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T H E U N I V E R S I T Y O F T U L S A

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

MELVILLE'S THE PIAZZA TALES: THE QUEST FOR COMMUNICATIONS

James D. Lester

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the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Department of English
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1970

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MELVILLE'S THE PIAZZA TALES: THE QUEST FOR COMMUNICATIONS

A DISSERTATION

APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF

ENGLISH

By Dissertation Committee

E. P. Haworth, Chairman

ABSTRACT

Lester, James D. (Ph.D.)
Melville's The Piazza Tales: The Quest for Communications
Directed by Professor E. Paul Alworth

This study explores an incompletely examined area in Melville scholarship: focusing on The Piazza Tales it examines Melville's quest for a more perfect communication. The six stories convey a Melvillian view of communication breakdowns among men, especially as misuse of language isolates the non-communicative soul. Although his tales are more than communications tragedies, an awareness of articulation breakdowns intensifies each story. In summary, his theory demonstrates these concepts: every man desires communication to overcome both his own imperfections and the external barriers preventing communication; some men successfully communicate, others merely articulate with hollow substance, and a few tragic ones reject communications entirely. The personalities seek communicative contact to find identity of self, to fill aesthetic needs, or to achieve therapeutic or psychological release. Melville evidences concern with three barriers: social norms that distort the receiver's attention to truth, the closed mind of the self-centered man, and the misreading of signs and symbols. Building upon this theory, Melville in each tale features a

final communication struggle of a person's articulate nature battling non-communication. The narrator of "The Piazza," who remains silent to avoid destroying Marianna's world, is poised between reality of concrete time and illusion of shadow. In "Bartleby" the lawyer-narrator attempts to reconcile his psyche, wrecked by communicative failures with Bartleby, the representative isolato. The narrator of "The Lightning-Rod Man" withstands verbal cohersion of a fanatical salesman who typifies the closed mind. In "The Bell-Tower" Bannadonna fails to communicate on either utilitarian or artistic levels, and the townspeople must accept a mute bell-tower instead of a melodious one. As demonstrated in "The Encantadas" with Hunilla, mankind must overcome isolation by strength of will or, like Oberlus, become warped by noncommunication and, eventually, turn bitter toward mankind. "Benito Cereno" is twofold because Don Benito cannot articulate and Captain Delano fails to comprehend signals. Melville implies the tragic necessity for man to withdraw into a silent soliloquy, a step necessary because man's nature carries a flaw that aborts true communication. Ultimately for Melville an acceptance of silence becomes necessary; it lies at the other end of the spectrum from successful communication. With the isolato, he displays his fear that man may revert to silence and that communication breakdowns might become so pervasive that interpersonal relationships could cease entirely.

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CHAPTER I

THE NEED FOR COMMUNICATION

I

Following the publication of Pierre, Herman Melville turned to the short story genre in 1853 as a new outlet for his creativity. Among his stories published by Putnam's magazine during the mid-1850's, five apparently had special appeal to him: "Bartleby" (1853), "The Encantadas" (1854), "The Lightning-Rod Man" (1854), "Benito Cereno" (1855), and "The Bell-Tower" (1855). He collected these stories into one volume, wrote an additional prefatory story, "The Piazza," and published the group through Dix and Edwards in May, 1856, as The Piazza Tales. This study will focus on the six tales in order to examine Melville's quest for a more perfect communication. Recognizing the human desire, indeed, the human necessity for communication, his stories portray in various guises man's efforts at overcoming numerous communication barriers. That is, messages become distorted by human misunderstanding, individual viewpoints are warped by social norms, and honest expression is threatened by persons with closed minds.

Ultimately, a significant message by Melville in The Piazza Tales is that man fails to overcome the barriers; the

result of this communication breakdown is tragic: the isolated hero becomes inarticulate, silent, deathlike. Language is smothered by ambiguities, private evaluations, and obscure symbologies (reflected light, walls, desolation, lightning, and signals of various types). Melville's stories portray the apocalyptic inner self of the isolated man who, having broken free of the prison of human blindness and having gained an irredeemable knowledge of cosmic indifference, retreats from communication with others and hence from life itself. The language and communicative signs available to the isolato are simply inadequate for revealing to other men the sterile, stark world in which he stands alone.

II

This study focuses upon The Piazza Tales, rather than Moby Dick or some other novel, for a significant reason: Melville wrote these tales at a time when his awareness and recognition of human communication failure was most vivid. After the poor sales of both Moby Dick and Pierre, Melville, disillusioned by his audience, turned to the short story form to depict, among other themes, a pessimistic view of communication breakdowns among men. Thus his tales enable the reader to view not only the isolato but also one significant reason for the isolato's solitude--a communication malaise in society. As R. W. B. Lewis notes, "Melville converts his sense of failure of communication into a central

fictional theme."[1] His tales display a poignant response to any breakdown in communication with his motifs of the unobserved signal or the dead letter, as in the Agatha letter, the island post office of "The Encantadas," or Bartleby's job at the Dead Letter Office.

Frustrated with such incidents as the December, 1853, fire which burned the Harper warehouse containing the complete stock of his books, Melville surely questioned the role of fiction in a world of lies.[2] A reading of his correspondence with his publishers reveals that he received little encouragement during this period. In fact, Leon Howard suggests that Melville might have written a great novel instead of a short story in "Benito Cereno" if "either he or his publishers possessed greater confidence in his energy and talents."[3] Interpreting "The Bell-Tower" as a personal allegory that comments on Melville's pride as a writer, Howard says, "If his own pride had not gone before a fall, he was trying to convince himself that it ought to go."[4] Howard, then, sees

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[1]R. W. B. Lewis, Trials of the Word (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1965), p. 42.

[2]See Edgar A. Dryden, Melville's Thematics of Form: The Great Art of Telling the Truth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1968), p. 199.

[3]Leon Howard, Herman Melville, Pamphlets on American Writers, No. 13 (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1961), p. 36.

[4]Leon Howard, Herman Melville (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1968), p. 223.

"The Bell-Tower" as Melville's "sardonic view of his condition as a writer who had overreached his fame."[5]

Melville also became disillusioned with the genteel tradition, with all that was visionary, enthusiastic, and illusory. He apparently felt that the communicative quest had gone astray, so he explored the dark side of the romantic mind. He bound himself to the metaphysical stance of romantic idealism, but the quest constantly polarized on him. He went to sea for escape only to find there the same dichotomy of good and evil with a gray haze covering all. He became somewhat paralyzed in his communicative efforts, perhaps, by trying to work in the shadows of philosophical problems that defy the best of minds.[6] In fact, critics today label his religion as "skeptical humanism,"[7] "tragic humanism,"[8] and an attack on God.[9] Nevertheless, while Melville carried a strong sense of duality (e.g., hopeful distrust, spiritual agnosticism, fatal optimism), he also displayed a hope that human communication could alleviate the malignant elements in

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[5] Ibid.

[6] For a more comprehensive discussion of this point see Leo Marx, "Melville's Parable of the Walls," Sewanee Review, LXI (Autumn, 1953), p. 602-27.

[7] Richard Chase, "Introduction," Melville: A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962), p. 7.

[8] Leslie A. Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel (New York: Criterion Books, 1960), p. 382.

[9] Lawrence Thompson, Melville's Quarrel With God (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1952).

the cosmos. He discovered, however, that man, rather than bringing peace, aggravates the cosmic problem. His darkening philosophical stance may have caused a withdrawal, as did his failure to win an audience and favorable criticism; but what really failed was an effort at communication. Melville felt deeply this failure, so much so that he stopped writing long fiction, then left fiction completely, finally writing poetry only for a select audience.

Accordingly, communication in The Piazza Tales seems uncertain--silence threatens it. The mortals in Melville's tales become afflicted with inabilities to communicate. The stories appear to reach a tragic conclusion or skepticism about communication, for we mark the silence of Bartleby, the stoic solitude of Hunilla in "The Encantadas," and the ineffectual stuttering of Don Benito in "Benito Cereno." Mankind in these tales seems doomed to misunderstanding or, worse, propelled toward absolute silence.

III

As an artist, Melville attempted to reveal the vein of darkness covering the facade of humanity's smugness and to reach across a void in order to unite mankind in a ceremony of art. He hoped to ward off any threat of cosmic obliteration by an interpersonal mutuality attained through the ritual of language. The question that worried Melville at this point, with the work of Moby Dick and other novels in the background, was this: could interpersonal communication

fill the vast void and silence of his lonely sea? Or should he make a tragic acceptance of non-communication itself as the inevitable lot of man? Should he finally accept as his own posture a pathos of communication breakdown and, like Bartleby, admit with reticent regret that he prefers not to communicate because, in truth, man's thoughts cannot be conveyed adequately through language? Those who point to his "silent period" of the mid-1850's imply such a withdrawal by Melville. Yet his volume The Piazza Tales points in a different direction, toward the necessity for communication, not only by the artist, but by every human who inhabits this indifferent cosmos and who needs interpersonal communication.

Despite frustrations in his career, Melville kept open the lines of communication. He continuously hammered his experience into statements, his feeling into words, his sensation into language contexts. He did this for his own personal satisfaction as well as for the exchange of ideas with others. It is difficult to believe that a man who created Moby Dick and Pierre could suddenly fall silent. Silence is always a prevalent danger for any writer, but the fact exists most certainly that Melville continued writing during this period (perhaps he wrote voluminously and merely refused to publish works that have since disappeared). With literary articulation in his blood, he needed to communicate as he told Hawthorne in a letter: "Let us speak, though we

show all our faults and weaknesses,--for it is a sign of strength to be weak, to know it, and out with it,--not in [a] set way and ostentatiously, though, but incidentally and without premeditation.--But I am falling into my old foible--preaching."[10]

Such a comment indicates that Melville in 1851 recognized that language and expression could give him control over the ambiguities of his own thoughts. He recognized that all men, including artists, are handicapped by communication failure. Importantly, he realized that communication provides for mutuality between two persons, thereby preventing the horror of isolation. Probably the strongest mutuality in his life, artistically, was his friendship with Hawthorne, to whom he wrote soon after their acquaintance: "I know little about you, but something about myself. So I write about myself,--at least, to you. Don't trouble yourself, though, about writing; and don't trouble yourself about visiting; and when you do visit, don't trouble yourself about talking. I will do all the writing and visiting and talking myself."[11] He had a compulsion to communicate with a fellow writer who might understand, and apparently Hawthorne offered enough response to give Melville confidence that his expression would be comprehended adequately, as opposed to the lack

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[10] The Letters of Herman Melville, ed. Merrell R. Davis and William H. Gilman (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1960), p. 132.

[11] Ibid., p. 129.

of confidence he felt in the American reading public. For Melville understood keenly the role of the writer whose technique must gain the attention of the public long enough to give the readers a comprehension of reality. Thus his quest for communicative success was joined with his quest for form.

He had gained his reputation in 1846 and 1847 with travel books, Typee and Omoo. He switched in 1849 to mythic allegory and philosophical discourse in Mardi; in 1851 his master epic Moby Dick employed symbolic allegory; and in 1852 with Pierre he touched psychological depths. His readers were unprepared or unwilling to follow him to these more sophisticated forms. That Melville would thus come to tragic conclusions about human communications is understandable. From Typee to Pierre his search for a communicative medium had come full cycle because one lesson of Typee is that man cannot improve communications by reducing language to a minimum,[12] and a second lesson in Pierre is that rhetorical eloquence also fails to fulfill the void of silence between a writer and his audience. Melville's quest for communicative success faltered, but he refused to compromise himself. He damned writers who repeated themselves, who vulgarized their powers, or who Narcissus-like assumed more than their due share. Yet he feared his own powers slipping:

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[12]Winston Weathers, "Melville and the Comedy of Communication," ETC: A Review of General Semantics, XX (December, 1963), 418.

"What 'reputation' Herman Melville has is horrible. Think of it! To go down to posterity is bad enough, any way; but to go down as a 'man who lived among the cannibals'!"[13] Accordingly, he refused to listen to his kind, utilitarian friends who advised him to write exciting, Typee-like travel books that people would eagerly read. In his maturity he knew that a continued use of only his travel experiences would lock him into a hollow shell of repetition. A review by him in 1850 carries this comment: "But it is better to fail in originality, than to succeed in imitation. He who has never failed somewhere, that man can not be great. Failure is the true test of greatness. And if it be said, that continued success is a proof that a man wisely knows his powers--it is only to be added, that, in this case, he knows them to be small. Let us believe it, then, once for all, that there is no hope for us in these smooth pleasing writers that know their powers."[14]

He displayed a desperate need to communicate in new provocative ways. In a letter to Hawthorne he complained: "What I feel most moved to write, that is banned,--it will not pay. Yet, altogether, write the other way I cannot."[15] He was never satisfied that he had found the right, the

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[13] Letters, p. 130.

[14] "Hawthorne and His Masses," The Literary World, August 17 and August 24, 1850.

[15] Letters, p. 128.

correct vehicle for his ideas. Before beginning Mardi, for instance, he explained to John Murray in a letter: "Proceeding in my narrative of facts I began to feel an incurible distaste for the same; and a longing to plume my pinions for a flight and felt irked, cramped and fettered by plodding along with dull common places,--so suddenly standing the thing altogether, I went to work heart and soul at a romance. . . ."[16] There is little doubt about this passage; he wants escape from the dull routine task before him, seeking escape in the quest of Taji, a quest not entirely dissimilar from his personal search for creative success in disseminating his views of universal awareness to a receptive audience, an audience, unfortunately, that eluded him all his life despite his desperate need to cast off the demons haunting his own isolated soul. Accordingly, after Moby Dick failed to attract a wide audience and after the bitter critical attacks upon Pierre, Melville turned to magazine fiction, not merely as a means of support, as argued by Leon Howard,[17] but as an available medium by which he could satisfy his cravings for publication. He was searching for another communicative form.

With the writing of "Bartleby the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street," Melville launched in 1853 a brief but brilliant career in short fiction. Although he seemingly

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[16] Letters, p. 70.

[17] Literature and the American Tradition (Garden City: Doubleday, 1960), p. 179.

preferred the medium of the novel, a shorter form enabled him to achieve a unified structure built with artistry around one symbol or a cluster of complementary symbols and a narrative point of view at once limited and consistent. Melville had been pointing forward to the short story technique by writing Moby Dick and Pierre in short units.[18] Actually, "The Town Ho's Story" has been excerpted on occasion as a separate story. As his confidence faltered, Melville practiced more strictness and constraint. As a result his prose gains explicitness and exactness, as demonstrated in the tight control of structure he displays with the creation of Bartleby.[19]

In his short fiction Melville wanted to dissect the problem of human communication failure, locating one of its sources in the isolato, the individual who refuses to acknowledge the common continent of men and prefers living unto himself on a separate island of his own.[20] Any image of an articulate individual who has a semantic awareness of language potentialities and who has the desire to move toward a better

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[18]This point is explored in more depth in Charles G. Hoffman, "The Shorter Fiction of Herman Melville," South Atlantic Quarterly, LII (July, 1953), 416.

[19]For a thorough discussion of Melville's literary craftsmanship see Warner Berthoff, The Example of Melville (Princeton, N. J., 1962); for the craftsmanship of "Bartleby" see A. W. Plumstead, "Bartleby: Melville's Venture into a New Genre," A Symposium: Bartleby the Scrivener, ed. Howard P. Vincent (Kent: Kent State Univ. Press, 1966).

[20]Herman Melville, Moby Dick (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964), p. 166.

system of communication is offset by Melville's image of an isolato like Bartleby, who refuses any form of interpersonal communication, or like Hunilla in "The Encantadas," who is forced against her will into a solitude that offers only the sounds of the baying of the dogs and the throbbing of the waves against the barren shores. Bartleby, for example, feels no need for communication; he never reads, not even a newspaper, he speaks only to answer questions, and at times refuses to do even that. Likewise, Hunilla is entirely lost in her labyrinth of time, for "no saint's bell pealed forth the lapse of week or month; each day went by unchallenged; no chanticleer announced those sultry dawns, no lowing herds those poisonous nights. All wonted and steadily recurring sounds, human, or humanised by sweet fellowship with man, but one stirred that torrid trance--the cry of dogs; save which naught but the rolling sea invaded it, an all-pervading monotone; and to the widow that was the least loved voice she could have heard."[21] The communication need is critical for those souls abandoned or lost in isolation.

A similar search for communication to fill a void is expressed by Melville in his Agatha letter to Hawthorne, depicting an abandoned Agatha journeying day after day to an empty postal box:

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[21]Herman Melville, The Piazza Tales, The Works of Herman Melville. Standard edition. (16 vols.; New York: Russell and Russell, 1963), p. 226; subsequent in-text references to The Piazza Tales are to this edition.

> As her hopes gradually decay in her, so does the post itself and the little box decay. The post rots in the ground at last. Owing to its being little used--hardly at all--grass grows rankly about it. At last a little bird nests in it. At last the post falls.[22]

Although he never published the Agatha story, Melville did not forget the image of the lone mailbox, for it reappears in his writing a few years later in "Sketch Tenth" of "The Encantadas":

> And though it may seem very strange to talk of post-offices in this barren region, yet post-offices are occasionally to be found there. They consist of a stake and bottle, the letters being not only sealed but corked. They are generally deposited by captains of Nantucketers for the benefit of passing fishermen, and contain statements as to what luck they had in whaling or tortoise-hunting. Frequently, however, long months and months, glide by and no applicant appears. The stake rots and falls, presenting no very exhilarating object. (251)

These messages, no matter how trivial, display an effort on the part of the sender to reach out for human contact; the letter need not be read to bring comfort to the writer who gains satisfaction and self identification by the communicative act itself. Similarly the lawyer bestows comfort upon himself as he administers to Bartleby:

> Yes. Here I can cheaply purchase a delicious self-approval. To befriend Bartleby; to humour him in his strange willfulness, will cost me little or nothing, while I lay up in my soul what will eventually prove a sweet morsel for my conscience. (34)

What this meant to Melville is that a mortal cannot exist successfully alone; each man has an unquenchable thirst for

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[22] Letters, p. 157.

human contact and for the satisfaction of communicative intercourse.[23] Since human nature craves exchange with living aspects of the environment, individual man, like Melville, goes in quest of communication.

The cosmos, however, remains indifferent to mankind, offering only communication chaos. The portraits of man in Melville's tales thus display the fluctuating vagaries that await any man looking for reality rather than recognizing that reality-as-comprehended (communicated to him) forms the basis for his behavior. For example, in "Benito Cereno," Captain Delano bases his behavior upon his interpretation of what he sees and hears--and his interpretation becomes his reality. At the same time, Don Benito, imperiled by the mutinous slaves, comprehends a far more horrifying reality, one that he cannot communicate to Captain Delano. Like so many men, he knows what he wants to say but doesn't know how; he has no adequate vehicle, whether language, symbol, or signal. Thus reality-as-apprehended becomes an essential ingredient in the "truth of the situation aboard the San Dominick. It is "truth" communicated from differing points of view: (1) the narrator viewing happenings essentially through the eyes of Delano, (2) the factual court deposition, and (3) the "normal" third person narrative at the dénouement

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[23]This point is explored in Lee Thayer, Communication and Communication Systems (Homewood, Ill.: Richard D. Irwin, 1968), 23-39, esp. 33-34.

of the tale. Essentially, Melville provides his reader with three perspectives of this one reality. He allows the story to unfold as apprehended by Delano, yet providing clues so that the reader understands Delano's limitations as a perceiver. The court deposition becomes the version of reality as apprehended and expressed by Don Benito. It is his attempt to make others aware of conditions never seen by Delano--the servitude he suffered at the hands of the blacks, the perilous danger in which Delano walked throughout the day carelessly making motions and comments that almost brought the blacks with their hatchets upon his back, or, significantly, the "meanings" of the many minor details that constantly puzzled the good American. After the deposition, an omniscient commentator, perhaps Melville, speaks briefly on the narrative method: "Hitherto the nature of this narrative, besides rendering the intricacies in the beginning unavoidable, has more or less required that many things, instead of being set down in the order of occurrence, should be retrospectively, or irregularly given. . . ." (166-67) The "nature of this narrative," of course, focuses on the failure of communication between Delano and Don Benito.

