phenomenologically in The Idea of the Holy as, "mysterium tremendum"[24]: the alluring sense of something awful and solemn, as well as marvellous and fascinating. Ishmael's narrative voice is characterized by a willingness to experience the disorientation intrinsic to perceptions of the holy, a willingness that combines with his abnegation of the need to contain or finally to decipher the transfiguring process through which the power of being is divulged. His attitude of expectancy and reception leaves him vulnerable to the rapture and the horror

of the numinous when it is intimated at a level sometimes prior
to, and sometimes transcendent of, the subject/object split of
habitual perception. But these disorientations also fracture the
spell of the banal and the ordinary mind-set of a life of quiet
desperation; in intercourse with the questing mode of his life at
sea they reorient him to communion with the world, with "this
world"[25] as he says repeatedly throughout the book. Ishmael's
openness to the strange and to "the narrative quality of experi-
ence"[26] is most apparent in contrast to the self-enclosure of
Ahab, who, in a drive to strike through the infuriating refraction
of "the unreasoning mask," (144) longs to encapsule and stab at
the ongoing symbiosis of life with its unfathomable roots in the
ground of being.

Ishmael and Ahab are juxtaposed in their relationships to the
source of life; however, that their difference is not depicted
primarily in terms of a moral valuation is pivotal to the novel's
sphere of religious meanings. Ishmael's meetings with, and
implication in, the fleeting sacredness of the "wonder-world" do
not 'come' to him, as the prevailing religious ideology of
Melville's day would have thought they must, because he shows some
fear of the Deity, and, above all, because he develops some good-
ness. Although Ishmael is not Melville, his story is entangled
in Melville's struggle against the dead letter and ecclesiastical
cliches represented, in some respects, by Father Mapple's Jonah
sermon. And at the heart of Melville's struggle is an effort to
subvert the insipid notion that the holy is the equivalent of the
good, and, in turn, that the good has mostly to do with useful

behavior. A remark made to Hawthorne--"I have written a wicked book and feel spotless as a lamb"[27]--reveals his awareness of the degree to which his novel inverts theological dictates; the statement is one example of an overall tendency in the writings which surfaces most pointedly perhaps in The Confidence-Man with its sly dedication to heretics. At any rate, in Moby-Dick Ahab's rage against what he takes to be a punitive divine order is presented as fundamentally courageous, however faulty or distorted in ethical terms. If his destructive way of being-in-the-world is said to be nurtured by the 'demonic', the word should suggest a perversion of the divine and not its unrelated opposite. For Melville, the demonic retains, even in its parasitic distortion of the divine, the power of the unfathomable depth dimension of life, and Ahab's idolatrous rampage, for all its working in terms of plot in Moby-Dick, functions also as one more indirect means of manifesting the vitality of the divine/demonic ground.

In other words, the interrogation of ultimacy in Moby-Dick unravels as narrative experience in a double sense: it is illuminated as the ground from which all things receive their being, and, synchronically, it is intuited as the ground of nonbeing, or Ungrund[28]--the chasm into which "brimming life is gulped and gone" (145). When Ahab berates Starbuck on the heroic challenge facing imprisoned man to strike through the "pasteboard masks" of "all visible objects," he is led to confess "sometimes I think there is naught beyond" (144). Similar premonitions of an infinite void enter the mental life of each of the important characters; and their particularized ways of responding to it

largely determine their portrayal, not as rounded characters, but
as representatives of styles of acting in the face of a primary
condition. In one sense they are paradigmatic of basic qualities
of human being, as William Faulkner suggests in a description of
the three mates as emblems of three modes of living: "knowing
nothing" (Flask), "knowing but not caring" (Stubb), "knowing and
caring" (Starbuck).[29] In another sense, the men on board the
Pequod are typical in the various ways they respond to their
awareness of ultimate absence. Pip's derangement begins with his
abandonment in the middle of a "heartless immensity" and a vision
of the appalling indifference of the "God" whose "foot" he is
said to see "upon the treadle of the loom" (347). Starbuck's
unshakeable belief in "the sun of Righteousness" (360) and the
salvific power of performing one's duty fails to shut out
completely his sense of "the latent horror" of life (148), thus
slowly unveiling his self-deception. Even Stubb, whose carefully
fashioned jocularity seems to make him invulnerable to any
worries about an abysmal blackness, has a moment during the
typhoon of "The Candles" chapter when his masquerade breaks down
and he cries out in terror. Not unlike Stubb's there is a de-
tached, humorous side to Ishmael also, but one that combines in
his equilibrious demeanor with the care impelling his quest and
stirring the disquiet in thoughts such as those upon the
engravings of the dubloon: "some certain significance lurks in
all things, else all things are little worth, and the round world
itself but an empty cipher, except to sell by the cartload, as
they do hills about Boston, to fill up some morass in the Milky

Way" (358). The "else" in this rumination intensifies the very real sense that there may be no significance, one of the unavoidable considerations arising from Ishmael's evolving inter-rogation of meaning and its disappearance. Meaninglessness is envisaged nowhere more vividly than in the image he offers of Queequeg, after the nearly disastrous first lowering:

> . . . no sign of the ship could be seen. The rising sea forbade all attempts to bale out the boat. The oars were useless as propellers, performing now the office of life-preservers. So, cutting the lashing of the waterproof match keg, after many failures Starbuck contrived to ignite the lamp in the lantern; then stretching it on a waif pole, handed it to Queequeg as the standard-bearer of this forlorn hope. There, then, he sat, holding up that imbecile candle in the heart of that almighty forlornness. There, then, he sat, the sign and symbol of a man without faith, hopelessly holding up hope in the midst of despair. (193)

For all of its darkness this sight itself constitutes a kairos in the story. The scene does not close for Ishmael into a blunt victory of either hope or despair, but lingers in the unstated question of the prius of both. There is no certainty in that ground of a final overcoming of despair, since a negating power is always felt as one of its aspects. The questioning in such a moment, then, might be called a questioning of the nothingness of god, the answer to which, if it comes at all comes in paradoxical terms, in words tied to the uncanniness of happening upon the silent god who is somehow the 'core' of nothingness.

However, to say as much is to state "the matter" abstractly when one of the major concerns of Moby-Dick is to overcome the inadequacy of god-talk and to break through the moribundity of conventionalized abstractions which encrust around it. The novel

does so by exploring the nature of the sacred in its looming
immanence through encounters with "the prolific" and "the
devouring,"[30] to use Blake's terms, as those duplicitous aspects
of the ground appear furtively embodied in the images, things,
events, and men of this world. Between the solemn despondency of
Queequeg's all-night vigil (chap. 48), and, to give an example of
a differently mediated encounter, the redemptive serenity of "the
grand armada" (chap. 87) wherein Ishmael finds himself bathed "in
eternal mildness of joy," (326) there is a tremendous spiritual
tension requiring an elasticity of witness. But for all the
differences in what is evinced, each instance is engendered out
of the particularities of a situation; each "hierophany,"[31] to
use Mircea Eliade's term, begins, not with a hankering after the
supernatural, but with an awakened turning to ordinary things ·
that allows them to become vessels of the extraordinarily other.
When Ishmael, late in the story, gazes upon feverish Queequeg
lying in his coffin, he finds

> . . . like circles on the water, which, as they grow
> fainter, expand; so his eyes seemed rounding and
> rounding, like the rings of Eternity. An awe that
> cannot be named would steal over you as you sat by the
> side of this waning savage, and saw as strange things
> in his face, as any beheld who were bystanders when
> Zoroaster died. For whatever is truly wondrous and
> fearful in man, never yet was put into words or books.
> (396)

Briefly Queequeg becomes for Ishmael a conduit to something
eternal, though even in proximity it remains a mystery which can-
not be penetrated. Similarly, the hieroglyphic tatooing on
Queequeg's body bespeaks "a mystical treatise on the art of
attaining truth" and fundamental knowledge of the cosmos; but
though "his own live heart beat against them" (399) Queequeg

cannot decipher the markings. The point here is not to argue a skepticism, nor to glorify the intimidating nature of mystery. Repeatedly Ishmael's concern is to face the limitations of human discernment so as to allow himself to be grasped by portents of ultimacy when they appear in their own time.

In "The Tail" chapter, after pursuing a course of analysis and an attempt to explain the phenomenon of the whale's movements, those "mystic gestures" said to be "akin to Free-Mason signs and symbols," Ishmael is led to a tentative conclusion: "Dissect him how I may . . . I but go skin deep; I know him not and never will" (318). A certain kind of knowledge does come to him though, ("The Grand Armada" chapter immediately follows), when he forfeits the desire to deduce reality and the dissecting compulsion subsides. When he remembers what he already knows, and has, in fact, partly illustrated with the whale "Etymology" and "Extracts" prefacing his narrative--namely, the changing history of language and the relativity of human points of view-- a broader range of the real unfurls for him. The reception and more relaxedly analogical expression of the allurements of a fleetingly consecrated world become tangible for him then in a way they cannot for, most prominently among the self-enclosed, Ahab, whose perceptual powers shall not break free from the rigidity of his narcissistic projection. Ahab recognizes the emanating ciphers which evoke the world to man, but refuses to let the resultant meanings widen beyond himself and the object to which he has transferred his rage. The riddle of Queequeg's body only leads him to disgust. In the dubloon he sees "three peaks

as proud as Lucifer. The firm tower, that is Ahab; the volcano, that is Ahab; the courageous, the undaunted, and victorious fowl, that too, is Ahab; all are Ahab." His further insistence that "every man in turn but mirrors back his own mysterious self" (359) prescribes the epistemological condition of everyone as that of his own empty 'absolute' relativism, and the energy of repression needed to maintain such a stance accelerates towards obliterating those who represent other possibilities.

Ishmael's flexibility of self and perspective opens the doorway to the possibility of a sacramental world. Such a world is not devised as fantasy or dogma, but is revealed as a prospect, as one of those "possibilities of the immense Remote, the Wild, the Watery, the Unshored" (402). The discovery that anything can become a temporary vessel for the unbounded sacred has the startling implication of suggesting everything is, at base, sacramental.[32] There is something shared by all conditioned things in the fact that they are--in their coming from, and returning to, the same creative ground. In so suggesting, Moby-Dick seems to set forth from an assertion Melville had made in "Hawthorne and His Mosses" a year earlier: "Nature [has not] been all over ransacked by our progenitors, so that no new charms and mysteries remain for this latter generation to find" (411). In the works following upon "Mosses," and as well, upon the impact of Hawthorne on Melville's life, some of these "mysteries" appear through the most unsettling facets of nature and its most alien forms of life. For instance, in "The Whiteness of the Whale" Ishmael contemplates the albatross that one day alights on

deck:

> Whence come those clouds of spiritual wonderment and
> pale dread, in which that white phantom sails in all
> imaginations? Not Coleridge first threw that spell;
> but God's great, unflattering laureate, Nature. (164)
> . . . Through its inexpressible, strange eyes,
> methought I peeped to secrets which took hold of God.
> (footnote, 165)

"The Shark Massacre" chapter exhibits the devouring side of
nature in the sight of creatures tearing at their own disembowel-
ments, "till those entrails seemed swallowed over and over again
by the same mouth" (257)--a horrific image that would seem to
designate sharks as the basest form of matter in the cosmology of
Moby-Dick.[33] Yet, sharks serve as the "congregation" for Fleece's
riotous sermon. Ishmael finds in them a "wondrous voracity," "a
sort of generic of Pantheistic vitality" (257). In the "Epilogue"
their "unharming" presence partakes of the miraculousness of the
storyteller's rebirth. On one plane they function as objects
for the novel's concern with realistic description, on another
the sharks embody the leitmotif of relentless cutting and
slashing. On still another plane they serve to carry the inter-
rogation of a ground, of the quiddity of a god who is, as
Queequeg puts it, "de god wat made shark" (257).

Towards the end of Melville's life, nearly forty years after
the writing of Moby-Dick, the interrogation will continue in a
wrenching probe of the god who made vultures, the sea-fowl which
fly screaming to circle the spot of Billy's consignment to the
sea. A "strange human murmur" arises from the sailors at that
startling second in the kairos of Billy Budd. "Though dictated
by mere animal greed for prey," to the men called to witness

Billy's burial, and who have just seen the numinous circumstances
surrounding his death, the action of the birds is "big with no
prosaic significance."[34] Almost immediately the learned
"instinct" to submit to the uneasy officers of the Bellipotent
compels the sailors back to their military stations and grinding
duties. However, for an instant something usurping the condi-
tioned response to coercion and surpassing human expectation of
the prosaic, is felt. Something substantial breaks through the
"measured forms" which, one of Vere's officers insists, "are
everything." An event of unambiguous importance occurs when the
human depth of these "average" men is momentarily awakened to a
significance contravening the finite authority and ideology of
the worshippers of war. And because the invisibility of that
unprosaic meaning can appear in and through the full ambiguity
and drivenness of the visible world without denying its nature,
the narrative presages a world infused with the sacramental, a
creation in which communion can be found with everything that has
being.

In passing from Moby-Dick to Billy Budd here to suggest that
both manifest a world latent with sacramental possibilities, I
do not wish to discount their differences, the many distances in
authorial intention and conception as well as in years. My
purpose, rather, is to point to recurrent discoveries arising
from Melville's fundamental orientation to onto-theological
inquiry. As noted, the inquiry is there from the first. Typee,
for instance, considers a gap between essence and existence in
the very midst of paradise, a fallen condition having more to do

with a rent in the fabric of universal human life than with specific misdeeds. The ingrained feature of the inquiry as it continues through the works is not, however, a consistency but an open-endedness fostering a view of fiction as performative disclosure--instead of as a highly descriptive lie agreed upon through an aestheticized pact between author and beguiled readers. The open-ended ontological stance and the view of fiction as truth telling, an activity necessarily fragmentary and imperfect, combine in the narrator's aside late in Billy Budd: "Truth uncompromisingly told will always have its ragged edges; hence the conclusion of such a narration is apt to be less finished than an architectural finial."[35] The final three chapters then disband the tale in a "sequel" that disturbs the closure pattern of conventional narration.[36] The reader is left with a dual sense: the potential for destruction in Billy's blissful, child-like ignorance remains alongside a bestirring contrary potential. But this mixture is not of a preternatural good and evil. A pain-killing drug is the simple catalytic agent for releasing the repressed "subtler element" that we are told is in all men, and in the dying Captain Vere when he murmurs Billy's name. Similarly, the "rude utterance" of an "artless" ballad serves as the vessel for the sailors' deepening memory of Billy and the subtle power of his confounding dissent.

Melville's concern with the ontic polarities of a world fraught with concrete vessels of a transcendent dimension is the root of his disinterest, persistent from Typee to Billy Budd, in 'pleading' an ontology or a theology. It is also, I think,

what enabled him to ascertain much from his lifelong reading of other authors that would further an expansive attitude towards things metaphysical. His mining of the Bible, especially the Old Testament, his reading of Shakespeare prior to the writing of Moby-Dick--these have been highlighted by a number of studies of Melville's growth[37] along with many other influences, including, for example, the effect of Rabelais on the satire of Mardi and the bawdy humour of Moby-Dick, and of Browne and Burton on his prose rhythms. Also important, though, are his readings of Carlyle and Coleridge, particularly for what he may have learned from them, or found confirmed through them, in regards to the use of symbols as a means of reenacting transient contact with a divine ground. Teufelsdröckh in Sartor Resartus speaks of "the wondrous agency of Symbols. In a Symbol there is concealment and yet revelation . . . some embodiment and revelation of the Infinite; the Infinite is made to blend itself with the Finite, to stand visible,and as it were, attainable there."[38] While there is no evidence of Melville's having met up with Coleridge's distinction between symbol and allegory in The Statesman's Manual, we do know he read the Biographia Literaria in 1848.[39] An attention to Coleridge that is sustained over the next few, highly formative years is enough to warrant speculation about him (and even Schelling behind him) as an informing presence in Melville's thinking. Perhaps the proposal of "Being" as both principle and activity in the Biographia,[40] and more generally, a realization of radical immanence, aided Melville in opening doors of imaginative reflection, doors otherwise locked by the

positivism and literalist moralizing of the strictly allegorical mind.

Which is not to confuse such an entrenched mentality with the dialecticizing allegories of Hawthorne. As an encountered life provocative of a depth half-hidden, half-manifest, and whose writings insinuate that fiction can be a way of seeing on the basis of one's own aliveness, Hawthorne is the decisive influence on Melville. The more theoretical side to Melville's passionate experience of his older neighbour is signalled in "Hawthorne and His Mosses." A recomposing of Moby-Dick then follows upon the encouragement gained and the insights substantiated, insights both as to the what and the how of truth telling through fiction.[41] The 'what' can be related to an entry Hawthorne had made years earlier in The American Notebooks: "We certainly do need a new revelation . . . for there seems to be no life in the old one"; or, to his own assessment of Twice Told Tales (in the 1851 Preface) as "attempts . . . to open an intercourse with the world."[42] When Melville takes note in his review of a "mystical depth of meaning" (405) in Hawthorne's tales, the recognition is not of a penchant for mystification, but of a stratum in the world where a new revelation might be unearthed. It is the level of a ground of meaning, that depth which, as Melville knows from his own explorations, is not confronted without meeting its aspect of darkness and disappearance. Hence, the Hawthorne who "so fixes and fascinates" him is the writer who has the courage to tell of "the blackness of darkness beyond" (406). Melville goes on to consider a tendency in Hawthorne possibly "too largely

developed," a disinclination to "give us a ray of light for every
shade of his dark" (407). "Perhaps" it stems from "a touch of
Puritanic gloom"; the soundings of "a great, deep intellect,
which drops down into the universe like a plummet," (405) will
inevitably be affected by the echoing traditions of the community
in which it is nurtured, and the Puritan past strongly impinges
upon Hawthorne's present. The "great power of blackness in him,"
Melville infers, "derives its force from its appeals to that
Calvinistic sense of Innate Depravity and Original Sin, from
whose visitations, in some shape or other, no deeply thinking
mind is always and wholly free" (406). The point here is less a
belief system that might explain Hawthorne than his crucial
stance towards an "original" condition. The awareness of non-
being, as the power of destruction in the world and in the heart
of man, is unremittingly central to that stance, but not to a
degree dissolvent of the polarities of the primary relation of
man to the world. There is an intermingling of humour and love
in Hawthorne which Melville perceives in the thick of his
darkness. In spite of "the infinite obscure of his background"
the stories evince "a boundless sympathy with all forms of
being" (404).

In the June 29 letter to Hawthorne, Melville, in high
spirits, proposes they get together and talk "ontological
heroics,"[43] a half-jesting remark that also happens to betoken a
mutual bearing towards matters of being. To allege that their
writings inhere vitally in such matters is not to propound a
blueprint for their authorships, but simply to say of both men

what Charles Feidelson, in Symbolism and American Literature,
says of Melville: he treats "meaning as substantive, not
adjectival."[44] The ways to an expression of grounded, as opposed
to ornamental or assigned, meaning might be called the 'how' of
fictional truth telling, and on this matter as well the conver-
gence is determining. In part, Hawthorne helps Melville see how
he can say what he wants to say, how the cumulative unfolding of
meaning-events can make visible something substantial which can-
not become visible in any other way. Clues as to the means for
this kind of unfolding--the disclosure of extravagant revealings
within a realistic narrative, without the mechanical contrivance
of sublimating the physical to a metaphysical plane--are offered
in the prefaces to Hawthorne's longer narratives. The preface to
The House of the Seven Gables draws distinctions between the
"Romance" and the "Novel" in order "to claim a certain latitude"
of imagination. The choice of the romance form allows Hawthorne
.to take into account the quotidian real, the details of "the
probable and ordinary course of man's experience," while re-
maining free to approach less calculable realms: the "truth of
the human heart,"[45] and, what one is tempted to call 'transcen-
dent reality'--if, that is, the term does not suggest an
etherialization. Hawthorne calls it the "Marvellous" and shows
its special feature as the capacity for interpenetration with the
ordinary and mundane. His aim in defining and redefining the
romance is to refine this interpenetration, not to explain the
presence of the marvellous. In the stories and sketches as well
as in his novelistic romances it simply appears when states of

mind and heart are portrayed through the common features of the physical world. "The Hollow of the Three Hills" (1830), for example, depicts a literal landscape that is suddenly perceived as a magical landscape; the interchange between the two releases secret communications having less to do with the build-up of a plot than with forming an ingress. We step into deeply rooted ambivalence and a peculiar order of non-chronological time suggesting enigmas running as hidden nerves beneath the control of our surface impressions. .

The impact on Melville of perusing such mysteries at the time of his closest association with Hawthorne is profound. As Sherrill profiles Melville at this time, the period in which he is writing Moby-Dick,

> Melville had learned, with Jonathan Edwards and Nathaniel Hawthorne, that he could not penetrate to the source of these mysteries, but he knew as well . . . that such mysteries and their sudden, tumultuous appearances figured vitally in the world he sought to recover, a world which, with this portentous character, provided the resource for the only meaningful God-language accessible to human utterance.[46]

The mention of Jonathan Edwards here may seem unlikely, for while Melville was cognizant of the Puritan synthesis forged in his writings and preachings, there is no direct influence and there is little in common formally between the didactic answers of the theologian's position and Melville's interrogative focus on the human situation, the only starting point available after a century of mediocre Calvinism maintained by the smaller minds who succeed Edwards.[47] However, in spite of moving along contrary paths in different cultural contexts, there is a comparable

bearing in Edwards and Melville towards the 'issues' of a divine ground, a ground which, for both, resists decipherment because it is not merely a completion or extension of the human. Nor is it confineable to the notion of a being, whether as a human father projected against the skies, or, in the deistic sense, a self-ruling entity residing beside the world. Commentators on Edwards have pointed out that he does not really resolve a conflict in his theories of creator, creation and creature between speaking theistically, on the one hand, of a Highest Being, and on the other hand, more spaciously of "that consent, propensity and union of heart to Being in general."[48] But to the extent to which he posits the latter, the possibility of human relation to being as such, he shares with Melville a salient experience, a movement of the heart prior to the argumentative assertions of theism and of its counterpart, atheism. Such an experience provides the only resource for explaining the similarities between Edwards's sense of an overflowing creation radiant in its "emanation and remanation,"[49] and the witnessing in Moby-Dick of a ground discernible through its momentary infusions and effusions. It is an experience which in both cases induces god-talk to revolve around manifestation, not decipherability, and around the refusal to equate any vessel of manifestation with the ultimate basis of the being of things.

Yet given this shared experience Melville is not inclined, like Edwards, to indicate forms and attitudes for an appropriate response to ultimacy. The side of Melville's thinking oriented towards criticism--and in the next section I will turn to that

impulse by which conscious critique extricates itself from immersion in being--is apt to make him feel Edwards's word "consent" as a rope around the neck. But if set responses are rejected, the relation remains incontrovertible for Melville, leading him to explore territory both inside and outside monotheism, the area routinely designated as the domain of the relation to ultimacy. In the "chartless" voyage of Mardi, for instance, polytheistic symbolism, with its emphasis on the sacramental act--the practiced tension between the ultimate and the particular--becomes the vehicle of interrogation. Taji's 'vision quest' through an archipelago of nations and consecrated spaces, in the companionship of a king, a legend-teller, a poet, and a philosopher, has been described as "a study of what it entails to regard thinking as a metaphysical journey."[50] The thinking transfigures around a range of meetings with divinities, half-deities and, more generally, a mythopoeic speaking that precedes the abstraction and reciprocal objectification inherent in monotheism's labour to attribute all significance to a single god.[51] Quantity, though, is not the keynote; the search for Yillah is preoccupied not with lots of gods instead of one god, but with the quality underlying multiple expressions of godliness: the dignity and power of being concretely felt. As H. Bruce Franklin points out in The Wake of the Gods: Melville's Mythology, "Mardi presents all lands as a world of pagan gods"; the novel "draws upon the mythologies of the Hindus, the Polynesians, the Incas, the Hebrews, the Greeks, the Christians, the Romans, and the Norse," comparing them and questing through

them "for a truth behind and beyond them."[52] One may as readily say "below" here and replace "truth" with the philosopher Babbalanja's phrase "that which is beneath the seeming,"[53] but however a 'ground' is signified and in whatever direction it is said to be sought, the self-transcendence of life, in its universality and its validity, is persistently reckoned with in Mardi.

