

A STUDY OF NARRATIVE TONE IN
THE PIAZZA TALES

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PREFACE

The purpose of this study is to define narrative tone in Herman Melville's The Piazza Tales. By tone I mean "the attitudes toward the subject and toward the audience implied in a literary work" (Thrall, Hibbard, and Holman's A Handbook to Literature, 1960). My method is a close reading of each of the six stories of The Piazza Tales with careful attention given to the characteristics of the persona, created by means of the narrating voice, and to the relationship of that persona to the patterns of actions, images, and symbols that emerge in the narrative.

I am very grateful to Dr. Mary Rohrberger, my major adviser, for stimulating my interest in the technique of fiction several years ago and for guiding my efforts throughout this study. I also appreciate the assistance of the other committee members, Dr. Jennifer Kidney, Dr. Neil Luebke, Dr. Jane-Marie Luecke, and Dr. Gordon Weaver.

Numerous people, teachers, colleagues and friends, have influenced my work on this thesis. In particular, I wish to acknowledge the sustaining influence of Dr. David S. Berkeley, who has encouraged my efforts at scholarship.

There remains one person to whom a special tribute is due, for it was under his tutelage in a seminar on Henry James that I gained an appreciation of the complexities of

narrative technique. This thesis is a small part of the legacy left by him, Dr. Clinton Keeler, through his years as a teacher at Oklahoma State University.

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CHAPTER I
NARRATIVE TONE AND THE
"POLICY OF CONCEALMENT"

Introduction

From 1853 until 1856 Herman Melville devoted himself to writing magazine pieces for Harper's Magazine and Putnam's Monthly. Melville's experiments with short fiction followed a period of intense literary activity in which he produced seven lengthy novels in as many years. Those seven years had culminated in the publication of what was to be called a great novel, Moby-Dick in 1851, and in the publication during the following year of what was recognized then and now as a literary failure, Pierre or, The Ambiguities. Although many explanations, which may or may not be valid, have been offered for Melville's turning to short fiction--quick money, depleted energy and inventiveness, the influence of Hawthorne--the result of the turn is clearly a body of literature in which Melville was able to experiment with those technical matters that had troubled him in the composition of Pierre.

In Pierre Melville had failed to provide the clues necessary to enable the reader to distinguish between the

stance of the implied author¹ and the narrator and between the stance of the implied author and the protagonist of the novel. The problem in an evaluation of Pierre is, in short, the difficulty of determining narrative tone, of determining to what extent the novel is ironic.

This problem exists, too, in the short fiction: the debates over the degree of pessimism inherent in "The Encantadas," the degree to which the lawyer-narrator of "Bartleby" is culpable or sympathetic, and the relative merits of Captain Amasa Delano's optimistic viewpoint are evidence of this problem. The resolution of these critical problems depends on the accuracy with which narrative tone is defined in each tale.

That narrative tone is a special critical problem for anyone dealing with Melville's short fiction was first suggested by Jay Leyda in his introduction to The Complete Stories of Herman Melville: "We are compelled to regard these stories as the artist's resolution of that constant contradiction--between the desperate need to communicate and fear of revealing too much."² Leyda suggests that Melville "seems to have confided in no one that there was any secret to be found in his stories."³ He points out that even Melville's brother Allan interpreted the tales as literal and autobiographical; the public's literal attitude can be seen as late as 1937 when the New York Times' headline announced the sale of Arrowhead in the following way: "'Melville's Chimney Intact in Old House; Author of

'Moby Dick' [sic] Refused to Remove Fireplace. . . ."⁴

This literal attitude is still occasionally present in those discussions in which the "I" narrators are referred to as "Melville."⁵

Characterizing Melville as "a poet whose special, perhaps unconscious mission is concealment," Leyda suggests in his discussion two techniques Melville employs to camouflage his real meaning. The first "disclosure of his [Melville's] policy of concealment" is the large group of "I" narrators. A second technique is to use "reality" so that it becomes the "most effective camouflage": "Though some degree of communication is present in each artistic work (else the work would not have been brought into existence) much of these stories' materiality seems a minutely painted and deceptive screen erected across what is really taking place behind it--in Melville's mind."⁶ In order to get past this screen Leyda suggests attention to clues buried in each story, such as the allusion to Jonathan Edwards' Inquiry into the Freedom of the Will in "Bartleby," attention to "books known to have been read by him [Melville] during these years," and attention to "ambiguity of symbol."⁷ Few generalizations have been added to Leyda's that would promote an understanding of Melville's "policy of concealment" in the short fiction.⁸

The Piazza Tales (1856), which consists of five stories published in Putnam's plus "The Piazza," written as the introductory piece to the collection, offers a representative

sample of Melville's short fiction which will illustrate the methods Melville used to submerge the views of the implied author beneath the surface of the narrative in what Leyda calls a "policy of concealment." To Leyda's suggestion that use of "I" narrators is one means of concealment, I add that use of narrators (whether first person or third person) whose awareness is limited in some way serves to conceal the stance of the implied author. In addition I suggest that Melville's policy of concealment is carried out in The Piazza Tales through manipulation of the sympathies and expectations of the reader for subversive purposes and through baiting the reader with palatable surface meanings that divert attention from symbolic content.

One technique that helps conceal the stance of an implied author is use of narrators with limited awareness. The lawyer-narrator of "Bartleby" may be classified as unreliable in a sense because, despite his honest and accurate description of events and people, he misdirects the attention of the reader: the lawyer's theme is Bartleby; the implied author's theme is the lawyer. If the reader fails to perceive this distinction, he experiences the tale as the frustration of an unassertive lawyer by an insane employee. Perception of a distinction between implied author and narrator allows discovery of the idea that despite society's praise of common man, common sense, and adherence to common usage, a human being who contents himself with such "common" values will remain pathetically mediocre.

In "The Lightning-Rod Man," too, Melville employs a narrator whose awareness is limited; that limitation, however, is not revealed until the final episode of the story. Nevertheless, if the reader does not recognize the possibility that the implied author has withdrawn from the narrator, then the tale becomes a didactic statement of faith that does not logically follow from the premises of the story. Even when Melville uses a third-person point of view he often limits the perceptions of narrating consciousness. The reader, for example, is deluded along with Captain Delano in "Benito Cereno." In "The Bell-Tower" Melville limits the perspective of the narrator at times in order to achieve an ironic contrast between the public view of the protagonist and the objective view communicated symbolically. If the reader fails to reckon with shifts in narrative perspective, he will be apt to accept the public view of Bannadonna as the "true" one, and the irony of the tale will escape him.

Manipulation of the reader's sympathy and expectations for subversive reasons is another technique Melville employs in The Piazza Tales that helps to conceal the views of the implied author. In "Bartleby" the narrator's sincere confession of painful experiences draws the reader into an intimate relationship with the lawyer that makes it more difficult for the reader to see the lawyer's limitations; nevertheless, Melville provides for the necessary detachment of the reader from the lawyer-narrator to enable the reader to share in an

awareness of the narrator's mediocrity. This double role in which the reader shares in the "commonness" of the lawyer and participates in the denigration of that "commonness" produces the reader's awareness of his own inadequacies. A similar technique is apparent in "The Lightning-Rod Man." In this story Melville employs a narrator with whom the reader identifies because he seems to speak for the implied author early in the tale as the lightning-rod salesman is satirized. The last episode of the story suggests that the narrator is also an object of satire; thus the implied author has betrayed the reader into identifying with a character whom the implied author is satirizing. So too the reader is forced to see with the eyes of Captain Delano in "Benito Cereno" and thereby be deceived; manipulation of reader identification in this story serves to undermine the reader's facile acceptance of his private perceptions as the objectively true and real.

Before "The Encantadas" was published Melville's readers were led to expect something far different from what Melville actually produced. The Evening Post on February 14, 1854, announced that what was to come would delight "the readers of Omoo and Typee" [sic] with "a prospect of another of those Pacific elysiums."⁹ Instead of a Paradise, of course, Melville gave his readers a Tartarus. But Melville did appear to satisfy the readers' expectations, as expressed in the paragraph in The Evening Post, insofar as he appeared to produce another "factual" work, "a reminiscence of life among

a group of islands on the equator." The narrator of "The Encantadas" assumes the role of travel-guide. Read as travel literature the sketches become "a series of charming descriptions."¹⁰ But that the narrator is playing another game with the reader is suggested by the fact that he unexpectedly turns attention from the islands to himself, first in regard to his role as artist and then in regard his power to manipulate the emotions of the reader. The narrator seems to wish to expose his facade as travel-guide as merely one of many masks which he can don, to expose the relativity of the perspectives he assumes.

A third technique that serves to conceal the views of the implied author is baiting the reader with palatable surface meanings that divert attention from symbolic content. In "The Piazza" Melville serves up a theme that is readily accessible: that one's perceptions change as his perspective changes. A symbolic reading of the tale does at least two things. First it increases awareness of the complexity of the reality/illusion theme. Secondly it exposes a theme that is counter to the assumptions of many of Melville's contemporaries. A symbolic reading of "The Piazza" makes a case for a distinction between "life" and art, a distinction that had been blurred by both the Transcendentalists and Melville's literalist-readers. So too in "The Bell-Tower" an obvious theme immediately presents itself: that pride goes before a fall. A symbolic reading of the tale indicates the complexity with which the implied

author views this truism. On a symbolic level also "The Bell-Tower" indicts a technological society which glorifies reason, acknowledges only a material reality, and denigrates the role of the artist to the level of mechanic. Melville was surely depicting defects of his own society--defects that had roots in the Renaissance, the period in which "The Bell-Tower" is set.

A close reading of each of the tales of The Piazza Tales with attention focused on the mode of narration is the method used in the following chapters to identify narrative tone. In those tales in which narrative perspective is stationary--one consciousness giving voice to the entire narrative--the reliability of the narrator is tested by the degree of consistency of the attitudes betrayed and exposition provided, both of which must be compared to symbolic meaning suggested by patterns of symbols and images. The result is that hidden conflicts are exposed; one has glimpses of submerged truth.

"The Encantadas" demands special treatment because its sprawling narrative contains no tightly-woven pattern of symbols as do the other components of The Piazza Tales. The unifying force in "The Encantadas" is the narrator whose voice is the center of interest in these sketches. Attention must be focused on the relationship of that voice to the objective world it creates.

In dealing with the two tales in which point of view shifts, "The Bell-Tower" and "Benito Cereno," one must

carefully separate the threads of the narrative, discerning between warp and woof, the perceptions which are limited by perspective and the perceptions which belong to an objective authorial voice. Both must be compared with the pattern of images and symbols that emerges in the tales.

Under careful scrutiny, the tension that Leyda describes "between the desperate need to communicate and fear of revealing too much" and that the reader experiences as the peculiar texture of Melville's short fiction takes specific forms. It takes the form of a disparity between surface meaning and a meaning that is communicated by patterns of action, imagery, and symbols. It takes the form of being drawn into an identification with a character and being dissociated from him. It takes the form, too, of a disparity between the purported role of the narrator and a quite different role that is divulged surreptitiously.

NOTES

¹Wayne Booth argues convincingly for use of the term "implied author" for the consciousness that stands behind the narrative and projects in that narrative a set of norms. That consciousness is an official version of the author's self, but because "regardless of how sincere an author may try to be, his different works will imply different versions, different ideal combinations of norms," one can more accurately describe these various selves, of Melville for example, by speaking of the implied authors of Melville's tales. See The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1961), pp. 70-71.

²(New York: Random House, 1949), p. xxviii.

³p. xxiii.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ironically even Leyda says that Melville is the narrator of "The Encantadas," "The Lightning-Rod Man," and "The Bell-Tower," p. xxi.

⁶p. xxviii.

⁷Pp. xxiv, xxv, xxvi.

⁸Richard Harter Fogle's concern is theme rather than technique in Melville's Shorter Tales (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960). Recently three more books on Melville's short fiction have been published. Marvin Fisher's Going Under, Melville's Short Fiction and the American 1850s (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977) is a thematic approach, but as the title indicates Fisher acknowledges Melville's use of "the indication of symbolism, allusion, and analogy" (p. xii). William B. Dillingham's excellent book, Melville's Short Fiction 1853-1856 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1977) contains a close reading of each of the short stories. Dillingham acknowledges in his introduction that "it is impossible to understand these stories without coming to an understanding of the narrative voice" (p. 11). The importance of the narrator is only one of several assumptions Dillingham makes about Melville's short fiction; consequently he concentrates on point of view more fully in some interpretations than in others. The main contribution of R. Bruce Bickley, Jr.'s The Method of Melville's Short Fiction (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1975) is in

the discussion of the influence of Washington Irving's sketches on Melville's short fiction.

⁹Quoted by Jay Leyda, The Melville Log, A Documentary Life of Herman Melville 1819-1891 (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1951), pp. 484-85.

¹⁰"The Encantadas" was described in this way by reviewers in The Criterion (May 31, 1856); similarly "The Encantadas" was described as a "charming series of articles" in the Berkshire County Eagle (May 4, 1854). See Leyda, The Melville Log, II, 515-16; I, 487. In several reviews "The Encantadas" is hailed as Melville's return to the style and subject matter of Typee and Omoo.

CHAPTER II

"BARTLEBY": IRONY BEHIND THE VOICE

The rhetorical irony created by the lawyer's story of "Bartleby" surfaces upon the reader's recognition that the narrator in attempting to center attention on "a scrivener, the strangest I ever saw, or heard of" actually centers attention upon himself, that the lawyer's goal, which he states as an attempt to give the reader "an understanding of the chief character about to be presented"¹ is achieved but in a sense other than the one he recognizes. The lawyer is thoroughly understood by the end of the narrative; Bartleby remains enigmatic. The reader's recognition of the ironic mode of the tale is provided for almost immediately as he goes from the title "Bartleby" to the lawyer's first sentence, "I am a rather elderly man" (p. 3).

The narrator-lawyer is not naive. On the contrary, he is highly conscious of his role as story-teller. After introducing himself as well as his employees, Turkey, Nippers, and Ginger Nut, he offers an explanation of his own complex reactions to the presence of Bartleby in his office. At first merely stunned by Bartleby's preference not to comply with "'common usage and common sense!," he

next decides to befriend Bartleby because Bartleby will be useful to him by feeding his good conscience (p. 17). Self-righteousness gives way to gloom as the lawyer imagines the suffering Bartleby must be enduring. But the gloom is extremely transitory, turning to fear and fear to repulsion as the lawyer rationalizes that when one cannot remedy suffering, "common sense bids the soul be rid of it" (p. 25). His repulsion culminates in an urge to kill Bartleby. The narrator-lawyer's mood then turns to resignation: he rationalizes that Providence has given him the mission of comforting Bartleby. The period of reconciliation is short. Once he thinks his professional reputation is at stake, his "blessed state of mind" vanishes and he determines to escape from Bartleby first by moving to another building and last by hiding Bartleby (either in the lawyer's own home or in prison). Bartleby's preferences lead to the latter alternative.

Irony comes of the excess meaning that resides in the lawyer's words, a meaning to which the narrator has no access. The lawyer is not aware, for example, of the frequency with which he mentions food and money nor of the possible import of such recurrent imagery. He is not aware that the external conflicts which he recounts (between employer and employees) suggest an interior conflict (heart against head). Neither is he aware that what he calls a "safe" and "peaceful" life is impossible for anyone truly following the models alluded to in his narrative, Jesus and Cicero.

The lawyer's preoccupation with money is introduced as he betrays an inordinate pride in having known "the late John Jacob Astor"; the money/mouth association is almost immediate as the lawyer continues: "a name which, I admit, I love to repeat; for it hath a rounded and orbicular sound to it, and rings like unto bullion." The lawyer speaks in precise terms about money and often connects money with oral gratification: Turkey receives "so small an income" that he cannot afford both wine and a respectable coat; he chooses the wine. Nippers' ambition (for more money--the presence of a dun suggests the need) results in recurring indigestion (p. 7). That money is of great importance to the lawyer is suggested by numerous references to precise amounts of it; that he is part of a system that allows him an inordinate share of the profits is suggested by the contrast between the poverty of his employees and his own affluence (the lawyer confesses that he is quite careless with pocket change). More significant is the fact that he thinks of his employee Bartleby from the outset in terms of his own gratification in money and food:² the lawyer determines to "cheaply purchase a delicious self-approval" by befriending Bartleby because humoring him in his strange wilfulness, will "cost me little or nothing, while I lay up in my soul what will eventually prove a sweet morsel for my conscience" (p. 17; emphasis added).

The lawyer describes Bartleby's move from zealous employment to total inactivity in terms of food: Bartleby's

initial devotion to copying is termed the result of his "long famishing for something to copy"; Bartleby is said to "gorge himself on my documents. There was no pause for digestion" (p. 12). After Bartleby reveals his inadequacies as an employee, the lawyer seeks a reasonable explanation for the scrivener's odd behavior by considering Bartleby's eating habits: "My mind then ran on in reveries covering the probable effects upon the human constitution of living entirely on ginger-nuts" (p. 17). Again Bartleby defies reason: the lawyer can find no connection between the hot, spicy flavoring of the cakes and Bartleby's character. It is Bartleby's refusal to eat that parallels his refusal to continue as part of the voracious system of Wall Street: his initial zealous copying is followed by total abstinence. Discovering Bartleby dead in prison, the lawyer, echoing the words of the grub-man, aptly describes Bartleby as a man who "'lives without dining'" (p. 46).

The lawyer's occupation commits him to a rational way of life. His appeals to "common usage and common sense" and an enlightened self-interest align him with eighteenth and nineteenth-century rationalists. But the lawyer is also a man of sentiment. His vacillation between these two modes of action suggests a psychological conflict that prevents his ever arriving at a satisfactory resolution of external conflicts.

Prior to Bartleby's arrival at the lawyer's office, for example, the narrator, acting as a rationalist, determines that, regardless of Turkey's poverty, his working time (and thus his pay) should be cut in half. The lawyer's decision is a sound one from a practical point of view: Turkey loses his usefulness as a scrivener each day at noon due to his over-indulgence in wine. Protesting the lawyer's decision, Turkey appeals to sentiment:

'Surely, sir, a blot or two of a warm afternoon is not to be severely urged against gray hairs. Old age--even if it blot the page--is honorable. With submission, sir, we both are getting old' (p. 7).

The lawyer succumbs to "this appeal to my fellow-feeling" (p. 7). The same pattern of reason frustrated by sentimentality is repeated at least four times in the lawyer's confrontations with Bartleby.

The first instance occurs when the lawyer returns unexpectedly to his office on a Sunday to find that Bartleby resides in the law office. The long passage detailing the lawyer's imaginative identification with Bartleby's suffering begins, "Immediately then the thought came sweeping across me, what miserable friendliness and loneliness are here revealed! His poverty is great; but his solitude, how horrible!" (p. 22). The lawyer continues to indulge his fancy until he experiences "a fraternal melancholy." As a practical man the lawyer recognizes that such an imaginative identification with Bartleby is cut loose from the "real" world; it is based on assumptions that are not "ascertainable." Consequently the lawyer ultimately rejects his

sentimental approach, calling his "sad fancyings" but "chimeras, doubtless, of a sick and silly brain" (p. 23). So too the narrator's later assumption that Bartleby has vision problems is not ascertainable, and the lawyer's temporary sympathy with Bartleby on that account quickly dissipates.

Included in the lawyer's recollection of how he successfully grappled with the "old Adam of resentment" which "tempted" him to do violence to Bartleby is a simple formula that entails several steps, two of which involve "benevolently construing his [Bartleby's] conduct" (p. 34). The lawyer simply unleashes his sentimental imagination: "Poor fellow, poor fellow! thought I, he don't mean anything; and besides, he has seen hard times, and ought to be indulged" (p. 35). The first exercise of fancy "drowns" the lawyer's "exasperated feelings"; the second is designed "to comfort" his despondency: he tries to fancy that "Bartleby, of his own free accord, would emerge from his hermitage and take up some decided line of march in the direction of the door" (p. 35). The lawyer's recourse to fancy produces no effective action, neither from himself nor from Bartleby: "But no. Half-past twelve o'clock came. . . . Bartleby remained standing at his window in one of his profoundest dead-wall reveries" (p. 35).

The lawyer's vacillation between sense and sensibility is a symptom of the lawyer's "conviction that the easiest way of life is the best" (p. 4). A total commitment to a

rational way of life or to a life of feeling would entail risk that "an eminently safe man" is unwillingly to take: the lawyer refuses to be rid of Bartleby (as "common sense bids") and risk being judged cruel; likewise he refuses to identify with Bartleby's suffering and risk sharing in an incurable pain (p. 25).

The lawyer's lack of commitment to either rationalism or sensibility parallels his lack of commitment to either of the role-models alluded to in his narrative. The narrator is apparently a Christian; he quotes Jesus and refers to plans to go to Trinity Church. Those plans are aborted once he has been "persuaded" by what he has seen of Bartleby's solitude that he must be rid of "the victim of innate and incurable disorder" (p. 25). The lawyer's actions regarding Bartleby are always decent and reasonable, but they do not reflect the extreme unselfishness commanded in the Sermon on the Mount. So too the ideas of the lawyer's professional role-model, Cicero, contrast to the attitudes the lawyer betrays.³

Twice the narrator alludes to Cicero, the bust of whom occupies a place just over the lawyer's head when he is seated at his desk. The first reference occurs after Bartleby's initial refusal to examine copy:

Had there been the least uneasiness, anger, impatience or impertinence in his manner; in other words, had there been anything ordinarily human about him, doubtless I should have violently dismissed him from the premises. But as it was, I should have as soon thought of turning my pale plaster-of-paris bust of Cicero out of doors (p. 13).

The second reference occurs during the lawyer's attempt to get information from Bartleby regarding his background. During the exchange Bartleby "did not look at me while I spoke, but kept his glance fixed upon my bust of Cicero, which as I then sat, was directly behind me, some six inches above my head" (p. 26). Cicero's conception of the role of the lawyer and his attitude toward moral expediency contrast to the lawyer-narrator's ideas and attitudes, ironically so since Cicero is apparently a model of the lawyer's own choosing.