The vagaries and ambiguities of reality as embraced and conceived by limited man are compressed into a passage about Captain Delano in "Benito Cereno":

> He leaned against the carved balustrade, again looking off toward his boat; but found his eye falling upon the ribbon grass, trailing along the ship's water-line,

> straight as a border of green box; and parterres of seaweed, broad ovals and crescents, floating nigh and far, with what seemed long formal alleys between, crossing the terraces of swells and sweeping round as if leading to the grottoes below. And overhanging all was the balustrade by his arm, which, partly stained with pitch and partly embossed with moss, seemed the charred ruin of some summer-house in a grand garden long running to waste.
>
> Trying to break one charm, he was but becharmed anew. Though upon the wide sea, he seemed in some far inland country; prisoner in some deserted chateau, left to stare at empty grounds, and peer out at vague roads, where never wagon or wayfarer passed.
>
> But these enchantments were a little disenchanted as his eye fell on the corroded main-chains. Of an ancient style, massy and rusty in link, shackle, and bolt, they seemed even more fit for the ship's present business than the one for which she had been built.
>
> Presently he thought something moved nigh the chains. He rubbed his eyes, and looked hard. Groves of rigging were about the chains; and there, peering from behind a great stay like an Indian from behind a hemlock, a Spanish sailor, a marling-spike in his hand, was seen, who made what seemed an imperfect gesture toward the balcony, but immediately, as if alarmed by some advancing step along the deck within, vanished into the recesses of the hempen forest, like a poacher.
>
> What meant this? Something the man had sought to communicate, unbeknown to anyone, even to his captain. Did the secret involve aught unfavourable to his captain? Were those previous misgivings of Captain Delano's about to be verified? Or, in his haunted mood at the moment, had some random, unintentional motion of the man, while busy with the stay, as if repairing it, been mistaken for a significant beckoning? (106-107)

Thus the universe, as seen by Delano, is comprehended as a shadowy blending of decadence with a disenchanting present. The images crowd together: the conscious awareness of the ship's water-line, the corroded main-chains, the gesturings of a sailor are blended in the subconscious glimmerings of a garden running to waste, a far inland country, and roads empty of wagon or wayfarer. Moreover, the images bring together the decay of overgrowth (seaweed in long formal alleys and

ribbon grass along the ship's water-line) with a deserted waste land (deserted chateau, empty grounds, vague roads). Reality as communicated to and comprehended by Captain Delano is mysterious, ambivalent, unreadable. He vaguely senses that he may be subject to a bewildering array of chance happenings beyond his control and even beyond his comprehension. Richard Chase, one of the few scholars to comment upon the communication theme, says that this passage presents a "universe poised between speech and silence, communication and isolation, a universe almost intolerably rich in associable human experience but a universe, nevertheless, in which men must try to communicate with each other with half-formed, half-intended gestures--a universe in which consciousness is completely involved and yet completely alienated."[24]

These complexities of communication-as-received occupy a central position in Melville's mythos. The ambiguities of the cosmos are reflected by the ambivalence of man's perception of it. The communication breakdown merely reflects the breakdown in man's total harmony with the universe. For example, the Lawyer in "Bartleby" has his ordered world fall into chaos when he attempts to communicate with his scrivener. In "The Encantadas" the world is a fallen one where the most frequent sound is the "hiss" of the reptiles. In "The Bell-Tower" the communication becomes a dull thud, a muffled sound, rather

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[24]Richard Chase, Herman Melville: A Critical Study (New York: Macmillan, 1949), p. 156.

than the clear, brilliant resonance of the bell. Melville's message suggests that man needs communication through both sensory impressions and human exchange. But that necessity only brings additional ambivalence into his life because reality escapes, and man registers only vague impressions of a reality malformed and disfigured by the human communicative exchange.

CHAPTER II

THE QUEST FOR COMMUNICATION

Melville's tales reveal variations on the communications quest as embodied in the portraits of men displaying an innate desire for communicative contact. They seek such intercourse for several reasons: to find an identity of self, to fill an aesthetic need, or to achieve therapeutic or psychological release. The quest seems necessary for these persons who hope to avoid confronting alone the stark, sterile world of the blank wall.

"The Piazza," which Melville wrote especially for this edition of six tales, depicts a narrator who makes an imaginative quest for fairyland where, hopefully, his communication dialogue with the fairy princess will transform to beauty a dark void that threatens him, a void made poignant by his discovery of a Chinese creeper infested with cankerous worms. In reaction to decay and death as depicted by the worms, he searches for romantic beauty and life:

> I saw the golden mountain-window, dazzling like a deep-sea dolphin. Fairies there, thought I, once more; the queen of fairies at her fairy-window; at any rate, some glad mountain-girl; it will do me good, it will cure this weariness, to look on her. No more; I'll launch my yawl--ho, cheerly, heart! and push away for fairyland--for rainbow's end, in fairyland. (8)

The mountain offers a rainbow hope to the romantic quest;

so he takes his voyage, "a true voyage; but, take it all in all, interesting as if invented" (5). Nevertheless, the narrator admits that these mountains, somehow, "play at hide-and-seek, and all before one's eyes" (5).

Melville, reluctant as always to draw final meanings, resorts to a camouflage of ambiguities. He teases the reader as he plays with fantasy and reality, fairyland and the real world, a true voyage and an imaginative quest.[1] Yet who can say one place is fairyland and one is real? The narrator indicates he cannot as he straddles a borderline between reality and the mythic dreamworld. Yet such a voyage will bring man two things, sensory awareness and reality-as-perceived through communicative awareness. The shaping of one's life thus depends upon the element--be it shadowy or factual--that carries the greatest impact for him. From such a tension he discovers an identity of self.

Ultimately, the narrator of "The Piazza" finds on the mountainside his princess who plays with shadows just as he. She treats the shadows as friends, even naming one specific shadow that comes and goes through the day. He reacts by exclaiming: "Have you, then, so long sat at this mountain window, where but clouds and vapours pass, that, to you shadows are as things, though you speak of them as of phantoms;

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[1] An extensive study of this theme in American literature is Joel Porte, The Romance in America: Studies in Cooper, Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, and James (Middleton, Conn.: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1969).

that, by familiar knowledge, working like a second sight, you can, without looking for them, tell just where they are [so] that, to you, these lifeless shadows are as living friends, who, though out of sight, are not out of mind, even in their faces--is it so?" (15) Her affirmative answer, that shadows form an essence of her life--sends him back to his piazza where the scenery remains magical and, he now knows, the illusion remains so complete. The interpersonal communication brings no rainbow; it only reaffirms his conviction that "truth comes in with darkness." He changes from a fool chasing a rainbow to a perceptive mortal who, confronted by contradictory symbols of light and shadow, learns that neither the rainbow nor the worm is a final answer. He gains self identity by accepting both the shadow that infects Marianna's world and the rainbow that embues it with beauty.

In "Bartleby" Melville depicts a different quest for communicative success that breaks into two parts--on the one hand the lawyer-narrator reaches out in every imaginable way for interpersonal contact with his scrivener and, when that fails, he attempts by telling his story to achieve a spiritual confession that will bring psychological and therapeutic comfort. In "The Piazza" the quest is one for romantic escape into a fairyland language where shadows might disappear under the radiance of the rainbow. In "Bartleby" the quest is for human understanding and mutuality, and when that fails, for penitence and relief.

The narrator assumes he can reach a communicative level with his quiet, enigmatic scrivener. But Bartleby refuses every attempt by the lawyer to reach a relationship with him. Repeatedly Bartleby replies, "I would prefer not to." The lawyer asks: "You are decided, then, not to comply with my request--a request made according to common usage and common sense?" (31) And Bartleby gives him to understand that his negative decision is irreversible. Moreover, he refuses to read, to check copy, and finally refuses to write. In desperation the lawyer pleads, "say now, that in a day or two you will begin to be a little reasonable:--say so, Bartleby" (44). To which the scrivener replies: "At present I would prefer not to be a little reasonable" (44). In truth, the narrator attempts numerous ways of establishing an interpersonal communicative relationship with Bartleby; he uses common sense, reason, generosity, trickery, authority--everything, in fact, that will, he hopes, bring Bartleby out of his dead wall reveries. But the walls of this communication breakdown remain steadfast.

The narrator has been a successful lawyer with his community of helpers, Ginger Nut, Turkey, and Nippers. As he states:

> . . . the irritability and consequent nervousness of Nippers were mainly observable in the morning, while in the afternoon he was comparatively mild. So that Turkey's paroxyams only coming on about twelve o'clock, I never had to do with their eccentricities at one time. Their fits relieved each other like guards. When Nippers's was on, Turkey's was off; and <u>vice</u>

> versa. This was a good natural arrangement, under the circumstances. (26)

But Bartleby the mysterious stranger disrupts the order of the lawyer's community, testing the lawyer's reaction to passive resistance and to non-communication. The lawyer responds with human warmth:

> Poor fellow! thought I, he means no mischief; it is plain he intends no insolence; his aspect sufficiently evinces that his eccentricities are involuntary. He is useful to me. I can get along with him. If I turn him away, the chances are he will fall in with some less-indulgent employer, and then he will be rudely treated, and perhaps driven forth miserable to starve. Yes. Here I can cheaply purchase a delicious self-approval. (34)

Yet shortly thereafter the narrator admits his temper flares on occasion in reaction to the passive Bartleby. He feels at times strangely goaded to encounter the scrivener in opposition--"to elicit some angry spark from him" (34). The lawyer throws himself against this dead wall of non-communication:

> Was there any other thing in which I could procure myself to be ignominiously repulsed by this lean, penniless wight?--my hired clerk? What added thing is there, perfectly reasonable, that he will be sure to refuse to do?
>
> 'Bartleby!'
>
> No answer.
>
> 'Bartleby,' in a louder tone.
>
> No answer.
>
> 'Bartleby,' I roared.
>
> Like a very ghost, agreeably to the laws of magical invocation, at the third summons, he appeared at the entrance of his hermitage.
>
> 'Go to the next room, and tell Nippers to come to me.'
>
> 'I prefer not to,' he respectfully and slowly said, and mildly disappeared. (36)

The conclusion is that Bartleby soon becomes a fixed fact in the life of the lawyer; he is always there.

The lawyer, speculating about Bartleby's resistance, reveals much about his own psyche:

> With any other man I should have flown outright into a dreadful passion, scorned all further words, and thrust him ignominiously from my presence. But there was something about Bartleby that not only strangely disarmed me, but, in a wonderful manner, touched and disconcerted me. I began to reason with him. (31)

As Kingsley Widmer points out, the peculiarities and oddities of the lawyer's reasoning and self-arguments provide an essential meaning of the tale.[2] Norman Springer argues that the narrator "needs to feel his superiority as he approaches Bartleby as a subject."[3] Mordecai Marcus views Bartleby as the lawyer's psychological double.[4] Yet no critic mentions the idea that the lawyer, by telling the story in this communicative confession, brings relief to his troubled mind. He waives the biographies of all other scriveners, all other men for that matter, in order to write the brief history of Bartleby. It is not a biography of Bartleby, only the portion of his life touching the narrator-lawyer. Call it a homo-duplex relationship or an anima-animus conflict, the relationship leads to an attempt by the lawyer to purge himself by telling the story. In this sense he is related to the

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[2]Kingsley Widmer, "The Negative Affirmation: Melville's 'Bartleby,'" Modern Fiction Studies, VIII (Autumn, 1962), 276.

[3]Norman Springer, "Bartleby and the Terror of Limitation," PMLA, LXXX (September, 1965), 411.

[4]Mordecai Marcus, "Melville's Bartleby as a Psychological Double," College English, XXIII (February, 1962), 365-368.

ancient mariner and other romance heroes. Yet the lawyer has no heroic status; he merely stumbles through a relationship that has left a stigma upon his soul. He is somewhat like Ishmael telling of Pip's ordeal alone in the ocean: "The awful lonesomeness is intolerable. The intense concentration of self in the middle of such a heartless immensity, my God! Who can tell it?"[5] Yes, who can communicate the spector of negativism that enters the lawyer's life?

As the lawyer's story continues, the dramatic irony of his self-revelation begins to mount. Recognizing Bartleby's extreme loneliness and observing his dead wall reveries, the lawyer admits that his original melancholy and compassion for Bartleby grows into fear and repulsion:

> . . . up to a certain point the thought or sight of misery enlists our best affections; but, in certain special cases, beyond that point it does not. They err who would assert that invariably this is owning to the inherent selfishness of the human heart. It rather proceeds from a certain hopelessness of remedying excessive and organic ill. To a sensitive being, pity is not seldom pain. And when at last it is perceived that such pity cannot lead to effectual succour, commonsense bids the soul be rid of it. (42)

The lawyer's hopes of freeing himself of Bartleby involve several stages: he could request that Bartleby leave, he could assume that Bartleby would leave, he could drive the scrivener away. With the latter idea the old Adam of resentment rose in the narrator, but he restrains himself by recalling the divine injunction: 'A new commandment give I unto

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[5]Melville, Moby Dick, p. 529.

you, that ye love one another' (52).

The lawyer's need for communication displays an effort at bringing under control his exasperated feelings and frustrations. His quest for penitence through confession reaches a turning point in the narrative when he adjusts his thinking:

> Gradually I slid into the persuasion that these troubles of mine, touching the scrivener, had been all predestinated from eternity, and Bartleby was billeted upon me for some mysterious purpose of an all-wise Providence, which it was not for a mere mortal like me to fathom. (53)

Here, then, is the key. These problems with the scrivener are not his fault! His role in life has a "predestinated" purpose: to care for the unaccountable Bartleby. The lawyer assumes that he must carry alone the burdens that beset him; he reads the communications breakdown as something he alone must overcome. Yet public reaction to a strange scrivener soon forces the lawyer to act against his better judgments. Henceforth follow a series of actions, sins against mankind, that the lawyer confesses. First, he abandons Bartleby in the office, taking new quarters elsewhere. Second, he denies Bartleby, telling the new tenant who wants the office rid of Bartleby: "The man you allude to is nothing to me--he is no relation or apprentice of mine, that you should hold me responsible for him. . . . I know nothing about him" (57). Despite that denial, he soon returns to the old office in an effort to dislodge Bartleby, but in the face of the scrivener's passive refusals of assistance, he runs from the building. He

commits, and admits to his readers, a third act, false justification of his actions:

> . . . I distinctly perceived that I had now done all that I possibly could, both in respect to the demands of the landlord and his tenants, and with regard to my own desire and sense of duty, to benefit Bartleby, and shield him from rude persecution. I now strove to be entirely carefree and quiescent; and my conscience justified me in the attempt; though, indeed, it was not so successful as I could have wished. (60)

His fourth immoral act consists of testimony that puts Bartleby behind bars in the Tombs because "as a last resort, under such peculiar circumstances, it seemed the only plan" (60).

The lawyer confesses, however, a dissatisfaction with the arrangement by twice visiting Bartleby and attempting to comfort his former employee. Still demonstrating a need for communication, the lawyer exposes himself to a final communications breakdown, for Bartleby says, "I know you and I want nothing to say to you" (61). Despite this obvious rejection of communications by Bartleby, the lawyer nevertheless believes the breakdown results from his own poor judgment in his handling of the scrivener. Thus the lawyer tells how he arranged for Bartleby's meals with the grub-man, relates the death of Bartleby, and recalls the rumour of Bartleby's prior employment in the Dead Letter Office at Washington. Buried in his passage about dead letters is the lawyer's despair over any undelivered letter that may have carried pardon for someone who died despairing, a communications breakdown of the worse sort. This narrator, of course, is delivering his

confessional at the present moment so that pentitence, hopefully, will be gained before his death.

Viewing the narrator's communicative quest as one of confession enables the reader to understand better the puzzling sentimentality of the ending. The dead letter episode advances the lawyer's excessive compassion. The final phrase--"Ah, Bartleby! Ah, humanity!"--expresses his final position with respect to the scrivener: as though he says, Ah, Bartleby, what befell you was not my fault at all but rather an act of fate as visited upon you, just as it was predestined upon me and, alas, upon all humanity. Thus ends the confession. In truth, the lawyer has assumed upon himself the burden of humanity's neglect; that is, all men are in part responsible for Bartleby's condition. Moreover, the lawyer believes the communications barrier is his sole responsibility; he forgets that both parties, he and Bartleby, must contribute if successful communication is to be found. Bartleby refuses to contribute, but that does not prevent the lawyer from assuming that he, and he alone, has broken the magnetic chain of humanity--thus he confesses from the depths of his own isolation in hopes that he may relieve the burden he has assumed.

In the "Lightning-Rod Man" the communicative quest becomes one of overcoming false communication, that is, recognizing distortions when presented as facts. In this sense the "Lightning-Rod Man" develops the idea that spiritual

and/or intellectual insight is necessary for successful communication. A man should avoid an isolated, self-centered isolation like that of Marianna in "The Piazza" and at the same time avoid a too gullible acceptance of another man's words.

Ben Kimpel in the first significant study of "The Lightning-Rod Man" justly labels the allegory of the story a "clear and vigorous attack on organized religion, and a declaration of independence of the orthodox creeds."[6] Hershel Parker, agreeing with Kimpel, adds that an essential, additional element of the story is the development of the Yankee peddler and the lengths to which he will go to make a sale.[7] Other critics have interpreted the salesman as representing modern science and the story as Melville's rejection of such mechanizations.[8] The salesman's role of distorting the truth receives mention in most studies, but not full development. Significantly, the communications test for the narrator is to comprehend and overcome the language distortions by the salesman. Without developing the communications theme, Parker adds:

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[6]Ben D. Kimpel, "Melville's 'The Lightning-Rod Man,'" American Literature, XVI (March, 1944), 30.

[7]Hershel Parker, "Melville's Salesman Story," Studies in Short Fiction, I (Winter, 1964), 154-158.

[8]See, for example, Charles Hoffman, "The Shorter Fiction of Herman Melville," South Atlantic Quarterly, LII (July, 1953), 424-25, and Richard Chase, "Introduction," Selected Tales and Poems by Herman Melville (New York: Macmillan, 1950), p. ix.

> The fact is that the salesman story is always built about a contest between a sharper and his intended victim; the better examples of the genre will deal with a significant prize and will increase in tension as the salesman applies successive pressures and the victim offers successive defences.[9]

Thus the intended victim of this story, the narrator, must be on his toes intellectually and, as Kimpel shows, spiritually in order to overcome the distortion. The narrator repeatedly asks questions: "Sir, will you be so good as to tell me your business?" "Who are you?" "Of what use is your rod?" "Does your beat extend into the Canadas?" "But what are these particular precautions of yours?" "Pray, will you tell me where and how one may be safe in a time like this?" "Is there any part of my house I may touch with hopes of my life?"

By keeping his wits, by questioning carefully each assertion of the peddler, and by standing firm in his own beliefs, the narrator overcomes the temptations and intimidations of the salesman. For example:

> Tell me at once, which is, in your opinion, the safest part of this house?
> 'This room, and this one spot in it where I stand. Come hither.'
> 'The reasons first.'
> 'Hark!--after the flash the gust--the sashes shiver--the house, the house!--Come hither to me!'
> 'The reasons, if you please.'
> 'Come hither to me!'
> 'Thank you again, I think I will try my old stand--the hearth.' (176)

The narrator refuses to give in to the language of fear employed by the peddler. He insists that the lightning-rod

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[9]Parker, 156.

salesman give reasons and explanations for each assertion. Ultimately, he extracts from the peddler the startling news that, during a thunderstorm, one should avoid a crowd of men and above all avoid tall men. The narrator's reaction is immediate: "Do I dream? Man avoid man? and in danger-time too" (178). Obviously a humanist, the narrator draws comfort from another assertion of the peddler--that lightning sometimes flashes from the earth to the clouds, suggesting that man may send upward a bolt just as cosmic forces send down a bolt.

The narrator soon sends the peddler away, asking: "Who has empowered you, you Tetzel, to peddle round your indulgences from divine ordinations?" (179) Calling the peddler a "false negotiator," one who distorts the language to achieve his unethical purposes, the narrator rests firm in his own belief, having withstood the communication barrage of the salesman. The narrator views the clearing sky and adds, "I read in the rainbow, that the Deity will not, of purpose, make war on man's earth" (179). "Impious wretch!" foamed the stranger, blackening in the face as the rainbow beamed, "I will publish your infidel notions" (179). The peddler, unsuccessful in this sale, will communicate to the neighbors a version of the narrator's infidel notions. At the same time, the narrator gives dissuasive talk of him to the neighbors; nevertheless, the peddler still "travels in storm-time, and drives a brave trade with the fears of man" (180).

Thus by noting the staccoto language and intimidating voice of the peddler, the reader more completely recognizes the accomplishment of the narrator in withstanding the distorted communication of a fraudulent preacher disguised as a peddler. Whereas in "Bartleby" the narrator-lawyer succumbs to his discovery of his own perverse nature, in "The Lightning-Rod Man" the narrator, aware of man's susceptibility to irrational forces, depends upon his moral fiber and intellectual acumen to withstand the barrage of bombast from the peddler.

The quest for communication takes a different turn in "Benito Cereno," in which a maskless man, Captain Amasa Delano goes in search of truth, straight talk, and honest statements. He is described as a "person of a singularly undistrustful good-nature, not liable, except on extraordinary and repeated incentive, and hardly then, to indulge in personal alarms, any way involving the imputation of malign evil in man" (67). Delano, then, is one of those persons who will attend events relevant to themselves but disattend those things which are contrary to their models of the world.[10] Thus the problem Delano tries to solve, the quest for true communication, is handicapped by each phenomenon he sees and the way in which he sees it, not reality as it exists for other men but only as it registers on Delano. From a communications point of

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[10]The communications habit is explored by Lee Thayer, 51-54.

view or from the perspective of human behavior, the result may prove fatal. As Barry Phillips observes, the good Captain is smug in his own adolescent idealism and "is as empty of self-perception as of worldly perception."[11]

Delano is wise enough to realize that all is not right in the world of the San Dominick, but he misinterprets continuously. Recalling the manner of Don Benito in telling of past events, Delano recalls:

> There was a gloomy hesitance and subterfuge about it. It was just the manner of one making up his tale for evil purposes as he goes. But if that story was not true, what was the truth? (98)

The truth continually escapes him, especially when he confronts false communication. For instance, Delano compliments Don Benito on his servant Francesco: "But tell me, has he not, so far as you have known him, always proved a good, worthy fellow?" The Spaniard responds, "Francesco is a good man" (128). Yet in truth Francesco is a murderer and a leader with Babo in the mutiny. Acceptance of false articulation delays genuine communication and destroys trust in the communicative act itself. Babo, we learn later in the story, has plotted the strategy whereby everyone aboard ship deceives Delano. He has, the better to disguise the truth, "devised many expedients, in some of them uniting deceit and defence" (158), in the case of the Ashantees, the oakum-pickers

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[11]Barry Phillips, "The Good Captain: A Reading of Benito Cereno," Texas Studies in Literature and Language, IV (Summer, 1962), 192.

and Atufal bound in chains that he can easily loosen to strick down Delano if necessary.