To suggest that such reckoning stems from the author's concern with being, a concern constituted by tensions in many unorthodox directions, is not to deck Melville out in the role of a speculating theorist. The point is rather to underline the cosmological nature and primal need of his imagination so as to offer a way of accounting for his extensive use of diverse mythological and religious ciphers. For example, there is a sense in which Moby-Dick seems to draw upon the Stoic idea of world-conflagration, the notion of successive world cycles cul- minating in a metamorphosis of all things into progenitive flame. In "The Try-Works" chapter a microcosm of the world is given in the image of "the rushing Pequod, freighted with savages, and laden with fire, and burning a corpse" (354) as it plunges into the night. And "The Candles" finds the captain's harpoon and the three masts burning, while lightning flashes and Ahab solilo- quizes on the ineluctable "clear spirit of clear fire" (416). These scenes may reflect the Stoic ekpyrosis--although without translating into Stoic doctrine.[54] In such moments we enter into the potency of an elemental symbol, since entering it is the only means by which its implicit, non-literal dimensions can be known.

Moby-Dick takes readers briefly inside this conflagration symbol in order to open a view to depths where perfunctory terms of understanding disappear and a matter bearing urgently on all life emerges in intimations of the self-consuming power of being.

The ontological acumen enabling such intimations also resists patterning them into a system. If Melville can be said to fashion any supposition from them, then it resides foremostly in an intensity of engagement with the fundamental question of the 'whence?' of human existence. The question is born out of the awareness that we are not the source of our own being; we do not originate ourselves and the recognition locates itself, as previously stated, along a broad spectrum of problems. Most basic perhaps is the problem of origin, an issue which turns up unrelentingly in _Moby-Dick_. In "The Pequod Meets the Virgin" Ishmael tells of his amazement at the inscrutable life force of a dying whale; he considers how the animal is itself a kind of source: "so vast is the quantity of blood in him, and so distant and numerous its interior fountains, that he will keep thus bleeding and bleeding for a considerable period; even as in a drought a river will flow, whose source is in the well-springs of far-off and undiscernible hills" (301). At another point astonishment turns to dread as he ponders the "antemosaic, unsourced existence of the unspeakable terrors of the whale, which having been before all time, must needs exist after all humane ages are over" (380). These and other discordant meditations on where and what all life-forms come from, on "the secret of our paternity" as he calls it late in the story, do not

settle into the assurance of resolution. Uncertainty is
dispelled neither by forging cryptic answers ("our souls" must go
to the "grave" of our "unwedded mothers" to learn "the secret"
[406]), nor by forgoing the question. In short, the narrator's
thoughts on the matter of origin function in the novel not merely
as a nostalgic longing for a lost fullness, but as a sustained
contemplation of the pure 'givenness' of our lives.

Something in Ishmael's humourous disposition, his own "godly
gamesomeness," celebrates this initial 'fact' of human experi-
ence, while his darker side is apt to depict it as a 'thrownness'
and to view all men as "orphans" tossed into precarious inter-
dependence, a predicament effectively imaged by Queequeg and the
narrator toiling on the "monkey-rope." But as moods vacillate,
along with the contrastive states of mind in which the enigma of
origin arises, another facet of the whence question appears: the
problem of un-consciousness. It is in "unconscious reverie"
(140), shown as both dangerous and revelatory, that Ishmael is
grasped by a sense of the elemental unity of being. The oceanic
self-forgetting of this "mystic mood" (406), contrary to his
cognitive impulse, brings an attunement with the aboriginal
fecundity of a ground. Of course, such an epiphany is fleeting,
for the perception of origin is soon truncated by an inevitable
heightening of self-consciousness--inevitable, that is, in most
men. That Queequeg embodies another type of awareness, and
hence, the possibility of a different relation to the origin--
one of dwelling and dying in its proximity--is suggested in a
number of places. For example, in the company of Queequeg during

the pre-voyage days of waiting, Ishmael experiences "a melting" in himself as he responds to a redemptive quality transmitted from "this soothing savage" (53). When the pagan harpooner rescues an overboard man in the Acushnet river, Ishmael asks "was there ever such unconsciousness?" (61), his question inferring something deeper than a character trait like spontaneity. The question points to a level of the story where Queequeg is illustrative of a mode of being in which world and self are not encumbered by the weight of deliberating reason. In other words, Queequeg is distinguished by an unbroken relation to origin, by an affinity written in the cosmogonic myths tatooed on his skin. Serenely immersed in the sacral present, his psyche can be seen, then, as an inversion of that of his captain. For Ahab is enmeshed in his own designs for a profane war on the malignancy of origin. An ever increasing consciousness of self suffuses those designs, making his situation more an epistemological than an ethical one. Or, as one critic has said in summarizing Charles Olson's interpretation of Ahab, "Ahab's primordial passions are beyond blame. His rival with the whale has its ultimate source in his race's emergence from total unconsciousness, the powers of which he has turned against to create his own identity."[55] The action of <u>Moby-Dick</u> revolves around this man's prototypical consciousness in strife with the non-rational depths which it stands out of and which exceed it in every direction. For the teller of the tale on the other hand, strife is replaced with contemplation of an unknown potentiality, an unplumbed realm that is extended even further in the telling. Both as strife and as

contemplation the underlying dynamic is born out of the author's imaginative capacity to interrogate the inception of human being, a capacity D. H. Lawrence describes as Melville's "mystical and symbolical" "underconsciousness."[56]

The problems of origin and un-consciousness overlap with others growing out of Melville's orientation to the existential question of whence, especially the problem of human nature. I will take up further treatment of that subject in a discussion of "Bartleby." I wish to note here, though, that at least one angle of Melville's vision of human nature is anchored in what he takes to be irretrievably given as human experience. Man's being always involves the shock of nonbeing; we are never not finite, and hence, never without some element of relation (visible or disguised) to the non-finite. From such givens stems Melville's concern with the enduring conditions of individuality within finitude, a concern which remains alive because it does not come to rest in the propositional. Propositions can, however, be extrapolated; observations from The Confidence-Man--for example, "The grand points of human nature are the same to-day they were a thousand years ago"[57]--can be joined with lines from the poems which speak of "peril in man" and "man's final lore"[58] in order to tie the author to a conservative perspective. But one may as readily show how Melville's attention to the ways human nature alters with changing social and environmental conditions under-mines every conservative assumption, and, as well, that attitude of social assent which takes refuge in apathy towards the questions of what it means to be human. Melville's thinking is

marked by a style interested less in making arguments as literary

sidelights than with addressing those fundamental questions.

Getting behind or in front of their self-evidentness begins the

movement to depths where the axial question of being itself

appears. And with it comes a paradoxical mixture of uncertainty

and openness, for "that question," to borrow Babbalanja's words

from Mardi, "is more final than any answer."[59]

(2) The Demands of Consciousness

But aren't it all sham?

"Billy in the Darbies"[60]

For all men who say yes, lie; and all men who say no,--
why they are in the happy condition of judicious
unincumbered travellers in Europe; they cross the
frontiers into Eternity with nothing but a carpet-
bag,--that is to say, the Ego.

letter to Hawthorne[61]

It seems to me now that Solomon was the truest man who
ever spoke, and yet that he a little managed the truth
with a view to popular conservatism.

letter to Hawthorne[62]

> Upon the summit of the temple was a staff; and as we
> drew nigh, a man with a collar round his neck, and the
> red marks of stripes upon his back, was just in the act
> of hoisting a tappa standard--correspondingly striped.
> Other collared menials were going in and out of the
> temple.
>
> from Mardi[63]

About halfway through volume two of Mardi the adventure
narrative turns a surprising corner. With ordinary reality left
behind at the beginning of the 'romance' when the narrator jumps
ship, by this point a reader has become used to dreamlike changes
of episode and the pattern of improvisation. But a reader
probably does not expect the pantheistic saunter to transform
into a full-fledged satirical survey of the nineteenth-century
social world. And yet, starting with Dominora (England) and
moving to Vivenza (the United States) Mardi, as fantastic world
metaphor buoyed in infinite time and space, becomes the Western
world in the spring of 1848, a civilization steeped in economic
and political exploitation. The tour steadily exposes connec-
tions between a reigning spirit of imperialism and the tyranny
and poverty systematized throughout society. Nationalism as a
religious sanctioning of the institution of slavery (in the
American south) is arraigned in the above quotation from the
Vivenza chapters.

One way of accounting for the shift to extended social
criticism in Mardi is to regard it in terms of form. The
travelogue-satire and the anatomy form gleaned from Swift and
Rabelais may have conditioned the structural choices in

Melville's work at this time. Autobiographical reading, on the other hand, looks first of all to the author's disdain for the demagoguery and chauvinism stifling contemporary politics and culture. For instance, Leon Howard points out in his biography that when Melville came to write this section of _Mardi_ "his opinions were hardly of the sort that could be freely expressed and patiently heard either in his family circle or in the circle of his literary friends."[64] While these circumstances are important, they tell mainly of the surface factors of composition, for Melville's literary endeavors are not finally rooted in literary ideas and political opinions. Finding the center of gravity for the impulse to social criticism in _Mardi_, an impulse that is tenaciously present in Melville's writing, means inquiring at a level beneath the rhetoric of motives, a level where it becomes necessary to speak of the deep-structure of human life.

Traditional approaches, and especially empiricist and positivist thought, tend to treat that structure as a sort of 'container'. But there are other avenues of approach seeking less to define an object than to trace a configuration with respect to its undergirding coordinates and its horizonal correlations. Such an approach finds human existence consisting in a duality--a duality that is at the same time a binding unity. To talk of duality is to run the risk of having the word mistaken for 'dualism', and worst of all, a dualism of body and soul. Still, the risk of a dialecticized view which attempts to maintain the tension between two poles is preferable to the static

definition of human being as a composite of faculties or sub-
stances. A double tendency is present because the human makeup
is relational. As Kierkegaard states, "man" is a "relation that
relates itself to its own self,"[65] a creature determined by the
inborn capacity for self-reflection. At whatever obscure point
in the evolutionary course of things humans became different from
other animals, and however that development occurred--whether
through the creation of language, or the technical act (or both
together, as in the Genesis story)--the emergence of humanity
out of nature is the arrival of a life-process endowed with the
capacity to question itself and its environment. Consequently,
man/woman's ex-sistence is simultaneously a standing-in and a
standing-out, a being within this given world of the instinctual
self, and, a reflective freedom from bondage to the timeless
particular here and now of the immediate surroundings. As
Heidegger's term Dasein indicates, man is the being who has a
'there'[66]; his presence is disclosed to him along with the
potentiality to choose a stand in the face of it.

In other words, man has both being and consciousness, or, as
the German words effectively convey the relation, Sein and
Bewusstsein.[67] I am offering these terms in a general way here
without seeking to follow their workings in a particular
philosophy such as that of Kierkegaard or Heidegger. Rather than
examining the histories of the terms or the problematic debates
appended to them--the distinction between consciousness and self-
consciousness (Hegel), the positing and refutation of a
transcendental ego (Husserl, Sartre), and so on--I intend an

inclusive usage. As abstractions 'being' and 'consciousness' are perhaps prone to a too easy severance from the concrete reality of human living. But in spite of that possible misusage they can provide a kind of binocular focus on the dual nature of human being and can scan each aspect under the rubric of a special context--the context of orientation. The orientation to being has been outlined as an inclination towards the given or the 'always' of human experience; immediately as origin, and fleetingly as the holy, "the eternal-evanescent present of reality"[68] presides as non-rational depth. In opposition to this inclination, however, consciousness goes beyond the immediate situation. Neither abstract entity nor mere faculty, it is an activity which breaks the spell of being by interrogating the limitations of the environment. Asking the question 'where to?' or 'whither?' in place of fixation upon the whence, consciousness divides the endless cycles of being to grasp the 'not yet' of future aim. Before it shapes into rebellion against what only seems fixed and eternal, it is the response to, and anticipation of, what 'ought to be'--the demand for essential change.

I have only alluded to the unity of being and consciousness in order first to differentiate them as the double context in which human being is set. I do not wish to imply, though, that consciousness is disjunctive with being, or that men and women question themselves and their environments in disembodied acts. In the case of Melville, to move back for a moment from the general to the individual, it should be apparent that his own concern for being is concurrently a questioning which, as with

Hawthorne, rises out of the recognition of the demand to reopen the condition of language and literature in his own time. In other words, the two orientations presuppose one another and interpenetrate vibrantly. To delineate them is to perceive their interaction.

From an historical vantage point that interaction becomes manifest as a dialectic, a movement requiring an interpretation of history in light of the breakthroughs of consciousness and the reaffirmations of being. For example, interpretation of the ancient world finds many of that period's contradictions to coalesce into a basic conflict, a conflict resulting in what Henri Frankfort has called "the emancipation of thought from myth."[69] Telling breakthroughs in the struggle occur in Greece and Israel, and they have often been described. In Greece a number of diverse developments--such as Hesiod's personal concern with cosmogony, the Ionian philosophers' examination of the phenomenal world, changes in the polis and in lyric and epic poetry--together signal a rupture with purely mythic paradigms and priestly mediations of the powers of being. In the sixth century B. C. new ways of thinking emerge which alter attitudes towards the gods and the whole thematic of the origin. A type of historical awareness also emerges--although, in the historiography of Herodotus and Thucydides that awareness remains tied in its interpretation to natural cycles and circular symbols. It is with the rise of biblical prophetism within the Hebrew tradition that a radically new kind of historical thinking appears. Judaism's battle for ethical monotheism over and

against polytheism is, at one and the same time, a break with the myth of origin, an "elevation of time above space,"[70] and a push towards linear, in place of circular, historicizing. The meaning of time is interpreted through history itself rather than through nature, and consequently all space-bound gods, and their atten- dant rituals and sacraments, come under attack. In the covenant with Yahweh and in the social imperatives of the prophets, consciousness encounters "sacred discontent,"[71] a demand for universal justice that will only be fulfilled in a "new heaven and a new earth," which is the promised 'end' or aim to which history is driving.

These transformations in Greek and Jewish thought generate countermovements in the later ancient world. Prominent examples are the Gnostic opposition to Yahweh and the recovery in the Hellenistic mystery religions of ecstatic contact with returning concrete gods like Dionysus. So in spite of the dispersal of the myth of origin and the advent of historical beginnings new ways are found back to the archaic powers of being. It is not my purpose here to follow out and evaluate those ways and, in turn, the counterreactions to them in the religious and political ferment of the ancient Mediterranean basin. The point is rather the dynamic character of the dialectic underlying the ferment. And perhaps the initial reason that dialectic has everything to do with Melville is his own implication in the conflicts of ancient thought. His readings of the Gnostics, Skeptics and Stoics, his lifelong grappling with Christianity, the journal of his trip to the Holy Land, and the more than 18,000 lines of

Clarel all testify to his modern embroilment in the hopes and
traumas of ancient belief. F. O. Matthiessen points to this
trait in Melville when he says "the values of both Pan and
Jehovah were not merely words to him, as they are to most men,"
for he had "relived them for himself in his own body and mind,
and especially in his imagination." Hence, in _Moby-Dick_,
Matthiessen argues, Melville was able to effect "not a fusion,
but a unique counterpoint of both"[72] sets of values.

The overarching reason that the dialectic of being and
consciousness finds reverberations in Melville's life is that it
also comprises the mainspring of transformation in his own
historical period. The religious dimension of life in nineteenth-
century America is pervaded with aftereffects of the Reformation,
and the Reformation can be seen as another historical moment in
which consciousness overcomes priestly mediations of the powers
of being. The struggle of the sixteenth-century reformers
against the authoritarian sacramentalism of the Church is, above
all, an attack on the myth of origin synthesized in and through
the ecclesiastical structures of the medieval period. The
Protestant attack on magic sacraments, on images, doctrines and
authorities claiming divine power for themselves, begins an
attempt to reset the purposes of the spiritual community and to
kindle an active mediating role for the awakened conscience.
But in the aftermath of the attack, and of the Counter Reforma-
tion, contradictions surface in contending Protestant factions;
in spite of the emphasis on personal piety, rigid collectivities
form and establish their own churches as holy spheres. One

contending faction, with its own history of internal disputes, is the Dutch Reformed Church in which Melville is baptized and reared. The theocentric Calvinism of this church has led a number of critics to see in it the decisive conditioning force in Melville's background. It seems to explain everything from Manichean overtones in the texts to recurring motifs like the fallenness of nature and the morally overbearing father. And yet, such a view overlooks another strong childhood influence in the liberal Unitarian bent of Melville's parents, and another strain of his texts in the parody of Calvinist motifs. To whatever degree, though, that Melville incorporates or throws off the content of institutionalized Protestantism, the Protestant tradition remains in his thinking as a principle of prophetic protest. Moreover, it is often most alive precisely in his criticism of the legalistic and conformist brands of religion which permeate the substance of his culture.

The dimension of culture in nineteenth-century America is the most conspicuous locus of the dialectic of being and consciousness. If the Reformation transmits a breakthrough of consciousness in religion, a correlative breakthrough can be seen in the dimension of culture with the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. By Melville's day the overt and covert repercussions of that movement are in a great many ways the determining factors of life in the brave new world of America.

To speak of the Enlightenment is necessarily to tell the story of the more fundamental development in which it is rooted and which it brings to a culmination: the appearance of Western

bourgeois man and the rise of bourgeois society out of the
medieval context. Attempts to tell that story are complicated by
their reliance on the tradition of criticism and analysis
inherited from the Enlightenment itself. Different interpretive
perspectives tend to emphasize one or more of a number of
features and events. The formulation of the scientific method,
the production of a world perspective through representational
building, the increase of individual owners in the marketplace,
the advent of the printing press and new literacies, the battle
against heteronomous power structures, the phenomenon of inner-
worldly asceticism--these are all key ingredients in a long,
intricate development of a certain history bearing group.
Although the group becomes most visible through battles in the
political arena, no less essential to its advancement is a
struggle for the autonomy of consciousness. Towards that end it
cultivates and deploys critical reason which displaces feudal
social forms and absolutist powers of being. In pursuit of new
values and new purposes the middle classes make victorious the
two vital powers of capital and technology. Along with the
growing division of labour these powers give birth to a spirit of
self-sufficient worldliness manifest in the will towards the
transformation of autonomous man's earth. Guided by a 'law' of
pre-established harmony and unencumbered by divine interference
or non-rational forces like 'fate', this transforming persuasion
leaves in its wake a virtual phantasmagoria of productivity. In
the details of that productivity--its particular instruments and
creations--lies much information about the bourgeois mind. But

more revealing perhaps is the underlying drive compelling such

exertion. Paul Tillich has called it the "principle" at the core

of Western bourgeois society. He defines it as,

> . . . the radical dissolution of all conditions, bonds,
> and forms related to the origin into elements that are
> to be rationally mastered, and the rational assemblage
> of these elements into structures serving the aims of
> thought and action. Goal setting takes the place of
> concern for being, the creation of tools replaces the
> contemplation of intrinsic values. The bourgeoisie, as
> an alien force, tames the arbitrary powers of existence;
> this it does by subjecting them to its own ends. And
> the way it tames them is by objectification and analy-
> sis. In every origin there is an element of the un-
> conditioned. The wholly conditioned, that which has
> become merely a thing, no longer bears any marks of the
> origin. Therefore total objectification is the
> abolishing of all reference to origin in an entity, its
> complete profanization. The spirit of bourgeois
> society is the spirit of a human group that after
> cutting every bond of origin, subjugates an objectified
> world to its own purposes.[73]

The radicalness of this principle, in Tillich's terms, makes it

the fertile source not only for the bourgeois programs of

rationalism, democracy, and liberalism, but also for opposing

proletarian movements. That is, socialism, communism, and

anarchism fight against bourgeois ideology because of its betray-

al of the egalitarian visions explicit in its original

revolutionary mandate, and yet each of these countertrends, even

while criticizing human objectification, also aims at the

"rational formation of reality."[74] In contrast, another series

of movements combats the rationalist axiom of the bourgeois

principle through a non-rationalist stance. They include, most

creatively, romanticism and philosophies of life in the nine-

teenth century, and, most destructively of the twentieth-century

political movements, national socialism (the chief absurdity of

which consists in the incorporation of manipulating reason into a fervent anti-rationalism). This pattern of reaction, realignment of orientation, and renegotiation of the relation of subject to object inaugurated by the bourgeois principle largely arbitrates the range of thought in the modern world. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno have described it as the "dialectic of Enlightenment,"[75] for the Enlightenment, its different stages and its slightly different formulations in Europe and America notwithstanding, can be seen as that historical moment in which the bourgeois principle comes to fruition as a potent force.

The objectified world of nineteenth-century America boasts favourite artifacts from its Enlightenment in two of that 'didactic' era's purest products: the Declaration of Independence and the American Constitution. Melville's early works show a special interest in these documents and their possibilities. On the one hand, Mardi offers a lampoon of the Declaration ("In-this-re-publi-can-land-all-men-are-born-free-and-equal . . .--Except-the-tribe-of-Hamo"), while White-Jacket, through a contrast of glorified officers and common sailors, accuses a failed revolution. On the other hand, there are passages in White-Jacket and Redburn[76] which speak for the idea of a world democracy of nations as a means of respecting, beyond nationalism, the dignity of all nations and races. Similarly, there are invocations to a theonomously democratic 'muse' in the early parts of Moby-Dick akin to a call in "Hawthorne and His Mosses" for new writers to look to "that unshackled, democratic spirit of Christianity in all things" (414). Such statements lead Walter

Bezanson to comment that "Melville in his early writings was as much an enraptured advocate of the democratic dream as he was a shrewd critic of particular American institutions."[77] In other words, one vein of Melville's social thought combines attention to the documents of American revolution with persistant remonstrations against warmongering, racism, and slavery, a combination which reflects his inheritence of the subversive, as distinguishable from the bureaucratic, qualities of Enlightenment criticism. This strand of his nay-saying surfaces early in Typee and Omoo with their exposés of naval tyranny and south-sea missions. It appears in Mardi in chapters on Diranda, where the institutionalized war games of self-deifying kings serve to subjugate a mystified population, and on Maramma, an island ruled by priestcraft, bigotry, and fundamentalist superstition: "'And what if [the sharks] destroy human life' say the Islanders, 'are they not sacred?'"[78] This enlightened strand also appears in later writing--despite the extinguished light at the end of The Confidence-Man. It surfaces as that "aspect" of Battle-Pieces in which sections of poems both appeal to and question humanist national feeling for just law. Other instances can be found in his public lectures on the lyceum circuit (1857-59) with their invectives against the brutality and cruelty of white, ostensibly Christian civilization; for example, an enlightened tone can be heard in "The South Seas" lecture when Melville warns against associating with other cultures "until we have found for ourselves a civilization morally, mentally, and physically higher than one which has culminated in almshouses, prisons, and

hospitals."[79] Throughout his life, then, Melville sides with the pre-revolutionary Enlightenment--even though at times he includes a theonomous element at odds with pure autonomy--in rejecting religious intolerence and authoritarian modes of mind, a rejection that grows out of a recognition of cultural relativity and individual human responsibility for understanding human processes.

