MELVILLE'S SPIRITUAL ISOLATION: THE LOSS

OF THE ELIZABETHAN

WORLD-PICTURE

BY

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PREFACE

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"Existentialism" is a term so freqeuntly used and so widely applied

that the ideas composing the philosophy have become difficult to

systematize. It is possible to find "existential" ideas in countless

modern writers, and it becomes almost impossible to distinguish

existentialists from non-existentialists. The philosophy defies

concise definition: like nineteenth-century Transcendentalism, there

seem to be as many varieties of the doctrine as there are spokesmen.

Perhaps a successful description of the movement is achieved in the

listing of existential themes by G. E. Bigelow. The following are the

themes he finds most commonly expressed in "existential" writers,

whether avowed existentialists or not: (1) "existence precedes

essence"; (2) reason is impotent to deal with the depths of human life;

(3) man is alienated from the universe; (4) man is cursed with a "fear

and trembling anxiety"; (5) man faces only nothingness; (6) man's only

hope for authentic existence is to utilize his freedom.[1]

    Of Bigelow's themes--which seem to apply more to the atheistic than

to the Christian existentialist--I have singled out primarily the

third, man's estrangement, for examination in this paper; this seems

a very basic part of the existential attitude. The existentialists'

idea of man's alienation is a part of the cultural inheritance of the

twentieth century: four centuries of scientific progress and scientism,

in large measure, have made this idea a part of the intellectual frame-

work of the age. And the concept of man's isolation has, no doubt,

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contributed to the formation of other existential ideas. This type of
existentialist-- without the belief in God-- views man as isolated from
visible nature as well as the rest of the universe. I suggest that this
theme is clearly expressed in the work of a nineteenth-century writer
who has been largely overlooked in this connection: Herman Melville
speaks in no uncertain terms of man's aloneness in the universe. He
cries out bitterly against the "malevolent" universe that victimizes
man-- a universe empty of spiritual reality, a universe with no sympathy
for man.

It will be the purpose of this paper, therefore, to treat the idea
of man's alienation as expressed by Melville. I believe his position
can best be defined by reference, first, to the well-ordered world-
picture of Elizabethan times (using primarily George Herbert's "Man")
and, second, to the changes in that old view which by Melville's time
had created a far less stable and meaningful world. I will attempt to
demonstrate that Melville's complete break with the old world-view
really constitutes his existential estrangement.

Perhaps the most striking contrast between the Elizabethan world
and that of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is the all-encompass-
ing Elizabethan dedication to unity. This habit of the Elizabethan
mind is difficult to understand from a viewpoint inside the intellectual
framework of the twentieth century; no such unity exists in our world.
Modern habits of thought, beginning perhaps in the eighteenth century,
have led to "pigeon-holing" different subjects, different aspects of
existence. Walls have been erected which have permanently divided the
twentieth-century world. Distinctions have been made, according to
Basil Willey, which have shut off "poetry from science, metaphor from
fact, fancy from judgment."[2] Modern man is usually trapped within one

of these areas; there is no relation between them, no unifying truth.

But in the seventeenth-century mind, Willey continues, "Many different

worlds or countries of the mind...lay close together--the world of

scholastic learning, the world of scientific experiemnt, the worlds of

classical mythology and of Biblical history, of fable and of fact, of

theology, and of demonology, of sacred and profane love...." And there

was no sharp division between these worlds: all were linked together

in complete harmony. The parts of the Elizabethan world functioned

together as harmoniously as did the Ptolemaic spheres. A hierarchy

existed--at least for the majority of the Elizabethans--in which every

part of life had its position; every aspect had its easily recognizable

place in a unified pattern of ultimate reality. Although he precedes

the seventeenth century, Elyot in the first chapter of The Governor

is a clear exponent of this order which is vital in Elizabethan times.

> Hath not God set degrees and estates in all his glorious
> works? First in his heavenly ministers, whom he hath
> constituted in divers degrees called hierarchies. Behold
> the four elements whereof the body of man is compact, how
> they be set in their places called spheres, higher or lower
> according to the sovereignty of their natures. Behold also
> the order that God hath put generally in all his creatures,
> beginning at the most inferior or base and ascending upward.
> He made not only herbs to garnish the earth but also trees
> of a more eminent stature than herbs. Semblably in birds and
> fishes some be good for the sustenance of man, some bear things
> profitable to sundry uses, other be apt to occupation and labour.
> Every kind of trees herbs birds beasts and fishes have a
> peculiar disposition appropered unto them by God their creator;
> so that in everything is order, and without order may be nothing
> stable or permanent. And it may not be called order except it
> do contain in it degrees, high and base, according to the merit
> or estimation of the thing that is ordered.[3]

That which made this remarkable homogeneity of the Elizabethan

world possible was very obviously its God. The Elizabethan world, as

E. M. W. Tillyard points out, was still solidly theocentric.[4] Such a

well-ordered world would not have been possible without an exceedingly

powerful central image to link the disparate elements of creation

together, and the seventeenth century found that image in God. God

acted as the center of the Elizabethan wheel; all revolved around him

and drew essence and meaning from him. Or, to change the metaphor, God

was the zenith of existence and all else was in an appropriate spot on

the hierarchy below him. Obviously, such a strong point of reference

gave this world-view a coherence that would be difficult to imagine

today. Nothing in the universe was foreign or senseless--simply

because it was linked to God in a fixed system of hierarchies. This

is not to imply that there was accord on all matters in the seventeenth

century; such was not the case. As will be discussed in greater detail

below, even in this age men such as Bacon, Locke, and Descartes were

thinking and writing things that would have a great part in transform-

ing this old world-view. Their ideas helped form a new world, a world

based on Cartesian skepticism, Lockean psychology, Newtonian sciences--

a world foreign to the Elizabethans. Although these men had revolution-

ary thoughts, however, almost without exception they retained their hold

on a theocentric, orderly universe. With very few exceptions, the

thinkers and writers of the seventeenth century, whatever their philo-

sophical views, saw truth of some order in the Christian doctrine and

the Bible.

Of course, the seventeenth century was not unique in its demand

for unity; it inherited what was already in the Middle Ages a highly

ordered view of the world. The complex system of hierarchies had been

fully worked out long before Elizabethan times. But literary evidences

of the system, according to S. L. Bethell, were brought to the fore-

ground by the "restless intellection" of the seventeenth century.[6] This
age gave eloquent expression to a large number of inherited ideas, ideas
that were a basic part of the intellectual framework already established.
Such elements as Aristotelianism, Platonism, Neo-Platonism, Stoicism,
and Christianity formed a pattern of commonplace ideas and assumptions
that were beyond disputation. Two of the fundamental assumptions, or
ideas taken for granted by the Elizabethans, are listed by Theodore
Spencer: (1)"Man is not something by himself; he is 'a part of the
order of things'"; and (2)"He must understand the universal _order_
of which he is so essential a part, and which makes the structure of
the world, of living beings, and of society, a single unity created by
the hand of God. For order is behind everything."[7] Not only is all
of creation a harmonious unity, but man is a vital part of that unity.
Obviously, as will be discussed later in this paper, such a system gave
man great comfort and assurance. Man need never worry about himself or
any part of his world; it was all a part of the perfect order created
and overseen by God.

George Herbert, I believe, provides an unusually direct and clear
picture of the theocentrically ordered Elizabethan world. Bethell rates
him above Donne in this respect. Donne, of course, is more far-ranging;
he incorporates more of the world into his poetry. But Bethell finds
Herbert more direct, more representative of the old view.[8] Herbert is
not to be viewed as simple or lacking education and sophistication, but
as a more narrowly religious poet he is less troubled than Donne by the
"new astronomy" that "called all in doubt." Donne's religious faith
is not destroyed by the new science, but he is more sensitive to
science's implications than is Herbert, who restricts himself to
religious verse -- using primarily the Bible, liturgy, etc. Herbert

gives expression to the conventional theocentric world-view of the age, to the commonplace ideas of his world. "It is to Herbert's writings and life," comments Douglas Bush, "that we owe much of our picture of the order, strength, and beauty of seventeenth-century Anglicanism at its best."[9] In short, Herbert is a suitable spokesman for that majority in the seventeenth century which retains a divine order at the center of the universe. Of course, Herbert's view is not one if utter contentment and peace: Herbert is not without doubt. He suffered very greatly in his choice of the priesthood. His anxiety, in fact, is very strongly express-ed in much of his poetry--"The Collar," "The Pulley," "Affliction (1), "for example. Yet, from this suffering, Bush points out, came comprehen-sion and fulfillment; out of this suffering came even stronger conviction.[10] The reason for Herbert's final stability is extremely important: his struggle was with "Beauty," "Glory," "quick Wit and Conversation"; all problems that did have a possible solution--his struggle was not with faith in God, the benevolence of the universe, the nature of truth; all problems that would plague men of later generations and would allow no final answers.