A comparison of how Cicero and the narrator of "Bartleby" conceive of the role of the lawyer reveals a profession greatly diminished in the world of Wall Street. The narrator-lawyer describes his occupation as "a snug business among rich men's bonds, and mortgages, and title-deeds" and himself as "a conveyancer and title-hunter, and drawer-up of recondite documents of all sorts" (pp. 4, 11). The traits of the narrator which suit him to fulfill the lawyer's role so successfully, he tells us, are prudence and methodicalness, a contrast to the wisdom and eloquence which must be joined in the lawyer as conceived of by Cicero. In De Oratore Cicero expresses this ideal, recounting how philosophy and eloquence had in the past been divorced:

For, as I observed before, the ancients, till the time of Socrates, united all knowledge and science in all things, whether they pertained to morality, to the duties of life, to virtue, or to civil government, with the faculty of speaking; but afterward,

the eloquent being separated by Socrates from the learned, (as I have already explained), and this distinction being continued by all the followers of Socrates, the philosophers disregarded eloquence and the orators philosophy. . . . the followers of Socrates excluded the pleaders of causes from their own body, and from the common title of philosophers--though the ancients were of the opinion that there was a miraculous harmony between speaking and understanding.⁴

Not only has the lawyer-narrator of "Bartleby" ceased to conceive of his role as that of a philosopher, he has had no ambition to be a "pleader of causes." Vestiges of the orator are visible in the rhetorical devices he employs and in the symmetry and balance of his sentences, but the ability to contend with the wills and opinions of other men through the use of words (the role of the orator) is sadly lacking. Before recounting his feeble attempts at molding the will of Bartleby, the narrator reveals his inability to contend with his other employees, principally Turkey. The lawyer, for example, wishes to convince his alcoholic employee that he should begin working only in the mornings:

But no; he [Turkey] insisted upon his afternoon devotions. His countenance became intolerably fervid, as he oratorically assured me--gesticulating with a long ruler at the other end of the room--that if his services in the morning were useful, how indispensable, then in the afternoon? (p. 7).

To the lawyer's further objection, Turkey responds, in an ironic continuation of role reversal, with an appeal to the lawyer's emotions by alluding to both his own and the lawyer's old age. Again, in an effort to get Turkey to improve his

personal appearance the lawyer says, ". . . I reasoned with him; but with no effect" (p. 9). The narrator's ineffectualness as a pleader of causes, even among his subordinates, underlines with irony the diminished role of the lawyer.

Whereas the eloquent style of the narrator's sentences serve to remind us of the oratorical tradition to which the lawyer is an unworthy heir, the references to the office of the Master in Chancery serve to remind us of the philosophical tradition to which the Ciceronian lawyer would be heir. Herbert Smith details in an article in American Quarterly the difference between the Courts of Chancery (also called Courts of Equity) and ordinary courts of law. The Courts of Chancery dealt with equity law or the "ideal application of justice," or as Aristotle defined equity, "'that idea of justice which contravenes the written law'."⁵ In short, the difference between Courts of Equity or Chancery and ordinary courts of law are two: the Courts of Chancery were concerned with ideality instead of mere precedent and with absolute instead of relative justice.⁶ In lamenting the abrogation of the office of Master in Chancery, the lawyer-narrator is upset, not over the loss of an opportunity to fulfill his role as philosopher in the Ciceronian tradition but over the loss of income which the abolition of the office meant to him. During the years that the lawyer-narrator held the office he may have slighted the great responsibilities which such a court in theory and conception must have entailed, for the lawyer describes the post as

"not a very arduous office, but very pleasantly remunerative" (p. 4).

To understand and adequately fulfill the post of Master of Chancery one would need what Cicero called philosophical wisdom or sapientia, which he defined as "the knowledge of all things, both human and divine, and . . . understanding of the need for social unity and harmony."⁷ Cicero contrasts sapientia, which he characterizes as "first of all the virtues" and "the most important thing," to prudencia or "practical wisdom, the knowledge of what should be done and what should be avoided" (I.43.153). Interestingly, it is the latter virtue that the lawyer-narrator of "Bartleby" claims as his "first grand point." Having cultivated this lesser virtue to the exclusion of the greater, philosophical wisdom or sapientia, the lawyer-narrator's moral system is inferior if the authority of Cicero is accepted. In On Responsibility (De Officiis) Cicero avers that because sapientia is of ultimate importance so "any obligation arising from that concept is also of supreme importance" (I.43.153).

But the lawyer-narrator of "Bartleby the Scrivener" operates on the level of prudencia, the practical level debased in the absence of sapientia to a mere self-interest. The lawyer makes his way of thinking quite clear in that familiar passage in which he explains how he controlled the hostility which Bartleby's behavior provoked:

Aside from higher considerations, charity often operates as a vastly wise and prudent principle-- a great safeguard to its possessor. . . . Mere self-interest, then, if no better motive can be enlisted, should, especially with high-tempered men, prompt all beings to charity and philanthropy (p. 34).

In all of the lawyer's dealings with other men he relies on the principle of self-interest as his guide to his behavior toward them. Just as Bartleby's catch-word is prefer, the narrator's catch-word is useful. Judging his employees, the lawyer says, "Nippers, like his compatriot Turkey, was a very useful man to me" (p. 8). Bartleby, too, he judges as "useful to me" (p. 17), thereby justifying not taking stronger measures to get rid of him because in many ways he was "a valuable acquisition" (p. 20). The lawyer considers Bartleby an ingrate for failure to appreciate the "good usage . . . he had received" (p. 26). And, finally, seeming to define "friend" in a way consistent with the principle of self-interest, the lawyer introduces the Grub-man with these words: "'Bartleby, this is a friend; you will find him very useful to you'" (p. 44). The lawyer's pragmatic bias, identifying that which is useful or expedient as "good," leads to a conflict with which he must struggle in his relationship with Bartleby. When Bartleby is judged "useless as a necklace" (p. 29), when his presence is judged a liability by "scandalizing my [the lawyer's] professional reputation" (p. 36), then the lawyer, according to the maxim, "whatever is expedient is good," must get rid of Bartleby. That the lawyer's conscience is reciting a different maxim

is made evident by the painful mental struggle which the lawyer recounts:

What shall I do? what ought I to do? what does conscience say I should do with this man, or, rather, ghost. Rid myself of him, I must; go, he shall. But how? You will not thrust him, the poor, pale, passive mortal-- you will not thrust such a helpless creature out of your door? you will not dishonor yourself by such cruelty? (p. 37).

Deciding to resolve the dilemma by moving his office to another building, the lawyer does not leave entirely in good conscience; for he says that he "tore" himself "from him whom I had so longed to be rid of" (p. 38). After the move, the lawyer "often felt a charitable prompting to call at the place and see poor Bartleby, yet a certain squeamishness, of I know not what, withheld me" (p. 39). After offering as a last resort to take Bartleby to his own home, an offer made quite clearly out of desperation, the lawyer says, "I now strove to be entirely care-free and quiescent; and my conscience justified me in the attempt; though, indeed, it was not so successful as I could have wished" (p. 42). Cicero speaks to the conflict which the lawyer experiences:

It is those who measure everything by the yardstick of self-interest and never allow this to be outweighed by considerations of what is morally good, who in their deliberations draw a distinction between goodness and expediency; but this is never the action of men of moral integrity. . . . Indeed not only is it disgraceful to place expediency above moral good, but also to accept that there is a conflict between them and to have any doubts about its solution" (III. 4.18).

In short, the lawyer's maxim, "whatever is expedient is good," is quite different from its converse, "whatever is good is expedient." Cicero subscribes to the latter and abhors the former. He says that there is a possible conflict between expediency and moral good only if one does not believe

that the highest good is moral good, and therefore whatever apparent advantage comes into conflict with it can neither make our life better by its presence nor worse by its absence (III. 3.12).

Cicero's moral views are idealistic fare for a man nourished on the commercial values of Wall Street. That such a man experiences a nagging conscience, that he identifies with the suffering of an incorrigible employee is more surprising than the fact that his morality suffers in comparison with the moral ideas of Cicero. It is for this reason that the lawyer evokes our sympathy. The implication of the narrator's struggle is that he operates on the conscious level with one moral system and has intimations of another, more demanding system of ethics. The bust of Cicero resting six inches above his head is a fitting symbol for those intimations. Yet, the lawyer apparently does not bring his conflict to the conscious level. He does not question his values nor does he question the moral assumptions that stem from those values. The narrator is largely unaware of the limitations he betrays.

The reader's recognition of the lawyer's limitations distances the reader from him. At the same time, however, the humanness of the narrator draws the reader into a sympathy with him.⁸ The narrator affirms his place among "common humanity"; he affirms his devotion to "common sense and common usage." Ironically, it is this commonness that is exposed to be the lawyer's failure. The lawyer's failure to measure up to the Ciceronian ideal is common humanity's failure also; the lawyer's blindness to his own limitations is a blindness to which all of humanity is prone. The walls which surround the lawyer and which are "deficient in what landscape painters call 'life'" (p. 5) represent the defenses each person erects to protect the self from the assaults that make up "life." The narrator's failings, then, are common failings. His sin is mediocrity.

To promote the reader's identification with the mediocrity that characterizes the lawyer, Melville has fashioned a narrator who, as a lawyer, is skilled at molding the sympathies of the reader. The lawyer is very much aware that what he says will evoke a certain response from certain readers. He announces at the beginning of the narrative that he "could relate divers histories, at which good-natured gentlemen might smile and sentimental souls might weep" (p. 3). He presumes an intimacy with the reader, occasionally addressing the reader directly. The reference to "parting with the reader" near the

conclusion of the story suggests that the lawyer remains conscious of the presence of the reader throughout the narrative.

The lawyer promotes the reader's identification with him by occasionally shifting from first person to third person pronouns. Those shifts tend to align the sympathies of the reader with the lawyer by making the lawyer a representative of common man, by suggesting the lawyer's reasonable detachment from the events of the story, and by placing the lawyer in a category that the reader would aspire to.

The lawyer often generalizes about himself as if he were generalizing about all men. For example, when the lawyer wishes to say that he is most capable of making wise decisions early in the morning, he says instead, "One of the coolest and wisest hours a man has, is just after he awakes in the morning" (p. 31). When the lawyer tells of his repulsion from Bartleby and his resolve to get rid of Bartleby, he explains that resolve not only in terms of his own emotions but also in terms of the reader's emotions (using the pronoun "our") and in terms of human emotions in general (using third-person pronouns):

So true it is, and so terrible, too, that up to a certain point the thought or sight of misery enlists our best affections; but, in certain special cases, beyond that point it does not. They err who would assert that invariably this is owing to the inherent selfishness of the human heart. It rather proceeds from a certain hopelessness of remedying excessive and organic ill (pp. 24-25).

When the lawyer reports that he was guilty of railing at Bartleby for failing to comply with the lawyer's requests to do some insignificant task, the lawyer admits guilt only in a collective sense: ". . . how could a human creature, with the common infirmities of our nature, refrain from bitterly exclaiming upon such perverseness--such unreasonableness?" (p. 20).

Not only does the lawyer make himself representative of common humanity by shifting to third-person perspectives, but also he creates the impression that he has attained a reasonable detachment from the events he is describing. Recalling "sundry twinges of impotent rebellion" that occurred when he was turned away from his office by Bartleby, the lawyer creates an image of himself that is trustworthy by calmly objectifying the account of his feelings of being "unmanned": "For I consider that one, for the time, is a sort of unmanned when he tranquilly permits his hired clerk to dictate to him . . ." (pp. 21-22).

Finally shifts to third-person point of view encourage an identification with the narrator by placing the narrator in a category that the reader would be apt to identify with. For example, the narrator generalizes, "Nothing so aggravates an earnest person as a passive resistance" (p. 11). Similarly, the lawyer explains his decision to abandon Bartleby by putting himself in the category of "generous minds": "But thus it often is, that the constant friction of illiberal minds wears out at last the best resolves of the more

generous" (p. 36). The narrator explains that his pity for Bartleby turned to repulsion because "to a sensitive being, pity is not seldom pain" (p. 25). If the reader identifies with earnestness, generosity of mind, or sensitivity, then he identifies with a category in which the narrator has cleverly placed himself.

The lawyer seeks the reader's sympathy because he is trying to justify his actions regarding Bartleby. On another level the implied author has provided for a simultaneous dissociation and identification with the lawyer-narrator so that the reader will find himself in the uncomfortable position of identifying with an object of satire.

In an epilogue to the tale the lawyer adds the "rumor" that Bartleby had been employed as a clerk in the Dead Letter Office at Washington. The epilogue has been the object of some critical discussion: it has been viewed as Melville's artistic failure or evidence of the lawyer's deepened humanity or another indication of the lawyer's overly-rational nature prompting him to opt for a sentimental understanding of Bartleby rather than a profound appreciation of the mystery Bartleby represents. When the epilogue is viewed in the context of the pattern of action that is exhibited in the entire narrative, the last explanation is the most plausible. The epilogue takes its place as another in a series of sentimental moments that give the lawyer a temporary and pleasurable respite from the

frustration of the unascertainable. But Bartleby remains, as the lawyer clearly acknowledges, inexplicable, unfixed, unknowable. Therein lies the lawyer's fascination with him; therein lies the lawyer's frustration. The lawyer's ambivalence toward Bartleby mirrors our own ambivalence toward "Bartleby," the tale: whereas the presence of the readily-analyzable lawyer satisfies our urge to understand, to see things in the black and white terms of the walls that comprise the view from the lawyer's office, Bartleby stands as the symbol of all that frustrates the reductive efforts of human understanding. Like the lawyer, we are forced by the presence of Bartleby to move out of the legal office that offers a view "deficient in . . . 'life'" (p. 5).

NOTES

¹The Complete Stories of Herman Melville, ed. Jay Leyda (New York: Random House, 1949), p. 4. All subsequent quotations from Melville's short stories will be from this edition. Pagination will appear parenthetically in the text.

²Dillingham interprets the food metaphors as the lawyer's "hunger for self-approval" (p. 32). See also Allen F. Stein, "The Motif of Voracity in 'Bartleby'," ESQ, 21 (1975), 29-34.

³Function of the Cicero allusions is discussed briefly as a part of a larger discussion of self-love versus virtue by Allan Moore Emery, "The Alternatives of Melville's 'Bartleby'," NCF, 31 (1976), 184-85. See also Marvin Singleton, "Melville's 'Bartleby': Over the Republic, a Ciceronian Shadow," CRevAS, 4 (1975), 165-73. Singleton argues that "Bartleby" is a parable contrasting "stoic-based Roman law jurisprudence" and "Anglo-American Common law." He concludes, "Bartleby called for the transcendent friend in an America lacking either a legal or philosophical foundation for obligation of such simple intensity . . ." (p. 171).

⁴J. S. Watson, trans., Cicero on Oratory and Orators (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1970), pp. 212-13.

⁵"Melville's Master in Chancery and His Recalcitrant Clerk," AQ, 17 (1965), 736.

⁶Ibid., 737.

⁷John Higginbotham, trans., On Moral Obligation (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), I.43.153. All subsequent quotations from Cicero are from this work.

⁸These contrary pulls on the reader's sympathy are responsible in part for the critical debate over the extent to which the lawyer-narrator is an object of satire. Liane Norman is the only critic to my knowledge who has addressed the issue of the role of the reader in this tale. See "Bartleby and the Reader," NEQ, 44 (1971), 22-39. Although Norman's conclusion is the same as mine--that the reader "finds himself at once associating himself with the Lawyer

and judging the Lawyer, and thus by association himself" (p. 30)--her approach to the evidence for that conclusion is quite different from mine. I have attempted to argue from evidence within the text in order to avoid as much as possible what David Shusterman calls the "reader fallacy" in "The 'Reader Fallacy' and 'Bartleby the Scrivener'," NEQ, 45 (1972), 118-24.

CHAPTER III

THE DIVIDED SELF IN "THE PIAZZA"

In "The Piazza" Melville creates a narrator who is clearly the protagonist of the tale. Unlike the narrator of "Bartleby," who attempts to center the attention of the "listener" on a strange and fascinating character who has profoundly affected his life, the narrator of "The Piazza" consciously focuses the listener's attention upon his own perceptions. Thus, instead of having to detach oneself from the narrator's point of view because the narrator imperfectly interprets the experiences he is relating, in "The Piazza" the reader undergoes an expanded consciousness along with the narrator-protagonist. In this way the narrative technique employed in "The Piazza" on one level demands less of the reader, for here one may forgo the psychological strain of refraining from committing one's trust to the only voice one hears.

Yet the author's relationship to the reader in "The Piazza" is oblique even when the narrator's views coincide with those of the implied author. Not only do the views of the implied author and the narrator of "The Piazza" coincide, but the narrator is, like Melville, both a

literary man and a former sailor. Consequently, the narrator of this tale is often taken to be Melville speaking directly in an autobiographical sketch. But I maintain that the narrator is a character whose reliability must be tested by a comparison of his perceptions and observations to what is communicated symbolically through the story. Just as the symbolic content of the tales uttered by the unreliable narrators is unrealized by those narrators, so the reliable narrator speaks seemingly unaware of the symbolic content of his story. Though he may intuit the symbolic meaning of his tale, and in some cases one feels that he does, too much self-conscious analysis or exposition can overburden the symbols and spoil the esthetic experience. In short, both a reliable and an unreliable narrator may say more than they know; the reliable narrator may also know more than he says.

The narrator of "The Piazza" does not explain the meaning of his tale, but almost every sentence he utters contributes to the reader's experience, even discovery, of that meaning. The consistency of the attitudes betrayed, the exposition provided, and the symbolic content of the story is the test of the reliability of the narrator. A mere surface reading of "The Piazza" yields what has usually been taken as the theme of the story: that what one accepts as reality may shift into illusion as one's perspective changes. This theme is made quite explicit by the experience that the narrator relates. After moving

into a country house, he has a piazza constructed from which to view the picturesque scenery about him. Attracted by the majesty of Mt. Greylock (fancifully called "Charlemagne"), which can only be viewed from the north side of the house, the narrator chooses that site for his piazza; the choice both amuses and puzzles his neighbors. From the piazza the narrator catches sight of a spot of radiance visible only "under certain witching conditions of light and shadow" (p. 441). The spot of radiance fascinates him, and he becomes convinced that it is a fairyland. Steeped in the contemplation of imaginative literature--Midsummer Night's Dream and The Faerie Queen--the narrator journeys to that spot of radiance, hoping to dispel his weary and peevish mood. The arduous journey completed, the narrator discovers not an ideal fairyland but a small cottage inhabited by a lonely girl whose weariness seems to match his own. To his surprise, she looks down upon his house, transformed into an azure world by the distant perspective, as the abode of some Prince Charming who has the power to relieve her own malaise. The narrator leaves the girl with her "illusions" but cannot forget her haunting face.

Rich in symbolism, imagery, and detail, which appear superfluous if the reality/illusion theme is approached simplistically, the narrative yields a complex interplay between what is the inner or psychological reality (the nature of the self) and what one takes to be the physical

reality. In effect, the two realms are one. And what the ego discovers to be an illusion may be but a projection of the possibility of completion arising from the unconscious. Whereas these projections are fleeting, when objectified (as in art) they can offer a means of transcending the self.

These variations on the illusion/reality theme can best be understood by approaching the short story structurally. The story may be divided into four parts; in each part the narrative tone has particular characteristics, but in each a double consciousness is discernible. In part one two consciousnesses are present: the narrator's past self when he first moved into the country and constructed his piazza and the narrator's present self who is speaking to us.

The narrator's former self seems to have been an Emersonian, aware of only the beneficent aspects of nature. Because nature is viewed as the symbol of spiritual fact, the former self is a priest of nature: he lives in view of a "monastery of mountains," the chief peak of which he calls Charlemagne, the champion of Christianity; and he compares the devotees of Nature to worshippers in cathedrals. Consistent with Emerson's contention that art and nature are equal and analogous, the narrator's former self made no distinction between the two: "the country round about was such a picture, that in berry time no boy climbs hill or crosses vale without coming upon easels

planted in every nook . . ." (p. 437). He calls the limestone hills "picture galleries . . . galleries hung, month after month anew, with pictures ever fading into pictures ever fresh" (p. 438). In short, the narrator once believed himself to have been a resident of a place in which empirical nature had the properties of art. The desire for a piazza itself was an extension of the narrator's belief that opposites could be reconciled in this world, for the narrator's fondness for piazzas was due in part, he says, to their "combining the coziness of in-doors with the freedom of out-doors" (p. 437). His love for the picturesque scenery was another indication of his devotion to ideality: what constituted the picturesque was a scene that combined the opposite characteristics of the sublime and the beautiful.¹

Other images of integration seem to indicate that the appeal of Emersonian idealism is based on the psyche's quest for wholeness, for completeness, a yearning that is a valid part of the narrator's maturer self. He describes the house in such a way as to take on the symbolic values of the ideal: it is constructed of "the Kaaba, or Holy Stone," a symbol of the Incarnation or Heaven come to Earth, literally a stone dropped in ancient times from the skies (an aerolite) and since then a focal point of sacred pilgrimage. In addition, the house stands on ground that partakes of both the forest and the plain: thus opposites meet and are reconciled. The narrator's imaginative

projections of himself are additional indications of his desire for psychic wholeness. He sees himself as Lazarus in Abraham's bosom, an image of heavenly compensation for earthly deprivation, and as "Canute-like," the Viking who reconciled in himself the Christian and the heathen, the statesman and the pirate.

Though the narrative in part one is rife with images of ideality, of opposites reconciled, the narrator's knowledge of the fallen world is intimated by discordant allusions and images. Thus the maturer narrator, unlike his former self, has a divided consciousness, the cheerful idealism of the persona and the suppressed knowledge of a contrary reality. In other words, the narrator records an imaginative projection of the desire for wholeness and completeness, which is a universal psychic phenomenon often taking the form of mandala images. But reason has discovered the unreconcilable nature of opposites. This repressed knowledge accounts for discordant imagery. The hints of the narrator's conflict create an ironic level of meaning, foreshadowing the mind-expanding events of the tale. In the key passage that echoes a line from Emerson's "The Problem," the narrator seems to have tongue in cheek as he seeks an explanation for the perfect vantage point facilitated by the location of the house:

Whoever built the house, he builded better than he knew; or else Orion in the zenith flashed down his Damocles' sword to him some starry night, and said, 'Build there' (pp. 437-38).

