Heather Ann Raff

STRUCTURE AND IMAGERY IN
MELVILLE'S SHORT STORIES OF THE 1850's

Department of English

Master of Arts Degree

This study focusses on the aesthetic strategy of Melville's short stories that preceded his long artistic silence. Viewed against the background of the tale tradition that Poe and Hawthorne were part of, Melville's stories mark a new departure. They are an exploration of attempts to see, an exploration of points of view. All reveal the impossibility of knowing anything absolutely and the counterfeit nature of art--which can create, through imagery that both unites and reveals an inner split, a beautiful illusion despite the void at the centre. One's vision of reality, Melville illustrates, is ultimately ambiguous. Appearances are illusory and the essence of life can be comprehended only with the death of the spirit and subsequent silence. Perhaps Melville had discovered that his "reality," some dogmatically ascertainable set of truths, simply does not exist, and that all life, therefore, consists of shifting appearances. The stories are ultimately seen, then, as a study of appearances.

STRUCTURE AND IMAGERY

IN

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by

Heather Ann Raff

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Department of English
McGill University
Montreal

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CHAPTER ONE

POE, HAWTHORNE, AND MELVILLE AND THE TALE TRADITION

It is common enough knowledge that Poe's contribution to the short story form was his striving for singleness of effect. It is perhaps ironic that the single effect Poe seemed so obsessed with to achieve was one of horror, and so, as Harry Levin has suggested,[1] his purpose seemed to be to enclose us and himself, alive, in that very claustrophobic coffin that was to his mind the supremely horrible situation that one might ever happen to be in. It is as if he kept meeting this fear of deadly oppression by rendering it artistically again and again. So very often his stories are the hysterically babbled confessions of a first person narrator before, during, and after he has committed, almost without will or feeling, some lawless, perverse, or unreasonable act. In a sense, then, "The Cask of

[1] In The Power of Blackness (New York, 1958), Harry Levin says that Poe "plays the hypnotist, continually bent upon effecting a transference of emotions or sensations. That is why the short story is peculiarly his medium, since its concentration helps him to cast a spell--or, in his own critical terms, to aim at unity of effect" (p. 135); and "yet his very phrase for obtaining a concentrated effect, 'a close circumscription of space,' harks back obsessively to his dread of confinement" (p. 161).

Amontillado" and others are stories about Poe's story-telling method. For telling a horror story is to perform a horrible act. These "acts" have been called nervous ones,[1] for all the serious craftsmanship and conscious artistic intent evident from Poe's theorizing.[2] But Poe really ploughed just one furrow: the perverse depths of man. Levin has interestingly termed his tales "Notes from the Underground,"[3] and indeed the feverishness of his narrators reminds us strongly of Raskolnikov and other disturbed Dostoievskian protagonists.

Certainly it is difficult to avoid using clinical terminology in describing the mind behind Poe's tales. Primarily it reveals a schizophrenic syndrome. In all his stories, from the horror tales to the tales of ratiocination to the more complex "The Fall of the House of Usher," one senses the utter split, the fight to the end, between mind and body, feelings and actions, sense for life (that we call the moral sense) and total disregard of it. The destruction of matter itself seems to be what Poe's heroes are hell-bent on accomplishing, whether "matter" be a life that must be quenched, a corpse that must be destroyed or caused to rot, or a house that must be brought down and engulfed by the

[1]Charles Feidelson, Jr., in Symbolism and American Literature, Phoenix edition (Chicago, 1953), sees Poe's nerves keyed to the point of "desperation" (p. 4).

[2]Feidelson says that Poe "considered the poet a craftsman, deliberately constructing the vehicle of irrationality" (p. 37).

[3]Levin's ch. V on Poe, pp. 132-164.

earth. An impulse of this nature will not allow for much flexibility, either in theme or techniques. "Usher" stands as a momentary triumph of the artist in experimenting with structural technique and point of view. This story, told through a normal, limited man drawn into a scene of sickly yet beautiful decay, bears remarkable affinities to Melville's "Benito Cereno." But Melville is not concerned with the destruction of matter in his works: Ahab is bent on destruction, but it is the insoluble problem of knowledge, the truth of the inscrutability of everything, the sublime disinterest and the element of chance at the core that he cannot tolerate, not matter itself. Similarly, Pierre and Bartleby destroy the matter of their bodies but only because they cannot live with the relativity of everything, the impossibility of truths.

Other than in the case of "Usher," I should not, as Feidelson does, group Poe quite so readily with, or at least not as so similar to, Emerson, Hawthorne, Whitman, and Melville as artists "preoccupied with a kind of archetypal figure . . . of Man Seeing, the mind engaged in the crucial act of knowledge."[1] Because truly, "realistically" to try to see, to explore the ways of seeing--through use of different characters as point of view or through searching out different vantage points--is to be wrangling with a mystery as immense and unknowable as the universe itself. Poe's self-avowed

[1]Feidelson, p. 5.

purpose is to create and control a mood,[1] rather than to explore ways of seeing and their validity. His artistic concerns are mainly environmental, then, and so "mysterious" supernatural phenomena and environmentally depicted psychic states (as in "Ligeia" and "William Wilson" and others) all serve to lead the reader away from his conventional bearings, but only into a hysterically pitched emotion, usually of repulsion from the flesh as the primal matter one experiences in life. Or perhaps I should say that Poe has few dealings with the forms of the naturalistic world that these other writers use as their basis for the quest: the open road, the ship, the foreign land, the city. Instead, Poe works backwards. If he is engaged in the act of seeing, it is a kind of intuitive realizing, a disregarding of the physical act of seeing and of the apparent world, an inspirational searching for knowledge. Like Dupin's, Poe's solutions are unreasoned, and that is why they can comprehend the irrational, unprogressive, and only superficially orderable nature of matter.

We might keep in mind the sensitive artist's (and gentleman's) predicament in an economically, pragmatically oriented culture which ignored the importance, even the existence, of the arts. In his

[1] In his essay "Twice-Told Tales" Poe asserts that the "skilful artist [who] has constructed a tale . . . has not fashioned his thoughts to accommodate his incidents, but having deliberately conceived a certain single effect to be wrought, he then invents such incidents, he then combines such events, and discusses them in such tone as may best serve him in establishing this preconceived effect." As quoted in Selected Writings of Edgar Allan Poe, ed. Edward H. Davidson, Riverside edition (Boston, 1956), p. 448.

brilliant study, Edward Davidson[1] suggests that in his real agony and sense of isolation, Poe's tales of irrationality (both those of horror and those of ratiocination) become a kind of revenge on frontier American culture. God-like artist, Romantic egotist ignored by the public, he created his own world. In it surface reality is largely ignored, except as expression of psychic deterioration. The criminal mind, or the equally anti-social, intuitively genius mind of the detective, is ironically the one in tune with the "real" reality, the irrational, amoral, chaotic activity of atomic matter.

But Poe does not write mystery tales in the way that "Bartleby" is a mystery story. Mysteriousness implies a flexibility, and a suggestion of unknown, even unknowable, possibilities, that Poe's tales do not generally give. His choice of point of view reflects this rigidity. Either we view the destructive force through the deft intuitive workings of a Dupin (for suspense, these are filtered through his more obtuse narrator-friend), in his tales of ratiocination, or, in his horror tales, through the unbalanced mind of the criminal, as in the sadistic husband of "The Black Cat" or the profligate protagonist of "William Wilson." The limitations though intensity of the narrator himself in his disturbed state, and the very thin delineation as well as sparsity if not total lack of other characters except in ghost form or in the narrator's memory, do not

[1]See Edward H. Davidson's Poe: A Critical Study (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1966).

allow the reader much scope for seeing more than the narrator himself does. Indeed, part of the effect of horror arises from the fact that we do not find out what is going on in the protagonist's mind prior to and during his struggle to relate to the world: either we see the lonely, agonizing deterioration reflected in the physical universe around him, as in "Usher," or we enter his mind after it is in the convulsive grip of the irrational, violent, criminal impulse, as in "The Cask of Amontillado," or "William Wilson."

In this last story the double technique is used, though not in any sophisticated way. The psyche, split into "conscience" and "perverse longings," hounds itself to self-destruction. "Bartleby," another double story, shows what more can be done with the technique. Poe deals in perversity, and Melville's Bartleby is perverse, lawless, and unreasonable, but to say that Poe explores the interior Bartleby world which Melville leaves almost a blank is somehow off the mark. Bartleby is a symbol in a way that none of Poe's characters seems to be. His silence, seen through the point of view of a conventional yet fairly complex man of society, for example, is more potent, because unknowable, than the total self-revelation of Poe's characters.

I am not suggesting that a sound mind is necessary to produce fine art: certainly Melville himself was only a "whole man" in Typee and Omoo, though he summoned up monumental vitality and health that he could not really spare to bring forth Moby Dick. Yet even in his last writing days, in the short stories that shall be examined in this study and which are a prelude to the silence that

followed them, he maintains an artistic flexibility, using these shorter materials to experiment widely with fictional techniques. Poe's artistic experimentation was nowhere as diverse as Melville's.

Hawthorne's gift is to use allegory ambiguously--not, in the traditional way, truths of the heart definitively. His tales are "modern" in this sense despite their deceptive surface simplicity, which causes many to read like children's stories. In "Rappaccini's Daughter," for example, are found several classic elements of the fairy tale: the wicked sorcerer, the beautiful captivated maiden, and her handsome rescuer; the concretization of abstracts so that "evil" is actually poison in the blood and breath and "exotic strangeness" that reveals itself in colour and dress--all contribute in creating a fantasy world. Yet each element is simultaneously subtle, more complex, and ambiguous. Giovanni represents not simply the virtues of the just and lawful civilization that the fairy tale prince does: he is drawn in both by the attractions of the garden and Beatrice and by some inner inclination, whether a greed for power over life and death or for some immersion in the unhealthy magic he has viewed from his balcony. The fairy tale prince, instead, would come in to contest the hand of the maiden and to carry her off. The "man of civilization" here is Gaglioni, who also appears in an ambiguous light. Not the protective fairy godmother figure alone, he has a jealousy that is a poison in his veins. Beatrice, deadly <u>against</u> her will and spirit, dies by the

"curative" potion of her lover, now clearly weak, bitter, and strangely effeminate.

This ambiguity that arises from Hawthorne's use of allegory is what differentiates it from the fairy tale. Thus Hawthorne shares a modernity--the recognition and expression of ambiguities--with Poe and Melville. He also shares an ambivalence in point of view with these two writers. "The Minister's Black Veil" seems a simple allegory, yet we ambivalently feel something of the parson's need for exposing the dark side of life, and too the parishioners' suspicion about this exhibitionism, this suspect, self-chosen isolation. In "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" there is a somewhat more complex suggestion of the ambivalence revealed through the double theme. The old order, the heritage of the past, the sustaining family lineage in the person of the Major is routed out of town. Robin recognizes his own features in the Major's face, yet is perversely, unwillingly impelled to laugh in scorn and possibly with a sense of freedom. Foreshadowings of an uncertain though open future are implicit in the character of the mob, the "new democracy," and in Robin's obvious naïveté, and apparent openness to the forces of corruption[1] so far revealed in his town visit. This

[1]In his "Journey into Moral Darkness: 'My Kinsman, Major Molineux' as Allegory," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, XIX (1964), pp. 171-184, Arthur T. Broes points to the significance of Robin's laugh as "recognition of the triumph of evil" (p. 183), and Young Goodman Brown, his sense of "loathful brotherhood" with the cruel townspeople as he addresses them as "friends."

is no simple allegory, though it is a tale. Yet it seems to me the closest of Hawthorne's tales to a short story in the more modern sense, possibly because of this use of the double technique, and partly because the story is open-ended, finally. Robin's has been a "journey into moral darkness"[1] in a "world largely given over to evil,"[2] but in spite of this general gloom his future is still open, unlived and untold.

Yet generally in artistic method and intent Poe and Melville seem to me more modern than Hawthorne. Hawthorne's vision, for the most part organically coherent and cohesive and belonging more to the past than the present, is one perfectly suited to the tale, especially the allegorical. This vision lends itself to the linear movement of plot (a chronological progression of events happening usually to the main character) that has always characterized the tale, and the simple characters who are often merely allegorical expressions of certain single qualities, like Faith in "Young Goodman Brown," or who are representative, like the protagonist of this tale who is any ordinary, decent man. The point of view is also straightforwardly clear and simple: usually a kindly, wise, detached teller, acting as a sort of host, invites the reader to "imagine himself [a] guest, . . . ushered into [his] study" to be

[1]Broes, p. 184.

[2]Broes, p. 183.

seated in "an antique elbow chair."[1] This detachment within the tale itself may be further advanced not only by the tone but also by the technique, the central story being just one circle of several concentric rings of stories. In "Rappaccini's Daughter" the voice that opens the story gives a gentle, critical assessment of a certain M. Aubépine, and then proceeds to "translate" one of this gentleman's tales for us. Even within this tale, the major one, there is a further small ring, a sub-tale, that is a comment on the larger tale. But because of these clear points of view, initially of the pleasantly mild critic and translator, no matter how murky and poisonous and strangely exotic a view of evil we glimpse in the tale of "Rappaccini's Daughter" itself, we come away with both a unified vision of life and a "message" to think about in a mood, really, of quiet contemplation.

I think that this is largely due to Hawthorne's acceptance of the limits of the tale, despite his rigorous tightening and purification of it from much of Washington Irving's discursiveness. But Hawthorne did not find the limits of the tale, at least until several years later when he moved on to the novel-romance, constricting to his vision, as Melville surely did. The limits of the form that Melville inherited encouraged him to experiment in many ways with the short story form: he never settled on one technique for long. Hawthorne's acceptance of the tradition of the tale compared

[1]Nathaniel Hawthorne, "The Old Manse," Mosses from an Old Manse, Wayside edition (Boston and New York, 1882), p. 46. Hereafter cited as Mosses.

to Melville's rebellion against it is characteristic of their different visions, for all that Melville felt a strong kinship for this fellow naysayer.[1] Hawthorne works *a priori*: he expresses through the definitive tale some truth he has already gleaned. It might be a moral about every man's partaking of evil ("Young Goodman Brown," "The Minister's Black Veil," and others), or about the necessity of accepting human limitations in this fallen world ("The Birthmark"), or about the precariousness of the sensitive aesthetic vision in a material world ("The Artist of the Beautiful"). Whatever the truth, it is generally accepted and expressed, for all the ambiguities, within a classical allegorical framework.