Delano misreads Don Benito, the signs of the Spanish sailors, and the blacks. Of Don Benito, the American thinks: "Thus, the Spaniard, regarded in his reserve, seemed the involuntary victim of mental disorder" (76). At another time he considers the Spaniard a wicked imposter:

> To think that, under the aspect of infantile weakness, the most savage energies might be couched--those velvets of the Spaniard but the silky paw to his fangs.
>
> From no train of thought did these fancies come; not from within, but from without; suddenly, too, and in one throng, like hoar frost; yet as soon to vanish as the mild sun of Captain Delano's good-nature regained its meridian. (93)

The captain, while suffering his communication breakdown with Don Benito, also misreads signs from others, as in the case of the young sailor descending from the rigging: "At this moment the young sailor's eye was again fixed on the whisperers, and Captain Delano thought he observed a lurking significance in it, as if silent signs, of some Freemason sort, had that instant been interchanged" (95). He also is blind to an older sailor's signals:

> How plainly, thought he, did that old whiskerando yonder betray a consciousness of ill desert. No doubt, when he saw me coming, he dreaded lest I, apprised by his captain of the crew's general misbehavior, came with sharp words for him, and so down with his head. And yet--and yet, now that I think of it, that very old fellow, if I err not, was one of those who seemed so earnestly eyeing me here a while since. Ah, these currents spin one's head round almost as much as they do the ship. (104-105)

Delano is not an absolute fool nor completely ignorant. He

attempts to comprehend, as when another sailor signals to him, he questions what it means: "Something the man had sought to communicate, unbeknown to anyone, even to his captain" (107). To repeat, Delano's quest for truth is handicapped by his communication failure--he continues to interpret the situation on the basis of his preconceived notions about sailors, Spanish captains, and Blacks.

His misreading of Babo and the mutinous slaves is as gross as his failures with Don Benito. Delano sees them as happy-go-lucky darkies. As he watches Babo shave Benito Cereno, his biased ideas about the Negro race crowd his mind:

> And above all is the great gift of good-humour. Not the mere grin or laugh is here meant. Those were unsuitable. But a certain easy cheerfulness, harmonious in every glance and gesture; as though God had set the whole negro to some pleasant tune. . . . At home, he had often taken rare satisfaction in sitting in his door, watching some free man of colour at his work or play. If on a voyage he chanced to have a black sailor, invariably he was on chatty and half-gamesome terms with him. In fact, like most men of a good, blithe heart, Captain Delano took to negroes, not philanthropically, but genially, just as other men to Newfoundland dogs. (120-121)

In truth, however, Babo play-acts the role of a cheery, attentive servant because he knows the American will expect that of him and be put on guard by any other behavior.[12] Delano is suspicious only of white men, members of the "shrewder race." He asks: "But if the whites had dark secrets concerning Don Benito, could then Don Benito be any

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[12]Cf. Jesse D. Green, "Diabolism, Pessimism, and Democracy: Notes on Melville and Conrad," Modern Fiction Studies, VIII (Autumn, 1962), 196.

way in complicity with the blacks? But they were too stupid" (108).

The communications failure of Captain Delano is symbolized rather pointedly by the episode with the knot being tied on deck by an old Spanish salt: "The knot seemed a combination of double-bowline-knot, treble-crown-knot, back-handed-well-knot, knot-in-and-out-knot, and jamming-knot" (109).

> While Captain Delano stood watching him, suddenly the old man threw the knot toward him, saying in broken English--the first heard in the ship--something to this effect: "Undo it, cut it, quick." It was said lowly, but with such condensation of rapidity that the long, slow words in Spanish, which had preceded and followed, almost operated as covers to the brief English between.
>
> For a moment, knot in hand, and knot in head, Captain Delano stood mute. . . . (109-110)

His inability to unravel the knot is characteristic of his failure to communicate on all levels. It is only after Don Benito jumps into his boat, jabbering in Portuguese, and Babo follows trying to stab Don Benito, that the puzzles of the day begin to unravel: "That moment, across the long-benighted mind of Captain Delano, a flash of revelation swept, illuminating, in unanticipated clearness, his host's whole mysterious demeanour, with every enigmatic event of the day, as well as the entire past voyage of the San Dominick" (143).

The unmasking of Delano has not revealed the complete truth, but he can now reconsider and interpret anew the communication symbols registered with him throughout the day. He has been the victim of a hoax, a fantastic communications breakdown. In a communications breakdown of this magnitude,

as E. F. Carlisle shows, the virtues of innocence, benevolence, and optimism become very definite handicaps, for "Delano reveals affirmation become foolish and blind."[13] Delano cannot even see wrong, unlike the lawyer in "Bartleby" who assumes the wrongs of the world and confesses the fact. And when truth is finally made clear to the Captain, he brushes it aside as not worthy of morose behavior as extreme as that of Don Benito. Kingsley Widmer contends that the story "is a sympathetic but ironic critical analysis of the radical optimist, the blandly benevolent rationalist, as a representative liberal American."[14] The good captain is the maskless man, communicating on the levels of appearance, legality, and outer substance but failing to quest true communication on the levels of morality, reality, and inner substantiality.

"The Encantadas" consists of a group of ten sketches that provide an historical-travelogue type narrative in an imaginative framework. The quest for communication in this instance appears to center around man's hopes in a fallen world. It is a quest for a correct reading of nature's signs and signals. The Encantadas islands are, according to the narrator, wavering uncertainties. The epilogue to the first sketch, from Spenser's Faerie Queene (II.xii.6), hints at the infernal atmosphere:

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[13]E. F. Carlisle, "Captain Amasa Delano: Melville's American Fool," Criticism, VII (Fall, 1965), 350.

[14]Kingsley Widmer, "Melville's Radical Resistance: The Method and Meaning of Bartleby," Studies in the Novel, I (Winter, 1969), 448.

> For those same islands seeming now and than,
> Are not firme land, nor any certein wonne,
> But stragling plots which to and fro do ronne
> In the wide waters; therefore are they hight
> The Wandering Island; therefore do them shonne;
> For they have oft drawne many a wandring wight
> Into most deadly daunger and distressed plight;
> For whosoever once hath fastened
> His foot thereon may never it secure
> But wandreth evermore uncertein and unsure. (181)

The world is illusory and illusive; it defies humanity. Communication is at a minimum: "No voice, no low, no howl is heard; the chief sound of life here is a hiss" (183). Overhanging the dismal isles are "screaming flights of unearthly birds" (183). No human lives on the islands for any extended period of time. The narrator adds: "In no world but a fallen one could such lands exist" (183). The isles seem the Apples of Sodom after touching (185). Most animals, and certainly mankind, disown the isles that, cut by the Equator, "know not autumn, and they know not spring; while already reduced to the lees of fire, ruin itself can work little more upon them" (182). In "The Piazza" the narrator journeyed to the mountaintop of romance in a communications quest. Now in "The Encantadas" a narrator searches deserted islands, the end of the earth, for a voice. Where the narrator of "The Lightning-Rod Man" had been faced with much noise and little meaning, the narrator in these sketches is faced with silence and ominous, universal meanings. For example, sailors arriving in the vicinity of the isles often sight a fellow ship, exalting in possibilities of human communication after months at sea:

> Four leagues away, of a golden, hazy noon, it seems some

> Spanish admiral's ship, stacked up with glittering canvas. Sail ho! Sail ho! from all three masts. But coming nigh, the enchanted frigate is transformed apace into a craggy keep. (194)

Rather than fellowship, they find only a deserted island. Ultimately, the reader ponders the fate of any human who dares scratch a living from the desert soil. The narrator answers that query in the final four sketches.

In "Sketch Seventh" the communicative quest may lead to danger. The Creole dog-king, using false communication, entices sailors to desert their ships in order to join his island empire. He then keeps his charges under control with a pack of fierce dogs. Yet the sailors revolt and establish their own government, which "was no democracy at all, but a permanent Riotocracy, which gloried in having no law but lawlessness . . ." (217). The communicative message thus sent out from the island is one about man's baser instincts--murder, thievery, desertion. For example, a ship passing the isle of thieves sights a signal light, but the captain is not deceived by the message:

> The captain laughed rather grimly, as, shaking his fist toward the beacon, he rapped out an oath, and said, 'No, no, you precious rascals, you don't juggle one of my boats ashore this blessed night. You do well, you thieves--you do benevolently to hoist a light yonder as on a dangerous shoal. It tempts no wise man to pull off and see what's the matter, but bids him steer small and keep off shore--that is Charles's Island; brace up, Mr. Mate, and keep the light astern. (218)

In sketch seven, then, Melville portrays the fact that human character, placed in this fallen world, provides a distorted passionate will, like an apple of Sodom. The man of intellect and good will reads correctly the communicative signals,

warning him to steer clear of the danger.

In sketches nine and ten the communicative quest faces breakdown because of outlaws and outcasts who isolate themselves from any interpersonal communications. The hermit Oberlus of "Sketch Ninth" has the mysterious custom, when strangers come to his island, of presenting his back, "unmindful of all greeting, jovial or bland; as the curious stranger would turn to face him, the recluse, hoe in hand, as diligently would avert himself . . ." (237-238). The narrator, offering a humorous reason for such action, says Oberlus turns his back on people because "that was his better side, since it revealed the least" (237). But Oberlus refuses to communicate because he has an animal scorn for all mankind. The sketch suggests that life on the fallen island has wholly distorted his personality.

The most sympathic character in "The Encantadas" is Hunilla, the Chola widow portrayed in "Sketch Eighth". In a quest for happiness in an interpersonal communication with her husband and brother, Hunilla falls victim to the sterile world of the island, watching one day as her brother and husband drown on a reef beyond the call of voices but not beyond sight:

> Before Hunilla's eyes they sank. The real woe of this event passed before her sight as some sham tragedy on the stage. She was seated on a rude bower among the withered thickets, crowning a lofty cliff, a little back from the beach. . . . Hunilla had withdrawn the branches to one side, and held them so. They formed an oval frame, through which the bluely boundless sea rolled like a painted one. And there, the invisible painter painted to her view the wave-tossed and disjointed raft, its once level logs slantingly upheaved, as raking masts, and the four struggling arms undistinguishable among them; and then all subsided into smooth-flowing creamy waters, slowly drifting

> the splintered wreck; while first and last, no sound of any sort was heard. Death in a silent picture; a dream of the eye; such vanishing shapes as the mirage shows. (223-224)

Death in a silent picture seems indeed the communication of these sketches of the Encantadas islands. Hunilla, numbed by the silent tragedy, "gazed and gazed, nor raised a finger or a wail" (224). She is silent; and living alone on the island, she remains silent with no interpersonal communication.

Accordingly, Melville's quest for an essential communication experience that would unlock certain mysteries of the cosmos remains unfulfilled. The quest failed on the mountain, on the ship at sea, and at the "happy" isles. Is it then possible that man may construct aesthetically or mechanically a communications device that will outperform the indifferent signals of nature?

Melville suggests one answer in his allegorical story "The Bell-Tower." In this work, articulation by art carries an inherent flaw of pride. The great mechanician Bannadonna has built a Bell-Tower, a great metallic aviary in which birded chimes of silver throats were to ring merrily. In the artist's peculiar symbolistic purpose and in his pride for superior communication of his ability, he attempts with the tower to combine time, space, and spirit in a machine that will duplicate human functions. The size of his ambition exceeds the height of his utilitarian tower. According to James Baird, "Bannadonna, the master architect of the city, thus becomes the representative of all urbane culture: with him, common-sense was theurgy

[divine intervention in human affairs]; machinery, miracle; Prometheus, the heroic name for machinist; man, the true God."[15] And Melville in the story indicates the overreaching of Bannadonna's ambition:

> . . . his design had, in the first place, been prompted by the sight of the watchman, and confined to the devising of a subtle substitute for him: yet, as is not seldom the case with projectors, by insensible gradations, proceeding from comparatively pigmy aims to titantic ones, the original scheme had, in its anticipated eventualities, at last, attained to an unheard-of degree of daring. He still bent his efforts upon the locomotive figure for the belfry. But only as a partial type of an ulterior creature, a sort of elephantine Helot, adapted to further, in a degree scarcely to be imagined, the universal conveniences and glories of humanity. . . . (266)

So excessive pride provoked Bannadonna into attempting to create a sign of man's genius. He would communicate mankind's superiority as well as his own.

Nevertheless, Bannadonna commits mortal error that spoils his communicative quest: his bell has both an artistic flaw and a mechanical flaw.[16] Among his twelve figures on the bell, one looks unlike her sisters--the face of Una. A magistrate chides Bannadonna, "Surely, Bannadonna, you meant the twelve should wear the same jocundly abandoned air. But see, the smile of Una seems but a fatal one. 'Tis different." (260) The artist attempts to explain away the difference by mentioning the law of art that bars the possibility of duplicates. Yet

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[15]James Baird, Ishmael: A Study of the Symbolic Mode in Primitivism (New York: Harper Torchbook, 1960), p. 398.

[16]Cf. Charles A. Fenton, "'The Bell-Tower': Melville and Technology," American Literature, XXIII (May, 1951), 219-32; Fenton argues that Bannadonna is mere mechanician, not artist.

Una, in Spenser's Faerie Queene, represents to many people the idea of truth. Later, when attempting to erase any error in Una's expression and thereby make his symbol perfect, Bannadonna forgets time and his human-like creature that is programmed to strike the bell at one o'clock, with the following result:

> And so, for the interval, he was oblivious of his creature; which, not oblivious of him, and true to its creation, and true to its heedful winding up, left its post precisely at the given moment; along its well-oiled route, slid noiselessly toward its mark; and, aiming at the hand of Una, to ring one clangorous note, dully smote the intervening brain of Bannadonna, turned backward to it; the manacled arms then instantly upspringing to their hovering poise. The falling body [of the now dead Bannadonna] clogged the thing's return; so there it stood, still impending over Bannadonna, as if whispering some post-mortem terror. (270)

Therefore the artistic flaw and the artist's desire to have a perfect communicative symbol trap him into his fatal position so that the mechanical Helot strikes his brain with the giant hammer.

In addition to the artistic flaw, Bannadonna commits a mechanical flaw. When forging the bell a workman evidences fear of the metal and is killed in anger by the great mechanician. The death blow causes a piece of human scrape to fly into the molden metal. Months later, when the populace wishes to honor Bannadonna's funeral with the ringing of the great bell, the people hear "naught but a broken and disastrous sound, like that of some lone Alpine landslide . . ." (270). Worse, the bell actually falls from the tower:

> Glancing backward, they saw the groined belfry crashed

> sideways in. It afterward appeared that the powerful peasant, who had the bell-rope in charge, wishing to test at once the full glory of the bell, had swayed down upon the rope with one concentrate jerk. The mass of quaking metal, too ponderous for its frame, and strangely feeble somewhere at its top, loosed from its fastening, tore sideways down, and tumbling in one sheer fall, three hundred feet to the soft sward below, buried itself inverted and half out of sight. (271)

Significantly, the flaw that causes the inarticulation of the bell is the human defect which entered at the time of the casting and the murder of the workman: "Upon its disinterment, the main fracture was found to have started from a small spot in the ear; which, being scraped, revealed a defect, deceptively minute, in the casting; which defect must subsequently have been pasted over with some unknown compound" (271). Bannadonna, of course, had covered the defect.

Thus the art symbol was flawed by error in Una's expression. Thus the bell itself was flawed by human defect. As a result, the artistry failed to enlighten the populace and the machinery failed to entertain them with its lovely sounds. Bannadonna, the artist-mechanician whose articulation would rival Nature's, is annihilated by his maneuvers of pride.

An aesthetic or mechanical communications device fails to outperform the indifferent signals of nature. Bannadonna is therefore related to others in The Piazza Tales who suffer communications breakdowns. These Melvillian portraits depict humanity striving for communicative contact as an answer to a sterile world of silence. But success rests upon their ability to overcome the barriers to communication.

CHAPTER III

THE BARRIERS TO COMMUNICATION

In one of his frequent letters to Hawthorne, Melville observed that "what plays the mischief with the truth is that men will insist upon the universal application of a temporary feeling or opinion."[1] This comment, voicing Melville's reservations about his reading public, does not condemn his readers but merely notes their desire for communication that is familiar, comfortable, and easily embraced within their established beliefs. One critic has observed that most people give attention only to events relevant to themselves and disattend those things that are contrary to their models of the world.[2] Accordingly, communication on anything beyond a one-to-one relationship extends into the area of social control and a network of mutual agreements that bind people together. Without social communication men would huddle "in miserable and lonely caves, not daring to trust anyone."[3] Melville has no enunciated communications theory, of course, but in writing his stories he offers evidence of an implied theory. He appears keenly aware that communication, its

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[1]Melville, Letters, 131.

[2]Thayer, 51-54.

[3]S. I. Hayakawa, Language in Thought and Action, 2nd ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1963), p. 106.

meaning, significance, and utility, functions necessarily in both message and receiver. In The Piazza Tales he evidences particular concern with three barriers that prevent successful reception: (1) social norms that distort the receiver's attention to truth, (2) the closed mind of the self-centered man, and (3) the misreading of signs and symbols. Each brings a tragic breakdown in communication.

I

The first barrier, social norms that color man's communicative awareness, is implied strongly in two stories of The Piazza Tales, "Bartleby" and "The Bell-Tower." In "Bartleby," the narrator establishes himself as a man limited by his social positions as lawyer and Master of Chancery. Kingsley Widmer labels this lawyer's role as that of the "practical optimist, the blandly benevolent rationalist," and a representative liberal American.[4] This kind of man tries his best to accomplish the good deed, but he seldom achieves a deep awareness of humanity, ending with only a superficial cognizance. He has, as Richard Chase notes, a "fatal limitation of personality which separates him from other men and renders his dealings with them imperfect and his future dark."[5]

An essential ingredient of this communication barrier is

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[4]Widmer, "Melville's Radical Resistance," 448.

[5]Chase, Herman Melville, 158.

cultural disparity. At first the lawyer is successful in his quiet business, as he displays:

> I am one of those unambitious lawyers who never addresses a jury, or in any way draws down public applause; but, in the cool tranquillity of a snug retreat, do a snug business among rich men's bonds, and mortgages, and title-deeds. (20)

Into his retreat appears the challenge of his life--Bartleby. The scrivener challenges his snugness, his conservatism, his very way of life. Melville asks: What happens when one is forced into communication with someone outside established norms. Bartleby causes consternation because he fits no norm and breaks the mold. When asked to check copy, he replies, "I would prefer not to." The lawyer reacts in a significant manner: "I sat for a while in perfect silence, rallying my stunned faculties" (29). Now challenged, his established ordered world begins to crumble around him:

> "Prefer not to," echoed I, rising in high excitement, and crossing the room with a stride. "What do you mean? Are you moon-struck? I want you to help me compare this sheet here--take it," and I thrust it toward him. (30)

Bartleby refuses to compare the sheet and refuses to explain why. The lawyer admits he would have flown into a passion with any other man, but "there was something about Bartleby that not only strangely disarmed me, but, in a wonderful manner, touched and disconcerted me" (31). The communication breakdown is under way. He adds, "I began to reason with him."

The lawyer cannot communicate with anyone who falls

outside set standards of correct conduct developed by the establishment for its own benefit. Attempting to fit Bartleby into a mold, he would make exceptions for the scrivener, but he must eventually accept the fact that Bartleby prefers not to be a little reasonable:

> The next day I noticed that Bartleby did nothing but stand at his window in his dead-wall revery. Upon asking him why he did not write, he said that he had decided upon doing no more writing.
>
> "Why, how now? what next?" exclaimed I, "do no more writing?"
>
> "No more."
>
> "And what is the reason?"
>
> "Do you not see the reason for yourself?" he indifferently replied.
>
> I looked steadfastly at him, and perceived that his eyes looked dull and glazed. Instantly it occurred to me, that his unexampled diligence in copying by his dim window for the first few weeks of his stay with me might have temporarily impaired his vision. (45-46)

The marvelously conservative lawyer supplies his own reason for Bartleby's refusal, an eye ailment. As Kingsley Widmer observes, this story "operates only within the assumptions of the decent and rational mind."[6] In truth, most statements by the narrator-lawyer are assumptions. His search for normalcy leads him to assume that his decisions are correct:

> Without loudly bidding Bartleby depart--as an inferior genius might have done--I assumed the ground that depart he must: and upon that assumption built all I had to say. . . . It was truly a beautiful thought to have assumed Bartleby's departure; but, after all, that assumption was simply my own, and none of Bartleby's. The great point was, not whether I had assumed that he would quit me, but whether he would prefer so to do. He was more a man of preferences than assumptions. (48-49)

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[6]Widmer, "The Negative Affirmation," 279.

