

ELEMENTS OF PROPHECY IN THE PROSE FICTION
OF HERMAN MELVILLE

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PREFACE

This study is concerned with Herman Melville's likeness to the Old Testament prophets. My primary objective is to show Melville's utilization of the various prophetic elements: his speaking to his own generation, his predicting the world in which we live, and his expressing eternal truths for all generations.

The phenomenon of Melville and his relationship to Biblical prophecy began to interest me while I was taking a course at Oklahoma State University. I was able to pursue the work because of a grant from Connors State College under the Title III, Higher Education Act of 1965, and an International Scholarship from the Delta Kappa Gamma Society. I am grateful to both of these organizations for their generous support, as well as to the administrators of Connors State College, Dr. Melvin Self, President, and Dr. James Klemm, Academic Dean, for their encouragement and understanding during the time I was working on the research.

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CHAPTER I

MELVILLE AS PROPHET: HIS LITERARY TECHNIQUES AND THEORIES

When Raymond Weaver's biography, Herman Melville, Mariner and Mystic, was published in 1921, an interest in Melville's work and genius was awakened so that Herman Melville has a much wider audience in the twentieth century than he ever had in the nineteenth. Many critics continue to study his works and are fascinated by his ambiguities. Melville even uses the word as a subtitle to one of his important novels, Pierre: or The Ambiguities. Although Melville's prose does have a literal surface, symbolism and allusion extend the meaning to several levels. It is the desire to "mine for new ore" which keeps Melville's readers searching for deeper insights into his meanings and techniques.

Although most of Melville's readers and critics note his use of the Bible in allusions, figures of speech, characters, themes, and even language, a few have noted the prophetic elements in Moby-Dick, but all have disregarded or overlooked the prophetic elements in the other prose. After extensive research, examining many publications--books, periodicals, and dissertations--I have found that no one has made a study of the reflections of the Biblical prophets in Melville's prose.

Nathalia Wright has made one of the most extensive studies of Melville and the Bible, but she dwells on imagery, characters, themes,

style, and quotations from the Bible.¹ She mentions the "theme of prophecy in Moby-Dick" in a list of four major scriptural themes found in Melville.² David S. Berkeley has pointed out that Moby-Dick is "full, like types, of things to come."³ And he has written a paper which appeared in the Bucknell Review suggesting that the story "predicts the sinking of modern civilization for its having entrusted to science in place of the church the conquest of moral and spiritual evil."⁴ Milton Stern⁵ and others have noted in passing that Melville's Bibles are marked extensively in the books of prophecy because he was interested in the Hebrew prophets. But a study of Melville's likeness to the Old Testament prophets has been neglected.

The more useful contributions of scholarship have been those concerned principally with Melville's personal history and outlook, notably the documentary compilations of Jay Leyda⁶ and Eleanor Metcalf,⁷ and the variously conceived biographies of Raymond Weaver,⁸ of Newton Arvin,⁹ and of Leon Howard.¹⁰ The interpretations of themes and meanings in Melville's books, which have been legion, are helpful also in understanding Melville.

The purpose of this study is to examine the prose of Herman Melville to show that elements of prophecy appear in work after work. Henrietta Mears reports that there were three elements in the message of the Old Testament prophets:

1. A message to their own age--directly from God.
2. A message of predicted future events.
3. A living message to our own age.¹¹

My object will be to demonstrate that Melville fulfills all of these elements except that he, unlike the Old Testament prophets, does not claim to be a messenger from God. Melville uses his stories and novels

to speak against evils of his day--particularly slavery and the injustices toward sailors and the working poor. He tries to show where America is erring in science, industry, politics, and philosophy. Not only does Melville speak to his own age, he looks to the future and predicts disaster if America does not "turn from her wicked ways." In Mardi, Moby-Dick, Pierre, The Confidence-Man, and some of the short stories, Melville forecasts a world that we recognize as our own. And his ideas of neurosis in Pierre certainly precede Freud and modern psychoanalysis. Melville also speaks truths for all ages. Many philosophic characters and philosophic passages appear in the prose which express the message to all ages from Melville, the prophet.

According to J. Barton Payne, Scripture recognizes prophecy as a "medium of divine communication."¹² Israel possessed three basic classes of human media for revelations from God, each with its own particular function. As expressed in Jeremiah 18:18, "The law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word [or vision, Ezekiel 7:26] from the prophet."

Payne reports that "the most utilized Hebrew noun for prophet, nāvi, remains uncertain in etymology but seems to come from the root meaning 'to announce.'¹³ Biblical usage confirms the concept of the prophet as "an announcer"; for example, when God sent Moses to Egypt, He explained, "See, I have made thee as God to Pharaoh, and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet: thou shalt speak all that I command thee, and Aaron thy brother shalt speak unto Pharaoh" (Exodus 7:1-2). A prophet may, therefore, be defined as a "spokesman of a special revelation" and prophecy, in its broadest sense, as simply "the message of a prophet." In the Old Testament, the prophet specifically was to

reveal God's will, His specific "word" for men, and reprove their sin and guide them to seek His "law" from the priest.

Melville does not claim to be speaking for God nor revealing a message from God. But he does reveal the things that he "sees" as being wrong in his world, and he predicts punishment to come if things are not corrected. The Old Testament has two other major terms for prophet which Payne lists as hōse' and rō'e', both meaning "one who sees," a "seer."¹⁴ Prophecy then involves both a forthtelling and a foretelling. When the Biblical prophets predicted events to come, they did not always understand their own prophecies. Such may be true with Melville. He envisions the world in which we live; however, he may not have really understood that he was making predictions.

It seems that even Melville's idea of the purpose of literature and his techniques of writing illustrate the influence of the Old Testament prophets on his writing. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss those statements gathered from Melville's writing which seem to express his theory of prose fiction, to examine Melville's literary techniques, and to compare them to those of the Old Testament prophets.

Melville was reared in a religious home. His father, Allan Melville, was a Unitarian who died when Herman was thirteen. His mother, Maria Gansevoort Melville, was a member of the Calvinistic Dutch-Reformed Church. Herman was educated in an especially pious school and as a youth listened to numerous sermons in his mother's church. He read a great amount of religious literature, including the Bible. Melville's writing reflects his Calvinist background. In a letter to Evert Duyckinck of London dated December 14, 1849, Melville says that he was "predestinated" to write:

. . . But we that write & print have all our books pre-destinated--& for me, I shall write such things as the Great Publisher of Mankind ordained ages before he published 'The World'--this planet, I mean--not Literary Globe. ¹⁵

The main documents for a study of Melville's expressed theory of prose fiction are the famous two-part essay that Melville wrote on "Hawthorne and His Mosses" (published in the Literary World on August 17 and August 24, 1850); the well-known "Agatha" letter written to Hawthorne on August 13, 1852, as well as the two letters on the same subject that followed in October and November of the same year; and Chapters XIV, XXXIII, and XLIV of The Confidence Man, published in 1857. These are the only formal discussion of his craft that Melville left us. Passages in Mardi and Pierre as well as remarks in letters, in his two journals kept while traveling abroad in 1849-50 and in 1856-57, and in his four anonymous book reviews in the Literary World offer clarification and support.

Melville's theory of composition is expressed very clearly in his letter to Hawthorne known as "The Agatha Letter." In this letter Melville sent the scenario for a story which, he felt, seemed "naturally to gravitate towards" Hawthorne. ¹⁶ While on a trip to Nantucket with his father-in-law, Melville had been so impressed with a story told by a New Bedford lawyer about young Agatha Hatch, who had been deserted by a sailor whom she had befriended and married, that he had asked the lawyer to send him a fuller account. Deciding that the material was better suited to Hawthorne, Melville sent it to him with suggestions regarding the directions the story might take. Melville stressed two things: first, the truth of the story, and second, the symbolic value of the material. "You have a skeleton of actual reality to build about with fulness & veins and beauty," he said, and his suggestions for

fleshing out this skeleton mainly called attention to many of the details in the narrative that were "instinct with significance."¹⁷

This letter is extremely important for an understanding of Melville's method as a writer. From the very beginning of his career Melville depended upon "a skeleton of actual reality" for his fictions, the "actual reality" being something he had personally experienced or observed or something he assumed to be true because of hearsay evidence or because he had encountered it in printed records of fact. In work after work, we can recognize or cite evidence that he gathered his facts from experience, his reading, or his journals and diaries he had kept on his travels. Typee and Omoo as well as Redburn and White Jacket are based on Melville's experiences when he went to sea as a young man, first as a ship's boy on a merchantman bound for Liverpool in 1837 and later as a sailor on the whaler, Acushnet. He was gone for nearly four years by the calendar, but in the world of literature, his voyage is not likely to see an end. The discovery of Melville's sources shows that through his career as a writer of prose fiction he felt the need for a "skeleton of actual reality" about which he could construct his sometimes fanciful fictions.

To impress themselves upon Melville, these "skeletons of actual reality" had to be "instinct with significance." That is, Melville had to see beyond or beneath the surface incident some significance or meaning that gave it a symbolic value. It was the symbolic value of the actual event that attracted him. He explored in his various novels and shorter pieces the meaning beneath the surface of experience.

It was the "deep faraway things" that Melville so admired in Shakespeare. In "Hawthorne and His Mosses," Melville expresses his

thoughts on Hawthorne, Shakespeare, and himself--or by extension, his thoughts on the theory and practice of literature. He says:

Those deep faraway things in him; those occasional flashings--forth of the intuitive Truth in him; those short, quick probings at the very axis of reality;--these are the things that make Shakespeare, Shakespeare. Through the mouths of the dark characters of Hamlet, Timon, Lear, and Iago, he craftily says, or sometimes insinuates the things which we feel to be so terrifically true, that it were all but madness for any good man, in his own proper character, to utter, or even hint of them. Tormented into desperation, Lear, the frantic king, tears off the mask, and speaks the same madness of vital truth.¹⁸

This faculty of seeing below the surface and telling the truth is what constituted for Melville the major accomplishment of both Hawthorne and Shakespeare:

For in this world of lies, Truth is forced to fly like a sacred white doe in the woodlands; and only masters of the great Art of Telling the Truth,--even though it be covertly and by snatches. (XIII, 131)

This same element of Truth with a capital "T" was what Melville treasured in the writings of Solomon. In a letter to Hawthorne in the spring of 1851, Melville wrote:

I read Solomon more and more, and every time see deeper and deeper and unspeakable meanings in him It seems to me now that Solomon was the truest man who ever spoke, and yet that he a little managed the truth with a view to popular conservatism; or else there have been many corruptions and interpolations of the text.¹⁹

Melville's conception of truth in literature as he expresses it in his writing was something more than literal or factual truth, although he tried to convince his readers that he was relating actual experiences. In his preface to Typee he referred to "the unvarnished truth." He referred to this factual truth again in his preface to Omoo, where he indicated that he had observed a "strict adherence to facts," sometimes using the printed accounts of previous voyages to

substantiate the charges he levied against the missionaries in the South Seas. "Nothing but an earnest desire for truth and good has led him to touch upon this subject at all" (II, viii), he said.

However, the truth of Typee and Omoo was not the same as the truth of "Hawthorne and His Mosses." Something of the difference can be seen in Mardi where Melville's "truth" began to be touched more by his imagination. In a letter to John Murray, March 25, 1848, Melville wrote:

. . . proceeding in my narrative of facts I began to feel an incurable distaste for the same; & a longing to plume my powers for a flight, & felt irked, cramped & fettered by plodding along with dull common places, -- So suddenly standing the thing altogether, I went to work heart & soul at a romance which is now in fair progress, since I had worked at it under an earnest ardor It opens like a true narrative--like Omoo for example, on shipboard--& the romance & poetry of the thing thence grow continually, till it becomes a story wild enough I assure you & with a meaning too.²⁰

Another explanation of what Melville meant by "truth" can be found in Mardi in the chapter entitled "Babbalanja Steps in between Mohi and Yoomy; and Yoomy Relates a Legend," where Yoomy, the poet, and Mohi, the historian, argue about truth. Historians, the poet insisted, deal in "Mangled realities" while poets "are the true historians" (III, 324).

In Pierre after Pierre reads Isabel's letter declaring herself his illegitimate sister, he declares,

Henceforth I will know nothing but Truth; glad Truth, or sad Truth; I will know what is, and do what my deepest angel dictates From all idols I tear all veils; henceforth I will see the hidden things; and live right out in my own hidden life!--Now I feel that nothing but Truth can move me so. (IX, 76)

Pierre discovered how difficult it was to arrive at Truth when, settled in New York with both Isabel and Lucy, he attempted to write a book:

For the more and the more that he wrote, and the deeper and the deeper that he dived, Pierre saw the everlasting elusiveness of Truth; in universal lurking insincerity of even the greatest and purest written thought. . . . Like knavish cards, the leaves of all great books are covertly packed. (IX, 399)

The pertinent text for what Melville meant by reality and his concept of "diving for truth" in fiction is Chapter XXXIII of The Confidence-Man. Here Melville stopped his story and had his narrator indicate just how far he was from the dominant literary attitude of his time. He answered the imagined charge of the critics "How unreal all this is!" by commenting upon how strange it was for readers of fiction to insist upon "severe fidelity to real life" since by taking up a work of fiction they indicated their willingness to "drop real life, and turn, for a time, to something different." He wondered why anyone who found his daily routine dull and sought relief in fiction should "demand of him who is to divert his attention from it, that he should be true to that dullness." It was for another class of readers that Melville wrote, those

who sit down to a work of amusement tolerantly as they sit at a play, and with much the same expectations and feelings. They look that fancy shall evoke scenes different from those of the same old crowd around the custom-house counter, and same old dishes on the boarding-house table, with characters unlike those of the same old acquaintances they meet in the same old way every day in the same old street. (XII, 206)

Because in life the proprieties will not allow people complete freedom of action, they go to books of fiction "not only for entertainment" but he says:

. . . even for more reality than real life itself can show. Thus, though they want novelty, they want nature too; but nature unfettered, exhilarated, in effect transformed. In this way of thinking, the people in a fiction, like the people in a play, must dress as nobody exactly dresses, talk as nobody exactly talks, act as nobody exactly acts. It is with fiction as with religion; it should present another world, and yet one to which we feel the tie. (XII, 244)

Thus we return to the concept expressed in the "Agatha" letter that the actualities of the everyday world were less important than what they signified. The realistic novelist deals with the surface of life, with what could actually happen, with--in a word--actuality. Melville's fiction, as he asserted, is primarily concerned not with actuality, but with reality, with indeed, "more reality, than real life itself can show." A writer concerned with this heightened reality is mainly interested not in the circumstantial events of daily experience, surface of life, but rather in what lies beneath the surface, the meaning of the surface--the meaning of life--or as much of it as the writer can apprehend.

Instead of a surface realism, then, Melville in his better works was concerned with what he called probing at the "very axis of reality" to achieve a larger truth than the merely literal or factual truth that the realist was primarily concerned with. Lewis Mumford suggests that while Melville was searching for truths far below the surface of conventional life, he

had in fact discovered the 'unconscious.' Step by step, first in Mardi, he had stripped down his own ego and thrown off the traditional armored superego . . . till he found himself facing the primal images and impulses that inhabit the deepest strata of the psyche.²¹

Mumford goes on to say that Melville came to feel that the revelation which came from "the exploration of this underground chamber of the soul" was "the ultimate truth of human existence."²²

Concerning Melville's searching for truths and his ability to "see" beyond the actual, Mumford theorizes that Melville's contemporaries could not understand or appreciate his writing:

They had no place, on their matter-of-fact plane, with its confident flatfooted science, and its many odd and useful

inventions, for the crosslights of Melville's imagination. . . . When they charged Melville with obscurity, they did not realize that sight demands not merely an object that can be seen, but an eye that is capable of seeing; and it never occurred to them, with all their doubts about Melville, that the defective vision might be their own.²³

The theory of prose fiction that Melville expressed in his writing and the unorthodox nature of Melville's best fiction worked against his contemporary reputation and success as a novelist. He wrote neither historical romance nor sentimental domestic novels, both of which forms were extremely popular with the reading public during the mid-nineteenth century when Melville was most productive. Consequently, for most of his thirteen-year career as a professional novelist, he was neither a critical nor a popular success. His most ambitious prose fiction--such works as Mardi, Moby-Dick, and The Confidence-Man--were misunderstood during his own day.

The hidden meanings and the "diving" below the surface led to Melville's being unaccepted by his generation. As Leon Seltzer says:

Neither Melville's fiction nor Conrad's is characteristic of its age. The movement toward literary realism dominant in their times could hardly be expected to attract two writers less interested in mirroring surface reality than in penetrating to murky subterranean regions. The versimilitude so many of their contemporaries strove for could not but appear inadequate and unsatisfactory to them.²⁴

Melville uses facts for his first two novels; then while proceeding with his "narrative of facts" in Mardi, he turned his interest to imaginative elements, to what he called "a romance."²⁵ Facts and documentation, while undoubtedly restricting the play of Melville's creativity on the one hand, provided on the other a solid basis for his greatest fictional achievement. He achieved his finest artistic synthesis in Moby-Dick where, in his own words in that novel, "facts and fancy, half-way meeting, interpenetrate, and form one seamless

whole," and with a meaning too. This, as Charles Feidleson has pointed out, constitutes the essence of his mature symbolistic method.²⁶

Melville declared in a famous letter to Hawthorne, written in June of 1851 while he was completing Moby-Dick:

My development has been all within a few years past. I am like one of those seeds taken out of the Egyptian Pyramids, which after being three thousand years a seed and nothing but a seed, being planted in English soil, it developed itself, grew to greenness, and then fell to mould. So I. Until I was twenty-five, I had no development at all. From my twenty-fifth year I date my life. Three weeks have scarcely passed, at any time between then and now, that I have not unfolded within myself.²⁷

In Howard Vincent's words, "As Melville's mind matured, so did his technique."²⁸

Ursula Brumm calls Melville's artistic style, including his mixing of "fact and fancy" and his use of metaphorical language "symbolic realism" to indicate the "bipolarity of world and meaning so characteristic of Melville's most important works."²⁹ She uses the example of White Jacket where ship symbolism is mingled with actual experience:

The symbolic illuminations of the described facts alone is what makes the book literary. In addition there is the motif of the white jacket, which quite obviously has a symbolic meaning.³⁰

In his use of figurative language and symbolism, Melville is following the literary techniques used by the Old Testament prophets. Payne discusses the forms that prophecy may take.³¹ He says prophecy may be verbalized both as a straightforward declaration of an oracle and as figurative language. Metonymy, simile, metaphor, and parable are figures used in Biblical prophecy. Wright's chapter on "Imagery" identifies Melville's use of figurative language, especially Biblical images used in metonymy, simile, and metaphor.³² She so satisfactorily describes Melville's use of figurative language I do not find it

necessary to elaborate on this writing technique employed by both Melville and the Old Testament prophets.

Payne suggests that, besides the verbalized prophecies, some prophecies are in the form that are acted out, that are pictorial in nature rather than verbal: "In correspondence to the forthrightly spoken oracle stands the acted symbol."³³ And he lists "type" as a literary device often used in the Old Testament which involves action rather than a verbal message. A type is different from a symbol which usually denotes a material object or event that connotes some matter of timeless significance. A type according to Payne:

. . . is a predictive symbol or prefiguration that is presented through an independently existing historical reality, just as a figure of speech conveys a second thought that grows out of its accepted common usage. That is to say, the type possesses another, separate existence among its immediate contemporaries even while communicating its developed, God-given truth about the future.³⁴

The Oxford English Dictionary defines "type" in the sense under review as "That by which something is symbolized or figured; a thing having a symbolical signification; a symbol, emblem; spec. in Theol. a person, object or event of Old Testament history, prefiguring some person or thing revealed in the new dispensation; corr. to antitype." Brumm, who has written about "types" in literature, regards Lexikon fur Theologie und Kirche as authoritative in its definition of type: "A type in the biblical sense is a person, thing, action, or institution which in addition to its significance in its own historical context also prefigures a future person, thing, action, or institution (antitypus), the God who predetermines history having lent it this power."³⁵ One could regard a type as a special sort of symbol, a prophetic symbol, where the image is historically given in the Old Testament and the

meaning must be inferred as the "fulfillment" of the image in a certain direction. According to Erich Auerbach,

Figural interpretation establishes a connection between two events or persons, the first of which signifies not only itself but also the second, while the second encompasses or fulfills the first. The two poles of the figure are separate in time, but both, being real events or figures, are within time, within the stream of historical life Since in figural interpretation one thing stands for another, since one thing represents and signifies the other, figural interpretation is "allegorical" in the widest sense. But it differs from most of the allegorical forms known to us by the historicity both of the sign and what it signifies.³⁶

A survey of Biblical types indicates that a type can be a person, as Adam; an event, as Israel's crossing of the Red Sea; a thing, as the temple; an institution, as the sabbath; or a ceremonial, as the release of the scapegoat.³⁷ When God's wrath, for example, brought death upon Israel by fiery serpents, the salvation that the Israelites gained by looking in faith at the brazen serpent on the pole (Numbers 21:8) served as a type of the final salvation from God's wrath that is gained, though less obviously, by looking in faith at Christ lifted up on the cross (John 3:14).