Hawthorne the writer strikes us as very much like his artist Owen, who, platonically, conceives of the Idea, works it out imaginatively for some time, then laboriously sets himself to the painstaking craftman's work of materializing it. Significantly, Owen's piece of artistry is a tiny butterfly, just as the characters in Hawthorne's tales strike us as clearly defined, colorful miniatures, their master's shadowy figure looming forever over them, arranging and rearranging their positions. All art is, of course, contrived. But while Melville came to regard fiction finally as an intolerable deception, Hawthorne, at least in his tales, looks upon

[1]See Melville's letter to Hawthorne, March (?), 1851, in *Herman Melville: Representative Selections* (New York, 1938), edited by Willard Thorp, p. 388.

the act of contriving, of controlling, working and reworking within the limits he accepts, as the finest craft for the sensitive imagination.

Hawthorne's settings and characters seem fashioned for a purpose. As in fairy tales, the simple settings are all visually clear and perfectly apt. The city in "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," for example, physically reflects in the "succession of crooked and narrow streets" the "twisted moral fabric of the town itself."[1] The exotic weediness of Rappaccini's enclosed garden surely expresses the scientist's corruption, just as the old stone fountain with its ever gushing, sparkling water "is the true and eternal Beatrice, unharmed by the evil of mortality," while the purple, deadly shrub beside it "is the external Beatrice."[2] Away from the civilized constrictions of the town, the woods, another representative setting of the fairy tale, reveal the darker truths of one's nature, as Young Goodman Brown discovered.

Given, then, the constricted geographic structure, and given the representative kind of characters--no matter how ambiguous, they have none of the complex inner characterization of writing grounded in psychological and social realism--Hawthorne's Idea is worked out materially in his story. In the few strict and transparent allegories like "The Procession of Life," one senses that

[1]Broes, p. 177.

[2]Fogle, Hawthorne's Fiction: The Light and the Dark (Norman, Okla., 1964), p. 94.

Hawthorne is turning away even from the material, fallen world that is his subject by spiritualizing his characters. Their names are sufficient indicators: "Posterity," "Child Unborn," "Man of Fancy," and so on.

"The Old Manse" differs from the other tales in that it seems to depict an acceptance of nature as it is in its unpruned yet fruitful orchards, meandering streams, and sudden drenching rains and bursts of sunshine. It similarly depicts an acceptance of his own reveries and wandering thoughts. This monologue is itself guided by the narrator's line of vision as it chances to stray onto objects here and there. A preamble like "[We] will return thither through the orchard"[1] directs the reader geographically, as it were. As part of this atmosphere of natural movement there is the sense of time passing during the story through the changes of weather within the story: "rain pattered upon the roof . . . while I burrowed among these venerable books"; "blessed was the sunshine when it came again."[2]

Hawthorne's portrayal of the natural—as it is in "The Old Manse" and as the artist chooses it to be in the majority of his tales—reveals a nostalgia for the pastoral typical of the American psyche. Hawthorne's nostalgia takes its most explicit form, fittingly,

[1] Mosses, p. 20.

[2] Mosses, p. 29.

in his introductory tale to Mosses from an Old Manse: here the very imagery shows a continual fusion between the natural and human worlds: "up gushed our talk like the babble of a fountain"[1]; "thought grows mouldy"[2]; trees are a "quiet congreation"[3] in the orchard, for they "possess a domestic character [and] have grown humanized by receiving the care of man as well as by contributing to his wants."[4] This fusion suggests an Edenic world and thus forms a significant structural pattern that is an important aspect of the way in which Hawthorne made the limits of the tale serve his personal interests and cultural heritage. The Edenic bliss of the newlywed in his old manse becomes a nostalgia for the feeling of oneness with the world, now forever unattainable.

All the other tales that follow take place in the fallen world, and so reflect the inherent divisions in it: between God and man, man and nature, and man against man. In these tales, where evil is an anarchical power, nature must be ordered by the artist to give his fiction an artistic form and fusion not otherwise possible. Of course, nature is not so neat--Hawthorne must order it for his art, whereas Melville, since he cannot find order in nature, does not try to order his art as logically as Hawthorne. Melville is more realistic than the more reductive Hawthorne. Like art, life,

[1] Mosses, p. 35.

[2] p. 29.

[3] p. 33.

[4] p. 21.

Hawthorne implies, demands that we set up and acknowledge our limits. If we do not, we will be punished. He, for example, who wishes to intrude on the secret of another individual's heart, as Ethan Brand did, or to improve on nature, as Aylmer did, is destroyed.

Hawthorne's vision of man's aspiring pride has a close affinity to Melville's: both of them shared some deep sense of guilt for this hubris, this original sin of Adam. The search to know, and, as artist, to create, is to be God-like: it is therefore to dethrone God, to perform the act of patricide. But whereas Hawthorne turned inward to the moral truths he saw in the human heart, Melville kept striving in all directions, from Pierre, who turned inward, to Taji and Ahab, who carried their search out into space for the very meaning of life. Yet Melville found with them that the truth was always unreachable and mysteriously hidden--possibly not even a valid concept, for speculation alone suggests that there are set truths. His turning inward was to the silence of Bartleby, and finally to his own professional silence. As he withdrew gradually during his last few writing years, he experimented restlessly with the shorter forms of fiction--the short story, the sketch, the diptych, the joke, even the allegory--whose very abbreviated length is perhaps expressive of the silence soon to come. In contrast to Hawthorne's tales, which work out a message that dispels life's mystery, that even naturalize the supernatural through allegory

(when evil and guilt can become a simple black veil), Melville's stories, mostly all grounded in history and fact, end, inevitably, in a greater sense of mystery than one sensed even at their beginning.[1] Harry Levin has made the distinction I may be looking for when he says that Moby Dick (and we could add "Bartleby," "Benito Cereno," "The Bell-Tower," and others) "is not a mystery . . . : it is a book about a mystery."[2]

Hawthorne's method clearly could not serve Melville's needs. He used it shakily in his allegorical "The Fiddler," adding the Melvillean technique of poet-narrator as a hat-knocking-off Ishmael figure. But Hautboy himself, supposedly representative of the matured, experienced, stoically enduring yet paradoxically hedonistic man in a frighteningly chastening world, to my mind calls up a grotesque memory of the plump, apple-cheeked, callous bachelor boy Cupid of the slavish factory in "The Tartarus of Maids." Melville's other allegorical sketches do not suggest this kind of awkward incongruity simply because he used the allegorical method in them ironically: they are his jest stories, "I and My Chimney" and "The Apple-Tree Table." True, there is in these tales none of

[1] I except the allegorical "The Fiddler" and "Jimmy Rose," and the domestic jests of "The Apple-Tree Table" and "I and My Chimney."

[2] p. 224. Levin refers to Melville's letter to Hawthorne that says: "Perhaps the secret may be that there is no secret" (p. 223).

the generative, ever-expanding vigour[1] of what Shulman calls the "phallic jokes"[2] of Moby Dick. Yet in a more limited, subdued way they reveal a writer still capable of playing with his materials and viewing the protagonist-self with much detachment. To my taste there is too much domesticity about these tales. But of course it is this very domestic fussiness, this household expediency, that is being joked about, the limitations of the wife who cannot see the "reason" for the ungainly and strange chimney's existence, and of the wife and daughters who do not believe that something beautiful came out of the husband's old table until it is proven in a visual, concrete way. The narrator himself, and his "strangeness" (his imagination? his masculinity? his philosophical concerns? his writings?), are part of this domestic jesting too, inversely. In any case, the allegorical tale was obviously not suited to Melville's intentions. There was no system of belief or unbelief that, as Hawthorne wrote in 1856, Melville could "be comfortable in,"[3] and serious allegory must surely arise from some such system. Though an oversimplification, it can be said that for

[1]In a letter to Hawthorne (Nov. [?], 1851) Melville wrote in the throes of creativity, "Lord, when shall we be done growing?" As quoted on p. 395 in Herman Melville: Representative Selections.

[2]Robert Shulman, "The Serious Functions of Melville's Phallic Jokes," American Literature, XXXIII (1961-1962), pp. 179-194.

[3]Nathaniel Hawthorne, The English Notebooks, ed. Randall Stewart (New York, 1941), p. 433.

all their affinity, Melville's mind was a Protestant one, that is, eternally protesting, and Hawthorne's, orthodox. Hawthorne has a feeling for sin, individual and communal; Melville's mind flexes itself over continents and oceans. The darkness he tries to survive is not sin but the very essence of space.

Fairly recent attempts have been made[1] to see Melville's turning to shorter fiction and experimenting with it as a beginning to a new career, a "great victory" in mastering a new genre, producing "the best product compatible" with what he felt "'most moved to write,'" that Melville was only a bit "tired and perhaps irritable" but otherwise "in full command of his powers," and ready to continue in his profession.[2] But to this, first I should say that none of these attempts explains why Melville stopped writing[3] altogether after these few years of experimenting with short stories.

[1]Charles G. Hoffmann, in "The Shorter Fiction of Herman Melville," South Atlantic Quarterly, LII (1953), pp. 414-430, sees Melville turning to shorter fiction for purely artistic reasons because he "bogged down in the attempt to work with large blocks of material" (p. 416), and puts aside any interpretations of despair. It is an interesting point that cannot be discarded, for it may very well be part of the answer. A. W. Plumstead, noted below, takes up this point and uses it in relation to "Bartleby."

[2]A. W. Plumstead, "Bartleby: Melville's Venture into a New Genre," ch. 7, "Bartleby the Scrivener": The Melville Annual, A Symposium, 1965, ed. Howard P. Vincent (Kent, 1966), p. 92.

[3]After The Piazza Tales of 1856 and The Confidence Man of 1857, Melville wrote only poetry for himself and a small group of friends and family, who would publish it privately. Billy Budd remained a manuscript. Melville died in 1891.

To me Melville was undoubtedly retreating from the profession during these very years, as Richard Chase so eloquently maintains. This is not to deny the quality of the artistry[1] or the real inventiveness of the artist-craftsman as he takes over the tale genre and experiments boldly with point of view, structure, and style to something quite different from the tale. Indeed the subject of this paper will be just that. But it is to see in all of the stories, most explicitly in "Benito Cereno," a retiring artist's apologia. The message behind this richly aesthetic story from Captain Delano's third person point of view as well as in its factual, legal document, and in its small, impersonally viewed, final tableau is that none of these approaches provides an access to the ever-hidden truth.[2]

The conviction that all art is inadequate or misleading and therefore counterfeit is the conclusion Pierre came to as he nailed his book to the table.[3] This is one step further from the

[1]In Herman Melville: A Critical Study (New York, 1949), Richard Chase says the "the mood of withdrawal . . . is a literary style in which Melville wrote some of his best prose" (p. 152).

[2]Allen Guttmann, in "The Enduring Innocence of Captain Amaso Delano," Boston University Studies in English, V (1961), pp. 35 - 45, discusses this point which will be further explored in this paper in chapters two and three.

[3]Feidelson says the style of Pierre is that "of an author who suspects from the beginning what his hero discovers in the end, that all literature is meretricious" (p. 201).

crucial problem of the writer who is compelled to write "books which are said to 'fail'"[1] in the world's terms, and the public, not any intellectual élite, is the audience Melville felt so strongly about writing for. Therefore we can approach our subject with the foreknowledge of the complex problem Melville was faced with. His various manipulations of fictional technique in the short stories may be explored and seen in a two-fold way. At the same time as he is experimenting with new techniques to express what he must, he is dramatizing, by this very shifting about, the artist's predicament.

[1]In a letter from Melville to Lemuel Shaw (October, 1849), as quoted in The Portable Melville, Viking edition, ed. Jay Leyda (New York, 1952), p. 385.

CHAPTER TWO

WAYS OF SEEING: THE AMBIGUITY OF THINGS

Much has been said about the thematic content of Melville's short fiction, especially "Bartleby the Scrivener" and "Benito Cereno." Approaches to the meaning of these stories, usually through character, have been done, one might say, definitively.[1] It may be time to follow Hoffmann's tentative lead[2] and approach them from the standpoint of form.

Certainly the tale tradition of Hawthorne and Poe would not serve a "modern" mind like Melville's. Chase has discussed this "modernity" in terms of the American setting, and the contradictions that have "excited the American imagination, . . . traceable to certain historical facts." He describes all these as having made

[1]See my bibliography.

[2]A shifting approach (some brief consideration of structure, etc., but mostly a study of character and theme) has been taken by Richard Harter Fogle in Melville's Shorter Tales (Norman, 1960). Fogle generally accepts the fact that these are Melville's tales, and that "what he really has to say is at odds with the limits he has chosen to observe" (p. 12). I emphasize these words because I do not believe he chose to observe the tale's limits. Hoffmann's article, already mentioned, generally discusses form mostly in terms of settings, what characters represent, and so on, and makes no explicit differentiation between Hawthore's tales and Melville's new approaches.

a deep impression on the "national consciousness": the "solitary position" of man placed on a new continent; the "Manichaean quality of New England Puritanism" interested not so much in resolution as in the "melodrama of the eternal struggle of good and evil," "enhanced by the racial composition of our people"; and the "dual allegiance of the American . . . to the Old World and the New."[1] I should add to this what held true also for the Russian imagination: the recently barbaric past and its endlessly divided tribal groupings, the immensity of geographical space that was lying open for the taking and at the same time proving, through the extremities of weather and the natural, violent dangers of woods, mountains, canyons, plains, and water, a hazardous and lonely testing ground, where man must either turn animal to survive, or resort to politically extreme measures to "resolve" human conflicts. The violence of civil war and revolution, and the all-inclusiveness of communist socialism and democratic capitalism, are all extremist ways of creating a setting in which a culture can grow.

How, then, does the artist's mind work in this "culture of contradictions"?[2] Chase answers that "the American novel tends to rest on contradictions and among extreme ranges of experience.