The lawyer, being a man of assumptions, chooses a communicative approach that is comforting to him.

However, such assumptions fail with a man like Bartleby whose negativism carries him more and more deeply into solitude, an isolation that the fearful, normal lawyer cannot comprehend. The narrator, bound within his limited world of rational optimism and thereby imprisoned by his own walls, fails to read properly the significance of his scrivener, his psychological double, who also is imprisoned by his limited world.

Only at times does the lawyer approach the truth:

> For the first time in my life a feeling of overpowering stinging melancholy seized me. Before, I had never experienced aught but an unpleasing sadness. The bond of a common humanity now drew me irresistibly to gloom. A fraternal melancholy! For both I and Bartleby were sons of Adam. (40)

Yet in his comfortable middle-brow American conservativism, the lawyer never fully accepts that fact. He looks upon Bartleby as an exception not only to normal behavior but to the human race. He knows full well that Bartleby has broken the chain of humanity. Only slowly does he recognize his own isolation, eventually reaching partial understanding:

> Ah, happiness courts the light, so we deem the world is gay; but misery hides aloof, so we deem that misery there is none. (40)

Unable to accept Bartleby, he is thus unable to accept himself. After judging himself guilty, he attempts to overcome his inner conflict by confessing his treatment of Bartleby and by over-sentimentalizing what the scrivener means to him.

The reader realizes Melville's communicative message: the establishment lawyer, who never comprehends the essential negativism of Bartleby, continually wants something better for the scrivener; yet he never arrives at a satisfactory conception of himself, only a pathos of pity for "Ah, humanity!" He is humanized by the experience, but he fails to attain, for example, the comprehension of the narrator of "The Piazza" who learns that truth comes in with darkness. Because of the communication breakdown, the lawyer never learns that truth comes in with Bartleby.

The manner in which social norms color communicative awareness is again developed in "The Bell-Tower," in which Melville depicts a man who becomes the representative of urban culture. As architect for the city, he represents the manner in which a community seeks cultural values and honors its mechanicians and their utilitarian accomplishments. As Melville points out: "With him, common-sense was theurgy [divine intervention in human affairs]; machinery, miracle; Prometheus, the heroic name for machinist; man, the true God" (268). Distorted by his Olympian pride, Bannadonna with his tower enters the imaginations of the townspeople, shaping also their self-esteem and idealizations. The tower, as symbol of the town, communicates their cultural prestige, as Wall Street represents a cultural plateau for the lawyer-narrator in "Bartleby". From a pile of stones the edifice becomes a marvelous tower and, finally, the glory of the city. By such

self-glorification the social norms of the community distort the message of the tower. Despite repeated signs and clues, the people are blind to the arrogant pride of Bannadonna.

The barrier of noncommunication infects the entire town. They go so far as to celebrate the "holiday of the Tower."

> To the sound of viols, the climax-stone slowly rose in air, and, amid the firing of ordnance, was laid by Bannadonna's hands upon the final course. Then mounting it, he stood erect, alone, with folded arms, gazing upon the white summits of blue inland Alps, and whiter crests of bluer Alps off-shore-sights invisible from the plain. Invisible, too, from thence was that eye he turned below, when, like the cannon booms, came up to him the people's combustions of applause. (254)

Later when the bells and mechanisms are completed, another proclamation is made to celebrate the striking of the clock. The people camp around the tower. The nobility and principal citizens arrive in a cavalcade. A guard of soldiers with music joins the occasion. The moment arrives for the consumation of sound and time:

> Suddenly a dull, mangled sound--naught ringing in it; scarcely audible, indeed, to the outer circles of the people--that dull sound dropped heavily from the belfry. At the same moment, each man stared at his neighbour blandly. All watches were unheld. All hour hands were at--had passed--the figure 1. No bell-stroke from the tower. The multitude became tumultuous. (263)

The ritual language of the tower fails. It is like a wedding ceremony stopped abruptly, an oath of office curtailed, or the national anthem stopped in the middle of a note. The people become tumultuous, for when an anticipated communication falters or fails they feel the cosmic forces at work. They

panic. An accustomed sound or message has not been forthcoming. Therefore they search frantically for the next horrendous alteration in the facade. A communication breakdown on this level is dramatic because it staggers the entire populace. Typically, however, one episode cannot awaken one man to actuality, much less an entire community. As a result the disaster is soon forgotten and cultural blindness entices them to honor Bannadonna with a state funeral. Moreover, it was resolved "that the great bell . . . should be rung upon the entrance of the bier into the cathedral" (270). But the bell does not ring: instead it breaks from its mountings and crashes three hundred feet to the ground. Additionally, one year later the tower itself crumbles to the ground, like a giant pine-tree:

> As all along where the pine-tree falls, its dissolution leaves a mossy mound--last-flung shadow of the perished trunk; never lengthening, never lessening; unsubject to the fleet falsities of the sun; shade immutable, and true guage which cometh by prostration--so westward from what seems the stump, one steadfast spear of lichened ruin veins the plain. (253)

It lies in ruin: the glory of the people lying in dissolution, cultural grandeur prostrate, utilitarian pride fallen. It may, as James Baird suggests, represent man's Christian estate as impotent.[7] It may also suggest a traumatic dream of castration.[8] In either case the archetypal awareness of the fallen tower suggests an impotent failure of the culture.

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[7]Baird, p. 54.

[8]Chase, Herman Melville, p. 124.

Bannadonna attempts a communication distorted by pride, and he fails. The people place confidence in a false communication, one that contains the erosion of human error, and they are left with only a spector of decay.

For the creative artist an alternative would appear to be an aesthetic, private voice. If the "world is apoplectic with high-living of ambition" and if "apoplexy has its fall" perhaps the artist should reserve his voice for a select audience rather than a populace that adores only utilitarian "towers," as symbolized by Melville's travel books. Perhaps the idea suggests one reason for Melville's decision, finally, to publish no more prose and to emphasize poetry for the remainder of his life.

Society attempts to establish systems of classification and communication that produce desired results. Thus "truth" remains relative; it depends upon what society regards as true.[9] If the people decide that a tower is worthy of their worship, then a rhetoric of the tower develops to denote the ritual allegiance of the populace. Social communication brings the people in groups to huddle at the base of the tower. But such language is ritual; it is phatic; it is meaningless. In this sense the language of the tower relates to the language of Wall Street, for social "truth" is closely allied with social communication.

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[9]See Hayakawa, p. 223, for amplification of this point.

II

In contrast, scientific truth is practical, asking that classification systems produce results that are predictable. S. I. Hayakawa comments:

> When lightning was classified as "evidence of divine wrath," no courses of action other than prayer were suggested to prevent one's being struck by lightning. As soon, however, as it was classified as "electricity," Benjamin Franklin achieved a measure of control over it by his invention of the lightning rod. (Hayakawa, 223)

However, when the lightning rod is advanced by a peddler as the only protection from the divine wrath of God's lightning, then man is back again to social communication of truth and, worse, the second barrier: the threat of the closed mind.

Melville's "The Lightning-Rod Man" depicts a man who is subjected to the tirade of a fanatic who bases his social "truth" on scientific facts. Such methods, which produced atrocities like the Salem witch trials, enable him to drive a "brave trade with the fears of man." This rhetoric of fear is generated, usually, by a closed mind, the religious or racial bigot. According to Milton Rokeach, anyone with an open mind is capable of accepting a speaker, his statement, or both. In contrast, anyone with a closed mind rejects the statement automatically if he rejects the speaker, or vice versa.[10] The peddler in "The Lightning-Rod Man" has a closed mind; his articulation, mostly meaningless exclamations,

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[10]Milton Rokeach, The Open and Closed Mind (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1960), pp. 54-70.

attempts only to break down the listener's resistence. True communication does not occur with this man. Like others with closed minds, he finds comfort in labeling externals as absolutely good or absolutely evil. A person, thing, or event either fits an acceptable mold or is cast aside.

He reveals his biased articulation in four ways. First, he employs devices that carry collective sanctions, offering excellent examples of words with emotional connotations, such as 'awful,' 'not for worlds,' 'so horridly ignorant,' 'terrific tempest,' 'life and death,' and so on. Next, he frequently repeats words, especially those with affective connotations: 'Hark,' 'Quick,' and 'Come hither to me.' Third, he invokes fear of punishment and harm:

> 'Sir,' said he, 'excuse me; but instead of my accepting your invitation to be seated on the hearth there, I solemnly warn you, that you had best accept mine, and stand with me in the middle of the room. Good heaven!' he cried, starting--'there is another of those awful crashes. I warn you, sir, quit the hearth.' (173)

Seconds later he cries: "Quit the spot--I conjure--I command you." The Lightning-Rod Man is living testimony to the idea that people with closed minds find life threatening. With repeated efforts he attempts to induce fear:

> Are you mad? Know you not that yon iron bar is a swift conductor? Desist. (176)
>
> Are you frantic? That bell-wire might blast you. Never touch bell-wire in a thunder-storm, nor ring a bell of any sort. (176)
>
> Hark!--after the flash the gust--the sashes shiver--the house, the house!--Come hither to me! (176)

These exclamations designed to induce fear are coupled with appeals to supernatural powers, his fourth language deception. The peddler invokes heaven's aid repeatedly with 'for heaven's sake' and 'merciful heaven.' Like a preacher, he declares, "Mine is the only true rod." Also, only one spot in the room (or in society), the center, is safe for human souls. In such manner this fanatical Yankee peddler with his closed mind attempts to induce fear through language distortions.

The narrator of the episode, to his credit as a balanced, perceptive person, withstands this assault on his emotions. He denies the biased stance of the salesman, denouncing him with his own affective language:

> "You pretended envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary to and from Jupiter Tonans," laughed I; "you mere man who come here to put you and your pipe-stem between clay and sky, do you think that because you can strike a bit of green light from the Leyden jar, that you can thoroughly avert the supernal bolt? Your rod rusts, or breaks, and where are you? Who has empowered you, you Tetzel, to peddle round your indulgences from divine ordinations? The hairs of our heads are numbered, and the days of our lives. In thunder as in sunshine, I stand at ease in the hands of my God. False negotiator, away! (179)

The peddler sees events as either right or wrong; the wrong threatens his security, causing his antagonism. Melville's narrator, in contrast, has a reserve of human reasoning. Although he employs in this instance the salesman's rhetoric of fear and appears to be a "wrath of god" man himself, the narrator represents the perceptive man who establishes a transcending Self to offset the demands of orthodox society.

When he encounters a man employing a fraudulent and distorted language, he turns that language of violence back upon the salesman and casts him from the house. He possesses an open mind receptive to new ideas yet wary of distortions of accepted concepts and theories.

In "Benito Cereno" both Captain Delano and Don Benito Cereno suffer the fate of closed minds; Delano is too much the optimist and Cereno too much the pessimist. Neither man achieves the central focus of the mythic-moral universe of Romanticism; in truth, the absolutely liberated romantic hero, according to Milton Stern, is no longer possible: "The hero must be found in a new guise, either as a man defined in society by history or as a man defined by an apocalyptic and inner self."[11] In "Benito Cereno" the Spaniard is a man defined by the inner Self (despite his aristocracy and Catholicism), while Captain Delano is a man shaped by his society.

Captain Delano is the counterpart of Bartleby's lawyer who was shaped by Wall Street restrictions and mores. However, in this story, Delano does not provide the first person narration; thus the follies of his closed mind become readily obvious in his communication failures as the story unfolds.

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[11]Milton Stern, "Melville's Tragic Imagination: The Hero Without a Home," in Patterns of Commitment in American Literature, ed. Marston La France. Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1967.

Throughout the story Melville's narrator controls Delano, whose errors in social classifications of truth reflect his closed mind.[12] E. F. Carlisle calls him "the American Fool" because he has excessive pride and misreads life.[13] For example, after being chided by Cereno, Delano admits that "the temper of my mind that morning was more than commonly pleasant, while the sight of so much suffering, more apparent than real, added to my good nature, compassion, and charity, happily interweaving the three" (168). William H. Gilman stipulates that a hero "must be capable of significant perception and of significant response to his perception."[14] But Delano fails to communicate with anyone on board the San Dominick, be it Cereno, Babo, or the Spanish sailors who attempt desperately to send signals to him. One critic argues that "Delano's courage so far outran his perception that he seemed to symbolize a national destiny over which clouds were rapidly gathering."[15] Freedom

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[12]See also Mary Rohrberger, "Point of View in 'Benito Cereno' Mechinations and Deceptions," College English, XXVII (April, 1966), 542; Rohrberger states: "The narrator cannot too openly discredit Delano's viewpoint, because the establishment is necessary if the dual perspective is to be maintained. Nor can the narrator always support Delano's viewpoint, because he cannot obviously mislead the reader."

[13]Carlisle, 349.

[14]William H. Gilman, "The Hero and the Heroic in American Literature: An Essay in Definition," in Patterns of Commitment in American Literature, ed. Marston La France (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1967), p. 8.

[15]Max Putzel, "The Source and the Symbols of Melville's 'Benito Cereno,'" American Literature, XXXIV (May, 1962), 196.

is a burden, requiring control, direction, and wakefulness. The shroud-gray San Dominick, drifting without control in the harbour of St. Maria, represents the loss of control by both white captains. At sea, bound in a common community, these men face sudden death.[16] In the isolated setting they depict the rawness of communication failure due to closed minds. As a result, when Delano avoids communication or misreads signs that would raise him to a new level of comprehension, he fails as a perceptive hero.

Throughout the day he has inferred, assumed, thought, ascribed, bethought himself; but he never reasons. He notes Babo's resemblances to other Negroes and, ignoring Babo's differences from the social norms imprinted on his mind, he leaps a chasm from Babo the individual man to Babo a jolly, black servant. He places this black man with all other blacks on a high abstraction level, thus damaging any concrete perception of any one of them. Accordingly, communication received about black men is distorted by his preconceived notions and his sterotyped image. He views Babo and his race as possessing both the "great gift of good-humour" and "a certain easy cheerfulness, harmonious in every glance and gesture; as though God had set the whole negro to some pleasant tune" (120). Sidney Kaplan puts it this way: to Delano the

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[16]For full development of the concept of community at sea see W. H. Anden, The Enchafed Flood (New York: Random House, 1950), pp. 30ff.

Negroes are "jolly primitives, uncontaminated nature, simple hearts, people to be patronized."[17] In a passage often cited, Delano views a slumbering negress giving suck to her child: "There's naked nature, now; pure tenderness and love, thought Captain Delano, well pleased" (105). His thoughts multiply:

> This incident prompted him to remark the other negresses more particularly than before. He was gratified with their manners: like most uncivilised women, they seemed at once tender of heart and tough of constitution; equally ready to die for their infants or fight for them. Unsophisticated as leopardesses; loving as doves. Ah! thought Captain Delano, these perhaps, are some of the very women whom Ledyard saw in Africa, and gave such a noble account of. (105-106)

Significantly, he bases his judgment upon secondary reading about the blacks and an occasional dealing with one on his ship. In truth, the negresses were more cruel than the men during the mutiny, crying for torture of the whites rather than quick deaths. Delano, with his stereotyped image of the Negro, cannot penetrate to the truth. His communication merely skims the surface. As Margaret Vanderhaar notes, "Delano wears the mask of benevolence which in reality hides a moral vacuum. . . ."[18]

Babo, of course, properly reads the biased, closed mind of Delano. It is Babo, with his distorted, vindictive

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[17]Sidney Kaplan, "Herman Melville and the American National Sin: The Meaning of 'Benito Cereno,'" Journal of Negro History, XLII (January, 1957), 18.

[18]Margaret M. Vanderhaar, "A Re-Examination of 'Benito Cereno,'" American Literature, XL (1968), 190-191.

purposes, who manipulates all events on board the ship; he plays a role as black servant that he knows Delano expects of him. His is communication contrived so that Delano accepts it as truth without any questioning. Babo also has his fellow blacks play roles--Atufal is kept in chains, the hatchet polishers and oakum-pickers are positioned as mere workers but also serve Babo's purposes as protectors. Even the story they tell Delano is rehearsed before he arrives on board. Delano is easy to deceive, as Babo knew he would be.

Because things are not right aboard the San Dominick and because the fault cannot lie with jolly good Negroes, the closed mind of Delano attributes the ship's condition to Cereno and suspects the Spaniard of threatening his life. He observes that the "whites, too, by nature, were the shrewder race" (108). Ultimately, he misreads Delano's leap into his boat:

> The dismayed officer of the boat eagerly asked what this meant. To which, Captain Delano, turning a disdainful smile upon the unaccountable Spaniard, answered that, for his part, he neither knew nor cared; but it seemed as if Don Benito had taken into his head to produce the impression among his people that the boat wanted to kidnap him. (141)

Then seizing Don Benito he cries, "this plotting pirate means murder!" (142) Delano's closed mind is opened only when he sees Babo reaching across to stab Benito Cereno. Then "a flash of revelation" sweeps across his clouded mind.

Cereno, the Spanish captain, commits the same type of error as Delano. Because of the horrifying experiences on

board the ship, Don Benito overlooks Babo the ex-slave, the victim of man's inhumanity to man, and views him as Babo-evil. The abstraction principle is at work; Don Benito sees similarities between Babo and pure evil as perceived and ignores any differences. Addressing himself to this point, Robert M. Farnsworth urges that the black man represents the dark side of the white man, a side that every white man must perceive and accept if he is to be whole.[19] Don Benito perceives the blackness; he faces it head-on. Yet he closes his mind to all else, sees only the blackness, and, unable to carry that burden, retreats into death. He cannot face the blackness and live. What about Delano? He is not man enough to see the blackness. Even after Don Benito has explained the "malign machinations and deceptions" that interpose in man's lives, Delano comments:

> "You generalise, Don Benito; and mournfully enough. But the past is past; why moralise 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."
>
> "Because they have no memory," he dejectedly replied; "because they are not human."
>
> "But these mild Trades that now fan your cheek, do they not come with a human-like healing to you? Warm friends, steadfast friends are the Trades."
>
> "With their steadfastness they but waft me to my tomb, senor," was the foreboding response.
>
> "You are saved," cried Captain Delano, more and more astonished and pained; "you are saved: what has cast such a shadow upon you?"
>
> "The negro."

Thus Captain Delano too lightly dismisses the shadow in mortal life and Don Benito too darkly succumbs to its negativism.

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[19] Robert M. Farnsworth, "Slavery and Innocence in 'Benito Cereno,'" Emerson Society Quarterly, No. 44 (1966), p. 95.

The dichotomy thus developed by Melville with these two portraits represents his recognition of the uselessness of communication with the closed mind. No matter how many signs and signals and hints are laid before Delano, he cannot comprehend them.

III

A third barrier to communication for Melville is the misreading of signs and symbols. The author realized that man must have the ability to read symbols, whether they connote good or evil. Only a willingness to accept symbols of shadow as well as light results in a balanced human nature. Accordingly, Melville is exploring the theme of man's blindness in the midst of appearances. He suggests that man misreads the less obvious forms of communication, that is, non-linquistic forms such as the physical act with eye or hand.

Only human error and tragedy results from Captain Delano's failure to read properly the signs and signals. He failed to understand the stern-piece with a "dark satyr in a mask, holding his foot on the prostrate neck of a writhing figure, likewise masked." (70). The maskless man cannot penetrate the signs of those who wear masks, such as Don Benito and Babo. He cannot penetrate the mystery of the knot, or the padlock and key symbols of Atufal, or Babo's use of the Spanish flag to drape Don Benito for shaving. He appears to represent for Melville the man with good intentions but poor understanding of the essence of life.

Melville portrays his more perceptive mortal, the one who reads the symbols of nature more accurately, as the narrator of "The Piazza," a narrator who reappears later in the tales to lend a balancing antithesis to the distorted views of the Lightning-Rod Man.

From his piazza the narrator looks upon the signs of reality (at this point reality-as-perceived but for him a final reality). With limited vision he places his optimistic faith in signs offering hope and goodness, such as golden birds or a rainbow. Noting a flickering light on the mountain, he wants to investigate it by making an "inland voyage to fairyland" (5). He admits that the mountains play at hide-and-seek and that "the spot in question was, at all events, so situated as to be only visible, and then but vaguely, under certain witching conditions of light and shadow" (5). He chooses to travel light-heartedly to visit his fairy princess. In his romantic quest he will, as one critic remarks, traverse the inward world of his moral faith."[20]

However, the journey's significance to The Piazza Tales rests firmly on the narrator's initiation into an understanding of Nature's symbols. His own nature alters in the story from that of an unperceptive fool to a comprehending mortal, one of Melville's exceptional men. Faced with signs and symbols, he learns that he cannot identify either level

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[20]William Bysshe Stein, "Melville's Comedy of Faith," ELH, XXVII (December, 1960), 320.

as the real one--rainbow or shadow, light or dark, the golden window or the rotting roof. He straddles a borderline between reality and dreamworld. He reflects the attitude of Babbolanja of Mardi who claims "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."[21]

"The Piazza" opens with an epigraph from Cymbeline:

> 'With fairest flowers,
> Whilst summer lasts, and I live here, Fidele----'

In the context of Shakespeare's play this comment functions as a pretty but rather empty vow by Aviragus over the supposedly dead Imogen. A few lines later Guiderius, the brother of Aviragus, cautions him against sentimentality and warns of inevitability of disaster and death:

> Prithee have done,
> And do not play in wench-like words with that
> Which is so serious. Let us bury him,
> And not protract with admiration what
> Is now due debt. To th' grave. (IV.ii.229-233)

The epigraph thus suggests the necessity of man's awareness of both life and death. The only possible way to reach a balanced nature, the epigraph suggests, is through proper reading of symbols and language.