Although critics have recognized that Melville took his themes and subjects from the Bible, Brumm is the first to recognize his use of typology. She says:

Not only does he seek a 'certain significance' in everything; he also regards the world and even the present as recurrences of biblical models. He uses typological ideas in many ways, changes and develops them, and experiments with that dimension of the type-concept that refers to the future.³⁸

She gives the example of the meeting of the American ship with the English ship in Israel Potter when Melville says, "There is something singularly indicative in this engagement: it may involve at once a type, a parallel, and a prophecy," indicating that Melville regarded

the American victory as a prefiguration of things to come. By way of explanation Melville states that America is the "John Paul Jones of nations." Brumm points out that "here we have a veritable definition of this Calvinistic form of the symbol. It comprises the meanings of model, parallel, and prophecy."³⁹

Melville's characteristic of symbolically interpreting actual experiences in his novels, Brumm says, "proves Melville an heir to the Calvinist endeavor of finding 'significances' in the world."⁴⁰ The belief that God uses real phenomena and events as signs for human beings is the presupposition of Melville's typology. Thus all of the world's phenomena are potential bearers of significance; all of them point to God's will, or more concretely, to biblical models and types. For Puritans versed in the scriptures, these significances were wholly unequivocal. Without a trace of doubt they could say, "This signifies . . ." and then give the explanation. A further characteristic of this Calvinistic tradition is the acceptance of the world and experience as divine creation, and thus as a source of insight into the meaning of the world and life. In Moby-Dick Melville says:

And some certain significance lurked in all things, else all things are little worth, and the round world itself but an empty cipher, except to sell by the cartload, as they do hills in Boston, to fill up some morass in the Milky Way. (VII, 243)

Melville often uses the words "type," "typify," "shadow forth," and "prefigure" in his prose fiction. For example, in The Encantadas he says: "It is deemed a fit type of all-forsaken overthrow that the jackel should den in the wastes of weedy Babylon; but the Encantadas refuse to harbor even the outcasts of the beasts" (X, 183). And in Pierre, "Now as the Memnon Statue survives down to this present day, so

does that nobly-striving but ever shipwrecked character in some royal youths (for both Memnon and Hamlet were the sons of kings) of which that statue is the melancholy type" (IX, 159). Another example is found in The Confidence-Man: "Here reigned the dashing and all-fusing spirit of the West, whose type is the Mississippi itself, which, uniting the streams of the most distant and opposite zones, pours them along, helter-skelter, in one cosmopolitan and confident tide" (XII, 9); and in The Confidence-Man it is said of bears that they are "true types of most destroyers of confidence" (XII, 53). One example of the use of "typify" is from Moby-Dick in "The Whiteness of the Whale" chapter: ". . . though in many climes, whiteness typifies the majesty of Justice in the ermine of the Judge . . . though even in the higher mysteries of the most august religions it has been made the symbol of the divine spotlessness and power. . ." (VII, 235). And in Mardi, Yillah is certain "that the whirlpool on the coast of Tedaidee prefigured her fate; that in the waters she saw lustrous eyes, and beckoning phantoms, and strange shapes smoothing her couch among the mosses" (III, 185). These examples also demonstrate Melville's departure from the traditional view of "antitypes" because Melville uses abstract antitypes.

Berkeley's paper deals directly with typology in Moby-Dick. He suggests that the sea is a type for the sinful world, the Pequod is the instrument for ridding the world of sin, specifically the white whale, and Ahab is a type of science. With Ahab (science) piloting the ship (which traditionally would be the church), Berkeley states: "The ship is rammed by the white whale, and is wrecked. Its inmates go to Hell; for it has attempted to supersede the church in a task for which it

was unfitted. Such is the butt-end of Melville's typology."⁴¹

Melville has been variously classified by the critics. Stern's thesis is that Melville is a Naturalist.⁴² In his book, G. P. Snell divides American fiction into four categories: Romantic, the Apocalyptic, the Temperamentist, and the Realistic.⁴³ Melville is included along with Charles Brockden Brown, Poe, and Faulkner in the Apocalyptic category. Seltzer considers Melville an existentialist,⁴⁴ but most other critics are divided between calling him a realist or a symbolist. Feidelson discusses Melville along with Hawthorne and others as symbolists.⁴⁵ He suggests that a main theme in Melville is metaphysics, especially the idea of intellectual adventure or intellectual quest. Melville's stories of voyages are really stories of intellectual voyages: "And Melville, no less than Taji, is committed to an intellectual search which holds out no prospect of success but to which there is no alternative."⁴⁶ However, perhaps Brumm has elected the best terminology in classifying Melville as a "symbolic realist." She says:

Melville's place in history is that of a pioneer of literary symbolism, but he was not a symbolist in the modern sense of the term. At times, above all in Mardi and The Confidence Man, he did base allegories on literary models. But in his most important works he is, as his native talent bids, a symbolic realist, i.e., a writer for whom the actual world and experience are keys for a deeper supernatural meaning. . . . For Melville, writing did not mean to create a world but to interpret the world. In fact it is the impulse to interpret, to ferret out the hidden meaning, that made a writer of him.⁴⁷

To "interpret the world" was also the work of the prophets, or Melville says in one of his letters, "[to get] the meaning of this great allegory--the world."⁴⁸ Therefore, we can see that his literary techniques were patterned after the Old Testament prophets who used figurative language, pictures, and types to convey their messages. Just

as Melville's "message" may be obscure at times, so the pictorialness of typology in the Bible makes the acted prophecy more obscure and difficult to interpret than the spoken prophecy. As Payne says:

Prophecy . . . naturally possesses something of the directness . . . of historical description. But types, having a significance or moral import of their own, apart from anything prospective, must, in their prophetic aspect, be somewhat less transparent, and possess more of a complicated character.⁴⁹

This is a reason that Melville was unpopular and rejected in his own day. Few nineteenth-century readers would have seen the underlying messages in Mardi, Moby-Dick, The Confidence-Man, or even in the stories. As Melville searched the depths for truths, he realized that he had to hide his meanings in his stories rather than to be frank with his readers. Richard Harter Fogle suggests that Melville conceals "his direct purposes, for artistic, personal, financial, and sometimes humorous reasons."⁵⁰ From his letters we learn more about Melville's reasoning. Concerning Mardi, he wrote in June, 1849, to his British publisher, Richard Bentley:

. . . Besides, the peculiar thought of fancies of a Yankee upon politics & other matters could hardly be presumed to delight that class of gentlemen who conduct your leading journals; while the metaphysical ingredients (for want of a better term) of the book must of course repel some of those who read simply for amusement.--However, it will reach those for whom it is intended; and I have already received assurances that "Mardi" in its larger purposes has not been written in vain.

You may think, in your own mind, that a man is unwise, --indiscreet, to write a work of that kind, when he might have written one perhaps, calculated merely to please the general reader, & not provoke attack, however masqued in an affectation of indifference or contempt. But some of us scribblers, My Dear Sir, always have a certain something unmanageable in us, that bids us do this or that, and be done it must--hit or miss.⁵¹

Thus we can see that Melville consciously writes as he does even though it makes him unpopular. After the criticism he received follow-

ing the publication of Mardi, he became increasingly discreet in hiding his meanings. To Evert Duyckinck, he wrote:

Had I not written & published "Mardi" in all likelihood, I would not be as wise as I am now, or may be. For that thing was stabbed at (I do not say through)--& therefore, I am the wiser for it.⁵²

When we understand Melville's writing techniques and the depth of meaning in him, we come to realize that the isolation of Melville was not the aristocrat scorn of the mob, nor was he snobbish. It was the same as the Biblical prophets who could not seem to communicate their message to their contemporaries and were rejected and scorned themselves. Because of the use of figurative language in Biblical prophecy, Payne observes, "A thorough interpretation of the prophetic portions of the holy Scriptures is largely dependent upon a mastery of the principles and laws of figurative language, and of types and symbols."⁵³ The same can be said about understanding Melville. As we read his prose fiction, we must read it as if we were reading the Old Testament prophets, looking for meanings in the language, types, and analogies.

One of Melville's best short stories, "Benito Cereno," is really a parallel to the Biblical message of the prophets to Israel. Melville bases his story on a source, Captain Amaso Delano's Narrative of Voyages, but he assimilates Biblical symbolism and allusions into his writing to convey his prophetic message to America.

The prophets of the Old Testament--Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Hosea, Ezekiel, and others--announce to Israel that because of sin the nation must suffer humiliation and captivity, but the prophets always predict that the Israelites will be freed from their captors.⁵⁴ As we read Melville's story, we can almost hear the Biblical prophets as they forecast the destiny of Israel:

Why should ye be stricken any more? Ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint.

From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores; they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment.

Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire; your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers. . .

Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah. (Isaiah 1: 5-9)

There are many reflections of the Bible in "Benito Cereno," as in most of Melville's work, but I will limit my discussion to Melville's use of the Biblical prophets and a comparison of Israel's story to that of the Spanish slaveholders.

When Delano observes the approaching ship, which is a stranger, he notes that "her keel seemed laid, her ribs put together, and she launched, from Ezekiel's Valley of Dry Bones" (X, 69). Melville alludes to Ezekiel 37:1-14 when the Spirit of God set Ezekiel down in the midst of a valley covered with a miscellaneous collection of dry, sunbleached human bones. The bones represent the fallen nation of Israel in exile, and their restoration seems incredible. One Biblical scholar contends that the scene is like a deserted battlefield with "the bones representing the extent of the disaster which has overtaken the house of Israel, and their very dry state the author's [Ezekiel's] opinion of the condition of the exiles."⁵⁵

Melville extends the metaphor of "dry bones"; not only is the ship described as having been launched from the valley of dry bones but it is a ship "in distress--a vessel by sickness almost dismantled of her crew--a vessel whose inmates were parched for water" (X, 98) and its captain Benito Cereno, is "almost worn to a skeleton" (X, 74). A skeleton is the figurehead of the ship with the words "Follow your leader" in chalk

under it (X, 144). By analogy, if the Spanish and their ship, with Benito Cereno as their leader, represent Israel, a nation and a people who are led into captivity and suffering, then Babo and the Negroes represent the evil forces used of God to subdue the Israelites for a time. But the prophets always foretell a rescue from tribulation; thus Delano is the instrument of God sent to deliver the Spaniards and their ship from their captors. Scene by scene through the story, Melville develops the parallels.

The evils of Israel are depicted in various ways by the prophets. Almost all of them consider the chief sin of Israel to be the failure to keep God's covenant, but there are social problems too.⁵⁶ Isaiah makes a withering attack on Judah's religious and social conditions. "And he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry" (Isa. 5:7b). The sins of greed and injustice which Isaiah lists are ominously similar to those of which the Spanish aboard the San Dominick are guilty as slaveholders. And even the innocent must suffer, "For the leaders of this people cause them to err; and they that are led of them are destroyed" (Isa. 9:17).

The prophets depict the day of captivity as a day of gloom and darkness: "Shall not the day of the LORD be darkness and not light? even very dark, and no brightness in it?" (Amos 5:20). The day in Melville's tale is described as a "grey day" (X, 66) and even at noon "from the greyness of everything it seemed to be getting toward dusk" (X, 112).

Prophecy concerning the Israelites predicts that they must suffer and go into exile away from their own land (Amos 7:17, Jer. 27). Jeremiah tells them that they will be servants of Nebuchadnezzar and

that they might as well submit rather than die. The misfortunes of the San Dominick include

the scurvy, together with a fever, had swept off a great part of their number, more especially the Spaniards. Off Cape Horn, they had narrowly escaped shipwreck, then for days together, they had lain tranced without wind; their provisions were low; their water next to none; their lips that moment were baked. (X, 71)

And later in the deputation we learn that the Spaniards are prisoners of the Negroes.

In another striking portrayal of what the Lord will do with His rebellious people, Ezekiel takes a sharp sword and uses it to shave his head and face. A third of his hair he casts into a fire built in the midst of the model of Jerusalem. Another third is scattered on the ground around the model and beaten with a sword. The remainder is tossed into the wind and struck at with the sword (Ezekiel 5:1-17). These acts symbolize the fate of the people of Judah--some will be consumed by pestilence and famine, others will die by the sword, and still others will be scattered to the four winds. Isaiah also suggests that the Lord will use a razor (as Babo does in the shaving scene) to sweep away the beard of Judah (Isa. 7:20).

But the wicked oppressor shall be trampled (Mal. 4:3, Isa. 63:3) and a remnant of Israel saved (Isa. 10:22, Amos 5:15). The "shield-like sternpiece" of the San Dominick with its "dark satyr in a mask, holding his foot on the prostrate neck of a writhing figure likewise masked" (X, 70) is not only a picture of what is happening on the ship but is also a picture of Israel. This emblem is also a prophecy of what will happen to the captor as Isaiah 14:25 says, "That I will break the Assyrian in my land, and upon my mountains tread him under foot; then shall his yoke depart from off them and his burden depart from off their

shoulders." Melville, like Isaiah, is saying "Yet a very little while and the indignation shall cease" (Isa. 10:25a).

When the Babylonians enter Jerusalem, they break down the walls and burn the dwellings so that Jerusalem cannot again be a threat. Then the remnant of the people are carried to Babylon (Jer. 39:8-9). In a like manner, when the Negroes overcome the Spanish crew, which seem "perished off to a remnant" (X, 98), they destroy all the boats "but the unseaworthy old hulk of the longboat, which, warped as a camel's skeleton in the desert, and almost as bleached, lay potwise inverted amidship. . ." (X, 116) so that there will be no means of escape.

Another image of the prophets which seems to fit "Benito Cereno" is that of the suffering servant of Isaiah. The heart of what the prophet has to say on this subject is found in four passages--Isaiah 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-10; and 52:13-53:12. These verses describe the character and mission of a mysterious figure who fulfills the purposes of God through a life of unselfish, suffering service. But who is the suffering servant? Scholars have pondered the question and offered several answers: that the servant is Israel, that the servant is the promised Messiah, and that there are two servants--Israel and the Messiah. In Isaiah 41:8-10, 43:10, 44:1-2, and 49:3, the servant is explicitly identified with Israel, and in other verses (53:4-12) the servant seems to refer to an individual. Johann Fischer explains it as follows:

The servant of Yahweh and the servant Israel are also basically different in their character. The servant Israel is despondent and fainthearted and must be admonished again and again to turn to trust in God (40:27; 41:8; 44:1-2, 21). The servant of Yahweh is guiltless and sinless (50:5; 53:4-6, 12), the servant Israel on the contrary is a sinner from birth (48:4; 43:27). The suffering of the servant of God is only explicable as suffering for the sins of others (53:

4-6, 9, 11-12), the servant Israel suffers in exile for his own sins (42:18-25; 43:22-28; 47:6; 50:1; 54:7). The servant of Yahweh suffers patiently (53:7), the servant Israel in discouragement (40:27; 49:14; 50:1-2); the servant of Yahweh suffers voluntarily, he intercedes for the sinner; the servant Israel suffers unwillingly (41:11-12, 15-16; 42:13-15). . . . Finally the servant of Yahweh had a mission of suffering for Israel (52:13-53:12) and thus can not be identified with Israel.⁵⁷

By examining the Biblical passages, we can identify the Spaniards and their ship with the nation Israel as the suffering servant. When Delano first sees Don Benito, the Spanish captain appears sick and despondent and "the debility, constitutional or induced by the hardships, bodily and mental, of the Spanish captain was too obvious to be overlooked" (X, 74) and he is "a prey to settled dejection . . ." (X, 74). The Spaniard's condition is "a conspicuous feature in the ship's general affliction" (X, 75). He is suffering not patiently but discouragingly and unwillingly. His manner conveys "a sort of sour and gloomy disdain" (X, 75) and a "splenetic disrelish of his place was evinced in almost every function pertaining to it." He is suffering for his own mistakes as Delano imputes at least part of the detention both to clumsy seamanship and faulty navigation, and, I would add, the sin of involvement in slaveholding. They have dipped their hands in wickedness as the Spanish sailor has dipped his hands in the pitch (X, 103). And they are suffering as if in exile in another country; for the ship, though upon the sea, seems like a deserted chateau in some far country (X, 107). And Delano notes when he first sees the ship that she is "drawing too near the land This seemed to prove her a stranger . . ." (X, 67); he continues to refer to the ship as "the stranger."

Babo and the Negroes, although they are the essence of evil them-

selves, are being used to punish just as the Assyrians and the Babylonians were used by God to punish the Israelites and to preserve the remnant. Actually Benito Cereno owes his preservation to Babo, who saved him when the others would have killed him. And Atufal is a constant reminder that eventually evil will be locked up by God, who holds the key (Rev. 20:1-2). The prophets always hold hope for the future that the remnant of Israel will be freed from their captors and foretell the destruction of her enemies. "And behold at evening tide trouble; and before the morning he is not. This is the portion of them that spoil us, and the lot of them that rob us" (Isa. 17:14). So it is inevitable that Babo shall be bound and carried away to imprisonment and eventual death.

As the Assyrians and the Babylonians are used of God, so Cyrus and the Medes are instruments to liberate the captives, even as Isaiah had predicted 150 years before (Isa. 44:28, 45:1); and Delano is the tool for liberating Benito Cereno and the Spanish. Some critics have commented that Delano is stupid, that his good nature renders him incapable of distinguishing innocence from its disguise, but he is not stupid in not being able to solve the mystery sooner. It is just that the time has not come for the deliverance. Delano is compassionate and charitable, frank and sincere. He is seeking rational explanations for the evil he fleetingly imagines, and when he can find none, he dismisses the suspicion as whimsy. When Babo jumps into the boat with a dagger at his master's throat, the "scales drop from his eyes," and he is able to perform his function as deliverer. I do not think that Melville intends to depict Delano as Christ, the promised Messiah and deliverer of Israel, but rather I see him as just an instrument, like Cyrus, for

fulfilling God's plan. As Cereno says, "God charmed your life, but you saved mine you had the Prince of Heaven's safe conduct through all ambuscades" (X, 168). Though Delano has misjudged the proceedings on the boat, he is undeceived when it comes time for action. Then he brightly tells Cereno that "the past is passed; why moralize upon it? Forget it. See yon bright sun has forgotten it all, and the blue sea, and the blue sky; these have turned over new leaves" (X, 168).

Here the analogy breaks down; for in the Biblical story some of the Israelites return to Jerusalem under the auspices of Cyrus to rebuild the temple, and later another group returns to rebuild Jerusalem. But Benito Cereno, although rescued, is not revived to start a new life. He is rescued bodily from the mutinous slaves, but a spiritual rescue is also necessary. "You are saved," Delano cries, "what has cast such a shadow upon you?"

"The Negro," Cereno replies (X, 196).

