

HERMAN MELVILLE'S DESERT PHASE: SYMBOLS OF
ISOLATION IN THE PIAZZA TALES

A THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH
IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE
TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

BY

CAROLYN CAHOON ARCHER, B.A.

DENTON, TEXAS

MAY 1977

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The substance of this work, a true phoenix, came into being because of the extraordinary friendship, guidance, and persuasions of two remarkable people, Dr. Charles Bruce and Dr. Lavon B. Fulwiler. My greatest thanks belong to Dr. Bruce, who found unlimited hours to work with me at my convenience rather than his own. I own an equal debt of gratitude to Dr. Fulwiler whose personal letters through three years of my indecision brought me back to a long abandoned endeavor. This thesis has been completed only through the generous and tireless efforts of these two and of Dr. Dean Bishop, who reviewed this work through days of enormous responsibilities.

My personal expression of gratitude is given to my husband, Bruce Raymond Archer, whose constant encouragements have made this work and my return to school possible. The essence of this thesis and the inspiration of its conception belong to him, for whom isolation has a very special meaning.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii
INTRODUCTION.	1
Chapter	
I. CAPE HORN.	7
A Symbol of the Isolating Experience Melville's Childhood His Sea-faring Days His Initial Literary Success His Pittsfield Years Devastating Critical Assaults Futile Literary Endeavors Melville's Insanity Final Statements The Long-sought Security Later Writings	
II. THE PIAZZA	27
A Symbol of the Unifying Theme of Isolation Melville's Use of Artistic Device Melville As Symbolist The Contrasting Polarity of Two Symbolic Worlds The Quest Motif: An In-land Voyage to Fairyland The Truth of the Mountain: Isolation The Narrator's Return to the Piazza The Symbol of the Piazza in the Other <u>Piazza Tales</u>	
III. THE MOUNTAIN	55
A Symbol of Melville's Isolation from God Melville's Religious Despair The Knot As a Symbol of the God That Binds A Distorted Image of God	

Contrast: Religious Affirmation in
"The Lightning-Rod Man"
Conclusion: A Statement of the Problem
in "The Bell-Tower"

IV. THE WALL 92

A Symbol of Melville's Isolation
from Society
His Dislike for the Masses
The Failure of Social Institutions to
Improve Social Conditions
Slavery
The Church
Civilization
Melville's Disdain of Literary Criticism

CONCLUSION. 114

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY 120

INTRODUCTION

To the devotee of Herman Melville, the prosaic, aged, and barren images of his post-meridian fictions are as intriguing as the vibrant, green, and fertile symbols of his earliest writings. Much of the power, beauty, and appeal of the Piazza Tales, Melville's one collection of short stories, emanates from the graphic chiaroscuro of its forlornly painted images. The symbolism of decay in references to "Abandoned cemeteries of long ago, old cities by piecemeal tumbling to their ruin"; tortoises "black as widower's weeds" with "furry greenness mantling . . . their shattered shells"; the sea, gray "like waved lead that has cooled and set in the smelter's mould"; and isles "like split Syrian gourds left withering in the sun, . . . cracked by an everlasting drought beneath a torrid sky"¹ enhances his tales with an aura of hopelessness characteristic of the works which follow Moby Dick.

When "the potency of sea-symbolism deserted him and gave place to the cracked parched imageries of waste and desolation,"² Melville entered the desert phase of his

¹Herman Melville, Piazza Tales, ed. Egbert S. Oliver (New York: Hendricks House, Inc., 1962), pp. 149, 155, 55, 150. All subsequent citations refer to this edition.

²Ronald Mason, The Spirit Above the Dust: A Study of Herman Melville (London: John Lehmann Ltd., 1951), p. 189.

literary career. Unlike Poe and Hawthorne in many respects,

Melville was at one with them in the conviction they all shared, . . . that "objects gross" are only provisionally real, and that the eventual reality is the "unseen soul" they embody.³

Transcendental in his appraisal of life and romantically ideal in his interpretation of it, Melville depicted an absence of life which suggested an absence of spiritual hope through the use of bleak symbolism and land settings. By avoiding movement through time and space in his plots and by narrowing the tragic perspectives of his characters, Melville portrayed an emotional despondency and a spiritual sterility which dominate his writings of the 1850s.

Melville's strange preoccupation with death, decay, and desolation, in terms of his literary expression, began with the writing of Pierre. In the creation of a hero capable of destroying his mother, his cousin, his fiancée, and his half sister and then committing suicide, Melville contemplated a unique resolution to a moral dilemma: a tragedy without survivors. Notably, the symbolic rebirth and resurrection of Ishmael do not occur. The fatalistic doubts which torment Pierre persist and intensify through Israel Potter and the Piazza Tales and culminate in the bitter cynicism of The Confidence-Man.

³Newton Arvin, Herman Melville (New York: The Viking Press, 1950), p. 166.

A deeper aspect of the desert phase, the theme of isolation, emerges from Pierre's wildly vengeful actions. In the pursuit of an ambiguous ideal, Pierre willingly severed all of his human relationships. In the resulting chaos, the severance--more than failure to attain his objectives--brought about Pierre's downfall. In each of Melville's books, at least one character is isolated, by accident or volition. The Ishmael motif, "the unhappy fate of the man whom choice or chance has alienated from the human community,"⁴ fascinated Melville throughout his career. In the 1850s, he became increasingly obsessed with the tragic inevitability of human isolation and the pathetic frailty of human interdependence. The inability of human communications to satisfy human needs baffled and appalled him.⁵

Through the medium of symbolism, Melville projects the devastating effects of isolation upon the individual in the Piazza Tales. The piazza itself, the controlling image of the work, is a profound symbol of refuge from the trials, tribulations, and quests of life. Many of the characters in the collection are thrust into isolation; a few choose it as the most desirable way of life. Melville finds compassion for all of them. Within the context of each story, the literal isolation of the characters is but surface to the two

⁴R. E. Watters, "Melville's 'Isolatoos,'" PMLA 60 (December 1945): 1138.

⁵Ibid., pp. 1142-43.

interpretive levels of meaning which Melville pursues: man's isolation from God and from society. Frank Goodman's explanation of "the prime cause of voluntary Ishmaelism"⁶ in The Confidence-Man is equally important to an understanding of isolation in the Piazza Tales:

Misanthropy, springing from the same root with disbelief in religion, is twin with that . . . ; for, set aside materialism, and what is an atheist, but one who does not, or will not, see in the universe a ruling principle of love; and what is a misanthrope, but one who does not, or will not, see in man a ruling principle of kindness?⁷

The Confidence-Man, published in 1857, followed by one year the writing of the introductory sketch "The Piazza." If the bleak locales of the Piazza Tales are peopled with atheists and misanthropes, it is perhaps because Melville himself had lost sight of faith and brotherhood.

The pervasive loneliness and unabated sorrow of his isolated figures assume a singular importance when considered in the perspective of Melville's personal solitude. Nothing speaks more plainly of his lacking fraternity than the dedications of Pierre to Mount Greylock⁸ and Israel Potter to the

⁶Ibid., p. 1147.

⁷Herman Melville, The Confidence-Man (New York: Airmont Publishing Company, Inc., Airmont Classics, 1966), p. 143.

⁸Edgar A. Dryden, Melville's Thematics of Form: The Great Art of Telling the Truth (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1968), p. 118.

Bunker Hill Monument.⁹ Critically and privately maligned in the years following the publication of Pierre, Melville had become increasingly withdrawn, detached, and reticent. With the publication of The Confidence-Man, he completely abandoned his literary career and relinquished all contacts with the public. For the thirty-four impending years of his life, he lived sequestered: the once garrulous, exuberant Melville became a silent, brooding recluse.

As a study in isolation, the Piazza Tales forms a biographic and literary milepost in the development of this major American novelist of the nineteenth century. Written during his bleakest period, at the depths of his despair, the Piazza Tales spans the gap and supplies the missing philosophical link between the mildly pessimistic confusion of Pierre and the total abnegation, the nihilism of The Confidence-Man. This study of the Piazza Tales proposes to delineate Melville's move toward negativism through an explanation of the symbols of isolation. Implicit to the study is an investigation of man's and Melville's complex impersonal relationship with God and with society.

Four major symbols which emerge as controlling themes in the collection will designate the chapters of this thesis: Cape Horn, the Piazza, the Mountain, and the Wall.

⁹Raymond M. Weaver, Herman Melville: Mariner and Mystic (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1968), p. 347.

Chapter I will study Cape Horn as a symbol of the isolating experiences in Melville's life. Chapter II will investigate the Piazza as a symbol of the unifying theme of isolation through an analysis of the introductory sketch and its relationship to the other tales. Chapter III will develop the Mountain as a symbol of man's isolation from God, as established in "The Piazza," through an interpretation of related symbols, allusion, and allegory. Chapter IV will develop the Wall as a symbol of man's isolation from society by examining Melville's repressive symbolic manifestations of slavery, the church, civilization, and literary criticism.

Symbolic isolation in the Piazza Tales is but one facet of an ornately complex myriad of poetic expression. Within the dismally crafted images of a crumbling, fading world, Melville concealed a bleak philosophical statement of man's teleological relevance. As artistic conception, the Piazza Tales is uniquely impressive; yet, it achieves far greater importance when read as an intrinsic explanation of Melville's own interminable solitude. In the symbol of decay of a transient world, Melville left a vivid portrait of the God he rejected and the world he shut out.

CHAPTER I

CAPE HORN

Of the countless memorable realities of Melville's nautical life, the struggle and hardship of rounding Cape Horn held the greatest significance. The immense impression of this critical experience found creative extension in many of his early writings. When Melville verbalized Cape Horn in White-Jacket, one of his most autobiographic novels, he applied a universal dimension to the magnitude of the symbol:

. . . sailor or landsman, there is some sort of a Cape Horn for all. Boys! beware of it; prepare for it in time. Gray-beards! thank God it is passed. And ye lucky livers, to whom, by some rare fatality, your Cape Horns are placid as Lake Lemans, flatter not yourselves that good luck is judgement or discretion; for all the yolk in your eggs, you might have foundered and gone down, had the Spirit of the Cape said the word.¹

As inevitably as Melville's other tragic figures, the characters of the Piazza Tales must each endure an individual Cape Horn. Against a diminished foe--sometimes the blindness of their limited understandings--they brave treachery and narrowly escape disaster. But inherent in their survival is disillusionment.

¹White-Jacket: or the World in a Man-of-War (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1956), p. 114.

In the scope of Melville's fiction, the narrator of "The Piazza" has experienced life and survived. He introspectively alludes to Cape Horn in defending the wisdom of having built his sole piazza on the north side of his house:

But, even in December, this northern piazza does not repel--nipping cold and gusty though it be, and the north wind, like any miller, bolting by the snow, in finest flour--for then, once more, with frosted beard, I pace the sleety deck, weathering Cape Horn (p. 3).

In remembering Cape Horn, the narrator reflects not upon the briefly perilous moments of his former sea-faring life but upon the whole of his difficult past history.

Melville's identification with the narrator is easily made. In 1856, he could look back to the thrills of an arduous, active life and, at the same time, acknowledge the anguish of a trying personal struggle. Like the narrator, Melville was a sailor turned farmer. Consistent to the tale, Melville actually added a piazza to the north side of his farmhouse²--"during the first year of my residence," (p. 2) as the narrator claims. In a letter to Hawthorne dated June 29, 1851, Melville speaks of making repairs on the farm and writing some "shanties of chapters and essays" after the "persuasive season" had revived him from "certain

²Herman Melville to Nathaniel Hawthorne, 29 June 1851, Merrell R. Davis and William H. Gilman, eds., The Letters of Herman Melville (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1960), p. 132.

crotchetty [sic] and over doleful chimearas [sic]." ³ In a similar frame of mind, the narrator of "The Piazza" begins his quest up the mountain in the hope of freeing himself from the "ingrate peevishness of my weary convalescence" (p. 6). The saddened resolution with which the narrator accepts his failures is suggestive of Melville's loss of faith and initiative. The narrator's decision to "stick to the piazza" (p. 15) thinly veils Melville's retirement to a life of seclusion.

Cape Horn is a fitting symbol for the tumultuous past which gave rise to Melville's despair in the 1850s. When he published the Piazza Tales in 1856, Melville had "weathered" much. Julian Hawthorne, in the biography of his father, Nathaniel Hawthorne, wrote a sensitive description of the incredible change in Melville's personality:

Normally he was not a man of noticeable appearance; but when the narrative inspiration was on him, he looked like all the things he was describing--savages, sea-captains, the lovely Fayaway in her canoe, or the terrible Moby Dick himself. There was vivid genius in this man, and he was the strangest being that ever came into our circle. Through all his wild and reckless adventures, of which a small part only got into his fascinating books, he had been unable to rid himself of a Puritan conscience; he afterwards tried to loosen its grip by studying German metaphysics, but in vain. He was restless and disposed to dark hours, and there is reason to suspect that there was in him a vein of insanity. His later writings were incomprehensible.⁴

³Ibid.

⁴Julian Hawthorne, Hawthorne and His Circle (n.p., 1903; reprint ed., Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1968), pp. 33-34.

Julian Hawthorne's judgments of "insanity" and "incomprehensibility"--shared by Melville's critics, reading public, friends, and family--were part of the adversity which Melville faced while writing the Piazza Tales. Yet, apart from the Puritan conscience and metaphysics which Hawthorne notes, Melville was deeply troubled by the alternating promise and disappointment of his life.

Melville had approached writing indirectly. He was born in New York City on August 1, 1819, to Allan and Maria Melville, both of prominent family heritage. As the son of a wealthy importer, Melville had the expectations of education, social position, and financial security. With the untimely death of his father in January 1832, precipitated by the bankruptcy of his father's business, Melville's prospects collapsed. When the subsequent bankruptcy of his oldest brother's business ventures threatened the security of the family, Melville signed on as cabin boy on the St. Lawrence, a trading ship bound for Liverpool. At his return from the four-month voyage, Melville tried unsuccessfully to secure a job which would adequately support his family. Failing in his efforts, Melville shipped out on a whaler, the Acushnet, on January 3, 1841:

Something like the desperation he was later to attribute to Ishmael, the narrator of Moby Dick--a damp, drizzly November of the soul--caused him to join a whaling voyage to the South Pacific, for a

whaler in those days was the last refuge for criminals and castaways.⁵

A few weeks later, as initiation to his sea-faring life, Melville rounded Cape Horn, the most treacherous passage of his sailing days. The event was to leave a marked impression upon his life and within his fiction.

For eighteen months, Melville endured the grim life of a sailor before deserting ship in the Marquesas Islands with Tobias Greene. Together they fled to the interior of the islands, finding refuge with the natives of the Taipi Valley, a cannibal tribe. When the hospitality of the tribe changed to friendly captivity, Melville and Greene escaped from the valley and signed on board the Lucy Ann, an Australian whaler bound for Tahiti.

The voyage of the Lucy Ann proved short-lived. Within days of her sailing, the crew mutinied, refusing to serve the ailing captain and drunken mate in command. Forced into port at Tahiti, the irate captain surrendered his crew to island authorities. Melville and other members of the crew were arrested, tried, and jailed at Papeete for mutiny. But, four weeks later, when the Lucy Ann put out to sea again on October 15, 1842, the charges against the crew were informally dropped.

⁵Leon Howard, Herman Melville (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1961), pp. 6-7.

Melville stayed at Tahiti for several weeks, beachcombing with Long Ghost, the ship's doctor of the Lucy Ann. When he tired of his vagrant existence, Melville signed on board the Charles and Henry, a Nantucket whaler bound for Hawaii. So few whales were seen that on May 2, 1843, the ship anchored in the Hawaiian Islands; Melville, along with most of the crew, was discharged. For three months he worked as a bookkeeper and clerk at a dry goods store in Honolulu.

Despite the peace and tranquility of island life, Melville developed a longing for home. On August 17, 1843, he enlisted in the United States Navy and secured a passage home on the United States, a man-of-war. From Hawaii the ship sailed to Tahiti, the Marquesas Islands, and South America, anchoring at Callao, near Lima, Peru, to take on provisions and enlarge its crew. As conclusion to his South Sea adventures, Melville again endured the perilous pitch of Cape Horn. On October 14, 1844, the United States arrived at Boston. With only fourteen months of service, Melville was mustered out of the Navy.

Within days, Melville returned to his mother's home at Lansingburg, New York. Friends and relatives gathered for hours to hear about the far-away places he had seen. Tales of the islands, the natives, pagan rituals, folklore, whaling, sailors, and shipboard life enthralled his audiences. Encouraged by his family, Melville wrote out the story of his

captivity in the Taipi Valley. Through the advice of a family friend, Thomas Lowe Nichols, Melville published his first novel, Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life, early in 1846.

An eager public responded to the appeal of pagan lore; Melville's romance of the South Seas was an instant success. Fame, prestige, and literary plaudits, coupled with an unexpected financial return, persuaded Melville to write a sequel to the book. In 1847, he published Omoo, an account of his beachcombing in Tahiti. The public's reception of this book was more enthusiastic than the reception of the earlier one.

With two successes behind him, Melville turned seriously to the profession of writing. In the summer of 1847, he moved to New York City to establish a closer contact with his publisher and began writing his third novel, Mardi: and a Voyage Thither. Not since his childhood had Melville lived with such security, confidence, and self-esteem. In August of 1847, he married Elizabeth Shaw, the daughter of Judge Lemuel Shaw of Massachusetts, a long-time friend.

Whether his acceptance of the responsibility of marriage brought on a maturing in Melville's writing or whether his return to serious reading produced the deep philosophical tone of Mardi, the book began as a mild travel narrative and developed into a complex moral allegory: "Mardi could serve

as source book for reconstructing the conflicting faiths and doubts that were sweeping this country at the end of the eighteen-forties."⁶ Much of its complexity can be linked directly to the failure of the European revolutions in 1848; for, like his contemporaries Whitman, Emerson, and Thoreau, Melville had adopted a passionate belief in the "potential magnitude of democratic man."⁷

Melville's anguish over the European situation and his concern with religious truths pervade Mardi in the guise of dreams, voyages, allegory, and satire. When Mardi was published on April 14, 1849, the public was shocked by the confusing work: "To most readers of the day, who doubtless expected another Typee, it was a disappointing performance, bordering on incomprehensibility if not outright lunacy."⁸ Fortunately, perhaps, Melville could not realize that the failure of Mardi was but the lull before the storm. The roar of the tempest, the hurricane of "slanting sleet and hail," and the rushing brutal lash of the swells lay still ahead.