But other strands of Melville's social criticism show a severe stance against the Enlightenment, insofar, for example, as it believes "that Man is naturally good, / And--more--is Nature's Roman, never to be scourged" ("The House-top"[80]). By the time he writes his last novel, which satirizes such belief as the preferred tool of an acquisitive population of confidence-men, Melville has moved far away from the American notion of a progressive aggrandizement of the good, common man. He is also far removed from Redburn's and White-Jacket's hopes for the prospects of tolerant self-determination, for in _Clarel_ those hopes are to receive rather different treatment, especially in Ungar's diatribe against "the Dark Ages of Democracy."[81] This long transition in Melville's social thought from his early novels to his postbellum poetry is sometimes psychologized as an inevitable fall from idealism into decades of brooding pessimism. But the transition also happens to mark an engaged response to the social and political condition as its base changes, around mid-century, from a diverse, unconstricted economy spreading across a continent, to a centripetal entrenchment of capitalist powers unimpededly exploiting labour and resources. Melville's disappointment with this self-devouring America, and it should be

noted that as early as _Mardi_ he predicts civil war,[82] does not
then turn into either reactionary acquiesence or utopian
idealization of technology (which is Walt Whitman's manner of
capitulation in "Passage to India" [1871]). Melville's disillu-
sionment shifts the emphases and oscillates the various strands
of his social criticism thereby changing its direction, but not
its concentration.

One such shift is to unmask with increasing directness the
forces of indoctrination in a mediocre culture. For instance,
the failure of the American bourgeoisie to apply its own
principle to itself--its own iconography and will to power--
produces an ideology of origin: the belief that Providence,
synonymous with progress, astutely invested in its own future by
setting aside throughout the dark ages of history a continent
for the express American purpose of building a new and better
Eden. Melville's answer is _Israel Potter_ (1855), the story of a
forgotten, revolutionary underling in aimless exile from this
promised land. Sarcastically dedicated to "his Highness the
Bunker Hill Monument," this historical novel shows a sacrificial
victim of the poverty and violence concealed by the monolithic
belief systems of Europe and the New World. When those systems
meet in the "mutual obliteration" of a naval battle between
England and America, the narrator takes an ironic distance from
the ludicrously automatic carnage that ensues: "It seemed more an
intestine feud, than a fight between strangers."[83] The process
by which men like Israel Potter are turned into cannon fodder
for the glorification of seductive but inane heroes like John

Paul ("I have not yet begun to fight") Jones is given central stage in a scene that can only be closed with the asking of questions: "What separates the enlightened man from the savage? Is civilization a thing distinct, or is it an advanced stage of barbarism?" (186).

Emphasis on the depravity of civilization looms large as Melville's cultural critique finds its predominant and sustained focus: the consolidation and fortification of the bourgeois principle in nineteenth-century America. The ever increasing reification of bourgeois life entails a rampant drive to turn all things into objects of calculation and control, which in turn entails rampant dehumanization. Human beings become things as the hypostatization of calculating consciousness creates a dictatorship of instrumental needs. The principle of this society becomes more and more shackling as it solidifies into positivism and a liberalism barely disguising its worship of all that fends off growing threats, as signalled by, for example, the labour resistance of 1837. Duty, the status quo, and praise of the harmonious, positively given are made part and parcel with pseudo-aristocratic ventures like the Mexican War in order to establish the sanctifying secular spirit of Manifest Destiny, and to secure an air of humanly managed divine purpose.

On one of its many levels Moby-Dick mirrors this society through the story's geographic removal. The Pequod, for all else it may symbolize, is a floating factory carrying an economic obsession out onto the seas where Ahab's despotic rampage simulates a society's dream of power and dominant self-assertion.

The dream requires wholesale servitude to industry; at the beginning of the novel labour is bought and isolated in order to appropriate systematically the "thing" which must be transmuted into a consumable commodity. Ishmael describes the phases of this transmutation process in detail--but in a way that rebukes the accompanying mutilation of man's own body (the carpenter, the blubber-room men, Ahab), and, as well, questions a mindless indifference towards the intrinsic form of the whale. His allusion to a society that makes comparative use of the whale's form ("A Bower in the Arsacides") is part of a crescendo of meditations on the marvellous current of life which runs through the animal. Those meditations effectively heighten a sense of violation in the suppression and loss of the whale's greatness as its "arbitrary powers" are tamed through "total objectification." In "The Try-Works" the original form of the creature is abolished; "the whale supplies his own fuel and burns his own body" as "bible leaves" of blubber are boiled down in a hellish furnace stoked by "the Tartarean shapes of the pagan harpooneers" (353). The demon imagery which quickly takes over the chapter carries the objectification process to its ritualistic conclusion by enacting the underlying fetichistic nature of its crusade for "complete profanization."

The quasi-religious underside of capitalist enterprize appears consistently at the centre of Melville's cultural critique. The consistency is not attributable to a method, however, for his cultural observation is not programmatic. It stems, rather, from an engaged standpoint conjoining an insight

not unlike that formulated by Marx--"the criticism of religion is the premise of all criticism"[84]--with a recognition of religion's capacity to return unremittingly as cultural substance, as the 'given' vested with complexes, taboos, and longings. Put another way, the depth element of Melville's orientation to consciousness is prophetic, not rational. In place of evidence and solutions arising from sociological and psychological argumentation, the indispensable concern is with the 'demonizations' endemic to affirmative culture. To give an example, the short sketch "The 'Gees" (1856) exhibits for critical judgement a demonization of humanism in the form of the scientific racism of its narrator. Melville's satire in this piece takes on the proportions of travesty as the speaker, casually addressing both the general public and ethnologists of good will, purports to describe the curiosities of the 'Gees, a "hybrid" race of African Negroes and Portuguese. "One must study them," we learn, "just as to know and be a judge of horses one must study horses." The speaker's "scientific view" includes, all at once, a disapproval of "bigotry," a fondness for the noble word "man," and a strong belief in the future of knowledge: much is still unknown about the mind of the 'Gee because it "has been little cultivated. No well-attested educational experiment has been tried upon him." But a kind of zoological observation has discovered "an aquatic nature," a hazard-resistant skin, "a great appetite, but little imagination," a preference for biscuits over wages, and "a natural adaptibility . . . to hard times." All in all, this race's "docile services" are "cheaply to be had"--a statement

which makes the 'Gee a fictional compatriot of the enslaved American Negro and the working classes in general. Melville's intention) here is to awaken readers to the destructive distortions of the proslavery ethnologists, whose benignly utilitarian tracts were extremely popular at the time.[85] Especially targeted are the rationalizations of economic disparity, and not just those of the ethnologists; the compulsive procedure of rationalization is shown to permeate the whole predatory society when one exploited group (common seamen whose slavery earns wages), in turn derides the 'Gee, "a creature of inferior race."[86] As pointed out in a recent examination of "slavery, race, and violence in Melville's America," "The 'Gees" presents "a strikingly modern concept of racism as a smoke screen for economic exploitation, victimizing 'regularly bred seamen' along with 'Gees, and setting these exploited classes against each other, instead of uniting them against their common oppressors."[87]

Redburn dramatizes the same means of oppression. The narrator-protagonist, on his return voyage, observes how the fighting that breaks out among immigrant masses aboard the plague-ridden ship efficiently prevents unified rebellion: "they themselves drive the strongest rivet into the chain, by which their social superiors hold them subject."[88] This realization comes late in the novel following upon earlier incidents which push Redburn towards maturation and away from both his father's delusions and his own sentimental idealism. At sea he runs headlong into the ship's class structure, and upon landing, the

dichotomy of rich and poor. The "soul-sickening wail" of a dying
woman with starving children whom he cannot help ("What Redburn
Saw in Launcelott's-Hey"), and endless scenes of squalor in the
Liverpool slums, lead him to begin drawing lines connecting
principalities and powers that be. One instance of this is his
irreverent description of the local Lord Nelson statuary; for
public benefit the frozen spectacle pedestals Nelson "expiring
into the arms of Victory" surrounded by "four naked figures in
chains, somewhat larger than life, . . . seated in various
attitudes of humiliation and despair." Aware that these figures,
with "their swarthy limbs and manacles," allegorize Nelson's
most impressive victories. Redburn is also "involuntarily
reminded of four African slaves in the market-place" (155). He
comes voluntarily to the conclusion, soon afterwards, that the
names of naval heroes bestowed upon the city's more illustrious
streets should be emblazened as well upon its poverty-stricken
docks; the docks might then be "fit monuments to perpetuate the
names of the heroes, in connection with the commerce they
defended" (162). His sense of the veiled connections between
the underside of "commerce," the military, slavery, clustering
masses, and the scenarios of cultural heroics, becomes blunt in
his reaction to the army recruitment posters stuck on walls near
the docks: "I never passed these advertisements, surrounded by
crowds of gaping emigrants, without thinking of rat-traps" (194).
Such links grow increasingly explicit with Redburn's stay in
Liverpool, and yet there are earlier hints at more implicit ones.
For example, in the portrayal of Jackson is the suggestion of an

interpenetrating relation between society and the authoritarian personality. No explanation ends Redburn's bewilderment--in lieu of any sign of physical power in his tormentor--at "what it was that made a whole ship's company submit to the whims of one poor miserable man like Jackson" (59). But when we learn of his experience on Portuguese slave ships, and of slavery's systematic techniques for denying people their humanity, something of Jackson's mystique is laid bare.

By portraying the contradictions of personalities like Jackson in relation to social distortions which infiltrate and mold character, Melville concretizes in his art a dimension ignored by the highly popular writers he calls "psychological novelists," who in the interests of "consistency" or aesthetic finesse, traffic in transparent human nature. Melville's strongest refutation of such "transparency" (which makes the "waters of human nature . . . either . . . very pure or very shallow"[29]) is probably Pierre, whose compulsive cycle of idealization and repression divulges deep roots in the conflicts of his social world. But in less developed characters too, historical forces are made operative--and to a surprising degree in the Benjamin Franklin of Israel Potter. The portrait of Franklin is unusual in that it depicts a man energetically constructing his own self-sufficient personality. Dubbed "the type and genius of his land" (66) by the heavily ironic narrative voice, at first we are given only caricature; when Potter first enters his "presence" Franklin's back is turned and flies are buzzing around an isolated chamber furnished in a "necromantic"

fashion with the "upholstery of science" (52). The Doctor's insipid lessons in the arithmetical logic of morality and "pecuniary matters" amplify his banality, and yet he does not seem merely an automaton. In contrast to Potter's lack of interiority, an unconscious facet begins to appear in the sheer vigor of his repression and in his surplus devotion to the techniques of adjustment he proclaims, in Poor Richard's Almanac, necessary for the private purposes of delayed gratification.[90] He comes to full development as a controlling will, a self-enclosed center around which all property and all bodily and mental needs are organized for the sake of the self-esteem to be gained from profit. His injunctions for the competitive ego to manage the whole of life reveal his internalization of society's new creed of calculation, and in his personal bid for immortality that internalization deifies the bourgeois principle as the pre-condition for life: "God helps them that helps themselves" (75). As an eros smothering father-figure this version of Ben Franklin is, in part, one of a number of satirical jokes in a picaresque adventure; but when the comedy disappears in the final chapters of what is also an historical novel, he is related to Israel's fate. His sensibility lingers as the articulation of forces which drive Potter into the futile, killing labour of the brick-yards, and which, on the larger scale of unlimited production and mass dislocation of the "laboring classes" (231), turn London into the "City of Dis" (227). The same principle compelling Franklin to his planning and inventing creates the actual conditions of the brick mill, where the

> . . . continual, violent, helter-skelter slapping of
> the dough into the moulds, begat a corresponding
> disposition in the moulder, who, by heedlessly slapping
> that sad dough, as stuff of little worth, was thereby
> taught, in his meditations, to slap, with similar
> heedlessness, his own sadder fortunes, as of still less
> vital consideration. (221)

This 'thingification' process enters and devastates human

personality at a depth immaterial to spiritual technocrats like

Franklin who invest in the process as productive activity.

Through its imaginative witness of such a depth, Israel Potter

becomes an indictment of both economic domination and American

belief.

Similar indictments in Melville's writings attack society's

spirit of "self-sufficient finitude"[91]: humans become functional

mechanisms when finite powers are imbued with the status of

ultimacy in a world shorn of the incalculable. These protests

may be called prophetic because they work to disconfirm what the

dominant consciousness takes for granted. Language, which is

taken naturally as its 'window on the world', is perhaps the

farthest reaching instance. Since all is at the disposal of man,

this realm too is understood as an instrument, a tool with a

function properly restricted to the business of representation.

As dictionaries remove words from "the street," meanings are

standardized to make language transparent to a logical order,

just as popular fiction consigns human nature to a psychological

grid. The literary 'use' of language becomes a special aid in a

culture's self-administered redemption. Such literature provides

the veneer of managed prose Melville remarks on in "Hawthorne and

His Mosses": "there is no hope for us," he warns, "in these

smooth, pleasing writers that know their powers" (413). His
response, and the lasting cutting edge of his vocational
critique, lies in refusing the notion of literature as a comfor-
table, substitute reality, and behind it, the reduction of
language to an indifferent transparency. One place that refusal
comes alive is in the opacity of symbols which, because they
subvert attempts to ferret out ambiguity of meaning, are ana-
thematic to the stable facts and pictures of a reconciled world.
For example, the "whiteness of the whale" insists on the inexpe-
diency of paradox; beauty and horror, the totality of colours
and "visible absence of color" (169), are yoked in unrestful
concert with the book's "repose of If" (406), bringing its key
symbol persistently into question, while eluding rigid reinter-
pretation. Bezanson points to the overall effect when he says
Moby-Dick has a "peculiar quality of making and unmaking itself
as it goes."[92] His comment may be applied to other works which
unsettle by juxtaposing different truths: by portending meanings
antithetical to the narrative voice (as that of Captain Delano in
"Benito Cereno"), by dispersing the 'limelight' in multiple
points of view (The Confidence-Man), and by parodying traditional
narrative forms (the conscious literary excesses of Pierre).
Such maneuvers flout the "yes-gentry's" regulated denial of the
negative. They stem from a counter-consciousness in the later
Melville coextensive with a concern, voiced as early as the
Preface to Typee, for "the unvarnished truth."[93]

In the widest sense of the word, there is a kerygmatic
element in Melville's refusal to underwrite the social condition

and its linguistic means. That is, he is interested in more than
the fictiveness of fiction. He plies his age's suicidal
principle into fictional view where its securities and ideals can
be seen as false. This practice involves an imaginative proce-
dure something like Kierkegaard's "indirect communication": "A
communication in the form of a possibility compels the recipient
to face the problem of existing in [reality] so far as this is
possible between man and man."[94] As existential possibility,
critical fiction works through the creation of a universe of
meanings and a heightened realism of relation (or, "more reality
than real life can show") to un-socialize readers by un-deifying
society. In the reenactment of truths adverse to the
enterprizing spirit of a dedivinized world, such writing un-
leashes ambiguities and contingencies that clash with the longing
to celebrate the present by ignoring its darkness, and as well,
the utopian belief in, what one confidence-man calls, a "final
benignity." Throughout, the effort is engrained with an impiety
towards the deadened bonds of received culture. As Henry Murray
states: "Perhaps the broadest generalization that can be made
about Melville's different truths is that they are all culturally
unacceptable."[95]

(3) Doubts and Intuitions

>Doubts of all things earthly, and intuitions of some
>things heavenly; this combination makes neither
>believer nor infidel, but makes a man who regards them
>both with equal eye.
>
><u>Moby-Dick</u> (314)

The coffin lifebuoy that rescues Ishmael at the end of <u>Moby-Dick</u> shoots from the "vital centre" of a subsiding whirlpool, a "slowly wheeling circle" emblematic of the endless cycles of death and life, of moving into and out of being. The coil of this "closing vortex," and also the rigid circularity of the final three day chase, are then starkly broken by the "length-wise" trajectory of Queequeg's coffin, by a perpendicular vector that falls to run parallel with the horizon. As Eleanor Wilner writes, this is a moment in which "the primal past breaks from the vortex, the 'dead' rise to restore the living, the forces of man's deepest past rise to sustain him from the very sea that would drown him; lower and upper world, dark racial unconscious and bright intellect join in new consciousness."[96] As a para-doxical yoking, "new consciousness" captures the tension between the unsynthesized poles of the primordial vital in man and his beckoning, deciding intellect. The phrase holds as well the urgency and largeness of an opening to be discovered in the tension.

It is that opening to which the dialectic of being and consciousness in Melville's work points, the same I think Hawthorne envisions when he speaks of Melville's "freedom of view."[97] The remark, typical of Hawthorne's concision and his restraint, comes in a review of Typee years before their first meeting. Specifically addressing Melville's style, he is also, I suspect, hinting at something more pressing: there is a certain freedom in undercutting surface appearances when the yes and no of dialectical penetration instinctively allows irresolution.

To summarize: the irresolution is between the substantive and the corrective, between a proclivity for what Melville calls "Primal Philosophy"--which might conceivably embark from Meister Eckhart's recognition that "Being precedes work"[98]--and a new, unauthorized directiveness away from the uncreative 'same' when it ossifies into structures of destruction. The first inclination finds embodiment in Moby-Dick's Bulkington and his inner pledge to landlessness, to the principle of fluidity and its magic fullness of ontic polarity. Critical consciousness, on the other hand, takes shape in "The Tartarus of Maids" as it bears witness to the plight of people forced to transpose their lives into objects: "Machinery--that vaunted slave of humanity-- here stood menially served by human beings."[99] These are examples that should not screen the mutual permeation of Melville's kernel orientations as they disseminate the protean forms of his art. That is to say, critical consciousness is itself an encounter with the unconditional, for the prophetic demand to expose injustice is not felt as relative or merely on

occasion. At the same time, the orientation to being, rather than a retreat, amounts to the strongest kind of break with the positivism of a society disavowing any relationship with what it wants solely to control. And yet this same technologized world, as Dennis Lee writes in Savage Fields, "can mount its titanic project of consciousness-as-mastery only by anesthetizing awareness of the earth-energies that quicken consciousness itself." To disclose in opposition the truth of those energies when, as Melville puts it, "truth is ridiculous to men,"[100] is, in Lee's terms, "to think sanely"--which "must be to think against thought, and to think more deeply than thought."[101]

Intuitions of the depth element of meaning, and doubts about all that society passes off as fixed: this combination has implications beyond the literary, and they bear hard on the thought of our own time. For the twentieth century, with its ever-escalating mental division of labour, has efficiently split asunder being and consciousness. Perhaps Ishmael's assurance of a "combination" follows from what has been called the "transitional sensibility" Melville acquires dwelling between "realism and modernism."[102] Or more simply, Melville may be located at a marginal place between two eras, a position enabling him to avoid the twentieth-century penchant for hypostatization. Although it is, of course, cast on a different plane from Melville's creative writing, Heidegger's philosophy of being is an example of that hypostatical tendency. In his venture to think against 'presence-bound' metaphysics, the later Heidegger wants instead to "think Being without regard to its being grounded in terms of

beings," to "think Being without beings."[103] But diametrically
opposed to Heidegger's fundamental ontology is Adorno, who at the
nucleus of his Negative Dialectics criticizes the very notion of
Being as "mythological" subterfuge. In the orbit of modern
psychology, the two figures of Freud and Jung parallel the philo-
sophical bifurcation of Heidegger and Adorno, for stemming from
totally contrary attitudes towards culture are their inverse
confrontations with un-consciousness. Freud rediscovers the
unconscious in terms of what he calls "the fact of conscious-
ness"[104]; the blind mechanisms of instinct are scientifically
analyzed under the stoical hope that through the controlling
quality of conscious acceptance, man can live in some degree of
daylight despite his own irrational depths. Jung, by contrast,
investigates the primordial images of those depths in terms of
the unconscious itself, which for him, as Philip Rieff points
out, is "all that consciousness can become."[105] But in Jung's
attempt to regain the archetypal powers from which Western man
has estranged himself, he forfeits radical critical conscious-
ness. It is hardly an accident, then, that both he and
Heidegger are caught, however briefly, by the politically roman-
tic ideals of National Socialism. On the other side of the coin,
though, it should also be pointed out that both Freud and Adorno
have been criticized for their compensating one-sidedness.[106]
More recently, Paul Ricoeur has attempted to overcome the
emptiness of hyper-criticism, with its pure hermeneutics of
"suspicion," by positing a restorative, interdisciplinary theory
of interpretation. Attentive to a symbol's immersion in being,

it would attempt "to go beyond criticism," he says, "by means of criticism" in order to arrive at a "second naïveté."[107] Yet this notion seems partly to override critical consciousness--at least as it appears in Melville's thought. For there is a visceral side to Melville's critique at odds with Ricoeur's expression. It is a side that sustains his difference from a number of modern writers, and from his contemporaries as well: from Hawthorne, who was reluctant to criticize slavery,[108] and from Emerson, whose disdain for the masses finds a new voice in the character of Mark Winsome. And yet Melville does not magnify that side to the point of becoming doctrinaire about the relativity of things, for "doubts or denials," there are some who "along with them, have intuitions" (314).

Hawthorne's record of his last meeting with Melville in England in 1856 revolves around an often-quoted observation: Melville "can neither believe nor be comfortable in his unbelief; and he is too honest and courageous not to try to do one or the other."[109] The statement is interesting, first of all, because it seems almost as applicable to Hawthorne himself. But it is also an astonishing illumination of the concurrent impulses of Melville's thinking and the boundary situation of his commitment. The commitment is problematic because the impulses are not the harmonized mystical and reformist avocations of a liberal citizen. Melville's reception of the sacramentally presentational and his push towards the prophetically kerygmatic together constitute a lived radical paradox.

Starting from one or another of the various aspects of this

paradox, commentators and critics often set out to show Melville
as either decidedly Christian in his final intentions
(Matthiessen on Billy Budd), or as bitterly bent upon an anti-
Christian rampage (Lawrance Thompson on Melville's "quarrel with
god"), or, as ruined by wayward Christian tendencies (Olson's
"he got all balled up with Christ"[110]). But none of these
approaches reaches the level on which Melville's religious
thought moves. By 'level' is not meant an Arnoldian ascent to
refined ethical feeling. The depth Melville dives for, which has
little to do with morality, is best seen from Hawthorne's
delineation as a human stance. It is simply the stance of
religious intelligence, and of a peculiarly twentieth-century
sort, for at every step a way must be found between the authori-
tarians within religion on the one hand, and the cultured
despisers of religion on the other. Melville knows sublimity,
how to blaspheme seriously, and that "it is only the no-mystics,
or the half-mystics, who, properly speaking, are credulous."[111]
In the light of that religious maturity, the fundamental
dialectic in his thought comes into focus--as it grows wild in
Pierre, and as it dives to fathom the otherness of the religious
genius, which it finds stillborn in a scrivener named Bartleby.

NOTES to CHAPTER ONE

[1]Walter E. Bezanson, Introduction to Clarel: A Poem and
Pilgrimage in the Holy Land, ed. Bezanson (New York: Hendricks
House, 1960), p. cviii.

[2]Dennis Lee, Savage Fields: An Essay in Literature and
Cosmology (Toronto: Anansi, 1977), p. 59.