Juxtaposed with the transcendental explanation for the location of the house is an allusion to the mythical figure Orion who was the ravisher and destroyer of nature.² The reference to Damocles' sword too clashes with the cheerful, optimistic tone of the passage, because it is an anxiety-producing symbol inconsistent with a belief in a beneficent universe. Whereas the narrator must surely recognize the discordant allusions undercutting his surface message, he appears to be unaware at times that he is revealing a self that is not the Emersonian one. For example, he light-heartedly criticizes his age as contrasted with a past age:

. . . when reverence was in vogue, and indolence was not, the devotees of Nature, doubtless, used to stand and adore--just as, in the cathedrals of those ages, the worshipers of a higher Power did--yet, in these times of failing faith and feeble knees, we have the piazza and the pew (p. 438).

Since the narrator himself desires a piazza for observing nature at his leisure and later in the narrative he tells of an initiation experience in which he falls, staining the knee of his white trousers, he mockingly includes himself among those of "failing faith and feeble knees." Even the practical, specific reason for constructing a piazza is counter to the more general, philosophic one mentioned at the onset of the tale: his majestic lounge of turf is so majestic, says he, tongue in cheek, "that here, as with the reclining majesty of Denmark in his orchard, a sly ear-ache invaded me" (p. 438).

"The Piazza" is the story of a consciousness in isolation and the reason for that isolation is central to the meaning of the tale. The peculiarity that distinguishes the narrator from his neighbors, indeed, from most other people, is the compulsion to choose a northern site for his piazza. His Promethean spirit is magnetically attracted to the sublime in nature. Not only does Mt. Greylock, Melville's Mont Blanc, hold an overwhelming attraction for the narrator, but the oceanic "vastness and the lonesomeness" of the meadow are part of the prospect offered by the northern piazza. These associations with the Promethean hero, the artist archetype, the Lucifer-Christ, underline the theme of divided consciousness and anticipate the quest delineated in part two.

Part two continues the flashback, detailing the psychological state of the narrator that leads to his embarkation. This short section covers the period of a year, from the time a spot of radiance on a distant mountain is discovered until the narrator sets off to find it. Absent are the images of integration that prevail as the tale opens. The possibility of the ideal exists only in the spot of radiance far away. But that spot of radiance has an obsessive allure for the narrator, and the words "Fairies there, thought I" become a refrain in this section. The desire for a fairyland is the result of conflict generated by a sense of separateness from nature and by knowledge of a malevolence there. The children who

pass the narrator's house and, although a storm is threatening, know no anxiety saying, "'How sweet a day,'" objectify the state of mind the narrator wishes to recapture. The narrator's former love of thunderstorms "which wrap old Greylock, like a Sinai, till one thinks swart Moses must be climbing among scathed hemlocks there" (p. 442) is another reminder of his "old" state of consciousness: he was once like an Old Testament Israelite still in direct contact with his Heavenly Father. The undivided consciousness has historically found symbolic expression in the gold which the alchemist sought. To the narrator this ideal psychological state is objectified in "the golden mountain-window" (p. 444). It dazzles "like a deep-sea dolphin" (p. 444). The dolphin, like the sheep which accompany the children who pass by, are mythic representations of benevolent nature. But the narrator has become aware of a malevolence there: the smoky Indian summer "was not used to be so sick a thing," says the narrator, and the Chinese creeper "climbing a post of the piazza . . . showed millions of strange, cankerous worms" (p. 443). The discovery of the blighted world produces an anxiety that is betrayed by imagery from Macbeth: "the sky was ominous as Hecate's cauldron--and two sportsmen . . . seemed guilty Macbeth and foreboding Banquo" (pp. 441-42). The reference to the "hermit-sun huttet in an Adullam cave" (p. 442), where David, escaping the murderous pursuit of Saul, was joined by other people in

distress, also suggests the narrator's anxiety. Aware of conflict at the very heart of existence, the narrator wishes to retreat to the child's state of unconsciousness. Thus he misreads Midsummer Night's Dream by taking it literally; failing to perceive the power of the imagination to amend a blighted world, he has faith that he will enter an ideal realm once he reaches the distant gleam on the picturesque mountainside. Thoroughly discontented with his immediate surroundings where his view of fairyland is obstructed by light and shadow, by "old wars of Lucifer and Michael" (p. 443), the persona determines to journey to fairyland--to find a means of resolving his mental conflict.

The journey to fairyland comprises the third part of the story. In the ritual journey, the narrator reenacts the two stages of life implicit in the first two parts of the story. The narrator sets out on his journey in the morning: his is the psychology of youth, optimistic, single-minded, at one with nature. Unable to see his goal, he is not lost because nature is his guide: golden-rods pointed "the way to the golden window" as enchanted cattle "seemed to walk in sleep" (p. 444). The narrator is reflecting a consciousness still at the instinctual (natural) level, when there is no division within the self.³

"A wiggled old Aries," the golden-fleeced rescuer of children intended to be sacrificed to Zeus and a synonym

for obtaining the unattainable, for completeness, leads the narrator on his journey. Like an Isaac in the hands of his father Abraham, the narrator does not question the authority of nature, which is at one with his inner promptings. The sacred ram leads the narrator through fields of flowers described metaphorically as Pleides and Hyades. The reference to constellations is a reminder of the image-projecting activity of the unconscious, which strives for completion. What exists as a psychological state is the outer reality: to the limited consciousness of the youth, these nature divinities, which when transported to the skies are known as Pleides and Hyades, still reside in nature; but they can reside there only until the narrator reaches sexual knowledge. At that time nature becomes subject to the cycle of death and rebirth.

That entry into sexual knowledge is anticipated by the sacred ram who abandons his charge when the narrator follows "golden flights of yellow-birds" into "deep woods-- which woods themselves were luring--and, somehow, lured, too, by their fence, banning a dark road, which however dark, led up" (pp. 444-45). Certainly not a "realistic" portrayal of a journey, the ascent is akin to such occurrences in dreams, which have a historical analogy in rites of initiation.⁴ Consonant with the theme of a new beginning is the appearance of yellow birds, which are not only traditional Christian icons associated with Christ's Passion but also an image suggestive of the sun

and the Phoenix and, thus, of resurrection in a larger sense.

Before a resurrection can occur, however, the Old Adam must die. After entering the dark wood, the narrator perceives the world about him in an entirely new way. Once secure and single-minded, the narrator perceives the world as an ancient place of toil and isolation:

. . . on I journeyed . . . by an old saw-mill, bound down and hushed with vines, that his grating voice no more was heard; on, by a deep-flume clove through snowy marble, vernal-tinted, where freshet eddies had, on each side, spun out empty chapels in the living rock; on where Jacks-in-the-pulpit, like their Baptist namesake, preached but to the wilderness; on, where a huge, cross-grain block, fern-bedded, showed where, in forgotten times, man after man had tried to split it, but lost his wedges for his pains--which wedges yet rusted in their holes; on, where, ages past, in step-like ledges of a cascade, skull-hollow pots had been churned out by ceaseless chirling of a flintstone--ever wearing, but itself unworn; on, by wild rapids pouring into a secret pool, but soothed by circling there awhile, issued forth serenely; on, to less broken ground, and by a little ring, where, truly, fairies must have danced, or else some wheel-tyre had been heated--for all was bare . . . (p. 445).

The ascent leads to a hanging orchard "where maidenly looked down upon me a crescent moon from morning" (p. 445).⁵ Reenacting the central symbolic act of Christian mythology, the narrator eats of Eve's apples and nature at once opposes him instead of bolstering him: he goes through blackberry brakes that try "to pluck" him back and he climbs "slippery steeps" (pp. 445-46). The narrator has moved from the certain guidance of instinct

to the guidance of his own consciousness: he is now differentiated from nature, orphaned, in the Promethean drive into consciousness.

The arrival at the mountain cottage marks the final movement of the story. The conflict that is repressed in part one, then enacted in the contrary depictions of nature in parts two and three, is objectified in part four with the result that the narrator temporarily comes to terms with himself.⁶ The two parts of the narrator's Self, the ego and the contents of the unconscious or the anima, which is the personification of the unconscious in the male, meet in part four. In dreams this confrontation takes place if the dreamer can succeed in establishing a temenos, a piece of land set apart and dedicated to a god. The narrator of "The Piazza" establishes a temenos in the "golden gleam" on the mountainside, which he imagines a fairy ring. Once arrived at the place of the gleam, the narrator finds a small cottage, which he describes in religious imagery: "capped, nun-like, with a peaked roof. . . . snail-monks founded mossy priories there" (p. 446). The house is also characterized as having fertilizing power; as the place that facilitates contact with the unconscious, it is a source of creative energy. The setting of the house is wild, untamed nature; the narrator is seemingly struck by the absence of man's civilizing touch:

No fence was seen, no inclosure. Near by--ferns,
ferns, ferns; further--woods, woods, woods;
beyond--mountains, mountains, mountains; then--

sky, sky, sky. Turned out in aerial commons, pasture for the mountain moon. Nature, and but nature, house and all; even a low cross-pile of silver birch, piled openly to season; up among whose silvery sticks, as through the fencing of some sequestered grave, sprang vagrant raspberry bushes--wilful assertors of their right-of-way (p. 447).

This region cannot be dominated by reason but is always in a "natural" state. And when reason cannot cope with experience, it is here--to the contents of the unconscious--that the Self must go. The wildness of the region is in contrast to the ideal realm of art that the narrator expected to find at the end of his quest. Even in sight of the fairy cottage, the narrator expects the resident to be "Una and her lamb," but because the narrator is still in the fallen world, no unity or oneness is possible here. What is possible is compensatory adjustment so that the conflicts that become too great in the fallen world can be handled. Accurately described as a "mere palanquin, set down on the summit, in a pass between two worlds, participant of neither" (p. 447), the cottage with its window that appears as a golden gleam from a distance does offer the passageway, the means of adjustment. But that adjustment is not an easy matter; that the ego strives against the unconscious is suggested by the narrator's stumbling in the thick ferns through which he must make his way to the threshold of the cottage.

Once at the doorway the narrator observes not the fairy queen or Una he expected but a "pale-cheeked girl";

she sits, not at the golden fairy-window which he envisioned, but at the fly-specked, mended one. The narrator immediately discovers that he has stepped inside his looking-glass. The girl sits at her window looking at the "far-off, soft, azure world" from whence he came, dreaming of the King Charming who lives in what he recognizes is his own abode. That the girl is a part of himself is suggested by the similarities they share; that the part of himself that she represents is his unconscious is suggested by the characteristics that distinguish her from the narrator's ego.

Like the narrator, the mountain girl is suffering from a weariness; consciousness and unconsciousness are in tension. The image of the hop vines which "climbed two poles, and, gaining their tip-ends, would have then joined over in an upward clasp, but the baffled shoots, groping awhile in empty air, trailed back whence they sprung" (p. 452) aptly describes the state of the Self. Accompanying the girl's weariness is a wakefulness which traditional remedies cannot cure. This weariness is consonant with the fact that when the ego sleeps, the unconscious is active; indeed, it is always active. The girl's fantasies of the happy person in the far-off glimmer and her desires to "once get to yonder house, and but look upon whoever the happy being is that lives there" (p. 452) is but the natural drive of the unconscious for completeness. The girl's explanation for her desire is appropriate to the

symbolic level of meaning: "'A foolish thought: why do I think it? Is it that I live so lonesome, and know nothing?'" The narrator replies, "'I, too, know nothing'" (p. 452). Surely both are captives of the psychic world where the boundary between empirical fact and illusion have no validity. Locke called attention to this fact, in as far as the conscious mind is concerned, with his doctrine of secondary attributes. The unconscious, as Melville intuited it, may be defined, even to Jung's satisfaction, as the "things we do not know."⁷

The girl Marianna differs from the narrator primarily in two ways: first, she is in harmony with the cycle of nature; and, secondly, she perceives reality in a supersensory way. Both of these attributes are consonant with the function of the unconscious. When the narrator's ego suggests to Marianna that the sun gilds her house, she insists repeatedly, "'Sir, the sun gilds not this roof'" (p. 449). Surely she is right, for the gilding is in the perception of the beholder. Literal-minded and unintellectual, Marianna is perfectly in tune with nature; unlike the narrator, who recoiled at the sight of worms in the blossoms that adorned his piazza, she accepts the cycle of nature--with its ripening and rotting effects--as good: "'The sun is a good sun; but this roof, it first scorches, and then rots'" (p. 449). When the narrator-ego tells her that she has strange fancies, she replies, "'They but reflect the things'" (p. 449). Marianna's means of

perceiving "things" is not the means that the narrator-ego uses. Marianna's world is one of shadows. Her particular favorite she names Tray, a dog-shaped shadow formed by a grassy rock, visible only when the sun's position and the absence of clouds permit. The narrator-ego describes how Marianna "sees" the shadows without "looking" at them:

'Have you, then, so long sat at this mountain-window, where but clouds and vapors pass, that, to you, shadows are as things, though you speak of them as of phantoms; that, by familiar knowledge, working like a second sight, you can, without looking for them, tell just where they are, though, as having mice-like feet, they creep about, and come and go; that, to you, these lifeless shadows are as living friends, who, though out of sight, are not out of mind, even in their faces--is it so?' (pp.450-51).

Like Plato's "forms," the images, motifs, patterns from the unconscious arise without the help of physical sight but through one's "second sight."

The final two paragraphs, which form a kind of epilogue to the story, comment on the results of the journey to fairyland. The question of ultimate importance to one interested in a psychological reading of the story is whether the narrator is different from the Emersonian persona who existed prior to the quest for psychological completeness. Like the old Emersonian persona, the narrator is still a lover of nature, but with a difference. Instead of viewing nature as a picture (or nature = art), the maturer narrator views nature as if it were a drama:

Launching my yawl no more for fairy-land, I stick to the piazza. It is my box-royal; and this amphitheatre, my theatre of San Carlo. Yes, the scenery is magical--the illusion so complete. And Madam Meadow Lark, my prima donna, plays her engagement here; and drinking in her sunrise note, which, Memnon-like, seems struck from the golden window, how far from me the weary face behind it (p. 453).

To any mind other than the childish or primitive one, drama exists on a different plane of reality than does primary experience. Arthur Koestler has commented on the positive effect of the esthetic experience, which allows one to forget the conflict within the Self--"the weary face behind" the window:

The aesthetic experience depends on that delicate balance arising from the presence of both matrices in the mind; on perceiving the hero as Laurence Olivier and Prince Hamlet of Denmark at one and the same time; on the lightning oscillations of attention from one to the other, like sparks between charged electrodes. It is the precarious suspension of awareness between the two planes which facilitates the continuous flux of emotion from the Now and Here to the remoter worlds of Then and There, and the cathartic effects resulting from it. For when interest is deflected from the self it will attach itself to something else; when the level of self-assertive tension falls, the self-transcending impulses become almost automatically dominant.⁸

The narrator, then, has progressed from the hypnotic trance in which nature once held him to a self-transcending experience. He recognizes that both picturesque nature and art are "fictions"; each by some magic resolves temporarily the conflict of the self but each as "fiction" exists on a different level of reality from primary experience dominated by reason. Once the individual has moved beyond the

instinctual psychology of the child, the division within the Self is perceived in the contraries that exist in nature as well:

But, every night, when the curtain falls, truth comes in with darkness. No light shows from the mountain. To and fro I walk the piazza deck, haunted by Marianna's face, and many as real a story (p. 453).

NOTES

¹Klause Poenicke discusses the aesthetic theories which form part of the intellectual background of "The Piazza" in "A View from the Piazza: Herman Melville and the Legacy of the European Sublime," CLS, 4 (1967), 267-81.

²Orion, the giant hunter, in one version of the myth was killed by Artemis for attempting to violate her or one of her maidens. In another version he threatened to destroy all the animals on the earth, and Mother Earth sent a scorpion to kill him.

³Carl G. Jung characterizes this stage of consciousness in this way: ". . . the psychic life of the individual is governed largely by instinct, and few or no problems arise. Even when external limitations oppose his subjective impulses, these restraints do not put the individual at variance with himself. He submits to them or circumvents them, remaining quite at one with himself." See "The Stages of Life," in The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche, Vol. 8 of The Collected Works, trans. R.F.C. Hull, 2nd ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1964), p. 391. I use Jung as an authority whose theories are readily applicable to literature. Melville's concept of the unconscious could have been influenced by any number of sources. See L.L. Whyte, The Unconscious Before Freud (New York: Anchor Books, 1962).

⁴The Stairway of Seven Planets played an important part in these rites. According to Jung, "The idea of an ascent through the seven spheres of the planets symbolizes the return of the soul to the sun-god from whom it originated." See "Individual Dream Symbolism in Relation to Alchemy," in Psychology and Alchemy, Vol. 12 of The Collected Works, pp. 334-35.

⁵According to Jung the moon has always been associated with the changing experience of the night and the sexual experience of woman. See "The Structure of the Psyche," in The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche, The Collected Works, Vol. 8, p. 154.

⁶This process has been described by Jung as the "transcendent function" because "it facilitates the transition from one psychic condition to another by means of the mutual

confrontations of opposites." See "The Difference Between Eastern and Western Thinking," Part I of "Psychological Commentary on 'The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation'," in Psychology and Religion: West and East, Vol. 11 of The Collected Works, p. 489.

⁷Ibid., p. 479. Jung's characterization of the Western perception of reality is illuminating here: "It is a paradox, yet nevertheless true, that with us a thought has no proper reality; we treat it as if it were a nothingness" (p. 480).

⁸The Act of Creation (New York: Dell, 1964), p. 306.

CHAPTER IV

"THE LIGHTNING-ROD MAN":

SCIENCE AND RELIGION

"The Lightning-Rod Man" is a short, puzzling story about a brief encounter between a lightning-rod salesman and a lightning enthusiast, who acts as the narrator of the story. During a thunderstorm in the "Acroceraunian hills," the narrator answers a knock on his door to find a "lean, gloomy figure," soaking wet. The contrast between the two characters is drawn immediately with a revelation of their attitudes toward the storm which surrounds them: to the narrator's "'A fine thunder-storm, sir'" the stranger replies, "'Fine?--Awful!'" The differences in the stances of the two men are both figurative and literal: to the narrator's polite request that the stranger be seated on the broad hearth where the narrator himself is standing the dark stranger replies,

'Sir . . . excuse me; but instead of my accepting your invitation to be seated on the hearth there, I solemnly warn you, that you had best accept mine, and stand with me in the middle of the room. . . . I warn you, sir, quit the hearth' (pp. 214-15).

The narrator proves himself recalcitrant in the face of the stranger's warnings; the stranger proves himself

dictatorial and irascible. The psychological breach between the two men widens to the point that the narrator demands that the stranger identify himself and his business. The stranger then acknowledges that he is a "dealer in lightning-rods" (p. 215). From this point until the conclusion of the story the narrator seems to adopt a mask, making those comments and asking those questions designed to make the salesman reveal the inefficacy of his calling. When the salesman reaches the climax of his sales pitch, resorting to scare tactics ("'Will you order? Will you buy? Shall I put down your name? Think of being a heap of charred offal, like a haltered horse burnt in his stall; and all in one flash!'",), the narrator can mask his displeasure no longer and ends by belittling the salesman's assumptions, countering with his own assumptions, and violently throwing the salesman out of his home. The narrator appears to be the hero of his tale, triumphing over the obnoxiously persistent salesman, albeit in a limited and temporary way--"the Lightning-rod man still dwells in the land; still travels in storm-time, and drives a brave trade with the fears of man" (p. 221). The puzzling aspect of the story is the inkling one gets that the narrator himself may be an object of satire.

Jay Leyda, tracing the history of "The Lightning-Rod Man" to illustrate "the whole compositional fusion of reality and symbol, subject and target" suggests that

Melville's encounter with a real lightning-rod salesman together with his hearing of a sermon at the wedding of his sister and perhaps his reading of a chapter from Cotton Mather's Magnalia Christi Americana were the catalysts that produced "The Lightning-Rod Man."¹ The influence of the last of these three experiences is evident in Melville's short story. In the chapter entitled "Ceraunius. Relating remarkables done by thunder" Mather explains his notion of the way God uses "his thunders" and then gives the text of a sermon delivered by a preacher whose house was struck while he was delivering the sermon on lightning and on the Christian's proper response to it. Both Mather's comments on thunder and the anonymous Puritan preacher's sermon on the phenomenon are reflected in Melville's short story. The use Melville makes of his source has not been accurately described. Melville is not satirizing the Puritan religion through his characterization of the lightning-rod salesman, as has been suggested.² Rather, he is satirizing the pseudo-religion, science, as the receptacle of human faith. Nor can the narrator of the story be with any assurance identified with Melville because the narrator's avowal of religious faith is counter to Melville's characteristic stance. The narrator is, nevertheless, Melville's raisonneur in speaking precisely those words that will expose the lightning-rod salesman as the purveyor of an ineffectual substitute for religion. He, too, however may be an object of satire. The two

lightning-rod men--the literalist and the enthusiast--may represent a dissociation between reason and faith in the American consciousness at large.

The lightning-rod salesman superficially resembles the Puritan preacher whose sermon is quoted by Mather in his chapter on lightning in Magnalia Christi Americana. That resemblance establishes a connection between science and religion in the narrative. Both the Puritan's sermon and the salesman's speech are punctuated by the claps and roar of thunder. Both men use the thunder for a calculated effect: the preacher to frighten his hearers to repentance; the salesman to frighten the client out of his money. The salesman is no ordinary confidence-man; like the preacher he is sincere in his belief in the public's need for his product, so sincere that he trembles in the unprotected house belonging to the narrator. Like the preacher, too, he believes there is no substitute for his product: "'Mine is the only true rod'" (p. 216). In general the techniques of the two involve driving "a brave trade with the fears of man" (p. 221).