Surprised and injured by the public's reaction, Melville quickly turned back to popular fiction, drawing the

⁶R. O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman (London: Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 378.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Richard Chase, ed., Introduction to Melville: A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962), p. 3.

material for Redburn: His First Voyage from his initial trip to Liverpool. The publication of Redburn in August of 1849 bolstered Melville's floundering reputation, but the book proved to be financially unsuccessful.⁹ Laboring under the enormous responsibility of supporting his family, Melville produced White-Jacket, an account of his tour in the Navy, in the "incredible space of two and a half months." Symptoms of hurry and fatigue are evident throughout the work.¹⁰

Worn by the financial burden which Mardi had imposed and by the physical strain of constant writing, Melville sailed to London in the fall of 1849 to secure better terms for the publication of White-Jacket and to rest from his work. The trip offered a needed respite, and renewed contact with the sea stirred memories of his past travels. Strengthened by the journey, Melville returned home in February of 1850 determined to write about the one part of his experience which remained untapped--the whaling expeditions.

⁹"On February 1, 1848, Melville had overdrawn his account with Harper's to the extent of \$256.03. On December 5, 1848, Harper's advanced Melville \$500; on April 28, 1849, \$300; on July 2, 1849, \$300; on September 14, 1849, \$500." Although Mardi and Redburn both sold well, the deduction of Melville's royalties on February 22, 1850, left him \$733.69 in debt to Harper's." Raymond M. Weaver, Herman Melville: Mariner and Mystic (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1968), p. 273.

¹⁰Newton Arvin, Herman Melville (New York: The Viking Press, 1950), p. 110.

"About the 'whaling voyage'--I am half-way in the work," Melville wrote to Richard Henry Dana in May 1850.¹¹ Evert Duyckinck, Melville's friend and frequent publisher, mentions Melville's work as "mostly done" in a letter dated August 7, 1850.¹² Nevertheless, Melville's whaling novel--the classic Moby Dick--was not completed until late in July 1851. For the pace at which Melville had been writing, seventeen months was an unusually long period of composition.

Much of the delay can be attributed to Melville's friendship with Nathaniel Hawthorne. In the summer of 1850, for economic reasons, Melville had moved his family to Arrowhead, a farm at Pittsfield, Massachusetts, fifty miles from Hawthorne's home at Lenox. In August, Melville and Hawthorne met on an excursion of young literary men to the top of Mt. Greylock. The chance meeting burgeoned into an intimate relationship, furthered primarily by Melville's persistence. Notations in Hawthorne's personal journal between August 1850 and October 1851 and a collection of Melville's letters survive as a record of their closeness.

Melville's glowing review of Hawthorne's Mosses from an Old Manse, written within days of their meeting, reflects

¹¹Herman Melville to Richard Henry Dana, 1 May 1850, Jay Leyda, ed., The Melville Log: A Documentary Life of Herman Melville, 1819-1891 (New York: Gordian Press, 1969), p. 374.

¹²Evert Duyckinck to George Duyckinck, 7 August 1850, Melville Log, p. 385.

the considerable influence of Hawthorne upon the younger man. When Moby Dick was published in July 1851, it was dedicated to Nathaniel Hawthorne: "In-Token of My Admiration for His Genius."¹³ Notably, when Hawthorne departed Lenox in November 1851, for an embassy post in London, much of Melville's creative energy waned.

Uncertainly, the gathering clouds began to brew a squall. Melville's move to Pittsfield had greatly changed his life, and many factors operating upon him in 1850 were interfering with his writing. In a letter to Hawthorne, dated June 1851, Melville recounts the physical hardships of farming:

. . . for some weeks past I have been more busy than you can well imagine,--out of doors,--building and patching and tinkering away in all directions. Besides, I had my crops to get in, . . . and many other things to attend to, all accumulating upon this one particular season. I work myself; and at night my bodily sensations are akin to those I have so often felt before, when a hired man, doing my day's work from sun to sun.¹⁴

Along with the grueling demands of farming, Melville suffered from increased financial pressures and a growing anxiety over his literary failings, as he further states in the letter:

In a week or so, I go to New York, to bury myself in a third-story room, and work and slave on my

¹³Herman Melville, Dedication of Moby Dick; or The Whale (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1851), cited in Melville Log, p. 433.

¹⁴Davis and Gilman, Letters, p. 126.

"Whale" while it is driving through the press. That is the only way I can finish it now,--I am so pulled hither and thither by circumstances. . . . Dollars damn me; and the malicious Devil is forever grinning in upon me, holding the door ajar. My dear Sir, a presentiment is on me,--I shall at last be worn out and perish, like an old nutmeg-grater, grated to pieces by the constant attrition of the wood, What I feel most moved to write, that is banned,--it will not pay. Yet, altogether, write the other way I cannot. So the product is a final hash, and all my books are botches.¹⁵

Among the concerns confronting him, Melville identifies the literary dilemma which Mardi had posed: whether to write from conviction or to write for popular appeal. Conceivably, in the months between August 1850 and July 1851, Melville rewrote much of Moby Dick, coloring in what "most moved" him. Employing a "kind of literary trickery" learned from reading Carlyle, he "edged perilously close to the allegorical style which the public detested."¹⁶ His letters to Hawthorne are filled with great apprehension of its reception.

In spite of Melville's efforts, when Moby Dick was published in July 1851, the critics rose en masse to attack the work, and the fury of the gale was upon him. The bitterest denunciation came from an unsigned review in The Athenaeum, which assailed the novel as

. . . an ill-compounded mixture of romance and matter-of-fact. The idea of a connected and

¹⁵Ibid., p. 128.

¹⁶Tyrus Hillway, Herman Melville (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1963), p. 108.

collected story has obviously visited and abandoned its writer. . . . The style of his tale is in places disfigured by mad (rather than bad) English; and its catastrophe is hastily, weakly, and obscurely managed. . . . Our author must be henceforth numbered in the company of the incorrigibles who . . . constantly summon us to endure monstrosities, carelessness, and other such harrassing manifestations of bad taste as daring or disordered ingenuity can devise. . . . Mr. Melville has to thank himself only if his horrors and his heroics are flung aside by the general reader, as so much trash belonging to the worst school of Bedlam literature¹⁷

Not even the praise of such reviewers as George Ripley, who noted the work "in point of richness and variety of incident, originality of conception, and splendor of description," superior to any of Melville's previous works,¹⁸ could reverse the damages of such caustic critical appraisals.

As the failure of Moby Dick intensified the pressures on Melville, the realization that he had exhausted his supply of sea-lore pushed him to desperation. The dual necessities of earning a steady income and salvaging his literary reputation forced Melville to immediately begin the writing of Pierre. Although in its extraordinary conclusion the most violent of Melville's works, Pierre was intended as "a tale of domestic passion imitating some of the bestsellers then

¹⁷Review of Moby Dick in The Athenaeum: Journal of Literature, Science, and the Fine Arts, 25 October 1851, pp. 1112-13, in Critics on Melville, ed., Thomas J. Rountree (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1972), pp. 22-23.

¹⁸George Ripley, Review of Moby Dick in Harper's New Monthly Magazine 4 (December 1851): 137, *ibid.*, p. 24.

current."¹⁹ But, mid-way in the book, Melville appears to have altered his purpose and written instead a satire of the romantic novel. With its unorthodox theme and dramatic ending, Pierre was certain to be unpopular. At a time when success meant survival, Melville produced his most crushing failure. When Pierre; or the Ambiguities was published in 1852, the critics rallied in retaliation. The American Whig Review impugned the book as "affected in dialect, unnatural in conception, repulsive in plot, and inartistic in construction."²⁰ But more devastating was its attack of the author:

Mr. Melville is a man wholly unfitted for the task of writing wholesome fictions; . . . his fancy is diseased, his morality vitiated, his style nonsensical and ungrammatical, and his characters as far removed from our sympathies . . . as from nature.²¹

In the turbulence of Pierre, Melville very nearly foundered. The critics were unanimous in condemning the work and in questioning the sanity of its author. Important among them was Evert Duyckinck, who had previously reprimanded Melville for the immorality of Moby Dick. In his horror at reading Pierre, Duyckinck concluded that Melville actually had gone mad. Their friendship of many years ended when Duyckinck

¹⁹Hillway, Melville, p. 108.

²⁰George Washington Peck, Review of Pierre in The American Whig Review 16 (November 1852): 446-54, in Critics, p. 27.

²¹Ibid., p. 30.

voiced his belief.²² In attacking the book, various reviewers leveled their assaults on Melville's most vulnerable point--his sanity. However latent the fear, Melville was painfully aware of real insanity in his background. His father had died insane, and his grandfather, Major Thomas Melvill, was notorious for his derangements.²³ Apart from the damage it rendered to Melville's career, Pierre exacted an enormous toll from his health and his nerves.

Public rejection of Pierre posed an actual crisis for Melville. He was no longer free to go to sea; he was neither physically nor mentally able to earn a living as a farmer; he was deeply in debt to his publisher, his creditors, and his father-in-law; he had no other skill but writing and he was failing at it, miserably. When the many tragedies and disillusionments of his life and literary career converged upon him in 1853, Melville turned to writing short stories for Putnam's Monthly Magazine as a means of supporting his family. From 1853 to 1855, Melville published eleven stories and the historical novel Israel Potter in popular magazines. According to Oliver, most were published without credit to the

²²Hillway, Melville, p. 47.

²³Weaver, p. 43.

author, a few under the pseudonym of Salvator Tarnmoor.²⁴
Such was the degree of public animosity.

"We all felt anxious about the strain on his health in the spring of 1853,"²⁵ Elizabeth Melville wrote in her journal. On two other occasions, she wrote of Melville's illness:

In February, 1855, he had his first attack of severe rheumatism--and in the following June, an attack of sciatica. Our neighbor in Pittsfield, Dr. O. W. Holmes, attended and prescribed for him.

In October, 1856, his health being impaired by too close application, he again sailed for London.²⁶

During these dismal years of unrewarding struggle, Melville lapsed physically and mentally to frustration, anxiety, and depression. Through the spring and summer of 1855, he was confined. In June, Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes was called to examine him. To the relief of his family, Melville was declared "not mad"; yet, he suffered the psychoneurotic miseries of his "real or fancied hereditary liability to madness."²⁷ The dark moods, remembered by Julian Hawthorne, became immutable, the silence impenetrable:

²⁴Herman Melville, Piazza Tales, ed. Egbert S. Oliver (New York: Hendricks House, Inc., 1962), p. ix.

²⁵Elizabeth Shaw Melville, Personal Journal, cited by Raymond Weaver, Mariner and Mystic, p. 311.

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 210.

²⁷Arvin, p. 210.

In the interval since Moby Dick, assailed as he had been by specters from within and without, Melville had passed through a prolonged emotional and nervous trial that, at a later period, would promptly have been described as a crack-up, and treated as such.²⁸

Through the months of confinement and sickness--neuralgia, eyestrain, sciatica, dullness and languor of spirit, sleeplessness, and "the terror of nameless, formless dangers impending over him"²⁹--Melville had persisted in writing his short stories and the final prose fiction he would publish in his lifetime, The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade. In the spring of 1856, he collected five of these stories, "Bartleby," "Benito Cereno," "The Lightning-Rod Man," "The Encantadas; or Enchanted Islands," and "The Bell-Tower," into a volume called the Piazza Tales and wrote "The Piazza," his final tale, as an introduction to the work. When noticed, the Piazza Tales was favorably reviewed; but the work attracted little attention. A report drawn up on August 28, 1856, at Melville's request, revealed that four months after its release, the Piazza Tales had not returned the expenses of publication.³⁰

²⁸Ibid., p. 209.

²⁹Ibid., p. 210.

³⁰Merton M. Sealts, "The Publication of Melville's Piazza Tales," Modern Language Notes 59 (January 1944): 58.

In the fall of 1856, Melville set out on a voyage to Europe and the Holy Land endeavoring to regain his health, and at last the storm abated. Even so, he took with him the manuscript of The Confidence-Man, hoping to find a British publisher for the work. After completing his travels and making the necessary publication arrangements, Melville returned home in February 1857. When The Confidence-Man was published in the spring, it sold very little in England or in America. As a bitter statement of Melville's seething anger, hate, and disillusionment, the book was a predictable failure. With The Confidence-Man, Melville's literary career ended. Appropriately, Dix and Edwards, the publisher of Melville's last two books and the owner of Putnam's Monthly Magazine, went out of business in the economic depression of 1857.³¹

How well the thoughts of White-Jacket account for Melville's actual experience in the 1850s:

But how could we reach our long promised homes without encountering Cape Horn? by what possibility avoid it? And though some ships have weathered it without these perils, yet by far the greater part must encounter them. Lucky it is that it comes about midway in the homeward bound passage, so that the sailors have time to prepare for it, and time to recover from it after it is astern.³²

³¹Hillway, Melville, p. 56.

³²White-Jacket, p. 114.

For Melville, there was plenty of time to recover. When he was thirty-eight, his voyage was only halfway done.

From 1857 until 1866, Melville lived on the limited returns of his books, the generosity of his father-in-law, the profits from an unsuccessful lecture circuit, and the income from the sale of *Arrowhead* in 1861. With his health worsening, Melville had decided to move his family away from the harsh Massachusetts winters and return to the less harsh climate of New York City. In 1861, following years of seeking political selection, Melville was appointed to the job of deputy inspector of customs for New York City, a task which he exactingly performed for twenty years.

In the long-sought security afforded by his position, Melville returned to the luxury of writing, choosing poetry as his genre. Two volumes were offered for publication: Battlepieces and Aspects of the War in 1866 and Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land in 1876. Neither received significant public recognition. Through the years, Melville produced two other volumes of poetry which he circulated privately: John Marr and Other Sailors in 1888 and Timoleon in 1891. He continued to write verse and prose until his death in September 1891. It seems strange that many years were to pass before the discovery in 1928 of Melville's final work, the short novel Billy Budd, Foretopman;

this great work, however, serves as a fitting epitaph for its author.

The all-encompassing silence which marked the end of Melville's life had been strangely foreshadowed in the stories of the Piazza Tales. In the persona of the narrator of "The Piazza," Melville had reflected upon the trials and challenges of his life, the Cape Horn of his experience. Inherent to the risks were the potential gains he had sought: prosperity, security, success, and self respect. In accepting his failures, Melville welcomed the retreat which the piazza symbolized--escape from the stormy turmoil of his most trying years. As he slipped gradually into seclusion through the years, Melville found the peace of privacy. At his death, he was completely unknown to the literary world.

CHAPTER II

THE PIAZZA

In his skillful conception of "The Piazza" as a frame setting for the Piazza Tales, Melville created both an impressive short story and a powerful myth of isolation delicately continuous in symbolism. Set in the rural farm lands of Pittsfield, Massachusetts, against the background of the Berkshire Mountains and the foreground of Melville's own Arrowhead, "The Piazza" gives unity to the collection as a common place of narration.¹ Accordingly, the familiarity of the narrator and the mundane and ordinary elements of his disillusioning experience lend credence to the fantastic unreality of the other tales of the collection.

In its dual role of story and frame, "The Piazza" generates philosophic cohesion through the potent symbol of the piazza itself. As the central image of Melville's most visual tale, the piazza provides an actual vantage point and a symbolic focal point for the unfolding story. From the security of the piazza, the narrator relates his tale looking backward to the events of the recent past:

¹Helmbrecht Breinig, "The Destruction of Fairyland: Melville's 'Piazza' in the Tradition of the American Imagination," ELH 35 (June 1968): 268.

When I removed into the country, it was to occupy an old-fashioned farm-house, which had no piazza--a deficiency the more regretted, because . . . the country round about was such a picture . . . (p. 1).

In explaining his original need of a piazza, the narrator identifies himself as an observer of life; and the fanciful terms in which he views the world establish the piazza as a creative extension of his active imagination:

During the first year of my residence, the more leisurely to witness the coronation of Charlemagne (weather permitting, they crown him every sunrise and sunset), I chose me, on the hill-side bank near by, a royal lounge of turf . . . (p. 2). (*Italics mine.*)

Overwhelmed by the beauty of the scene, he determines that "a piazza must be had" (p. 2). It is in remembering the building of the piazza that the narrator recalls the inner story of the tale:

For the Melvillian narrator memory is an imaginative act which makes the present a moment of creative understanding of a past adventure that was experienced initially as an unintelligible and frightening chaos of sensations.²

Physically, the piazza provides the perspective from which the narrator first notes an alluring glimmer of light upon a distant mountain. From the piazza he watches, conjectures, and imagines, as the substance of his discovery, a fairyland: "some haunted ring where fairies dance" (p. 5).

²Edgar A. Dryden, Melville's Thematics of Form: The Great Art of Telling the Truth (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1968), p. 35.

Continually drawn by the appealing vision, he sets out to approach and climb the remote pinnacle. Seeking a happy cottage where happy beings dwell, he finds instead a ruined mountain hut and a "lonely girl, sewing at a lonely window" (p. 10)--the counterpart to his own isolation. Startlingly the mirrored image of his own existence includes the girl's happy illusion of "a far-off, soft, azure world" (p. 10). Central to her vision is a marbled residence glowing in the sunset, a veritable King Charming's palace. In anguished recognition, the narrator acknowledges, "I hardly knew it, though I came from it" (p. 10). Ultimately, it is the whole experience, the circle of events leading back to the piazza which enlightens the narrator to his isolation.

Believing in the tragic isolation which gives meaning to the tale, Melville made use of artistic device rather than argument to prove his premise. "The Piazza" is a masterpiece among Melville's most professional writing:

"The Piazza" concerns vision, perspective, illusion, and reality. Its surface is archly ornate, self-consciously agreeable, sentimentally fanciful. . . . It is nevertheless a fine piece, with a sustaining core of intense life, like a fine picture in a fantastically decorative frame.³

It is Melville's conscious art which perfects the immensely illusive impression. Symbols of isolation, story within a story, otherworld, the fairyland metaphor, illusion versus

³Richard Harter Fogle, Melville's Shorter Tales (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960), p. 85.

reality, the quest motif, pastoral imagery, Biblical and classical allusion, and myth create the dramatic effect of the piece.

In theme and structure, "The Piazza" develops three essential aspects of romance: the introduction of the tale establishes the object of the narrator's desire; the inland voyage to fairyland recounts his struggle to obtain the desired object; his investigation of the mountain reveals the ultimate truth of the object attained--the futility of the narrator's quest and the falseness of his beliefs. Yet, "The Piazza" is paradox; for it is written in the format of romance, using traditional motif and symbol, to purposefully refute the basic precepts of romantic literature--the beauty and benevolence of nature, the reality of a universal good, the transcendence of spirit, and the pleasures of solitude.