[3]Paul Tillich, The Interpretation of History (New York:
Scribner's, 1936), p. 83. The passage continues: "In order to
say this, however, we must also say something else: that the
depth of things, their basis of existence, is at the same time
their abyss; or in other words, that the depth of things is
inexhaustible."

[4]Rowland A. Sherrill, The Prophetic Melville: Experience,
Transcendence, and Tragedy (Athens: The University of Georgia
Press, 1979), p. 3.

[5]Melville to Judge Lemuel Shaw, 6 October 1849, The Letters
of Herman Melville, ed. Merrell R. Davis and William H. Gilman
(New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), p. 91.

[6]Melville to Hawthorne, 1? June 1851, Letters, p. 128.

[7]A number of insights into the prose fiction of Melville's
day can be found in Allen Hayman's "The Real and the Original:
Herman Melville's Theory of Prose Fiction," Modern Fiction
Studies 8 (Autumn 1962): 211-32. According to Hayman, "an
examination of the files of a number of American periodicals
during the years when Melville was productive--the years between
1844 and 1857--disclosed that the demand for realism in the
handling of characters, dialogue, plot, incident, and background
was perhaps the major theme in the criticism of prose fiction.
Critics and reviewers had long been asking novelists to take as
their subject 'the ordinary course of things' and to treat this
subject with minute fidelty. The demand for realism became
especially loud during the middle years of the century when,
ironically, the historical romance and the sentimental domestic
novel were the most popular forms of prose fiction" (p. 212).
"For the most part, the 'countless tribes of common novels' were
well received. On the one hand, the strongly moralistic attitude
adopted by many reviewers led to their accepting with little
complaint the sentimental domestic novels where virtue always

triumphed and vice always was punished; and, on the other, the desire that novels amuse and entertain led to a too-ready acceptance of the equally false historical romances" (p. 225). Also, Henry Nash Smith shows that the predominant theme of the fiction in mid-nineteenth-century America is "the cosmic success story." See "The Scribbling Women and the Cosmic Success Story," Critical Inquiry I (September 1974): 47-50.

[8]Melville to Hawthorne, 16? April 1851, Letters, p. 125.

[9]Davis and Gilman offer the following remarks on this passage: "Is this a mistaken reading of Melville? Perhaps Julian Hawthorne's transcription is an error for Melville's 'Being that matters' or 'Being that maddens'. This would suppose that Julian read Melville's 'that' as 'of the' and that he did not recognize Melville's final 's', both of which are possible and understandable mistranscriptions of Melville's hand. Either of the two readings proposed here would be more appropriate in the context" (p. 125).

[10]For a discussion of these philosophical sources and Melville's usage of the word 'being', see Stanford E. Marovitz, "Melville's Problematic 'Being'," ESQ, A Journal of the American Renaissance 28 (1st Quarter 1982); 11-23.

[11]Letters, p. 125.

[12]Herman Melville, White-Jacket, or The World in a Man-of-War (Evanston: Northwestern University Press and Newberry Library, 1970), pp. 76-77.

[13]Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson: An Organic Anthology, ed. Stephen E. Whicher (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), p. 46.

[14]Ralph Waldo Emerson, Representative Men (New York: AMS Press, 1968), p. 5. "Our theism is the purification of the human mind. Man can paint, or make, or think, nothing but man. He believes that the great material elements had their origin from his thought. And our philosophy finds one essence collected or distributed."

[15]"Nature," Selections from Emerson, p. 21.

[16]The term is used by Morse Peckham in "Toward a Theory of Romanticism," Romanticism: Points of View, ed. Robert F. Gleckner and G. E. Enscoe. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964), p. 212.

[17]"Nature," Selections from Emerson, p. 22. The passage reads: "Undoubtedly we have no questions to ask which are unanswerable. We trust the perfection of the creation so far as to believe that whatever curiosity the order of things has awakened in our minds, the order of things can satisfy."

[18]Nathaniel Hawthorne, "The Old Manse," in Selected Tales and Sketches, third edition, with introductions by Hyatt H. Waggoner (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), p. 569. Hawthorne's understanding of, and response to, the theological and religious crises of his time, are elucidated by Benita A. Moore in an interesting essay, "Hawthorne, Heidegger, and the Holy: The Uses of Literature," Soundings 64 (Summer 1981): 170-96.

[19]Marvin Fisher, Going Under: Melville's Short Fiction and the American 1850's (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), p. 2. Fisher treats the review as a short story, emphasizing the "Virginian" as a distinct narrative voice.

[20]Herman Melville, Moby-Dick, ed. Harrison Hayford and Hershel Parker (New York: W. W. Norton, 1967), p. 16. Subsequent references to this text will appear in the body of the chapter.

[22]Sherrill, The Prophetic Melville, pp. 86-87. This passage makes reference to an observation (quoted p. 85) by Perry Miller: "On the whole, one is safe in saying, the literature of America is marked by its concern, often neurotic rather than sanative, that literature be not regarded as an end in itself, but that expression be put to work in the service of a creed, a career, a philosophy, a disgruntlement or a rage." See Major Writers of America, ed. Miller, 2 vols. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1962), I: 84.

[23]Sherrill, The Prophetic Melville, p. 88. My discussion here is derived, in part, from chapters 4-6 of Sherrill's book, which offers, I feel, one of the more valuable critical readings of Moby-Dick to date. I have found some of my own understandings to coincide with his, especially the emphasis on symbol and kairos as the key features of Melville's narrative. Also, I have found Sherrill's book helpful as an example of how literary studies and religious studies can be intermingled in an inter-disciplinary fashion without the traditional tendency to reduce one to the terms of the other. I disagree, however, with Sherrill's reading of Billy Budd and his tendency to see Moby-Dick and Ishmael's quality of response "as a standard against which to see other, less satisfactory, responses" (p. 169).

[24] Rudolf Otto, _The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the non-rational factor in the idea of the divine and its relation to the rational_, trans. John W. Harvey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 12.

[25] Warner Berthoff, _The Example of Melville_ (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1962), p. 14. Berthoff takes note of this usage.

[26] The phrase is from an essay on the role of story in human life by Stephen Crites, "The Narrative Quality of Experience," in _Journal of the American Academy of Religion_ 39 (1971): 291-311.

[27] Melville to Hawthorne, 17? November 1851, _Letters_, p. 142.

[28] Jacob Boehme's notion of the _Ungrund_ captures the sense of an unfathomable and irrational void which, as Nicolas Berdyaev puts it, "precedes all positive determination of being." See Hans L. Martensen's _Studies in the Life and Teaching of Jacob Boehme_, new revised ed., trans. T. Rhys Evans (London: Loxley Brothers, 1949), p. 94.

[29] From the interview with Jean Stein in _William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism_, ed. with an Introduction and Bibliography by Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery (Michigan State University Press, 1960), p. 75.

[30] William Blake, _The Marriage of Heaven and Hell_ in _The Poems of William Blake_, ed. W. H. Stevenson, text by David V. Erdman (London: Longman, 1972), p. 115. Ronald Mason argues that "Melville's imagination was of the same order as Blake's." See _The Spirit Above the Dust_ (London: John Lehmann, 1951), p. 52.

[31] Mircea Eliade, _The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion_, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1959), p. 11. "Man becomes aware of the sacred because it manifests itself, shows itself, as something wholly different from the profane. To designate the act of manifestation of the sacred, we have proposed the term _hierophany_. It is a fitting term because it does not imply anything further; it expresses no more than is implicit in its etymological content, i.e., that something sacred shows itself to us."

[32] This idea is discussed by Nathan A. Scott, Jr., in _The Wild Prayer of Longing: Poetry and the Sacred_ (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), p. 117. In a chapter on Theodore Roethke, Scott notes "the very essence of the sacramental principle--namely, that nothing may be a sacrament unless

everything is, at bottom, sacramental, and that ours may be considered to be a sacramental universe because in its every aspect and dimension, it is instinct with that which appears to be for man rather than against him--which is none other than Being itself."

[33]The "sacralization" of base matter in <u>Moby-Dick</u> is treated in relation to Gnosticism by Viola Sachs, "The Gnosis of Hawthorne and Melville: An Interpretation of <u>The Scarlet Letter</u> and <u>Moby-Dick</u>," <u>American Quarterly</u> 32 (Summer 1980): 123-43.

[34]Herman Melville, <u>Billy Budd, Sailor (An Inside Narrative)</u>, ed. with Introduction and Notes by Harrison Hayford and Merton M. Sealts, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 127.

[35]Melville, <u>Billy Budd</u>, p. 128.

[36]The point is made by Joyce Sparer Adler in "<u>Billy Budd</u> and Melville's Philosophy of War and Peace." I am indebted to this article, which has been collected in Adler's <u>War in Melville's Imagination</u> (New York: New York University Press, 1981), p. 160-85.

[37]For example, Nathalia Wright, <u>Melville's Use of the Bible</u> (New York: Octagon Books, 1949); and, above all, F. O. Matthiessen, <u>American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman</u> (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), esp. pp. 412-17 on the Shakesperian influence.

[38]Thomas Carlyle, <u>Sartor Resartus</u> (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1975), p. 165.

[39]Jay Leyda, ed. <u>The Melville Log</u>, 2 vols. (New York: Gordian Press, 1969), I: 271.

[40]Samuel Taylor Coleridge, <u>Biographia Literaria</u>, Vol. I, ed. J. Shawcross (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 183. According to Marovitz, Chapter XII of the <u>Biographia</u> would have been, for Melville, the key source for this notion of 'being'. See "Melville's Problematic Being," pp. 17-18.

[41]The point is made by Sherrill, <u>The Prophetic Melville</u>, p. 102.

[42]Nathaniel Hawthorne, Preface to <u>Twice Told Tales</u> in <u>Selected Tales and Sketches</u>, p. 587.

[43]Melville to Hawthorne, 29 June 1851, Letters, p. 133.

[44]Charles Feidelson, Jr., Symbolism and American Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), p. 178. Feidelson makes this point about meaning in relation to Melville's "Agatha" letter.

[45]Nathaniel Hawthorne, The House of the Seven Gables (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill, 1969), p. 1.

[46]Sherrill, The Prophetic Melville, p. 105.

[47]See Conrad Cherry, Nature and Religious Imagination: From Edwards to Bushnell (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980). According to Cherry, "most American theologians and preachers who immediately succeeded Edwards lost the vision of this balance. His disciples defended and developed his categories, but they were more attracted to his didacticism than to his participatory knowledge. [They] . . . ignored the indirect path of his symbolic imagination. Those who candidly repudiated Edward's theology and preaching substituted sweet reasonableness for the sense of the heart, and gentle persuasion for sensational shadowing. Men of morals, men of sentiment, and men of reason lost sight of the whole self in a whole world and hence severely restricted the human response to physical nature" (p. 62).

[48]Jonathan Edwards, "The Nature of True Virtue," in Jonathan Edwards: Representative Selections, ed. Clarence H. Faust and Thomas H. Johnson, revised edition (New York: Hill and Wang, 1962), p. 350. The passage is quoted in Cherry, Nature and Religious Imagination, p. 53. Cherry suggests that the conflict in Edwards between the notion of God as "Highest Being" and as "Being in General," is paralleled in his failure to unravel the puzzle of "the relation between emanation and the Fall" (p. 51).

[49]These words are from Edwards's "Dissertation Concerning the End for which God Created the World," Representative Selections, p. 344. Also, see Sherrill, The Prophetic Melville, p. 97.

[50]Feidelson, Symbolism and American Literature, p. 167.

[51]The nature of polytheism is discussed by Paul Tillich in his Systematic Theology, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951-63), 3:90. Also informative is his essay "The Political Meaning of Utopia," in Political Expectation, ed. James Luther Adams (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), pp. 140-54.

[52]H. Bruce Franklin, The Wake of the Gods: Melville's Mythology (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1963), pp. 16-17.

[53]Herman Melville, Mardi: and A Voyage Thither (Evanston: Northwestern University Press and Newberry Library, 1970), p. 352.

[54]William Braswell notes that "using fire as a symbol for the Deity might have been suggested to [Melville] by knowledge of Zoroastrianism, Heraclitus, the Stoics, the Bible, or various other sources." See Melville's Religious Thought: An Essay in Interpretation (Durham: Duke University Press, 1943), p. 61.

[55]Paul Christensen, Charles Olson: Call Him Ishmael (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), p. 37. In thinking about Queequeg as emblematic of "a mode of being" I have found helpful Guy Davenport's essay "Ishmael's Double," in The Geography of the Imagination (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1981), p. 215.

[56]D. H. Lawrence, Studies in Classic American Literature (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1961), p. 143.

[57]Herman Melville, The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade, ed. Hershel Parker (New York: W. W. Norton, 1971), p. 60.

[58]The lines are from "In a Bye-Canal" and "The Coming Storm" respectively, in Selected Poems of Herman Melville, ed. Hennig Cohen (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1964), pp. 150 and 44.

[59]Melville, Mardi, p. 284.

[60]Melville, Billy Budd, p. 132.

[61]Melville to Hawthorne, 16? April 1851, Letters, p. 125.

[62]Melville to Hawthorne, 1? June 1851, Letters, p. 130.

[63]Melville, Mardi, p. 515.

[64]Leon Howard, Herman Melville: A Biography (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), p. 124. For Howard, "the political section of Mardi was more intellectually mature than anything he had yet written" (p. 127). For an example of the formal approach to this section of Mardi, see Merrell R. Davis,

Melville's Mardi: A Chartless Voyage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952). Davis uses the term "travelogue-satire" and describes "episodes in which humor and didacticism are alternately in control" (p. 142)--which I would prefer to see in terms of a dialectic. Richard H. Brodhead discusses the anatomy in his essay "Mardi: Creating the Creative," in New Perspectives on Melville, ed. Faith Pullin (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1978), p. 36.

[65] Søren Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), p. 146. This is, in part, an ironic definition, for Kierkegaard goes on to say, "so regarded, man is not yet a self"; that is, for Kierkegaard full humanity begins when "the self is grounded transparently in the Power which posited it" (p. 147).

[66] Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962). "Dasein is an entity for which, in its Being, that Being is an issue" (p. 236). Heidegger's term Dasein is elucidated by Rollo May in his Introduction to Existence: A New Dimension in Psychiatry and Psychology, ed. Rollo May, Ernest Angel, Henri F. Ellenberger (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1958), p. 41.

[67] For an understanding of these terms and their application to historical analysis I am indebted to Paul Tillich's 1933 work The Socialist Decision, trans. Franklin Sherman (New York: Harper and Row, 1977). Tillich both employs and criticizes insights derived from Hegel, Kierkegaard, Marx and Heidegger in the groundbreaking Introduction to this work, "The Two Roots of Political Thought" (which also appears in The Interpretation of History).

[68] The phrase is George Whalley's; see his Poetic Process (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953), p. 180.

[69] Henri Frankfort, H. A. Frankfort, John A. Wilson, Thorkild Jacobsen, Before Philosophy: The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1946), p. 237.

[70] Tillich, The Socialist Decision, p. 20.

[71] Herbert N. Schneidau, Sacred Discontent: The Bible and Western Tradition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977). Schneidau's historical-cultural study argues that inherent in the ancient Hebrew Bible is a 'liberating' alienation experience stemming from the Hebrews' struggle against the place and idol-bound cultures of their neighbors. Although mythology also developed in Hebrew history, the fact of having a history lent to the mythology "a tendency to turn against itself," (p. 13)

thus passing on to western civilization a demythologizing consciousness which disturbs and eventually undercuts all entrenched conventions.

[72]F. O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 466.

[73]Tillich, *The Socialist Decision*, p. 48.

[74]Tillich, p. 71.

[75]Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Seabury Press, 1969).

[76]The Declaration of Independence is spoofed in Chapter 157 of *Mardi*, p. 512. In "Flogging Not Lawful" the narrator-protagonist of *White-Jacket* argues that for the common sailor "our Revolution was in vain" (p. 144). On the other hand, his following chapter ends with a veritable hymn to the liberating potential of forward-looking American democracy. Redburn places America in a world context and contemplates the extinguishment of national prejudice: "Settled by the people of all nations, all nations may claim [America] for their own. . . . We are not a nation, so much as a world; for unless we may claim all the world for our sire, like Melchisedec, we are without father or mother." *Redburn: His First Voyage* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), p. 169.

[77]Bezanson, Introduction to *Clarel*, p. cii. I have found this section (ix) of Bezanson's Introduction helpful for its treatment of Melville's historical context.

[78]*Mardi*, p. 334.

[79]From Merton M. Sealts, *Melville as Lecturer* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), p. 180.

[80]Herman Melville, *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War*, ed. Sidney Kaplan (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1972), p. 87.

[81]*Clarel*, (IV, xxi, 135), p. 483. Bezanson: "Whereas in *Mardi* he had warned of dangers confronting a democracy in which he felt a stake, in *Clarel* he stood hostile to the whole spirit of the age" (p. ciii).

[82]Mardi, "The Extreme South of Vivenza," p. 533. Mohi warns that "These South savannahs may yet prove battle-fields."

[83]Herman Melville, Israel Potter: His Fifty Years of Exile (New York: Sagamore Press, 1957), p. 178. Subsequent references appear in the body of the chapter.

[84]Karl Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," in The Marx-Engels Reader, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton, 1972), p. 11.

[85]This is pointed out by Carolyn L. Karcher, Shadow Over the Promised Land: Slavery, Race, and Violence in Melville's America (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), p. 161. Karcher notes that the format and style of "The 'Gees" are determined by its parody of the proslavery treatise Types of Mankind by Josiah C. Nott and George R. Gliddon. By the time Melville came to write his sketch, this book "had already gone through seven editions."

[86]Great Short Works of Herman Melville, ed. Warner Berthoff (New York: Harper and Row, 1969). Quotations are taken from pp. 356-60 of "The 'Gees."

[87]Karcher, Shadow Over the Promised Land, p. 183.

[88]Herman Melville, Redburn: His First Voyage (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1971), p. 264. Subsequent references appear in the body of the paragraph.

[89]Melville, The Confidence-Man, p. 59.

[90]With a note to Herbert Marcuse's Eros and Civilization, Alexander Keyssar calls this version of Franklin "a magnificent symbol" of Marcuse's notion of "surplus-repression." Melville's Israel Potter: Reflections on the American Dream (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), p. 26.

[91]The phrase is Tillich's, as quoted by James Luther Adams, in his On Being Human Religiously: Selected Essays in Religion and Society, ed. Max L. Stackhouse (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976), p. 231.

[92]Walter Bezanson, "Moby-Dick: Work of Art," in Moby-Dick Centennial Essays, ed. Tyrus Hillway and Luther S. Mansfield (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1953), p. 56.

[93]Schneidau, in Sacred Discontent, makes a useful comparison of the kerygmatic with the cybernetic, which "can only validate what has gone before, and is thus cybernetic, a feedback loop that confirms again and again the structure and functioning of things. The kerygmatic logos is the exact opposite: it disconfirms structure" (p. 296).

[94]Søren Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, trans. David Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), p. 320. Kierkegaard does not give a theory of fiction, but I think one is derivable from a number of scattered statements, especially those on the imagination: "it is not one faculty on a par with others, but . . . it is the faculty instar omnium [for all faculties]. What feeling, knowledge, or will a man has, depends in the last resort upon what imagination he has . . ." (The Sickness Unto Death, p. 163).

[95]Henry Murray, Introduction to Pierre (New York: Hendricks House, 1949), pp. xxix-xxx.

[96]Eleanor Wilner, Gathering the Winds: Visionary Imagination and Radical Transformation of Self and Society (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1975), p. 182.

[97]Hawthorne's remarks on Typee appear in the Boston Advertiser, 23 March 1846. See Hugh W. Hetherington, Melville's Reviewers: British and American, 1846-1891 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961), p. 51.

[98]Meister Eckhart, quoted by Rudolf Otto in Mysticism East and West, trans. Bertha L. Bracey and Richenda C. Payne (New York: MacMillan, 1932; reprint ed., New York: Meridian Books, 1957), p. 208.

[99]Great Short Works of Herman Melville, p. 215.

[100]Melville to Hawthorne, 1? June 1851, Letters, p. 128.

[101]Dennis Lee, Savage Fields, pp. 40 and 111.

[102]Mark A. Siegel, Dialectics of Consciousness: Melville and the Realistic Imagination (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1977), p. ii.

[103]Martin Heidegger, On Time and Being, trans. J. Stambaugh (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), p. 2.

[104]Sigmund Freud, An Outline of Psycho-Analysis, trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1973), p. 14.

[105]Philip Rieff, Freud: The Mind of the Moralist, third edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 35. For example, see the final section (XX) of Jung's Answer to Job, The Portable Jung, ed. Joseph Campbell, trans. R. F. C. Hull (New York: Viking Press, 1971), pp. 648-50.

[106]For example, Siegfried Kracauer criticizes Adorno's "unfettered dialectics" which try to eliminate ontology altogether: "His rejection of any ontological stipulation in favour of an infinite dialectics which penetrates all concrete things and entities seems inseparable from a certain arbitrariness, an absence of content and direction . . . . The concept of Utopia is then necessarily used by him in a purely formal way, as a borderline concept which at the end invariably emerges like a deus ex machina. But Utopian thought makes sense only if it assumes the form of a vision or intuition with a definite content of a sort. Therefore the radical immanence of the dialectical process will not do; some ontological fixations are needed to imbue it with significance and direction." See History: The Last Things Before the Last (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 201.
    Otto Rank has criticized Freud: "The whole of psychoanalysis in its theoretical and practical aspects is actually an unparalleled glorification of consciousness and its power." See Truth and Reality, trans. Jessie Taft (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), p. 6.

[107]Paul Ricoeur, The Symbolism of Evil trans. Emerson Buchanan (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), pp. 350-51. Ricoeur's notion of a hermeneutics of "suspicion" can be found in "The Critique of Religion," The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur, ed. Charles E. Reagan and David Stewart (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), p. 213.

[108]Karcher points this out in Shadow Over the Promised Land, p. 12.

[109]Nathaniel Hawthorne, The English Notebooks, ed. Randall Stewart (New York: Russell and Russell, 1962), p. 433.

[110]Charles Olson, Call Me Ishmael: A Study of Melville (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1947), p. 13; Lawrance Thompson, Melville's Quarrel with God (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952); and, Matthiessen, American Renaissance, p. 500-14.

[111] Herman Melville, *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press and Newberry Library, 1971), p. 354.

CHAPTER TWO: <u>Pierre</u>; or, The Abrupt Intermergings

You would not find out the limits of the psyche, even though
you should travel every road: so deep a logos does it have.

Heraclitus[1]

That the subjective existing thinker is just as positive as
he is negative can also be expressed by saying that he has
just as much of the comic as he has pathos. According to the
way people exist ordinarily, the distribution of pathos and
the comic is such that someone has the one, another has the
other . . . . Pathos that is not safeguarded by the comic is
illusion; the comic that is not safeguarded by pathos is
immaturity.

Kierkegaard, <u>Concluding Unscientific Postscript</u>[2]

The epic and the novel, these two major forms of great epic
literature differ from one another not by their authors'
fundamental intentions but by the given historico-philoso-
phical realities with which the authors were confronted.
The novel is the epic of an age in which the extensive
totality of life is no longer directly given, in which the
immanence of meaning in life has become the problem, yet
which still thinks in terms of totality.