The differences between the lightning-rod salesman and the Puritan preacher are equally dramatic and reveal the failure of science as a substitute for religion. The salesman arrives, timorous, thin and gloomy, leaning upon the staff of science, a lightning rod. He appears diseased with "sunken pitfalls of eyes . . . ringed by indigo halos." Alarmed by the narrator's flaunty fearlessness

during the electrical storm, the salesman utters a series of expletives which both underline and ironically contrast to his anxiety about becoming a victim of the lightning stroke: he exclaims, "'Good Heavens!'" and "'Merciful Heavens.'" To the narrator he implores, "with a strange mixture of alarm and intimidation--'for Heaven's sake, get off the hearth!'" (p. 215). Although the salesman's diction echoes the sentiments of the Puritan preacher, who assured his flock during the thunderstorm that they were in "a covenant of grace" with their God, the salesman's words, as expletives, have been emptied of all meaning and stand as a symbol of form without content, signifying only fear. Like the conventionally religious, the salesman is capable of righteous indignation, condemning the narrator as "profane in this time of terror" (p. 215). But the source of the salesman's annoyance is the narrator's refusal to heed the salesman's scientific warnings--in other words, science is sacred to the lightning-rod salesman.

In addition to his fearfulness and his misdirected righteous indignation, the lightning-rod salesman differs from the Puritan preacher in his emphasis on magic instead of miracle and his one-dimensional thinking. As a purveyor of science the lightning-rod salesman directs his attention to the power of man rather than to the power of God. He proclaims his own magic: "' . . . of this cottage I can make a Gibraltar by a few waves of this wand'" (p. 216). In answer to the narrator's queries about the Canadian girl

who was struck by lightning while at prayer, the salesman acknowledges no metaphysical problem; instead, he becomes defensive about his own particular brand of lightning rod, which is copper instead of iron. Unlike his Puritan forbears who were intensely aware of a spiritual reality behind the physical one, the lightning-rod salesman thinks on a one-dimensional level. To him lightning is a physical phenomenon to be dealt with by science, not the voice of God, proclaiming his power as author of natural law. The salesman's literal-mindedness is exposed when he fails to catch the double meanings suggested by the utterances of the narrator. The salesman cautions, "'Never touch bell-wire in a thunder-storm, nor ring a bell of any sort.'" The narrator replies, "'Nor those in belfries?'" Characteristically taking the literal fact to its spiritual significance, the narrator is saying, in effect, "Should not one be called to prayer in storm time?" Next, the salesman mentions the "returning-stroke" which occurs when lightning passes from the earth to the clouds. The narrator appreciates the spiritual significance of the phenomenon: "The returning-stroke; that is, from earth to sky. Better and better" (p. 219). The narrator unknowingly mocks the narrator's words by reference to the literal: "'I am here, and better wet'" (p. 219). Finally, to the salesman's delineation of things he avoids during thunderstorms, which include tall men, the narrator replies, "'Man avoid man? and in danger-time, too.'" The salesman has no

inkling of the spiritual significance latent in the narrator's statement and so replies at the literal level: "Are you so grossly ignorant as not to know, that the height of a six-footer is sufficient to discharge an electric cloud upon him?" (p. 220).

Unable to tolerate the salesman's arrogance and obtuseness any longer, the narrator, who, like his Puritan forbears, views lightning and thunder as a divine act rather than a strictly natural one, accuses the salesman of being a fake and a fraud--a

' . . . pretended envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary to and from Jupiter Tonans
Who has empowered you, you Tetzels, to peddle round your indulgences from divine ordinations?'
(pp. 220-21).

The narrator continues with an avowal of faith in a beneficent God who is in a covenant with man:

'The hairs of our heads are numbered, and the days of our lives. In thunder as in sunshine, I stand at ease in the hands of my God
See, the scroll of the storm is rolled back; the house is unharmed; and in the blue heavens I read in the rainbow, that the Deity will not, of purpose, make war on man's earth' (p. 221).

The salesman's reply to this testimony is so blatantly ironic, so lacking in logic that it jars. To his host's very conventional and orthodox statement of creed, the salesman foams: "Impious wretch! . . . I will publish your infidel notions" (p. 221). To the nineteenth-century New Englander there would have been nothing impious or infidel about the narrator's sentiments; even to the most ardent advocates of science, the statement might be

considered naive or foolish, but certainly not impious or infidel. The sentiments are impious, however, to one whose god is science; the narrator is refusing to obey reason, preferring to rely on faith instead. Describing the salesman as "blackening in the face as the rainbow beamed" the narrator seems to identify him with the devil (p. 221). The final telling sign that science is not an adequate substitute for religion is the salesman's attack on his host:

The scowl grew blacker on his face; the indigo-circles enlarged round his eyes as the storm-rings round the midnight moon. He sprang upon me, his triforked thing at my heart (p. 221).

The salesman becomes in this image a personification of lightning directed at the heart of man. Lightning is a threat to faith in a beneficent God. Only by a strenuous act of will does the narrator resist the lightning-attack against his faith:

I seized it; I snapped it; I dashed it; I trod it; and dragging the dark lightning-king out of my door, flung his elbowed, copper sceptre after him (p. 221).

The Puritan, too, had to deal with the facts as Mather reported them: that although lightning was an agent of God, "Godly persons" were struck by lightning and "houses of God" were struck more often than other houses.³ The Puritan sermon which Mather records suggests in essence that even though one knows he may be struck by lightning he must not fear it but must trust in the "covenant of grace, wherein he is our God and he will bless

us. . . ."4 The only consolation offered by the preacher in case the believer is "slain by thunder" is that "we shall but in that thunder of heaven, have a great voice from heaven saying to us, come up hither!"5 In other words, one must have faith in a beneficent God despite all evidence to the contrary; one must trust God for safety during the thunderstorm, knowing full well that the believer may be struck by lightning anyway.

Despite the narrator's avowal of a very comfortable faith in a beneficent God at the end of the story, he, too, hangs onto his faith while acknowledging evidence that would seem to prove his faith foolish. The narrator calls attention to an event in Montreal--"'a servant girl struck at her bed-side with a rosary in her hands; the beads being metal'" (p. 216). The narrator cannot completely deny the operation of physical laws: metal is a conductor of electricity. But he insists that lightning is "the supernal bolt" in his avowal of faith, that lightning is an aspect of "divine ordination," not merely an aspect of physical laws. The narrator in his avowal of faith resembles the Puritan preacher who believes that lightning is an agent of God despite the philosophical paradox such a belief leads to. In the narrator's statement of belief he points to the rainbow as evidence "'that the Deity will not of purpose, make war on man's earth'" (p. 221) and as justification for standing "'at ease in the hand of my God'" (p. 221). Yet, at the beginning of the story, the narrator thinks of the

storm in terms of warfare:

. . . the scattered bolts boomed overhead, and crashed down among the valleys, every bolt followed by zigzag irradiation, and swift slants of sharp rain, which audibly rang, like a charge of spear-points, on my low shingled roof (p. 213).

The narrator describes the lightning-rod salesman as a personification of a thunderstorm:

His sunken pitfalls of eyes were ringed with indigo halos, and played with an innocuous sort of lightning: the gleam without the bolt. The whole man was dripping (pp. 13-4).

The narrator calls the salesman "'Jupiter Tonans . . . the Thunderer himself'" (p. 214), the god who hurls his weapon, the thunderbolt, from Olympus as a sign of his wrath. At the end of the story the lightning-salesman aims a bolt at the narrator's heart. The thunderbolts outside the cottage as well as the personification of the thunderbolt inside the cottage test the faith of the narrator; the narrator withstands the test in an act of extreme unreasonableness.

The narrator of "The Lightning-Rod Man" takes an extreme stance, and by its extremity he allies himself with Ahab, Pierre, and the narrator of "Cock-A-Doodle-Do!" Like these characters the narrator of "The Lightning-Rod Man" eschews common sense in order to live boldly and extravagantly, and thereby he increases his chances of destruction. Melville's ambivalence toward such a stance is evident in the heroism/destruction of an Ahab and the heroism/self-delusion of a Pierre. What distinguishes the narrator of "The Lightning-Rod Man" from Melville's other

defiant rebels is the narrator's insistence on a divine order in the universe and his confidence in a beneficent God.⁶ He seems to be aware of the possibility of his own delusion. He opts for religious faith as the better of two alternatives; possibly neither of the two options are completely viable or satisfactory.

What the narrator gains by his stance is a manliness that comes of purposely taking risks.⁷ It is the lack of masculinity in the safety-conscious salesman that first annoys the narrator: "And why don't he, man-fashion, use the knocker, instead of making that doleful undertaker's clatter with his fist against the hollow panel?" (p. 213). The narrator has achieved a kind of freedom, too, denied the fear-ridden salesman: he can stand on the hearth to warm himself while the salesman trembles in the center of the room. The narrator's manliness is also derivative of an insistence on the reality of a supersensuous or noumenal realm of being. His appreciation of the sublime experience--"grand irregular thunder"--is an indication of his belief in a reality beyond the empirical one of sense experience. To the lightning-rod salesman a man can become but "'a heap of charred offal, like a haltered horse burnt in his stall; and all in one flash!'" (p. 220). The narrator is incensed at the comparison of a man, especially himself, to a mere beast. Such a reaction is not surprising from one who believes in the spark of divinity within each man--the "'returning stroke; that is, from earth to

sky'" (p. 219).⁸ By rejecting materialism the narrator gains manliness and freedom; he loses only an extra measure of safety from physical harm offered by science. What the narrator sees that is more frightening than the supernal thunderbolt is science's threat, personified in the lightning-rod salesman, to deny both man and nature their divinity.⁹

The two characters who converse in "The Lightning-Rod Man" suggest the two extremes which form the legacy of the American consciousness. The narrator represents what the American inherited from his Puritan forbears--an unreasonable faith in a God who is both good and omnipotent. The lightning-rod salesman represents the legacy of the Age of Reason, a materialism which denies man his freedom and nobility. Neither choice was acceptable to Melville himself: Hawthorne describes him as a man who could "neither believe nor be comfortable in his unbelief."¹⁰ Melville's depiction of two stances, neither of which he wholly subscribes to, suggests his refusal to reveal himself to an audience from whom he felt alienated. Melville seems to lead the reader into an identification with the narrator of the story only to subtly undercut the assumptions of the narrator, refusing to allow the reader any contact with the implied author. If "The Lightning-Rod Man" is a comic tale, as Hershel Parker has argued that it is, then it is comic not only in its depiction of an encounter between a salesman and a resistant victim but bitterly so in its

ability to convince the reader to sympathize with a point of view which the implied author rejects.¹¹

NOTES

¹The Complete Stories of Herman Melville, p. xxvi.

²See Ben D. Kimpel, "Melville's 'The Lightning-Rod Man'," AL, 16 (1944), 30-32. Dillingham suggests that identifying either the narrator or the salesman with the Puritan preacher leads "to a dead end" (p. 178).

³Magnalia Christi Americana; or, The Ecclesiastical History of New England from its first planting in the year 1620, unto the year of Our Lord, 1698. 1st American ed. from London ed. of 1702 (Hartford: Silus Andrews Roberts & Burr, 1820), II, 313.

⁴Magnalia Christi Americana, 316-17.

⁵Magnalia Christi Americana, 317.

⁶John Bernstein in Pacifism and Rebellion in the Writings of Herman Melville (London: Mouton, 1964) suggests that Melville's rebel-heroes view the universe as being essentially chaotic--"if not downright evil . . . at best amoral" (p. 12).

⁷Were the narrator unaware of his risk, like Helmstone in "The Fiddler," he would be pathetically comic; his awareness of risk, however, results in a curious blend of the comic and heroic.

⁸The image of the "returning stroke" may have its source in Shelley's preface to Prometheus Unbound where Shelley speaks of the lightning of the minds of great writers: "The cloud of mind is discharging its collected lightning. . . ."

⁹This theme is, of course, a common one among Romantic writers. See, for example, Poe's "Sonnet--To Science."

¹⁰The English Notebooks, ed. Randall Stewart (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1941), pp. 432-33.

¹¹For a discussion of the story as comedy see Hershel Parker, "Melville's Salesman Story," SSF, 1 (1964), 154-58.

CHAPTER V

"THE ENCANTADAS": NARRATOR AS CONFIDENCE-MAN

In "The Encantadas" the narrator exercises a conscious duplicity.¹ That duplicity may have been Melville's response to the tension between what his readers wanted--a return to the style and themes of Typee and Omoo--and what Melville wanted--to continue to write books like Mardi and Moby-Dick that would not sell. Before the sketches of "The Encantadas" began appearing in Putnam's, the reading public was led to expect that Melville would be returning to the autobiographical travel story that had made him famous. (See Introduction, p. 6.) "The Encantadas; or, Enchanted Islands" is the only Piazza story that seems to signal Melville's capitulation to popular tastes.

On the surface "The Encantadas" does indeed appear to be an autobiographical account in the genre of travel literature. That many readers accepted this appearance is suggested by the epithet that was most often used in contemporary reviews to describe the sketches--"charming." One wonders if Melville had anticipated the use of the epithet because he seems bent on exposing to the reader the exact sense in which the sketches are "charming." Like the

islands which stand at the center of the sketches, the narrator as an artist is a "charmer"--an enchanter.²

The meaning of enchantment suggests the function of the poet or artist archetype. Enchantment is derived from Latin incantare which means "to sing upon or against" and implies the utterance of significant words. Furthermore, the word enchant exhibits the ambiguity characteristic of Melville's tale and, indeed, much of his fiction. Enchanted may mean "deluded, captivated as by magic" or it may mean "delighted, charmed, enraptured" (OED). The power in control of the literal Encantadas may be either beneficent or malignant just as the creator of the fictional "Encantadas" may delude or enrapture those who read. The duplicity one feels as he reads "The Encantadas" may derive from Melville's ambivalence toward both kinds of creation.

That Melville was resisting the reader's facile acceptance of his sketches as mere travel story, factual and "real" because the sketches were based on experience, is suggested by a recurring disparity in the early sketches between what one expects from a travel story and what one gets in "The Encantadas." The first sketch begins as a somber, straight-forward description of the general aspect of the isles; the narrator appears to be appropriately detached. But at the end of the sketch the narrator shifts from third-person to first-person point of view; he unexpectedly turns attention to himself and his own psychology. The second sketch continues to center attention on the

narrator's attitudes and his imaginative experience. The narrator returns to description in the third sketch, but he presents his eye-witness "facts" in such a way as to expose the dubiety of what is often called "objective truth." In the remaining sketches the narrator calls attention to his power to make appearance pass for objective truth. He demonstrates a protean quality that enables him to project the same kind of enchantment on the reader that the Isles exhibit.

In the first sketch the narrator acts as a travel-guide painting a dreary picture of the Enchanted Isles that look "much as the world at large might, after a penal conflagration" (p. 49). An occasional discrepancy between what the narrator sets forth as his "intention" and what he actually accomplishes in his description of the Encantadas results in the narrator's becoming the object of his own mild satire. Whereas the narrator seems intent upon asserting the absolute hellishness of the Isles, he makes the reader's experience of that hell pleasurable. The first characteristic of the Isles that the narrator describes is desolateness, which is the result of the absence of association with humanity. Any association with humanity, he suggests, "awakens in us some thoughts of sympathy," which he describes as "less pleasurable feelings" (p. 50). At the same time that the narrator is emphasizing the total absence of the human touch on the Isles, he humanizes the Encantadas not only by his own

presence but by imagery that associates the Isles with the human:

'Have mercy upon me,' the wailing spirit of the Encantadas seem to cry, 'and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame' (p. 50).

The narrator has thus demonstrated the transforming power of words--a kind of enchantment implicit in Sketch First.

The narrator also sets out to act as travel-guide to those who wish to explore the Encantadas and the enchantment that inheres in the islands, but in fact he ends by centering attention on his own imagination and the enchantment proceeding from art. The narrator at the beginning of the sketch assumes an off-handed, matter-of-fact, rational attitude toward his subject as he introduces the sketch with an imperative sentence: "Take five-and-twenty heaps of cinders dumped here and there in an outside city lot . . ." (p. 49). He assumes a distance toward his subject by avoiding first-person pronouns ("It is to be doubted whether . . .") and adopting a rational tone: the appellation "enchanted" can be explained by the "capriciousness of the tides of air . . . and those of sea."

The tone shifts abruptly in the last two paragraphs of the sketch as the narrator reluctantly confesses to two mystical experiences--at least experiences that have no rational basis. The Encantadas have been experienced in two ways by the narrator: as proof (to be apprehended rationally) that this world is a fallen one and as the

objective correlative of nightmare (to be apprehended imaginatively). While sitting "in the mossy head of some deep-wooded gorge, surrounded by prostrate trunks of blasted pines" he recalls "as in a dream" the tortoises and "the vitreous inland rocks worn down and grooved into deep ruts by ages and ages of the slow draggings of tortoises in quest of pools of scanty water"; and "often in scenes of social merriment, and especially at revels held by candle-light in old-fashioned mansions" he seems to see "the ghost of a gigantic tortoise, with 'Memento * * * *' burning in live letters upon his back." The narrator abruptly moves (and because the move is abrupt it appears unpremeditated) from a description of the Enchanted Isles as a physical phenomenon to the Isles as a vessel of symbolic content to the narrator: "I can hardly resist the feeling that in my time I have indeed slept upon evilly enchanted ground" (p. 54). The imagination of the narrator has invested the Isles with meaning: the Isles of the narrator's psychic universe are a reminder of nightmare--the world evoked by the epigraphs to the first sketch.

The testimony that concludes the first sketch sets the tone for the second, "Two Sides to a Tortoise," which has been described by John Franzosa as "what appears to be a learned sermon in the form of Biblical discourse."³ The sketch begins with a didactic passage warning the excessively cheerful--those who are able to keep the tortoise

in the unnatural position of breast-plate up--not to deny that the tortoise has a black side. The paragraph rankles with annoyance at pollyannas whose view, according to the narrator, is the unnatural one. But the remainder of the sketch indicates that whereas the narrator is prone to interpret experience in a black mood, he is subject to intuitive moments of exhilaration and wonder. The sketch continues with the narrator's account of the effect of having examined three tortoises brought aboard his ship. The account is much more an account of the workings of the narrator's imagination than a realistic description of the tortoises. The "wondrous" tortoises, "mystic creatures," "seemed hardly of the seed of earth."

They seemed newly crawled forth from beneath the foundations of the world. Yea, they seemed the identical tortoises whereon the Hindoo plants this total sphere. With a lantern I inspected them more closely. Such worshipful venerableness of aspect! Such furry greenness mantling the rude peelings and healing the fissures of their shattered shell. I no more saw three tortoises. They expanded--became transfigured. I seemed to see three Roman Coliseums in magnificent decay (p. 57).

After this account of the transforming power of the imagination (the enchanting power) the narrator addresses a prayer to the tortoises asking for "the freedom of your three-walled towns"--protection from injury and power for self-healing when injury comes.

Although the narrator wishes to take on some aspects of the tortoise, in a more rational mood he sees tortoises as "victims of a penal, or malignant, or perhaps a downright

diabolical enchanter" because of their propensity to "hopeless toil": "Their crowning curse is their drudging impulse to straightforwardness in a belittered world" (p. 58). Immediately thereafter in another mystical experience the narrator loses himself

in volcanic mazes . . . till finally in a dream I found myself sitting cross-legged upon the foremost [tortoise], a Brahmin similarly mounted upon either side, forming a tripod of foreheads which upheld the universal cope (p. 58).

Arlene Jackson offers the following explanation:

Hindu tradition presents the Brahmin as intellectually and spiritually set apart from the rest of mankind because of his special insights. In the dream, the narrator has become an integral part of the Encantadas world and has gained awesome knowledge of the nature of the universe, and this knowledge sets him apart from the rest of mankind. The trinity of Brahmins suggests an additional meaning. As the second person of that trinity, surrounded by Brahma the Creator and Shiva the Destroyer, the narrator assumes the identity of Vishnu (Krishna) the Preserver.⁴

The mood and tone of Sketch Second change with the last paragraph. The narrator, returning to his mundane mood, refers to his vision as a "wild nightmare." After having transformed the tortoise into a holy symbol, a transformation in which the reader has participated, the narrator confesses to an act that he finds "strange": he sits down with his shipmates, who have not participated in the veneration of the tortoises, to "a merry repast" of tortoise steaks and tortoise stews, followed by the carving of the shells and calipees into utilitarian objects--soup tureens and salvers. The symbol-eating would not be

shocking or offensive to the reader were it retained in its original context of a holy communion, but it is an ordinary meal in which the reader cannot participate. John Franzosa in his attempt at a "vertical" or "structural" analysis of this sketch sees the ending of it as a kind of "double-crossing" of the reader, who has been involved in the symbolizing and is left out at the end when "the symbolizing is scrapped for a feast."⁵

Franzosa concludes that the sketch "makes, actually, very little sense."⁶ It seems to me that the sketch does make sense as an indication of the narrator's ambivalence toward the artist who must avoid "straight-forwardness in a belittered world" and yet is set apart by divine knowledge and a divine function, who is a mere mortal with a rational bent like his fellow sailors but has the gift of symbol-making. The rhetorical effect of the abrupt shift in the last paragraph of the sketch is to draw attention to the fact that the reader has been the willing victim of an enchantment--the symbol-making--perpetrated by the narrator, an enchantment that he is acutely aware of only when the spell is snapped.

The mundane mood with which the second sketch ends is continued in Sketch Third, "Rock Rodondo." The narrator assumes once more the voice of the travel-guide and his matter-of-fact presentation of the appearance of Rock Rodondo contrasts to the nightmare imagery in the description of "the Rock of vile Reproach" in the sketch's

Spenserian epigraph. As in the two previous sketches, the epigraph stands as a silent reminder of the dark side of the tortoise, the world of nightmare, which in the ordinary world of rational experience appears not to exist. It is from this ordinary world of rational experience that the narrator travel-guide speaks to us in the third sketch. The narrator draws attention to his presence by describing Rock Rodondo as he first saw it in a "double twilight," which "heightens" and "softens" the view. The moon's glow, the light wind, the languid waves, and the faint stars contributed, according to the narrator, to "Rodondo in his perfect mood."

