MELVILLE'S USE OF THE NATURALLY GOOD MAN

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PREFACE

While taking an American literature course at the Oklahoma State University English department, I became interested in Queequeg as a character who contrasted directly with the monomanic Ahab in Moby Dick. Later, while reading Billy Budd and Typee, I thought that there was a very apparent connection between the "naturally good" characters of the novels. After reading various interpretations of Billy Budd and reading an excellent article on Queequeg, I decided that since only a small quantity of critical work had been done on the naturally good man in the novels of Melville, a more extensive study might be beneficial to others as well as to me.

I wish to thank Dr. Clinton C. Keeler for taking so much time in teaching me to not be "so cryptic." I also wish to thank Dr. D. Judson Milburn, Dr. William R. VanRiper, and Dr. Juanita Kytle for their help and encouragement.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The perceptive reader can find as he reads the literature of the Western World that the searching mind of man has never been content for any great length of time. The changes in literary thought might well be plotted to show that a great emphasis on one idea in an age has tended to bring about an opposing idea in the next. Just as an age of great works will be followed by an age of criticism, an age in which the artists pursue moderation, common sense, clarity, and simplicity will almost certainly produce an age of romantic rebellion. A life devoted to work in the city often causes one to yearn for a life in the country; as urban life becomes complex, tense, and materialistic, almost always a poet will begin to think that the "world is too much with us. . . ." The great interest in the "noble savage" and the "natural man" in the 18th and early 19th centuries in England, France, and the United States was just such a rebellion against the neo-classic urban sophistication.

A simple listing of character and theme in the works of Herman Melville will show that his faith was far more in the Noble Savage than in his Christianized, missionary-haunted brothers, whether they lived on South Sea islands, on whaling ships, or in New Bedford. As a thinker, reared in a materialistic world, like Rousseau and Shaftesbury before him, Melville saw that the Christian was often

less "Christian" than the pagan savage. Bue we must remember that Melville was never a sentimental Rousseauist. As Howard P. Vincent writes, "Melville was too realistic to perpetuate in fiction the myth of the goodness of natural man; he had seen mankind in its baseness, primitive and civilized, in two hemispheres."[1] Since Melville was a searching reader, one may assume that he was in some measure influenced by the 18th century primitivists; and though my study of Melville's use of the characters of the noble savage and the natural man will not be concerned primarily with the influences of other writers on Melville, a short summary of the history of these ideas will be relevant.

In his book, The Noble Savage, Hoxie Neale Fairchild writes that "whatever our private definition of romanticism may be, there can be no doubt that one important aspect of the Romantic Movement is the return to nature."

> The wave of illusioned naturalism which begins to rise about the middle of the eighteenth century and which has given place to other forces by about 1830 includes not only the cult of scenery but the cult of the child, the peasant, and the savage. The conception of a Golden Age is to the ancient world as the Noble Savage idea to the modern world. Each represents a protest back from the corruptions of civilization to an imaginary primeval innocence . . . There is a similarity between Rousseau's view of the state of nature and Ovid's picture of the Golden Age. To Ovid, the Iron Age represents what Rousseau calls "the moral effect of the arts and sciences."

Professor Fairchild concludes:

> The Noble Savage idea results from the fusion of three elements: the observation of explorers; various classical and medieval

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[1] Howard P. Vincent, The Trying out of Moby Dick (Boston, 1949), p. 78.

conventions; the deductions of philosophers and men of letters.[2]

The concept of the naturally good man has remained in literature since its inception. The idea probably had its literary beginning in Greek pastoral works and was passed on to the Roman writers; later, various explorers returned to their countries with stories of savage people who were in various degrees naturally benevolent. Rousseau's ideas on the Noble Savage and Natural Man had great influence on the continent and later in England and America.

Anthony Ashley Cooper, the Third Earl of Shaftesbury, was one of the writers who in the 18th century was looking for a system of ethics which was not based on Machiavelli's concept of the natural state of evil in society. Restoration England, though disagreeing with Machiavelli on general questions, accepted some of his views on specific matters.

Hobbes had echoed Machiavelli in the 17th century. Egoism and pride are the driving forces of man. Since each man desires his own good, and most men desire the same things, man is in a constant state of competition. Hobbes believed that there was a state of war existing at all times in the world and that reason tells man to try for peace, but so long as the state of nature exists there can be no peace. The only way to achieve peace is for man to give up his right to kill, seize, and destroy and to keep only his inalienable rights to life and physical liberty.[3]

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[2]Hoxie Neale Fairchile, The Noble Savage (New York, 1928), p. 136.

[3]Edwin T. Mitchell, A System of Ethics (New York, 1950), p. 451.

Shaftesbury was a man of benevolent nature, and Hobbes was a man of egoistic reason. To Hobbes, a man, even with imperfect reason, could see the advantage of strict law and order. Since moral law is only convention, i. e., established for man by man, how can an egoist be anything but moral if morality is advantageous?

Undermining the whole tradition of thought thus far in England, Shaftesbury, as a gentleman, had decided that a man of taste could never be termed an egoist. A person of good breeding had a "natural" feeling for his fellow man. Of course the egoist would say that even this feeling is egoistic, but Shaftesbury was not bound by the traditional "proving" arguments of the "professional" philosopher. --- He was a gentleman with traditions of noblesse oblige. This feeling, he felt, must be explained, so "natural moral sense" must be the answer.

Shaftesbury, as part Stoic, believed that man was not so much of divine reason, but was part of the harmony of the whole. He was trying to find the design of society as it related to man. Since the universe was planned to be harmonious, there must be some principle of cohesion. This cohesion Shaftesbury called sympathy. And what does he later call sympathy? - - - Good taste. Having sympathy and being naturally a social animal, man's goal must be a harmonious society, a benevolent society, where "practiced" taste and gentlemanly reason will rule. Reasoning in this manner called for the ungentlemanly actions of man's passions. But with practice, he said as a man of his age, Reason will moderate these passions. Man must use practice to restrain himself because our over-indulgence, bad education, bad examples can distort our natural moral sense by filling our minds with superstitious fear and distorted Deities.

Then, Shaftesbury says, "Tell me, therefore, have you fitly cultivated that Reason of yours, polished it, bestowed the necessary pains on it, and exercised it on this subject?"[4]

Speaking of moral sense, Shaftesbury said, "If you dislike the word 'innate,' let us change it to 'instinct,' and call instinct that which nature teaches, exclusive of art, culture or discipline."[5] By proper use of emotion, tempered with reason, a man of good breeding could develop a sense of good taste. Good taste, by way of a natural moral sense, would lead a person toward benevolence.

Since so many writers used the concept of the naturally good man, the limits of the concept may be somewhat vague. Just as each writer must define such terms as Romanticism and Realism in order to have useful working tools, so the terms "Noble Savage" and "Natural Man" must be defined. Moreover, each "naturally good" character in literature usually reacts to a situation in his own individual way, and Melville in particular usually avoided the use of stereotyped characters. Most readers would agree that Leather Stocking, Billy Budd, Huck Finn, Chingachgook, and Emile are all "naturally good" men, but there are many readily seen differences among these men. In order to have some sort of common demoninator, I shall use Mr. Fairchild's definition of the "Noble Savage." He writes:

> In my opinion, the rather common restriction of the term "Noble Savage" to the American Indian has no logical basis. Negroes, South Sea Islanders and other sorts of savages are often regarded in precisely the same light as the redman. To me, a Noble Savage is any free and wild being who draws directly from nature virtues which

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[4]Ibid., p. 468-77.

[5]Ibid., p. 648.

raise doubts as to the value of civilization. The term may be applied metaphorically to romantic peasants and children when a comparison between their innocent greatness and that of the savage illumines the thought of the period.

To differentiate between the "Noble Savage" and the "Natural Man," I shall use Rousseau's description of Emile as a "Natural Man." He says of Emile:

> The philosopher is aware of his own vices, he is indignant to ours, and he says to himself, "We are all bad alike." The savage beholds us unmoved and says, "You are mad." He is right, for no one does evil for evil's sake. My pupil is that savage, with this difference: Emile has thought more, he has compared more ideas, has seen our errors at close quarters; he is more on his guard against himself, and only judges of what he knows.[6]

The "Natural Man" to Rousseau was a "Noble Savage" who had a "great subtlety of mind," a man through whom or with whom the reader may judge society. The difference between "Noble Savage" and "Natural Man" is that the latter term includes the intuitively good man <u>in civilization</u>; the former term emphasizes the intuitively good man in a society close to nature.