Georg Lukács, <u>The Theory of the Novel</u>[3]

Like all youths, Pierre had conned his novel-lessons; had
read more novels than most persons of his years; but their
false, inverted attempts as systematizing eternally unsystem-
atizable elements; their audacious, intermeddling impotency,
in trying to unravel, and spread out, and classify, the more
thin than gossamer threads which make up the complex web of
life; these things over Pierre had no power now. Straight
through their helpless miserableness he pierced; the one
sensational truth in him, transfixed like beetles all the
speculative lies in them. He saw that human life doth truly
come from that, which all men are agreed to call by the name
of God; and that it partakes of the unravelable inscrutable-
ness of God. By infallible presentment he saw, that not
always does life's beginning gloom conclude in gladness;
. . . that while the countless tribes of common novels
laboriously spin vails of mystery, only to complacently clear
them up at last; . . . yet the profounder emanations of the
human life; these never unravel their own intricacies, and
have no proper endings; but in imperfect, unanticipated, and
disappointing sequels (as mutilated stumps), hurry to abrupt
intermergings with the eternal tides of time and fate.

<u>Pierre</u>[4]

If Melville did intend a "rural bowl of milk"[5] in _Pierre_, as
he writes to Sophia Hawthorne when beginning the work, he proves
ambiguous to it in the end. He does so with a vengeance under-
standable only in view of a cultural climate in which negative
thinking is conceived as a sort of public enemy, and 'pessimism'
is defined, in the example of one disapproving comment on _Mardi_,
as "the doctrine that this world can be a failure."[6] The Nature
and Progress fantasies fostering that definition are overripe for
debunking when, with _Pierre_, Melville meets the critical demand
for subversion by supplying parody and more parody--to an extent
which his contemporaries find repulsively incomprehensible.
"Herman Melville Crazy"[7] reads the headline of one journalistic
evaluation following publication. From our own historical
vantage point it is, perhaps, easier to perceive the degree of
cultural satire in the book. Yet our contrasting habit of
objective cynicism makes it no less difficult to distinguish the
send-ups in _Pierre_ from the unfeigned, an intermixture basic to
the ambiguity which is the very principle of the book. Today the
difficulty is sometimes surreptitiously overcome by taking the
whole novel as parodic to the point of nihilism, and its author
as still another devotee to the purely self-reflexive play of
ironic textuality.[8] However, such readings--really, elaborated
versions of Charlie Millthorpe's refrain, "the whole world's a
trick . . . . Ha! Ha!" (319)--skirt the work's attention to the
nature of grief, and beyond the supposed poignancy of a man's
self-destruction, its concern with "the whole range of all that

can be known or dreamed" (289). In the midst of the comedy,
"lurking insincerity" (339), and sheer absurdity of Pierre, are
moments in which an imploring seriousness flares fragmentarily,
breaking upon the reader "like a morning" (289). For in spite
of the storyteller's distance and recalcitrant purposes, he
himself becomes implicated as the story unfolds. So that in
Pierre is presented the apparent anomaly of a novel in which both
narrator and reader find "the complex web of life" to be made up
of forces simultaneously creative and destructive, which combine
in a profoundly ambiguous process that fills "this world" with
tensions and conflicts heavily weighted to end in "failure."

Fluctuations and contradictions in the controlling voice
signal the leading enigma of Pierre: an overstating, highly self-
conscious narrator who draws attention to his own machinations
while becoming involved in the destiny of his protagonist. The
story opens with an omniscient perspective presaging unrestricted
entrance into the world and mind of Pierre Glendinning. But an
agitation in the point of view quickly becomes apparent as the
speaker starts to offer unexpected disclaimers--"this may seem
rather irregular sort of writing" (25)--and, as if it were an
obligation of omniscience, to offer some routine, though
conspicuously barbed, foreshadowing: "Nature intended a rare and
original development in Pierre. Never mind if hereby she proved
ambiguous to him in the end; nevertheless, in the beginning she
did bravely" (13). Such final knowledge of Pierre's fate clashes
with the narrator's studied lack of omniscience at other moments:
"We know not Pierre Glendinning's thoughts as he gained the

village" (162) after fleeing Saddle Meadows with Isabel. More

often than not, though, the hero's thoughts are exhibited, and

sometimes in a manner which permits them, sporadically, to merge

with and bear the narrator's own arguments and questions, as when

Pierre contemplates the "fathomless fountain of ever-welling

mystery" in every "human creature" (138). Still, a reader is

unlikely to be surprised when informed elsewhere that "the

thoughts we . . . indite as Pierre's are to be carefully discrim-

inated from those we indite concerning him" (167). At times the

narrator's shifting concentration may suddenly cohere around an

announced narrational intention; for example, in Book X we are

told that since "some nameless struggles of the soul can not be

painted," the truest recourse will be to "let the ambiguous

procession of events reveal their own ambiguousness" (181).

However, even that 'method' is more or less repudiated, along

with all "the various conflicting modes of writing history," in

a later declaration designed partly to gather up and account for

the contradictions, and partly to spurn literary convention: "I

write precisely as I please" (244, Book XVII). The elusiveness

grows extreme in relation to Pierre himself. Off and on, his

"noble soul" (271) is placed in high esteem by a narrator who,

also, does not hesitate to turn sardonically upon him. For

instance, the hero's addiction to spiritualization is bitterly

mocked when, at the Apostles', Pierre apprehensively envisions

"a God--a Being positively present everywhere;--nay, He is now in

this room; the air did part when I here sat down. I displaced

the Spirit then--condensed it a little off from this spot" (317).

This send-up of spiritual idealism, like the novel's exposes
of materialistic world views, is accomplished through the device
of a narrator who moves wildly between the two poles, on occasion
even donning either the rhetoric of the Transcendentalists and
the Utilitarians, while staging their philosophies as life-
stances prone to shatter and likely to leave destructive despair
in their wake. In the course of the staging, the turbulent
intensity of the narration functions both as a character trait of
the narrator (or implied author[9]), and, more importantly, as the
vehicle for a double-edged scrutiny of human limitations. The
sources of that double movement are the two orientations intrin-
sic to Melville's thinking on the whole range of human dilemmas.
In Pierre they intermerge and separate abruptly, in the process
generating and structuring a story that is itself "strange wild
work" (105).

What I have called, in Chapter One, Melville's orientation
to consciousness, is active in the form he works with in Pierre.
For what the novel form implicitly promises as open territory for
the reenactment of human life under the pressures of social,
psychological and historical forces, correlates with the critical
impetus of his prophetic concern. While the novel as a form
eventually diversifies into different kinds, the genre can be
seen, in broad terms, as a cultural creation growing out of
rising bourgeois society, that centuries-long development which
begins in the struggle against the heteronomous closures of the
medieval world and 'peaks' in the revolutionary breakthroughs of

the Enlightenment. As such, the novel bears the imprint of the bourgeois quest for the autonomy of consciousness on the basis of its world-transforming principle. In its capacity to objectify and analyze--in aesthetic terms, to invent character, and to depict relationships, customs and institutions as the products of human construction, rather than as the manifestations of an eternal, pre-ordained order of things--the novel reveals roots in a "goal-setting" propensity for "rational assemblage" serving "the aims of thought and action."[10] The Enlightenment aim of displacing absolutist mediations of being--or, what I will be referring to in this chapter as, the powers of fate-reverberates in the novel's attention to factors giving rise to empirical change. Directly or indirectly, everything becomes historically 'relativized'; personalities and communities take on uncharted aspects when psychological and social determinants are disclosed, even if unintentionally. With fulfillment and completeness of meaning now sought in the unlimited future, instead of in the past via the immanent meaning of a myth of origin or a community epic, new possibilities, new demands and elements of uncertainty come into focus. Especially in the increasing social complexity of the nineteenth-century novel, uncertainty becomes incorporated into the portrayal of character development. A reader senses it, in part, as a dimension of unconsciousness that makes the decisions of characters, and on a magnified scale, the fates of deep-feeling protagonists like Pierre, richly problematical.

'Fate' is an overused word in <u>Pierre</u>, and consciously so, since it serves partly to clash with a novelistic display of the

forces and needs spurring the life decisions and subsequent

career of a young man born into the quasi-aristocratic

expectations of a family heroically anchored in the American

Revolution, and now fading on its rural estate. We meet Pierre

just "emerging from his teens," happily immersed in the abundance

of his environment, yet on the verge of losing the edenic harmony

of its tentative integration. Our first view finds him lifting

his eyes to the sight of his beloved in a gesture suggestive of

a hierarchical world that includes, besides the angelic Lucy, an

idealized dead father and a "pedestaled mother" (5) at its

pinnacle. This upward glancing Pierre fashions an image anti-

thetical to the later Pierre, who stares down in despair as he

walks the deserted streets of a New York slum, or sits in the

gloom of his rooms at the Apostles' with his mind immersed in

"earnest thoughts of murder" (337). A narratorial comment

repeated several times in Book I--"we shall see if Fate hath not

just a little bit of a small word or two to say in this world"

(12)--is echoed at this late, desperate point when the narrator

drily remarks upon the transition from "paradise" to "hell":

"Pierre was such; fate, or what you will, had made him such"

(337). "What you will" here spoofs the notion of fate as a

catch-all concept that can too easily bypass human complexity,

for throughout the narrator has been at pains, however self-

mockingly, to show concrete, ascertainable causes shaping the

course of his hero's distorted life. Because Pierre is a

personality, rather than an embodiment of pre-determined action,

his life does not unfold simply as a function of his apparent

deeds. Even though what he considers his prime choice in life--
"Lucy or God?" (181)--turns out to be a rationalization of his
sexual desire for his half-sister Isabel, and even though
Pierre's ending is predictable on that basis, a reader becomes
aware of the relativity of his conditioning and of alternative
directions of choice which tend to demystify fate, or at least,
to contravene suppositions about its unbreachableness.

Descriptions of the domestic milieu of Saddle Meadows
exhibit conditions obviously nurturing Pierre's drive towards a
final phase of cyclical self-imprisonment and hostility. The
obviousness is, at the same time, undercut through an insistence
on the protagonist's interiority. As Pierre ponders his options,
that insistence is evident in the attention given his every
involuntary wish, turn of thought, and commitment of feeling[11];
it can also be heard in the narrative voice--"look for no
invariableness in Pierre. . . . Catch his phases as your insight
may" (337)--until finally it is emblazoned into Isabel's last
words: "All's o'er, and ye know him not!" (362). But in the
Saddle Meadows chapters we do come to know Pierre as he is molded
in his inward growth, as he is embedded, in other words, in "the
myriad alliances and criss-crossings among mankind, the infinite
entanglements of all social things" (191). We see him in rela-
tion to his family lineage, as folded into the social history of
his patriarchal forebears, whose legendary martyrdom, patriotism,
and genteel religion turn out to be camouflage for buried
'traditions' of genocide, slavery, and self-glorification. More
immediately, we see Pierre in living relation to his widowed

mother to whom he is son, brother, and, in ambivalently playful scenes ushering in the novel's incest motif, make-believe suitor to boot. It is under the guise of their flirtations, wherein "the courteous lover-like adoration" of the son accords the mother feelings of "the most conquering virgin" (16), that an all-determining narcissism becomes apparent. In the opening pages, for example, we behold the mother looking upon her off-spring with a "triumphant maternal pride" in order to find there "her own graces strangely translated into the opposite sex" (5). At first Lucy Tartan seems to offer a means of breaking this maternal snare, though we soon learn she is Mrs. Glendinning's chosen mate for Pierre. Just as quickly it becomes clear, then, that the young couple's passion can only extend the primary narcissism, as implied in the inaugural melodrama of Pierre and Lucy "ardently eyeing each other, beholding mutual reflections of a boundless admiration and love" (4). On the one hand, Pierre wishes half-consciously to break from both Mary Glendinning's overbearing symbiosis and Lucy's sterility, and a reader detects the arrival of Isabel as a creation engendered out of the hero's unconscious precisely to meet this dual purpose. On the other hand, his ensuing causa-sui project--his drive, that is, to become "his own Alpha and Omega" so as "to feel himself in him-self, and not by reflection in others" (261)--remains mediated by mainly narcissistic prospects, by a 'self-reliant' form of incest between an actual persona and an ideal persona comprising his self.[12] And it can hardly be otherwise when Pierre so readily separates his intentions from his bodily life, when he has

learned to sustain himself in a state "almost without bodily consciousness" while keeping "his soul unobtrusively alert" (93). The crisis that follows the vision of Isabel empowers him "to feel two antagonistic agencies within him; one of which was just struggling into his consciousness" (63). However, instead of gradually feeling one of those "agencies" as his own bodily desire, the emergency evoked by Isabel's letter causes him to shrink "abhorringly" from what must now be relegated to "the infernal catacombs of thought" (51). Hence, the toil of his repression becomes the he███hness of his predicament: sexual energy is awakened--as in Mrs. Tartan's match-making devices for baiting Pierre--in a context that refuses to acknowledge that energy except in saccharine terms, let alone permit its consummation within a dominant cult intent upon sanctifying virginal (particularly blonde) womanhood. In showing this predicament, the novel connects the cultural practice of etherializing the human body to patterns and instances of human distortion, such as the fetishistic feelings that seize Pierre upon finding himself alone on "holy ground" in the "secret inner shrine" of "the piety of love" (39)--Lucy's bedroom. As similar connections are made, the novel's analytical spotlight repeatedly careens back to Pierre's relation to his mother. For it is that "pure joined current of life" (5) which, as Richard Brodhead has pointed out, first "breeds in him an ambiguous mixture of sexual desire and reverential love that, compounded in his relation to Isabel, produces the aggressive idealism of his titanic self."[13]

By grounding the disorder of Pierre's personality in his

family, later deepening the sense of that institution's capacity for corruption through the portrait of Beatrice Cenci, Pierre defiles a standard American idol of the day. Evert Duyckinck's review for the Literary World (August, 1852) reproachfully names the offense: "the supersensuousness with which the holy relations of the family are described. Mother and son, brother and sister are sacred facts not to be disturbed by any sacrilegious speculations."[14] The reactionary tone of Duyckinck's review, which rushes to protect those he calls "ordinary novel readers" and to defend as "holy" what has suddenly been uncovered as ambivalently human, may be taken as a confirmation of the book's critical perspicacity. An ideal hidden behind a cloud of conventional "facts" is shown to be falsely sacrosanct. A popular belief that dedication to Virtue always culminates in triumph over evil is denied. Through these doubts and denials and others, Melville, according to another outraged reviewer, "strikes with an impious, though, happily, weak hand, at the very foundations of society."[15] Or, in less dramatic terms, we may say Melville makes manifest the socially critical mandate latent in the novel form.

In one of its more unexpected gestures, Pierre carries out that mandate through its attack upon "the countless tribes of common novels." Chapters with titles like "Young America in Literature," scattered anticipations of reader rejection, and, more generally, a literary burlesque oscillating over the course of the book, propel an attack aimed not only at the narrative cliches of popular works, but at the routine procedures of

literary production and reception. The target, in other words, is an entire sensibility, one which, ironically, will find exemplary expression in another review of Pierre (in the Athenaeum, November, 1852):

> We take up novels to be amused--not bewildered,--in search of pleasure for the mind--not in pursuit of cloudy metaphysics; and it is no refreshment after the daily toils and troubles of life, for a reader to be soused into a torrent rhapsody uttered in defiance of taste and sense.[16]

Literature as sensible entertainment for moral maintenance at the end of a busy day--that is the mainstay of the domestic sentimental novel which, in a parodied form, furnishes a superficial framework for Pierre. Amid the reasonably toned-down gothic sensationalism of a Vice-punishing plot, stock devices make their predictable appearances: magic portraits, a mystical guitar, mirrors, a country/city backdrop, an unearthly blonde heroine, and a dark musical temptress. But these are employed in a manner that calls attention to their vapid conventionality. For instance, in the middle of a passage striving to ratify the queenly dignity of Pierre's betrothed, the narrator stops to ask, "By immemorial usage, am I not bound to celebrate this Lucy Tartan?" With the audience's aesthetic hunger for idealized women restricting the novelist's "proper province" to Lucy's "angelic part" (25), it becomes "needless to say she was a beauty" (23). For the largely middle-class readership a related cultural compulsion is for things aristocratic, obligating the narrator to deliver the appropriate fictional goods:

> In general terms we have been thus decided in asserting the great genealogical and real-state dignity of some

> families in America, because in so doing we poetically
> establish the richly aristocratic condition of Master
> Pierre Glendinning, for whom we have before claimed
> some special family distinction. And to the observant
> reader the sequel will not fail to show, how important
> is this circumstance, considered with reference to the
> singularly developed character and most singular life-
> career of our hero. Nor will any man dream that the
> last chapter was merely intended for a foolish bravado,
> and not with a solid purpose in view. (12)

The slippery purpose of this and many similar passages lies

partly in an ongoing sarcastic foray against "the always intelli-

gent, and extremely discriminating public" (225). But there is

more than scorn involved: drawing attention to the formulaic

contrivances of the narrative technique allows the narrator to

move suddenly outside the self-evidentness of the sentimental

novel form. The effect upon "ordinary novel readers," if they

are reading, is to erode a standard readiness to grant uncritical

belief in the counterfeit inventiveness of such works.

Still there is another, a more penetrating, subversion

operating here. As the narrator shows himself a manipulator

caught up in the techniques and blatant calculatedness of his

novel, he concurrently points up the imprisoning nature of the

instrumental consciousness. Thereby Pierre becomes an inter-

rogation of the spirit of its own historical time, the century

that has canonized the bourgeois principle of analysis, calcula-

tion and control. The reified effects of that historical

consolidation--a process Horkheimer and Adorno call the "conver-

sion of enlightenment into positivism"[17]--are omnipresent in the

world depicted in Pierre. They constitute the cultural scene, a

teeming, often bizarre panorama that includes: literature of the

Captain Kidd Monthly kind which aims "to dress" up thought with "gloss" (247); the phenomenon of the "brisk novelist" (69) who abandons critical perception while describing "the _povertiresque_ in the social landscape" (276); a "Urquhartian Club for the Immediate Extension of the Limits of all Knowledge, both Human and Divine" (251); lemming-hearted hordes of readers and reviewers "happily" devoid of the consideration "that there is no such thing as a standard for the creative spirit" (284); in short, a mass-minded "worship" of "Mediocrity and Common Place," which, in combination with "the ever multiplying freshets of new books, seems inevitably to point to a coming time, when the mass of humanity" will be "reduced to one level of dotage" (264). And sitting as if the presiding moderator over the legacy of "these enlightened times" (222), we find that master of adjustment, that "most miraculously self-possessed, non-benevolent man" (290), Plotinus Plinlimmon. Pierre watches the face of Plinlimmon at his office window near the top of the tower of the Church of the Apostles'--a building which, since it "could no longer be efficiently devoted to its primitive purpose," has been, fittingly, "divided into stores, cut into offices; and given for a roost to the gregarious lawyers" (266). Plinlimmon's "Chronometricals and Horologicals" serves as a set piece of philosophical manipulation, briefly providing a reader with faint relief from the ironic, narratorial variety. After implicitly adopting a 'survivor' mind-set, which takes survival to be the highest good, and a humanitarianism motivated by self-interest, this lecture pamphlet is able to argue "incompatibility" into

"correspondence" (213), to overcome tragedy and ambiguity through the powers of calculating reason. In a treatise designed to help the "honest citizen" find some use value in Christ the "chronometer," a reconciliation is achieved between the admittedly beautiful but impracticable idea of unconditional self-sacrifice and a business-like sense of "virtuous expediency" (214).

A world infiltrated in its remotest aspect by Plinlimmon's 'reasoning' is exhibited by the narrator as the world he himself shares with the likes of Pierre and "the bodies of the hurrying thousands" (340). In moments of cumulating derision that world acquires the farcical feel of an open-air arena in which the writer can be little more than a combined showman and technician of narrative components: though "like knavish cards the leaves of all great books [are] covertly packed" (339), still "it is pleasant to chat" and "we are paid for our breath" (259). In these and other truculent remarks the narrator's hyper-self-consciousness creates a parallel to Pierre's hyperactively upbraiding conscience, and the theory/practice relation of 'consciousness' to 'conscience' takes center stage in Melville's illumination of the age's over-extended adherence to a single, finally stultifying dimension of human life. But there are also calmer passages in which the same point is made through the narrator's own modulated deliberations. For instance, while engaging the novel's facility for complex character development and character analysis, the narrator intermittently calls into question the limitations of those enterprizes:

> In their precise tracings-out and subtile causations,
> the strongest and fieriest emotions of life defy all
> analytical insight. . . . the most impressive, sudden,
> and overwhelming event, as well as the minutest, is but
> the product of an infinite series of infinitely in-
> volved and untraceable foregoing occurrences. Just so
> with every motion of the heart.\ Why this cheek kindles
> with a noble enthusiasm; why that lip curls in scorn;
> these are things not wholly imputable to the immediate
> apparent cause, which is only one link in the chain;
> but to a long line of dependencies whose further part
> is lost in the mid-regions of the impalpable air. (67)

In this and a similar passage already noted--"the profounder

emanations of the human mind . . . never unravel their own

intricacies"--consciousness encounters the emptiness of infinite

critical analysis and the limitations of consciousness itself.

In relation to the novel form it encounters what Georg Lukács, in

The Theory of the Novel, calls the "dissonance" special to that

genre: "the refusal of the immanence of being to enter into

empirical life."[18] In Pierre the encounter of consciousness with

such "dissonance" is highlighted and then redirected into the

subject matter of the book, an astonishing twist that grows out

of Melville's own refusal to dispel the problem of being.

The victory of the bourgeois principle in Melville's America

entails a struggle against the powers of fate and a rejection of

the question of origin in favor of objectifying activities

directed towards the future. Constant becoming, in other words,

is substituted for being. But this effort of an entire histori-

cal epoch takes its toll in the awareness, often half-conscious

or suppressed, of the broken bonds of origin. The novel can

avoid neither expressing this sense, nor striving--bourgeois epic

that it is--to master it in some way. As Lukács states, "the

novel is the epic of an age in which the extensive totality of
life is no longer directly given . . . yet which still thinks in
terms of totality." The opening chapters of Pierre appear to
meet that need for totality, for meaning immanent in a multi-
dimensional wholeness of life. And in contrast to the ongoing
economic and social upheaval fracturing the daily life of
readers, their first look at the world of Saddle Meadows does
find a state of complete meaning. There the blood ties of a
family sustain an unbroken 'we-consciousness' in a relation of
identity with the environment. "The hills and swales" surround-
ing Pierre seem "as sanctified through their long uninterrupted
possession by his race" (8). "Universal Love" is on "the march"
and "busy everywhere" (34), and the fullness of being, if it was
ever lost, has been repossessed. But as quickly as the triumph
over dissonance is fabricated it is put to the lie by a
sentimentalized language working to expose the plentitude as
overwrought and deceptive.[19] We are offered horses "kind as
kittens" "bound in perpetual feudal fealty" (21) to an overly
humanized green and golden estate on a "day mad with excessive
joy" (35). That is to say, this world turns out to be as fake as
the moral perfection of Pierre's father--the marble shrine to
whom, in an analogous way to the popular sentimental novel, takes
"things which in themselves" are "evanescent" and makes them
"unchangeable and eternal" (68). By showing the disparity
between the longing for permanence and the actual "tide of change
and progress," the narrator of Pierre insinuates about the novel
genre what he states directly about the "formerly sacred" (266)

Church of the Apostles: "when the substance is gone, men cling to the shadow" (268).

In the face of that dearth of substance, Melville accomplishes something more in Pierre than fiction conceived as a stacking of the deck, whether to escape dissonance, as in the domestic sentimental novel, or to expose dissonance, as through his own narrator's cascading satire. A larger realization of Pierre resides in its tenacious turn, despite dissonance, towards inquiry into being. The book continuously inverts to tell the story of a soul at a level of ontological action that leaves behind obsession with manipulation and technique--a strain in the genre of the novel which reaches a dead end in our own century with the doctrine of "technique as discovery."[20] Since Melville does not make substance secondary to technique, nor so exclusive a matter as "totality" in Pierre, he resists the allurement, faced in a corresponding way by his narrator's hero, to "hurl his deep book out of the window, and fall to on some shallow nothing of a novel" (305).