Thus aspects of nature enchant the observer, even the narrator himself; the enchantment may include delusion, for the sea-tower "fully participating in that enchantment which pervades the group, when first seen afar invariably is mistaken for a sail" (p. 61). The poet-narrator is both the object of enchantment and an enchanter as he creates experience in a particular mood. The pattern is one of geometrical progression: the poet-narrator projects an enchantment at the same time that he is under the enchanting influence of nature; nature, too, is enchanted, exhibiting a particular mood. One may infer from the pattern that Melville is questioning the existence of the "real" and the human ability, or more specifically the artist's ability, to project it. It is this question that leads Pierre to despair in Pierre or, The Ambiguities.⁷

At the same time that Melville calls into question the authenticity of the narrator's depiction of the "real" Isles, the narrator continues to flaunt his magical powers: in Sketch Fourth, "A Pisgah View from the Rock," he translates us to the top of Rock Rodondo and draws attention to his power:

If you seek to ascend Rock Rodondo, take the following prescription. Go three voyages round the world as a main-royal-man of the tallest frigate that floats; then serve a year or two apprenticeship to the guides who conduct strangers up the Peak of Teneriffe; and as many more respectively to a rope-dancer, and Indian juggler, and a chamois. This done, come and be rewarded by the view of our tower. How we get there, we alone know. If we sought to tell others, what the wiser were they? Suffice it, that here at the summit you and I stand (p. 66).

The narrator proceeds to describe not what can be viewed from the summit but, as if to underscore his enchanting powers, he shows us what it is impossible to see from the summit: the continent, the isles of St. Felix and St. Ambrose, Juan Fernandez and Massafuero, etc. As the narrator explores the nearer objects his tone becomes more familiar and he explains the spell within a spell implicit in "'Cowley's Enchanted Isle'," an explanation that prepares us for the remaining six sketches: "That Cowley linked his name with this self-transforming and bemocking isle, suggests the possibility that it conveyed to him some meditative image of himself" (p. 73). The protean self "runs in the blood, and may be seen in pirates as in poets" (p. 73). Each of the succeeding sketches illustrates not

only the Enchanted Isles--Barrington, Charles's, Norfolk, and Hood's--but also the enchanted and enchanting self--the protean narrator.

In Sketches V, VI, and VII, the narrator demonstrates his ability to fade from view, to disappear at times. In these three sketches Melville employs the narrator as a framing device first for an "eye-witness" account, then for sentimental speculation, and last for a "history" learned from a shipmate. The first instance, "The Frigate, and Ship Flyaway," is an account of a fabulous incident in which the U.S. frigate Essex pursues an enchanted ship. The narrator's seemingly rational, empirical bias (he relies on "eye-witness authorities"--Cowley, Colne, and Porter--relegating all other sources of information to the category of "barren, bootless allusions from some few passing voyagers or compilers") establishes credibility, and his use of Porter's eye-witness account distances the reader from the fabulous events in that account. Consequently the reader trusts the narrator but feels no compulsion to judge the validity of Porter's account. A similar technique is used in Sketch VI, "Barrington Isle and the Buccaneers." The narrator frames the sketch by describing Barrington Isle and then disappears by turning the narrative over to "a sentimental voyager" who romantically speculates on the nature of the buccaneers who constructed "romantic seats" on the island. Like the fox of Spenser's Prosopopoeia: or Mother Hubberds Tale in the epigraph to the sketch, the

narrator is able to be "lord of the world," to "wander free" and temporarily escape "servitude" through masquerade. The seventh sketch, "Charles's Isle and the Dog-King," is termed a "history" both at its outset and near the end. Like Sir Philip Sidney's description of the historian whose authority is based "upon other historians, whose greatest authorities are built upon the notable foundation of hearsay," the narrator-historian of this sketch is described as having "gathered" his story of "Charles's Isle and the Dog-King" from a shipmate. As a historian, the narrator gives no emotional coloring to the tale. The isles seem suddenly neutral as the narrator, allowing events to interpret themselves, relates the story of the Creole, who, rewarded for his services to Peru with the gift of an island in the Galapagos, was eventually exiled by his revolting colonists, who thereafter provided a haven for deserting sailors. Neither the narrator nor the reader is sympathetically engaged with the Creole King. Because of the historian's point of view, the reader experiences the tale as logos rather than as mythos; that is, rather than savoring the emotions which the events evoke, the reader is left with "the history of the king of Charles's Island which furnishes another illustration of the difficulty of colonizing barren islands with unprincipled pilgrims" (p. 84).

I believe it no accident that Melville ordered "Norfolk Isle and the Chola Widow" to follow "Charles's Isle and the Dog-King" in this orchestration of the tales of the Encantadas,

for in terms of narrative masks no two pieces could be juxtaposed which would better illustrate the rhetorical effect of modulation in the narrative voice. Whereas the narrator relates the tale of the deposed Creole king without involving himself or the reader emotionally, he introduces the tale of the Chola widow with the declaration that his emotions will be engaged in the framing of mythos:

Far to the northeast of Charles's Isle, sequestered from the rest, lies Norfolk Isle; and, however insignificant to most voyagers, to me, through sympathy, that lone island has become a spot made sacred by the strangest trials of humanity (p. 86).

The narrator then goes to extreme lengths to retain his "sympathetic" point of view, a point of view necessary to the ennobling and idealizing of humanity, to the creation of something sacred out of something human.⁸

In order to retain a "sympathetic" point of view the narrator emphasizes every indication of human kindness incidental to the tale and glosses over, sometimes quite awkwardly, every indication of human frailty. The former emphasis is apparent in the narrator's rather involved explanation of how the widow's waving handkerchief was spied by only one of the ship's crew: the sailor in question "leaped" atop of his spike in heaving (rather than merely standing up to his spike as was the common practice) because his spirits had been elevated by "a dram of Peruvian pisco, in guerdon for some kindness done, secretly administered to him that morning by our mulatto steward" (p. 87). After Hunilla's sad tale has been told, the sailors respond

to orders to secure her belongings with "such alacrity of both cheery and sad obedience seldom before . . . seen" (p. 97) and they exhibit "silent reverence of respect" for Hunilla (p. 97). The mariners also take up a collection for the widow and give it to her with the proceeds from her tortoise oil so the gift will be secret.

The nobility of Hunilla, too, is emphasized. The narrator, who as one of the actors in the drama obviously has no claim to omniscience, attributes attitudes to the widow that are clearly the product of conjecture and an effort to idealize:

There was something which seemed strangely haughty in her air, and yet it was the air of woe. A Spanish and an Indian grief, which would not visibly lament. Pride's height in vain abased to proneness on the rack; nature's pride subduing nature's torture (p. 100). She seemed as one who, having experienced the sharpest of mortal pangs, was henceforth content to have all lesser heart-strings riven, one by one. To Hunilla, pain seemed so necessary, that pain in other beings, though by love and sympathy made her own, was unrepiningly to be borne. A heart of yearning in a frame of steel (p. 101).

In relating her story Hunilla, the narrator stresses, is without self-pity: "It needs not be said what nameless misery now wrapped the lonely widow. In telling her own story she passed this almost entirely over, simply recounting the event" (p. 91). Hunilla is also depicted as without egotism: "Construe the comment of her features as you might, from her mere words little would you have weened that Hunilla was herself the heroine of her tale" (p. 91).

Despite the fact that the drowning of Hunilla's husband and brother was due in part to an "ill-made catamaran" and possibly "natural negligence of joyfulness," the waves are called "murderers" (p. 92) and Hunilla's stoic suffering is described as the result of "a heart of earthly yearning, frozen by the frost which falleth from the sky" (p. 101). When the virtues of man are compared to those of Heaven, Heaven is found wanting:

But Felipe's body floated to the marge, with one arm encirclingly outstretched. Lock-jawed in grim death, the lover-husband softly clasped his bride, true to her even in death's dream. Ah, Heaven, when man thus keeps his faith, wilt Thou be faithless who created the faithful one? But they cannot break faith who never plighted it (p. 91).

If the blame for an instance of human suffering cannot be shifted to cosmic forces, then the narrator resorts to silence. One may infer from Hunilla's comments that ships had intentionally abandoned her and an incident had occurred which was worse than abandonment. On the verge of relating the incident, the narrator balks:

But no, I will not file this thing complete for scoffing souls to quote, and call it firm proof upon their side. The half shall here remain untold. Those two unnamed events which befell Hunilla on this isle, let them abide between her and her God. In nature, as in law, it may be libelous to speak some truths (p. 95).

All of the preceding ploys--the accentuation of human virtue, the de-emphasis on human guilt, and the suggestion of the culpability of cosmic forces--are calculated to draw a particular response from the reader; but the narrator

does not work surreptitiously; rather, he invites attention to his power to manipulate the reader's emotions. Before introducing the heroine of the tale he says, "It is not artistic heartlessness, but I wish I could but draw in crayons; for this woman was a most touching sight; and crayons, tracing softly melancholy lines, would best depict the mournful image of the dark-damasked Chola widow" (p. 88). He later pauses in the narrative to inform the reader that he, the narrator, is in control of the reader's emotional responses--that the reader is the willing victim of the narrator's enchanting powers: "Unwittingly I imp this cat-like thing [Fate, which exercises a 'nameless magic'], sporting with the heart of him who reads; for if he feels not he reads in vain" (pp. 93-94).

Underscoring the artist-as-enchanter motif and indicating the narrator's ambivalence toward the role of the artist is the passage in which the narrator describes Hunilla's witnessing the double drownings. In this set-piece the narrator draws attention to the distinction between the "real" and the "sham"; the "real" and the "dream"; the "real" and the "mirage":

The real woe of this event passed before her sight as some sham tragedy on the stage. She was seated in a rude bower among the withered thickets, crowning a lofty cliff, a little back from the beach. The thickets were so disposed, that in looking upon the sea at large she peered out from among the branches as from the lattice of a high balcony. But upon the day we speak of here, the better to watch the adventure of those two hearts she loved, Hunilla had withdrawn the branches to one side, and held them so. They formed an oval frame, through

which the bluey boundless sea rolled like a painted one. And there, the invisible painter painted to her view the wave-tossed and disjointed raft, its once level logs slantingly upheaved, as raking masts, and the four struggling arms indistinguishable among them; and then all subsided into smooth-flowing creamy waters, slowly drifting the splintered wreck; while first and last, no sound of any sort was heard. Death in a silent picture; a dream of the eye; such vanishing shapes as the mirage shows (pp. 90-91).

Seeing the events "framed" as if the "real" events were but an artist's depiction has the effect of enchanting not only the reader of The Encantadas but Hunilla, the observer in this scene:

So instant was the scene, so trance-like its mild pictorial effect, so distant from her blasted bower and her common sense of things, that Hunilla gazed and gazed, nor raised a finger or a wail. But as good to sit thus dumb, in stupor staring on that dumb show, for all that otherwise might be done, With half a mile of sea between, how could her two enchanted arms aid those four fated ones? (p. 91).

Viewing the sketch within the framework of The Encantadas as a whole, one senses the irony of the narrator's calling attention to the fact that he can don a mask and make his audience the willing victim of an enchantment that makes the sham pass for the real, an enchantment that can engage the emotions of the reader. It is as if the narrator flaunts his power at the same time that he deprecates it. The narrator affirms the distinction between fact and fiction, terming the latter "dreams"; he bemoans the common error of censoring fiction more than fact, an act that seems to be based on the naive

assumption that fiction is somehow more dangerous than fact: "If some books are deemed most baneful and their sale forbid, how, then, with deadlier facts, not dreams of doting men?" (p. 93).

The three epigraphs to the eighth sketch are consistent with the view that the narrator of the sketch has self-consciously donned a mask of sympathy that allows him to project a biased view of human suffering. Because the narrator arbitrarily chooses the color of reality that he projects, his pose is in a sense false; the reader is, in a sense, duped--not that the view of reality that is projected is false in an objective sense, but that it is relative and calculated. So, too, the epigraphs to the sketch appear to be utterances that evoke human sympathy when they are viewed in isolation. In context, however, each is an instance of deception. The first epigraph, from Book II of The Faerie Queen, is the description of the siren who attempts to lure the ships to the rocks by appealing to the sympathy of the seamen:

At last they in an Island did espy
A seemely woman, sitting by the shore,
That with great sorrow and sad agony
Seemed some great misfortune to deplore,
And lowd to them for succour called evermore.

The second epigraph, from Chatterton's The Mynstrelles Songe from Aella, is the minstrel's lament over the death of one who is actually alive:

Blacke hys eye as the midnyghte sky,
 Whyte hys neck as the driven snowe,
 Redde hys cheek as the mornynge lyghte,
 Cold he lys ynne the ground belowe;
 Mie love ys dedde,
 Gon to hys deathe-bedde,
 All under the cactus tree.

The third, from William Collins' Dirge in Cymbeline, is also a lament over the death of a person who in fact lives:

Each lonely scene shall thee restore,
 For thee the tear be duly shed;
 Belov'd till life can charm no more,
 And mourn'd till Pity's self be dead.

As Robert C. Albrecht has pointed out, "each instance involves false pity."⁹ The narrator of "Norfolk Isle and the Chola Widow," then, seems to be sincere in his adoration of the Chola widow, and humanity as well, who against all evidence to the contrary continues to trust in goodness and life:

As mariners, tost in tempest on some desolate ledge, patch them a boat out of the remnants of their vessel's wreck, and launch it in the self-same waves, see here Hunilla, this lone ship-wrecked soul, out of treachery invoking trust. Humanity, thou strong thing, I worship thee, not in the laureled victor, but in this vanquished one (p. 94).

But the narrator also is conscious that to take a sympathetic point of view is arbitrary and such a view means that one must temporarily suspend acknowledgment of all that conflicts with that point of view. In the narrator's consciousness the whole of the tortoise always exists, both the dark and the bright side. So, too, the image with which the sketch ends reminds one symbolically that human experience is made of contraries, despite the fact that the narrator's tone and the resulting mood may temporarily make experience seem

monochromatic:

The last seen of lone Hunilla she was passing into Payta town, riding upon a small gray ass; and before her on the ass's shoulders, she eyed the jointed workings of the beast's armorial cross (p. 101).

In the ninth sketch, "Hood's Isle and the Hermit Oberlus," the narrator changes his mask once more. He is not the historian of Sketch Seventh, for he lacks the necessary detachment. The way in which this mask differs from that of a historian's is made apparent by the additions the narrator of "Hood's Isle and the Hermit Oberlus" makes to what the historian-narrator said about the Creole king:

The unfortunate Creole, who enjoyed his brief term of royalty at Charles's Isle was perhaps in some degree influenced by not unworthy motives; such as prompt other adventurous spirits to lead colonists into distant regions and assume political pre-eminence over them. His summary execution of many of his Peruvians is quite pardonable, considering the desperate characters he had to deal with; while his offering canine battle to the banded rebels seems under the circumstances altogether just (p. 105).

In short, what the artist-narrator adds to the historian-narrator's sketch is moral perspective: the artist concerns himself with establishing motives, with asserting values.

Like the narrator of the Chola widow's story, the narrator of the hermit's story assumes the mask that will effectively counter his subject. For example, the suffering of the Chola widow is countered by the narrator's sympathetic attitude; the evil deeds of the hermit Oberlus are countered by the narrator's ethical bias. The effect of this mask is to arouse the reader's moral sense. The narrator's diction

is loaded with such epithets as diabolical, beast-like, coiled, warped, crooked, malevolent, sinister, vain, selfishly tyrannical, misanthropic, etc. Through the narrator's enchanting power the reader feels no sympathy for the hermit; the narrator assures us that

for this King Oberlus and what shortly follows, no shade of palliation can be given. He acted out of mere delight in tyranny and cruelty, by virtue of a quality in him inherited from Sycorax his mother (p. 105).

In a note at the end of this sketch, the narrator draws attention to the fact that he has altered his primary source for the story of Oberlus--Porter's Voyage into the Pacific--calling particular attention to the changes he made in Oberlus's letter. He even specifies what he attempted to do in his alteration of his source--to make the latter "full of the strangest satiric effontery" (p. 112). Indeed, the changes the narrator makes are calculated to rob Oberlus of any redeeming grace by making him appear deceitful merely for the fun of it. The version of the letter in "The Encantadas" follows the source very closely except in three particulars: 1) the deletion of a specific charge that Oberlus makes against a Quaker named Captain Paddock; 2) the alteration of Oberlus's purported destination and the name of his boat; 3) an elaboration of the reference to the old hen. The last two alterations allow Melville to draw attention to the fact that he has assumed a mask in this sketch and is giving only one version of the "truth," each version changing as perspective changes.

In order to denigrate Oberlus's character as much as possible the narrator of Melville's sketch makes him appear hypocritical: Oberlus names his boat Charity rather than the Black Prince of the original; he only pretends to be bound for the Feejee Isles, arriving later at Guayaquil, and his concern for the setting hen turns out to be a rude joke.

So much under the power of the narrator's spell are we that the paradox with which the sketch ends seems quite reasonable after the narrator has detailed the misanthropic adventures of Oberlus: "And here [a South American jail], for a long time, Oberlus was seen; the central figure of a mongrel and assassin band; a creature whom it is religion to detest, since it is philanthropy to hate a misanthrope" (p. 112).

The rather brief sketch that concludes The Encantadas picks up the threads spun in the opening sketch. The theme of solitariness, which was one of three characteristics of the Isles discussed in the first sketch, is discussed at length in the same voice of the travel-guide that we encountered in the early sketches. Just as sketches IV-IX are proof of the protean-magic of the narrator, so the narrator in the tenth sketch illustrates the narrator's prerogative to create another persona who in this case assumes a third mask. The narrator travel-guide concludes the sketch by quoting an epitaph from a tomb on Chatham Isle. The epitaph is as common as well as an unmistakable example

of the use of a persona. The narrator of "Runaways, Castaways, Solitaries, Grave-Stones, Etc." quotes a "good-natured forecastle poet and artist" who inscribed "the doggerel epitaph" on his fellow-sailor's grave-board:

Oh, Brother Jack, as you pass by,
As you are now, so once was I.
Just so game, and just so gay,
But now, alack, they've stopped my pay.
No more I peep out of my blinkers,
Here I be--tucked in with clinkers!

The surprisingly comical ending of the verse--which begins in a predictably moralistic tone--is but another instance of the narrator's drawing attention to the mask as a poetic convention: the "good-natured forecastle poet and artist" is having fun at the expense of the dead sailor.¹⁰ And if the words of the epitaph are not a "real" expression of the dead sailor, so too the forecastle poet and artist is a creation of the narrator travel-guide, who in turn is a creation of an implied author.

The complexity of tone which one finds in "The Encantadas; or, Enchanted Isles" stems, I think, from Melville's increasing sense of alienation from his audience, perhaps even his despair of finding an audience.¹¹ His American audience wanted "true" accounts: that meant accounts of events that had actually happened, descriptions of places the author had actually been.¹² They wanted a travel-guide, someone who could give them a reality as hard and cold as the rock that Dr. Johnson kicked. Melville made clear his lack of esteem for travel-guides in Redburn: he

was not to be content with creating a one-dimensional narrative, a mere travel-guide to the Galapagos Islands. But dollars were damning him, as he stated his dilemma in a letter to Hawthorne. In other words, in order to sell his fiction, he had to disguise it in the garb of literal fact and he had to speak with the voice of the confidence man.

But the narrator of these sketches wishes to be found out: in the first two sketches he turns attention to himself and his artistic consciousness; in the third sketch he introduces the appearance/reality theme; in the remaining sketches he illustrates his ability as an artist to make appearances pass for the real. The narrator continually turns upon himself, calling attention not only to the inadequacy of human vision in a fallen world but also to the importance of perspective in determining that vision. The magic of the artist is that he can assume any perspective he wishes and make it appear to be absolute.

NOTES

¹David A. Roberts has suggested that an ironic contrast is created by an Emersonian narrator who fails "to justify the islands as embodying the principles of compensation." See "Structure and Meaning in Melville's 'The Encantadas'," ESQ, 22 (1976), 234-44. Although Marvin E. Mengeling refers to the narrator as "Melville" in "Through 'The Encantadas': An Experienced Guide and You," ATQ, 7 (1970), 37-43, he does address himself to point of view. Mengeling suggests that the "I" intrudes only when the narrator's experience exceeds the reader's:

²Even the pseudonym under which Melville published the sketches in Putnam's--Salvadore R. Tarnmoor--suggests Melville's ambivalence toward the role of the narrator in these sketches. "Salvadore" suggests that the narrator may function as an agent of redemption. (Salvator is Latin for "savior.") "Tarnmoor" suggests that he may water the wasteland only to convert it into a bog.

³"Darwin and Melville: Why a Tortoise?" AI, 33 (1976), 369.

⁴"Technique and Discovery in Melville's Encantadas," SAF, 1 (1973), 135.

⁵372.

⁶369.

⁷Pierre recognizes "the universal lurking insincerity of even the greatest and purest written thoughts." Melville's doubt as to the efficacy of the artist-narrator as a "guide" is expressed quite explicitly early in Pierre as Pierre is mistakenly goaded into action by his reading of Hamlet. The narrator of the novel comments that Pierre "knew not--at least, felt not--then, that Hamlet, though a thing of life, was, after all, but a thing of breath, evoked by the wanton magic of a creative hand, and as wantonly dismissed at last into endless halls of hell and night." Pierre or, The Ambiguities (New York: Grove Press, 1957), pp. 472, 237.

⁸For a similar analysis of this sketch, though taken in isolation, see Howard D. Pearce, "The Narrator of 'Norfolk Isle and the Chola Widow'," SSF, 3 (1965), 56-62.

⁹"The Thematic Unity of Melville's 'The Encantadas'," TSL, 14 (1972), 474.

¹⁰Melville's source for the epitaph, Porter's Journal, ends in the somber tone with which it began:

Gentle reader, as you pass by,
As you are now, so wonce was I;
As now my body is in the dust
I hope in heaven my soul to rest.

¹¹In addition to the failure of Pierre, 1853 marked the beginning of the end of Melville's friendship with Hawthorne. For a discussion of the latter see William B. Dillingham's discussion of "The Encantadas" in Melville's Short Fiction 1853-1856.

¹²Russell E. Nye discusses public hostility toward fiction in America in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century. He says, "In response to accusations of 'immorality' and 'falseness to life,' novelists claimed that their stories were really 'moral lessons' and usually appended a subtitle or preface to point out that their plots were 'founded on fact' or were 'truthful representations of human passions'." See American Literary History: 1607-1830 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), p. 235. For a discussion of Melville's estrangement from his American audience on different grounds see Ann Douglas, The Feminization of American Culture (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), 289-326.