Of Herbert's poetry, one of the more direct and artistic expressions of the Elizabethan world-picture is the work entitled "Man" which is quoted below.

My God, I heard this day
That none doth build a stately habitation
But he that means to dwell therein.
What house more stately hath there been,
Or can be, than is man, to whose creation
All things are in decay?

For man is everything,
And more: he is a tree, yet bears more fruit;
A beast, yet is, or should be, more;
Reason and speech we only bring;
Parrots may thank us if they are not mute,
They go upon the score.

Man is all symmetry,
Full of proportions, one limb to another,
And all to all the world besides。
Each part may call the farthest brother,
For head with foot hath private amity,
And both with moons and tides。

Nothing hath got so far
But man hath caught and kept it as his prey:
His eyes dismount the highest star;
He is in little all the sphere;
Herbs gladly cure our flesh, because that they
Find their acquaintance there。

For us the winds do blow,
The earth doth rest, heav'n move, and fountains flow。
Nothing we see but means our good,
As our delight, or as our treasure;
The whole is either our cupboard of food,
Or cabinet of pleasure。

The stars have us to bed;
Night draws the curtain, which the sun withdraws;
Music and light attend our head;
All things unto our flesh are kind
In their descent and being, to our mind
In their ascent and cause。

Each thing is full of duty:
Waters united are our navigation;
Distinguished, our habitation;
Below, our drink; above, our meat;
Both are our cleanliness。 Hath one such beauty?
Than how are all things neat!

More servants wait on man
Than he'll take notice of; in every path
He treads down that which doth befriend him
When sickness makes him pale and wan。
Oh, mighty love! Man is one world and hath
Another to attend him。

Since then, my God, Thou hast
So brave a palace built, O dwell in it,
That it may dwell with Thee at last!
Till then afford us so much wit
That as the world serves us we may serve Thee,
And both Thy servants be。[11]

Quite obviously, the poem's central concern is the status of man

in the Elizabethan world-picture。 And the judgment is a solid affirm-

ation of man's preeminence: the question which provides the structure

for the poem is simply, "What house more stately /than man/ hath there
been...?" The poem is primarily a listing of evidences to support this
idea, and the conclusion is a plea that, since man is "So brave a
palace," God would dwell in him so that he might eventually dwell with
God (in heaven). A serious work could hardly be more optimistic about
the nature and destiny of man. In order to fully understand this highly
enthusiastic exaltation of man, I believe it will be necessary to
examine in some detail the standard seventeenth century concept upon
which this poem is based. The following paragraphs will be devoted to
this matter.

The underlying image which Herbert utilizes in this poem in
expressing his judgment on man is perhaps the most comprehensive of his
age. In addition, that image, the "chain of being," was in many ways
responsible for creating the optimistic picture of man. As men in the
Middle ages sought unity for the vast plenitude of God's creation, for
the order they saw evidenced throughout the universe, the metaphor of
the chain of being was formulated from an idea that began with Plato's
Timaeus and was developed by Aristotle and the Neo-Platonists.[12] But,
as the idea was superimposed on the universe, it developed into more
than a metaphor; it became a concrete fact, a reality. It became a
vast chain, stretching from God at the top to the lowest speck of
creation at the bottom. The essential principles of the concept of the
chain were termed "plenitude" and "continuity." The first of these,
explains A. O. Lovejoy, "presupposed that, not only for the existence
of this world, but for every one of its characteristics, for every kind
of beings which it contains-- in strictness, indeed, for each particu-
lar being-- there must be an ultimate reason"; and continuity assumes

"there are no sudden 'leaps' in nature; infinitely various as things
are, they form an absolutely smooth sequence, in which no break appears,
to baffle the craving of our reason for continuity everywhere."[13] A
perfect and ultimate unity was thus formed from the almost infinite
diversity of the universe. Man's compelling desire for unity was
satisfied by one simple, easily grasped scheme, a scheme rendered
indisputable by the evidence available at every hand. Two necessary
implications of this scheme are apparent, says Tillyard: "First it
made vivid the idea of a related universe where no part was superfluous;
/and, consequently/ it enhanced the dignity of all creation, even of
the meanest part of it."[14] Man--of course--profited most of all by
this system; his position on the scale made him creation's darling.
The system was conceived as a means of order and as a means of exalting
and praising God. However, the principal effect of the chain was to
exalt man: it was man who occupied the "key" position in the chain,
and he bacame far-and-away the most interesting and talked-about
component.

The chain was visualized as a vertical gradation during the
centuries up to and including the seventeenth. The gradation included
all creation, dividing the scale into classes of related creatures or
objects. At the base of the scale lay the inanimate class, according
to Bethell's description. Here, as in higher classes as well, there
was a great complexity of levels of "virtue." Bethell quotes from the
Natural Theology of Raymond de Sebonde: "There is a vast difference of
virtue; water is nobler than earth, the ruby than the topaz, gold than
brass."[15] And at the top of this ranking inside each class stood a
primate, the most excellent being in that class. The second class of
beings was termed "vegetative," the plant group. Each class possessed

a peculiar set of faculties: the vegetative class boasted existence and life and was thought to possess a profound ability to grow. Thus, when Donne speaks of his mistress's affections as having vegetable qualities, he is on firm ground. A third class, the "sensitive" group, possessed existence, life, and feeling. It was graded according to the number of faculties possessed. Next, in the central slot in the scale, came man, who had all of the faculties of creatures below him as well as a part of those of the orders above him, the angels and God.[16] Man, the "middle link," was in Lovejoy's terms a "point of transition from the merely sentient to the intellectual forms of being."[17] He was blessed with a rational soul, a will, and the power of reason. It should be pointed out, however, that man's reason was limited in that it was merely discursive. And the angels, the order above man, surpassed his discursive reason with the power to reason intuitively, the power to perceive without the aid of senses. Finally, at the top of the scale came God, who possessed all faculties actively rather than merely potentially. The creatures above man were thought to correspond precisely in number to those below him, so a delicate balance was maintained-- and man was the fulcrum; he was the point of balance.

Man, as Pope points out in the Essay on Man, was the uniquely necessary link in this chain of being. The order of the universe depended on him, for he had the job of binding together all creation. The greatest cosmic chasm was that between matter and spirit, and, as Tillyard points out, man was the bridge across that gulf. He continues, "During the whole period when the notion of the chain of being was prevalent, from the Pythagorean philosophy to Pope, it was man's key position in creation-- a kind of Clapham Junction where all the tracks converge and cross-- that so greatly exercised the human

imagination."[18] Pico della Mirandola's <u>Oration</u> <u>on</u> <u>the</u> <u>Dignity</u> <u>of</u> <u>Man</u>
is an apt statement of this attitude toward man as it existed at its
strongest from the fifteenth through the nineteenth century.[19] To
Pico, man's position was extremely crucial because he could use his
power of reason to choose between the angelic life of the intellect and
the animal life of the senses: he had the power to choose between
heaven or hell. It was his responsibility to understand and help
maintain the splendid universal order he found in the world. In short,
the marvelous scheme of these centuries raised man higher than ever
before or ever since; it gave man the means to live a life of uncommon
intensity and drama, and he did just that. At least once since the
Fall man had been lifted to a cosmic setting.

As stated earlier, "Man" begins with the statement that man is
a "stately habitation," that there have been none more stately.
Herbert uses the Biblical house metaphor for man: he is a fit dwell-
ing for God. And, as stated, it is the chain of being which provides
more than sufficient foundation for this statement. Almost every
image, every evidence, for Herbert's argument draws upon some assoc-
iation of the chain of being. The chain provides the central metaphor
for the poem; all other images are drawn from this --it is a point of
reference for Herbert, a part of his world-picture that is proof-posi-
tive for his optimistic ideas about man. The dependence on the chain
is obvious even in the first stanza: the statement in lines five and
six is clearly based on that concept. All creation is below man on
the scale, Herbert implies. All possess fewer faculties than man, and
all will be insignificant, "in decay," when compared to man. The next
two stanzas continue to exalt man in essentially this same fashion.

Stanza two says that man has the faculties of the tree (vegetative class), yet he has more. He has the faculties of the beast (sensitive class), but he is more than a beast. Only man has the faculties of reason and speech. If parrots have learned to speak, man has been the teacher. Stanza three rejoices in the perfection of man's form: "Man is all symmetry." Each member is in perfect harmony with all others. The hand and foot function together as brothers, as part of the order that man sees everywhere else in his world -- like the harmonious cooperation of "moons and tides." No less perfection of form would be appropriate for that being who was shaped in God's image and is God's very temple.

