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Melville: The Individual/Social Conflict

THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY IN SELECTED FICTION OF HERMAN MELVILLE

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ABSTRACT

The conflict between the individual and society in the characters of Herman Melville is a projection of the conflict within the author himself.

The protagonist of Typee reveals an inability and a subconscious reluctance to function as an autonomous individual despite his assertions of his individuality. Furthermore, he is in conflict with both civilized and primitive societies, fleeing from civilization to a primitive world, only to seek refuge from the latter back in civilization. Unable to resolve the conflict, he apparently will remain unhappy in any society. In Redburn, the individual/social conflict subsumes that between innocence and experience, as Redburn moves from innocence and arrogant egotism to experience and humanitarian sociality. In White-Jacket, the individual is ultimately forced to conform to what he deems an oppressive society, but is still able to espouse the cause of social justice. In Moby-Dick, Ahab succumbs to his ego-oriented tendencies, which annul his social instincts and compel him to pursue his ego-maniacal quest to his doom. Queequeg is governed by a selfless sociality. Ishmael, influenced by Ahab and Queequeg, strives to reconcile the forces of self and sociality within him, comes to embrace humanity, and is symbolically rescued by this love. In "Bartleby the Scrivener," Bartleby passively rebels against society, and dies symbolically as a result of his self-imposed isolation. The

lawyer/narrator of the tale, aware of his own inability to reconcile his business-like egocentricity with his humanitarian instincts, is left to mourn the wretched state of humanity.

Thus, the fate of each character discussed is determined by his capacity to resolve the individual/social conflict.

ABRÉGÉ

Le conflit entre l'individu et la société chez les personnages de Herman Melville est une réflexion du conflit à l'intérieur de l'auteur lui-même.

Le protagoniste de Typee révéle une incapacité et une répugnance sur le niveau du subconscient de fonctionner comme un individu autonome, malgré ses affirmations de son individualité. De plus, en conflit avec les sociétés civilisé et sauvage, il s'enfuit de la civilisation à un monde primitif, mais bientôt il cherche le refuge de la dernière chez la civilisation de nouveau. Donc, incapable de résoudre le conflit, il sera malheureux en n'importe qu'elle société. Dans Redburn, le conflit individuel/social coïncide avec celui entre l'innocence et l'expérience en tant que Redburn progresse de l'innocence et l'égoïsme arrogant a l'expérience et la socialité humanitaire. Dans White-Jacket, l'individu est finalement forcé de se conformer à une société qu'il juge être opprimante, mais néanmoins, il peut défendre la cause de la justice sociale. Dans Moby-Dick, Ahab succombe à ses tendances égoïstiques qui annulent ses instincts sociaux et qui le contraignant de poursuivre son enquête égoïste à sa mort. Queequeg est gouverné par une socialité altruiste. Ishmael, sous l'influence de Ahab et Queequeg, tente de réconcilier les forces égocentristes et sociales dans son intérieur, finalement embrasse l'humanité, et est symboliquement sauvé par cet amour. Dans "Bartleby the Scrivener,"

Bartleby se rebelle passivement contre la société, et il meurt symboliquement comme le résultat de l'isolement qu'il s'impose. L'avocat/raconteur de l'histoire, au courant de son incapacité de réconcilier son égoïsme d'un homme d'affaires avec ses instincts humanitaires, conclut l'histoire en lamentant la condition misérable de l'humanité.

Donc, le destin de chaque personnage discuté est déterminé par sa capacité de résoudre le conflit individuel/social.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate that the conflict between the individual and society is a major and recurrent theme in the fiction of Herman Melville, and that--depending on the work--this conflict is related to, or facilitates the development of numerous other "dichotomy themes" in Melville. Thus, although the focus of the study is limited, the implications of its theme are manifold.

The conflict shall be illustrated on the two levels on which it most frequently appears in selected works of the author: in the subtle psychological conflict between the ego-centric and socially oriented instincts within the major characters, and in the direct, philosophical conflict between the individual and his society. Both of these levels do not, of course, appear in all of the works to be discussed, and where they do not, the focus of the paper will be on either one or the other. Initially, the study will point out that the individual/social dilemma in many of Melville's characters is a projection of the conflict within the author himself. Ultimately, it shall present the argument that the fates of the characters discussed are determined by their ability or inability to resolve the external conflict in which they are engaged with their society, and/or to reconcile the internal conflicting forces of self and society.

With regard to the other "dichotomy themes" in Melville, the only such conflicts which shall be discussed in this study are those which are in some way pertinent to the central theme of the individual versus society. The two most significant of these secondary dichotomies are those between primitivism and civilization, and innocence and experience. Other Melvillean dualities, such as good and evil, divine and diabolical, light and dark, and land and sea may be briefly mentioned, but not explored in detail. This is not, of course, to minimize the importance of the numerous other conflicts in Melville, some of which may be even more significant in an overview of the author than the primary theme of this paper. The nature of a thesis such as this, however, demands that the scope be limited so as not to lose a concentrated focus on the principal issue at hand.

The works of fiction which shall be included in this thesis have been selected as basic to the theme of the individual/social conflict and to an understanding of the development of Melville's thought in this area. They are the novels Typee, Redburn, White-Jacket, and Moby-Dick, and the short story "Bartleby the Scrivener." The novels Pierre and Billy Budd, though in themselves among the most significant works in the Melville canon, have been intentionally excluded from this study, except for a brief reference to them in the Conclusion. Although the conflict

between the individual and society is evident in both of these novels, it expands to the metaphysical conflict between chronometrical and horological values. This latter opposition becomes perhaps the central theme of Melville's later works, encompassing, in fact, the individual/social conflict, and thus it cannot be justifiably discussed as a secondary theme. My hope, however, is that a detailed critical analysis of the works which are included in this thesis will be sufficient to establish the conflict between the individual and society as a basic and significant theme in Melville's fiction.

I THE BIOGRAPHICAL ROOTS OF THE CONFLICT

The concept of the dual nature of man is perhaps the most significant of the recurring general themes which pervade the novels and stories of Herman Melville. Based upon the physical and philosophical dichotomies which Melville reveals within so many of his literary characters, man may well be considered--at least on an abstract level--to be composed of conflicting forces, some of which are reconciliable, others of which are hopelessly incompatible. In either case, these forces are, according to Melville, the principal sources of man's behavioral motivation.

One such conflict which is manifested in several of Melville's characters is that between the antithetic human instincts of individuality and social conformity. Melville, an acute observer of both the individual man and the society of man, was himself torn between the one and the other. He saw in himself a man of superior individual talent who, in the fulfillment of his personal goals and ambitions, was unable to cope--either materially (specifically, on a financial level) or psychologically--with the demands of an "inferior" society. His initial literary efforts, Typee and Omoo, were geared to be popular with the general reading public, and, as such, proved to be financially successful. Upon publication of Mardi--an intricately allegorical work which served to fulfill his own literary instincts--however, he

encountered critical and financial failure. Despite this failure, though, the work did satisfy the individual within Melville, and from this satisfaction he was able to derive some degree of insulation from the dismal reception of the book. In a letter to Richard Bentley, who published Mardi after it had been rejected by Melville's original British publisher, John Murray, the author expresses his indifference, affected or otherwise, to public opinion, in light of the fulfillment which the work had provided him as both an individual and an artist:

> The critics on your side of the water seem to have fired quite a broadside into Mardi; but it was not altogether unexpected.... However, it will reach those for whom it is intended; and I have already received assurances that Mardi, in its higher purposes, has not been written in vain.
>
> You may think, in your own mind that a man is unwise,--indiscreet, to write a work of that kind, when he might have written one perhaps, calculated merely to please the general reader, and not provoke attack....But some of us scribblers, My Dear Sir, always have a certain something unmanageable in us, that bids us do this or that, and be done it must--hit or miss. 1

This haughty independence and individuality was but short lived, for financial exigencies, which Melville could not ignore,

1 Herman Melville, Letters, ed. Merrell R. Davis and William H. Gilman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), pp. 85-6. The letter was written on 5 June 1849.

obliged him to suppress the "something unmanageable" within him and to resort once again to that style of writing "calculated merely to please the general reader." For the sake of survival as both an author and a man, Melville thus abandoned his individual literary pursuits for those of a more socially acceptable nature. The resulting novels, Redburn and White-Jackat, written in the popular vein, were both fairly well received by the public; they were also, however, the objects of the scorn and deprecation of their author. In a letter to his father-in-law, Justice Lemuel Shaw, Melville writes: "...no reputation that is gratifying to me can possibly be achieved by either of these books. They are two jobs, which I have done for the money--being forced to it, as other men are to sawing wood."[2] As the letter continues, it becomes a striking, exemplary document of Melville's personal individual/social dilemma: for although he admits that his individual interests yielded to social demands in the writing of Redburn and White-Jacket, he still asserts the individual quality --albeit limited--of the novels, and once again assumes the indifferent, highly individualistic attitude which prevails in the earlier letter to Bentley:

> ...while I have felt obliged to refrain from writing the kind of book I would wish to; yet,

[2] Ibid., p. 91. The letter was written on 6 October 1849.

> in writing these two books, I have not repressed myself much--so far as they are concerned; but have spoken pretty much as I feel.--Being books, then, written in this way, my only desire for their "success" (as it is called) springs from my pocket, and not from my heart. So far as I am individually concerned, and independent of my pocket, it is my earnest desire to write those sort of books which are said to 'fail.'--Pardon this egotism. 3

Unable to long deny his "earnest desire to write those sort of books which are said to 'fail,'" Melville resumed the pursuit of his creative ambitions, just as he had earlier abandoned these ambitions in favor of the demands of his reading public. The subsequent novels, Moby-Dick and Pierre, predictably enough spawned critical and--of greater importance to Melville--financial failure. Melville's resentment of the financial and general social demands which inhibited his individual literary instincts, and the overwhelming frustration which resulted, is lucidly reflected in what has by now become a classic letter to Nathanial Hawthorne. Writing to Hawthorne on the progress of Moby-Dick, which he then referred to as The Whale--the novel's original British title--Melville expresses his anger at having to write according to the dictates of the public for the sake of financial need, rather than according to those of his own heart, and speaks scornfully of his earlier adventure romances

[3] Ibid., pp. 91-2.

which, well received by the public, had become the source of his "fame":

> ...Truth is the silliest thing under the sun. Try to get a living by the Truth--and go to the Soup Societies....In a week or so, I go to New York ...and work and slave on my 'Whale' while it is driving through the press. That is the only way I can finish it now,--I am so pulled hither and thither by circumstances....Dollars damn me....What I feel most moved to write, that is banned,--it will not pay. Yet, altogether write the other way I cannot. So the product is final hash, and all my books are botches....
>
> What 'reputation' H.M. has is horrible. Think of it! To go down to posterity is bad enough, any way; but to go down as a 'man who lived among the cannibals!'....[4] I have come to regard this matter of Fame as the most transparent of all Vanities. 5

Unable to succeed as an individual who continued to present what he felt "most moved to write" to a society which could not appreciate it, Melville was ultimately compelled to accept a position as Deputy Inspector of Customs in New York City in order to support his family. His literary interests were thus relegated --by financial needs and social circumstances--from a career to a pastime.

[4] A reference to the reputation bestowed upon him as a result of Typee and Omoo.

[5] Melville, Letters, pp. 127-130. The letter was written on 17 June 1851.

As Melville's characters--the literary embodiments of his conception of man's dual nature--are so often autobiographically oriented, this conflict between individual and social instincts is evident within them, for Melville has either consciously incorporated or subconsciously projected his own conflict into these characters.

II TYPEE

In his first published novel, Typee, Melville depicts the individual in a constant state of flight, and the theme of the narrative may thus ostensibly appear to be the individual's escape from society. Melville, however, establishes the theme of the conflict between individual and social instincts since each time his apparently individualistic narrator/protagonist, Tommo (a fictionalized Melville figure), effects an escape from one society, he finds refuge in another.

As the whaler "Dolly"[1]--perhaps the metaphorical microcosm of civilized society--lies moored in the Bay of Nukuheva, Tommo, on board the ship, contemplates the relationship between the civilized and savage worlds which are symbolically merged within the confines of the harbor. In these meditations, Tommo gives the initial indications of his displeasure with the society he is soon to escape from, and of his sympathy with the society which he will unwittingly escape to:

> Our ship was now wholly given up to every species of riot and debauchery. The grossest licentiousness and the most shameful inebriety prevailed.... Alas for the poor savages when exposed to the

[1] Melville's fictionalized appellation for the "Acushnet," from which he and a shipmate, Richard Tobias Greene (Toby), fled in 1842 while at the Marquesan Islands. The ensuing episodes became the basis of the plot of Typee.

> influence of these polluting examples! Unsophisticated and confiding, they are easily led into every vice, and humanity weeps over the ruin thus remorselessly inflicted upon them by their European civilizers. Thrice happy are they who, inhabiting some yet undiscovered island in the midst of the ocean, have never been brought into contaminating contact with the white man. 2

Ironically, Tommo is soon to be the white man with whom the savages are to be "brought into contaminating contact." The naivete which Tommo manifests in this passage sets him up, from a thematic standpoint, for the learning process which his experiences among the savages effect, and from which he comes to understand that there is no ideal society (a prevalent theme in Melville, and one which was no doubt derived from his own experiences among the Typees).

Tommo's original intention of jumping ship might at first appear to indicate a very definite effort on the part of the individual to resist and free himself from the ill-usage of society, as represented by the abuse to which each sailor on board the "Dolly" is subject. In explaining why he had decided to "run away" from the ship, thereby hoping to evade the stigma associated with these words, Tommo claims that

> The usage on board of her [the "Dolly"] was tyran-

[2] Herman Melville, Typee (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1957), p. 13.

> nical; the sick had been inhumanly neglected; the provisions had been doled out in scanty allowance; and her cruises were unreasonably protracted. The captain was the author of these abuses; it was in vain to think that he would either remedy them, or alter his conduct....His prompt reply to all complaints and remonstrances was the butt-end of a hand-spike, so convincingly administered as effectually to silence the aggrieved party. 3

Despite Tommo's apparent individuality, however, he is loath to act alone, as an individual, in his undertaking. At this point of the narrative, the reader is introduced to Toby, soon to become Tommo's companion in escape, and whom Tommo presents--as if to extenuate his actual inability to quit society without taking a part of it along with him--as a man who, like himself, is very much an individual:

> Toby, like myself, had evidently moved in a different sphere of life....He was one of that class of rovers you sometimes meet at sea, who never reveal their origin, never allude to home, and go rambling over the world as if pursued by some mysterious fate they cannot possibly elude. 4

[3] Ibid., pp. 14-15.