[1]Richard Chase, The American Novel and its Tradition, Anchor books edition (New York, 1957), p. 11.

[2]Chase, first sub-title of his Chapter I, "The Broken Circuit," p. 1.

When it attempts to resolve contradictions, it does so in oblique, morally equivocal ways."[1] Relevant to our consideration of Melville's experimentation in his modern approach to the tale is Chase's comment on the intent of the American artistic imagination. It "has not been stirred by the possibility of catharsis or incarnation, by the tragic or Christian possibility. It has been stirred, rather, by the aesthetic possibilities of radical forms of alienation, contradiction, and disorder."[2]

To render, then, the complexities of experience was something we can agree on that Melville was attempting to do in his writing. Urgently romantic as he was, for all the "philosopher" or the primarily sociable citizen that Watters insists on,[3] Melville tried to go even further. Pierre attempts to define his very self, trying and casting off different styles of living, from pastoral love to Hamlet-like anxiety to artistic catharsis, as Melville tries and casts off various literary styles as they prove inadequate and false. Pierre is the last writing, it seems, that

[1] p. 1. [2] p. 2.

[3] In possibly a misguided attempt to find a humanistic, moral touchstone to unify Melville's work, R. E. Watters tends to regard all Melville's characters in terms of their isolation from the community, an isolation which was, says Watters, to Melville the major sin. See "Melville's 'Isolatoes,'" PMLA, LX (1945), pp. 1138-1148 and "Melville's 'Sociality,'" American Literature, XVII (1945-1946), pp. 33-49.

Melville had his heart in.[1]

How can this deadlock, this blind alley, this blocking up, be expressed in form in terms of the short story? We have suggested already that the abbreviated length of his writing is indicative for Melville, at least, of encroaching artistic silence. Second, the formal fragmentation of these sketches, diptychs, allegories, jests, and short stories as a group is an overall phenomenon reflected again and again in their interior splits and in their very broken structures.

This interior fragmentation is caused by the use of shifts in point of view to represent attempts to see and to explore different ways of seeing. The kind of character through whose eyes we see, for example, Captain Delano or the lawyer of "Bartleby," and the spatial position the narrator searches for and uses, for instance, in "The Piazza", are both of crucial importance. It becomes evident especially in "The Bell-Tower" that one's way of conceiving things is directly related to the way one perceives. In this story two ways of feeling about the world direct two ways of seeing, and these are explored by an impersonal author rather than an individual character.

While all the stories explore different ways of seeing things, inevitably one is faced with the basic duality of everything: their appearance(s) and their unknowable "real" nature. Each thing, each scene, seems to have a deceptive aspect from afar,

[1]The confidence man is only a series of assumed identities. One senses the inner void.

and often on close inspection reveals only the core, the basic instinctual life principle: the will to survive in any form, through any means, of the living cell. Melville's mind characteristically entertains the dualistic sense of a thing simultaneously. Thus it is continually aware of both sides of the tortoise, the dark and the bright, even though only one is evident at a time; it is aware of both paradise and Tartarus, of the petals of the rose and the gnawing worms in the center, of the aesthetic beauty of the Spanish civilization and its parasitic use of slaves, of Bartleby's nobility and self-annihilating absurdity, and of "the dimpling water and the shark beneath"[1] of the ocean. Beyond this, and in the complex area of man's mind and motivations, as well as in the metaphysical, philosophical and religious realms and the spatial realm itself, search for "reality," "truth," is only, finally, an impossible quest. Those who insist on the quest to its end, as Pierre did through his attempts to write "a mature book,"[2] that is, a Book of Truths, will discover that the nature of all art is as the nature of all apparent reality, all appearances.

> Yet now, forsooth, because Pierre began to see through the first superficiality of the world, he fondly weens he has come to the unlayered substance. But, far as any geologist has yet gone down into the world, it is found to consist of nothing but surface

[1]Fogle, Melville's Shorter Tales, p. 6.

[2]From title of Book XXI in Pierre Or, The Ambiguities, Signet edition (Toronto, 1965), p. 320.

> stratified on surface. To its axis, the world being nothing but superinduced superficies. By vast pains we mine into the pyramid; by horrible gropings we come to the central room; with joy we espy the sarcophagus; but we lift the lid - and no body is there! - appallingly vacant as vast is the soul of man![1]

Pierre's nailing his book to the table is the prelude to his self-crucifixion, for he could not subsist in the realm of relativity, of assumed roles, of various life styles, of chaotic amorality. This is to say that he could not keep afloat in the maelstrom, and so was sucked down, like Ahab, into the void of nonexistence.

The constantly shifting points of view within these stories dramatize the restlessness of the writer and finally his demonstration of the insufficiency of each. Melville's exploration of attempts to see, through these short stories that preceded his artistic silence, form the subject of this study. His aesthetic strategy, his experimentation in structure as defined by points of view, marks a new departure from the tale tradition which Poe and Hawthorne used. I have chosen to study the stories simply in order of the number of viewpoints each explores. Yet, predictably, in an attempt to organize Melville's stories in a logical way (numerically, here) one feels a little like the lawyer in "Bartleby" who tried to organize his scrivener into taking on usable and predictable roles. However I have kept in mind, and as a central focus of this thesis, the ambiguity of the Melville world. For all the stories reveal the

[1] Pierre, p. 323.

impossibility of knowing anything absolutely and the counterfeit nature of art—which can create, through imagery that both unites and reveals an inner split, a beautiful illusion despite the void at the centre.

Though in external structure "The Piazza" is in one part and "Benito Cereno" in three, internally each presents a three part approach in searching for the truth. "The Bell-Tower" is also overtly one, but internally it explores two ways of seeing, revealing two different ways of feeling, the historical and the supernatural; the diptychs reflect in their outer structure as well the very duality of their vision. "Bartleby" is consistently one in both outer form and actual point of view, for it is composed entirely of the confessions of an aging lawyer. Yet the silent character of the scrivener, possibly the narrator's own subconscious and therefore inextricably bound to him, serves to ignite constantly opposing dualities. Finally, the directionlessness, the constantly ranging, impersonal point of view of "The Encantadas" (as Fogle points out, the author even reminds us that Rock Rodondo, the most "comprehensive"[1] vantage point, can be climbed only in the imagination[2]), the seemingly endless splitting

[1]"The Encantadas," Selected Writings of Herman Melville, Modern Library edition (New York, 1952), p. 60. For references to all Melville's short stories discussed this text will be used.

[2]Fogle, Melville's Shorter Tales, p. 8.

into scenes and perspectives, at random fanciful or real, the very timelessness, all conspire to divest the reader of his ordinary bearings. One is left, at last, with the first duality ever to exist in the creation of the world: the light and the dark. They are not fused or blended on the tortoise's body, but entirely distinct, yet forever wedded to each other.

This central paradox of the ambiguity of everything is well demonstrated in this thesis of duality: that no thing and no quality exists except in terms of its opposite. If this holds true, then nothing can be known in itself. Nothing can be known absolutely. Perhaps the primal duality of the Melville world consists of its two basic materials, land and ocean. As far back as Typee the youthful, roving sailor, archetypal questor, chose to leave the limits of the land of his childhood to enter the ocean world where he might see more, and grow into a man. Redburn, before his first voyage, was imaginatively captured by the land scenes and "sea pieces,"[1] the paintings in his parents' home. In his youthful naïveté he thinks of the ocean in terms of land, that is, foreign land. The actual voyage will awaken him to the ranging expanses of elemental ocean life, as paradoxically it is accompanied by his painful initiation into adult land-life, that is, the evil on board the ship, as well as in the corrupted city of Liverpool.

[1] Redburn: His First Voyage, Anchor edition (New York, 1957), p. 4.

But more than the simple duality of land and sea as cultural (in its broadest sense) and elemental worlds, these materials that compose Melville's world reveal the possibilities of points of view. The ocean, being flat yet of profound, unknowable depths, encompasses, as Moby Dick attempted to, all points of view, and no one vantage point can exist or prevail. Thus the world of ocean represents the absoluteness that formed one polarity of Meville's never-ending dualistic conflict, his habitual way of seeing things. The other, of course, is all the limited and insufficient, therefore relative and limited, yet specific vantage points that land provides. This is the realm of history, of particular events and people and jobs like writing books with severe limits so that they will sell.

Allied with this are the psychological and emotional differences springing from land and ocean perspectives. Or, instead of "land" and "ocean," we might differentiate between closeness and distance, being "grounded" and being high up on a mast or mountain top: the tension seems to be that when one is distant, and especially high up, away from the "reality" of one's daily life, one can lose the painfully constricting self-consciousness that grinds one down in land-life. From on high, physically distanced from the fallen world, if you like, things become oceanic as one's mood is: rolling hills become endless billows, just as ocean wastes seem a vast plain, a "watery Kentucky"[1]

[1]"The Encantadas," p. 66.

Ironically, though there is this relief, in which "man's private grief is lost like a drop,"[1] one cannot see more clearly, in fact optical delusions caused by hazes, mists, glinting sunlight, or simply distance itself, lift one into a realm of pure imagination that may well lead one astray. And yet, if one descends or moves closer to the object viewed, one is again confined to his self-awareness, his limitations, his insignificance, his "comparatively squalid tussles of earth."[2]

My approach to the stories, through an examination of Melville's experimentations with points of view, will be to see his aesthetic strategy as a demonstration of ways of seeing, and a demonstration that one can only perceive appearances which themselves are not fixed. Here he seems most clearly modern, for he will not, as Poe and Hawthorne to some degree did, take on the role of artist as god-like creator of a universe. Ironically, Melville remains the "democratic man" the "ideal American," in this culture which he felt so alienated from. His abandonment of his art, finally, is a kind of paradoxical acquiescence to this anti-intellectual, pragmatic business culture.

[1]Herman Melville, Israel Potter, Russell and Russell, Inc., Standard edition (New York, 1963), p. 11.

[2]Israel Potter, p. 161.

CHAPTER THREE

THREE ATTEMPTS TO SEE IN "THE PIAZZA" AND "BENITO CERENO"

The narrator tests three spatial points of view within the single story of "The Piazza," and in the end stands in darkness and uncertainty. In "Benito Cereno" the author tries again three approaches to the truth of a scene but in three separate sections: through a simple man's eyes faced with an aesthetically rendered yet morally rotten situation, through the language of the law, and through the impersonally rendered observation of words and silences. Again each reveals an ambiguous appearance, none of which probes the "axis of reality"[1] except "covertly and by snatches."[1]

"The Piazza" is tale-like in a way because of its convival narrator-host (though one senses that his jovial, hospitable garrulity "doth protest too much"), its tale within a tale, and its spatial and temporal progression, the location of three main

[1] from "Hawthorne and His Mosses" (1850), as quoted in Thorp's edition of Selections, p. 334.

vantage points, following the natural linear movement of first the four views from the sides of the house, second of the journey, and third of the pacing in the dark on the verandah. In spite of this and the overt unity of its structural form, internal divisions are apparent.

The style and imagery in "The Piazza" serve not only to unite (artificially) but also to reveal a fundamental split--between art and nature. The kind of imagery used, the rich surface ornateness of the Spenserian fairyland world, the Arcadian allusions to classical mythology, the transposition of nature into the fantasy of the pastoral idyll, the references to paintings of "picture-galleries"[1] in order to describe the natural views of country and sky, all these underline the artfulness and artifice of literature, of its very deceptiveness, even, in portraying the truth. Only some inadequate system like the pastoral myth or the daydream world of illusions and longings can unify, though falsely, the manifold aspects of life in both man's world and nature's.

As part of this we must consider the point of view of the narrator as artist, both creator of illusive scenes like the gold-touched cottage at the end of the rainbow high on the mountain or "Madam Meadow Lark [who] plays her engagement here," as well as theatrical spectator in his "box-royal."[2] Spatially, all points of

[1] "The Piazza," p. 438. [2] p. 453.

view are troublesome to find and inadequate when located. Carefully, the narrator separately describes, and mulls over their particular virtues, each of the four views from his four-sided house: an entirely relative numerical splitting of the total scene, a cultural assumption, as it were, since man's house, a work of (pragmatically useful) art, is four-sided only because that is usually the most practical, expedient shape. Similarly, an attempt to see better by getting closer, to peel away the petals of the rose and reach its centre, reveals something sickeningly hard to accept as part of one's vision of reality, the "millions of strange, cankerous worms,"[1] the predatory animal destroying by instinct in order to survive, at the core of life even in its most beautiful form--the alluring fragrance and softness and color of the rose's petals. Marianna, too, seen at close view, only survives. Her womanly allurements have long vanished and the illusive beauty of her cottage from far off now is simply a ragged, fly-infested, damp and chilly hut, "nun-like."[2]

Nor is the narrator's new, broader viewpoint from high on the mountain down onto the countryside more true or clear than his perspective from the piazza. He looks down and recognizes "more by its position than its aspect" his simple farmhouse like "King Charming's palace"[3] which seems to Marianna made of marble.

[1] "The Piazza," p. 443. [2] p. 446

[3] p. 448.

"The Piazza" is like Pierre after the fact.[1] I suppose this is why it looks more ahead to Conrad[2] than back to Hawthorne.

> But, every night, when the curtain falls, truth comes in with darkness. No light shows from the mountain. To and fro I walk the piazza deck, haunted by Marianna's face, and many as real a story.[3]

The hospitable host at the beginning has become a kind of Marlow by the end, speaking quietly in the darkness of the ghosts that haunt him. The three main spatial locations in the story, found in the attempt to see better, have led from the magical, romantic illusions that distance inclines one to entertain, to sheer biological truths that closeness reveals, finally to confusion and brooding that are natural activities of darkness and resulting blindness.

Darkness, blindness, and silence are the substance of the "Benito Cereno" world, its floundering like the House of Usher into anarchic dissolution marked by momentary and muted unleashings of violence. Don Benito, impotent representative of a highly ornate,

[1]In his introduction to the Hendricks House edition of Pierre Or, The Ambiguities (New York, 1962), Henry A. Murray sees Pierre itself as a story "after the fact": "One might say that Pierre is a tragedy of moral conflict; in contrast to Hamlet (conflict before the deed), here we have conflict after the deed: the hero is equal to his action, but not the idea of his action" (p. cf).