In the latter part of stanza three Herbert alludes to a significant assumption of the chain concept which has not as yet been mentioned. He says not only that man is symmetrical and proportional, but this proportion corresponds to "all the world besides." The idea is given fuller expression in stanza four: "He is in little all the sphere." Herbert here is drawing on the Elizabethan commonplace that man is within himself a small image of the world. Man's position in the scale of being made the "small image" idea a necessary development. Man had the unique role of possessing all faculties and all possible states of being, so he quite naturally provided a miniature which contained parts correspondent to all of creation. In the language of the age, he was a "microcosm" which corresponded to the "macrocosm," the universe. Spencer gives the excellent description of the microcosm concept which follows. This idea, he says,

> became a medieval platitude, and as we look back on
> the sixteenth century it seems the most universal
> and most revealing symbol for the whole concept of
> Nature's order and unity, and for the glorification of

man's place in the universal scheme.

He continues,

> The whole universe, which was made for man, found in man
> its reflection and its epitome; man was the center of the
> ideal picture which optimistic theory delighted to portray.
> Nature's order was shown in the elements, in the stars, in
> the hierarchy of souls, in the ranks of society. Everything
> in the world was part of the same unified scheme, and the
> body and soul of man, each a reflection of the other, and
> both an image of the universal plan, were the culmination and
> the final end of God's design.[20]

This microcosm-macrocosm concept can perhaps be best examined in

relation to the seventeenth century system of correspondences. As

stated, the chain was a continuous vertical structure composed of

countless distinctive links. But the medieval search for unity had

not been content with this; a system of horizontal planes had been

formulated in which each plane held one or more of the classes of the

scale of being. The planes, arranged one below another in the order

of dignity, provided countless evidences of universal order and design

through their immense numbers of correspondences.[21] Here was endless

opportunity for expounding on the unity which was proved, first, by a

being's location on the chain, and, secondly, by its correspondences

with other beings on other planes. These planes of correspondence

were the divine and angelic, the universe or macrocosm, the common-

wealth or body politic, man or the microcosm, and the lower creation.[22]

Thus, man was one plane and all of creation was another, and these two

provided the most common grounds of the age for comparison. It was

an unfailing resolution of the Elizabethan mind to find comparisons

between these two and the other planes of the scheme. In fact, it was

more than a conscious resolution--the faith in comparisons, the ana-

logical habit, became a prevalent mode of thinking for the ages

influenced by the chain. The system of correspondences was both a

product of and a stimulant for this analogic habit of thinking, a
method of reasoning that had the authority of law. For a theocentric,
authoritarian society such as theirs, this was a comfortable mode of
thought. And with their devotion of ceremony and ritual, Tillyard
says, "they found the formality of these correspondences very
congenial."[23] A number of critics have suggested that metaphysical
poetry is an offspring of the habit of free-ranging analogy. Bethell
accepts this theory for Donne's metaphysical conceits, which he sees
as the analogical habit applied to the two cosmologies with which
Donne was concerned, the old and the new.[24]

Returning to the text of "Man," it is clear that Herbert is
representative of the seventeenth-century dependence on analogy.
Stanza four, as already pointed out, contains his explicit reference
to the microcosm-macrocosm correspondences: "He is in little all the
sphere." The poet then continues the correspondence--herbs gladly
cure men's flesh because they find their "familiar" there; they find
in man a part of themselves (the vegetable soul). George Williamson's
analysis in Six Metaphysical Poets divides "Man" according to Herbert's
introduction of the microcosm at this point. In the first three verses,
man's splendor is described rather generally in terms of the chain, but
in four the microcosm is presented in its fullness; the chain reference
is more specific.[25]

From the fifth through the next-to-the-last stanza, Herbert ex-
plains man's reward for serving as the key link in the chain and as
the microcosm of all creation. Speaking for his age, the poet has no
doubt whatever that the world was made solely for man. The winds blow
for man, he says; the earth stands still and the heavens move for man.

Herbert is speaking here, of course, of the older astronomy, the
Ptolemaic system of a fixed earth and moving heavenly spheres. He does
not seem to have been greatly bothered by the threats of the new science,
for we find none of the troubled references to science in his verses
that are so plentiful in Donne. Lines 27-30 continue with the assertion
that all is for the good of man; that all is either delight, treasure,
food or pleasure for man. Six continues this thought still further--
the stars, night, sun, music, and light all have their well-defined
services to render to man. In lines 34-36 the poet refers to the
microcosm in direct terms: "All things unto our flesh are kind/ In
their descent and being, to our mind/ In their ascent and cause." To
paraphrase, all things below man on the chain are akin ("kind") to his
flesh, and all above him are like him in mind and final cause.[26] In
lines 37-42 Herbert illustrates nature's subservience to man by using
the element water as an example. Water is so dutiful a servant that it
provides man with a means of travel: it separates to give him a dwelling
place; it gives food, drink, and cleanliness. The poet exclaims--if
just one element can do all this for man, how marvelous is all of
creation! The next-to-the-last stanza begins with a reprimand for man
because he has ignored his many willing servants: "More servants wait
on man than he'll take notice of." Then lines 47-48 close this portion
of the poem with an exclamation that man is one world (microcosm) and
has the world of nature (macrocosm) to serve him. The final lines of
the poem return to the statement of stanza one, that man is God's state-
ly house, his brave palace. Herbert pleads with God to live in man--
since he is this splendid temple-- and to help man live with him finally
in heaven. The last two lines are a superb summary not only of the poem
but of man's place in the Elizabethan age: "That as the world serves us

we may serve Thee,/ And both thy servants be." Man could hardly be more

happily situated. All of nature bows humbly at his feet, awaiting his

command. And he in turn serves his creator by recognizing and maintain-

ing the harmonious order and rectitude that are manifest in the universe.

The twentieth-century reader of George Herbert may find it quite

difficult to imagine the optimism that he expressed in "Man." It is

not easy to glimpse the world picture he saw which placed man high in

an "ivory tower." The problem is not in understanding Herbert, but in

realizing that almost all of his age looked at this world picture. The

Elizabethans were almost unanimous in their agreement; the world had

without a doubt been made for man and placed at his disposal. He, as

God's agent, was master of all the world. Spencer quotes La Primaudaye

as a representative of this attitude:

> When I admire...so many wonderful works under the cope of heaven
> I cannot marvel enough at the excellency of Man, for whom all
> these things were created, and are maintained and preserved in
> their being and moving, by one and the same divine providence
> always like unto itself.[27]

Even Bacon, the exponent of scientific thinking untainted by

religious thought, gives his support in favor of man:

> Man if we look to final causes, may be regarded as the centre
> of the world; insomuch that if man were taken away from the
> world, the rest would seem to be all astray, without aim or
> purpose....and leading to nothing. For the whole world works
> together in the service of man; and there is nothing from which
> he does not derive use and fruit...insomuch that all things seem
> to be going about man's business and not their own.[28]

At this point, sufficient evidence has been given to support three

general conclusions about the Elizabethan world-picture. First, as

seen in "Man," the seventeenth century looked at man quite optimisti-

cally as an exalted being, a unique and marvelous creature. Second,

man lived in a theocentric universe. The chain of being and the

ultimate unity and order of creation testified to the existence of a

creator, a creator who fondly looked upon man as the best of creation. Thirdly, man's position on the scale gave him an intimate relation with nature as well as with God: nature was his obedient slave. It was sympathetic to his every need or desire. These three concepts harmonized perfectly; they blended and interlocked in a myriad of ways to form a world-picture that must have seemed unbreakable to the Elizabethan.

But, of course, that picture did break. And in its place another world-picture was constructed which was to become equally convincing. The remainder of this paper will deal with this new world-picture, more specifically, with some of the concepts which were substituted for Elizabethan ideas. As stated previously, Herman Melville will be examined as an early representative of the "modern" view, a view which contrasts very strongly with the Elizabethan world-view. Melville is, in a sense, a nineteenth-century prophet of modern attitudes that became well established after his death and which have become a basic part of the "existential attitude" common to the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Perhaps it will be most profitable to approach Melville through a brief discussion of the changes which occurred between his time and Herbert's that helped create Melville's idea of the world. The goal of this paper is to better illuminate Melville's "existential" stance, first, by contrasting it with its predecessor, and, second, by showing its development from (or, more correctly, development away from) that predecessor. That development, that transition between the two world pictures, will, therefore, provide the subject for the following paragraphs.