Entwined with the orientation to consciousness in Pierre, then, is an exploration of the non-rational depth of the human heart, "that mysterious thing in the soul, which seems to acknowledge no human jurisdiction" (71), while yet summoning a vertical movement to know.

> Deep, deep, and still deep and deeper must we go, if we
> would find out the heart of a man; descending into
> which is as descending a spiral stair in a shaft, with-
> out any end, and where that endlessness is only con-
> cealed by the spiralness of the stair, and the black-
> ness of the shaft. (288)

The spiraling interpenetration of being and nonbeing becomes the
preponderant circumstance for a concern focussed upon the meaning
of the extremity of a particular life. What Yeats calls "the
fury and mire of human veins"[21] is traced in the embodied path of
Pierre's evolution, an opaque but, at the same time, emblematic
development burning out its life "within the bounds of earthly
finitude" (172). The path is Pierre's fate, subsumed and even
denounced for stretches of the novel before reemerging at
irregular intervals to stand alongside his character, his visible
personality with its more analyzable unconscious drives. Over
the course of _Pierre_ this conflict between the presentation of
character and fate turns into an entanglement of freedom and
destiny, and an assertion, finally, of the dynamic ambiguity of
Pierre's selfhood and, what might be termed, his 'soulscape',
which bears its own calendar and its own geography. In following
the soul's process of individuation, the narrator also discovers
forces and elements demanding their own mode of reenactment,
rooted as they are in a symbolic event, an inexplicable shift
from essence to estranged existence conveying the experience of a
fall.

The personality crisis perpetuated by the arrival of
Isabel's letter in Book III of _Pierre_ makes tangible a disinte-
gration of innocence originating earlier at a more primary level
in an underivable event: Pierre's alarming premonition of an
inscrutable, suffering face. Before it is a factor in his
personality, in other words, "the shock of his extraordinary
emergency" (89) is an ontic event encompassing "the deepest roots

and subtlest fibres of his being" (48). The letter serves
primarily to illuminate a "demon Principle" (33) that has been
there all along as potentiality, hidden like the fraudulence of
Pierre's idolized father and the decay of the pastoral estate.
The archetypal imagery of tree and serpent reinforces the sense
that a universal transition from the potential to the actual has
occurred, and that it continues to occur as a felt quality
suffusing every passing moment. This transhistorical dislodge-
ment, or "earthquake" (25), is made symbolically evident through
Pierre's escalating awareness of an irreparable split at the
foundation of his world, a cleavage between the corruption of
what 'is' and the perfection of what 'ought to be'. That
awareness throws him into a state of separation from others, from
his environment, and from himself, a state wherein he must
nevertheless begin to act. "Intuitions of Fate" (62) accompany
his first contemplations of action, while feelings of guilt and
responsibility are enkindled through a process of conscientiza-
tion which seems identical with ex-sisting, with 'standing out'.
"What he had always before considered the solid land of veritable
reality" (49) soon disappears under the glare of an inflamed
conscience, as knowledge of his father's guilt and a presentiment
of his own self-contradiction intensify estrangement. Eventually,
that estrangement will take on tragic proportions and a circular
pattern when, in the feverish commotion of Pierre's murder-
suicide, only an act of violence can unite his fragmented soul--
on a level below the human one. Initially, though, his life can
be brought to cohere around a superhuman vow: "From all idols,

I tear all veils; henceforth I will see the hidden things; and live right out in my own hidden life" (66). This tormented resolution launches Pierre's drive towards heroism; it signals the completeness of his change, but also the outstanding spirit compelling his individuation. The change leaves him scarred: as he walks to Isabel's cottage "the charred landscape within him" (86) is projected onto the alien sky and the "inhospitable" (109) terrain. However, it also propels him fervently into life, into sorrow and joy and a meeting with decay and birth. He has awakened from the sedative daydreams of pointless innocence into the doubleness of experience otherwise unknowable.[22] "The profound willfulness in him" (339), which the narrator is apt both to admonish and affirm, sets his life on the course of a quest, and thereby expands his impassioned, defiant consciousness beyond that of "men in general" (136), whose tribal consciousness consists in an attempt to avoid tragedy and the pain of living through an avoidance of 'standing out'.

E. L. Grant Watson's 1930 essay on Pierre, one of the first recognitions of the book, interprets Pierre's quest as that of "a conscious soul attempting to draw free from the psychic world-material in which most of mankind is unconsciously always wrapped and enfolded, as a foetus in the womb." In the same vein, Watson views Isabel as "the dark half" of Pierre's soul, his "gate" to "the depths of the underworld," and ultimately, as a "symbol" of "the consciousness of the tragic aspect of life."[23] At this level of primordial drama, the narrator offers a scattered natural history of the soul in which the hero serves as a type, a

"melancholy type" (136), who evokes pathos and, now and then, laughter, and who may be viewed "forward and . . . backward, as occasion calls" (54) through a synchronic array of images. Interspersed with heuristic remarks about "the soul of man"-- for example, that when surrounded by the "blasts of Fate" it "can not, and does never intelligently confront the totality of its wretchedness" (104)--we are given portraits of Pierre at his different stages: in the forest soliloquizing beneath the Terror Stone, in prison promulgating Ahabian contempt, swaddled at his writing desk ("Is Pierre a shepherd, or a bishop, or a cripple?" [301]), in the mire of a city gutter, as a statue "planted on a revolving pedestal" (337), as a skeleton on Lucy's canvass, and, towards the end of the book, as a toddler, "toddling entirely alone, and not without shrieks."

> There now, do you see the soul. In its germ on all sides it is closely folded by the world, as the husk folds the tenderest fruit; then it is born from the world-husk but still now outwardly clings to it;-- still clamors for the support of its mother the world, and its father the Deity. (296)

Showing Pierre as an infant late in his development undercuts the predominance of conscious, chronological representation of human life, and brings forward the prerational scope and the intricacies of the human psyche. Isabel generates the same effect when she inaugurates Pierre's search for his real father through the telling of her story.

The first appearances of Isabel in Pierre release archaic strata and primitive forms which stream into the narration and briefly transmute the style to that of a romance.[24] Her tale

gives structure to the reality of the unconscious in the same way
her arrival on the scene substantiates Pierre's glimmerings of an
infinitely "beseeching countenance of mystery, underlying all the
surfaces of visible time and space" (52). While her letter
leaves Pierre "thoroughly initiated" into a "darker, though truer
aspect of things" (69), his two interviews with Isabel thoroughly
heighten his response to that "aspect." He becomes entranced
with the power she abides in, with her embodied expression of the
marvellous fecundity of undifferentiated being. Childhood
memories of "groppings" amid "dreams," "solidities" and "shapes,"
of a dilapidated house, an ocean journey, and an asylum--these,
like the vague discovery of her "humanness" (122), only magnify
the fundamental riddle of her origin: "I found myself in the
world" (123). The fluidity of her actions in the world, often
"without evidence of voluntary will" (328), and the undulations
of her speech disclose her partial submergence in the
inarticulateness of purely organic existence, a mode of being to
which she seeks full entry: "I pray for peace--for motionlessness
--for the feeling of myself, as of some plant, absorbing life
without seeking it . . . . I hope one day to feel myself drank up
into the pervading spirit animating all things" (119). In the
immediacy of Isabel's communion with that spirit lies the source
of her "physical electricalness" (151) and psychic magnetism.
But it also impels her away from the sorrow of what she calls "a
world of snakes and lightnings" (122). During their sail across
the bay she has to be restrained by Lucy and Pierre from jumping
ship to reach the desired "nothing," the longed for horizon

"where the two blues meet" (355). And the same obliterating drive appears in the final chapter in the form of a vial of "death-milk" (360) that comes from her own bosom to dissolve Pierre's identity. However, there is a magic quality in her presence which can also instill everything around her with life, for without separation of subject and object, things in her world retain an inner meaning and are perceived more as powers than as objects. The key instance is a "human" guitar that comes to her from unidentifiable sources to teach her its own "secret" (125). Spellbound, Pierre is "almost deprived of consciousness" by the incantation and the "supernatural tides" (150) of music Isabel summons from the instrument--which unaccountably bears her own name inside. This conjoining of person and object mirrors her special relation to language--"my own tongue teaches me new things" (123)--and to words magically linked with what they signify. Only human reasoning poses a threat to such relations, and is therefore disclaimed. "Mysteries," Isabel tells Pierre, are "far sweeter than surmises: though the mystery be unfathomable, it is still the unfathomableness of fullness; but the surmise, that is but shallow and unmeaning emptiness" (153).

When Pierre decides to forfeit his heritage in order to give his life wholly to "this mysterious being" (206), he does so in the name of a duty he considers divinely sanctioned and commensurate with love, a love Isabel perceives "is almost as hard to bear as hate" (154). Her surmise of his hidden malice points up the increasingly evident nature of Pierre's fall: it retains no sense of innocence. Just as his state of dreaming

"docility" (20) once debarred experience, his proliferating knowledge is bereft of humor and preserves no memory, despite separation, of an earlier unity. The shock of nonbeing inflates into absolute loss--above all, of his father, "his fond personi-fication of perfect human goodness and virtue" (68)--creating an intolerance towards innocence and imperfection that becomes a resentment against life. That basic life-stance is hinted at early in the novel; in one instance Pierre sees the image of Lucy's bed in her mirror and feels repulsion when a gap fleeting-ly appears between "the real one and the reflected one" (89). A related disgust for "fleshly alliances" (164) underscores his rudimentary craving for totality, a craving which, ironically, seals him into an inner world of self-sacrifice: "I have bought inner love and glory for a price" (191), he tells Isabel, the price, he names privately, of "sacrificing myself for Duty's sake" (134). The claustrophobic, nightmare images that befall Pierre and Isabel when they enter the City and the winter season are a projection of self-enclosure born out of the rigidity of Pierre's sacrificial ethic and the constriction such an ethic places upon his ability to imagine his task.

In so presenting his encircled hero, the narrator makes us aware enough of Pierre's free will and the hubris of his causa-sui aspiration to suggest Pierre "himself" is his own "voluntary jailer." However, the narrator also portrays him (on the same page) as having "no power over his condition. For in tremendous extremities human souls are like drowning men" (303). The 'extremity' here is the condition of despair, the condition in

which one is aware of the impossibility of being healed--precisely

Pierre's predicament when he lies under the Memmon Stone and asks

to be crushed because he foresees the devastation that will result

from his paltry sacrifice. Like the poet and guide of Dante's

Inferno who are ferried over the Styx, the divided Pierre is said

to have crossed a river when he leaves his Stone and goes to the

City. And there he is in a hell of despair, having "ringed him-

self in with the grief of eternity" (304).

In the terms of Søren Kierkegaard's cogent examination of

this condition, The Sickness Unto Death, Pierre's is the despair

of "defiance," "the despair of willing despairingly to be

oneself"[25] regardless of the consequences. According to

Kierkegaard, the "torment" of such despair is

> . . . not to be able to die--yet not as though there
> were no hope of life; no, the hopelessness in this case
> is that even the last hope, death, is not available.
> When death is the greatest danger, one hopes for life;
> but when one becomes acquainted with an even more
> dreadful danger, one hopes for death. So when the
> danger is so great that death has become one's hope,
> despair is the disconsolateness of not being able to
> die.[26]

Pierre's "acquaintance" with a "danger" greater than death is

firmly established by the time he learns of Lucy's collapse and

curses himself as "the murderer of his mother" (289). "The grave

is no help" (286) then, for it cannot restore self-forgiveness, a

capacity lost all but for the masochistic ends a debased form of

it may serve. The narrator steadily uncovers the ugliness of

these procedures of self-contempt, alleging "it is impossible in

time and space to kill any compunction arising from having cruelly

injured a departed fellow-being." "It is possible," though "to

bury a tranced grief in the soul" (286). And yet, as powerfully
as with sexual denial, the dynamics of ontological repression
send back the truth--to Pierre the truth that his life is
eternally altered by having violated another's. His despair can-
not be removed by self-sacrifice, and the infinite weight of it
pulls him down like gravity, only to grow stronger with every
surge of his "infinite, quenchless rage" (283). That rage is
fuelled by an inner sense of specialness he tries to reproduce
outwardly in the form of a book, "some thoughtful thing of
absolute Truth" (283). But the book fails; and, from the start,
it can amount to no more than a castle in the air, as Kierkegaard
contends, since "at the bottom of it all there is nothing. . . .
Just at the instant when [the despairing self] seems to be
nearest to having the fabric finished it can arbitrarily resolve
the whole thing into nothing."[27] Pierre's encounter with an
ambiguous combination of truth and lie at his own core leads him
to just such a 'resolution', a negation, uttered before Isabel,
that nullifies the whole world along with himself:

> "Look: a nothing is the substance, it casts one shadow
> one way, and another the other way; and these two
> shadows cast from one nothing; these, seems to me, are
> Virtue and Vice."
> "Then why torment thyself so, dearest Pierre?"
> "It is the law."
> "What?"
> "That a nothing should torment a nothing, for I am
> nothing. It is all a dream--we dream that we dreamed
> we dream." (274)

After striving to live unflinchingly in the light of
unfragmented knowledge of final truths, Pierre winds up "the fool
of Truth" (358) seeking neutrality as relief from the double

determinism of "equally immense pride and grief" (285). The narrator reveals the stratagems of <u>ressentiment</u> which mark that flight into disintegration, with its attendant decision to "hate the world" (303), as belonging to the condition of all men, though ordinarily concealed. His claim, "I am more frank with Pierre than the best men are with themselves," points to regions of human being simply prior to the formation of character, places where men meet "the flashing revelations of grief's wonderful fire" (88) in darkness and without courage--for only "in reserves" do "men build imposing characters; not in revelations" (108). In this pointing capacity the narrator speaks also of human "clay" (107), of the entrapments of the psyche which possess "all" men to become "jailers of themselves" (91), of their shallow vision before the richness of the actual other, and of the everlasting futility that draws them into petrification and stasis. But through Pierre's striving the narrator turns to tell as well of the courage of finite freedom when it acts decisively on its yearning to prevail over ambiguity, thus opening the way, even in brokenness and distortion, to deeper regions of the real. By divulging a tragic pattern for Pierre, the narrator sustains a sense of greatness and courage coincidental with the blindness of his emblematic hero--and, in the same act, he sustains a confrontation with those who think of death by tragedy as an aberration and not as a crucial fact of every lived life.

Working against his own proclivity for these existential investigations and assertions, the narrator may suddenly shift

his stance to focus on the fortuitous side of Pierre's character
structure. And once again, the tale is a concrete history
showing a man's internalizations of his grotesque cultural
world--above all, of the remnants of Puritanism that have led him
to believe "that by starving thy body, thou shalt fatten thy
soul" (300). Pierre's prototypical 'tragedy' is now more the
story of an individual living out the disaster of middle-class
values: "Civilization, Philosophy, Ideal Virtue! behold your
victim!" (302). Following the narrator in this mood, we cut
through Pierre's sublimation to his smothered physical need to
"caress" (142). And in the same vein, we discover Isabel the
unfathomable, late in the novel, jealous of Lucy in the most
ordinary sense. Not some fatal snare in the psyche, then, but
the tendency to "think we are not human" destroys us when we are
"tyrannically" driven to attain a "transcendental object" (180).
On his final walk with Isabel and Lucy, Pierre himself is
depicted gleaning something of the same realization:

> . . . regarded in the unscrupulous light of real naked
> reason, . . . and setting aside all his own manifold
> and inter-enfolding mystic and transcendental
> persuasions,--originally born, as he now seemed to
> feel, purely of an intense procreative enthusiasm:
> . . . setting all these aside, and coming to the plain,
> palpable facts,--how did he <u>know</u> that Isabel was his
> sister? (353)

But, these deductive thoughts give rise to yet another displace-
ment. Before an onslaught of "mental confusions" (354), practi-
cal reason is called into question, as once more, while riding
the harbor waves, Isabel's story does seem to be true.

Erratically, contrary narratives interweave the fabric of

Pierre. Like the two portraits in the art gallery--the "Cenci of
Guido" and the "Stranger"--which seem to talk secretly to each
other in a dialogue "over and across the living spectators
below" (351), discordant modes of thought enter and leave the
novel. The most startling is Pierre's dream of the Mount of
Titans: in a "state of semi-unconsciousness" he recognizes him-
self as Enceladus "writhing from out the imprisoning earth,"
hurling his armless torso with "immitigable hate" at the
"invulnerable steep" (346) of heaven's wall. Though Pierre wakes
up in alarm, the narrative voice suddenly breaks into a cosmo-
gonic speaking: "Old Titan's self was the son of incestuous
Coelus and Terra, the son of incestuous Heaven and Earth. And
Titan married his mother Terra, . . ." (347). The voice quickly
turns back to the story of Pierre, but in its brief emergence it
casts his life in a mythic frame. Such a frame within the novel
holds the fullness of the moment of Pierre's metamorphosis in
which name and essence become fused.

Pierre's transformation to stone can be analyzed as a
reversion to the tranquility of the inorganic rooted in an
unconscious drive--"the love deep as death" (307)--for the stony
peace of the grave and symbolic union with his lost parents. Or
an onto-theological perspective might understand Pierre's cry of
absence in terms of the movements of what Meister Eckhart calls
"the spark of the soul." Dimly aware of its exhaustibility, this
spark

> . . . is not satisfied with the simple immobile divine
> being that neither gives nor takes. Further, it wants
> to know where this being comes from. It wants to

> penetrate to the simple ground, the silent desert where
> distinctions never gazed, where there is neither
> Father, nor Son, nor Holy Spirit.[28]

Such varied angles of vision are in tandem with the narrator's

unsettled portrayal of Pierre--which perhaps grows out of a quest

identical to his hero's. Certainly he shares with Pierre what

Eckhart elsewhere calls, in a prayer to god, the longing to "rid

us of 'God'."[29] His discussions of the "Silence of God" are

caustic, but, significantly, wind up as a question: "for how

can a man get a Voice out of Silence?" (208). How can one even

talk of god without reducing him to an object of our knowledge?

Repeatedly, the narrator insists we cannot presume to know the

answer. And yet, something of what he says on another topic

about 'not knowing' may reflect back to this issue of a ground.

Hardly "by way of bagatelle," he halts his story to wonder

> . . . whether some things that men think they do not
> know, are not for all that thoroughly comprehended by
> them; and yet, so to speak, though contained in them-
> selves, are kept a secret from themselves? The idea
> of Death seems such a thing. (294)

NOTES to CHAPTER TWO

[1]Translation of this fragment is by Gary Brent Madison in his The Phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1981), p. v. Charles H. Kahn, in The Art and Thought of Heraclitus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), offers a different version: "You will not find out the limits of the soul by going, even if you travel over every way, so deep is its report" (p. 45).

[2]Søren Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, trans. Rune Engebretsen, from the provisional manuscript of the forthcoming edition of Kierkegaard's Writings, ed. Howard V. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press).

[3]Georg Lukács, The Theory of the Novel, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971), p. 56.

[4]Herman Melville, Pierre; or, The Ambiguities, ed. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker and G. Thomas Tanselle (Evanston: Northwestern University Press and Newberry Library, 1971), p. 141. Subsequent references to this text will appear in the body of the chapter.

[5]Melville to Sophia Hawthorne, 8 January 1852, The Letters of Herman Melville, ed. Merrell R. Davis and William H. Gilman (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 1960), p. 146.

[6]Quoted by Elizabeth S. Foster in the "Historical Note" to Mardi: and a Voyage Thither (Evanston: Northwestern University Press and Newberry Library, 1970), p. 669.

[7]Quoted by Leon Howard and Hershel Parker in the "Historical Note" to Pierre, p. 380. A similar view of Melville's sanity seems to lie behind Fitz-James O'Brien's review (Putnam's Monthly, February, 1853): "Thought staggers through each page like one poisoned. Language is drunken and reeling. Style is antipodical, and marches on its head. Then the moral is bad. Conceal it how you will, a revolting picture presents itself." The review is collected in Studies in Pierre, comp. Ralph Willet (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill, 1971), p. 3.

[8]See, for example, the concluding paragraphs to Richard
Brodhead's otherwise excellent essay, "The Fate of Candor:
Pierre; or, The Ambiguities," in Hawthorne, Melville, and the
Novel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), pp. 191-93.
It has become commonplace, rather than radical, to maintain that
an author is modernist or post-modernist because he shows "that
there is nothing but deception and self-deception, in fiction and
life" (p. 191). The liberating "pleasure" which is said to go
with this vision is not Melville's. The image of endlessly
stratified layers in Pierre is not a foretaste of Barthes' onion.
Although Melville's fiction may suggest we can never arrive at a
pre-suppositionless beginning, his vision is not an endorsement
or celebration of meaninglessness. For Melville the question of,
and implicitly, the quest for, a ground persists. Similar to
Brodhead on this score is Edgar A. Dryden, "The Entangled Text:
Melville's Pierre and the Problem of Reading," Boundary 2
7 (Spring 1979): 145-73.

[9]Whether that voice should be called narrator or 'implied
author', to use Wayne Booth's term, and just where Melville
might shift from one device to the other seems to me less signi-
ficant than the distinctly changeable quality of that voice.
These problems are discussed by Karl F. Knight, "The Implied
Author in Melville's Pierre," Studies in American Fiction 7
(Autumn 1979): 163-74. According to Knight, "the bafflingly
complex manner in which the narrator is used suggests that he is
a created figure distinct from Herman Melville, and further, that
he is used precisely for the purpose of compounding the ambigui-
ties of the book . . . ." Pierre can be viewed in part as "the
story of an implied author who tries to examine the moral
universe by tracing the career of a naive youth who moves from
exuberant idealism to despairing self-knowledge. The implied
author begins blithely but ends in something akin to the despair
of his hero" (p. 164). I agree with Knight that the distance
between the narrator and Pierre works against the intriguing
notion that Pierre is the book the hero is himself writing
towards the end of the novel, as argued by Raymond J. Nelson,
"The Art of Herman Melville: The Author of Pierre," The Yale
Review 59 (Winter 1970): 201-12.

[10]See p. 56, Tillich's definition of the bourgeois principle.

[11]Warner Berthoff, in The Example of Melville (Princeton,
N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1962), points out Melville's
"insistance on explaining in minute detail every inflection of
motive" in Pierre. By showing "every new position and rhythmic
phase in the mechanics of [Pierre's] responsiveness," Melville
"provides . . . a working display of the process by which
thoughts are formed and the commitments of feeling actually
entered into within the human mind. At this level of demonstra-
tion Pierre is an extraordinary performance" (p. 52).

[12]This is Otto Rank's concept of narcissism as developed in The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study, trans. and ed. Harry Tucker, Jr. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1971). Its applicability to Pierre is mentioned by Diane Long Hoeveler, "La Cenci: The Incest Motif in Hawthorne and Melville," ATQ. A Journal of New England Writers no. 44 (Fall 1979): 247-59. Hoeveler also discusses Melville's "stinging assault" in Pierre on "conventionally accepted human relationships," on "the ideals of family, marriage with the blonde virgin, and fraternal friendship" (p. 248). "Lucy the virgin turns out to be the death-delivering sterile ideal that American culture foists on its reluctant Adams. This is made clear in the final scenes of the novel, when Lucy's arrival coincides with Pierre's temporary blindness" (p. 249).