[2]See Jesse D. Green's enlightening study of Melville and Conrad's relation to Schopenhauer's "exposition of the world as Will and Idea" (p. 294) in "Diabolism, Pessimism and Democracy: Notes on Melville and Conrad," Modern Fiction Studies, VIII (Autumn, 1962), pp. 287-305.

[3]p. 453.

long decaying civilization, and now dying himself, refuses at the trial to look at or speak to Babo, and upon referring to him, can only sink into "silence, while the moody [Spaniard] sat, slowly and unconsciously gathering his mantle about him, as if it were a pall." Babo, deeply potent in his assuming mastery, finally becomes silent, too. On board ship he spoke freely, but with artifice and deception. Once captured, "seeing all was over, he uttered no sound, and could not be forced to."[1] "Some months after, dragged to the gibbet at the tale of a mule, the black met his voiceless end," and his speechless head gazed "unabashed"[2] thereafter across the Plaza at the monastery on Mount Agonia. Only Captain Delano, limited man and man of limits, lives on. He has been saved, perhaps ironically, by the shattered Benito, whose impulsive and dangerous leap overboard alone saved Delano from being murdered that night by the negroes. And just as Don Benito depended on Babo for his life in the most obvious way, so Babo depended on him to captain the ship and to carry out the deception, though unwillingly. These involved links of "man's interdependence with man"[3] culminate in the scene of leaving the boat, in which Don Benito is characteristically leaning heavily on Babo, who both

[1]"Benito Cereno," p. 352.

[2]p. 353.

[3]Barry Phillip's study "'The Good Captain': A Reading of Benito Cereno," Texas Studies in Literature and Language, IV (1962), pp. 188-197, goes into this (p. 196).

supports and restrains him, and in which at the same time he is leaning over and tightly grasping Captain Delano's hand in anguish, mute pleading, and desire to help (he knows that his own soul is incurably wounded anyhow). These subtle gestures suggest a complex psychic involvement between the captain, the Spaniard, and the negro.

Though deeply suggestive to the reader, these incomplete gestures and accompanying, fragmented verbal interchanges are reflected in the vague, indeterminate concepts of time in the story. The immediate mystery is cleared up at least for Delano, partly as soon as he discovers that it is the Spaniards who have been held captive, and partly with the further shift back in time to the realistic, detailed description through the deposition (a post facto document) of the negroes' actual taking over of the ship. Yet one is left with the sense that for a more profound explanation one would have to go much further back in time, even centuries, perhaps beyond time itself. One is even left with the impression that any searching at all comes belatedly, that the endless paradoxes, obscured motivations, and chains of freak as well as planned happenings that make up "history" are as impossible a knot to untangle as the one the desperate old Spaniard handed silently to Captain Delano on board the San Dominick.[1]

[1]"After a leisurely almost 'action-less' development in which, nonetheless, suspense and mystification are thickly compounded, the story explodes into violence before it ends, quietly, with the same overtones of meaning and more meaning which are so unmistakenly Melville's" (p. 108), William M. Gibson, "Herman Melville's 'Bartleby the Scrivener' and 'Benito Cereno,'" The American Renaissance, ed. George Hendrick, Die Neuern Sprachen, IX (1961), pp. 107-116.

In a sense there are two central actions, both of which took place long before the story began. The obvious one is the mutiny itself, but before that was the act of enslavement. All three approaches to clear up the mystery of the ritualized violence on board ship are either too superficial (Captain Delano's and the lawcourt's) or ambiguous and inexplicit (the impersonal scene at the end). If one glimpses "truth" at all it is after stumbling knee-deep through the luxuriant vegetation and tangles of fretted weeds as the narrator of "The Piazza" did in his search for Marianna, finally to come upon the instinctual, cancerously merciless fight for survival, "as of submerged sword-fish rushing hither and thither through shoals of black-fish."[1] Beyond this fact, that the instinctual, amoral and unfeeling laws of the jungle, wilderness, and ocean are as deeply embedded in the nature of man as they are in any other animal or living creature, there are no truths, at least evident to any man's limited mind and vantage point. The artist may spin his webs so that they catch the rainbow hues of the sunset, but all this is fantasy and optical illusion. The law clerk may copy word for word the lengthy recollections of court witnesses describing things as they happened, but all this is the inadequate recapturing of an historical moment in time that leaves untold years and centuries. All that one can grasp at, a mere straw, are the few but truthful words of a man dying and therefore no longer part of conventional society, civilization, or the particular code of his tradi-

[1] "Benito Cereno," p. 332.

tional lineage. And yet even having bent our ear to the dying Don Benito and caught his words, it is still an unsure possibility that we will interpret them well and justly, given our own limited experience and our own complex yet necessarily limited, even conditioned individual psyches which we bring to the problem, our own ways of feeling and seeing.

Possibly we are closest to Captain Delano's point of view, of the three approaches in "Benito Cereno," basically because we, as readers, come in ignorance but good faith to the story, as he did to the San Dominick. He carries the burden of the quest in "Benito Cereno," for his story (seen through the third person point of view) is the first and longest of the three sections. The deposition to follow describes first-hand a lengthy but incomplete memory of the words and actions of the mutineers, further back in the time sequence of events, but through the medium of the law clerk and in the exposure of the courtroom where mental subleties or hesitations have no airing. In contrast, Delano's story recounts all his gestures, words, doubts, suspicions, and fantasies on board the Spanish ship as they took place. We are first led, then, into the problem through the eyes of an ordinary man on the spot--a good citizen, a hard-working, benevolent, yet strict ship's captain. These qualities, society's assumed values to live by, may keep him in good stead but they will not be any aid in seeing the truth of the situation on the San Dominick. The area itself is said outright to be lawless and lonely,[1] as in a sense the whole ocean is. The maze

[1]"Benito Cereno," p. 256.

of "baffling"[1] uncertain movements of the San Dominick will resemble not only the captain's predicament but the reader's also--possibly the author's too.

Since Delano himself is a man of few words, there is an interesting tension set up in this first part between the impersonal author, the aesthetically gifted and richly expressive artist himself, and naïve, simple-hearted[2] protagonist through whose confusion we view the deceptive scene first. There is a constant counterpoint between the elaborate accompaniment of the author in his chorale of beautiful, cynical despair and the voice of Delano, sounds of hope in suspension over a bottomless chasm. Delano's "cure" for the morally-stricken ship is his gift of potatoes, pumpkins, and water, just as the lawyer of "Bartleby" slipped the prison grub-man money for Bartleby to have the best dinner possible.

Undoubtedly, as some critics have insisted,[3] Captain Delano is the thick-headed, jovial, pragmatically successful American of

[1] "Benito Cereno," pp. 256-257.

[2] "'Who would murder Amasa Delano? His conscience is clean. There is someone above!'" (p. 298).

[3] In his aesthetic, archetypal, and political approach to "Benito Cereno" in Herman Melville: A Critical Study, New York, 1949, Richard Chase sees Captain Delano as representing the "timeless emptiness of America" (p. 156); Barry Phillips, in his uneven study already cited, calls Delano a "blind buffoon" (p. 191); more perceptively, in "The Source and the Symbols of Melville's 'Benito Cereno,'" American Literature, XXIV (1962), pp. 191-206, Max Putzel observes that "the man's courage so far outran his perception that he seemed to symbolize a national destiny over which clouds were rapidly gathering" (p. 196).

inadequate sensitivities and inadequately flexible imagination. But Robin Magowan has suggested a somewhat different approach: "It may help to see Captain Delano . . . as a kind of Spenserian fairy hero, a temporarily becharmed Knight of Civilization owing his survival to nothing less than his continuing faith"[1]--in any case an understandable obtuse American.[2] For "it is apparent that the world of the San Dominick, with its show of good manners and animal spirits on the part of the slaves and its vestiges of a feudal courtesy in the person of Don Benito, exerts a wonderful fascination over Captain Delano. There is something in it, perhaps what psychologists would term his 'death wish,' to which the American captain feels mysteriously drawn."[3]

Unsatisfied with the superficial "final" truth of the situation that Melville discovers in Delano's story, that the negroes,

Among others who take a more complex view are Allen Guttmann in "The Enduring Innocence of Captain Amasa Delano," Boston University Studies in English, V (1961), pp. 35-45, and Guy Cardwell in "Melville's Gray Story: Symbols and Meaning in 'Benito Cereno,'" Bucknell Review, VIII (1959), pp. 154-167. Cardwell says that Captain Delano is "not unintelligent," and though "simple, innocent," is "a philosophical, not a mechanical, center of revelation" (p. 162).

[1]from p. 348 of Magowan's richly suggestive article "Masque and Symbol in Melville's 'Benito Cereno,'" College English, XXIII (1962), pp. 346-351.

[2]Magowan, p. 351.

[3]Magowan, p. 349.

not the Spaniards, control the ship, he turns in the second section to the language of lawyers and courts, to witnessed, signed, and sealed documents of legal proof in order to explore the realistic details of the actual mutiny, murders, suggested cannibalism, and further plottings. The present, historical situation is explained, but deeper, ambiguous and complex questions about motive, enslavement, and kinds of justice are wholly absent from the deposition.[1] For example, Babo is the legally guilty and condemned man in the eyes of the court, just as by the end of Delano's story he seems a symbol of evil like the dark, masked satyr of the stern-piece who is crushing his victim. Yet he has an ambiguity, even a stature, about him that belies this interpretation. For he represents "primitive man in a cyclical world where time and history do not exist . . . . Close to nature, he is remote from both the worlds that dominate history even though he has made an art of pretending to serve them." In serving them he has been treated with a brutality, possibly symbolized by his barbarous end, which he meets with a stoic and potent silence. "And that head stares inscrutably down the whole vista of Christian civilization, medieval and American, in implacable accusation."[2]

[1]Guttmann says that "the deposition misses the truth as widely as did Delano in his completest innocence" (p. 42), that surely the fate of "Bartleby" should "warn us to be cautious about the language of the law and the attestations of 'His Majesty's Notary'" (p. 43).

[2]Putzel, p. 194.

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[2]Putzel, p. 194.

The third, impersonal fragment of "Benito Cereno," another attempt to get at the truth, consists of the last meeting between the two captains and a ritualized recounting of the deaths of Don Benito and Babo. It simply suggests more shadows, and final paradox and perplexity. In the end we are left with the ambiguity of silence: Babo has met his "voiceless end," Don Benito has been "borne on the bier"[1] to Mount Agonia nearby, and the author himself has laid down his pen. Captain Delano's blindness, then, is merely a matter of degree, for the author himself has not, with his greater powers, been able to find the truth either.

The imagery, perhaps richer and more ornate here than in any other story of Melville's, does not serve its usual function, that is, through imaginative, suggestive comparison to help the reader see better. In fact, "Benito Cereno" seems to be not so much a story about happenings as about artistry and artfulness in various forms. The ship itself "seems unreal; these strange costumes, gestures, and faces, but a shadowy tableau just emerged from the deep, which directly must receive back what it gave."[2] The story had, after all, already been written, in chapter 18 of Amasa Delano's own A Narrative of Voyages and Travels in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres, and therefore fixed by an outside element. Ornamented and

[1] "Benito Cereno," p. 353.

[2] "Benito Cereno," p. 260.

decorated by the artist's work on it, "Benito Cereno" has the final static quality of a lifeless but beautiful shell.[1] Magowan has seen this turning to outside sources for his plots in The Piazza Tales all part of Melville's mood and method of withdrawal.

In the imagery itself there is a preponderance of masques, emblems, and tableaux, as if the entire story were an elaborate masquerade contrived by the artist-author, just as the setting on board ship that Captain Delano was audience to was artfully planned and executed by Babo and the others. Nor are the roles that the characters play always practically necessary or simply forced on them. They assume them for some obscure reason, as when the dark giant Atufal in chains makes hourly obeisance to Don Benito. The careful shaving and perfuming of the Spaniard, the dressing him in his finest aristocratic linens and arming him with his ornate but empty scabbard are all for show, just as his dumb gestures and swoons, spontaneous though they are, seem Chaplinesque.

The set and formalized quality of the actions, from those on board the San Dominick down to the actual legal execution of Babo and the funeral procession that carries Don Benito to his rest, are reflected in the "fixed" quality of Nature in the opening scene, in which the usual differentiation between Art and Nature are completely

[1]One thinks of Pierre: "We lift the lid--and no body is there! --appallingly vacant as vast is the soul of a man!" (p. 323).

ignored.

> The morning was one peculiar to that coast. Everything was mute and calm; everything gray. The sea, though undulated into long roods of swells, seemed fixed, and was sleeked at the surface like waved lead that has cooled and set in the smelter's mold. The sky seemed a gray surtout. Flights of troubled gray fowl, kith and kin with flights of troubled gray vapors among which they were mixed, skimmed low and fitfully over the waters, as swallows over meadows before storms. Shadows present, foreshadowing deeper shadows to come.[1]

This is a world where Art conspires with Nature to simulate a particular mood in which moral decay is made to seem beautiful. Captain Delano nearly loses his senses as well as his life, so bewitched is he by the dream-like vision of an old château with carefully kept gardens it all suggests to him, rotted through though the balustrade is whose function it is to keep him from falling to his death.

Magowan calls the "total atmosphere" the story's greatness, and that "it is here that we must look for Melville's condemnation of the evil of slavery, rather than in any examination of a color symbolism which cannot help but be ambiguous."[2] Indeed the blackness--of the negroes, of the cabin below deck, of the labyrinth of the subconscious that one struggles to interpret in the story, and the whiteness--of the Spanish sailors, of Don Benito's paleness, of the "whitewashed"[3] slaver that the American spies that morning, of the sunlight itself that streams down "equivocally enough," like a "lima intrigu-

[1]"Benito Cereno," p. 255.

[2]Magowan, p. 348.

[3]"Benito Cereno," p. 257.

ante's one sinister eye peering . . . from the Indian loop-hole of her dusk saya-y-manto,"[1] are fittingly blended in the predominant greyness that invests the opening scene with its ambiguity.