In his denial of romantic idealism, Melville adheres strictly to the physical symbolism ascribed by Emerson in his essay on "Nature":

By a few strokes he [the poet] delineates, as on air, the sun, the mountain, the camp, the city, the hero, the maiden, not different from what we know them, but only lifted from the ground and afloat before the eye. He unfixes the land and the sea, makes them revolve around the axis of his primary thought and disposes them anew. Possessed himself by a heroic passion, he uses matter as symbols of it. . . . To him the refractory world is ductile and flexible; he invests

dust and stones with humanity and makes them the words of the Reason.⁴

Writing "The Piazza" during the desert phase of his expression, contemplating the visible decay and ruin of a tragically miserable reality, Melville engendered a masterfully mythic and primeval symbol of reason which few writers have approached.⁵ "His penetration and his power lost nothing" in narrowing his poetic vision to the dimensions of short fiction; rather they gained in "an unusual intensity, a power to isolate his mood in a controlled symbolism the more effective because at last uncluttered with metaphysical argument or irrelevant narrative detail."⁶ In the landscape of his home, from the "dust and stones" of his convictions, Melville created a profoundly human crisis in the classic tension of universal symbol.

Almost as tableau he establishes a perspective for his narrator from the farmhouse to the mountains. The farmhouse--low, wide, and old-fashioned--denotes realism, humility, and the common man in the familiar architectural

⁴Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature," The American Tradition in Literature, 3d ed., edited by Sculley Bradley, Richmond Croom Beatty, and E. Hudson Long (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1962), pp. 1085-86.

⁵Newton Arvin, Herman Melville (New York: The Viking Press, 1950), p. 87.

⁶Ronald Mason, The Spirit Above the Dust: A Study of Herman Melville (London: John Lehmann Ltd., 1951), p. 181.

theory of the nineteenth century.⁷ The mountains, "such a purple prospect . . .--nothing less than Greylock, with all his hills about him," (p. 1) represent the glorious illusion of the romantic ideal: beauty, strength, and imagination; things believed in, hoped for, and dreamed of--a motif firmly fixed in Christian scripture, classic mythology, and Melville's fictional context.⁸ (For example, in Pierre, creative roles are given to Mount Sinai, the "divine mount" of Christ's sermon, and Bunyan's Delectable Mountains.)⁹ The function of the piazza, in Melville's symbol, is to bring together these opposing poles of understanding.

Contrived in Melville's imagination, the piazza approaches the farmhouse and the mountain in magnitude. Significantly, the narrator laments the absence of piazza in the opening of the tale:

a deficiency the more regretted, because not only did I like piazzas, as somehow combining the cozi-ness of in-doors with the freedom of out-doors, . . . but the country round about was such a picture (p. 1).

The building of the piazza, crucial to the storyline of the tale, represents his desire to fuse the two perspectives and comprehend the ideal. The piazza establishes a realm in

⁷V. H. Litman, "The Cottage and the Temple: Melville's Symbolic Use of Architecture," American Quarterly 21 (Fall 1969): 635.

⁸Ibid., pp. 636-37.

⁹Dryden, p. 118.

which the imaginative (out-doors) and the actual (in-doors) can strangely mingle, each contributing something to the narrator's vision of life without nullifying the antithetical properties of the other. The piazza, then, becomes a symbol of perspective, of enlightened awareness.

In Melville's adaptation, the tensions of actual and ideal are manifest in the contrasting polarities of two symbolic worlds. The real world, the world of farm and piazza in which the narrator resides, is tragically isolated; the fairy world which he construes upon the mountain is happily social. Both worlds are viewed from the perspective of the piazza; both are defined in the consciousness of the narrator, filtered by his beliefs and wishes, colored by his imagination.

"Whoever built the house, he builded better than he knew; or else Orion in the zenith flashed down his Damocles's sword to him some starry night, and said, 'Build there,'" (p. 1) asserts the narrator, proudly distinguishing the enchanted site and the special qualities of his seventy-year-old abode. With good-natured irony, he gives to the tale its first double allusion. The contradictory combination of Orion and Damocles' sword is made possible by

the half-jocular tone in which the narrator immediately devaluates most of his extravagant conceits about himself, his place, and the world. . . . While Orion suggests regained power of vision and

spiritual rebirth, Damocles' sword portends danger at the height of success and happiness.¹⁰

The ambivalence of the image reflects the narrator's moral dilemma, giving a divided, uncertain atmosphere to his world. The narrator's excessive imagination, evident in the allusion, contributes to his actual isolation--as he ascertains when commenting upon the strange light from the mountain. To the narrator's perception, the gleam suggests an enchanted cottage; but, voicing this reaction, he is refuted:

But a work-a-day neighbor said, no doubt it was but some old barn--an abandoned one, its broadside beaten in, the acclivity its background. But I, though I had never been there, I knew better (p. 5).

Aesthetically, he lives at odds with his community.

Indulging his preference for fancy and "picture-galleries" (p. 2), and thereby rejecting such drab constituents, he builds a piazza. As a manifestation of creative imagination, the piazza supersedes the farmhouse as symbol of the narrator's domain: in his desire to witness life rather than actively participate, he realizes social isolation. In his selection of a site for the piazza, the narrator's imagination further separates him from common thought and human ties. Having decided to build his piazza to the north, he must tolerate the jeering humiliation of his neighbors:

¹⁰Breinig, p. 278.

No sooner was ground broken, than all the neighborhood, neighbor Dives, in particular, broke, too--
 e north! Winter piazza!
 to watch the Aurora
 p. 3).

enjoys the completed piazza:
 ence, and August comes,"
 asure in his unusual selection,
 he bitterest weather, remem-
 nautical imagery of his more
 full extent of his

swells roll the slant-
 ets of the grass ripple
 ; their beach, and the
 wafted like the spray,
 ins is just the purple
 August noon broods
 calm upon the Line;
 esomeness are so
 the sameness, too,
 ange house, rising
 the world like spying,
 nown sail (pp. 3-4).

human involvement, the nar-
 rator relishes fancy and introspection. Consciously he
 bestows symbolic import upon the objects viewed from the
 piazza. Describing his residence, he gives notice to the
 woods which used to dominate the site of his farmhouse: "Of
 that knit wood, but one survivor stands--an elm, lonely
 through steadfastness" (p. 1). In attributing the human
 quality of loneliness to the solitary tree, the narrator

identifies the elm as a projection of his own self image. For his world is starkly unpeopled.

In the idyllic surroundings of his country home, he lacks even the romantic companionship of nature. Turning to the beauty of the natural world for solace, he is appalled by the unnatural animosity of the elements. Preferring in his present state of mind to watch "a little shower islanded in misty seas of sunshine," (p. 5) he shrinks from thunderstorms

which wrap old Greylock, like a Sinai, till one thinks swart Moses must be climbing among scathed hemlocks there (p. 5). (Italics mine.)

Through the images of dark-skinned Moses and seared hemlocks, he imputes divine wrath and Old Testament vengeance to the thunderstorms.

Discerning clouds as "troops of shadows, an imperial guard, with slow pace and solemn, defiled along the steeps," (p. 6) he rebukes the procession for its malignly willful intervention; for it obscures his vision of the fairy mountain. Blasphemously he interprets an illusive mixture of light and shadow enveloping the mountain as "old wars of Lucifer and Michael," (p. 6) demeaning the significance of the allusion. Terming the interplay as "mirrored sham fights in the sky," (p. 6) he forms "a recurring and pervasive symbol for the inseparable oneness of good and evil."¹¹

¹¹Ibid., p. 272.

Even to the mountains, regal in their presence, the narrator commends a negative will bent upon thwarting his vision. Seemingly, the mountains "play at hide-and-seek" (p. 4) and harbor an "atmosphere otherwise unfavorable for fairy views" (p. 6). As symbol they designate the mystery of nature and man's inability to perceive it.

So far removed is the narrator from the compassion of nature that even a plant growing upon the piazza reflects his disjunction:

I could not bear to look upon a Chinese creeper of my adoption, and which, to my delight, climbing a post of the piazza, had burst out in starry bloom, but now, if you removed the leaves a little, showed millions of strange, cankerous worms, which, feeding upon those blossoms, so shared their blessed hue, as to make it unblest evermore--worms, whose germs had doubtless lurked in the very bulb which, so hopefully, I had planted (p. 6).

Pathetically, the narrator reveals his vain attempt to adopt the plant, defining both his lack of human relationships and the hostility of nature toward his needs. Fittingly, the Chinese creeper symbolizes Melville's understanding of innate depravity--a principle of inherent evil which undermines the optimism of romantic idealism. The discovery of the "cankeraus worms" portends in microcosm a similar revelation of misconception within fairyland, another bulb so hopefully planted. As a physical reality, the plant epitomizes the narrator's total isolation from nature.

Encompassed by an alien solitude, the narrator compensates for his loneliness by creating a fictional affiliation and rapport with great writers, making himself "appear as one of their society."¹² Mingling in the fraternity of Shakespeare, Spenser, and Cervantes, he shares theory, argument, and vicarious action with Don Quixote, Macbeth, Banquo, Titania, Oberon, Captain Cook, and Una on a personal level, confusing the fine distinction between reality and imagination. The richness of imaginative perspective granted to the narrator by these literary contacts and his receptive mind willing to accept fantasy as reality impel his creation of fairyland.

As motif, the fairyland of "The Piazza" is an other-world of romantic idealism. To substantiate the illusory, Melville adopted a literary device used by other American writers before him--the fairyland metaphor. Drawing elements from the genuine *Marchen*, the fairyland metaphor provides a "fairy-tale quality of indefinite temporal-spatial remoteness" in which to convey individual messages of moral, religious, or aesthetic truths.¹³ Washington Irving, the first romantic writer to use the form in an American setting, expanded its potential by implementing the tale as a medium of criticism:

¹²Ibid., p. 275.

¹³Ibid., p. 255.

By using the world of romance as a realm where he could develop his fictional intentions (humor, satire, character portraits, etc.), by making romance carry some meaning beyond its mere entertaining or frisson-creating possibilities, he stands at the beginning of an American tradition.¹⁴

Melville's creation of fairyland in "The Piazza" follows the pattern of Irving's literary innovation. Melville evokes a fairy-tale atmosphere through the narrator's interpretation of his physical surroundings. Appropriately, he distinguishes his piazza as "my poppy-bed" (p. 1). On a "wizard afternoon in autumn--a mad poet's afternoon," (p. 4) he notices the shining image upon the mountain. The perplexing object, visible only under "certain witching conditions of light and shadow," (p. 4) appears most brilliant when the woods are hazed by a smouldering smoke, rumored to have drifted from forest fires burning in Vermont. Amid these bewitching natural elements, as "ominous as Hecate's cauldron," (p. 5) the narrator's fantastic fairy world is born.

As symbol of the romantic ideal the narrator's fairy world emerges in images of sunlight and brilliance: a "small, round, strawberry mole upon the wan cheek of northwestern hills. Signal as a candle. One spot of radiance, where all else was shade" (p. 5). As the narrator's expectations increase, the illusion intensifies to golden imagery--"a golden sparkle in the same spot as before" (p. 5). To the

¹⁴Ibid., p. 259.

imaginative narrator, the glowing image becomes "a golden mountain-window, dazzling like a deep-sea dolphin" (pp. 6-7). Employing, as he so often does, contrasting images of light and darkness, Melville imputes perfection to the golden hue.

In giving substance to luminescence, defining the fairyland of his imagination, the narrator relies upon established symbols of hope which are common to religion, folklore, and human experience:

Fairies there, thought I; remembering that rainbows bring out the blooms, and that, if one can but get to the rainbow's end, his fortune is made in a bag of gold. Yon rainbow's end, would I were there, thought I. . . . whatever it was, viewed through the rainbow's medium, it glowed like the Potosi mine (p. 5).

Phrasing his object as fairyland, rainbow's end, a bag of gold, and the Potosi mine, the narrator purposefully invokes a significance both general and specific, objective and subjective, suggesting variable levels of spiritual and physical aspiration. As religious symbol, token of the covenant given by God to Noah (Gen. 9:12-17), the rainbow distinguishes fairyland as a spiritual ideal. The rainbow confirms man's continued presence on earth in amity with God.¹⁵ The bag of gold, a convention of folklore implying riches and happiness, and Melville's contemporary allusion

¹⁵John L. McKenzie, S. J., Dictionary of the Bible (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Co., 1965), p. 720.

to the Potosi silver mines of Bolivia¹⁶ establish fairyland as a material ideal.

As literary device, the elaborate concept of gold-ness suggests the peace and prosperity of Saturn's Golden Age.¹⁷ The imaginary inhabitants of the charmed domain--fairies, a queen of fairies, or "at any rate, some glad mountain-girl," (p. 7) Una and her lamb--comprise the ideal of a perfectly harmonious society. Significantly, to the narrator's desire, the golden world is peopled. In opposition to his isolation, the lure of a social ideal draws the narrator from his piazza. Unwittingly, his intrinsic love of observation, his perversely creative imagination, and his persistent desire to fill the physical, spiritual, and emotional void with positive realities transform the narrator into a romantic knight errant--an Arthurian knight undertaking a pilgrim's progress.¹⁸

Through the motif of the quest, Melville absolves the dualism of matter and spirit--enigma of the nineteenth century--severing the twin properties for the purposes of

¹⁶Herman Melville, *Piazza Tales*, ed. Egbert S. Oliver (New York: Hendricks House, Inc., 1962), p. 229. Oliver in his explanatory notes identifies this reference to South America and calls for further study of Melville's references to South America.

¹⁷William Bysshe Stein, "Melville's Comedy of Faith," *ELH* 27 (December 1960): 326.

¹⁸Fogle, p. 88.

artistic examination. The inland voyage of "The Piazza" deals primarily with a search for spiritual regeneration, the mountain with physical gratification. Donning the tropical clothing of his past sea-faring adventures, ennobling the landscape with florid allusion, and mildly understating the merit of his intent, the narrator elevates the journey to the stature of moral quest. As a search for the foundations of faith, the narrator's quest enacts an ironic casting off of all religious belief. Seeking spiritual renewal and assurance, he turns skepticism into nihilism.

The exalted purposes of the narrator's journey, countered by a tragic foreknowledge absolute, give to the telling of the experience a curious mixture of pastoral and wasteland imagery. "The atmosphere is artificial pastoral, with enameled flowers and golden flights of birds,"¹⁹ but the setting is decayed. Approaching the mountain's edge, the narrator securely follows "road-side golden-rods, as guide-posts . . . to the golden window" (p. 7). Losing sight of his objective, he encounters "golden flights of yellow birds--pilots, surely, to the golden window" (p. 7). As traditional icons of the passion and redemption of Christ,²⁰ the golden birds precede as guide until the narrator enters a dark woods "banning a dark road, which however dark, led up" (p. 7). Rapidly

¹⁹Ibid., p. 89.

²⁰Stein, p. 326.

turning back to the lighter regions, the golden birds demonstrate the inefficacy of Christianity in the modern world. As a symbol of the mysteries beyond, the dark road draws effectiveness from the emblems of mutability which border it. Passing through a rotten gate, "letting down five mouldering bars--so moistly green, they seemed fished up from some sunken wreck," (p. 7) the narrator finds an old saw mill, "bound down and hushed with vines, that his grating voice no more was heard" (p. 8). Tirelessly, he travels on,

on, by a deep flume clove through snowy marble,
 vernal-tinted, where freshet eddies had, on each
 side, spun out empty chapels in the living rock;
 on, where Jacks-in-the-pulpit, like their Baptist
 namesake, preached but to the wilderness (p. 8).

In its association with symbols of Christianity, the vine-bound mill reflects a dying philosophy, no longer heard. "A cross-grain block, fernbedded," sighted along the way, which "showed where, in forgotten times, man after man had tried to split it, but lost his wedges for his pains," (p. 8) suggests the fate of those who challenge the tenets of the creed. Acknowledging his doubts, the narrator, who equates fairyland to a promised after life, defames the image of heaven. Following a stream, he comes upon "a little ring, where, truly, fairies must have danced, or else some wheel-tire been heated--for all was bare" (p. 8). As oxymoron, the pastoral wasteland mirrors the moral atmosphere of the tale--a clashing ambivalence between faith and doubt, hope and despair.

Symbolically, three trials of faith beset his path, "shadows of the trials and terrors of old romance,"²¹ testing the doctrines of belief which make life possible. As moral snares, they usher in Melville's literary incarnation of the man without confidence and the confidence-man, peddling hoax and fraud aboard a steamboat called Fidele.

As first test along his journey, the narrator confronts literature as a means of finding fairyland. In plotting his way, he looks to the path worn by Edmund Spenser before him. But instantly he rejects Spenser's leadership, for Spenser sought and found virtue in the physical sphere:

How to get to fairy-land, by what road, I did not know; nor could any one inform me; not even one Edmund Spenser, who had been there--so he wrote me (p. 7).

As a symbol of fictional authority, Spenser represents the wisdom of poet, scholar, sage, and philosopher. Denying the validity of Spenser's truths, the narrator approaches the next trial of his quest--the sapience of ancient faiths.

Presently, a "wigged old Aries" joins his trek. Assuming the lead, the ram guides him past "dim-clustering Pleiades and Hyades, of small forget-me-nots" (p. 7). For a time the narrator follows, until, approaching a dark woods, he observes, "Aries, renouncing me now for some lost soul,

²¹vida K. Brack and O. M. Brack, Jr., "Weathering Cape Horn: Survivors in Melville's Minor Short Fiction," Arizona Quarterly 28 (Spring 1972): 71.

wheeled, and went his wiser way. Forbidding and forbidden ground--to him" (p. 8). As symbols of Greek mythology, Pleiades, Hyades, and Aries fall back, deferring to an encroaching Christianity²²--the narrator's third conflict.

Managing the grade, the narrator arrives at a hanging apple orchard. Symbolically, he reenacts the fall of man:

My horse hitched low his head. Red apples
rolled before him; Eve's apples; seek-no-further.
He tasted one, I another; it tasted of the ground
(p. 8).

To the bitter symbol of materiality Melville sacrifices the Christian concept of life eternal. Not sweetness but rot rewards his inquiry. The apples, a symbol which he corrupts to Apples of Sodom (p. 152) in "The Encantadas," reflect the finality of death.

In his denial of known theology, the narrator emulates Redburn's plight when discovering the invalidity of his guidebook of London:

The book on which I had so much relied; the book
in the old morocco cover; . . . the book full of
fine old family associations; . . . this precious
book was next to useless. Yes, the thing that had
guided the father could not guide the son.²³

With shattered faith, Redburn passively accepts the consequence:

²²Breinig, p. 279.

²³Herman Melville, Redburn: His First Voyage (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., Doubleday Anchor Books, 1957), p. 150.