CHAPTER VI

THE SHADOW IN "THE BELL-TOWER"

Although "The Bell-Tower" is written from a third-person point of view, the narrator is not omniscient nor is his perspective stationary. When the narrative opens we are distanced by many years from events that culminated in the fall of the great bell-tower of Bannadonna's engineering. The narrator begins by placing us at a spatial distance from an image which "seems" to be something which it is not. The stump of the prostrate bell-tower appears to be "the black mossed stump of some immeasurable pine, fallen, in forgotten days, with Anak and the Titan" (p. 355). The Titanic structure only seems ancient and natural: it is the product of modern technology. More specifically it is the product of the mind of Bannadonna, a modern Titan. If the opening image suggests the difficulty of distinguishing the real from the "seeming," it also gives hope that a true evaluation may be made of the bell-tower and its creator if one finds it possible to examine the "shade immutable," the shadow of the fallen man:

As all along where the pine tree falls, its dissolution leaves a mossy mound--last-flung shadow of the perished trunk; never lengthening, never

lessening; unsubject to the fleet falsities of the sun; shade immutable, and true gauge which cometh by prostration--so westward from what seems the stump, one steadfast spear of lichened ruin veins the plain (p. 355).

If Melville is suggesting, as I think he is, that Bannadonna's reputation while he lived was "subject to the fleet falsities of the sun," then one might be duly warned that public opinion regarding Bannadonna may be inconsistent and therefore at times false.

There does exist a tension between the public view of Bannadonna and the "real" view, communicated symbolically. This tension is developed obliquely because the narrator does not enter the consciousness of Bannadonna. Instead, Bannadonna's psyche is projected through symbols--immutable shades--principally through Melville's use of the psychological double. Otherwise, our view of Bannadonna is always from the outside--through the eyes of the elderly magistrate and his good-hearted associate and through the lore of the populace. Essentially, then, three views of Bannadonna are projected: the symbolic, the popular, and, mediating the two, the wise-hearted.

Symbolically the tale of the bell-tower suggests that Bannadonna is a divided man. Like so many other Romantic writers Melville chose Prometheus as the mythic figure to suggest the modern Titan's capacity for creation and destruction.¹ Both Hawthorne and Melville had used the Promethean figure before in ways that suggest awareness of the equivocal nature of the myth.² In Platonic and

Neo-Platonic interpretations, the myth spoke of the double nature of man: men rose from the Titans' ashes, but Titans had eaten Dionysus before they turned to ashes; therefore the soul (Dionysus) is imprisoned in the Body (Titan). The Biblical continuation of this myth is slightly different: the race of giants (the sons of Anak) are traditionally assumed to be the offspring of the sons of God (angels who fell with Lucifer) who married the daughters of men (alluded to in Genesis 6). The male element, then, in the Titan is the spiritual, intellectual, and ambitiously aspiring; the female element is the fleshly, irrational, and unconscious.

Both the allusion to "Anak and the Titan" and the central symbol of the story, the bell-tower, suggest the duality that characterizes Bannadonna. His pride increases as the tower rises higher and higher; as his name implies, Bannadonna attempts to suppress all that is female. He resides in the tower, cut off from earthly contacts. His aim is to live outside the bondage of the flesh: with his own common sense and mechanical skill he creates an image of himself, and "merrily" calls his double Haman. As this creature's name implies, he is only half-man. He represents Bannadonna's attempt to cut man's bondage to the flesh and to time, to deny the female element. The mechanical man's function in the bell-tower is to strike, quite literally, the hands of time, represented by female figures on the great bell. The association of the bell with the flesh is also quite literal. The great bell has a bit of flesh

lodged in it, the result of Bannadonna's having struck a workman a killing blow in a fit of passion. It is this flaw in the bell which causes it to come crashing into the side of the tower and down to the ground. Bannadonna cannot break the human tie to the flesh and to time; he cannot deny his own femaleness without destroying himself.

The pose of Una, Bannadonna, and Haman after the death blow has been struck suggests that Haman is Bannadonna's shadow or psychological double, that the two are one, the one, two:

Bannadonna lay, prostrate and bleeding, at the base of the bell which was adorned with girls and garlands. He lay at the feet of the hour Una; his head coinciding, in a vertical line, with her left hand, clasped by the hour Dua. With downcast face impending over him like Jael over nailed Sisera in the tent, was the domino . . . (p. 366).

The allusion to Jael's killing of Sisera is an ironic reversal of Bannadonna's earlier allusion to his own role as an Esther who will hang his Haman on "this, his lofty tree" (p. 360).³ Both allusions recall women of God as agents of the deaths of powerful men. The image of a vicious cycle of self-hatred evoked by the montage of these two allusions is reinforced by the description of the automation:

It was manacled, and its clubbed arms were uplifted, as if, with its manacles, once more to smite its already smitten victim. One advanced foot of it was inserted beneath the body, as if in the act of spurning it (p. 366).

In addition to the two interpretations already given the name Haman (half-man and Esther's Haman), there is a third possibility that relates Bannadonna's divided self to the modern world of technology created by the values of the Enlightenment. Bannadonna joins a long list of nineteenth-century Prometheus figures who are devoted to Reason:

Goethe's, Byron's, and Shelley's Prometheus figures were brothers of Satan. But angels had fallen from heaven because of the sin of pride. Lucifer is the Prince of Reason. The last deity of all, the one that 'will not suffer rivals,' one that seems even more cruel than the former, is the arrogance of reason. This deity considers itself to have mastered destiny, to be able to charge and direct it The Hegelian realization of the realm of reason and Marxian 'historic necessity' are among those 'blind hopes' Prometheus offered to men.⁴

As the last of the three epigraphs to the tale suggests, Bannadonna in attempting to escape bondage to nature had but extended the "empire of necessity" (p. 355). "Those who claimed acquaintance with Bannadonna's intent" described him as "a practical materialist": "With him, common sense was theurgy; machinery miracle; Prometheus, the heroic name for 'machinist'; man, the true God" (p. 370). That this view of Bannadonna disregards all contrary urges is suggested by the fact that his automaton shadow is given the name of a chief spokesman for the Counter-Enlightenment in the eighteenth century, Johan Georg Hamaan, who rejected materialism, atheism, and other values of the Enlightenment and became a proponent of faith and feeling. As the automaton Haman strikes Bannadonna dead, he too acts as a

spokesman for the Counter-Enlightenment. Whereas Bannadonna seems to suppress all that is female within himself, those powers cannot be denied indefinitely; so Bannadonna's name also suggests "proclaim" woman from the Anglo-Saxon bannan "to summon or proclaim," just as it may mean "to curse or forbid."

As an apparent exemplar of the values of the Enlightenment Bannadonna acted as the agent of his culture. The bell-tower was, after all, a project approved by popular vote (p. 356). Furthermore, a perversion of religion that is suggested by the events of the story is the result of popular attitudes. We are told that on saints' day the masses come to pay homage to the mechanician. The State proclaims a "holiday of the Tower" to celebrate the laying of the cornerstone and another to honor the Tower and its builder. The clock-bell, which calls men to mundane affairs rather than to prayers, was considered a triumph "in which the state might not scorn to share" (p. 358); the state, too, shares the guilt for the murder which Bannadonna committed during the casting of the clock-bell, for the state as well as the church overlooked the murder. The suggestion is that society is in part responsible for the creation of the double monster Bannadonna-Haman, the divided self. If Bannadonna became the god of the populace, then the automaton was their high priest: the populace, as well as the chief magistrate and his associate who visit Bannadonna in the tower, know the automaton as a "domino" because of his

hooded form. Applauded while he is alive, Bannadonna is given the honor of a stately funeral after his death. Despite the homage paid to Bannadonna, however, the narrator suggests early in the story that the mechanician's soul was hidden from popular view: "Invisible . . . from thence was that eye he turned below" (p. 356).

The populace, despite its overwhelming adoration of Bannadonna, knows Bannadonna in two essentially superficial ways; one group, apparently the least vocal, view him through their own superstition; the other, the scientifically minded, idealize him according to the values of the Age of Reason. The undercurrent of anxiety among the populace begins to surface periodically once Bannadonna begins work on his automaton. In the narrative, point of view shifts at this juncture to the suppositions and eye-witness accounts of Bannadonna's contemporaries and the lore preserved by tradition. In accounts of Bannadonna's work on the automaton, the suspicions of the minority are always countered by the reasonable explanations of the majority:

Most people imagined that the design would involve a casting like the bells. But those who thought they had some further insight, would shake their heads, with hints, that not for nothing did the mechanician keep so secret. Meantime, his seclusion failed not to invest his work with more or less of that sort of mystery pertaining to the forbidden (p. 358).

A similar point-counterpoint presentation of the nature of Bannadonna's creation follows:

But, as the object rose, a statuary present observed or thought he did, that it was not entirely rigid, but was, in a manner pliant. At last, when the hidden thing had attained its final height, and obscurely seen from below, seemed almost of itself to step into the belfry, as if with little assistance from the crane, a shrewd old blacksmith present ventured the suspicion that it was but a living man. This surmise was thought a foolish one, while the general interest failed not to augment (pp. 358-59).

The schizophrenic reactions of the public, which mirror Bannadonna's own fractured self, are underlined by allusions to Cornelius Agrippa and Albertus Magus [sic], sixteenth and thirteenth-century scientists respectively, both of whom were suspected to be in communication with the powers of darkness because of their scientific pursuits.

After Bannadonna's death, a similar division occurs between those who solve the problem of the foundling's fate by attributing it to some "supernatural agency" and those "few less unscientific minds" who "pretended to find little difficulty in otherwise accounting for it" (p. 367). The narrator gives the explanation of the scientifically minded, for that is the explanation "tradition had explicitly preserved," but he does so only after warning the reader that "in the chain of circumstantial inferences drawn, there may, or may not, have been some absent or defective links" (p. 367). The narrator also seems to look with some disdain at the scientifically minded who presume "to penetrate as well into his Bannadonna's soul as into the event" (p. 367). Nevertheless, the account of Bannadonna's creation of an automaton follows, and the account idealizes the public

figure one meets at the beginning of the narrative. Bannadonna's goal, according to tradition, was to create "a sort of elephantine Helot . . . to further . . . the universal conveniences and glories of humanity" (p. 368). The Helot is named "Talus, iron slave to Bannadonna, and, through him, to man" (p. 369). The substitution of the name Talus for Haman betrays the popular bias because the name Talus is an allusion to the beneficent iron man of Spenser's The Faerie Queen. The populace would have identified the name Haman with the Biblical character whose extreme evil included a plan to exterminate all Jews.

According to the scientifically minded, Bannadonna's self-destruction is the immediate result of his attempt to be as machine-like as his creature Haman. Bannadonna is fatally struck by the mechanical man, according to conjecture, because of a last minute attempt to correct the expression on the face of Una, one of the figures on the clock-bell. The good-hearted official, given a preview of the clock-bell, had remarked on the singular appearance of Una, so unlike her eleven sisters who wore "the same jocundly abandoned air" (p. 362). Bannadonna had attributed the variance to "'a law in art, which bars the possibility of duplicates'" (p. 362). Bannadonna was killed, it was surmised, in the act of "striving to abate that strange look of Una; which, though, before others, he had treated with unconcern, might not, in secret, have been without its thorn" (p. 371). Bannadonna attempted the impossible--to be

machine-like, to duplicate the expressions of the mythological creatures on the bell. That the populace did not recognize the attempt as an impossibility is suggested by the popular idea that Bannadonna was quite different from other projectors who may "have been hopelessly infected with the craziest chimeras" of the age. The populace justify Bannadonna's actions on the basis that he is a mechanician: "what Bannadonna had aimed at was to have been reached, not by logic, not by crucible, not by conjuration, not by altars; but by plain vice-bench and hammer" (p. 369). A hero according to the values of his age, Bannadonna was, to the public view, a practical materialist working for the good of mankind.⁵

Between the first section of the tale, in which the narrator sets the stage for the arrival of the automaton, and the last part of the tale, in which the narrator relates what tradition has preserved of Bannadonna's mind and work, lies a brief episode involving the visit to Bannadonna's tower of two elderly men, the chief magistrate and an associate. They come to investigate the appearance of the domino-clad automaton. Limiting omniscience to the minds of the two magistrates, the narrator provides a scene that functions to mediate the two views of Bannadonna otherwise offered by the story: the symbolic projection of self-hatred and the superficial views of those who reside on the plain. The two men, presumably the best specimens that the plain has to offer, enter the tower and are disturbed by hints of

the mechanic's divided self but show themselves ultimately to be to some extent responsible for Bannadonna's self-alienation.

The divided self is suggested both by Bannadonna's obvious masquerade and by the presence of the hooded figure. The narrator points out the discrepancy between Bannadonna's Vulcanic face and the "burning brightness" which it hides, Bannadonna's merriment at the disquietude of the officials and his serious attempts to convince the two visitors that the hooded figure does not truly live. The kind-hearted junior magistrate, detecting the falseness of Bannadonna's obsequious pose that involves referring to himself as a "poor mechanic" and moving with "ostentatious deference," is troubled by Bannadonna's "sardonical disdain" lurking beneath his "humble mien" (p. 361). Before literally barring the two old men out of the tower, Bannadonna bars them psychologically, speaking with no intention of being understood: when the "milder magistrate" is puzzled by a remark by Bannadonna that jars with his obsequious pose, Bannadonna brushes the remark aside and ushers his guests out.

The duplicity involved in Bannadonna's pose is heightened by his secrecy regarding the mechanical man housed in the tower with him. First he refuses to explain the draped figure "plausibly entrenching himself behind the conceded mysteries of his art" (p. 359). He then puts a sheet in front of the already draped figure. "All sorts of vague

apprehensions" stir the two magistrates as they observe evidence that seems to indicate that the figure behind the curtain is actually a living being: it sits, moves, perhaps drinks and moans, and possibly looks through the peepholes provided in the domino. "They even dreaded lest, when they should descend, the mechanician, though without a flesh and blood companion, for all that, would not be left alone"

(p. 360). The fearful suspicions of the populace are given credence by Bannadonna's secrecy and the fears of the magistrates. The outcome of the story indicates that the domino is to be feared but only as a projection of the monster that a real man may become. Symbolically the story suggests that Bannadonna has repressed all that is female within him--the unconscious, the irrational, the flesh. The result is a self that is hated and alien--a mechanical man.

This scene offers suggestions that the two magistrates as representatives of their culture are accomplices in the creation of the automaton. First the two magistrates never refer to Bannadonna as a great artist or a great architect but deprecatingly as "the foundling" or "our great mechanician." His age has denied him the role of the artist as creator and has manacled his hands by asking him to be machine-like. Ironically Bannadonna has appeared to accept the role created for him. But he is aware that the role is an impossible one: he reminds the chief magistrate of his being commissioned to engrave one-hundred identical seals for the republic, a project that defies the law in art

barring the possibility of duplicates. The magistrates further reveal their denigration of the role of the artist by their unwillingness to "let the foundling see how easily it lay within his plebeian art to stir the placid dignity of nobles" (p. 361). Not only is art denied its emotional effect, but symbolically the dialogue in this scene suggests that the popular artist in an age that is excessively pragmatic and materialistic is denied a soul:

'Hark! --sure we left no soul above?'

'No soul, Excellenza; rest assured, no soul.'
(p. 363).

The psychological conflict that Bannadonna feels is overt in this scene--apparent enough that representatives of the plain observe it. But the two magistrates, like the masses below, are unaware that Bannadonna's divided self is symbolic of the ills of the society as a whole.

After the initial objective account of the building of the bell-tower, the view through the minds of the two magistrates of Bannadonna and his domino, and the explanation preserved by tradition of Bannadonna's building of the automaton (including his death at its hands), the narrator again takes an objective pose, relating the remaining fate of the bell-tower. At Bannadonna's funeral the great bell was to have been rung, but only "a broken and disastrous sound" rings out as the bell "too ponderous for its frame" and weakened by the bit of flesh and blood lodged in it comes crashing into the side of the tower and down to the

ground. The public persists: "the remolten metal soon reassumed its place in the tower's repaired superstructure." But one year later an earthquake brings the entire structure down.

A paragraph of summary and pseudo-explanation concludes the tale:

So the blind slave obeyed its blinder lord; but, in obedience, slew him. So the creator was killed by the creature. So the bell was too heavy for the tower. So the bell's main weakness was where man's blood had flawed it. And so pride went before the fall (p. 372).

This over-simplified summary, which corresponds to Melville's use of "tradition" as point of view earlier in the tale, is characteristic of the kind of proverbial lore left by the simplest mental life of a community. It may be a part of Melville's "policy of concealment" to encourage those readers who do not wish to know Truth, as he was convinced by the reception of his serious novels most American did not,⁶ to stop their thinking with the familiar proverb, readily acceptable because it is cliché.⁷

One must remember that proverb is linked to parable and to riddle. Careful attention to shifts in point of view facilitates exposure of the intricacies behind the proverb "pride goes before a fall." Bannadonna's pride--his aspiring to rise above the common man to a level with the gods--alienates him from other men and ultimately from himself. The aspiring, in itself, is not the evil, however; the evil is the separation that occurs within Bannadonna's self,

between the artist and his community, and within the community itself. What the public views as a wholesome hero is but a half-man they have created by reducing the artist to mechanician. The epithet used to describe Bannadonna most often in the narrative, regardless of shifts in point of view, is "foundling," often "unblest foundling."

Bannadonna, as an artist, is a rejected child in an age that is overly pragmatic and literal-minded. He is "unblest" by his society: the legacy foisted upon him is dehumanizing. Bannadonna attempts to accept the values of his age: the result is that his popularity extends to adoration, but he becomes alienated from himself. For Bannadonna pride is but a mask for self-hatred.

NOTES

¹Melville purchased Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein: or, The Modern Prometheus* in 1849. See Merton M. Sealts, Jr., Melville's Reading: A Check-List of Books Owned and Borrowed (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966), no. 467.

²Hawthorne treated the Promethean theme in "The Birthmark," "Ethan Brand," and "The Great Stone Face." Only in the last of the three does Promethean aspiration escape destructive results. Both Ahab and Pierre are Promethean figures: the former is tragic, the latter merely pathetic. Gerard M. Sweeney, who identifies Bannadonna as the "Baconian version of the Titan, Prometheus-as-Alchemist," suggests that Melville in his depiction of the machine-man may have been influenced by Hawthorne's "The Minotaur" in Tanglewood Tales (1853). See Melville's Use of Classical Mythology, Melville Studies in American Culture, Vol. 5, ed. Robert Brainard Pearsall (Amsterdam: Rodopi N. V., 1975), 149, 157-63.

³Bannadonna is deceived in believing his role will be that of an Esther who will hang a Haman; in an ironic role-reversal Bannadonna fulfills the role of the Biblical Haman who was hanged on the gallows which he had prepared for Mordecai. The pattern of ironic role-reversal in "The Bell-Tower" parallels an ironic pattern which occurs in two different forms in the Biblical Haman story: before Haman was hanged on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai, he had to honor Mordecai in the ways in which he had expected to be honored himself. (Esther 2-7)

⁴Jan Kott, The Eating of the Gods: An Interpretation of Greek Tragedy, trans. Boleslaw Taborski and Edward J. Czerwinski (New York: Random House, 1970), p. 38.

⁵William B. Dillingham in Melville's Short Fiction 1853-1856 (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1977) sees the effect of "The Bell-Tower" deriving "largely from the enormous difference between Bannadonna as he really is and as the world sees him. An obsessed artist of profound genius who is bent upon the degradation of mankind, he is popularly regarded as a kind of eccentric Ben Franklin who is struck by lightning while nobly trying to harness electricity for man" (p. 226). Dillingham is the only critic, to my knowledge, to deal with the importance of point of view in this story. Criticism has generally gone in two

directions: Freudian interpretations center on the Oedipal theme; the bulk of criticism of the story deals with its anti-technology theme. For an example of the former see Jacqueline A. Costello and Robert J. Kloss, "The Psychological Depths of Melville's 'The Bell-Tower'," ESQ, 73 (1973), 254-61; for the latter see Charles A. Fenton, "'The Bell-Tower': Melville and Technology," AL, 23 (1951), 219-32.

⁶In a letter to Hawthorne (June 1, 1851), Melville speaks of his belief in "an aristocracy of the brain" despite a reputation of espousing a "ruthless democracy." He comments: "This is ludicrous. But Truth is the silliest thing under the sun. Try to get a living by the Truth--and go to the Soup Societies. Heavens! Let any clergyman try to preach the Truth from its very stronghold, the pulpit, and they would ride him out of his church on his own pulpit bannister. . . . Truth is ridiculous to men." The Letters of Herman Melville, ed. Merrell R. Davis and William H. Gilman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), pp. 126-27.

⁷"The Bell-Tower" was one of the most widely read of Melville's short stories; Leyda reports the following in notes to The Complete Stories of Herman Melville: "Originally published in Putnam's Monthly, August, 1855; reprinted in The Piazza Tales (1856), in Little Classics: Tragedy (edited by Rossiter Johnson, 1874), and in A Library of American Literature from the Earliest Settlement to the Present Time (edited by Edmund Clarence Stedman and Ellen Mackay Hutchinson, 1889)," p. 470.

CHAPTER VII

POINT OF VIEW AND THE SLAVERY ISSUE IN "BENITO CERENO"

Melville's manipulation of point of view in "Benito Cereno" is largely responsible for the haunting power of the tale and the debate which the tale has engendered over the slavery/racial issue.¹ In the first and longest section of the story Melville employs what Mary Rohrberger has called a "dual consciousness."² The narrator enters the consciousness of Amasa Delano so that the reader can experience the events aboard the San Dominick along with the optimistic American captain. The reader is deceived and puzzled by the mysterious attitudes and actions of Benito Cereno and his companions because Captain Delano is puzzled and deceived. Simultaneously, however, another perspective is subtly suggested by which the reader can see events more clearly than can Captain Delano; this perspective is communicated through "equivocation, metaphor, foreshadowing, suggestion, and subtle character delineating."²

As the tale opens, an omniscient voice introduces the narrative. The introduction consists of unequivocal facts: the year is 1799, the place is the harbor of St. Maria, "a

small, desert, uninhabited island toward the southern extremity of the long coast of Chili," and the morning of the day on which the events of the story take place is still and gray. After establishing the setting, the narrator limits his perspective to the consciousness of Captain Delano, but occasionally he injects his own commentary. The perceptions of Amasa Delano are often distorted, but the third-person narrator presents those perceptions as if they were objectively true. For example, when Delano boards the strange ship, he surveys a scene which includes the slave Babo, whose true character is the central issue in the story. Whether Babo is truly evil or not may be debated, but that he feels no love for the captain of the San Dominick is made quite clear by the events of the story, yet the narrator records this first picture of Babo:

By his [Benito Cereno's] side stood a black of small stature, in whose rude face, as occasionally, like a shepherd's dog, he mutely turned it up into the Spaniard's, sorrow and affection were equally blended (p. 261).