[13]Brodhead, Hawthorne, Melville, and the Novel, p. 188. In relation to Lucy too, Brodhead argues, this "ambiguous mixture" commits Pierre to a "cycle of repression and idealization." Pierre is thus "compelled to see himself as living in a world divided between good and evil, heaven and hell, without realizing that his own images of the heavenly are fueled by what he considers hellish in himself" (p. 174). I am indebted to these and other insights Brodhead provides into the depth psychology Melville ingrains into the art of Pierre.

[14]Duyckinck's review is collected in Studies in Pierre, p. 2.

[15]This hysterical assessment appears in the Whig Review, as quoted in the "Historical Note" to Pierre, p. 390.

[16]"Historical Note," p. 382.

[17]Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, Dialectic of Enlightenment, trans. John Cumming (New York: Seabury Press, 1969), p. x.

[18]Lukács, p. 71.

[19]The facetious, syrupy prose in this section is sometimes read simply as execrable writing on Melville's part. I find fascinating E. L. Grant Watson's view that "there is a viscous and somewhat cloying quality about the style, which like the substance of the subconscious world, with which it deals, is at first repellent." See the "Historical Note," p. 402.

[20]Mark Schorer, "Technique as Discovery," The Novel: Modern Essays in Criticism, ed. Robert Murray Davis (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969), p. 75.

[21]William Butler Yeats, "Byzantium," Selected Poems and Two Plays of William Butler Yeats, ed. M. L. Rosenthal (New York: Macmillan, 1962), p. 132.

[22]In his essay on the Fall motif in Pierre, Charles Moorman quotes a passage from Arnold J. Toynbee which helps to explain this notion of the humanizing impact of the events that throw man out of his essential state of dreaming innocence: in Eden the figure of Satan functions as "a critic to set the mind thinking again by suggesting doubts; an adversary to set the heart feeling again by instilling distress or discontent or fear or antipathy." See A Study of History, abr. D. C. Somerville (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), p. 63. Moorman's essay, "Melville's Pierre and the Fortunate Fall," is collected in Studies in Pierre, p. 41.

[23]E. L. Grant Watson, "Melville's Pierre," New England Quarterly, 3 (April 1930): 195-234. Watson's essay is quoted in the "Historical Note," pp. 397, 398, 402, 405.

[24]In a craftily written letter to his English publisher Richard Bentley (16 April 1852), Melville refers to Pierre as a "regular romance." Not exactly "regular," it is a romance in Hawthorne's sense (see p. 39). There is an inclusion of extravagant revealings within a realistic narrative especially in Books VI and VIII in which Isabel relates her history. See the "Historical Note," p. 367.

[25]Søren Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), p. 200.

[26]Kierkegaard, p. 151.

[27]Kierkegaard, p. 203.

[28]This translation from Meister Eckhart: Die deutschen Werke (ed. J. Quint) is by Bernard McGinn in "The God beyond God: Theology and Mysticism in the Thought of Meister Eckhart," The Journal of Religion 58 (January 1981): 1-19, p. 12.

[29]Breakthrough: Meister Eckhart's Creation Spirituality in New Translation, Introduction and Commentaries by Matthew Fox (New York: Doubleday, 1980), p. 215.

CHAPTER THREE: Bartleby, the Stranger

Already have we been the nothing we dread to be.

Mardi[1]

What amazes me most is to see that everyone is not amazed
at his own weakness.

Pascal, Pensées[2]

If a man be in any vague latent doubt about the intrinsic
correctness and excellence of his general life-theory and
practical course of life; then, if that man chance to light
on any other man, or any little treatise, or sermon, which
unintendingly, as it were, yet very palpably illustrates to
him the intrinsic incorrectness and non-excellence of both
the theory and practice of his life; then that man will--
more or less unconsciously--try hard to hold himself back
from the self-admitted comprehension of a matter which thus
condemns him.

Pierre[3]

[In the movie, The Pawnbroker] we see with complete clarity
why people lead "repressed" lives, why they arm themselves
against the world, why they close their personhood down to
a narrow focus of control and meaning: the academicians,
the military, the workingmen, the administrators--all men,
in fact, except the religious genius. To open oneself
completely means that one invites the world to invade one-
self, it means to weaken one's center, to expose oneself to
the threat of absolute meaninglessness. Furthermore, it
invites the scoffing and denigration by one's fellow men.
People snigger at the open person, shrug their shoulders at
him, distrust him, hound him and snap at him, just as
Nazerman did to those who crossed his life in the pawnshop.
. . . The open person gives no appearance of strength, he
seems pathetic in his naïve trust, his childlike confidence.
His tentativeness seems like hesitation, his soft approach
seems like timid appeasement. . . . He seems shallow, dis-
possessed of "secrets," of murky depths that fascinate, of
subterranean walls that hold back deep and rumbling passions
and unknown reserves of strength. All these things the
closed person gives the appearance of, and so we respect
him, handle him gently, fear him. How can one think of
changing one identity for the other in the predatory world
of men?

Ernest Becker, Angel in Armor[4]

We are not the source of our own being: whether acknowledged in fits and starts, normally on the occasions of grief, or repressed over most of a lifetime, the fact is bound to become a conundrum for eminently safe men. When, in spite of themselves, such persons discover suffering at their doorsteps or notice human powerlessness standing in their offices, they may feel, first of all, the need for a change of plans. Gradually, they may sense that a response is in order, a response to a demand that appears beyond the dictates of common sense. Melville's short story "Bartleby, the Scrivener" hints there is a courage in the response which meets that demand through story, and the attorney who relates what he saw of the man Bartleby manages enough engaged observation to place his own life and the scrivener's in narration. Constricted by the safety of his language, the lawyer-narrator's efforts for the sake of "literature"[5] eventually succumb to the cowardice of sentimental closure. But, in its course, his tale reveals more than its teller knows. Concrete sources of human suffering become visible in the frantic pursuits and exploitative relations of men who do not know where they are. Enclosed by those relations, they draw one man into a purgatory of emptiness. There, in the sequences of a stillborn rebirth, Bartleby's deathly peace forms an uncanny threshold to the question of the aim of our being--social, political, and otherwise.

"Bartleby, the Scrivener" has been called, correctly I think, "one of the bitterest indictments of American capitalism

ever published."[6] At the same time, it seems pervaded, from the moment we first meet the scrivener, by a spiritual concern, a discernment that "all is vanity but through this vanity eternity shines into us, comes near to us, draws us to itself."[7] To coincide in the same story, either the indictment is faulted by an alienated need for mystification, or else the inward experience of eternity has been improperly confused with this world-- at least, from their opposing fortresses, so might say political hyper-activists and theological reactionaries. The work offers, to the contrary, a narrative gathering of contentious theological concerns and political implications which, in their interlacing complexity, urge interpretation past both available spiritual belief and correctly critical unbelief.

However, if our literary criticism is to give the impression of "unknown reserves" of hermeneutical strength, of "deep and rumbling" competency, we must settle on some interpretative ground. And so we have Bartleby as schizophrenic, as alienated worker, as effaced artist, as the protagonist in yet another tragedy of pride by Melville the broken writer, the allegorist, the macabre comedian. If such views add to our comprehension, they also find too easy caricature in the remedies they imply: Bartleby needs to get therapy, get organized, get Dionysian, get religion. There is a side to "this little history" (40), though, which defies explication and reasonable commentary because it cuts through every solution comprehension may insinuate. No less does the work undercut laughter at the attempts to understand, for such dismissals usually arise out of a hidden impulse to

defuse the profound uneasiness "Bartleby" evokes.

Although he does not have Melville's work specifically in mind, I think Ernest Becker, for one, touches on that incisive, radically unsettling aspect of "Bartleby" in his description of the phenomenon of the "religious genius." Continuing from the remarks quoted above, Becker suggests that such a person

> . . . has nothing to lose in the world, because he has nothing to gain in it. He knows that basically he can do nothing here, expect nothing here; so he can become completely humble, passive, as nothing. This is a passivity that achieves its fulfillment in destruction, which is why so few can understand it, sanction it, or want to imitate it. Nietzsche was appalled by this ideal of the "Christian slave" and vented his whole fury on it: he understood that it undermines man's peculiar task on this planet--to make something out of it. In the world's terms the religious genius is "crazy," and perhaps rightly so, since it is more than can be asked of the mass of men: they must live and work and continue on.[8]

I do not wish to argue that Bartleby, the fictional character, fits Becker's description in any convenient, or elaborate sense-- only that in Melville's story appears something of this 'craziness' which is a preposterous affront to our basic instincts. As the tale opens to an experience that is usually unthought and almost always unlived, we glimpse a seeming madness which, paradoxically, may end up on the side of life by going deeper than, and thereby affronting, the most tabooed instinct of all: the drive towards death that, sometimes at any rate, whispers at the core of every human heart.

In the attempt to arrive at what he calls "an adequate understanding of the chief character" in his "Story of Wall

Street," the lawyer-narrator first introduces his own occupational life, noting especially the safe and peaceful nature of his "unambitious," yet nevertheless acquisitive, "avocations." His introduction flows with an easy-going ambiance that suggests the ways and means of a comparatively generous and benign individual, while belying an essentially closed personality. His congeniality appears dubious as quickly as he signals his class standing and begins to record the facts of his property: "my employés, my business, my chambers and general surroundings" (40). As narrator-capitalist he informs us as to how, under the pre-eminent authority of the written law, he exploits, both "professionally and privately" (39), his own character traits of "prudence" and "method" in marshalling "a snug business among rich men's bonds, and mortgages, and title-deeds." He readily admits to having invested his life in the superficially upright, but essentially predatory, world of Wall Street finance. He "freely" confesses as well to a sycophantic reverence for the "good opinion" of his own former employer, "the late John Jacob Astor," whose name he loves to recite for the sensations it conjures up: "it hath a rounded and orbicular sound to it, and rings like unto bullion" (40).

As he recounts further details of his enterprize, moving from the walls that demarcate his chambers to his clerks and their piecework, the narrator begins, unwittingly, to reveal some of the powers compelling his loyalty to this system of property, propriety, and profit, and the celestial sanction it receives from financial 'orbs' like Astor. Walls themselves, peculiarly

enough, seem to constitute one of those powers. Ubiquitous and monolithic, they mason up the lawyer and cordon off his copyists in an office where meager windows offer empty 'views' of two windowless walls of competing enclaves of self-interest. The surfaces of those barriers--one black, one white, and both somewhat "deficient in what landscape painters call 'life'" (41)-- will become emblematic of an impeding blandness in the narrative vision which follows from the speaker's confined perceptions. As those perceptions pile up they build a metaphorical wall of rhetoric in which a constructed story can finally contain the bewildering case of Bartleby. In a more literal and immediate way, though, walls and enclosures function as the framework for all interaction in the story's social world--to the degree that Bartleby's eventual imprisonment in the massively walled Tombs suggests little change of environment. Walls make possible the internalizing process which enables self-fortification and efficient worker management, imperatives indispensable to the successful maintenance of highly venerated consumer confidence. Moreover, they ensure the productivity of Wall Street's white-collar proletariat,[9] one of the impoverished classes American society at large required in the nineteenth century and requires now as a reliable source of exploitable labour. Walls, in short, play the vital role in "Bartleby" of determining the territories where survivalist sensibilities--even highly reflective ones like the narrator's--can procure the false needs and passions which the presiding culture deems requisite to 'get one through'.

The life which the characters get through, however, appears

to be a kind of death. While the narrator--who himself lives off mortgages, or, literally, 'dead pledges'--believes his building throbs during the daytime with "industry and life" (55), his descriptions exhibit a stationary world, a prison-house of the dead-letter bordering, beneath its aura of bustle, on the depleted condition of entropy. The denizens of this world include: its part-time spokesman, the narrator, whose final impetus to do something about the problem of Bartleby is the thought that the scrivener (whom he will come to touch most feelingly when a corpse) might some day enjoy a "cadaverous triumph" (62) over him; a "column" (48) of half-functional law-copyists with no prospects, whose 'thing' names--Turkey, Nippers, and Ginger Nut--are "deemed expressive of their respective persons or characters" (41); and, finally, a "lean, penniless wight" (52) who, for most of the duration of his sojurn, engages in "dead-wall reveries" (64) after finding immediate accomodation in the bureaucracy as a harmless object--"his great stillness, his unalterableness of demeanor under all circumstances, made him a valuable acquisition" (53).

Before this "ghost" (52) arrives on the scene, the attorney reviews his prefatory "list" of employees and thereby establishes early in the story one of its guiding tenets: 'character' is a business of adjustment, a tolerable aggregate of minor psychoses under the conditions of unrelieved uniformity, an "arrangement," in many sad cases unfortunately, of "eccentricities" (45), as the narrator calls them, held together by a reasonably productive ego within the precincts of social necessity and economic privilege.

Turkey is the first grotesque case in point. Uproarious when he brandishes a long ruler "to gallantly charge the foe" of mindless legal labor, and pathetic as he insists obsequiously upon slaving through his "afternoon devotions" (42), he is a spectacle of adjustment to a dead-end existence, a life that has so narrowed down its "focus of control and meaning" by swathing it in a cloak of trivial routine as to become a self-regulating mutation. In a half-whimsical observation he is called "the proprietor" of his own "face" (41), a remark that also initiates the tale's theme of 'facework' wherein human faces serve as signposts for the procedures of self-incarceration and, at times, as the collective battlefield for the submerged hostility of the office. Turkey's afternoon passions of pen-breaking and petty "insolence" are comic intimations of that hostility, though in his case they remain embedded in the preserving schema of clerk heroics which provides for a harmless mixture of defiance and servitude, the latter exemplified in the mitigating refrain, "with submission, sir" (42). But where Turkey's spasms of resistance can be managed through remonstrations, Nippers, that "rather piratical-looking young man," presents the lawyer with the slightly larger threat of "diseased ambition": "The ambition was evinced by a certain impatience of the duties of a mere copyist, an unwarrantable usurpation of strictly professional affairs, such as the original drawing up of legal documents" (43). Although, like his elder colleague, Nippers is dysfunctional for half of the working day when his table seems to appropriate his missing life to become "a perverse voluntary agent" (44), and though bound to

perform his "ugly mood" (49) and his own facework of "grinning
irritability" (43), he appears to have a partial life outside the
office and at least some capacity to conceive of rebellion, to
realize, in other words, that he might "be rid of a scrivener's
table altogether" (43). But, as with "Turkey's combativeness"
(51) and all disturbances, his are molded to the rites of power
and finally tempered "in the heat of business" (43). Traits of
character, in short, simply extend and reinforce the distortions
of the claustrophobic system. Or as the narrator himself points
out in regard to his employés, "their fits relieved each other,
like guards. . . . This was a good natural arrangement under the
circumstances" (45).

The narrator's own ways of adjusting to what he rationalizes
to be "natural" circumstances become evident in a gap which forms
cumulatively between the surface level of his expression and a
level of latent meanings that tell a different story. We see in
that gap, above all, his characteristic ways of repression and
their correspondence with the dominant patterns of enclosure and
oppression. For instance, his predilection for secure activity
and for a secure style which can mollify confrontation--he
regards himself as "a man of peace" (42)--is distinctly at odds
with his own hostility, the streak of aggressiveness that ranges
from vexation at losing the office of a Master in Chancery to
fantasies of the death of his most difficult employee: "the
scrivener's pale form appeared to me laid out . . . in its
shivering winding sheet" (55). More conspicuous is the
narrator's awareness, on the one hand, of the dehumanizing

bondage of his workplace with its scanty pay, long hours, and
killing futility--"a very dull, wearisome and lethargic affair"
(46)--and, on the other hand, his "natural expectancy of instant
compliance" (47), his basic consensus, in other words, with the
dominant assumption that the toil of endless duplication is the
incontestable lot of some losers: "Every copyist is bound to
examine his copy" (48). We notice his friendly posture evaporate
and watch his charitable impulses recede when his own policy of
reasonable self-interest emerges deviantly in his copiers, in
Nippers' "continual discontent" (43), and in the "insolent" tone
Turkey suddenly adopts when he dons a "new overcoat," thus
making the impoverished Englishman, in the narrator's eyes, "a
man whom prosperity harmed" (44). Immersed in an institution-
alized network of master/servant relations, then, the attorney
seems little surprised when articulating the contradictory
effects those relations produce inside him. Although he believes,
for example, that "indignation at wrongs and outrages" is
"dangerous" (40), he feels disenchanted when not facing a modicum
of resistance to the outrages he helps to administer: "the
passiveness of Bartleby sometimes irritated me" (51), or, more
passionately, "I burned to be rebelled against again" (52). That
Bartleby's passive resistance will come to leave the narrator-
master "disarmed" and even "unmanned" (54) in a way Nippers'
"evil" ambition cannot, is a phenomenon which finds its own logic
on a level of the story that becomes increasingly dislodged from
the storyteller's governing intentions.

Behind the armor of his character, imaged in an overcoat

that buttons from the knee to the neck, the narrator's repres-
sions and managed prose generate pervasive unconscious irony and
a host of unconscious puns. These elements produce a duplicity
in the accounting which alerts the reader to consider alternate
perspectives of the represented events and, as well, to keep open
the question of the nature of Bartleby, "one of those beings of
whom nothing is ascertainable, except from the original sources"
(40). The first time we see this particular clerk, he too is
described in predominantly instrumental terms:

> After a few words touching his qualifications, I
> engaged him, glad to have among my corps of copyists a
> man of so singularly sedate an aspect, which I thought
> might operate beneficially upon the flighty temper of
> Turkey, and the fiery one of Nippers. (46)

Just as Nippers is thought "useful" because his "deportment"
reflects "credit" (44) upon the office, Bartleby's mildness is
also to find its function--a social and an administrative stra-
tegy, it might be added parenthetically, taken note of in our own
century by Franz Kafka: "shyness, modesty, timidity are accounted
noble and good because they offer little resistance to other
people's aggressive impulses."[10] Under the impact, however, of
Bartleby's initial resistance, his first "I would prefer not to"
(47), the narrator loses his grasp on character traits and begins
to glimpse an alterity that distinguishes the scrivener's
presence:

> Not a wrinkle of agitation rippled him. Had there been
> the least uneasiness, anger, impatience or impertinence
> in his manner; in other words, had there been anything
> ordinarily human about him, doubtless I should have
> violently dismissed him from the premises. (47)

This partial awareness of Bartleby's difference precipitates

a succession of inventive evasions. These enable the narrator to
hold the danger of a more complete awareness in characteristic
abeyance:

> I stood gazing at him awhile, as he went on with his
> own writing, and then reseated myself at my desk.
> This is very strange, thought I. What had one best do?
> But my business hurried me. I concluded to forget the
> matter for the present, reserving it for my future
> leisure. (47)
>
> With any other man I should have flown outright into a
> dreadful passion . . . . But there was something about
> Bartleby that not only strangely disarmed me, but, in
> a wonderful manner, touched and disconcerted me. I
> began to reason with him. (48)

But reasoning in a one-dimensional world is, finally, the will to
accomodation. And future leisure cannot provide a mind-set
different from that of present work when work and leisure, along
with present and future, are all amalgamated under an ethos of
control. In the same way, privacy is integrated with atomized
public life: "I procurred a high green folding screen which
might entirely isolate Bartleby from my sight, though not remove
him from my voice. And thus, in a manner, privacy and society
were conjoined" (46). On one level of the story, this screen is
no different from the ground-glass folding-doors dividing the
office in two; it provides another instance of the surfeit of
structure that aids enormously in the creation of masses of
estranged men like Bartleby. On another level, though, the
partition becomes an emblem for the actual otherness of a
particular man, one whose otherness inheres unreasonably in his
'decease'. For following the last death throes of an initial
period in which he does "an extraordinary quantity of writing"

(46), Bartleby dies wholly to prevailing belief. He dies to the omnipotent pretense of what human activity amounts to as it endeavors to resist the threat of nonbeing implied in the passing of time. There occurs in him, and with him, an expiration of automatic allegiance to the provisos for living in the world's meaningless progression. Knowing death and seeing irrevocable meaninglessness then become, before the narrator's "astonished eyes" (40), Bartleby's "own peculiar business" (50).

Entailed in the scrivener's 'death' is a negation of the foundation of the narrator's "private surmises" (44) and moderating judgement. That is, Bartleby's otherness is born out of a radical resistance to calculation, perhaps one of the connotations of electing to 'prefer' over the more fortified way of 'willing': "At present I would prefer not to be a little reasonable" (58). The narrator is predisposed to narrow down this stance to his own frame of reference: "his decision was irreversible" (49). He is, nevertheless, fascinated with "the mild effrontery" (54) implicit in Bartleby's "extraordinary conduct" (48) and the unanticipated ways it disarranges normal behavior: "He never spoke but to answer"; "for long periods he would stand looking out . . . upon the dead brick wall" (55); "he had declined telling who he was or whence he came" (56)--and yet, this "demented man," it is soon realized, has "in some degree turned the tongues, if not the heads of myself and clerks" (59). For a short while, master/servant relations are breached by way of the "unheard-of exemptions" (53) afforded Bartleby when he abstains from examining his copy, from verifying the words that,

in effect, underwrite those relations. And the category of property is briefly overturned when the narrator finds himself locked out of his own office. But this threat is less mild; the discovery that Bartleby has been eating, dressing and sleeping there "without plate, mirror, or bed" (54) eventually evokes an ardent defence of ownership: "What earthly right have you to stay here? Do you pay any rent? Do you pay my taxes? Or is this property yours?" (63).

In ignoring customary powers and social premises Bartleby's scandalous stance seems to take on its own odd relation to space and time. Further, in trespassing the narrator's universal categories he enters into relation with something not measurable in terms of space and time. In extravagant contrast to the narrator's decorous rationality, we see a "hermitage" (50) form in the midst of a Wall Street law-office where a "poor, pale, passive mortal" (66) gazes upon a wall illuminated by a vertical light. We see one man, in other words, undergo a countermovement towards eternity in the very midst of a culture devoted to the potency of self-sufficient finitude. Having relinquished all life supporting self-esteem proffered through that culture's system of heroics and petty anti-heroics, the man appears to embark silently on a different kind of existence--an indeterminable period of 'incubation' in the womb-like space of his enclosure. At the same time, however, any suggestion that a rebirth might result from this extraordinary gestation disappears as the completeness of Bartleby's separation overwhelms the one nearest him:

> . . . he seemed alone, absolutely alone in the universe.
> A bit of wreck in the mid-Atlantic. At length,
> necessities connected with my business tyrannized over
> all other considerations. Decently as I could I told
> Bartleby that in six days' time he must unconditionally
> leave the office. (60)

The more the narrator expresses his revulsion at the scrivener's

proximity to emptiness, to "sheer vacancy" (55), the greater

seems the "perverseness" (57) implied in the act of giving up the

lie of self-sufficiency. Whatever the narrator may say about his

own "fellow-feeling" (42) and "the bond of a common humanity"

(55), it is his self-protecting flight from Bartleby's human

protest that constitutes the true story, a story of that objec-

tifying attitude of mind which makes the arrest of rebirth

inevitable because, finally, it walls off all possible connection

with others in their outside chance of healing. That inevita-

bility has been described in our own 'stillbirthing' times by

Dennis Lee, for one: "Salvation cannot be controlled; if one's

mode of being is exclusively to control one is damned. And if

the mode of being one inherits from one's civilisation is to

control, the same is true."[11]

Bartleby's yielding of character armor and his coincidental

noncompliance with the principle of calculation and control

quickly make him an "intolerable incubus" (66) in the life of the

lawyer, an enigma generating "nervous resentment" (63) and

inciting the compulsion to maneuver. For example, when asked by

the scrivener if he himself does not see the reason to stop

writing, the narrator is forced to escape along a utilitarian

route:

> I looked steadfastly at him, and perceived that
> his eyes looked dull and glazed. Instantly it occurred
> to me, that his unexampled diligence in copying by his
> dim window for the first few weeks of his stay with me
> might have temporarily impaired his vision.
> I was touched. I said something in condolence
> with him. I hinted that of course he did wisely in
> abstaining from writing for a while . . . . (59)

Besides sympathy, appeals to justice, and various forms of

shoulder shrugging, there are also genuine attempts at charity.