The narrator of "The Piazza" lives in a old house with a charmed ring of mountains surrounding it. The mountains become worthy of his worship; indeed Mt. Graylock reminds him of

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[21]Herman Melville, Mardi and a Voyage Thither (New York: Capricorn, 1964), p. 248.

Charlemagne among his peers as he founded the Holy Roman Empire. In these times of "failing faith and feeble knees," the narrator builds his place of worship--the piazza. Yet from his safe orthodox piazza he ventures on his inland voyage to fairyland. He will attempt to locate the signal light at the spot where he saw a rainbow, a spot that glowed like the Potosi silver mine of Bolivia. The narrator overlooks the fact that the rainbow appeared on Greylock only shortly after a thunder-storm which made the mountain a Sinai, a mountain quaking and smoking before Moses and his people. He fails to heed the communicative message--the mountain is a place of both the rainbow and the storm.

The religious connotations suggest a journey to test his moral faith, or as William Stein suggests, he "re-creates the predicament of modern man in search of his soul."[22] Stein's approach, however, makes the voyage a Christian defense of human brotherhood. On that basis the narrator is bound to fail. Moreover, Stein argues that the narrator fails to pass certain tests of self-knowledge, that he is a trickster and foe of moral order, and that he is "alienated from the vital sources of traditional morality and yet secretly dissatisifed with the limitations of reason."[23] Arguing that the narrator compulsively resorts to fantasy in order to

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[22]Stein, 327.

[23]Ibid., 328.

adjust himself to the imperfection of temporal existence, Stein says the narrator "exhibits himself in the status of a fool reveling in his own foolishness."[24] However, any revelation sought by the narrator need not be a Christian or even spiritual apocalypse. Why not merely read the journey as an epistemological quest? He will test the limits of his knowledge, especially as it relates to his need for illusion in a rainbow world of fairyland.

He wishes to escape the divided world he finds around him as embodied in the beautifully flowering but worm-infested Chinese creeper. He cannot bear to look upon it, preferring instead the signals of absolute beauty from the mountainside. Judith Slater labels him a narrator who "lives in a divided realm and suffers from his inability to reconcile the halves."[25] Slater argues that the narrator carries that view to the very end of the story: "He cannot look on a universe in which good and evil live side by side."[26] Slater's interpretation, like William Stein's, rules out any possible discovery made on this initiative quest. If the quest is merely religious, the narrator fails, but if the quest involves an epistomological reading of signs and symbols and if the narrator successfully passes this test, then he has gained a better understanding of his role in the universe. The

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[24] Ibid., 332.

[25] Judith Slater, "The Domestic Adventurer in Melville's Tales," American Literature, XXXVII (1965), 279.

[26] Ibid.

narrator, that is, begins his voyage with a closed mind, but he ends it with an open mind. At the beginning, certainly, he fails to read the signs. The Ram Aries (icon for redemption of Christ) abandons him because he follows the golden flights of yellow birds (icons of the Passion) into a dark road leading up. The narrator, still blind to sorrow and suffering, must climb unawares his own Calvary. He passes Jacks-in-the pulpit preaching from empty chapels in the rock; they are flowers representing the unheeded warnings of John the Baptist. Rather than pay homage to the Virgin Mary, as emblemed by a maidenly look from the crescent moon, he bites into one of Eve's apples which "tasted of the ground."

Ultimately he reaches the "grayish cottage, capped, nun-like with a peaked roof" (10). He assumes he has reached fairyland, failing to realize the significance of the setting:

> No fence was seen, no enclosure. Near by--ferns, ferns, ferns; further--woods, woods, woods; beyond--mountains, mountains, mountains; then--sky, sky, sky. Turned out in aerial commons, pasture for the mountain moon. Nature, and but nature, house and all; even a low cross-pile of silver birch, piled openly, to season; up among whose silvery sticks, as through the fencing of some sequestered grave, sprang vagrant raspberry bushes--wilful assertors of their right-of-way. (11)

This is not a fairyland house at all, but one that blends with nature, but he cannot see this fact. Only later does he recognize that the house is rotting and that it thereby is returning to a natural state.

He meets Marianna, who is not a fairy queen but a distraught Marianna at the moated grange from Measure for Measure.

She seems a cousin to Tennyson's Mariana, according to Egbert Oliver, because "she is depressed, her nights are dreary, her house is weed-grown and decaying, her mood is melancholy and tearful, and her thoughts are on the distant vision."[27] Also similar in the portraits, both Tennyson's Mariana and Melville's Marianna watch a black shadow, live with the songs of birds, and rely on ineffective prayer.[28] In her solitude Marianna proves an unlikely fairy queen. Viewing a pleasant house in the valley, she imagines its happiness; it appears as King Charming's palace, just as her cottage from below had appeared as fairyland. She expresses her desire:

> "Oh, if I could but once get to yonder house, and but look upon whoever the happy being is that lives there! A foolish thought: why do I think it? Is it that I live so lonesome, and know nothing?" (17)

The narrator admits that "I, too, know nothing; and, therefore, cannot answer. . . ." (17) According to Richard H. Fogle, a surface interpretation would stress Melville's emphasis that "illusion must yield to hard fact, fancy to observation."[29] Yet Fogle offers little alternative, except to stress that the "imagery of the mountains, infinitely various in its potential relationships, seems to tell us that one vision need not disqualify another; and perhaps it says also that the

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[27]Egbert S. Oliver, ed., The Piazza Tales by Herman Melville (New York: Hendricks House, 1948), p. 229.

[28]Ibid.

[29]Richard Harter Fogle, Melville's Shorter Tales (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1960), p. 91.

comprehensive view is best."[30] Fogle's answer centers around the idea that illusion must yield to a comprehensive view, a theme Melville certainly develops: the narrator must accept the shadow that infects Marianna's world just as he accepts the rainbow that imbues it with beauty.

Nevertheless, questions remain unanswered: Why does communication break down between the narrator and Marianna? Why does he retreat from Marianna and refuse to tell her the truth, that it is he who lives in yonder house? Does he, as William Stein argues, betray Marianna and himself?

The answer appears to lie in Melville's emphasis upon the word "illusion." The signs and symbols of nature and man serve to denote factual elements and to connote emotional value. In her emotional waste land on the mountain Marianna has found meaning for her life both in her dream of happiness in the Prince Charming house in the valley and in her illusory world of shadows that play about her house (one shadow she even names Tray). Moreover, the narrator reaches a new understanding: illusion is a necessity if Marianna is to continue living in her solitude. The semantic drama, therefore, between Marianna and the narrator serves as analogy to this illusion-reality conflict:

> . . . noting, through the fairy-window, a broad shadow stealing on, as cast by some gigantic condor, floating at brooding poise on outstretched wings, I marked how, by its deeper and inclusive dusk, it wiped away into itself all lesser shades of rock or fern.

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[30] Ibid.

"You watch the cloud," said Marianna.

"No, a shadow; a cloud's, no doubt--though that I cannot see. How did you know it? Your eyes are on your work."

"It dusked my work. There, now the cloud is gone, Tray comes back."

"How?"

"The dog, the shaggy dog. At noon, he steals off, of himself, to change his shape--returns, and lies down a while, nigh the door. Don't you see him? His head is turned round at you; though, when you came, he looked before him."

"Your eyes rest but on your work; what do you speak of?"

"By the window, crossing."

"You mean this shaggy shadow--the nigh one? And, yes, now that I mark it, it is not unlike a large, black Newfoundland dog. The invading shadow gone, the invaded one returns. But I do not see what casts it."

"For that, you must go without." (14-15)

This dialogue contains the slow awakening of the narrator to the world of Marianna. He finally sees Tray, recognizing him, in fact, as a Newfoundland dog. He comes to recognize the pervasive illusory world with which she surrounds herself. He leaves her in that condition. He leaves her this peace of mind, at least. Back home on his piazza the narrator remarks, "Yes, the scenery is magical--the illusion so complete" (17). Illusion becomes a settled, necessary part of life also. Having read properly the symbols, he now accepts the song birds: "And Madam Meadow Lark, my prima donna, plays her grand engagement here; and, drinking in her sunrise note, which, Memnon-like, seems struck from the golden window, how far from me the weary face behind it" (17-18). He accepts the illusion, yet he accepts darkness also:

> But, every night, when the curtain falls, truth comes in with darkness. No light shows from the mountain. To and fro I walk the piazza deck, haunted by Marianna's face, and many as real a story. (18)

He now reads the signs with understanding; his communications quest has brought him to a knowledge, though not complete acceptance, of life's dichotomy in an indifferent cosmos. Although he suffers a communication breakdown with Marianna, he has gained new insight that makes him exceptional--he knows and can communicate to others the tragic necessity of life's illusion--reality drama.

Helmbrecht Breinig extends the illusion motif to the writer himself: "Illusion is necessary for the imaginative artist, even though it has to be destroyed in the very works of art themselves. The narrator, from his view-point of the imagination, sees himself as an actor."[31] Breinig argues that truth brought to reality as symbolized by Marianna's face makes it possible for one to write "many as real a story."[32] That is, the narrator, unable to communicate with Marianna, must leave her with her illusion, and that, says Breinig, is what the writer must do with his art. For Breinig that "is one of Melville's bitterest statements about the limitations of man in general and of the creative writer in particular."[33] One may extend the motif to embrace the writer, as does Breinig, or remain on an epistomological level. In either case the problem of communication remains. If the

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[31]Helmbrecht Breinig, "The Destruction of Fairyland: Melville's 'Piazza' in the Tradition of the American Imagination," ELH, XXXV (1968), 280.

[32]Ibid.

[33]Ibid., p. 282.

exceptional man reads correctly the symbols and recognizes the futility yet necessity of illusion, should he retire unto himself or should he attempt to explain to others that there can be no absolute truth for humanity, no truth of fancy, no dependence upon intuitive imagination?

Seemingly, the normal mortal must go down to the sea as an isolato or remain socially comfortable, and ignorant, with a closed mind. In "Bartleby" the lawyer's eyes are opened enough to cause his scrabbling confession toward penitence and a false renewal of faith in mankind, if not in God. In "Benito Cereno" the illusion of Delano remains unshattered while the absolute loss of illusion sends Don Benito into an unbalanced and unnatural isolation that ends in death. In "The Lightning-Rod Man" the peddler believes his illusion so strongly that he marches across the country preaching his fear to each who will listen. In "The Bell-Tower" the mechanician Bannadonna carries his illusion to the limits of pride, attempting unsuccessfully to rival, even outdo, Nature.

"The Encantadas," a story of illusion and illusory islands, demands more detailed analysis. The barrier of human failure to read properly the signs and signals of nature lead ultimately to disaster. Rather than a plush, over-ripe mountain lush with greenery, the narrator in "Sketch First" describes a group of barren isles in the Pacific, an enchanted group because of fleetingness and unreality about their true location to early Spanish explorers. He adds, "In no world

but a fallen one could such lands exist" (183). Consequently, the Encantadas are not the "happy" islands; rather they represent a sullen, ugly symbol that man must understand: "However wavering their place may seem by reason of the currents, they themselves, at least to one upon the shore, appear invariably the same; fixed, cast, glued into the very body of cadaverous death" (185). The quest is not for a reading of fairyland but for a comprehension and understanding of natural symbols. For instance, in this first sketch he introduces the tortoise that functions as the key symbol of the islands:

> . . . apart from their strictly physical features, there is something strangely self-condemned in the appearance of these creatures. Lasting sorrow and penal hopelessness are in no animal form so suppliantly expressed as in theirs; while the thought of their wonderful longevity does not fail to enhance the impression. (186)

Thus the narrator, placed on his barren land with the lumbering tortoise, must read perceptively the symbols of his environment--birds, penquins, fish, deserted isles, and perverted people. The communication must be complete and undistorted.

As established in "The Piazza," he must accept reality with its illusion. In the passage that ends "Sketch First," he describes himself as a social man in the love of brotherhood who nevertheless escapes into daydream:

> Nay, such is the vividness of my memory, or the magic of my fancy, that I know not whether I am not the occasional victim of optical delusion concerning the Gallipagos. For, often in scenes of social merriment, and especially at revels held by candle-light in old-fashioned mansions, so that shadows are thrown into the further recesses of

> an angular and spacious room, making them put on a look of haunted undergrowth of lonely woods, I have drawn the attention of my comrades by my fixed gaze and sudden change of air, as I have seemed to see, slowly emerging from those imagined solitudes, and heavily crawling along the floor, the ghost of a gigantic tortoise, with 'Memento ****' burning in live letters upon his back. (186-187)

The message of this illusive dream is death, memento mori, 'remember that you must die.' The turtle, like the barren isles, serves as symbol of death, a simple enough communication. But the narrator allows no such easy interpretation, warning in "Sketch Second" that even the tortoise, "dark and melancholy as it is upon the back, still possesses a bright side" (188). In "The Piazza" he teases the reader with the hopes of a magic land of the rainbow on the mountain, only to take away that hope. In "Sketch Second" of "The Encantadas" he teases the reader with the dismay of a darkened tortoise in the Pacific, only to display the ambivalence of the tortoise death symbol by turning it on its back:

> Enjoy the bright, keep it turned up perpetually if you can, but be honest, and don't deny the black. Neither should he, who cannot turn the tortoise from its natural position so as to hide the darker and expose its livelier aspect, like a great October pumpkin in the sun, for that cause declare the creature to be one total inky blot. The tortoise is both black and bright. (189)

Rather heavy-handedly the narrator makes his point; as symbols for mankind, the tortoises are victims of "a penal, or malignant, or perhaps a downright diabolical enchanter" (191). Thus Melville answers the genteel tradition and Emersonian transcendentalism. Man, like the tortoise, is prone toward a Sisyphus type labor, for his "crowning curse is [a]

drudging impulse to straight-forwardness in a belittered world" (191). The narrator offers the warning that man too often fails to heed the communicative signs and to look where he steps: "Their stupidity or their resolution was so great, that they never went aside for any impediment" (191). Melville invites our association of this dull creature with such nonperceptive characters as Captain Delano.

Throughout the remaining sketches of "The Encantadas" the narrator describes an object, offering a piece of reality as found in the islands and then allowing it to slide away into the illusory ambivalance of symbol. Communication becomes complex and an open mind is essential. For example, in "Sketch Third" he elaborately describes the layer under layer of bird species that inhabit Rock Rodondo, birds of prey that raise an unholy, dissonant din. Yet with the commotion he hears:

> . . . clear, silver, bugle-like notes unbrokenly falling, like oblique lines of swift-slanting rain in a cascading shower. I gaze far up, and behold a snow-white angelic thing, with one long, lance-like feather thrust out behind. It is the bright, inspiriting chanticleer of ocean, the beauteous bird, from its bestirring whistle of musical invocation, fitly styled the 'Boatswain's Mate.' (197)

In this barren, desolute world, the narrator refuses to allow the death of Romance and Beauty, just as "The Piazza" displays a refusal to allow escape from the shadow.

"Sketch Fifth" again displays the enchantment of the isles that causes communicative difficulty in reading the signs and symbols. The U. S. ship Essex, sighting an enemy ship, almost crashes on the cliffs of Rodondo, recovers in

time to give chase, then sees the ship raise American colours. Not satisfied, the Essex dispatches a cutter, whereupon the strange ship raises British colours and escapes while the Essex lies becalmed. How does one read this event? The narrator states:

> This enigmatic craft--American in the morning, and English in the evening--her sails full of wind in a calm--was never again beheld. An enchanted ship no doubt. So, at least, the sailors swore. (208)

That answer serves as well as any, enchantment and illusion being necessary ingredients of the human condition.

Two separate sketches, the seventh and ninth, develop the tragic stories of two men afflicted with a similar blindness. Both the Creole dog-king and Oberlus misread nature and mistake their barren islands for kingdoms. The Creole is deeded an island from Peru and proclaims himself the "Supreme Lord of the Island, one of the princes of the powers of the earth" (214). For a time he controls his subjects by virtue of his ferocious dog-regiment. Eventually his populace rebels, expels him from the island, and forms a new government labeled by the narrator as Riotocracy, which gloried in having no law but lawlessness (217). In similar fashion, Oberlus, who founds his kingdom upon earth at Hood's Isle, also falls victim to misreading the barren stretch of land:

> The long habit of sole dominion over every object round him, his almost unbroken solitude, his never encountering humanity except on terms of misanthropic independence, or mercantile craftiness, and even such encounters being comparatively but rare; all this must have gradually nourished in him a vast idea of his own importance,

> together with a pure animal sort of scorn for all the rest of the universe. (239)

Like the Creole, Oberlus takes delight in tyranny and cruelty, establishing his own community by abducting sailors from visiting ships and turning them into abject slaves. Eventually his kingdom fails, as it must on this desert isle. Later jailed in Payta, Oberlus is confined in public cells that stand "upon the hot and dusty Plaza, offering to view, through the gratings, their villainous and hopeless inmates, burrowing in all sort of tragic squalor" (246). Picturing a jail island in the middle of the plaza, the narrator recognizes the deplorable condition of Oberlus who had failed to recognize the prison of his Pacific isle or the prison of an illusive private empire he attempted to force wickedly into reality. The communications breakdowns of both Oberlus and the Creole dog-king bring both to ruin.

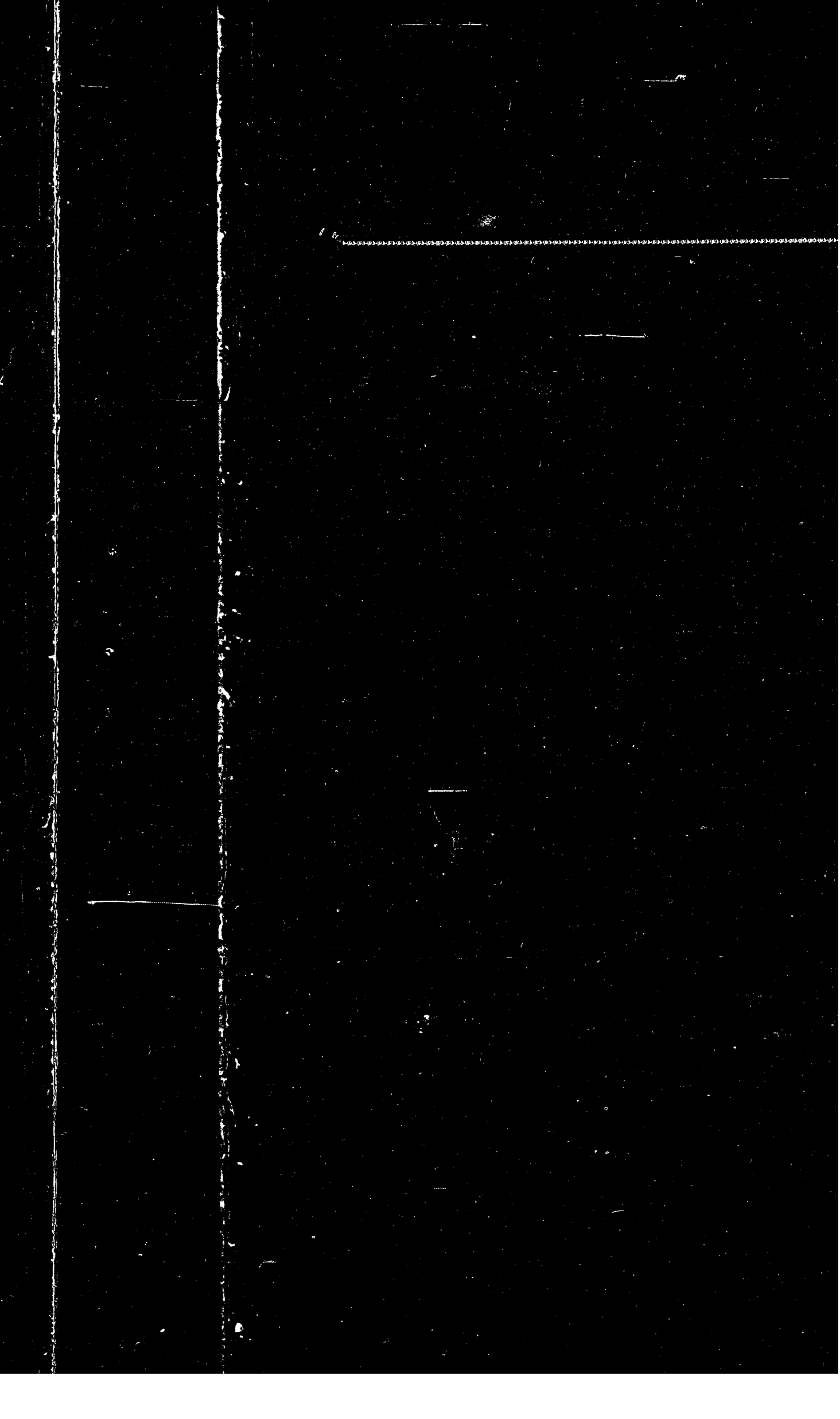
In "Sketch Eighth" the narrator portrays Hunilla, the Chola widow. She has faced the death of a husband and brother, unnamed horrors with men from whaling ships, and near death from thirst and starvation. Yet she complains not and, unlike Oberlus and the Creole, makes no attempt to inflict harm on others.