The reader, then, has the difficulty of recognizing that certain statements may be false (such as the one imputing affection in Babo's face as he looks at Benito Cereno) and discerning between those statements and the reliable commentary provided by the narrator. A second difficulty is knowing to whom to attribute the imagery. Does the commenting narrator think of Babo as similar to a shepherd's dog? Or is the animal imagery, a motif in the tale, a hint

as to the thinking of Delano? Both of these difficulties must be surmounted if the reader is to grasp what the tale is communicating, especially what the tale is saying about blacks.

At one point in the narrative Melville seems to lose control of the dual perspective, making it impossible to discern between the omniscient viewpoint and Delano's viewpoint. Although the passage has often been cited as evidence of Melville's racism, the technical problems inherent in it have been all but ignored. In the middle of the shaving scene the narrator attempts to account for the fact that Delano "took to" negroes, "not philanthropically, but genially, just as other men to Newfoundland dogs" (p. 307). The passage can be reduced to a list of once-popular generalizations about the negro: that he is suited for "avocations about one's person"; that he is naturally cheerful; that he is docile because of the "unaspiring contentment of a limited mind"; and that he is susceptible, because he is an "indisputable inferior," to attachment to his superior. The comments seem to be the opinions of the objective voice because nowhere in the two paragraphs in question does Melville attribute the ideas to Delano and near the end of the second paragraph the narrator is quite clearly speaking his own thoughts:

But if there be that in the negro which exempts him from the inflicted sourness of the morbid or cynical mind, how, in his most prepossessing

aspects, must he appear to a benevolent one? When at ease with respect to exterior things, Captain Delano's nature was not only benign, but familiarly and humorously so (p. 307).

The passage contains two remarks, however, that preclude one's attributing the ideas in the two paragraphs to a truly omniscient narrator. The consciousness aware of the "true" state of Benito Cereno in the hands of his captor Babo, of the true terror of Benito Cereno as well as the sadism of Babo in the barber's scene, must be aware of the irony of the statement that the negro tending his "master" there is "singularly pleasing to behold, and still more so to be the manipulated subject of" (p. 306). Neither could a truly omniscient author suggest that Benito Cereno, like Johnson and Byron, has taken "to his heart" his serving man Babo, except perhaps on an ironic and metaphoric level. These two paragraphs, then, are subject to the same stereotypical thinking as that which characterizes Captain Delano, and the ideas expressed there form the background for his attitudes. But the speaker is a third-person voice that cannot be identified with Amasa Delano's consciousness nor can he be identified as an omniscient narrator.

The only Melvillian scholar to treat this problem passage is Carolyn Karcher, who views the first part of the paragraph as Melville's

sounding the depths of Delano's mind [at the same time that] he was exorcising something of Delano's unhealthy attitude toward blacks

from his own mind and participating in the discomfiture he was inflicting on the reader.⁴

The references in the second paragraph that seem to preclude the passage's being attributed to Delano's consciousness Karcher refers to as a "confusing shift in point of view."⁵ The passage certainly is confusing because hitherto the narrator has subtly undercut Delano's perceptions. But in this passage one part of the dual perspective serves to corroborate the other. The point-counterpoint effect is temporarily lost. The result is a pervasive feeling that Melville is promoting views which the story as a whole reveals as false.

If this passage is not flawed by a temporary lapse in Melville's technical skill, if Melville intentionally allows his narrator to verbalize ideas that should belong to Delano alone, then the purpose must be trickery. If the reader is duped into accepting ideas, which he may have been predisposed to accepting, that will later prove false, then he will have been doubly fooled. Not only has the narrator allowed the reader to believe, along with Captain Delano, that the whites are in control of the San Dominick, but he has also allowed popular prejudices to promote a broader deception--that blacks differ in disposition from whites. Such a reader will learn, along with Captain Delano, that whereas some blacks are capable of docility, cheerfulness, solicitude, contentment, they are also capable of hatred, resentment, and rebellion.⁶ But the modern reader is not

apt to accept such generalizations that apologists for slavery once made popular; this passage, which contains a confusing shift in point of view, is merely confusing.

Although the animal imagery associated with blacks, a second technical problem, conceals the omniscient author's attitudes toward blacks, it reveals the stereotypical thinking of Captain Delano. Denying blacks the complexities inherent in being fully human, Delano "likes" them just as some people like dogs (p. 307). Surely Melville is aware of providing an example of one of the most insidious and pernicious forms of racial prejudice. No champion of slavery, for Delano views the slashing of Babo's cheek (self-inflicted, unbeknownst to Delano) as evidence that slavery raises ugly passions in man (the slaveholder, presumes Delano), Delano would appear to be a friend of the negro; but he is no true friend. He projects a psychological slavery as destructive to humanity as the social institution of slavery. Because Delano thinks of blacks in the role of docile animals, likeable in their stupidity, he is interested in the nature of the mulatto Francesco. What happens when the white men, characterized by shrewdness, mixes with the black man, characterized by docility, he seems to wonder. Consistent with Delano's penchant for racial generalizations, Delano thinks to settle the question by judging the one mulatto Francesco: when Benito Cereno pronounces Francesco "'a good man'," Delano replies,

'Ah, I thought so. For it were strange, indeed, and not very creditable to us white-skins, if a little of our blood mixed with the African's, should, far from improving the latter's quality, have the sad effect of pouring vitriolic acid into black broth; improving the hue, perhaps, but not the wholesomeness' (p. 314).

Such racial stereotyping is surely one reason for Captain Delano's inability to see the true state of affairs aboard the San Dominick. Furthermore, stereotypical thinking, like the social institution of slavery, of which it may be an outgrowth, proscribes and limits the growth of the individual. The motto "Follow you leader" scrawled on the side of the San Dominick is an apt description of both the repressive social order that led to mutiny and the stereotypical roles the blacks were forced to play if Captain Delano's "benevolent" attitudes were the prevalent mode of thought even of those who might oppose slavery.

But if the animal imagery is a mere reflection of Delano's dim-sightedness, why do the next two sections of the tale--the brief narration of the battle between the whites and the blacks and the deposition, which is not projected through the alembic of Delano's mind but is from Benito Cereno's point of view--continue to contain descriptions of blacks in animal images? First of all, the animal imagery in the remainder of the tale does not confirm Captain Delano's prejudices regarding blacks. After having exposed Delano's view of the negro as a stupid, docile animal--a shepherd's dog, a doe with her fawn--the tale serves to break the stereotype and reveals a fuller range

of emotions and intelligence of which the blacks are capable. The animal imagery that appears after the "flash of revelation" sweeps across "the long-benighted mind of Captain Delano" (p. 388) suggests a ferociousness that contrasts with the imagery of the first part of the tale. Babo is "snakishly writhing up from the boat's bottom," the blacks are like "cawing crows escaped from the hand of the fowler" (p. 329) and their "red tongues lolled, wolf-like, from their black mouths" (p. 332). Secondly, the continuation of bestial imagery is necessary in the short section in which the omniscient narrator follows the pursuit of the negroes in order to justify and give credence to Benito Cereno's extreme horror at the mere sight of the blacks. Thirdly, another cluster of images--enchantment images--function with the bestial images in the first part of the tale to prepare one to view the deposition in the same light that one views the first part of the tale--each is the result of the perceptions of one consciousness, first Delano's and secondly Cereno's; and therefore each is subject to the coloring of the lens through which it is projected.⁷

The enchantment theme is introduced as Delano approaches the San Dominick in his whale-boat. He sees a kind of sleep-walking bird perched in the ship's tops: "a white noddy, a strange fowl, so called from its lethargic, somnambulistic character, being frequently caught by hand at sea" (p. 258). The bird, who moves about in a

dream-state, is not unlike Captain Delano and Benito Cereno, for enchantment images cluster around both, suggesting that each consciousness is somehow an enchanted region, subject to its own peculiar spells. The narrator underlines the enchantment theme by suggesting that anyone viewing the contents of "a large and populous ship at sea, especially a foreign one" will feel "the effect of enchantment":

"The ship seems unreal; these strange costumes, gestures, and faces, but a shadowy tableau just emerged from the deep, which directly must receive back what it gave" (p. 260).

To feel, believe, even accept that the real is the unreal or vice-versa is a condition that the characters aboard the San Dominick must contend with. As Captain Delano stands in the starboard quarter-gallery, his reveries transport him to "some far inland country; prisoner in some deserted ch[^]ateau, left to stare at empty grounds, and peer out at vague roads, where never wagon or wayfarer passed" (p. 294). The imagery of this passage suggests the isolation of a consciousness projecting its own reality. Delano's "enchantments were a little disenchanted as his eye fell on the corroded main-chains" and he thinks he sees a Spanish sailor gesturing to him. Delano does not know whether to take the gesture as a meaningful one or to blame his "haunted mood" for making "some random, unintentional motion" seem like "a significant beckoning" (p. 294).

When one is in a state of enchantment, one sees the line between "seeming" and "being" very dimly, if at all.

Although the events of the story clearly expose the difficulty Delano has in distinguishing the authentic from the masquerade, Benito Cereno's distorted vision is more subtly suggested. When Benito Cereno is introduced, he, like Delano and the white noddy, is described with enchantment images. He stares "like some somnambulist, suddenly interfered with" and he speaks "but brokenly and obscurely, as one in a dream" (pp. 267, 268). Whereas Delano's vision of reality is colored by a happy optimism and trust in a benevolent creator, Cereno's is colored by a morbid spell. That morbid spell is objectified in Babo, not literally a dark beast but projected as such in Benito Cereno's consciousness. The deposition, Cereno's version of the events surrounding the slave revolt, together with the bestial imagery that pervades the tale, is necessary to the reader's understanding and identification with this projection, a projection that is made clear in the dialogue in the final section of the tale: "'You are saved,' cried Captain Delano, more and more astonished and pained; 'you are saved: what has cast such a shadow upon you?' 'The negro'" (p. 352).

In the original source, Captain Amasa Delano's A Narrative of Voyages and Travels in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres (1817), the slave Babo appears, but Melville in his rendering of the character elevates his importance to that of Amasa Delano and Benito Cereno. Instead of following his source, in which Babo is killed aboard the Tryal

in the battle with the Americans, Melville allows Babo to survive the battle and, in the final section of the tale, stand trial and stoically receive the death sentence for his part in the revolt. It is Babo's image with which the tale ends:

Some months after, dragged to the gibbet at the tail of a mule, the black met his voiceless end. The body was burned to ashes; but for many days, the head, that hive of subtlety, fixed on a pole in the Plaza, met, unabashed, the gaze of whites; and across the Plaza looked toward St. Bartholomew's church, in whose vaults slept then, as now, the recovered bones of Aranda: and across the Rimac bridge looked toward the monastery, on Mount Agonia without; where, three months after being dismissed by the court, Benito Cereno, borne on the bier, did, indeed, follow his leader (p. 353).

Elevating Babo's importance in the tale and describing him with bestial imagery--ground by the right foot of Captain Delano, Babo "was snakishly writhing"--Melville charged Babo, the black man, with mythic significance. Whereas the changes Melville made in his sources were not necessary for the social criticism inherent in the tale, they were necessary to imbue Babo with suggestions of the darkness that is associated with the devil, the unconscious, the primitive, the horror and terror that arises from that region and the mystery of it all. Without racial reference, black is pregnant with all of these meanings. The clusters of enchantment images are also connected with blackness: the magician's "black art" is perhaps derived from medieval Latin nigromantia, "as if this word contained the Latin niger, nigro 'black'." (OED) The suggestion of the crime

that "the tribunal, in its final decision, rested its capital sentence upon" may have been a crime involving Black Magic, a crime that Babo as an incarnation of the devil, an anti-Christ, committed that would defy both rational explanation and natural laws, an unnamed crime that the tribunal "held dubious for both learned and natural reason" (p. 333).

According to the Spaniard, Captain Delano survived his visit to the San Dominick because "'God charmed your life'" (p. 351). But Don Benito Cereno does not survive the black shadow that has been "cast" upon him by "the negro Babo." He seems to have been subsumed by the dark spell of the terrorist Babo, who, to Benito Cereno, stands for the forces of absolute evil in its original, concentrated form. Richard Chase says that we may take "the negro" "to symbolize the dark side of life and history, the ancient burden of crime, guilt, and death."⁸ The symbolic reference may be more specific. As other readers of "Benito Cereno" have noted, the name "Babo" suggests "baboon" or "bestiality." But Melville possibly knew that "Babo" (babao, babau) is the Italian colloquialism for both "bugbear, bogey" and "daddy." To Captain Delano Babo is merely a bugbear. But to Benito Cereno Babo is a Daddy--Sylvia Plath's Nazi Daddy, the dark side of Carl Jung's Yahweh who reveals himself in the Book of Job as an antinomy.¹⁰ He is Anti-Christ, a Daddy of ontological significance.

To those who object to Melville's symbolic suggestion that Babo is Evil Incarnate and by extension that Benito Cereno is a suffering Christ-figure, I suggest that in all complex fiction the reader must discern between levels of meaning. On the level of social commentary the tale can be vindicated by the point that evil is projected onto Babo by Benito Cereno, not by Melville. But to limit the tale to one level of meaning is to deny what many readers intuit--that Babo, as well as Benito Cereno, is larger than life, that they are imbued with mythic significance for the reader. And to interpret myth as commentary on a specific social situation (the slavery issue, e.g.) can only distort the meaning of myth. If Melville had been inclined to write in "Benito Cereno" a tale that functioned primarily on one level of meaning--social criticism--perhaps he would have made fewer alterations in Delano's Narrative. But Melville is a myth-maker, and just as the legalistic truth, the prosaic truth, of one sailor Billy Budd misses drastically the poetic truth embodied in that young man's life and death, so the tale about one Captain Benito Cereno is more than a critique of a foolish optimism and stereotypical thinking, a theme that is fully developed by the first two sections of the tale: the first involves the "dual perspective," in which Captain Delano misinterprets the condition of the slave ship and the second, in which Delano's point of view is dropped, recounts the pursuit of the slave ship after Captain Delano has been, to some extent,

enlightened. The legal account of what happened aboard the San Dominick, the third section of the tale, is from Benito Cereno's point of view. When Melville recorded Don Benito Cereno's view of the events that had transpired aboard the San Dominick, he made that account consistent with the characterization of Cereno in the first part of the story: he is an ineffectual leader, debilitated by the nightmare that beshrouds his consciousness--a perfect foil to the less-sensitive, optimistic American captain. This third section of the tale functions with the last section, in which the omniscient narrator is again in control, to communicate the psychological level of meaning; for through these two sections we see the possibility of being destroyed by one's own projection of evil, of being sucked into one of the black holes in the universe. However, the entire tale leads inevitably to the broader theme, the mythic suggestion of the power of darkness that extends to the heart of creation. To effect this theme, the character of Babo was enlarged, expanded, and intensified. In short, Melville made changes in Babo's character because Melville was a myth-maker.

NOTES

¹Sidney Kaplan argues that, regardless of evidence of Melville's anti-slavery stand in his other writing, "Benito Cereno" is an "'artistic sublimation' . . . of notions of black primitivism dear to the hearts of slavery's apologists." See "Herman Melville and the American National Sin: The Meaning of 'Benito Cereno'," JNH, 42 (1957), 26; rpt. in Melville's Benito Cereno: A Text for Guided Research, ed. John P. Runden (Lexington: Heath, 1965), p. 177. In order to vindicate the tale from the charge of racism, Allen Guttman argues that Babo is the hero of the tale in "The Enduring Innocence of Captain Amasa Delano," Boston University Studies in English, 5 (1961), 35-45; rpt. in Runden, pp. 179-88. Carolyn Karcher points to evidence from other sources (primarily Moby-Dick) of Melville's attitude toward negroes and concludes in her analysis of "Benito Cereno" that evil is projected onto blacks by Benito Cereno, not by Melville. See "Melville and Racial Prejudice: A Re-evaluation," SoR, 12 (1976), 287-310.

²"Point of View in 'Benito Cereno': Machinations and Deceptions," CE, 27 (1965), 542.

³Ibid.

⁴Karcher, 300.

⁵Karcher, 301.

⁶Eleanor Simpson ("Melville and the Negro: From Typee to "Benito Cereno," AL, 41 [1969], 34-7) argues that Delano by stereotyping the black in this way is typical of the Northern abolitionist. Howard Welsh ("The Politics in 'Benito Cereno'," AL, 46 [1975], 556-66) continues the argument; Karcher, op cit., suggests that this stereotype was the result of the propaganda of Southern apologists for slavery. Paul David Johnson ("American Innocence and Guilt: Black-White Destiny in 'Benito Cereno'," Phylon, 36 [1975], 426-34) argues that Melville is debunking both denigrating and idealizing myths of the negro.

⁷Both Guttman and Karcher argue that the deposition is a distorted version of the events of the tale rather than the "absolute truth."

⁸"Introduction" to Selected Tales and Poems by Herman Melville, ed. Richard Chase (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1950), vi-vii.

⁹Robert Cochran ("Babo's Name in 'Benito Cereno': An Unnecessary Controversy?" AL, 48 [1976], 217-19) summarized the various interpretations of Babo's name. Cochran's own position, which I find ludicrous, is that because the name Babo was in Delano's Narrative (Melville's source) as the name of the commander of the blacks, the name was "a matter of no consequence to Melville."

¹⁰"Answer to Job," in Psychology and Religion: West and East, Vol. 11 of Collected Works, pp. 355-470.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

Technique cannot be separated from theme. The preceding chapters illustrate how an examination of technique inevitably leads to the ideas that technique serves. Melville's technique in The Piazza Tales is partly the result of an effort to cope with a subject with which he had dealt explicitly and disastrously in Pierre--the plight of the American writer. Each of the narratives in The Piazza Tales speaks of or to this plight in one way or another.

In both "The Piazza" and "The Encantadas" Melville attempts to draw a distinction between art and life. Art is deceptive, he suggests, but deceptive in a sense different from the popular charge in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that fiction was false to life. The popular solution to this kind of deception was to take stories from "real life." (It was on this level of truth alone that Melville was appreciated during his lifetime.) Melville asserts that fiction (like all art) is false because it creates an illusion of reality that is unified and whole. A belief that art can somehow be "true" simply by being based on someone's actual experience is a

misconception that Melville satirizes in "The Encantadas"; there he illustrates the many selves (or implied authors) behind the narrator. Each projects a slightly different view of "real" experience; each view is equally true and equally false despite the fact that Melville was drawing from "real-life." It is the narrator of "The Piazza" who suggests the sense in which art is truly deceptive: the protagonist is deceived into first believing that art and life are synonymous; when experience contradicts the idea that life has the properties of art, then he grows into the recognition that art cannot alter the real world, but it does allow one to transcend the conflicts of the real world through the cathartic effect that rests, paradoxically, on one's awareness of being deceived, of viewing an objectification of experience that is not real.

Melville's readers were, on the whole, too naive to grasp this distinction. The result is that Melville, recoiling from his literalist readers and they from him, went underground in his short fiction. He gave them surface morals they would readily accept (such as "pride goes before a fall") and submerged truths they would probably miss. In "The Bell-Tower" under cover of moralistic cliché Melville depicts the conflicts of the artist who panders to the distorted values of a mechanistic, reason-dominated age. The result, as Melville saw it, was a man divided against himself bound to self-destruct. Bartleby, too, represents what the writer might become in a legalistic, reason-dominated

age. As a scrivener, the writer is nothing more than a Xerox machine, whose work is appreciated only for its physical properties--its mere legibility. He is walled off from the real world, denied imaginative creativity, and doomed to copy other men's words.

A policy of concealment, the technical ploy Melville used in The Piazza Tales that reflects his alienation from his audience, includes making the audience an object of satire on several occasions. We continue to read in "The Encantadas" despite the narrator's flaunting of his power over us. In "Bartleby the Scrivener" we are made to identify with the lawyer so that his failings and frustrations are ultimately our own. In "The Lightning-Rod Man" we find ourselves identifying with a narrator only to feel abandoned by the implied author. In "Benito Cereno," too, we are deceived right along with the naive American captain.

The Piazza Tales stands as testimony to the fact that during the magazine period (1853-56) Melville only appeared to abandon his will to write books that would not sell. Although the narratives of The Piazza Tales were outwardly inoffensive enough to be published in Putnam's, once collected into a volume they were ignored by American readers to the extent that the collection never cleared a profit for the publisher.

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APPENDIX

THE IRONIC PRESENTATION OF CHARACTER IN "JIMMY ROSE" AND "THE FIDDLER"

An analysis of "Bartleby" clearly demonstrates Melville's ability simultaneously to conceal and reveal theme through the use of an "I" narrator. Like the speakers in Shakespeare's soliloquies or Browning's monologues, the "I" narrator indirectly exposes intricacies of character. This method of characterization makes special demands on the reader: the reader directly confronts character without the prefabricated notions of an omniscient author to guide him; thus he must rely on himself to penetrate tone of speech, to analyze the casuistic use of words, to fill in the gaps left by allusions, to arrive at moral judgments. Examining the "I" narrators of The Piazza Tales does not sufficiently expose the range of first-person narrators Melville employed. That range may be further suggested by analysis of two additional narrators whose opacity exceeds that of any of the narrators in The Piazza Tales.