[4] Ibid., p. 23. Although this aspect of Toby is never revealed or elaborated upon past this point, he nevertheless may be the prototype of a significant Melvillean figure, the individual who is mysteriously drawn to the sea. In this regard, he may be compared to Bulkington, Ahab (except that Ahab does "allude to home"), and, to a lesser extent, the "water gazers" in Moby-Dick.

Having thus provided himself with a viable rationale for doing so, Tommo approaches Toby, and in a passage imbued with subtle psychological innuendoes which further expose the conflict between the individual and social tendencies within Tommo, the two men reach an agreement:

> ...the attempt was so perilous in the place where we lay, that I supposed myself the only individual [Italics mine] on board the ship who was sufficiently reckless to think of it. In this, however, I was mistaken.
>
> When I perceived Toby ...buried in thought, it struck me that the subject of his meditations might be the same as my own. And if it be so, thought I, is he not the very one of all my shipmates whom I would choose for the partner of my adventure? and why should I not have some comrade with me to divide its dangers and alleviate its hardships?...
>
> These thoughts passed rapidly through my mind, and I wondered why I had not before considered the matter in this light. But it was not too late. A tap upon the shoulder served to rouse Toby from his reverie; I found him ripe for the enterprise, and a very few words sufficed for a mutual understanding between us. 5

It is significant to note that in this sequence, Toby does not approach Tommo, but rather Tommo--through a process of intellectualization which enables him to obviate an admission of his need of a companion--convinces himself that Toby would naturally want to accompany him. Ostensibly, therefore, Tommo discloses his

5 Ibid., p. 24.

plans to Toby because he has persuaded himself that in "choosing" Toby as his companion, he would be doing his shipmate perhaps as great a service as the latter would be doing Tommo in sharing the anticipated burdens of his "adventure." Subconsciously, however, and despite his assertions of his individuality, Tommo is unable to completely overcome his socially oriented instincts, and thus he must paradoxically seek a social companion to join him in an act which would attest to this individuality. He is unable, therefore, to realize his novel, highly individualistic quest without the aid of the very society from which he is attempting to flee.

After having effected the escape from the ship, and having thus symbolically passed the confines of civilized society, Tommo is clearly unable to function as an individual. As he and Toby journey along a sort of no-man's-land between the civilized and savage worlds, it is often Toby's ingenuity and physical prowess which enable the pair to survive. Upon entering the valley and society of the Typees, the narrator, in unfamiliar surroundings, finds his once "potent" individuality totally stifled. He is at a loss when he feels that he has been deserted by Toby, and indulging in self-pity, laments that

> [Toby] ...has secured his own escape, and cares not what calamity may befall his unfortunate comrade....He has gone, and left me to combat <u>alone</u> [Italics mine]

all the dangers by which I am surrounded. 6

Furthermore, because of Tommo's unexpected lameness--a malady perhaps psychosomatically induced so as to excuse his manifest lack of autonomy--he is completely incapable of functioning to any significant extent without the aid of his "manservant," Kory-Kory, or one of the other inhabitants of the valley. The interpretation of Tommo's lameness as possibly being the result of psychosomatic cause-and-effect further reveals the conflict between the individual and social instincts within him; in this instance, the social forces stem from primitive society rather than from civilization. For example, as he despairs at the inexorable determination of the Typees to tattoo him, and in so branding his white skin, symbolically render him a member of their savage society, Tommo's ailment, which had been relieved to some degree, is renewed with its previous vigor:

> Not a day passed but I was persecuted by the solicitations of some of the natives to subject myself to the odious operation of tattooing. Their importunities drove me half wild....A thousand times I thought how much more endurable would have been my lot had Toby still been with me. <u>But I was left alone, and the thought was terrible to me</u> [Italics mine]....
>
> It was during the period I was in this unhappy frame of mind, that the painful malady under which I had been labouring--after having

6 <u>Ibid</u>., p. 115.

> almost completely subsided--began again to show itself, and with symptoms as violent as ever. This added calamity nearly unmanned me; the recurrence of the complaint proved that, without powerful remedial applications, all hope of cure was futile; and when I reflected that just beyond the elevations which bound me in, was the medical relief I needed, and that, although so near, it was impossible for me to avail myself of it, the thought was misery. 7

Two aspects of the psychological individual/social conflict are illustrated in this passage. One is the general need of the individual to have a companion, as reflected in Tommo's terror at the thought of being "left alone." The other is the individual's need to belong to a specific society: for despite Tommo's conscious desire to escape from the savage society itself and from the fate of being symbolically "converted" to it, his lameness--perhaps a result of his latent desire to be a part of the society--prevents him from doing so, at least in this instance.

This ambivalence is perhaps more clearly reflected at the moment that Tommo first recognizes a viable means of escape. Provided with a course of action by Marnoo, the savage who, being "taboo," is free to wander unmolested among all the tribes of the island, Tommo, healthy once again, makes several unsuccessful attempts at escape. Although these attempts reflect his conscious desire to quit the Typee society, the social forces

[7] Ibid., pp. 244-5.

within Tommo soon dominate those of the individual once again; and as he contemplates making yet another attempt at escape, his lameness reappears as mysteriously as it had vanished, thereby precluding any further essays to flee:

> I endeavored to console myself with the idea that ...I might yet effect my escape.
> Shortly after Marnoo's visit [,however,] I was reduced to such a state, that it was with extreme difficulty I could walk, even with the assistance of a spear, and Kory-Kory, as formerly, was obliged to carry me daily to the stream. 8

Even at the moment that Tommo's hopes of escaping are rekindled with the announcement that a ship bearing Toby--who, as it turns out, is not aboard the ship at all--has anchored just outside of the valley, the conflict within Tommo is still very much in evidence. It is evinced in the combination of his enthusiasm at the thought of escaping and the untimely recurrence of his lameness, which, initially mitigated at the news of the appearance of the ship and the reappearance of Toby, still prevents Tommo from reaching the shore on his own. The scene is certainly among the more comical of the romance:

> ...one day, about noon, and whilst everything was in profound silence, Mow-Mow, the one eyed chief,

8 Ibid., p. 257.

> suddenly appeared at the door, and leaning forward towards me as I lay directly facing him, said, in a low tone, 'Toby pemi ena,' (Toby has arrived here.) Gracious heaven! What a tumult of emotions rushed upon me at this startling intelligence! Insensible to the pain that had before distracted me, I leaped to my feet, and called wildly to Kory-Kory, who was reposing by my side. The startled islanders sprang from their mats; the news was quickly communicated to them; and the next moment I was making my way to the Ti [the 'royal' residence] on the back of Kory-Kory, and surrounded by the excited savages.....
> .....
> [At the Ti, Tommo is given permission to proceed to the beach.]
> Accompanied by some fifty of the natives, I now rapidly continued my journey, every few moments being transferred from the back of one to another, and urging my bearer forward all the while with earnest entreaties. As I thus hurried forward, no doubt as to the truth of the information I had received ever crossed my mind. I was alive only to the one overwhelming idea, that a chance of deliverance was now afforded me.....
> .....
> ...I was now borne along at a rapid trot, frequently stooping my head to avoid the branches which crossed the path, and never ceasing to implore those who carried me to accelerate their already swift pace. [9]

Although the escape to which the above passage is a prelude is ultimately realized, Tommo has yet to fully exercise the individualistic tendencies which are in him, and which are responsible for his taking it upon himself to escape first from the "Dolly" and then from the Typees: for just as he had solicited

[9] Ibid., pp. 260-61.

Toby's aid to escape from the ship which represents civilization, so too does he require and actively seek the aid of the unsuspecting savages in order to escape from their society.

When Tommo finally does escape from the valley of the Typees, he is once again fleeing from one society only to find refuge in another--ironically, that from which he escaped in the first place. As he nears the ocean with the hope of escaping aboard the Australian whaler "Julia,"[10] which is anchored off-shore, he echoes sentiments which, despite his earlier protestations of the evils of civilization, reveal his affinity with this very society:

> We proceeded onwards, and never shall I forget the ecstazy I felt when I first heard the roar of the surf breaking upon the beach....Oh! glorious sight and sound of the ocean! with what rapture did I hail you as familiar friends. By this time the shouts of the crowd upon the beach were distinctly audible, and in the blended confusion of sounds I almost fancied I could distinguish the voices of my own countrymen. [11]

As Tommo joins the crew of the "Julia," he is escaping by means of a ship of the civilized world--the very object from which he sought to escape at the onset of the narrative.

[10] The "Lucy Ann," aboard which Melville sailed following his escape from the Marquesas in August, 1842.

[11] Melville, Typee, p. 264.

In describing aspects of the rebel in Melville's Tommo, John Bernstein maintains that the narrator/protagonist's strong desire to flee from the primitive Typee society and return to civilization is the novel's major flaw. This desire, Bernstein argues, contradicts Tommo's earlier "rebellious" attitude which is illustrated in his escape from, and especially in his deprecation of, civilized society, and in his complementary (and, for that matter, complimentary) panegyrics with regard to the savage world:

> Primitive man ...as viewed by Melville, is happy, kind, dignified, friendly, and able to live in harmony with his fellows....Though there are instances of evil in Typee, this evil is neither beyond the control of man nor an underlying aspect of human nature, but it is rather a result of the corruption of natural law by the white man's civilization.....
> .....
> The land of the Typees ...is a 'Happy Valley' in which there is neither metaphysical evil nor a need for social reformers. It is, as Melville suggests, quite similar to the Garden of Eden. If this is the case, why does Tommo quit his South Sea paradise? The major artistic and thematic weakness of Typee is that Melville never really deals honestly with this question. To be sure, Tommo talks of his horror of being tattooed and of his renewed fears of becoming the chief course of a Typee banquet. But these reasons for Tommo's flight do not seem to be sufficient for they are not convincingly presented. [12]

[12] John Bernstein, Pacifism and Rebellion in the Writings of Herman Melville (The Hague: Mouton and Company, 1964), pp. 20-23.

Indeed, Melville has used the conflict between the individual and society, if not to encompass, then at least to help develop the thematic dichotomy between civilization and primitivism. He has done so by placing a civilized individual, who is in conflict with his native society, against the backdrop of a primitive society, which he can objectively appraise and compare with his own civilized world. In Tommo's reflections about the polarized natures of the two societies, the primitive world does, as Bernstein points out, emerge as the more naturally appealing, as illustrated in the previously cited passage in which, as the "Dolly" lies anchored in the Bay of Nukuheva, the narrator laments the vitiating effects of civilization on the savage world. In perhaps a more insightful analysis of the two worlds--more insightful in that, at this point, Tommo has lived within and has experienced the savage society--the protagonist compares the sense of order among civilized and primitive man:

> During the time I lived among the Typees, no one was ever put upon his trial for any offense against the public. To all appearances there were no courts of law or equity. There was no municipal police for the purpose of apprehending vagrants and disorderly characters. In short, there were no legal provisions whatever for the well-being and conservation of society, the enlightened end of civilized legislation. And yet everything went on in the valley with a harmony and smoothness unparalleled, I will venture to assert, in the most select, refined, and pious associations of mortals in Christendom. How

> are we to explain this enigma? These islanders were heathens! savages! aye, cannibals! and how came they, without the aid of established law, to exhibit, in so eminent a degree, that social order which is the greatest blessing and highest pride of the social state? 13

Although Tommo thus apparently sees the savage world--which is dictated by natural, rather than man-made law--in a more favorable philosophical light than he does civilization, his desire to escape from this "paradise" does not, as Bernstein suggests, betoken a significant incongruity of character. Just as Tommo seeks to flee the distressing evils of civilized society, so too does he wish to escape from what he views as the evils of primitive society, which, notwithstanding its Eden-like quality, is still imperfect. Tommo's fear of cannibalism is not as vague as Bernstein maintains it is, as he witnesses first hand the flesh-stripped remains of its victims, and is warned by Marnoo that fate holds in store a similar demise for him. Furthermore, neither cannibalism nor the tribal wars which precipitate it in the society of the savage are the "result[s] of the corruption of natural law by the white man's civilization," which Bernstein asserts is the cause of the evil depicted in Typee. Whether or

13 Herman Melville, The Portable Melville, ed. Jay Leyda (New York: The Viking Press, 1973), p. 272. This passage, excerpted from the first English edition of Typee, does not appear in the American edition, heretofore used as the textual source.

not the "natural law" abiding savage sees cannibalism as an evil is not a significant factor in determining Tommo's motivation to escape. What is important, is that in the judgment of Tommo's civilized mind, cannibalism is a social evil which, like those to which he was subjected aboard the "Dolly," is intolerable.

Not only is Tommo's desire to flee from the Typee society consistent with his previous deportment and attitudes, but it also further substantiates the idea of the individual/social conflict within him. Despite his efforts to alienate himself from civilization, and in so doing attest to his individuality and independence, Tommo cannot function in this alienated and independent condition for an extended period of time. The individual who has rebelliously escaped from his society at the beginning of his story, thus gleefully returns to it--despite his deprecation of it in itself and in its relationship to the savage world--as his tale is concluded.

Bernstein, in attempting to account for Tommo's escape from the "Happy Valley," proffers an explanation rendered by D.H. Lawrence, to the effect that, "like every American," the hero feels the rebel's urge to fight, and thus, "despite the fact that he finds undreamed of happiness among the Typees, Tommo flees back to the white man's world in order to fight against the injustice and evil which he knows is an inescapable part of the

life of civilized man."[14] It is not likely, however, that Tommo has attained the level of maturity required to stand up to and "fight against ...injustice and evil." Upon deciding to escape from the "Dolly," Tommo himself uses the phrase "run away," an action which can hardly be associated with a "fighter." When he flees from the Typee society, therefore, he is not returning to civilization in order to altruistically combat its evils. Rather, yielding to the social forces within him, he is quite simply "running away" once again, this time back to civilization, apparently ready to either reconcile himself to its foibles or to disregard them: for whether or not he is cognizant of it, he and civilized society are intrinsically a part of one another.

If Typee is to be considered even a partially accurate, if embellished, account of Melville's own experiences, and Tommo at least a partially legitimate self-characterization of the author, then Melville has possibly depicted the individual/social conflict within himself at the time the events described in the novel take place. His character, Tommo, entertains highly individualistic ideas and plans, but, because of his dominant social instincts, he is never able to convert them into action. His individual dimension is destined, therefore, to be overshadowed by his social dimension, and while the individual is not destroyed

[14] Bernstein, p. 215. Bernstein's source is Lawrence's Studies in Classic American Literature.

by this imbalance, he is unable to find self-fulfillment and satisfaction as a member of any society.