Perhaps I have been guilty of oversimplifying the Elizabethan world-picture for the sake of depicting the remarkable unity it did achieve on such matters as the divine order of the universe, etc. For

there were dissenters in Herbert's day; there were men who were beginn-
ing to challenge the accepted commonplaces and defy the traditional
sources of truth. Although men such as Bacon, Descartes, Locke, Hobbes,
etc., with few exceptions, were not challenging the broader outlines of
the Elizabethan world picture, they did begin to see defects in various
aspects of its structure.[29] In most cases, they retained their faith in
God, man, divine order, beneficent nature, etc., but, at the same time,
they were discovering that many of the details of the scheme were
inconsistent. And they must for this reason be considered the revolu-
tionists of the seventeenth century. Whether they meant to or not, they
began the movement that was to destroy the old world-view. Herbert's
own friend, Francis Bacon, argued that scientific thought should not be
corrupted by combining it with religious thought.[30] In other words,
truth should be arrived at inductively; traditional analogical thought
was damaging in considering scientific truth. Descartes closely
paralleled this view with his skeptical scrutiny of the universe, with
his insistence that truth must be proved rather than accepted on
authority. The eventual effects of such ideas on the Elizabethan system
of analogical correspondences (and all religious truth) is obvious. In
addition, John Locke's epistemological theories were a significant
contribution to the revolution. And, very importantly, Newton provided
new views of the controlling forces in the universe. Such men and men
of earlier centuries as well -- Galileo, Kepler, Machiavelli--were
announcing the imminent fall of the old world-view. Whether or not
they intended to destroy the old view, they began the attack which
accomplished precisely that.

One of the first significant changes in the old world-scheme
becomes noticeable at the end of the seventeenth century and grows in

intensity through the eighteenth. Newton, in discovering scientific laws to explain the working of the cosmos, had cleared the path for a revised concept of order. The older scheme had given God complete responsibility for order; and order was conceivable primarily in terms of correspondences. However, Newton's system, as it came to be applied, removed the purposive harmony from the universe and replaced it with a mechanical system, what Willey calls "a world of quantity, a world of mathematically computable motions in mechanical regularity."[31] Willey further explains that Cartesian metaphysics was a large component of the Newtonian scheme, and that the product of the union was a system of thought so powerful that it "became the predominant world-view of modern times." One inevitable result of this mathematical picture of the universe was the lessening of God's authority. Newton's machine merely needed someone to start it. Then it ran independently. So God was reduced from the status of Master Director to Observer: he became the Watchmaker God of Deism. Simultaneously, according to M. M. Fitzgerald, Locke's theory was creating a greater respect for nature: if man did indeed learn of the universe through stimulation of the senses by nature's objects, nature must of necessity have a rather high degree of authority.[32] Nature began to be a "religion" unto itself, and, says Willey, "As 'natural religion' came more and more to seem all sufficient, 'revelation' began to appear, if not superfluous, at least secondary, and perhaps even slightly inconvenient."[33] What we have occurring, then, is a move away from the traditional, orthodox view of God toward a consequent increase in the religious role of nature -- a move that was quite general in the eighteenth century and of very great significance. By the end of the eighteenth century, such deistic ideas had in great measure dethroned God; he was rapidly becoming impotent in comparison

to his former power -- he was being pushed further and further away from the connection with creation he had enjoyed as the top link of the chain. By the end of this age, the theocentric universe was no longer the unquestioned certainty that it had once been. Bethell comments that Christianity survived the attacks of science and scientism, but "the world-view was no longer Christian; and specifically Christian attitudes become limited to the spiritual and moral life."[34] Men of the coming century would face religious decision hitherto unnecessary.

The image of God was not the only component of the old scheme that was to suffer change in the eighteenth century. For, as already seen, man's exalted position in the old scheme was very closely tied to God's: man was important as God's agent on earth, an agent who drew authority from his spiritual kinship to God. But in the new scheme God was on his way out of the universe, and man's noble rank as a spiritual being was sure to follow. Everything on earth had previously been related to the central problem of man. The new scheme, however, Bethell explains, "possessing...the austere beauty of a mathematical theorem, has no more meaning than a piece of clockwork of which we cannot guess the use."[35] Perhaps the decay of man's noble status can best be understood in relation to the chain of being, for it had given him that status. The chain had been inherited as a central idea in the eighteenth century, although revised to comply with Newtonian mechanical laws.[36] The chain served as a useful reinforcement of the new mathematical order and coherence assigned to the universe. Yet, the ideas of the chain were at heart opposed to the strict rationalism of the age, as Lovejoy points out, and they were to undergo remarkable transformations in their new role.[37] The eighteenth century tried to retain the chain of being, but

it attempted to rationalize and fully develop the old concepts; and the result was disastrous, especially for man. First of all, this age began to scrutinize man's role as 'center link' in the chain. An obvious difficulty began to present itself: if man were indeed both spirit and matter, he had a dual, unharmonious nature. He was necessarily the most unstable creature of the entire chain.[38] Secondly, the principle of continuity inherent in the chain, upon the closer examination of this age, began to bridge the gap between man and nature; man's spiritual faculties became less and less a distinction. Third, there was an increasing realization in this period that the chain allowed room for a vast number of spiritual creatures above man. If man were actually the mid-point, there must be as many links above man as below him: when carefully examined, this was not at all flattering to man. Lovejoy comments on this matter:

> Only a segment of the scale exists on this planet, and /man/ happens to be the not altogether non-rational yet on the whole very stupid creature who occupies a certain point in the series-- a little higher, indeed, than any other on the globe which he inhabits, yet incalculably below the highest.[39]

The rationalizing on this point continued to the extreme of insisting that the links of the chain above man must inhabit various planets other than the earth. Such an idea became extremely common in the eighteenth century.

A highly significant change of another type was taking place in the chain of being at this time; it has been termed the "temporalization" of the chain by Lovejoy.[40] In his very thorough treatment of the matter he describes this as "one of the principal happenings of the eighteenth century." The principles of plenitude and continuity, he explains, were primarily the cause of this transformation because they began to blend with the concept of evolution.[41] A wide-spread

inclination toward "evolution" can be seen in this period: evolution-
ary thinking long antedated scientific discoveries such as those by
Darwin that gave supporting evidence for such views. As part of this
attitude, the chain's plenitude and continuity began to be seen as a
succession rather than a "ready-made cosmical order." The plenum
formarum, the catalog of nature, came to be seen, Lovejoy says, "not
as the inventory but as the program of nature, which is being carried
out gradually and exceedingly slowly in the cosmic history."[42] Metaphor-
ically speaking, the chain was being transformed from the old vertical
scale on which each creature was a separate and distinct gradation to a
horizontal scale on which members of creation were involved in a
progressive move up to higher levels of being.

As would be expected, this temporalization of the chain also had
its effects on the place of God in the universe. Again I quote Lovejoy's
full explanation of the matter.

> When the chain of being...came to be explicitly conceived,
> no longer as complete once for all and everlastingly the same
> in the kinds of its components, but as gradually evolving
> from a less to a greater degree of fullness and excellence,
> the question inevitably arose whether a God eternally complete
> and immutable could be supposed to be manifested in such a
> universe.[43]

God's traditional existence as a separate, transcendent Being was being
gravely threatened by this development of the intellectual framework.
And by the end of the century, the inevitable happened: God himself was
temporalized. God himself became synonymous with the progressive
movement of nature upward toward a point of perfection.[44] The chain
of being, then, had been converted to a becoming, a process, and God
was a part of that process; or more correctly, he was that process.
With the completion of this transformation of the chain, a type of God

new to Christian world had been produced. The God of the old scheme
had been, in Lovejoy's terms, an "other-worldly God," separate, distinct
from the world. The God of the new evolutionary scale, however, was
"this-worldly": a combination with natural creation. Again, as we have
already observed in the case of Deism, the conception of God is being
weakened -- much to the benefit of nature. God, in becoming "this-
worldly," was being fused with nature and losing his identity in doing
so.

At this point, a number of changes have been examined which occurr-
ed in the century following Herbert. Those discussed were, I believe,
among the major forces in reshaping the Elizabethan world-view into a
scientifically mechanistic scheme. Perhaps the most significant result
of this change in world schemes is that discussed just above: the
weakening of the traditional Christian conception of God. The
significance is obvious -- as God faded away, man as a semi-spiritual
being found himself more and more isolated in his universe. And one of
the hardest things for man to bear is spiritual isolation. Man must
have some hold on life, some connection with What Is to give his life
meaning. God had for centuries provided an intimate relation with
Being. With the removal of God from the universe (comparatively
speaking) in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, man
found himself very much in need of a substitute, some replacement for
the lost sense of relation and association. That substitute, quite
clearly, was the concept of nature which, as mentioned, had been gain-
ing preeminence under the new evolutionary scheme. "With the waning of
religious faith," states J. W. Beach, "/man/ grasps at nature--at the
great benevolent order of things in which every individual is provided
for in the harmonious plan of the whole; which speaks to him through

every lovely and sublime object...."[45] For the literary mind at least,

explains Beach, the romantic concept of nature did amount to a type of

substitute, one which provided a "moral and intelligible universe."