The religious imagery adds to the ambiguity, for it performs a blessing on all the members in this ritual drama. The negroes are like "Black Friars," the slave ship like a "monastery . . . perched . . . among the Pyrenees,"[2] and Don Benito like Charles V in his "anchoritish retirement."[3] The paradoxical duality of the religious way of life, of a way of feeling about and seeing things, is revealed through religious imagery in the description of the captain's cabin. The room calls up not only intensity and spiritual fervour of the Spanish Catholic past, but also the fanatic, persecutory nature of it in the cruelties and torments of the Inquisition.

Animal imagery, too, is applied to all. The Spanish sailors are "pilot-fish,"[4] the negroes are wolf-like, the regal Atufal, a "mulish mutineer,"[5] the old Spaniard working on the cable resembles a "grizzly bear" except for his furtive "sheep's eyes,"[6] and Babo is of the race to whom Captain Delano took as to "Newfoundland dogs,"[7] who seems to Captain Delano at first to gaze up to his master like a "shepherd's dog"[8] but who later was "snakishly writhing up from the

[1] "Benito Cereno," p. 256
[2] p. 257.
[3] p. 264.
[4] p. 265.
[5] p. 276.
[6] p. 291.
[7] p. 307.
[8] p. 261.

boat's bottom,"[1] and whose head finally was a "hive of subtlety."[2] Don Benito himself is a white noddy, and Captain Delano, like his longboat, Rover, suggests a friendly dog.

This imagery of bestiality superimposed on the sacred imagery serves to reveal the dualistic way one can regard men, or rather, the way one must regard them. The animality seems to be at the core, the religious or formal nature imposed artificially. But the animality need not be simply bloodthirstiness or domestic stupidity: the negresses who urged slow torture on their captives also suckled their young like lithe fawns in instinctual tenderness. The problem is that none of these contradictory scenes need be any more valid an expression than the other,[3] just as none of the three points of view in seeking for the truth in the structure of the story need by any more valid than the other.

Art, then, cannot, as Melville once hoped it would, pierce the mask, cannot express, explain, justify, or make bearable the void which one senses may, for Melville, lie beyond. And so we might look on "Benito Cereno" as an _apologia_ of the retiring artist. A poet like Edmund Spenser could rest in the cunning of Art, could call the mingling of Art and Nature "sweet diversitie,"[4] but Melville could not. He was drawn in by its allurements, but could not tolerate its deceptiveness.

[1] p. 327.

[2] p. 353.

[3] See Guttmann, p. 42.

[4] _The Faerie Queene_, II, xii, 59.

CHAPTER FOUR

TWO WAYS OF SEEING IN "THE BELL-TOWER" AND THE DIPTYCHS

True, Nature may be rendered only deceptively and artificially by means of Art. For Nature herself, or any situation or any person, may exist not in any absolute, set way, but instead be comprised of shifting appearances. "The Bell-Tower" is more an exploration of two ways of seeing than a document on the falsity of both. The diptychs reveal two actual, different scenes which must be examined and depicted completely separately, for they reveal a world of exploitation in which the masters and the slaves can be linked only through imagery of force and submission, here, of sexual force.

"The Bell-Tower" is another story that like "The Piazza" is less of Hawthorne's tradition than it first appears to be. The story takes place, like "Rappaccini's Daughter," in far off Italy, land of art through the centuries, and during the Renaissance, the peak period of aesthetic endeavor. The allegorical mode is used, though with a difference, to make a moral theme about pride explicit.[1]

[1]Compare "The Birthmark."

But as in "The Piazza," the structure, overtly unified, shows inherent internal divisions. The whole structural pattern gives the impression that we are viewing something after the fact and at great distance, so that the "real" events can be only very tentatively assumed. We are first introduced to the scene of the fallen tower long after the event, so that it now has a "dank mould"[1] on it. Then, we are told the strange story of the town's proud project, and Bannadonna's structuring of the belfry followed by his mysterious, sudden death by the hand of his mechanical monster. This ends with us being led into a maze of guesses and surmises. "Uncertainty" can only prevail about it all. One may "suppose," and conjure up scenes in which, for example, "at the least, for a time, they would stand in involuntary doubt; it may be, in more or less of horrified alarm." "Some averred" and "others denied." "Probably, for some unknown reason,"[2] the dog was buried with the domino. "Nor to any after urgency, even in free convivial hours, would the twain ever disclose the full secrets of the belfry."[3]

Then we are forced back even further in time to the scene of the actual casting of the bells, and the "reasonable" mental processes of Bannadonna in conceiving of his metallic agent. This

[1] "The Bell-Tower," p. 355.

[2] p. 366.

[3] p. 367.

reconstruction of what really happened serves as a temporary undercutting of the "supernatural"[1] reading of the allegory, or possibly not so much an undercutting as a shifting to another way of viewing, another set of attitudes toward an event. Everything makes sense in a historical way, even the death of Bannadonna, whose head apparently intervened between the domino's mallet and Una's head as, "true to its heedful winding up," it moved automatically towards the craftsman, "absorbed" and oblivious in his work, "true artist"[2] that Bannadonna was.

Yet even this historical presentation of the events has been questioned, first by its introductory reservations in abstracted, law-like language.

> But some few less unscientific minds pretended to find little difficulty in otherwise accounting for it. In the chain of circumstantial inferences drawn, there may, or may not, have been some absent or defective links. But, as the explanation in question is the only one which tradition has explicitly preserved, in dearth of better, it will here be given. But, in the first place, it is requisite to present the supposition entertained as to the entire motive and mode, with their origin, of the secret design of Bannadonna; the minds above-mentioned assuming to penetrate as well into his soul as into the event. The disclosure will indirectly involve reference to peculiar matters, none the clearest, beyond the immediate subject.[3]

This explanation is once more temporarily abandoned for the allegorical and miraculous presentation of the crumbling of the belfry during

[1] "The Bell-Tower," p. 367. [2] p. 371.

[3] p. 367.

Bannadonna's funeral and then again, after being rebuilt, on its first anniversary. The biblical intoning of the story's final words are like the bell that tolled its fatal message to John Donne two centuries earlier. Donne in his shroud, yet still alive, was also living after the fact, the voluntary assumption of his own "death."

If the very structure of this story consists of inversions and counter inversions, so that in the end one is sure of nothing, except the possibilities of different ways of seeing, springing from different ways of feeling about something, so does the imagery, generally, reveal inversions. Whereas in "The Piazza" nature was described in terms of art, in "The Bell-Tower" art is described in the imagery of nature. This further transposition is weirdly grotesque; the artist, we see, can transgress more limits than the creating of art out of nature: he can create nature, or something that seems natural, out of art. Just as Bannadonna's mechanical figure is beast-like, the tower itself is constantly called "some immeasurable pine, fallen," becoming a "mossy mound," a "dank mould cankering at its bloom." The bells themselves are a "metallic aviary" with "silver throats" that sing from the top of the "stone pine."[1]

The jarring of our usual way of looking at things is reinforced by the shifting and obscured point of view in relation to the

[1]"The Bell-Tower," p. 355.

tower itself. Fogle has suggested that the tower motif in several of these stories represents an attempt to see better.[1] I should agree it represents a concern with the problem of point of view, yet surely our readings of the dream-like, unreal state of reveries on the mast in Mardi, White-Jacket, and Moby Dick[2] have taught us a lesson about the aid of height. It is true that from a mountain top, a mast, or a tower, one can see more area, here "the white summits of blue inland Alps . . .--sights invisible from the plain," but one cannot necessarily see better, as "The Piazza" and others reveal. Indeed in "The Bell-Tower" Bannadonna finds that he can see nothing from the top of the people below (nor the people of him except perhaps as a distant speck against the sky), though he can hear their "combustions of applause."[3]

Within the tower itself, which is, we are told, Bannadonna's custom to bar shut, just as he places a cover over his figure and a

[1]Of "The Two Temples," Fogle says, for example, in Melville's Shorter Tales, "In both sketches he ascends, to find the best point of view" (p. 39).

[2]Ishmael warns us of the fearful consequence possible as well as the "opium-like" attraction of the pantheistic reveries on the mast. If one's foot carelessly slip in this mood of being at one with the world, "perhaps, at mid-day, in the fairest weather, with one half-throttled shriek you drop through that transparent air into the summer sea, no more to rise for ever." Moby Dick, Modern Library edition, (New York, 1950), pp. 157-158 (ch. XXXV).

[3]"The Bell-Tower," p. 356.

further "coarse sheet of workman's canvas between"[1] the people and the object, there are only slits through which one may attempt to see, so small that even the wind is kept out by them. One virtue of the tower over the mast is that one cannot fall from the tower, whose spiralling staircase is enclosed. The only fall in the last stories is Billy Budd's, from pantheistic innocence to the painful experience of the "real" world. But that was the final and private taking up of the perspective of youth in the nostalgia of Melville's old age, balanced as it was by the perspective of the citizen in society, historical man. Attempts to climb, to see, in these stories of the 1850's which we are discussing here represent fruitless gestures, basically, empty as the gilded scabbard at Don Benito's side.

Whereas "The Bell-Tower" contains internally two different approaches, two ways of seeing and interpreting events, Melville's diptychs present us with an outright splitting, and so represent in their very form the nature of incongruity and irreconcilability. A split into any other number suggests a more rounded completeness than the dual polarity of the diptych. A triptych, for example, like the three-sided Eastern orthodox icon, suggests most generally the Trinity, and in its actual images of God, Christ, and the Virgin Mary represents the basic family structure of father, mother, and child. Joyce Cary, a novelist with a highly developed visual imagination, has

[1] p. 360.

experimented with the three panelled structure. He found in his first and major trilogy that the middle book with the social and historical sweep of Wilcher's world took a central position quite naturally. Just as a three part split tends to take on formal cyclical or triangular unity, so a four part division suggests peripheral completeness (in the analogy, for example, of the four corners of the world). With further division splitting possibilities increase, but in a five part splitting one might tend to look for a pyramidal structure in which the third division has pivotal importance. Even the ten sketches of "The Encantadas," while seemingly representing the endlessness of the splitting process, have some formal significance: ten bears mathematical, historical, mythical, and psychological dimensions. Yet regardless of the number of sketches, "The Encantadas" acquires its form in the same way that a medieval bestiary does: the overall attempt to catalogue natural phenomena in a formalized and representative way. Though both "The Encantadas" and the bestiary have a grounding in realism, this is much more vital to "The Encantadas," which accepts no supernatural framework, so that attempts to see in it are careful, hesitant, and beset with natural difficulties.

If the two part structure of these diptychs presents us with the split in its primal form, so that the most obvious unity is in the thematic contrast of opposites - sociological, economic, and psychological - we must look for their stylistic and structural fusion somewhere if they are successful works of art because they are linked as

one story by the author. Patterns of imagery, expecially sexual, are an evident and obvious unifying factor. Yet one can go back further, to the artist's very originating, generative mind in which there is the unity of a common source. Especially considering the diptychs, we might see the artist's mind as like the whale's, with its double vision and resulting more sensitized nerve reactions.

> A curious and most puzzling question might be started concerning this visual matter as touching the Leviathan. But I must be content with a hint. So long as a man's eyes are open in the light, the act of seeing is involuntary; that is, he cannot then help mechanically seeing whatever objects are before him. Nevertheless, any one's experience will teach him, that though he can take in an undiscriminating seep of things at one glance, it is quite impossible for him, attentively, and completely, to examine any two things—however large or however small—at one and the same instant of time; never mind if they lie side by side and touch each other. But if you now come to separate these two objects, and surround each by a circle of profound darkness; then, in order to see one of them, in such a manner as to bring your mind to bear on it, the other will be utterly excluded from your contemporary consciousness. How is it, then, with the whale? True, both his eyes, in themselves, must simultaneously act; but is his brain so much more comprehensive, combining, and subtle than man's, that he can at the same moment of time attentively examine two distinct prospects, one on one side of him, and the other in an exactly opposite direction? If he can, then is it as marvellous a thing in him, as if a man were able simultaneously to go through the demonstrations of two distinct problems in Euclid. Nor, strictly investigated, is there any incongruity in this comparison.
>
> It may be but an idle whim, but it has always seemed to me, that the extraordinary vacillations of movement displayed by some whales when beset by three or four boats; the timidity and liability to queer frights, so common to such whales; I think that all this indirectly proceeds from the helpless perplexity of volition, in which their divided

> and diametrically opposite powers of vision must involve them.[1]

The artist's mind, because it is a god-like, originating power, can simultaneously comprehend the "two distinct prospects" of, for example, the bachelor-lawyers' self indulgence in their London club and the enslavement of the factory maids in the American mill. Its generative power implies what the description further suggests, its masculine and feminine characteristics. On the one hand there is its extraordinary power and mental subtlety needed to grasp two entirely opposed visions simultaneously, and on the other, its "extraordinary vacillations of movement" and its extreme sensitivity, its "timidity and liability to queer frights" in an image of the whale as vulnerable victim of a rapacious industry.

While the exposition on the eyes hints at the kind of visionary strength of the whale and at its resulting ambivalent characteristics, the description of its mouth is outright in its sensuous suggestiveness of female and male components, forcibly separated. The parts of the jaw have been unnaturally wrenched apart, "easily unhinged by a practised artist," to reveal a mouth "really beautiful and chaste-looking . . . [from floor to ceiling, lined, or rather papered with a glistening white membrane, glossy as bridal satins," while its extracted "ivory teeth" furnish the "hard white whalebone with which the fishermen fashion all sorts of curious articles including canes, umbrella-sticks, and handles to riding whips."[2]

[1] Moby Dick, pp. 329-330 (ch. LXXIV).

[2] p. 331 (ch. LXXIV).

It might be helpful to look at these diptychs, then, in terms of the structural duality of the rape: a union by force which implies a real split in intention and experience, a side by side positioning of opposite components, an atmosphere of guilt in this master-slave relationship, a violence of physical movement as well as a rigidity of response, and a wrenching away afterwards. This knowing power in the artist's mind that feeds on both polarities can contain, even unite, but not fuse them, and must express them in the world's terms (with words on paper) only separately, though side by side.