III REDBURN

In Redburn, Melville portrays the induction of the innocent individual into the society of experience. As Newton Arvin writes: "The outward subject of the book is a young boy's first voyage before the mast; it/s inward subject is the initiation of innocence into evil--the opening of the guileless spirit to the discovery of 'the wrong,' as James would say, 'to the knowledge of it, to the crude experience of it.'"[1] Thus, in Redburn, the conflict between the individual and society subsumes the dichotomy between innocence and experience.

The quality of innocence in Redburn before he embarks on "His First Voyage" (the novel's subtitle) is essentially reflected in his romanticized conception of the nautical and foreign urban societies into which he wishes to venture. Not anticipating the grotesque spectacles of humanity and the bleak, morbid images which are to eventually dominate his impressions of Liverpool--and which are but a part of the reality of city life--he originally entertains only exalted and idealized notions of any and all foreign ports, based on his recollections of what his father had told him of them. He speaks of these lands with such detached awe and wonderment as to impart to them an almost extra-terres-

[1] Newton Arvin, Herman Melville (New York: The Viking Press, 1966), p. 103.

trial quality:

> [My father] ...used to tell my brother and me ... all about Havre, and Liverpool, and about going up into the ball of St. Paul's in London. Indeed, during my early life, most of my thoughts of the sea were connected with the land; but with fine old lands, full of mossy cathedrals and churches, and long, narrow, crooked streets without sidewalks, and lined with strange houses. And especially I tried hard to think how such places must look of rainy days and Saturday afternoons; and whether indeed they did have rainy days and Saturdays there, just as we did here; and whether the boys went to school there, and studied geography, and wore their shirt collars turned over, and tied with a black ribbon; and whether their papas allowed them to wear boots, instead of shoes, which I so much disliked, for boots looked so manly. 2

The latter part of this passage vividly reflects a child's idiosyncratic view of all that is strange and alien to him. Yet, although these reflections were made by Redburn as a young child, his ingenuous concept of things foreign has not really been altered, even as he has matured enough to undertake his voyage. Indeed, upon first espying the coast of Ireland from the deck of the "Highlander," and realizing that there is little extraordinary about it, he remarks, "If that's the way a foreign country looks, I might as well have staid at home."[3]

[2] Herman Melville, Redburn (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1957), p. 3.

[3] Ibid., p. 118.

Just as the innocent Redburn's concept of foreign lands and their societies is greatly over-romanticized, so too is his notion of the world of the sailor. As he prepares for his odyssey, he gives little, if any, thought to the hardships and base labor which he will encounter while performing the duties of a "boy" on board a ship; nor is he able to anticipate the inevitable conflict between his own rustic mores and innocence, and the vulgar society of the crude, boorish, and experienced sailors. Rather, he embroiders nautical vocabulary so as to ascribe to common terms and phrases of sailing far more glorious meanings than they actually imply. A brig, for example, is not merely a double-masted ship, but "a black, sea-worn craft, with high, cozy bulwarks, and rakish masts and yards."[4] He also considers only that aspect of sailing which pertains to travel, and amuses himself with fantasies of the esteem in which he would be held as a cosmopolite who had ventured into all the exotic corners of the globe:

> ...I frequently fell into long reveries about distant voyages and travels, and thought how fine it would be, to be able to talk about remote and barbarous countries; with what reverence and wonder people would regard me, if I had just returned from the coast of Africa or New Zealand; how dark and romantic my sunburnt cheeks would look; how I would bring home with me foreign clothes of a rich fab-

[4] Ibid., p. 2.

> ric and princely make, and wear them up and down the streets, and how grocers' boys would turn back their heads to look at me, as I went by. 5

In all, Redburn is introduced to the reader hardly in the character type of an able seaman prepared to make his way through the world on his own. Melville thus sets his protagonist up for a voyage not only from America to Europe and back, but for an allegorical voyage as well. As Arvin writes:

> The voyage itself ...is a metaphor of death and rebirth, of the passage from childhood and innocence to experience and adulthood; the crossing, to and fro, of a sea in the waters of which one dies to the old self and puts on a new. 6

To take Arvin's explanation of the metaphor one step further, the voyage may also be seen--as shall be illustrated--as one from innocence and individuality to experience and sociality.

Melville symbolically foreshadows the results of this metaphorical voyage early in the novel. In the course of his discussion on how his love of the sea was inbred in him, Redburn speaks of a scale-model glass ship--"La Reine"--which is the pride of his family's household. The lucid crystalline material of which the model is totally composed betokens an untainted purity which

[5] Ibid., pp. 3-4.

[6] Arvin, p. 106.

parallels the innocence of young Redburn before his voyage. With the passing of time, however, the once delicately ornate ship--and of great symbolic import, its vitreous figurehead--is reduced to a state of decay:

> We have her ['La Reine'] yet in the house, but many of her glass spars and ropes are now sadly shattered and broken,--but I will not have her mended; and her figurehead, a gallant warrior in a cocked-hat, lies pitching head-foremost down into the trough of a calamitous sea under the bows--but I will not have him put on his legs again, till I get on my own; for between him and me there is a secret sympathy; and my sisters tell me, even yet, that he fell from his perch the very day I left home to go to sea on this 'my first voyage.' [7]

The "secret sympathy" between Redburn and the "gallant warrior," and, for that matter, the ship itself is clear: for just as the once immaculate glass of the ship has been blemished by age, so too does Redburn, the once innocent individual, return from "his first voyage" blemished by the brand of social experience.

Redburn's initiation into the world of experience begins almost immediately after he leaves his family's country home for New York City. As he steams down the Hudson River dressed in his brother's shooting jacket--a garment as consistently incongruous with its surroundings as its wearer is in the various new societies

[7] Melville, Redburn, p. 8.

into which he seeks admission--he becomes cognizant of a mutual, tacit animosity between himself and the other passengers, whose scorn for him is inspired by his apparent indigence. Once having arrived in New York, he is swindled by a crafty pawnbroker, deprived of an advance of a month's wages by the combined naivete of his elder friend and temporary guardian, Mr. Jones, and the cunning of Captain Riga, and consequently left a penniless wanderer on the streets of the city until the "Highlander" is prepared to weigh anchor. Even his glorious notions of sailing are dispelled as he finds his crewmates--who shall compose his social ring for the next several months--to be a crass lot of men who avail themselves of every opportunity to belittle and discourage the young greenhorn. To add insult to injury, his first duty as a sailor is to scour clean the pig sties, a task which he can but stoically accept.

As the "Highlander" is piloted out of New York Harbor and is passing through the Narrows, Redburn already begins to be afflicted with the pangs of homesickness. He expresses the fear that he shall never see his native land again, is convinced that the sailors will abuse him throughout the voyage, and laments that he ever left the familial comfort and security of his home. At this point, providing something of a psychological insight into his character, Melville depicts the innocent individual desperately grasping for a symbolic refuge from the world of experience into

which he has cast himself. As the city gradually fades from view, and as Redburn thus slips further and further into new and unfamiliar surroundings, he observes the remnants of a fortress, which as a child he had visited with his father and uncle, high atop a cliff on the Staten Island side of the Narrows. The young hero briefly describes the structure, whose idyllic surroundings would appear to provide a perfect setting for innocence to flourish in, and then continues, claiming that "the fort was a beautiful, quiet, charming spot. I should like to build a little cottage in the middle of it, and live there all my life."[8] Metaphorically, the innocent sees the fortress as a symbol of protection--as a stronghold which would be impervious to the evils of experience which he is on the verge of encountering. In this regard, the incipient conflict between innocence and experience--which shall ultimately correspond with the instincts of individuality and sociality--is making its initial appearance in Redburn: for despite the fact that he has chosen by his own free will to leave home and go to sea, he is unquestionably reluctant to fulfill his plans at the point at which he realizes they are irreversible.

As Redburn's contact with the society of experienced seamen increases, the individual/social conflict itself becomes discernible within him. At one point, invigorated by the brisk salt air

[8] Ibid., p. 34.

and his first taste of alcohol, the combined "medicinal" qualities of which have mitigated a case of sea-sickness, the hero begins to feel quite at ease in the company of his fellows, and even admits to a sort of charitable love for them:

> ...finding the sailors all very pleasant and sociable, at least among themselves, and seated smoking together like old cronies....I began to think that they were a pretty good set of fellows after all....
>
> Yes, I now began to look on them with a sort of incipient love; but more with an eye of pity and compassion, as men of naturally gentle and kind dispositions, whom only hardships, and neglect, and ill-usage had made outcasts from good society.... 9

As the sailors continue to mistreat him, however, Redburn's "love" is transformed into a consuming hatred, thereby illustrating the conflict within him. Unable to recognize the manner in which experience attacks innocence, Redburn cannot comprehend how or why the sailors could so ill-treat a poor, young, innocent such as he is. He can find no middle ground upon which to base his emotions, but moves from an apparently sincere love for the men who comprise his society to a scathing and total execration of them:

> I loathed, detested, and hated them with all that

9 Ibid., pp. 44-5.

> was left of my bursting heart and soul, and I thought myself the most forlorn and miserable wretch that ever breathed....And I wailed and wept, and my heart cracked within me, but all the time I defied them through my teeth, and dared them to do their worst. 10

Spurred by Jackson--a sailor of a diabolical, almost metaphysically evil nature, the likes of which Redburn cannot hope to cope with--the sailors' abuse of the hero intensifies, and with it, Redburn's reciprocal hatred of them. Thus, a correlation develops between the external, philosophical conflict between the individual and his society, and the internal, psychological conflict between the individual's social and anti-social instincts. In the philosophical dimension of the conflict, society--in this case, the crew of the "Highlander" provoked by Jackson--oppresses the individual, Redburn. As a result, Redburn reveals the ambivalence within him, as his hatred for the society of his crewmates increases shortly after he has expressed a love for these same men.

The psychological conflict within Redburn is not, however, illustrated only in his animosity which so closely succeeds his benign feelings for the crew, but also in his earnest desire to suppress this animosity, which, in spite of himself, has become uncontrollable:

10 Ibid., p. 50.

> ...at last I found myself a sort of Ishmael in the ship, without a single friend or companion; and I began to feel a hatred growing up in me against the whole crew--so much so, that I prayed against it, that it might not master my heart completely [Italics mine], and so make a fiend of me, something like Jackson. 11

Thus, the individual despises the society of the crew, but aware that he cannot exist happily as an Ishmael figure[12]--confined to his own company while in the midst of others--he desperately strives to rise above and circumvent his hatred.

Even were his shipmates to accept him more readily, it is quite possible that Redburn still would not eagerly accept them, and herein lies yet another facet of the conflict within him. Most of what there is to Redburn's individuality is comprised of an egotistical sense of elitism--of a feeling that he is far superior to his mates: for, as Bernstein writes, "...Redburn is a terrible snob, and his own exaggerated self-image is responsible for much of his unhappiness."[13] There are several instances of this snobbish egotism throughout the novel. Despite being a poor boy from a poor country family, for example, Redburn cannot help

[11] Ibid., p. 60.

[12] "And he [Ishmael] will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and in the presence of all his brethren shall he dwell." Genesis, 16:12. The Ishmael figure, of course, takes on greater significance in Moby-Dick.

[13] Bernstein, p. 59.

but make numerous allusions to his late father's former prosperity, and thus to the actual gentility of his family. Furthermore, he avails himself of even the most remotely appropriate opportunities to make some reference to his great uncle, who in his day had been a senator. Indeed, after making the acquaintance of Harry Bolton, who speaks to him familiarly of a variety of dukes, earls, lords, and the like, Redburn, not to be outdone, counters with his great uncle, claiming:

> As for me, I had only my poor old uncle the senator to fall back upon; and I used him upon all emergencies, like the knight in the game of chess; making him hop about, and stand stiffly up to the encounter, against all my fine comrade's array of dukes, lords, curricles, and countesses. [14]

There is one passage in particular, however, in which Redburn's initial patronizing attitude toward his mates is most vividly reflected. Engaging himself in an apparently innocent conversation with another sailor, Redburn is appalled at the seaman's lack of familiarity with affairs of literature, and, worse yet, of religion:

> When I heard this poor sailor talk in this manner, showing so plainly his ignorance and absence of proper views of religion, I pitied him

[14] Melville, Redburn, p. 213.

> more and more, and contrasting my own situation with his, I was grateful that I was different from him; and I thought how pleasant it was, to feel wiser and better than he could feel....[Italics mine] Thinking that my superiority to him in a moral way might sit uneasily upon this sailor, I thought it would soften the matter down by giving him a chance to show his own superiority to me, in a minor thing; for I was far from being vain and conceited. 15

Despite this latter assertion, though, Redburn is indeed "vain and conceited," as the preceding segment of the passage indicates. Thus, the "superior" Redburn probably would not have accepted the vulgar society of the "ignorant" sailors, even had they not abused him: for despite his apparent desire to fit into this society, to allow himself to do so would have been a threat to his self-concept as an elite individual. It might, therefore, be argued--as Bernstein does in claiming that Redburn's "exaggerated self-image is responsible for much of his unhappiness"--that after the customary cold reception given a greenhorn, Redburn's mates would not have continued to reject him so blatantly had they not sensed his haughty air and "holier-than-thou" attitude toward them.

Just as Redburn's snobbish individualism is characterized by innocence, so is his inception into sociality marked by experience: for as his innocence yields to his growing experience, his

15 Ibid., pp. 46-7.

egotism develops into a distinct social awareness. Although his initiation into experience originates aboard the "Highlander," by far his most impressive experience occurs in the jungle of human depravity which encompasses the docks of Liverpool. The incident is detailed in the nightmarish chapter, "What Redburn Saw in Launcelott's Hey." Once, while passing through the alley-like street named in the title of the chapter, Redburn hears a weak, mournful cry emanating from the cellar of a decaying warehouse. Gazing into the opening of the cellar, he sees

> ...some fifteen feet below the walk, crouching in nameless squalor, with her head bowed over ...the figure of what had been a woman. Her blue arms folded to her livid bosom two shrunken things like children, that leaned toward her, one on each side. At first, I knew not whether they were alive or dead. They made no sign; they did not move or stir; but from the vault came that soul-sickening wail. 16

The experience soon progresses from one of a vision of the fallen state of humanity to one which depict's man's indifference to this state--one which shows man's inhumanity to man. Seeking aid for the starving family, Redburn approaches several old and ragged women who are picking through piles of garbage in the vicinity of Launcelott's Hey in search of bits of discarded cloth which might be salvaged and sold. Contrary to what his innocent faith

16 Ibid., pp. 173-4.

might lead him to expect, however, he is respectively ignored by one of the rag-pickers, told by another that she hasn't the time to offer assistance, and "enlightened" by a third, who proffers the opinion that the starving woman deserves her cruel fate for having had her children out of wedlock.