Every age makes its own guide-books, and the old ones are used for waste paper. But there is one Holy Guide-Book, Wellingborough, that will never lead you astray, if you but follow it aright; and some noble monuments that remain, though the pyramids crumble.²⁴

As a continuum of Melville's thought, the guidebook image re-emerges in "The Piazza"; yet, Redburn's consolation--Melville's confidence of faith seven years before--has been abandoned in the interim. The narrator discovers the Bible itself to be another guidebook of past ages.

Undaunted, he pushes on beyond the precepts of orthodoxy: "For the way now lay where path was none, and none might go but by himself, and only go by daring" (p. 8). The natural world effectively warns and endeavors to forestall his revelation of infinite mysteries. But doggedly he trods,

Through blackberry brakes that tried to pluck me back, though I but strained towards fruitless growths of mountain-laurel; up slippery steepes to barren heights, where stood none to welcome (p. 8). (Italics mine.)

In the hollow imagery of futile struggle, the narrator conveys his finding--a dark abyss, fathomless and godless.

For the narrator, the truth of the mountain is a religious awakening. In monastic imagery he describes the ruined mountain cottage:

a little, low-storied, grayish cottage, capped, nun-like, with a peaked roof.

²⁴Ibid., p. 151.

On one slope, the roof was deeply weather-stained, and nigh the turfy eaves-trough, all velvet-napped; no doubt the snail-monks founded mossy priories there (p. 9). (*Italics mine.*)

As in the world below the mountain, the symbol is determined by the narrative.²⁵ To the narrator the mossy cottage yields a tragic truth, deposing Christianity as a passing vanquished creed, replacing it with nothing. For the mountain girl Marianna, sequestered without cause, the imagery reveals a wasted physical existence.

Symbolically the mountain forms a dichotomous polarity to the narrator's golden illusions. In pursuit of fairies, he finds isolated orphans--a brother absent by necessity, a sister stranded and alone:

Long had they been orphans, and now sole inhabitants of the sole house upon the mountain (p. 10).

Fulfilling Melville's Ishmael motif, they lack even the parentage affiliated with the cottage, as Marianna notes: "They went West and are long dead, they say, who built it" (p. 12). As fairy cottage transforms to shabby hut, the golden window emitting a golden sparkle is realized as a "fly-specked window, with wasps about the mended upper panes" (p. 10). The golden glow itself reflects from a roof newly shingled on the north side of the cottage, "where the sun strikes most on what the rain has wetted. The sun is a good

²⁵Breinig, p. 275.

sun," asserts Marianna, "but this roof, it first scorches, and then rots" (p. 12).

So parallel are the piazza mountain worlds that Marianna's illusion of King Charming's palace includes the gilding of the sunset. Contrary to its nature as a life-giving force, the "hermit-sun" (p. 5) devastates the material world. The narrator's lands are visited by "sun-burnt painters painting there" (p. 1). Marianna's sole companion, a shadow resembling a dog, is blotted out at noon by the menacing sun.

In her solitude, Marianna, too, lacks the companionship of nature. Her life experience consists only of "the sound of thunder and the fall of trees" (p. 13). Surrounded by nature, she stays within the cottage: the woods are wide "and lonesome; lonesome, because so wide" (p. 14). Bothered by the silence of the woods, the narrator asks of singing birds and boys a-berrying. Paling to her response of "Birds, I seldom hear; boys never," (p. 13) the narrator acknowledges a detachment and disinvolvement more frightening than his own.

Endeavoring to ease her troubled spirit, the narrator offers a philosophical panacea which he has himself rejected: "I have heard that, for this wakeful weariness, to say one's prayers, and then lay one's head upon a fresh hop pillow---" (p. 14). Abruptly, the prayer and pillow, as symbols of

spiritual and physical consolation, are renounced by the girl's tragic gesture:

Through the fairy window, she pointed down the steep to a small garden patch . . . where, side by side, some feet apart, nipped and puny, two hop-vines climbed two poles, and, gaining their tip-ends, would have then joined over in an upward clasp, but the baffled shoots, groping awhile in empty air, trailed back whence they sprung (p. 14).

As symbol of her total isolation, the hop-vines reveal a dual theme of sexual unrelatedness and Marianna's exclusion from relevant, productive experience, and, as a female figure, from procreation.²⁶ For Marianna's illusion is that of the possible reality, the reality of home and family. Her lack of love and physical involvement is further symbolized by the chimney of her cottage, the center of domesticity, blocked with snow.²⁷

In presupposing Marianna to be Una, the narrator gave a dual implication to his quest: Una is both the creative principle inherent in the Trinity, *prima materia*, out of which the cosmos rose²⁸ and the princess of Truth in The Faerie Queen.²⁹ Ironically, the narrator finds what he seeks,

²⁶Stein, p. 331.

²⁷Litman, p. 632.

²⁸Stein, p. 324.

²⁹R. Bruce Bickley, Jr., "The Minor Fiction of Hawthorne and Melville," American Transcendental Quarterly 14 (Spring 1972): 150.

the truth of the mountain; but Una is Marianna--Tennyson's Mariana, the saddest and loneliest figure of poetry.³⁰

The revelation of Marianna as a material ideal gives a final symbolic meaning to Melville's golden imagery of light. From their separate geographic perspectives, the narrator and Marianna each views a gilded illusion: he looks to the west for the hope of death; she looks to the east for the hope of birth, the continuance of life, and the renewal of spring. With the narrator's journey to the top of the mountain, the life cycle imagery of the sun is completed, for the inland voyage begins at early dawn and concludes in the darkness of sunset of a single day. The destructive reality of the sun undermines the hope of each illusion.

The ironic twist with which Melville transposes the symbols of actual and ideal is typically Melvillean. As a romantic, he demonstrates rather than claims the basis of his feelings, for his objective is the destruction of romantic idealism. The simplicity of the theme, Melville's heavy reliance upon fundamental symbols, and the universal dimension of the narrator's revelations, based upon the slight actions of the plot, elevate "The Piazza" to the level of myth. The disillusioning experience of the narrator becomes an archetype for the experiences of the other characters of the Piazza Tales.

³⁰Fogle, p. 89.

Even in his retelling, the agony of recollection forces the narrator to break away from the tragic discovery. Interrupting his narrative with a single word, he jars away the bitter reality of the lonely, isolated girl:

--Enough. Launching my yawl no more for fairy-land, I stick to the piazza. It is my box-royal; and this amphitheatre, my theatre of San Carlo. Yes, the scenery is magical--the illusion so complete (p. 15).

Recoiling from the shock, he again withdraws to the security of home and the piazza. The eagerness with which he retreats to illusion reiterates Marianna's tragic admonition: "Better feel lone by hearth, than rock. The shadows hereabouts I know--those in the woods are strangers" (p. 14).

It is the narrator's return to the piazza which forms the final meaning of the symbol. In its final usage, the piazza represents total isolation and withdrawal from life. It symbolizes the individual in isolation because he has chosen to move out of the mainstream of human activity. The man of the piazza actively avoids the quests in life. He seeks refuge and seclusion from the dangers of pursuit. He lives without ambition, goal, or hope in the religious sense. Having once comprehended the falseness of his illusion, the narrator perceives that the wonder of appearance is no longer possible. Beyond the enchantment of the vision lies a tangible reality:

But, every night, when the curtain falls, truth comes in with darkness. No light shows from the mountain. To and fro I walk the piazza deck, haunted by Marianna's face, and many as real a story (p. 15).

For the characters of the collection--as human in depiction as the narrator of "The Piazza"--the closing lines of the tale tragically forbode a similar disillusionment. Physically or spiritually at least one character in each tale confronts the hazards of isolation. Each is depicted without family, friend, or confidant. Some of the characters experience exposure to the truth and grapple with the repercussions.

Graphically, the image of the piazza appears in each of the Piazza Tales, a haunting symbol of human isolation. No character more closely defines Melville's meaning of the piazza than the lawyer-narrator of "Bartleby":

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. All who know me, consider me an eminently safe man (p. 16).

By choice he lives in a world of walls on Wall Street. Amasa Delano, the sea captain protagonist of "Benito Cereno," encounteres isolation through the tragedy of another person. Trapped friendless and alone aboard an ill-fated slave ship, Delano longs for the security of his own ship, the Bachelor's Delight, a symbol of his philosophic separation from the

iniquity of the San Dominick. Most fully detached from the events of his narrative is the sailor-narrator of "The Encantadas" who recalls the sketches of his tale from atop Rock Rodondo, a geographic point separated from the physical drama of the islands. His ascension of the rock, possible only in the imagination, provides the reader with a proper perspective:

To go up into a high stone tower is not only a very fine thing in itself, but the very best mode of gaining a comprehensive view of the region round about. It is all the better if this tower stand solitary and alone . . . or else be sole survivor of some perished castle (p. 158).

Melville again employs the tower as piazza in "The Bell-Tower." Shunning public contact, the demonic hero Bannadonna works isolated and alone, secreted within the architectural masterpiece of his career, the most glorious bell tower of the Italian Renaissance. So, too, does the narrator of "The Lightning-Rod Man" live apart from his social community, sequestered in the Acroceraunian hills. As isolated figures, the characters of the collection fully experience both the illusion and the tragedy of Melville's introductory tale.

Thematically the Piazza Tales forms a moral drama and a composite study of isolation. In rendering the activities and conclusions of his work, Melville employs a profound pattern of symbol which critic Helmbrecht Breinig defines as the basic method of all of his later works:

He puts ideas into action, he sees his characters as actors on "this great stage," and makes them try out the various forms of human behavior, the practical effects of theoretical assumptions, and the possible role of the gods in this world. It is his way of showing the futility of the values in which mankind believes.³¹

With the final awareness of the narrator in "The Piazza," Melville destroys two illusive myths of human confidence: man's affinity to a beneficent God and his relevance to a compassionate society. The piazza itself, as symbol of the narrator's enlightened self-knowledge and the isolation which induced it, creates the unifying theme of the collection.

³¹Breinig, p. 270.

CHAPTER III

THE MOUNTAIN

"For though, of old, when reverence was in vogue, and indolence was not," observed Melville in "The Piazza," "the devotees of Nature, doubtless, used to stand and adore--just as, in the cathedrals of those ages, the worshippers of a higher Power did--yet, in these times of failing faith and feeble knees, we have the piazza and the pew" (p. 2). In the fall of 1856, deserting his piazza for physical restoration and spiritual renewal, Melville set out on a pilgrimage to Europe and the Holy Land. En route, he passed through Southport, England, for a visit with Nathaniel Hawthorne, their first meeting since Hawthorne's departure from Lenox in 1851. No statement more sensitively describes Melville's religious despair than Hawthorne's journal account of the visit dated November 20, 1856:

. . . on the intervening day, we took a pretty long walk together, and sat down in a hollow among the sand hills. . . . Melville, as he always does, began to reason of Providence and futurity, and of everything that lies beyond human ken, and informed me that he had "pretty much made up his mind to be annihilated"; but still he does not seem to rest in that anticipation; and, I think he will never rest until he gets hold of a definite belief. It is strange how he persists--and has persisted ever since I knew him, and probably long before--in wandering to and fro over these deserts, as dismal

and monotonous as the sand hills amid which we were sitting. He can neither believe, nor be comfortable in his unbelief; and he is too honest and courageous not to try to do one or the other.¹

Just six months following the publication of the Piazza Tales, Melville set out on this desperate quest to the mountain, hoping to find in the physical domain evidence of the spiritual reality he had lost:

The nostalgia for the primitive had yielded in him to the nostalgia for the venerable and the moribund, and mingled with this was some still more special longing for the Biblical, the Hebraic, the Judaeian past--the past of the patriarchs and the judges, the prophets and the kings.²

The stories of this period are filled with his doubts and despair; yet, more importantly, they are filled with a disquieting bitterness, anger, and denial of divine presence--and a tragic sense of loss which weighed heavily upon his mind. The illusion of the mountain, that image of orthodox Christianity bred into him from birth, remains in the stories, but delapidated, fading, and impotent.

Much of Melville's disparity began in the environs of his religious home. Some tensions existed between his earliest contacts with religion--the dissident faiths of his

¹Nathaniel Hawthorne, Journal Notation, 20 November 1856, Jay Leyda, ed., The Melville Log: A Documentary Life of Herman Melville, 1819-1891 (New York: Gordian Press, 1969), p. 529.

²Newton Arvin, Herman Melville (New York: The Viking Press, 1950), p. 212.

father and of his mother. His mother contributed "the most decisive intellectual and spiritual influence of his early life, his saturation in orthodox Calvinism."³ Her teachings bespoke a God

. . . whose sovereignty was absolute and whose power was infinite; a just, rigorous, angry, but also merciful God, whose ways were not to be searched or sounded by mortal understanding⁴

However brief, the opposing influence of his father, an infinitely happier person than his mother, gave Melville a concept of liberal Unitarianism: a fusion of "reasonableness, optimism, 'Arminianism,' and trust in the rational beneficence of a paternal deity; a kind of pious Deism"⁵

Whatever its ultimate dimensions, Melville's religious training was thorough, orthodox, and essential to his life. From such heights of faith, Melville's descent to skepticism in the 1850s was a declivitous plunge. The Piazza Tales is a record of glimmering faith and glaring doubt. There is in the tales a tragic detachment from God and an anguish at His desertion, equal in magnitude to Melville's childhood loss of his natural father. The correlation of these events is essential to an understanding of all of Melville's works. Critics recognize in all of his prose

³Ibid., p. 30.

⁴Ibid., p. 32.

⁵Ibid., p. 30.

odysseys and descriptive solitudes a pathetic search for the father at many levels of expression.⁶

Melville's journey to the Holy Land betrayed the frightening awareness into which he had stumbled and signaled a frantic attempt to abort the darkness of his fears. The effort was painfully unsuccessful; yet, it contributed much that would in later years exert a pacifying influence upon Melville's black despair. The journey must be viewed as a flight away from the spiritual abyss which Melville discovered in writing the Piazza Tales.

Thematically, Melville's isolation from God is revealed in two distinct modes of representation:

The tales have either the pattern of the quest, in which a seeker actively pursues truth, as in "The Piazza" . . . , or the naturally converse situation of man's being thrust into circumstances which dismay and baffle but conclude by educating him. . . .⁷

Three of the tales, "Benito Cereno," "Bartleby," and "Sketch Eighth" of "The Encantadas," are portraits of man entangled in the throes of divine wrath, complication, or retribution. In each of the tales primary characters voice and live by the standards of orthodox Christianity. In "Sketch Second" and "Sketch Tenth" of "The Encantadas," "The Lightning-Rod Man," and "The Bell-Tower," Melville depicts characters who

⁶Ibid., p. 23.

⁷Richard Harter Fogle, Melville's Shorter Tales (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960), p. 6.

live of their own volition without external complication:

"The quest and its object are represented primarily in visual terms, and thus the problem arises of point of view" ⁸

In each motif symbol and commentary express Melville's doubt. Infrequently, he intrudes upon the text with blatant comment; more often, his view is heavily veiled in illusion and symbol.

Religious scholar Mircea Eliade has researched the concept of human bondage to deities through most of the major theologies. Delving into the realms of Hindu, Indo-European, and Asian mysticisms, he has determined the knot as a primary symbol of man's relationship to God. Even in the Judeo-Christian doctrines, he equates the thoughts of Job as an example: "Know then, that God has put me in the wrong, and closed his net about me" (Job 19:6). Repeatedly, the voice of Jehovah employs this binding imagery: "As they go, I will spread over them my net; I will bring them down like the birds of the air" (Hos. 7:12); "And I will spread my net over him, and he shall be taken in my snare, and I will bring him to Babylon" (Ezek. 17:20). ⁹ The symbol of the knot embodies an intrinsic statement of man's abject relationship to God: "This multivalency of the 'binding' complex . . . is probably

⁸Ibid.

⁹Mircea Eliade, Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism, trans. Philip Mairet (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1969), p. 113.

due to man's recognising, in this complex, a sort of arche-type of his own situation in the world."¹⁰

In "Benito Cereno" Melville employs the powerful symbol literally to symbolize both the plight of Don Benito and the mystery of God. Observing an aged sailor "with a countenance grave and composed" (p. 90) engrossed in tying the most elaborate construction he has before seen--"a combination of double-bowline-knot, treble-crown-knot, back-handed-well-knot, knot-in-and-out-knot, and jamming-knot" (p. 90)--Captain Amasa Delano probes into the curiosity of his labor:

"What are you knotting there, my man?"

"The knot," was the brief reply, without looking up.

"So it seems; but what is it for?"

"For some one else to undo," muttered back the old man, plying his fingers harder than ever, the knot being now nearly completed.

While Captain Delano stood watching him, suddenly the old man threw the knot towards him, saying in broken English--the first heard in the ship--something to this effect: "Undo it, cut it, quick" (p. 91).

In the confusion of Delano's reaction, he is observed by an elderly Negro, who approaching with apology and explanation for the Spainard's "simple-wittedness," implores the knot:

Unconsciously, it was handed to him. With a sort of conge, the negro received it, and, turning his back ferreted into it like a detective custom-house officer after smuggled laces. Soon, with some African word, equivalent to pshaw, he tossed the knot overboard (p. 91).

¹⁰Ibid., p. 117.

The nothingness of the knot, requiring that Delano delve into introspection, and the imagery of languages--Spanish, English, and African--suggest a level of communication which necessitates abstract reasoning. Much of the knot requires an evaluation of Delano's spiritual strengths and an examination of his Christian conscience. It is his attempt to comprehend the will of God which gives the tale a profound theme of man's isolation from God.

In untangling the knot of complex human problems thrust upon them, both Delano and the lawyer narrator of "Bartleby" probe their spiritual beliefs for the significance of the situation and their possible roles in them. As they struggle with conscience and with faith, the parallel of the tales requires of each a new statement of personal Christian theory. For they are the humanitarians of the collection, reaching out to unravel mysteries and God for the sake of another. Yet, as men faced with similar dilemmas, they depart to opposite conclusions.

Bartleby, as character in fiction, is perhaps a representation of the greatest frustration, bound in enigma, ever forced upon an individual's responsibility. To the lawyer who employs the strangely quiet man to copy papers in a law office, the saddened man--unalterably and unexplainably preferring not to work and preferring not to depart his

premises and employ--presents a spiritual crisis untouched in short fiction. Whatever the merit or being of Bartleby,¹¹ he culls from the lawyer a resignedly occult response.