Historical and mythic dimensions can be added to this concept of forced union without internal fusion. Each of the three diptychs is set in both the New and Old Worlds. Levin as well as others have made much of this dual and ambiguous loyalty in the American consciousness.[1] He calls it a kind of schizophrenic split, operating especially in the writers of "blackness," alienated, as artists, in the new materialistic culture, and pessimistically undercutting the superficial optimism and progress of their nation. Like their countrymen, these writers originally looked back nostalgically to the old culture of traditional values and hierarchically struc-

[1]Levin says that "Voyaging heroes of legend, ever since Odysseus, have been delayed and deflected from their homecoming. . . . [But what] seems so uniquely American . . . is [that] the missing man, having left his home behind, keeps looking homeward: because he exists in a state of suspense between wanderlust and nostalgia" (p. 4).

tured society, and to the "safety" of this time because one lived in an accepted framework. Because the nostalgic dream represented a kind of regression to childhood, it was accompanied by guilt and by the painful knowledge that this "paradise"[1] was unattainable. At the same time the writers shared, with their culture, the Adamic myth of looking ahead to the endless possibilities in this fresh, untouched, fertile continent.[2]

Melville is dealing with these very myths—the Old World as corrupted with artfulness and the Adamic hope for the New—in his diptychs, in particular with their forced inversions and presentations "after the fact" which we have seen characterizing all these short stories. Each myth may be seen in a dualistic way, as having, like the tortoise, a dark side and a bright. The dark side is most apparent in these stories. In "The Paradise of Bachelors and The Tartarus of Maids" the mock-heroic working with the dedicated Knight Templar tradition of old is background to the present lawyers who are bachelors not for holy chastity's sake but because they want to "give the whole care-worn world the slip,"[3]

[1]Even the sexual life is simpler and easier as in the infantile state. The bachelor-Templars, for example, are lulled by the powder-like snuff, and then the Decameron and a cigar provide their nightly stimulation. "The Paradise of Bachelors and The Tartarus of Maids," pp. 194-195.

[2]See R. W. B. Lewis's The American Adam, Phoenix edition (Chicago, 1958).

[3]"The Paradise of Bachelors," p. 185.

while their profession no longer gives "gratuitous ghostly counsel" but works "to check, to clog, to hinder, and embarrass all the courts and avenues of Law"[1] like the maggot-like attorneys of Dickens' Chancery. Similarly, the New World is seen after the taking, and the result of this blighting rapacity is the maidens' pale, hostile frigidity, last defence of the enslaved, for their body is the only property they own, and their emotional response, the only "work" that cannot be elicited by force.

The seedsman-narrator of "The Tartarus" is chilled and pale, and in a sense of guilt (for he is a male) his "pained homage" to the maids makes him "involuntarily bow" before a quick departure from this Devil's Dungeon, "'far colder and more bitter than elsewhere,'"[2] Even justifiable frigidity chills. The narrator as artist is sensing, too, the "helpless perplexity of volition, in which [his] divided and diametrically opposite powers of vision"[3]—here, the simultaneous perception of the bachelors' and the maidens' worlds--involve him.

The narrator's movement down into the valley for a closer look at the maidens, and final distancing himself from the horror to ascend the mountains once more, marks a spatial as well as

[1]"The Paradise of Bachelors," p. 187.

[2]"The Tartarus of Maids," pp. 210-211.

[3]Moby Dick, p. 330 (ch. LXXIV).

intellectual and emotional experience. In "The Two Temples" the narrator's spatial position and kind of vantage point are also significant in reflecting the way he will feel about what he sees. In the church he finds a lookout with much difficulty and awkwardness (he finally sees the interior only through colored glass and screen), and in the English playhouse where he will experience a sense of communion he is in an open gallery with others.

Both "The Bell-Tower" and this diptych have to do with towers and heights as points of perspective. Fogle has stressed their similarities mainly, I think, because he gives a very technological-political-moral reading to "The Bell-Tower," explaining away any mysteriousness by saying that the tale is purely allegorical and Poe-esque. I myself find "The Bell-Tower" mysteriously powerful. It has the deep subterranean rhythms of the ocean current in it, of the subconscious, if you will, and so the attempt to establish the murky truth either through allegory or through conjectured historical fact remains difficult at the beginning as at the end. The use of the impersonal narrator as point of view in "The Bell-Tower," impersonal too in the sense that it presents no solution, looks forward to the impersonal narrator of Billy Budd, "personal" only in the sense that he undergoes the agonies of both Billy's mythic fall and Captain Vere's historical decision.

In backing away from reading the words too closely for social, economic, and political meaning, I think we can see "The

Two Temples" as "land tales," as opposed to the "sea tale" of "The Bell-Tower," and agree that Melville was aware of this himself. For the tower in this latter story, though enclosed and serpentine (the circular stairs), is something of a lighthouse, for finally at the top one reaches the open sky, as with the mainmast top rigging, and glimpses the "white summits of blue inland Alps, and whiter crests of bluer Alps off-shore--sights invisible from the plain."[1] In contrast, the church bell-tower in "Temple First" is frustratingly complicated and fragmented inside: there are stairs, ladders, and different kinds of windows--one painted with stars, the other screened--and the atmosphere itself is stiflingly hot and claustrophobic. In climbing to the top, the narrator does not see "sights invisible from the plain" but simply looks down onto the whole interior of the church and sees in miniature the tops of the heads of all the people. Indeed the narrator says that, "[Nor] could [he] rid [his] soul of the intrusive thought, that, through some necromancer's glass, [he] looked down upon some sly enchanter's show."[2] The paltriness of these materialistic and pompous land-people reduces the story about them to paltriness. Some of the description strikes one as foolish and trite, like the "'spic-and-span new temple,'"[3] but perhaps this, too, is Melville's

[1]"The Bell-Tower," p. 356.

[2]"Temple First," p. 153.

[3]"Temple First," p. 149.

way of saying, how can I write anything but a paltry sketch about these degraded land-people? The incongruity of the image is perfectly fitting: this American church is a product for the use of the people; it is slick and tasteless.

In "Temple Second" the narrator compares land and sea outright and states his preference: "Better perish mid myriad sharks in mid-Atlantic, than die a penniless stranger in Babylonian London."[1] The land-people, in their moral depravity and pompous egotism, are far more frighteningly repulsive and rapacious than the more natural cannibals of the ocean world. The emphasis of the stories falls heavily on the landlubbers and all their artificial appurtenances like clothes, money, buildings, ritual, and so on, as seen critically by the hardy sailor, committed to ocean ways but now briefly on shore. Yet this viewpoint is not quite definitive, for we see in "Temple Second" that the sailor himself has initially sold out to the unnatural relationships of shore-life. He has come by free passage to England by virtue of being a kind of man-servant, a bought companion, mock-heroically a serving knight, suggestively a eunuch-slave.

But once alone again in the city, an act of spontaneous charity redeems him and uplifts his despair. A workman gives him his ticket to enter the theatre, and he climbs up and up to the stifling heights, this time to be in the company of unselfish people, poor families enjoying together the performance below. Significantly,

[1] "Temple Second," p. 159.

land imagery suddenly is transformed to sea imagery:

> The rail was low. I thought of deep-sea-leads, and the mariner in the vessel's chains, drawing up the line, with his long-drawn musical accompaniment. And, like beds of glittering coral, through the deep sea of azure smoke, there, far down, I saw the jewelled necks and white sparkling arms . . . . The volumed sound came undulating up, and broke in showery spray and foam of melody against our gallery rail . . . .[1]

The place becomes genuinely church-like, and the narrator shares a freely given drink of coffee and ale with a friendly ragged boy, a "prince-like benefactor."[2] The overtones here of communion and worshipful thanks to the father have been pointed out by Fogle.[3] The description of this works in a Joycean way: the naturalistic scene is very believable and valid, not artificially changed in any way to make the grandiose symbolism "fit." After partaking of the gift, the narrator stands "at the very main-mast-head of all the interior edifice."[4] "Now [as] the music surges up again, and borne by that rolling billow, [I], and all the gladdened crowd, are harmoniously attended to the street."[5]

The other diptych, "Poor Man's Pudding and Rich Man's Crumbs," contains two more land tales. The narrator is an outsider to both

[1]"Temple Second," p. 163.

[2]p. 164.

[3]Fogle, Melville's Shorter Tales, p. 40.

[4]"Temple Second," p. 164.

[5]p. 165.

scenes: in the first he is "the guest of Blandmour in the country, for the benefit of [his] health,"[1] and in the second he is in London on a "sea-voyage" recommended by his physician.[2] Because the narrator in both stories is coming into a society as an outsider who is sensitized by ill health as well as by obvious democratic sympathies for the unjustly downtrodden, he can perceive freshly and criticize objectively. He sees very quickly through the pomposity and self-deception of the poet Blandmour, who takes an "artistic" pleasure in an Adamic kind of naming of things. But Blandmour's language, which is falsely euphonious, artificially nourishes his romantic fantasies. He transforms cold, wet snows into "'Poor Man's Manure'" or "'Poor Man's Eye-water'";[3] he changes chilling rain into "'Poor Man's Egg,'"[4] and so on. This habit suggests the same kind of cultural blindness which unintentionally perpetrates evil that Captain Delano also revealed. He benevolently felt, for example, that negroes enjoyed bright colors, even to the point of using a flag as apron, and so with patriarchal condescension he exchanged what he felt was a mutual recognition of this with Babo. Blandmour's kind of artificial naming and the landlord's severity on his laborers at the same time reveal a

[1] "Poor Man's Pudding," p. 170.

[2] "Rich Man's Crumbs," p. 177.

[3] "Poor Man's Pudding," p. 168.

[4] p. 169.

New World of both continued class injustice (the Coulters work for Squire Teamster at dog's wages) and irresponsible behavior--a banality,[1] a compromising of art itself to serve one's own "spiritual" gratifications. The children of "Poor Man's Pudding" are also expressive of this Adamic myth seen after the fact, the dark side of the dual concept of the myth: they are dead, and live only as ghosts in their mother's memory. The future of the new country is dead. All the Puritanical, middle-class business virtues of self and free enterprise--including the idea that material goods are representative of divine pleasure and so proof that one is of the chosen elect, the fearful and prejudicial belief that unfortunates are what they are because of laziness, stupidity, or, worse, because of divine punishment (they are among the damned)--are myths that can harm. The Coulters is a household of real misery, where the bloodlessness and patience and acceptance of Mrs. Coulter are more frightening than solely admirable. Like Marianna and the maids at the mill, she merely survives, and like them she horribly suggests, not by faults of her own, the enduring power of the colorless, cankerous worm. The narrator once more feels compelled to distance himself from this glimpse into land-life, and leaves.

In "Rich Man's Crumbs" there is no such redemption as there was in "Temple Second." This story, set in the Old World, exhibits

[1]Compare Hannah Arendt's expression "the banality of evil."

a hierarchically structured society. Royalty and an overtly benevolent nobility make only the occasional gesture of "charity" to the poor. Again the story is seen after the fact. An elaborate dinner has taken place the night before. All that is left has been gouged, chewed on, wrenched apart by the greed of the nobles. Their male rapaciousness is coupled with their inverted effeminate tastes: "the two breasts were gouged ruthlessly out, exposing the bare bones, embellished with the untouched pinions and legs."[1]

The poor have not, by this inhuman treatment, become tamed, domesticated animals like the Coulters.[2] In this classed and fated society they have been so long considered low and worthless and given no chance that they have become howling, cannibalistic beasts—not just wildly, but repulsively and evilly so, full of scorn, and reeking like sewers.[3] These are two sketches of land life from which the horrified narrator can only wish to be saved. He has sought a good vantage point and glimpsed again the bestiality of man. Again he departs in haste.

[1]"Rich Man's Crumbs," p. 181.

[2]Mr. Coulter calls his imaginary horse 'Martha" ("Poor Man's Pudding," p. 174).

[3]"Rich Man's Crumbs," p. 183.

CHAPTER FIVE

A SINGLE VIEWPOINT ONTO THE VOID: "BARTLEBY THE SCRIVENER"

There was a time when Melville took sheer delight in the realization of the multiplicity, the relativity of all spatial and temporal vantage points. The continual naming of things—ranks, laws, games, duties, and parts of the ship—that makes White-Jacket something of a guidebook is the kind of cataloguing of "endless possibilities for the New American" that Matthiessen compares to Whitman, Emerson, and Thoreau's "ideal of diversity" in this eminent critic's discussion of Mardi. With this ideal as background to Moby Dick, this "desire to enter as fully as possible into the immensely varied range of experience,"[1] the question of its form that has bothered older critics—is it a novel? romance? treatise or tract? moral story about isolation?—becomes irrelevant at least in terms of "judging" it. What is more relevant is the further dimension revealed of the relativity and subjectivity of any attempt to perceive reality.

[1] F. O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance (New York, 1941), p. 380.

For the endless projections themselves that every man characteristically and subconsciously has subjectify, color, distort in a different way any perception of anything. Feidelson has indicated the importance of the Doubloon chapter in Moby Dick.[1] It is central to our understanding of the artist's mental expansion. In the end one can know absolutely nothing for sure except this very fact. And if "the White Whale is a grandiose mythic presentation of what is godlike in the cosmos" to Newton Arvin's mind, then his "apparent and perhaps real indifference to men"[2] is the very essence of this symbol of all and endless points of view, wrested necessarily from any schemes whatever such as moral assumptions or "interested" intent. The ever-shifting points of view within the novel, from the sweeping expanse seen from the mast to the very bowels of the whale itself, the inspection of all aspects of sensate reality from as many angles as possible, are an artist's attempt to perform what the White Whale symbolizes: god-like omnipresence and omniscience.

The danger of this immensely rewarding openness to all points of view that Melville was able mentally to accommodate with youth and success is that with time it can drive a man mad. Or rather, with severe vicissitudes like derision and almost total neglect which were the public's response to Mardi, Moby Dick, and

[1]Moby Dick, ch. XCIX.

[2]Newton Arvin, Herman Melville, Compass edition (New York, 1957), p. 189.

Pierre, and in private life the urgent problem of supporting a family and so the erosion of his sense of manly individuality and proper pride,[1] then the openness of this view of life becomes dangerous and threatening, like the vortex that sucked the Pequod down into the depths.