Dismayed and disappointed, though not yet totally discouraged, Redburn turns to a constable, understandably anticipating enough concern and compassion to result in succor for the wretched family. The conversation which ensues between him and the officer, however, impresses upon him, perhaps even more forcefully than his encounter with the rag-pickers had done, the indifference of man to the plight of his fellows, and reveals to him the evil of a society divided within itself:

> 'It's none of my business, Jack,' said he [the constable]. 'I don't belong to that street.'
> 'Who does then?'
> 'I don't know. But what business is it of yours? Are you not a Yankee?' [italics mine]
> 'Yes,' said I, 'but come, I will help you remove that woman if you say so.'
> 'There, now Jack, go on board your ship and stick to it; and leave these matters to the town.' 17

Thus, Redburn finds society to be composed of self-isolating individuals, such as his elitism had, in a sense, made him during

17 Ibid., p. 175.

the voyage. He endeavors, therefore, to rectify this situation, at least within himself, before he too becomes an individual whose individuality causes him to neglect the needs of his fellow man. He brings portions of bread, water, and cheese to the woman and children, but as they eat, he watches them with more remorse than satisfaction, for he realizes that, however beneficent his intentions, he is doing little more than prolonging their misery and postponing their inevitable doom. He admits, in fact, that he might have terminated their lives, if not for the fact that "the law, which would let them perish of themselves without giving them one cup of water, would spend a thousand pounds, if necessary, in convicting him who should so much as offer to relieve them from their miserable existence."[18]

Despite the macabre nature of the incident, it does serve to rattle the now once innocent Redburn into an awareness of the realities of life which surround him, because of this very grimness. He takes no comfort in his "superiority" over the starving family, as he once did when confronted by an "ignorant" sailor on board the "Highlander," for if there is one thing which this experience, however morbid, has taught him, it is that there is no room for such haughty and complacent individuality as long as scenes such as that in Launcelott's Hey are allowed to occur any-

[18] Ibid., p. 177.

where within the greater society of man, of which all individuals are a part:

> ...I asked myself, What right had anybody in the wide world to smile and be glad, when sights like this were to be seen? It was enough to turn the heart to gall; and make a man-hater of a Howard. For who were these ghosts that I saw? Were they not human beings? A woman and two girls? With eyes, and lips, and ears like any queen? with hearts which, though they did not bound with blood, yet beat with a dull, dead ache that was their life. 19

As the chapter concludes, he continues in a similar vein:

> Surrounded as we are by the wants and woes of our fellowmen, and yet given to follow our own pleasure, regardless of their pains, are we not like people sitting up with a corpse, and making merry in the house of the dead? 20

Thus, Redburn now sees all men as members of the same family, dwelling within the same "house"--that of humanity. Furthermore, for the first time in the novel, he displays a genuine interest in the cause of social justice, an interest lacking in his innocence and inspired by his recently acquired experience, and an interest which shows that his selfish, individualistic instincts

[19] Ibid., p. 174.

[20] Ibid., p. 178.

have yielded to his selfless, social instincts. As Bernstein observes:

> ...Redburn comes to shun [his] perpetual egotism as a result of his experiences in Liverpool. His continued exposure in that city to pimps, beggars, cripples, prostitutes, and drunkards forces him into a realization that his own problems are comparatively petty and that all human existence is a form of suffering.....
> .....
> We find in Redburn's concern for the starving woman his first true act of kindness in the novel, and when he brings her food, he moves from a position of detachment to a position of commitment. For Redburn has reached the conclusion that no man is an island, that to turn your back on one who is suffering is in reality to turn your back on yourself. To maintain any sort of self-respect, he feels that he must fight against all social evil and social injustice. Needless to say, after his initial act of kindness, most of Redburn's snobbishness and egotism disappears, and his major concern now is more with the misfortune of others than with his own discomforts and disappointments. 21

As Redburn's exposure to the full range of human depravity catalogued by Bernstein at the beginning of the above passage increases, his innocence continues to fade, leaving experience in its stead. Aside from his contact with these sordid elements of Liverpool, Redburn's transformation from innocence and egotism to experience and humanitarianism is further precipitated by his

21 Bernstein, pp. 60-2.

brief, somewhat nebulous ordeal at "Aladdin's Palace," the London gambling casino to which he is taken by Harry Bolton. While Harry is engaged in a gambling orgy during which he is apparently to lose the better portion of whatever money he possesses, Redburn remains isolated in a side room of the hall, fairly overwhelmed by the opulent grandeur by which he is surrounded. Despite this luxuriance, however, he cannot help but mark a similarity in the sensations inspired by his present situation and by the scenes to which he was a witness in Liverpool:

> ...spite of the metropolitan magnificence around me, I was mysteriously alive to a dreadful feeling, which I had never before felt, except when penetrating into the lowest and most squalid haunts of sailor iniquity in Liverpool. All the mirrors and marbles around me seemed crawling over with lizards; and I thought to myself, that though gilded and golden, the serpent of vice is a serpent still. 22

Thus is Redburn's initiation to experience while abroad consummated: with the realization of the universality of experience and evil, which are as much a bane to the wealthy and affluent as they are to the poor and indigent.

Redburn thus prepares for the homeward voyage armed with the experience which he lacked as he departed from America; and as he begins to understand the implications of his experiences to

22 Melville, Redburn, p. 226.

the nature of life, his resulting sociality and sense of brotherhood become more and more dominant over his once ascendant egotism. Perhaps nowhere is this more in evidence than in his commentary on the emigrants who constitute the majority of the "Highlander's" passengers on her return voyage to New York. In speaking of the relationship between the vain, imperious cabin-passengers and the humble emigrants, Redburn, once the snob himself, notes and condemns the snobbishness of the cabin-passengers, who have insisted that a rope be put up to clearly delineate the boundary which separates them from the emigrants:

> Lucky would it be for the pretensions of some parvenus, whose souls are deposited at their banker's, and whose bodies but serve to carry about purses, knit of poor men's heart-strings, if thus easily they could precisely define, ashore, the difference between them and the rest of humanity. 23

As Redburn continues to speak of the emigrants, and discourses on the hardships they must endure to reach the shores of America, the spirit of brotherhood and humanity within him is further manifested. In 1835, Samuel F.B. Morse published a treatise entitled "Imminent Dangers to the Free Institutions of the United States Through Foreign Immigration." The work generated a movement of almost xenophobic nativism during the following two decades, a

23 Ibid., p. 235.

movement which Melville apparently was strongly opposed to. Through the medium of his narrator, Redburn, Melville thus points out the folly of condemning men strictly because of their nationality:

> Let us waive that agitated national topic, as to whether such multitudes of foreign poor should be landed on our American shores; let us waive it, with the one only thought, that if they can get here, they have God's right to come; though they bring all Ireland and her miseries with them. For the whole world is the patrimony of the whole world [Italics mine]; there is no telling who does not own a stone in the Great Wall of China. 24

Redburn ultimately sees, therefore, that in the final analysis, the fraternal bond by which all men are joined transcends international boundaries.

It might well be argued that since, in this instance, the mature Melville and not the young Redburn is speaking, this passage reflects the author's, not his character's, sociality. As the work is quasi-autobiographical in nature, however, it can be assumed that Melville himself benefited from his experiences as a boy sailor much in the same fashion as Redburn does in the novel. Melville is speaking not only as the man/author, therefore, but also as the boy, Redburn, grown up and revealing the socially

24 Ibid., pp. 281-2.

oriented attitude which was originally kindled by the experiences he has been relating.

Aside from the emigrants and cabin-passengers, the "Highlander" embarks for New York with at least one other passenger who was not aboard during her outgoing voyage--Harry Bolton. As he sets sail for America, Harry might best be characterized by a trait reminiscent of Redburn as he set out for Liverpool--a snobbish egotism based wholly upon an inflated, but spurious, self-image. Despite his assertions of his worldliness and his claims of extensive sailing experience, Harry's apparent sophistication is little more than an affected veneer. He is unable to perform even the most basic of seaman's tasks, and is as out of place as a sailor aboard the "Highlander" as he was as a gambler at "Aladdin's Palace." In brief, he is awkward anywhere within the realm of experience.

Unlike Redburn, however, Harry could never tolerate the deflation of his self-image, which his exposure to experience would shatter. Thus, he is not receptive to the challenges put forth by his experiences, preferring to cower before, and be overwhelmed by, these experiences rather than accepting the opportunity for growth with which they provide him. He is never, therefore, able to grasp the realities of life which experience might have revealed to him, as it did to Redburn, and so is never able to overcome his vain individuality, as Redburn had done. It is not sur-

prising, then, that Harry is ultimately destroyed by his inexperience while on a whaling expedition which, were he not blinded by his vanity, he might have realized he had no right to be on. Redburn, on the other hand, continues to survive even "after having passed through far more perilous scenes than any narrated in ...(His) First Voyage."[25]

Although Redburn loses his innocence during the course of the novel, he is not corrupted by social experience, but is rather edified by it, as indicated by the eye of compassion with which he ultimately comes to view a fallen mankind. Unlike Tommo, who remains essentially unchanged at the end of Typee, Redburn has accepted experience and sociality as means to learn more about himself and to improve himself as an individual. Tommo, having never resolved the individual/social conflict, witnesses the evils of the societies of which he is a part, and can do no more than run away from them. Redburn, however, having resolved the conflict in favor of sociality--without allowing himself to be dominated by it, as Tommo had done--witnesses the evils of society, and is determined to help rectify them. Furthermore, despite this apparently one-sided resolution, Redburn has, in a sense, actually reconciled the conflicting forces of individuality and sociality by recognizing the power which the individual, who

[25] Ibid., p. 301.

does not conform to the apathetic, general mass of humanity, can and must assert in order to help better society. In brief, it might be said that Redburn has cast aside his deleterious egotism, while achieving and maintaining the beneficial aspects of a sort of balanced, "socialized individuality."

IV WHITE-JACKET

In White-Jacket, Melville continues to present the conflict between the individual and society on both the psychological level and the more direct philosophical level, much as he had done in Redburn. The narrator of the novel--again a literary quasi-projection of Melville--is, like the author, a keen observer of society, which as in Typee, is represented in the microcosm of a ship, in this instance the frigate "Neversink." [1] Like Tommo and Redburn, White-Jacket manifests a conflict between his individualistic impulses and his desire to be a part of the society of his shipmates. Unlike Tommo, however, White-Jacket's conflict is not rooted in the weakness of the individual, but rather in the fact that, like Redburn, he is basically a socially oriented character unable to tolerate passively the injustices imposed upon the individual by the society of which he is both a part and a detached--but not disinterested--observer.

Melville establishes the psychological conflict within White-Jacket at the very onset of the narrative. The novel opens with an explanation of the jacket from which the protagonist's nickname is derived. In both its color and style, it distinguishes its wearer from the other sailors, donned in the conventional

[1] Probably the frigate "United States," aboard which Melville served as an ordinary seaman from August, 1843 to October, 1844.

navy-blue pea coats, and is thus made the allegorical mark of the individual within society. In this regard, one may note a symbolic parallel between this white jacket and Redburn's shooting jacket, which also renders its wearer a somewhat conspicuous character. In asserting the allegorical significance of the white jacket, John Seelye observes that:

> The emphasis in White-Jacket is ...on [the character's] attempts to remain an individual while yet seeking the acceptance of the crew. The difficulty of such a divided quest in the warship world of regulations and uniformity is emphasized by the singular white jacket: though the jacket certainly accentuates the narrator's individuality, in so doing it also serves to alienate him from most of his shipmates. [Italics mine] 2

As Seelye notes, White-Jacket, despite the individuality of which he himself is apparently incognizant, does "seek the acceptance of the crew," and thus does not wish to have the distinction which his ersatz garment bestows upon him. Indeed, he himself has "fashioned" and made his jacket (perhaps connoting the self-made individual) only because he was unable to obtain the more traditional attire. Even once he has resolved to wear the jacket, he is determined to make it resemble--at least in color--those of

2 John Seelye, Melville: The Ironic Diagram (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1970), p. 58.

his crewmates:

> ...I had been terribly disappointed in carrying out my original plan concerning this jacket. It had been my intention to make it thoroughly impervious, by giving it a coating of paint.... [But] so much paint had been stolen by the sailors, in daubing their overhaul trousers and tarpaulins, that by the time I--an honest man--had completed my quiltings, the paint-pots were banned, and put under strict lock and key. 3

Although on a practical level the paint would make the jacket impermeable (the fact that the jacket seems to absorb rain and seawater to the point of total saturation parallels the observant, all-absorbing nature of the mind of its wearer), it also serves a literary purpose on a philosophical and thematic level: for it would make the jacket the same shade as the regulation pea coat, thereby enabling White-Jacket to conform to the shipboard society. Thus, the motif of the reluctant individual is established.

Although there are several instances throughout the novel in which White-Jacket reiterates his desire to become less alienated from the frigate society, he is prevented from surrendering his individuality and his position as an outsider--as symbolically suggested by his post high aloft on the Neversink's foretop--as a result of his observations of the evils of this society. During

[3] Herman Melville, White-Jacket, ed. Hennig Cohen (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1967), pp. 2-3.

the course of the ship's voyage, he is witness to--and either directly or indirectly affected by--dehumanizing living conditions, the abuse of authority, and the general inhumanity of society toward its members.