In addition to the terms "Natural Man" and "Noble Savage," I shall occasionally use the term "naturally good man" in this work. I define the term as meaning that a man is good by the gifts of nature. The concept of the "naturally good man" is an established literary tradition. Melville's Billy Budd, like Huck Finn, is an individual who by nature is good; his conduct, like Huck's, owes little or nothing to the civilization around him. Melville, like Twain, draws a portrait of a person who has not learned enough in his short life to greatly affect his actions. I mentioned earlier that we as readers may view civilization with or through the Natural

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[6]Fairchild, p. 1-4.

Man. In Huck Finn for the most part the reader views civilization critically with Huck, but in Billy Budd we view the "man-of-war-world" through Billy with little or no criticism from Billy himself. We view the "man-of-war-world" through Budd because he is almost too innocent to reflect. So when the term "Natural Man" is used, I shall be referring to a "Noble Savage" who has gone into civilization, and who judges or allows the reader to judge the world through him in light of his "natural goodness." In Moby Dick, Queequeg is a "Natural Man" in that he has brought his wisdom and benevolence to town. Kory-Kory of Typee is a "Noble Savage," but he has had glimpses of civilization. He has seen enough and heard enough stories from Marnoo to exclaim to Tom that even Heaven cannot be too much better than Typee, and that the land and people of Typee are very much superior to those in civilization. But Kory-Kory is still a savage with little experience of the outside world.

CHAPTER II

TYPEE

Before I discuss the characters of Typee as individuals, I should like to consider certain statements made by Melville in Typee which have to do with the general milieu of the island people and which influence the action, but which are not expressed through the actions of the characters. Tom (Melville) and Toby deserted an outbound whaling ship on which the treatment of ordinary sailors had not been good. The island on which the Valley of the Typees is situated seemed very inviting to the sea-weary pair, and with shore leave which gave them ample time to desert, the young sailors went "over the hill" into Typee Valley. The Typee warriors were some of the most feared cannibals in the whole of the South Seas, and Tom and Toby, hoping to find the much more friendly Hapers, nonetheless found themselves greeted with all courtesy by the "fierce" Typees. The Typee people explained to their visitors in detail that they were in fact the "civilized" tribe, and that the Hapers were extraordinarily cannibalistic and would be more than happy to eat the white gentlemen from the ship without any qualms whatever. After being healed by the natives of the wound he had received getting into the valley, Tom began immediately to compare the "savages" to "Christianized" natives, to "civilized" people in general. His findings were quite conclusive--he had come to paradise. All of his wants had been taken care of by the "darkeyed

nymphs" who waited on him constantly, and his faithful servant Kory-Kory cared for him with kindness and sympathy beyond his expectations. He became more and more convinced that beyond the hills which surrounded the Valley of the Typees there was little more than a world of care and anxiety. In this mood he reflected that this was truly the "Happy Valley." His thoughts at that point suggested the familiar theme decrying man's pursuit of materialistic values that the "world is too much with us. . . ." He reflected on the absence of "those thousand sources of irritation that the ingenuity of civilized man has created to mar his own felicity." He added that:

> There were no foreclosures of mortgages, no protested notes, no bills payable, no debts of honour in Typee; . . . no destitute widows with their children starving on the cold charities of the world; no beggars; no debtor's prisons; no proud and hardhearted nabobs in Typee; or, to sum up all in one word--no Money! That "root of all evil" was not to be found in the valley.[7]

Even the children of the island were different from those of civilization; they played for hours without quarreling, though the same number of children in the civilized community could not have played together for the space of an hour without biting or scratching one another. The young women of the island were not in the least jealous of each other's personal property or physical appearances. The young men were continually busy, but not at all hurried by necessity to finish their work. The old men spent their last days at their own private club; the taboo allowed no women to enter this section of the island. When there was no festive day to prepare for in the near future, the natives retired early. Tom says that the

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[1] Herman Melville, Typee (London, 1930), p. 132.

strength of the native constitution was shown in no better way than by the amount of sleep that they could endure. In fact, he says, for many of them life is little more than "an often-interrupted nap." Much of the happiness which prevails in these primitive communities was due to the astounding lack of disease; he mentioned that Rousseau's writing had brought this to his attention in the beginning.

He had witnessed for himself before coming to the Valley of the Typee that natives, even the primitive ones, stole only from the Europeans. He attributed this stealing to a condition which prevailed throughout the islands; "that bearing in mind the wholesale forays made upon them by their nautical visitors, they consider the property of the latter as a fair object of reprisal." There was no stealing on Typee because there was no reason to steal. He observed that there was a vast difference between "personal property" and "real estate" on the island. The groves of food-bearing trees would one day be harvested by a native from one part of the island and the next day by another who lived on the other side of the valley. There was respect for personal property. Each person had varying amounts of personal property of varying degrees of value, but it was never hidden. Their safety deposit boxes were in the form of packages which were hung in plain sight from the ceiling. Many times Tom saw the finest spear in the whole valley left leaning against a tree for days.

Tom was very much impressed by the community spirit of the Typees. He and Kory-Kory once witnessed the building of a bamboo dwelling. At least one-hundred of the island's natives were engaged in the building, and Tom wondered that ". . . Such an air of hilarity prevailed; and that they worked together so unitedly, and seemed

actuated by such an instinct of friendliness, that it was truly beautiful to behold.[2] The definite "air of hilarity" seemed to prevail each time any work which was out of the ordinary or of any real consequence needed to be done. Moving a rock of no great size, the original mover shortly had more laughing, pushing helpers than it would have taken to move a rock ten times that size.

Not only are the materialistic values of Melville's world contrasted with the "pure" society of Typee, but also the joyless Puritan morality of 19th century New England is contrasted with the simple delights of the island.

These 19th century Puritanic morals of the Western World had left the Typees quite untouched. One of Tom's chief amusements was bathing in the company of "troops" of girls. The moral code of the island allowed the "nymphs" to swim with Tom in varying amounts of bathing attire. The taboo came into effect only when he insisted that a canoe be brought to the bathing place. After the canoe was put into the water, the girls were not allowed to return to the pool. Tom explained:

> I not only wanted the canoe to stay where it was, but I wanted the beauteous Fayaway to get into it, and paddle with me about the lake. This latter proposition completely horrified Kory-Kory's notions of propriety. He inveighed against it, as something too monstrous to be thought of. It not only shocked their established notions of propriety, but was at variance with all their religious ordinances.[3]

But Kory-Kory was eventually brought to ask for a special dispensation. Then for the first time in the island's history, a woman was allowed in the canoe:

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[2] Ibid., p. 209.

[3] Ibid., p. 140.

The first day after Fayaway's emancipation, she reclined with Tom in the stern of the canoe. The gentle nymph occasionally placed her pipe to her lip, and exhaled the mild fumes of the tobacco, to which her rosy breath added a fresh perfume. Strange as it may seem, there is nothing in which a young and beautiful female appears to more advantage than in the act of smoking.[4]

Later, Tom described her joy:

With a wild exclamation of delight, she disengaged from her person the ample robe of tappa which was knotted over her shoulder (for the purpose of shielding her from the sun), and spreading it out like a sail, stood erect with upraised arms in the head of the canoe. We American sailors pride ourselves upon our straight spars, but a prettier little mast than Fayaway made was never shipped aboard of any craft.[5]

The marriage and divorce system of the Typees seemed highly irregular to Tom, but at the same time, very practical. The women of Typee married at least twice in their lives. The first marriage was normally to a lad of approximately their own age, and the second marriage admitted an older man into the marriage. Tom often saw a plurality of husbands but never a plurality of wives, which "speaks volumes for the gentle disposition of the male population." The chief reason for a plurality of husbands seemed to be in all cases a matter of expediency, since the males considerably outnumbered the females. No male on the island had more than one wife, and no female had had less than one husband. The marriage bond could be broken with little or no effort, and certainly without a court order. Separations occasionally occurred on the island, but there was none of the petty bickering which usually accompanies a "civilized" divorce. Since this was truly the land of plenty and there were never

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[4]Ibid., p. 142.

[5]Ibid., p. 144.

more than two children in each family, the position of the divorced woman was again superior to that of the woman in a "civilized" society.