Allied with this is the artist's possible insight into a system that consists only of endlessly shifting appearances, with no set, ascertainable reality at all. "No frame, no form. Nothing one can assume"[2] as real. No dogmatic system of belief, no truths, only the ambiguity of transient appearances. The shock of coming to this realization might manifest itself as not unlike the ambiguous, pale silence of Bartleby the scrivener, against whom each character must react defensively or be sucked down into his deathly silence as down the cistern-shaped white sky-light shaft at Bartleby's window.

What I am suggesting is that it may be more helpful to look upon Bartleby not as a character (though ostensibly he is one, of course) but as a symbol of all points of view, and the deathly impossibility of entertaining them all, as well as the hopelessness

[1]One resists the simplistic formula, yet it does not take much imagination, either, to sense through his themes and imagery that Melville paid heavily in his sexual life for the kind of mother he had and the kind of wife he chose.

[2]In "The Attorney and the Scrivener: Quoth the Raven, 'Nevermore,'" ch. 8, "Bartleby the Scrivener": The Melville Annual, A Symposium, 1965, ed. Howard P. Vincent (Kent, Ohio, 1966), Marjorie Dew used these words to describe what the lawyer has been forced to realize "at unguarded moments" through the scrivener (p. 103).

of knowing anything ever for sure, even the non-existence of any certain reality.[1] This impossibility manifests itself in the character of Bartleby through his non-activity and his "dead-wall reveries,"[2] his silence and despair, his subsisting, finally, on no food at all, and so dying.

Insofar as Bartleby shows up the absurdity of all assumptions, he elicits from the others awe, horror, wonder, despair, and violence.[3] "For the first time in my life a feeling of over-powering stinging melancholy seized me,"[4] says the usually composed lawyer. Nippers wants to "'kick him out of the office,'"[5] and Turkey attempts to "'black his eyes.'"[6] Yet these losses of control are momentary, for basically Bartleby is not a

[1]This "hopelessness" because one's deeper questions will never be answered is the usual and, I feel, important interpretation. See Leo Marx's "Melville's Parable of the Walls," Sewanee Review, LXI (1953), p. 603, and others more recent, like Marvin Felheim's "Meaning and Structure in 'Bartleby,'" College English, XXIII (1962), pp. 369-376.

[2]"Bartleby the Scrivener," p. 24.

[3]As a character, Bartleby has some kinship with the "fool" tradition of the absurd clown-idiot-saint who cannot come to terms with the world as it is. Robert Donald Spector's "Melville's 'Bartleby' and the Absurd," Nineteenth Century Fiction, XVI (1961), pp. 175-177, talks of "the symbolic universe [of absurdity] which is Bartleby" (p. 176).

[4]"Bartleby the Scrivener," p. 23.

[5]p. 15.

[6]p. 18, my italics.

potent threat in the same way that the whale was. Even from the beginning it was suggested that Bartleby was somehow almost inorganic. There was, says the lawyer, nothing "human about him." "I should have as soon thought of turning my pale plaster-of-paris bust of Cicero out of doors."[1] He stands, later, like "the last column of some ruined temple,"[2] like a "Caryatid," like the antique, dethroned "awful essence" of the "captive king"[3] in the "larger, darker, deeper part"[4] of Ahab. This is more than the "not-to-be-thought-of-woe"[5] that Pierre foresaw, even more than the "woe that is madness"[6] which Ishmael spoke of: it is "sheer vacancy," a "forlorn . . . solitude,"[7] like the building itself at nighttime. Bartleby represents not so much, finally, the potentiality of all points of view but this truth in its essence "after the fact." He is a symbol of the final absurdity of this "truth," of its dead-end impossibility.

The insoluble paradox, then, is that though impossible, what he represents is the only truth there is. The absolute truth is the endlessness and relativity of points of view, not just in

[1] p. 13.

[2] p. 30.

[3] Bartleby joins the sleep of "'kings and counselors'" (p. 46).

[4] Moby Dick, pp. 184-185 (ch. XLI).

[5] Pierre, p. 242.

[6] Moby Dick, p. 423 (ch. XCVI).

[7] "Bartleby," p. 23.

time and space but in the distorting projections of man's very mind.

If man cannot live by this, neither can books be written from seemingly endless points of view. Or so Melville learned through his books that "failed."[1] "Bartleby" is a story about that failure, that impossibility, and so is an afterword to Moby Dick. As if the artist has finally destroyed the whale's image, Bartleby is "a bit of wreck in the mid-Atlantic."[2]

The potency of Bartleby as a character, though a silent one, is reflected in the polarities made evident all through the story. All the qualities that Bartleby suggests form one part of the duality; the contrasting ones arise from the person of the aging lawyer, from whose point of view alone we are told the entire course of events. The significance of this is at least threefold. First, we may see Melville recognizing that all men, including himself, must live in this world by expedience and assumptions, and so choosing a "survivor" to tell the tale.[3] Second, artistically, Melville has put aside his ever-shifting perspectives[4] and especially

[1]The title alone of Stanley E. Hyman's article "Melville the Scrivener," New Mexico Quarterly, XXIII (1953), pp. 381-415, reminds us that we cannot divorce the theme of the writer's plight from "Bartleby," if indeed from all of these last stories.

[2]"Bartleby," p. 29.

[3]Ishmael's last words in Moby Dick are Job's: "'I only am escaped alone to tell thee'" (p. 566, Epilogue).

[4]He started this process in Pierre by shifting to a point of view limited to the third person, yet that person was still the rebel and seeker rather than "ordinary man."

for the actual limits of the short story assumed only one. In a way this is a movement towards the reader, possibly a last period of an attempt to reach him. Third, he reveals the absurdity and the limitations of this very method by his choice of narrator, who is so naive that he damns himself unknowingly with his own words. He admits, for example, that he does not fire Turkey because he is "a very useful man to me; . . . he always dressed in a gentlemanly sort of way; and so, incidentally, reflected credit upon my chambers."[1] He indulges the eccentric and depressed Bartleby because "here I can cheaply purchase a delicious self-approval."[2] The absurdity of Bartleby being described in these terms shows the total inadequacy of the lawyer's utilitarian position. "His steadiness, his freedom from all dissipation, his incessant industry (except when he chose to throw himself into a standing revery behind his screen), his great stillness, his unalterableness of demeanor under all circumstances, made him a valuable acquisition."[3] The business ethic of a society that owns, accumulates unendingly, is fortified by the unabashed prudence of the Puritan ethic.[4] This way of thought applied to spiritual

[1]"Bartleby," p. 8, my italics.

[2]p. 17, my italics.

[3]p. 20, my italics.

[4]Compare the prudent housewifery and "Christian" optimism of Esther Summerson with this lawyer-narrator. In Bleak House the impersonal narrator interrupts with dark nihilism; in "Bartleby" the nihilism remains white silence.

qualities is comically grotesque: "Aside from higher considerations, charity often operates as a vastly wise and prudent principle--a great safeguard to its possessor."[1] Applied in one's relations to an unfortunate this mode of thought seems to result in a sterile liberal benevolence and a sentimentality under which one does not discern honest good will. "I strove to drown my exasperated feelings towards the scrivener by benevolently construing his conduct. Poor fellow, poor fellow! thought I, he don't mean anything;[2] and besides, he has seen hard times, and ought to be indulged."[3]

The same kind of dizzying inversions between nature and art that we observed in "The Piazza," "The Bell-Tower," and "Benito Cereno" manifest themselves first in the employees who have long ago been made into artificial things, shown in their mechanically expressed eccentricities. Even when the noon drink stimulates a little natural blood back into Turkey's cheeks it is called "red ink."[4] The counter inversion reveals itself in the lawyer's present renaturalizing them to living beings, but now as animals. These are not even threateningly wild animals, but those owned and domesticated to serve their owner, like Captain Delano

[1] p. 34.

[2] This statement is highly suggestive. The lawyer so often describes Bartleby to perfection without knowing it. (my italics)

[3] pp. 34-35. [4] p. 9.

and his genial ways with negro servants, to whom he "took . . . just as other men to Newfoundland dogs."[1]

> One winter day, I presented Turkey with a highly respectable-looking coat of my own--a padded gray coat, of a most comfortable warmth. . . . I thought Turkey would appreciate the favor, and abate his rashness and obstreperousness of afternoons. But no; I verily believe that buttoning himself up in so downy and blanket-like a coat had a pernicious effect upon him--upon the same principle that too much oats are bad for horses. In fact, precisely as a rash, restive horse is said to feel his oats, so Turkey felt his coat. It made him insolent. He was a man whom prosperity harmed.[2]

But for all the differences between this "eminently safe man"[3] and the scrivener, the chasm between them seemingly absolute, yet they are yoked together through hint and suggestion and suggestive imagery in a way that convinces me that they are psychological doubles to each other. Mordecai Marcus has compellingly discussed this in the light of the lawyer's unwilling but deep involvement (he finally forces Bartleby out to preserve his own sanity).[4] He recognizes a bond himself. "The bond of a common humanity now drew me irresistibly to gloom. A fraternal melancholy! For both

[1]"Benito Cereno," p. 307.

[2]"Bartleby," p. 9.

[3]p.4. He is safe in two ways: self-protective and prudent, and so blind enough to survive safely in the Melville world.

[4]Mordecai Marcus, "Melville's Bartleby as a Psychological Double," College English, XXIII (1962), pp. 365-368. Kingsley Widmer also suggested the double concept in "The Negative Affirmation: Melville's 'Bartleby,'" Modern Fiction Studies, VIII (1962), pp. 276-286.

I and Bartleby were sons of Adam."[1]

Marcus does not comment on two other important passages in considering a deep alliance between Bartleby and the lawyer. One is the Colt and Adams story, like the fraternal enmity of Cain and Abel. In the "solitary office" that is "entirely unhallowed by humanizing domestic association," the lawyer is afraid that, like Colt, he would be "unawares hurried into his fatal act--an act which certainly no man could possibly deplore more than the actor himself." Bartleby, then, is the "unfortunate Adams" who disturbed Colt enough to commit violent murder. The lawyer internalizes his natural urge. "When this old Adam . . . rose in me . . . concerning Bartleby, I grappled him and threw him."[2] Bartleby represents the threat of his subconscious, long denied, and, according to Marcus, the passive, inward-turned character the genteel bachelor lawyer would become were he to relax his "civilized" controls.

There is another passage that links Bartleby and the lawyer in a strange way:

> It was Bartleby.
> I was thunderstruck. For an instant I stood like the man who, pipe in mouth, was killed one cloudless afternoon long ago in Virginia, by summer lightning; at his own warm open window he was killed, and remained leaning out there upon the dreamy afternoon, till some one touched him, when he fell.[3]

[1] "Bartleby," p. 23. [2] p. 34.

[3] p. 32.

The effect of Bartleby on the lawyer is like death by the elements. Once dead, he stands like a statue, upright, still gazing like the plaster bust of Cicero which Bartleby resembled as he "remained standing at his window in one of his profoundest . . . reveries."[1]

The servant is free from his master but not the master from the servant. In the end it is quite fitting that it is the lawyer who murmurs that Bartleby is asleep "'with kings and counselors.'"[2] That this has a "rounded and orbicular sound"[3] to it does not, I feel, deny its speaker some small stirrings of recognition of the "excessive and organic ill," the "innate and incurable disorder,"[4] that Bartleby both represents and rebels against.

The split, then, is not structural but psychological: it is the artist's mind which yokes them together. But in life, and within the story itself, they must remain apart. Other than "I would prefer not to," Bartleby's own story is silence. The lawyer's

[1]"Bartleby," p. 35. After being positioned next to the wall, where he stayed day and night, by the end Bartleby moves out into the centre of the room, now utterly silent, "without heeding [any] talk" (p. 36). The centre is the axis, source and turning point of projections in every direction. It is also the "safe" spot, according to the second-rate lightning-rod man in his sales talk to the defiant narrator-host ("The Lightning-Rod Man"). But this is safety after the fact, too late for Bartleby and so another empty and futile gesture: his "dull and glazed" (p. 28) eyes have already been blinded. He stands stone-like, a Pierre after Medusa's curse, the embrace of the elemental Isabel whose long black hair fell over his body like serpents.

[2]p. 46.

[3]p. 4.

[4]p. 25.

story is all the words printed in front of us, a partial blackening of the blank, white page. The typescript itself is a symbol, as are the pages, for the script overlaps the blankness of the pages, as the lawyer's words are the intervening explanation of as well as a series of misleading misinterpretations of Bartleby. But they are necessary words, for Bartleby refuses to express himself in the spatial and temporal confines of the page. Conversely, since the awful truth he represents in an a posteriori way will shrivel a man's soul to extinction, the shrunken length of the short story, the shrunken spoken words, the final death in the shrunken foetal position are all a natural result of the failure (to survive) of what he represents, and of the "failure" of Moby Dick.

CHAPTER SIX

END OF THE QUEST: "THE ENCANTADAS"

If the White Whale is the symbolic centre of Melville's novelistic years, then the tortoise is the centre, symbol now turned emblem, of the final stories. The litheness, the sensuous beauty, the subtleties of mind, the endlessly confident playfulness, the very mammality and warm bloodedness of the whale have now become the cold bloodedness and reptilian nature of the tortoise. Contrary to the whale, who in its watery element can move in all directions, whose speed vies with the fastest whalers, whose sportiveness encompasses all points of view, and whose eyes can see two totally different scenes at the same moment, the tortoise's "crowning curse" is its "drudging impulse to straightforwardness," whose progression consists of "draggings and concussions," as it writhes grimly, "crawling so slowly and ponderously, that not only did toadstools and all fungous things grow beneath [its] feet, but a sooty moss sprouted upon [its back]."[1] Its tiny eyes, almost sightless, are confined in visionary range by the simple fact that the tortoise, like the

[1]"The Encantadas," p. 58.

serpent, is cursedly destined to crawl, with the aid of four truncated legs, more or less on its belly, as are most of the "population of Albemarle"[1] statistically catalogued for us in "A Pisgah View from the Rock." The emblematic nature of the tortoise's shell, "medallioned and orbed"[2] like a shield, extends to its whole body, and so with its stomach a "calipee or breast-plate,"[3] it presents an "impregnable armor of . . . living mail."[4] The tortoises, like the islands themselves, are emblems of the "sorrow and penal hopelessness"[5] of man's lot since the Fall, brutish survival in cursed labour. The absence of the geographical and seasonal vicissitudes of Nature and the processes of growth and aging in man, which are the essence of the "real" fallen world, suggest the emblematic quality of "The Encantadas." They are a depiction of the timeless fallen state.