Foremost among these problems in the heedful, incisive mind of the protagonist are the brutal floggings which he and his crewmates are made to witness. During the course of four consecutive chapters dealing with flogging, he conveys his pronounced objections to the practice. In the first of these chapters, simply entitled "A Flogging," he portrays the sheer barbarity of this form of punishment, arbitrarily administered according to the whims of the ship's captain, and illustrates its ineffectiveness against an evil man and its detrimental effect upon a good man. Following a scuffle between four of the sailors, Captain Claret decides that they shall each face one dozen lashes as a penalty for their misconduct. Among these men are John, a scurrilous bully and the instigator of the skirmish, and Peter, a young, well-liked lad, who fought only in self-defense. Upon the completion of his punishment, John "went among the crew with a smile, saying, 'D--m me! it's nothing when you're used to it! Who wants to fight?'"[4] Peter, on the other hand, walks among the crew after being flogged, claiming, "'I don't care what happens to me now!...I have been flogged once, and they may do it again, if they will. Let them

[4] Ibid., p. 135.

look out for me now!'"[5] Thus, as a result of flogging, the evil man remains unchanged; the good man, however, is demoralized and vitiated by it. In the three subsequent chapters, White-Jacket discourses on "Some of the Evil Effects of Flogging" and the unconstitutionality of flogging ("Flogging Not Lawful"), and, in presenting examples of notable British and American captains who did not practice this atrocity, points out that "Flogging [Is] Not Necessary."[6]

Throughout the novel, White-Jacket is exposed to and observes various other examples of the negative quality of the shipboard society, ranging from the simple incivility of his mates to the grave matter of the vainglorious Doctor Cuticle, the ship's surgeon, who performs a needless, ultimately fatal amputation, merely to impress a gathering of his compeers. The passing of the amputee/sailor is shrugged off with such a cold and callous indifference by Cuticle, as to make the man's death seem meaningless, and his life even more so. The incident perhaps exemplifies the insignificance of the individual as he is viewed by his society. White-Jacket is thus subconsciously prevented--at least until the end of the narrative--from disposing of his jacket, in spite of

[5] Ibid., p. 136.

[6] Melville's verbal attack on the practice of flogging is in close conjunction with one of his principal sources, Richard Henry Dana's Two Years Before the Mast (1840), a work which White-Jacket alludes to during the course of the narrative.

his often asserted intention of doing so: for in ridding himself of the jacket, he would symbolically conform to and become a part of the man-of-war society which, based on his observations, merits little more than absolute deprecation.

When White-Jacket ultimately does shed his jacket, it is not implied--just as it is not in Redburn's case--that society has succeeded in corrupting the individual, nor that, like Tommo, the character has completely relinquished his individuality and become totally dominated by his socially oriented instincts. He has rather come to the realization of the futility of the lone, isolated individual's struggle against society, whether physically outside of or emotionally within himself. White-Jacket finds himself the object of social abuses similar, if not identical, to those which he has been observing, and, because he is so conspicuous an individual, society attacks him with even greater force, rendering a grapple with these abuses all but useless. Herein lies the symbolic, philosophical conflict between the individual and society. He is banished from all social units on board the "Neversink" (e.g. his mess unit); his jacket pockets are picked, connoting a direct attack on the token of his individuality; and he is knocked from his post on the foremast when, in his jacket, he is taken for a ghost by his superstitious crewmates.

Throughout each of these attacks, however, the hero continues to wear the jacket, thus maintaining his individuality; he also

incessantly curses the garment, even as he wears it, thereby further illustrating the psychological aspect of the individual/social conflict which rages within him. Following the episode in which he is mistaken for the ghost of the ship's dead cooper, for example, he tears the jacket off, and, as though it were a thing personified, berates it, again declaring his intention of dyeing it:

> 'Jacket,' cried I, 'you must change your complexion! you must hie to the dyers and be dyed, that I may live. I have but one poor life, White-Jacket, and that life I cannot spare. I cannot consent to die for you, but be dyed you must for me. You can dye many times without injury; but I cannot die without irreparable loss, and running the eternal risk.' 7

Despite these protestations, however, White-Jacket is once again unable to procure the much sought-after coloring, and is thus obliged to reluctantly continue displaying the emblem of his individuality.

In considering the assaults of the frigate society to which White-Jacket is subjected, one may note a distinct parallel between Melville's fictional work and Emerson's essay on "Self-Reliance," a point which is interesting in that so much of Melville's philosophy counters Emerson's transcendentalism. In

7 Melville, White-Jacket, p. 77.

"Self-Reliance," Emerson's philosophical portrait of the individual/social conflict depicts society as a hostile force which constrains the individual to conform to its purposes, thereby absorbing him to the point where he can no longer be distinguished from the mass of humanity:

> Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members. Society is a joint-stock company [8] in which the members agree, for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater. The virtue in most request is conformity. Self-reliance is its aversion. It loves not realities and creators, but names and customs. 9

In similar fashion, White-Jacket is thus "conspired" against by a society which--unable to tolerate anyone or anything different from it, or any cause contrary to its own (White-Jacket is, after all, a pacifist aboard a war-ship.)--attempts to forcibly shape him in its own mold.

Only at the instant that White-Jacket is actually confronted with imminent death as a result of his jacket--and thus as a result of his individuality--does he cast it off. Having become

[8] The metaphor of the "joint-stock company" or world is one to which, as shall be illustrated, Melville is to ascribe a great deal of significance in Moby-Dick.

[9] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance," in Selected Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. William H. Gilman (New York: New American Library, 1965), p. 260.

tangled in the cumbersome jacket, he consequently falls overboard from one of the yardarms of the ship; the jacket, which caused his fall, becomes saturated with water, thereby also preventing him from remaining afloat once he has risen to the surface. He frees himself from it, therefore, and in so doing, symbolically yields to the pressures which society has placed upon his individuality:

> I whipped out my knife ...and ripped my jacket straight up and down, as if I were ripping open myself [the individual]. With a violent struggle I then burst out of it, and was free. Heavily soaked, it slowly sank before my eyes.
> Sink! sink! oh shroud! thought I; sink forever! accursed jacket that thou art! [10]

Appropriately, the jacket is assailed by the crewmen even as it sinks. The individual must thus be attacked until he is literally and figuratively drowned out by society:

> 'See that white shark!' cried a horrified voice from the taffrail; 'he'll have that man down his hatchway!...'
> The next instant that barbed bunch of harpoons pierced through and through the unfortunate jacket, and swiftly sped down with it out of sight. [11]

[10] Melville, White-Jacket, p. 394.

[11] Ibid.

Seelye maintains that the stripping-off of the jacket symbolically signifies the protagonist's ultimate rejection of the society which the frigate represents:

> The jacket, at first emblematic of White-Jacket's heart (open, roomy, comfortable), has come to stand for the man-of-war world (closed, restrictive, uncomfortable, dangerous), and by shedding it, he bids that world [or society] farewell. 12

If the jacket "has come to stand for the man-of-war world," though, why, then, do the sailors who represent this world continue to attack it? It would seem, furthermore, that if the jacket does symbolize White-Jacket's individuality, as Seelye himself had earlier attested to, then the antithesis of Seelye's argument here is a more logical interpretation: in shedding the jacket, the individual has symbolically lost his struggle, and has ostensibly conformed to society, much in the fashion written of in "Self-Reliance."

In The Power of Blackness, Harry Levin proffers a somewhat less dubious interpretation of White-Jacket's climactic plunge than does Seelye. Maintaining that the jacket is symbolic of the hero's innocence and that--as in the case of Redburn--it is this innocence that provokes the attacks of the shipboard society upon

12 Seelye, p. 59.

White-Jacket, Levin writes:

> The climax, which rids White-Jacket of his encumbrance, is a dizzying plunge from the mast overboard....[It] would seem to recapitulate the fall of Adam, as every man does in his fashion....But Melville's innocent ... seems to be motivated by that imp of the perverse, the longing to fall. If the whiteness of the jacket connotes innocence, it likewise has the connotation of faith. The loss of one or the other or both, after the sensation of drowning, is the precondition of survival. [13]

Although this interpretation is perhaps more tenable than Seelye's, it too leaves room for dispute. Is White-Jacket, for example, really the innocent Levin claims him to be? Melville, at the time he wrote White-Jacket, had already served aboard the merchantman "St. Lawrence" (the "Highlander"), the whalers "Acushnet" (the "Dolly"), "Lucy Ann" (the "Julia"), and "Charles and Henry," and the frigate "United States" (the "Neversink"), and thus was an experienced sailor. Although White-Jacket certainly is not Melville, he is at least partially a fictional extension of the author, who has used many of his own experiences as the basis of his novel. The character, White-Jacket, therefore, speaks of at least some previous sailing experience. Furthermore, even if White-Jacket, who is but a young man, does not have a wealth of

[13] Harry Levin, The Power of Blackness (New York: Vintage Books, 1960), pp. 182-3.

worldly experience, he certainly never manifests the naive innocence of the thoroughly green Redburn. As for Levin's contention that the stripping-off of the jacket also represents the loss of faith, it must be noted that White-Jacket maintains his faith through the end of the narrative, at which point he speaks of "Our Lord High Admiral" who shall ultimately redress all the wrongs which man suffers at the hands of his fellows during his earthly life.

Levin's interpretation, however, is not totally unfounded, as the whiteness of the jacket (a precursor, perhaps, of "The Whiteness of the Whale") may certainly in itself symbolize innocence. If it does suggest innocence, though, this innocence is just one more feature which distinguishes White-Jacket from his shipmates, and is thus one more facet of his individuality. The quality of individuality, therefore, subsumes whatever quality of innocence there is in White-Jacket, and it is hence likely that the jacket is a symbol of his individuality first, and of his innocence second.

In this regard, Arvin tenders an explanation of the final scene, taking the apparent loss of White-Jacket's individuality into account:

> [The jacket] sinks slowly before his eyes, and White-Jacket returns to life. He does so because he has in fact ripped open an aspect of him-

> self, thrown it off, and allowed it to sink in the sea; the aspect of himself that is mere uniqueness and differentness, mere protective-unprotective self-assertion, easy to identify and individualize in any mob [Italics mine], and white, fatally white, as a shroud.
>
> [The jacket] is a magnificent symbol of the lesser Self, the empirical Self, the Ego....[Italics mine] 14

Since the jacket is a symbol of White-Jacket's "uniqueness and differentness," the stripping-off of the jacket represents his surrendering these qualities, or at least relinquishing enough of his individuality to prevent himself from being completely deprived of life and cut off from society. As Hennig Cohen writes in his introduction to White-Jacket, "White-Jacket must divest himself of a part of his individualism, symbolized by the jacket, before he can become a member of the body politic of the world-frigate."15

Despite this apparent dominance of society over the individual, however, White-Jacket, unlike Tommo and like Redburn, has actually reconciled the individual and social forces within him, and has thus resolved the conflict. Though it may appear that he has ceded his individuality, and is thus to be swallowed up by society in the manner depicted by Emerson, he is still able to

14 Arvin, pp. 114-15.

15 Hennig Cohen, Introduction, Melville's White-Jacket, p. xxxvii.

maintain his ideals and espouse the cause of social justice for the individual, much as Redburn had done. He does so, however, within the bounds of society, rather than from without, for he realizes that society can be neither better nor worse than the individuals of which it is composed. Only the individual can see to it that he conducts himself wisely, practicing good and eschewing evil; in a sense, therefore, only the individual can determine the kind of society in which he lives:

> Oh, shipmates and world-mates, all round! We the people suffer many abuses....Yet the worst of our evils we blindly inflict upon ourselves; our officers cannot remove them, even if they would. From the last ills no being can save another; therein each man must be his own saviour. 16

Thus, as earlier mentioned, it is in vain that the alienated individual struggles against the evils of society when it is his own actions--good or evil, which he alone dictates--that contribute to the nature of society; for in conducting himself in a manner likely to secure his own salvation, as suggested in the above passage, he becomes at least one more beneficent element of the greater social world.

16 Melville, White-Jacket, p. 400.

V MOBY-DICK

In Moby-Dick, while Melville portrays numerous aspects of man's inherent dualities in his major characters, each of these characters is, for the most part, dominated by one extreme of each specific dichotomy. Throughout the novel, the two characters who most frequently confront one another from their positions on the opposing extremes of these dualities are Ahab and Starbuck, who respectively evoke images of darkness and light, evil and good, diabolical and divine, doubt and faith, and ocean and land, to enumerate a select few. In keeping with the nature of an internal conflict or duality, there are, of course, instances when both of these men reveal tendencies distinctly opposite those with which they come to be generally associated. Ahab, in particular, as will be seen, often appears to be struggling between the forces of two antithetic alter-egos: Fedallah, who would drag him to an even deeper level of darkness and diabolism, and Pip, who would harbor him in innocence and love. The qualities enumerated above, however, are simply those which become the ascendant elements of the conflicts within Ahab and Starbuck. Ishmael--Melville's spokesman in the novel--ultimately comes to serve as the reflective, rational median between these conflicting oppositions, by which Ahab and Starbuck often seem to be inexorably governed.

In the conflict between individual and social propensities, Queequeg, the noble savage prince, supplants Starbuck as one of the three central figures involved in the numerous dichotomies presented in the novel, while Ahab and Ishmael remain the "constants," as it were. Ahab, for example, generally represents the ego, Queequeg represents social instincts, and Ishmael, who, like Redburn and White-Jacket, is a keen observer of the lives around him, remains quietly regardful of the conflict and its consequences, and seeks to balance or reconcile the forces of self and sociality within him.

As the novel opens, Ishmael is presented as a rather self-oriented, anti-social figure. In fact, he so much as claims that he is setting out on a voyage in the first place in order to mitigate the quasi-misanthropic forces within him:

> Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet; and especially whenever my hypos get such an upper hand of me, that it requires a strong moral principle to prevent me from deliberately stepping into the street, and methodically knocking people's hats off--then, I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can. [1]

[1] Herman Melville, Moby-Dick, ed. Charles Feidelson, Jr. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964), p. 23.

Melville thus immediately projects the conflict between individual and social instincts into Ishmael, who, recognizing the imbalance of these instincts within himself, sets out to rectify it. His multi-symbolic whaling voyage thus follows a course which--on one level of allegory--leads to a reconciliation between these antagonistic forces.

As Ishmael proceeds to seek a suitable vessel for his voyage, he meets Queequeg, who is to become his mentor, as it were, in the "art" of mutually beneficial co-existence with one's fellows. Upon first learning that Queequeg is a pagan harpooneer who is a "self-employed" head merchant, and furthermore that this same cannibal is to be his bedfellow during his stay in New Bedford, Ishmael is, to understate it, somewhat less than enthusiastic about meeting him; indeed, his attitude is marked by nothing short of bigoted unsociability:

> No man prefers to sleep two in a bed. In fact, you would a good deal rather not sleep with your own brother....And when it comes to sleeping with an unknown stranger, in a strange inn, in a strange town, and that stranger a harpooneer, then your objections indefinitely multiply....
>
> The more I pondered over this harpooneer, the more I abominated the thought of sleeping with him. It was fair to presume that being a harpooneer, his linen or woollen, as the case might be, would not be of the tidiest, certainly none of the finest. I began to twitch all over. [2]

[2] Ibid., pp. 41-2.