The suffering of Benito Cereno has given him spiritual light, but he can not accept it. As James Miller says:

Although he is innocent of the plot imagined by Delano, Benito Cereno is not, as he says, an innocent man; indeed the experience brings to him an acute sense of his heritage of guilt. In Babo, who appears symbolically as his double, Benito Cereno vividly perceives his own and man's evil-- and the knowledge undoes him.⁵⁸

It is conceivable that as Melville read the Delano Voyages he was impressed by the parallels of the ill-fated Spanish commander and the Israelites from the Biblical prophets and actually composed his story, adding details and allusions where necessary, with the Biblical account in mind. Applying his theory that prose fiction should be based on "a skeleton of actual reality" but "instinct with significance," he developed his story, concealing below the surface the "Truth" that he

had discovered. By assimilating the Old Testament story of the Israelites and the Delano report of the captivity of the Spanish sailors, Melville is strengthening his argument against slavery. He invokes the name of God as the ultimate authority validating his message about the evils of slaveholding. However, Melville does not preach. By hiding his "truth," the prophet Melville could predict doom for those involved in the evils of slavery and cover his prophecy with Delano's misconception: "Yes, this is a strange craft; a strange history, too, and strange folks on board. But--nothing more" (X, 113).

The Old Testament prophets were concerned for social and political conditions and issues of their day. So was Melville! Just as the prophets had a message for their own day and a predictive message forecasting the future, so Melville speaks to his own age about where America is erring in science, industry, politics, and social evils such as slavery and the injustices towards sailors and the working poor. Melville also predicts a world we can recognize as our own. The following chapters will deal with Melville's "forthtelling" and his "foretelling" as we continue our study of the prophetic elements in the prose fiction of Herman Melville.

FOOTNOTES

¹Nathalia Wright, Melville's Use of the Bible (Durham, North Carolina: Duke Univ. Press, 1949).

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³David S. Berkeley, "Figurae Futurarum in Moby-Dick," Bucknell Review, 21 (Fall, 1973), p. 109.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Milton Stern, The Fine Hammered Steel of Herman Melville (Urbana, Ill.: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1957), p. 21.

⁶Jay Leyda, The Melville Log (New York: Harcourt, 1951).

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⁸Raymond M. Weaver, Herman Melville, Mariner and Mystic (New York: Doran, 1921).

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¹⁰Leon Howard, Herman Melville, A Biography (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1951).

¹¹Henrietta Mears, What the Bible is All About (Glendale, Calif.: Regal, 1966), p. 208.

¹²J. Barton Payne, Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. 3.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁵Metcalf, p. 71.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 139-142.

¹⁷The Letters of Herman Melville, ed. Merrell R. Davis and William Gilman (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1960), p. 130. Hereafter, this source will be cited as Letters.

¹⁸Herman Melville, "Hawthorne and His Mosses," In Billy Budd and Other Prose Pieces, from The Works of Herman Melville, (1924; rpt. New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1963), XIII, 130. Hereafter, when the text from Melville's prose is used, the volume number and page numbers will be indicated in parentheses.

¹⁹Metcalf, p. 110.

²⁰Merrill R. Davis, Melville's Mardi: A Chartless Voyage (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1952), p. 75.

²¹Lewis Mumford, Herman Melville, a Study of His Life and Visions (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, 1963), p. 98.

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid., pp. xv-xvi.

²⁴Leon F. Seltzer, The Vision of Melville and Conrad (Athens, Ohio: Ohio Univ. Press, 1970), p. 105.

²⁵Letters, p. 75.

²⁶Charles N. Feidelson, Symbolism and American Literature (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1953), p. 176.

²⁷Letters, p. 130.

²⁸Howard P. Vincent, The Trying-Out of Moby-Dick (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1949), p. 6.

²⁹Ursula Brumm, American Thought and Religious Typology, tr. John Hoaglund (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1970), p. 192.

³⁰Ibid

³¹Payne, pp. 16-26.

³²Wright, pp. 20-46.

³³Payne, p. 21.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Brumm, p. 23.

³⁶Erich Auerbach, "Figura," Scenes from the Drama of European Literature, tr. Ralph Manheim (New York: Peter Smith, 1959), p. 53.

³⁷C. I. Scofield, ed., The New Scofield Reference Bible (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1967), p. 6.

³⁸Brumm, p. 165.

- ³⁹Ibid., p. 18.
- ⁴⁰Ibid., p. 193.
- ⁴¹Berkeley, p. 108.
- ⁴²Stern, p. 9.
- ⁴³G. P. Snell, Shapers of American Fiction 1798-1947 (New York: Dutton, 1947).
- ⁴⁴Seltzer, p. 117.
- ⁴⁵Feidelson, p. 168.
- ⁴⁶Ibid., p. 175.
- ⁴⁷Brumm, p. 196.
- ⁴⁸Letters, p. 142.
- ⁴⁹Payne, p. 25.
- ⁵⁰Richard Harter Fogle, Melville's Shorter Tales (Norman, Okla.: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1960), p. 4.
- ⁵¹Metcalf, p. 62.
- ⁵²Ibid., p. 71.
- ⁵³Payne, p. 26.
- ⁵⁴William C. Martin, These Were God's People (Nashville: Southwestern Co., 1966), p. 204.
- ⁵⁵Herbert G. May in The Interpreter's Bible (Nashville: Abingdon, 1956), VI, 266.
- ⁵⁶Martin, p. 231.
- ⁵⁷Johann Fischer in The Interpreter's Bible (Nashville, Abingdon, 1956), V, 408.
- ⁵⁸A Reader's Guide to Herman Melville (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1962), p. 154.

CHAPTER II

MELVILLE AS FORTHTELLER: HIS MESSAGE TO HIS OWN AGE

One of the most notable and original features of the teaching of the Hebrew prophets is their repeated insistence that the Lord is more concerned with men's behavior in their social relationships than with the formal worship offered to Him. The prophets insist that God is not pleased by gifts and praise and "religious" ceremonies and observances as such, but He looks for the more sincere tribute of imitation in human conduct of His justice, goodness, truth, and mercy. Micah, among many others, proclaims:

Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself
before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt
offerings, with calves of a year old?

Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or
with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-
born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin
of my soul?

He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what
doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love
mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? (Micah 6:6-8)

The prophets--Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Micah, Amos, and others--were all tremendously concerned with social conditions and public issues. They did not speak merely in general terms of sin and repentance, but they were usually specific and startling in their indictments. Institutional religion was to them a hindrance and its leaders an offense to God if the actual human situation and urgent moral issues were ignored.

The messages of the prophets arose out of the circumstances in which they found themselves. Their environment gave rise to their message. For instance, Micah served as the spokesman for the poor and the oppressed of his day. He described in somber tones the lack of justice in the land. He told of the abuse of power in the courts and of the corruption of the judges through bribery. He rebuked the ones who were anxious to exploit the poor in order to increase their own wealth. Some of them, he asserted, even lay awake at night planning the next day's evil: "Woe to them that devise iniquity, and work evil upon their beds! When the morning is light, they practice it because it is in the power of their hand" (Micah 2:1).

The Hebrew prophets had as their primary task interpreting the events of their times in terms of God. They wanted people to know that true religion had power for their lives. Its ethic provided directions for social transformation. Amos condemned the Israelites for their greed and injustice toward the poor:

Thus saith the Lord; For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes; That pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor; and turn aside the way of the meek.
(Amos 2:6-7)

Hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy, even to make the poor of the land to fail, Saying, When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the sabbath that we may set forth wheat, making the ephah small, and the shekel great, and falsifying the balances by deceit?

That we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes; yea and sell the refuse of the wheat?
(Amos 8:4-6)

Amos predicted political, military, and economic disaster as punishment.

Melville recognized the same problems in his world that Amos had faced in the eighth century B.C. Economic inequalities, class distinctions, indifference to human need, social injustices, corruption in the

courts, and hypocritical religion were apparent in both ages. Though critics often identify Melville with the outcasts and wanderers, the Ishmaels of the world, he was no escapist fleeing the drudgery and frustrations of civilization for high drama aboard whaling ships and exotic adventure on the South Sea islands. He was deeply committed to the world in which he lived. Melville looked clearly at his homeland, as the prophets had done centuries before; he looked at the people and at the institutions which men had developed, and, like the prophets, he was troubled by what he saw all around him. D. H. Lawrence says that "Melville hated the world."¹ But I disagree! Melville may have seen the world as hateful and envisioned a better world, but I doubt that he hated the world. He was too concerned about his fellowman who inhabited the world. As Melville, the prophet, looked around him and reflected on what he saw, he determined to use his stories to show America where she was going wrong. This chapter will examine the prose works of Melville to find his message to his own world about social problems, science and technology, the church, and politics and government.

About fiction, Melville observed, "it should present another world, and yet one to which we feel the tie" (XII, 244). What was the world to which Melville felt a tie? In his most creative years it was the world of mid-nineteenth century America during the twenty years that stretched from the Mexican War to the Civil War. Although most Americans lived on farms, there were definite signs that the nation would develop an industrial economy. Railroads were being built, telegraph lines completed, and canals opened. Inventions and the assembly line were revolutionizing industry. Large-scale westward migrations to the Oregon

Territory began in 1843; Texas was annexed and admitted as a state in 1845. Disagreement with Mexico over the boundary separating the two nations brought on the Mexican War, 1846-1848. Acquisition of new territory in the West raised the critical problem of slavery. In 1848 there were thirty states with an equal balance of fifteen slave states and fifteen free states. After the gold rush of 1849, however, California had enough people to become a state and the question arose whether California would be free or slave. Just when the slavery issue threatened to break up the Union, Congress passed the Compromise of 1850. It provided that California be admitted as a free state and that New Mexico and Utah be organized as territories without mention of slavery. The Compromise included a stronger fugitive slave law and abolished slavery in the District of Columbia. These measures postponed war between the North and South for ten years. However, slavery and the related question of states' rights became the chief national issues during the 1850's as the tension between the North and South increased.

This period in both England and America marked a time of social movement, change, and reform activity. Slavery and the race question, workingmen's conditions and child labor, democratic equality, and the widening of suffrage--these were weighty problems which engaged the novelists, intellectuals, and leaders to think and act in the mid-nineteenth century. A. N. Kaul reports that American novelists were preoccupied with social questions:

If practical reform was no part of the American novelist's conception of his function, it was not because he was less humane than Dickens. Nor was he wholly at ease with social conditions around him. On the contrary, we recognize him among the most penetrating critics of his society at the same time we notice that his criticism rarely tends to arouse sympathy for the amelioration of existing institutions and evils.²

Although not much is written to verify Melville's participation in discussions about the social-political life of "Young America," we do know that while Typee and Omoo were being written, the young author was a friend of Evert Duyckinck, who was a leader of New York's Gotham's literary circles, and that he participated in discussions on the Mexican War and free soil and slavery.

Nor was the air of New York, where the American great, both pro-slavery and anti-slavery, lived or visited, the only influence that stimulated Melville at that time. He made trips to Boston to visit Judge Lemuel Shaw, his father's old friend and father of his bride-to-be. Sidney Kaplan points out that Judge Shaw, who a few years later would uphold the legality of the Fugitive Slave Law, became the target of the anti-slavery wrath of such writers as Emerson, Thoreau, Longfellow, and Dana.³ This, then, was the milieu in which Melville worked out the political and social ideas which he conveys in his novels. Melville must have complained about conditions in America because Mrs. Metcalf records:

I have no doubt that Melville 'railed' at the unpleasing domestic conditions, as he 'railed,' according to my mother, at conditions in the country at large, to anyone who would listen, with much heat and oratory.⁴

According to Merrill Davis, another indication that Melville was aware of his country's problems was the use of incidents in Mardi which are based on historical events.⁵ Melville includes observations on the 1848 revolutions, the Chartist Movement, the Mexican War, the Oregon boundary question, the California gold rush, and the 1848 presidential campaign which brought the slavery problem forward.

In work after work from Typee to Billy Budd, Melville comments on civilization and the problems of society. His early stories,

although they appear to be romantic novels of the South Seas, speak of social, religious, and moral values. . . Typee attacks many institutions and values of the Western world including imperialism and even the practice of Christianity. To the Polynesians, as Melville says in Typee, civilization brought no benefits. On the contrary, missionaries, merchants, and soldiers left everywhere a legacy of disease and devastation and put the native well on the road to complete extinction. In Omoo the ills brought by Westerners to the South Seas are both physical and spiritual--smallpox, syphilis, drunkenness, and machinery for weaving, among other things. Social criticism of these first novels include pride and greed that accompanied commerce and trade.

In Mardi, Melville uses satire to look at individuals, institutions, and society in a critical way. The Mardian voyagers note the shortcomings of all political systems, social and cultural patterns, and dogmatic claims of the church; everywhere society is found to be stupid and least desirable. Stephen Larrabee suggests that "Melville has so thoroughly exposed the evils of the nineteenth century that Mardi is called the Gulliver's Travels of the mid-nineteenth century."⁶ Redburn, Melville's next novel, is a statement on social evils and conditions of the poor and presents an ironic view of the prosperous world and progressive civilization. But it is in White Jacket that Melville really assumes the role of reformer as he condemns such evils on a man-of-war as drunkenness, gambling, sodomy, and particularly flogging. Although most critics see the story as the protagonist's initiation and baptism into the world of evil, Carl Bredahl in Melville's Angles of Vision proposes that it is "a story depicting the exchange of isolated arrogance for involved concern."⁷ After all, White Jacket

has been aboard the Neversink a year when the book opens and has, therefore, surely seen the evils of the deck before. Bredahl says:

His story is one of growing awareness of the danger of isolation; it is not one of an initiation into the world's evil. His fall from the mast is not a fall from innocence but rather a descent from lofty isolation towards involvement in the familiar concerns of mankind.⁸

Edgar A. Dryden in Melville's Thematics of Form speaks of the narrator's movement in similar terms: "As his adventure aloft implies, the idealistic world of the maintop is as fictitious and more dangerous than the world of the deck."⁹ Dryden's reading of White Jacket, however, sees both worlds as unreal and leads to this conclusion:

In pretending to call for social reform while actually insisting that the nature of reality makes reform impossible, he is hiding his vision of whiteness under the colors of an apparently propagandistic fiction.¹⁰

On the other hand, William Braswell believes that even though the book is somewhat propagandistic, "in White Jacket Melville frankly assumed the role of Christian reformer."¹¹ Braswell continues:

Though he did not accept the teachings of Christianity in their literalness, he was a sincere believer in the truth and the virtue of Christian ideals. Justice, democracy, sacrifice, brotherly love, he was convinced, would save the world if the world could be saved. A fatalistic pessimism may sometimes appear in White Jacket, but the book as a whole advances the sound optimistic argument that men can overcome much evil if they but try.¹²

Continuing his concern for society Melville presents the barbarity of human nature in Moby-Dick. He includes thoughts on science, industry, and technology as well as ideas on brotherhood among the crew which is drawn from almost all nationalities. He also presents the totalitarian rule of the captain on a whaling ship as he had done with the man-of-war in White Jacket. Whether or not we follow D. H. Lawrence in interpreting the Pequod as the "symbol of the civilized

world of ours,"¹³ it is true that the tales which follow its catastrophe are the tales of a civilization that has floundered. According to Kaul, "In place of the Happy Valley we now have the blasted shores of the Enchanted Islands, the latter name itself suggesting ironically the contrast between the two."¹⁴ Kaul also points out that in the 1850's Melville's tales deal "with individual innocence, individual integrity, individual fortitude, and redemption through individual suffering" with emphasis on the individual instead of society.¹⁵

However, Melville does continue to criticize America and note her social problems, particularly in The Confidence-Man and Israel Potter. The device of the steamboat sailing down the Mississippi, in The Confidence-Man, offers something more than a means for bringing together for brief periods of time the various types of humankind. This "Ship of Fools" presents a witty and biting analysis of the American--or human--condition. Through symbolism, Melville presents some rather acute criticism of his native land. And in Israel Potter the melancholy fate of Israel consistently points to social problems. The contrast between the brilliance of the ideology and the leadership and the misery of the masses of men who fought for this ideology becomes a magnificent parable of the fate of all unfortunates, of the downtrodden, and of the oppressed. Instead of adventure and escape in Israel Potter, Melville offers considerations of character and of social problems. Throughout the novel, one feels the tragic disparity between the American dream of democracy and the plight of the common man in America. Of Melville's last novel, Billy Budd, critics have ranged widely in their interpretation. Some have read the story as a commentary on the impersonality and essential brutality of the modern state, exacting death penalties

of the innocent. Others have found the tale an affirmation of the need, even at the risk of injustice, for society to protect itself and to assure order for the general welfare. It is not easy to sift the truth from all the conflicting comment, but an understanding of Melville's themes in his other works helps us to see that Billy Budd's instinctive, fatal action and resulting death may well be a suggestion to America of the possible catastrophe of her innocence.

Thus we can see from a survey of Melville's prose fiction that he was concerned with the social problems in America. That he speaks very clearly on such topics as poverty, war, slavery, and the brotherhood of man can also be determined by a close examination of his works. First, let us see what message he has for America about poverty.

The economic factor, although concealed at times, was a part of Melville's experience at every stage of his writing. It bothered him that he had to write to please the public in order to earn a living. As he was finishing Moby-Dick, he wrote to Hawthorne: "Dollars damn me . . . What I feel most moved to write, that is banned,--it will not pay. Yet, altogether write the other way I cannot. So the product is a final hash, and all my books are botches." And we must not forget that the first reason Ishmael gave for going to sea was "having little or no money in my purse." Of course, this was the very reason that Melville had gone to sea.

The theme of poverty is a recurring one in the words of Melville, although poverty is completely missing in Typee. However, the Typees had no economic system based on money: "That 'root of all evil' was not to be found in the valley." Likewise there is no property in land. In chapter twenty-seven Melville makes it clear that there was no

"community of goods" in Typee and that, on the contrary, "personal property" was held inviolate and was in no case encroached upon by the inhabitants.

In Mardi, Melville depicts poverty best in a series of chapters about the isle of Maramma. Life on the island is full of social injustices with the rich living near the miserably poor; and the rich are seemingly unconcerned. It was this unconcern that troubled Melville, and he uses Redburn to preach his message of the need for more charitable attitudes toward the unfortunates.

In 1839, on his first voyage, Melville had visited Liverpool. Gay Allen reports:

. . . Melville found the grime, the open sewers, the ragged beggars, the depravity, and people actually dying of starvation on the streets almost more than he could stomach. . . . The hordes of beggars were almost unknown in America (though a few years later, after the seaboard cities had been flooded by impoverished immigrants from Europe, parts of New York City would resemble Liverpool in 1839). For the first time, Melville began to see the need for social reform.¹⁶

Later Melville wrote of his Liverpool experiences in Redburn. Wellingborough Redburn is shocked by the veritable hive of iniquity on the docks in Liverpool, where every conceivable vice flourishes. He is most moved, however, by the sight he sees in Launcelott's-Hey, in the cellar of an old warehouse:

Some fifteen feet below the walk crouching in nameless squalor, with her head bowed over, was the figure of what had been a woman. Her blue arms folded to her livid bosom two shrunken things like children, that leaned toward her, one on each side. (V, 231)

Redburn's shock at the plight of this pitiful family is exceeded only by his horror at the indifference of the people he tries to bring to the scene. They either disclaim responsibility or self-righteously

proclaim that the woman was unmarried, her fate is richly deserved. Redburn is oppressed by his utter helplessness to be a "Good Samaritan" and his tender heart is torn as he discovers one day the family gone and in their place a glistening "heap of quick-lime." A strong plea concludes this graphic account:

Ah! what are our creeds, and how do we hope to be saved? Tell me, oh Bible, that story of Lazarus again, that I may find comfort in my heart for the poor and forlorn. Surrounded as we are by the wants and woes of our fellow men, and yet given to follow our own pleasures, regardless of their pains, are we not like people sitting up with a corpse, and making merry in the house of the dead? (V, 237)

During the 1850's, Melville wrote a series of sketches and tales dealing with other aspects of poverty. Among these were "The Two Temples," "Cock-A-Doddle-Do!" and "Poor Man's Pudding and Rich Man's Crumbs." In the latter, Melville contrasts the poverty of rural areas and that of the cities as he eats the poor man's pudding in America and the rich man's crumbs in London. The point is that poverty is the same everywhere:

The native American poor never lose their delicacy or pride; hence, though un-reduced to the physical degradation of the European pauper, they yet suffer more in mind than the poor of any other people in the world. Those peculiar social sensibilities nourished by our own peculiar political principles, while they enhance the true dignity of a prosperous American, do but minister to the added wretchedness of the unfortunate; first, by prohibiting their acceptance of what little random relief charity may offer; and, second, by furnishing them with the keenest appreciation of the smarting distinction between their ideal of universal equality and their grindstone experience of the practical misery and infamy of poverty--a misery and infamy which is, ever has been, and ever will be, precisely the same in India, England, and America. (XIII, 201-202)

And he concludes with the prayer: ". . . Heaven save me equally from the 'Poor Man's Pudding' and the 'Rich Man's Crumbs'" (XIII, 209). In addressing his fellow Americans of the 1850's, Melville is not didactic;

he offers no panaceas. He is just arguing for a more charitable attitude toward the unfortunate. He says:

We may have civilized bodies and yet barbarous souls. We are blind to the real sights of this world; deaf to its voice; and dead to its death. And not till we know that one grief outweighs ten thousand joys will we become what Christianity is striving to make us. (V, 379)

Another topic on which Melville dwells and about which he tries to warn America is that of war. Concerning the disagreement of the Typees with neighboring tribes, he writes:

But surely, if our evil passions must find vent, it is far better to expend them on strangers and aliens, than in the bosom of the community in which we dwell. In many polished countries civil contentions, as well as domestic enmities, are prevalent, at the same time that the most atrocious foreign wars are waged. How much less guilty, then are our islanders, who of these three sins are only chargeable with one, and that the least criminal! (I, 276)

Here Melville maintains that savage societies are superior to civilized ones, inasmuch as the latter, in addition to waging atrocious foreign wars, are marked by constant strife and violence within "the bosom of the community." As is obvious, the antagonism that Melville comments upon in White Jacket is precisely this civil antagonism--the war within a nation rather than the war of nations. What we have in the man-of-war is the image of a society divided against itself, with the spirit of suspicion and hatred animating each separate cog in the machine.