"Nature" became synonymous with moral teacher, teacher of order, etc.,

and it was still conceived as benevolent to man, as sympathetic to his

desires and wishes. The affinities of these romantic views to the

temporalized chain of being are conspicuous. It would be correct, I

think, to view Romanticism as a development, a revision, of the chain

of being. Though some of the Romantics, Coleridge, for instance,

rejected evolutionary ideas -- though many of these writers were deeply

religious, a very basic part of their poetic world was the chain as it

had been altered by deistic and evolutionary influence. But, be that

as it may, the literary mind of the Romantic period turned to nature

in many instances as a means of ordering the universe, as a substitute

for the old order. Nature, however, was to serve a limited appointment

as substitute: it was in a broader sense a transition to the scientific

positivism characteristic of the twentieth century. Beach explains

this matter as follows:

> The human mind cannot suddenly pass with ease and comfort from
> any form of faith to agnosticism or unbelief. It instinctively
> provides itself with means for easing off the emotional strain
> of such a transition. It provides philosophical bridges from
> faith to unfaith. And such a bridge was the romantic cult of
> nature, considered in the large. It made possible the passage
> without too great emotional strain from medieval Christian
> faith to the scientific positivism which came to dominate
> cultivated minds today.[46]

Very importantly, scientific positivism was to triumph in the end.

Scientific positivism was the scheme that finally replaced the

Elizabethan world-view; Romanticism was only a transition. Romanticism

was an attempt to keep moral order in a world which was moving rapidly

toward a coldly mechanistic science.

Wordsworth is an excellent example of the Romantic's substitution of nature for the old order. As Willey explains, Wordsworth was one of the first great poets to be left without a ready-made order; he faced the task of producing poetry with no established "mythology."[47] His choice was to create a poetic system, as later poets were to do, or to communicate directly with the visible universe. He chose to do the latter; communication with nature became the basis of his poetry and, at the same time, his defense against the loneliness of the scientific world. For him, nature still possessed the world soul of the temporalized chain of being. As Beach explains, he avoided materialism in his turning to nature by finding this spirit or active principle in natural creation. In fact, Beach sums up Wordsworth's romanticism as a fusing of the active-principle or spirit and the benevolent, unified nature of the chain of being.[48]

Ralph Waldo Emerson occupies a position very close to Wordsworth in matters relevant to this paper, but he should be mentioned briefly for at least one reason. Through coincidence, Emerson provides an excellent distinction between the old world-scheme and that of the new as seen by the Romantic of the nineteenth century. Near the end of his first book, Nature, Emerson quotes five stanzas from Herbert's "Man." The significance of this is that these five carefully omit references to the Christian God whom Herbert addressed. Herbert uses his poem to rejoice in that -- through God's kindness -- all nature serves man. Emerson, on the other hand, removes the "other-worldly" God from the poem and finds his comfort in the benevolent service of nature which Herbert describes. He is able to find assurance in the moral order in nature without the aid of the traditional God; just a few pages

before he quotes "Man" he states that, "It has already been illustrated,
that every natural process is a version of a moral sentence. The moral
law lies at the centre of nature and radiates to the circumference."[49]
His strongly developed concept of the world-spirit ("natural process")
is able to serve as substitute for Herbert's God.

For those like Emerson who -- with the help of an "Over-Soul," etc.
--maintained the old scheme's benevolent nature in spite of the chang-
ing world-view, optimism about man and his place in the universe was
still possible. But for some in Emerson's time, those who were, in a
sense, more seriously affected by the new science, nothing but
scepticism remained -- scepticism which, Geoffrey Stone points out, was
"the result of the loss of a world-picture comfortable and familiar."[50]
Herman Melville is such a figure: he faced the nineteenth-century
universe with a thorough pessimism about man, truth, nature. And I
suggest that his position is largely because of his loss of the old
world-picture; he -- far more than even Wordsworth (who retained an
orderly Nature) -- confronts a world devoid of unity, order, and
beneficence. He found himself alone in a universe which offered no
apparent reason or purpose, no unifying scheme to give man a tangible
relation to his universe. That harmony which did exist in the universe
for Melville seemed evil, sinister -- conspiring against helpless man.
As stated in the introduction of this paper, Melville faced an
"existential" universe, one devoid of meaning for man. He found him-
self estranged from God, nature -- from everything which offered meaning-
ful relationship. He was alone in the universe, separated from it; and
his work was greatly influenced by that separation: indeed, it provides
an underlying theme for many of his books and stories. And his
separation is significant in a broader sense: it was far more prothetic

than was Romanticism of the new world-view of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries; and it was an early representative of the literary and philosophical existentialism which was to become an important component of the new world-picture.

Perhaps it should be emphasized, however, that existentialism was to be only one component of the new world-view: Melville's alienation was prophetic of an existential attitude that formed only one part of the modern world. There were to be a number of other components of equal or even greater importance in forming the intellectual framework of the latter nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and it would be incorrect to exaggerate falsely the significance of existentialism. John Macquarrie in Twentieth-Century Religious Thought presents five philosophies which he finds significant in contemporary thought: these, he declares, can be classified as either metaphysical or anti-metaphysical systems.[51] The metaphysical includes "New Realism" and neo-Thomism, both of which he finds to be of major consequence. New Realism, he explains, was short-lived in England where it began, but it has remained strong in America, largely through the influence of A. N. Whitehead. Neo-Thomism, closely allied to Roman Catholic theology, has become one of the major intellectual forces of our time, according to Macquarrie. It boasts such first-class thinkers as Jacques Maritain, F.C. Copleston, and E. Gilson. The anti-metaphysical philosophies include logical empiricism, kerygmatic theology, and existentialism. The first, earlier called "logical positivism," is a developemnt of the New Realism; it inherits the analytical tendencies of the thought of G. E. Moore and A. W. Russell. Kerygmatic theology, associated closely with the name of Karl Barth, "has been the most

influential movement in the Protestant theology of the present century,"
according to Macquarrie. It relates in one respect to Catholic neo-
Thomism, he continues, "for in the face of the conflicts of modern
philosophies, both have withdrawn to the security of a classic Christian
tradition."[52] The third system in this category, existentialism, is the
descendent of earlier philosophies of personal being. It contains
elements of Dilthey's historicism, Husserl's phenomenology, and the
"philosophies of life and action." From this extremely brief discussion
of Macquarrie's analysis it should at least be obvious that existential-
ism takes its place beside other notable intellectual movements in the
twentieth century. Very importantly, however, Macquarrie does give
existentialism one major distinction: he finds it to be the "most
typical product of the century."

Melville obviously makes a very important move away from the old
world-view toward spiritual isolation when he dismisses Herbert's
God (and even the God of Deism): the traditional authoritarian God
has been removed. As will be discussed below in greater detail,
Melville does not only remove Herbert's God, he declares that any
existent God must be an evil one. Indeed, Moby Dick, Billy Budd,
Pierre, Mardi, and others to lesser degrees contain numerous veiled
and direct attacks on the Deity. However, at this point it should be
emphasized that Melville was, to say the least, concerned about
spiritual existence. Hawthorne described him as always willing to
discourse on "Providence" and "futurity" and "everything that lies
beyond human ken." Hawthorne continues, "If he were a religious man,
he would be one of the most truly religious and reverential; he has a
very high and noble nature, and better worth immortality than most of

us."[53] But, like St. Emmanuel in Unamuno's story, Melville was unable

to believe that which he most wanted to believe. Melville insisted

above all else on rational, concrete proof of any ideal system which

attempted to explain the universe; even more, he wanted to know truth

by his own experience. In addition, he had been alienated from religion,

or at least organized religion, by its defense of what he considered

obvious fallacy. Such thinking carried Melville to the inevitable

result: what Tyrus Hillway describes as "tentative agnosticism."[54] In

Hawthorne's passage referred to above, Melville is described as inform-

ing Hawthorne that

> he had 'pretty much made up his mind to be annihilated'; and,
> I think, will never rest until he gets hold of a definite
> belief. It is strange how he persists--and has persisted
> ever since I knew him--in wandering to-and-fro over these
> deserts, as dismal and monotonous as the sand hills amid which
> we were sitting. He can neither believe nor be comfortable in
> his unbelief....