> She seemed as one who, having experienced the sharpest of mortal pangs, was henceforth content to have all lesser heartstrings riven, one by one. To Hunilla, pain seemed so necessary, that in other beings, though by love and sympathy made her own, was unrepiningly to be borne. A heart of yearning in a frame of steel. A heart of earthly yearning, frozen by the frost which falleth from the sky. (235)

Hunilla, like others in this fallen world of islands, has come to terms with the symbols of her natural prison. Like Agatha searching each day for a letter, so Hunilla searched each day for a sign of hope. Her dream of rescue, perhaps, kept her alive in an environment that offered no comfort. She is thus a counterpart for Marianna of "The Piazza."

The narrator of "The Encantadas" has the wisdom to communicate the stoic beauty of Hunilla to interpose between the blind negativism of the Creole and Oberlus. In effect, he shows again both the dark and bright sides of the tortoise. Like the narrator of "The Piazza," he comprehends the non-linguistic forms of communication, those signs and symbols of nature as found on the remote islands.

Accordingly, individual man must maintain an open mind that enables him to interpret without bias the communication symbols bombarding his mind with "establishment" norms of civilized society and with stark signals of the indifferent natural world. Melville's implied communication message is that man must overcome the barriers to communication. He must avoid hollow articulation, like that of the lawyer in "Bartleby" or Captain Delano in "Benito Cereno". And he must ward off the threat of retreat into silence with its resultant isolation.



CHAPTER IV

ISOLATION AND SILENCE: THE RESULTS OF THE COMMUNICATIONS BREAKDOWN

I

The communication awareness of Melville suggests a flaw in the ordering of the cosmos, a flaw that extends into the nature of man, a flaw which, too often, isolates the individual, especially that person who perceives the indifferent forces of disorder in the universe. Within the environment of his Piazza stories, Melville portrays three sorts of people: (1) exceptional people who maintain a balance of communication and non-communication with their world; (2) establishment figures whose articulation defends only the legality of appearance and the outer substance of things; and (3) the isolated individuals who fall silent and serve as symbols to depict tragic humanity. The latter are the isolatoes, as explained in Moby Dick: "They were nearly all Islanders in the Pequod, Isolatoes too, I call such, not acknowledging the common continent of men, but each Isolato living on a separate continent of his own."[1] The isolatoes presented in The Piazza Tales are Bartleby, Benito Cereno, Marianna in "The Piazza," and Hunilla in "The Encantadas." Yet one wonders if Melville intended Bartleby and the others

[1] Melville, Moby Dick, p. 166.

to be representative of man? Or exceptions? Is the vanquished one, this isolato, Melville's symbol of humanity, as some critics have argued? Or is the isolato his preferred symbol for depicting the tragic consequences of the human condition? Are these people, forced by circumstances into non-communication, most typical of the human condition? A brief review of the role of the establishment figures and the exceptional people as well as an analysis of each isolato and his story may provide clues or give an indication of Melville's intensions.

Melville portrays his establishment figures with the lawyer-narrator in "Bartleby" or Captain Amasa Delano in "Benito Cereno." He develops this type of character, according to Kingsley Widmer, as a "sympathetic but ironic critical analysis of the practical optimist, the blandly benevolent rationalist, as a representative liberal American."[2] The communicative efforts of the lawyer and Delano are with people and events as perceived by a limited conscience--what each man sees as well as the way he sees it. But as Lee Thayer has observed man must not only perceive, he must also conceive the world; and his conception of his world is "both consequence and cause" of external events:

> Our sense-data are partly dependent upon external event-data for their existence. But that which is external to us depends (in any practical or behavioral

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[2]Widmer, "Melville's Radical Resistance: The Method and Meaning of Bartleby," 448.

> sense) upon the extent to which and the manner in which we individually attribute meaning or significance or utility to it. And it is important to note that we cannot purposefully relate ourselves to any part of our environment we cannot conceive of.[3]

In this sense, neither Delano nor the lawyer can relate to the isolato's world which is beyond their limited comprehension.

The lawyer, for instance, represents a plateau of conventional language behavior. According to one critic, he is the keeper of the collective conscience and "custodian of its enduring traditions of love and justice."[4] He avoids any spiritual or emotional entanglement with Bartleby, yet what is known of Bartleby comes by way of the lawyer's distorted communicative efforts. As Norman Springer has said: "All our 'information' about Bartleby comes to us from the mouth of a man who is limited, flawed, with a built-in protective device: his self-esteem. Thus his judgments cannot be the reader's judgments, which grow out of the totality of the story."[5] Any decision about the isolato Bartleby, therefore, must be based upon one's understanding of Melville's ironic use of this limited, biased narrator.

The same conditions hold true for "Benito Cereno" in which the third person narrator views the opening actions through the eyes of Captain Delano. What Delano comprehends

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[3]Thayer, p. 50.

[4]William B. Stein, "Melville's Comedy of Faith," 319.

[5]Norman Springer, 410-18.

and what is communicated to him are not necessarily the "Truth." Delano refuses to get involved in any mental or spiritual affliction. William B. Stein argues that Delano represents "exclusive, rational Protestantism, a part of the brittle force of Christendom."[6] Certainly as a benevolent rationalist of the establishment, Captain Delano occupies a waste land of isolated consciousness because he overvalues his own ego, limits his insight into the affairs of others, and in a tragic manner fails to communicate with Don Benito. He wants peace and order and no nagging suspicions that all is not right in the world:

> Once again he smiled at the phantoms which had mocked him, and felt something like a tinge of remorse, that, by harbouring them even for a moment, he should, by implication, have betrayed an atheist doubt of the ever-watchful Providence above. (139)

At the end of the story Captain Delano has advanced in knowledge only slightly. He knows the details of the mutiny and the tricks of deception played upon him, but his communication with Don Benito is a failure. He does not penetrate beyond the mask in order to locate the essence of the inner man. Thus the representative of the establishment, a basically good man and a representative American, cannot communicate with the isolato.

In contrast, Melville presents his exceptional person as the narrator-character of two stories--"The Piazza" and "The Lightning-Rod Man." In these stories the first person

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[6]Stein, 319.

narration develops forceful characterization that differs from the third person narration of "The Bell-Tower" or the historian-travelogue tone of "The Encantadas." The narrators of "The Piazza" and "The Lightning-Rod Man" represent Melville's concept of the balanced man, one who knows that the meanings and values in this world are not absolute. The establishment figures may merely articulate and the isolatoes may fall into silence, but the judicious man communicates effectively because he properly identifies a problem and wisely recognizes its insolubility. He learns quickly the impossibility of escape to freedom, as in "The Piazza," where his contact with Marianna taught him that man cannot live happily in pure freedom. So his communicative message is clear: Freedom is a burden, for Eden is flawed. Melville's exceptional man thus reaches a level of moral skepticism; he accepts an amoral, ultimate reality as a basis for establishing his own identity and derives his control from a vivid perception that includes both the ugly evil of Babo and a vision of the rainbow. He understands the hollow articulation emanating from closed minds, just as he admits the tragic necessity of illusion. Accordingly, he can leave Marianna in her isolation because he can communicate nothing better to her. Although an exceptional man, he is still human and thus "no more able than a madman to cope with the insentience of the universe."[7]

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[7]Robert D. Spector, "Melville's 'Bartleby' and the Absurd," Nineteenth Century Fiction, XVI (September, 1961), 176.

With his narrator-as-character, Melville advances an epistemology that centers on a man who conditions himself to live in the natural world as it exists both physically and in the mortal psyche. The epistemology carries with it an implied theory of communications that has several levels. First, the exceptional man communicates with a community of fellow human beings, some better and some worse. Second, he knows the difference between articulation and communication. Next, he knows better than to ask--what is truth? Finally, he recognizes that the communication breakdown is an analogue for the illusion-reality conflict. He is aware that any extreme position limits the individual, whether the mouthings of the closed mind or the silence of the isolato, who represents that segment of humanity forced into non-communication.

The isolatoes are Melville's tragic people: Benito Cereno, Bartleby, and others who are forced by circumstances into non-communication. Melville perhaps felt that these secluded souls are most typical of the human condition. They serve as his preferred symbol for depicting the tragic condition of man who is seldom the victor and often the vanquished. Unlike the exceptional people who have insight into the human condition and an ability to communicate it, and unlike the establishment figures who are plentiful but have closed minds or distorted communication, the isolatoes are forced into a tragic situation that brings them insight into the hell and prison of this world, but they lack the ability or the desire to communicate that horror.

The Melville hero, as he confronts 'reality' and the 'self,' seldom manages to blend the rainbow with the cankerous worms. Indeed, he may become absorbed into the evil, as with Bannadonna in "The Bell-Tower" or Babo in "Benito Cereno." Most usually after his awakening, however, he withdraws into his secret self, as with Don Benito, Hunilla, or Bartleby. With these characters the communication breakdown plays a key role; it is an analogue to the isolation itself. Bartleby can say nothing because there is nothing. Hunilla cannot express her grief or describe the horrors endured on the island because there is nobody to understand; she stands alone in the midst of a crowded boat as she lived alone on the island. The isolatoes, therefore, are self-reliant; they find little comfort in Emerson's decree of self-reliance. They have no intuition of the good life but a living awareness of the bad. Milton Stern notes, for instance, that in Melville's time a shift had occurred from "theology and idealism to secularism and an emphasis upon experience" with the result that individual perception carried the day.[8] In short, Melville depicts man in his apocalyptic inner self, not in a role as liberated romantic hero. The isolato is not the Byronic hero crying out against the wrongs of the universe but a modern anti-hero, the stoic, who knows his voice would be lost in the stammerings and murmurings of the multitude.

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[8]Stern, "Melville's Tragic Imagination: The Hero Without a Home," pp. 43-44.

As a result, the nature of the hero in The Piazza Tales is a tragic one, for Melville reduces the human character to negativism (as seen in Bartleby, Hunilla, Benito Cereno, and Marianna). The hero pictures a symbolic loss into awareness of evil and despair, a pattern echoed in Hawthorne and influential on Twain and James, Hemingway and Faulkner. Melville's emphasis lies on the withdrawn man, the imprisoned man, as well as the narrators who must communicate with the isolatoes and, hopefully, perceive properly the human condition. The anti-heroes have nothing to tell--it is left for narrators with limited communicative abilities, Delano or the Wall Street lawyer, to tell the story.

For a moment in his life, the Melvillean hero escapes from a self-centered monomania and, in a moment of true communication with the natural world, sees life as it truly is. Like Ishmael, this isolato hero appears to recognize the need for interdependence of all mortal humanity and the impossibility of its attainment. Seeking community, he is cut off from mankind: Bannadonna by pride, Hunilla by calamity, Don Benito by brutality, Marianna by loneliness, and Bartleby by his psyche. For Melville in the mid-1850's individualism and character, not faith in community, provide strength to endure. A character's own perception provides the meaning of his experience.

II

The narrator of "The Piazza" introduces the reader to

the first isolato of the tales, Marianna. The narrator, intrigued by the "signal as a candle" glistening on the side of Mt. Greylock, journeys in quest of a bright spot in a world of shadows. A hint of darkness, the cankerous Chinese creeper, has pointed forward to an unpleasant discovery by the narrator. As James Baird comments, the Chinese creeper, "imagistically rendered as it is, stands for this same deified, painted Nature visibly beautiful, invisibly repulsive. . . . It is the white sign of the God of all being [and] the God of endless contradiction."[9] Yet the narrator insists on his quest, finding the isolato Marianna:

> Pausing at the threshold, or rather where threshold once had been, I saw, through the open doorway, a lonely girl, sewing at a lonely window. A pale-cheeked girl, and fly-specked window, with wasps about the mended upper panes. (12)

Rather than a fairy queen he has found an isolato weary of both life and of the view from her window. The narrator asks, "And what wearies you of it now?" She replies: "I don't know, but it is not the view, it is Marianna." The reader has his first clue that the ailment of the isolato is not caused by external solitude but derives from an inner, psychic discomfort.

Marianna has glimpsed the eternal ordering of the universe, as indicated in her description of a brother:

> When at evening, fagged out, he did come home, he soon left his bench, poor fellow, for his bed; just as one,

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[9]Baird, 259.

> at last, wearily quits that, too, for still deeper rest. The bench, the bed, the grave. (13)

Slowly the narrator begins to understand that the rainbow only veneers this austere world because to Marianna there is nothing beautiful about her "fairyland."

> Sir, the sun gilds not this roof. It leaked so, brother newly shingled all one side. Did you not see it? The north side, where the sun strikes most on what the rain has wetted. The sun is a good sun; but this roof, it first scorches, and then rots. (14)

Marianna again reveals the eternal cycle at work--creation, preservation, destruction. She displays an epiphany on the cycle of birth, life, and death. The narrator, however, does not fully comprehend her message:

> "Yours are strange fancies, Marianna."
>
> "They but reflect the things."
>
> "Then I should have said, 'These are strange things,' rather than, 'Yours are strange fancies.'"
>
> "As you will"; and took up her sewing.
>
> Something in those quiet words, or in that quiet act, it made me mute again. . . .

Communication falters between the two, but the illusion-reality drama springs to life in this dialogue. As Joel Porte asks, "Is darkness the fault of the imagination or of the material upon which it builds?"[10] Which is strange--the fancy or the things or both? The narrator seeks the answer, but Marianna evades a definitive conclusion, preferring instead to introduce the narrator to the shadows that

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[10]Porte, p. 154.

flicker around the house, including her favorite shadow, Tray.

This isolato Marianna has retired from the world into her secluded self:

> And no doubt you think that, living so lonesome here, knowing nothing, hearing nothing--little, at least, but sound of thunder and the fall of trees--never reading, seldom speaking, yet ever wakeful, this is what gives me my strange thoughts--for so you call them--this weariness and wakefulness together. (16)

The burden of awareness rests heavily upon the isolato; there is no escape in the 'real world, for the narrator asks her, "But, do you not go walk at times? These woods are wide."

> "And lonesome; lonesome, because so wide. Sometimes, 'tis true of afternoons, I go a little way; but soon come back again. Better feel lone by hearth, than rock. The shadows hereabouts I know--those in the woods are strangers." (16)

Marianna only finds comfort in her illusory shadows; yet these are insufficient because she cannot rest, cannot sleep, cannot escape weariness.

> "You have tried the pillow, then?"
> "Yes."
> "And prayer?"
> "Prayer and pillow."
> "Is there no other cure, or charm?"

The charm that the isolato Marianna seeks is in the dream of happiness with the home in the valley: "Oh, if I could but once get to yonder house, and but look upon whoever the happy being is that lives there! A foolish thought: why do I think it? Is it that I live so lonesome, and know nothing?" (17) Marianna knows nothing and everything, as it turns out, for she exposes both the facade of 'reality' and the necessity of

illusion in her life. That is the implied communicative message she offers the narrator who, recognizing her dependence upon dream and fantasy, refuses to break into her isolation. He comprehends the tragic necessity of the illusion-reality drama in each man's life, particularly as expressed so poignantly in Marianna.

Therefore, at the end of the story the narrator is "haunted by Marianna's face" because the isolato can never be fully dismissed. Ronald Mason observes that this story appeals to Melville as corroboration of his belief that "natural beauty was illusory, and that human devotion and human hope were illusory too."[11] The isolato Marianna clings to the illusory world, knowing full well that the next and final stage would be withdrawal into silent reverie. Richard H. Fogle, calling "The Piazza" a familiar essay transmuted into symbol, argues that it concerns "vision, perspective, illusion, and reality."[12] In rather simple terms the story shows that "illusion must yield to hard fact, fancy to observation."[13] Yet Fogle admits such a solution is flat and unjust to the story. May not the narrator's refusal to break down Marianna's illusion justify his role as exceptional man who will not willingly destroy another's world? If so, the tragic necessity

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[11]Ronald Mason, The Spirit Above the Dust: A Study of Herman Melville, (London: John Lehmann, 1951), p. 183.

[12]Fogle, Melville's Shorter Tales, p. 85.

[13]Ibid., p. 91.

of the illusion-reality complex in the bereaved Marianna is a foreshadowing of the isolatoes in the other tales, thereby serving as preface to the other stories.

The isolation of Marianna is echoed tenfold in Bartleby, the self-exiled hero of the next story in this collection. Bartleby mystifies his employer-lawyer, withholding reasons for his isolation, thereby halting any counter-arguments or final answers for the lawyer. Bartleby has broken free of mankind, setting himself adrift as an isolato who prefers no change, who wants to remain in a dead wall reverie. Seemingly, Bartleby has recognized the law office as a cosmic madhouse in which he and the others are prisoners of the absurd universe. Since the cosmos is indifferent, he will be indifferent. Upon reaching that state he gains freedom from dependence upon the lawyer or anyone else. He is free in his isolation and has nothing to tell; thus he falls silent. In the characterization of Bartleby, Melville has given his reader an extreme example of human negativism, thereby portraying what man may become when interpersonal communication fails and human compassion cannot reach him. With Bartleby Melville depicts his extreme example of the isolato, a man who asserts his freedom by choosing not to participate and by isolating himself in his private world of the wall.

Although a good worker, Bartleby is isolated from the beginning by the lawyer: "Still further to a satisfactory arrangement, I procured a high green folding-screen, which

might entirely isolate Bartleby from my sight, though not remove him from my voice" (28). Gradually, Bartleby prefers to do nothing until he becomes a "perpetual sentry in the corner." (33) He carries "a certain unconscious air of pallid . . . haughtiness" about him (41). His isolation has developed slowly but surely. At first he refused to join the community by jointly checking copy with another person. Soon he refuses to perform any errand; next he refuses to copy any longer; finally he refuses to leave his position until, cast into the hallway by a new tenant, Bartleby lives in the halls and stairways until carried by the police to the Tombs. He has slowly but irrevocably removed himself from other men, casting himself upon the ocean of the universe and making only minimal efforts to stay alive, eventually refusing any form of sustenance.

Adrift in life, Bartleby finds little human warmth because the lawyer demonstrates a lack of perceptive compassion; extreme negativism escapes his comprehension. Melville has created in Bartleby a human who represents the ultimate tragic consequence of the human condition when the communication breakdown is severe. His withdrawal becomes complete when the narrator visits him at the Tombs:

> And so I found him there, standing all alone in the quietest of the yards, his face toward a high wall, while all around, from the narrow slits of the jail windows, I thought I saw peering out upon him the eyes of murderers and thieves.
>
> "Bartleby!"
>
> "I know you," he said, without looking around--"and I want nothing to say to you." (61)

Bartleby knows where he is, and he wants nothing from the lawyer.

Bartleby asserts his freedom like no other man. He represents that part of the human condition that prefers not to participate in the civilized world with a civilized mind. He has no need for phatic communication, the social chit-chat of the masses. He dismisses the fact of dependence, turning his back, like Oberlus, upon attempts by the lawyer to befriend or understand him:

> "Will you tell me anything about yourself?"
> "I would prefer not to."
> "But what reasonable objection can you have to speak to me? I feel friendly toward you."
> He did not look at me while I spoke, but kept his glance fixed upon my bust of Cicero, which, as I then sat, was directly behind me, some six inches above my hand.
> "What is your answer, Bartleby?" said I, after waiting a considerable time for a reply, during which his countenance remained immovable, only there was the faintest conceivable tremor of the white attenuated mouth.
> "At present I prefer to give no answer," he said, and retired into his hermitage.

During this exchange, Bartleby is staring at the bust of Cicero, the famous orator. Melville's irony is heavy but his meaning clear: Cicero gained a degree of success or fame by his ability to communicate with others while Bartleby, the modern exile, alienates others and falls into silence. As Tyrus Hillway comments, Bartleby, "given freedom of choice within the limits of human action, preferred simply to choose nothing."[14] The lawyer-narrator even extends an offer of

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[14]Tyrus Hillway, Herman Melville (New Haven: College and Univ. Press, 1963), p. 116.

lodging in his own home, urging the scrivener, "Come, let us start now, right away" (59). But Bartleby replies, "No; at present I would prefer not to make any change at all" (60). He is, as R. W. B. Lewis notes, "Irredeemably an individual."[15] He sits in his hermitage, oblivious to everything but his own peculiar business there.

Bartleby, in his own way, is like Captain Ahab: he establishes his own identity by passive defiance while Ahab does so by active assertion of his will. Bartleby's is a quiet death, Ahab's violent; yet each man at his death is an iconoclastic hero. Speaking on Bartleby's independence, Fogle adds, "Bartleby is an absolutist, an all-or-nothing man."[16] Newton Arvin perhaps says it best: "What Bartleby essentially dramatizes is . . . the bitter metaphysical pathos of the human situation itself; the cosmic irony of the truth that men are at once immitigably interdependent and immitigably forlorn."[17] Thus by asserting his absolute freedom, Bartleby, like Ahab, breaks from interdependent compassion; but that is exactly what Melville wishes to show: the adverse evolution of a man who withdraws from communication with others.

The wall becomes symbolic of Bartleby, a part of his existence. Both Henry A. Murray and Leo Marx equate the wall

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[15]Lewis, Trials of the Word, p. 39.

[16]Fogle, Melville's Shorter Tales, p. 19.