The religion of the Typees, like their social and moral habits, revealed a simple capacity for uncomplicated happiness. Tom never ceased to be amazed at the religious system of the island. He felt that the natives were either too sensible or too lazy to worry about the abstract aspects of religion. He saw no policy-making boards in session the whole time he was on the island except for the time that Kory-Kory gained special dispensation for Fayaway's boating excursions. With the exception of the Taboo, which was simply a "Do unto others" system with a few odd modifications, the natives were allowed an "unbounded liberty of conscience" in matters of religious preference. There seemed to be no end of individual idols which various people worshipped in varying degrees and methods. There were also those who were allowed not to worship at all, and some of the natives were allowed to have implicit faith in a god which was apparently in disfavor with the majority of the inhabitants.

To Tom one of the most revealing instances in this stay on the island was the Feast of the Calabashes. It seemed to him to be primarily a religious festival, but the "revelers" hardly seemed interested in religious observances.

> No attention whatever seemed to be paid to the drummers or to the old priests, the individuals who composed the vast crowd present being entirely taken up in chatting and laughing with one another, smoking, drinking arva, and eating. For all the observation it attracted, or the good it achieved the whole savage orchestra might, with great advantage to its own members and the company in general, have ceased the prodigious uproar they were making.
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> But the temples seemed to be abandoned to solitude; the festival had been nothing more than a jovial mingling of the tribe; the idols were

quite as harmless as any other logs of wood; and the priests were the merriest dogs in the valley.[6]

The interest of the people of the island toward any religious occasion was never much more than a "childish amusement."

The presiding priest at the Feast of the Calabashes was the warrior-priest Kolory, and the very small but extremely powerful god Moa Artua was administered to by him. The bruised and battered Moa Artua, speaking through his medium, Kolory, was a light-hearted and well-favored prophet. The treatment of this all-powerful god was quite astounding to Tom. After soothing, whispering, and caressing the little god, Kolory asked him a few questions. When there was no immediate answer, Moa Artua was severely "boxed over the head" by Kolory and laid to rest in his canoe. After asking all of those present whether or not he had done the right thing in silencing Moa Artua, Kolory again asked questions of the little god. This time the answers, which were invariably pleasant, were readily whispered into the priest's ear to the enjoyment of all the natives. Quite concerned about the treatment of the main deity of the island, Tom asked Kory-Kory about the power of the little god:

> He once gave me to understand, with a gesture there was no misconceiving, that if he (Moa Artua) were so minded, he could cause a cocoanut tree to sprout out of his (Kory-Kory's) head; and that it would be the easiest thing in life for him (Moa Artua) to take the whole of the island of Nukuheva in his mouth, and dive down to the bottom of the sea with it.[7]

Once when Kory-Kory and Tom were examining one of the minor deities of the island, the idol toppled over, almost crushing Kory-

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[6]Ibid., p. 186.

[7]Ibid., p. 191.

Kory. He immediately assailed the idol with a large stick and all of the strong language at his command. The position of most of the idols on the island was anything but safe.

> The fact is, they had to carry themselves "pretty straight," or suffer the consequences. Their worshippers were such a precious set of fickle-minded and irreverent heathens, that there was no telling when they might topple one of them over, break it to pieces, and making a fire with it on the very altar itself, fall to roasting the offerings of bread-fruit, and eat them in spite of its teeth.[8]

On the island Tom found that "however ignorant man may be, he still feels within him his immortal spirit yearning after the unknown future." The evidence was a figure sitting in a canoe, holding a paddle, and looking toward his heaven. Kory-Kory told Tom that this figure was paddling his way "to the realms of bliss and bread-fruit." This land was superior to Typee in all material things; even the women were superior to those of the island. Tom then asked Kory-Kory whether or not he wished to follow the warrior, and Kory-Kory answered that he was quite happy where he was; but that someday, he supposed, he would follow the warrior. Kory-Kory then ended his statement with one of his usual epigrams which Tom construed to be about the equivalent of "a bird in the hand." Tom mentioned that Kory-Kory "was a discreet and sensible fellow, and I cannot sufficiently admire his shrewdness."[9]

Kory-Kory's physical appearance was quite deceiving and exceptionally striking; Melville describes him in the following manner:

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[8]Ibid., p. 192.

[9]Ibid., p. 186.

Kory-Kory, though the most devoted and best-natured serving-man in the world, was, alas! a hideous object to look upon. He was some twenty-five years of age, and about six feet in height, robust and well made, and of the most extraordinary aspect. His head was carefully shaven, with the exception of two circular spots, about the size of a dollar, near the top of the cranium, where the hair, permitted to grow to an amazing length, was twisted up in two prominent knots, that gave him the appearance of boing decorated with a pair of horns . . . His countenance thus triply hooped, as it were with tattooing, always reminded me of those unhappy wretches sentimentally looking from behind the grated bars of a prison window.[10]

The appearance of the "hideous" savage was deceiving to Melville as the Christian observer. This evil looking savage was the chief's son, yet when he was assigned the questionable duty of servant to the white intruder, he immediately accepted the duty and caused Tom to comment:

Sometimes, in the cool of evening, my devoted servitor would lead me out upon the pi-pi in front of the house, and, seating me near its edge, protect my body from the annoyance of the insects which occasionally hovered in the air, by wrqpping me round with a large roll of tappa. He then bustled about, and employed himself at least twenty minutes in adjusting everything to secure my personal comfort.[11]

Kory-Kory often felt that a certain amount of instruction had to be given to the "civilized" white man. When Tom first bathed in the presence of the men and women of the island alike, he was too embarassed to remove all of his clothing. And Kory-Kory, seeing that Tom did not mean to bathe his whold body, immediately gave him a short lecture on cleanliness and proceeded to remove the clothes himself and bathe the careless sailor.

Though Kory-Kory knew very little about the civilized world outside of the Typee valley, he had seen enough and heard enough in his

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[10]Ibid., p. 84.

[11]Ibid., p. 117.

twenty years to become quite concerned with Tom's sanity when he talked about leaving the valley:

> The grief and consternation of Kory-Kory, in particular, was unbounded; he threw himself into a perfect paroxysm of gestures, which were intended to convey to us, not only his abhorrence of Nukuheva and its uncivilized inhabitants, but also his astonishment that, after becoming acquainted with the enlightened Typees, we should evince the least desire to withdraw, even for a time, from their agreeable society.[12]

Mehevi, the head chief of Typee, was always concerned with the threat of invasion by the French "civilizers." The French had taken the neighboring bay of Nukuheva, and Mehevi had seen the effects of civilization upon the local natives, and his concern seemed quite justified to Tom.

If one did not believe the account of Fayaway which is given by Melville, he would certainly accuse the author of sentimentalism. The following account sounds not a little like a look at Lucy Grey:

> The easy unstudied graces of a child of nature like this, breathing from infancy an atmosphere of perpetual summer, and nurtured by the simple fruits of the earth; enjoying a perfect freedom from care and anxiety, and removed effectually from all injurious tendencies, strike the eye in a manner which cannot be portrayed. This picture is no fancy sketch; it is drawn from the most vivid recollections of the person delineated.[13]

Although Fayaway smoked a pipe and disrobed in public, Tom was most shocked by her habit of eating raw fish, and this was to Tom the worst offence of the three. He exclaims:

> Let no one imagine, however, that the lovely Fayaway was in the habit of swallowing great vulgar-looking fishes: oh, no; with her beautiful small hand, she would clasp a delicate little, golden-hued love of a fish, and eat it as elegantly and as innocently as though it were a

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[12]Ibid., p. 103.

[13]Ibid., p. 88.

Naples biscuit. But alas! . it was after all a raw fish; and all I can say is, that Fayaway ate it in a more ladylike manner than any other girl in the valley.[14]

As I said in the beginning, Melville can hardly be said to be a sentimental Rousseauist; neither Tom nor Kory-Kory was convinced that all of the island's inhabitants were always Christ-like in their actions. Just as there is a strain of imperfection in Queequeg and in Billy Budd, there is an apparent innate depravity in some of the islanders, and a sentimental portrait of character does not allow much imperfection. Kory-Kory was quite convinced that the Hapers were no better than the "civilized inhabitants" of Typee. He exclaims to Tom:

"nuee, nuee, ki ki kannaka! -- ah! owle motarkee!" which signifies, "Terrible fellows those Hapers! -- devour an amazing quantity of men! — ah, shocking bad!"[15]

It is important in gaining insight into the works of Melville to realize that though the author was dealing in people and subject matter which at first glance seem to be pure fancy, his picture of these people is accurate. Melville did not, in Typee nor later in Moby Dick and Billy Budd, allow himself to be carried very far from reality or plausibility by romantic excitement. There is of course a mystic over-tone in most of his works, but, after all, as Melville told Hawthorne, there are still unexplainable things in the world. Melville usually dealt with fact in his works, and those parts which are fiction are almost always plausible. Kory-Kory, carefree child of nature that he is, is still a practicing cannibal. Each time Tom

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[14]Ibid., p. 215-216.