"Jimmy Rose" is the story of a sentimental gentleman named William Ford, the narrator, who takes up residence in a house once occupied by one of his "earliest

acquaintances," Jimmy Rose. Ford idiosyncratically guards the delapidated wallpaper in the "old parlor of the peacocks or room of roses" because "of its long association in my mind with . . . the gentle Jimmy Rose" (p. 244). The posture in which we see Ford as he tells the story of Jimmy Rose, who lost his fortune but continued to associate with his affluent friends seemingly oblivious to his own degradation, is sitting in the parlor of peacocks indulging in tears of sympathy for his old acquaintance.

In "Jimmy Rose," then, Melville is giving us the opportunity to analyze the man of sentiment, a stereotype in American literature of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Instead of idealizing the man of extreme sensibility, Melville presents an objective picture in which certain defects emerge from behind a highly moral nature. Specifically, Melville reveals Ford's tendency to what might be called closed-circuit vision because of a desire to idealize a friend. Melville also reveals an element of selfishness that may reside in extreme sentimentality.

Apparent early in the narrative is William Ford's tendency to project to other people what he imagines their mental view to be, never seeming to question the authenticity of his view. For example, Ford relates that after moving into the house which he inherited that he "thought" his neighbors "insanely fancied the ward was looking up--the tide of fashion setting back again" (p. 241). After

describing his mental construct of his neighbors' thoughts, Ford proceeds to describe his house with special attention to the largest parlor where the gaudy, rose and bird-studded wallpaper hangs. Even here Ford projects to the birds on the wallpaper a mental attitude:

. . . so patiently and so pleasantly, nay, here and there so ruddily did they seem to bide their bitter doom . . . so full, too, seemed they of a sweet, engaging pensiveness, meditating all day long, for years and years, among their faded bowers (p. 243).

After witnessing this display of indulgence to fancy, the reader should be a bit skeptical when Ford turns to his association of the "room of roses" with Jimmy Rose and attributes to Jimmy Rose the emotions he imagined the wallpapered parrots to be feeling. Not until the climactic scene when the narrator relates the last episode that he witnessed in the life of Jimmy Rose does one find confirmation for doubts about the accuracy of Ford's perception. The bitter doom which Ford describes as Jimmy's was after financial ruin

to be seen of those--nay, crawl and visit them in an humble sort, and be tolerated as an old eccentric, wandering in their parlors--who once had known him richest of the rich, and gayest of the gay (p. 249).

Rose's seeming humiliation, over which Ford sheds many tears of sympathy, is apparently not experienced in that way by Rose; for on his deathbed Rose reveals his own perception of himself. Refusing the attending girl's gift of supposedly religious books meant to comfort the dying, Rose murmurs,

"'Why will she bring me this sad old stuff? Does she take me for a pauper? Thinks she to salve a gentleman's heart with Poor Man's Plaster?'" (p. 253).

Ford offers two possible explanations for Jimmy's strange behavior: "repugnance at being considered next door to death" or "natural peevishness brought on by the general misery of his state" (pp. 252-53). Ford does not consider the idea that Rose may actually consider himself in some sense a gentleman and be unaware of the humiliation Ford perceives. So Ford is left as perplexed as when he began his narrative:

I still must meditate upon his strange example, whereof the marvel is, how after that gay, dashing nobleman's career, he could be content to crawl through life, and peep about among the marbles and mahoganies for contumelious tea and toast, where once like a very Warwick he had feasted the huzzaing world with Burgundy and venison (p. 253).

Ford is never able to penetrate Rose's consciousness, to assume for a moment Rose's view. The conflict is left in stasis.

The central symbol in the short story, the gaudy peacock wallpaper, supports the depiction of Ford, and Jimmy Rose as well, as experiencing their own unique reality. The paper is covered with

great diamond lozenges, divided by massive festoons of roses . . . and in those lozenges, one and all, as in an over-arbored garden cage, sat a grand series of . . . parrots, macaws, and peacocks (p. 243).

The image is suggestive of the caged consciousness. In

"Jimmy Rose," then, we get a bird's-eye view, as it were, of the solipsistic vision of the narrator.

Ford's unique vision of Jimmy Rose seems the result of a determination to idealize the man. Only once does Ford approach criticism of his friend, suggesting that a "military learning in a man of an unmilitary heart . . . is an indication of some weak love of display" (p. 251). But immediately he chides himself for behaving in an unbecoming, possibly unchristian, way. Furthermore, Ford's refusal to admit any defects in his friend is suggested by the way in which he alludes both to Jimmy's acquisition of wealth and to his loss of it. Born to a moderate fortune, Jimmy, Ford says, added to it "by a large and princely business, something like that of the great Florentine trader, Cosimo the Magnificent" (p. 244). The allusion to "Cosimo the Magnificent" is ambiguous. Cosimo was the member of the Medici family who was largely responsible for the great wealth which it enjoyed for many generations. However, the epithet "the Magnificent" is associated, not with Cosimo, but with his grandson Lorenzo, who is noted not for his acquisition of wealth but for the liberality with which he spent what he had inherited. It was Lorenzo, too, whose reputation has been blemished by the popularly-held belief that he misappropriated to his own use the Dower Fund.¹ The ambiguity of the allusion to Cosimo the Magnificent is consistent with the ambiguity with which Ford expresses Jimmy Rose's loss of fortune: "Sudden and terrible reverses in

business were made mortal by mad prodigality on all hands" (p. 245). Never does Ford suggest exactly who might have been prodigal. Because of a sentimental bias Ford seems to withhold information that would be inconsistent with his sympathetic picture of Jimmy Rose as an innocent sufferer.

Similarly, Ford shows a disinclination to differentiate between the relative value of Jimmy Rose's wealth versus Rose's personal qualities in attracting friends. Ford produces a sentence in which he alternates the two very different categories of Rose's "wealth":

his uncommon cheeriness; the splendor of his dress; his sparkling wit; radiant chandeliers; infinite fund of small-talk; French furniture; glowing welcomes to his guests; his bounteous heart and board; his noble graces and his glorious wine (p. 244).

That it was primarily Rose's wealth that attracted friends is suggested by the fact that Ford is only one of two people to attend Jimmy Rose's funeral.

The narrator's association of Jimmy with roses is based on a similar attempt to idealize. The rose image is suggestive, of course, of a Christ-figure. Ford makes the association explicit when he attributes to Jimmy Rose a thought that is patterned after the words of Jesus. Ford relates that Jimmy had no money to give to the poor but he gave what he had--compliments--to the rich: "The rich in their craving glut, as the poor in their craving want, we have with us always. So, I suppose, thought Jimmy Rose" (p. 252). The allusion is to Jesus's reply to Judas's criticism when Judas sees Mary put expensive ointment on Jesus's feet: "Let her

alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this. For the poor always ye have with you; but me ye have not always" (Jn. 12. 7-8, K.J.V.). The thought attributed to Rose twists the meaning of Jesus's reply to Judas. Whereas Jesus is justifying ministering to the Christ before ministering to the poor, Ford is attempting to justify Rose's glorifying the rich. An ironic criticism seems to be present in the allusion; Ford, of course, is oblivious to the ironic implications.

Just as Melville suggests that the perceptions of a man of extreme sentimentality may be distorted, so too he reveals an element of selfishness that may reside in such a man. This selfishness is suggested in the prayers that constitute a refrain in the short story. Four times during Ford's account of Jimmy Rose, Ford interrupts the narrative with the refrain, "Poor, poor Jimmy--God guard us all--poor Jimmy Rose." The function of this prayer is two-fold. Rather obvious is the fact that the prayer underlines the characterization of William Ford as a man of sentiment. In a subtler way, however, the prayer indicates a secret motive of self-interest that may lurk on the nether side of a shallow sympathy. A careful look at the refrain is necessary to reveal the self-interest that lies there. Although the refrain begins and ends with a sympathetic expression for Jimmy Rose, the supplication couched in the middle cannot be for the welfare of Jimmy. After all, to the narrator's mind the worst of all calamities has already happened to

Jimmy: ". . . fate slowly bent him more and more to the lowest deep" (p. 249). So the prayer is really for the narrator himself; he prays, in effect, that Jimmy's misfortunes may not be his own. The use of the pronoun "us" is a thin disguise for the narrator's concern for self.

If recounting the story of Jimmy Rose arouses Ford's anxiety for his own welfare, then why does he dwell so on the story of his old friend? Ford has gone to great lengths to preserve the parlor of the peacocks because of his association of that room with Jimmy Rose, having defied the wishes of his wife and daughters to do so. He suggests that he spends many hours in the parlor meditating on Rose's "strange example." The explanation lies, I suggest, in the possibility that Ford derives a secret pleasure from contemplating the misfortunes of his friend.

Addison in Spectator No. 418 explored the possible reasons for the pleasure which tragedy as an art form gives. He suggested that we make a comparison, perhaps unconsciously, between the sufferer and ourselves and derive pleasure from our awareness of our own good fortune. However, Addison suggests that in real life the comparison would not please because "the object presses too close upon our senses, and bears so hard upon us, that it does not give us time or leisure to reflect on ourselves." Ford, however, contemplates a tragedy that happened in the past, and, as Addison points out, under such conditions, "reflection on ourselves rises in us insensibly."² Furthermore, the

tragedy of Jimmy Rose has been objectified for Ford in the design of the wallpaper in the parlor of the peacocks. William Ford's pain at seeing an old friend humiliated is converted into a pleasurable sorrow because Ford is distanced from Jimmy Rose, first, by an anxious concern for self, secondly, by time, and, thirdly, by an identification of Jimmy Rose with the peacock-filled wallpaper. The result is that William Ford appears to be something of an aesthete in the posture in which we last see him, sitting in his parlor of peacocks, meditating on Jimmy Rose; the parameters of his consciousness remain as static as the peacocks on the walls.³

In "Jimmy Rose" Melville has taken the good-hearted man of sentiment, so common in the literature of the time, and made him the communicator of the complexities of human nature. Tearfully sympathetic for the suffering of his old friend, Ford remains trapped in his own limited consciousness, never able to identify sufficiently with Jimmy Rose to understand Rose's perception of himself. Any expansion of consciousness is blocked by Ford's tendency to idealize.

In the debate over "sense and sensibility" Melville insists on balance. In a letter to Hawthorne he takes issue with Hawthorne's thesis in "Ethan Brand": "that the cultivation of the brain eats out the heart."⁴ However endearing a man of great heart may be, Melville suggests in his portrait of William Ford, as in his portrait of Charlie Millthorpe of Pierre or, The Ambiguities, that heart alone

is not adequate to make one fully human. Rather, as Melville put the idea in his letter to Hawthorne:

But it's my prose opinion that in most cases, in those men who have fine brains and work them well, the heart extends down to hams. And though you smoke them with the fire of tribulation, yet, like veritable hams, the head only gives the richer and the better flavor.⁵

Both thought and feeling, then, must be exercised for human growth to occur. And that growth may be blocked by the self's unconscious urge to place distance between the self and suffering.

"The Fiddler," that very short tale involving only three characters and recounting their afternoon and evening of camaraderie, like "Jimmy Rose" is concerned with the faulty perception and judgment of the narrator. Helmstone narrates the tale of his encounter with Hautboy, the fiddler, with staccato rhythm and present-tense verbs that give events a vivid immediacy and humorous abruptness. Dashing down a newspaper containing a review, Helmstone exclaims, "So my poem is damned, and immortal fame is not for me! I am nobody forever and ever. Intolerable fate!" (p. 233). (The absurd over-reaction by which Helmstone introduces himself prepares for a similarly imprudent reaction with which the tale ends.) Rushing out into Broadway in a "desperate mood," Helmstone meets his "old friend" Standard, who introduces him to Hautboy. The three go to a circus where Hautboy takes a childish delight in all he sees. Helmstone is fascinated by Hautboy, who seems to display the perfect blend of "good sense and good humor"

(p. 235). The three eventually go to Hautboy's humble dwelling where Hautboy entertains his two companions by playing common tunes such as "Yankee Doodle" on his fiddle. Baited by Standard's leading comments, Helmstone demands to know who Hautboy really is. Standard whispers the name of a once-prosperous and famous prodigy. Inspired by the disclosure, Helmstone tears up his manuscripts, buys a fiddle, and begins taking lessons of Hautboy.

The narrator believes himself to be relating his discovery of an extraordinary genius who is able to maintain the joviality of youth in spite of the dark knowledge that comes with experience to a man of "genius." The reader may suspect, however, that the essence of the story is that the narrator himself has been duped into following a person who may be no genius at all.⁶

Evidence suggesting that Helmstone's vision, obscured by conceit, is faulty lies in the account of Helmstone's relationship with one whom he considers an "old friend." If Helmstone is oblivious to Standard's hostility toward him, might he not be hoodwinked by this "friend" into believing Hautboy is a genius when in truth he is not?

That Standard looks upon Helmstone with utter disdain is implicit throughout the short story although Helmstone describes Standard as his "old friend." Standard's affronts to Helmstone range from intentional misinterpretations of Helmstone's statements to outright insults. Helmstone meets Standard on the street after Helmstone has just read

criticism that damns his newly published poem and after Standard has just heard of the damning criticism. Helmstone's distress is apparent, for Standard boisterously says, "'Ah! what's the matter? Haven't been committing murder? Ain't flying justice? You look wild,'" (p. 233). Such boisterous questioning cannot be interpreted as an approach meant to comfort a wounded friend. Assuming that Standard intends to comment on the published criticism, Helmstone replies, "'You have seen it, then?'" In a seeming non sequitur Standard replies as if he understood the "it" to refer to the clown in the nearby circus. Standard's display of an incisive intellect as the story progresses is inconsistent with this instance of apparent obtuseness. The implication of this intentional misunderstanding is that Standard refuses to acknowledge that Helmstone's poem or the criticism it received is any more noteworthy than the clown at the local circus. Helmstone seems to assume that the "mortifying" mistake is unintentional, for he says that he had not the "time or inclination to resent" it (p. 233).

The next exchange between Standard and Helmstone that is recounted in the story occurs as the two discuss Hautboy. Again Standard intentionally misinterprets Helmstone's meaning in order to ridicule him. Helmstone, puzzled by Hautboy's good temper, concludes that felicitous temper and good sense exist in Hautboy only because Hautboy is not a man of "genius":

'His great good sense is apparent; but great good sense may exist without sublime endowments. Nay, I take it, in certain cases, that good sense is simply owing to the absence of those' (p. 236).

From the context of Helmstone's comments, one may easily infer that Helmstone means by "genius" above average abilities, a knowledge of complexities and ambiguities, and the intellectuality and ambition to go "beyond the common limit" (p. 237). Standard's resentment of Helmstone's analysis is expressed in these words:

'You think he [Hautboy] never had genius, quite too contented, and happy and fat for that--ah? You think him no pattern for men in general? affording no lesson of value to neglected merit, genius ignored, or impotent presumption rebuked? --all of which three amount to much the same thing' (p. 238).

Thus, Standard defines "genius" in his sentence as "impotent presumption." Standard's objection to Helmstone's use of the word "genius" possibly stems from two sources. The first and most obvious is his resentment of Helmstone's egotism, an egotism which Helmstone makes no effort to mask. The second source may be a philosophical bias. Helmstone uses "genius" with meanings it acquired during the eighteenth century, meanings reflective of romantic thought. The word which once meant simply one's "natural ability or capacity" came to denote in the eighteenth century "instinctive and extraordinary capacity for imaginative creation, original thought, invention, or discovery," a capacity which "has the appearance of proceeding from a supernatural inspiration or possession, and which seems to arrive at its results in an inexplicable and miraculous manner" (OED). Standard

apparently has no sympathy with such romantic concepts, even though Helmstone is willing to place Standard along with himself in the category of "genius." Standard's manipulation of language in order to insult Helmstone does not seem to penetrate Helmstone's consciousness, for Helmstone shows no awareness of an affront.

Besides thinking Helmstone enormously presumptuous, Standard also implies that he thinks Helmstone opinionated ("'You speak very decidedly'" [p. 237].) and dogmatic ("'And didn't you yourself lay his Hautboy's whole anatomy open on the marble slab at Taylor's? What more can you possibly learn?'" [p. 239]). Standard's disdain for Helmstone is apparent in the very gestures which Helmstone records. During the tête-à-têtes in which the two engage Helmstone notes that Standard drums on the table, a gesture suggesting at the least impatience and perhaps a controlled hostility. And during Hautboy's performance, Standard gets Helmstone's attention forcibly enough so that Helmstone recalls the nudge "beneath the left rib" with surprising specificity.

Helmstone's insensitivity to the barbed comments which Standard aims at him and his seeming unawareness of the hostility those comments betray suggest a certain naivete that would make him easily duped by Standard. If Standard wished to humble his friend by citing facts that would prove Helmstone's opinions wrong, he could be quite confident that Helmstone would not question the validity of those "facts." It is possible that when Standard tells Helmstone that

Hautboy is a man of "genius," by Helmstone's definition, having achieved fame as a boy, Standard is capitalizing on the gullibility of his "friend" and achieving a perverse victory over one whom he obviously considers a dolt. The evidence that leads to this conclusion is the allusion to Master Betty which Standard drops in his conversation with Helmstone. Helmstone has been expounding upon his analysis of Hautboy's character, categorically ruling out the possibility that Hautboy could be "'a reasonable example to a heady fellow like you, or an ambitious dreamer like me'":

'Nothing tempts him beyond common limit; in himself he has nothing to restrain. By constitution he is exempted from all moral harm. Could ambition but prick him; had he but once heard applause, or endured contempt, a very different man would your Hautboy be' (p. 224).

Standard then interjects a strange question: "'Did you ever hear of Master Betty?'" (p. 224). The question is strange because Standard fails to suggest any connection between the subject under discussion--Hautboy--and Master Betty, attributing the question merely to absent-mindedness. If, however, Standard could assert that Hautboy was Master Betty, the actor-prodigy who achieved fame in his youth, Helmstone's argument would be over-turned just as it appears to be in the final episode of the story when Standard whispers the name of a musical prodigy who, he says, is Hautboy. If the latter assertion is a lie, why does Standard abandon the chance to contradict Helmstone during their initial discussion of Hautboy's character? The answer may be found in

Standard's own comments. In answer to Helmstone's question as to what Master Betty and Hautboy have in common, Standard says, "'Oh, nothing in the least. I don't imagine that they ever saw each other. Besides, Master Betty must be dead and buried long ere this'" (p. 238). Standard may, in other words, realize that he does not know enough about Master Betty, even whether he is alive or dead, to tell a convincing lie. If we can assume that the events recorded in "The Fiddler" were set in the early 1850's, then Master Betty, or more properly William Henry West Betty (1791-1874), was indeed alive at the time. But Standard is correct in deducing, if indeed the allusion to Master Betty is an aborted lie, that William Betty, who was fifty-nine in 1850, was several years older than Hautboy appears to have been; for Helmstone estimates Hautboy's age as "forty or more" (p. 220).

What appears to be a nonsensical allusion, then, may be a clue to the reader that Standard is plotting a deception that is designed to humble his egotistical friend. Helmstone says that the effect of Standard's alluding to Master Betty is "to puzzle me only the more" (p. 237). Helmstone views the allusion as part of Standard's "mysterious reserve," a reserve that Helmstone thinks is an indication that Standard is withholding some information about Hautboy--"the master-key of our theme" (p. 237). A more probable reason for Standard's reserve is contempt for Helmstone's conceited opinions. Nevertheless, Helmstone is

perfectly primed by his misinterpretation of that reserve to demand to know later in the evening the actual identity of Hautboy. As if lying in wait to spring upon his victim, Standard replies "with sudden ardor" that Hautboy is "an extraordinary genius": Standard uses the term in Helmstone's sense, a sense he had earlier disdained. He then tells a story of a genius, who, famous in his youth, is not only content but "hilarious," without it. Standard is citing an example in Hautboy, then, that contradicts all of Helmstone's earlier generalizations about the impossibility of men of "sublime endowments" being possessed of cheerfulness and good sense. Surely Standard's victory is even greater than he had expected, for Helmstone not only believes immediately Standard's version of Hautboy's identity but he gives up his poetry in order to become a musician-disciple of Hautboy.

Helmstone, then, becomes the gullible dupe familiar in humorous American tales. In its examples of how language can be manipulated for perverse purposes and how naivete can be victimized, "The Fiddler" adumbrates what Melville does on a more complex scale in The Confidence-Man.

NOTES

¹Col. G. F. Young, The Medici (New York: The Modern Library, 1933), p. 212. It is interesting to note also that Lorenzo the Magnificent, like Jimmy, is associated with roses. The poem by Luigi Pulci, La Giostra de Lorenzo de Medici, recounts in great detail Lorenzo's tournament held February 7, 1469. As a supporter of the Yorkists in the English War of the Roses, Lorenzo wore a silk scarf embroidered with fresh and withered roses with the motto Le Temps Revient picked out in pearls. An additional identification of roses with Lorenzo is due to his most famous song in which he bids, "Pluck the rose, therefore, maiden, while 'tis May." These associations of Lorenzo and roses suggest that perhaps he rather than Cosimo may be the fitter type of Jimmy Rose, thus suggesting that Rose may be culpable for his bankruptcy and the consequent losses of those to whom he was in debt. See Hugh Ross Williamson, Lorenzo the Magnificent (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1974), pp. 86-88, 104.

²A. Chalmers, ed., V (New York: R. Worthington, 1881), 163. David Hume's conversion theory suggests that the pleasure derived from the talents that go into an artistic expression (eloquence, genius, judgment, e.g.) overpowers and converts the pain of the tragic experience into pleasure.

³Melville is not deprecating the value of art but insisting that the distinction between art and life be maintained. Robert T. Eberwein explores the theme as Melville expressed it in Billy Budd. See "The Impure Fiction of Billy Budd," SNNTS, 6 (Fall 1974), 318-26.

⁴The Letters of Herman Melville, ed. Merrell R. Davis and William H. Gilman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), p. 129.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Disregarding the possibility that the narrator's judgments may be unreliable, critics have in the past centered their attention on Hautboy, whom the narrator idealizes. Only recently has R. K. Gupta argued that Hautboy "is not to be regarded as an image of Melville's mature and ideal man." Gupta's argument is based on the fact that the juvenility that characterizes Hautboy is not

a complimentary description elsewhere in the Melville canon and on the similarities which Gupta finds between Hautboy and Plotinus Plinlimmon. See "Hautboy and Plinlimmon: A Reinterpretation of Melville's 'The Fiddler'," AL, 43 (1971), 437-42.

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