Not only is the tortoise's shell somehow a sign or token, but it is also fissured, scarred, "strangely widened," peeling, and "shattered," so that even in its emblematic state it is seen centuries late, in ruins, like "Roman Coliseums in magnificent decay."[6] Craggy, charred, "half obliterate[ly]" covered with hieroglyphic, incomprehensible markings, the shells present a mystery to the narrator, who feels himself an "antiquary of a geologist, studying

[1] "The Encantadas," p. 70. [2] p. 56.

[3] p. 55. [4] p. 57.

[5] p. 53. [6] p. 57.

the bird-tracks and ciphers upon the exhumed slates trod by incredible creatures whose very ghosts are now defunct."[1] If the whale as fish is a living symbol of endless fecundity, the tortoise is a broken emblem, a symbol after the fact, just as other emblematic scenes in "The Encantadas" are those of loss, like the Chola Widow who in her woeful state suggests the Pietà. Any memories of the distant Paradise are all long-aged relics cast up, like Felipe's drowned body and Truxill's "gay, braided hat of golden straw,"[2] by the tide, "decayed bits of sugar-cane, bamboos, and cocoanuts" from Tahiti, perhaps, or "fragments of charred wood and mouldering ribs of wrecks."[3] The islands themselves, like the tortoise shells, resemble "split Syrian gourds left withering in the sun, . . . cracked by an everlasting drought beneath a torrid sky."[4] We explore their clinkered surfaces carefully in the sketches but we make no certain discoveries; they seem so incredibly strange.

In this fallen world man has been torn forever from his angelic state and is now a kind of beast, not a "natural beast" that lives according to his instincts for survival but an unnatural beast that enslaves and perverts Nature. The Dog-King's army of hounds, for example, tyrannizes over the captured men; the sailors of the

[1] "The Encantadas," p. 57. [2] p. 91.

[3] p. 51. [4] p. 50.

passing whalers turn the Chola Widow into a domesticated beast, like the donkey she rides, by ravaging her; the Hermit Oberlus seems to drop poison, not potato seeds, into his garden, and in cynical sadism leaves wayfarers a "fowl" for eggs which turns out to be only a "starveling rooster."[1] Man, beast, and nature are dizzingly confused beyond normal limits: Oberlus is a "volcanic creature," "coiled" in his "lava den," a "heaped drift of withered leaves"; his is certainly a "strange nature."[2] Nor are the tortoises simply reptilian animals, but "mystic" creatures, too, like "the identical tortoises whereon the Hindoo plants this total sphere,"[3] and part of the vegetable world as well, mossy green fungous growing right on their shells. In this fallen world God and man are no longer in harmony, God is far removed, even dead; man is a strange sort of beast.

Yet if "The Encantadas" seems to place us not so much in time and in the context of nature as <u>after</u> and <u>outside</u> the vital sense of life—only the lees and dregs of humanity, the castaways, are found in this "belittered world,"[4] on these "five-and-twenty heaps of cinders dumped here and there in an outside city lot"[5]—so, confusedly, are the sketches placed <u>before</u> time, that is,

[1] "The Encantadas," p. 111. [2] p. 103.

[3] p. 57. [4] p. 58.

[5] p. 49.

before the cycle of history and civilization and culture. The cumbrous and ancient tortoises and other forms of dumb life on these Galapagos Islands have risen from the mud and water in that abyss of untimed evolutionary change. "The centuries [have been] plundered," as James Baird has put it, and the tortoise is "the last emblazoned figure commemorating the quest."[1]

In this strange pretemporal and posttemporal untimeliness of the sketches Nature itself does nothing to help place one in time. To these islands "change never comes; neither the change of seasons nor of sorrows. Cut by the Equator, they know not autumn, and they know not spring; while already reduced to the lees of fire, ruin itself can work little more upon them."[2] None of the signs and rhythms of Nature are evident: not rain but "an everlasting drought," not a harbour but an "emphatic uninhabitableness,"[3] not a voice or articulated sound but a "hiss," not foliated vegetation but "tangled thickets of wiry bushes, without fruit and without a name, springing up among deep fissures of calcined rock, and treacherously masking them." Not even the

[1]James Baird, Ishmael, Harper Torchbook edition (New York, 1960), p. 381.

[2]"The Encantadas," p. 50.

[3]p. 50.

natural progression of the sun lends temporal order to the day: a "swirl of gray, haggard mist" overhangs the rocky coast so that most days are "oppressive" and "clouded."[1] The Chola Widow, who in her agony attempts to place herself in time, found "little, outside herself, [that] served for calendar or dial,"[2] in the "labyrinth" of Time "in which Hunilla was entirely lost,"[3] and the "sultry dawns," the "poisonous nights,"[4] were a "torrid trance," an "all-pervading monotone."[5] The only signs that nature gives turn out to be deceptive: the rocky protuberance covered with bird-lime is seen through the swirling mists like the sails of a ship to those approaching; the confusing currents and eddies have misled one captain actually to chart and carefully to record on the map the existence of an entirely imaginative isle; the exact location and aspect of all the islands are obscured by "the capriciousness of the tides of air" and of the sea, the "baffling," "unreliable," "perplexing" winds and calms as well as the "mysterious indraft"[6] which have made the isles seem enchanted, apparently fleeting and unreal.

If there is no natural progression of time, if time has abdicated the Enchanted Isles leaving them timeless, then one is left with space alone, and the artist is presented with the problem

[1] p. 51.
[2] p. 92.
[3] p. 93.
[4] p. 92.
[5] p. 93.
[6] p. 52.

of what to do with it, how to explore and depict it. This is possibly what Leon Howard was suggesting when he said that Melville was a master of the "picturesque," and "The Encantadas" are "pictures . . . sketched in prose."[1] Scenes are described visually in a flat, two-dimensional way, so that each is like a "great piece of broidery."[2] The wild birds on Rock Rodondo, for example, are an "aerial choir," a word indicating both sound and sight, and, more, their cries are transposed into purely visual description: the "clear, silver, bugle-like notes unbrokenly falling, like oblique lines of swift-slanting rain in a cascading shower."[3] The Chola Widow, seated on the rocks of the beach, seemed branched in an

> oval frame, through which the bluely boundless sea rolled like a painted one. And there, the invisible painter painted to her view the wave-tossed and disjointed raft, its once level logs slantingly upheaved, as raking masts, and the four struggling arms undistinguishable among them; and then all subsided into smooth-flowing creamy waters, slowly drifting the splintered wreck; while first and last, no sound of any wort was heard. Death in a silent picture; a dream of the eye; such vanishing shapes as the mirage shows.[4]

But the scenes and images are not two-dimensional in a naturalistic, scientifically pictorial sense, but rather in an emblem-

[1]Leon Howard, "Melville and Spenser--A Note on Criticism," Modern Language Notes, XLVI (1931), p. 292.

[2]"The Encantadas," p. 63. [3]p. 64.

[4]p. 90-91.

atic one, in the same way as the tortoises, the Widow, and the very islands themselves are emblems. Nature as sign (the signs themselves being highly ornate and formalized) and the close relation between naturalism and morality, science and mythology, suggests not only the medieval "broidery" or tapestry with its emblematic imagery, but the medieval bestiary too. Each depiction of bestial characteristics seems to lead quite naturally to moral conclusions. Thus, the tortoise being "both black and bright" indicates the two sidedness of life, the more evident dark side and the briefer joys: and so "enjoy the bright, keep it turned up perpetually if you can, but be honest, and don't deny the black." Nor should you "declare the creature to be one total inky blot."[1] Because the pelicans perch long and still, they have a "lugubrious expression," are a "pensive race" and "penitential"[2] birds. Similarly, the "'rusty dagger-fragment in one hand, and a bit of a wine-jar in another,'"[3] lead the voyager seated on the old stone sofa made by the Buccaneers to "'consider the vacillations of a man,'" for here were murderers who were also "'meditative philosophers, rural poets, and seat-builders.'"[4] The Chola Widow, like Chaucer's Griselda, is not simply an unfortunate woman but "pride's height in vain abased to proneness on the rack,"[5] representative of the lesson that all pain was "unrepiningly to be

[1] "The Encantadas," p. 56. [2] p. 63.

[3] p. 78. [4] p. 79.

[5] p. 100.

borne.[1]

If the deeper formality of the medieval bestiary's cataloguing of natural phenomena arose from its representative depictions, decorative form was achieved in its emblematic, ornately coloured, tapestry-like workings on the first letter of each sketch. Indeed the purely visual art of the bestiary was often used to cover whole ceilings and walls of medieval churches.[2] In "The Encantadas" the "picturesque," allegorical Spenserian verses form a decorative beginning to each of the sketches, just as each sketch depicts a world--of nature and beasts--in which, because time is not of the essence, things must be known by listing and cataloguing, by visual examination and then moral conclusions.

Yet "The Encantadas" is not, of course, a bestiary. It accepts and depicts but does not explain the unclearness, the inexplicable, unknowable strangeness of things, the actual "ocular deceptions and mirages"[3] prevalent everywhere like the "fantastic islet."[4] It mirrors this openness to possibilities not so much of clear perception as of perversions and deceptions in its constantly moving point of view, so that spatially, geographically, we

[1]"The Encantadas," p. 101.

[2]See, for example, T. H. White's The Bestiary, Capricorn books edition (New York, 1960).

[3]"The Encantadas," p. 73. [4]p. 72.

view the isles from afar and then up close, we climb onto them and down between the fissures in the rocks and painstakingly up to the highest point, Rock Rodondo. We are given manifold three dimensional ways of seeing from all planes, degrees, and angles. None is conclusive.

Similarly, the overt structure, the split into ten, is entirely relative. The medieval bestiary could have nine, ten, or any number of sketches, but each was self-contained and complete, depicting a single beast, fish, or fowl, and each was a supposed real animal phenomenon. In "The Encantadas" there are in fact twenty-five isles depicted in various groupings in the ten separate sketches, from all the isles ("The Isles at Large") to the tower-like Rock Rodondo that is a point of view ("Rock Rodondo") onto all, including the non-existent Cowley's Enchanted Isle ("A Pisgah View from the Rock"), to a closer study of one isle (Barrington, Charles, Norfolk, and Hood's Isles each are studied for the terrain and "animal" life on them in separate sketches). One sketch ("The Frigate, and Ship Flyaway") is not about the islands at all but an "enigmatic craft," some "enchanted ship,"[1] like Cowley's Enchanted Isle, which nearly led the U. S. Frigate Essex to its doom on the rocks. There is no apparent pattern in the structural divisions, rather an experimenting with approaches to the subject in a

[1]"The Encantadas," p. 75.

way that suggests both a use and a questioning of all attempts to formalize--through art--what is seen.

As a high point from which to look, like St. Mark's Bell-Tower or the top of a lighthouse or a "cruiser" or "glad populous ship,"[1] Rock Rodondo is symbolic of what, in their smaller heights, each of the islands is--for that matter, what every island and therefore every continent around the globe is: a point of view (no matter how limited) onto the endless flatness of the rolling ocean, the element out of which life spawns and to which it will return. Each example of struggling life on each island is somehow depraved and dangerous: each attempt at establishing animal and human life on land only ends in an unclean, painful bastardization. The wise man will consequently take to sea, and "'steer small and keep off shore'"[2] if he wishes to be safe and free from the degeneracies of land life. Each of the Enchanted Islands is cast up from the depths through volcanic overflow, just as the highest protuberance, Rock Rodondo, contains a hierarchy of life thrown up from the elemental source of life. The "entablatures of strata"[3] rising "in graduated series" reveal "the aviary of the Ocean." A lesson in "Natural History" could be learned from these "locust-flights of strong bandit birds," "outlandish beings" quite

[1] p. 65. [2] p. 85.

[3] p. 61.

savagely different from any "land-bird" or "poor warbler." Here a "demoniac din"[1] prevails. At the upmost point of this progressively important "senatorial array"[2] is the "beauteous" white "'Boatswain's Mate,'" linked by name to humanity through its clear song and whiteness, a color highly symbolic to human culture. The furthest point downwards is into the depths of the ocean where "certain larger and less unwary wights"[3] reveal their alien, monstrous nature by never, like their higher, beautiful but gullible brethern, contending "for the honor of capture."[4]

If the medieval bestiary sprang, like the allegory, from a system of absolute belief (in both natural characteristics observed and the spiritual qualities assigned or morals drawn) in which the impersonal point of view of author was simply "Catholic," this modern "bestiary" expresses relativity in every sense: the possibilities and limitations of variously explored points of view, as well as, in the number of the sketches themselves, the relativity of possible endless splitting, like the evolutionary process itself. The greyness of the isles, the greyness of the atmosphere, the grey relativity of the splits, are as mysterious as the fact of life in a single amoebic cell. Similarly, any belief in the progressive

[1] p. 62. [2] p. 63.

[3] p. 64. [4] p. 65.

nature of the evolutionary process, the endless bettering activity of life, is entirely ignored or destroyed by the inversions of human beings, like the Dog-King or the despicable, inhuman Oberlus. Even the noble Chola Widow merely endures, through an inhuman rigidity rather than an achieved, matured flexibility.

But having said all this, in the end one is left only in grey doubt and confusion about the basic problems of perception, given the deceptiveness of appearances and limitations of all points of view. If Nature and animal life, including fish, fowl, and man, are so difficult to distinguish and relate, if Nature herself presents a series of shifting appearances only, and no discernible, set "reality," and if Art is even further removed by the very nature of its medium and the relativity of its choices (point of view, structure, words and images), all that we can be certain of is life's vast mystery. In Hawthorne, the truths sought, not physical nature itself, are mysterious. Poe, by taking the pulse of only the nervous human heartbeat, looks no further into the universe, except obliquely in Pym. In Melville, everything--man, animal, and nature--ends by being strange, wondrous, and unknowable, and art itself by being merely "dreams of doting men."[1]

[1]"The Encantadas," p. 93.

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