When Melville presents his analysis of the military world in White Jacket, he is a troubled American interested in social justice according to the tenets of a democratic nation. Melville seems to see war as barbaric and un-Christian regardless of how nations rationalize their behavior. Certainly there is no glory in it:

There is little or no skill and bravery about it. Two parties, armed with lead and old iron, envelop themselves in a cloud of smoke, and pitch their lead and old iron about

in all directions. If you happen to be in the way, you are hit; possibly killed; if not you escape. (VI, 83-84)

Melville actually served on a man-of-war for a year and he vows, "If my beloved and forever glorious country should be ever in jeopardy from invaders, let Congress put me on a war-horse, in the vanguard, and then see how I will acquit myself" (VI, 82). Melville does not glamorize combat, but offers instead some realistic description of warfare, including the horror of dismemberment.¹⁷ In this chapter entitled "Rumors of a War, and How They Were Received by the Population of the Neversink," Melville shows the revulsion the common sailor has for war. He points out that the seaman has nothing to gain from war: "What, then, has he to expect from war? What but harder work, and harder usage than in peace; a wooden leg or arm; mortal wounds, and death?" (VI, 258-259). But the officers feel differently because the prospect of war offers promotion or "glory" for them. This hostile contrast of feelings between the common seamen and the officers only serves to indicate the antagonism in which they dwell on the man-of-war.

And as the very object of a man-of-war, as its name implies, is to fight the very battles so naturally averse to the seamen; so long as a man-of-war exists, it must ever remain a picture of much that is tyrannical and repelling in human nature. (VI, 260)

Although Melville may have accepted the idea that war is the most constant and predictable event in human history, he does so sorrowfully with sidelong glances at that condition as chaotic, meaningless, evil. He describes warmaking not as heroic adventure but as an economic function to rid a nation of its poor. In Mardi war is satirized in the description of the island of Diranda, ruled over by Kings Hello and Piko, who have instituted war games in order to keep their islands from becoming overpopulated (IV, 141). And in Israel Potter Melville

presents London at the end of the American Revolution as the city glutted with returned soldiers for whom there are no jobs and who soon find themselves engulfed in poverty. Melville presents the remedy: "In 1793 war again broke out, the great French War. This lighted London of some of its superfluous hordes . . ." (XI, 206). But like the Old Testament prophets, Melville looks forward to a time when war will be abolished:

When shall the time come, how much longer will God postpone it, when the clouds, which at times gather over the horizons of nations, shall not be hailed by any class of humanity, and evoked to burst as a bomb? (VI, 260)

Negro slavery, as was pointed out in the first chapter in the discussion of "Benito Cereno," is another evil about which the prophet Melville warns America. Melville was never an abolitionist nor was his writing, for the most part, ever directly applied to influencing immediate events in the manner of an Emerson, a Lowell, a Thoreau, or a Whittier. However, as Kaplan asserts, "in forms of fiction, he uttered from time to time the most powerfully democratic words of his age on the dignity of the Negro as a part of America life."¹⁸ Many of Melville's prose writings contain Negro characters or touch in some way on the question of bondage and revolt.

Typee makes brief mention of Mugo, a "black cook" aboard the whaler Dolly. In Omoo two Negroes appear: Billy Loon, pounder of the tambourine and the "poor old black cook" Baltimore, a runaway Maryland slave. Both are stereotypes of the time. Yet the treatment of Baltimore shows a deep sympathy without the nasty chauvinism so frequently present in other writers. But it was with Mardi that Melville set down his first considered ideas on slavery in America which he saw as "a sin, a blot, foul as the crater pool of hell" (IV, 252). In the

visit to South Vivenza, the travelers meet with "Nulli; a cadaverous, ghost-like man; with a low ridge of forehead; hair, steel-gray; and wondrous eyes" (Calhoun), from whom they learn the position which some southerners take on the question of slavery (IV, 248). Ironically, they have already observed in the North the statue of the "helmeted female, the tutelar deity of Vivenza," with the inscription, "In-this-republi-can-land-all-men-are-born-free-and-equal," and the addition, "Except-the-tribe-of-Hamo" (IV, 224). None of the travelers, however, has a practical solution for the problem of slavery, although Babbalanja takes it upon himself to suggest what was the general Whig attitude in America, that "Time, great philanthropist!--Time must befriend these thralls" (IV, 252).

In his next prose fiction, Redburn, Melville includes among the characters aboard young Redburn's ship, the Highlander, two Negroes, Thompson the cook and Lavender the steward. Thompson is the serio-comic minstrel type while Lavender is presented as "a handsome, dandy mulatto." Three or four times, in Liverpool, Redburn encounters Lavender "walking arm in arm with a good-looking English woman." Redburn's initial reaction is shock:

So young and inexperienced, and unconsciously swayed in some degree by local and social prejudices . . . at first I was surprised that a colored man should be treated as he is in this town, but a little reflection showed that, after all, it was but recognizing his claims to humanity and normal equality. (V, 260)

In England, he continues, "the Negro steps with a prouder pace and lifts his head like a man; for here, no such exaggerated feeling exists in respect to him, as in America" (V, 259). In some things, he concludes, "we Americans leave to other countries the carrying out of the principle that stands at the head of our Declaration of Independence."

White Jacket also adds some insights into Melville's feelings about the Negro. In its long muster of characters, seven Negroes--a cook and his three helpers, the captain of a carronade, an old sheet-anchor man, and the purser's slave--not only repeat the minstrel stereotypes, but a new figure, the Negro as human being, makes his entrance on the deck of an American warship. Two of the Negro seamen evoke in White Jacket complete and unambiguous admiration. The first, his superior at battlestations, is the captain of "Gun No. 5"--a fine Negro in honor of whose sweetheart, "a colored lady of Philadelphia," the gun's crew had christened the carronade Black Bet (VI, 84). The second is "an old Negro, who went by the name of Tawney," a sheet-anchor man, whom they often invite into the top on tranquil nights to hear him discourse. He is a staid and sober seaman, very intelligent, with a fine, frank bearing, one of the best men in the ship and held in high estimation by everyone. And in Moby-Dick, there is "Black Little Pip," and Dago and his colleagues of color, the fearless harpooners of the Pequod, who are displayed as "equals of their white mates." Moreover, although for most people of the Western Hemisphere the color black symbolizes evil and the color white good, this does not hold for Melville. The "preeminence" of whiteness, he points out in his famous chapter on "The Whiteness of the Whale," applies "to the human race itself, giving the white man ideal mastership over every dusky tribe" (VII, 235). It was an ideal that Melville tried to discredit throughout Moby-Dick.

Although Melville does not openly discuss slavery within the framework of "Benito Cereno," symbolically he does so, and he champions the slaves. Melville was thinking in terms of the cultural concerns of his time. "Benito Cereno" was written at the mid-point of the hottest

decade of the anti-slavery struggle prior to the Civil War, when to many the conflict seemed both irrepressible and impending. Nor was it a struggle fought solely in legislative halls, in the press, in the lyceum circuit, in the pulpit. The threat of a black Spartacus waiting to rise in the South pervaded the decade of the fifties; it was John Brown's idea precisely to raise up such leaders. One modern historian, Harvey Wish, looking back on the period, has written of what he calls "The slave insurrection panic of 1856"--the year the The Piazza Tales came off the press. Nor were slave revolts on the plantations of the South the only items of Negro unrest that Americans could read either in their daily press or in the pamphlet literature of the slavery controversy. Black mutiny on the high seas was also a familiar thing. So Melville writes of the concerns of his time, but he applies universal truths.

What strategy would Melville have individuals follow in their struggle against the evils of society? Does "Benito Cereno" suggest that Melville approved of revolution? No. Mutinies in themselves, said Melville in effect in Billy Budd, are never a permanently good thing, nor do they completely effect good (XIII, 3). In Mardi, Melville had suggested that "Time" would take care of the ills, and when he finished White Jacket after the total indictment he had leveled against naval brutality and corruption, he asks the question, "What must his shipmates and the world do to lessen their misery?" Is revolt the answer? As with the tribe of Hamo in Mardi, the analysis seemed to point inescapably to action of some sort. But, as with Hamo, once more the counsel is patience. Can nothing be done to right the world's wrongs? Perhaps, but

whatever befall us, let us never train our murderous guns inboard; let us not mutiny with bloody pikes in our hands. Our Lord High Admiral will yet interpose; and though long ages should elapse, and leave our wrongs unredressed, yet, shipmates and worldmates! let us never forget, that,

Whoever affect us, whatever surround
Life is a voyage that's homeward-bound!
(VI, 504)

The answer is, of course, Babbalanja's: Old Coffee and his galley-helpers, the Captain of Black Bet and Tawney, as well as their white shipmates--all must wait on their Lord High Admiral and Time. Like the Old Testament prophets, Melville does not advocate revolution but submission and patience; "Yet a very little while and the indignation shall cease" (Isa. 10:25a).

Although Melville does not advocate revolution, the mere fact that White Jacket has an overt purpose in terms of bringing about reforms in the Navy reveals that he believed in the possibility of change, and White Jacket was indeed influential in calling attention to some Navy abuses. Melville must have felt that there was also an answer to the other problems of society. Throughout his novels, that answer seems to be found in his doctrine of "brotherhood." The humanity in Melville recognizes that if one loves his fellowman, as he loves himself, then social injustices, poverty, war, and slavery would soon be abolished. Most critics say that Melville was an "isolato," who withdrew from the world. I disagree with this theory. Melville was shunned and rejected by the world as the Hebrew prophets were, but I think he longed for close personal friends all his life. In my study of the prose fiction of Melville, I have found that in each book he actually seeks out a good friend with whom he can fellowship. In Typee, he finds Toby who will share his adventures, and in Omoo Long Ghost is his friend; among

others there are Jarl in Mardi, Harry Bolton in Redburn, Queequeg in Moby-Dick, and his mother at first and then Lucy and Isabel in Pierre. His friend was not always of his own nationality, indicating that Melville's brotherhood is a universal one. In the first chapters of Mardi, as he introduces Jarl, a descendant of "heroes and kings" from the Hebrides, Melville argues that all men are kinsmen:

King Noah, God bless him! fathered us all . . . since in antediluvian days, the sons of God did verily wed with our mothers, the irresistible daughters of Eve. Thus all generations are blended; and heaven and earth of one kin . . . the nations and families . . . one and all, brothers in essence--oh, be we then brothers indeed. (III, 14)

Melville's ideal island in Mardi, the isle of Serenia, is a democracy erected on the belief that as the sons of God all men are equal. And in discussing the equality of men Babbalanja says:

. . . how little do our pious patricians bear in mind their magnificent destiny, when hourly they scorn their companionship. And if here in Mardi they cannot abide an equality with plebians, even at the altar; how shall they endure them, side by side, throughout eternity? But since the prophet Alma asserts that Paradise is almost entirely made up of the poor and despised, no wonder that many aristocrats of our isles pursue a career, which according to some theologies, must forever preserve the social distinctions so sedulously maintained in Mardi. (IV, 192)

While Mardi and Redburn were being completed, Melville wrote a number of book reviews, most interesting of which was that of Francis Parkman's The Oregon Trail, which appeared in the Literary World, March 21, 1849. Braswell notes that "Parkman's contemptuous attitude toward the Indians set Melville to proclaiming that as the sons of God all men, regardless of color, are brothers."¹⁹ One of Melville's bases for his democracy was the idea that all men are "sprung from one head and made in one image," and that "if we regret this brotherhood now, we shall be forced to join hands hereafter; for misfortune is not

a fault; and good luck is not meritorious."²⁰ In Redburn, the sympathetic equalitarian of the Parkman review has much to say about the universal brotherhood of Americans. He explains, "There is something in the contemplation of the mode in which America was settled, that, in a noble breast, should forever extinguish the prejudices of national dislikes" (V, 216). Since America was settled by so many nationalities, we are all brothers now and should dwell together in love, and he looks forward to a time when all the sons of Adam will be restored to their father:

Settled by the people of all nations, all nations may claim her for their own. You cannot spill a drop of American blood without spilling the blood of the whole world . . . We are not a nation, so much as a world; for unless we may claim all the world for our sire, like Melchisedec, we are without father or mother.

For who was our father and our mother? Or can we point to any Romulus and Remus for our founders. Our ancestry is lost in the universal paternity . . . We are the heirs of all time and with all nations we divide our inheritance. On this Western Hemisphere all tribes and people are forming into one federated whole; and there is a future which shall see the estranged children of Adam restored as to the hearthstone in Eden. (V, 216)

Certainly this same concept of different nationalities comprising a nation and the brotherhood of man is seen in Moby-Dick, Israel Potter, and The Confidence-Man and several of the short stories.

Without preaching, Melville is saying to America through the medium of his stories that the answer to America's problems--social injustice, poverty, war, and slavery--is the Christ-like love and concern of brother for brother. For Christ, the pre-eminent and eternal prophet, had said, ". . . all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth; for one is your Father, which is in heaven" (Matt. 23:8-9). And Paul constantly taught that man should add "to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity"

(I Peter 1:7) as an indication that he was a child of God. Melville, too, championed the brotherhood of all mankind. This was his answer to America's social problems.

Melville was not only concerned about society in America, but he was also interested in the effect of science and technology on the industrial life of America. Between the publication of Typee in 1849 and Clarel in 1876 science made tremendous advances as an influence on the intellectual life of Europe and the United States. Tyrus Hillway points out that Melville "took an active interest in the signs of scientific progress in the nineteenth century, and through his reading, at least in the middle years of the century, kept himself informed of new discoveries and new theories."²¹ We know that he read and gave opinions of "authorities" on the subject of whales (VII, 164-165), that he was aware of geological discoveries which disproved much long accepted as true (IV, 109), and that he discussed Darwin's effect on science and religion (IV, 110-112). Hillway says, "In spite of the many references to science in his works and evidence of its effect upon his life writings . . . Melville was never such an enthusiast for science as were many of his contemporaries."²² In fact, Melville says in Clarel that science enlarges the bounds of knowledge about the world but leaves the human mind helpless as always before religious mysteries. Science simply makes one more conscious of his ignorance about spiritual matters (XV, 297). What Melville seems to object to is the application of science to technology and industry. He also objected to displacement of the Christian God by scientific theorizing, particularly in geology.

In several short stories Melville is rather explicit in his condemnation of machines and inventions. "The Happy Failure," a short story

first published in Harper's in July, 1854, presents the idea of progress as a delusion when an old man discovers happiness only in the absolute failure of a fantastic machine he has invented. Obsessed with the "universal drift of the mass of humanity toward oblivion," the old man attempts through his invention to invest himself with immortality. His failure impresses him with the futility of his motive, and, rid of his distorted ambition, he discovers true happiness for the first time. The old man advises his nephew: "Boy, take my advice, and never try to invent anything but--happiness. . . . Boy, I'm glad I've failed. I say, boy, failure has made a good old man of me. It was horrible at first, but I'm glad I've failed. Praise be to God for the failure" (XIII, 219).

Another short story, "The Bell Tower," is one of Melville's most pronounced attacks on scientific invention and technology. I think a detailed analysis of this story will reveal Melville's response to his contemporary world. Critics usually discuss "The Bell Tower" as an "artist" situation, ignoring Melville's repeated identification of his central figure as "mechanician." It would seem that Melville's primary concern was with Bannadonna as Renaissance scientist and technologist. With this in mind perhaps we can make a precise study of the statement which the story makes.

We learn, first, that the tower rose in an area which was once a center of the civilized world, "in the south of Europe nigh a once frescoed capital" (X, 253). It is the work of a man who by his birth--"unblest foundling"--and by his vocation--"mechanician, caster"--stands from the beginning a little apart from conventional human society. He is a man of the firmest resolve, fortunate that his patrons have been

"enriched through commerce" to a point where they can encourage his talent. We suspect at this opening stage in the story an analogy to the United States of the 1850's. Melville lived at a time of technological change when America was being enriched through commerce, and a patron class was appearing. The bulk of mechanical experimentation was taking place in and around New England, where Melville would have constantly observed the new technology. One could equally argue that mid-nineteenth century America may further represent in a larger sense a parallel to the mechanician's day, when "the water of the Dark Ages had dried up, and once more the green appeared." This mid-century decade was the beneficiary of Benthamism, the notion that there was no limit to the bounds of human progress; like Bannadonna and his Renaissance contemporaries, Americans felt that "the jubilant expectation of the race should, as with Noah's sons, soar into Shinar aspirations."

But an ominous note appears as the tower begins to rise. Though it moves slowly, snail-like, it nevertheless does continue to rise, and the reader is uneasily aware that this rise is measurable too in terms of proportionately rising human vanity. It is "torch or rocket in its pride." This is one of the primary themes of the story as Melville continually reminds us of the perils of pride in intellectual and human achievement. Bannadonna's tower overtopped not only "still larger walls" but also trees. The man is, indeed, surpassing nature. Nor is he content with what his "ever-ascending summit" implies; every day he lingers long after the masons have left, "wrapped in schemes of other and still loftier piles." There are no bounds to his ambition. We see, too, that the entire populace participates in his crime. They will

idly around the construction on saints' day and scramble on the scaffolding to gawk at Bannadonna's tribute to himself. By their attitude they become conspirators in this elevation of man: "their homage not the less inspirited him to self-esteem." Their complete link with the mechanic comes when they make of the lifting of the climax-stone a "holiday of the tower." They are participants in his acts. A semi-religious tone is lent to the occasion by "the sound of viols," and a salute of honor is fired by the citizen-militia. This reminds us of the ceremonies which were attending the linking of railroad lines and the laying of factory cornerstones.

During the casting of the bells for the tower, the workmen become panic-stricken at the monstrous bubbling of the metals, and Bannadonna, enraged at the threat to his achievement, fatally assaults the principal offender and the "spilled blood" becomes the flaw in the bell. Melville reminds us of gross industrial accidents and occupational diseases which occur in the name of progress. Another holiday is declared to celebrate the hoisting of two great bells to the summit of the tower. Bannadonna then works in secret on a device for striking the hours. It is a wonderful "automation," and though Bannadonna carefully keeps it hidden in a dark cloak, two state officials see enough of it--it seems almost to walk and breathe--so that they suspect it is alive. Visiting the belfry where Bannadonna is at work, they spy an earthen cup and are terrified at the thought that this may be the drinking cup of some "brazen statue, or, perhaps still worse" hiding under the cloak. There is no humility in Bannadonna, however, as he mockingly soothes the two troubled old men. He lulls their uneasiness by displaying his more conventional productions. Bannadonna maneuvers his mechanical jargon

to dull their suspicions. As the officials descend for the last time before the first ringing of the bell--which is to take place on the following day at one o'clock--they hear a noise above, which they imagine to be the footfall of the automaton. They are reminded by Una, one of the figures on the clock, of the prophetess Deborah and the story of Jael, who took Sisera into her tent and drove a nail through his head as he slept.