[17]Newton Arvin, Herman Melville (New York: William Sloan Associates, 1950), p. 243.

with the whale of Moby Dick. Murray notes that Ahab tries to thrust through the obstacle while Bartleby accepts the fact that the wall is impregnable and, in turn, accepts his defeat, resigned to hopelessness, an impotent prisoner.[18] Marx, interpreting Bartleby as a writer, argues that "what ultimately killed this writer was not the walls themselves, but the fact that he confused the walls built by men with the wall of human mortality."[19] Extending this idea, one might argue that the wall represents the wall of indifference of the cosmos, not merely his shared humanity. Rather than death or a dead end, might not the wall suggest the implacability of existence itself in the universe? The burden of mortality cannot be lessened in any way; consequently, when Bartleby stands in one of his dead-wall reveries looking upon the brick wall, he is not searching for an answer. Rather, he has arrived at his epiphany with indifference, a wall that demonstrates the isolation of the hero who dies with his head against the cold stones in symbolic foreshadowing of the fate of humanity, that is, a breakdown of interpersonal communications and a loss of human compassion.

Bartleby commits himself to a pattern of negative

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[18]Henry A. Murray, "Bartleby and I," in A Symposium: Bartleby the Scrivener, ed. Howard P. Vincent (Kent: Kent Univ. Press, 1966), p. 16.

[19]Marx, 622.

volitions.[20] As R. W. B. Lewis notes, the story of Bartleby's withdrawal is almost a parable of the "gradual extinction of spirit."[21] Newton Arvin, Charles Hoffman, and Kingsley Widmer all see Bartleby as dramatizing the "irreducibly irrational in human existence."[22] Bartleby, who has learned in the Dead Letter Office that communication is practically impossible, withdraws into sickness unto death. As A. W. Plumstead comments: "Bartleby is like Hunilla. He has lost his sense of time, and he is lost to time. Time cannot touch him, except in death."[23] The lawyer-narrator assumes that Bartleby's position with the Dead Letter Office caused his malady, saying "Dead letters! does it not sound like dead men?" (65) The letters, like the lives of men and especially the prototype Bartleby, "speed to death" (65). That idea, says Maurice Friedman, summarizes "the entire hopeless attempt at human dialogue and communication between Bartleby and his employer and, by the same token, between man and man."[24]

Bartleby, realizing that man is everywhere imprisoned, withdraws into himself rather than attempt to break through

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[20]See, for instance, the article on necessitarianism by Walton R. Patrick, "Melville's 'Bartleby' and the Doctrine of Necessity," American Literature, XLI (1969-70), 39-54.

[21]Lewis, Trials of the Word, p. 45.

[22]This concept is explored thoroughly in Widmer, "The Negative Affirmation," 277.

[23]Plumstead, p. 89.

[24]Maurice Friedman, "Bartleby and the Modern Exile," in A Symposium: Bartleby the Scrivener, ed. Howard P. Vincent (Kent: Kent State Univ. Press, 1966), p. 78.

or climb the wall. He saw, perhaps, what Melville saw--the truth of man's predicament of isolation by physical and psychic forces that threaten every individual consciousness. Bartleby chose to shrink away from the predicament, cease his efforts to communicate, and like Cereno, Hunilla, and Marianna shut himself off from any sense of community where language might possibly bridge the gap between an isolated individual and an impersonal cosmos.

If, therefore, Bartleby represents the isolation that may occur in a one-to-one ralationship between an employer and his scrivener and if Marianna demonstrates how an occasional visitor cannot lessen the burden of isolation, "The Bell-Tower" portrays the isolato in the midst of a crowd. Bannadonna stands in the spotlight of fame because of his architectural skills, and the populace applauds his every move. As his tower rises above the city, "snail-like in pace, but torch or rocket in its pride," Bannadonna gradually isolates himself with pride. Yet he refuses to communicate with the people. After each day he stands on his tower "wrapped in schemes of other and still loftier piles." Even at the holiday of the Tower he is isolated, for he stands alone at the top listening to the people's "combustions of applause" from below. The people of the community, who must share the blame for the breakdown, turn to this mechanician as the hero of their culture. By their actions they force Bannadonna into isolation. W. H. Auden comments:

> If a community so dissolves, the societies, which remain so long as human beings wish to remain alive, must, left to themselves, grow more and more mechanical. And such real individuals as are left must become Ishmaels, "isolatoes, not acknowledging the common continent of men, but each isolato living in a separate continent of his own. . . .[25]

Bannadonna is the isolato; he removes himself from interpersonal communication as demonstrated in his refusal to talk with the magistrates, the representatives of the people. He keeps them locked out of the tower whenever possible. He communicates with others by creating his tower and by standing erect and alone at its apex. Charles Fenton notes that "Melville will now continually remind us of the perils of intellectual and creative pride."[26] In this sense, Bannadonna is linked with Hawthorne's Ethan Brand, but Melville, Fenton adds, extends the pride to surpassing Nature and to having the populace participate in the act.[27] Even human life is not as important as this creation, for Bannadonna kills an inept workman and is absolved by the judge and given absolution by the priest.

Marvin Fisher observes that "Bannadonna is simultaneously a proud creator of lifelike artificial forces and a relentless enemy of the natural life force."[28] By cutting himself

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[25]Auden, p. 35.

[26]Fenton, 222.

[27]Ibid.

[28]Marvin Fisher, "Melville's 'The Bell-Tower'" A Double Thrust," American Quarterly, XVIII (Summer, 1966), 205.

off from communication with the people and by articulating only through his artistic-mechanical skills, Bannadonna has severed himself from the chain of humanity. He goes beyond the life force:

> In short, to solve nature, to steal into her, to intrigue beyond her, to procure someone else to bind her to his hand;--these, one and all, had not been his object; but, asking no favours from any element or any being, of himself, to rival her, outstrip her, and rule her. (268)

In his creation of Talus, the mechanician would make advancement upon all the excellences of God-made creatures, combining these into one iron slave. The result, of course, is that the iron slave, a mechanical monster like too many humans who cannot communicate, smashes the skull of its creator. Afterwards the great bell crumples to the ground, followed a year later by the tower itself. James Baird reads the crumbling tower as "a cultural failure,"[29] but it also depicts the failure of deliberate isolation. The solitude of a man reduces him to negativism, as with Bartleby, or raises him to self-centered supremism, as with Bannadonna. Bannadonna has supremist counterparts in other stories--the Creole dog-king and Oberlus in "The Encantadas" and the Yankee peddler in "The Lightning-Rod Man." Bartleby has his companions of solitude in Marianna, Hunilla, and Don Benito Cereno. These isolatoes each design their own tragedies by withdrawal. Bannadonna, in his pride, withdraws to seek a superhuman perfection and

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[29]Baird, 399.

to triumph over life; he found death instead because he had removed himself from true communication with the community and was merely articulating in a utilitarian fashion.

In "The Lightning-Rod Man" the salesman suffers a self-induced isolation. As Richard Fogle notes, he withdraws from mankind and cowers in solitude while preaching that every man must submit to external power.[30] He purposely separates himself: "The stranger still stood in the exact middle of the cottage, where he had first planted himself" (171). By his actions and language he communicates more than he means to, for with his closed mind he finds life threatening and thinks therefore that life threatens all men. In contrast, the narrator of the tale, who feels no personal threat from the storm raging on the mountainside, knows that his security comes from within, from the flexibility of his mind that can accept both the good and the evil in life, for he tells the salesman: "In thunder as in sunshine, I stand at ease in the hands of my God" (179). He refuses to be intimidated by this false minister.

The salesman, without recognizing it, is the tragic isolato. He isolates himself by his blind faith in only one panacea: "I solemnly warn you, that you had best accept mine, and stand with me in the middle of the room" (172-173). He adds, "Mine is the only true rod" (175). The following statement demonstrates the extent to which the salesman will go for

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[30]Fogle, Melville's Shorter Tales, pp. 56-57.

self-preservation:

> "Briefly, then. I avoid pine-trees, high houses, lonely barns, upland pastures, running water, flocks of cattle and sheep, a crowd of men. If I travel on foot--as to-day--I do not walk fast; if in my buggy, I touch not its back or sides; if on horseback, I dismount and lead the horse. But of all things, I avoid tall men."
>
> "Do I dream? Man avoid man? and in danger-time, too."
>
> "Tall men in a thunder-storm I avoid." (178)

The salesman isolates himself from all the good things in life for the sake of preserving it. Especially he isolates himself from his fellow man. The isolato in this story, then, cowers in fear from divine wrath and, because of fear, cuts himself off from humanity. The narrator, more balanced, knows that his spirit is free even in the midst of predestination: "See, the scroll of the storm is rolled back; the house is unharmed; and in the blue heavens I read in the rainbow, that the Deity will not, of purpose, make war on man's earth" (179).

In his sketches of "The Encantadas," Melville portrays a land that inflicts its own barren isolation. The islands are an extension of the fallen paradise that has the effect, according to Charles Hoffman, of a "mysterious enchantment of an isolated and forgotten world that attracts the misfits of both man and nature."[31] Those forced by circumstances or choice to live here become isolatoes, cut off from the mainstream of human life. R. E. Watters notes that "prolonged

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[31]Hoffman, 422.

isolation either chills the heart or corrupts the mind--or both!"[32] In the ten sketches, the narrator of the tales moves from general portraits of the desolation of the isles to individual portraits of people caught in a labyrinth of solitude.

He opens with a sketch of the isles at large which "have oft drawne many a wandring wight / Into most deathly daunger and distressed plight . . ." (181). The isles are solitary, desolate, and without change because they "know not autumn, and they know not spring . . ." (181). The narrator devotes the entire first sketch to establishing the barrenness and isolation of the islands, these apples of Sodom that remain fixed forever in time and space:

> However wavering their place may seem by reason of the currents, they themselves, at least to one upon the shore, appear invariably the same; fixed, cast, glued into the very body of cadaverous death. (185)

He next introduces the tortoise, his living symbol of the island. It even carries an image of lasting sorrow and penal hopelessness, an image that foreshadows the story of Hunilla in the eighth sketch. In addition to the tortoises, the narrator marks additional isolatoes among the animals on the isles, such as the pelicans, "A pensive race, they stand for hours together without motion" (196). Or the penguins:

> Their bodies are grotesquely misshapen; their bills short; their feet seemingly legless; while the members

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[32]The issue of isolatoes throughout the works of Melville is explored in R. E. Watters, "Melville's 'Isolatoes,'" PMLA, LX (1945), 1138-48.

> at their sides are neither fin, wing, nor arm. And truly neither fish, flesh, nor fowl is the penguin; and an edible, pertaining neither to Carnival nor Lent; without exception the most ambiguous and least lovely creature yet discovered by man. Though dabbling in all three elements, and indeed possessing some rudimental claims to all, the penguin is at home in none. On land it stumps; afloat it sculls; in the air it flops. As if ashamed of her failure, nature keeps this ungainly child hidden away at the ends of the earth, in the Straits of Magellan, and on the abased sea-story of Rodondo. (196)

The narrator is doing more than providing his reader with a travelogue of these barren isles. He establishes at every turn the isolation and negativism of the setting to reinforce his portraits of three individuals--the Creole dog-King, Oberlus, and Hunilla--who are cut off from communication, suffering thereby a chilling of the heart and corruption of the mind.

The narrator's pursuit of the malign, forlorn, and dark, states Kingsley Widmer, allows "no positive resolution, no escape from perplexity."[33] The Creole dog-king of the seventh sketch offers an example. He isolates himself with his "disciplined cavalry company" of large grim dogs. He controls, for a time, his island empire: "Armed to the teeth, the Creole now goes in state, surrounded by his canine janizaries, whose terrific bayings prove quite as serviceable as bayonets in keeping down the surgings of revolt." (215) Amidst the people of his kingdom, the Creole stands alone, isolated by fear of revolt. Eventually of course, the revolt occurs, and

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[33]Kingsley Widmer, "The Perplexity of Melville: Benito Cereno," Studies in Short Fiction, V (Spring, 1968), 225.

he is banished into exile to Peru. The chance to be a king and the isolation of that position corrupted his mind and talents.

The fate of Oberlus is similar. Oberlus deserted at Hood's Isle and severed himself from communication with others, even turning his back upon strangers at first encounters. At times, "like a stealthy bear, he would slink through the withered thickets up the mountains, and refuse to see the human face." (238) The narrator juxtaposes the hermit to the tortoise, and Oberlus "seemed more than degraded to their level, having no desires for a time beyond theirs, unless it were for the stupor brought on by drunkenness" (238). But the isolation has its effect upon Oberlus, chilling his heart and corrupting his mind. He alters dramatically:

> The long habit of sole dominion over every object round him, his almost unbroken solitude, his never encountering humanity except on terms of misanthropic independence, or mercantile craftiness, and even such encounters being comparatively but rare; all this must have gradually nourished in him a vast idea of his own importance, together with a pure animal sort of scorn for all the rest of the universe. (239)

Oberlus, like the Creole dog-king, establishes a kingdom with slaves as subjects. Communication with him completely breaks down, for no passing merchant ship can trust him. Ultimately he leaves the island and is jailed in Payta where he sits in isolation. His deceit is humorously exemplified in a portion of his farewell letter from the island:

> P.S.--Behind the clinkers, nigh the oven, you will find the old fowl. Do not kill it; be patient; I leave

> it setting; if it shall have any chicks, I hereby bequeath them to you, whoever you may be. But don't count your chicks before they are hatched. (245)

The fowl proved to be a starveling rooster. Oberlus is truly the isolato turned bitter and ironically vindictive toward mankind.

The Chola widow, Hunilla, serves as vivid contrast to vile Oberlus and the Creole dog-king. In her oppression and isolation she maintains human dignity. She is a victim of the desert isles caught in a labyrinth of time. She does not turn bitter, although she has cause--the merchant ship fails to return for her, the sea destroys her husband and brother, and the men of two visiting whaling ships afflict unnamed horrors upon her. She has witnessed man's depravity and nature's indifference; consequently, she retires into her secret self so that "crayons, tracing softly melancholy lines, would best depict the mournful image of the dark-damasked Chola widow" (221). Howard Pearce argues that the narrator of this sketch is overly sentimental with such lines as "All hearts bled that grief could be so brave." That element of sentimentality is present, indeed necessary, because the narrator and Melville himself stand in awe, not of Hunilla, but of the necessity of isolation and the tragic consequences of it on the human condition. The narrator states:

> Dire sight it is to see some silken beast long dally with a golden lizard ere she devour. More terrible, to see how feline Fate will sometimes dally with a human soul, and by a nameless magic make it repulse a sane despair with a hope which is but mad. Unwittingly I

> imp this cat-like thing, sporting with the heart of him who reads; for if he feel not he reads in vain. (227)

The narrator admits that he teases the heart of the reader, testing his link in the chain of humanity. It is compassion expressed for this ultimate image of the human condition, this lone ship-wrecked soul clinging to a mad hope. He stands alone. No wonder he cries out: "Humanity, thou strong thing, I worship thee, not in the laurelled victor, but in this vanquished one" (227).

Fortunately, human hope can survive in the isolated victim as demonstrated in Hunilla's continuous search for rescue. She has a hope that brought her a "mysterious presentiment, borne to her . . . by this isle's enchanted air" (229) that the ship of the narrator was in the harbor on a far side of the island:

> "How did you come to cross the isle this morning, then, Hunilla?" said our captain.
> "Senor, something came flitting by me. It touched my cheek, my heart, Senor."
> "What do you say, Hunilla?"
> "I have said, senor, something came through the air."

By her mysterious trust and her journey of haste, Hunilla is rescued, though she is not, perhaps, saved spiritually because she "seemed as one who, having experienced the sharpest of mortal pangs, was henceforth content to have all lesser heart-strings riven, one by one:" (235) she does not meliorate her condition. Melville, as D. H. Lawrence puts it, does not "sentimentalize the ocean and the sea's unfortunates."[34]

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[34]D. H. Lawrence, Studies in Classic American Literature (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1930), p. 193.

He communicates an image of desolation, an image of what man may be reduced to without communication. If anything, he offers a cry of fear and warning rather than sentiment.

The implications he offers throughout the sketches point toward an insistence on his part that we recognize the isolato as he stands unto himself on a fallen isle and as he appears, usually in mask, beside us in our normal endeavors. It is this latter isolato, the one in a mask, that he develops in "Benito Cereno."

Don Benito Cereno, the Spanish aristocrat and captain of the slave ship San Dominick, personifies the isolato who withdraws in horror from life. Reduced to witnessing the brutal slayings of his men and denied the opportunity of expressing the truth to Captain Delano, Don Benito suffers a corruption of the mind and a chilling of the heart far different from Oberlus or the Creole dog-king. Rather than turning bitter and striking out against mankind, Don Benito retires into himself at a monastary where he dies. Unable to communicate at the very time he desperately needs an interpersonal relationship and then later unable to purge himself of his taste of evil, Don Benito withdraws quietly with a whimper.

The story, it must be remembered, offers three views of the tragic affair--the events as seen through the eyes of Delano, the episode as explained by Don Benito in the deposition, and a perspective from the third person narrator. Neither Delano nor Don Benito present the truth, according to R. W. B.

Lewis, who asserts that truth comes finally into view in the tension between the alternate versions.[35] Yet Melville would argue there is no absolute truth--a concept that sets up much of the ambiguity of the story. Cereno falls into isolation because he cannot communicate with Captain Delano who, in turn, cannot penetrate the mask of deceit enforced by Babo.

After Delano's recognition of Babo's evil, his viewpoint is unnecessary and is discarded. As Mary Rohrberger notes, "gone are the shadows and the vapors and the air of unreality."[36] Next comes the deposition by Don Benito. He narrates the events of the San Dominick, but he fails to communicate fully the illness that has chilled his heart. The deposition therefore gives but another version of the incidents, supposedly the true version but one that leaves unanswered questions. Thus the final conversations between Delano and Don Benito throw new light on the Spaniard's character, more so than the previous deposition. He says: "Ah, my dear friend, at those very times when you thought me so morose and ungrateful, nay, when, as you now admit, you half thought me plotting your murder, at those very times my heart was frozen; I could not look at you, thinking of what, both on board this ship and your own, hung, from other hands, over my kind benefactor" (167). Significantly, his heart is frozen, chilled by his isolation and inability to speak. Delano, of course,

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[35]Lewis, Trials of the Word, p. 49.

[36]Rohrberger, 545.

credits Providence with saving his life when his suspicions were so wide of the mark of truth. Don Benito responds:

> "Wide, indeed, you were with me all day; stood with me, sat with me, talked with me, looked at me, ate with me, drank with me; and yet, your last act was to clutch for a monster, not only an innocent man, but the most pitiable of all men. To such degree may malign machinations and deceptions impose. So far may even the best man err, in judging the conduct of one with the recesses of whose condition he is not acquainted." (168)

These comments serve as indication that Don Benito withdraws into isolation not merely because of Babo but also because of his inability to remove the mask and communicate openly and honestly. He is dismayed by the blindness of Delano, who could not penetrate the mask. Rosalie Feltenstein states: "It is this heart-rendering ambiguity, this impossibility of valid judgments except by accident, that helps to destroy Don Benito, much more than any physical pain."[37]

Thus Don Benito's blinking pessimism is gradually uncovered. As one critic points out, it is too simple an interpretation to see Benito as goodness and Delano as genial observer.[38] Don Benito, like the others, is too complex for any quick judgment. E. F. Carlisle, for instance, observes that the Spaniard "thinks he has been overwhelmed by the world's evil and malevolence, but Benito does not understand . . .

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[37]Rosalie Feltenstein, "Melville's 'Benito Cereno,'" American Literature, XIX (November, 1947), 251.

[38]Guy Cardwell, "Melville's Gray Story: Symbols and Meaning in 'Benito Cereno,'" Bucknell Review, VIII (May, 1959), 164.

either."[39] Viewing Babo as a monster changes Benito into a cynic, one who is "weak-witted" and "unheroic" in the eyes of Newton Arvin.[40] As a Spaniard who depends upon his aristocratic state and the doctrine of the church, Don Benito holds to a rather weak crutch, just as the hollow scabbard he wears symbolizes his impotence. As Stanley Williams observes, the state and the church are little help to Benito Cereno in a moment of crisis.[41] Melville is demonstrating, it seems, that Cereno's impotence physically and spiritually characterizes the tragic breakdown in interpersonal communication. He may be something of a martyr-figure, but he is nevertheless a noncommunicative anti-hero.

Don Benito suffers from his weakness of will as much as from the brutality and evil he has witnessed. When Delano asks the Spaniard what has cast such a shadow upon him, Don Benito replies, "The negro." One's first supposition is that Don Benito refers merely to the brutality of Babo. Yet the Negro has also forced Don Benito into a communication breakdown with Delano. Don Benito has recognized in his double, Babo, the elements of his own evil, but he also recognizes the crafty deceit of the human heart that can separate one from personal contact with others. The concept goes beyond Feltenstein's

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[39]Carlisle, 362.

[40]Arvin, p. 240.

[41]Stanley T. Williams, "Follow Your Leader: Melville's 'Benito Cereno,'" Virginia Quarterly Review, XXIII (Winter, 1947), 74.

"Cereno . . . is cut off from all men except those who share his knowledge of the blackness at the center of life."[42] Cereno is cut off by both the mask he wears and by the game of deceit he must play; and the game of deceit chills his heart. Thus Don Benito retires from the world in abject horror at the world's blackness.