The story of Bartleby is set in a symbolic physical setting which reflects the ambiguity of the narrator's dilemma. Consistently Melville achieves this effect through his use of color imagery. The lawyer's office on Wall Street is notably confined by the suggestion of walls. Two windows light the chambers. At one end of the room a window opens onto the white wall of an interior sky-light shaft which penetrates the center of the building: a view significantly "deficient in what landscape painters call 'life'" (p. 17). At the opposite end of the chamber a window opens onto "an unobstructed view of a lofty brick wall, black by age and everlasting shade; which . . . for the benefit of all near-sighted spectators, was pushed up to within ten feet" of the window (p. 17). As in the interspersions of light with cloud in "The Piazza," the two walls emblematically denote the

¹¹Nathan Cervo in "Melville's Bartleby--Imago Dei," American Transcendental Quarterly 14 (Spring 1972): 152-156, views Bartleby as a symbol of God. John Gardner in "'Bartleby': Art and Social Commitment," Philological Quarterly 43 (January 1964): 87-98, interprets Bartleby as a Christ figure in interminable conflict with the lawyer-narrator who represents God. Egbert S. Oliver, *ibid.*, p. 229, chooses to read Bartleby as Thoreau, and Leo Marx in "Melville's Parable of the Walls," Sewanee Review 61 (October 1953): 602-27, regards him as a self portrait of Melville.

mixture of good and evil in this moral circle. Only one color intrusion, a green screen which partitions Bartleby away from the rest of the office, interrupts the basic scheme. The interior of the chambers is decidedly gray as a result of the dim lighting. Symbolically, the extravagantly used walls in the tale represent monumental barriers to the human will, a dramatic symbol of man's limitations. The dim light itself becomes a symbol:

. . . this weakness of light serves to exemplify . . . the deceived rationalism, which often goes by the name of common sense, self-styled arbiter of reality. Thus the major symbols of light and wall not only construct the setting but begin, also, to formulate the problem.¹²

Melville's representation of the lawyer's religious enlightenment is formed symbolically as a three-part drama with an epilogue. "Now, one Sunday morning I happened to go to Trinity Church, to hear a celebrated preacher, and finding myself rather early on the ground I thought I would walk around to my chambers for a while," (p. 31) recalls the lawyer. However lax his Christian conduct or lame his motivation, the narrator's introduction of the church (of such a singularly revealing name) advances the structure as a foil to the on-going tragedy of Bartleby. The lawyer maintains a tremendous vein of staunch Christian doctrine: finding a disheveled Bartleby in his offices, and withdrawing at his

¹²Francis K. Howard, "The Catalyst of Language: Melville's Symbol," English Journal 57 (September 1968), p. 826.

request, the lawyer reassures himself that Bartleby's purposes for being there were not dishonorable:

Besides, it was Sunday; and there was something about Bartleby that forbade the supposition that he would by any secular occupation violate the proprieties of the day (p. 32).

The lawyer's subsequent return and investigation of the offices, following Bartleby's departure, forms the emotional climax of the tale. The revelation of Bartleby's "bachelor's hall" (p. 33) evokes a deeply felt response from the lawyer:

. . . what miserable friendlessness and loneliness are here revealed! His poverty is great; but his solitude, how horrible! Think of it. Of a Sunday, Wall Street is deserted as Petra; and every night of every day it is an emptiness. . . . And here Bartleby makes his home; sole spectator of a solitude which he has seen all populous--a sort of innocent and transformed Marius brooding among the ruins of Carthage! (p. 33).

Considering his discovery, the lawyer grows overpowered by a "fraternal melancholy" (p. 33)--a realization which affords his acceptance of the oneness of humanity:

Ah, happiness courts the light, so we deem the world is gay; but misery hides aloof, so we deem that misery there is none. These sad fancyings--chimeras, doubtless, of a sick and silly brain--led on to other and more special thoughts . . . (p. 33).

In terming the reality as chimera, Melville adds a dimension of illusion to his color imagery of black and white. The religious significance of the scene is realized in the lawyer's simple statement:

I did not accomplish the purpose of going to Trinity Church that morning. Somehow, the things I had seen disqualified me for the time from church-going (p. 35).

This symbolic casting off of the church (the Trinity) represents a basic doubt in the lawyer's faith, and assuredly in Melville's, which cannot equate the role of a loving God with the despicable state of the human condition in the world. In the face of such reality, the concept of worshipping a responsible divinity is negated.

These feelings of religious doubt remain with the lawyer until an ensuing conflict with Bartleby, who refuses to proofread, copy, or remove himself from the premises, pushes the mild-tempered lawyer to a consideration of his murder. To the credit of Christianity, religion and philanthropy prevent the desperate action (p. 43). Seeking religious explanation for his unwarranted persecutions, the lawyer turns to reading "Edwards on the Will" and "Priestly on Necessity," Melville's recurring symbol of the guidebook. From these treatises, he gains an understanding of his part in God's scheme and accepts the consequence of Bartleby:

Gradually I slid into the persuasion that these troubles of mine, touching the scrivener, had all been predestinated from eternity, and Bartleby was billeted upon me for some mysterious purpose of an allwise Providence, which it was not for a mere mortal like me to fathom. . . . Others may have loftier parts to enact; but my mission in this world, Bartleby, is to furnish you with office-room for such period as you may see fit to remain (p. 44).

For Melville's understanding of God in "Bartleby," another symbol, the Tombs, destructive of the moral calm and serenity, is essential. Melville uses the continual reverberation between faith and doubt, both unsubstantiated, to confirm the absurdity of certain belief amid such perplexing and unrevealing confusion. The religious significance of the Tombs, more appropriately the Halls of Justice in "Bartleby," becomes apparent in the circumstances which lead to Bartleby's incarceration there. Whether or not Bartleby is in fact imago dei,¹³ his betrayal follows the symbolic pattern of Christ's, a position in Melville which seems to reveal more the humanity of Christ than the divinity of Bartleby.

Like his predecessor the ill-fated Peter, the lawyer is obliged to act the part of traitorous denial: "--but, really, 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" (p. 47). Melville's description of Bartleby's conduct to the Tombs no less depicts Christ's progress to the cross:

. . . the poor scrivener, . . . offered not the slightest obstacle, but in his pale, unmoving way, silently acquiesced.

Some of the compassionate and curious bystanders joined the party; and headed by one of the constables arm in arm with Bartleby, the silent procession filed its way through all the noise, and heat, and joy of the roaring thoroughfares at noon (p. 51).

¹³Cervo, p. 154.

The narrator's immediate impression of Bartleby, upon first visiting him at the Tombs, completes the image of crucifixion: "from the narrow slits of the jail windows, I thought I saw peering out upon him the eyes of murders [sic] and thieves" (p. 51). Even in his benevolent attempt to care for the scrivener, the lawyer is associated with the sin of Judas. To his former employer, the dejected Bartleby charges all of his adversity:

"I know you," he said, without looking round--"and I want nothing to say to you" (p. 51).

As a total expression, the death of Bartleby in the Tombs transforms the symbol into one of hopelessness rather than salvation. No heavenly response ordains the passing of this mortal Christ. No darkening of the sky at noon, no quakes of rage avenge his sufferings.¹⁴ Bartleby dies ignominiously to the awful nothingness of silence--a silence which haunted Melville in these tales: "The yard was entirely quiet. . . . The surrounding walls, of amazing thickness, kept off all sounds behind them" (p. 53). To the grub man's innocent question--"Eh!--He's asleep, ain't he?"--the lawyer commends but a cryptic reply: "With kings and counselors" (p. 53). Taken from the book of Job, the phrase laments the misery of the universal sufferer. Assaulted by unbearable

¹⁴Matt. 27:45, 51.

agonies, he bewails his very breath at birth, preferring death:

For now should I have lain still and been quiet,
I should have slept: then had I been at rest,
With kings and counsellors of the earth, which
built desolate places for themselves;¹⁵

As conclusion to the drama of Bartleby, Melville appropriately chose an image of peace which encompasses the greatest death wish of the Bible and perhaps the greatest doubt of God. This is the voice of the un placated Job. Melville's emphasis upon the unanswered question, disregarding God's response, denies the concept of life eternal and the saving capacity of the crucifixion.

The futility of death implied in the demise of Bartleby imbues the final symbol of the epilogue with an equally tragic meaning. In imparting an unsubstantiated rumor, the narrator again links his common destiny to that of Bartleby:

The report was this: that Bartleby had been a subordinate clerk in the Dead Letter Office at Washington, from which he had been suddenly removed by a change in the administration (p. 54).

The narrator, too, at the telling of the tale has been removed from the position of Master in Chancery in a political upheaval. His expression of emotion is therefore an acceptance of his common heritage and plight:

¹⁵Job 3:13-14.

When I think over this rumor, hardly can I express the emotions which seize me. Dead letters! does it not sound like dead men? (p. 54).

The final image, the dead letter perpetually tossed to the flames, consumes every form of spiritual hope. Not hell fires of predestination, as Nathan Cervo contends,¹⁶ but earthly torments which consume, leaving but ash--an image of total dying in the flesh.

In "Benito Cereno" as in "Bartleby," it is the atmospheric silence which raises a question of divine existence and morality. Captain Delano inadvertently implies this in a phrase meant to describe Don Benito, but which more accurately reveals an image of God:

But the Spaniard, perhaps, thought that it was with captains as with gods: reserve, under all events, must still be their cue (p. 64).

Melville's assessment of God's "reserve" is brutally apparent in the tale. Benito Cereno is another of Melville's Job-like figures:¹⁷ "a good man suffering torments at the hands of Satan with God's leave."¹⁸

¹⁶Cervo, p. 155.

¹⁷The validity of this theme is evident in the fact that Melville's literary Cereno is far removed from the character of the actual Cereno. Rosalie Feltenstein in examining Melville's source, the eighteenth chapter of Captain Delano's Narrative of Voyages, published in Boston in 1817, has determined that the true Cereno was cowardly and hardly less savage than his mutinous slaves; "Melville's 'Benito Cereno,'" American Literature 19 (November 1947): 247.

¹⁸Janis Stout, "Melville's Use of the Book of Job," Nineteenth Century Fiction 25 (June 1970): 70.

Melville's color imagery again denotes the moral "knot in hand and knot in head" (p. 91) which Delano must unravel. "Benito Cereno" is a "pictorial, a seascape done in black, white and gray"¹⁹--"throngs of dark cowls" and "dark moving figures" pacing a "white-washed monastery" (p. 57) amid the exaggerated gray of the sea and the sky:

The sea . . . was sleeked at the surface like waved lead. . . . The sky seemed a gray surtout. Flights of troubled gray fowl, kith and kin with flights of troubled gray vapors among which they were mixed, skimmed low and fitfully over the waters, as swallows over meadows before storms (p. 55).

Apart from the mystery of the silenced mutiny, the color imagery establishes a contrast between the piety of Delano, Don Joaquin, and Cereno and Melville's suggestion of the role of God in the tale. The faiths of Delano and Cereno, though differing as protestant and Catholic, and the glistening jewel of the passenger Don Joaquin create the light of Christian hope in the story, an illusive philosophy engulfed in the darkness of evil.

There is no symbol for Delano's faith except the grayness which surrounds him. Melville's representation of Christian confidence through the voice of Captain Delano, the least reliable character of the tale, is ironic in tone. For Delano is the myopic observer in Melville's fiction--a

¹⁹Stanley T. Williams, "Follow Your Leader!": Melville's 'Benito Cereno,'" Virginia Quarterly Review 23 (January 1947): 68.

literary device employed to deceive the reader. Left alone to contemplate the signs of conspiracy which he reads into Cereno's actions, Delano attempts philosophically to reassure himself:

. . . I, little Jack of the Beach, . . . ; I to be murdered here at the ends of the earth, on board a haunted pirate-ship by a horrible Spaniard? Too nonsensical to think of! Who would murder Amasa Delano? His conscience is clean. There is some one above. Fie, fie, Jack of the Beach! you are a child indeed; a child of the second childhood, old boy . . . (p. 92).

Sustained by his faith temporarily, Delano again lapses into doubt and suspicion of "collusion" (p. 104). Again he allays his fears by reason:

. . . and more than all, as he saw the benign aspect of nature, taking her innocent repose in the evening; Once again he smiled at the phantoms which had mocked him, and felt something like a tinge of remorse, that, by harboring them even for a moment, he should, by implication, have betrayed an atheist doubt of the ever-watchful Providence above (p. 116).

For Melville's themes, the appearance of sympathy in nature is an illusion which collaborates with the illusion of Christian myth. Both rationales are formed by Delano; both are undermined by Melville's singular narrative interruption of the tale, an aside introducing Delano as

. . . a person of singularly undistrustful good nature, not liable, except on extraordinary and repeated incentives, and hardly then, to indulge in personal alarms, any way involving the imputation of malign evil in man. Whether, in view of what humanity is capable, such a trait implies,

along with a benevolent heart, more than ordinary quickness and accuracy of intellectual perception, may be left to the wise to determine (p. 55).

With the revelation of Babo's hideous plot comes the awesome realization that Delano had been at every moment in deadly peril. The childish nature of his faith, although not in keeping with Christian theory, tends to invalidate all that he trusts.

There is bitter religious irony in Melville's addition of the character of Don Joaquin, a fabricated figure not present in the actual text. Forced to dress and act the part of a common sailor in Babo's black masque, Don Joaquin is actually the Marques de Aramboalaza. When abandoned on the craft by Cereno and his sailors, he is killed in the guise of another dark illusion. Tied to a bulwark on the deck with a hatchet bound to his outstretched hand, he is shot by the rescuing Americans as a renegade. The legal deposition following the tale recounts his tragic loss:

. . . on the person of Don Joaquin was found secreted a jewel, which, by papers that were discovered, proved to have been meant for the shrine of our Lady of Mercy in Lima; a votive offering, beforehand prepared and guarded, to attest his gratitude, when he should have landed in Peru, his last destination, for the safe conclusion of his entire voyage from Spain . . . (p. 137).

The innuendo of the passage is that of a merciless Oversoul or an absent one. The jewel of hope is transformed into an image of death.²⁰

²⁰Ibid., p. 71.

The faith of Cereno, belatedly revealed, is symbolized by the two spiritual piazzas to which he turns for refuge. In search of water had the San Dominick entered the harbor of St. Maria--a haven in which Benito intended to escape from the horrors of his own ship. The name of the port is factual, but it is significant that Melville chose not to change it, as he did change the names of the ships and some characters.²¹ In the conclusion of the tale, Cereno retires to the sanctuary of the monastery at Mount Agonia. Seeking spiritual peace, he finds it in death: "three months after being dismissed by the court, Benito Cereno, borne on the bier, did, indeed, follow his leader" (p. 140).

The beneficence of Cereno's death is, however, deceptive. As a fulfillment of Job's plea, it totally lacks spiritual optimism. Much of Melville's religious implication in the tale derives from a Biblical allusion linked to the decay of the San Dominick:

. . . the cause of the peculiar pipe-clayed aspect of the stranger was seen in the slovenly neglect pervading her. . . . Her keel seemed laid, her ribs put together, and she launched, from Ezekiel's Valley of Dry Bones (p. 57).

Melville's use of the allusion is significant, especially because, as Breinig notes,

. . . quotations, images, and allusions in Melville always take the whole meaning of the context from

²¹Feltenstein, pp. 246-48.

which they are removed to their new place. They are not simply embellishments but ways of broadening the scope of meaning and expression, especially within the limited space of tales and sketches.²²

Melville's mention of Ezekiel's Valley of Dry Bones is an allusion to God's prophecy of the rebirth of Israel.²³ Set down in the midst of a desert of bones, Ezekiel is instructed by God to command life into the bones. When the miracle is performed--bones joined, sinew, flesh, and skin restored--God speaks again to interpret His miracle for Ezekiel:

Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off from our parts.

Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel.²⁴

God's prophecy to Ezekiel is of an earthly estate and of a deliverance out of bondage. It refers not to a promise of heaven but to a reaffirmation of hope in this life.

Melville's use of the allusion is satiric--an epithet for a slave-ship carrying people into bondage. In the character of Don Joaquin, traveling to the new world, God's miracle is reversed--life transforms to death.

²²Helmbrecht Breinig, "The Destruction of Fairyland: Melville's 'Piazza' in the Tradition of the American Imagination," ELH 35 (June 1968): 276.

²³Ezek. 37:3-13.

²⁴Ezek. 37:11-12.

Melville's use of the allusion, as a restoration of "bones" in the tale, and the havoc of death in the closing passages link integrally to the fore-piece of the San Dominick, the skeleton of Alexandro Aranda unveiled during Cereno's escape from the ship:

. . . the fag-end, in lashing out, whipped away the canvas shroud about the beak, suddenly revealing, as the bleached hull swung round towards the open ocean, death for the figure-head, in a human skeleton; chalky comment on the chalked words below, "Follow your leader" (p. 119).

The final image of the tale is an image of death, and the leadership followed is to the grave. The whole implies God's betrayal.

Only Delano remains untouched by the ghastly experience. Beyond compassion for the suffering Cereno, he offers an optimistic appraisal of the future:

But the past is passed; why moralize upon it?
Forget it. See, yon bright sun has forgotten it
all, and the blue sea, and the blue sky; these
have turned over new leaves (p. 139).

As he invokes the illusion of nature in support of his faith, Delano again engages a Melvillian reality--his perspective as narrator-observer is not to be trusted.

What Melville intimates in "Bartleby" and "Benito Cereno," an image of God as absent, reserved, or uncompassionate, he vehemently avows in "Sketch Eighth" of "The Encantadas": the story of Hunilla, the Chola widow of

Norfolk Isle, incorporates the most devout and the most heretical characters of the Piazza Tales. The fabric of the tale, drawn from Melville's "Agatha Letter" to Hawthorne,²⁵ is the theme of patience, faith, and endurance in response to infidelity, "out of treachery invoking trust" (p. 187). But Agatha's betrayal by her husband, Robertson, is transformed into Hunilla's betrayal by God. The impact of the narrative generates from the tension between Hunilla's symbolic piety and the sailor narrator's repressed but fervid anger. As a member of her rescue party, he blasphemously deplores her futile suffering.

Found stranded upon a desert isle, Hunilla tells of having come there three years before with her husband and brother to hunt for tortoises. From a mountain piazza, half a mile from shore, she viewed the deaths of both:

She was seated on a rude bower among the withered thickets, crowning a lofty cliff, a little back from the beach. The thickets were so disposed, that in looking upon the sea at large she peered out from among the branches as from the lattice of a high balcony (p. 183).

Among the most beautiful passages of Melville's short fiction is the tranquil death scene of Felipe and Truxill. The scene is viewed through withdrawn branches which form

. . . an oval frame, through which the blueely boundless sea rolled like a painted one. And

²⁵Charles N. Watson, Jr., "Melville's Agatha and Hunilla: A Literary Reincarnation," ELN 6 (December 1968): 114-18.