[15]Ibid., p. 108.

speaks of his intentions of leaving Typee, his leg suddenly becomes worse; and in the end Tom does not sail off into the setting sun, waving Aloha to natives who are always completely benevolent, but rather he is almost killed as he leaves.

The people of Typee, Nantucket, and the Indomitable were, whether partially symbolic or not, largely authentic. The Noble Savage and the Natural Man (with only very minor flaws) represented actual people to Melville. Any understanding of Kory-Kory, Queequeg, and especially of Billy Budd must be gained with these concepts in mind. Melville was always concerned with the welfare of these innocents. They represented the highest form of benevolence he had seen on his voyages. There is a great similarity between Kory-Kory and Queequeg, as I will explain in the next chapter; and in his last work Melville even stops to point out that he has seen someone very much like Budd.

Typee is, of course, little more than a 19th century romantic travel book. Its plot is nothing more than an exciting adventure. Its characters are somewhat sentimental and rather bloodless, except for Kory-Kory, who could have been a very interesting character. But as early as the first book, Melville seemed to be seeing and reporting the tragic elements of life. The world was never almost completely good to Melville as it was to Thoreau and Emerson, and even the children of nature who are presented in Typee are never completely good. The lovely Fayaway is capable of eating raw fish, and Kory-Kory is capable of eating his fellow man. This early tragic sense in Melville led him to examine this element which he found present even in the good children of Typee. This tragic sense led him to

search with Ahab for the reason behind the "mask." And whatever the meaning of Billy Budd, the author was still examining this thread of evil which seemed to him to pervade all creation. As early as Typee Melville was compelled to question the value of Christian dogma as practiced by the 19th century Christian. The "civilized" natives on the other side of the island from the Valley of Typee were inferior to the Typee natives in every way, except that the "civilized" native ate only animals. The civilized natives had little more to live for than Christian materialism, and theft seemed to them a logical development of their new faith. Melville used theft as an ironic term which represented for these natives the new "Christian" way of life. Materialism had brought the "man-of-war world" of Billy Budd to a "Happy Valley." It had made thieves of Melville's innocents. Melville believed in an innate sense of goodness---the 18th century natural benevolence of Shaftesbury, because he himself had seen it exist in the South Seas. The people of Typee had also, in the last analysis, a great amount of freedom of will and conscience. The Taboo, which seemed to affect much of the life of the natives, was often completely silent on various matters of behavior. Perhaps Melville meant to infer that their twelfth General Order was "Do unto others. . . ." The son of the head chief of the island was not forced to enjoy being a servant of the white man, and yet he was always more than willing to carry the stranger on his back and give bathing lessons when necessary. With the French intruders had come a new system of society wherein man's humanity to man was no longer present. And throughout Melville's life a man's maltreatment of man remained as a large stone in the author's shoe.

CHAPTER III

MOBY DICK

In his novels Melville chose his characters well. When he used a good man, he always chose the best available representation. In order to give the greatest contrast to the materialistic, unthinking Christian, Melville chose in Moby Dick the best "true" person he had seen in his experience to date---a pagan. Melville contrasts with the "drunken Christian" a person who is a symbolic representative of all the naturally good savages he had known on his voyages. Queequeg, as the most noble of the noble savages, is brought to New Bedford to become a Natural Man, and in light of his natural goodness, we are able to judge society.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of the use of the Natural Man in the works of Melville; the importance is that the symbol represented a truth to the author---something he had seen in Typee and on board the whalers and the man-of-war. Melville's ideal was not the arm chair idealism of Rousseau and Cooper; it was a reality which could not exist in the man-of-war and Christian society in which the watch word is "Do unto others before they do unto you." This is also the importance of the relationship of the people of Typee to Queequeg. Queequeg was real and ideal to Melville, and as the Christian prejudice, superiority feelings, and unconcern for the feelings of a dark stranger are thrown out at this innocent,

Ishmael feels and records the sting.

Through his natural sense of benevolence, Queequeg compares his world with ours; and in the end, the pagan is the much better "Christian." The comparison for the reader comes about by contrasting the actions of the savage with the Yankee townspeople and sailors. At times Queequeg himself reveals to the reader that much evil is caused by the unthinking Christian. Kory-Kory's comments about the settlement across the island were largely true but nevertheless hearsay, whereas Queequeg had experienced much before the meeting with Ishmael. After his years of experience and comparing, he tells Ishmael that before he returns to his land, he must be cleansed. Melville could believe in this Natural Man because he had seen many of them in Typee, and there is great similarity between Queequeg and the natives of the island, particularly Kory-Kory. Though much stronger, Kory-Kory's condemnation of the Christian community was no deeper than Queequeg's. Kory-Kory ridiculed and rebuked the evils of civilization, but Queequeg merely ignored the ignorance and cruelty of the New Englander. The quick acceptance of Ishmael by Queequeg is very similar to the reception of Tom and Toby by the natives when they entered the Valley of Typee. The treatment of the little god which Queequeg carries with him at all times is a combination of the treatment given to the idols of Typee by Kory-Kory and the head priest of the island. The morning bath scene in Moby Dick is very similar in meaning to that in Typee. But the contrast in the habits of the pagan and the Christian are much more subtly drawn in Moby Dick. Melville used contamination of the innocent by the white man in both books, but again much more subtly in Moby Dick---where he has Queequeg crawl under the bed to put on his boots.

Obviously Queequeg's function in the book is to allow the reader to contrast him with the others, and Melville chose his character well; Queequeg contrasts with the Christian in many ways, but the greatest differences lie in the dramatic contrast between the appearance and reality of his person and secondly in his pagan (but more Christian) religion. In Queequeg's general appearance, too, we see the similarity between him and the natives of Typee. Ishmael awakes and says:

> Such a face! It was of dark, purplish, yellow color, here and there struck over with large blackish looking squares. Yes, it's just as I thought, he's a terrible bedfellow; he's been in a fight, got dreadfully cut, and here he is, just from the surgeon. But at that moment he chanced to turn his face so towards the light, that I plainly saw they could not be sticking-plasters at all, those black squares on his cheeks. They were stains of some sort or other. He now took off his hat--a new beaver hat--when I came nigh singing out with fresh surprise. There was no hair on his head--none to speak of at least--nothing but a small scalp-knot twisted up on his forehead. His bald purplish head now looked for all the world like a mildewed skull.[1]

In chapter ten Melville uses a very pointed and meaningful figure; he describes the noble Queequeg by saying, "Queequeg was George Washington cannibalistically developed." Ishmael comments that one cannot hide the soul of a noble person even under the most hideous exterior. The nobility he saw was the nobility of a free man, free from the evils of the materialistic world: "He looked like a man who had never cringed and had never had a creditor." This nobility of character was evident in his bearing. He was a man who was twenty thousand miles away from his people, and yet he was completely at ease among the crude and "civilized" strangers. There was in Queequeg

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[1] Herman Melville, Moby Dick (New York, 1925), p. 19.

the same light of contented goodness which radiated in the same manner as from Billy Budd, from his "sugaring the sour ones." Ishmael says:

> I began to be sensible of strange feelings. I felt a melting in me. No more my splintered heart and maddened hand were turned against the wolfish world. This soothing savage had redeemed it. There he sat, his very indifference speaking a nature in which there lurked no civilized hypocrisies and bland deceits. While he was; a very sight of sights to see; yet I began to feel myself mysteriously drawn towards him. And those things that would have repelled most others, they were the very magnets that thus drew me. I'll try a pagan friend, thought I, since Christian kindness has but hollow courtesy.[2]

As a Natural Man, Queequeg, completely evil in appearance, is contrasted with Ahab, with the bumpkins of New Bedford, with Ishmael, with the Christian world in general. Melville pictured the bumpkin as a Christian who was extremely prejudiced, interested in Queequeg only as an amusing person, completely unconcerned about the feelings of a person in a strange land, and totally blind to the good which radiated through the dark skin of the savage. After being harrassed by the bumpkins to a point at which the New Bedford "Christian" would have committed murder, Queequeg saved his tormentor from drowning. As Ishmael and Queequeg meet Bildad and Peleg, the symbolic irony becomes biting. Bildad is so interested in himself as the Spiritual father of the cruise that he is not even concerned with Queequeg's real name; he merely writes down the first similar word in English which comes to his mind; and symbolically, Queequeg signs his life away under the name "Quohog!" There is a good contrast drawn as Ishmael and Queequeg become friends. Ishmael is apparently only reluctantly trusting his new friend, but the savage immediately

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[2]Ibid., p. 58.

divides all he has with Ishmael. The most important contrast is, of course, between Queequeg and Ahab. Queequeg will save a tormentor's life, divide all he has with a person he barely knows, and even choose to die with this friend; whereas, Ahab is capable of making the statement, "I would strike the sun if it offended me." One could presume that all of this material on Queequeg as a social man was carefully chosen to show in action Melville's theory of the effect of the instinctively good pagan upon Christian society as he is seen through the open mind of Ishmael.