It should not be inferred that Ishmael's objections in this instance are unjustified; they are, however, manifestly inconsistent with a sentiment which he had earlier expressed in explaining the allure which the exotic and uncivilized lands suggested by a whaling voyage had for him:

> ...I am tormented with an everlasting itch for things remote. I love to sail forbidden seas, and land on barbarous coasts. Not ignoring what is good, I am quick to perceive a horror, and could still be social with it--would they let me--since it is but well to be on friendly terms with all the inmates of the place one lodges in. [Italics mine] 3

Despite Ishmael's initial negative reaction to Queequeg, his exposure to the gentle-natured pagan soon mollifies whatever aspects of misanthropy may lurk within him. On the second night of their acquaintance, as Ishmael, entranced by the warming glow of the hearth-side fire, observes the dimly illumined figure of his new-found friend, he reflects on this change which Queequeg has wrought in his attitude:

> As I sat there in that now lonely room ...I began to be sensible of strange feelings. I felt a melting in me. No more my splintered heart and maddened hand were turned against the wolfish world. This soothing

3 Ibid., p. 30.

savage had redeemed it. 4

The "melting" sensation, of course, is the thawing of Ishmael's cold and embittered outlook on society, which has been warmed by Queequeg just as Ishmael is warmed by the fire.

Appropriately, soon after this scene, Ishmael's relationship with Queequeg becomes exemplary of the most widely acknowledged and exalted form of "mutually beneficial co-existence," when, on the same night, it is consummated with a symbolic marriage:

> How it is I know not; but there is no place like a bed for confidential disclosures between friends. [Contrast with Ishmael's previous reluctance to share his bed.] Man and wife, they say, there open the very bottom of their souls to each other; and some old couples often lie and chat over old times till nearly morning. Thus, then, in our hearts' honeymoon, lay I and Queequeg--a cosy, loving pair. 5

It is of particular interest that Melville should utilize the character of Queequeg, a savage, as a dominant force in the socialization of Ishmael, since Melville was apparently preoccupied with the dichotomy between civilization and primitivism, and the qualities of both in all men. In completing his thoughts in the previously quoted passage concerning Queequeg's role in allaying his

[4] Ibid., p. 83.

[5] Ibid., pp. 85-86.

hostility toward the "wolfish world," Ishmael, in fact, asserts that it was Queequeg's savage quality which most affected him:

> There [Queequeg] sat, his very indifference speaking a nature in which there lurked no civilized hypocrisies and bland deceits. Wild he was; a very sight of sights to see; yet I began to feel myself mysteriously drawn towards him. And those things that would have repelled most others, they were the very magnets that thus drew me. I'll try a pagan friend, thought I, since Christian kindness has proved but hollow courtesy. 6

These observations echo Ishmael's earlier reasoning when, despite his objections to sharing his bed with, of all people, a head-selling harpooneer, and his mortification upon first seeing Queequeg, he finally resigns himself to sleeping with the pagan, marking that "for all his tattooings he was on the whole a clean, comely looking cannibal, [and that] the man's a human being just as I am....Better sleep with a sober cannibal than a drunken Christian." 7

Ishmael's acceptance of Queequeg's savagery is not, however, without some reservation, for just as Ishmael is caught between his social and anti-social attitudes, so too is there originally an ambivalence in his disposition toward the primitive world.

6 Ibid., pp. 83-84.

7 Ibid., p. 51.

This ambivalence is reflected as Ishmael describes his emotions upon awakening after his first night together with Queequeg, and feeling himself embraced--or rather crushed--in the savage's "bridegroom clasp." Although it creates an essentially comforting sensation of friendship, it also evokes in Ishmael a feeling akin to horror, as it recalls to his mind a vague, nightmarish occurrence which happened to him when he was a child. Having been confined to his bed early in the day as a form of punishment by his stepmother, he awoke from a troubled sleep during the night:

> Instantly I felt a shock running through all my frame; nothing was to be seen, and nothing was to be heard; but a supernatural hand seemed placed in mine. My arm hung over the counterpane, and the nameless, unimaginable, silent form or phantom, to which the hand belonged, seemed closely seated by my bedside. For what seemed ages piled on ages, I lay there, frozen with the most awful fears, not daring to drag away my hand....8

Although there is nothing in Queequeg's embrace which in itself is unpleasant, Ishmael still associates it with an unpleasant event in his childhood, and struggles to free himself from it. Just as Ishmael was perhaps unable to determine whether the awe-inspiring quality of the "supernatural hand" was diabolical or

8 Ibid., p. 53.

divine, so too is he uncertain of the nature of the savage's caressing arm. Thus, like Tommo, Ishmael originally sees something benign, yet something terrifying in primitive man. (The same ambiguity, of course, is to enshroud Moby-Dick.) As his friendship with Queequeg develops, however, this conflict in Ishmael is satisfactorily resolved, if not in respect to primitive man in general, then at least in respect to Queequeg.

Almost immediately after they set out from New Bedford with the intention of shipping aboard a Nantucket whaler, Queequeg is provided with an opportunity to reveal to Ishmael--his proselyte, as it were, to sociality--an even deeper level of the profound humanity than was primarily responsible for their friendship. As they stand aboard a schooner en route to Nantucket, Queequeg is affronted by an ignorant "bumpkin," a Christian who evinces considerably less civility than the savage. Only moments later, this same passenger is knocked overboard by a loose section of the mainsail. Without hesitating so much as an instant to ponder a decision, Queequeg dives into the water and rescues the man whom he had earlier considered his adversary. Following the rescue, Queequeg stands on deck, indifferently "eyeing those around him, [and] seemed to be saying to himself--'It's a mutual joint-stock world, in all meridians. We cannibals must help these Christians.'" [9] Self-sacrifice--particularly for the sake of one's

[9] Ibid., p. 96.

enemies--is perhaps the ultimate manifestation of a socially oriented existence, and is to be exemplified by Queequeg at least once more during the course of the novel, twice more if his symbolic "rescue" of Ishmael at the end of the novel is considered. The final sentiment in the above passage is one of the initial suggestions of the theme of brotherhood, which becomes a significant theme of the novel and the principal aspect of Ishmael's ultimate reconciliation of the individual and social elements within him. It is of singular interest to note the contrast between Melville's use of the phrase "joint-stock world" in depicting a positive view of a society of individuals working for the benefit of one another, and the strictly negative connotations which Emerson had ascribed to "joint-stock company" as a metaphor for society in "Self-Reliance." [10]

Despite portraying a "joint-stock" society as beneficial to its members in this instance, Ishmael, in the second of at least three references to this metaphor, also reveals an antipathy toward such "joint-stock" arrangements. Upon introducing the character of Starbuck, Ishmael hints at the tragic consequences of the first mate's ultimate submission to the will of Ahab. He adds, though, that it is not his intention to depict the fall of Starbuck's sacred nobility, which is inherent in the "ideal" form of all individuals, even if mass-man is essentially corrupt:

[10] See Chapter IV, footnotes 8 and 9.

> Men may seem detestable as joint-stock companies and nations [Italics mine]; knaves, fools, and murderers there may be; men may have mean and meagre faces; but man, in the ideal, is so noble and so sparkling, such a grand and glowing creature, that over any ignominious blemish in him all his fellows should run to throw their costliest robes. 11

Ishmael's praise of the "ideal" man within the individual and his deprecation of "joint-stock companies and nations" (man as a commercial and political mass) are blatantly inconsistent with his use of the schooner incident to illustrate that the individual would be lost without the support of a "joint-stock" society. It is, however, a significant inconsistency, as it reminds the reader that the conflict between individuality and sociality within Ishmael has not been left ashore, but is still very much a part of him even as he embarks on his voyage. Consistency is a virtue rarely found in the man torn between two such extremes.

Contrary to Queequeg, Ahab is the embodiment of man's egocentric and individual drives, a man totally obsessed with and consumed by the self. He is so ego-oriented that he deems himself the center of his ship, and thus, metaphorically, the center of the universe. Indeed, when Starbuck questions the sagacity of Ahab's decision not to halt the "Pequod's" progress in order to salvage the valuable sperm oil which is leaking from the casks,

11 Melville, Moby-Dick, p. 160.

the captain threatens the mate at gun point, and fiercely justifying himself, reveals his apotheosized self-image, declaring: "There is one God that is Lord over the earth, and one Captain that is lord over the Pequod." [12] He eschews any form of sociality on board the ship, and scorns the practice of gamming--a social exchange, as it were, between two whalers meeting at sea--unless the captain of the vessel encountered can provide him with information concerning Moby-Dick. He claims that the Spanish doubloon--which he has fastened to the main-mast as a bonus for the first crewman to sight the White Whale--is "like a magician's glass [which] to each and every man ...but mirrors back his own mysterious self [as does Moby-Dick]," [13] immediately after the most conspicuous feature of "his own mysterious self" [Italics mine], his egotism, is mirrored in the coin as he attempts to interpret its engraved symbols:

> 'There's something ever egotistical in mountain-tops and towers, and all other grand and lofty things; look here,--three peaks as proud as Lucifer. The firm tower, that is Ahab; the volcano, that is Ahab; the courageous, the undaunted, and victorious fowl [which Ishmael had earlier referred to merely as a 'crowing cock'], that, too, is Ahab; all are Ahab....' [Italics mine] [14]

[12] Ibid., p. 604.

[13] Ibid., p. 551.

[14] Ibid., pp. 550-51.

In short, Ahab envisions himself as an individual so thoroughly transcending society, that he is an ennobled pariah who fits nowhere within the social boundaries which circumscribe common men. Indeed, the measureless powers of mind instilled by his madness induce him to believe that he has somehow surmounted even the infinite realm of the divine: " ...Ahab stands alone among the millions of the peopled earth, nor gods nor men his neighbors'." [15] Thus, ironically, Ahab is more of an Ishmael figure than Ishmael himself. [16]

Ahab's extreme individualism is so entirely adverse to anything of a social nature that it bereaves him of even a mere token degree of the basic human sense of compassion. Upon "speaking" the whaler "Rachel," for example, and being adjured by that ship's captain to offer assistance in searching for a whaleboat which has vanished along with its crew during an encounter with Moby-Dick, Ahab responds with a blunt, peremptory refusal. Maintaining that he is losing time in his pursuit of Moby-Dick, Ahab remains equally inexorable even when the "Rachel's" commander informs him that his twelve year old son is among the missing boat's crew, and implores Ahab--in the name of his own son--to join the search. During this scene, Ishmael informs the reader

[15] Ibid., p. 697.

[16] See Chapter III, footnote 12; also: R.E. Watters, "Melville's 'Isolatoes'," Discussions of Moby-Dick, ed. Milton R. Stern (Boston: Heath, 1960), p. 108.

that the two captains are remotely acquainted with one another, both residing in Nantucket. Keeping this in mind, one may note a significant contrast between the conduct of Queequeg, on one extreme of the individual/social conflict, and Ahab on the other: the instinctively humane savage risks grave danger to himself to save the life of a total stranger, whereas the supposedly civilized captain, driven by a wholly selfish motive, will not accept so much as a minor inconvenience to save the life of the son of a man whom he knows, and to whom he is bound by a common profession and a common paternal love.

Nor does Ahab evince any remorse or compassion as he witnesses his crew perish during the inevitable outcome of his relentless, though pointless quest. Rather, he remains the stark egotist to the end, only lamenting that he has been deprived of his "right" as a captain to "go down with his ship":

> ' ...death-glorious ship! must ye then perish, and without me? Am I cut off from the last fond pride of meanest shipwrecked captains?...Oh, now I feel my topmost greatness lies in my topmost grief.' [Italics mine] 17

Thus, Ahab's immoderate, paranoiac egocentricity renders him oblivious to everyone and everything around him which cannot be used as a vehicle in the fulfillment of his monomaniacal purpose;

17 Melville, Moby-Dick, p. 721.

furthermore, it is this fanatical obsession with the concept of self which ultimately results in his own fall, as well as in the demise of the metaphorical universe and society of the "Pequod." Just as society, in Emerson's terms, works to the detriment of the individual, Melville thus reveals that the individual--in whom the forces of self operate to the utter exclusion of social forces--can conversely work not only to his own detriment, but to the detriment of his society as well. As Matthiessen writes, in considering the violent urges for total subjugation and vengeance which, instilled in Ahab by these ego forces, make him the antipodal image of Emerson's benign individual:

> Melville created in Ahab's tragedy a fearful symbol of the self-inclosed individualism that, carried to its furthest extreme, brings disaster both upon itself and the group of which it is a part. He provided also an ominous glimpse of what was the result when the Emersonian will to virtue became in less innocent natures the will to conquest. [18]

In spite of his unbounded egotism, Ahab is nevertheless encumbered by social bonds of which he is painfully cognizant. In his article on "Melville's 'Sociality,'" Watters alludes to the most obvious of these restraints--Ahab's psychological enthrall-

[18] F.O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman (London: Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 459.

ment to the enigmatic Fedallah, and his physical dependencies upon Starbuck, the ship's carpenter (who fashions and fits Ahab's ivory leg), and his crew in general--and draws from them a conclusion that bespeaks the philosophical individual/social conflict which confronts the captain:

> Ahab ...had his spiritual 'monkey-rope'[19] yoking him with Fedallah, and even a physical one with Starbuck, who guarded the rope which hoisted Ahab aloft to look for the whale. Without the help of Starbuck (and, of course, the crew to sail the ship) Ahab could not look for Moby Dick, just as he could not even stand without the carpenter's help. The social fabric enmeshed Ahab despite himself. [Italics mine] 20

The Titanic individual, Ahab, struggles to circumvent the social elements of the conflict more actively than either Tommo, Redburn, or White-Jacket, because of all these characters, he is the one who is the most acutely aware that he is engaged in the conflict at all. Bemoaning the fact that an individual with as superior an intellect as his must be beholden to the unimaginative, addlebrained carpenter for a leg to stand on, for example, he inductively considers all such social debts in general, wish-

[19] The significance of the "monkey-rope" shall be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

[20] R.E. Watters, "Melville's 'Sociality,'" American Literature, 17, No. 1 (March 1945), 42.

ing to emancipate himself from them:

> Oh, Life! Here I am, proud as a Greek god, and yet standing debtor to this blockhead for a bone to stand on! Cursed be that mortal inter-indebtedness which will not do away with ledgers. I would be free as air; and I'm down in the whole world's books. I am so rich, I could have given bid for bid with the wealthiest praetorians at the auction of the Roman empire ...and yet I owe for the flesh in the tongue I brag with. By heavens! I'll get a crucible, and into it, and dissolve myself down to one small, compendious vertabra. So. 21

Ahab never realizes, as Ishmael eventually will, the futility of a struggle against this "mortal inter-indebtedness," and in resisting these debts, he is resisting humanity, which he cannot admit himself a part of.