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 (p. 184).

Abandoned by their deaths, Hunilla began a physical and mental ordeal of total isolation.

Hunilla is the only true Job of the Piazza Tales. She suffers but, through her suffering, maintains a faith in God. The irony of her endurance provokes the sailor to voice the only directly atheistic statement of the collection:

Ah, heaven, when man thus keeps his faith, wilt thou be faithless who created the faithful one? But they cannot break faith who never plighted it (p. 184).

Melville appropriately uses the image of the cross to express her suffering in universal terms.²⁶ At her husband's grave, Hunilla fixed "a rude cross of withered sticks" (p. 185). Appealing to the Virgin Mary for release from her torment and praying at the gravesite, she clasps a small brass crucifix, "worn featureless, like an ancient graven knocker long plied in vain" (p. 92). To God's or Fate's apparent disregard, the narrator ruefully charges a cruel intent:

Dire sight it is to see some silken beast long dally with a golden lizard ere she devour. More

²⁶Don S. Howington, "Melville's 'The Encantadas': Imagery and Meaning," Studies in the Literary Imagination 2 (April 1969): 74.

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 (p. 186).

With the image of the cat, Melville affronts the symbol of the cross.

As final grief of her experience, Hunilla must heap the pain of isolation upon the last of what she loves, the progeny of two small dogs who accompanied her to the island. Told by the rescuing mate that she may take only two, Hunilla catches "the two most eager creatures in her arms" (p. 192). Stoically enacting the God-like role of predestination, she steps into the boat, oblivious to the rest:

The dogs now seemed aware that they were in the very instant of being deserted upon a barren strand. . . . their busy paws hard scraped the prow, as it had been some farmer's door shutting them out from shelter in a winter storm. A clamorous agony of alarm. They did not howl, or whine; they all but spoke (p. 192).

In deference to her courage, the narrator phrases the final image of divine presence in the tale, describing Hunilla as "A heart of yearning in a frame of steel. A heart of earthly yearning, frozen by the frost which falleth from the sky" (p. 193). To the implication of divine "frost," Melville juxtaposes a final human tribute in the symbol of the cross.²⁷

The last seen of lone Hunilla she was passing into Payta town, riding upon a small gray ass; and before her on the ass's shoulders, she eyed the

²⁷Ibid., p. 75.

jointed workings of the beast's armorial cross
(p. 193).

Considerably less potent in spiritual statement are Melville's tales of those persons free from divine complication. Without personal despair or suffering, they encounter God, sometimes unsought, in human experience. An important image of divine presence appears in "Sketch Second" of "The Encantadas," an image of God the Savior embodied in a non-Christian deity. As a study of Hindu theology--a distinctly less painful and more peaceful faith than Christianity--it breaches heresy or "infidel notion" (p. 148) in Melville's thinking.

The passive effect of the piece derives primarily from its contrast to the Christian implication of "Sketch First," especially in its description of the Encantadas or Enchanted Isles: "A group rather of extinct volcanoes than of isles; looking much as the world at large might, after a penal conflagration" (p. 149). (*Italics mine.*) "Man and wolf alike disown them," Melville continues; "No voice, no low, no howl is heard; the chief sound of life here is a hiss" (p. 150). The name of the islands, as he further explains,

. . . originated in that air of spell-bound desertness which so significantly invests the isles. Nothing can better suggest the aspect of once living things malignly crumbled from ruddiness into ashes. Apples of Sodom, after touching, seem these isles" (p. 152). (*Italics mine.*)

No symbol or image more beautifully extols the plight of suffering humanity in a fallen world than the forlorn tortoise of the Encantadas, "dwelling upon these hot aridities, sole solitary lords of Asphaltum" (p. 153).

Essentially,

. . . 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 . . . (p. 153).

Melville suggests their symbolic interpretation in three lines of the epigram to "Sketch Second," adapted from Spenser's Faerie Queen, as pointed out by Oliver:²⁸

Fear naught, then said the palmer, well avized,
For these same monsters are not there indeed,
But are into these fearful shapes disguised.²⁹

As critic I. Newberry suggests, these antediluvian creatures are the spirits of the damned, enduring an earthly inferno.³⁰

To the narrator of the sketch, first viewing the woe-ful aspect of three captured beasts unloaded upon the deck, the magnificence of the tortoise inspires an illusion:

We had been broad upon the waters for five long months, a period amply sufficient to make all

²⁸Herman Melville, Piazza Tales, ed. Egbert S. Oliver (New York: Hendricks House, Inc., 1962), p. 243.

²⁹Faerie Queen, bk. 2, canto 7, stanza 25.

³⁰I. Newberry, "'The Encantadas': Melville's Inferno," American Literature 38 (March 1966): 50.

things of the land wear a fabulous hue to the dreamy mind (p. 155).

Enraptured by his dream state, the narrator elevates the tortoise to a religious symbol:

Such worshipful venerableness of aspect! Such furry greenness mantling the rude peelings and healing the fissures of their shattered shells. I no more saw three tortoises. They expanded--became transfigured. I seemed to see three Roman Coliseums in magnificent decay (pp. 155-56).

Symbolically, Melville alludes to the demise of the Christian church and the Christian faith. In the imagery of decadence, that of the estate of man, he makes way for a bitter desecration of God. Finding one of the beasts "butted like a battering-ram against the immovable foot of the foremast, and still striving, tooth and nail, to force the impossible passage," (p. 156) he infers the nature of their curse:

That these tortoises are the victims of a penal, or malignant, or perhaps a downright diabolical enchanter, seems in nothing more likely than in that strange infatuation of hopeless toil which so often possesses them (p. 156).

To the rescue of these pitiable creatures, Melville invokes the Hindu god of Siva, the Destroyer. Listening to the "draggings and concussions" of the tortoise upon the deck, he slips into a nightmare:

With them I lost myself in volcanic mazes; brushed away endless boughs of rotting thickets; till finally . . . I found myself sitting crosslegged upon the foremost, a Brahmin similarly mounted

upon either side, forming a tripod of foreheads which upheld the universal cope (p. 157).

Of the Hindu Puranic Triad--Brahma, the Creator; Vishnu, the Preserver; and Siva, the Destroyer³¹--the narrator must assume the role of Siva. With the coming of morning, he joins in the slaying of the beasts, converting the concave shells into "three fanciful soup-tureens" and their flat calipees into "three gorgeous salvers" (p. 157). Although seemingly irreverent to these venerable ones, in the Hindu faith, the slaying constitutes an act of mercy:

. . . death is not death in the sense of passing into nonexistence, but simply a change into a new form of life. He who destroys, therefore, causes beings to assume new phases of existence--the Destroyer is really a re-Creator; hence the name Siva, the Bright or Happy One, is given to him.³²

Melville's recreation of the tortoise, appropriately, turns life into art. The suggestion of Siva is similar to the Judeo-Christian concept of spiritual rebirth; it is therefore infinitely more relevant that Melville, a renowned scholar of the Bible,³³ chose not to express this ideal in Christian symbol. To a god he deemed but myth, Melville granted a compassionate saving grace; to his own God, he alleged malignity.

³¹W. J. Wilkins, Hindu Mythology: Vedic and Puranic (London: Curzon Press, 1973), p. 262.

³²*Ibid.*, p. 263.

³³Arvin, p. 212.

There is much anger in Melville's religious doubts in the Piazza Tales; yet, at moments these fears emerge as quiet despair or saddened dejection. In "Sketch Tenth," appropriately titled "Runaways, Castaways, Solitaries, Grave-Stones, Etc.," Melville describes the ultimate fate of the isles' inhabitants. Suggesting it to be a "convenient Potter's Field" (p. 207) for sea-faring vessels of the vicinity, Melville ends the selection with a revealing epitaph found on Chatham Isle:

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

Melville's conclusion shows a drastic deviation in thought from that of his source. Taken from Captain Porter's Journal of a Cruise Made to the Pacific Ocean, the original epitaph contained a positive spiritual note:³⁴

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

Omitting the orthodox hope of resurrection, Melville closes the work with an image of death without hope.³⁵ With the

³⁴Newberry, p. 67. Newberry credits the discovery of the source to Russel Thomas, "Melville's Use of Some Sources in 'The Encantadas,'" American Literature 3 (January 1932): 442-43.

³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 67.

symbol of the tombstone, he marks a profound isolation from God.

One glimmer of religious affirmation, like the jewel of Don Joaquin cached in his breast, "a sparkle in the shadowy hatchway," (p. 80) alleviates the spiritual darkness of the Piazza Tales, the surprisingly optimistic crescendo of "The Lightning-Rod Man." To the narrator of the tale, secure in the bower of his mountain-top piazza, the approach of the dark stranger, whom he hails as "Jupiter Tonans," in the midst of a theatrically beautiful electrical storm causes no alarm. Extending the courtesies of hospitality and civility to the stranger, he is rudely rebuked by the "lean, gloomy" man.

The ensuing Socratic dialogue between the narrator and the stranger, a confidence-man in the guise of lightning-rod salesman, elicits from the narrator a statement of faith unique to Melville's short fiction.³⁶ Symbolically, the Satanic manifestations of the salesman--"His sunken pitfalls of eyes were ringed by indigo halos, and played with an innocuous sort of lightning: the gleam without the bolt" (p. 141)--and his polished copper rod, knobbed in the gilded tines of a trident, stand diametrically opposed to the

³⁶Marvin Fisher, "'The Lightning-Rod Man': Melville's Testament of Rejection," Studies in Short Fiction 7 (Summer 1970): 437.

confidence of the narrator, revealed in the symbols of hearth, fire, and cottage.

As the verbal debate heats to physical confrontation, the narrator willfully orders the salesman away:

Who has empowered you, you Tetzels, 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! (p. 148).

True to its calling, the storm draws back revealing blue sky and a rainbow in response to the dark innuendo of the lightning-rod. One final course of action remains for the narrator, the destruction of the lightning rod and the bodily expulsion of the salesman.

Within the context of the Piazza Tales, the religious fervor of "The Lightning-Rod Man" contributes a disconcertingly incongruous position of faith--on the surface. Two distinctions explain its presence in the collection: written in comic form, it follows the popular nineteenth-century magazine genre of the Yankee peddler; as such it was a most salable piece of fiction;³⁷ and second, as allegory it conceals the most vicious assault on "hell-fire and brimstone evangelism" Melville could write.³⁸ The "Lightning-Rod Man" is audacious literary guile, illustrative of Melville's

³⁷Hershel Parker, "Melville's Salesman Story," Studies in Short Fiction 1 (Winter 1964): 156.

³⁸Fisher, "'The Lightning-Rod Man,'" p. 439.

practice of "combining in a single work a story to please himself and a more innocuous one to please the publisher and the public."³⁹

Nevertheless, "The Lightning-Rod Man" remains an impressive statement of true faith, not totally defrocked by its allegory. Thematically, it perhaps belongs to the illusion, mirage, and "optical delusion" (p. 153) which Melville presents only to destroy in the collection. Yet, it may genuinely express an optimism which Melville longed to believe.

Melville's interest in the symbol of the rainbow links directly to its use in the last tale of the collection, "The Bell-Tower"--a story of the architectural masterpiece of the great mechanician Bannadonna:

Like Babel's its base was laid in a high hour of renovated earth, following the second deluge, when the waters of the Dark Ages had dried up, and once more the green appeared (p. 208).

Gothic in form, "The Bell-Tower" offers a poignant statement of the nineteenth-century conflict of faith and reason.

The tale is completely formed in the mold of Biblical story. Like the other sources of Melville's choice, this device requires a predestination of result. Every aspect of the tale conforms to Biblical history: "as with Noah's sons," (p. 208) Melville's reference to Babel forebodes the

³⁹Ibid., p. 434.

destruction of Bannadonna's creation. The basis of the fall lies in the sin of hubris, a pride which challenges heaven, borrowed from the fabric of the Biblical text. In building his bell-tower, the "unblest foundling" Bannadonna repeats the sin of Cain (p. 209) and reenacts the forging of the Golden Calf: "throwing in much plate, contributed by the public spirit of the nobles" (p. 209). Awaiting the unveiling of his design, the public stands in silence, "as of the expectation of some Shiloh," (p. 216) an allusion to God's prophecy to Samuel of the fall of the house of Eli (I Sam. 3:12-14).⁴⁰

Even the death of Bannadonna conforms to the pattern of Biblical ritual, that of the slaying of Sisera at the hand of Jael, according to the prophecy of Deborah.⁴¹ While admiring the engravings of the bell, a magistrate suggests this correlation:

"Why, just now, . . . his walk seemed Sisera's, God's vain foe, in Del Fonca's painting. And that young, sculptured Deborah, too. Ay, and that---"
 "Tush, tush, Signor!" returned the chief. "A passing whim. Deborah?--Where's Jael, pray?"
 (p. 216).

Jael, too, is depicted in the form of Haman, the mechanical bell-ringer of the tower, so named for the treacherous enemy of Mordecai in the book of Esther.⁴² So compacted is the

⁴⁰Oliver, p. 250.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Esther 3:5-7.

tale with Biblical sin that the conclusion, the toppling of the tower, appears to suggest God's triumph over iniquity. For Melville's subtlety, the point is somewhat overwrought.

Quite curiously, Melville also explains each facet of the event in scientific terms. Bannadonna is a mechanician, revering science; yet, the failure of science defeats him. The nobles had warned that the bell was too large for its frame:

. . . that though truly the tower was Titanic, yet limit should be set to the dependent weight of its swaying masses (p. 209).

The bell, afflicted with a physical weakness "strangely feeble somewhere at its top," (p. 222) broke free of its structure, crashing three hundred feet to the ground when a

. . . 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 [sic] jerk (p. 222).

Upon later examination, the half-buried bell displayed a fracture, "which, being scraped, revealed a defect, deceptively minute, in the casting" (p. 222). Most especially are the course and movements of Haman, the executioner, fixed by science. An error in human judgment causes Bannadonna's death. Unmysteriously, a natural phenomenon destroys the tower:

But on the first anniversary of the tower's completion . . . an earthquake came; one loud crash

was heard. The stone-pine, with all its bower of songsters, lay overthrown upon the plain (p. 223).

This montage of reason forms an equally exaggerated truth, purporting science as the catalyst.⁴³

Like the dual perspectives of mountain and piazza, "The Bell-Tower" presents two conflicting speculations to explain the events and fully supports neither. What the tale achieves is a symmetrical statement of the problem; it offers no resolve. The much-criticized closing passage of the tale supports both postulates:

So the blind slave obeyed its blinder lord; but in obedience, slew him. So the creator was killed by the creature. So the bell was too heavy for the tower. So the bell's main weakness was where man's blood had flawed it. And so pride went before the fall (p. 223).

Suggestively, however, the very triteness of the ending implies a reading of the tale as allegory. Following the format of "Bartleby," the action of the tale offers little enlightenment. It is in the conclusion, in the teller's attempt to explain--to the limited degree that is possible--that the tale assumes a larger meaning. Melville's use of the terms "creator" and "creature" suggests the symbolic roles of God and man. This view is reinforced by the statement:

⁴³Tyrus Hillway, "Melville As Critic of Science," Modern Language Notes 65 (June 1950): 411.

With him [Bannadonna], common sense was theurgy; machinery, miracle; Prometheus, the heroic name for machinist; man, the true God (p. 220).

The "blind slave" and "blinder lord" refer to the distorted image of man, created by the separation of distance (and conversely of God, from man's perspective), offered in explanation of the physical form of the domino:

Perched on a great mast or spire, the human figure, viewed from below, undergoes such a reduction in its apparent size, as to obliterate its intelligent features. It evinces no personality. Instead of bespeaking volition, its gestures rather resemble the automatic ones of the arms of a telegraph (p. 219).

Melville's emphasis on volition, automation, and the appearance of will recalls the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination. His interest in fixed fate and foreknowledge, as cited in "Bartleby," lies close to the center of the religious debate.⁴⁴ It is that appearance of will bound within a fixed course of action which breeds the inevitable destruction of Bannadonna:

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 backwards to it . . . (p. 222).

In allegory, Melville strokes the death of God by reason.

⁴⁴Walton R. Patrick, "Melville's 'Bartleby' and the Doctrine of Necessity," American Literature 41 (March 1969): 39.

Man's fatalistic detachment from God is evident in all of the Piazza Tales. In Melville's thought, one reads a quest, a frustration, an anger, a fear, and an acceptance of isolation:

It is man's problem, and certainly Melville's problem, that he is a teleological animal. He seeks in this world for benevolence and intelligible purpose: He looks for God to take his side and is dismayed to find indifference. Melville is a religious-minded agnostic, a rationalist distrustful of reason, an indefatigable seeker uncertain of the ultimate ends of his search. All these are excellent things for a writer to be, and all are rather wearing.⁴⁵

⁴⁵Fogle, p. 3.

CHAPTER IV

THE WALL

"It seems an inconsistency to assert unconditional democracy in all things, and yet confess a dislike to all mankind--in the mass,"¹ Melville wrote to Hawthorne in 1851. His qualification of this position greatly explains his own seclusion. In the preceding paragraphs, he speaks of a newly found awareness of natural order, of an "aristocracy of the brain" and echelons of "intellectual estates" which he had before failed to recognize.² Perhaps anticipating a too-narrow interpretation of this position, he passionately reaffirmed a contrasting, but equally felt, belief in the "ruthless democracy" of political equality.³

Melville's tragic understanding of the absence of social order and unconditional democracy greatly distorted his impression of society in the 1850s. In the Piazza Tales, the imposing symbol of the wall, skillfully projected in "Bartleby," effectively designates the realistic opposites

¹Herman Melville to Nathaniel Hawthorne, 1 June 1851, Merrell R. Davis and William H. Gilman, eds., The Letters of Herman Melville (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1960), p. 127.

²Ibid., p. 126.

³Ibid., p. 127.

of both order and democracy, the chaos and tyranny which Melville perceived as the basis of all society. Melville's ultimate rejection of the masses was based upon his image of man as helplessly trapped between these negative extremes and corrupted by them.

Melville's love of social order and fear of chaos are carefully contrasted in "Sketch Third" and "Sketch Seventh" of "The Encantadas." The "aviary of Ocean," (p. 160) Rock Rodondo, rising two hundred fifty feet from the sea, displays a perfect social hierarchy in nature. Sequentially, upon the leveled "entablatures of strata" stand ornithological species ranging from the ungainly penguin at its base to the "chanticleer of ocean," the "snow-white angelic" Boatswain's Mate (p. 161) at its summit. Strewn between, "disposed in order of their magnitude," (p. 161) are pelicans, gonies, gulls, gannets, sea-hens, jays, and petrels.