Queequeg's religion, like Kory-Kory's, was based on nothing more than a version of "Do unto others." He seems to be saying with Gandhi that the only thing wrong with Christianity is the Christian. There is much similarity in the treatment of Kory-Kory's little idol and Queequeg's. This treatment of the savage idol seems on the surface, if one is considering only the treatment of the idol, to show that the savage has little respect for the god; but on second consideration, both Kory-Kory and Queequeg have complete faith in the power of their little gods, should the little god choose to act. But these are gods with a sense of humor rather than the Calvanistic God who punished the sinful. Ishmael says of Queequeg's god:

> I have forgotten to mention that, in many things, Queequeg placed great confidence in the excellence of Yojo's judgement and surprising forcast of things; and cherished Yojo with considerable esteem, as a rather good sort of god, who perhaps meant well enough upon the whole, but in all cases did not succeed in his benevolent designs.[3]

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[3] Ibid., p. 77.

The treatment of Yojo by Queequeg is also similar to that of the Typees' god by the head priest, and Queequeg's confession of respect is much like that of Kory-Kory. Melville might have had in mind the contrast between some of the idol-worshiping Christians who at times show great religious manifestations but obey in practice only "hollow custom." Ishmael says of the ceremony:

> . . . he at last succeeded in drawing out the biscuit; then blowing off the heat and ashes a little, he made a polite offer of it to the little negro. But the little devil did not seem to fancy such fare at all; he never moved his lips. All these strange antics were accompanied by still stranger guttural noises from the devotee, who seemed to be praying in a singsong or else singing some pagan psalmody or other, during which his face twitched about in the most unnatural manner. At last extinguishing the fire, he took the idol up very unceremoniously, and bagged it again in his grego pocket as carelessly as if he were a sportsman bagging a dead woodcodk.[4]

Later we find Queequeg

> . . . sitting on a bench before the fire, with his feet on the stone hearth, and in one hand was holding close up to his face that negro idol of his; peering into its face, and with a jack-knife gently whittling away at its nose, meanwhile humming to himself in his heathenish way.[5]

Mr. Vincent says:

> From the tortuous soul-searching of Father Mapple, the story of Moby Dick moves immediately in vivid, even antithetical, contrast, to the serenity of Queequeg, the pagan harpooner. By all odds the most attractive character in the novel. . . For thematically, Queequeg is a counterpoint to Father Mapple; it is no accident that Melville moved directly from the man of God to the savage idolator, from the Christian to the Pagan. . . Where Father Mapple was the extreme intensity of spiritual consciousness, Queequeg is, on the other hand, the instinctual and unconscious self.[6]

Father Mapple's statement is:

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[4]Ibid., p. 44.

[5]Ibid., p. 50.

[6]Vincent, p. 76.

If we obey God, we must disobey ourselves; and it is in this disobeying ourselves, wherein the hardness of obeying God consists.[7]

This statement by Father Mapple is most important in its being definitive of Melville's position at this time. This statement foreshadows Ahab's monomania and is the direct antithesis of Queequeg's position in the novel. The position of Father Mapple is also opposed to the views which are apparently held by the author, for it assumes this: If we obey God (Good), we must disobey ourselves (who are naturally evil). But not until Claggart do we find a man who by nature is bad. There is a direct relationship between the monomania of Ahab and the natural goodness of Queequeg. Ahab is not interested in what happens to the crew; he is insane with his desire to find out what is behind the "mask," if there is anything there at all. There is a great difference between Ahab's monomaniac drive which spares no one and the care which Queequeg takes in order not to offend any of his fellow men. This contrast is also true in Captain Bildad; he is not at all interested even in converting the pagan, which is unusual. He says to Peleg that if the harpooner is converted, he is no longer a good harpooner. Besides the obvious reference that Bildad is being quite unchristian, this inference is important in that Melville is saying that only the pagan is not at all worried about his life after death. This was true of Kory-Kory as he said to Tom that "a bird in the bush. . . ," and besides, heaven was only a little better than Typee anyway. Melville's concept at this point is ironically like that of Thoreau's in that he has seen that the average

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[7]Melville, Moby Dick, p. 47.

Christian needs to clean his own backyard before he begins to clean his neighbor's. But it seems that Melville's missionaries were all too eager to sail off into the sunset to convert the pagan to a religion which, as it was used by the Christian, was little more than "hollow courtesy." So if we assume that Queequeg had the same freedom of will as the natives of Typee, then Queequeg's religion is only between his god and himself. Practically speaking, Queequeg's god is himself, since he and the head priest of Typee gave their own interpretations to the utterances of their little gods. Apparently then, according to Queequeg's philosophy, if a man is true to himself he is also true to his god, and he can in no way be inconsiderate of his fellow man.

It seems that Melville is saying that only the pagan is completely sure of his relationship with God, but as unsure as the Christian is, he is willing to take whose who are certain of their fate with him into uncertainty. Even Ishmael, who is more considerate than all the others, attempts conversion of the pagan. Mr. Vincent points that this sequence is a parody on the failure of the missionary. This is a relatively small point but an important one. I feel that Melville is at this point thinking in a much wider scope. This idea seems to mean that the author is again speaking of the remarkable ability of mankind to find a crowd when in doubt. Doubt played quite a large part in Melville's life, and it was particularly true in this period. It seemed ridiculous to Melville that the Christian would, even when he sees a much more effective religion, attempt to change the believer. But this is one of the great mysteries of life; to Melville it was as unexplainable as the instinctive opposition of Claggart to Budd. Perhaps Melville felt that the Christian was

attempting to pay his fare to heaven with conversions.

Though not prone to sentimentality, Melville was nonetheless rather idealistically concerned with the effect of society on the innocent. The innocent represented to him not only a person who was naturally benevolent, but it also represented a man who was free from the bonds of the materialistic world---free enough to be in the position to be able to care about the welfare of his fellow man. The noble savage, Kory-Kory, and the natural man, Queequeg, were true to themselves, not to organized religion. Their soothing simplicity was beautiful to Melville. Their religion was not bound up in ritual with a ten per cent payment for services rendered; Queequeg's ritual was symbolic, and he divided half and half with his fellow man, not ten per cent with God. Queequeg, who "desired to learn among the Christians," comes rather as the fulfillment of the sermon: "To preach the truth to the face of falsehood!" He preaches not to the ear, but to the eye and the heart of those who can see and comprehend. Ishmael, with nothing to interest him on shore, would "sail about a little" and see "the watery part of the world." He finds in his search that the rather short-run idea of "getting away" is not the "substitute for pistol and ball," as it was not the answer for Jonah; Ishmael's answer lies finally in the great natural insight and goodness of "this soothing savage," Queequeg; and as Queequeg allows himself to be sacrificed with his new found friend by the insane Ahab, we gain a little more insight into Billy Budd's final words, "God bless Captain Vere!"

CHAPTER IV

BILLY BUDD

Both in Typee and in Moby Dick Melville contrasted the naturally good man with the materialistic world of civilization. The world had become to him a world of necessity wherein the natural goodness of the primitive could not survive. Kory-Kory was a noble savage and had only secondary contact with the materialistic world, but even with his sketchy knowledge of the world outside the Valley of Typee, he had more than enough of an index to compare. He realized what would happen to a spear of great value if it were left "leaning against a tree for days" on the other side of the island, where the chief's most important pastime was sizing up the strength of the French intruders. With the civilizing influence of the missionaries had come the evils of the white man. And this great change for the worse was seen many times by Melville in his travels through Polynesia.