In stating that he had "made up his mind to be annihilated," Melville

meant of course that he had reached the decision that there was no life

after death. However much he may have wanted traditional religious

belief, he could not convince himself that it was valid and he could

not finally accept it. He was simply not able to find sufficient

logical foundation to support that religious belief which had been of

such comfort to the men of Herbert's world.

Yet that which moves Melville into total spiritual isolation is

more than just his rejection of the traditional God; it is his rejection

of any substitute system which attempts to establish order. As has

been observed, the Romantics retained a benevolent, orderly nature as a

substitute for the traditional God. This afforded a useful aid in giv-

ing meaning to man's world. But, as Hillway points out, Melville's

personal experience had shown him far too much of the brutality of

nature (and of man); he was unable to accept the optimistic assumption that all worked for the benefit of man, that there was an inherent beneficence in nature and God.[55] It seems reasonable to assume that Melville's experiences at sea were very influential in shaping his ideas about the intent and design of nature. A second substitute system which would have been available to Melville was naturalistic science. Nineteenth-century naturalistic science was emerging, in Hillway's terms, "as the single most influential factor in civilized human life."[56] And this influence on Melville can not be overestimated: more than most of the literary men of his day, he read scientific works and prepared himself for his decision about the universe.[57] (Ishmael's geological discussion as he recounts the whale's ancient ancestry provides excellent proof of Melville's scientific competence; and his attitude is one of extreme fondness for modern science). Melville could see the eventual conquest of scientific realism over both romanticism and anti-scientific religion. As Hillway explains, he did not, like Evert Duyckinck, attempt to ignore science, or, like Hawthorne, to pass over it as of minor importance: he had the intellectual integrity to see that science would be the final victor in the new world-scheme.[58] But unlike Morgoth in Clarel, Melville does not seize upon this coldly efficient scientific system. Melville admired science for its precise analysis, but he avoided it as an answer, a system, for fear that it would lead to a false religion--just as orthodox religion had done for him. In rejecting science, he rejected the final "organized" system available to give order and meaning to his universe. Like Henry Adams, he tried all possibilities and found all lacking: he found no means of relation to his universe. No final answer seemed acceptable--he offered only a strong 'No' to any organized system or ready-made solution.

Evidence of Melville's existential isolation is only to a very small degree biographical; by far the greater evidence is contained in his writing. As stated above, his attitude finds strong expression in many of his works. Melville is quite notable, in fact, for the degree to which he adapts fiction to the expression of personal views--sometimes through the use of allegory, sometimes through a vague biographical parallel such as he used in _Pierre_. The remainder of this paper, therefore, will deal with Melville's spiritual isolation from his universe as expressed in a number of his works, primarily _Moby Dick_, _Pierre_, and _Mardi_, in that order.

Moby Dick provides an obvious beginning point for this examination not merely because it is Melville's masterpiece, but because it serves as the "gospel" of his spiritual isolation; it is his deepest and most intense look at the problems which plagued him throughout his life. Those probelms are well summed up by Ishmael, who very often speaks for Melville as well as for himself: "With the problem of the universe revolving in me, how could I...but lightly hold by obligations...."[59] This was Melville's problem, "the problem of the universe," and it was the same problem Nietzsche encountered. "The general character of the world," said Neitzsche, "is to all eternity chaos: not by the absence of necessity, but in the sense of the absence of order, structure, form, beauty, wisdom, and whatever else aesthetic humanities are called."[60] That same chaos was to Melville the central characteristic of the universe. Nature, "God's great unflattering laureate," is to him some-thing very different from the poetic world of the Romantics: when he looked at nature he did not see a harmonious, peaceful order, but rather the terrific struggle-for-existence that reigns throughout natural creation. The sea, as his dominant artistic symbol for nature,

was a universal cannibalism. As Ishmael says,

> But not only is the sea such a foe to man who is an alien
> to it, but it is also a fiend to its own offspring; worse than
> the Persian host who murdered his own guests; sparing not the
> creatures which itself hath spawned. Like a savage tigress that
> tossing in the jungle overlays her own cubs, so the sea dashes
> even the mightiest whales against the rocks, and leaves them
> there side by side with the split wrecks of ships. No mercy,
> no power but its own controls it. Panting and snorting like a
> mad battle steed that has lost its rider, the masterless ocean
> overruns the globe (p.270).

Fleece says the same as he preaches to the sharks that follow the Pequod:

"Your woracious, fellow-critters, I don't blame ye so much for; dat is

natur, and can't be helped; but to gobern dat wicked natur, dat is de

pint" (p. 288). But it is significant that the sea, which is depicted

as evil and cannibalistic, is also the medium of truth, fleeting

though truth may be. The sea for Melville, according to John Bernstein

in Pacifism and Rebellion in the Writings of Herman Melville, represents

a "realm of actuality"; a means of glimpsing that which is valid.[61]

In "The Lee Shore" Melville expresses this idea about the sea, that "in

landlessness alone resides the highest truth, shoreless, indefinite

as God...." And in the same passage he states that "better it is to

perish in that howling infinite, than be ingloriously dashed upon the

lee, even if that were safety!"(p. 116). Man should perish boldly in

the raging sea--the only medium of truth--rather than waste away in the

secluded safety of the shore.

Melville does not confine chaotic evil to the sea, however: all of

nature is included. For instance, Ishmael reasons that a young New

England colt demonstrates a knowledge of the evil of nature by its

fearful reaction to a buffalo robe: "here thou beholdest even in a

dumb brute, the instinct of the knowledge of the demonism in the world"

(p. 195). And what the colt saw in the buffalo robe, Ishmael (for

Melville) was able to find throughout the world:

> Thus, then, the muffled rollings of a milky sea; the bleak
> rustlings of the festooned frosts of mountains; the desolate
> shiftings of the windrowed snows of prairies; all these, to
> Ishmael, are as the shaking of that buffalo robe to the
> frightened colt! (p. 196).

Though he does not know what it is he fears, Ishmael continues, he

is afraid: "Though in many of its aspects this visible world seems

formed in love, the invisible spheres were formed in fright." This

intense fear of an unknown evil is a predominant element in the book.

In the same chapter as the passage above, Ishmael expounds on the

deceptive practices of nature in covering her evil designs. He says

that the beauties of nature, the beautiful skies, forests, butterflies,

young girls, etc., are

> but subtle deceits, not actually inherent in substances, but
> only laid on from without; so that all deified Nature absolutely
> paints like the harlot, whose allurements cover nothing but the
> charnel house within...(p. 196).

With such a viewpoint, Ishmael concludes that "the palsied universe

lies before us a leper." Ishmael here lays down a rule that extends

throughout Melville's work. The symbolism in "Benito Cereno," accord-

ing to Hillway, is based on this same concept, the earth's evil and

vulturism. And Hillway sums up "The Encantadas" as painting "the grey

picture of a world cursed and made barren by its own vulturism, a world

rendered bearable only by patience and courage."[62]

The fear of the universe that is expressed repeatedly in Moby

Dick extends higher than mere inanimate or animal creation. Social

laws and perhaps even man himself become a part of the chaotic evil

that pervades creation. The debauched and miserable lives of the men

of the Pequod are hardly part of a benevolent or meaningful order. And

the utter cruelty of the laws on ship-board is ample evidence for

Melville of the malevolent order in the world. Melville repeatedly
protests about such injustice to man which occurred as part of naval
"law." In this matter he closely approximates Ionesco, who according
to W. V. Spanos, blames God as the oppressor when man is the helpless
victim of social tyranny, etc.--even if the evil seems to be of man's
own making.[63] Billy Budd appears to be an elaborate testimonial to
such an idea. Billy is sacrificed to an inherently--even necessarily--
evil system, one in which the innocence represented by Billy is useless
and out-of-place. Melville protests that man's necessary system which
destroys Billy is as evil as everything else in the universe.

The reason for Ahab's mad venture in Moby Dick, as Hillway explains,
is his "deliberate protest against the sharkish nature of the world"--
which has been discussed above.[64] But, of course, there is an obvious
implication here: to indict nature is to indict her creator, the one
responsible for her actions. Melville very intentionally does this:
he blames the creator for the irrationality, the chaos of the universe.
Moby Dick, comments Denham Sutcliffe, "deliberately calls into question
the benevolence of deity, and even of its existence" (afterword to
Moby Dick, p. 542). Even in the eyes of Father Mapple, God is "chiefly
known to me by Thy rod" (p. 64). The God who unleashed this fierce
cannibalistic world must be like his nightmarish creation. Ahab
rebelled against both the sharkish world and its creator, and his
rebellion is the basis of Moby Dick. Ahab could not, however, rebel
directly against God, the intangible, indefinite being. He could only
assault some part of God's creation which acted as a divine agent.
Ahab himself explains this: "Would now the wind but had a body; but
all the things that most exasperate and outrage mortal man, all these
things are bodiless, but only bodiless as objects, not as agents"(p.526).