Melville's didactic connotation is implied in the phrase: "thrones, pryncedoms, powers, dominating one above another in senatorial array" (p. 161). To this vestige of natural harmony, Melville adds the appearance of illusion, as he describes its effect when viewed in the "strange double twilight" (p. 159) of dawn:

The great full moon burnt in the low west like a half-spent beacon, casting a soft mellow tinge upon the sea . . . ; while along the entire east the invisible sun sent pallid intimations of his coming (p. 159).

This "dim investiture of wonder" (p. 159) causes Rodondo to be frequently mistaken for a sail, as the narrator explains:

Its birdlime gleams in the golden rays like the white-wash of a tall light-house, or the lofty sails of a cruiser. This moment, doubtless, while we know it to be a dead desert rock, other voyagers are taking oaths it is a glad populous ship (p. 162).

As part of the changing illusion of the Enchanted Islands, Rodondo suggests nature's deception and man's misconception of natural order.

As illusive as the "glad populous ship" is the human myth of liberty and equality which Melville destroys in "Sketch Seventh." To the history of Charles's Isle belongs an unsuccessful experiment in government, the miniature monarchy of the Creole Dog-King. Awarded the isle for his heroism in fighting for the freedom of Peru from Spanish control, the Creole quickly abandoned cause and ideal for self-interest and power. Populating his isle with a cargo of emigrants, deluded by his promise of paradise, the Creole holds sway over his pilgrims with a guard of vicious dogs:

These, it was observed on the passage, refusing to consort with the emigrants, remained aristocratically grouped around their master on the elevated quarter-deck, casting disdainful glances forward upon the inferior rabble there; . . . (p. 176).

In their scorn and subjugation of humanity, master and dog pervert Melville's concept of natural order; inevitably, this transgression incites the natural response of

insurrection. In a bloody conflict of man and beast, the reigning monarch is scourged and banished from the island. Jubilantly, the liberated patriots proclaim the isle a Republic. Yet, in their fervor for freedom, they create instead "Anathema," a totally chaotic and depraved society:

. . . the insurgents had confederated themselves into a democracy neither Grecian, Roman, nor American. Nay, it was no democracy at all, but a permanent Riotocracy, which gloried in having no law but lawlessness (p. 178).

As an annal of the course of human events, the socio-political activities of Charles's Isle depict the extremes of what Melville deplored in society. For chaos, as well as tyranny, based upon an ignorance or rejection of natural order, is equally the product of man's design.

Melville's concern with natural order extends as well to the failure of social institutions to upgrade social conditions. In the physical world of the Piazza Tales, signs of material decay are evidence of an internal moral decay in society. Melville's vivid description of nature's repossession of the fallen bell-tower is his comment upon the decadence of the culture which built it:

In the south of Europe, nigh a once frescoed capital, now with dank mold cankering its bloom, central in a plain, stands what, at distance, seems the black mossed stump of some immeasurable pine. . . .

As all along where the pine tree falls, its dissolution leaves a mossy mound--last flung shadow of the perished trunk; . . . so westward from what seems the stump, one steadfast spear of lichen'd ruin veins the plain (p. 208).

In his collection of tales, Melville categorized most social institutions as effecting moral corrosion. Essentially, he depicts slavery, the church, and civilization as artificial walls which segregate humanity. At the center of each, he finds a corruption of purpose--in the freedom of American society, the business of slavery; in the universal dominion of the church, a failure to attend to pertinent social problems;⁴ in other manifestations of civilization, a destructive dehumanizing force.

Frequently, the magnificent bell of "The Bell-Tower" is identified as the Liberty Bell, and its flaw, as the disruptive influence of slavery in the nineteenth-century prosperity of the burgeoning nation.⁵ This supposition is reinforced by the date of publication, August 1855, and by the first of three mottoes which introduced the tale in Putnam's Monthly Magazine, which Oliver includes in the textual notes of the present edition:

Like Negroes, these powers own man sullenly;
mindful of their higher master; while serving plot
revenge.⁶

⁴Neal B. Houston, "Silent Apostles: Melville's Animus Against the Clergy," Research Studies 34 (December 1966): 234.

⁵Marvin Fisher, "'The Bell-Tower': A Double Thrust," American Quarterly 18 (Summer 1966): 206.

⁶No apparent reason is available for Melville's having discarded the mottoes, but they did not appear in the collected Piazza Tales. Herman Melville, Piazza Tales, ed. Egbert S. Oliver (New York: Hendricks House, Inc., 1962), pp. 247-48.

The correlation of this theme is further extended by Melville's early reference to the "sons of Noah," (p. 208) a possible allusion to Ham, whose descendants were cursed to be "the servants of servants."⁷ For Bannadonna's iron man, Haman, bears this Biblical inference in his suggestive name.⁸

"The Bell-Tower" openly deals with the relations of slave and master. Interpreting the tale as an allegory on the issue of slavery provides an important meaning for two specific passages of the text. Bannadonna's creation of the domino is eventually discovered to be only a prototype for his future plan, the production of

. . . an ulterior creature . . . ; supplying nothing less than a supplement to the Six Days' Work; stocking the earth with a new serf, more useful than the ox, swifter than the dolphin, stronger than the lion, more cunning than the ape, for industry an ant, more fiery than serpents, and yet, in patience, another ass (p. 219).

In his use of animal imagery, Melville again implies a debasement of humanity through an inversion of natural order--the subservience of man at bestial levels. Much of the pro-slavery debate generated from an acceptance of the Negro as a lower order of man. Advocates of slavery asserted the suitability of the race for servitude based upon their

⁷Fisher, "'The Bell-Tower,'" p. 202.

⁸Ibid., p. 203.

lower intelligence⁹ and, as Delano notes, "the docility arising from the unaspiring contentment of a limited mind" (p. 100).

Another passage of the tale reflects the nineteenth-century belief that slavery was not immoral because, as savages, Negroes lacked spiritual souls.¹⁰ This issue is raised in dialogue. As Bannadonna escorts the visiting magistrates down from his tower, a sound heard overhead, where only the domino remains, causes alarm in one official:

"Hark! is that--a footfall above?"

"Mortar, Excellenza; sometimes it drops to the belfry-floor from the arch where the stone-work was left undressed. . . ."

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

"No soul, Excellenza; rest assured, no soul.-- Again the mortar" (p. 215).¹¹

These interpretations offer "The Bell-Tower" as a statement of Melville's own position on the current topic of slavery. In the mottoed phrase "mindful of their higher master," Melville suggests a divine injunction of human liberty. The substance of the allegory comprises a warning that slavery will "own" the master as well as the slave--a position affirmed in the ironic reversal of Atufal's chains

⁹Eleanor E. Simpson, "Melville and the Negro: From Typee to 'Benito Cereno,'" American Literature 41 (March 1969): 37.

¹⁰Fisher, "'The Bell-Tower,'" p. 204.

¹¹Ibid.

and Cereno's key in "Benito Cereno." The concept of revenge is realized in Haman's destruction of his master. Through his allegory, Melville cautions that the issue of slavery can sever the brain of the new technological country with a single death-blow. The enamored bell itself, cracked by a moral weakness, becomes a symbol of the crisis.

As the son-in-law of Judge Lemuel Shaw, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Massachusetts, Melville had a greater contact than most men with the brewing issue of slavery and a greater reason for concern. In April of 1851, Shaw had ruled against the runaway slave Thomas Simms and ordered his return to Savannah, where he was publicly whipped. Throughout Simms' trial, an iron chain encircled the courthouse, providing a "ready-made propaganda weapon" for the abolitionists. In 1849, Shaw had upheld Boston's segregated school system, establishing the precedent of "separate but equal" education. In 1842, he had aroused public animosity in ruling against the runaway slave George Latimer, ordering his return to Virginia.¹² In view of Melville's writings during this period, it is probable that on this one major issue, he opposed his father-in-law's position.¹³

¹²Simpson, p. 26.

¹³In Mardi, Melville openly denounced slavery; in Redburn, he supported the rights of free Negroes; and in many of his later works, he dealt sympathetically with Negro characters. Ibid., pp. 26-27.

The issue of slavery and its effect upon the American society form an important aspect of "Benito Cereno." The tale is filled with symbolic representations of master and slave, but some allude directly to the political problem. Among the crumbling balustrades of the San Dominick's quarter-deck, reminiscent of the fading grandeur of Spain, the relic of an oval "shield-like stern-piece" creates a focal point,

. . . intricately carved with the arms of Castile and Leon, medallioned about by groups of mythological or symbolical devices; uppermost and central of which was a dark satyr in a mask, holding his foot on the prostrate neck of a writhing figure, likewise masked (p. 58).

In Spanish, "Castile" and "Leon" denote "castle" and "lion," emblems which suggest a conflict of "arms" between human and animal savagery. The masks on the figures conceal the ambiguous relationship between master and slave in the tale.

In Delano, the American character is depicted; he is the symbol of "New-World innocence, vigor, and promise. Born to command" ¹⁴ He represents the energy of a new civilization, philosophically and ethically immature, ¹⁵ inextricably tied to the Old-World "feudal structure of caste and and fealty," which Don Benito represents. ¹⁶ Dramatically,

¹⁴Max Putzel, "The Source and Symbols of Melville's 'Benito Cereno,'" American Literature 34 (May 1962): 193.

¹⁵Stanley T. Williams, "'Follow Your Leader': Melville's 'Benito Cereno,'" Virginia Quarterly Review 23 (January 1947): 73.

¹⁶Putzel, p. 191.

Delano accepts his bond to the cultural heritage of Europe in the intense tableau of mistaken identities in which Cereno escapes from Babo's control; a brilliant pictorial:

. . . the left hand of Captain Delano, on the one side, again clutched the half-reclined Don Benito, heedless that he was in a speechless faint, while his right foot, on the other side, ground the prostrate negro; . . . (p. 118).

Symbolically Delano duplicates the oppressions of the past.

Defiantly, the final motion of the battered San Dominick indicts the American society. When her anchoring cable is cut by the Negroes, the flailing line tears away the shroud canvas on the bow,

. . . suddenly revealing, as the bleached hull swung round towards the open ocean, death for the figure-head . . . (p. 119). (Italics mine.)

Towards darkest Africa, the ship displays a skeleton, which in the legal depositions is explained to have been "substituted for the ship's proper figure-head--the image of Christopher Colon, the discoverer of the New World" (p. 129). Towards the American continent, the ship reveals her ominously accusing stern-piece:

. . . these symbolic devices of Melville's allude to the sinister fact of slavery, something the historic Delano also regarded as an evil.¹⁷

The implication of the stern-piece is reasserted by the unmasked eyes of Babo. Brought to trial in Lima, he is convicted, executed, and beheaded, according to custom:

¹⁷Ibid., p. 202. This analysis is based upon Putzel's investigation of Delano's Narrative of Voyages (Boston: n.p., 1817): 204.

. . . but for many days, the head, that hive of subtlety, fixed on a pole in the Plaza, met, unabashed, the gaze of the whites; . . . (p. 140).

His deadly gaze, confronting the vault of Aranda at St. Bartholomew's church and the enfeebled Cereno at the monastery of Mount Agonia, levels its truths at the white Christian world.

In his handling of slavery, Melville's humanitarian feelings are less fully expressed than are his national interests; yet, Babo's barbarism is somewhat exonerated by his relentlessly fixed gaze.¹⁸ As in "The Bell-Tower," a bell symbolizes the tragedy of American involvement in human degradation. As he passed tremulously through a dark corridor between Cereno's cabin and the upper deck, where the chained Atufal stood silent guard, Delano cringed at a doleful sound:

At this moment, with a dreary grave-yard toll, betokening a flaw, the ship's forecastle bell, . . . , proclaimed ten o'clock through the leaden calm (p. 73). (Italics mine.)

Melville's use of a negative ecclesiastical motif¹⁹ in "Benito Cereno" suggests another important theme in the tale. With images of "a white-washed monastery," (p. 57) "Black Friars pacing the cloisters," (p. 57) Charles V's

¹⁸Scott Donaldson, "The Dark Truth of The Piazza Tales," PMLA 85 (October 1970): 1085.

¹⁹Williams, p. 70.

"anchoritish" retirement from the throne, (p. 63) and melancholy rigging stacked "like a heap of poor friars' girdles," (p. 99) Melville enriches his theme of isolation by incorporating the fading glories of the church. In his intimation of the Old World unity of church and state, Melville extends to the church a guilt by association for the moral iniquity of the San Dominick.²⁰ The same implication is more fully examined in "The Bell-Tower": the blessings of the church and the patronage of its congregation encourage and promote Bannadonna's diabolic achievement. The unity of church and state is evidenced by Bannadonna's combined construction of bell-tower and clock-tower: "before that period, such structures had commonly been built distinct" (p. 209).

Critic R. E. Morsberger in tracing a correlation between Bannadonna and Benvenuto Cellini, the artisan who cast a statue of Perseus in bronze during the Renaissance, considers both men to have been Faustian in their pride:²¹

In fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italy, the individuality and prestige of the artist were heightened to the point that he became to the Renaissance what the saint was to the Middle Ages.²²

²⁰Ibid.

²¹R. E. Morsberger, "Melville's 'The Bell-Tower' and Benvenuto Cellini," American Literature 44 (November 1972): 461.

²²Ibid., p. 460.

In adoration of Bannadonna's creation, the public desecrated the sanctity of holy days: "Those who of saints' days thronged the spot . . . their homage not the less inspirited him to self-esteem" (p. 208). In deference to his work, a "holiday of the Tower" is proclaimed when the structure is completed, mocking the irreverence shown to God on holy days.²³

The blasphemous guilt of the church is charged in its response to Bannadonna's murder of a workman, who had in fear drawn back from the molten metal. Rushing forward to amend the dereliction, Bannadonna "smote the chief culprit with his ponderous ladle," (p. 209) dashing the offender into the seething mass. Somehow, the perfection of the casting excuses the atrocity of the crime: in the name of progress, "the homicide was overlooked. By the charitable that deed was but imputed to sudden transports of esthetic passion . . ." (p. 210). No blame whatever falls on Bannadonna:

His felony remitted by the judge, absolution given him by the priest, what more could even a sickly conscience have desired (p. 210).

Church and state together conspire to hide the crime.²⁴

²³Charles A. Fenton, "'The Bell-Tower': Melville and Technology," American Literature 23 (May 1951): 223.

²⁴Morsberger notes that Cellini, who stabbed a man to death, was absolved by Pope Paul III on the basis of his being "above the law." Morsberger, p. 461.

Even more sacrilegious is the church's demeanor following Bannadonna's death. A Christian interment is allotted for this national hero:

. . . not unmindful of the rare genius of the mechanician, the republic decreed him a stately funeral. It was resolved that the great bell . . . should be rung upon the entrance of the bier into the cathedral (p. 222).

Precisely, as the pall-bearers entered the cathedral porch, the great bell plunged disastrously to the ground. Heedlessly, the clergy administer to Bannadonna the rites of the church.

Equally vindictive, but far different in message, is Melville's assault of the church in "The Lightning-Rod Man." In the comic sketch, Melville's ire is directed toward the hypocrisy of the fanatic revival minister. The salesman of the tale--frequently identified as the Reverend John Todd, who pastored the First Church of Pittsfield from 1842 until 1873²⁵--"may be the Devil himself," states Fisher, "but his gospel is a peculiarly American blend of science and salvation."²⁶ Announcing his presence with a "doleful undertaker's clatter" (p. 141) on the door, he arrives wet and terrified at the narrator's mountain cottage, exclaiming his

²⁵Oliver, p. 238.

²⁶Marvin Fisher, "'The Lightning-Rod Man': Melville's Testament of Rejection," Studies in Short Fiction 7 (Summer 1970): 435.

fear in supernatural expletives: "Good Heavens!" (p. 142); "For Heaven's sake!" (p. 142); "Merciful heaven! what a crash!" (p. 143). Endeavoring to sell lightning rods in a thunderstorm, he reminds the narrator of the famed Tetzels, a seller of divine indulgences in medieval times.²⁷

The message preached by this spiritual confidence-man calls for "potsherd" and "ashes" in human action: besides the insulation of the lightning-rod (a conversion to Calvinism), one must avoid the hearth and fire (human comforts), the cellar (desires of the flesh), the attic (intellectual probing of the divine will), and one's fellow man ("Are you so grossly ignorant as not to know, that the height of a six-footer is sufficient to discharge an electric cloud upon him?").²⁸ He further requires penitence and baptism. "But come here on the hearth and dry yourself," the narrator recommends, concerned at his guest's shivering. Incredulously, the salesman retorts, "I am better here and better wet" (p. 146).²⁹ The fear, self-abasement, and isolation which the salesman advocates establish a doctrine analogous to

²⁷Alan Shusterman, "Melville's 'The Lightning-Rod Man': A Reading," Studies In Short Fiction 9 (Spring 1972): 170.

²⁸Ibid., p. 171.

²⁹Ibid.

Jonathan Edwards' "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God."³⁰ The narrator's vehement rejection of this harsh theology exemplifies Melville's own. Furthermore, the salesman's dogmatic evangelism vividly portrays one of Melville's primary complaints against the church. He totally condemned those universal "religionists who cherish hell more than they cherish heaven."³¹

Functionally, the narrator serves to discredit the salesman's logic in the tale. Unmoved by his arguments, he challenges the truth of the lightning-rod man's philosophy:

"Let me see. Was it not at Criggan last week, about midnight on Saturday, that the steeple, the big elm, and the assembly-room cupola were struck? Any of your rods there?"

"Not on the tree and cupola, but the steeple."

"Of what use is your rod, then?"

"Of life-and-death use. But my workman was heedless . . ." (p. 143).

As an advocate of isolation from the human community, the dark salesman blames human error for the failure of his rod. Again, the narrator challenges, asking of a girl struck by lightning in Canada "with a rosary in her hand; the beads being metal" (p. 144). The salesman's anti-Catholic response³²--"Those Canadians are fools. . . . Mine is the only true rod," (p. 144)--followed by a high-pressured sales

³⁰Fisher, "'The Lightning-Rod Man,'" p. 437.

³¹Houston, p. 235.

³²Fisher, "'The Lightning-Rod Man,'" p. 436.

pitch, demonstrates Melville's second charge against the church. In Calvinism, he found self-righteous salvation founded upon pride and hypocrisy and the "doleful . . . clatter" of damnation.

Melville's adamant opposition to slavery and the church, as elements which alienate men from society, forms a theme of man's inhumanity to man in the Piazza Tales. Scattered through the text are numerous other innuendoes of the brutality of civilization. In "Sketch Tenth," Melville warns the runaway sailor against taking refuge on the South American coast or in the Pacific:

Neither is it, in general, much easier to escape pursuit at the isles of Polynesia. Those of them which have felt a civilizing influence present the same difficulty . . . , the advanced natives being quite as mercenary and keen of knife and scent as the retrograde Spaniards . . . (p. 204).