The only observable change in Queequeg was his rather confused sense of modesty, but he thought of himself as throughly tainted by the Christian world. The New Englanders had not only treated this benevolent savage with disrespect and unconcern, but they were completely blind to his very apparent "Christian" attitude toward mankind. Only Ishmael seemed to be dissatisfied with the attitude of the world, and there is little doubt that he found his answer in the pagan. Ahab, who could not afford even the time to look for the lost

son of the Jungfrau's captain, symbolized the blind selfishness of the civilized man in search of his own ends. Ahab's "Master Plan" had no room for consideration of anything but self, just as the "man-of-war world" of the Indomitable had no room for the "Handsome Sailor." Melville had always thought that there was little chance for the naturally benevolent to exist in the materialistic "man-of-war world." In taking the naturally good Budd out of his Eden, Melville, for the last time, brought the innocent child of nature into a world of materialistic necessity. This conclusion to the Noble Savage and Natural Man progression in the works of Melville is manifested in the meaning of his last novel, Billy Budd. The bringing of Budd into the "man-of-war world" was the author's final trial of society in its relationship with the naturally good man.

Interpretations of the meaning of Melville's last novel, Billy Budd, vary from its assessments as a bitter satire to that of a testament of acceptance which shows a certain philosophic peace. Carl Van Doren says that Melville wrote Billy Budd "after a long silence in which he had turned from a romantic rebellion to philosophic peace in the inscrutable universe."[1] Lewis Mumford says:

> He accepted the situation as a tragic necessity; and to meet that tragedy bravely was to find peace, the ultimate peace of resignation, even in an incongruous world. As Melville's own end approached, he cried out with Billy Budd: "God bless Captain Vere!"[2]

Geoffery Stone says:

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[1]Carl Van Doren, ed., Billy Budd, Benito Cereno, and The Enchanted Isles, by Herman Melville (New York, 1942), p. viii.

[2]Lewis Mumford, Herman Melville (New York, 1949), p. 357.

The freedom there exercised could only be with regard to some final end, and Melville's affirmation of freedom was of its kind religious. The message of Billy Budd, to put it at its very simplest, is that the last victory allowed to man cannot be of this world.

Plainly enough, the problem with which Melville had wrestled through a long lifetime met no intellectual solution here: the contradiction at the heart of things was for the last time affirmed and the intellect's helplessness was implicit in that affirmation.[3]

Richard Chase states:

The real theme of Billy Budd is castration and cannibalism, the ritual murder and eating of the host.

In symbolic language, Billy Budd is seeking his own castration--seeking to yield up his vitality to an authoritative but kindly father, whom he finds in Captain Vere.

Melville is overwhelmingly moved with pity for the passive, hermaphrodite youth, an image of himself, who must continuously be killed in the rite of the sacrament if books are to be written or the man-of-war world sustained--or indeed if life is to go on at all.[4]

Lawrance Thompson writes:

If such readers understand the traditional principles of satiric literary art, they should have no difficulty in overcoming their bias enough to recognize that the misanthropic Melville does indeed ask the reader to laugh with him, derisively, even to the bitter end of Billy Budd.[5]

The setting of Billy Budd is on the outward bound war ship H.M.S. Indomitable in the year of the great mutiny of 1797. The plot is simple and well defined. Billy is impressed from the English merchant ship Rights of Man. On boarding the man-of-war, Billy's apparent virtue causes the old, experienced Dansker's smile to change to a:

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[3]Geoffery Stone, Melville (New York, 1949), p. 315.

[4]Richard Chase, Herman Melville (New York, 1949), p. 269.

[5]Lawrance Thompson, Melville's Quarrel With God (London, 1951), p. 356.

> . . . speculative query as to what might befall a nature like that, dropped into a world not without some man-traps and against whose subtleties simple courage lacking experience and address and without any touch of defensive ugliness is of little avail.[6]

Claggart, the Master-at-Arms, who is innately evil and has a natural disdain for Billy's innocence, views his accidental spilling of a bowl of soup as the "futile kick of a heifer, which yet were the heifer a shod stallion would not be so harmless." Dansker tells Billy that Claggart is "down on him," but Billy's innocence will not allow him to see Claggart as a "man-trap." Later, in the presence of Captain Vere, when Claggart accuses Billy of plotting mutiny, Billy, who cannot speak quickly enough because of his stuttering, kills Claggart with a blow to the head. Vere immediately pronounces Billy's fate, as he says, "struck down by an angel of God. Yet the angel must hang." At the court martial next day, Vere explains to the court that Billy's intent has nothing to do with their judgment. Vere argues:

> In natural justice is nothing but the prisoner's overt act to be considered? How can we adjudge to summary and shameful death a fellow-creature innocent before God, and whom we feel to be so--Does that state it aright? You sign sad assent. Well, I, too, feel that, the full force of that. It is Nature. But do these buttons we wear attest that our allegiance is to Nature? No, to the King.
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> Our vowed responsibility is in this: That however pitilessly that law may operate, we nevertheless adhere to it and administer it.[7]

That night, the Chaplain finds that Billy has no fear of death and decides that "innocence was even a better thing than religion

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[6]Sculley Bradley, ed., Billy Budd, American Traditions in Literature, by Herman Melville (New York, 1956), p. 730.

[7]Ibid., p. 760.

wherewith to go to Judgement." As Billy stands under the main-yard, he speaks only four words: "God bless Captain Vere!" Later in his life after a battle with the Atheiste, Captain Vere is carried ashore with the other wounded, and he dies murmuring, "Billy Budd, Billy Budd."

Throughout the story, Melville has developed the incident in such a way that its possibility is almost incontestable. The action, characters, and setting all contribute to the verisimilitude of a situation which seeks to prove that in that "man-of-war world," this sequence of events can happen. Melville has designed his characters to be as absolute as possible and still maintain their real-life qualities. Like Hawthorne, he could never allow the absolute, whether good or evil, to exist in his characters. Billy is as absolutely good as Melville could allow him to be. Though he is a natural man, there are three pronounced flaws in his character; first, his stutter which is evident only when he is excited; second, his rather quick temper; third, ironically, his goodness. These flaws, though, do not impede the flow of virtue that "went out of him sugaring the sour ones." As the lieutenant who came for Budd was preparing to leave the "Rights"; the Captain said, "Lieutenant, you are going to take away the jewel of 'em; you are going to take away my peacemaker!"[8] There is apparently a very pointed similarity between the "soothing" of Queequeg and the "sugaring" of Billy Budd. Other than color, which is unimportant, the great difference between Kory-Kory, Queequeg, and Budd is that the latter lacks wisdom and insight into the problem of evil. Budd is personified innocence, and

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[8]Ibid., p. 714.

being "only innocent," he cannot perceive that the evil Claggargt is "down on him" even with the Dansker's warning. From the beginning of the story, when Budd stands in the boat, he stands out as the innocent one. Melville contrasted the naturally good man with materialistic society by causing the noble savage, Kory- Kory, and the natural man, Queequeg, to point up the evils of the very un-christian world. Both of these characters were aware of the evils of the world, but the reader has greater pity for Budd as he is sacrificed without his understanding why. The night after the court martial, Vere explained his reasons for committing him to death:

> On Billy's side it is not improbable that such a confession would have been received in much the same spirit that prompted it. Not without a sort of joy indeed he might have appreciated the brave opinion of him implied in his Captain making such a confidant of him. Nor, as the sentence itself could he have been insensible that it was imparted to him as to one who was not afraid to die.[9]

And Billy, true to his benevolent, fatalistic character, blessed the Captain as he died.

Captain is a very apparent example of the meeting of necessity (man-of-war law) and natural justice (tempered law). Vere could have loved Billy little more had he been his natural father, but as a naval officer who was forced to consider the times, he could not allow personal feeling to temper his judgment. He is father, judge, attorney, jury, and accusing witness. He is the witness for the defense and at the same time the administrant of the King's justice--the meeting of heart and mind.

Claggart is the opposite of Billy, in that Billy is personified love, and Claggart is incapable of loving. He is Melville's example

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[9]Ibid., p. 763.

of a "depravity according to nature."