And he felt that the bodiless unknown who had caused the chaotic world was represented in such a physical agent, the White Whale. Thus, it was Ahab's monomaniac resolve to destroy the whale, to have his revenge on Moby Dick for the cruelty of all nature. As God's agent, then, the whale was not only a part of creation but a symbol for all of creation.[65] For all of the deceptiveness, cannibalism, and evil in the universe "the Albino Whale was the symbol." Ishmael says, "The White Whate swam before him as the monomaniac incarnation of all those malicious agencies which some deep men feel eating in them, till they are left living on with half a heart and half a lung" (p. 185). The whale became for Ahab a means of approaching that mysterious mover of the malevolent universe:

> All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks. But in each event--in the living act, the undoubted deed--there, some unknown but still reasoning thing put forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask. If man will strike, strike through the mask! How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall? To me, the white whale is that wall, shoved near to me. Sometimes I think there's naught beyond. But 'tis enough. He tasks me; he heaps me; I see in him outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing it. That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate; and be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal, I will wreak that hate upon him (p. 167).

As Ahab found, however, the whale could not be destroyed: it was immortal. In his reaction to this fact we see the very essence of Ahab's philosophy, according to Bernstein.[66] For Ahab does not surrender even in certain defeat; he continues his futile struggle against the whale although it means his own final destruction. This attitude of stoic defiance is particularly important in this examination because we shall see it again in _Pierre_ and in _Mardi_. It is more than an artistic tool used in _Moby Dick_; it is the attitude of Melville himself. In a chaotic, evil universe --devoid of any benevolent deity--Melville reacted just as Ahab did, with stoic defiance.

Pierre provides a useful indication of Melville's philosophy

because it gives a vague parallel to Melville's life, as already
mentioned. Many of the details and events in _Pierre_, according to
Geoffrey Stone in _Melville_, are "more or less equivalent to facts in
Melville's own life and background."[67] Certainly, the book is not a
precise biography, but there is no doubt that Melville's general
spiritual state is revealed. Most importantly, Pierre's conclusions
seem to be the same as Melville's in many cases. As emphasized by Stone,
Melville had adopted the verdict of Ahab--that there is a contradiction
at the center of being--and now he puts this same verdict in _Pierre_.
The whale and the fabulous world of Ahab are gone, but the same ambig-
uous universe is carried over into _Pierre_ where it is discovered by an
unhappy young man struggling against the practical problems of life.
Both Ahab and Pierre, then, are alienated from the universe because of
an outraged moral sense; they both found the world malignant.[68] Pierre
finds that truth in its very essence is contradictory, that an insoluble
ambiguity is the very foundation of existence. Pierre seeks to solve
the incredible problems he faces by a strict adherence to virtue and
truth. In other words, he makes a strict application of the moral laws
which are a part of orthodox religion. It is the utter failure of
this attempt that disillusions him, that reveals the apathy of the
universe and the ambiguity of truth and virtue. "Civilisation, Phil-
osophy, Ideal Virtue! behold your victim," Melville cries.[69] At the
final moment of Pierre's awakening, Isabel speaks to him:

> 'Tell me first what is Virtue:--begin!'
>   'If on that point the gods are dumb, shall a pigmy
> speak? Ask the air!'
>   'Then Virtue is nothing.'
>   'Not that!'
>   'Then Vice?'
>   'Look: a nothing is the substance, it casts one shadow
> one way, and another the other way; and these two shadows
> cast from one nothing; these seems to me, are Virtue and

Vice.'
   'Then why torment thyself so, dearest Pierre?'
   'It is the law.'
   'What?'
   'That a nothing should torment a nothing; for I am a
nothing. It is all a dream--we dream that we dreamed
we dream' (pp. 381-2).

Pierre reaches the same conclusion as the waiter in Hemingway's "A

Clean, Well-Lighted Place": all is nothing. In the end, Pierre finds

that virtue and vice come out alike. The cold, indifferent universe

has no concern about these trivial matters. When Pierre fully realizes

the nature of the universe, he reacts much as Ahab had done. His

response is suicide, a reaction different from Ahab's, certainly, but

like it also in its futile defiance of an overwhelming foe.

After Pierre's disillusionment, he is well qualified to speak for

Melville about the status of man in the universe. Just before the arrival

of Lucy, he laments

I own myself a brother of the clod, a child of the Primeval
Gloom. Hopelessness and despair are over me, as pall on pall.
Away, ye chattering apes of a sophomorean Spinoza and Plato,
who once didst all but delude me that the night was day, and
pain only a tickle. Explain this darkness, exorcise this devil,
ye cannot. Tell me not, thou inconceivable coxcomb of a Goethe,
that the universe cannot spare thee and thy immortality, so long
as--like a hired waiter--thou makest thyself 'generally useful.'
Already the universe gets on without thee, and could still spare
a million more of the same indentical kidney (p. 421).

Cut off from his universe as he is, isolated from God on the one hand

and nature on the other, man can only feel that he is a "clod." To

isolate him is to deprive him of any meaning or purpose. Melville's

isolation of man, to say the least, places man in a very lowly and

degraded position. Moby Dick, Pierre, and, as will be seen, Mardi all

ask questions, all search the universe for meaning, but there are no

answers. In the end, comments Hillway, "There is only...the conviction

of human weakness which finds all truth ambiguous."[70] In sharp contrast

to the old world-view in which man had a solid relation to his cosmos

and a purpose because of that relationship, Melville's man is a helpless,

impotent, "existential" man...whose every connection with the universe

has been severed. In this, Melville joins Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and

a good many other existentialists who, according to Ernst Breisach,

"contributed to the gradual destruction of the overconfidence of modern

man concerning the validity of what he knows and does."[71] Kafka, for

instance, depicts man as thrown into an alien world and left to survive

alone. And his characters fail much as do Melville's.[72] Heidegger

also agrees with Melville, for, according to Breisach, a basic part of

Heidegger's philosophy is that anxiety which "makes $\overline{/man/}$ aware of his

estrangement from Being, makes him feel completely threatened."[73]

Melville clearly occupies a position on this matter closely akin to that

of modern atheistic existentialism.

Melville's Mardi is without a doubt the most detailed and straight-

forward explanation of his philosophy. Here the heavy veil of allegory

that was to cover Moby Dick is missing (Mardi was written in 1849, two

years before Moby Dick); indeed, Mardi is so direct at times it can hardly

be called allegory. Mardi's allegory, of course, is given structure by

Taji's search throughout Mardian countries for his lost Yillah. Melville

speaks allegorically of politics, religion, etc. through Taji's travels

in Polynesian islands, representative of modern nations. That which is

important here is that search itself, Taji's long journey in search for

his love. It seems likely that, as Stone comments, Yillah represents

happiness, perfection.[74] She seems to represent truth, certainty,

order--all that which Melville sought himself. Melville places Yillah

before Taji as representation of that which all men seek but cannot

obtain. And Taji searches unceasingly for her throughout land after

land. Finding her becomes a monomania for him almost like destroying

the whale became for Ahab. Though dealing with the problem in different

ways, comments Hillway, Ahab and Taji both face the same problem: "the

search for a true explanation of man's relationship with God in the

universe."[75] To find Yillah will give Taji that truth, that knowledge

of God and the universe. But the search for her is futile, and as the

futility becomes apparent, another solution presents itself: Serenia--

the serentiy of orthodox religious faith. Taji, however, rejects

Serenia because of a mental struggle involving something like the

traditional split between faith and reason. Taji rejects faith, remarks

Stone, because he cannot reconcile it with reason.[76] Instead, Taji

finally accepts the view that Babbalanja expresses--that there is an

eternal contradiction at the heart of things. He continues to search,

however, and just as for Ahab, the all-important search is frustrating.

For both it leads to a futile, defiant death. Taji continues to seek

for Yillah, even though it means his death, because therein is his

defiance; he defies a confused, irrational world that actually has no

truth, no Yillah, to offer.