Admittedly, he is less than heroic and somewhat blind and dogmatic in labeling Babo as pure evil. Yet the Spanish captain also suggests the modern exile who, stripping away the mask of falseness, discovers that he stands isolated in a lonely ocean of unperceptive, unconcerned mortals. As a consequence, he falls into silence, a stillness that carries a final desperate message from Melville.

III

Without communication man is doomed to silence, a tragedy in itself as expressed in the stories of Bartleby and other isolatoes. The characters must express themselves and, hopefully, complete the communicative act by achieving a degree of understanding with another human being. But a flaw in their articulation results in communication breakdown, a failure that is outward evidence of the larger illusion-reality drama that mystifies most Melville characters. John Seelye comments that silence as well as darkness and whiteness are "tokens of mystery" to Melville because they suggest the

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[42]Feltenstein, 253.

possibility of "ultimate nothingness, the grand hoax of the universe."[43] One critic puts it this way:

> . . . the glass of language is flawed, and as man looks through it back into the past and out into the present, his view is distorted and blurred. Individually and collectively, he is linguistically maladjusted. Not understanding himself, he fails others. Such misunderstandings may lead to fears, anxieties, conflicts, disasters which might have been lessened or prevented if man were able to communicate properly.[44]

If man then cannot communicate effectively, silence becomes a phenomenon that affects a writer seriously. As John Seelye notes, silence appears to become for Melville a correlative of emptiness and the "inexpressible implication of infinitude."[45] In Pierre, his novel of this immediate period, Melville says, "Silence is the only Voice of our God."[46] He had expressed the same concept earlier in Mardi, in which Babbalanja asserts that "truth is in things, and not in words: truth is voiceless; so at least saith old Bardianna."[47] Babbalanja also declares "The last wisdom was dumb." A silence pervades the ocean around Ishmael on the coffin, a stillness follows the

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[43]John D. Seelye, "The Ironic Diagram," in The Recognition of Herman Melville, ed. Hershel Parker (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1967), p. 363.

[44]Kelly Thurman, ed. Semantics (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1960), p. viii.

[45]Seelye, p. 364; cf. Eleanor M. Metcalf, Herman Melville: Cycle and Epicycle (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1953), p. 48.

[46]Herman Melville, Pierre: Or the Ambiguities, ed. Henry A. Murray (New York: Hendricks, Farrar, Straus, 1949), p. 239.

[47]Melville, Mardi, p. 248.

execution of Billy Budd, and Hunilla watches the silent death throes of her brother and husband. An absolute acceptance of silence becomes a necessary condition for man; it lies at the other end of the spectrum from a successful communication with another human being. Winston Weathers submits that the average man often cannot overcome the obstacles to the communications quest and ends in rejection of communication.[48] Silence engulfs one person after another in The Piazza Tales, as these limited mortals reach the ultimate condition.

Marianna of "The Piazza" becomes the first victim and serves as a forecast to the others. Both she and the narrator withdraw into silence because neither can escape the irrevocable tragedy of communication breakdown. In the face of the illusion-reality drama, the narrator withdraws into silence rather than damage the illusion of hope for happiness that Marianna finds in her view of the house in the valley and in her friendship with the shadows. He has attempted to complete his communication quest. Just when he thinks he has arrived, he learns that his vision is illusion, one that coincides with Marianna's. Therefore, he tells her "I, too, know nothing; and, therefore, cannot answer; but, for your sake, Marianna, well could wish that I were that happy one

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[48]Winston Weathers, "A Portrait of the Broken Word," James Joyce Quarterly, I (1964), 31.

of the happy house you dream you see; for then you would behold him now, and, as you say, this weariness might leave you." (17) Silent he leaves her at her golden window with her shadows and her dreams of a better life. Marianna clings to the illusory world while the narrator knows that the next and final state could be an absolute withdrawal into silent reverie, like Bartleby's.

In "Bartleby" there surrounds the title character a language of silence. There was always a "great stillness" about him. A "silent" man, he is pictured as "standing in one of those deadwall reveries of his." Additionally, he is a "fixture," a "millstone," the "forlornest of mankind," and "like the last column of some ruined temple." This rhetoric of silence prevades the entire story, indicating that Bartleby placed himself outside the realm of human communication on any level--normal, private, or even non-verbal. He withdraws into the isolation of his walls, shutting himself off from communication with the establishment figure (the lawyer).[49]

Bartleby wishes to withdraw in peace unto death:

> Strangely huddled at the base of the wall, his knees drawn up, and lying on his side, his head touching the cold stones, I saw the wasted Bartleby. But nothing stirred. I paused; then went close up to him; stooped over, and saw that his dim eyes were open; otherwise he seemed profoundly sleeping. Something prompted me to touch him. I felt his hand, when a tingling shiver ran up my arm and down my spine to my feet. (64)

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[49]Norman Springer argues that Bartleby evidences emotion at the Tombs, indicating that he is not yet dead and expects something from the lawyer, "Bartleby and the Terror of Limitation," 417.

In his withdrawal and death Bartleby is linked by Maurice Friedman with the modern exile and the death of God; and death, says Friedman, "reduces all attempts at communication between persons to permanent silence."[50] That remains the ultimate chilling message of this abnormal man's retreat from life. The narrator lawyer does all the talking and rationalizing; Bartleby, like the ocean, death, time--the cosmos itself--remains silent.

The story "The Bell-Tower" demonstrates the pervasive role of silence, one that extends into the manufactured works of man. Bannadonna attempts the creation of a tower with clock and bell that will rival nature in its beauty and perfection. Yet at the appointed time, the populace that gathered in silence around the base of the tower hears "a dull, mangled sound--naught ringing in it; scarcely audible, indeed, to the outer circles of the people--that dull sound dropped heavily from the belfry" (263). This mangled sound is followed by silence:

> Waiting a few moments, the chief magistrate, commanding silence, hailed the belfry, to know what thing unforeseen had happened there.
> No response.
> He hailed again and yet again.
> All continued hushed. (263-264)

The silence of death has claimed Bannadonna and will soon claim his mechanism and tower. An attempt to ring the bell at Bannadonna's funeral fails. As the pall-bearers enter the

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[50]Friedman, pp. 75-76.

church, a "broken and disastrous sound, like that of some lone Alpine landslide, fell from the tower upon their ears. And then, all was hushed." (270) Bannadonna dies and his creation, the bell, crumples into silence. Finally, the tower itself, due to an earthquake, is overthrown upon the plain:

> . . . its dissolution leaves a mossy mound--last-flung shadow of the perished trunk; never lengthening, never lessening; unsubject to the fleet falsities of the sun; shade immutable, and true gauge which cometh by prostration--so westward from what seems the stump, one steadfast spear of lichened ruin veins the plain. (253)

Unlike the eternal art of a true artist, Bannadonna's art crumples to rubble because he removed himself from true communication. When his utilitarian device fails, all falls into silence.

The world of "The Encantadas" is a barren, silent one. As Bruce Franklin observes, "There are no divine promises; Heaven is as mute and impersonal as the clinkers themselves."[51] The impression that the islands give to a stranger is that of an unimpaired silence and solitude.

> Little but reptile life is here found: tortoises, lizards, immense spiders, snakes, and that strangest anomaly of outlandish nature, the aguano. No voice, no low, no howl is heard; the chief sound of life here is a hiss. (183)

The threat of silence appears threatening to any man that craves brotherhood and an interpersonal communication. Melville implies with these sketches the tragic consequences of non-communication. For him silence plays a valid role in the

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[51] H. Bruce Franklin, "The Island Worlds of Darwin and Melville," Centennial Review, XI (Summer, 1967), 358.

creation of the tragic moment.[52] An example is Hunilla's witnessing the drowning of her brother and husband:

> Before Hunilla's eyes they sank. The real woe of this event passed before her sight as some sham tragedy on the stage. . . . And there, the invisible painter painted to her view the wave-tossed and disjointed raft, its once level logs slantingly upheaved, as raking masts, and the four struggling arms undistinguishable among them; and then all subsided into smooth-flowing creamy waters, slowly drifting the splintered wreck; while first and last, no sound of any sort was heard. Death in a silent picture; a dream of the eye; such vanishing shapes as the mirage shows. (223-224)

Hunilla watches the voiceless deaths at the splintered wreck; the effect upon her is one of silence:

> So instant was the scene, so trance-like its mild pictorial effect, so distant from her blasted bower and her common sense of things, that Hunilla gazed and gazed, nor raised a finger or a wail. But as good to sit thus dumb, in stupor staring on that dumb show, for all that otherwise might be done. (224)

Even in telling of the tragedy, Hunilla simply recounts the event. The narrator recalls that she only showed "her soul's lid, and the strange ciphers thereon engraved; all within, with pride's timidity, was withheld" (225).

There are other nameless horrors at which the narrator repeatedly falls into silence:

> "And now follows-----" (226)
>
> "When Hunilla-----" (227)
>
> "Then when our captain asked whether any whale-boats had-----" (229)

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[52]For a detailed analysis of this concept see Winston Weathers, "An Exemplary Theory of Communication in Modern Literature," in Communication Theory and Research, ed. Lee Thayer (Springfield, Ill.: Charles Thomas, 1967).

He says, "The half shall here remain untold. Those two unnamed events which befell Hunilla on this isle, let them abide between her and her God. In nature, as in law, it may be libellous to speak some truths." (229) In the face of facts, the narrator prefers not to comment on the horror of true events. The facts are more deadly than fiction, for he says, "Events, not books, should be forbid" (226-227). Howard Pearce submits that "the teller, be he Melville or a fictive character, is pointedly leaving in shadow the exact color of the evil. It has grown darker from the beginning of Hunilla's story, finally so dark that humanity can be saved only by a refusal to reveal the truth."[53] That thesis is the same Melvillean idea developed between the narrator and Marianna in "The Piazza," in which the narrator refuses to reveal the truth in order to preserve Marianna. Consequently, the tragic necessity Melville communicates is that the mortal condition invites, at times demands, an eternal silence.

With Hunilla communication falters and fails:

> The oars were plied as confederate feathers of two wings. No one spoke. I looked back upon the beach, and then upon Hunilla, but her face was set in a stern dusky calm. . . .To Hunilla, pain seemed so necessary, that pain in other beings, though by love and sympathy made her own, was unrepiningly to be borne. A heart of yearning in a frame of steel. (234-235)

The Chola widow depicts human endurance in a fallen world.

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[53]Howard D. Pearce, "The Narrator of 'Norfolk Isle and the Chola Widow,'" Studies in Short Fiction, III (Fall, 1965), 59.

With mortal yearnings in a frame of steel, she is reduced to the voice of her heart speaking mournfully and quietly. In a fallen world, Melville implies, that is the ultimate fate of all men--silent yearning.

In "Benito Cereno" the real darkness in the story is that of silence and non-communication. The entire story has carried a subdued tone, muted by the gray haze that covers the ship and Captain Delano's perception. Richard Chase notes several instances of quietness and silence:

> Hatchets clashed sound dull and leaden. The forecastle bell rings "with a dreary grave-yard toll," betokening a flaw. Benito is in a "twilit stage of consciousness." Attempts at communication are vague and "not always distinguishable from nervous starts and twitches."[54]

Repeatedly we witness with Delano the silent and motionless pose of Don Benito. Later, after the rescue, both Cereno and Babo withdraw into an irrevocable silence.

Babo, seeing all was over, uttered no sound. He could not be forced into speaking, for "his aspect seemed to say, since I cannot do deeds, I will not speak words" (169). Stanley Williams comments:

> Babo goes far beyond his needs as a hard-pressed mutineer. He is a dynamic force. Finally, when his course is run, he becomes uninterested. He confesses nothing; like Iago, whom he resembles in other ways, he meets a "voiceless end."[55]

After Babo has been executed, his head, "that hive of subtlety,

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[54]Chase, Herman Melville, p. 151.

[55]Williams, 75.

fixed on a pole in the Plaza, met, unabashed, the gaze of the whites . . ." (170). The result for Babo is silence, but not the end of his communication. His head upon the pole is a sort of "fertile silence" out of which a new awareness may grow among those people who view his steady gaze toward Mount Agonia where Benito Cereno dies three months later.[56]

Don Benito had tried to communicate, desired it above all else, finally in desperation leaping into Delano's boat. Winston Weathers describes this sort of man:

> The individual communicator who travels the downward path starts his journey, of course, with the intention of ascension, not regression. He is travelling to escape the ordinary world. . . .to retreat from the broken world as he recognizes it in the marketplace . . . to escape the broken word of others and the broken word of society from which he hopes to isolate himself.[57]

In his final conversation with Delano, Don Benito attempts to overcome the broken word and miscomprehension of Delano. He admits Delano was woefully wide of the mark in his suspicions:

> . . . you were with me all day; stood with me, sat with me; and yet, your last act was to clutch for a monster, not only an innocent man, but the most pitiable of all men. To such degree may malign machinations and deceptions impose. So far may even the best man err, in judging the conduct of one with the recesses of whose condition he is not acquainted. (169)

Captain Delano and Don Benito reach an impasse: "There was silence, while the moody man sat, slowly and unconciously gathering his mantle about him, as if it were a pall" (169).

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[56]For development of the concept of "fertile silence" in James Joyce, see Weathers, "A Portrait of the Broken Word," 31.

[57]Ibid., 28.

Don Benito, realizing true communication was not possible with Delano or perhaps any other man, gives up trying to speak. As Weathers states, "The only communication that remains is with oneself, a soliloquy in which one's voice speaks softly to one's lonely heart."[58] John Seelye adds this comment:

> The silence and darkness shrouding the deaths of Cereno and Babo are the "truth" of man's condition. Silence, not communication, darkness, not light--these are the thresholds of mystery--and the affairs of men are chiefly characterized by isolation, frustration, and truncation.[59]

As Babo fell into silence and refused to communicate, so did Don Benito follow his leader in silence.

IV

George Steiner calls language a defining mystery of man that offers him identity and historical presence. Steiner adds:

> It is language that severs man from the determination signal codes, from the inarticulacies, from the silences that inhabit the greater part of being. If silence were to come again to a ruined civilization, it would be a two-fold silence, loud and desperate with the remembrance of the Word.[60]

Melville in The Piazza Tales bears witness to his fear that man may revert to silence and that the communication breakdown

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[58] Ibid., 39.

[59] John Seelye, Melville: The Ironic Diagram (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1970), p. 110.

[60] George Steiner, Language and Silence (New York: Atheneum, 1967), p. x.

could become so pervasive that interpersonal relationships would cease. Melville's final view is ultimately seen in terms of the isolato grappling with illusion and reality. As Richard Chase sees it, the isolato is poised between concrete fact in time and an absolute void, between necessity and chance, and between reason and madness.[61] With his preoccupation with the difficulties of articulation and communication, Melville demonstrates that the destruction of an illusion-reality balance results in tragedy. He implies the tragic necessity for each man to withdraw into the silent soliloquy of himself. That is necessary because mankind carries a basic flaw that makes his attempts at true communication abortive from the beginning.

Although his tales are more than communications tragedies, an awareness of articulation breakdowns intensifies each story of The Piazza Tales. Briefly in summary, his theory of communication demonstrates these concepts: (1) every man displays his desire to communicate by striving to overcome his own imperfections and the external barriers of language that prevent perfect communication; (2) some individual men successfully communicate, others merely articulate with hollow substance, and a few tragic individuals reject communication entirely and fall silent. Building upon this theory Melville developed a climax for each of these six tales that features a final communication struggle by a person whose

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[61]Chase, Herman Melville, p. 156.

articulate nature battles against noncommunication. The narrator of "The Piazza" must remain silent to avoid the destruction of Marianna's world. In "Bartleby" the lawyer cannot reconcile his own reactions to the indominable Bartleby. The narrator of "The Lightning-Rod Man" must withstand the verbal cohersion of the fanatical salesman. In "The Bell-Tower" the townspeople must accept a mute bell-tower instead of the anticipated melodious one. As demonstrated in "The Encantadas," especially with Hunilla, mankind must at times overcome silent isolation by heroic strength of will. In "Benito Cereno" the climax is twofold because Don Benito cannot articulate the truth and Captain Delano fails to comprehend the signals sent his way.

Therefore, Melville's communication theory should be included in any discussion of his philosophy of art and of the world. As a writer of fiction, he made one last attempt at reaching the mass audience with the publication of The Confidence Man. Upon its poor reception and its failure to communicate with the American masses, he withdrew into a private language of poetry for a select audience, a group of readers who would, hopefully, comprehend his message. In turning from prose, he wrote several volumes of poetry--Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War, John Marr and Other Sailors, Timoleon, and Clarel. Although communications may be doomed for some men, Melville maintained his faith in language as evidenced by his continued production of literature. Although

he portrayed silence as an ultimate condition of man in the characterization of Hunilla, Bartleby, and Don Benito, he could not accept as inevitable the tragedy of silence. Hart Crane in his poem "At Melville's Tomb" records these lines:

> Often beneath the waves, wide from this ledge
> The dice of dead men's bones he saw bequeath
> An embassy. Their numbers as he watched,
> Beat on the dusky shore and were obscured.[62]

At times in his life Melville must have viewed himself as a dead mariner with undelivered messages, but fortunately for his audience, a late but appreciative twentieth century one, he maintained a literary perspective that prevented his own silence.

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[62]Hart Crane, "At Melville's Tomb," The Complete Poems and Selected Letters and Prose of Hart Crane, ed. Brom Weber (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1966), p. 34.

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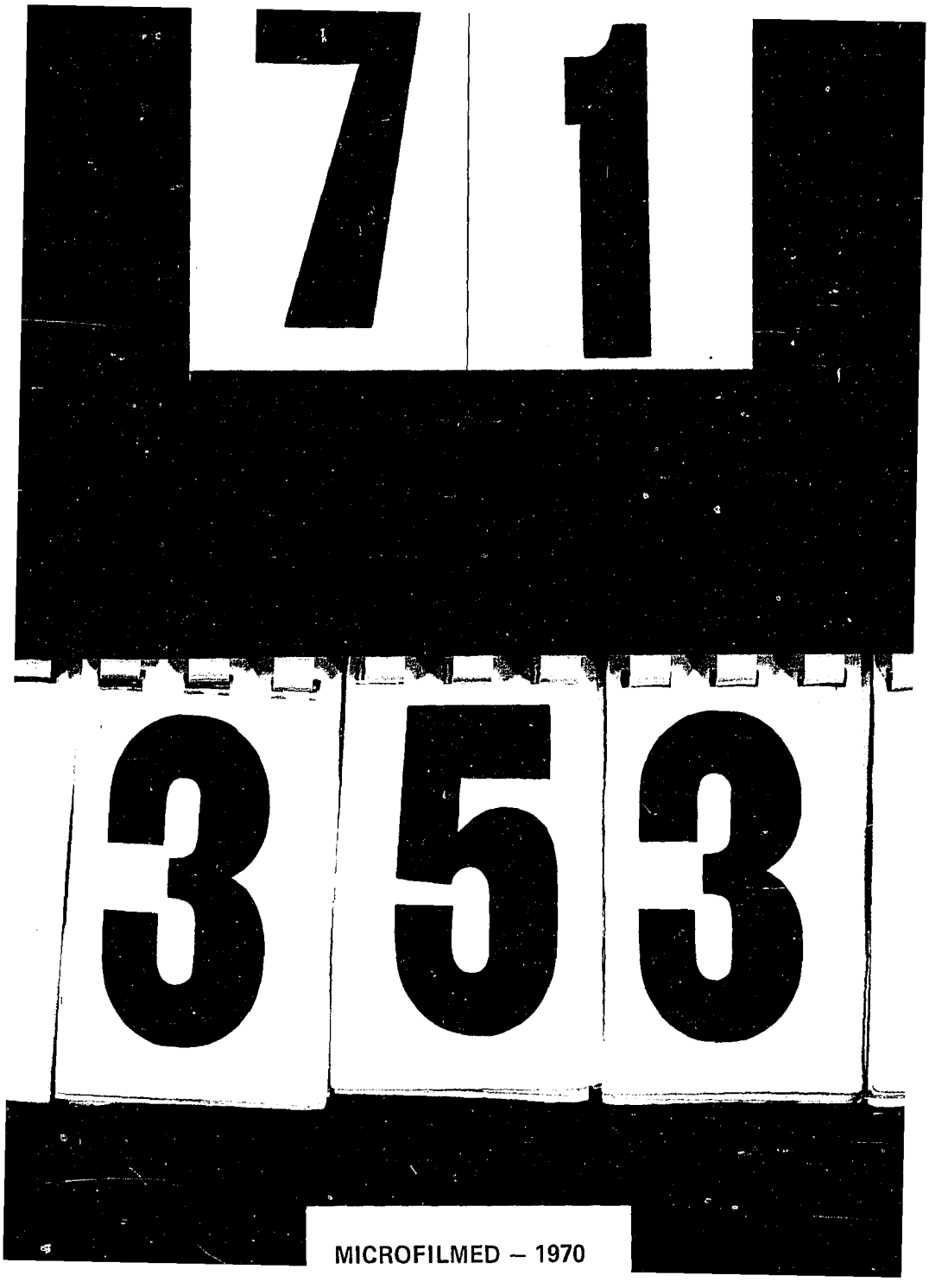
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