But it is psychological routes of circumvention that are most

favoured, for they seem to situate Bartleby within the everyday

rituals of 'facework' and personality conflict: "I felt strongly

goaded on to encounter him in some new opposition--to elicit some

angry spark from him answerable to my own" (51). Because the

narrator postures openness--"what reasonable objection can you

have to speak to me? I feel friendly towards you? (57)--and

because his generous philanthropic offers are declined, he must

psychologize Bartleby as the impossibly closed one: "it was his

soul that suffered, and his soul I could not reach" (56). And

yet, as closed as the narrator's guilty purposes require Bartleby

to be, we sense more naked human emotion in "the faintest con-

ceivable tremor" that passes across the scrivener's mouth when

implored to provide an "answer" that cannot be heard than at any

other point in the story, including the narrator's final

apostrophic lament. When a response does come from Bartleby--

"At present I prefer to give no answer" (53)--it provides one of

the story's few hopeful moments, an instance of the discernment

and abnegation of the well-intentioned ways of calculating love.

When the narrator draws upon the New Testament "injunction"

to "love one another" so as to conquer the "old Adam of resentment" welling up in him against Bartleby, he amalgamates that "commandment" with his own "prudent principle" to arrive at a self-preserving ethical code, a methodology of charitable action which, he avows, "saved" (64) him. Towards the same end, he looks "a little into 'Edwards on the Will' and 'Priestley on Necessity'" in order to fall under the "persuasion" that "Bartleby was billeted" upon him "for some mysterious purpose of an all-wise Providence" (65). By feigning a relation to the mysterious and by manipulating religious language in this manner--the same rhetorical manner, we imagine, employed publicly for the culture at large by the "celebrated preacher" (53) of Trinity Church--the narrator momentarily finds enough spiritual capital to fund the act of toleration. More importantly, though, he finds the most effective means for overriding the implication of actually perceiving something ineffable in "this quiet man" (46). Half-conscious references to the "advent" (41) and the "election" (62) of Bartleby divulge that perception. So does an overall change in the narrator's response to Bartleby's serenity; he shifts from welcoming the "mildness" as agreeably innocuous to acknowledging the "wonderous ascendency" (62) it has over him. Following the discovery of the scrivener's full-time occupancy of the office--the revelation that "he was always there" (53)--the narrator is prevented from dismissing Bartleby by "something superstitious knocking at [his] heart" (57). Here the word "superstitious" functions to name an uncanny phenomenon while ensuring its nonsensicality, or, at least, its probable

consignment to the curious category of many other "singular coincidences" (41). This technique goes far in maintaining the authority of common sense. But it fails before extreme conditions, above all before an im-mediate encounter with nonbeing-- like the passing one which disqualifies the narrator from church-going for a day when he fathoms the extent of Bartleby's "loneliness": "For the first time in my life a feeling of over-whelming stinging melancholy seized me. Before, I had never experienced aught but a not unpleasing sadness" (55). This experience runs deeper than any sadness because it entails the disappearance of every neurotic shield against the sense of being ultimately not in control of one's life, and hence, for the narrator, of being ultimatley lost. It is the same sense which conjoins with a breakthrough of something numinous in the story's final episode at the Tombs:

> Strangely huddled at the base of the wall, his knees drawn up, and lying on his side, his head touching the cold stones, I saw the wasted Bartleby. But nothing stirred. I paused; then went close up to him; stooped over, and saw that his dim eyes were open; otherwise he seemed profoundly sleeping. (73)

The vision of Bartleby as an entombed fetus, like the image of grass growing "by some magic" in the midst of the "Egyptian" masonry, startles the narrator into a momentary intuition of the ineluctable entanglement of life and death. In the face of his own and Bartleby's involvement in that ambiguity, the narrator becomes momentarily aware of the illusory nature of his pro-claimed safety, an awareness that is felt as a shock: "Something prompted me to touch him. I felt his hand, when a tingling

shiver ran up my arm and down my spine to my feet" (73).

The acutely ironic fact that he reaches out really to touch (and be touched by) Bartleby only when the scrivener is finally lifeless reveals the narrator's tendency both to repress death and to depend upon death in order to come alive. It points up the narrator's underlying anxiety about the ambiguity of mortal things, the foreboding of death and futility which his strong personality is fashioned to conceal. That anxiety is the source of what one critic has called the narrator's "prophylactic re-lations with Bartleby, with readers, and with humanity in general,"[12] the same source which prompts the story's last move-ment from a "shiver" of urgent recognition to a maudlin expres-sion of bemused sorrow: "Ah, Bartleby! Ah, humanity!" (74). Moreover, it is anxiety, and not a supervisory crisis, which instigates the story's pivotal event, the decision to change offices that accelerates Bartleby's arrest and releases the narrator from the peril of losing the position he holds in the respect of others, and along with that position, the vital lie of self-esteem.[13] The threat of such a loss terrifies when it looms as potential public disgrace. At first, though, it appears only as "unsolicited and uncharitable remarks obtruded upon" the lawyer by his "professional friends" who pass through the law-chambers:

> At last I was made aware that all through the circle of
> my professional acquaintance, a whisper of wonder was
> running round, having reference to the strange creature
> I kept at my office. This worried me very much. And
> as the idea came upon me of his possibly turning out a
> long-lived man, and keep occupying my chambers, and
> denying my authority; and perplexing my visitors; and

> scandalizing my professional reputation; and casting a
> general gloom over the premises; keeping soul and body
> together to the last upon his savings (for doubtless he
> spent but half a dime a day), and in the end perhaps
> outlive me, and claim possession of my office by right
> of his perpetual occupancy: as all these dark
> anticipations crowded upon me more and more, and my
> friends continually intruded their relentless remarks
> upon the apparition in the room; a great change was
> wrought in me. (65-66)

Here again the dread of death, which in this instance bottles up

formal articulation, is the crucial stimulant. Now the narrator

acts decisively to remove "the cause of great tribulation" (68).

Though conscience and a distaste for "vulgar bullying" (61)

demand a slightly indirect course of action--"I tore myself from

him whom I so longed to be rid of" (67)--failure to act would

mean losing the unending security of perpetual life. For just as

Cicero and his greatness survive in the bust which the narrator

keeps close by in admiration, the narrator's overwhelming need is

to live on--not imposingly like Cicero, but inertly in the snug

retreat of his identity as a useful, Enlightened man. That

identity brings with it a procedure for solving the problem of

death. It promises, as Becker has noted, the Enlightenment way

to immortality: "living in the esteem of men yet unborn, for the

works that you have [or will have] contributed to their life and

betterment."[14] Not surprisingly, the narrator dreads the dis-

appearance of such esteem in those who know him in his identity

and to whom he is therefore "bound" (69). He is "fearful . . .

of being exposed in the papers" (68), but on account of a danger

greater than the one he does acknowledge when he envisions the

disrepute that would befall him with a public attack upon his

character.

Before jumping on an omnibus in his terminal escape from Bartleby, the narrator conducts "a confidential interview with the scrivener" (68) on the stairs of his former office building. The conversation is marked by Bartleby's "unwonted wordiness," a comment which, for sheer hilarity, rivals the narrator's earlier offer of aid if notified by mail. Still, there is a slight change apparent in Bartleby, one that is abruptly nullified by the narrator's outburst of exasperated anger, his last attempt to "frighten [Bartleby's] immobility into compliance" (69). In the manner of "business driving fast" (65), the dynamics of self-esteem draw the narrative to a close quickly after this point, stopping briefly over the narrator's negotiations with his conscience, Bartleby's demise in prison, and a short sequel in which we are told that "imagination will readily supply the meagre recital of poor Bartleby's internment" (73). The lawyer's obligatory judgement--the scrivener "is a little deranged" (72)-- is facilitated by this increasingly distanced stance, which finds exemplary utterance in the conclusion to the sequel after that "one little item of rumor" (73) does what it can to explain. The last line reinforces the tenor of the story the teller thinks he is telling. But the finale does not touch another level of the tale which seems to have a wholly different center of gravity. Though it remains as riddled with indefiniteness as the madness of breaking from every available source of confidence and strength, that other focal point is, perhaps, the question Bartleby utters in response to the query as to why he does not

go on: "Do you not see the reason for yourself?" (59).

Divergent levels and axes of meaning, along with the narrator's blend of earnest interest and "blind inveteracy" (52), create undulations beneath the smooth surface discourse of "Bartleby, the Scrivener." The tensions of that submerged thought may be summarized in terms of the matter they tend to revolve around around, the manifold issue of human nature which enters deeply into the substance of the work.

In one of its aspects, Melville's concern with human nature is present in his depiction of ties between character, ideals, and society. Over the course of the story, we are shown the ideology which enforces those ties. We come to recognize a rationalizing benevolent selfishness that suffuses the lawyer's mercantile world, sounding its affection for "cheerfully indus- trious" (46) functionaries, while, at the same time, reducing the lives of such workers to biological subsistence. We note the absence of justice as it is uttered in the narrator's ironic reference to "the Tombs, or, to speak more properly, the Halls of Justice" (70). We gauge, in Turkey's parodied use of communion "wafers" (45), the farcical state of community, a condition up- held by the prototypical lawyer as second nature. In presenting such conditions and conditioning, Melville knows that human nature changes in history. He is conscious, in other words, that what seems to be fixed as human behavior and human potential is an acclimatization to the dehumanizing principle of his own historical period. The element of prophetic realism in his

symbolic art follows from such awareness. He unveils the actual
fate of people marginalized under the weight of oppression,
people like Bartleby, or the Merrymusks of "Cock-A-Doodle-Doo!",
who know fully where they are inside their programmed destitution.
Prophetically, Melville places before the ruling consciousness of
his time instances of embodied anguish, the anguish of those
whose protest is gradually annihilated by removing them from
sight where they are then permitted to wither away.

But the fact that human nature changes in history, Melville
also knows, presupposes the nature of a creature who can have
history. It presupposes some ontological conditions of life,
whether they happen to be admitted, suppressed, or postponed for
later consideration. It presupposes finitude, for instance,
which is a condition of human being and not of society, however
differently that condition is mediated by different cultures.
Finitude and the relation it entails with the non-finite are
fundamental to another aspect of Melville's concern with human
nature, the concern which generates the interrogation of the
nature of death that in many respects is "Bartleby, the
Scrivener." From this angle, the story portrays two men reacting
to death in converse directions. The narrator tends to cover up
death at the same time that his basic orientation is towards
dead things, for dead things can be manipulated through "masterly
management" (61). Although on the surface it appears as
Bartleby's defining characteristic, the narrator is marked by a
drive towards death, one that takes the form of a flight from
his own finitude. He consigns his life to the immortality of

duty and self-interest since they seem to make something invulnerable out of life, something that can surmount his dim recognition of "a certain hopelessness of remedying excessive and organic ill" (56). Hence, there is unconscious irony in his citation from the book of Job at the scene of Bartleby's death[15]; Job's despair and his cursing of his birth are antithetical to the narrator's implicit belief that Enlightened civilization can ultimately overcome finiteness, separation, and tragedy. The narrator is fully conscious of this antithesis in his reference to the Dead Letter Office where Bartleby is rumored to have worked. The disquieting implication is that even a future civilization progressively overcoming the gap between what is and what should be could not redeem the meaningless suffering of "those who died stifled by unrelieved calamities" (74).

The honesty of the narrator consists in his inability to shake completely the sense that the quality of his own 'having'-- now or in the chimerical future--is permanently altered by the 'not having' of others. This sense is what first draws him to take up the story of Bartleby, whose relation to life and death partly enthralls him in its contrariety to his own: "some paramount consideration prevailed with him to reply as he did" (49). Bartleby's movement is towards eternity rather than immortality, towards the 'whence' of human existence prior to the simultaneity of life and death, hope and despair, black and white. If there is a transcendence in this movement, it is not a matter of arriving or not arriving at a spiritualized state that can be evaluated in terms of success or failure. It is,

rather, an issue of the heart, of knowing that one's eternal worth in relation to the source and aim of life does not hang on the outcome of an inner moral sacrifice or an outward social struggle.

Melville does not depict any rebirth in the social context of "Bartleby" to coincide with this outside possibility of transcendence. In the story's focus upon the strangeness of Bartleby's stance, however, a radical kind of protest is pointed up, one that must seem unexpectedly aggressive to those with power and ludicrously helpless to would-be managers of revolution. In the same way, finally, that the event of Bartleby's life cuts through the narrator's attempt to contain verbally an unusual case, this unexpected conjoining of spiritual and political meanings breaks through expectations of how things usually go on this planet. Whenever such a breakthrough is perceived Melville's story becomes an instance of what Nietzsche called that "spirit" which is "the life that itself cuts into life."[16]

NOTES to CHAPTER THREE

[1] Herman Melville, Mardi: and A Voyage Thither (Evanston: Northwestern University Press and Newberry Library, 1970), p. 237.

[2] Blaise Pascal, Pensées, trans. A. J. Krailsheimer (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1966), p. 37.

[3] Herman Melville, Pierre; or The Ambiguities (Evanston: Northwestern University Press and Newberry Library, 1971), p. 209.

[4] Ernest Becker, Angel in Armor: A Post-Freudian Perspective on the Nature of Man (New York: Free Press, 1969), pp. 96-97.

[5] Herman Melville, "Bartleby, the Scrivener," in Great Short Works of Herman Melville, ed. Warner Berthoff (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), p. 39. Subsequent references to this text will appear in the body of the chapter.

[6] James C. Wilson, "'Bartleby': The Walls of Wall Street," Arizona Quarterly 37 (Winter 1981): 346.

[7] Paul Tillich, The New Being (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), p. 169.

[8] Becker, Angel in Armor, pp. 97-98.

[9] The term is used in relation to "Bartleby" by Marvin Fisher, Going Under: Melville's Short Fiction and the American 1850's (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), p. 186.

[10] The Diaries of Franz Kafka, 1910-1923, ed. Max Brod (New York: Schocken Books, 1949; reprint ed., Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1975), p. 403.

[11] Dennis Lee, Savage Fields: An Essay in Literature and Cosmology (Toronto: Anansi, 1977), p. 107.

[12] Lewis H. Miller, Jr., "'Bartleby' and the Dead Letter," Studies in American Fiction 8 (Spring 1980): 11.

[13]The life-giving powers of self-esteem are marvelously depicted in the John Paul Jones of Israel Potter. Potter notes how Paul stays up all night only to become completely re-energized by morning. His aids are: a mirror, "the consciousness of possessing a character as yet unfathomed, and hidden power to back unsuspected projects." Herman Melville, Israel Potter: His Fifty Years of Exile (New York: Sagamore Press, 1957), p. 87.

[14]Ernest Becker, The Denial of Death (New York: Free Press, 1973), p. 121.

[15]The narrator's murmured line, "With kings and counselors" (73), comes from Job's first soliloquy of lament (3:14). Job 3:11-15 and 23-26 is discussed in relation to the ending of the story by Stanley Brodwin, "To the Frontiers of Eternity: Melville's Crossing in 'Bartleby, the Scrivener'" in Bartleby the Inscrutable: A Collection of Commentary, ed. M. Thomas Inge (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1979), pp. 189-91.

[16]Friedrich Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra (II 8), as quoted by Walter Kaufmann, Nietzsche (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 271.

Conclusion

The majority of men in any generation, even those who,
as it is said, are occupied with thinking (professors and
the like), live on and die in the illusion of a continuous
process, that if they were granted a longer life the
process would be a continued direct ascent of comprehending
more and more. How many ever arrive at the maturity of
discovering that a critical point comes where it reverses,
where from now on the ascending comprehension is to
comprehend more and more that there is something which
cannot be comprehended.

Kierkegaard[1]

Art plays an unknowing game with ultimate things, and yet
achieves them.

Paul Klee[2]

Enjoy the bright, keep' it turned up perpetually if you
can, but be honest, and don't deny the black.

"The Encantadas"[3]

The movement I have tried to follow in this study, the
dialectic that infuses Melville's imagination under the impact of
his response to his times, could be traced through both the prose
and poetry appearing, largely without a readership, over the
nearly forty years that follow publication of "Bartleby" in 1853.
It could be examined, as well, in relation to the variously
fashioned and very differently directed dialectical inspirations
of Dostoevsky, Marx, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche, the group of
seminal and (in a broad, not an elite sense of the word) heroic
nineteenth-century thinkers to which he properly belongs. Such
a study might take many possible directions and might expand to
compare also the twentieth-century figure of Freud. But if it
turned to probe an area termed "theories of human corruption"[4]--
of what goes rudimentarily wrong in individuals and/or society--
I think Melville would divulge his greatest affinity with his
(unknown to him) contemporary, Kierkegaard. There is a remark-
able similarity in the way both focus, first of all, not upon the
psycho-sexual basis of neurosis (though in Melville's case Pierre
is a cogent instance of that), and not upon the forms of aliena-
tion rooted in the oppressiveness of the socio-economic order
(and yet see Israel Potter), but upon the centrality of despair
in human life--how it hides behind the masks of normality and
madness, and can be heard crying out behind culturally nurtured
acts of self-deception.

The key to such a view is the notion of an indispensable
relation between persons and what they presuppose as 'other' to

themselves, a relation which social and psychological distortions usually transmute into a 'disrelation', as Kierkegaard calls it. But to whatever an individual may choose to relate his or her life with passionate seriousness, no matter how thoroughgoing the masks of irony or cynicism, or how rich the veins of humor, it is narrative, whether as literature or biography, which offers a way to make the contours of the relation come visibly alive in terms of the quality of the relation and its central element of courage. In that sense, crucial connections are discernable between Melville characters as different as Tommo, Babbalanja, Stubb, Queequeg, the Chola Widow, John Marr, and Clarel, connections evincing that 'depth' which repeatedly replenished the author in his creative task. Often such connections between characters seem most obvious in terms of their brokenness, the inevitable smashups that occur when the centers around which people organize themselves disappear or turn out to be demonic. From one realistic angle, those smashups simply substantiate a notion like that expressed by Albert Camus: "There is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn."[5] But from another angle, which requires the engagement of a reader to be realized, they tell liberating truths about human decisions through their reenactment in the widest context of human meaning. Their unflinching portrayal allows fragmentary apprehension of what cannot finally be made an object of calculation, or of indifference. Such apprehension is possible for the same reason that Melville could be so pre-occupied with heroic failure, a reason that has been stated in ontological terms by Paul Tillich: "Every act of courage is a

manifestation of the ground of being, however questionable the
content of the act may be. The content may hide or distort true
being, the courage in it reveals true being."[6]

Melville shares with both Kierkegaard and Tillich an
awareness "that there is something which cannot be comprehended."
For Tillich, however, we are also comprehended: "We are known in
a depth of darkness through which we ourselves do not even dare
to look. And at the same time, we are seen in a height of
fullness which surpasses our highest vision."[7] Sometimes this
is, and sometimes it clearly is not, Melville's sense of the
deeper truth, the incessantly repressed truth of human lives.
His argument for taking the stultifying word 'god' out of the
dictionary, or his emphasis on the recalcitrant indeterminateness
of the very notion, or his observation in a letter to Hawthorne
that "there is a slight dash of flunkeyism" in employing "a
capital initial in the pronoun referring to the Diety," or, in
the same letter, his awareness that "the mass of men" long to
submit to "Him," a parental authority whom "at bottom" they
"dislike"[8]--these ideas colour Melville's thought at every step
and make it impossible to identify him with any theological or
anti-theological position. But however he is labelled
spiritually, and however the 'Melville industry' may cash in on
his stirring side or, more recently, his harshly nullifying side,
it is Melville's insistence on asking contemplative questions and
on achieving "ultimate things" that makes his art heroic. Again,
I do not mean 'heroic' in the sense of tackling or constructing
something larger than life, the supporting role required of

culture heroes. I mean, rather, the sense that Melville risked
the direction of his thought, allowing it to become larger, and
consequently darker ("The light is greater, hence the shadow
more"[9]) than a great many people will permit theirs to be.

Melville's restless concern with ultimacy places him at odds
with the very strong grain in the American tradition of pragmatic
thinking, a stance towards life which, in the interests of
getting the literary, historical, educational, philosophical,
or theological job done, quickly grows impatient with the
unfeasibleness of imponderables. There is, perhaps, an edge of
such impatience in Hawthorne's journal-record of his last meeting
with Melville:

> Melville, as he always does, began to reason of
> Providence and futurity, and of everything that lies
> beyond human ken, and informed me that he had "pretty
> much made up his mind to be annihilated"; but still he
> does not seem to rest in that anticipation; and, I
> think, will never rest until he gets hold of a definite
> belief. It is strange how he persists--and has
> persisted ever since I knew him, and probably long
> before--in wandering to-and-fro over these deserts, as
> dismal and monotonous as the sand hills amid which we
> were sitting.[10]

At the same time, Hawthorne goes on to affirm a greatness in this
'persistence', yet rightly I think, without situating Melville on
a pedestal beyond criticism. For to gloss over the ambiguities
inherent in every heroic stance--not least of all, the destruc-
tive effects it may have on those close to such a person--or, to
deny Melville's limitations as an author--his inability to
portray sexual love, for instance--would be to ignore the
incessant demand for conscious critique which comprises fully
one-half of Melville's own thinking, the same demand that led

him to embody the demonic facets of heroism in Ahab, and to show
the results of sexual repression in "The Tartarus of Maids."
Perhaps the dialectic of intuition and suspicion in Melville's
thought, which can in turn be directed in this way towards his
works, has the overall impact of displacing certainty from
knowledge and belief. Still, after completing this segment of
my voyage through his writings, I _feel_ with some certainty what
Hawthorne means when he says at the end of his entry on Melville
that "he has a very high and noble nature"; and further, that,
among all men, he would have to be considered one of the most
genuinely "reverential"--"if he were a religious man."

NOTES to the CONCLUSION

[1] Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers, 7 vols., ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967-1978), 3: 636.

[2] Paul Klee, Schöpfersiche Konfession (Berlin: E. Reiss, 1920), p. 40. The passage is quoted by F. David Martin, Art and the Religious Experience: The "Language" of the Sacred (Cranbury, N.J.: Associated University Presses, 1972), p. 152.

[3] Great Short Works of Herman Melville, ed. Warner Berthoff (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), p. 104.

[4] John Douglas Mullen, Kierkegaard's Philosophy (New York: New American Library, 1981), p. 59.

[5] Albert Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus, trans. Justin O'Brien (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955), p. 90.

[6] Paul Tillich, The Courage to Be (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952), p. 181.

[7] Paul Tillich, The Shaking of the Foundations (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), p. 50.

[8] Melville to Hawthorne, 1? June 1851, The Letters of Herman Melville, ed. Merrell R. Davis and William H. Gilman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), p. 129.

[9] From the "Epilogue" to Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land, ed. Walter E. Bezanson (New York: Hendricks House, 1960), p. 523.

[10] Nathaniel Hawthorne, The English Notebooks, ed. Randall Stewart (London: Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 432.

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