> With no power to annul the elemental evil in himself, though readily enough he could hide it; apprehending the good, but powerless to be it; a nature like Claggart's, surcharged with energy as such natures almost invariably are, what recourse is left to it but to recoil upon itself and, like the scorpion for which the Creator alone is responsible, act out to the end the part allotted it.[10]

Melville chose the period during which the action takes place for the same reason he chose these particular characters, for its lending of probability to the whole. With the addition of the times to the plot, there is little room for contesting the possibility of the action. The action takes place in the time of the great mutiny of 1797. Considering the period, Vere had no choice but to hang Billy ever though he knew he was innocent of the mutiny charge and not morally responsible for the murder of Claggart. The danger of mutiny was real; Vere could not allow an offender to go unpunished, and the law was explicit: "We must do; and one of two things we must do--condemn or let go." He says that with the recent outbreak aboard the Nore that they (the sailors) "would think that we flinch, that we are afraid of them--afraid of practicing a lawful rigour singularly demanded at this juncture lest it should provoke new troubles." The meaning of the novel is then Melville's statement that in man's relationship with man in this world of ours, at times "the angel must hang!"[11]

Milton Stern quotes Melville as penciling in the margin of his copy of Emerson, next to the section on the malleability and goodness

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[10] Ibid., p. 737.

[11] Ibid., p. 753.

of man,--"God help the poor fellow who squares his life according to this." He quotes Melville's letter to Duyckinck as saying:

> I could readily see in Emerson, not withstanding his merit, a gaping flaw. It was, the insinuation, that had he lived in those days when the world was made, he might have offered some valuable suggestions. These men are all cracked right across the brow.[12]

In Typee Melville pictured the primitive in a light which was very different from the usual mid-nineteenth century view. Melville showed the noble savage as an individual who has not attained an existence completely free from evil by living far from civilization, in a world not ruled by necessity; but rather, he showed that, though spiritually far ahead of their civilized brothers, the primitive had grave moral problems nonetheless. There is no answer to the problem of evil in Typee; there is only the statement of the universality of evil in man. Throughout Moby Dick, Ahab searches for the truth behind the "mask"--behind the White Whale. Melville said in the novel that there is a need in man, rather in some men, not only to recognize evil (as he did in Typee) but a need to search for the evil even in Nature itself. But the search may end, as it did for Ahab, in obsession and death. Nearly forty years later, Melville was still grappling with the problem of these threads of evil which pervade the world. He had shown that the innocent are sacrificed in order that human (man-of-war) order man be maintained. Raymond Weaver quotes Melville as writing at the end of Billy Budd: "A story not unwarranted by what happens in this incongruous world of ours. . ."[13]

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[12] Milton R. Stern, The Fine Hammered Steel of Herman Melville (Champaign, 1957), p. 12.

[13] Raymond Weaver, ed., The Shorter Novels of Herman Melville (

Melville's later life tells us nothing for certain about an "acceptance," a "rejection," or a "philosophic peace." As Mr. Freeman said, we "shall never know his exact nature during these last years, for his complex personality can be turned to the whim of any interested reader."[14] Throughout Billy Budd Melville made no condemnation of the characters as individuals; he has condemned society--man's relationship to man in the man-of-war world. Carl Van Doren said of the characterization:

> Few characters in fiction have ever been so thoroughly conceived and so imaginatively present in so difficult decision. Nor is Melville, fair to Vere, less fair to the victim Budd or the villain Claggart.[15]

The searching reader of Melville would perhaps hope for some meaningful solution in his last novel to the author's groping among the "sandhills," perhaps a pessimistic peace in acceptance such as Hawthorne's. There is certainly a condemnation of the laws of society in the novel; I see little to support an argument which seeks to prove a "philosophic peace" in Melville's quarrel with God. Billy accepts his death with a blessing for his accusing witness, but this is part of his character. Vere accepts Billy's death because he is a naval officer. Though I agree with Mr. Van Doren's comments about the fairness of Melville toward his characters, I must disagree with his comment on the decision. If he meant to say it was a difficult situation, I would agree, but a "difficult decision" is precisely not the point of Vere's character. Vere is the man-of-war world's law

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[14] F. Barron Freeman, ed., Melville's Billy Budd (Cambridge, 1948), p. xlix.

[15] Van Doren, p. 3.

personified. The point is that, being as wise as he is, he has no "difficulty" in deciding Billy's fate. Necessity (law) demands the life of Billy. The decision was made as soon as it was known that Claggart was dead. The problem of necessity is settled in the mind of the Captain as he dies with "Billy Budd, Billy Budd" on his lips. Though the words, "these were not the accents of remorse," would seem to show a clear conscience--a "philosophic peace" on the part of Vere, we cannot construe this statement to be a testament of peace toward God in Melville. Does this not mean that Melville had said that it is possible in this world for a wise man such as Vere to condemn a morally innocent man to hang? If this was the case, I see little trace of a theological "philosophic peace" directing his pen. Is he not saying that there is now no state of natural rights--that there is often a Claggart fishing just on the other side of Walden?

On the other hand, there is evidently no open and shut case for the people who seek to prove that Melville's attitude is a complete rejection, for Melville is saying "this is so," not "I accept" or "I reject." The reader of this novel can hardly say that Melville found or did not find an answer in Billy Budd to the problem of evil which had plagued him all his life. He did little more theological problem-solving here than he did in Typee or Moby Dick. The early Melvillian search for evil is over; we can see that Claggart is "depravity according to nature" (evil personified), and there is little question as to Claggart's presence in the world. The reason for the sacrifice is clearly answered in human necessity, which lies in man's relationship to man, not God's relationship to man, and this is hardly an

answer which could give "peace" to Melville. The dominant question which runs through many of his early works is not why evil exists, nor why people allow it to exist, but rather, where it exists. In this last novel he has said only, "This is reality." The key to an understanding of Melville's acceptance, peace, or rejection, as is evidenced in his works, would have to come from a work which gives convincing evidence that Melville had made a decision concerning the problem of why this evil "for which the Creator alone is responsible" is allowed by the Creator to exist in the world. If we were to construe the meaning to be a theological one, we can only say that it is that God allows evil (the sacrifice) to exist in order that the man-of-war world may survive, and this could hardly be a satisfying theological answer to Melville. Inevitably then, the answer lies in why the man-of-war world itself is allowed by the Creator as a man-of-war world. This question and its answer are well beyond the scope of Billy Budd. An interpretation of the meaning of this novel must lead one to agree with Mr. Stone, that "we meet no intellectual solution here."[16] As to the problem of why the Creator allows naturally good men to be sacrificed in order that this basically evil system may continue to exist, there is little doubt that Melville believed that the simplicity of natural goodness, the simple code of "Do unto others," was the right answer for man; but this man-of-war world will not allow this non-materialistic system of benevolence to operate. It is rather natural for the Christian to want to believe that Melville was saying that even though we die as Budd did, a life dedicated to the benevolent way, even when it is

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[16]Stone, p. 315.

repaid with death by hanging, is well worth the price. If these were Melville's thoughts, he had changed completely in his last few years. This answer had always annoyed him, and it is difficult for the reader to believe that he accepted it at this point. A positive acceptance of this situation is even more difficult to ascribe to Melville when one considers that throughout his writing he is almost overly concerned with the fate of these innocents. Kory-Kory had only to fight off the French intruder; Queequeg, we must believe, knew his fate from the beginning of his meeting with Ishmael in that the signs of death were perfectly evident to one with such insight and knowledge of evil; but the death of Budd is pitiful. He was sold into death by his symbolic father as a martyr of a system to which he could never belong.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In this final chapter I should like first to examine very briefly the setting, character, style, and plot of Billy Budd; then I should like to give an interpretation of the theme of the novel as a natural progression and logical conclusion to Melville's thoughts on man's relationship to man in Typee and Moby Dick, and examine the importance of the naturally good man in this progression.

The authors of The American Tradition in Literature state that Melville "recaptured his highest powers during the very last years of his life."[1] I find that Melville has perhaps more than recaptured his talents in Billy Budd; he has retained his power and has developed a new one--refinement. Many critics acclaim Moby Dick as a great novel but find great fault in its art. The authors of American Tradition state that Moby Dick:

> . . . shines above the stylistic awkwardness of many passages, the tendency of the author to lose control of his own symbols, or to set the metaphysical thunderbolt side by side with factual discussion or common place realism.[2]

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[1] Sculley Bradley et al. The American Tradition in Literature (New York, 1949), p. 709.

[2] Ibid., p. 708.