Nowhere is Ahab's resistance to his fellow man more poignant--and more fatal--than in his rejection of the social advances of Pip, a sort of childlike, passive Queequeg in his manifestations of sociality, in whom just an instant of stark isolation upon the ocean has instilled a madness with which Ahab can readily identify. During the course of the following scene, the obdurate Ahab shows signs of relenting, and his hardened individualism of mollifying before Pip's importunate entreaties, but the captain makes a <u>conscious</u> effort to withstand the soothing effect

[21] Melville, <u>Moby-Dick</u>, p. 601.

which Pip mysteriously has upon him, and in so doing, clearly reveals the conflict within him. The invincible individual Ahab grapples, however, with the social Ahab, and emerges the victor:

> 'Lad, lad, I tell thee thou must not follow Ahab now. The hour is coming when Ahab would not scare thee from him, yet would not have thee by him. There is that in thee, poor lad, which I feel too curing to my malady. Like cures like; and for this hunt, my malady becomes my most desired health. Do thou abide below here....'
>
> 'No, no, no! ye have not a whole body, sir; do ye but use poor me for your one lost leg; only tread upon me, sir; I ask no more, so I remain a part of ye.'
>
> 'Oh! spite of million villains, this makes me a bigot in the fadeless fidelity of man...!' [Italics mine]
>
> 'They tell me, sir, that Stubb did once desert poor little Pip [the mentioned abandonment of Pip on the ocean]....But I will never desert ye, sir....Sir, I must go with ye.'
>
> 'If thou speakest thus to me much more, Ahab's purpose keels up in him. I tell thee no; it cannot be.'
>
> 'Oh good master, master, master!'
>
> 'Weep so, and I will murder thee! have a care, for Ahab too is mad.' 22

In thus resisting Pip's filial-like sociality for fear that it's incompatibility with his self-serving pride will sway him from his purpose,[23] Ahab turns his back on one of his final chances to relinquish his crazed pursuit of Moby-Dick, and thereby save his own life as well as the lives of his crew. At this point, one

[22] Ibid., pp. 672-3.

[23] Bernstein, p. 112.

may note an important contrast between Ahab and Ishmael: the latter, maintaining an open mind, allows himself to be charmed by Queequeg's spell, as it were, which mitigates his anti-social sentiments; the Calvinistic Ahab, though, ever aware of his egomaniacal mission, pursues what he deems his predestined course, and never swerving from the "iron rails" of his "fixed purpose,"[24] struggles to overcome a similar socializing effect which Pip would have upon him.

This dialogue with Pip is the first significant indication that even Ahab, despite his unbridled sense of individuality, is not only plagued by a philosophical conflict--in the form of his social debts and obligations--but by the more tormenting psychological aspect of the individual/social conflict as well. Shortly after the cited anguishing episode with Pip, for example, in the chapter entitled "The Symphony"--which depicts the proverbial calm before the storm--Ahab opens the very depths of his soul to Starbuck, and reflecting on the tribulations of his life of isolation, discloses a genuine need for close social contact:

> 'When I think of this life I have led; the desolation of solitude it has been; the masoned, walled-town of a Captain's exclusiveness, which admits but small entrance to any sympathy from

[24] Melville, Moby-Dick, p. 227. "'The path to my fixed purpose is laid with iron rails, whereon my soul is grooved to run.'"

> the green country without--oh, weariness! heaviness! Guinea-Coast slavery of solitary command!--when I think of all this ...-- when the poorest landsman has had fresh fruit to his daily hand, and broken the world's fresh bread to my mouldy crusts--away, whole oceans away, from that young girl-wife I wedded past fifty, and sailed for Cape Horn the next day, leaving but one dent in my marriage pillow-- wife? wife?--rather a widow with her husband alive! Aye, I widowed that poor girl when I married her, Starbuck; and then, the madness, the frenzy, the boiling blood and the smoking brow, with which, for a thousand lowerings old Ahab has furiously, foamingly chased his prey-- more a demon than a man!--aye, aye! what a forty years' fool--fool--old fool, has old Ahab been! Why this strife of the chase?... how the richer or better is Ahab now? Behold. Oh, Starbuck! is it not hard, that with this weary load I bear, one poor leg should have been snatched from under me?... I feel deadly faint, bowed, and humped, as though I were Adam, staggering beneath the piled centuries since Paradise. God! God! God!--crack my heart!-- stave my brain!--mockery! mockery! bitter, biting mockery of grey hairs, have I lived enough joy to wear ye; and seem and feel thus intolerably old? Close! stand close to me, Starbuck; let me look into a human eye; it is better than to gaze into sea or sky; better than to gaze upon God. [italics mine] By the green land; by the bright hearth-stone! this is the magic glass, man; I see my wife and my child in thine eye.' 25

Thus, for the first time in the novel, Ahab's impenetrable veneer totally crumbles, and he exposes his long obscured social side. Indeed, after lamenting his self-imposed solitude, he solicits eye-contact, perhaps the most profound sort of social exchange;

25 Ibid., pp. 683-84.

and in Starbuck's eye, he sees his family, the only social tie he has, and even that, a tie from which he has detached himself.

The psychological conflict within Ahab is further revealed later in the same chapter, when, unable to comprehend or even believe his own frenzied behavior, he wonders whether he is actually self-motivated, or driven by the same preternatural, unfathomable power which he feels lies behind the "pasteboard mask" of Moby-Dick:

> 'What is it, what nameless inscrutable, unearthly thing is it; what cozzening hidden lord and master, and cruel, remorseless emperor commands me; that against all natural lovings and longings, I so keep pushing, and crowding, and jamming myself on all the time; recklessly making me ready to do what in my own proper, natural heart, I durst not so much as dare? Is Ahab, Ahab? Is it I, God, or who, that lifts this arm?' [Italics mine] [26]

In asking, "Is Ahab, Ahab?," the captain implies that his individuality, once apparently his most distinguishing feature, is actually very indefinite, vague, and perhaps totally non-existent.

On the second day of "The Chase," however, Ahab ironically utilizes the identical reasoning of the above passage--that he is impelled by an external force beyond his control--to derive the antithesis of his doubt as to who he is. Beseached by Starbuck for the penultimate time to abandon his pursuit of

[26] Ibid., p. 685.

Moby-Dick following his second consecutive unsuccessful, and nearly fatal, attempt to kill the whale, Ahab responds with an unqualified reassertion of his individuality:

> 'Starbuck, of late I've felt strangely moved to thee....But in this matter of the whale, be the front of thy face to me as the palm of this hand--a lipless, unfeatured blank. Ahab is for ever Ahab, man. [Italics mine] This whole act's immutably decreed. 'Twas rehearsed by thee and me a billion years before this ocean rolled. Fool! I am the Fates' lieutenant; I act under orders.' 27

Thus does Ahab answer his own question, "Is Ahab, Ahab?": "Ahab is for ever Ahab." This is his final resolution of the conflict. His individual and social tendencies are not reconciled, but--just as in the previously quoted dialogue with Pip--the individual prevails.

Ishmael, observing the grievous and deranging effects which Ahab's unmitigated isolation and individuality have upon the captain, is, then, ironically influenced as much by the self-centered Ahab as by the altruistic Queequeg in his ultimate embracing of humanity. Indeed, as Ishmael is the sole surviving witness to Ahab's final tragedy, he is even given an insight into the fate which he too might have encountered had he continued to pursue the antisocial course on which he found himself at the onset of the

[27] Ibid., pp. 706-07.

novel. Thus, following the socially oriented pattern of life exemplified by Queequeg, and avoiding the pattern which the blindly egotistical Ahab unerringly follows to his doom, Ishmael eventually comes to espouse the cause of brotherhood. In "The Monkey-Rope" chapter, for example, Ishmael sees the rope by which he supports Queequeg--who is standing upon the back of a slaughtered whale, inserting blubber-hooks into it--as a metaphorical link which signifies the interdependence of all men. In this passage, Melville once again evokes the earlier themes of symbolic marriage and a "joint-stock world":

> It was a humorously perilous business for both of us. For ...the monkey-rope was fast ... to Queequeg's broad canvas belt, and fast to my narrow leather one. So that for better or for worse, we two, for the time, were wedded; and should poor Queequeg sink to rise no more, then both usage and honor demanded, that instead of cutting the cord, it should drag me down in his wake. So, then, an elongated Siamese ligature united us. Queequeg was my own inseparable twin brother....
>
> So strongly and metaphysically did I conceive of my situation then, that ...I seemed distinctly to perceive that my own individuality was now merged in a joint stock company of two [italics mine]: that my free will had received a mortal wound; and that another's mistake or misfortune might plunge innocent me into unmerited disaster and death....And yet still further pondering ... I saw that this situation of mine was the precise situation of every mortal that breathes; only, in most cases, he ...has this Siamese connexion with a plurality of other mortals. [italics mine] [28]

[28] Ibid., pp. 415-16.

Although Ishmael regards the monkey-rope as a particularly social restraint on his free will, the individual is not totally lost--in the Emersonian sense--nor is Ishmael's free will as restricted as he deems it to be. Rather, Ishmael and Queequeg are still individuals, each working with the other to form a stronger unit or "company" by "merging," but not sacrificing, their individualities. In working in a situation in which he is able to exercise his individual skills, for example, Ishmael helps to avert a potential disaster for his mate, and thus for himself, while Queequeg, supported by Ishmael, utilizes his own skills to complete his task. There is no intimation that either man has surrendered his skills because he is working with someone else; on the contrary, each man complements the other. Furthermore, although Queequeg may indeed fall and "drag [Ishmael] down in his wake," Ishmael has not been obliged to "surrender [his] liberty," [29] as Emerson might claim; for regardless of what Ishmael himself may believe, he actually does have a choice as to whether or not he will go down with his comrade. In <u>choosing</u> not to cut the rope, if the need to do so arises, Ishmael is following nothing more binding than the dictates of "usage and honor," which require a fraternal concern for the welfare of one's fellow man; and he is following these dictates of his own free will. Thus, unlike Ahab, Ishmael at least recognizes that, since man does not

[29] See Chapter IV, footnote 9.

live in a vacuum, there are instances when he must accept certain risks, if, in so doing, he may support, or even save, another mortal. (Compare this with Queequeg's willingness to accept these risks, as in the "Nantucket schooner incident.")

Ishmael's awareness of the symbiotic nature of human relationships soon evolves into a total, unquestioning love of humanity which is ultimately to save his life. As he stands with a number of his crewmates, kneeding the spermaceti in order to prepare it for the try-works, for example, he is carried away--as he is several times throughout the novel--by the wave of his philosophical meditations, and calls upon all men to join hands as universal brothers:

> Squeeze! squeeze! squeeze! all the morning long; I squeezed that sperm till I myself almost melted into it; I squeezed that sperm till a strange sort of insanity came over me; and I found myself unwittingly squeezing my co-laborers' hands in it, mistaking their hands for the gentle globules. Such an abounding, affectionate, friendly, loving feeling did this avocation beget; that at last I was continually squeezing their hands, and looking up into their eyes sentimentally; as much as to say,--Oh! my dear fellow beings, why should we longer cherish any social acerbities, or know the slightest ill-humor or envy! Come; let us squeeze hands all round; nay, let us all squeeze ourselves into each other; let us squeeze ourselves universally into the very milk and sperm of kindness. 30

30 Melville, Moby-Dick, pp. 532-3.

Ishmael is ultimately rewarded for his love of humanity, for at the novel's conclusion, he alone survives the encounter with Moby-Dick. Buoyed by Queequeg's coffin/lifebuoy, which, like a veritable deus ex machina, is miraculously cast out of the vortex which has engulfed the ill-fated "Pequod," Ishmael is symbolically saved by his love of man and by man's--as represented by Queequeg--reciprocal love of him. Ishmael is thus granted survival because of the transformation which has enabled him to discover and realize a love of humanity; Ahab, however, encounters an inevitable doom, the result of an ego-mania which has not only prevented him from making such a discovery, but which has also compelled him to annihilate a creature, the nature of whose existence is as complex and inscrutable as--and thus analogous to--that of man himself.

Ishmael, like Redburn and White-Jacket, has thus successfully resolved the conflict between the forces of self and society within him. Furthermore, unlike Ahab, he has not merely reached a unilateral resolution, but has reconciled these polarized tendencies. Had he simply resolved the conflict in favor of his social instincts, as it may, in fact, initially appear, he would not have balanced the individual Ishmael with the social Ishmael, but--as in Tommo's case--would have been strictly dominated by his social tendencies, and would have thus found himself on the opposite, but equally dangerous, extreme of Ahab. Rather, he

evokes brotherhood, perhaps the ideal solution to the conflict; for the concept of brotherhood does not imply a society in which the individual cannot be distinguished (which, not to completely refute Emerson, is indeed a possibility if a resolution such as this is not attained), but rather a <u>society</u> of close-knit, mutually respecting, and mutually sustaining <u>individuals</u>.

VI "BARTLEBY THE SCRIVENER: A STORY OF WALL STREET"

In the story of "Bartleby the Scrivener," Melville apparently closely identifies with the title character. Although Bartleby is obviously a "writer" of a different sort than Melville, the author may be using the scrivener's occupational form of writing as an allegory of his own writing career; for obliged to write according to the dictates of the reading public--just as Bartleby is obliged to write according to the dictates of his employer--and thus unable to follow his creative intuition, Melville saw himself as little more than a copyist who wrote what was demanded of him for the sake of earning a living. As Melville viewed his situation, and as he presents it in "Bartleby," the writer is thus paid to drop the standard of his own creativity in order to bear that of the barren, uninspiring desires of those who wield the power of money.[1]

Levin, in discussing the meaning of the story's subtitle, --"A Story of Wall Street"--further expounds on the parallel between Melville and his character, Bartleby:

[1] Melville observed this dilemma in a number of his contemporaries as well as in himself. He scorned and greatly resented, for example, the fact that Washington Irving allowed himself to be bought, as it were, by John Jacob Astor, to write the latter's biography.