Bannadonna calls his wonderful machine Haman, apparently after the tyrant in the Biblical book of Esther who ordered Mordecai to be hanged but was later himself hanged on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai. Taken naively, the name also suggests "half man." Haman, we learn, is only a prototype of a mechanical slave of all trades which Bannadonna hopes some day to perfect.

The next day the crowds gather around the tower to await the tolling of the bell at one o'clock. Instead they hear "a dull mangled sound." Rushing to the belfry, the officials find the bloody body of Bannadonna entangled in the arms of the dragonish mechanism, which has crushed his head between its hammerfist and the bell, for Bannadonna, entranced by the face of Una, has been struck by the mechanism. The two magistrates, convinced that the domine is a living thing, destroy it and smuggle the remnants out to sea, where it is carefully sunk amidst great secrecy. Through Melville, however, they brood upon the mechanic's attempt, recalling now that he had tried to assume the function of God. He had transcended "not alone the bounds of human invention, but those of divine creation." He had conceived that not only would the mechanical domine excel its human counterpart in sounding the bell--the familiar nineteenth-century motif of the machine replacing

man--but had also "resolved that his invention should likewise possess the power of locomotion, and, along with that, the appearance, at least, of intelligence and will." The officials conclude that the mechanician had intended "a supplement to the Six Days' Work, the creation of a new serf. . . . All excellences of all God-made creatures, which served God, were here to receive advancement, and then to be combined in one." As Melville tells us, Bannadonna's weakness is that "he stooped to conquer;" he has flirted with a new dimension of energy, "an original production," the technological displacement of man.

And yet, we are reminded, Bannadonna failed, and the population and civilization (the Renaissance era) which had conspired with him was eventually obliterated. Its culture, which had lacked the strength to resist his mechanics, vanished. Bannadonna's destruction was caused by his inability to sublimate the mechanician in him. But for the citizens there was no ignominy in Bannadonna's death. "Not unmindful of the rare genius of the mechanician," the citizens decree him a stately funeral. They decide that the great bell--"the one whose casting had been jeopardized through the timidity of the ill-starred workman"--should be rung upon the entrance of the bier into the cathedral. Inevitably, because of its initial flaw, the ring is hollow; its note is a broken and disastrous one, "like that of some lone Alpine land-slide." The final catastrophe occurs simultaneously, as the belfry crashes sideways "strangely feeble somewhere at its top," taking with it the human bell-ringer who had been honored for the occasion--"the most robust man of the country round."

The superstructure of the tower, however, is repaired, but nature completes its destruction. On its first anniversary which has again

been published as a public holiday, an earthquake blasts the tower completely. The bell's main weakness, we conclude with Melville, was where man's blood had flawed it. "And so," he declares, "pride went before the fall."

Thus we can see that "The Bell-Tower" is one of Melville's most pronounced attacks upon the machine. Man puts himself above God as creator and takes pride in his accomplishments without realizing his dependence on God and the need for a right relationship with Him. Melville is warning America that she can destroy herself with her technology if she does not keep it in the right perspective.

However, the things that Melville sees America doing with her technology is what really disturbs him. He must speak out about the evils which accompany the application of science to industry. "Industrialism," according to Kent Kreuter, "is a broad term that encompasses a number of related social and economic phenomena Industrialism is dependent upon inventors and scientists who create the necessary machines and processes."²³ Because new forms of labor are created in factory systems of production and concentration of population or urbanization occurs, industrialism brings about many changes in society. It is the dehumanization of people brought about by industrialism about which Melville complains in most of his prose works. For instance, in Mardi when Taji and his companions visit Dominora (Great Britain), they find great suffering and starvation brought upon those dependent on machines when the machines break down or when their products are no longer needed (IV, 182-184). And there is a brief allusion to the problems of industrialism and economic injustice in the description of the mines of King Klanko, where the slaves are forced to labor as long

as the mines still yield a profit (IV, 347-348). An example of those who suffer because of industrial accidents is given in Redburn. One of the crippled beggars which Redburn sees on the docks of Liverpool is described as having a painted board on his knees, "a picture intending to represent the man himself caught in the machinery of some factory, and whirled about among spindles and cogs, with his limbs mangled and bloody" (V, 240). Ships and men are pictured as machines in Moby-Dick; also we see the ship as a factory with Ahab as the captain of industry.²⁴ One of Melville's short stories, "The Tartarus of Maids," which he couples with another sketch, "Paradise of Bachelors," shows the impact of industrialism on human existence (XIII, 238-254). Hillway calls this story "a bitter indictment of the factory system which destroys the bodies and souls of its workers."³⁵

The narrator in "The Tartarus of Maids," who uses the first person, is described as a "seedsman," with a seed-distributing business which extends over the Eastern states. On a bitter cold, gray day in January, he decides to drive to "Devil's Dungeon paper mill" to order a certain kind of paper which he uses in great quantity as envelopes for his seeds. As the traveler reaches the bottom of the deep and desolate valley, at first he sees nothing but blank, frigid whiteness. But he hears the "whirling, humming sound" of machinery; he looks around and sees a large white-washed factory standing before him like a "whited sepulchre!" As he enters the factory he sees "rows of blank-looking counters" at which are sitting "rows of blank-looking girls, with blank, white folders in their blank hands, all blankly folding blank paper." Strange phantasmal machines are to be seen in various parts of the building and tending each one of these machines, like a slave, is a pale girl. No

human voice is heard, only the relentless hum of the machines:

. . . Nothing was heard but the low, steady, over-ruling hum of the iron animals. The human voice was banished from the spot. Machinery--that vaunted slave of humanity--here stood menially served by human beings, who served mutely and cringingly as the slave serves the sultan. The girls did not so much seem accessory wheels to the general machinery as mere cogs to the wheels. (XIII, 245)

The owner of the paper mill then appears and orders the only other male in sight (a fellow named Cupid) to show the seedsman around the plant. As the seedsman penetrates into the interior of the factory, he is shown the colossal waterwheel which drives the machinery with power furnished by the blood-red stream. Then the seedsman is conducted into the "rag-room" where several consumptive, deathly white girls are shredding old rags upon long scythelike blades which stand before the girls making them look like "old, condemned state prisoners"²⁵ facing their doom. Cupid jests callously about the blades and the consumptive girls, and the seedsman reflects, "More tragical and more inscrutably mysterious than any mystic sight, human or machine, throughout the factory, was the strange innocence of cruel-heartedness in this usage-hardened boy." The narrator asks whether the great papermaking machine makes anything but foolscap. He is answered, "'Oh, sometimes, but not often, we turn out finer work--cream-laid and royal sheets, we call them. But foolscap being in chief demand, we turn out foolscap most.'" Richard Fogle calls this "a multiple hit at mass production, the publishing business, and some theories of American democracy."²⁶ The seedsman is overcome with awe at the relentless precision of the machine. The "inflexible iron animal" fills him with dread, as if he were about to be devoured by "some living, panting Behemoth," just as the souls of the pale girls have been devoured by the mechanical

monster. The impact on the narrator as well as the reader is the "unbudging fatality" of this factory system on the "girls" and all humanity. In the cold air, he revives from his swoon, finds his horse, and rides away reflecting on the difference in the "Tartarus of Maids" and the "Paradise of Bachelors."

Melville also had much to say to America about the church and organized religion. Whether or not Melville actually became a member of the church, he felt its influence. Not only was he brought up by parents who instructed their children at home and took them to church regularly, but his wife was a devout Christian also.²⁷ We know that he read the Bible and books on religion. References in his writings indicate he knew something about Polynesian religions, Hinduism, Buddhism and the Persian religions.²⁸ He refers to Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, Parseeism, Gnostics, and Marcionites.²⁹ I do not intend to discuss Melville's religious beliefs; Braswell, Lawrence Thompson,³⁰ Daniel Noel,³¹ and others have thoroughly presented the background and development of Melville's ideas on religious doctrine. The point I want to make here is that Melville denounced what he saw as evils in organized Christianity. When he says in Typee that religious affairs are at a very low ebb, it is as if he is speaking about America:

When one of the inferior order of natives could show such contempt for a venerable and decrepit God of the Groves, what the state of religion must be among the people in general is easily to be imagined. In truth, I regard the Typees as a backslidden generation. They are sunk in religious sloth, and require a spiritual revival. . . . The wood-rot malady is spreading among the idols. . . the temples themselves need re-thatching--the tattooed clergy are altogether too light-hearted and lazy--and their flocks are going astray. (I, 241)

Melville comments on the effects of Christians and Christendom on the savages in Typee and Omoo, and he says the natives would be better

off and happier to remain unchanged. Life on the isle of Maramma in Mardi satirizes Catholicism and organized religion (IV, 1-49). The main burden of the satire occurs in the extended visit of the travelers to the idols and temples of the island and is directed generally at the shallowness and superstition connected with the forms rather than the spirit of religion. There are three portraits of individuals associated with the religious rites of the country. Blind Pani, the official guide to the island, is characterized as an extortionist who demands gifts from the pilgrims who would climb the peak of Ofo. The idol maker of the island, Hevaneva, also represents a satire on the methods of religious officialdom or "priestcraft." Finally, the characterization of the high pontiff of the island, Hivohitee, is a satirical portrait of the high priests of such religious orders. On Maramma there is great social injustice with the rich living near the miserably poor. In contrast to Maramma, life is completely different in Serenia, Melville's ideal state (IV, 364-372). All human relationships and the relationship between man and God are based on love. There are no temples in Serenia. Money that might have been used for temples is used for charity. There is also no priesthood--a fact which emphasizes all Melville's criticisms of the clergy. There, all are apostles, living their religion every day in the week and worshipping in a simple way.

Melville comments on chaplains and church services on a man-of-war in White Jacket (VI, 193-194) and at the end of his life in Billy Budd said as a final word on the subject:

Bluntly put, a chaplain is the minister of the Prince of Peace serving in the host of the God of War--Mars. As such, he is as incongruous as a musket would be on the altar at

Christmas. Why, then, is he there? Because he indirectly subserves the purpose attested by the canon; because, too, he lends the sanction of the religion of the meek to that which practically is the abrogation of everything but force. (XIII, 100)

In "The Two Temples," Melville attacks religious intolerance, bigotry, fanaticism, and mammonism. This sketch contained such graphic satire on Grace Church in New York City, in comparing the services there with a theatrical performance, that the editor of Putnam's Monthly Magazine rejected it for fear of offending the religious public, particularly the congregation of Grace Church and its pompous and obese usher named Brown. The rejection letter is now used as a preface for the story (XIII, 173). In the first sketch, the narrator visits a church in New York and is not admitted, probably because he is "poor folk." Slipping through a door and ascending some steps, he finds a little window through which he can view the services below. He feels as though he "looked down upon some sly enchanter's show" because of the form and ritual. Later he is detected by "the beadle-faced man" who is bigoted, is arrested as "a remorseless disturber of the Sunday peace," is carried to the "Halls of Justice," and is fined. In the second sketch, his visit to a theater in London leads to a completely different kind of experience. The place is a "blessed oasis of tranquility." He is invited by "a cheery summons" to take a ticket. The whole atmosphere is one of friendly "charity." Not only does he receive the free ticket, but he is offered a "mug of ale." The music and performance give him the feeling of serenity as if he has been to a worship service. The message is clear; he has been cast out of the first temple but is treated with Christian love at the second. Melville warns America that she needs to practice the Christianity she

professes.

Not only does Melville perceive the sociological, technological, and religious conditions of America, but he also recognizes the political situation in his world. Melville was twenty-five when he left the sea. The year was the one in which American voters chose Polk, the expansionist, for the presidency. Typee came off the press not far from the time when American soldiers crossed the Rio Grande and took the road which led toward Mexico City. Melville, home from his wanderings, found his fellow countrymen absorbed in their war, even as the Marquesan natives had been in theirs when he dwelt among them. He saw, moreover, no essential difference between the triumphant mood of the Typee warriors, whom he had seen staggering back to their village with the carcasses of conquered Happar enemies, and that of Polk submitting to the Senate the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which secured to the United States about a third of the territory of Mexico. In Typee Melville writes:

Towards noon we drew abreast the entrance to the harbor, and at last we slowly swept by the intervening promontory, and entered the bay of Nukuheva. No description can do justice to its beauty; but that beauty was lost to me then, and I saw nothing but the tri-colored flag of France trailing over the stern of six vessels, whose black hulls and bristling broadsides proclaimed their warlike character. There they were, floating in that lovely bay, the green eminences of the shore looking down so tranquilly upon them, as if rebuking the sternness of their aspect. . . . The whole group of islands had just been taken possession of by Rear-Admiral Du Petit-Thouars in the name of the invincible French nation. (I, 13-14)

This experience, in the spring of 1842, and subsequent events that summer, gave Melville a revulsion against the extension of colonialism by military power. In Mardi, he says:

And be not too grasping, nearer home. It is not freedom to filch. Expand not your area too widely, now. Seek you

proselytes? Neighboring nations may be free, without coming under our banner. And if you cannot lay your ambition, know this: that it is best served by waiting events. (IV, 245)

In "Moby-Dick and American Political Symbolism," Alan Heimert shows that Moby-Dick reflects the political situation in America at the time that it was written in 1850.³² He particularly points out that Melville was against imperialism and expansionism as shown in Moby-Dick.

When Melville came home from the sea, the American people were making the greatest outward thrust of their history. Nationalism was in the air. Men talked of saving the western wilderness for democracy. The democratic faith guaranteed the justness of the war, save for a critical minority who saw in it a plot to extend slavery. It was this smugness of the American democratic philosophy which roused the rebel in Melville. Ralph Gabriel observes:

As Melville looked at the democratic faith against the background of his experience at sea and in Polynesia, he saw it for what, in truth, it was, a philosophy of security. In partnership with Protestant Christianity it explained the meaning of human life and the destiny, not only of men, but of America. It gave to Americans the comforting assurance that, in their democratic institutions and ideals, they had discovered the ultimate truth.³³

Protestant Christianity, together with the democratic faith, provided for Americans of the mid-nineteenth century the socially sanctioned answer to the questions of belief and conduct. Melville, looking at the pattern, thought that the security which it offered was false and that most of its basic assumptions were illusions. He considered its doctrines--the God-given moral law, progress, the free individual, and the destiny of America--and was troubled at the neatness and the finality of the manner of their statement. He began his questioning in Mardi in 1849 when his fellow countrymen were crowding the trails which led to California and gold.

The state of inequality and the boasted freedoms of America are concerns expressed in Mardi. After the visitors leave the great Temple in Vivenza, they encounter Znobbi who comments on the chieftain or king of their country: "All kings here--all equal. Everything's in common." But Babbalanja observes, "There's not so much freedom here as these freemen think" (IV, 234-235). And in the reading of the scroll in the North of Vivenza, he discloses:

It is not gildings, and gold maces, and crown jewels alone that make a people servile. There is much bowing and cringing among you yourselves, sovereign kings! Poverty is abased before riches, all Mardi over; anywhere, it is hard to be a debtor; anywhere, the wise will lord it over fools; everywhere, suffering is found.

Thus, freedom is more social than political. And its real felicity is not to be shared. That is of a man's own individual getting and holding. It is not, who rules the state, but who rules me. Better be secure under one king, than exposed to violence from twenty millions of monarchs, though oneself be of the number. (IV, 244)

Since Moby-Dick was produced in the very months of one of America's profoundest political crises--the controversy surrounding the "Compromise of 1850"--Heimert feels that the novel reflects Melville's attitudes toward the democratic situation at that time. He suggests that when the citizen of the 1840's "pictured his nation's development and situation, he imagined the Republic as a ship, its history as a voyage."³⁴ The threat of disunion meant shipwreck. He concludes:

In this image, endlessly repeated and imaginatively embroidered by speakers of many persuasions, were embodied the nations's fears of beholding the broken and dishonored fragments of a once glorious Union. But the shipwreck in Moby-Dick, followed as it is by Ishmael's salvation, emerges as a symbol of hope to the faithful disciples of democracy.³⁵

This is the prophet's message that a remnant will be saved to occupy the new Canaan.

Billy Budd also serves as a warning to America. Chase reminds us

that "Billy Budd, as its opening pages strongly insist, is more political than theological or mythic."³⁶ Frederic Ives Carpenter agrees with this line of reasoning:

Melville remains the greatest critic of the democratic dream. Whether our democracy ultimately triumphs and proves his forebodings false depends in part on how well it heeds Melville's own warnings in Moby-Dick. But the submission to traditional authority and the rejection of individual responsibility which Melville approved in Billy Budd runs counter to American experience and American idealism.³⁷

The key word in this quote is "approved." For rather than an approval of such abdication, Billy Budd seems, like Moby-Dick, more of a warning-- a warning that if the American dream of democracy is to succeed, the nation's leaders must choose a path other than expediency. Melville seems to make it clear that it is not enough for one to die with "Billy Budd" on his lips after he had been the chief agent in bringing about his death (XIII, 129). This warning stems from the somber tone of the work itself, an elegiac statement of the death of man's political hope for democracy. For it seems that Carpenter is correct, despite his citing of Melville's "approval," when he states that "the story describes the military execution of the good man, who has previously been deprived of his civil rights without his own consent."³⁸ If the "good man" is killed in the name of expediency, Melville seems to say, then the hopes for political and social justice are dead. This sense of Billy Budd as elegy is at least suggested in an article by Ralph Willett. In commenting on Melville's attitude toward Vere, Willett concludes: "Small wonder that Melville in his last years, should have shown compassion and understanding for a character who illustrates the complexity of human hopes and behavior in a tense and uncertain world."³⁹

Melville particularly warns of totalitarianism as illustrated in

the military structure in White Jacket, Billy Budd, and Israel Potter. The similarities between White Jacket and Billy Budd are many. Both are set on warships; both present essentially innocent heroes persecuted, in different degrees, by the master of arms, Bland and Claggart; both are concerned with officer and enlisted man relationships and the problems of justice in a totalitarian military world. In White Jacket Melville announced that he saw no present threat of a military takeover in the United States, but he would explore life within a military structure in order to expose its effects upon an individual thinking man. In Billy Budd, with less of his earlier optimism for American political development, he looked again at the same subject. Not very much had changed. There was still much to fear, much to be apprehended, particularly when so benevolent a dictator as Captain Vere, well intentioned as he might be in the effort to preserve social order in the face of change, could manipulate justice in order to bring about the death of an innocent victim in the name of expediency.

In White Jacket, Melville's analysis of the command or corporate pyramid pictures a world in which the captain is dictator, the various ranks of officers do his bidding for positions and prestige, the marines aboard ship are the captain's police force, the seamen are bondsmen or slaves, and the midshipmen are children receiving training which will perpetuate the system. At every point he insists upon this structure as totalitarian:

It's no limited monarchy, where the sturdy Commons have a right to petition, and snarl if they please; but almost a despotism, like the Grand Turk's. The captain's word is law; he never speaks but in the imperative mood. When he stands on his quarter deck at sea, he absolutely commands as far as the eye can reach. Only the moon and stars are beyond his jurisdiction. (IV, 27)

These seamen are like automatons who have given up all sense of freedom.

Melville generalizes about the men-of-war:

. . . men are to be found in them, at times, so used to a hard life, so drilled and disciplined to servitude, that, with an incomprehensible philosophy, they seem cheerfully to resign themselves to their fate. They have plenty to eat; spirits to drink; clothing to keep them warm; a hammock to sleep in; tobacco to chew; a doctor to medicine them; a person to pray for them; and, to a penniless castaway, must not all this seem as a luxurious Bill of Fare? (VI, 483)

It would seem that for the security of bread and board these men forego their freedom.

And in Israel Potter, Israel is victimized by this same rigidly structured society. Within the military, he leads a rebellion against authority and is put in chains (XI, 16); he battles against the cruelty of officers (XI, 117); he is critical of a structure in which a lieutenant can offer his men to another officer "as if they were a parcel of carcasses of mutton" (XI, 113-114). The military, in its rigidity, serves as a microcosm of a cruel world which finally reduces Israel to poverty and death. That Melville particularly intends to damn American society is suggested by the ironic tone of his dedication to the Bunker Hill monument: ". . . a private of Bunker Hill, who for his faithful services was years ago promoted to a still deeper privacy under the ground, with a post-humous pension, in default of any during life, annually paid him by the spring in ever-new mosses and sward" (XI, v).