The white whale loomed so large to Melville that Bulkington was lost as a very promising character. Yet Moby Dick is almost always called a great work of art and very often Melville's greatest work. Critics admire the novels of Jane Austen because of the astounding control of her art as the reader ponders with her for pages over who is to dance with whom. If we admire power in character, theme, immaterial setting, and style and, at the same time, admire excellence in control over the same essentials, it seems that Billy Budd demands greater rank as art than it is often given.

It is necessary for the reader to recognize that if Melville's last work was to fulfill its purpose, proper choice of setting was necessary to give verisimilitude. Melville's choice of the time of the Nore Mutiny was essential. The combined conditions of the mutiny and war lend a certain probability to the whole. Vere himself said that if the trial had been on shore, intent would have been considered, but under the articles of war, the officers of the court martial had no choice. Vere's buttons attested that his allegiance was to the King, not to Nature. As soon as the Captain knew that Claggart was dead, the decision was made. There was, of course, a choice, but like the Greek fate in Oedipus of the prophecy in Macbeth, there was a great force acting on the one who must choose, and the force allowed little choice. The times, then, lend a great deal of probability to the whole.

The characters were equally well chosen. Vere, as I mentioned, is symbolic father, judge, jury, representative of the Crown, and witness for both the defense and the prosecution. Vere is the medium through which the man-of-war law operates, and importantly, it is a

law which operates not on the principles of mercy but on expediency--the watch-word of materialism. Vere is mankind at its wisest caught up in "civilization." Claggart is the essence of what lies behind the "cardboard mask" of Moby Dick. He is the Serpent of Eden--personified evil. The setting is right for the Master-at-Arms; Claggarts thrive on expediency. And Budd, as personified innocence, is not quite a god. He has the beauty of Fayaway, the intelligence, benevolence, and humility of Kory-Kory, but he lacks the insight of Queequeg. Shrewdness and hypocrisy go quite unnoticed by the "handsome sailor," and expediency is far beyond his understanding. Billy is mankind at its innocent best; he is one who is naturally benevolent ---the last of the line of Melville's innocents. Like Queequeg, he is a fulfillment of Father Mapple's sermon to "preach the truth in the face of falsehood"; he "sugars the sour ones." Unlike Ahab, he has even found identity without the evils of the ever-present Self. He has innocence and natural virtue "with which to go to judgement," not religion. Kory-Kory had some second hand information about the evils which the French could bring to his people; Budd had a "natural disdain" for evil as Claggart had for good. Billy moved away from the coins which were offered to him not because he realized the full significance of the coins but because he sensed evil as an animal senses danger. Budd might seem quite improbable to the reader, but Melville had been to Typee where each man worshiped his own god, yet each man practiced his own brand of "Do unto others." It is important for the reader to realize that as Billy falls to the principles of expediency, symbolically, Queequeg and all the innocents of Typee fall with him, and these people could only have meant to Melville the last

stand of practical benevolence--practical Christianity unshrouded by mysticism and dogma.

We find little or none of the criticism levied at Moby Dick by the authors of The American Tradition directed toward Billy Budd. The latter novel is less susceptible, for there is rather always an apparent use of control. Much of the style, though, is still characteristic of Melville, but this time artistic heights are attained slowly and reached where they are needed. The hanging of Budd is a good example:

> At the same moment it chanced that a vapory fleece hanging low in the East, was shot thro with a soft glory as of the fleece of the Lamb of Good seen in mystical vision and simultaneously therewith, watched by the wedged mass of upturned faces, Billy ascended; and, ascending, took the full rose of the dawn.[3]

In Billy Budd there is great universality in plot and theme. In the "Poetics," Aristotle pointed out that there must be the fall of a great man before there is tragic significance. I do not wish to conclude that Billy Budd is an Aristotelian tragedy; no one character possesses the characteristics necessary to produce an Oedipus, yet there is enough of basic life in each of the characters to allow the reader to project himself into both the whole and its parts.

The tragic function of Billy Budd seems to be divided, and perhaps it should be since it is a novel which concerns itself with society as a whole operating in such a way that human rights (the rights of man) cannot exist. It is as though the tragic characteristics of an Oedipus or a Macbeth are divided between the central characters of the novel. Vere is wisdom, civilization, the father image--the one who must choose. Claggart is, of course, Evil, and

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[3]Melville, Billy Budd, p. 769.

Budd is Good. The Dansker is apparently an oracle. The crew at times is even a chorus. There is a fall, but it is not the fall of one man--it is the fall of all men operating together. There is dramatic irony in that Budd was chosen as a known "peace-maker," yet he was unknowingly at odds with Claggart and "the Navy way" the moment he boarded the Indomitable. Vere, intending to do good by doing the expedient, recognized the implications immediately and died still thinking of the incident. So as Budd left the merciful decks of the "Rights" and boarded the Indomitable, materialistic society went on trial.

In Billy Budd, as wisdom, honor, courage, fatherly love, and obedience fall because of an adherence to the laws of a system dedicated to the good for the greater number, as the world of the Indomitable (the world of necessity) is found guilty, our world falls with it. The guilt is not in one character or in one individual but in the materialistic society which the Indomitable symbolizes. Melville was not saying that all the world is black--he always pointed out that there was an exception in both complete good and evil. The reader must bear in mind that all ships are not Indomitables.

The setting, characters, and plot were all apparently chosen to give proper verisimilitude to a tale which should fittingly carry a novelist's last word.

If one considers Typee, Moby Dick, and Billy Budd as a natural progression, he can see that the progression provides a pattern which parallels the themes in these novels. The major part of Typee is concerned with Tom's realization that primitive man, man

who has dealt with little more than life's essentials and certainly has no rigid set of moral standards, can be more "Christian" than the Christian himself. In Typee Melville found man who by the gifts of Nature was good; Kory-Kory was not concerned with a heavenly reward; Heaven was not much better than Typee to him, and "Do unto others" was not merely a theory to him; it was the most pleasantly workable theory he knew. Kory-Kory offered himself to Tom with no expectation of long or short run payment.

In Moby Dick the naturally good man is a character of contrast. Ahab begins a voyage in search of the secret of good and evil when the secret lay in his own deluded mind. Ishmael explained to the old Captain that he wished to sail about and see the "watery parts of the world," and ironically the old Captain answered Ahab's question as he answered Ishmael's when he explained that the rest of the world was essentially like that which could be seen off the back of the ship. The lives of all on board are wasted in the search by one who is interested in his own ends. Queequeg had found his answer in simple goodness, but all except his friend Ishmael were blind to his silent testimony.

If one sees Billy Budd as the final word in a progression of works which deal with essentials like man's relationship to man and to God, statements like the ones made in The American Tradition concerning the importance of Billy Budd seem rather confusing. The authors statethat: "Billy Budd is fundamentally significant for the interpretation of its enigmatic author and his masterpiece, Moby Dick.[4]

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[4]Bradley, p. 709.

They again say that:

> . . . its (Billy Budd's) theme has obvious relations with that of Moby Dick; yet the essential spirit of the work cancels the infuriated rebellion of Captain Ahab. In its reconciliation of the temporal with the eternal there is a sense of luminous peace and atonement.[5]

If one considers the works as a progression which begins with the author's discovery of the naturally good man in his home environment in Typee, then as a man who is in basic contrast with one who is personified Self in Moby Dick, and finally as a man whose only real flaw is a stutter, a man who is clearly a composite of Kory-Kory and Queequeg, in the final novel Billy Budd, the "spirit" of Billy Budd seems to be a rather logical and mature conclusion to a life of thought. The main tragic significance of Moby Dick is not a Nietzscheian glory struggle against impossible odds, because Ahab chooses to do battle with the whale and sacrifices the crew in doing it. Its theme is a rather common one in tragedies, that of a basically good man who is overcome by Self, and in which his intentions are reversed. Now, the importance of Queequeg is that through Ishmael the reader sees the great contrast between the pagan and the Christian Ahab, i.e., Queequeg clarifies the errors of the monomaniac captain.

Billy Budd is significant first for its beauty of form--its control over essentially tragic material, second because it is another evidence of man's preaching "the truth in the face of falsehood," and third because it is a work which "cancels the infuriated rebellion of Ahab" through its mature view of a tragic situation.

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[5]Ibid., p. 708.

It is Melville no longer needing the Andes for an ink well. It is Melville dealing with a theme which is perhaps greater than that of Moby Dick since it deals directly with the guilt of all society--the guilt of a society which is concerned not with the welfare of the innocent but with materialism.

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