> Wall, in this context, can be taken at its literal meaning; for the law-office, the constricted locale of the unadventurous pale, looks out upon a dead wall; and that is suggestive of the predicament Melville had arrived at in his literary career. Bartleby can be taken as his double, the copyist who mildly but stubbornly asserts his individuality by refusing either to copy or to leave. [2]

In the second dimension of this analogy between Melville and Bartleby--the first being their common fruitless, or "dead wall" circumstance as writers--Levin argues that Melville has projected his own rebellious, if sometimes reluctant, individuality into Bartleby, who, in an allegorical sense, is as autobiographically oriented a character with regard to Melville/ the writer, as Toumo, Redburn, White-Jacket, and Ishmael are with regard to Melville/ the seaman.[3] It is an interesting, and almost incredible paradox that the innocuous and unobtrusive character of Bartleby, "who mildly but stubbornly asserts his individuality,"

[2] Levin, p. 187.

[3] Throughout Melville's fiction the writer figure appears rather infrequently since Melville, the author, drew more heavily from his experiences as a sailor than from his experiences as a writer. Allegory aside, even Bartleby is more Melville/ the clerk, than Melville, the writer. The only genuine, major author figures in Melville's fiction appear to be the protagonist of Pierre and Helmstone in "The Fiddler."

probably comes the closest of all of Melville's characters to paralleling Ahab in the manner in which the individual/social conflict is manifested. Bartleby is simply a passive Ahab. He does not assert his individuality in as violent and rampant a fashion as Ahab does, but is equally inexorable in repulsing any encroachment of society upon that individuality. Like Ahab, Bartleby reaches a point of impasse at which he and society become totally incompatible, and as a result of his ultimately uncompromising individuality, the conflict is never resolved. In thus being unable to reconcile his individual interests with the demands which society makes of him, Bartleby is doomed to the same inevitable fate as the captain.

Bartleby's death, in fact, like Ahab's, may be interpreted to be at least partially the result of his self-imposed isolation and loneliness--which will not permit him to accept any assistance which others might offer him--and his awareness of the like condition of humanity in general. His "dead-wall reveries" represent his obsession with the notion that man, no matter how physically close he may live to his fellows, nevertheless "walls" himself off from them on a metaphysical level, preferring to live within himself, as Bartleby eventually does. The scrivener had perhaps first come to this realization as an employee in the Dead Letter Office, which symbolized man's futile attempts to communicate with one another. The concept is reinforced as

Bartleby attempts to function as a member of the cold and depersonalized business society where he finds himself as the tale opens. He is eventually killed by the oppressive nature of this consideration--which is magnified by his insanity to the point where he sees no hope of ever escaping from his own isolated condition--when confined within the walls of a prison which are really no different from the wall outside his office window. As Bernstein observes:

> Walls in "Bartleby the Scrivener' symbolize the isolation of the individual man and the sterility and hopelessness of human life. The fact that Bartleby is the character in the tale most conscious of walls indicates that he is most aware of the sterility and despair which they imply. The realization that mankind, whether in the Tombs or in the 'outside' world, is everywhere imprisoned is what eventually destroys the scrivener. [4]

Despite Melville's apparent affinity with the character of Bartleby, he reflects the internal conflict between the instincts of self and society more vividly in the character of the lawyer who narrates the tale. The lawyer is among the most complex psychological figures in Melville's fiction. Although he ostensibly wishes to help Bartleby, whom he is to ultimately equate

[4] Bernstein, pp. 170-1. Compare the numerous allusions to walls in "Bartleby" with Ahab's reflections on "the masoned, walled-town of a Captain's exclusiveness." (See Chapter V, footnote 25.)

with humanity in general, the reader must question his sincerity. The lawyer flatters himself with the notion of his remarkable degree of tolerance and generosity, attributes which he is quick to point out. If an appropriate Shakespearian line may be interpolated, however, "the [lawyer] doth protest too much." The veneer which the lawyer diligently establishes in his subjective, biased narrative stripped away, the reader may find that his ardent protestations of his own magnanimity may well be part of a defense mechanism which represses the lawyer's subconscious guilt at being, in reality, a strongly ego-dominated character.

In order to penetrate this veneer, one must recognize that the lawyer is a member of the Wall Street society where little, if anything, is ever given for nothing. On several occasions, therefore, the narrator unwittingly hints, despite his assertions of the unselfish nobility of his character, that in his apparently charitable treatment of Bartleby, his own interests are really at hand. Upon deciding, for example, to allow Bartleby to continue working for him after, and in spite of, the initial manifestation of the scrivener's "passive resistance" to any responsibilities given him, the lawyer's reasoning moves from the purely altruistic to the totally selfish so abruptly, yet so imperceptibly, that the lawyer himself is probably unaware of it:

> Nothing so aggravates an earnest person as a passive resistance. If the individual so resisted be of a not inhumane temper, and the resisting one perfectly harmless in his passivity, then, in the better moods of the former, he will endeavor charitably to construe to his imagination what proves impossible to be solved by his judgment. Even so, for the most part, I regarded Bartleby and his ways. Poor fellow! thought I, he means no mischief; it is plain he intends no insolence; his aspect sufficiently evinces that his eccentricities are involuntary. He is useful to me. I can get along with him. If I turn him away, the chances are he will fall in with some less-indulgent employer, and then he will be rudely treated, and perhaps driven forth miserably to starve. Yes. Here I can cheaply purchase a delicious self approval. To befriend Bartleby; to humor him in his strange willfulness, will cost me little or nothing, while I lay up in my soul what will eventually prove a sweet morsel for my conscience. [Italics mine] 5

The lawyer's use of the term "morsel" implies that, in the twisted logic of a businessman, even charity is reduced to a material level, and is a commodity which can be "cheaply purchased."

The underlying personal interests of the lawyer are further revealed as he attempts to rationalize to himself his tolerance of Bartleby and his "strange willfulness:"

> Gradually I slid into the persuasion that these troubles of mine, touching the scrivener, had been all predestinated from eternity, and Bartleby

5 Herman Melville, "Bartleby the Scrivener," in Billy Budd and the Piazza Tales (Garden City, NY: Dolphin Books, 1961), p. 127.

> was billeted upon me for some mysterious purpose of an allwise Providence, which it was not for a mere mortal like me to fathom.[6] Yes, Bartleby, stay there behind your screen, thought I; I shall persecute you no more....At least [sic] I see it, I feel it; I penetrate to the predestinated purpose of my life. I am content. Others may have loftier parts to enact; but my mission in this world, Bartleby, is to furnish you with office-room for such period as you may see fit to remain. 7

Thus, the narrator has no sincere interest in aiding Bartleby in his indigence. His tolerance and generosity are a sort of dues which he must pay to society to remind him that he is a part of it, and the payment of which he feels will secure his own spiritual--not Bartleby's physical--salvation.[8] This would seem to refute Bernstein's contention that "the exposure on the part of the lawyer to this philosophy [of Bartleby's 'passive resistance'] eventually leads to his [the lawyer's] salvation."[9] As already illustrated, the lawyer's character is deceptive, and his motives

[6] Contrast with Ahab, who also believes in divine predestination, but whose extreme individualism coerces him boldly, if vainly, to challenge the will of the gods.

[7] Melville, "Bartleby the Scrivener," p. 143.

[8] Compare this and the sentiment in the passage documented in footnote 5 with the later theme of The Confidence Man.

[9] Bernstein, p. 171.

ambiguous. While his altruism may seem real, his charity is self-oriented and, therefore, is not genuine; and since his charity is not genuine, the salvation which it is intended to secure --and which Bernstein feels it has secured--cannot be genuine either.

Despite the lawyer's ego-centered motivations, he nevertheless manifests a social affinity which adds to the complexity of the conflict between social and individual forces within him. It often appears that he would really like to help Bartleby and, in so doing, become a truly beneficial member of society, as opposed to a benefactor of himself. This socialized dimension of the lawyer is not, however, evinced in his specious acts of charity, but rather in his thoughts and choice of words. Upon discovering, for example, that Bartleby has no home to speak of, but lives by night in the same office where he works by day, the narrator echoes a sentiment reminiscent of the brotherhood expressed by Redburn and Ishmael:

> For the first time in my life a feeling of overpowering stinging melancholy seized me. Before, I had never experienced aught but a not unpleasing sadness. The bond of a common humanity now drew me irresistibly to gloom. A fraternal melancholy! For both I and Bartleby were sons of Adam. (Italics mine) 10

10 Melville, "Bartleby the Scrivener," p. 132.

Later, upon realizing that Bartleby has ignored his request to leave his office, the lawyer considers the possibility of using physical force in order to eject his employee, but is mollified by a similar humanitarian thought:

> But when this old Adam of resentment rose in me and tempted me concerning Bartleby, I grappled him and threw him. How? Why, simply by recalling the divine injunction: 'A new commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another.' Yes, this it was that saved me. Aside from higher considerations, charity often operates as a vastly wise and prudent principle--a great safeguard to its possessor. [11]

Despite the apparent fraternal love which is evident in this and the preceding passage, one may nevertheless object to the sentiments therein expressed as further protestations of spurious goodwill. In the above passage, in particular, the lawyer has been thinking of a case in which a dispute between an employer and his employee resulted in the death of the latter, and the lawyer must, therefore, have considered the consequences which he would face if his aroused emotions were to induce him into an act of murder. In this light, it is interesting to note that, in reference to his timely remembrance of "the divine injunction," he claims, 'This it was that saved me [Italics mine]," disregarding the fact that, at least for the moment, Bartleby is also

[11] Ibid., p. 142.

saved. One may thus claim that, in this instance, "the divine injunction ...that ye love one another" more closely resembles "love thyself." It should also be observed that the final sentiment expressed in this passage--that charity is "a great safeguard to its possessor"--again reveals that the lawyer's charity is consciously intended to be more for his own benefit than for Bartleby's.

In a less disputable passage, the narrator again manifests his desire to be a functional part of society, a desire which, of course, is incompatible with his ego-oriented nature. The lawyer has decided to permanently abandon his office, and with it the problem of Bartleby, thereby reflecting the self-dominated individual's inability to cope with a social problem. Upon his exit, he pays his farewell to the scrivener:

> 'Good-by, Bartleby; I am going--good-by, and God some way bless you; and take that,' slipping something in his hand. But it dropped upon the floor, and then--strange to say--I tore myself from him whom I had so longed to be rid of. [Italics mine] 12

The image of the lawyer reluctantly "tearing" himself from Bartleby--symbolically "tearing" himself from humanity--as though he were a part of him, is among Melville's most powerful intima-

12 Ibid., p. 146.

tions of the internal conflict between individual and social impulses.

Although, by the end of the story, the lawyer has apparently come to a realization of the wretched state of humanity through his experience with Bartleby, this experience has not necessarily led to his salvation, as Bernstein maintains. The lawyer does, perhaps, show signs that the hardened armor of his cold, indifferent, and callous individualism has been cracked, but he is, as illustrated, too aware of the "what's in it for me?" principle for one to believe that this armor has really been penetrated or that the lawyer himself has actually been reformed. Melville has apparently used the tale as a vehicle to make a scathing, critical comment on the dehumanizing nature of the business world, and thus, as mentioned, presents the businessman as one totally conditioned to be an autonomous, self-centered individual. In the struggle between ego-centric and societal instincts, therefore, social interests are completely obliterated, and the self invariably emerges as the only victor. In this light, it would seem that the business oriented lawyer, unlike Redburn, White-Jacket, and Ishmael, is unable to reconcile the conflicting individual/social inclinations within him. His final lamentation, "Ah, Bartleby! Ah, humanity!"[13]--equating

[13] Ibid., p. 153.

Bartleby's fate with that of all mankind--suggests his awareness of society's loss in the struggle, and of the fact that the desolate condition of all Bartlebys in general is likely to endure.

CONCLUSION

Through each of the protagonists of the works discussed in this study, Melville manifests a different variation of the individual/social conflict within himself. He also depicts within his characters several different ways in which this conflict may be dealt with. The concept of balance--an integral aspect of much of Melville's philosophy--assumes a significant role in the resolution of this conflict; for those characters who have failed to reconcile or balance the ego and social forces by which they are influenced both internally and externally have been unable to successfully resolve the conflict. The individual, like Tommo, may have the potential of great individual power, but, unable to assert it, will find little more than discontent in any society in which he finds himself; or, like Ahab, the individual may completely defy and transcend society, or in Bartleby's case, ignore it, and finding absolute self-sustenance impossible, must inevitably fall; or, like the lawyer/narrator of "Bartleby," the individual may have a strong yearning to pursue and fulfill his social or humanitarian instincts, but having been thoroughly ego-conditioned, ironically by society, he is unable to recognize and cope with the demands of these instincts--in which case, society must suffer and the individual really gains nothing.

Melville constantly reminds his reader that the external

philosophical conflict between the individual and his society is a common dilemma faced by man, and that the internal psychological conflict between one's self-inclined and socially oriented instincts is a major aspect of man's dual nature. Each individual, therefore, must strive to balance the forces of self and society both outside of and within himself, for only in realizing this reconciliation--as Redburn, White-Jacket, and Ishmael, for example, have done--may the individual survive and find self-fulfillment in his society.

The problem of the individual versus society in Melville does not, however, end with the characters discussed in this thesis alone. In two of Melville's other major works, Pierre and Billy Budd, for example, the individual/social conflict is intrinsically linked with the more significant, metaphysical conflict between horological and chronometrical law. Pierre, an individual who is governed by the chronometrical, or absolute rule, is in conflict with society, which is governed by the horological, or earthly, expedient rule. Unable to reconcile the chronometrical with the horological, he is, of course, also unable to reconcile his sublime individuality with an imperfect society, and dies an ignominious death.

Billy Budd also lives by chronometrical rule, although on a far more instinctive level than does Pierre. Billy, too, is destroyed by the horological laws of his society, but resigning

himself to his fate and to the imperfection of society with a stoicism unknown to Pierre, he resolves, or to put it more accurately, passively accepts the conflict between the chronometric individual and the horological society. Unlike the demise of Pierre, who fails to reach such a resolution and/or acceptance, Billy's death is marked by glory, and his memory observed with reverence.

In short, even up to his final work, Melville was troubled by the individual/social conflict, and engineered its thematic development toward the end of his life and his literary career on a far more complex and sophisticated level than he did in any of the works which have been discussed in detail in this study.

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