Equally well, the degradable death of Babo, "dragged to the gibbet at the tail of a mule," (p. 140) butchered and displayed within sight of the church, attests to the virtues of social justice. In avenging its wrongs, society frequently inflicts punishments more awful than the offense.

In "Sketch Ninth," Melville recalls the tragic history of Hood's Isle and the Hermit Oberlus. No character of the collection exceeds the degeneration of Oberlus,

. . . ; his befreckled skin blistered by continual exposure to the sun; nose flat; countenance contorted, heavy, earthy; hair and beard unshorn,

profuse, and of a fiery red. He struck strangers much as if he were a volcanic creature thrown up by the same convulsion which exploded into sight the isle (p. 195).

Oberlus survives by committing crimes of kidnapping and theft against the vessels which dock at his port for food and water. Caught in the act on one occasion, he is carried on board the victimized ship for his just retributions:

This proved an Englishman, and a smuggler; a sort of craft not apt to be over-charitable. Oberlus is severely whipped, then handcuffed, taken ashore, and compelled to make known his habitation and produce his property" (p. 198).

Vengefully, the seamen destroy his shack and garden, loot his food and money, and leave a guilty Oberlus lucky to be alive. In consequence, Oberlus preys more severely and more cautiously upon the passing vessels, eventually securing enough money to leave his despicable isle. Escaping to the mainland, he leaves behind a decoy letter explaining his destination, which is revealingly signed "Fatherless Oberlus."

Apprehended as "highly suspicious" in Payta, he is jailed after being found "concealed one night, with matches in his pocket, under the hull of a small vessel just ready to be launched" (p. 202). The closing passage of the tale expresses Melville's profound compassion for this miserable outcast and his unqualified abhorrence of social justice:

The jails in most South American towns are generally of the least wholesome sort. Built of huge cakes of sun-burnt brick, and containing but

one room, without windows or yard, and but one door heavily grated with wooden bars, they present both within and without the grimmest aspect. As public edifices they conspicuously stand upon the hot and dusty Plaza, offering to view, through the gratings, their villainous and hopeless inmates, burrowing in all sorts of tragic squalor. And here, for a long time, Oberlus was seen; the central figure of a mongrel and assassin band; a creature whom it is religion to detest, since it is philanthropy to hate a misanthrope (p. 202).

Amid the symbolic ruin and decay of the Piazza Tales, Melville concealed his greatest social hostility, his disdain for literary criticism. No statement more clearly explains his total isolation from society. In "The Piazza," Melville sketched the role of the artist in society and much of his own sensitivity to criticism: ". . . no boy climbs hill or crosses vale without coming upon easels . . . and sun-burnt painters painting there" (p. 1). Melville's conception of art required that the artist be exposed to the sun, to the harsher realities of life. In the character of Dives, ridiculing the absurdity of his northern piazza, Melville embodied the cruelty of public reaction to his own art. "Sketch Eighth" plaintively defends his literary creations. Breaking the narrative with a genteel admonition that some truths may not be told, Melville protests his own reserve:

If some books are deemed most baneful and their sale forbid, how, then, with deadlier facts, not dreams of doting men? Those whom books will hurt will not be proof against events. Events, not books should be forbid. But in all things man sows upon the wind . . . (p. 186).

At a different level of allegorical interpretation, "The Bell-Tower" also suggests Melville's concern for his failing career and his appraisal of literary criticism. In the building of the tower and the casting of the bells, Bannadonna is mechanician, but in engraving the primary bell, he is artist. It is in perfecting the enigmatic smile of the hour Una, one of the pagan girls adoring the bell, that he is slain by Haman. The tale provides a bleak allegory for Melville's fear of being destroyed by his own creations, for Bannadonna dies trying to amend a misunderstood "flaw" in his art.³³

Leo Marx's extensive investigation of "Bartleby" as an expression of Melville's physical withdrawal from literary endeavors greatly explains Melville's symbolic isolation from society in the Piazza Tales. The mysterious Bartleby is in fact a writer, a copyist on Wall Street. Imperative to reading this figure as Melville himself is the realization that the tale is told from the lawyer's perspective, that of Wall Street, a technique which reflects society's impression of the declining author:

Writing from the point of view of the Wall Street lawyer, Melville accepts the popular estimate of his work and of his life. The scrivener's trance-like stare is the surrealistic device with which

³³John Vernon, "Melville's 'The Bell-Tower,'" Studies in Short Fiction 7 (Spring 1970): 269.

Melville leads us into the nightmare world where he sees himself as his countrymen do.³⁴

The complication of the tale, Bartleby's determination to no longer copy, arises when he is asked to proof and correct his own work. The manuscripts of copy come to represent all of Melville's works--the innuendo that his depiction of life is defective, and he is, therefore, asked to conform its appearance to the standards of Wall Street.³⁵ The two monumental symbols of the tale, the wall and the Dead Letter, designate Melville's assessment of his future as a writer in these difficult years. The wall dually suggests Melville's unpopular fascination with metaphysics and the public's intolerance of his investigations and discoveries.³⁶ From the perspective of society, the wall contains a misdirected and unwholesome purpose in Melville's art. In the symbol of the Dead Letter, Melville expresses his failure to communicate with his contemporaries. Tossed to the flames, Melville's creations and his hopes expire. The image of the Dead Letter forms a visual comment upon Melville's earlier observation to Hawthorne in a letter dated June 1851:

What's the use of elaborating what in its very essence, is so short lived as a modern book?

³⁴Leo Marx, "Melville's Parable of the Walls," Sewanee Review 61 (October 1953): 612.

³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 609.

³⁶*Ibid.*, p. 619.

Though I wrote the Gospels in this century, I
should die in the gutter!³⁷

In accepting the conclusion of his literary career, Melville
surrendered his only viable hold on society. Bereft of his
literary voice, he had nothing more to impart.

³⁷Gilman and Davis, Letters, p. 129.

CONCLUSION

As a neglected aspect of Melville studies, the Piazza Tales preserves an important statement of Melville's anger, fear, and anxiety through the most tragic years of his life-- years of failure, bitterness, depression, ill health, frustration, and, perhaps, insanity. The haunting symbols of isolation which pervade the tales reflect numerous explanations for Melville's gradual withdrawal from society in the late 1850s and for the all-prevailing silence of his final years. The collection is significant because it contributes major statements of biographic importance; because it is the single expression of this genre which Melville produced; because it precedes the final statement of his active literary career; because it contains the germ of Melville's curious isolation; but, most of all, because it was written by Herman Melville.

Quite surprisingly, the remarkable singularity of the volume only accentuates the fine quality of its fiction. "Benito Cereno" and "Bartleby," if not the others, are among the best of American short stories, and all of the tales share the artistically unique symbolism of Melville's desert phase. Much of the provocative beauty of Melville's symbolism in the Piazza Tales emanates from the epigram to "The

Piazza," drawn from Arviragus' pledge of faithfulness to Imogen in Cymbeline (4. 2. 218-19):

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

The lines imply a deceptive state of existence, for Imogen appears dead, but in reality, lives. The flowers of summer scattered upon her grave symbolize Arviragus' enduring devotion. Melville's vein of expression in the Piazza Tales derives primarily from the uncited lines of the speech which affirm Arviragus' continuing vigil in winter:

--bring thee all this;
Yea, and furr'd moss besides, when flowers are none,
To winter-ground thy corse. (4. 2. 226-28)

Melville borrowed the symbol and season of winter and the theme of illusion from these suggestive lines to enhance his collection of tales. The season of the Piazza Tales is the winter of human aspirations. Melville's adornment of fallen monuments and faded hopes with "furr'd mosses" denotes his awareness of their inevitable passing. Paradoxically, Melville adorns life with the symbols of death, giving a theme of death-in-life to his exquisite illusions.

The Piazza Tales is filled with crumbling, aged, and ruined symbolic reflections of Melville's religious doubt and his personal despair. Dimly contrasted to this tragic depiction of life are flickering symbols of the pale illusions of faith and confidence. Through his bleakest years,

Melville found neither "a ruling principle of love" in the universe nor "a ruling principle of kindness" in man.¹ By his own definition, he became an atheist and a misanthrope. The Piazza Tales carefully records Melville's "atheist doubt" (p. 116) and his contempt for humanity.

In the opening paragraph of the collection, the narrator of "The Piazza" alludes to his thwarted hope of religious promise. Inadvertently, he expresses the tragic reality of man's isolation from God as he views the beauty of his farm piazza world:

. . . a very paradise of painters. The circle of the stars cut by the circle of the mountains. At least, so looks it from the house; though, once upon the mountains, no circle of them can you see (p. 1).

Philosophically, in these tales, Melville had been "upon the mountain." In the harsh physical reality of human experience, Melville could find no evidence of a loving God. Through the isolated perspectives of the narrators of "Bartleby" and "Benito Cereno," he condemns a heedless God. In the sinister world of "The Encantadas," he rebukes the malignity of "feline Fate" and the "diabolical enchanter" in symbols of repressed anger. Melville's image of God in the Piazza Tales intensifies his bitter regard for God in Pierre:

. . . Melville's own dark, bitter, and anti-Christian viewpoint . . . rests on the

¹Herman Melville, The Confidence-Man (New York: Airmont Publishing Company, Inc., Airmont Classics, 1966), p. 143.

theological assumption of God's malicious indifference to all human striving toward perfection; the practical-joking of God, who seems to take some pleasure in human misery; the apparent inscrutability which God employs to protect Himself from being understood in His proper light by mankind, who would obviously find fault with Him and (if brave enough) defy Him, if they should understand Him.²

Yet, in the Piazza Tales, Melville pursues divine responsibility to a different resolve: In "Bartleby," in "The Bell-Tower," and in "The Encantadas," he contemplates the dark reality of an absent or non-existent God.

More tragic than Melville's religious isolation was his complete alienation from society; for the second half of his life, he lived secluded. Separation from humanity was a gross contradiction for Melville. He adamantly opposed Emerson's doctrine of isolated individualism.³ His greatest works are filled with "dissenting reminders that man is born, lives, and dies in constant debt to the social community of his fellows."⁴ Nevertheless, in the composite racial community of his collection of tales, Melville exposed the destructive forces which drove him from society. Subtly, he warns of the dangers of the brewing issue of slavery in

²Lawrance Thompson, Melville's Quarrel With God (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1952), p. 273.

³R. E. Watters, "Melville's 'Sociality,'" American Literature 17 (March 1945): 33.

⁴Ibid.

"Benito Cereno" and "The Bell-Tower." He vehemently assails the moral corruption of the church and abuse of ecclesiastical privilege in "The Bell-Tower" and "The Lightning-Rod Man." Satirically, he strikes at the inhumanity of social justice and the brutality of civilization in "Benito Cereno" and "The Encantadas." Yet, as explanation of Melville's own solitude, the most important social statements of the tales are those directed at the malice of literary criticism. Many of the tales reflect Melville's disdain; none so significantly as "Bartleby." Melville's representation of society in the Piazza Tales is exceedingly harsh. If the image is an accurate reflection of how he perceived his own surroundings, his desertion of humanity can be seen as his greatest act of self-preservation.

In the privacy of seclusion, free from criticism and perpetual disillusionment, Melville enjoyed the anonymity of his post-meridian years. Nevertheless, the obscurity of his retirement effaced in his own lifetime the enormous substance of his contribution to American literature, as a memorial published in the New York Times on October 6, 1891, ironically reveals:

. . . "The Late Hiram Melville" was the heading of a column which contained a letter entitled "A Tribute by One Who Knew Him."⁵

⁵Hugh W. Hetherington, "A Tribute to the Late Hiram Melville," Modern Language Quarterly 16 (December 1955): 325.

Melville's publication of the Piazza Tales in 1856 had foreshadowed this tragic withdrawal. In the Piazza Tales, Melville anticipated his ultimate separation from society in the introductory sketch, "The Piazza."

Critic Richard Harter Fogle has asserted that "to respect these tales at their full value, one must have respected Melville to begin with."⁶ Certainly, the genius of Melville endows the Piazza Tales with a literary importance; but the collection needs no such distinction to be read and appreciated as fine literature. In its own right, the Piazza Tales is, at worst, the lowest ebb of a magnanimous tide.

⁶Richard Harter Fogle, Melville's Shorter Tales (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960), p. 13.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Arvin, Newton. Herman Melville. New York: The Viking Press, 1950.
- Bickley, R. Bruce, Jr. "The Minor Fiction of Hawthorne and Melville." American Transcendental Quarterly 14 (Spring 1972): 149-52.
- Brack, Vida K., and Brack, O. M., Jr. "Weathering Cape Horn: Survivors in Melville's Minor Short Fiction." Arizona Quarterly 28 (Spring 1972): 61-73.
- Breinig, Helmbrecht. "The Destruction of Fairyland: Melville's 'Piazza' in the Tradition of the American Imagination." ELH 35 (June 1968): 254-83.
- Cervo, Nathan A. "Melville's Bartleby--Imago Dei." American Transcendental Quarterly 14 (Spring 1972): 152-56.
- Chase, Richard, ed. Melville: A Collection of Critical Essays. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962.
- Davis, Merrel R., and Gilman, William H., eds. The Letters of Herman Melville. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1960.
- Donaldson, Scott. "The Dark Truth of The Piazza Tales." PMLA 85 (October 1970): 1082-6.
- Dryden, Edgar A. Melville's Thematics of Form: The Great Art of Telling the Truth. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1968.
- Eliade, Mircea. Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism. Translated by Philip Mairet. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1969.
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo. "Nature." In The American Tradition in Literature, 3d ed., pp. 1064-98. Edited by Sculley Bradley, Richmond Croom Beatty, and E. Hudson Long. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1962.
- Feltenstein, Rosalie. Melville's 'Benito Cereno.'" American Literature 19 (November 1947): 245-55.

- Fenton, Charles A. "'The Bell-Tower': Melville and Technology." American Literature 23 (May 1951): 459-62.
- Fisher, Marvin. "'The Lightning-Rod Man': Melville's Testament of Rejection." Studies in Short Fiction 7 (Summer 1970): 433-38.
- _____. "Melville's 'Bell-Tower': A Double Thrust." American Quarterly 18 (Summer 1966): 200-207.
- Fogle, Richard Harter. Melville's Shorter Tales. Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960.
- Gardner, John. "'Bartleby': Art and Social Commitment." Philological Quarterly 43 (January 1964): 87-98.
- Hawthorne, Julian. Hawthorne and His Circle. n.p., 1903; reprint ed., Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1968.
- Hetherington, Hugh W. "A Tribute to the Late Hiram Melville." Modern Language Quarterly 16 (December 1955): 325-31.
- Hillway, Tyrus. Herman Melville. New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1963.
- _____. "Melville As Critic of Science." Modern Language Notes 65 (June 1950): 411-14.
- Houston, Neal B. "Silent Apostles: Melville's Animus Against the Clergy." Research Studies 34 (December 1966): 230-39.
- Howard, Francis K. "The Catalyst of Language: Melville's Symbol." English Journal 57 (September 1968): 825-31.
- Howard, Leon. Herman Melville. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1961.
- Leyda, Jay. The Melville Log: A Documentary Life of Herman Melville 1819-1891. 2 vols. New York: Gordian Press, 1969.
- Litman, V. H. "The Cottage and the Temple: Melville's Symbolic Use of Architecture." American Quarterly 21 (Fall 1969): 630-8.
- McKenzie, John L., S. J. Dictionary of the Bible. Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Co., 1965.

- Magowan, Robin. "Masque and Symbol in 'Benito Cereno.'" College English 23 (February 1962): 346-51.
- Marx, Leo. "Melville's Parable of the Walls." Sewanee Review 61 (October 1853): 602-27.
- Mason, Ronald. The Spirit Above the Dust: A Study of Herman Melville. London: John Lehmann Ltd., 1951.
- Matthiessen, R. O. American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman. London: Oxford University Press, 1941.
- Melville, Herman. The Confidence-Man. New York: Airmont Publishing Company, Inc.: Airmont Classics, 1966.
- _____. Piazza Tales. Edited by Egbert S. Oliver. New York: Hendricks House, Inc., 1962.
- _____. Redburn: His First Voyage. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc.; Doubleday Anchor Books, 1957.
- _____. White Jacket or the World in a Man-of-War. New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1956.
- Morsberger, R. E. "Melville's 'The Bell-Tower' and Benvenuto Cellini." American Literature 44 (November 1972): 459-62.
- Newberry, I. "'The Encantadas': Melville's Inferno." American Literature 38 (March 1966): 49-68.
- Parker, Hershel. "Melville's Salesman Story." Studies in Short Fiction 1 (Winter 1964): 154-58.
- Patrick, Walton R. "Melville's 'Bartleby' and the Doctrine of Necessity." American Literature 41 (March 1969): 39-54.
- Putzel, Max. "The Source and Symbols of Melville's 'Benito Cereno.'" American Literature 34 (May 1962): 191-206.
- Rountree, Thomas J., ed. Critics on Melville. Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1972.
- Sealts, Merton M. "The Publication of Melville's Piazza Tales." Modern Language Notes 59 (January 1944): 56-59.

- Shusterman, Alan. "Melville's 'The Lightning-Rod Man': A Reading." Studies in Short Fiction 9 (Spring 1972): 165-74.
- Simpson, Eleanor E. "Melville and the Negro: From Typee to 'Benito Cereno.'" American Literature 41 (March 1969): 19-38.
- Stein, William Bysshe. "Melville's Comedy of Faith." ELH 27 (December 1960): 315-33.
- Stout, Janis. "Melville's Use of the Book of Job." Nineteenth Century Fiction 25 (June 1970): 69-83.
- Thompson, Lawrance. Melville's Quarrel With God. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1952.
- Vernon, John. "Melville's 'The Bell-Tower.'" Studies in Short Fiction 7 (Spring 1970): 264-76.
- Watson, Charles N., Jr. "Melville's Agatha and Hunilla: A Literary Reincarnation." ELN 6 (December 1968): 114-18.
- Watters, R. E. "Melville's 'Isolatoos.'" PMLA 60 (December 1945): 1138-48.
- _____. "Melville's 'Sociality.'" American Literature 17 (March 1945): 33-49.
- Weaver, Raymond M. Herman Melville: Mariner and Mystic. New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1968.
- Wilkins, W. J. Hindu Mythology: Vedic and Puranic. London: Curzon Press, 1973.
- Williams, Stanley T. "'Follow Your Leader': Melville's 'Benito Cereno.'" Virginia Quarterly Review 23 (January 1947): 61-76.