The common man is denied almost all the right for which the United States and the Bill of Rights stood. He has neither the right to trial by his peers, nor religious freedom, nor freedom of expression; and he certainly does not possess the right to pursue liberty. Melville looks to the Constitution as the means for judging the military process

which brings about such conditions:

If there are any three things opposed to the genius of the American Constitution, they are these: irresponsibility in a judge, unlimited discretionary authority in an executive, and the union of an irresponsible judge and an unlimited executive in one person.

Yet by virtue of an enactment of Congress all the commodores in the American Navy are obnoxious to these three charges, so far as concerns the punishment of the sailor for alleged misdemeanors not particularly set forth in the Articles of War. (VI, 178)

Carpenter, within the context of a consideration of Melville's lack of faith in the fulfillment of the dream of a democratic America, analyzes his use of a military world:

Because he believed that war was the only constant fact of human history, he wrote of the world as a man-of-war. And because he believed that this constant of war made it inevitable that martial law would prevail, he embodies the law in the authoritarian discipline of the ship, whose captain's orders were final. About half of his novels were set in actual men-of-war where martial law was absolute, and about half in whaling ships where authoritarian discipline prevailed in a modified form. But all his novels excepting Pierre suggested that the authoritarian life of the ship was the microcosm of the life of the nation, and ultimately the world as a whole.⁴⁰

Most critics of Israel Potter see satirization in the characters of Benjamin Franklin, John Paul Jones, and Nathan Hale. Chase suggests that Jones embodies what Melville feared the nation would become-- "inorganic, unstable, possessed by an enormous impatience which would lead it to plunge violently into undertakings for which it was unprepared."⁴¹ James E. Miller agrees with Chase on Melville's intention for Jones and sees in the combination of Jones' savageness and Ethan Allen's self-righteous defiance a sense of Ahab and a warning for America that if Allen and Jones embody the American character, "America might, like Ahab, go in defiance to her doom."⁴²

Melville disapproved of colonialism, fascism, imperialism, and all

forms of totalitarian types of governments. He believed that "true freedom is something to be experienced individually and not collectively." He had many fears and apprehensions about democracy in America. Melville's idea of democracy is based on the divinity of man: ". . . that democratic dignity which, on all hands, radiates without end from God; Himself! The great God absolute! The center and circumference of all democracy! His omnipresence, our divine equality" (VII, 144). In other words, Melville's democracy was one for the men of all ages and nations in a world conscious of the social, religious, and political relationships of living human beings. Proclaiming, on the one hand, liberty, equality, and fraternity, Melville, protests vigorously, on the other hand, things in America which are offensive to the spirit of democracy. Lewis Mumford sums up Melville's intention as well as anyone:

Melville had his misgivings about current political institutions; in Mardi he pointed out that many of the boasted freedoms of America were the product of free land and an uncrowded domain; and though he was a republican, he recognized inequality and had no hope of doing away with those distinctions between man and man in a functional capacity, which separate captain, mates, and crew. His own outlook was emotionally patrician and aristocratic; but his years in the fore-castle had modified those feelings, and one needs some such compound word as aristodemocracy to describe his dominant political attitude. . . . Like most men of good will, Melville looked forward to a time when the world itself would be federated into a whole, so that the conflicts between peoples and tribes and communities, the inevitable and salutary conflicts, would not take place on the physical plane . . . but on the plane of culture.⁴³

Melville, as prophet, examines the world in which he lived and tries to interpret the events of his time. He warns America of the evils which he sees. Melville also looks into the future and sees the world in which we live. The next chapter will discuss Melville's picture of our world.

FOOTNOTES

¹D. H. Lawrence, Studies in Classic American Literature (New York: Thomas Seltzer, 1923), p. 34.

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³Sidney Kaplan, "Herman Melville and the American National Sin," Journal of Negro History, 41 (December, 1956), 314.

⁴Eleanor M. Metcalf, Herman Melville, Cycle and Epicycle (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1952), p. 216.

⁵Merrell R. Davis, Melville's Mardi: A Chartless Voyage (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1952), p. 81.

⁶Stephen Larrabee, "Melville Against the World," South Atlantic Quarterly, 24 (October, 1935), 416.

⁷Carl A. Bredahl, Jr., Melville's Angles of Vision (Gainesville, Fla.: Florida Univ. Press, 1972), p. 38.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Edgar A. Dryden, Melville's Thematics of Form (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1968), p. 77.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 78.

¹¹William Braswell, Melville's Religious Thought: An Essay in Interpretation (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1943), p. 50.

¹²Ibid., p. 51.

¹³Lawrence, p. 236.

¹⁴Kaul, p. 275.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Gay Wilson Allen, Melville and His World (New York: Viking Press, 1971), p. 42.

¹⁷See Israel Potter, p. 15.

¹⁸Kaplan, p. 331.

- ¹⁹Braswell, p. 17.
- ²⁰Ibid., p. 26, quoted from "Mr. Parkman's Tour," Literary World, 4 (March 31, 1849), 291.
- ²¹Tyrus Hillway, "Melville and Nineteenth-Century Science," Diss. Yale University, 1944, p. 48.
- ²²Ibid., p. 26.
- ²³Kent Kirby Kreuter, "The Literary Response to Science, Technology, and Industrialism: Studies in the Thought of Hawthorne, Melville, Whitman, and Twain," Diss. University of Wisconsin, 1963, p. 4.
- ²⁴See Moby-Dick, Chapters 47, 67, 68, 72, and 96. This point will be discussed further in Chapter 3 of this paper.
- ²⁵Hillway, p. 185.
- ²⁶Richard H. Fogle, Melville's Shorter Tales (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1960), p. 53.
- ²⁷Braswell, p. 7.
- ²⁸See III, 15; VII, 3, 325, 331; VIII, 104; IX, 405.
- ²⁹See IV, 54; VI, 194; VII and VIII, Passim.
- ³⁰Lawrance Roger Thompson, Melville's Quarrel with God (Princeton: Yale Univ. Press, 1952).
- ³¹Daniel C. Noel, "The Portent Unwound: Religious and Psychological Development in the Imagery of Herman Melville, 1819-1851," Diss. Drew University, 1967.
- ³²Alan Heimert, "Moby-Dick and American Political Symbolism," American Quarterly, 15 (1963), 498-534.
- ³³Ralph H. Gabriel, "Melville, Critic of Mid-Nineteenth Century Beliefs," The Course of American Democratic Thought (New York: The Ronald Press, 1940), p. 70.
- ³⁴Heimert, p. 499.
- ³⁵Ibid., p. 527.
- ³⁶Richard Chase, The American Novel and Its Tradition (New York: Peter Smith, 1957), p. 114.
- ³⁷Frederick Ives Carpenter, American Literature and the Dream (New York: Russell and Russell, 1955), p. 82.
- ³⁸Ibid., p. 79.

³⁹Ralph W. Willett, "Nelson and Vere: Hero and Victim in Billy Budd, Sailor," PMLA, 82 (October, 1967), 376.

⁴⁰Carpenter, p. 76.

⁴¹Richard Chase, Herman Melville, A Critical Study (New York: Peter Smith, 1949), pp. 160-163.

⁴²James E. Miller, Jr., A Reader's Guide to Herman Melville (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Girous, 1962), p. 148.

⁴³Lewis Mumford, Herman Melville, A Study of His Life and Vision (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963), pp. 204-205.

CHAPTER III

MELVILLE AS SEER: HIS MESSAGE TO OUR AGE

The message of the Old Testament prophets was often two-fold--that is, they often described immediate events and at the same time pictured scenes from the future. For instance, in the first chapter of Zephaniah, the prophet predicts a great day of terror which is about to break on Judah and surrounding nations. Henry Halley suggests that this is an "unmistakable reference to the Babylonian invasion and Judah's captivity" and also is a "sort of symbolic delineation of catastrophes to happen at the time of the end."¹ Likewise, Melville describes events that apparently are contemporary with him, and at the same time he interprets the age in which we live.

The totalitarian madness of Nazism and Communism, the great mass labor movements and the "Organization Man," civil rights demonstrations and student revolutions, intellectuals drowning in the dreams of psychoanalysis--this is the world the masses of men strive to understand today. Yet this is also the world which Melville describes. Melville begins his forecast in Mardi and continues it in the totalitarian state of the man-of-war in White Jacket; we can follow the predictive trend through his works to Billy Budd. But one of the best descriptions of our contemporary world can be found in Moby-Dick.

Melville tells about an American whaling vessel at sea on its way

to the whaling grounds when suddenly its one-legged captain, Ahab, asks Starbuck, the first mate, to send everyone aft. There he informs the crew that the real purpose of the voyage is to hunt and kill a white whale well known among whaling men for its peculiar color, its size, and its ferocity. This is the whale, he says, which took off his leg and he will chase it round perdition's fires. His passion and his tactical skill win them to excited agreement.

For Starbuck, the mate, people hunt whales to get money and anything else is madness. He protests violently. For money he is ready to do anything;

'for the jaws of Death too, Captain Ahab, if it fairly comes in the way of the business we follow; but I came here to hunt whales, not my commander's vengeance. How many barrels will thy vengeance yield thee even if thou gettest it, Captain Ahab? it will not fetch thee much in our Nantucket market.'
(VII, 203)

Ahab then utters words which strike at the very foundation of American civilization. He says, in effect, business and money are not important:

'Nantucket market! Hoot! . . . If money's to be the measurer, man, and the accountants have computed their great counting-house the glove, by girdling it with guineas, one to every three parts of an inch; then, let me tell thee, that my vengeance will fetch a great premium here!' (VII, 203-204)

And Ahab smites his chest.

That free enterprise should produce goods for sale, that by working for as much money as possible men help themselves and make their country great, that it is every man's duty to do this--these were the unchallenged foundations of American civilization in 1851 and are still its quasi-official doctrines. But here was a man who trampled upon these sacred principles, derided them, and set up instead his own feelings as a human being. Captain Ahab has a similarly profound scorn for other

pillars of Americanism. One day oil is leaking from the vessel, and Ahab, intent on his pursuit of Moby Dick, refuses to stop to repair the leak. Starbuck, as usual, protests: "What will the owners say, sir?"

Ahab consigns the rights of owners to perdition:

'Let the owners stand on Nantucket Beach and outyell the Typhoons. What cares Ahab? Owners, owners. Thou art always prating to me, Starbuck, about those miserly owners, as if owners were my conscience. But look ye, the only real owner of anything is its commander' (VIII, 243)

It is obvious that whatever Moby-Dick is, it is no mere adventure story. If Captain Ahab were to express these opinions today, he would not only be blackballed from any kind of job by every employer in the country, but he might be investigated by the F.B.I.

Who is this extraordinary character? We can today reconstruct his biography and understand him far better than the people for whom the book was written. First, we see Ahab as a rebel. His ancestors are among those who founded the United States. He was born about 1790 in New England. He, therefore, grew up in the period of expanding freedom after the War of Independence. America was the freest country in the world, and, above all, in freedom was opportunity. When still a boy, Ahab chose whaling as his profession, and at eighteen he struck his first whale. Nantucket, his birthplace, was one of the great whaling centers of the day, and whaling was on the way to become one of the greatest industries of the United States. Ahab was part of this striking growth of material progress, of trade, and of money. By his energy, his skill, and his devotion to his work, he becomes captain of his own vessel like so many other gifted and energetic young men. In fact, he is a master of his difficult craft. But having become captain, Ahab finds himself in continual revolt against his work, his personal

life, and the opinions of the people around him. Although his type may have been new to Melville's world, we see it in the youth of today.

The gospel of America has been, first, above all things, devotion to work. Ahab, a man of Quaker upbringing, has followed it. In forty years he has spent only three ashore. The drive to work kept him from marrying until late in life and has separated him from his wife and son. So now we can understand his heartfelt cry as toward the very end of his long search for the white whale he reviews his life. He has done what everyone said a man should do, and it has turned to dust and ashes in his mouth. He says to Starbuck:

' . . . what a forty years' fool--fool--old fool, has old Ahab been! Why this strife of the chase? why weary and palsy the arm at the oar, and the iron . . . I feel deadly faint, bowed, and humped as though I were Adam, staggering beneath the piled centuries since Paradise.' (VIII, 328)

We can also see Ahab as the foreman of industry. Today industry has changed, and the man who bears the burden is not the owner but the foreman. Can it be that in the managers, superintendents, executives, and administrators of today might arise such loathing and bitterness against the society of free enterprise, market, and democracy, that they would try to reorganize it to suit themselves and, if need be, destroy civilization in the process? But first we need to understand the totalitarian mind which Ahab represents.

Ahab is no common man. He has a fine brain and has had some education. He is a Quaker, and in his early days so hated the Catholic Church that he spat into one of the sacred vessels of a cathedral. In short, he is a man who wants to live fully and completely according to his beliefs. That precisely is the cause of his undoing. He has dropped Quakerism, and his basic religion for years has been the

religion of his age--material progress. Power, the axiom of material progress, is a mighty creative force to Ahab. But its creativity is mechanical, a word he uses many times. It is this which is destroying his life as a human being, and he will fight it. He has now reached the stage where he sees the problem philosophically as a problem of world civilization--how to reconcile the undoubted advantages of an industrial civilization with what that very civilization is doing to him as a human being. Ahab here has formulated the question which his countrymen would begin to ask only many, many years later.

So far millions of Americans can understand Ahab. They have worked under such men. A smaller but not insignificant number have gone through his experiences. The Diesel engine and now atomic energy present the vast majority with the same problem that Ahab faced: the obvious, the immense, the fearful mechanical power of an industrial civilization which is now advancing by incredible leaps and bringing at the same time the mechanization and destruction of human personality. In industry and "big business," machines are becoming more important than people. Men who are thinking about the dehumanization of the mechanized world, classes of people in a nation who are questioning the technological society, are being steadily prepared for desperate action. Eric Fromm writes of these individuals in his essay "Our Way of Life Makes Us Miserable."² He says that the men of our large-scale, bureaucratized industrialism have become "alienated" men who are just a "small, well-oiled cog in the machinery."³ If now there descends upon them a violent catastrophe that ruins them and convinces them that the life that they have been living is intolerable and the grave doubts that have previously tormented them are justified, then they are going to throw

aside all the traditional restraints of civilization. They are going to seek a new theory of society and a program of action, and, on the basis of this theory and this program, they are going to act. This is what happens to Ahab when a whale bites off his leg.

The loss of his leg was for Ahab final proof of the absolute unreasonableness of the world. And in the long hours of pain and suffering which followed, Ahab's doubts and difficulties and frustrations about the world in which he lived came to a head. In *Moby-Dick*, he decides, is the solution to his problems. Killing *Moby-Dick* will solve all that is troubling him:

The White Whale 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 All that most maddens and torments; all that stirs up the lees of things; all that cracks the sinews and cakes the brain; all the subtle demonisms of life and thought; all evil, to crazy Ahab, were visibly personified and made practically assailable in *Moby Dick*. He piled upon the whale's white hump the sum of all the general rage and hate felt by his whole race from Adam down; and then as if his chest had been a mortar, he burst his hot heart's shell upon it. (VII, 229-230)

Mad he undoubtedly was, but that which was madness in a book one hundred years ago today is the living madness of the age in which we live. Here we see the totalitarian mind at work, seeking to become the master (or the master race as the Germans did, or the Russians, or the United Europe, or the United States). That this is how masses of men would sooner or later behave is what Melville was pointing out in 1851. Melville uses the whaling industry and the pursuit of whales, in this case symbolized by one whale, to point out the madness of what the world has hitherto accepted as sane and reasonable the values by which all good men have lived and worked. Each country has a plan, each tries to outdo the other, build factories, harness energy, monopolize oil or

other resources, and excel in missiles and space exploration. Now we can see in Ahab the embodiment of the totalitarian type. With his purpose clear before him, he is concerned with two things only: science, the management of things, and politics, the management of men.

In a magnificent chapter entitled "The Chart," Melville shows us Ahab, the man of purpose, at work using modern techniques. He has at his sole command a whaling vessel which is one of the most highly developed technological structures of the day. Ahab has catalogued in his brain all the scientific knowledge of navigation accumulated over the centuries. His purpose may be mad, but the weapons that he is using to achieve this purpose are the most advanced achievement of the civilized world, and this purpose gives his already high intelligence a command over them and a power which he never had before. At night he sits alone with his charts. He knows the set of tides and currents, the drift of the sperm whale's food. He has old log books which tell him where Moby Dick has been seen on previous voyages. Sometimes Ahab's madness seems to overpower him. He rises and rushes out of his cabin. But this is no madness that any doctor can cure. What rushes out, according to Melville, is his common humanity flying from the monster that has overcome it. So that Ahab is then "a vacated thing, a formless somnambulist being, a ray of living light, to be sure, but without an object to color and therefore a blankness in itself." Melville suggests that when humanity goes there remains only abstract intellect, abstract science, abstract technology, alive, but blank, serving no human purpose but merely the abstract purpose itself.

Ahab is by nature a dictatorial personality. But that has not made him a dictator. It is the fact that he has been in command so long, has

learned the usages of command at sea which all tend toward creating a dictatorship. Give him now his purpose, and his outstanding ability, and we have the basis of what Melville calls the "tremendous centralization" of power. The analysis of Ahab might have been written yesterday. His problem is contemporary beyond belief. The moment Ahab states that the purpose of the voyage is different from that for which the crew had signed, the men were by law entitled to revolt and to take possession of the ship themselves. But what is more important, Ahab has a certain conception of the men, and this, like everything about him, is the result of his years of command. The crew are not human beings but things, as he calls them, "manufactured men." For him their permanent condition is sordidness. For a moment he has lifted them out of themselves by the crusade for achievement of his purpose. And even then he bribes them with a doubloon and grog and ritual. Now he feels that he must for the moment hide the purpose. So he falls back once more on the business of the Pequod as being purely money-making. Later we see and recognize the other methods he uses to dominate the men. For the time being, however, Ahab concentrates on their sordidness, their incapacity to respond to anything but the meanest motives. The high purpose in reality is for him alone, not for them. Melville brings to the surface what, for centuries, has been the attitude of the aristocrats toward the great masses among whom they live.

The question that immediately presents itself to the reader today is this: if Melville really saw the executives, the managers, the administrators, the popular leaders, and their development into the totalitarian type so clearly, how did he, in 1851, see the ordinary people whom these monsters bind in chains, exploit, corrupt and

ultimately ruin? Melville answers this question clearly. Even before he begins to tell us what Captain Ahab stands for, he describes the officers and the crew of the Pequod in two chapters, both of which have the same name, "Knights and Squires."

The first chapter begins with Starbuck, the first mate. Like Ahab, he is a New Englander. He is a man of principle, high moral qualities, brave, and competent. But at the same time, Melville shows how this moral coward is certain to fail before the concentrated purpose and the force of character of Ahab. Then Melville rushes on to describe the role of the working men, the crew:

If then, to meanest mariners, and renegades and castaways, I shall hereafter ascribe high graces; if even the most mournful, perchance the most abased, among them all shall at times lift himself to the exalted mounts; if I shall touch that workman's arm with some ethereal light; if I shall spread a rainbow over his disastrous set of sun; then against all mortal critics bear me out in it, thou just Spirit of Equality, which hast spread one royal mantle of humanity over all my kind! (VIII, 144)

In the next chapter, which bears the same title, Melville drops the meanest mariners, renegades and castaways and goes back to the officers. He describes Stubb, the second mate who laughs at everything, and Flask, the third mate who has no character whatever. But like Starbuck, they are New Englanders and men of great courage, competence, and sobriety. Next, we are introduced to the three harpooners. They are first, a South Sea cannibal, Queequeg; the second, Tashtego, a Gay-Head Indian from Massachussets; and the third is Dago, a gigantic Negro from the coast of Africa. They are all men of magnificent physique, dazzling skill, and striking personality. The crew is made up of a pack of ragamuffins picked up at random from all parts of the earth. Nearly all on Ahab's ship are islanders, and in fact, nearly all the nations of the

globe are represented with white American officers providing the brains. "Isolatoos," Melville calls them, not acknowledging the common continent of men, but each "Isolato" living on a separate continent of his own:

Yet now, federated along one keel, what a set these Isolatoes were! An Anacharsis Clootz deputation from all the isles of the sea, and all the ends of the earth accompanying Old Ahab in the Pequod to lay the world's grievances before that bar from which not very many of them ever come back. (VII, 149-150)

Then Melville tells us what he means by his over-hasty statement in the earlier chapter that the most abased shall lift himself to the most exalted position. The most abased of the crew on board is Pip, a little Negro from Alabama, the lowest of the low in America of 1851. It is Pip who in the end will be hailed as the greatest hero of all.