In Taji's defiance, as well as Ahab's, Melville has clearly

expressed an attitude common to many of the later and better-known

existentialists. Two of the central attitudes of existentialism, as

listed by Dr. Harry Campbell, are the ideas that the common lot of

man is suffering and (2) the denial that man actually seeks happiness

or well-being. Kierkegaard, explains Campbell, says that man would

choose the freedom of the life of suffering even if he were given that

choice. And Dostoevsky in "The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor" and

Notes from Underground exemplifies this viewpoint. He says in the latter

that "I am sure man will never renounce real suffering, that is,
destruction and chaos. Why, after all, suffering is the sole origin of
consciousness."[77] And in the same book, "But I repeat for the
hundredth time, there is one case, one only, when man may purposely,
consciously, desire what is injurious to himself, what is stupid, very
stupid--simply in order to have the right to desire for himself even
what is very stupid and not to be bound by an obligation to desire
only what is rational."[78] Dostoevsky's statement is a perfect analysis
of Taji's actions, for Taji's defiance, his suicidal search, is a
completely irrational, "stupid" act. But it does achieve one thing:
it asserts his free will to choose that which is irrational; it asserts
his independence from any rational explanation of his world (such as
that offered by Serenia). He pursues his goal on to death because it
cannot be obtained. And this defiant pursuit even includes an anxiety
close to that of the systematic existentialists: he is followed
throughout the search by the three sons of the slain leader who, explains
Stone, are symbolic of the guilt or anxiety Taji feels over his choice.
The anxiety, Stone continues, is the

> normal reaction of the human mind...when the complete
> independence of the will is insisted upon. Guilt (or the
> sense of sin, or, in currently fashionable language, Angst)
> is the feeling in the individual that he stands outside of
> the order of things, that even his own sickness, however it
> may be in contradiction to the rest of the world, has an
> absolute claim to existence.[79]

Taji, like Ahab, Pierre, and Melville himself, insists on finding a
rational, coherent scheme in the universe (Yillah) but comes to grief
because his insistence on the primacy of his own will makes that
impossible. Taji rejects all organized, ready-made answers; he speaks
for Melville in defying all logical schemes to order the universe. If
he offers any answer, it is defiance--the independence of the free

human spirit. Near the end of _Mardi_ Taji exclaims

> So, if after all these fearful fainting traces, the verdict
> be, the golden haven was not gained; yet on bold quest thereof,
> better to sink in boundless deeps, than float on vulgar shoals:
> and give me, ye gods, an utter wreck, if wreck I do.[80]

It has been observed in this examination that Melville does indeed

have a number of the central characteristics that have come to be

identified and systematized as "existential" in the twentieth century.

He occupies a prophetic post as he speaks of man and his universe, for

in the early nineteenth century he says what the existentialists were

to repeat for the next century--that man has no relation to his chaotic

universe and that the only course of any merit is an assertion of the

free human spirit. I have attempted to better define Melville's

existential position by a contrast with the world-view of the

Elizabethan period and by a brief explanation of how the old view faded

away--making Melville one of the first to deal with a world devoid of

meaning and order. One final point remains to be emphasized, however.

Obviously, existentialism takes its name from its central concern with

human existence. And it is in this respect that Melville finalizes

his existential position. Melville's emphasis is on the "I," the self:

his constant reference, in Stone's terms, is "to the experiencing agent."

Melville insists that "no problem is solved if the solution does not

reckon in the questioner to whom it is addressed."[81] Melville, like

Taji, insists on having all on his own terms...in reference to the

self. Neither God, nature, nor science offers a solution, only one

guide remains--the Sovereign Self.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Reading, Writing, and Rheotric, ed. J. B. Hogins and R. E. Yarber (Chicago, 1967), pp. 378-85. It should be pointed out that Bigelow's themes do not adequately express Christian existentialism; the final two points, particularly, must be revised if they are to explain the theistic existential attitude. The atheist does indeed face death and "Nothingness": he accepts God's death as literal truth. Thus, freedom to rebel against the human predicament is the only authentic response. And "salvation," according to W. V. Spanos (A Casebook on Existentialism /New York, 1966/, pp. 8-9), lies only in "the humanizing awareness of the irreconcilable divorce between man and the world." For the theist, on the other hand, there is another alternative: he makes a wager, Spanos continues, "concerning the truth of the existence of the absent God, or more specifically, the truth of the Incarnation, which reconciles time and eternity and thus infuses meaning into the apparently chaotic and fragmented temporal world." Therefore, for the theist there is more than the freedom to rebel: there is Kierkegaard's "leap of faith." The man of will becomes the man of faith. And salvation becomes "a marriage of the individual and Christ, and, through this, a reconciliation between man and the universe."

[2]The Seventeenth Century Background (New York, 1967)-quoted by S. L. Bethell, The Cultural Revolution of the Seventeenth Century (London, 1951), p. 97.

[3]Quoted by E. M. W. Tillyard, The Elizabethan World Picture (Random House, New York), p. 11.

[4]Tillyard, p. 2.

[5]The Seventeenth Century Background (New York, 1967), p. 111.

[6]Bethell, p. 86.

[7]Shakespeare and the Nature of Man (New York, 1949), p. 1.

[8]Bethell, p. 92.

[9]English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century (Oxford, 1962), p. 143.

[10]Ibid.

[11]Seventeenth-Century Prose and Poetry, eds. A. M. Witherspoon and F. J. Warnke (New York, 1963), II, 853.

[12]Tillyard, p. 26.

[13]*The Great Chain of Being* (Cambridge, 1961), p. 327.

[14]*Ibid.*, p. 31.

[15]Bethell, p. 40.

[16]*Ibid.*, p. 41.

[17]Lovejoy, p. 190.

[18]Tillyard, p. 66.

[19]Spencer, p. 216.

[20]*Ibid.*, p. 20.

[21]Tillyard, pp. 83-99.

[22]Bethell, p. 41.

[23]Tillyard, p. 83.

[24]Bethell, p. 88.

[25]New York, 1967, pp. 110-11.

[26]*Ibid.*

[27]Spencer, p. 4.

[28]Francis Bacon, *De sapientia veterum* in *Works*, Ellis and Spedding, eds., VI, 747; quoted by Lovejoy, p. 187.

[29]Bethell, p. 62.

[30]*Ibid.*

[31]Willey, p. 11.

[32]*First Follow Nature* (New York, 1947), p. 107.

[33]Willey, p. 74.

[34]Bethell, p. 63.

[35]*Ibid.*, p. 56.

[36]Ibid., p. 42.

[37]Lovejoy, p. 288.

[38]Ibid., p. 198.

[39]Ibid., p. 192.

[40]Ibid., p. 244.

[41]Ibid., p. 262.

[42]Ibid., p. 244.

[43]Ibid., p. 316.

[44]Ibid., p. 317.

[45]The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth-Century English Poetry (New York, 1936), p. 8.

[46]Ibid., p. 5.

[47]Willey, p. 298.

[48]Beach, p. 174.

[49]The Selected Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. Brooks Atkinson (New York, 1950), p. 23.

[50]Melville (New York, 1949), p. 282.

[51]New York, 1963, pp. 252-376.

[52]Macquarrie, p. 256.

[53]The Portable Hawthorne, ed. Malcolm Cowley (New York, 1967), p. 588.

[54]Herman Melville (New York, 1963), p. 129.

[55]Ibid., p. 128.

[56]Ibid., p. 9.

[57]Ibid., p. 128.

[58]Ibid., p. 143.

[59]Moby Dick, afterword by Denham Sutcliffe (New York, 1961), p. 161. Subsequent quotations from Moby Dick will be from this edition and will be cited in parentheses in the text of the paper.

[60]Quoted by Ernst Breisach, Introduction to Modern Existentialism (New York, 1962), p. 56.

[61]London, 1964, p. 87.

[62]Hillway, pp. 118-19.

[63] *A Casebook on Existentialism*, ed. W. V. Spanos (New York, 1966), p. 202.

[64] *Ibid.*, p. 100.

[65] Stone, p. 163.

[66] Bernstein, p. 116.

[67] Stone, p. 192.

[68] *Ibid.*, p. 30.

[69] *Pierre, The Works of Herman Melville*, IX (New York, 1963), p. 421. Subsequent references to *Pierre* will be from this edition and will be cited in parentheses in the text.

[70] Hillway, pp. 111-12.

[71] Breisach, p. 56. In grouping Kierkegaard and Nietzsche together, Breisach does not seem to make adequate allowance for Kierkegaard's "leap of faith." Kierkegaard's theistic emphasis on the man of faith has, of course, been a notably different influence on modern thought from that of Nietzsche's nihilism and "Superman."

[72] *Ibid.*, p. 64.

[73] *Ibid.*, p. 88.

[74] Stone, p. 104.

[75] Hillway, p. 83.

[76] Stone, p. 97.

[77] Spanos, p. 235.

[78] *Ibid.*, p. 230.

[79] Stone, p. 106.

[80] *Ibid.*, p. 108.

[81] *Ibid.*, p. 162.

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