If these chapters are read and accepted, then the book itself can be seen for what it is, the grandest conception of the modern world, our world, as it was, and the future that lay before it. The voyage of the Pequod is the voyage of modern civilization seeking its destiny. Ahab, we know, is consumed with anger at that civilization. The three American officers represent the most competent technological knowledge, brains, leadership. The harpooners and the crew are the ordinary people of the whole world. It is only since the end of World War II, with the emergence of the people of the Far East and of Africa into the daily headlines, the spread of Russian totalitarianism, the emergence of America as a power in every quarter of the globe, that the American reader can see the range, the power, and the boldness of Melville and the certainty with which he writes. He sees horrible crises and catastrophes coming, presenting modern civilization with the question of survival. He asks many questions himself: Can mankind

overcome his problems? What will be, or could be, the relationship between educated people, the technical and executive leaders of an advanced civilization, and the vast millions of ordinary people the world over? Will modern man every be happy or is he condemned to eternal misery? Will he in the end destroy himself? Melville asks these questions and he answers them. His answers, however, are in terms of human relations as he contrasts Ahab and his crew.

Critics say that Melville describes the techniques of the whaling industry as if he were drawing up some sort of textbook or manual.⁴ Melville is doing nothing of the kind. He has painted a body of men at work, the skill and the danger, the mental and physical labor of human resources, the comradeship and the unity, the simplicity and the naturalness. Melville's crew consists of "meanest mariners, castaways and renegades." Their heroism consists in their everyday doing of their work--and they are good workers. They are not suffering workers, nor revolutionary workers, nor people who must be organized, nor people who must have more leisure or more education so that they will be able to enjoy their leisure. The only tragic graces with which Melville endows them are the graces of men associated for common labor. The men pursue whales, sharing the skills, dangers, sweat, and jokes. Ahab pursues his whale with foam-glued lips and inflamed distracted fury. Sometimes the men quarrel and fight, but the essence of their relationship at work or at play is congeniality. Ahab is either in a state of grim reserve, tragic gloom, or hopeless silence, overwhelmed by his isolation and lack of human communication and his scorn for the great masses of men as "manufactured men." The thoughts of the men are in general untroubled. Ahab lives perpetually planning and scheming, with his

wrinkled brow and his shoulders humped with the "burdens of the centuries since Paradise." The crew is anonymous; a few of them are mentioned by name a half dozen times, but those names easily could be left out. The crew is ignorant and superstitious while Ahab has some education and knowledge and an intense consciousness of himself and the world around him. Melville dramatizes the basic qualities of the crew in the three harpooners. What he does is to take the ideal qualities of the crew and intensify them in these three vivid figures. By making them savages, Melville could emphasize the break with intellectual and emotional self-torture which he feels is the primary condition for the survival of modern society.

But the story is seen through the eyes of Ishmael. And Ishmael, like Ahab, first lived in Melville's imagination. But it is the twentieth century, our own, which has its Ishmaels in every city block. He is a member of a distinguished American family, is well educated and has been a teacher. But he cannot endure the social class in which he was born and reared; so he lives as a worker, digging ditches, or doing whatever is available. He is subject to fits of periodical depression (today we would call him a neurotic) and whenever he feels a fit coming on, he goes to sea. Ishmael wants to be a plain ordinary seaman. He feels himself one of the people; however, it is not that he likes workers but that he hates authority and responsibility of any kind. He does not want to be a commodore, but he does not want to be a cook either. Presidential elections, international politics, commerce--all of these he wants no part of. He wants to go to sea because when life on land is too much for them, men have always gone to sea to find there some explanation of what is baffling them. He wants to go whaling

because he wants adventure and peril in far places. And (also typical of many today) he loves the horrible, although he is neither pervert nor degenerate. Ishmael's description of himself shows that the instinct for violence, the cruelty and the sadism inherent in Western Civilization of the twentieth century are not accidental. They were detected in America over three generations ago.

What is wrong with this young man? He is as isolated and bitter as Ahab and as helpless. He cannot stand the narrow, cramped, limited existence which civilization offers him. He hates the greed, the lies, the hypocrisy. Thus shut out from the world outside, he cannot get out of himself. The only truly civilized person he can find in New Bedford and Nantucket is a cannibal savage, the harpooner, Queequeg. Already a man disillusioned with the world, what he sees in New Bedford and Nantucket so shocks Ishmael that he watches Queequeg, the seller of human heads, with fresh interest. What he sees in him is exactly what he has not been able to find in the world around him.

Through all his unearthly tattooings, I thought I saw the traces of a simple honest heart; and in his large, deep eyes, fiery black and bold, there seemed tokens of a spirit that would dare a thousands devils. And besides all this, there was a certain lofty bearing about he pagan, which even his uncouthness could not altogether maim. He looked like a man who had never cringed and never had a creditor. (VII, 60-61)

Poor lonely Ishmael feels something melting in him. Queequeg is the opposite of everything he has known.

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. Wild he was; a very sight of sights to see; yet I began to feel myself mysteriously drawn towards him. And those same things that would have repelled most others, they were the very magnets that drew me. I'll try

a pagan friend, thought I, since Christian kindness has proven but hollow courtesy. (VII, 62)

As usual with Melville's people in Moby-Dick, Ishmael, at first sight, is merely one of those dreamy young men of education and intellect who cannot live in the world. Ishmael's favorite place on board ship is up on the mast-head where he is supposed to be taking his turn at looking for whales. He never sees one, for he is up there dreaming his life away and imagining that his soul is once more at one with the waters that stretch around him to the horizon on every side. But soon it becomes apparent that Ishmael is no mere dreamer. He is a completely modern young intellectual who has broken with society and wavers constantly between totalitarianism and the crew. Why does Ishmael join Ahab's quest? What overwhelms Ishmael in 1851 is what modern psychologists talk about more than anything else, a sense of guilt. But it is constantly dominated by a sense of inadequacy and isolation. Ishmael says that he followed Ahab for a reason peculiar to himself, and he adds, unless he makes us understand this, then the story he is writing will have no meaning.

Not only is Ishmael attracted to Ahab, the man of action, but equally strong on him is the attraction of the crew. At first he has only Queequeg as a friend, but then over a long period under the influence of daily work with them, he almost becomes one of the anonymous crew. What keeps them apart is his intellectualism which compels him at all times to seek to find out what is happening to himself in relation to the world. After his first violent experience of what hunting a whale from an open boat is like, Ishmael almost forgets his preoccupation with himself. He decides that, whatever happens, he will take it in stride. He goes to his friend Queequeg and makes his will. He is

the one who is attached to Queequeg by the rope. He sweats and strains with the rest. One day when they are squeezing spermacetti, all their hands in the soft fluffy mixture together, he experiences a sensation of comradeship and fraternity such as he has never felt before, and he wishes they could all squeeze sperm forever (VIII, 172). One night when Ishmael is at the helm, he looks down at the men working below:

I thought my eyes were open; I was half conscious of putting my fingers to the lids and mechanically stretching them still further apart. But, spite of all this, I could see no compass before me to steer by; though it seemed but a minute since I had been watching the card, by the steady binnacle lamp illuminating it. Nothing seemed before me but a jet gloom, now and then made ghastly by flashing of redness. Uppermost was the impression, that whatever swift, rushing thing I stood on was not so much bound to any haven ahead as rushing from all havens astern. A stark, bewildered feeling, as of death, came over me (VIII, 180-181)

Henceforth, Ishmael will seek refuge from the world in books, particularly in Ecclesiastes where it says that "All is vanity." He takes refuge in his philosophical abstractions--he will soar like the eagle in the mountains and even if he has to swoop, his lowest flight will still be higher than that of ordinary men (VIII, 182).

In Moby-Dick, Melville also presents the world of labor. The men do not merely collect and prepare the raw material; the whale ship is also a factory. When the blubber is ready, then the try works, huge cauldrons, are put into place, and the oil is distilled. This is really modern industry. In the chapter called "The Try-Works," Melville presents a section of the modern world--the world of the Ruhr, of Pittsburgh, of the Black Country of England.

From the beginning of Moby-Dick Ahab is, and to the end remains, a master of his science of whaling. But rapidly he narrows the very concept of science down to what serves his purpose simply and directly.

Any other kind of science he will destroy. One day he has just taken the daily reckoning from the sun with the quadrant when in a sudden rage he dashes it to the deck. "Science! I curse thee, thou vain toy," he yells and stamps upon the instrument (VIII, 274). His reason is one of Melville's penetrations into the nature of totalitarianism. The quadrant, Ahab says, can tell where the sun is, but it cannot tell man what he wants to know, and that is where he will be tomorrow. It lifts man's eyes up to the great and glorious sun.

'Aye, thus I trample on thee, thou paltry thing that feebly pointest on high; thus I split and destroy thee.'
(VIII, 275)

Here is the ruthless limitation of social aspirations which totalitarianism imposes on the masses of its followers. Their eyes must be kept level with the horizon until after the purpose is achieved. It is on the same evening after the breaking of the quadrant that the storm breaks, the fires burn on the masts, and Ahab defies the fires of industry. Thus within one day, Industry and Science, the twin gods of the nineteenth century, have been deposed.

What Ahab really wants in order to advance his purpose is to finish away altogether with men who think. This is what he tells the carpenter:

'I'll order a complete man after a desirable pattern. Imprimis, fifty feet high in his socks; then, chest modelled after the Thames tunnel, then, legs with roots to 'em, to stay in one place; then, arms three feet through the wrist; no heart at all, brass forehead, and about a quarter of an acre of fine brains; and let me see--shall I order eyes to see outwards? No, but put a sky-light on top of his head to illuminate inwards.'
(VIII, 238)

This is precisely the aim of every totalitarian dictator whether he be someone like Castro who rules a country or a supervisor of industry.

He wants hundreds of millions of inhumanly strong, capable, technically efficient men with no heart to feel, without aspirations, except what their masters tell them.

Observers of Communist totalitarianism in particular will have noted that most of its followers have an extraordinary capacity for accepting, and accepting with apparent joy and enthusiasm, policies which the followers execrated up to the very day they were announced. Stubb is their prototype. It is likely that Melville, working on board ship, had observed closely how men rationalized their subservience to tyranny, and from there plunged into an imaginative projection of the process carried to its logical conclusion. Melville gives a penetrating description of how the Communist makes a virtue and pleasure of accepting what to the ordinary human being would be degradation and self-destruction, and at the same time ties any doubters into knots of confusion and sophistry. Because the men so readily followed their leader, they did not revolt. But Melville took great pains to show that revolt was no answer. He introduces into his narrative a story of a revolt on another vessel. The great length of the story and the power Melville puts into it shows how important it was for him. Steelkilt, a magnificent specimen of manhood and a sailor of heroic character, leads a revolt against a tyrannical mate and a weak captain (VII, 306-333). The revolt is in the end successful. But what happens? Steelkilt and some of his fellow mutineers escape and get back home again. That is all. Everything goes back to where it was before. That is exactly what would have happened in 1851 if there had been a revolt on the Pequod.

Melville shows how the society of free individualism would give

birth to totalitarianism and be unable to defend itself against it. His theme in Moby-Dick is totalitarianism, its rise and fall, its power and its weakness. For long before Moby Dick actually destroys him, Ahab begins to show the fatal weaknesses of the course he has embarked upon. He begins to weaken on the side of Fedallah and he begins to weaken on the side of Pip. Few dictators, however well established, depend entirely on a regular army, a regular police, and the normal protection of power. They usually create a special force, loyal to themselves alone, men totally alien from the population, who are dependent entirely upon the dictator for life, for livelihood, and for ideas to live by. Ahab has such a force, a crew of savages from the Manillas with Fedallah as their head. Totalitarianism and barbarism are inseparable, twin sides of the same coin, and Melville makes Ahab and Fedallah inseparable. Together they are leading society to its destruction. However, when Moby Dick is sighted and Armageddon begins, Ahab, with his evil cohorts, are destroyed along with the other members of the crew. Only Ishmael and Moby Dick survive.

Today Melville's characters are often used as references in relation to national political figures and events. Jeanne C. Howes reports several of these references in the newsletter of the Melville Society, Extracts.⁵ For example, in the New York Times of December 31, 1972, Robert Lefkowitz of New York in a letter to the editor speaks of "the most outstanding Quaker of our time, Captain Ahab, President Nixon," noting that "Vietnam has become his private white whale." He also finds other analogies: "Henry Kissinger as his first mate" and "his ship of state, the Pequod." Then Mr. Lefkowitz, like a modern-day Elijah, warns us at the launching of the new Nixon administration: "to

those who are preparing to ship out with this newest of Ahab's, let them recall the stern lesson the great white whale has to teach, and let them take heed, if they fear for their souls and fear God."

The image of Moby Dick has been modernized by Ray Bradbury, the science fiction writer who wrote the screenplay for Moby-Dick in 1953. Bradbury has written a new play "Leviathan '99." The play is a drama about a mad space captain in the year 2099 who pursues a great white comet. This comet had blinded the captain when he was very young. Now, the comet fires back into our part of the universe and the captain sets out with rocket and with men to destroy the dread visitor.

Although Melville wrote Moby-Dick in 1851, in it today can be seen the anticipations of Darwin's theory of man's relation to the natural world, of Marx's theory of the relation of the individual to the economic and social structure, and of Freud's theory of the irrational and primitive forces which lie just below the surface of human behavior. Melville expresses many of the same ideas in his other works of fiction. Beginning in Mardi, Melville discusses his world and predicts the world to come. Mardi is a satirical novel whose subject matter is the fundamentals of political democracy. It is obvious that Melville yielded to what was an irresistible impulse to write his views on the philosophy, literature, and politics of Europe and America. No politician in the campaign of 1974 has said anything so savage against graft, greed, and corruption in Washington politics as Melville does in Mardi as the Mardians and Taji visit Vivenza, the United States. Melville does not denounce one party; he denounces the whole Congress and his attitude is that it will always be the same. It is extremely dangerous to take these ideas as specific political policies of Melville. He was an

artist and had made no consistent studies of economics and politics. He was for example an extreme, in fact a fanatical, democrat, but some of the views he expresses in Mardi he changes in his next book. However, Mardi shows that already he believed that a future continually expanding democracy was an illusion, for America as for the rest of the world, that he considered politics a game played by politicians, and that he was grappling seriously with the question of what exactly men meant by freedom. It is not too much to say that he was thinking about the very things that the vast majority of men are thinking about today.

One hundred years before World War II burned across Europe, Melville had shipped aboard an American man-of-war, the United States, on a journey home from the Hawaiian Islands. He had experienced the life of a common sailor within the structured society of the military world, mulled it over, and recreated it in White Jacket. Long before fear of Communism had permitted military ascendance in the United States, Melville warned of the dangers of the totalitarianism of the Right. He showed that in the structured world of the man-of-war, everyone loses his freedom. As he wrote White Jacket, Melville saw no immediate threat of a military take over in his native land, reasoning that a liberal constitution, and a liberal political philosophy guaranteed continuing democracy. By the time of the creation of Billy Budd, however, such faith had vanished. Melville knew as well as anyone that all too often men and nations are willing to sacrifice freedom for authority during times of crisis and to continue under totalitarian rule as long as economic conditions are tolerable. With this in mind one wonders what Melville's hope for American democracy would be today in a politically polarized world ridden with crises and conflict where

many countries are ruled by just such a military regime.

Despite the ironic ending of White Jacket in which Melville shuns revolution and his refusal to include mutiny on the Pequod in Moby-Dick, Melville appears not averse to using violence if other measures fail. For instance, White Jacket ultimately chooses to write a book in order to foster change, but when about to be humiliated by Captain Claret, he considers killing him despite the fact that it would mean an end to his own life as well (VI, 353). From the incident grows a theory of revolution as White Jacket thinks: "The privilege, inborn, and inalienable, that every man has of dying himself, and inflicting death upon another, was not given to us without a purpose. These are the last resources of an insulted and unendurable existence" (VI, 353). It is the theory of revolution that desperation breeds today. Of course, a "Christianized" crew would never resort to violence, but Melville at least dangles the possibility before the reader that this "Christianization" makes it possible for the officer-elite to dominate the crew-masses, and indeed, the present rejection of Christianity among militant blacks echoes Melville's voice. White Jacket, however, does not choose revolution; he writes instead, hoping for evolutionary change through nonviolent means.

There was one specialized feature of the age to come which Melville knew but could find no place for in his conception of Moby-Dick. It is what we know today as psychoanalysis. And as soon as Moby-Dick was finished, Melville in a few months wrote another novel, Pierre, which is a study of what the Freudians call neurosis. According to Freud, neurosis is the prevailing condition of mankind. The foundation of neurosis is the incestuous sexual desire of the child for the parent of the opposite sex. It is in this desire and its history that must be

sought the roots of individual personality. This, Freud claimed, has always been so in civilized society, but it was first scientifically discovered and expounded by him and his assistants at the turn of the century. The idea of the unconscious, and particularly the sexual unconscious, the struggle between the unconscious and the need for disciplined behavior, the influence upon adult personality of the relations between parents and children, the pervading consciousness of sickness, of guilt, or crisis, in the individual personality--these psychological preoccupations dominate the thinking of educated people in the twentieth century. This is what Melville deals with in Pierre. But, although he had anticipated Freud by fifty years, Melville is no Freudian. In fact, he is today one of the deadliest enemies the Freudians have ever had, because, for Melville, the preoccupation with personality, the tendency to incest and homosexuality was not human nature but a disease, a horrible sickness. Secondly, the disease is confined to a special class of people, chiefly intellectuals and the idle rich who cannot decide what attitude they should take to a changing society. Thirdly, this disease is no mere personal sickness. Its tortured victims explode in the tendency to destruction, suicide, murder, and violence of all kinds which distinguish our age. Finally, Melville, though very much aware of the unconscious, was very cautious about it. And he certainly did not believe that it represented the animal, the primitive, the lustful drives in man which had to be constantly fought and kept in check. It would seem that he thought exactly the opposite--that in civilized man, the unconscious was the source of immense creative energy and power, which was repressed by the discipline of society as he knew it. Thus, while he saw very clearly the facts which the psychoanalysts discovered

fifty years after, his interpretation of them clashes with theirs at every point.

The psychoanalyst's couch is the favorite resting place of many Pierres today as the mast-head was for Ishmael. The Pierres are of both sexes. Anyone familiar with that section of society where meet together the left-wing of the liberal movement, the radical intellectuals, the rising labor leaders and a small section of workers who aim at raising themselves above the workers' status can see the Pierres and the Isabels by the hundreds. All the burdens of social decision, or half-decision, of the personality disintegrating under the pressures are piled by Pierre, male or female, upon Isabel. They need not end in suicide but the ruin of each personality is sealed. There is always Ahab waiting to give them protection from having to make choices and from the constant struggles of a world that is too much for them.

In several of Melville's short stories, too, can be seen the twentieth-century world. "Bartleby" is the story of a revolt of a white-collar worker on Wall Street, but millions of girls who spend their lives typing and retyping documents every day or the factory worker who does the same repetitious task day after day will understand Bartleby well. Though he is writing in 1853, Melville has isolated a section of society in his own time which has grown to immense importance in our own day--those millions of human beings who spend their strength, vitality, and capacity for living, day after day, taking down, typing, checking, filing and then looking for documents which are to them as dead as the dead letters Bartleby handled. This today has reached a stage which Melville could hardly have envisaged. But he saw the tendency of things, and again the words he uses bring to mind the

contemporary millions who constitute the hewers of wood and drawers of water for the vast administrative machines that now dominate modern life. And he presents a likewise dejecting picture of the factory worker in "Tartarus of Maids." Both stories seem to be a gigantic protest against the waste and degradation of human life. Yet, these same conditions are even more prevalent today. He concludes with the lament, "Ah, Bartleby, Ah, Humanity."

As we look about us and note the result of the technological revolution, we see that technology has improved our comforts but made us less human. Melville describes these dangers in "The Bell Tower" and warns that man's technology can destroy its creator. This story could have been considered science fiction at the time that it was written because of the futuristic idea of an automaton or robot doing the work of man.

Again we conclude that Melville's concern was that of a humanitarian. Even in predicting the future, he was most concerned with the human being--what totalitarianism in government or industry could do to an individual. If the prophet Melville were alive today, he would be concerned with the ethical issues of an industrial society. He would probably be writing about organized capital and labor, about financial credit structures, new kinds of exploitation, environmental pollution, slums, and a broad concern for human well-being in modern society.

FOOTNOTES

¹Henry H. Halley, Halley's Bible Handbook (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1959), p. 343.

²Erich Fromm, "Our Way of Life Makes Us Miserable," Now: Essays and Articles, ed. M. L. Sutton, R. W. Puckett, and H. L. Copps (Beverly Hills: Glencoe Press, 1969), pp. 79-85.

³Ibid., p. 81.

⁴William Ellery Sedgwick, Herman Melville, The Tragedy of Mind (1944; rpt. New York: Russell & Russell, 1962), p. 83.

⁵Jeanne C. Howes, "Melville on the Political Scene," Extracts: An Occasional Newsletter of the Melville Society, No. 16 (November, 1973), p. 12.

CHAPTER IV

MELVILLE AS PHILOSOPHER: HIS MESSAGE TO ALL AGES

In Deuteronomy 18:18 we find the scriptural definition of a prophet: "I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee [Moses], and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him." Although the prophets spoke to their own age, as we have already noted, they were ever looking forward to future events. Besides this, we find abiding principles stated for all times. Melville, following the techniques of the Old Testament prophets, also presents truths for all ages, attempting to answer many philosophical questions.

Melville was primarily a philosophical novelist, not an academic philosopher whose chief business is to clarify and explain philosophical concepts. A novelist, by necessity, has to restrict himself to one or two themes which would significantly shed light on the area of experience he wants to illuminate, but at the same time a philosophical novelist's preoccupation with the metaphysical problems is bound to creep into his works. Melville uses many philosophical characters, such as Babbalanja and Yoomy in Mardi and Ushant in White Jacket, as well as philosophical passages to express his message to all ages.¹ This is precisely the reason the novels of Melville are so fascinating to the modern reader. His insight into the perennial problems of man's

existence makes his work timeless in significance. Two topics which are dominant throughout Melville's prose fiction are his search for God and his discussion of the dualism of good and evil. These subjects have been explored and reported by many critics.² I would like to limit my discussion to other philosophical questions about man, life, death, fate, and truth.

The first of Melville's queries was: What is man? The answer to this question was Melville's lifelong preoccupation. Father Mapple asked it as he stood in the pulpit of the Whaleman's Chapel at New Bedford addressing the mongrel crew about to embark on the Pequod in pursuit of Moby Dick. Melville knew the formulas of his generation. Human nature is evil by inheritance from Adam, said the Calvinist; it is good, retorted the Unitarian; it is capable of perfection, affirmed the humanitarian whose utopian thought sprang from the Enlightenment; it is divine, cried Emerson. In Moby-Dick Melville speaks of the dignity and divinity of man:

Men may seem detestable as joint-stock companies and nations; knaves, fools and murderers there may be; men may have mean and meager faces; but man, in the ideal, is so noble and so sparkling, such a grand and glowing creature that over any ignominious blemish in him all his fellows should run to throw their costliest robes. That immaculate manliness we feel within ourselves . . . But this august dignity I treat of, is not the dignity of kings and robes, but that abounding dignity which has no robed investiture. Thou shalt see it shining in the arm that wields a pick or drives a spike; that democratic dignity which, on all hands, radiates without end from God; Himself! The great God absolute! The center and circumference of all democracy! His omnipresence, our divine equality! (VII, 143-144)

In Pierre Melville describes the soul of one of those towering personalities who rises like a mountain above his fellows:

But, as to the resolute traveler in Switzerland, the Alps do never in one comprehensive sweep, instantaneously reveal

their full awfulness of amplitude--their overawing extent of peak crowded on peak, and spur sloping on spur, and chain jammed behind chain, and all their wonderful battalionings of might; so hath heaven wisely ordained, that one first entering into the Switzerland of his soul man shall not at once perceive its tremendous immensity; lest illy prepared for such an encounter, his spirit should sink and perish in the lower-most snows. Only by judicious degrees, appointed of God, does man come at last to gain his Mont Blanc and take an overtopping view of these Alps; and even then, the tite is not shown; and far over the invisible Atlantic, the Rocky Mountains and the Andes are yet unbeheld. Appalling is the soul of a man! Better might one be pushed off into the material spaces beyond the uttermost orbit of our sun, than once feel himself fairly afloat in himself! (IX, 396)

As Pierre drew toward the crisis of his life, he thought much of Hamlet and of Hamlet's problem. Melville, picturing the traveler in Switzerland tramping toward his Mont Blanc, was perhaps seeking a simile for such a soul as that of Shakespeare.

Melville knew evil men as well as great. Among the former was the captain of the Acushnet, for whose avaricious oppression the young whaler was willing to substitute the hazards of life among the cannibal tribe. In Redburn, as he discusses Jackson, who seemed to have sold his soul to the devil, Melville comments: "For there is no dignity in wickedness, whether in purple or rags; and hell is a democracy of devils, where all are equals" (V, 356). Nor did Melville approve of what civilization had done to the islanders:

Let the savages be civilized, but civilize them with benefits, and not with evils: and let heathenism be destroyed, but not by destroying the heathen . . . Among the islands of Polynesia, no sooner are the images overturned, the temples demolished, and the idolaters converted into nominal Christians than disease, vice, and premature death make their appearance. (I, 263)

Just what is life all about? In Moby-Dick, Ishmael indicates that man can learn about life from the sea:

Why did the old Persians hold the sea holy? Why did the Greeks give it a separate deity, and own brother of Jove?

Surely all this is not without meaning. And still deeper the meaning of that story of Narcissus, who because he could not grasp the tormenting, mild image he saw in the fountain, plunged into it and was drowned. But that same image, we ourselves see in all rivers and oceans. It is the image of the ungraspable phantom of life; and this is the key to it all. (VII, 3-4)

And in Mardi, when describing the House of the Afternoon which is visited on the island of Juam, Melville mentions a stream which issued forth from a grotto, enjoyed the sunlight, and sprang into an arbor. Philosophically, he says:

Truant streams; the livelong day wending their loitering path to the subterraneous outlet, flowing into which, they disappeared. But no wonder they loitered; passing such ravishing landscapes. Thus with life: man bounds out of night; runs and babbles in the sun; then returns to his darkness again; though, peradventure, once more to emerge. (III, 272)

One of the best discussions of life is found in the chapter entitled "The Gilder" in Moby-Dick. Here Melville tells about the boats paddling after the whales in the Japanese cruising ground. When the weather is mild and pleasant, the boat afloat upon the smooth, slow-heaving swells, there is much time for contemplation and dreamy quietude. Beholding the beauty of the ocean, one tends to forget the "tiger heart" beneath it. This leads to the ideas of man's life:

Oh, glassy glades! oh, ever vernal endless landscapes in the soul; in ye,--though long parched by the dead drought of the earthy life,--in ye, men yet may roll, like young horses in new morning clover; and for some few fleeting moments, feel the cool dew of the life immortal on them. Would to God these blessed calms would last. But the mingled, mingling threads of life are woven by warp and woof; calms crossed by storms, a storm for every calm. There is no steady unretracing progress in this life; we do not advance through fixed gradations, and at the last one pause:--though infancy's unconscious spell, boyhood's thoughtless faith, adolescence' doubt (the common doom) then scepticism, then disbelief, resting at last in manhood's pondering repose of If. But once gone through we trace the round again; and are infants, boys, and men, and Ifs eternally. Where lies the final harbor, whence we unmoor no more? In what rapt ether sails the world, of which the weariest will

never weary? Where is the foundling's father hidden? Our souls are like those orphans whose unwedded mothers die in bearing them; the secret of our paternity lies in their grave, and we must there to learn it. (VIII, 264)

Melville often writes of life as a voyage (VI, 502, 504) and in a letter to Mrs. Hawthorne January 8, 1852, he writes:

Life is a long Dardenelles, My Dear Madam, the shores whereof are bright with flowers which we want to pluck, but the bank is too high; and so we float on & on, hoping to come to a landing-place atlast--but swoop! we launch into the great sea! Yet the geographers say, even then we must not despair, because across the great sea, however desolate & vacant it may look, lie all Persia & the delicious lands roundabout Damascus.³

However the sea is not always calm. In White Jacket, after the rough trip around the Cape Horn, he warns:

But, sailor or landsman, there is some sort of a Cape Horn for all. Boys! beware of it; prepare for it in time. Graybeards! thank God it is passed. And ye lucky livers, to whom, by some rare fatality, your Cape Horns are placid as Lake Lemans, flatter not yourselves that good luck is judgment and discretion; for all the yolk in your eggs, you might have foundered and gone down, had the Spirit of the Cape said the word. (VI, 137)

And in Moby-Dick when he explains the "blanket" of the whale, the thick skin which covers it, he sermonizes on a lesson he thinks man can get from this blanket:

It does seem to me, that herein we see the rare virtue of strong individual vitality, and the rare virtue of thick walls, and the rare virtue of interior spaciousness. Oh, man! admire and model thyself after the whale! Do thou, too, live in this world without being of it. Be cool at the Equator; keep thy blood fluid at the Pole. Like the great dome of St. Peter's and like the great whale, retain, O man! in all seasons a temperature of thine own. (VIII, 33)

In a world of uncertainty and of terror men must abolish fear, even the fear of death. Billy Budd went almost gaily to the yardarm. Melville feels that to sailors "the grisly king seems not half so hideous as he appears to those who have only regarded him on shore." He says that

although most regard death as "the last enemy of all" yet the wise should "regard him as the inflexible friend, who, even against our own wills, from life's evils triumphantly relieves us" (III, 36).⁴

The idea of Fate is another dominant theme in Melville's works. As Ahab tells Starbuck about his forty years of sailing and about his wife and child he has left, he comments on Fate: "By heaven, man, we are turned round and round in this world, like yonder windlass, and Fate is the handspike" (VIII, 330). It was Ahab's fate to spend his life pursuing Moby Dick, knowing that the master of the Pequod could never conquer the whale. In the end Ahab maintained inviolate his personal integrity by going down in unconquered defeat while Moby Dick swam on for other Ahabs to pursue. Yet, Melville still asserts that man does have some part in arranging his own life. One day Ishmael and Queequeg are weaving mats, Ishmael theorizes on Chance, Free Will, and Necessity:

. . . it seemed as if this were the Loom of Time, and I myself were a shuttle mechanically weaving and weaving away at the Fates. There lay the fixed threads of the warp subject to but one single, ever returning, unchanging vibration, and that vibration merely enough to admit of the crosswise interblending of the other threads with its own. This warp seemed necessity; and here, thought I, with my own hand I ply my own shuttle and weave my own destiny into these unalterable threads.

Meanwhile Queequeg's sword hit the woof which made a difference in the fabric. Ishmael continues his reflections:

This savage's sword, thought I, which finally shapes and fashions both warp and woof; this easy, indifferent sword must be chance--ay, chance, free will, and necessity--no wise incompatible--all interweavingly working together. The straight warp of necessity not to be swerved from its ultimate course--its every alternating vibration, indeed, only tending to that; free will still free to ply her shuttle between given threads; and chance, though restrained in its play within the right lines of chance by turns rules either, and has the last featuring blow at events. (VII, 269-270)⁵

Truth is another subject with which Melville is concerned. Pierre

determines to know truth, "glad Truth, or sad Truth; I will know what is" (IX, 90) and he decides that Truth can only be found in the heart: "The heart! the heart! 'tis God's anointed; let me pursue the heart!" (IX, 127). However, Ishmael in Moby-Dick thinks that "in landlessness alone resides the highest truth . . ." (VII, 133). Melville also feels that truth is a function of literature. When Mohi accuses Yoomy in Mardi of not telling the truth when he related a legend, Babbalanja says:

. . . truth is in thing, not in words: truth is voiceless; so at least saith old Bardianna. And I, Babbalanja, assert, that what are vulgarly called fictions are as much realities as the gross mattock of Dididi, the digger of trenches; for things visible are but conceits of the eye: things imaginative, conceits of the fancy. If duped by one, we are equally duped by the other. (III, 329)

And Yoomy arguing with Mohi asserts that truth is the work of the poet: "Much truth is not in thee, historian. Besides Mohi, my songs perpetuate many things which you sage scribes entirely overlook In much that is precious, Mohi, we poets are the true historians; we embalm; you corrode" (III, 324).

Melville feels that this truth of poets comes from inspiration. As the poet Yoomy admits: "I seldom think . . . I give ear to the voices in my calm" (IV, 279). And in another place Yoomy comments about inspiration: "My lord, I deem these verses good; they came bubbling out of me, like live waters from a spring in a silver mine. And by your good leave, my lord, I have much faith in inspiration. Whoso sings is a seer" (IV, 278).⁶

When Melville was rediscovered in the twentieth century, at first he seemed to be a dark and mysterious figure, a man of one book. He was declared a pessimist. The theories of Freud were called in to explain the contrast between the Melville of Moby-Dick and the customs

inspector on the wharf although Billy Budd had demonstrated that they were essentially the same man. This is not the place to enter into a detailed discussion of the causes for Melville's eclipse. Suffice it to say that he was a prophet who was rejected. He began in Mardi his effort to convey the prophet's message. The prophetic elements can be traced throughout the prose fiction. But he was rejected by his own generation. Americans of the 1850's preferred to Melville's hard teachings the sentimentalism and the simplicity of Uncle Tom's Cabin published in the same year as Pierre. The public's disinterest in his books forced Melville to make a living where he could. The vicissitudes of his own life were at least a partial verification of his philosophy of life in general; his career was a perfect expression of his moral thought. Though he shut his generation out of the house of the customs inspector that they might not witness his defeat, he wrote Billy Budd to remind them that he had never surrendered. The years of contemplation between Pierre and Billy Budd had refined but had not changed Melville's philosophy.

Nay, in an average man of the world [He said in his valedictory] his constant rubbing with it blunts that fine spiritual insight indispensable to the understanding of the essential in certain exceptional characters, whether evil ones or good Coke and Blackstone hardly shed so much light into obscure spiritual places as the Hebrew prophets. And who are they? Mostly recluses. (XIII, 45)

Melville, the recluse, was a prophet to the end. In 1891, three months after the completion of the manuscript of Billy Budd, Melville died. He went down with colors flying like one of the old, oak-ribbed frigates which he knew so well. But the ocean was dark, and no one saw, or cared about, the final triumph. Noting that Melville had been forgotten by his own countrymen, Robert Buchanan wrote with great feeling:

. . . Melville, sea-compelling man,
Before whose wand Leviathan
Rose hoary white upon the Deep,
With awful sounds that stirred its sleep;
Melville, whose magic drew Typee,
Radiant as Venus, from the sea,
Sits all forgotten or ignored,
While haberdashers are adored!
He, ignorant of the draper's trade
Indifferent to the art of dress,
Pictured the glorious South Sea maid
Almost in mother nakedness--
Without a hat, or boot, or stocking,
A want of dress to most so shocking,
With just one chemisette to dress her,
She lives--and still shall live, God bless her,
Long as the sea rolls deep and blue,
While Heaven repeats the thunder of it,
Long as the White Whale ploughs it through,
The shape my sea-magician drew
Shall still endure, or I'm no prophet!

FOOTNOTES

¹Davis feels that the characters are not mouthpieces for Melville (Davis, p. 60), but other critics see the characters as mouthpieces for Melville's ideas and opinions. See Sedgwick, p. 41; Braswell, pp. 33-40.

²See Braswell, Thompson, Sedgwick, and James Miller.

³Metcalf, p. 132. Also see VI, 138, 502, 504; VII, 48.

⁴See III, 225, 276, 277, 315, 335; VII, 45.

⁵See IV, 125; VI, 161, 404; VIII, 48.

⁶See IV, 136, 278; V, 145-146, 200-201, 321-322, 358.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

We have now examined the most important of Melville's writings.

But what have we learned about him? As Wright says:

In all that Melville wrote he was no nearer saying what he had to say at the end than he was at the beginning. His effect, like Shakespeare's, is one of extension rather than of volume. One receives the impression of spaces and distances, of approaches and retreats, of vistas opened but not entered upon. One is always traveling but never arrives.¹

Above all, one is made to feel that what has been left unsaid is unspeakably vaster than what has been said. The superabundance of material appalls him and he is driven at last to think of all truth as voiceless and of the question as more final than any answer.² "God keep me from ever completing anything," cries Ishmael. "This whole book is a draught--nay, but the draught of a draught" (VII, 179). It is the ambiguities and complexities of Melville which attract the critics.

There are many questions about Melville which this study has not attempted to answer. Many critics have researched the questions of whether Melville was an orthodox Christian and what his religious beliefs were as well as his search for God and the discussions of good and evil which permeate his works. This study has dealt only with comparing Melville to the Old Testament prophets. It has looked at the concerns of the prophets, their literary techniques, their characteristics of forthtelling and foretelling, and has shown how Melville

resembles the prophets.

Although Melville may not have been the only literary prophet of his day, he is unique in that he so closely follows the patterns set forth by the Old Testament prophets. It is almost as if he planned his writing to utilize the prophetic elements, but we have no proof that he did.

Melville's idea of the purpose of literature and his techniques of writing illustrate the influence of the Old Testament prophets on his writing. However, his search for "truth," his "diving below the surface," and the unorthodox nature of Melville's best fiction worked against his contemporary reputation and success as a novelist. Like the prophets, he was rejected by his own generation.

Just as the messages of the prophets arose out of the environment in which they found themselves, so Melville uses his stories to interpret the events of his time. He speaks specifically about the social problems of poverty, war, slavery, and brotherhood, about the evils which accompany the application of science to industry, and about the religious and political conditions of America.

What strategy would Melville have individuals follow in their struggle against the evils of society? As with the tribes of Hamo in Mardi (IV, 252) and the sailors in White Jacket (VI, 504), Melville suggests that all must wait on their Lord High Admiral and Time to alleviate the ills. The only physical way to combat the evils of society is found in Melville's doctrine of brotherhood. The humanity in Melville recognizes that if one loves his fellowman, as he loves himself, then social injustices, poverty, war, and slavery would be abolished. This was his answer to America's social problems.

When Melville was rediscovered in the twentieth century, his readers could recognize their world. What Melville did was to establish his theme as world civilization, and he presents his theme so that any ordinary human being today can grasp the essentials of the world he lived in. To do this a man must contain within himself, at one and the same time, the whole history of the past, the most significant experiences of the world around him, and a clear vision of the future.

If this essentially American writer now takes on increasingly the status of the most representative writer of modern civilization, one result should be to bring more sharply into prominence the period in which he wrote, the period which preceded the Civil War. That period ushered in the world in which we live. For our world, a world of wars, the fact is neglected that the Civil War was the first great war of modern times. The great American writers of the period preceding the Civil War knew that something was wrong, something deeper than slavery, but inasmuch as they lived under democracy and the republic and had no monarchy nor land-owning aristocracy to contend with, their task was difficult. They probed into strange places and what they found they did not often fully understand. There were no precedents. It is only today when democracies and republics once more have to examine their foundations that the work of Poe, Hawthorne, Whitman, Garrison and Phillips, and Melville can be fully understood. Melville today already towers above his countrymen in the poet-prophet tradition, and such is the hunger of the world for understanding itself that the time cannot be far distant when men in every country will know him for what he is--a writer in the great tradition of the Hebrew prophets and the interpreter of the age in which we live, its past, its present and its uncertain future.

FOOTNOTES

¹Wright, p. 173.

²See XIII, 134; III, 329; IV, 19; and IX, 284, 290.

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